SEXUAL EXPLOITATION VIA ONLINE PUBLIC CHATROOMS

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Abstract

Significant numbers of scholars perceive the Internet as a superior medium in comparison to the conventional media, which is very much exclaimed by the fact that 'it is almost impossible to be controlled'. Parallel to such notion the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 enacted that 'nothing in this Act shall be construed as allowing censorship'. Significantly the internet has been widely utilized for multiple functions, not merely on communication but has been extended to business, library data, educational, religious matters, multicultural relation, acculturation, entertainment and socialization. The public can significantly employ and being subtly forced to employ the internet for many of their daily chores and such phenomenon has created a generation of information and idea sharing. Chat rooms are seen to be one of the most popular platforms despites debates and critical insights on its misuse or otherwise abuse. In line to that, the Internet, with its lack of restrictions makes sexual inclination communication and related behavior more significant between users and strangers. With a click of a button, users may transmit, manipulate, and even manufacture pornography that includes child pornography or specifically pedophilia. Open sexual discussions with strangers will potentially lead to more serious results such as dating and sexual intercourse. When these people (chatters) involved in free sex, there are certain consequences that would crop up, such as illegitimate babies, baby dumping, abortions and worst to that, suicidal acts of the victims. This study, with the aid of two major communication theories, social learning theory and uses and gratification theory outlines the happenings and conversation patterns of public chat rooms' users focusing on sexual conversation. In regards to the methodology, this research employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches based on analysis of textually recorded content from purposive samples selected all over Malaysia. It is found that thirty (30%) percent of the total Malaysian samples commenced webcam chatting with sexual intention, eleven (11%) percent initiated face to face meeting with sex intention, forty six (46%) percent of the total conversation are sexual-involved dialogues. This study recommends that sex education is vital in Malaysian education system as the social problems pertaining sexual intercourse has increased these few years. The statistics of cases on baby dumping and abortion are worrisome. Malaysians' mentality needs to be widened and broaden as sex education can help children and the public to understand human sexuality and more to that, sexual exploitation via the Internet.

Keywords:
Online public chat rooms, sexual explicit conversation, sexual exploitation, perception alteration

Introduction

Malaysia is significantly inclined to portray herself as an Islamic nation, which has been clearly affirmed in the Malaysian Federal Constitution that Islam is the Federal Religion (Law of Malaysia, 2009). However in regards to the British colonial legacy, it is inevitable for Malaysians to deny secularism, which is being manifested through its educational, cultural, political and economic practices. Even its conventional media as reflected through the law and regulation are seen very much of British essence, which later and currently engrossed more on sustaining and heightening national integration and security.

Nevertheless with the emergence of the Internet and the fast-developed communication technology of interpersonal communication as well as mass communication, the essence of Malaysian Islamic stance that highly emphasized on moral values, which is very much opposes explicit sexual exposure via the mass media, had been significantly challenged. This includes the technology of the Internet that allows explicit mass discussion as well as interpersonal, on sexual matters. It is also inevitable that such open discussion would lead to sharing and later reinforce the tendencies of influencing sender and receiver of those explicit sexual exposures to the extent of having sexual intercourses. One of the common avenues for such sexual explicit discussion is the public online chatting rooms.

Even though there are positive objectives in regards to the utilization of such online chatting rooms but informal conversation in the company of non common people or stranger may encounter several problems translated as unlawful practices or wrong doing that comply to the exploitation from one party upon another. Such public chat rooms which engaged visitors for interpersonal relationship with new people are facing extra ordinary growth (P.J. Deitel and H.M. Deitel, 2008) and these can lead to unintended social problems and later defined as nation's problem if there is no control of it.

Problem Statement

Online public 'chat room is a Web site, part of a Web site, or part of an online service that provides a venue for communities of users with a common interest to communicate in real time. Most chat rooms do not require users to have any special software' (Rouse, 2005). With reference to such definition, this study explored the usage of online public chat room and observed chatters behavior as well as their intention expressed during their conversation with the second party during those chatting session.

According to Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission forty two point three percent (42.3%) of internet users (home users) are youth aged from 24-year-old and below (MCMC, 2005). Six point five percent (6.5%) are children below 15-year-old, eighteen point six percent (18.6%) are youth aged between 15-year-old to 19-year-old and seventeen point two percent (7.2%) are youth aged between 20-year-old to 24-year-old. Through this research, we know that the most internet users are the youth.

