Social Media as a Channel and its Implications on Cyber Bullying

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Abstract: This research aims to provide an explanation on the role of social media as a channel and its implications in cyber bullying. It focuses on the problems of bullying that happens in the cyberspace. Qualitative approach was utilized for the study. It involves methods of data collection and analysis that are non-quantitative. The researcher relies on the data provided by the chosen key informants who were experts in their respective fields. The findings explicated that social media has become a channel (1) to bring its users in the cyber space where things that are impossible in the real world are made possible; (2) to provide a person in the cyber space more power through the mask of anonymity; (3) to let unwarranted use of power dominance; and (4) to allow information to travel fast. It also elucidated the legal and ethical implications for cyber bullying in the social media. The findings indicated that social media can be used to do massive information dissemination to encourage people make themselves aware of the possible impact and consequences of using social media. It was concluded that social media possess distinct characteristics that make it a gratifying tool for cyber bullies. Social media therefore has real-time updating, has widespread dissemination of information, is a rallying point for people, is open to anonymity, has instantaneousness, has the ability to reach wide audience, is cheap, has a connection to power dynamics, can make an information to go viral, is open to making other social network users to respond or generate feedback, can build up and generate support from others, can assure cyber bullies of the impact of their actions, and is very empowering.

Key Words: social media; channel; cyber bullying; implications

1. INTRODUCTION

The increase in internet accessibility have brought the general public highly desirable outcomes such as considerable improvement in the way people communicate, changes in the way work is done, and for being able to do more, with increased efficiency and effectiveness in less the time and cost especially among the working sector of the society. These positive outcomes are felt by many in their quest for knowledge. However, the increase in internet accessibility has also brought a societal problem that deserves utmost attention and must be addressed immediately – cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying according to Hardcastle (2011) *"is a form of harassment that occurs via the Internet that may include vicious forum posts, name calling in chat rooms, posting fake profiles on web sites, and mean or cruel email messages"*. Cyber bullying unlike other cyber abuses occurs among young people. Cyber bullying happens when both the victim and the perpetrator are underage. When an adult is involved, cyber bullying may escalate to a more serious act called as cyber-harassment or cyber-stalking, a crime that can have legal consequences and involve jail time (What is cyberbullying?, 2011).

Although bullying is considered as a long time problem that happens in school among school-aged kids, cyber bullying is seen as a different problem in the age of Internet. Chait (2006) explained that unlike the traditional form of bullying where the bullies

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attack their victims face to face, perpetrators of cyber bullying have the capability to use all types of communications technologies to attack others deliberately and repetitively. Such communication technologies include e-mail, short messaging system (SMS) or instant messaging, chat rooms, bash board, and social networking sites. These communication technologies are collectively known as social media. Tufts University as cited by Venable (2013) defined social media as "*a set of tools that foster interaction, discussion and community, allowing people to build relationships and share information*".

In a constructive way, social media tremendously increased the different communication platforms. However, the proliferation of social media has come with an unfortunate downside. Bullying and meanness become easier when all it takes for the doer to perpetrate the act is a few keystrokes. At present, the number of internet users continuously increases and more they become active in the online world which consequently intensifies the cyber bullying problem. With the continuous increasing number of netizens today, cyber bullying is no longer an ordinary issue. It is now raising concerns not only among internet users but as well as the authorities and even ordinary people. Legal and ethical issues are now confronting the abuse of using the social media to bully other internet users.

This research aims to dig more information to help explain the complex and challenging problem on cyber bullying. It attempts to discover the role of social media in the continuous intensification of cyber bullying among netizens. Most importantly, the study explicates the implications of using social media as a means of cyber cruelty.

2. METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach for the study. Clough, P. & Nutbrown C., (2002) describe this research design as "*an overall plan for obtaining answers to questions and handling difficulties encountered during the study*". Boudah (2011) added that "*qualitative research includes data collection and analysis grounded in observation,*

interview and document review". In qualitative approach, the researcher attempts to set aside his predetermined ideas. The qualitative approach breaks with traditional research methodology in that it does not focus on the production of objective and reproducible data but is concerned with meaning, and how it informs subjective understanding (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Where quantitative research primarily concerns itself with techniques and instruments of obtaining data in hypothesis testing, qualitative research is concerned with the meaning of experience, language and symbol (Berg, 1995; Welman and Kruger, 2001).

