



A mixed methods approach to the posting of benevolent comments online



Yoon-Jung Jang^a, Hee-Woong Kim^{b,*}, Yoonhyuk Jung^c

^a *CJ Olive Networks, Seoul, Republic of Korea*

^b *Graduate School of Information, Yonsei University, 50 Yonsei-Ro, Seodaemun-Gu, Seoul 120-749, Republic of Korea*

^c *School of Business Administration, Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (UNIST), 50 UNIST-gil, Ulsan 44919, Republic of Korea*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 May 2015

Received in revised form 3 February 2016

Accepted 3 February 2016

Available online 17 February 2016

Keywords:

Online comments

Cyberbullying

Malicious comments

Benevolent comments

Social exchange theory

Mixed methods

ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying by way of malicious online comments has been identified as a critical social issue. As a way to combat cyberbullying, it is important to promote the posting of benevolent comments, especially in response to malicious comments. In this study, we adopted a mixed methods approach in using social exchange theory to explore what motivates people to post benevolent comments online. We first adopted a qualitative study to explore the decision factors involved. These were then used as the basis for development of a theoretical research model to undertake a quantitative study. The results explain how people decide to post benevolent comments online. The study makes a strong theoretical contribution in demonstrating the decision factors underlying the posting of benevolent comments. It also has practical implications by providing guidance on how to combat cyberbullying through promoting the posting of benevolent online comments.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Cyberbullying or electronic harassment has recently caused a vast amount of damage across the globe. In Singapore, 59.4% of students underwent at least one type of cyberbullying, and 28.5% were the targets of abusive comments on Facebook (Kwan & Skorik, 2013). In Australia, Charlotte Dawson who had hosted a TV program named “Next Top Model” committed suicide in 2012 after she was the target of malicious and abusive comments. Moreover, a survey of 3000 teachers by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, which is a teacher’s union in Britain, found that 42% of them had received insulting comments on their performance.¹ Malicious comments are made as part of attacks that amount to cyberbullying.

The identification of cyberbullying as a critical social issue in the context of comments online and in social media has also attracted attention to the search for ways to prevent it and to deal with those who commit it. For example, there is a campaign on Facebook

called “Help Stop the Stomping” that has the goal of preventing cyberbullying.² Within the European nations, an anticyberbullying campaign named “The Big March” is considered the world’s first virtual global march in pursuit of children’s right to be safe from cyberbullying.³ “Sunfull” is an Internet campaign to promote posting benevolent comments online to counter bullying and the hateful comments that are posted.⁴ All of these anticyberbullying campaigns have in common the goals of not only stopping the posting of malicious comments, but also motivating people to post benevolent comments (i.e., comments that express goodwill and/or help others) as a kind behavior to foster civility on the Internet. However, promotion of the posting of benevolent comments should rank higher in importance in all these campaigns than merely stopping the posting of malicious comments because their cessation does not necessarily lead to the posting of benevolent comments. Posting benevolent comments may lead to the development of online social norms that in turn may reduce the posting of malicious comments and lead to a lessening of cyberbullying.

Despite the importance of benevolent online comments as a way to oppose cyberbullying, there is a lack of understanding about what motivates people to post benevolent comments in the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jang_yj@cj.net (Y.-J. Jang), kimhw@yonsei.ac.kr (H.-W. Kim), yjung@unist.ac.kr (Y. Jung).

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/social-media/9373724/>

[Cyberbullying-I-got-a-message-from-someone-telling-me-to-go-and-kill-myself.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/social-media/9373724/Cyberbullying-I-got-a-message-from-someone-telling-me-to-go-and-kill-myself.html).

² <http://www.niot.org/blog/cyberbullying-campaigns-using-tools-good>.

³ <http://deletocyberbullying.eu/the-big-march/>.

⁴ <http://www.sun-full.org>.

online and social media contexts (Kim, Chan, & Gupta, 2015). Prior research on cyberbullying has mainly addressed issues of conceptual definition (Abu-Nimeh, Chen, & Alzubi, 2011; Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008), classification of cyberbullying types (Aoyama & Talbert, 2010), reasons for it (Varjas, Talley, & Meyers, 2010), the relationship between cyberbullying and traditional bullying (Brown, Demaray, & Secord, 2014; Kwan and Skoric, 2013), assessments of cyberbullying (Cetlin, Yaman, & Peker, 2011; Mason, 2008), its effects (Talwar, Gomez-Garibello, & Shariff, 2014; Dredge, Gleeson, & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014), and its prevention (Beale & Hall, 2007; Bhat, 2008; Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008; Keith & Martin, 2005). Of particular interest in the literature is the research on the prevention of cyberbullying. Even the few studies that have been done merely discussed strategies and guidance for school counselors and parents to prevent cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007; Bhat, 2008; Diamanduros et al., 2008) and the creation of a culture of respect in the cyber world (Keith & Martin, 2005). Missing from the research is a theory-based empirical explanation of what factors lead to the posting of benevolent comments online.

