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# Identifying trends and patterns in offending and victimization on Snapchat: a rapid review

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## Abstract

Few studies have examined crime on Snapchat despite its popularity and growing accounts of victimization occurring on the application. This study addresses this gap in knowledge by conducting a rapid review of crime on Snapchat across 18 databases. The findings indicate this area is under-researched, with only 35 articles eligible for inclusion and five focusing solely on crime on Snapchat. Nevertheless, eleven types of crimes were identified as occurring on Snapchat, including: blackmail; the sharing of private, sexual material without consent; grooming/solicitation of minors; stalking; posting threatening, intimidating or harassing material; hate crime; sharing offensive, menacing or obscene content; obtaining illicit goods; identity theft; fraud; and hacking. The findings additionally revealed some patterns in offending and victimization that are also discussed.

**Keywords** Snapchat · Cybercrime · Victimization · Social media · Crime

## Introduction

The ever-evolving landscape of social media gives rise to new and innovative areas where people may use social media applications for communication, social needs fulfillment, expression, and more (Stone et al. 2022). However, social media can be double edged due to cybercrime victimization (Hadlington et al. 2021). Cybercrime is defined as any type of crime enabled by or involving the use of online networks, social media applications, the internet, and technology (Act of Parliament

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2015; De La Hoz 2021; Leitão 2021). Cybercrimes can facilitate more personalized and nuanced attacks on people, which can be done remotely, sometimes with the illusion of anonymity, and with law enforcement often struggling to investigate and prosecution these crimes (Bungert 2021; Hadlington et al. 2021; Williams et al. 2021). For example, on social media, many crimes occur including, but not limited to, child solicitation, harassment, phishing scams, revenge pornography, stalking, and more (Act of Parliament 2015; Bungert 2021; De Kimpe et al. 2021). Additionally, research has found that criminal activity beginning on social media may bleed into offline behaviors (Bungert 2021). For instance, the cybercrime of harassment on social media can lead to face-to-face altercations and become assault or destruction of property (Elsaesser et al. 2021). In 2021, 36,034 cybercrimes mediated specifically by social media were reported in the USA alone, with these crimes netting a loss of \$235,279,057 (Federal Bureau of Investigations 2021). Social media related crimes can also take a mental toll on the victim and their wellbeing (Bungert 2021). For example, an individual might find themselves stalked virtually, bank accounts hacked, identity stolen, threatened, and harassed (Bungert 2021; De Kimpe et al. 2021). As a result, a victim may suffer from emotional, psychological, and behavioral consequences, in addition to the potential financial consequences that might arise (Borwell et al. 2022). Consequently, the impact on society requires social media related crimes be examined.

Since its inception in 2011, Snapchat has proven to be a behemoth in social media, boasting a revenue of 4.11 billion dollars worldwide in 2021, and an active user base of 363 million people (Dixon 2022). Although not as large as other sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, Snapchat defines itself by its unique features, most notably with its self-deleting messages, photos ('Snaps'), and videos, which delete upon viewing by the recipient, and with its ability to notify users if a screenshot was taken of the message content (Dixon 2022; Snapchat Support 2022). By having a self-destructing message, there is no tangible proof of what image, message, or video was sent to the receiver, unless the receiver screenshotted the message (Snapchat Support 2022). Snapchat was also the progenitor of the 'story' feature; a picture or video posted by a user that can be viewed by others an infinite number of times within a 24-h period, unless deleted (Snapchat Support 2022). Finally, one of the other features unique to Snapchat is the Snap map, which shows another user's precise location in addition to how long ago they were in that location, their battery percentage at that time, and their Bitmoji avatar (Snapchat Support 2022). While these features define Snapchat and encourage some to view it as a more privacy-oriented social media application, there are concerns that it can facilitate cybercrime victimization, especially among younger people (18–24 years) who make up 39% of its total users worldwide (Dixon 2022). In particular, some have expressed concern that the unique features of Snapchat may led people to believe they have greater perceived control over the information they share, potentially leading them to be more willing to disclose personal, sensitive information, including intimate images or videos (Vaterlaus et al. 2016).

