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Regulations and Media Literacy Education On Online Sexual Information: A Japanese Perspective

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Abstract

This paper* presents a Japanese perspective on measures against online sexual information. A research question is set on what kinds of measures are required in order to protect youth from the harmful influence of online sexual information. The paper firstly examines measures initiated by both national and local governments as well as by cell phone carriers, and secondly explores how to protect youth from potential online sexual dangers toward them. Lastly, the paper investigates the impact of online sexual information on Japanese young people's behaviors and values in comparison with that of other countries in an attempt to provide the basis for accurate measures. The results of the research found that online sexual information has some significant impact on young people, including the increase of the curiosity for sexual crimes.

Keywords: Media literacy; Internet education; Mobile communications; Contents regulation; Harmful information; Child pornography

1. Introduction

The number of Internet users in Japan has increased since the middle of 1990s. By 2008, 75.3% of population has been able to access the Internet¹, just like in other countries, such as England, Canada and Korea². While Personal Computers (PCs) in these countries are mainly used as the Internet connecting tools³, however, in Japan, cellular phones are also major devices for this purpose, particularly among young people. A survey conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office in 2009 shows that 95.4% of high

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school students have their own cell phones, 43.1% in junior high schools, and 18.3% in elementary schools, respectively. Among these students, 99.4% of high school students have the Internet connection via cell phones, 97.6% in junior high schools, and 76.9% in elementary schools, respectively. Students tend to be addicted to the Internet, as some 40% of them in high school use the Internet more than two hours per day. On the contrary, the number of students who have their own PCs or laptops is quite small: 11.6% of students in high schools, 4.8% in junior high and 3.2% in elementary schools have their own PCs or laptops.

One factor that contributes significantly to the popularity of the cell phone among youth can be its high functionality. Cell phones made in Japan are quite sophisticated, even from a global perspective. Even with standard handsets, users are able to send e-mails, take photos and movies, connect to the Internet, watch TV, listen to music, and pay bills and fees with e-money ("Osai-fu Ke-tai"). Since these functions are so substantial, youth choose to use cell phones instead of PCs or laptops that are less portable and more expensive.

The moderate cost for the Internet access service through the cell phones is another factor that leads youth to actively connect to the Internet via cell phones. In Japan, cell phone operators provide monthly fixed-rate service for the Internet access. The rate is from 6,000 yen to 7,000 yen, which is lower than the cell phone's Internet access fee in Finland and Canada where the flat-rate service is not popular yet⁴. Therefore, Japanese youth are able to surf the Internet with their cell phones as much as they want, without worrying about expenses.

However, their heavy usage of the Internet via cell phones has caused many problematic cases, involving sexual exploitation of them. The number of young people who were assaulted by strangers they met on dating sites or SNS has been increasing. In order to solve this problem, regulations on the cell phone usage and media literacy education for youth have emerged in Japan.

This paper firstly examines measures initiated by both national and local governments as well as by cell phone carriers, and secondly explores how to protect youth from potential online sexual dangers toward them. Lastly, the paper investigates the impact of online sexual information on Japanese young people's behaviors and values in comparison with that of other countries in an attempt to provide the basis for accurate measures.

2. Online Sexual Information in Japan

Various harmful information on sex can be seen on mobile Web sites in Japan. An example is “an Internet dating site,” where people introduce themselves and communicate to find a date for a casual relationship. The site is often criticized as a hot bed for child prostitution. The number of young people who have become victims of sexual assaults through such Internet dating sites has reached 724 in 2008 (National Police Agency 2009), and more than 98% of them used cell phones to access the sites. A typical scenario of such a crime is the following: First, a child (usually a girl) would make friends with a stranger on a dating site; then she would be lured by him to meet outside. When they meet, he would put her in his car and sexually violate her. There are numerous assaults to mention: For example, “a child was forced to take a sleeping pill, and her naked photographs were taken,” “carved a tattoo to a body,” “was forced to take stimulants, and sexually assaulted” and so on.

