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Scrolling into risk? A structural examination of social media use, demographics, and psychological factors in cyberbullying victimization

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Highlights:

- Cybervictimization research requires a broader perspective beyond just young children and adolescents.
- Heavy social media use lowers self-esteem and coping strategies, increasing cybervictimization risks.
- Stable employment and older age foster self-esteem, reducing cybervictimization susceptibility.
- Older, highly educated individuals leverage social support and adaptive coping against cybervictimization.
- Social support boosts self-esteem, indirectly reducing cybervictimization.

Abstract

Given the increasing prevalence of cyberbullying and its harmful effects on social media, previous research has extensively documented social media usage and cyberbullying victimization. However, the findings are often mixed, and studies on cybervictimization beyond teenage and young adult populations are limited. Based on prior literature and theories, this study investigates how social media use, individual demographic characteristics, and psychological factors influence cybervictimization among U.S. adults. A total of 560 participants were recruited through Qualtrics Online Panels. The results indicate that heavy social media use is associated with lower self-esteem and weaker coping strategies, which in turn increase vulnerability to cybervictimization. In contrast, greater social support derived from social media use enhances self-esteem, thereby reducing vulnerability to cybervictimization. The results also revealed the mediating role of an individual's self-esteem, social support, and coping strategies in the relationship between individual demographic variables and cybervictimization. This study is expected to provide valuable insights for future research and practice on the development of preventive strategies to support cyberbullying victims on social media based on individuals' diverse demographic backgrounds and experience of social media use.

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1. Introduction

As social media becomes an increasingly essential tool for communication, scholars have paid attention to its darker aspects, such as cyberbullying victimization. Although a growing body of literature has examined the impact of social media use on cybervictimization, there remains ambiguity regarding who is most vulnerable on social media. Prior research has largely focused on social media use or traditional antecedents of cybervictimization, such as individual demographic characteristics and psychological factors, but has paid limited attention to the combined and interrelated effects of these factors (Alijasir & Alsebaei, 2022; Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022; Sarıer, 2022; Vishwakarma et al., 2024). Furthermore, the existing literature has primarily focused on empirical studies involving young children and adolescents, thereby giving little attention to other age groups (Chisholm, 2014).

Therefore, to gain deeper insight into the role of social media in cybervictimization across diverse populations, a broader perspective beyond young children and adolescents is required. To address this scholarly gap, the present study examines how social media use, individual demographic characteristics, and psychological factors influence cybervictimization among U.S. adults. The findings are expected to advance understanding of the predictors of cyberbullying victimization in social media contexts and to inform the development of effective prevention strategies.

1.1. Social Media Use, Individual Demographic Factors, and Cybervictimization

Prior research has extensively documented a positive relationship between social media use and the likelihood of cybervictimization, particularly among young people through online chat rooms and instant messaging (Duarte et al., 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Leung & Lee, 2012; Mesch, 2009). Earlier research identified Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) as the platforms with the highest frequency of cybervictimization (Görzig & Frumkin, 2013; Whitaker & Kowalski, 2015). However, subsequent studies have found that other social media platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat, have also become venues for cyberbullying, often characterized by the sharing of unflattering or edited images, videos, and aggressive comments (Byrne et al., 2017).

Regarding individual demographic factors and cybervictimization, existing findings in the cybervictimization literature have been mixed or limited. While some studies suggest that age is not a significant factor in cybervictimization (Balakrishnan, 2015), others have found that adolescents and university students are more likely to be involved in cybervictimization compared to other age groups (Cho & Yoo, 2016; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). As with age, the relationships between demographic factors such as education level, employment status, income, race, and cybervictimization have yielded mixed results or remain unclear. For example, Oksanen et al. (2020) identified a negative relationship between education level and cybervictimization, finding that individuals with university degrees were 15% less likely to be victimized compared to those with only primary education. However, Lowry and colleagues (2016) found that demographic factors such as age, education level, employment status, and income did not significantly affect the frequency of cyberbullying among adults. In addition, Kowalski et al. (2020) found no significant racial differences in cybervictimization experiences among White and Black university students in the United States, whereas Zalaquett and Chatters (2014) observed a higher prevalence of victimization among Asian American groups compared to other racial demographics. Compared to other demographic variables, however, gender seems to have a more consistent impact on cybervictimization. Research indicates that females are more susceptible to victimization than males, as they use social media to maintain existing relationships and seek information (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Lowry et al., 2016). Given the mixed and inconsistent findings in the literature, it is essential to further examine these factors among U.S. adults who use social media. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions to explore the predictive power of social media use and individual demographic factors in cybervictimization

RQ1: How does social media usage affect cybervictimization?

