Exploring YouTube Users' Reactions to Bullying Incidents

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Abstract. This research paper explores into the responses of YouTube viewers who encounter videos depicting heinous acts of bullying among teenagers. For this case study, the researchers selected three YouTube videos featuring instances of adolescent bullying were selected. The content of these video clips, along with the reactions and comments of viewers, was analyzed and categorized. The findings of this study shed light on the complex spectrum of viewer responses. The statistical analysis revealed that most viewers expressed profound displeasure and condemnation of the featured video clips, reflecting a widespread societal concern for the victims. Conversely, a minority of viewers appeared to endorse or encourage such behaviour, underscoring the complexity of public attitudes on the platform. This research contributes to our understanding of the multifaceted role of social media as a medium for information dissemination while highlighting its unintended role in facilitating and perpetuating harmful behaviours that demand monitoring and intervention. The study also highlights the apprehension that bullying incidents may become more prevalent, particularly among teenagers, necessitating more proactive measures to address this growing issue. In a world where social media platforms are integral to communication and interaction, comprehending their influence on societal challenges like bullying is crucial. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the dynamics of online reactions to bullying incidents, offering a foundation for developing strategies and interventions to combat this evolving threat to the well-being of young individuals in the digital age.
Keywords: Bully cases, social media, teenagers, and YouTube, information management

1   Introduction

Numerous studies have demonstrated that media has a significant impact on adolescent behavior. Various forms of media including the Internet, television, magazines, and newspapers can influence the development of adolescents (Dhiman, 2023; Vasan, 2010). Nowadays, social media has become a new trend among teenagers. It enables people from different geographies to connect with each other and share their experiences (Sawyer and Chen, 2012). With the advancements in communication technologies and media, the world has become more connected. We can now share scientific advancements and cultural experiences with people across the globe with just a click of a button. The internet, telephones, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and other media platforms are invaluable sources of information for people of all ages to learn about various subjects.

With the advent of social media, newspapers and magazines now have social media accounts, making it even easier to access information. Although social media has numerous advantages, it also comes with specific hazards that users should be aware of. Social media has become increasingly popular among young people in recent years. It is essential to educate young people about the potential risks associated with social media use (Tarmizi et al., 2020). This will enable them to use social media responsibly and avoid any negative consequences.

In the digital age, social media platforms like YouTube have become a prevalent avenue for sharing and consuming content. It is a place where people from all walks of life engage with a vast array of videos, spanning from entertainment and education to news and personal stories. Unfortunately, this accessibility to a global audience also means that incidents of bullying and harassment often find their way onto the platform. Understanding how YouTube users react to these bullying incidents is of vital importance as it sheds light on the role of online communities in addressing social issues.

2   Literature Review

Social media development has reshaped crime patterns (Yar, 2012) and significantly impacted behaviour nowadays. Criminal behaviours, especially among teenagers, are becoming more common, and with the development of social media, adolescents are becoming more susceptible to crime (Malek & Kamil, 2010).

Bullying is one such crime. Electronic communication is used to bully others by sending text messages and images to damage someone's reputation and relationships. This form of bullying is complicated to detect and track, as in most cases, the culprit remains hidden (American Institute for Research, 2019). Cyberbullying occurs when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices (Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). Hurtful social media messages, unpleasant words made while gaming, hate accounts designed to shame, threaten, or abuse, and other types of cruelty and meanness online are all examples of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020).

Teens are attracted to social media because of its easy access to information and its variety of amusements. However, despite the excitement of surfing, social media has its challenges and issues related to distributing content, particularly about cyberbullying. Donegan (2012) explains how adolescents use bullying to overcome their frustration with others. Teens now do not have to be present physically to commit a crime, but with the mere uploading of videos, they will have the potential to commit a crime. When taking into consideration the geography of any particular crime, the overall distance travelled by the offender is considered to be an essential factor in crime, thus showing the tendency to commit more crimes near their homes as compared to the distance (Dern, Frönd, Straub, Vick, & Witt, 2004). However, in the present era of sophisticated technologies, this opinion can be questioned because crime on social media does not depend on the distance or the place of the crime being committed. For example, a lot of speculation and false stories were produced by social media users all over the place, causing a firestorm of information to be displayed and shared when the plane MH370 was lost. In this example, disseminating false information is a criminal act that cannot be measured by distance as the action occurred in cyberspace.

