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Malaysian Social Media Users and Empowerment through Social Surveillance

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Abstract
Introduction: Surveillance is traditionally associated with negative authoritative monitoring to control society and often viewed as invasion of state authority that disregarded citizens' right to privacy. However, ongoing technological advancements in networked, mobile and digital technologies facilitate social transformations in surveillance. Users of digital technology can also engage in surveillance. This research explored Malaysian social media users' awareness and perception of social surveillance and investigated the manner of which social surveillance was utilised.
Methods: Drawing upon a series of in-depth interviews conducted via Facebook messenger with a selected group of Malaysian social media users, this paper explored how Malaysians understand social media as a tool of surveillance and empowerment. Malaysians, being some of the most active users on social media platforms in the world were selected for this study.
Findings: Findings suggested that surveillance did not merely subject individuals to scrutiny but also offered opportunities for empowerment because of that scrutiny. Empowerment through social surveillance brought benefits to individual users and also encourages an expansion of surveillance activities. However, most do not perceive such conduct as surveillance because the interviewees viewed institutional surveillance as actual surveillance while social surveillance as a concept was foreign to them.
Originality: Surveillance studies is still an emerging field in Southeast Asia and is rarely taught as an independent subject in Malaysia. This perspective of this research considered the use of surveillance as a tool for empowerment and this is not an area that is studied much in this part of the world.
Keywords: Surveillance, Perceived Surveillance, Malaysian Social Media Users, Empowerment, Facebook Messenger.

Introduction

Surveillance, typically, centers around the collection of information aimed at controlling or managing the surveilled. As Lyon, (2007) succinctly explained, it is focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction whereby in most typical situations, surveillance powers lie in the hands of the state or governments. Historically, surveillance, in the hands of ruling powers, is used to manage and control through exploiting information collected through surveillance. One of the most fitting illustrations of this exertion of power is George Orwell's seminal work, 1984. Surveillance is manifested by 'Big Brother' social actors who represent the ever-present and watchful eye of the government. The omnipresent and powerful state exerts control over its population by constantly watching them, and effectively implanting them with the fear of being watched. In essence, as Monahan, (2010) puts it, surveillance at its core is about control.

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The power of surveillance enables the people with such power to control others, exploiting in them the fear of being observed doing something inappropriate or unacceptable by the people who wield power.

State-held surveillance systems are typically regulatorily manifested through political and police entities, for instance, the enactment of the Patriot Act in the United States of America after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. While proponents of the act argued that the Patriot Act will help to keep America safe, opponents highlighted concerns over provisions in the act that make it easier for federal authorities to infringe on Americans' right of privacy through the legal collection of private information via monitoring of online and offline activities. American nonprofit organization, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), described the Patriot Act as a law that turns regular citizens into suspects. The effects of instilling fear through the awareness of being watched is often depicted as a form of panoptic effect (Foucault, 1979) whereby he referred to Jeremy Bentham's conceptualization of a panopticon design for prisons. The design illustrates the invisible 'watcher' in the watch tower wielding power over his prisoners (the 'watched') unable to hide from tower's its 'watchers' field of vision. Panopticon power lies wholly with the in the unidentifiable 'watcher' in the tower.

In today's world of data and digital media technology, the power to watch has not only been enhanced for the ruling powers but for corporate owners who now treat consumer personal information as commodity, thanks to advances in data mining. Such proliferation of digital and mobile technology use in the world meant that there is massive amount of data being transmitted and exchanged constantly in most parts of the world. Inevitably, this also meant that digitally mediated communication led to the world today to be what Lyon described as surveillance societies (2003) where surveillance is a routine and inescapable part of everyday life (Lyon, 2007). The accessibility of user-friendly and simple surveillance tools in the form of mobile technology allows anyone to observe and collect information about others. In today's world of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras and mobile cameras, digital surveillance tools are no longer viewed with suspicion. Instead, they have blended into landscape of everyday work and living. The permeation of cameras into everyday life meant that people are used to be exposed to electronic eyes everywhere and are now desensitized to the possibility of being watched, diluting society's once real fear of the Orwellian Big Brother.

