

Motives behind Cyber Deviancy in University Students and Use of Different Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the motivations driving university students' participation in cyber deviancy, a growing problem as students engage in unethical online activities against their peers. Using a qualitative research technique, this phenomenological study purposefully selected undergraduate students known to engage in online inappropriate behavior. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get information about their motives. According to the study of participant responds, undergraduate students at private universities commonly engage in deviant behavior often uses platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, often hiding behind fake profiles to avoid accountability. The studies identify numerous primary motivators for these acts, including a desire for dominance, retribution, entertainment, peer influence and desiring justice against previous bullies to behaving out of jealousy or a desire for social approval. Understanding these reasons is critical for establishing effective measures to combat and minimize cyberbullying among university students.

Keywords: *Motives, University Students, Cyber Deviancy, Social Media Platforms.*

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1. Introduction

In today's digital era, social media platforms have become an essential part of students' lives, providing new chances for communication, learning and enjoyment. However, in addition to these benefits, a darker tendency has emerged: cyber deviancy. This problem comprises a variety of activities that exploit the anonymity and reach of online platforms, such as hate speech, rumor spreading, cyber stalking and name calling (Wright et al., 2014). Understanding the motivations underlying students' inappropriate behavior is critical for educators, parents and legislators in developing effective preventative and intervention programs.

Students may be motivated by a variety of motivations, including a desire for social recognition, the thrill of breaking the rules or the effect of peer pressure and online groups that justify such behavior. Psychological factors such as the anonymity of social media and the absence of immediate consequences also play an important role, encouraging students to act in ways they would not in face-to-face conversations. Furthermore, feelings of social isolation, mental health issues such as anxiety and depression and a lack of guidance or supervision can further contribute to students' involvement in cyber deviancy. Feelings of social isolation and loneliness may motivate students to seek acceptance or connection through online platforms, leading to cyber

deviant conduct such as cyberbullying, harassment or trolling (Kowalski et al., 2014). Some students suffering from mental health issues may utilize online platforms to cope with their problems, occasionally engaging in cyber deviant conduct to vent their frustrations or seek attention (Tokunaga, 2010). Furthermore, mental health concerns including anxiety, sadness and stress are common among university students, which might lead to their involvement in cybercrime.

Furthermore, contextual factors such as family dynamics, educational environments and social norms might impact a student's tendency for cyber deviance. By diving into these complex and interconnected motivations, this paper hopes to shed light on the causes for students' involvement in cyber deviancy.

2. Literature Review

Previous researches observed different types of deviant behavior emerging on social media day by day. Individuals become involved in online deviant acts such as harassing, bullying and trolling others through various social media platforms. However, it causes desensitization to harmful behavior because repeated exposure to deviant content online can normalize it and make student more likely to participate (Fioravanti et al., 2021).

It is also found that access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) is essential for higher education. The increased exposure to ICT, coupled with the excessive usage of social media, has exacerbated the issue of cyberbullying among university students. Undergraduate university students are more engaged in online deviant behavior. Social media usage plays a crucial role between cyber deviant intention and cyber deviant behavior (Tandoc, Ferrucci & Duffy, 2015).

2.1. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) has been identified as a significant factor influencing university students' online behavior. It has been found that university students are often affected by FOMO, which influence them to indulge in risky online behavior. This can result in serious outcomes such as legal issues, reputational damage and emotional distress (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan & Gladwell, 2013). Further researches investigated the link between FOMO and social media use among college students. They discovered that higher degrees of FOMO were linked to increased social media involvement, particularly on sites like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. FOMO was also found to be strongly connected with unpleasant emotional states like anxiety and despair (Tandoc, Ferrucci & Duffy, 2015)

FOMO create a problematic behavior and negative outcomes (Elhai et al., 2018). However, students who experience maladjustment in their colleges or universities are more likely to engage in social media and in this FOMO plays a crucial role. This suggest that FOMO plays an important role in understanding why students indulge in online unacceptable behavior (Alt, 2018).

FOMO has been associated with greater social media use among university students. Students experiencing FOMO may spend excessive amounts of time on social media platforms in order to prevent feeling excluded or detached from their friends. The fear of missing out on social events, experiences and relationships may cause students to continually check their social media accounts, which can contribute to feelings of anxiety and stress.

FOMO has been linked to harmful online activities such as cyberbullying, oversharing personal information and hastily uploading stuff without thinking about the repercussions. Students who are feeling FOMO may feel pushed to maintain a specific online identity and may engage in actions that they would not ordinarily do offline.

2.2. Disinhibition

Disinhibition refers to as people tend to act differently online than they do in person. This is because the internet creates a kind of invisible mask that makes us feel less worried about what others think. We're more likely to share personal stuff, get angry or even do things we wouldn't normally do offline. This "online disinhibition effect" happens for a few reasons: we feel more anonymous online, less connected to the people we're talking to and more free to use our imaginations. It can be a good thing, helping us express ourselves and connect with others in new ways. But it can also lead to problems like cyberbullying, fake news and online fights (Suler, 2004).