In today's world, number of cases recorded in local and international news on social problems and criminal cases dealing with online chatting activities. Among the possible social problem caused by online chatting are listed below and illustrated in the following chart.

The possible social problems:
1.   Child pornography
2.   Social networking: significantly contribute to free sex
3.   Looking for sex partners through internet
4.   Free sex activities
5.   Baby dumping
6.   Rape
7.   Kidnap
8.   Sexual abused
9.   Cheating

Cyberspace, with its lack of restrictions makes child pornography more readily available in the United States than it has been since the 1970s (McLaughlin, 1998).

Online chat rooms also become one of the most efficient tools to communicate with strangers and to build network for all purposes. Specifically is one of the largely used among Malaysian when it comes to online chat rooms services. With the absolute freedom to communicate with one another, the discussion on sex is hardly to be stopped.
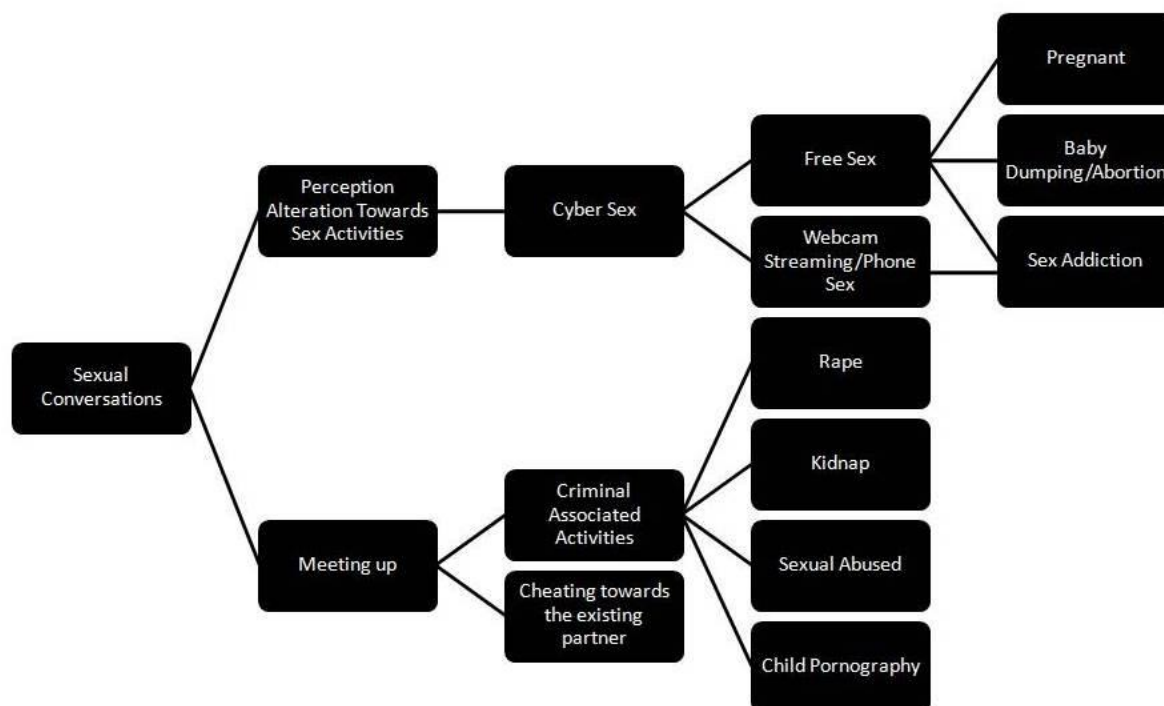
Chart 1.1 : The possible social problems caused by online Public Chat room

Therefore, this study intends to identify the conversation patterns among chatters within online public chat room specifically focused on the immoral conversations possibly lead to sexual bantering and to determine the possible social problems initiated by interacting with strangers as well as sexual exploitation through public chat room.

Research Questions and Research Objectives

This paper raises several research questions as follows:

1.4.2   What are the significant inclination and tendency in regards to sexual explicit conversations among Malaysian online public chatters during their chatting session?
1.4.3   How the conversation developed and changed online public chatters attitudes after constantly exposed to sexual-explicit conversations with strangers in the public chat rooms?
1.4.4   What are the patterns and behaviors of online public chatters throughout the chatting session?