As technologies evolved and increasing gadgets are made available to the masses, the practice of surveillance have also evolved into sousveillance, the watching by the masses (non-authoritative figures) which Mann & Ferenbok, (2013) argued as a potential 'balancing force' against the power of institutional gazes. Pairing this with the proliferation of social media use, the roles of the watcher and the watched are no longer only determined by institutional power. However, as souveillance through the use of social media increased, the corporate and institutional means of accessing big data and meta data meant that 'datafication of everyday lives' (Kravchenko & Karpova, 2020) is also made possible. The irony here is that while the digital tools and gadgets being used allow for the empowerment of surveillance for the masses, the corporations that produced and provided such services are also actively collecting and storing data through the digital footprints of the users. As such, further surveillance are made possible for institutions and consciously or unconsciously, users are surrendering their private information to multiple organisations without much protection.

A study by McCahill & Finn, (2010) examining the impact of surveillance at

schools through a series of focus groups discussions found that most participants experienced different levels of surveillance, most of them are conscious of an environment of surveillance both within their schools and the outside world. They are aware of institutionalized surveillance as well as being active participants in 'watching' and being 'watched' as well. Herein lies the idea of surveillance as empowerment. As opposed to the traditional understanding of surveillance where being watched puts the person in a passive position, active involvement in watching, and consciously taking advantage of the benefits of being watched places the individual in a position of active decision making and action, and thus empowering them. Shilton's discussion on empowering surveillance explored the idea of power relations between individuals or informal communities and established corporations or governments (Shilton, 2010) through the disruptions of participatory data collection. Her ideas centered on the coexistence of traditional modes of surveillance with community participatory sensing that enables 'reappropriating surveillance tools' that moves beyond the traditional disciplinary and control functions of surveillance. For them, the empowerment comes also from the fact that they are not subjected to involuntary surveillance, but they have the freedom to decide on the employment of surveillance.

Part of the trajectory towards empowerment through surveillance came from the ubiquity of digital mobile technology in this era of globalized socio-economy that connects massive numbers of people, transcending spatial borders. With digital products becoming cheaper and more accessible through mobile data connections, more users are online today, with majority of them via mobile smartphones. A Pew Research Center report Taylor & Silver, (2019) stated that more than five billion people around the world owned digital devices with more than half of them owning smartphones. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Commission of Multimedia and Communication (MCMC) reported that by year 2018, 93% of the 28.7 million internet users access the internet via smartphones (Taylor & Silver, 2019). The same report also stated that 85% of Malaysian users visit social networking platforms with 97% of them on Facebook (the most popular platform), posting, sharing and commenting each day, showing robust activity in the Malaysian cyberspace.

The Malaysian mediascape has very active internet use, and to the extent that network digital activities facilitate state, corporate and individual activities of surveillance, it is important to look into Malaysia's measures to safeguard people's privacy. Alarmingly, according to the United Kingdom data research firm, Comparitech, Malaysia ranks at the bottom five, alongside China and Russia in a 2019 ranking of legislative protection of citizens' privacy in non-European countries (Bischoff, 2019). This leads to a very important discussion point regarding active internet use within an environment of relatively high surveillance.

The overall verdict is that Malaysia is relatively behind in regulatory efforts to protect privacy and is lacking in proper safeguards for a range of privacy-related matters. Other than citizens being described as 'accustomed to monitoring and surveillance by the government' (Opennet.net, 2012), Malaysia was named as one of the countries detected with servers running FinFisher, a sophisticated cyberspying system used by governments for political spying (Perlroth, 2013).

Another significance of this discussion stems from the lack of study and healthy public discourse about surveillance in Malaysia. Most research about surveillance typically revolves around surveillance in the scientific and medical fields, with very little specific studies in the context that is being discussed in this paper. Additionally, it

should be highlighted that much of the discourse around surveillance occurred more vigorously in the Western hemisphere where both politics and culture value individual rights over collectivist norms and authoritative edicts. However social-political and cultural norms and values in other parts of the world also warrant serious in-depth debates and discourse about surveillance.

As previously mentioned, the study of surveillance and social surveillance, particularly in areas that are not related to science and medicine, have been largely peripheral in this region. Interestingly, there is a small number of research that looked at social media as a tool for social surveillance via online shaming or public shaming. Online shaming often involved the ordinary user who observed something that he or she deemed inappropriate and decided to use his or her mobile device (often in the form of the smartphone camera) to record perceived transgressions and put in on his or her social media account as a way to shame the transgressor to the world. While some of these studies do not address the idea of surveillance or even social surveillance per se, the central idea still looked at social media tools being used to surveil others for a specific reason.

