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“Who Me? A Cyberteenteen”

Implications Of Internet Usage On Realities And Identities Of Malaysian Adolescents

The daily realities of media savvy Malaysian youths are an integration of on-line and off-line relationships, events, information, memberships, chats and online shopping. Once they get into the Net there is not one single day when they are disconnected from their cyberspace realities. If they are not on-line then someone else is. Or, they get relooped into the conversation or circle of events the next time they log on. It is an interesting phenomenon of connectedness that is a blend of real and virtual. This paper examines the Internet usage pattern of Malaysian adolescents based on a survey of 1,404 adolescents between the ages of 13-16 and focus group discussions.

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Today's generation of adolescents in the urban centers of Malaysia no longer wake up to the crowing of the rooster but rather to the blaring of Matchbox 20 or the purring of Sonia on MTV. For the rooster has long been replaced by various symbols of development and technology that has encroached and made a place in the everyday lives of Malaysian society since the 1960's. These young people instead live on a daily blitz and diet of media penetration. From the guitar strumming of *Santana* on their compos, the chattering of the *Nestle* milk mom and the game show hostess on TV to the advertised possibilities of acquiring great brilliance in various Colleges in the dailies to the bountiful uncharted terrains of web sites on the Internet. These are but a few of the possible daily menu on the media available to these young people. All of these are readily available in their homes and if not, within cheap and accessible sites in their neighborhood.

This is the media landscape of urban adolescents and it is of course a far cry from that which their parents grew up in.

The mid-1980's saw the introduction of the Internet into the local media landscape. By the end of the 1990's through two Internet Service Providers (ISP) *Jaring* and *TMnet*, the number of subscribers have increased significantly to 500,000 while the estimated number of users stand at 1.27 million. Hence, the Internet seems to rival the ever popular radios, TVs, videos, VCDs, CDs, movies and magazines in terms of its usage among the local populace (Media Guide, 2000; Daud, 1999). If in the 1970's it was "with it" to own a VCR, the 1990's make ownership of personal computers with Internet hook up and computer classes the "in thing" for the general populace (but let's not forget the handphone too!). It is this ever-changing media landscape and its corollary implications on society as a whole that calls for immediate attention.

A study of 1 700 respondents between the ages of 13 to 25 (Samsudin and Latiffah, 1999) revealed that although the ownership of personal computers is relatively low (21%) as compared to other media, the adolescents do have access to the Internet either through peers or their local cybercafes. Thus, the presence and growing use of the Internet among the young brings several questions to the forefront: what are the implications of Internet usage to the everyday lives of these young people? Does it create a shift in their patterns of media use? Has the Internet through its potential for anonymity and role play (in chat rooms and virtual communities) brought or created new and differing sense of time and space, social and virtual identities that is a shift from prevailing norms?

This paper presents two sets of data. First a survey data of media environment among 1,404 adolescents between the ages of 13-16 years. This data will focus on the patterns of media availability/accessibility and media use among adolescents in the urban, suburban and rural areas of Malaysia. The second data is from a focus group of 12 adolescents living in Petaling Jaya, Damansara and Subang Jaya. These are middle-class residential areas in the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur. As it is, more than 64 percent of the Malaysian Internet users are located here. The focus group discussion will unpack and explore the meaning of the Internet, the symbol that it connotes and the constructs for their identities.

Modern everyday life is characterized by multifarious interconnections and interdependencies commonly known as the globalization phenomenon. The Internet is a consequent of this phenomenon and is in itself a global system of communication.

Internet And The Young

Global communication technology brings forth and creates new meaning for the concept of connectivity and proximity for modern societies. Hence, bringing forward McLuhan's notion of the global village where events in distant places becomes a part of the social reality of everyone whether they choose to or not. Globalization and all of its consequences is no longer a matter of choice but rather a fact of life. It brings, criss-crosses, integrates and at times imposes not just technology and economic events but emotions, ideologies and cultural idiosyncrasies into the core existence of people from various facets of life.

