

Cyber Violence and Three Psychological Effects

Huiyi Cai^{1, *, †}, Tongle Wang^{2, †}

¹Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, New York, USA

²Xinjiang University, Urumqi, China

*Corresponding author: caihuiyi0809@gmail.com

[†]Those authors contributed equally.

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Abstract: In the era of rapid development of social media, people take advantage of convenient and unlimited information exchange and freedom of speech. At the same time, a kind of violence, sometimes hidden behind the label of justice, quietly but quickly infiltrates and invades China's Internet environment, which is called cyber violence. The influencing factors of communication are one of the important determinants of network violence, but it is difficult for researchers to summarize all the influencing factors. Through three main methods: questionnaire survey, text analysis and interview, this paper analyzes three different types of audience cognitive psychological effects - appeal to authority effect, drift effect and self-reference effect - and the impact of online violence on China's social media. This paper holds that the three audience cognitive psychological effects have an impact on network violence, but they all have limitations and conditions. In addition to using the method of text analysis, it provides a deeper understanding and the basis of network violence. The interview with Yang puts forward new ideas. The purpose of this paper is to show the potential influencing factors of cyber violence, deepen the understanding of bullying, and describe the changes of future research.

1. Introduction

Cyber violence, defined by the National Crime Prevention Council, states that it is any harassment by using the internet, cellphone, and other devices through sending or posting messages or images to hurt or embarrass other people [1]. As the rapid development of technology, the high speed wifi helps people to connect to each other more frequently, easier and with varied options. In January, 2021, the data uploaded by Joseph depicts that in global there were 4.66 billion active internet users, and 4.2 billion social media users [2]. The more widely the internet could reach, the more reliant people are on the internet, and the more potential of cyber violence would be involved in daily life. The article written by Li hehou pointed out that 2007 was a turning point in China's cyber violence. In the following years, a series of cyber violence broke out, which had a huge, amazing and long-lasting impact, and had a different degree of negative impact on people's mood and society at that time [3]. Especially, in the year of 2020 and 2021, because of the global pandemic Covid-19, people were more active online than before, and more cyber violence happened quietly but quickly influencing people's mental health and daily life. The factors formulated as cyber violence are hard to conclude into several effects or causes. This is an imminent but everlasting topic worth to research further on. To eliminate and understand more on cyber violence and its factors, this paper will take some audience cognitive psychological effects as the starting point, analyze and conclude whether it will affect the causes of cyber violence and even accelerate the expansion of this human disaster.

Three audience psychology effects will be researched in this paper: the appeal effect on authority, the drift effect and the self-reference effect. Appeal to authority is a kind of cognitive psychology effect, but also counts as a kind of fallacy of relevance. In the essay written by Goodwin, it describes this effect as because the authority claimed the issue being true without any other supporting evidence provided, others are blindly following and insisting the issue is true [4]. As the internet forcing to strengthen the connection and bondings between people, the authorities, such as experts, celebrities,

and “net-red”(people who have amount of fans to support his or her creation posted online), have less distance with ordinary people and influence the fans more by posting private thoughts.

The second effect, bandwagon effect, is a phenomenon that describes the tendency of the audience to accept and follow a certain behavior, style or attitude because others are doing so [5]. When this effect involves in cyber violence, it will always involve a lot of people to pay attention on the event, and even some people do not know what happened but they will be influenced and remember the conclusion of what other people think so.

The third effect, the self-reference effect, is more targeted at a group of people. This can be concluded as a tendency that people are better at remembering the information and having empathy when it is coded as the reference to the self [6]. When the influence is related to cyber violence, it always affects a special group with some similar characteristics, encourages them to join the violence, and uses the intention of self-defense to cover up the nature of cyber violence. This paper will show how these three effects affect cyber violence and reveal people's ideas when participating in these effects.

2. Materials And Methods

2.1 Questionnaire and Data Analysis

The first method this research used is survey, a descriptive exploratory method. The researchers designed the survey into 20 questions, of which 9 were related to three cognitive psychological effects of the audience, of which 4 were related to personal information, and the other 7 questions were designed to show the respondents' attitude towards online violence and reveal some internet habits. The sample size of this survey is 178. The nationality of the respondents are Chinese because of exclusive research on cyber violence in China. The survey was published on Sept. 27th, 2021, and ended on Sept. 30th, 2021, in a period of 4 days. Since there is no previous research studying the relationship between three effects and cyber violence, the data analysis of the result from survey helps researchers to know the basic information of how Chinese audiences know and aspects of thoughts about the three effects, and use the data analysis to point out some interesting findings, which exceed the expectations of the assumptions put forward by the researchers.

