

Teens and Social Media: Stalking and Problematic Behaviour

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Abstract

The term "social media" is also used to describe emerging types of media that allow for immersive interaction. Being able to communicate easily and getting to know more about a particular person has become easier nowadays. However, this can also be taken to another level where an activity defined as stalking gets developed between the users unknowingly. In Malaysia, the highest percentage of social media users are teenagers from 15 to 19 years old. This research will focus on how teenagers are more prone to develop cyberstalking tendencies and if they are aware of the line between privacy and social media. The method that the researcher used to conduct this research was an in-depth interview to collect data. Twenty social media users were selected to be interviewed by the researcher and the respondents were interviewed with the questions that have been prepared. 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 highlight the truth behind the development of cyberstalking among teenagers due to the influence of social media.

Keywords: social media, cyberstalking, teenagers, active usage, privacy

1 INTRODUCTION

Stalking occurs on a daily basis in the real world, but cyberstalking has risen exponentially in the cyber world because stalkers can quickly harass victims while remaining anonymous on social media. In comparison to other phenomena associated with the dark side of the Internet and social media, such as fear of losing out and social media exhaustion, the scholarly understanding of cyberstalking is still in its infancy. According to Fox and Moreland (2015),

the study of these dark aspects of Internet and social media use, as well as its functioning, has piqued academic interest, one being the problem of cyberstalking (Baccarella et al., 2018). Social Media has become a tool to socialise with a lot of people. Being able to communicate easily and getting to know more about a particular person has become easier nowadays. However, this can also be taken to another level where an activity defined as stalking gets developed between the users unknowingly. Social media gives users unique access to their images, whereabouts, and dating histories. On social media platforms, you can email a single photo to thousands of users at once, significantly increasing the possibility of harassment or stalking.

Cyberbullying can take different forms, ranging from flaming to harassment to cyberstalking. The following list defines different forms of cyberbullying harassment, cyberstalking, masquerade, and impersonation. Tracking out somebody's personal and confidential information and exploiting it to make them fearful, texting them repeatedly a day to let them know you're monitoring them, "creeping" on their social media accounts to find out where they are so you can turn up uninvited, or writing about them repeatedly and without their consent are all examples of cyberstalking activities (Nobles et al., 2014). Teenagers, who are the most active users of social media, are particularly vulnerable. We are just beginning to understand how social media is shaping not just their present but also their future. The behaviour causes the target to be highly concerned about their personal safety and causes some sort of anxiety, fear, or irritation.

The Help Net Security (2021), stated how three out of every five Gen Z and Millennial American young adults who have been in a romantic partnership or a normal friendship or huge fan concede to "stalking" an ex or existing partner or friends or celebrities digitally by checking in against them without their prior consent. The statistics show that the group is 60% of people aged 18 to 39 which is more than double the percentage of Americans 40 years old or older who belong to 24%. American teenagers are also three times as likely as those aged 40 and up to agree that online stalking is acceptable if one or both partners have tried to cheat or are accused of cheating or they worship an idol on social media or want to tarnish a friend's reputation, and confess they would be more probable to stalk online if they knew they wouldn't be caught.

Thinking about this rise in the context of our research is frightening. Many young Americans believe that these intrusive applications will eventually become a part of their existing relationships with friends or the eagerness to get to know a person. With current representations of internet stalking and stalkerware technologies in TV programmes and other popular media, it's troubling to consider that these romanticised dramatizations are affecting modern-day dating standards. Cyberstalking is commonplace all around the world. 34% of worldwide users confessed to spying on a previous or present spouse, friends or strangers without their prior consent on the internet. India (74%) and Japan (9%), respectively, have the highest and lowest percentages, while the rest of the countries have a proportion ranging from 27 to 37 %.

There is a paucity of literature in Malaysia on the criminalization of cyberstalking and the legal protections provided to victims. Surprisingly, those who are involved as perpetrators are also teenagers. According to Cyber Security Malaysia, cyberstalking is a minor issue, but the actual number of casualties is larger because not all sufferers are ready to come forward with their complaints (Cyber Security Malaysia, 2010). The Malaysian Computer Emergency Response Team (MyCERT) recently gathered statistics on cyber harassment incidents in Malaysia, which reveal that the number has quadrupled in the previous 10 years (MyCERT, 2017).

Research Objective

1.1.1 To investigate the actions that can be considered as breaching the line of privacy between getting accessed to one's information and cyberstalking.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Social Media Evolution*

The oldest techniques of communication across long distances used hand-delivered written writing from one person to another (Hendricks, 2013). To put it another way, letters. The first postal service dates back to 550 B.C., and this basic transportation system would grow more ubiquitous and streamlined in subsequent years. The expansion of the internet in the 1980s and 1990s permitted the launch of internet communication networks such as CompuServe, America Online, and Prodigy. People were exposed to digital communication via email, bulletin board messages, and authentic online chatting. The telegraph was created in 1792 in which it enabled communications to be carried across great distances far speedier than a horse and rider might. Even though telegraph messages were brief, they were a pioneering method of communicating news and information.

