Case Study of Cyberbully among Effeminate Male Students in Public University

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Abstract. Social media is a worldwide trend and it has been used by everyone regardless of their age and background. The benefits of social media to consumers are the fast-paced functions of information delivery worldwide. However, social media has its own cost such as cyberbullying which involves the unknown disguised perpetrator and the poor victim. The issue of cyberbullying is a phenomenon that takes place on an internet platform and it has a profound impact on the victim. Cyberbullying is a form of deviant behavior of irresponsible individuals. This case study was conducted to understand the effects of cyberbullying among effeminate male university students. The subjects of the study consisted of four students at two public universities in the northern part of Malaysia. The methodology of research is a qualitative method by using in-depth interviews. The findings show that the main factor for cyberbullying to happen is the feminine character and the content of feminine posts such as fashion and makeup. Furthermore, the subjects are also affected emotionally, academically and in some aspects of their lives. In conclusion, the symptoms of cyberbullying are increasingly widespread and can happen to anyone. Various parties need to work together to control and mitigate these symptoms from continuously damaging the well-being of the community.

1. Introduction
Cyberbullying is understood as any form of violence experienced by the bullying victims and via the cyber world or the Internet. Cyberbullying can also be defined as harmful acts repeatedly used by electronic media users (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). According to Crozier and Skliopidou (2002), bully means acting on the weak to show their respective powers. This has indirectly caused the bully-victim to obey their will to respect those powerful by force. Generally, a bully can be defined as aggressive behavior either physical or psychological form repeatedly over the victim and it has brought fear to the bully-victim. Meanwhile, cyberbullying occurs when someone uses an internet platform such as social media via electronic equipment such as cell phones or personal computers to intimidate people online by posting threatening messages or comments (Donegan, 2012).
Nowadays, the standard of living had been improved and it benefited most of the people in the country. Modernization had affected us in many ways such as the emergence of new problems among adolescents and adults (Ngafifi, 2014). Problems will arise due to the increasingly
widespread social media outbursts and the explosion of the Internet that broadcasts negative elements (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). According to Mohd Dahlan A. Malek and Ida Shafinaz Mohamed Kamil (2010) the social problems that occur among adolescents related to cyber world can be included various act of crime such as internet fraud, indentity theft, pornography, cyber bullying, pedophilia, sexual harassment and online gambling. This criminal behaviour occurs either in urban or rural areas and adolescent involved as perpetrator or victims. For a developed country like Malaysia, it is important to maintain the quality of an individual’s social life.

Social media has a role to change behavior in each adolescent (Anderson et.al, 2003). Among the social issues that often occur among adolescents and adults are cybercrime, cyberbullying, drug abuse, adoption, alcohol addiction, etc. Technological change has encouraged the spread of new crime among adolescents (Li, 2006). A total of 7,600 children between 8 and 17 years old show one in three children in Malaysia are victims of cyberbullying. Growing cyberbullying indirectly affects the negative emotions of society, especially to children, adolescents, and adults (Patchin & Hinduja, 2013).

Cyberbullying referring to the use of the Internet or other electronic technology tools such as the use of smartphones, computers and tablets used for sending messages for contempt purposes, removing something that is hurtful or to embarrass others by email, website, message delivery or videos through social media and the like (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). In Malaysia, The use of social media is a medium for some parties to spread lies, sedition, intimidation and the like to sue the harmony of one's life without permission through chat sites, and pornographic images or personal information on the internet (Mohd Zaidi Mahmud, 2013). Extreme internet addiction due to the present sophisticated technological and communication cyberbullying is the cause of the development of cyberbullying. Among the symptoms of cyberbullying is when an individual experienced bullied, harassed, threatened or humiliated on the internet and to the extent victim commit suicides (Che Hasniza Che Noh & Mohd Yusri Ibrahim, 2014).

