



# 通往未來之路

青少年上網狀況的研究

## **Roads to the Future**

A Study on Internet and Young People

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### ***Roads to the Future: A Study on Internet and Young People***

#### **SUMMARY REPORT**

## **1. Introduction**

The number of personal computers has multiplied rapidly worldwide in the past ten years. As a result, accessibility has increased to a huge store of information provided via the Internet connection. In Hong Kong, the number of Internet Service Providers has also increased from 2 in 1993 to 26 in 1995, reflecting business confidence in the huge potential market. At the same time, concerns of abuse of the Internet are emerging in every corner of the world, concerns about obscenity, defamation, copyright, hacking, computer literacy, etc. The regulatory debate is of great concern to government, service providers, parents and users, and also to educators.

The major objectives of this study are to obtain a profile of young people who become involved in Internet activities, find out about the kind of data they have access to, and its effect on them. The study will also reveal some of the implications for services and policies in the area.

## **2. Methodology**

A multiple approach was adopted so that researchers could collect extensively viewpoints from a wide spectrum. It includes (a) an extensive literature review on the topic through library research and Internet search; (b) interviews with computer experts, Internet Service Providers, Internet users, young people and computer teachers; (c) a telephone survey, conducted from 23 to 30 May 1996, designed to assess the level of young people's computer literacy and obtain a profile of those using Internet. Standard Public Opinion Programme sampling procedures were adopted and 546 young people aged from 15 to 29 were successfully interviewed using a structured questionnaire. Finally, (d) information gathering and consultation in Newsgroups of Internet. Data collected were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

## **3. Findings from respondents**

- 3.1 Over half of the respondents (50.5%) mainly used personal computers at home. A significant portion of respondents have been exposed to computers at work or in school.
- 3.2 43.7% of respondents indicated that they wanted to learn how to use a computer because it was necessary in their job or for homework. There were also 14.1% motivated by playing computer games or watching VCD. Another 10.6% were curious.
- 3.3 Over half (58.2%) of the respondents had acquired knowledge of computers informally

by themselves, from magazines, from friends or colleagues, or in the workplace. Only 29.3% of the respondents claimed to have learned about computers from school teachers despite the fact that 58.6% said that they had taken computer classes at school.

- 3.4 Over half (59.0%) of the respondents have a computer at home which is used mainly by themselves or their siblings. A majority (81.5%) of the respondents claimed that neither of their parents know anything about computers.
- 3.5 Most respondents use computers at home from 8:00 pm to 12:00 midnight, with the peak (36.1%) from 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm. A majority (84.3%) on average uses it for three hours or less on weekdays which is reduced to 68.3% at weekends. 64.3% spend \$200 or less on buying computer accessories including computer hardware, software, books, Internet monthly service fees and PNETS.
- 3.6 A small proportion (18.5%) of the respondents have used Internet. Most of them use Internet at school, at home or at work. An overall 45% of the respondents claimed that they have accidentally or deliberately accessed obscene or indecent Worldwide web sites (13%), Newsgroups (2.8%), BBS (7.0%) or e-mail (4.2%).
- 3.7 When asked to rate their computer knowledge on a scale of 0 to 5, a significant proportion (63.4%) of the respondents rated themselves below 2.0 and the average score was 2.1. There were 6.4% who gave themselves zero.
- 3.8 Although over half (55.1%) of the respondents claimed that their present computer knowledge was able to meet their job requirements, 62.6% were planning to increase their knowledge in the coming year. The reasons given were being interested and wanting to learn more (44.0%), to meet job requirements (27.9%), to do homework (24.6%) and in-service training by company (1.2%). Those who do not plan to learn mostly say they have no time (30.9%).

#### 4. Discussion and Recommendations

##### Discussion

- (1) **Young people are widely exposed to computers and information technology, yet the proportion using Internet is not high and their self-rated computer knowledge is low.**

The research indicated that young people are widely exposed to computers and information technology. They may need to use computers for word-processing or database management for their homework. Only 18.5% of respondents have ever used the Internet service. Most users of Internet use the Worldwide Web, Bulletin Board Service, News Group, Electronic Mail or Cyber Art. The majority has accessed Internet between 8:00 pm and midnight, with 36.1% of respondents using it at the peak hour between 9:00 pm and 10:00 pm. Over three-quarters (76.2%) of the respondents pay on average \$200 or less on computer purposes, such as buying computer books, hardware, software, Internet service fees and PNETS expenses. 84.3% of the respondents used Internet for three hours or less on weekdays.

Only 68.3% respondents use it for a comparable length of time at weekends.

Even though young people widely recognize that computers are a necessity today and some are using the Internet service, 63.4% of the respondents have rated their level of computer literacy at below 2.0 on a scale of 0 to 5. The average score is only 2.1 and a further 6.4% of respondents gave themselves zero. Evidently, young people feel inadequate in their computer knowledge and this is particularly the case for respondents of secondary or matriculation education.