Online Disinhibition refers to the phenomenon where individuals exhibit more aggressive or negative behavior in online communication compared to face-to-face interactions. This is often attributed to factors such as anonymity, invisibility and lack of eye-contact, which can lead to toxic online disinhibition (Lapidot & Barak, 2012).

It is also observed that the way people act online and share personal information is a bit like a two-sided coin. In addition, when people are online and can be anonymous or don't have as many social cues, they tend to share more about themselves. This can be good because it helps people connect with others. However, there is a disadvantage, sharing too much sensitive information can harm our reputation. It is important to understand that people are different and some may be more at risk when sharing online (Clark et al., 2019).

Moreover, anonymity and perceived dissimilarity significantly influence online aggression through amplifying disinhibition. When individuals feel less identifiable and perceive themselves as dissimilar from others online, they experience reduced social accountability, leading to increased disinhibited aggressive behavior. The study also revealed gender differences in online aggression, with men expressing higher levels of aggression as compare to women (Stahl & Sunden, 2016).

There is the concerning connection between cyberbullying and cyber hate perpetration, driven by the concept of "toxic online disinhibition." Their research indicates that individuals prone to disinhibited aggression online are more likely to participate in both cyberbullying and cyber hate (Clark et al., 2019).

2.3. Deviant Peer Influence

Peers have a significant role in shaping individual behavior. It is stated that social learning theory provides a useful framework for understanding cyber deviance (Holt, Burruss & Bossler, 2010). The authors argue that people can learn to engage in cyber deviance by observing others doing it. It is observed that the influence of deviant peer groups may amplify the connections between an individual's level of self-control and their engagement in computer-focused cyber deviance and victimization.

Cyberbullying is a serious and wide spread problem that can have devastating consequences for victims. There are some risk factors that make university students susceptible to engaging in cyberbullying behavior in response to peer influence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The university students who belonged to online communities that promoted cyberbullying were more likely to engage in such behavior (Patchin & Hinduja, 2017).

Students who had peers engaged in cyberbullying were more likely to engage in similar behaviors. Recent research has started to take into consideration these criminogenic characteristics and comprehend cyber-deviance as arising not only from individual (i.e., dynamic) traits but also as a result of exposure to digital technologies, online platforms and services, along with the interactive possibilities they provide (Kim, 2018).

Similarly, students who had friends involved in hacking or illegal downloading were more likely to engage in these activities themselves. Students learn from their peers (Nodeland & Morris, 2020). The selection of good peers is crucial because it significantly impacts an individual's behavior and attitudes, especially concerning cyber deviancy (Wang, Geng, Zeng & Lei, 2021), they also explained the importance of peer selection, where individuals with similar interests and attitudes toward cyber deviancy form friendships. Individuals who have low self-control and deviant peer association are related to specific forms of cyber deviance (Louderback & Antonaccio, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology and a phenomenological approach to analyze the motivations for university students' engagement in cyber deviancy. Purposive sampling was utilized to select 15 undergraduate students from private universities who had been identified through discipline committee reports. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover major themes and patterns. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality and securing ethical approval from the university's ethics committee. This approach gives a thorough knowledge of the underlying factors that drive students' cyber-deviant activities.

4. Results and Discussions

Motives of Cyber Deviants behind Cyber deviancy

Table 1: The demographic information of participants is given in.

Demographic Information of Cyber Deviants.

Participants	Age	Program	Semester
1	26	LLB	9 st
2	25	BS Political Science	8 th
3	22	BS Criminology	5 th
4	22	BS Criminology	4 th
5	23	BS Criminology	1 st
6	21	LLB	5 th
7	23	BS Sociology	6 th
8	26	BS Psychology	8 th
9	22	BS Political Science	6 th
10	21	BS Criminology	4 th
11	20	BS Sociology	4 th
12	19	BSOT	2 nd
13	20	BS Anesthesia	2 nd
14	25	BS Sociology	3 rd
15	23	BS International Relations	6 th

Analysis of the responses revealed that most participants harassed and threatened their fellow university students. Some did this by revealing their identities, while other hide their identities by creating fake accounts to engage in online immoral activities. There were different motives behind everyone's conduct.

4.1. For Revenge

The participants were asked about any online unethical activity done by participants. Some of the participants used the social media apps to threaten, harass, embarrass or spread hate against someone online and to take revenge.

