

Candidate 2 evidence

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Social Media Breeds a New Type of Criminal

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Introduction 720 words

As a result of constant developments within our society, technology has become widely accessible across continents. However, with an increased flow of knowledge and accessibility, serious concerns have arisen as a result. 82.8% of the UK population using social media; 83% of ten-year-olds have a social media profile.¹ This is particularly shocking due to the vast amount of unsuitable content prevalent across the internet. As a result, false information can cause misconstrued conceptions surrounding aspects of society, such as crime and its frequency. In fact, a survey conducted by Ipsos of 8,000 people in countries including the UK, Austria, Croatia, the US, Algeria, Mexico, Ghana and India, found that 56% of internet users got their news mainly from social media, and 68% of those surveyed claimed social media was where false information was most spread.² This reinforces that social media channels are replacing mainstream media but are a very unreliable news outlet. This effects many aspects of society however, the over-representation of crime across social media escalates the publics fear of crime, causing inaccuracies surrounding who and where the criminals are. Interactionalists reference this phenomenon as the 'labelling theory' where the medias exaggeration of deviance from certain youth subcultures leads to 'moral panic.' This can cause referenced groups to face social exclusion and hostility from wider society, which can trigger a response of further deviant behaviour amongst the labelled group.³ My hypothesis is that this negative cycle fuelled by social media is creating a new type of criminal. This will be explored further in my first chapter; Media creates a skewed view of crime and its frequency.

¹Dixon, S.J. (2024). *Active social media audience in the United Kingdom (UK) in January 2023*. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/507405/uk-active-social-media-and-mobile-social-media-users/>.

²Survey on the impact of online disinformation and hate speech. (2023). Available at: https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/11/unesco_ipsos_survey.pdf.²

³Faucher, D.C. (2023). 3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on the Relationship Between Crime, Media, and the Public. *kpu.pressbooks.pub*. [online] Available at: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/introcrim/chapter/3-1-theoretical-perspectives-on-the-relationship-between-crime-media-and-the-public/>.

The prevalence of adolescents online exposes their underdeveloped minds to media content unsuitable for any age. Therefore, due to the impressionability of young people, concerns are raised surrounding the possibility of radicalisation, and as a result, breeding criminal behaviour. With different types of content, a constant exposure to criminal activities can create a sense of normality in relation to crimes, persuading youths to perpetrate. However, the effects of over access to social media increasingly prove to be psychologically damaging. Young minds become utterly desensitised to crime due to social media and video games, significantly increasing their likelihood for criminal offence. The YEF national youth survey suggested that 79% of those who took part thought that social media was a factor behind acts of violence committed by young people in their area, with 51% saying it was a major or the most important factor.⁴ This reinforces my hypothesis as it can be reasonably argued that a greater exposure to crime can increase deviant behaviour. This issue will be debated in my second chapter; To what extent does social media expose young minds to crime, causing them to act criminally.

With that being said, crime does not only remain offline, as social media allows an array of criminal activity to be committed online. Through advancements technologically, online users have the capability to remain nameless throughout their activity; allowing criminal acts to thrive. As a result, social media has increased the ease of committing a crime, whilst decreasing the risk of punishment. The Rational Choice Theory emphasises this idea, highlighting that individuals partake in computer crime because they believe it has a high profitability and low risk.⁵ This clearly shows that through the creation of anonymity, there is no longer a boundary preventing people from committing crimes because of fearing punishment. Whether the crime levels online are greater than offline is to be debated, yet, with most of the population having social media

⁴ Gadenne, V. and Olajide, P. (2023). *Under the influence: how harmful is social media to children and young people?* [online] Crest Advisory. Available at: <https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/under-the-influence-how-harmful-is-social-media>.

⁵ Ramirez Thompson, E. (2021). *Cybercriminology*. *cod.pressbooks.pub*. [online] Available at: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/crimj1165/chapter/module-3/>.

accounts; committing a crime is easier than ever. This issue will be finally discussed in my third chapter; How much crime is now based in the cybersphere? With this final chapter comparing the results in reference to international comparators- America and Greece.

After the three problems are reviewed, we can explore the fact that despite the benefits social media has provided, it causes society to believe that there is more crime than there truly is, and the access to information influences more people to commit crime. With researcher Vanshika Kainya claiming, “social media is a sanctuary for criminals,”⁶ this suggests that crime is being exacerbated by the public's broad utilisation of social media as a source of perpetrating and as an inspiration for crime. Therefore, social media breeds a new type of criminal.

⁶ Thukral, P. and Vanshika Kainya (2022). How Social Media Influence Crimes. *ResearchGate*, [online] 04(02), pp.198–208. Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360540601_How_Social_Media_Influence_Crimes.

