BULLYING BY TWITTER USERS IN THE SELENA GOMEZ AND HAILEY BIEBER DRAMA

Alya Nugrahaeni Rosyadah[1], Agus Wijayanto [2]

[1,2]English Education Department, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Indonesia
aw213@ums.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Today, we have witnessed the increasing act of bullying, which is an intentional act to harm individuals physically and psychologically. With the pervasive use of information and communications technology, bullying frequently occurs in online environment, particularly in social media. This study investigates the types and motivations of cyberbullying expressions used by Twitter users in the Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber drama. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research analyses transcripts of Twitter comments to understand the underlying motives behind the observed bullying behaviour. The findings have revealed several key motives including fanaticism towards idols. Strong identification with and defence of preferred idols can induce aggressive responses towards perceived threats, leading to attacks on rival fans or their idols. Emotional reactivity that encounters tweets perceived as disrespectful or harmful towards their idols can trigger anger and frustration, driving users to engage in cyberbullying as a means of retaliation. Witnessing the success or popularity of other idol groups or their fans can trigger feelings of jealousy, prompting some users to engage in cyberbullying to diminish their rivals' perceived advantages. Engaging in aggressive online behaviour and "winning" arguments against perceived opponents can provide some users with a sense of validation and satisfaction, further reinforcing the cycle of cyberbullying.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Bullying Motives, Twitter, Social Media.*

INTRODUCTION

Verbal bullying refers to intentional use of offensive words to harm individuals emotionally or psychologically (Azeredo, 2015) and it is a pervasive form of aggression that transcends age and gender. It often manifests through taunts, insults, threats, and the spreading of rumours, leaving lasting emotional scars on victims even when it goes unnoticed. Verbal bullying can take many forms, including cursing, physically demeaning, and anything else that can hurt individuals psychologically (Johansson and Englund, 2021).

The ease with which verbal abuse can be committed, both online and offline, coupled with its ability to fly under the radar of adults and peers, makes it a particularly devious form of harassment. Nowadays, the pervasive use of social media can trigger bullying, which often intends to ridicule others. Unlike traditional forms of bullying confined to physical spaces, cyberbullying can manifest through a wider range of strategies, from insults and hateful comments to the insidious

spread of rumours and impersonation. This phenomenon is particularly widespread on Twitter, where the public nature of interactions and relative anonymity embolden users to engage in harmful online behaviour (Haider Khadum et al., 2020).

Cyberbullying takes place over digital examples of such devices include mobile phones, computers, tablets and they occur in online forms of communication, forums, and gaming. Kowalski, et. al (2014) stated that cyberbullying, the electronic context in question, includes email, blogs, instant messages and text messages. It is targeted to people who cannot easily protect themselves. Cyberbullying includes the transmission, posting, and sharing of negative, harmful, false, or malicious content about another person, including personal or private information that may cause embarrassment, humiliation, or even emotional distress. This harmful behaviour can manifest in various forms, from offensive memes and hate speech to online threats and impersonation. In severe cases, cyberbullying can even cross the line into unlawful or criminal territory (Haider Khadum et al., 2020).

According to Walker and Jeske (2016) cyberbullying is becoming increasingly common as internet users are protected by anonymity on the web. As pointed out by Duggan (2017), Twitter users, particularly women, often face a barrage of online harassment, including death threats, explicit sexual harassment, and even stalking threats. There have been several incidents of Twitter-related cyberbullying recently, including #gamergate, the harassment of Robin Williams after the death of his daughter, and the decision to sue Ashley Judd for trolling. Speculation suggests that this high-profile incident prompted the introduction of anti-harassment blocking tools such as "quality filters" on Twitter.

Prolonged cyberbullying can destroy the trust of a person, make him or her feels gloomy and worried, and always feel guilty or fail because they are unable to overcome the disturbance that hit him (Trihapsari, 2016). Cyberbullying victims experience emotional burdens, often struggling to cope with the persistent harassment. In some cases, cyberbullying can even contribute to suicidal attempts, highlighting the severity of its impact. For teenagers, the stress of cyberbullying can manifest as risky behaviours such as acting out in school, running away from home, or engaging in substance abuse such as alcohol and drugs (Trihapsari, 2016).

