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# An Analysis of Gen Y Perception between Male and Female on the Use of Vulgar Words When Communicating

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**_Abstract_**_: - Vulgarity lenience among Malaysian is increasing, although it is against the fifth principle of this country: Good Behavior and Morality. Since vulgarity has become the societal norm among Malaysian, paper aims to explore how the use of vulgar words have any differences in terms of perception between female and male to further understand the norms and reason behind it. The present study was conducted on 2 males and 2 females in Malaysia to investigate their perceptions on vulgarity. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview and validated via member checked. The study showed that female respondents use vulgarity freely compared to male respondents. The findings show that both gender use vulgarity when expressing emotions especially frustration, and also engage in humour to show intimacy among friends. The study reveals, that image of individual can be influenced by the practice and frequency of vulgarity used._

**_Keywords_**_: - vulgarity, swear words, gender perception_

## 1.0    Introduction

### 1.1    Background of study

The way people communicate interpersonally has changed through the ages (Venter, 2017). There has been a general increase in the use of vulgarity ("swear words") by English speakers in public and private settings (Knirnschild, 2019). Jay and Janschewitz (2008) added that vulgarity practiced varies on the person and the situation, yet vulgarity is commonly related to the expression of emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise. While Sylwester and Purver (2015) agreed that the use of vulgarity violates the moral foundations of purity and the common norm for speech, suggestive of the potential to engage in other antisocial behaviours that violate norms and morality (Feldman, et.al, 2017). Societies' attitudes conflicted concerning the use of vulgarity (Feldman, et.al, 2017). The debate echoes an interesting question and mirrors the academic discussion regarding the nature of vulgarity.

The aim of the current study was to examine the differences in acceptability and motivation of vulgarity, vulgarity and derogatory language usage among Malaysian. People evaluate the moral implications of vulgarity rather differently based on their age; gender and social class. Evaluating vulgarity ideology differences based on those traits will need longer time and pressure suggesting; how different gender perceived vulgarity shall be put on stress first.

### 1.2    Statement of problem

Kapoor (2016) brought up that vulgarity usage can increase significantly in casual settings and the presence has become less offensive in such contexts. This raised the red flag from the time when once the social context has determined and shaped the language, the realization becomes the property of society (Ashwindren, Shankar & Zarei, 2018) specifically by people of different ages especially youths (Fanny, 2014). As added by Shankar and Zarei (2019), due to the influence of vulgarity, Malaysian teenagers tend to dominate a particular conversation using vulgarity among their peers, teenagers. Specific attention needs to be put to this second: equally (regardless of gender) tend to swear using vulgarity to dominate over a conversation.

In Malaysia, the focus group of later research is female teenagers despite gender differences;

Baudin and Paramasivam (2015) aim to seek about why teenagers swear, the kinds of swear words used, and their viewpoints of swearing. In order to gain that, the survey was conducted on 51 female teenagers in Malaysia to investigate their swearing behaviour in English. The study found that female teenagers in Malaysia swear regularly using their favourite swearwords as such; *shit*, *damn*, and *hell* followed by *bitch*, *fuck* and *bullshit*. Additionally, Baudin and Paramasivam (2015) also found that swearing functions as a tool to deal with daily life affairs; to express anger and frustration and joking. It has also been mentioned that the study shows respondents (female) swear often amongst themselves as girlfriends, hardly with the opposite gender: male.

Enlarging the scope, Rosenberg, P., et al, (2017) add that specifically, women in the USA seem to swear as frequently as men do, but at the same time, women perceive the words they iterate as more offensive. This is further clarified by Knirnschild (2019) in her study on the gender differences in perceived vulgar words. The data was collected from 400 students, and 10 in depth interviews with ten students, to examine the disparities between what is considered "vulgar" from males and females perspectives. The respondents were asked to rate the level of obscenity of various words and it is found that male and female perceptions of vulgarity and obscenity are not as different as expected.

Thou swearing fulfils multiple functions, emotional expression being but one. In Malaysia ambiance, the behaviour is frowned upon by society, and in certain contexts, for instance on streets and in formal settings, is punishable by law (Baudin & Paramasivam, 2015).

Baudin and Paramasivam (2015) stressed that politeness, ethics, and appropriate use of language in communication are important in society. Furthermore, vulgarity in regular social settings are considered inappropriate and, in some situations, unacceptable (Feldman, et.al, 2017). As detailed by Ashwindren, Shankar, and Zarei (2018), a speaker's influenced vulgarity words choice usage, notions of

taboo and perceived rudeness by their sociolinguistic, demographic and background.

In order to further understand the gap of vulgarity perception, the variables of gender should be put onto the focal point, as different gender have different ways of communication (Venter, 2017). Therefore, lenience towards vulgarity in Malaysia suggests that the gap between the genders in one specific generation group is an activity that needs specific guidance.

However, the number of research and article publications done on gender differences in Malaysia is understudied. It is expected that the outcome of study could be used to channel information to other researchers to specifically broaden the respondent on a bigger scale. This is to ensure openness of community and to understand the gap that has been increased; miscommunication can be decreased and provided too comfort language code between genders within the generations. Thus, this paper aims to explore how the use of vulgar words have any differences in terms of perception between female and male to further understand the norms and reason behind it.

## 1.3    Objective of the study

The objectives of this paper are:

1.  To examine the differences in perception of vulgarity, and derogatory language usage among Gen Y female and male.
2.  To examine the motivation of vulgarity, and derogatory language usage among Gen Y female and male.
3.  To compare the use of vulgarity, and derogatory language between Gen Y female and male.

## 1.4    Research Question

This study focal point is guided by the following research questions:

1.4.1    What are the Gen Y female and male perceptions of the use of vulgar, and derogatory language when communicating?

