

Online Incivility: Exploring from Malaysian Academic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving globalization in Malaysia, many organizations employ online communication platform for faster decision making, easier collaboration on assignments and greater recognition of employees for achievement and rewards. However, this additional medium of communication posts a risk of uncivil online comments that can lead to lower unproductively among employees that reduces employees' well-being and increases organizations costs. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the negative consequences of online incivility, in particular in Malaysia, considering aspect of negative moods as possible mediator in the relationship. In addition, problem solving conflict management styles is also discussed as a social support that may decrease the negative consequences of online incivility based from sound literature review. Plausible hypotheses are also then derived from the constructive arguments. This study is consistent with the objectives of Eleventh Malaysian Plan (2016-2020) and Transformasi Nasional 2050 (TN50) to improve the nations' well being and productivity from perceiving the positive and work harmony created. In practical, the study can help shape policies and guidelines involving human-technology interaction for the decision makers by incorporating aspects of human psychological well-being that can be affected by technology through the online paradigm.

Keywords: Incivility, Online, Academic, Wellbeing, Conflicts

Introduction

In Malaysia, many organizations has employ instant messaging platform to ensure dissemination of timely information to the employees to simultaneously improve and facilitate reciprocal communication (Raiman, Antbring, & Mahmood, 2017). As the number one instant messaging platform in Malaysia with 81% users (Connected Life, 2015), WhatsApp application messenger is worthwhile to study due to its attractive feature in facilitating one-on-one or group communication. Schools as one of the academia institutions for instance, are also using WhatsApp messenger as one of the alternative medium of communication (Bouhnik & Deshen,

2014). A supervisor for example, can get his instruction on ongoing projects across to the subordinates in real time and by doing so, the work performance can be increased. On one hand, the social media indeed seem to promote higher performance, but on the flip side, it could be misused.

Online incivility, defined as a manner of offensive interaction that can range from aggressive messages in threads, incensed discussion and rude critiques, to outrageous claims, hate speech and harassment may occur in this omnipresent activities (Antoci, Delfino, Paglieri, Panebianco, & Sabatini, 2016). It is used as an umbrella term to represent other similar terms such as cyber incivility, cyber bullying and online harassment where they are individually defined by several authors as shown in Table 1. In addition, reports from the Pew Research Center (PRC) also revealed heightened incivility incidence experienced by online adults in Social Network Sites (SNS)-based interactions as presented in Figure 1.

Table 1: Definition of Other Terms Similar to Online Incivility

Source: Giumetti, McKibben, Hatfield, Schroeder & Kowalski (2012); Pinar, Cesur, Koca, Sayin, & Sancak (2017); Dilmaç (2017) & Ojanen et al. (2014)

Term	Definition
Cyber Incivility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflected by disrespectful behaviours that were portrayed through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as email and text messages (Giumetti, McKibben, Hatfield, Schroeder & Kowalski, 2012).
Cyber bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characterized by repetitive, hostile acts that were conveyed via Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as e-mail, cell phone, pager, short message services and websites by an individual or a group of individual where their motive is to intentionally harm other individuals (Tanrikulu, Kinay, & Aricak, 2013). There are two types of cyber bullying: Electronic bullying and electronic verbal bullying. Electronic bullying refers to obtaining passwords or hacking into websites or other’s account. Electronic verbal bullying involve uncivil acts such as spreading rumors, humiliating and defaming others using the Internet (Aricak, 2011).
Online harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In reference to any deliberate behaviours to hurt other individuals through the use of Internet of mobile devices (Ojanen et al., 2014).