Just last year alone, there were millions of content violations reported on Snapchat, with sexually explicit content being the most prevalent, as it was reported 7,605,480 times (Snap Inc. 2022). The non-consensual distribution of private and



intimate images, also known as revenge pornography, is a crime that seems to occur frequently on Snapchat and can affect people of all ages (Bungert 2021). Other ways in which Snapchat has facilitated offending have been identified in the media. For example, in October 2020, using the Snap Maps feature, two teenage boys were able to stalk and track down two other boys to a bus, and then proceeded to attack them to the point of hospitalization (British Broadcasting Corporation 2022). In another example in November 2022, an article was published about a 36-year-old man who had solicited, groomed, and raped a 14-year-old girl after making contact via Snapchat and using communications on Snapchat to groom her to facilitate an in-person meeting (Gleaves 2022). Additional examples include individuals using Snapchat to threaten, intimidate or harass others, post offensive, menacing or obscene content, and committing hate crimes (Act of Parliament 2015; Bungert 2021; Hadlington et al. 2021).

Yet, despite the growing awareness of the potential for social-media related cybercrime to cause harm and mounting concern about how Snapchat can be used to facilitate cybercrime, few studies have examined the extent and nature of crime on Snapchat.

## The present study

This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a rapid review to investigate what research has been conducted on crime on Snapchat. More specifically, the present study addresses the following questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent has existing research examined crime on Snapchat?

Research Question 2: What is known about crime on Snapchat?

The rapid review will review and synthesize existing studies exploring crime on Snapchat in order to garner a better comprehension of this phenomenon. By analyzing the existing literature, our understanding of this phenomenon can be enhanced, improving our theoretical knowledge of this behavior, ability to address this type of offending, as well as identify and support those who are at risk of being victimized.

## Methodology

The study utilized a rapid review to answer the research questions. Rapid reviews adopt a streamlined approach to reviewing research, providing a faster means of synthesizing evidence compared to systematic reviews which differ in terms of their duration, rigor and resources (National Collaboration Centre for Methods and Tools (NCCMT) 2010; Tricco et al. 2017). Despite, rapid reviews differing in duration, rigor and resources, studies have found that their essential conclusions do not differ from systematic reviews (Khangura et al. 2012). For these reasons, decision-makers, practitioners and policymakers are increasingly using rapid reviews to inform their



policymaking, practice and actions (Khangura et al. 2012). Rapid reviews involve several key stages including developing a search strategy, identifying relevant databases, screening results, assessing the quality of the findings, extracting data, and synthesizing this data into key themes (Campbell et al. 2019).

### **Search strategy**

The following search term strategy was developed and reviewed by a specialist librarian to identify studies examining crime on Snapchat: (Snapchat AND Crim\* AND Offen\*). Utilizing these search terms, a search of the following 18 databases was conducted during July 2022: APA PsycInfo; Applied Science and Technology; John Jay One Search; Google Scholar; IEEE Xplore; International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS); ProQuest; SAGE journals; ScienceDirect; SCOPUS; Social Care Online; Social Sciences Full Text; Sociological Abstracts; Social Services Abstracts; Springer; Taylor and Francis; Web of Sciences; and Wiley Online. A search of these databases identified 3428 possible results, which were imported into Endnote for screening using predetermined selection criteria.

### **Selection criteria**

In order to be eligible for inclusion, the results identified from the searches needed to meet the following selection criteria: were peer-reviewed, deemed to be of sufficient methodological quality as determined by the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), published from January 2011 to July 2022, involved primary data collection on crime on Snapchat, and written in English. Only English results were included in the rapid review as the author(s) did not speak other languages and no funds were available for translation services. Results involving primary data collection on crime and Snapchat were only eligible for inclusion in line with the study's research questions. Results were also required to be published from January 2011 to July 2022 as Snapchat was not released as a social media application until 2011 and the rapid review was undertaken in July 2022. Lastly, only peer-reviewed articles and articles deemed to be of sufficient methodological quality, as determined by MMAT, were included in the rapid review to ensure the results were of a high standard. Two members of the research team were involved in screening the results. The results were screened using a two-stage process, whereby initially the abstract and key words were reviewed to determine if the work was eligible for inclusion. Full texts were then retrieved and reviewed for those results deemed eligible for inclusion and those for whom further scrutiny was required to determine eligibility. Duplications were removed.

Applying the selection criteria reduced the possible 3428 results to 710 results. After reviewing the abstract and key words, a further 589 results were excluded from the rapid review because they did not meet the selection criteria. The full text was then sought for the remaining 121 results, with the full texts being reviewed to determine eligibility for inclusion in the rapid review. Based on reviewing the full text of the articles, only 36 results were deemed to meet the study's selection criteria.