For the adolescent user of the Internet, access more often than not is a recreational and entertainment activity. This is no surprise since the adolescents between the ages of 13 to 16 years of age are easily attracted to the entertainment medium and to the pursuit of pleasure (Garratt, Roche and Tucker, 1997). And furthermore, for the adolescents who live in a world that is seemingly owned, controlled and produced by adults, the Internet opens up a new horizon of possibilities, without restraints and interference.

With the Internet, the user is the navigator and the characteristics of the Internet not only encompasses but surpasses the features of any of the other preceding media, it certainly draws attention to its potential. One cannot deny that better, precise and active information output is an advantage to the user. The issue with adolescents and Internet usage is one of responsible and appropriate usage of the contents. Since, there is no censorship of the contents except for software filters Internet usage may open the floodgates to information that may be inappropriate or that requires intellectual maturity to discern its value and meanings.

How does a young person in his or her teens respond to the question, "Who are you?" or a self reflecting question of "Who am I?" The answer or answers given to those seemingly straightforward face value questions will in actuality uncover or discover layers of stories about the identities of a generation. As it is, identities are always constructed by individuals and social groups in interaction. Identity is also modified unconsciously or consciously in the process of growing up and in the mundane acts of give and take in social interactions. We are born into a particular time period and participate in specific social situations that provide us with numerous resources for the construction of our personal, social and cultural identity. All three components of identities are pertinent to the formation of an adolescent's identity and affect and effect each other (Johanssen and Miegel, 1992).

Identities In Daily Reality

Giddens (1991) described identity as a reflective process that is constantly reordered against the backdrop of everyday experiences and the tendencies of modern institutions. In the same vein, Gergen and Gergen (1997) offered an explanation where identity as “reflexive and diachronic and is concerned with states of active as opposed to passive being” (p.162). Hall (1996) suggest that identities are about the using of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being; not “who we are” or “where we come from”, so much as what we might become, how we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (p.4).

From a communication perspective, Pearce (1994) describes identity in terms of the self that is a part of a person’s social world. It is through the various patterns of conversations with others that the self is (re)enacted as a reflexive consequence of those conversations. This conception of self acknowledges that each self must be viewed within the array of personal experiences and a cultural context.

Although we can never safely say or be certain that we attain our identity by a certain age for it is indeed a lifelong process; it is during the sensitive years of adolescence that we first become aware of certain biological and psychological changes. Erikson (1977) described how adolescent identity develops as the “process of identity formation depends on the interplay of what young persons at the end of childhood have come to mean to themselves and what they now appear to mean to those who have become significant to them” (p.106). This definition of identity captures three factors that is; biological ability, personal organization and cultural environment as all contributing to give meaning, form and continuity to one’s unique existence.

It is in the interplay of these factors that an adolescent is caught between a body that is developing adult characteristics, a desire to respond like the adult but getting little or no support to do as such from the social environment. The adolescent years are often marked by changes that will consequently affect the everyday goings-on and may make an adolescent feel like a growing adult but without due privileges or independence.

Furthermore, the adolescent years is also the phase where a young person is excused for experimenting, adapting, modifying, resisting certain values, ideologies, behaviors and interests in the name of immaturity (Kroeger, 1996). Nevertheless, the rules governing adolescent conduct and norms vary according to cultures. In Malaysia, the adolescent is still very much bound by rules of obedience, obligation and duty to parents and elders. The collectivistic societal tendencies prevail and dominate much of public conduct.

Adolescents & Media Usage

Implications of Internet usage must be viewed within the context of the developmental process since adolescents between the ages of thirteen to eighteen are engaged in a struggle between giving up childhood and developing the social skills necessary for adult living. As it is, there appears at this juncture to be a weakening of the parent-child bond and a greater reliance on peers for consultation and approval for their actions. Here also is the transition phase where the young person is in search of an identity and a lifestyle. It is also during this period that there is a growing awareness of one's body, sexuality and the opposite sex.