Research objectives are as follows:

1.5.2   To study the significance inclination and tendency towards sexual explicit conversations among Malaysian online public chatters during their chatting sessions.
1.5.3   To explore the change of attitudes among online public chatters after constantly exposed to sexual-explicit conversations with strangers in the public chat rooms.
1.5.4   To examine the patterns and behaviors of online public chatters throughout the chatting session within the online public chat room.

Literature Review

The advert of the Internet has been one of the most exciting major events in the second half of the 20th century (Guangrong, 1998). Everyone is connected to the Internet either through social network accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Flicker and Instant Messaging services to keep in touch with friends and families. Internet provides great opportunity to everyone to build their own network through various ways.

This study focuses on the conversation among chatters within public chat rooms, which seemingly becoming popular among Malaysians who seek friendship and intimate relationship. As Laura (2010) asserts, among the reasons that engaged people for online public chatting is simply because some people cannot restrain themselves from being spoil sport (Laura, 2010).

Several chatters over the chat rooms use fake name (ID) or pseudon, to hide their actual identity (Laura, 2010). A number of people were also found to carry sex chats over the chat rooms, known as cybersex.

Social Learning Theory

Media effects are simply the consequences of what the mass media do, whether intended or not (McQuail, 2000). Human learn from observation. There have been some questions about how much and what kind of behaviors people learn from the media.

Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences. By using this theory, it is to believe that when constant sexual conversations between strangers in chat rooms, there are the possibilities that the assumptions and impressions towards sexual activities are altered.

Uses and Gratification Theory

Every other person uses the media for different purposes. In this study, human behavior can be monitored on hoe the use media accordingly to their intention. In Blumler and Katz's uses and gratification theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Chatters according to their intention to enter chat rooms can use public chat rooms differently.

Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies had been utilized in this research. It employs researcher involvement in online public chat rooms, to explore the chatting inclination of the second party. Nevertheless the actual identity of the researcher as well as the research intention is being kept confidential to the second party. All the selected communication contents are recorded and later analyzed in tandem with the research objectives.

Through random sampling, the researcher selected the first 10 chatters of every state to be the sample for the research and chat with them accordingly to the flow and content that they intended and most importantly the tendency of the conversation that inclined towards sexual issues. All the conversations during the chatting sessions are recorded.

The researcher purposively chose the regions as per stated below to pick 10 random respondents (chatters) from state representatives of the region for data collection.
In regards to content analysis, the content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any messages that are being communicated during the chatting session. The text is anything written, visual or spoken that serves as a medium for communication (Neuman, 2006).

Ten (10) states were chosen as per the following (accordingly to region)

Region	Representative State (s)
North Peninsular	Kedah Darul Aman Pulau Pinang
South Peninsular	Johor Darul Takzim Malacca

East Coast Peninsular	Kelantan Darul Naim Pahang
Central Peninsular	Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur Selangor Darul Ehsan
East Malaysia	Sabah Sarawak

Table 1.1 : Regional sections for the research (Wikitravel, 2010)

A particular online public chat room was chosen as it is the current market choice based on its popularity among Malaysian. It also provides specific regional chat rooms for both mass chatting (more than two chatters at a time), as well as personal one-on-one chatting.

The researcher then chose 10 states accordingly to represent 5 regions of Malaysia including North, East Coast, South, Central and East Malaysia.

Easy sampling was used in this research where the first chatters that initiated conversation with the researcher will be chosen as sample. The researcher chose the first 10 chatters who communicated with the researcher upon logging in to the online public chat rooms.

This method involves the researcher 'getting to know' the people in the study by entering their world and participating – either openly or confidentially.

Quantitative research approach is used to gather quantitative data and information dealing with numbers and anything that is measurable. Statistics, tables and graphs are often used to present the results of these methods.

Qualitative research is also utilized that aims to identify the development of the conversation and to determine the tendency of each conversation between researcher and the respective respondents.

Content analysis approach is significantly employed to study the content of interpersonal communication among chatters of the selected online public chat rooms. This content is textually recorded and later analyzed to observe the pattern of conversation and how it would lead to sexual matters as well as the chatters intended behaviors. Content analysis would also allow researcher to reveal and interpret the messages hidden in the content.