RQ2: How do individual demographic factors (i.e., sex, age, race, income, employment status, and education level) influence cybervictimization?

1.2. Self-Esteem as a Mediator in Cybervictimization

Regarding psychological factors, empirical studies have shown that self-esteem is a key indicator of psychological well-being and is negatively related to cybervictimization (Moon & Mello, 2021; Palermiti et al.,

2022). Furthermore, social media use has been shown to affect self-esteem, with positive feedback enhancing it and negative feedback diminishing it (Sireli et al., 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2006). Symbolic interaction theory explains how self-esteem mediates the relationship between social media use and cyberbullying victimization. According to this theory, individuals gauge their self-worth based on others' perceived expectations (Prihadi et al., 2019). On social media, negative comments or cyberbullying can significantly harm one's self-esteem.

Demographic factors have inconsistent effects on self-esteem. Moksnes et al. (2010) observed that women generally have lower self-esteem, which is associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Conversely, McMullin and Cairney (2004) noted that self-esteem typically declines with age, especially among women, but income has minimal impact except among those over 65. Shaw et al. (2010) and Orth et al. (2018) reported an increase in self-esteem with age until the late 60s, potentially due to changes in employment. Helwig and Ruprecht (2017) also identified a nonlinear relationship between age and self-esteem. Education is positively correlated with self-esteem (Joy et al., 2023; McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Trani et al., 2020), with effects more pronounced in late adulthood (Wagner et al., 2014). The relationships among income, education, and self-esteem vary; Batool and Batool (2018) suggest that education directly affects women's self-esteem, whereas income's effect is indirect. More specifically, Krauss and Orth (2022) found that employment status significantly boosts perceived self-esteem, with notable differences between employed and unemployed individuals. In a similar note, Trani et al. (2020) emphasized the role of employment in self-worth, noting that employed individuals report lower levels of depression.

Likewise, prior research has shown that individual demographic factors influence self-esteem, but their effects on cybervictimization remain inconsistent or largely unknown (Batool & Batool, 2018; Krauss & Orth, 2022; Trani et al., 2020). Given that prior research indicates self-esteem is a significant predictor of cybervictimization and is associated with social media use and individual demographic variables, we propose the following research question.

RQ3: How does self-esteem influence the relationships among social media usage, individual demographic factors, and cybervictimization?

1.3. Social Support as a Mediator in Cybervictimization

Research demonstrates that social support plays a crucial role in helping victims cope with cyberbullying (Tennant et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2009). Social support is often defined as an individual's perception of support from family, friends, and coworkers (Cho & Yoo, 2016; Ho et al., 2020). Strong perceived social support not only increases reliance on others during crises but also boosts self-esteem, which in turn improves coping with cybervictimization (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Mishna et al. (2016) suggested that social support plays a significant role in shaping individuals' sense of self-worth during childhood and adolescence. The stress-buffering model also suggests that strong perceived social support can reduce the impact of stressors, thereby playing a protective role in the relationship between self-esteem and cybervictimization (Guo et al., 2021). Social media, with its vast online networks, is expected to provide new avenues for social support. The buffering hypothesis further supports this, suggesting that a strong support network can mitigate negative outcomes by strengthening coping abilities (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020; Pouwelse et al., 2011). However, findings on the interplay between social support and cyberbullying in this context are mixed (Cho & Yoo, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2011). Kim and Lee (2011) observed that individuals with many close online friends perceive greater support, whereas Cho and Yoo (2016) found that a higher friend count might increase vulnerability to cybervictimization. Research on demographic factors and their impact on social support in victimization has also yielded mixed results (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2020; Bhui et al., 2017; Yılmaz & Kıl, 2020). Some studies have found that social support has different effects on male and female victims (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2020). Coventry et al. (2004) reported minimal age differences, noting that support tends to increase during childhood but decline in adulthood, whereas Zabalegui et al. (2013) suggested that older individuals may seek less support due to greater pessimism. Bhui et al. (2017) compared White British and Bangladeshi adolescents, finding that peer support relates to distress in White British students, while family support declines over time, affecting distress regardless of ethnicity. Zabalegui et al. (2013) noted that higher-income individuals tend to seek more social support, which may mitigate financial stress, as supported by Schulz et al. (2006). Mohebi et al. (2018) found a positive association between education and self-care, but not with social support. Conversely, Yilmaz and Kil (2020) found that individuals without formal education reported higher perceived support, while those with higher education reported lower support.

