



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CYBERBULLYING  
AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA**

**FARIDAH HANEM BINTI AB RASHID**

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COPING STRATEGIES AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA**

By

**FARIDAH HANEM BINTI AB RASHID**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
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Doctor of Philosophy**

**July 2022**

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## DEDICATION

**“Three duas will not be rejected by Allah: Dua of the parents for his child, dua of one who is fasting, and dua of the traveler” (Tirmidhi)**

I dedicated my Ph.D. journey to my loving parents Haji Ab Rashid Ismail and Hajjah Radziah Md Nor. You have been my primary support since day one. Thank you as you keep making dua for my success. Thanks, Abah and Mama, for your physical, emotion, and financial support. I'm lucky to have your endless dua for my success.

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Lastly, I dedicated this thesis to myself. It is my contribution to society that was achieved through passion and determination. Completing this journey is not the end, but it is just the beginning of my life. Thank you, Ya Rahman.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**July 2022**

**Chairman : Professor Siti Zobidah binti Omar, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

The shift from physical reality to a virtual counterpart indicates the unprecedented interactivity and prevalence of social media usage where social media influencers (SMIs) could develop a strong rapport with their followers. The SMIs are followed by passionate and participative individuals with high regard for their perspectives and detractors. Notwithstanding, SMIs are susceptible to cyberbullying despite being notable brand endorsers or influential opinion leaders. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research (i) examined 10 SMIs' lived experiences of being cyberbullied on social media and (ii) strived to comprehend the implications of cyberbullying on victims (SMIs) together with their coping mechanisms. The adverse effects of cyberbullying could be attributed to broader social media audiences who virtually reflect meanness and cruelty, which could lead to suicides and long-term depression. Semi-structured and face-to-face online interviews with open-ended questions were implemented in this study to elicit in-depth informant experiences. Underpinning theories involving the Social Cognitive Theory (self-efficacy and self-regulation) and Transactional Model of Stress and Coping were utilised as empirical guidelines. The study data, which were evaluated through Moustakas's modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen phenomenological analysis method, led to the identification of nine themes: (i) associated with cyberbullying activities; (ii) instantaneous famous but negatively portrayed; (iii) online media and online portals used for sensational news; (iv) less personal information posting on social media; (v) post pleasant and enlightening content; (vi) desire to bring awareness; (vii) problem-focused coping strategies; (viii) emotion-focused coping strategies; (ix) cyber coping strategies. Resultantly, the informants portrayed high levels of self-worth through self-descriptions, particularly in managing cyberbullying incidents. The informants were also unaware that their social media content inevitably instigated cyberbullying. In this vein, cyberbullying typically occurs through online portals and news platforms. The

current research could facilitate communication and media education practitioners, social media and anti- cyberbullying authorities, and relevant policymakers to comprehend how cyberbullying impacts social media contexts and provides the victims with optimal countermeasures to protect and resolve such incidents. Summarily, this research has bridged the existing literature gap for a holistic comprehension of actual cyberbullying experiences on social media posting and optimal countermeasures among public figures, such as SMIs.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MEMAHAMI PENGALAMAN HIDUP MANGSA BULI SIBER DAN STRATEGI  
MENANGANI MASALAH BULI SIBER DALAM KALANGAN  
PEMPENGARUH MEDIA SOSIAL DI MEDIA SOSIAL**

