

Restoration of Good Name Towards Victims of Online Defamation as a Form of Cyberbullying

Ni Made Padmawardhani Rakheswari
Universitas Gadjah Mada

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ABSTRACT

With the pervasive use of digital platforms, online defamation has emerged as a prominent form of cyberbullying, threatening individuals' reputations, psychological well-being, and social credibility. This study investigates mechanisms for restoring the good name of victims of online defamation, emphasizing legal, social, and psychological interventions. Using a mixed-method approach, quantitative data were collected from 300 social media users who experienced defamation, while qualitative interviews explored personal experiences, coping strategies, and social reintegration. Data analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to evaluate relationships among online defamation, psychological impact, social support, restorative strategies, digital literacy, and perceived reputation recovery. Findings indicate that social support, digital literacy, and restorative justice interventions significantly enhance reputation restoration, with victims who received legal action, public acknowledgment, and community support reporting the most effective outcomes. Grounded in Cyberbullying Theory, Reputation Management Theory, and Restorative Justice Theory, the study provides a comprehensive framework linking individual psychological resilience, social perception, and restorative mechanisms. The results highlight the importance of culturally sensitive approaches, including social norms, online ethics, and communication strategies tailored to specific communities. These insights inform policy design, platform governance, and educational programs aimed at mitigating online defamation, empowering victims, and promoting digital literacy. The study contributes to theory by integrating social, legal, and psychological perspectives on reputation restoration, and to practice by offering actionable strategies for victims, policymakers, and digital platform managers.

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Corresponding Author:

Name: Ni Made Padmawardhani Rakheswari
Institution Address: Universitas Gadjah Mada
e-mail: padmawardhani29@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed how individuals interact, exchange information, and construct social identities. Social media platforms, online forums, and instant messaging applications provide unprecedented opportunities for communication and self-expression. However, this transformation has also intensified harmful online behaviors, particularly cyberbullying and online harassment, which increasingly threaten individuals' psychological wellbeing and social credibility [1];[2]. Among the various forms of cyberbullying, online defamation represents one of the most severe manifestations because it directly targets an individual's reputation through the spread of false, misleading, or degrading information in digital spaces.

Online defamation differs from traditional forms of bullying due to its high visibility, persistence, and rapid dissemination. Defamatory content can remain accessible indefinitely, be shared across platforms, and be indexed by search engines, thereby amplifying reputational harm beyond the initial incident [3]; [4]. Empirical studies demonstrate that victims of online defamation often experience prolonged psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, as well as tangible consequences such as career disruption and loss of social trust [5]; [1]. These characteristics make reputation restoration not only difficult but also essential for victims' long-term psychological and social recovery.

Although research on cyberbullying has grown substantially over the past two decades, scholarly attention has predominantly focused on prevalence, risk factors, and preventive measures. Comparatively fewer studies explore post-incident recovery processes, particularly how victims can restore their good name after reputational damage has already occurred [6];[7]. Existing legal and platform-based responses often emphasize punishment or content removal, which may be

insufficient to address deeper psychological harm and social stigma experienced by victims [8]. Consequently, there is a need for a more comprehensive framework that goes beyond deterrence and incorporates restorative mechanisms aimed at repairing harm and rebuilding social credibility.

Reputation restoration is inherently multidimensional, involving psychological resilience, social acknowledgment, and strategic communication. Reputation Management Theory conceptualizes reputation as a socially constructed asset that can be actively managed and repaired through corrective actions, transparency, and engagement with supportive networks [9]. From this perspective, victims are not passive recipients of harm but active agents capable of reclaiming credibility through appropriate communication strategies and social support. This approach aligns with empirical findings showing that public clarification, community endorsement, and controlled online engagement can significantly improve perceived reputation recovery [10].

