



EXPLORING ADOLESCENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SEXTING VIA SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS)

by

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Penerokaan Penglibatan Remaja Dalam Penukaran Imej, Teks dan Suara Seksual yang Jelas melalui Laman Rangkaian Sosial (LRS)

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini adalah salah satu kajian pertama di Malaysia untuk meneroka fenomena penukaran imej, teks dan suara seksual yang jelas di kalangan remaja. Penukaran imej, teks dan suara seksual yang jelas adalah amalan secara elektronik telah membawa kepada tingkah laku seksual. Aktiviti penukaran imej, teks dan suara seksual yang jelas ini menggunakan laman rangkaian sosial (LRS) memudahkan remaja untuk melakukan perkongsian di kalangan mereka. Terdapat kekurangan kajian yang dijalankan dalam bidang ini, terutamanya dari konteks masyarakat Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka penglibatan remaja dalam fenomena terutamanya kelakuan remaja, sebab atau keadaan, fenomena, strategi tindakan dan akibat dari strategi tindakan. Kaedah pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah kaedah kualitatif. Sesi temu bual melibatkan 75 peserta dari enam buah sekolah menengah di Perlis telah dijalankan. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan kaedah berasaskan daripada prosedur pengkodan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat empat sebab atau keadaan iaitu tekanan sosial, isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan penukaran imej, teks dan suara seksual yang jelas, ciri-ciri rangkaian sosial dalam talian dan ciri-ciri penjaga yang mempunyai pengaruh ke atas kelakuan remaja khususnya kepada penghantar dan penerima, mangsa, penentang, penyokong dan pemerhati. Eksploitasi dalam menggunakan alat-alat elektronik dan LRS mengakibatkan aktiviti penukaran imej, teks dan suara seksual yang jelas ini. Aktiviti ini dapat dilihat melalui kaedah penukaran dan faktor pendorong. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan fenomena ini mempunyai kesan sosial, psikologi, emosi, fizikal, akademik dan peraturan sekolah. Kejadian fenomena di kalangan remaja mencetuskan strategi tindakan. Strategi tindakan, khususnya, aktif, kognitif, agresif dan elak digunakan untuk menangani fenomena ini. Hasil daripada strategi tindakan, ia membawa kualiti kehidupan yang baik kepada mangsa. Kajian ini memberi manfaat kepada semua pihak iaitu remaja, ibu bapa, sekolah, pembentuk dasar dan pihak yang berkepentingan.

Exploring Adolescents' Participation in Sexting via Social Networking Sites (SNS)

ABSTRACT

This study is one of the first studies in Malaysia to explore the sexting phenomenon among adolescents. Sexting is a practice of sending and receiving sexually explicit images, sexually explicit texts and sexually explicit voices electronically which has led to sexual behavior. The sexting activities that uses social networking sites (SNS) helps to facilitate adolescents in sharing sexually explicit images, texts and voices among them. There is a lack of studies undertaken in this field, particularly from Malaysian context. The study aims to explore adolescents' participation in sexting particularly the actors' behavior, its conditions, the phenomenon, the action strategies and the consequences of sexting. Qualitative data collection methods were used in this study. Interview sessions with 75 participants from six secondary schools in Perlis were conducted. Data were analysed using coding procedures. The findings of this study demonstrated that there are negative and positive impacts resulting from adolescents' participation in sexting. The results also indicated that there are four conditions, namely: social pressures, issues related to sexting, characteristics of online social networks and characteristics of guardian that have influence on actors' behavior specifically sender and receiver, victim, opposer, supporter and bystander. The actors exploit and utilize electronic devices and SNS advertently cause the sexting activities. These activities can be seen through the methods of sexting usage such as images, texts and voices, and the factors that motivate them. Based on findings also, sexting has impacts in terms of social, psychological, emotional, physical, academic and school rules and regulations. The incidents of the phenomenon among adolescents have triggered the action strategies. The adolescents use action strategies, namely: active, cognitive, aggressive and avoidance to deal with sexting. Resulting from the action strategies, the consequences have delivered a good life quality to the victim. This study beneficial to all related parties, adolescents, parents, schools, policy makers and stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a brief overview of the importance of undertaking research on the participation of sexting among adolescents. This chapter presents the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the scope and limitations, the operational definitions and the organization of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