Previous evidence suggests that social support can help mitigate the effects of cyberbullying victimization. However, the influence of social support on cybervictimization across different socio-demographic

groups remains unclear. To address this gap, it is important to examine how social support influences cybervictimization, particularly in relation to an individual's social media use and socio-demographic factors. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

RQ4: How does social support influence the relationships between social media usage, individual demographic factors, and cybervictimization?

1.4. Coping Strategy as a Mediator in Cybervictimization

Individuals often adopt coping strategies in stressful situations, including cybervictimization, when they perceive a sense of control. Accordingly, prior studies have examined the relationship between coping strategies and cybervictimization and found that effective coping strategies can buffer negative emotions and, in turn, reduce or prevent cybervictimization (Byrne, 2021; Machackova et al., 2013).

Previous research has found that social media use can foster individual coping strategies by providing opportunities for social communication with other users, thereby helping individuals manage and resolve stressful situations (Pang & Wang, 2020; Wolfers & Utz, 2022). Furthermore, several socio-demographic factors, including age, employment status, race, and income level, influence the coping strategies individuals choose in stressful situations such as cybervictimization. Perreault et al. (2017) observed that employment status is linked to stress levels, with employed individuals generally experiencing lower stress and receiving more social support. Brantley et al. (2002) showed that income influences coping strategies, with low-income individuals using a wider range of strategies than their middle-income counterparts. Research also indicates a negative relationship between education and cognitive avoidance, with higher education associated with a greater likelihood of active coping strategies (Holahan & Moos, 1987). Based on prior literature, we might expect that coping strategies will prevent individuals from experiencing cybervictimization, but it remains unclear how social media use and individual demographic factors differentially affect coping strategies and cybervictimization. Accordingly, the following research question was examined:

RQ 5: How do coping strategies affect the relationships among social media usage, individual demographic factors, and cybervictimization?

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model outlining the research questions. The model illustrates the relationships among social media use, individual demographic factors, psychological factors, and cyberbullying victimization.

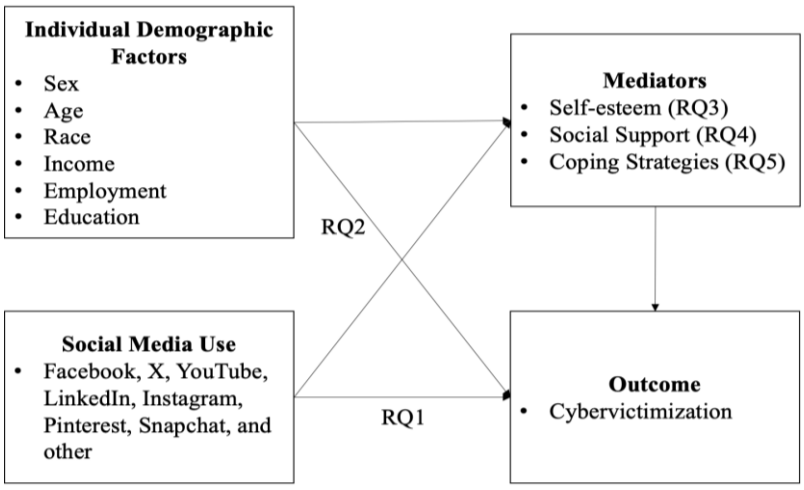

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

2. Method

2.1. Research Design and Recruitment

The population of this study is social media users in the United States who are likely to have experienced cybervictimization. To obtain a non-probability, opt-in online sample through quota sampling (Sandstrom-Mistry et al., 2023), we used Qualtrics Panels to administer identical online survey questions to social media users across different demographic groups, including sex, age, race, education and income levels, and employment status. Eligible panel respondents were at least 18 years of age and used social media in the United States. To recruit participants for this study, we asked Qualtrics to randomly email invitations to their panelists who use