At the same time, Restorative Justice Theory offers an alternative lens by emphasizing harm repair, acknowledgment, and reconciliation rather than solely punitive responses [11]. Applied to online defamation, restorative justice involves mediated dialogue, public apologies, legal recognition of harm, and community reintegration. Prior studies suggest that acknowledgment and accountability play a critical role in alleviating victims' emotional distress and restoring social trust, particularly within culturally sensitive contexts where social norms and collective values shape reputation [12]; [13].

In addition, Cyberbullying Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the behavioral dynamics and psychological consequences of online defamation. This theory explains how anonymity, power imbalance, and audience amplification exacerbate harm, leading to sustained psychological and social impacts on victims [2];[4]. Integrating this perspective with

reputation management and restorative justice allows for a more holistic understanding of both the harm caused and the pathways toward recovery.

Within this integrated framework, social support and digital literacy emerge as crucial enabling factors. Social support has been shown to buffer the psychological effects of cyberbullying and facilitate coping and reintegration processes [14];[5]. Meanwhile, digital literacy equips victims with the skills needed to navigate online environments, monitor harmful content, manage digital narratives, and engage in strategic reputation management [7]; [15]. Together, these factors enhance the effectiveness of restorative strategies and empower victims to regain control over their digital identities.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) what mechanisms are effective in restoring the reputation of victims of online defamation; (2) how social support and digital literacy influence the effectiveness of restorative strategies; and (3) how Cyberbullying Theory, Reputation Management Theory, and Restorative Justice Theory explain the outcomes of reputation restoration efforts. By answering these questions, the study seeks to contribute theoretically by integrating social, legal, and psychological perspectives on reputation recovery, and practically by offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, digital platform managers, educators, and legal institutions in addressing online defamation and supporting victims' long-term recovery.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cyberbullying and Online Defamation

Cyberbullying is defined as intentional and repeated harm inflicted through electronic communication technologies, often involving power imbalances and public exposure [4];[2]. Online defamation constitutes a specific and particularly damaging form of cyberbullying because it directly targets an individual's

reputation and social identity through the dissemination of false statements, rumors, or derogatory content. Unlike offline defamation, online defamation is characterized by the permanence of digital traces, rapid diffusion across platforms, and the potential to reach unlimited audiences, which significantly amplifies both psychological and social harm [3]. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that victims of online defamation experience substantial psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and social withdrawal [1]; [5]. Beyond these psychological effects, reputational damage often leads to broader social consequences, such as social exclusion, diminished professional opportunities, and long-term stigma within both online and offline communities [6]. These patterns indicate that online defamation extends beyond a mere communication issue and should be understood as a complex social phenomenon with enduring personal and societal consequences. From a theoretical perspective, Cyberbullying Theory explains how anonymity, limited immediate accountability, and audience amplification in digital environments contribute to the persistence and severity of harm experienced by victims [2]. Accordingly, the theory emphasizes that psychological recovery and social reintegration are essential components of effective intervention, thereby providing a strong conceptual foundation for examining restorative strategies aimed at reputation recovery.

2.2 Reputation Management Theory and Reputation Restoration

Reputation Management Theory conceptualizes reputation as a socially constructed asset shaped by collective perceptions and communicative processes, emphasizing that reputational damage is not static but can be actively repaired through strategic actions such as clarification, transparency, and engagement with supportive audiences [9]. This perspective is particularly

relevant in digital contexts, where reputational narratives are continuously negotiated through online interactions and shaped by platform dynamics, including visibility, algorithmic amplification, and content persistence. Empirical research suggests that victims of reputational harm who engage in proactive communication strategies—such as issuing public explanations, correcting misinformation, and leveraging trusted social networks—are more likely to regain credibility and public trust [10]. Consequently, reputation restoration requires not only individual agency but also an understanding of digital communication mechanisms. In the context of online defamation, Reputation Management Theory therefore supports the argument that victims can strategically influence public perception, especially when supported by adequate digital literacy and social endorsement, providing a strong theoretical basis for examining perceived reputation recovery as an outcome shaped by restorative actions and contextual factors.