New media congregates the roles of information, media, electronic communication, where it can be undoubtedly displayed by the Internet. The rapid growth of new media has facilitated the movement of globalization in community because of its special features. It allows the community to interconnect (Chen, 2012). New media, particularly social media for instances MySpace, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube have connected human society in virtual world. Social media benefits users to communicate, share information, and build social relationships (Chen, 2012; Tartari, 2015).

Adolescents are among the first to have grown up completely enclosed by communication technologies. They are in an era of swift development, growth and maturation (Ahn, 2011). Adolescents from the ages of 13 to 19 are recognized as generations with highest internet consumption since the late 1990s (Kraut, Lundmark, Patterson, Kiesler, Mukhopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998). Based on media research, more than 90 % of adolescents aged 8 to 18, uses new media at a greater percentage than any other age group (Collins, Martino, & Shaw, 2011). Adolescents use new media for entertainment or socializing by watching videos, listening to music, and interacting with friends through social networks like Facebook or Myspace (Hobbs, 2011; Pascoe, 2013).

According to Laird (2012), adolescents spent at least 10.6 billion minutes each day surfing social networking sites (SNS). SNS have obtained substantial popularity among adolescents in recent years, mainly due to the swift advances in information and communication technology (ICT) (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015). In addition, 93% adolescents spend a minimum of 6 hours per day on social media (Bhavana, 2014). Besides, adolescents use SNS to develop relationships and discover new abilities (Ahn, 2011). The uses and consequences of new media, which refers to Internet, text messaging and SNS over the internal and external aspects of adolescents has been debated since the beginning of its existence (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Guse, Levine, Martins, Lira, Gaarde, Westmorland, & Gilliam, 2012).

Adolescents are lack self-regulation, making them vulnerable to the risks of social media use, for instance, exposing to inappropriate information, harassment, cyberbullying, sexting, and privacy issues (Carrol & Kirkpatrick, 2011; O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson & Council on Communications and Media, 2011). Online harassment experienced by schoolchildren in Malaysia is increasing, according to a survey conducted

by DiGi Telecommunications Sdn Bhd and its CyberSAFE in schools program partners. The level of online harassment was reported to be high, above 70% especially involving posting improper messages and inappropriate photos (National Survey Report, 2014).

In Raub, Pahang, the media reported that a 19-year-old male teenager threatened to spread a nude photo of his ex-girlfriend in social networks after she asked to break up. The male teenager also over reacted by hanging the nude photo on the fence of the girl's house. The victim was embarrassed and traumatized, worried that her family would know about it. A police report was lodged, and the police advised the public not to take or keep nude photos even for personal collection because of possible abuse by specific parties (Harian Metro, 2014, p 53).

In another incident in Johor Bahru, a girl recorded herself kissing her boyfriend in public. The video spread on Facebook and invited negative reactions from the community. One of the Facebook users said that the video scene could lead as a bad influence on kids and teenagers (Harian Metro, 2013, p 52). A Form One school student was caught having sex with her 15-year-old school dropout boyfriend in her house who she knew after a month on Facebook. The male teenager was detained by the student's uncle and sent to Setiu Police Station (Berita Harian, 2013, p 25).

'Norton Online Family' reported that Malaysian adolescents spend an average of 19 hours online per week, while their parents' think they only spend 11 hours. Director General of National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) Datuk Dr Siti Norlasiah Ismail mentioned that the study also reported only four in ten parents knew what that their child is looking at online. It was reported that 90% adolescents in Malaysia were exposed to negative experiences through online media (Harian Metro, 2013, p 48).