Oleh

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Peralihan daripada ruang interaksi secara fizikal kepada alam maya menunjukkan bahawa interaktiviti dan kelaziman penggunaan media sosial yang tidak pernah berlaku sebelum ini, telah memungkinkan pempengaruh media sosial (SMLs) membina hubungan lebih yang kukuh dengan pengikut- pengikut mereka. SMLs atau di dalam Bahasa Inggerisnya social media influencer mempunyai pengikut setia yang sentiasa berminat untuk mendekati serta mengambil berat terhadap perspektif dan pengkritik- pengkritik mereka. Akan tetapi, SMLs turut terdedah sebagai mangsa kes buli siber walaupun mereka merupakan duta jenama terkenal atau tokoh yang berpengaruh. Penyelidikan fenomenologi kualitatif transendental ini dijalankan untuk (i) mengkaji pengalaman hidup 10 SMLs yang merupakan mangsa-mangsa kes buli siber di media sosial dan (ii) berusaha untuk memahami implikasi kes buli siber terhadap mangsa (SMLs) termasuk mekanisma untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut. Kesan-kesan buruk akibat daripada kes buli siber boleh dikaitkan dengan pengguna-pengguna media sosial di luar sana, yang mana kekejaman dan kezaliman yang ditonjolkan boleh membawa kepada kes-kes bunuh diri dan kemurungan jangka panjang. Temubual berstruktur separa secara atas talian dan pertanyaan soalan terbuka secara bersemuka telah dilaksanakan bagi mendapatkan pengalaman informan dengan lebih mendalam. Teori-teori asas yang merangkumi Teori Kognitif Sosial (keberkesanan sendiri dan kawal selia sendiri) serta Model Transaksi Stres dan Daya Tahan telah digunakan sebagai garis panduan empirikal. Data-data kajian yang dinilai melalui kaedah analisis fenomenologi Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen yang diubahsuai oleh Moustakas, telah membawa kepada pengenalpastian sembilan tema: (i) kaitan dengan aktiviti-aktiviti buli siber; (ii) populariti segera tetapi digambarkan secara negatif; (iii) media dan portal atas talian yang digunakan untuk berita-berita sensasi; (iv) kurangnya penyiaran maklumat peribadi di media sosial; (v) penyiaran kandungan yang menyenangkan dan memberi inspirasi; (vi) keinginan untuk

memberi kesedaran; (vii) strategi menangani masalah berfokus; (viii) strategi daya tindak yang berfokuskan emosi; dan (ix) strategi menangani buli siber. Hasilnya, para informan telah menunjukkan tahap nilai sendiri yang tinggi melalui penerangan yang diberikan oleh mereka, khususnya dalam menguruskan kes buli siber. Para informan juga tidak menyedari bahawa kandungan media sosial mereka secara tidak langsung telah mencetuskan kes-kes buli siber. Dalam konteks ini, buli siber biasanya berlaku melalui portal-portal dan pelantar berita atas talian. Justeru, penyelidikan-penyelidikansemasa mampu memudahcara pengamal komunikasi dan pendidikan media; pihak media sosial dan pihak berkuasa anti-buli siber; serta penggubal dasar untuk memahami impak kes buli siber kepada mangsa- mangsanya dan menyediakan langkah-langkah tindak balas yang optimum demi melindungi mangsa dan menyelesaikan kes tersebut. Secara ringkasnya, penyelidikan ini telah merapatkan jurang kajian yang sedia ada bagi pemahaman holistik tentang pengalaman sebenar mangsa buli siber menerusi kandungan-kandungan di media sosial serta langkah-langkah tindak balas yang optimum di kalangan personaliti terkenal seperti SMIs.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SNSs	Social Networking Sites
MCMC	Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SIMs	Social Media Influencers
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
TMSC	Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Many people communicate daily via social networking sites (SNSs), such as Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reported that 94% and 65% of adolescents in developed and developing countries were active Internet users. UNICEF (2019) also claimed that higher Internet usage is more prevalent among adolescents. As for the case in Malaysia, the number of people using the Internet is escalating on annual basis. The Internet User Survey conducted in 2018 by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) – a body that regulates the multimedia and communications industry – depicted that Malaysians were indeed heavy Internet users. In fact, the MCMC reported that Malaysian Internet users had escalated to 87.4% (28.7 million users) in 2019 from 76.9% (24.5 million users) in 2016. Likewise, a report by Digital 2019 found that Malaysia was ranked top five and the highest in global and Southeast Asia, respectively, for Internet penetration (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2019). Bernama (2019) depicted that 80% of Malaysians spent eight hours daily to surf the Internet, in which two hours and 58 minutes were spent for SNSs. Until February 2022, Facebook ranked first as the most used SNS among Malaysian at 85.04%, followed by Instagram (4.84%), Twitter (3.52%), YouTube (3.5%), Pinterest (2.08%), Reddit (0.68%) and others (0.34%) (Statcounter Globalstats, 2022). Despite the advantages of easy Internet access and online communication, some people use this technology medium to hurt others (Barlett, Dewitt, Maronna & Johnson, 2018). The Internet is an alternative medium for its users to engage in new communication violence against others (Eastin, 2013). Communication violence is a communication that uses manipulative or coercive language to cause fear, guilt, shame, satire, burden of duty, or punishment (Rosenberg, 2005). These behaviours may create uncontrollable circumstances that can lead to undesirable consequences, such as cyberbullying. According to Berne, Frisen, and Berne (2019), cyberbullying involves uploading offensive texts, images, and videos onto Internet websites or SNSs to inflict pain in others. Whittaker and Kowalski (2015) also highlighted that even there is potential positive outcomes associated with social networking use, but from their study suggested social media use is also related to maladaptive behaviours, including cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is use of technology by a person or a group of individuals to intentionally act aggressively towards a victim (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019; Zych, Baldry, & Farrington, 2017). Simon (2017) indicates cyberbullying as a risk that stems from Internet usage when one is attacked intentionally in the cyber realm. The cyberbullying issue has garnered attention from multiple domains, including legal, communications and media, sociology, information and communication