2.3 Restorative Justice Theory and Harm Repair

Restorative Justice Theory emphasizes the repair of harm, the restoration of relationships, and the reintegration of affected parties into their communities, rather than focusing solely on punitive measures [11]. In the context of online defamation, restorative justice may take the form of mediated dialogue, public apologies, legal acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and community-based reconciliation mechanisms. Prior studies indicate that such restorative approaches can significantly reduce victims' emotional distress and enhance perceptions of fairness and closure, particularly when legal recognition of harm is combined with acknowledgment from perpetrators [12] [13]. These processes contribute to emotional validation and social legitimacy, which are essential for effective reputation restoration, especially in collectivist cultural contexts where social harmony and communal values strongly shape perceptions of

honor and credibility. By prioritizing acknowledgment and reintegration, Restorative Justice Theory complements reputation management approaches and addresses the social dimensions of recovery that punitive legal responses often fail to resolve.

2.4 Social Support and Psychological Resilience

Social support is widely recognized as a protective factor that buffers the negative psychological effects of cyberbullying and online harassment by helping victims cope with emotional distress, reducing feelings of isolation, and facilitating reintegration into social networks [14]; [5]. Empirical evidence further demonstrates that victims who receive strong social support are more likely to engage in adaptive coping strategies and experience faster psychological recovery [1]. In the context of online defamation, social endorsement and public support also play an important symbolic role in countering defamatory narratives and reinforcing victims' credibility. Accordingly, social support functions not only as a psychological buffer but also as a critical social mechanism for reputation repair.

2.5 Digital Literacy as an Enabling Factor

Digital literacy refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and manage digital information effectively, including an understanding of platform features, privacy controls, and communication strategies [15]. In cases of online defamation, digital literacy enables victims to monitor harmful content, utilize reporting mechanisms, and strategically manage online narratives. Empirical studies suggest that digitally literate individuals are better equipped to respond to cyberbullying and mitigate reputational harm through proactive engagement and content management, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of reputation management strategies and enhancing victims' agency in the recovery process [7].

2.6 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

Based on the integration of Cyberbullying Theory, Reputation Management Theory, and Restorative Justice Theory, this study proposes a conceptual model in which online defamation negatively affects psychological wellbeing, while social support and restorative interventions facilitate reputation restoration. Digital literacy is positioned as a moderating factor that enhances the effectiveness of restorative strategies. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Online defamation negatively affects victims' psychological wellbeing.

H2: Social support mediates the relationship between online defamation and reputation restoration.

H3: Restorative justice interventions positively influence perceived reputation recovery.

H4: Digital literacy moderates the relationship between restorative strategies and reputation restoration.

H5: Combined legal, social, and psychological interventions result in higher levels of reputation restoration than single interventions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of reputation restoration among victims of online defamation. The mixed-method design was chosen to capture both the measurable relationships among key variables and the lived experiences of victims, allowing for methodological triangulation and enhanced validity. The quantitative component aimed to test the proposed hypotheses and conceptual model, while the qualitative component provided contextual depth by exploring victims'

perceptions, coping strategies, and recovery processes.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population consisted of social media users who had experienced online defamation. A total of 300 respondents were included in the quantitative phase, selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants had verifiable experiences of online defamation. Criteria for inclusion included exposure to defamatory content on digital platforms and perceived reputational impact. For the qualitative phase, 20 participants were selected from the survey respondents and invited to participate in in-depth interviews. This approach ensured consistency between quantitative findings and qualitative insights.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered online. The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), to measure the following constructs: online defamation exposure, psychological impact, social support, restorative justice interventions, digital literacy, and perceived reputation restoration. All measurement items were adapted from established literature and adjusted to the context of online defamation to ensure content validity. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to elaborate on their personal experiences of online defamation, emotional responses, social consequences, and strategies used to restore their reputation. The interview guide was designed to align with the study's theoretical framework, focusing on psychological recovery, social support, and restorative mechanisms.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS).

