

Adoption of Internet Parental Controls 2014

Focus Group Discussion Qualitative Report

Prepared for

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(MDA)**

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1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

- 1.1 The Media Development Authority (MDA) has launched public consultation on facilitating adoption of Internet parental controls on 21 April 2014. This is intended to help parents, particularly those with children aged 16 years old and below, to address the challenges of protecting the young from potentially harmful content or contact over the Internet.
- 1.2 The proposals being consulted are aimed at increasing parents' awareness on the availability of the controls, and simplifying the subscription process to such controls, should parents be interested to subscribe to them.
- 1.3 The focus group discussion sessions were part of the public consultation efforts initiated by the MDA. The main objective is to gather public's views, in particular parents, towards enhancements on the current Internet parental controls provided by Internet Access Service Providers (ISPs). *[Referring to them as Internet Service Providers as this term is more familiar with the public.]*
- 1.4 The focus group participants included members of the public who signed up for the focus group discussion sessions through MDA or people who were randomly selected from Degree Census household database. Within each session, the demographic profile of the participants was varied across race, occupation, dwelling type and education level.
- 1.5 A total of 7 sessions were conducted across the different segments of parents, members of the public and social workers who interacted with youths and their parents in their course of work.

1.6 The details of the sessions were shown in the table below:

	Date	Segment	Attendance
Session 1	6 May	Parents with children studying in Lower Primary level	8
Session 2	7 May	Parents with children studying in Lower Secondary level	10
Session 3	8 May	Parents with children studying in Upper Secondary level	10
Session 4	12 May	General Public	8
Session 5	14 May	Parents with children studying in Upper Primary level	10
Session 6	15 May	Social Workers	7
Session 7	16 May	General Public	8

2 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Internet Usage Patterns

2.1 The sessions started with the understanding of the Internet usage patterns of the children. From the parents' sharing, it was noticed that children in primary schools spent less time on average than the children in secondary schools. This could be attributed to secondary school students spending more time than primary school students doing online research for school work. Another factor observed was that more of the older children had mobile devices where they could access Internet easily while younger children had limited use on devices that belonged to their parents.

Awareness / Use of Filters

2.2 Most of the parents were aware of the Internet parental controls though their knowledge on such controls was not extensive. Thus, only a handful of the parents used Internet parental controls.

2.3 The more widely used method to supervise children's Internet usage was physical monitoring – to look at the websites that the children were browsing or have the children accessed Internet at common living spaces at home. Time limit was more often administered by parents with primary school going children than those with children in secondary schools. This was because for older children, it was more challenging to set restrictions without rational reasoning. Thus, for the latter group of parents, the inculcation of right values with regard to the appropriate use of Internet was more relevant for them.

Subscription Process

Required Decision

- 2.4 Across the four focus groups discussion sessions conducted among parents, three sessions saw most of the parents choosing the Required Decision approach over the other two approaches. One of the main reasons was Required Decision was the most straight forward and convenient approach, as aptly put by a mother with children studying lower secondary level, *“it’s (Required Decision) very simple when somebody asks you, do you want to filter, (just answer) yes or no”*. It required an explicit decision from consumers at the point of subscription or renewal for fixed-line and mobile Internet access. It would reduce the incidences of consumers forgetting about the availability of the Internet parental controls as compared to the Inform and Offer approach. As shared by a working mother in her thirties, *“instead of we go back home then (consider) want or don’t want, then miss out the date already”*.
- 2.5 At the same time, it would remove the inconveniences of having to contact the ISPs to opt out of the Internet parental control service in the event that they did not want it. This was mentioned by parents with older children (upper secondary) who might not need this service as their children grow older. Thus, they would rather reject the service at the point of subscription or renewal with ISPs than go through the hassle of contacting ISPs again to opt out. In fact, the interest of the general public was considered and Required Decision was favoured as it reduced inconveniences for members of the public who did not need Internet parental controls. To quote a working mother, *“very unfair to those who don’t want the service. They have to go through extra trouble to opt out for something they never asked for in the first place.”*
- 2.6 Another key reason for supporting Required Decision approach was the freedom to choose whether to have the Internet parental controls. To quote a female home tutor whose child is studying lower secondary level, *“because it gives me the liberty to choose”*. Another participant whose child is in lower primary said, *“I am in charge of what I am going to do”*.

