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## Students' Perception of Online Dating: An Exploratory Investigation

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### Abstract

Online dating offers significant advantages for single people such as it provides an effective and less expansive choice of approach in choosing a date. However, with so many online dating sites there would be pros and cons in choosing and participating in the site. This present study explores an individual's opinion about online dating among university students. A qualitative research approach was chosen to explore their perception and opinion on online dating. Respondents are required to answer a question by writing a self-report during a structured interview. Then, they were to answer a standard quiz which retrieved from America PEW Research Centre. Data collected were compared to reassure the validity and reliability of the result. Research finds that majority of respondents hold a neutral point of view on online dating. The implication of this study gives some insight into the view and perception of a university student on the aspect of online dating which might be influenced by their upbringing and culture/norms.

**Keywords:** Online Dating, Students, Malaysian, Exploratory Study

### Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a unique phenomenon known as 'online dating'. People nowadays, living in the time of the internet, are willing to spend most of their time in a virtual online world. They may have different kinds of purposes for surfing the internet. However, their main purpose is to occupy their life with their fingertips by getting to know new people, 'researching' others' lifestyles, or exposing their own life to the world. Hence, the internet not only helps in a formal working setting but is also better known as a new kind of entertainment by most people. By using the internet, being in a relationship, or courtship it no longer depends on the traditional way. Internet increase the possibility and opportunity in meeting new people, get to know each other, being in a relationship with others although it might not be able to be done in a face-to-face situation. Online dating is a term that is defined

as finding a partner to engage in a romantic relationship through websites (Finkel et al., 2012). Online dating seems to be a modern and unique way that enables people to meet with potential mates or even establish romantic relationship. The interaction and bonding between couples may be different from couples who interact in a traditional way (face-to-face, matchmaking, etc....) but couples are still able to be in a relationship as long as others do. Usual online dating starts from sending messages or e-mails, and intimacy between both will increase from time to time (Rosen et al., 2008).

Online dating generally promotes and carries out from websites or applications which are specially created and designed for social dating purposes. Online dating website and application users create their profile which contains their interest, preference, photos, and personal contact details. Users can establish interactions with others through websites and applications by exploring others' profiles and exposing their personal information to attract the others. Through an online dating website or application, users are able to communicate and interact with a person who is like them, or they interested in. Most of the website and application designed for people who engaged in online dating increases the probability of people who have similarity and live in the same area meeting and interacting with each other. Online dating websites and applications help to arrange and organize users' information by categorizing the provided details so that the process of matching and searching will become easier for the users. Therefore, people are engaged in finding their partner online because the probability of meeting someone suitable to them increased with less effort and more convenience (Couch et al., 2012).

Involvement in online dating depends on the person's motivation or inner drive. People have a reason for performing certain kinds of behavior. According to Lawson and Leek (2006), people who are involved in online dating because of loneliness are urged to find a partner who is a companion; who is able to provide emotional support; and who is willing to communicate with them. Otherwise, they may see online dating to fulfill or light up their boring life. People who have faced life crises such as the death of a loved one or divorce may seek comfort or new hope from online dating (Lawson & Leek, 2006). They believe online dating may help them to overcome their sorrows and brings them a new life after. Besides, Lawson and Leek (2006) stressed that online dating is more beneficial than interaction in bars or nightclubs which is regarded as 'unhealthy' and unsafe interaction. Although online dating may have its risks such as people tend to create a virtual world which refers to a situation of providing false information or creating a new character to impress and attract the other. But it is still considered a safe and less risky interaction compared to the interaction that happened in a nightclub or bar.

Individuals select their partner based on their perception which it usually varies because of their personalities, gender, or cultural background. Hence, instead of finding a partner by meeting with people in a different setting, most people rely upon online dating as an easier and time-saving alternative to find a partner who meets their preference or certain preset criteria. Individual preference or preset criteria on selecting a mate include religious, ethnic, socioeconomic status, or personal achievement and success. People usually attract each other when they meet someone like them which is known as homogamy (Miller & Perlman, 2009). Apart from that, mate selection is a social phenomenon that researchers are interested in exploring, and usually, few theories are used in defining and explaining people's selection

of their partners. One of the theories in mate selection is known as filter theory which implies people do 'filter' their social interactions and meeting according to their preference to meet up with potential mates. Online dating websites and applications square up those sociological assumptions and theories to provide people with another approach to meeting with others by making use of the advancement of technology and communication. With the advancement of technology and communication, people are not only able to enlarge their social circles with no boundaries or limits but their relationships could be deepening even though they probably have not met each other face-to-face.

