A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ADDRESSING CYBERBULLYING FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This article introduces a concise conceptual model designed to address cyberbullying from an Islamic perspective. The model revolves around five strategies encompassing adherence to Islamic ethical principles, educational programmes, Islamic conflict resolution mechanisms, communal responsibility, and seeking guidance from Islamic scholars. Crucially, the model emphasises the need to integrate Islamic ethics into the regulatory and institutional fabric of digital spaces. By aligning legal measures with Islamic moral imperatives, it seeks to foster an online environment in harmony with Islamic principles. This conceptual model provides a culturally sensitive and spiritually informed response to the global challenge of cyberbullying. It demonstrates the potential for faith-based ethics to create a more compassionate, just, and virtuous digital realm. In addressing cyberbullying within Islamic communities and beyond, this model offers valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and educators grappling with this complex issue.

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INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying, characterised by the utilisation of digital communication platforms, such as social media, instant messaging, or email, for the purpose of harassing, intimidating, or causing harm to others, represents a prevalent and escalating social concern (Hua et al., 2019). To effectively address this issue, comprehensive strategies for prevention and mitigation are imperative.

In the Malaysian context, researchers have undertaken investigations into the prevalence and characteristics of cyberbullying across various age groups, with a pronounced focus on adolescents and teenagers who are particularly vulnerable to online harassment (Abdul Hamid et al., 2022; Che Noh & Ab Rahman, 2013; Hua et al., 2019; Meerangani et al., 2022; Noor & Hamid, 2021; Shaikh et al., 2020). Concurrently, extensive inquiry has been directed towards discerning the psychological and emotional repercussions of cyberbullying on its victims, including its association with conditions such as anxiety and depression (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Doane et al., 2014; Lee & Shin, 2017; Lozano-Blasco et al., 2020; Raskauskas & Huynh, 2015). In response to this issue, researchers and educators have been actively engaged in formulating and evaluating strategies and interventions to combat cyberbullying and provide support to its victims, encompassing school-based programmes, awareness initiatives, and counselling services.

Past studies have concurrently explored the online behaviour of individuals involved in cyberbullying as well as the identification of risk factors that predispose certain individuals to engage in such deleterious behaviour (Lee & Shin, 2017; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013; Sule & Musa, 2023; Watts et al., 2017). Moreover, research efforts have delved into the legal and policy dimensions of cyberbullying, assessing the effectiveness of extant legislations and regulations while advocating potential policy revisions (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Goodboy & Martin, 2015; Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2018; Khawrin, 2023; Rani et al., 2015). In light of Malaysia's diverse cultural and religious landscape, particular attention has been dedicated to understanding the influence of cultural norms and religious precepts, including Islamic principles, on the perceptions and responses to cyberbullying (Abdul Hamid et al., 2021; Che Noh & Ab Rahman, 2013; Meerangani et al., 2022; Sule & Musa, 2023). Additionally, with the rapid technological advancements, several studies have scrutinised the roles of specific online platforms and technologies in either facilitating or mitigating cyberbullying incidents (Hua et al., 2019; Sule & Musa, 2023).

While existing studies have substantially contributed to the understanding of cyberbullying, a notable gap exists with regards to investigations conducted from an Islamic perspective. Such investigations are crucial to explore how Islamic ethical principles, including kindness (Ihsan), avoidance of harm (Dharar), and accountability and repentance (Taubah), may shape the behaviour of cyberbullies and whether an understanding of these principles could potentially deter cyberbullying. It can further delve into the impact of religiosity and Islamic practice on the conduct of cyberbullies to determine whether individuals with stronger religious convictions are less inclined to engage in cyberbullying activities.

Recognising the literary gap, this study endeavours to develop a conceptual model delineating strategies for the reduction of cyberbullying that is firmly rooted into an Islamic framework. It aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on cyberbullying by incorporating Islamic ethical principles and values, thus offering a faith-based approach to mitigate this pervasive societal issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying, as highlighted in scholarly works (Notar et al., 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Rosa et al., 2019), represents a form of aggression that is widely deemed unethical and detrimental when viewed through the lens of Islamic ethics. Within the Islamic framework, a profound emphasis is placed on the principles of benevolence, compassion, and the imperative of treating others with respect. The act of cyberbullying is often characterised by the use of digital platforms for the purpose of harassing, intimidating, or inflicting harm upon others, which is fundamentally incongruent with these core principles. Central to Islamic teachings is the

directive for individuals to engage others with respect (Adab), uphold their dignity, and exhibit kindness (Meerangani et al., 2022). Conversely, cyberbullying entails actions that degrade, insult, or subject others to harassment, thereby starkly contravening these principles.