1.4.2　What are the factors that contribute to the use of vulgarity, and derogatory language used among Gen Y when communicating?

1.4.3　What are the similarities and differences of Gen Y female and male of the use of vulgar, and derogatory language when communicating?

## 1.5　Operational definition

The operational definition acts as a specific indicator of a variable measured in this study.

1.5.1　Vulgarity
Vulgarity is referred to the any utterances or particular word that is being rude and likely to upset or anger people, especially referring to sex or the body, or something such as a phrase that is rude as perceived by the respondents.

1.5.2　Generation Y (will be referred as GEN Y)

Gen Y is those who were born between 1980 and 1996 that are currently between 23-39 years old in the year of 2019.

## 1.6　Scope of the study

The scope of this study is summarized as follows:

1. The term vulgarity, definitions and its classifications in communication will be used throughout the research to represent the concept of interaction, although there are a lot of other terms such as profanity, derogatory, and taboo words which have been used elsewhere.

2. Among the Malaysian generations and other variables, the research will only focus on the perception of Gen Y males and females with the highest educational background: Bachelor Degree.

3. The scope of the study will be focused on the perception of vulgarity used in communication and development of the framework resulting from the findings.

4. The data will be interpreted based on the adaptation of the theoretical framework referred in this study.

5. For validity, the data will go through member check, where the emerging themes were shown to 2 of the participants interviewed to check whether the tentative assertions (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998, 2002, 2003) of the findings were probable.

## 1.7　Boundary of the study

According to Cresswell (2009), researchers use definitions, delimitations and limitations, and statements about significance to place boundaries on their study plans. Further, the researchers will be referring to the conceptual frameworks developed from previous literature; Griffiths (2018) to denote the area of the research. The adaptation of conceptual frameworks will be further discussed in chapter 2.

## 1.8　Limitation of the study

The focus of this study falls onto one specific generation; GEN Y due to other generations are beyond the feasibility of the researcher. Since only 2 females and 2 males were interviewed, their views and perception cannot be generalized to populations at large.

There are also differences in other literature on definition of GEN Y, however this study will stick with 1981 to 1996 that is also a widely accepted definition.

## 1.9　Significance of the study

The present study boards on sociolinguistic-based research from an applied linguistic perspective. The first significance of this study is in the categorical words that are also termed as "swear words", to re-assess perceptions from different gender perspectives on the use of vulgarity in communication.

The semi-structured interviews developed in this study are based from the research questions developed that will be used for data analysis and enable the researcher to allied with the real and current perception from a group of people interviewed. The findings will be used to add to the literature of sociolinguistics specifically on vulgarity.

Qualitative research on vulgarity and another synonym of it in Malaysia, have been scarce. Most of the studies in Malaysia are based on quantitative data that restrict the finding to understand and describe in-depth the meaning of vulgarity based on the real perspectives. This research will be contributed to the literature by catering on qualitative data that focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about vulgarity.

## 1.10 Study outline

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the focus of the study, including problem statement, objectives, scope of the study, and significance of the study which is followed by an outline of the thesis. Next, chapter 2 presents the literature review related to this study, as such vulgarity in communication, perceptions on vulgarity used in communication, factors contribute to vulgarity used in communication and other past studies relevant. Correspondingly, chapter 3 will introduce and further explain the research methodology. This is followed by data procedure, data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 will describe thoroughly the findings that have been analysed and obtained in the research. Finally, chapter 5 will be on discussion based on research questions as the focal point and reflect the finding to the previous literature. Recommendation, implication and suggestion for future research will also be included to wrap this research paper.

## 2.0 Review of literature

### 2.1 Introduction

This section outlines the summary of prior research for the topics in this study. A review of the literature "is a written summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describes the past and current state of information, organises the literature into topics, and documents a need for a proposed study." (Creswell, 2005:79). The goal of the literature review is to critically evaluate fields in this study and thus provide evidence to support this paper findings.

The chapter begins with critical reviews on the general scope of vulgarity used in communication and narrowed down to the factors and most importantly the perceptions of it. Afterwards, an adapted version of the theoretical framework will be discussed to provide basic understanding of the idea of this paper.

### 2.2 Vulgarity in communication

It is worth highlighting where vulgarity is commonly used in communication before discussing the factors and perceptions to the use of vulgarity. Swear words are commonly viewed as a socially unacceptable language. Rosenberg, et al. (2017) state that U.S. residents engage in vulgarity between 60 and 90 words per day. Interestingly as indicated by Kwon and Gruzd (2017), that offensiveness can become a community-wide phenomenon as a result of being emotionally contagious within the communication. For workplace settings, Baruch et al. (2016) found that vulgarity did not take place in informal meetings, written communications (letters/memos), phone conversations or e-mails, instead, face-to-face swearing between colleagues was the most common. As for public setting, Kwon & Gruzd (2017) differentiates two types; online swearing and public swearing. For online vulgarity, usually tend to be interpersonal that trigger trolling among anonymous users, while for public setting; there is no target-specificity and much more a form of emotional outbursts (Kwon & Gruzd, 2017). Schippers (2013) remark that the vulgarity common construction is expletives, for example, *"shit!", "fuck!", "hell!"*, and abusive like *"you bastard!"*, *"you motherfucker!"*. It is also a form of being expressive and evocative functions of the utterance.

