

Exploring the Nexus Between Social Media Usage, Self-Esteem, Risky Online Exposure and Cyberbullying Victimization among University Students

Siti Nur Aisyah Aznam¹, Muhammad Al-hafiz Mohd Nafizan², Mohamad Aiman Afiq Harni³,
Muhammad Syah Ikmal Sujidin⁴, & Nor Ezrine Yussoff^{5*}

¹⁻⁵Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Negeri
Sembilan, Kampus Seremban, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication has expanded at a rapid rate, which has exposed university students to a high risk of cyberbullying; hence, it is a serious threat in institutions of higher learning. The paper focuses on the determinants of cyberbullying victimisation among UiTM Seremban students. It explores the correlation between social media use, low self-esteem, exposure to risks on the Internet, and victimisation in cyberbullying. The extent of cyberbullying victimisation, as well as the most influential factors, was determined with the help of descriptive and inferential analysis. The results demonstrate that these factors make students highly vulnerable to cyberbullying. The study will help fill the gap in Malaysian university research concerning cyberbullying.

Keywords: cyberbullying, risky online exposure, social media, Routine Activity Theory

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies has significantly transformed the way individuals interact, particularly among university students who rely heavily on digital platforms for academic, social, and personal communication. Social networking sites, instant messaging applications, and online forums provide convenience and connectivity. However, they have also facilitated the emergence of harmful online behaviours such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is commonly defined as intentional, repetitive aggression carried out through electronic means, including social media, text messages, and online platforms, to cause harm to others (Smith et al., 2008).

University students are considered a high-risk group for cyberbullying victimisation due to their frequent and prolonged exposure to digital environments. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can anonymously reach a wide audience instantly and persist beyond physical spaces and time boundaries, making it more difficult for victims to avoid or stop harassment (Kowalski et al., 2014). Studies have shown that cyberbullying victimisation among university students is associated with negative psychological outcomes such as stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and reduced academic performance (Akbulut & Eristi, 2011).

Despite growing awareness, cyberbullying among university students remains underreported, as victims may perceive online harassment as a normal part of digital interaction or fear negative social consequences if they report the incidents (Walker et al., 2011). This underreporting limits the effectiveness of institutional responses. Moreover, while numerous studies have focused on adolescents, research examining cyberbullying victimisation and its associated factors among university students is still relatively limited, particularly within specific cultural or educational contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to examine cyberbullying victimisation and the factors associated with it among university students. By identifying the key determinants of victimisation, this research seeks to contribute to the

existing literature and provide practical insights for higher education institutions in developing effective prevention strategies, awareness programs and support systems to ensure a safer digital environment for students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Routine Activity Theory

The theoretical framework underpinning this research is the Routine Activity Theory (RAT), originally developed in 1979 by Cohen and Felson (Perera, 2025). This theory assumes that criminal events take place when three necessary conditions are met: an individual offender, an appropriate target, and the lack of a strong guardian. Put differently, according to the theory, situational opportunity is as crucial as the nature of the offender seeking to commit a crime. While originally conceptualised to explain predatory violations in physical settings, shifts in human communication required adapting this framework to virtual environments where digital presence effectively replaces physical location.

Routine Activity Theory underlines the importance of situational context and opportunity to explain criminal behaviour rather than the personality traits of an individual or psychological factors. This theory is therefore often utilised in explaining the effect of changes in day-to-day life and social contexts in determining the potential for victimisation. In modern society, the Routine Activity Theory has been applied to the cyberspace sphere, where social relations are implemented not on the physical level. This virtual world contains the possibility of creating conditions that create more chances of criminal behaviour, especially with degraded systems of control and surveillance.

Using the Routine Activity Theory, the use of social media and exposure to risky online material can be considered one of the key factors that increase the chances of becoming a victim of cyberbullying. These two elements make people visible at targets, but also weaken the existence of strong guardians at the same time. Low self-esteem plays the role of a secondary factors that increase the vulnerability of the victims, even though it was not included as a fundamental factor in the Routine Activity Theory.

