Analysis of a Video Campaign to Help Children Prevent OnlineSexual Abuse

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Abstract: The current study examines a way to help children take action when they feel that they are being groomed or someone is asking for sexual content online by reporting such instances to a national crime agency. For instance, in the United Kingdom (UK), children can use the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) website; similarly, in Saudi Arabia (KSA), the National Family Safety Program offers a child helpline number for children to report sexual abuse cases. This study describes a semiotics analysis of the images obtained from a video created by the CEOP that explains to children how they can detect and report online abuse and, consequently, help track and bring offenders to justice. Further, it compares the child abuse statistics of the UK and KSA.

Keywords: Child abuse, Child protection, Sexual abuse, Semiotics analysis.

1 Introduction

Child abuse has always been a societal problem. Sexual exploitation of children is punishable by law in most countries and isoften investigated by international organizations, including the International Criminal Police Organization (Bn Ayad, 2014). According to Al-Eissa et al. (2015), the large number of countries that investigate and punish child abuse indicates that it is considered a serious problem by mandated professionals who are interested in finding solutions. However, further research is required to determine how the occurrence of child abuse can be reduced. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) states that "governments should ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them." Moreover, "the community has a responsibility to protect children from abusive experiences through the internet, especially those children whose parents are unable or unwilling to protect them" (Stanley, 2001, p. 22).

By linking children with the organizations aiming to enhance online safety—such as Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP), a national crime agency in the United Kingdom (UK)—the Internet can play an effective role in increasing children's awareness of such dangers (Hick & Halpin, 2001). The CEOP considers how children can be taught to protect themselves by following safe online practices, reporting abuse, and building strong relationships with their parents and teachers so that they feel comfortable going to them for help. In the UK, online child sexual abuse and exploitation offences include online grooming, online coercion, and blackmail. The measures adopted by the CEOP command, police, and government are intended to ensure the safe use of the Internet by children and give them the confidence to act effectively in case they become targets to such abuse.

The CEOP-produced video analyzed in this study focuses on the organization's role in not only the elimination of child sexual abuse through the Internet but also the use of online reporting technology to build a database of national and international offenders. Further, the CEOP's child protection campaign includes the ThinkUKnow program, which focuses on spreading awareness of abuse among children and their parents (CEOP, 2020). Finally, the CEOP is part of the United Kingdom's policing approach to track and detain child abuse offenders with the help of local and international forces.

1.1 Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

1.2 The term "abuse" has several definitions. Munro (2002) states that such definitions "embody beliefs about what child-rearing behaviour is unacceptable or dangerous" (p. 50). In this respect, definitions of abuse differ among societies and depend on not only the commonly accepted beliefs of each country but also the legal system that classifies different types of abuse. In the UK, the Department of Health and Social Security classifies abuse into physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and includes neglect (Munro, 2002) within its classification, whereas in the KSA, executive regulations of the child protection system define abuse as acts carried out by any person who uses children in unlawful acts by exploiting their young age, judgment, or lack of experience (Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 2020). Although these are two different definitions, they both represent the sentiment that abuse is a lack of safety or a threat to the abused individual.

1.3 Sexual exploitation of a child is the child's exposure to the abuser's arousal or sexual activity to satisfy the latter's sexual desire; this includes exposing a child to pornographic images (Munro, 2002). Most children are afraid to tell others that they have viewed pornography. Abusers who practice this type of behavior can be considered to be committing a non-contact form of sexual abuse (Munro, 2002).It is very easy for offenders to make children view pornography online. Hick and Halpin (2001) describe child pornography as "graphic material featuring naked or sexually active children that is used for sexual gratification. It is also maintained that, in the online pedophile community, the images have different functions beyond that of sexual gratification" (p. 60).

These different means of child sexual abuse and exploitation engender hostility toward these deviant behaviors and elicit strong public moral reactions. In the KSA, 25.7% of children have been subjected to abuse and violence, and 9% have been sexually abused online. This abuse includes inappropriate online relationships, and even extortion (National Family Safety Programme, 2016).