According to Ericson Consumerlab (2013), a survey reported that Malaysian adolescents aged 16 to 24, contributed 70% by using smart phones (Utusan Malaysia, 2014, p 16).

In Canada, a teenager, Amanda Todd, committed suicide in 2012 after posting a YouTube video detailing harassment and bullying. She described how she was lured by a stranger to expose her breasts on webcam (The Guardian, 2014). In the case of Jessica Logan, an 18-year-old, her nightmare of harassment started when she sent nude pictures of herself to her boyfriend. When they broke up, he sent the photos to other high school girls after which they began harassing her, calling her a slut and a whore. She was miserable, depressed, and was even afraid to go to school. Two months later, she hanged herself in her bedroom (Celizic, 2009).

The usage of online media among adolescents at a very young age in Malaysia is increasing rapidly. Technology advancing such as social media allows them to connect with others and share activities, for instance, accessing the internet, sending and receiving messages and photos (Mustaffa & Megat Ibrahim, 2014). In the world that is increasingly sexualized, adolescents who have sex interest are more prone to choose online media to discover about sex (Brown & Keller, 2009; Collins et al., 2011) and adolescents can use online media for transmitting sexual content. When they do so, they are engaged in sexting. However, sexting has garnered a great deal of concern among parents, teachers and school administrators (Arcabasio, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Sexting encouragement during adolescences are connected to develop aspects such as sexual identity and body-image development or harmful intentions such as violence among peers and partners (Bianchi, Morelli, Baiocco, & Chirumbolo, 2017).

The above cases show that sexting can lead to negative repercussions. Therefore, it is crucial to initiate an exploratory study to comprehend this phenomenon as adolescents

in Malaysia appears to be involved in sexting incidents. Therefore, this study explored adolescents' experiences and perceptions of sexting and the aspects that lead to the phenomenon. Consistently, this study explored the causes of adolescents' participation, the potential effects, and the potential actions to deal with this phenomenon. In particular, this study focuses on the conditions, adolescents' behavior, impacts, action strategies, and consequences. By studying this phenomenon in Malaysia, this study contributed to the literature on sexting.

1.2.1 The Global Overview of Sexting Phenomenon

Nearly 20% of all participants from a single private school in the southwestern U.S reported they had sent sexually explicit images of themselves via cell phones, while almost twice as many also reported that they had received sexually explicit pictures via cell phones, and of these over 25% indicated that they had forwarded such pictures to others (Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita, & Rullo, 2012).

In another study, 28% of the sample from seven public high schools in southeast Texas reported of having sent naked pictures of themselves through text or email (sext), and 31% reported of having asked someone for a sext. Over than half (57%) had been asked for a sext, with a vast majority were being bothered by having been asked. Adolescents who engaged in sexting behavior were more likely to have begun dating and had sex than those who did not sext (Temple, Paul, Van den Berg, Le, McElhany, & Temple, 2012).

The EU Kids Online survey explored children's experiences of a range of possible risks online. It was found that 11% of UK children had encountered sexual images online,

8% of UK aged 11 to 16 years old said they had seen online sexual images, including nudity, 6% (more teenagers than young children) had seen images of someone having sex, 6% had seen images of someone having sex, 6% had seen someone's genitals online, and 2% had seen violent sexual images (Livingstone, Haddon, Gorzig, & Olafsson, 2010).

Issues relating to the practice of sexting among adolescents have been increasingly gaining media attention both nationally and internationally. Studies on adolescents' experiences indicated that sexting is a global phenomenon. Adolescents are using electronic devices, particularly mobile phones and online media to engage in sexting behavior.

1.2.2 Tendency of Sexting Phenomenon in Malaysia

Adolescents easily imitate what they see. In the past, television was the primary source followed by pornography CD Rom. Now, the internet and smartphone are the intractable sources. Short video clips shared on video-sharing websites such as YouTube has become the reference. The new technology via the Android software in smartphone, tablet or iPad facilitates applications of downloading immediately (Berita Harian Online, 2013).

