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An Investigation of Factors Contributing to Workplace Cyberbullying among Generations Z

Suraya Ika Tamrin¹, Azlul Kalilah Zaghlol², Muhammad
Ridzuan Abdul Aziz³, Nur Atiqah Zakiyyah Ramlee⁴, Norasekin
Abd Rashid⁵, Abidah Saad⁶

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Corresponding Author's Email: ikatamrin@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the effect of workplace cyberbullying on Generation Z (Gen Z) by constructing a model using specific determinants: demographic factors (gender, race/ethnicity, and education), technology-related factors, and individual factors. The research design of the proposed research is quantitative. A self-administered questionnaire adapted from previous studies will be distributed to respondents (Gen Z) in Selangor. A purposive sampling method will be applied. Data collected will be analyzed through the partial least square (SmartPLS) technique. Then, the findings of this research are expected to specify significant differences between demographic factors and workplace cyberbullying based on gender, race/ethnicity, and education. The finding will also identify the technology-related and individual factors driving Gen Z to perpetrate cyberbullying in the workplace. The quantitative method for this research will enable researchers to explore beyond the variables that will be tested. The results are anticipated to assist various parties such as the government to design better models to address workplace cyberbullying issues, develop policy and strategize preventive measures in the long term to become a top morally conservative nation. The research on workplace cyberbullying is inimitably fascinating. A practical framework based on workplace cyberbullying factors among Gen Z will be developed as a guideline and will support the government's effort to increase awareness among youngsters.

Keywords: Workplace Cyberbullying, Generations Z, Technology, Malaysia

Introduction

Recently in Malaysia, the issue of cyberbullying has elevated to the level of national concern. The element of 'cyber' makes it different from traditional bullying, where it involves the usage of technology to perpetrate bullying. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, is referring to the intentional and repeated harm from one or more peers that occurs in cyberspace caused by the use of computers, smartphones, and other devices (Jadambaa et al., 2019). Additionally, several studies agreed with the advancement of digital technology increases the involvement in cyberbullying (Engalnder, 2019). Meanwhile, as reported by UNICEF (2022), cyberbullying can take place on various platforms of digital technology such as social media, online gaming,

messaging platforms, and mobile phones. Furthermore, most people think of cyberbullying as something that happens to middle school children that extends beyond the classroom. However, little did they know, cyberbullying is also occurring in colleges, workplaces, and in adult communities. This is supported by Kowalski, et al (2018) that employees in the workplace are not immune to cyberbullying.

According to Scisco (2019), workplace cyberbullying is defined as negative, technology-mediated behaviors that are repetitively experienced by a vulnerable target within the work context. It takes many forms of workplace cyberbullying that involves a social media campaign or blog that disparages the victim. It may also involve threats of exposing private information to the public. Additionally, workplace cyberbullying may take place both in and out of the office. Victims may receive electronic communication outside of work hours, making it impossible for them to escape the torment. Nowadays, almost all organizations are equipped with technology-related devices with Internet connectivity to communicate and delegate or deliver tasks. Due to that, many employees are cyberbullied in the workplace. This scenario allows for cyberbullying to occur during the work day (Truell et al., 2019). Kowalski, et al, (2018) added that colleagues are the most significant perpetrators of cyberbullying in the workplace. Within this group, co-workers at the same level were found to be the most significant perpetrators of cyberbullying, followed by superiors and bosses, and then subordinates. From another point of view, Place (2021) reported that workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z (victims and perpetrators) is at a high rate as they can take advantage of technological changes in various aspects of their lives. Surprisingly, 86% of Gen Z workers say they have experienced discrimination or bullying at the workplace.

Gen Z (referring to those born between 1981 and 1996) in particular, was born with the Internet as their main muse. Hence, it is not surprising that cyberbullying among them is a topic that has been thoroughly studied. However, further research on cyberbullying in the workplace among Gen Z should be studied to understand what may cause Gen Z to perpetrate workplace cyberbullying. Thus, this research is conducted to understand the contributing factors of workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z by highlighting three main factors, which are; 1) demographic, 2) technology, and 3) individual. Then, this research proposes a conceptual framework that consists of the relationship between all the contributing factors and workplace cyberbullying. The findings of this research would be beneficial to assist various parties such as the government and organizations in designing a better model of cyberbullying guidelines. Then, this study adds to the literature on workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z within the Malaysian context.