### 2.3 Motives of vulgarity used in communication

Vulgarity engagement does not stand alone, hence it is important to recognize the motives behind the usage of it. Initiated by Andersson and Hirsch, (1985), different motives are as summarized in the following figure:
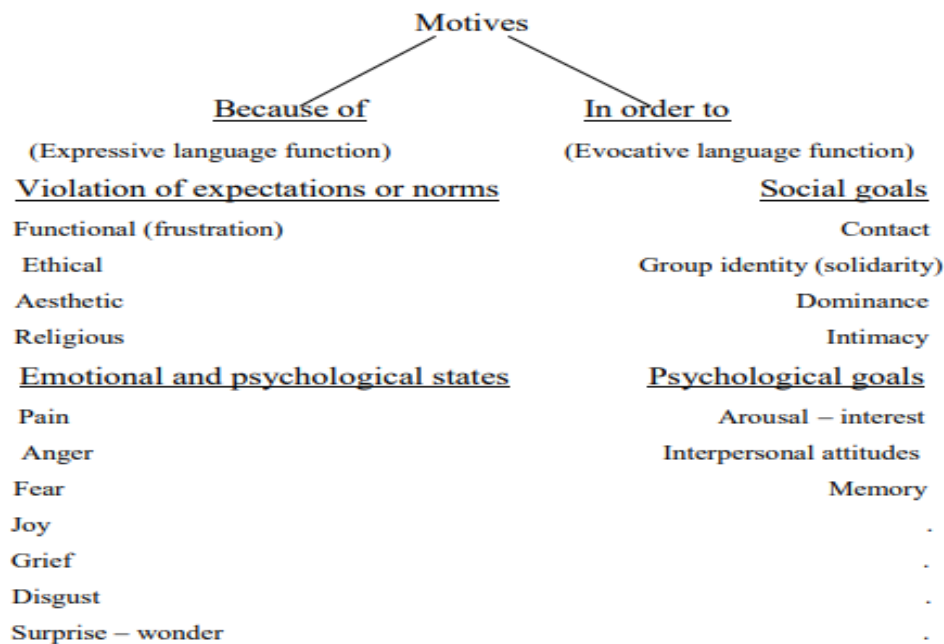
Figure-1: Different motives in swearing

Source: Anderson & Hirsch (1985)

Based from figure 1, it suggested that the most prominent reason for swearing is because of emotional and psychological states that is to express pain, anger, fear, joy, grief, disgust and surprise-wonder, as supported by Jay and Janschewitz, (2008), Stephens and Umland, (2011), Ashwindren et al. (2018). In Malaysia context, Baudin and Paramasivam noted that swear words used for humour purposes and showing solidarity between the members of social groups, also some feel that vulgarity in certain context is because of the excitement but hardly used for sexual reasons.

### 2.4    Past studies on gender perception differences

Rosenberg et al. (2016) came out with a quantitative study that investigated the relationship between the level of vulgarity intensity and frequency of usage to rate how offensive the respondents perceived the words. The study is conducted via online survey among 1,900 U.S residents. This study found slight changes in the motives of swear words used by people in daily life explained as a part of a person's natural language. However, if the swear words are considered intense, it will be hardly used. For the gender gap, the study highlights that even though females use swear words as frequently as male, they (female) point out that the "taboo" words are more

offensive compared to men. This research implies gender differences based on the level of vulgarity.

Knirnschild (2019) comes out with a focus to examine gender differences in frequency, acceptability and motivation of vulgarity language usage, targeted respondents among U.S. university students. She employed a perceptual survey and oral interviews to gain in depth understanding on gendered perceptions and vulgarity usage. The results suggest that the differences in frequency and motivation of vulgarity usage were rather small. The finding suggests, both female and male find it is important to respect women, therefore female derogatory terms to insult women perceived as extremely obscene compared to male-descriptive derogatory terms. Hence, signifying no difference on derogatory terms from female and male perceptions.

Contrastively, Baruch et al. (2016) in their study on exploring the use and misuse of swearing in the workplace, collected their data from the interviews of 52 business executives from the United Kingdom, France and the United State of America. It is reported that in terms of gender differences, female perceived vulgarity included in speech is beneficial as professionals to assert their strong identity and earn respect to earn respect from their male

colleagues. While male perceived it as a normal encounter and practiced even in professional settings. Overall, this paper highlights the different perception of gender on the usage of vulgarity specifically in the workplace situation.

*2.5    Theoretical framework*

Obviously, the development of perception towards the vulgarity used in communication does not stand alone, thus it is important to recognise the main element that stimulates and influences it. Figure 2 is an adaptation of a conceptual framework proposed by Griffiths (2018) to suit the purpose and highlight the focal point of this study (Adom et al. 2018). Building on the essence that academics refer to their theoretical frameworks when publishing papers or experiments to explicitly identify the assumptions that inform their work (Zamboni, 2018), this paper further illustrate its statement based on the theoretical framework proposed is as per below:
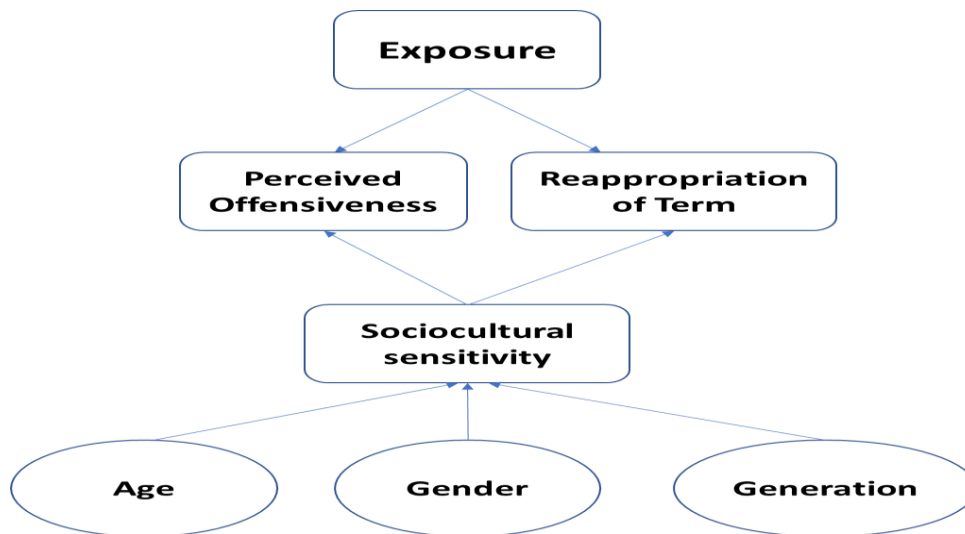


Figure-2: Relationship between exposure and demographic background towards perceived offensiveness.

