A Critical Discourse Analysis of Cyberbullying Among University Students in Pakistan

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Abstract

In the present era of technology, cyber-bullying on social media is a rising concern all over the world. The current study aims at exploring the language used by bullies among university students on social media especially Facebook and Instagram so as to unfold how bullies exploit their fellows for dominance. The data was collected from five students of the university with the age ranging from 20-25 years. The participants provided the data in the form of screenshots of the chats. For the analysis of the data, Van Dijk’s three-dimensional model was used to analyze the discourse on three levels: text, social cognition, and social context in the context of the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. The results and discussion revealed that the bullies exploited the victims via their language to achieve certain goals which included blackmailing and making the victims feel inferior by targeting their weak points. The study concluded that the bullies targeted
the weaker fellows in the circle and maintained an imbalance of power by using harsh, offensive, abusive, and target-specific words. The victims faced despair, nervousness, hopelessness, insecurity, and in some cases psychological pressure leading to suicidal behavior.

Keywords: Cyber-bullying, language used by bullies, Facebook, Instagram, psychological pressure, Van Dijk’s three-dimensional model

Introduction

Cyber-bullying is a promptly rising concern upsetting generations severely. With the rise of technology, the present generation is enjoying many benefits whereas it also brings many issues especially cyber-bullying in Higher Educational Institutions. Faucher, Cassidy & Jackson (2014) explored that cyber-bullying utilizes language that can criticize, compromise, annoys, menace, bar, segregate, disparage, embarrass, tail, reveal individual data, or contain hostile, profane or censorious remarks, to mischief or hurt the beneficiary.

The concept of bullying is explored by Putril and Satvikadewi (2017) as a negative activity that is viewed as forceful and manipulative. Such an activity is executed by an individual or a gathering of people against someone else or gathering of individuals for a while which comprises brutality and power imbalance. Among dental students, different types of bullying has been reported by majority of students (137 (91.3%) over the period of last 12 months (Arslan, et al., 2020). Patchin (2013) investigated the act of cyber-bullying as the point at which an individual consistently bugs, abuses, or ridicule someone else on the web or while utilizing cells or other digital gadgets. Due to rising innovation, cyber-bullying has got hold on the web especially on online media. It is a crucial instant as physical and social limits start to obscure and online media has become another holder to the minimization of the gatherings or individuals who are viewed as contrary with others.

The elements of cyber-bullying has been explored in another research by Stephanie Hughes (2014) and states that there are three elements involving behavior of cyber bullying as i) acted by the individual who holds some type of control over the other individual on whom the force is worked out., ii) aim to fear or to make hurt others iii) and it is redundant. Moreover, Kowalski et al (2012) added up that bullies select those are weaker than them as their prey. The reason to bully can be either to blackmail for some personal reasons or interests or to make others inferior. Snell
and Englander (2010) explored in another study that the most notable reason for cyber-bullying was the prey's appearance and additionally who they dated or become a close acquaintance with. Bullies are hostile and they prey the passive targets on the strands where they feel prey cannot shield themselves.

H. Hosseinmardi et al. (2015) and Ditch the Label, (2013) enlisted top five networks having highest percentage of experiencing cyber-bullying as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Ask.com. And for the current study, Facebook and Instagram are taken as a means of data collection. There are number of ways through which cyber-bullying happens on Instagram and Facebook like by uploading an embarrassing picture of someone and commenting on them via fake profiles, Hinduja (2013) furthermore provides other reasons such as sending messages, defaming someone by using offensive language. Slonje and Smith (2008) states that electronic communication has become easy via text messages, emails and chats which is used for spreading rumors and destroying acquaintances.

To have a clear view of the effects of cyber-bullying phenomena on prey which is the second aim of the current study, the research by Hickney (2012) helps in providing impact of cyber-bullying as he states that oral and psychological harassment may affect mentally as well as low-esteem lead the victims to anxiety. Other issues and effects are elaborated by a research of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2016) as it states that prey of cyber-bullying come across many grave mental and psychiatric disorders.

Therefore, the current study aims at exploring the use and role of language for bullying others on social media especially Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, the study will explore the impact of bullying on university students as victims. So, we will analyze the language of bullies and its impact to unfold how bullies exploit prey and it leads them to anxiety.