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this research project comprised of eight (8) experts from various field of specialization. As this is a qualitative research with the aim to gather detailed narratives from participants, the sample size may be limited but may produce rich data due to intensive engagement between researcher and participants (Berg, 1995). Qualitative inquiry is suited to smaller samples and allow for more rigorous accounts in its attempt to widen the understanding on a particular subject (Elliot, et al., 1999).

The purposive or judgment sampling method was used in identifying the key informants of the study. Purposive sampling was used in cases where the specialty of an authority can select a more representative sample that can bring more accurate results than by using other probability sampling techniques. The process involves intentionally choosing individuals from the population based on their background and qualifications or the researcher's knowledge and judgment (Schreiber and Asner-self, 2011).

Description of the Key Informants

The key informants of the study are as follows:

Mr. Timothy John Dimacali - Editor and Website Community Manager, GMA News Online

Mr. Mark Madrona - Blogger and Executive Director, The Filipino Scribe

Prof. Danilo Arao - Online Journalist from bulatlat.com, blogger, member of Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, and journalism professor at UP Diliman

Atty. Abel Maglanque - Legislative staff of Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago, proponent of Senate Bill No. 2677, or the Anti-Bullying School Policy Act.

Mr. Jose Descallar- Legislative staff of Buhay Party List, proponent of House Bill No. 6114 or the Anti-Cyber Bullying Act of 2012

P/C Insp. Kimberly Gonzales - PIO, Anti-Transnational and Cyber Crime Division- PNP-CIDG

Dr. Nymia Pimentel Simbulan - Sociology professor at UP Manila and the Executive Director of Philippine Human Rights Information Center

Atty. Christopher Lao - Practicing lawyer of OCMA Law, a victim of cyber bullying, and advocate of anti-cyber bullying legislation

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the interviews conducted to the selected key informants.

Matrix No. 1: What is the significant role being played by social media in cyber bullying?

Mr. TJ Dimacali	Without social media there would practically be no cyber bullying.
Prof. Danilo Arao	Social media make it possible for online users to engage in cyber-bullying as it is much easier to post and share content online, as well as quickly react to other online content
Mr. Mark Madrona	The problem in cyber bullying came in the advent of social media, since before there in no social media there is also no cyber bullying.
Atty. Abel Maglanque	Through the use of social media the perpetrators are empowered to target wide audience with a big

	guarantee of anonymity. These worsen the situation at some level.
Mr. Jose Descallar	Cyber bullying happens in social media like Facebook and Twitter that includes texting.
Insp. Kimberly Gonzales	Social media is the perfect medium for cyber criminals to do the act because it is an open community for everybody.
Prof. Nymia Simbulan	On one hand cyber bullying has positive effects. Cases of cyber bullying particularity for certain individuals who may have violated certain laws or who may have exhibited abusive behavior resulted to public uproar.
Atty. Christopher Lao	In social media everybody is interconnected so information travels fast unlike before where sending of information is real time.

Matrix No. 2: What are the prevailing problems of cyber bullying in the Philippines?

Mr. TJ Dimacali	The real time updating very nature of social media
Prof. Danilo Arao	Cyber-bullying happens not just in various Internet fora (e.g., email, discussion groups, blogs, social media and other communication platforms like Skype and Facetime).
Mr. Mark Madrona	The prevalence of cyber bullying in the Philippines cannot be stated quantitatively. For once there is no record or data and there is no authority that specifically handles cyber bullying cases.
Atty. Abel Maglanque	Bullying has been a long time problem in school but because of the onset of social media it became widespread.

