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Cyberbullying on social media among Arab youths in the UAE

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Abstract: Cyberbullying is one of the social phenomena that spread on social media. The study aims to investigate the extent to which cyberbullying is emerging among Arab youth in the UAE. Also, it examines youth's views of cyberbullying and investigates the factors that impact the prevalence of the phenomenon. The study employs a quantitative approach by conducting an online survey. A total of 180 responses were received from the youth who participated in the survey. The results conclude that factors of age, gender, and time spent on social media are not statistically related to the behavior, while attitude can be a factor that impacts the behavior. Further research is needed to examine the motivation of youth attitudes toward the phenomenon and the extent of awareness of youth of cyberbullying forms.

Keywords: social media, cyberbullying, attitude, perception, social information processing theory.

1. Introduction

The advancement of ICT is changing the way people live, experience, and adopt internet and digital technology. People depend on the internet to connect with the cyberworld to get lasts information and integrate with society and share the news. Besides, they use social media to interact with other, by making friends, sharing an individual's lifestyle, taking a photo, and sharing one own stories, experiences, skills, and talent. So, social media become a dominant medium for communication among youth. According to Pew research center, the number of Americans who use social media has increased from 53% in 2012 to 72% in 2020. Besides, the most common age of social media users is youth between 18 and 29 years old (2021). Social media is considered a gate for posting opinions, liking or disliking posts, and sharing the posts with friends to inform or criticize these posts. Social media gives options to communicate, but it also allows negative phenomena such as cyberbullying to emerge. According to a study conducted by UNICEF, one in three young people, between ages 13 and 24, are victims of cyberbullying. They were bullied through popular social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat that are the most common platforms on which cyberbullying occurs (GulfNews,2019).

Cyberbullying is a significant issue to address in the paper. It affects many dimensions of people's lives, psychological, educational, and social. Also, because many youths view it as a normal part of life and there is no need to take consideration into this issue to solve it. Despite the importance of the phenomenon, there is a lack of research studies in the Arab

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Algerian Communication Journal
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world compared to the US and Western countries. “The majority of SNS bullying studies were conducted in the US, followed by in Europe” (Chan et al., 2020, p.4). Also, most of the studies focus more on children and adolescents than on young adults. Another gap in the research is that most of the studies were done in psychology with 50%, and information system with 20%. There is a lack of research done in communication studies with only 7 % (Chan et al.,2021). Therefore, this paper intends to shade light on the cyberbullying issue in term of prevalence, factors associated with the phenomenon and finally, the youth's perception toward cyberbullying.

2. Literature review

2.1 Emerging cyberbullying among youth on social media

Cyberbullying rate is determined differently from one country to another and between different studies due to the concept adopted by the researchers, cultural environment of the community, and youth experience and attitude. The method of measuring the rate of cyberbullying varies among researchers. Some studies focus on cyberbullying perpetration and victimization only, while others add the bystander who witnesses the incidents into the spreading rate as it is part of cyberbullying experience. This current study intends to show cyberbullying prevalence from the perspectives of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

In a study of university student in Malysia, Balakrishnan (2015) sampled 393 youth between 17 and 35 years old. The researcher indicated that only 39% of participants were cyber victims. When they were asked whether they bullied others, around 33% of participants indicated yes. These results showed the low percentage compared to those who were not exposed to cyberbullying or bullied other. However, the study found that more than half of participants (61%) mentioned having witnessed the cyberbullying occurrence.

Cyberbullying abounds in online networks and electronic tools such as blogs, online games, websites, social networks, emails, messages, and chats. However, social media are considered the most popular platforms of the spread of cyberbullying. Previous research has shown that the most online platforms where students have experienced cyberbullying were social networks with more than 50 percent. The second online format was email (47%), then text messages (43%) and finally nonrelated course such as blog (25%) (Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2014). Balakrishnan found that social media is the primary tool for emerging cyberbullying among youths, with around 64 percent of total online sites (2015). Besides, a recent study by Abaido (2019), concluded that “the majority (91%) of participants surveyed in this study agreed with the existence of online harassment in the form of cyberbullying on social media platforms” (2019, p. 7**)**. In addition, the most common platforms of cyberbullying incidents are Instagram (55.5%), then Facebook (38%), and Twitter (35.5%) (Abaido, 2019).

