Passive Communication & Social Networking: Initial Results of Facebook Use and Cyber Stalking in Japan

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Abstract

This study looks into “stalking” and “cyber stalking” as found in the social networking site (SNS) Facebook. It begins by discussing the differences between virtual and terrestrial stalking, whether stalking via Facebook is viewed as problematic, potentially harmful or just a simple form of interaction known as “passive communication.” This concept describes communicative messages from a sender to unintended destinations who passively receive the message. This paper focuses on a Japanese population and seeks to learn how they use social networking sites such as Facebook as well as how they feel about potential negative side effects of SNSs, such as online stalking behaviors. Results show Japanese people use Facebook much less frequently than other social networking sites, that they are aware of the problem of cyber stalking but have varied levels of concern and minimal firsthand experience with it. Caveats of this present study as well as ideas to extend this body of research in Japanese populations are also offered.

Introduction

The Internet has pervaded the lives of most, if not all members of modern society. The cyber world, as life “online” has come to be known, can be seen as an extension of the real world. It is another realm of our daily lives where we can study, play and work. This world of seemingly limitless information and contacts with a limitless number of people anywhere on the globe has had enormous benefits in our society. People can hunt down virtually any type of factoid they seek. At the same time, they can also “hunt down” any type of person they are looking for, whether it be as a friend, a boy/girl friend, or a social contact for some specific purpose (job hunters, people with shared hobbies, etc.). The desire to make new friends online via social networking sites (SNSs) has increased dramatically in recent years. A social networking site is “an online location where a user can create and share a self-profile, seek and build relationships with other users, and connect to others via personal networks” (Zengyan, Yinping & Lim, 2009). As one researcher notes, “Social networks is the highest growing web-application in terms of users” (Sorensen, 2009, p. 427). But when people seek out others (for whatever reason), they can tend to lose their inhibitions (Chik, 2008). While some people innocently join an SNS to make friends, or find a long lost friend from their school days, others create new “cyber versions” of themselves. This can be in the form of avatars for online gaming or other online personas that allow them to participate in cyber activities. Sometimes true identities are revealed, but sometimes anonymity is kept (for a variety of reasons). In cases where people “hide” behind the perceived security blanket of online anonymity, it sometimes “emboldens people to act as they may not normally
do offline” (Chik, 2008, p. 13). It is in these cases where problems can be found in cyberspace that have negative effects in the real world.

In the cyber world, when people are the receivers of communication from others that was not intended for them, they can be said to receive messages via passive communication. This preliminary study investigates whether social networking sites in Japan promote a type of “passive communication” which can lead to an increased level of tolerance of stalking behaviors, such as that which occurs online and is known as cyber stalking. This paper can be considered one step in a longitudinal study of both a Japanese population as well as a U.S. population of subjects who have experienced this phenomenon. In our effort to learn about this growing type of communication and its potential effects on net users, this research strives to better understand the possible dangers that come from joining the very public world of SNSs, which are on the increase in Japan. Through this research, conducted through quantitative methodology, it is hoped that the findings will lead to work that helps reduce the possibility of people being victims of cyber stalking in Japan.

The enormous rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the accompanying popularity of social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, has caused much research to focus on this unique way of communicating. Such communication on the Internet is often asynchronous, “meaning messages sent between two individuals may be staggered in time, and individuals have the ability to send, receive, save, or retrieve messages at their own convenience” (Bronander, Urso, Davis, Barko, Hausman & O’Toole, 2009, p.3). That is to say that the response rate (and physical distance) between sender and receiver makes the synchronous nature of traditional face to face communication much different from asynchronous communication that takes place via computers. Mentioned earlier, one of the biggest negative side effects of such asynchronous CMC has been the resulting “hunting” of people via what is now called cyber stalking (cf. Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002).

Research has shown that CMC can create a misperception of reality in some people (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). Cyber stalking has become such a legal nuisance in developed countries that it has been “translated into law in larger jurisdictions with more matured technological infrastructure such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Japan (Chik, 2008, p. 14). The rapid increase in how people use CMC may come from a desire to escape the restrictions of reality. People may say “what I do in the cyber world can never be found by anyone else” so they dive in without fear of consequence. This is done through the use of anonymity. Yet, the boon of anonymity can also be a bane. Even people that have perfectly ordinary profiles and lead ordinary lives offline can display a different personality in the digital realm - something more playful or open, but also sometimes something more sinister, giving in to the temptation of deviant behavior induced by the drug of anonymity (Chik, 2008).

Computer-mediated communication is a form of technology which allows users total anonymity, and this act of not revealing one’s name when using CMC may also decrease one’s inhibition when it comes to self disclosure of personal information (cf. Basu & Jones, 2007; Roberts, 2008; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Pseudo-anonymity allows people to act out their fantasies and to speak or express their innermost thoughts, which can be illegal, offensive or objectionable, that they may be proscribed from doing in real life. They do this under the impression that there are no social repercussions and that they cannot be traced. This stems from a false sense of security against both the detection of identity and the vigilance in enforcement of the law (Chik, 2008).
Stalking

Stalking has received increased attention in both scholarly research and in the news in recent years. Sadly the reasons for this can be said to be an increase in stalking cases and the recognition of government to (finally) recognize this problem and take steps to outlaw such behavior. Spitzberg and Cupach (2003) explain stalking this way: “Somewhere at the nebulous nexus of privacy and possessiveness, courtship and criminality, intrusion and intimacy, lies the phenomenon of stalking” (p. 345). Other research notes that stalking can take many forms, including electronic communication including phone calls, e-mails and instant messages (Holmes, 2001). More detailed work on stalking tactics by Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) offers a typology of eight different stalking tactics. Those relevant to electronic media are summarized here. The first is mediated contacts, which involves all communication efforts done through technologies, such as e-mail, cell phones, and social networking sites. Surveillance tactics, as the name suggests, include efforts on the part of the stalker to get knowledge or information about his/her intended victim without the victim knowing it is happening. Even though that type of stalking behavior would seem to fit easily into behaviors that can easily be done on the Internet via SNSs, the authors note that “Interestingly, although this activity is commonly associated with stalking, by itself it would rarely qualify as stalking because of its typically covert nature” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007, p.71). Invasion activities are directly related to proximity between stalker and victim, and involve an invasion of legal boundaries, such as breaking into the victim’s home, workplace or vehicle. Harassment and intimidation tactics involve verbal and nonverbal activities such as spreading rumors and harassing the victim’s other friends. Like surveillance tactics above, such intimidation tactics seem easily achieved given the very public nature of SNSs, where not only profiles and personal interests of account users are visible, but so are daily activities (e.g. “Today I’m meeting X for lunch at ...”). Too much information, it seems, would be readily available for potential stalkers to use if their goal is harassment and intimidation of the victim. Physical aggression and violence are the final stalking tactics (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

When stalking does occur, it most often happens between people who know each other (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003, 2007; Spitzberg, Nicastro & Cousins, 1998; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Wright, Burgess, Burgess, Laszlo, Mccrary & Douglass, 1996). Interestingly, however, research has shown that people were far less likely to describe someone as a stalker if they were involved in an earlier intimate relationship with that person (Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld & O’Connor, 2004). With the unique ability of the Internet to get rid of social reality and real time, yet allow real (albeit electronic) communication with others, this may actually strengthen mediated contacts’ ability to serve as a stalking tactic (Meloy, 2001). This idea that real time is eliminated is relevant to the use of passive communication on the Internet, which this paper strives to learn more about. Although the literature on stalking (including cyber stalking) continues to expand, not enough of it focuses on those factors that influence individual perceptions of stalking (Phillips et al., 2004).

Stalking is not limited to Anglo populations, yet not much research has been done on non-Anglo subjects. In early research by Cupach and Spitzberg (2004), out of a total 149 sample populations, only 2 were based on Japanese (1% of the total). Stalking is prevalent in Japan, yet laws recognizing it and outlawing it were only enacted in 2000. In the law of 2000, stalking is defined as “a persistent pattern of action that prevents the victim from leading a safe and normal existence” (Matsumoto, 2002, p. 1). In
early research, Yoshihama and Sorenson (1994) reported that over 75% of subjects in Japan experienced at least one type of intimate aggression. Yokoi (1998) investigated Japanese stalking cases and revealed typical aspects of stalking (e.g., destruction of property, intimidation, theft, sexual assault or rape), but lower levels of threat and physical assault than is typical of stalking in the U.S. Omata (2002) surveyed over 400 female Japanese junior college students and found that nearly 17% of respondents experienced persistent stalking. Suzuki (1999) found that 7.2% of females in Japan had been stalked, and 54.9% of the behaviors victims experienced were in electronic form (telephone calls, excessive use of pagers, etc.).

