

YOUNG ADULTS AND ONLINE DATING IN MALAYSIA:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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**YOUNG ADULTS AND ONLINE DATING IN MALAYSIA: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY**

By

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ABSTRACT

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Grace Ong

Youths in Malaysia today believe that online dating applications is the most conducive way to meet someone new. This study seeks to examine how Malaysians use online dating sites for actual dating purposes and the extent of self-disclosure to provide a clearer understanding of communication and possibly romantic or unromantic attachments, especially for the people within the region of Klang Valley, Malaysia. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) holds major assumptions that individuals are active, rational and objective, to the extent of being almost goal-oriented in their choices. Supplemented by SPT focusing on the importance of amount of self-disclosure for success in online dating, forms the basis of this qualitative research. The study which is conducted with 21 in-depth, semi-structured interviews that are gathered via convenience and snowball sampling and guided by the concept of data saturation found that the study of online dating behaviour has the potential to help us understand how computer mediated communication but can also provide new insights into existing interpersonal communication theories focusing on face to face relationship formation, self-presentation, and self-disclosure.

Keywords: Online Dating Malaysia, Young Adults, Uses and Gratification, Social Penetration Theory

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Date: 16 December 2019

SUBMISSION OF DISSERTATION

It is hereby certified that ***GRACE ONG*** (ID No: 13UJM00024) has completed this dissertation entitled “***YOUNG ADULTS AND ONLINE DATING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY***” under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sharon Jacqueline a/p Albert Wilson from the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Creative Industries , and Prof. Dr. David Tneh Cheng Eng from the Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Creative Industries.

I understand that University will upload softcopy of my dissertation in pdf format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,

Grace Ong

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.

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APPROVAL SHEET

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The method and strategy of gaining the interests of a potential partner is similar in nature when dating online or offline: present yourself in an attractive manner to others using body language, tone of voice and words. When a bond is established, the stages of deepening a relationship through communication and reciprocal disclosure begin.

Rather than dressing up and heading out to a restaurant, bar, or club to meet someone; first impressions on online dating apps is not always affected by one's attire, physical mannerisms or social circle, as it would be in a public setting. With mobile dating apps, people are now able to match with someone within a set geographical vicinity, age limit and gender preference while being able to connect with innumerable matches via texts, all at one swipe and match.

First impressions on online dating apps consists mainly of several profile photos and a detailed or brief write-up by the individual. While *Tinder* is known for brief one-liners, focusing on physical attributes via photos, other dating apps such as *OKCupid* asks participants numerous questions as algorithms gauge who is the best match for them based on their selected preferences. The ease of access has encouraged over 90% of single Americans to try out dating apps for themselves, with 84% hoping to find a relationship (Matthews, 2018).

1.2 Online Dating in Malaysia

The intentional usage of the internet has been rapidly increasing in Malaysia. Active social media users as percentage of the total population in Malaysia was reported as 62% in 2016, but involves 78% of the country in the 2019 (Statista, 2019). As the nation increasingly relies on online platforms to fulfil their social needs, it is inevitable for its people to open up to the possibilities of meeting people through online mediums rather than the old-fashioned face-to-face.

In the year 2017, a New YouGov research¹ reveals three in ten (29%) Malaysians have participated in internet and online dating apps, increasing to one third (33%) of millennials. However, The Star² (2017) found that only 7% of Malaysian youths believe that *Tinder* is a very conducive way to meet new people, almost half of the global average of 12%. Malaysian youths display a preference to meeting organically, in comparison to meeting online.

The Truth About Youth (TAY) survey conducted by McCann Truth Central shows that half of the youths between the ages of 18 to 30 years old admit they do not trust the people they find online. In the Star Online (2017), social psychologist Fernandez explained that depending on what someone uses online dating apps for, the potential for a mismatch of expectations is high, leading to frustration and disappointment. On the other hand, users also “shop”

around and constantly look for their best match online in comparison to offline dating where choosing to meet someone and getting to know them requires behavioral commitment (ibid.)

Whether its embarrassment caused by online dating apps being popularly known as “hook up apps” or the perception that participants of online dating apps are less capable of finding love offline, a high number of six in ten Malaysian millennials reported feelings of embarrassment in admitting that they had met their partner through the process of online dating, inclusive of apps (YouGov, 2017). In contrast, the smaller percentage of online daters which comprise of older adults differ in this opinion, with only a fifth (18%) of baby boomers feeling embarrassed of online dating (YouGov, 2017). This displays a general fear of potential social stigma. In contrast to this feeling of embarrassment, the Malaysian society also showed an increasing acceptance for couples who meet through online dating apps, with 45% of all respondents saying they would not think of a couple that met online any differently (YouGov, 2017).

1.3 Problem Statement

In October 2013, Forbes (2013) reported that 41% of *Tinder* users log onto the app everyday 60% use it weekly, and 75% monthly. This displays that even in the initial stages of dating apps, the app had begun to be used as fully integrated manner of ‘dating’, with the company boasting over 350 million daily swipes that produces 4 million matches each day. The app was also available in 24 languages, propelling it forward to achieve its quick growth strategy. Currently boasting an estimated 50 - 57 million users, *Tinder* are urging singles to, “Make every single moment count. *Tinder* is more than a dating app. It's a cultural movement. Welcome to #swipelife” (Tinder.com).

As *Tinder* gained popularity, other dating apps have been developed, inclusive of mobile dating apps such as *Bumble* and *Happn*. Some of the dating apps that are popular in Malaysia include *Malaysian Cupid*, *Malaysian Social* and *Match.com* (YouGov, 2017). While this includes websites as well as apps, it is important to note that after the mobile revolution, dating sites such as *Match.com* has also launched apps in order to stay in this competitive industry.

A popular dating app in Malaysia, Badoo.com surveyed all 370 million users to uncover modern dating trends worldwide (Peat, 2018). Findings showed that men spent 85 minutes daily on dating apps, averaging 9.7 minutes each log-on, on the other hand, women spend 79 minutes daily on dating apps, browsing 7.6 minutes each log-on.

On a global scale, the usage and participation in online dating has been increasing, with users stated to be driven by six motivations to participate on *Tinder* (Sumter et al, 2016, p.2). The main motivations found in this study based on emerging Dutch adults includes love, sex, ease of access, self-esteem, validation, excitement, and trendiness (ibid.). Motivations for love, described as long-term relationships, appeared to be the strongest in the study and were positively related to offline encounters with matches. Therefore, it is believed that online dating apps provides more benefits to its users than just a hook-up app, which was how *Tinder* was perceived in the past. The findings from a Malaysian study, Alam and Yeow (2011, p.158) supports the findings by Sumter et al. (2016), stating women participants look for long-term and romantic relationships over online dating sites while males wanted casual relationships, and a better match.

Most scholarly articles have focused on perceived long-term success in online dating (Ramirez et al., 2014; Gibbs et al., 2006), *Tinder* motivations (Sumter et al, 2017); and self-presentation and disclosure (Johnson, 1981). These studies have uncovered crucial details concerning both self-disclosure and motivations of communicators in either the purely online or offline medium. There have been limited studies found on studying the relationship between actual communication such as self-disclosure and what users seek from online dating apps alongside the gratification of using the app. This has been even more limited in Malaysia, as according to Alam et al. (2018), locally the country is at its starting point for online dating research. Research concerning online dating in Malaysia has revolved around cyber-love crimes, victimisations (Hamsi et

al., 2015), online dating fraud that lead to scams (Edwards et al., 2018) as well as romancing strategies of internet romance scammers (Tan and Yoong, 2017).

As of the year 2018, there were no prior studies on factors that influence users of online dating sites in Malaysia (Alam et al., 2018). Alam et al (2018) provided an introductory study of the extrinsic factors such as perception and trust of university students using online dating sites, no prior studies looked into both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations in a relational manner, or applied the concept of self-disclosure by any degree, in terms of online dating apps.

This thesis attempts to address the current gap in knowledge about the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to establish relationships through online dating apps, and individual self-disclosure on these platforms, especially in the initial stages. This study is crucial because social media usage trends in the country remains high, with unprecedented opportunities for people to disclose themselves that are unavailable offline (Kim & Dindia, 2011). The social media form is an underlying theme for sociability and now significantly affects the overall communication skills of a person. As the line between online and offline communication begins to blur with major communication channels such as WhatsApp and WeChat (Business Insider, 2019), enables users to seamlessly chat, call, and video call people they meet through online dating apps with a more personal experience than ever before.

1.4 Research Question and Objective

First Research Question

- i. What role does online dating apps play in the lives of young adults?*

Objectives

- a) This research questions posits to discover how individuals use online dating apps. These motivations include intrinsic motivations of the users themselves as well as extrinsic motivations that are informed by various extraneous factors such as positive or negative perceptions and mindsets of online dating apps that the individuals may hold due to stories told by their parents or social circles. The research objective is firstly to discuss and explore the motivations that users seek to obtain from online dating apps.
- b) Since online dating involves one individual's motivations of using the app, as well as the fact that this particular individual interacts with a match who has their own set of motivations for joining the app, the research objective is to understand whether users obtain fulfilment or gratifications from their motivations in the usage of online dating apps.

Second Research Question

- ii. To what extent do online participants manage their online disclosure of self in order to accomplish their goals?*

Objectives

- a) In the world of dating, it is usual to put one's best foot forward in terms of attempting to obtain a date. While real life interactions enable people to utilize their tone of voice, body language and grooming to convey a person's message, online data is refined to photos and a biography such as the one shown in Appendix A. Therefore, the second research question attempts to reveal the extent in which online participants manage their online disclosure of self on their online dating profiles.
- b) While most profiles consist of several short sentences and words it is often hard to portray everything about an individual. After a chatroom opens and both parties are able to personally message one another through the in-app chat, most users would be inclined to show positive and attractive traits rather than weaknesses during initial conversations. As self-disclosure increases in a linear fashion, it is expected that the amount of information given would be the most in a face-to-face setting when online communication moves away from edited photos and text messages. This research question seeks to understand the impact of face-to-face meetups in the context of self-disclosure for participants as well as their matches on online dating apps.

1.5 Methodology

This research has been conducted based on qualitative in-depth interviews with 20 heterosexual young adults inclusive of singles and unmarried

couples, consisting of 10 males and 10 females who have used, or are using at least one online dating app in Malaysia.

As YouGov (2017) listed apps such as *Tinder*, *Malaysia Social*, *OK Cupid*, *Badoo*, *Twoo*, *Skout* and *Happn* as the most popular dating apps in Malaysia. This research will not restrict users to certain apps, but will open to users of online dating apps in general.

Therefore the researcher aims to apply a thematic analysis to the profiles of participants examining their presentation of self in written form. This will be complimented by a participatory observation where the researcher immerses herself in the group as a native.

1.6. Definition of terms

1.6.1 Online Dating

Finkel et al (2012) stated that online dating provides users with some combination of the following functions, firstly, access to potential romantic partners, where users can browse through photos and a short biography of various individuals. Secondly, communication with potential romantic partners which is usually through a chatroom. Thirdly, matching with compatible romantic partners. This study refers to online dating as forming relationships through communication via the internet, specifically, via sites and apps that are designed for this intended purpose.

1.6.2 Online Dating Applications

Smith and Duggan (2013, p.16) stated that mobile dating apps “allow users to update their profile, search the profiles of others, and find potential dates in their area using their mobile phones”. This study uses online dating applications such as *Tinder*, *OKCupid* and *Coffee Meets Bagel* which are downloaded into a user’s phone, also known as apps, for the focus of this research.

1.6.3 Self-Disclosure

Derlega et al. (1993) provided the definition that self-disclosure was revealing information about one’s self to others, intentionally. Ying et al. (2016)

stated that online social media users can present themselves in either verbal or visual form, or both, as seen on online dating profiles. Self-disclosure of superficial information such as daily hobbies are significant in starting a relationship (Ying et al, 2016). Yet, continuous disclosure that includes personal information such as values, feelings and thoughts are essential to the success of relationship development and maintenance in social networking sites (Ying et al, 2016). Johnson (1981, p. 761) further explained that self-disclosure dynamics would hold that endorsement of a personality, a factual communication about oneself. For the purpose of this study, self-disclosure involves sharing information about oneself to either one or more other persons. Since the goal of many online dating participants is an intimate relationship, these individuals may be more motivated to engage in authentic self-disclosures (Ellison et al, 2006).