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	Information before that are private became exposed and out in the open.
Mr. Jose Descallar	Social research would show that people especially kids and teenagers spend more time in front of computers. They also spend most of their time using their cellphones and smart phones; a clear manifestation that access to internet is now more mobile.
Insp. Kimberly Gonzales	Cybercrimes are now becoming prevalent and that there is really a need to study the issue. Presently here in the Philippines there is no specific law that clearly defines what cybercrime is.
Prof. Nymia Simbulan	Cyber bullying is now becoming a problem in the sense that in the recent past there have been victims of cyber bullying as a result of certain event or certain behavior which have been captured in video and posted in the social media network.
Atty. Christopher Lao	Cyber bullying in the Philippines is getting worst because there are new reported cases. People need better safeguard and better awareness among people that cyber bullying is wrong.

Matrix No. 3: What are the common reasons why cyber bullies use social media in bullying?

Mr. TJ Dimacali	
Prof. Danilo Arao	Cyber bullying is considered a cheap form of "getting even" with perceived enemies.
Mr. Mark Madrona	Perpetrators can hide their selves with the use of aliases and maintain their anonymous identity.
Atty. Abel Maglanque	Perpetrators are empowered to target wide audience with a big guarantee of anonymity.
Mr. Jose Descallar	Social media is connected to power dynamics. The mask of anonymity is what gives a cyber bully more power.
Insp. Kimberly Gonzales	
Atty. Christopher Lao	Cyber bullies are assured of the impact. It is very empowering. The attack can be done anonymously.

Matrix No. 4: What standards are being violated when somebody uses social media to cause harm to others?

Mr. TJ Dimacali	The use of social media in bullying is an apparent issue between the exercise of freedom of expression and on one hand the sense of morality.
Prof. Danilo Arao	The codes of ethics in journalism, advertising and public relations and entertainment are compromised.
Mr. Mark Madrona	No clear ethical standards are being violated when a person use social media in bullying. It is mainly because, internet users in the Philippines and around the world have not agreed to a single set of ethical standards in using the internet.
Atty. Abel Maglanque	Cyber perpetrators can be liable for libel or unjust vexation but these are only applicable for minor crimes. Acts of cyber bullying is more on civil rather than criminal.
Mr. Jose Descallar	On the part of the government, since there is no special law that addresses a special problem like cyber bullying, the only mechanism that is use are the existing laws and regulations that covers specific acts of cyber bullying.
Insp. Kimberly Gonzales	The Philippines do not have specific law that clearly defines what cyber crime is. PNP-CIDG address the problem by categorizing cyber crime acts as to libel, harassment, hacking,

	threat, fraud, and other similar acts.
Prof. Nymia Simbulan	There is no specific law or regulation that is being violated. This is because there is a very thin dividing line between cyber bullying and the right to freedom of expression. The dividing line is very thin that it is very hard to differentiate the two.
Atty. Christopher Lao	Libel and slander under the revise penal code; however it is different when the act is done using social media.

Matrix No. 5: What measures should be implemented to prevent or control cyber bullying?	
Mr. TJ Dimacali	There is a need for to verify first the information before disseminating or sharing those.
Prof. Danilo Arao	Media literacy could be done among social media users so that they would know what cyber-bullying is and consequently avoid engaging in it.
Mr. Mark Madrona	Educating the users should be done and on the part of the social media user, self-discipline is what is needed.
Atty. Abel Maglanque	A big part in the resolution of the problem is education.
Mr. Jose Descallar	It should be compulsory to the administrators and users of social media to self-regulate.
Insp. Kimberly Gonzales	Parental guidance is needed. The responsibility is put upon the parents to guide the kids.
Prof. Nymia Simbulan	Generally what is needed to address the issue is the responsible use of the internet and social media.
Atty. Christopher Lao	Victims should not just be passive bystanders; they should not just tolerate it, they should take a stand and they should condemn the

	actions.

