



Dual Working Parents' Awareness Towards Children Internet Activities in Federal Territory of Labuan

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Abstract

This paper explores the awareness of dual-working parents towards their children's internet activities in Federal Territory of Labuan (F. T. Labuan), Malaysia. The internet has been considered as an important tool for people to exchange information and interact with each other. The existence of smartphones and mobile devices has become a menace towards parents to monitor their children's internet activities. Moreover, with the huge shift of mothers participating in the work sector, it has been increasingly challenging for dual-working parents to check and control their children's internet activities. A semi-structured interview was conducted with 11 families. The interview data were then analysed using qualitative method. The results showed that dual working parents in Labuan were mostly aware of the games and sites that their children often access dual working parents described that the main activities done by children are for the purpose of seeking entertainment, virtual social interaction and education.

Keywords: Dual working parents, awareness on children's internet activities, children's online activities



Introduction

In this current era, information and communication technology (ICT) is considered as a crucial component amongst the life of almost every community throughout the entire world, and there is no different in Malaysia. ICT has the ability to collect and distribute all necessary information as well as keep individuals, experts and organizations connected to one and another. Media technology has affected the lifestyle of a society drastically, especially on how they communicate with one and another where distances and times are no longer a constraint (Noh, Ismail, Ibrahim & Mustaffa, 2017). However, the internet medium and digital technology is dynamic and sadly, so is cyberthreats. Unrestricted internet use carries a handful of threats; psychological, social, physical, exploitation of children and social media (Alsehaima & Alanazi, 2018). We can see an increased number of incidents in regard to cyber security where data breaches, cyberstalking, identity theft and other unlawful conduct is done.

Over the past decade, we could see a huge influx of mothers participating into the labour force which in turn increase the amount of dual working parents in Malaysia. This is link with the government initiative to include more female in the labour force sector as well as in planning and implementing government policies and initiative (Bernama, 2022). Dual working parents have multiple roles to perform; the role of a paid worker, and the unpaid role of a parent to their children- if both work and family are imbalance, then work-family conflict may arise (Kingsley, 2020). The lack of time parents spend with their child could potentially deteriorate their parent-child bond. According to research by Cho and Choi in 2005, an increase in parent-child attachment has the ability to lower the exposure of risky internet content among children (Kanan, Arokiasamy & Ismail, 2018).

The adoption of internet in our communities especially children has brought parental control into a different dimension. Parents are no longer able to monitor their children's content access traditionally, hence digital literacy are also required. Reason being so is that, children are able to gain unlimited access to various unfiltered content on the internet through their small and portable gadgets such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops. This makes parenting harder for parents especially dual working parents where time is their biggest enemies. Parents are required to keep track and monitor their children's online activities to avoid any unwanted and harmful content from being accessed. It is important for dual working parents to be conscious on the activities and internet pattern of their children to prevent them from becoming a victim of the internet trap. Therefore, the motive of this paper is to explore the awareness of dual working parents towards their children's internet activities.



Literature Review

The effects of internet towards children

There are possibilities for children to have a wider access to inaccurate content, fake news, inappropriate sexual and violent contents, thus their well-being might be affected (Ferrara et al., 2021). Privacy issues in applications that were downloaded by children could also be a worrying situation whereby repository was not identified prior to apps installation and all the data would then be shared with third parties (Basu, Hussain, Gupta & Karri, 2020). Based on a report by Timberg and Romm in 2019, a famous social media app TikTok formerly known as Musical.ly were fined \$5.7 million by Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for illegally gathering private information of children under the age of 13. Moreover, overuse can lead them to internet addiction, commercial exploitation and exposure to inappropriate content (Kaya & Dalgic, 2021). What worries the most here is, those effects could not be detected in short term but in long term such as changes in children's physical, social and psychological development (Chankaya & Odabasi, 2009). The long period spent by children accessing the internet might affect their body posture. Beside that, as children spent more time on the internet, the higher the chances of them accidentally access unsuitable or inaccurate content.