1.6.4 Self-Presentation

A self-presentational endorsement is not merely a description of one's behavior but also involves a social act intended to indicate how one is to be regarded, to other persons (Johnson, 1981, p. 761). While all interactants experience the pressures of impression management with the desire to be authentic, online communication provides a greater control over self-presentation behaviour and strategy due to its the asynchronous nature (Ellison et al, 2006). As perceptions of deception influences online dating especially in self-reported nature of individuals' profiles, participants may adopt presentation strategies geared to warrant their identity claims (Ellison et al, 2006). This study

utilises this definition for self-presentation, with the concept that in self-presentation, one attempts to convey an image of oneself.

1.6.5 Young Adults

As defined in the 1997 Malaysian National Youth Development Policy, young people between the age range of 15 – 40 assume the status of youth (Youthpolicy.org, 2014). Respondents of this study range from 21 to 40 years old as the definition of young adults for the purpose of this research.

1.6.6 Swiping and Matching

After a user creates an online dating profile by uploading one or more photos and providing some answers to prompts or questions provided by the app, each person can select criteria of people they would be interested in – preferences such as gender of their matches being men, women, or both; the geographical proximity of potential matches e.g. within 80 kilometres, and an age range e.g. 21 to 40 years old with some apps even asking for religious or ethnic choices. With the information provided, dating apps attempt to find participants who match with the users' selection criteria, and presents them in a random order. The user would then 'swipe left' on profiles they don't like, sending to be discarded from the selection list, or 'swipe right' on profiles that one likes.

If the user swipes right on someone, and that other person also swipes right, then it makes a match. The dating app then allows matched users to proceed to an in-app chatroom.

1.6.7 Hook-ups and Casual Sex

Hook-ups, known or uncommitted sexual encounters, is a practice that is becoming more engrained in popular culture today (Garcia et al, 2012). In this study, while hook-up activities may include a wide range of sexual behaviours, such as kissing, oral sex, and intercourse as stated by (Garcia et al., 2012), the term casual sex is used to define penetrative intercourse.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

1.7.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory, also known as the U&G Theory, forms the basis of this entire research which consists of major assumptions that people are active, rational and objective, to the extent of being almost goal-oriented in their choices as well as proactive communicating participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1985). The theory seeks to answer the question of why active and rational individuals make the conscious decision to use aspects and features of media by the identification of gratification and rewards they seek to obtain.

Initially, the U&G theory was frequently used to explain the use of traditional media channels such as the television, magazine, radio, video games (Ruggiero, 2000). This theory has been modernised to the prevailing digital age that started from the early 2000s and is now utilised to explain the phenomena in new media (Ruggiero, 2000). For instance, the Internet has three attributes of data that is not usually associated with traditional media: interactivity, demassification akin to interpersonal communication, and asynchronicity, where users are able to have control over the media as well as sending, receiving, and saving messages (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 18).

Interactivity is defined as “the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over, and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse” (Williams et al., 1988, p. 10). There are five areas of interactivity which covers fun, choice, connectedness, information collection,

and two-way communication (Ha & James, 1998). The research by Ha and James (1998) expounded that for self-indulgers, the fun and choice elements of interactivity would fulfil needs of self-communication and entertainment which is a part of U&G.

In applying the U&G to online dating, Snell (2016) wrote that users utilize online dating sites for two-fold purposes. Firstly, smartphone owners could apply similar gratification behaviours to any application installed on their smartphones, namely, that they may be more likely to use dating apps or sites as social interaction and integration media (Snell, 2016). Second, based on the U&G theory within the context of social networking sites, because online dating can be considered a form of social networking site, it stands to reason that people may utilize these sites in a similar fashion (Snell, 2016).

U&G, which has its roots in communication, expels the idea that individuals seek out media that fulfil their needs and leads to ultimate gratification. In this study, U&G theory has specific relevance to social media, especially in online dating apps, and therefore the usage of this theory in this study helps to explain why young adults use online apps and the gratification that they receive from said media.

1.7.2 Social Penetration Theory

The theory of social penetration theory, also known as SPT, which was founded by Altman and Taylor describes the different stages of interpersonal relationships as a multi-level behavioral process covering spoken, nonverbal, and environmental behaviors that happen in a systematic manner through time at differing degrees of intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor (1973) presented the idea that relationship creation moves from general to intimate areas of the self, in orderly fashions in line with the quantity and the quality, the breadth and depth, respectively, of interpersonal exchange. This concept was supported by Tang and Wang (2012) in the self-disclosure of bloggers that found bloggers disclose a wide range of topics to their online audiences but only disclosed personal matters to their friends in the real world.

One key aspect of the experiment that was conducted by Taylor (1968) speculates the environmental effects on interpersonal relationships, in particular, social penetration for college roommates and pairs of isolated men. Taylor et al. (1973) discovered a relationship between personalities that had a predisposition to reveal, followed by adjustment in a socially confined environment. Low disclosers who had significantly high levels of disclosure as well as high disclosers with minimal levels of disclosure to isolation partners were unable to achieve social penetration in comparison to counterparts whose disclosure patterns conformed to expectations (*ibid.*). The findings are consistent in Chan and Cheng (2004)'s research in the realm of online communication and relationships.

As interpersonal relationships proceeded inwards from superficial to more intimate areas of exchange, Altman and Taylor (1973) proposes that individuals are severely affected by the rewards and costs of behavioural exchanges in the the time continuum of past, present, and future (Foster et al, 2019). Taylor, Altman and Sorrentino (1969) found that self-disclosure is affected by the variables of reward or cost outcomes as well as the individual's commitment to the relationship. Greater disclosure occurred due to positive outcomes, rewards, and a feeling of liking towards the experimenter in comparison to negative outcomes, costs, and elicited responses. In terms of reinforcement in the context of mixed patterns, subjects opened up more and disclosed further when initially negative responses turned positive (Taylor et al, 1969).

The researchers labelled distinction of personality traits where the variations between high discloser and low discloser were identified as a function of the increased sensitivity of high disclosers to the selection and recognition of person-oriented stimuli in comparison to low disclosers (Taylor et al, 1969). The researchers worked with the assumption that gregarious individuals who were involved in a greater amount of social interactions and experienced knowing a wider range of acquaintances are exposed to a high social stimulus cue density. A social stimulus cue is a part of the individual's surrounding that is can be selected as a social variable to his behaviour such as facial characteristics, attire and body movement, and includes direct or indirect communication such as

voice nullity, facial expression, gestures, and even pupil dilation (Taylor et al, 1969).

Therefore in this study, this theory is suitable to be applied because self-disclosure is essential to the formation of friendships or relationships either online or offline and it is essential to understand the depth and breadth of disclosure.

1.8 Chapter Overview

In chapter 2, the researcher will be analysing and exploring prior studies done on this topic as well as explain in detail the theory used as a framework for this study

In chapter 3, the researcher will be expounding on the methodology of the research and how qualitative data would be collected and analysed.

In chapter 4, the researcher details the findings from the research from an observational perspective as well as information gathered from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis on user's profiles.

In chapter 5, the researcher discusses the results of the findings, and draws an overall conclusion to the study as well as explains the limitations that was met in conducting the study and recommendations for future direction of research in this area.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 The Revolution of Online Mobile Dating Apps

In the year 1995, online dating begun on websites, particularly, one site called Match.com which enabled users to create online profiles in and find their match through compatibility algorithms (Ward, 2016). Due to technology advancements and the mobile devices consistently becoming a bigger part of our daily lives, when *Tinder* officially went online in October 2012, achieving global popularity (ibid.). The ability to select matches based on geographical locations through information obtained through a mobile phone's GPS tracking system enabled users to narrow down matches to the exact location a user was at, this meant that instead of talking to a possible uninterested stranger in a mall, users could use *Tinder* to if there were people in that specific mall who were on *Tinder*.

Many researchers simply frame dating apps as social media or consider apps as similar to dating sites, rather than contrasting dating apps to these analogues (Wu & Ward, 2018). Other researchers considered social media such as Facebook (Alam & Yeow, 2011) and Instagram (Noor & Enomoto, 2016) as networking sites utilised as dating platforms. This is problematic, given that even the design difference between two dating apps can inspire different interpretations and preferred motives of users (MacKee, 2016).

Therefore a study by Finkel et al (2012) created a prototype to demonstrate that people do use more than one dating app and they are motivated by various factors.

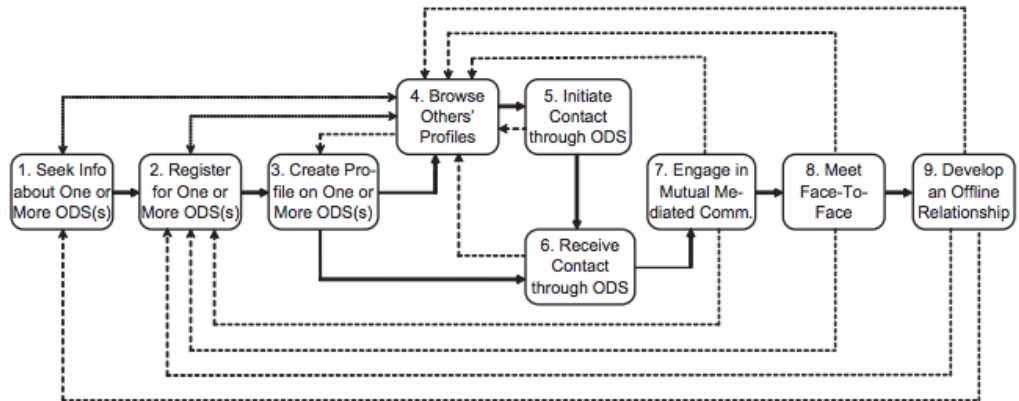


Figure 1: The nine steps in the ideal online dating process. Taken from Finkel et al. (2012). OD represents Online Dating.

The nine steps of the online dating process as explained by Finkel et al (2012) in a diagram depicting how users move from information seeking to registering for online dating apps, to creating their profiles. Participants then move into browsing profiles and swiping right (or liking). If the other party swipes right on the person, contact can be made and either party could initiate contact, leading to mutual mediated communication if the other party responds. These conversations ideally move to a face-to-face meet-up and an offline relationship is developed.

When it comes to step 3 in terms of creating profiles on one or more online dating sites, photos are usually uploaded as a manner of self-presentation and self-disclosure of the participant. However, Tajuddin et al (2013) found that

selfies taken by Malaysian students and uploaded unto social media sites could increase one's perception and self-confidence, on a positive note, with the negative impacts that many participants would edit their photos before posting it to social media. The study by Noumeur (2019) revealed that the majority of respondents disclosed a "little" of their real selves on social media, specifically, Facebook services. Noumeur (2019) stated that 35% of participants uploaded their photos, 33% disclosed their interests, and 33% gave information such as education. A total of 33% revealed very little about themselves and 22% said that their status updates did not show them at all like the person they really were (Noumeur, 2019).

2.2 Motivations for Online Dating

While each dating app has been created with specific possibilities in mind, the motivations to use an app differs from person to person as well as countries, regions, and sexual orientation. Tong and Van De Wiele (2014) found six U&G reasons users participate in online dating in their study, namely: social inclusion, sex, friendship also termed socialising, entertainment, romance, and geographical accessible searches which allows users to meet people as close to their vicinity as possible. This American research discovered that the friendship and social network motivation factor was significantly more important for men in rural areas in comparison to men who resided in larger urban areas with men living in urban areas reporting greater importance of sex gratifications than those living in smaller urban clusters.

In regard to searching for romantic partners, Chan (2018) stated that among the individuals he interviewed in China, Katie, 33, uses the online dating app, *OkCupid* with the motivation for long-term relationships, although “there are some people only looking for [hookups]” (p.6). The access to dating apps enables Katie a contact and be contacted by a fresh and larger set of potential boyfriends outside her small social network: “in gatherings my friends will show up with some new friends, but these people are usually married, so I cannot look for a partner on such occasions” (Chan, 2018, p.6). When researching a purely female sample, Chat (2018) concluded that 9 out of 19 women believed they can find true love on dating apps, making it the main motivation for using it.

Sumter et al (2016) stated that motivations of young adults in Netherland who use *Tinder* can be classified into three broad categories sexual, social and psychosocial. The researchers further broke it down to self-worth validation, fun and ease of communication. Self-worth validation occurs when a person is provided positive feedback on their appearance, interests, and other aspects of themselves. Fun includes thrill of excitement, entertainment, and trendiness, and are in line with previous social networking U&G studies. The third is the ease of communication, a psychosocial motivation concerning the ease of access in online settings. Sumter et al (2016) found that the dating app particularly focuses on satisfying romantic and/or sexual needs.