Source: Griffiths (2018).

This theoretical framework narrates the existence of other dependent variables such as age, gender, generation that can be grouped as sociocultural sensitivity, and exposure to vulgarity could influence how individuals received it as offensive or inoffensive. It will also impact how certain vulgar words view as appropriate or acceptable individually. For others, depending on the exposure may see vulgarity as a normal practice and therefore reveal their perspective and moral position. The relationship proposed needs empirical validation and logical view to fully understand about vulgarity and how different perceptions between genders is affected by exposure and sociocultural sensitivity.

*2.6    Summary*

This chapter reviewed the vulgarity used in communication, motive of vulgarity used in communication, and most importantly the past studies on gender perception differences of vulgarity. Additionally, a theoretical framework adapted from previous studies presented for a nuanced understanding of this present study focus.

**3.0    Methodology**

*3.1    Introduction*

This chapter will describe the research design, instruments used in this research to collect the data. Prior to achieving the objectives of this study, the methodology designed as the guideline to ensure this review process is within the scope of the study.

*3.2    Research Design*

After considering the nature of issues explored, this paper principally refers to Kvale (1996) definition; "the qualitative research interview seeks to describe the meanings of central themes". It is best to adapt a qualitative method for this study as this paper meant

to gain in-depth insights on different perceptions of vulgar words used in communication. This present study is specifically a basic interpretive qualitative study that is researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning in a situation or phenomenon (Merriam et al., 2019).

### 3.3 Sample

This paper has selected four samples from Gen Y of two from each gender. The four purposive samples were selected based on their generation age group that has been previously defined. Hence, the sample varied from gender category will be able to provide more information and a deeper insight of perception studied in this paper (Elmusharaf, 2012). The details of the sample are as below:

| | **Interviewee 1** | **Interviewee 2** | **Interviewee 3** | **Interviewee 4** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | 33 years old | 23 years old | 23 years old | 23 years old |
| **Gender** | Male | Female | Female | Male |
| **Pseudonym** | MP1 | FP2 | FP3 | MP4 |
| **Education** | Masters | Bachelor Degree | Bachelor Degree | Bachelor Degree |

Figure-3: Respondents Demographic Profile

The sample is selected based on purposive sampling grounded on the research problem to shape the information needed (Palys, 2008). Henceforth, researchers search for individuals in the community that are potentially valuable in giving information. Criterion sampling is applied since the nature of this study is to analyse perspectives of vulgarity from different gender views but in the same generation: Gen Y as coined by Palys, (2008) to search for individuals who meet certain criterion.

### 3.4 Instrument

To achieve the objective, the interview questions will be made with reference from existing research and past study. The basis of the qualitative data instruments mainly because of its personal approach (Kabir, 2016). Hence, the researcher collects data directly from the interviewee on a one-to-one basis.

The research instrument present in this case study is a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The interview contained seven main categories; demographic background, general questions, views, reasons, norms and habits, conflict and action. The first category; demographic questions, covering only on two essential parts; age and educational background that is relevant for this study. This information is crucial in supplying demographic data to be used for the analysis process. The next section is catering to the first element pointed in the theoretical framework: exposure. The semi-

structured questionnaires are as attached in the appendix (es).

### 3.5 Method of Data Collection

Hereafter, signifying a semi-structured interview to be conducted for data collection purposes. In semi-structured interviews, few sets of questions will be prepared to be answered by the interviewee and at the same time interviewer additional questions might be asked during interviews to clarify or further expand certain issues (Dudovskiy, 2019). Transcribe process will take place as the transcription is required for the next procedure: data analysis.

### 3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The data gained from the interviews will be analyse by:

1. Line by line coding within case
2. Cross-case analysis

Line by line coding is useful for this paper to "dig deep" into the data and extract as much as possible from it (Kriukow, 2017). Further, the data are inductively analysed via cross-case analysis done will enable this paper to deconstruct the data derived and to articulate the themes emerged (Merriam et al. 2019; Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). For data validation purposes, the data will go through member check, where the emerging themes were shown to 2 of the participants interviewed to check whether the tentative assertions (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998,

2002, 2003) of the findings were probable. Both processes of data analysis are as in the appendix (es).

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter is reviewed based on a methodology plan. A summary of the plan is presented as follows:

1. Identify the nature of study hence research design is recognized
2. Selection of the sample based on the criterion required to fulfill the research purposes.
3. Choice of instrument used, taking into account the type of information and details sought by the researcher.
4. Data collection is divided into two methods; interviews and transcription of the interviews.
5. Data analysis applied judging on the nature and also desirable outcome of the study.

Based on this research, expected research outcome for each objective of study will be acknowledged.

## 4.0 Finding

### 4.1 Introduction

This paper presents the findings of the proposed research on the different gender perceptions on vulgarity usage in communication. First, the focal point of this research will be presented - research questions and followed by arrangement of data based on the theme emerged from the data analysis. The research questions are:

RQ1: What are the Gen Y female and male perceptions of the use of vulgar, and derogatory language when communicating?