Today, there is another new mobile Web site called “purofu,” which is overwhelmingly supported by youngsters. The “purofu” (an abbreviation for “profile”), a Web site that lets users post their profiles, launched the service in 2002. Users disclose their personal information, including their full names, their dates of birth, names of school, and their resident areas. Similar to Facebook, the site enables users to post their photos and journal entries, and a third-party could write a comment on them. According to an investigation that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology carried out at the end of 2008, more than 40% of the eleventh graders access the “purofu.” If it is among only high school girls from metropolitan areas, the percentage even rises to over 70%. On the other hand, only 20% of parents are aware that their child uses the “purofu.” In addition, the “purofu” is recently used as a place of compensated dating. Girls would post their half-naked images on the site and recruit potential partners for compensated dating. Some adults also post a message, which suggests prostitution as “a recruitment of a girl who look for petty cash,” and send a message as if a sexual intercourse for money were an easy way to make money. The number of youngsters who became victims to sexual assaults through the “purofu” and other SNS that are not “Internet dating sites” accounts for 792 in 2008 and 545 in the first half of 2009, both of which exceed that of dating sites. It can be considered that the reinforcement of a regulation on such dating sites has led crime location to shift to other sites, including the “purofu.”

3. Regulations on Online Sexual Information

In Japan, where most young people access the Internet via their cell phones, more regulations on mobile Web site are made than those of the PCs. The Cabinet Office enforced "The Law Concerning the Maintenance of Youth Internet Environment" in April 2009. This law imposed an obligation for cell phone enterprises to offer a "filtering service" to cell phones used by those who are under 18 years old. This filtering service sorts out illegal and harmful information on mobile Web sites so that the youngsters cannot access the information. The law also obliged guardians to report a cell phone enterprise in making a cell phone contract for their children who are under 18 years old. The enterprise is not allowed to remove the filtering service without the proposal from a guardian.

In response to this regulation, the mobile carriers made more convenient filtering service available. The filtering can be set at several levels for limited content, depending on a user's age and circumstance. In addition, the cell phone made specifically for youngsters has a function to sort out unwanted e-mails and to limit partners of incoming and outgoing calls only to their family members.

As for the criteria for harmful sites, the Cabinet Office at first insisted that the government should decide them. However, the Internet industry and mass communication companies strongly opposed to the Cabinet Office for fear of infringing "the freedom of expression," and therefore, a private enterprise was entrusted to set the standard.

The standard for filtering offered by the private company divides the content of mobile Web sites that should be restricted into 73 categories, including "SNS," "gambling," and "adult." However, current filtering service is not sophisticated enough, sorting out all the information whether it is from communication among friends or from information from public organizations. Therefore, young people tend to avoid using the service. As of July 2009, the usage rate for the filtering among the junior high school students in Tokyo cannot be consider high yet, since it has not reached 50% (Metropolitan Police Department 2009). In addition, youngsters often forge written consents of their parents to remove the filtering. It seems that keeping the filtering service on their cell phones is regarded as nerdy among them.

In the meantime, the regulation on possession of cell phones advances, as well. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology notified the Board of Education of the entire country ban students from carrying their cell phones in the elementary and junior high schools in 2009. Judging from a survey conducted by the Ministry in 2008, it is clear that 94% of elementary schools and 99% of junior high

schools prohibited students from bringing their cell phones to schools.