The methodological quality of the results considered potentially eligible for inclusion in the rapid review were then assessed through the use of the MMAT. This tool has been found to be reliable when reviewing the quality of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research designs (Pace et al. 2012). All articles bar one were judged to be of sufficient methodological quality for inclusion in the rapid review.

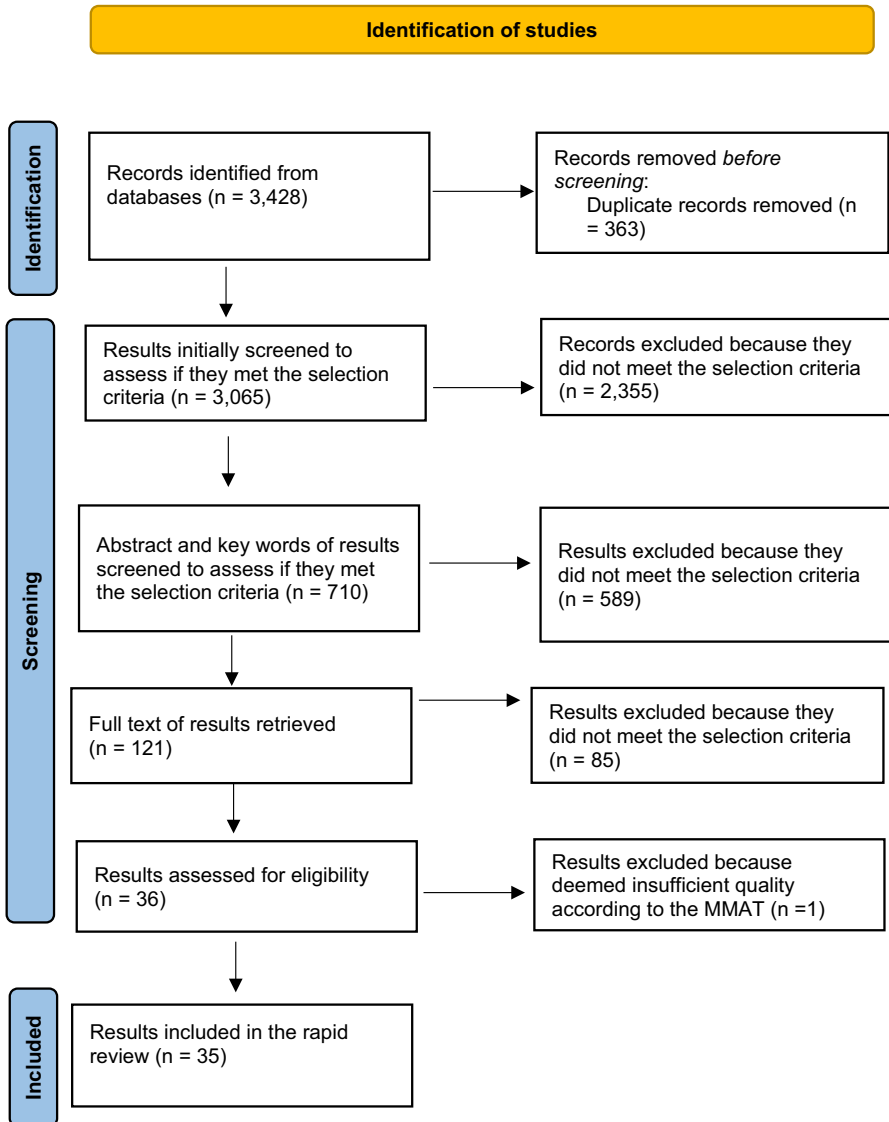


Fig. 1 Flowchart detailing the identification and screening of results for the rapid review. A modified version of the PRISMA flowchart (see Page et al. 2021) was used to present the results of the rapid review



The one result deemed to be of insufficient methodological quality by the MMAT was excluded from the review, resulting in a final sample of 35 articles (see Fig. 1).

## Data extraction

A data extraction tool was developed to extract the relevant data from the final sample of 35 articles and help synthesize this data into key themes. The tool captured the following information: article details, research design, sample size, nature of the crimes found to occur on Snapchat, information on victims and their victimization, as well as information on offenders and their offending behavior. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (see Braun and Clarke 2006) and the findings are presented as a narrative summary providing an overview of the breath of work on this topic and a summation of what we know about crime occurring on Snapchat.