Online dating certainly enables people to communicate with anybody easily; it is also considered a better form of communication for people who are constantly in a busy state or for those who have a face-to-face communication problem (shy person, disabled person, etc...). At the same time, online dating allows people to communicate anywhere, or anytime and it is an indirect approach (no face-to-face) which can reduce awkwardness or shyness while people try to establish an intimate relationship with their potential mate. However, online dating may not applicable or not that reliable for everyone. There are several issues caused by online dating which could not be denied, and people should be aware of them. People's awareness of online dating issues is crucial for them to prevent certain harm or risk, especially for those who are using it.

#### *Social Issues Brought by Online Dating*

Online dating is a form of social communication manipulated by using a network. People engaged in online dating do not necessarily know the person they interact with through the network personally. Meaning that they probably have not met their mate vis-to-vis, or they might not have the chance to do so. Couples who are dating online basically communicate or 'meet' their mate through a computer screen.

One of the issues prevailing from online dating is cybercrime. According to Rege (2009), cybercrime is defined as conducting crime by making use of the technological advancement of communication and information. Sometimes, online dating may refer to a fraud trap, especially for those who are innocent and pure. People with foul intentions view online dating to fool people who seek comfort and love. Along with the advancement of technology, love scam increases because high technology allows those cheaters to commit this kind of cybercrime which is less risky and low in cost. Con artist of love scam refers to people who create a false profile and get close to their online dating mate with an impure intention such as cheating them for their money, body, or feelings. Victims of love scams usually feel they are loved by the cheater because to be able to 'get benefits' from those victims, gaining their trust and love is a 'must' for those cheaters. The advance of technology in the telecommunication and networking field has become ascendancy for those con artists. They simply create a new profile or even a non-exist and flawless character either with perfect looking or personality to attract people who tend to search for their Mr. or Mrs. Right.

According to the Internet Scams study by Telenor Group, which Digi.Com Bhd is also a part of, found that online dating scams are one of the top three scams which account for approximately 20% of overall internet scams in Malaysia (The Star Online, 2016). Based on Telenor's study, Malaysia was the country most vulnerable to internet scams of the regions (Thailand, India, and Singapore) surveyed. In Malaysia, 46% of respondents said they had

been victims of scams followed only by Thailand at 43% which represents data 1-in-5 people have been victims of both internet auction scams and online dating scams. Besides, 46% of Malaysian respondents report there is a victim of internet scams among their friends or family member. Most of the online dating scams in Malaysia involve con artists who create fake profiles on online dating sites to elicit money from victims. The Star (2016) reported that Malaysian women became a top list of online scam victims, with more cheating cases by Africans, recorded in 2015. These Malaysian women gave away RM71 million to love scammers despite frequent reports of fraud in the media. According to Datuk Seri Mortadza, love scams increase over the years because of the influx of foreign cybercriminals (The Straits Times, 2016). Datuk Seri Mortadza adds that 90% of African scam victims were women who are lonely, gullible, seeking love, and those seen to be greedy (The Straits Times, 2016).

Most love scamming is using similar tricks and can be done in a similar way to the process. A con artist will first create a fake profile that consists of attractive characteristics such as charming or gorgeous-looking profile pictures, promising career statements, tons of pictures to show off their glamorous lifestyle, and so on to attract people who search for a perfect partner. After the scammer is approached, they will start to establish a relationship and try to deepen their ties so they can gain trust. To achieve people, trust, con artist must put in their efforts and be patient because it is time-consuming. However, the more successful con artist to gain their target's trust and affection, the more probability target will fall into their trap and be more easily persuaded.

#### *Online Dating Trend*

Forms of human communication evolving from time to time as the technology of communication become more advanced. Nowadays, human is welcoming the era of high technology which promote a new form of communication and interaction among the society that is mainly connected through the internet. Along with 2, 905 million worldwide internet users, today's communication network has become a space for people to be gathered according to their interests and benefits which indirectly formed an online community (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2011). People are using the internet because of different reasons and purposes. They may use it to stay connected with society, earn income, share information, or become social with others. Therefore, some people may have the intention to find a life partner from their online community. They may get to know different kinds of people from different places and establish a kind of friendship or even a more serious and deeper relationship with their online mates.

