

Experienced versus Instigated Cyber Incivility: Does Self-Enhancement Matter?

Ketidaksopanan Siber yang Dialami Lawan Dimulakan: Adakah Peningkatan Diri Penting?

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ABSTRACT

Cyber incivility is an emerging cyber deviance that has gained substantial attention among scholars and practitioners alike. However, cyber incivility literature mostly took the victim's perspective rather than the instigator's perspective. Overcoming the paucity of research by looking into instigated cyber incivility is essential to fully capture the knowledge. A challenge to this effort is in understanding the willingness of employees to report their cyber incivility instigation. In light of this problem, the objectives of this study are two-fold. First, it intends to identify the frequency of cyber incivility reported by Malaysian employees. Second, it intends to examine the role of self-enhancement in reporting experienced and instigated cyber incivility. One hundred five responses were obtained from a purposive sample and analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. Results indicate statistically significant differences between experienced and instigated cyber incivility. Response narratives from a follow-up study provide an additional picture of the role of self-enhancement. Discussion of the findings based on self-enhancement theory was included, along with the theoretical and managerial implications of the study.

Keywords:

Ketidaksopanan siber ;
Memulakan
ketidaksopanan siber ;
Peningkatan Diri

ABSTRACT

Ketidaksopanan siber adalah penyimpangan siber memuncul yang mendapat perhatian besar dalam kalangan para cendekiawan dan pengamal. Walau bagaimanapun, literatur ketidaksopanan siber kebanyakannya mengambil perspektif mangsa berbanding perspektif orang yang memulakan. Mengatasi kekurangan penyelidikan yang melihat kepada ketidaksopanan siber yang dimulakan adalah penting untuk mendapatkan pengetahuan sepenuhnya. Satu cabaran untuk usaha ini adalah memahami kesediaan pekerja untuk melaporkan kelakuan ketidaksopanan siber mereka. Berdasarkan masalah ini, terdapat dua objektif kajian ini. Pertama, ia bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti kekerapan ketidaksopanan siber yang dilaporkan oleh pekerja-pekerja di Malaysia. Kedua, ia bertujuan untuk mengkaji peranan peningkatan diri dalam melaporkan ketidaksopanan siber yang dialami dan dimulakan. Seratus lima respons diperoleh daripada sampel bertujuan dan dianalisis menggunakan ujian Wilcoxon Signed Rank. Keputusan menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan secara statistik antara ketidaksopanan siber yang dialami dan yang dimulakan. Naratif respons daripada kajian susulan memberi gambaran tambahan tentang peranan peningkatan diri. Perbincangan penemuan berdasarkan teori peningkatan diri disertakan bersama dengan implikasi kajian terhadap teori dan pengurusan.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's information and communication technologies (ICT) have changed the employment landscape globally. It allows employees from various locations to communicate with each other and other stakeholders such as suppliers and customers using e-mail and other communication applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Cisco WebEx are used extensively in organisations to hold virtual meetings. These video conferencing tools also embed the live chat feature that allows meeting attendees to communicate through texts while the virtual meeting occurs. Microsoft Teams, for example, allows team members to communicate and collaborate off meeting through its messaging system.

Previous studies reported that online communication could increase employees' job satisfaction and job performance (Huang & Liu, 2017) as well as enhance customer service satisfaction (Li, Chan, & Kim, 2018). On the contrary, Windeler, Chudoba, and Sundrup (2017) contended that telework, which relies on information technology to work from home or other locations outside the workplace, may lead to work exhaustion. Johnson et al. (2020) supported this result, arguing that telework might negatively influence employees' well-being. Furthermore, given that online communication involves social interaction, cyber incivility is another negative event that employees may encounter.

Cyber incivility refers to an uncivil behaviour perceived or instigated by a person using the Internet as a medium (Lim & Teo 2009). It differs from cyber bullying, which is an aggressive intentional behaviour carried out repeatedly over a period of time through online communication mediums (Smith et al., 2008; Vranjesa et al. 2017). On the contrary, cyber incivility is classified as a low intensity deviant behaviour with the ambiguous intention to harm and not necessarily repetitive (Symons et al., 2021). Nevertheless, cyber incivility also results in detrimental effects much like cyber bullying. Studies have shown that cyber incivility negatively affects employees' organisational commitment, job satisfaction, spouse stress perception, and customers' perceived service climate (Bacile, 2020; Lim & Teo, 2009; Park & Haun, 2018).

In Malaysia, cyber incivility study is still scant. An exception is found in a conceptual paper written by Abas and Awang (2017) that hypothesised the relationships between online incivility, negative moods, and problem-solving strategies among school teachers. Despite the lack of empirical investigation and statistical record showing its occurrence, it can be assumed that cyber incivility is a common daily stressor facing employees in the Malaysian workplace. It is because cyber incivility is a variant of workplace incivility that has been well-established to affect Malaysian employees' attitudes and behaviours negatively (e.g., Alias, Ojo, & Ameruddin, 2020; Arshad & Ismail, 2018; Ismail, Poon, & Arshad, 2018). This issue becomes more prevalent nowadays due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Employees must engage in online communication when performing their jobs from home and abiding by the social distancing rule. Therefore, the first objective of the present study is to test the assumption that cyber incivility is a common daily stressor facing employees in the Malaysian workplace by identifying the frequency of cyber incivility reported by Malaysian employees. This research objective allows the researchers to gain an insight into the cyber incivility occurrence among Malaysian employees.

