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The Review of the Ugly Truth and Negative Aspects of Online Dating

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Abstract- Millions of people are using online dating sites to seek for partners in this era of digital technology. Dating sites are commonly used by people all around the world. There are various risks of meeting potential mates online. This paper investigates the negative impacts brought by online dating, and to what extent do they affect online users. It is discovered that there are eight main harmful aspects impacting the people and society.

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The Review of the Ugly Truth and Negative Aspects of Online Dating

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Abstract- **Millions of people are using online dating sites to seek for partners in this era of digital technology. Dating sites are commonly used by people all around the world. There are various risks of meeting potential mates online. This paper investigates the negative impacts brought by online dating, and to what extent do they affect online users. It is discovered that there are eight main harmful aspects impacting the people and society.**

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I. Introduction

According to the Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs, humans require physiological, safety, social, self-esteem and self-actualization in life (Mazanderani, 2012). The need of love is one of the basic needs for human beings. The main concern about love is searching for the right person. So how exactly do people find their partners? Most people meet their potential partners in their social circles, such as school and office (Rosenfield & Thomas, 2012). However, the number of potential partners in a person's social circle can be very limited. People spend a lot of time on internet every day. Besides that, mobile technology is evolving quickly all around the world. Smartphones are now a necessity for most people in daily life. Based on a survey, 77% of the respondents claim that it is important to have access to their smartphones all the time whereas 92% of them say that they would rather having their smartphones with them instead of bringing debit cards or credit cards (Olenick, 2013). Hence with the help of today's technology, online dating has been a very common tool for people to meet new friends and potential mates from the internet.

Online dating market is expanding to numerous countries, including United States, United Kingdom, Malaysia and many more. In a recent study, online dating market in UK is booming with its value increases tremendously by over 70% in the last five years, reaching a total amount of £165m (Bacon, 2015). Another report forecasts that the future value of the market can goes up to £225m in 2019 (Mintel, as cited in Bacon, 2015). Online dating sites offer users convenient way of browsing, for example users may download the phone application and simply click on it to start viewing others' profile and messaging. Online daters can access to online dating websites anytime they want and everywhere they go, using computer or mobile phones. In this article, we are going to explore the negative sides of online dating. It is undeniably that online dating helps a number of people in meeting suitable potential partners and finding love, but at the same time online dating does have several bad sides and consequences.

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II. Deception

The issue of online deception is commonly discussed since the emergence of internet, social media and now online dating. Deception can be considered as a deliberate act that intended to mislead people, while the deceiver has the intention of giving false perception and the other person has no clue that these actions are taking place (Tsikerdekis & Zeadally, 2014). Deceptive behavior is more frequently found on the internet due to the absence of no verbal cues in online communication, and people can easily manipulate the information (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Online users may change the information on the internet according to their wish because cyberspace is a virtual place which allows users to chat freely without meeting each other face to face.

The purpose of joining an online dating site is to search for a love partner. There is no doubt that people with better physical appearance and good personality are more popular than those who have relatively lower physical attractiveness. Therefore, online daters may alter their profiles to attract others, for instance enhancing the photograph and giving inaccurate information regarding their hobby or income level. An experiment is carried out to prove the point. It is shown that online users are deceptive on photograph and text-based self-presentation to form a better impression in an online dating environment (Lo, Hsieh & Chiu, 2013).

People can decide whether to chat with a certain user after viewing his or her profile. An eye-catching self-presentation usually receives more attention on online dating sites. Research discovers that online users tend to increase deceptive self-presentation when the desirable potential mate they are interacting with appears to be more attractive (Guadagno, Okdie & Kruse, 2012). Men are willing to use deception in order to look more dominant and kind than the actual self; whereas women are reported to show tendency in

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presenting a more favorable physical appearance than they actually are (Took & Camire, as cited in Guadagno, Okdie & Kruse, 2012).

III. Unreliable Matching Method

Online dating sites collect data from users, study the possibility between users and recommend desirable potential partners to respective users. Many dating sites states that using proprietary algorithms, they can help online dater to pick a perfect match out of millions of people who is on the same dating site. Dating sites insist on the concept that their matching algorithms are scientifically valid, however they fail to disclose their algorithms and provide evidence that they are adhering to the standard of science (Finkel, as cited in Horn, 2012). There are two hurdles that should be taken care of for a psychometric evaluation to be taken seriously by scientists (Epstein, 2007). First of all, the psychometric test has to produce reliable and stable results. Secondly, the test ought to be proved as a valid measure of what it is supposed to be measuring.