technology (ICT), psychology, and education. Cyberbullying exists in the bully-victim interpersonal relationship during verbal exchange or even in nonverbal form within the contexts of cultural and organisational communication processes.

### **1.1.1 Cyberbullying on social media in Malaysia**

Cyberbullying, as indicated by Abu Bakar (2015), has been regarded as a “silent epidemic” that lurks among Malaysians and their society. As reported in a study by Lai, Mohamad, Lee, Mohd Salleh, Sulaiman, Rosli, and Chang (2017), 66% of the participants admitted that they were cyberbullied, with a higher prevalence among Malay female victims. Meanwhile, another study found that 23% of Malaysian parents believed their children were cyberbullied at least once in 2018 (Yusuf, Hassan & Ibrahim, 2018). In addition, out of 28 surveyed countries, Malaysia was the second-highest to record cyberbullying cases: 37% worse than Saudi Arabia, 19% more than China, 17% more than South Korea, and 13% more than Japan (Rosli, 2018). Surprisingly, in 2020, Malaysia was ranked second in Asia for cyberbullying among youth (“Malaysia ranked second,” 2022).

Likewise, Lai et al., (2017) denoted that cyberbullying caused its victims to undergo emotional changes and become over-sensitive towards their environment. In addition, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported suicide as the second leading cause of death among those aged 15-19 years. Suicide cases in Malaysia rose among youth aged 13-17 years, where 10% had suicidal ideas in 2017 while 7.9% in 2012 (National Health and Morbidity Study, 2017). Based on the 2019 National Health Morbidity Survey, half a million Malaysian adults had depression. Although these issues are not stated directly as a result of cyberbullying consequences, previous studies have proven that mental health, depression and suicide are the effects of cyberbullying victimization (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019).

Further, cyberbullying in Malaysia mainly occurred on Facebook (65.7%) and mobile phone applications (apps) (60.2%), including Telegram and WeChat (Lai et al., 2017). Similarly, another study found that 25.0% of adolescents were moderate to severely cyberbullied, 53.5% had a moderate to high tendency to turn into cyberbullies, and 36.0% experienced aggressive behaviour on the online platform (Yuan, Lee, & Say, 2018). In addition, an exploratory study was conducted by Balakrishnan (2015) on cyberbullying in Malaysia with about 400 youth aged 17 to 30 years. The study found that the intensity of internet use could give rise to the occurrence of cyberbullying and that existing social network sites and the Internet could prompt cyberbullying among the youth.

With better accessibility to social media, cases of cyberbullying have escalated (Beng & Hua, 2019). A bully can create a dummy account to give negative comments or harass anonymously. A study conducted by Che Noh and Ibrahim (2014) among 134 university students in Malaysia found out that those

respondents have experienced cyberbullying situations. Among the situations were receiving negative and embarrassing comments, personal photos or videos disseminated without permission, slandered through social media, personal information disseminated without permission, received embarrassing criticism, password breach, received dirty and obscene words, received threats by unknown individuals, was made the subject of jokes by social media friends and received sexual harassment.