Similar to workplace incivility, cyber incivility can be perceived, instigated, and observed. Addressing perceived and instigated cyber incivility is more relevant because online communication is typically reserved between a sender and a receiver. The common approach in scholarly works is to examine cyber incivility by its specific type. For example, Lim and Teo (2009) investigated the perceived cyber incivility, whereas Febriana and Fajrianti (2019) examined the instigated cyber incivility. To date, no studies have examined the two cyber incivility types together, either by obtaining responses from the same or different respondents. Despite the criticism of using self-report in organisational behaviour research (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002), scholars have used this conventional approach to measure incivility. It is because incivility is defined from the perception of a victim or an instigator (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). However, the extent to which respondents will tell the true state of affairs is questionable. As cyber incivility is a negative work behaviour, using self-report may be clouded by social desirability bias. Thus, the second objective of this study is to examine the role of self-enhancement in reporting experienced versus instigated cyber incivility among Malaysian employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a literature review on the study variables. First, an explanation of the nature and types of cyber incivility is presented. Second, the relevance of self-report and bias concerning cyber incivility is discussed. Last, a discussion on self-enhancement in cyber incivility is presented.

Nature and Types of Cyber Incivility

Lim and Teo's (2009) seminal work on cyber incivility has sparked a growing interest in understanding this negative work behaviour. The authors defined cyber incivility as a "communicative behaviour exhibited in computer-mediated interactions that violate workplace norms of mutual respect" (p. 419). Although the behaviour was coined as cyber incivility, their work mainly refers to e-mail incivility. Giumetti et al. (2012) also refer to this negative behaviour as cyber incivility, but it was defined as rude or discourteous behaviour occurring through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as e-mail or text messages. Online incivility is another related term that scholars used to refer to cyber incivility. Bacile (2020), for example, defined online incivility as "rude or offensive comments made from one individual to another via communications on the Internet" (p. 1758). In the present study, cyber incivility is defined as rude or discourteous communicative behaviour by one employee to another exhibited in the e-mail or other computer-mediated interaction forms that violate workplace norms of mutual respect. Hence, this definition implies that uncivil behaviour can occur in cyberspace through various forms of online communication.

Cyber incivility is a common daily stressor experienced by employees across industries, organisations and professions (McCarthy, 2016). Examples of cyber incivility include saying something hurtful to someone through e-mail, using capital letters to "shout" to someone, not replying to someone's e-mail, sending an e-mail using a rude and discourteous tone, and ignoring a request made through e-mail (McCarthy et al., 2019). Past studies found that personality traits (Krishnan, 2016), dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity (Febriana & Fajrianti, 2019), and social grooming (Kim, 2020) are examples of antecedents contributing to cyber incivility. More studies were found for cyber incivility consequences, which include, but are not limited to, poor employee performance, insufficient organisational commitment, reduced employee satisfaction, high employee turnover, the tendency to engage in deviant behaviour, and experiencing affective and physical distress (Giumetti et al. 2016; Lim & Teo 2009; Park & Haun, 2018).

Existing cyber incivility literature has not specified its types expressively. Borrowing from the workplace incivility literature (e.g., Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016), this phenomenon can be divided into three types based on how it can be investigated. The first type is experienced cyber incivility. This type emphasises the perception of a target or a victim. For example, a sender may not intend to be discourteous in writing an e-mail to the receiver by forgetting to include a proper salutation. The receiver, however, may interpret such a message as being discourteous and, hence, perceive it as the sender's uncivil behaviour. In this situation, cyber incivility is said to have been experienced by the receiver. This type has dominated the cyber incivility literature (e.g., Bacile, 2020; Lim & Teo, 2009; Park & Haun, 2018). The second type is instigated cyber incivility. Researching this cyber incivility type is often difficult because it taps into the intention of the cyber incivility instigator. Existing studies that examine the perpetration incidences also obtained the data from the targets, not the instigators themselves (e.g., Giumetti et al., 2012; Lim & Chin, 2006). Thus, it is not surprising that quite a few studies addressed cyber incivility based on this perspective to date. Similarly, the literature review also shows that there are no studies done on the third type yet, which is observed cyber incivility.

Self-Report and Bias

The literature review indicates that survey questionnaires and experiments are the two approaches used to obtain respondents' cyber incivility incidence data. Of the two approaches, scholars have used the survey questionnaire more than the experiment. Among the cyber incivility measures used by scholars include the Cyber Incivility Scale (Lim & Teo, 2009), the

modified Workplace Incivility Scale (Giumetti et al., 2012), and the E-mail Incivility Scale (McCarthy et al., 2019). All these measures are self-reported measures, whereby respondents were asked to read and rate the items accordingly. For example, Krishnan (2016) had adapted Lim and Teo's Cyber Incivility Scale when obtaining data on instigated cyber incivility. In his study, the respondents were asked to report the frequency of engaging in cyber incivility behaviour. To minimise the self-report bias, the author conducted a two-phased online survey in which personality variables were collected a week before collecting the cyber incivility instigation data. This data collection approach helps in minimizing the common method variance, which is caused by collecting data from the same source (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

