

The Impact of Online Harassment via Social Media to Self-Esteem Among Youth

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive use of social media among teenagers and youth has surged in recent years, bringing with it a concerning rise in online harassment. This study investigates the impact of online harassment on the mental health and self-esteem of youth. Employing a qualitative approach, data and perspectives were gathered from 28 participants aged 19 to 29, representing both genders. The findings reveal widespread awareness of online harassment among respondents, with many reporting personal experiences of being targeted. Importantly, the study underscores the detrimental effects of social media harassment on individuals' self-esteem and mental well-being. As social media continues to play an integral role in modern communication, it is imperative for users to exercise mindfulness and empathy, fostering a digital environment free from harm and intimidation.

Keywords: Online Harassment, Social Media, Mental Health, Self-Esteem, Youth.

INTRODUCTION

Social network sites like social media are not a new thing for us nowadays. Social media refers to a computer-based technology that makes it possible to share thoughts, ideas, knowledge and many more (Dollarhide, 2021). It allows users to share anything quickly including movies, images, documents, and personal information. Users interact with social media through web-based software or applications on a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Most people now have their smartphones so they will have more time to check their social media on smartphones as it is more convenient although smartphones are smaller than others. Recently, social media has been incorporated into people's everyday routines when many of them spend hours daily on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other well-known platforms. For Instagram, Instagram offers users edit and post images and the videos on feed and Instagram story which each post can have a caption. Of all the social media users, nearly all teenagers or adolescents are the ones who dominated most social media platforms. Visual communication such as posting and commenting on photos predominates in children's and teenagers' usage of social media.

However, the growth of social media as a communication technology and the enthusiasm for social networks created a result of certain people to stalk, bully or harass in a repetitious way other people called it online harassment (Mylene Fernet, 2019). Online harassment which also referred as cyberbullying can be reported if it is in at least one of these distinct behaviours which are offensive name-calling, purposeful embarrassment, stalking, physical threats, harassment over a sustained period of time and sexual harassment.

Online harassment is something that can happen to anyone especially to social media users because anyone can be the target of any unwelcome behaviour in that online world. It can be a serious issue when the offensive statements are excessive and repetitive (John Sammons, 2017). In *New Straits Times* in December 7, 2021, it said over the previous five years, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has received 15,238 complaints about online harassment (Times, 2021). The Former Minister of Communications and Multimedia in Malaysia, Tan Sri Annuar Musa stated in *Dewan Rakyat* that the figures from 2016 to September 30 on 2021 were general complaints about online harassment, including bullying, sexual harassment, threats, exploitation of personal data, and the use of private photographs to victims or degrade some individuals (Times, 2021). There were 963 cases investigated under the MCMC Act's Section 233 (Times, 2021).

Therefore, based on this, it will expose some of social media users to becoming online harassment victims on social media, which can also have an impact on their mental health and self esteem. Mental health issues refer to a wide range of symptoms known as internalising or externalising problems (Beeres et al., 2020). Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being are all parts of our mental health (MentalHealth.gov, 2022). It influences our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Additionally, it also influences how we respond to stress, interact with others, and make decisions (MentalHealth.gov, 2022).

Meanwhile, over the past few years, an increasing number of research have focused on the potential effects of teenagers' social media use on their low self-esteem that is caused by sexual harassment. Although social media can give positive impacts and benefits to people, it

also can lead to mental health problems such as low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. People who have experienced online harassment may experience worry and tension until at one time they are facing hard to do their ordinary activities such going to school or work or going out to meet people (Raypole, 2019). This can lower their performance in school or work. More worst, serious and persistent harassment that they got can contribute to depression, suicidal thoughts and even suicide attempts (Raypole, 2019).

The rapid development of technology in various aspects, such as the development of internet users and the reliance on technology to carry out interpersonal communication such as email, text, and other social media that enable a user to connect, (Thomas, 2019). This is what happens when the whole world is given the intention to feel the great power of the internet (Kainat Shahid, 2018). Even so, behind any advantage, there must be its shortcomings. These are some of the reasons or factors for online harassment, which has now become a global phenomenon that affects victims involved in online harassment (Kainat Shahid, 2018).