- 2.7 Besides having the freedom to choose, the process of being informed, thereafter making a considered choice appealed to quite a number of the participants as they believed this would boost awareness on Internet parental controls. Given that parents would have to make an explicit decision during the subscription or renewal process, they would have to make a considered choice based on the information provided on the controls. This would encourage parents to give more thoughts to their needs for Internet parental controls which in turn would promote greater awareness of such controls. The outreach, perceived by some participants, could be quite wide since both new and existing subscribers would be informed and asked for their considered choices.
- 2.8 Most of the general members of the public preferred Required Decision approach to Opt-Out approach as it would create greater awareness among parents who have to think through their choices. The convenience of Required Decision approach where the decision to subscribe could be made upfront during subscription or renewal process was important to the members of the public since they were less likely to need the controls. They did not have to go through the hassle of contacting the ISPs to opt out of the service.

Opt-Out

- 2.9 The session that was conducted among parents who have children studying in upper primary level saw a unanimous agreement that Opt-Out was the most favourable approach. It should be noted that the views shared in this session were not mentioned in the other three sessions. Unlike the other sessions where most of the parents preferred to make their own choices, the parents of this particular session would want the decisions to be made for them. In fact, one even wanted it to be mandatory. This, according to the participants, would be a more effective method to ensure high adoption of Internet parental controls. To quote a father who shared the strong view of imposing such controls *“We can’t rely parents to make the right decision. We have to put some law to protect the kids”*. There were concerns towards parents who were less IT savvy or less educated who might not appreciate the benefits of Internet parental controls, thus would not sign up for them under the Required Decision approach.

- 2.10 Besides the concern of the less educated parents being left out of the adoption of Internet parental controls, there were worries among the parents that the service staff of the ISPs might not be fully equipped with knowledge of Internet parental controls to share with consumers, resulting in parents making uninformed choices. This would then defeat the main objective of encouraging parents to take up the Internet parental controls service. To quote a father in his fifties *“Those people that you talk to (ISP service staff) they don’t even know what they are talking about. They can barely even get through a re-contract of mobile phones or broadband and now we want to go into a subject area that they don’t know?”*
- 3.1 A separate note was made on a disadvantage of Required Decision, thus the preference for Opt-Out approach. Under Required Decision, some parents might reject the Internet filtering service but changed their minds later. However, they might procrastinate the signing on for the filtering services because they were not keen to communicate with ISPs. *(There was a common consensus during the session that ISPs were not prompt in handling customers’ requests.)* Such procrastination might eventually lead to parents not signing up for the Internet filtering services at all. Opt-Out would ensure that parents would have Internet filtering services for their younger household members by default without having to go through the cumbersome process in the abovementioned. As shared by a father, *“If I say no, and I decide to do it later. That will never happen. I will forget or I think my wife will do it. She’ll think I’ll do it. You know, it just won’t happen. We forget. We get lazy. We procrastinate. The deal’s over”*.

- 3.2 Quite a number of the social workers who interacted with youths and their parents in their course of work supported the Opt-Out approach. This was due to their worry for parents who were not technologically savvy or were not as educated to appreciate the benefits of Internet parental controls. In particular, the social workers who usually interact with parents from low socioeconomic status felt more strongly towards Opt-Out and this would ensure that parents would by default be subscribed to the controls even if they did not have much knowledge.
- 3.3 Some of the social workers suggested that during the subscription process, the ISPs staff could emphasise to the parents that the Internet parental controls were recommended by MDA. A suggested method was to state “*Under the recommendation of MDA ...*” in the subscription documents. Social workers felt that the endorsement by a public agency would raise awareness and give stronger recognition towards the importance of Internet parental controls.
- 3.4 Another enhancement proposed by social workers was to have both approaches implemented – first, to implement the Opt-Out for a certain period of time (e.g., 6 months), next the Required Decision. This was to ensure that parents by default have a trial period of the Internet parental controls under the Opt-Out approach and thereafter could make an informed decision on whether to continue with such a service under the Required Decision process. This was in line with the general stand among social workers which was to drive adoption first before raising awareness through informed choices.

