

**SEXTING MOTIVE ON SEXTING  
BEHAVIOURS AMONG EMERGING  
ADULTS IN MALAYSIA: THE  
MODERATING ROLE OF GENDER AND  
RELATIONSHIP STATUS**

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EMERGING ADULTS IN MALAYSIA: THE MODERATING ROLE  
OF GENDER AND RELATIONSHIP STATUS**

By

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## ABSTRACT

### SEXTING MOTIVE ON SEXTING BEHAVIOURS AMONG EMERGING ADULTS IN MALAYSIA: THE MODERATING ROLE OF GENDER AND RELATIONSHIP STATUS

GOH YEE SHAN

Although the media has been negatively portraying sexting behaviour, yet it remains prevalent among people across countries. The recent lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic makes sexting behaviours an even more viable option for satisfying individuals' sexual desires. Local studies on sexting are limited, but evidence depicted an increasing engagement in this behaviour. Despite the fact that sexting behaviour is regularly associated with negative consequences, the motivations that keep people sexting are unknown among Malaysian emerging adults. This study seek to identify the engagement level in sexting behaviour in Malaysia. It also seeks to examine the sexting motives, gender, and relationship status differences, as well as the moderating role of gender and relationship status between sexting motives on sexting behaviour. This cross-sectional quantitative study recruited participants using the purposive sampling technique during the pandemic period from August to October 2020. A total of 252 emerging adults ( $M_{age} = 22.84$ ;  $SD = 2.05$ ), with 55.7% being females, participated in the study. The result depicted that 88.1% of participants ever sexted with someone. The independent sample *t*-test analysis showed that males and participants in-relationship were more likely to sext compared to females and singles. Hierarchical multiple regression depicted that intimacy, enhancement, and peer pressure significantly predicted sexting behaviour. Gender does not moderate the association between all motives and sexting

behaviour. Meanwhile, relationship status moderates the associations of self-affirmation and peer pressure on sexting behaviour. Findings have shed new light and bridged the knowledge gap on sexting behaviour among Malaysian emerging adults that serve as an informative input for the future revision of sexual reproductive health education implementation.

*Keywords:* sexting, motive, sexually-explicit contents, emerging adult, Malaysia

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## APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation entitled “**SEXTING MOTIVE ON SEXTING BEHAVIOURS AMONG EMERGING ADULTS IN MALAYSIA: THE MODERATING ROLE OF GENDER AND RELATIONSHIP STATUS**” was prepared by GOH YEE SHAN and submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Social Science) at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

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## 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. J. G.', written over a horizontal line.

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Date: 14/12/2023



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**SUBMISSION OF FINAL YEAR PROJECT /DISSERTATION/THESIS**

It is hereby certified that GOH YEE SHAN  
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I understand that University will upload softcopy of my dissertation in pdf  
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UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,



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(Goh Yee Shan)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CMIN	Chi-square minimum
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DSM	Differential susceptibility to media effects model
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
ICT	Information and communications technology
MEDC	Malaysian Education Deans' Council
NCPTUP	National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy
NFI	Normed fit index
RMSEA	Root mean square error of approximation
SBS	Sexting behaviour scale
SEM	Structural equation modelling
SPSS	Statistical package for the social sciences
SRH	Sexual reproductive health
U&G	Uses and gratification theory
VIF	Variance inflation factor



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background of the Study

The evolution and advancement of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century provided tremendous opportunities to fulfil people's needs, such as information seeking, entertainment, and sexual gratification. Smartphones have been an important communication tool in achieving these needs. The global smartphone users were 3.5 billion in 2020 (Deyan, 2021). A closer look at the local information and communications technology statistics in 2021 found that Internet, computer, and smartphone usage has exponentially increased among Malaysians aged 15 and above, with 95.5%, 88.3% and, 99.6%, respectively (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022).

Smartphones also enable people to explore their sexuality with just one click in hand. Sexuality exploration can happen in various forms, from initiating virtual relationships with strangers, meeting online, viewing pornography, and sexting (Blais-Lecours et al., 2016; Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Fullwood et al., 2016). Dating applications such as Tinder, Tan Tan, and MeetMe further provide a platform for people to date, hook up, or have sex talk (Elgersma, 2019). In recent years, the media and research have directed researchers' attention towards the phenomenon of sexting.

Sexting is the unification of "sex" and "text". It has been defined as creating, sharing, forwarding, sending, or receiving sexually suggestive messages or nude or semi-nude photos or images through cell phone, smartphone, or the Internet (Dir et al., 2013; Döring, 2014; Ferguson, 2011;

Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Lenhart, 2009; Scholes-Balog et al., 2016; Vanden Abeele et al., 2014). The sexting phenomenon started around the year 2004, which sex messages initially involved the use of cell phones and later smartphones, tablets and phablets (Weiss & Samenow, 2010). The topic of sexting soon captured scholars' attention following the first publication of the Sex and Tech survey (National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy [NCPTUP], 2008) that sought to identify teenagers' and young adults' engagement in sexting. Research on sexting soon emerged in the United States, Australia, and Czech, which investigated different types of sexting and its contents across different cohorts of participants (Cooper et al., 2016; Klettke et al., 2014; Madigan et al., 2018).

Emerging adulthood indicates a developmental period between 18 to 29 years old (Arnett, 2014). Sexting behaviour is getting common among emerging adults, where 53.3% of the mean prevalence was reported in a systematic review (Klettke et al., 2014). Similarly, literature depicted that 66.8% of emerging adults in Spain (Gómez-Guadix et al., 2015) and 82% in Australia (Scholes-Balog et al., 2016) ever sexted with someone. This evidence suggested that sexting behaviour may be more prevalent among emerging adults especially given the widespread dating applications and the COVID-19 pandemic that have restricted offline dating and meeting people.

There is still a lack of consensus in sexting research, whether it is a risky and deviant behaviour or a new form of communication due to the advancement of technology in the digital era. Sexting has its positive and negative consequences, as documented in the literature. For example, the positive aspects of sexting are being sexually aroused, enhancing relationships with partners,

feeling more comfortable expressing love and emotion, and being a safer alternative to replacing real-life sexual activity (Hudson & Marshall, 2018; Lenhart, 2009; Parker et al., 2013). Conversely, sexting also brought severe legal and psychological negative consequences, especially involving minors below 18 years old. For instance, keeping erotic photos can be charged under Section 292 of the Penal Code and Section 5 of the Film Censorship Act 2002, while distributing youth erotic photos can be charged under Section 293 of the Penal Code (Ding & Tan, 2021). Furthermore, because preadolescents and adolescents are vulnerable to blackmail and cyberbullying, engaging in sexting behaviour can be risky and dangerous. (Kopecký, 2012).

In the literature, the association of the consequences of sexting behaviour were made, such as multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, and enhancement of relationships (Hudson & Marshall, 2018; Kosenko et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2013), while the linkage between sexting motive and sexting behaviour remains under study. Motives are also important predictors of behavioural outcomes (Dir et al., 2013; Englander, 2012; Walker et al., 2013). The present study is guided by the uses and gratification theory, which seeks to understand why individuals actively use specific media to satisfy certain needs. Some commonly reported sexting motives in the literature were peer pressure, entertainment, attention-seeking, flirtation, and foreplay (Drouin et al., 2013; Klette et al., 2014; Luo et al., 2011). In the present study, sexting motives include intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure from the scale of sex motive measure (Parker et al., 2012) were used to examine its linkage with sexting behaviour.

In short, this study seeks to determine the level of engagement in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia, which can serve as evidence of their engagement in sexting behaviour in this information age. Examination of the sexting motives provides a better outlook on the reasons emerging adults engage in sexting despite the consequences concluded in the literature. Furthermore, examining the differences and moderating role of gender and relationship status can further extend the understanding of contextual differences when emerging adults involve sexting behaviour.

### **1.1 Problem Statements**

Sexting may be one of the sources of social problems such as humiliation, shame, and blackmail. In Kuala Lumpur, a 20-year-old lady was blackmailed by her ex-boyfriend using the nude images she sent him when they were still in a romantic relationship (Fazaniza, 2018). When sexually-explicit content was mistakenly sent to the wrong people instead of the partner, the sender receive criticism, humiliation and embarrassment (Selvanayagam, 2017). The prevalence rate of sexting behaviour has been the primary focus in the literature in the Western context (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Drouin et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2014). However, the level of engagement in sexting behaviour in the Malaysian context is unknown, and it may cause difficulty in implementing interventions to deal with the issue. Hence, this study seeks to find evidence of the level of engagement in sexting behaviour and to what extent emerging adults are involved in this new form of sexual behaviour.

Furthermore, social issue related to sexuality is becoming rampant. The out-of-wedlock pregnancy, abortion, and baby dumping were familiar headlines

in the news (Said & Bernama, 2019). Statistics revealed that 14 in every 1000 underage females get pregnant yearly. The existing SRH education was still central to the human reproductive system's anatomy, and educators often avoided topics beyond anatomy (Said, 2021). These evidences further depicted that the sexual reproductive health (SRH) education taught at the school was still lacking and inadequate, possibly from the syllabus and attitude of educators. Besides, it is also evident that Malaysian educators are uncomfortable teaching sexual reproductive health in class (Khalaf et al., 2014; Talib et al., 2012). The fast pace of the evolvement of the Internet further exposes individuals to the vast array of chances to explore sexuality. When teenagers engage in sexting behaviour without realizing that it is an act of sexting, they become the victim of cyberbullying when the content goes viral (Holt & Bossler, 2020). Thus, SRH education that over-emphasises the abstinence approach towards sexuality may be insufficient to address the fast pace changes in conveying sexuality online. Therefore, the discussion of sexting and its motives prevent or deter an early onset of sexting behaviour when teenagers are not sexually and psychologically mature yet.

Past studies drew samples from undergraduates (Dir et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2011; Hudson & Marshall, 2016; 2018), while some included samples from a wider age range (Currin et al., 2016; Wysocki & Childers, 2011). Additionally, social scientists in Malaysia did not frequently use the term emerging adult as they preferred other existing terms such as youth or young adult (Côté & Bynner, 2008). However, there is an overlap in the age range of youth defined in Malaysia as individuals aged 15 to 30 years old. Wider et al. (2015) suggested the need to examine emerging adults in the Malaysian context,

as the period of emerging adulthood is not universal. In short, studies focusing only on undergraduate samples limited the broader population's understanding, while studies including a wider age range may overlook the issues in the specific developmental period. Thus, studies focusing on emerging adulthood are needed to address the limitation mentioned above, and findings may bridge the gap in understanding the developmental theory of emerging adulthood, particularly in the Malaysian context.

In 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 has escalated the phenomenon of sexting. Many countries, by early April 2020, were in a lockdown state. People were spending more time at home, specifically in front of the screen. This may be due to working and studying at home becoming routine when Malaysia started the Movement Control Order (MCO) in the mid of March (Tang, 2020). The implementation of MCO emphasized social distancing, in which in-person social interaction, intimate contact, and human touch were restricted. Couples in long-distance relationships have difficulties meeting each other (Bianchi et al., 2021). Under these circumstances, sexting becomes an alternative for people to fulfil their sexual gratification (Iovine, 2020). The frequency of sexting rose in the United States during quarantine as people communicated their sexual desire through online platforms (Peck, 2020). Maintaining sexual intimacy was common among couples (Scholes-Balog et al., 2016). However, no study to date has examined the relationship status differences in sexting behaviour in Malaysia. Therefore, examining the differences in relationship status can provide localized evidence of sexting behaviour across different relationship statuses.



Despite plenty of negative consequences portrayed in the local newspaper, such as blackmail (Fazaniza, 2018; Yeap, 2018), sexting behaviour is increasingly popular. A search from various databases, namely PubMed and PsycINFO, found only four studies on sexting behaviour in Malaysia. Among the four studies, Rosli et al. (2010) examined sexting behaviour from a legal perspective, Nor et al. (2015) investigated the definition of sexting behaviour from adolescents using a qualitative approach, Soon et al. (2019) examined sexting behaviour as part of cybersafety comparing between Malaysia and Thailand, and Suzen et al. (2017) only focused the samples in Pontian, a town in Johor Bahru. Although sexting behaviour remains prevalent according to the local newspaper and literature, no prior local research has examined the motives of such behaviour. The sexual reproductive health programme that prioritises abstinence may not be comprehensive without considering the motives that encourage individuals to sext. Thus, examining the sexting motives provides a broader picture and statistical evidence of such behaviour.

Moreover, inconsistencies in gender differences found in sexting behaviour were shown in systematic reviews (Cooper et al., 2016; Klette et al., 2014). Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) found no gender difference. However, Englander (2012) found that females were more likely to engage in sexting when pressured. On the other hand, Walker et al. (2013) study showed that males sexted due to peer pressure when masculinity was being challenged. The results mentioned showed that the extent to which gender differences in sexting behaviour remain unclear. Hence, there is a need to examine the gender difference in Malaysia to fill in the knowledge gap.

The research on this sexting behaviour still lacks a consistent scale to assess sexting behaviour. Studies often applied self-developed instruments which were lack of or sometimes did not report the psychometrics properties of the instruments (Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Gordon-Messer, 2013; Henderson, 2011; Scholes-Balog et al., 2016; Temple et al., 2012; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Additionally, some instruments used were insensitive to capture the complexities of sexting behaviour as those only consisted of a single item. These issues were addressed in the limitations of the respective studies (Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Henderson, 2011; Scholes-Balog et al., 2016). Although validating the psychometrics properties was not the focus of the present study, limitations addressed earlier can be minimized using instruments used in other studies with at least reliability and validity reported in the studies.

In short, prevalence rate and individual characteristics have been the primary focus in the past literature in the Western context (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Drouin et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2014) and thus leaving a significant knowledge gap on the motives of sexting behaviour (Cooper et al., 2016). The gender and relationship status differences in sexting behaviour were frequently examined (Dir et al., 2013; Henderson, 2011; Klettke et al., 2014). However, the results found remain inconsistent, which may give rise to the importance of the present study to examine the differences.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

In light of the problems identified, seven research objectives were established that served to guide the researcher in conducting the study were as followed:

1. To identify the level of engagement in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.
2. To investigate whether sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) have a relationship with sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.
3. To determine the gender differences in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.
4. To determine the relationship status differences in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.
5. To determine the sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) of emerging adults engaging in sexting behaviour in Malaysia.
6. To determine the moderating role of gender between sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.
7. To determine the moderating role of relationship status between sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on the research objectives, the research questions were established to conduct the study.

