



Research on the Social Media Presentation of Juvenile Cybercrime: A Case Study of Cyberbullying

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Abstract. With the rapid development of the internet, adolescents have become a significant user group in cyberspace. However, incidents of juvenile cyberbullying have also become increasingly common. This paper focuses on juvenile cyberbullying, exploring the dual roles adolescents play in such incidents—as both perpetrators and victims. Based on this, the paper analyzes the forms and causes of cyberbullying, particularly the impact of the anonymity of cyberspace, group psychology, and the lack of media literacy among adolescents. Through the study of related reports on new media platforms, this paper proposes strategies to improve adolescents' media literacy, regulate news reporting on social media platforms, and strengthen platform governance, aiming to provide effective suggestions for preventing juvenile cyberbullying.

Keywords: Adolescents, cyberbullying, dual roles, media literacy, social media

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the era of rapid technological advancement, the growth of adolescents has become deeply integrated with the internet. On August 29th, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 54th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China.” The report shows that as of June 2024, the number of internet users in China reached nearly 1.1 billion (1.09967 billion), an increase of 7.42 million from December 2023, with adolescents accounting for 49% of new users [1]. In this era of information explosion and boundless communication, while the internet undeniably brings convenience to our lives, its virtual nature has also become a breeding ground for cybercrime. Adolescents, as a significant portion of internet users, have drawn much attention. However, during their adolescent years, their minds are often immature, lacking the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and they are easily influenced by harmful information online, leading to deviant behaviors. Judicial data from the past five years shows that cyber violence accounts for the smallest proportion of all internet-related crimes, approximately two per thousand. However, according to The Paper, as reported by the Shanghai People's Procuratorate, in 2023, the Shanghai procuratorial agency handled 6,960 cases of cybercrime involving 11,689 individuals, with indi-

viduals born in the 1990s and 2000s accounting for nearly 70% of those prosecuted, indicating a clear trend of younger individuals committing cybercrimes. Among these many cases, adolescent participation in cyberbullying incidents is particularly significant. The anonymity of the internet allows them to discard their real-life identities and freely express their emotions online, making comments laden with personal emotional bias.

1.2 Research Purpose and Significance

In the information age, social media platforms have become important places for internet users to express personal opinions and obtain trending information. Regarding the issue of cyberbullying, the highly developed nature of new media and self-media presents significant challenges for social media platforms. In the process of dissemination, instances of ethical violations in news reporting frequently occur. In recent years, the forms of cyberbullying have also evolved, becoming more covert under the influence of subcultures and adolescent social groups (e.g., the emergence of the “toilet culture” in 2023), making regulation and control more difficult, and evidence collection even more challenging. This paper investigates media reports on juvenile cyberbullying as a case study, exploring issues in media presentations in the context of the new era. It also analyzes the forms of juvenile cyberbullying and their dual roles in these incidents, providing feasible suggestions for the regulation of new media reporting and the correction of juvenile deviant online behavior.

2 Forms and Causes of Juvenile Cyberbullying

2.1 Forms of Juvenile Cyberbullying

2.1.1 Verbal Cyberbullying.

"Verbal cyberbullying" is not merely a transfer of traditional verbal abuse to online platforms; rather, it is a product of the evolution of internet communication technology. The internet medium provides a revolutionary function for verbal violence. In foreign research, related terms include online harassment and cyberbullying [2]. Domestic mainstream viewpoints consider verbal cyberbullying as one manifestation of cyber violence, closely related to online insults and doxxing, which are considered subforms of verbal cyberbullying. Xinxin Miao defines verbal cyberbullying as behavior in the virtual space that, through the form of discursive hegemony, uses humiliation and contempt to harm others' dignity and mental well-being [3]. According to the 2019 "Social Blue Book" published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, nearly 30% (28.89%) of adolescents encountered abusive messages while using the internet. These abuses typically involved insults, offensive terms, online ridicule, and sarcasm. The use of malicious images (53.87%) and textual or verbal threats (45.49%) were also significant [4]. In such a vast virtual environment, anyone has the potential to be a "perpetrator" or a "victim." Adolescents, in particular, often lack the ability to control their emotions, and a minor incident can trigger a verbal confrontation, where defamatory

and insulting language is imposed on others. Sometimes, even threatening and intimidating messages are sent to others.