Categories of Content to be Filtered

Filtering “adult content” by default

- 2.11 Almost all of the parents supported MDA’s proposal to specify “adult content” as the content category to be filtered by default when Internet parental controls are switched on. A self-employed 34-year-old father felt that filtering “adult content” *“should be the standard for parental controls.”* They agreed that “adult content” would be the top category that they would want to be filtered. To quote a mother with 3 children aged between 13 and 18 years old, *“I mean, if you do go for the parental controls, I think, any content of sexual nature is the mother of all categories that (should be blocked)... then you may as well put that as a default”.*
- 2.12 Some of the parents felt that this arrangement would protect children who entered adult content websites by accident. To quote a mother aged 50 with 3 children aged between 13 and 24 years old who had bad experiences while doing some research online with her children on biology, *“I was telling my children about sexual education, Biology... So I was very naïve, I just keyed in ‘female parts’. Then what came out was totally shocking and I have to stop everything... They block it (adult content), you know, by default, so it won’t appear like that”.*
- 2.13 A few of the parents commented that having “adult content” to be filtered by default gave them a sense of security as *“it’s like, something that has been done already. So, it’ll reduce the, so-called, our burden, in a sense”.*
- 2.14 “Violence” was the next common content category that was suggested to be filtered by default by most of the parents across all of the sessions. Parents were afraid that their children would be influenced by the violent images exposed to them. To quote a mother who is in her forties, working as a University lecturer *“a lot of research has shown that children who watch or see violent images after ‘x’ number of years will behave more aggressively”.* Other content categories that parents mentioned that they were concerned though needed not be filtered by default were addiction such as gambling, malicious or dating sites.

- 2.15 The same view was reflected from the social workers session where they agreed that “adult content” should be filtered by default. They saw this default filter as a “*basic level safety net*” against the “*worst of the worse out there that we are trying to filter*”. Violence would be the next category that they would want to filter, especially computer games that have violent themes.
- 2.16 Most of the members of the public also supported the proposal of filtering “adult content” by default. For the remaining few who held a different opinion, they thought that parents should decide for themselves the content to be filtered since every parent has a different parenting method.
- 2.17 A minority of the parents preferred not to have selected content categories to be filtered by default as they wanted the flexibility to choose the type of content to be filtered. In addition, they were not certain about the classification of content categories, especially if the informative or educational content within a negative content category would be restricted. In the case of a father in his forties, he might not block all “adult content” from his daughter who is studying upper secondary level. He felt that some parts of the content could be used for educational purpose. This view was shared by another mother with children from the lower secondary level – “*maybe the adults section, there are some categories that can choose here and there (for educational purpose)*”.
- 2.18 A suggestion was made by a few parents regarding the concern about the subjective classification of content. Information on the definitions used to classify content could be shared with parents to provide greater assurance that most of the educational content would not fall under the harmful content categories or vice versa. This might reduce the uncertainty towards predefined content categories and encourage greater adoption of Internet parental controls.