Nonetheless, it appears that the youths who witness the incidents in social media are more than the victims. For instance, comparing the rate of victims and bystander showed that number of youths who had witnessed cyberbullying incidents were greater than number of victims in social network (Gahagan, Vaterlaus, & Frost, 2015; Sobba, Paez, & Bensel, 2017).

Algerian Communication Journal
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WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

2.2 Factors related with cyberbullying rate

Recent research studies have found factors linked with cyberbullying incidents. First, age is considered a significant factor when studying cyberbullying behavior from the scientific research perspective and the psychological development perspective. Barlett and Chamberlin (2017) argued that there is a quadratic relationship between four variables (cyberbullying attitudes, cyberbullying behavior, perceived anonymity to harm online, and technology time use) and age. This means that cyberbullying is increasing from adolescents to youth adults, then it starting to decrease at older adulthood. The researchers conducted a questionnaire survey. They collected a sample and divided it into two samples, one of youth from two different schools, and the other for older adults. A total of 167 youth (average age 13.76) and 552 adults (average age 36.20) participated in the survey. The findings reveal substantial nonlinear age relationships, implying that cyberbullying does indeed change with age.

However, when comparing youths with older groups from 26 and above, youths are the group who experiences cyberbullying incidents the most. Zalaquett and Chatters (2014) reported a study to investigate if there is a difference in the frequency of cyberbullying based on specific variables (gender, age, race, and ethnicity). The researchers sampled 604 students. Most of them (60%) were aged between 21 and 24, (27%) were 25 to 29, and only (11%) were 30 and above. The study found that "participants between the ages of 20 and 25 were 10 times more likely to report cyberbullying than participants 30 and over" (p. 4).

Gender can be an inconsistent factor in the occurrences of cyberbullying. In a study of cyberbullying among university students in Hong Kong, Xiao and Wang (2013) hypothesized that males are more likely to commit cyberbullying than females. However, the results found that gender is a significant impact on cyberbullying, suggesting that female students were more likely to perform cyberbullying and "male students were less likely to engage in cyberbullying behavior" (p. 54). MacDonald and Pittman (2010) conducted questionnaires that involve 357 participants of college students at Midwestern University in the US. Most of the respondents were females (72%), while males were (28%) of the sample. Comparing between gender percentages, the results showed the numbers were close to each other. The number of female students who reported being cyberbullied reached 22%, compared to 21% of male students. In term of perpetration, only 11% of males cyberbullied someone else, while 8% of females reported similar acts. So, there is no gender different of cyberbullying behavior in this study.

Paullet and Pinchot (2014) showed that most of the participants in survey were male (62%), while (38%) were females. However, gender showed a significant factor in cyberbullying behavior. Besides, although the total of male respondents in the survey was more than female, the number of victims of cyberbullying for females were greater than males at a rate equal to 57% compared to 43%.

Time spent online has been investigated as a factor related to cyberbullying behavior. In Indonesia, a recent study carried out by Handono, Laeheem, and Sittichai (2019) aimed to examine the relationship between cyberbullying among youth and six variables: social support from family and friends, attitude toward cyberbullying, self-esteem, problematic internet use and time spent online. The results demonstrated that only five variables had

Algerian Communication Journal
Volume : 24/ N° : 02 (2022) P20-32
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WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

statistically significant relations with cyberbullying behavior except the variable of time spent online.