A study by Hinduja & Patchin (2013) concluded that victims of cyberbullying or those who conducted cyberbully suffer from an inferiority complex, extreme depression and tend to commit suicide. In case of prolonged bullying, the victim will also have severe emotional distress (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). The victims of cyberbullying tend to isolate themselves from the people around them (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). This would lead to psychological distress where individuals unable to cope with the high expectation and fail to cope up with the pressure Psychological distress is an explosion of emotional disturbance that consists of two main symptoms; anxiety and depression (Rose & Mustafa, 2018). When this occurs to any individual it would affect their quality of life and later on hinder them to have a psychologically healthy life. Therefore, there should be a control mechanism for social media users as a means of protection from violation of one individual’s psychological health. Social media users should not be too easy to share all things in the social media account because social media is the most prevalence platform for cyberbullying especially among adolescents.

On the other hand, cyberbullying is growing rapidly among primary and high school students and is associated with easy access to their smartphones. From the year of 2009 to 2010 comparing primary and secondary students, 1.5 percent of primary school students reported as victims of cyberbullying and high school students reporting a total of 18.6 percent (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). A study found that Facebook is the most frequently used medium for cyberbullying with a percentage of 78.8%, followed by Whatsapp by 37.4%, Twitter 26.3%, Short Message System (SMS) 22.2 % and Emails 12.1%. This suggests that Facebook is a popular medium often used by adolescents to perform cyberbullying (Wan Hassan Wan Embong 2015). The LGBT youth report has more online distortions of 42% and through text messages of 27% (Robers, 2014). Cyber bullying among adolescent is also related to suicidal thought and act among adolescent either the offender or victim due to aggressive behaviour they receives prior to it (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).
Effeminate male refers to men who are more feminine in terms of gestures, conversations, and appearances (Tiantian Zheng, 2015). They were born a man but they have a strong tendency to act feminine since childhood, for example, they show more interest in any activities or tasks that normally for girls. As they became older, the feminine instincts continue to grow and it strengthens when they meet the rest. Later, they form their group and live on their own culture as effeminate males. This group will try to present themselves with a fascinating style to show their more personality to women. They struggle to look exactly like real women. Often, this group is not accepted in the society as they were considered against the societal norms. Even though how hard they try to fit in, society will always reject them in every aspect. The society never tries to understand let alone to accept them as part of the community. Thus, it causes social problems such as bullies and discrimination toward them. In this modern world, bullies and discriminations also happen via the internet.

2. Methodology of Research
The study attempted to approach the effeminate male students to understand their cyber-bullying experiences. In particular, this study was conducted to explore the factors and effects of cyberbullying among effeminate male students at the University. The exploration was conducted using qualitative methods with in-depth interviews. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), in-depth interviews are face-to-face interaction between researchers and participants to know and understand their life, their experiences and social situations. In other words, in-depth interviews are two-way conversations in an informal setting between researchers and the participants.

Qualitative method is research that results in unreachable findings using statistical procedures of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research can generally be used for research on community life, history, behavior, social activity, and others. Qualitative methods are approaches to the study to analyze and collect data in research studies. Qualitative approaches are used to understand hidden phenomena in those groups and aim to get a general outcome of the reality of cyberbullying symptoms.

2.1. Sampling Technique
The selected Public Universities are Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) as a sample study for this study. The sampling technique is intended to select the study participants who meet the criteria to be studied. Furthermore, to get enough research participants, sampling techniques are also used. An interview with a gentleman who was once a victim of cyberbullying symptoms, from the student, he would suggest that other students who were also victims of cyberbullying. Interviews were continued with the victims to get the data to answer the questions studied. Using the snowball sampling method, the interviewed informants are related to each other and this will assist the researcher to obtain information correctly and accurately. Participants of the study were four soft men who had cyberbullying experiences. The table below shows the background of the study participants.

| Research Participant | Age | Course                | Year |
|----------------------|-----|-----------------------|------|
| Participant 1        | 20  | New Media communication | 1    |
| Participant 2        | 23  | Hospitality Management | 3    |
| Participant 3        | 23  | Communication         | 3    |
| Participant 4        | 21  | Communication         | 2    |
2.2. Research Instruments
In this study, to obtain the information required, the instrument used is the interview question protocol which is based on the objective of the study. The interview questions are semi-structured whereby the main set of questions is built first and other questions can be added later if it is necessary. Apart from that, the researcher played an important role as an instrument to process data starting from the beginning of data collection. The role of the researcher is to have holistic understanding, to evaluate and to reflect on the experience of the study participants.

