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CYBERBULLYING BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Objective: Cyberbullying is a new type of bullying activity due to the advancement of digital technology as compared to traditional bullying. This study aims to examine the influence of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control on cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media among adolescents and the mediating effect of empathy between these variables. The questionnaire survey was conducted mainly in West Peninsular Malaysia (Selangor, Penang, Ipoh and Johor Bahru) and a total of 219 respondents among adolescents were successfully collected. The data collected are being analysed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the use of the Partial Least Square approach (PLS). The results of the relationship between three independent variables on the mediating variable and cyberbullying behavioural intention as the dependent variable for this study. Attitude and perceived behavioural control have a significant relationship on cyberbullying behavioural intention ($p < 0.05$) and therefore H1 and H3 were accepted. In addition, attitude and perceived behavioural control ($p < 0.05$) have a significant relationship on empathy towards cyberbullying behavioural intention ($p < 0.05$), hence H4a and H4c were accepted. However, an insignificant result ($p > 0.05$) was identified for the subjective norm on cyberbullying behavioural intention and therefore, H2 is rejected. Furthermore, the results also show that subjective norm and empathy towards cyberbullying behavioural intention are insignificant ($p > 0.05$) and therefore H4b is rejected. Overall, all hypotheses are accepted except for H2 and H4b are rejected in this study. Furthermore, for future studies, it is recommended to include other

components of empathy such as cognitive and affective, other personality traits of self-esteem and loneliness as the mediating effect that would give better insight towards cyberbullying behavioural intention in Malaysia during the pandemic situation.

Keywords:

Cyberbullying; Theory Planned Behaviour (TPB); Empathy; Digitalisation

Introduction

The world of digitalisation nowadays has led society to communicate with each other by relying upon online networking specifically on social media using smartphones. However, excessive use of smartphones may increase cyberbullying cases and eventually towards psychological effects on society. Cyberbullying involved any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others (Camerini, Marciano, Carrara & Schulz, 2020).

According to Brewer and Kerlake (2015) cyberbullying is a new type of bullying activity due to the advancement of digital technology as compared to traditional bullying. In Malaysia, issues on cyberbullying have become a worsening trend whereby almost 70% of Malaysians are using social media as the platform in bullying others and the cyberbullies are mainly from teenagers and adolescents (IPSOS, 2018). However, the variability in the reported prevalence of experiencing cyberbullying, the prevalence rates suggest that for some adolescents experiencing cyberbullying is a regular occurrence and, as such, it is important to understand the motives behind engaging in cyberbullying behaviours (Steer, Betts, Baguley & Binder, 2020).

The impact of cyberbullying can cause serious negative outcomes to the person that is being bullied such as traumatise, depression, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders and even commit suicide (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020, the Malaysian government has imposed the movement control order (MCO) and the people are required to stay at home for a long period. It is predicted that the trend and reported cases of cyberbullying during the MCO will be increased. This will lead to the increase of cyberbullying cases via WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many other downloadable applications (Rashid & Mohamad, 2016; Johanis, Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2019).

Past studies mainly focus on cyberbullying among the young generation and students but lack coverage on adolescents with the element of personality traits as mediating effect. Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of Theory Planned Behaviour (attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control) on cyberbullying behavioural intention using social media among adolescents in Malaysia during the movement control order (MCO) and the personality trait of empathy as the mediating effect. This study shall contribute further understanding on cyberbullying intention among adolescents in Malaysia and the significant effect of TPB with empathy as mediation.

Literature Review

Cyberbullying Behavioural Intention on Social Media during MCO in Malaysia

Cyberbullying is most prevalent in the 'online' generation, which predominantly consists of children and adolescents (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2012). While technology continues to advance and becomes increasingly available in less developed countries, the number of individuals influenced by cyberbullying is predicted to increase. Rising prevalence of cyberbullying, combined with a paucity of available information and the suggestion that those responsible for adolescent welfare may be ill-equipped to address the issue, highlight the importance of investigating the cyberbullying experience (Brewer and Kerslake, 2015). Therefore, cases of cyberbullying in Malaysia among adolescents are expected to be increased during the MCO period due to the increase of use of technology on social media platforms.

