



EXPLORING CAUSES AND TRIGGERS OF SEXTING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATION IN FOCUS

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Abstract

In the existing body of knowledge, sexting is considered as a technological problem especially for young people. This phenomenon has been introduced after the influence of information and technology on the young population. Sexting is conceptualized as “sending or receiving sexually explicit messages or images through the devices”. Causes are that gives rise to an action, phenomenon, or condition. Triggers are factors that promote the particular behavior or mechanism. The progressive prevalence of sexting is noticed among the Pakistani students as well. The present study is conceptualized to enlist the causes and triggers of sexting among Pakistani higher learning students. This current study was qualitative in nature. Semi structured interviews were conducted to arrive at prudent findings. Two questions were posed and responses were audio taped. Questions are (Q.1 when and why you do sexting? Q.2 what triggers you to do sexting?) Sample depended upon the saturation point. The data were collected from both male and female. The collected data were transcribed by using transcription manual. The content analysis was utilized to reach at valid findings. To establish reliability and validity of the transcribed data along with re-checking two experts were deployed. The tentative findings also exhibited the possible causes such as peer pressure, curiosity, sensation seeking behavior and the possible triggers are positive expectations (sexting leads to sexual encounter, sexting makes one feel happy) and sexual pleasure. The current study will provide insightful remedial measures to diminish the causes and triggers negatively influencing our youth. The limitation and future avenues were also condoned off.

Keywords

Sexting, Causes and Triggers, Semi-Structured Interviews, Qualitative Inquiry, Pakistani Students.



1. Introduction

Sexting, is the fusion of "sex"+"texting", is the "sending, receiving, or forwarding of sexually explicit messages, images or photos through electronic means, particularly between cell phones" (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014). Further, causes are factors that gives rise to behavior, phenomenon or condition. In this study more common causes are being in relationship and social media and late marriages. Whereas triggers are the facilitators and motivators that promote the particular behavior or mechanism. In this study factors that promote sexting are positive expectations (sexting leads to sexual encounter, sexting makes one feel happy) and sexual pleasure. As one study, found that students who admitted that they do sexting were 32% more likely to report having sex the next year.

‘Sexting’ is a common phenomenon like exposure to porn videos and pictures online. Sexting cases resulting in cyberbullying and suicide have supply to all nations by media, such as the case of Jessica Logan. Sexting has both negative and positive outcomes. We cannot limit ‘sexting’ to just mobile phones or online messages. Now, people have easy access to social media. Social media is providing various possibilities for private messaging and chat. Research has found many young people involved in revealing sexual poses and nudity (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). One qualitative research revealed that boys and girls were under per formative pressures to pose in ‘sexy’ way through their social media profiles.

It has been reported that almost 13-68 percent of young population of age 18 to 24 years are engaged in watching sexually explicit content and sexting each other. It is also observed that the tendency of their involvement in sexting is more than the older adult population (Gómez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015). One survey suggests that sexting is sending or receiving ‘sexually explicit pictures/video’ and sex chat and similarly, another survey reported that sexting is about sending and receiving ‘sexual words and images. Sexting provides the opportunity to the individuals to have an ownership in the privacy in their relationship and to look into the personal and physical space of each other. Sexuality is also considered as the part of culture for the adults (Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski & Zimmerman, 2013). Main method of individuals to engage in sexting is the use of text messaging (Drouin & Landgraff, 2011). Sexting is often considered as sexual activity between new sexual (Dir & Cyders, 2015). Sexting is like sexual “hookup”, defined as unplanned, sexual encounter with someone whom you are not committed romantically. The problematic relation have been observed among the relationship between sexting and sexual hook ups due to certain personality traits. The most common personality factors which are relevant to the current study are negative urgency and sensation seeking. The negative urgency is the tendency of individual to act strongly to the negative emotions whereas seeking sensation is the tendency in which individuals seeks for new experiences and feel excited with them (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001).

Both of these personality factors are related to the sexual behavior and sexting (Deckman & DeWall, 2011).

Further, there is extreme likelihood of risk taking in sexting due to impulsivity and it also increases the positive behavior outcomes which causes the individuals to engage themselves in that certain behavior again and again in the future (Smith & Anderson, 2001). Getting attention may be another reason of sexting. Survey suggests that people use sexting to be “fun or flirtatious.” Sexting, like drug use, leads to a rush of dopamine in the brain. Those neurotransmitters cause a sense of euphoria and pleasure. The desire for the pleasure leads to increase this behavior. This phenomenon is very common nowadays in various cultures and populations all over the world. People tend to overcome their frustration regarding sexual tendencies through the sexting. This is a very sensitive issue in which is usually denied by the people that is why adequate scientific evidence and literature regarding the reasons and factors which activates this sexting behavior lacks in the existing body of knowledge. Due to this paucity of literature, our study was aimed to explore the causes and triggers of sexting and conceptualization of this phenomenon.

