

Article

Coming Out Strategies on Social Media among Young Gay Men in Malaysia

Collin Jerome * and Ahmad Junaidi bin Ahmad Hadzmy

Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan 94300, Malaysia; ahajunaidi@unimas.my

* Correspondence: jcollin@unimas.my

Abstract: Social media have afforded many young gay men the opportunity to explore their identities and practice coming out. The ease of use and the anonymity that can be assumed online has enabled young gay men to come up with different strategies of self-disclosure in social media. The present study seeks to examine these strategies among young gay men in Malaysia, given the limited data on the social media experiences of gay men in the country. In-depth interviews were conducted with six young, gay-identified men to find out the strategies they employed in disclosing their sexual identity online. The analysis of the interview data revealed that the coming-out strategies among the participants mostly resembled those employed by gay men in Western societies, including being out and proud, being out and discreet, and being closeted on social media. The analysis also revealed that the participants held different views regarding the role of social media in the coming out process for gay men in Malaysia. These findings have implications that are relevant to the issues of identity formation among gay men in contexts where homosexuality is still subject to social, legal, and religious condemnation.

Keywords: gay; coming out; strategies; social media; Malaysia



Citation: Jerome, C.; Hadzmy, A.J.b.A. Coming Out Strategies on Social Media among Young Gay Men in Malaysia. *Youth* **2022**, *2*, 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth2010004>

Academic Editor: Pamela Nilan

Received: 28 November 2021

Accepted: 17 February 2022

Published: 23 February 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Coming out is an important part of the lives of many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals. It is often referred to as a process involving a single event or a series of events through which individuals (1) accept their sexual orientations and/or gender identity as LGBTQ, and/or (2) tell others about their sexual orientation or gender identity. These events are often described through “the closet” metaphor, wherein LGBTQ individuals liberate themselves from the closet by being true to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, being honest with others, making connections, and gaining support within their community [1].

Coming out is also often viewed as a lifelong process, with said events taking place at any stage of an individual's life. Such a view has long been the subject of much discussion and debate in the scholarship on coming out, particularly regarding how the process is understood in terms of the developmental stages an individual goes through to achieve an integrated LGBTQ identity [1]. The present study aims to add to this discussion by examining coming out strategies on social media among young gay men in Malaysia.

1.1. Coming Out among Young Gay Men

Coming out among young LGBTQ individuals, particularly gay men, has been a subject of investigation for many years, with researchers examining various aspects of coming out, including factors and reasons for coming out, the stages of coming out, the consequences of coming out, and coming out processes and experiences, to name just a few [2–4]. Some of the factors and reasons include coming out to oneself (i.e., internal/personal factor) for self-acceptance, and coming out to other individuals (i.e., external