

ANALYZING CYBERBULLYING ON TIKTOK: IMPACTS ON ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

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Abstrak

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The development of social media, particularly TikTok, has changed adolescent interaction patterns while increasing the risk of cyberbullying, which impacts their mental health and social lives. Although several studies have examined the psychological impact of cyberbullying, there is still a gap in understanding its integrative relationship to adolescent social interactions, especially in the context of TikTok use in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the forms and dynamics of cyberbullying on TikTok, its impact on mental health, its influence on adolescent social interactions, and its efforts. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with library research, through data collection and analysis from various scientific literature such as journals, books, and relevant research reports. The results show that cyberbullying on TikTok appears in various forms such as flaming, harassment, and denigration, which tend to be normalized in adolescent digital communication. The impact is multidimensional, including stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as decreased self-confidence, withdrawal, and social isolation that affect the quality of interpersonal relationships. In addition, it was found that individual factors (empathy and self-control), family, and peer influence contribute to the occurrence of cyberbullying. These findings confirm that cyberbullying is a complex psychosocial problem and requires a comprehensive approach to handling it through collaboration between families, schools, communities, and digital platforms.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology today is progressing very rapidly and has transformed the way young people interact, communicate, and express themselves. This development has had positive impacts, one of which is enhancing social interaction through the use of social networking platforms, commonly referred to as social media. One of the most prominent social media platforms among Generation Z is TikTok, a short-form video-based application that allows users to share various types of content, ranging from entertainment and education to viral trends (Setia & Pamungkas, 2026). Based on data from Business of Apps, in the first quarter of 2022, the number of TikTok's global monthly active users reached 1.39 billion (Aulia et al., 2022). This figure demonstrates TikTok's dominant position as one of the leading and most influential social media platforms worldwide. Socialinsider.io reports that users aged 18–24 in Indonesia account for 41.26% of total TikTok users, while those under 18 make up 30.8% (Yunita & Ayu, n.d.). These data indicate that the majority of TikTok users are adolescents and young people.

However, the use of TikTok, especially among adolescents, carries significant risks. Teenagers often perceive the digital space as equivalent to real life. They may use social media, particularly TikTok, to demean or insult their peers. This reflects the negative side of behavior commonly referred to as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is an aggressive act intentionally carried out by an individual or group using electronic media repeatedly over time against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves (Syadza & Sugiasih, 2017). It is considered a new form of bullying enabled by technology, where violence still occurs but through electronic devices. This behavior typically appears in the form of negative comments, insults, harsh language, or verbal harassment conducted online.

Social media and adolescents have a very close and almost inseparable relationship, especially as many social and learning activities have shifted into digital spaces, increasing the intensity of social media use among teenagers (Baranandita et al., 2022). At this stage, adolescents are still in the process of forming their identity, making them more sensitive to social judgment, peer acceptance, and recognition from their environment. These conditions make adolescents a vulnerable group to various forms of cyberbullying on social media. This vulnerability arises because they have not yet developed stable emotional maturity and their self-regulation abilities are still evolving. In addition, adolescent psychological development can also be seen in their ability to interact with their social environment or peer groups, making social acceptance an important aspect of their lives.

Given these conditions, adolescents are more susceptible to experiencing negative impacts when subjected to unpleasant treatment on social media. This is in line with findings that cyberbullying on social media influences adolescents' emotional development by 31.36%, while the remaining 68.64% is affected by other factors. The psychological impacts caused by cyberbullying do not stop at emotional disturbances but also extend to impairing an individual's ability to engage in social interactions. According to Romadhoni et al., (2023), victims of bullying tend to have low self-confidence and feel isolated from their surroundings, which leads them to withdraw from social interactions with family, society, and their environment. This condition not only affects individual well-being but can also have broader implications for social systems, education, and overall mental health.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on cyberbullying on the TikTok platform has been widely conducted, particularly focusing on identifying its forms, patterns, and impacts on adolescent mental health, such as anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. However, most of these studies remain limited to content or comment analysis without deeply examining how cyberbullying experiences affect aspects of adolescents' social interactions, such as peer relationships, social communication, and engagement within their social environment. A study conducted at Indiana University Bloomington, USA, by Gordon Amido (2025), entitled *The Impact of Gamified Cyberbullying Trends on Adolescent Mental Health on TikTok in the U.S.*, highlights limitations in understanding cyberbullying from different cultural perspectives, including Indonesia, which has unique social characteristics and patterns of digital media use. Therefore, a research gap still exists in integratively examining the influence of cyberbullying on TikTok on adolescent mental health and its implications for social interaction in a broader and more contextual framework. Thus, this study is important to provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship between cyberbullying, mental health, and adolescent social interaction.