Besides that, algorithms of dating sites have a major issue with the information they collect from users. They only ask questions related to individual characteristics and personalities. These information do not guarantee the relationships and happiness between two persons. Based on the algorithms, two persons who have similar characteristics such as political orientation, religion background and life values are most probably going to end up to be perfect match in the system (Finkel& Karney, 2012). A study discussed in a journal titled Psychological Science in the Public Interest (PSPI) shows that the level of marital satisfaction is not affected by the degree of similarity of these traits (Bennett, 2012).

Another underlying problem is the elimination of possible matching candidates using trait-based method. There is no actual algorithm revealed by dating sites because it is being preserved as trade secret in the firms. Though it is possible to predict the way these algorithms work, which is matching people with compatible personality traits (The Modern Matchmakers, 2012). Two persons with different characteristics will not be put together as perfect match; but love is not only about identical personality, it is about how two people actually feel when they meet. “Chemistry” plays a crucial role in love but it is not something that online daters can feel when theyinteract with each other in front of computer screen. Finding the right person and falling in love involve a complex combination of feelings, intuition and interaction which is magic that cannot be captured and analyzed by algorithms (In matters of the heart, 2012).

IV. Short-Lived Relationships

The most common process for online dating is searching for a desirable potential partner, then starting to communicate via messaging, getting to know each other and set up for a meeting in person. The key difference between online dating and traditional way of meeting people in real life is the sense of urgency (Slater, 2013).A person who opts for online dating most probablyis more eager to enter into a relationship. When a person registers for online dating site, it shows that one is ready to meet a partner on the internet and engage in a relationship. After warming up with messaging and possibly phone calls with the opposite party, the pair has developed a certain level of familiarity. When the pair meets up face to face, they already have basic understandings towards each other.

Normally two outcomes might occur after this stage. Firstly, it speeds up the whole relationship under given circumstances where both parties acknowledge the feelings towards each other. They might start a relationship faster and quicker compared to traditional way of meeting people. However, “a false sense of intimacy is created when interaction remains purely cognitive”, says Dr Reece Burka, who is a psychologist in New Orleans (Kim, Benson, Harrison & Koss-Feder, 2000). Many couples who meet online tend to maintain their relationships for a short period of time and eventually break up easily. Another possible outcome is the pair does not feel right when they encounter face to face. Online daters feel the need to set up a meeting in person before they invest intense emotions in the cyber relationship (Henry & Barraket, 2008). Although they reach a high level of intimacy by maintaining virtual relationships, it is always lacking the significant feelings of seeing each other in real world. Then their relationships are most likely going to break at this point.

In addition, people choose to meet potential mates on the internet normally faces difficulties in finding love in real world; and people who have less compatible mates are more likely to suffer from careless decision because they do not think properly before making a commitment. A study suggests that couples from online dating have a higher possibility to get involved in dating and romantic relationships while couples who met offline are more likely to be in marital relationships (Paul, 2014). Furthermore, the breakup rates for marital and romantic relationships among couples who met through dating sites are shown to be higher.

V. Threat to Marriage

Today, the phenomenon of internet infidelity takes place in the society. Internet infidelity is defined as any sort of communication or interaction happens between two parties on the internet which carries emotions and behaviors away from the primary relationship and influence the relationship negatively (Jones & Tuttle, 2012). Those who suffer from dissatisfaction in marriage have the tendency to meet new friends online because other online daters do not

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know the real person who is already married. They can simply avoid the topic and refuse to disclose any information regarding their marital status. Online users have the ability to manipulate the information and no one will discover the truth as long as the deceiver keeps lying. A survey titled "How Has Internet Dating Changed Society?" points out that online dating plays a role in the rise of divorce rates (Slater, 2013). Happy couples who are highly satisfied in their marriage do not have the urge to put themselves in the virtual world and search for other options. On the other hand, couples who are in average or unhappy marriages might be motivated by people from the surrounding to join dating sites because a lot of people subscribe for dating sites. People get influenced by friends easily because they share similar topics and thoughts. Match.com, which is one of the largest dating sites, sees a total increase of 26% in the number of memberships compared to last year (Stockwell, 2009). Online dating has indirect association to the increasing divorce rates because it allows people to get access to many new choices on the internet.

