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250,000 kids on Facebook even with age restriction

BY HARIATI AZIZAN



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PETALING JAYA: Facebook is still mulling over whether to open its doors to those aged under 13, but in Malaysia, nearly 250,000 children, some as young as seven, have already signed up on the world's biggest social network.

The young Internet users, like millions worldwide, have managed to avoid the age-restriction ruling by lying about their age, sometimes with the help of their parents.

The 13-year-old age limit was set by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act in the United States.

According to global social media and digital analytics company Socialbakers, about 248,500 Malaysian Facebookers were pre-teens as of August last year, making up about 2.2% of the nearly 11.3 million users.

The number of users has since increased to more than 12.4 million, said the

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CyberSecurity Malaysia has warned of the dangers of underage children using Facebook without proper parental guidance.

“We know there are already children under 13 on Facebook,” said its chief executive officer Lt Col (R) Prof Datuk Husin Jazri.

He believed lifting the age restriction could be a positive move.

“By allowing children to sign up, we can keep tabs on how many below 13 there really are,” he said.

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Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission chairman Datuk Mohamed Sharil Tarmizi agrees.

“Children can potentially be more open with a Facebook account. This may encourage them to share their experiences online.

“By hiding their age and bypassing protective measures, children may not be appropriately protected.”

Social media specialist Jasmin Choy said, however, it would make the kids more vulnerable to cyber bullying and sexual predators.

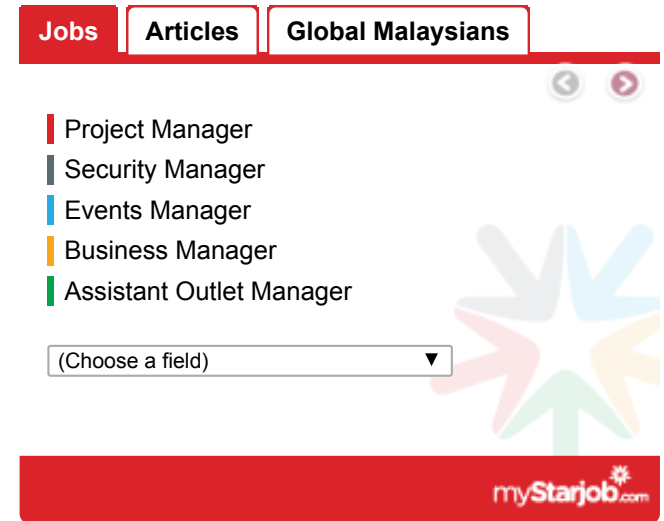
“Their parents either feel they can't do anything about it or they just don't know what is happening to their kids in cyberspace,” said Choy, who has two young children.

College student Syaza Nazura, 18, said: “Banning under-13s doesn't really work because they can just fake a birth date.”

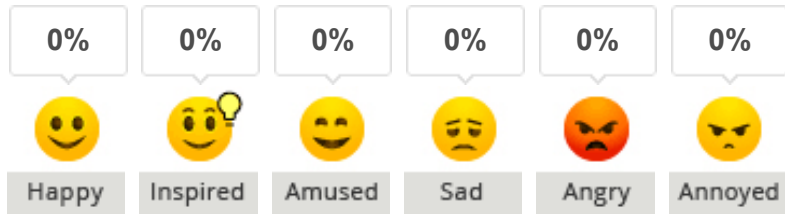
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