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Research report

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"Developing restrictions on excessive use of social media to prevent cyberbullying. "

MUNESCO

Oostvaarderscollege, Almere

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the influence of social media has been growing. For those who grew up with it, a big problem has arisen. Bullying is of all times, however, a new form has recently been added. This is the phenomenon of cyberbullying, bullying via the internet. Through anonymity and fake profiles, bullying has only become easier, as facing the other person is no longer necessary. Hurting others emotionally and psychologically has never been easier. The rising rate of cyberbullying and its effects need to be addressed.

This research report contains information on the subject and its problem.

Definitions of key terms

Cyberbullying:

> Using electronic communication to bully someone, typically by sending messages with an intimidating or threatening tone.

Social media:

> Websites and applications that allow users to create and share content or participate in online networking and communication.

IP address:

> An Internet Protocol address is an address in a computer network that allows data to be transported over the Internet from the sender to the receiver.

General overview of information

Cyberbullying is an umbrella term, meaning there are many forms of it. These forms include, sexually transgressive behaviour, misinforming, impersonation, threatening or damaging someone's reputation. As mentioned earlier, cyberbullying is often anonymous and in a virtual environment, this ensures that the chances of getting caught are low. The virtual environment used gives cyber bullies the opportunity to do whatever is desired, without having to face consequences.

However, cyber bullies do leave a digital footprint. This is often in the form of an IP address. This happens when they have an application or website linked to their email address. This footprint can be used as evidence to pin down who, when and where this person committed an act of cyberbullying.

Because cyberbullying is online, the victim can feel unsafe anywhere, even in their own home. With an ever-increasing degree of connectedness and online presence, further boosted by high usage of mobile devices and almost global network coverage, virtually anyone can become a victim of cyberbullying anywhere, anytime. The need to be present online creates a paradoxical situation where some victims see no way out. This can lead to worrying mental - and eventually physical - problems.

The problem

The increased use of social media by children, teenagers and young adults makes them more vulnerable to becoming victims of cyberbullying, or becoming a cyber bully themselves. There are very few restrictions on social media platforms regarding what their users can say, post, view and share. These few

restrictions are also often easily circumvented by actions such as but not limited to lying about someone's age, distorting images, using upper rather than lower case letters and so on.

The amount of traffic passing through major social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram from Meta cannot be controlled because of the sheer volumes; let alone the privacy implications of going through people's personal conversations. Algorithms are often used to filter out unwanted or harmful content from users' feeds, but their usefulness and the storage of the data collected by the algorithm is often questioned.

Many academics have linked certain increases in suicide rates to cyberbullying, especially among children, teenagers and young adults. Due to the anonymity of the perpetrator, victims are often unable to stand up for themselves and end the bullying. Some states have also picked up the trend, encouraging schools to educate and help victims. Since the early 2000s, mental health institutions have also increased their commitment regarding the problem. Few states have enacted laws to tackle cyberbullying as they often include aspects of censorship or other drastic measures. A global response is needed to try to end these cyber crimes.

Previous attempts to solve the problem

Educational institutions from all over the world have tried to combat (cyber) bullying since it became a problem, doing so for example by teaching their students how to avoid falling prey to it or campaigning against it. Educational programmes in primary and secondary schools have helped young people realise the consequences of their actions in real life and online. These programmes are also useful for their parents. By making them aware of the problem, they will be more aware of the online

activities of their children. They will be more likely to spot the signs of cyberbullying and offer appropriate resources to help them. Help for victims of cyberbullying remains most important because even with proper education on the subject, the act still takes place.

Possible solutions

While raising awareness is extremely important, it is only part of the solution. Not everyone will have access to the same amount of knowledge everywhere, let alone it may not always be effective. Some may be fully aware of the consequences of cyberbullying and yet, for example, want to take revenge on someone, have an intrinsic feeling of hatred towards someone or simply act without thinking clearly.

One of the more controversial solutions includes parental authority. They would monitor their children's devices and online activities more strictly, either to catch their child cyberbullying or to help when their child is a victim of cyberbullying. A parent may notice their child feeling sad much earlier than the teacher since they have the opportunity for more contact, which can certainly help in prevention. Parents' control over their children is always in question, both in terms of the child's growth and the parents' duty.

Furthermore, social media platforms could monitor their platforms and set stricter mandates to prevent cyberbullying. This could take the form of extensively verifying users, developing more thorough algorithms or making it easier to report other users. The factors we can influence are the user's behaviour, the user's environment or the medium used itself.

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