

## **YOUNG PEOPLE AND NEW MEDIA IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL USES AND PRACTICES**

***Dr. Shanthi Balraj Baboo,***

Associate Professor  
The School of Arts, Universiti Sains  
Malaysia, Penang.

***Dr. Ambigapathy Pandian,***

Professor  
The School of Languages, Literacies and  
Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

***Dr. N.V Prasad,***

Assoc.Prof.  
Film & Broadcasting Section  
School of Communication  
Universiti Sains Malaysia

***Mr.Aaron Rao,***

Lecturer  
Department of Public Relations, Faculty of  
Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku  
Abdul Rahman, Perak, Malaysia.

### **ABSTRACT**

Today, new media technologies form an important part of young people's lives and it is important for us to understand the needs of young people and the ways new media is appropriated in their growing lives. However, there is little knowledge about the social uses of new media technologies among young people in Malaysia. This study builds upon new media studies in developing a framework for studying young people's patterns of engagement with the new media in contemporary media landscape in Malaysia. Questionnaire surveys were conducted among a sample of 1200 young people aged 13 -15 and 16-18 age groups across Malaysia to examine their patterns of new media engagement. As for the qualitative phase, focus group interviews were conducted among young people to examine their media consumption practices on selected issues to provide a rich understanding and documentation on the changing practices in the new media environment of young people's lives in Malaysia today. The study reveals how young people appropriate new media in their everyday lives and the embedding of new media within the temporal and social dimensions of young people's life.

**Keywords:** New media, young people, social uses, mobile phones & media games.

## INTRODUCTION:

A new media landscape is emerging where media cultures are changing young people's lives in both the private and public spheres. Many young people's lives today are dominated by media where an average child grows up with television, DVD player, radio, CD players, video games, mobile phones, computers and iPods (Livingstone, 2002, Osgerby, 2004). The texts and images produced by these media technologies help shape their views of the world. They contribute to educating young people about meanings, messages, and systems of norms, values, practices and social relations and patterns of interactions (Buckingham, 2002; Felitzen & Carlsson, 2000). The new media carry information and values about family, friendship, love, violence, horror and so on. Further, these stories present practices, behaviours and life-styles that are deemed as desirable and undesirable and actions that bring rewards and penalties (Budd, Craig & Steinman, 1999).

Malaysia in the past decade has also experienced a flooding of old and new media which are, without any doubt, a highly significant part of contemporary young people's lives. Young people use media because, they find them fun, exciting and imaginative and because they experience learning through the media. Young people are often fascinated by these new media technologies that offer them thrilling encounters and understanding of the social, cultural and moral facets of the adult world.

Needless to say that new media technologies form an important part of young people's lives and it is important for all of us to understand the needs of young people and the ways new media is appropriated in their growing lives. However, there is little knowledge about the social uses of new media technologies. There is hardly any empirical information on the ways young people are using these rapidly developing new media and how important these new media are for their social development, for their building of social relationships and for the shaping of leisure practices.

The present study builds upon new media studies and audience centered theories in developing a framework for studying young people patterns of engagement with the new media. Drawing from the insights of the projects conducted by Livingstone (2002), Osgerby (2004) and Youth(2006), the present study reveals how young people appropriate new media in their everyday lives and the embedding of new media within the temporal and social dimensions of young people's life as well as their perception of new media regulation and risks.

Osgerby (2004) traces the development of contemporary young people culture and its relationship with new media and asserts that young people in different locales are appropriating and giving new meanings to globally circulating cultural forms and media texts. Concerned with the new dangers of new media that threaten the everyday lives of young people, The Appropriation of New Media by Youth Project (2006), supported by the European Commission of Information Society and Media, designed a study to explore new media access and how young people between the ages of 12 -18 appropriate digital media to confront media safety issues of young people.

Working on the above framework, the study examines new media, with a specific emphasis on the Internet, mobile hand phones, video and online gaming and construct an analysis of young people's engagement with the new media which will consider the quantity and quality of new media contact, consumption and practices.

The outcome from collecting and gathering data and the feedback from young people enables us to identify, determine and measure the significant impact of new media practices in the contemporary dramatic Malaysia media landscape. This project will not only contribute to the understanding of the new media environment experienced by Malaysian young people today but also contribute to local and global discourses on media consumption of young people as a new media generation.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data on new media uses among young people in Malaysia.

In the quantitative phase, questionnaire surveys were conducted to examine patterns of new media use among young people in a face-to-face to a national random location quota sample of 1200 young people aged 13 -15 and 16-18 age groups across Malaysia from February to May 2011. The study population was divided into 6 regions which include the following states of Malaysia:

Northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang), Central (Perak, Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan) Southern (Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor) East coast (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang), East Malaysia (Sabah ) and East Malaysia (Sarawak) The data obtained from the assessment were analysed using SPSS to quantify young people's access and media practices as well as their perception towards safety and risks.

