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Facebook as a Tool of Catfishing: An Analytical Study of University Students

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This study aims to highlight the catfishing hoax by using the medium of Facebook where a catfisher simulates someone else by using other's enchanting pictures to make someone impress so that he can easily plunder a target person due to digital vulnerability.

Methodology: In this study quantitative method has used with survey construction. In this study sample size (N=387) participants participated in survey to answer the questions using questionnaire.

Findings: Findings showed female responded more than male like 213 were female and 174 were male they responded that catfishing phenomenon is occurring on different social networking sites but Facebook is an ideal medium for catfisher where there is no difficulty to impersonate the target person.

Conclusion: The study concludes that catfishing can be controlled by the help of law enforcement agency (FIA) and individual effort such as setting up strong passwords and stopping unfamiliar friend request.

Keywords: Catfishing, Facebook, Digital Vulnerability.

Introduction

Counterfeiting on social networking site is known as catfishing where catfish pretend to be someone else that he is not by using other's identity and images. Catfish catches netizens into romantic net for financial and personal gains, getting escape from insecurities and loneliness. Majority of offenders create sock puppet accounts in facebook for deception. Catfishing is a subordinate type of cyberbullying now it has become social pathology and nobody can escape from this abuse on virtual space. Where people are getting benefit from internet on the other hand they globally are being victimized by catfishing in different ways like copyrighted art of others and identity steeling. Catfishing is not new it came into being since the invention of internet, social media and social networking sites like Instagram, twitter, whatsapp and most prominent facebook.

There are several studies that have been conducted over catfishing crime according to Senja and Delliana (2022) advancement of technology has made people unconventional than what they used to conventional. Internet is the only basic technology that made romance easier through online dating and also made a

threat for internet users in the form of catfishing. It is the subject matter of MTV reality show namely "Catfish". The purpose of this study is to observe the response of adolescent virtual daters on catfishing and about catfishing program.

There are various cases of catfishing that has taken place in the Pakistan according to Humair (2020) 60 years old woman catfished a young boy by using the picture of her niece in facebook account in Karachi for the purpose of personal gains like mobile balance card, receiving gifts and getting escape from boredom. When boy bump into the real identity of young girl in facebook he exposed the old lady to her niece and complained to FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) this law enforcement agency arrested her.

There is another study conducted by Somiah (2023) illustrates about romance by digital Avatar, cyber courtship, catfishing, and representation that is occurring among irregular women immigrant in Malaysian state of Sabah.

According to Balt et al, (2023) usage of social media has enormous advantages for adults but on the other hand it has badly effected mental health of young people who have been victimized by cyberbullying, social competition, cyber challenges, and impersonation etc. Due to these effects suicidal thoughts have developed in their minds and behaviors.

There is need to protect virtual communication by detecting method in another study that is conducted by Fortunatus et al., (2020) investigated prevalence of cyberbullying in social media communication has increased. There is need to apply detection method for creating protective online communication.

Facebook is the basic platform through which all the anonymous entities are active to scam online bodies by making fake profiles and creating false romantic alliance.

Facebook

In 2004 Mark Zuckerberg developed social networking site Facebook who was sophomore student in Harvard University USA. Facebook was created for the purpose of connecting students with one another in order to share their daily activities and images so that problems can be cleared among students. Gradually it became popular in other renowned educational institutes of America like Yale College, Columbia and Stanford. Moreover it had become famous website in all over the word where individuals have cognitive, business and social interaction. Currently it is known as multimillion enterprises.

In another study Ellison et al., (2007) assesses the connection between facebook utilization, famous social networking sits and establishment of social capital. This study also analyzed usage of facebook with the measurement of psychological health and proposing social capital it may cater benefits to netizens who have low confidence and less life contentment.

Facebook has played vital role in cyberbullying such as Coban et al., (2023) examine digital vulnerability of women, children and teenagers who fall prey of cyber harassment by the use of social media , cyber games, online environment and blogs etc. Cyber bullying effects are severe and have become the social pathology in present time.