2.3. Data Analysis
In this study, the data were collected through an in-depth interview. The interview conducted in two sessions for each participant. The process of data analysis includes the searching for theme and coding based on the objectives of the study. In this study, the researcher did the coding and then categorized all the sub-themes according to the main theme. The frequency of this sub-theme is listed and been put under the main theme. To achieve that, the interview transcripts prepared first by copying and rewriting all recorded interviews using audio recorders. The transcription process is very important for researchers to get raw and genuine data. Then, transcription needs to pass through the filtering process and data cleaning. This process is carried out with caution and repeated reviews are also made to ensure no relevant data is left out. To increase the validity of the data, each theme and subtheme has gone through an expert review process, peer review and member checking. Any sensitive and confidential information such as name and origin will be protected to respect the privacy of the study participants.

3. Results and Discussion
From in-depth interviews, participants said cyberbullying took place through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, and Twitter. These types of social media applications are the most frequently used by the participants every day. Result of this study suggested two major themes. Each theme represents the study objectives which were to understand the factors and effects of cyberbullying among effeminate male students. The first theme has two subthemes and the second theme has 3 subthemes. The figures below show the main themes and sub-themes.

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Main Theme 1-Factors of cyber-bullying
The first main theme is the factor of cyberbullying among effeminate male students consists of two sub themes, namely feminine personality and feminine posting in social media. The personality of subject which shows more feminine character has caused dislike from people at their surrounding. Their presence often receives rejection and ignorance from other students at the university. Most of the participants stated that because of their gentle feminine personality, they were bullied in social media.

"Maybe because of my character... actually I am more toward female personality since long ago... because I am not like other male so they feel not comfortable.. They dislike me..." (Participant 1)

Participants 2 agreed that the factors that cause him to become victim of cyber bullying is also due to his soft and slow personality especially in doing work. He frequently received harassment from unknown in social media. They sent him personal messages that distract his emotions.

"I received personal messages from people that I don’t know who... they wrote something like you are slow, work like a girl... those message often upset me because it cause distraction to me" (Participant 2)

Meanwhile, participant 4 said that he was being teased and name calling for having a personality and a feminine character. He also receives ridicule and negative words in social media like facebook.

"They teased me and call me names in facebook... Sometimes they wrote bad and negative comments... It was because of me being feminine" (Participant 4)

Participants 1 stated that he was bullied because of frequent posting of feminine posts. This caused him to receive various negative comments from people who did not like the content that he posted on social media.

"I think many of my friends in social media did not like what I posted... I like to post activities that I joined such as fashions, make up, accessories... that’s why they always teased and they hate me” (Participant 1)

In addition, participant 2 also stated the same thing regarding femininity posting in social media. Therefore their friends in social media have a negative perception towards them that leads to cyberbullying.
"Honestly, I actively post about fashions and make-up. I used to share make up tutorial because for me the content is interesting. Then, I received negative comments at all postings that I share. They put public comment, everone could read everything... all the bad words and comments” (Participant 2)

Then the second main theme is to understand the effects of cyber bullying on the participants. Three sub themes emerged which is emotion, academic and daily life. Results of data analysis from the interviews, sub theme that have the most impact are the effects on emotions. The participants experience emotional disturbance due to the harassments from people in social media. Cyber bullying leads them to a more serious issue such as psychological distress. This happen when participants could not handle the situation and they choose to withdraw themselves from it. They felt that the situation is too depressing. This is agreed by a participant 1 who feels so stressed on what is happening.

