How to talk to kids about internet safety

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INTERNET has had an undeniably profound and positive impact in Asia, and will continue to do so as the expansion of infrastructure sees a digital future for all in this region. At the same time, cyberspace undoubtedly presents a double-edged sword. Risks abound online, many of them threatening the most vulnerable among us, namely children. Data from the Boston Consulting Group on internet use among children in thirteen countries show that eight percent may have unknowingly subscribed to commercial services, one in 10 has potentially been subject to personal data misuse, and one in five potentially exposed to harmful contents.

For these reasons, coupled with a lack of awareness as to the positive value of internet, some parents in Asia have exhibited reluctance to embrace the technology. While their caution is understandable, by limiting their children's exposure to cyberspace they also inadvertently restrict their access to the life-changing positive possibilities offered by internet.

With Safer Internet Day on February 10, now is the time for a region-wide discussion on how to keep kids safe on internet. Telenor is committed to safe internet for all, and as part of this, will be releasing a Safe Internet Book in the coming months to provide parents with the tools to keep their children safe in cyberspace. Drawing on Telenor's global and regional expertise in transforming societies through connectivity, the book details simple techniques that parents with little or no experience of internet can use to ensure that their children's time spent online is positive, productive, and safe.

What do we recommend? Above all, building resilience rather than restricting access. Children will access internet, with or without their parents, and it thus is important to create rules that acknowledge that children can't be monitored at all times. This process can be facilitated by setting time limits to usage, and age limits and security measures on devices. Keep internet-enabled devices in sight, in order to avoid inappropriate use. Check browser history to keep abreast of what your children are seeing online, and make sure they always log out.

Fundamentally, keeping kids safe online is about communication, and thus it is important to start the conversation about online risks. Basic ground rules like protecting passwords and personal information should become second nature. Also, know the right questions to ask: parents should familiarise themselves with the online landscape, and know what risks are presented by what platforms.

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We estimate that an overwhelming majority of an estimated 500 million children in emerging Asia markets will be accessing internet for the first time via mobile in the coming decade. Within the next three years alone, Telenor expects up to 85 million children will be introduced to internet via mobile in its global markets.

As operators we have a responsibility to ensure children's safety on internet, and Telenor works with multiple stakeholders to deliver on that commitment. With other leading ICT players, including Google, Facebook, and Microsoft, we are partners in the European Commission's CEO Coalition to make internet a better place for kids. We have worked with Interpol to become the first mobile operator in the world to introduce safety and child pornography filters for mobile phones, and we have joined industry forces to drive the establishment of the GSM Association's Mobile Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Content.

We firmly believe the opportunities presented by internet outweigh the dangers, but all stakeholders – including parents, educators, regulators and telecoms operators – must commit to ensuring that our children are safe online.

The writer is executive vice president and head of Asia Operations, Telenor Group.

HSBC bank 'helped clients dodge millions in tax'

The banking giant admits failings

BBC PANORAMA

BANKING giant HSBC helped wealthy clients across the world evade hundreds of millions of pounds worth of tax, the BBC has learned.

Panorama has seen accounts from 106,000 clients in 203 countries, leaked by a whistleblower in 2007.

The documents include details of almost 7,000 clients based in the UK.

HSBC admitted that some individuals took advantage of bank secrecy to hold undeclared accounts. But it said it has now "fundamentally changed".

The bank now faces criminal investigations in the US, France, Belgium and Argentina.

HSBC said it is "co-operating with relevant authorities". But in the UK, where the bank is based, no such action has been taken.

Offshore accounts are not illegal, but many people use them to hide cash from the tax authorities. And while tax avoidance is perfectly legal, deliberately hiding money to evade tax is not.

India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has said that all Indian names on the list will be investigated, although he cautioned that some accounts might be legitimate. A current inquiry looking into more than 600 people who hold accounts overseas, will now be widened to look into the current list of names.

The French authorities concluded in 2013 that 99.8 percent of their citizens on the list were probably evading tax.

The thousands of pages of data were obtained by the French newspaper Le Monde. In a joint investigation, the documents have now been passed to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the Guardian newspaper, Panorama and more than 50 media outlets around the world.

The documents include details of almost 7,000 British clients - and many of the accounts were not declared to the taxman.,

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) was given the leaked data in 2010 and has identified 1,100 people who had not paid their taxes. But almost five years later, only one tax evader has been prosecuted.

