

THE EFFECT OF JUSTICE SENSITIVITY AND MORAL DISENGAGEMENT ON CYBERBULLYING AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract: The aim of the research was to conduct a manual survey among young adults in various universities on the sensitivity to justice and moral disengagement factors which affect cyber bullying behavior. Cyberbullying is an unusual type of aggressive behavior each influenced by anonymity, relentless behavior, and the extensive reach of internet resources, therefore, this paper discusses how the sensitivity of justice and moral disengagement influences the cyberbullying behavior of young adults in different ways. The study design was a survey using questionnaire where the sample size was 205 students in a university between the ages of 18-25 years. The findings reveal that the sensitivity to justice was positively associated with cyberbullying and at the same time moral disengagement was significantly negatively associated. Each of these factors was a predictor of the behavior of cyberbullying and they accounted 22.9% of the variance, with the moral disengagement a stronger predictor even though it was negatively associated with it. These results highlight both the need to implement interventions that concentrate on emotion management and awareness to counteract emotional response to perceived injustice, as well as indicating the need to do more research into other psychological and contextual factors that could contribute to cyberbullying.

Keywords- *cyberbullying, sensitivity to justice, moral disengagement, young adults.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Moral Landscape Through Digital Media

Digitally mediated communication has led to a fundamental change in the way individuals can interact, form perceptions of other individuals and manage their behavior. Internet spaces are often pseudo-anonymous, flowing and low-visibility place. These attributes are very detrimental to traditional moral regulators such as social accountability, obtaining feedback, and empathic hints. This implied that people could find themselves a bit less accountable of their deeds more when the effects of these acts may not be experienced immediately. Face to face contacts through bodily gestures such as tone of voice, emotional feedback and facial expressions encourage judgment and morals. These cues are an implicit regulatory process, accomplished through signaling distress and behavioral constraint. In fact, digitally mediated relationships have to rely on textual, symbolic, and avatars that in most instances, lack emotional subtext and are more puzzling. This transformation may make the perception of people easier to downgrade or overlook the effects of their actions that may also lead to loss or impersonalization of the psyche and loss of sympathetic interest. Besides, there is a behavioral impact of the digital platforms influenced by such architectural features as the appearance of algorithms, indications of social approval (likes and shares), and the length of the online content. This produces a performative space where attention, recognizability, and peer approval may be reinforcing certain habits such as aggression. The nature of cyberbullying in this respect seems to be an issue that is sunk into the moral and social ecology of its own, rather than at least just a manifestation of traditional aggression on the internet.

1.2 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is defined as the deliberate and repeated application of digital technology to harm others such as harassment, ostracization, disparaging others, and the dissemination of negative or derogatory materials. Although the similarities of cyberbullying and traditional bullying are evident, the digital media and their affordances, which include anonymity, the reach of the audience, or the longer lifespan of online materials, set it apart. Such features lead to deepening of torment as patients can be powerless in regulating the amount and span of harmful substances circulation. Notably, cyberbullying has the opportunity to happen in real time and be monitored by an absent crowd because of the absence of time or physical impediments, which increases its psychological effects. With more and more digital interaction mostly among the youth, there is a great need to understand what the causes of cyberbullying are.

1.3 Moral Disengagement

The concept of moral disengagement, introduced by Albert Bandura in 2017 as part of the overall social cognitive perspective of moral agency, is a key paradigm to understand immoral action. This perspective holds that individuals apply instilled codes of morality and self-assessment in the process of controlling their behavior. These self-regulatory mechanisms are not, however,

always activated. Individuals engaged in moral disengagement can also behave badly and can rationalize or justify the bad behavior and this helps to avoid the feelings of shame or self-loathing. Victim-blaming is an example of these processes.

euphemism labeling, diffusion of responsibility, reduction of consequences and moral justification. Such strategies allow individuals to possess a favorable moral self-concept in spite of the harmful behaviour. The factors that shall encourage moral disengagement are usually magnified in digitally mediated contexts. With less visible victims, the emotional feedback is minimal, and some actions on the internet are acceptable; it may be easier to downplay or misinterpret mischief. Empirical research has revealed that moral disengagement, in the cases of increased moral disengagement, correlates with online animosity through greater involvement in cyber bullying (Zhao et al., 2021, p. 12463).