Cyberbullying Victimisation

Cyberbullying has become one of the major problems of young people, especially university students in Malaysia. Mohd Fauzi et al. (2023) found that 36.6% of 355 university student participants had been cyberbullied, and almost one-fifth experienced it nearly every day. Cyberbullying commonly occurs on social media platforms such as Facebook and is perpetrated not only by anonymous individuals but also by peers, classmates, and friends (Mat et al., 2023). Mat et al. (2023) found that offensive language, humiliating comments, and persistent harassment are common forms of cyberbullying among young people in Malaysia, suggesting that it has become a part of their everyday digital communication.

The impact of cyberbullying has also been documented as severe psychological and academic problems. Mui et al. (2023) reported that psychological distress and suicidal ideation were significantly related to cyberbullying victimisation, with victims having a significantly higher risk of suicidal ideation, given the higher levels of depression and stress. Likewise, Rusli et al. (2024) found that cyberbullying victims may have increased anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and decreased academic motivation, indicating that cyberbullying hurts mental health and academic functioning. These findings align with Tetteh et al. (2022), who noted that victims often experience distress, discomfort, and a decreased quality of life. Taken all together, the literature has shown that cyberbullying is a continuous issue that has significant emotional and academic impacts, and thus a need for increased awareness and support in educational environments.

Factors Influencing Cyberbullying Victimisation

The use of social media has been recognised as one of the major factors in cyberbullying victimisation among Malaysian youth. Kasim et al. (2025) reported that the frequency and intensity of social media use significantly predict cyberbullying victimisation among university students, particularly on platforms such as Instagram,

Facebook, and Twitter. In addition to the frequency of use, problematic social media usage also makes students more vulnerable. Lee et al. (2023) reported that students who scored high on social media addiction were more vulnerable to cyberbullying victimisation. Likewise, increased online visibility and interaction were linked to increased risk (Ahmad Ghazali et al., 2020), while posting many times and interacting with a big online network were found to be significant risk factors among youth in Malaysia (Arifin et al., 2025). Overall, these findings indicate that the amount of social media use and content type are directly linked to increased exposure to cyberbullying, which underlines the need to consider the online environment in designing educational and social support interventions for Malaysian youth.

Self-esteem is one of the factors that contribute to cyberbullying. According to a study conducted by Foeh Jacob et al. (2023), self-esteem is how individuals assess or judge themselves. Self-esteem is an important component for everyone to build character and identity, either in a more positive direction or otherwise. Based on several studies that have been conducted, low-self-esteem can be formulated as a factor, and an initial concept that shapes the personality of society towards negative things, one of which is cyberbullying. Foeh Jacob et al. (2023) found that higher self-esteem decreases the likelihood of involvement in cyberbullying, while low self-esteem increases this tendency. The lower a person's self-esteem, the higher the person's tendency to be involved in cyberbullying activities. However, the findings of the study by Vishwakarma et al. (2024) state that the findings are less consistent regarding the behaviour of bullies. Bullies can be those who have both low and high self-esteem. A study conducted by Deshmukh et al. (2025) found that the relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying behaviour is very high. According to Sinclair et al. (2010), using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE), victims of cyberbullying usually have lower self-esteem scores than bullies. However, bullies have lower self-esteem scores than people who are not involved in cyberbullying. Researchers found that it is most likely that those who become bullies use cyber platforms to bully others to compensate for their own insecurities towards other weaker individuals. From an international perspective, in Italy specifically, Palermi et al. (2017) in their study, found a strong relationship between low self-esteem and cyberbullying. In their findings, they found that subjects with a low level of self-esteem are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying risks.

Brewer and Kerslake (2015) found in their study that victims of cyberbullying are more vulnerable to more negative psychological effects, especially loneliness, and having low self-esteem. Not only that, but the study also found that bullies show low self-esteem, but in a different form and have low levels of empathy, which encourages them to hurt others. Perpetrators are also at risk of experiencing psychological effects because many of them have been victims. In a Malaysian perspective, a study by Ayub et al. (2023) found that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to be victims rather than perpetrators of cyberbullying on social media. Research by Lei et al. (2020) found that young people with poor self-esteem may use cyberbullying as a way to take charge and feel empowered, something they don't have in their offline life. Cyberbullying may provide these young people with a skewed means of self-expression and self-affirmation in the Malaysian cultural setting, where candid conversations about emotional health are frequently stigmatised. According to a study by Aliyev and Gengec (2019), young people who have a greater sense of self-worth are more likely to be able to withstand cyberbullying. Additionally, they are more proactive in using coping mechanisms like reporting the occurrence or blocking the offender. However, the study also shows that resistance to cyberbullying and self-esteem have a complicated relationship that is impacted by several variables, such as cultural norms and family support. Consequently, even while self-esteem is crucial in determining how Malaysian kids perceive cyberbullying, it is simply one aspect of a much bigger picture.