Findings

First 10 chatters were selected from every state to be the sample for the research and the researcher will communicate accordingly to the development and tendency of the conversation. The identity and the intention of the researcher is being kept confidential. The sample is given the liberty to decide on the pattern of the conversation flow and where it would lead to.

The segmentation of the samples are as the following:

Region	Representative State (s)
North Peninsular	Kedah Darul Aman Pulau Pinang
South Peninsular	Johor Darul Takzim Malacca
East Coast Peninsular	Kelantan Darul Naim Pahang
Central Peninsular	Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur Selangor Darul Ehsan
East Malaysia	Sabah

			Sarawak		

Region: Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia
State: Pulau Pinang and Kedah

Pulau Pinang Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
9	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	5

According to the above data:
- 9 male samples and 1 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- None of the samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of sexual and social.
- 2 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with social intention.
- 3 samples requested for webcam-chat with 2 samples meant to initiate sexual chatting and 1 for social purpose.
- In short, 5 samples (50%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Kedah Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
10	0	1	2	2	4	4	0	4

According to the above data:
- 10 male samples and 0 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- 3 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of (1) sexual and (2) social.
- 6 samples requested for the researcher's phone number, with social intention 4 samples and sexual intention 2 samples.
- 4 samples requested for webcam-chat with the purpose to initiate sexual chatting.
- In short, 4 samples (40%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Region: Southern Region of Peninsular Malaysia
State: Malacca and Johor

Malacca Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
10	0	1	1	2	4	1	1	2

According to the above data:
- 10 male samples and 0 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- 2 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of (1) sexual and (1) social.
- 3 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 2 sexual intentions and 4 for social.
- 2 samples requested for webcam-chat with intention to initiate sexual chatting and socially.
- In short, 2 samples (20%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Johor Data Evaluation				
Total Samples of 10	Face-to-face meeting	Phone Number	Webcam-chat	Total sexual

Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	conversation
10	0	1	0	3	3	5	0	5

According to the above data:
- 10 male samples and 0 female samples were selected through random sampling.
- 1 sample requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of sexual.
- 6 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 3 chatters for social intention and 3 samples for sexual intention.
- 5 samples requested for webcam-chat with the purpose to initiate sexual chatting.
- In short, 5 samples (50%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Region: East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia
State: Kelantan and Pahang

Kelantan Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
9	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	4

According to the above data:
- 9 male samples and 1 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- 2 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of sexual and social.
- 3 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 1 sample for sexual purpose and 2 samples for social intention.
- 3 samples requested for webcam-chat with 2 samples meant to initiate sexual chatting and 1 for social purpose.
- In short, 4 samples (40%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Pahang Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
10	0	1	2	3	4	3	0	4

According to the above data:
- 10 male samples and 0 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- 3 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of (1) sexual and (2) social.
- 7 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 3 samples for sexual purpose and 4 samples for social intention.
- 3 samples requested for webcam-chat with the intention to initiate sexual chatting.
- In conclusion, 4 samples (40%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Region: Central Region of Peninsular Malaysia
State: Kuala Lumpur and Selangor

Kuala Lumpur Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
10	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	8

According to the above data:
- 10 male samples and 0 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- None of the samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of sexual and social.
- 3 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 2 sexual intentions and 1 for social.
- 2 samples requested for webcam-chat with intention to initiate sexual chatting
- In short, 8 samples (80%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Selangor Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
8	2	4	1	3	2	7	3	8

According to the above data:
- 8 male samples and 2 female samples were selected through random sampling.
- 5 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of (4) sexual and (1) social.
- 2 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with social intention.
- 3 samples requested for webcam-chat with 2 samples meant to initiate sexual chatting and 1 for social purpose.
- In short, 5 samples (50%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Region: East Malaysia
State: Sabah and Sarawak

Sarawak Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
10	0	1	1	1	5	3	1	4

According to the above data:
- 10 male samples and 0 female sample were selected through random sampling.
- 2 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with the intention of (1) sexual and (1) social.
- 6 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 1 sexual intention and 5 for social.
- 4 samples requested for webcam-chat with intention to initiate sexual chatting (3) and socially (1).
- In short, 4 samples (40%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Sabah Data Evaluation								
Total Samples of 10		Face-to-face meeting		Phone Number		Webcam-chat		Total sexual conversation
Male	Female	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	Sex	Social	
8	2	1	2	1	4	1	2	2

