

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2016.023.096](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2016.023.096)

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## **SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO INDECENT CONTENT VIA NEW MEDIA: A CASE STUDY FROM THAILAND**

### **Abstract:**

The research aims to study the new media usage of Thai children and youth, between 6-22 years old. A mixed research method was applied including: survey of 633 children and youth around Bangkok, selected by multi-stage sampling, and three focus groups of parents selected by purposive sampling.

The results showed that smart phone was the most popular new media among children and youth. Their average time spending on new media was more than 4 hours per day, while a large portion of kids spent up to 10 hours per day. You Tube was the most popular social media among children and youth in every age. Online game was the most popular among small children, whereas Facebook was the most popular among youth. The main purposes of utilizing new media were entertainment, followed by chatting with friends and searching information. Most of the kids reported while going online they can easily and accidentally access to indecent contents, especially sexual content. Also, focus groups of the parents revealed that it became more difficult to control their children's usage of new media while they grew up. Some children severely addicted to new media. Another main problem was less media and information literacy of parents. International study would be a lesson learned for policy makers in order to protecting children. Media and information literacy should be taken seriously for both parents and kids.

### **Keywords:**

children, new media, media literacy, indecent content, Thailand

## Introduction

New media such as internet and online social media become more and more popular among children and youth nowadays. The increase of accessing and owning new media and other kinds of mobile devices showed in almost every study. For example, Children and Parents Media use and Attitudes Report 2014 found that UK children access to new media devices have increased drastically. Kids at age 3-4 years old had one new media device at an average; 5-7 years old kids had 1.9 at an average; 8-11 years old had 3.3 at an average; and 12-15 years old had 4.6 at an average (OfCom, 2015).

In addition, Pew Research Center survey in 2015 showed that 92 percents of American youth (age 13-17) used internet daily. Approximately one fourth accepted that they used internet almost all the time. About 91 percents of them accessed internet via mobile devices; and 75 percents of them owned smart phones. 76 percents accessed social media regularly, and the most popular social media among them were Facebook (71%) and Instagram (51%) (Lenhart, 2015).

Another study from Australia indicated that numbers of children and youth in Australia had online access over than the number of European kids. 96 percents reported that they accessed to the internet both at school and at home, with 60 percents accessed via mobile device regularly; and 76 percents reported that they access the internet daily (Green, et.al. 2011). 78 percents of kids, age 8-9, and 92 percents of kids, age 10-11, regularly accessed to social network; YouTube was the most popular one among them. And 97-99 percents of youth (age 14-17) regularly accessed to social network; and Facebook was the most popular social network (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013).

Also, a 2014 survey from Thailand National Statistical Office, Ministry of ICT, showed that Thai public has increased usage of new media (77% owned mobile phone increasing from 72% two years ago). Also, 82.3 percents of children (age 6-14) had used new media regularly, and more than half of them access the internet and social media (National Statistic Office, 2014).

Accessing to new media is a huge concern among parents, since children and youth have less capability to filter offensive and indecent contents. They are the risk group as Office of Communication (OfCom) in the UK studied the Children's online behavior (2014) indicated that there were three kinds of online risks: contact risks, conduct risks and content risks. All these risks should be concerned in order to protect children and youth. A research study in UK found that one out of six internet users, age 12-15, revealed that they had faced indecent content pop-up. 40 percents of the internet users at age 13-18 also stated that they knew some new friends related to sexual contents (OfCom, 2015).

In addition, a survey done by Carnegie Mellon University in collaboration with Pew Research Center found that 83.5 percents of loading pictures via internet were related to sex or pornography. The largest market of online pornographic pictures was

undergrad students (Lenhart, 2015). Also, a website, [internetsafety101.org](http://internetsafety101.org), reported that along 15 years children and youth were the largest group of online victims (more than 640,000 cases in the U.S.). The internet become the main channel of pornography distribution cost around 13 billion dollars per year (Enough Is Enough, 2011).

Common (2013) studied the role of new media in construction of social values and identity of youth in Bangkok. It was found that new digital media had influenced upon youth's social values both positive and negative ways. The youth applied new digital media as a tool and space to explore, express, and experiment their identities.

Although new media allows children and youth explore and develop their knowledge and experience the world, there still be problems adhered to these new media access; such as indecent and offensive contents, fraud information, cyber bullying, etc. Review of previous research studies found that one concern issues of children and youth access to new media was indecent contents. Thus, this research aims to study the new media usage of Thai children and youth, both hardware usage (smartphone, tablet, and notebook) and software usage (internet, social media, and online game). The focal study specified their accessibility to indecent contents such as sexual explicit content, language, violence and gambling.

## Method

A mixed research method was applied. Quantitative data collection included a self-administrative questionnaire distributed (both face-to-face and online) to 633 children and youth, age between 6-24 years old, around Bangkok (the capital city), selected by multi-stage sampling. Qualitative data were collected by two focus groups of 21 parents selected by purposive sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, while descriptive analysis applied to qualitative data.

## Findings

The result revealed that the youngest age of first time using new media was 2 years old, whereas the average age of first time using new media was 9 years old. Data also showed that first time using new media appear at younger age kids more than the elders. K1-6 reported that their first-time new media usage was 7 years old, while K7-12 did first-time at the age over 10 years old.

A smart phone became the most popular new media device for every age group. But young kids had less access this mobile device than old kids, since most parent did not allow their kids to have a mobile phone at a younger age.