Facebook has always privacy and security issues according to Loong (2014) discussed social media that has become the particular aspect of life of younger people for gratifying their social need through it but the problem starts from the advancement in technology and features of social media communication. Where they get all types of information in one click but there is no cyber security and privacy on cyber space.

Facebook has different types of bullying that Tamyo & Martinez (2019) discussed they analyzed through the platform of Facebook adolescents faced cyber bullying in negative relationships. Researchers did survey by constructing questionnaire on seven kinds of cyberbullying 312 adolescents answered that frapping, cyberstalking, trolling, exclusion, masquerading, catfishing and harassment experienced sometimes.

Study Objectives

1: To explore that Facebook is being used as major tool of catfishing among students.

2: To assess that people's digital vulnerability on Facebook increases cybercrimes.

Research Questions

RQ 1: Is Facebook being used as major tool of catfishing among students?

RQ 2: Does digital vulnerability on Facebook increase cybercrime?

Rational of the Study

Cyber bullying is the basic term of catfishing that encompasses all type of online harassment issues like posting and sharing insulting contents, indecent videos and images extortion, trolling, doxing etc. The signification behind this study is to highlight the cyberbullying subtype catfishing which is gradually prevailing on account of addictive attitude of users towards digital communication and free communication apps. Furthermore this study has defined the social networking platform facebook that has become the basic medium for constructing false identity and romanticism for seeking personal gains and monetary benefits so that internet users can be made awoken from these scams how can it be dangerous to carelessly share personal information to unknown entity online.

Research Gap

Literature review has defined that "Catfishing" is not a new topic to research there are number of researches have done on impact of catfishing such as online dating scam, money fraud, psychological issues and romance scam etc. In this study researcher finds out that catfishing has become the suitable source of catfishing through which users of facebook catfish same gender and cross gender for their personal gains.

Review of Literature

Review of literature is the complete summary of previous studies on a particular topic so here are some researches that have been done by different scholars on cybercrime catfishing and fake identity on social media.

As Haron and Yusof (2010) described a qualitative study about social media platforms provide social association and interactional avenue to internet users. Due to advancement in communication technology netizens have become more unlatch in swapping their ideas, thoughts and feelings that can lead them towards virtual violations. Majority of the users have faced cyberstalking because of free-flow of communication. In this study there has been discussed four types of cyberstalking such as impersonation, fake profiles and threatening and harassing and victims have faced psychological issues like anxiety, isolation and depression.

Cox (2014) inferred that internet is a main reason behind cybercrime this study has been conducted in USA that examines the rapid growth of cybercrime and implication of laws do not enough to rectify. There are several online crimes that cause trouble for users such as virtual impersonation, online harassment and cyberstalking. He suggested that there is prime responsibility of law enforcement agencies to make legislation for particular crime that upgrade the safety of users and answerability for offender.

Amedie (2015) delineated about negative influence of social media on the people by taking evidence from previous studies that have been conducted by numerous scholars. The aim of this study was to explain three basic types of social media impact on consumers such as fake relationship that drawn towards emotional issues, secondly individual's addictive behavior that led toward introversion and finally social media had become main medium for cyber criminals for committing criminal activities.

Hobby and Zeki (2015) explored about quick growth of social media site facebook. There are different pages of celebrity and well known personalities who are being victimized by hackers on cyberspace. The aim of this study was to aware people from counterfeiting incidents that posts in facebook. This study indicates the deceptive effects of impersonation on Egyptian community. This study used quantitative method and took 210 respondents as sample size to manifest higher education proportion knows more about impersonation.

Ullah et al., (2015) described growth of internet in Pakistan is unexpected due to popularity of communication apps in wise society. This provides freedom of expression, zero boundary worlds which caters knowledge facilities to individuals. This study analyzed that it is necessary to observe negative impact on society when administration is continuously striving to make legislations for maintaining cyberspace. Purpose of this study was to expose speedy growth of management for cyberspace and refusal between technology salesmen.