Accompany by the advance of network technology, there are a ton of the latest applications being introduced and used for social media purposes in society. Those applications are grabbing people's attention and being regarded as nowadays global trend whereby Asia is the largest market in using the internet application (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2011). The statement of the advance of telecommunication and technology has promoted the expansion of the online social network is undeniable. People are currently obsessed with finding their partners through online social network. Most of them view the concept of "online dating" more openly and positively. Online dating is also a hot topic and trend either among teenagers or adults regardless they are male or female.

In 2013, Lunch Actually Agency researched 1900 respondents who represent the population of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia (Lim, 2013). The result of this research shows that 51% of the respondent from Singapore had been involved in online dating. This result shows an increase of around 25% if compared to data collected in 2009 which indicates there were only 26% who had experienced online dating. The result of the research also indicates there are 70% of respondents had been using the social website as one of the approaches to search for their partner according to their preference. Among 788 respondents from Singapore, there are 79% of them are in the range of age 26 to 40.

In Malaysia, statistic retrieved from Social Media Usage 2014 shows there are 19 million (66%) people are active in using the internet (David, 2015). Besides, there are 55% of those active users are using the internet to surf social websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others. Although most social websites did not purposely or intentionally promote the trend of online dating, however, it is a fact that the majority of people use it to approach people who grabbed their interest and begin to establish an online intimate relationship with that person. Based on a survey by Social Media Usage 2014, it is stated that Facebook is the most well-known and frequently used by people in Malaysia.

People's involvement in online dating increases as technology and telecommunication system is becoming more advanced. People nowadays could get their friends and search for their partner just by downloading the online application using smartphones. The existence of online applications is bringing new hope and opportunity to people who are interested in meeting new friends or being alone. Some people think it is indeed the best way for people to be social and meet new friends. The probability of a person to a friend with others who are living in a different country is higher if the process of making friends could be done by using the internet. Sometimes people who meet through the internet could be more open-minded and establish a purer relationship because it does not involve the pros and cons which usually exist in a real-life relationship.

### **Objective and Rationale of the Study**

After review of certain aspects regarding online dating such as trends nowadays, the reason for usage, and social issues related to online dating, it can be summarized that online dating is one of the activities which can represent the modern living style of today's society, but it is also related to certain social issues due to limited control and regulation on today's internet. Those social issues may affect the human right and should be taken into consideration and attended. Although people may be aware of the risk of online dating, that did not stop their curiosity and interest in exploring the online social world. They keep using it, involve themselves in online social relationships, and even depend on it in searching for their happiness. This phenomenon may be assumed as online dating is no longer a 'want' but a 'need' in most people's life. They may start online dating because of their desire to get a partner but the process of maintaining the online relationship with their partner soon becomes necessary so that they could avoid loneliness. Hence, it is reasonable to find out how people view online dating regardless they have experienced or have not experienced online dating. To minimize the scope of the study, this study only focuses on the student's perception of online dating at the University of Malaysia Sabah. Besides, the level of usage among university students in online dating can be detected as well.

In terms of the importance of the study, although the study covers a limited number of respondents, the information gathered is enough to impress the respondents' perceptions of online dating. This is due to the questions posed in the data collection process being focused on the issue of opinion on online dating and respondents were asked to answer in the form of self-reports. This study can be regarded as one of the sources which provide information about the trend of online dating among university students. The result or data of the study also can be referred to as a source of ideas to conduct a related study in the future. The trend of online dating can be detected among UMS students as well during the process of data collection. This study is also based on the concept of early adulthood as the period of people who act in interact with others and find their potential partners (Santrock, 2013). Moreover, the life of today's university students is related to high technology and the advance of telecommunication (The influence of modern technology on society: Good or bad? 2013). Therefore, the issue of online dating was chosen as the topic of a study conducted among university students who are also people undergoing early adulthood.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study was conducted in a qualitative method which included a structured interview and self-report session with 6 students from the University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS). By conducting a structured interview, data regarding students' perceptions of online dating can be collected. Respondents were required to provide opinions or perceptions on online dating by producing a brief self-report in Malay or English. This qualitative study is focused on responses in the form of description and elaboration to obtain more specified and rich data regarding the selected topic – online dating. Therefore, data or results of the study could provide a more comprehensive description and understanding of online dating.