RQ2: What are the factors that contribute to the use of vulgarity, and derogatory language used among Gen Y when communicating?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences of Gen Y female and male of the use of vulgar, and derogatory language when communicating?

The findings from the interviews conducted answer all the research questions and fulfil the research objectives set out by the researchers. The discussion of the individual responses includes quotes from the interview to substantiate the points being made.

*In answering research question 1, the following themes are as explained below in 4.2.: Exposure, and will be linked with 4.3: Perceived Offensiveness.*

### 4.2 Exposure

First, the finding will highlight the exposure that contributes to the differences of vulgarity used perception. Among the premises considered are familiarity with vulgarity in family, social media, and society.

#### 4.2.1 Vulgarity in family

The analysis view from 4 of the participants answered differently on their family practices on vulgarity used in communication but rather similar on acceptable language code of the family. The evidences as per below:

MP1 stated that his family occasionally use the curse word in front of him despite being warned in his childhood that it is not a good practice.

*"Yes. Sometimes we do curse, they do use the curse word in front of me."* [Line: 14]

*"My mother always told me that using swear word is not good."* [Line: 22-23]

Similarly, as explained by FP2, the usage of curse is common among her siblings, and FP3 highlights her male siblings who use the swear words prominently among her family.

FP2:

*"Yes, but then it's not the parents but among my siblings we like curse to each other a lot."* [Line: 18]

FP3:

*"Yes of course but it is from my brothers. My sisters never curse. So, I think it's all my brothers because there are. Boys right. So yeah."* [Line: 19-20]

In the same way, both respondents said that their family acceptable language code is without swear words which has been nurtured even during childhood.

FP2:

*"When I was in kindergarten my mom my parents would say you, you cannot swear use swear words because one of my neighbours their children curse a lot even when they are still at a young age. So, my parents warned me about that. But then as I grew up, I tend to use that a lot."* [Line: 29-30]

She however added as she grew older, she neglected her parents advice on not to use swear words.

FP3 said that she has been warned since she is the youngest in the family, so they perceived it inappropriate for her to practice;

*"Of course, and it is both from my parents my siblings because I am the youngest in the family so I've been warned a lot."* [Line:30-32]

MP4 stressed that his family preserved the polite language code when communicating to each other and revealed him being regularly advised by his parents not to use the curse words with at all when communicating without exclusion to any group of age;

*"I've never encountered this particular issue, meaning that most of my I mean all of my family members, they are quiet, quite particular in terms of using bad words at our household. So, they do not encourage or basically do not encourage the other family members to swear or use bad words in the context of our household."* [Line: 21-25]

*"My parents they regularly they regularly advised me not to use curse words when I'm having conversation either with my with those who are in the same league or in the same age as me and also those who are older or those who are younger than me."* [Line: 36-39]

4.2.2   Vulgarity in social media

As for exposure of vulgarity in social media, all of the respondents responded the same, that it is common for them to encounter the curse word at the social media platform.

MP1 quote:

*"Yes, I have seen this curse word in social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, in any social media."* [Line: 11-12]

FP2 added to:

*"I have heard and read about curse words in social media especially on Facebook, Twitter and also Instagram and I think (the) these platforms are the most common one that... I find curse word is being used."* [Line: 12-14]

Also, FP3 stated similarly with MP1 and FP2:

*"Yea I think I read it (aaa) in (aaa) social media like Twitter, and the entertainment medium as well (aaa) like that, magazine, things like that. They also talk about curse."* [Line: 19-20]

MP4 describes in detail about vulgarity in social media and entertainment mediums from western that use a lot of curse words for a better storyline purpose.

*"I often see a lot of people use curse word in their social media posts and in terms of the entertainment medium itself, we can spot like most entertainment platforms such as movies, TV series, that originate from, (from from) the western part of, of the world. Keep on using vulgar, vulgar words and also swearing words in order to like express the storyline better, I guess."* [Line: 13-16]

4.2.3   Vulgarity in society

The participants also specified that the use of vulgarity is also common among the society explaining the exposure is not only encountered in real life but also in online medium. This can be seen from below quotes:

*"Ya, from my observations every day when and when I go to riding the trains, I see most of the teenagers nowadays is is like a trend to use this swear words among them."* [Line: 84-85]. MP1

FP2 added she experienced vulgarity encounter as below:

*"I think it is so frequent on a daily basis. I mean everywhere I go I will either listen or read people using curse words be it online or in a*

*physical face to face communication process.”* [Line: 84-86]

FP4 explained his encounter vulgarity not only on social media but also in entertainment medium as quoted below:

*“So basically, I often see the use of curse word in social media by today's generation and also in movies. Sorry, and also in movies when it comes to the entertainment industry.”* [Line: 17-19]

Based on the exposure on vulgarity in daily life, it will present the connection between the familiarities towards each of the participant's personal perceptions. Differences in communication contributed from sociocultural sensitivity, in this case; gender that will further manipulate the participant's perceptions.

*4.3 Perceived Offensiveness*

The data analysis has shown that female and male participants perceived vulgarity rather differently as suggested under each theme below.

4.3.1 Vulgarity in Personal Perception: Family

MP1 explained he found vulgarity among his family member as unpleasant based on his quote as below:

*“I am not really feel comfortable when they're using the curse word? Because for me, I don't like it.* [Line:16-17]

Swearing among the family members not backfired for the two female respondents. As FP3 mentioned:

*“I just I just laugh it out. Because it's not something serious.”* [Line: 24-25].