In Malaysia, Mahmood et al., (2018) found a similar culture of online shaming on social media with Malaysians participating in posting, sharing, commenting and liking of such content. Online shaming acts in Malaysia revolved around sensitive issues like sexism, religion and racism, which could point to a dangerous inclination to disregard the sensitivities of others. Another research in Singapore based its study of public shaming online in relations to Asian values and social responsibility (Skoric et al., 2010). Skoric et al studied users' motivation of online shaming within the Asian context among participants based in Singapore. They study interviewees believed that their act of shaming someone online is an act of social responsibility, arguing that such revelations will deter others from engaging in acts that offended public indecency. This logic belies the highly collectivist values of Asian culture. Skoric et al, while noting that Singaporeans' online shaming acts were mostly a benign form of civic peer monitoring, also warned such actions could easily spiral into civic vigilantism online.

A more serious form of social surveillance that would lead to abuses through online shaming would be one that is aimed at humiliation, social condemnation and punishmen a form of online mob trial, or even real-life harassment (Cheung, 2014). Such use of online tools would turn the empowering function of the Internet into one that is, according to Cheung, tyrannical because it allowed the watchers to disregard the privacy of those whom they have judged to be transgressors by sharing photographs, videos or even personal information. And shaming as an act, is an extension of the power of surveillance. As Cheung stated, people no longer needed to wait for the authorities to act as individuals could invoke the authority of a public denouncer on behalf of the community. As Laidlaw, (2017) discussed in her paper about online shaming and privacy, the use of shaming is for social control by guilting the transgressor into conforming to group expectations. However, Laidlaw also posited that shaming can be a step towards positive change to empower people to right social wrongs that are not within the reach of laws. Herein lies the idea of online digital networks like social media in its potential to empower its users through the use of social surveillance.

Schneider & Goto-Jones, (2014) outlined that the diversity and ubiquity of digital technology around the world could mean that there is a potential for an emancipatory role through impacting the way people in technologically advanced societies relate to

each other, engage in social activities, conduct commerce, and participate in political processes. The discussion should lead the focus on integration of social media into daily life which also normalized the practice of using social media in all forms of community life. Marwick, (2012) posits that social media being embedded in modern life allowed for social surveillance to be normalized through using social media to broadcast information, survey content created by others, and regulating one's own content based on the perceptions of the audience. Much of the discussion about social surveillance revolves around watching and allowing others to watch, bringing in the discussion of voyeurism (Marwick, 2012) and narcissism (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Deriving pleasure from watching and being watched is a direct consequence of this proliferation of social media use, particularly in new media consumption and engagement.

Part of the nature of new media, or perhaps more specifically, networked digital media, is, as described by Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly (2009), characteristically interactive and networked within a vast connected world that is increasingly embedded into the lives of the modern man. With the introduction of social media, it is now normal to watch others and/ or be watched because Web 2.0 is an ecosystem of overlapping and connected sites (Marwick, 2012) in which users make use of these platforms on Web 2.0 as their personal surveillant tools to manage and control social relationships online and to even utilize these tools for civic engagement.

Civic engagement, activism and use of surveillance as a form of empowerment are also studied. Studies by Shilton, (2010), Wilson & Serisier, (2010), Fuchs, (2011), Leistert (2012), Reeves, (2012) and Trottier, (2017) identified that surveillance power in the hands of the public can turn into useful tools to balance the power between the traditional masters of surveillance and those who did not have access to those tools to raise the voice of the minority or the ruled. Shilton, (2010) wrote that empowering surveillance in the form of computer technology development can turn surveillance into a tool to improve individuals' quality of life and increase their power relative to corporations and governments in a form of anti-hegemonic manner to disrupt the social control agenda of surveillance by corporations or governments. In the same logic, online media, too, may serve to become empowering media as both media producers and audience have to access to this virtual public sphere to monitor and make their voices heard when they feel that something needs to be discussed or even changed.