Review of Research Methods 560 words

In writing this dissertation, I utilised various different methods of research, including both primary and secondary sources. Although most methodologies were effective and able to be utilised, I encountered some barriers when conducting this research. One of the primary research methods used was my participation in a group discussion with Fiona Dyer, the director of CYCJ.⁷ This was extremely useful as she discussed the current issues children of Scotland were facing, and how the Scottish Government and global organisations were attempting to solve these issues. This was effective within my research as I was able to directly link the information surrounding children and social media to crime and therefore utilise it within my dissertation. Fiona spoke about the Labelling Theory, and how groups who are labelled online are more prone to display deviant behaviour,⁸ and this reinforces the harm of social media's misinformation on perceptions of crime, which links to Chapter 1. Although, there is the possibility that Fiona may be biased due to her job being to advocate for children involved with crime, so she may be more likely to victimise all young offenders and see these issues from a distorted view. However, what she was saying correlated directly with the information I had found online within sources, such as her point about the rise in child sexual exploitation online⁹ was reinforced by Barnardo's study on digital danger¹⁰, therefore I considered what she said to be trustworthy. If I was to change anything about this method of research, I would have asked for some statistics and evidence to reinforce Fiona's statements about social media and youth crime, as this could have improved my usage of UK-based evidence to support my arguments.

⁷ See Appendix 3

⁸ See Appendix 3

⁹ See appendix 3

¹⁰ Palmer, T. (2015). *Digital dangers The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people*. [online] Available at: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/digital-dangers.pdf>.

Moreover, I accessed methods of secondary sources, such as statistics. Through utilising official websites such as the National Policing Digital Strategy (PDS)¹¹, I was able to quickly and effectively find research which directly supported my arguments and other research discoveries. This was particularly helpful as it included the latest forms of evidence surrounding online crime rates, and results surrounding the recent domination of online crime, which allowed me to draw conclusions within my points. Although, it is important to consider the reliability of certain statistics, as sample size and validity of results are not always specified and should therefore be considered as potentially unreliable. For example, on the PDS website, not all the evidence referenced in the source state their sample size. Furthermore, all the statistics utilised on this website are drawn from other sites, which means that the statistics cannot be immediately trusted as they come from various alternative websites. Despite this, the PDS is an official, national website which is held to governmental standards, which means that the information within the website is likely to be accurate and therefore making it a reliable source of information. In the future, I would improve this method of research by ensuring that the statistics I used were from representative samples and valid sources, to ensure accuracy throughout my dissertation. This would be achieved by making my own surveys to create directly linking and supporting information towards my topic of issue. This would allow me to ensure a representative sample was used while conducting the survey, and that certain societal groups or ages wouldn't dominate the results due to pre-existing ideas surrounding technology; making the results widely applicable.

¹¹ Anon, (n.d.). *The Big Picture – Police Digital Service*. [online] Available at: <https://pds.police.uk/national-policing-digital-strategy-2020/national-policing-digital-strategy-2020-2030/the-big-picture/>.

Aim 1: Media creates a skewed view of crime and its frequency. Discuss. 935 words

The role of the media is arguably to inform the public about significant political, social and economic matters within the wider society. However, some sources of news have now transformed into corrupt outlets, no longer providing reliable and accurate information when broadcasting crime. The function of this misinformation is a clear attempt to create broader engagement amongst viewers, as ‘sensational, eye-catching information’¹² is what attracts the most attention. Therefore, to maximise the success of certain news articles overexaggerated headings or images are developed when reporting about crime, influencing individuals to further investigate the issue through reading. Yet, the level of disinformation can vary, with cases of news outlets providing extreme deceiving subjects for the cause of profit. A clear example of this was in August 2017, where The Sun claimed – in 6 different articles – that Mathews Williams, murderer of Cerys Yemm was ‘demonic’, and he was a ‘cannibal’ who had eaten sections of her face.¹³ Inquest into the case discovered that there was no evidence of cannibalistic behaviour, and this severity of false information was not only harmful for those involved, but also for the general public. This reinforces that media provides a skewed view of crime, overdramatising it for the purpose of attention. Although, the prevalent issue of false information is exacerbated by people themselves sharing highly dramatized and often improbable information and articles. As a result, the misconceptions derived from an untrustworthy source create a widespread false perception of crime. This is supported by a survey in 2019 which found 42.8% of news sharers admit to forwarding inaccurate and false information.¹⁴ This exemplifies how disinformation is inescapable due to its varying forms, meaning that the chances of developing a skewed perception of crime is highly probable. Therefore, this is detrimental for not only the public but

¹² Madrid, P. (2023). *Study Reveals Key Reason Why Fake News Spreads on Social Media*. [online] USC Today. Available at: <https://today.usc.edu/usc-study-reveals-the-key-reason-why-fake-news-spreads-on-social-media/>.

¹³ Jain, L. (2018). *The top ten fake and misleading news stories of 2017*. [online] The i Paper. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/top-ten-fake-misleading-news-stories-2017-118313?srsltid=AfmBOoomYocnXoIKBkCv0kuEjEkt1lfW1ld9LICybaAGjv8psKkkhUI> [Accessed 7 Dec. 2024].