Before the 1980s, bullying was regarded merely as a childhood experience. Bullying has become an all-too-common societal problem that many families, towns, schools, and other youth-serving organisations have confronted in recent years. Bullying is divided into two parts – direct and indirect. Direct bullying is the attack on the victim either physically (hitting, choking, pushing or kicking) or verbally. Indirect bullying involves one or more action relationships, such as damaging a person's reputation, making faces or obscene gestures behind someone, manipulating the relationship with friends and intentionally spreading rumours (American Institute for Research, 2019).

Children and young people spend most of their time in school (Hoover & Stenhjem, 2003). A total of 8% of the participants surveyed admitted that bullying affects them and demotivates them to escape from school. (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). According to Omoteso (2010), students who are victims of bullying are passive and are usually reserved, cautious, sensitive and prone to tears. They have low self-confidence and a less attractive self-image. Children or people in this group are physically weaker and have few or no friends. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), bullying hurts how bullied children feel about themselves (27%), their relationships with friends and family (19%), their schoolwork (19%), and their physical health (14%).

Bullying hurts the life of the victim. It has caused difficulties for young people to learn and had adverse effects which will be long-lasting in their lives. Teens who were bullied also faced difficulties such as stress, anxiety, alienation from society, low self-esteem, social relationship problems, become anxious, depressed, aggressive, physical injury, psychological, social, or education, and the impact of all this are worst which could end with the suicide of the victim (Mameli et al, 2022). According to Lieberman & Cowan (2011), in the case of cyberbullying, there are almost two times more likely chances to attempt suicide by the victim than in face-to-face bullying. A study conducted in 2022 by Mameli et al. highlights the importance of providing platforms for disadvantaged students to share their perspectives and address pertinent issues.

Social media, a prominent platform for communication and information sharing, needs more traditional news scrutiny. Users' interactions, like likes, shares, and comments, make it popular, but misinformation thrives due to the absence of editorial oversight.

The data in Table 1 is taken from Malaysia Computer Emergency Response Team (myCERT) Cyber Harassment Statistics. From 2012 to 2021, the number of cyber-bullying cases has fluctuated. However, in 2019, the total number of cyberbullying cases has shown a minimal decrease to 260 cases compared to the numbers in other years. After 2019, the number of incidents increased to 596 cases, the highest number within ten years. The number of cases should continue to reduce by taking relevant actions to overcome this issue.

Table 1: Cyber harassment reported incidents in Malaysia within ten years (2012-2021)

Year/Month	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
2012	26	22	32	37	28	28	24	12	26	28	16	21	300
2013	21	30	49	48	42	43	49	42	43	40	54	51	512
2014	57	41	45	44	46	48	52	44	53	36	50	34	550
2015	30	40	32	51	30	45	42	32	24	43	43	30	442
2016	46	36	35	36	33	42	45	31	30	48	98	49	529
2017	41	45	64	71	119	39	27	25	32	36	31	30	560
2018	27	31	22	38	24	28	33	30	42	30	25	26	356
2019	21	22	23	22	13	27	18	17	28	14	34	31	260
2020	37	27	58	65	73	69	48	32	40	50	60	37	596
2021	35	37	40	29	30	55	41	34	35	30	25	26	417

Source: https://www.mycert.org.my/portal/statistics

3   Methodology

This study was fully conducted through research and analysis of YouTube videos, a social media platform that displayed a variety of videos from the public. Videos were selected based on the highest number of viewers among YouTube videos related to bullying. This approach helped explore the phenomenon and responses from YouTube users to bullying cases in schools. According to Jewitt, C. (2012), there was no specific requirement for the number of videos to be selected in video research. In this study, the researchers utilized a combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods to identify three popular YouTube videos (from the year 2018-2021) depicting bullying in school settings among teenagers.

