Malaysian Youth Perception on Cyberbullying: The Qualitative Perspective

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Abstract
Cyberbullying is not an emerging new problem and number of international scholars have placed their interest on the issue. In Malaysia, although the number of cyberbully studies are increasing, however, studies on cyberbullying in particular from the qualitative perspective is still lacking. This has geared the current study to prod youth perception on cyberbullying from the qualitative perspective. Their perceptions on cyberbullying were based on six main aspects, namely their comprehension of it, sources of their knowledge, examples that they know, the reasons for youth involvement in cyberbullying and their suggestions on how to prevent cyberbullies. This study involved a total of four FGDs with 27 participants among youth aged between 20-30 years old. A number of discussions are placed and hopefully this study can further enhance understanding on cyberbullying among youths in Malaysia.
Keywords: Cyberbully, Youth Development, Internet Usage

1- Introduction

Several youth studies have outlined a number of critical issues that impede youth development and one of them is cyberbullying. A swift evolution in communication technology has changed the way people do things nowadays as most of it can be accomplished virtually and this includes bullying. Unlike traditional bullying which involves physical abuse, cyberbullying is an online version as it occurs when an individual is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated or embarrassed by other individuals via online or digital technologies (Li, 2007; Ozden and Icellioglu, 2014; Al Garadi et al., 2016; Balakrishnan, 2015; Sari and Camadan, 2016). This issue attracted scholars across the globe to examine it from different perspectives and angles. Studies in the west by Patchin and Hinduja (2016), Palermiti et al. (2017), Baldry et al. (2016) and Hawker and Boulton (2000) concluded 7.8% to 12.1% of youth were involved in cyberbullying. Comparatively, studies from the east have surprisingly

recorded a significant number of cyberbully cases between 8% to 60% (Lee and Shin, 2017; Udris, 2015; Chan and Wong, 2015)

Similar to the global trend, scholars in Malaysia have conducted several studies related to cyberbully issues. Balakrishnan (2015) for example, examined the roles of gender, age and internet frequency on cyberbullying among Malaysians, while Ang (2015) reviewed the characteristics required to prevent and intervention strategies for cyberbullying. In studies done by Che Noh and Ibrahim (2014) and Faryadi (2011) on the other hand explored cyberbullying among university students.

Despite the existence of these studies, most of the resulted findings were based on a quantitative approach and not much from the qualitative perspective. Qualitative data offers a rich and depth understanding on the related issues which are needed to be built up about why people act in certain ways, and their feelings about these actions. This in turn will assist the recommendations made are fit their interests, need and ability. The main aim of this study is to narrow down this gap by examining qualitative perspective of youth perception on cyberbullying. By applying this approach, more inclusive and in depth information is expected. Qualitative perspective is vital as it provides a more in-depth and detail data, create openness, stimulates individual experiences and attempts to avoid pre-judgemental behavior (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2008). Perceptions of these youth were based on six main aspects, namely their comprehension of it, sources of their knowledge, examples that they know, the reasons for youth involvement in cyberbullying and their suggestions on how to prevent cyberbullies

2- Literature Review

Based on the facts that cyberbullying study is still lacking in Asian countries and most of the existing studies focus on specific population such as children and teenagers under 17 years, Balakrishnan (2015) conducted a quantitative study that aimed to explore cyberbullying among young adults. This study was conducted among 393 youths (aged between 17-30 years old) in Malaysia. He concluded that internet usage frequency could initiate cyberbullying among youths while the internet and existing social networking sites could instigate cyberbullying among Malaysian youth. These findings has correspondingly confirmed that cyberbully victims have a tendency to become cyberbully themselves or otherwise.

Ang (2015) reviewed on characteristics, prevention and intervention strategies for cyberbullying. This study concluded the frequency of internet usage has a significant role in cyberbullying and accentuate on its causes, which are proactive aggression, poor relationship and bond between parents and their children. Ang (2015) later suggested empathy training and modify beliefs supportive of aggression, guidelines for internet usage behavior and develop strong and positive parent–adolescent bonds as an early tactic to combat cyberbullying.

