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Cyberstalking and Youth Behaviors via Social Media

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Abstract

One of the most popular forms of interactive computing is social media, which interferes with technology that allows people to communicate and exchange information. However, this can also be taken to another level where an activity defined as stalking gets developed between the users. This research will focus on how teenagers are more prone to develop cyberstalking tendencies especially if they are active users of social media. The method that the researcher used to conduct this research was in-depth interviews to collect data. Fifteen respondents who are social media users were selected to be interviewed by the researcher. All the data and information were transcribed (verbatim) and thematic data analysis was used to sort out all the data and information. In particular, the findings found that teenagers who spend a huge amount of time on social media tend to develop stalking habits due to time spent, lack of self control, and lack of understanding on the importance of privacy and boundaries. Further studies on the impact of cyberstalking for teenagers is recommended.

Keywords: Social Media, Cyberstalking, Teenagers, Active Usage, Privacy

Introduction

The term "social media" is also used to describe emerging types of media that allow for immersive interaction. The way we connect, access knowledge, think, and shape communities is being transformed by social media. The cultural and psychological impacts of social media are manifesting quicker than science can ingest them because networks are relatively young and ever evolving. However, social media has its advantages and disadvantages, with lack of privacy being the primary concern for all. In social media platforms, you can email a single photo to thousands of users at once, significantly increasing the possibility of harassment or stalking. Because of the increased usage of social networking sites, a person's profile, images, and status changes can contain enough information for that person to become a possible stalking target without even realising it (Romo et al., 2016). Cyberstalking is a complicated

phenomena with nuanced links to the identities of victims (Aghatise, 2006) and stalkers (Finkelhor et al., 2000), technology networks, and legal and social contexts. Cyberstalking is also embedded in and shares certain characteristics with its physical counterpart, 'offline' stalking. About every teenager now has access to a mobile. There is a paucity of literature in Malaysia on the criminalization of cyber stalking and the legal protections provided to victims. Surprisingly, most of the perpetrators who are involved are also teenagers. Experts are concerned that technology is taking a toll on teenagers because they already have access to too much content, rivalry, and peer pressure.

Therefore this study seeks to learn about teenagers' behaviours and reasons behind the development of cyberstalking. For this research, Problem Behaviour Theory by Richard Jessor will be used to explain the emergence of characteristics of problematic behaviours among teenagers.

Research Objective

To investigate if teenagers who are more active on social media change their behavior and develop the habit of cyberstalking.

Literature Review

Use of Social Media among Teenagers in Malaysia

The primary reason Malaysian adolescents utilise social media is peer-to-peer contact (Mun & Fernandez, 2011). Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter offer an excellent platform for youngsters to interact (Mun et al., 2011), socialise, and interact with their peers. More significantly, it allows adolescents to network and participate in online groups based on common interests (Lim et al., 2014). For teenagers from very diverse cultures, this open channel of contact fosters new understandings and partnerships (Shewmaker, 2012). They can form global coalitions based on anything from specific interests (Shahjahan & Chisty, 2014) and hobbies to activist actions. Malaysian teenagers also use social media for information gathering and learning (Lim et al., 2014) because of the interactive and collaborative qualities of social media (Hamat et al., 2012). Depending on how the medium is utilised, social media may be utilised in a positive or negative way and there are so many factors leading to the argument of the influence of social media on teenagers.

Cyberstalking Habit Development among Teenagers

The invisibility of the Internet allows the offender to contact nearly anybody with Internet connection at any time without concern of being recognized, and much less fear of being imprisoned and convicted under many jurisdictions' present legal systems (Pittaro, 2007). Teenagers' use of technology has lowered or altered their expectations of privacy in their personal relationships (King-Ries, 2010), normalising a "boundarylessness" that may lead them to accept and be more vulnerable to abusive actions by their intimate partners (Short et al., 2015). Teenagers' judgement tends to be more short-sighted (McCraken, 2011); though they are able to recognise the implications of their acts, their understanding of risk has little influence on their decisions (Dhir et al., 2021). Teenagers also have significantly less impulse control than grownups. Teenagers are inclined to participate in dangerous activities in part because they tend to exaggerate the potential advantages of the action while underestimating the consequences, especially in social media. Over-engagement with various social media sites and technologies has the potential to have further negative consequences for individuals (Pittaro, 2007), in addition to exacerbating their current psychosocial issues

(Dhir et al., 2021). Stalkerish actions among teenagers are facilitated and even encouraged by the structure and operation of social networking platforms (Pietkiewicz, 2018).

Teenagers are more prone to participate in dangerous activity such as cyberstalking because of their lack of understanding towards the line of privacy, particularly in respect to interpersonal relationships (Pietkiewicz, 2018).

