Assessment 1: Background & Literature review

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Social Media and Cyberbullying

**Introduction and Background**

Social media has a substantial impact on adolescents as it provides great communication opportunities. With the advancement in technology, social media provides a viable platform for adolescents to engage in communication and entertainment activities. However, with the passage of time, social media is being used as a tool to bully adolescents. It is important to mention the fact that most of the adolescent’s experience on social media is based on the benefits of digital communication. However, anonymity experience of adolescents is making them vulnerable to cyberbullying, which can be highly catastrophic. Social media has revolutionized the field of communication, entertainment, and professional working through blogs, instant messaging platforms, and social networking sites. It offers a specific platform for individuals to engage in social interactions. Furthermore, social media offers adolescents with the possibilities of establishing and maintaining friendships. Regardless of the positive aspects, social media can contribute towards the confrontation of an individual with threatening circumstances such as suicidal thoughts, signals of depression, sexually-transgressive behavior and cyberbullying. The purpose of this paper is to determine the role of social media towards high prevalence of cyberbullying.

**Literature Review**

The prevalence of cyberbullying is increasing at an alarming speed as users are reachable 24/7. Social media is a viable platform for an offender to confront someone outside his/her house and school premises. Researchers have found that adolescents usually stay in contact with their peers through social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, etc. Previously, cyberbullying usually occurred through instant messaging programs and mobile phone activities. Internet-based text messages were used in the past to oppress or harass an individual. Currently, social networking sites are being used to bully an individual, which creates a significant sense of fear in victims. It is notable to mention that social media interaction of youth contains some specific digital stressors that can be catastrophic for a victim. The social media platform is being used to send mean and harassing personal messages to an individual. It can also be used to steal personal information of an individual by hacking into his/her accounts. Later, this information can be used to harass or blackmail that specific individual. The impact of social media harassment in terms of cyberbullying can be severe for adolescents due to the large portion of the online audience. Researchers have found that social media platform is being used for personal attacks, impersonation, humiliation, and public shaming. It is obvious that social media tools offer potential damaging ways to interact with individuals regardless of its multiple advantages.

According to Erdur-Baker (2010), “peer bullying now goes beyond school borders.” It is important to consider cyberbullying in terms of the school environment. Cyberbullying beyond schoolyard has increased at an alarming rate due to which schools are being charged by government to take immense actions on this particular issue (Erdur-Baker, 2010). There is an immense need to prevent cyberbullying as it has a crucial impact on adolescents. Cyberbullying has the potential to establish a threatening feeling for students in the school. It is important to consider the fact that cyberbullying can disrupt the academic progress of an individual. Various research done in the past tried to find out the reason behind cyberbullying and how they influence the behavior of adolescents. For this particular purpose, researchers interviewed teachers and parents of victims to evaluate their thoughts on this particular topic. According to parents, cyberbullying has created a terrifying feeling in their children, so their children often find a way to avoid going to school (Erdur-Baker, 2010). The prevalence of cyberbullying is catastrophic for adolescent students as it negatively impacts their academic progress. Parents are highly concerned about their children due to the increment in cyberbullying activities. It is observed that parents are worried about the emotional wellbeing of their children.

Cyberbullying has the potential to destroy the psychological wellbeing of individuals due to the creation of threatening feelings. Parents often feel powerless to control the impact of cyberbullying as they are facing difficulties to understand the mechanisms of cyberbullying (Erdur-Baker, 2010). It is one of the most crucial aspects that should be focused in an effective manner to establish some viable solutions. The permanency of online communication is also problematic for parents as it has the potential to increase the risk of cyberbullying. Parents expressed concerns about the engagement of their children on social networking sites (Erdur-Baker, 2010). Uploading or posting things on impulse has the potential to be misjudged. Such circumstances can be crucial for an individual as it can later be used in the wrong way by other individuals. Posts or comments of an individual on internet can be misinterpreted and used to blackmail or harass them. It is the core responsibility of parents to take significant participation in cyberbullying prevention and intervention.