Mode by which Content is Filtered

Network Level Internet Parental Controls

- 3.5 Most of the sessions with parents observed that there was a greater preference towards filters being applied at the network level, except for the session with parents whose children are studying in the upper secondary level where most of them chose to install filters in their children's devices.
- 3.6 The predominant reason raised among those who chose having content filtered via network level was the convenience. Having the ISPs to install the filters at their end removed the hassle for parents to have to do installation for their devices, especially for those whose children have multiple devices. It was also highlighted that the less technologically-savvy parents would benefit from this approach. Another convenience created was for parents who frequently change devices for their children as they would not have to re-install the controls into their children's devices.
- 3.7 With the increased ease, it was perceived by the parents that this would drive greater adoption of the Internet parental controls. As stated by a 44 year old mother with children studying in lower secondary level, *"I think having that control at network level is probably the easiest way to reach out to a very wide audience to get the parental controls in place"*.
- 3.8 Another perceived advantage of the network level Internet parental controls was that the filters were harder to bypass by youths as compared to device level Internet parental controls. This was because the network controls settings were done at the backend by the ISPs so it appeared that there is a smaller chance of technologically-savvy children being able to get around the configurations.

3.9 From the social workers session, it was gathered that around half of them would advocate network level controls as it would reduce the inconveniences of installation for the less technologically-savvy parents or the less well-to-do parents who are *“busy earning money, trying to make ends meet”*. It should be highlighted that those who supported network level controls were aware of the effectiveness of device level controls. According to them, the use of device level controls could be left to the consideration of parents and could be applied to older children who use mobile devices more often. In the words from an executive in TOUCH Cyber Wellness, *“the network part should be the basic, then the device will come in when necessary”*.

Network Level Internet Parental Controls at Public Level

3.10 A noteworthy observation was that quite a number of parents who chose network level Internet parental controls were concerned with the lack of protection on the content their children could access when their devices are tapped onto other network when they are not at home. To overcome this limitation, a common suggestion of filtering content via public network or the 4G or 3G mobile network was made. In particular, most of the parents from the session where children are studying upper primary level strongly advocated that the filters should be applied to public network to ensure full coverage of the Internet content accessed by their children wherever they were. To quote one of the parents, a mother who is a professional educator, *“Why stop at either the device level or the home network level? There are so many public places in Singapore now that have free Wi-Fi”*. To note, this was the session where there were a few parents who had strong beliefs towards a blanket approach in promoting the adoption of Internet parental controls. Parents from the other sessions also made this suggestion though the proportion was lower. Another mother in her forties, whose child was in lower secondary level, liked having filters at public network level. To quote her, *“Anyone who offers public Wi-Fi, for example Starbucks or the library, they should have this... Then I think you have a very wide security net”*.

- 3.11 Substantiating the earlier point, an IT professional proposed that MDA could impose regulations for places which provide Wi-Fi to the public, such as Internet cafes, where they should have Internet filtering. To quote this father, *“Whether they are business, Government or private, if they are businesses they should be obliged to block (undesirable content)”*.

Device Level Internet Parental Controls

- 3.12 For most of the sessions, only a minority of parents would opt for device level filters. However, a reverse trend was noticed in the session with parents of children studying in the upper secondary level. Most of the parents from that session preferred device level controls as their children access Internet on their mobile devices rather frequently, both at home and out of home. The main draw of device level Internet parental controls was that the content would be filtered wherever the children brought their devices to. The parents who chose this did not mind the hassle of installing filters onto multiple devices. They were also against network level approach where their children could be exposed to inappropriate content if their devices were connected to other network besides their home network.
- 3.13 Another benefit offered by the device level approach was the segregation of usage by the ownership of the devices. Children’s devices would have the Internet parental controls installed while parents’ devices would not have the controls. This gave more flexibility to parents who preferred not to have their content filtered which might not be the case if the filters are applied to network at home.
- 3.14 Around half of the social workers had the same perception that youths use their mobile devices more frequently than their computers at home. This justified the need for device level Internet parental controls even though technical assistance on the installation should be provided for the less technologically-savvy parents.

3.15 Most of the public members favoured the device level controls and they had similar reasons as the parents and social workers who chose this option – the more frequent use of mobile devices and the concept of “*whenever you go, just block*”. They showed understanding towards the hassle of installation on multiple devices though they felt that there were more benefits from a more extensive filtering coverage under the device level Internet control. Interestingly, a suggestion to resolve the technical inconvenience was to design mobile applications for such Internet controls. The configurative settings of the application can be transferrable across devices within the same user account. At the same time, the user login function enables parents to access their children’s devices and manage the Internet control settings.

