

The Cause and Influence of Cyberbullying

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Abstract. With the ever-increasing prevalence of the Internet and electronic devices, social media has become more accessible, resulting in the alarming rise of the cyberbullying crisis. Throughout the years of the pandemic, Internet usage skyrocketed, exacerbating the occurrence of cyber violence, with severe cases garnering increasing attention. This study primarily delves into the causes and far-reaching effects of cyber violence, exploring various dimensions in which cyberbullying impacts individuals and society. The study will examine the evolving identity of "netizens," the distinctive features of contemporary social media platforms, and the immediate as well as long-term consequences of cyberbullying. Additionally, we will explore readily implementable measures to address this pressing issue. It is important to note that cyberbullying lacks a universally accepted definition across various disciplines. Therefore, our definition will be formulated based on the defining characteristics of cyber violence and a comprehensive synthesis of prior research. Subsequently, we will engage in a detailed discussion centered on this definition.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, cyber violence, social media, cyberspace, school bully.

1. Introduction

While the Internet continues to evolve, the realm of social media is steadily maturing. As electronic devices and wireless networks become more pervasive, individuals enjoy greater access to social media platforms, enabling them to freely voice their opinions online. Unfortunately, this increased connectivity also provides cyberbullying with fertile ground to flourish. According to recent research [1], cyberbullying can lead to a range of maladaptive emotional, psychological, and behavioral outcomes, including but not limited to sadness, anxiety, depression, and social phobia. The gravity of these repercussions cannot be underestimated or dismissed, which is why the concept of "cyber violence" has begun to permeate the public consciousness. The present study delved into the causes and consequences of cyberbullying while suggesting pertinent measures currently available to combat this pressing issue. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the definitions and official punitive measures for cyberbullying remain underdeveloped for three primary reasons.

First, the emergence of cyberspace is shortly in current decades, and the development is not thorough. Legal procedures have not yet been fully followed up. As a new medium, relevant research isn't yet fulfilled, resulting in different definitions of cyber violence from various fields, such as politics, law, psychology, sociology, and linguistics.

Secondly, the accelerated pace of evolution in social media surpasses people's initial expectations. This presents an even greater challenge in devising relevant regulations and laws, as the legal process often lags behind the rapid developments in social media and the emergence of cyberbullying incidents. In some cases, the rules for social media software have not yet been set, and the form of new changes or additions of new functions that cannot be constrained by current regulations and laws appear.

The epidemic in recent years has given social media a lot of room for usage, including online social, online courses, online shopping, online food ordering, etc. More people have come into contact with cyberspace, while also exposing potential threats of cyberbullying to the surface. According to research, the number of cyber violence incidents has increased sharply during and after the pandemic, and possible reasons are longer time spent online, more isolation from others, additional time away from schools and businesses, etc. [2]. As previously highlighted, there is currently no universally agreed-upon definition for cyber violence. In this paper, we will provide a concise and well-defined explanation of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, in our context, is defined as the deliberate and repetitive

use of aggression within the digital realm. This encompasses various forms of harm-inflicting verbal behaviors, such as insults, harassment, threats, and any actions that seek to undermine an individual's rights, including their reputation and privacy, as well as other facets of their personal identity. Additionally, the term "bullying" inherently conveys the notion of multiple individuals targeting a specific person or a minority group, often through tactics involving insults, intimidation, and harassment. Therefore, our analysis will also delve into the implications of this characteristic of online violence, along with its societal implications. The feasible countermeasures suggested will be discussed only based on current available literature [3]. Recognizing the impact of cyberbullying overall, this study aims to view in general the cause and effect of cyberbullying, as well as some enforceable measures.

2. The Cause of Cyberbullying

2.1. The features of Cyberspace

The distinctive and extraordinary characteristics of the digital realm create a fertile breeding ground for aggression. From a psychological perspective, anonymity emboldens individuals, making them less apprehensive about consequences and discipline. When one believes that their identity is concealed, the sense of responsibility for their words often diminishes. Within this virtual domain, freedom of expression takes on a transformative nature, resulting in relentless debates and the proliferation of hurtful language. When individuals recognize the exceedingly minimal cost associated with online aggression—virtually no financial repercussions and a limited likelihood of facing punishment—the inclination to engage in such behavior becomes more pronounced.