¹⁴ Loughborough University. (n.d.). *New O3C Survey Report: News Sharing on UK Social Media: Misinformation, Disinformation & Correction*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/online-civic-culture-centre/news-events/articles/o3c-1-survey-report-news-sharing-misinformation/>.

See survey poll result in Appendix 1

also the victims of crime, as their fear of becoming a victim again can be exacerbated by the disinformation about crime and its frequency, leading to moral panic.

As certain societal groups are often more likely to be involved in disinformation within crime, misconceptions amongst the public can cause alienation towards certain groups. Through the media, biased and racist preconceptions amongst online users can create an exaggeration of deviance amongst racial groups. A study conducted by the NIH discovered that black focused stories were more than two times more likely than white focused stories to be about crime – 69% and 28%.¹⁵ This highlights that the underlying racism within the media has a negative impact on ethnic minorities, leading to false and inaccurate portrayals online, which emphasizes the public's moral panic. However, this is not only an issue of importance in the UK. In America, the racial stereotypes on social media remain a prevalent issue, where Black perpetrators are similarly over-represented and treated with less dignity in comparison to white perpetrators. “News media have often reinforced a presumption of guilt and dangerousness assigned to Black people when reporting on crime while devaluing the lives of Black people and the harm they suffer when victimized.”¹⁶ : this reinforces the consequences of racially biased coverage, as the frequency of black crimes being portrayed online causes the public to have an elevated fear of Black individuals perpetrating crime. Left Realists agree with this evidence that false, inaccurate information mainly negatively impacts young black males.¹⁷ As a result, these stereotypes being portrayed through the media shine a dark light on the lives of minority groups.

¹⁵ Bjornstrom, E.E.S., Kaufman, R.L., Peterson, R.D. and Slater, M.D. (2010). Race and ethnic representations of lawbreakers and victims in crime news: A national study of television coverage. *Social Problems*, [online] 57(2), pp.269–293. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.2.269>.

¹⁶ Equal Justice Initiative (2021). *Report Documents Racial Bias in Coverage of Crime by Media*. [online] Equal Justice Initiative. Available at: <https://eji.org/news/report-documents-racial-bias-in-coverage-of-crime-by-media/>.

¹⁷Thompson, K. (2016). *Left Realist Criminology*. [online] ReviseSociology. Available at: <https://revisesociology.com/2016/09/06/left-realism/>.

Disinformation is not solely limited to skewing perceptions of perpetrators, as the frequency of crime is often misinterpreted as well. When graphic crimes tend to dominate the media, they contribute to a false perception of the frequency of crime. As media is a major source of the public's understanding of crime, over-reporting portrays the world as a frightening and dangerous place. Thus, the constant broadcast of crime leads the public to be able to imagine themselves as potential victims of these crimes.¹⁸ Reinforcing this, a survey discovered that 78% of people in England and Wales believed that crime had increased in the last few years. However, the exact opposite had happened, where crime has been declining in the last 30 years by 90%.¹⁹ This emphasizes the truly impactful role of the media and its influential nature; capable of distorting societal views of the frequency of crime. Consequently, moral panic is ensued amongst the public. Sociologist Stanley Cohen defines moral panic as a widespread fear that an evil person, group, or entity threatens a community or society.²⁰ This is amplified and sensationalised by the media, giving a rise to public concern and instilling anxiety within individuals. Ultimately, these skewed perceptions of crime can cause an unnecessary fear of being victimised, causing isolation to society- perpetrators and victims.

In conclusion, the media creates a skewed view of crime and its frequency. This is because media outlets are increasingly prioritising gaining attention and views from viewers rather than informing the public about current affairs. This means that they over-display crime online as it gains more attention due to the public's concern, which causes an array of issues. This is

¹⁸ Australian Psychological Society (2022). *Media portrayals of crime* | APS. [online] psychology.org.au. Available at: <https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/tragic-events-community-violence/media-portrayals-of-crime>.

¹⁹ Davies, T. (2024). *Most crime has fallen by 90% in 30 years – so why does the public think it's increased?* [online] Policing Insight. Available at: <https://policinginsight.com/feature/analysis/most-crime-has-fallen-by-90-in-30-years-so-why-does-the-public-think-its-increased/>.

See graph in Appendix 2

²⁰ Faucher, D.C. (2023b). 3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on the Relationship Between Crime, Media, and the Public. *kpu.pressbooks.pub*. [online] Available at: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/introcrim/chapter/3-1-theoretical-perspectives-on-the-relationship-between-crime-media-and-the-public/>.

exemplified through the development of false perceptions surrounding who the perpetrators of society are and therefore the public develop a fear of certain minority groups who are often criminalised on social media. Alongside this, it also leads the public to develop a skewed view of the frequency of crime, and this leads to moral panic as people feel like they should fear crime more than they need to. Therefore, the media creates a skewed view of crime and its frequency, which demonstrates how social media breeds a new type of criminal.