Chapman & Spitzberg (2003) compared U.S. and Japanese populations and found 20.3% of Japanese subjects were “persistently pursued.” Gender differences showed that 17.9% of all males and 22.2% of females in the Japanese sample indicated they had been pursued in unwanted ways. Japanese victims perceived the behavior they experienced as more threatening (51.1%) than did their U.S. counterparts (41.2%). Regarding the types of stalking behaviors experienced by the Japanese, the non-physical behavior of sending “affection messages” (e.g., romantically-oriented notes, cards, letters, voice-mail, e-mail, messages with friends, etc.) was most prevalent. As for cultural differences between the Japanese and U.S. populations, Japanese reported some physically intrusive behaviors as occurring more frequently. They include sexual coercion, being watched, being physically threatened, being physically hurt and having one’s personal property invaded. These results may help explain why the Japanese felt, overall, that their experiences were more threatening than did U.S. subjects (Chapman & Spitzberg, 2003). Further research by the same authors the next year showed that 26.9% of Japanese reported some type of “unwanted harassment in pursuit of intimacy” (Chapman & Spitzberg, 2004).

This body of research by the first author, however, was not directly related to stalking in cyberspace. It did not specifically address computer-mediated communication (such as social networking sites), and stalking behaviors. The problem of stalking in Japan is not going away. One Tokyo police report found that 54% of stalkers waited for and followed their victims, 53% pressured their victims to meet, while 31% called their victims on the telephone but did not say anything. As for the motive, the same report states that for 65% of stalkers, their reason for stalking was emotional attachment to the victim. Another 33% did it because of unreciprocated love, meaning that 98% of all reported cases were driven by feelings of desire (Larkin, 2007).

There is little doubt that crimes specifically related to cyber space are increasing in Japan. In 2010, the National Police Agency of Japan stated that cyber crimes are on the rise every year and “more advanced and diversified tactics are being employed” in pursuit of such crime (National Police Agency, 2010, p. 64). Unfortunately, the crime of cyber stalking did not receive any specific attention in that report. The only category of related crime in this realm was called “crimes related to online dating sites.” The definition given for those sites is eerily similar to that of normal (i.e., non-romantic) network sites:

Websites which render services for people who want to socialize with unknown people of the opposite sex, where relevant information regarding such people is posted on the Internet so that website users can access this information and maintain communication with the concerned person through electronic mail or telecommunication (National Police Agency, 2010, p. 65).

Sadly, however, no data was found from the government on the rate of stalking in cyber space. Nor
were there any law enforcement measures taken up to 2010 that specifically addressed cyber stalking (the only changes to the law, called the Online Dating Site Regulation Act, were methods to enforce the ban of children from such activities). There is a clear need for more law enforcement acts to address and prevent the unique type of stalking that occurs in cyber space, including a definition of what constitutes cyber stalking behavior in Japan. The simple fact is that not enough research is available in the realm of CMC-based stalking in Japanese populations. It is for this reason that this paper should be considered a preliminary step toward developing a larger body of work addressing the literature gap on stalking behaviors in the context of using social networking sites in Japan.

Computer-Mediated Communication, “New Media” & Social Networking Sites

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be described as the social interactions between individuals through the use of the Internet (Southard, Panasci, Vritrtle, Mitchell & Onderko, 2007). With the help of CMC, people anywhere and anytime can join together to connect and share ideas. One of the biggest advantages that CMC is said to provide is the ability of expanding one’s social network (Orr, Sisic, Ross, Simmering, Arseneault & Orr, 2009). Mentioned earlier, the benefits of CMC seem limitless. Besides the limitless amount of information available to the curious user, those who seek an expansion of their social network have many choices when they use social networking outlets to communicate with others or in a more targeted manner, connect with people who have the same interests. CMC is part of what is now referred to as “new media.”

New media allow for the combination of words, images, and sound in a single format, revolutionizing the way Internet users experience information. Many new media messages are asynchronous, meaning the receiver and sender do not have to be present at the same time in order to communicate. During asynchronous communication, the control of time is put in the hands of the individual receiving the message (Bronander et al., 2009, p. 7).

But this asynchronous communication is not the only type of communication available in the world of CMC. Real-time interaction, or nearly synchronous communication, can take place in the form of instant messaging or participating in chat rooms. One difference between new and old communication technology so prevalent today is what has been called “demassification.” Ruggerio (2000) explains part of the demassification of technology, writing “unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs” (p. 16). How people cater their own personal messages is most easily seen in daily “tweets,” which are sent via Twitter, or on “wall” posts on Facebook. Twitter is similar to Facebook in one big way: just as Facebook users can update their status, Twitter is also focused on status updates, called “tweets” (a short messaging service that allows people to share their “status” with followers in their network). These tweets are very similar to Mixi, based in Japan, and offers essentially the same type of service (detailed later in this paper).

The realm of CMC provides net users who do not feel comfortable communicating face-to-face and therefore prefer less direct, more asynchronous interpersonal communication (Gillespie, 2006; Rogers, 1986; Ruggiero, 2000; Southard, Panasci, Brittle, Mitchell & Onderko, 2007; Trenholm, 2007; Walther, Heide, Kim, Westerman & Tong, 2008). When looking at what variables some users value when avoiding interpersonal communication, research has suggested that anonymity, the perceived ability to
control conversations, and eliminating the concern about the concept of physical attractiveness are some of the reasons people use CMC (Orr, Sisie, ROs, Shimmering, Arseneault & Orr, 2009). It is this “type of asynchronous communication, in the context of the Internet, [that] facilitates passive communication” (Bronander et al., 2009, p. 8). One of the most pervasive ways in which one can experience passive communication is through participation in a social networking site (SNS). Briefly introduced earlier, SNSs have been defined in many ways, but for the purposes of this study, a social networking site is defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social networking sites such as Facebook, or Mixi and GREE in Japan have become a ubiquitous part of many people’s lives. Why have SNSs become such a normal part of our daily lives? The answers to that question seem ever-growing as the platforms evolve to make SNSs more user-friendly and rewarding. What started out as a way to find old classmates from school has grown into an easy way to keep the world informed of our daily lives, and to be informed of the lives of others who we have “allowed” to be part of our network. To begin with, a user on an SNS needs a personal profile, and this ability to make one’s own unique personal profile has contributed to the popularity of SNSs. After creating such a profile, which includes a certain level of self-disclosure on any number of topics (from the most mundane of age and hobbies to political and religious perspectives, among others), the disclosure of such information and personal interests facilitates users to connect with people of similar interests within that network. In short, “SNSs present individuals with the opportunity to form network connections and become ‘friends’” (Bronander et al, 2009, p. 9). After users become “friends” with other network members, they are then able to access each other’s profiles. There are differences in privacy settings that determine what amount and type of disclosed information a “friend” can view (and those privacy settings are customized by each individual network user). As Guo (2008) notes, SNSs have contributed to changing and redefining how the current generation interacts.

The Use of Social Networking Sites in Japan

In recent years, Japan has seen some social networking sites (SNSs) explode, while others have seen a smaller amount of growth in popularity. Those SNSs currently popular in Japan are Mixi, GREE and Mobage Town. Among those three, the most popular SNS among young people are Mixi and GREE. (Mobage Town is considered far more game-centered than the other sites, as opposed to a place to “connect” with friends and share daily updates. It is a social network with a focus on delivering fun in the form of entertainment-based experiences to its users.) GREE is an online community where users can socialize with each other through avatars, online games as well as other experiences such as earning or buying “virtual goods.” Mixi tends much more toward the communication aspect of using its site. It offers a network experience of real life friends with different social applications that allow users to share similar experiences. Mixi users post photographs, share comments and links, and interact on community pages that have become huge forums based on themes as diverse as recipe-sharing and Michael Jackson (Tabuchi, 2010). This is not unlike Facebook, but it has done so in a way that made it much more popular, including making its mobile app available much earlier than Facebook.
Mixi allows users to keep a web diary and upload social and game applications. Two new features — Mixi Check and Mixi Check-in — which mirror Facebook’s “share” feature and its map location option respectively (Koh, 2010). Noted earlier, of the people who use social networking sites in Japan, over 75% said they only accessed social networking sites from their mobile phone (Social Media Today, 2010).

