

CYBERBULLYING AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHODIFFERENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between the socio-psychological, communicative, and technological factors influencing the emergence of cyberbullying and the individual psychodifferential characteristics of a person. The study theoretically substantiates the forms of cyberbullying manifested in the modern digital environment, its psychological determinants, and its association with individual characteristics such as temperament, character, emotional stability, level of empathy, aggressiveness, self-esteem, and communicative competence. In addition, the psychological profiles of cyberbullying participants—aggressors, victims, and bystanders—are described based on a psychodifferential approach. The findings indicate that individual psychological differences constitute an important prognostic factor in the formation and development of cyberbullying behavior. The article also proposes scientific and practical recommendations aimed at reducing the negative psychological consequences of cyberbullying, enhancing individuals' digital culture, and improving preventive and corrective intervention programs.

Keywords

cyberbullying, individual psychodifferential characteristics, aggressiveness, empathy, emotional stability, temperament, communicative competence, digital environment, psychological prevention, internet communication.

The rapid development of information and communication technologies has created new opportunities in people's lives while simultaneously giving rise to a number of psychological and social problems. One of these problems is cyberbullying, which refers to a set of aggressive behaviors aimed at intentionally causing psychological harm to an individual through the Internet, social networks, messaging applications, and other digital platforms. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is not limited by time or place and can subject victims to continuous psychological pressure. Cyberbullying is influenced by several major factors, including social, psychological, and technological factors. Among the social factors, family relationships, peer groups, and social interactions play a significant role in the emergence of cyberbullying. Insufficient parental supervision, inadequate communication between parents and children, and the presence of a violence-prone environment within the family can increase the likelihood of cyberbullying.

Furthermore, aggressive behavior that is supported and reinforced by peers can also contribute to the development of this phenomenon. From a psychological perspective, an individual's emotional state, level of self-control, tolerance to frustration, and degree of aggressiveness are directly associated with cyberbullying. Psychological problems, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, or, conversely, excessively high self-esteem may intensify aggressive behavior. Technological factors also play a significant role in facilitating cyberbullying. The sense of anonymity on the Internet, limited control over users, and the rapid dissemination of information create favorable conditions for cyberbullying. Individuals may engage in aggressive actions toward others while concealing their true identities. Individual psychodifferential characteristics consistently serve as fundamental factors in the development and formation of personality. Differential psychology examines the individual differences among people. The following characteristics are particularly important in understanding cyberbullying: Temperament reflects an individual's innate psychological traits. People with a choleric temperament may be more actively involved in cyberbullying due to their impulsive nature and tendency to react quickly. In contrast, individuals with phlegmatic or melancholic temperaments may be at a greater risk of becoming victims. Personality traits such as determination, responsibility, and humaneness help individuals refrain from engaging in cyberbullying¹. Conversely, egocentrism, aggressiveness, and low levels of empathy increase the likelihood of cyberbullying behavior. Emotionally unstable individuals often experience difficulties in managing stress and negative emotions. As a result, they may display aggressive behavior in online environments. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Individuals with a high level of empathy are less likely to engage in cyberbullying because they are more capable of recognizing the emotional consequences of their actions on others. Individuals with low levels of empathy often fail to adequately recognize the harm that their actions may cause to others. Aggressiveness is considered one of the primary psychological determinants of cyberbullying. Individuals with high levels of aggression are more likely to engage in insulting, humiliating, or intimidating behaviors toward others through online platforms. Self-esteem also plays a significant role in cyberbullying behavior. While low self-esteem increases the risk of victimization, excessively high and unrealistic self-esteem may contribute to heightened levels of aggression. Communicative competence is another important factor associated with cyberbullying. Individuals with well-developed communication skills tend to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, whereas poor communicative competence may lead to the escalation of conflicts in online environments. Cyberbullies are often characterized by a strong desire for dominance, aggressiveness, low levels of empathy, and impulsivity. They tend to perceive the Internet as a tool for exerting pressure, influence, and control over others. Victims of cyberbullying are typically shy, emotionally sensitive individuals with limited