Matrix No. 6: How should social media be used as a tool for addressing cyber bullying?	
Mr. TJ Dimacali	Social media can be used to launch counter campaigns against the perpetrators.
Prof. Danilo Arao	As platforms, social media can be used to enlightened users through education.
Mr. Mark Madrona	Social media perse cannot be used to stop cyber bullying…but we can educate the users to be more vigilant.
Atty. Abel Maglanque	Social media like Facebook can be used to report offensive acts, statements, photos.
Mr. Jose Descallar	Users can report through social media like Facebook somebody who is not doing good.
Insp. Kimberly Gonzales	For CIDG, we have created a site that provides information about cybercrimes.
Prof. Nymia Simbulan	What is needed is the responsible usage of the social network sites.
Atty. Christopher Lao	It is a useful tool to inform them of the negative implications and harm that it might bring once use in cyber bullying.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The researcher, through the focus interview analysis, has come up with the following conclusions: Social media caused cyber bullying to exist. As a tool originally designed for communication purposes, it has been abusively used by people whose aim is to gratify their selves by causing harm or damage to other people.

Social media possess distinct characteristics that make it a gratifying tool for cyber bullies. These gratifying characteristics includes the following: real time updating, wide spread dissemination of information, a rallying point for people, anonymity, instantaneousness, ability to reach wide audience, cheap, connected to power dynamics, information posted in social media has a tendency to go viral, it allows other social network users to respond or generate feedbacks, it builds up and can generate

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support from others, cyber bullies are assured of the impact, and it is very empowering.

The law in the Philippines does not clearly define what legal standards are being violated when somebody uses social media in bullying. This is because of the fact that the Philippines do not have any explicit law that clearly defines the punishable acts of bullying online. Because of the absence of a clear legislation on this, law enforcers define the crime that happens in the actual world and apply the same in the crimes that happens in the virtual world.

Bullying using social media also face ethical concerns. Bullying online is contrary to the moral good of a person. It is a manifestation of wrong orientation about the use of social media. This is true to the fact that most of the users do not know their "cyber ethics" as seen and observed in their actions in the cyberspace.

Preventing the cases of cyber bullies requires certain measures to avoid the possible damages. First is to impose self-discipline among social media users. When creating a social media account users should have thorough understanding on pros and cons, its use, features, purpose, capabilities and possible effects.

Propagating social media literacy campaigns is also one way to address the issue. Cyber bullying happens because of lack of knowledge. If social media users will have thorough understanding of social media, the ill and damaging effects of cyber bullying can be avoided.

Understanding cyber security should also be a goal of all social media users. With easy access to information, users should learn how to safeguard personal information that they upload in their social media accounts. This information can be used against them by the perpetrators of online bullying.

Lastly, reporting the case to the authorities should be done especially if the acts already pose a threat to the life and liberty of the victim.

Social media is a tool for both good and bad. If cyber bullies can use it to cause harm to others, it can also be used as a tool for addressing bullying in the same manner cyber bullies use it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

The students should learn and be aware on using the internet properly; they should be oriented on the benefits as well as the consequences of using the internet. As users, students are not expected to use the internet to harm others. They are advised to choose and analyze the kind of message they are re going to post or send in the internet, consider its effect to the possible reader or receiver; and assure that it will not give any harm or damage to others.

The parents should be concern and aware of the internet activities of their children considering that most of the respondents admitted that they use internet at home most of the time; more parental supervision should be put into practice to be sure that that internet is not being use the wrong way like in cyber bullying.

The school is considered as the second home of the students therefore; to protect the students from cyber bullying, schools should implement guidelines on the usage of private internet to assure that the students are safe from cyber bullies. Furthermore, students shall be guided properly when using the internet facilities of the school to guarantee that it is only being used for purely academic purposes

In the Philippines, there are very few studies that have been conducted about cyber bullying. The researcher strongly recommends to other future researchers to further study other facets of the issue and dig more relevant information that will be useful in addressing this problem. They are also encouraged to suggest possible ways or measures that can be implemented to eliminate or control its effect.

The promotion of life and liberty is among the basic duty of the government. In consideration of this, legislators from both chambers of the Congress are encouraged to enact a law that will specifically address the problem on cyber bullying. The enactment of such law will ensure the due protection of the rights and welfare of the people more particularly the *netizens* as far as the problem in cyber bullying is concerned.

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