Digitally mediatized surveillance on Facebook highlighted how it is used tools with some on privacy and self-disclosure issues (Johnson & Regan, 2014; Zlatolas et al., 2015) as tool (Netceteraeterahitailova, 2012) and as postmodern panopticon (Ivana, 2013). Westcott and Owen (2013) focused on friendship and trust in Twitter. Montgomery (2015) discussed policy and social implications that was brought on by surveillance due to high usage of Facebook by youths. Although with the expansion of personal use of surveillance through social media and the like, Sullivan, (2014) pointed out the possibility of an even greater expansion of surveillance power through what he calls 'data panopticon'. Sullivan identified that with the growing range of data mining globally, and as proven by Edward Snowden's WikiLeaks, the web of surveillance is no longer confined by geopolitical boundaries as technology and commercial power enabled the access of information. He also warned there seems to be less concern by the public about surveillance even as surveillance tools grow. Sullivan believed that the public's decreasing concern with surveillance is related to not only rising fear of terrorism but the public's own monitoring habits as well. This is also connected to Andrejevic, (2004) and his concept of lateral surveillance.

Andrejevic's observations of mutual surveillance, or in his words, 'mutual monitoring', as a kind of surveillance strategy to 'reinforce and replicate the imperatives of security and productivity' is becoming increasingly common. Citizens become invested in participatory monitoring through the information and technology access in order to decrease risk and for self-protection. In line with Andrejevic, Reeves Reeves, (2012) extended Andrejevic study of lateral surveillance by studying the US Department of Homeland Security programme, *"If You See Something, Say Something"*, and dissecting the government's strategy of redirecting the responsibility of surveillance to the public. As part of the initiative to harness the sensory capacities of citizens, this use of lateral surveillance has combined traditional policing strategies and the concept of peer-to-peer monitoring. Reeves also made this connection to sousveillance, bottom-up surveillance through the use of new mobile technologies. This also indicated the use of such tools for empowerment, power to the masses. Prior to the research by Reeves, Wilson & Serisier, (2010) examined how counter-surveillance by the use of video activism is engaged as a form of resistance against police misconduct, violence and abuse, in which the power relations are turned the other way. These video activists rely heavily on alternative media in order to communicate their messages. Other than lateral surveillance, there are also studies by Albrechtslund, (2008) on participatory surveillance and social surveillance (Joinson, 2008; Tokunaga, 2011; Marwick, 2012) which are similar in nature and focused on bottom-up surveillance as well as peer-to-peer surveillance. Much of this sort of surveillance showed the common man's empowerment against established systems through the use of Internet.

Marwick's framework for studying social surveillance is outlined by the three axes that social surveillance exists within: power, hierarchy and reciprocity (2012). Social media works as the capillaries of power, described by Foucault as how power can flow through relationships. This network of power connects the users within the binary of the watcher and the watched in which the roles are interchangeable--reciprocal and eliminates any hierarchical power since all users are both the watcher and the watched, therefore people are equal. In fact, this argument that ability to surveil gives power returned to the original discussion of panopticon as the idea of someone watching, perceived surveillance, gives control to the watcher and heightened the sense of awareness of the watched, and in turn, rendering the watched person to react in ways that he or she considered appropriate.

The study of surveillance is multidisciplinary and broad as surveillance itself in embedded in many aspects of life. There are multiple approaches that researchers can study surveillance due to the broad ranging approaches towards surveillance that can be observed and identified. In Malaysia, most surveillance-related research is focused on the traditional surveillance spheres, namely state and corporate surveillance. Many published research related to surveillance and Malaysia available currently are focused on environmental, science and medical surveillance, in which there are many studies that look at how surveillance is utilized in the examination of environmental, science and medical issues. Others look at safety, security and privacy issues through the existence of technological tools while studies about occupational and organizational surveillance focused on work productivity is impacted through surveillance control. Regionally and globally, there are some works that look at media, and particularly, social media as surveillance tool and the interactions within the social surveillance. However, in Malaysian context, there are not many studies that are focused on media

and surveillance. Therefore, the potential of surveillance studies in Malaysia is relatively untapped.