The videos were carefully chosen based on their high number of views and comments compared to similar videos on the platform. The study solely focused on incidents that occurred in school settings. The videos, identified as Case 1, Case 2, and Case 3, were from different states in Malaysia: southern, east coast, and Borneo. The researchers analyzed the videos and used them as a research sample to examine users' comments about bullying. This study aimed to provide valuable insights into the prevalence and nature of bullying among teenagers in Malaysian schools.

The selected videos were viewed, and data related to the responses from YouTube users in the comments section were analyzed. Detailed descriptions related to the bullying phenomenon for each video were provided. To protect individuals' privacy and confidentiality, the names of suspects involved in the crime, the names of YouTube users, and profile images were not disclosed.

This study was related to social media users' emotions and expressions, adapted from research conducted by Mat Ghani & Ghazali (2015). The emotions were measured when individuals transformed the information they received into either joy, tears, anxiety, or more (Mehrad & Yousefi, 2018). Viewers' expressions could be observed in comments and the icon buttons (like or dislike) on YouTube.

3.2 Context of the Study

Case 1 related to a teenage boy being harmed by a few individuals. The victim was kicked cruelly because he wore his favourite football team jersey. The incident happened in one of the schools in the southern region. The YouTube video showed a man wearing a black T-shirt trying to suffocate the victim by wrapping a plastic pipe around the victim's neck.

Case 2 involved bullying incidents among students in a primary school in the East Coast region aged 10 to 12 years. Seven students bullied a boy in the prayer room. One of them was in Standard 4 (10 years old), while the other six students were in Standard 6 (12 years old). The 7:17 minutes video showed that the students wore sports attire, forced the victim to kiss their stockings, and frightened him with a hammer. The bullies also demanded money from the victim and warned not to report it to anyone. It was learnt that the victim was bullied several times and requested his parents to allow him to transfer to another school.

Case 3 related to bullying incidents in Borneo. After a bullying incident went viral on YouTube, police arrested four 16 years old students to assist in the investigation. Based on the investigation, the incidents started with a relationship problem. The victim was seemingly scolded after going out with someone. In the 2:51-minute video, the victim was slapped and slammed and felt to the ground after the suspects pulled her hair. Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Wellbeing Development (KPWK) ordered the state education department to investigate the case.

4   Findings and Discussions

Each selected YouTube video consisted of a video title, duration of the video, total number of views the video has, total number of comments the video has, and the number of likes and dislikes. This section outlines two significant aspects of YouTube users' responses to the selected cases. The first section relates to information about the chosen videos, while the second part links to an analysis of the comment categories from the viewers.

Table 2: Information about selected video

Case	Video Duration	Total view	Total Comments
Case 1	1:45 minutes	8,193	30
Case 2	7:17 minutes	14, 788	63
Case 3	2:51 minutes	18,887	86

The first case titled "Kes Buli Budak Baju JDT". 8,193 viewers have viewed the 1:45 minutes video. Thirty comments were available, with 11 people like and 24 people dislike the video published. The second selected video was titled "Video buli murid sekolah rendah jadi viral, " published about five months after the first case. It is a 7:17 minute video and viewed by 14,788 YouTube users. 63 comments were stated on the video and no user neither likes nor dislike. Video related to Case 3 titled "Kes Buli di SMK Sematan" was published on 19 November 2021, 3 days after Case 2. 18,887 viewers viewed this video. This was the highest recorded number of viewers compared to Case 1 and Case 2 video.

Table 3: Categories of Comment on selected video

Com-ment/Case	Unlike (Angry)	Number of Advice	Number of Suggestion	Support the bully ac-tivity	Total
Case 1	27	0	0	3	**30**
Case 2	53	2	5	2	**62**
Case 3	72	5	3	3	**83**
Total	152	7	8	8	

Table 3 indicates the number of comments for each category. The number of comments are least compared to the number of viewers. Nowadays, most people prefer to view rather than comment and want to update themselves on the incidents. Based on the analysed comments, 152 viewers were mad with the bullying incidents. Some viewers are worried about entering boarding school because of the bullying incidents. An example of a comment available in Case 1, Comment 21:

"I hate this condition. Too many students involved in bullying activities. Makes me worried to enter boarding school."

