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Digital harassment in gaming communication: Identifying types of cyberbullying among Malaysian gamers

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ABSTRACT

Digital harassment in online gaming is on the rise due to the misuse of communication features, including voice chat, messaging, and in-game interactions. Such harassment has a significant impact on gamers' mental health, gaming experience, and social interactions within virtual communities. This study examines types of cyberbullying among Malaysian gamers through a qualitative inquiry using thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and April 2023 with four expert informants: an academic researcher, a cybersecurity expert, a game developer, and a licensed counsellor. The findings reveal six distinct types of cyberbullying: verbal bullying, avatar bullying, sexual bullying, racial bullying, newbie bullying, and cyberstalking. Avatar bullying and newbie bullying emerged as novel forms unique to gaming environments, where harassment occurs through attacks on players' virtual representations. The study extends existing cyberbullying typologies to encompass gaming-specific manifestations, highlighting the importance of cultural context within Malaysian gaming communities. These findings contribute to understanding digital harassment in gaming contexts and inform the development of targeted intervention strategies to protect gamers from cyberbullying.

Keywords: ***Cyberbullying, gaming communication, digital harassment, thematic analysis***

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INTRODUCTION

Gaming platforms have emerged as a significant communication environment for young people, facilitating social interactions that extend beyond traditional gameplay activities (Zhang et al., 2022). Unlike conventional social media platforms, gaming environments facilitate real-time interactions through voice chat, text messaging, and avatar-based communications during emotionally charged competitive scenarios (Vergel et al., 2024). These unique communication characteristics create conditions that may intensify aggressive behaviours, as demonstrated by Moral-García et al. (2025), who found significant associations between bullying, cyberbullying, and inappropriate use of the internet, cell phones, and video games among children and adolescents. Consequently, cyberbullying has evolved beyond traditional platforms into gaming environments, representing what Nixon (2014) identified as an international public health concern among adolescents.

Cyberbullying has become a global phenomenon affecting young people across diverse digital platforms, with prevalence rates ranging from 14.6% to 52.2% for victimization and 6.3% to 32% for perpetration worldwide (Zhu et al., 2021). Recent international studies reveal that approximately one in six school-aged children experiences cyberbullying, with rates continuing to increase due to the growing digitalization of youth interactions (WHO Europe, 2024). Within the Asian context, this issue has garnered particular attention due to the region's high internet usage and unique sociocultural factors that influence online behaviours (Park et al., 2014). Malaysia presents a particularly compelling case, ranking second in Asia for cyberbullying problems. Kee et al. (2023) reported that 3 out of 10 young Malaysians experience cyberbullying, while Lai et al. (2023) documented a 1-month cyberbullying victimization prevalence of 2.4% among young adults in urban Selangor. However, these studies primarily focused on general social media platforms, leaving gaming-specific cyberbullying patterns largely unexplored.

Cyberbullying manifests through various forms of digital aggression, including flaming, harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerading, outing and trickery, and exclusion, each with unique methods and distinct psychological impacts on victims (Tan et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2021). Contemporary research recognizes that cyberbullying extends beyond peer relationships to include harassment targeting strangers, public figures, and broader social groups across digital platforms (Mohd Ramly et al., 2025; Ray et al., 2024). More recent developments include comprehensive classification systems that incorporate aggression, repetition, intent to harm, and peer occurrence as core elements of cyberbullying detection (Ejaz et al., 2024), alongside systematic reviews confirming the need for standardized conceptual frameworks across different age groups and digital contexts (Ray et al., 2024).

However, research specifically examining cyberbullying within gaming environments remains limited, with only a handful of studies investigating gaming-specific harassment patterns, cybersecurity intervention strategies, and measurement instruments to address this growing concern (Che Omar et al., 2024; Che Omar, Abdullah et al., 2025; Che Omar, Saad et al., 2025; Cotler et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2025). While previous studies provide valuable insights for understanding types of cyberbullying behaviours, they were primarily developed for conventional social media

platforms. They may not adequately capture the unique manifestations of harassment within gaming environments, where avatar-based interactions, real-time competitive dynamics, and anonymous gaming identities create distinct communication contexts that may facilitate novel forms of digital harassment (Hu et al., 2025).