Although it is no longer widely used outside of drive-through finance, the pneumatic post, invented in 1865, provided another method for speedily delivering mail between receivers. A pneumatic post transports capsules from one location to another by using subterranean pressurised air tubes. During the last decade of the 19th century, two significant discoveries occurred: the telephone in 1890 as well as the radio in 1891. Both inventions are still in use today, albeit newer versions are far more complex than their forefathers. Telephone lines and radio transmissions allowed individuals to converse across long distances in real-time, something that humanity had never encountered before. In the twentieth century, technology began to advance at a breakneck pace. Following the creation of the first supercomputers in the 1940s, technologists began to design methods to connect such computers, eventually leading to the establishment of the Internet.

The first versions of the Internet, such as CompuServe, were created in the 1960s (Hendricks, 2013). During this period, primitive kinds of email were also invented. By the 1970s, networking technology had advanced, and UseNet, launched in 1979, allowed users to connect via a virtual newsletter. UseNet was one of the first computer network communication networks, launched in 1979, nearly a decade before the World Wide Web. According to Bickart & Schindler (2001), these newsgroups were created as discussion forums where users could share user-generated material and were a valuable determinant of consumer information. UseNet enabled its users to connect with one another through the use of a virtual newsletter (Hendricks, 2013); it was necessary to construct newsreader applications, forerunners of RSS (Rich Site Summary) feed readers that generally monitor blogs and news sites and allow their users to upload articles or postings to newsgroups.

Home computers had become more ubiquitous by the 1980s, and social media was getting more complex. IRCs, or Internet relay conversations, were initially used in 1988 and were widely popular into the 1990s. Online services such as Prodigy and CompuServe are regarded as the first really "corporate" attempts to access the Internet. CompuServe, which debuted in 1969, was the first internet service to provide users with chat capabilities. Prodigy, a rival, provided a comparable service at a considerably lower cost (Hendricks, 2013). They were accompanied by Genie (General Electric Network for Information Exchange), a text-based service developed by General Electric in 1985. It also included services such as games, commerce, mail, and a forum known as 'Round Tables' and was seen as a rival to CompuServe.

Listserv, the first electronic mailing list software tool, was released in 1986; previously, email lists were maintained manually. Listserv enabled the sender to send an email to several recipients at the same time. WELL (Whole Earth Electronic Link), Listserv, and IRC (Internet Relay Chat) were created alongside Genie in the 1980s. "WELL" was one of the first functional virtual communities, founded in Sausalito, California, by Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant. Several service providers, such as Asian Avenue, Black Planet, and MiGente, emerged between 1997 and 2001, integrating various features such as establishing a profile, issuing friend invitations, and recognising friends on their personal profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Swedish online community "Lunar Storm" with incredible accuracy, such as a logbook, buddy list, and diary entries (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Ryze.com's inception in 2001 signalled the beginning of the next generation of social networking sites since it was more targeted toward business and assisted its members in leveraging their corporate networks (Festa, 2003). Friendster, which began in 2002, revolutionised the game by providing its users freedom over who they wish to interact with rather than a computer-managed environment. From 2003 until the present, there has been an increase in the number of social networking sites. Shirky (2003), a social software expert, invented the phrase "YASNS (Yet Another Social Networking Service)" to refer to all such websites. Social media hit the mainstream with the development of blogging. We can only conjecture on how social networking will look over the next decade or perhaps even 100 years, but it is apparent that it will persist in some form for as long as people exist.

2.2 Use of Social Media among Teenagers in Malaysia

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions (2020), the proportion of Internet users in 2020 was 88.7 percent, up 1.3 percent from 87.4 percent in 2018. The proportion of people who do not use the Internet has decreased from 12.6 percent in 2018 to 11.3 percent in 2020. Surprisingly, more than half of non-Internet users are aged 60, while teenagers in their 20s and adults in their 30s make up the majority of Internet users, accounting for 46.0 percent and 21.2 percent, respectively (MCMC, 2020). A closer look indicates that youth ages 13-34 make up a huge percentage of 80.3 percent of the social media users in Malaysia and according to Mahadi (2013), the 18-24 age group has the highest proportion of social media users in Malaysia (34.5 percent), accompanied by the 25-34 age group (29.5 percent) and those aged 13-17 (29.5 percent).