social media. Based on the study procedures approved by the University IRB, interested participants voluntarily completed a 15-minute survey after agreeing to the informed consent form. After participation, participants were compensated in accordance with Qualtrics' guidelines. Participants included 560 individuals in the United States, with an average age of 39.33 years (SD = 15.60, range 18–82). Of these, 272 (48.4%) were male, 284 (50.7%) were female, and 5 (0.9%) identified as other. 344 (61.4%) were White-Non-Hispanic, and 216 (38.6%) were Non-White. Education levels included: grammar and less (n = 8, 1.4%), some high school (n = 33, 5.9%), high school grad/GED (n = 169, 30.2%), some college (n = 175, 31.3%), college grad (n = 127, 22.7%), some grad work (n = 12, 2.1%), Master's (n = 25, 4.5%), and PhD/Prof (n = 11, 2.0%). Household income levels were: less than $20,000 (n = 161, 28.7%), $20,000-$39,999 (n = 132, 23.6%), $40,000-$59,999 (n = 103, 18.4%), $60,000-$79,999 (n = 73, 13.0%), $80,000-$99,000 (n = 35, 6.3%), and $100,000 and above (n = 56, 10.0%). Employment status included: full-time (n = 232, 41.4%), part-time (n = 74, 13.2%), and unemployed (n = 254, 45.4%). Social media usage showed that 448 (80.0%) used Facebook, 404 (72.1%) used YouTube, 314 (56.1%) used Instagram, 272 (48.6%) used X, 250 (44.6%) used Snapchat, 237 (42.3%) used Pinterest, 195 (34.8%) used LinkedIn, and 122 (21.8%) used other platforms.

2.2. Measures

In addition to the six individual socio-demographic factors of social media users stated above (i.e., sex, age, race, household income, employment status, and education level), which were self-reported, the following variables were also measured. Each variable had acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis (between -2 and 2). (Therefore, all variables were assumed to be normally distributed.

2.2.1. Social media use

Participants were asked to indicate their frequency of using various media platforms to communicate with others on a 5-point scale (1 = Never, 5 = Every hour). The question included eight different social media platforms, such as Facebook, X, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and others (M = 2.27, SD = .97, α = .85, Skewness = .71, Kurtosis = .04).

2.2.2. Self-esteem

We assessed self-esteem using 10 items, adopted from Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979). An example item included "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree) (M = 3.46, SD = .73, a = .75, Skewness = -.05, Kurtosis = -.54).

2.2.3. Social support

We assessed social support using 12 items adopted from Zimet et al.'s multidimensional scale of perceived social support (1988). An example item is "There is a special person who is around when I am in need." Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree) (M = 3.63, SD = 1.01, a = .94, Skewness = -.72, Kurtosis = .08).

2.2.4. Cybervictimization

We assessed cybervictimization using 21 items, adopted from Doane et al.'s cyber-victimization items (Doane et al., 2013). An example item is "In the past year, has someone written mean messages about you publicly electronically?" Respondents answered on a 5-points scale (1= Never, 5 = Everyday/Almost everyday) (M = 1.76, SD = 1.05, a = .98, Skewness = 1.39, Kurtosis = .88).

2.2.5. Coping strategies

We assessed coping strategies using 25 items, modified from Machackova et al.'s strategies to stop cyberbullying and online harassment (Machackova et al., 2013). "I deleted the messages, which troubled me." is an example of items used in this scale. Respondents were asked to choose one of three responses (1 = Yes, 2 = No or 3 = Not applicable/no experience) (M = 1.90, SD = .66, a = .98, Skewness = .66, Kurtosis = -.92).

3. Results

To address three research questions, we employed path analysis in LISREL 12. Before testing path analysis, the dataset was completely cleaned, and some items were reverse coded as needed. After the means,

standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, skewness, and kurtosis of the study variables were computed, a correlation analysis of cybervictimization and its antecedents was conducted. Table 1 shows that each variable is statistically significantly correlated.