Research conducted by LendEDU (2017) reported that 44.44% of overall millennial online dating users in America used *Tinder* mainly for “confidence-boosting procrastination”, almost akin to a mixture of utilising

online dating apps for being communicated with “likes” and “messages” that provides a sense of connectedness while enjoying the process of swiping as a form of entertainment, or playful activity to achieve gratification or self-fulfilment while enjoying the ability to choose to swipe left (no) or swipe right (for likes). Out of the 3,852 participants they studied, 70.2% of these users had not met anyone from *Tinder* in person.

Whitney, aged 24, from New York, stated to BBC (2016) that “your life kind of revolves around it, you wake up and you swipe, you go to sleep and you swipe, and if you’re like me, during conference calls at work, you swipe. And at first it was sort of a game, I wasn’t looking for anything serious”. This statement by Whitney in BBC (2016) shows that users could get increasingly involved in the multiple facets of online dating, especially “swiping”. There could also be a change in intention as users experience “swiping” as a game in the beginning and possibly dating in the long-run.

Overall, in regards to motivations in online dating, we see differences in motivations when researchers compare participants in urban and rural areas (Tong & Van De Wiele, 2014), different countries and cultures such as China (Chan, 2018) and Netherlands (Sumter et al, 2016) as well as participants who have met matches in person as well as participants who had not met their matches in person (LendEdu, 2017). With these stated findings, the study applies the following factors of urbanisation, culture and face-to-face encounters into account and thus focuses on a Malaysian, urban sample size who

have all invested at least one face-to-face meetup resulting from online dating apps.

2.3 Sexuality and Usage of Online Dating Apps

Although online flirtations could lead to high self-disclosure of both individuals chatting, Rosenfeld (2018) stated that over 80% of single heterosexual adults did not go on any dates or met new online matches in the past year. In contrast to this finding, Rosenfeld (2018), stated that American gay men who were most active on dating apps such as *Tinder* and *Grindr*, were also more inclined to meeting new partners (also known as matches), in person. Rosenfeld and Thomas (2012) showed Internet dating in general is more useful to gays and lesbians than to heterosexuals, because gays and lesbians are always in a thin dating market, where potential partners are difficult to identify in face-to-face social interactions. Homosexual men also were reported to be far more active in liking than heterosexual women (Tyson et al, 2016, p. 463).

According to this study (Tyson et al, 2016), a much higher majority of participants of around 12% of male *Tinder* users were identified as homosexual or bisexual, while a minority of 0.01% of female profiles did so. Since findings clearly state that there is a variation between how heterosexual participants and homosexual participants approach online dating, as well as the act of meeting online matches offline, this study will focus on findings concerning heterosexual online dating participants.

2.4 Social stigma of online dating apps

Goffman (1963) states that where a person possesses less attractive attributes, he is reduced from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one, in our thoughts. The undesirable attribute is labelled a stigma, especially when it has a severely discrediting effect that is considered a failing, shortcoming, or even a handicap.

Where Western countries have reported an increasing acceptance of online dating apps, participants of online dating in countries such as India, Japan and China still report embarrassment concerning online dating apps. In comparison to the reducing social stigma in other countries, Chan (2018) stated that in China, using a dating app may jeopardize one's reputation. One user stated that "I will feel embarrassed, even though my major objective is to make friends." (Chan, 2018, p.8).

"At first we didn't inform our parents that we met through a dating app, but once they knew, they accepted it because we are both from the same religion and caste," Shruti, a 30 year old financier in India who married her online dating partner, informed *BBC News* (2016). The perception of social stigma concerning users of online dating could arise from family, as seen in Shruti's case, seem to cause users of online dating apps to remain secretive about their participation in this method of meeting people.

In Japan, Farrer and Gavin (2006) reported that thirty-two percent of participants stated they did not inform any of friends or family about their

participation in online dating because it was considered embarrassing to some as there was already a negative image of online dating in Japan. 'I am scared of acknowledging that it might be safe to meet people through this kind of medium. And it is embarrassing if someone you know sees you'. (25–29, female, Japan) (Farrer & Gavin, 2006, p.409).

Therefore in this study, it is pivotal to uncover and understand the role online dating apps play in the lives of young adults, especially in Malaysia.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This research tries to discuss to the self-presentation strategies of online dating app users using their profiles uploaded to the app using two theories which are U&G as well as SPT. In line with research done by (Gibbs et al, 2006; Ward, 2017), the goal of this paper is to first understand the self-presentation techniques of users by identifying their motivations for downloading the app using the U&G Theory; and second, to explore how they present their profiles, swipe, and disclose information about themselves to matches through subsequent conversations utilising SPT.

2.4.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Papacharissi and Rubin (2000, p. 176) stated that the U&G theory assumes people communicate or use media to gratify their needs or wants, inclusive of communication motives. Motives were expressed as general dispositions that influence people's actions taken to fulfil a need or want

(Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p. 179) and listed interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment as five internet motive statements (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p. 185).

Focusing on *Tinder*, Timmermans and De Caluwéb (2017) identified a comprehensive list of 13 motivations among users on this online dating app based on the U&G Theory. Apart from using the app for hookups, *Tinder* users use it to search for romance and to socialize. *Tinder* is not only used for extrinsic purposes but also for intrinsic needs, including curiosity, self-validation, reduce boredom and also improve one's individual social skills. In situational motivations, *Tinder* is used as a connection tool that enables participants to understand local cultures when traveling or take a break during work or study. The researchers identified social motivations including being trendy and follow peer suggestions. Finally, some users use *Tinder* to recover from break-ups and meet people with a similar sexual orientation. From a U&G perspective, Timmermans and De Caluwéb (2017) argued that it is not simply the existence of mobile dating applications such as *Tinder* that facilitates motivations such as casual sexual behaviors, but rather the sexual motivations leading to the use of *Tinder*, and that the gratification of finding a sexual encounter will encourage users to continue using the app.

In several exploratory studies, (Urista, 2009; Whiting & Williams, 2013), researchers have applied the U&G theory in qualitatively studying the usage of social media sites. Hence, this study sees it fit to apply U&G to online

dating, which applies the basic principles of social networking sites for dating purposes.

2.4.2 Social Penetration Theory

Altman and Taylor (1973) described each individual's personality in comparison to the layers of an onion, people have an outer persona, however as they get to know someone, they slowly reveal their inner self, stage by stage, till they're at the core. In line with SPT, the opening up through and peeling back of layers of one partner is not only in order to reach his core, but also vice versa, therefore self-disclosure works in two directions: towards the interaction partner, and in the opposite direction (Niebrzydowski, 1996). In order for a relationship to grow closer, self-disclosure increases over time and is reciprocal, involving a deeper level of sharing by both parties, in a manner considered appropriate (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins and Miller, 1994). In a paper focused on the disclosure in friendships, researchers found that the breadth and depth of self-disclosure occurs in proportion to the stage of development of the interpersonal relationship both parties are in (Niebrzydowski, 1996).

How does a person make the decision to disclose to one particular individual, especially in vulnerable romantic settings? One crucial factor for self-disclosure is physical attraction as people are generally more likely to disclose to others they find attractive (Brundage et al, 1976). As users look around to see the picture perfect photos of other users, photo filters and specific angles have been used to capture a person's "best side", while it gains increasing

swipe rights, likes, and matches – it could also call into the authenticity and honesty of each profile.

After matching, online dating operates through the concept of mutual attraction, if not acceptance as app enabled conversations between two users are only possible when both parties have indicated their interest by swiping right, or clicking “like”, depending on the app. A chatroom for two opens up with both “likes”, which enables both users to text one another on the app. According to SPT, communication through self-disclosure where individuals make themselves known to others and is reciprocated by the sharing and revealing of information by the intended persons is a direction toward intimacy and relational development (Taylor & Altman, 1987).

When individuals are communicating online, they have a greater ability to control their manner of self-presentation since communication occurs simultaneously and does not rely on nonverbal communication cues, which are less likely for individual manipulation (Walther, 1996). Due to this, users can find that it is easier to alter their self-presentation in online environments like an dating apps such as *Tinder*, where profiles and messages can be carefully crafted and thought out (Walther, 1996).

2.4.2.1 Self-Disclosure and Social Penetration Theory

Walther et al. (2001) states that online users with long-term goals “have a greater affiliation motive, seek and exchange more personal information, and

evaluate each other more positively than those emerging from short-term interactions”. Ward (2017) extends this research and added that there is important distinction in online-to-offline relationships between expected online interaction and anticipated face-to-face communication rather than specifically short-term in comparison to long-term interactions. While Ward J (2017) focused only on self-presentation tendencies of online dating app users in the pre-match phase, before participants have started electronically conversing with the other party, this research seeks to cover both pre-match as well as post-match phases, taking into account the self-disclosure that occurs not only on online dating profiles but also in the online chats and offline chats that occur, if users have proceeded to face-to-face meetings.

In the qualitative study implored by Ward (2017), when exploring match selection of *Tinder* users, interviewees described their thought process in deciding whether to swipe left or right, thus rejecting or accepting a potential matches in real time. The main reason interviewees gave for rejecting potential matches was rather subjective elements that were considered unattractive to the participant swiping, demonstrating that when swiping, users tend to focus their judgement on superficial traits in profile photos (Ward, 2016). *Sergio*, one of Ward’s (2017 p.1652) participants stated, “I want to see a face and a face that I like...someone must attract me. It can be the shape of the mouth, nose, hair, anything” while *Wildon* explained that he would reject photos consisting, “Stupid pictures, duck faces, and people with animals” (Ward, 2017, p.1653)

2.4.3 Where Uses and Gratifications Meets Social Penetration theory

Within online environments, users may create a profile in view of observing the profile construction of others, and select potential matches based on these online profiles (Ward, 2017). Attraction is subjective and affected by variables outside of just sex appeal. These results suggest a mirroring of self-presentation with one's potential matches, as users overwhelmingly reported searching for people like them. This selection process, however, may differ when the desire to connect with someone outweighs the need to find a similar match, thus reducing selectiveness. *Reinout, 27*, stated: 'There are days when I'm out of dates ... then I like more people on *Tinder*.' (Ward, 2017, p.1654).

However, people of different cultures disclose certain information and their intent is unclear, for instance, in a qualitative study based on purely women in China, Chan (2018) stated that users are required to navigate their self-presentation strategies as well as deciphering the motivations of their match through displayed profiles or behaviours. One participant stated, "They give you a hint ... They usually suggest meeting at 10 p.m. It is too late for dinner or movies" (Chan, 2018, p.9). Where else in contrast, Ellison et al (2006)'s study stated that an American participant who purposefully included sexually explicit terminology in his profile in order to meet someone who shared his motivation for sexual encounters.

These studies indicate that the motive of using online dating, and the direct communication of their intent could vary especially when comparing eastern and western dynamics. The clear depth and breadth of information

disclosure concerning a participant’s motivations for using online dating apps is possibly affected by culture. At the same time, how a person discloses about themselves may not justify their motivations for usage.

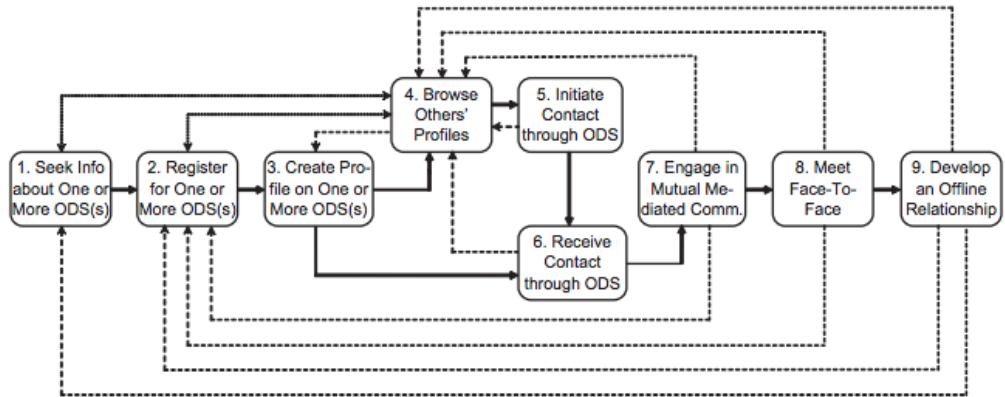


Figure 2: The 9 steps in the ideal online dating process (Finkel et al, 2012)

Adapting the U&G theory and SPT into Finkel’s online dating process, the study would explain why users seek out information and apply themselves to one or more dating apps.

