



Digital Danger: Exploring The Connection Between Social Media And Teenagers' Exposure To Dangerous Drugs.

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Abstract

Social networking platforms provide numerous benefits to its members. However, social media programmes can have both beneficial and harmful effects on youth. With the availability of social media application platforms, these young people are now exposed to social difficulties such as illicit drug and substance use, prostitution, abortion, alcohol, pornography, smoking habits, and other social problems. Illicit drugs and substance misuse are not a new phenomenon, and they have become a source of concern in the country. Thus, the study is being carried out to examine the relationship between the usage of social media and exposure to illicit drugs and substance addiction among teens in Sarawak. From June to August 2022, 3067 people involved in drug misuse were detained in Sarawak, with most of them being youth. This article examined the topic of drug and substance misuse, as well as its relationship to social media exposure and usage among Sarawak youth. This qualitative research was carried out in specific districts of Kuching. An in-depth assessment of social media usage and exposure to illicit drug activities was obtained through interviews with several selected respondents. The study discovered that more young generations are getting exposed to drug use, and that with the use of social media, contacts between teens and those involved in drug selling operations have become easier.

Keywords: *Social Media application, dangerous drugs, substance, teenagers.*

Introduction

Technology has a great influence in our lives. People use information and communication technology for various reasons, including communication with others, gathering information and knowledge, and performing daily tasks. Smartphones, computers, and tablets are the devices used to communicate and stay connected with family and friends both locally and abroad. A world without limits has created many opportunities, such as sharing information in a fraction of a second or receiving knowledge without physically being present at the spot. Although the beauty of technology is universally acknowledged, the swindles of technology in human existence are as concerning. Social difficulties among teenagers are not a new issue that must be addressed. Societies and authorities have been working on the challenges even before technology existed. Prostitution, drug abuse, and alcoholism are just a few examples of social problems that have existed in the past. The expansion of virtual and digital communication, including the introduction of social media, has created an even greater difficulty for teenagers or teens, as it may have an impact on their emotional and physical health. Morin (2022), debated that today's teen is facing new and different social issues. Digital communication has changed the way teens interact with their peers and others. The ways in which teenagers interact with one another, date, study, rest, and work out are all being affected by their increased use of electronic media. Teens typically use their electronic gadgets for more than eight hours every day. While exposing young kids to societal issues, technology has created a new social networking platform. On-screen violence, which can lead to a lack of empathy, academic challenges, peer pressure, and cyberbullying are a few instances of social issues that surround the life of a teenager. Youth are swiftly influenced by the information they see on social media due to their heightened susceptibility to peer pressure and its consequences at this young age.

In Malaysia there are 32.57 million of populations as for January 2021. According to Kemp (2021), there were 27.43 million internet users in Malaysia in January 2021. The number of internet users in Malaysia increased by 738 thousand (+2.8%) between 2020 and 2021. Therefore, social networking has become a way of life for most individuals, from younger to older generation and the social media has become an essential component of their daily routine. The used of social media application among Malaysian have increased dramatically. They use social media for a long list of reasons, the major reason would be to connect them with friends and family. Howe (2023) reported that, there are 34.13 million of Malaysian and 96.8% of them are connected online on the internet. It is interesting to know that 26.8 million



Malaysians are active social media users. Besides to be connected with their family and friends, other reasons for using the social media are varied, from searching for a recipe, to sharing lovely moments in life thru their favourite platform. Users are allowed to take any approach while creating social media material. The evolution of social media material may differ from one another. The contents were created with the users' interests in mind, as well as the platform and media that they use to post the contents. Malaysian youth create content that differs slightly from teenagers in western countries such as America, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. Sarawak has a population of 2.907 million people as of 2020, according to the Malaysian Department of Statistics. 70.05 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 65, and half of the population (57 percent) lives in cities. Given this backdrop, using technology in everyday life has become necessary, and as a result, the user must deal with any consequences, whether positive or negative. (https://www.citypopulation.de/en/malaysia/admin/13__sarawak/)

