Of Virtual Friendships, Romantic Relationships and Safety: A Survey on How College Students of MSU-IIT Think

Cesar G. Demayo and Mark Anthony J. Torres
Department of Biological Sciences
College of Science and Mathematics
MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology
Iligan City

Abstract - Many young people are actively using the Internet to find information, play games, to meet new people and to make new friends. It is through the internet that many people tend to talk about their lives and to form new relationships with each other. It is a common knowledge that many of those who frequented the internet café’s established romantic relationships with online friends resulting to marriage. Others use the relationships established online as source of money asked from online foreigner friends. But just how young students of a local university feel about meeting people on the Internet: how many friends they have, what kinds of people they like to meet, and perhaps most important of all, what information is safe to share with people they don't know anywhere other than the Internet? We conducted a survey of one hundred eightyeight (188) student internet users of the university ages 16-19 to be able to find some of the answers. Results showed fifty-four (54) percent of those who use the internet had virtual friends even when they were as young as ten (10) years old. The ages of virtual friends range from 10years old although a majority ages 18 and above. Many communicate with their online friends through chat and instant messaging. Of those with virtual friends, thirty six (36) percent had online romantic relationships who liked that they get to meet people outside of the school, are less intimidated by dating someone less often seen, and have less commitment when dating someone less often seen. Those who do not have believe that having online boyfriend/s or girlfriend/s is tantamount to cheating. Regarding trust and truthfulness with virtual friends, only twenty-five (25) percent agree they like virtual relationships because they can pretend they are someone they are not. Only six (6) percent usually trust what people tell them online. Age, gender, location and names are the common things the respondents lie to online friends they do not know. Likewise, they also believe that the same things are also lied to them by their online friends. A higher percentage (58%) believed it is unsafe in meeting virtual friends in person. Friends (27%), school (12%), parents (13%), website (10%), and experience (10%) are the common sources of information how to be safe online. Of all the people they talk to online, 29% were not known before, 30% said they met a few of those, 14% most of those were already known to them and 23% said they met all of them. To those who had virtual relationships, 18% have talked on the phone, 5% met in public, 25% met in private, 19% used a webcam, 9% written letters in emails, 9% exchanged pictures, and 15% communicated online. Hobbies, birthday, last name, first name, phone number, email address, favorite book, favorite movie, parent’s names, street address, city, province, country, favorite color, what they look like, and name of school are the common information shared to online friends. Only 14% agreed they are closer to their virtual friends than the friends they see face to face. Fifty-nine (59%) believed it is not easier to be honest in a virtual relationship than in a person-to-person relationship. Only nine (9%) believed it is easier while 29% believed it is easier sometimes.

Keywords - internet, romantic relationship, virtual friendship

Remark: The full paper may be found in www.inrit2011.com or www.ijcim.th.org.