As per Wong et al. (2010), the primary reason Malaysian adolescents utilize social media is peer-to-peer contact. According to Mun et al. (2011), social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter offer an excellent platform for youngsters to interact, socialize and interact with their peers. More significantly, it allows adolescents to network and participate in online groups based on common interests. Social media platforms and wireless communication apps enable real-time chats with people who are far away. This allows for the continuation of ties that would have been too far in the past as well as the formation of new ties with people from all over the world. For teenagers from very diverse cultures, this open channel of contact fosters new understandings and partnerships (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). They can form global coalitions based on anything from specific interests and hobbies to activist actions.

Youth may use social media to share their work or creative creations such as photographs, videos, and writing with each other (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). This demonstrates how social media may meet the demands of young people for relationship development while also providing them with a unique chance to become active media players. Malaysian teenagers

also use social media for information gathering and learning (Yin et al., 2014). According to Hamat et al. (2012), who performed research to evaluate Malaysian university students' use of social media, the proportion of participants use media for socialization activities. Students can engage, collaborate, and study with others because of the interactive and collaborative qualities of social media (Hamat et al., 2012). Similarly, Yin et al. (2014) report that, in addition to social activities, youngsters utilize social media to learn. They supplement their learning by using social media platforms like Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, and Dropbox (Yin et al., 2014). Malaysian teenagers commonly participate in entertainment behaviours such as downloading video and music materials and playing online games via social media. They engage in these activities to pass the time and to alleviate loneliness and tension (Ismail, 2014). Depending on how the medium is utilized, social media may be utilized in a positive or negative way and there are so many factors leading to the argument of the influence of social media on teenagers.

2.3 Cyberstalking Habit Development among Teenagers

The invisibility of the Internet allows the offender to contact nearly anybody with an Internet connection at any time without concern of being recognized, and with 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 relationships (King-Ries, 2010), normalizing 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 (McCracken, 2011); though they can recognize 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 adults. 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 on 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 activities such as cyberstalking because of their lack of understanding of the line of privacy, particularly concerning interpersonal relationships (Pietkiewicz, 2018).

3 METHODOLOGY

For this study, there was a sample size of 20 informants, aged from 15 - 19, who were chosen as the targeted group to be interviewed. To discover the teenagers who might have developed the cyberstalking habit through social media, snowball sampling aided this study in seeking the participants that are needed for this research by enabling more informants to recommend to similar groups of people. The age range has been narrowed down to 15-19-year-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. This is why snowball sampling will be utilized 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 utilized semi-structured questions to the respondents in the interview conducted for the aim of this study to obtain detailed information. The respondents were chosen among teenagers who are well-versed in the usage of social media and have experienced 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 utilized a thematic analysis technique to determine the interview's coding sequence.

To analyse the data gathered about the Cyberstalking habit development from the influence of social media this research will apply the technique stated by Braun and Clarke (2006) since it has been the most frequently used method of thematic analysis within the qualitative literature (Terry et al., 2017).

A one-on-one interview is conducted to chronicle these unique experiences. Throughout a series of interviews, care must be taken to ensure not only unbiased inquiry but also stability in the way the interviews are conducted (Hunter, 2012). When performing qualitative research, non-directive questions will be practiced. New information will be investigated by giving the study participants every chance to reveal their whole narrative in a form that is easier to understand (Hunter, 2012). Developing a clear protocol ahead of schedule will help the researcher to carefully consider the research, the major interview questions, and the necessary follow-up questions to extract the relevant information (Bolderston, 2012).

4 RESULTS

Stalking is a term that refers to a pattern of unwelcome conduct that occurs multiple times a day, causing the victim to feel threatened and fearful (Tomasek, 2012). This can involve efforts to create direct "face-to-face" contact as well as indirect contact via the Internet. Stalking and cyberstalking are related in that both involve the offenders threatening and controlling their victims. While media reports and anecdotal information suggest that females are the victims of traditional stalking, cyberstalking is "open-slayer" anybody may target anybody (Treder, 2016). The term "cyberstalking" refers to any Internet activity that involves the victim being threatened via e-mail or other digital communication technologies.

Nowadays this habit does not develop through a severe psychological issue but more generally among the higher users community of social media which will be the teenagers. Teenagers are still wet behind their ears and unaware of the dangers that this action can bring upon both them and their victims. In this theme we will be discussing insights on matters such as teenagers' experiences in facing cyberstalking activity, what is considered the final line before breaching their privacy and what type of negative impact they face afterwards. All the informants have provided many opinions that will be stated below.

Respondent 2 shares her first encounter with a cyberstalking activity in the past.

"There was this one time where my account almost got destroyed after a certain person started reporting it. I don't know if it was a threat but I do feel like it was an account that was constantly attacking me for a reason as if I were being stalked on my private account. Yeah I think I have my experience in it." (R1)

Respondent 3 spoke about the horror she faced when she faced cyberstalking problems through her account..