A study done by Che Noh and Ibrahim (2015) focused on cyberbullying among university students. A survey was done among 134 university students in the East Coast region of Peninsular Malaysia. They concluded that cyberbullying among university students occurred at a moderate level; some of the respondents were involved in contributing negative comments, disseminating personal pictures without permission, uploading videos without permission, slandering via social networks and online harassment. The study emphasizes on the roles of family and school authority in creating a positive environment that is able to prevent cyberbullying.

Studies by Hawker and Boulton (2000) and Blanchard (2011) reviewed the types of cyberbullying , its impacts and some prevention strategies. Blanchard (2011) confirmed dating violence, text message abuse and disturbing personal information distribution on social media sites as the most common cyberbullying practiced. These activities are found to result in stress, conflict, social anxiety, sadness and frustration. In a study by Hawker and Boulton (2000), they found that cyberbullying can lead to extreme impact such as the victims committing suicide . To combat cyberbullying, Blanchard (2011) stressed on the importance of technology to solve cyberbully cases while the role of social service workers and law enforcers should be empowered.

A study by the Cyberbullying Research Center (2012) found that peer is the main source among youth to gain information related to cyberbullying information and activities. The similar study found nearly two thirds (62%) of youth who have been bullied in the cyberworld admitted that they had cyberbullied others in the previous 6 months. The study accentuates that there is ample time to correct youth's perception on cyberbullying as common and accepted behaviours.

3-   Methodology

This was a qualitative study whereby a total of four Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted. The study employed FGDs as the main data collection method as it offers several advantages such as easy to be organized, the group dynamic offers valuable information unlike individual data collections and such method offers an in-depth and detailed discussions on a topic that is difficult to obtain through other data collection methods (Morgan, 1997). Four FGDs were conducted in a meeting room at the Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia. A total of 27 informants were involved in the FGDs. All of them were youth aged between 20-30 years old and they were currently pursuing their PhD, Master and Degree.

The study applied a phenomenology approach that focuses on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world (Creswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). It enables the identification of living experiences and interpretation on cyberbullying among youths in Malaysia and the approach simultaneously offers a rich and thick phenomenological description of youths' views on cyberbully. The numbers of informants for each FGDs relied on the quality of the data collected and findings, as recommended for most qualitative methodologies. Discussions during the FGDs were continued until the saturation point are reached (Laverty, 2003).

The first FGD was conducted for 85 minutes among seven informants, three of them were PhD students while the remaining four were Master students. The second FGD was conducted for 97 minutes among six informants; three of them were Master students while the remaining three were degree students. The third FGD lasted for 64 minutes among seven informants; six of them were degree students and one Master student. The fourth FGD lasted for 65 minutes among seven informants and all of them were Master students.

The FGD begins with an ice breaking session with the informants. The process allowed researchers to know the informants' background and at the same time informed them on the objectives of the FGD. A list of questions was prepared earlier as a guide for the interview protocol in line with the study's objective and maintain the flow of conversation. The guide questions were developed based on review of literature on cyberbully related documents (either online or printed). The questions were developed in order to gain youth perception on cyberbully related information such as 1) Meaning of cyberbullying, 2) sources of their

knowledge on cyberbullying, 3) examples of cyberbullying that they know, 4) the reasons for getting involve with cyberbullying, 5) the impacts of cyberbullying and 6) what they do to prevent cyberbully. In general, questions related to the examples of cyberbullying took the longest time to discuss during the FGD. The data obtained were later transcribed verbatimly and analysed using thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The discussions focus on the main objective of the study, which is to explore youth perception on cyberbullying. The discussion started by exploring the meaning of cyberbullying based on youth perception, followed by the sources of their knowledge on cyberbully. Furthermore, they were asked to provide examples of cyberbullying that they know and the reasons for youth involvement in cyberbully. The discussion later focuses on the impacts of cyberbullying and their measures to prevent cyberbully activities.

4.1 Meaning of cyberbully

Overall, the informants possessed good knowledge on cyberbully. Even if it was seen simply as 'bullying', the students described it clearly and appeared to understand cyber-bullying as a set of discrete behaviours done via the internet. As a result, two issues have emerged under this aspect, negative activities done via the internet and keyboard warriors.