Aim 2: To what extent does social media expose young minds to crime, causing them to act criminally? 1247 words

As social media has become the predominant tool of the younger generation, they have become exposed to content and issues not suitable for their age. This comes as a consequence of the lack of effective age-restrictions surrounding certain content online, which is a particular issue with violent video games and uncensored videos. There is ample evidence reinforcing that current age-restrictions are ineffective, with studies showing that 1/3 of children aged 8-17 with a social media profile have an adult user age through submitting a fake date of birth, with 65% of 8–12-year-olds using this for TikTok.²¹ This is an issue of great significance, as in recent years social media platforms, especially TikTok, have lacked the ability to effectively monitor the content placed online. Fiona Dryer emphasizes this concern, claiming that the Internet is often used for sexual exploitation (especially with children), and that they may face being black- mailed with this in the future.²² Therefore, young minds can be exposed to concerning content which can negatively impact their psychological and physical welfare, and this exposure can range from videos of indecency, violence and evidence of various criminal acts. This glorified representation not only undermines societal norms by distorting what is right and wrong, but also misleads impressionable groups, specifically youths, into seeing crime as desirable and glamorous, and therefore, acting criminally.

As social media positions and perceives crime as a form of entertainment, this dilutes the severity of criminal acts, creating an inaccurate facade over its reality. There are many social media accounts whose sole purpose is to report real life examples of accidents, violence and criminal acts, such as TikTok account ‘makingatruecrimerer’, with 2.9million followers. With 45% of girls and 95% of boys reporting seeing violent content on social media consisting of

²¹ Yonder Consulting (2023). Report: Children’s Online User Ages Quantitative Research Study. *Children and Young People Now*, [online] 2023(1), pp.40–40. doi:<https://doi.org/10.12968/cypn.2023.1.40>.

²² Appendix 2

videos of war crimes, gore and violence,²³ this sensationalizing of criminality on social media can skew the presentation of perpetrators, inadvertently drawing sympathy and romanticizing their misbehaviour. This is evidently seen within the court case of Cameron Herrin in 2022, who committed double-vehicular homicide, killing a mother and her child. However, throughout social media platforms, Herrins' 2million+ fans pleaded his 'innocence', claiming he was "too cute" to go to prison.²⁴ This is a worrying trend online, as this idolisation of perpetrators is distorting individuals understanding of what's right and what's wrong, increasing their likelihood of offending due to confused morals.

As a result of the glorification of crime on social media, young people may be more likely to imitate and replicate criminal acts portrayed online in order to achieve a certain 'lifestyle'. With 29% of teenagers testifying seeing posts of glorifying attacks on young people,²⁵ this emphasizes the false presentation of crime online, which can create skewed morals surrounding perpetrating and lead youths to replicate this behaviour. This is reinforced by the Social Learning Theory, which suggests that we learn by observing and imitating others behaviour, especially when it is constantly reinforced. Therefore, the repeated exposure and glorification of criminal behaviour, violence and gang culture within social media leads young people to internalise these behaviours, viewing them as acceptable or even admirable.²⁶ This issue is increasingly prevalent amongst gang culture, with gangs often fabricating an enticing online presence which presents themselves as powerful figures living a glamorous lifestyle. According to Fiona Dryer, gangs utilise social

²³ Social Finance (2022). *Social media, psychological harm and violence among young people*. [online] Available at: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/8634/social-media-psychological-harms-and-violence-final-report.pdf>.

²⁴ Newsweek. (2021). *TikTok users are protesting convicted killer's innocence because 'he's too cute'*. [online] Available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/cameron-herrin-tiktok-fans-prison-sentence-1618006>.

²⁵ Youth Endowment Fund. (2024). *70% of teens see real-life violence on social media, reveals new research | Youth Endowment Fund*. [online] Available at: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/70-of-teens-see-real-life-violence-on-social-media-reveals-new-research/> [Accessed 30 Nov. 2024].

²⁶ activatingcreativetalent (2023). *The Power of Social Media & It's Negative Influence on Young People, Crime and Serious Youth Violence*. [online] Activating Creative Talent. Available at: <http://www.actcic.org.uk/the-power-of-social-media/>.

media as an organisation point for crime, allowing their criminality to be widely accessible and impactful.²⁷ This is seen within the social media presence of the Hellbaniaz gang in Essex, who portray a luxury lifestyle through their various posts flexing expensive cars, lavish gold jewellery, guns and illegal substances.²⁸ By claiming to offer financial rewards, a sense of belonging, status, and community for vulnerable youths, this especially targets marginalised teens, encouraging them to partake in criminal activities to achieve the seemingly desirable lifestyle; ignoring criminal repercussions.

