

Staying safe online

Why you shouldn't click on links from strangers and what's being done to curb health-related misinformation on social media.

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IT PAYS to be alert about possible scammers lurking on social media.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) is warning the public to beware of unsolicited messages from unknown parties offering them a chance to generate income during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Circulated on WhatsApp and other social media platforms, such messages claim that recipients can earn up to RM500 a day.

MCMC advised the public against replying to such messages and clicking on any provided links.

"Delete the message and do not forward it to others," MCMC said in a statement, adding that public awareness is crucial to protect themselves from scams, phishing attacks, personal data theft and other forms of crime.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in a statement said hackers and scammers are taking advantage of the pandemic by send-



ing fraudulent emails or text messages to trick recipients into clicking on malicious links or opening attachments with malware.

"These actions can reveal your user name and password, which can be used to steal money or sensitive information," WHO wrote in a statement, adding that some of these scammers may even impersonate the organisation to "appeal" for donations.

Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department director Comm Datuk Zainuddin Yaacob said in a recent report that most online scam victims are women, 55% of whom are above the age of 51. He added that most ended up being scammed when told that their properties were being confiscated under the Anti-Money Laundering Act.

The cost of online scams is devastating. Comm Zainuddin said some 5,218 online scams were reported between January to October this year, with over RM265mil lost and 2,676 arrests made.

In 2019, he said there were 5,725 reports on online scams with losses amounting to RM254mil, compared to 4,965 cases in 2018 with losses totalling RM226mil.

MCMC is also ramping up efforts to

take action against individuals for misusing social media – 48 court charges were filed from January till September 2020, marking a 66% increase from last year.

Of the 48 charges, 34 were listed as offences committed under Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. The remaining 14 charges were offences committed under the Penal code and Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017.

MCMC added it received 178 reports on social media abuse as of September 2020, compared to 139 during the same period last year.

Members of the public are reminded that any act of sharing or spreading fake, offensive and/or threatening content is an offence under Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. Upon conviction, offenders will receive a fine of no more than RM50,000 or one year's imprisonment, or both.

Speaking of fake news, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin shared on Twitter that a viral video "spreading lies and misinformation about vaccines" by a user has been removed from YouTube after his ministry lodged a report with MCMC.

"We will continue to monitor information about anti-vax (anti-vaccine) and take action," he said in the Twitter post on Nov 12. Similarly, Facebook announced in

October that it will ban ads with information that discourage people from getting vaccinated.

"We already don't allow ads with vaccine hoaxes that have been publicly identified by leading global health organisations, such as WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Now, if an ad explicitly discourages someone from getting a vaccine, we'll reject it," the company said in a statement.

However, CNBC pointed out that Facebook still allows ads that "advocate against government policies around vaccines" such as one launched by a state delegate in the United States protesting "forced coronavirus vaccinations".

