

# Mechanism Behind Cyberbullying: Summary and Reflections

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**Abstract.** Cyberbullying involves the perpetration of personal assaults and has witnessed a significant increase in prevalence in the Internet era. This escalation may be attributed to several causes, including the ability to remain anonymous and the influence of group dynamics. This article discusses the origins and repercussions of cyberbullying, uncovering a multifaceted interaction between personal, collective, and digital elements. This study aims to provide insight into the role of social identity and group polarization in fostering online hatred by thoroughly examining existing literature. The bystander effect and diffusion of culpability were analyzed in this review, focusing on their potential to amplify cyberbullying inside the digital realm. Moreover, the anonymity provided by the Internet is widely seen as a significant enabler of unethical conduct. To mitigate the occurrence of cyberbullying, we advocate for the use of comprehensive and diverse methods. It is strongly encouraged for individuals to cultivate self-awareness, empathy, and digital literacy competencies. The transformation of group dynamics into inclusive and good online environments, with an emphasis on promoting bystander intervention, is crucial. The establishment of explicit standards and laws can facilitate the creation of a more secure online environment inside society.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, internet flame war, social media, social psychology.

## 1. Introduction

In recent times, there has been a notable escalation in the prevalence of online conflicts characterized by harsh criticism and reprimand. The increasing prevalence of mobile devices, such as smartphones, along with the advancements in 4G and 5G communication technologies, has facilitated widespread Internet accessibility for a growing number of individuals. Simultaneously, there has been an observable increase in online aggression among individuals. The Internet often becomes a breeding ground for contentious debates on issues such as gender, racial, and nationalism, which in turn trigger cycles of heated exchanges and reprimands among users. An internet flame war refers to a contentious exchange of opinions and ideas among individuals in the online realm, frequently characterized by derogatory language and personal affronts. These debates may manifest themselves on many online platforms, such as social media, forums, or other digital spaces that enable interpersonal communication. The phenomenon known as “flame wars” is characterized by heated exchanges among participants, often leading to a shift in focus from the initial issue to personal attacks [1]. According to the survey report examining the prevalence of online violence among American adults, it was revealed that 41% of the surveyed individuals reported encountering at least one manifestation of online violence. Furthermore, a subset of 25% reported experiencing more severe forms of online violence, including but not limited to physical threats, stalking, sexual harassment, or persistent harassment [2]. According to the research, it was shown that political perspectives serve as the primary catalyst for instances of cyberbullying. Approximately 20 percent of individuals in the United States reported experiencing online attacks specifically targeting their political beliefs [2]. According to the article, social media platforms have been identified as the primary setting for cyberbullying incidents, as reported by 75% of those who have experienced cyberbullying. These findings highlight the prevalence of cyberbullying occurrences on social media [2]. The precise determinants and underlying processes of cyberbullying and individual violence over the Internet are insufficiently understood and explored. Through the examination of the phenomenon of increased aggression among individuals on the Internet, along with an exploration of the underlying causes and resulting impacts, it becomes possible to suggest viable strategies and measures for addressing and mitigating cyber violence. These may include enhancing the development and

enforcement of legal frameworks and regulations, fostering an improved sense of ethical awareness and media literacy among internet users, and cultivating a wholesome and harmonious online environment.

## 2. Method

The main electronic databases used in this review are Google Scholar, Social Science Research Network, and SocArxiv. These databases are authoritative and well-known libraries in the social sciences or sciences and are commonly used in scientific research. This review used indexing terms for database searches, and the search formula was: bullying OR cyberbullying AND flame war OR internet flame war AND social media AND anonymous AND personal attacks AND psychology. The selection criteria for the references in this review are relevant research published in the past five years, relevant theories not limited by time range, and the main background is the Internet rather than real places such as schools or society.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. What is Cyberbullying?

The term “cyberbullying” encompasses the deliberate utilization of electronic platforms such as social media, messaging systems, and phone calls to inflict harm on individuals [3]. Online violence encompasses a wide range of manifestations, such as the transmission of hostile, impolite, or derogatory comments, the dissemination of frightening, malicious, and possibly deceptive content to others, the disclosure of sensitive or confidential information (often referred to as exposure), and the act of barring someone from online spaces [4]. This article investigates the underlying factors that contribute to individuals engaging in the transmission of angry, impolite, or offensive communications, specifically focusing on the manifestation of online aggression.

### 3.2. Group Factors

Social media platforms provide highly effective push mechanisms. The recommendation algorithm employed by social media platforms primarily aims to suggest things, content, or services to individuals with comparable tastes [5]. Individuals who share similar interests and engage in online platforms such as blogs or discussion boards can establish a cohesive collective effortlessly. The construct known as social identity refers to an individual’s experience of belonging, pride, and loyalty towards a certain group to which they are affiliated [6]. Individuals who possess a robust sense of affiliation with their own social group may exhibit a heightened propensity to initiate acts of aggression against other groups, driven by the need to safeguard or promote the interests of their own group. Individuals tend to categorize themselves into an “us” group, which represents their in-group, and a “them” group, which represents their out-group. In doing so, they want to establish the superiority of their in-group over the out-group across several dimensions [6]. In certain instances, it is seen that those who identify as supporters of Barcelona may engage in acts of aggression towards others who identify as followers of Real Madrid, based on the perception that their team is superior to Real Madrid.

