Adolescence and internet use

In this paper, I will go into detail of the threats that adolescent users are faced. And it is in the light of purging this threats that I am writing your kind office. I believe that the school is the most basic instrumental and effective institution to counter these imminent dangers to the youth. Of course the education of the teenagers is of prime concern but, moreover, your good office can be the front bearer of furthering this cause by stimulating participation and activism of the parents and of the whole local society to make cyber world a safer place for the future of the youth.

However, as like do all social media, it poses several threats to the unwary and uneducated users, and such users are especially the teenage population. Cyber issues and offenses such as bullying, privacy and security breach, identity theft, anti-social and withdrawal to society behaviors, and online predators are very serious threats to the well-being of the adolescent person. In several cases, these issues can lead to even life threatening scenarios if not remedied and prevented. The educational institution, particularly the school, is an instrumental medium for the holistic formation and awareness of the youth.

Therefore, it is their sworn obligation to equip their students with proper knowledge that will enable them to survive in society, be it in the real world or even in the cyber elm of the internet. They can then better the protection from these threats by involving the participation of the parents, and eventually advocate for programs from higher offices in order to cement social networking sites as safe place for teenage colonization.
INTRODUCTION Social Networking Sites (or SANS, for brevity) have attracted

millions of followings, and many of its users religiously inculcate the use of these sites on their daily practices (Boyd & Ellison 1).

This has paved way and redefined how people interact and do about their social lives. SANS have rapidly become a method for immunization and socializing among children and young adults Figure 1 illustrates the average age distribution across networking sites. 95% of all teenagers from 12-17 use the internet and 80% use SANS. While the rationale of social networking sites is altogether wholesome in its nature, these sites also post threats especially to vulnerable and immature audience especially in the teenage age group.

Figure 1: Average Age Distribution across Social Networking Sites Source: Google Ad Planner (United States Demographic Data 2010) While SANS cater to vast and diverse segments of the population, it is important to insider and evaluate how teenagers cope to this new social medium and how they handle their interactions. It is worth highlighting that even as early as middle school, 94. 7% of children have used SANS and 72. 4% indicate that they have encountered unwanted behavior directed to them on their social networking profile (Element 10).

In such young age, where they are most vulnerable to social stimuli and influence of others, social networking might prove to be very dangerous if not monitored. Further on this paper, issues about information that they post through SANS and their harms, Weber-bullying, online predators, and breach of privacy issues will be delved into deeper to analyze their impact on teenagers and how this matter can be avoided and remedied. 28% of

teenagers also say that they would not know what to do if they were harassed or bullied online (" A Parent's Guide 4).

By probing through the experiences of teenagers and their level of privacy and their exposure to online cruelty (if any) will hopefully lead to the betterment of protocols for such sites for better use of these social sites. The scope and limitations of this paper are the dangers faced by teenagers on SANS sites. Other risks that are not very prevalent on this age group were not considered. The facts and numbers are the ones which showcase the current scenario and risks of adolescents in their use of SANS and also what the society can do for them in order to have a more secured use of these sites.

THE SOCIAL NETWORKING PHENOMENON What is Social Networking? SANS is defined as " web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and hose made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison). In simpler terms, these are sites that allow social interaction by creating an online persona and allowing them to mingle with others in the confines of the site.

This also simulates real life since it also allows social interaction to get to know and meet strangers, in a sense this allows people to connect and " meet" in an otherwise impossible scenario in the real world. Origin and Evolution of Social Networking With the advent of popularity of the internet, SANS began with the desire for people to have a quick and convenient way

to share information with their friends and Emily (Kennedy & Mack). While there were chatting and other similar interaction services offered previously, due to demand for a medium that can accommodate a wider crowd and recreate society, this gave birth to SANS.

The appeal of these sites also grew largely because entrepreneurs started to harness these sites for promoting their businesses and so the development of this social media became popular. Backbone, the most popular SANS with no age group of people who use the internet dip below 95% of usage popularity with 800 million active members, only started as a college networking site but then vastly expanded to accommodate now the global social networking endeavor, also driven by advertisements that fueled its development. It is also the most popular SANS among teenagers (" A Parent's Guide" 4).

Why is Social Networking so Appealing? Users each have their very own profiles where they could upload pictures, videos, play games, take quizzes, and run applications. They are also empowered to freely express their own two cents with Just about anything; ranging from reflective realizations to educated opinions, where their friends in their network could also comment and share their insights and develop discussions. Figure 2 summarizes what the SANS users reveal about themselves. These are also viewable by people in their network or the whole public, if their security options are lax.

This public display is a crucial, and attractive, feature of SANS since man, being social beings by nature, have the need to interact and relate to other people. These sites became a cultural phenomenon because they provide

the venue for that, and more. Not only do these sites make Communication easier, but it also encourages other endeavors; be it doing business or establishing transactions, be it for amusement and entertainment, or be it for Just getting back with old acquaintances and meeting new people. Figure 3 shows what the users use SANS for.