Recent instances of cyberbullying have underscored its potentially severe repercussions on students, educational institutions, and communities. These incidents have catalysed a sense of immediacy among both state and local educators and policymakers, prompting them to address the issue of bullying. This urgency stems from the numerous appeals for assistance made by state and local officials, educators, and policymakers alike. Presently, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia lack legislative measures specifically addressing cyberbullying and the protection of internet users' privacy. Consequently, educational institutions find themselves frequently confronted with the dilemma of choosing between ensuring their students' safety and respecting their privacy. This decision-making process often occurs with insufficient consideration for the essential rights that learners should be entitled to enjoy within the school environment (Khairunnissa et al., 2018). Bullying has been investigated in various fields such as at work (Hutchinson and Jackson, 2015), at school (Gillespie et al., 2017), and on social media (Craig et al., 2020), such as Twitter (Okorie and Ekeanyanwu, 2014; Xu et al. 2014). The present research conducted here serves to continue the research that has been conducted by Chatzakou et al. (2017). However, this research differs from that research in terms of the focus, even though it uses Twitter as its data source. This research aims to comprehend the motives for bullying expression used by Twitter users in the Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber drama. The author sees this gap and analyse the contents and motives behind Twitter users carrying out cyberbullying. Considering these facts, the present research aims to examine the motives underlying bullying acts expressed by Twitter users, which have received little research attention. This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the contents of bullying experienced by Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber on their Twitter?
2. What are the motives of Twitter users in carrying out cyberbullying towards Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber?

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Bullying strategies

According to Smith (2016) bullying is a rather broad concept that can be defined as a specific type of aggressive social relationship that is intended to harm another

- the intentional type of aggression in which people frequently and for an extended period behave sharply with different people, consistently spite and harass them. Johansson and Englund (2021) classify bullying into three types. *Physical Bullying*: This is the most common form of oppression and the most obvious form of bullying. While one-third of occurrences of bullying were recorded by students, incidents of physical oppression were less common. A student's physical bullying is defined as shoving and fighting into lockers. This sort of bullying is more visible. It is easier for school employees to oppose and stop this behaviour when observations can be made. *Verbal Bullying*: One of the most popular forms of oppression employed by both girls and boys is verbal abuse. Regardless of whether it is caught, it is possible to whisper in front of adults as well as peers, and it is simple to commit verbal abuse. Verbal bullying is frequently the outward attempt of taunting or name-calling towards an individual. It can take many forms, including cursing, physically demeaning, and anything else that can hurt someone's heart or mind. Relational bullying is difficult to identify from the outside. This sort of bullying occurs systematically as a result of ignorance, exclusion, or avoidance. Avoidance, an act of exclusion, is a powerful means of oppression; thus, relational oppression diminishes the dignity of the victim of bullying. Will still feel the effect if there is a child who is perhaps being gossiped about him, even if the child does not hear it directly.

Cyberbullying is similar to traditional bullying, but involves the use of new communication technologies and can create an imbalance of power. It is a form of violence expressed through electronic media, causing emotional and psychosomatic problems, social difficulties, and moderate to severe depressive symptoms in adolescents . It is associated with daily use of internet, webcam, text messages, posting personal information, and harassing others online (Bottino et al., 2015). Texting and social media are the most commonly used venues for cyberbullying victimization among college-age students (Whittaker and Kowalski, 2015). Verbal aggression and offensive or insulting messages are the most prevalent forms of aggression in cyberbullying (Machimbarrena and Garaigordobil, 2018).