Other than two earlier-mentioned studies (Mahmood et al., 2018; Skoric et al., 2010) there is a dearth in research on surveillance in Asian, and especially Malaysian contexts. This, by all means, does not mean that Malaysians are not aware of the idea of surveillance, but based on some of the findings that will be presented further in this paper, Malaysians do express awareness of acts of surveillance but do so regarding specific incidences without demonstrating cognizance of the larger notion of surveillance. In this exploratory research, we set out to study whether Malaysians are aware of surveillance and whether they engage in surveillance as well. Considering the high rate of Internet use, specifically social media use, among Malaysians, this research also discussed the kind of social surveillance that Malaysians engage in and motivations for their acts of surveillance.

This paper is an initial report from ongoing research that explores social surveillance practice through the use of interviews with social media users. The focus of this research is particularly of interest as Malaysians are some of the most socially engaged in the world, according to a TNS Global report in 2014, with 62% of the population accessing social media daily. The aforementioned TNS Global report also identified Malaysians as being very attached to digital devices by spending about 6 hours on digital devices (mobile phones, computers and tablets), placing immense importance in their online activities as part of their daily lives. The analysts also noted that Malaysians are highly engaged with online content and usage of online media tools. This is also reinforced by the 2019 MCMC findings of Malaysian internet users who spend an average 6 hours online. In 2021, Statista.com, (2021) reported that more than 78% of Malaysians are on social media and at the same time another Statista report (2021) stated that in 2020, more than 76% Malaysians are on Facebook, the most popular social media platform in Malaysia.

Methods

This study examined social surveillance and empowerment via in-depth interviews with Malaysians active on social media. Seven interviews, consisted of semi-structured questions, were conducted via Facebook Messenger. The interviews were done remotely as the interviewees were from two cities in Malaysia, namely Kuala Lumpur (capital city of Malaysia) and Ipoh (capital city of the state of Perak in Malaysia) while the researcher is based elsewhere. Given that the research focused on social media, it was an appropriate choice of platform to communicate and the interviewees were comfortable and appreciated the use of this platform as it was more convenient for them. The interviewees selected are part of this population in which they are social media users who used at least two social media platforms for a period of time daily. They are active in posting and sharing on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. This adhered to the description by Verduyn et al., (2017) in which active usage included use of social media for interactions with others through posting, liking, commenting and sharing of posts. In addition to that, all of the interviewees also used social media daily for more than an hour. The seven interviewees were also selected because they fell between the ages 20 to 50 years as these are the groups with the most active internet use in Malaysia, based on the aforementioned MCMC report. The qualitative data is exploratory in nature, aimed at providing the groundwork for further research. The findings in this paper were extracted from a series

of interviews with the focus of query on social media habits and practice with specific questions about interviewees opinions on using social media for surveillance and the awareness and usage of social surveillance.

Results

Based on Marwick's three axes of power, hierarchy and reciprocity, the findings will be discussed in accordance to how the three axes are characterized within the social surveillance that users have engaged in. The social media users who were selected as interviewees because they have educational background with a specific level of media literacy as all of them were graduates or will be graduating with minimum a degree in media and communication. They were also users of social media for more than five years at the time of the interviews therefore they were experienced and knowledgeable about social media and its uses. According to their responses, they were highly conscious of security and privacy issues, thus influencing their opinions and practices in their social media usage. All the interviewees expressed the understanding that when they post something onto their social media accounts, they are exposing personal information to others, showing an awareness of surveillance. However, while they know that their information will be watched by others, they were only aware of surveillance in general, in terms of CCTVs and police use of surveillance, but did not express concern or deep insights about the matter, compared to the average American who would display awareness or in some cases, critical and negative responses towards state and corporate surveillance, relating it to infringement of privacy and stealing of personal data.

When asked about whether they engage in surveillance or social surveillance, they needed explanation about the concepts. In fact, only one interviewee actually discussed surveillance in some depth, while the others did not pick on it. One interviewee made connection to law enforcement-related surveillance (traditional surveillance forms), but still was able to discuss eloquently about social surveillance. One interviewee said the following:

"I thought you meant surveillance by law enforcement agencies ... social media as a surveillance tool for law enforcement as well as policy makers may sound like a good idea, especially among lobbyists who would, at all costs, reduce criminal behaviour on social media as well as crime rate within their neighbourhood." (Interviewee 3)

While all of the interviewees showed awareness of being watched (perceived surveillance) and the privacy concerns that could come with it, they believed that they have the ability to control the information that others could collect from their postings. This is aligned with the power axis in which the dynamics of power relation between the watched and the watcher is interchangeable and is flowing through all relationships.