Group polarization can affect the individual opinions held within a group. The phenomenon of group polarization suggests that group’s beliefs, attitudes, and decisions often exhibit a greater degree of amplification or extremity than the individual members’ perspectives. Consequently, the group’s collective opinions get intensified, resulting in more extreme views than those held by the individual group members [7]. Individuals often exhibit heightened levels of extremity and aggression when operating inside group settings to safeguard their self-esteem and establish a distinct sense of identity.

Deindividuation refers to the process through which individuals in a group experience a loss of their sense of self and uniqueness, rendering them more susceptible to the influence and pressure exerted by the group [8]. When individuals perceive themselves as a collective member, they

substitute their individual identity with a communal one and behave according to the group's rules and objectives [8]. Through this process, the individual has a diminished sense of self-awareness and self-assessment, directing their attention solely toward the awareness and evaluation of the collective entity [8]. Depersonalization may thus diminish an individual's perception of accountability and ethical considerations towards their acts, hence increasing the likelihood of engaging in behaviors that transgress societal norms and ethical standards, such as heightened aggression or violence.

### **3.3. Network Environment Factors**

#### **3.3.1. Bystander**

The widespread understanding is that a substantial number of individuals populate the Internet. According to recent data from April 2023, it has been observed that over 64.6% of the global population possesses the ability to connect to the Internet [9]. This implies that a substantial number of individuals observe or are present within the network. The phenomenon known as the bystander effect can exacerbate the severity of cyberbullying incidents. The phenomenon known as the bystander effect pertains to the observation that in some instances of emergency or crisis, the level of assistance provided by those who are present but not directly involved declines as the number of spectators in the vicinity grows [10]. In essence, the presence of a larger number of individuals engenders a collective perception that absolves each person from the responsibility or obligation to assist the victim, thus impeding the prompt and efficacious provision of aid to the victim. If the perpetuation of cyberbullying remains unaddressed, cyberbullies may see their actions as being acknowledged or intriguing to a wider audience, so motivating them to target their victims persistently or increasingly. The presence of the bystander effect is likely to exacerbate the severity of cyberbullying in this scenario.

#### **3.3.2. Responsibility Diffusion**

Individuals undergo a cognitive process known as moral disengagement to participate in unethical behavior without experiencing remorse or self-condemnation [11]. The cognitive mechanisms often encompassed in moral disengagement are as follows. One of the identified phenomena is referred to as moral rationalization, which is the process of justifying harsh behaviors by attributing them to a moral purpose or sense of justice, rendering them more socially acceptable [12, 13]. One potential justification for cyberbullying directed towards specific individuals involved in illegal activities is the notion of seeking justice. The second phenomenon is referred to as linguistic whitewashing, which involves the utilization of imprecise or neutral language to obfuscate or diminish the gravity and consequences of a brutal action [14].

Additionally, it has been seen that cyberbullies may experience a reduction in guilt, leading them to perceive their actions as innocuous or even humorous expressions of personal viewpoints [15]. For instance, labeling someone using derogatory terms can be referred to as "criticism" or "discussion." Another term used to describe this phenomenon is "favorable comparison," when someone compares their own action to a more severe or cruel behavior to diminish its negative implications [16]. For example, some hold the belief that engaging in verbal abuse is a comparatively more benevolent kind of mistreatment when compared to physical violence. The final cognitive process associated with moral disengagement that warrants discussion in this article is dehumanization. Dehumanization entails perceiving the victim as being of lesser value, lacking worth, or devoid of human essence, consequently stripping them of their inherent dignity and entitlements. As a result, dehumanization diminishes feelings of empathy and moral accountability towards the victims [17]. As an illustration, an individual with racist beliefs may perceive individuals of different races as primitive, uneducated, or threatening collectives or creatures.

#### **3.3.3. Anonymity of the Internet**

The Internet's provision of anonymity diminishes the social limitations and moral obligations borne by its users. Facilitating users' ability to disregard the ramifications and effects of their conduct on others [18]. One such instance involves certain individuals known as internet trolls who exploit

the anonymity afforded by the online environment to engage in abusive, taunting, threatening, or intimidating behavior towards fellow users, all while evading any potential consequences or retaliation [18]. Moreover, the Internet's anonymity can facilitate moral disengagement by serving as a psychological shield, allowing individuals to engage in immoral conduct without disclosing their true identities and experiencing feelings of guilt or self-condemnation [19, 20]. According to a study, it was shown that in situations where group members are characterized by a higher number, greater density, more anonymity, and greater similarity, there is an increased likelihood of experiencing a diminished sense of self-awareness and self-evaluation. Consequently, individuals in such groups tend to engage in activities that deviate from established social norms and moral standards [21]. The Internet effectively fulfills these criteria since individuals with shared interests like to congregate online, benefiting from the anonymity afforded by the network.