The researchers chose the contents and motive for cyberbullying behaviour as the object of this research because humans take advantage of social media to

interact with each other online. However, there are still many negative impacts arising from the existence of the internet and social media, such as the rise of cyberbullying by Twitter users.

b. Previous research on Bullying

Workplace bullying, prevalent in public sector institutions like healthcare (Hutchinson and Jackson, 2015), reflects embedded power dynamics and can contribute to institutional failures. This study, based on 3345 Australian public sector workers, analyses managerial bullying through a Foucauldian lens. It aims to understand how cultures opposing institutional missions emerge and influence care failures. This study highlights how power dynamics in bullying enforce harmful organizational narratives and practices, contributing to undercurrents that pave the way for systemic care failures. Thus, a crucial challenge for nurses and leaders is understanding organizational power and developing the moral courage to sustain their identity, resist harmful practices, and advocate for care and justice.

At school context, Gillespie et al. (2017) designed and piloted a program to educate nursing students about bullying against nurses. Using a descriptive design, they developed a multi-component, multi-year program approved by IRBs. The program's content validity was confirmed by an advisory board, and pilot testing on five campuses demonstrated its value for faculty and students. Findings from the pilot implementation of the program indicate the need to incorporate the program into additional nursing courses beginning during the sophomore year of the nursing curricula;

Craig et al. (2020) explored social media bullying among young people (11-15 years old) in 42 countries using the 2017-2018 HBSC survey. Findings have revealed variations in problematic social media use (SMU) and cyber-bullying across countries, influenced by development and gender. Engagement in SMU was significantly associated with both cyber-victimization and perpetration, with stronger connections for perpetration and among girls. These findings highlight the complex interplay between SMU, cyber-bullying, and demographic factors.

Okorie and Ekeanyanwu (2014) investigated cyber-bullying on Twitter, focusing on its impact on self-disclosure and prevalence among Nigerian users. A

survey found that 46% reported experiencing cyber-bullying, while 87% witnessed it. Notably, 55% admitted to cyber-bullying others, and 44% retaliated with verbal or visual attacks. The study underscores the need for stricter cyber-bullying laws and increased NGO involvement in Nigeria and similar developing countries.

Xu et al. (2014) analysed a bilingual microblog corpus to compare school bullying behaviours in Western and Chinese cultures. They compared English tweets from Twitter and Chinese Weibos from Weibo, focusing on author roles, teasing, temporal dynamics, and social processes. The findings suggest several cultural differences. Asian cultures' emphasis on saving face might explain why Chinese posts rarely identify victims or label bullying as such. Differences in school schedules and holidays led to distinctive patterns in bullying posts' timing. Weibo posts mentioned family more often than tweets, reflecting the greater importance of family in Asian cultures.

Chatzakou et al. (2017) propose a methodology to identify bullies and aggressors on Twitter based on text, user, and network attributes. They find that bullies post less, participate in fewer online communities, and are less popular, while aggressors are relatively popular and use more negativity in their posts. Machine learning algorithms trained on a 1.6M-tweet corpus achieve over 90% accuracy in identifying these users. Users involved in the "Twitter war" exhibit higher engagement, negative sentiment, and less joy in their tweets compared to random users. Additionally, the study analyses Twitter's suspension mechanism for handling abusive behaviour.

Calvin et al. (2015) analysed bullying-related hashtags on Twitter, finding their use associated with high-profile suicides, TV shows, and anti-bullying campaigns. While McHugh et al. (2019) conducted one of the few qualitative studies of bullying tweets, their focus was solely on cyberbullying and not on characterizing different bullying roles. Instead, they analysed 300 cyberbullying tweets for themes like purpose, focus, and tone. This research has demonstrated how Twitter data can be employed to understand bullying and the need for more qualitative analyses to explore the characteristics of different bullying roles.

Past research on bullying discussions on Twitter has mostly used machine learning algorithms to classify and flag harmful content (e.g., Blanco et al., 2014;

Chatzakou et al., 2017; Saravanaraj et al., 2016). While these studies prove how well machine learning can spot bullying behaviour, they miss the bigger picture and deeper understanding of how bullying roles play out. Some studies have started to fill this gap by using machine learning to categorize specific roles within tweets, like bullies, victims, defenders, and reporters (Bellmore et al., 2015; Chelmis et al., 2017; Dhungana Sainju et al., 202).

