



Communicating insults in cyberbullying

* Tan Kim Hua

kimmy@ukm.edu.my

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Shahidatul Maslina Mat So'od

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan

Bahiyah Abdul Hamid

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is basically bullying on electronic or social media. This form of bullying is often overlooked and yet it can be just as damaging as face-to-face bullying. This paper reports on a study of provocative insults used in online bullying among Malaysian youths. Important keywords or phrases used by tertiary-level Malaysian students who have experienced cyberbullying, have bullied others or were merely bystanders in social media platforms were elicited. Data collection and analysis were conducted in two phases. The first involved a survey using the BuLI (Bashing using the Language of the Internet) questionnaire, and the second involved analysing streamed data from Twitter via the Twitter API and R statistical software using key terms derived from the first phase. Thematic analysis was employed in the second phase of the analysis where the keywords of each theme were subjected to qualitative interpretation based on the context where these words were used. Initial results point towards insults related to intelligence, physical appearance and worthiness. The linguistic realisations used to communicate these insults are categories of a mixed code of Malay and English. This exhibits innovative and marked (unusual) words and phrases that have crept into the lexicon of online insults. The preferred terms used are also uniquely related to the concept of "face" in the Malay culture.

Keywords: ***cyberbully, insults, tweets, perpetrators, themes, social media***

INTRODUCTION

This study stems from the escalating numbers of aggressive acts occurring in Malaysia's social media, which has led to cyberbullying activities. Despite the plethora of definitions and viewpoints available owing to innumerable applications, websites and platforms, Dollarhide (2019) recently reviewed social media as a computer-based technology that enables interactions and networking via the sharing of ideas, information and life stories. Social media is likewise known for its social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Beyond these social media juggernauts, people use social media for other reasons such as participating in forum discussions; engaging in content curation, consumer review, interest-based socialising, social shopping, sharing economy, blogging and publishing networks; and bookmarking.

The Internet was introduced in Malaysia in 1995 in an attempt to place the country as a regional and global competitor in information technology (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). The emergence of broadband in 2007 has perceptibly rendered Malaysians increasingly dependent on the Internet for daily activities. Such activities include sharing parts of their lives online through individual media and SNSs. Malaysians are reported as having the highest number of friends on various social media networks in the world and thus Malaysians have been labelled as "sociable online". Among Malaysian Internet users, the smartphone is the most common device used to access the Internet, whilst Whatsapp and Facebook are considered the trendiest platforms for communicating and social networking (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2018).

The overwhelming involvement of Malaysians on the Internet was disclosed by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), which is the regulatory body that controls the communications and multimedia industry in Malaysia, in its Internet User Survey 2018. The MCMC has recently unveiled that the percentage of Internet users at the national level has increased from 76.9% in 2016 (24.5 million users) to 87.4% (28.7 million users) in 2019. Hootsuite and We Are Social (2019) have likewise testified in their latest Digital 2019 report that Malaysia ranks top five globally and ranks the highest in Southeast Asia in terms of Internet penetration. According to the report, 80% of users in Malaysia spend an average of up to 8 hours online daily, including the 2 hours and 58 minutes they spend on social media consumption (Bernama, 2019). As of March 2019, Facebook is reported as the most used social media platform by Malaysians, with 84.3%, followed by Instagram (4.5%), Pinterest (4.4%), Twitter (4%), Youtube (1.9%) and Tumblr (0.4%) (Statcounter Globalstats, 2019).

By exposing themselves to the convenience of SNSs and interconnectedness through virtual human interaction, Malaysian Internet users have become susceptible to a number of common problems that most major social media platforms have failed to solve despite ongoing efforts. Cyberbullying, which is the act of sending hurtful and abusive texts via the Internet or any electronic technology device (Simon, 2017), is one of the most detrimental Internet risks that social media users generally experience. It is a "silent epidemic" in the Malaysian society (Bakar, 2015). Online harassment and sexual cyberbullying are the most common types of cyberbullying encountered by social media users in Malaysia, which can lead to the cruellest outcomes such as social isolation, anxiety, depression, sexual assault, humiliation and homicide-suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007).

The threats of the cyberworld can be observed through the numerous cyberbullying cases that have been reported in Malaysia. A recent study conducted by a team of six experts and lecturers from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia reported that 53.5% of teens have a moderate to high tendency of being cyberbullies, 36% are likely to experience aggressive online behaviour,

whilst 25% are being moderately to severely victimised online (Yuan, Lee & Say, 2018). Teens are considered Internet users who are most at risk of being cyberbullied for various reasons. Firstly, most of them are digitally literate and rely heavily on the Internet for their studies. Secondly, they can easily access the Internet through public computer facilities at their colleges. Lastly, the current learning method has shifted to web-based and mobile learning approaches, which necessitates students to spend increased hours online. Another study also indicated that 66% of students (470 of 712 public and private college and university students surveyed) have been cyberbullied, which can be considered a high prevalence (Lai et al., 2017).

Problem statement

A number of cyberbullying studies has been conducted since the influx of internet usage in Malaysia. Several studies in understanding the issue of cyberbullying among university students have been carried out by Faryadi (2011), Noh & Ibrahim (2014) and Rashid, Mohamed and Azman (2017). In addition, Ang (2015) evaluated the attributes in counteracting cyberbullying and its intervention strategies while Balakrishnan (2015) extended her study to include young adults and focused on the relationship between internet usage frequency and cyberbullying. Apart from the many quantitative studies in understanding the nature of cyberbullying in Malaysia, Ghazali et. al's (2017) is one of the few studies that qualitatively addressed youth's perception of cyberbullying. Mazni, Zeti and Aini (2016) who examined cybercrime awareness revealed that among all active Internet users, Malaysians have limited awareness of cybercrimes and its related laws. This is instrumental to the prevalence of cyberbullying in the country. Therefore, given the sudden surge of cyberbullying cases in Malaysia (Shuib, 2014) that took place through online comments and other social media posts (Golbeck et al., 2017), there is an urgent need to recognise and comprehend all features that might influence and lead to cyberbullying in Malaysia. As cyberbullying normally involves three parties (bully, victim and bystander), this study takes the initiative to understand cyberbullying behaviours of all three parties. It explores the language of cyberbullying, specifically the language used by bullies, victims and bystanders in Twitter, one of the most popular social media platforms among the younger generation in Malaysia.