Another study titled *Analysis of TikTok Social Media's Impact on Bullying Behavior among Students of SDN 13 Pekanbaru* conducted by Saski & Nukman, (2025) shows that social media use, particularly TikTok, influences bullying behavior and contributes to decreased self-confidence, mental health issues, and social skill development among elementary school students. However, this study focuses on younger children and emphasizes the general relationship between social media use and bullying behavior, without specifically examining the phenomenon of cyberbullying on TikTok. In addition, previous research has not comprehensively analyzed the relationship between cyberbullying and adolescent mental health, as well as its implications for social interaction. Therefore, there remains a research gap in more deeply investigating the effects of cyberbullying on TikTok on mental health and social interaction among adolescents as a more vulnerable and highly active group in social media use.

Based on the identified research gaps, this study offers novelty by examining the phenomenon of cyberbullying on TikTok through an integrative approach that connects aspects of mental health and adolescent social interaction within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on identifying forms of cyberbullying or its psychological impacts in isolation, this research also highlights how such experiences influence both mental health and social interaction, including peer relationships and communication patterns. Another novelty lies in the specific focus on TikTok as a dominant digital interaction space among adolescents. The subjects of this study are adolescents, who demonstrate more complex patterns of social media use compared to elementary school children. In line with this novelty, this study aims to analyze the forms and dynamics of cyberbullying occurring on TikTok among adolescents, examine its impact on mental health, and explore its influence on adolescent social interaction. Additionally, this study seeks to identify the driving factors behind cyberbullying and propose comprehensive prevention efforts among adolescents.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive qualitative research is a method that seeks to describe all data or research objects as well as the

phenomena under study, analyze them, and compare them based on current realities while attempting to provide solutions to existing problems. This method was chosen as the primary foundation for analyzing phenomena relevant to the topic discussed. In terms of its type, this research is categorized as a literature-based study, specifically a library research approach. Library research is a method in which data collection is carried out by gathering information from various forms of literature. The sources examined are not limited to books but also include documentation materials, magazines, journals, and newspapers. The emphasis of library research is to identify and compile theories, laws, principles, opinions, ideas, and other relevant concepts that can be used to analyze and address the research problem (Sarjono, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Cyberbullying Phenomenon on TikTok

Cyberbullying is a term that was officially recognized in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) in 2010. It refers to the use of information technology as a means of intimidation, such as sending threatening or pressuring messages to others. In general, cyberbullying can be understood as acts of bullying, coercion, harassment, and verbal abuse carried out through social media. Cyberbullying can be influenced by several factors, including family, school, and peer group environments. In addition, such behavior is often driven by feelings of revenge, disappointment, anger, or frustration. This may also occur because perpetrators lack positive activities despite having easy access to technology.

Cyberbullying has serious impacts on adolescents' psychosocial development, including the emergence of anxiety, self-withdrawal, and emotional trauma. Platforms such as TikTok function not only as spaces for expression but also as arenas for the reproduction of social norms, which often create exclusion for individuals who do not conform to dominant standards within digital communities. TikTok has evolved into one of the most dominant platforms in the lives of adolescents and Generation Z. Its presence serves not only as a medium for entertainment but also as a social space where users express themselves, build relationships, and construct their identities. Research by Dewi Kinanti et al. (2023) explains that TikTok provides a platform for young people to channel creativity while shaping personal narratives that are visually accessible. This highlights that TikTok plays a role beyond that of a mere application—it has become part of the social and psychological construction of its users.

As an interactive digital platform, TikTok has become a significant space for the development of various forms of cyberbullying among Indonesian adolescents. The most common types include flaming (openly hostile or insulting comments), harassment (repeated abuse), denigration (spreading rumors or negative information), impersonation, outing, cyberstalking, and happy slapping. These forms do not occur randomly but emerge repeatedly as part of communication patterns among adolescents on social media. This tendency indicates a normalization of behaviors that demean and attack others' dignity in digital spaces. Cyberbullying on TikTok also exhibits specific patterns and characteristics, both in terms of the types of content that are vulnerable to targeting and the interaction dynamics between perpetrators and victims within the platform. Content that highlights individual differences such as physical appearance, voice, or clothing style is often targeted. Additionally, videos that show users in vulnerable situations, such as trying makeup, singing, or dancing, frequently become targets of bullying. Viral or



controversial content also carries higher risks due to increased visibility and attention from other users.

