

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Love or affection is one of basic psychological needs for people in all eras; similarly, dating timelessly plays an essential role for making a romantic relationship. However, from the ancient time when people were limited to finding their partner from neighbors, at least two aspects of dating has been changed by the hands of technology: chances to meet and ways of communication.

In early years, parents, especially in Asian countries, were responsible for selecting a mate for their children and the courtship was traditional and very formal. The only way to contact each other was to talk face-to-face with the presence of other people. Opportunity to meet opposite the sex in private was rare so chance for girls to build an intimate relationship with boys whom their parents did not expect was even thornier. After the expansion of education and revolution of womens' rights, youths were free for finding a partner by themselves. Though dating was still traditional, postal service development gave the option for people to communicate more privately via letters. Telephone invention had provided lovers even more easy access to each other; distance seemed not to be as important as it used to. But most relations were still initiated from face-to-face meeting and interpersonal communication still depended highly on both verbal and non-verbal language.

Once internet was invented, it totally changed the figure of long distance communication. Bill Gates said in his address at Harvard University that "The emergence of low-cost personal computers gave rise to a powerful network that has transformed opportunities for learning and communicating. The magical thing about this network is that it collapses distance and makes everyone your neighbor" (2007). A student in the North Pole can send electronic mail to his teacher in Asia within seconds. Friends chat in group in real time although they stay in their own house. A man can send an instant message asking a woman to marry him though they are apart in different continents. Cyberspace connects people from the different parts of the world together and it has changed conventional dating, face-to-face encounter, to e-

mailing or instant messaging courtship. Interestingly, most of those relations are based on verbal language only in written form.

The World Wide Web is the next stimulation of interpersonal relationship revolution. Space in cyber world is infinite. Everyone can stake out as much as they want from the vast virtual land. Anyone can post any information in to his or her space or place his or her own profile on a public website. Wired world can be considered as a pool of information or, in sense of dating, market of available mates as Ben-Ze'ev (2004) suggested in *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet* that environment of availability and desired options are provided in cyberspace. Without expensive investment people can easily reach preferred mates and perform desired actions. "It is easier to find romantic partners in cyberspace than at bars, shopping malls, or supermarkets" (p. 19).

There are many other features of the Internet encouraging people to form closer online relationships. Imagination, interactivity, availability, and anonymity are major attributes of the Internet liable to the romance affairs in cyberspace (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004). Privacy of communication would also be considered as a factor which enables men and women to simply develop their online relationships to love, a Cyber love.

Cyber love is a romantic relationship consisting mainly of computer-mediated communication. Despite the fact that the partner is physically remote and is to a certain extent anonymous, in one important aspect this relationship is similar to an offline romantic relationship—the emotion of love is experienced as fully and as intensely as in an offline relationship (p. 4)

Owing to the advantageous characteristics of the Internet mentioned earlier, the growth of love online tends to increase on and on. In America, the trend of making cyber dates has been rising every year. Online Publishers Association (OPA) and ComScore Networks study reported that internet dating and personals was the largest segment of paid content on the site. \$469.5 million was spent on the webs in 2004 and went up to over \$600 million (28+ %) in 2006. www.manageronline.com reported in 2007 that the market value of dating services in China was expected to be 600 million Yuan in 2008. Eight hundred forty-four lifestyle and dating websites were posted online at the end of November 2004 according to Hitwise Inc. study (*Online Dating*

Service, 2007). The popularity of cyber love seems to influence lots of people in many parts of the world.

Even in Thailand, though there are not any existing statistics about the incidence of cyber love, this kind of relationship tends to grow, particularly among teenagers. Some studies in Thailand have shown that young people are intense users of chatrooms, the place to meet, talk, and make new relationships among Cyberians. The Thailand National Statistical Office (สำนักงานสถิติแห่งชาติ, 2550) reported that in 2006 35.6% of Thai Internet users fell in the group of people aged 15-24 years. In 2007, an ABAC Poll revealed that 80% of Bangkok youth (15-24 years) had some experience of online chatting and half of the respondents used internet in order to talk via chatrooms or instant messaging programs like MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, or ICQ (2007). The ABAC Poll also reported that nearly half (48.3%) of the university students in Bangkok on average spent 2 hours/day for online chat. More than one-third (44.1%) of students using chatrooms used it for meeting new friends and 8.7% accepted that they chat for finding a romantic partner (2006). Surprisingly, the youngest age of Thai people visiting online dating service was only 11 years according to the study of www.หาคู่.com (สำนักข่าวไทย, 2550).

Not only the heavy usage of chatrooms makes adolescents the majority of cyber love culture in Thailand but the nature of people in young age also supports this idea. A young person, especially in the period of adolescents usually engages in peer and opposite sex relationships; this positive relationship has high potential to be developed to love (Podhisita & Pattaravanich, 1995).