More time spent on the internet is said to reduce children's interest in sports, face to face interaction with colleagues and family members, refusal to engage in voluntary or community work and less interest in attending out of school classes such as art and music (McDool et al., 2020). This social isolation might lead children's involvement in other problematic internet usage such as cyberbully activities - either as the perpetrator or as the victims (Ahmad Ghazali et al., 2020). Internet usage is also related to depression and this can be caused by several factors. First, too much available sources might create digital information overload which only a part of the younger generation can cope with, second; excessive internet usage and third; when internet users try to compare themselves with others in the social media - this social comparison if constantly practiced by the users will result in exaggeration of real life, jealousy and depression (Ivie et al., 2020). Viewing videos or pictures on the internet that portrays the perfect living lives of certain individuals have the potential to allow children to compare their life with others which therefore could lead to depression.

Parental awareness on children internet usage

One of the responses to the problematic internet usage is that parents need to be aware of what have been surfed by their children. What is more demanding is that Wi-Fi and unlimited internet speed are available almost everywhere, thus allowing children to perform activities with it anytime and anywhere they are. According to Benedetto and Ingrassia (2021), after four years, countless number of parents proclaimed that they have little knowledge on their children's online activities and possessed more challenges to closely supervise children's internet events. This



is supported by Blackwell et. al. (2016) as cited in Ghosh et. al. (2018) that claimed personal gadgets such as mobile phones, tabs and others developed more threats for parents to monitor online activities together with the obfuscated use of certain questionable applications such as Snapchat.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 Pandemic has forced the country to carry out learning activities through online platforms and parents acknowledge their responsibility in assisting these educational experiences. However, dual working parents are concerned on allowing children to learn, grow media skills and enjoy but at the same time keeping them safe from internet harm (Vincent, 2015; Nouwen & Zaman, 2018). Thus, adding more challenges to the already low level of awareness in children's browsing pattern. Some parents found difficulties in determining the minimum age for their children to use social networking sites. While some said that exposing internet at the early age might not be too good for the children, parents are concern that introducing their children too late to the internet might delay development of their social and cognitive skills (Mertala, 2018). Another issue to be solved is strategy to change the mindset of the children that internet is not only about game and entertainment. With regards to this, parents face problems in strategies to be implemented especially when they want to use the internet for their children's educational purpose and failure to do this might drive towards another problematic internet usage - online gaming addiction (Belisle and Dixon, 2020).

Parental mediation strategies

Parental mediation strategies are the methods used by parents in control and regulating their children's online activities (Chen, Liu & Tang, 2023). The number one objective of parents is to protect their children from negative impact whilst allowing them to expose in useful content while they are on the internet. There are four main strategies that parents can perform; restrictive mediation, active mediation, participatory learning and technical mediation (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Clark, 2011; Adigwe & Walt, 2020). Restrictive mediation is the communication on building stern sets of rules and regulations regarding the use of media and followed by punishments when children break it (Hoffman, 2019). Second, active mediation supplies the method that allow parents to have evaluative conversations with their children to talk about or explain children's internet usage (Adigwe & Walt, 2020). Third, mediation strategies are the steps or action plan that parents take to check on and monitor what their child are doing when accessing the world wide web. Lastly, technical mediation refers to the use of filtering, tracing, and managing children's internet activities (Adigwe and Walt, 2020). Through performing mediation strategy, parents are able to be aware of what types of content that their children watch and visit online. With the emergence of information technologies, a new mediation strategy was found; technical mediation. Parents are able to track and monitor their children's internet pattern through software and technical settings



on their children's devices. Additionally, Zaman and others (2016) in Cremers (2019) discovered distant mediation. Distant mediation refers to a technique where parents monitor their children from a distance (workplace to home).

Research Method

A non-probability sampling is used in this paper through the implementation of purposive sampling guided by inclusive and exclusive criteria that can be found in the table below. Dual working parents are selected as this study's informants due to the fact that in this era, we can see a huge number of mothers changing their status from a housewife to a working wife. Therefore, the dynamic of a family has shifted from single bread winner to a dual parental effort to keep pace with the current standard of living which can be translated into lack of time spent to monitor their children.