4.1.1 Negative activities done via Internet

First, in line with previous studies by Li et al. (2007), Al Garadi et al. (2016), Balakrishnan (2015), Sari and Camadan (2016), Ozden and Icellioglu (2014) and Che Noh and Ibrahim (2015); the informants' tried to relate their cyberbullying definition towards negative activities done via the internet. It involves activities such as disruptment, slandering and harassment. Informant R1G3 informed

> *In my understanding through some readings that I've done, cyberbullying is an activity where the victim is disturbed, humiliated or even slandered via social media by using electronic gadgets. It is different from physical bullying because cyber bullying is limitless. I mean, the internet doesn't have the borderline between the bully and the victim. It could be 24 hours per day and 365 days in a year. That is what I understand by cyber bullying. (R1G3)*

Informant R4G3 provided a shorter definition of cyberbullying by stating
'I've heard of it before, but what I understand about cyber bullying is like someone accusing someone else in their social media"

Issues stressed by R1G3 and R4G3 are supported by informant R7G1 as he stated
> *Only we know how it feels when we put something on our social media page and then people started bashing.*

4.1.2 Keyboard warriors

Interestingly, some of the informants have defined cyberbully as a pass time among keyboard warriors – the second theme emerged under this aspect. A keyboard warrior is an individual who is not able to express his anger via physical violence and in turn they would overcome

this by expressing their lack of expression via the internet which is usually in the form of aggressive writing. Informant R2G4 said

> *Cyberbully is just a keyboard warrior. They did not dare to talk if*
> *they were confronted but only have the guts to type.*

Informant R5G1 added '*most of them try to be a cyberbully*' and this was supported by R4G2 by stating '*most cyberbullies are keyboard warriors*'

4.2 Sources
Subsequently, the following will discuss on how the informants know about cyberbully. Under this aspect, two themes have emerged, namely the internet and social environment.

4.2.1 The internet
Technology development and technology improvement offer limitless information, which includes cyberbullying. Within this study, it is no surprise that the internet was mentioned as one of the main sources to learn about cyberbullying as it is in line with a study done by Balakrishnan (2015), which examined the ability of internet in exposing youth to cyberbully information. R5G3 stated that he gained information regarding cyberbullying from the internet, specifically from social media. He stated

> *Generally, from reading, the internet and some media*

R7G2 supported R5G3 statement and he explained

> *Me too, I read it from social media.*

Furthermore, R3G2 supported R5G3 and R7G2 statements and he comes out with more specific source of social media – Facebook. To have this finding is in tandem with studies by Balakrishnan (2015) and Al-Garadi et al. (2016) who touched on how social networks could expose its users to cyberbullying information. Furthermore, these findings accentuate the role of traditional media such as newspaper in providing cyberbully information. R3G2 stated

> *Because of Facebook, from friends... and newspaper too... read it on*
> *the internet... something like that.*

4.2.2 Social Environment
Albeit the importance of internet, the traditional way of spreading information cannot be denied. The informants stated their own and other's experiences have informed them on cyberbully. Cyberbullying Research Center (2012) claimed that youths who have observed cyberbullying will inform on the specific techniques or tactics and they will learn to justify the behavior. R2G3 stated

> *Usually, from our own experience, or of which we know has*
> *happened before, maybe it happened to other people, the people*
> *around us.*

R6G2 supports R2G3 and accentuate that their colleagues are willing to share their cyberbullying experiences and this finding supports the previous finding by Cyberbullying Research Center (2012).

> *For me, it is from my own friends... they told me*

4.3 Examples of cyberbully that they know
The informants were asked about the examples of cyberbully activities and as a result three themes have emerged from this question; namely split personality, fake identity, and uploading embarrassing pictures.

4.3.1. Split personality
This finding is in line with a study done by Ozden and Icellioglu (2014). Split personality is kind of mental disease whereby an individual personality possesses two or more distinct parts, each of which the individual will apply according to a situation. According to the informants, an individual who has a split personality would act differently in the cyber world compared to when they live in the real world. Informant R7G3 stated

> When we met, he is a nice guy, however, on the internet, he will act
> differently

Informant R3G3 has a similar experience with R7G3 and he stated

> When we meet him 'outside', he's just an ordinary photographer.
> But, virtually, he represents a body. And he has his own strategy.
> Every month, he has the strategy to..

R7G1 informed that his colleague acts differently on the internet as he wants to freely express his ideas, whereas in the physical world he is not able to do so. He stated

> He is a very nice guy. But once he logged in into his Facebook
> account, as a founder of 'Dubook' he brought along his socialist
> idea. It is very different of him.