Krishnan's (2016) approach signifies two important issues. The first issue is about the multi-phase survey. Although collecting data using a multi-phase survey aligns with Podsakoff and Organ's (1986) recommendation in reducing the presence of common method variance, this approach cannot be applied across situations. A challenge in collecting data in multiple phases is that the respondents must be identifiable. The same respondents need to answer the survey at two different time intervals for different study variables. In many circumstances, getting the probability sampling is not easy. For example, Alias, Ojo, and Ameruddin (2020) as well as Ismail, Poon, and Arshad (2018) used a cross-sectional survey in their workplace incivility studies involving a purposive sample of Malaysian respondents. Despite the lack of justification for choosing the purposive samples, it can be deduced that obtaining continuous cooperation from the respondents may be challenging and time-consuming. In addition, there is a possibility of a high attrition rate or respondent withdrawal from the study.

The second issue relates to obtaining cyber incivility data using a self-report survey questionnaire. Existing studies primarily rely on self-report data, but Podsakoff and Organ (1986) argued over the validity of this self-report data. The authors mentioned that, among others, self-report is susceptible to social desirability bias. When answering a survey questionnaire, especially on negative behaviour, the respondents are more likely to present themselves positively. As such, they may not be telling the actual state of affairs. This view is widely supported by other scholars (Chan, 2009). On the contrary, Fox et al. (2007) demonstrated that both job incumbents and co-workers' reports converge to a certain extent. Based on the results, the authors suggested that a co-worker may rely on limited information about a job incumbent's behaviour. They are best at judging job incumbents' publicly displaying interpersonal behaviours but not their private interpersonal behaviours. The finding supports Spector's (1994) earlier argument that using a self-report survey questionnaire is appropriate for tapping into a respondent's feelings and perceptions.

Self-Enhancement in Self-Reported Cyber Incivility

Previous cyber incivility study focuses mainly on investigating experienced cyber incivility among the respondents. Thus, more research is needed to understand how and why the instigators perpetrate cyber incivility to draw a complete picture of this phenomenon. A researcher will likely use a self-report survey questionnaire following past researchers' footsteps in obtaining the data. This contention is supported by the review of existing literature, which demonstrates that the self-report survey questionnaire is the preferred data collection method (e.g., Krishnan, 2016; Lim & Teo, 2009; Park & Haun, 2017). Relying on the self-report survey questionnaire to obtain the perceived cyber incivility incidences may not be as problematic as obtaining the instigated cyber incivility instigation incidences. In the latter situation, there is a tendency for respondents to respond in a socially desired way.

According to Paulhus and Vazire (2007), social desirability bias relates to a person's self-presentation. All individuals are motivated to maintain a positive self-concept (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988), which is reflected in the desire to think of themselves favourably and to want others to see them positively. It also means that they will avoid unfavourable information, action, and situation that have aversive consequences on their positive self-concept. This situation explains people's tendency to engage in social desirability bias. Drawing from this argument, respondents may not provide the actual frequency of cyber incivility instigation incidences to avoid being shunned. As a result, the actual count of instigated cyber incivility incidences will be under-reported.

The social desirability measures such as the Marlowe-Crowne scale and the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding are widely used to tap into the social desirability bias in organisational behaviour research (Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992). Nevertheless, investigating the effect of a specific component in the social desirability bias beyond the common approach will add value to the existing body of knowledge. Thus, the present study focuses on self-enhancement, which is defined as the degree to which people actively strive to enhance feelings of personal worth (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988).

According to the self-enhancement theory, people have the desire to think favourably of themselves (Shrauger, 1975). This theoretical assumption logically explains why employees who experience others' cyber incivility would report it more than employees who instigate it. It is because the employees want to be seen as "good persons", not as "villains". Although cyber incivility is a low intensity counterproductive work behaviour, admitting to instigating this behaviour would tarnish their image and reputation. This theoretical assumption could also explain the reason why respondents would respond in a socially desirable way. They are less likely to admit to the survey items that tap into their engagement in a negative work behaviour such as cyber incivility. Various studies have examined the self-enhancement concept (e.g., Chen et al., 2013; Paulhus & Holden, 2010), but there are no studies that have been done to test the role of self-enhancement in relation to cyber incivility.

Therefore, the current study includes self-enhancement for three reasons. Firstly, self-enhancement has been recognised as one of the four core motives of people (Fiske, 2014). It means that self-enhancement is people's inherent motive omnipresent in a social situation. Cyber incivility is a socially contextualised phenomenon; hence, investigating the effect of self-enhancement on cyber incivility instigation is relevant. Secondly, the ambiguity in intention to act uncivilly has made it difficult for people to identify others' uncivil behaviours correctly. As such, a self-report survey questionnaire has been used when examining perceived and instigated incivility to allow respondents to indicate the frequency of incivility incidences. Paulhus and Holden (2010), however, argued that self-report might be contaminated by people's tendency to self-enhance. Thus, it is important to examine the role of self-enhancement in self-reported cyber incivility experience and instigation. Thirdly, Chen et al. (2013) investigated workplace incivility using a self-enhancement model. They contextualised self-enhancement as a narcissistic trait based on the positive self-view. Their study found support for the role of narcissism on work engagement and task performance following reported workplace incivility. The results provide interesting insights into the self-enhancement role but within the context of perceived workplace incivility instead of instigated workplace incivility. Furthermore, self-enhancement was measured through narcissism as a personality trait reflecting the concept in their study. It is also interesting to note that Lavrakas (2008) argued that the Internet survey might decrease the prevalence of social desirability bias. The respondents are less likely to feel that their self-concept is threatened in the absence of

researchers, which may result in more accurate reporting. Hence, the present study intends to extend Chen's et al. study and test Lavrakas' contention by examining the role of self-enhancement in reporting experienced versus instigated cyber incivility.