### *Respondents*

This research consists of 3 female students and 3 male students from the University of Malaysia Sabah (Sabah). They are from different faculties and age range from 23 to 24 years old. Among the selected respondents, there are 4 of them had been experiencing online dating and 2 of them have not experienced online dating. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling by employing criteria that included gender, age, level of education, and a basic understanding of online dating. This research is more emphasis on students who have a basic understanding or interest in online dating so that the data they provided regarding online dating can be more accurate and maximum.

### *Instruments*

The instrument of the research included a structured interview question. Self-report regarding online dating was produced by each of the respondents during the interview session. An online survey created by the PEW Research Center of America had been used as a reference and part of the interview in this study. The question that respondents were required to respond to during the interview was constructed in the form of an open-ended question, which allows them to provide their opinion towards online dating without pressure and is less restricted.

The instrument of this research consists of 3 parts only. The first part of the interview requires respondents to provide their background information such as age, gender, ethnicity,

and faculty. The second part of the interview involved open-ended questions which requires the respondent to provide a brief description of a piece of paper about their perception towards online dating. The final part of the interview requires respondents to answer an online quiz adopted from the PEW research center. This quiz consists of 13 questions, and it was divided into 3 sections which are: Section A is about involvement in online dating; Section B is regarding online dating experience, and Section C consists of questions related perception and attitude of respondents toward online dating.

The instrument of study is accomplished in 20 to 30 minutes. Data collected from the interview session was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher in a qualitative way to obtain more information regarding online dating.

### *Procedure*

The question and structure of the interview session were constructed based on previous research done by the PEW research center. However, this study does not fully duplicate the research constructed by the PEW research center due to consideration of feasibility and suitability in the current context. Then, the structure of the interview session was decided to be done in 3 parts which are the first part – collect demographic details, the second part – a respondents' brief description of online dating, the final part – a quiz to be answered by respondents regarding online dating. Following is the respondent selection which is done in a purposive way. There is a total of 6 persons from different faculties were chosen as respondents of the study. There are 3 female students and 3 male students. Afterward, respondents were given some information and explanation regarding the study and the concept of online dating so that they can provide relevant and accurate data. The interview session was conducted individually to protect the respondent's privacy and rights. The interview session started with a self-introduce. Then, respondents were given a piece of paper to write down their brief responses based on the question given, which is "What is your perception towards online dating?" After they did their brief report, they were requested to answer an online quiz adopted from the PEW research center of America. The result obtained after the quiz was then given to each of the respondents. The process of data collection can be accomplished once respondents had answered the online quiz. There is no time restriction for respondents to accomplish each part of the interview. However, the average time for a respondent to accomplish the interview session is about 20 to 30 minutes. Finally, a follow-up procedure had been carried out by the researcher to provide a chance for the respondent to replenish their point of view about online dating. There are five of the respondents were requested to translate their self-report from the Malay language into English for reporting purposes so that mistranslation of their statements during reporting can be avoided.

### *Data Analyze*

The collected data were analyzed based on the manual introduced by (Burnard *et. al.*, 2008). The procedure listed in the manual is shown below:

1. The technique of open coding was used to summarize the collected data so that the main idea of statements can be retrieved.
2. The technique of initial coding was used to obtain the word and meaning of the response from the collected statements.
3. By using initial coding, words that carry the same or similar meaning can be categorized according to the final coding (the theme).



4. To assure the trustworthiness of respondents' statements, the method of triangulation was used to determine the validity and reliability of the data.

## Result

From the analysis of the collected data, the perception of respondents can be categorized into three types which are they have a positive view, negative view, or neutral attitude toward online dating. Besides, the results of the self-report and online quiz show a similar tendency which is the majority of the respondents are more likely to uphold a neutral attitude towards online dating.