Literature Review

Research on the topic of cyberbullying has typically been conducted in school settings since the early 2000s (Vranjes et al., 2021). However, recent research highlights that workplace cyberbullying is increasingly been recognized as a significant problem facing modern organizations (Coyne et al., 2019). Many research has been conducted to discuss more on this issue relating to workplace cyberbullying. However, less research is concerned with factors contributing to workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. Thus, based on the above discussion, the objective of this research is to identify the contributing factors that lead to workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. Then, the factors will be explored in this research are

demographic factors, technology-related factors, and individual factors (victims and perpetrators).

Demographic Factors and Workplace Cyberbullying

Demographic factors have been identified to have an influence on workplace cyberbullying. This research focus on four demographic factors; which are: gender, race/ethnicity, and education as described below:

a) Gender

Previous studies on cyberbullying in the workplace have shown differences in gender (Forssell, 2018). According to Yudes et al (2021), gender had been proven as a significant predictor of cyberbullying perpetration. Their study also revealed that boys seemed to be cyberbullying perpetration targets. Additionally, according to Forssell (2018) men were exposed to cyberbullying to a higher extent than women in the workplace. Also, Forssell, (2018) added in her research that gender needs to be taken into consideration when examining the phenomenon of cyberbullying in working life. Hence, to test the relations between gender and workplace cyberbullying, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H1: Gender positively influences workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

b) Race/ethnicity

As reported by Blakemore (2019), both race and ethnicity are used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations. The race is usually associated with biology and linked with physical characteristics such as skin color or hair texture. Meanwhile, ethnicity is associated with cultural expression and identification. Previous studies have found that there is a significant relationship between race/ethnicity and workplace cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2019). However, according to them, there is only a handful of studies have examined the relationship between race/ethnicity and workplace cyberbullying. They added that it is important to note the lack of recent research attention to race/ethnicity as a risk factor for cyberbullying perpetration. Therefore, this research has developed a hypothesis as follows:

H2: Race/ethnicity positively influences workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

c) Education

Previous studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between education level and workplace cyberbullying. The higher level of education or academic performance, the lesser the opportunity to get cyberbullied. Zych, Farrington, & Ttofi, (2019) in their research explained people with high achievement in academics had less tendency of being cyberbullied. It is supported by Jiameng Li & Hesketh, (2021) that mentioned poor academic performance was one of the factors in cyberbullying. It is thus exciting to discover whether education influence workplace cyberbullying based on the following hypothesis:

H3: Education positively influences workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

Technology-related Factors and Workplace Cyberbullying

Technology-related factors have shown a significant correlation with cyberbullying perpetration across all ages because ICT is present at every age (Kowalski et al., 2019). Thus,

this research is conducted to explore the technology-related factors that influence workplace cyberbullying as described below:

a) Technology proficiency

According to Saad & Sankaran (2020), technology proficiency is referring to the ability to use technology to communicate effectively and professionally, organize information, produce high-quality products, and enhance thinking skills. Nevertheless, this research intends to investigate how proficiency in technology can lead to cyberbullying in the workplace, especially among Gen Z. Previous research done by Wang & Ngai (2021) stated that people with more-advanced smartphone and Internet skills were more likely to engage in deviant phone and Internet activities. However, less research focuses on cyberbullying in the workplace, in the context of technology proficiency. Thus, this research is conducted to investigate the relationship between those mentioned variables based on the following hypothesis

H4: Technology proficiency positively influences workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z

b) Technology Access

Previous research mentioned that the ease of access and time spent on the Internet and social media have created new opportunities to engage in cyberbullying and online acts of aggression (Craig et al., 2020). It is supported by Tommy et al (2019), that the ease of access to technology and connectivity to online platforms have led to individuals shifting from social activities to creating criminogenic opportunities for cyberbullying. In the context of this research, it shows that the more accessible individuals to technology, the higher the tendency to engage with cyberbullying in the workplace. However, less research focuses on this factor among Gen Z to perpetrate cyberbullying in the workplace. Hence, it is hypothesized that