As was the case with television it was found that media images and messages are therefore potentially more persuasive, compelling and seductively reassuring without parental involvement (Hattemer and Showers, 1993). Although lately a tremendous amount of attention and expectation has focused on computer usage and in particular the Internet, let us not forget that there are other equally popular media activity experienced by the young in their daily life. These adolescents are familiar with the use of the radios, CD's, televisions, videos and video games long before the Internet arrived into the local media environment. Although the Internet has received wide positive support and applauded as the gateway to the future, its' downside has not gone unnoticed (Mohd. Safar, 1999; Syed, 1999).

In the local scene, it is obvious from the public debates, forums (formal and informal) and reported incidences of new patterns of behavior among the young (such as cybercafes as alternative social place, truants found at cybercafes, Internet junkie syndrome, on-line gambling, robbery and rape by friends met on-line, etc) that there is a growing concern and perhaps, to a degree apprehensiveness of this new media. It is undeniable that this new media in its hardware, software and usage has its merits and has found a place within our local structure of existence (Salleh et al. 1999; Samsudin and Latiffah, 1999, Syed, 1999; NST 1st Oct 1999; Malay Mail 19th Aug 1999).

This study of 1,404 adolescents between the ages of 13-16 years was conducted to determine the media environment that is the ownership, availability as well as accessibility of particular media among the adolescents. Table 1 shows that accessibility to terrestrial television, radio and newspapers are high irrespective of urban or rural areas. The two most commonly owned media in all localities are the radios (urban 98% and rural 97%) and television (urban 97% and 97%). In contrast to the old media namely the terrestrial television, radio and newspapers, accessibility to the new media such as the satellite television (13% urban; 6% rural) and computers (38% urban; 16% rural) is relatively low. The significant difference in the accessibility between urban and rural areas for

ownership of personal computers that can be attributed to the economic means of the population in those localities.

As for video games and computer-related activities, the urban adolescents have greater access to facilities such as video games arcades and cybercafes. Table 1 indicates that there is a comparatively significant difference in the availability of video games arcades with 60% in the urban areas and only 21% in the rural areas. As for cybercafes offering computer usage and Internet hook ups again there is a marked difference in availability between urban and rural areas with 51% in the urban areas and only 10% in the rural areas. It should be mentioned here that these venues are business enterprises that began and flourish in the urban areas where the economic standard of living is higher. However, the limited availability of such venues are not necessarily a setback altogether for such venues have been found to be connected with several social ills such as small scale gambling, gangsterism, truant hang out, smoking and drug taking. Hence, the closing up of many video games arcades in the 1990's and the enforcement of the above eighteen years of age for patrons. Nevertheless, access to cybercafes do not have an age limit and random observations have shown that the clientele is made up of mostly young people between 12 to 27 years of age with time of day determining the age group usage. (Salleh et.al. 1999).

Table 1: Media Environment

Types of media	Percentage of ownership and availability		
	Urban	Sub urban	Rural
Terrestrial TV	97%	98%	97%
Satellite TV	13%	9%	6%
Video player	71%	57%	47%
Personal computer	38%	26%	16%
Video game	35%	28%	18%
Radio	98%	97%	97%
Cassette player	76%	65%	44%
Newspaper/magazine	95%	98%	96%
Story book/comic	89%	89%	92%
Music shop	75%	66%	51%
Video games arcade	60%	44%	21%
Cinema	44%	25%	11%
Computer shop	57%	42%	32%
Cybercafe	51%	34%	10%
Newspaper stall/bookstore	87%	90%	84%

As for media use, the data in Table 2 indicate that the adolescents in the urban areas spend 6.1 hours a week with the print media while their counterparts in the rural areas spend 7.5 hours per week.

The overall computer usage inclusive of e-mail, surfing, computer software is much higher among the urban than the rural adolescents. That is 2 hours for the former as opposed to 0.9 hours per week surfing the web sites for the latter group. Again, the adolescents in the urban areas spend 2.4 hours per week on e-mail as compared to the ones in the rural areas with 0.8 hours per week. As for usage of other software, the urban young spend 3.7 hours per week with only 1.8 hours per week among the rural adolescents. This date is indicative of computers in the media environment in those areas.