“When the thing become too serious and I cannot handle it anymore, it makes me feel so stress... I don’t want to talk, I don’t want to talk to anyone. At certain time, I don’t want to meet anyone. I don’t want to hear whatever they say about me. It was too stressful” (Participant 1)

Apart from that, participant 2 also stated that his emotions were so disturbed and distorted that he becomes more sensitive and could not think well. The situation also made it difficult for him to live a daily life as a student.

“I admit that I was so stressed with such messages and I was emotionally down for quite some time. I honestly say my emotions were seriously disturbed because of this cyber bullying. I feel that I am a victim... relatively a bullying victim. That time I was quite sensitive, very sensitive. In one day I got four to five messages no matter what time and I think I’m depressed because as a student, I have other pressures and lots of work and assignments need to be done. It’s a lot of pressure.” (Participant 2)

The participants also stated that the effect of cyberbullying can be worst that they feel like committing suicide. It happened when they keep on receiving disturbance messages and negatives comments in social media. Participant 3 and 4 shared the same experiences that they once have the suicidal thought in their mind. Other than that, cyberbullying also affect academic performance. Participants unable to focus on their study and it affect their academic performance.

“Humm I was first depressed with the situation but then I try to act like nothing happen. Emotionally, I feel stressed when I remember what they say to me. After that, I thought I wanted to go to a high building and jump from there. They teased me until I did not want to leave the house. During that time, I did not go out of the room and did not meet the outsider within a week. I’m so sad because of the fact that what they say about me’’ (Participant 3)

“My emotions are really stressful when I remember what they say and do to me. I thought of suicide to satisfy everyone but I did not want to do it at all.” (Participant 4)

“I think my life is quite zero. I feel like I do not want to live, I think this is the end of my life I do not think I’m going to live right when I’m a victim. I think everybody hates me.” (Participant 2)

“Errr honestly I said when I was a bully victim, that my decision was so severe that I had to face the disrespect from the people.” (Participant 1)
Cyber bullying also affects the daily lives of participants. It has a great impact on life because they have to deal with the people around it. It is very difficult for participants to live their daily lives as normal person as the effects of cyberbullying make them avoid dealing with society. Psychologically, their self esteem is too low when they being around people. Participants feel the society rejects them because of their feminine character. All those bad words and comments received on the internet affect their real lives and they form a negative perception to the community. Moreover, the participants also admitted that they were not only bullied on the internet but they were also bullied in real life. The participants took steps to engage themselves in the room alone without associating with the people around them because of shame to deal with the public. The conflict between them and the society is never ending and it continuously affects their lives.

Overall, the findings have succeeded in forming two sub themes for the answer the first research question while three sub themes for the second research question. As a result of this study, there are two main factors in cyberbullying that are the feminine personality of participants and frequently uploading posting of feminine content in social media. The feminine personality of the participants is a factor because effeminate males are seen as threatening to other groups and thus making them to be rejected by the society. Therefore, these effeminate males are often bullied in social media as well as in real life. Eventually, they move away from the society due to negative perceptions from community in social media.

The second factor of cyberbullying is that the participants of this study often upload posting related to femininity in social media. This causes dislike and inappropriate comments from social media users who disapproved them. It shows that the society unable to accept gender confusion and is considered to have violated the norms of society. However, the dislike is not appropriate either because all the comments are too negative such as mockery, insults and name calls that are not supposed to be.

The second main theme is to understand the effect of cyberbullying to participants. Through this study, three effects that mostly affected the participants are emotion, academic and daily life. The most significant impact to the participants is in terms of emotion. Participants feel very distressed by the harrassments they received through social media that cause them to withdraw from the community. In addition, participants may experience severe depression if these symptoms are not controlled and prolong. Emotions are often disturbed if they frequently receive interruptions in social media. Additionally, participants also lost their trust with their known users in social media as they have been victims of cyber bullying. Indirectly, this victim will not be easy to trust other social media users.