1. What is the level of engagement in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

2. Do sexting motives each has a relationship with sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?
3. Is there any gender differences in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?
4. Is there any relationship status differences in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?
5. What are the sexting motives of emerging adults engaging in sexting behaviour in Malaysia?
6. Does gender moderate the relationship between sexting motives and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?
7. Does relationship status moderate the relationship between sexting motives and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

#### **1.4 Hypotheses**

Based on the research objectives, the respective hypotheses were established to conduct the study.

Research Question 2: Do sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) each has a relationship with sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no relationship between intimacy and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no relationship between enhancement and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no relationship between self-affirmation and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no relationship between coping and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>05</sub>: There is no relationship between peer pressure and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

Research Question 3: Is there any gender differences in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

H<sub>07</sub>: There is no gender differences in sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

Research Question 4: Is there any differences in relationship status on sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

H<sub>08</sub>: There is no differences in relationship status on sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

Research Question 6: Does gender moderate the relationship between sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

H<sub>09</sub>: Gender does not moderate the effect between intimacy and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>010</sub>: Gender does not moderate the effect between enhancement and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>011</sub>: Gender does not moderate the effect between self-affirmation and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>o12</sub>: Gender does not moderate the effect between coping and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>o13</sub>: Gender does not moderate the effect between peer-pressure and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

Research Question 7: Does relationship status moderate the relationship between sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia?

H<sub>o14</sub>: Relationship status does not moderate the effect between intimacy and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>o15</sub>: Relationship status does not moderate the effect between enhancement and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>o16</sub>: Relationship status does not moderate the effect between self-affirmation and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>o17</sub>: Relationship status does not moderate the effect between coping and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

H<sub>o18</sub>: Relationship status does not moderate the effect between peer pressure and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

## **1.5 Significance of Study**

Firstly, the study is important in terms of knowledge contribution. There were limited local studies that documented emerging adults' sexting behaviour. Thus, the findings of this study can extend but are not limited to our understanding of sexting as part of sexual behaviour and new sexual media

behaviour. The term “sexting” can be relatively new to many people. They may not even be aware that sending sexually-explicit content is a form of sexting. Thus, on the micro level, answering the questionnaire can provide insight into what sexting means.

Secondly, examining the level of engagement in sexting behaviour is important as this preliminary evidence informs researchers, healthcare providers, and policy makers about the burgeoning of sexting behaviour that needs attention. With the data showing that sexting happens within the community, more research is to be carried out to provide a more comprehensive outlook on sexting in Malaysia. Additionally, healthcare providers can be more aware of sexting behaviour, mainly when dealing with relational and marital conflicts during counselling sessions.

Thirdly, this study offers insights into the sexting motives of emerging adults. The calls for research to address the consequences of sexting assumes that when people understand the adverse effect of sexting, they will not engage in such behaviour. Such a premise overlooked that knowledge does not necessarily result in behaviour and fails to examine the underlying motives. If there is a change in sexting behaviour, either encouraging or discouraging, then understanding where the motives originate from would help explain the reasons for such changes.

Moreover, studying sexting behaviour is crucial in breaking the stereotype that sexual-related topics are taboo. The depiction of sexuality in the mass media is often meant to exploit and entertain but not inform or provide educational messages regarding sexuality. Educators were found to teach sexual

reproductive health education vaguely (Said, 2021; Talib et al., 2012). This may suggest that even if educators, parents, and peers are aware of the phenomena of sexting, they may not address this issue in their daily life. It is crucial to break this taboo and discuss sexting, just like how human anatomy is discussed. When people can discuss sexting more openly, they may be more cautious and make wise decisions when sexting with someone. For instance, knowing the boundary of what to send and what not to send (e.g., nude photos).

The finding of the study may also be extended to past literature by examining the moderating role of gender and relationship status. These two moderating variables may enhance our understanding of under what context sexting behaviour is prone to happen. With this evidence, intervention and prevention programmes dealing with sexting can be modified and tailored to the two circumstances accordingly.

## **1.6 Definitions of Terms**

### ***1.6.1 Emerging Adults***

Conceptual definition: Emerging adults are aged 18 to 29 (Arnett et al., 2014). Emerging adulthood falls into the developmental period between late adolescence and young adulthood, often marked by substantial life changes (e.g., tertiary education, working, marriage) (Arnett et al., 2014).

Operational definition: Emerging adults in the present study refer to any individuals in the age range from 18 to 29 years old.



### ***1.6.2 Sexting Behaviour***

Conceptual definition: Sexting behaviour is defined as receiving, sending, sharing, or forwarding sexually suggestive content, which includes text, photos, and video via cell phones, mobile phones, or instant messaging (Badenhorst, 2011; Ferguson, 2011; Gordon-Messer, 2013; NCPTUP, 2008)

Operational definition: Sexting behaviour refers to receiving, sending, and posting sexually suggestive content, which includes nude or semi-nude photos, videos, and suggestive text messages via smartphone or the Internet. Sexting behaviour was measured using the sexting behaviour scale (Dir et al., 2013). A higher mean score indicates a greater frequency of sexting behaviour.

### ***1.6.3 Sexting Motive***

Conceptual definition: Sexting motive is the reasons and intentions people engage in sexting behaviour (Henderson, 2011; Kopecký, 2012).

Operational definition: Sexting motive was reflected in the participant's score on the adapted sex motive scale (Cooper et al., 1998; Parker et al., 2012). A higher mean score indicates a greater inclination of the motive to sext.

### ***1.6.4 Gender***

Conceptual definition: Gender indicates a set of roles, behaviour, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.).

Operational definition: Participants who self-identified as male or female.

### ***1.6.5 Relationship Status***

Conceptual definition: Relationship status is individuals in a relationship or married (Scholes-Balog et al., 2013).

Operational definition: Relationship status is classified as single and in a relationship. It was determined in the background information section by asking the participant to identify themselves as single, in-relationship, and others.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter comprehensively explained the variables and theories used in the study. In this study, sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure), sexting behaviour, gender and relationship status differences, the moderating role of gender and relationship status, theoretical and conceptual framework were discussed in this chapter.

#### 2.1 Sexting Behaviour

Sexting is operationally defined as receiving, sending, and posting sexually suggestive content, including nude or semi-nude photos, videos, and suggestive text messages via smartphone or the Internet (Scholes-Balog et al., 2016; Vanden Abeele et al., 2014). However, the definition of sexting behaviour varies according to different studies and terminology. Some researchers define sexting behaviour as an act of sending sexually-explicit content only (NCPTUP, 2008; Temple et al., 2012; Walrave et al., 2015), while some also include receiving, forwarding, sharing, and posting the sexually-explicit contents (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kopecký, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012). Individuals who are the receivers or forwarders of sexting may not necessarily engage in sending as they passively engage in sexting. The inconsistencies in the definition of sexting yielded the prevalence rate of this phenomenon to range from 0.9% to 60% (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017).

Furthermore, past studies reported various mediums and platforms to engage in sexting behaviour. Cell phones and laptops were the main mediums during the last decade when sexting became the research interest among scholars (Lenhart, 2009; NCPTUP, 2008). However, with the popularization and availability of smartphones at various prices, people were more affordable, making sexting more convenient. This is further proven by the emergence of dating applications such as Snapchat, Tinder, and Grindr, which provide platforms for the growth of sexting behaviour (Pitti, 2019). For instance, Snapchat has its unique function whereby pictures and videos sent will be deleted automatically after viewing (Poltash, 2013). This function further makes Snapchat a growing ground for sexting as users assume the posted content (e.g., nude or semi-nude images) remains private and confidential (Colao, 2012; Thompson, 2017). In addition, some top dating applications for hooking up or sexting were also popular, namely Tinder, Kik, Hot or Not, Yubo, and MeetMe (Hurtado, 2020). Overall, information and communications technology (ICT) services enable users to easily send text messages, photos, and videos.

The study on sexting began in the United States by NCPTUP (2008) on the prevalence of sexting among 1,280 teenagers and young adults. The result showed that 20% of teenagers and 33% of young adults have sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos of themselves online. The rate was even higher when 39% of teenagers and 59% of young adults sent sexually suggestive texts (e.g., messages and emails) (NCPTUP, 2008). Similarly, Lenhart (2009) reported a somewhat lower rate of sexting behaviour among teenagers, in which 8% of 17 years old teenagers ever sent sexually-explicit photos compared to 4% of those

aged 12 years old. This implied that individuals might start to sext from a less arousing text form to a more arousing form where they exchange photos.

Additionally, in receiving sexually-explicit content, 30% of older teenagers aged 17 were more likely to receive photos or videos than only 4% of younger teenagers aged 12 years old (Lenhart, 2009). There were also more young adults (64%) than teenagers (48%) who reported receiving sexually suggestive messages (NCPTUP, 2008). Teenagers and young adults also feel that engagement in sexting behaviour makes hooking up or dating easier. Both studies demonstrated that the frequency of sexting increases as people age, and participants were more likely to be receivers than senders. Hence, examining emerging adults in the present study is important as literature reported a higher prevalence rate of sexting behaviour among emerging adults (Mori et al., 2020).

Furthermore, several studies also proved that sexting emerged as a new means of conveying one's sexuality (Henderson, 2011; Lenhart, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011, 2013). These findings suggested that sexting provided users with a more comfortable sexual experience. In short, it is important to examine sexting behaviour as it emerged as a new form of digital communication in this technological era. Examination of this topic is also vital as the study in the Malaysian context is limited to a few published studies that provide a limited scope of understanding of sexting behaviour (Rosli et al., 2010; Soon et al., 2019).

## **2.2 Sexting Motive**

Individuals have various motives for Internet use (Nijjer & Raj, 2020), and this study focused on sexting motives. Sexting motives are the underlying reasons emerging adults engage in sexting behaviour. Likewise, the uses and gratification (U&G) theory employed in the present study also examines why people selectively choose and actively use media to fulfil their needs derived from media. Additionally, Strassberg et al. (2013) stressed the need to explore individuals' motives in sexting behaviour, while Ruggiero (2000) suggested the importance of examining the motivation from the audience's perspective (Ruggiero, 2000). There were several motives proposed in the past literature.

### ***2.2.1 Sexting Motive (Intimacy) and Sexting Behaviour***

Intimacy motive indicates the retention of relational bonds with others, particularly in a sexual relationship (Cooper et al., 1998). A commonly reported intimacy motive was flirtation. This is prevalent in the focus group discussion among American teenagers aged 12 to 17 years old (Lenhart, 2009), a survey of 947 high school students (age 13-19) (Reed et al., 2020), young adults in a mixed-method study (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014), 72% and 70% of young adult men and women, respectively (NCPTUP, 2008), and two-third participants from 468 undergraduates from Idaho, U.S. age 18-30 years old (Henderson, 2011). Flirting with a potential partner was also perceived as a strategy to receive reciprocated sexually-explicit content in which one of the parties hopes to develop an intimate relationship (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). Similarly, when sexting was examined among college students across different partners (i.e.,

committed, casual, and cheating partners), flirting with someone also emerged as the primary motive to sext (Drouin et al., 2013).

Additionally, people seeking sexual experiences will turn to sexting behaviour (O'Sullivan, 2014). When individuals are sexually inactive and are too afraid to have intimate face-to-face contact with their partners, sexting behaviour becomes a form of sexual experimentation where they can express their sexual thoughts freely, which is common among young adults (Yeung et al., 2014) and adolescents (Dir et al., 2013; Lenhart, 2009). Additionally, adults in a relationship also seek to enhance intimacy, which encourages them to sext, as depicted in Parker et al.'s (2013) study on 86 romantic relationship couples. More young adults engage in sexting to improve their intimacy and passion with partners compared to adolescents (Bianchi et al., 2019). In short, when individuals want to develop an intimate relationship with others, they will resort to sexting behaviour.

### ***2.2.2 Sexting Motive (Enhancement) and Sexting Behaviour***

The enhancement motive indicates the desire to seek contentment and enjoyment in sexual activity (Cooper et al., 1998). A study in China depicted that entertainment and aesthetic use of social networking sites (SNS) significantly correlate with SNS usage (Chen, 2012). When people feel bored, they will sext to make them feel pleasurable (Hudson & Marshall, 2016; Kopecký, 2012). Similarly, undergraduates who seek entertainment will turn to sexting, which eventually makes them feel sexually aroused (Hudson & Marshall, 2018). It is also possible that sexting brings a similar pleasurable and

arousal effect of foreplay that further prompts them to sext (Hudson & Marshall, 2018).

Similarly, females exchange semi-nude photos of themselves in a bikini as they enjoy the appraisal of their good body figure (Burkett, 2015). In fact, females do not perceive such images as sexual, but they enjoy looking at those aesthetically pleasing photos (Burkett, 2015). In short, the advent of technology has made the source of enhancement more convenient. People can quickly obtain pleasure, relaxation, and enjoyment with just a few clicks over smartphones.

### ***2.2.3 Sexting Motive (Self-affirmation) and Sexting Behaviour***

Self-affirmation indicates the need to affirm one's sense of attractiveness (Cooper et al., 1998). In this case, sexting behaviour served as a reassurance-seeking behaviour where internal tension of relational insecurity can be alleviated via exchanging the sexually-explicit content (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). When females comply with their partners' requests to send sexually explicit content, they tend to rationalize the negative consequences as they love their partners (García-Gómez, 2017). When they received compliments from partners (e.g., you looked sexy), they justified sexting as a way of self-affirmation (e.g., it makes me feel sexy). Hence, the constant affirmation of one's self-value from sexting may prompt them to continue this behaviour.

The study correlating self-affirmation and sexting behaviour is limited, but it has been discussed concerning body image satisfaction. When females



internalize and accept the cultural definition of ideal body image, they experience disturbance (Bergstrom et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that the self-affirmation of one's body satisfaction varies across cultures. Individuals may seek appraisals by sending their sexually-explicit content to prove their attractiveness.

#### ***2.2.4 Sexting Motive (Coping) and Sexting Behaviour***

Coping is the motive to deal with or avoid negative emotions (Cooper et al., 1998). During the pandemic, more people experienced issues in psychological health such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, social isolation, and psychological distress (Violant-Holz et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Early findings during the pandemic lockdown showed that people turned to online sexual activities such as pornography (Zattoni et al., 2021) and dating applications use (Ting & McLachlan, 2022), which helped alleviate and overcome the stress (Garfin, 2020).