With the sense of perceived surveillance, the interviewees all pay conscious heed to what they post in order to do the following. *First*, to ensure that what they post is not offensive or avoid bad or confrontative situations:

"But I am careful not to say insensitive things, unless it is to create an awareness of their own ignorance ... such as racism which is a recurring issue in my life. Some are not racist; they are just unaware of their own ignorance." (Interviewee 1)

"I experienced cyber bullying back then when I was in high school when my classmates bullied by making fun of me or names online. Back then when I was in high school I used to vent out on a blog on the days when I feel down or feel depressed on how I encounter with my classmates at school ... They happened to come across my blog and share it on Facebook. Then, I stopped blogging for a while I find out how I can private

my blog which latter I knew how to private the blog to only myself to be able to write and view it. Then, it helped when my classmates are not being able to access to my blog anymore." (Interviewee 2)

The perception of being watched led to the power of the hypothetical watcher being imposed on the adjustment in behaviour by the users. As such, this consciousness about their visibility of their extended self in the form of their social media accounts aligned with the idea of digital reputation and management discussed Duffy & Chan, (2019). Their findings showed that the imagined surveillance has instigated a variety of preemptive social media practices which is similar to the impact perceived surveillance had on the interviewees in this research.

Secondly, they have belief in their ability to make sure that they control what they want to share or what they share is protected by privacy settings: *"... my posts are not very interesting and not very personal. No skin, no face, no kids. I make my privacy settings only friends. My Instagram is public though. That has pictures of food. That's all."* (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 4, being the eldest in the group of interviewees, considered the idea of privacy and usage of the social media settings as primary to her control of the content visible to others. In this, there is a perception that the ability to adjust settings in their personal accounts as well as control in the type of content that was shared. However, it was evident that for most of the interviewees, they understood the importance of personal privacy where certain information or images were considered too personal and a factor for consideration before posting anything.

"First, I will consider my own security with a few questions. Will this content sharing be detrimental to my own personal security or my family's, such as sharing an image of my identity card or drivers' license and other personal sensitive documents? Could this post be self-incriminating where it can affect my career, where my employers may see that I had too much of a drink the previous night and made a fool of myself--an image the company could not bear to carry? Next is the question of relevancy, where if my friends should know about the content, or simply if the joke is relevant to them. Third, I would consider accuracy and accountability, where if say, I may have read a news article, but is it accurate?" (Interviewee 3)

"I will think through the consequences before posting … Let's say I am out drinking and partying my whole Sunday. Monday I don't show up to work. Obviously my colleagues know what I am up to … We don't want things we post to backfire on us later on." (Interviewee 5)

In the above response from Interviewee 3 and 5, there should be also an indication of the power relations as well as hierarchy in the form of the possibilities of the watchers being in a higher social hierarchy and thus could affect the user in some way should the watcher be offended or negatively construe the message. Therefore, because the interviewees believed that privacy and the loss of privacy is within the control of the user as users get to determine what gets posted as well as there are ways to make sure that their privacy is protected.

In extension to the previous point about users' belief in controlling what they share, some of the interviewees shared about using the posts to shape how others (watchers) view them. Their experience indicated how they made use of social media in a way that empowered them constructing a social identity to people who watch, which aligned to the reciprocity axis. One interviewee, in specific, knowingly posted specific content in order to show people she perceived to be paying attention to her account an

image that she wanted to project. It also helps her boost her confidence when she knows that people are paying attention.