Both Network Level and Device Level Internet Parental Controls

3.16 There were a few parents who wanted both the network and device level Internet parental controls. Having both approaches would address the shortcomings of each individual approach. For instance, having network level filters removes the hassle of installation on multiple devices but youths could still access unfiltered when their devices are connected to other network besides home. Thus, having device filters, especially for mobile devices, it will ensure that youths are not exposed to unfiltered content. These parents were willing to go through the trouble of having both types of Internet parental controls as their priority was to prevent their children accessing undesirable Internet content.

3.17 A handful of parents proposed refinement to MDA’s recommendation of requiring ISPs to provide network level Internet parental controls, with device level Internet parental controls left to ISPs’ own commercial considerations. They hoped that both modes of controls could be made available for parents to select as different parents will have different preferences. They will choose the mode that complements the different supervisory style they have on their children’s Internet usage.

Subscription Costs

At least a version of Internet parental controls free-of-charge

- 3.18 All of the parents were delighted to learn about MDA's proposal of ISPs being required to offer consumers at least a version of Internet parental controls free of charge with the subscription of any Internet access package. All of the social workers and members of the public welcomed the proposal on the complimentary Internet parental controls as well. There was a common consensus, among all of the participants from the different segments, that this would increase adoption of Internet parental controls as parents would not mind trying the controls given that they were costless. In fact, some of those parents who doubted the effectiveness of Internet parental controls appeared keener to try out the controls if they were free. To quote a mother in her forties who works as an administrator, *"Even if there are loopholes, never mind, it's free"*.
- 3.19 Not only does this proposition encourage adoption of the basic comprehensive controls package, it might also raise the signing up for more advanced packages with additional features if parents found the basic version useful. As shared by a working mother whose child is studying in lower primary level, *"they (ISPs) will offer maybe like a basic, and then if you already see some effectiveness out of it, I think parents will be more than willing to pay for it"*.
- 3.20 Amidst the receptiveness of MDA's recommendation, some concerns were brought up. A common worry was that ISPs would transfer their costs of providing complimentary Internet parental controls to other services such as their Internet subscription packages, resulting in price increases. It was also anticipated that ISPs might charge for the controls after a certain period of time. These concerns were shared by both parents and social workers. Parents who voiced out such worries suggested that MDA could ensure that ISPs do not transfer costs to consumers or impose charges after a trial period of the Internet control package.

- 3.21 There were doubts cast on the extent of Internet filtering capabilities provided in the complimentary package. It was pointed out by a father, working in a managerial position, that he found the description of the proposed complimentary package – “minimally comprehensive” vague. He was unsure about the standard of the complimentary Internet filtering services provided and the benefits that could be derived from it. In his opinion, there should be a standard set of filters such as customizable settings for filters to be provided by ISPs and “*MDA actually would have to regulate*”. Echoing this view was another social worker who worked with schools on Cyber Wellness programs. He opined that a complimentary package that was described as “minimally” and “comprehensive” seemed contradictory to him. He stressed the importance of ensuring a good standard of filters that would be provided free-of-charge. At the same time, a youth worker at Care Singapore suggested subsidies for lower income families who wished to subscribe for more comprehensive version of the Internet parental controls.
- 3.22 Last but not least, a participant brought up that awareness of Internet parental controls might not be as optimal if the controls were provided free of charge. This was because consumers might give less consideration when deciding to take up the controls given that they were free.

Important product features to meet the needs of parents

- 3.23 One of the most commonly wanted features among the parents was the Parent Mobile Application. This application allowed parents to monitor the children’s online activities from their mobile devices. The key appeal of this feature was the convenience of monitoring from a mobile device that was most of the time with the parents. As shared by a working mother in her thirties “*we are more on our handphone than anything else and the app gave direct connectivity to see what my child is doing, via my phone which is with me 24/7*”. Most of the social workers also recommended this feature being useful with similar reasons as the parents. In particular, a few of them specified that the Google Play Store did not have parental control settings unlike the Apple Store which might then call for Mobile App Supervision since youths have less restrictions in downloading mobile applications.