According to the above data:
- 8 male samples and 2 female samples were selected through random sampling.
- 3 samples requested for a face-to-face meeting with 1 of the sample having the intention of sexual and 2 with the intention of social.
- 5 samples requested for the researcher's phone number with 1 chatter for social intention and 4 samples for sexual intention.
- 3 samples requested for webcam-chat with 1 sample having the purpose to initiate sexual chatting and 2 for social.
- In short, 2 samples (20%) of the chosen 10 discussed and chatted openly on sexual issues with the researcher.

Discussion

It is found that 46% of the total samples had openly discussed on sexual matters that lead to discussion of sexual intercourse.

It is also found that the central region of Peninsular Malaysia (Selangor and Kuala Lumpur) has the highest percentage (80%) of chatters who initiated conversation on sex matters that carry significant inclination towards having sexual intercourse.

The researcher has experienced several similar significant patterns with the chatters:
• Photo sharing request
• Webcam streaming requests
• Facebook requests
• Sex-chat request
• Sex-phone requests
• Underage sex discussion

The findings also conclude that photo sharing request is the most common request among the samples. There are 30% of all samples who requested for webcam streaming. Nevertheless such request had been rejected since it can be dangerous in term of face recognition of the researcher and the stranger.

This study found that, 46% of the chatters were recorded to be discussing on sexual intercourse subjects. Such significance in numbers suggests apprehension against sexual exploitation as it would also suggest meeting for sexual intercourse and develop a culture of free sex among chatters. However perception alteration is also a common phenomenon among chatters when one of the party involved managed to convince the other of their safety and security.

This implies that sex chat and phone sex conversations are almost a common happening in today's world and as a matter of fact is a result of sexual exploitation against the younger generation via online communication (Ospina,M., Harstall, C.,and Dennett,L. 2010; Laaser, M. 2003; Lanning, K., 1998). It is also found that 11% of the samples requested for a date and intended for intimate relationship which includes sexual intercourse.

Such behaviors would be more dangerous when it involve younger chatters (aged below 18) who are more prone to be misled and sexually abused (Ospina,M., Harstall, C.,and Dennett,L. 2010).

Facebook is found to be a common matter discussed during conversation and requested for another avenue of communication among chatters. This could be explained for the reason that Facebook facilitated users with pictures and identity of the owner. It reinforces both parties to meet, since there is also perception alteration (positively), when they are informed in regards to the actual identity as perceived through Facebook. In such light it would further enhance future acquaintances among chatters and develop trustworthiness towards their partners.

Reducing the danger in the online public chat rooms: Cautions and safety tips

This research identifies several ways in reducing the danger of online public chat rooms including that chatters have to be reminded that they are in conversation with a stranger and therefore personal information are not suppose to be shared.

If a stranger chatter decides to have a meet up, it is advisable to the user to inform their closest family member on the whereabouts of the meeting. This is to ensure if anything bad were to happen, they are aware of the meet up. Sex education needs to be implemented in Malaysia education system as the social problems pertaining sexual intercourse has increased there few years.

Conclusion

For future studies, the researcher recommends future researcher(s) to increase the number of samples and conducting an undercover chatter of a more variety identity including female, lesbian, male and gay chatters in order to obtain a more precise and wider range of sexual conversation to be discussed.

Apart from only using 'participation-observation' the research being a qualitative method, I would recommend for future studies to include a quantitative questionnaire in order to investigate and identify the awareness and knowledge about chat room dangers among children, young adults and adults between the age of 9 to 30. By doing so, it enables us to recognize and identify the statistic of understanding among children and develop possible campaigns to increase the knowledge and awareness among the public.

Another suggestion is for future researcher(s) to widen the options of Instant Messenger providers such as Skype, AIM, MSN and many more. Different online public chat rooms providers could be using different method and approach in arranging their online public chat rooms and could be having different policies in its chatting safety and privacy.

Future researcher(s) is also encouraged to investigate thoroughly on the policy and safety in these online public chat rooms providers to identify weaknesses in the policy for future improvements.

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