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Level of Cybercrime Threat During the Outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study in Malaysia

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Abstract

Cybercrime threat has shown a sudden increase during the enforced stay-at-home order due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, empirical research was conducted in providing substantial evidence regarding the level of cybercrime threats in Malaysia during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative approach was used to collect data among 332 respondents across Malaysia. The finding stipulated that a large number of respondents have experienced a high level of online phishing/malware distribution (72.9%), a moderate level of online fraud (69.2%), and a moderate level of online sexual harassment (87.7%). The move to explore the level of cybercrime threat experienced by the public during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is essential to detect, disrupt, and mitigate cybercrime threats during unprecedented situations.

Keywords: Cybercrime, Cybercriminals, COVID-19, Threat, Pandemic

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the emergence of various problems such as creation and consumption of false information, political hoaxes, transmission of misleading medical remedies for COVID-19, and fabrication of false conspiracy theories across the globe (Hansson et al., 2021; Tharshini et al., 2021). On the other hand, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led many countries to issue “stay-at-home” orders to contain the spread of that virus resulting in a radical alteration to the individual’s lifestyle. Some valid proof shows that violent crimes such as robberies, burglaries, murders, and thefts cases are reported to decline in major cities across the United States ranging from 30% to 42% following the decreased mobility due to the stay-at-home order (Hawdo et al., 2020). Consequently, the idling of society during the COVID-19 pandemic along with the advancement in digital technologies has created an optimal impact on the cybercrime threat landscape.

In general, cybercrime refers to illegal activities that use a computer or smartphone as its primary means of commission to intentionally cause harm against individuals or groups of individuals (Chigada & Madzinga, 2021). According to Payne and Hadzhidimova (2018), cybercrime is classified as the second most reported crime across the world. Similarly, the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (2021) defined cybercrime as unauthorised