

Craving freedom, we become slaves

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Comment

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OF late, US President Barack Obama has voiced what is on everyone's mind — the "perils" of the Internet, especially the social networking, that is now becoming trendy and popular among all ages, rightly or wrongly.

In what he called "the YouTube age," he cautioned youngsters "to be careful about what you post on Face-book" (assuming this is just an example), because it could come to haunt them later.

This advice follows a recent study which reportedly suggests that employers in the United States are increasingly turning to such sites to conduct background checks on job applicants.

A recent survey by one Career-Builder.com found that 45 per cent of employers used social network sites to research job candidates.

Allegedly, some 35 per cent of the employers surveyed said they had found content on the sites that had influenced them to reject a candidate.

Examples included inappropriate photographs, information about the applicants' drinking or drug use, or bad mouthing previous employers, co-workers or clients.

Notable figures from the survey include 53 per cent of candidates posted provocative or inappropriate photographs or information and 44 per cent, posted content about them drinking or using drugs.

About 35 per cent bad-mouthed their previous employers, co-workers or clients, 29 per cent showed poor communication skills, 26 per cent made discriminatory comments, 24 per cent lied about qualifications, and 20 per cent shared confidential information from previous employers.

Issues of cyberbullying and cyber-stalking have also been raised, while ever more criticisms were levelled at such sites, including invasion of privacy.

"Social networking is a great way to make connections with potential job opportunities and promote your personal brand across the Internet," said Rosemary Haefner, vice-president of Human Resources at Career-Builder.

"Make sure you are using this resource to your advantage by conveying a professional image and underscoring your qualifications."

But this dilemma has never been sufficiently highlighted when it comes to technology that is as transparent as the Internet.

On the contrary, it has become a haven for liars and rumour-mongers hiding behind the anonymity, unsuspected by others.

While the good side of technology is often advocated, its downside is not so, leaving an impression that technology is a panacea for rapidly expanding society.

We forget that technology is just a tool, usually far from perfect, but could help if properly utilised. Like all machines, there are the do's and don'ts that users must be made aware. But this is hardly the case.

Even information as crucial as the health impact of technology is not forthcoming, again adding to the impression that all is well.

It is not surprising therefore that a recent Synovate's poll on cellphones found that most users admit that they cannot live without the gadget (perhaps, an early indication of a kind of dependency syndrome).

Reportedly, some two-thirds of respondents go to bed with their phones nearby and would not switch them off, even though they want to, because of the fear that they would be missing out on something.

It boggles the mind how we crave freedom and autonomy, but then become slaves to a lifeless machine.

If that is not bad enough, consider the finding of another study in a neighbouring country (Straits Times, Sept 6) where more and more youngsters — including pre-pubescent children — are said to be involved with sex, and the Internet is said to be blamed.

Now, with Internet converging on to the cellphones, things could become worse. Already in the first half of the year, some 37 cases of statutory rape involving girls under the age of 14 were reported by the study — an increase of more than 70 per cent from the same period last year.

Moreover, while this used to be a problem associated with dysfunctional homes; today, increasingly, it commonly involves what was described as "very loving families".

We have not begun talking about Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) which is emerging everywhere, again among youngsters.

The US has just opened its first addiction recovery programme for IAD called, reSTART (<http://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/the-problem/signs-and-symptoms.html>), a programme designed to take serious sufferers of IAD and bring balance to their lives.

In this region, Korea, Japan and lately, China, are involved, thanks to their sophisticated hi-tech info-structure, but relatively poor hi-touch.

Are the scenes in Malaysia any different? It is a matter of time, given that our info-structure is still developing.

But why are we not pre-empting it before IAD worsens, unlike the experiences with intractable drug abuse problems we have been condemned to for more than three decades now.

Because, by the time we are aware of it, it is already too late.

It is therefore laudable if similar issues are taken up by the National IT Council that had its first meeting, chaired by the prime minister recently, so that we can be more accountable when it comes to balancing hi-tech and hi-touch, moving forward.

Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri to all Malaysians.

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