Given such findings, cyberbullying should be rigorously addressed, as the usage of aggressive words has been amplified considerably by the younger population. At some point in time, all of us have been the target of insults by fellow social media users using abusive language [an expression that comprises abusive words or phrases in verbal and textual contexts] (Tan, 2018, Kev & Tan, 2019). This study focuses on analysing Twitter posts that contain cyberbullying-related words and examining their forms and functions.

Conceptual framework

Cyberbullying refers to the use of abusive insults in online interactions, and its identification is generally determined by a lexicon of potentially disrespectful or offensive words. To achieve the research objectives of this study, the underpinning theory was derived from different harassment content found in social media as proposed by Rezvan et al. (2018). The five content areas detailed by Rezvan et al. (2018) are shown in Table 1. They are *Sexual harassment*, *Racial harassment*, *Appearance-related harassment*, *Intellectual harassment* and *Political harassment*. This study has however identified an additional theme which is "Worthiness-Related" harassment which also frequently takes place in tweets. Thematic analysis (Sharafah & Nik Normah, 2018) was employed in the second analysis phase to examine keywords that fall in the categories of Intellect-related, Appearance-related and Worthiness-related insults. The most prevalent themes selected provided

a relevant scope for the study, thereby focusing its findings and enhancing its usefulness. The themes were qualitatively deduced by three higher education experts with linguistics and communication backgrounds.

Table 1. Types of harassment content

Type	Explanation
Sexual harassment	Involves sexuality and frequently targets females. The harasser might mention the victim's sex organs or express sexual relations using slang. However, slang itself is not enough to signify sexual harassment.
Racial harassment	Aims at the victim's race and ethnic features such as colour, country, culture, faith and religion.
Appearance-related harassment	Apart from sexuality, relates to body appearance such as hairstyle or physique. Fat shaming and body shaming are significant subtypes.
Intellectual harassment	Concerns intellectual abilities or the merits of personal thought. Subtypes include level of formal education and grammar. Victims may in fact be intellectually gifted.
Political harassment	Links to political views on issues under government purview, such as global warming, immigration and so on. Most victims are politicians or politically active individuals.

(Source: Rezvan et al., 2018)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research involved two main phases, namely Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Phase 1

In this phase, keywords or phrases used in cyberbullying were elicited from the perspective of the perpetrators or cyberbullies. The results were later categorised into discernible themes.

A survey was conducted in this phase using the Bashing using the Language of the Internet (BuLI) questionnaire (see Appendix) to elicit cyberbullying-related keywords from victims, perpetrators and bystanders. The questionnaire was designed to invite respondents to share their experiences of cyberbullying specifically the language typically used. A total of 10 questions were included in the questionnaire, four of which objective in nature and the rest were open-ended and subjective.

The objective part of the questionnaire comprised Questions 1 and 2, which elicited demographic information. Respondents were requested to provide basic information such as gender and age. Question 3 established whether the respondent is a victim, a perpetrator or a bystander. The subsequent core questions, that is, Questions 4–8 were open-ended to invite respondents to provide as many responses as possible and not to restrict their subjective responses in any way. Essentially, the keywords and phrases used to respond to textual and visual stimuli was the main objective.

Procedure

The BuLI questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate students in the main lecture hall of a public university in Malaysia. A protocol was conducted to ensure that none of the respondents had prior knowledge of the study so as to obtain the most honest feedback that reflected their social reality. The selection of respondents was made on the basis of availability and representation of

Malaysia's racial diversity. General consent was obtained from the respective students and lecturers after the introduction of the study and the statement of intent. Further instructions were then given after research assistants distributed the BuLI questionnaire to the respondents. A total of 15 minutes was allocated for respondents to answer the questionnaire. This short duration prevented them from overthinking the questions and it also prompted them to provide the most direct and spontaneous answers according to their relevant experiences.

Data Analysis

The present study isolated key terms used by Malaysian social media users in cyberbullying. The responses gathered were keyed in and tabulated using SPSS Statistics 23. Responses to Questions 4–10 were further analysed. Manual coding was performed on grouped keywords that fall under the same categories. The most frequent insult-related n-grams and functional lexical bundles were identified. Keywords and phrases with similar semantic connotations were clustered under similar themes specifically those related to intelligence, physical appearance and worthiness. These themes were further employed in data extraction in Phase 2 where the focus was on weighting their usefulness and universality.

Phase 2

This phase examined the contexts in which insults related to intellect, physical appearance and worthiness occurred.

Procedure

Twitter, which is a mini-blog platform, was chosen because its user demographics tend to skew towards the young generation. This age group on Twitter is more susceptible to cyberbullying, as victims and perpetrators, compared with the same age group in other social media outlets such as Facebook. The nature of Twitter is direct and concise, thereby making it easy to analyse. The contexts in which the keywords occur were collected from English and Malay entries and analysed based on the three different themes of intellect, physical appearance and worthiness. These themes were identified from the analysis of the survey that was conducted in phase 1.

In this manner, the BuLI questionnaire provided the key terms and phrases to be categorised into themes. These themes provide a relevant scope for the study, thereby focusing its findings and enhancing its usefulness.