Barlett et al. (2019) define exposure to risky internet material as providing incorrect information, watching unlawful activity, and being purposefully or inadvertently exposed to violent content that swears or disparages celebrities. Savoia et al. (2021) provide an alternative viewpoint by categorising dangerous online circumstances into content, contact, and economic hazards, highlighting the unique susceptibility of teenagers to damaging content and the possible exploitation by businesses. They emphasise the significance of considering individual differences in sensitivity to online dangers and contend that the simple act of being online increases risk exposure, particularly among younger users. To better understand and reduce these risks in the context of teenagers' distinct developmental stages and social media interactions, they advocate for a nuanced approach to online dangers, departing from the general and static viewpoints common in current studies. Branley and Covey (2017) confirmed the relationship between young people's exposure to internet content that portrays hazardous conduct and their offline risky behaviour. Bae (2021) in his study found that exposure to internet content that portrays hazardous

conduct and offensive behaviour. This risky online exposure directly manifested as behavioural tendencies such as communicating with unfamiliar online contacts, revealing personal details, or accessing unverified virtual spaces. One of the behaviours is cyberbullying. According to Cho and Rustu's (2020) research, cyberbullying may occur when the victim and the offender engage in similar everyday behaviour, such as exposure to hazardous online information.

In the research of Czech youths, Babilonová et al. (2024) discovered that sending films to strangers, getting explicit information, exchanging nude images, coming across financial offers for meetings, and being exposed to blackmail are all risks linked to online behaviour. Not only that, Feijóo et al. (2021) discovered that in a survey of teenagers in Spain, the rates of cyberbullying also varied between 5.2% for victims, 4.5% for offenders, and 4.3% for bully-victims, totalling 14% of engagement in cyberbullying across all roles. There is a connection between mobile usage and dangerous internet conduct. Compared to teenagers who engaged in cyberbullying, those who did not engage in cyberbullying were less likely to spend more than five hours online per day, have accounts on more than five social networking sites, use mobile phones in class, and use mobile phones after midnight. Bullies and bully-victims displayed even greater rates in every instance, whereas victims displayed higher rates for all the aforementioned. Taking a deeper look, research conducted in Thailand by Atsariyasing et al. (2024) discovered a substantial correlation between cyberbullying engagement and nearly every online risk behaviour. The odds ratio indicated that sharing personal information, scheduling online meetings with strangers, and engaging in online conversation with strangers were the three riskiest actions. Furthermore, there was a significant correlation between the high-risk social media addiction group and cyberbullying engagement. In a Malaysian perspective, Yusuf et al. (2023) found in a study that 9–16-year-old students in Selangor were exposed to online risks such as unwanted exposure to pornography, potentially harmful user-generated content, sexting, misuse of personal data, cyber grooming and cyberbullying. Among the factors that influence increasing risky online behaviour or the risk of becoming a victim are starting with one's own behaviour, namely online perpetration by harassing others and sexual solicitation, as well as posting revealing body images, which are associated with a higher risk of becoming a victim (Marret & Choo, 2017).

Therefore, the relationship between social media usage and cyberbullying victimisation is primarily explained by the increased digital presence of an individual. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media usage and cyberbullying victimisation among university students.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between risky online exposure and cyberbullying victimisation among university students

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between low self-esteem and cyberbullying victimisation among university students.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

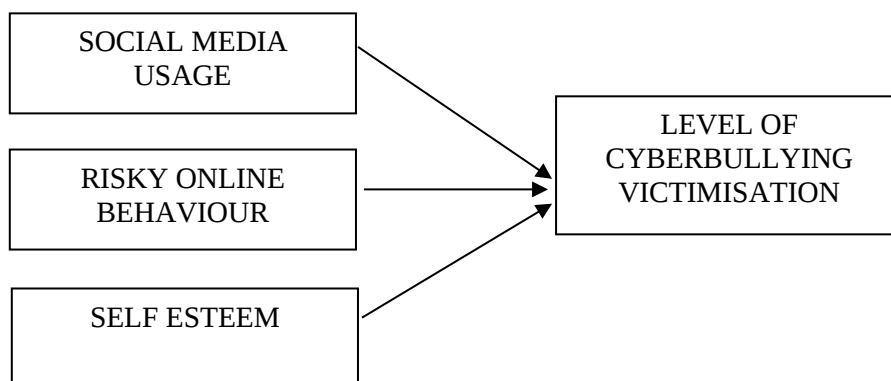


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Variables which influence Cyberbullying Victimization and Factors among University Students at UiTM Campus Seremban