Theory Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB was evolved from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) that was proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1985 (Ajzen, 1991). The three belief-based concepts such as attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control (PBC) are the main factors that an individual's intention to engage in a certain behaviour (Pan & Truong, 2018). According to Jafarkarimi, Saadatdoost, Sim and Hee (2017), victims that are being cyberbullied multiple times via a digital platform will have negative impacts on their life. Therefore, cyberbullying is considered as an unfortunate event that is occasionally done and thus is referred to as behaviour. Hence, to predict an individual's intention towards cyberbullying, TPB can be used as a theory that has a higher tendency to predict actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

Attitude (AT)

Attitude towards behaviour emerges from behavioural beliefs that produce a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of certain behaviour (Ajzen, 2013). Attitude depends on an individual's beliefs to act either the feeling is a positive or negative effect toward an object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Heirman and Walrave (2012) opined that attitude becomes an important determinant of cyberbullying intention. In their study, adolescents' attitude was examined to predict their motivation to engage in cyberbullying and revealed that adolescents' attitude becomes a vital predictor to perform cyberbullying. Besides that, Panumaporn, Hongsanguansri, Atsariyasing, and Kiatrungrit (2020) stated that bystanders' attitudes can lead to cyberbullying either to join or to ignore it based on their study that revealed 304 participants who were bullies had a positive attitude towards cyberbullying intention. Meanwhile, Rashid, Mohamed and Azman (2017) investigated undergraduate students' which majority of them were internet users that are highly exposed to cyberbullying. They found that undergraduate students' attitudes become the second most important predictor to perpetrate cyberbullying. On the contrary, Jafarkarimi et al. (2017) investigated 96 students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia by using a scenario-based and revealed that the role of attitude showed an insignificant effect on cyberbullying intention. Furthermore, Lazuras, Barkoukis, Ourda and Tsorbatzoudis (2013) observed that empathy can influence an individual's attitude and decision to engage in cyberbullying directly or indirectly. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that

H1: There is a positive relationship between attitude towards cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media.

Subjective Norms (SN)

Subjective norms refer to how people that are close to us such as families and friends influence our decision making. Ajzen (1991) defined subjective norms as “perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour”. Heirman and Walrave (2012) examined the adolescents’ subjective norm to predict their behavioural intention of cyberbullying and found out that subjective norm was less important than attitude due to negative social pressure showed less intention to engage in cyberbullying. Furthermore, Yang, Lu, Chen and Sun (2019) interviewed a group of teenagers to understand how normative factors influence cyberbullying on social networking sites. They concluded that subjective norms have a positive effect on adolescents’ behaviour towards cyberbullying intention. Peer-related environmental factors significantly associated with cyberbullying perpetration and victimization include social standing, popularity, social acceptance, and perceived social presence (Camerini et al., 2020). In contrast to the previous study, Rashid, Mohamed and Azman (2017) opined that subjective norm becomes a more important construct to engage in cyberbullying which showed that perceived social pressure influences an individual’s intention to perform cyberbullying via cyberspace. In addition, Jafarkarimi et al. (2017) explained that subjective norm was the idea of those important people for the individual and their perception about how they evaluate the behaviour. Their study concluded that the effect of subjective norms on cyberbullying intention was significant but suggested that in different circumstances the role of subjective norms can be altered. However, the personality trait of empathy can play an important role to influence an individual’s decision to engage in cyberbullying directly or indirectly (Lazuras et al., 2013). Therefore, it can be hypothesised that

H2: There is a positive relationship between subjective norms towards cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media.

Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)

According to Smith (2015), PBC is an extent to which individuals’ confidence level and determination to achieve specific actual behaviour in accordance to the perceived easiness or difficulty of an act to be completed. Consequently, the level of confidence emphasised by PBC would be affected due to the opportunity of chances and possessions to act (Anggraini & Siswanto, 2016). Hence, Sasson and Mesc (2016) revealed that PBC has a positive influence on risky online behaviour intention and Festl (2016) revealed that there is a positive influence between PBC and cyberbullying behaviour intention. Hence, the study showed a high level of PBC could lead to higher cyberbullying intention. On the contrary, Rashid, Mohamed and Azman (2017) found that PBC was not significantly related to toxic behaviour (e.g., cyberbullying intention). However, PBC does not significantly affect cyberbullying behaviour based on findings conducted by Adekoya (2016). This study was presented without providing any valid reason and justification for the research findings. Hence, it can be hypothesised that

H3: There is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control towards cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media.