Dual working parents with children aged 6 to 12 years old are one of the inclusive criteria in this paper. By this stage of age, children seek more autonomy from parents and start to involve with the internet which will expose them to harm but at the same time this is the age range where they still obey to parents' authority (Cremer, 2019). Only families residing in F. T. Labuan are eligible to participate in this paper to ensure that accurate data and representation of the state of F. T. Labuan are made possible.

Table 1 *Inclusive and exclusive criteria.*

Inclusive Criteria	Exclusive Criteria
Both parents are working	Single earner parents
Married parents	Divorced parents
Have child(ren) aged 6-12 years old	Have child(ren) aged below 6 or above 12 years old
Malaysian citizen	Non-Malaysian citizen
Residing in F.T. Labuan	Residing outside of F.T. Labuan

As a result, 11 informants representing 11 families residing in F. T. Labuan participated in this study. Each informant was given a consent form before the interview session is started. A semi-structured face-to-face interview session were conducted to obtain rich and useful data from dual working parents in Labuan. At the end of the interview session, each informant was given RM50 in cash as a token of appreciation for their voluntary participation.

The research instruments created by researchers are in line with the research objective set which is to investigate dual working parents' awareness towards children's online activities. The semi-structured interview questions are built from



previous related studies, experts' opinion and discussion among research members on guide question and protocol development. The data collection process starts by identifying the eligible candidate for this research. Prior to the interview session, respondents are contacted first to identify the date and time that they are available for an interview. Upon conforming the date and time, the venue is set based on the preference of the informants themselves to allow them to feel comfortable during the interview session.

The average interview duration is between 20 minutes to 35 minutes as shown in the table below. However, informant LA08 took longer time to complete the interview session is due to personal character, whereby the informant likes to share and explain personal experience in depth and in a story telling manner as compared to the other informants.

Table 2 Lists of informants.

Informant Code	Gender	Date of Interview	Interview Duration
LA01	Female	16 Aug 2023	41:35
LA02	Male	22 Aug 2023	35:00
LA03	Female	28 Aug 2023	39:22
LA04	Female	29 Aug 2023	29:57
LA05	Female	29 Aug 2023	28:20
LA06	Female	29 Aug 2023	37:30
LA07	Male	17 Oct 2023	27:24
LA08	Male	19 Oct 2023	1:07:48
LA09	Female	25 Oct 2023	24:13
LA10	Female	25 Oct 2023	27:31
LA11	Male	27 Oct 2023	19:03

Interview sessions are recorded and then transcribed for the analysis of data. Thematic analysis is the type of analysis which is applicable for this study. It aims to identify themes and sub-themes based on notifying the patterns and themes, clustering, counting, noting similarities, and relationship detected between the extracted data (Flemming et al., 2018).

Data collection procedure

Before starting fieldwork, research first need to perform few steps to obtain permission to collect research data. Firstly, researcher need to prepare semi-structured interview questions and the questions must have approval from the



ethics committees. Next, researcher need to have permission from the University's Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human (JKEUPM), the approval letter from Universiti Putra Malaysia ethics committee can be referred in appendix 1. Finally, researcher will contact the selected informant to determine the data and venue for the interview session.

Study location

This research has been carried out in Federal Territory of Labuan, Malaysia. Labuan is best known for its offshore financial centre offering international financial and business services since 1990. Besides that, it also serves as an offshore support hub for deep water oil and gas activities in the region. These two main exertions are one of the many reasons that contribute to the increase of dual working parents in the working landscape. Parents particularly in the oil and gas industry are required to adjust to unexpected working hour due to the busy offshore activities. Therefore, sacrificing the time spent together with the with their child which ultimately risk the monitoring capability of parents. Thus, Federal Territory of Labuan is selected for this research.

Sampling technique

A non-probability sampling is used in this research through the implementation of purposive sampling guided by inclusive and exclusive characteristic. Families that consists of dual working parents and have middle childhood children (6-12 years old) are identified. The identification of this type of family is assisted by Malaysia Social Institute (ISM) (the study's collaborator), related associations/Non-Government Organisations (e.g. Muslim Volunteer Malaysia) and based on the researchers' networking and linkages. The researcher then selected either father or mother of the identified family as the study's informant. Five informants were recruited through four personal contacts. The other six remaining informants were gained through snowball sampling. Through snowball sampling, the sample is usually more varied (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 166; Cremers, 2019) as it consists of different ages, background and socio-economy.