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out at UiTM Campus Seremban. There were 6,015 students enrolled in three faculties: the Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Policy Studies (FSPPP), the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics (FSKM), and the Faculty of Sports and Recreation Sciences (FSR). The sample size calculation was based on the minimum sample size table proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which recommended a minimum sample size of 361 for a population size of about 6,000. A stratified sampling method was used to obtain proportional representation from each faculty.

The data were gathered through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via UiTM digital platforms, such as WhatsApp groups and social media pages. The questionnaire had five parts: Demographic data, Cyberbullying victimization, Social media usage, Low self-esteem, and Risky online exposure. Measurement items were adapted from previously established studies (Samsudin et al., 2023; Kasim et al., 2025; Sinclair et al., 2010; Deshmukh et al., 2025; Savoia et al., 2021). To provide a detailed measurement tool, all constructs were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Furthermore, to evaluate the strength of the data collection process, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. As presented in Table 1, the instruments demonstrated good internal consistency, with alpha values of 0.784 for cyberbullying victimisation, 0.739 for social media usage, 0.868 for low self-esteem, and 0.706 for risky online exposure.

The collected data were screened, coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The characteristics of the respondents and the level of cyberbullying victimisation were described in terms of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to explore the associations between social media use, low self-esteem, risky online exposure and victimisation from cyberbullying. Then, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the most significant factors that influence cyberbullying victimisation among students at UiTM Seremban.

Table 1. Measurement of variables, normality test, and reliability test results

Variables	Items	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha
Cyberbullying Victimisation	1. I have seen other people being cyberbullied. 2. In my lifetime, I have been cyberbullied. 3. I have experienced cyberbullying on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and different social networking websites other than Facebook. 4. I have experienced cyberbullying through computers or phone instant messages. 5. Someone posted mean or hurtful comments about me online. 6. Someone spread rumors about me online. 7. Someone threatened to hurt me online.	-0.637	-0.812	0.784
Social Media Usage	1. I use social media to maintain close social relationships with people around me. 2. I use social media to discover friends with interests like mine. 3. I use social media to entertain myself. 4. I use social media to relax from studying. 5. Using social media increases the likelihood of online harassment.	-1.251	1.401	0.739
Self-Esteem	1. In general perspective, I am satisfied with myself 2. At times I think I am no good at all. 3. I feel that I have several good qualities. 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	-0.754	-0.301	0.868

	6. I certainly feel useless at times. 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others			
Risky Online Exposure	1. I have chatted or communicated with friends or individuals on social media whom I have never met in person. 2. When I post on social media, I mention or tag my town, school name, location, or other personal information. 3. I communicate with other players whom I do not know while playing online games. 4. I interact with people on social media whom I do not personally know. 5. I have received messages or pictures online that made me feel uncomfortable	-1.143	2.451	0.706

FINDINGS

Demographic Profiles

Out of 362 respondents, most are female (n=197, 54.4%) and the rest are male (n=165, 45.6%). Next, for the age group, the number of respondents 21-23 years old is 215 respondents (59.4%). This is followed by 18-20 years old (n=58, 16.0%), 24-25 years old (n=51, 14.1%) and 26 years old and above (n=38, 10.5%). Academic qualification of the respondents shows that most of the respondents are degree students, with 240 respondents (66.3%) and 122 respondents (33.7%) were diploma students. For faculty, the majority of respondents are from the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Study (n=162, 44.8%), followed by the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics (n=104, 28.7%) and the Faculty of Sports Sciences and Recreation (n=96, 26.5%). Based on semester distribution, Semester 5 recorded the highest number of respondents (n=102, 28.2%), followed by Semester 4 (n=81, 22.4%), Semester 6 (n=57, 15.7%), Semester 2 (n=50, 13.8%), Semester 3 (n=43, 11.9%), Semester 1 (n=17, 4.7%), and Semester 7 (n=12, 3.3%). In general, the respondents were mostly female, aged between 21 and 23 years, degree students in the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Study, and presently in the 5th semester.