Table 2: Media Use

Media usage	Mean		
	Urban	Sub urban	Rural
Watching terrestrial TV	16.8	17.4	15.6
Watching satellite TV	1.8	1.3	0.8
Watching video	5.5	3.6	3.9
Playing video game	2.0	1.8	1.5
Listening to radio	14.5	13.5	16.4
Reading newspaper/magazines	6.1	5.6	7.5
Reading comic	2.9	3.1	5.0
Surfing website	2.2	1.4	0.9
E-mail	2.4	1.4	0.8
Using other computer	4.7	2.4	1.8

Another computer related activity is the playing of video games with 2.0 hours in the urban areas and 1.5 hours in the rural areas. Perhaps, the lessening of the usage gap has to do with the cost of an average video game that is readily available at a low cost of RM\$3 at the night market.

In both the areas, watching terrestrial television and listening to the radios are comparably high. Terrestrial television viewing is at 16.8 hours in the urban areas with 15.6 hours per week in the rural areas. Radio listening makes up for 14.5 hours per week in the urban areas and 16.4 hours per week in the rural areas.

Overall, the patterns of media penetration that is the environment and use reveals that although the accessibility of computers is low in the urban areas at 38% but the combined time

Grammars & Symbols Of Identities

spent with computer related activities totals 9.3 hours per week. Thus, indicating that it now rivals the radio and the television and has surpassed the print media in terms of hours spent with it by the adolescents.

Indeed, how does the urban local adolescents respond to the question, "Who are you?" The issue underlying this simple question is one that is aimed at tapping and unpacking the notions and conceptions of the "I" within situated acts in daily life. In an effort to ascertain the responses a focus group of twelve adolescents between the ages of 13 and 16 were carried out. Two series of face to face discussions, follow up telephone conversations with a selected few and e-mail interviews were done. The focus group reciprocators also represented the survey sample.

As mentioned earlier this study is grounded within the theoretical social constructionist framework and in particular the body of work in the "coordinated management of meaning" that looks at the self and its social significance as not given in life but rather a consequent of discursive and interactive life. In addition, CMM theory also seeks to integrate cultural dimensions, interactive episodes and identity (Cronen and Pearce, 1991/92).

Thus, for our conversations with the adolescents and our analysis we moved to view the construction of identities as the identifying and identification through symbols that were particular words, phrases or images used to identify a person in a situated act. In other words, the effective meaning of a particular symbol or form is contingent upon its use by someone and the particular episode in which it is used. The conversations and interviews were subsequently organized and interpreted according to the CMM theory. It is felt that this contextual schema provided an insight into the grammars of identities within the adolescents lived and told stories.

Episodes: These are communicative routines which the participants view as distinct wholes and are characterised by special rules of speech and non-verbal behaviour and often distinguished by opening or closing sequence.

This group of adolescents reside in the urban areas of the Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya and Damansara. The residents in these localities are predominantly middle class and all of the reciprocators belonged to that economic group and with two working parents. These adolescents have personal computers in their homes and that the computers are mostly used for schoolwork and playing games.

When it comes to Internet use, they either do so at the cybercafes that they frequent at least twice a week or at a friend's home. They either get on the chat sites on their own or in groups. The most popular and common web sites shared by these groups

of adolescents include the IRC, music, sports and games. They are introduced to these sites by their friends. E-mail is another popular use. The focus group discussions further revealed that these adolescents are on the Internet on a daily basis for at least 2 hours per day. They regard the times spent on the Internet as their “break time” or ifiller timeî for if it is not the Net then they will be on the phone.

Steven: I like it a lot at the cybercafes, more friends, try out more things

Vasanthi: I do use it at home but I like it at the X Cafe, lots of friends. I do it when I can't sleep and when my dad's sleeping!

Amai: We use the IRC together, fun this way, e-mail also.

KL: Talking on-line is much easier than real talk after you know the rules, I'm usually shy but not on-line.. helps me make more friends

Samad: I download a lot of stuff, mostly games, songs

Anand: To me on-line chat is similar to real chat, talk about everything, sex too

Amai: I get into mozac, *kampung*, *mamak*, horizon and coke. I talked about life in different places.. oh sure, must know the rules to the Chat or else get kicked!