Data analysis

Data collected are transcribed and thematic analysis is the main analysis technique used. It is a type of analysis where a researcher interprets stories that are told within the context of research or shared in everyday life. The data analysis that researchers might need is regarding the respondent's life history or their life experiences. Thematic analysis is the type of analysis which is applicable for this study. It aims to identify themes and sub-themes based on notifying the patterns and themes, clustering, counting, noting similarities, and relationship detected between the extracted data (Flemming et al., 2018). Thematic analysis assisted



the researchers to identify any pattern that emerge and develop themes and sub-themes (if there are any) related to parents' perception on media and its impact on children, problems parents encounter, strategies parents used, and desired tools or resources to better navigate children in new media environment as suggested by Cremer in 2019. In this research, data are analysed manually by the researcher without using any software or application. Due to the little number of informants involved, this method is made possible.

Research Findings

Online streaming videos

From the interview sessions it shows that parents in general are aware of their children's internet activities. Interviewed parents informed that most of their children's online activities revolves around seeking for entertainment. Without a doubt, the internet provides users a variety of entertainment. One of the entertainments that children can fill up their free time on the internet is through watching online streaming videos. Arguably the most famous online streaming platform for videos is YouTube. This can be shown from the answer parents provide during the interview regarding their child's online activities. Some of their responds are as follows:

"He often watch Roblox and some cartoons on YouTube." LA02

"She likes to watch videos on cartoons and Mukbang (eating)." LA06

"The third one (age 12) would watch bunch of things, games and other YouTube things." LA07

"YouTube, she access the trending songs." LA11

In addition to the online streaming platforms available, TikTok, an up-and-coming social media platform that provides a short to medium duration of online videos are gaining a lot of users especially from children in Labuan. TikTok has been receiving positive feedback in terms of their growth especially for children aged 6-12 years old as informed by parents:

"My daughter likes watching TikTok, she watches informative contents. Sometimes she will tell me that we can do these things, we can do that thing..." LA01



"He would also access TikTok. His TikTok content would normally display contents regarding his games (FIFA), religious and cooking recipe." LA03

"TikTok normally she will scroll on the Roblox contents." LA06

Online video games

Apart from watching videos online, parents said that their children would also play games that are available online. Online games are becoming very popular among children in this century. Children could play online games alone, with friends and even with random users from different states and countries for the sake of enjoyment. One of the most common online games played by children are Roblox. These can be shown from the replies that parents gave during the interview:

*"Games like Baby Panda and also **Roblox**, but I will monitor when he plays Roblox."* LA05

*"She often plays **Roblox**, once in a while she will play princesses games, saloon games, unicorns and games that test her mind."* LA06

*"He would play mobile legends and **Roblox**."* LA07

*"**Roblox**, fun run, games like makeups, changing outfits, handbags, Among Us. So, basically games like that."* LA08

*"He plays **Roblox** and drawing stuff."* LA10

*"Normally **Roblox** and coloring site. Only those two."* LA11

Besides Roblox, there are few other games that children can play online that involves playing with unknown player such as FIFA, Minecrafts, Monopoly and Mobile Legends.

"Usually what I have seen, he often use it to play games (FIFA)." LA03

"Games like Minecraft and now he's crazy for Monopoly." LA04

"In Minecraft, he will play with random people, I often heard him talking with randoms." LA04

"He would play mobile legends....." LA07



Online communication platforms

Some parents allow their child to download and use communication applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram. These communication apps allow children to communicate with their peers, teacher and family members online. Through these applications, children could receive and send their school works to their teacher, talk to family members and also receive information regarding their extracurricular activities. Examples of parents' answer are:

"Allow them to call or WhatsApp, just in case if have an emergency." LA01

"Telegram, WhatsApp for homeworks, choral speaking or dancing class." LA08

"Sometimes he refer YouTube and WhatsApp if his teacher requires him to. Sometimes they send their homework through WhatsApp." LA10

"...and to call his cousins." LA10

Discussion

Figure 1 Children's online activities thematic map.