2.1.1 Anonymity and Virtuality - Deindividuation Theory

In situations where individuals are shielded by anonymity, they tend to exhibit higher levels of aggression compared to scenarios where their actions are traceable to their real identities. The Anonymity Scale [4] has been developed to evaluate an individual's perception of anonymity in online environments and the frequency with which they engage in aggressive behavior when their identities are concealed. This assessment entails self-reporting, with participants selecting responses on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time). The findings consistently illustrate that people are more inclined to manifest aggressive behaviors when they are operating anonymously. This outcome aligns with the deindividuation theory, which offers an explanation for this phenomenon under conditions of anonymity. In such situations, individuals tend to be less concerned about facing repercussions from authority figures, thus diminishing their sense of responsibility for their words [5]. People behave in deviant or even violently under such deindividuated situations because people hidden behind a group can't easily be blamed or criticized. The virtuality of cyberspace further enforced the anonymity of the environment, that the phenomenon takes place more severely.

2.1.2 Low Intervention Cost

With the development of the Internet, the cost of social media intervention is getting lower and lower. Today, anyone with an electronic device can access social media simply by downloading and creating accounts. The pace at which the Internet evolves is astonishingly fast, and as a result, there is a significant gap in the development of timely regulatory and legal frameworks for various social media platforms. This deficiency in regulations further exacerbates the accessibility and affordability of engaging in cyber aggression. With the relatively low barriers to entry and a significant degree of freedom of expression, cyberviolence has gained momentum. Additionally, the ease with which individuals can create multiple accounts on these platforms goes largely unchecked, increasing the likelihood of one person using multiple accounts to propagate cyber violence.

2.1.3 Openness

Due to the openness of the network platform, netizens exist to be coming from different regions and cultural backgrounds. In different cultural backgrounds, views on the same event can be very

different. When people with different positions speak freely on the Internet, disputes are inevitable. If the dispute is not carried out in a rational scene, it can easily turn into a fierce quarrel and lead to online violence.

2.2. Characteristics of “Netizens”

Cyberspace gathers people from all over the world, which also means that netizens have the characteristics of diverse cultures, diverse beliefs, diverse languages, etc. In an environment where diversity is not limited, or in other words, cannot be limited, the dispute between different viewpoints is more likely to arise. This makes heated disputes inevitable, therefore having negative language contributes to cyberbullying.

2.2.1 Individuals’ lack of complete definition of cyber violence

In certain cases, some individuals may not be fully aware that their actions contribute to cyber violence due to the ambiguous boundaries of such behavior. The way we define cyberspace and cyber violence plays a crucial role in shaping people's motivations to engage in these activities. When we define "cyberspace" as an electronic interactive realm crafted by information network technology, essentially an intangible "virtual society" distinct from the physical world, it becomes clear that the online conduct of netizens is primarily influenced by the moral dynamics within this virtual realm. However, if we fail to distinguish between the "network society" and the "real society," considering both as collections of individuals and viewing the Internet merely as one of the modern mediums for free speech, we can better understand that netizens' "violent" actions often stem from their pursuit of freedom of expression. In this context, their behavior can be seen as a reflection of their desire to exercise their right to free speech in a digital age [6].

Discrimination of gender, sexuality, race, etc. also appears to be a significant topic online, causing fights and humiliating aggression. The degree of freedom online makes discriminating memes and language increasingly possible to be present and spread, causing a higher range of victims to be hurt by the content. Political standpoint plays role as a primary problem causing cyberbullying as well and might cause offline consequences, such as public panic and turmoil.

2.2.2 Compassion and Empathy Fade

In real life, sometimes perpetrators lack empathy, which leads to violent behavior. At the same time, people with certain personality traits are more likely to engage in online violence, such as impulsivity, antisocial personality disorder, violent tendencies, and short-term mood disorders, which may increase their risk of committing and experiencing violence. According to research, congenital and acquired mental problems may also lead to an increase in psychopath traits, thereby increasing the likelihood of violence [7]. These factors should be taken into account in the reasons why a small number of online violence perpetrators commit violence.