A similar phenomenon is also shown in sexting. A study among Italian emerging adults showed that they cope with pandemic-related stress, where they seek affection and support virtually through sexting behaviour (Bianchi et al., 2021). Another qualitative study further depicted that sexting served to reduce the perceived distance when individuals were physically apart during the quarantine (Caponnetto et al., 2022). This evidence showed that sexting can be a resourceful coping strategy between individuals. Despite the literature depicting that people cope with their negative emotional state via sexting, it was

hitherto unknown whether such motive remains prominent among Malaysian emerging adults.

### ***2.2.5 Sexting Motive (Peer Pressure) and Sexting Behaviour***

Peer pressure is the motive where individuals seek relational maintenance and approval from their peers (Cooper et al., 1998). Qualitative studies have highlighted the importance of peer pressure in understanding sexting behaviour (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2012). Males feel the pressure to sext where collection and distribution of the sexually-explicit content are used to gain and display their social status among peers (Lenhart, 2009; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Vaden Abelee et al., 2014; Walrave et al., 2015). For females, sexting was driven by the need to gain approval among same-sex peers when they had a poor peer relationship, as sexting behaviour subsequently helped boost their popularity (Vaden Abelee et al., 2014).

Additionally, females were more likely to receive peer pressure and even threats from a male to sext (Englander, 2012; NCPTUP, 2008) compared to males. For instance, teenagers (Lenhart, 2009; Walrave et al., 2015) and undergraduates (Henderson, 2011) reported social pressure as one reason they sexted. It is also evidenced that among 617 freshmen from Massachusetts who were grouped into pressured and non-pressure sexters, peer-pressured emerged as the second-highest reported reason to sext (Englander, 2012). Thus, peer influence remained remarkable during emerging adulthood, where they shared relational bonds with others while transitioning to adulthood (Guarnieri et al.,

2015). In short, peer pressure remained as one of the motives why people sext. Therefore, the present study examined peer pressure in the local context to determine if peer pressure predicts sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.

### **2.3 Gender Difference in Sexting Behaviour**

Gender difference happens in society at different levels, such as in nations, occupations, and education. As a result, gender has been a critical variable being studied in relation to sexting behaviour (Dir et al., 2013; Ringrose et al., 2012; Sakaluk et al., 2014). Although past studies have concluded that sexting behaviour is highly gendered, the inconsistencies in the result remain prominent.

A London qualitative study with 35 young people (aged 11-16) showed that the gendered double standard exists where people were judged differently for engaging in sexting behaviour (Ringrose et al., 2012). Females were commonly blamed and described disrespecting themselves for sending nude or semi-nude photos. In contrast, males posting topless “six-pack” photos was socially acceptable. Although the qualitative study provides an in-depth understanding of sexting behaviour, the generalizability of gender differences is limited. Additionally, a study on 697 undergraduate students in Midwestern Texas showed significant differences where males reported greater sexting intention as reflected in items such as “if they trusted the receiver”, “if they found the right person”, and “if they were married” (Hudson et al., 2014). Males

were also significantly more likely to send sexually-explicit content than females (Hudson, 2011; Husdon & Marshall, 2016).

In contrast, Henderson (2011) assessed sexting behaviour among undergraduate students and showed no significant difference in gender between individuals sending nude or semi-nude photos and those who send sexually-explicit text messages. Similarly, Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) also reported no significant differences in gender found between males and females. Hinduja and Patchin's (2010) review of four national studies in the US on youth found that males and females were equally likely to send nude or semi-nude images of themselves.

A closer look at a local study of gender differences found that males tend to engage more than females in sexting behaviour (Suzen et al., 2017). However, the explanation of gender differences in sexting behaviour in the study remains vague, where the differences found were not explained based on contextual differences. Furthermore, statistical evidence of gender differences in Suzen et al.'s (2017) study depicted that males sexted more than females. However, the samples were only drawn from a small coastal town, Pontian, in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. This further limited the generalizability to the bigger population and may be biased. In short, the present study needs to examine gender differences in sexting behaviour to validate further if a similar result can be obtained in the Malaysian context.

## **2.4 Relationship Status Differences in Sexting Behaviour**

The active sender or recipient of sexting content varies in their relationship status. It can be a single individual initiated sexting aiming for a hook-up or to date the other. This is evidenced by the interview carried out by Lenhart (2009) that revealed a male during high school sent his naked photo to a female as a hint to hook up. Similarly, teenagers were more likely to participate in sexting behaviour when dating someone (Temple et al., 2012) as they hoped to initiate a sexual relationship. Garcia et al. (2016) examined 5,805 singles and found that 21.1% and 15.5% ever sent sexually-explicit texts and sexy photos of themselves, respectively. However, the sample's age drawn in this study ranged from 21 to 75 years old, crossing several developmental periods.

Sexting behaviour is also common among people in romantic relationships (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011), which serves as a relationship maintenance activity. Individuals who were dating, in a serious relationship, and cohabitating had a greater tendency to sext (Dir et al., 2013; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Drouin and Landgraff (2012) further found that one out of three college students engaged in this behaviour with partners. Other than romantic relationships, Drouin et al. (2013) also illustrated that sexting happened in casual (e.g., hook-up or flirting) and cheating sex partners. Married couples also engaged in sexting (McDaniel & Drouin, 2015; Parker et al., 2013; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Scholes-Balog et al. (2016) further claimed that being in a relationship emerged as a significant predictor for sexting behaviour compared to single individuals.

Furthermore, young couples in loving and long-term relationships were found to engage in various sexual activities (e.g., oral and anal sex) more than couples in short-term relationships (Kaestle & Halpern 2007). Sexting behaviour is useful for couples' sexual expression, which they may not be comfortable asking in person (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). Thus, this evidence may suggest that sexting may be an initial step to initiating sexual behaviour within a romantic relationship context. Sexting may be a popular sexual communication tool to convey sexual desire.

Similarly, individuals mostly send the sexually-explicit content to their partners, followed by someone they dated or hooked up with and finally to someone they knew online (Henderson, 2011). However, Henderson (2011) did not specify the participants' relationship status. Drouin et al. (2013) revealed that more participants sexted with their committed partners instead of casual sex and cheating partner. Hudson et al. (2014) examined 697 undergraduates and found a significant difference between undergraduates in casual dating and committed to a serious relationship towards sexting behaviour. This evidence implied that engagement in sexting behaviour might be varied across different relationship statuses. In short, given the inconsistent result illustrated in the literature, the present study seeks to examine the differences in relationship status among emerging adults to provide a more comprehensive outlook on how different relationship statuses differ in their sexting behaviour.

## **2.5 Moderating Role of Gender on Sexting Motive and Sexting**

### **Behaviour**

Understanding sexting motives on sexting behaviour will not be completed without examining the moderating role of gender. Studies on sexuality have demonstrated that gender as a moderator further explains how specific behaviour differs between males and females (Karakurt & Silver, 2013; Kincaid, 2012; Kisler & Scott Christopher, 2008). Based on the systematic review conducted by Petersen and Hyde (2010) on gender differences in sexuality from 1993 - 2007, the study depicted that males were more likely to engage in sexual activities such as masturbation, pornography consumption, and casual sex compared to females. A qualitative study in Melbourne with 33 young people aged 15 to 20 suggested that sexting behaviour is influenced by gender dynamics, whereby males sext under peer pressure when their status or masculinity is challenged (Walker et al., 2013). For males, the evidence of them engaging in sexting with same-sex peers is considered part of homosociality (Flood, 2008), the social bond that maintains a same-sex relationship that is not sexual in nature (Bird, 1996). Although sexually-explicit photos of males found were relatively low, cases occurred whereby males have their photos on genitals sent to girls as a motive to coerce girls to send them in return. This serves as another form of pressure females' experience. Walker et al. (2013) further concluded that sexting is not gender-neutral but is influenced by gender dynamics.

Moreover, a quantitative study on 617 freshmen in Massachusetts found a significant gender difference where females sexted under pressure, such as being blackmailed or threatened by their partners (Englander, 2012). Similarly,

a study on 1,280 teenagers and young adults reported that more teenage girls (51%) than boys (18%) cited pressure from the opposite gender as the reason to involve in sexting behaviour (NCPTUP, 2008). These implied that different motives drive males and females to sext.

The conflicting evidence on gender differences and less acknowledgement of gender as a potential moderator created a need for additional research. Studies of sexting motives on sexting behaviour as moderated by gender also remain scarce. Therefore, it is plausible to expect that gender would facilitate the link between sexting motive and sexting behaviour. The finding on the moderator further provides essential input for implementing sex intervention and education as it enhances our understanding of contextual differences.

## **2.6 Moderating Role of Relationship Status on Sexting Motive and Sexting Behaviour**

Sexting behaviour is also part of the experimental stage for people who are not sexually active yet, whereas it is considered part of a sexual relationship when couples are in a romantic relationship (Lenhart, 2009). Interestingly, qualitative studies (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014; Walker et al., 2013) pointed out that sexting behaviour helped maintain long-distance relationship and enhance intimacy among couples despite physical separation. This further suggested that sexting motives vary according to the relationship status of an individual.

Moreover, a mixed-method study by Sakaluk et al. (2014) found that individuals in a relationship versus singles can have a huge difference in the



sexting context. For example, single females who appeared sexually were often being judged negatively. In contrast, once females engage in a relationship, they can behave sexually and will not be judged negatively (Sakaluk et al., 2014). The qualitative finding of this study clearly illustrated that relationship status does matter in relation to the respective motive in sexual behaviour, which may suggest that it may also play a role in sexting behaviour.

Furthermore, Drouin et al. (2013) also pointed out the need to examine individuals in different relationship statuses as it may influence the sexting motive on sexting behaviour. While sexting motives are linked to sexting behaviour, little is known about the moderating role of relationship status between the two variables. Past studies investigated samples in serious and casual relationships while assessing the relationship status of single and in a relationship remains scarce. Drouin and Landgraff (2012) also mentioned the need to examine sexting behaviour within different types of relationships. Thus, determining the moderating role of relationship status between sexting motive and sexting behaviour may provide a more holistic understanding of this issue and bridge this knowledge gap in the Malaysian context.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

The present study is guided by the uses and gratification theory (U&G) and differential susceptibility to media effects model (DSMM). The U&G is used to explain the motives, while DSMM supports the contexts where people sexted. Both theories were derived from media studies.

### ***2.7.1 Uses and Gratification Theory***

Over the past decades, the innovation of technology has transformed social communication into computer-mediated communication (CMC), enabling people to stay constant and connected regardless of distance via technological devices (Drouin et al., 2014). One theory closely associated with CMC is the uses and gratification theory (U&G; Katz et al., 1973). The application of U&G theory was evidenced in various types of CMC, such as radio (Ferguson et al., 2007; Finn, 1997), television (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979; Pittman & Sheehan, 2015; Rubin, 1983, 2009), and the Internet (Luo et al., 2011). However, studies using the U&G have shifted the focus to the motivation of using the latest technology, especially social media (Gallego et al., 2016; Muhammad, 2018).

U&G theory examines what people do with the media and how media influence the users (Ruggiero, 2000). From this perspective, U&G theory guides and explains how and why specific needs are met with the active use of media and the purpose of media usage to satisfy the audience's needs (McQuail, 2010). This approach assumes that audiences are active users in the media selection, audiences' former media experiences help make motivated choices, and audiences use media to satisfy daily needs (Livaditi et al., 2003). In the present study, individuals have different sexting motives to meet their needs. Some of the needs being fulfilled can be affective (connected to media use emotionally), cognitive (gained new insight), integrative (maintaining relational bond with others) and escapist (disconnect from reality tentatively) (Katz et al., 1973). However, the present study only focusses on the path from motive to

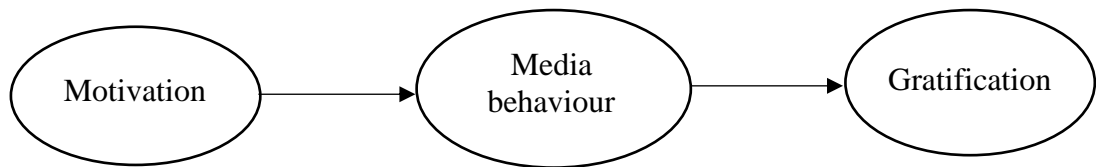
behavioural usage. Thus, the path from behavioural usage to gratification will not be discussed in detail.

Based on U&G theory, McQuail (2010) provided examples of the motives in media use, such as entertainment, integration and social interaction. When audiences sought to escape from reality or try to relax, they are motivated to use media to entertain themselves. For instance, the enhancement motive in the present study is similar to the entertainment motive (McQuail, 2010). In this case, when individuals desired for sexual pleasure and arousal, they turned to sexting (Hudson & Marshall, 2018). Additionally, the peer pressure motive also shared some similarity with the integration and social interaction motives coined by McQuail (2010). For example, Malaysians live in a collectivist culture where maintaining a harmonious social relations is crucial in daily life (Zahra et al., 2018). Therefore, when individuals seek to maintain a social bond with peers, they tend to conform to what their peers do (Englander, 2012). In this case, engaging in sexting behaviour makes them have a common topic as the in-group members.

The application of U&G theory is evidenced in the literature explaining the purpose and practice of sexting behaviour (Hudson & Marshall, 2018; Ukwueze & Abaneme, 2021; Yu & Zheng, 2020). The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1. The present study will only focus on linking motivations to sexting behaviour.

**Figure 1**

The Theoretical Framework of Uses and Gratification Theory



### ***2.7.2 Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM)***

The differential susceptibility to media effects model (DSMM) is an integrative model for understanding media effects (Valkenberg & Peter, 2013). DSMM explained the three types of susceptibility to media effects: dispositional, developmental, and social susceptibility. In addition, this model operates on three assumptions: why some individuals are highly susceptible to media effects than others, how and why media influence those individuals, and how media effects can be enhanced or counteracted. DSMM also consisted of five global features: conditional media effects, media use as a mediator, media response states as mediators, media effects as mediators, and transactional media effects. However, the present study will only focus on the conditional media effects in explaining the two moderators in the study. Previously, the usage of DSMM has been focused on media such as television (Riddle et al., 2018) and video games (Milani et al., 2020). However, with the ease of the Internet in exploring sexuality, a further study testing the DSMM in relation to sexuality is crucial as people have shifted their exploration of sexuality from the traditional media (e.g., television and magazine) to new media (e.g., social networking sites).