Current cyberbullying research has predominantly focused on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, with gaming environments receiving significantly less attention despite their growing prevalence among youth (Bansal et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2020; Ray et al., 2024). While existing studies have identified various cyberbullying categories, these classifications were primarily developed for conventional digital environments and may not adequately capture the unique manifestations of harassment within gaming contexts. Malaysian research has similarly concentrated on general cyberbullying experiences, with Mat So'od et al. (2023) and Balakrishnan (2015) identifying broad cyberbullying categories among youth. This research gap is particularly significant, given that the distinctive communication features of gaming environments may enable unique forms of cyberbullying that existing classification systems do not capture. Therefore, it is essential to understand how cyberbullying manifests specifically within gaming contexts to develop targeted prevention strategies and create safer digital gaming environments for the Malaysian youth.

The present study addresses this research gap by examining types of cyberbullying specifically within Malaysian gaming communication contexts through a qualitative inquiry involving in-depth interviews with four expert informants: game developers, counsellors, academics, and cybersecurity professionals. The identification of culturally informed, gaming-specific types from multi-stakeholder professional perspectives holds significant implications for educators, platform designers, policymakers, and families working to create safer digital gaming environments while preserving the positive benefits that gaming communities can offer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying in digital environments

Cyberbullying has evolved from traditional bullying to encompass aggressive behaviours conducted through digital technologies, characterized by intentional and repeated harm inflicted upon individuals who cannot easily defend themselves (Nixon, 2014). The phenomenon differs from conventional bullying in several critical ways, including the potential for anonymity, the persistence of digital evidence, and the ability to reach victims beyond physical boundaries (Ray et al., 2024). Recent research emphasizes that cyberbullying should be examined as a distinct category rather than merely an extension of traditional bullying, particularly given the unique technological affordances that enable new forms of harassment (Bansal et al., 2024).

Gaming platforms have transformed from simple entertainment tools into complex communication ecosystems that facilitate extensive social interactions among users (Zhang et al., 2022). These environments possess distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from conventional social media platforms, including real-time voice communication, text-based messaging during gameplay, avatar-based interactions, and competitive dynamics that may intensify emotional responses (Vergel et al., 2024).

The immersive nature of gaming environments creates unique opportunities for both positive social connections and negative harassment behaviours.

Recent studies have identified gaming-specific harassment behaviours such as griefing (disrupting other players' gameplay), spawn camping, and deliberate team sabotage that extend beyond traditional cyberbullying classifications (Hu et al., 2025; Kanasan, 2024). The competitive nature of many games can normalize aggressive communication patterns, potentially blurring the lines between acceptable competitive banter and harmful cyberbullying (Vergel et al., 2024). Meanwhile, real-time interactive features enable immediate and persistent harassment that may follow players across multiple gaming sessions.

Existing types and classifications

Contemporary developments include comprehensive classification systems for cyberbullying detection that incorporate four key aspects: aggression, repetition, intent to harm, and peer occurrence (Ejaz et al., 2024). Building on these foundational elements, researchers have developed more nuanced classifications that focus on direct versus indirect aggression, using the quadripartite violence typology to categorize aggression as rage, revenge, reward, or recreational (Graf et al., 2020). These classifications distinguish between direct forms of aggression, which include threatening messages, and indirect forms involving social exclusion or reputation damage, with recent comparative studies revealing that cyberbullying is more likely to result from recreational aggression compared to offline bullying (Graf et al., 2022). Furthermore, recent systematic reviews have identified various manifestations, including group violence, visual violence, impersonation and account forgery, privacy disclosure, sexual harassment, and cyberstalking as common forms across digital platforms (Zhu et al., 2021).

However, these classification systems were primarily developed for general social media contexts and may not adequately capture the unique manifestations of harassment within gaming environments. For instance, "flaming" in gaming contexts may involve verbal abuse through voice chat during competitive matches. At the same time, "exclusion" might manifest as the deliberate exclusion of players from team strategies or guild memberships (Kou, 2020). The interactive and immersive nature of gaming platforms may facilitate distinct forms of cyberbullying that require specialized categorization frameworks.