As for the qualitative phase, focus group discussions were conducted to examine narrative accounts, critical opinion, and media consumption practices on selected issues to provide a rich understanding and documentation

on the changing practices in the new media environment of young people's lives in Malaysia today. The selected issues focused on communication practices, new gaming practices and learning activities and experiences. The interviews were conducted with 12 groups from 13-15 age group and another 12 groups from the 16-18 age group from each of the above region totaling to about 152 young people

The data collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods have been analysed and given below are some of the key findings of the project.

### SOCIAL USES - PATTERNS OF NEW MEDIA USE:

In efforts to understand the patterns of new media uses among young people, the data collected has been summarised into the following categories:

**Media tools that can be found in most of the respondents' home are TV, mobile phone & computer/laptops:** As shown in table 1.11, the top three new media tools found at home are television (96.2%), mobile phone (90.8%) and computer/laptop (87.4%). The percentage shows that television set can be found in almost every respondent's home. The rest can be examined in the following chart below:

**High access to Internet connection:** Almost 75.2% of the respondents have access to Internet connection in their homes. Online activities can easily take place at home due to this.

TOOL	YES (%)	NO (%)	TOTAL (%)
Computer/ Laptop	87.4	12.6	100
Netbook	11.4	88.6	100
PSP	22.0	78.0	100
Mobile Phone	90.8	9.2	100
I Pod	19.2	80.8	100
TV	96.2	3.8	100
Console	32.9	67.1	100
MP3/ MP4	46.9	53.1	100
Radio	79.4	20.6	100
Internet Connection	75.2	24.8	100
Others	3.8	96.2	100

(n=1200)

Table 1.11: Media tools in the home

**Mobile phone is seen as the most important tool in young people's lives:** Based on table 1.12 below, About 36.8% of respondents consider mobile phone as the most important media tool. The second and third most important media tools are Computer/Laptop (29.5%) and Internet (13.2%) respectively. As we can see here, even though most of the respondents have a television set a home, yet it is not considered as the most important media tool to them when they are given a variety of other choices.

TOOL	PERCENT (%)
Computer/ Laptop	29.5
Netbook	1.4
PSP	2.4
Mobile Phone	36.8
I Pod	0.8
TV	10.1
Console	2.1
MP3/ MP4	1.6
Radio	1.4
Internet Connection	13.2
Others	0.8
TOTAL	100

(n=1200)

Table 1.12: Most important media tool

**First started using new media games, mobile phone and Internet at the age of 11-13 years:** As seen in table 1.13 below, more than half (51.0%) of the respondents start using mobile phone at the age of 11-13 years old; 14.3% of respondents start using the Internet before they reach 8 years old, closely followed by starting to use media games at the age of 8 -10; 31.3% of respondents start using PSP and Console at the age of 11-13 and 19.8% respondents start using games/PSP/Console before they reach 8 years old. The data shows that most of the respondents have been exposed to the new media tools before the age of 13.

	<8 Yrs (%)	8-10 Yrs (%)	11-13 Yrs (%)	14-16 Yrs (%)	NR (%)	Total (%)
Internet	14.3	24.4	45.0	8.8	7.5	100
Mobile Phone	8.3	21.1	51.0	12.3	7.3	100
Media games/ PSP/ Console	19.8	25.8	31.3	5.3	17.8	100

(n=1200)

Table 1.13: Starting age for using media tools

**Time spent on media games increases during weekends while usage of the Internet and mobile phones is higher during the weekdays:** Most of the respondents spend 1-3 hours per week on the Internet during the weekday (34.3%) with a slight decrease during the weekend (33.5%). In the case of the mobile phone, 33.4% of the respondents spend less than 1 hour during the weekday compared to 26.8% of the respondents who do the same during the weekend. On the other hand, the respondents who spend more than 12 hours on a weekday (10.5%) are fewer than those who spend more than 12 hours on a weekend (15.5%). As far as games are concerned, 23.7% of the respondents spend 1 – 3 hours during the weekdays compared to 29.4% during the weekends.