According to the Malaysian Coalition for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (MCPSA), lately, there were rape cases reported to the police involving children. The investigation revealed that school teenagers involved in such crime after being influenced by social media such as Facebook and pornographic websites (Utusan Online, 2014).

Since the new technology opens potential risks to adolescents either as perpetrators or victims, the researcher explored the use of social networks and electronic devices among adolescents in sexting participation. Social networks furnish adolescents with pornographic material and can be influenced to commit sexual misconduct.

1.3 Problem Statement

Results of a survey among school children in Malaysia revealed that they had worries or concerns about using the Internet, such as anonymity, consuming too much time, bullying, addicted, and privacy issues (National Survey Report, 2014). According to Chhachhar, Qureshi, Ahmed Maher, & Ahmed (2014), many young people consume the Internet without adults' supervision and expose them to the negative impacts. Another issue related to using the Internet is sexting behavior, which is related to the use of pornography (Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2014). Studies showed that pornographic viewing was significantly related to sexual activities among adolescents (Awaluddin, Ahmad, Mohd Salleh, Aris, Mohd Kasim, Muhammad Sapri, & Nik Abdul Rashid, 2015). Also, it was found that online sexually explicit materials had impacts on addiction and criminal behavior among adolescents (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012).

Adolescents can create, send and receive sexually explicit materials using electronic devices and the Internet. Studies revealed that sexually explicit materials could be shared with partners or to someone they only knew online (Lounsbury, Mitchell and Filkelhor, 2011; Peskin, Markham, Addy, Shegog, Thiel, & Tortolero, 2013).

Sexting is labeled as critical issue and has dangerous activities (Angelides, 2013). Other studies found that sexting has social, psychological, emotional, and physical impacts on adolescents (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2012; Temple et al., 2012; Rice, Gibbs, Winetrobe, Rhoades, Plant, Montoya, & Kordic, 2014; Houck, Barker, Rizzo, Hancock, Norton, & Brown, 2013). However, adolescents were reported to perceive sexting as a normal practice and as part of romantic relationships or courting practices. Hence, even though sexting is a mode that adolescents use to show their sexuality, they may not be aware of the potential ramifications (Crime Prevention Ottawa, 2013; Dake, Price, Maziarz, & Ward, 2014; Prather & Vandiver, 2014).

In addition, adults discover that they are lack of ability to handle sexting and its impacts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Furthermore, mobile phone activity and sexting behavior among adolescents tends to be unsupervised by parents (Prather & Vandiver, 2014). This is because of adolescents and parents lack of information on sexting (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2011). Therefore, it is essential for adolescents, parents and school administrators to comprehend this phenomenon (Wolak et al., 2011; Strassberg et al., 2012).

To date, there are no studies on sexting practices in Malaysia. Also, as noted by Eneng Faridah Iskandar, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) advocacy and outreach senior director, there is no evidence of comprehensive studies on sexting. Studies have shown that pornography relates to sexual activities, and the new technology has become a medium for adolescents to view pornography. The pornographic materials can be accessed from new media such as pornography websites, and video-sharing websites. But recently, in addition to pornography, adolescents appear to be using social media for sexting. Sexting has many appealing aspects, such as creating,

transmitting, and interacting sexually online. The gap in the sexting literature shows the importance of exploring adolescents' participation particularly the adolescents' behavior, its causes, actions and consequences as a result from the influence of sexually explicit online material.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The overall aim of this study was to explore sexting participation of adolescents. Thus, five specific aims were intended to be accomplished:

- (a) to explore the seriousness of sexting phenomenon among adolescents;
- (b) to acknowledge the participants who are involved in the sexting phenomenon;
- (c) to understand the conditions that affect the participants;
- (d) to reveal the action strategies used to overcome the impact of sexting activities;
- (e) to describe the consequences resulting from the action strategies by participants.