She refused to become my friend, so my friends made fun of me. This made me feel embarrassed.... That's why I started targeting and harassing her. (Participant 15)

4.2. Desire for Discipline and Punishment

One of them expressed her desire to discipline a male who had harassed her. Her intention was to utilize social media to instruct someone rather than to cause harm or humiliate someone. She monitored his actions and learned about him through various online sources. Another participant reported,

I once used the fake identity to harass someone. That was my university fellow; he always texted and followed me in the university and I was very disturbed by his act. I told this to my sister and she gave me an idea to make a fake ID to stop it. I made an ID with a male name and warned him not to disturb that girl in the university. After this, he stopped following me. (Participant 9)

Most of them admitted that they were annoyed because the victims did something wrong at university. They were first teased and bullied by targeted individuals in the university. Feeling victimized themselves, they sought retribution by engaging in similar behavior online. Their actions were motivated by a desire for justice and a need to express their power in response to the mistreatment they had experienced. While realizing the negative consequences of their conduct, they underlined their desire to hold their previous bullies accountable for their behavior. One of the cyber deviant said, "I was first bullied by a group at university...they targeted me by passing foul comments frequently, then I decided to teach them a lesson.... (Participant 2)

I know that was not the right way to teach him, but he continuously spread fake rumors about me.... In the end, my friends and I collected his personal information and posted it on our department page on Instagram.... (Participant 7)

4.3. Peer Influence, for Amusement and Social Acceptance

Participants were also asked about the motives behind their involvement in cyber deviant activities. Most of them admitted that there did not have any personal issues with the victims. They engaged in these activities because of their friends and have a desire to fit in. These activities became an amusement for them. One of the victim reported,

"There was a guy with Instagram account called 'Batman' and sent messages too many girls from our university. He would directly message girls, telling them about their activities and forcing them to talk to him.... He found it amusing and saw it as a way to pass the time.... (Participant 1)

Initially, it was because of my friends. They seemed to be enjoying it, so I joined them.... It seemed like harmless fun and I found these activities exciting and enjoyable. (Participant 6)

4.4. Desire for Dominance and Power

Some participants said they don't want to be ruled by anyone. They have a desire of recognition and want to ruled and assert dominance over others that led them to involve in these online immoral activities. They targeted others using their own WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook accounts, without hiding their identities. For them, it was about gaining dominance and control in their social circles, even at the price of other people's wellbeing. Their actions were driven from a desire to position themselves as influential figures and to project a certain image of dominance and superiority. One of the participant said about his group,

To be honest, it was about feeling superior.... We did not have any personal problems with anyone; we just wanted everyone to listen to us and accept our decisions. We didn't like it when people disagreed with us, even in class, so we

turned to harassing those who dared to challenge us, especially on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram... (Participant 2)

4.5. Jealousy

Some of the participants reported that they target their good friend in a WhatsApp group due to jealousy. They said their friend really good in academics, sports and possesses a decent personality, arousing jealousy among the group. Motivated by their jealousy, they begin passing weird comments both in class and on social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. Although they label it as "fun", they are fully aware of their intentions to intentionally hurt their friend. Their actions stem from a desire to undermine their friend's achievements and elevate their own status.

We wanted to appear cool in our class and be like him, with a personality that everyone would want to be friend. That's why we started degrading him, insulting him in front of everyone, both in the WhatsApp group and in class. But we would show him in private that he was our friend, but we were just using him. We had a separate group about which he had no idea and we never included him in any of our plans.... (Participant 8)

The summary of the findings provides in the table 4, given below.

Table 4

Findings/results related to the motives of cyber deviants behind their cyber deviant activities.

Motives of cyber deviants behind their cyber deviant activities	
Revenge	Participants engaged cyber deviancy to retaliate against individuals who had previously harmed or mistreated them.
Desire for Discipline Seeking Justice Retribution	Some participants wanted to punish or condemn those who tortured or disturbed them, utilizing online platforms to assert control.
Peer Influence Amusement	Some were individuals influenced by their social dynamics, participants often engaging in deviant activities to fit in or gain acceptance within their social circles.
Desire to Fit in Group	
Desire for Dominance	Certain individuals participated in online immoral activities to establish power and control over others, as well as to gain superiority and recognition within their social circle.
Jealousy	Participants targeted their peers out of jealousy, engaging in criticizing behavior both online and offline in order to undermine their successes and enhance their own status.

4.6. Discussion on Data of Cyber Deviants

In this section, researcher examines and discuss the motives of university students behind their involvement in deviant's acts. Understanding these motives is crucial for comprehending the factors that drive cyber deviancy among university students.

1. Participants engaged in online immoral activities to retaliate against someone who had previously mistreated or tortured them. This action was frequently motivated by a desire for justice and retribution.
2. Some participants wanted to punish or 'teach a lesson' to individuals who annoyed or disturbed them. Cyber deviancy was viewed as a technique of gaining power and influence over their peers.
3. Many individuals claimed to engage in cyber deviancy mostly due to peer pressure and a desire to fit in with their social circle. They found online immoral behaviors amusing and entertaining.
4. Some individuals used cyber deviancy to assert power and control over others. They tried to establish themselves as influential characters in their social circles.

Participants also admitted to attacking their friends out of jealousy and using online harassment to undermine their success. This action was frequently motivated by a desire to appear superior and advance their own social standing.

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