**(2) While young people need to use computers for work or study, some are attracted by curiosity or computer games. Over half of the respondents acquire computer knowledge by themselves rather than from schoolteachers**

The survey findings indicated that over half the respondents (58.2%) have acquired their computer knowledge by themselves, from newspapers or magazines, from friends or colleagues, or through in-service practice. Only 29.3% of the respondents obtained their computer knowledge from teachers at school. The survey also shows that computer games, video-CD or curiosity often provide the motivation for learning how to use a computer.

The positive interpretation of this phenomenon is that young people are receptive to new technology and have a strong motivation for self-improvement. 62.6% of the respondents claim that they will learn to use a computer within a year. On the other hand, it also suggests that the teaching of computer studies in secondary schools is not current enough to represent the latest developments in computer technology and information.

**(3) Parents are often willing to buy computers for their children, but themselves lack computer knowledge to monitor the use of or access to Internet information**

The survey results show that a large proportion of parents are willing to buy their children computers as 59% of the respondents have a personal computer at home. However, the survey also reveals that 81.5% of the parents of the respondents have no computer knowledge at all. While over 60% of the respondents use computers for playing games or watching VCD, 13% claimed that they have intentionally or accidentally encountered obscene articles. These usually come from Worldwide Web, News Group, e-mail or BBS.

Parents are evidently aware of the importance of computer knowledge for their children's future and are willing to spend money on computers. Yet, with limited computer knowledge themselves, parents are unable to monitor how their children use computers or access the Internet.

**(4) Computer studies in Hong Kong are not keeping up with current demand nor with our counterparts in Asia, the Four Little Dragons**

The twenty-first century will be an era of information. Compared with our Asian

neighbours, such as Taiwan, Singapore or Korea, Hong Kong lags behind in fundamental computer education. At present, there are four syllabuses for computer education: the Syllabus for Computer Literacy in Secondary Form 1 to 3, HKCEE Examination Syllabus for Form 4 to 5, HKAL examination Syllabus for Form 6 to 7 and a HKAL Examination Supplementary Syllabus on Computer Application for Form 6 to 7. The overall impression of the computer studies curriculum is that it does not put much emphasis on computer applications needed for employment, such as word-processing, database management, spreadsheets, the use of Internet and e-mail, etc. Apart from the Syllabuses, computer facilities in the educational systems seem to be inadequate. We interviewed experts who pointed out that problems in secondary schools are the following: the computer hardware is not up to standard for Internet or multimedia, the Chinese educational software is grossly inadequate, individual computers are not linked into a Local Area Network (LAN) to share data for training, and schools do not even have enough phone jacks to take phone lines for modems. Under these circumstances, it is hardly expected that efficient computer teaching, demonstrations or exercises by students are possible.

Singapore, on the other hand, has devoted considerable resources to fundamental computer education and infrastructure. Interdepartmental efforts are organized for better human resources training. Even a Ministry of Information has been set up to steer Singapore into an Information City early next century.

#### **(5) Hong Kong lacks discussion about and concern for the complexity of Internet issues**

Internet, together with the information explosion, has become a way of life. The phenomenon has highlighted some complex issues, such as the balance between freedom of expression and information and the protection of morals and young people, the enforcement of international law in the area of Internet, whether Internet and its information should be regulated and if so how?

##### ***(a) How to balance freedom of information and the protection of young people and morals”?***

In a society of sophisticated technology, the basic social fabric is freedom of information which provides an important social environment for business and for the economy to flourish. In United States, “The First Amendment” of the US Constitution expresses clearly the constitutional position of freedom of expression and information. A similar article on freedom of expression is also incorporated in The Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada. Article 39 of The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, states that “The provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)...as applied to Hong Kong shall remain in force and shall be implemented through the laws of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.” Article 19 of ICCPR states that “1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference, 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.” However, section 3 subsection (b) of the same article points out that “The exercise of the rights...may therefore be subject to certain restrictions...provided by law...for the protection of ...public health or morals.”

As it is stated in the ICCPR that "everyone shall have the right to...seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds...of his choice", it is in a prima facie interpretation that it should include information transmitted through Internet or any other electronic medium. However, it also points out that the exercise of the rights may be subject to restrictions provided by law for the protection of morals. This brings out exactly the key issue that the regulation of obscenity is a moral issue, and concepts of morality differ from country to country and from culture to culture. As a result, there is no standard yardstick to measure the moral standard for every country. It is also a very difficult task to balance the freedom of information and the protection of morals and young people. In the United States, the recent enactment of the Communication Decency Act just reflects the moral standard and the inclination of the country. The object of the Act is to protect young people. Anyone, including non-profit organizations, who imparts or provides obscene information for young people will commit an offence. However, it has just been ruled on 12 June 1996 at the Federal Court of Philadelphia that the Communication Decency Act is unconstitutional. This decision implies that the society puts a higher priority on freedom of information than on the protection of morals and young people.