While frameworks such as Willard's (2007) typology provided a foundational understanding, Hu et al. (2025) confirmed that research specifically examining cyberbullying within gaming environments remains limited. Studies by Hu et al. (2025) and Cotler et al. (2017) were among the few investigations into gaming-specific harassment patterns. Therefore, the definitional landscape of cyberbullying remains complex, with notable inconsistencies across studies regarding core elements and measurement approaches, particularly when applied to gaming contexts that feature unique communication features and social dynamics (Ray et al., 2024).

Cyberbullying in the Malaysian context

Recent studies indicate that Malaysia ranks second in Asia for cyberbullying problems, with global statistics placing the country sixth out of 28 countries globally, where 1 in 4 Malaysian parents reported that their child has experienced cyberbullying

(Kee et al., 2023). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 3 out of 10 young Malaysians reported being cyberbullied, with the youth representing the highest number of victims in Malaysian cyberbullying cases (Kee et al., 2023). Malaysia presents a particularly compelling context for cyberbullying research, with significant prevalence rates among youth populations.

Research conducted in Selangor found that the prevalence of cyberbullying victimization was 24.4%, whilst 13.0% reported cyberbullying perpetration over the past six months (Ayub et al., 2023). A cross-sectional study among Malaysian adolescents found that, over the past month, the prevalence of cyber-victimization and cyber-perpetration was 31.6% and 20.9%, respectively. However, this increased more than twofold when extended to a past 3-month period (73.7% and 64.2%, respectively) (Sivabalan et al., 2021). The prevalence of cyberbullying among Malaysian youth demonstrates concerning patterns across different contexts.

Research has identified the development of hate speech detection frameworks, specifically for the Malay language, highlighting the multilingual nature of online harassment in Malaysian digital spaces, where users communicate across Bahasa Malaysia, English, and other local languages (Maity et al., 2023). In response to these multilingual challenges, the regulatory landscape in Malaysia continues to evolve, with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission actively addressing cyberbullying concerns through existing legislation. However, specialized frameworks for gaming environments remain underdeveloped (Razali & Nawang, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative method and research design

The qualitative methodology was selected to capture nuanced understandings of cyberbullying manifestations that might not be apparent through quantitative measures alone, as it allows for a detailed exploration of complex phenomena and enables researchers to understand professional perspectives across multiple domains (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the limited existing research on gaming-specific cyberbullying typologies (Hu et al., 2025), the exploratory nature of a qualitative inquiry was particularly well-suited to identifying and understanding emerging patterns and novel forms of harassment in gaming contexts. The flexibility of qualitative research enables the comparison of findings across expert viewpoints (Bogner et al., 2009), allowing for comprehensive conclusions about gaming-specific forms of cyberbullying.

Informants

The population of interest consisted of professionals with expertise relevant to gaming cyberbullying issues in Malaysia. Four expert informants were selected using purposive sampling to represent diverse professional perspectives, which are essential for understanding cyberbullying in gaming contexts. As noted by Guest et al. (2006), experts with specialized knowledge can provide comprehensive insights with smaller sample sizes than general population studies. Research demonstrates that theme saturation can be achieved within 4–12 interviews when working with focused populations with specialized knowledge (Wutich et al., 2024). The inclusion criteria for potential

informants were: (1) minimum 10 years of professional experience in their respective domains, (2) direct exposure to gaming-related cyberbullying issues through professional work, (3) ability to provide informed perspectives on Malaysian gaming contexts, and (4) willingness to participate in comprehensive interviews.

Informant 1, an academic researcher with 10–15 years of research experience in digital media studies and online harassment among Malaysian youth, was selected to provide theoretical frameworks and empirical insights essential for understanding cyberbullying patterns and developing evidence-based typologies. Informant 2, a cybersecurity expert with 30 years of experience in cybersecurity and online threat assessment, was chosen for their expertise in technical detection mechanisms and legal frameworks crucial to identifying and addressing gaming cyberbullying from a regulatory perspective.