The study uncovers the beginning of self-disclosure, the amount of information divulged and the fulfilment of their initial motive for the app. The gratification process may begin as soon as they see profiles they are attracted to. With the concept of SPT, we can see that self-disclosure begins at the profile creation level where users select which information to divulge about themselves (including the depth or breath of this information). As contact is made, self-disclosure normally increases on a one-on-one setting, where users can ask and respond to questions conversationally. The fulfilment of their initial motive for the app can be a driving factor to self-disclose and further communicate till a

face-to-face meeting takes place. If self-disclosure offline happens in a positive and consistent manner to how online conversations take place, an offline relationship is developed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is focused on the qualitative phenomenon that is relate to or involves its quality or kind that is especially utilised when researchers are interested in exploring the underlying reasons for human behaviour, such as ‘motivation research’ which is considered an important type of qualitative research (Kothari, 2004, p. 3). By applying depth interviews to discover the deeper level of motives and desires in human behaviour, researchers can explore the various factors that motivate and drive people to a particular behavioural manner or understand why they like a particular thing (Kothari, 2004, p. 3).

Bhattacharjee (2012) stated that social sciences applying the scientific method of research, includes a variety of research approaches, tools, and techniques, for the collection and analysis of both qualitative or quantitative data. In contrast, quantitative research consist of explaining phenomena by collecting numerical information that mathematically analysed, especially via statistics (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002).

3.1 Inductive and deductive approach

Themes or patterns within data can be identified using two primary ways in thematic analysis either an inductive or bottom up approach (Frith & Gleeson, 2004, p.42), or in a theoretically deductive or top-down manner (Boyatzis, 1998).

An inductive approach means the themes identified are firmly connected to the data (Patton, 1990), bearing resemblances to the grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this approach, data collected through interviews or focus groups with identified themes may bear little resemblance to specific questions that were asked of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or even in the interview guide. The codifying of collected information is done without attempt to slot it into a preexisting coding frames, or even the researcher's personal analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A deductive, theoretical thematic analysis, however, is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area studied and is more explicitly analyst informed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This manner of thematic analysis provides a more detailed analysis of some data areas (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, the researcher administers a deductive approach based on prior studies in this area, and seeks to use that as a guide to further explain U&G theory and SPT in application to online dating usage.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

A theme is a concept that enables the researcher to capture critical and emerging data concepts in relation to the research question and is a representation of identifiable patterned response or meaning in the set of data and reporting data themes while providing minimal organization and detailed

description of the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis functions as a base method for qualitative analysis that is a foundational skill that will be crucial in the implementation of many other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is usually applied exclusively on one selected level, either semantic or latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the semantic approach, data themes of exterior meanings are selected, with the analyst not looking for meanings further than what a participant has explicitly said or written. However, thematic analysis conducted at latent level studies the semantic content of the data and also examines underlying assumptions, and conceptualizations, forming theories that shape the data set's semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify themes and prevalence through multiple manners, an important overarching factor is for the researcher to remain consistent with the manner it is implanted in that particular analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Therefore, in this study, the researcher aims to utilize the full extent of the qualitative research through the application of thematic analysis to the profiles of participants, examining how they present themselves in written form; in relation to words that are used to describe themselves, and what they're like as a person. Each of the 21 interviewees will be asked for their online dating profiles to depict the self-presentation of each person and analysed via thematic analysis.

3.3 Observation

Observation is the systematic description of the events, behaviors, and artifacts of a social setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79). Regardless of discipline, good qualitative research usually contains both observational and interviewing techniques in various combinations (Gerson & Horowitz, 2003). In the observational research design, multiple study sites are involved, therefore, observational data can be integrated as auxiliary or confirmatory research (Gray, 2009). There are 4 types of observations, namely: nonparticipation, complete observer, observer as participant; and moderate or peripheral membership (Baker, 2006).

In non-participatory observations, Spradley (1980) states that the researcher has no level of involvement with insiders. The researcher is not present on the scene but observe from an entirely different environment through methods such as Transaction log analysis (TLA). While this role has advantages and is effective for some studies, it does not allow for an in-depth understanding of people's behaviour in their own world (Baker, 2006).

In the complete observer role, the researcher's only role is to listen and observe. One advantage of this role is that the researcher can remain completely detached from the group, however, this could be a major disadvantage as it could prevent the researcher from hearing entire conversations or grasping the full significance of the information exchange (Baker, 2006).

When the researcher is a participatory observer, the researcher who adopts this role advances very slightly in the involvement with the insiders with the researcher's identity can more overt as it becomes known to more of the insiders (Baker, 2006). While still mostly involved in observing, the researcher may conduct short interviews (Baker, 2006).

Finally, in the membership role, the researcher immerses themselves fully in the group as natives (Adler & Adler, 1987, p.67). The researcher relates to their subjects as status equals, dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings and goals with the highest emotional stance among the various types of observation techniques. This role encompasses a range of behaviours that vary along a continuum of complete membership associated with researchers adopting the worldview of the members or unsuccessful yielding to this world (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67).

In this study, the researcher seeks to be a participatory researcher, having the ability to use data from observation to conduct the interview process. The researcher does not hide her identity as a member of the online dating community, nor does the researcher approach the person who is being observed as just as ordinary member.

3.4 Scope of Study

This interview aimed to study 21 participants within the age of 21 years old to 40 years old as this proves to be the largest age group utilising online dating apps in Malaysia as shown in Statistica (2017). Initially, the researcher

interviewed 8 females and 13 males, following a snowball and convenience sampling selection. The 21 interviewees participated to the point of saturation.

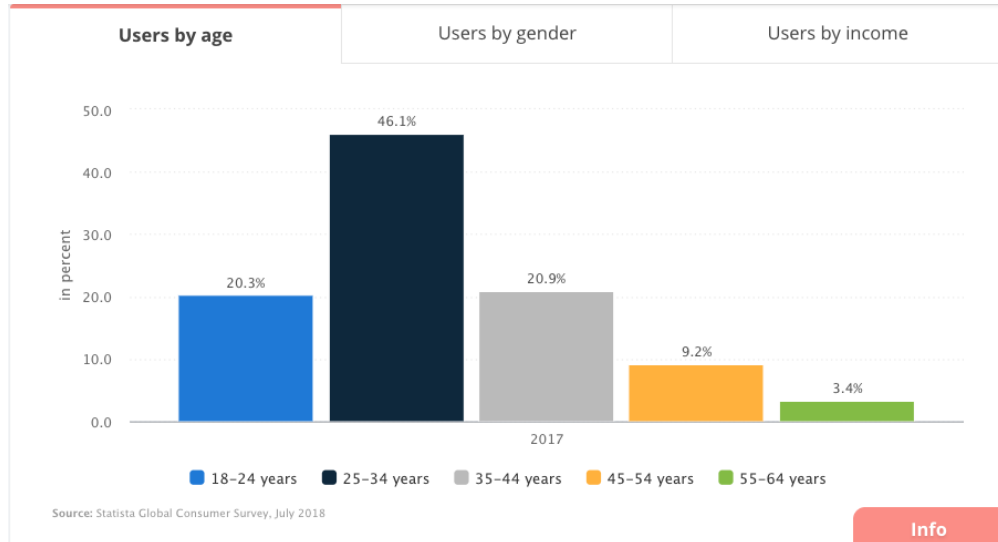


Figure 3: Statista global consumer survey of online dating users by age in Malaysia

The research focused on users of online dating apps with profile pictures and enables users to provide a short write-up concerning themselves. These apps enable individuals to begin messaging through chat once two users have either “Liked”, “Swiped left”, “Super Liked” or said “Yes” to one another. These apps are location sensitive and will enable users to speak to other users who are within a predetermined distance from the user themselves, although some apps, such as *Tinder Passport*, enables users to “speak to users of another country”. While some users have spoken to friends of friends via social media for the goal of dating them, social media is strictly not considered a dating app in this research.

3.5 In-depth Interview : Semi-Structured Interview

Prior to the interview, participants were asked for their online dating profile. The researcher obtained consent from each interviewee to include their online dating profile without their photograph or name as part of the research findings of this study. Essential information concerning the participants such as age, gender and relationship status will be revealed according to Table A.

According to Kothari (2004, p. 96), interview methods include personal interviews and, if possible, through telephone or mail interviews. Due to the nature of the research which will be based on online dating and focused on participants who are comfortable with online communication, the study was conducted via a mixture of face-to-face interviews as well as online video communication channels such as WhatsApp Video, Skype or FaceTime. Video communication was an added advantage to mere audio calls as non-verbal communication such as facial expression, body language, could be observed. If the participant declined video communication, the researcher proceeded with a telephone interview. All interviews were audio recorded.

The method of data collection in this study was carried out through semi-structured interviews. These interviews use a set of predetermined questions and highly standardised techniques of recording (Kothari, 2004, p. 97). The interviewer will be guided by “structure a rigid procedure laid down, asking questions in a form and order prescribed” (Kothari, 2004, p. 98). The structured interview method is applied in a manner that increases the ability to compare

participants' answers with one another and the analysis of structured responses by various participants, which is lacking in unstructured interview (Kothari, 2004, p. 98).

The semi structured interview guide in Appendix B was used for the interviewing process. Several questions in this guide was adapted from Nadin Van De Rest (2015) for her study in Netherlands. The researcher has obtained permission to use this interview guide to be adapted for this study in Malaysia.

In fine-tuning qualitative interview guides for the multi-racial nation of Malaysia, Yeong et al (2018) found that in the Malaysian context, during preliminary relaxed introductory questions, the interviewer needs to firstly build rapport and then gauge the respondent's conversational manner and level of literacy. Participants could range from formal language speaking styles to simple everyday language and expressions, the interviewer is encouraged to mirror the participant's language style for a smooth conversational interview between both parties (Yeong et al, 2018). Probing questions were also added to verify if the respondent's negative emotions, which he or she may initially conceal out of politeness especially in Asian populations (Yeong et al, 2018). These findings by Yeong et al (2018) was carefully taken into account in this study which encompasses various races and participants of various educational levels in Malaysia in order to formulate an interview protocol that ultimately assists the researchers in obtaining quality data for this qualitative research. In this study, respondents often used casual language and required further

explanation on certain dating terminologies as well as added clarification of interview questions, sometimes, with examples.

3.5.1 The Interview Process

Interviews for this study were mostly conducted in face-to-face settings (n=15) with four participants opting for video-calls and three participants preferring voice calls. Face-to-face interviews were done mostly at quiet restaurants and cafes where participants felt comfortable to converse for an average duration of 45 minutes with a clear audio recording captured. All interviews took place one-to-one, with the exception of two couples (n=4), where each participant was interviewed separately, although the partners they had met through online dating apps were in the same location.

The entire interview process lasted for a month and a half. The researcher simultaneously asked interviewees and friends for referrals while interviewing participants who were available.

3.5.2 Observations from In-depth Interviews

In the interview process, it was observed that male participants were more open to interviews and to meet face-to-face compared to female participants who preferred video-calls, and voice-calls. Despite the fact that the researcher is also female, two female participants stated they were most comfortable in a setting that only involved voice-calls, and stated they felt a level of discomfort with video-chats. The researcher also observed the fear of

misrepresentation that online dating users may have when one participant indicated that they are heavier in person than perceived through their profile photos.

During the interview, it was observed that male participants were more open in discussing their history on online dating apps, detailed information of their past partners, as well as practices that may be considered taboo or frowned upon by society specifically hook-ups and casual sex. Female participants would answer questions as asked, providing information such as the amount of time they have been on online dating apps, but would only provide details about their past partners when explicitly asked by the researcher.

Self-disclosure was less as compared to the male participants, although female participants felt more comfortable sharing information with the fact that the researcher was also involved in the online dating process as a participatory observer. Female participants openly disassociated themselves from either being involved in hook-ups or even swiping and matching with potential partners who portrayed themselves in that manner. However, with further questions, female participants would share that they themselves have been involved in hook-ups or casual sex encounters.

3.5.3 Observations as an observatory participant

As an observatory participant, the researcher discovered that matches were more inclined to reveal personal flaws through phone conversations when the weakness such as stammering, could not be hidden from verbal

communication; or when the match had scheduled a face-to-face meeting where their flaws, such as a severe hearing impairment and the need for hearing aids may not only be a surprise, but a dating deal-breaker for certain individuals.