Based on the findings, the informants show a convincing result of awareness towards their child's online activities. They indicated that the majority of activities carried out by children on the internet are watching online videos from free-to-view platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Facebook. As supported by Daramola (2015), most children would prefer visiting online sites that provides the platform to share and view videos. This explains the high volume of children choosing to watch their favourite cartoons and game shows on such platforms whenever they have the time. As these videos could be paused and played wherever and whenever they want, it is seemed to be their go-to activity on the internet for their entertainment, tranquility and life play (Sorenson, 2010; Martinez, 2017). Moreover, TikTok, YouTube and



Facebook offer short video clips or known as *reels* that allows children to watch it for a short duration of time. Children watches online streaming videos to enjoy and relax after a stressful and tiring day in school and other extra-curricular activities.

Apart from watching online streaming videos, parents are also aware that their child have been playing games that are available online for free. Most young children prefer to submerge in the virtual world, it is a phrase used to express specially stimulated setting on the internet that allows children to play games and socialize with others through online avatar interactions (Blake, Winsor & Allen; 2012; Daramola, 2015). Games like Roblox, Mobile Legends and Among Us provide such features that allows children to enjoy their game and at the same time communicate with others via in-game chatting or voice comms. Children could either choose to play with their friends from schools, their relatives and even with unknown players. Although parents could hear and see what their child are playing, the details of communication done by their child through in-game chat still remains a hard task to monitor. Parents have to fully rely on children's reaction when playing such games to see whether their behavior is acceptable or vice versa.

"As younger children get older, they broaden their internet activities to include information consulting, doing their homework and socializing" (Ofcom, 2012; Childwise, 2012; Gudmundsdottir & Hardersen, 2011; Findahl, 2012; Daramola, 2015). As children gets older, their responsibilities and activities also increase. Older children would have more schoolwork and participated in more extra-curricular activities. Sometimes, their teachers would post homework or assignments in virtual communicating platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram. Parents are left with no other choices but to allow their child to install such application in order for their child to be up to date with their latest tasks and schools works as what have been found earlier. Parents indicated that their children use online communicating platforms to receive school information and communicate with their teachers and peers. Parents also disclosed that their child would use this communicating application to communicate with their friends in regards to their extra-curricular activities such as place and time for training, meetings and projects with schoolmates. Other children would take advantages of these useful resources to keep in touch with family members from a distance.

In order for to protect children from unintentionally access unsuitable or unwanted contents online, dual working parents must prepare themselves with the knowledge and understanding of what they children are doing on the internet. Parents must be resilient to filter or block harmful contents and ideologies in the internet from the exploration of their children. According to Walsh (2003) in Bhattacharjee, Baruah and Doley (2022), a resilient family are described as a family system that has the ability to resist and recover from unfavorable situations, become stronger and smarter in resources they have. The resources that parents have (knowledge on children's online activities) can reflect their efforts and ideas in protecting their children from the danger of internet (cyberbully, online exploitation and excessive



screen time) that could affect children's mental and physical developments. Therefore, dual working parents in F. T. Labuan prepare themselves with adequate resources such as being internet literate, familiarizing with what is going on in the internet and various parenting tools to help them track and filter the contents that their children access and the activities that they perform online. With this, parents are able to set the right path for children in F. T. Labuan to develop physically and psychologically.

In general, dual working parents showed clear sense of awareness towards their children's internet activities. Dual working parents are able to identify the main activities of their children when they go online. From the games they played to content they reached out; dual working parents are able to familiarize themselves with their children's internet pattern.

Conclusion

In summary, research finding shows that dual working parents in F. T. Labuan has a strong awareness on the activities done by their children upon accessing the internet. Based on what has been described by dual working parents, children used the internet to seek for entertainment, virtual social interaction and education. From the findings, we can conclude that children aged 6-12 years old seeks prefer seeking entertainment on the internet, which includes playing games, watching videos or even communicating with their friends. Being aware towards children's internet usage are crucial for dual working parents. Early detection and prevention could be made by parents when they have clear awareness on their children's internet usage. Parents will have a clear view on what their children are currently accessing and whether it is an alarming situation to properly plan their intervention strategies.

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