Methodology

For this study, sample size will be a total of 15 participants, aged from 15 - 19, have been chosen as the targeted group to be interviewed. Snowballing sampling as well classified as chain referral sampling is actually a form of purposive sampling (Mack, 2005). Snowball sampling is frequently used to locate and attract "hidden populations," or those that are difficult to reach using conventional sample methods (Mack, 2005). As to discover the teenagers who might have developed the Cyberstalking habit through social media, snowball sampling will aid us towards the participants that are needed for this research by enabling more participants to recommend to similar groups of people. The age range has been narrowed down to 15-19 years old teenagers, as this research mainly focuses on how they might have unknowingly developed the Cyberstalking habit through using social media. Sampling cannot be chosen just based on the age range group but the sampling will be focused on the group of participants who share the same type of behaviour or thinking. Which is why the snowball sampling will be utilised in this research.

The researcher has chosen to use a qualitative method in this study by conducting in-depth interviews with the respondents. The subject is described and understood through qualitative research interviews based on the relevant phenomena examined. The researcher utilised semi-structured questions to the respondents in the interview conducted for the aim of this study in order to obtain detailed information. The respondents were chosen among teenagers who are well-versed with the usage of social media and experiences in cyberstalking. The replies made by the respondents throughout the in-depth interview sessions were then evaluated by the researcher. The interview procedure included recording, which was done with the respondents' permission after sending out informed consent to them. The researcher utilised a thematic analysis technique to determine the interview's coding sequence.

Results

Social Media

Social media is also used by teenagers for amusement and self-expression. Furthermore, the platforms may educate teenagers on a number of topics, including healthy habits, by exposing them to current affairs, allowing them to engage across geographical boundaries, and exposing them to current events (Karacic et al., 2017). Below will be focusing on the main reason why teenagers are active on social media. The respondents have provided details and opinions based on their understanding of their behaviour.

Respondent 1 clearly shows the characteristics of active usage in social media platforms.

"Because of the pandemic and all of it, when I'm free, I use it for a long time in a day. I think you can say like 8 or 9 hours. But not continuously. I scroll, I don't post my photos often but my stories like once in a while. Recently, I archived my posts

on Instagram. It's just sometimes there won't be anything else to do, so social media helps to relieve that boredom feeling." (1)

Respondent 4 shares the reason why he is active on social media.

"I usually spend around 7-8 hours on social media apps. So yes, I am an active user. Sometimes I will be busy with my assignments or will be out with my friends or parents, so yeah the hours of usage usually vary a lot. I think it can be considered an addiction? Because currently I only have those apps, to keep up with what is going on with the world. And I use it a lot to contact my friends and scroll through my pass time." (4)

Respondent 10 shared in another interview regarding how she likes to be the most knowledgeable person among her group to gossip about.

"I certainly do because I am the talkative person of my group so if I don't know what I am going to share in my group then my friends will be clueless about how to interact. So I tend to go on social media and scroll through interesting topics and people to get gossip items, and later on I share the content to as many as people I can." (10)

This sub-theme can be concluded with

Respondent 13 who shows a slight tendency of our main scope of this study which will be the development of cyberstalking based on his statement provided.

"Oh I actually use it to stalk people and my favourite shows. I have nothing else to do and I don't really take pictures too. So I end up stalking or just chat with people most of the time. Other than that, I'm not sure what I can do in my house." (13)

Development of Cyberstalking Habit

Cyberstalking is becoming more prevalent than traditional stalking (McVeigh, 2011) especially among the teenagers. According to Maple et al (2011), cyberstalking has become increasingly common on social media since almost. Cyberstalking has such a broad impact on people's psychology, money, and social connections that it not only harms victims mentally, but also has an impact on their career and even their connections with colleagues and families. Significantly, 21% of 8-11-year-olds now have social media presence, which quickly rises to 71% of 12-18-year-olds (Smartinsights, 2021). Some teenagers use social media to abuse, threaten, or shame a peer (texting, blogs, social networking, etc.). Based on the response of respondents towards activities of cyberstalking on social media, we can analyse the proneness of involvement in cyberstalking activity (Kumar et al., 2016).

Respondent 1 shares how the development of anxiety happened due to the fear of being left out from what is going around in the world.

"Well when I started using social media, I was like get to know about the world, get to know about some knowledge but I think recently, in the past 3 years, I developed this anxiety. So I keep Twitter for example Twitter, like different from Instagram, right? Like you get to know about a lot of like what's happening in the country, and what's trending." (1)

Respondent 6 shares how they have crossed the line when it comes to accessing one's private information.

"I may or may not have crossed a line here or there when it comes to accessing someone's information. It was just a coincidence. Really. Stalking has become a norm today and I just do it because there are a lot of public accounts and I just like to know more about people. Now that I think about it I think I do have the habit of cyberstalking but not to a severe level." (6)

Respondent 9 states how she likes to know everything about her which led him to be more active.

"I did. I really did. When I was in a relationship plus we never had the chance to meet, so the only option I had was to know everything about her through social media. So I became very active, and I had to like to follow all her friends, so that I will know about her more. I had a fear that if I didn't know everything there is about her than I might appear like a loser." (9)

Respondent 9 has also admitted to have conducted cyberstalking against his partner due to the fear of being left out in the relationship. And how this caused him to be more satisfied to be able to keep an eye on her through the social media platforms.

