

The Perceptions of Saudi Youth Regarding the Dangers of Exposure to the Content of Pornography on the Internet: A Field Study

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Abstract

In light of concern raised from the studies that measure the social effects of using the Internet, there are worries about the effect of using the Internet in the social context and the impact on individual behaviours. Due to the scarcity of studies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that are concerned with the negative effects of the Internet, as represented in the increasing spread of pornography on websites, especially when talking about youth who are the group most exposed to the risks of communication technology, the research problem is defined in describing and analysing the patterns of Saudi youth exposure to pornography and their perception of the effects on them and other people. In addition, the study is concerned to identify the level of censorship that is implemented by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the undesired content. This comes through a survey study that included a sample of 159 terms used by youth. The study was applied in the eastern region that is characterized by cultural and demographic variation. The study relied on the hypothesis of the theory of influence of a third person to test the hypothesis on the Saudi youth, to conclude with results that contribute in protecting youth from exposure to such content that violates religion and decency. The results indicated support for the conceptual hypothesis for the theory of the third person, as the Saudi youth believe that pornography is more influential on others than on themselves. This is consistent with previous studies. In addition, the study was consistent with the behavioural hypothesis for the theory of a third person influence with the consent of the Saudi youth to control the Internet and the view that blocking such websites is the best solution to protect youth from viewing this content, provided that KSA applies the blocking procedure. However, some people may succeed in breaching the censored websites, which necessitates coping with the technology used to counter breaching methods.

Keywords: Internet, pornography, theory of the third person.

Introduction

Websites provide various positives for individuals, whether they are cultural, cognitive, scientific, social or recreational etc. However, despite these positive features, the Internet is a double-edged sword as it includes various negatives in all life aspects. Every technology has desired and undesired effects, and sometimes the undesired features have damaging effects that can threaten the cancellation of the required benefits (Farhan, 2012). These negatives include social isolation, humiliating others, loss of family communication, damaging family bonds, forming illegal relationships between the two genders and the spread of pornographic content.

In this regard, the next medial flow coming from abroad is linked sometimes to negative influences that threaten social, political, economic, religious and ethical security.

Furthermore, the Internet is considered the latest invention in technology, starting with the process of printing, to video cameras and cassettes – which are used to allow the discovery of pornographic issues– as well as other related topics. There are various advantages to the Internet such as easy access/entry, easy viewing and exposing ambiguity, which enhance the power of this technology while discovering pornographic issues (Mark, 2010). Some people began to express their concern and fear of this kind of development that cannot be restrained, as it is considered a cultural invasion which threatens cultures, values and local traditions.

In this context, the various forms and kinds of pornographic content are well known by all, with the emergence of some groups that make use of the potential of the web in spreading their ideologies as long as freedom of expression is open for all without any control or restrictions, especially in light of framing the media as information and recreation and giving it a physical recreation style or a pornographic form. Such content is addressed to adolescents and youth claiming to be self-recreation and filling free time. In fact, the Internet has become the largest means to transfer and exchange pornographic movies and photos; for instance, the number of pornographic websites amounted to 2.4 million web pages or 12% of the total websites. In addition, the number of pornographic pages amounted to 420 million, while the daily requests using engines searching for pornographic content and the monthly downloads amounted to 68 million requests, making 25% of the total requests for search engines, and 5.1 million downloaded files, making it 35% of the total of downloaded files. In addition, there are about 5.2 billion pornographic messages per day (8% of the total messages); that is 5.4 messages per user daily. There are about 100 websites that contain pornographic practices with children, and 89% of chat rooms as the number of users amounted to 20%.

However, pornography is the first topic that is searched for through the Internet. As per the research conducted by the Relevant Knowledge Company in the market, there were more than 9.6 million persons (or 15% of web users) who used one of the most famous pornography websites during the month of April 1998. Industry sources show that searches for pornography represent 10-20 % of the visitor requests looking for pornographic content through the web. Moreover, pornography is not only considered the first search topic on the web, but it is one of the websites that generate high profits.