Derzakarian (2017) discussed the proliferation of social media, virtual interaction and its user's way of swapping contents. This development of technology unlocked the gate of deception and social media was prominent for online dating where lots of people were hacked. This study examined the catfishing that impacted numerous actors in this act both people were trapped one whom was impersonated and second whose identity and pictures were misused.

Jumrah et al., (2019) inferred catfish deception on single parents through facebook in Malaysia. It analyzed catfish as someone who utilized other's identification for creating romantic alliances. The purpose behind this study was to find out main aspect that contributed to offence of cyber love of the sufferer experiences. Researcher took five respondents and did extensive interview. Results indicated facebook was used for trapping single mother.

Cross and Layt (2021) expressed the identity theft phenomenon in which scammers steal picture and identification of other internet users for making intimate associations in Australia. Thousands of people were being affected on communication apps through romanticism. This study used qualitative method to measure love frauds and findings showed that in future there should be security provided to netizens whose identities are compromised.

Buil-gil and Zeng (2021) defined that in UK online dating sits are big source of romance fraud. The aim of this paper was to showcase love hoax phenomenon where individuals masqueraded themselves for finance during the time of pandemic. Moreover this study analyzed that covid-19 was favorite period for culprit to commit romance scam because everyone was in lockdown and internet use had increased due to stagnation at home. The researcher used qualitative method and panel study was conducted, results showed that love scams grew more after 2020.

Knafo (2021) found out that how people change their persona on cyberspace by catfishing that conceal their real self and truth because of creating false romantic relationship. These romantic alliances promote human fantasy therefore they replace their physical identity into virtual one to progress secret affection. This study also examined catfish as co- creation advantages and benefits.

Kasherwani et al., (2021) explained that in current digitalized age social networking forums put individual's life into jeopardy. Facility of immense knowledge and broad mindedness of internet users provide opportunity to cyber culprits for making malignant bots on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram and LinkedIn and these malignant bots are semi-automated and automated that are used in malicious way to exploit internet users and getting their illicit advantages like producing fake profiles, hijacking and spreading fake contents.

These previous researches have focused on cyber victimization like harassment, identity theft, misuse of social networking sites such as facebook, instagram and whatsapp etcetera and recommended additional work is required to be done. This present study addressed facebook as medium of catfishing from the perspective of space transition theory.

Theoretical Framework

In accordance with this reference Eisenhart (1991) theoretical framework is a design that caters direction to research established on prior theory.

In this research space transition theory is used that has been designed by Indian criminologist k. Jaishankar in 2008. In this theory he explained people behavior on social media how they behave differently when they move from physical to cyberspace because they have fear to commit crime in real world due to good reputation in the society and when they appear on social media they change their identity because they know there is difficult to map the real identity on virtual world.

He explained seven assumptions in this theory. Firstly he indicates that someone who has repressed criminal attitude in physical world may prone to do crime virtually due to having fear of damage honor. Secondly he describes anonymity and false identity cater criminals a sense of security and safety in cyberspace so that he can fearlessly commit illegal activities. Thirdly this approach defines that when behavior of criminal is transferred from physical to virtual crime is less dangerous and beneficial than traditional offence. Fourth assumption explores that cyberspace is a travelling space where netizens come and go here and there they do not reside permanently on one place this irregularity of criminals permit them to move around and conceal their real location. Fifth assumption describes there is a possibility that internet has become the basic channel for criminal recruitment and criminal business. In sixth assumption Jaishankar assumes that somebody from close community such as religious and ethno-religious may commit offence in virtual space because they are answerable to religious authority and feel embarrass to do crime in real world. In final assumption Jaishankar says it is possible to do crime online because there is conflict between values and norms of virtual space and physical space. Virtual space is a globalized space where people have worldwide connection and have different frame of mind so people on physical space this thing creates disputes among online and real world people. This theory is more relevant to explain cybercrime before it researchers used to use other criminology theory to describe cybercrime such as social learning theory, routine activity theory, these theories were not relevant to explaining virtual crimes which is why Jaishankar design space transition theory.