"If … I have 'high' views on instastories, it kind of boosts my self-esteem … as though I am important and people are paying attention to me. 'Virtual' social life buildup literally. (I care) who actually pays extra attention on what I am doing. Sometimes we intentionally post them so they would see … (example) I would say my ex, and his gang of friends who are always after on what I am doing … to know they have seen things that shows I am happy and doing good will somehow boost the ego." (Interviewee 5)

The deliberate use of social media content to shape the way others perceive the user showed the manipulation of the act of watching by others. Vitis, (2023) pointed out that in cases of domestic abuse, abusers used surveillance tools to monitor and control their victims as it creates a sense of omnipresence (panoptic effect). Similarly, in a less violent example, Hernández-Santaolalla & Hermida, (2020) in their study of social media use for malicious social surveillance that led to negative implications for undergraduates in romantic relations, found that users use social media due to the ability to control through monitoring their partners. For Interviewee 5, a young undergraduate at the time of the interview, she made use of her social media posts to stimulate jealousy and regret in her ex-boyfriend and his friends. Therefore, evidently, the use of social media and surveillance provided self esteem boosts and perhaps, a sense of vengeance for this interviewee and this is not limited to current romantic relationships as well. Hence, while the previous researchers (Hernández-Santaolalla & Hermida, 2020; Vitis, 2023) considered the use of social surveillance in negative contexts, the use of surveillance is not always only for control and disciplinary purposes. Like the way Interviewee 5 made use of social surveillance, Talvitie-Lamberg, (2018) posited that the use of surveillance can be positive as a tool of empowerment and should not only be understood negatively.

When questioned about the use of social media as a form of empowerment, most of interviewees shared about the way social media allowed them to have ability to do good or educate others through posting and sharing of information that they deem important, even if the content could be one that is infringing the privacy of others, as long as it is positive. They believed that if the content of the posts, for example showing someone helping others, even though the photos or videos were taken without the permission of the person, it was acceptable. They did not feel that the encroachment of privacy as problematic because it was for something that the interviewees deemed as positive.

"In all due and respect, I understand the privacy of the person but if someone shared it that brings positivity to the community then it a good thing as a form of awareness that people should learn from that person." (Interview 2)

Only one showed a different view, in which he believed that there is no need to share such posts, even though the message could be positive and inspirational. This is the same interviewee who was more eloquent in the discussion of surveillance and had more concerns about privacy of personal information. *"If someone has done a good deed, let it stay among those who he has helped."* (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 5 also shared a personal experience in which she explained for deterrent, sometimes infringing the privacy of others is necessary. *"Public awareness … maybe me going and scolding doesn't make any difference, but if me using social media as tool to bring justice would work, then I would post it. Things like that gets viral very easily … Justice served sooner as well. (Example) when there are perverts molesting*

girls, when people snapped their picture and posted it, I have shared it for public safety." (Interviewee 5) Overall, the findings showed a healthy indication of awareness of perceived surveillance and the privacy problems that come with disclosure of information on social media because of social surveillance. Even so, interviewees showed that they believe that they can utilize social media and perceived surveillance to achieve certain goals.

Discussion

Marwick's three axes of power, hierarchy and reciprocity could be discussed the incorporation of the concept of empowerment. Not only the findings show alignment of all three axis of various levels, but there is also an element of empowerment in the way interviewees think about their ability to wield the social media weapon that makes use of surveillance for their benefit or needs. The findings reflected what Marwick, (2012) described users as 'strategically reveal, disclose and conceal personal information to create connections with others and protect social boundaries'. The responses of the interviewees showed that they have very strong awareness of being watched (perceived surveillance) and they utilized this fact by communicating in a way that helped them in some way. This reflected the discussion of 'digital media allow actors to change their world for the better' (Schneider & Goto-Jones, 2014) and the potential of such use to be turned into becoming collective activities where digital vigilantism can mediate campaigns to police and monitor the society (Trottier, 2017).

The axis of hierarchy is also particularly important in the consideration of the identity of the possible watchers. Again, perceived surveillance or Duffy & Chan, (2019) showed the understanding of social media's visibility meant that even on their personal accounts, users should not post in whichever manner they life as it could impact their reputation and image. This aligned with the function of surveillance as a tool to control and manage behaviour even though this time the watcher is not an institutional power that policed the population. The realisation that the users are 'permanently visible' (Manokha, 2018) meant that users have to have discipline and restraint in their social media interactions and that social media, in the end, is another form of panopticon. Similarly, Lewis, (2018), who studied the practicing of the Christian faith on social media, discussed how individuals practice their faith online and through her workshops, she found some participants being concerned about how their interacions online could be perceived by non-Christians. However, she concluded that the fact that surveillance is a factor also meant that this space can be a tool to empower the followers of the failth to facilitate better opportunities for communication.

