



Storytelling as a School Awareness Tool Against Bullying

Ana Lucía Cusman-Barriga  and Eliana Gallardo-Echenique ^(✉) 

Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Lima 15023, Peru
eliana.gallardo@upc.edu.pe

Abstract. Bullying has been present in society and it has been defined as intentionally aggressive and abusive interpersonal behaviour, carried out repetitively by a group of people against a person who becomes the victim. This study is positioned in a phenomenological paradigm to analyse school bullying. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 students in their seventh year of secondary education at a private university in Lima, Peru. This study aimed to identify the types of school bullying perceived by students in the campaign ‘Voces contra el bullying (Voices against bullying)’. The results of the study indicate that the participants were able to identify the types of bullying depicted in the spot, including the physical, verbal and psychological bullying, which were conveyed through the lyrics of the song and the scenes. The findings indicate that storytelling is important in social campaigns to produce awareness among the audience. Finally, the study defined the promoters of school bullying and its types in Peruvian society.

Keywords: Advertising · Social Problem · Bullying · Storytelling · Qualitative Analysis

1 Introduction

Bullying or harassment has always been present in society, occurring in different areas such as work, family, friends, the media, politics and school, with some people deliberately assaulting others [1, 2]. These violent attitudes originate or are encouraged within schools. As a result, school bullying has become a major societal problem in recent years, increasing worldwide and resulting in a greater number of victims worldwide [3, 4]. However, many people think that bullying is just physical aggression, which can result in a lack of action or reporting of bullying incidents. However, bullying can take different forms, including physical, social, psychological, verbal damage and cyberbullying, which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years [1, 3, 4]. Identifying the different types of harassment is crucial to report it to authorities and prevent it from continuing, as it can have fatal consequences, including being one of the main causes of suicide among adolescents or young adults and causing psychological problems [4, 5].

Storytelling is one of the most effective communication strategies for educating people about bullying, with the help of the media. It creates a powerful connection with the target audience as it constitutes a series of stories with a specific narrative structure

[6–8]. The use of storytelling allows the audience to identify with the different types of language, such as verbal or iconic, present within stories. This aspect creates an emotional bond and leaves a lasting impression in the receiver's mind. This, in turn, helps achieve the communication objectives [6, 7].

Storytelling is one of the most powerful tools in advertising, as it enables people to engage in a cognitive process of interpreting and reconstructing their personal, professional, cultural and social realities through stories. This creates a two-way connection between people and the company or brand [6, 8, 9]. These stories can be presented within *transmedia* narratives, a technique in which the story is presented as short stories on different platforms and media, be it social networks, advertising spots, movies, among others [6, 8]. Brands utilise transmedia storytelling in their advertising to tell multiple, distinctive yet interconnected stories through different formats, resulting in a stronger emotional connection with their target audience [6, 8]. Storytelling helps reinforce the message of the campaign and generates awareness with the public by connecting with the presented advertising pieces through their experiences, knowledge and feelings [7, 8]. These advertising pieces tell a narrative that creates identification within the receiver, as tools for learning and communication, in which experiences help develop new lessons [7, 8]. There is a technique within storytelling, using micro narratives, which use few elements to tell or communicate something [6, 10]. This technique increases people's engagement with the brand, maintaining their interest in the stories they present, encouraging the receiver to interpret the different elements and to connect them with each other and making them finish the scheme of ideas with their imagination and/or knowledge, based on what has already been stated [6, 10].

This study aims to identify the types of school bullying that students in their last year of secondary education at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) perceive in the Jockey Plaza Shopping Centre's storytelling advertisement aimed at raising awareness about the problem.

1.1 School Bullying

Bullying or harassment has been defined as intentionally aggressive and abusive interpersonal behaviour, carried out repetitively by a group of people or individuals against a person who becomes the victim [1, 4]. There are power, physical, skill or social differences between them, having a lower status within society or social circle, which prevents the person from being able to defend themselves and seek help within their environment [1, 3, 4]. In addition to the aggressor and the victim, there is also the bystander who can take the role of a passive aggressor, if they decide to ignore it or remain silent about the bullying they witness, creating a certain complicity with the aggressor and their actions [3, 5]. Over time, bullying has become one of the biggest problems globally, giving rise to specific subcategories when it occurs in different environments such as bullying at work, family, groups of friends and at school [1, 4, 5]. Each year, the number of victims of school bullying increases by 25% [3, 4].

Table 1 presents the different types of bullying. Many people think that bullying is limited to physical attacks against an individual. Therefore, they overlook or dismiss other forms of bullying when they witness them [3–5]. This lack of awareness and action leads to a decrease in the likelihood of stopping bullying within schools, despite the fact

that approximately 60% to 70% of young people witness bullying in their daily lives [4, 5]. Reporting witnessed bullying could result in an 80% reduction in incidents, as there is a greater than 50% chance of stopping or preventing it through intervention [4, 5].

