

The Influencing Factors of Cyber Violence

Lingyue Jia

Chongqing Yucai Secondary School, Chongqing, China

jsloanu52365@student.napavalley.edu

Abstract. Cyber violence is a problem that exists all over the world and has brought negative effects to countries, societies and individuals. The present study explored the causes of cyber violence and the abnormal reactions of cyberbullies in the face of their immoral behavior to fill the gaps in the existing literature in the academic world. It is concluded that there are four factors that will affect the causes of cyber violence and the psychological activities of cyber bullies, namely moral disengagement which helps cyberbullies get rid of guilt, invisible narcissism and empathy which determine the probability of cyberbullying, and callous-unemotional traits which are indifferent to all behaviors of cyberbullying. It is hoped that this study can arouse the awareness of researchers and the public on cyber violence and make efforts to reduce cyber violence together.

Keywords: Cyber violence, moral disengagement, empathy, invisible narcissism, callous-unemotional traits.

1. Introduction

With the development of society and the rise of the internet, the development of the internet has also brought many problems, such as cyber violence. Cyber violence refers to violence on the Internet, which means that individuals or groups use the Internet as a medium to infringe on an individual's right to reputation and privacy through verbal attacks, human flesh searches, etc., causing psychological or physical harm to the individual [1]. Recently, cyber violence has occurred frequently worldwide, with people of different ages and locations experiencing it. On June 29, 2023, China Youth Daily reported that 15.84% of minors in China feel that cyber violence is frequent around them [2]. 73% of Chinese citizens believe that the situation of cyber violence is becoming increasingly severe [3]. Except for China, cyber violence is occurring at a high frequency worldwide. As early as 2004, there were 7617 cases of cyber violence in South Korea [4], and the American Federal Bureau of Investigation received 7175 cases of cyber violence in 2018 alone. According to statistics, the proportion of Americans experiencing cyber violence in 2019 was as high as 37% [5]. Frequent cyber violence has also caused many tragedies. For example, in January 2023, a female college student in China was violently raped by netizens because of her pink hair, which led to the girl finally committing suicide; the well-known Korean actress Cui Shirley was violently raped online by netizens for a long time. She suffered from depression due to her figure and clothes, and finally committed suicide because of long time cyber violence; and the Shandong youth who committed suicide by drinking pesticides in February because of suffering long-term cyber violence [6]. However, it is very regrettable that even after these tragedies happened, these internet abusers did not repent. Words that continue to hurt victims of cyber violence and their families can still be seen on the Internet. For example, those internet abusers would say "he dies because of his own psychological vulnerability". At the same time, such behavior is morally strange. Because even babies will show condemnation of immoral behavior from an early age and a sense of guilt as the perpetrator of immoral behavior. This proves that people seem to be born with an aversion to immoral behavior and if they are responsible for the immoral behavior, they will feel guilty and sad [7]. But in cyber violence, cyber bullies show unexpected reactions. In the face of victims who have been harmed or even committed suicide because of their cyber violence, internet abusers do not admit their behavior and show their guilt.

Meanwhile, in Milgram's obedience experiments, such abnormal reactions were also shown. In the experiment, the subject needs to play the role of a teacher, and another experimenter who pretends to be the subject will play the role of a student. The researchers prepared the electric shock button in

advance and marked it with a reminder of the strength of the electric shock, ranging from mild electric shock, moderate electric shock to dangerous electric shock, extremely dangerous electric shock, etc. The subjects were asked to press a button to shock the students when the students answered incorrectly and the amount of current increased as the number of incorrect answers increased. As the experiment progressed, the amount of current continued to increase and the experimenter, who played the role of a student, would gradually moan, shout, roar at the top of their lungs, hit the table, and kick the wall. The subjects were asked to continue pressing the button and continuing the experiment, even if they heard these screams. The purpose of the experiment is to see if these subjects (the teacher) will refuse to obey the experimenter's instructions and stop the electric shock after hearing the screams. Surprisingly, over two-thirds of the participants showed complete compliance with the experimenter's instructions. They constantly electrocute learners who make mistakes, and even engage in dangerous electrocution. Even after making dangerous clicks and not receiving a response from the students, they did not stop but followed the experimenter's instructions and electrocuted the students [8]. It is worth discussing that these subjects who unconditionally obey the experimenter always attribute the responsibility to the experimenter when the experimenter questions why they continue the electric shock after the experiment is over, saying, "You (the experimenter) asked me to do this". They do not feel that they are responsible and they do not have any guilty to the students even though they keep pressing the button, causing harm to the students. This is like those internet abusers, when they see their target commit suicide or suffer from depression, they do not feel that they should take responsibility for it and they will not have guilty about this.