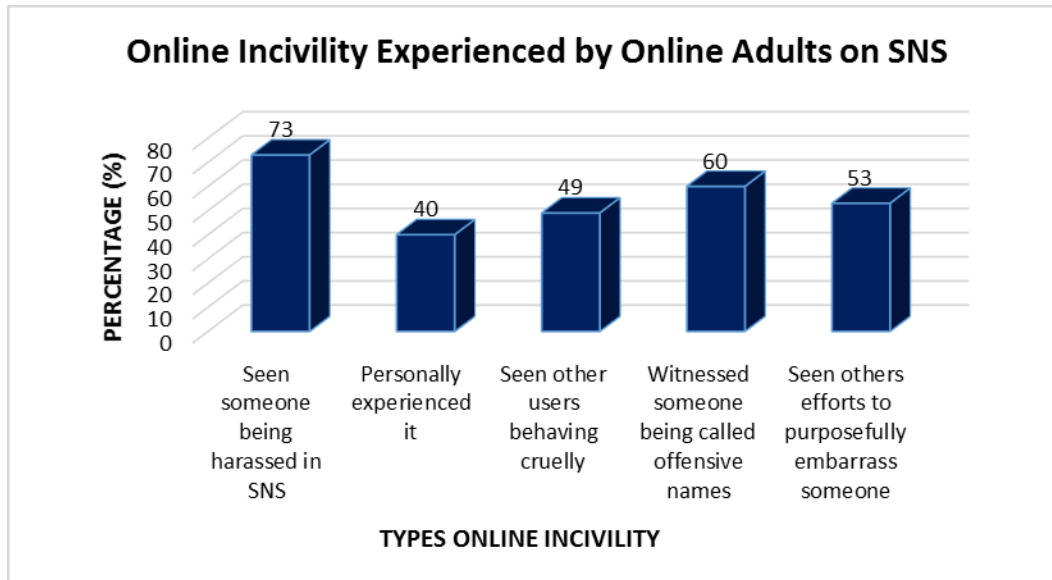


Figure 1: Online Incivility Experienced by Online Adults on SNS

Source: Antoci, Delfino, Paglieri, Panebianco & Sabatini (2016)

While Social Network Sites (SNS) interactions may allow opportunities for the sender to express messages, these messages can have uncivil tints to it and may bring about negative consequences such as stress, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, frustration and irritability to the receivers (e.g.; Aboujaoude, Savage, Starcevic, & Salame, 2015; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013). In fact, approximately 70% of Malaysian employees witnessed an increase in work stress-related illnesses, such as experiencing a rise in their work stress level and suffering from lack of sleep due to work-related worries as shown in Figure 2. Ultimately, this not only can increase organizations’ cost due to employees’ increasing health care costs and sick leave but also the psychological cost, such as lower job satisfaction and commitment. This is worrying as teachers’ health can lead to lower productivity with its accompanying negative ramifications for student learning. Moreover, this ongoing incivility can interfere with learning and safe performance. In line with the Malaysia’s National Transformation (TN50) aim to place Malaysia in the top 20 country by the year 2050 by transforming citizen well-being, technology and social interaction, reduction of incivility especially online incivility is essential.

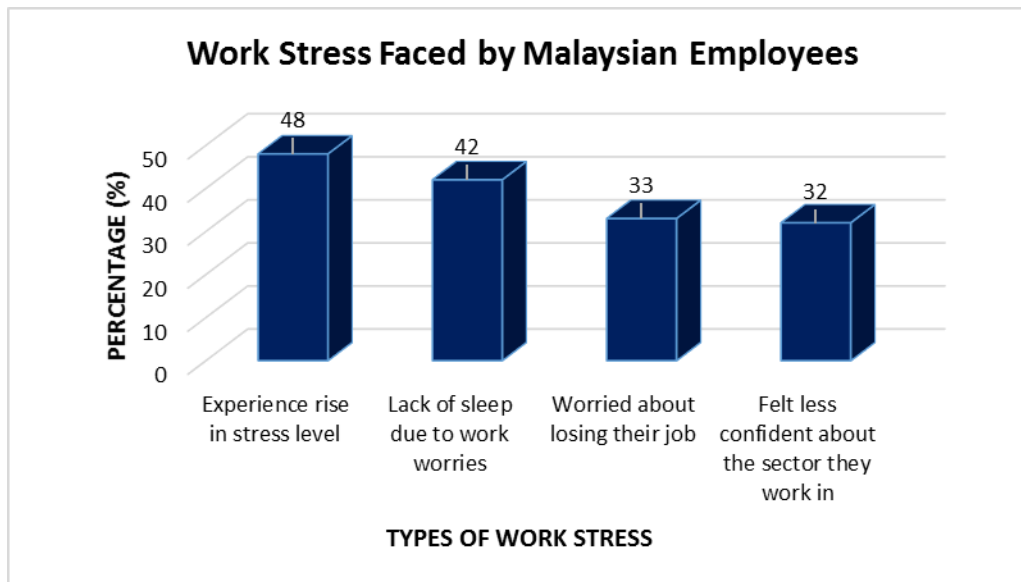


Figure 2: Work Stress Faced by Malaysian Employees

Source: Sobri (2015)

Therefore, the paper addresses the needs of this group of educational “manpower” in schools and its negative consequences when being incivilized online by their principals. The roles of negative moods and problem solving styles in managing conflicts by the teachers will also be investigated. Should negative mood is proven to mediate the relationship, it is essential in regulating moods appropriately to reduce the work stress. Similarly, problem solving styles will then be suggested to apply for the teachers if high levels of problem solving styles are deemed effective in reducing the work stress. The technology tint will be taken into account while exploring the abovementioned assumptions because the work on incivility, where the intention to harm another person is ambiguous online, is still lacking (Pang et al., 2016).