**2.7.2.1 Conditional Media Effects.** Media effects on cognitions, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, physiology, and behaviour may be influenced by individual factors (e.g., gender and developmental level) and social-context variables (e.g., social relation). These variables are considered moderators when they modify the strength and direction of the outcome variables. Conditional media effects help to extend our understanding of individual and social context factors that can be considered potential moderators. However, the details of which variables can be integrated into the study as moderators are still yet to be tested.

**2.7.2.2 Three Types of Susceptibility.** The DSMM conceptualized three broad types of conditional variables. These variables are also known as differential susceptibility variables, which include dispositional, developmental, and social. The present study focused on dispositional and social susceptibility only as developmental susceptibility highly rely on early development experience. Dispositional susceptibility is a personal dimension that predisposes the selection and responsiveness of media use, such as gender, motivation, and mood. Additionally, social susceptibility includes social context factors that influence media use and responsiveness. These social factors may act on micro-level (interpersonal context, e.g., family and friends). For instance, on the micro-level, when one's peer actively engages in sexting behaviour, the individual may also consider it is normal to do so (Lenhart, 2009). Thus, gender as a dispositional susceptibility and relationship status as social susceptibility will be tested as the moderators in the relations of sexting behaviour.

While both U&G and DSMM focus on discussing media use, DSMM combines several media research theories. Unlike U&G, DSMM considered the

moderators and in the model, which provides the contextual differences of the phenomenon being examined, in this case, the sexting behaviour. The research over past 10 years on sexting behaviour is central to its correlation with demographic variables and the consequences experienced across different cohorts. Studies on gender and relationship status differences were also observed despite yielding mixed results. Hence, using U&G and DSMM, the present study seeks to move beyond the descriptive interpretation of sexting behaviour but focuses on the underlying motives people sexted. The differences in gender and relationship status were also tested. The moderating role of gender and relationship status was considered to determine if the mixed results of the differences in gender and relationship status in the literature could be better explained by the moderators.

## **2.8 Conceptual Framework**

The present study aimed to examine sexting motives on sexting behaviour. The conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 2. This study consisted of five sexting motives: intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure. Gender and relationship status were two potential moderating variables affecting the strength of relationships between sexting motives and sexting behaviour. Age is set as the control variable. These five motives were hypothesised to predict sexting behaviour. Additionally, the study proposed that the path from sexting motives to sexting behaviour is moderated by gender and relationship status. The literature review earlier consisted of the

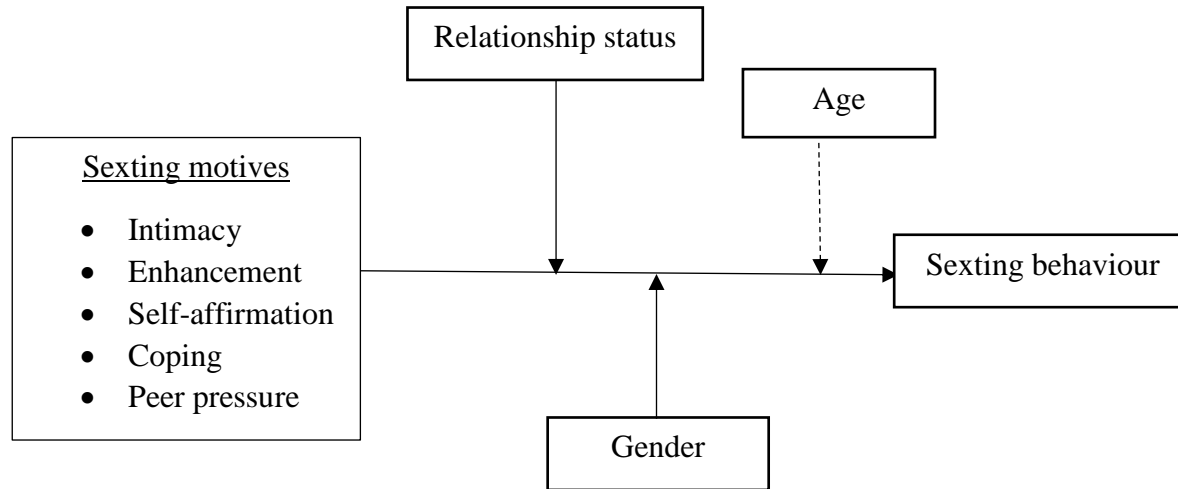
sixth motive being partner approval. However, partner approval was excluded from the present study as this motive may not apply to singles.

Both U&G and DSMM have been used in the Western contexts to examine the media uses but not in the Eastern contexts. Specifically, studies of sexting in the Eastern context often pathologize the usage, such as leading to the distribution of child pornography (Rosli et al., 2010) and cyberbullying (Balakrishnan, 2015). The participants also hold a more conservative value towards sexting despite the advancement of technology (Alimen & Alimen, 2011). Therefore, the sexting studies remained central on the demographic and descriptive findings in Malaysia (Nor et al., 2015; Suzen et al., 2017). In short, studies of sexting in the Eastern context lack a theoretical grounding and remain superficial findings towards this behaviour. Thus, the guidance from the U&G and DSMM theories offers a broader explanation of the study's significance and validity.

In short, H<sub>01</sub> to H<sub>08</sub> is supported by the U&G theory, illustrated by the linkage from sexting motives to sexting behaviour discussing the correlation between these two variables. Meanwhile, H<sub>09</sub> to H<sub>18</sub> is supported by DSMM discussing the moderating roles of gender and relationship status.

**Figure 2**

*Proposed Conceptual Framework of Sexting Motives, Sexting Behaviour, Gender, and Relationship Status as the Moderating Variables*



*Note.* The dotted line indicates controlling effect on sextig behaviour.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter discussed the methods and procedure for data collection to achieve the objective of the present study. The methodology explained the detail of how the study was conducted. The following sections discussed the research design, location of study and research population, sampling, research procedure, instruments, pilot test, and data analysing.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The quantitative study design was used in the study. This research design utilized instruments and proceeded with subsequent analysis using statistical procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the cross-sectional study was used whereby data collection within a certain sample was carried out at one point of time. A correlational study was used to study the association between variables in the study. The online questionnaire was distributed using the online software named Qualtrics.

#### **3.2 Location of Study and Research Population**

The location of the study is Malaysia. Malaysia is located in Southeast Asia, consisting of two regions, namely Peninsular (West) and East Malaysia (Oii et al., 2020). However, the data collection was carried out by circulating the questionnaire on online platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This

study focused on emerging adults aged from 18 to 29 years old. Sexting behaviour has increased as one ages, as reported in the systematic review (Madigan et al., 2018) and was more prevalent among emerging adults (Mori et al., 2020). This may be due to individuals of this age having more financial capability. Moreover, they have greater autonomy on smartphone usage and activities without strict parental supervision on online content and activities. Drouin et al. (2013) also recommended that future studies on sexting should move beyond the undergraduate sample and the target sample of this study fulfils this recommendation. Hence, this study recruited emerging adults in Malaysia aged ranging from 18 to 29 years old.

### **3.3 Sampling Size and Sampling Method**

Sampling size was determined using the subject-to-variables ratio, 30:1, proposed by Pedhazur (1997). This sampling size calculation is commonly used in studies where prediction and multiple regression are required to answer the research question (Nimon & Reio, 2011; Osborne, 2000). There are six variables in the present study, including five subscales from sexting motive (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, peer pressure) and one dependent variable, sexting behaviour. Thus, the sample size needed will be 180. After considering the possibility of incomplete responses, an additional 20% oversample was added on top of the calculated sample size. The present study aimed to recruit at least 216 participants.

The purposive sampling technique was utilized in this study. This non-random sampling technique draws participants based on their specific

characteristics (Etikan et al., 2016). As there is no statistical evidence of the population of emerging adults and the sampling frame is unavailable, the purposive sampling method is considered most suitable. The inclusion criteria include participants aged 18 to 29 years old. The participants who exceeded the age range were excluded from this study as they are not considered emerging adults. The exclusion criteria were participants who do not possess technology gadgets, such as smartphones. A filtering question in the demographic section asked participants, “Do you own a technology gadget (e.g., smartphone, iPad, Tab)?”

### **3.4 Research Procedure**

Prior to conducting the study, ethical approval was sought from the Scientific and Ethical Review Committee of the Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). Ethical approval is needed when research involves human participation (Geiling, 2016). The ethical approval was obtained on 6 May 2020 with the reference number of U/SERC/69/2020. Upon ethical approval, the questionnaire is made available through Qualtrics, an online platform. The questionnaire consisting of an information sheet, informed consent, and personal data protection statement was circulated through social media, which are Whatsapp and Facebook (i.e., [Malaysia] Survey Group and personal account).

The information sheet provided background information about the study, inclusion criteria of participation, duration to complete, potential advantages and disadvantages of participating in the study. The subsequent section

contained informed consent. Informed consent is an agreement form in which participants were informed on all the study aspects, which is crucial for deciding whether to participate in the study voluntarily or consider leaving the study whenever they feel unpleasant (Hardicre, 2014; Perrault & Keating, 2018). Some aspects include extending confidentiality and potential benefits or risk.

Furthermore, the personal data protection statement consisted of information on the collection, storage, usage, and retention of personal information and the data set of the answered questionnaire. In short, participants who clicked on the invitation link to answer the survey reviewed the study description and indicated consent by clicking “Agree” to proceed to the subsequent page. A ‘thank you’ note was provided at the end of their response submission. The estimated duration of answering the questionnaire is 15 minutes. The actual data was collected from August to October 2020.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

The online questionnaire of this study consists of three sections. The first section asked about the participants' demographic information such as age, gender, and relationship status (i.e., single and in a relationship). The second section used the sex motive measure to assess the sexting motives. The third section included the sexting behaviour scale to examine the sexting behaviour. In total, there are 46 items in the questionnaire. The major advantage of using an online questionnaire is that it provides the target participants a greater sense of privacy and can reach out to participants from different geographical areas. Several sexting studies also utilized online questionnaires (Drouin et al., 2013;

Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011) as the data collection tool. In addition, a local study (Hassan et al., 2017) on online sexual activities also pointed out the need to use online questionnaires when dealing with sexuality topics that are highly sensitive in the Malaysian context.

### **3.5.1 Sex Motive Measure**

Sexting motives of participants were measured by 25 items based on five subscales: intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure (Cooper et al., 1998). The instrument was adapted by Parker et al. (2012) to determine the sexting motives. The adapted version of the sex motive measure was utilized in this study by modifying the word from “sex” to “sexting”. Initially, this instrument had six scales, with the sixth scale being partner approval (4 items). However, this sub-scale was removed from the present study. The rationale for excluding this subscale is that requesting single participants to answer questions on partner approval may be inappropriate, as some may not even have had a romantic relationship before. There is no reverse score among the items. Participants were required to answer each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Always*). The scores were computed by using the mean of each subscale. Each subscale displayed good internal consistency, which was  $\alpha = .88, .85, .91, .84, .97$  for intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure scales, respectively (Parker et al., 2012). The convergent and discriminant validities have been established by Cooper et al. (1998). A sample item from the scale is “How often do you engage in sexting to make an emotional connection with your partner?”

The reliability found for each motive in the present study with the Cronbach alpha coefficient,  $\alpha = .97, .95, .94, .95, .97$  for intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure scales, respectively, indicated excellent reliabilities.

### **3.5.2 *Sexting Behaviour Scale (SBS)***

The SBS developed by Dir et al. (2013) examines the frequency of sexting behaviour in sending and receiving sexting contents (i.e., sexually suggestive texts, photos, or videos) through a mobile phone or Internet social networking sites. SBS consisted of 11 items, whereby nine items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Frequently*). The other two items assessed the number of lifetime sexting partners, and the other assessed to whom the samples initiated or engaged in sexting behaviour. However, these two items were excluded from the analysis as they are irrelevant to the research objectives of determining the sexting behaviour of emerging adults. SBS had an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .81$ . This scale also showed convergent and discriminant validity among the undergraduate sample with a significant relationship between SBS score and impulsivity, sexual behaviour, problematic mobile phone use, and Internet use (correlation range from 0.05-0.22) (Dir et al., 2013). There is no reverse scoring among the items. The scores were computed by obtaining the mean score of the items. Higher mean scores indicate more frequent sexting behaviour. A sample item from the scale is “How often have you sent suggestive or sexually charged text messages?” The reliability found for SBS in the present study was .97, which indicated excellent reliability.

### **3.6 Pilot Study**

A pilot test was conducted online using a purposive sampling method. The pilot study is essential to ensure the viability of the approach in the actual study (Morin, 2013). In order to minimise the issue of the same participants answering in both the pilot test and the actual study, the survey for the pilot test was only circulated in two WhatsApp groups, which consisted of 140 people in total. A reminder for not answering the survey for the actual study was also included in the chat. A total of 44 emerging adults answered the online survey distributed between May 2020 and July 2020. Based on the result, the reliability of the subscales of sexting motives were .98 (intimacy), .96 (enhancement), .95 (self-affirmation), .98 (coping), and .98 (peer pressure), while the reliability of SBS was .96.

### **3.7 Data Processing and Analysing**

All the data collected was analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS). Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a statistical technique conducted to confirm the model fit of the scales used in the study (Brown & Moore, 2012). The rationale for including CFA is that the sex motives measure was originally developed to operationalize sex instead of sexting motives. However, the present study utilised Parker et al. (2012) adapted version of the scale where he examined sexting motives. Both the sex motives measure and SBS have not been used in the Malaysian context. Thus, CFA was conducted to test whether the same subscales emerge in the context of sexting in Malaysia.

Then, descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of participants, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Inferential statistics were used to determine the correlation and make predictions and interpretations among variables. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, independent *t*-test, and hierarchical multiple regression were used to answer the research questions. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables (Bluman, 2018). An independent *t*-test was used to test the gender and relationship differences. Multiple regression is used to predict dependent variables with more than one independent variable (Bluman, 2018). Finally, hierarchical multiple regression was used to determine the sexting motives in predicting sexting behaviour and the moderating role of gender and relationship status. The variables are entered into the regression equation in several successive steps (Aiken and West 1991; Cohen et al. 2013). After entering the interaction terms, results of moderation of five independent variables will be generated at once after controlling other effects and thus reducing the type 1 error.