The Personality Trait of Empathy (E)

Empathy can be defined as sharing another person’s emotional state that involves both an emotional and a cognitive dimension (Eisenberg, Guthrie, Cumberland, Murphy, Shepard, Zhou & Carlo, 2002). Furthermore, empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share another person’s emotional state or context (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). It also enables a person

to validate others' emotions (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015) and it seems to have some associations with cyberbullying (Doane, Pearson & Kelley, 2014). According to Cleemput, Vandebosch, and Pabian (2014), the lower level of emphatic concern could be an important factor of a person participating in cyberbullying behavioural intention and empathy was found to be a significant predictor of cyberbullying perpetration. However, Wigati, Diponegoro and Bashori (2020) found that empathy was a significantly negative role towards cyberbullying behavioural intention among high school students in Merangin, Jambi. In line with the study from Yuan, Liu and An (2020), showed that empathy has a mediating role towards cyberbullying behaviour intention. Precisely, the result among Chinese Junior High School students showed that empathy skills would be influenced by other factors of cyberbullying behavioural intention. Hence, it can be hypothesised that

H_{4a}: There is a positive relationship between attitude and empathy towards cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media.

H_{4b}: There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and empathy towards cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media.

H_{4c}: There is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control and empathy towards cyberbullying behavioural intention on social media.

Methodology

A survey questionnaire was developed for this study and the construction of the questionnaire was based on the three main beliefs highlighted by Ajzen (2013) which are behavioural beliefs (attitude), normative beliefs (subjective norm) and control beliefs (perceived behavioural control) were developed including personality trait of empathy as the mediating effects in this study. This survey is divided into section A into demographic data and Section B on psychometric data using a 5-point Likert-type scale between strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Random and convenient sampling techniques were used for distributing the survey mainly in West Peninsular of Malaysia (Selangor, Penang, Ipoh and Johor Bahru) and a total of 219 out of 230 respondents among adolescents aged between 16 to 24 years old (58 males and 161 females) were successfully collected and usable to conduct this study. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2012), convenience sampling was the most easily accessible respondents to provide the information and therefore, Google form links of the survey questionnaires were sent to respondents via social media platforms. Data collected are being analysed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the use of the Partial Least Square approach (PLS) and the results of the study such as R-square values, reliability and structural model tests are provided in the following chapter.

Data Analysis

The descriptive results on the demographic background (Table 1) and general information of respondents of this study show that the respondents are spending hours at home by accessing the social media platforms i.e., Facebook and Instagram frequently (more than 10 times per day) as their leisure time during the pandemic and MCO. Due to this restriction, the majority of the female respondents are having experience being bullied over social media. In addition, the R-square values which are more than 40% of the variables can be explained to behavioural intention and empathy (Table 2). While Cronbach's alpha value for each variable was generated and the results are shown in Table 3. From this test, Cronbach's alpha level was from 0.8 until 0.9 which is very good reliability.

Based on Table 4, shows the results of the relationship between three independent variables on the mediating variable and cyberbullying behavioural intention as the dependent variable for this study. AT and PBC have a significant relationship on CBI ($p < 0.05$) and therefore H_1 and H_3 were accepted. In addition, AT and PBC ($p < 0.05$) have a significant relationship on empathy towards CBI ($p < 0.05$), hence H_{4a} and H_{4c} were accepted. However, an insignificant result ($p > 0.05$) was identified for SN on CBI and therefore, H_2 is rejected. Furthermore, the results also show that SN and E towards CBI are insignificant ($p > 0.05$) and therefore H_{4b} is rejected. Overall, all hypotheses are accepted except for H_2 and H_{4b} are rejected in this study.