Research Method

Research Design

This research has used quantitative method and positivist approach has followed for specific observation which has explained causal relationship between variables and concepts. Survey method has used for gathering data.

Populations and Sampling

In this study population has taken from two universities namely University of Punjab and Minhaj University which is comprised of both male and female students of social science. In sampling technique researcher has used non probability sampling and convenient sampling type has followed to assemble data quickly. Sample size of this research has (N= 387) males and females students who are being taught in Minhaj University and University of Punjab.

Data Analysis

Data is statistically analyzed through SPSS software and chi- square test is used to measure the variables such as facebook is the independent variable and catfishing is dependent variable.

Results

Current study applies Chi-square test to exhibit the significant relationship between independent variable and dependent variable that are catfishing and facebook usage.

It is more likely that Facebook is being used as major tool of catfishing among students.

Table 1: *Chi-square Test (Cross-tabulation)*

	What do you think is Facebook being used as major tool of catfishing among students?					
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	**Total**
What do you think that catfishing usually takes place on Facebook?	1	2	3	3	4	13
	4	3	9	7	11	34
	1	9	32	28	25	95
	2	11	18	62	47	140
	3	3	15	28	55	104
Total	11	28	77	128	142	386

Table 2: *Chi-Square Tests (Association)*

	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	51.984[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	46.890	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.754	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	386		

a. 10 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .37.

Above table defines the significance of hypothesis that is "It is likely that Facebook is being used as major tool of catfishing among students" in this respect chi-square test was applied to know the association between variables, in this case, the *p*-value 0.00 is smaller than the standard alpha value, so it is accepted the alternative hypothesis that Facebook is used as a major tool for catfishing among students.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to give awareness about catfishing that prevailing through Facebook and victimizing young people who have technological vulnerability. Findings shows catfishing via facebook has various reasons that how Facebook accounts is created by students for the act of catfishing. This article is conducted over catfishing phenomena except time, place, age group and medium of catfishing and purpose. In this literature (Jumrah et al 2019) expressed the results by conducting detail interview of five participants they found Facebook is the major instrument of catfishing in which single parent like mother was victimized on facebook by creating fake identity. Present study has also described utilization of Facebook as main tool of catfishing among university students. This study is conducted over young males and females university students who are the regular users of facebook and findings revealed majority of females students agree with catfish hoax on the platform of facebook this study is better than comparative study because it covers only single mother catfishing victimization and present study covers young university students from 18 to 35 age bracket. Another literature (Buil-Gil and Zeng 2022) analyzed that catfishing in COVID19 that how individual cheat someone for monetary gain and create fake romantic relationship for this purpose and target loneliness of people and growth in virtual relationships. Results of this study indicate the cyber romance hoaxes increased in pandemic and online love fraud was more immediate among young people than older one. In this respect current study's results indicates young generation are more willing to target someone on facebook because youngsters have more use of Facebook than other social networking sites. There is another literature (Knafo 2021) findings elaborated that catfishing built totally on fake persona with different purpose like romanticism and entertainment on free communications apps like social networking sites. In this respect current article defines online exposure on cyberspace which is based on anonymity and predator fantasized target person into fake world by the use of Facebook.

Conclusion

A considerable number of respondents who have been victimized by catfishing through Facebook they were not aware and did not report incident to FIA the service that government provided for protecting people from cybercrimes. Catfishing can mentally and physically influence on person and there can be risky results to such harassment. Therefor this study outlines the security issues on Facebook that how anonymous entities manipulate Facebook as crime source.

Recommendations

Internet users should not accept unknown friend requests. The community should be conscious about the existence of fake profiles in Facebook on cyberspace and get solution through law enforcement agency like FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) of Pakistan.

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