Islam unequivocally proscribes causing harm to others (Dharar). Given its potential to result in severe emotional, psychological, and even physical ramifications for the victim, the act of cyberbullying manifestly violates the principle of abstaining from harm (Abdul Hamid et al., 2021). This is further accentuated by a Hadith by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), wherein he stated, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." The quintessential Golden Rule underscores the importance of empathy and treating others with the same compassion that one would wish to receive, thereby encompassing the prohibition of causing harm to others whether in physical or digital spaces (Doane et al., 2014; Lee & Shin, 2017).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that cyberbullying often encompasses conducts such as disseminating false or damaging information about others that are akin to backbiting (Ghiba) in Islam. Ghiba is not only discouraged but also considered a sinful act (Abdul Hamid et al., 2021). Islam espouses the values of forgiveness and repentance, thereby stipulating that individuals who realise their involvement in cyberbullying should earnestly repent and seek forgiveness, both from Allah and the individuals they have harmed (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018). In the Islamic ethos, a profound sense of communal responsibility exists to prevent harm and wrongdoings. Consequently, Muslims are not only encouraged but obligated to intervene and cease any form of harm, including cyberbullying, within their communities (Alzamil, 2021; Erliyani, 2021; Noor & Hamid, 2021; Zych, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019).

It is crucial to recognise that numerous Islamic nations have instituted legal frameworks that expressly proscribe cyberbullying, recognising it as a grave transgression. Within the Islamic jurisprudential context, adherence to the laws of one's respective country is obligatory, provided that these laws do not contravene Islamic principles (Erliyani, 2021). While interpretations and practices may vary among individuals and communities, the foundational values of kindness, respect, and the avoidance of harm remain integral to Islamic teachings and offer a resolute basis for unequivocally condemning cyberbullying from an Islamic perspective.

HOW TO AVOID CYBERBULLYING FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Mitigating cyberbullying from an Islamic standpoint necessitates the diligent practice of Islamic values, such as kindness, compassion, and reverence for others, within the realm of digital interactions. Practical measures can be adopted to guide individuals in adhering to Islamic principles while navigating the online sphere. First and foremost, adherents are encouraged to exercise vigilance over their speech, both oral and written. Such concept is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings (Che Noh & Ab Rahman, 2013; Noor & Hamid, 2021; Sule & Musa, 2023). In Islam, the judicious use of words is emphasised, necessitating the avoidance of offensive or hurtful language in online communications such as comments, messages, and posts.

Respecting the privacy of others is another pivotal step aligned with Islamic ethics (Che Noh & Ab Rahman, 2013; Chotimah & Widyana, 2018; Noor & Hamid, 2021; Sule & Musa, 2023). In accordance with Islamic principles, one is admonished to treat others' privacy with the same reverence that one expects for their own. This involves refraining from disclosing personal or confidential information about individuals without their explicit consent.

The avoidance of gossip and backbiting is also deemed indispensable within Islamic ethics (Che Noh & Ab Rahman, 2013; Chotimah & Widyana, 2018; Noor & Hamid, 2021; Sule & Musa, 2023). Engaging in online gossip, backbiting, or the dissemination of rumours about others is considered sinful within the Islamic framework due to its potential to instigate harm and discord.

Additionally, practical measures such as reporting and blocking are recommended (Brailovskaia et al., 2018; Shaikh et al., 2021). In instances where cyberbullying is observed, individuals are encouraged to report such behaviour to the platform or website administrators. The option to block individuals involved in cyberbullying is also available, thereby preventing further interactions with them.

Responsible utilisation of social media platforms is also paramount (Shaikh et al., 2021). Individuals are encouraged to observe mindful consideration of content shared on these platforms. Conversely, spreading false or detrimental information about others is discouraged, with individuals are urged to contemplate the potential consequences of their posts prior to dissemination.

Another facet to avoid cyberbullying from the Islamic perspective is fostering positive online behaviour (Brailovskaia et al., 2018; Shaikh et al., 2021). The promotion of constructive and affirmative online conduct is encouraged within one's online communities and social circles. Islamic teachings, which underscore kindness, forgiveness, and empathy, can also be shared as deemed appropriate. Additionally, responding to negative or hurtful comments online warrants circumspection as doing so with anger or hostility may exacerbate tensions. Instead, a measured response characterised by patience and a desire to defuse conflicts is advised.

Another pivotal measure of mitigating cyberbullying is education, both self-education and the dissemination of knowledge to others (Slonje et al., 2013; Sule & Musa, 2023; Zych et al., 2019). For this purpose, creating awareness regarding the consequences of cyberbullying is essential along with active encouragement and dissemination of Islamic principles and values pertinent to online conduct. Seeking guidance from qualified Islamic scholars or leaders is also recommended when confronting specific online dilemmas from an Islamic perspective.

