



A Study on Role of Social Media Addiction in Contribution to Cyberbullying and Hate Speech among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Technology is a huge asset to human development and it has advanced significantly in recent years. One of the gifts of technology is social media which is a huge platform that allows people of all ages, but notably young people, to widen their social networks, share ideas and be creative. It is very famous among youngsters and is mostly used by them as they are more exposed to it than any other generation has ever been. Social media holds the power to change the world and make a huge difference as it is a place where people can share their opinions freely without hesitation. However, social media also has disadvantages that may be harmful to us. It may result in hate speech, addiction to social media, and cyberbullying, all of which are detrimental to our mental health. The purpose was to study role of social media addiction in contribution to cyberbullying and hate speech among young adults. To measure the stated variables, standardized scales were used, and data was collected from a total sample of 60 people in the 18-25 age group. The results found out that, there is a considerable positive correlation between cyberbullying and hate speech. There are

few measures that can be taken to deal with hate speech and cyberbullying, that is, to encourage worldwide cooperation to combat cyberbullying, maintain strong platform policies against hate speech, and promote digital literacy and appropriate online conduct. Promote community involvement and goal support while keeping platforms responsible for upholding a secure online environment.

Keywords: Social Media Addiction, Cyberbullying, Hate Speech, Young Adults

Introduction

Young adults also known as youth are a group of people who have transitioned from adolescence to early adulthood, their age ranges from 18 to 25 years. Young adults are pillars of a country and this generation of young adults has been exposed to technology since an early age compared to any other generation and has become masters in handling technology. As the world is developing, technology is growing with it and these days the ones who make the most out of it are the young adults. One of the most popular platforms that technology has created is social media which almost every youth uses and is familiar with. Social media is an open platform which allows different individuals to connect, share their ideas with each other and is a free space for developing and sharing one's creativity. Social media brings a lot of advantages with it, but it also has some disadvantages to it, for example social media addiction, in which an individual is constantly using the platform and becomes totally dependent on it. Social media can also be a very dark place as people can indulge in cyberbullying and spread hate speech towards each other which can cause psychological and emotional issues among people. Cyberbullying and hate speech can occur on any kind of social media platform. According to a survey by Panda Security (2023) at least 38 percent people experience cyberbullying on social media platforms on daily basis in India and is

one of the biggest concerns right now with hate speech online. The current research is to study how social media addiction can lead to increase in cyberbullying and hate speech among young adults.

Social Media Addiction

According to Tech Target (2019) it has been defined as, “social media addiction is an unhealthy dependence on interactive platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Like most dependencies, social media addiction manifests as overuse and difficulty in abstaining. Ironically, one common effect of the problem is social isolation.” Additionally, MedicalNewsToday (2022) defines it as, “social media addiction is when a person feels an extreme compulsion to log in or use social media. They may also feel an overwhelming concern about social media and devote a large amount of time to it. It is a behavioral addiction, meaning that someone is dependent on an activity or action. Due to the amount of time a person spends on social media, there may be a negative effect on their daily activities and personal relationships.”

Marengo et al. (2021) studied the relationship between young adult Facebook users' neuroticism, extraversion, and addiction to social media. It was conducted on 1094 Facebook users and found that anxious people tend to get addicted because they post a lot, while sociable people become addicted when they receive many likes on their posts. Both types of people are at risk if they get a lot of positive feedback. A study conducted by Moreno et al. (2021) on assessing addiction to social media, internet gaming disorder, and problematic internet use in young adults. It was conducted on 6,000 people and they found that about half had a problem with internet use, a quarter with video games, and only a few with social media. The issues were linked to different things,

but they also had similar health problems. Using internet addiction to find video game or social media addiction worked sometimes but also gave some incorrect results.

Cyberbullying

Anti-Bullying Alliance (2015) has defined cyberbullying as, “online bullying (often referred to as cyberbullying) is any form of bullying that is carried out through the use of electronic media devices, such as computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets, or gaming consoles.” According to Tokunaga (2010) it is defined as “any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.”

Balakrishnan (2015) studied cyberbullying with relation to roles of gender, age, and internet frequency in young adults in Malaysia. It was conducted on 393 people and it was found that cyberbullying still occurs after school, with more females involved. Younger individuals engage in cyberbullying more, and spending more time online increases the chances of being bullied or being a bully. Victims can also become bullies and vice versa, although it's less common among older users.

A study conducted by Balakrishnan and Fernandez (2018) on impact of self-esteem, empathy on cyberbullying among 1268 young adults found that self-esteem didn't significantly affect any group, but victims with higher self-esteem were more likely to feel angry and report cyberbullying. Bystanders with higher self-esteem were more likely to feel angry, sad, have pity for victims, and defend them. Empathy didn't show significant effects on any group's actions or feelings.