Data Collection

Large data were streamed using Twitter API and R statistical software from 18–25 April 2018. These data provided instances of tweets that contained the identified keywords and phrases. Weekly data included approximately 427,108 entries (42, 312 Twitter users) with various lengths and themes. Tweets were streamed based on three criteria: tweets are from an active user, tweets are in English or Malay and tweets are from Malaysia.

Data Analysis

The collected 427,108 tweets were transferred to Microsoft Excel Comma Values File & Microsoft Excel Worksheet for annotation and further analyses in three stages. The first stage of analysis used keywords to identify the themes from Phase 1, namely, intellect, physical appearance and worthiness, which were deduced from the questionnaire in order to select and identify related

tweets. The recorded tweets were categorised under the three categories in the second stage of analysis for further annotation.

The findings were then discussed under the three thematic categories of insults, namely intellect-related, physical appearance-related and worthiness-related. Keywords that were particularly distinct and marked were isolated for discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Three thematic categories of insults are evident from the qualitative analysis. Such insults comprise key phrases related to intellect, physical appearance and worthiness. The aforementioned categories are the most appropriate, most prevalent and most socially relatable in the Malaysian context.

Intellect-related insults

Recurring words that belong to the category of insults related to intellect include “noob” and its Malay equivalents, namely, “*sengal*” and “*kepala*”, and all their derivatives.

The word “noob” owes its origin to the online gaming community, where it denotes a novice, an unskilled player and a loser. The term is generally used to elicit anger and to humiliate an opponent team after their defeat, especially if judged to be unworthy of a rival, thereby leading to an easy victory. The term is also used as a distraction to prod players of a rival team to make as many mistakes as possible. However, the meaning of the word has morphed, and its usage has evolved allowing it to be accepted outside its niche environment of online gaming and cyber sphere. Currently, the word has been reduced to mainly express anger, frustration and what is deemed as a lack of intelligence of the third party.

The word “noob” has numerous derivatives such as “nob”, “nub”, “nOOB” and “noobies”, all of which denote the same meaning. Based on the results, the word “noob” is sometimes used quite liberally from its original intention. For instance, some users employ it to refer to the physical appearance of a person such as their “sorry old face”. In general, the context in which the word is used is confined to intellectual inferiority, ignorance, social awkwardness or lack of skills. Usage of the word “noob” and its derivatives is exhibited in the posts as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Intellect- related insults

Post no	Tweets
#1345	@famkahphin Muka kau tua bahhh. Noob
#9944	Aku dengar org sebut sin jadi sim, hahahaha noob https://t.co/9DM8JHO9ph
#7033	@nasih7 @__badrulhisyam @mirulhafiz94 Lai la sih jing nobb fak
#4067	Healing myself nk hiking lgi heh heh hubs baby mesti xnk follow. Nub
#23487	dah kalah tu kalah la noobies

Another recurring word in the corpus is “*sengal*”, which is Malay for “paraesthesia” or the state in which muscles stop functioning for a short period of time owing to an inadequate amount of blood reaching it. In the context of its general usage, the word refers to the brain rather than muscles. A quick survey of Urban Dictionary reveals that the word “*sengal*” is used to

acknowledge that one is stupid. However, the word is not deemed extremely vulgar. ‘*Sengal*’ is considered as the toned-down version of the word “*bodoh*”, which is Malay for “stupid”, thereby making it palatable for audiences as the intended or unintended party. Moreover, “*sengal*” is almost an euphemism but not quite. However, the intensity of the word may be reinforced by coupling it with other derogatory words such as “*semak*” or “*bongok*” in seen in #9394 (Table 3). In these instances, “*sengal*” no longer possesses its original meaning as being soft in nature. *Kamus Pelajar Edisi Kedua* defines “*semak*” as “*mengganggu dan mengusutkan fikiran*” (distressing someone’s mind), whilst “*bongok*” denotes the idea of “being stupid”. Several examples of ‘*sengal*’ are exhibited in the posts in Table 3.

Table 3. Intellect-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#8260	@saifuddin_ Bukak la privet mcm mana org nk rt <i>sengal</i>
#1507	Bagi la orang dari dalam lif tu keluar dulu baru kau dari luar tu masuk. Lepastu main langgar je orang. Spesis <i>sengal</i> . https://t.co/Xxp2rwBvtA
#9353	Pernah tak bila kau dah pakai earphone kat telinga, tapi dah sejam pakai, lagu tak pasang pun.. <i>Sengal</i>
#7039	"Mana sakit. Jatuh hati. Jatuh ditimpa tangga. <i>Sengal</i> "
#9394	<i>Semak</i> , daripada 5 nak buang jadi 4 .. Pastu yg dept yg dah ada 8 org nak tambah ke 9 .. Alaaaa <i>bongokkk</i> .. Dept tu buat apa je <i>sengalllll</i> ?

The last word in this category is “*kepala*”, which is Malay for “head” and all its derivatives. Numerous abusive remarks in Malay start with “*kepala*”, such as “*kepala bana*”, “*kepala bapak*”, “*kepala hotok*” and “*kepala butoh*”. The list is by no means exhaustive, but the examples are all derivatives elicited from the present corpus. The numerous derogatory derivations of “*kepala*” are crucial to understanding the Malay conception of the word. Rezvan et al. (2018) opined that the head is the most sacred part of the body. Similarly, traditional Malay beliefs hold the head in the highest esteem because it is where the “*semangat*” or the “natural energies” of a person, reside. Thus, touching a person’s head (Hays, 2008) or passing objects over the head is taboo, as an imbalance in the “*semangat*” will bring illness or even death to a person.

Given that the head is highly guarded and respected in the Malay culture, any insult to this part of the body is regarded as one of the harshest. Moreover, the Malay word “*kepala*” is never used as a single word but is often phrased with two or more words, as shown in Table 3. Carefully crafted to elicit the highest degree of insult, the word “*kepala*” is usually juxtaposed with Malay words that denote genitals. Such words include ‘*bana*’, which is Malay for the head of the penis, and ‘*butoh*’, which is a unisex word applicable to both men’s and women’s genitalia, are considered crude and offensive as exhibited in the posts in Table 4.