## Findings

The findings are broken up into two sections. The first explores the breath of work on this topic and what crimes have been found to occur on Snapchat. The second provides an overview of what is currently known about offending and victimization on Snapchat.

## Crime on Snapchat

Despite cybercrime being one of the fastest growing areas of criminality globally, and a growing recognition of how social media can enable and facilitate offending, the findings of the rapid review indicate that few studies have investigated crime on Snapchat. Since Snapchat was developed and released as a social media application in 2011, only 35 articles were found that meet the inclusion criteria for this rapid review and, of these studies, only five focused solely on crime occurring on Snapchat. The remaining 30 investigated offending on social media, in which Snapchat was one of the social media applications people reported using. In these studies, little attention was paid to identifying the specific types of crimes occurring on different social media applications but rather on offending on social media in general. This reveals a significant gap in knowledge regarding the specific nature of crime and victimization on Snapchat, in spite of its popularity and increasing reports of people being victimized on this application. Overall, crime on Snapchat is extremely under-researched, and given the potential for crime and victimization to occur on this platform, more research is required.

In reviewing the different types of criminal behavior people reported experiencing on Snapchat, a number of different behaviors were identified, including: blackmail (often using sexualized images e.g. sextortion); the sharing of private, sexual material without consent (e.g. revenge porn); grooming/solicitation of minors;



stalking; posting threatening/intimidating/harassing material; hate crime; sharing offensive/menacing/obscene content; obtaining illicit goods; identity theft; fraud; and hacking.

## **Blackmail**

Especially prevalent was blackmail. Of the 35 articles examined, 12 recounted experiences in which victims had been blackmailed with the release of intimate material about them if they did not acquiesce to the demands of the perpetrator (Douglass et al. 2020; Naezer and van Oosterhout 2021; Suzor et al. 2017; Walsh and Tener 2022). Frequently, this material involved sexualized images that were initially taken consensually while in a relationship, but following the breakdown of the relationship, the ex-partner was now threatening to release this information without the victim's consent if they did not meet their demands (Ricciardelli and Adorjan 2019; Yeung et al. 2014). In some cases, perpetrators were seeking to use these images to regain sexual favors or power over the victim (Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021).

## **Sharing private/sexual material without consent**

Accounts of people sharing private images without consent which did not involve blackmail were also common. Such incidents were mentioned in six articles. In these instances, the sharing of this material without the person's consent resulted in feelings of shame, guilt and disgust (Holoyda et al. 2018). This material was often circulated by former or current partners, but strangers may also circulate it by screenshotting an image they had received and sharing it with their contacts (Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021). The effects on victims was psychologically harmful, as they were often disturbed by others viewing intimate images of them, especially if the person committing the crime was a known associate (Borwell et al. 2022; Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021; Suzor et al. 2017).

Of course, there are instances where explicit content is sent and received consensually, although it violates Snapchat's community guidelines (Snapchat Support 2022; Snap Inc. 2022). Such accounts were reported in four articles. On Snapchat, people can sell intimate images via a Snapchat premium, an informal predecessor to many of the explicit platforms used today (Aguirre 2019). In this instance, a person would take an explicit photo of themselves, and send them to paying customers who send gift cards or money via Venmo for example (Aguirre 2019). Of particular concern is that minors may engage in this activity and sell photos of themselves (Aguirre 2019; Holoyda et al. 2018). This behavior is problematic for many reasons. Firstly, there are concerns about the wellbeing of the minors involved (Aguirre 2019; Holoyda et al. 2018). Moreover, the retention and distribution of intimate images of minors is a criminal offence involving the possession and distribution of child pornography (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020; Holoyda et al. 2018; Naezer and van Oosterhout 2021). Additionally, if the person buying the images is a minor, while the person selling the images is





an adult, the adult has just engaged in sexting a minor, which may be a punishable crime (Act of Parliament 2015; Ringrose et al. 2021). Of the 35 articles examined, 10 discussed the possession of child pornography.