Schools play a crucial role in a student's personal development, helping them learn about themselves and their ability to interact with others [2, 11, 12]. It is essential to consider the consequences that exist when bullying occurs within the school life of students, either for the victims or for the aggressors [2, 12]. School bullying refers to any form of harassment between students, whether it occurs inside or outside an educational institution [1, 4, 5]. Victims may experience a range of negative consequences such as disinterest in their studies, reluctance to attend school, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety and suicidal behaviour or ideation. These problems may escalate and lead to more significant psychological issues. As a result, those who experience school bullying may develop a distorted mentality, leading them to think less of themselves, which could impact their employment or family life [2, 11, 12]. The aggressors experience consequences, including problematic relationships within their social circle, whether with friends or family. They may become irritable and struggle academically or perform

Table 1. Bullying classification.

Types of bullying	Definition
Verbal [4, 11]	It is one of the most frequent types of bullying, where the aggressor intentionally attacks the victim through words. It generally highlights specific characteristics of the victim, whether physical, psychological or social and involves creating nicknames, insults, mockery and/or making harmful or threatening comments.
Social or psychological [3, 4, 11]	This is one of the most challenging types of bullying to identify as it is carried out behind the victim's back. In this case, the aggressor generates the rejection or social exclusion of the victim by spreading false or negative rumours and sharing personal information. The objective is to harm the victim, preventing them from joining their social circle.
Physical [3, 4, 11]	This is the more traditional type of bullying, which is usually more quickly identified. It can occur directly, presenting physical damage to the victim, whether this may be in the form of kicks, blows, shoves, among others. It also involves indirectly damaging or stealing the property of that person and thereby intimidating the person
Cyberbullying [2, 3, 11]	It arose with the evolution of technology and children's access to cyberspace. In this case, damage is intentionally and repetitively caused to others through electronic devices. It can be through emails, text messages, social networks or different online means.

poorly in their careers [11, 12]. The long-term consequences for aggressors of school bullying can include low self-esteem and even criminal behaviour [11, 12].

It is relevant to inform people about this problem through the media, which have a greater reach within society [4, 5, 8]. To effectively inform people about school bullying, various brands or organisations often prepare social campaigns with the aim of contributing to society or building stronger connections with their consumers [7, 8]. When conducting such campaigns, it is important to ensure that the advertisements displayed in the media are explicit, effectively conveying the message and establishing a connection with the audience [7, 8].

2 Methodology

The work is positioned in a phenomenological paradigm to understand the phenomenon of school bullying and generate knowledge according to the experiences of students who were victims of or witnessed this type of abuse [13]. An analysis was conducted on the storytelling used in the Jockey Plaza Shopping Centre's 2022 campaign titled *Voces contra el bullying* (Voices against bullying), with the aim of promoting awareness about school bullying among students. The participants were selected from seventh- to tenth-grade students enrolled in the PUCP Secondary Education program in Lima, Peru. To select informants, the sampling method employed was a combination of 'snowball' and 'convenience' sampling. The former involved the recommendation of informants by their peers, while the latter was based on the accessibility and availability of potential participants to participate in the study [14, 15].

As a data collection technique, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 students at a private university in Lima, Peru. These are less rigid than structured ones, as they have fixed questions that can be adapted according to the answers of the interviewees to accurately understand the viewpoints presented by the informants [16]. To collect the data, a set of 32 interview questions were used, which were organised into different themes and categories. These included the following: (1) Bullying, which had subcategories such as actors associated with bullying (aggressor, victim and spectator) and types of school bullying (verbal, physical, social or psychological and cyberbullying); (2) storytelling, which had subcategory techniques, comprising *transmedia* and micro narratives; (3) advertising campaigns, which had subcategory social advertising campaigns. The interviews were conducted virtually through the Zoom platform and lasted between 20 and 40 min. Saturation was achieved after interviewing the 16th participant [15].

Each student was provided with an information sheet where the purpose of the study was communicated, as well as the treatment and confidentiality of the data. Verbal consent was requested from each participant to record the interviews [15]. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, which comprises identifying specific themes and categories within the collected data, to later organize them into a set that details and interprets different aspects of the phenomenon to be studied [17]. An alphanumeric coding (e.g. P01) was used to keep participant information anonymous [16].

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Voices Against Bullying at School

Most participants mentioned having witnessed or been victims of school bullying at some point. In the last four decades, bullying has intensified. Almost all of the participants, as future teachers, stated that if they witnessed a bullying situation, they would attempt to communicate with both the aggressor and the victim and also take them to the school psychologist. This is because there may be internal problems that they need to talk about. Many aggressors who engage in bullying behaviour may have underlying issues or problems that contribute to their behaviour, which may be related to their home environment or their mental and emotional well-being [1, 5, 11, 18]. The problem becomes even more significant during the early years of adolescence, as individuals are going through significant changes to which they may not have fully adapted [1, 5, 11]. If the aggressive behaviour of individuals is not addressed during adolescence, they may encounter difficulties in their adult life, including challenges in interpersonal relationships and an increased likelihood of exhibiting violent behaviour [1, 5, 11, 18].