Informant 3, a game developer with 10 years of experience in multiplayer communication systems and community management features, was included to provide insider knowledge of platform design elements, technical vulnerabilities, and industry practices that may inadvertently facilitate or prevent harassment. Informant 4, a licensed counsellor with 15 years of experience treating cyberbullying cases among adolescents and young adults, was selected to provide clinical insights into psychological impacts, victim responses, and therapeutic intervention approaches specific to gaming-related harassment cases.

Instrument and procedure

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore experts' perspectives on the types of cyberbullying in Malaysian gaming communication contexts. The interview guide was designed to systematically identify and categorize different manifestations of cyberbullying specific to gaming environments, building on existing typologies from the literature (Kou, 2020) and incorporating insights from multiple professional domains. Following Kallio et al.'s (2016) recommendations, the instrument underwent validation by two qualitative research experts to ensure content validity, clarity, and logical flow across all four expert domains. The final interview guide included opening questions to build rapport, core questions addressing cyberbullying typologies in gaming contexts, targeted probing questions to enable detailed categorization, and closing questions to elicit additional insights, ensuring comprehensive identification of gaming-specific harassment behaviours while maintaining flexibility for expert-led discussions.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with four expert informants via online platforms (Google Meet and Webex) to accommodate geographical dispersion and professional constraints. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes and was conducted in Malay, according to the informants' preferences, using a progressive questioning approach that began with general concepts of cyberbullying and progressed to specific gaming-related manifestations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The researcher established rapport through professional introductions, clarified technical terminology, and encouraged informants to provide concrete examples from their professional experiences to illustrate different types of cyberbullying in gaming contexts. All interviews were digitally recorded with the informants' explicit consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English, ensuring technical accuracy was

preserved. Ethical protocols included institutional approval letters, signed consent forms in both languages, confidentiality assurances using pseudonyms, and informant verification of interview summaries before analysis, which was conducted in NVivo 14.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, which involves systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process consisted of: familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts; initial coding of segments describing cyberbullying behaviours and manifestations; development of potential themes representing distinct types of gaming cyberbullying; review and refinement of themes to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness; definition and naming of final themes; and report writing with supporting informant quotes.

The constant comparative method was employed throughout the analysis to identify similarities and differences across expert accounts. Particular attention was paid to coding segments that described different types of cyberbullying behaviours, communication channels through which harassment occurred, and contextual factors specific to gaming environments in Malaysia. To enhance trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with informants for verification and feedback. Additionally, peer debriefing sessions were held with research team members to discuss emerging themes and ensure analytical rigor. Inter-coder reliability was established by two researchers independently coding 20% of transcripts, yielding 92% agreement in thematic categorization.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with four expert informants, this study identified six distinct types of cyberbullying occurring within Malaysian gaming communication contexts. The findings reveal unique manifestations of harassment enabled by the specific technological and social features of gaming platforms. Each type represents a distinct pattern of harmful behaviour that emerged consistently across expert perspectives, demonstrating the complex nature of cyberbullying in gaming environments.

Verbal bullying

The findings reveal that verbal bullying emerged as the most commonly discussed form of cyberbullying across all expert informants, manifesting through both voice chat and text-based communication channels in gaming platforms. This type involves using harsh, insulting, or threatening language directed at other players via real-time communication features.

Informant 1 noted that, *"players use harsh, insulting, or threatening words against other players through voice or written chat,"* highlighting the dual communication channels through which verbal abuse occurs. Informant 2 emphasized the intentional nature of such behaviour, explaining that, *"the malicious intent to bring down and shame someone can be easily implemented"* and that, *"cyberbullying involves harming and*

attacking victims through harsh words and using tricks to achieve their goals." Informant 4 provided a comprehensive categorization of verbal bullying behaviours, noting that *"cyberbullying criteria include insulting words, threats, sarcasm, body shaming, and so forth."* This broad spectrum of verbal abuse demonstrates the varied manifestations of this cyberbullying type within gaming contexts.