A study conducted by Huang, Zhong, Zhang, and Li (2021) examined 11 factors of cyberbullying in social media including the internet usage factor. The researchers found the factors related with being bullied or bullying other in social media were gender, anxiety, and internet addiction. However, there is no relationship between time spent on internet daily and cyberbullying behavior on social media. The researchers explained that spending more time on internet does not necessary means to spend more time on social media, instead it could be other activities like, learning, entertainment, or gaining information.

The attitude toward cyberbullying can be a factor of cyberbullying behavior. According to Ajzen (1991) attitude determine the degree to which an individual is agreed or favored toward the behavior. Which means, if a person has a positive attitude toward this behavior, the probability of performance will increase.

Previous studies have emphasized that attitude toward cyberbullying is a major factor in this behavior. For example, Handono et al. (2019) measured youth's attitude toward cyberbullying as a psychological factor. Statistically, they found a significant relationship between attitude and cyberbullying behavior, and attitude ranks fourth as a cause of cyberbullying incidents (after social support from friends, self-esteem, and social support from family).

A study conducted in 2012 aimed to predict adolescents' perpetration of cyberbullying using planned behavior theory. The researchers measured three determinants of behavioral intention, including attitude toward cyberbullying. They questioned a sample of 1042 students aged 12 to 18 from randomly selected schools. The analysis showed that attitude is the strongest predictor of cyberbullying behavioral intention in adolescents. Attitude toward cyberbullying behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were factors underlying cyberbullying behavioral intention in 45% of adolescents (Heirman & Walrave).

In 2017, a study by Barlet and Chamberlin observed that the relationship between attitude toward cyberbullying and behavior was moderated by age. They found that a significant correlation between attitude and perpetration in each separated group (18–26, 27–35, 36–49) was likely to lead to cyberbullying, while the youngest and oldest groups (12–17, 50+) displayed the weakest relationship.

2.3 Youths' perception of cyberbullying

Understanding youth's perception toward cyberbullying provides an insight into the extent of their awareness of the phenomenon. Perception means how a person understands and interprets cyberbullying based on prior experience and whether it is meaningful to them. Perception is closely related to attitude in how an individual perceives a topic, and both factors influence the individual's behavior (Pickens, 2005).

Previous studies showed different results regarding youth's perceptions toward cyberbullying. Huang, Zhang, and Yang (2020) explained that perception of the seriousness of cyberbullying among teens and youth was a common factor in predicting cyberbullying behavior. For a study conducted by Crosslin and Gloman (2014), students were interviewed in a focus group about their impressions of cyberbullying. The findings showed that half of

Algerian Communication Journal
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WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

the participants thought that cyberbullying is a way of mocking others, while around 17% saw cyberbullying as childish behavior and is not an important topic to talk about with other. In addition, the participants perceived the term "cyberbullying" as outdated and preferred to use "harassment" or "attack". The researchers observed that students did not always recognize cyberbullying; they also found that some students did not realize that they were being cyberbullied until they finished the group interview.

The issue here is the connection between perception and behavior. It is clearly observed that youth understand the phenomenon of cyberbullying but most of them do nothing when they witness cyberbullying incidents. For example, a study showed that most university students reported that cyberbullying should be illegal. However, out of 60% of participants who had witnessed cyberbullying, around 47% of them did nothing (Sobba et al., 2017). Another study conducted by Gahagan et al. (2015) examined how college students perceived responsibility toward cyberbullying when they witnessed an incident. The results illustrated that most students (70%) perceived that the responsibility depends on circumstances such as the relationship with the victim, an individual's morals regarding cyberbullying, or their ability to help the victim. In contrast, 30% clearly described the bystander's responsibility in the incident; of that 30%, most of them "advocated for a responsibility to act" (p.1103), while a small number of them reported that they had no responsibility to act.