METHOD

An online cross-sectional survey questionnaire was distributed through the authors' networks and on the second author's Facebook. Two criteria were specified in advance to make sure that responses were relevant to the study's objective. The two criteria are that the respondent must be an employee and must be currently working in Malaysia. In addition, a filter question on the employment status was added in the demographic section to ensure that only employees were chosen in the final sample for the data analysis. Of 151 responses obtained for this survey, only 105 cases were included in the final sample based on the two criteria specified previously.

The majority of the respondents were male ($n = 78, 74\%$), Malay ($n = 91, 87\%$), married ($n = 63, 60\%$), attained a bachelor degree ($n = 43, 41\%$), and were full-time employees ($n = 87, 83\%$). The respondents who were between 22 and 62 worked in either the public sector ($n = 48, 46\%$), private sector ($n = 47, 45\%$), or non-profit organizations ($n = 10, 9\%$). Most of them had worked for ten years or more in their respective organisations ($M = 4.13, S.D. = 1.19$). The respondents also reported that they were living with several dependents. Only 24 (23%) respondents reported that they were staying alone. Interestingly almost all respondents had the experienced of working from home (WFH) except for one person. The respondents were also asked if they still worked from home when they responded to the survey. Seventy-three (70%) were still working from home, and only 32 respondents (30%) reported that they had gone back to work in the office. Regarding how satisfied they were when they worked from home, only 13 respondents reported feeling dissatisfied (12%), and 50 respondents reported feeling satisfied (48%). The remaining number of respondents was neutral in their response ($n = 42, 40\%$).

The survey questionnaire comprised five sections: demographic information, experienced cyber incivility, online communication style, perceived stress, and instigated cyber incivility. Although this study is intended to examine the relationship between experienced and instigated cyber incivility, online communication style and perceived stress were included to reduce the social desirability bias. Furthermore, experienced and instigated cyber incivility were placed far apart so that respondents could not recall their responses easily to the experienced cyber incivility when responding to the instigated cyber incivility questions. In addition, a list of uncivil cyber behaviour examples was included in the first section, together with other demographic variables. The purpose is to identify the frequency of the cyber incivility instigation among the respondents. These examples, which were taken from the cyber incivility literature, had more specific details than the adopted instigated cyber incivility measure. As for the perceived stress and online communication style, these variables were not the study variables. Therefore, we decided not to report them in this paper.

Following Krishnan (2016), instigated cyber incivility was measured using the shortened scale of Lim and Teo's (2009) cyber incivility measure. Krishnan identified six items that were intended to identify the frequency of which the respondents had engaged in cyber incivility behaviour based on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). However, Bouranta, Chitiris, and Paravantis (2009) argued that using the five-rating scale will increase the response rate and it will be less confusing to the respondents. Thus, in this study a five-point Likert type scale was used ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In order to compare the reported experienced

cyber incivility to the instigated cyber incivility, the same shortened cyber incivility scale was used to measure the experienced cyber incivility. However, the items were reworded so that they reflected the respondent's experience with cyber incivility. Specifically, the six items of experienced cyber incivility were intended to measure the frequency of which the respondents had experienced such behaviours from others as perceived by them. The Cronbach's alpha values for the shortened cyber incivility scale in the current study were 0.69 and 0.74 for experienced and instigated cyber incivility, respectively.