Literature Review

Academic incivility is any actions that disrupt the harmony of the teaching-learning environment (Natarajan, Muliira, & van der Colff, 2017). Online incivility involves disrespectful, insensitive or disruptive behaviour of a sender to a receiver in an electronic environment that can interrupt with the receiver’s personal, professional and student learning in health profession education (De Gagne et al., 2016). In a workplace setting, supervisors are the main source of interpersonal mistreatment as they symbolizes the representative of the organization and have more power over subordinates’ work appraisal. In the present study, immediate supervisors in public secondary schools would be the principals. Supervisors’ central managing task is a constant negotiation, and hence interaction with other organizational members, including their subordinates (i.e. teachers), can be assumed to be an everyday task for them.

In a recent study by Abas and Otto (2016), receivers who experienced interpersonal mistreatment perpetrated by their supervisors demonstrated higher negative emotions, higher organizational attitudes and lower positive emotions compared to their co-workers who did not experienced mistreatment. Similarly, studies from Fahie and Devine (2014) indicated that those mistreated teachers reveal profound physical and psychological effect, for example anxiety, fear, vulnerability and low motivation to work which resulted from the negative moods. It is also impacting their physiological and work related effects; from decision making processes, quality relationships with fellow teachers and instructional teaching in classrooms. The negative consequences from such mistreatments are expected to be similar with the in-workplace setting incivility especially on their cognitions, emotions and behavior (Rösner, Winter & Krämer, 2016). Hence, it is predicted:

Hypothesis 1: Online incivility is positively associated with work stress.

Hypothesis 2: Online incivility is positively associated with negative moods.

Explaining further, the outcome of aforementioned results will be used as a starting point coupled with Affective Events Theory (AET) that explains that the accumulated work-related affective experiences of individuals can affect their well-being. In other words, this theory supports the notion that those employees experiencing negative emotional states (i.e. after uncivil episode occurred) experience lower level of affective commitment from the higher level of negative moods and cognitive reactions at work (Vagharseyyedin, 2015). This also means that higher negative emotions or negative moods may work as a mediator that will enhance teachers' level of work stress when they receive the uncivilized comments from the principals. It is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Negative moods is positively associated with work stress

Hypothesis 4: Negative moods mediate the relationships between online incivility and work stress

Using the same relationship, the work stress of teachers can be reduced when teachers' problem solving styles are used as the moderator. Problem solving conflict management styles can be defined as having high concern for self and others involving openness, exchanges information and examination of differences in order to reach effective solutions. Problem solving is consistently shown as the most effective style in resolving conflict in social interactions hence, it is chosen as a moderator in buffering the negative consequences of online incivility (De Dreu, C. K. W., Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001; Meier, Semmer, & Gross, 2014). Therefore, it is posit that:

Hypothesis 5: Problem solving styles of teachers will moderate the negative relationship between principal's online incivility and teachers' work stress in such a way that the relationship will be weaker when problem solving styles is higher rather than lower

Table 2 shows the benefits of problem solving conflict management style as explained by various authors.

Table 2: Benefits of Problem Solving Conflict Management Style

Source: Gross & Guerrero (2000); Shih & Susanto (2010); Rahim, Magner & Shapiro (2000) & Rahim, Antonioni & Psenicka (2001)

Author	Benefit
Gross & Guerrero (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving is seen as effective because it allows both parties to be involved in a decision making process • This promote the emergence of mutually efficient and collaborative solution to a problem between both parties
Blake & Mouton (1964); Lawrence & Lorsch (1967); Jamieson & Thomas (1974); Jordan & Troth (2002); Meyer (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving is positively associated with promotion, productivity and job performance • Through this conflict management style, conflicting parties satisfy their interests though discussion and exchanging information • Resolution of conflicts results in satisfaction among individuals which in turn contribute to greater efforts in achieving performance
Prein (1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving leads to creative solutions to a problem as it involve open and direct between two parties in order to resolve their conflicts
Korbanik, Baril, & Watson (1993); Tutzauer & Roloff (1988); Wall & Galanes (1986)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving results in increased shared benefits for the parties, better decisions being made and greater satisfaction of the partner

Importance of Research

The benefits of the research are threefold; for the schools' management, teachers and also academia research. First, this study provides suggestions to the management of the university to develop and implement incivility policies to prevent this to expand widely and affecting their teachers' health. The management may be able to apply this new knowledge into devising zero-tolerance policies that can effectively reduce the frequency and severity of uncivil not only behaviour but also online messages, which ultimately can benefit the students.

For teachers, this work sheds new light on adapting styles in managing conflicts. Because conflicts can trigger as subtle as it is, teachers need to attempt in adapting these styles in any issues with the principals to ensure their work stress will not be heightened. In relation with aforementioned notion, the finding can also enhance the preparation of the government to reach its TN50 objectives by emphasizing the interplay between technology and the prosperity and well-being of the citizens.

Finally, given that research on school incivility in Malaysia has not been adequately explored in previous research, it is a critical area to explore in order to produce highly interactive and harmony learning environment. Subsequently, this study also makes a substantial contribution to the academic literature relating to the role of problem solving styles in managing conflict in relationship between online incivility and work stress.

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