Hate Speech

Council of Europe (2022) defines it as, “hate speech refers to a wide range of communication that is highly divisive and endangers societal harmony.” The Committee of Ministers (2022) defines hate speech as any form of expression that, either directly or indirectly, incites, encourages, spreads, or justifies acts of violence, hatred, or discrimination against an individual or group of individuals, or that disparages them because of their actual or perceived personal characteristics or status, such as "race," "color," "language," "religion," "nationality," "age," "disability," "sex," "gender identity," or "sexual orientation." Online hate speech has emerged alongside the emergence of new media platforms. Further consideration, action, and attention to regulations and innovative strategies for addressing hate speech online are necessary.” United Nations (2019) defines it as, “hate speech is referred to as derogatory language that may endanger societal harmony and targets a group, or an individual based on innate traits (such as gender, religion, or ethnicity).”

Obermaier and Schmuck (2022) studied causes of hate speech victimization among teenagers and young adults on the internet. They surveyed 1,180 adolescents and young adults in Germany and found that some are significantly affected by online hate speech, especially those who feel disadvantaged, engage in online politics, and are less skilled with social media.

Celuch et al. (2022) studied elements linked to acceptance of online hatred among young adults. They surveyed young adults from six countries and found that acceptance of online hate is linked to general acceptance of violence, producing hate speech, and certain beliefs about group dominance. Factors like personal internet experiences, empathy, and trust in institutions also influence this, and these factors can vary between countries. In simple terms, understanding why

young people accept online hate speech is important because it's connected to their beliefs and can vary based on their backgrounds and experiences.

Purpose

The purpose is to study Role of Social Media Addiction in Contribution to Cyberbullying and Hate Speech among Young Adults.

Hypothesis

- There will be significant relationship between social media addiction and cyberbullying.
- There will be significant relationship between social media addiction and hate speech.
- There will be significant relationship between cyberbullying and hate speech.

METHODS

Sample

A total sample of 60 in the age range of 18-25 was collected from Aurangabad.

Measures

- **The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale**, BSMAS as developed by Andreassen et al. (2012), consists of 6 questions, each rated on a five-point scale from 'very rarely' to 'very often.' Used as an instrument for the assessment of social media addiction.
- **The Cyberbullying Perpetration Scale**, CBPS as developed by Patchin and Hinduja (2015), consists of 6 questions, each rated on a five point scale from 'never' to 'several times'. Used as an instrument for the assessment of cyberbullying.

- **Motivations for Engaging in Online Hate Speech Scale**, MHATE as developed by Wachs and colleagues (2021), consists of 6 questions each indicating a different type of motivation i.e. Revenge, Ideology, Group conformity, Status enhancement, Exhilaration and Power, each rated on a five point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' Used as an instrument for assessing of hate speech.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms; each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized Psychological Tests were administered to the participants.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Result

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Social Media Addiction	Cyberbullying	Hate Speech
N	60	60	60
Mean	16.2	7.27	7.43
Standard deviation	6.13	2.00	3.51

Table 2*Correlation among social media addiction, cyberbullying and hate speech*

	SocialMedia Addiction	Cyberbullying	Hate Speech
Social Media Addiction	—		
Cyberbullying	0.227	—	
Hate Speech	0.195	0.695	***
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$			

Discussion of Results

The findings of the correlational statistical study clearly suggest that there is a considerable positive correlation between cyberbullying and hate speech ($r = 0.695$, $p < 0.001$). However, no significant relation was found between cyberbullying and social media addiction, between hate speech and social media addiction. The present study's results are consistent with the prediction that hate speech and cyberbullying will significantly positively correlate.

The current study's findings are in line with earlier research by Giordano et al. (2021) which examined 428 American teenagers and discovered that cyberbullying is more common among those who spend a lot of time online, are highly addicted to social media, and identify as male. Thus, the findings bolster the notion that there is a positive correlation between hate speech and cyberbullying.

Conclusion

As a part of social networking, young adults are constantly using social media and do get involved in hate speech and cyberbullying which can have a negative impact of individuals resulting in various mental health issues. Through this research the results confirms that hate speech is correlated to cyberbullying in young adults. There are three potential limitations concerning the results of this study. The first limitation concerns the taken age of the participants that is 18 to 25, focusing only on young adults. The second potential limitation is that the survey was done only in Aurangabad city and the final limitation is that it only focuses on hate speech and cyberbullying in young adults. In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current finding by examining mental health issues caused due to cyberbullying and hate speech on both the people doing it and receiving it.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the prevalence of cyberbullying and hate speech among young adults. Future research should address these limitations and expand on these findings to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies.

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