## **4. Future Orientations**

### **4.1. Strategies for Mitigating Cyberbullying**

It is imperative to act within the realms of individual, group, and social situations to mitigate the occurrence of cyberbullying. Individuals need to cultivate and augment their self-awareness and self-regulation abilities alongside developing cognitive and emotional empathy. Also, it is essential for individuals to acquire the necessary skills to manage unpleasant emotions and proactively seek assistance, when necessary, effectively. Additionally, it is imperative for organizations to cultivate a constructive and all-encompassing environment that actively discourages cyberbullying while promoting bystanders' active involvement in intervening. Furthermore, society must develop unambiguous and consistent standards and rules to control online activity and safeguard online rights effectively. Network platform operators should enhance the oversight of user-generated content, employing advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and extensive data analysis to promptly discover, filter, and remove cyber-violence-related material, mitigating its dissemination. Simultaneously, governments and educational institutions must offer formal instruction and advice on digital citizenship and media literacy. Additionally, they should strive to enhance public awareness of the detrimental effects and repercussions associated with cyberbullying. Implementing these measures makes it possible to establish an online environment that is safer and more conducive to promoting good health for all those involved.

### **4.2. Limitations**

The present study possesses several shortcomings that necessitate acknowledgment and subsequent resolution. Initially, the author neglected to consider the potential impact of cultural variables on the prevalence and interpretation of cyberbullying. Individuals' online behavior and communication can be influenced by the norms and values prevalent in their respective cultures. For instance, certain societies may have a greater inclination towards collectivism and hierarchical structures, while others may display a stronger emphasis on individualism and egalitarian values. The potential impact of cultural variations on cyberbullying, including its prevalence and characteristics, as well as the coping mechanisms and consequences experienced by victims and bystanders, has been noted [22].

Furthermore, the examination of the function of stereotypes and biases in the context of cyberbullying was not conducted. A stereotype may be defined as a broad and generalized view held about a certain group of individuals, whereas prejudice refers to the presence of unfavorable attitudes or emotions directed against a specific group of people [23]. Cyberbullies may employ preconceptions and biases to selectively victimize and torment others on the basis of their racial or ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or other facets of their social identity. The many manifestations of cyberbullying can exert more profound and enduring impacts on the self-esteem, mental well-being, and social integration of its targets. Furthermore, no empirical study was conducted to validate the theoretical framework and underlying assumptions. This article's

primary focus is conducting a comprehensive literature review and employing logical analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge that these methods may not fully encompass the intricate nature and wide-ranging manifestations of the real-world phenomena of cyberbullying. Hence, it is recommended that future studies undertake additional empirical investigations utilizing a range of methodologies, including surveys, experiments, interviews, observations, and content analysis in order to validate and enhance the existing theoretical framework and assumptions.

## 5. Conclusion

In the contemporary digital age, characterized by widespread global connectivity to the Internet, there has been a notable increase in cyberbullying and a corresponding escalation in online conflicts characterized by verbal aggression. The present study examines the complex origins and outcomes of cyberbullying, elucidating the intersection of individual psychological factors, group processes, and the distinct characteristics of the digital realm. In this study, we explore the psychological aspects of individuals and their inclination towards moral disengagement, mainly while operating under the veil of anonymity in online contexts. The lack of personal accountability and the manipulation of ethical thinking give rise to a conducive environment for cyberbullying. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these cognitive mechanisms is of utmost importance in developing efficacious therapies. The influence of group elements has emerged as a significant contributor to the proliferation of cyber assaults. Social identification and group polarization contribute to the intensification of differences between distinct social groups, leading to a perpetuating cycle of animosity. Deindividuation, which refers to the phenomenon of losing one's individuality inside a collective, serves to magnify these inclinations, rendering people more vulnerable to the sway exerted by the community. Within the domain of digital platforms, the presence of bystanders and the diffusion of responsibility intensify the issue at hand. The prevalence of bystanders, in conjunction with a reduced sense of accountability, contributes to the unabated persistence of cyberbullying. The aforementioned occurrence underscores the critical significance of bystander engagement in mitigating cyberattacks. The duality of the Internet's anonymity has both advantageous and detrimental aspects. The platform facilitates unrestricted self-expression while simultaneously facilitating moral disengagement. The utilization of anonymity by internet trolls enables them to engage in acts of harassment, threats, and intimidation without apprehension of facing any retribution. The convergence of social identity dynamics, group polarization, depersonalization, the bystander effect, and moral disengagement in digital settings culminates in a potent combination that facilitates the occurrence of cyberbullying. In order to address this issue, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach. Individuals need to cultivate self-awareness, empathy, and digital literacy. Groups need to cultivate an environment that promotes diversity and actively encourages bystander intervention. Society must develop explicit standards and legislation to govern online conduct effectively. Furthermore, online platforms should include robust monitoring and filtering methods. Further investigation is required to examine these features to further our comprehension of cyberbullying. In conclusion, addressing the issue of cyberbullying necessitates implementing a comprehensive strategy that considers the various dimensions of individual, collective, and societal dynamics.

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