"Back then, I stalked her and her friends, to get to know her and keep her on update. There was this once where I was mad that she was responding to her other friends and not me and I threatened her about exposing her personal details and told her to regularly respond to me. I was too obsessed over it but I never realised it was wrong or a crime to harass someone like that even on online. I do believe that it gave me a feeling of satisfaction and fun at that time. That's right, it is because social media allowed me to get in touch with her and her friends and it was easy for me to keep her on tabs. My only motivation was to not miss any information about her. It was kinda like an ugly desire." (9)

Respondent 13 regrets the decision behind the actions they did in the past which relates to cyberstalking.

"I'm sorry but I think I have done one of the activities before. I really thought it was normal because my school seniors told me. I don't know that it is a criminal activity. If I knew I would not do it. Satisfied? I think I am. Because I'm sorry I didn't know that it was cyberstalking but I really had feel satisfied after screenshotting images like that. So the desire or motivation is simple. I just want to own the pictures. That's why I did what I did." (13)

Respondent 15 shares their feeling to own all the information since it provides them a feel that they are in control of all situations that go on.

"I am so scared of it. So I always stalk many people or pages or accounts. I actually tried to equip myself with as much information as I can. Because I like to have control over my information so when someone asks me I can straightaway tell them what they need to know or want to know."(15)

Discussion

Regarding the changes in the behaviour of teenagers due to the active usage, it has been proven as one of the causes for the development of cyberstalking habits. The results from the respondents have proven and provided many statements that support the objective. Cyberstalking habit had been developed due to the desires of teenagers such as obtaining the information, taking control over others' social media accounts, and purpose as pure stalking. Do keep in mind that this study purely focuses only on the development of cyberstalking

habits among the teenagers under the influence of social media. Teenagers who are more active on social media have been proven to show the tendencies of cyberstalking habit development. They also tend to neglect the term called privacy when it comes to prying into others' information. Those who are not active on social media do not develop the stalking habit excessively and respect the boundaries of others' on the social media platforms. While those who developed the cyberstalking habit brought their actions to a more severe level, which will be trying to sabotage others' social media accounts by spreading false statements or threatening them through messages. Though some of the teenagers tend to keep to themselves the information they obtain and do not carry out any extreme cyber criminal activities, the characteristics of a cyberstalker still present in them.

As for PBT, the balance of risk and protective factors in a teenagers' environment, as well as the young person's personality, dictates whether or not he or she will engage in problem conduct. On the interpersonal level, theories like PBT generally address the impact of social relationships. Understanding cyberstalking might benefit from studying stalkers' social experiences as well as their interactions inside their social networks. PBT has been found to be helpful in comprehending not just traditional antisocial and criminal conduct, but also future criminal behaviour that occurs in the cyberworld. For example, computer misuse within businesses (Rogers, 2001; Skinner & Fream, 1997), online fraud (Higgins, 2006; Higgins & Makin, 2004), and general illegal computer activity (Lee & Lee, 2002). By its very essence, the social media setting in which this study takes place is extremely social and participatory; social media fosters such social connections and copying behaviours. Given the significance of social influence and engagement by the respondents in social media, it's understandable that a social learning phase may have a significant impact on individual cyberstalking behaviour. This is especially true when research was conducted.

Conclusion

Findings showed that teenagers spend a lot of time on social media, sometimes for up to 9 hours a day. While they use it to communicate with their online contacts, they also browse social media to collect information on people and things that are happening online. The tendency to cyberstalk, however, developed mostly when they want to know more about their potential or current romantic partners and what activities they are doing. The cyberstalking behaviour can range from stalking that person's and their close friends' activities to screenshotting images of that person without the other person being aware of it. The results from the respondents have proven and provided many statements that support the objective. Teenagers who are more active on social media have been proven to show the tendencies of cyberstalking habit development. This study looked at what factors contribute to the development of the cyberstalking habit among teens and found that active usage, lack of self-control and a lack of understanding of the border between personal and professional privacy are the main factors. This study focuses solely on teens, who are the primary users of social networking sites. A structured interview with respondents who have been both perpetrators and victims of cyberstalking on social media platforms were used to obtain data. Teenagers should enlighten themselves on online security protocols and utilise these tactics to help limit accessibility to personal data on websites to avoid incidents of cyberstalking. Teenagers should also prevent social networking actions that bring individuals into closer virtual contact, such as trying to add random people as friends, trying to engage in unlawful behavior, and trying to associate online with negative peer, as all of these activities increase

the risk of becoming both a perpetrator and a victim of cyberstalking (Reyns et al., 2011). Consumers for acquiring knowledge, transmitting content, gathering data, and effective and timely communications have become a regular day-to-day action for people, especially teenagers from elementary school to all levels of higher education, teachers, businessmen, government officials, and those who provide public service, among others. Stalking has the same repercussions for both victims and perpetrators. As a result, it is necessary to pay attention to this occurrence. By learning about cyber stalking and using preventative methods, one may maintain a secure and healthier internet environment. Without a doubt, it is critical to get knowledge regarding the existence and prevention of this threat.

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