Youth's perception toward cyberbullying affects their behavior, but their views differ depending on specific people, such as friends, famous people, or people unknown to them. Whittaker and Kowalski (2015) conducted three studies on cyberbullying via social media; in the second study, the researchers expected to see that cyberbullying targeted toward famous people or someone known via the internet was the most frequent and was viewed as the least negative, while they expected to see that cyberbullying directed at peers was the least frequent and viewed as the most negative. The results were in line with expectations. They found that participants saw aggressive comments toward peers as less acceptable and more offensive than toward other targets (random people or celebrities). Additionally, participants reported that they made aggressive comments toward others with whom they did not have a close relationship, such as online celebrities and random people.

A limitation of these previous studies is that they did not include the number of individuals who were victims, or whether they were perpetrators or bystanders, in order to create a link between perception among youth and the number of cyberbullying incidents. These studies also did not make a connection between prevalence of cyberbullying and perception among youth

3. Theoretical framework

Social information processing theory

Social information processing theory is one of the major theories used to examine and learn aggression and cyberbullying issues (Bauman,2012). It was developed by Crick and Dodge (1994) and it aims to explain the social cognitive processes when responding to social situations. It is a mental process that includes the individual's perception of others in society and how they react to them. Besides, this theory explains "how people explain interpret and evaluate the process in a social situation and how they make a decision in this direction"

Algerian Communication Journal
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WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

(Madencioglu & Arslan, 2021, p. 21). In other words, the way the person perceives and understands the situation impacts his or her behavior. According to the theory, people go through six stages before evaluating the social situation or acting out a certain behavior (2021). The stages include (1) encoding of environmental cues (both internal and external) (2) interpretation of cues (3) setting or explaining the goal (4) generating response options (5) deciding the response (6) enacting the chosen behavior (reacting) (Crick & Dodge,1994).

4. Hypotheses

The researcher intends to assess the following hypothesis of cyberbullying behavior which are:

H1: there is a significant relationship between factors (age, gender, attitude) and cyberbullying behavior.

H2: H0: there is no relationship between the factor (time of spent online in social media) and cyberbullying behavior.

H3: there is a significant relationship between youth's perception and cyberbullying behavior.

5. Method

This research aims to investigate the extent to which cyberbullying prevails on social media platforms among Arab youth in the UAE and the factors that impact cyberbullying behavior. Furthermore, it examines how youth perceive the phenomenon and whether these factors affect perception of cyberbullying. Thus, in order to examine the relationship between variables, the study employs a quantitative approach to answer the research questions and hypotheses as a statistical analysis to test the relationship between variables.

6. Procedure and data collection

In order to check the form's validity, a pretest or pilot survey was conducted and sent to 10 college students to determine whether the survey questions are clear and not misleading or confusing.

After the pilot study was completed and modifications made to implement requested suggestions, an online survey was officially conducted and sent out via social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter); data was collected from the 7th to the 20th of February, 2022.

In order to measure the variables, the researcher analyzed the results through using software program which is SPSS or Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

7. Results

A total of 180 responses were received from the youth who participated in the survey. Most of the participants are female (79%), while 21% are male. More than half of the sample (57.6%) are Arab expats, while 42.2% are UAE citizens. Non-Arab participants has been eliminated from the study because the main target sample of the study is Arab youth. About 40.7% of the sample are between 18 and 22 years old, 25.6% are between 23 and 25 years

Algerian Communication Journal
Volume : 24/ N° : 02 (2022) P20-32
ISSN:1111-536X EISSN:2676-1793
WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

old, and 18% are between 26 and 30 years old, while only 15.7% of the sample are between 31 and 39 years old.

The average number of youths who spend more than 8 hours per day on the internet is around 27.9%, while 29.1% spend between 6 to 8 hours on the internet. Most of the participants (36%) spend between 3 and 5 hours on the internet, while only 7% of youth spend less than 3 hours on the internet. Comparing social media use, about 39.6% of participants spend between 3 to 5 hours each day on social media. Approximately 33.1% of participants use social media for 6 to 8 hours. Only 9.9% of participants spend more than 8 hours on social media, while 17.4% spend 1 to 2 hours daily on social media (see Table 1).