- 3.24 Another popular feature was the Personal Information Protection, which could prevent the sharing of sensitive personal information such as phone number or birthday online. This feature could address parents' concern of their child sharing personal information online where *"identity gets stolen and that's a very very scary thing. For adults as well, not just for youths"*.
- 3.25 Weekly or Monthly Email reports were found useful among parents who wished to receive updates of their children's online activities. Parents felt that such summaries could give a quick overview of their children's Internet usage. It also serves as an alert for parents to intercept their children's online activities if they were accessing inappropriate content.
- 3.26 Among the social workers, Time Supervision was another popular feature that they perceived to be effective for parents who faced difficulty limiting the duration of Internet usage among their children. As commented by a youth worker from Care Singapore, *"(duration of Internet use) was the issue that every parent have"*.
- 3.27 Quite a number of the members of the public, especially the students, chose Social Network Monitoring. The key reason was parents should understand how their children present themselves on social media platforms and to stop inappropriate behavior if any.
- 3.28 Other mentioned features were Web Supervision, Time Supervision, Mobile App Supervision, Social Network Supervision, Video Monitoring and Text Message Supervision.
- 3.29 A few of the parents with lower secondary children frowned upon the use of such features as these might intrude into the privacy of their children. They would want to establish the trust between the parents and children and to educate the children on being responsible Internet user instead of relying on such supervisory features. To quote a father in his forties *"you want to cultivate trust and responsibility, instead of snooping (investigating) on everything they do"*.

Willingness to pay

- 3.30 Participants were asked on their acceptable price ranges for the Internet parental controls. The most common prices stated by parents were \$2 or not more than \$5 per month. However, quite a few of the parents were not willing to pay for Internet parental controls.
- 3.31 Among those who were not willing to pay for Internet parental controls, some shared that they would rather forsake the additional help from such controls and educate their children instead. A few of them felt strongly that ISPs should provide such services for free or at least have a free trial period. One father even commented that ISPs should undertake corporate social responsibility of providing such services.
- 3.32 Most of the social workers advised against the charging for the basic package of Internet parental controls as the cost would be additional barrier for adoption, particularly among those who were not that keen to consider controls in the first place. A parenting strategist from Focus on the Family organization pointed out that basic filtering services were readily available thus *“it doesn't make sense for the ISPs to charge a nominal price”*. She believes that ISPs should take up the social responsibility of offering complimentary basic controls.
- 3.33 As for the add-on features, there were more parents who were willing to pay for them. The prices mentioned were typically \$1, \$2, \$3 or less than \$5 per month. A few of the social workers proposed not more than \$1 per feature and suggested that the features to could be in the form of applications, instead of monthly subscription. The one-time purchase of applications was perceived to be more convenient than the payment for monthly subscriptions. Certain features such as Time Supervision should not be charged as these features could be found in Windows operating system, as shared by an executive who conducts Cyber Wellness programs in schools.

Provision of Technical Assistance

- 3.34 Across the four focus groups discussion sessions conducted among parents, almost all of them were satisfied towards the technical assistance proposed by MDA in resolving the technical difficulties faced for both new / re-contracting subscribers and existing subscribers. Those who were pleased complimented that these measures would improve convenience for the consumers as they would not have to call the hotline or follow up with ISPs if they could not install the controls themselves. Many of the parents added that such assistance will benefit the less technologically-savvy parents and reduce their inertia to subscribe to Internet parental controls.
- 3.35 On a side note, there was a query by a working mother on second-hand devices bought in second-hand retail shops. Technical assistance should also be provided for second-hand devices.
- 3.36 There were a number of concerns raised despite the receptive attitude towards these measures. Most of these suggestions aimed to enhance the current quality of technical assistance provided by ISPs.
- 3.37 One of the key suggestions was to ensure transparency in the assistance provided. This would pertain to costs and device configuration at the stores. Parents hoped that the technical support from the ISPs would come with no hidden terms and conditions or charges. Furthermore, some parents thought that the configurations of the parental controls could be done in front of the consumers and to go through with them on the installation steps and features. A 43-year-old housewife felt that *“it is better that the awareness is there so you know, they sit and they let us see everything”*. Another 37-year-old Chinese housewife also mentioned, *“I think if I am knowledgeable about this, I will make full use of it”*.