### A Positive View of Online Dating

*Online dating is being viewed as another source of novelty*

Nowadays, people learn and absorb information and knowledge from the internet. Internet users share their knowledge, own point of view, information, or thoughts through social media websites such as Blogger, Facebook, or Instagram. Accessibility of the information is a lot more improved if compared to the past. There are no boundaries and fewer restrictions in the world of the internet. People may be able to learn or even experience something different from their culture and background through the internet. This statement is supported by Respondents C, D, E, and F.

*Respondent C: "online dating is a chance to get to know people from a different country."*

*Respondent D: "Nowadays people think online dating is the easiest and most useful way to know and make friends with people from a different country."*

*Respondent E: "Making friends with people from different places could provide us the chance to know other things. Because the internet without boundaries allows people from different places or cultures to get in touch."*

*Respondent F: "Online dating is an activity to occupy leisure time. Besides, online dating may also allow people to interact with a foreigner. Interaction with foreigners brings benefits to me as I could learn foreign living styles and different social cultures."*

Online dating is being viewed as a platform for people to learn a foreign language. Interaction with a foreigner may somehow improve people's ability in mastering a foreign language.

*Respondent C: "Online dating is a just nice platform for people who are learning a foreign language to practice the language."*

*Respondent F: "Online dating could provide a chance for people to learn a foreign language. It could be a benefit for me to acquire a foreign language and communication skills if someday I will be travel to that place."*

### Way to Approach Other

Online dating probably would dispense with face-to-face communication; people who are shy and have low self-esteem are more likely to make friends through the internet. Besides, online dating makes busy people's dating lives more convenient.

*Respondent C: "Online dating is a good way for people to make new friends. People who are shy and have low self-esteem will be able to make new friends."*

*Respondent D: "Online dating allows people to communicate with anybody more easily. It is also a form of communication that enables us to communicate with busy people and shy people. At the same time, we may also be able to chat at any time and easy to establish a relationship with people who have similar interests to us."*

*Be deemed as a "beneficial" activity*

People nowadays occupied their leisure time by surfing the internet. They immersed themselves in the cyber world to avoid loneliness and boredom. People may also gain dating experiences from online dating although the form of interaction in online dating may contain visionary and fictitious elements. The feeling of loving somebody or being loved by somebody may not experience in real life by people who are shy, low in self-esteem or introverted. However, those people may become more open towards others and experience more in the virtual world of the network as the interaction between people is unrestrained. Below are some of the responses which aligned with the statement of online dating is regarding as a "beneficial activity":

*Respondent B: "People may avoid being alone by surfing social websites to expand their friend circle."*

*Respondent F: "From my point of view, online dating is an activity to occupy free time."*

*Respondent F: "Besides, I think online dating provides people with dating experience in the virtual cyber world."*

Although some of the respondents view online dating as an activity that brings benefits and convenience, however, they did share some disadvantages of online dating which affect people's daily life in their response.

### **A Negative View of Online Dating**

*Source of cyber-crime and social problems*

Online dating frequently involves fictitious or unrealistic elements created by online users to purify or embellish themselves in the virtual world. Most online users tend to provide false personal information to portray themselves as a perfect or better individual in the virtual world of the internet. Besides, online users also face risks in which their profile or information may be misused or embezzled by a third party for another purpose. Embezzlement of personal information may lead to slander or misunderstanding which causes the person trapped in defamation. It should be regarded as an offensive cybercrime. People should aware that there is a lack of rules and control in the world of the internet. Therefore, there is currently no guarantee of network safety. The virtual online world has abounded with pitfalls that lead to fraud, sexual harassment, intimidation, or extortion.

*Respondent A:" However, to me, this online dating can be a very 'naïve' and unsafe system for people to search for their partners as one will be meeting anybody who uses the system."*

*Respondent A:" This online dating system, is also been used by some scammers to obtain information such as their address, contact number, and also personal information which can be further used to hack their bank accounts and also plan*

*for criminal acts especially the abduction of a young teenager who falls as a victim.”*

*Respondent C: “If somebody misuses online dating websites or services, it may lead to social problems such as fraud.”*

*Respondent D: “There are a lot of social problems caused by online dating. Some people use online dating websites as a platform to deceive others and make use of others’ emotions or feelings.*

*Respondent E: “Online dating can be regarded as a root of certain sexual harassment, fraud, or rape cases.”*

*Respondent F: “ People who engaged in online dating or are obsessed with social media websites spend most of their time in the virtual world till they emerge some anti-social characteristics in their real life.”*