In terms of interaction dynamics, cyberbullying on TikTok can occur through various platform features. The comment section and direct messages allow perpetrators to deliver negative messages or send threats and insults directly to victims. Moreover, responses to posted content can also take the form of bullying, ranging from degrading comments to the creation of content that mocks the victim. These dynamics become more complex due to the involvement of other users within the community. Content containing bullying that receives positive or supportive reactions from other users tends to persist longer and may even go viral, thereby intensifying its impact on victims. Conversely, responses that oppose or reject bullying content can help suppress its spread while also providing support to victims.

The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescent Mental Health

The phenomenon of cyberbullying on social media not only affects social interactions but also has serious impacts on the mental health of its victims. It is known that cyberbullying on the TikTok platform has negative effects on adolescents' mental health. These impacts are closely related to the characteristics of today's youth as digital users and their high level of social media usage. The following explains the effects of cyberbullying on adolescents' mental health:

Stress as a Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescents
Stress is one of the most common psychological impacts experienced by adolescents who become targets of cyberbullying on social media platforms, especially TikTok. Uncertainty about potential digital attacks that may occur at any time keeps them in a constant state of heightened vigilance (Prestasi et al., 2025). This situation creates a sense of insecurity and triggers prolonged stress responses that affect not only emotional well-being but also physical health. In this context, stress caused by cyberbullying should not be underestimated, as it can disrupt adolescents' overall psychological balance.

Anxiety as a Psychological Consequence of Cyberbullying
In addition to stress, anxiety is another major psychological response commonly experienced by adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying. Feelings of anxiety arise from fear of negative judgment in a highly open and uncontrolled digital public space. The worry that degrading comments or insults on social media will continue to recur in future content creates deep and ongoing psychological pressure (Prestasi et al., 2025). This condition can lead to a tendency to withdraw from online activities and possibly from social interactions altogether. If not properly addressed, anxiety can develop into complex social anxiety disorders that hinder adolescents' social adjustment.

Depression as a Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescents
Depression may also arise as a severe mental consequence of prolonged cyberbullying experiences. Depression is a mental disorder generally characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, sleep disturbances or reduced appetite, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating (Zulaikha & Pulungan, 2023). A lack of knowledge on how to cope with cyberattacks further increases the psychological burden, making victims feel trapped in a situation with no way out. If left untreated, depression can have long-term effects on mental health, academic achievement, and adolescents' social integration during their transition into early adulthood.

Concentration in Learning Research by Artadewi et al., (2024) shows a significant

relationship between cyberbullying and students' mental health in learning at the junior high school level. Adolescents who become victims of cyberbullying experience decreased learning motivation, emotional stress, anxiety, and even depression, all of which interfere with concentration and academic performance (Hidayat & Putra, 2025). Although physically present in class, these students often struggle to absorb academic material effectively because their thoughts are continuously disrupted by traumatic online experiences. This condition illustrates how emotional problems can directly affect cognitive performance, particularly in concentration and comprehension during learning. Risk of Depression and Social Withdrawal (Self-Isolation) Victims of cyberbullying often tend to avoid social interactions or social media platforms altogether to prevent further harassment. This can lead to social isolation, which negatively affects their social development.

The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescents' Social Interaction

The analysis shows that experiences of cyberbullying on the TikTok platform not only affect psychological aspects but also significantly influence the quality of adolescents' social interactions in real life. These impacts are reflected in changes in communication patterns, social engagement, and the quality of interpersonal relationships after experiencing harassment in digital spaces. This confirms that experiences in the online world are directly related to social behavior in the real world.

One of the most prominent impacts is a decline in self-confidence in socializing. Adolescents who become victims of cyberbullying tend to experience decreased self-esteem due to exposure to negative comments, insults, and ridicule that attack their identity. This condition leads to feelings of insecurity when interacting with others, making them more passive in social environments. This finding is consistent with research stating that victims of bullying experience reduced self-confidence, which limits their ability to build social relationships (Romadhoni et al., 2023). Thus, low self-confidence not only affects an individual's internal condition but also hinders their ability to socially adapt.

In addition, adolescents tend to withdraw from their peer groups and school environments. This behavior emerges as a response to the negative experiences they face on social media. Adolescents often avoid social interactions to protect themselves from the possibility of further bullying. This condition indicates a significant shift from previously active social behavior to a more withdrawn one. Other studies show that a high intensity of cyberbullying is associated with deteriorating peer relationships and an increased tendency toward social isolation (Arifin, 2025). This suggests that negative experiences in the digital world can trigger real-life social withdrawal.