Table 1. Correlations among Observed Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
(1)	1										
(2)	-.27***	1									
(3)	.01	.04	1								
(4)	-.26***	.19***	.49***	1							
(5)	-.07	-.05	.01	-.09*	1						
(6)	-.30***	.31***	.10***	.28***	-.16***	1					
(7)	.23***	-.08	-.08***	-.06	-.04	-.32***	1				
(8)	.07	-.00	.13***	.09*	-.14***	-.01	-.06	1			
(9)	-.22***	.16***	-.05	-.04	.08*	.20***	-.11**	-.33***	1		
(10)	.09*	.09*	.15***	.12***	-.11*	.10*	-.04	.38***	-.25***	1	
(11)	.50***	-.22***	.12***	-.14***	.03	-.35***	.20***	.08	-.24***	.06	1

Notes: *N*=560; (1) Cyberbullying victimization; (2) Coping strategies; (3) Social support; (4) Self-esteem; (5) Sex (male = 1, female = 2); (6) Age; (7) Race (1= White, 2= non-White); (8) Income level; (9) Employment status (full-time =1, part-time =2, unemployed = 3); (10) Education level; (11) Social media usage; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

The initial path model appeared to be saturated. Based on evidence from the literature review, a path from social support to self-esteem was added, and the revised model showed acceptable fit indices, χ^2= 9.83; *df* = 6; *p* = .13; CFI = 1.00; NFI = 1.00; RMSEA = .03 with 90 percent confidence interval for [.00; .07]. The significant relationships among constructs were presented in Figure 2.

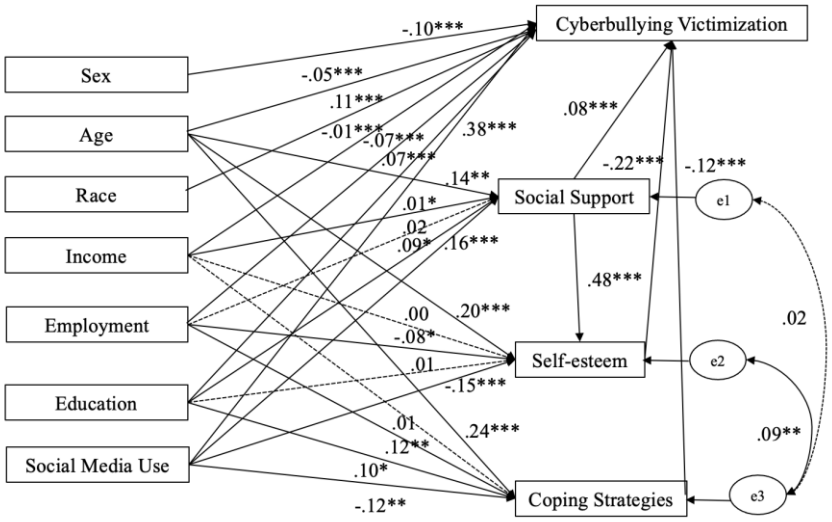

Figure 2. Conceptual model of cybervictimization

Note: *N*=560; +*p* < .1; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

RQ1 asked how social media use is related to cybervictimization. The results showed that people who spend more time on social media are more likely to experience cybervictimization (β = .38, *p* < .001). To examine the relationships between time spent on individual social media platforms and cybervictimization, a multiple regression analysis was also conducted. The model regressing social media platforms on cybervictimization was significant, indicating that time spent on social media explained 29.2% of the variance in cybervictimization [F(8, 551) = 28.42, *p* < .001, *adjusted* R^2 = .28]. The findings also demonstrated that time spent on YouTube (β = .08, *p* < .1), LinkedIn (β = .26, *p* < .001), Instagram (β = .09, *p* < .1), Snapchat (β = .16, *p* < .001), and other platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Tumblr, Reddit, LINE, WeChat) (β = .10, *p* < .05) was positively related to cybervictimization.