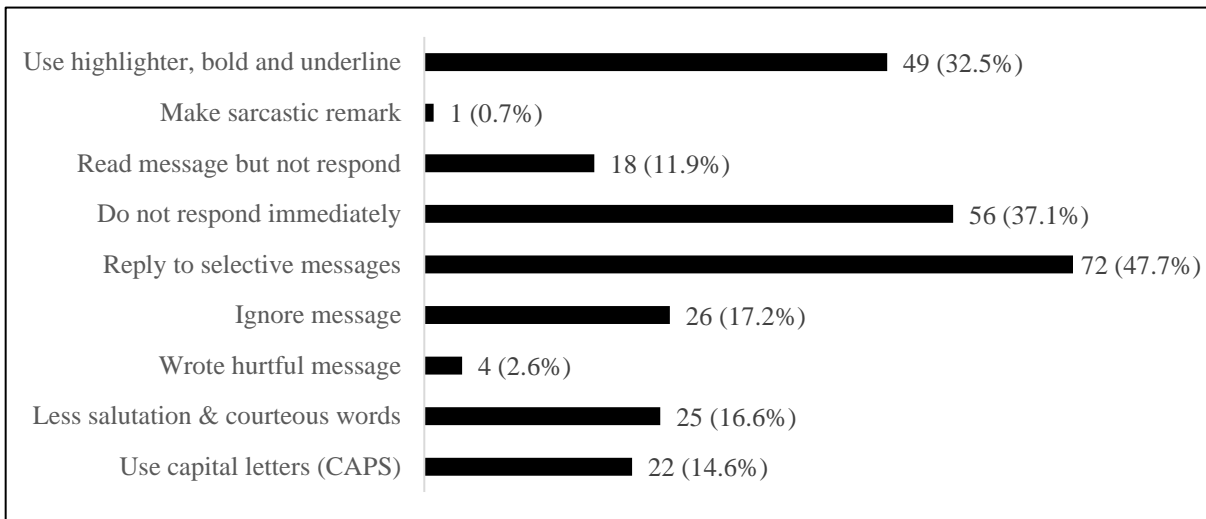
In order to understand the role of self-enhancement in this study, respondents were asked if they were willing to provide further explanation about cyber incivility instigation. They were assured that only the second author would have full access to the responses. Those who were willing to participate in this follow-up study gave their e-mails to be contacted. Only nine out of 105 respondents consented to provide a narrative explanation on their cyber incivility instigation. Three open-ended questions were included in a Google Form following a brief explanation of the definition and examples of the instigation of cyber incivility. The first question asked the respondents to tick a list of cyber incivility behaviours that they had done. The second question asked whether they would report their cyber incivility instigation if asked to do so in a survey questionnaire. Based on the respondents' answers to the second question, the last question asked them to narrate their uncivil behaviour instigation.

RESULTS

Based on the study objectives, two main results are reported in this paper. First of all, the frequency of the cyber uncivil behaviour instigation is presented in Figure 1. It is expected that employees also engage in uncivil cyber behaviours because incivility is a common daily stressor often ignored by employees (McCarthy, 2016). Measuring the frequency is also important to verify whether or not there is a significant difference between respondents' self-rated experienced cyber incivility and their self-rated instigated cyber incivility.

Figure 1 shows the frequency and percentage of uncivil cyber behaviour instigation based on a list of examples taken from the cyber incivility literature. As mentioned earlier, this list of items has more details than the scale adopted from Krishnan (2016). The respondents were asked to tick actions reflecting cyber incivility instigation that they had engaged in when using computer-mediated communication while working from home. The item with the highest number of reported cyber incivility instigation is *I do not respond to all messages but be selective* ($n = 72, 47.7\%$), followed by *I do not respond to messages immediately* ($n = 56, 37.1\%$), and *I use the highlighter, bold letters, and/or underline to indicate importance of the message* ($n = 49, 32.5\%$). In contrast, the three items with the lowest scores are *I use online medium to make sarcastic remarks to someone* ($n = 1, 0.7\%$), *sometimes I wrote hurtful message* ($n = 4, 2.6\%$), and *I read the message but I rarely respond to it* ($n = 18, 11.9\%$).

Figure 1: Frequency and Percentage of Uncivil Cyber Behaviour Instigation (n =105)



Source: Authors own construction

Overall, there is evidence indicating cyber incivility instigation by the respondents based on the nine examples presented to them in the survey questionnaire. These findings are consistent with the validated scales adopted from previous studies that were used to measure experienced and instigated cyber incivility.

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of experienced and instigated cyber incivility. Regarding experienced cyber incivility, the number of reported incidences is higher for never and rarely categories than often and always categories. The respondents reported that they had not received computer-mediated communication messages with capital letters to indicate shouting at them (76.2%), received demeaning or derogatory remarks through computer-mediated communication messages (72.4%), and received computer-mediated communication messages using a rude and discourteous tone (67.6%). Within this form of cyber incivility, seven respondents (6.7%) rated that they always received replies from other people's computer-mediated communication messages without fully answering their queries. Another nine respondents (8.6%) reported that they often experienced this form of cyber incivility. Another two forms of experienced cyber incivility that received often and always rating are *was ignored a request made through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication* with a combined percentage of 5.8% and *received e-mails or message in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude and discourteous tone* with a combined percentage of 2.9%.

Similar patterns can be observed for instigated cyber incivility. In other words, the majority of respondents reported either never or rarely engaged in cyber incivility. Specifically, 95 respondents (90.5%) reported that they had never used capital letters to shout through computer-mediated communication, and 90 respondents (85.7%) reported that they had never made demeaning or derogatory remarks through computer-mediated communication. In addition, the same number of respondents reported that they had never sent e-mails or messages in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude or discourteous tone. Unlike experienced cyber incivility, the respondents reported engaging in four forms of cyber incivility. The highest number of instigation could be observed in terms of *replying to other people's e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication without fully answering their queries* with a combined percentage of 10.5%, followed by *sending e-mails or messages in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude and discourteous tone* with

a combined percentage of 2.9%. Another two forms of cyber incivility instigation that respondents often engaged in are *ignoring a request that other people made through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication* (2.9%) and *saying something hurtful through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication* (1.9%).

Although similar response patterns could be seen between experienced and instigated cyber incivility, a closer examination of data in Table 1 shows that respondents tend to deny cyber incivility instigation more than experienced cyber incivility. Additionally, a cross-check between data in Table 1 and Figure 1 questions the validity of the reported frequency of cyber incivility instigation. For example, 72 respondents reported replying to selective messages in Figure 1, but only 11 respondents reported not fully replying to other people's queries, as shown in Table 1.