2.2.3 Moral restraint and Freedom of Speech Causing Cyber Violence

Internet violence incidents have received widespread attention as early as the 2000s, stimulating public opinion and gradually producing deeper social impacts. Part of the reason why it has a huge social impact on Jiang's research is that some cases of online violence are morally critical, and this single moral criticism could be caused by the perpetrator's lack of self-examination, in short, named Moral Constraint Violence Theory. This type of Internet explosion involves netizens conducting moral trials against a certain object in cyberspace based on moral constraints. The common feature of these public opinions are (1) set by gathering a group of people for a blaming purpose of coercive; (2) trying to interfere with and control the behavior of others through a dominant position in power and a form of coercive intrusion; (3) contain targeted verbal violence that is single-sided constraining. There is also another theory raised by Jiang to explain the phenomenon of group online violence, namely the Alienation Theory of Freedom of Speech. The basis of this theory is that "cyberspace" is a branch of real society, but it is a social space that enables interaction through virtual media. Therefore, "cyber violence" is the alienation of the impact of speech caused by some netizens

exercising their citizens' right to freedom of speech while ignoring their speech responsibilities. In general, social cyber violence often involves a certain scale of organized or temporary groups of netizens who use network platforms to initiate group, irrational, large-scale, and sustained attacks against specific targets. Public opinion attacks cause damage to the rights and interests of the target, including personal, reputation, property rights, etc. [6].

2.3. General Strain Theory

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the root causes of criminal behavior and delinquency. GST places a central emphasis on dissecting the collective impact of negative emotions, which exert significant pressure leading individuals towards criminal and delinquent actions. This theory posits that the primary catalysts behind criminal behavior and delinquency are predominantly rooted in adverse emotional states, including but not limited to anxiety, depression, fear, and envy, among others. This theory is highly applicable to the cause of cyberbullying. Netizens could have the possibility of simply being angry, upset, depressed, etc. that they decide to vent their emotions in cyberspace [8].

In addition to the negative emotional factors explained by GST, the behaviors that can be explained by this theory also combine the effects of individuals into social cyber violence. When multiple individuals use the Internet as a way to vent their emotions and form the beginning of violence, this will vigorously promote the development of online violence. Furthermore, this phenomenon has contributed to the development of a shared mindset within society, indirectly fostering the emergence of certain societal awareness, such as a widespread aversion towards the affluent. When a common social mentality is spread through the Internet, online violence is inevitable. While the number of people who commit violence is large, causing its impact to expand. This is likely to lead to the spread of more public opinion, affect social order, and lead to social mental disorder and turmoil [6].

3. The Effect of Cyberbullying

3.1. Social Impact

From a social perspective, the public opinion brought about by online violence can lead to panic in the least and can lead to social disorder in general. Its severity may cause social unrest, political unrest, and civil unrest.

3.2. Impact on Individuals

Cyber violence may lead to an overwhelming sense of exposure and pain, seriously affecting people's daily social interaction, life, work, and other development. It will also seriously distort physical and mental health, and may even lead to suicide and self-harm in severe cases [9]. To put it simply, online violence can even be considered a murder weapon hidden in the dark. Its impact on the victim and the perpetrator cannot be predicted, and it may even lead to the end of a person's life.

3.2.1 General Mental Impact of Cyberbullying on Individuals

Cyberbullying inflicts the most substantial harm in the form of mental health issues, affecting individuals on both sides of the situation—victims and perpetrators alike. The repercussions encompass heightened levels of stress, anxiety, depression, tendencies toward violent behavior, and diminished self-esteem. While these consequences affect both victims and perpetrators, it is worth noting that the severity of the impact may vary, with victims typically experiencing more profound and lasting effects. Even if the bullying has stopped, cyberbullying can have long-term emotional effects. The lasting embarrassment caused by cyberbullying can also cause social difficulties for victims. This continued sense of embarrassment is also due to the persistence of cyberbullying because when bullying content is uploaded online, it will be difficult to completely disappear and may be forwarded and saved countless times. This record will become a long-term memory for the victim. threaten. In terms of social isolation, online violence not only causes personal shame and

embarrassment but also causes further isolation and rejection caused by people around you who choose to leave the victim to avoid suffering the same violence [9].