As pointed out previously, with the use of social media, there is always the concern of privacy, which is antithesis of the practice of surveillance. When there is surveillance, there is no privacy, regardless of whether the power of surveillance is wielded by institutional and corporate powers or by the common man. In the interviews, it is interesting, to say the least, that interviewees have concerns about their own privacy but not as much with the privacy of others. The interviewees described the way they make decisions on the kind of content that they want to share as well as utilising the settings to control visibility to others. Like what Romele et al., (2017) pointed out, the idea of users being able to use the tools provided by platforms like Facebook gives them a sense of control over their visibility and that the tool of social surveillance cannot be wielded easily by everyone who watches.

Interestingly, the same careful consideration of personal privacy was not applied

when it came to others' personal privacy. The interviewees expressed some misgivings about sharing photographs or personal information about others in negative posts, they believed that if the content of the information is positive, they should share the information so that others know about the good deeds, even if personal information would be disclosed. There is a certain sense of this tool giving users the power to reward others for behaving in a manner that users think is appropriate or inspiring, without considering privacy. Most of the studies so far, particularly those that revolve around online shaming, focused on the 'shaming posts' that reveal transgressors but so far, there seemed to be a lack of discussion about the positive posts that do disregard the idea of privacy of information.

Studies typically focused also on users who gain satisfaction in fulfilling social responsibility through public shaming or online shaming (Skoric et al., 2010) and as 'social mechanism' in which authorities can mobilise the public to provide personal information to give visibility to presumed transgressors (Trottier, 2018). Through the initial findings, perhaps there is further exploration to be done to study the impact of those whose information was disclosed without their permission even though in a positive format. As the sole interviewee pointed out, some people do not want their good deeds known as it does not always end well for them:

"Such example can be seen, where in the news of a schoolgirl who made it into the news with her excellent academic results--which it was a good thing, as she became an inspiration for other aspiring students, however a handful of social media users decided to degrade such good occasion by highlighting that as a Muslim, she did not don her hijab and was 'too exposed'." (Interviewee 3)

Conversely, being conscious of social surveillance meant that they have the power to use this for impression management. As discussed by Pearce & Vitak, (2016) as well as Duffy & Chan, (2019), being conscious of being watched meant that they adjust their interactions on social media to manage the way they want to be viewed. While both set of researchers pointed out that having to adjust their social media interactions were not emancipatory, the responses by the interviewees in this research would show that having the option to shape their responses can be useful when they have the ability to judge and decide on their personal disclosure of information. As pointed out by Lyu (2016), strategic self presentation, while not always an authentic reflection of the actual individual, were often useful for the indiduals' 'enhancing and maintaining of their self-esteem as well as in obtaining others' approval'.

As this research is still ongoing and in its exploratory stages, there are limitations to its findings thus far. There is need for more interviews as the current set of interviewees were of a very specific background, hence the findings could be rather narrow. The questioning about social surveillance usage were limited to personal use but did not expand to the very real implications of social media content that could lead to doxxing and cancel culture. This consideration could be very impactful as they relate closely to consequences brought by the loss of privacy. Further discussion that differentiated the heavy users with moderate users could also provide a different view. While the responses from the interviews have been quite uniform, even though the interviewees are from very similar educational background (all of which with a degree in communication) and they show a moderately high level of media literacy, there is some slight difference in their use with the ones with higher frequency of social media usage. The interviewees who use social media between six to ten hours a day showed more tendency to post, share and comment with lesser concern about disclosure and

privacy of information. They also showed more motivation and confidence in the way social media can serve and empower them. More interviews should be done to expand and study this further. From here, there is potential for this to be adapted into quantitative surveys to gain a better overview of the bigger population.

Conclusion

Shilton, (2010) wrote that participatory sensing may 'simultaneously give people their own way to use tools and platforms of surveillance' that gives people empowerment through surveillance. The core vision centered at the use of mobile technology that led to positive community engagement. Today, mobile technology transcended from community engagement to individual empowerment in which each individual, through social surveillance, can serve more than just social roles but individual roles through construction of identities online. However, as pointed out previously, Malaysians, who are active participants of online social media activities, might not be the most knowledgeable about the existence of surveillance though they have a sense that they are probably being watched. More discussions and education about surveillance, especially social surveillance and privacy, would be of great service.

Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organization related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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