Table 2. Demographic profiles

Profile		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	165	45.6
	Female	197	54.4
Age Group	18-20 years old	58	16.0
	21-23 years old	215	59.4
	24-25 years old	51	14.1
	26 years old and Above	38	10.5
Academic Qualification	Diploma	122	33.7
	Degree	240	66.3
Faculty	Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics	104	28.7
	Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Study	162	44.8
	Faculty of Sports Sciences and Recreation	96	26.5
Semester	1	17	4.7
	2	50	13.8
	3	43	11.9
	4	81	22.4
	5	102	28.2
	6	57	15.7
	7	12	3.3

Mean Analyses

The level of cyberbullying victimisation can be calculated and interpreted based on three levels of mean scores: 1.00–2.50 (low level), 2.51–3.50 (medium level), and 3.51–5.00 (high level). Table 3 shows that the statement “I have seen other people being cyberbullied” recorded a high level of cyberbullying victimisation ($\bar{x} = 3.928$). Similarly, the statement “I have experienced cyberbullying through computer or phone instant messages” also showed a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.511$). Meanwhile, the statements “In my lifetime, I have been cyberbullied” ($\bar{x} = 3.091$), “I have experienced cyberbullying on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and other social networking platforms” ($\bar{x} = 3.318$), “Someone spread rumours about me online” ($\bar{x} = 3.431$), and “Someone threatened to hurt me online” ($\bar{x} = 3.304$) were all at a medium level. In contrast, the statement “Someone posted mean or hurtful comments about me online” recorded a low level ($\bar{x} = 2.332$). Overall, the mean value indicates that the level of cyberbullying victimisation among the respondents is at a medium level ($\bar{x} = 3.274$).

Table 3. Level of Cyberbullying Victimisation

Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Level
B6. I have seen other people being cyberbullied.	3.928	0.959	1.00	5.00	High
B7. In my lifetime, I have been cyberbullied.	3.091	1.214	1.00	5.00	Medium
B8. I have experienced cyberbullying on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and other different social networking platform.	3.318	1.417	1.00	5.00	Medium
B9. I have experienced cyberbullying through computer or phone instant messages.	3.511	1.502	1.00	5.00	High
B10. Someone posted mean or hurtful comments about me online.	2.332	1.572	1.00	5.00	Low
B11. Someone spread rumours about me online.	3.431	1.491	1.00	5.00	Medium
B12. Someone threatened to hurt me online.	3.304	1.555	1.00	5.00	Medium
Cyberbullying Victimisation	3.274	1.387	1.00	5.00	Medium

Note: 1.00-2.50, low; 2.51-3.50, medium; 3.51-5.00, high.

Pearson Correlation

Pearson correlation analysis was used to see the relationship between each variable involved in this study. The results in Table 4 show that all independent variables have a significant positive relationship with the dependent variable (cyberbullying victimisation). Among the three independent variables, risky online exposure has the highest positive relationship with cyberbullying victimisation ($r = 0.635$, $p < .001$), followed by self-esteem ($r = 0.318$, $p < .001$) and social media usage ($r = 0.276$, $p < .001$). Therefore, all hypotheses are accepted.

Table 4. Correlation analyses

		Cyberbullying Victimisation
Social Media Usage	Pearson Correlation	0.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001
	N	362
Self-Esteem	Pearson Correlation	0.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001
	N	362
Risky Online Exposure	Pearson Correlation	0.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001
	N	362

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Multiple Regression

Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between social media use, low self-esteem, and risky online exposure to cyberbullying victimisation. Multiple regression is frequently applied to identify the relative importance of the different independent variables in the prediction of changes in a dependent variable. Multicollinearity must be evaluated before interpreting the regression results, so that the independent variables are not highly correlated. The tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values can be used to assess multicollinearity. If the tolerance value is > 0.01 and the VIF value is < 10 , then multicollinearity is not a problem in general. Table 5 shows that the tolerance values ranged between 0.840 and 0.948, and the VIF values ranged between 1.055 and 1.191. So, there is no evidence of multicollinearity among the independent variables, which means that the regression model is statistically acceptable.