FP2 similarly feels relaxed and believe it is not something that is thought-provoking when asked pertaining to the use of vulgar words among their family members as quoted below:

FP2: *“I don't feel anything because it's not that we meant something bad is that we used that to express our dissatisfaction among each other or our anger toward each other.”* [Line: 22-23]

FP4 claimed he view the vulgarity intensity depending on the context but still highlight it as not a good practice:

*“Personally, it depends on the context. Because, from my point of view. I do think that profanity is a bad habit.”* [Line: 41-42]

4.3.2 Vulgarity in Personal Perception: Daily usage

For norms and habits, data analysis has shown that from 3 participants perceived vulgarity similarly as bad practice. This can be seen as the quotes below:

MP1: *“For me, it is not good to represent us as individu because using this word is not good, you're using the word the bad word. There is so many other words that you can use it. Why you have to use the curse word.”* [Line: 27-29]

MP1 also stressed on other available options of words that are much more suitable to be used rather than options for vulgarity.

FP3 also advised on the usage of the vulgarity in daily conversation as something that is not suggested moreover to make it a trend.

FP3: *“I don't think it is a good thing to do because we have other words that can feed the situation especially when you want to feel trendy or like the younger generation now and younger generation nowadays they love to curse a lot in their like, it is like the normal words for them. So, I don't think it is a good thing to do. Especially in daily conversation.”* [Line: 36-39]

MP4 in the same way with MP1 perceived vulgarity as something that is unruly for human being:

*“I'm someone who views the use of bad words as, as a bad practice of us as a human being. But being a human being, you always make mistakes. And sometimes you are not able to practice what you advise others to basically do.”* [Line: 43-46]

FP2 did not state directly on her view instead she reasoned why she engage with vulgarity as quoted below:

*"Actually, I use profanity on daily basis but not to that extent uh that I use it as a simply I use when I'm feeling angry or does something that (pause) make me feel like very angry but I cannot I express it in any other way. So that's why I curse. K."* [Line: 36-38]

Based on her statement on using profanity, it can be implied that she did not naturally use it and practice it as her habit. However, since her statement did not answer directly to the questions, hence will be omitted.

4.3.3    Vulgarity    in    Personal    Perception: Professional

From the analysis, it can be viewed that all the respondents perceived vulgarity as not suitable in professional settings.

MP1 explained briefly based from the quote below:

*"Yes, for the professional group of people, they shouldn't use the profanity. Why? Because they are working as professional like the professional people, such as engineers, teachers or lecturers they're supposedly not use the swear word, because normally the cursing with a lot of people's like the engineer the meet lot of people during the meeting it's not kind of (pause) it's not kind of showing the professionalism in their in their work when they using the professional when using the swear words. It is not good at all. Yes, it's not good in terms of the (what do we call it) like, it is not good at all."* [Line: 31-38]

MP1 repetitively said *"not good"* can be implied that he disapproves of any vulgarity engagement by professionals. MP4 view are aligned with MP1 statement and he also added on the effect of professional when use profanity as quoted below:

*"I do think that it is not advisable for professionals to engage in the process of using profanity. (...) It will greatly or negatively affect their reputation and also their status as a professional in an organization."* [Line: 53-58]

FP3 added that a professional role is to inspire younger generations, therefore it is not proposed for

this group of people to include curse words in their conversation. This can prove from the quote:

*"Because they are in the professional industry so they should not curse because they are the they should be the inspiration and idols for the younger generation. So of course, they should not curse."* [Line: 43-45]

FP2 on the other hand partly agreed that professionals should not use vulgarity and give exceptions if it is not in the workplace settings. This is as quoted below:

*"For a professional I think they cannot like use it. Frequently. You know formal setting, but if it in like casual conversation between family members they can use it but not to that extent that... is like very prominent in their linguistic features."* [Line: 42-44]

4.3.4    Vulgarity    in    Personal    Perception: Consequences

Based on the data evaluated, all of the participants suggested that vulgarity usage will give a bad impact either to the person who uses it or to the one who receives it. This statement will be shown from the evidence through 4 of respondent's quotes as below:

MP1 first mentioned: *"...swear word will give bad impact to the person..."* [Line: 42-43] and later on added by including an example of a situation and how it will later affect the people who are in the picture.

*"(...) your boss used to say a word to you early in the morning of course it will affect your means your yeah you may impact the whole day may impact your mood of work for that day..."* [Line: 44-46]

FP2 added that vulgarity usage should not become too prominent in one linguistic feature considering how it will imprint a one-person image to the others. This is as quoted below:

*"If you use it moderately. For example, you curse. When only something makes you angry but not in each sentence that you uttered then it's okay. But then if any of your sentence entails a curse word regularly then it's not very good*

*because it will give you some sort of bad impression to you. And people will like judge you for doing that."* [Line:49-52]

FP3 inserted that other people perception need to be considered and highlight on her gender identity as a female as quoted:

*"...it will give me a bad impact because people would have the perception that especially, I am a girl. So, people of course would look at me like I am rude I am not polite so it would give me bad impact."* [Line: 50-53]

MP4 also noted that engaging in vulgarity will reflected the individual as someone who is being disrespect to the other:

*"it will somehow affect you negatively because like other peoples who are not keen to the use of profanity, may regard as someone who is not respectable someone who doesn't respect others presents because like you use profanity very much in some sense that you are not aware of others opinion about you."* [Line: 67-70]

Based on the quotes and explanation above it can be summarized that exposure towards vulgarity within the family especially did impact the personal perceptions of it. This can be seen by reflecting back to FP2 who indicated that she feels vulgarity is acceptable to be used among the family as long as it does not imply any intense meaning. Towards the flow of the theme, FP2 shows more leniency towards vulgarity compared to MP1 and MP4. As for male participants, their perception towards vulgarity consistently against it, relating to how they perceive it when vulgarity is used among the family members.