Psychological needs in company with technology advancement have influenced the rising popularity of cyber love among adolescents. This phenomenon might not be new for people in Western countries, but cyber love for Thai society where modesty about love and sex are traditionally preserved becomes a controversial issue now. Many grown people view cyber love as a usually deceptive relationship, which may lead to cybersex or other improper sexual behavior, while youngsters may differently perceive it as a new way to meet their challenges. Youth might use cyberspace to express their feelings to someone they trust. They may feel safer with an online relationship than that of the offline. Cyberspace may provide comfort to do courtship and youth may perceive that love online may lead to a real love similar to a

face-to-face relation. To understand them more, this research purposively assesses adolescents' perceptions and beliefs about cyber love in terms of intimacy development, focusing on text-based communication. The results from the study will provide in-depth information about the attitudes young people hold about cyber love, to present to public about the trends of the courtship and selection of their mate in the decades ahead. In addition, information derived from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on cyber love among adolescents.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As online intimacy becomes a new type of interpersonal relationship development among adolescents who are considered as trend setters, this study aims to discover this phenomena with the following guidelines:

- 1.2.1 How many adolescents have an experience on cyber love?
- 1.2.2 How do adolescents develop online intimate relationships?
- 1.2.3 What do adolescents think about cyber love?
- 1.2.4 How do adolescents use the Internet?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Objectives of this survey are as follows:

1.3.1 Main objective

- To explore current attitudes of adolescents towards cyber love

1.3.2 Sub-Objectives

- To investigate adolescents' experience on cyber love
- To obtain the whole picture of online intimacy development among adolescents
- To study the Internet usage of adolescents

1.4 VARIABLES AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1.4.1 Variables

Independent Variables

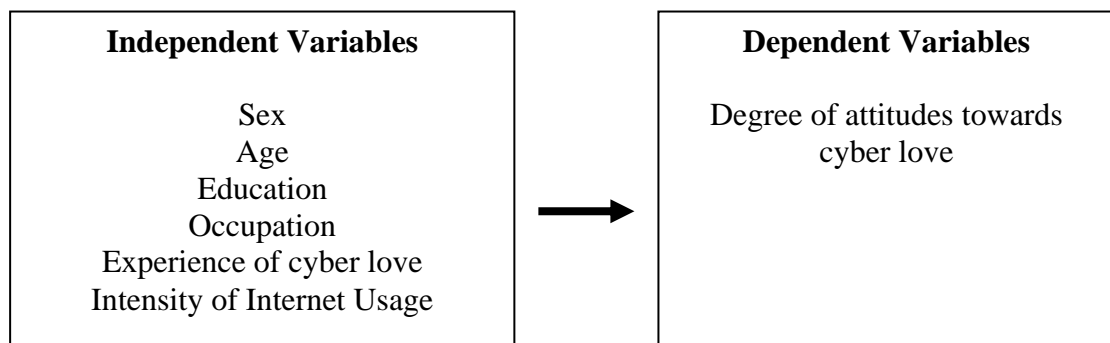
The independent variables of this research were the factors related to the attitude towards cyber love of adolescents which included sex, age, education, occupation, experience of cyber love, and intensity of Internet usage.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable of this study was the degree of attitudes towards cyber love of adolescents.

The relation of independent and dependent variables can be demonstrated in the following model.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of adolescents' attitudes towards cyber love



1.4.2 Definitions of terms

In order to pave a common ground for this study, definition of each variable is specified based on the purpose of this study as follows:

Table 1. Definitions of Terms

Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Indicator
1. Attitude	The way a person thinks or feels about a concerned issue, especially when this shows in the way he/she behaves	The tendency to agree or not agree with provided statements	Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly disagree

(Table continues)

(Table 1. continued)

Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Indicator
2. Cyber love	An intimacy which consists mainly of computer-mediated communication	A romantic relationship between two persons which is initiated and developed by merely using the Internet as communication channel	A relationship which is closer or deeper than friendship and both parties start the relationship on Internet only
3. Experience	An observation of something or some events a person gains through involvement in or exposure to that thing or event	A person's direct and indirect participation in provided activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having direct participation in given activity, • Knowing someone who participates in given activity
4. Internet Usage	The use of interconnected computer networks	The purpose and the number of times for which a person uses Internet per week	Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-mail • Finding information • Query • Chat or MSN • Web blog • Game online • Others Number of times <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday • 4-5 times/week • 2-3 times/week • Less than 2 times/week

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to describe only attitudes of young people whose ages are between 18-25 years and who live in Bangkok. The attitude focuses on intimate relationships which are formed by using text-based communication on the Internet only.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Love is a classic relationship which all people need to be in, but the way to form love in this day is changing. Among the young population who are considered as trend setters, love can be formed at a distance, without seeing each other, due to advanced communication technology. This phenomenon would be a paradigm shift of interpersonal relationship development in the near future. Consequently, the results of this study will provide initial information about the tendency or direction of social changes. The findings of this survey will also provide parents and student guardians further understanding of their children's behavior.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of adolescents' attitudes towards cyber love is divided into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the background of cyber love among young people and statement of the problem, the objectives, the scope of the study, the definition of terms, and the significance of the study in order. Chapter two discusses about related literature and previous studies. Chapter three reviews the research methodology and the result of this study is demonstrated in chapter four. The last chapter, chapter five, discusses the survey summary, findings, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for further study.