1.4 Justice Sensitivity

Interpersonal variations in perception of morale, emotional response and thought, all play a big role in behavior. Justice sensitivity is a dispositional predisposition to detect and react to the situations of fairness and unfairness. When people are highly responsive to justice, they tend to recognize injustices and become highly emotional, e.g., angry, guilty, or outraged. The broad sense of justice sensitivity incorporates perspectives on victim sensitivity (sensitivity to personal injustice), observer sensitivity (sensitivity to injustice towards others), perpetrator sensitivity (concern about practicing unfair advantages) and beneficiary sensitivity (an uneasiness as a result of gaining unfair advantages). These factors can have various effects on behavior. Certain types of justice sensitivity, such as the elevated sensitivity to personal injustice, are likely to elevate chances of defensive or retaliatory action (Tayinmak and Erol Korkmaz, 2025), but other types can raise empathy and prosocial responses (Camacho et al., 2025). The sensitivity of justice may become a strong force in how individuals respond to perceived offenses or provocations, in online settings that are generally unclear in their interactions and open to interpretation. In turn, one has to be aware of the variety of cyberbullying behaviors.

1.5 Intersections Between Justice Sensitivity and Moral Disengagement

Two aspects of moral functioning that are different yet related are moral disengagement and justice sensitivity. Although justice sensitivity involves a more developed sense of fairness and emotional reaction to unfairness, moral disengagement is a cognitive dilution of said moral rules. In this regard, one of the two constructions can enhance moral accountability whereas the other can diminish it. Their engagement may have a significant role in digitally mediated environments. Although this relation may vary depending on contextual and individual factors, very sensitive to injustice individuals will be less inclined to be in the condition of moral disengagement so long as they have the higher standards of innerized ones. However, the excessive application of disengagement strategies might also determine the way frequent users might be ready to re-brand perceived injustices in such a way that will encourage or reward violent behaviours (Hood and Duffy, 2018). Each therefore to understand individual differences in cyber bullying behaviour, there is need to understand the relationships between these words.

1.6 Young Adulthood and the Development of Digital Morality

Young adulthood is a time of critical development that is increased by autonomy, new interests in digital spaces and the discovery of identity. During this age, people are occupied with the formation of their social identities and unfavorable interpersonal interactions that are usually evident in the Internet where people can observe and quantify social approval. Therefore, cyberbullying as perpetrators or victims can be very influential in moral development and positive interpersonal trust development and mental health. Moreover, the interdependence of the victimhood with the perpetration implies that the victim can take revenge, perhaps, due to the psychological reasons and perceptions of inequalities. This highlights the importance of considering emotive and cognitive processes to comprehend cyberbullying among this population.

1.7 The Present Study

The objective of this research paper is to explore the role of moral disengagement and sense of justice on the cyberbullying behavior among young adults. The study is a convergence of the dispositional moral orientation and the context situational self-regulatory strategy as they develop in the social cognitive perspective of the moral agency, by Albert Bandura and the multidimensional theory of justice sensitivity. The research, including these positions, transcends the explanations based on the explanatory framework that is one-dimensional (Online aggression: its complexity and fundamental causes 2008) and places cyberbullying as an activity in the context of a much broader moral-cognitive framework. In particular, three areas are examined in the paper. Since it is an emotive and moral prism through which people are feeling and acting in relation to injustice, it first examines the question of whether the action of cyberbullying is being attributed and correlated to the sensibility of justice. Whereas the elements of justice sensitivity may result in engagement of empathy and prosocial conduct, greater sensitivity on perceived unfairness towards self may also result in retaliation or defense in the virtual world. Second, the paper outlines the research line that focuses on the influence of moral disengagement as part of the cognitive process that may influence cyberbullying behaviour. The previous research has tended to link moral disengagement to the promotion of aggressive behaviors, but its role in digital-mediation is even more complex. Moral aversion can have an effect on the way individuals see and respond to toxic behaviors in cyberspace where there is less responsibility and low degree of emotional involvement. Third, by examining the relationship between the two concepts: justice sensitivity and moral disengagement, the paper discusses the relationship between them considering the fact that the two concepts can be complexly interacting in digitally intermediated