This study thus aims to determine what motivates people to post these benevolent comments. Posting benevolent comments online can be viewed as a social exchange in which individuals offer something to someone without negotiating terms and without knowing whether or when the recipient will reciprocate (Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000). Hence, this study adopts social exchange theory to explore the posting of benevolent comments online. Social exchange theory holds that individuals decide if they want to perform such a behavior (i.e., posting benevolent comments) based on a cost-benefit analysis of its worth (Blau, 1964; Molm et al., 2000).

This research used a mixed methods approach for an exploratory qualitative study that was followed by a confirmatory quantitative study with a “developmental” purpose (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013; p. 26). A sequential combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., mixed methods) is useful for developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Lee, Noh, & Kim, 2013). The first stage of this research adopted a qualitative research method and then identified cost and benefit factors specific to the posting of benevolent comments. The identification of these factors was based on interviews with persons who had posted comments. The second stage used a quantitative research method by developing a theoretical research model based on social exchange theory and using the cost and benefit factors explored in the first stage. The model was validated by collecting survey data from online users. In this way, this study expects to advance the theoretical understanding of the posting of benevolent comments in an online context and knowledge of the drivers of this activity. Moreover, the study can inform social network service (SNS) providers on how to combat cyberbullying through informing them of the relevant cultural aspects of the online and social media contexts and teaching techniques to promote the posting of benevolent comments.

2. Social exchange theory

Social exchange refers to “reciprocal acts of benefits, in which individuals offer help, advice, approval, and so forth to one another without negotiation of terms and without knowledge of whether or when the other will reciprocate (Molm et al., 2000; p. 1396)”. Accordingly, in a social exchange actors initiate exchanges by performing a beneficial act for another without knowing whether, when, or to what extent the other will reciprocate. Posting a benevolent comment as prosocial behavior on the Internet (Sproull, Conley, & Moon, 2005) is an act of voluntarily posting or commenting to provide information or emotional support such as encouragement, compliments, and consolation to benefit or help

an individual or a group in an online and social media context. People tend to have no clear expectation of a future return from posting such comments. Posting a benevolent comment thus represents a social exchange. Furthermore, social behaviors in cyberspace have been explained from the social exchange perspective (e.g., Chiu, Hsu, Wang, 2006; Faraj & Johnson, 2011). Therefore, this study uses social exchange theory as its theoretical lens.

As one of the core theories used in social media research (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015), social exchange theory posits that people calculate the overall worth of a social exchange based on a comparison between benefits and costs (Blau, 1964; Molm et al., 2000). Because the terms are not precisely specified in social exchange and actors do not know whether or when a recipient will reciprocate, actors consider only expected benefits and costs in their overall worth assessment. In such exchanges, the currencies of exchange are tangible and intangible resources (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Payable resources or negative outputs revealed as the result of an exchange are referred to as “cost” such as time and effort; resources produced as the result of an exchange or positive outputs are referred to as “benefits” such as emotional support and trust (Ellison, Gray, & Lampe, 2014). Social exchange theory postulates that people act to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs (Molm, 1997). The overall worth of an exchange derived from such a comparison determines whether a social exchange occurs (Blau, 1964; Molm et al., 2000). Therefore, this study explores these benefit and cost factors through the following qualitative study, then tests them by developing a theory-based research model based on the factors explored earlier.

3. Qualitative study

3.1. Research method

We first conducted an exploratory qualitative study. This exploratory study adopted an interview approach; such an approach has several strengths, such as exploring relevant factors and inferring relationships between them in a targeted research context (Yin, 2008). Interview questions – developed and posed to comply with social exchange theory – dealt with the benefits and costs of posting benevolent comments online.

In recruiting interviewees, we used the snowball sampling technique (Biernacki & Dan, 1981), a process of chain referral: when members of the target population are located, they are asked for the names and contact information of other members of the target population. This technique has been used to create sampling frames with nonprobability methods of selection (Biernacki & Dan, 1981; Sudman & Kalton, 1986). Qualitative studies tend to use a nonprobability sampling approach because the relevance to the research topic determines the data sampling (Neuman, 2006).

For qualitative data collection (i.e., interviews), we first recruited eight students enrolled in courses taught by the co-authors in Korea. All of these recruits had posted comments online at least once before. Each subject then recruited additional interviewees (i.e., their acquaintances). We selected only interviewees who had previously posted benevolent comments online. These first eight students then recruited 49 other persons, all Koreans, with posting experience for a total sample size of 57. These 57 subjects used several online sites such as Nate Pann, Daum Agora, SLR Club, PAXNet, Today’s Humor, and People Using Macs. The number of interviewees was determined by confirming theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).⁵ Interviewees comprised

⁵ Theoretical saturation is achieved through constant comparison of incidents (indicators) in the data to elicit the properties and dimensions of each category (i.e., code). This constant comparing of incidents continues until no new properties or

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1025515>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1025515>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)