Prior to the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the computed scores for independent and dependent variables were converted into standardized scores. Next, the interaction terms were generated by multiplying the two moderators with the independent variables. Next, the control variables, independent variables, dependent variables, and interaction terms were entered step by step into the regression, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlined and discussed the analysis of results from participants' responses. It consisted of data cleaning, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and the interpretation of statistical analyses. Subsequently, this chapter also discussed the findings with support from past literature. The limitations that were unavoidable were also highlighted, together with the recommendation for further improvement in future studies. Finally, this chapter ended with the conclusion to summarize the essence of the findings obtained.

#### **4.1 Data Cleaning**

A total of 262 participants participated in the study. However, 10 participants were removed, as they do not fall into 18 to 29 years old. The remaining 252 participants were only included in the first research question. Subsequently, participants who reported never engaged in sexting behaviour (N = 30) were eliminated, leaving 222 participants for the remaining analyses.

## 4.2 Exploratory Data Analysis

### 4.2.1 Normality test

The data for sex motives measures and sexting behaviour scales were checked before proceeding with statistical analyses. The normality was checked using the skewness and kurtosis test. George and Mallery (2016) provided a guideline that skewness values should fall between  $\pm 2.0$ , while Hair et al. (2010) suggested kurtosis values between  $\pm 7$  considered acceptable. By referring to Table 1, the distribution of all variables was positively skewed. This indicated that the data fall in an acceptable range and was normally distributed. Thus, the basic parametric assumption was met.

**Table 1**

*Normality of All Variables using EDA, Skewness, and Kurtosis (n = 222)*

Scale	Mean	SD	5% Trimmed Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
Intimacy	1.35	1.15	1.29	0.60	-.618
Enhancement	1.38	1.18	1.30	0.59	-0.76
Self-affirmation	1.06	1.10	1.10	0.98	0.82
Coping	0.82	1.08	0.70	1.40	1.07
Peer pressure	0.56	1.02	0.42	1.98	3.07
Sexting behaviour	1.20	0.92	1.12	0.96	0.40

### 4.2.2 Linearity test

Pallant (2020) mentioned that it is best to generate a scatterplot to explore the relationship between two variables before running a correlation analysis. In this case, the scatter plots were used to determine the linearity

between the motives and the sexting behaviour. After generating the scatter plot, the result showed that the scatterplots for the variables are in a linear relationship because there was no residue of a curvilinear relationship found (Appendix D). Hence, the data can be proceeded with the test for multicollinearity.

### 4.2.3 *Multicollinearity*

Multicollinearity happens when the independent variables are highly correlated, which may disrupt the actual analyses, specifically regression analyses. Tolerance value and variance inflation factor (VIF) is used to examine the multicollinearity. In this case, multicollinearity occurs when the tolerance value is lesser than 0.2 and VIF is above 10 (Sinan & Alkan, 2015). Table 2 illustrates the result of multicollinearity for all the independent variables. The tolerance value ranged from 0.248 to 0.610, and VIF were all below 10, indicating that multicollinearity is absent in the present study.

**Table 2**

*Tolerance and VIF values of the Sexting Motives (n = 222)*

	Tolerance	VIF
1. Intimacy	.254	3.940
2. Enhancement	.272	3.677
3. Self-affirmation	.248	4.025
4. Coping	.345	2.898
5. Peer pressure	.610	1.640

### 4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The present study used the CFA to examine the model fit of the scales, sex motive measure and sexting behaviour scale (SBS). Hair (2010) suggested three fit indices establish a model fit. The suggested critical values of the fit indices are  $NFI > 0.90$ ,  $CMIN/df < 5.0$ , and  $RMSEA \leq 0.08$  (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Byrne, 2001). Table 3 shows that the critical values obtained have met the suggested benchmark values. Thus, this implied a well-fitting model of the scales used.

**Table 3**

*Fit indices For Sex Motive Measure and Sexting Behaviour Scale (n = 222)*

Scale	NFI	CMIN/df	RMSEA
Sex motive measure	0.93	2.23	0.07
Sexting behaviour scale	0.98	2.36	0.07

### 4.4 Descriptive Statistics

#### 4.4.1 Participants

There were 252 qualified participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 22.84$ ;  $SD = 2.05$ ) in the study. Table 4 illustrated that 252 participants consisting of 136 females (54.0%) and 116 males (46.0%) who joined the study voluntarily. With regards to the relationship status, there were almost equal numbers of participants being single (52.0%) and in-relationship (48.0%). In terms of ethnicities, the majority of the participants are Chinese (73.0%), followed by Malays (14.7%), Indians (9.9%), and others (2.4%).

**Table 4***Participant's Demographic Profiles (n = 252)*

	N (%)	Mean	SD
Age		22.84	2.05
Gender			
Male	116 (46.0)		
Female	136 (54.0)		
Relationship status			
Single	131 (52.0)		
In relationship	121 (48.0)		
Ethnicities			
Chinese	184 (73.0)		
Malay	37 (14.7)		
Indian	25 (9.9)		
Others	6 (2.4)		

#### **4.4.2 Level of Engagement Of Sexting Behaviour Among Emerging Adults**

The scoring of SBS determined the level of engagement in sexting behaviour. The participants who scored zero marks are indicated as never engaging in sexting behaviour. Based on descriptive statistics, 30 participants reported never engaging in sexting behaviour as they scored zero in SBS, whereas 222 (88.1%) ever sexted. This result depicted that nearly 9 in 10 respondents have sexted with someone. Therefore, these 30 participants were removed from the subsequent analyses.

### **4.5 Inferential Statistics**

#### **4.5.1 Correlation between Sexting Motives and Sexting Behaviour**

Pearson's Product-moment Correlation Coefficient was conducted to determine the correlation between each sexting motive on sexting behaviour. As illustrated in Table 5, all sexting motives showed significant positive

correlations with sexting behaviour with all the significant levels at  $p < .001$ . The Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) depicts the strength of the relationship between variables. The value of  $r$  around .1 is considered small, .3 is considered medium, and .5 is considered a large effect (Allen & Bennett, 2007). As the  $r$ -value ranged from .56 to .73 in the present study, the strength of the relationship between sexting motives and sexting behaviour is considered to have a medium to large effect.

**Table 5**

*Pearson's Product-moment Correlation Coefficient among the Motives*

*Subscales and Sexting Behaviour (n = 222)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intimacy	1					
2. Enhancement	.82*	1				
3. Self-affirmation	.79*	.77*	1			
4. Coping	.69*	.68*	.77*	1		
5. Peer pressure	.43*	.36*	.53*	.55*	1	
6. Sexting behaviour	.72*	.73*	.66*	.62*	.56*	1

*Note.* \*  $p < .001$

#### **4.5.2 Gender Difference in Sexting Behaviour**

An independent sample  $t$ -test analysis was conducted to compare differences in sexting behaviour between males and females. There was a significant gender difference in sexting behaviour, with males ( $M = 1.49$ ;  $SD = 1.00$ ) having a greater engagement of sexting behaviour compared to females ( $M = 0.93$ ;  $SD = 0.75$ ),  $t(220) = 4.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.63$  (see Table 6). The result suggested that gender differed in sexting behaviour and reported a medium effect between variables. Specifically, the result indicated that a male

is more likely to participate in sexting behaviour. Effect size is a quantitative measure of the magnitude of the experimental effect (McLeod, 2019) that describes the observed effect size (Fritz et al., 2012). Cohen (1988) proposed that  $d = 0.2$  is considered as a small effect size while  $d = 0.5$  and  $d = 0.8$  represent medium and large effect sizes, respectively. Hence, based on the calculated effect size  $d = 0.63$ , the present study has a medium effect size.

**Table 6**

*Result of Independent t-test for Gender Difference in Sexting Behaviour (n = 222)*

Gender	N (%)	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Male	104 (46.8)	1.49	1.00	4.71	< .001
Female	118 (53.2)	0.93	0.75		

#### **4.5.3 Relationship Status Difference in Sexting Behaviour**

An independent *t*-test was used to compare single and in-relationship emerging adults in sexting behaviour. On average, emerging adults whom were in-relationship ( $M = 1.47$ ;  $SD = 1.00$ ) had greater engagement of sexting behaviour than singles ( $M = 0.91$ ;  $SD = 0.72$ ). Table 7 showed that the difference was statistically significant,  $t(220) = -4.80$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the result depicted that when emerging adults are in a relationship, they will sext more. The effect size of  $d = -0.64$  indicated a medium effect size.

**Table 7***Result of Independent t-test for Relationship Status Difference in Sexting**Behaviour (n = 222)*

Relationship Status	N (%)	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Single	109 (49.1)	0.91	0.72	-4.80	< .001
In relationship	113 (50.9)	1.47	1.00		

**4.5.4 Predictors (Intimacy, Enhancement, Self-Affirmation, Coping, and Peer Pressure) of Emerging Adults Engaging in Sexting Behaviour in Malaysia.**

A three-stage hierarchical multiple regression was utilized to investigate the predicting effects of sexting motives on sexting behaviour. Table 8 showed that in stage one, age, gender, and relationship status, were entered to examine whether these variables predict sexting behaviour. The sexting motives were entered in the second block. In the third stage, the interaction terms were entered (discussed further in the next section). In the first stage, age, gender, and relationship status contributed significantly to the regression model,  $F(3, 218) = 15.03, p < .001$ , accounting for 17.1% of variances. Next, introducing the motives in stage two accounted for an additional 48.1% of variances in sexting behaviour, and the change in  $R^2$  was significant,  $F(8, 213) = 49.78, p < .001$ . Among the five predictors entered, it was found that intimacy ( $\beta = .231, p = .004$ ), enhancement ( $\beta = .440, p < .001$ ), and peer pressure ( $\beta = .302, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted sexting behaviour but not self-affirmation and coping.



**Table 8***Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Sexting Motives and the Moderating Role of Gender and Relationship Status (n = 222)*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>				.414	.171	15.027	.171**
Age	.024	.374	.709				
Gender (0 = Male)	-.273***	-4.368	< .001				
Rstatus (0 = Single)	.276***	4.299	< .001				
<b>Step 2</b>				.807	.652	49.777	.480**
Age	-.031	-.720	.472				
Gender	-.005	-.109	.913				
Rstatus	.090*	2.007	.046				
Intimacy	.231**	2.881	.004				
Enhancement	.440***	5.667	< .001				
Self-affirmation	-.047	-0.580	.563				
Coping	.010	0.150	.881				
Peer pressure	.302***	5.822	< .001				
<b>Step 3</b>				.826	.682	24.216	.003**
Age	-.048	-1.108	.269				
Gender	.013	0.282	.778				
Rstatus	.098*	2.162	.032				
Intimacy	.269	1.599	.111				
Enhancement	.398**	2.692	.008				
Self-affirmation	.015	0.097	.923				
Coping	.026	0.182	.855				
Peer pressure	-.034	-0.259	.796				

---

Gender X Intimacy	- .031	-0.300	.765
Gender X Enhancement	- .106	-1.051	.295
Gender X Self-affirmation	.189	1.740	.083
Gender X Coping	- .004	-0.047	.962
Gender X Peer pressure	.013	0.214	.831
Rstatus X Intimacy	.003	0.023	.981
Rstatus X Enhancement	.159	1.364	.174
Rstatus X Self-affirmation	- .285*	-2.229	.027
Rstatus X Coping	.026	0.222	.824
Rstatus X Peer pressure	.378**	3.295	.001

---

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ . Rstatus = Relationship status.

#### ***4.5.5 Moderating Role of Gender on Sexting Motives and Sexting***

##### ***Behaviour***

The hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the moderating effect of gender between sexting motives and sexting behaviour. The interaction terms of gender and motives were entered in stage 3. Table 8 above illustrated that the overall model 3 was statistically significant,  $R = .826$ ,  $F(18, 203) = 24.22$ ,  $p < .001$  and adding interaction terms resulted in a significant  $R^2$  change of .031. However, gender does not significantly moderate any of the relationship between sexting motives and sexting behaviour (see Table 8).

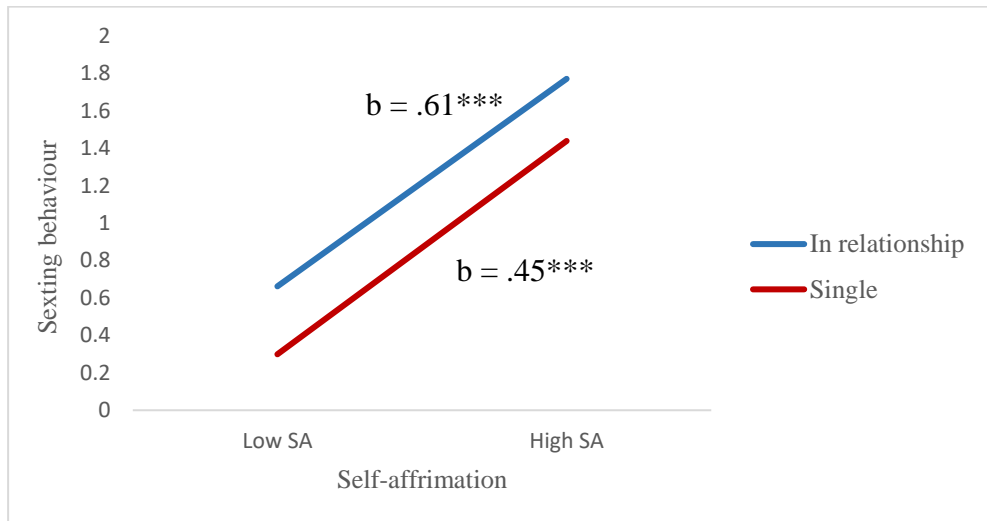
#### ***4.5.6 Moderating Role of Relationship Status on Sexting Motives and***

##### ***Sexting Behaviour***

The hierarchical multiple regression was used to examine the moderating effect of relationship status between sexting motives and sexting behaviour. By referring to Table 8 above, the results showed that the overall model 3 was statistically significant,  $R = .826$ ,  $F(18, 203) = 24.22$ ,  $p < .001$  and the addition of interaction terms resulted in an  $R^2$  change of .031. The result supported the moderating effect where relationship status moderated the relationship between self-affirmation and peer pressure with sexting behaviour. The standardized slope for self-affirmation was significant for both in-relationship ( $\beta = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and singles ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $p < .001$ ) emerging adults (see Figure 3). The moderating effect indicated that the degree of self-affirmation had a more positive effect on the in-relationship than on single emerging adults.