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research to explore the phenomenon of bullying in Twitter interactions. Qualitative research was employed to understand communication via social media such as Twitter. The formal object of this study was the bullying experienced by Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber on Twitter. The material object was Twitter itself, used by Twitter users in 2023. This study focused on bullying utterances expressed by Twitter users in response to the "Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber Drama" on Twitter in 2023. The data was primarily sourced from Twitter comments responding to this event. The primary data source was a specific Twitter thread on the topic, accessed at https://x.com/bieberitboy/status/1633565794150805504?s=46. This thread was considered a documentation source for research purposes. Secondary data was obtained from various sources, including social media (Twitter), transcripts, articles, and websites related to the research topic.

The study employed documentation as the main data collection method. This involved identifying, classifying, investigating, and interpreting written documents from public domains. Specific data collection techniques included (1) Documenting Twitter comments related to the "Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber Drama." (2) Selecting and identifying comments categorized as bullying utterances. (3) Examining the pragmalinguistics (linguistic features related to social context) and intentions of the bullying utterances.

The study utilized triangulation to enhance data validity. This technique involved using multiple data collection methods to corroborate findings. Three types of triangulation were employed in this study: Source triangulation, that is, using data from multiple Twitter users and sources. Investigator triangulation, that is, involving multiple researchers in data analysis to minimize bias. Methodological

triangulation was employed by the present study including the combination of observation and documentation methods for data collection.

The study utilized content analysis to examine the research data. The analysis involved systematically examining the Twitter comments to identify the contents and the motives or reasons of bullying utterances on in other words we analysed both the linguistic features and the underlying intentions or motives behind the bullying expressions. To analyse the motives of conducting bullying, the present research used Giddens (1991) who defines a motive as a drive or driving force, which inspires human action along a cognitive or behavioural trajectory to satisfy needs. Motives do not have to be consciously felt. Giddens (1991) provides three internal dimensions for perpetrators, namely subconscious motives, practical awareness and discursive awareness. Unconscious motivation refers to a desire or need that has the potential to drive action, but is not the action itself. Meanwhile, discursive awareness refers to our capacity to reflect and provide detailed and explicit explanations of our actions. In other words, there are a number of reasons for all our actions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study have revealed a number of contents of bullying expressions including mocking, body shaming and harassing. Mocking is one of impoliteness strategies that can be offensive, especially if it is targeted someone's vulnerable aspects and it can lead to feelings of insecurity (Van Rythoven, 2022). However, the impact of mocking depends on the context in which it occurs and it can be used as a way to assert power over someone else, to bully or intimidate others, and create an unequal power dynamic within a relationship or group. Body shaming, according to Constanze Schlüter et al. (2021) refers to the act of humiliating someone or making negative comments about their physical appearance**.** It can be directed towards any part of the body, from weight and height to skin texture and facial features. It can be done verbally, through gestures, or even online through comments and posts. Verbal harassment refers to the act of using spoken words to harass, intimidate, or bully someone**.**

a. The Contents of Cyberbullying

(1) Mocking

The example above is a Twitter user's comment on the Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber drama. He responded to the post/tweet by attacking and mocking the drama directed against their actress and because Hailey's husband not defending her. Their hate speech also employs anonymous or fan profiles with no identifiable information. This makes them unconcerned with the victim's situation.


The aim of cyberbullying perpetrators responding to sensitive posts/tweets about the actress is that they feel obligated to correct fake news but with bad language about the actress so that no one insults them. They believe that the comments are simply regular opinions intended for the actresses. However, it is included in the act of cyberbullying without their knowledge. The perpetrator stated that it was a spur-of-the-moment emotion that drove him to act without considering the consequences.