H5: Easy access to technology positively influences workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

c) Type of Technology Used

The type of technology used is referring to the type of technology most often used by individuals. In this research, those individuals reflect those Gen Z who use technology, the means by which cyberbullying occurs in the workplace. Kowalski et al (2019) in their research mentioned that cyberbullying most occurs in online gaming and massively multiplayer online games among elementary school children and adults accordingly. Meanwhile, social networking sites are common venues for cyberbullying among adolescents. There is a lack of attention paid to the type of technology used by Gen Z to perpetrate cyberbullying in the workplace. Hence, further studies are required to investigate the relationship between the type of technology used and workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. It is hypothesized that

H6: Type of technology used positively influences workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

Individual Factors and Workplace Cyberbullying

Individual factors are divided into two factors, which are, victims and perpetrators. In the context of workplace cyberbullying, it is important to investigate these two factors to

understand both inner characteristics that could lead to such bullying behavior in the workplace. As stated by Vranjes, et al (2021), bullying involves individuals who engage in both bullying victimization and perpetration roles at different times. Also, they revealed that both victims and perpetrators are unlikely to engage in aggressive and anxious behavior patterns if they are not first being bullied. It is supported by Smith (2019) who stated that role overlap is the tendency of victims to become perpetrators, and perpetrators to become victims. This phenomenon raises the question of how the inner characteristics of both victims and perpetrators could increase the intention to cyberbully in the workplace. However, scarce attention has been paid to the individual factor of workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. Therefore, more studies are needed to investigate these individual factors contributing to workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. Thus, this research has developed two hypotheses as stated below:

H7: Victims' inner characteristics positively influence workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

H8: Perpetrators' inner characteristics positively influence workplace cyberbullying among Generation Z.

In summary, Figure 1 displays the conceptual framework adapted for the proposed research.

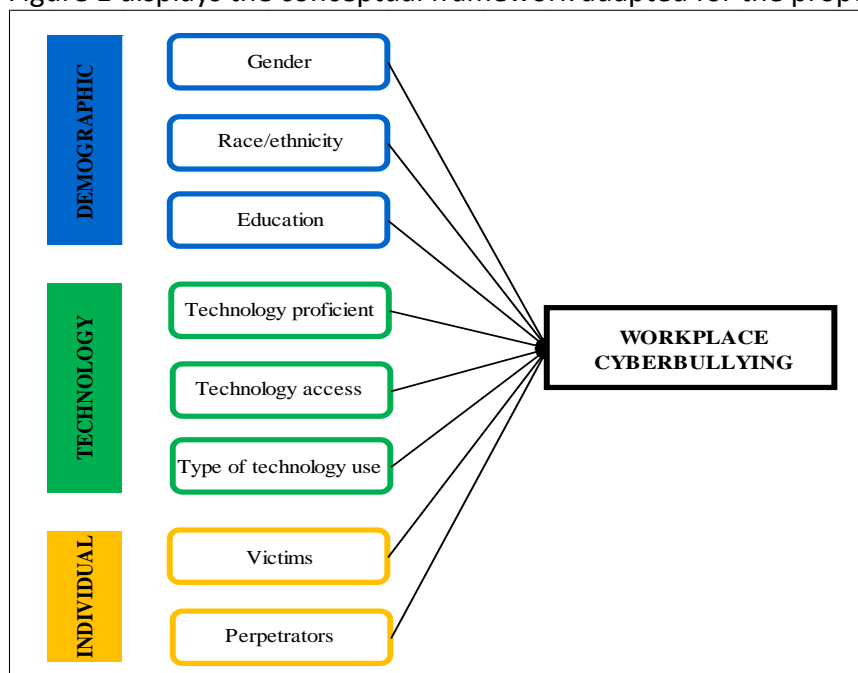


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z

Methodology

This research is a cross-sectional; survey research that will be carried out in Selangor, Malaysia. The research will be conducted as explanatory research in identifying factors of Gen Z towards workplace cyberbullying. In other words, it examines cause and effect relationships. Generally, this research aims to understand the factor of workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. Additionally; the same method is used to identify the relationship between technology-related factors and individual factors towards workplace cyberbullying. The respondents of this research will be Gen Z (born between 1997 to 2013) and living in Selangor, Malaysia. As defined by (Schroth, 2019), Gen Z is a group of people who were born

between 1997 to 2013. The potential respondents must satisfy the following conditions: the respondent must be Malaysian and born between 1997 to 2013.