As various individuals of different life stages, race, religion and socio-economic status use these apps, the researcher observed that participants would often try to apply uncertainty reduction by asking for a match's social media account such as Instagram or Facebook in order to look for common friends, or see the person in other photos than the ones displayed on the app. A small element of trust is usually built before the matches exchanging numbers and moving into chats such as WhatsApp.

Overall, ghosting could occur regardless of whether matches shared common friends, were affiliated to the same religious organization, or had casually met before. The researcher observed that the process of ghosting occurred so frequently that it was easy for users to feel desensitized to the practice over time, especially since there was always someone new to talk to.

Finally, the researcher felt that with the multitudes of profiles to swipe on, and the various apps one could use, it was easy to feel overwhelmed by the amount of choices one had. It was easy to swipe on too many matches, and simply lose track of the number of conversations one had to keep going, and the lack of a reply could be perceived as ghosting even when it wasn't.

3.6 Sampling Procedure

Qualitative researchers in health care established that the elements of a good sample are in qualitative research (Higginbottom, 2004). Quantitative sampling techniques, therefore, are designed to accommodate these goals of minimizing bias and maximizing generalizability (Koerber A. & McMichael L., 2008).

Participants will be recruited through two methods of sampling which are convenience sampling as well as snowball sampling (MacNealy, 1999). A convenience sample is described as one that researchers acquire by going to public “asking passers-by to participate”, while snowball sampling occurs when “the population of interest [that] cannot be identified other than by someone who knows that a certain person has the necessary experience or characteristics to be included” (p. 157).

Prior qualitative research on this topic inclusive of Swiping, Matching, Chatting: Self-Presentation and Self-Disclosure on Mobile Dating Apps (Ward, 2016) conducted studies on 11 men and 10 women while (Rest, 2015) “A qualitative exploration of emerging adults’ motivations and experiences regarding dating application *Tinder*” conducted interviews on 10 men and 10 women. Hence, this shows that the sample size of 21 participants used for this research is applicable to the study at hand.

The sampling process is guided by the concept of data saturation. This entails that when the researcher no longer observes fresh data appearing in the

research and when any additional data being collected appears repetitive (McMichael K, 2008). To achieve data saturation, the researcher continually analyses the collected data while more data is compiled (Tuckett, 2004, p. 49). The grounded theory concept aims to obtain theoretical saturation where all the researcher's theoretical categories are full and is able to provide an adequate basis for theory generation to explain the studied situation (McMichael K, 2008). Researchers achieve theoretical saturation when no fresh emergent themes or concepts are generated from the findings (Higginbottom, 2004).

3.6.1 Data Collection via Convenience Sampling

In convenience sampling, the researcher created a profile on *OKCupid*, as shown in Appendix C explicitly stating that “Hi, I’m a Masters student who is currently studying online dating. Would like to hear about your experiences on online dating apps as well as make friends!”. The researcher used the initials “G.O” as a way of identification on the online dating platform. Once a match was made, the researcher would strike up a basic conversation with the participant, and request for an in-depth interview.

While five male participants who were acquired through the profile were open to in-depth interviews, it was more difficult to obtain female participants compared to male participants due to a certain level of caution displayed by female counterparts when it comes to online dating activities, inclusive of the interview process. Female participants refused to provide their basic contact information such as phone-numbers or e-mail addresses for further

communication, and many stopped responding to the researcher in the built-in *OKCupid* chatroom.

3.6.2 Data Collection via Snowball Sampling

Through Snowball Sampling, the researcher was able to obtain the remaining seven female participants and eight male participants. Snowball sampling was conducted in the researcher's university, in approaching 3 undergraduate students whom the researcher did not know as well as other participants garnered through these undergraduates who provided details of their friends after expressed permission from these specific individuals. The researcher also acquired more participants via participants from the convenience sample who were willing to connect the researcher with their friends.

It could be clearly observed that female participants were more comfortable speaking to the researcher via snowball sampling compared to convenience sampling, which displays the caution females may feel when interacting with someone from a purely online medium as compared to being interviewed by an acquaintance of a friend or someone from the same organisation such as a university where the mediator would be seen as a point of references or point of contact for the interviewee.

3.7 Data Analysis

Grounded Theory Approach

As stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, p 192) states that it is critical for researchers to consider the analysis segment of the paper prior to conducting interviews. This paper uses the Grounded Theory approach as an additional technique. This approach does utilise a qualitative analysis of the relations to other codes and to context and action sequences while coding is done using software analysis of interviews (ibid.). The purpose of grounded theory is not to test existing theory but to develop theory inductively. In this research, however, no new theory was developed based on these interviews. The codes were immediate, shot and defined the experience described by the interviewee with the ultimate goal of developing categories to capture the fullness of the experiences and actions studied. Similarities and differences in data are compared and the writing of the theoretical memoranda for more focused coding until data saturation occurs in the coding process with no new insights.

While classical Grounded Theory scholars such as Glaser and Holton (1967) state that researchers are to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, Timonen et al (2018) argue that the Grounded Theory can be used to deepen existing theoretical insights while working with extant literature. Timonen et al (2018) states that the key premise of this approach is remaining open to the portrayals of the world as encountered and not forcing data into theoretical accounts with the statement that “This can be done more productively with such awareness”. Hence, this paper utilises theoretical

insights on the basis founded by the literature review as well as the theoretical framework while studying data collected with an objective and open mind rather than ignoring all prior theory and fact under the researcher's area of study.

3.8 Concerns

In order to handle any ethical concerns in the best manner, the confidentiality of individual participants in this research, the “agreements with participants about what may be done with the data that arise from their participation” (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015: 94) was fully protected throughout this study. Only demographic information pertinent to the discussion of results was presented in the findings as shown in Table A. Participants were each given one random alphabet as identifiers rather than using their initials during the coding process and after the transcription their real names were no longer used in association with this research. Other possibly identifying information such as participants' job scope was also omitted to protect the individuals interviewed for this study, as this information was unimportant to the findings of the research done.

Pertinent information from the semi-structured interviews and deductions from online dating profile descriptions would be attached to this research rather than mere observations made in a more abstract manner.

Permission was sought and granted from scholars, especially Rest (2015) and Finkle (2012) for the authorisation to use their work as a part of this research, as seen in Appendix B and Appendix I.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Research Sample Demographics

Data was collected from 21 participants from the Klang Valley region of Malaysia, with eight female participants and 13 male participants. Although the researcher sought out 15 participants through snowball sampling and six participants via convenience sampling. All 21 semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face, through videocalls, or phone conversations. All participation was voluntarily, and participants did not receive any incentive for their participation.

At the time of the interview, in terms of relationship status, all participants were not married, and 6 participants were in committed relationships with people they had met through online dating apps. Their usage of online dating apps ranged from several months to the longest being 14 years of usage of online dating apps with only 1 participant having not met anyone face-to-face while 5 participants having met more than 20 people through online dating apps. This study does not focus on participants of any particular or selected app, participants used various apps inclusive of *Tinder*, *OKCupid*, *Coffee Meets Bagel* and other mobile apps that were focused for dating purposes.

Table A: Demographics of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Status	Duration
A	30	M	Chinese	Single	5 year
B	28	M	Chinese	Single	3 years
C	32	M	Indian	Single	2 years
D	23	F	Indian	Attached	7 years
E	29	F	Malay	Single	1 year
F	27	M	Chinese	Attached	1 year
G	27	F	Chinese	Attached	3 years
H	21	F	Chinese	Attached	1 year
I	21	M	Chinese	Single	1 year
J	25	M	Malay	Single	4 months
K	21	F	Indian	Single	2 years
L	22	M	Others	Single	1 year
M	35	M	Indian	Single	5 years
N	30	F	Indian	Single	1 year
O	35	M	Others	Single	1 year
P	30	F	Chinese	Attached	1 year
Q	35	M	Chinese	Single	15 years
R	33	M	Chinese	Attached	1 year
S	26	M	Malay	Single	8 years
T	30	M	Malay	Single	13 years
U	29	F	Others	Single	2 years

4.2 The role of online dating in the lives of young adults

4.2.1 Main 6 motivation themes for online dating usage

In an attempt to answer the first research question, data analysis displayed a total of 6 themes arose from the analysis. This included meeting new people, which included expanding their social circles and building a larger network of friends while being open to the possibility of romance, serious relationships which were mainly committed long-term romantic relationships, recovery from

a previous break-up from a long-term relationship, curiosity concerning online dating apps and the usage it could have for their lives, entertainment and just to have fun, and finally to make friendships without wanting a committed relationship.

Table B: Example of quotes from participants concerning motivation for using online dating sites.

Initial Motivation	Frequency	%	Excerpt
Meet People	5	24%	I started using it because everyone around me was getting into relationships, and things like that. I wasn't seeing anybody, so I decided, why not download the app and meet people. - K
Serious Relationship	4	19%	Okay, I started using the app about April 2017. The reason I wanted to use the app was because I wanted to find a serious girlfriend. I didn't want to find a girlfriend (...) in the same working place as me. - F
Recover from previous Break-Up	4	19%	It was after a break-up that spark me to use this app, like the break up and hearing about the app from my friends. So, that's when I started using it, and here I am today. - A
Curiosity	4	19%	One of the reasons is, I've never really dated before and also, just want to see the hype of it, what's going on. - J
Platonic Friendship	2	9.5%	To me, dating apps is like a friend-making. My target of using this dating app is not particularly for dating but then to meet more new friends, yeah. - H
Have Fun	2	9.5%	It seemed like a fun thing to do. Like, just experimenting but then eventually like, I guess it was more towards like, peer pressure, everybody was having a boyfriend, and I wondered how it would be like, so, I got onto the app. - I
Total	21	100%	

While these are the listed intrinsic motivation of participants, more than half of the participants were encouraged by extrinsic influences, especially various forms of social pressure (n=12), with 11 participants reporting it was due to peer pressure and 1 female participant stated it was due to family pressure to get into a relationship that would lead to marriage, as seen in Appendix E. Two female participants reported that their friend downloaded an online dating app into their phones. *Participant B* stated his feelings of curiosity was piqued: “because my friend was playing (Tinder) and he had rave reviews about some dates he went on, and that’s what got me started. He didn’t find a girlfriend. But I saw him swiping in real time. I thought the quality of Tinder users wasn’t bad at all. Not too shabby.”

These initial motivations changed over the course of using online dating apps (n=8), while some users indicated that they first started off wanting to meet people or for fun, and then desired for a romantic relationship (n=4). *Participant D*: “Initially, it was, “I am not going to date you. I just want to party with you and be done”. But, something clicked, and we got into a relationship.”

In regard to feeling like they received gratifications for using the app, 15 participants reported that they felt that they had found what they were looking for ranging from friendships, to romantic relationships, according to their motivations for using the app. Within this group, 2 *Participants C* and *E* stated that while they found what they were looking for but it either didn’t go anywhere or didn’t last. *Participant B* felt a partial fulfilment to his motivations: “If soulmate, no, obviously because I’m still single. By friends, yes”.

Participants (n=4) indicated that they felt that getting into a serious relationship would be an added gratification to their main motivation for joining online dating apps. Participant M: *“My goal in dating apps, it's just have friends, if it leads to a relationship, it's a bonus for me.”*

Among the interviewees, 6 participants stated that their face-to-face dates resulted in casual sex although this wasn't their main motivation for using online dating apps. Participant T: *“Both parties not into that tbh. Started with friends then slowly sex coming in. This case only a few. Not all okay”.*

4.2.2 Swiping Behaviour

While the study on motivations answer the question of “What do I want here?”, our study on swiping behaviour attempts to answer, “Who do I want to talk to?”. As each user on an online dating app is required to firstly create a personal profile of themselves with the usual information on their age, gender, and most would include their job description along with a phrase about themselves. The most attention-grabbing part of these profiles are usually the photos that are used.

As seen in Table C, most users stated that they placed importance on the biography of their potential match as well as the photos (n = 12), although most participants placed more emphasis on the photos themselves. Several users stated they would be hesitant to swipe right on an empty profile that does not have any texts. *Participant H*: “If they don't write anything, they only put one

to two pictures, I won't swipe right because it looks like a fake profile", although her profile only contained several photos, and her age. Participants also swiped right based on commonalities such as finding someone who had the same motivation for using the app they did. *Participant P*: "Someone who looks like they were looking for a serious relationship. It's not that easy to find".