Table 4. Intellect-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#22632	@DeinAfi Kepala bana ko lah dilamun cinta bagai
#40459	Salah keluar ja mesti jadi haru biru, kepala bana betoi
#24284	Pkul 12 nak keluar nge tea pala bana dia esok kerja .. Dah aku dh kunci pintu rumah jgn sapa2 keluar !!
#31072	Kepala butoh. https://t.co/j4HGny2S79

Another variation is “*kepala bapak*”, which is likewise regarded as extremely offensive, as it is not only an insult to one’s intellect but also to that of his/her father (*bapak* is a Malay word for father). Thus, this insult implicates the entire family, as the father represents the head of the family. In addition, the phrase “*kepala bapak*” is verboten in Malay households (Mokhtar, 2017). “*Kepala bapak kau*”, which was said to have been uttered by former Prime Minister Najib Razak was deemed by Mokhtar (2017) as “coarse and should never have been uttered by a PM”. However, the jovial reaction over this remark by the MCA leadership (non-Malays) is understandable (they considered it as a joke), as they may have inadequate knowledge on the nuances of the Malay language. Jelutong MP RSN Rayer was once scolded and reprimanded for saying “*kepala bapak*” in his speech in Parliament. Moreover, he was criticised by a few other deputy speakers for using such words that might be offensive and derogatory to others (Astro Awani, 2018).

Similar to the Indonesians who normally add a suffix such as ‘*mu*’ to words that are used for cursing (Ibrohim & Budi, 2018), the use of ‘*dia*’ and ‘*ko*’, which means ‘you’ and signifies a family member, in #8262 and #30045 are considered more offensive than #7448, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Intellect-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#7448	kepala bapak ah
#8262	Kepala bapak dia banyak gila https://t.co/fDqXVdYZHG
#30045	Kepala bapak ko https://t.co/wGbGVURYvA

Other insulting remarks worth mentioning are those that use animal imagery, such as “*lembu*” (or cow in English). Most Malaysians are easily insulted when they are called “*lembu*” or when they are associated with the word. Malays consider the word “*lembu*” a taboo and it is one of the most provoking words, because being associated with an animal that is deemed brainless, dim-witted and sluggish can degrade one’s pride and simultaneously humiliate the person. Moreover, the word “*lembu*” when used to degrade someone should never be brought up in conversations with other cultural groups, especially Indians, because they consider “*lembu*” (cows) and bulls sacred, specifically as caretaker, maternal figure and as a symbol of unselfish giving (Ismail, Noh & Omar, 2016).

Physical Appearance-related Insults

Numerous other insults fall under the physical appearance category, which may suggest aspects of Malaysian culture that focuses on a person’s looks and first impressions. Discussions on the cultural aspects of physical appearances are not within the scope of this paper. However, based on the corpus, insults pertaining to physical appearances generally create identifiable trends of usage

such as referencing local fruits and delicacies as well as referencing to objects and foreign entities. For instance, insult references such as “*jambu*” (Malay), “*potato*” (English), “*cokodok*” (Malay) and “*pau*” (Malay), to name a few.

The word “*jambu*”, specifically “*jambu air*”, is Malay for the local “water apple” fruit which is recognised as a recurring label to describe ladylike facial qualities of a man. The stereotypical description of Malaysian masculinity is deemed inconsistent with the features of a water apple/*jambu*, which is smooth, soft and tinged with redness as if blushing. Thus, highlighting such features when describing a Malaysian man is considered derogatory. Table 6 displays tweets that contain the word “*jambu*” to describe a person’s appearance.

Table 6. Physical appearance-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#23335	Mateen kacak 6pax muka jambu suka kuda bela rimau..
#36057	The first one looks so â€œjambuâ€ OMG https://t.co/wICCv21VOo
#45627	@HafizApiss Hahahha ramai je muka tak jambu pun kunyit
#79304	"So my grab driver said. ""save ah number, nnti boleh lepak" "jambu siot! And plus sarawakian fella!
#85891	Lallana ni elok jadi model lah. Muka jambu dah tu
#138049	Muka jambu....Menonggeng la ko dlm tu... https://t.co/40Dh2zso8h

Similarly, the usage of words such as “*rupa macam* (Malay for ‘looks like a’) potato”, for a person whose chin or forehead is unusually round in shape and where the face is bulbous and full of indentations like the surface of the potato. The Malay word “*cekodok*” which is a type of fritter snack, a popular street food in Malaysia, is referenced to indicate a person’s dark complexion, (which is stereotypically undesirable in Malay culture). As an insult to highlight flaws in a person’s face, such as wrinkles or uneven and burnt skin tone, it is understandably harsh, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Physical appearance-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#1035	apa benda la muka dh ke main lawa kata rupa mcm potato? ada ke patut dia potatokannya
#23107	WALAUPUN MUKA BURN MACAM COKODOK HANGUS TAPI HATI TAK PERNAH HANCUS Alhamdulillah baru habis https://t.co/x1mB2wMDFL

The posts likewise demonstrate the inclination of Malaysians to use food delicacies to describe a person’s appearance. However, unlike the previous unpleasant remarks, “*pipi pou*” (Malay for cheeks like the “*pau/pou*” (a steamed dumpling)) and “*pipi kuih bom*” (Malay for “cheeks like the local sweet dumpling delicacy” which is round like a small cannon ball) in #26113, #5965 and #20908 in Table 8 are good natured and less offensive to the recipient.