RQ2 examined how individual demographic factors among social media users related to cybervictimization. The findings revealed that factors such as sex, age, race, employment status, income level,

and education level significantly influence the likelihood of experiencing cybervictimization. Specifically, individuals who are male (β = -.10), younger (β = -.05), Non-White (β = .11), full-time employed (β = -.07), have higher income (β = .01), and have higher education (β = .07) were more likely to experience cybervictimization (p < .001).

RQ3 asked how self-esteem affects the relationships among social media use, individual demographic variables, and cybervictimization. The findings indicate that self-esteem mediates the relationship between social media use and cybervictimization (β = .03, 90% CI [.01; .05]), suggesting that heavy social media users tend to have lower self-esteem, which in turn increases their susceptibility to cybervictimization. The findings also show that self-esteem mediates the relationship between age and cybervictimization (β = -.04, 90% CI [-.06; -.02]) and the relationship between employment status and cybervictimization (β = .02, 90% CI [.00; .03]). This suggests that older individuals and those with more stable employment tend to have higher self-esteem, making them less susceptible to cybervictimization than younger individuals and those who are part-time employed or unemployed.

RQ4 explored how social support influences the relationships among social media use, individual demographic variables, and cybervictimization. Although no direct mediating effect of social support was found between social media use or individual demographic variables and cybervictimization, interestingly, the findings revealed a sequential mediation pathway from social media use and individual demographic variables to cybervictimization via social support and self-esteem. As shown in the findings, increased social media use indirectly reduced cybervictimization by enhancing social support, which boosts self-esteem, ultimately protecting against cybervictimization (β = -.02, 90% CI [-.03; -.01]). The findings show that age (β = -.01, 90% CI [-.02; -.01]) and education (β = -.01, 90% CI [-.02, -.00]) indirectly reduced cybervictimization by enhancing social support and self-esteem. The findings indicated that older and more highly educated individuals tend to report greater social support, which in turn enhances their self-esteem, so that making them less vulnerable to cyber-victimization compared to younger and less educated individuals.

RQ5 assessed how coping strategies affect the relationship among social media usage, individual demographic variables, and cybervictimization. The findings showed that coping strategies mediate the relationship between social media usage and cybervictimization (β = .01, 90% CI [.01; .03]). This suggests that heavy social media users may have less adaptive coping strategies, making them more susceptible to cybervictimization. The findings also demonstrated that coping strategies mediate the relationships between individual demographic variables and cybervictimization; specifically for age (β = -.03, 90% CI [-.05; -.01]), employment status (β = -.01, 90% CI [-.03, -.00]), and education (β = -.01, 90% CI [-.02, -.00]). This suggests that older, more highly educated, but unemployed individuals tend to use more adaptive coping strategies, making them less susceptible to cybervictimization than younger, less educated individuals with more stable employment.

4. Discussion

Consistent with prior research, our study confirmed that social media use significantly predicts cybervictimization, with more time spent online associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing it (Kim et al., 2024). However, unlike earlier studies that identified Facebook and X as primary platforms for cyberbullying (Görzig & Frumkin, 2013; Whitaker & Kowalski, 2015), we found YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Snapchat to be significant as well, with LinkedIn the most frequently reported platform. By demonstrating significant positive relationships between cybervictimization and the use of YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Snapchat, this empirical evidence contributes to the literature by highlighting how such victimization blurs the lines between public and private spheres of social media. The findings also suggest that no social media platform is entirely free from the risk of cybervictimization, and users should be cautious about sharing personal information and managing privacy settings, even on professional networking platforms, such as LinkedIn. This reflects the unique social media patterns of. The U.S. adult population in our study. Future research examining generational differences in social media use and cybervictimization would further support and extend this study's findings.

Regarding individual demographic factors, our findings revealed that males are more susceptible to cyberbullying than females, inconsistent with previous literature on gender differences (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Lowry et al., 2016). Additionally, our findings supported the role of self-esteem as a mediator between age and employment status and cybervictimization, indicating that younger and unemployed individuals, who often have lower self-esteem, are more vulnerable to cybervictimization. We

also found that increased social media use is associated with lower self-esteem, making individuals more susceptible to cybervictimization. This aligns with symbolic interaction theory (Prihadi et al., 2019), which suggests that greater social media interaction heightens exposure to negative feedback, further diminishing self-esteem and elevating the risk of victimization.