On the positive side, the Internet is a useful means to enhance sexual education. However, there are a number of such websites that are spreading within chat rooms and offer sexual arousal, containing not only hazardous activities but also illegal ones. In addition, the issue of sex through the Internet has become a hot debate issue as it affects the matters of freedom of expression, education and youth protection. As a matter of fact, despite the wide spread of pornographic websites, there is a shortage of studies that document the behaviours of users (what they do), their attitudes and perceptions, when it relates to searching the Internet for pornographic content. In addition, documentation is too scarce. For instance, the types of information or recreations required by users when they use the web: What is their feeling regarding search on pornography sites? What is the perspective of those who do not use it?

Through searching in more than twelve databases including ERIC, PsychInfo , social abstract and others by using search terms such as sex, pornography and Internet and “virtual sex”, “E- sex”, it was found that there are limited studies that document the behaviours of the Internet users who look for pornographic content, most importantly, the study conducted by Cooper and Colleagues (Goodson & McComick and Alexandra, 2004). On the Internet there are sites that organize illegal relationships; once the user accesses the site, he has to decide on the type of relationship he likes: is it a request for friendship, marriage or to establish a special relationship to achieve satisfaction and desires?

In order to benefit from these choices, a visitor must register his personal data and the characteristics of his partner (male/female) by answering tens of questions that clarify his words and description. Unfortunately, many young Arabs (whether males searching for females or females looking for males) have accesses to the site that was allocated in some Arab countries and has popularity, which can be embodied through the large numbers of their visitors (Al-Dahmashi & Niazi, 2015). It is surprising that a state such as Israel comes fifth in the rank on this website, after USA, Ukraine, Russia and Canada, whether in terms of men who are looking for women or the opposite. On the other hand, this raises suspicions and doubts, since such relationships may spread infectious diseases such as AIDS among the Arab youth, or cause military or economic secrets of the Arab states to be revealed .Or it may enable the recruitment of men and women as spies, which is the cause of our caution in light of the relationships between Israel and Arabs (Al-Dahmashi & Niazi, 2015). In this context, there are pornographic websites that target Arab users directly as tens of websites allow access to pornography in the Arabic language and address Arab people, especially youth. Furthermore, it is surprising to notice that the visitors to those websites amount to more than 35,000 of both genders at one time, not to forget that there are various websites that allow visitors to change the wordings and extensions of movies and porno photos which can support operation through mobiles.

Al-Qadhi (2002) indicated that the source of pornography currently is the mobile phone camera and to serve videotaped chat some adolescents picture themselves while naked or performing sexual acts through such technologies then they download and exchange them through the web. in the streets and while in their cars by using (Bluetooth). This kind of technology allows the transfer of files onto the mobiles of those who are available in the same location easily and smoothly. The problem of mobiles is embodied in the difficulty of follow-up by family members, since it is easy to move such content through Bluetooth.

A study conducted by the Saudi specialists showed that 34% of Saudi users visit pornography websites and among them are 7% who view the blocked sites such as those which promote selling drugs or terrorist ideology, or that are humiliating to the religion of the state. The study warned of the breach of E-obscenity to houses or threatening youth (Al-Qadhi, 2005). The study relies on the third-person effect, which assumes that a person tends to exaggerate judgement on the effect of media content on other people. It is expected that the effect of content is greater on them, which may urge them to protect others. Since Philip formulated the hypothesis of the theory, it concluded a set of studies that are consistent with these assumptions. The previous studies intended to identify the effects of social Internet media that is represented on the websites that present pornographic content to adolescents and youth. In addition, the studies aimed at determining the appropriate methods to protect them while viewing/accessing the Internet in order to avoid its negatives, through considering regulative and legal measures, through programs that can provide protection or by proposed recommendations, as follows.