Indirectly, these bullying phenomena have negatively influenced parents who plan to send their children to boarding school in the future. The bullying incident has caused anxiety and stress not only to victims but also to the viewers.

Table 3 also indicates seven comments related to positive sense by giving some advice to the students involved in bullies. This can be seen in Case 3, Comment 43:

"I feel so pity with these girls…They forgot the real motive why they go to school. Next year you will sit for SPM examination. Hope you will get the best results so you can move on and reach a better future…so pathetic".

Rather than the usual condemning approach, this group of viewers gave some guidelines to society. This was a good way to convey that this phenomenon must be discontinued. Constructive comments could bring better insight to younger generations to re-align their main objectives regarding why they attend school.

Suggestions provided by the viewers through comment's section were also analysed. The advice given are more directly for schools to take further actions against bullies. Case 2, Comment 35 as an example:

"Better send the bullies to juvenile school."

Even though many viewers were angry about the bullying incidents, eight comments on YouTube showed that a small group of people support the bullying activity. One of the comments was found in Case 3, Comment 10:

"The reason for the girl's actions was her belief that her boyfriend had been taken away from her".

One of the most prominent findings is the prevalence of passive observership among YouTube users. The majority of users tend to prefer viewing content related to bullying incidents without actively engaging through comments. This observation suggests that many individuals are more interested in staying informed about such incidents rather than actively participating in the discussion.

Among the users who comment, a significant proportion express solid emotional responses to the bullying incidents. Many comments reflect anger, fear, and concern. Notably, the study highlights that the emotional impact extends beyond just the victims, affecting those who witness the incidents. Parents, in particular, are shown to be deeply concerned about sending their children to environments where bullying is prevalent. In their study, Erlin et al. (2023) highlighted the roles that parents should play in improving their children's interpersonal intelligence of adolescents in reducing their bullying behaviours. This research indirectly reveals that bullying incidents shared on YouTube have a significant impact on parental decision-making. Parents who plan to send their children to boarding schools' express anxiety and stress due to concerns about bullying, emphasizing the need for institutions to create safer environments for students.

5   Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concluded that YouTube played an essential role in disseminating information through videos while also exhibiting negative characteristics, specifically as a bullying tool. This study also highlighted and provided information about the local community's reactions to bullying activities posted on YouTube. It revealed that most viewers of bullying videos on YouTube did not support bullying and considered it a harmful act that should be discontinued. However, sharing such videos encouraged some teens to engage in similar behaviour. Government and non-governmental agencies can utilize this study to reassess and establish appropriate policies and measures to curb the spread of negative videos on social websites. This study also proposed the need for schools to implement an awareness training program, monitoring, and evaluation of bullying, which would be suitable for use in Malaysia to combat bullying among school adolescents. Such programs are expected to help reduce bullying. Additionally, the proposed body responsible for multimedia communications, such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, could consider restricting and censoring material disseminated through social media to ensure it does not negatively impact viewers. These findings have significant implications for parents, teachers, educationalists,

and counsellors who should be aware of the improper and excessive use of social networking sites by children and should establish intervention methods to address the problem. Further studies can explore methods to educate social media users on uploading content and responding to social media posts. This study will be helpful for the Ministry of Education in framing awareness programs for teenagers, which can be incorporated into the school's co-curricular curriculum. This is agreed by Sharma et al. (2023), who stressed the primary roles of policymakers in considering the effects of social media and the importance of government collaboration with other platforms in protecting the young generation in their social media usage that suits their needs and healthy future. To combat cyberbullying, Malaysia needs regulations specifically designed to address it. Many internet users are unaware of the laws and self-defence strategies, making public awareness crucial for prosecuting perpetrators.

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