Past work on cyberbullying mainly focused on school children (Patchin & Hinduja, 2019; Milosevic & Vladislavljevic, 2020), adolescents (Sittichai & Smith (2018), and youth (Tokunaga, 2010; Balakrishnan, 2018) as these categories of groups are often described as a “digital generation” (Buckingham, 2013, p.1). However, the latest trends on cyberbullying have shown that anyone, regardless of age, race, religion, education level, job status, or social status, has the potential to become a victim of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying victims may include public figures such as celebrities, politicians, and social media celebrities, also known as Social Media Influencers. These public figures are increasingly utilizing social media platforms to establish their brand and interact with their fan base, but they often become the targets of cyberbullying activities.

According to Abidin (2016), many young people pursue celebrity on the Internet as a profession, with commercial benefits, cross-platform visibility, and established marketable personas that function as highly relatable Influencers. Influencers generally begin as ordinary social media users who, through publishing highly curated content and updates about their lifestyles, come to accumulate followers whose viewership can be monetised for advertorials (Abidin, 2016). As SMIs continue to embrace social media, cyberbullying by haters has become a more common occurrence and a substantial concern. In today’s online world, Influencers are among the most prominent, crucial, and controversial victims of cyberbullying (Abidin, 2019).

Sticca and Perren (2013) stressed out, the adverse effect of anonymous cyberbullying was rated worse than known perpetrator or private incidence. Besides that, these public figures are among the victims of the horrible comments from anonymous attackers (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). For example, on March 28, 2020, the Internet was ablaze with the story surrounding Malaysian entrepreneur and Influencer Vivy Yusof when she posted a comment on her view regarding the COVID-19 economic impact and the Economic Stimulus Package announced by former Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on her Instagram account. However, her statements were misunderstood by netizens. She had been badly cyberbullied by receiving nasty comments and embarrassing criticism. Even netizens had insulted her family’s dignity online, causing people to launch a petition to push for her dismissal from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) as the board of directors. Vivy had to come out with a video of herself explaining and apologizing to the netizens for what she had said earlier to stop the cyberbullying. She cried out throughout the video recording.



According to Vivy, the cyberbullying incidents she had faced made her feel sad, depressed, and shame. This case has revealed that cyberbullying can result in unpleasant and dramatic outcomes even among Influencers.

Consequently, cyberbullying across SNSs has turned into an alarming concern as it interferes with one's physical and mental well-being, even leading to suicide attempts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019; Rivituso, 2014). Even in Malaysia, cyberbullying victims suffer from depression and humiliation, turning them into recluses. In extreme cases, they commit suicide (Beng & Hua, 2019). More and more cases of cyberbullying have involved Influencers as the victims. For instance, a K-Pop Singer/Influencer, Suli, has committed suicide after she struggled with her online abuse in what became known as the '*no-bra*' scandal on social media (Fortin, 2019). Another case involved Hana Kimura, a Japanese reality TV show star/Influencer who committed suicide when she received a hateful online message ("Hana Kimura Death: Cyberbullying," 2020). The stress of being cyberbullied through the medium that has become a large part of netizens' lives, and is central to young people's social development, is an issue that is important to address.

Nowadays, Influencers have been viewed as opinion leaders by young internet users and have millions of followers on social media (Khalid, Jayasainan & Hassim, 2018). Influencers communicate with followers through their effective digital strategies applied across various potentially integrated digital platforms. These Influencers initiate trends over the social networks, and they play a significant role in shaping the opinions of users on the Internet (Qualman, 2012). As Influencers, their opinions play an essential role in the lifestyles of young adults as they are viewed as the dominant users (Nandagiri & Philip, 2018) on social networking such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube.