According to Rayward et al (2019), social media platforms are powerful tools for recruiting participants/audiences. Meanwhile, Delouya (2022) reported that nearly half of Gen Z prefers searching on TikTok and Instagram over Google Search and Maps. Hence, the researchers take the opportunity to run a series of TikTok advertisements (TikTok Ads) to collect data. When the participants click on the ad, they will be directed to an online survey, which will be created and administered using Google Forms. During the recruitment period, the ad will appear in the news feed of TikTok users. Then, only users who chose to participate after clicking the 'agree' button on the informed consent page will be allowed to access the questionnaire. Then, the ad will auto-run as scheduled without the researcher following up. To run the TikTok Ads, the first thing to do is to create a TikTok account. Given TikTok's ability to target specific audiences, the advertisements will be displayed in the news feeds of individuals born between 1997 and 2013 who resided in Selangor, Malaysia.

In this research, the purposive sampling method will be applied, which means the researchers decide what needs to be known and seek to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by knowledge or experience (Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Then, a sample is selected based on criteria set by the researchers to be aligned with the research objective. Then, the sample size used the technique adopted by Gill et al (2010), which stated that the recommended sample size for a population of more than 1,000,000 is 384. Since this research will use SEM-PLS as a tool for data analysis, thus needed prudent decisions in determining the appropriate sample size for this research.

All the items of the questionnaire will be designed as a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale consisting of three sections, as illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Questionnaire items

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Demographic 1) Gender 2) Race/ethnicity 3) Education |
| B | Technology-related factors 1) Technology proficiency 2) Technology access 3) Type of technology used |
| C | Individual factors 1) Victims 2) Perpetrators |

Section A will be designed to gather data on the respondents' demographic characteristics, including their gender, race/ethnicity, and education. Meanwhile, section B will focus on technology-related factors, including technology skills, access, and the type of technology used by Gen Z towards workplace cyberbullying. Then, section C will concentrate on

individual factors divided into two: victims and perpetrators. Investigating both sides (victims and perpetrators) is essential to understanding the inner characteristics that lead to workplace cyberbullying.

The responses will be transferred into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) spreadsheet. The data will be analyzed and described. A descriptive quantitative data analysis, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation from the questionnaires, will be conducted using SPSS Version 26. Further, this research will use SEM-PLS to test the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous of the proposed model. In addition, further findings such as effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) will be determined.

Conclusion

As noted earlier the focus of this paper is to learn about cyberbullying among Gen Z as well as to identify the contributing factors that lead them to practice cyberbullying in the workplace by dividing the factors into three categories; demographic, technology, and individual. To date, there is a lack of innovative methods being used to measure workplace cyberbullying and that might be one of the reasons for the existing theoretical gap. This research, then, offers several useful contributions to the information systems (IS) literature by exploring workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z.

Besides that, in the context of theoretical, this research contributes by exploring the factors that will help explain the mechanism to avoid or lessen the impact of workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z. Additionally, this research integrates few factors of workplace cyberbullying from previous studies to expand the scope and understanding on workplace cyberbullying. Meanwhile, in the contextual perspective, this research contributes to the existing knowledge by gathering the current literatures of workplace cyberbullying which will benefit the industrial practitioners and acted as references for future research as well.

The results of this research also will implicate in multiple ways: 1) to broaden the understanding of workplace cyberbullying as a phenomenon, specifically among Gen Z; (2) to identify the factors of workplace cyberbullying among Gen Z, and finally (3) to propose a conceptual framework of workplace cyberbullying that consists of socio-technical factors to be used as a guideline for practitioners to design policies and procedures that can prevent cyberbullying in the workplace.

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