#### *Misuse of information or misleading information*

The world of online dating may be full of fabrication and falsehood whereby users’ information is made up of them to attract others. Therefore, people's identity is hard to be defined or determined through the information listed on online dating websites. Some people might want to protect their reputation and privacy by creating a false self in the online world; some might live like a different character in the online world according to their preferences and desire, and some might concoct a perfect online character to phish people for malicious reasons. Whatever the reasons it is, there is certainly considered deceiving once people attempt to provide fake information to the public. Although not all fake profile could lead to hazard or physical harm to others, people who are deceived by fake profile is emotionally or psychologically get hurt since they had been trusted and committed to their online partner.

*Respondent A: “one might not be knowing who they will be connecting to as the other party may give false information about themselves.”*

*Respondent D: “Sometimes, we are unable to determine the person’s true identity through online dating. Most of the time, the identity or profile of people that we get to know from online dating or social media websites might be false or fake.”*

*Respondent E: “I feel I can’t easily trust an online dating relationship as I might not be able to know the person that I knew online very well.”*

#### *Online dating is wasting time and money*

People may spend most of their time in a virtual world which is more attractive and less realistic. Therefore, online dating that is no guarantee of success only seems to be a killing time activity. Although people put their effort into maintaining the relationship online, that might be a possibility that they will get no return at all since some of the users may not truly regard online dating relationships as serious relationships. Besides, some of the users may also spend money on maintaining or establishing a relationship through online dating.

*Respondent F: “online dating made people bad at managing their time because they are willing to occupy their leisure time to surf social media or online dating websites.”*

*Respondent A:” Even if online dating is used wisely, some of them who go for a blind date might feel disappointed as some of the information given by the second*

*party might not be true. Consequently, the person using this system will end up wasting their money on something that is not necessary."*

### **Neutral View toward Online Dating**

*Depends on the users or people who get involved in online dating*

Some of the respondents stated whether online dating is good or bad can only be defined by how people use it or experience it. Online dating may bring bad effects if people are involved have malicious thinking; otherwise, it may turn out all right if the interaction between people is fair and upright. Hence, whether online dating is beneficial or not, depends on the people who use it.

*Respondent B: "What online dating means or in what form should it be all depends on how an individual perceives it. It is subjective and depends. If people choose to believe online dating is a good way to start a relationship, then they may their best to make it turns out a good result which brings benefits to both. If people somewhat doubt or scruple about the interaction through online dating or even think it will only cause disadvantage, then the outcome of online dating may not seem to be a good one."*

*Online dating as an entertainment*

Most people who related to online dating are having curiosity about online dating and therefore they will try it to fill up their curiosity.

*Respondent E: "I experienced it (online dating) for entertainment's sake."*

*Respondent F: "For me, online dating is an activity that does fill up some free time."*

Many of the respondents are aware of the disadvantages and risks they may have while involved in online dating. However, they do not think online dating only brings disadvantages to people.

*Analysis of Quiz PEW*

The level of usage among respondents had been divided into three categories which included average user, light user, and not user. There are 3 respondents under the category of the average user, 1 respondent as a light user, and 2 respondents who are not online dating users. They answered the PEW online dating quiz, and their results were interpreted and analyzed. Based on the analysis of the PEW online dating quiz, the characteristics and perceptions of each respondent were described and summarized by comparing their result with a representative sample of a study conducted by the PEW research center.

Respondent A was one of the 89% of the representative sample in that study who have not used online dating. Even though respondent A has not been involved in online dating before, his attitudes towards online dating and the people who use it are consistently negative. Besides, respondent A might have heard about online dating, but it is just not from the horse's mouth. Therefore, respondent A is known as Detractor according to the analysis of the quiz.

From the analysis, Respondent B was one of the 11% of the representative sample in PEW's study who has used an online dating website or mobile dating app. Her level of online dating activity is right around average. She understands that love is complicated therefore her attitudes reflect her thoughts as well. Ultimately, she seems to be a bit of a Skeptic about this whole online dating thing according to the analysis of the PEW quiz. She has not experienced any negative situations such as being deceived or feeling harassed by her partner through online dating. In terms of usage, respondent B is an average online dater since she had been involved in one or two online dating-related activities that were questioned in the quiz. Respondent B has a mix of positive and negative attitudes toward online dating.

