

**FACEBOOK AS A MAIN TOOLS OF THE ‘CATFISH’ CRIME:
A CASE STUDY AMONG SINGLE MOTHERS IN KOTA KINABALU**

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Abstract

Cyber-crime cases involving women, especially single mothers are becoming one of the most serious social issues. Technological acceleration becomes a new mechanism in making single mothers as a major target of catfish. Catfish can be defined as an individual who uses the second identity to attract the attention of victims of cyber-love crime by giving a perfect shadow to his opponent. The objective of this study is to identify the major factors contributing to the crime of cyber-love from the perspective of the victim's experiences involving five informants through an in-depth interview. The findings show that the main medium used by catfish in trapping single mothers is through Facebook. Meanwhile, the major contributing factors to cyber-crime crimes are categorized into two main themes which are the social environment and interpersonal attraction.

Keywords: single mothers, catfish, social environment and interpersonal attraction

1.1 Introduction

Technology is a new mechanism as a relationship medium that is increasingly fast developing and succeed tackle in community's heart nowadays from children level until adult and senior citizen. Initially, the technology is developed to ensure humanity is easier and more relevant and faster. Along with that, various telecommunication companies are racing to produce various communication facilities in a variety of forms that are simple, concise and capable of users needed.

This technology rapidity not only gives new innovations to users but also give the best way to criminals in committing cybercrime. Cybercrime was not an issue that new to society today, however increase towards this crime that is increasingly concern had attracted the attention of many especially scholars to try rummage and find cause and solutions which could help the ladies out there especially to youth group and single mother so that more careful while using virtual site for various purposes especially looking for new acquaintances. This is because, most of the single mother group aged middle reported incline to love scam victim of fraud syndicate or cyber love crime masterminded by foreign man (Bernama, 2016).

Some scholars such as Ahmad Safwan et al. (2015); Rege (2009); Grudgings (2014), newspaper reports and local news shows that cyber-crime crimes in Malaysia involve Nigerian citizens. Cyber-crime is synonymous with catfish involvement as the main driver. Catfish can be defined as an individual who uses the second identity to attract the attention to victims of cyber-love crime by giving a perfect shadow to his opponent. This makes the victim quicker and more hopeful and trustful to the catfish even though he has never met before. This cyber-love crime is a romantic relationship between two individuals with a particular financial target of catfish (Koon and Yoong, 2013). In essence, the catfish's act is to trap the victims for money in an easy and undetermined manner by the victim and is only realized by the victim when

catfish change their way of communication to break the relationship by closing the FB account or blocking the victim rather than connecting with them.

In 2016, cyber-crime involving catfish was 2,497 with estimated losses almost RM100 million. The situation has been increasing every year, since 2014, about 1,026 cases have been reported with a loss of RM 52.8 million and followed by 2015, rising to 1,841 cases with a loss of RM 63 million (Audrey, 2017). Law enforcement is intensified but it is still inadequate in addressing this problem. Consequently, grassroots empowerment or through a bottom-up approach is seen as necessary and desirable to help keep it from falling into cyber-crime. It has become a current trend that makes local women, especially single mothers as the backs of overseas men to serve as protectors in fulfilling their self-needs.

In this regard, more collective and empirical actions and studies need to be done to curb this social problem from continuing. This is because it is impossible for Malaysia as a developing country to refuse not to follow the current world development in technology, especially information technology. Consequently, we as consumers need to be wiser in order not to continue to become victims of technology so they have to sacrifice emotions, feelings, and money in order to benefit only one party. This situation makes this study an important part of filling out the existing challenges that involve the empowerment of women, especially single mothers to be more intelligent in controlling such situations.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

In this study, the main objectives to be discussed are touching with (i) identifying key applications that the victim uses to connect with catfish and (ii) the main contributing factors to cyber-crime crime from a victim's perspective. This study was conducted on single mothers who had direct experience with cyber-crime and became victims of love and money fraud especially in the city of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The study on experiences from cyber-crime

victims is seen to provide exposure and teaching to other women, especially among their own single mothers and generations of Y to be more careful and to use telecommunication tools more wisely and prudently.

1.3 Research Methodology

This research is based on a study conducted in Kota Kinabalu involving five informants in 2018 using an in-depth interview method using a purposive sampling method. The selected informants are from single mothers who have undergone an experience in cyber-crime especially with regard to catfish. In addition, observations were also used to help get information on cyber-crime. To support the findings, secondary sources were also used in this study. Kota Kinabalu was used as the study area as Kota Kinabalu was the state capital for Sabah and was more open and gaining more exposure with technology, especially smartphones compared with other areas.