**Figure 3**

*Interaction between Self-Affirmation and Relationship Status in Predicting Sexting Behaviour (n = 222)*



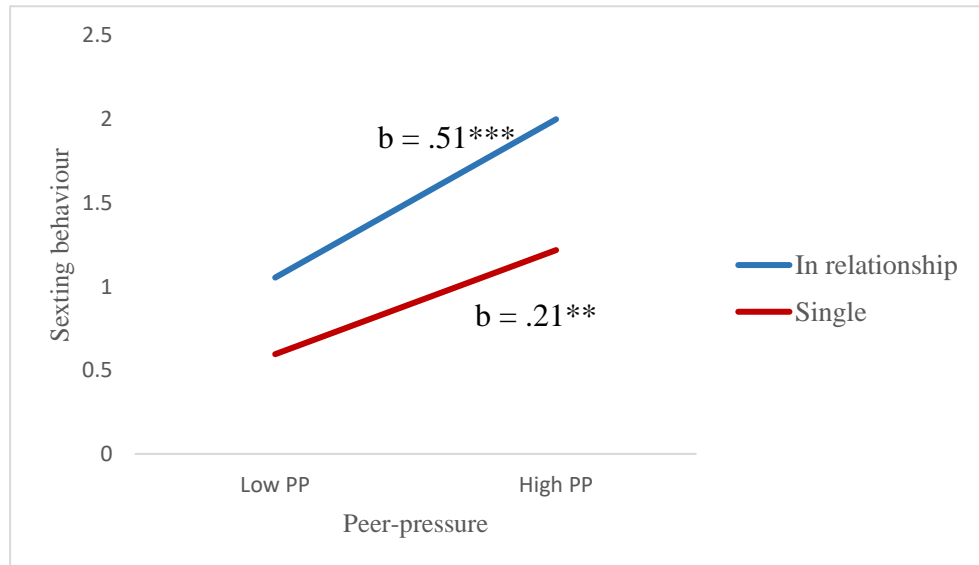
*Note.* SA=Self-affirmation.

The standardized slope for peer-pressure was also significant for both in-relationship ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ) and singles ( $\beta = .21, p = .001$ ) emerging adults (see Figure 4). The moderating effect indicated that the peer-pressure had a more positive effect on in-relationship than single emerging adults.

**Figure 4**

*Interaction between Peer Pressure and Relationship Status in Predicting*

*Sexting Behaviour (n = 222)*



*Note.* PP=Peer-pressure.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings with support from past literature. The limitations that were unavoidable were also highlighted, together with the recommendation for further improvement in future studies. Finally, this chapter ended with the conclusion to summarize the essence of the findings obtained.

#### 5.1 Level of Engagement of Sexting Behaviour among Emerging Adults

The advent of technology and the lockdown order during the pandemic have further introduced people to try sexting behaviour (Ao, 2021; Lehmillier et al., 2020). As noted in the systematic review, the level of engagement in sexting behaviour across nine databases from eight countries ranged from 0.9% to 60% (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). The current study's findings conflict with those of the earlier study (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). The results of this study are somewhat surprising in that 88.1% of the participants have ever sexted, almost equivalent to 9 in 10 emerging adults. This result may be due to sexting behaviour slowly becoming normalized sexual behaviour in this digital age (Madigan et al., 2018; Yeung et al., 2014). People no longer limit themselves to developing their sexual relationships in the offline community but expand to the online community. Additionally, they were unable to meet up with others during the lockdown, but online platforms enable sexual expression by sexting with others. In this case, they do not risk going out with the possibility of getting the

coronavirus while simultaneously enjoying sexting with someone. However, the data might be interpreted cautiously as the present study does not examine the different categories of sexting behaviour separately, such as receiving, sending, and forwarding. In this case, the participants responded to the different categories of sexting behaviour under one scale, which eventually yielded one final score.

## **5.2 Correlation Between Sexting Motives and Sexting Behaviour**

The result rejected the null hypotheses  $H_{01}$ – $H_{05}$ . The correlation analyses between the sexting motives (intimacy, enhancement, self-affirmation, coping, and peer pressure) and sexting behaviour were significant and positively correlated. A strong relationship between intimacy and sexting behaviour has been reported in the literature (Drouin et al., 2013; Reed et al., 2020; Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). Consistent with the literature, the result of the present study depicted that when emerging adults want to develop intimacy with others, they are more likely to turn to sexting. People found it hard to develop or maintain intimacy with others during the COVID-19 pandemic as they were physically apart (Keck, 2020). However, sexting that provides synchronous communication helps to keep individuals closer to one another psychologically through virtual means' (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). Therefore, when emerging adults seek intimacy, they are more likely to sext with someone.

Further, the correlation analysis showed that enhancing motive, where emerging adults want to make themselves feel better, was also positively correlated with sexting behaviour. In line with the literature (Burkett, 2015;

Hudson & Marshall, 2018; Kopecký, 2012), when they desire to make themselves feel sexually pleasurable, they will turn to sexting. During the pandemic, when individuals were forced to self-quarantine at home, the source of entertainment and interaction with others was limited. It is conceivable that the advent of technologies has been supporting emerging adults during the pandemic (Bianchi et al., 2021). When they want to feel sexually aroused in their own comfort, sexting is a good choice as one can experience contentment without having sexual activity with others. In short, when emerging adults want to keep themselves sexually pleasurable, they are more likely to sext.

In the present study, self-affirmation also correlated significantly with sexting behaviour, which is consistent with previous research (Garca-Gómez, 2017; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). This correlation can be explained by the desire of emerging adults to demonstrate their sexual attractiveness by sending sexually explicit content (Garca-Gómez, 2017). In summary, this positive correlation among emerging adults demonstrated that the more they seek self-affirmation, the more likely they are to engage in sexting behaviour.

The relationship between coping motive and sexting behaviour was also significant. In line with previous research, this significant correlation suggests that emerging adults seeking to alleviate psychological distress during the pandemic, such as work-related stress, may resort to sexting (Garfin, 2020). Malaysians have reported moderate to high levels of stress as a result of the pandemic (Bahar Moni, 2021). During the lockdown, however, they were forced to stay at home for the majority of the time. People were also unable to engage in stress-relieving activities such as socialising, jogging, and going to the gym. As a result, individuals may engage in sexting behaviour to cope with



negative emotions (Bianchi et al., 2021; Caponnetto et al., 2022; Violant-Holz et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). In short, emerging adults who would like to cope with their negative emotions such as upset will sext with someone more.

As mentioned in the literature, peer pressure was also associated with sexting behaviour (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Vaden Abelee et al., 2014; Walrave et al., 2015). In agreement with the past studies, the result illustrated that the influence of peers would also prompt the participants to sexting behaviour. Cultural differences could explain this result. Malaysians live in a collectivist culture in which serving the group's interests takes precedence over serving personal interests (Ang & Liang, 2021). When emerging adults have peers who actively engage in sexting behaviour, they may engage in similar behaviour to conform to the group norm and share a common topic with their peers. In short, if emerging adults have friends who enjoy sexting, they will join them.

### **5.3 Gender Difference in Sexting Behaviour**

The result rejected the null hypotheses  $H_{07}$  saying that there was no gender difference in sexting behaviour. The present study showed that gender differences existed, and males tend to engage in sexting behaviour more frequently than females. Past literature has also reported on the significant gender difference, where males sexted more frequently than females (Dir et al., 2013; Hudson & Marshall, 2016; Ringrose et al., 2012). This gender difference can be attributed to the gendered double standard, where males and females are judged differently by society for their engagement in sexual

activities (Doring, 2014; Englander, 2012; Yeung et al., 2014). Females were judged more harshly for their involvement in sexting. For example, when a guy's sexting content is exposed to someone else, people often laugh it off or be uninterested. This response is totally in contrast with females. If content with females is exposed, it will go viral and result in the females being stigmatized and humiliated by the public. As a result, many females felt pressure to conform to what was seen as acceptable behavior for their gender, while males were free to act as they pleased (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). This double standard placed an unfair burden on females and contributed to the idea that females are somehow responsible for males' sexual behaviour. In short, sexting is more common among males than females in Malaysia.

#### **5.4 Relationship Status Difference in Sexting Behaviour**

The result rejected the null hypotheses  $H_{08}$  saying that there was no relationship difference in sexting behaviour. In the present study, the emerging adults who were in-relationship sexted more frequently than singles. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that sexting behaviour has gradually become a form of sexual behaviour that couples use as foreplay before actual sexual activity (Mori et al., 2020). Hence, when emerging adults seek to induce their sexual arousal, they start by sexting with their partners first. Another possible explanation is that the data was collected during the pandemic when emerging adults must comply with the lockdown order by staying at home (Yusof, 2021). In this case, couples could not meet each other physically. Sexual intimacy may have shifted from offline sexual activity to online sexting

behaviour (Ao, 2021). It is possible that sexting behaviour became an alternative method to express sexual affection via online platforms when an offline meeting is restricted and prohibited. In contrast, singles were unlikely to sext as they may perceive greater risk and negative expectancies such as shame and embarrassment (Dir et al., 2013). Without a strong trust in the person they sext with, singles may find it insecure, as they fear that the sexting content will be forwarded to others without consent (Renfrow & Rollo, 2014).

### **5.5 Predictors (Intimacy, Enhancement, Self-Affirmation, Coping, and Peer Pressure) of Sexting Behaviour in Malaysia.**

Although the correlation analysis in the present study depicted that all the motives significantly correlated with sexting behaviour, only intimacy, enhancement, and peer pressure significantly predicted sexting behaviour. Intimacy motive predicted the sexting behaviour in the present study. The offline meeting is not always feasible, particularly when emerging adults have a long-distance relationship. Meeting up with people has been even more difficult, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Malaysia. For instance, previously the government had given the green light for inter-state travel only to married couples, which left unmarried couples separated from each other (Anis, 2021). The ways individuals used to express their intimacy, such as touching, hugging, and kissing, have now been replaced by the emoji on the smartphone as they sext with someone (Bond, 2016). Therefore, sexting helps emerging adults maintain intimacy with partners despite physical distance. Similarly, when emerging adults seek to develop intimacy with someone they

have just dated, sexting can be the option to warm up the intimate relationship (Renfrow & Rollow, 2014). Hence, emerging adults who desire intimacy with others will engage in sexting behaviour.

Additionally, the enhancement motive also predicted the sexting behaviour in the present study. This finding complimented the U&G theory in explaining the individuals' motives during media use (Katz et al., 1973). Based on U&G theory, individuals seek entertainment when using social media, which can explain the enhancement motives. Emerging adults who want to maintain sexually pleasurable are more likely to engage in online sexual behaviour. For example, Grubbs et al. (2019) pointed out that people keep themselves sexually pleasurable by watching pornography. However, the viewing of pornography is a solitary activity. In contrast, sexting behaviour requires two-way communication, which can be far more exciting and engaging. Thus, emerging adults who desire sexual excitement are more likely to sext someone.

Notably, peer pressure also significantly predicted sexting behaviour, in line with past studies (Kopecký, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Walker et al., 2013). Emerging adults who live in a collectivist culture in Malaysia may be more prone to act according to the group's interest. For instance, when emerging adults belong to a social group, where their peers actively sexted, they may want to act according to the group members without being judged as deviant for not engaging in sexting behaviour. In this case, they can remain accepted in the group as they follow what the majority are doing.

However, self-affirmation does not predict the sexting behaviour in the present study. Rationalizing sending sext as a means to prove one's sense of

attractiveness can be irrational for emerging adults living in this sexually conservative culture. The cultural value surrounding sexual issues can further hinder people's ability to see beyond what is traditionally considered attractive (Wong et al., 2012).

Furthermore, coping does not predict sexting behaviour. In a conservative culture like Malaysia, emerging adults who cope with daily stresses through sexting may face public condemnation (Hald & Mulya, 2013). Alternatively, they might consider solitary yet sexually stimulating activity such as watching online pornography that does not require interaction with others (Zattoni et al., 2021). This suggests that social stigma and prejudice from sexting may make it difficult for people to cope with the behaviour.

## **5.6 Moderating Role of Gender between Sexting Motives and Sexting Behaviour**

The result failed to reject the null hypotheses  $H_{09}$ – $H_{013}$  saying that there were no moderating effect of gender between sexting motives and sexting behaviour. The result depicted that gender does not moderate the link between sexting motives and sexting behaviour. This finding contradicts DSMM, which suggested that gender can be a potential moderator. This showed that both males and females have similar motives for sext. A possible explanation can be a change in traditional cultural value. Females in this 21<sup>st</sup> century no longer be positioned in a submissive role only when expressing their sexuality (Farvid et al., 2016). Instead, they can also be the initiator just like males in any sexual activity such as sexting. Hence, males and females can have similar motives to

engage in sexting behaviour which justify why gender does not moderate sexting motive and sexting behaviour.

### **5.7 Moderating Role of Relationship Status between Sexting Motives and Sexting Behaviour**

The result failed to reject the null hypotheses  $H_{014}$ ,  $H_{015}$ ,  $H_{017}$  but rejected  $H_{016}$  and  $H_{018}$  saying that there were no relationship difference between sexting motives and sexting behaviour. The result was partially supported by the moderating role of relationship status. Moderation of relationship status only occurred on self-affirmation and peer pressure motives towards sexting behaviour. According to the simple slope analysis result, the self-affirmation motive was more likely to encourage in-relationship emerging adults to sext. This result supports the findings of the previous research in Waling et al. (2022), where self-affirmation is commonly linked to social approval. For example, people in relationships seek self-confidence to affirm their unique characteristics (Waling et al., 2022). In this case, they may crave validation from their romantic partner in the form of compliments about their body, which could lead to sexting.

Additionally, the simple slope analysis also revealed that peer pressure was more likely to encourage sexting among emerging adults in relationships. This finding is in-line with the DSMM (Valkenberg & Peter, 2013), which posited that relationship status being the social susceptibility factor can act as a conditioning variable. According to previous research, emerging adults who want to keep their social group (Kopecký, 2012; Walker et al., 2013) and sexual

intimacy with partners (Iovine, 2020) are more likely to sext. Being in a relationship and subjected to peer pressure can lead emerging adults to engage in sexting behaviour. Malaysian emerging adults often belong to multiple groups (Zahra et al., 2018). As a result, if they believe this behaviour is acceptable among their peers and between partners, it may inspire them to sext because serving the interests of groups is regarded as more important than serving personal interests.