Of course, the legal system in Hong Kong is different from that of the United States, but the concerns will be the same. The issue is further complicated when it involves communication at a personal level. If communication in Internet is to be regulated, those who transmit obscene articles via the Internet may commit an offence. However, if the transmission involves only a one-to-one e-mail communication, with the same content, will it also constitute the same offence as if it were the transmission of obscene articles to the public? If the answer is positive, does it mean that personal communication of obscene articles should also be regulated? If again the answer is positive, does it further imply that daily telling dirty jokes to a friend at a social gathering could also be an offence? This example may be a bit extreme but it illustrates the complexity of defining and balancing the issues involved.

***(b) Internet has an international character and regulation or law enforcement is complicated***

The emergence of Internet raises the issue of communication in an international arena. It also suggests that law enforcement over an international concern can be complicated. In different countries, the definition of obscenity differs. For example, if obscene articles imparted from country A are downloaded in country B, is it reasonable to treat it as a criminal offense in country B if the articles are acceptable in country A? Or if the articles are unlawful in both country A and country B, will the laws in country A or country B be enforced? And in which country should the case be tried in the courts of country A or country B? What degree of sentencing, according to country A or country B, will be invoked? These are some of the related technical and legal concerns involved in the issues that need to be considered.

***(c) Information on Internet is exploding rapidly making both pre-screening and post-classification or filtering inefficient***

The information on Internet is multiplying rapidly everyday. The number of computer servers is also increasing at a speed that almost defies measurement. Creating a homepage or putting information into a WWW site often requires no registration and pre-screening. If there

is a need for post-classification and filtering of a particular type of information, such as for example, obscene and indecent material, the time taken will inevitably be much longer than the creation and increase of new materials. In addition, the manpower and resources involved in the post-classification and filtering will be huge. It would thus be inefficient to do such screening and filtering.

## Recommendations

- (1) Since the level of computer studies is lagging behind that of our Asian counterparts, the Hong Kong government needs to emphasize education for computer application and develop comprehensive planning on human resources training for the future**

As we can see from the survey results, Hong Kong lags behind its counterparts Taiwan and Singapore on education in computer application. We can also see that the standard of computer hardware and Chinese education software does not meet the need for Internet teaching, demonstration and exercises. In order to respond to the rapidly developing information and computer technology, it is obvious that the Hong Kong government needs to put more emphasis on education for computer application in secondary schools. Additional resources should be provided for the training of adequate personnel to enable them to acquire sufficient knowledge of computer applications, such as word-processing, database management, use of Internet or e-mail or spreadsheets, which are needed commercially, or in employment or for domestic use. The development of comprehensive planning on human resources training for the next five to ten years will also be important. This should be regarded as a valuable investment for the future of society.

- (2) The regulation of Internet information by legislation seems ineffective. The issue should be considered from various angles to include self-regulation by business or by public opinion**

Apart from the debate on the balance of freedom of information and the protection of morals and young people, the technical limitations of law enforcement, such as the definitional controversy, legal proceedings and the application of the law in different countries, render the regulation of Internet information inefficient, if not impossible. Furthermore, it is not uncommon that when a piece of controversial legislation is enacted, it may not always have the intended effect. If enforcing a law or regulation in Internet in the name of protecting morals and young people, but has the effect of limiting the fundamental civil liberties of freedom of information, it will be a disaster in a society which treasures freedom. How to create a balance between the two ends has no exact answer. In the United States, the responsibility is given to parents who install a V-chip in the television to filter out obscene and indecent programmes. At present, some Internet Service Providers in Hong Kong have also voluntarily started some self-regulations. They have blacklisted those WWW sites with obscene or indecent articles and filtered them out before they can be accessed by customers. It is therefore recommended that opinions from different sectors, such as Internet Service Providers, computer experts, parents and society at large, should be widely consulted before any decisions on regulation are reached.

- (3) Since the Internet is accessible to young people in every family, the Internet Service Providers should take on the responsibility of a performance pledge on self-regulation**

In view of the rapid multiplication of Internet information, it is the social responsibility for the Internet Service Providers to have a performance pledge for young people. The pledge should include initiatives on self-regulation and filtering of obscene or indecent articles in the Internet before they can be accessed by the customers. Indeed, a number of Internet Service Providers have already blacklisted obscene websites and provide screening and filtering. This not only helps to build up the reputation of the company, but also attracts a group of customers who just want to access "clean sites". This method of self-regulation should be encouraged.

- (4) The Government should consider public education to alert the public as well as incorporating consciousness-raising training in secondary school computer education.**

The government should consider educating the general public to alert them to the issue of obscenity in Internet so that they can avoid unpleasant websites. Consciousness-raising training should also be incorporated into computer education in secondary schools as a preventive measure.