Often, cyberbullying related to celebrities highlighted their role to support a good cause in preventing cyberbullying (Click, Lee & Holladay, 2013). These influencers somehow managed to always inspire their users in doing something new, i.e., influencing their opinion on their lifestyle or buying a new product (Khalid et al., 2018). Serman and Sims (2020) also believe that Influencers have the power to influence others through their lifestyle, buying habits, attitude, and behaviour. In other words, the Influencers can connect with the netizens on such a level that they are willing to let them affect their decision-making process.

Having said that, knowing how Influencers lived experiences with cyberbullying and the coping strategies they used to overcome cyberbullying may help other victims use the same strategies. In addition, it can also help netizens equip their knowledge on cyberbullying issues to avoid becoming the next perpetrator or victim of cyberbullying on social media. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has explored first-hand knowledge of how Influencers respond to cyberbullying in Malaysia. Hence, it is timely to shed some light on

the cyberbullying experiences on social media and coping strategies of one particular group of public figures, namely Social Media Influencers.

## 1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Studies on cyberbullying have escalated over the last decade, mainly concentrating on its definition, prevalence, measurement, and correlations (Cassidy, Faucher & Jackson, 2018). Some scholars have focused on parental roles and norms (Sasson & Mesch, 2017); social networking sites (SNSs) cyberbullying (Sterner & Felmlee, 2017; Nilan, Burgess, Hobbs, Threadgold & Alexander, 2015); empathy (Zych et al., 2018); avoidance and resilience (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017); mental well-being (Kim et al., 2018); estimation (Chen, Ho & Lwin, 2017); prevention (Hong & Espelage, 2017); bystander behaviour (Kazeerooni, Taylor, Bazarova & Whitlock, 2018); socio-emotional aspects (Olenik-Shemesh & Heiman, 2017); as well as coping strategies (Sittichai & Smith, 2018). Many studies have highlighted the significance of the research issues.

Despite the growing literature, some gaps were detected, missing primarily on the effectiveness of cyberbullying coping strategies used to overcome cyberbullying (Machakova et al., 2013; Neaville, 2017; Shaik, Rehaman & Amin, 2020). Due to the unique aspects of cyberbullying, most scholars used quantitative methodologies (Chen, Ho & Lwin, 2017; Swenson-Lepper & Kerby, 2019; Balakrishnan, 2018). These studies relied on questionnaires or surveys to gather data, which may not have captured the full experiences of being a victim (Smith, 2019). There are qualitative studies which aim at exploring the perspective of cyberbullying but seek to understand the motive for cyberbullying, the impact of cyberbullying or the coping method used (Alipan, Skues & Theiller, 2018). However, these studies did not specifically focus on the efficacy of coping strategies used to overcome cyberbullying incidents from the experiences of actual cyberbullying victims.

The cyberbullying coping strategies prescribed in past studies are changing of contact details/usernames, reporting to authorities, as well as ignoring, warning, or blocking the perpetrator (Alipan, Skues, & Theiler, 2018; Tokunaga, 2010). Additionally, Sittichai and Smith (2018) reported that cyberbullying coping strategies that have been commonly used are ignoring and avoiding the situation, blocking the perpetrator, changing account settings, seeking advice; as well as confronting the perpetrator in order to cope with cyberbullying. As most of the participants in previous studies were not actual cyberbullying victims, the response on how the victims would cope with incidents of cyberbullying were hypothetical (Rosa et al. 2019) rather than on how victims had actually responded to cyberbullying (Smith, 2019).

Furthermore, most studies on cyberbullying have focused on isolation schools (Anderson, 2018) and university students (Balakrishnan, 2018), working adults (Harris-Dale, 2020), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), and special needs groups (Gearhart & Zang, 2014); it is imperative to assess a broad spectrum of categories to avoid missing factor(s) unravelled in isolation studies. It is because victims from varied groups face different issues due to cyberbullying (Abidin, 2019). For instance, it is imminent to assess cyberbullying amongst social media influencers (SMIs) on SNSs, primarily because the influencer marketing industry is massive, and its worth may hit USD5 to USD10 billion in the next five years (Mediakix, 2018).