Facebook, on the other hand, has been struggling to get the large numbers of users that its rivals at Mixi and GREE have found. Facebook is an SNS created by Mark Zuckerberg and introduced to the world on February 4th, 2004 (Guo, 2008). Since its introduction, it has become immensely popular in the U.S. and many other countries. “The attraction to FB is simple; students want a place of their own to communicate freely with peers” (Stern & Taylor, 2007, p. 9), but that attraction does not seem to have carried over to the Japanese population yet. These days, Facebook is not limited to university campuses as it was when first introduced in the U.S. These days, it is widely used the world over not only by individuals, but by organizations as diverse as small business and multi-national corporations to promote their products, to governments and NGOs to share their messages with the populace. Facebook is now available in more than 70 languages, but was just introduced in the Japanese language from mid-2008 (Tabuchi, 2010). It has almost doubled its subscriber base in Japan in 2011 to about 2.2 million, but it ranked 49th in terms of total users registered around the world for the service, with the U.S. topping the list at 148.9 million (Alpeyev & Eki, 2011). Facebook users in Japan number less than 2 percent of the country’s online population. That is in sharp contrast to the United States, where 60 percent of Internet users are on Facebook. Up to now Japanese have been using the other well-known social networking sites and game portals (Mixi, GREE and Mobage Town). As Tabuchi (2010) confirms, each of those Japanese-based SNS “has more than 20 million users, and each offers its own approach to connecting people online.” Because of this, FB is nowhere near being the most used social networking site in Japan.

In 2010, GREE overtook Japanese social networking giant Mixi to become the leader in the market. At that time, GREE reported that 21.25 million users were registered members by the end of July 2010, just beating out the 21.02 million members on Mixi (Poole, 2010). Other research describes similar, but higher numbers, showing GREE has 22.5 million members in 2010, overtaking the 21.6 million members on Mixi. Even lesser-known Mobage has 21.7 million users (Tabuchi, 2010). Whichever numbers one chooses to accept, both dwarf the number of FB users. Facebook, boasting more than 700 million users worldwide (as of late 2011) has a valuation above $80 billion, and says it is focusing on expanding in Japan and Russia, according to Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg in July, 2011. It will have a hard time catching up with Mixi, which began social network operations in 2004, which has roughly 10 times the number of Japanese Facebook users (Alpeyev & Eki, 2011). But Facebook is making specific efforts to woo the Japanese population. In an effort to bring Japanese users into the Facebook world, the company decided (in late 2010) to launch a cross-platform feature that will allow users of Facebook and Mixi to link to each other’s profiles. This also allows users to share links, videos and photos (Koh, 2010).

**Personal Privacy vs. Public Exposure on SNSs: How Much Should I Share?**

Increased use of SNSs such as Facebook has resulted in some concerns about how much disclosure
people share on their profiles. The act of sharing personal information with others is called self-disclosure. “Self disclosure is the voluntary act of providing personal information about oneself. The levels of self disclosure when communicating face-to-face versus CMC differ. Interpersonal impressions made online differ from those made offline” (Bronander et al., 2009). Yet some research has said that in some instances, CMC leads to more self disclosure (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther et al., 2008). The ease of misrepresenting oneself online has been discussed in recent studies (Roberts, 2008; Walther et al., 2008).

For users of Facebook, there is no shortage of choices one can make when sharing personal information. You can share your status “now,” (“I’m going out for dinner with .... now.”) as well as almost any photograph including those of anyone else, phone numbers, thoughts on current events, religious and political views, favorite music, movies and books, etc. Sharing personal information on Facebook differs from self disclosure on other forms of CMC, where there is not a “wall” to post on that focuses on only one member of that network. Facebook members can write anything they like about someone or may post pictures showing another individual with or without their approval. Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza (2008) found reading and responding to comments/posts on one’s page/wall was an extremely popular activity among participants. As SNSs continue to grow in popularity, concern regarding personal privacy in the U.S. continues to increase (Lewis, Kaufman & Christakis, 2008). That is not a problem limited to western countries, however. Tabuchi (2010) noted that in a survey of 2,130 Japanese mobile Web users, 89 percent of respondents said they were reluctant to disclose their real names on the Web, explaining what specialists say is a tendency for “many Japanese use Web anonymity to express themselves, free from the pressures to fit into a conformist workplace.”

The Japanese online community has always been known to value anonymity. Past research also shows that compared with Westerners, Japanese tend to have a higher fear of negative appraisal and low levels of self-disclosure (Acar, 2011). They always seem to hesitate to communicate something that may be perceived as “going against the flow” or disrupting the harmony of a smooth situation. Besides this general tendency to avoid being “the nail that sticks up [and then] gets hammered down,” when online, Japanese have a strong desire to not be known. That is to say that privacy and anonymity are highly prized. This one aspect of Japanese society is common to websites in Japan: a commonality that is crucial to Japanese people’s “fiercely private” Internet users. Japanese sites allow members to hide their identities, which is in direct contrast to the real-name, oversharings hypothetical user on Facebook (Tabuchi, 2010). Described earlier, the three most popular SNSs in Japan are Mixi, GREE and Mobage Town, although Twitter is also becoming more popular in the last 12 months. From among these sites, “Mixi is better suited for Japanese users because it gives subscribers more control over who sees their content and personal data is more secure (Alpeyev & Eki, 2011).

In any case, the key concern seems to be privacy. There are privacy settings on Facebook that allow users to determine the settings of almost every part of their profiles. But not all people are aware of these settings. Stern and Taylor (2007) found several students did not know of the confidentiality options and did not know who could access their profiles. Although users disclose information on their page with the intent to share with a desired audience, this information can be seen by people outside of these intended destinations. “The privacy setting options on Facebook raise unease among some users, as the realization that settings may only offer the illusion of privacy” (Bronander, et al., 2009, p. 12).
Regardless of the privacy settings one chooses, the larger his/her network of "friends" is, the larger the chance that information from one’s profile will make its way to unintended destinations, the very characteristic of passive communication. Related to the amount of information that users may want to keep "under wraps" or at least limited to people personally know, Lewis et al. (2008) suggest, "More active users may have more elaborate profiles, and thus may have ‘more to hide’" (p. 82). Even if a student limits his profile to be viewable by “friends” only, the unclear definition and inconsistent interpretation of Facebook “friends” often decreases the credibility of this privacy limitation (Stern & Taylor, 2007; Walther et al., 2008; Zywica & Danowski, 2008). “Not knowing which users will see the information indicates the existence of unintended destinations, or the people who are able to see the information one posts whether intended for them to see it or not” (Bronander, et al, 2009). Research has found most participants indicated they accepted friend requests from people they did not know. Further results unveiled that “Twenty percent of students had the philosophy that FB is a social networking site, and accepting friends, meeting people, and interacting were the reasons they signed on in the first place. Twenty-two percent of students did not deny friend requests because being a “friend” doesn’t really mean much” (Stern & Taylor, 2007, p. 14). Will a similar feeling be found in a Japanese population? Given that keeping ones friends close and engaging more in anonymous communication on SNSs is more prevalent in Japan, as opposed to sharing one’s name in more popular sites (e.g. Mixi), this research hopes to fill in the gap in the existing research on SNS use in Japan, and whether users are concerned about sharing too much information.

Cyber Stalking

Cyber stalking is a relatively new phenomenon. It came about in the 1990’s as a result of its reliance on the growing maturity of computer and communications technology (Basu & Jones, 2007). The most concise definition of cyber stalking presented by Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002): “Cyberstalking is the use of Internet, email, or other electronic communications devices to stalk another person” (p. 75). Cyber stalking has also been defined as “threatening behavior or unwanted advances directed at another using the Internet and other forms of modern online electronic communications technology” and it is a new method of stalking, which in turn is a form of harassment (Chik, 2008, p. 16). More specific definitions include cyberstalking behaviors and what emotional response the victim should experience. Finn (2004) stated that a victim is left afraid and concerned for his/her safety after constant threats and harassment that take place through electronic mail.

Cyber stalking behavior is an area of growing concern, and there are many examples of such behaviors, including: a user enables your email, via live chat or newsgroup postings, then emails you with obscenities, and attaches pornographic or other sexually explicit pictures. Other forms of cyber stalking via online harassment can include: 1) unsolicited email; 2) live chat (unwelcome); 3) hostile or provocative postings about you (on a FB wall, in a public chat room, or other social site); 4) spreading vicious rumors about you (in email or on a wall, chat room, or other site); 5) leaving abusive messages on sites (on public wall postings such as social network sites, guest books, etc.); 6) impersonations of you online; and 7) electronic sabotage, (sending viruses, etc). There are also other novel ways of stalking that have arisen in the context of the digital realm and through the workings of electronic media that involve more than just the stalker and intended target. This can include the
enlistment of third parties to harass a victim irrespective of the intentions or knowledge of the third party in question. Harassment can also arise through victim impersonation to solicit unwanted advances or attention (Chik, 2008).