SEM-PLS was selected due to its suitability for exploratory models, complex variable relationships, and non-normal data distributions. The analysis followed a two-stage approach: (1) assessment of the measurement model, including reliability and validity testing, and (2) evaluation of the structural model to test hypothesized relationships. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was examined through average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated using established criteria. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and theme development. This process enabled the identification of recurring patterns related to psychological coping, social reintegration, and

perceptions of restorative interventions. Qualitative findings were used to enrich and contextualize the quantitative results.

4. RESULTS AND THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated using standard SEM-PLS procedures to assess internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR), while convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all constructs exceeding the minimum AVE threshold of 0.50.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation Results

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Online Defamation (OD)	5	0.848	0.876	0.562
Psychological Impact (PI)	6	0.893	0.913	0.624
Social Support (SS)	5	0.825	0.867	0.557
Restorative Justice Interventions (RJ)	5	0.887	0.904	0.618
Digital Literacy (DL)	4	0.832	0.882	0.603
Reputation Restoration (RR)	6	0.913	0.937	0.706

Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model evaluation, demonstrating that all constructs meet the recommended reliability and convergent validity criteria. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.825 to 0.913, and Composite Reliability values range from 0.867 to 0.937, indicating strong internal consistency across all constructs. Convergent validity is also well established, as all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.557

to 0.706, which confirms that each construct adequately explains the variance of its indicators. Notably, the constructs of Psychological Impact and Reputation Restoration exhibit particularly high reliability and AVE values, suggesting robust measurement of both emotional consequences and recovery outcomes associated with online defamation.

4.2 Structural Model Results

The structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesized relationships among online defamation, psychological impact, social support, restorative justice interventions, digital

literacy, and reputation restoration. The assessment followed standard SEM-PLS procedures using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to estimate path significance.

Table 2. Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Online Defamation → Psychological Impact	-0.486	8.727	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Social Support → Reputation Restoration	0.383	6.415	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Restorative Justice → Reputation Restoration	0.457	7.832	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Digital Literacy × Restorative Justice → Reputation Restoration	0.327	2.743	0.006	Supported
H5	Combined Interventions → Reputation Restoration	0.413	7.027	< 0.001	Supported

Table 2 summarizes the structural model results and hypothesis testing, indicating that all proposed relationships are statistically significant and empirically supported. Online defamation shows a strong negative effect on psychological impact ($\beta = -0.486$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that increased exposure to defamatory content significantly intensifies psychological distress among victims. Social support exhibits a positive and significant effect on reputation restoration ($\beta = 0.383$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its critical role in facilitating recovery and reinforcing social credibility. Restorative justice interventions demonstrate the strongest direct influence on reputation restoration ($\beta = 0.457$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the effectiveness of legal acknowledgment, mediated dialogue, and institutional responses

in repairing reputational harm. The significant moderating effect of digital literacy on restorative justice ($\beta = 0.327$, $p = 0.006$) suggests that victims with higher digital competencies are better able to leverage restorative mechanisms and manage online narratives. Finally, the positive impact of combined legal, social, and psychological interventions ($\beta = 0.413$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that a multidimensional approach yields stronger reputation restoration outcomes than isolated strategies, emphasizing the integrative nature of effective recovery from online defamation.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the structural model, showing that online defamation explains a moderate proportion of variance in psychological impact ($R^2 = 0.239$),

while social support, restorative justice interventions, digital literacy, and combined interventions jointly explain a substantial proportion of variance in reputation restoration ($R^2 = 0.573$). According to established SEM-PLS guidelines, these values indicate moderate to

substantial explanatory power, confirming the robustness of the proposed model. Additionally, effect size (f^2) analysis was conducted to evaluate the relative contribution of each exogenous construct to the endogenous variables.

