



Facebook bullying: An extension of battles in school

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 11 August 2012

Keywords:

Facebook
Cyberbullying
Risky Facebook use
Singapore

ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of cyberbullying on Facebook and how it is related to school bullying among secondary school students in Singapore, aged 13–17. We also focus on generic use of Facebook and risky Facebook behaviors as the predictors of cyberbullying and victimization on Facebook. 1676 secondary students, from two secondary schools, participated in a pen and paper survey. The findings show that the intensity of Facebook use and engagement in risky Facebook behaviors were related to Facebook victimization and Facebook bullying, respectively. Moderately strong positive relationships between school bullying and Facebook bullying, as well as between school victimization and Facebook victimization, were also uncovered.

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1. Introduction

Research on bullying has been carried out for decades. The reason for this drive to understand the phenomenon lies in the fact that victims of bullying experience a range of negative effects from poor academic performance to emotional trauma and even suicide (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002; Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000; Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009; Meadows, 2005). However, while researchers have been focused on studying face-to-face (FTF) or traditional bullying, communication technologies have been evolving. Social interactions are now occurring in a technology-mediated context as much as they are occurring FTF. Furthermore, the widespread use of social network sites (SNSs) and content-sharing sites has significantly transformed the nature of everyday social interactions.

Accompanying this shift in communication is the emergence of cyberbullying. Essentially, cyberbullying is bullying that occurs via information and communication technologies (ICTs). This study more specifically focuses on bullying that happens via Facebook, a popular SNS, which has an estimated 2.4 million users in Singapore, as of April 2011, of which, 13% are aged 13–17 (Socialbakers., 2011). Aside from the fact that Facebook is a popular social network site (SNS) among Singaporeans, this study focused on Facebook as a case study for bullying over SNS due to the specific affordances of the platform. Social network sites allow users to post comments on each other's profile pages, send private messages, comment on each other's postings, upload photos and videos, organize group events and join interest groups. While being a facilitator of social interaction, these same tools could also be used for cyberbullying. Examples of teenage victimizations on so-

cial network sites could be found in the United States as well as in Singapore, the research site for this study. While there has been plenty of research looking into cyberbullying across different platforms, none has specifically measured bullying that takes place over SNSes, such as Facebook. By tailoring measures of cyberbullying of Cassidy, Jackson, and Brown (2009) and Patchin and Hinduja (2010) to the context of Facebook, this study hopes to contribute to the literature of cyberbullying by exploring how it is manifested on a social network site.

Research shows that the likelihood of being involved in cyberbullying is predicted by the time spent online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) and risky online behaviors (Erdur-Baker, 2010). Therefore, this study also examines how the intensity of Facebook use (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) and engagement in risky Facebook use relate to both the involvement in Facebook bullying and likelihood of Facebook victimization. We also seek to establish the relationship between school bullying and victimization and their Facebook equivalents.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining bullying

Bullying can be defined as a prolonged mistreatment by a person who harbors malicious intentions and who is perceived to be more powerful than the victim of abuse (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Face-to-face (FTF) bullying can be carried out physically, verbally or relationally (Woods & Wolke, 2004). Physical and verbal bullying are forms of direct bullying. While physical bullying involves hitting, taking of belongings, shoving, and kicking, verbal bullying involves teasing, taunting, name-calling and being insulting. Relational bullying is an indirect manner of bullying and involves the spreading of gossip and rumors (Woods & Wolke, (2004)).

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In defining bullying, it is important to take into account the motivations of the perpetrator. Rigby (2008) illustrated the difference between aggression and bullying using the following example. Aggression may occur when two children resolve a conflict in an aggressive manner, like that of fighting. However, this act of aggression is not necessarily bullying if both parties are equal in strength and there is no power differential between them. Bullying carries with it a malicious intent to hurt a weaker party. Therefore, bullying could also be defined as a “systematic abuse of power in interpersonal relationships” (Rigby, 2008). This definition suggests that the perpetrator is conscious of the power differential and uses it to hurt the victim. The victim, in turn, feels oppressed and helpless.

2.2. Prevalence of bullying

The prevalence of bullying has been studied in many different countries and contexts. For example, 16% school children in Australia, aged 7–17, reported being bullied (Rigby (2008)). In Korea, a study of 13–15 year old youths found that around 14% of students were involved in bullying (Rhee, Yun, & Khang, 2007), while panel study conducted on the Japanese form of bullying, *ijime*, which consisted of name-calling, isolation and ignoring of someone, is practiced by around 8% of primary school and junior high school students (Taki, 2001). In Singapore, a study of primary and secondary school students found that around 13% were bullied on a weekly basis (Ng & Rigby, 2010) though 94.7% of respondents have experienced at least one of the 21 types of bullying behaviors listed in the questionnaire. These statistics suggests that bullying is a problem that is common to cultures and nations, and that the social climate in Singaporean schools is similar to those in other countries.