In today’s technological world, the differences between cyber stalking and stalking should be perfectly clear. “Cyber stalking entails the same general characteristics as traditional stalking, but in being transposed into the virtual environment it is fundamentally transformed” (Ogilvie, 2000, p. 2). People who engage in cyber stalking have no shortage of electronic tools with which they can use to pursue victims, including computers, cell phones, fax machines and other electronic or digital devices to track and pursue their victims. Cyber stalkers are also getting more sophisticated and use various technology including global positioning systems (GPS), hidden cameras as well as malware or spyware. Their motives are just as diverse (Chik, 2008). Research has suggested that cyber stalking is confined to three specific situations: a) when cyberspace is the only setting, or b) when stalking begins in cyberspace, but transitions to terrestrial stalking; and c) when cyberstalking is one of the numerous methods used by stalkers in addition to other, more traditional tactics (Spence-Diehl, 2003). Within these situations are “the definitive characteristics of cyberstalking: malice, premeditation, repetition, distress, obsession, and vendetta” (Bronander et al., 2009, pp. 13-14). Furthermore, Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) note that when the act of stalking is threatening, harassing, distressing, lacking some form of legitimate purpose, persisting despite multiple warnings to stop, or is specifically directed toward an individual, it should be considered cyber stalking. The electronic medium that SNSs offer makes cyber stalking much different than other “offline” stalking. It is important for its many implications. First, the ease of use and hence lesser impediments to aggressive behavior; second, the borderless nature of electronic communications and accompanying concerns of legal jurisdictional; third, the type of evidence and means of its collection; fourth, the lack of current laws defining it; and fifth, the lack of effective (or any) laws dealing with this unique and growing problem in many countries (Chik, 2008).

The research on cyber stalking is limited, but one study has categorized stalker and cyber stalker motivations into four main groups: vindictive, composed, intimate, and collective cyber stalkers (McFarlane and Bocij, 2003). Vindictive cyber stalkers use not only the Internet to stalk and/or harass victims online, but they do so offline as well. Composed cyber stalkers try to inflict “constant annoyance” upon their victims. In doing so, they find pleasure in causing victims anguish, which they do in place of trying to establish some sort of relationship with the victim. Intimate cyber stalkers want the adoration of the target, and intimate cyber stalkers are split into two sub-groups: ex-intimates, seeking to restore previously lost relationships, and infatuates, which are people who want some type of intimate relationship with their intended victim. Lastly, collective cyber stalkers, as the name suggests, collaborate with other people in their pursuit of the same victim (see McFarlane & Bocij, 2003).

Online users can be targeted by cyber stalkers in various ways, such as through chat rooms like live chat or Internet Relay Chat (IRC), where a user talks live with other users; message boards, discussion forums and newsgroups, where a user interacts with others by posting and replying to messages; e-mail, where a user can write and attach files to be sent to the victim and even spam the victim; and online impersonation by the theft of the victim’s electronic identity or persona. There are also many different types of stalking involving various people, including third parties. Stalking can be direct or indirect, such as by sending false information or vicious information about the victim to
others. It can also be a threat or an actual attack on the victim’s computer (e.g. electronic sabotage by sending viruses and worms). It can come in the form of threats made to the victim’s person or property or family, friends or loved ones (Chik, 2008, p. 17). Among all the potential victims of cyber stalking, it has been suggested that university students are most prone, or at least most aware of such behavior. “Students have the strongest perceived risk and fear of cyber stalking because of their demographics’ norm of disclosing information on sites like Facebook. First, they do not constantly monitor what they disclose both on and offline. College students, more than most, are also vulnerable to sexual assault, as well as other deviant behavior that is commonly found on college campuses” (Bronander, 2009, p. 17). This may be due to the lack perception regarding the possible consequences (Higgins, Ricketts & Vegh, 2008; Truman & Mustaine, 2009).

Mentioned earlier, self disclosure in SNSs is virtually required to participate. Self disclosure through CMC is part of the process of forming the online social communities that bring people to the SNSs to begin with. Being able to interact with individuals online and the requirement of and appeals of self disclosure from SNS members, there has been an increased risk of being a victim of cyber stalking (e.g. Alexy, Baker, Burgess, & Smoyak, 2005; Ellison & Akdeniz, 1998; Gillespie, 2006; Roberts, 2008; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Wykes, 2007). As summed up so well by one researcher, “People will say and do things on the Internet, it is maintained, that they would never seriously entertain doing in real life” (Ellison & Akdeniz, 1998, p. 37). Sadly, proof can easily be found of bad behaviors in the cyber world. In a very recent survey from the U.S. it was found that the majority of teenagers (88%) say they’ve witnessed people being mean and cruel on social networking websites. They do say their peers are mostly kind to one another online, but such a staggering number have witnessed bad behavior of some kind. Fifteen percent say they’ve been the target of bad behavior on social media sites (L.A. Times, 2011). Given the potential for increased stalking in cyber space, this paper hopes to fill the gap in the research on cyber stalking in Japanese populations of Facebook users. Before such a study is done, it is important to look at current stalking laws in Japan.

**Stalking Laws in Japan**

In Japan, “stalking” was earlier defined as a pattern of behavior that keeps people from leading “safe and normal” lives (see Matsumoto, 2002). Other research has focused on the legal aspects of stalking in several countries, including Japan, and found that in Japan stalking is defined as “repeated acts of harassment of a specific person, motivated by an emotional attachment or a grudge borne because of unrequited love” (see Chik, 2008, for more on Japan’s Law on Proscribing Stalking Behaviour [sic] and Assisting Victims of 2000; and Larkin, 2007). This is quite limited in scope and confines the offence to the motive of the perpetrator, and only one motive at that. A person who engages in any of the following eight activities in Japan relating to the above mentioned acts can be charged with stalking:

1. Following and waiting near or visiting the victim’s home, office, school or other places the victim frequents without a previous appointment.
2. Placing the victim under relentless surveillance and informing the victim that he or she is being closely watched.
3. Demanding to meet or go out with the victim when he or she has no wish to do so.
4. Speaking or acting rudely toward the victim (using abusive language).

5. Making silent or constant telephone calls or sending repeated fax messages to the victim [emphasis added].

6. Sending repugnant items that will cause discomfort to the victim such as excrement or dead animals.

7. Telling the victim that the stalker knows secrets that could ruin the victim’s reputation (defamation).

8. Telling the victim things that will make him or her feel sexually debased or sending documents or pictures that will sexually embarrass the victim (Chik, 2008; Matsumoto, 2002).

The penalty for anyone found guilty of violating the law is up to six months in jail or a maximum fine of 500,000 Japanese yen (Chik, 2008, p. 20). According to Japan’s Anti-stalking Law of 2000, after the stalker carries out one of the eight actions noted above, the victim should file a report asking for the police to give a warning (Larkin, 2007). As noted, a stalker can be charged for offenses for making silent or constant telephone calls, or sending repeated fax messages, which in this list of offenses are the only ones related to electronic communication. Spence-Diehl (2003) explains, “Electronic communication devices offer a myriad of opportunities for stalkers to gather information about their victims” (p. 8). Stalkers may use this “new media” as an additional method of identifying and targeting victims (Alexy et al., 2005). Discussed earlier, however, none of the current laws related to cybercrime in Japan specifically address cyber stalking, but there is one area mentioned in the law that may relate to harmful situations. In that part of the law, Japan says that using “illegal information” is forbidden, meaning information which may be used online that is illegal to post, involves child pornography or other indecent images, information regarding sales of illegal stimulants, etc. As part of that description, there is “harmful” information defined as:

information that does not fall into the category of illegal information, but has the potential to trigger crimes and other incidents and should not be left uncontrolled from the viewpoint of public safety and maintenance of order (National Police Agency, 2010, p. 66-67).

Social networking sites are popular because they allow users to not only communicate directly (via messages, emails, texts or “tweets”), but they also allow users to engage in social networking by sharing information about themselves while viewing the profiles of and interacting with other members of the same network, or “friends” as they are known on Facebook. However, some of the information disclosed on SNSs such as Facebook “can be harmful, sometimes resulting in the prevention of an individual from getting a job or an internship, or an increase their vulnerability of being stalked, cyber stalked, or what many college students refer to as being “Facebook stalked.” The information disclosed on one’s profile is seen to be passively communicated to future employers and/or future stalkers due to their position in the user’s unintended destinations” (Bronander, et al, 2009, p. 16). Given this very real possibility of information posted on an SNS that may be viewed by other unintended viewers, what do we know about Japanese people and their use of the very public domains that SNSs represent?