Furthermore, some local governments have recommended that parents should not provide cell phones to their children. The local government in Ishikawa prefecture enforced the first regulation nationwide in January 2010, which determined that a guardian should not give a child a cell phone if a child is a primary or secondary student, except for a purpose of crime prevention. No punitive clause is followed to the regulation. This regulation was formed by a suggestion from the Liberal Democratic Party members of the Diet, as the cell phone-related issues had prevailed in the prefecture. According to my interview with the prefectural government, the schoolteachers welcome the regulation, thinking that it is now easy to have guardians and students pay attention to this matter. However, even if the regulation prohibits possession of cell phones, there are still many other methods of accessing the Internet, such as an Internet cafe or a game console. The claim “what is important is to educate youth how to use the mobile Internet safely, not to just regulate them” can be heard within the prefecture, too. The prefecture now requires each school to make a presentation to students on the potential danger of the mobile Web sites once a year. However, a person of the prefectural government who is in charge of the regulation says that the know-how of the Internet education is still insufficient and that they expect to forward the education while exchanging information with other prefectures.

4. Media Literacy Education

Media Literacy is the combined ability of criticizing media’s characteristics, techniques and impacts and using media to express oneself (Watanabe, 2007). Japanese school education does not have a subject specialized in teaching media literacy. While schools may let students experience media production during the course of integrated study, they do not pay enough attention to teaching students the main element of media literacy—how to criticize media.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, on the other hand, enforced elementary school to include a course of utilizing computers in 2002. In the beginning, the lesson was simply involved in the operation of the PC. In 2009, the course of study eventually added a new purpose of “acquiring information morals” as a non-binding target. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology defines the information morals education as “a way of thinking and manner that all citizens should acquire in surviving the information-based society and developing it into

a sound society.” The education could foster students’ judgement to critically examine sexually harmful information available online and to understand the danger of the Internet bullying. The information morals education is to be implanted in the course of technical home economics in junior high school curriculum, and in informatics in senior high school curriculum.

However, teaching materials and guidance methods are not yet established, as the budget for and experiences of teachers are not sufficient. At the same time, teachers claim that they do not understand how to teach information morals. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology plans to dispatch an expert of the Internet education to each school who can facilitate teachers with guidance methods, and the Ministry prepares to hold workshops for teachers. In addition, private groups have started developing the Internet teaching materials for schools.

Media literacy education for guardians is another important issue. There are many cases that guardians, without the understanding of the potential danger of the mobile Internet, give their children cell phones easily. At the local government level, several groups have begun to develop their original Internet education for guardians. The Mie prefecture’s Board of Education distributes a guidebook, titled “An Internet/Cell Phone Safety Guidebook” to guardians. The guidebook includes such information as “the Internet can specify a person who wrote a comment on a Web site” and “parents should make rules for their children’s cell phone usage time.” The board also holds a training session for volunteers who monitor harmful information online and a workshop in the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA). The similar actions have been observed in Toyama, Niigata, Aichi, Kagoshima prefectures.

However, it is the guardians with a high level of consciousness on their children who participate in the PTA meetings and read the distributed papers. A common issue among local governments is that they cannot reach the parents whom they need to educate. According to a survey conducted by Symantec in 2009, only 22% of parents in Japan have told their children about safe usage of the Internet, and the percentage is the lowest among the countries participated in the survey. While it is considered to be a domestic issue, it is required from schools that they offer workshops in an environment where guardians certainly get together, such as an entrance ceremony or a commencement.

Mobile carriers have also begun to emphasize on such education. Each carrier dispatches employees to schools to teach students safe usage of the cell phone. This lecture is called “the delivery of the class.” In the case of KDDI, one of the major mobile carriers in Japan, the company is also in charge of training guardians and school staff.

There were some 1,000 applications for the KDDI's delivery of the class from the city's Board of Education in the entire country in 2009. Although schools tend to ask the police for the delivery of the class on the cell phone usage, the police ask KDDI to substitute, as the number of requests is too large to respond.

KDDI mainly teaches the manner of the cell phone usage for the primary school students, including time and place to use the cell phone. When the company teaches junior high students, they cover a method of avoiding troubles, such as not exposing personal information in the "purofu." According to my hearing at KDDI, the company delivers the class to reduce a negative side of the cell phone usage as a business risk. The possession of cell phones becomes a premise for such a lecture; therefore, the company says that few request of the delivery of the class came from Ishikawa prefecture.