situations. Though justice sensitivity may be connected to higher moral accountability and responsiveness to norms of fairness, moral disengagement, may have an association with the loss of moral standards. However, they can be sporadic and based on the person and the circumstance that can result in diverse cyberbullying acts. The research will elaborate on the phenomenon of cyber bullying through these links through both the affective and cognitive factors. The findings belong to the existing literature on the moral self-control in the online situation, that is, regarding the population under the age of 25, which is understudied. Along with theoretical implications, there are practical implications of the work. Perhaps, the definition of the kind of psychological traits which associate with cyberbullying would also be relevant in the prevention and intervention strategies which would deal not only with the emotional response to the perceived unfairness, but with the thought processes underlying the moral response as well.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Population and Sample

The research sample was comprised of young people, who often use digital communication platforms due to their relevance to the cyberbullying behavior analysis.

Convenience sampling was used to introduce a sample of 205 individuals (N = 205) aged 18-25. Online resources, colleges, and institutions were used to select the participants depending on their availability and desire to participate. There was a representation of male and female volunteers.

The age range was believed to be appropriate because of their excessive use of social media and social interactions in general which causes them to be more vulnerable to not only being a victim of cyberbullying but also becoming the perpetrators themselves.

2.2 Data and Sources of Data

Self-reported questionnaires were the main source of primary data of the research. University networks were used to recruit participants and ways in which the surveys were administered were systematic. Participants answered the questions which were then recorded, entered and coded to statistical software to analyze. The study was cross sectional in nature since all the data was collected at once. Measures of the following factors were made using standardized psychological tools:

Justice Sensitivity Scale (JSS-8)

Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS-32) Cyberbullying Scale.

Strict adherence to ethical principles i.e. informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were observed during data collection process.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The present paper is grounded on the social cognitive theory of moral agency, formulated by Albert Bandura, who believes that moral norms and self-appraisal regulate the behavior. The study includes:

Dependent variable: Cyberbullying behavior.

Independent variables: Justice Sensitivity and Moral Disengagement.

Justice sensitivity is the understanding or emotional reaction to injustice in any individual whereas moral disengagement is the mental pathway of justifying or justifying an unethical conduct. According to the theoretical paradigm, the behavior of cyberbullying is put under the influence of not only thought processes (moral disengagement) but also emotional processes (justice sensitivity). These concepts can be compounded to influence the ways individuals perceive, protect themselves, and react to interactions online in digitally mediated settings.

2.4 Statistical Tools

Data analysis was done with the IBM SPSS Statistics (Version XX). Cyberbullying, moral disengagement and justice sensitivity were assessed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to determine the relationship between the factors.

2.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

In order to summarize the distribution of the study variables (justice sensitivity, moral disengagement, and cyberbullying), calculations of descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values) were done.

2.4.2 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach alpha was used in determining the reliability and internal consistency of the scales. All the scales used were acceptable to high reliability hence they were appropriate to measure the constructs of interest.

2.4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between

moral disengagement, justice sensitivity, and cyberbullying behavior. Specifically, correlations between justice sensitivity and cyberbullying, moral disengagement and cyberbullying, and moral disengagement and cyberbullying were determined. The cutoff point for statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

2.4.4 Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to assess the expected impacts of moral disengagement and justice sensitivity on cyberbullying behavior. The model evaluated the coefficient of determination (R^2) to measure the amount of variance explained, regression coefficients (β) to determine the direction and strength of predictors, and the F-statistic to determine overall model significance.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results of Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Shapiro- Wilk W
Cyberbullying	3	55	17.1	8.39	0.751
Justice Sensitivity	8	39	22.6	7.48	0.974
Moral Disengagement	66	159	108	15.6	0.966

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the central tendency and dispersion of the research variables, which included moral disengagement, justice sensitivity, and cyberbullying conduct. With a mean score of 17.10 (SD = 8.39) for cyberbullying behavior and scores ranging from 3 to 55, the results demonstrated that participants' participation in online hostile behaviors varied. The average score of justice sensitivity was 22.60 (SD= 0.16)

(= 7.48), where the average scores of the individual who experience different levels of perceived injustice are observed to vary between 8 and 39, signifying that there are moderate measures of sensitiveness to perceived injustice. The means of moral disengagement with a rank of 66-159 (SD=15.60) indicated a heterogeneity in the willingness to morally or intellectually justify unethical conduct. The variables distribution was then analyzed with Shapiro-Wilko test which showed that all the variables were significantly non-gaussian ($p < .001$). Nonetheless, owing to the sufficient number of samples, the data were deemed adequate to analyze it in additional parametric analyses.