HMRC said £135 million in tax, interest and penalties have now been paid by those who hid their assets in Switzerland.

But the chairwoman of the Public Accounts Committee, Margaret Hodge MP, said: "I just don't think the tax authorities have been strong enough, assertive enough, brave enough, tough enough in securing for the British taxpayer the monies that are due."

HSBC did not just turn a blind eye to tax evaders - in some cases it broke the law by actively helping its clients.

The bank gave one wealthy family a foreign credit card so they could withdraw their undeclared cash at cashpoints overseas.

HSBC also helped its tax-dodging clients stay ahead of the law.

When the European Savings Directive was introduced in 2005, the idea was that Swiss banks would take any tax owed from undeclared accounts and pass it to the taxman.

It was a tax designed to catch tax evaders. But instead of simply collecting the money, HSBC wrote to customers and offered them ways to get round the new tax.

HSBC denies that all these account holders were evading tax.

Richard Brooks, a former tax inspector and author of The Great Tax Robbery, said: "I think they were a tax avoidance and tax evasion service. I think that's what they were offering. They knew full well that people come to them to dodge their tax liabilities."

The man in charge of HSBC at the time, Stephen Green, was made a Conservative peer and appointed to the government.

Lord Green was made a minister eight months after HMRC had been given the leaked documents from his bank. He served as a minister of trade and investment until 2013.

He told Panorama: "As a matter of principle I will not comment on the business of HSBC past or present."

Treasury minister David Gauke defended Lord Green's appointment on BBC's Radio 4. "I am not aware of any evidence that suggests that Lord Green was involved in this sort of activity", but said he did not know whether anyone asked him about HSBC prior to his government appointment.

But Hodge said: "Either he didn't know and he was asleep at the wheel, or he did know and he was therefore involved in dodgy tax practices.

"Either way he was the man in charge and I think he has got really important questions to answer."

Meanwhile, HSBC said it has completely overhauled its private banking business and has reduced the number of Swiss accounts by almost 70 percent since 2007.

In a statement, the bank said: "HSBC has implemented numerous initiatives designed to prevent its banking services being used to evade taxes or launder money."

The bank said it now puts compliance and tax transparency ahead of profitability. But Panorama has spoken to a whistleblower who said there were still problems with tax dodging at HSBC private bank when she worked there in 2013.

REUTERS/FILE

A shop assistant waits for customers at a Meizu store as Meizu MX3 smartphones are seen on display in the foreground, in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

Alibaba places China smartphone business bet with $590m Meizu deal

REUTERS, *Beijing/Shanghai*

China's Alibaba Group Holding Ltd is taking a $590 million stake in an obscure domestic smartphone maker as the e-commerce giant tests ways to expand its mobile operating system in a shrinking, cut-throat handset market.

Extending a previously muted push into hardware, Alibaba said on Monday it will buy an unspecified minority stake in smartphone maker Meizu Technology Co. Dwarfed by rivals like Xiaomi Inc, privately owned Meizu's slice of China's smartphone market is estimated by analysts at below 2 percent.

The deal, unlike US rival Amazon.com Inc's foray into smartphones with its own-brand Fire Phone, is designed to help Alibaba push its mobile operating system within China through Meizu's handsets. In return, Zhuhai, Guangdong-based Meizu will get access to Alibaba's e-commerce sales channels and other resources, the companies said in a joint statement.

For China's e-commerce king, with a market value of $213 billion market value, the $590 million price tag may be a costly entry fee. Meizu's reach in China, and likely that of the Alibaba operating system, is severely blunted by domestic leaders Xiaomi, Huawei Technologies Co Ltd and Lenovo Group, as well as multinational giants Apple Inc and Samsung Electronics Co Ltd.

"You could say they're spending $590 million to experiment a bit and see what happens - it's an expensive experiment, right?" said Michael Clendenin, Managing Director at Shanghai-based RedTech Advisors.

"My concern is that some internet players are confusing being able to just spend a couple hundred million dollars to buy a piece of hardware that looks pretty cool but is essentially a copy of what Apple has done and what Xiaomi has done," he said.

Germany clocks up record exports, trade surplus in 2014

AFP, *Frankfurt*

Germany, Europe's biggest economy, clocked up a record volume of exports and attained its largest ever trade surplus in 2014, data compiled by the federal statistics office Destatis showed on Monday.

Germany exported a record 1.134 trillion euros ($1.28 trillion) worth of goods last year and imported goods worth 916.5 billion euros.