(2) Body shaming

In the data example above a Twitter user targeted Selena Gomez with hurtful comments about her weight, engaging in body shaming without considering the potential impact. This behaviour, alongside Selena's critique of Photoshopping within her brand, highlights the complex and often harmful nature of online interactions.
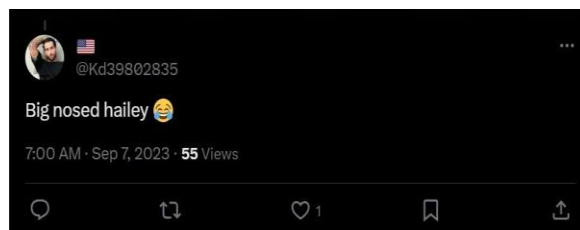

The comment by @Kd39802835 appears to have influenced the response to one of the Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber feud posts and it falls under the definition of cyberbullying. It targets s Hailey Bieber's appearance in a negative way, especially using offensive language, constitutes harmful behaviour. The tweet roasted Hailey Bieber by commenting about her nose. The anonymous nature of the account further amplifies the issue, as it removes accountability and facilitates recklessness.

(3) Harassing

In response to Hailey Bieber promoting Selena Gomez's song, a Twitter account named @dollquiver wrote, "You're right, Hailey Bieber is a nobody!" Additionally, @dollquiver targeted the photo Bieber posted with hurtful comments, amounting to cyberbullying. Their offensive remarks went beyond simple disagreement and crossed the line into harmful behaviour.
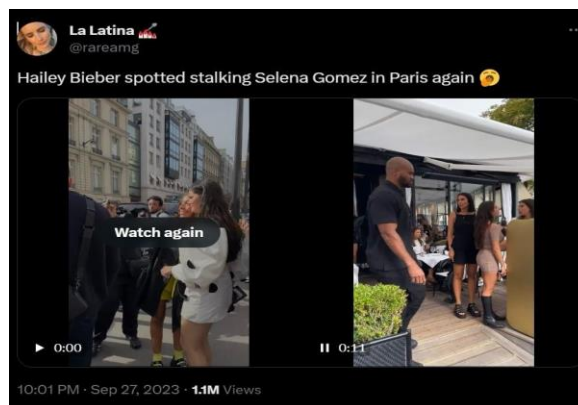
The data demonstrated that a Twitter account @rareamg spread rumours about Hailey Bieber being a stalker of Selena Gomez, accompanied by that emoticon, crosses the line from harmless gossip into harassment. These rumours, fuelled by @rareamg's actions, contribute to the cyberbullying behaviour directed at Hailey Bieber by other Twitter users. While responding to posts/tweets to refute misinformation about the actresses is commendable, it's crucial to ensure that the methods used don't inadvertently perpetuate harmful rumours or engage in cyberbullying themselves.

b. The motives of cyberbullying

The data of the present study demonstrated that the motives of Twitter users to carry out cyberbullying on Twitter social media were affected by fanaticism towards idols, feeling annoyed and angry when they saw posts/tweets that criticized the idols, expressing upsetting feelings of the actresses, and get bored. The context of the drama is that Selena laminated her eyebrows too much and posted about it. Next, Kylie posted a selfie with the same eyebrows mocking her with Hailey Bieber. She has said she didn't see Selena's post but it seems she was making fun of her.

(1) Expressing annoyed and anger

Fuelled with anger and annoyance towards the ongoing Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber drama on the Twitter**,** Twitter users on fan accounts engaged in cyberbullying by directing abusive and offensive comments at both actresses. Their words, filled with hate speech, were aimed to insult and hurt. However, the anonymous nature of their profiles, often lacking identifiable information, allows them to engage in cyberbullying without concern for the actresses' emotional well-being or the potential harm caused by online negativity**.**

The data above shows a Twitter user commenting on the Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber drama despite claiming indifference. While commenting can indicate some level of engagement, the user's chosen words were inappropriate and constituted

cyberbullying, even if unintentional. Their use of anonymous or fan profiles further highlights the disconnect between online actions and personal accountability.