"I had few people who tried to login into my account before. There were people who liked to stalk me and those are types of people I am protecting myself and my account from. It was actually scary because I constantly had to change my passwords. I was too paranoid about whether or not I must allow people to follow. I became aware of the content that I share in both my accounts."(R3)

Respondent 4 stated about a person who she knew, stalked her online and caused problems for her.

"To be honest, yes. There was this once a guy who from a private account kept spamming me on Instagram. And I actually didn't bother. Then I just opened it because I thought it might be a friend. But he actually texted messages of my pictures from my stories and my friend's stories. And he spammed me with creepy stuff. I didn't know how he actually got some of the pictures cus they were not from my account but my friend's account."(R4)

Respondent 5 was cyberstalked and had difficulties in using her account.

"Not severe or extreme, but I had this encounter when I was new to social media, where someone tried to break into my account multiple times, I discovered new messages that I don't send to people and posts that I didn't like in my account. Which clearly shows that my account had been hacked and stalked. I reported the activities many times. In the end I gave up and deactivated my account."(R5)

Respondent 7, a social media influencer who shares her experience in maintaining her privacy of personal life and the struggle to protect her account from cyberstalkers.

"There are too many people who tried to impersonate me on Instagram. I had to go on and create stories and let my followers know that they must not follow any fake accounts. That they are trying to act like me. I have these types of incidents happening to me all the time like once in a month. Even though I try to protect my privacy, cyberstalking still occurs to me."(R7)

According to the statements provided by these respondents throughout the interviews, cyberstalking has become a norm among teenagers especially now since most of them own their accounts on social media platforms. Cyberstalking is more offensive, hurtful and detrimental to the victim than traditional stalking, and the threat of legal retaliation is currently limited because Online communication is so handy and famous (Pietkiewicz et al., 2018). While the victim may already be suffering from psychological distress, cyberstalking may quickly escalate to intimidation outside of virtual forums, including repeated phone calls, crime, and even physical assault.

5 CONCLUSION

According to Moore (2018), teenagers are not well-knowledge to distinguish the line between stalking and simply scrolling through an account on social media, thus they tend to carry out certain criminal-based activities thinking it's a norm to do. Respondents have stated their experience in getting cyberstalked by others, such as getting spammed with direct messages from unknown accounts. Getting the account's information spread despite the account being private. After a thorough discussion, it was highlighted that most cyberstalkers are identified as close friends or someone from their schools or universities whom they share the same age range.

It can be established that most teenagers tend to involve themselves in cybercrimes such as cyberstalking, and the respect towards privacy is not being followed by them. The victims of cyberstalking have shown how dangerous the activities have been to them. They had stepped away from social media for days to cope with the trauma they faced. According to the respondents, they agree with the statement that despite the privacy settings that exist in social media platforms, it does little to prevent cyberstalkers from acquiring information from their accounts. This is due to the followers who come from the background such as their close friends or schoolmates, and not just a random stranger.

Online stalking activities are usually done by those who use social media platforms as the main pathway to acquire details beyond the line of privacy that exists to protect the victims (Paulet & Chawdry, 2018); and the majority of the individuals who involve themselves in this activity are teenagers and the victims are also teenagers, both ranging from age such as 15-19 years old. Thus, teenagers should be more aware of how important it is to both respect and practice the line of privacy on social media platforms to avoid the development of cyberstalking and to avoid falling victim to such activities.

The motivation for the study arises from the observation that teenagers often lack the knowledge to distinguish between innocent social media activity and cyberstalking. Teenagers tend to engage in criminal activities, believing them to be normal behaviors, due to their limited understanding of online boundaries. Many respondents reported experiencing cyberstalking incidents, including unsolicited messages and the exposure of private account information. Notably, cyberstalkers are often identified as individuals within the victims' social circles, such as friends, schoolmates, or peers of the same age. The study is motivated by the need to address the increasing involvement of teenagers in cybercrimes, particularly cyberstalking, and the apparent disregard for online privacy.

The study contributes to the understanding that a significant number of teenagers are involved in cyberstalking activities. It highlights the negative impact of cyberstalking on victims, leading some to take breaks from social media platforms to cope with trauma. The research underscores that despite privacy settings on social media platforms, cyberstalkers can obtain information due to their existing connections with the victims. It identifies online stalking as a prevalent issue, with teenagers being both the perpetrators and victims, typically falling within the age range of 15-19 years old. The study emphasizes the importance of educating teenagers about respecting online privacy boundaries and practicing responsible online behavior to prevent cyberstalking and victimization. In summary, the study's motivation stems from the need to address the increasing involvement of teenagers in cyberstalking and their lack of awareness regarding online privacy boundaries. Its contribution lies in shedding light on the prevalence and impact of cyberstalking, particularly among teenagers, and emphasizing the importance of education and awareness to combat this issue.

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