To verify this suspicion, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was conducted on all cyber incivility items. This data analysis technique was chosen because the data in the present study were not normally distributed; hence, using the paired sample *t*-test was not suitable. Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, median, and Wilcoxon Signed Rank test results for the six items of the two study variables. Items for experienced cyber incivility have higher mean and standard deviation values than instigated cyber incivility. The results also show that all items were significantly different at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$. The item with the largest response difference is *ignoring a request that other people made through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication* ($Z = -4.261, p < 0.001$), followed by *replying to other people's e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication without fully answering their queries* ($Z = -3.541, p < 0.001$). The item with the lowest response difference is *sending e-mails or messages in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude and discourteous tone* ($Z = -2.517, p < 0.05$).

The test statistics above indicate that self-enhancement could be the reason for the presence of significant differences. Although having a large number of respondents to participate in this follow-up study was desired, forcing them towards compulsory participation is unethical. Therefore, a further explanation was sought from the respondents who were willing to provide narrative data about their behaviours. Table 3 shows the excerpts of narrative responses from nine respondents together with their brief profiles.

As shown in Table 3, four male and five female respondents participated in the follow-up study. The age range is between 26 and 51 years old. Six of them were full-time employees, and the remaining respondents were part-time employees. Only four of the respondents worked in public sector organisations, and another five worked in private sector organisations.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Shortened Experienced and Instigated Cyber Incivility Measures

Items	Frequency (%)				
	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Always)
<i>Experienced cyber incivility</i>					
Told something hurtful through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	47 (44.8)	39 (37.1)	19 (18.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Received demeaning or derogatory remarks through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	76 (72.4)	20 (19.0)	9 (8.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Received e-mails or messages in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude and discourteous tone.	71 (67.6)	20 (19.0)	11 (10.5)	1 (1.0)	2 (1.9)
Received CAPS (i.e., capital letters) to shout through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	80 (76.2)	20 (19.0)	5 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Was ignored a request that other people made through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	30 (28.6)	39 (37.1)	30 (28.6)	3 (2.9)	3 (2.9)
Received replies from other people's e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication without fully answering their queries.	26 (24.8)	36 (34.3)	27 (25.7)	9 (8.6)	7 (6.7)
<i>Instigated cyber incivility</i>					
Said something hurtful through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	67 (63.8)	28 (26.7)	8 (7.6)	2 (1.9)	0 (0.0)
Made demeaning or derogatory remarks through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	90 (85.7)	12 (11.4)	3 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Sent e-mails or messages in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude and discourteous tone.	90 (85.7)	6 (5.7)	6 (5.7)	2 (1.9)	1 (1.0)
Used CAPS (i.e., capital letters) to shout through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	95 (90.5)	7 (6.7)	3 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Ignored a request that other people made through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	57 (54.3)	30 (28.6)	15 (14.3)	3 (2.9)	0 (0.0)
Replied to other people's e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication without fully answering their queries.	48 (45.7)	31 (29.5)	15 (14.3)	6 (5.7)	5 (4.8)

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Median, and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Statistics

Items*	Experienced cyber incivility			Instigated cyber incivility			Z-score	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Md	Mean	S.D.	Md		
Said something hurtful through email or other forms of computer-mediated communication	1.73	0.75	2.00	1.48	0.72	1.00	-3.217	0.001
Made demeaning or derogatory remarks through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	1.36	0.64	1.00	1.17	0.49	1.00	-3.102	0.002
Sent e-mails or messages in other forms of computer-mediated communication using a rude and discourteous tone.	1.50	0.87	1.00	1.27	0.74	1.00	-2.517	0.012
Used CAPS (i.e., capital letters) to shout through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	1.29	0.55	1.00	1.12	0.41	1.00	-2.736	0.006
Ignored a request that other people made through e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication.	2.14	0.97	2.00	1.66	0.83	1.00	-4.261	0.000
Replied to other people's e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication without fully answering their queries.	2.38	1.15	2.00	1.94	1.13	2.00	-3.541	0.000

Note. *S. D.* = standard deviation. *Md* = median.

*Items were worded based on their original form.