(2) To express hate

Replies from the account @luxuxirious appears to have influenced the response to one of the Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber feud posts. He compared it to the concerns of billionaires, seemingly to highlight its lesser significance. However, his attempt to express this opinion resulted in cyberbullying through rude, hateful, and offensive comments in the comments section. This behaviour, regardless of intent, undermines the actresses and constitutes cyberbullying. The use of anonymous or fan profiles without identifying information, although his headshot is a male, suggests a lack of concern for the potential consequences of his actions on the victims.

A Twitter user hates them because the drama between Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber is too stupid and very unimportant. He tried to destabilize Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber's conflict by making harsh, unpleasant, and terrible comments in the comments area, which is a kind of cyberbullying. His hate speech is also given anonymously or through fan profiles that do not include any personal information. As a result, they are uncaring about the victim's predicament.

(3) Get bored

The comment above shows that she claims that witnessing the victim's emotions run high pleases them. Especially if a large number of people like, share, and respond to cyberbullying perpetrators' answers. Furthermore, Twitter users admit to feeling bored after reading the comments, but they do not feel guilty. When the offender sees the victim apologizing since his post/tweet includes advantages and negatives, she feels satisfied and joyful because he believes he has won the argument.

The online discourse surrounding the ongoing "Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber drama" on Twitter presents a concerning example of online cyberbullying. The tweets by a number of users directed to Gomez and Bieber contained strong emotional reactions such as anger and frustration, similarly reported by previous research (e.g. Chatzakou et al. (2017). These feelings manifested in verbally abusive comments directed at both actresses. The data showed that the online comments often framed the actresses as rival figures among their fans.

The finding of the present research is in line with recent research on cyberbullying, such as the studies by Okorie and Ekeanyanwu (2014) and Trihapsari (2016) that has found that bullying harms both victims and their willingness to share openly online. This is sadly clear in the ongoing online conflict between fans of Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber. Hateful comments thrown at both celebrities reveal the negative side of online anonymity. Trihapsari (2016) argues that the internet's cloak of anonymity can make users feel brave to act like bullies, throwing insults and threats without consequences, often hiding behind fan accounts. However, the outcomes of such online cruelty are serious, as shown in

studies by Chatzakou et al. (2017). Cyberbullying is connected to emotional distress, reputational damage, and even physical harm.

The drama between Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber is just a small part of a bigger problem: cyberbullying and hate speech online. People often target others based on certain characteristics, and this happens a lot on the internet. It is important to remember that behind every screen, there is a real person, consequently the things people say online have real effects to them. Instead of hiding behind anonymity, we can use the internet for positive things. We can report abusive behaviour, encourage respectful conversations, and support organizations fighting against cyberbullying. That way, we can make the internet a more inclusive and caring place for everyone.

CONCLUSION

The present study has analyzed bullying utterances expressed by Twitter users in response to the "Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber Drama" on Twitter in 2023. The study utilized content analysis to examine the contents of verbal bullying experienced by Selena Gomez and Hailey Bieber on their Twitter and the motives behind the offensive acts. The results of the study have revealed a number of contents of bullying expressions including mocking, body shaming and harassing. The study also found that the motives of Twitter users to carry out cyber bullying on Twitter social media were related to the fanaticism towards the two idols, feeling annoyed or angry when they found tweets that criticized the actresses, jealousy of the fans, and get bored. As a result, efforts must be made to raise Twitter users' education and awareness of social media ethics and behavioural norms, as well as to teach them how to communicate and engage healthily and productively on social media. Aside from that, there is a need for cyberbullying monitoring and law enforcement, as well as encouragement from families, schools, and fan groups to behave well and responsibly on social media.

This analysis provides a preliminary exploration of the issue, and further research is necessary to fully understand the complex dynamics of cyberbullying. Future studies could examine the specific linguistic features of abusive comments, investigate the role of social media algorithms in amplifying negativity, and explore potential interventions for mitigating online harassment. The present study

underscores the need for platforms like Twitter to implement stricter measures to combat online harassment and protect users from cyberbullying.

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