4.3.2 Fake identity
Ozden and Icellioglu (2014) claimed that fake identity is one of the most common cyberbully act reported and this study demonstrated a similar result. Some of the informants claimed that some of their friends used a fake identity to become famous or say something bad about others. R5G1 explained

> He uses other people's identity… to be famous or to bring others
> down I. I was one of the victims and I don't know why he did what
> he did

Explanation of R5G1 was then supported by R1G1 as he also experienced almost a similar situation. He stated

> My friend went through it once. It was that bad until some people
> thought she did.. that account was hers.. and someone made up a
> fake Facebook account for her and posted things..

4.3.3 Uploading Embarrassing Pictures
R7G2 relates cyberbullying with activities related to uploading embarrassing pictures of the targeted individual and a similar finding was found by Che Noh and Ibrahim (2014) who further stated that this is among the common cyberbullying done by youth

> He wrote a status and posted embarrassing pictures on my wall.
> Foul words, and during that time I did not realize it.

R6G2 further added *'They upload some pictures and aim to embarrass that individual'*

4.4 Reasons for Cyberbully
The informants then were asked, why these people get themselves involved in cyberbullying. Via this question, a total of three themes emerged;, namely revenge, just for fun and loneliness.

4.4.1 Revenge
This finding is in line with Balakrishnan (2015) who concluded that cyberbully victims have the tendency to become cyberbully themselves. A traditional bully victim may not have the courage to fight his or her bully back, nevertheless, this may not be the case with a cyberbully-victim. Some of the informants such as R3G2 stressed that some individuals end up cyberbullying others as they want to take revenge. Some of them have been cyberbully victim and to cyberbully others is considered an appropriate action. The informant explains
> *Sometimes the bully did what they did because they themselves were once a victim*

What has been explained by R1G2 seems to be in line with R3G2 as he stressed on revenge as the main cause for people who got involve in cyberbully. R1G2 further explains
> *Right now.. A lot of people have their sense of revenge on.. with someone.. so they will.. like what she did just now.. she will use the technology to bash them.. through social media…*

4.4.2 Just for fun
Some people, according to R2G1 merely get involve in cyberbullying just for the sake of fun. Cyberbullying Research Center (2012) and Hinduja and Patchin (2005) both claimed that youths would imitate if they see other people have fun doing it, they come to see a certain behavior as normative and they feel free to engage in that kind of behavior. The informants informed
> *That is why when someone started bashing another.. they only feel the fun and they don't know what kind of impact it has to that person..*

Fun and satisfaction are two things sought by individuals who got involve in cyberbullying and R7G3 stated on this
> *It feels like some sort of happiness, because we don't like him and we got to get on his nerve, so it's kind of a satisfaction for us..*

4.4.3 Loneliness
Loneliness can be understood as a complex and usually it is an unpleasant emotional response to isolation or a lack of companionship. It is a situation that involves anxious feelings related to a deficient communication with other beings, both in the present and possibly extended in the future (Larranagaa, et al., 2016). Loneliness can be a reason why people become cyberbullies and R5G2 stated
> *I think.. people who do cyberbullying doesn't have many friends..*

R4G1 in his opinion stressed that lonely individuals will eventually become attracted to the internet which offers excitement and fun, plus, to involve in cyberbullying can offer both of these. He further explained

> *Because he has nothing fun to do.. so the internet.. when he read about an issue that excites him.. I think that's the thing that triggered him..*

R7G2 agreed with R5G2 and R4G1 by stating As *for me, I think they need love, and attention.'* and he further explained Yes*, given attention and perhaps they don't have many friends either…"*

4.5 Impacts of Cyberbullying
The next part of the study focuses on the impacts resulted from cyberbullying . Under this question, a total of three themes emerged; namely suicide, stress and conflict.