Perceived Risks of Using Facebook in Japan

When using SNSs such as Facebook, users are almost expected to share personal information about
themselves with other members. That is, after all, one of the main benefits of a social networking site. But many people see sharing personal information as problematic in Japan. In the U.S., research has suggested that students do not see these disclosures as problematic because in the context of college, such disclosures are not seen as threatening, but more a part of Western courtships and general ideas of romance, which makes them socially sanctioned behaviors (Lee, 1998). Such attitudes of personal disclosure are not as easily found in Japanese people.

In one study of former FB users, when asked if they stopped using FB because of its real name policy, a majority of the participants said yes. On the other hand, when prompted if they would actively use Facebook if anonymity were allowed, most of the respondents did seem to hesitate. They stated that Facebook was an “international platform” (Acar, 2011), unlike Japan-based Mixi, GREE or Mobage Town. It was noted that the biggest concern among users is Facebook’s real name policy. However, when asked if they would start using Facebook again if anonymity were allowed, most of the participants noted their reluctance because communication in Japanese was more convenient on Mixi (Acar, 2011). People in Japan who are active Web users, even popular bloggers, typically hide their identity behind pseudonyms or nicknames. People like Maiko Ueda, 26, a Mixi devotee, see little reason to switch. Ms. Ueda, who works in Osaka (Japan’s 2nd largest city), logs into Mixi at least once a day to read other users’ “diaries,” which resemble status updates on Facebook, albeit in longer form. She uploads pictures of her life, and sometimes writes her own posts. As Tabuchi (2010) explains, however, “most people on Mixi do not know her real name, nor have they seen what she looks like. In her five years on Mixi, she has never uploaded a photo of herself. She has heard of Facebook but says she is suspicious of “how open it seems.” “I don’t want to give it my real name,” Ms. Ueda said. “What if strangers find out who you are? Or someone from your company?” She spoke on the condition that her Mixi user name would not be revealed.”

To prove how being anonymous in Japan is highly valued, a new social site began in 2011 has become immensely popular. Called “The Interviews” this is a unique social interview service. On that site, users ask other people, famous or not, questions that they will then answer in a post on their page on the site. When they register, they get a personal page where answers to given questions are listed publicly. They can then invite friends to “follow” you in a similar way to other social networking services such as Twitter, Mixi or Facebook. The interesting part of all this is that the identities of the people asking the questions are not disclosed. So the questions could be from anyone, whether they are close friends or people you’ve never met who happen to stumble across your page (Akimoto, 2011).

Besides the idea of revealing oneself and one’s name on FB being one factor in keeping Japanese users away, the level of personal content being visible to other users and how much control there is over that information may be another factor. The president of Mixi noted that it is better suited for Japanese users because it gives subscribers more control over who sees their content and personal data is more secure (Alpeyev & Eki, 2011). While this may be a self-promotion on the part of this company, the possibility that Facebook users do not know that they can change their own privacy settings, and thereby control who sees what parts of their personal profile, may be a factor in the small numbers of FB users in Japan compared to other sites (explained earlier). On a more practical and user-friendly level, a study by Acar (2011) showed four factors that affect how Japanese use an online social network: whether the site is seen as secure; whether it has a better (e.g. easier to use) interface; whether it is seen by society as more popular; and whether or not it is seen as a good source of
information. Concerns over privacy issues and early problems with site design and translation have also set back Facebook’s popularity in the country (Alpeyev & Eki, 2011). Some users complained that Facebook’s Japanese-language site is awkward to use (Tabuchi, 2010).

Facebook faces some challenges in winning over Japanese users. Koh (2010) writes that “may be tied to the fundamentally different ways Japanese users socialize on the Internet.” People in Japan have the fewest digital friends on social networks, according to one survey, which said that Japanese have an average of just 29 friends - compared to Malaysia’s 233 and the Facebook average of 130. So it seems that choosing to join close-knit online circles is more common with Mixi’s model, which emphasizes private communication (Koh, 2010). Other reasons for the small number of FB users in Japan are based on content, with one study saying that other more successful networking sites such as GREE and Mixi “put gaming either central to or highly within the user experience, making it much more popular” (Social Media Today, 2010). To help boost its subscribers, FB opened an office in Japan in September, 2011 and then in October introduced an application that assists Japanese university students with their job search process. A FB spokesperson confirmed that the service, only available to people in Japan, helps students to find and connect with alumni, friends and classmates interested in similar companies and industries, or those who have already accepted job offer. As the head of a well-known game network says of the Japanese market: “Japan is a unique marketplace and it is necessary to take care when bringing a global product and localizing it to the Japanese culture,” (Alpeyev & Eki, 2011). Based on the low numbers of FB users, that certainly applies in this case. If more FB users are not available, the perceived dangers of being cyber stalked due to too much public disclosure of personal information may be one of the biggest reasons.

One study has given more specific reasons for why Japanese may be uncomfortable using such a public platform as Facebook. They include the idea that a) old friends, acquaintances, and co-workers can easily find them and ask to be friends, but they would feel uncomfortable rejecting a “friend request,” especially if that request comes from a co-worker or some ranked higher than them in the social hierarchy (a “sempai”) so prevalent in Japanese society (for foreigners it might be easier to just ignore or reject the request but this seems very difficult in Japanese culture); b) users may make a mistake when posting an update, something considered very embarrassing in Japanese culture; c) fear that something they post on their walls might be “irrelevant or bothersome” to some members who view that site; and d) photo-tagging is an invitation for invasion of privacy. (Japanese users noted that using the tagging function makes them uneasy because it still feels “like a stranger is looking at their picture” (Acar, 2011). The Japanese traditionally prefer face to face communication as online conversing might cause more misunderstandings. Although 95% of Japanese ages 18-49s had access to the internet in the past 10 years, Mixi (or any other social network) membership has always been about 25%. In other words, unlike foreigners, the Japanese do not have a burning desire to maintain relationships online regardless of their friends’ geographic proximity (Acar, 2011). Microsoft did a survey in 2010 among 3,000 people in 11 Asia-Pacific countries and regions. In that case, people said that only about 25% of their “friends” on social networking sites were close friends. But it was quite different in Japan, where more than half of all respondents said that “not one of their acquaintances on social networks was a close friend” (Tabuchi, 2010).

Other thoughts as to why Japanese are averse to FB can be very personal. Japanese value harmony, or keeping the cohesion of a group intact. Such thinking may make it difficult to reject a friend request
(for fear of hurting that person’s feelings, especially if the person is a “sempai” as noted above). Similarly, not inviting co-workers who are known to use FB to one’s own network group may offend them. Japanese may also hesitate to switch to Facebook from another site if the majority of one’s friends/peers are not using it; or they may not post an honest or direct thought or opinion that may offend or criticize something or someone. Since Japan has a high risk-avoidance culture, it may be difficult to disclose personal information (posts, photos, videos, event organizing, user location), or make friends on such online social networks. In a society where hierarchy controls much of daily life, and where **sempai-kohai** relationships of students or co-workers (where the older or senior person in the dyad, the **sempai**, generally earns a higher respect than the junior, or **kohai**) and in which a high “power distance” is often maintained, people may avoid sharing the same message with all members of their social network at the same time (e.g. senior and junior co-workers, older as well as younger friends, close friends vs. acquaintances and/or relatives.) In short, some things are meant to be shared with one group of people, and other things should be saved for other people!

**Facebook Users & Passive Communication: Observers, Stalkers, Lurkers or Just Browsers?**

Whereas this paper attempts to study how Japanese people use Facebook, and if the potential for their information to be too public may affect their use of SNSs, the concept of passive communication is defined here. “Passive communication travels from a naive/unaware sender beyond the message’s intended destination. The sender is aware that unintended destinations may exist, but is unconscious as to their depth. These unintended destinations consist of any individuals with access to the message, which is passively communicated to them by the sender. The sender’s ignorance is a function of the unintended destinations’ accessibility to the message being sent out” (Bronander et al., 2009, p. 22). As an inherent of passive communication, what happens to the “sent” or posted message is of significance, particularly given that the destination of that message may be intended, but often ends up in unintended destinations. After the message is received (by either the intended or unintended destination) “it may then be retained for personal knowledge, responded to as feedback to the sender, or communicated to others. Examples of passive communication can be seen in many forms of interpersonal communication, such as stalking, voyeurism and, most intriguingly, in CMC situations, including interactions on SNS’s” (Bronander et al., 2009, p. 22-23).

