

Who Engaged More Online Sexual Activities, Younger or Older Adult? Implication for Marital, Couple and Family Counseling

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i14/3700>

Published Date: 18 December 2017

Abstract

The objective of this study is to describe the level of cybersex engagement among adult and to compare mean difference between younger and older adults. An online survey via google.doc has been used to collect data among Facebook user who engaged in cybersex. To date, a total of 202 respondents voluntarily participated in this study. Snowball sampling technique was employed among Facebook users initiated from a public university in Malaysia. Instrumentations used were the adapted Internet SST, and adapted ASAI Data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and t-test. The results show that the level of sexual engagement is at low level and older adult engaged more in comparison to younger adult. The findings of this study are unlikely to be useful for generalization due to the non-probability sample, yet they remain suggestive. Theoretical and practical implication for marital, couple and family counselling research are recommended. Finally, implication for future research is suggested.

Keywords: Cybersex, Online Sexual Activities, Internet Use, Facebook, Online Survey, Age

Introduction

With the advancement of new technologies such as smartphone, I-pad and tab, the percentage of internet users is exponentially increased. According to The Economic Report 2013/2014, the number of the internet users in Malaysia is projected to reach the 25 million for the next three years, which is as approximately a 23% increase over the 18 million estimated users in 2012 (Internet World Stat, 2015). Accordingly, engaging with cybersex is becoming more and more relevant phenomenon among Malaysian.

According to Wery, Devos, DeSutter, and Billieux (2014), there are many individuals who use the internet for sexual purposes such as watch pornography, engage in sexual chats, search and participate in sex-webcam and seek for offline sexual partners. Cybersex is a loose term that encompasses a variety of internet-mediated sexual activities, in which some are regarded as pathological (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2015). Cybersex also defined as a subcategory

of online sexual activities, which includes two or more people engaging in online sexual talk to get sexual pleasure and may or may not include masturbation (Daneback, Cooper, and Månsson, 2005).

Furthermore, Laier and Brand (2014) stated that cybersex includes the use of internet for sexual purposes interactively or passively. Interactive cybersex refers to self-involvement in cybersex activities such as sex chatting and sexual self-displaying or watching other individuals performing sexual actions through a webcam. In contrast, passive cybersex takes place when an individual watches pornographic material.

Cybersex activities in a broader spectrum include sexual contacts via the internet, the involvement of online trading for sexual products, accessing information on sexual issues, using online service sex, and searching for online sex workers (Döring, 2009; Laier & Brand, 2014). Meanwhile, Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelly and Mathy (2004) defined cybersex as using the internet to engage in gratifying sexual activities such as viewing pictures, engaging in sexual chats, exchanging sexually explicit emails, and “cybering”.

Delmonico (1997) defined cybersex based on three conditions: a) people engage in cybersex by viewing and exchanging pornographic material; b) cybersex as the first step interaction before indulging in real sexual conduct; and c) cybersex conducted offline where multimedia systems act as a medium to channel one’s sexual desires.

Online sexual activities (OSA) also known as cybersex has been postulated to be a new part and parcel of sexual revolution and human civilization (Cooper et al. 1998). Thus, OSA most likely affected the couple, marital and family relationship landscape (Schneider, 2003). The prevalence of internet used today, has shown high level of human ‘connectivity’, thus provided some clue on how human engaged with sexual relationship look like (Cooper et al. 2003). Despite a very significant increase in the internet usage among Malaysia, a study on cybersex among Malaysian is very limited.

Internet has becoming a powerful medium for online sexual activities due to the “Triple A engine” as coined by Cooper (1998), i.e. accessibility, affordability and anonymity. Accessibility refers to the characteristics of the internet which is “easy to pass” and “easy to log”. Cooper (1998) explained that affordability refers to the low economic spending by people to access sexual material via the internet. Lastly, the internet has the power to conceal the identity of users. This characteristic is known as anonymity and thus, attracts people to explore sexually explicit material because there is more freedom to do so without the risk of revealing one’s identity; there is a freedom to experiment; and the freedom to talk openly about sex, questions, concerns and/or fantasies without people knowing your identity. In addition, another two factors that has been identify, namely, acceptability and approximation (King, 1999; Ross & Kauth, 2002). Therefore, there is an emerging topic of interest among the scholars in Malaysia (Hawafi, & Hassan 2015).

Accordingly, conducting survey via online is much more convenient and easier to the researchers and respondents. The tremendous increasing in the internet usage and computer mediated communication in the past few decades (Horrigan, 2001; Ghoroghi, Hassan, & Baba, 2015) caused augmentation in conducting online surveys where online samples and populations are more novel as compared to traditional survey method in study of online behaviour and internet use (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003; Yun & Trumbo, 2000).