Upon watching the advertisement ‘Voces contra el Bullying (Voices against bullying)’, many participants recalled instances from their school experience in which they had witnessed incidents of bullying but did not intervene due to various reasons, such as fear or a lack of understanding that it was a form of bullying, considering it as a mere joke. Previous studies [4, 18] have revealed that bystanders of a bullying situation prioritize their situation over the victim’s situation. They may prefer not to speak up if they are in a comfortable position during a bullying incident, or they may be afraid of becoming the next victim if they go against the aggressor [3, 4]. Similarly, it highlights the significance of understanding the different types of bullying, as it is possible to misinterpret them as jokes due to lack of awareness [2, 18].

The advertisement represented different types of bullying, but it did not depict scenarios that are common in Peruvian society, such as open lockers with thrown backpacks, which are more prevalent in Anglo-Saxon countries. This generated discrepancy among the audience for whom the campaign was intended. How bullying occurs worldwide differs depending on the society in which it is found [1, 12]. Furthermore, the forms of bullying can vary depending on the context of the social circle in which you are [1, 12]. Therefore, the spot could be improved, better identifying and researching its target audience. In this manner, the message can be successfully communicated, and it will last in the mind of the user [6, 9].

Xenophobia and homophobia are latent problems in Peruvian society and one of the leading causes or boosters of bullying in schools in Lima. A large number of people suffer from school *bullying* by students and teachers [19]. As of 2016, due to the various political and economic problems that arose in Venezuela, Venezuelans began to migrate to different countries in Latin America. Peru is one of the leading countries that presented a growing number up to the present, which generated an inevitable rejection towards this group within schools due to the beliefs imposed at home [19].

Other bullying boosters, which stood out after the interviews, were classism and racism, which are being normalised in Peru. For a long time, classism and racism have been present in Peruvian society, showing up in daily life, be it in the workplace, the

Table 2. Classification and definition of school bullying boosters.

Types of school bullying boosters	Definition
Xenophobia [21, 22]	It is an attitude or behaviour that discards, excludes and denigrates, through hostile manifestations, aversion, fear or hatred, people or groups considered foreign or external based on their supposed origin, gender, religion or sexual preferences, regarding them as trespassers or strangers to the community.
Homophobia [23, 24]	It is the rejection, discrimination and/or constant hatred of heterosexual people towards homosexual people or belonging to the LGBTBI+ community due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
Classism [25]	Organised oppression of people who do not have social influence, economic power, and privileges by people who do have these privileges and have access to control the necessary resources with which other people earn a living, maintaining prejudices towards individuals who are in a situation of poverty.
Racism [26, 27]	It is the discrimination, rejection, exclusion and automatic hatred of a person who presents different characteristics, such as skin colour, language, ethnicity and origin.

media and educational centres [19, 20]. From an early age, children are taught to pay attention to the socioeconomic status and skin colour of those around them, leading to the normalisation of classism and racism in Peruvian society [19, 20].

Given the exposed results, a Table 2 of definitions of the boosters of school *bullying* in Peruvian society is presented.

3.2 Types of School Bullying that Students Perceive

Most participants identified the types of physical, verbal and psychological bullying, mentioning cyberbullying to a lesser extent, which may happen because the scenes in which they performed cyberbullying were not as explicit or retained in the participants' minds. However, not all future teachers were well-informed about the various types of bullying and how to differentiate them. Therefore, I mentioned them during the study to ensure that they would remember the different types of bullying that exist. Storytelling enables people to reflect and create meaning according to what they observe in the advertising pieces, allowing them to share knowledge and values so that a change is made in their way of thinking [8, 9]. However, if the elements presented within the pieces do not make it possible for the viewer to reflect, they will try to add the missing pieces with intuition, even distorting the message [6, 8, 9]. In this case, the participants became confused about the types of school bullying and their characteristics. They highlighted another type of bullying that did not appear in the spot, the sexual school bullying. This type of bullying is identified as sexual behaviour that is unwanted and/or accepted, which

interferes in different ways in the lives of students, showing intimidation, discomfort, lack of respect for personal space, among others [1].

3.3 Storytelling as an Awareness Tool in Social Campaigns

Many agreed to mention that the brands that carry out social campaigns against school bullying do not investigate the problem correctly and do not take any action to create a real change, coming to have a repetitive message. It is essential to state the objective of the social campaign before carrying it out so that you can dig into the problem and not be alien to the victims of it [6, 9]. Likewise, it must be taken into account that, if the campaign fails to adequately interpret the factors that contribute to the problem, it is possible that it will not be successful as it does not create a connection with the people, causing some disgust among those affected [6, 8].