The findings also have similarities with Patchin & Hinduja (2010), who found that the cyber bullying victim would be pensive and isolated from the people around them because they feel inferior and afraid to deal with people around. Apart from that, the study also found that the victims were always in an uncertain state and were often depressed as they were frequently mocked and humiliated by bullies in social media. The victim's life will also be confused and unmanageable due to the overpressure irresponsible parties in social media. Furthermore, a study conducted by Che Hasniza Che Noh and Mohd Yusri Ibrahim (2014), saying that cyberbullying among students in the university can affect the academic performance of the victims. Indirectly it will make the victim unable to focus on study and later fail in academic. Meanwhile, a study saying that cyber bullying also has a major impact on the daily lives of victims similar to traditional bullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Both the offenders and victims have negative affects in terms of psychological health, physical health and academic performance. Most cyber bullying victims will isolate themselves from the surrounding and fear to be in the public. Victims will also be cautious in choosing friends because the victim does not have the courage to deal with the outside world. Most of these victims will also be cautious when using social media because they do not want to create discomfort between them with other social media users.
4. Conclusion and Recommendation
The cyber bullying phenomenon is still occurring among the social media users especially teenagers despite the existence of laws under the cyber law of the Computer Crime Act 1997 and the Digital Signature Act 1997 (2006). With the formulation of these Acts is expected to address cyber bullying problem that occurs in Malaysia. These acts will apply to perpetrators who commit crimes in cyberspace and if convicted with offenses can be fined not exceeding RM150,000.00 and imprisoned not more than ten years. However, those who commit crimes or cyber bullying are still trivial about the fines that will be imposed if they commit this crime. The cyber bullying phenomenon that occurs amongst these teenagers, especially among university students, is immoral. This symptom can lead to the collapse of teenagers’ attitudes in the future. Some suggestions or steps can be taken to keep cyber bullying from expand among youngsters in Malaysia.

Among the steps that can be taken to fight cyberbullying are through campaigns such as exhibitions or talks about cyber bullying. From there, the authorities can explain the consequences or penalties that bullies will receive for this crime in a more detailed way. Through this talk, teens will also be afraid to commit cyber bullying. For example, authorities have to conduct exhibition at school or at university to educate people about the punishment that bullies will take on cyberbullying. Through such activities, adolescents will have the awareness of the disadvantages or penalties forced by bully who commit cyber bullying on purpose. If an exhibition on cyberbullying awareness is often held, it is possible to raise awareness among adolescents that cyber bullying is actually a crime.

In addition, researchers suggested creating an Anti Cyber Bullying Policy at schools and universities. In today’s age, teenagers are often using the Internet for information. Through this policy, adolescents will be aware of the implications and consequences that will be encountered by them if they involved in cyber bullying. This Anti Cyber Bullying Policy can be involving students as early as in secondary school to adult as a control mechanism. Young teenagers need to be exposed and educate that social media has various other functions and advantages apart from being involved with cyberbullying. Therefore, such a policy should be made to give youth awareness about the dangers of cyber bullying.

Suggestions for future research, that future researcher will investigate the cyber bullying that occurs among other minority groups such as gay, lesbian and transgender. More studies conducted on this group, then more information and information can be shared so that experts could find the best solutions to help them and to lessen the act of cyber bullying in the country.

Finally, it can be summarized that this study has its own purpose to share and get information about cyberbullying among effeminate males. There are still many factors and effects that cause cyberbullying as this study is subjective to the participants that involved. In conclusion, the study found that cyberbullying act is increasingly growing among effeminate males and this phenomenon has largely affected their lives. This cyberbullying phenomenon is immoral act as it affects the live of victims psychologically and emotionally. Therefore, awareness must be made in the community about the risk of involving in cyberbullying. Authorities also need to intensify efforts to eradicate these symptoms rather than rampant for common good.

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