The reason for individual Internet use differs from person to person. Goal-oriented users focus on completing a specific task when accessing the Internet, while other users web surf randomly with no task in mind (Ruggiero, 2000). Are users who log on to SNSs there simply to “catch up” on what other members are doing? Or is there a more sinister reason to log on? Are they lurking? A popular activity for people who use Facebook is spending more time just reading others’ posts than actually posting their own thoughts. On SNSs such as Facebook, some interaction occurs when one posts or updates information, but the more common behaviors were found to be observational (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009; Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). These “looking only” behaviors include looking at or reading others’ profiles, looking at other members’ pictures as well as reading the news feed (Pempek et al., 2009). Other research found similar results, reporting 66% of participants had browsed friends’ pages/profiles and/or walls (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

Furthermore, some individuals are “lurkers,” using the Internet to be “quiet observers”, rarely
participating in the CMC they are observing (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 20). Pempek et al., (2009) state that observing may become a part of lurkers’ and stalkers’ daily routines. As such, some individuals may engage in this form of passive communication while feeling that they are actually engaging others and participating in communicative activities. A new expression has been coined in recent years, called “Facebook stalking” and relates only to users of Facebook. Research has suggested that this type of behavior may be used by young people to follow members of their own social network, and watching how people in their social network interact with each other (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). This paper seeks to learn how Japanese use passive communication in social networking sites such as Facebook, as well as how they feel about potential negative side effects of SNSs such as online stalking behaviors. Are they concerned with who is watching them?

**Hypotheses**

To address the use of Facebook in Japan as well as how people feel about the potential negative effects of using this growing social networking site, the following hypotheses are proffered:

H1: As individual use of social networking sites in Japan increases, acceptance of online stalking behaviors increases.

H2: A majority of college students in Japan use Facebook to obtain information about “friends” by browsing personal information provided by users.

In addition to these hypotheses, this paper intends to learn more about overall CMC use in Japan compared to interpersonal communication. It was discussed earlier that Japanese may be less likely to reveal as much about themselves on an SNS compared to people in Western countries such as the U.S. If Japanese do join an SNS, one way to prevent any chance of revealing too much is to practice anonymity on the site. The discussion showed that this is a key feature when Japanese choose to use an SNS. In the case of some SNSs, anonymity is optional, but in the specific case of Facebook, users’ real names are required as a matter of policy. Whereas it is theoretically possible for people to change part or all of their real name when signing up for a FB account, this paper assumes that users follow Facebook rules and use their actual full-name, which makes anonymity virtually impossible. Due to that lack of anonymity on FB, the following research question is asked:

RQ: Will Japanese users of Facebook be more likely or less likely to engage in computer-mediated communication (CMC) over interpersonal communication?

**Methodology**

Data for this research study focused on Facebook users in Japan (not including expatriates who reside in Japan). This research intended to learn about what prevalent attitudes exists toward SNS users and how any potential negative aspects of using such sites may affect their use of CMC over interpersonal communication (i.e. face-to-face communication). Data was collected at three different universities in Hiroshima, Western Japan. One was a small private liberal arts college, one was a small public university and the last was a large public university. All subjects were asked to fill out the Japanese-language survey (available from the first author, if requested). The English-language survey can be found in the Appendix. It should be noted that some minor changes were made between
the English-language and Japanese-language surveys: any references to AIM, the instant messaging service offered by America Online were omitted from the Japanese-language survey as that service is not available to Japanese users. Also, question 22 about the use of the “mini feed” feature was omitted since Japanese users were unfamiliar with that.

Subjects at the two small universities were asked to fill out the survey during class time, while students at the large university were approached during their lunch break. The surveys were distributed during the 2011 fall semester, mostly during the months of October and November. Of the 135 students surveyed, there were 93 (69%) females and 42 (31%) males. Only 33% of subjects (n=45) had a Facebook account, which is a much smaller sample than was hoped for (the reasons for a much smaller population of people who use FB in Japan is addressed later in this paper). Of the 45 Facebook users, 32 (71%) were female and 13 (29%) were male), and their ages ranged from 18 to 26, with a mean age of 22.42 years.

Analysis

The data for this study was entered and analyzed by using a statistical software system, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 18.0.0) — a program designed for data management, preparation and statistical analysis. In order to test hypothesis 1 (“As individual use of social networking sites increases, acceptance of online stalking behaviors increases”), a bivariate Pearson correlation was used to determine whether or not question items related to Facebook usage (questions 7 and 8) showed any significant correlation to the question items related to the acceptance of stalking behaviors (questions 36 and 37). For hypothesis 2 (“A majority of university students use Facebook to obtain information about ‘friends’ by browsing personal information provided by users”), descriptive statistics were gathered from questions 16 and 23-25. Frequency analysis was used to determine whether the sample population engages in stalking-like and/or passive communication behavior. Finally, in order to analyze data related to the research question (“Will Japanese Facebook users be more likely or less likely to engage in CMC over interpersonal communication?”), a bivariate Pearson correlation was again conducted by analyzing whether the participant responses to questions 7-16 (Facebook usage) showed any correlation to the way in which they answered question 18 (“How often do you choose a form of computer-mediated communication over traditional interpersonal communication?”).

Results & Discussion

Facebook Use in Japan

Only 33% of the subjects in this study had a Facebook account. Of those users, 47.7% sometimes or often preferred CMC over interpersonal communication, while 52.3% said they preferred CMC most or all of the time. Of the participants, only 15.9% of users said Facebook was their choice of CMC most or all of the time, while 75% preferred it as their form of CMC sometimes or often (mean = 2.59). Facebook users in Japan logged into their accounts an average of 5.2 times per day, and each time a user logged on, participants spent an average of 11.25 minutes using their Facebook account. When communicating with friends in their geographical vicinity, Japanese Facebook users chose Facebook (43.3%) after
calling or emailing friends (47.7% each), but slightly more than meeting them face to face (31.8%). When communicating with friends outside their geographical area, Facebook was the last choice, after emailing, calling and texting. Taking active steps when they log into Facebook, 52.3% of Facebook users update their status 1-3 times a week.

**Concern Over “Facebook Stalking” in Japan**

Facebook users in this study reported almost no instances of unwanted pursuit or stalking on the part of other Facebook members. In each stalking-related question, data show subjects were never / not aware [of] or pursued only once in unwanted ways (Has someone undesirably pursued you by leaving unwanted messages on your page?, m = 1.318, sd = .67; by involving you in activities in unwanted ways?, mean = 1.454, sd = 1.10; by leaving threatening messages?, mean = 1.045, sd = .37).

**Discomfort Levels Using Facebook in Japan**

When asked if they felt uneasy with people viewing their Facebook pages, only “minimal” discomfort was revealed (The survey asked “How uncomfortable do you feel [when] a user who is not a Facebook “friend” views your page?, m = 1.886, sd = 1.039; After writing on the wall of a Facebook “friend,” another Facebook “friend” views the exchange. How uncomfortable does that make you feel?, m = 1.7273, sd = .99; and “After you tag someone in a photo, a Facebook “friend” of theirs, but not of yours, views the entire album. How uncomfortable does that make you feel?”, m = 1.704, sd = .97).

**H1:** Hypothesis 1 postulated that as individual use of social networking sites in Japan increases, acceptance of online stalking behaviors increases. The results of data collected in this study suggest that there is no significant correlation between Facebook usage and the acceptance of online stalking behaviors. 83.8% of the Japanese participants in this study reported being only slightly worried or not worried at all, and over half of the participants (51.2%) reported that they were not worried at all about Facebook stalking. However, 72.2% of participants reported that they believed Facebook stalking was prevalent or extremely prevalent. Only 2.3% of participants believed that Facebook stalking was not prevalent. Due to the sample size, it is difficult to determine whether Facebook usage is correlated to the acceptance of online stalking behavior because in this study, the vast majority of participants indicated that they believed in the prevalence of Facebook stalking but overwhelmingly reported that they were not concerned with being stalked. Thus, due to the one-sided nature of the responses, it is difficult to determine whether the amount of time spent using Facebook had any relationship to the acceptance of online stalking behaviors.