4.5.1 Suicide
While it is 'a relatively new phenomenon', cyberbullying is an important and serious issue and no wonder several informants would relate the impacts to extreme actions such as committing suicide. Hawker et al. (2000) informed that activities related to peer harassment (most often as a target, but also as a perpetrator) could result in depression, decreased self-worth, hopelessness, and loneliness – which can drive towards suicidal thoughts and behavior. Within this study, similar findings can be found as the informants via their exposure to cyberbullying information and knowledge stated that cyberbully activities can drive its victims to commit suicide. R4G1 was keen to highlight

> *Some of the victims commit suicides from what I've understood*

R5G2 agreed with R4G1 statement and he informed on the news that an Indian female have committed suicide as a result of being cyberbullied. The informant stated

> *There's this women, she killed herself because she was cyberbullied..*
> *I think it's from there..*

4.5.2 Stress
The informants claimed that stress is another impact caused by cyberbullying. To have this finding is expected as Ang (2015) and Blanchard (2011) claimed that cyberbullying can cause an intense stress that could be worse than being harassed in person. The trauma resulted after being stalked or tormented through the internet, indeed, has a bad impact on any individual's mental health. R5G2 expressed his experience on this by stating

> *Yeap… after that she became.. and then.. she .. became.. so depressed.. you know.. like a mental breakdown..*

R3G2 expressed his agreement with R5G2 and said '*After she checks the Facebook account.. it was indeed her picture.. and she deleted it.. she was really stressed at that time. She cried..*

.5.3 Conflict
Another theme that emerged is conflict and Blanchard (2011) concluded similar results. Usually, when the victim knows who their cyberbully is, especially if that person is someone they are close with, it can create a great conflict. R4G1 informed this by stating

> *I've been through it once. Things that I've said was responded by a*
> *laugh. And then people started bashing and then she suddenly got*
> *so angry and some more people join to bash her..*

R4G2 seemed to agree with R4G1 statement and he stated 'She *had a fight with her boyfriend..I don't know if she cyberbullied her boyfriend or anything..and then she wrote a status like she was really mad at her boyfriend or something*

Dia gaduh dengan pakwe dia…. Tak tahu lah dia cyberbully pakwe dia ke macam mana kan…. Lepas itu dia up status macam tak puas hati kat pakwe dia something….'

4.6 Cyberbullying Prevention

Informants were then asked about the measures they will take if they are cyberbullied. Under this question, a total of three themes emerged; namely make police report, block the cyberbully and confront the cyberbully face to face.

4.6.1 Make reports

Cyberbullies should be ignored and charges should be taken in order to overcome it. The informants stressed that if they are cyberbullied, they will make necessary reports to related agencies. R5G1 informed on this by stating

> *And then I went to.. lodge a police report.. and after that.. she went*
> *to MCMC.. and MCMC will block that account..*

R3G2 agreed with R5G1 and he stated '*yes, then he made a police report*'

Another approach they will take is by blocking the individual who cyberbullies from accessing their social media account. This enables cyberbullies from harming the potential victim. R4G2 shared his opinion by stating

> *…. The best that we can do is..blocking.. that's the only thing that*
> *we can do.. to stay away from all of the negativity..*

R1G2 agreed with R4G2 and he expressed '*So if anyone encountered a cyberbully.. the best way is.. just to block them..*

Meet the individual who cyberbullies.
The individual also stressed on the importance of meeting the individual who committed cyberbully. According to them, confronting them will let them know the causes. R1G2 explained

> *Maybe we can talk to him face to face..ask him why.. does he have*
> *some problem that he needs to take it out on other people..*

R3G2 expressed his agreement with R1G2 and he explained '*If we have a friend who is a bully.. we need to always remind them.. so that they will stop doing so.. so that they know.. what they did was wrong.."*

5. Conclusion

Cyberbullying is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia and the situation is similar to the ones across the globe. As not many local studies focus on the qualitative perspective of cyberbullying, the current study have explored on how Malaysian youth perceived cyberbullying. Via four FGD's, it is to highlight here that in addition to the negative activities done via internet, Malaysian youth would relate the definition of cyberbullying with keyboard

warriors - an individual who is not able to express his or her anger via physical violence would probably overcome this by expressing his/her anger via the internet, in which it becomes the most common form of aggressive writing. The main source for cyberbullying information were the internet and their social environment. Among the main examples of cyberbullying stated were split personality, fake identity, and uploading embarrassing pictures. The informants stressed out that taking revenge, seeking fun and loneliness were among the main reasons why people got involved in cyberbully, while committing suicide, stress and conflicts were among the resulted impacts. Furthermore, the informants further suggested that cyberbully victims should make a police report, block the individual who cyberbullies them or confront their cyberbullies through face to face interaction.

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