5. Method

This paper measures the impact of online sexual information on Japanese youngsters' behaviors and values in comparison with other three countries: Korea, Finland and Canada⁵. The study was conducted between July and November, 2009. The samples in the study included 123 university students in Japan, 105 in Korea, 108 in Finland, and 17 in Canada. Finland and Canada are together considered to be "West." Respondents were asked to complete questionnaires.

The demographics of the sample are summarized as follows: The male students consisted of 36.9% (Japan 48.8%, Korea 47.6%, West 15.6%), and female 60.0% (Japan 45.5%, Korea 49.5%, West 83.6%), as shown in Table 1. In addition, 88.9% of the students were undergraduate students (Japan 89.4%, Korea 96.2%, West 81.9%), 8.0% master students (Japan 6.5%, Korea 1.9%, West 14.7%), and 0.3% doctorate students.

Respondents were between 18 to 25 years old or over. Among them students aged from 18 to 20 consisted of 27.4% (Japan 49.6%, Korea 7.6%, West 22.1%); those who are aged between 21 and 24 consisted of 54% (Japan 44.7%, Korea 73.3%, West 45.1%), and 25 or over comprised 18% (Japan 4.9%, Korea 17.14%, West 32.8%).

Table 1: Population and Gender of Respondents

	Japan	Korea	West	Total
Males	48.8% (60)	47.6% (50)	15.6% (19)	36.9% (129)

Females	45.5% (56)	49.5% (52)	83.6% (102)	60.0% (210)
N/A	5.7% (7)	2.9% (3)	0.8% (1)	3.14% (11)
Total	35% (123)	30% (105)	35% (122)	350

Source: The research conducted by Sugaya, Watanabe& Kim in 2009 (Unpublished Paper)

6. Results

The research examines the followings: How many youngsters refer to sexual information online for their own sexual activities and what kind of impact the online pornography has on their view on their opposite gender.

According to the survey results, 18.8% of the respondents in West, 6.7% in Korea, and 2.4% in Japan have written their own sexual experiences on PC Web sites, such as message boards, and 3.2% of respondents among participating four countries have written their own sexual experiences on mobile Web sites. In contrast, the results also indicates that higher percentage of the respondents have read sexual experiences of others on PC Web sites; 45.5% in Japan, 73.4% in Korea, and 58.2% in West. In addition, 31.7% of the respondents in Japan, 5.7% in Korea, and 3.3% in West have read other people's sexual experiences on mobile Web sites. As to a method of discussing the respondents' concerns about sex, 73% of them chose face-to-face conversation. However, 17% of people preferred talking online via SNS or message boards, which comprised the second largest group.

For the regulation on the online sexual expression, 36.6% of the respondents in Japan, 52.4% in Korea, and 46.8% in West favored the regulation. On the other hand, 30.1% of the respondents in Japan, 15.3% in Korea, and 18.8% in West did not support the regulation, as shown in Table 2. This result shows that Japan had the highest percentage of people not supporting the regulations on online sexual expression.

The respondents were asked to choose the reason for their answers in the questionnaires. Among those who preferred the regulation, 65.7% of them selected the reason that "it may give a child distorted sexual information"; 16.1% of them chose "the human rights of the woman are not protected"; and 10.4% chose the reason that "it disturbs study." The following answers were also collected through open-end questions: "online sexual information is addictive," "child pornography should not be forgiven," "it is uncomfortable to see what I do not want to see," and "the regulation leads technical progress." Among the respondents who did not support the regulation, 42.7% chose the reason that "the regulation infringes the freedom of expression," 33.3% chose the reason

that “the regulation is impossible on the Internet,” and 17.7% chose the reason that “the online sexual information has no influence on viewers.”