The use of social media among teenagers since the arrival of COVID-19 is increasing. This is causing the use of social media among teenagers to increase. Indirectly, the uncontrolled use of social media such as the use of social media exceeds the period that should make them vulnerable to the risk of becoming victims of online harassment. So, the rate of cybercrime on social media has also increased (Muhammad, 2019). As a result, this has indirectly affected the mental health of social media users since they are at high risk of being exposed to online harassment especially those who have been victims of online harassment. People at that age usually are eager to know what's going on in the digital world.

Due to their high curiosity, they tend to expose themselves to threats on social media such as threats of online harassment, and this is certainly very closely related to mental health issues where a person is a victim of cybercrime such as online harassment crime on social media. This will hurt their mental health for example in terms of self-esteem. Online harassment involves the actions of a person or persons towards the victim in cyberspace which causes emotional distress, mental harassment, gender harassment, and invasion of privacy. These people will be the ones who do not have self-confidence and will have less faith in their potential. A person's life in the digital world can have an impact on one's self in the real world. This shows how a certain media can influence the life of a user. This means that if a person is harassed on social media the effect of the matter is the same as if they are harassed in the real world and it is possible that the effect can be worse.

Based on the statement above, it can be seen how if a person becomes a victim of online sexual harassment, it will affect their mental health. Based on the statement mentioned above, it shows that online harassment can have an impact on the victim's mental health, especially in the aspect of self-esteem. It is because they recall being a victim of online harassment, which makes them less confident in doing certain things. In this regard, it is undeniable that uncontrolled and excessive use of social media has an impact on the user, particularly in the mental realm. So, the purpose of this study is to determine the extent to how much social media can affect a person's mental health in a noticeable way, especially self-esteem. Being a victim of sexual harassment is not an easy thing. Therefore, this study needs to be done to identify the

types of challenges and difficulties experienced by victims of online harassment, regardless of the mental or physical effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SOCIAL MEDIA

Today's world is packed with great innovations. The wide range of devices and applications that are becoming available at an incredible rate to overtake and redefine the economy, politics, society, and psychology the fabric of our daily lives are influencing and shaping everything we see and every part of our existence (Pawar & Shah, 2019). According to Sadagheyani & Tatari (2021), social media has been recognized as a factor in evolution in the modern era of internet expansion. The term "social media" describes a group of websites and applications that have emerged and grown in the space left by modern media, including communication networks, the internet, and mobile phones (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021).

Currently, social media gives people a variety of platforms to express their ideas, demands, opinions, information, philosophies, worldviews, lifestyles, behavioral patterns, and their own "self" (Balci & Karaman, 2020). At the same time, social media has an impact on how individuals spend their time in a variety of areas, including entertainment, sociability, marketing, consumption, and knowledge (Balci & Karaman, 2020). Social media gives users the chance to create their environment, share their content, start new polemics, read the messages sent by others, and exchange comments and likes in addition to giving them the chance to reach a large audience (Balci & Karaman, 2020). The majority of our society has used social media in just a few decades. Teenagers engage in a variety of social media platforms extensively, which is a sign that social media plays a significant role in their lives (Karim et al., 2020). With 71% of teenagers accessing several platforms and 24% of all adolescents admitting to continually being online due to smartphones increasing, social media reaches a huge number of users globally (Schivinski et al., 2020).

According to (Schivinski et al., 2020), social media use affects various kinds of behavior across the lifespan and is not just used by the youth but adults also use social media platforms as a major tool for information and socializing. It can also be a platform for them to have a sense of independence and identity, encouraging introverted people to develop their social networks, easing communication barriers, raising self-confidence levels, encouraging people through difficult times, and providing an opportunity to develop lasting, healthy relationships (Avineri, 2020). It is proven that social media has advantages for people who use social media without any bad intentions. They also have good mental health and have high self-esteem in themselves.

ONLINE HARASSMENT, MENTAL HEALTH & SELF-ESTEEM

According to Santre & Pumpaibool (2022), online harassment has become a major issue of public health among teenagers in recent years. The behavior of someone or a group using the Internet to harass, threaten, or make fun of another person while using either a false or real identity is known as online harassment, which is also referred to as cyberbullying and gender-

trolling (Koirala, 2020). It also involves a larger variety of online threats, such as disseminating harmful lies, making offensive or threatening comments about people, disseminating embarrassing rumors, and publishing digital images or videos to publicly shame others (Ullah et al., 2021). According to Muhammad et al., (2019), youth suffer negative impacts from encounters associated with trauma, and those who have encountered online harassment suffer from several negative consequences, such as psychological distress and suicidal thoughts.