¹ Zhilavskaya, I. V. (2017). Media education and the development of communicative competence among adolescents in the digital environment. *Media Education Journal*, 4, 45–52.

social support and low self-confidence. The emergence of new digital environments and the widespread use of the Internet have given rise to entirely new forms of communication. It is difficult to agree with the widespread assumption that the Internet replaces real-life communication among young people. On the contrary, online interactions expand, diversify, and make communication more dynamic and accessible. Considering that children begin using the Internet from an early age, online communication gradually becomes as natural for them as interactions with parents and peers. Over time, users cease to perceive the Internet as a separate environment and instead regard it as a global means of communication. As I. V. Zhilavskaya notes, "Adolescents accumulate valuable knowledge about the social environment and subsequently apply it in their professional activities, business interactions, and interpersonal communication."² These forms of communication, which will become increasingly important in the future, contribute to the formation of new ethical standards, social norms, and rules of virtual interaction, within which a unique language, logic, psychology, and culture emerge. The deep integration of digital technologies into everyday life has fundamentally transformed the forms of human communication. Alongside the expansion of opportunities for virtual interaction, various forms of psychological pressure and aggression directed toward individuals have also increased. Cyberbullying is one of such negative phenomena, and its emergence is closely associated not only with external environmental factors but also with the individual psychological characteristics of the person involved. According to the findings of psychological research, the emotional and volitional characteristics of an individual play a significant role in the formation of cyberbullying behavior. Individuals whose emotional self-regulation skills are insufficiently developed tend to express negative emotions uncontrollably in online environments. The anonymity provided by virtual space further facilitates and intensifies such behavior. As a result, individuals may freely express aggressive attitudes through the Internet that they would not dare to display in real-life situations. The level of empathy occupies a particularly important place in the development of cyberbullying. A low level of empathic ability limits an individual's capacity to understand the emotional experiences of others and to demonstrate compassion toward them. Consequently, cyberaggressors often fail to fully comprehend the negative psychological impact that their actions may have on victims. A high level of empathy and prosocial behavior serves as an important protective factor that contributes to the reduction of cyberbullying incidents. Temperamental characteristics are also among the significant psychodifferential indicators determining an individual's susceptibility to cyberbullying. Individuals with high levels of impulsivity and emotional excitability are more likely to become involved in virtual conflicts. In contrast, emotionally stable individuals who are capable of regulating their behavior tend to resolve online conflicts in a constructive manner. An individual's level of self-esteem also plays a crucial role in the cyberbullying process. Research findings

² Tokunaga, R. S. (2010). Following you home from school: A critical review and synthesis of research on cyberbullying victimization. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(3), 277–287.

indicate that some individuals who experience self-doubt and internal psychological imbalance attempt to strengthen their social status by humiliating others through online platforms. At the same time, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to become victims of cyberbullying. The social environment is another important determinant in the emergence of cyberbullying. The emotional climate within the family, relationships with peers, the psychological atmosphere in educational institutions, and the culture of Internet use all have a direct impact on an individual's behavior in virtual environments. In particular, insufficient supervision and negative communicative experiences may create conditions conducive to the development of aggressive behavior³.

Today, there is an increasing need to study cyberbullying not merely as a technological problem but as a complex socio-psychological phenomenon closely associated with individual psychological development. From this perspective, considering individual psychodifferential characteristics when designing preventive programs aimed at reducing cyberbullying is of considerable scientific and practical significance. Cyberbullying is one of the most pressing psychological issues in today's information-oriented society. Among older adolescents, stable behavioral tendencies such as active problem-solving, reliance on social opinion, denial, avoidance, and aggression tend to be well established. In addition, altruistic coping, defined as the desire to help others, is observed primarily among younger adolescents and in situations involving family crises. As adolescents grow older, they become increasingly inclined to distance themselves from family-related problems and to conceal them. Alongside social, psychological, and technological factors, individual psychodifferential characteristics play a significant role in the formation of cyberbullying behavior.

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³ Barlett, C. P., & Gentile, D. A. (2012). Attacking others online: The formation of cyberbullying in late adolescence. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 1(2), 123–135.