Table 8. Physical appearance-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#26113	Tips utk sorok pipi pau & muka slambak âœ... jgn senyum mlampau & tongkat dagu guna tgn https://t.co/fdeeRPtLp
#5965	Ayat Faem tiap kali vAdeo call. "Eh nampak kurus lah, eh pipi dah tak pou lah dh nmpk jaw" '. Ada je ayat manis dia nak sedapkan hati zis!
#20908	Pipi kuih bom “. #PresentationCancel https://t.co/0BH71iK62J

The findings also show that references to typical household items are also quite common, such as the comparison to the “*penyapu*” (Malay for “broom”) as shown in #19322. A broom is considered as a bad omen and taboo in certain cultures. Likewise, brooms are considered as dirty objects in the Malay culture, as they come in direct contact with dust, dirt and rubbish. Thus, referring to a person’s face as broom-like is highly condescending, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Physical appearance-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#19322	And aku 97 muka mcm penyapu https://t.co/GpWuYifZvv

The last word in this category deals with a person’s skin colour. People place considerable importance on skin colour in the Malaysian local setting and use it to set the standard of beauty. Most Malaysians equate being fair and having a light skin tone to beauty and talent. By contrast, dark-skinned individuals, especially women, sometimes suffer from feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem (Muzaffar, 2016). The word “*pariya*” in #5689 in Table 10 actually describes the dark skin tone of the person at the receiving end. However, people should be attentive when using the word “*pariya*” or “pariah”, as it refers to the lowest caste within the Indian social hierarchy. Provocative in nature, most Indians are easily offended when referred to by such a title. Thus, avoiding racial discourse at all costs, specifically in describing someone’s physical appearance, is crucial.

Table 10. Physical Appearance-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#5689	Mana nak cari lotion lengan kasi putih. Dah macam <i>pariya</i> dah lengan aku ni!

Worthiness-related Insults

The Collins English Dictionary defines “worthless” as “something that is of no real value or use” and “someone who is considered to have no good qualities or skills”. According to Winter (2017), the lasting and most universal feeling of worthlessness arises from a perceived feeling of somehow being unloved. However, the feeling of being worthless is unusual, as it is actually a projection of someone else’s perception onto another person (Thomas, 2018). Thomas added that people who experience shortcomings in life can end up feeling as if they lack value and that their life is meaningless. Such feelings normally lead to a sense of insignificance. This “worthlessness” feeling is one of the leading causes of depression and suicide.

Building on the study by Thomas (2018), it is obvious that a considerable part of cyberbullying is done to strip victims off their self-value and self-esteem by employing certain

labels and qualifiers such as “worst”, “trash”, “slut”, “*sampah*” (Malay word for “rubbish/trash”) and “pathetic”, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Worthiness-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#16625	#Netflix says Harith Iskander jokes are the worst https://t.co/68zNG86lan
#21503	Greg you're the fucking worst. You gave me 5 months of bliss and I fucking hate you for breaking my heart. I pray https://t.co/WImE2n6xGu
#26894	To be honest, saya sangat lah a low confident person. Every time, every second, i always thought i am the worst, https://t.co/RIDgggUWDR

Paradoxically, the word “worst” is not the “worst” term that can be used, as it may be used in reference to a certain trait or work and not necessarily as a reference to one’s self. Thus, though “worst” is harsh when used in a criticism, it falls short of being a cyberbullying remark. Hence, the nature of certain words, though inherently negative, may not necessarily be insulting. Such words should be understood by the way they are used in a sentence vis-à-vis their social context.

The last variation of worthiness-related insult originates from remarks such as “pathetic” or “*sedihnya hidup kau*” (Malay for “your life is so sad”), which is generally used to mock someone’s existence or to question his/her value to others. Some people consider the word “pathetic” as a harsh insult. It sometimes carries a mocking connotation, depending on the context or how it is used, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Worthiness-related insults

Post no	Tweets
38570	I am so pathetic that i really had to ask you whether you're jealous of me or not
27615	@MA0jie People were so pathetic this days never let you happy but not all laa hahah

In summary, worthiness-related insults may generate grave effects to victims of cyberbullying. The depression that arises from being called “worthless” and “useless” may eventually affect how one thinks, feels and acts (Orchard, Pass & Reynolds, 2018).

DISCUSSION

Although social media has its merits, its negative qualities such as the harsh language used may adversely affect other users, as been clearly pointed out. The results of the present study show that prominent keywords, related to intellect, physical appearance and worthiness are widely used in cyberbullying.

Code switching from English to Malay and vice versa in the corpus is an important aspect that should be discussed. Three reasons have been identified with regard as to why code switching (Crystal, 1987) is done, specifically, to convey specific attitudes to the listeners, to create social bonds and according to Hashim, Soopar and Hamid (2017), to assist someone overcome his/her inability to express himself/herself. That most Malaysians, especially youths who actively engage with social media activities, are bilingual speakers of Malay and English is noteworthy. Malaysians

generally converse using interlingual code mixing and code switching owing to their social environments, which are ethnically and linguistically diverse in nature (Stapa & Khan, 2016). In fact, disparities in social backgrounds has been claimed as one of the causes why people display less sensitivity towards offensive words (Azman, Azmi, Maros & Bakar, 2017).

Despite recent findings, the language that people use online essentially indicate their thoughts, emotional states and intentions (Habsah, Tan & Darus, 2016). In the case of Twitter users, code switching might be used to create rapport and solidarity. From the tweets, the use of intersentential switching is evident, which is defined by Poplack (2001) as a type of code switch that occurs between a clause, a sentence or between sentences. Code switching has been observed in the intellect insults category. Several code switching examples from the physical appearance-related insults are listed in Table 13.

