

DOCTORAL THESIS

Three essays on cyberbullying on social networking sites: understanding the effects of technological factors

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ABSTRACT

Technology continues to evolve quickly and is dramatically changing the behaviors of online users. Social networking sites, while offering users interactive online spaces to socialize with their friends and family, are also a breeding ground for various undesirable online behaviors, such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying on social networking sites (SNS bullying) has emerged as a societal challenge in recent years. The prevalence and adverse consequences of SNS bullying have been extensively reported in the mass media and drawn increasing attention from government agencies, parents, and the academic community. The research on SNS bullying is broad, and little effort has been devoted to consolidating its findings. Furthermore, scant attention has been paid to understanding the role technological factors play in the development of SNS bullying.

Accordingly, this dissertation proposes two main research objectives to advance the scientific understanding of SNS bullying. It seeks to (1) summarize the research status of SNS bullying and (2) examine the role of technological factors in SNS bullying among perpetrators and aggressive bystanders. Three essays are included. In Essay 1, I summarize the current knowledge on SNS bullying through a literature review and analysis. Drawing on the general aggression model, I propose a classification framework to classify the factors affecting SNS bullying. The literature review and analysis outline the patterns of research on SNS bullying and identify future research directions. In Essay 2, I examine the effects of technological factors on SNS bullying perpetration. Drawing on crime opportunity theory and affordance theory, I propose a research model to examine the drivers of SNS bullying perpetration and test how SNS affordances influence the

evaluation of SNS environments for perpetration using an online survey. The results suggest that SNS affordances are salient enablers that afford SNS bullying perpetration. In Essay 3, I examine the effects of technological factors on bystanders' aggressive responses to SNS bullying. Drawing on moral disengagement theory, I develop a research model to investigate the effects of beliefs about SNS use and moral disengagement mechanisms on bystanders' aggressive responses to SNS bullying using a focus group discussion and a scenario-based survey. The results suggest that moral disengagement mechanisms are significant social cognitive processes bystanders use to rationalize their aggressive responses toward victims.

This dissertation offers important implications for research and practice. Theoretically, it contributes to the information systems (IS) literature by examining an emerging societal challenge associated with the undesirable use of information technology. It also adds to the growing body of research on SNS bullying by integrating knowledge from multiple disciplines, and demonstrates that technological factors play a substantial role in affecting the development of SNS bullying. Practically, this dissertation offers practitioners a rich and fine-grained understanding of the cause and development of SNS bullying. It also provides valuable information about the effects of the technological factors that lead to SNS bullying perpetration and bystanders' aggressive responses. Overall, this dissertation derives important insights into the prevention and intervention of SNS bullying.

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