The findings from this study also indicate that while social support has a limited direct influence on cybervictimization, it predicts self-esteem and indirectly buffers against victimization rather than directly reducing it. The findings indicate that increased social support through social media use, along with factors such as age and higher education, enhances self-esteem, which in turn helps individuals cope with cybervictimization. These insights can help future researchers and healthcare providers consider the diverse motives and experiences of social media use and develop preventive strategies tailored to individuals' demographic backgrounds.

Our study also confirmed that coping strategies mediate the effects of social media use, age, education, and employment status on cybervictimization. Specifically, heavy social media use diminishes coping strategies, increasing vulnerability to cybervictimization. The findings further revealed that older, more highly educated individuals employ more coping strategies than younger, less educated individuals, reducing their vulnerability to victimization. This aligns with previous research indicating that older adults prefer problem-solving strategies over avoidance, thereby reducing their risk of negative online interactions (Yang, 2021). Notably, individuals who are unemployed or have unstable jobs tend to use more adaptive coping strategies than those with stable employment. Because healthcare resources are often directed toward vulnerable populations, those with stable jobs may lack the means to cope with cybervictimization or avoid the stressful situation. To better understand the potential of coping strategies to mitigate cybervictimization, future research and healthcare practice should explore resources that support their adoption, tailored to the specific needs of different target populations.

4.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, we use panel data from Qualtrics, which is effective for acquiring a qualified and representative sample, but the generalizability of our findings could be improved with a larger, nationally representative dataset. Furthermore, this study employed a cross-sectional survey research design, so the established sequential mediation model we proposed should not be interpreted as evidence of causal relationships between variables.

We explored the influence of sociodemographic factors among social media users (i.e., sex, age, race, household income, employment status, and education level) on cybervictimization, using participants' self-reported data. However, potentially relevant demographic variables (e.g., political orientation or more nuanced measures of ethnicity beyond the White vs. Non-White categorization) may have been overlooked, potentially affecting the interpretation of the findings. Future studies incorporating a more comprehensive characterization of participants' demographic profiles may provide further insight into cybervictimization research.

Lastly, while we used both original and revised measurement scales from existing studies to assess predictors of cyberbullying, unresolved questions remain. These include how individuals form social relationships on social media based on their backgrounds and available resources, and how these relationships influence their experiences of cybervictimization. To address these gaps, future research should focus on developing and validating new metrics designed to assess social media use in terms of both quantity and quality, particularly regarding motives and their connection to cybervictimization.

5. Conclusion

In light of the increasing prevalence of cybervictimization, this study examined how social media use, individual demographics, and psychosocial variables predict cybervictimization. Given the limited research on cyberbullying among U.S. adults, our study offers critical insights by evaluating how social media use, demographic characteristics, and psychosocial factors relate to cybervictimization. Specifically, the findings suggest that people who use social media frequently, are younger, and do not have full-time jobs tend to have lower self-esteem and weaker coping strategies, making them more vulnerable to cybervictimization. In contrast, older, higher-income, and more educated frequent social media users are more likely to receive social support, which can enhance their self-esteem and buffer against cybervictimization. These findings offer valuable insights for future research and practice on how social and mental health care can be designed to

support cyberbullying victims on social media, taking into account their demographic characteristics and patterns of social media use.

Statement of Researchers	
Researchers' contribution rate statement:	**First Author:** Conceptualization, methodology, software, investigation, validation, writing- original draft preparation, writing - review & editing, data curation. **Second Author:** Conceptualization, writing-original draft preparation, investigation, writing - review & editing.
Conflict statement:	The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
Data Availability Statement:	The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.
Funding:	The study was funded by the Central Connecticut State University internal grant awarded to Yeojin Kim.
Ethical Considerations:	All procedures followed were by the ethical standards of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Central Connecticut State University. The study was exempted by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Central Connecticut State University (Protocol #19078), dated 6/12/2019.

Author Biographies

Yeojin Kim (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Central Connecticut State University. Her primary research area is social media and strategic communication, with a focus on channel tactics and their influence, message strategy, and organization-public relationships for strategic purposes, particularly in response to advancements in communication technology.

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