A research suggests that relationship and marriage become more disposable with the establishment of dating sites. (With online dating heating up, commitment gets the kiss-off, 2013). One of the elements which decide the quality of commitment is availability of options (Slater, 2013). Online dating sites give people the idea of bigger social circle and larger number of potential mates. The online dating market is getting bigger over time as the mobile technology improves and allows people to access to internet everywhere. Online dating helps people to realize that they do not have to settle for an unsatisfying relationship regardless their age and marital status. People who are still in a marriage can easily access to dating sites for the purpose of looking for new love or even casual sex. A study shows that fifty-three percent of marriage and family therapists conveyed the amount of cases they encounter that relates to cybersex are growing (Goldberg, Peterson & Rosen, as cited in Jones & Tuttle, 2012). Couples who face problems in their marriage would arrange therapy sessions and seek for advices from marriage and family therapists. Hence, they are often the first one who comes across to cybersex issue.

VI. Health Risk of Sexual Activity

Online dating sites provide a platform for users to search for new friends, ease boredom, relaxation, finding romantic partners, as well as sexual partners (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). A study states that 45% of female and 55% of male utilize internet for the sexual purpose; and those who claimed that they have met offline sexual partner online consist of 40% of female and 35% of male (Daneback et al., 2007). Having casual sex with an online stranger brings a major threat, which is raising the possibility of contracting sexual transmitted diseases (STDs). Dating sites offer identity and anonymity. It is very difficult to know the accurate STD status of online users as there is no guarantee that the person will confess the truth. A higher frequency in casual sex and number of sexual partners can cause greater incidence of STDs among the population (Chan & Ghose, 2014). STDs have negative impact on people, government and the society. They affect infected patients in a physical and psychological way. Moreover, U.S. healthcare system spends $16.4 billion to provide treatment to a total of 19 million new STD infections every year (Chan & Ghose, 2014). People pay extra attention to HIV among various STDs because it is a virus which involves widespread mortality and morbidity. The willingness of online users to have higher number of casual sex partners can escalate the HIV transmission. A survey reveals that there are more online sex seekers, including those who are HIV negative people, are engaged in unprotected sex intercourse, are sexually exposed to HIV positive individuals, and have stated that they are less worried about HIV infections due to improved HIV treatment compared to offline sex seekers (Elford et al., as cited in Chan & Ghose, 2014).

VII. Racial Prejudice

Racial prejudice is a hostile attitude toward an individual from a certain group, simply because he belongs to that group; and it is, therefore, presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group (Allport, as cited in de Lima Nunes, 2010). Online daters habitually generally prefer those who are from the same racial background due to different cultures and beliefs. A research reveals that Americans' preference for same racial background exceeds their preference for similar personality and characteristics (Lewis, 2013). A survey conducted on over 4000 online daters shows that Latinos prefer to date other Latino; and they are more willing to date whites than black (Feliciano, Lee & Robnett, 2011). White women are more likely to avoid Asian while white men are more likely to avoid dating blacks (Feliciano, Robnett & Komaie, 2009). This proves racial prejudice also happens among online dater. Another study shows that online daters rate white-stereotypic profile owners to be more attractive compared to black-stereotypic profile owners (Alhabash, Hales, Baek & Oh, 2014). Moreover, people with similar background and characteristics share higher compatibility based on the algorithms of dating sites. This situation further reduces the possibility for two online users from dissimilar races to acquaint. In real life, there are chances where an individual meet a person from another race and slowly develop friendship. They might end up in a relationship if they have common interest or feelings for each other. However, with the dating sites' algorithms, online users avoid

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potential partners from other races at the very beginning. It completely eliminates the chance for online daters from respective races to start a conversation.

VIII. Scam

Online romance scam has become a new kind of fraud since 2008 (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). It is a crime which the criminal pretend to begin a relationship via online dating sites and then defrauds their victims of a substantial amount of money (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). A study estimates 230,000 citizens in Britain may have fallen victim to online dating scam and the UK National Fraud Authority reports an estimation of over £38 billion is taken into account of fraud cost in United Kingdom in 2011 (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). Apart from financial loss, victims also suffer from emotional distress. Victims pour their hearts out for the criminals, thinking them as romantic partners, end up with broken heart. Level of emotional can lead to high Neuroticism, as well as high Loneliness and low Openness to Experience (Buchanan & Whitty, 2014). Victims might lose trust in people and love.

Other than online romance fraud, there are also fake online dating services in the market. Camarillo (2010) subscribed to a dating service and was asked to submit bank account information for payment to enjoy the online dating service. She did and money was pulled out from her bank account. She later found out that this online company called Executive Lesbian Dating is a criminal team operating in America and Canada. Their main purpose is to swindle lesbians who are seeking for online dating service.