Figure 2: What Users Reveal About Themselves on Source: Smith teal 12 Figure 3: How Social Networking Sites Are Used Source: Smith et al 7 Encouraging Participation For an online community, content is very important. That is why SANS aggressively encourage their users to share information regarding their selves, for without content discourse would not possible since there are no intersecting points and opinions and hence no social interaction (Social Networks Research Report 20). Also, to stand out in social sites, users must have some unique information that they can hare that can be the talk of the cyber society.

Therefore it also becomes a breeding ground for sharing controversial and scandalous topics since they are very engaging themes or similar topics that can spark up dialogue and interaction between the users, whether wholesome or otherwise. DANGERS AND RISKS FOR ADOLESCENTS Illustrated on Figure 4 are the risks and problems identified by students associated with the use of SANS. And further on this paper, these risks will be Justly classified and given proper definition. Figure 4: Risks or Problems Associated with Source: Swart et al. 60 Cyber Bullying Online bullying (a. K. A. Cyber-bullying) is a very serious issue that users of SANS face.

This is defined as using the internet or familiar technology to send or post text and/or images with the intent to hurt or embarrass another person (" A Parent's Guide 12). Since these sites are all about personal information sharing and are also designed to spread gossip fast and vastly, users can be then easily become victims. Although cyber bullying does not harm the victim physically, the impacts on the emotional and psychological aspects are devastating and can lead to depression or even to suicide (Hindu & Patching, 2010). It is alarming that in American teenagers from the age group of 12-17 have issues about online bullying (Hall).

Invasion of Privacy and Security With SANS containing so much personal information and promoting social interaction, it is no different in the real world that privacy concerns and issues are also encountered. This is according to Passbooks, Privacy Policy: Backbone is about sharing information with others -? friends and people in your networks -? while providing you with controls that restrict other third parties from accessing your information. We allow you to choose the information you provide to friends and outworks through Backbone.

Our network architecture and your privacy settings allow you to make informed choices about who has access to your information. We do not provide contact information to third party marketers without your permission. We share your information with third parties only in limited circumstances where we believe such sharing is 1) reasonably necessary to offer the service, 2) legally required or, 3) permitted by you (Backbone). While this statement may sound very encompassing and infallible, users

must be wary that the default privacy settings permit the whole public to access one's profile ND other information (Kennedy & Mack 2).

Third parties may easily access these profiles and use them in any malicious intent they desire. Also, with features that enable a user to share their location in real time could become potential accessories to robbery and even kidnapping since it can potentially provide information about a user when he or she is most vulnerable to such. Too much Information and Identity Theft With so much personal information being floundered about especially by unsecured user profiles, it becomes a serious breach when someone can easily access that data and imitate and steal one's identity.

Most SANS encourage their users to edit and constantly update their profiles: this includes adding your real name (and even nicknames that are used only with closest peers), closest friends, interests, home address and other places where you frequent, phone numbers, family and relations, and many others. " Users share a variety of information about themselves on their Backbone profiles, including photos, contact information, and tastes in movies and books. " nines & Solutes, 2005). With the available information, imposter can easily copy the identity of the users and they could even manage to verify.

In as a study, it was deemed that profiles of the users were very accurate in depicting who they really are in real life. It also highlights the way they express themselves as the year of usage lengthens. Figure 5 illustrates this. Figure 5: Do SANS profiles accurately reflect user identity Source: (Swart et al. 41) Promoting Anti-Social behavior in the Real World Through the internet

and with the popularity of SANS, the way people socialize and communicate have been drastically changed and revolutionized.

Cyber activity limits personal social interaction and may tend to promote antisocial behavior with reloaded exposure to these SANS. While SANS strengthen the bonds over people that are physically impossible to interact with, it may weaken the interaction with people that have direct contact with their lives and bring physical social isolation. With the illusion that users are always kept on the loop of things through their newsfeed and tweets of other people, they might lose grasp and interest on the things that really happen on their lives.

In a study, it showed that 1 of every 7 SANS user says that SANS increase feelings of isolation and also " Nearly 70% report reading posts from money close to them that seemed like a cry for emotional help, and while most students would offer support in some way, fewer than half would make a personal visit" (Katmandu News Network). Online Predators Online predators are criminals who preferably target teenagers with the purpose of manipulating them into meeting for sex (" A Parent's Guide).

Their modus operandi is through building trust with their victims through deceits and gaining their emotional reliance either through blackmail or guilt or similar tactics. They would then engage to be more intimate with their victim until they agree with personal meetings. Information provided by the teenagers can also be used by these predators in order to locate and access their victim. WHAT THE SCHOOL CAN DO It is important to note that SANS are not entirely bad for the development of adolescents, is should be

appreciated that they are also honing their social and technological skills through these sites.