From the data collected in this study, it seems that Facebook usage in Japan varies between two extremes. On one hand, previous research indicates that there are few users of Facebook in Japan when compared with other countries. Privacy and the reluctance to use ones’ real name have been cited as one main reason for the low participation rates in Japan (cf. Tabuchi, 2010). On the other hand, the participants in this study who did use Facebook showed almost no concern for the dangers present in using Facebook even though they did believe those dangers exist. Thus, it seems that there is no middle ground in the usage of Facebook among Japanese users. One possible interpretation of this polarization is that, as previously stated, Japanese users of SNSs have a relatively small network of friends. Koh (2010) reported that Japanese SNS users have only 29 friends on average, a small number
when compared with users of many other countries. Due to this small number, it could be assumed that users have a greater ability to monitor what information is being channeled through Facebook and also who is able to view this information. Additionally, it could be assumed that this small number of friends indicates that Japanese SNS users allow only those with whom they have built a certain degree of trust with to be friends, rather than vague acquaintances or strangers. That is to say that some people simple want to collect as many “friends” as possible, granting themselves bragging rights. The first author has friends in the U.S. among other countries (both western and Asian countries) who willingly accept anyone to their FB network, even people they have never had any personal or face-to-face contact. They “friend” people simply to increase the number of people in their online network. Japanese users, on the other hand, may be the type who will only accept someone into their SNS that they have had first-hand experience and/or communication with, a much more realistic representation of the “actual” number of friends in their lives, not just their “cyber” lives. Another possibility for this seeming lack of concern for the dangers present in SNSs is that students hold varying ideas of what it means to be stalked. As online stalking is a relatively new phenomenon, students might not be able to articulate indicators that suggest the dangers of online stalking and may hold interpretations of stalking that are somewhat uninformed. As previously noted, the definition and articulation of online stalking as defined by the national police agency in Japan is still vague. Because of the loosely defined terms, citizens may also hold vague notions of what constitutes stalking behaviors and thus be unaware of the dangers related to Facebook disclosure.

Related to the concept of cyber stalking and what Japanese users may view as unwanted contact with people in cyberspace, when asked if they were interested in a tool enabling other members to see who has viewed their Facebook, most were neutral on the idea (mean = 4.11). This is very surprising to the researchers given that online anonymity is so valued in Japanese society. It was expected that Japanese users would welcome the ability to see who has “seen” them (their online profile) so they could monitor if they were being “seen” by people they know or not.

**H2**: Hypothesis 2 postulated that a majority of college students in Japan use Facebook to obtain information about “friends” by browsing personal information provided by users. Facebook users in Japan who browse personal information provided by other Facebook users to obtain information about “friends” was only minimally supported with a cumulative 33% of subjects surveyors having a Facebook account. Of that 33%, however, 54% of those users said browsing others’ profiles and photos was their most frequent activity. Out of the 6 activity choices given, 72.3% of users ranked browsing profiles and photos in their top three most frequent activities. When asked which types of information they used to glean information about other members, 68.2% said they used the status or photo feature to find out things about their “friends.” These results show how subjects used Facebook more passively as a method to seek information about other members.

If we were to look not only at how Japanese Facebook users sought out information about others, but also at how they interacted with their members through responding on Facebook, the data is less clear. While 54% said they browsed others’ profiles and/or photos, 63.6% said responding to messages was their next most frequent activity (this was ranked as both the 2nd and 3rd most frequent activity by 31.8% of the subjects respectively). Why then, is responding to wall posts and updating ones’ personal status chosen so infrequently (47.7% ranked responding to wall posts as their 4th or 5th most frequent activity; 70.5% ranked updating personal status this the 6th most frequent activity, out of 6 options)?
It could be that both those functions require users to share more information *publicly*, which was previously shown to be something Japanese people are averse to. Wall posts and any response to them, as well as any update in ones’ status are seen by all members of ones’ network, yet responding to messages, which are sent only from one user to another, are equal to email in that they are viewed only by the target intended by the sender.

When Japanese Facebook users do decide to join and create their own personal profile, there are limits as to what information they are willing to display on their profile. The survey asked what items they were willing to disclose on their Facebook page, and results show a willingness to reveal some parts of their lives, but not others. The questions asked about various items members disclosed on their personal page. Of 8 choices, Japanese willingly chose to share four aspects of themselves in their profile: birthday (75%), pictures (70.5%), personal information (though it is unclear what exactly that refers to; 68.2%), and hometown (59.1%). They were far less willing to share their religious views (2.3%), political views and cell phone numbers (6.8% each), or their relationship status (20.5%).

**RQ:** The research question asked *“Will Japanese users of Facebook be more likely or less likely to engage in computer-mediated communication (CMC) over interpersonal communication?”* The choice of CMC over interpersonal communication was split nearly down the middle. 47.7% of Facebook users said they sometimes or often choose CMC over interpersonal communication. Simultaneously 52.3% said the opposite: they prefer interpersonal communication over a form of CMC, meaning these results show only a slight preference for interpersonal communication over CMC.

In the realm of passive communication, Facebook allows users to browse wall-to-wall exchanges (or what people said about other people). Such messages are representative of passive communication since the sender posted something on his/her friends’ wall, but the intended target is not the only person able to view it. In Japan, this seems to be something users are aware of and perhaps it affects how willing they are to view the wall of a friends’ friend (i.e. someone they do not know). Only 11.6% of Japanese Facebook users were *moderately or extremely likely* to browse wall-to-wall exchanges. The biggest group of users were either *moderately unlikely* or only *somewhat likely* (25.6% each, respectively) to do so. This can be seen as Japanese unwillingness to peer into the lives of someone they do not know. Pictures seem to be a bit more approachable, with 65.1% of users *somewhat* or *moderately likely* to peruse visual images of other members. Perhaps with photos, the lack of a context in which to judge the content means there is no way to know what message lies behind the situation! In other words, without written words to explain the photo, this “passive” glance at others’ photos is perfectly acceptable, and not seen as peering into the “private” topics that may be found in written post or status updates.

**Research Limitations & Ideas for Future Research**

This paper sought to learn more about Japanese users of social networking sites, their views on passive communication via SNSs and whether or not they had had any negative experiences using SNSs. This paper specifically focused on Facebook users as the topic of study, which limited its reach, not only in scope but in the number and type of subjects surveyed. First and foremost, the small number of Facebook users in this study made the sample limited in its breadth and depth. A much larger number of Facebook users may have shed more light on the questions addressed in this study.
Related to that, this study collected data from only one prefecture in Western Japan. It did not survey students from the largest cities in the country (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, etc.) so the demographics of these college populations, and therefore the participants overall, lacked diversity. Also of note is the fact that in most cases, the subjects were English-language majors. It could be argued that students majoring in a foreign language are more interested in foreign cultures and are, therefore, more likely to use an SNS that is not Japan-based, such as Facebook. Similarly, these majors could have more experience overseas or with foreigners in Japan, additional reasons they may be more likely to use Facebook. Future subjects in Japan should not be limited to students majoring in foreign languages and cultures. Further research would survey students from different parts of Japan. For example, asking students in rural areas, where face to face communication is less convenient due to geographical location, may yield a higher frequency of CMC use over interpersonal communication than with SNS users in urban areas. Related to the group of subjects in this study, the age group ranged from 18 to 26, with over 57% of the participants being either a university freshman or sophomore. Future work on a Japanese population including a wider range of age groups may reveal different attitudes toward Facebook and other SNSs. For example what are the differences in SNS use between high school users, university students, and adult non-student users in Japan? This study did find that the older the subject was, the more likely s/he was to be a Facebook member, but is that true of all SNSs in Japan? Future research could address that.

Furthermore, as Japanese users often prefer to use SNSs in an anonymous way, asking questions as to how strong the feeling of anonymity is when using Facebook (or the Japan-based SNSs) would likely yield interesting results about overall feelings of what Japanese do to prevent unpleasant experiences when using an SNS. Described earlier, Facebook is not as widely used in Japan as other sites are (Mixi, GREE, and Mobage Town). To compare how users value those other SNSs, questions to learn which of those SNSs are most widely used, and if the subjects have had any cyber stalking experiences on those Japan-based SNSs would have been a great first step toward a larger study on the problem of cyber stalking in Japan. Focusing only on Facebook made this study very limited. In earlier work by the first author, Japanese subjects admitted to taking part in what they viewed as (terrestrial) stalking behaviors. Chapman and Spitzberg (2004) found that 20.9% of subjects admitted to having engaged in stalking someone, with 78.6% of those self-admitted stalkers were female. This leads the current paper to ask: will people who admit pursuing behaviors that can be viewed as stalking be more likely to carry on that “hunt” into CMC? That is, would they be more participative in seeking information about others on social networking sites than people who do not engage in terrestrial stalking behaviors? Future research could pursue this.