Table 2 below highlights the R-square values which are more than 40% of the variables that can be explained to behavioural intention and empathy. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha value for each construct was generated and the results are shown in Table 3 below. From this test, the alpha level that more than 0.9 is considered as excellent reliability, from 0.8 until 0.9 is very good reliability, from 0.7 until 0.8 is considered as good reliability, from 0.6 until 0.7 is considered as moderate reliability, less than 0.6 will be considered as poor reliability (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 1. Demographic Background

Items	Results
Social media platform	Facebook = 42%; Instagram = 30%; YouTube = 15%
Frequency login to social media	More than 10 times per day = 42%
Purpose of using social media	Leisure time = 45%; News update = 33%; Socialising = 17%
Experienced being cyberbullied	Yes = 87%; No = 13%

Table 2. R-square Values

	R-square
Behavioural intention	0.461
Empathy	0.563

Table 3. Reliability Analysis Result

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
AT	0.817
SN	0.883
PCB	0.802
E	0.866
CBI	0.888

Table 4. Result of the Structural Model

Variables	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Hypotheses
AT on CBI	0.213	0.08	2.711	0	H ₁ Accepted
SN on CBI	0.026	0.045	10.028	0.597	H ₂ Rejected
PBC on CBI	0.587	0.08	7.338	0	H ₃ Accepted
AT on E towards CBI	0.144	0.054	2.71	0	H _{4a} Accepted
SN on E towards CBI	0.018	0.031	0.528	0.597	H _{4b} Rejected
PBC on E towards CBI	0.401	0.078	5.088	0	H _{4c} Accepted

Discussion

There were consistent results identified with the past studies on attitude and PBC. Panumaporn et al. (2020) stated that bystanders' attitudes can lead to cyberbullying had a positive attitude towards cyberbullying intention. In addition, Rashid, Mohamed and Azman (2017) also identified that majority of cyberbullied were internet users that are highly exposed to cyberbullying intention. Heirman and Walrave (2012) opined that attitude becomes an important determinant of cyberbullying intention and revealed that adolescents' attitude becomes a vital predictor to perform cyberbullying. This can be further supported by Brewer and Kerslake (2015) that adolescents with low levels of self-esteem and empathy were most likely to engage in cyberbullying and suggests that individuals who perpetrate cyberbullying display a similar lack of empathy to traditional bullies.

Meanwhile, Sasson and Mesch (2016) revealed that PBC has a positive influence on risky online behaviour intention and Festl (2016) revealed that there is a positive influence between PBC and cyberbullying behaviour intention. Hence, this study includes the role of empathy as the mediating effect between attitude and PBC towards CBI and the results are significant. However, empathy does not mediate between subjective norm and cyberbullying behavioural intention. The probable reasons are due to the norm of cyberbullies that ignoring the influence of friends and family lead to insignificant results towards CBI. Furthermore, the age factors of the majority of respondents ranging from 18 – 45 years old have made them mature enough to make their own decision making and opinion without interference from others in cyberbullying.

This can be further supported by Camerini et al. (2020) that peer-related environmental factors are significantly associated with cyberbullying perpetration and victimization which include social standing, popularity, social acceptance, and perceived social presence. Lastly, due to technological advancement in smartphones and applications, most of the respondents owned social media accounts and the tendency to respond behaviourally towards other unknown users on social media would be more significant and prevalent as compared to close family and friends.

Limitation

Limitation of study on the literature review of personality traits are difficult to be found and the influence of technology application is not being applied in this study to further explore the cyberbullying behavioural intention.

Conclusion

This study shall further contribute to the literature review and understanding of TPB, the personality trait of empathy towards CBI. In addition, by having these results, it is expected that the relevant regulatory bodies shall consider further strengthening the existing rules and regulations with the involvement of various technology and communication key players in curbing the cyberbullying activities. By providing sufficient awareness and information in educating the public, it shall increase the consciousness towards cyberbullying activities among society. For future studies, it is recommended to include other components of empathy such as cognitive and affective, other personality traits of self-esteem and loneliness as the mediating effect that would give better insight towards CBI. Furthermore, other theories such as Technology Acceptance Model (technologies and social media applications) and Social Cognitive (psychology, education and communication) can be applied to discover the influence of technology applications and psychological effects in studying the behavioural intention of cyberbullying.

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