

An Invisible Predator:

The Internet

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Technology modifies, rebuilds, and now control many parts of the world. The Internet continues to shift countries across the globe through communication and information access. Many consider the numerous contributions of the Internet as the greatest advancement in history, which continue to expand today. The World Wide Web grants access to many parts of life, from social media accounts to personal finances. Although an advantageous technology, the internet has gone too far in the case of social media, it holds many threats, allowing the possibility of limiting privacy, online harassment, and social media anonymity. This stems from the user choices of social media, personal records, and the waiving of privacy unbeknownst to the users, generally through neglect of the fine print. The Internet allows a wide number of social media platforms to be utilized. Allowing one to connect with others from across the world, social media forums often provide public access, where much content is shared and duplicated.

### Privacy Limitations

“Nothing on the internet ever goes away,” so chides nearly every parent on the planet. Considering 65% of US adults in 2015 utilized applications through the internet (Perrin, 2015) and even more high school aged teens do so as well, this can be frightening. The American public holds many records online through photographs, messages, and other communication forms. With such many social media sites on the internet, people can access information quickly. While allowing many across the world to connect with far away family and friends, the internet also provides a very easy way to gain access about other’s private lives by unsettling methods. The apps do not have filtering capabilities for questionable users promoting the potential of dangerous activity. Unrestricted access to social media, such as stalking, allows these media

outlets to become a ground for illegitimate activity. Online privacy does not exist in the a majority of cases. According to a BBC report, internet privacy has lessened due to the use of social media, which claims children using social media sites such as Instagram do not understand the Terms and Conditions they accept, neglectfully signing away their data and privacy (Shultes, 2017). Additionally, in a 50-48 vote, Senators voted to repeal the internet privacy bill enacted under the Obama-era Federal Communications Commissions. The repeal made March 16, 2017, enables the use of data tracking to be done by third parties. (Selyukh, 2017), sparking concern for some as they feel their right to privacy will be signed away and out of their hands. However, not only is this information used by the social media apps or companies exclusively, but also by the consumers, making the threat of being hacked for companies or private users a possibility (Curtis, 2017). The open nature of the internet leads to the practice of dangerous attempts to reach or harm a person online. Social media holds too much power without providing adequate protection for its users. Apps like Facebook and Pinterest have the ability to buy items advertised on the app in-site, resulting in another considerable risk for those whom use these application as the information placed on the site could be hacked.

### **Negative Aspects of Social Media**

The internet holds an extensive amount of ways to contact others, and to follow their personal lives. Many social media types allow access to account information from one user to others. For instance, Snapchat is a picture message app that allows pictures to be sent to other users. The pictures or videos on the app last between 1-10 seconds while viewed. According to Hootsuite, Snapchat has over 100 million active users daily. (Fontein, 2016). This popular app released an update on June 28<sup>th</sup> of 2017 allowing a feature called Snap Map. The map allows users with the June update to view their snapchat friend's location (Huddleston, 2017). As many

teenagers use this social media account, it has become very easy to track their friends via the snapchat app, giving detailed locations. This is not the only social media feature that allows location tracking, Facebook offers a similar feature in their messenger app. Many users are not comfortable with allowing their location to be tracked and find the app capabilities to be excessive. Social media is too advanced, as users can discover the location of others or learn of their personal lives in addition to the other risks presented to users.