*In answering research question 2, the following themes are as explained below in 4.4: Impetus of vulgarity used,*

*4.4    Impetus of vulgarity used*
4.4.1   Vulgarity in Use

In this study sample, both male and female respondents admitted to swearing either intentionally or unintentionally. However, both of the female asserted that, they use it intentionally to joke around with friends and family:

FP2: *"I would say I use it intentionally and unintentionally sometimes it's just like pop out of my mouth when I'm so angry or is like when I'm joking around with my friends, it is not that I meant literally the meaning of the curse word."* [Line: 58-60]

FP3: *"Unintentionally, usually when I am like shock or something so sometimes it happens but intentionally, I also use it especially when I am joking with my friends or with my brothers. Then I would use it but then not to not like the curse that is too extreme. I can say."* [Line: 62-64]

Both of male respondents said they only use swear words unintentionally:

MP1: *"I'm rarely use the profanity word, but sometime, maybe use it, but unintentionally, I didn't use the words (international intent) intentionally."* [Line: 52-54]

MP4: *"In most cases, I will say that I will engage the action of profanity unintentionally. For (aaa) for example, when usually I will do this particular action when I'm in the process of driving."* [Line: 75-77]

4.4.2   Vulgarity as carrier of emotion and resonator of meaning

Almost all respondents admitted to swearing and as cited most incidents causing swearing were feeling frustrated, pressured and angry. These stressors triggered an emotional release in the form of an immediate expression of feelings through swear words. This can be seen from the quotes below:

MP1: *"Sometime when you're in not good mood, that you are angry or you shock off anything. So, you might unintentionally use the curse word. My is not often very often, this very rarely."* [Line: 57-59]

MP1 also added the details and example of the situation which triggered him to use the swear words. This can imply, MP1 engage in action of vulgarity when something frustrated him and it is beyond of his ability to control other people action:

*"Sometime when I feel angry when I waiting for something for a long time or maybe someone, someone (pause) someone when I in the queue, and then someone might pass my cue might make me angry sometimes and then, you unintentionally might use the swear words."* [Line: 99-102]

Similarly, both of the male respondents tend to swear while driving:

MP1: *"When driving when someone trying to overtake your car or trying to provoke you on the roads. So, of course not cannot be avoided and you might tend to say this swear words unintentionally."* [Line: 105-107]

MP4: *"...but most cases, I will swear when I'm when I'm in the process of driving. And also, when I encounter some issues of conflict, that beyond my skill and ability to basically tackle."* [Line: 140-143]

Both of female respondents responded that they use to express themselves especially when feeling upset and annoyed:

FP2: *"...I use when I'm feeling angry or does something that (pause) make me feel like very angry but I cannot I express it in any other way. So that's why I curse. K."* [Line: 36-38]

FP3 also inserted that she uses vulgar words to show intimacy between friends:

FP3: *"When I'm joking with my friends then yeah sometimes it happens. And then if I am like too angry and I just need like wanting to say too like. Break my angry ness then I would curse but then once or twice. And then that's enough right."* [Line: 116-118]

Based on the quotes and evidence provided above, majority of the respondents use vulgar words as a form of self-expression. One of them uses swear words in positive settings when joking with friends, and this may be associated with her efforts to display solidarity within her group.

*In answering research question 3, the following themes are as explained below in 4.5.: Sociocultural sensitivity and 4.6: Reappropriation of term*

### 4.5 Sociocultural sensitivity: (gender communication)

Based from the evidence collected, similarly the respondents find there are gaps and limitation to use swear words amongst the opposite gender:

FP2: *"Yes because when we are in the same gender I do not like feel some sort of barrier when communicating but when I'm communicating with the other gender, I will like restrict the usage of curse word and profanity because it's not that good because it will make you appear to be very bad sometimes."* [Line:69-72]

FP3: *"Yeah, I can say yes, but then. It still has some limitation. It's not usually it's just like rarely but I do curse often than the one with a different gender like voice.* [Line:68-69]

MP4: *"when it comes to the opposite gender, I do think that I'm being disrespectful when I'm when I'm cursing in the presence of the opposite gender, for example, here in the presence of females. Yeah, so I curse more often when my male friends with me in the contrast of those who are female."* [Line: 89-92]

This implied resemblance of gender gap when using vulgarity in communication.

### 4.6 Reappropriation of Term

Contrastively, male respondent does not find any vulgar words acceptable for his language code:

MP1: *"No, I don't think so. Don't have any curse word that acceptable for me."* [Line: 78]

Female respondents on the other hand are more lenient towards the use of vulgar words but depending on the context and meaning that can be derived from the vulgar words.

FP3: *"I think it is depending on the situation. If if you are serious about that, then it would not be acceptable but if it's like in a joking manner that it is acceptable but of course it has some limitations. Like the Malay words like "bengong" or. "Bengong". Ya. I think "bengong"*

*and "bangang" has two different (aaa) weight to them. "Bangang" would be more extreme then "bengong". "Bengong" would be acceptable but "bangang" is like to a rough. And then, yeah, the like the F word that I don't find it suitable to say it. Yeah."* [Line:90-96]

Based on the evidence above, it can be concluded that female and male respondent levels of tolerance towards vulgarity are different from each other.

*Additional data:*

*4.7     Image*

It is important to note the outcome of the vulgarity based from the respondents view especially on images constructed when engaged with vulgarity.

MP1 highlighted that to show professionalism, one should not use swear words:

> *"Yes, of course. I feel discomfort when my upper superior use that swear words to me, because I think it is not professional for my superior use that kind of swear word to me. There is any other way to advise me or to say something about me. It's not really compulsory to use the swear word."* [Line: 121-124]

FP3 added that words are like a product and it is the outcome from an individual:

> *"I would because if I cause a lot then my words are not like you know I would not have like a product. My words are not like. If I can say like productive, something like that."* [Line: 53-55]

MP4 believed that vulgarity will create a negative image if used frequently:

> *"may regard as someone who is not respectable someone who doesn't respect others presents because like you use profanity very much in some sense that you are not aware of others opinion about you."* [Line: 68-70]

Founded by the quotes above, action of vulgarity did construct a certain image on individuals who were involved in it.