Table 2: Preference for the Regulation on Online Sexual Expression

	Japan	Korea	West
Quite agreeable	18.70%	25.70%	19.70%
Agreeable	17.90%	26.70%	27.10%
Neither	32.50%	31.40%	32.00%
Not quite agreeable	21.10%	10.50%	16.40%
Disagree	9.00%	4.80%	2.50%
Missing	0.81%	0.95%	2.46%

Source: The research conducted by Sugaya, Watanabe& Kim in 2009 (Unpublished Paper)

The questionnaire also contained some questions on online child pornography. The result indicates that 20.3% of the respondents in Japan, 34.3% in Korea, and 33.6% in West have viewed online pornography with a real child involved on PC Web sites. In addition, 10.5% of the respondents in Japan, 2.9% in Korea, 4.9% in West have viewed online pornography with a real child involved on mobile Web sites. As for the pornography with an illustration of a child in an animated cartoon format—which is not illegal in Japan—26.1% of the respondents in Japan, 32.4% in Korea, and 29.5% in West have viewed it on PC Web sites, and 15.4% of the respondents in Japan, 4.8% in Korea, 3.3% in West have viewed one on mobile Web sites. The survey results demonstrate that the Japanese students accounts for the biggest number of respondents who accessed the illustrated child pornography via the cell phones.

As for the Web sites concerning sexual crimes (including the crimes against adults), such as a pervert, rape, imprisonment rape, voyeurism, and indecent assault, in order to satisfy sexual interest, 39.9% of the respondents in Japan, 60.0% in Korea, and 21.3% in West have viewed these Web sites.

The impact of online sexual information

The respondents were asked what kind of feelings they would have by viewing sexual information online According to the results, 40% of the respondents chose the

answer that “it gives me an idea of how to make money,” 30% of them chose the answer that “I feel loathsomeness,” and 4.5% chose the answer that “it raises my sexual curiosity to a child,” as shown in Table 3. Moreover, the respondents who felt that “I want to have a sexual intercourse with a child” consisted of 4.5%, the answer that “having a sexual intercourse with a child is acceptable” consisted of 2.5%, and “forced intercourse is not unpleasant for a child” consisted of 2.5%.

As for the Web sites concerning sexual crimes, 68% of the respondents felt “loathsomeness,” 9.3% of them felt that “sexual curiosity to such sexual crimes,” and 3.1% felt that “it gives me an idea of how to make money,” as shown in Table 4. Furthermore, the respondents who felt that “I want to commit such sexual crimes on women” consisted of 1.5%, the answer “forcing a sexual intercourse to a woman is acceptable” consisted of 1.0%, and the answer "forced intercourse is not unpleasant for a woman" consisted of 1.0%.

Table 3: Feelings Evoked by Viewing Child Pornography Online

	N = 350
It gives me an idea of how to make money	40%
I feel loathsomeness	30%
It raises my sexual curiosity to a child	4.5%
I want to have a sexual intercourse with a child	4.5%
Having a sexual intercourse with a child is acceptable	2.5%
Forced intercourse is not unpleasant for a child	2.5%

Source: The research conducted by Sugaya, Watanabe& Kim in 2009 (Unpublished Paper)

Table 4: Feelings Evoked by Viewing the Web sites on Sexual Crimes

	N = 350
I feel loathsomeness	68%
It raises my curiosity to such sexual crimes	9.3%

It gives me an idea of how to make money	3.1%
I want to commit such sexual crimes on women	1.5%
Forcing a sexual intercourse to a woman is acceptable	1.0%
Forced intercourse is not unpleasant for a woman	1.0%

Source: The research conducted by Sugaya, Watanabe & Kim in 2009 (Unpublished Paper)

7. Discussion

The results demonstrate that online sexual information has been viewed by many young people. As for the access to PC Web sites with sexual expression (i.e., in a swimsuit/a nude figure, a sexy animated cartoon, and an indecent promo word), West reached nearly 80%, and Japan and Korea are around 40%. Japan stood out with nearly 30% of the respondents accessing sexual sites from their cell phones, which suppressed the other countries with less than 10%. This is due to this tendency peculiar to Japan, where the Internet usage via the cell phone has prevailed.