Table1

Factors		**Freq.**	**Percent %**
Gender	Male	36	21
	Female	136	79
Age	18 – 22	70	40.7
	23 – 25	44	25.6
	26 – 30	31	18
	31 – 39	27	15.7
Nationality	UAE citizen	73	42.4
	Arab Expat	99	57.6
How much time do you spend on the Internet?	Less Than 3 hrs.	12	7
	3 – 5 hrs.	62	36
	6 – 8 hrs.	50	29.1
	More Than 8 hrs.	48	27.9
How often do use social media on average each day?	1 – 2 hrs.	30	17.4
	3 – 5 hrs.	68	39.6
	6 – 8 hrs.	57	33.1
	More Than 8 hrs.	17	9.9

8. Analysis of the findings

H1: There is a significant relationship between factors (gender, Age, attitude) and cyberbullying behavior

We will separate the above hypothesis into 6 sub hypotheses as follows:

First: gender

H_{10}: There is a significant relationship between gender and cyberbullying behavior Victims

H_{11}: There is a significant relationship between gender and cyberbullying behavior perpetration

To test the above two hypothesis H10 and H11 we use the independent samples t-test.

Algerian Communication Journal
Volume : 24/ N° : 02 (2022) P20-32
ISSN:1111-536X EISSN:2676-1793
WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

Table 2: Mean and std dev. For CB based on gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CB_Victims	Male	36	1.6869	.43704
	Female	136	1.5455	.49012
CB_ Perpetration	Male	36	1.7269	.49945
	Female	136	1.6146	.38649

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test for CB based on gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CB_Victims	Equal variances assumed	.031	.861	1.573	170	.118
	Equal variances not assumed			1.682	60.447	.098
CB_ Perpetration	Equal variances assumed	2.989	.086	1.453	170	.148
	Equal variances not assumed			1.253	46.671	.216

From table (3) and based on the value of sig. (2-tailed) = 0.118 which is greater than 0.05, we accept the **null hypothesis** of no mean difference in the population between male and female of cyberbullying behavior Victims.

From table (3) and based on the value of sig. (2-tailed) = 0.148 which is greater than 0.05, we accept the **null hypothesis** of no mean difference in the population between male and female of cyberbullying behavior Perpetration.

Second: Age

H_{12}: There is a significant relationship between Age and cyberbullying behavior Victims

H_{13}: There is a significant relationship between Age and cyberbullying behavior perpetration

To test the above two hypothesis H14 and H15 we use the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Algerian Communication Journal
Volume : 24/ N° : 02 (2022) P20-32
ISSN:1111-536X EISSN:2676-1793
WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

Table4 : ANOVA (age)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CB_Victims	Between Groups	1.644	3	.548	2.420	.068
	Within Groups	38.040	168	.226		
	Total	39.684	171			
CB_Perpetration	Between Groups	.923	3	.308	1.824	.145
	Within Groups	28.332	168	.169		
	Total	29.255	171			

The results in table (4) provide that the p – values (sig.) are 0.068 and 0.145 respectively and all are greater than the level $\alpha = 0.05$ therefore we accept all the null hypotheses and conclude that there is no statistically significant effect of Age at level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) on each of the following dimensions: cyberbullying behavior Victims, cyberbullying behavior perpetration.

Third: attitude

H_{14}: There is a significant relationship between Attitude and cyberbullying behavior (Victims and perpetration)

To test the above hypothesis H14 we use the multiple regression technique.

Table: 5 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.298[a]	.089	.078	.76400

a. Predictors: (Constant), CB_Perpetration, CB_Victims

Algerian Communication Journal
Volume : 24/ N° : 02 (2022) P20-32
ISSN:1111-536X EISSN:2676-1793
WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

Table 6: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.642	2	4.821	8.260	.000[b]
	Residual	98.644	169	.584		
	Total	108.286	171			

a. Dependent Variable: Factor_Attitude

b. Predictors: (Constant), CB_Perpetration, CB_Victims

From table (5), R^2 = 0.089 = 8.9% which indicates that 8.9% of the variance in the dependent variable Attitude can be explained by the independent variables CB_Perpetration and CB_Victims. But the remainder 91.1% can be explained by other variables.