2.1.2 Online Privacy Violations.

Privacy violations in juvenile cyberbullying usually include infringements on others' privacy, reputation, and image rights, with "doxxing" being the most common form. In cyberbullying, doxxing often accompanies insults and aggressive comments, escalating into cyber violence that infringes upon the legal rights of the individuals involved. "Doxxing" poses a high risk of rights violations and abuses, and once personal information and privacy are exposed online, the resulting damage is often irreversible [5]. Group polarization is particularly evident in fan communities. For example, in the widely impactful "227" incident, fans of Chinese actor Xiao Zhan formed a group to target minors, doxxing the victims and attacking their families. The victims' lives were turned upside down, and they suffered severe psychological trauma due to the constant threatening calls and malicious images.

2.2 Causes of Juvenile Cyberbullying

2.2.1 The Virtuality and Anonymity of the Internet.

Adolescents navigate the virtual internet space under various pseudonyms. Unlike face-to-face communication, they lack a concrete concept of the people behind the screen names they encounter, easily reducing others to mere symbols and weakening the concept of "people." As their perception of the individuals behind the screen names diminishes, they gradually lose empathy. The distance created by the internet leads to cognitive biases, and they abandon the politeness and humility they would maintain in face-to-face interactions, freely expressing emotionally charged comments. The internet's inherent anonymity lowers the cost of verbal violence. Under the mechanism of dispersed responsibility, individuals gain a sense of safety from a false sense of security, thereby weakening their self-monitoring abilities. As described in Plato's "Republic," "people use the internet as if they were wearing an invisible ring, unleashing the darkest parts of their inner selves."

2.2.2 Group Psychology.

Adolescents, driven by an innate biological tendency to protect themselves, often hide within the group to avoid social exclusion. From the "onlookers" described by Lu Xun to today's "language mobs" in the digital age, most individuals seem to lack personal rationality under the will of the group. In the era of new media, cyberbullying often emerges in the comment sections. For example, on platforms like Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), adolescents often lack the ability to discern right from wrong, and their judgments are heavily influenced by pinned comments or those with the most likes.

3 Media Reporting and the Dual Roles of Adolescents in Cyberbullying

3.1 Victims

Media as a Driving Force: The Loss of Responsibility Under the Pursuit of Traffic.

Da Xiang News is a provincial-level media outlet in Henan Province, active on various social media platforms. On June 7, this year, a high school student in Henan was unable to enter the exam venue due to metal in her shoes. With the assistance of local special police, she quickly purchased slippers and was able to participate in the exam. This event, which should have been a positive story highlighting the thoughtful actions of the police, was twisted in Da Xiang News' reporting, with a subtle mocking tone towards the girl's attire. This led many netizens to associate her wearing of short skirts and over-the-knee socks with labels such as "frivolous" and "irresponsible," triggering online bullying. As a mainstream media outlet, Da Xiang News should have objectively and fairly guided social opinion and spread positive energy, rather than reinforcing stereotypes to attract traffic, thus making the girl a victim of cyberbullying.

Irregular Handling of Information During the Dissemination Process.

Currently, much of the news content on new media platforms originates from self-media accounts, and a single trending event can be reposted across hundreds or even thousands of accounts. The varying levels of media literacy among content creators, combined with the difficulty platforms face in regulating large volumes of homogeneous content, has led to irregular handling of information during the dissemination process. For instance, on Douyin, news accounts shared footage of a campus bullying incident without blurring the faces of the perpetrators, which resulted in their personal information being exposed by angry netizens. This led to severe cyberbullying against the perpetrators, causing them to develop depression and blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator. On the other hand, although civil law protects the privacy rights of citizens, it does not explicitly address the protection of the privacy of offenders in crime reports. Often, reports disclose all the information about the victim but reveal only the age and gender of the perpetrator. The irregular handling of information by social media platforms creates an outlet for public anger, pushing the perpetrator into the eye of the storm, where they face relentless public criticism and condemnation.

3.2 Perpetrators

3.2.1 The Lack of Media Literacy Among Adolescents.

In the era of information overload, adolescents are immersed in the excitement brought by being at the "center of information," but in the process of receiving vast amounts of information, they rarely take the time to reflect on its accuracy and reliability. Instead, they blindly follow the collective will. The anonymity of the internet

provides them with relatively free space, leading some adolescents to mistakenly believe that they can speak freely online without consequences. The lack of media literacy among adolescents leads to a moral and ethical deviation in their perception of the internet, causing them to become the main perpetrators of cyberbullying.