3.2.2 Severe Offline consequences - School Bullying

In real life, teenagers lack mental maturity and have a lower ability to judge online information. This makes it easier for online violence to affect young people. According to a sample of 384 respondents below 17 analyzed by Patchin and Hinduja, adolescents found that the main forms of school violence through online violence include frequent online harassment, malicious teasing, insulting others and even personality humiliation, deliberately omitting someone's information to achieve isolation, threatening, and spreading rumors. The data paints a concerning picture: 30% of respondents disclosed that they had personally endured cyberbullying, with an additional 11% admitting to having engaged in online bullying behavior. Moreover, nearly half of all participants reported bearing witness to cyberbullying incidents in some capacity. In terms of emotional responses to online aggression, a significant portion of victims revealed their feelings: 42.5% expressed frustration, while almost 40% acknowledged experiencing anger, and over 27% disclosed feelings of sadness. The impact of cyberbullying is far-reaching, transcending the confines of the digital realm; 31.9% of victims disclosed that they had felt its effects at school, and 26.5% reported experiencing its repercussions within their homes. These findings underscore the pervasive and distressing nature of cyberbullying, which can permeate various aspects of students' lives. A large number of victims choose to log out of their accounts or feel forced to go completely offline for a period of time. Among these people, very few are able to report the Internet or glass, and only 9% of them dare to report it to teachers and adults [10].

Research reveals alarming statistics: individuals who fall victim to cyberbullying are twice as likely to contemplate suicide or engage in self-harm when compared to those facing traditional forms of bullying, familial stressors, or historical trauma. Moreover, studies indicate a troubling trend, with suicide attempts among teenagers nearly doubling since 2008. The impact of online violence has inflicted deep and lasting harm, leaving an indelible mark on the physical and mental well-being of young people. It has also posed significant challenges to their personal growth and future prospects, with consequences that are often irreversible and difficult to predict. In addition to internal emotions of depression and sadness, victims may also experience anger as a result of the violence they suffered. Driven by such anger, the victim may develop serious anti-social values, ignore right and wrong, and have a fear of being victimized again, thereby committing criminal acts of attacking and hurting others in order to retaliate against society and the bully, escalating the situation [9].

4. Achievable Measures

According to Chinese law, all media platforms are responsible for conserving the healthy online environment. Online insults, online defamation, violations of the security of citizens' personal information, offline harassment, and malicious hype through online violence should all be dealt with accordingly. Punishments, platforms and individuals that cause serious consequences such as mental disorder and suicide of the victim, insult and slander many people, and cause bad social impact have the right to file lawsuits against the perpetrators, and the perpetrators and related troublemakers should bear corresponding legal responsibilities [11].

4.1. Censorship

The review of online information plays a vital role in preventing and stopping online violence. Before the work is released, media platforms are obliged to screen and review videos uploaded by users, and return illegal, vulgar, and prohibited content. In instances where a video's release triggers an outbreak of online violence or has the potential to escalate into a significant public opinion incident, it is imperative that the platform in question takes swift and appropriate action. In severe cases, the content should be expeditiously removed from public view. This approach is being adopted by numerous media platforms, including but not limited to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok,

among others, and is reinforced by relevant laws and regulations in various regions and countries. In order to maintain the health of the network environment, users who violate the rules repeatedly or seriously should be punished accordingly. Removal of published content, traffic restrictions, warnings, account bans, etc. all need to be implemented, and the specific regulations vary from platform to platform. Only effective punishment can increase the cost of cyberbullying crimes and thereby reduce the rate of cyber violence crimes from the root. This method is being used by multiple media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc., and there are relevant laws in many regions and countries.