As young minds are constantly being exposed to horrific acts of violence, this desensitises them from crime, increasing their chances of perpetrating. This is because their reaction to this content gradually decreases, causing them to have an impacted empathy level, as well as a changed physical and emotional reaction. This is supported through international research, where an analysis of 72 study samples showed that survey measures of empathy have declined nearly 40% in American young adults since 1979, and researchers point to social media as a culprit.²⁹ This exemplifies the consequences of social media, as the normalisation of crime across social media leads adolescents to exhibit violent behaviour that they are exposed to. As they no longer have the moral fear of committing criminal acts and are less likely to be emotionally impacted by the consequences due to their desensitisation. This means that they may actively begin seeking violence, leading them to perpetrate criminal acts. A study discovered children in grades 4 through 8 preferentially choose video games that award points for violence against others.³⁰ This shows the chokehold social medias influence has amongst young minds, where it creates an

²⁷ Appendix 3

²⁸ O'Leary, A. (2019). *UK's gang scene glorified in flashy social media brags about criminal lifestyle*. [online] mirror. Available at: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/uks-gang-scene-uncovered-social-16189451>.

²⁹ Shu-Sha Angie Guan, Hain, S., Cabrera, J. and Rodarte, A. (2019). *Social Media Use and Empathy: A Mini Meta-Analysis*. [online] ResearchGate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336326078_Social_Media_Use_and_Empathy_A_Mini_Meta-Analysis.

³⁰ American Academy of Pediatrics (2009). Media Violence. *PEDIATRICS*, [online] 124(5), pp.1495–1503. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-2146>.

elevated desire for replicating violent behaviour, therefore, increasing criminal behaviour amongst youths.

In addition to the cognitive issues that exposure to violence through social media causes, there is a secondary concern which is that social media can act as a source of inspiration and provide knowledge as to how to commit crime. This is supported by the Rational Choice Theory, which claims that a potential offender must make four choices: whether to commit a crime, whether to select a particular target, how frequently to offend, and whether to desist from crime.³¹ This means that individuals considering offending may be influenced by differing criminals and imitate their actions within their own crime, known as Copycat crime. Most of the time this imitation is derived from social media coverage, which clearly demonstrates that the accessibility of social media can provide an additional sway on youth-perpetrating through the possibility of accumulating fame and exposure for their crime. A recent example of a form of copycat crime was the riot surrounding the fatal stabbing of three girls in a dance class on August 7th. However, this was fuelled by misinformation online through X, leading to the riots shifting to forms of violence against mosques and hotels for asylum seekers.³² Therefore, because of the accessibility of crime online, people become inspired to do riots and violence in response to issues, mimicking previous ones. This clearly exemplifies the harmful risk social media poses for youth criminality, as it can become a point of influence and inspiration for their own crimes.

In conclusion, social media exposes young minds to crime and violence, influencing them to act criminally. This is because through the unenforced age restrictions online, it means that young, impressionable minds can be exposed to various acts of violence and crime, which is glamorised and glorified through social media. This can cause the youth to begin desiring a sense of criminality within their own life and engaging in crime as a result. But this over-display of

³¹ Verbora, A.R. (2023). 16.6 Rational Choice Theory. *kpu.pressbooks.pub*, [online] 16.6(16.6). Available at: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/introcrim/chapter/16-6-rational-choice-theory/>.

³² BBC News (2024). *Why are there riots in the UK and where are they taking place?* [online] BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckg55we5n3xo>.

extreme crimes can also desensitise a child, skewing their empathy and moral understanding, meaning they may be less likely to be negatively affected by violence, in turn increasing their desire to engage in violent crime. Additionally, they may take advantage of the vast array of violent content and criminal activity on social media and use it as a source of education and inspiration when considering perpetrating. Therefore, social media exposes young minds to crime and violence, influencing them to act criminally, which demonstrates how social media breeds a new type of criminal.

Aim 3: How much crime is now based in the cybersphere? 1099 words

Social media has become a significant platform for perpetrators, with crime being facilitated and directly committed online. However, with the constant development of technology, it has become increasingly challenging to monitor and eradicate various crimes online. As 90% of crimes reported have a digital element³³, social media allows perpetrators to thrive online and gives access to a vast number of potential victims. This is a significant issue, as each country faces a different rate of online crime. The UK has the highest number of cybercrime victims per million internet users, resting at 4783 in 2022, which is a 40% rise since 2020. Comparably, Greece saw the greatest decrease in cybercrime, going down 75% since 2020.³⁴ This emphasizes the difficulty in generalising the prevalence of crime online, as different countries face different risks associated with cybercrime.

As social media utilisation grows, a variety of crimes are becoming exacerbated. Along with harassment, online crimes can consist of, fraud, identity theft, defamation, sexual exploitation and revenge porn. These are typically targeted towards the vulnerable users of social media, often being young children, leading them to fall for traps fabricated by criminals. With an estimated 90 cyber-crimes against children daily,³⁵ their vulnerability is exploited online and used to the advantage of perpetrators, as the anonymity of social media along with the naivety of young people create a perfect breeding ground for crime. This encourages more criminality, as perpetrators are more likely to succeed in their criminal activities due to the average audience on social media being children.