SMIs can quickly become victims of cyberbullying as they need to communicate with their followers via successful digital marketing stratagems deployed across SNSs (Abidin, 2019). For fans alike, SMIs generate haters as well. Although SMIs are endorsers of prestigious brands due to their popularity, they also face cyberbullying threats (Hassan, Yacob, Nguyen, & Zambri, 2018). Knowing their experiences as victims of cyberbullying will add to the literature on cyberbullying among different groups.

Hence, conducting an in-depth qualitative study sheds light on the participants' stances based on their own experiences. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to address a gap in the literature information gained from an actual victim of cyberbullying, especially from the lived experiences of SMIs, which can be used to organise cyberbullying awareness programmes and help the netizens get an idea of coping strategies to overcome cyberbullying. The study's outcome can help strengthen one's self-efficacy and self-awareness in escaping cyberbullying on social media and aid one in hindering the adverse impacts of cyberbullying.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This qualitative phenomenological study gathered the experiences and coping strategies used by Social Media Influencers (SMIs) when dealing with cyberbullying incidents on social media. The following research questions outlined for this study are:

1. What are the lived experiences of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) who have been victims of cyberbullying on social media?
2. How do Social Media Influencers (SMIs) who have been victims of cyberbullying describe their lived experiences of cyberbullying, affect content creation on social media?
3. How do Social Media Influencers (SMIs) who have been victims of cyberbullying on social media describe their lived experiences of coping strategies to overcome cyberbullying?



## **1.4 Research Objectives**

### **1.4.1 General Objective**

The study's general objective is to understand the lived experiences of cyberbullying and coping strategies among Social Media Influencers on social media.

### **1.4.2 Specific objectives**

- 1 To explore the lived experiences of cyberbullying faced by Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on social media.
- 2 To determine the impact of cyberbullying on content creation activities of the affected Social Media Influencers (SMIs).
- 3 To analyse the effective coping strategies used by Social Media Influencers (SMIs) to overcome with cyberbullying on social media.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This research is essential for a variety of reasons which has contributed to helping in understanding cyberbullying issues in Malaysia towards practicality, policy, and the academic world. The study results add to the body of literature by capturing information from Social Media Influencers (SMIs) about their lived experiences as victims of cyberbullying and the coping strategies to overcome cyberbullying on social media. Learning directly from the victim about their coping strategies in overcoming cyberbullying offers relatable sources and first-hand knowledge, which could help other cyberbullying victims in such a terrible situation to wriggle their way out from further harm.

### **1.5.1 Practical**

This study adds to the existing knowledge on cyberbullying issues in Malaysia by identifying strategies that can effectively overcome cyberbullying on social media. Hence, this study contributes to reducing emotional distress suffered by victims and providing essential knowledge for netizens to hinder the adverse impacts of cyberbullying – ultimately maintaining their mental and physical well-being. One effective way to overcome cyberbullying is to raise awareness in the cyber community about the harmful impacts of cyberbullying. This may facilitate netizens to sense the suffering faced by victims and turn their empathy to actual intervening behaviour (Wang, 2021). Having said this, SMIs was seen as people who can influence others by their action or words. Therefore, the SMIs who are the victims of cyberbullying can share their cyberbullying experiences and

coping strategies and give followers awareness of cyberbullying issues on social media.

### **1.5.2 Policy**

Besides devising effective prevention and intervention programs to halt cyberbullying threats, the study outcomes serve as a measure to evaluate the efficacy of the strategies for coping with cyberbullying. The study findings can aid Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) or other NGO organizations to prepare a module on content self-regulation on social media and ways to cope with cyberbullying issues on social media. This module can help Malaysian online users equip knowledge to produce social media content that will not create an issue that can trigger cyberbullying. Besides that, a public service announcement (PSA) using the Influencers as the spokesperson can be made to educate the effective ways to cope with cyberbullying issues on social media. If Malaysian netizens face emotional distress, their well-being and development will be badly affected. Information that enhances adolescents' learning and social conditions ensure that their self-worth and dignity are protected, thus encouraging positive social change.