2.3. Demographic factors and bullying

Research on bullying has found several key demographic patterns that affect likelihood of being involved in bullying. Boys, in general, bully more often than girls (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Rigby, 2008). Proportion of boys who report high frequencies of victimization is also greater than that of girls. Notably, boys and girls differ in the types of bullying they experience. Boys are more likely to be physically bullied while girls usually report being bullied verbally or relationally (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996; Rigby, 2008; Smith & Shu, 2000). As children grow up, they tend to engage in less bullying. A study of 4000 students in Australia, grades 7–11, found that victimization peaks at grade 8, followed by a decrease in reported frequencies (Marsh, Parada, Craven, & Finger, 2004). However, Rigby (2008) noted that changes in school environment, like that of moving from primary to secondary school, might result in an increase in bullying. He suggested that it is a result of a need to reestablish social ranking and status in a new environment.

2.4. Bullying-conducive environments

Bullying usually occurs when there is a lack of adult supervision and when there is a presence of an audience (Rigby, 2008). Smith & Shu (2000) found that the common venues for school bullying to occur were the playground, corridors and hallways. With the advancement of various new communication platforms, the access to such bullying-conducive environments is greatly increased. Furthermore, parents often find it difficult to adapt to new online environments as quickly as their children, failing to understand their use for purely social purposes (Ribak, 2001).

Bullying which takes place over communication platforms like email, chat rooms, mobile phones and websites is termed cyber-

bullying (Campbell, 2005). Willard (2007) listed eight forms of cyberbullying:

1. Flaming: Angry and vulgar online exchanges.
2. Harassment: Repeated sending of nasty and insulting messages to the victim.
3. Denigration: Spreading of rumors and gossiping about a person online to damage his/her reputation or friendship.
4. Impersonation: To cause someone to get into trouble or to damage someone's reputation by pretending to be that person and sending material on that person's behalf.
5. Outing: Sharing secrets or humiliating information of another person on the Internet.
6. Trickery: To convince someone to share humiliating information, then making the information available online.
7. Exclusion: To intentionally exclude someone from an online group in order to cause hurt to the person.
8. Cyberstalking: To repeatedly harass someone such that the person feels threatened or afraid.

Victims of cyberbullying have been found to suffer significant psychological harm like feeling threatened and distressed (National Center for Missing, 2000), and have even committed suicide when they were no longer able to cope with the abuse (Meadows, 2005, March 14). In a study of adolescents' experiences with cyberbullying, about half of the respondents thought that cyberbullying had an equal or more serious impact than traditional bullying (Kapatzia & Sygkollitou, 2007).

A well-known case of cyberbullying involved Megan Meyer, a teenage girl from Missouri, US (Steinhauer, 2008, November 26). Megan committed suicide after being harassed by an adult, who posed as a 16-year-old boy in MySpace. It was later discovered that the adult was the mother of the girl's friend. Another publicized incident of cyberbullying occurred in 2003, in which a video tape of a Canadian teenager pretending to be a character from Star Wars was stolen from his school and uploaded onto a website (Snider & Borel, 2004). This attracted millions of hits to the website and the teenager was teased relentlessly in school, causing him to change schools. Though these were isolated incidents of cyberbullying, they illustrate how cyberbullying can have real and devastating impact on its victims. While cyberbullying excludes the possibility of physical abuse that is common in FTF bullying, research has found that compared to physical abuse and direct verbal abuse, relational abuse causes greater distress (Coyne, Archer & Elsea, 2006). Sharp's (1995) study on 13–16 years old secondary students also found that indirect aggression, involving spreading rumors and telling tales to be perceived as most hurtful.

2.5. Cyberbullying in technophilic Singapore

In 2009, 81% of Singapore households had Internet access (Infocomm Development Authority, 2010) and mobile penetration rate stood at 137.4% (Infocomm Development Authority, 2010). Singaporeans aged 15 and above, spent an average of 21 h online in the month of February in 2009 (comScore (March 27, 2009, March 27). Online users spent an average of 10 h in April 2010 viewing online videos, watching a total of 320 million videos in that month alone (comScore, 2010b, June 3). The younger users, between the ages of 15 and 24, were found to display the strongest online video engagement, watching 192 videos per viewer in April 2010. Furthermore, Internet users are found to spend 24.2% of their time on Instant Messaging and 8% on social network sites (comScore (March 27, 2009, March 27). In fact, Singapore was ranked 5th in SNS penetration rate in the Asia Pacific markets with 83.7% penetration rate as of February 2010 (comScore, 2010a, April 7).

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