The relationship status, conversely, does not moderate the link between the motives (intimacy, enhancement, and coping) and the sexting behaviour. A possible reason can be that enhancement, and coping are both self-focus motives (Copper, 1998). In other words, emerging adults' relationship status has no contextual effect on whether they are motivated to make themselves feel better or cope with difficult situations. However, the absence of moderating effect of intimacy could be due to the various interpretation of intimacy within a relationship across various ethnicities. For example, touching and hugging is acceptable for Chinese and Indian couples but is prohibited among Malays before marriage (Ubaidullah, 2023).

## **5.8 Implications**

### ***5.8.1 Theoretical Implications***

The findings of the study provide a localized explanation for emerging adults' sexting behaviour. As mentioned earlier, gender differences in sexting behaviour have been studied extensively despite yielding inconsistent results (Mori et al., 2020). However, although males were more likely to sext compared

to females, gender does not moderate the association between motive and sexting behaviour. The DSMM theory has been partially supported by the result of the study, explaining the social factor, relationship status moderated the link between peer pressure and self-affirmation on sexting behaviour. The result can serve as a future research direction, where examining the relationship status should be treated as a contextual factor in relation to sexting behaviour. This could provide a better understanding that sexting is more likely to occur under certain contextual factors.

Additionally, the sexting motives confirmed the U&G theory that people sext for various reasons (Hudson & Marshall, 2018; Ukwueze & Abaneme, 2021; Yu & Zheng, 2020). This is important because the underlying sexting motives provide greater clarity to practitioners in dealing with issues related to sexting behaviour.

### ***5.8.2 Practical Implications***

The results of the present study serve as a preliminary input for the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) that sexting behaviour remains prevalent among Malaysians and requires more attention. Although the present study focuses on emerging adults, sexting behaviour may start at the teenage age, as depicted in the literature. To delay the onset of sexting among adolescents, SRH education should include a topic on sexting, such as issues related to the harmful consequences, privacy, and consent to sexting behaviour (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2020). In this case, educators can broaden



adolescents' understanding of sexting behaviour and may be better equipped to make informed decisions and engage in consensual and safe sexting behaviour as they progress through their sexual development within a digital age. Ultimately, it is up to each individual to make the decision whether or not to sext, but it is important that they are fully informed of the potential risks before doing so.

Furthermore, rather than promoting an abstinence-based approach to sexting, MCMC can run online campaigns and create an informational posting on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram) that promote and highlight safe sexting. For example, guidelines such as sexting should only be done with consenting adults and that any form of sexting without consent is a criminal offense can be considered. This approach does not encourage people to sext, but if they are unable to resist sexting, with the knowledge of safe sexting, they can do their best to protect themselves.

## **5.9 Limitations of the Study**

Despite providing some preliminary shreds of evidence of sexting behaviour in the Malaysian context, the interpretation of the findings should be made with several limitations. Firstly, the study utilized a quantitative study design for data collection and interpretation of the results. While this method provided statistical evidence on the variables examined, it does not allow for a more holistic view and understanding of the sexting behaviour.

Secondly, the use of cross-sectional design enabled the data collection within a short period. However, it does not provide an understanding of the

change in sexting motives and limits the causal inference between variables. As such, when the participants was filling up the questionnaire, they were responding to their present and past sexting motives and experiences at the same time.

Thirdly, almost three-quarters of the participants were Chinese, which may not provide greater representativeness of the population in Malaysia. Malaysia comprises West and East Malaysia and consists of the three main ethnicities: Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other minorities. Every ethnicity has unique cultural backgrounds where they may respond to sexting behaviour differently.

Forth, the high level of engagement in sexting behaviour should be interpreted with cautious. The present study does not examine the specific categories of sexting behaviour such as sending, receiving, and forwarding separately. In this case, participants who ever send, receive, or forward the sexually-explicit content are considered as ever engaged in sexting. This can be the reason where the present finding showed a higher level of sexting engagement compared to the literature.

Fifth, the present study did not specify the context such as to whom they sexted. In this case, it is possible that the findings may differ depending on whether the sexting occurred within a committed relationship or with a casual partner. Hence, partners in different types or stages of relationships may also differ in their sexting behaviour.

## **5.10 Recommendations for Future Studies**

Considering the share of emerging adults engaging in sexting behaviour, the current study calls for additional research in various sexting-related areas. Therefore, several recommendations should be considered for future studies. Firstly, researchers should consider using a mixed-method study design incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques rather than a quantitative study design alone. In this case, the qualitative result can give us a more thorough understanding of people's perceptions of sexting behaviour, improving our discussion of findings. Therefore, the study can produce a more comprehensive outlook on sexting behaviour.

Secondly, a longitudinal study should be conducted to observe the behavioural changes overtime. This is particularly relevant during the post-pandemic period. A longitudinal study collects data over time; thus, differences between the two periods can be observed. As a result, any changes in behaviour can be detected.

Thirdly, since most participants were Chinese, representativeness to a broader population is limited. Future studies may consider recruiting participants based on the ethnic ratio in Malaysia. In this case, differences among ethnicities can be observed, and findings may be useful resources for improvising sexual reproductive health programs addressing issues of sexting that is beneficial for the multi-ethnicities context in Malaysia.

Fourth, future research can explore the different categories of sexting behaviour: receiving, sending, and forwarding, or the types of content sent, such as text, sexually suggestive photos, and videos. Individuals' intensity in different

categories may vary, and some may only indulge in one category. In this case, the result will better reflect the definition of sexting behaviour from the participants' point of view rather than only categorising them into one category.

Fifth, future studies could specify and explore different types of relationship status (e.g., committed relationship, casual partner, and acquaintances) concerning the sexting behaviour. Such examination can better understanding of the complexities of sexting behaviour and inform the development of tailored interventions that promote healthy sexual behaviour while mitigating potential negative psychological outcomes.

## **5.11 Conclusion**

This study managed to identify the level of engagement of sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia. Meanwhile, all sexting motives correlated significantly with sexting behaviour, although only intimacy, enhancement, and peer pressure emerged as significant predictors of sexting behaviour. Furthermore, males and those in a relationship engaged more in sexting. Although gender does not moderate the link between motives and sexting behaviour, relationship status is a significant moderator. Particularly, relationship status moderated the links between self-affirmation and peer pressure towards sexting behaviour. Taken together, the results provide insight into the occurrence of sexting behaviour in Malaysia. Future studies should also continue to examine sexting behaviour as the usage of smartphones, and social media has become a norm in our daily life.

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## Appendix A

### Ethical Clearance



**UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN**

Wholly Owned by UTAR Education Foundation (Company No. 579227-M)

Re: U/SERC/69/2020

6 May 2020

Mr Tan Soon Ann  
Department of Psychology and Counselling  
Faculty of Arts and Social Science  
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman  
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat  
31900 Kampar, Perak

Dear Mr Tan,

#### Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to your application for ethical approval for your research project (Master student's project) and are pleased to inform you that your application has been approved under expedited review.

The details of your research project are as follows:

<b>Research Title</b>	Sexting Motive on Sexting Behaviour Among Youth in Malaysia: The Role of Gender and Relationship Status
<b>Investigator(s)</b>	Mr Tan Soon Ann Dr Gan Su Wan Goh Yee Shan (UTAR Postgraduate Student)
<b>Research Area</b>	Social Sciences
<b>Research Location</b>	Malaysia
<b>No of Participants</b>	460 participants (Age: 18 - 30)
<b>Research Costs</b>	Self-funded
<b>Approval Validity</b>	6 May 2020 - 5 May 2021

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

- (1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research,
- (2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and
- (3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.

Kampar Campus : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia  
Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 466 1313  
Sungai Long Campus : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia  
Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8868  
Website: [www.utar.edu.my](http://www.utar.edu.my)



## **Appendix B**

### Survey Questionnaire

#### **Sexting Motive on Sexting Behaviour among Emerging Adults in Malaysia: The Moderating Role of Gender and Relationship Status**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the sexting motive on sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia. Specifically, the study aims to examine the moderating role of gender and relationship status. I would like to invite you to participate in this research project.

##### **Why am I doing the project?**

This is a project as part of the fulfilment of the coursework on my master's study as a student from department of psychology and counselling. The project aims to provide useful information for the existing theoretical gap, practitioners and policy makers to draw effective programs to deal with the limitation in the existing sexual reproductive health education in Malaysia.

##### **Who is qualify for this study?**

You are qualify for this study if you fit these criteria:

1) Age falls in between 18-29 years old      2) Be able to read, write, and understand English.

You will be asked questions about your personal experience on sexting and motive to do so in the form of a self-reported survey. Hence, it is necessary for participants to be able to read, write, and understand English.

##### **How much of your time will the participation involve?**

The questionnaire may take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

##### **Will your participation in the project remain confidential?**

Yes. Data collected will only be seen by researcher and supervisor of this study, and will not be linked to any identifying information (e.g., name, address, email) that you provided. The anonymous data collected may be shared with other researchers via public data repositories, with summaries presented at conferences and in academic publications. We will ensure that it is impossible to identify your identity from any of the information we publish and share about this study.

##### **What are the advantages of participating in this project?**

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, you may find the project interesting and enjoy answering questions about the matters regarding sexting behaviour.

##### **Are there any disadvantages of taking part?**

There are risks involved in all research studies. Some questions related to sexuality can be quite personal and you may feel uncomfortable sharing it with the researcher.



**Do you have to take part in the study?**

No, your participation is entirely voluntary.

**For further information**

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact Ms. Goh (kellygoh97@utar.my)

**Personal Data Protection Statement**

In accordance with Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (“PDPA”) which came into force on 15 November 2013, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (“UTAR”) is hereby bound to make notice and require consent in relation to collection, recording, storage, usage and retention of personal information.

Notice:

1. The purposes for which your personal data may be used are inclusive but not limited to:-
  - For assessment of any application to UTAR
  - For processing any benefits and services
  - For communication purposes
  - For advertorial and news
  - For general administration and record purposes
  - For enhancing the value of education
  - For educational and related purposes consequential to UTAR
  - For the purpose of our corporate governance
  - For consideration as a guarantor for UTAR staff/ student applying for his/her scholarship/ study loan
2. Your personal data may be transferred and/or disclosed to third party and/or UTAR collaborative partners including but not limited to the respective and appointed outsourcing agents for purpose of fulfilling our obligations to you in respect of the purposes and all such other purposes that are related to the purposes and also in providing integrated services, maintaining and storing records. Your data may be shared when required by laws and when disclosure is necessary to comply with applicable laws.
3. Any personal information retained by UTAR shall be destroyed and/or deleted in accordance with our retention policy applicable for us in the event such information is no longer required.
4. UTAR is committed in ensuring the confidentiality, protection, security and accuracy of your personal information made available to us and it has been our ongoing strict policy to ensure that your personal information is accurate, complete, not misleading and updated. UTAR would also ensure that your personal data shall not be used for political and commercial purposes.

## Consent Form for Research Participation and Personal Data Protection

Title of Project: Sexting Motive on Sexting Behaviour among Youth in Malaysia: The Role of Gender and Relationship Status

**NOTE:** This consent form will remain with the UTAR researchers for their records.

I understand that:	YES	NO
I will be asked to complete a set of questions about sexting motive and sexting behaviour among emerging adults in Malaysia.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My participation is voluntary, I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I may ask at any time for my data to be withdrawn from the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No information I have provided that could lead to the identification of any other individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will remain anonymous at all times in any reports or publications from the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

By submitting this form, I hereby authorise and consent to UTAR processing (including disclosing) my personal data and any updates of my information, for the purposes and/or for any other purposes related to the purpose.

I acknowledge that if I do not consent or subsequently withdraw my consent to the processing and disclosure of my personal data, UTAR will not be able to fulfil their obligations or to contact me or to assist me in respect of the purposes and/or for any other purposes related to the purpose.

Please feel free to contact any of the researchers listed below if you have any inquires:

**Ms Goh Yee Shan (kellygoh97@1utar.my)**

## Acknowledgment of Personal Data Protection Notice

*By clicking "Agree", I agree that:*

- Agree, I have been notified by you and that I hereby understood, consented and agreed per UTAR above notice.
- Disagree, I disagree my personal data will not be processed.

## What is sexting?

Sexting behaviour refers to receiving, sending, and posting sexually suggestive contents which include nude or semi-nude photos, videos, and suggestive text messages via smartphone or internet.

### Background information

#### Sexting Motive Scale

Below is a list of questions asking about your motivation in engaging in sexting behavior. 0 indicates never while 4 indicates always.

Never (0)	Some of the tim (1)	About half of the time (2)	Most of the time (3)	Always (4)
-----------	---------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------	------------

No	Item	0	1	2	3	4
1	<b>Intimacy</b> How often do you engage in sexting to become more intimate with your partner?					
2	How often do you engage in sexting to express love for your partner?					
3	How often do you engage in sexting to make an emotional connection with your partner?					

4	How often do you engage in sexting to become closer with your partner?					
5	How often do you engage in sexting to feel emotionally close to your partner?					
6	<b>Enhancement</b> How often do you engage in sexting because you feel “horny?”					
7	How often do you engage in sexting because it feels good?					
8	How often do you engage in sexting just for the excitement of it?					
9	How often do you engage in sexting just for the thrill of it?					
10	How often do you engage in sexting to satisfy your sexual needs?					
11	<b>Self-Affirmation</b> How often do you engage in sexting to prove to yourself that your partner thinks you’re attractive?					
12	How often do you engage in sexting because it makes you feel like you’re a more interesting person?					
13	How often do you engage in sexting because it makes you feel more self-confident?					

14	How often do you engage in sexting to reassure yourself that you are sexually desirable?					
15	How often do you engage in sexting to help you feel better about yourself?					
16	<b>Coping</b> How often do you engage in sexting to cope with upset feelings?					
17	How often do you engage in sexting to help you deal with disappointment in your life?					
18	How often do you engage in sexting because it helps you feel better when you're lonely?					
19	How often do you engage in sexting because it helps you feel better when you're feeling low?					
20	How often do you engage in sexting to cheer yourself up?					
21	<b>Peer Pressure</b> How often do you engage in sexting because you worry that people will talk about you if you don't have sex?					
22	How often do you engage in sexting because people will think less of you if you don't?					