### Grooming/solicitation of minors

Another concern was that Snapchat could be used to engage in grooming/solicitation of minors, contributing to child exploitation, which was mentioned specifically in three articles (De La Hoz 2021; Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020; Lykousas and Patsakis 2021). The studies highlighted how adults can use their influence, position, and power to coerce and groom young people, generally young girls (Lykousas and Patsakis 2021; Nikupeteri et al. 2021). By using their status as an adult or a more dominant person, perpetrators could coerce children, and sometimes other adults, into sending intimate pictures (Havard and Lefevre 2020). Both strangers and known associates were involved in committing this activity (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020; Havard and Lefevre 2020; Savoia et al. 2021). It is argued that when grooming first starts, it usually begins with the groomer making contact with a younger victim on Snapchat, and lying about their background, perhaps saying that they are a 15-year-old girl to seem less suspicious and gain trust (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020). Once trust is garnered, the perpetrator then begins to manipulate the victim into engaging in sexual behaviors (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020). During their interactions on Snapchat, the perpetrator frequently begins to attempt to gain the trust of the victim and manipulate the victim into modifying their body and/or their behavior, in order to appease them (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020). This often involves the person coercing the victim into taking explicit images and sharing the images with them, with these images being used in a way that was not intended by the victim (Velez 2019; Walsh and Tener 2022). Such actions are often traumatic for the victim, and can even lead to harassment (Suzor et al. 2017; Velez 2019; Waldman 2017).

### Stalking

Three articles discussed how Snapchat may enable and facilitate stalking by being a medium whereby a person can monitor a person's location, behavior and who they are socializing with (Nikupeteri et al. 2021). For instance, Snapchat can be used by perpetrators to surveil a person's contacts and make threats based on that information (Havard and Lefevre 2020; Leitão 2021). Information on Snapchat can also be used to track the movements of people, their purchases/ items they own, known associates, activities, and more (Havard and Lefevre 2020; Leitão 2021; Nikupeteri et al. 2021). Additionally, in instances such as a divorce/separation, children may be contacted on Snapchat by coercive parents and feel pressured into providing information, which may be used to harm, control or induce fear in the other parent (Nikupeteri et al. 2021).



## Posting threatening/intimidating/harassing material

Another crime frequently identified as occurring on Snapchat was the use of Snapchat to threaten, intimidate or harass another person, with six articles describing this behavior. It was reported that social media applications, such as Snapchat, provided new opportunities for intimidating, threatening, and harassing behavior to occur online (Jones et al. 2021; Moneva et al. 2021; Skierkowski-Foster 2019). Often threatening, intimidating or harassing comments were made relating to a person's appearance, gender and/or sexual orientation, in order to intimidate, dehumanize, shame, or punish a person (Moneva et al. 2021; Schoenebeck et al. 2020; Skierkowski-Foster 2019). These comments were made by people known to the victim, as well as strangers, who seemed to use these comments as a means of feeling superior to others (Jones et al. 2021; Ortiz 2021; Schoenebeck et al. 2020; Skierkowski-Foster 2019). In particular, accounts of feeling harassed because of cyberbullying were frequently heard, with five different articles noting that harassing and intimidating behavior was engaged in by children and adults alike on social media (Charteris and Gregory 2020; de Felice et al. 2022; Jones et al. 2021; Moneva et al. 2021; Skierkowski-Foster 2019). While cyberbullying may not always be illegal, it is quite damaging, and can turn into a prosecutable crime if it involves harassment, intimidation, threats to life, a breach of personal security, incites criminal activity or involves a hate crime (Jones et al. 2021; Obeidat et al. 2018).

## Hate crime

Harassment online can take the form of hate crime; a crime specifically mentioned in one of the articles. On social media, perpetrators of racism and hate crimes may feel more emboldened, and be more willing to be overtly racist, as they feel that they can hide behind the guise of online anonymity (Ortiz 2021). However, such comments can negatively impact on people's wellbeing, contributing to negative emotional states involving depression, fear, feeling depersonalized and stigmatized (Ortiz 2021).

## Sharing offensive/menacing/obscene content

There are also instances where material is not necessarily sent to another person to intimidate them, but posted publicly with the intention to circulate offensive, menacing or obscene content directed at a whole group or an individual (Ortiz 2021; Salerno-Ferraro, et al. 2021). Two articles discussed how Snapchat could be used to share offensive/menacing/obscene content (Ortiz 2021; Salerno-Ferraro, et al. 2021). In particular, the sharing of offensive racist and sexist material on Snapchat was referred to, as well as the sharing of obscene content that was sexual in nature and unsolicited by the recipient (Ortiz 2021; Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021).