Verbal bullying emerged as the most prevalent form across all expert domains, utilizing gaming's dual-channel communication system of real-time voice chat and text messaging in online games. Games such as PUBG Mobile, Mobile Legends (MOBA), and Valorant provide extensive communication features that enable players to coordinate strategies and interact during gameplay (Kou, 2020; Vergel et al., 2024). However, these same communication channels become conduits for verbal harassment, particularly in competitive gaming environments where high-stakes gameplay intensifies emotions and aggressive behaviours. The behavioural spectrum ranges from insulting words and threats to sarcasm and body shaming.

From a technical perspective, Informant 3 identified significant challenges in detecting and moderating verbal bullying, stating that *"in gaming voice chat, players often use harsh language to insult opponents. Automatic moderation systems find it difficult to detect all forms of verbal abuse."* This technical limitation creates environments where verbal harassment can occur with limited oversight, particularly in voice communications where automated detection systems struggle to identify contextual abuse.

Avatar bullying

Avatar bullying represents a unique form of harassment that exploits players' emotional investment in their virtual identities. Informant 1 explained that, *"players attack or demean other players' characters or avatars in the game by causing harm or damaging their gaming experience."* In contrast, Informant 2 highlighted that, *"attacks on player avatars can involve manipulating character data or stealing virtual items that have value in the game."* Informant 3 noted that, *"avatar bullying is unique in gaming - players can repeatedly attack characters, or block other players from completing objectives,"* while Informant 4 emphasized that, *"attacks on player avatars can cause emotional stress because players associate their identity with characters in the game."*

The findings reveal that avatar bullying operates on two interconnected dimensions that distinguish it from conventional cyberbullying. The first dimension involves technical exploitation through tactics such as repeated character attacks, data manipulation, and virtual item theft, where perpetrators weaponize game mechanics to harass victims. The second and more critical dimension is psychological, occurring when players who have invested emotional identity in their avatars experience virtual attacks as personal threats, resulting in real emotional distress. This dual nature creates a unique form of harassment that exploits both technological vulnerabilities and the blurred boundaries between virtual and personal identity in gaming environments.

These findings align with existing research indicating that gaming platforms facilitate distinct forms of cyberbullying that require specialized categorization frameworks beyond those used in traditional social media contexts (Kou, 2020; Vergel et al., 2024). These findings suggest the need for comprehensive protection systems and

heightened awareness among game developers regarding their responsibility to create safe gaming spaces that address both mechanical exploitation and psychological harm.

Sexual bullying

Regarding sexual bullying, Informant 1 defined sexual bullying as *"sexual harassment of players, inappropriate comments, or gender-based bullying of other players."* Furthermore, Informant 2 highlighted that, *"one example of a situation that often arises is obscene behaviour where perpetrators try to accuse others of creating such images."* He also noted that, *"many online games display inappropriate images or characters, causing teenagers to play these games more frequently."* Similarly, Informant 4 raised concerns about game content, stating that, *"there are many games made involving pornographic elements and so on, which are not very suitable for those individuals."* Informant 3 observed that, *"female players often face sexual harassment in voice chat. This forces them to mute their microphones or stop playing."* Sexual bullying in gaming contexts involves harassment of a sexual nature, including inappropriate comments, sexual advances, and gender-based discrimination.

The presence of sexualized game content, such as provocatively dressed female characters in popular games like PUBG, Mobile Legend, and other mainstream titles, appears to normalize inappropriate behaviours within gaming environments, as research has shown that playing with a sexualized female character increases adolescents' acceptance of rape myths and tolerance for sexual harassment (Driesmans et al., 2015). This poses significant risks given the widespread exposure of children and adolescents to these popular online games. This concern is substantiated by research indicating that 42% of Malaysian respondents aged 16–24 engage in daily online gaming (Kamal & Wok, 2020). Therefore, this study recommends enhanced parental oversight of children's online gaming activities and the establishment of content filtering mechanisms to protect young users from inappropriate material.