Problem Statement

According to Baughman (2023), social media has accomplished far more than merely bringing people together. Several studies have linked the significant increase in prescription drug abuse treatment admissions in the United States to better access to these prescriptions. The Ministry of Welfare, Community Wellbeing, Women, Family, And Childhood Development in Sarawak reported that by November 2020, 15 out of the state's 40 districts have been deemed high-risk areas with a high prevalence of drug misuse and trafficking instances (Ling, 2020). The case of drug addiction is worsening over time, as indicated by the 3067 drug abusers jailed between June and August 2022. While the use of illegal substances and substance abuse are linked to internet activity in Western countries, whether a comparable situation arose in Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak, is questionable. As a result, the goal of this research is to investigate the teen drug abuse phenomena and see if social media has any impact on the expanding teen drug abuser population in Sarawak.

Research objective

The paper main concern is to explore the possibility of relationship between the escalating usage of social media among teens and the increased number of drugs and substance abuse cases. Thus, the objective of the research is to investigate the usage of social media in drug abuse and drug trafficking activities among the teenagers in Sarawak.

Literature Review

Usage of social media among teenagers.

The social networking programme has proven to be capable of much more than merely connecting friends. TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and Snapchat are just a handful of the programmes popular among the online community. Users of these social media platforms come from all areas of life. As an open platform, the social media programme has been used by children, teenagers, adults, and even older citizens (65 years old and above). The purpose of the application used varies from person to person. Some people use it to keep up with family and friends, while others use it to acquire the newest news. At some point, social media platforms like YouTube will be used as a learning tool.

Illicit Drugs on the Web

There are many activities can be done using the online platform. The activities of selling and buying the Illicit drugs and substance abuse had slightly changed from conventional, into technology based. Previously it is well known that drugs pusher dealt with the drugs addict in the black alley or unknown places. However, the condition has slightly changed where in some situation the pusher is using their social media account to sell the items. WhatsApp, snapchat, website or few others platform being used by the drugs pusher to approach their potential client.

According to Rafiuddin et al. (2017), another well-known application of the dark web is the sale and distribution of illegal narcotics. Many websites operate just to supply addicts and other drug traffickers with the substances they want. According to McIntosh, J. et al., A third of the children said they had been exposed to drugs, either by being in situations where they were being used or by being offered them." While cannabis was the most often exposed substance, a significant number had also been exposed to more dangerous narcotics. Drug use by friends or family members, association with classmates who engaged in antisocial behaviour, the child's own involvement in problem behaviours, and regular alcohol use were the factors most strongly associated with exposure.



Methodology

To achieve the objective to explore the relationship between social media exposure and illicit drugs usage among teenagers, a qualitative study has been conducted. The main data collection method is semi structured interview. The semi structured interview allowed the researcher to have a standard kind of questions to ask and at the same time to expand some questions based on the answers received from the respondents. The study solicited responses from teenagers in Sarawak. The respondents were picked through a snowball sampling method in which a responder introduced the researchers to friends or family members who they thought would be interested to participate in the study. Even though the study focused on social media usage and drug abuse, respondents would include people who are involved in drug abuse as well as those who are not active in drug abuse but use social media. Understanding the sensitivity of the issues related to illicit drugs used, interviews were conducted with respondents anonymously through phone conversations as well as using the online meeting applications. Knowing the anonymity nature of the interview session, the respondents are more open to discuss their drugs abused condition and how they utilize the social media in their drugs transactions activities. The researchers transcribed the data acquired during the interview sessions. The transcriptions were then analysed utilising a content analysis approach to produce an analysis for the issue's discussion and conclusion.

Findings

The research findings were produced during the data collection stage, which included interviewing respondents. The purpose of the interview was to gather information on the current status of drug and other substance usage among teens in Sarawak, the relationship between social media use and drug abuse and trafficking, and the factors that influence this relationship. The conclusions were based on interviews with teenagers and the authority department. The demographic data of the respondents is obtained, and table 1 below provides the details.