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study consisted of eight (five males and three females) university students from BS, MSc and M.Phil. programs. The participants in this study were recruited by employing snow-ball sampling technique. They were approached and briefed about the research purpose and they were also ensured regarding

confidentiality of their data and anonymity of their identities. After obtaining their consent of participation in the study, they were interviewed. For the collection of data, semi structured interviews were conducted and their responses were audio taped. Two questions were posed to participants; Q1 when and why they do sexting? Q2 what triggers them to do sexting? Every participant was given 25-30 minutes time for their detailed response. Further, the data were transcribed according to transcription manual (Dresing, Pehl & Schmieder, 2015). Transcribed data were analyzed by using content analysis (manually). The prudent findings were verified by independent judges to ensure trustworthiness of verdicts.

3. Results

The table 1 of findings exposed that participants of the study were university students who were engaged in sexting. They reported that they do sexting because they have body needs. Due to delayed marriages they cannot accomplish their sexual needs so that is why they engaged in sexting. Watching porn leads to sexting because everyone has sexual needs and not everyone can do sex so those who can't have sex, they do sexting to satisfy their sexual needs. Female who were engaged in sexting reported that they involve in sexting due to peer pressure, but later they found it pleasurable and easy phenomenon to satisfy their sexual needs. Sexual pleasure obtained by use of sexting, facilitates sexters to remain continuously engage in this activity until their marriage.

Table 1

P No	Gender	Age	Recording units	
			Causes	Triggers
1	M	24	After getting engaged I do call sex. Basically, exposure to porn, sexual desires, being in relationship and future understanding are the causes of sexting.	Need for sexual gratification triggers me to do this again and again because I don't want to have sex with her before marriage but there is body need too that demands satisfaction.
2	M	23	Watching porn leads to sexting because everyone has body needs and not everyone can do sex so those who can't have sex, they do sexting to satisfy their sexual needs. Late marriages are also the reason of sexting.	Sometimes to divert attention I do sexting. Whenever I feel frustrated and depressed I do sexting to divert my attention and for seeking pleasure.
3	M	23	Once I watched a porn video and I wanted to do same with my girlfriend. I talked with her for imaginary sex. Once I watched a live sex in my village and at that time it was very difficult for me to control my urges.	Because now it is a source of pleasure to me, I want to do this again and again. I found a way to do sex which is pleasurable to me.
4	F	19	First time, I watched porn and reason behind watching porn was English movies. I like English movies so I was curious to know about sex. When I found him, after 2 years he started pressurizing me to do sexting. At first I did it because to his pressure but gradually I found it fun and pleasurable. Friends company is also the cause of this behavior. The way girls dress now a days also becomes the cause of provoking sexual desires which in turn becomes the cause of sexting. In fact, sometimes our own dressing motivates us to involve in this	

behavior. Dressing in which our body parts becomes prominent and we look sexy. Family's over pressure also leads to do this. Because families usually suppress these type of talks and feelings so whenever we find little exposure we start sexting to seek pleasure.

5	M	20	I did sexting because I was curious. My family is over protective and I was always in over pressure, so when I watched porn I started sexting to gain sexual pleasure. I have girlfriend so one reason to do sexting for me is to strengthen my relationship and I wanted to remain closer to her.	Sexual satisfaction, fun, sexual pleasure. Now I am obsessed to do sexting and its continuous source of pleasure for me.
6	F	21	When I attached myself with someone of my opposite gender. He pressurized me to have call sex with him, then I also found it pleasurable and fun so my body need is also the cause of sexting. Stressful situation sometimes also leads to this behavior	Positive results of call sex trigger me to do this again and again. I think its best way to seek sexual pleasure that's why I do sexting on regular basis.
7	F	20	The environment of hostel and friends, who used to talk their boyfriends on daily basis,. Especially my roommates it made me to talk to a boy. My friends told me about porn movies, it made me curious about it so, I started to watch porn. I think porn videos are a major cause of sexting. My boyfriend insisted me to watch porn and this resulted into sexting.	His ingeminate demand convinced me to do sexting. Now, it is a pleasurable part of my daily routine so, I am Doing it. I love him so, I respect his wish or desire. I think it is also a way to develop understanding before marriage. Through this the relationship becomes stronger. And he will remain totally involved in me.