2.2 Text Analysis

The second method in this paper to dedicate the research is text analysis. In order to lay a solid foundation for understanding China's cyber violence, reading and learning previous research will help researchers describe more objective and academic analysis and research in this paper. There is no direct research on cyber violence and the three effects. Some previous research papers can be found through China's National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The researchers selected two papers for further research and analysis. First representative essay is Moral reactions of online rumors: The effects of social media rumors on cyber-bullying, which was written by Jihong Liu and Huixin Ke. The essay sets up a conclusion that a negative moral reasoning and a moral emotion indices implied in the rumors are one of the causes of cyber violence, which meanwhile generates severe moral condemnation. This paper is of guiding significance for the research. The second paper, researchers studying on, is the formation mechanism of cyber violence from the perspective of “The Spiral of Silence” written by Kai Zhang. The theory “The Spiral of Silence” is mentioned in this essay, which was originally established by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974. The theory states that people will be unwilling to publicly express their opinion if they believe they are in the minority and will be more vocal if they believe they are a part of the majority [7]. The researchers believe that this theory can be applied to explain the bandwagon effect. Meanwhile, the essay points out that the immature law system and lack of effective supervision also can be one of the factors affecting cyber violence.

2.3 Interview

The third method for further researching on the hypothesis is an interview. Influenced by the text analysis of the essay written by Kai Zhang, the researchers interviewed an experienced lawyer in order

to learn more about cyber violence in China on the aspects of professional in law. By regarding the authoritative interpretation as background on this research, this method diversifies the aspects of understanding on cyber violence and displays more comprehensive with less limitation and more objective.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The higher the level of education, the more objective the attitude

Comparing the answers of respondents on cyber violence to their education levels, it clearly shows that there is some relationship between the two variables. The people of low education level, most of them pay attention to the event, instead of the cause and process. Their viewpoint is illogical, and they cannot put the event of cyber violence perspective. In cyber violence event, the people with low education are easy to become a new perpetrator.

On the other hand, the highly educated people hold a calm, objective, comprehensive and independent view on this issue. Moreover, if people with higher education levels know the event comprehensive and in their perception the people who is victim of cyberbullying is innocent, they will have the intention to help victims of cyber violence, which can be analyzed from their tendency to show their sympathy and sincerity to the world. So, in the cyber violence event, the highly educated people are more likely to become a man of justice.

3.2 Emotional resonance may lead to incomplete views on cyber violence, but the degree of influence is not high

In our questionnaire, more than half of the surveyed show agreement on research questions. The answer to the partial question is that there is some influence of self-reference effect on cyber violence. Due to the emotional impact, there are some people who may be partial to individuals who have the familiar experience. However, in our questionnaire we found the impact is not high.

3.3 One cyber violence may lead to another

As the ir-rationalization of the network environment, the cyberspace for public opinion is divided into black and white. And it is hard to find a balanced viewpoint of one event. According to a question in our survey, the data shows that 30% of surveyed once believed in the opinion that the majority believed, but interestingly 55% of surveyed once saw the opinion which the majority believed was proved to be wrong. Some studies believe that one of the reasons for network group radicalization is that group pressure and social trend effect lead to group polarization [8]. And experiments designed by American psychologist Ashi have also repeatedly proved that group pressure can produce submissive behavior. People who disagree with the majority may be attacked by the majority. In other words, the new cyber bullying is generated in the old cyber bullying. And because people do not want to become a new victim, they will express an opinion that is familiar to the most people hold. This is why 55% of respondents have seen what most people think is wrong.

3.4 Opinion leaders have alleviated the extreme Internet public opinion environment

The views of some opinion leaders can prevent disputes on the Internet. They can put forward relatively objective views, and followers with different views may give up their views. In addition, with the development of social media and consumerism, we media is flooded, and these contents are mixed due to the lack of supervision. It is really easy to deliver wrong values to teens. In China, the government has the tendency and already tried to control the trends of commentary, themes on social media, and other seemingly minutiae but effective things. And when a serious event happened, the media such as People's daily may publish an editorial to control public opinion environment and give a relatively rigorous and correct point of view to help net citizens to correct understand the event.