- 3.38 A much emphasized suggestion by quite a number of the parents was that dedicated resources should be readily available to provide prompt assistance as the current level and quality of technical support provided by ISPs were deemed to be weak. As lamented by a 46-year-old mother, *“it’s very troublesome having to connect with them (ISPs)”*. Thus, a specialised team to assist consumers who signed up for Internet parental controls should be set up. This team should be comprise of technical officers who are well-trained and knowledgeable to provide accurate information to consumers. A 24-hour toll-free hotline could be made available to consumers as parents might need assistance when their children were using the Internet that usually occurs at night.
- 3.39 Some of the social workers considered for the less educated parents who might not be able to understand the content in push notifications or online step-by-step guides. Thus, they came up with the idea of providing subsidies to community organisations such as community centres, voluntary welfare orgnsiations or family service centres to train more staff or volunteers who could provide hands-on technical assistance. Interestingly, a few of the members of the public also suggested having additional technical help in the form of on-site assistance by technical staff. This would be especially useful for parents who were illiterate or less educated.
- 3.40 Other forms of assistance suggested were online aid, such as instructions on website, video guide on installation and live chat capabilities, could be provided.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Subscription Process

- 3.1 More parents preferred Required Decision approach to Opt-Out approach. The main reason was that it is a straight forward and convenient process where consumers decide if they want Internet parental controls or not during the subscription or renewal process. This reduces the incidences of forgetting about the Internet controls under the Inform and Offer approach. It also avoids the inconveniences of having to contact the ISPs to opt out under the Opt-Out approach, especially for members of the public who do not require such services.
- 3.2 Next, the Required Decision process would encourage parents to make considered choices, thus raising the awareness of Internet parental controls. The possible outreach could be rather extensive given that both new and existing subscribers would be informed by the ISPs and asked for their explicit decisions.
- 3.3 The Opt-Out method was favoured by parents who found a blanket approach more effective in driving adoption where Internet parental controls are applied to all households with young members. They felt that such controls were important in limiting youth's exposure to undesirable content online. Thus, the Opt-Out process would ensure that most parents, including the less technologically-savvy or less educated ones, would have such services by default. This view was backed by social workers who were concerned that parents from low socioeconomic status would be left out of the adoption drive due to the lack of knowledge in this aspect.
- 3.4 There was an interesting suggestion from the social workers session. It was to have both approaches implemented in a step-wise manner. The Opt-Out approach could be used first where the parents, regardless of their awareness on Internet parental controls, by default could have a trial period of the Internet parental controls. Thereafter, they could make an informed decision on whether to continue with such a service under the Required Decision process. This proposal seems to tap on the pros of both approaches and mitigate the cons of them.

Categories of Content to be Filtered

- 3.5 MDA's proposal to specify "adult content" as the content category to be filtered by default when Internet parental controls are switched on is widely supported by parents, social workers and members of the public. Most of them agreed that "adult content" is the key category that is deemed most objectionable and should be filtered by default.
- 3.6 Violence would be the next common content category that participants would want to filter. However, there were mixed views towards violent content being filtered by default or not.
- 3.7 It should be reflected that there were queries on the definitions used to classify the different types of content. There were perceptions that such classification might be subjective and inaccurate. This might result in educational content being filtered or harmful content not being filtered. Though it was highlighted to participants that there are inherent limitations in Internet parental controls and parental supervision is still required, such concerns were still brought up. More assurance could be given by sharing more information on the methods of classification. This would in turn improve perception towards the effectiveness of Internet parental controls.