8	M	20	<p>When I watched Porn video, I was unable to control my sexual urges at that time. I shared these feelings with my girlfriend she was already waiting for this from my side. So, we started to do sexting. It opens the beautiful world of imagination or our dreamland of sex.</p>	<p>We are Doing sexting because it is a way of sexual satisfaction and easy as compare to only masturbation.</p>
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4. Discussion

The current study examined causes and triggers of sexting among university students. There are many causes that leads to sexting. The strongest among them are being in a relationship and social media. Delayed marriages are also the reason of sexting. A number of studies supports this recent research. When considering sending messages, the strongest predictor of sending all types of texts was being in a relationship (Scholes-Balog, Francke & Hemphill, 2016). Media usage leads to entertainment include escape, relaxation, boredom cure, emotional release, and sexual arousal (McQuail & Van Cuilenburg, 1983). The results showed that sexting has some positive outcomes that motivate sexters to do sexting again and again. These positive outcomes are expectation to have sex in real after sexting, sexual pleasure that one seeks after sex chat, fun, happiness and excitement (Hudson & Marshall, 2017). After the content analysis of the transcribed data the following themes were emerged which are validated in the light of previous literature and verbatim of the participants.

4.1 Emerging Themes

4.1.1 Theme 1: Being in a Relationship

Sexting is usually more common among people who are dating. Being in a romantic relationship increases our sexual desires. Mostly, people do sexting due to peer pressure as a participant said “When I attached myself with someone of my opposite gender. He pressurized me to have call sex with him” (6: F:21). “When I found him, after 2 years he started pressurized me to do sexting” (4: F:19). “After getting engaged I do call sex” (1:M:24). Recent study has found that, sending all types of texts is considered acceptable in the romantic or love relationships (Scholes-Balog et al., 2016). People in relationship do sexting so that they can develop future understanding or for the enhancement of relationship.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Impact of Social Media

Availability to internet now a days is necessity of the time. Every participant reported exposure of porn to be the main cause of sexting. Pornography makes people curious and sexually aroused so they use their sex knowledge to do it practically. Participants said “When I watched Porn videos, I was unable to control my sexual urges at that time” (8:M:20). “Once I watched a porn video then I wished to do same with my girlfriend” (3:M:23).

As shown in the previous study, the use of media is for the sake of entertainment in which individual seek escape from the reality, cure of boredom, emotional release, relaxation and sexual arousal (McQuail & Van Cuilenburg, 1983).

4.1.3 Theme 3: Delayed Marriages

It is a common observation that people who do sexting are not married. When one has no sexual partner then he/she can easily get fascinated by sexting. They will get aroused by sexy dressing of others. Negative emotions like stress, frustration and family over pressure will lead them to involve in sexting. As reported by participants “I am unmarried and my family is over protective and I am always in over pressure, so when I watched porn I started sexting to gain sexual pleasure”(5:M:20) “If I was married then I never ever had gone to this side” (2:M:23).

Previously, literature suggested that sexting was more common among individuals who were casually dating, in a committed relationship, or who were cohabitating, rather than those who were single or married (Dir, Coskunpinar, Steiner & Cyders, 2013). People usually act rashly as the reaction of extreme negative emotion, which is characterized by the negative urgency and it is linked with the sexual behavior and sexting habit of the individuals (Deckman & DeWall, 2011; Whiteside & Lynam, 2001).

4.1.4 Theme 4: Positive Expectations toward Sexting

Sexters reported that they feel relaxed after doing sexting. It is a source of fun and sexual pleasure for them. “We are Doing sexting

because it is a way of sexual satisfaction” (8:M:20). “Sexual satisfaction, fun, sexual pleasure triggers me to do sexting again and again” (5:M:20). Sexting enhances relationship as participants said. “I think it is also a way to developing understanding before marriage. Through this the relationship becomes stronger and he will remain totally involve in me” (7:F:20).

Previous study suggests that people likely to engage in sexting because of the positive behavioral outcomes, which cause them to have sex, make them feel satisfied, happy, excited and aroused sexually (Dir et al., 2013). Those participants who were involved in sexting showed positive behaviors. Most of them (60.5%) reported that they always feel sexually aroused after sharing sexually explicit content. Whereas, almost 48.4 % of participants agreed that due to this sexting and sharing of sexual content they believe that their relationship is more enhanced with their partner or crush as they feel more intimated and closer to each other (Hudson & Marshall, 2017).

5. Conclusion

In this qualitative research on the phenomenon known as “sending and receiving sexually explicit messages, pictures and videos” we tried to understand why university students are under the influence of sexual communication and what triggers them to endure under this influence. The findings revealed that the most reported cause is being in a relationship and social media. Interest, sensation-seeking, peer pressure, families over pressure, company of friends and stressful situations leads to involve in sexting. Positive expectations, fun and sexual

pleasure facilitate this behavior of young people. Further, according to the findings of our study, people engage in the sexting due to delayed marriages and being in long distance relationships where physical contact with their partner is not possible. So, there is need to focus on this dilemma which is causing the psychological and physical frustration among the young population. Due to the addictive nature of this sexting habit, it is difficult for them to stay away from such content. It is suggested to future veterans for carrying out the impact of sexting on the certain psychological factors.

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