Apart from gathering information for better understanding of the “Internet scene” and the related sin, this paper serves as a preliminary study for a larger scale study on cybersex engagement nationally and internationally. For theoretical and practical importance, this study helps to suggest the prevalence of cybersex and the most affected age group.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer two main research questions as the following;

1. What is the level of online sexual activities (OSA) among the Facebook users in Malaysia?
2. Is there any significant difference in the mean score of OSA between younger and older adult?

Methodology

This study is a descriptive and causal-comparative design. According to Mills, & Gay, (2015), causal comparative design is to determine the cause for preexisting differences in groups of individuals. In this study, the data was collected through online survey by using google.doc. To date, a total of 202 respondents voluntarily participated in this study. Snowball sampling technique was employed among Facebook users initiated from a public university in Malaysia.

Participants

There are 136 (67.3 %) female and 66 (32.7%) male participants. Muslims are the highest percentage of participants 55 % (n=111), followed by equal number of participants for Christian and Hindu both are 13.9 % (n=28). Next, there are 22 (13.9 %) of Buddhist and 13 (6.4%) are others.

Online survey

The internet has made possible of the online survey and benefits the researchers because of the increased anonymity, can reduce social desirability responding, obtain more truthful responses (Wright, 2005), provides convenience environment which respondents are free to choose when and what manner to respond to the survey, can be programmed to unlimited responses, rotate questions and accept only complete survey (Malatesta, 2008, Ghoroghi, Hassan, & Baba, 2015).

The questionnaires contain two important parts which are demographic background and adapted ISST by Delmonico (1999). There were 202 respondents participated in answering the online questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to the respondents’ Facebook accounts and e-mail. The responses from the respondents were gathered in a google drive account and analyzed by using SPSS 20.0.

Adult Sexual Activities and Internet Inventory (ASAI)

Originally, ASAI is a tool to assess the degree of online sexual activities of the adolescent users and offline sexual behaviors as the result of online contact developed by Hassan, Ayob, Abu Talib and Abu Bakar (2013). In this study, the ASAI has been adapted for the adults users categories of different online communication approaches such as social networks (e.g., Facebook and twitter) or smartphone or computer (e. g., Viber, WhatsApp, Skype, and webcam) to track the ways users engage in the online sexual activities. The samples of questions are: “I go out with him/her” and “cybersex has interfered with my daily life”. ASAI is 23-item, scored on a 5-point from “Never true” to “Often true”. The instrument has

administered in different contexts in Malaysia especially for university students and established validity. The reliability of ASAII Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$.

Internet Sex Screening Test (ISST)

Internet Sex Screening Test (ISST, Delmonico, 1999) contains 25 items. The original instrument was a dichotomous yes/no item. Integrating ASAII items that are parallel with ISST, the questionnaire was adapted into 5-point scales ranged from "never true" to "often true". The ISST (Delmonico, 1999) contains items focusing on the time spent on online sexual activity, online sexual behavior, spending on online sexual materials, the interest in online sexual activities and surfing illegal sexual material.

In this study, there are 25 items used to measure the online sexual activities, the minimum score is 25 while the maximum score is 125. The score then divided into three categories which are classified as i) low in cybersex engagement, ii) at-risk group and iii) high-risk group. The persons that have low in cybersex engagement are describes as may or may not have a problem in their sexual behavior on the internet. The persons with at-risk cybersex engagement were describes as the areas of their lives has been interfered with their sexual behaviors. The persons that scored more than 92 classified as high risk in cybersex engagement and described as their behavior interfere and jeopardize important areas on their lives such as in social, occupational, educational and etc. The reliability of the adapted ISST Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$.

The scoring of the inventory is as below:

| scores | Descriptions |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| 25 -58 | Low in cybersex engagement |
| 59 - 92 | At risk |
| ≥ 93 | High Risk |

Research Finding

Online sexual activities (OSA) among the Facebook users

To answer the first research question, we conduct descriptive analysis of frequency, a total score 25-58 is low, 89-92 is medium, and 93and above is high.

A descriptive analysis of frequency of the level of OSA is illustrated in Figure1. The table shows 137 (67.8 %) of the Facebook user are in low level of engagement in OSA, 53 (25.7 %) are in medium and 13 (6.4 %) in high level of engagement in OSA.