The regression results indicated that social media usage, low self-esteem and risky online exposure significantly affected the outcome of cyberbullying victimisation. The model accounted for 50.6% of the variance in cyberbullying victimisation ($R^2 = 0.506$); the adjusted $R^2 = 0.502$ means that the three predictors in this model explained 50.2% of the variance in cyberbullying victimisation. Other factors not analysed in this study could account for the remaining 49.8%. Also, the F Change value was 122.319 with a significance of $p = 0.001$, which was significant.

Of the independent variables, risky online exposure had the highest effect on the victimisation of cyberbullying ($\beta = 0.635$, $p = 0.001$). This means that the riskier the time spent online, the more likely one is to be a victim of cyberbullying. Likewise, low self-esteem also had a significant positive correlation with cyberbullying victimisation ($\beta = 0.318$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that low self-esteem increases the risk of being a cyberbullying victim. The use of social media was also a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.276$, $p = 0.001$), but to a lesser extent than the other two measures. In summary, the results indicated that risky online exposure and low self-esteem are the most salient factors for cyberbullying victimisation, and that the use of social media also plays an important role in the risk of being a cyberbullying victim.

Table 5. Regression analyses

	Beta (β)	Sig. (p)	Tolerance	VIF
Social Media Usage	0.201	0.001	0.840	1.191
Low Self-Esteem	0.630	0.001	0.948	1.055
Risky Online Exposure	0.636	0.001	0.872	1.146
R^2	0.506			
Adjusted R^2	0.502			
F Change	122.319			
Sig.	0.001			

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that cyberbullying victimisation among UiTM Seremban students is at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 3.274 on a five-point Likert scale, where scores between 2.51 and 3.50 indicate a moderate level. This suggests that cyberbullying is not severe but is still a common issue among students. The result is supported by previous studies in Malaysia, such as Mohd Fauzi et al. (2024), who found that 36.6% of university students experienced cyberbullying, and Mat et al. (2023), who reported that cyberbullying often occurs in daily social media interactions through offensive comments and harassment. However, some studies show different findings, such as Lee et al. (2023), who found higher cyberbullying risk among heavy social media users, while Feijóo et al. (2021) reported lower levels of cyberbullying among adolescents in Spain, especially those with less online activity. These differences suggest that cyberbullying prevalence varies depending on social media usage, online behaviour, and cultural context. Overall, the findings indicate that cyberbullying remains a persistent but moderate issue among university students.

The results showed that risky online exposure is among the most important risk factors for being a victim of cyberbullying among university students. This result aligns with the previous studies conducted by Bae (2021),

Atsariyasing et al. (2024), and Marret and Choo (2017), which showed that cyberbullying victims are those who practice risky internet usage activities like communicating with strangers, giving personal information, and entering into unsafe online environments. The findings of this study are similar to the previous study because today's youth have more opportunities to be exposed to communication platforms than ever before, thus putting them at a higher risk of victimisation.

The study also revealed that self-esteem is significantly related to cyberbullying victimisation. This result is consistent with other studies conducted earlier by Palermi et al. (2017), Brewer and Kerslake (2015), and Deshmukh et al. (2025) where they found that individuals with lower levels of self-esteem tend to be more susceptible to cyberbullying experiences. This resemblance could be because those with a low level of self-confidence tend to be more emotionally reactive and have fewer coping strategies to deal with online harassment. However, self-esteem is not congruent with certain previous research. For example, Ayub et al. (2023) observed that those who had high self-esteem scores were more prone to fall victim than to perpetrate cyberbullying. The reasons for this discrepancy might lie with the different respondents, culture, and the methods of measurement employed in different studies. Being a study that investigates university students, the experiences of university students could be very different from those of Ayub et al. (2023), which examined a wider youth population. However, the overall results indicate that psychological factors, online behaviour and social media involvement are still significant predictors of being a victim of cyberbullying.

Furthermore, using social media was identified as being a significant factor in cyberbullying victimisation. This finding is in line with research by Kasim et al. (2025), Lee et al. (2023), and Ahmad Ghazali et al. (2020) that found that regular use of social media leads to higher visibility and interaction online, which in turn provides more opportunities for cyberbullying incidents. The results were consistent across the platforms, indicating that social media remains an important place for cyberbullying to occur among young adults.

