The Cyber ethics Issues: Factors and Impact of Internet Scamming among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract: *Nowadays, emerging of technology has led to cybercrime issues, which affecting Malaysian society. The role of computer and smart phone and other electronic devices has become crucial and from there it can seed a good and the bad of networking activities. One of the activities is chain letter or messages using social media platform. Chain letters are messages which are broadcast to a large number of people that ask recipients to forward them to as many as possible. Some chain letters can be humorous and was send for the sake of having fun by the sender. Some can contain threats that are hidden and cannot be foreseen. This paper will study on the factors and effects of spreading chain letters and the results were analyzed among university students conducted in University Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia.*
Keyword: *Cyber ethics, Cybercrime, Chain letter, Internet Scamming, Kantianism, Universal Law*

I. Introduction

Cybercrime cases keep on increasing not just in Malaysia but also throughout the world (Hamsi et.al, 2015). All groups admitted that they use social media technologies to communicate with citizens almost every day (Obar et.al, 2012). Chain letters is one type of message which is broadcasted to a large number of people, asking recipients to forward those to as many people as possible disguised under concern of spreading awareness. This is the type of some chain letters can be humorous and sent for the sake of fun but some may contain threats that are hidden and cannot be foreseen. Chain letters may also contain false information which purpose is to create anxiety, fear and confusion among its recipients, especially whenever something goes viral. It is also often written in a way that it looks so genuine that its authenticity is often not questioned by its recipients, hence the short time taken for it to go viral. Years ago, chain letters were sent through emails only. But now, since the rise of Internet, it can be spread through many platforms given that the increasing number of social media and its users. Today there is many social networking or electronic devices that can be the medium of chain letters. It can be in form of an email, an instant message, a comment on celebrities' Instagram, a tweet, a Facebook post, or as simple as a shared link.

The threats posed by chain letters are evidently dangerous. It could wreak havoc in the country if it goes viral especially when it comes in forms of malicious false information.
Overall, there are numerous types of chain letter all over the web. There are a few categories depending on the manipulation scheme they use to fool their targets. These include modus operandi like;
1. Sick children in need: This is the most famous form of chain letter. They tell you that a sick child who needs to raise money for an expensive operation. They will ask you to donate money to a bank account.
2. Petition: They tell you to sign an online petition for something that may be regarding to politics or whatsoever. They give you the link and you will have to insert your personal details
3. Hoax news: This kind of manipulation method usually comes with extra malicious intentions. Usually this type of chain letter is used to frame people to affect their credibility and to create misunderstanding and confusion. Public figures are the typical victims
4. Superstitions: Threatens you with bad luck to intimidate you so that you will forward whatever nonsense contained in the chain letter

II. Theoretical Rational & Framework

The reason as to why we chose this issue to be highlighted is because of the rising numbers of cases that have been reported. The number of cyber crooks is growing each day, and they have been using chain letters as their mean of manipulation. The ever growing numbers of cases reported is due to the lack of awareness among Internet users. The growing fraud cases through chain letters related to the social media has alert the authority bodies of the country to investigate the source of the problems and actions that need to be taken to nip this problem in the bud.

This research adopted the Kantianism theory in investigating the cyber ethics and behaviour of chain letters on social media. Based on the Kantianism framework, there are two different but correspondent ways of defining the Categorical Imperative (Crook, 2008). One of them is the Universal Law Formula. A wrong action can be regarded as a right action as long as everybody else is doing the same thing too. The best example would be stealing. Yes, stealing causes a lot of implications on the victim and the perpetrator. But what if everybody steals? This will create social tension and public unrest. Who needs to work ten hours a day when you can get big income by stealing?

Looking from Kant perspective, it is clear that Internet scammers have contradicted the Universal Law Formula. Their modus operandi of the Internet scamming is to manipulate and confuse the recipients of chain letters for their own benefits. Another theory that applies to this research is the Agenda Setting theory. In short it is the conception of what the public think is important. For example is our very own research. The rising cases of chain letters are because of people having been forwarding it without even thinking or questioning its authentication. They believe what they want to believe. They do not have the audacity to counter check the source or whatever. Hence the growing numbers of fooled victims.