Lack of technical knowledge is also hindering the efforts of parents to prevent their children from cyberbullying (Erdur-Baker, 2010). Parents are unable to do adequate parenting despite the sense of responsibility as they are facing difficulties to have better technical knowledge. Governments and states made it compulsory for schools to address the incidents of cyberbullying (Erdur-Baker, 2010). However, the majority of parents are unaware of the requirement and boundaries that should be adopted by schools. Due to this conundrum, parents are unable to completely address the incident of their children being cyberbullied in schools. Teachers and school administration are also aware of the fact that legislations legitimized schools to address the serious issue of cyberbullying.

Lowry et al (2016) also focus their research work to critically examine why adults extensively involved in cyberbullying specifically in case of social media. The main aim of researchers through their research work is to identify different integrated factors that cause the growing concern of cyberbullying on social media particularly in the context of adults. Undoubtedly, it is significant to identify and critically analyze the particular aspects that trigger young people to involve in inappropriate activities on social media platforms specifically in the form of cyberbullying (Lowry et al., 2016). The researchers come up with the argument that it is essential to identify the integrated aspects to identify the actual intensity of this issue and propose suitable solutions. Cyberbullying on social media is defined as the inappropriate approach of communication to harass others. Researchers come up with the opinion that plays a role to encourage adults to involve cyberbullying activities on social media (Lowry et al., 2016). The extensive research work by researchers helps to determine IT artifact as one critical source that causes the growing trend of cyberbullying. The particular theoretical model in the form of social media cyberbullying model (SMCBM) is used by the researchers to determine the adult’s inclination of using social media platform for cyberbullying.

It is established by the researchers through their research findings that extensive social media usage with the combination of anonymity facilities and encourage adults to adopt the approach of cyberbullying (Lowry et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is important to identify all the hazards and negative implications associated with the trending issue of cyberbullying. There is evidence of many young individuals who greatly suffer due to the inappropriate approach of social media mainly in the form of cyberbullying (Lowry et al., 2016). The duration of using social media on a daily basis is another crucial aspect relevant to the growing issue of cyberbullying. It is observed that young people invest many hours of their day to remain engage in different social media sites (Lowry et al., 2016). The increasing involvement of adults with the world through social media increases the risk of cyberbullying.

The use of social media by teenagers has increased over the past few years. They are not just using it as a communication tool but their lives are circling around its usage (Alim, 2016). Over the past few decades, the use of social media sites has enormously increased. In the United States, it is estimated that nearly 80 percent of adolescents are using social media networking sites (Alim, 2016). Broad set of functionality is offered by social media websites to attract an individual to utilize social media websites. Social media websites offer collective communication style and user-generated content, which is highly appealing to individuals. According to Garett, Lord, & Young (2016), selective sharing of information is allowed by social media networking site. An individual usually finds it highly engaging to share specific information to others through these social media networking sites. Unprecedented access is given to adolescents through social media to share even their personal information on internet (Garett, Lord, & Young, 2016). This ability has the potential to leverage personal information of individuals against themselves (Garett, Lord, & Young, 2016).

The extensive use of technology and social media has made them as Generation Z and has also caused a major issue of cyberbullying for teenagers as well as for the whole society. Cyberbullying refers to the use of information and communication technology with the purpose of harassing and causing harm to others (Alim, 2016). This harassment is often carried out in thoughtful, repetitive and in a hostile way. Moreover, the information and communication technology here includes the use of email, text message using mobile and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, social bookmarking sites and video-sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube (Alim, 2016).