Racial bullying

Findings also reveal that racial and ethnic bullying involves discrimination and harassment based on players' racial or ethnic identities, representing a particularly concerning form of cyberbullying in Malaysia's multicultural gaming environment. Informant 1 described this phenomenon as situations where *"players bully other players based on race or ethnicity by insulting or making discriminatory comments."* Informant 2 provided crucial cultural context, noting that, *"in the context of multiracial Malaysia, slurs and discriminatory comments based on ethnicity often occur on gaming platforms."* Informant 4 highlighted the psychological impact, contending that, *"victims of ethnic bullying in gaming often experience trauma and withdraw from gaming communities due to continuous discrimination."* From a technical perspective, Informant 3 emphasized that, *"reporting systems in games need to be sensitive to the Malaysian cultural context to detect and control racial discriminatory comments."*

Online games feature an inclusive concept that allows people of all races to participate together (Shliakhovchuk, 2018). However, racial and ethnic bullying in Malaysian gaming environments presents unique challenges in the country's multicultural context. The findings reveal that victims experience psychological trauma leading to withdrawal from gaming communities, while current moderation systems

prove inadequate for detecting Malaysia-specific ethnic harassment patterns. The research highlights the need for culturally sensitive reporting mechanisms that can identify and address discriminatory language specific to Malaysian ethnic dynamics. These findings suggest that effective intervention requires specialized moderation systems that recognize local ethnic slurs and culturally informed policies that address the specific multicultural challenges in Malaysian gaming environments.

Newbie bullying

According to Informant 1, newbie bullying is described as situations where *"more advanced players mock, belittle, or insult new or inexperienced players."* Informant 2 connected newbie bullying to broader patterns of harassment, noting that, *"cyberbullying also includes repeated harassment and stalking, which makes victims feel pressured and eventually leave the group."* Informant 3 emphasized the business implications, stating that, *"newbie bullying is a serious problem in game design. New players who are bullied will stop playing, affecting player retention."* From a psychological perspective, Informant 4 noted that, *"new players who experience bullying often lose self-confidence and interest in continuing to play or learn new skills."*

This study describes how newbie bullying operates through gaming power dynamics, where experienced players repeatedly attack weaker or less skilled players, transforming educational interactions into cycles of harassment. This repetitive targeting behaviour meets the core criteria of cyberbullying, creating emotional distress among victims who lack defensive skills (Nixon, 2014). The power imbalance enables experienced players to exploit newcomers' vulnerabilities, leading to systematic intimidation rather than supportive mentorship. The emotional impact is particularly evident when siblings play together, where the stronger player repeatedly defeats the weaker one, often causing the losing sibling to become upset and cry. These findings suggest that gaming environments amplify existing power structures, creating toxic learning spaces that ultimately harm community growth and player retention.

Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking in gaming contexts involves persistent monitoring, following, and harassment of targeted players across gaming platforms. Informant 1 defined cyberstalking as situations where *"players constantly pursue other players, monitor their activities, or make threats through private messages or social media."* Informant 2 provided technical insights, explaining that, *"cyberstalking in gaming involves tracking player activities across different platforms, from game profiles to social media."* Informant 3 identified specific technological enablers, noting that, *"stalkers can use in-game features like friend requests and guild systems to monitor victims continuously."* From a psychological perspective, Informant 4 emphasized the severe impact, stating that, *"victims of cyberstalking in gaming often experience anxiety and paranoia, afraid to log in or join game sessions."* The identification of gaming-specific cyberstalking reveals how the persistent, interconnected nature of gaming platforms creates unique opportunities for stalking. Unlike traditional cyberstalking, which may be limited to specific platforms, gaming-related stalking can span multiple games, social features, and external platforms, creating a more comprehensive harassment experience.