Table 13. Physical appearance-related insults

Post no	Tweets
#1034	apa benda la muka dh ke main lawa kata <u>rupa mcm potato</u> ? ada ke patut dia <u>potatokannya</u>
#8079	Teringat bila nampak dia berlakon babak selekeh, cakap dengan adik ." <u>Muka dia macam Alien</u> " ~, Tak tahu la kenapa duâhttps://t.co/YRByHo87T4
#13458	Sebab <u>muka aku average</u> je <u>so next time</u> aku nak hampar semua <u>results</u> aku sebagai cara melamar. Harap menjadi

Spelling alterations of cyberbullying words should likewise be investigated. Twitter provides only a limited space for commenting; thus, people tend to use short forms and write in different ways to avoid being filtered by the system. As a result, “*bodoh*” and its derivatives have undergone spelling variations such as “*bodoh*”, “*buduh*” and “*budus*”, which all share the same connotation. “*Budus*” is actually a term coined by Malaysians to tone down the word “*bodoh*” to make it palatable for the intended person(s). Moreover, the spelling variation of “noob” varies from “nob”, “nub”, “nOOB”, to “noobies”.

That criticisms might border the demarcation of bullying remarks, especially after considering the Malaysian concept of “face”, is noteworthy. In the Malay culture, engaging in inappropriate acts can bring “*malu*” (shame, shyness and embarrassment) upon an individual (Evason, 2016). Thus, complimenting people, showing respect to others or engaging in actions that increase self-esteem can give Malaysians “face”. A person’s face represents one’s entire self. The “face” is a quality in most Asian cultures that complements a person’s status, authority, worthiness and pride, especially in this region. Therefore, Malaysians are not only generally sensible in their actions and tend to keep things in check to safeguard their self-worth and peer perception but are also highly conscious of when, where and how criticisms are stated.

“Face” can be lost by openly criticising, insulting, or putting someone on the spot; engaging in actions that bring shame to a group; challenging someone of authority, especially if this is done in public; showing anger towards another person; refusing a request; breaking a promise; or disagreeing with someone publicly (Heriot Watt University Malaysia Cultural Awareness, 2015).

In the same way, saving “face” actually refers to preserving one’s reputation, trustworthiness and pride. Thus, it is normally accomplished by evading certain situations that be embarrassing (Boleh Blogger, 2016). However, the rapid development and evolution of the cybersphere, which the older generation has purportedly failed to embrace, has created a mentoring vacuum among the young generation, who are the “occupants” of this new territory. The young

generation shape the discourse in social media and are in turn shaped by it. This perpetual and cyclical nature of online discourse has created a generation that is so out of touch with their cultural identity and societal norms that they have forgotten the concept of “saving face”. Rather than commenting using harsh words, “saving face” generally involves discussing a matter privately rather than publicly or merely suppressing negative opinions and emotions regarding a particular person or subject out of respect. Such practices can likewise prevent one from humiliating others (Tang, 2017) and sustain the practice of being polite and respectful (the Malay concept of “*budi*”), which is deemed important to human communication, and uphold the model of “*budi bahasa*” (man of nature) (Evason, 2016) that is the quality of having ‘etiquette and courtesy’.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that the focal points of cyberbullying are insults related to intellect, physical appearance and worthiness. The most prevalent features of each type of insult were examined to demonstrate their social relevance and origin in the context of the Malaysian social media. The strategies employed by perpetrators as well as the apparent disengagement of the young generation with what is deemed as traditional Malaysian norms of articulation were also explored.

This study was limited to the corpus yielded by the Twitter API and R software, and the utility of its analysis was capped by the age group of Malaysian youths given that the platform is highly popular among them. However, a cursory survey of different social media sites also reveal that activities appropriately identified as cyberbullying are also highly prevalent among the older sectors of society, especially in relation to politics or anything political in nature. Hence, future studies and analyses should be expanded to capture the totality of the phenomenon by using other platforms that Malaysian senior citizens can relate to, such as Facebook, which helps people bond with families, friends and old acquaintances (Destiana & Salman, 2015). Twitter, nevertheless, remains an outlet for youths to vent their anger and impose their feelings onto others especially when they are engaged in cyberbullying.

Traditional ways of communicating appear to be quite inefficient in terms of laboured effort and time spent and have proven to be unpopular amongst the younger generation. The method used in the study i.e. collecting and analysing data from Twitter is beneficial in terms of the platform’s nature as a mini blog. Twitter, where users are permitted to express their views and criticism via a short passage of 140–280 characters, is the epitome of the modern fast-paced lifestyle.

Although research in the detection of hate speech, abusive and violent language in online comments via automated technologies is becoming more prominent, proponents of machine learning and deep learning approach have acknowledged drawbacks with the presently available technologies. Notably, Dadhe et. al (2018) opined that all systems require human interpretation and therefore cannot be automated. Taking on this view posited by Dadhe et. al (2018), the present study brings to the fore the advantages of analysing naturally occurring cyberbullying discourse specifically in the Malaysian social media context of Twitter. It not only demonstrates that with regard to the usage of insults, the focal points of cyberbullying are insults related to intellect, physical appearance and worthiness, it also highlights a set of current vocabulary items for each category that are intentionally and commonly used in the Malaysian Twitter messages analysed. In addition to identifying the most prevalent features of each type of insult within dual language use (code-switching), the findings also reveal their social relevance and origin in the context of the

Malaysian social media. The strategies employed by perpetrators as well as the apparent disengagement of the young generation with what is deemed as traditional Malaysian norms of articulation were also discussed. The findings suggest that the key to prevent cyberbullying lies not only in the need for users to learn responsibilities associated with the use of technology, but more importantly, they should be made aware of how cyberbullying behaviour via language use takes place. By identifying the linguistic forms, structures and linguistic strategies that are manifested in the language used to achieve cyberbullying, stakeholders on the front lines of the issue can better understand the varied forms of cyberbullying as it is manifested in and through language use.