3.2 Reliability Analysis of the Scales

Scale	Cronbach's α
Cyberbullying Scale	0.923
Justice Sensitivity Scale	0.772
Moral Disengagement Scale	0.871

Table 3.2: Reliability Analysis

The Cyberbullying Behavior Scale's good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .923$) demonstrated strong reliability. The Justice Sensitivity Scale is a valid measure of perceived injustice sensitivity, as evidenced by its satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .772$). The Moral Disengagement Scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .871$). Despite one item (MDS1) exhibiting a negative item of total correlation, the scale's overall reliability was still sufficient.

3.3 Correlation Matrix for study variables

Variables	I	II	III
I. Cyberbullying			
II. Justice Sensitivity	0.258***		
III. Moral Disengagement	-0.438***	-0.155*	

Table 3.3: Correlation Matrix

Pearson's correlation analysis shows a significant positive relationship between justice sensitivity and cyberbullying ($r = .258$, $p < .001$). There was a significant negative link between moral disengagement and cyberbullying ($r = -.438$, $p < .001$). Additionally, moral disengagement and justice sensitivity were negatively correlated ($r = -.155$, $p < .05$).

3.4 Linear Regression of the Predictors

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Justice Sensitivity	0.219	0.070	0.195	3.12	.002
Moral Disengagement	-0.220	0.034	-0.408	-6.53	<.001

Note- $R^2 = 0.229$, Adjusted

$R^2 = 0.222$, $N = 205$ Table

3.4: Linear Regression

A multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine whether moral disengagement and justice sensitivity affect cyberbullying behavior. The entire model was statistically significant, explaining 22.9% of the variation in cyberbullying ($R^2 = 0.229$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.222$), with $F(2, 202) = 26.15$, $p < .001$. Justice sensitivity was revealed to be a significant positive predictor of increased cyberbullying behavior ($\beta = 0.195$, $p = .002$). However, moral disengagement was discovered to be a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.408$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of moral disengagement are associated with lower levels of cyberbullying. It's interesting to note that moral disengagement contributed more proportionately to the model than justice sensitivity. Collinearity diagnostics indicated that there is no multicollinearity issues ($VIF = 1.02$, tolerance = 0.976).

3.5 Interpretation and Discussion

The results of the current research indicate that multifaceted interaction of affective factors and cognitive factors has a contribution to cyberbullying behavior. The perceived relationship between justice sensitivity and cyberbullying indicates that individuals having a high degree of justice sensitivity can have a higher chance of being violent online possibly due to a perceived injustice or provocation. This confirms the notion that, under digitally mediated conditions, an increase in emotional reaction to the injustice can sometimes result in protective or vindictive actions.

Moral disengagement had high negative relationship with cyberbullying, which is not as expected based on the previous studies. The moral disengagement has been long linked to escalation of destructive behavior due to the justification that individuals gain about their behavior. The existing results, however, suggest otherwise: there was an inverse relationship between more moral disengagement and less-reported cyberbullying behaviour. This pleasant surprise could be due to cultural or environmental difference in the functioning of the moral disengagement in online settings. The individual experiencing greater disengagement may be less inclined to respond emotionally to online communication and this may minimise the likelihood of engaging in direct cyberbullying. Alternatively, the result can be influenced by self-report biases or the existence of additional variables that influence the display of behaviors in digital forms, but that cannot be measured.

When applied, these findings can emphasize the importance of encouraging young adults to be critical thinkers, have digital empathy, and engaging in proper online activity. To increase moral responsibility, learning exercises and sensitization can also be developed and the emotional problems leading to retaliatory behavior addressed. More research is required to investigate these associations in relation to various cultures and contextual variables and include additional variables like empathy, impulsivity and social norms in order to gain a more accurate picture of cyber bullying behavior.

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