³³ Police Digital Service (n.d.). *The Big Picture*. [online] Available at: <https://pds.police.uk/national-policing-digital-strategy-2020/national-policing-digital-strategy-2020-2030/the-big-picture/>.

³⁴ Griffiths, C. (2023). *The Latest 2022 Cyber Crime Statistics (updated December 2022) | AAG IT Support*. [online] AAG. Available at: <https://aag-it.com/the-latest-cyber-crime-statistics/>.

³⁵ Hardinges, N. (2020). *Roughly 90 online abuse crimes a day recorded against children*. [online] LBC. Available at: <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/uk/roughly-90-online-child-abuse-crimes-day-recorded/> [Accessed 16 Dec. 2024].

With the rise of social media, stalking has become increasingly accessible and easier to conduct. As many as 7.5million people are cyberstalked each year, with 41% of undergraduates experiencing cyberstalking,³⁶ showing the global prevalence of this issue, and the concerns that are arising. Social media allows perpetrators to hide behind a cloak of anonymity and gain rewards, leading stalking to potentially affect a wide range of children and leave vulnerable youths susceptible to becoming victims. As a result of the ease provided by social media, this has taken over conventional methods of stalking, with 80% of all stalking victims being tracked using technology, while 67% are stalked in person.³⁷ This reinforces the domination of online stalking rather than face to face, as social media is the perfect environment for criminal activity, as the anonymity decreases the risks of being caught, which appeals to offenders. As a result, with the rise of social media, traditional crime is facing a shift, which is leading more crime to be based in the cybersphere. This is supported by the Routine Activities Theory, which proposes that if there is a desire for crime, with accessibility and no deterrent, a crime will be committed.³⁸ This reiterates that social media is becoming increasingly appealing to individuals wanting to perpetrate, as the risks are significantly lower committing a crime online rather than in person. Therefore, this explains why cybercrime is becoming one of the fastest growing forms of crime worldwide.

Through the popularity of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat, criminal activities have evolved, causing a shift in criminality overall. As user behaviour

³⁶ Sheridan, M. (2024). *The Latest Cyberstalking Statistics for 2024*. [online] SafeHome.org. Available at : <https://www.safehome.org/data/cyberstalking-statistics/>.

³⁷ Sheridan, M. (2024). *The Latest Cyberstalking Statistics for 2024*. [online] SafeHome.org. Available at: <https://www.safehome.org/data/cyberstalking-statistics/>.

³⁸ Despres, H. (n.d.). *A Current and Increasing Problem of Anti-Social Behavior via A Current and Increasing Problem of Anti-Social Behavior via Anonymity Using Electronic Mediums Demanding Recognition as Anonymity Using Electronic Mediums Demanding Recognition as a Biopsychosocial Disorder that Perpetuates Criminal Behavior a Biopsychosocial Disorder that Perpetuates Criminal Behavior Online Online*. [online] Available at: <https://publications.regis.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1847&context=theses>.

changes and technology advances, crime follows this pattern and develops at a similar pace which can make it hard for law enforcement agencies to track and prevent these offences effectively. With the rise of deepfake technology, this has become a harmful, new development driven by technological advances. This consists of the manipulation of certain images, videos or audios on social media, portraying a different perception of the original content. This has created a new type of crime, where impersonation and slander can arise from fraudulent content, leading to defamation of an individual. In New Jersey's Westfield Highschool in 2023, teen boys created sexually explicit deepfakes of their own female classmates.³⁹ This use of AI prompts various concerns surrounding the use of technological developments for malicious purposes. With the ease of committing crime provided by artificial intelligence, existing criminals have moved online to perpetrate due to the lack of deterrent. Meanwhile this has also encouraged others new to crime to offend due to the accessibility of this modern technology. Its prevalence is strengthening as we advance technologically, and it will continue to grow as its utilisation becomes even broader. However, there are still notable differences between the prevalence of deepfakes internationally. North America had a 1740% increase in deepfake fraud in 2024, whereas Europe only had a 780% increase in the fraud detected.⁴⁰ Whilst both statistics display different rates of increase, overall, it shows concerning growth in the usage of deepfakes to emulate criminal acts online.

As crime is now transferring from in-person to online, law enforcement is now faced with new, multi-faceted challenges to combat this rapid shift. However, law enforcement agencies around the world are struggling to combat this new area of criminal activity, due to various boundaries which prevent catching a perpetrator. With social medias anonymity, criminals can use pseudonyms and encrypted communications in order to prevent the tracing of themselves and

³⁹ Cruz, B. (2024). *2024 Deepfakes Guide and Statistics*. [online] Security.org. Available at: <https://www.security.org/resources/deepfake-statistics/>.