No of Respondent (R)	Gender
12	Male
2	Female

Table 1: Number of respondents

The current status of drugs and other substance abuse among teen in Sarawak

According to the table above, there were fourteen (14) respondents total, and two out of the twelve (12) respondents were women. They are young adults between the ages of 18 and 22. In terms of educational backgrounds, six (6) of the fourteen (14) respondents have bachelor's degrees, while the remaining three (3) have diplomas. Respondents are identified using R1 through R12, where R stands for study participant or research respondent. Respondents in the study were asked questions about their knowledge of dangerous substances and drug use. It is critical to understand how and when they became involved in the activities. Concerning the dates in question, it was revealed that some had included children as young as twelve (12) years old. According to R5, the majority of those who purchase are teens between the ages of thirteen (13) and seventeen (17). According to R7, a person's exposure to the use of dangerous drugs and substances is mostly determined by their four environments. Some teenagers have been exposed to drug users and pushers since a young age, such as straight after primary school. Since they have been exposed to drug users since a young age, it is possible that out of curiosity, children or teenagers may have become curious about trying drugs.

Respondents who were asked about the behaviours that could result in the use of dangerous drugs and substance abuse concurred that drinking alcohol and smoking are two such behaviours that teens may begin to engage in.

R3 in the response said *"it is all started with smoking habits. From there, normally teenagers would like to try advance stuff such as dangerous drugs and substance use such as liquor. By consuming the alcohol, it will help the club or pubs goer to get along with one another. People will easily involve with drugs when they himself/herself are smoker and an alcoholic."* R5 said *"the reason why teenagers get involved with dangerous drugs and substance abuse because they are following their friends and wanted to try something new and to follow the trend, or FOMO."*

Drugs and other substances come in a different variant. Cannabis (also known as marijuana, dope, pot, ganja, hash, herb, skunk, boom, gangster, chronic, and blunt), and cocaine (also known as coke, crack, rock, Charlie, snow, dust,



and yay-yo. These harmful substances are known by a street name, and various areas may have a different name for the same harmful substances. Common street names for the harmful substances include "ice" and "batu."

The usage of social media relates to drug abuse and drug trafficking activities.

Teenagers who are proficient in IT make up all of the replies. They used a cell phone or other mobile device to access the internet. The connection was made using either their own mobile data or open access (Wi-Fi), and the internet is available around-the-clock. A few social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, were used by respondents. Most respondents spend at least four hours per day, and many spend more than twelve (12) hours per day, playing online games or monitoring their social media profiles. Those who responded to the survey were asked about their use of social media and how it relates to illegal drug use and substance abuse. The respondents claim that they have never seen a social media account-related marketing or open post about drug trafficking. Social media platforms like WhatsApp or WeChat, which were highlighted by R12 and R13, can be utilized to build networks and as a quick way to connect and close deals. But as was already mentioned, no business is done on a public social network account. According to R1, *"normally they will make a deal through the social media chat box, after that they will meet up in certain places and do the business. Based on my observation, most of the drugs pusher will be riding a motorbike. Well maybe it is easier way to run from being caught by the police..."*

Conclusion & recommendation

Socialization begins at birth. Primary agents of socialization are the individuals and groups that have the most direct and sustained contact with an individual during their formative years. Therefore, the family is the primary agent of socialization, as it is the first and most influential group to socialize. Parents have a significant role in any aspects of their children's lives as they may talk to their children about the dangerous of drugs usage and its implication in their life. Good communication between them is important for developing a positive relationship and may avoid children's especially teenagers from taking drugs. Secondary agents of socialization are the individuals, groups, an institution, that individuals encounter later in life such as peers, school, community, religion and social media. From the discussion before, social media always have the double sword effects. While it is true that the platform could provide a solution or happiness or a lot of benefits for the user, at the same time the negative impact is alarming and need a proper attention and solutions. No matter how good the precautions that parents took, teens are likely to be exposed to dangerous people, unhealthy images as well as sexual content through online platform. Therefore, the right technique in handling the social media platform need to be learn and teach to the younger user of the technology. As the most influential person in the children's life, parents should open up and talk to their children about the dangerous of drugs abuse, vaping, alcohol or any other sensitive issue. Kids need the very first insight from the most trusted person in their life.

To combat illicit drugs users among teenagers required a joint cooperation between parents, schools, authority and even the community. Positive and supportive relationship between each of these entities will helps teenagers to develop strong characters and enable them to face greater challenges that they might face in the future. To conclude, our teenagers are our future.

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