3.2.2 The Post-Truth Era: The "Hot-Blooded Youth" Manipulated by Reversed Narratives.

What appears to be moral outrage is often just another form of malice. According to research by People's Daily, the initiators of cyberbullying are often not evildoers, but ordinary individuals whose actions may not have been deliberately aimed at harming others. They often act with a sense of "righteous indignation." For instance, in the "Fat Cat" incident, on May 3, a hashtag about a young man named Tan Zhu went viral. The initial report stated that Tan, a 21-year-old professional player in the game "Honor of Kings," had been romantically involved online with a girl named Tan for two years, during which he frugally saved money and transferred more than 510,000 yuan to her. On April 11, after the girl broke up with him, Tan committed suicide by jumping into the river in Chongqing. His sister, Liu, later exposed the chat records and bank transfers between Tan and the girl on social media. Many netizens, moved by Liu's emotional pleas during her livestreams, immediately sided with her. "Honor of Kings" is one of China's most popular games, particularly among adolescents, and the "Fat Cat" incident sparked intense discussions and empathy among youth gaming communities. Outraged by the story, young netizens flocked to Tan's social media accounts, bombarding her with accusations in an attempt to seek justice for the deceased. The cyberbullying forced Tan to go offline. However, on May 19, the police issued a statement clarifying that Tan had not deceived the young man for money under the guise of romance, and that her actions did not constitute fraud. Furthermore, Liu had deliberately leaked private information to gain public sympathy. This revelation brought an abrupt end to the wave of cyberbullying. In this case, adolescents blindly followed the crowd and, in their pursuit of so-called justice, became participants in cyberbullying.

4 Strategies to Prevent Juvenile Cyberbullying

4.1 Enhancing Media Literacy Among Adolescents

Moral education should be strengthened to guide adolescents in establishing correct life values and enhance their sense of responsibility. Adolescents should gain a clear understanding of cyberbullying and develop the ability to critically evaluate the vast amount of information they encounter online. Legal education should also be emphasized, helping them understand the penalties and harms associated with cyberbullying. On a psychological level, efforts should be made to foster a sense of individuality and rational thinking in adolescents, helping them avoid blindly following the crowd.

4.2 Regulating News Reporting on Social Media Platforms

Strengthening the Role of "Gatekeepers".

In contemporary internet communication, gatekeepers have expanded from media organizations and government agencies to include ordinary netizens. As such, gatekeeping needs to be diversified based on these different roles to regulate online content [6]. Every news publisher must improve their media literacy and adhere to content norms. News content should be promptly reviewed to remove false information, and articles should be written objectively and fairly to guide public opinion in a positive and constructive direction, promoting positive societal values.

Strengthening the Guiding Function of Mainstream Media.

As seen in the case of Da Xiang News, inaccurate and biased news content can damage a media outlet's credibility. Mainstream media should be particularly mindful of their role in guiding public opinion. In addition to regulating their own reporting, they should focus on mainstream societal ideologies and actively promote positive voices in public discourse, thereby maintaining control over the direction of public opinion [6]. At appropriate times, mainstream media should amplify positive messages and remain vigilant against negative trends in public discourse during online dissemination.

4.3 Strengthening Platform Governance: Fulfilling Responsibilities

Internet platforms bear significant responsibility for governing cyberbullying. As both regulators and enforcers of cyberbullying governance measures, platforms should require users to undergo real-name verification and intensify efforts to eliminate accounts that have not completed this process. Additionally, artificial intelligence and algorithms for content moderation should be further improved to strengthen the detection and identification of cyberbullying content and harmful comments. Websites and platforms should also enforce stricter regulations and punishments for accounts that engage in cyberbullying or promote negative discourse.

5 Conclusion

Adolescents are the generation that has grown up alongside the internet, and social media platforms have become an essential part of their leisure and entertainment. However, the development of a healthy online ecosystem for new media platforms still faces many challenges. Therefore, coordinated efforts from platforms, media, society, and the government are required to support the "Clean Cyberspace" campaign, creating a healthy online environment for adolescents and promoting the continued positive development of the online ecosystem.

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