3.5 Weak legal supervision and unclear definition of cyber violence

We interviewed a lawyer who works in a Law Firm in BeiJing called YS. Y said, because of cyber citizen are irrational, and the undeveloped law system, the occurrence of cyber violence is more and

more frequent. Due to the anonymity of the network and the blurred boundary between network violence and justice, it is easy to be manipulated. Online speech is difficult to control. And some perpetrator hold a mentality that the law does not blame others. However, a journalist Zhang said, a few perpetrators hold a mentality that the law does not blame others, but most of those perpetrators do not think they are exerting cyber violence, but a normal criticism of social problems. Therefore, it is more necessary to prevent cyber violence than to punish afterwards.

4. Limitations

There is no previous research related to the relationship between three psychological effects and cyber violence. For studying in other essays to analyze the hypothesis, there are limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, although the three psychological effects the researchers never mainly talked about in their paper, there are some traces that could be found implicitly mentioned. The researchers in this paper could only analyze the essay in pieces, but not completely, or otherwise it will go off the main thesis. Secondly, the topic and focus on cyber violence is brand new to the academic field, and it is also a discussion currently attracting attention from more people. Therefore, there is limited paper and academic support for cyber violence compared to other developed researches and long-existing social topics.

During this research, the final data of the survey has some differences between what researchers expected, which concludes as a clear positive or negative attitude toward the effects on cyber violence. There are two limitations that could be concluded to explain the insufficient result from the survey. First, the sample size and the sample variation is not really scientific and has some restrictions. Because the research is related to Chinese social media and does not include opinions from other countries, the nationality could be limited to Chinese. In this survey, the job occupation is not equally distributed and sufficiently varied, which could influence the final result and cause some unpredictable biases. Secondly, the method of survey does not perfectly fit into the measurement of behavioral research. The expression of questions is hard to be perfectly objective and with no implication for all surveyees. Particularly in this research, the word "cyber violence" is considered as a negative attitude phrase, but people tend to maintain and show their positive images to others intentionally or unconsciously. Therefore, it is difficult to collect 'real' data from the survey. For continuing further research, the experiment method and the one to one interview method would be recommended in decreasing the noise in data and results.

From the interview, the researchers originally planned to interview a net-red who experiences cyber violence and has a reverse ending of the issue. However, there is no reply from the people researchers invited. There are mainly two reasons that can be applied to explain. Firstly, the project is small and does not have any fundings which might not be too attractive for people. There is no big social influence the research could provide, so the interviewee has no benefits from attending this project. Meanwhile, the big fan base introduces more restrictions, such as concerns of anti-fan's trap, negative influence on their fame, and so on. Secondly, the researchers might neglect the degrees of pain from cyber violence. Some of the potential interviewees just experienced the disaster, this might cause an irreversible injury and be hard to heal. Therefore, they might not be able or willing to share their experience with a calm and peaceful mind. As a result, the researchers invited a lawyer to discuss the topic in a more academic manner. However, this also involves some restrictions. The lawyer could not provide the psychological thoughts related to the cyber violence, since he has not experienced it before. The more rational conclusion and thoughts he provided, the less emotional requests the researchers could analyze. A reasonable, and complete result of social research applied should include both rationale and sensibility. Unfortunately, due to those uncontrollable factors, this research could not depict a complete conclusion to the three effects on cyber violence, but it definitely provides new ideas and aspects on the relationship, and is a good foundation for further research.

Analyzing Chinese social media has some specialties due to the identical political system. Translated by Tongle Wang, "Marxist news thought holds that the news media is the tool of the people's production and life and serves the people (Wu)." [9] The Chinese government has the tendency and already tried to control the trends of commentary, themes on social media, and other

seemingly minutiae but effective things [10]. Sometimes, authority needs the power of words and thoughts, and sometimes cyber violence is just hidden behind the label of justice. Nowadays, the borderline between cyber violence and justice is ambiguous, and easy to be manipulated. That is the reason for this research to figure out the factors which could cause cyberbullying and to understand it for preventing reckless “sense of justice” from being everywhere on the internet.

5. Conclusion

From this study, the data set from the survey and the data analysis shows clearly that the three cognitive psychological effects of the audience, self-reference, drift with the tide effect and appeal to authority, have a certain impact on the causes of internet violence. However, the ways for presenting cannot be defined by recent research and collected data sets. For a more detailed and condensed conclusion, the research needs to be continued and examined further. This topic is still young in the academic field, but within the huge potential of inquiry and many silent appeals for help. Cyber violence exists in every dark corner on the internet. Hundreds, thousands of them connect, twist, and fill in to create the darkest night in everyone’s mind. The awareness of the violence, the critical thinking and reflection of the issue, and the defend help the victim would eventually converge together lighten the dawn. Then we will call it a new day.

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