Interviewed and informal interviews were conducted with informants to get information on why and how they could be trapped, used applications, ways that catfish use to deceive them and the effects of cyber-crime on women. Additionally, informants were asked about their response to this issue and how this issue could be taught to them in the pursuit of their happiness in the future. Interviews were conducted in the informal home area to create a comfortable atmosphere for informants. The duration of the interview is about 50 to 75 minutes and the language used is Malay by using the voice recorder on the consent of the informant. The data obtained were analyzed using the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to answer the objective of the study.

1.4 Research findings

From the thematic analysis, two main findings have been obtained: (i) Facebook as the main modus operandi of catfish and victim in social relations and (ii) Social environment and interpersonal attraction as a major contributor to cyber-crime crime.

1.4.1 Facebook as Main Operating Module of Catfish and Victims in Conducting Social Relations

Cyber-crime is no longer a new phenomenon occurring among modern societies today. The upgrading of community and social standards demands communication companies to move faster and meet the needs of each customer. Hence, applications that were previously usable with the use of computers have now shifted the direction of the smartphone more easily to take it here and there. As a result, literature and analysis analyzes and observations have found that the main application used by victims and catfish in social networking is via Facebook (FB).

The use of FB apps that are easier to understand and fast make this app more widely used and as a medium of communication to find old and new friends more easily and quickly. Furthermore, the tendency of the victim to victim and share their lives openly provides catfish opportunities to better understand the victim's personality pattern and use existing data to be closer to the victim. This is reinforced by the opinion of informants:

"... he's like to know and understand my feelings ... he knows what I want and is always there when I need a friend to talk ... there's a time he'll gently give me advice and give words of encouragement every time I express my problem ... that's who cause I feel comfortable with it ... "(I5, 35 years).

This situation indirectly provides a safe, calm and a sense of belonging to the victim. Although originally, the victim only acquainted and chatting freely with catfish without any commitments or having a serious relationship sharing of problems and stories made them closer

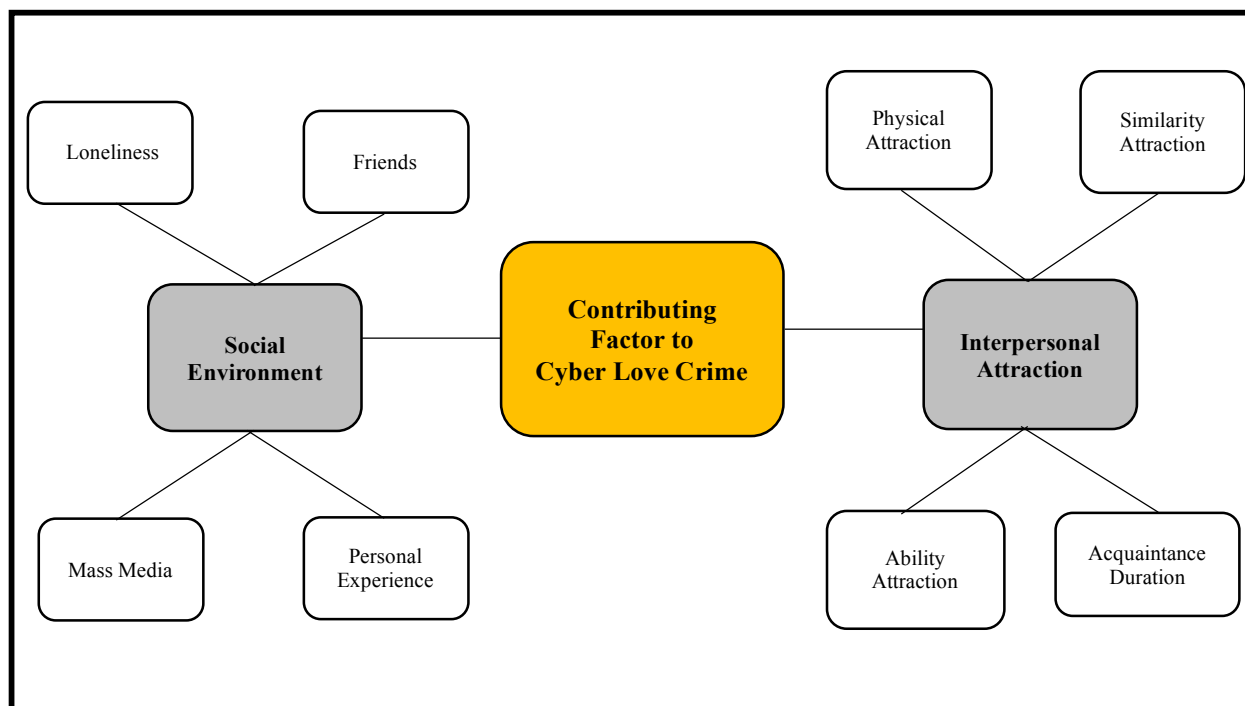
and comfortable with each other. The analysis of the study also shows that FB is used as the main medium of communication between catfish and the victim due to the convenience of this application that can be viewed and used freely by anyone only including those outside the country without any restrictions and making FB more user-friendly. This is supported by the informant's statement:

"... originally just accepted as a friend and talked to ordinary people ... so long time to be comfortable and keep in touch ... knowing why he started first and did not feel any reason from other countries so just thought it was just for fun ... do not know how where he can get my f ... "(I1, 38 years).

1.4.2 Social Environment and Interpersonal Attraction as a Factor of Contributing to Cyber Love Crime

Cyber-crime crimes can occur in a variety of factors and contributing factors to cyber-crime crimes in the study area are divided into two: social environment and interpersonal attraction. Every major factor contributing to cyber-crime crimes among single mothers in Kota Kinabalu is further subdivided into four elements that support each of these factors as shown in Figure 1.1:

Figure 1.1: Contributing factors to Cyber Love Crimes among single mothers



From the research and analysis, the findings show that social environment is one of the main factors that cause single mothers to be victims of cyber-crime. In the theme of social environment, four small themes formed as a result of thematic analysis are (i) silence; (ii) mass media; (iii) partners and (iv) self-esteem. From the silence theme, it is found that the catalyst for single mothers to move actively in FB is due to the feeling of loneliness. Although single mothers have the responsibility of caring for and raising children alone without a partner, they cannot refuse to feel lonely and need to find a life partner who can take care of them and children. After being a single mother, FB is a media application that they make as a friend to express feelings and get acquainted with many people. Hence, when individuals offer themselves to get acquainted with them, they hesitate to accept the allegations. This is supported by the informant's statement:

"... I feel lonely and need friends to chat and share my problems ... there is a time I need someone to fill the silence of my heart ... yes I have a child who needs care and attention and my time is focused on them but there also certain times I feel depressed and sad that I am active in FB and start updating my movements ... what do I eat what I make me go

where ... I'm friends with everyone and accept anyone who wants to make friends with me ... "(I3, 41 years).

From the aspect of mass media and friends, most informants make it a catalyst for them to be trapped in cyber-crime because mass media and partners have a great influence in helping them to be more open in accepting new acquaintances and improving the way their relationships and appearances. This makes them more confident to share pictures and life in their respective FBs. This is reinforced by the informant's statement:

"... if you do not have time to actively watch it a week later, just look at it at a glance sometimes just look at a glance just because you want to take care of your child, your husband, but since becoming a single mother, the children also have their own school activities, playing with a friend so I do not know what to do besides scrolling tu FB ... many friends for advice and open my mind to be beautiful and I started to fb with FB and social media while searching about beauty products ... "(I2, 31 years).

This situation indirectly gives space to catfish to easily approach and thus make them a target. Furthermore, the presentation of the happiness concept highlighted by friends and communities around them through mass media makes single mothers want to feel the same happiness and strive towards serious relationships with catfish. In line with the sweet talk and sweet words, catfish managed to persuade the victim to invest some money in catfish without any hesitation. In addition, self-reliance experienced by single mothers in the last relationship does not break their spirits to keep looking for the best mate and can be their future guards and mentors. Accordingly, most informants agree that they need to continue living and find and do things that can make them feel happy.

At the interpersonal attraction level, when informants communicate with catfish, they are not only interacting in terms of delivering the content they want to deliver but at the same time, they are actually determining the level of communication between them. This makes them more indirectly and shares a lot of stories. As with the social environment, research findings show that interpersonal attraction also has four other elements that support the theme. These include (i) physical attraction; (ii) introductory period; (iii) the pull of the ability and (iv) the attractiveness of the equation. In the physical attraction, the habit is attracted to the appearance of the catfish by their profile picture in FB. The face is a communication tool that can play an important role in attracting others to interact and feel comfortable with them. This is because, even though

the face is rigidly displayed, however, the face of a particular person, especially catfish, can attract the victims to be more open and attracted to them so that they are more closely connected and provide a lot of investment in such relationships as time, feelings, emotions, and money. This is reinforced with the informant's view:

"... the man claimed that he was from the UK and worked as an engineer ... he offered himself to be friends and often travel and was looking for a really serious friend to be his wife ... our introduction only lasted for weeks on FB before being more intimate in WhatsApp and the phone ... I'm attracted to his face, like a good and credible person besides having a soft voice ... that's why he has no doubt when he asks me to give him money ... I'm willing to lend him without such conditions ... "(I3, 41 years).