Another impact is the weakening of social relationships. Adolescents who experience cyberbullying often feel uncomfortable and unsafe when interacting with others. They become more cautious in their social environment due to fear of negative judgment or similar treatment. As a result, the quality of friendships declines, and communication becomes less open. This is in line with findings that show cyberbullying experiences are correlated with increased social anxiety, which affects the quality of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, cyberbullying not only harms individuals but also weakens their social relationship structures.

Furthermore, cyberbullying can lead to antisocial behavior and a tendency toward social isolation. Victims not only reduce interactions but also begin to avoid participation in various social activities, both in school and family settings. This behavior is

characterized by increased withdrawal, reduced communication, and low participation in social activities. This condition indicates that the impact of cyberbullying has developed into a disruption of individuals' social functioning. Research shows that victims of bullying often feel isolated from their environment and are unable to interact optimally with the surrounding community (Romadhoni et al., 2023).

Overall, these findings indicate that the impact of cyberbullying on adolescents' social interactions is complex and interconnected. A decline in self-confidence leads to withdrawal, which in turn causes strained relationships and eventually results in social isolation. These findings emphasize that cyberbullying is not only a digital issue but also a social problem that directly affects adolescents' real-life experiences. Therefore, interventions should not only focus on psychological aspects but also on restoring adolescents' social interaction skills so they can function optimally within their social environments.

Factors Contributing to Cyberbullying Among Adolescents

Based on the data analysis conducted, cyberbullying does not occur as a single, isolated phenomenon but is influenced by a combination of interrelated internal and external factors. Specifically, individual factors that increase the risk of adolescents engaging in cyberbullying include previous experiences of bullying, personality characteristics, and daily activity patterns. Vandebosch & van Cleemput, (2009) found that victims of cyberbullying are generally individuals who are highly dependent on internet use, feel unpopular, and engage in risky online activities. Meanwhile, Fanti et al., (2012) found that perpetrators of cyberbullying tend to be individuals who lack concern and empathy for others and are frequently exposed to online violence. Continuous exposure to violence in the digital world may lead adolescents to perceive aggressive behavior as normal or acceptable.

On the other hand, such exposure can also reduce their sense of empathy toward victims. Cyberbullying is often carried out by individuals with low levels of empathy, meaning an inability to understand or share the feelings of others. Most perpetrators do not realize that their actions can hurt others and may even result in legal consequences. They often perceive their behavior as a form of self-expression, humor, or casual advice delivered jokingly. This condition is common among adolescents who are not yet emotionally mature. In addition to empathy, self-control plays a significant role. Self-control refers to an individual's ability to restrain negative impulses and respond in a more adaptive manner (Kelly et al., 2025). Individuals with low self-control tend to be reactive, easily angered, and quickly offended, making them more likely to engage in verbal aggression online as a form of emotional release.

Research by Setia & Pamungkas, (2026) shows that empathy and self-control have a significant relationship with cyberbullying behavior among adolescents. Adolescents with low empathy and poor self-control are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior in digital spaces. This indicates that prevention efforts should begin with the development of social and emotional skills from an early age. Self-control helps adolescents regulate themselves and develop a desire to build positive habits and become better individuals. However, adolescence is often characterized by emotional instability, as it is a transitional phase of learning and self-discovery. This instability highlights the importance of the family's role in shaping character during development.

Parental influence is a crucial external factor, particularly in terms of parenting

style and supervision of adolescents' online activities. A permissive parenting style, characterized by excessive freedom and lack of boundaries can lead to impulsive, aggressive, and rebellious behavior, low self-confidence, poor self-control, lack of direction in life, and low academic achievement (Tridhonanto, 2014). Many parents fail to recognize that the digital world can have impacts as significant as those in the real world. Research by Winoto and Sopian (2019) states that a lack of supervision and limited parental awareness of adolescents' social media activities can contribute to the occurrence of cyberbullying. Educating and guiding children to avoid negative behavior is a fundamental responsibility of parents. However, studies show that communication between adolescents and parents is often low, with about half of adolescents experiencing poor communication. This is often due to strained relationships, lack of mutual trust, or even the use of hurtful language by parents.