Table C: Importance of Photos or Biography in Swiping

Swiping Preferences	Frequency	%	Excerpt
Only Photos	6	28.6%	For me I look at pictures and what you write on the profile, yeah, both are equally as important. - A
Photos, then Bio	3	14.3%	Looks. I read the description after I'm happy with the looks. Maybe, English proficiency (on the profile) because I don't speak Mandarin very well, so... - B
Photos and Bio	12	57.1%	Look for a decent looking guy but more importantly to see if his interests matches mine or not. It would also be a plus if he wrote his profile with a bit of wit and humour. - N
Total	21	100%	

As a multicultural nation, only 7 participants stated that they would only swipe on someone specifically of their own race and religion (refer to Appendix D). This is backed by Nagaraj (2009) that stated that diversity that arises in Klang Valley as the major urban growth centre in the country explains in part why intermarriages were more likely among persons with different religions or the young.

Swiping on online dating apps are strongly tied to participants' goals, as participants look at profile after profile for someone who they are attractive to,

and holds the same motivations they personally do for using the app. *Participant U*: “I wouldn't swipe until I read what they are as a person, sometimes they look really nice, but their description they want a hook-up, or a one-night stand. I wouldn't swiped right on that type of person, no matter how good looking they are.”

Participant F explained, “Well I guess you can't really come all out, cause, it can scare some people, you didn't want to be such a person who is too over the boundaries. So, I think it's good to have a subtle approach. Start slow. Start getting to know each other rather than you...everything then suddenly you feel wow why is my match so outspoken...”. However, this mutual self-disclosure could easily face an end in terms of ghosting whenever the costs of self-disclosure outweighs the benefits or even when the depth and breadth of disclosure does not seem appropriate at that respective development stage.

4.3 Self-disclosure on Online Dating apps

4.3.1 Self Disclosure on Online Dating Profiles

The profiles of participants were provided to the researcher, with users who have already deleted their online dating profiles detailing what was written via the interview. Most (n=19) participants divulged some form of information concerning either their jobs, hobbies or interests on their online dating profile, with a minority of females (n=2) only disclosing their gender and age on *Tinder*. It was observed that *Tinder* profiles normally had less information compared to other dating apps, with links to Instagram photos instead.

Most disclosures had breath, and were varied but no participant displayed great depth in their profiles in terms of disclosing information that was private or personal in nature. Participants gave a combination of information concerning their occupation (n=9), hobbies such as music and fitness (n=8), and favourite food or drinks (n=6). Some participants (n=4) posed challenges for their matches such as Participant G: “If you think you can handle me, text me”.

This supports the assumption of the study that while information is given of users of online dating apps, it is merely orientation information that is useful for further communication and does not involve deep and personal information about a user that would be provided in a chatroom.

When asked to describe their photos on their online dating profiles, *Participant D* said: “I initially experimented with like, taking really bad, like just a random selfie ... and then, (...) I realised that better lighting, better angles got more likes.

4.3.2 Initial Online Conversations

Once matched, participants are able to interpersonally communicate with one another. In the initiation of the first conversation, however, all 8 female participants ascribed more to traditional gender stereotypes where men are expected to “make the first move” aside from exceptional circumstances. Participant U stated that: “Actually, most of the guys initiate the conversation”

she added that in some occasions, “But, if I really like that guy, I would initiate”. In direct response to these stereotypes, 9 of 12 male participants said that they would definitely initiate the first conversation. *Participant T*: “Of course, in this kind of situation, usually guys that will start”. Only 3 male participants said they wouldn’t initiate due to busyness or lack of time. *Participant L*: “I would have a template of basic introduction questions. Name, age, where you're from, stuff like that”.

4.3.3 Self-disclosure in face-to-face settings

As seen in Table D, 16 participants stated that face-to-face dates increased their self-disclosure either during the face-to-face scenario, or after meeting up. A majority of participants (n=11) brought up the need for chemistry alongside reciprocal and consistent self-disclosure of their match with one participant stating that he required a set duration of 6 months before he trusts his match enough to self-disclose.

Table D: Effect of Online and Face-to-Face Communication on Self

Disclosure

Disclosure	Frequency	%	Interview Excerpt
Higher Disclosure depends on Face-to-Face Chemistry	10	47.5%	Obviously, meeting a person, and seeing them in real life, gives you more level of comfort in light, sharing a lot about yourself. But , I think for me, having the click is more important - J
Higher Information Disclosure Face-to-Face	6	28.5%	I think yes. I usually show myself more after I meet them, not before. Like on the chat, I don't really talk about myself that much. During face to face (I speak more). I prefer face-to-face. - H
No, Higher Disclosure online	2	9.5%	I share more personal information to friends I really trust, online, because there's a barrier between, like, you're behind the screen, so, more comfortable sharing deeper conversation with the friend. Yeah, I believe there's no judgement in this type of friendship. - I
Disclosure depends on Face-to-Face & Duration	1	5%	I am the kind of person, where it takes effort to gain my trust. Up until a point where she has gained my trust, I won't disclose anything. It's a duration of time, not date counts. 6 months of chatting and meeting up. Once we get really serious, then I would open up. - S
No Difference	1	5%	I think it doesn't really matter much. Sometimes it does help, like, let's say I'm going through a very bad day (...) the friend of mine, usually when I send him a voice note, he usually replies with a call (...) and I tell him whatever I'm feeling. That kind of helps. - D
No Comment	1	5%	
	21	100%	

4.3.4 Misrepresentation

When it came to bringing online matches on a date, 6 out of 7 female participants who have met their online matches in person expressed caution and the fact that they perceived a lack of safety, a factor that seemed to be more prevalent in Malaysia. Participant K: *“It is always scary to go on real life dates with someone you met online”*. Several male participants stated that they would plan dates at public places to help females feel more secure. Participant T: *“In Malaysia, people are scared of meeting up because of crime (...) I say, “well we can meet at the mall, we can meet at a place where you feel safe, right?”.”*

Two female participants reported that they were previously placed in situations where they felt unsafe, with one female participant meeting people who were catfishing her in terms of appearance. Participant U: *“I have also met someone who is not real, like catfish (...), he used another person’s picture. He apologized and all. I said, “that’s ok, but I don’t think I want to be a friend with you because you are not honest in the first place”.”*

Some participants stated that there was a difference in their personality and even interests of their match online as compared to during face-to-face meetings. Participant S: *“Most of them are talkative on online dating apps, but when we meet up, they tend to talk less. So, every time I ask them questions, they would give me simple answers (...) It’s a big turn off.”*. While some participants are only interested in meeting someone who had the same motivation for using the app they did, meeting them in person proved otherwise

as mentioned by Participant E: *“Profile serious, tak de yang main-main. Tapi in real-life main-main. (the profile seemed like he was looking for something serious, but he was just looking to have fun in real life). The first one I met. I went back home (...) With his full name, I can google (...) I found out that he’s someone’s boyfriend, someone’s husband-to-be.”*

This misrepresentation was not confined to their matches but something they saw in their own profiles as well. Participant O: *“I think most people don’t match with their photos, for example, me. But yeah, you know, today with their beautify options and what not.”*. Where some participants are comfortable with slight misrepresentations, others make corrections to it. Participant U: *“Many thought I was a Chinese, so, many Chinese guys matched with me. So, we chat a bit and then when we meet, they’re like, “oh, you’re Malay”. They’re a bit turned off (...) So, nowadays, what I do, I put in I am a Muslim, so that everybody will be clear with it, and it will not be an issue”*.

4.3.5 Ghosting

In ghosting, which is found to be more prevalent in emerging adults mainly due to relationship formation via technology, the relationship dissolution process involves vanishing without notice, which equates to avoidance (LeFebvre. et al, 2019). Ghosting is defined as ending a relationship by cutting off all contact (Freedman et al, 2018). Ghosting is different from other forms of relationship dissolution because it occurs in the absence of the ghosted partner immediately knowing, or being informed, that it has happened (Freedman et al,

2018). The party which is ghosted usually comes to that realisation after noticing all attempts to communicate are disregarded.

As described by Altman and Taylor (1973) decisions to self-disclose are based on perceived rewards that will be gained if he or she discloses information. If the cost of disclosing information is perceived to be greater than the rewards, then no information will be disclosed. Even on the onset of matching, one of the participants felt that the cost of self-disclosure outweighs its benefits if his match doesn't have any information on their profile, and he does. Participant J: *“people who have empty profiles. So, when they actually talk to me and I say something, and they say something, now, I don't know where this is going. I am not even going to spend my time trying to engage, so I just ghost them”*.

In this research, all 21 participants reported that they had either faced ghosting or being ghosted by their online dating matches. While 12 participants felt that 'ghosting' was negative, 9 participants felt that it was neither; and that if there was a difference in opinion, motivation, or lack of chemistry, especially in an online dating app, it was understandable, as seen in Appendix F. One participant's perception of ghosting changed after meeting her match again at a common social gathering. Participant U: *“I ghosted a match, then I saw him at a party. My friend's friend. It was so awkward. He still came up to me, “hi, how are you?”. I don't ghost after that, because I feel awkward meeting them again”*.

4.4 Preferences for Offline Dating

Despite participants being on online dating apps for a period of time, 9 participants said that they would rather meet offline according to Appendix G, inclusive of couples who successfully met online. Participants felt meeting someone offline and proceeded to dating would be safer, more genuine, and even more romantic, as flirting is done in person rather than via text messages. This contradictory view was also in line with Bryden's research where (2017) participants displayed a complete distrust in the effectiveness of online dating apps, stating, "I would never actually date anyone on a dating site. Old fashioned meet and greets are the way to go." although the participant remained casually participative of the app and mentioned logging in about 4 times a month.

The more ambivalent group of the remaining 8 participants consisted of people who felt that they had no particular preference for either online or offline dating as two guys reported that they transition from online chatting to face-to-face dates really fast. Participant C: "It's the same. It's just a platform for you to meet people. Once you start meeting then it's no longer go through the app anymore." Only 4 participants stated that they preferred online dating as it was either easier to show that they were looking for a romantic partner or they were simply more comfortable to initially speak to people online as compared to face-to-face settings.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The researcher found that participants managed their self-disclosure in order to obtain more likes, this ranged from angled and filtered profile photos, that may hide any physical unattractiveness. The lack of information on their biographies aside from orientation stage information such as occupation, hobbies, and interests may also conceal individual character weaknesses on the onset, as several (n=4) female participants stated that they avoided matches who said they were “open minded”, as this usually indicated the person was seeking for hook-ups.

Female participants (n=7) exhibited signs of caution in using and meeting people through this platform, and hesitated to make their usage of the app public (n=4) compared to male participants. Overall, participants are less affected by social stigma of online dating than research conducted in countries such as Japan and China (Chan, 2018; Farrer and Gavin, 2006). Yet, Malaysians do not openly admit their involvement, especially the fact there are actively looking for a partner, as compared to western countries such as US (Matthews, 2018).

Some young adults in Malaysia display certain eastern characteristics seen in Chinese and Indian cultures concerning online dating, such as being heavily influenced by their surrounding community and explains positive extrinsic motivations that spur users to log on to these sites after being encouraged or pressured by friends or family (n=9). Negative extrinsic motivations such as perception of danger also causes users to either delete the

app, or adopt behaviours that increases caution and avoids danger such as only meeting in crowded public areas.

Although a number of participants were led by extrinsic factors, an equal amount of participants (n=9) were completely motivated by personal factors such as curiosity despite not knowing anyone using online dating apps. This displays that the Malaysian young adults studied do not behave homogeneously, but are diverse in nature perhaps due to the variety of age, religions and races that reside together in this metropolitan area.

As the socio-economic status of the participants are mostly professional, and educated, urban young adults in the Klang Valley region, it is also possible that their mindsets would be more exposed to more western values in comparison to other areas of Malaysia. This contributes to the willingness of participants to explore meeting partners through online dating apps as well as dating outside one's race and religion (Nagaraj, 2009), or even get involved in new experiences such as selective hook-ups or casual sex.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion

This study has given a perspective of the extent in which participants use online dating sites as well as how they manage their self-disclosure in order to accomplish their personal goals. There were various factors that came into play while studying the U&G of research participants due to the changing nature of their motivation, especially since the motivations of these participants come into negotiation with the motivations of their match, which may provide insight into (n=6) participants encountering casual sex and or finding a serious relationship (n=4) as an added gratification, though not a main motive.

External factors such as break-ups from serious relationships or transitions (e.g. from high-school to college) also impact the use of online dating apps, and can be used to meet people at a time where prior friendships may have been affected by life changes. In sum, it can be seen that online dating apps are used in a multifunctional manner to achieve various desired motivations, intrinsic or extrinsic, primary or secondary.