The study conducted by Al-Qadhi (2005) showed that porn addiction through websites appears first by curiosity then it develops to addiction accompanied by a number of negative consequences that vary between self, social, economic and security consequences. The study cautioned of the entry of E-obscenity to houses or threatening youth, indicating a number of effects of pornography in terms of health. Moreover, the study confirmed that blocking of the pornographic sites by the Saudi government is an active method in countering this phenomenon, and Al-Qadhi advised enhancing research that is concerned with blocking any pornographic site due to the danger of nurturing and human conduct. Al-Khulaifi's study (2002) stated that the Internet helped in the cultural invasion of communities, causing social, ethical and health problems due to the exaggerated use of the web as this is one of the greatest negatives of websites.

Michele L. et al. (2005) examined the extent of child and adolescent exposure to the pornographic content provided by the Internet for the age groups 10-17 years. This study is consistent with the study conducted by Janis, Wolak et al. (2007) in terms of objective and age group, whereas the study by Lukasz Wojtasik (2003) was limited in the age group (12-17 years) and intended to reveal the dangerous behaviour of children in dealing with the Internet and sexual chat rooms, as well as the pornographic pictures, not to forget the attempts to engage in sexual activity with children, paedophilia. The study by Nirmin (2011) detected the exposure of youth to pornographic content on the Internet and TV stations and the achieved satisfaction. The study used the survey method and it was applied on a sample of 708 terms from adolescents. The study concluded with a series of results, namely 41.8% of adolescents view pornographic movies on a permanent basis. The sites which adolescents are keen to use are chat rooms, pornographic sites then the artistic sites. Motives to visit pornographic sites include 'sexual arousal' since the sites are always renewed and communicate with some people on a regular basis.

Problem of the study

In light of concern raised by the studies that measure the social effects of using the Internet there are worries about the effect of using the Internet on the social context and behaviours of individuals. Here lies the problem of the research in describing and analysing the patterns of the exposure of Saudi youth to pornographic content and in recognizing their effects on them and others. The study is also concerned with learning about the control patterns that are followed by families and the feasibility of the censorship system followed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding the undesired contents.

Hypothesis of the Study

First hypothesis: there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves and others.

Second hypothesis: there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves and others based on the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).

Two sub-hypotheses stem from the second one:

- There are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves due to the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).
- There are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content on others due to the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).

Third hypothesis: the Saudi youth support imposing control on the Internet to avoid the risks of pornographic content.

Methodology of the study

The research was conducted on a sample of Saudi youth in the eastern region (Al-Ahsa, Abqiaq, Dammam, Khobar). The intentional portion sample was used in accordance with the gender factor (male/female) and the academic level (secondary- university graduate) on the Saudi youth Internet users (sample: 159 terms of male and female youth). The field study was implemented on 17-20 December 2014.

Validity and reliability

Procedures were conducted to measure the validity of the instrument (a survey) as it was presented to a group of referees. Amendments were made based on the comments of the referees. Test re-test was used to measure validity since the instrument was appropriate for 10% of the original size of the sample.

Results and discussion

The first hypothesis: there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves and others in terms of their effect. Table 1 shows the results of differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content compared with their effect on others for one sample.

| Variable | Means | SD | T-Test | Freedom degree | F level | Significance |
|----------------------|-------|--------|--------|----------------|---------|--------------|
| Effect on themselves | 1.76 | 0.5420 | 27.01 | 119 | 0.010 | Significant |
| On others | 2.86 | 0.501 | | | | |

The above data indicates the truth of the hypothesis stating there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content compared with the level of effect on others ($T= 27.01$ at 0.010), as they see that such effect on other people is greater than on themselves. This is clear from the high level of effect on others (2.86) compared with the mean of effect on them (1.76).

This result is consistent with the third-person theory (the cognitive aspect) as stated by Davison “the individuals who are exposed to a convincing letter, think that it is more influential on the others since they might be breached from its effect on themselves ‘as characterized by Gunther’ than what we think about the beliefs of the others”.

Second hypothesis: there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves and others based on the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).

Two hypotheses subdivide from this one, which are:

- There are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves due to the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).
- There are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for others due to the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).