III. The Objectives of The Study

The objective of this study is to figure out the contributing factors and impact of the sending or receiving chain letters. We need to know what the roots to this problem are in order to nip it in the bud. By being able to know the causes, we can find the ways to solve it. Our objective is also to explore the effects of chain letters in our society. The effects that discovered will give awareness towards the society about the risk of spreading fraud like chain letters. Other than that, our objective is to prevent chain letter activity from being continue practice by the society. With this action, we can ensure that, no one will get fraud and misunderstood to certain issue or news. This study is crucial to the social media users in understanding how the Internet could affect the environment around them. The limitations to this study included 100 samples focused on university students which limit its generalizability and respondents were mainly first year students.

IV. Methodology

The researcher used survey method and treated around 40-50 first year students in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) as a respondent. A questionnaire that consists of nine questions was developed to collect the data, and it was divided into three parts. The first part of the survey instrument was designed to get information about the contributing factors that caused the spread of chain letters through social media. The second part of this survey is to recognize the effect from the spreading of chain letters. The third part of the survey is to analyse steps to prevent the problems. These questionnaire items are measured using a four-point Likert scale (from 1- really agree to 4- really disagree.) The survey was conducted in the Centre of Academic Information Service (CAIS) in (UNIMAS). A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed among UNIMAS first year students. The data was analysed by using statistical software SPSS and the statistical method included correlation and regression analyses.

V. Results of Findings

According to the results of a questionnaire that carried out by 100 respondents on Figure 1 below, about 45% respondents really agree, 52% respondents agree, 2% respondents disagree and only 1% respondents really disagree with the statement that chain letter is just an entertainment or joke and that is it the factors of spreading chain letters. About the next statement which is the neglecting of verification of news, about 60% respondents really agree, 20% respondents agree, and 10% respondents disagree and really disagree with the statement. The last statement is misused of social media itself, about 20% respondents really agree, 70% agree, while 5% respondents disagree and really disagree with the statement as shown in Figure 1.