Also, Respondent C has been suggested as one of the 11% of representative samples in PEW's research who has used an online dating website or mobile dating app. However, she is considered a light user of online dating. Respondent C is seeming to be a bit of a Skeptic towards online dating based on PEW quiz analysis. She has had some negative experiences with online dating. However, she has a mix of positive and negative attitudes toward online dating.

Respondent D was reported to be one of the 89% among the representative sample in that study who have not used online dating. According to the analysis of the PEW quiz, respondent D answered some question positively and some negatively which represent he has a mix of positive and negative attitudes toward online dating. He is a skeptical about online dating. He has not used online dating and understands how complicated love can be. His attitude towards online dating reflects his thought.

Respondent E was one of the 11% among the representative sample in PEW's study that has used an online dating website or mobile dating app. Her level of online dating activity is around average. She also quite a doubter about online dating. She has a mix of positive and negative attitudes toward online dating. She has had some negative experiences with online dating before.

Whilst Respondent F was also similar to Respondent E (as one of the 11% among the representative sample in PEW's study) that has used an online dating website or mobile dating app. His level of online dating activity is right around average. He has had negative experiences with online dating. However, he does not completely view online dating negatively. He has a mix of positive and negative attitudes toward online dating. He is a Skeptic about online dating.

## **Discussion**

Nowadays technology promotes a well-developed and efficient communication system. Communication and interaction between people no longer need much time to be processed, yet it can be done within a shorter period or even immediately resolved regardless of wherever, whenever, or whoever. Therefore, online dating becomes possible and prevailing among the current social trend. Online dating becomes a trend because it is cool and fascinating. Besides, online dating can connect people from all around the world. People's interaction is no longer restricted by their living environment, but it can be expanded if only they connect themselves with others by using the internet. Hence, online dating is a good

idea for promoting the expansion of individual social circles by connecting the individual with people from another country (Cohen, 2015).

Otherwise, online dating provides people with another way to learn about other cultures or languages (Fagan, 2014). Diverse culture from different places around the world is a good source of life experience and knowledge that widens one's vision. Understanding other's cultures may bring people to come closer to each other so that their relationship can be strengthened. From culture sharing, people learn to become understanding, tolerant, and wiser. They may also spare thoughts from each other due to some cultural differences. For example, they may try their best to avoid any misunderstanding and conflict which affects their relationship by minding their words and deeds during the conversation.

Most people perceive online dating as a method to approach others or make friends. According to the PEW research center, 59% of Americans are engaged in using online dating as a good way to make friends and establish a relationship with others (as cited by Leibowitz, 2015). Some people even found their life partners through online dating or related social media websites. Research conducted by the University of Chicago found that marriage between people who met and paired through the internet lasted longer than people who met in the traditional way (Harms, 2013).

Loneliness is one of the factors that encourage people to engage in online dating (Rosewarne, 2016). Based on research retrieved from Your magazine, there are 2 per 3 teenagers engaged in finding mates through the internet due to feeling lonely (Hartley-Parkinson, 2011). They try to make friends through the internet to avoid being alone since they may be able to communicate and chit-chat with each other if they remain online. Physical appearance, identity, personality, or income may not be the main consideration when people find a partner through the internet. Sometimes, people just need a person who is willing to listen to their trouble and can talk to them.

Online dating might not cause hazards as any other serious social problems do, but it is still bringing some bad influence on society. One of the effects of online dating is "promoting" cybercrime. Cybercrime included fraud or scams which refers to cheating people by creating fake identities for malicious reasons (Hamsi et al., 2015). People with bad intentions may hanker for others' property. Normally, people who crave love and attention may be the target of those con artists. Besides, a vulnerable group of people such as women, the elderly, or teenagers may also mark those cheaters as their next target. Fraud cases happened frequently in Malaysia. For instance, in 2014, a woman was created by her online "lover" and lost a great deal of money (Hamsi et al., 2015). Therefore, internet safety and trustworthiness are still under a state with no guarantee.

