

Cyberbullying: Causes of Online Harassment

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Abstract

The use of social media has risen along with cyberbullying as the world gets more digitally linked. Based on a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (2020), Malaysia is ranked as the second highest in Asia for cyberbullying among youth indicating that cyberbullying is becoming an increasingly prominent problem in the country. Research on cyberbullying has made significant progress in recent years, but understanding of cyberbullying behavior remains limited. Therefore, more investigation is needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of factors that influence cyberbullying behavior among adults in Malaysia. The current study aimed to examine the effect of anonymity, accessibility, and peer pressure on cyberbullying behavior among Malaysians. The quantitative research method is utilized by distributing the online questionnaire using Google Forms via face-to-face, email, and social networks. A total of 171 responses were collected and used for the data analysis. The findings show that anonymity, accessibility, and peer pressure have significant effects on cyberbullying behavior. In addition, the study also revealed that accessibility is the most influential factor in cyberbullying behavior. In the digital age, social media plays a central role and it is essential to foster a safe and respectful online environment. Additionally, addressing cyberbullying requires a collective effort from individuals, families, institutions, communities, and policymakers. Enforcing stricter laws and regulations to hold cyberbullies can serve as a deterrent and help to protect potential victims.

Keywords: Social Media, Cyberbullying, Anonymity, Accessibility, and Peer Pressure.

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Introduction

Cyberbullying is a pervasive issue with global implications, transcending geographical boundaries and cultural differences. According to Zulkilfi (2022), cyberbullying is defined as the use of communication and information technology equipment, as well as an online platform, to harass or humiliate another person. In a rapidly digitizing world, the phenomenon of cyberbullying has become a concerning aspect of online behavior, impacting individuals of all ages. With the globe becoming more digitally inclined, the use of social

media has escalated tremendously which also brings forth a certain problem known as cyberbullying. In addition to lowering self-esteem, cyberbullying can also cause physical (such as sleeplessness) and mental (such as stress and anxiety symptoms, drug usage, and drug use) health problems. To harass their victims, cyberbullying offenders always employ digital technologies, such as social media, mobile short messaging, email, and chat rooms. The physical and emotional health of cyberbullying victims is substantially impacted due to the anonymity, time constraints, and robust communication of the

practice (Zych et al., 2018). According to Huan Liu (2019), preteens and teenagers are really endangered by cyberbullying, therefore it's essential to comprehend the motivations behind it in order to stop it from happening and lessen its effects. It also shows that the cause of cyberbullying behavior is very widespread among all members of the public, particularly in Malaysia. Based on a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (2020), Malaysia is ranked as the second highest in Asia for cyberbullying among youth indicating that cyberbullying is becoming an increasingly prominent problem in the country (Bernama, 2022)

Research on cyberbullying has made significant progress in recent years, but several notable gaps still exist. Most previous research on cyberbullying focused on the impact and effect of cyberbullying (Helfrich et al., 2020; Celuch et al., 2022; Maurya et al., 2022), cyberbullying among youth (Alismaiel, 2023; Zhu et al., 2021; Saef and Purbasha, 2023), and causes of cyberbullying (Santre, 2022; Shaikh, 2020). These research gaps are areas where our understanding of cyberbullying behavior remains limited, thus, more investigation is needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of factors that influence cyberbullying behavior among adults in Malaysia. Therefore, the current study will examine the effect of anonymity, accessibility, and peer pressure on cyberbullying behavior among Malaysians.

Literature Review

Cyberbullying Behaviour

Cyberbullying is defined as “any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.” (Tokunaga, 2010). Persons who engage in cyberbullying behavior are referred to as "cyber bullies," while individuals who have been impacted by it are referred to as "cyber victims” (Kavuk Kalender et al. 2019). Emotional assaults, harassing or discriminatory

behavior, disseminating libelous material, misrepresenting yourself online, exposing sensitive information, social isolation, and cyberstalking are all examples of cyberbullying (Kao, 2021). Additionally, typical bullying takes place in the context of the classroom, whereas cyberbullying can happen at any time (Kowalski, Limber, & McCord, 2019).

Cyberbullying and cyber victimization are widespread issues experienced by adolescents and kids (Zhu C, Huang S, Evans R and Zhang W (2021). Adolescents who report greater levels of emotional and behavioural challenges also have a propensity for bullying and cyberbullying, whether as a victim or an offender. This behaviour is more prevalent among individuals who develop addictions to social networks and those who spend a greater amount of time online (Kao, 2021). Therefore, in order to prevent the kids from participating in and or being exposed to such practices, the family members need to be aware of these behaviours (Kavuk Kalender et al., 2019; Ronis & Slaunwhite, 2019; Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2020; Tanrkulu, 2018).