Given that online conversations with various matches are open at the same time, it is likely for participants to feel a match is being an unresponsive communicator as compared to other matches and terminate the conversation although they are disclosing equal to the amount the participant is. As illustrated

in the diagram below, where participant A has matched with 3 people, match A, B and C and proceeded to a second date with Match A. Participants could have as little and as many matches as they are comfortable with. The conversations that arises aren't solitary but in concurrence with other matches.

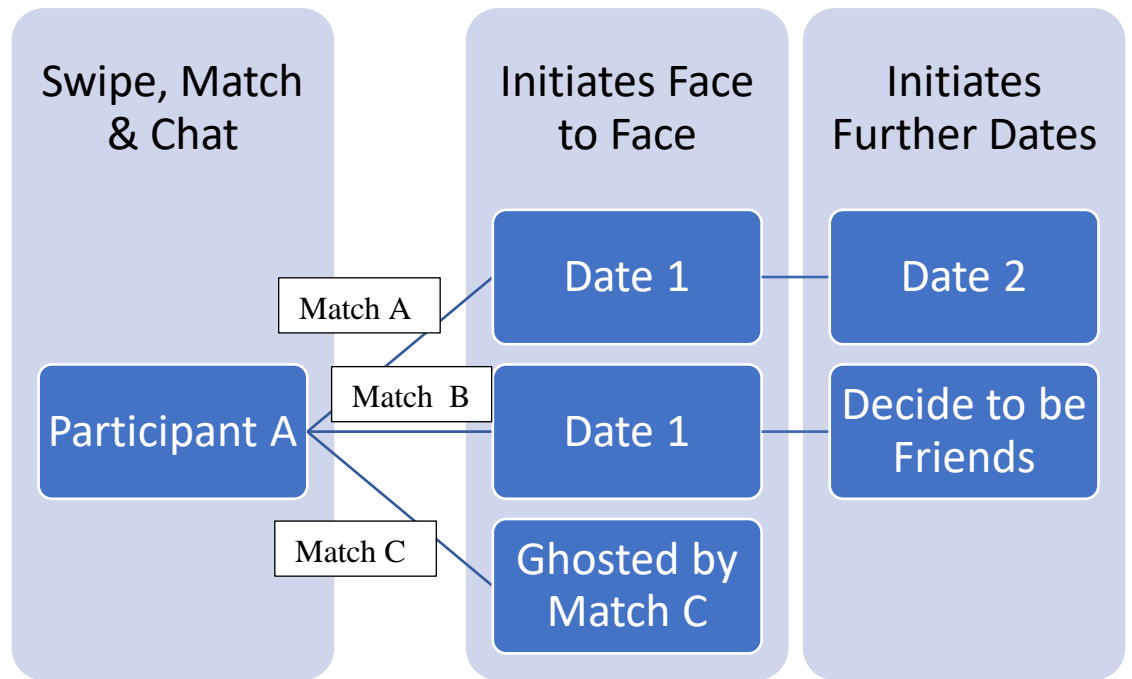


Figure 4: Swiping, Matching, Chatting and Meeting in a Multi-User Online Environment.

The explanation provided in Figure 4 can be further elaborated by Finkel's (2012) diagram in Figure 5. This research displays how online mediums has impacted the interpersonal communication process required for the formation of relationships and will continue to do so at an even larger extent, as more young adults' turn to applications to fulfil their needs. While computer mediated communication such as e-mail or social media such as Facebook or Instagram has continuously changed how we relate to our personal social and extended social networks such as friends of friends, online dating apps has

provided a medium for individuals with no common friends to engage in possibly getting to know anyone available in their geographical area, if they match.

As communicators are constantly bombarded by the noises of other chats and other matches, preventing both communicators to significantly encode and decode messages well online, in that environment, especially enough for both parties to identify chemistry. Ghosting has also created an unforgiving environment when it comes to getting tied up with life, and trying to resume the communication two parties once had.

As stated by Finkel et al. (2012) when browsing profiles, a user compares multiple options with one another, but, when he or she initiates and pursues a relationship with one potential partner after a series of more in-depth self-disclosure, the relationship is frequently evaluated on its own as the perceived cost-reward scenario may have gradually altered. This study surmises that while online dating apps in Malaysia has proven to be a technology that has brought people together, creating friendships while enlarging social circles, the effects of mass choices has deteriorated the time, energy and patience for young adults to seek meaningful connection.

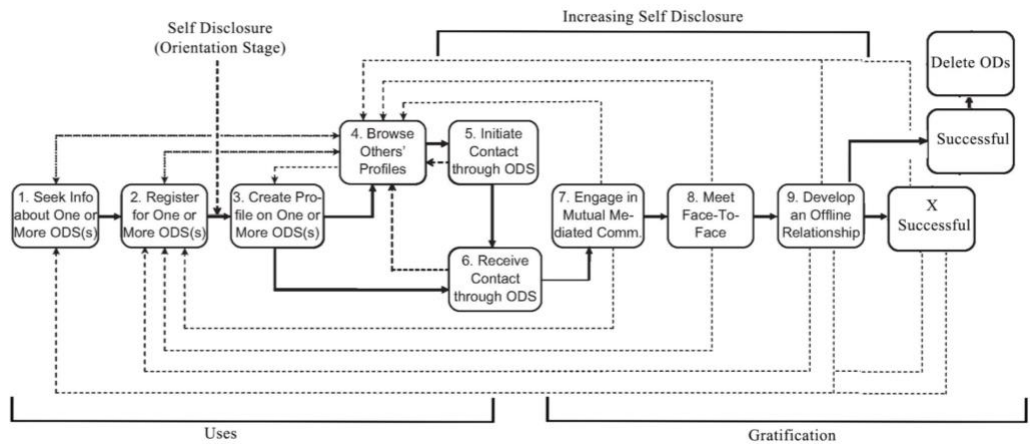


Figure 5: The nine steps in the prototypical, idealized online dating process. Taken from Finkel et al. (2012) and adapted from the findings of this research.

Based on Finkel et al (2012)'s diagram, the study has expanded the nine steps in the prototypical, idealized online dating process with self-disclosure starting at the creation of the profile. The amount of self-disclosure increases once contact is made on the online dating app. As stated in Finkel et al (2012), users can drop out of the dating process altogether at any stage, although it is not depicted in Finkel's diagram. In this study, findings show that dropping out was usually done by ghosting, without true closure. Participants are also prone to delete the online dating app for various personal reasons such as not being able to find someone they have chemistry with, yet, reinstall it and begin Step 2 again at a later date.

The depth and breadth of disclosure increases as participants move from online in Step 7 to face-to-face communication in Step 8, with the condition that there is chemistry upon the meetup. This would encourage verbal disclosure even as other information such as the person's physical appearance, is now fully disclosed without photo filters or specific angles together with dressing style,

body language, tone of voice or facial expression. According to this study, the end of a first date could revert to ghosting due to perceived or actual misrepresentation or lack of chemistry.

Using the U&G theory, we see that the diagram is separated into two. The motivation for participants to use the app plays a role in seeking information and registering for an app particularly when deciding on serious relationships. After creating a profile, users would swipe on profiles that attract their attention, and proceed to initiate or reciprocate contact and self-disclosure would continue if participants felt that the communication process was in line with fulfilling why they were using the app. After face-to-face encounters, successful serious offline relationships were marked by users deleting their profiles and uninstalling the online dating app. If this relationship failed and resulted in a break-up, participants would re-install the app and the process would start again.

In **SPT**, the orientation stage occurs between registering for an online dating site and the creation of an online dating profile. The orientation stage continues to develop until the users engage in mutual mediated communication which is also a continuation of the orientation stage. Nevertheless, self-disclosure expands in depth and breadth when users begin to trust each other, they tend to reveal information in depth rather than breadth and users move on to other levels of self-disclosure (Masaviru, 2016, p. 43).

Once a match is made and a chatroom opens up for two people to communicate, the first conversation, although usually on the 'Orientation' layer,

only takes place when one individual initiates. Despite popular belief that gender equality has enabled men to wait for women to initiate contact. A major study carried out by Dinh et al (2018) of Oxford Internet Institute (OII) and eHarmony found that men are 30 per cent more likely than women to initiate conversation, and when a woman *does* send the first message, the response rate drops by 15 per cent. The male counterpart is expected to initiate a second date based on traditional gender roles held by the participants in this study and even be the one to move the relationship into Step 9 where an official and offline relationship is established.

SPT consists of four stages: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange (Roloff M E, 1981). This first stage of self-disclosure, the Orientation Stage, is where highly ritualised conversations occurs with the disclosure of mainly superficial information, but helps decide whether the relationship is rewarding and both participants move into the exploratory affective exchange stage.

This study concurs with Chan (2018) who reports embarrassment concerning using online dating apps especially for sexual gratification as well as Farrer and Gavin (2006) this could be cultural stigmatisation of meeting strangers for relationships, online. In Malaysia, this research found that users were more likely to state their motivation as looking to meet new people with embarrassment to stay they are looking for a committed romantic relationship or sexual gratifications.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Through the combination of Uses and Gratification theory alongside SPT, this study depicts how rational users of online dating apps embark on the usage of this technology in a methodological manner as seen in the steps of Finkel et al (2012)'s diagram with individual initial intrinsic motivations, that could be affected by positive and negative extrinsic factors that promote or discourage their usage of dating apps. Extrinsic motivations such as social pressure to get attached cause users to start using the apps, but social stigma only causes caution amongst female users rather than app deletion. It is the unfulfilled intrinsic motivations that cause male and female users to delete the app though they have not found a desired friendship or relationship through the app.

This study displays that online users who are intend to meet face-to-face, in hopes of developing a deeper connection are also likely to terminate communication due to incongruent disclosure of their match and their motivation. None of these participants desired “confidence boosting procrastination” found in LendEdu (2017)'s research. The study shows that participants perceive high costs-rewards, trying to balance misrepresentation with attractiveness, initial personal motivations with the motivations of their match, and their latent intention for sexual or romantic gratifications with meeting people and simply seeing where things go as each match has multiple possible matches to choose from.

Several dating apps such as *OKCupid* has functions where users are able to select the ‘connections’ they are looking for such as short term and long-term dating, hook-ups or new friends, but this is often still confusing due to secondary and latent motivations that each user has. Perhaps future dating apps could apply primary and secondary motivations for using the app, as well as a ‘safety scorecard’ primarily for female participants to see how secure women felt around a prospective male match. This may encourage users to lower their caution in the usage of these apps and promote more meaningful communication.

5.3 Limitations

As the researcher for this study is female, there were certain lack of complete information disclosure that were observed when the researcher interviewed male participants concerning sexual references. When male participants were asked about their motivations for using online dating apps, the researcher sensed some amount of reservation on perceived negative information such as sexual needs. Participants emphasized more positive traits like being open to new friendships, regardless of race or religion. Given the sensitivity of certain questions that were posed in regards to sexual intimacy and open mindedness, participants displayed social desirability bias where they wants to avoid seeming sexually promiscuous yet non-discriminatory.

The researcher also faced certain variations over the semantics of terminologies such as online friendships especially ones that would involve

hook-ups and casual sex, as these are normally termed friends with benefits, but was not understood as such by all participants. The researcher attempted to reduce any forms of miscommunication by adding increased detail to explanations of questions to the point the participant understood in his or her manner, the exact meanings of the query posed.

5.4 Recommendations

As this research was conducted on a compatible sample size of both male and female participants who use online dating apps, it would be beneficial for additional studies to explore different gender perspectives on online dating apps. As traditional gender roles play a role in initiating conversation, researchers could further study how masculinity or femininity may affect participants' in terms of both uses and gratification as well as self-disclosure on online dating apps.

Finally, while this study explores the cognitive domain or thoughts concerning online dating and the perceptions of people around them, as well as behavioural aspects of online dating, in how they actually use the app in an end-to-end manner, it does not examine the affective processes involved. The affective component could provide more details on the behavioural aspects of participants, and more insight into changes in motivations over time due to emotions such as fears.

Cognitive processes of participants thoughts and the perceptions of people around them and behavioural aspects in how they actually use the app.

The affective component, is not examined, and could explain behavioural aspects of changes in motivation due to emotions such as fear or love.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reduces the gap in knowledge about online relationships and self-disclosure. The study is pivotal in understanding the trend of using social media in society especially in the underlying theme of sociability and interpersonal communication. The results of this study have both academic and practical implications for researchers and practitioners interested in the field of social media research. The application of U&G theory to online dating helps explain the many and varied reasons why young adults use and like online dating apps and the application of SPT helps explain the extent in which consumers disclose information about themselves. The qualitative design of this study provides a rich and vibrant understanding of the above areas of study.