Table 3: Brief Profile of Respondents and Excerpts of Narrative Responses

Respondent	Gender	Age	Employment status	Sector	Response (excerpt)
R1	Female	45	Full-time employee	Public	<i>I don't tell people about my wrongdoings. Why should I do that when I know people will criticise me even when it is not a big sin?</i>
R2	Female	51	Full-time employee	Private	<i>It is common for everyone, especially in our country, to do that. So what is wrong when using capital letters and special functions such as bold and underline? Sometimes we need to emphasise our points, and that is the best way to do it.</i>
R3	Male	29	Part-time employee	Private	<i>Everyone does it in my organisation, but none of us spoke about it. I also do it because I thought it is not a wrongdoing, but I had never disclosed it to anyone so far. I don't want my colleagues to sneer at me and look down on me.</i>
R4	Male	36	Full-time employee	Private	<i>I did some of these so-called uncivil behaviours. It is not a sin, but I will not tell people about it. I don't want people to form a negative perception of me.</i>
R5	Female	32	Full-time employee	Public	<i>Even if I do it, I will never disclose it. I can always say to my recipient that he/she might have wrongly interpreted my intention. No one knows my true intention. Even if they know, they could not be bothered. So, I don't want people to look at me negatively for just a small matter.</i>
R6	Female	49	Full-time employee	Public	<i>It is not wrong to admit uncivil behaviours. We are human beings and to err is part of us. Furthermore, responding to a survey questionnaire honestly is important to make sure the results are reported correctly.</i>
R7	Male	38	Full-time employee	Public	<i>I will never admit it. I don't trust people at all. They may share my information with someone else. If that happens, then my reputation will be tarnished.</i>
R8	Female	26	Part-time employee	Private	<i>There is an anti-bullying policy in my workplace. We are not allowed to be rude to our colleagues and clients. But I think if it is about not responding immediately to a request via e-mail, it is not wrong. We have many workloads, and we can't always be on time. It is just that I will not say "yes" if I were asked to respond to a survey questionnaire. It will give a bad impression of me.</i>
R9	Male	30	Part-time employee	Private	<i>We don't play nice at all times. Looking through the list, well, I think everyone does it. But, just like everyone else, I don't talk about it, and I will never admit it. I want people to see me as a nice person.</i>

None of the respondents mentioned the keywords *self-enhancement*, *self-enhancing*, or *self-enhance*. However, based on the excerpts, it could be inferred that their behaviours were influenced by the desire to maintain a positive self-concept. Specifically, the phrases used such as *I don't want my colleagues to sneer at me and look down on me* (R3), *I don't want people to form a negative perception about me* (R4), *I don't want people to look at me negatively for just a small matter* (R5), and *if that happens, then my reputation will be tarnished* (R7) reflect the self-enhancement basic premise. Similarly, responses from R1 (*why should I do that when I know people will criticise me even when it is not a big sin?*), R8 (*It will give a bad impression about me*), and R9 (*I want people to see me as a nice person*) indicate the respondents' desire to maintain positive self-concept despite engaging in cyber incivility. On the other hand, only two respondents' (R2 and R6) answers suggest that self-enhancement might not influence their behaviours.

DISCUSSION

The objectives of the present study are two-fold. The first objective is to identify the frequency of the cyber incivility reported by Malaysian employees. Results show that respondents in this study reported experiencing cyber incivility to some extent. Specifically, the frequency reported by the respondents is not alarming to indicate the severity of cyber incivility. The types of cyber incivility that they experienced are subtle forms, such as their messages were not fully addressed and ignored. Only a few respondents reported that they received messages with a rude or discourteous tone. Similarly, the respondents reported a lesser number of cyber incivility instigations. The forms of cyber incivility instigation are similar to the experienced cyber incivility, with an additional report that a small number of respondents sent out hurtful messages to recipients using e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication. Overall, the results obtained in this study supported McCarthy's (2016) contention that cyber incivility is a common daily stressor experienced by employees across industries and organisations. The results also supported Schilpzand, De Pater, and Erez's (2016) incivility types. This study shows that experienced and instigated incivility exists among Malaysian employees, albeit the nature of this phenomenon (i.e., cyber incivility instead of workplace incivility).

An interesting finding in the present study relates to the second study objective; to examine the role of self-enhancement in reporting experienced and instigated cyber incivility. Although more respondents admitted that they had engaged in uncivil cyber behaviour using the listing approach, a smaller number of respondents admitted that they had not done it using the shortened cyber incivility measure. This finding raised a suspicion that the respondents might have answered to the cyber incivility measure in a socially desired way. The test statistics comparing the reported experienced cyber incivility with the reported instigated cyber incivility highlights the significant difference in reporting the incidences. A follow-up study using a narrative approach further supports the role of self-enhancement. In general, it can be summarised that the respondents in the present study had a desire to maintain a positive self-concept. They avoided reporting negative behaviour due to the contemplated aversive consequences that could smear their positive image. Disclosing their cyber incivility instigation would be shunned and condemned by the proximal (e.g., colleagues and supervisors) and distal society (i.e., public at large). Such criticisms would undermine the respondents' positive self-concept. In other words, they would not be able to ma

intain a positive self-image and reputation, especially in other people's eyes. According to the self-enhancement theory, this situation will lead the respondents to avoid engaging in any behaviour such as admitting their cyber incivility instigation, which could harm their positive self-concept. Therefore, they would respond to the survey questionnaire without disclosing the true state of affairs. This action may create social desirability bias in cyber incivility instigation using a self-report survey questionnaire. This contention is in line with the arguments put forth by Paulhus and Vazire (2007) and Paulhus and Holden (2010).

Despite Lavrakas' (2008) argument that the Internet survey may decrease the prevalence of social desirability bias, the present study reveals a contrasting finding. The study was conducted using the Internet survey. Apart from ensuring anonymity of the respondents and confidentiality of the data obtained and using purposive sampling, no personal identifiers were included in the survey questionnaire. Respondents' names, telephone numbers, and personal identification numbers were not sought in the present study. The submission of the survey responses was automatically recorded in the Google database. The only personal identifier included in the survey questionnaire was the e-mail address, but the respondents provided this information only if they wanted to participate in the follow-up study. Although such actions were taken, results showed that social desirability bias is still an issue when using an Internet survey.