Previous studies highlighted the importance of social ties, particularly those with their parents, in determining how likely they are to continue engaging in behaviors of bullying (Chan & Wong, 2019; Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2020; Tanrkulu, 2019). According to Lapidot-Lefler & Barak (2012), Morales (2011), Thomas et al. (2015), accessibility, anonymity, and exposure contribute to cyberbullying behaviours. Despite the fact that most academics acknowledge that cyberbullying is an advanced form of violence made possible by the growing usage of the internet and modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) towards teenagers. Relying on past studies, the present research will look into anonymity, accessibility and peer pressure as potential causes of cyberbullying.

Anonymity

Anonymity refers to the degree to which a user believes the source of a communication to be

unclear or unknown (Evans et al. 2016). Even though anonymity may be possible, some users may inadvertently or purposefully reveal their identities (by verifying accounts, for instance) or by posting multimedia that contains their own information, such as audio or video. The anonymous perpetrators of cyberbullying cannot perceive the victims' emotional responses, such as anger, worry, or uncertainty. This makes it impossible to stop even accidental or unintentional cyberbullying right away. Face-to-face interactions, on the other hand, allow for adjustments based on the other person's response and the ability to see the victims' changing feelings. Even the nonverbal behaviour of the person teasing you offline gives up a social cue that allows you to deduce their motive. The absence of face-to-face interaction in cyberspace reduces the opportunity for social cues (Jun, 2020).

From a business perspective, users are less likely to complain when the anonymity of online hotel evaluations is not maintained (Dyussebayeva et al., 2020). Thus, anonymity can enable more direct, frank, and useful feedback for service providers, overcoming social desirability. Therefore, anonymity in business discussions may be valued in situations where people work since it keeps the individual from being identified with the communication. On the other hand, it may also encourage the use of offensive language or cause conversations to become more divisive. High levels of anonymity might promote unexpected bad effects including cyberbullying, fake reviews, and false information Wagenknecht et al. (2018).

Restaurant reviewers who can post anonymous online reviews are likely to give lower ratings and express more negative emotions, which may cause negativity bias: the more frequently a user is exposed to negative anonymous communication, the more likely it is that they will also leave negative anonymous communication (Deng et al., 2021). Cyberbullying can also result from regular social media use and

perceived anonymity (Lowry et al., 2016). This might lead to brand trolling, which would be detrimental to service providers (Demsar et al., 2021).

Accessibility

The advancement of Information and communication technology has given us numerous advantages, but it also comes with some drawbacks. The percentage of internet access by households in Malaysia has increased from 94.9% in 2021 to 96% in 2022. For individual access, the percentage has also increased from 96.8% in 2021 to 97.4% in 2022 (Ministry of Economy, 2023). Accessibility and connectivity to cell phones and digital technology might increase the risk of cyberbullying. Due to the lack of physical boundaries between the abuser and the victim, cyberbullying is likely to persist as "non-stop bullying." (Jun, 2020). Factors like mobility, affordability, and ubiquitous Internet connection make it easier for users to gain unrestricted access to social media networks. Everytime-everywhere computing has opened an avenue for intensive online socialization (Braumüller B., 2020). Lack of desire to communicate with peers, a sociality, and a loss of sense of reality are the problems that occur from the excessive use of social media. Through social networks, chats, and blogs, people are harassed on the Internet, and cases of anonymous bullying and aggression on social networks are growing. As a result, the tendency to violent behavior is intensifying and the number of suicides among young people is increasing (Pomytkina et al., 2021).

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure, also known as social pressure, refers to the direct impact of peers on individuals, or the effect on an individual who is pushed to follow their peers by modifying their views, beliefs, or behaviors to correspond to those of the influencing group or individual (Vyas & Gupta, 2020). Peer pressure is a shift in behavior that occurs when individuals perceive the effect of

groups of peers on their perspectives. When a person remains in a peer group, the various types of individuals put a lot of pressure on each other (Rong & Fang, 2018). Peer conduct has been demonstrated to impact the chance of cyberbullying in the same way that adult behavior influences children's lives (Baldry et al., 2018).

