

# THE DARK SIDE OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA: IMPACT UPON INTERNET USERS

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**Abstract:** *One of the most popular forms of interactive computing is social media, which involves technology that allows people to communicate and exchange information. 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 stalking becomes easier to be done by or for users. 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 of privacy on social media. The method that the researcher used to conduct this research was 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 was 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

The term "social media" is used to describe emerging types of internet-based media that allow for immersive interaction. The way we connect, access knowledge, think, and shape communities are 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. On social media platforms, you can send through 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 realizing it (Romo et al., 2016).

One of the most popular forms of interactive computing is social media, which interferes with technology that allows people to communicate and exchange information (Khan et al.,

2020). 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. Social media gives users unique access to their images, whereabouts, and dating histories. The way we connect, access knowledge, think, and shape communities are 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. Our lives have been drastically altered as a result of social media. Our lives have become more comfortable as a result of social media, which is a very helpful medium for us in the twenty-first century and will assist us in improving our lives. However, we must be conscious of how we use them. If we learn to use social media effectively, it would be an improvement for us.

Cyberstalking is a complicated phenomenon 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 of its physical counterpart, 'offline' stalking. About every teenager now has access to a mobile. There is a dearth paucity of literature in Malaysia on the criminalization of cyberstalking and the legal protections provided to victims.

Friends and family will keep in touch with each other using social media. With the advancement in technology, the success of these sites has skyrocketed. Social media has its advantages and disadvantages, with lack of privacy being the primary concern for all. On 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 like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Foursquare, and YouTube, a person's profile, images, and status changes can contain enough information for that person to become a possible stalker target without even realizing it. Keeping a private life online is challenging these days, from Instagram posts to tweets. People are left insecure and susceptible to these public posts, where they share personal details such as their address or everyday activities.

Sharing and viewing on social media platforms are associated with two distinct online behaviors: (a) online self-disclosure or sharing of information, and (b) a newer, rapidly developing phenomenon known as social media stalking or information searching (Dhir et al., 2021). Cyberstalking is a felony that infringes on people's online privacy. Even though cyberstalking does not require physical interaction, it is just as risky as traditional stalking. Recent research studies have revealed that cyberbullying and online harassment are considerable problems for users of social media platforms, especially young people. Researchers are finding some concerning emerging developments as more teenagers go online and socialize. According to a study of Internet usage by youngsters aged 10 to 17, 6% of habitual Internet users claimed they had been bothered, concerned, or humiliated by continuous online invasions (Finkelhor et al., 2000). It even looked at how people felt about being cyberstalked. The majority of cyberstalkers were either classmates or former sexual friends, so the harasser was well-known to the survivor.

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. Stalking occurs daily 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, 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 socialize 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 behavior causes the target to be highly concerned about their safety and causes some sort of anxiety, fear, or irritation. Therefore, this study seeks to learn about teenagers' behaviors and the reasons behind the development of cyberstalking. For this research, Cognitive Behavioural Theory by Aaron T. Beck will be used to reflect on how specific thoughts contribute to specific emotions, which lead to specific behavioral responses.

## 1.1 Research Objective

1.1.1 To investigate if the habit of cyberstalking develops and causes changes in the behavior of teenagers who are more active on social media.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. 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 made 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, socialized

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 spread 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 uses 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 behaviors 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 used in a positive or negative way and there are so many factors leading to the argument of the influence of social media on teenagers.

## 2.2. Cyberstalking Habit Development among Teenagers

The invisibility of the Internet allows the offender to contact nearly anybody with the 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 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' judgment 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 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 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 participants, aged from 15 - 19, and have been chosen as the targeted group to be interviewed. Snowball sampling also known as chain referral sampling is 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 aided this study to seek 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 behavior 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 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 utilized a thematic analysis technique to determine the interview's coding sequence.

To analyze 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). For this study of the development of cyberstalking through the influence of social media, the Narrative Inquiry approach, also referred to as the Long Interview Technique, supports documenting study participant experiences involving the notions of contextually meaningful and spatially restricted recollections (Hunter, 2012).

A one-on-one interview is performed to chronicle these unique experiences. Throughout a series of interviews, care must be made 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 necessary follow 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 (Begotti et al., 2019). 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 (Begotti et

al., 2019). 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 unknown of the dangers of this action that 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 considers the final line before breaching into their privacy, and what type of negative impact they faced afterward.