Cyberstalking in gaming environments exploits the interconnected nature of modern gaming ecosystems to persistently harass across multiple platforms. Stalkers systematically join all servers where victims play, follow them across different games, such as PUBG, Mobile Legends, and Free Fire, and monitor their social media profiles to track their gaming schedules (Weekes et al., 2025). The creation of multiple accounts enables stalkers to circumvent blocking mechanisms, while cross-platform pursuit eliminates safe gaming spaces for victims. Therefore, this study's findings reveal that cyberstalking transforms recreational gaming into a source of anxiety, forcing victims to choose between complete gaming withdrawal or continued exposure to persistent harassment across their entire digital gaming identity. Previous research has shown that cyberstalking victimization is associated with significant psychological impacts, including depression and a decline in academic performance (Wright, 2018), with victims experiencing prolonged distress that extends beyond the digital environment.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of cyberbullying by identifying six distinct types of harassment specific to gaming environments, such as verbal bullying, avatar bullying, sexual bullying, racial bullying, newbie bullying, and cyberstalking. The findings extend traditional cyberbullying frameworks by revealing how gaming-specific features create unique forms of harassment that differ significantly from those found on conventional social media platforms. The identification of avatar bullying as a distinct category demonstrates how investment in virtual identity creates new vulnerabilities for players, while the documentation of cross-platform newbie bullying reveals the complexity of harassment in interconnected gaming ecosystems. These findings suggest that existing cyberbullying theories need to be expanded to account for the unique technological and social dynamics of gaming environments.

The research findings have significant implications for game developers, platform administrators, and policymakers in Malaysia. Game developers must implement culturally sensitive moderation systems that can detect Malaysia-specific ethnic slurs and harassment patterns, particularly given the country's multicultural context. Platform administrators should develop comprehensive protection mechanisms that address both technical exploitation and psychological harm, especially for vulnerable groups such as new players and female gamers. Critically, recommendations for game developers and policymakers must be specifically tailored to protect children and adolescents, who represent the most vulnerable population in gaming environments. To address sexual bullying, game developers should enforce stricter content moderation policies, remove sexualized character designs targeting young audiences, and implement mandatory reporting mechanisms for sexual harassment within gaming platforms. To combat cyberstalking, policymakers should advocate for cross-platform blocking systems, real-time monitoring tools, and stronger legal frameworks that criminalize persistent online harassment in gaming contexts. The study's findings also indicate the need for enhanced parental oversight tools and content filtering systems to protect young users from inappropriate material, given that 42% of Malaysian youth aged 16–24 engage in daily online gaming.

This study's limitations include its reliance on expert perspectives rather than direct victim experiences and its focus on the Malaysian context, which may limit generalizability to other cultural settings. Future research should employ digital ethnography to observe cyberbullying behaviours as they naturally occur within gaming environments, providing authentic insights into harassment dynamics that expert perspectives alone cannot capture. In-depth interviews with victims and perpetrators would offer first-hand accounts of gaming-specific cyberbullying experiences, while surveys conducted across diverse gaming communities could establish prevalence rates and identify demographic patterns among those affected. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term psychological impacts of gaming-specific cyberbullying would contribute valuable insights for intervention development. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts could help identify universal versus culture-specific patterns of gaming cyberbullying, with particular attention to ethical considerations in research involving vulnerable populations such as minors.

This study successfully identified six distinct types of cyberbullying in Malaysian gaming environments: verbal bullying, avatar bullying, sexual bullying, racial/ethnic bullying, newbie bullying, and cyberstalking. Each type represents a unique manifestation of harassment that exploits specific features of gaming platforms and the social dynamics within gaming communities. The findings reveal that gaming environments create distinctive cyberbullying experiences that require specialized understanding and intervention approaches beyond traditional social media contexts. Traditional social media cyberbullying typically involves static content like posts and comments, whereas gaming-based cyberbullying occurs through real-time, interactive gameplay involving avatars, voice chat, and cyberstalking across multiple games or servers. The research contributes to both theoretical knowledge and practical applications by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding cyberbullying in gaming contexts while offering concrete recommendations for prevention and intervention tailored to protect children, adolescents, and other vulnerable groups. As online gaming continues to grow in popularity, particularly among young people in Malaysia, understanding and addressing these gaming-specific forms of cyberbullying becomes increasingly critical for creating safe and inclusive digital spaces for all players.

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