Mode by which Content is Filtered

- 3.8 A greater number of sessions saw stronger preference towards the network level Internet parental controls. This was mainly driven by the convenience of having ISPs installing the filters at the backend. This could reduce the barrier of signing up for Internet parental controls among parents who found it a hassle to install controls on multiple devices or for the less technologically-savvy parents. Some also thought that network level controls would be harder to bypass by youths since the configurative settings were controlled at the backend by the ISPs.
- 3.9 Among those who selected network level Internet parental controls, quite a few of them proposed a more comprehensive method where content can be filtered via public network or the 4G or 3G mobile network. This arose from the concern that youths could still access undesirable via other network besides the network at home.
- 3.10 A smaller proportion of participants supported device level Internet parental controls. Among those who favoured it, the key motivation was to ensure that youths would access filtered online content via their mobile devices wherever they are. In addition, youths were perceived to use their mobile devices more frequently than their computers at home. Typically, for those who liked the device level controls, they did not mind the trouble of performing the installations on their own. They felt that the benefits of device level controls outweigh the inconveniences in having to do the installations themselves.
- 3.11 There were a few parents who suggested having both network and device level Internet controls to cancel out the shortcomings of each individual approach. Another suggestion was to have both modes of controls made available for parents to select as different parents will have different preferences.

Subscription Costs

- 3.12 The proposal of requiring ISPs to offer consumers at least a version of Internet parental controls free of charge with the subscription of any Internet access package was much welcomed by the participants. Interestingly, some of those parents who initially doubted the effectiveness of Internet parental controls would be more motivated to try out the controls if they were free. This proposal was deemed to boost the adoption rate of the Internet parental controls. In fact, there were parents who expressed interest in signing up for more advanced packages with additional features if they found the complimentary version useful.
- 3.13 A key uncertainty brought up was that ISPs would transfer their costs of providing complimentary Internet parental controls to other services such as their Internet subscription packages. Additionally, some of the parents projected that the ISPs might charge for the controls after a certain period of time. It seemed that to encourage parents to take up the complimentary Internet parental controls, the implementation would have to be coupled with assurance that there would not be hidden charges or transfer of costs.
- 3.14 Some of the participants were not comfortable with the description of the proposed complimentary package being “minimally comprehensive”. They felt that this sounded vague and did not give consumers much confidence about the quality of the Internet filters. These participants emphasized on the importance of offering a good standard of Internet parental controls free-of-charge so as to drive the adoption of the controls.
- 3.15 One of the most popular features among parents was the Parent Mobile Application. This application provided the convenience of monitoring from a mobile device that was most of the time with the parents. Another well-liked feature was the Personal Information Protection as it could prevent youths from sharing sensitive personal information online.
- 3.16 A considerable proportion of participants were not willing to pay for Internet parental controls. They would rather forsake the controls and rely on their own parenting methods. A few of the parents and social workers opined that charging would discourage some parents from signing up for the controls.

Provision of Technical Assistance

- 3.17 Almost all of the participants were pleased with the proposed arrangement of technical service being provided by ISPs in the installation of Internet parental controls. This would reduce the need to seek technical assistance from the ISPs if they were to install the filters themselves. The less technologically-savvy parents were perceived to benefit greatly from such services.
- 3.18 Despite the receptiveness towards this proposal, some of the parents reminded that the technical support should come without hidden terms and conditions or charges. At the same time, a common suggestion made was that dedicated resources (example, a 24-hour toll-free hotline) should be readily available to provide prompt assistance as the current level and quality of technical support provided by ISPs were deemed to be not ideal. Another source of assistance could be to train volunteers who could provide hands-on technical assistance at community centres, family service centres or voluntary welfare organizations. This would be more useful for parents who were illiterate or less educated.