Jun: I get into *warisan*, *kiut*, 17, hip-hop and I talk about anything that's on.

Samad: I get on *mamak* ... just talk about movies and music I like undernet and I just do small talkrules are like regular talk *lah*. You learn the emoticons and smileysthat's all

The chat sites have become the “place” to meet and make new friends in the company of other friends. To these young people it provides an opportunity for them to talk to others without being obtrusive and it takes away the awkwardness in face to face interaction. Once you know the rules, it is as easy as daily conversation and in fact easier since it is text and not visual although one of the reciprocators did admit to sending his “best photo” on-line. The chat is conducted in language familiar to them with particular on-line symbols such as emoticons, smileys and acronyms that needed some initial learning. Then, there is also particular etiquette to learn and follow or else they will not be allowed to stay in the chat rooms. Somehow these adolescents seem to accept the on-line language and etiquette demands as necessary part of cyberlife.

As for their favourite sites the list includes *mozac*, *undernet*, *mamak*, *horizon* and the IRC. A few of them did mention that they have “stumbled” onto the pornographic visual and chat sites but this is not a site that they frequent. They protested that at times

their on-line chat is interrupted by some form of pornography or other which they found most irritating.

The group felt that once a person is part of the chat scene, e-mail and other uses of the Internet there is a need to keep on checking for “what’s happening” almost on a daily basis. When they first started out getting into the Internet irrespective of what the sites were, they needed to use it everyday for it was the latest fad and trend.

Conversations tended to revolve around it but after some time (estimated duration of 6 months) once they get the “feel and hang of things” they are no longer as needy as they first started out. Yet, they cannot deny that Internet usage of any form is now part of their daily activities.

Relationships: It is the story that is implicit and makes the collective “we” in a communication episode. The relationship context enacts the moral framework in which that relationship occurs and informs what is allowed, prohibited, privileged or obligated in any given interaction.

On-line chatting gives these adolescents a broader and more international range of people to interact with. Since these adolescents are fluent in the English language they have no problems communicating with others outside of Malaysia. One of them remarked that virtual friendships is liken to real friendship and she hopes to meet her virtual friend in the near future. It replaces the conventional “pen-pal” with a process that is faster and cheaper. They admitted that on-line chatting is additive, can take up a lot of would be study time and can be costly too. These virtual friendships then become the topic of conversations with real friends off-line. Five of them revealed that they have met their virtual friends of the opposite gender out of curiosity. A few remarked that they seem to carry out a “short-lived invisible romance with someone out there”. To those involved these relationships are fun and fill out their time. Topics of discussion with on-line friends include school-related activities, music, boyfriends or girlfriend related issues, parents, fashion and the sharing of jokes.

Vasanthi: I like it, I have friends from other countries like Australia, US, etc

KL: Me too, friends in Brazil and even China

Anand: In Latvia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia

Amai: Feel like I’m internationalgoing everywhere Oh, it’s real friendship but sometimes there are creeps

Jun: Some are nuts, just nuts, wierdo’s, like old people

Amai: Found a guy once, two months long marathon chat, everyday till my sister told my mom.

Samad: Dissappointing-*lah*, when I met her, *tak best!*

KL: Can't stop once you get on, there's always something to tell. I talk about familyour countries

Maggi: Never use my own name so I can pretend to be someone else, I like it. Everybody's like that, only playing"

Shanti: Must use cool names or nobody will know you

Anand: Nope. Parents not into this, at home I surf for info. At Y cafe I do anything right, you all?

Maggi: I knew Amai at X cafe and Samad also

As for their parents, they all laughed when asked if their parents share in these conversations. An affirmative "nope" was the response to parents knowing about the topics on-line and another affirmative "nope" when it comes to revealing their on-line nicknames. They do share this nickname information with their peers. This group of adolescents admitted that they have met several weirdos and perverts on-line but they were quick to break-off the chat

Autobiography: It represents the stories that a person knows about himself/herself that was the consequent of interaction with others. It is composed of all the actions and abilities that make up one's self-concept. It is not fixed or finished but rather continuously evolving with each interaction.

