

# Chapter 7

## Personality Factors Predicting Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Today more than half of the world population use the internet and online communication tools. These changes in communication has come with a pay-off, which is cyber aggression. Bullying behavior in physical space has changed its medium. Personality is one of the factors that play a role in traditional bullying and it is related to cyberbullying. Different personality theories examine personality and online harassment behavior relations from different perspectives. Biological theories focus on brain anomalies and hormone-behavior interaction. Psychoanalytic theory emphasizes how cyberspace effect personality. Trait view of personality theories found that different traits which are psychopathy, narcissism, machiavellianism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism are related to cyberbullying perpetration. In this study, how personality traits related to online bullying behavior is examined. Researchers clearly showed that personality is a crucial factor in cyberbullying behavior. As cyberbullying behavior is complex, there is a need for further studies.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today 4.388 billion people or more than half of the world's population use the Internet (Global Digital Report, 2019). Online medium allows people to conduct their everyday jobs like shopping, banking, and communicating through their cell phones or personal computers. As online activities increase, people's benefit from these services increase accordingly. A member can watch a video, share a photo, meet with new people, join online communities, and get in touch with past friends via Facebook (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). As the number of online medium users increase day by day, online behaviors of people become one of the main topics in the field of social sciences. Thus, one of the main research topic is aggressive behavior in online mediums.

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Although aggressive behavior is studied extensively, general theories of aggression can be inadequate to explain online forms of aggression (Jaishankar, 2008). Space transition theory assumes that people change mediums from physical to cyber mediums, and their behavior shows some changes, especially in non-conformative acts. According to this theory, cyber space provides people anonymity and identity flexibility (Jaishankar, 2007). Disinhibition caused by cyber space makes it easier for people to act aggressively in online mediums like Facebook and Instagram (Jaishankar, 2007). For that reason, researchers' share concerns about the causes and effects of online aggressive behaviors.

Similar to the physical space, there are different forms of aggressive behavior in cyber space as well. Cyberbullying, cyberstalking, cyber trolling and online harassment are some of these behaviours (Kircaburun, Jonason, & Griffiths, 2018). Even though some of these terms are used interchangeably, cyberbullying is defined as the intentional, repetitive offensive behavior that is mainly caused by power imbalance (Vandebosh & Van Cleemput, 2008). Yet, online harassment is defined as overt, intentional aggressive behavior (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Still, some of the researchers use cyberbullying for both acts.

In this paper, different personality theories' explanations regarding to cyberbullying and cyber harassment behavior will be reviewed. For this purpose, cyberbullying behavior will be examined through three main theories; biological theories, psychoanalytic theory and trait theories.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment**

The explanation of cyberbullying is derived from the term bullying by adding '*electronic forms of conduct*' to its definition (Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino, & Blaya, 2018). Though some of the researchers argue about whether cyberbullying is the 'same wine' in an old bottle (Li, 2007), studies showed that bullying and cyberbullying differ from each other (Jaishankar, 2007). Main differences between two types of bullying are anonymity, publicity, connection between bully and victim, and the time and space limit (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Since publicity and anonymity worsen the effect of bullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013), cyberbullying can be considered as a more severe form of bullying.

On the other hand, online harassment is defined as the offensive behaviours conducted through electronic mediums to intentionally harm and embarrass another person (Jones, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2013; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Online harassment behavior is seen as a form of verbal or sexual aggression. In addition, victims also experience cyber stalking, receiving inappropriate and/or pornographic messages as well as threatening ones (Burke Winkelman, Oomen-Early, Walker, Chu, & Yick-Flamagan, 2015). Online harassment differs from cyberbullying in that most of the harassment incidents are not repetitive, they only happen once (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). Even though terms are used interchangeably, statistics showed that the number of people suffering from cyberbullying and/or online harassment increases every day (Pew Research, 2018). Besides, some of the research found out that many youth are victims of both traditional and cyber bullying (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015).

There is growing literature on the cause and effect of cyberbullying. Personality is among the factors that are related to cyberbullying and online harassment.

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