Appendix

Appendix A



A sample of an online dating profile from Coffee Meets Bagel



Sample Online Dating Profile

(Image Taken from *Tinder* Google Playstore images)

Appendix B

Interview Guide		
Research	Themes	Sentisizing Concepts
<p>Goal 1</p> <p>Gaining insight on user's initial motivations for downloading and online dating app</p> <p>Goal 2</p> <p>Exploring what need participants expected to fulfil in the course of using online dating apps.</p> <p>Motives displayed are cross-referenced previous studies of literature.</p>	<p>1. Motivations</p> <p>Introduction:</p> <p>This interview will focus on your past or present usage of online dating apps. I would like to understand your reasons for engaging in online dating and your experience so far.</p> <p>Firstly, I would like to know why you downloaded an online dating app and created an online dating profile.</p> <p>Initial question:</p> <p>When did you start using online dating apps? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>Additional questions:</p> <p>Which online dating apps do you use?</p> <p>What is the main reason you started using online dating apps? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>What did you expect to find on this dating app? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>What does your online dating profile look like? (photos, personal details, interests) (Rest, 2015)</p>	<p>Sentisizing concepts:</p> <p>Uses and Gratifications</p> <p>Find out what are the main motivations users had for downloading an online app and creating a profile. Which motivations were stated in the profile and which weren't?</p> <p>Self-disclosure</p> <p>Discuss how the participant shares information about themselves.</p>

	<p>What do you search for when judging online profiles? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>Did you plan to arrange real-life dates through these online dating apps? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>What are your initial topics of conversations when a match is made?</p>	
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Interview Guide		
Goals	Themes	Sensitising Concepts
<p>Goal 1</p> <p>Exploring participants' actual experiences with online dating (Rest, 2015) in view of initial expectations and motivations for signing up.</p> <p>Goal 2</p> <p>Figuring out what participants expect of online dating (Rest N, 2015) and what main motivations they had when they downloaded the app and created their profile.</p> <p>Goal 3:</p> <p>Uncovering attitudes towards online dating, both from participants viewpoints of online dating themselves, as well as of other online daters and the society</p>	<p>2. Experiences</p> <p>Introduction:</p> <p>Now that I understand your reasons for using online dating apps, I would like to hear about your actual real-life experiences (Rest, 2015).</p> <p>Initial question:</p> <p>Have you personally met the people you matched with on online dating? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>(If the answer is no, interviewer will ask why this is so)</p> <p>Additional questions:</p> <p>How many people have you met? (Rest, 2015)</p>	<p>Sensitizing concepts:</p> <p>Social Penetration Theory</p> <p>Discuss whether participants who proceed to face-to-face meetings are prone to more extensive self-disclosure in offline meetups, or after the meetings itself, when users return to online communication.</p>

<p>knowing they are a part of online dating</p>	<p>How was your experience on these dates? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>Do you share deeper information about yourself during or after meeting your match face-to-face?</p> <p>Do you experience any noticeable differences when dating people you met offline (e.g. at work or through friends) compared to someone you met online? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>Did you find what you were looking for through online dating? (Rest, 2015)</p> <p>Are you still using online dating apps?</p> <p>Have you either been ghosted or have you ghosted any user? If so, why?</p> <p>End of interview: Do you have anything to add? Thank you for your participation in this study. (Rest, 2015)</p>	
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Permission obtained for the listed interview guide shown below:



Grace Ong • 3:40 PM

Would love to have your permission to use some of the questions in your interview guide if that's alright?

Will definitely provide the needed citations :)

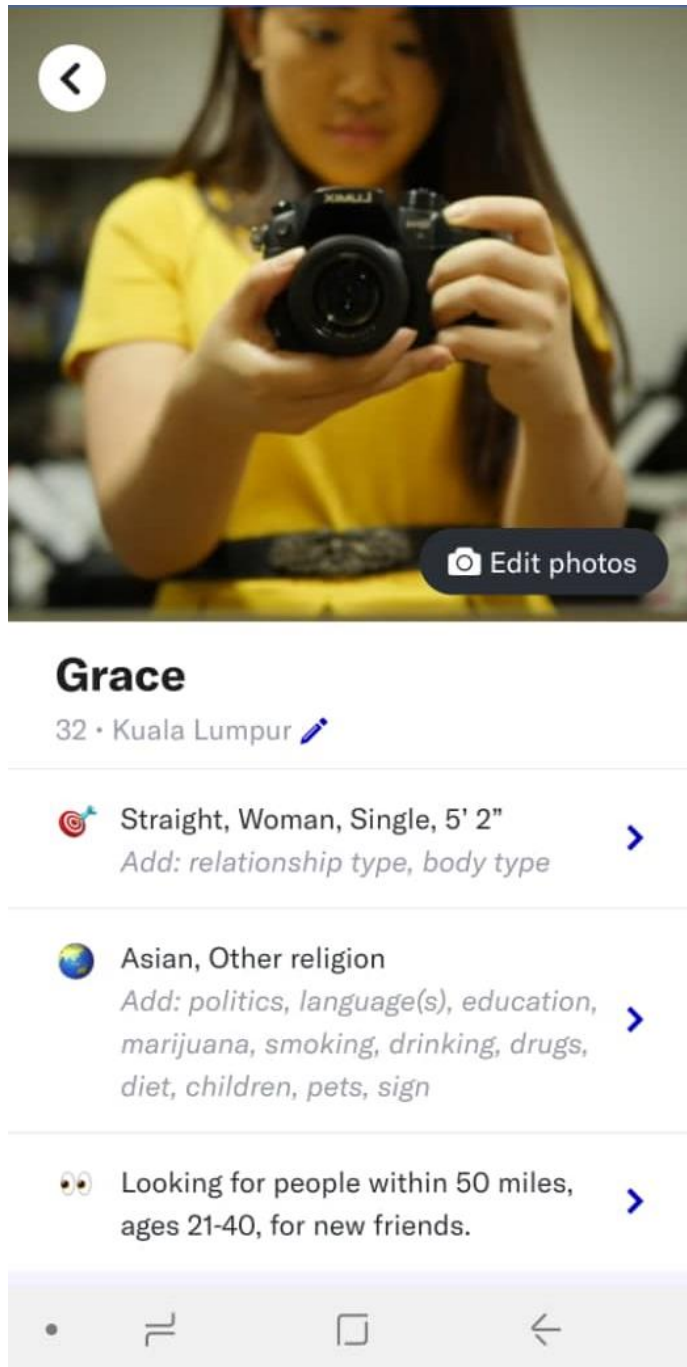


Nadin van de Rest • 5:27 PM


Hi Grace, of course you can use my interview guide with citations. Did you find my guide in my thesis or do you need me to send it to you? In that case I can look it up. :)

Appendix C

Profile created to recruit participants via OKCupid



ages 21-40, for new friends.




ABOUT ME >

My self-summary


Hi, I'm a Master's Student who is currently studying online dating.

Would like to hear about your experience with online dating apps as well as make friends!

Can't see likes. Drop me a line if you're open to chat!  **EDIT**

ASPIRATIONS >

What I'm doing with my life

Finishing my master's program!
 **EDIT**

Appendix D

Racial and Religious Preferences of Matches

Racial Or Religious Preferences	Frequency	%
No Preferences	6	28.5%
Racial - Certain Races	6	28.5%
Racial - Own Race	4	19.25%
Religious - Own Religion	3	14.25%
Religious - Certain Religions	2	9.5%

Racial Or Religious Preferences	Frequency	%
No Preferences	6	28.5%
Racial - Certain Races	6	28.5%
Racial - Own Race	4	19.25%
Religious - Own Religion	3	14.25%
Religious - Certain Religions	2	9.5%
Total	21	100%

Appendix E

External Influence in participants' use of Online Dating Apps

External Influences	Frequency	%	Excerpt
Friends Influence / Peer Recommendation	9	42.9%	So I uninstalled the app and then I downloaded it again. I think I delete it and redownload it quite a number of times after hearing from my friend's success stories. Actually some of my friends met their current girlfriend on the app so I felt like maybe it helps, maybe it works, yeah. - A
No External Influence	9	42.9%	None of my friends used online dating apps back then. (I started) out of curiosity. - U

Friends Influence & Transition	2	9.5%	I was a high-school student moving to college , like, you find yourself having very limited friends. So, you would want to have more friends, and after that period of time, I find myself to have a stronger relationship with my college-mates, and then yeah, I met new friends from outside. So, I don't think it's necessary to have dating apps, anymore. - I
Family Pressure	1	4.7%	I felt pressure from my parents - E
Total	21	100%	

Appendix F

Perception of Ghosting on Online Dating Apps

Perception of Ghosting	Frequency	%	Excerpts
Negative	12	57%	I won't, because I think it's really rude because when someone is talking to you, and suddenly you stop talking to that person without any particular reason, I think it's rude. - I
Positive	6	29%	For me, if I feel like I don't click with the person, I'll just ghost them. Like romantic or friendship. As long as you don't find the click there's really no point like continue the conversation. - A
Neither	3	14%	I think because everyone is looking for something, so if you don't find it in that person, you don't want to waste time. No hard feelings. (...) I think definitely, I'll be more careful with real life friendships - P

Appendix G
Online or Offline Dating Preferences

Dating Preferences	Frequency	%	Excerpt
Prefer Dating Offline	9	42.9%	<p>I honestly still prefer knowing someone, or at least like, I still prefer meeting someone in real and then building something. (...) cause at least if I know a person in real life, how they are, then I will know like, "OK, maybe I wouldn't mind talking to this person". - O</p> <p>Yes, I feel (Online dating is) more dangerous because I don't know about him, I don't know about his background And I also don't know whether he has any mutual friends or not, and I also don't really like people to know that I use this app. (...)My parents, they are very traditional. They also cannot accept the fact that I am using. - G</p>
No Preferences	8	38.1%	<p>I think surprisingly, the difference is not that huge. Because, I don't talk to someone for months and years, so we proceed to meeting face to face fairly fast. So, I don't feel that the difference between meeting online or offline is that big. - R</p> <p>I think it's more about security. Why I say that is because when you meet a friend's friend, right? You have the security that this person might be genuine because this person is your friend's friend. This person is much more "genuine" open close inverted commas. Genuine in wanting to know you. - A</p>
Prefer Dating Online	4	19%	<p>It's different, because, the intention I meet them ni, untuk something yang serious, bukan just friends, so differentlah, different from the others. - E</p>
Total	21	100%	

Appendix H
Status of Applicants on Online Dating Apps

Online Dating App Usage	Frequency	%
Yes	10	47.6
Deleted, Relationship	5	23.8%
Deleted	5	23.8%
Deleted, Re-installed	1	4.8%
Total	21	100%

Appendix I

Permission from Finkel for 9 step diagram

RE: Permission to use diagram from Online Dating [Inbox x](#) [grace@superscriptlab.com x](#)



Eli J Finkel
to Grace, sharon@utar.edu.my

Mon, Jul 29, 8:26 PM

Sure, no problem.

I wish you the best with your research. ☺

Yours,
Eli

Eli J. Finkel
Northwestern University
Professor of Psychology | Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences
Professor of Management and Organizations | Kellogg School of Management
[Website](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
[Newsletter](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#)

Bestselling Book: [The All-Or-Nothing Marriage](#)

From: Grace Ong <grace@superscriptlab.com>
Sent: Sunday, July 28, 2019 10:57 PM
To: Eli J Finkel <finkel@northwestern.edu>; Eli J Finkel <finkel@northwestern.edu>
Cc: sharon@utar.edu.my
Subject: Permission to use diagram from Online Dating

Good day Prof Finkel,

My name is Grace and I am a Masters Student from Malaysia doing my research on Online Dating and Self Disclosure in my country.

I came across your paper, "Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science (2012)" while doing my research. I was overjoyed to read the paper and know that there were many elements that related to what I was doing.

Prof, I am writing this e-mail to humbly seek your permission to use the diagram on "The nine steps in the prototypical, idealized online dating process" on page 14 in my study. Please be assured that the study is only for academic purpose and I will give credit to your work.

For further inquiries, you can e-mail me or my supervisor Dr. Sharon Wilson at sharon@utar.edu.my.

Thank you very much and I hope to hear from you soon.

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