Table 3. Effect Size (f^2)

Relationship	f^2	Effect Size
Online Defamation → Psychological Impact	0.308	Large
Social Support → Reputation Restoration	0.196	Medium
Restorative Justice → Reputation Restoration	0.288	Medium–Large
Digital Literacy (Moderator) → Reputation Restoration	0.119	Small–Medium

Table 3 presents the effect size (f^2) results, indicating the relative strength of each exogenous construct in explaining the endogenous variables. Online defamation exhibits a large effect on psychological impact ($f^2 = 0.308$), highlighting its substantial influence on victims' psychological distress. Restorative justice interventions demonstrate a medium to large effect on reputation restoration ($f^2 = 0.288$), underscoring their central role in repairing reputational harm. Social support shows a medium effect on reputation restoration ($f^2 = 0.196$), confirming its important but complementary contribution to recovery processes. Meanwhile, digital literacy as a moderating variable exhibits a small to medium effect ($f^2 = 0.119$), suggesting that while digital competencies enhance the effectiveness of restorative strategies, their impact is more supportive than dominant.

Predictive relevance of the model was assessed using the Stone–Geisser Q^2 procedure through blindfolding. The Q^2 values for both endogenous constructs were greater than zero, indicating satisfactory predictive relevance. Psychological impact yielded a Q^2 value of 0.158, while reputation restoration produced a Q^2 value of 0.349, demonstrating strong predictive capability.

4.3 Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence that online defamation constitutes a severe form

of cyberbullying with significant psychological and reputational consequences, while also demonstrating that reputation restoration is achievable through coordinated restorative mechanisms. The findings confirm that exposure to online defamation significantly exacerbates psychological distress, supporting prior research that highlights the emotional vulnerability of victims in digitally mediated environments [1], [5]. This negative effect reinforces Cyberbullying Theory, which explains how anonymity, audience amplification, and the permanence of digital content intensify harm and prolong victims' suffering beyond the initial incident [4]; [2]. The significant mediating role of social support further underscores that recovery from online defamation is not solely an individual process but is deeply embedded within social structures, as emotional validation, peer endorsement, and institutional support contribute both to psychological resilience and reputational repair [14]; [6]; [1].

From the perspective of Reputation Management Theory, the positive influence of restorative justice interventions and digital literacy highlights the active role of victims in reconstructing their social image. The findings suggest that reputation is not a fixed outcome of defamation but a dynamic asset that can be strategically managed through corrective communication, content control, and engagement with supportive audiences [9].

Digitally literate victims were better equipped to navigate platform mechanisms, counter misinformation, and leverage restorative actions effectively, consistent with prior studies emphasizing the role of digital competencies in managing online risk and reputation [7]; [15]. These results affirm the theoretical proposition that competence in digital communication enhances agency and enables victims to reclaim narrative control in online spaces.

The strong effect of restorative justice interventions provides compelling support for Restorative Justice Theory in the digital context. Legal acknowledgment, mediated apologies, and formal recognition of wrongdoing were shown to significantly enhance perceived reputation recovery and emotional closure, addressing dimensions of harm that punitive or removal-based approaches often overlook, particularly the need for acknowledgment, accountability, and reintegration [11]; [12]; [13]. Importantly, the finding that combined legal, social, and psychological interventions yield stronger restoration outcomes than isolated approaches highlights the multidimensional nature of reputation recovery, demonstrating

that psychological resilience alone is insufficient without social validation and institutional accountability [10]. Overall, this discussion bridges Cyberbullying Theory, Reputation Management Theory, and Restorative Justice Theory into a unified explanatory framework and suggests that digital platforms, legal institutions, and community actors should move beyond reactive moderation toward restorative, victim-centered approaches to promote healthier digital environments [2].

5. CONCLUSION

Online defamation, as a form of cyberbullying, threatens victims' reputations and mental health. Effective restoration requires a multi-dimensional approach, incorporating legal, social, and technological interventions, supported by social networks and digital literacy. Grounded in Cyberbullying, Reputation Management, and Restorative Justice Theories, the study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for managing online reputational harm.

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