⁴⁰ Vyacheslav Zholudev, Pavel Goldman Kalaydin, Novoselsky, A. and Petrov, T. (2024). *Sumsb Expert Roundtable: The Top KYC Trends Coming in 2024*. [online] Sumsb. Available at: <https://sumsub.com/blog/top-kyc-trends/>.

other perpetrators. Despite several apps such as TikTok and Instagram developing detection programmes to reduce the criminality on their platforms, perpetrators are finding ways to surpass this by using encrypted messages or by sharing seemingly innocent content which masks illegal activity. Through the global law enforcement operation ANOM against the encrypted communication, they discovered 12,000 encrypted devices had been used by around 300 criminals in more than 100 countries for the purpose of drug smuggling, money laundering, and organising murder.⁴¹ This exemplifies the mass scale of criminal activity that takes place online, providing areas of serious concern due to the difficulty to track these communication patterns.

In conclusion, crime is increasingly based on the cybersphere. This is due to technological advancements, as crime is able to thrive unchecked across the cybersphere, transcending national boundaries and avoiding detection. With the anonymity that social media provides, it offers a sense of security for criminals due to the reduced risks of being caught perpetrating and receiving a punishment. This allows new crimes to be created, whilst also maintaining and increasing the prevalence of other crimes such as sexual exploitation and harassment. Especially because the target audience of social media is considerably young, this means that young people are not only more susceptible to becoming victims of crime and but also may pursue a life of crime due to various influencing factors online. Social media is becoming a harbour for criminals, allowing them to unite globally with one another to organise crime and widen their reach of victims. Therefore, social media breeds a new type of criminal.

⁴¹ Kleinman, Z. (2021). ANOM: Hundreds arrested in massive global crime sting using messaging app. *BBC News*. [online] 8 Jun. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-57394831>.

Conclusion 555 words

Clearly the issues posed by social media in relation to crime are of a serious concern. This dilemma is not only centralised within the UK, as the effect of social media on youths is impacting masses of the global population, emphasizing the true scale of the issue. As it stands, technology is developing continuously, and this means that the possibilities provided by social media widens, greating the narration of crime. In particular, misinformation of crime and its frequency increases online, as it allows anybody to report, 'educate' or 'warn' others about certain aspects of crime, and thus, leading to a skewed perception of the true perpetrators and common offences. The scale of false information is seen through more than half of British social media users coming across news in the past month on social media that they thought was not fully accurate.⁴² This shows that misinformation is frequent online, and that it can be a point of concern for those who are incapable of distinguishing between true and false information. As a result, social stigmas and fears of crime progress rapidly amongst the population, leading to moral panic due to fearing becoming a victim of crime.

However, this is not only an issue of misinformation, as social media also provides a significant influential factor in persuading young people to commit crimes. With 42% of teenagers agreeing that social media is the greatest contributor towards crime and youth violence⁴³, this highlights the strength of influence that social media truly holds amongst the younger generation, as they are also fully aware of the negative effect it holds on to society. In fact, Karen ___ claimed that since the brain continues to develop until the age of 25, young people are at a significantly

⁴² IS INFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND CORRECTIONS SURVEY REPORT, M. (2018). *O3C 1 NEWS SHARING ON UK SOCIAL MEDIA* ANDREW CHADWICK & CRISTIAN VACCARI. [online] Available at: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/media/research/o3c/Chadwick%20Vaccari%20O3C-1%20News%20Sharing%20on%20UK%20Social%20Media.pdf>.

⁴³ Yates, J. (2024). *Social Media and Violence Amongst Young People: A Growing Concern* | Youth Endowment Fund. [online] Youth Endowment Fund. Available at: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/social-media-and-violence-amongst-young-people-a-growing-concern/>.

greater risk from technology as it can interrupt the development of the brain.⁴⁴ As a result, this can affect their judgement skills and influence a life of crime as seen online. Especially as social media can portray a glamorous lifestyle of criminals, for young minds, this can easily alter their perception of criminality and the balance between consequences and rewards when perpetrating. Therefore, the skewed perceptions of crime drive a newfound motive for crime and therefore influences youth criminality.

Moreover, crime is beginning to establish its presence on the cybersphere. As social media offers various platforms and areas for communication and interaction, this can become the perfect hub for criminality. This is because of the anonymity social media provides, which allows criminals to gain security whilst committing crime, as well as alleviating the threat of being caught. In the 2024 London mayoral elections, ¼ of all candidates were subjected to defaming websites created using their name. This led to hundreds of bot accounts being created, as well as reputationally breaking content being posted on these websites.⁴⁵ Although this may not be illegal, anonymous harassment and defamation is very difficult to track due to the namelessness of social media, which can therefore harbour endless possibilities of untraceable crimes.

Therefore, despite continuous efforts to prevent the greatening impact of social media on criminality, its effect is still widely seen across the globe. Youths are in a position of vulnerability due to the openness of social media, and this is radicalising the morality of individuals online. Breeding a new type of criminal amongst the new generation.