That pushed the trade surplus -- the balance between imports and exports -- to an annual total of 217 billion euros, Destatis calculated in a statement.

In December alone, Germany exported goods worth a total of 98.7 billion euros in seasonally adjusted terms, an increase of 3.4 percent from November, Destatis said.

Imports, on the other hand, fell by 0.8 percent to 76.9 billion euros.

That meant the seasonally adjusted trade surplus expanded to 21.8 billion euros in December from 17.9 billion euros in November.

G20 plan for investment targets faces stiff opposition

REUTERS, *Istanbul*

GROUP of 20 finance officials look likely to reject a proposal to set countries specific investment targets to spur a global economy which looks increasingly reliant on the United States for growth.

The meeting of finance ministers and central bankers in Istanbul comes as Greece casts a new shadow over Europe, cheap oil plays havoc with inflation and growth forecasts and a strengthening dollar threatens emerging economies.

Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said Turkey - G20 chair for 2015 - preferred to set binding national investment targets but it appeared to be struggling to win support.

"Would all international countries be committed? ... We don't know yet," Babacan said in a speech on Monday.

One G20 source told Reuters the idea had already been taken off the table.

US Treasury Secretary Jack Lew said last week the United States could not be "the sole engine of growth" and a senior US official said Washington's message would again be that Europe is not doing enough.

Germany, with its hefty current account surplus and a balanced budget, has come under pressure at successive G20 meetings to spend more.

Berlin has rejected that suggestion in the past and is likely to argue that its rising domestic demand and plans to increase investment, largely through the private sector, shows it is doing what it can, according to European sources familiar with the G20 agenda.

Its euro zone peers France and Italy have urged more investment in the struggling single currency bloc.

"We need to be bolder in Europe in terms of risk taking ... I hope that policy action will indeed facilitate stronger private sector investments, especially infrastructure investments," Italian Economy Minister Pier Carlo Padoan told a financial gathering in Istanbul ahead of the G20 meeting.

Leaders of the world's top 20 economies agreed measures last year to raise their collective gross domestic product growth by an additional 2 percentage points over the next five years above the level projected in 2013.

The pledge, called the Brisbane Action Plan, entails about 1,000 commitments, which are now likely to be slimmed down to a more manageable number for each country to deliver on.

"Keep your word, or explain," was how Babacan explained the strategy.

Coming good on those pledges could add more than $2 trillion to the global economy and create millions of new jobs over the next four years, International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde said in a blog post.

REUTERS

Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan, *right*, chats with OECD Secretary General Angel Gurria as they leave after a joint news conference during the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting in Istanbul yesterday.

The new Greek government's refusal to extend an EU/IMF bailout and instead seek a new deal that ends austerity and restructures its debt will cast a long shadow at the Istanbul meeting.

Many of the main euro zone protagonists are here and the world is watching.

"There has to be compromise. It's clear that Greece has got to be prepared to make some changes, and I think a wholesale repudiation of their debt is not on the cards," Canadian Finance Minister Joe Oliver told Reuters in an interview. "But other countries, creditors will have to work with Greece to arrive at a compromise.

"I don't think anybody wants Greece to leave the currency union."

The G20 put together a stimulus package that pulled the world back from the brink in 2009 but today's challenge is more delicate, with diverging monetary policies a cause of global turbulence.

The US Federal Reserve looks set to raise interest rates this year, a stark contrast to huge money printing programmes by the European Central Bank and Bank of Japan and impromptu rate cuts from India to Australia, Canada to Denmark. China's giant economy is also slowing.

A by-product of that is the dollar being driven higher while other major currencies tumble.

Lew said he saw no signs of active currency manipulation and officials from other G20 countries do not expect Washington to complain while its economy is growing robustly.

Italy's Padoan said lower oil prices and the anticipated impact of an ECB plan to buy around a trillion euros of government bonds had helped improve the economic picture and would push the euro to a more "consistent" level.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development said structural reforms had slowed over the past two years.

G20 nations must focus on higher labour productivity and become more competitive and innovative if they want to boost growth, the OECD said in a report prepared for the meeting.

Bank of England Governor Mark Carney urged the G20 to mount a "big push" to implement global regulatory reforms, fearing that governments may be tiring of non-stop rule-making since the financial crisis six years ago.

Carney was speaking as head of the Financial Stability Board which, since Lehman Brothers crashed in September 2008, has coordinated a raft of new banking and markets rules to make the financial system more resilient.