The findings of the study will be of immense benefit to the society in many ways considering that cyberbullying is at an alarming state in Malaysia. The researchers anticipate society (specifically, social media users) to be able to recognize the language of cyberbullying in cyberspace and to be aware of any incident that can lead to cyberbullying issues. Precautionary steps to prevent them from becoming victims or to identify other cybercrimes are only possible if they know how to identify language patterns that might lead to cyberbullying activities. Moreover, from a communicative language perspective, this study provides a good starting point for discussion and further research on the development of effective frameworks in evaluating the user-level and word-level offensiveness in Malaysian messages.

Open Access: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY 4.0) which permits any use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

Acknowledgement: The authors received financial support for the research and authorship of this article from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Research Grant coded GUP-2017-079.

References:

- Ang, R. P. (2015). Adolescent cyberbullying: A review of characteristics, prevention and intervention strategies. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 25*, 35–42.
- Azman, I. N., Azmi, N. F. A., Maros, M., & Bakar, K. A. (2017). (IM)Politeness: Swearing among youths in Malaysia. *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences, 7*, 47–54.
- Bakar, H. S. A. (2015). The emergence themes of cyberbullying among adolescences. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 20*(4), 393–406.
- Balakrishnan, V. (2015). Cyberbullying among young adults in Malaysia: The roles of gender, age and internet frequency. *Computers in Human Behavior, 46*, 149–157.
- Bernama. (2019, Jan 31). Malaysia ranks top 5 globally in mobile social media penetration, highest in region. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/bots/2019/01/456119/malaysia-ranks-top-5-globally-mobile-social-media-penetration-highest>
- Boleh Blogger. (2016). The concept of saving face in a Malaysian cultural context. Retrieved from <http://cultureboleh.com/the-concept-of-saving-face-in-a-malaysian-cultural-context>
- Crystal, D. (1987). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dadhe, M.S., Masidkar, P.S., & Vaidya, V. (2018). Detection of abusive language from Tweets in social networks. *International Journal on Recent Trends in Computing and Communication, 6* (3), 148–151.
- Destiana, I. & Salman, A. (2015). The acceptance, usage and impact of social media among university students. *e-Bangi, 12*(4), 58–65.

- Dollarhide, M. (2019). Social media definition. *Investopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>
- Evason, N. (2016). Malaysian culture-core concepts. Retrieved from <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/malaysian-culture/malaysian-culture-core-concepts>
- Faryadi, Q. (2011). Cyber bullying and academic performance. *International Journal of Computational Engineering Research*, 1(1), 23–30.
- Ghazali, A. H. A., Abdullah, H., Omar, S. Z., Ahmad, A., Samah, A. A., Ramli, S. A., & Shaffril, H. A. M. (2017). Malaysian youth perception on cyberbullying: The qualitative perspective. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 7(4), 87–98.
- Golbeck, J., Ashktorab, Z., Banjo, R. O., Berlinger, A., Bhagwan, S., Buntain, C., & Wu, D. M. (2017). A large labeled corpus for online harassment research. In Boldi, P. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM on Web Science Conference* (pp. 229–233). New York, USA: Association for Computing Machinery.
- Habsah, H., Tan, K. H., & Darus, S. (2016). What's on your mind? Self-presentation and impression management among Malaysian tertiary level students in Facebook status updates. *Proceedings of SOLLs INTEC 2016 Conference* (pp.177–186). Bangi: School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Hashim, F., Soopar, A. A., & Hamid, B. A. (2017). Linguistic features of Malaysian students' online communicative language in an academic setting: The case of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia [*Ciri-ciri linguistik bahasa komunikasi atas talian pelajar Malaysia dalam suasana akademik: Kes Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*]. *Akademika*, 87(1), 231–242.
- Hays, J. (2008). Customs, manners and etiquette in Malaysia. Retrieved from http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Malaysia/sub5_4b/
- Hootsuite Inc. & We Are Social. (2019). The state of digital 2019. Retrieved from [hootsuite.com](https://www.hootsuite.com).
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2007). Offline consequences of online victimization: School violence and delinquency. *Journal of School Violence*, 6(3), 89–112.
- Heriot Watt University Malaysia Cultural Awareness. (2015). *Cultural guide to Malaysia*. Retrieved from https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/doc/Malaysia_Cultural_awareness_document.pdf
- Ibrohim, M. O., & Budi, I. (2018). A dataset and preliminaries study for abusive language detection in Indonesian social media. *Procedia Computer Science*, 135, 222–229.
- Ismail, I. R., Noh, C. H. C., & Omar, K. (2016). Knowing the taboos, improve intercultural communication: A study at Terengganu, East Coast of Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 219, 359–366.
- Kev, Y.B & Tan, K. H. (2019). Differences in Cultural Perspectives on Cyberbullying-related words. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9(10), 22-36
- Lai, C. S., Mohamad, M. M., Lee, M. F., Salleh, K. M., Sulaiman, N. L., Rosli, D. I., & Chang, W. V. S. (2017). Prevalence of cyberbullying among students in Malaysian higher learning institutions. *Advanced Science Letters*, 23(2), 781–784.
- Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). (2018). *Internet Users Survey 2018: Statistical Brief Number Twenty-Three*. Cyberjaya, Selangor: Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.
- Mazni, B., Zeti, A. A., & Aini, M. A. M. (2016). Cybercrime in Malaysia. *Proceedings of the 2014 Asian Network for Public Opinion Research (ANPOR)*. Niigata, Japan: International Islamic University Malaysia.
- Mokhtar, M. (2017, Nov 8). The shocking 'Kepala Bapak Kau' remark. *Free Malaysia Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2017/11/08/mind-your-language-mr-prime-minister/>
- Muzaffar, C. (2016, March 13). Our un-fair obsession with skin colour. *News Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/03/132441/our-un-fair-obsession-skin-colour>
- Sharafah, D. & Nik Normah, N.H. (2018). Framing the Sustainable Development Goals in Malaysian online news. *SEARCH: The Journal of the South East Asia Research Centre for Communication and Humanities*, 10(1), 1–24.
- Noh, C. H. C., & Ibrahim, M. Y. (2014). Kajian penerokaan buli siber dalam kalangan pelajar UMT. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 134, 323–329.