1.4 Research Questions

This study aims to clarify the meaning of the images in the CEOP video for children in the UK and investigate the role of the Internet in teaching children how to protect themselves from online sexual abuse.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1.   What do the images in the CEOP video represent?
2.   How do the images in the video spread awareness among children and help them protect themselves from sexualabuse?

2   Experimental Sections

2.1 Methods

With the emergence of more methods to secure data, visual image research is becoming an attractive study area in social science research (Jenkings, Woodward, & Winter, 2008).

According to Mukherji and Albon (2018), some researchers who analyze visual images focus on the numbers and words in the images, whereas others concentrate on how images convey different attitudes, ideas, and values. Hence, I decided to analyze this video to clarify how society can support children incase they face any type of sexual abuse, particularly online, because children, especially teenagers, are common targets of such abuse today. In this study, images are analyzed using a semiotics approach. Semiotics is defined as "the study of how meaning is generated and interpreted through signs and symbols" (Mingers & Willcocks, 2017, p. 1). The language used by human beings in their interactions with one another is considered a type of sign that reveals the meanings to be expressed (Mingers & Willcocks, 2017). Further, Bignell (2002) reveals the two elements of a sign, the signifier and signified, and opines that the signified is "the concept which the signifier calls forth when we perceive it" (p. 12).

This study used a semiotics approach to achieve two objectives. First, it clarifies the meaning of images using signs (Prosser, 2006). The semiotics approach "has been proved to be a powerful tool for further analyzing how such references function" (Codognet, 2002, p. 48). Second, it enables a clearer consideration of image details in a clearer way, and provides an objective analysis of the images' layout and design (Goodnow, 2010). Further, Punch (2011) clarifies that the semiotics approach was founded by the Swiss linguist Saussure and the American philosopher Pierce. Saussure pointed out that signs can be codes, whereas Pierce stated that anything can be viewed as a symbol and clarified that the role of semioticians is to "identify mechanisms by which meaning is produced (the most common ones are metaphor, metonymy and opposition) and devise techniques using these mechanisms for interpreting qualitative data" (Punch, 2011, p. 199). On the other hand, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) claim that when a researcher is analyzing images, he/she is not being objective since the researcher's background and culture may influence his/her interpretation. This research adopted Walcott's system, which compartmentalizes image analysis into three steps: description, analysis, and interpretation (Qualitative Data Analysis booklet, 2013).

3   Results and Discussion

3.1 Aims of the Video

The video was created by the CEOP. Despite being short, it is easy to understand, clearly presents the ways in which childrencan be helped, and highlights their right to safety. While pursuing a PhD, I learned how to analyze pictures using the qualitative method; and I applied this skill to analyze and explain the signs conveyed in the video.

This video was intended to spread awareness on how children can help themselves in case they become targets of online sexual exploitation and abuse. Further, it focuses on preventing online and offline child abuse and freeing children from the fear of sexual abuse by teaching them how to protect themselves from such violations. The video presents the ways in which children can contact the CEOP for help by clicking on the appropriate icon on the CEOP website. Further, it focuses on the CEOP's role in empowering and protecting children and enforces the law by tracking and detaining offenders with the help of police intelligence. Finally, it provides information on the CEOP campaign ThinkUKnow, which spreads awareness of child abuse and exploitation while discussing different methods to prevent and combat abuse with the aid of educational institutions, teachers, and parents.