Bullying and cyberbullying are known to result in peer pressure and poor academic achievement (Gao et al., 2020). Adolescents are more likely to take risks in the company of peers in order to receive social benefits, and peer pressure can develop a lack of morality and cyberbully (Jiping et al., 2022). Peer pressure

affects cyberbullies because they frequently desire to blend in with a circle of peers or people to be accepted. Even if it means defying their better judgment. Friends occasionally cyberbully each other for fun, thus numbers can create a false feeling of security. Cyberbullies feel that everyone else is doing it, thus they are more inclined to do it as well. Because their peers tolerate the behavior, it does not appear to be a major issue in their eyes. For instance, if the group they belong to largely promotes rather than disapproves of cyberbullying perpetration, teenagers may be more likely to engage in cyberbullying behavior (Sasson & Mesch, 2017).

Research Framework and Hypotheses

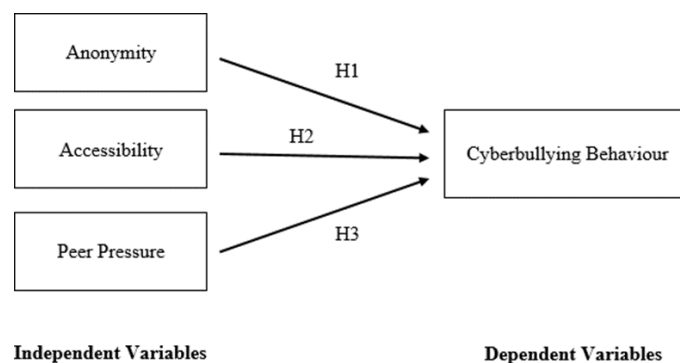


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

H1: The more anonymity the higher cyberbullying behavior.

H2: There more accessibility toward digital tools the higher cyberbullying behavior.

H3: The greater the peer pressure the higher cyberbullying behavior.

Methodology

This study will utilize a quantitative research method to gather numerical data and statistical analysis to measure the prevalence and factors of cyberbullying behavior among Malaysians. An online questionnaire was formed using Google Forms in order to reach the objectives of this study. They were distributed to the respondents through face-to-face, email, and social networks. All the items were measured using five items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

The questions were divided into five sections. Section A required the respondents to answer the demographic questions. Sections B, C, D, and E requested the respondents to answer questions on Cyberbullying Behaviour (Kamel et al., 2021), Anonymity (Kechter, A.,2019), Accessibility (Camacho, S., Hassanein, K., & Head, M.,2014), and Peer Pressure (Kamel et al., 2021) consecutively.

In addition, random sampling techniques are employed to ensure a representative sample of the target population. The unit of analysis of the study was the individual level that consisted of Malaysian residents. The sampling size for this research is obtained by using G*Power by setting the predictors to three, an estimation of at least 89 samples were suggested. A total of 171 data set was received which has exceeded the requirement and is adequate to represent the population.

Findings

Demographic Profile

A total of 377 questionnaires were distributed and 171 questionnaires were returned, presenting an overall 45% response rate. Of the 171 respondents, 42, or 24.6% were male, and 129, or 75.4% were female. With regards to the age of the respondents, 152 respondents (88.9%) were aged between 18 to 24 years old which becomes the majority while 13 respondents (7.6%) were range between 25-34 years old and

followed by the age range 35 to 44 years old which 4 respondents (2.3%). It was found that 150 respondents were students (87.7%), 16 respondents were full-time workers (9.7%), 3 respondents were self-employed, and another two respondents were part-time workers and retirees. Concerning their level of education, 83.6% of the respondents possess a Bachelor's Degree followed by 17 (9.9%) Diploma holders, 6 respondents (3.5%) possess Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), 3 respondents possess a master's degree and another 2 respondents possess a certificate.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Criteria	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	24.6
	Female	129	75.4
Age Group	18-24	153	89.5
	25-34	13	7.6
	35-44	4	2.3
	45 and above	1	0.6
Employment Status	Employed full-time	19	11.1
	Employed part-time	1	0.6
	Student	150	87.7
	Retired	1	0.6
	Unemployed	0	0
Education Level	SPM	6	3.5
	Diploma	17	9.9
	Bachelor's degree	143	83.6
	Master's degree	3	1.8
	PhD	0	0
	Certificate	2	1.1

Reliability Analysis

A reliability test was used to measure the degree to which the measurement instrument produces stable and consistent results. The reliability was done when a test measures the same thing more than once and the results will become the outcomes and there are several different reliability coefficients. One of the most commonly used is Cronbach's alpha which was based on the average correlation to provide a measure of the internal consistency of a test or

scale it is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 and the study results were based on the rules of thumb (Manerikar & Manerikar, 2015). Table 2 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha values of all the items for the independent variable are reliable with their values being more than 0.7. (Aziz, Racheal Samuel, and Kaliani Sundram, 2021). The values indicate that all the respondents understand the questions well.

