Malaysian Parents' Perception of Their Children's Digital Media Usage: A Negotiation of Risks and Benefits

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Background

Children are assumed to be digital by default

Many parents are still unaware of how to parent their children best digitally, sometimes choosing restrictive ways that may ultimately hinder children's capacity to capitalise on the opportunities provided by digital technologies.

Parents should instead consider their children's interactions with digital devices in terms of risks and opportunities. Parents must accept that to take advantage of the potential provided by the internet, they must tackle the risks.

This study looks at how Malaysian parents perceive and negotiate the risks and benefits of their children's digital media usage

Risks and Benefits

- Risk, as it pertains to our discourse on children's digital use, thus, refers to the uncertain of and the severity that their digital usage will result in something which threaten their wellbeing.

- Risk is not to be construed as actual harm, but rather it is the probability of its actual occurrence.

- The typology in its inception classified children's digital risk into three categories; content, contact and conduct

- Benefits are not as elaborately defined and in the literature of digital parenting, this is even more conspicuous

- First and foremost area in children's life emphasized regarding digital benefit is education. According to UNICEF (2017), dissemination of knowledge can now transcend rural-urban, socio-economic divide due to digital connectivity.

- The second area of digital benefits that received the most exposition in the digital technology literature in relation to children is social interaction.

Research Questions

1. What are Malaysian parents risk perception of their children's digital use?

2. What are Malaysian parents benefit perception of their children's digital use?

3. How do Malaysian parents negotiate digital risks and benefits of their children's digital use?

Methodology

- The research population is Malaysian parents with children aged 7 to 12 years old.

- 654 survey questionnaires were collected from all the all the states in the peninsular Malaysia as well as Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur

- Survey done in Bahasa

Demograpics

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Role	Mother	432	66.1
	Father	218	33.3
	No response	4	0.6
	Total	654	100.0
Age (years old)	20-30	45	6.9
	31-40	273	41.7
	41-50	275	42.0
	51 and above	57	8.7
	No response	4	0.6
	Total	654	100.0
Ethnicity	Malay/Bumputera	489	74.8
	Chinese	88	13.5
	Indian	67	10.2
	Others (specify: Indonesian, Orang Asli)	6	0.9
	No response	4	0.6
	Total	654	100.0
Highest completed education	Secondary education/SPM/ STPM	257	39.3
	Diploma	133	20.3
	Bachelor degree	232	35.5
	Master/Ph.D.	31	4.8
	No response	1	0.2
	Total	654	100.0
Total household income	RM2,000 and below	127	19.4
	RM2,001 – RM5,000	283	43.3
	RM5,001 – RM10,000	182	27.8
	RM10,001 – RM15,000	46	7.0
	RM15,001 and above	13	2.0
	No response	3	0.5
	Total	654	100.0

Findings 1: Parents' Risk Perception

- All items in parent's risk perception of digital use to child are significantly high

- Digital media causes physical harm like eye irritation and back aches (81.1%).

- Causes their child to lose boundaries (spiritual/religious) (63.7%).

One sample t-test for Parent's Risk Perception on Child

No.	Parent's Risk Perception to Child	M*	SD	%	t**	p
1.	4a1: It causes physical harm like eye irritation and back aches.	4.055	0.936	81.1	28.828	.000
2.	4a2: It causes neurological harm like attention deficit or overstimulation of the nervous system.	3.882	1.022	77.6	22.079	.000
3.	4a7: It can introduce my child to inappropriate content such as pornography and violence.	3.859	1.113	77.2	19.743	.000
4.	4a3: It causes emotional harm such as aggression, depression, and mental health.	3.815	1.019	76.3	20.445	.000
5.	4a5: It makes my child lazy.	3.804	1.036	76.1	19.852	.000
6.	4a9: It causes Internet addiction.	3.755	1.095	75.1	17.642	.000
7.	4a10: Bad people such as paedophile and swindlers can easily find my child.	3.749	1.098	75.0	17.455	.000
8.	4a6: It makes my child anti-social and prefers to be online than be with friends.	3.702	1.117	74.0	16.067	.000
9.	4a4: It deteriorates imagination/phantasy/creativity.	3.581	1.099	71.6	13.516	.000
10.	4a8: My child becomes uncontrollable every time I refuse to allow him/her to be online.	3.271	1.216	65.4	5.693	.000
11.	4a11: It causes my child to lose boundaries (spiritual/religious).	3.185	1.305	63.7	3.625	.000
Overall Parent's Risk Perception to Child (N = 654)		3.620	0.900	72.4	17.620	.000

* On a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree (1 – 20%), 2 = disagree (21 – 40%), 3 = slightly agree (41 – 60%), 4 = agree (61 – 80%), and strongly agree (81 – 100%). (1 mark)

Findings 2: Parents' Benefit Perception

- All items in parents' benefit perception of digital use to child are significantly high

- Search for information about things in which he/she is interested and this builds curiosity (79.6%)

- Improves fine motor skills (69.4%).

Independent Sample *t*-test for Enabling Parenting Style by Demographic Characteristics

No.	Parent's Benefit Perception to Child	M*	SD	%	t**	p
1.	4b8: My child can search for information about things in which he/she is interested and this builds curiosity.	3.982	0.826	79.6	30.384	.000
2.	4b1: It opens my child's world.	3.950	0.929	79.0	26.144	.000
3.	4b10: My child can keep pace with technological development and improves his/her digital skills.	3.939	0.837	78.8	28.682	.000
4.	4b7: My child can learn through educational applications and this helps in learning.	3.904	0.855	78.1	27.041	.000
5.	4b3: It increases openness - my child will be more open to the world and new things.	3.827	0.921	76.5	22.978	.000
6.	4b11: My child becomes more creative and able to produce digital content.	3.820	0.876	76.4	23.935	.000
7.	4b9: 4b1: It helps foreign language learning.	3.800	0.989	76.0	20.678	.000
8.	4b2: It helps maintain/form relationships.	3.653	0.928	73.1	17.995	.000
9.	4b6: It improves logical thinking/problem-solving/intelligence.	3.624	0.900	72.5	17.718	.000
10.	4b4: It offers leisure/entertainment opportunities.	3.515	1.009	70.3	13.055	.000
11.	4b5: It improves fine motor skills.	3.469	0.989	69.4	12.137	.000
Overall Parent's Benefit Perception to Child (N = 654)		3.885	0.781	77.7	28.974	.000

* On a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree (1 – 20%), 2 = disagree (21 – 40%), 3 = slightly agree (41 – 60%), 4 = agree (61 – 80%), and strongly agree (81 – 100%). (1 mark)

Findings 3: Comparison and Relationship between Parent's Risk and Benefit Perception

- Parents perceived that benefits are more than the risks to their child.

- Parents with a high risk perception also have a high benefit perception

Paired t-test for Parent's Risk and Benefit Perception of Digital Literacy to Child

Pair	Variable	N	Mean	SD	Mean diff	SE Mean	t	p	r	p
1	Parent's Risk Perception to Child	654	3.620	0.900	-.265	0.039	-6.720	.000	.289	.000
	Parent's Benefit Perception to Child	654	3.885	0.781						

Concluding Discussion

Malaysian parents are very much aware of the importance of digital technologies in their children's lives

Nurture digitally resilient children

Instead of continually monitoring their children's digital use, parents should mentor them.

Parents must offer a set of shared values that are articulated and negotiated with their children in order for the children to be grounded in these values in their daily lives

Parents must realise that they, too, are learning how to live with technology, and as such, it is best to make it a shared learning experience, with parents learning from their children at times.