3.2 Proliferation of Child Sexual Abuse on the Internet

The video starts by showing four images: a newspaper headline, an unhappy girl, a mobile phone, and a doll lying damaged on the ground. These powerful images create and reinforce an impression, symbolize bad feelings, and present the concepts of fear and worry. Figure 1

introduces an idea of the large scale of the child sexual abuse problem using the text "More than 1,200 children are abused …." The text is located on the front page of a print publication, and the issue's importance is highlighted by the use of the bold font. The image of the newspaper reveals how the topic plays an integral part in media and confirms the media's strong impact of the media on people, regardless of whether they are aware of it or not (Laughey, 2009). Figure 2 depicts a young girl who is clearly very worried about something; she has a sad face and looks like she wantsto cry and needs help. Why would she need help? Figure 1 may explain the girl's worries by implying that she was thinking about a bad experience, maybe some type of abuse.

Figure 3 shows a ringing mobile phone and the caller's identity—"Mum"—on the screen. The phone has clearly been dropped on the ground, and the image suggests an isolated outdoor location, perhaps a park or somewhere in the woods. The phone is lying next to a soft toy, which when combined with the name on the screen suggests that these are a child's belongings and hints that something untoward has occurred. Figure 4 shows a doll, a particularly powerful image, with its legs splayed and clothes torn and rumpled. All these images clearly suggest the occurrence of some form of abuse. The viewer is prompted to compare the broken doll to a broken child. Together, these four images tell a story that moves from awareness to outcome. Further, the video includes phrases such as "it's a growing problem" and "the sexual abuse of children" between its images to draw the audience's attention to this important issue.

The video presents a situation in which a girl is abused and is experiencing different stages of mental and physical trauma. Children who have been sexually abused often feel guilty, lose confidence, and exhibit unbalanced behavior (Marshall, 1988). Hasina and Saud (2017) state that following sexual assault, an individual develops a desire to separate the situation from memory and completely forget about it. Many studies suggest that this effort often fails and causes an increase in the anxiety and isolation felt by the victims of sexual abuse.

Figures 5 and 6 show a distressed girl sitting on her bed, clearly worried about something. In Figure 5, the girl is sitting upright with her knees drawn up in a defensive position, indicating that she is afraid. She looks gloomy, her hair is messy, and she appears to be worried and to think deeply about what has happened: "What shall I do? How can I stop this?" In Figure 6, the girl appears to be looking at a computer screen. The fear in her eyes indicates that she may have just received a threatening or hurtful online message or is remembering an earlier message. She is crying in the corner of her room lookingat the computer screen and feeling scared, anxious, and confused; she is unsure of what is happening or whether anyone will help her.Figures 5 and 6 reveal how the Internet can play a key role in the perpetration of child abuse and creation of fear among children. They show that children are not safe, even in their own homes (Lawson & Comber, 2000) and that the virtual world does not allow the establishment of boundaries.

Figure 7 suggests that a man is looking at pornographic images that he may be sending to child victims. His glasses reflect the screen image; he is sitting in the dark, suggesting that he is doing something that is wrong or forbidden. This is clear fromhis eyes, as well Sexual offenders are mostly men, as reported by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which stated that "just under one-third of offenders were reported by the child victims as being female" (Stanley, 2001, p. 3).

Figure 8 shows a child victim, a girl, running from a house with wounds on her face; her clothes are torn, indicating that she has been physically harmed or was defending herself from some kind of abuse. She is shown as running away in fear, possibly remembering the incident.

All the aforementioned images depict female victims of sexual abuse. Why does the majority of social media coverage focus on female victims when statistics indicate that boys are also frequent victims of sexual abuse? According to Al-Muneef, Al- Ghamdi, and Saleheen

(2016), in the KSA, the two most common forms of child abuse are physical abuse (42%) and neglect (39%), followed by sexual abuse. However, boys are 2.9 times more likely to be sexually abused than girls. Further, Al-Eissaet al. (2016) state that "the rate of sexual abuse was greater for boy[s]" (p. 568) in the KSA. On the other hand, a report by the seventh annual report of the child helpline (2018) revealed that more girls than boys contacted them, and statistics showed that 22% of all the reports were from girls, whereas only 9% were from boys. Moreover, although male and female victims reported different types of problems, the two most common problems were family relationships (27%), which included violence, and neglect (26%); social media abuse (1%) showed the lowest statistics.