A study suggest that socio-cultural traditional orientation restrictions are made through a particular language used to serve manly interests as an indication of power and predominance over females. The socially gendered language depicted in the novel is intended to victimize ladies, in the event that they oppose it, they are treated as 'other' and 'unnatural' by a male-overwhelmed society. (Shakil Ur Rehman, Suleman & Shafi, 2021)
The research questions for the current study are: what is the effect of bullies’ language on adolescents’ mind and psychology? And how harassment exploits prey’s minds via language? The current study serves the following objectives:

- To investigate the use of language to exploit preys in cyber-bullying
- To understand the impact of Cyber-bullying practice on victims

The ramifications of the investigation could be that individuals would know about the kind of language and they can handle this cycle of being engaged on the off chance that they are aware of certain aspects and impacts of cyber-bullying on victims. The victims may report and restrict the social media accounts to send messages utilizing certain kind of language, rather than being occupied by the discussion with victims. Cyber-bullying has been the focus of many researchers for exploring the various aspects of bullying, but as far as the role of language and prevalence of cyber-bullying is considered in relation to exploiting people has not been explored yet significantly in the context of Pakistani population. (Zych, Ortega-Ruiz and Rey, 2015).

**Research Methodology:**

**Theoretical Framework:**

The current examination means to investigate the cycle in which individuals enable others, make an irregularity of force by focusing on individuals more fragile than them in gatherings and with regards to this investigation, these gatherings are college understudies' gathering and the effect of this strengthening on victims' brain science. It very well may be accomplished by researching the content that is language in direct messages (individual talk) that how force is practiced to rule casualties in social media.

Critical Discourse Analysis is used as a lens to examine the phenomena and Van Dijk’s framework for the interpretation of the collected data. In the media discourse, Teun A. van Dijk stated that the idea of power and access are inseparable. The notion of Power is essential in the development of discourse as well as it is a device used by the institution, social group or organization to curb thoughts and actions for restricting the liberty of other groups. A control group of victims of cyber-bullying is selected for the current study. For the current study, Van Dijk’s three dimensional model is used which analyzes the discourse on three levels as text, social cognition and social context.
T.A. Van Dijk (1996) explores the notion of power is considered as an affluence of access on social resources like status, job, wealth or public communication space including all social media sites by a group. A symbolic power is associated with social media as it permits people to curb the thoughts of people leading to get control of their actions by using language as a tool for harassment and disrupting the life of victims. So, power can be exercised on preys by using social media as a tool because it provides a platform for developing communication with anyone freely letting them do whatever they want.

Social media provides an open space for communication which helps people to use it as a medium of bullying the minority by various ways such as sending messages or passing judgmental or rude comments. The same kind of power relationship is witnessed by cyber-bullying by using Facebook and Instagram as a medium. Bullies particularly set their target by assessing who are weaker than them or passive targets which are generally less lean to defend themselves. The question here is that how language is used by the bullies to exercise the power. The selected model of Van Dijk explores that how discourse is used for maintaining supremacy by bullies. This social imbalance is not mere an act of individual but a mutual act which lead to depict that all this domination is legitimate and natural. (T. A. Van Dijk, 1993).

Three dimensional model of Van Dijk is based on three levels such text analysis, social cognition level, and contextual level. At first level messages were selected to analyze cyber-bully language and its impact on prey’s psychology. Second level analyzes messages to depict how bullies see their targets for help was sought from mental structure model of Van Dijk. Finally, contextual level analyzes the context i.e. power and access as explained by Van Dijk that power is ownership of one group to control the other. So, the subject of current study is to analyze fundamental ways of maintaining supremacy either by controlling discourse or by controlling minds.
Sample and Demographics

This study aims at exploring language used in cyber-bullying and its impact on victims. Therefore, two distinct samples are selected one from Instagram and two from Facebook for analyzing these two parts. A questionnaire was distributed to 20 university students with the age range of 20-25 years for collecting data from victims and aggressors. Out of 5 identified cases, 3 gave consent to participate in the research and facilitated with the required data in the form of chats. 2 participants were identified as aggressors and 1 as victim from Facebook and Instagram.

For the said purpose, university students are selected as at this age they get a lot of exposure variety of interactions leading to conflicts. Either in the form of group or pair, they find the prey to exploit those who are not in position to defend them and bully them via social media anonymously to scare him, to blackmail, to offend or to get a personal goal. Moreover, the linguistic choices of the particular age group are marked as distinct from the people below the age of 20.