Table 2. Reliability Test Result

Variables	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cyberbullying Behaviour	7	.760
Anonymity	7	.876
Accessibility	7	.963
Peer Pressure	7	.762

Correlation Analysis

A correlation was executed to determine the association between variables based on the guidelines that were developed by Salkind (2017).

Table 3. Total Results of the Correlations Test

No	Variable	1	2	3	4
1	Cyberbullying Behaviour	1			
2	Anonymity	.495**	1		
3	Accessibility	.524**	.649**	1	
4	Peer Pressure	.381**	.425**	.337**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the result of the correlation test, the highest association is between accessibility and anonymity ($r=.649$, $p=.000$) and the second largest is between anonymity and cyberbullying behavior ($r=.524$, $p=.000$). Moreover, the lowest association is between peer pressure and accessibility ($r=.337$, $p=.000$). In relating the associations between anonymity, accessibility, peer pressure, and cyberbullying behavior are all significant. The association between anonymity and cyberbullying behavior was a positive, moderate, and significant relationship ($r=.495$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a moderate association between these two variables. The existence of the state of anonymity in the usage of digital tools can moderately influence cyberbullying behavior.

Next, the association found between accessibility and cyberbullying behavior is

positive, strong and significant relationship ($r=.524$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, it could be concluded that the accessibility of digital tools can highly influence cyberbullying behavior among the respondents. Finally, the association between peer pressure and cyberbullying behavior was positive, weak, and significant relationship ($r=.381$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a weak association between these two variables. Greater peer pressure is less likely to influence cyberbullying behavior.

Regression Analysis

For the hypothesis testing, linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between variables. Table X below shown the result by testing the four hypotheses using regression test.

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.586 ^a	.344	.322	.50035

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Pressure, Accessibility, Anonymity

b. Dependent Variable: Cyberbullying Behaviour

The model summary indicates that all three causes which are Anonymity, Accessibility, and Peer

Pressure contribute only 34.4 percent (0.344) towards Cyberbullying Behavior.

Table 5. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	21.889	3	7.296	29.114	.001b
Residual	41.008	167	.250		
Total	63.697	170			

a. Dependent Variable: Cyberbullying Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Pressure, Accessibility, Anonymity

The ANOVA table above shows the results of the regression test. Based on the results, the model of

ANOVA is significant because the result of regression is 0.001 which indicates the model is significant.

Table 6. Coefficients Table

Model	Unstandard. Coefficients		Standard. Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.550	.255		6.080	.001
Anonymity	.161	.068	.203	2.363	.019
Accessibility	.281	.070	.330	3.992	.001
Peer Pressure	.158	.060	.184	2.639	.009

Table 7. Hypothesis Summary

Hypothesis	Result
H ₁ Anonymity and Cyberbullying Behaviour	Supported ($\beta=.203, p<.05$)
H ₂ Accessibility and Cyberbullying Behaviour	Supported ($\beta=.330, p<.05$)
H ₃ Peer Pressure and Cyberbullying Behaviour	Supported ($\beta=-.184, p<.05$)

The coefficient table shows the evidence of the hypotheses' acceptance. Based on the results, there are significant relationship between three independent variables; anonymity, accessibility, peer pressure, and cyberbullying behaviour. Therefore, all hypotheses are supported in this study.

Conclusion

Internet access provides new information, social-related information, and social networking opportunities but also simultaneously contains risks and a serious form of misbehavior among the young generation, such as Internet addiction, cyberbullying, cyber pornography, health risks, Internet fraud and cyber victimization that can hurt and distort a young generation' development. The result of this study found that anonymity,

accessibility, and peer pressure are three significant factors that can influence cyberbullying behavior. The internet provides round-the-clock access to communication channels and social media platforms. This constant availability means that cyberbullying can occur at any time, making it difficult for victims to escape or seek respite from the harassment. In addition, the key feature of online interactions is the ability to remain anonymous or pseudonymous. When individuals can hide behind fake usernames or profiles, they may feel less accountable for their actions. This anonymity can embolden them to engage in aggressive or hurtful behavior they might not consider in face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, many instances of cyberbullying occur within peer groups. In these cases, individuals might engage in harmful behavior to conform to the norms or expectations of their social circle. Peer pressure can push individuals to participate in cyberbullying even if they have reservations.

To create a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying behavior, future studies should consider embedding a broader range of factors that influence and interact with cyberbullying. By considering a wide range of factors, future studies can offer more nuanced insights into the nature of cyberbullying and inform the development of targeted interventions and policies. Understanding how technology, social dynamics, mental health, and broader contextual factors intersect in the cyberbullying landscape is crucial for creating effective prevention and support strategies in the digital age.

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