From table (6), Sig. = 0.00 indicates that the model is valid. So, there exists a relationship between attitude and cyberbullying behavior.

Fourth: time spent on social media

H2: There is no relationship between the factor (time spent online in social media) and cyberbullying behavior (Victims and perpetration)

To test the above two hypothesis H2 we use (ANOVA)

Table 7: ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CB_Victims	Between Groups	.835	3	.278	1.204	.310
	Within Groups	38.849	168	.231		
	Total	39.684	171			
CB_Perpetration	Between Groups	.278	3	.093	.538	.657
	Within Groups	28.977	168	.172		
	Total	29.255	171			

The results in table (7) provide that the p – values (sig.) are 0.310 and 0.657 respectively and all are greater than the level α = 0.05 therefore we accept all the null hypotheses and conclude that there is no statistically significant effect of "time spent online in social media" at level (α

Algerian Communication Journal
Volume : 24/ N° : 02 (2022) P20-32
ISSN:1111-536X EISSN:2676-1793
WWW.ACR-DZ.COM

≤ 0.05) on each of the following dimensions: cyberbullying behavior Victims, cyberbullying behavior perpetration.

Fifth: perception

H3: There is a significant relationship between youth's perception and cyberbullying behavior (Victims and perpetration)

To test the above hypothesis H3 we use the simple regression technique

Table: 8 ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.499	2	.250	.503	.606[b]
	Residual	83.903	169	.496		
	Total	84.403	171			

a. Dependent Variable: Yout_Per_CB

b. Predictors: (Constant), CB_Perpetration, CB_Victims

The results in table (16) provide that the p – value (sig.) is 0.606 greater than the level α = 0.05 therefore we accept all the null hypotheses and conclude that there is no statistically significant effect of "youth's perception" at level (α ≤ 0.05) on each of the following dimensions: cyberbullying behavior Victims, cyberbullying behavior perpetration.

9. Discussion

This section summarizes the findings and contributions made. Our results demonstrated that despite the emergence of cyberbullying in social media among Arab youth it may not be impacted by specific factors.

First, several studies, such as those (Barlett and Chamberlin,2017; Zalaquett and Chatters,2014), have shown that age considers a factor in predicting CB behavior. Besides, it was hypothesized that there is a link between these variables. However, the ANOVA showed that the results were not statistically significant.

In terms of gender, the results are consistent with MacDonald and Pittman (2010) who showed a negative correlation between males and females in CB behavior.

Prior studies have noted the importance of attitude factors in predicting CB tendency. The findings are directly in line with the previous findings. Looking for the youth's attitude helps us to detect their behavior.

In addition, a comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms there is a null relationship between the variables time spent on social media and cyberbullying.

Finally, previous studies evaluating perception toward CB inconsistent results on whether the perception affects behavior. This study has been unable to demonstrate that the way the youth perceive the behavior causes similar behavior.

10. Limitations

This study has faced several limitations that need to take into consideration for further research. One of them is that the study did not measure whether the factors impact perception. Another concern about the findings was the lack of male participants in the survey. Also, the sample size was not large enough for the study.

11. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to determine the youth perception of cyberbullying and whether there are factors that impact the prevalence of CB. The investigation of the study has shown that attitude can be a prediction of CB tendency, while the other factors (age, gender, average time used) showed no significant impact on behavior.

This study needs to add a qualitative method to get in a deep insight into youth's view on CB. Further research is needed to examine the motivation of youth attitudes toward the phenomenon. In future investigations, it might be possible to highlight the psychological effects of CB in youth.

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