Implications

The present study has theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. The first theoretical implication is that self-enhancement is an important factor influencing cyber incivility instigation reporting validity. As discussed earlier, respondents tend to protect and maintain their positive self-concept through self-enhancement. Subsequently, it leads to social desirability bias that could threaten the validity of the survey results. Therefore, self-enhancement must be included in a theoretical model as a variable of interest or control if it has no theoretical relevance in a study's model. The second theoretical implication relates to the prevalence of self-enhancement in an Internet survey. Despite the typical assumption that an Internet survey has higher privacy than a conventional paper-and-pencil survey, respondents may still be reluctant to report the actual incidences of cyber incivility instigation. If they under-report the incidences, then social desirability bias is assumed to have occurred. Hence, it is important to include the self-enhancement variable in the cyber incivility instigation model even when using the Internet survey to reduce the validity threat.

In terms of methodological implication, we suspected that the items in the existing measure are culturally relevant. Although the present study adapts a reliable and valid cyber incivility measure, the number of reported incidences is low. Such low reporting could be explained by examining the nature of the items listed in the measure. While items with subtle incivility intensity might be seen as commonly accepted behaviours among the respondents in the present study, the same items might be considered uncivil behaviours in other parts of the world. Therefore, the existing measure must be validated within the Malaysian working culture before it could be used to test the hypothesised relationships. The second methodological implication that could be drawn from this study relates to using a self-report survey as a data collection technique. Results of the present study indicate that a self-report survey may be relevant in obtaining data on cyber incivility instigation, but it also suffers from social desirability bias due to self-enhancement. As such, relying on a self-report survey should be used with caution. The problem can be minimised if researchers consider using vignettes or a diary approach when collecting cyber incivility instigation data.

Concerning practical implications, firstly, the results of our study indicate that cyber incivility instigation is not severe among Malaysian employees. Its subtlety, however, should not be taken lightly by employers and employees. Past studies have shown that cyber incivility instigation has negative consequences to both employees and organisations in the long run. Therefore, employers in Malaysia should be aware of this phenomenon, especially during the COVID-19 era and teach proper communicative behaviours to their employees. Among efforts that could be made include explaining what cyber incivility is and what its consequences are, putting up a policy against cyber incivility instigation, and sending electronic reminders to employees who work from home. The latter action can be done until employees internalise the importance of demonstrating cyber civility in their online interactions. Employers could also provide an online discussion forum for their employees to discuss uncivil cyber behaviours and related actions taken if they encounter them on the job. Secondly, the present study results suggest that employees experience and instigate cyber incivility across gender, age, employment status, work sectors, and tenure. Therefore, employers must emphasise the importance of ethical conduct and professionalism among employees. By reminding the employees of these expected conducts, cyber incivility instigation could be minimised.

Limitation and Future Suggestions

The present study has its limitations. Firstly, the study has not examined the causality of self-enhancement on cyber incivility instigation reporting. Therefore, it could not be confirmed that self-enhancement causes respondents to report the cyber incivility instigation in a socially desired way. However, the present study provides an insight into the general role of self-enhancement in prompting employees to under-report the incidences of cyber incivility instigation. Thus, future researchers should consider examining the causality of self-enhancement in influencing employee cyber incivility instigation using a longitudinal design and probability samples.

Secondly, the present study is intended to identify the frequency of cyber incivility among Malaysian employees and the role of self-enhancement in reporting experienced and instigated cyber incivility. Although the study objectives were fulfilled, the study did not distinguish the perpetrators and targets of cyber incivility. Therefore, we suggest that future researchers should take this action. Furthermore, examining how self-enhancement affects different perpetrators and targets of cyber incivility could provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, it is beyond our study objectives to examine the effect of self-enhancement on a comprehensive cyber incivility model. At this juncture, we suspect that self-enhancement could be an independent variable, a moderating variable, or a control variable. Future researchers are encouraged to examine the role of self-enhancement on the relationship between cyber incivility (i.e., experienced and instigated cyber incivility) and its outcome variables. Through such studies and appropriate underpinning theories, the role of self-enhancement could be explicitly determined.

Lastly, the present study draws its conclusion from a relatively small sample size. Although the data obtained from a sample of 105 respondents catered to the study objectives, its results must not be interpreted as representative of the whole Malaysian employee population. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to replicate and extend our study to include employees from diverse occupational levels, industries, and states in Malaysia to provide a more accurate picture of cyber incivility experiences and instigations.

CONCLUSION

Cyber incivility is a common daily stressor experienced and instigated by employees throughout the world. Its occurrence has caught the attention among scholars and practitioners because of various negative consequences that it brings to individual employees, organisations, and other stakeholders. It is even more important to address this problem nowadays because more employees work from home and rely on communication technologies due to the COVID19 pandemic. Researchers have made various efforts to quantify the severity of incidences, but the willingness of respondents to disclose the actual state of affairs may be low. In the present study, it is found that self-enhancement matters when reporting experienced and instigated cyber incivility. Therefore, the researchers must take appropriate theoretical and methodological actions to ensure that self-enhancement will not distort the validity of their study outcomes.

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