## Illicit goods

Two articles discussed how Snapchat could be used to facilitate obtaining illicit goods (Staton et al. 2022; Philip et al. 2020), with Snapchat's privacy features (e.g., self-deleting messages and screenshot notifications) potentially giving users a false sense of security that it was safe to engage in risky behaviors on the application (Charteris and Gregory 2020). The first article drew attention to the use of social media to solicit transactional sex, with sex being exchanged for money or drugs (Staton et al. 2022). Posting pictures while on holiday was also perceived as potentially increasing the risk of having goods stolen as thieves could see that homeowners were away on holiday (Philip et al. 2020).

## Identity theft

Reference to the potential for information gleaned through Snapchat to be used to facilitate identity theft and the distribution of material aimed at disparaging victims was made in two articles (Nikupeteri et al. 2021; Philip et al. 2020). One article described how Snapchat, and other social media applications, could be used by ex-partners to gather intelligence and disseminate information intended to disparage their former partner's reputation and/or damage their relationship with their children (Nikupeteri et al. 2021). Another article referred to how sensitive information can be garnered from social media posts which would facilitate identity theft (e.g. pet names which can often be used as passwords) (Philip et al. 2020).

## Fraud

Moreover, a variety of fraudulent activities were referred to six articles. For instance, minors declaring fake ages to register as normal service users (Lykousas and Patsakis 2021). Fake accounts being created to groom minors, distribute threatening/intimidating/harassing or hate crime material, as well as to blackmail people (de Felice et al. 2022; Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020; Jones et al. 2021; Walsh and Tener 2022). Additionally, one article discussed the potential for phishing and social engineering to occur on social media applications, such as Snapchat, with the sensitive information obtained through these methods being used for fraudulent purposes and identity theft (Philip et al. 2020).

## Hacking

Two articles also made reference to the potential for hacking to occur (Philip et al. 2020; Suzor et al. 2017). Due to the ephemeral nature of Snapchat messages, people may feel more comfortable disclosing intimate images on the application. However, Snapchat accounts are hacked, with the images stolen and disseminated or information garnered used to commit identity theft (Philip et al. 2020; Suzor et al. 2017). For instance, in 2014, over 100,000 intimate images sent on Snapchat, that were



initially thought to be deleted, were recovered, and dispersed, with some images even containing intimate images of minors (Suzor et al. 2017).

## Victims and offenders

Insights into some of the characteristics of those engaged in offending behavior on Snapchat, those victimized by this behavior and the relationships between victims and offenders were also gleaned from the rapid review.

### Victims

With regards to the age of the victims, 11 articles specifically stated that victims tended to be younger, whether that be children, teens or very young adults. Compared to their grown-up counterparts, children were more likely to be victims of crime on Snapchat or social media more generally (De La Hoz 2021; Lykousas and Patsakis 2021; Rowse et al. 2022). A common finding among the studies was that children were encouraged to trust an older Snapchat user and were subsequently victimized due to this misplaced trust (Nikupeteri et al. 2021; Rowse et al. 2022; van Baak et al. 2022). Perpetrators seemed to build trust by contacting victims and maintaining a friendly persona to convince the victim they were genuine and should be trusted (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020). This development of trust was done to encourage the victim to feel safe disclosing intimate content to them, with these disclosures being used against them (Rowse et al. 2022; Waldman 2017).

Another key finding to emerge from the rapid review was that 14 out of the 35 studies specifically mentioned that women were more at risk of victimization than their male counterparts. Women were more frequently victimized than men and were more frequently sought out by perpetrators compared to men (Ringrose et al. 2021; Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021; van Baak et al. 2022). However, gender often interacted with age to influence victimization, as younger women were more likely to be victimized compared to men or older women (Henry et al. 2019; Moneva et al. 2021; Ringrose et al. 2021). Although, people on Snapchat were victimized by both strangers and known associates, when it came to public spaces on Snapchat, women were more likely to be victims of pervasive and unwanted sexual attention and harassment by strangers (Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021). That is not to say that men or adolescent boys are not also victimized (van Baak et al. 2022). There are instances of cyberbullying or grooming happening to young boys as well, albeit less frequently (Skierkowski-Foster 2019). Nevertheless, there is a greater tendency for the victims of such crimes to be female as opposed to male. Of course, it must be acknowledged that Snapchat is more likely to be used by younger people and has a slight majority of female users (54%) (Dixon 2022).