One of the ways to deal with cyberbullying victimisation is not to reply to hurtful messages, to save proof like screenshots, and to use platform tools to block and report offenders, as it helps in stopping further harassment and facilitates the investigation processes (Willard, 2006). Getting emotional and practical support from reliable people like friends, family, or university counselling services is also a way to help one recover from psychological distress, whereas enhancing safety in the digital environment by changing privacy settings and disclosing less personal information online is also a way of lowering the risk of victimisation going forward (Smith et al., 2008). To ensure that the cases of cyberbullying are handled systematically and effectively, there is a need for universities to have a comprehensive Cyberbullying Response Protocol in accordance with the provisions of the Anti-Bullying Act 2026 and the relevant provisions in the Malaysian Penal Code. In Malaysia, victims may seek help and report cases through CyberSecurity Malaysia's Cyber999 Help Centre for technical help, Talian Kasih 15999 for emotional and harassment support, or the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) for more serious or criminal cases (CyberSecurity Malaysia, 2024; MCMC, 2020). Integrating self-protection strategies with institutional support and official reporting channels is, first of all, the necessary combination to effectively deal with and lessen cyberbullying victimisation (Willard, 2006; MCMC, 2020). Digital literacy and online safety education need to be more institutionalised at the institutional level. Unlike previous recommendations that generally advocate awareness campaigns, the findings of this study indicate that risky online exposure is the strongest predictor of cyberbullying victimisation among university students. Thus, Digital Citizenship and Online Safety Modules must be made mandatory in the orientation programmes of first-year students at universities. The module should introduce students to privacy protection, responsible social media usage, managing digital footprint and risks of communicating with strangers online. Refresher workshops should also be offered at least annually, preferably on a semester basis, to recap safe online practices and inform students of new cyber issues. This proactive approach can minimise exposure to risk online and, as a result, the risk of victimisation by cyberbullying among students.

Furthermore, universities should provide a confidential cyberbullying reporting and support framework to promote the reporting of cyberbullying without the fear of stigma or retribution from others. A safe reporting tool would allow students to report cyberbullying incidents anonymously or confidentially, meaning that no one would know who reported the bullying, and the information would be kept confidential during the investigation process. There should also be clear procedures for handling reports so that intervention can take place promptly and appropriate disciplinary action can be undertaken if required. Even though universities report incidents,

universities should offer emotional and psychological support through counselling services, student welfare units or peer support programs to help victims deal with the negative impacts of cyberbullying. Having support services that are easily accessible to students can encourage them to report incidents and help foster a positive and inclusive campus atmosphere (Kowalski et al., 2014).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights, it is subject to a few limitations. First, the data were collected exclusively from students at UiTM Seremban, which may limit the generalisability and application of these findings to students from other universities or geographic regions. Second, because the study utilises self-reported information, the responses may be subject to response bias and heavily influenced by the students' willingness to honestly disclose personal and sensitive experiences with cyberbullying.

To address these limitations, it is recommended that future studies include students from multiple universities across different locations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying victimisation in Malaysia. Additionally, researchers should examine additional variables such as gender differences, specific online habits, digital literacy, social support systems, and other underlying psychological factors to identify wider influences on cyberbullying experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to examine the factors influencing cyberbullying victimisation among university students at UiTM Seremban. The findings revealed that cyberbullying victimisation among students is at a moderate level, indicating that online harassment remains a concern within the university environment. The results further showed that social media usage, low self-esteem and risky online exposure are significantly related to cyberbullying victimisation. Among these factors, risky online exposure emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that students who frequently interact with strangers online, share personal information or engage in unsafe online activities are more likely to become victims of cyberbullying. These findings are consistent with previous studies that identified social media engagement, psychological vulnerability and risky online behaviour as significant predictors of cyberbullying victimisation among young people (Atsariyasing et al., 2024; Bae, 2021).

Overall, the study highlights that cyberbullying is not solely driven by online activity but is also influenced by individual psychological and behavioural factors. The findings support the Routine Activity Theory, which suggests that increased exposure to online environments and reduced protective mechanisms may increase the likelihood of victimisation (Perera, 2025). Therefore, universities should foster a safer digital environment by promoting responsible social media use, strengthening digital literacy, and providing adequate emotional and psychological support for students. Such initiatives are essential in reducing cyberbullying incidents and protecting students' well-being in today's increasingly digital world (Akbulut & Eristi, 2011).

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