### **1.5.3 Academic**

Past work on cyberbullying has adopted chiefly the quantitative approach. Therefore, by adopting the phenomenological qualitative approach, this present study offers the opportunity for the SMIs as a victim to voice out issues about cyberbullying, particularly on the effective coping strategies that can be used by other or potential victims of cyberbullying. Moreover, the outcome can help educators involve communication studies to identify content related to social media and cyberbullying. Having good knowledge about cyberbullying on social media from teachers, lecturers, or even parents, may help to reduce the risk of becoming the next victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying by knowing effective coping strategies to overcome cyberbullying and good ways of posting and responding to the content posted on social media.

## **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

A potential limitation was research bias during the data collected. Results from a study with a small sample size should be carefully interpreted. The study had a relatively small sample size of ten informants, which might bias the results. However, the detailed data analysis and the detailed descriptions gathered from the interviews enhance the transferability of the findings in this study. Another potential limitation was that participants might not have provided honest or complete answers to the interview questions. The data collected were based on the self-reporting of experiences described by the informants. As the study

informants are victims of cyberbullying and are from prominent groups, the informants may not fully disclose information they consider confidential or socially unacceptable about their experiences without the researcher's knowledge. Researcher bias is possible in qualitative research, but bracketing was used to enhance the credibility of the research. Bracketing in qualitative studies lowers research bias and enhances research credibility. In bracketing, preconceived ideas or experiences that may affect the ability of a researcher to remain impartial are set aside. In addition, the member checking method was used in the study to lower research bias.

## 1.7 Definition of Terms

**Cyberbullying:** Common elements among definitions of cyberbullying include the intentional nature of the harm caused to another person using electronic means. Causing harm using electronic means may refer to online impersonation, spreading rumours, sending threatening messages, unsolicited pictures, or harassment via text messaging, instant messaging, or chat rooms (Goldstein, 2015; Wright, 2017). The term cyberbullying has also been used interchangeably with online harassment, cyberaggression, online bullying, cyber harassment, online peer harassment, and cyber victimization (Corcoran, Guckin, & Prentice, 2015; Wright, 2017). In this present study, cyberbullying denotes communication using social media with the intent to coerce, intimidate, harass, degrade, humiliate, and spread/make fake news/stories.

**Social Media:** Social media is defined as "Internet-based, disentranced, and persistent channels of mass personal communication, facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content" (Carr & Hayes 2015; p. 49). Social networking websites (Facebook, YouTube, Yelp, Tiktok, etc.), social video games (Farmville, second life, etc.), chat boards and blogs, professional networking websites (LinkedIn, Beehive, etc.), and socially designed mobile applications (Instagram, Yik Yak, etc.) are examples of social media platforms.

**Social Media Influencers:** Also known as social media celebrities, they turn famous due to their social media presence instead of traditional celebrities who become famous from film, music, and television programs (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Influencers are a subset of a digital content creator defined by their significant online following, distinctive brand persona, and patterned relationship with commercial sponsors (Duffy, 2020).

**Coping Strategies:** Skinner and Wellborn (1994) defined a coping strategy as action or failure to act by an individual to regulate a stressful situation. Coping can be appraised using either a problem-focused approach or an emotion-focused approach. The strategies are then employed depending on the

approach being either adaptive, maladaptive, or absent of action (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Herman & Tetrick, 2009).

## **1.8 Chapter Summary**

Cyberbullying on social media among Social Media Influencers (SMIs) has become a serious problem that negatively impacts people who are victimized. Therefore, the study conducted was timely and significant to current events. Chapter 1 contained an introduction to the background of the study to highlight the overview context of the study. To better understand the purpose of the problem, a statement of the problem was highlighted, and three research questions were identified that guided the data collection of the study. A discussion of the significance and limitation of the study was also provided, which discussed the present challenges and how they were addressed. Lastly, the definitions of terms sections consisted of important key terms in the study to better understand the study topic. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature related to social media as a platform to facilitate cyberbullying, primarily focusing on cyberbullying on Facebook, further details on the nature of cyberbullying, looking deeper into the meaning of SMIs and types of coping strategies. The next chapter will also take an in-depth look into the theoretical framework used to guide the study.

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