In the interview conducted, all twenty respondents acknowledged that most of them are active users of social media, indicating that teenagers are the greatest users of social networking websites. They have also provided their opinions and insights on matters such as how social media have impacted their life, their usage of social media in daily life, and the purpose they stepped into the world of social media platforms. Social networking platforms cater to young people's need for belonging (Davis K, 2011).

According to the statements provided by these respondents throughout the interviews, cyberstalking had become a norm among teenagers especially now since most of them own their accounts on social media platforms. Cyberstalking is more offensive and 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.

#### 4.1. Impact of Cyberstalking

What action can be considered as breaching the line between getting access to one's information and cyberstalking? Nowadays this habit does not develop through a severe psychological issue (Darshan, 2014) but more generally among the higher users community of social media which will be the teenagers. Teenagers are still wet behind their ears and unknown of the dangers of this action that can bring upon both them and their victims (Mvungi & Iwaihara, 2014). In this theme, we will be discussing insights on matters such as teenagers' experiences in cyberstalking activity and what considers the final line before breaching their privacy. Based on their response toward respecting boundaries on social media, we can analyze the proneness of involvement in cyberstalking activity (Kumar et al., 2016).

**Respondent 4** shares their habit of taking screenshots of what they stalk and keeps it for their interest. Sometimes those who are involved in cyberstalking activities will not realize that they are crossing the line and entering online criminal behavior (Bocij et al., 2002).

*"I don't have a desire but what I'm about to tell might sound like it. I use insta a lot and I screenshot a lot of pictures of celebrities and friends. But it's just for my interest, and there are a lot of articles on social media that allow us to know more about the celebrities, and yeah that's all. But I do keep up with the celebrities by regularly checking their posts, and updates about them. Once, I tried to go on all platforms to search about certain celebrities. I think I might have developed it?" (4)*

**Respondent 9** spoke about the importance of respecting a partner's boundaries on social media as it can ruin a relationship if they choose to not stay out of the line of privacy.

*"I now have my account in private because my partner and I broke up recently over an issue so I felt like there is no use in keeping my accounts in public. Privacy is dead? I guess I can agree. Because of the issue, I realized that there is a line we should never cross to maintain a good, healthy, and safe relationship with a person. But I think social media ruined everything for me since it makes us want to know and possess everything that is there or available in front of our eyes and it makes us feel like we want to acquire everything little detail that exists. That is the one thing that makes us cross the lines but we don't realize it." (9)*

The sub-theme concludes that teenagers are still more focused on protecting their private information on social media. While social media platforms do have new privacy settings, despite that privacy is still under threat (Yan et al., 2015).

## **5. DISCUSSION**

According to Moore (2018), teenagers are not equipped with the 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 is a norm to do. Respondents have stated their experience in getting cyber stalked by others, such as getting spammed with direct messages from unknown accounts. Getting the account's information spread despite the account is private. After a thorough discussion, it was highlighted that most cyber stalkers are identified as close friends or someone from their schools or universities where they share the same age range.

According to the respondents, they agree with the statement that despite the privacy settings that exist on 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 strangers. 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 (Pullet & Chawdry, 2018); and the majority of the individuals that 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 respects and practice the line of privacy on social media platforms to avoid the development of cyberstalking and avoid falling victim to such activities.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The results from the respondents have proven and provided many statements that support the objective. Do keep in mind that this study purely focuses only on the development of cyberstalking habits among 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 trying to get information about a person. Fox et al. (2009) were the first to apply CBT to stalking and found that poor self-control is linked to both stalking behaviors and stalking victimization; however, the link between stalking victimization and low self-control which is related to emotions and thoughts was only relevant among teenagers. As a result, teenagers are more prone to use cyberstalking as "an efficient and successful way of obtaining rapid satisfaction" (Bossler & Holt, 2010).

Teenagers who have the characteristics of cyberstalking, tend to breach the line of privacy while trying to obtain others' personal information that is available on social media (Begotti et al., 2019). According to this study, immoral behaviors are learned via models that arise in social relationships. As a result, those who are exposed to cyberstalking are significantly more likely to learn how to cyberstalk another. This research might help society, especially the authorities, better grasp the dangers that active use of social media poses to teens, as well as how hazy teenagers' understanding of the concepts of preserving and breaking privacy is. Teenagers should enlighten themselves on online security protocols and utilize these tactics to help limit access to personal data on websites to avoid incidents of cyberstalking. 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.

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