Peer influence is another major factor affecting cyberbullying behavior among adolescents. At this stage, adolescents have a strong desire to be accepted within their social groups, leading them to follow group behavior to avoid exclusion. If their peer environment normalizes bullying, adolescents may engage in cyberbullying to maintain their social status or demonstrate loyalty to the group. This phenomenon is known as social conformity, where individuals adopt group behaviors even when they conflict with their personal values. Krisnawan (2018) found that the desire to gain attention and appear "funny" in front of peers is often a primary motivation for adolescents to engage in online bullying. They may not realize the deep psychological impact experienced by victims. Even when individuals feel that such actions contradict their personal values, peer pressure often leaves them feeling as though they have no choice but to participate.

Efforts to Prevent and Address Cyberbullying on TikTok

Based on the factors that drive cyberbullying among adolescents, prevention efforts cannot be carried out partially; instead, they require a comprehensive approach involving individuals, families, schools, and the broader social environment. According to a literature study by Hidajat et al., (2015), several preventive measures for cyberbullying include: (1) verifying and fact-checking information before sharing it, (2) paying attention to appropriate language use on social media, (3) promoting education and self-discipline among users, (4) providing guidance from parents, schools, universities, and communities, (5) conducting regular anti-cyberbullying campaigns on social media platforms, and (6) encouraging victims to take an active role by reporting incidents to the platform.

Furthermore, research by Glansner (2010) cited in Syah & Hermawati, (2018) highlights the lack of attention given to cyberbullying by parents and teachers. Many parents tend to ignore such behavior or are unaware of the issue, while some even forgive or downplay cyberbullying incidents. In some cases, reports from victims are not taken seriously. Similarly, teachers may perceive cyberbullying as mere mischief. As a result, cyberbullying becomes normalized, leaving adolescents with little motivation to stop and, in some cases, even encouraging the behavior.

This situation is also related to norm formation within the family, particularly the role of parents. From an early age, parents shape children's behavior to align with societal norms through specific parenting styles. Certain approaches, such as parental support (Barnes et al., 2006, cited in Syah & Hermawati, (2018)), have a significant influence on behavioral development. This support can take the form of praise, moral encouragement,

and affection. It is important for parents to show that their children are valued and loved. Studies have shown that parental support enhances adolescents' self-confidence in social interactions. This character development contributes to better self-control, which can prevent deviant behaviors such as cyberbullying.

In addition to the roles of parents and teachers, various programs and policies have been developed by digital platforms to address cyberbullying. For example, TikTok enforces age restrictions for users under 16 and uses systems to detect inappropriate words or content, with sanctions such as temporary or permanent account suspension. Moreover, one successful anti-cyberbullying initiative is the KiVa program in Finland, which includes computer-based classroom activities designed to support victims and address both cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Evaluations have shown that this program is effective in reducing cyberbullying Syah & Hermawati, (2018). Overall, preventing and addressing cyberbullying requires collaboration across multiple levels, combining education, supervision, policy enforcement, and supportive social environments to create safer digital spaces for adolescents.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that cyberbullying on the TikTok platform is not merely a digital phenomenon but also has real consequences for adolescents' mental health and social interactions. Forms of cyberbullying such as flaming, harassment, and denigration are not simply individual behaviors; rather, they have become part of communication patterns that tend to be normalized within adolescents' digital environments. The impacts are multidimensional, including psychological disturbances such as stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as social disruptions such as decreased self-confidence, withdrawal from social environments, deteriorating friendship quality, and the emergence of antisocial behavior and social isolation. These conditions indicate that negative experiences in digital spaces can transform into real barriers in adolescents' social development, meaning that cyberbullying should be understood as an integrated psychosocial issue, not merely as deviant behavior in cyberspace.

Furthermore, this study identifies that cyberbullying is influenced by a complex interaction of individual and environmental factors, including low levels of empathy and self-control, suboptimal parenting styles, peer social conformity, and weak supervision of adolescents' digital activities. Therefore, intervention efforts must be carried out systematically and sustainably through a multilevel approach. Practically, interventions can include strengthening digital literacy with a focus on ethical online communication, integrating character education to enhance empathy and self-control within educational curricula, and improving the quality of parental communication and supervision of children's digital activities. On the other hand, social media platforms need to optimize content moderation systems, enforce stricter regulations on harmful speech, and develop consistent anti-cyberbullying campaigns.

The implications of these findings highlight the importance of collaboration among families, schools, communities, and digital platform providers in creating a safe and supportive digital ecosystem for adolescents. However, this study is limited to a descriptive approach; therefore, future research is recommended to use quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure the strength of relationships among variables in a more comprehensive and in-depth manner.

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