Nature of the Data

The nature of the data is based on the respondents’ chats in the form of screenshots from Instagram and Facebook chats as they provided their direct messages in which they experienced cyber-bullying on social media. The provided data is bilingual as it contains code-switching and
code-mixing of English and Urdu language. The data is analyzed by using general principals of critical discourse analysis and Van Dijk’s three dimensional model of discourse analysis.

**Ethical Consideration**

There is slight chance to approach somebody's very own information particularly engaged with Cyber-bullying yet at the same time, a few people can give their information if the specialist guarantees them to deal with it cautiously. Along these lines, members were guaranteed that the information is basically for research reasons and while analyzing and describing the particular such as names, and identities would not be disclosed.

**Data Analysis**

The already given theoretical model will be used to analyze the data at two levels. Firstly, the data is analyzed by the familiarization process at the level of data management, moreover, it is labelled and sorted out the patterns and themes. The entire material is coordinated and organized in an order at the abstraction and interpretation. The collected data is in the form of direct messages’ screenshots from Instagram and Facebook and the data is provided in the results section as an evidence of authentic source. These messages are decoded considering the principles of CDA and Van Dijk’s model of three dimensions (Description, Explanation, Interpretation and Analyses). These responses are further analyzed to explore the subsequent research question of the study.

![Figure 1: Data Analysis Process](image)

**Results and Discussion**
Text Analysis

At Text analysis level, it is examined that how construction of the content is utilized to accentuate a specific subject and with regards to this investigation, language is dissected in the messages (talks) that what kind of words are utilized to mean for the personalities of the preys in Cyber-bullying and what form of words are used to engage the victims. Based on this reason, 3 cases are introduced from Instagram and Facebook in which aggressors are attempting to depict some information by demonstrating that they know them and prodding them focusing on their past occasions just by giving own data assuring casualties uncertain. In this segment, how this strengthening is occurring under the caption of impacts on brain research, is additionally talked about the second inquiry of this investigation.

Case 1: Facebook

The first case is from Facebook, we come across various elements used for cyber-bullying by the bullies such as the aggressor aims at the prey by exposing her bio-data such as name, address, family information, contact number and unveiling some of her past information (something more personal), by directing her images. In response to all this, the prey kept on refusing to be the person and called many a times to get to know the bully. The date history of chat showed us that it was a repeated action and it indicates how the victim is puzzled. The replies of the victim as well as the use of repeated question marks which is a sign of anger or shocked response indicated that the victim started feeling insecure. As it can be seen in the chat as, by asking “come to point what u want Nw?????” Moreover, repeated laughs of bully increased the victim’s insecurity as shown in replies of chats. The bully also used several abusive words for the victim when the victim was not responding such as bitch, mad, bad, chor, fazool log, bad, doodh ki dhuli. Thus, the aggressor is directing her past happenings related to personal life, unveiling information, by making use of harsh and abusive language to humiliate and dampen the victim, moreover, the act is primarily executed using language which is psychologically disheartening and exploiting the prey. By using these means, the bullies cultivate a power relationship with the victims and grasp hold over the victims.
Case 2: Facebook

Figure 2: Victims response over aggressors’ language teasers

For this situation, the bully harass the victim in light of the fact that the aggressor is blackmailing to accomplish something by threatening via messages that on the off chance that she would not do as demanded, he would harm her reputation by leaking her photos from fake ID or profile. The bully hacked the prey's record and related data is stolen. The prey is stressed out and asks simply what the individual needs (What do you need?) depicting victim’s depressed mental state and furthermore tolerating to assist the bully by showing submission. In this way, by the utilization of words, the bully is undermining and hustling her by controlling the psyche of the prey ultimately experiencing depressed, discouraged, submissiveness and feels helpless, additionally contended that the victims testified hopelessness, sensations of pity and sadness. (Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007)
In this case, the aggressor is entitled as “X” and the prey as “Y”. X targets Y by facilitating the whole data to other member such as family details, happenings and events on several chats, information about the x-girlfriend and so on. On getting to know all, Y started feeling inquisitive, anxious and upset, moreover, inquiring who Y actually is. The bully ‘X’ is repeatedly laughs bridging up the perplexity of Y at peak and inquires “Yar sai btao kon ho tum? Q tens de rhi.” On not revealing the identity of X and the continuous upsetting behavior leads Y to anger but slowly he started showing submission with the realization of power of aggressor holds on the victim. Repeated inquiry about the identity of X reveals how much perplexity and anxiety is depicted by the victim whereas the aggressor enjoys the victims’ state.
**Figure 4:** Insecurity of victim leading fun for aggressor

