

Assessing the validity of western measurement of online risks to children in an Asian context

ABSTRACT

Before the advent of the Internet, television and film was the only audio-visual medium to which most children were exposed. The risks were primarily limited to children being exposed to sexual and violent materials, the nature of which were known and easy to control. Nowadays, children are surrounded by a variety of digital media and are exposed to different risks, many of which are still unknown. The Internet is fully integrated into children's daily lives, along with the potential risks. The present study aimed to (i) describe the level of risks children are exposed to, and (ii) test the measurement validity of a total of 45 items assessing nine scales of online risk to children that were adapted from studies carried out in Europe and the United States. The study comprised 420 schoolchildren. The results showed that children were more exposed to 'unwanted exposure to pornography' and less to 'conduct risk' (e.g., accidental illegal downloading; creating profiles on inappropriate websites). Boys and older children were more exposed to the risks compared to girls and younger children. The study validated five dimensions (inappropriate materials, sexting, contact-related risks, risky online sexual behavior, and bullying/being bullied) assessing online risk to children by using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The study found that scales developed in Europe and the United States are not wholly suitable to an Asian context and needed to be modified. Further investigation to classify online risks to children and offer a solutions to reducing the online risks.

Keyword: Online personal data misuse; Cyberbullying; Online contact risks; Potentially harmful online content risks; Sexual online content