23	How often do you engage in sexting because others will kid you if you don't?					
24	How often do you engage in sexting just because all your friends are having sex?					
25	How often do you engage in sexting so that others won't put you down about not having sex?					
26	<b><u>Partner Approval</u></b> How often do you engage in sexting out of fear that your partner won't love you anymore if you don't?					
27	How often do you engage in sexting because you don't want your partner to be angry with you?					
28	How often do you engage in sexting because you worry that your partner won't want to be with you if you don't?					
29	How often do you engage in sexting because you're afraid that your partner will leave you if you don't?					

### Sexting Behavior Scale

Below consisted of a list of items examining your sexting behavior. Rate on the scale 0 (Never) to 4 (Frequently) that is best describe you.

Never (0)	Rarely/A few time (1)	Occasionally/ 2-3 times a month (2)	Often/ 2-3 times a week (3)	Frequently/ Daily (4)
-----------	-----------------------	--	-----------------------------	--------------------------

No	Sexting Behavior	0	1	2	3	4
1	How often have you <b>received</b> suggestive or sexually charged <b>text</b> messages?					
2	How often have you <b>received</b> provocative or suggestive <b>pictures</b> by text message?					
3	How often have you <b>responded</b> to provocative or suggestive text or picture messages you received?					
4	How often have you <b>received</b> provocative suggestive pictures or messages over the Internet (e.g. Messenger, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc)?					
5	How often have you <b>sent</b> suggestive or sexually charged text messages?					
6	How often have you <b>sent</b> provocative or suggestive pictures by text message?					
7	How often has someone responded to a suggestive or sexually charged text or picture message <b>you sent</b> ?					
8	How often have <b>you sent</b> provocative or suggestive pictures or messages over the Internet (e.g. Messenger, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc)?					
9	How often have you publicly <b>posted</b> suggestive or provocative pictures on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or Instagram?					



10. How many people have you exchanged provocative pictures or texts with? \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)

11. On average, I usually exchange sexts with (*You may choose more than one answer*)

a. I don't sext

b. Friends of casual acquaintances who I am attracted to

c. Someone I am dating

d. Someone I am in a committed relationship with (i.e., boyfriend/girlfriend, partner)


**Background information.**

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: Male/Female
3. Ethnicity
  - a. Malays
  - b. Chinese
  - c. Indian
  - d. Others : \_\_\_\_\_
4. Religion
  - a. Islam
  - b. Buddhist
  - c. Hindu
  - d. Others : \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which state you are from: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Highest educational level: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Working status: \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., student/full time working?)
8. Marital Status
  - a. Single
  - b. In-relationship
  - c. Others: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Have you engage in sexting behavior?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. Do you own a smartphone?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
11. Have you engage in sexual intercourse?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
12. What are the dating apps you currently downloaded? (e.g., Tinder, Tan Tan, or others?)

Thank you for your participation. If you feel any discomfort after answering the questionnaire and feel like talking to someone, you may contact Befriender at **603-79568145** for emotional support.

## Appendix C

### Approval to use questionnaire

 **Goh YEE Shan** Feb 1, 2020

Dear Dr. Cooper,


Good morning. I am Goh Yee Shan from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Perak Campus, Malaysia pursuing Master in Philosophy (Social Science).

I have read your paper, 'Motivation for Sex and Risky Sexual Behaviour Among Adolescents and Yound Adults: A Functionall Perspective'. It appears to be potentially useful to my research on Sexting among Young Adults In Malaysia.


I am writing to ask whether you could send the full set of questionnaire for Sex Motive Measure.

Thank you in advance for helping me.

Regards  
Goh Yee Shan

 **Mary Lynne Cooper** to you Jan 23, 2021

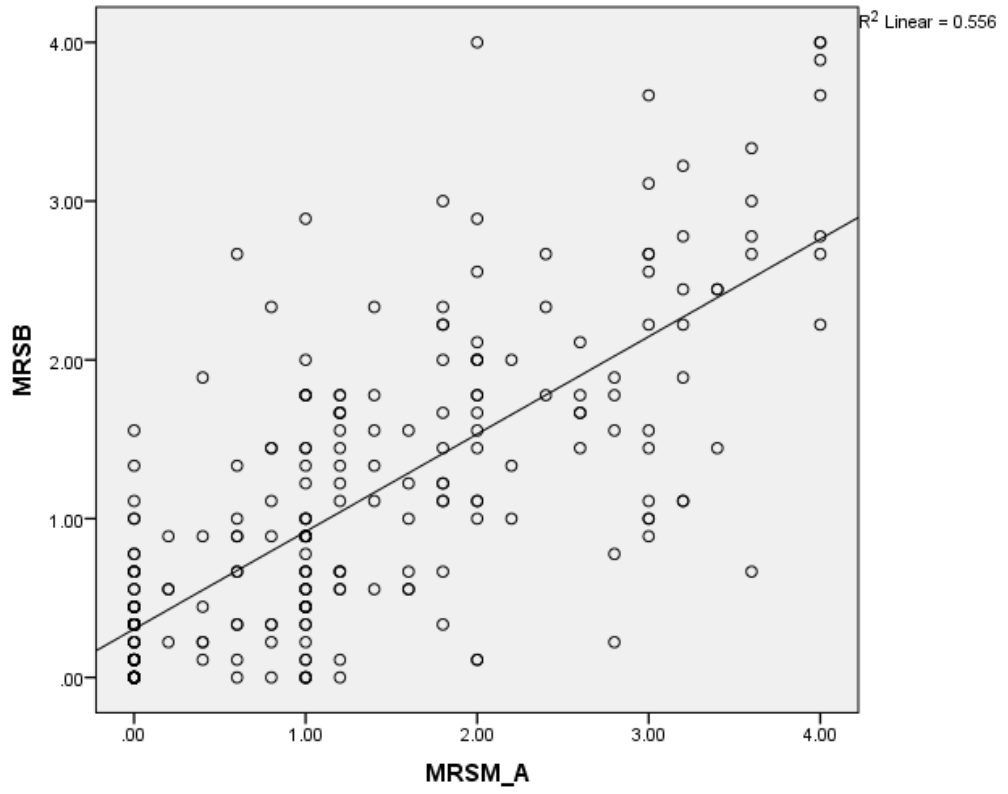
I am so sorry for the delay in responding. I don't go on this account often. Hopefully this is still helpful to you.

 Sex Motives Scale (2).doc

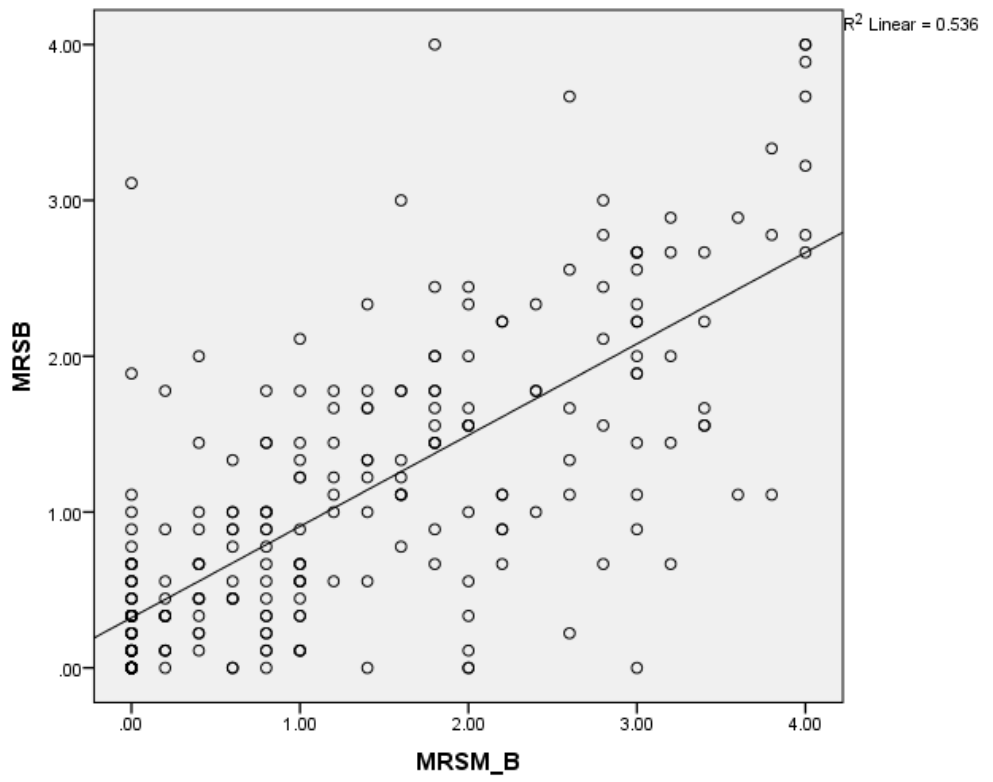
## Appendix D

### Linearity Test

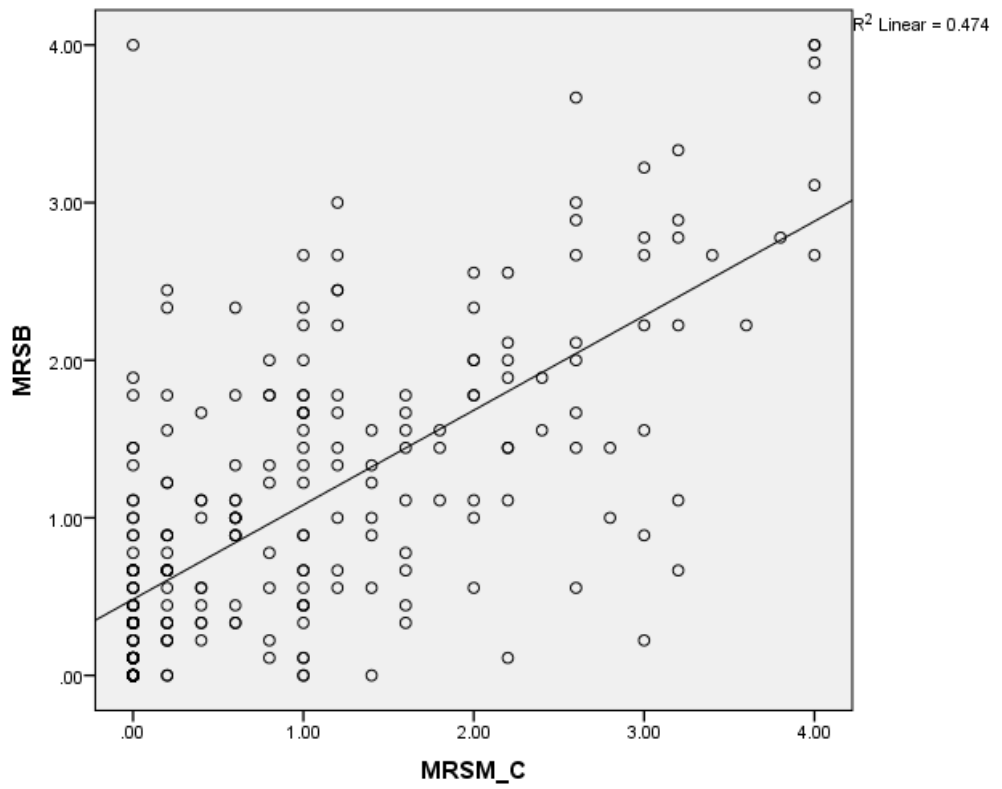
#### Intimacy and sexting behaviour



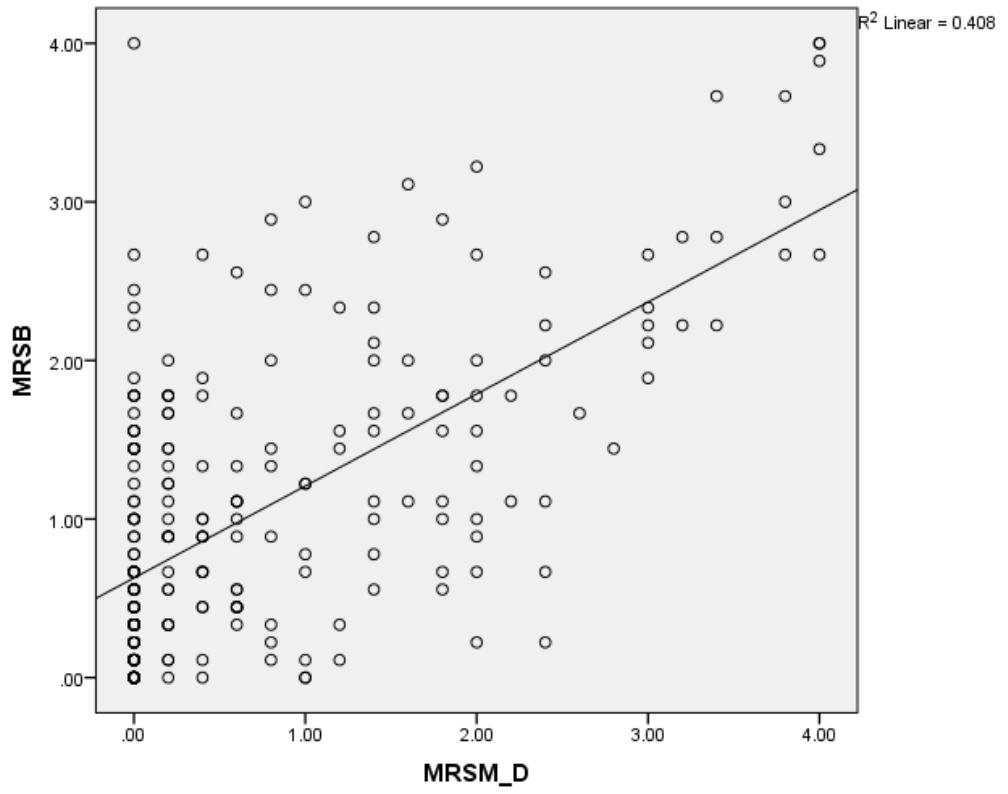
### Enhancement and sexting behaviour



### Self-affirmation and sexting behaviour



### Coping and sexting behaviour



### Peer-pressure and sexting behaviour