Table 2 shows the differences among the Saudi youth in their level of conception of the risks of pornography on themselves and others according to gender, by using T- test for two samples.

| Variable | Males | | Females | | Freedom degree | T-value | Level of morality | Significance |
|--|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------------|---------|-------------------|--------------|
| | Means | SD | Means | SD | | | | |
| Recognizing the risks of exposure to pornography content on the self | 1.76 | 0.621 | 1.52 | 0.622 | 119 | 4.02 | 0.010 | Significant |
| Recognizing the risks of exposure to pornography content on others | 1.32 | 1.88 | 1.69 | 2.01 | 119 | 1.839 | 0.000 | Significant |

The study concluded with a partial acceptance of the truth of the sub-hypothesis stating: “there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves due to the demographic variables (gender, place of residence).

There was a relationship in terms of the gender variable at 0.010, as shown in the above table, while there was no relationship for the variable place of residence as the level of significance was 0.470 as shown in the table below. The results show that females are more understanding of the risks of exposure to pornography to themselves. This can be attributed to the conservative nature of the society, which imposes restrictions on women’s use of the Internet.

Moreover, the study concluded with a partial acceptance of the sub-hypothesis stating: there are significant statistical differences in the perceptions of the Saudi youth regarding the risks of exposure to pornographic content for others due to the demographic variables (gender, place of residence). In this context, there was a relationship for the gender variable at 0.000, while there was no relationship for the variable place of residence (0.251), as shown in the table below. On the other hand, the results showed that females are more understanding of the risks of exposure to pornography for themselves. This can be attributed to the conservative nature of the society, which imposes restrictions on women’s use of the Internet.

Table 3: the differences between the Saudi youth in their conception level for the risks of exposure to pornographic content for themselves and others as per the variable of place of residence (using T-test for two samples)

| Variable | Rural | | Urban | | Freedom degree | T-value | Level of morality | Significance |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|---------|-------------------|----------------|
| | Means | SD | Means | SD | | | | |
| Recognizing the risks of exposure to pornography content on the self | 2.37 | 0.625 | 2.65 | 0.632 | 119 | 1.28 | 0.470 | Un-Significant |
| Recognizing the risks of exposure to pornography content on others | 1.32 | 1.88 | 1.69 | 2.01 | 119 | 1.15 | 0.251 | Un-Significant |

Third hypothesis: The Saudi youth support imposing control on the Internet to avoid the risks of the pornographic content. Table 4 shows the means of the conceptions of the Saudi youth for the credibility of institutions that use social media (using T-Test for one sample).

| Variable | T value | Freedom degree | Moral | Means | SD |
|--|---------|----------------|-------|--------|---------|
| Support for imposing control on the web. | 20.140 | 119 | 0.000 | 2.1534 | 0.62736 |

The study concluded with the truth of the hypothesis: The Saudi youth support imposing control on the Internet to avoid the risks of the pornographic content. T-value was 20.140 at 0.000. This is congruent with the third-person theory (the behavioural hypothesis) as shown by Davison “the individuals’ belief that the others are more affected with the media content compared with them, which cause to demand for imposing restrictions or controls on the medial content that they think is a hazard or has negative effects on the others”.

Recommendations

- Launch media campaigns that clarify and raise awareness about the impact of the Internet on the psychological and social behaviours of youth.
- Encourage families to make their children aware and to instil the principle of self-control within them. Parents should not take a negative position towards the Internet, by ignoring knowledge of what goes on in the world, but not let their children be like a straw in the wind.
- Advise young educators and inform them about the international rules for using the Internet, such as not disclosing personal information except to those they know, and only engaging in dialogues with people they know in the chat rooms or on the web, and not answering e-mails that contain mean wordings and ignoring e-mails from unknown sources.
- Not to open email messages except if sent from well-known persons.
- To leave bad peers since they send pornographic links to their peers.
- Avoid using search engines while looking for sexual-related topics.

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