### **Limiting Social Media Predation**

Social media exists to connect users and build friendships. However, in addition to connecting with known users, the ability to connect with unknown users is possible. This can cause a variety of unwanted attention especially in the case of sexual harassment on social media. “Unwanted sexual attention on the Internet occurs when a harasser uses direct personal communication to harass a victim. Additionally, the harasser uses personal communication to convey messages directly relating to sex and/or sexuality which are unwanted or unwelcome by the victim. Such messages often: (1) refer to the victim's sex organs; (2) refer to the victim's sex life; (3) refer to intimate subjects; (4) impose sex-related images or sounds; or (5) insinuate or offer sex-related activities.” (Barrios & Sosa, 2010) Furthermore, a harasser who uses unwanted sexual attention to harass a victim online, intends to solicit sexual cooperation from his/her victim either on the Internet or in person. Though social media is not the only internet technology used to expose or harass teens, it is a prominent and growing issue. Such an immense issue, that the Supreme Court has set their attention to the safety of minors on social media in the case of *Packingham v. North Carolina*. Argued February 17, 2017, and decided June 19, 2017, the state of North Carolina considered the usage of a social media site that allows access to minors, sites such as Facebook, as a felony if used by a registered sex offender. Furthermore,

this law applies to contacting a minor through any other prohibited sites or gathering information about minors through the internet. (Packingham v. North Carolina, 2017) Social media has expanded beyond the control of some users and the rights they possess to an enjoyable social platform due to the overbearing nature of other account holders presenting a threat. *Packingham v. North Carolina*, a case of minors' safety while using social media, has been brought to the highest court of the United States and is evidence that the capabilities of social media are too numerous, as they may assist in helping sexual predators in further way than that of the past. For instance, the Snapchat location map, a seemingly positive feature, is also incredibly dangerous and could potentially benefit dangerous individuals if used improperly. A lack of privacy and the ability to easily access social media accounts, and the locaters on the app, is in many cases, a massive concern and safety issue. The idea of social media's numerable capabilities and too powerful advancements are reiterated in light of the concern of North Carolina and the Supreme Court.

### **Dark Side of Anonymity**

The internet allows an anonymous front that is often difficult to find the person who is "trolling" from behind the screen. On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, outrage, and concern were sparked by Snapchat and Facebook users concerning threats of a school shooting. A snapchat user under the name of *Deming High* threatened to shoot Deming High School after the untimely death of one of our own. The snapchat user(s) claimed that they would shoot the school at 10:00 am or during the lunch break of the high schoolers. Controversy began when the Deming Facebook page News Before News became aware of the Snapchat threats. Starting with a screenshot of an email from a freshman to all of the freshman students at the high school, stating the student "deserved to die. It was Expected. All you Mortals are Foolish." Then followed with threats of

shooting. On the Facebook page *News Before News* was flooded with concerned parents that did not want to take their children to school. Before the end of the night, emails sent to high school students regarding the safety of the high school were posted to this Facebook page. The next morning, hundreds of parents added comments to the page claiming they were not allowing their children to go to school. Students from the elementary schools to the high school level were absent both November 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. From the high school alone, over 1,000 children were absent and only an approximate of 270 reported to classes on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Though police filled the high school, concerned mothers did not want to risk the safety of their children. Many classes had an average of 5 students or less per class. The Snapchat threat made by an unknown source was made public by Facebook. Unfortunately, as of November 15<sup>th</sup>, the Deming High Snapchat account user has not been identified. According to recently appointed Superintendent of Deming High School, Dr. Romero, the threats came from a fake account that was uneasy to trace. (Deming Radio, 2017) As social media progresses, it can be impactful and effective, as shown with the awareness of the shooting threats by the Facebook group *News Before News* yet allows the anonymity of the Snapchat user that sparked the fear throughout the district. Social media has allowed individuals to hide behind a screen and induce fear/panic through their electronic device. Leading to an inconclusive end on who is behind the account. In this sense, social media has advanced beyond that of safety.

### **Conclusion**

A world changed by the technological advancements of the Internet are not always positive. In the case of social media, technology has gone too far in the pursuit of continual growth. Social media, a platform for friendships and fun, can also be very dangerous. Privacy becomes increasingly limited in the age of social media and continues through the repeal

of the internet privacy set in place by former President Barack Obama. Because of little privacy, a great deal of personal information could be used to stalk users. This continues with the capabilities of popular social media accounts which allow some the viewing of the locations of fellow account members. As the Internet and Social Media are very open, they could be used to reach a person in many ways. This also allows the internet and social media to become a front for unsafe internet usage.

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