Next, mental health is stated as a condition of well-being in which individuals are aware of their capacities, successfully navigate through daily challenges, perform effectively at work, and considerably improve the quality of life in their surroundings (Karim et al., 2020). Mental problems affect one in seven 10 to 19-year-olds worldwide. This social media will have both advantages and disadvantages. Positive comments will make people feel like others are supporting them. Negative feedback will result in criticism that is bad for someone's mental health. They develop low self-esteem or depression as a result of this. If they encounter online harassment that makes them feel unsafe, it will be worse. Furthermore, self-esteem is an important factor of people, especially those who are growing (Julia Rahma & Setiasih, 2021). According to Julia Rahma & Setiasih (2021), self-esteem is linked to social welfare and mental health. A person's overall personality has a significant impact on many aspects of their life. High self-esteem individuals will respect themselves and only take appropriate steps. Low self-esteem makes a person feel less capable and results in worse learning achievement. Social media use will lead to a lot of people comparisons. They will feel inadequate in comparison to others when they observe their improvement. A person's self-esteem will suffer as a result. People may compare in a positive or negative way. The advantage is that they will be affected by other users' posts, but the disadvantage is that they will speak harshly of themselves.

EFFECTS OF INSTAGRAM

Instagram is one of the most popular social media networks. It is also more widespread than other social media (Hidayah & Aryandari, 2021). Instagram is used for self-expression and social engagement, making it easier for users to display their ideal and true selves (Kircaburun et al., 2018). Pictures and videos are planned to be uploaded. To reply to that person's Instagram, it may also feature a direct message feature. A person's self-esteem decreases the longer he accesses social media. Instead of forming friendships with others, they spend a lot of time on social media comparing themselves to one another. Posting their picture online will make them feel anxious. Every time they intend to upload a picture, they carefully examine every detail to find its flaws. They will be watching for the response once it has been uploaded.

They will assume no one loves the picture if there are no comments. If someone makes a comment, they will mistrust it, and even if it is harsh, they will feel more hatred toward themselves. They will develop undesirable qualities as a result. As we can see, certain people who use Instagram will experience online harassment. They will be tracked who possess information, and from there, they will be portrayed as victims in online harassment. Perpetrators will make individuals feel uncomfortable about their actions by making unpleasant comments. Perpetrators will commit the crimes till they are pleased. Their mental health will be affected by this. If these things continue to happen, various negative things will occur. The

thoughts they have are inappropriate. Taking their own life or harming themselves, for instance. Depression will result from this. If neglected, it will only become worse.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to analyze whether online harassment on social media will have an impact on mental health and self-esteem among youth or not. A qualitative method has been carried out to ensure that the objective of this study is achieved. Our study also looked at the gender differences in the sample respondents that we surveyed. This interview method is conducted online using a professional and secure platform, Cisco Webex. The platform allows users to use it without a limitation period which makes the interview conducted more easily and smoothly. This participant was taken based on a survey conducted on a Google Form that was distributed on an application called Whatsapp. The Google Form contains questions related to the topic of this study.

The participant is then invited to join the discussion on the Cisco Webex platform to review questions related to the association between online harassment, social media, and mental health. Participants also have agreed to sign an electronic consent form before the interview has started. When the method of in-depth interview is conducted participants are allowed to voice their opinions and views on the topic of study to answer the questions posed to them. Each session performed with each group of participants takes about 28 to 45 minutes. However, the maximum amount of time to conduct an in-depth interview with the participant is 1 hour long.

Next, all the data taken from the in-depth interview session that was conducted with the participant earlier was analyzed using mathematical methods. The mathematical method that is used is the self-esteem scale. This is to calculate the level of self-esteem of a participant related to their use of social media (Gözde Yazıcı, 2020). The next mathematical method that is used to analyze the data from this study is the Social Media Addiction Scale to examine the participants' addiction to social media (Gözde Yazıcı, 2020). Based on this social media addiction score, states that the higher the score an individual has, the higher the rate of social media addiction that they have.