## Offenders

Many of the studies highlighted how perpetrators were generally older than victims when it came to crimes, such as grooming (De La Hoz 2021; Lykousas and Patsakis 2021; Rowse et al. 2022). It appeared that older adults or older adolescents tended to victimize younger people on Snapchat (Nikupeteri et al. 2021; Rowse et al. 2022; van Baak et al. 2022). Yet, when it came to crimes such as sexual harassment, sextortion, or revenge porn, these were generally committed by peers of a similar age and older people (Charteris and Gregory 2020; Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021). Additionally, the literature suggests it is more often men who engage in blackmail (e.g. sextortion), stalking, sharing private/sexual material without consent (e.g. revenge porn), grooming/solicitation of minors and threatening/harassing/intimidating behavior (Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020; Henry et al. 2019; Korkmaz and Överlien 2020; Leitão 2021; Ramirez and Lane 2019; Starr and Lavis 2018; van Baak et al. 2022).

## Victim-offender nexus

Only, six articles discussed the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Prior relationships were a reoccurring theme for sextortion, revenge porn, coercion, stalking, and physical attacks mediated by Snapchat. Although some of the studies suggest that strangers may commit crimes against victims, current or former partners were often perpetrators of crimes on Snapchat (Korkmaz and Överlien 2020; Leitão 2021; Ramirez and Lane 2019; Starr and Lavis 2018). In such cases, one party might feel jilted and have a desire to get revenge on their former partner, leading to revenge porn or sextortion, with a greater tendency for the female to be the victim and the perpetrator to be male (Starr and Lavis 2018; van Baak et al. 2022; Walsh and Tener 2022). Nevertheless, men can be victims of revenge porn or sextortion as well (Ringrose et al. 2021; Ricciardelli and Adorjan 2019). Research indicates that 36% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants had experienced nonconsensual intimate image sharing victimization, with 39% of bisexual and gay males experiencing this as opposed to 33% of bisexual and lesbian females (Henry et al. 2019).

## Discussion

The results of the present study suggest some interesting implications for future work and research. First and foremost, in answer to Research Question 1, the results indicate that few studies have specifically investigated crime on Snapchat, despite its growing popularity and the potential for crime and victimization to occur on its platform. Since 2011, only five articles were found which investigated crime occurring specifically on Snapchat, with another 30 articles examining crime on Snapchat as part of a wider goal of investigating crime on social media. This indicates that this area is under-researched and more research is needed if we are to understand the prevalence of crime on Snapchat and enhance our theoretical understanding of this behavior. In answer to Research Question 2, we know that there are several crimes



occurring on Snapchat. In particular, blackmail (e.g., sextortion), the sharing of private, sexual material without consent (e.g., revenge porn), grooming/solicitation of minors, stalking, using Snapchat to threaten/intimidate/harass another person, post hate crimes, share offensive/menacing/obscene content, obtain illicit goods, identity theft, fraud and hacking. The findings of the rapid review also indicate that offenders can be older or a similar age as victims, with females being more likely to be victimized, especially younger females. Moreover, victims and offenders were sometimes known to each other, with frequent reports of victimization occurring in past and current relationships.

In many ways, these findings are similar to previous studies examining crime on social media. Past studies demonstrate how other social media applications can facilitate obtaining stolen goods, fraud, identity theft, hacking, posting threatening/intimidating/harassing material, hate crime and sharing offensive/menacing/obscene content (Moneva et al. 2021; Ortiz 2021; Philip et al. 2020; Ringrose et al. 2021; Schoenebeck et al. 2020; Staton et al. 2022). Blackmail, the sharing of private, sexual material without consent, grooming/solicitation of minors and stalking can also occur on multiple social media applications (e.g. Al Habsi et al. 2023; DeMatteo et al. 2017; Greene-Colozzi et al. 2020; Henry et al. 2019; Walsh and Tener 2022).