		None	<1 hour	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	7-9 hours	10-12 hours	>12 hours	Total (%)
Internet	A weekday	24.1%	22.5%	34.3%	11.4%	4.2%	1.1%	2.4%	100
	A weekend	10.7%	10.8%	33.5%	22.5%	9.1%	3.7%	9.8%	100
Mobile Phone	A weekday	13.9%	33.4%	20.9%	11.3%	6.3%	3.7%	10.5%	100
	A weekend	10.9%	26.8%	20.5%	10.3%	10.3%	5.7%	15.5%	100
Media Games	A weekday	41.3%	21.5%	23.7%	7.6%	2.7%	1.3%	1.9%	100
	A weekend	24.3%	15.8%	29.4%	13.4%	7.0%	2.3%	7.8%	100

(n=1200)

Table 1.14: Hours spent on new media

**Parents/guardians are more likely to pay the bills for new media use:** Parents/guardians are more likely to pay the bills for the Internet bills expenses (66.1%), mobile phone (39.5%) and media games (32.3%). For mobile phone, nearly half of the respondents (47.9%) spend not more than RM30 in a week.

	<RM 10	RM11- RM30	RM 31- RM 50	>RM 51	Parents/ guardian pay the bill	NR	Total (%)
Internet	14.1%	5.6%	3.5%	3.3%	66.1%	7.5%	100
Mobile Phone	32.0%	15.9%	3.1%	2.3%	39.5%	7.3%	100
Media games/ PSP/ Console	16.7%	4.6%	0.9%	0.9%	32.3%	44.7%	100

(n=1200)

Table 1.15: Money spent on new media in a week

**Most of the Internet use, gaming and mobile phone usage takes place at the home:** About 74.8% of respondents use the Internet, 85.6% use the mobile phone and 64.7% play media games at home. The school appears to be detached from new media activities relevant in the present day.

	At home (%)		At school (%)		At cyber café (%)		At friend's House (%)		Others (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Using Internet	74.8	25.3	8.2	91.8	21.6	78.4	16.6	83.4	6.8	93.3
Using Mobile Phone	85.6	14.4	5.2	94.8	8.5	91.5	23.7	76.3	25.9	74.1
Playing Media Games	64.7	35.3	2.9	97.1	14.6	85.4	18.8	81.2	9.3	90.7

(n=1200)

Table 1.16: Places for using new media

**Self-learning is the most popular way of learning to use new media tools:** The respondents noted self learning happens with mobile phone (63.8%), with media games (49.1%) and with Internet (46.8%). Friends and siblings are also significant when it comes to learning to use new media tools.

	Self-Learning	Parents	Teachers	Brothers and Sisters	Friends	Others	NR
Internet	46.8%	8.1%	4.6%	20.0%	18.3%	1.3%	0.9%
Mobile Phone	63.8%	10.2%	0.3%	15.4%	8.8%	1.2%	0.3%
Media games/ PSP/ Console	49.1%	0.8%	1.0%	23.0%	21.4%	2.5%	2.3%

(n=1200)

Table 1.17: Sources of learning about new media

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES AND VIEWS ON NEW MEDIA:

Information on students' social uses of the Internet, mobile phone and gaming was obtained via 24 focus group interviews with 152 students from the states of Selangor, Melaka, Penang, Kelantan, Sabah, and Sarawak, Malaysia. A moderator posed questions to the group and students were encouraged to state their experience with the new media. The same set of questions guide was presented to all groups of students. The findings of the focus group discussion can be summarised according to specific themes as below.

The qualitative data shows that nearly all the young people between the ages of 14 – 16 are using the Internet and the mobile phone. In the case of Internet, a large majority of the young people go online daily or weekly. The Internet and mobile phones serve different functions to the respondents. Both the Internet and mobile phones are deemed important, especially for learning, communication, entertainment and play purposes.

**Social uses of new media:** Young people are very excited and eager to connect with new media technologies today. The respondents find it very important to have both the Internet and mobile phone in their everyday lives. These new media assist them with their school work, especially in retrieving information and new knowledge. These tools are also helpful to keep safe contact with their parents and to connect with friends to discuss about everyday routines and matters. Quite a proportion of them play electronic media games for fun, leisure and to relieve tension. The main uses of the new media falls on communication, education, entertainment and play which are seen as integral parts of living today.

*R1 I don't go to tuition so I rely on the Internet. Because now it has become a part of our education.*

*R2 For me, I think Internet is the most important thing because I can socialise with my friends.*

*R3 I think Internet is the most important while mobile phone cannot do all the things...it is limited for doing school work and finding information.*

## LEARNING:

The respondents state that the new media tools are helpful for doing school work and socialisation. Most of the respondents claim that they engage with the Internet when they want to look for information to help them finish their school work. The Internet, according to them, provides them with a lot of information which they can use for school work or general knowledge. Searching for information is a lot easier in the Internet compared to more traditional sources like books.