Impact of Exploitation Process

The screenshots of the chats provided previously clearly showed this cycle of exploitation. In the principal case, after accepting individual data, the young lady calls over and over restlessly to know the assailant and rehashes a similar inquiry and once more, what the attacker needs with so many question marks that show the prey is getting depressed, stunned, nervous, and discouraged. In the subsequent case, the casualty is likewise getting influenced after bully’s threats and furthermore rehashes a similar inquiry. Her submission to play out the undertaking additionally demonstrates her instability and anxiety which compels her to become submissive and weak.

As far as Instagram case is concerned, it provides more instances as the victims’ mood keep on changing as witnessed in the chats that at first the victim got shocked subsequently showing he is not depressed and worried and considers it as a fun and laughs, leading to angry outburst on its severity and finally again feels stressed out. It is noticeable in the victims’ reactions when commonly he has said that he is getting stressed out by the individual who knows this much about him and now disturbing him. Likewise, Klomek et al. (2008), Price M. (2010), and Wang J. et al. (2011) revealed expanded sensations of hurt, instability, burdensome effect, and defenselessness. All the instances have been provided in the form of screenshots.
Social Cognition Analysis

The social cognition analysis helps in exploring the production of text in the context of social cognition about the message. To investigate this, the mental structure model of van Dijk is applied as it helps in providing an insight we examine and judge other human beings living in the society. With reference to present investigation, some particular messages specifically including harsh words showed how aggressors see victims and which positions aggressors give preys in the talk when they grasp control over the victims. As a result of this power irregularity, the bully utilizes awful, hostile and harsh language.

In one of the cases, the bully uses several abusive words such as mad, bitch, “fazool log” etc. for the victim to realize him/her that the victim is under the command of bully and to humiliate the victim by making him/her realize what the victim actually is. The other case of Facebook do not witness these abusive words but threats are observed. As far as the Instagram case is concerned, the bully addressed an adult by using vocabulary such as “Ghadha” (Donkey), “Bandar” (Monkey), “Bacha” (Kid) and “BC” containing offensive connotation. To present oneself superior, the bullies use such kind of addressing words through which they try exploit the victims and view victims as object which can be used as wished.

Context Analysis

This level deals with the analysis of the selected chats for the discourse analysis with respect to cyber-bullying context. The current study needs to be viewed in the context how and why cyber-bullying texts are produced. Furthermore, it probes into various reasons, aims and involved participants in the context. Van Dijk explores that the context of cyber-bullying context unveils the idea of power and access and the current study view the said aspects of context to be linked the context of cyber-bullying to provide the psychological impact over the victims.

Along these lines, the information uncovers the members consisting 4 females and 2 guys, and in other instance the affiliation is girl to girl, focusing on one another. Out of three, two aggressors are focusing on casualties for no particular reason and diversion, to debase the individual too however one attacker has a few objectives to accomplish by undermining her to play out specific assignments in an undesirable manner which is the interest of assailant yet not for the person in question. One case manages the subject of threatening someone by hacking the record
to play out specific acts leading the bully to grasp control on the young lady by getting own data. Similarly, the other two cases depict the very idea. The bully focus on some close connections and negative comments to humiliate the person in question, in addition, by getting the data to establish authority on the victim to satisfy certain desires as well to accomplish few objectives. So, this is the way how language is used to maintain dominance and power are practiced over harassers in online media.

**Conclusion**

Cyber-bullying is a significant concern influencing youth and subsequent to dissecting the information, the investigation explores that preys are exploited by the use of language in online media which focuses on their weak points to realize them to humiliate, to mortify, to make sub-par and exposure of individual data which makes victims anxious, and harsh language too that uncovers the authority over victims in the end causing prey to upset in the shape of melancholy, seriousness, pressure, uncertainty and mentally wiped out that is really exploitation, a process indeed. Common explanations behind this harassment, provocation and blackmailing include certain objectives to accomplish like to accept it as fun and to cause the victims to play out specific demands. The results and discussion propose that adolescent can be saved in the act if the idea and process of exploitation is known to the victims and they take certain timely steps by blocking or reporting the bullies’ profiles.

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