These adolescents acknowledged that they want to belong, to have friends and to be well liked if not the most popular among their peers. They all agree that being on the Internet and hanging out at particular cybercafes makes them one of the "in" people, the "happening group", the "*gempak*" and to be "cool". To them, their on-line nicknames are fun names that they pick for themselves and most felt that those names would never get their parents approval. Several names border on blatant sexuality while others reveal a super-ego personality. Four of them admitted to having changed their nicknames at least more than twice just to get a different response.

Amai: Jadi gempaklah.

Jami: I know a lot of girls who say that they know everything on IRC, and they lie but it's okay, the other person is also lying I think. I know because I say I'm fair and can sing and all when I'm not!

Maggi: I change my nickname a lot because other people have taken it I'm now Nemesis, last time Venus

Zul: I'm called *psychorin* - it's my attitude and my crazy self. I'm also Cyber Jebat II

Shanti: Girl 6 and I got it from a movie. Won't use my name or people will know me

Sara: Evilgal17, Syira-17 and Passion-G. I've changed mine 5 times because it was getting boring and many people knew me

KL: I am bulat k , my cousin gave me. I've changed 3 times till I use this one. Suits me better

Steven: Fat Joe from the rapper. Give me style and coolness-lah. Have to have a nickname or you're not gempak!

Amai: Pkitty and before Chinatits

Zul: My real name is so *kampung.com!*

Several of the informants revealed that they have created a new personality on-line. However, they do not regard this act as deception or insincerity but just "good fun". It is all about being creative, freedom from parental control, comments and checks and about exploring what could be. Often, the on-line personalities possess characteristics that they like in others but that they feel they do not possess. Girls aspire to be slim, fair complexion, pretty and popular while the boys all want to have more money, to stand at 5' 9" or 5' 10", "heavenly bodied" (?) and to be popular.

As for the created identities, exaggerated self image and dual selves on-line especially in the IRCs these adolescents do not regard those acts as wrong doings or necessarily "bad". To them, they are just having fun with others like them and the group is split when it comes to how they regard their virtual friendships. Some view these friendships as real while an equal number seem to distinguish between real off-line friends and virtual on-line friends.

The simple chats with other young people like themselves from around the world have created a sense of connectedness. Although they have received support, approval, liking and acceptance they have also been times when they have faced rejection, criticism and racism. They were appalled when they first encountered negative remarks but after a few instances of being called "blackies" by certain chat groups, they have learned to retaliate with words of similar nature or just leave. Internet usage does give the user the liberty to get out or in as they choose.

Cultural patterns: They are essentially broad patterns of social order and the relationship of people to that order. They obligate, legitimise and prefigure certain ways of doing and acting in various situations for a group of people. Often times, what is thought of as common sense and taken for granted are cultural patterns.

As for media usage it is interesting to note that the electronic media is an everyday act for these adolescents. Whether it is the radio, television, computer games or the Internet it has become a habit of daily living. Surprisingly, the most popular media among this "cool" young people is the radio for they all agree that they

like having music in the background all the time. Although, the computer does provide music it is not as convenient as switching on their own radios. Only two of the reciprocators have personal computers in their bedroom. The rest share the computers with parents and other siblings in common space.

Jami: like opening a book where one has to focus unlike the radio. You can switch it on, not pay attention to it, do other things and it still makes you happy. Less time on the Net

Shanti: I still prefer the radio.

Sara: Me too

Chin: Nothing beats the radio-there all the time. Just like my buddies.

KL: It's good because I know more about people in other places. Learn everything from my best friend

Zul: Bad cos I spend time and money and I need to study for exams

Anand: I still follow my parents and I'm still Indian but I'm CyberChief else where.