The participants mentioned that they preferred social campaigns that evoke emotional responses and help them feel close to and identified with the problem being addressed. If a campaign fails to do so, they may overlook it and its purpose. Thus, storytelling is often used in social campaigns, as it can create a two-way emotional connection between the problem and the viewer [6, 8, 9]. Storytelling often uses cultural attractors or triggers, such as stories, to engage viewers with similar interests and give meaning to the narrative [6, 9].

The participants emphasised the significance of character portrayal in social campaigns and expressed their desire to see more diverse actors representing teachers or parents of the students involved in school bullying as victims or aggressors. The use of character portrayal in storytelling is a powerful way for brands to create a sense of involvement and duty among viewers. When actors resembling the viewers are included in a problem, it helps them visualize their position within the issue and fosters a deeper emotional connection to the campaign [6, 8, 9]. The storytelling presented in the spot successfully conveyed the message of the song to all the participants, encouraging them as future teachers to be aware of the issue and take action by not remaining silent when witnessing bullying. As previously mentioned, feeling close to the problem can change people's attitude towards it [6, 8, 9].

4 Conclusions

This study highlights the significance of using storytelling effectively in social campaigns that address issues like school bullying, as it can create awareness about the problem and educate people on it. The results indicate that the participants were able to identify the types of bullying depicted in the spot, including the physical, verbal and psychological bullying, which were conveyed through the lyrics of the song and the scenes. Although they also mentioned cyberbullying, it was relatively harder for them to recognize it. There is clear evidence that the participants in the study have a general understanding of the actions that constitute school bullying. However, only some have a proper education on the types of bullying, which may result in confusion or difficulty identifying them. Nevertheless, the study concludes that the use of storytelling in a social campaign can raise awareness among the viewers. Furthermore, the participants developed a stronger

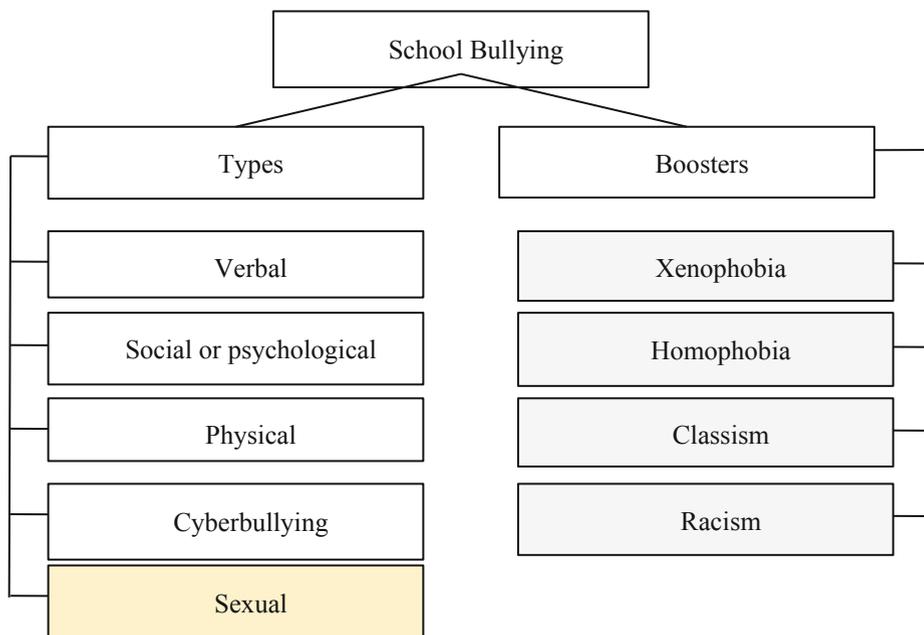


Fig. 1. Proposal for types of school bullying and its boosters in Peruvian society.

sense of empathy towards the issue of school bullying after watching the ‘Voces contra el Bullying (Voices against bullying)’ spot, which instilled in them a strong sense of responsibility as future teachers who may eventually be responsible for students who could be affected by bullying.

In the future, it is recommended to analyse the spot or other social campaigns that highlight the issue of school bullying, considering the perspective of different players within the problem, such as parents, teachers, educational psychologists or same students. Some limitations of the study are as follows: One limitation encountered was the difficulty in finding participants who were willing and available to take part in the research, as schedules did not always align. During the Zoom interviews, various audio issues were encountered due to connectivity problems, leading to the need for redoing some interviews. In addition, the use of anonymous interviews with only audio limited communication, as it was not possible to observe the expressions of the participants. In addition to what has already been stated, the results indicate a new type of school bullying, different from those previously presented (Table 1), depicted in Fig. 1 with their boosters.

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