In another area, it was mentioned earlier that Japanese are far more mobile in their use of SNSs. One study on 4,000 social network users in Japan found that over 75% of respondents who accessed social networking sites only did so from their mobile phone (not from their PC). The number who did access SNSs from only their PC was very low at just 2% (Social Media Today, 2010). A future study could address if the use of a mobile device affects their choice of SNS, as well as what advantages or disadvantages they experience accessing an SNS via a mobile device. Finally, on a more pragmatic level, the Japanese-language survey used was three pages long and took up to 7-8 minutes to complete. That could have possible led to subject fatigue and, therefore, less honest answers. On a larger scale, future work should focus not only on unwanted behaviors that subjects may experience on SNSs in
Japan, but how they react to them. That is, as this study wanted to learn about potential negative experiences of SNSs in Japan, questions that specifically addressed user experiences and what, if anything, they did to avoid them could be asked. For example, although three questions in this survey asked about being “undesirably pursued” via unwanted messages, involvement in activities or threatening messages on Facebook, additional questions could have asked, then “how did you respond/reply to that unwanted pursuit” by offering either multiple choices, or open-ended questions that allow users to provide qualitative responses.

The present study focusing on aspects of Facebook and SNSs and what was termed as “passive communication” has many other areas of potential research in Japan. Besides looking deeper into other Japan-based SNSs, future work could look at a very popular site in the U.S. that is only now becoming popular in Japan: Twitter. Twitter (briefly introduced earlier) is similar to Facebook in one central way: just as Facebook users can update their status, Twitter is focused on status-like updates, or what are called “tweets.” This present study found that Japanese users of Facebook are very reluctant to share updates about themselves (70.5% ranked updating personal status their 6th most frequent activity out of 6 options). So the status update feature on Facebook is less popular in Japan than other features, but in Twitter, “tweets” are the central feature. In short, Twitter users willingly choose to “follow” other users, and they are notified of their “tweets,” which is a perfect example of a potentially stalking behavior (or passive communication according to this study). Twitter users have the ability to share with the world anything about their daily lives at any time or any minute of the day. Such potential exposure could be a focus of what, if any links there are between Twitter stalking experiences in Japan. If people choose to write about where they are and what they are doing for anyone to see, then Twitter may become an SNS that is used by stalkers in Japan. Given that the number of Twitter users in Japan went from only about 500,000 in early 2010 (Social Media Today, 2010) to recently being called the “Twitter-nation” which produces about 14% of all Tweets around the world (Landsberg, 2011), research comparing stalking experiences on Twitter with other SNSs could be very enlightening.

Other future research may examine professional uses of SNSs in Japan. Facebook is widely seen as being used more by businesses than individuals (in Japan) and after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis that took place in Japan in March, 2011, it was found that the Prime Minister’s Office, Ground Self-Defense Forces, TEPCO (Tokyo Electric and Power Company, who controls the damaged nuclear power plant at the center of the crises) as well as other organizations began opening accounts. “Twitter has also joined forces with NTT DoCoMo, making its logo familiar throughout Japan” (Landsberg, 2011). Given this increased use of SNSs by business and government, future research could investigate how these organizations are using social networking to collaborate through computer-mediated communication.

On a personal level, why do the small number of people who choose Facebook make it their choice? Are there any psychological motivations for that choice? Similarly, why do some Japanese people choose an SNS in place of a phone call, text or email in order to get some information about friends? Are they merely passive browsers? People in Japan may choose their method of media to obtain information about others for a variety of reasons that are different from populations in Western countries, either because of the type of information they seek out, or because of unique social norms of privacy that exist which make the notion of seeking personal information about other people unusual.
or taboo in Japan. This study discussed many areas of research that are woefully lacking in Japanese populations. Yet, with one of the most wired societies on the planet, it is hoped that future studies would take some of these research ideas.

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References


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Appendix: English-Language Survey

This survey is completely optional and anonymous. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering. Thank you for your time and help.

1. What is your age? _______
2. What is your sex?  M / F
3. What year student are you?  1st year / 2nd year / 3rd year / 4th year / Graduate Student
4. What is your major? ___________________
5. Are you a Facebook member?  Yes / No  If no, this questionnaire is complete, thank you.
6. When did you open your Facebook account? ____________
   (e.g., senior yr. of high school, summer before college)
7. How many times do you log onto Facebook per day? _______
8. How many times do you log onto Facebook per week? _______
9. How many minutes do you typically spend on Facebook each time you log on? _______
10. When you receive a wall post/message, how long does it take before you respond? _______
11. While performing an online task other than Facebook, how often do you interrupt it to check Facebook?
    Never sometimes often most of the time always
12. How often do you log onto Facebook with a particular goal in mind?
    Never sometimes often most of the time always
13. How many times per day do you update your Facebook status? ____________
14. How many times per week do you update your Facebook status? ____________
15. Check off all of the following items you disclose on your Facebook page.
    ____ personal info ____ relationship status ____ cell phone number
    ____ pictures ____ address ____ political views
    ____ hometown ____ “looking for” ____ birthday
    ____ religious view
16. Please rank the following in descending order of how you spend your time on Facebook.
   (1 most time, 6 least time)
   _ Browsing ‘friends’ pages and photos _ updating your status _ uploading photos
   _ creating groups/events _ responding to posts _ responding to messages
17. How many of your Facebook ‘friends’ do you regularly interact with face to face?
    none some many most all
18. How often do you choose a form of computer-mediated communication (e.g., Facebook, email/aim, text message, etc.) over traditional interpersonal communication?
    never sometimes often most of the time always
19. How often is Facebook the form of computer-mediated communication you use?
    never sometimes often most of the time always
20. Please rank, in descending order, which form of communication you use most with friends who live elsewhere (e.g., friends from high school while you’re at college; college friends when you’re home).
   (1 most likely, 4 least likely)
21. Please rank, in descending order, which form of communication you use most with friends who, at the time, live in your geographical vicinity (e.g., college friends at college). (1 most likely, 4 least likely)

   ___ calling to talk   ___ e-mail   ___ Facebook   ___ texting

22. How helpful is the ‘mini-feed’ application in keeping up with friends?

   Extremely helpul moderately helpful somewhat helpful neutral unhelpful unhelpful

23. Please rank, in descending order, which Facebook feature you use to learn the most about a person? (1 most helpful, 5 least helpful)

   ___ personal info.   ___ wall posts   ___ status   ___ photos   ___ mini feed   ___ videos   ___ live feed

24. How likely are you to browse others’ photos?

   Extremely unlikely moderately unlikely somewhat unlikely neutral likely moderately likely extremely likely

25. How likely are you to look through wall-to-wall exchanges?

   Extremely unlikely moderately unlikely somewhat unlikely neutral likely moderately likely extremely likely

26. When writing on another’s wall, how likely are you to consider it a public conversation?

   Extremely unlikely moderately unlikely somewhat unlikely neutral likely moderately likely extremely likely

27. Have you kept the default privacy settings on your Facebook page?  Yes / No / Not Sure

28. A user who is not a Facebook ‘friend’ views your page. How uncomfortable does that make you feel?

   Not at all minimally somewhat very completely

29. After writing on the wall of a Facebook ‘friend,’ another Facebook ‘friend’ views the exchange. How uncomfortable does that make you feel?

   Not at all minimally somewhat very completely

30. After you tag someone in a photo, a Facebook friend of theirs, but not of yours, views the entire album. How uncomfortable does that make you feel?

   Not at all minimally somewhat very completely

31. Has anyone ever undesirably pursued you on Facebook by leaving unwanted messages on your page? (e.g., wall posts, comments on photos, inbox messages, etc.)

   Never / Not Aware Only Once 2 to 3 Times 4 to 5 Times Over 5 Times

32. Has anyone ever undesirably pursued you on Facebook by involving you in activities in unwanted ways? (e.g., invitations to events, excessive application requests, etc.)

   Never / Not Aware Only Once 2 to 3 Times 4 to 5 Times Over 5 Times

33. Has anyone ever undesirably pursued you on Facebook by leaving threatening messages?

   Never / Not Aware Only Once 2 to 3 Times 4 to 5 Times Over 5 Times

34. Of your Facebook ‘friends,’ how many would you know less about without Facebook?

   none some about half many all
35. How often would you communicate with friends without Facebook?
   Extremely Moderately Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Moderately Extremely
   less       less       less       more       more more

36. How prevalent do you believe Facebook stalking to be?
   not prevalent slightly prevalent prevalent highly prevalent extremely prevalent

37. How worried are you about being stalked on Facebook?
   not worried at all slightly worried worried very worried extremely worried

38. How supportive would you be of a tool enabling others to see who’s viewed their page?
   Extremely Moderately Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Moderately Extremely
   unsupportive unsupportive unsupportive supportive supportive supportive

39. Do you have any immediate plans for disabling your Facebook account? Yes / No
   If so, why?

   Thank you for your time and help with this survey! Have a nice day!