Chin: No, it's not really lying just create stories to make it interesting

Zul: With real friends, it's bad to lie, they can check on you but IRC that's different. I need my gang *lah*

To these young people, Internet usage is now part and parcel of their everyday life. For not a day goes by that someone does not mention something relating to the Internet. Whether it is e-mail news, chat site news or at school when the teacher refers to a particular topic or in the daily newspapers. This new media is just one more media to them. Inasmuch as they do marvel at what the Internet offers them in terms of navigating for preferred information, they still cannot be without the other media especially their radios. Furthermore, the Internet is an entertainment media and that parents should encourage them to use it more. It is just another media and they do not understand the hype about it.

With regards to Internet usage among the urban adolescents, there is a growing presence in terms of use, accessibility and ownership of personal computers and cybercafes. Although the ownership of personal computers stand at 38 percent and supported by accessibility at cybercafes as 51 percent, the total number of hours of computer usage is at 10 hours per week. For a media that was introduced for popular consumption into the community in the late 1980's as compared to radio and television that has been around since the early 1950's and 1960's respectively,

Realities & Identities: Implications

it has certainly created an impact and found a place in the everyday lives of these young people.

These adolescents acknowledged that the Internet is a high-involvement media that demands attention and particular skills. It is unlike the radio that is a low-involvement media. Nevertheless, despite the adolescents seeming preference for the radio, the Internet continues to hold their interest as indicated by the increase in hours of usage. This growing interest in a high-involvement media that requires particular skills will ultimately benefit them in the long run.

Nonetheless, computer and Internet usage alike opens up issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, technical know-how, content supervision, family lifestyle and local values and norms. The focus group discussions reveal that the adolescents themselves prefer to use the Internet in the company of their peers rather than their parents. This supports the notion of old and new media as belonging to the "old and new generation" (Samsudin, 1999; Latiffah and Samsudin, 1999). Furthermore, the design and usage of computers whether for Internet or other software differs from radio or television.

This raises and leads into the issue of parental supervision of contents and child raising practices common within the local culture. The individuation of young persons at such a tender age of 13 to 16 also touches the sensitive issue of patterning a lifestyle that is grounded within a western framework. Although early separating and decision making in terms of contents among the young can be viewed as preparation skills for an independent adult life, the local parenting patterns follow a tradition that is much to the contrary. That is, children are guided all the way till adulthood (21 years) and even some still seek parental guidance way into their mid-life. This has to do with the reverence and respect accorded to parents by cultural values and religious beliefs alike. However, urban living patterns with two working parents, peer group pressure for approval and computer hook-ups seem to make it inevitable for the transformation in parenting patterns.

As it is, Internet usage is a social event that is shared with peers either in the privacy of their homes or the preferred common venue is the local cybercafes. Thus, this newly established commercial entity has now become the haunt of local adolescents. It is a place to be "oneself" free from all constraints, a sort of moral support group with a common generational interest. The IRCs have become a place to explore all creativity with regards to identities and relationships. It is also the place to find friends of the opposite sex, talk about problems, share jokes and interests.

In a society that demands conformity to conventions more often than not it is in the private that a person can explore to be

different. And since young persons are regarded as immature, their adolescent years are acceptable culturally and biologically as the time to explore and experiment (Kroeger, 1996). As such, the Internet provides in its qualities that possibility: to allow a person to explore, share ideas with real and virtual others, feel a sense of commonness, empowerment, to keep his/her privacy and yet make one's views public without giving away the person's identity. These computer-mediated contacts contribute toward enhancing their self-esteem and will further contribute toward the identity formation of these adolescents in the coming years.

Conclusion

Hence, once again to the question of "Who are you" the response of "Who me? A cyberteent" is far from unexpected. This is due to the place and role of the Internet in the everyday lives of these adolescents. Theirs is a life filled with "cyber this and that" and not to be "cyberly-connected" is certainly not with it. The daily realities of these media savvy young people are an integration of on-line and off-line relationships, events, information, memberships, chats, purchases and others. Once they get into the Net there is not one single day that has gone by where they are disconnected from their cyberspace realities. If they themselves are not on-line then someone else is. Or, they get relooped into the conversation or circle of events the next time they log on. It is an interesting phenomenon of connectedness that is a blend of real and virtual. ■

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