The Internet exposes respondents to new experiences. The Internet allows them to learn new information and new friends. Most of the respondents say that they learn a lot of information from the Internet. They use the Internet for their school assignments. Some even picked up English. Of course, the games they play give them the entertainment they need.

Some of the significant comments are as follows:

*R1 Yes, for portfolio. Especially Form Two, Form Four, we have a lot of folios. Internet has been my first supplier for information so it is very useful.*

*R2 The new media especially the Internet gives us a lot and a lot of information. Not a waste of time if we know how to use it. I can use it for many things like searching for information, how to do things.*

*R3 New media provides positive experiences: gaining new knowledge, getting information, keep in touch with friends, sharing of photos, and arrangement for activities.*



## COMMUNICATION:

Social networking and downloading material from the Internet is done extensively. Respondents also use the social platform in the Internet to connect with their friends from school, relatives or new acquaintances. Facebook is most popular among them to chat with their friends and express themselves. The mobile phone is used largely for texting messages and images, sometimes to flirt and to gossip.

Quite clearly, apart from Internet, young people see mobile phones as vitally essential to their lives. Many of the respondents assert that it is a tool that is important in conducting their everyday lives, for communicating, for learning about themselves and others, for establishing family ties and friendship and even connecting with others for play and entertainment. Many of them consider that it is important to be attached with family and friends where they plan events and activities, keeping in touch with people who are dear to them, talking about the lives of their friends which may include gossip, rumours, updating news of friends and family, sometimes even flirting with friends.

The mobile phone is also meant mainly to stay in touch with the parents. Respondents think that owning a mobile phone allows them to stay connected with family from time to time and their safety is assured as their parents are just a phone call away. Most respondents note that nowadays, they are left alone in the house after school while the parents are away at work. The mobile phone serves as a tool to connect and keep in touch with the parents just in case if there is any emergency. Mobile phones are also popular for sending short messages (texting) either to the parents or friends.

Respondents normally choose their Internet friends. However, sometimes they are introduced to someone by their friends. In this case, they would decide to continue the friendship or not. In the Internet, Skype for example, they can choose to ignore the person if they are not interested.

The Internet and mobile phone are means for the respondents to stay connected with their parents and friends. Respondents use the Internet to manage their friendship. Apart from chatting on the Internet, respondents would also try to solve friendship issue if they quarrel. They are happy if they get to chat with their friends on-line. They also use it to text their friends.

Some of the views of the respondents related to the aspects of communication are recorded as follows:

*R1 Most of the time we see friends in school and share ideas and comments...and it is nice to continue this even when we go home...we can text or talk to them or go to Facebook.*

*R2 Our conversations are about everything, I feel so excited when I keep contact with friends and we get advice and friends views if we want to do something.*

*R3 Sometimes, I feel happy when I'm using the internet. I get to play games, communicate with my friends at the same time.*

*R4 Because I get transferred to a new school, I get to communicate with my old friends through facebook."*

*R5 Mobile phone helps me when I stay in the house alone, my mother will contact me every hour. So, she knows I am safe in my house.*

## ENTERTAINMENT AND PLAY:

Downloading music and video is very popular among young people. The games in the Internet add to the popularity of its use. Apart from filling up free time, electronic media games are also mentioned as a stress reliever. Some of the significant quotes from the focus group interviews are as follows:

*R1 I normally like online games. I like games in social networking like Facebook and all that because in Facebook we can play with our own group.*

*R2 What I like is media games because it can help me with my time and help me release stress when I am having exam after study I can play to release stress.*

## CONCLUSION:

The study sees young people of Malaysia today (14 – 16 years) as a group that spends a lot of time doing study related activities. Watching television and listening to music are top leisure actions where most of them spend 1-3 hours per week on these activities. The respondents also assert that talking to parents and friends are important in building their social relationships. Internet use among young people is closely related to interests in education, social networking, self-expression and creative work. Frequent uses of Internet are watching videos, using search engines for finding new knowledge and information as well as downloading or uploading music or videos. Working on exchanges among social and civic groups and participation in online discussion on civic action in communities do not emerge as top concerns of young people.

Also found is that much of the new media use encompassing Internet, mobile phone and media games takes place at home rather than at school which indicates that there is a huge gap between what young people do with new media in real life and what they do in school. From the amount of time the respondents spend on new media usage, it reveals great potential for educators to adopt new media tools as a form of information bank for students to gather from.

As such, in order to achieve the above, broadband connection becomes a great necessity in urban and in rural areas so as to reduce that digital divides between the haves and the have-nots. Internet access that is efficient and affordable will be the impetus of better new media saturation in Malaysia, possibly also leading to a greater media or new media literacy in the country.

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