- Orchard, F., Pass, L., & Reynolds, S. (2018). 'I am worthless and kind'; The specificity of positive and negative self-evaluation in adolescent depression. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 58(3), 260–273.
- Poplack, S. (2001). Code-switching (linguistic). In Smelser, N. J. & Baltes, P. B. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social behavioral sciences* (pp. 2062–2065). Oxford, United Kingdom: Pergamon Press.
- Rashid, M. S. A., Mohamed, S., & Azman, T. A. T. M. (2017). Predicting the intention to cyberbully and cyberbullying behaviour among the undergraduate students at the International Islamic University Malaysia. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 2(5), 257–270.
- Rezvan, M., Shekarpour, S., Balasuriya, L., Thirunarayan, K., Shalin, V. L., & Sheth, A. (2018). A quality type-aware annotated corpus and lexicon for harassment research. *WebSci '18: Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Web Science*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Association for Computing Machinery.
- Shuib, S. (2014, Dec 24). Cyberbullying on the rise in 2014: Who is responsible for the phenomenon? *Astro Awani*. Retrieved from <http://english.astroawani.com/before-2015/cyberbullying-rise-2014-who-responsible-phenomenon-50681>
- Simon, S. (2017). Cyber victimization: School experience of Malaysian cyberbullied teenagers. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(3), 713–720.
- Sinar Harian. (2018, July 31). Parlimen kecoh kerana 'Kepala Bapak'. *Astro Awani*. Retrieved from <http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/parlimen-kecoh-kerana-kepala-bapak-181867>
- Stapa, S. H., & Khan, N. N. B. S. (2016). Functions of code-switching: A case study of a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences Humanities*, 24, 181–194.
- Statcounter Globalstats. (2019). Social media stats in Malaysia — March 2019. Retrieved from <http://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/malaysia>
- Tan, K. H. (2018). Cyberbullying: A cursory review. In Tan, K.H. (Ed), *Stop cyberbullying* (pp. 17–34). Kuala Lumpur: UKM Press.
- Tang, R. (2017). What is "Jaga Muka" and why it's a big thing among Asians. *Says*. Retrieved from <https://says.com/my/lifestyle/jaga-muka-why-are-asians-so-concerned-about-saving-their-face>
- Thomas, J. (2018). Self-esteem: Why do I feel worthless?. Retrieved from <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/self-esteem/self-esteem-why-do-i-feel-worthless/>
- Winter, C. (2017). How to conquer a feeling of worthlessness. Retrieved from <https://www.aconsciousrethink.com/6847/feeling-worthless/>
- Wok, S., & Mohamed, S. (2017). Internet and social media in Malaysia: Development, challenges and potentials. In Acuña, B. P. (Ed.), *The evolution of media communication* (pp. 45–64). Rijeka, Croatia: InTech.
- Yuan, M. K., Lee, L. M., & Say, C. (2018, March 18). Our teens are bullies. *The Star Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/03/18/behaving-badly-in-cyberspace-malaysian-teens-more-likely-to-be-cyberbullies-than-victims-says-study>

Appendix

BuLI Questionnaire

Cyberbullying is when someone (typically teens), bully or harass others on social media sites. Harmful bullying behaviour can include posting rumours, threats, sexual remarks, a victim's personal information, or pejorative labels (i.e., hate speech).

Please complete the following questionnaire.

Kindly tick (/) for your answer.

1. Gender
 Male Female

2. How old are you?
 18 – 20 years old
 21 – 23 years old
 24 – 26 years old
 26+ years old

3. Have you been bullied?
 Yes No

If you choose 'YES', please proceed to No 4 and 5. If 'NO', please answer NO 6 and 7.

4. If you have been bullied on the internet through **text messages**, what are the word(s) or sentence(s) the cyberbully sent you? (eg: stupid, you go kill yourself etc)

5. If you have been bullied on the internet through **visual messages** (pictures/video clips etc), what are the kinds of visual message(s) the bully sent you? (eg: your personal picture has been photo shopped unpleasantly etc).

6. If you have seen or heard of anyone being bullied on the internet, can you give some examples of those messages? It can be **word(s) or phrase(s)/sentence(s)** that have been sent to him/her.

7. If you have seen anyone being bullied on the internet through **visual messages**, you can describe what kind of visual messages (pictures/images/videos etc) that he/she received? (eg: someone sent a video of "slapping face" to that person/ someone sent her 'POOP' emoticons etc)

8. Have you cyberbullied others?

Yes

No

9. If yes, what are the **word(s) or phrase(s)/ sentence(s)** that you've used in your messages? (eg: b****, kau tu gila! etc)

10. If you have used **visual messages**, what are the types of pictures/images/videos that you send to the other person? (eg: you send him a picture of F*** finger etc)

End of questionnaire. Thank you.

Kim Hua Tan

(an Associate Professor (PhD)) who lectures in Corpus Linguistics and actively examines the intersections of Language, Power and Ideology in computer-mediated communication. She is the Editor-in-Chief of 3L Journal: Language Linguistics, Literature, The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies @ <http://ejournals.ukm.my/3l>, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Shahidatul Maslina Mat So'od

is currently pursuing her Doctor of Philosophy degree at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), specialising in Language Studies. As she has been active in the tertiary education field for over a decade, she has published a few articles in her study area, mainly focusing on Malaysian youth.

Bahiyah Abdul Hamid (PhD.)

is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Literacy and Sociocultural Transformation, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her research interests are language and gender, gender issues, identity construction, code alternation and code choice and discourse and semiotics analysis.