However, the absence of boys' images in the video can be considered a weakness because, ideally, the video should cater to both genders since both can experience sexual abuse, particularly online abuse. However, Figure 9 depicts a male teacher explaining the significance of CEOP and how children can be protected from online sexual abuse to an audience that includesboys and girls.

Figure 10 depicts a happy ending for a girl who was harassed online and reported a man to the police. In the image, a girl is playing in the playground, and a man, who is being arrested by two policemen, is staring at her. This implies that the police had been notified and were investigating the offender. This image reassures us that children remain safe, as long as they are taught to report offenders to the police and how to report abuse.

Figures 11 and 12 show a means to address the problem: A sexually abused girl sends a message through a website and clicks on the icon "report abuse." She seems comfortable taking this action and appears to be confident that there is someone who can help and protect her.

Figure 13 shows a girl who is safe and free. She is happy and at peace, confident in reporting offenders and helping her friends. It is worth mentioning that the video shows girls with white skin and straight hair as well as girls with dark skin and thick-afro hair, implying that all are equal, regardless of race or other differences.

3.3 CEOP's Role in Protecting Children from Online Sexual Abuse

As described earlier, Figure 9 reveals a teacher directing students on using the ThinkUKnow website (CEOP, 2020). The website offers age-appropriate advice to children and adults on safe Internet use because each age group has different needs. For example, children aged 8–10 years are provided advice on handling online gaming issues and on how they can protect themselves when strangers contact them. Children aged 11–13 years were advised on the many icons that could be clicked to obtain the help they needed, lodge a report, and talk to a Childline representative. Childline is a free helpline for children and young people. They can use it to contact a representative about anything that is worrying them in a safe and secure manner, since the helpline assures confidentiality. Hence, the details of what was spoken will remain between the child and Childline.

Most importantly, parents should ensure that their children understand that they must not give their personal information to anyone they do not know. Parents must further be taught about the need to build a good relationship with their children so that the former can trust their children to report any behavior that makes them uncomfortable while using the Internet. According to the children's tips section on ThinkUKnow, it is a good idea to use a nickname when chatting with new people, avoid opening any e-mails from strangers, and label such e-mails as junk mail so that no messages are received from that address again. Children should be taught to tell any adult they trust about any anxieties experienced by them while using the Internet.

In the KSA, the National Family Safety Program (2016) has established the Child Support

Line, a free telephone line to talk about abuse issues that affect children under 18 years of age. It provides callers with appropriate advice and referrals to agencies where they can report a problem and ensure follow-up on the actions taken to address the reported issues.

4 Conclusions

This analysis indicates that the CEOP video expresses how child abuse can take many forms, although all such incidences areoften not reported. The development of CEOP in the UK and the free Child Support Line in the KSA is effective in preventing child abuse, since they connect agencies (the police, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and intelligence agencies) to track and bring offenders to justice. The CEOP plays an important role in these effortssince it works to eradicate child abuse, an example of how governmental and nongovernmental organizations can act together to make the society, particularly children, more aware of a social problem. The discussion, a detailed review of the video, anda comparison between the effectiveness of the video and that of the Saudi free support line for children have found that online support is critical in minimizing incidences of child sexual abuse.

These effective approaches open up avenues children to protect themselves. Furthermore, they alert children to the most common forms of both offline and online abuse and help them to connect with resources for prevention and resolution. The video analyzed in this study not only notifies parents and teachers that they should spread awareness of child abuse but also describes how abuse occurs so that it can be prevented. Adults and children should spread awareness of CEOP's role in preventing child sexual abuse so that both children and their guardians can contact the agency for help. The video revealshow online reporting can help children to live without fear of abuse. Society has a responsibility to protect children's rights. The CEOP video is a pivotal measure in that respect.

5 Appendices

Figure 1   Figure 2   Figure 3   Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

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