It is highly important to consider some specific features of cyberbullying in order to make a better understanding of its existence. According to Alim (2016), the features of cyberbullying include: (a) sharing of embarrassing information of an individual to large audience, (b) cyberbullying can happen 24/7, (c) cyberbullies are not necessarily needed to have face to face meeting with their victims, (d) cyberbullying activities can be aggressive and repetitive, (e) it is difficult to find a cyberbully due to vast number of people who use social networking sites, and (f) victims of cyberbullying are unable to cope with bullies due to mental stress. Recent research conducted by Bridianne and Andrew has shown that one in three teens practice some kind of cyber-bullying that result in emotional distress, psychosocial trauma and decreased self-esteem (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). Ditchthelabel in partnership with Habbo Hotel in 2014 also conducted a survey about this issue (Alim, 2016). This included 10,008 teenagers and young people having ages 13–22 years. Among this population, 37% of teenagers were experiencing cyberbullying on a regular basis (Alim, 2016). Another study conducted by Duggan, Coresi, and Gassar in 2014 focused on the approachability of the digital world by teenagers and resultant implications of cyberbullying (Alim, 2016).

Moreover, researchers are mostly focusing on the upsetting effects of cyber-bullying instead of constituents of cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying although includes the use of technology for the purpose of harassing or threatening others. However, at the same time, the research about the nature and regularity of harassment is also required (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). Some researchers consider any action as cyber-bullying only if it ongoing and repetitive in a manner (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012).

Generally, cyber-bullying occurs through mobile phone activity and instant messaging programs. A study conducted in Finnish included a large number of adolescents and results showed the use of instant messaging programs as a real cause of the cyber-bullying (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). Here, teens were sending the internet-based text messages to each other in real-time. More recent studies have also shown the more and more use of instant messaging programs along with the use of social networking sites (SNS). SNS being interactive media sources permit teens to keep in contact with each other and share information. They are found to interact with their SNS for over an hour a day. This use of SNS also exposes them to numerous risks if they share their identifiable information such as photos and geographic location (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012).

Similarly, other research have also shown the reasons for joining SNS by teens. These include peer pressure, friendship, self-expression as well as sexuality (Alim, 2016). However, no study has still established a conclusive connection between this new social medium and cyber-bullying. According to the findings of Alim (2016), nearly 40 percent of students received mean comments on social networking sites, which is problematic and demotivating for them. It is also found that approximately 37 percent of individuals have to experience victimization in online gossips, which concludes that social media is being used as a tool to bully individuals (Alim, 2016). It is essential to consider the prevalence of social media and cyberbullying in South African youth. According to a national survey by “Global Advisor Cyberbullying Study”, 25 percent of South African parents reveal that their child has been victimized by cyberbullying. This case study has interviewed nearly 20,793 people from 28 countries to find out the prevalence of cyberbullying. According to this survey, it is revealed that South Africa has higher proportion of cyberbullying as compared to other nations in the world. This study states that more than half (54 percent) of parents in South Africa are aware of a child in the society who has experienced harassment and oppression through cyberbullying. According to that study, the US and South Africa are among top five countries whose parents reported that their children have experienced harassment or oppression through cyberbullying.

As the prevalence of cyberbullying is increasing at an alarming rate, there is an immense need to take some critical actions in order to restrict cyberbullies to attack an adolescent through social media. School administration need to take serious steps in this regard by complying with the legislation of their specific region (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). Many researchers have interviewed teachers to find out the link of cyberbullying to the academic performance of an individual. It has been indicated by teachers that cyberbullying usually traumatize an adolescent. Due to the negative impact of cyberbullying on the psychological health of an individual, it is impossible for that particular student to cope up with his/her studies (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). Therefore, schools should need to comply with the anti-bullying policies to restrict these incidents. The process of cyberbullying in schools can be reduced by creating awareness about cyberbullying and outlining processes to respond and report the incident of cyberbullying. Bullying prevention lessons have a tendency to reduce the overall occurrence of cyberbullying (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). It is important to mention that bullying prevention lessons are a part of the learning curriculum. Consequently, major emphasis is needed in this regard to overcome the prevalence of cyberbullying. A critical examination of existing literature on cyberbullying indicates that social media is one of the major reason behind the high prevalence of cyberbullying (Wiederhold & Riva, 2012). It dictates that social media platform and social networking sites possess both positive and negative aspects at the same time.

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