Lastly, cyberbullying can be avoided through self-reflection and repentance (Slonje et al., 2013; Sule & Musa, 2023). It is paramount for individuals engaged in cyberbullying in the past to seek sincere repentance and forgiveness from Allah. They should also commit to transforming their behaviour and making amends with those they may have harmed.

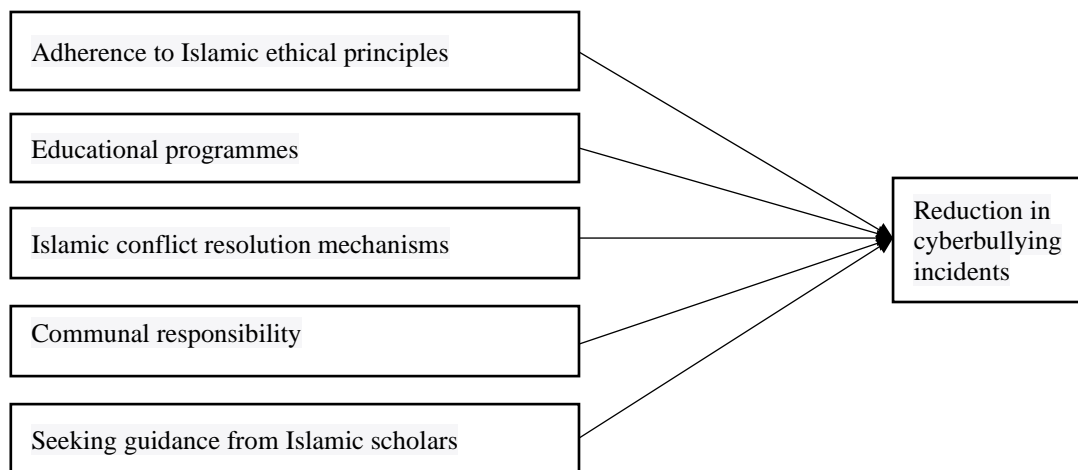## CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This research introduces the outlined conceptual framework as a comprehensive approach for the mitigation of cyberbullying incidents from an Islamic perspective. The framework encompasses five distinct strategies aimed at the reduction of cyberbullying occurrences, namely adherence to Islamic ethical principles,

educational programmes, Islamic conflict resolution mechanisms, communal responsibility, and seeking guidance from Islamic scholars. The following are the propositions for this study.

Preposition 1 (P1):   Adherence to Islamic ethical principles, including kindness (Ihsan) and avoidance of harm (Dharar), is negatively correlated with engagement in cyberbullying behaviour among individuals within Muslim communities.

Preposition 2 (P2):   Educational programmes grounded in Islamic teachings that aim to raise awareness about cyberbullying and promote positive online behaviour will result in a significant reduction of cyberbullying incidents among participants.

Preposition 3 (P3):   The utilisation of Islamic conflict resolution mechanisms, such as arbitration (Tahkim) and reconciliation (Sulh), will lead to a higher rate of successful resolution of cyberbullying disputes and prevent further escalation.

Preposition 4 (P4):   A strong sense of communal responsibility within Muslim communities will lead to increased collective efforts to combat cyberbullying, resulting in a reduction of cyberbullying incidents and a more respectful online environment.

Preposition 5 (P5):   Seeking guidance from qualified Islamic scholars when confronted with complex ethical dilemmas related to cyberbullying will facilitate adherence to Islamic values and contribute to more ethical online behaviour among individuals.

These research hypotheses serve as testable statements that researchers can investigate to determine the impact and effectiveness of various aspects of the Islamic framework for addressing cyberbullying. Conducting empirical studies to test these hypotheses will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of Islamic ethics and principles in combating cyberbullying and inform the development of evidence-based interventions and policies.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic framework presents a robust foundation for addressing the intricate issue of cyberbullying through a comprehensive approach deeply rooted in ethical principles. The proposed framework advocates for a set of strategies that seamlessly integrate with these ethical principles. These strategies encompass the implementation of educational programmes aimed at disseminating Islamic teachings on online ethics, the utilisation of Islamic conflict resolution mechanisms to address and resolve cyberbullying disputes, the fostering of communal responsibility in the prevention and intervention of cyberbullying incidents, and the encouragement to seek guidance from qualified Islamic scholars when confronted with intricate online ethical dilemmas.

In summary, this conceptual model furnishes a structured roadmap for stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and individuals, to collectively contribute to the eradication of cyberbullying within the context of Islamic ethical principles. Islam's principles underscore the imperativeness of positive and ethical conduct, both in offline and online realms, and by adhering to these principles, the creation of a more harmonious and respectful digital milieu becomes attainable in alignment with Islamic values. This approach engenders a nuanced comprehension of how Islamic ethics can act as a guiding beacon for the cultivation of virtuous digital spaces and serves as an invaluable resource for those earnestly committed to this noble undertaking..

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