To ensure that security is maintained, we ensure that the identity features are not included in the consent form such as name, age, and address. All details and questions that were asked to the participants are shown first to the participants before they sign the electronic consent form before the process in-depth interview is carried out. This safety measure taken is to prevent the author from experiencing any related problems at the time of the study completed.

DISCUSSIONS

Most of the respondents have no difficulties understanding the concept of online harassment as they can explain it when they are asked to define the meaning of it. This might be because this topic is not a rare topic to discuss as online harassment is a thing that is often done by irresponsible people nowadays. From all of them, a few participants have experienced being harassed in their social media. They were being faced sexual harassment or other harassment

over a period of time that makes them feel embarrassing. From the data, we also know that more than half of our respondents had experience when people leave bad comments to them on their any posting until they feel down and lose the confidence to post anything after it. Many of our respondents had to deal with rude and hurtful comments online. It seems like most of the time inappropriate language was used by some people when they were communicating online. Most of these remarks were made on Facebook and WhatsApp, where harsh and hurtful language was used (Yaar Muhammad, 2019). Most often, disrespectful and hurtful comments were directed from the unknowable (Yaar Muhammad, 2019). They spoke indecently even in public online like in people's postings or comment spaces without really caring about what other people might be feeling.

However, when we asked the respondents if they would report about online harassment if they get any of it, some of them answered that they would not report it as a crime to the authorities. The reason is some people might think law enforcement is not the best option as being open with the authorities means that they need to open about what they have been through to someone who is not close to them. People who are faced with online harassment may feel not ready to share their story or they may feel embarrassed to report about the harassment (Joseph, 2022). Online bullying is particularly damaging and distressing because it is typically anonymous or difficult to track. The victim has no idea how many individuals or hundreds of people have seen the messages or posts, which makes it difficult to control (Joseph, 2022). Every time a person checks their computer or device, they still have chances to be continuously harassed.

Besides, most respondents were saying that social media is not a safe place for mental health. While social media provides many benefits such as it can connect people that are living far from each other to stay in touch or people can have so many good entertainments through social media, but because some people did irresponsible things like bullying, stalking or harassing, it can cause bad outcomes for social media. As a result, it can affect the victim's mental health and self-esteem. Depression and anxiety are the most problems that are faced by teenagers or youth who are using social media excessively (Rea Alonzo, 2021). They also feel down and have no confidence after being downgraded by other rude people in their social media accounts. Even worse, it can affect the victims in the long term.

This study provides evidence to suggest the real impact of online harassment on social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter among youth. From the respondents' responses, some of them think that the effective ways to prevent online harassment to happen are to block and report any people who did online harassment or enhance the specific law for this issue. The strength of the study is the study allowed us to easily collect data from youth as the target audience which is youth is already in our age range.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified that there is a big impact of online harassment on social media to mental health and self-esteem. Every social networking platform must have both advantages and disadvantages. Users of social media should be aware of which accounts to follow and which to unfollow. They also do not so easily trust someone on the internet that suddenly wants

to become their friends. It can lead them to do something unnecessary such as online harassment. When they put their trust in that, the perpetrators will do anything on them. Every person who uses social media must apply their own discretion to decide what is best for them. To protect themselves from online harassment from both known and unknown parties, they should set limits on how much time they spend on social media.

For them, this is crucial since it can stop them from thinking undesirable thoughts that might lead to unpleasant events. They should always look after their mental health for their own good. They should also develop a high self-esteem so that they can persuade themselves that they are enough to be seen and they don't compare themselves with other people who they saw in social media. Anyone who harasses them online should be ignored, blocked, or reported. From every online harassment that someone did to others, it can make their mental health worse and it also makes their self-esteem going down. Additionally, the government must step in and take enforcement action against the offenders. Their social media accounts should be blocked so they can't keep making offensive comments about other people.

The limitation of the study is the interview is done only for the youth. So, the future researchers need to expand their interview about online harassment, mental health and self-esteem for all generations because it may be impacted in the same ways that youth may be and the way they react to it. The next limitation of this study is that not all social media is included. This study only uses Instagram as representative for all social media, future researchers should investigate the other social media to see the more impact of online harassment on social media to mental health and self-esteem. The third limitation of this study is having a little quantity of respondents because using the qualitative method. The future researchers need to use quantitative methods for having more respondents for the research.

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