**Table 1: Percentage of ownership of new media device among different age groups**

Ownership of new media device*	K1-6 (N=225)	K7-12 (N=235)	Undergrad N=172)
	%	%	%
Smart phone	52.00	62.13	75.00
Tablet	20.89	9.36	8.14
Notebook	7.56	8.08	9.30
PC	20.00	21.28	12.21

\* answer more than one

Thai children mainly used new media at home. While the parents did allow young kids (K1-6) to use new media under their care (at living room), they did less restriction to the youth, who can use it in their bedroom.

Average time spending on new media was 4-6 hours per day. The older kids spent more hours than the younger kids. K1-6 kids reported their average time spending on new media was 2-4 hours per day, while K7-12 kids spent more than 4 hours per day. A large portion of youth (22.67%) especially undergrad spent up to 10 hours per day.

**Table 2: Percentage of average time spending on new media per day**

Average time spending on new media per day	K1-6 (N=225)	K7-12 (N=235)	Undergrad N=172)
	%	%	%
Less than 2 hours	15.55	3.40	0.58
2-4 hours	62.67	26.81	15.70
4-6 hours	10.67	24.25	25.00
6-8 hours	5.33	14.47	23.26
8-10 hours	0.89	7.66	12.21
More than 10 hours	2.67	22.98	22.67

The most popular social media among children and youth in every age was YouTube. While younger children favored online game, older children preferred Facebook. Their main purposes of utilizing new media were entertainment ( $\bar{X}=4.44$  S.D.= 0.80), followed by chatting with friends ( $\bar{X}=4.00$  S.D.= 1.15) and searching information ( $\bar{X}=3.50$  S.D.= 1.05).

Similarly, the most popular application among young kids was game application and the most popular application among old kids was Line application.

Around one third of the respondents reported that they had ever accessed or download indecent content accidentally, especially sexual content, cruel language and violent content (as shown in table 3).

**Table 3: Percentage of access to indecent contents via new media (%)**

Have ever access to	Yes, accidentally	Yes, from my friends	Yes, by myself	Never
Sexually explicit content	32.07	14.85	13.11	39.65
Violent content	36.97	19.27	16.75	26.22
Cruel language content	36.81	21.49	15.32	25.43
Gambling website	18.32	3.95	4.42	72.20
Other indecent contents	3.63	1.42	2.06	27.17

When asking how they dealt with those contents: most of them left or closed the window; some told parents or teachers; few of them clicked next and shared.

**Table 4: Percentage of handling indecent contents**

How you handle them	K1-6 (N=225)	K7-12 (N=235)	Undergrad (N=172)
	%	%	%
Close the window	68.44	50.64	52.33
Click next	14.22	30.21	34.88
Share	2.70	5.53	2.91
Tell parents or teachers	12.00	4.26	3.49

In addition to survey, two focus groups of the parents revealed similar findings. The parents mostly allowed older kids (K7-12) to have mobile devices but not younger kids (K1-6). Also, they allowed the children to access new media under their care, mostly at living room; small kids in particular. The serious problems of new media usage were long time spending online, especially online game. Some reported their kids spent up to five hours per day playing online game. Most of them tried to control time spending online, such as set up rules (limited time online, finish homework before playing online game), create and encourage outdoor activities, shut down online access devices.

Many parents confirmed that their kids can accidentally access to indecent contents, especially sexual contents (website). Some found that while their kids searched for online movie or games, pop-up windows or advertising about sexual contents or the related subjects often appeared unintentionally. Moreover, some parents complained that mass media had highly influence people to access to violence contents. Especially TV news covered the clips, either sexual scandal or fighting scenes, sharing from YouTube or Facebook. Viewers then were eager to search for the clips.

Some parents accepted that their knowledge about new media was not good enough to suggest or monitor their kids. Some of them accepted that new media devices, i.e. smart phones or tablets, were the tools keeping their kids quiet or at home.

## Discussion and conclusion

The survey results found similar online behaviors of children both in Thailand and other countries. Most of them spent time on new media almost one forth of their daily activities. Not merely unbalancing time spending on new media but also the ease of accessing to indecent contents was mainly concerned. The finding replicated the other

international studies, as stated previously. However, some Thai parents had concerned these issues, still had no effective strategies or assistances from the government system (e.g. internet censorship policy or content control software).

Parenting by depending on media was not a good idea (e.g. turn on television or give the kids tablets or smart phone when they cry). However, some parents still apply this strategy, since they found that it helps their kids sit still and quiet. Along with this issue, many parents admitted that they have less media and information literacy for protecting their children from negative effects of new media. As the focus groups results revealed that it became more difficult to control their children's usage of new media while they grew up. Some children severely addicted to new media.

Another concerned issue was the ease of accessing to indecent content. The finding of Thai children's access to indecent contents via new media was similar to other international studies, e.g. pornography, unbalancing online time, offensive and indecent contents. Nonetheless in Thailand it showed less cases of cyber bullying in comparing to international studies.

A suggestion is that lessons learned from international studies could be suit for policy makers in order to protecting children from these issues. For example, online networks of NGOs and foundations provided various suggestions and parent guides for protecting children from indecent content via new media; i.e. Digizen.org (from the UK), SafeKids.om, ConnectSafely.org, Commonsensemedia.org (from the U.S.), and Cybersafekids.com.au (from Australia). Importantly, media and information literacy should be taken seriously for both parents and kids.

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