1.5 Research Questions

Thus, the following research questions helped to develop interview questions:

Q1. What is sexting phenomenon?

Q2. Who are the actors participated in sexting phenomenon?

Q3. What are the conditions that affect the actors participating in sexting phenomenon?

Q4. What are the action strategies in dealing with the impact of sexting phenomenon?

Q5. What are the consequences resulting from the action strategies?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study of sexting participation by adolescents is significant for two reasons. First, this study addresses the insufficiency of research on sexting in Malaysia. The lack of attention about adolescents' behavior, its causes, action strategies and consequences are a gap in the literature. Besides, social problems related to sexual misconduct among adolescents are increasing. Adolescents were chosen as participants because they described as developmentally immature including emotional and social maturity. Little is known about the sexting participation. This study is, therefore, one of the first few attempts to explore secondary school students about their experiences and perceptions of sexting. The study provides an insight into sexting and offers information for further research in this area of interest.

It is significantly contributing to the expansion of knowledge due to an interpretive and systematic approach which draws from the experience and reality of the involved participants, and a way to achieve reliable results that can generate action strategies as well as to improve knowledge. The categories in sexting are used as a framework to understand the relationship of the actors, the conditions that influence sexting, the action strategies, and the consequences. It is hoped that the findings of this

study and those reported in previous research would give better insights into the understanding of the sexting.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The focus of this study was to describe and explain the sexting phenomenon. However, the study has these limitations:

- (a) The study concentrated in Perlis. The target participants were secondary school students aged between 13 to 19 years old. However, the names and location of the correctional institution and any other agencies involved in this study are not revealed for confidentiality purposes and to ensure the safety and well-being of all parties concerned.
- (b) This study was concerned with the applicability of qualitative approach.

1.8 Operational Definitions

SNS that are most frequently use: Adolescents loves to post their daily lifestyles and personal information on SNS such as Facebook and Twitter. It becomes a trend for them to show people everything they have done (Loking & Castillo, 2012). Adolescents use technology and it is not surprising that SNS plays an important role in interaction with peers, partners and intimate friends. Based on the results, participants of 75 adolescents, aged 13 to 19, used electronic devices and SNS such as WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook, Twitter and BeeTalk for sexting. 34.7% of participants reported using WhatsApp, 27% of participants reported using WeChat, 1.3% of participants reported using BeeTalk, 20%

of participants using Facebook and 1.3% of participants reported using Twitter. WhatsApp and WeChat became the most popular applications that was frequently used among adolescents due to its enticing features like profile creating, friends' connections, private messaging, photo-sharing and video-sharing, and free and easy mode for social contact.

Sexting vs sexual behavior: According to Temple et al. (2012), sexting is “a combination of the words sex and texting, or the practice of electronically sending sexually explicit images or messages from one teen to another” (p. 828). Houck et al. (2013) defined sexting as “the transmission of nude (or semi nude) images via an electronic device” (p. 2). Peskin et al. (2013) refer sexting as “using technology to create, send, and receive sexually explicit photos, videos, and/or text-only messages” (p. 454). It explains that sexting is not only the practice of sending and receiving sexually explicit images or messages but a practice of creating as well. Mitchell et al. (2012) defined sexting as “transmission via cell phone, the Internet, and other electronic media of sexual image” (p. 14). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) referred sexting as “sending and receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive images or video via a cell phone” (p. 1). According to Mitchell et al. (2012) and Hinduja and Patchin (2010), sexting is a transmission of sexually explicit images via cell phone. The above definitions summarized sexting as practice of sending and receiving sexually explicit images or messages via electronic devices. Prevalence of sexting behavior among adolescents are associated with sexual behavior which is relating to sex, conception and satisfaction (Bauermeister, Yeagley, Meanley, & Pingel, 2014). In the present study, findings demonstrated that adolescents who are engaged in sexting have also engaged in sexual behavior for instances masturbation, adolescents having sexual practice such as hugging