Nevertheless, while other social media applications can be used to share private, sexual material without consent and stalking, Snapchat seems to be a major medium for such crimes (Ricciardelli and Adorjan 2019). Burnell et al. (2022) argue that Snapchat is unique in its ephemerality. Accordingly, this ephemerality combined with Snapchat's notification if messages have been screenshot may contribute to people feeling safer sharing more intimate videos and images on this application (Naezer and van Oosterhout 2021; Starr and Lavis 2018). Indeed, research suggests that people feel that they are less at risk of being a victim of crime when posting information on Snapchat compared to other applications like Facebook and Twitter but the ability to share location on Snapchat via the Snap map was perceived to increase the risk of stalking or burglary compared to other social media applications (Philip et al. 2020). These defining features of Snapchat may induce a greater perceived control over the disclosures people make, with past research linking greater perceived control with riskier disclosures, behaviors and lower perceived privacy risks, potentially enhancing their susceptibility to victimization (Hajli and Lin 2016). Perceived control can be defined as believing you retain control over the dissemination, distribution and use of information disclosed when in reality you may not retain such control (Hajli and Lin 2016). Future research should examine if perceived control may influence disclosures on Snapchat and contribute to cybercrime victimization.

This study's findings also confirm past research indicating that women tend to be more likely to be victimized on social media (Ringrose et al. 2021; Salerno-Ferraro et al. 2021). However, while past research on age and victimization on social media is more mixed, the results of this rapid review suggest that younger people may be more likely to be victimized on Snapchat. More research is needed to explore the victim-offender nexus as the relationships between victims and offenders on social media is not always clear but the findings of this rapid review highlight how often it



is current/former partners who may be victimizing people on Snapchat and not just strangers.

The present study highlights the importance of understanding self-disclosure on Snapchat, in particular the rationale and motivations behind why people make disclosures. By self-disclosing information of a sensitive nature, and trusting another party with that content, a person can increase their risk of becoming a victim of cybercrime. In the rapid review, several articles noted that victims had been in relationships with perpetrators when they made their self-disclosures on Snapchat, suggesting that trust and relationship development may be key factors influencing their behavior. Other reasons why people may self-disclose information include for the purposes of expression, friendship maintenance, communication, or even feelings of loneliness (Staton et al. 2022; Stone et al. 2022). For instance, a person may disclose personal information if they feel lonely and want to connect with other people, using their self-disclosures as a means of connecting to others with similar experiences (Staton et al. 2022; Stone et al. 2022). Further research is required to understand self-disclosure on Snapchat and its relationship to potential victimization.

Additionally, as the messages on Snapchat delete after being viewed, this limits the potential for evidence to be gathered and used in criminal investigations and prosecutions (Bungert 2021; Vaterlaus et al. 2016). Based on the results of the present study, this could explain why some criminal activities are more likely to occur on this application. By having self-deleting messages, the proof that the messages were sent or occurred at all is nullified, so people might feel more emboldened to act. Therefore, further research on the self-destructing nature of Snapchat content should be encouraged to understand the tensions between the use of self-destructing messages to enhance feelings of privacy and the challenges this feature poses for criminal investigations and prosecutions.

Finally, as the rapid review found that many victims had been in prior relationships with their victims, further research is required in this area to help develop possible interventions to reduce this behavior. While there are studies that examine strangers perpetrating cybercrimes, in many of the cases, the victim was either currently in or previously in a relationship with the perpetrator, especially in the case of revenge porn. This suggests that these types of cybercrimes are occurring as a form of retribution over perceived slights in a relationship, whether that be the termination of the relationship or refusal to obey a command set forth by the perpetrator. Future research should be encouraged on this subject, as it might allow for possible intervention measures to be developed to prevent such crimes from occurring.

Of course, there are limitations to the present study that must be borne in mind when interpreting its findings. First, the present study consisted of a rapid review of the literature, and although nuanced, lacked detail that a long-term systematic review might have unearthed. Furthermore, the present study only examined articles written in English, restricting the inclusion of studies published in other languages, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Lastly, the research studies examined were often cross-sectional in nature, limiting the extent to which longer term patterns in offending and victimization could be observed, changes over time or conclusions drawn about causal relationships.



## Conclusion

This study presents some new interesting findings. It has identified the different types of crime that can occur on Snapchat, provided more clarity on what is currently known about crime on Snapchat and identified patterns in offending and victimization on Snapchat. It has also noted and identified gaps in our knowledge which need to be addressed to enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, the present study differs from others in that it focuses specifically on crime occurring on Snapchat when most other studies tend to focus on social media related crime more generally. Providing a more nuanced understanding of how the experience of crime and victimization may vary between different social media applications can help develop our theoretical understanding of this phenomenon, and enhance policy and practice, to better prevent cybercrime victimization.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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