Another issue related to online dating which is also often being discussed and argued is the truthfulness of users' identities and information provided in their online profiles. People creating fake or false profiles in the world of the internet somehow becomes a common phenomenon. People may care about their physical appearance on their online profile whether they are attractive or not to others. People may lie about their weight, and height, or even use a fake photo as their profile picture to attract others (Seidman, 2014). Therefore, people may not be able to determine their online mates' identities. Study shows men are

more likely to change their self-reported personality characteristics and physical appearance when they expected to meet a potential online date (Guadagno et al., 2011). They may also exaggerate their characteristics when the method of the meeting was via email.

The next negative influence brought by online dating is time and money waste. Some online dating websites require members to pay for their membership or spend money to join their activities. Although people spend money on maintaining their membership with a large amount of extra spending, they might not get a 100% quality of service or guarantee in return (James, 2012). Meanwhile, they may spend their time waiting for feedback or reply from others. They may end up occupying most of their leisure time which suppose for them to do other meaningful activities or take a rest to reply to or entertain their online partner who might not even show their real self. According to research conducted by the PEW research center, 1 in 3 of online dating users do not want or expect to meet with their online partner in real life, however, their relationship will have remained as an online relationship (as cited by Danlo, 2014). Therefore, some people may think it is better if online dating users spend that time finding a real partner in their real life rather than putting the effort into maintaining a virtual relationship.

The study has found that gender affects an individual's perception of online dating. Meaning that different gender may have different perceptions of online dating. Based on research findings, men are more engaged in downloading mobile dating applications compare to women whereby women are more likely to use it compared to men (Gossett, 2015). Besides, men will surf online dating websites without a certain purpose, but women will have the intention to find a partner while surfing online dating websites (Gossett, 2015). However, Abramova *et. al* (2016) indicates that men are more active in using online dating website than women. Men are upholding a positive point of view towards online dating because they regard it as a medium for people to connect with others or make friends (Abramova et al., 2016). In 2010, research found that men are more likely to review a personal profile three times more than women and 40% of men tend to start a relationship with the person they had been following on an online dating website (James, 2012).

In terms of usage, there are differences as well according to gender. Research stated men are more likely to lie compared to women while having an online dating relationship (Seidman, 2014). For example, they tell lies about their income, occupation, characteristics, personality, or family background. This is because they thought a perfect background and profile will make them look more charming and attractive than others. As for women, they are more likely to tell stories about weight, height, or physical appearance. Women think a perfect physical appearance is essential in grabbing men's attention. Both gender like to cheat about their age, especially among mature women (Hall et al., 2010). The main purpose of getting involved in online dating is to find a life partner. However, men are more engaged in a short-term relationship full of passion whereas women are desire for getting a life partner who able to promise them a more sustainable relationship (Hall et al., 2010).

### **Strengths and limitations**

One of the strengths of the present study was the exploration of students' perception toward online dating in the country (i.e., Malaysia) which is still very traditional in terms of culture and norms about the issue of dating, marriage, and role play by males and females.

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations of this study that should be highlighted. Firstly, a limited number of respondents although able to provide enough information for the study, it will be better if involve more respondents so that the result of the study can be generalized to the population. Currently, the finding of this study is more suitable in providing extra information for others to refer to but not generalizing the current situation of online dating. This study shows the majority of the respondents have a neutral point of view on online dating.

### Conclusions

Online dating has many advantages and disadvantages. From an advantageous perspective, online dating can be a platform to learn more about one's culture and languages which might be beneficial for the users. In addition, people perceived online dating as a strategy to make friends with others which might be useful for decreasing the chances of being alone without a friend. However, online dating also posed several drawbacks such as it can be used to promote various bad behavior such as cybercrime. Furthermore, online dating users also can fake their identities which may lead to various negative influences and behavior. It was reported that women used online dating more compared to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, in order to curb the negative aspect of online dating; thus, some sort of mechanism needs to be implemented to make sure that women do not fall into the men's trap such as falling into the wrong hand due to believing fake identities portrayed by men. In addition, more awareness programs should be initiated and implemented to assist online dating users to guard them against the negative side of online dating. In addition, the responsible authority that develops online dating sites or apps should be able to filter those users with questionable identity and information from getting information and contact with the genuine users of online dating platforms. Furthermore, if the approach of online dating is to be successful among youth in Malaysia, future studies should not only focus on the target audience, i.e., youth (including university students) but also their parents to understand the scenario of searching for a partner online. This is to gain more insights regarding online dating among the general population in Malaysia.

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