According to the results of a questionnaire that carried out by 100 respondents as shown in Figure 2 below, about 65% respondents really agree, 30% respondents agree, 5% respondents disagree and only 2% respondents really disagree with the statement that the impacts of chain letters to students will bring down the students reputation. About 40% respondents really agree, 50% respondents agree, 7% respondents disagree and just 3% respondents really disagree that effects of chain letters will causes the slander. About the last statement, 20% respondents really agree, 60% respondents agree, 13% respondents disagree and 7% respondents really disagree that effect of chain letters will causes social unrest.
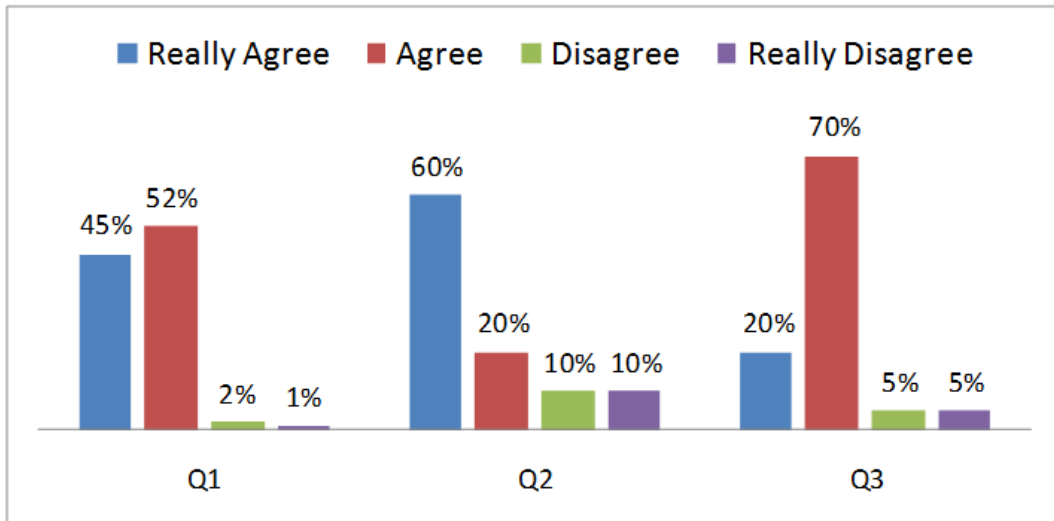
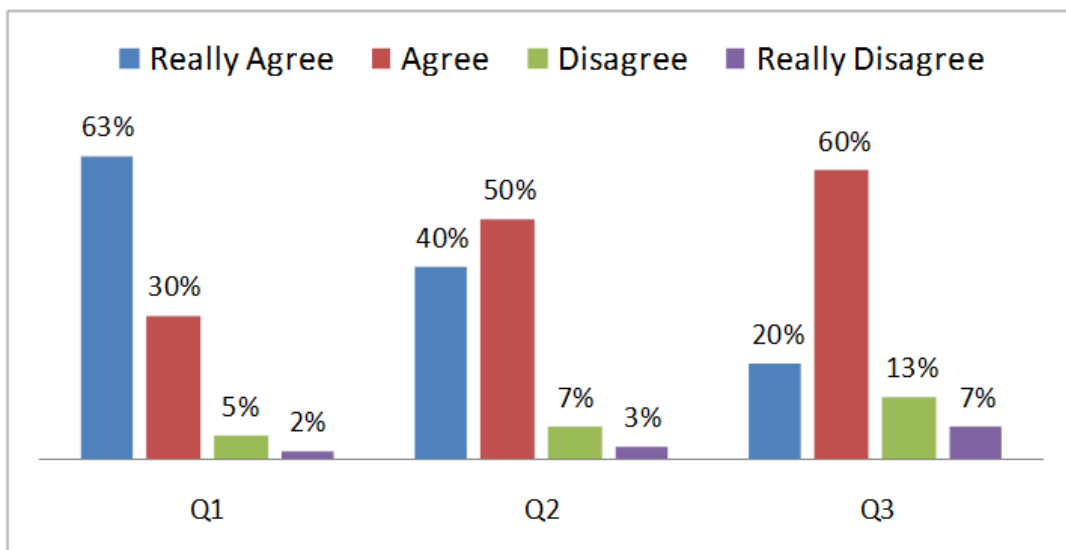**Figure 1:** Factors and Medium of Spreading Chain Letters

Figure 2: Impact of Chain Letters towards Students

VI. Discussion

The results of the survey show that sending chain letters is more towards negative impacts and rather obvious and imminent, especially in a country. The chain letters that contain malicious designated information could lead to social unrest, creating panic and anxiety among the people. Falsified news or information could provoke fights between the various parties. People from all walks of life could be affected. This situation could also affect national security if the chain letters contain a lot of slanders.

Among the contributing factors leading to the spreading of chain letters is the abuse of social media causing the issue to be so severe at times. The next contributing factor is some of social media or the Internet users mostly could not care less to verify the message contained in the chain letters before disseminating the information. In other word, they do not counter check or questioned the source of the news. They do not have the awareness or the self-consciousness. This kind of negative attitudes is what makes this problem difficult to contain. They are irresponsible in carrying out their duties in being good social media users.

The authorities play a very significant role in combating the problem. In Malaysia, we have the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (MCMC) which role is to implement and enforce the provisions of the communications and multimedia law. MCMC needs to raise awareness among social media users on how harmful chain letters can be. Future development must focus on chasing further specifications of these strategies in order to combat Internet scamming through chain letters on social media.

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