## 5.0     Discussion & Conclusion
*5.1     Summary of discussion*

Our findings specify that exposure to swearing socially, although formally viewed as unacceptable, does occur at most social settings; family, social media and society. This is as supported by Hobart (2005), social media and entertainment medium is a compelling source through which vulgarity has pervaded contemporary society.

Based on the findings for research question 1, it is revealed that females are more free to use the curse compared to the male. But females also highlight the sensitivity of certain swear words that hold more "weight" in terms of vulgarity. Male respondents claimed it is difficult to assert vulgarity as normal habits. This result is contradicted to the studies by Rosenberg, et al., (2017) and Knirnschild (2019) as they found that male and female perceptions of vulgarity and obscenity are not as different as probable. This is because of exposure and norm practices are rather diverse and offensiveness is largely dependent upon the individual's interpretation (Christy, 2006).

In answering research question 2, it is shown that both female and male show that swearing is used by the sample as a tool to deal with daily life affairs (Baudin & Paramasivam, 2014; Baruch et al. 2016). This study found a link between swearing and gagging with female participants using vulgarity in casual occasions with friends to show intimacy and solidarity (Baudin & Paramasivam, 2014; Baruch et al. 2016). Male on the other hand tend to use swear unintentionally to express frustration and annoyance (Jay and Janschewitz, 2008). Overall, it can be concluded that the factors of the use of vulgarity differ as swearing is interpreted differently depending on the individual's language code (White, 2002).

For research question 3, the similarities between female and male respondents is refraining oneself from cursing in front of the opposite gender in which it is viewed as unacceptable. This finding is in concordance with DeFrank and Kahlbaugh (2018), stating that different genders communicate varies with whom they are communicating with. As for differences between female and male, female perceived certain curse words as acceptable. This is

in contrast with a finding where female speakers were rated more trustworthy, more polite, and less nonconformist than their male counterparts (DeFrank and Kahlbaugh, 2018). It can be implied that certain words would not be considered vulgar since people have become more desensitized to certain swears and even expect them at times (Patrick, 1901).

Research shows that, based on personal relevance, vulgarity usage represents an individual image. A person who used vulgarity frequently portrayed a bad image and perceived it as being disrespectful and impolite. It is the most prominent negative outcome as agreed by all of the participants, suggesting that purposely and aggressively using vulgarity will create potential to degrade one's image (Stone et al., 2010). Over the discussion above, this paper concluded there are presence of influence of vulgarity on individual image and as illustrated in figure 4 below:
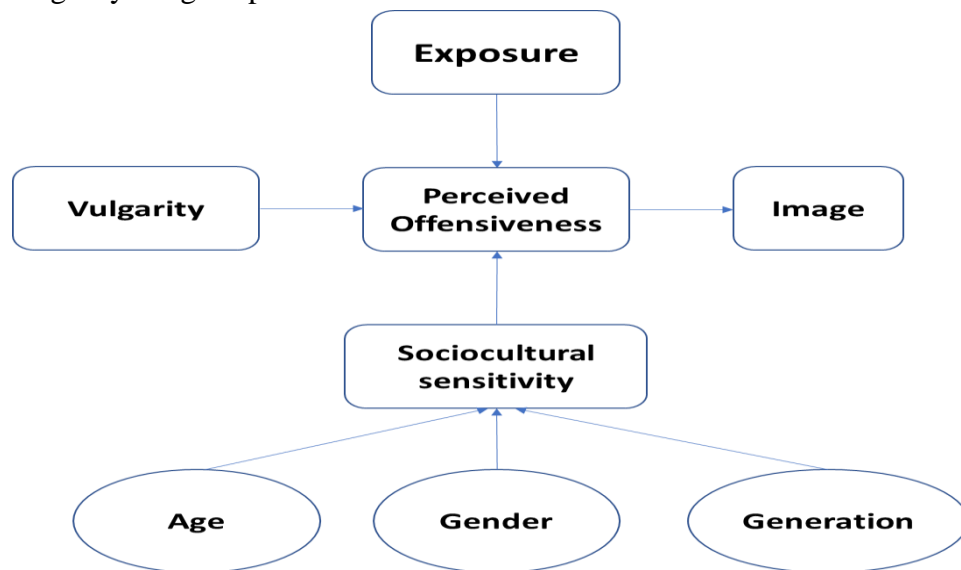


Figure-4: Vulgarity on individual images.

Source: Griffiths (2018).

This theoretical framework can be summarized as of follow:

1. The effect of vulgarity on one's image is facilitated by perceived offensiveness of the vulgarity.
2. Perceived offensiveness (versus inoffensiveness) of vulgarity is influenced by exposure and sociocultural sensitivity factors.

*5.2 Implication*

This study provides a more nuanced understanding of current language code practiced by Gen Y generally, and gender differences specifically. The findings of this research could provide more insights and add to the literature on sociolinguistic principally. Theoretical framework suggest can be used for future research to formulate suitable core and base of the study.

*5.3 Suggestion for future research*

It is suggested for future research to conduct the interview on a bigger scale. Wisely, adding more variables of generation such as Gen X, and Gen Z that can produce different results (Elmusharaf, 2012) hence different perspectives can be obtained.

**About the Authors**

Rabiatul Adawiyah Ibrahim is currently working on her Master in Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi Mara, Shah Alam. Her research interests lie in discourse, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and genre.

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