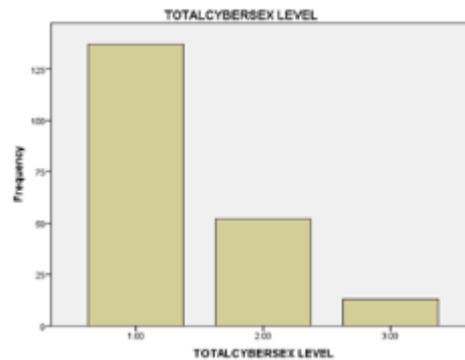


Figure 1: Frequency of the level of OSA

Age differences in Cybersex (OSA) among Facebook users

Accordingly, to answer research question 2, we conduct an independent t-test. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:

Independent t-test Result

| | Age group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|----------|-----------|-----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Total | Young | 103 | 44.19 | 23.051 | 2.271 |
| cybersex | Older | 99 | 52.57 | 27.537 | 2.768 |

Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | | F | Sig. | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| Cybersex | Equal variances assumed | 6.438 | .012 | -2.34 | 200 | .020 | -8.371 | 3.568 | -15.407 | -1.336 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -2.33 | 191.15 | .020 | -8.371 | 3.580 | -15.433 | -1.310 |

A preliminary data analyses indicate that the data is normal according to the cutoff point for skewness is +- 3 and kurtosis = +- 10 (Steven, 2012). The data of this study shows skewness= 1.76 and kurtosis= .474. Levene test indicates that, equal variance assumption has been violated, F= 6.44, p=.012. Therefore, we used the corrected Independent samples t-test, we found that there is a significant difference [t (191.15) =-2.33, p<0.05] in the mean score of OSA between younger (M=44.19, SD=23.05) and older adult (M=52.57, SD=27.56).

According to Cohen (1988, p. 20), the effect size of for t-test is as the following;

$$(2.2.1) \quad d = \frac{m_A - m_B}{\sigma}$$

However, since the variance is unequal, the

$$(2.3.2) \quad \sigma' = \frac{\sqrt{\sigma_A^2 + \sigma_B^2}}{2}$$

Therefore, $d = \frac{8.38}{25.41}$

$d = 0.32$

We conclude that the effect size of age group on cybersex is small according to Cohen (1988, p.40), effect size guideline, small: $d = .20$, medium: $d = .50$ and large: $d = .80$.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the level of online sexual activities among the participants is low. This study is in line with our previous study (Hawafi & Hassan, 2015; Hawafi, Hassan & Mohd. Ayob, 2017), where the adolescents of Malaysia were also in low level of their sexual activities. Similarly, the findings indicate that age does make a difference the level of cybersex engagement. Previous study shows that older adolescent engaged more online sexual activities (OSA) as compared to younger adolescents. The present study, we found that the older adult (25-50 years old) significantly higher engaged in cybersex as compared to that of younger adult (18-15 years old).

Interestingly, the findings of this study may suggest that older adult age is more likely in marital age. Contrary to a general perception, young people are more explorative. This study, however, shows the group of older adults were more explorative in their sexual interest as compared to younger adults who were still in universities. Feree (2003) suggest that the age factor is significantly important especially when people engage online sexual activities as an activity to look for a partner.

Practically, there is an important implication for marital, couple and family counselor. Contrary to a traditional believe, marriage may help curb the sexual misconduct. Online sexual activities however, has open a new avenue for sexual misconduct even for married people. Especially for women, as the majority of the participants of this study were women. Offline sexual activities may seem a struggle for women to engage and express due to enormous shame (Feree, 2003). The "triple A engine" as coined by Cooper (1998), i.e. accessibility, affordability and anonymity has encouraged women to engage in cybersex without the risk of being caught as infidel. Although the findings of this study show that only 6.4 % ($n=13$) participants in high level of engagement in OSA, this amount is not negligible. Those who are highly engaged in cybersex has lost interest in their real-life partner for sexual relationship (Shenider, 2000).

This study has contributed to fill the knowledge gap on cybersex and its related field on sexuality among Malaysian. Theoretically, sexual relationships are sacred and ties the man and women with marital relationships for Muslim. Sex is also an expression of love. The Eros love style is a passionate attraction which is closely linked to the portrayal of the partner as ideally beautiful. The major characteristics of Eros are passion (Walsh, 1993; Frey & Hajjat, 2010) that leads to early sexual activities. Hendrick & Hendrick (1987) classified sexual behaviour into four dimensions – permissiveness, instrumentality, sexual practice, and communion. Permissiveness sexual attitude refers to unserious acts, which searches love for entertainment purposes. Instrumentality love style refers to biological sex, a person who searches pleasure in a sexual context. Sexual practice refers to birth control responsible sex and pregnancy control. While communion refers to the seriousness and meaningful connection between partners. Hence, we can conclude that cybersex is nothing more than just for entertainment and definitely not for commitment.

Future research may be conducted with a bigger sample size and probability sampling. Despite the findings of this study may not be inferred to Malaysian population, it remains suggestive. Most of the previous study on cybersex were conducted in the USA and European countries (Cooper, 1998, Delmonico & Miller, 2003). Cybersex may seem a taboo topic for Asian (Li et al., 2015) especially among Muslim. However, this study has shown that Muslim and Asian are open to discuss when the anonymity is ensured. Thus, future study using online study is most recommended for sensitive such online sexual activities.

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