Why is there such an abnormal reaction to immoral behavior? On the basis of existing literature discussing the harm and governance suggestions of online violence in the academic community, there is still a lack of literature in the academic world to explain why cyberbullies do not feel guilty about their own behavior when they see others commit suicide or lose their jobs or family tragedies due to their cyberbullying and why do those cyberbullies even think they should not be held responsible for this. This article summarizes and analyzes the existing literature on the causes of online violence through a literature review, summarizing a more systematic reason for formation of cyber violence and the formation of "apathy" among cyberbullies when faced with their such immoral behaviors, that is, what influencing factors caused the unusual psychological activity of these cyberbullies of thinking that they should not take responsibility for their own immoral behavior or not feeling guilty about their own immoral behavior. The results of this study can promote researchers and educators to understand and pay attention to the harm of network violence, and point out the direction of intervention research to reduce network violence.

2. The Harm of Cyber Violence

2.1. Resulting in lower levels of individual physical and mental health

In cyberbullying incidents, as the victim of cyberbullying, the right to reputation and privacy will be violated, and they will suffer strong physical and mental harm. As bystanders in online violence incidents, it is easy for individuals to follow the trend blindly due to the herd mentality, resulting in individuals lacking the ability to make rational judgments for a long time. In particular, young people's blind conformity in cyber violence will prevent them from forming a mature ability to judge right and wrong. At the same time, the hostile online violence environment will cause the physical and mental health of young people to be corroded, and then they will not be able to form good values and world views [9].

2.2. Resulting in social disorder

The frequent occurrence of network violence leads to the occurrence of network violence for the purpose of venting emotions. Such cyber violence leads to the gradual disappearance of the morality and integrity of the individuals involved in cyber violence. For a long time, it will lead to the damage of social integrity and moral atmosphere, resulting in the imbalance of social ethical standards [10].

There are many tragedies in life caused by cyber violence. For example, some netizens posted irresponsible remarks on the Internet without knowing the truth of the incident, causing Internet violence against the parties involved in the incident, causing irreparable consequences, and also causing a bad impact on society and disrupting social order.

2.3 Inducing Juvenile Delinquency

Due to certain legal negligence in the Internet environment, criminals induce minors to commit crimes by, for example, taking paid photos of certain body parts of women. At the same time, as mentioned above, online violence is not good for the physical and mental health of teenagers, and will prevent teenagers from forming a complete and correct outlook on life and values. Such an environment will also prevent teenagers from forming good moral values. Therefore, frequent online violence incidents prevent young people from forming healthy values and induce them to engage in offline criminal behaviors such as fighting, defrauding others online, theft, etc [9].

3. Influencing Factors of Cyber Violence

3.1. Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement refers to an individual's unique cognitive tendencies that lead to a redefinition of their behavior, a reduction in their responsibility, and a decrease in their sense of identification with injured goals. At the same time, moral disengagement is also used to explain why normal people engage in unethical behavior without obvious guilt and self-blame [11]. It also means that moral disengagement can explain why in the cyberbullying incidents and Milgram's obedience experiment, when the cyberbullies and the subjects who chosen to obey the instructions of experimenters all the time (the teachers) are out of the specific situation, the cyberbullying incidents and Milgram's obedience experiment, they were obviously just ordinary people, having their own lives, wives, jobs, but they don't feel guilty after doing immoral behavior like cyberbullying and shocking "the student" all the time. There are 8 mechanisms for moral disengagement, namely: moral defense, euphemistic labeling, favorable comparison, transfer of responsibility, decentralization of responsibility, neglect or distortion of results, dehumanization, and attribution of blame [11].