While from the aspect of ability and similarity, the findings found that victim tends to be attracted to someone who has the same personality, interest, attitude, value, and background. The attraction of this affair is shown by catfish by designing the same story with the informant to attract the informant to continue the conversation with them. In addition, catfish is also often seen trying to exhibit a sad situation by sharing the experience and condition of those who are unlucky, need support and attention, for example, deceiving victims that their mothers have cancer and are already at the fourth level and they have never been in a romance or marriage repeatedly.

In addition, compatibility between victim and catfish was created by demonstrating the sharing of interests, attitudes, personality, and background of the same experience with the victim. Additionally, early introductions of catfish attempt to showcase to victims that they are successful individuals and have a good and stable financial and ready to set up a home with victims. Beliefs derived from victim make catfish bolder to advance the next step by creating a variety of situations to reach the sympathy of the victim and encourage the victim to transfer money to their bank account. Despite the fact that the victim did not have the sum of money requested by catfish, but for the bonds of communication and sweet appointments from catfish, the victim had worked out their power to make enough money and send it to catfish. The situation persisted until the victim was burdened with debt so it led to the occurrence of fights and catfish disappeared without being tracked by the victim.

1.5 Discussion

The findings show that single mothers are attracted to catfish because they are wise to arrange a conversation pattern that makes the victims feel comfortable and eventually decide to continue their relationship to a more serious relationship. This situation is complicated with the social and interpersonal attractions displayed during virtual communication between catfish and victim. The themes discussed from the thematic analysis clearly indicate that catfish actually identifies and studies the background and personality type of the victim before they begin to get acquainted with the victim again. This is because catfish always gives you a great time and commitment and becomes a faithful spouse to the victim to always be with the victim. Furthermore, the catfish's seriousness in proving their love and concern for the victims makes the victims more confident and in tandem want to prove their love through their sacrifices. Hence, a study on the experience of single mothers who are victims of catfish can provide awareness and empowerment to open minds and knowledge to other women, especially single mothers to be more vigilant and wise in establishing relationships that start from the virtual world. Emphasis on such studies is desirable and necessary to help women to better understand the patterns and modus operandi used by catfish to deceive victims. This is because, every year, the increase in loss of money, especially of ringgit from cyber-crime crimes, is increasingly alarming and fearful if the capacity building of women in overcoming the problem is that it cannot only harm money but also to themselves and their families.

1.6 Implications and suggestions

From the aspect of designers and policymakers, this study can help them to better understand and identify the patterns of communication done by catfish before they begin to seriously deal with the victims. Additionally, a continuous monitoring system from such authorities as police is necessary and emphasized to ensure that cyber love crimes are declining and more awareness campaigns and disclosures are made to women at all levels. This is to ensure that women, especially women, are more vulnerable to the information available and know the way or channels they can follow if they or their families are faced with the same problem. However, this study still has an argument that this study focuses only on one area of Kota Kinabalu and only limited to single mothers. Accordingly, an empirical study is necessary and desirable to obtain more information and a stronger analysis of operating modes and the causative factors of catfish attraction to victims.

1.7 Conclusion

Social environment and interpersonal attraction are the major contributing factors that induce victims to get caught up in cybercrime. The thematic analysis found that the victims were originally unaware they actually belonged to catfish snares until catfish slowly left them and tricked them with sweet appointments. Additionally, Facebook that should be used to be a fast and easy communication mechanism has become a major mode of appealing to victims because the mode of application is easier to learn and be adopted by the rest of the world. Cyber-crime crimes if not properly subscribed will cause more women, especially single mothers, and the Y generation to be trapped and suffer from multiple folds not only in the form of feelings but also money and time. Hence, such studies can be helpful in understanding the behavior of catfish treatments and the way they use to trap the victims so that they are deceived. This can indirectly help increase the ability of women to be more prepared and wisely arrange steps to keep them from getting caught up in cyber-crime.

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