The sexual information on the Internet also served a role of the “word-of-mouth communication.” 70% of the respondents in Korea read sexual experiences of others on PC Web sites, which is the highest among the participating four countries. Since Korean people maintain the moral of Confucianism which does not allow people to talk about sex publicly, the respondents in the country are considered to depend on the online information. As for the number of people who have written their own sexual experiences on PC Web sites, 20% of the respondents in West have done, which is the highest among the participating countries. In those countries where people are considered to be more open about sex than Asian people and where the filtering of sexual sites is not popular, reading and exchanging sexual information online might be done more openly.

The students did not take the present conditions lightly that sexual information can be seen on the Internet. Women in particular considered sexual expressions to be unpleasant. According to the survey results, 51% of women preferred regulations on online sexual expressions, while 34% of men did so. However, when concentrating on the result of Japan, some 30% of men and women considered regulations unfavorable, while around 10% in Korea and West considered the same way. Japanese youngsters have a chance to encounter sexual expressions more frequently in a convenience store or on an advertisement in a train than those in many other countries. The result indicates that Japanese respondents had a low level of consciousness to regulations on sexual expressions.

An alarming result has been brought up about the influence of the online sexual information on young people. According to the survey results, regarding the impression of viewing a child pornography site, there are 4.5% of respondents who chose the answers respectively “it raises my sexual curiosity to a child,” and “I want to have a sexual intercourse with a child.” As for Web sites concerning an act (a pervert or rape) considered to be a sexual crime to women in order to satisfy sexual interest, nearly 10% of the respondents answered that they feel “sexual curiosity for such sexual crimes.” In consideration of a present condition that high rate of sexual crimes targeting not only youngsters but also adults⁶, the ideal method of regulations and education on pornography should be further investigated.

8. Conclusion

In Japan where the cell phones with high functions have prevailed, the number of young people with the Internet access via their cell phones is much higher compared to that of other countries. The troubles around the mobile Web sites are frequently seen. Violations of child prostitution/child pornography prohibitive law, sexual assaults, and compensated dating (sexual intercourse for money) through the “purofu” are numerous to mention. Adult Web sites containing images of women sexually assaulted can be seen by people under 18 years old in an uncontrolled manner. In addition, despite the number of victims of child pornography is increasing, the Japanese Government has made it legal as long as pornography does not involve a real child.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has set information morals education as a non-binding target, but the teaching materials and the guidance method are not yet established. On the other hand, the some regulations have been implemented. The Cabinet Office has obliged people under 18 years old to use the filtering service; the local governments have established a regulation to prohibit youngsters from possessing cell phones.

The results of the research found that online sexual information has some significant impact on young people. It catches many young people’s eyes and serves the role as “the word-of-mouth communication.” Young people who watch Web sites containing child pornography or sexual crimes may increase their curiosity to have sexual intercourse with a child or their curiosity for sexual crimes.

In order to protect the youth from the bad influence of online sexual information, simply keeping youngsters away from harmful information is not sufficient. Media

literacy education that improves their judgment ability so that they do not accept all sexual information on faith is strongly required.

NOTES

1. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the diffusion of the Internet was 9.2% in 1997, and 57.8% in 2002.
2. Sugaya, Watanabe & Kim (2010) reported the diffusion of the Internet in the major countries as follows: 70% in England, 84% in Canada, and 71% in Korea.
3. See Sugaya, Watanabe & Kim (2010).
4. Countries such as Finland, UK, Canada, and Korea (Sugaya, Watanabe, & Kim 2010)
5. This study is part of a larger research project on the international comparison of regulations and media literacy education on online sexual information. The research was supported by the Yoshida Hideo Memorial Foundation.
6. According to the statistics by Japan National Police Agency (2008), the number of acknowledged rape victims under aged 19 was 695, and aged between 20 and 49 was 850.

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