IX. Privacy Breach

Online dating sites collect all kinds of data from users, including geographic, demographic and other characteristics. They say the ultimate motive is to ensure the matching algorithms work well and suggest perfect matches to users. Australian Privacy Commissioner Timothy Pilgrim found Cupid Media failed to make reasonable effort to secure customers' data on its websites, thus breached the Privacy Act (Branley, 2014). There are more than 35 dating sites under Cupid Media (Branley, 2014). Hackers got unauthorized access to Cupid webservers and stole 245,000 Australian Cupid site users' personal information in January 2013 (Branley, 2014).During the investigation, Pilgrim says Cupid did not fulfill the password encryption processes.(Branley, 2014).

X. Discussion

Binazir (2011) says online dating sites may expand the opportunities for those who live in a small town, but the others better meet someone in real life because it is deceptive and it gives unhelpful excessive choice. Online dating sites bring risks and danger to users; and it is supported by various researches and studies throughout decades. Although the world is conquered by digital technology now, there are still issues that cannot be fixed by online dating company. Firstly, human behavior is unpredictable and cannot be detected by system. Dating websites have no appropriate system to track lies and deception. Online users are allowed to alter any information regarding their identity, weight, income, and many more. There is no way for other online users to find out the truth about deceivers because online dating sites are a virtual world. It is a waste of time to spend way too much time on the internet, chatting with people who might be total opposite of what they wrote on their profiles or said in their conversations. A survey reports online daters spend an average of 5.2 hours on searching and browsing through profiles, and 6.7 hours writing and replying e-mails weekly; all for a payoff of just 1.8 hours of interaction outside of internet (Frost et al., 2008). The ratio of time spending on online dating sites to offline interaction time is nearly 7:1. In addition, successfully meeting a potential online partner in real life does not guarantee a fruitful relationship or love. One of the respondents in a survey reveals that she developed a connection with a special one and built up hopes, then ended up drowning in disappointment after meeting him in person (Couch, Liamputtong & Pitts, 2012).

Online dating sites also provide plenty of choices to users, and most of the time, excessive unhelpful choices. A study proves that more search options triggers user to search excessively, leading to less selective processing by decreasing users' cognitive resources, distracting them with irrelevant information, and reducing their ability to eliminate inferior options (Wu & Chiou, 2009). Online relationships do not last as long because love involves feelings and actual interaction between couples. Many people experience the problem of chatting frequently online but when they actually meet up in person, they do not feel the same intimacy they felt through online chatting. Besides that, dating sites allows married people to communicate with others online and discovering other options, thus leading to increased divorce rates. Apart from risky sexual activity which causes the transmission of STDs, many dating sites are taking short cuts in protecting users' privacy. Reitman (2012) says online users' profiles can hang around for a long time after users cancel their accounts. Users are exposed to higher risk of scam and hacking issues with their information available on the internet, such as their identity, photos and other personal details. Furthermore, OkCupid as one of the biggest dating sites, keeping users' profile by default and their profiles are indexed by Google (Reitman, 2012). This enables stalkers to freely search up any users.

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XI. Conclusion

Dating sites are widely used in today's generation due to several reasons. Firstly, many people engage in hectic lifestyle with work, study, family and entertainment. They do not have enough time to go out and meet new friends. Secondly, most people have a limited social circle and less choice of potential romantic partners. Thirdly, dating site is a new form of meeting partners because of technological advancement; and people are so used to doing things on the internet, including seeking for significant ones. However, meeting partners online can lead to severe negative impacts. Some of these drawbacks can cause permanent damage to users. Deceptive behavior occurs frequently on dating sites because majority users prefer to appear as more attractive individuals to attract others' attention. Although online dating companies claim to have accurate matching algorithms, they do not reveal their algorithms due to trade secrets, and also fail to provide evidence to prove their point. Besides, online daters are most likely to have short-lived relationships because they start off in a virtual world. Many people like to imagine their ideal partners before meeting them, which makes the expectations to be higher. Therefore, when they set up a meeting, reality turns out to be lower than expectation, and then this can lead to breakups.

Online dating also cause relationships more disposable because people know there is no need to settle for unsatisfying marriage. A huge number of people, including married people use dating sites to seek for casual sex partners. Casual sex can lead to STDs, which bring emotional distress and psychological stigmatization to victims. Racial prejudice happens in real life, as well as dating sites. Online users have negative perception towards particular individuals from different racial background. Fraud takes place more easily because criminals can carry out wrongdoings through internet. Not only facing the need to worry about scam, they also have to be careful with leakage of personal information because many online dating companies fail to secure users' privacy and information. Online users must learn how to protect themselves from risks and dangers if they wish to expand their social circles to the internet. They are responsible for their own health and safety. On the other hand, online dating firms should take immediate actions in curbing the problems of users' privacy leakage. Trust of customers ought to be earned and built gradually. Furthermore, it is their duty to safeguard information of online users.

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