Research has shown that among the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement, the highest score is for responsibility dispersion. Because many individuals believe that when a collective makes a mistake, the responsibility for taking responsibility for it will spread to everyone, and they may even feel that they do not need to take responsibility for it. When individuals engage in online violence against others in the form of a group, they believe that responsibility should be dispersed, resulting in individuals not feeling guilty or responsible even if the victim commits suicide, depression, or bankruptcy due to online violence. At the same time, individuals may also use responsibility shifting as a means of moral disengagement to get rid of their inner guilt for their unethical behavior. Just like in Milgram's obedience experiment, the subjects (the teachers) who have always chosen to be unconditional and unresponsive to the experimenter's instructions will deny their responsibility of harming the student by reasoning that "my behavior is under the experimenter's instructions, and I am just obeying the order", in which they transfer responsibilities to the experiment, and free themselves from their own guilt. Similarly, in cyber violence incidents, cyber violence perpetrators will argue that "I just followed the trend and posted a sentence, it was not me who scolded first", converting their unethical cyber violence behavior into a simple follow-up behavior, and transferring the responsibility to other cyberbullies. In this case, even though they make violent comments on the Internet, they do not feel guilty [11].

3.2. Empathy

Studies have shown that empathy has an impact on the formation of cyberbullying through the intermediary role of moral disengagement. When a person has a high degree of empathy, they will be more able to empathize with others, achieve higher moral standards in interpersonal interactions, and be more willing to abide by moral rules. As a result, they use fewer moral excuses to justify their

actions, meaning they have lower levels of moral excuses. For these people, facing the emergence of their own immoral behavior, they pay more attention to self-reflection and criticize themselves for finding problems in themselves, rather than exploring their own immoral behavior through moral reasoning. Therefore, they instinctively tend to reduce the occurrence of unethical behaviors such as online violence from the source. It can be seen from this that moral disengagement plays a mediating role between empathy and cyber violence. There is an inverse relationship between empathy and cyber violence. That is, a higher empathy ability will be less likely to participate in or initiate cyber violence [12].

3.3. Invisible Narcissism

Invisible narcissism refers to a person who appears to be gentle on the surface, does not like to brag or socialize, and claims to be sensitive and introverted, but is actually a completely self-centered person. Invisible narcissism can also play a mediating role in the formation of cyber violence through moral disengagement. In the online world, due to the virtual time and space, the lack of face-to-face communication makes it difficult for individuals to exert their moral self-regulation mechanism [13]. When the individual moral self-regulation mechanism does not work, in order to balance the moral level in the body [11], it is easier for individuals to use moral disengagement to invalidate their moral mechanism, thereby freeing themselves from the self-blame and guilt caused by cyber violence. For individuals with high levels of implicit narcissism, they rarely display direct aggressive behavior because they display a more obvious lack of confidence, overevaluation and criticism of others, and excessive anxiety. Thus, people high in implicit narcissism are more likely to avoid direct aggressive behavior due to guilt, but are more likely to use moral disengagement due to the online environment, thereby reducing feelings of guilt. Therefore, this person with high covert narcissism will also display direct cyber violence [13].

3.4. Callous-unemotional Trait

Callous-unemotional traits are a type of antisocial personality, which refers to an individual's indifference to others and surrounding things, lack of identification with others, low empathy, and lack of guilt. That is, for people with callous-unemotional traits, when they participate in the cyber violence which leads to the suicide of the victim of cyber violence, they will not feel the slightest guilt, because their ruthless nature makes them naturally indifferent to it and feel no guilt [14]. Because people with callous-unemotional traits are indifferent to everything around them, people with callous-unemotional traits are more likely to engage in cyber violence [15].

4. Conclusion

Cyber violence can cause physical and mental harm to the victims of cyber violence, causing those who participate in cyber violence to be unable to form good values, lose the ability to make independent judgments, easily induce juveniles to commit crimes, and have a negative impact on society. The existing studies also showed that there are four influencing factors that affect the formation of cyberbullying and the abnormal psychological activity that cyberbullying people do not feel guilty about their immoral behavior. Among them, moral disengagement is the more important influencing factor. Among the two major factors that influence cyber violence, such as empathy and invisible narcissism, moral disengagement plays a mediating role in the occurrence of cyber violence and the abnormal psychology of cyber violence perpetrators. Moral avoidance is positively related to cyberviolence, which means that people with high levels of moral avoidance have higher odds of exhibiting cyberviolence. And because people with high empathy are less likely to use moral evasion mechanisms to excuse their immorality, people with high empathy will choose to avoid the occurrence of online violence from the source, which means they have a lower probability of participating in or initiating online violence. As for the influencing factor of invisible narcissism, the virtuality of the Internet increases the possibility of using cyber violence, which leads to the

probability of direct online attacks by people with invisible narcissism, that is, cyber violence. Finally, people with callous traits are more likely to engage in or initiate cyberbullying because they are inherently antisocial, anti-human, indifferent to everything around them, indifferent to their own actions, and have no sense of guilt.

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