It would be childish to think to do away with SANS since it is already a very vast social mechanism and part of the modern world that we live in. Not different from any other threat, knowledge of the nature of the threats and the possible sources and signs of these dangers will help one avoid it. The school, being a prime instrument of learning is already geared up for this task. On the next pages of the paper, the actions that the school can and should take to augment the risks are highlighted.

Inculcate SANS Awareness in Curriculum The most effective way to counter these threats is to equip the users (most especially the teenagers) with the knowledge and risks that SANS post (Swart et al 78). By doing so, the teenagers are empowered when they use such sites and are on guard with the consequences. This can be best done by tailoring educational activities. Teenagers should also be made aware of the legal ramifications by the use f such sites. This should be integrated in the school curriculum since this is a matter of societal importance and since it is the rationale of schools to prepare their students for the real world.

What should be realized is that social networking, although cyber in nature, should not be enclosed (if any) to be taught on merely Just computer classes, lest should it be disregarded. In like manner that values education is given significant importance in the curriculum, so should a media that gives the students the freedom to interact and socialize and practice these values. Although it loud be next to impossible to monitor their cyber activities, the

school should at the very least inculcate guidelines social networking behavior and etiquette.

They must be made aware of privacy, confidentiality, defamation and copyright laws that they might violate (Swart et al. 84). There are no drastic changes and even extravagant budgets that are needed instead this can be worked out Just from what the school already has. The school could perhaps inculcate Social Networking Awareness campaigns in their homeroom and values education classes. The school guidance counselor, with the duty of watching ever the social and personal welfare of the students, should be active in monitoring and implementing activities and symposiums for this awareness campaign.

SANS can make matters worse for an already problematic teenager, therefore, the school should also strengthen its programs about creating a harmonious atmosphere for students, since some of the threats in the SANS are only amplified matters in the real world (like bullying, anti-social behavior, and the like). Get Involved with the Teenagers in SANS Another approach that the school could try is to follow their flock. The working OIC here is that the school can use SANS to counter the threats of SANS. It may sound puzzling at first but it is logical.

By being involved in SANS, the school can better monitor the online activities of their students. This can be achieved by encouraging the school teachers to use SANS as a medium for their classes. The teacher can create a Backbone group for their subject and in that way monitor the interaction of his students. Through this, the teacher, an adult control, is involved in the

social network lives of the students. This will not only achieve as a monitoring instrument, but also it will give the students a social network intact with an adult with the authority to reprimand or come to their aid.

This serves as a very effective control in a set-up wherein prior there was next to none adult intervention and mentoring. This is a master stroke when we seek to remedy these threats simply because SANS derives there threats because of lack of monitoring and security. Make the Parents Aware Through the initiative of the school, it should involve the parents in the awareness campaign. With the aid of PTA meetings, the teachers can spark the activism of the parents to fight for the protection of their children in this scenario.

Parents have the primary responsibility of safeguarding and protecting their children from any threats and dangers that they may be exposed to, and SANS dangers are of no exception. In fact, parents play a very crucial role in protecting their children from negative repercussions of SANS. If they are not yet aware of their power over this matter, the school should make them see that they are very important since most SANS activities are done at home. First and foremost, they should be involved with their child's activities on the internet and talk about the activities that they engage into (" A Parent's Guide" 8).

They should also set limits and rules to what their child can do regarding online behavior and advise them to be wary of people that they don't know about. It is important that the children grasp the idea that social networking, although virtual by nature, poses like threats to that of physical socializing, such as that strangers are still dangerous in SANS and they should inform

their parents when they encounter something odd or uncomfortable while using these sites. It is also important to limit their exposure and amount of time that they spend on these sites, o as to minimize them from being subject to such risks.

Timeline of the Actions What should be the utmost concern of the school is to spreading of awareness to its students. This is not hard to achieve since there are already parts of the curricula that should cater for such issues as these. The next step is for the involvement of the teachers to the social networking lives, and then the inclusion of the parents in the awareness campaign. Through the parents' participation and discourse with the school board, better school policies and activities can be devised.

The author of this paper does not hold monopoly over what path of actions should be taken to eradicate these threats, but through the participation of the parents and then all of the local society, it may start enough movement that will generate better ways of protecting the future generation of the threats of SANS. CONCLUSION Social networking sites are full of potential threats to the welfare and safety of its users. Teenagers and young adults are most susceptible to these dangers since they are the most emotionally unstable and immature users of these sites and are the general target of many of the threats.

It should therefore be of utmost importance that they be made aware of such threats. The school is in the best position to reach out to the teenagers and spread the information and awareness regarding these threats. Discourse then among parents and teachers can and will lead to a more unified and

purposed approach in eliminating social networking risks. Ultimately, such actions could snowball and involve major changes in the whole locality and then the nation to make and help nurture a social networking climate that is safe for everyone. Works Cited " A Parent's Guide to Social Networking Sites".

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