⁴⁴ See appendix 4

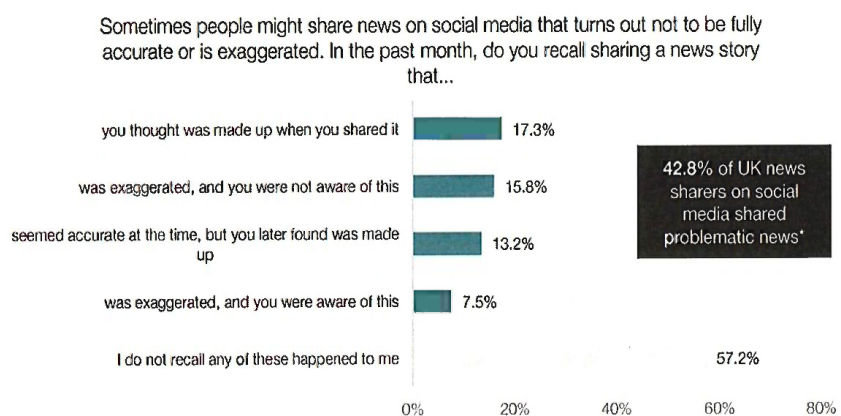
⁴⁵ Rufo, Y. (2024). *London mayor election: Bots, misleading URLs cause voter confusion*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68923015> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2024].

Appendices

Appendix 1: Result of users sharing false information

Source: Loughborough University. (n.d.). *New O3C Survey Report: News Sharing on UK Social Media:*

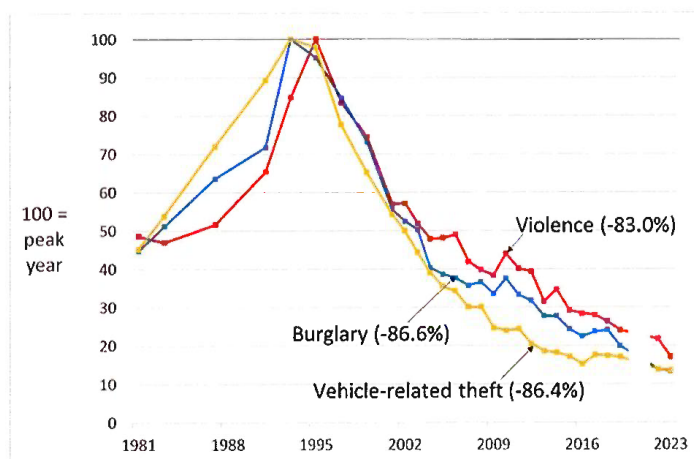
Misinformation, Disinformation & Correction. [online] Available at: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/online-civic-culture-centre/news-events/articles/o3c-1-survey-report-news-sharing-misinformation/>.



* The total is more than 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one answer from among options 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Appendix 2: Decrease in Crime

Source: Davies, T. (2024). *Most crime has fallen by 90% in 30 years – so why does the public think it's increased?*
[online] Policing Insight. Available at: <https://policinginsight.com/feature/analysis/most-crime-has-fallen-by-90-in-30-years-so-why-does-the-public-think-its-increased/>.



Appendix 3: Conference meeting with Fiona DryerLocationDate: 27/11/24

- o Poor parenting is less influential on teenagers than the impact of peers and their pressure.
What is seen on social media can influence teens into recreating crime
- o Social media has a great impact on youth crime. Social media riles up the criminality of individuals through their beliefs being conflicted online
- o Internet is also used for sexual exploitation (especially with children), and then they may face being black- mailed with this in the future —≥ when these offences were written they didn't consider the impact of media
- o Easier access to crime online- gangs arranging fights through social media
- o Social media riles up crime rates e.g. riots, criminal exploitation, bullying
- o Information of crime is shown through the media (labeling)
- o 2004 Antisocial Behavior Legislation, this focuses strongly on the behavior of young people
- o Increase in Antisocial behavior following Covid, and free bus passes have given children more opportunity to commit crime
- o We often get our information surrounding the justice system through social media.

Appendix 4: Scottish Sentencing Council KarenLocation:Date:27/11/24

- o Determine seriousness, culpability of offender, harm caused or could have been caused to victim
- o Seriousness, level 1,2 and 3
- o Sentencing range- A= community payback order, B= community payback C= fine of up to \$10,000
- o Aggregating factors, more than one person killed, victim was a vulnerable road user
- o Mitigating factors, driver sustained serious injury, previous good driving record
- o To this guideline a young person is aged under 25
- o Young people may not have full maturity- leads to lower culpability, may have greater potential to change
- o The brain continues to develop until the age of 25, however, constant technological use can hinder this development —≥ although age does not stop a judge from sentencing a harsh punishment on a young person
- o Sentencing young people- emphasis on rehabilitation – this doesn't prevent imprisonment if the crime is serious enough
- o Website- scottishsentencingcouncil.org.uk
- o High end community payback- up to 300 hours of unpaid work, 2 years of regular meeting with social worker, a program to address an issue e.g. drug use
- o Community sentences can be very challenging- even more challenging than a short prison sentence
- o Reasons for optimism: 2021-22 crime was down by 51% since 1991
- o Online crime has gone up significantly in cases of fraud, and this means sentencing for fraud has changed and become more difficult to hammer down

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