4.2. Information Filtering

Through streaming media data, media platforms can use online algorithm to forward relevant content that users tend to accept, are entertaining, are close to the user's region and are unambiguous with the user's characteristics. This could make the content available for viewing on social platforms as close to the needs and preferences of users as possible, and reduce unnecessary confrontations and arguments. Simultaneously, media platforms should empower users to proactively filter content. For instance, users should have the ability to provide feedback on whether the content they are being presented with aligns with their preferences, allowing for a reduction in the presentation of content that does not align with users' interests. The inherent entertainment aspect of internet platforms should be acknowledged. By minimizing unnecessary conflicts and disagreements, platforms can enhance user satisfaction, diminish online hostility, and contribute significantly to maintaining a healthy online environment. This approach is being implemented by numerous media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others, and is reinforced by pertinent laws and regulations in various regions and countries.

Information cocoon is a phenomenon of information narrowing formed by the development of streaming media data and online algorithm [12]. This phenomenon seriously affects people's information acceptance, causing users to easily receive completely single-sided information, thus forming cognitive biases. More extreme issues of social consciousness arise. Algorithm itself is a good tool, but media platforms should adjust the scope of its use to prevent users from only receiving a single aspect of information. All information should be disclosed to users so that users can freely choose to browse content. Browsing channels based on users' multi-faceted information can also achieve users' civil rights to receive information. To reiterate, algorithm recommendation and reducing information cocooning itself do not conflict. Media platforms need to master a degree to minimize the push of contradictory information rather than completely eliminate the comprehensive dissemination of multi-faceted information.

4.3. Improving Awareness Through Education

Internet violence has become a hot topic and a major source of violence. Education in this area should be planned into the education syllabus as soon as possible, alongside body language violence, so that the younger generation can cultivate anti-cyber violence awareness from an early age and maintain future network security.

4.4. Improvement of Internet Laws

Given the abstract and expansive nature of cyberspace, coupled with the vast and unpredictable number of participants in online violence, identifying the aggressor and gauging the severity of the aggression poses a formidable challenge. This complexity lies at the core of the issues surrounding rights protection. It is imperative that all countries and regions respond promptly to these challenges through comprehensive legislation, enhance their understanding of cyber violence through multifaceted research, and expedite the establishment of a consensus on legislative measures to combat cyber violence.

5. Conclusion

The present study mainly discusses the various causes and effects of cyber violence and mentions some existing or implementable solutions or possible directions. Cyberviolence has yet to be fully defined in various fields, thus increasing the difficulty of solving real-world problems.

Starting from the network platform itself, the reasons for the formation of cyber violence are (1) the anonymity and virtuality of Cyberspace; (2) the low cost of committing violence; (3) the openness of the Internet. Cyberspace is a new system that has emerged in recent years, so the confused identity of netizens has also surfaced, and more learning is needed to improve the characteristics and obligations of their identities. From the perspective of the new "netizen" identity, the causes of online violence include (1) netizens generally lack awareness of online violence, and do not even know that some of their behaviors are contributing to online violence; (2) the psychological problems of some people, such as a lack of empathy and anti-social personality; (3) groups are often formed based on a single moral basis for open moral judgment committing to violence, and individuals in the group often lack self-moral examination. In addition to the viewpoints of the network itself and netizens themselves, general strain theory provides the essence of online violence from the perspective of criminology and sociology, and the spread of emotions caused by personal extreme emotions, thus forming severe online violence.

The impact of cyber violence extends to both the individual and society. Its social impact may cause social unrest, while its impacts on individuals can lead to (1) mental health problems of both victims and perpetrators, severely causing self-mutilation and suicide; (2) affect other people around victims, causing offline isolation and affecting a range of people's daily life; (3) social public opinion brought about by its long-term impact; (4) severe school violence for adolescents.

Currently, many media platforms and national governments are paying attention to this issue and conducting in-depth research on these issues. Some methods and directions that are currently being implemented or can be implemented by platforms include (1) establishment of rules and order, and implementation of penalties; (2) screening of recommended content and technical implementation of information cocoon; (3) setting up further research and improvement of laws.

This article aims to promote the solution to online violence by reviewing past research. The Internet is a platform with a broad vision, and its positive impact on academics, entertainment, social activities, public health and other aspects is driving our lives. However, the other side of this double-edged sword should receive more timely attention, making the Internet a safer and more secure community that serves people positively.

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