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Prevalence and personality correlates of Facebook bullying among university undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the prevalence of cyber-bullying through Facebook in a sample of 226 Greek university undergraduates, and to explore whether big five personality characteristics, narcissism, as well as attitudes toward Facebook, technological knowledge and skills were predictive of such behavior. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire measuring the above constructs. Results indicated that almost one third of the sample reported Facebook bullying engagement at least once during the past month, with male students reporting more frequent involvement than females. Bullying through Facebook was predicted by low Agreeableness and more time spent on Facebook only for males, whereas for females none of the studied variables predicted engagement in Facebook bullying. Findings are discussed in terms of prevention and intervention strategies.

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1. Introduction

Technology-mediated communication, such as social network sites (SNS), has significantly influenced the nature of everyday social interactions. Facebook (FB) is a member-based Internet community that allows users to post personal information and to communicate with others in innovative ways such as sending public or private online messages or sharing photos online. However, while the use of social media can have positive benefits associated with community engagement, education, social connectedness, and identity development, it can also lead to risks linked to social rejection, depression as well as other negative effects for well-being such as cyber-bullying (CB¹) (O'Keefe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communication and Media, 2011). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) defined CB as an intentional act carried out by a group or an individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over

time, against a victim who cannot easily defend him/herself. Most of the definitions include similar characteristics such as durability, repeatability, harassment, disrespect, anonymity, publicity, the intention of the perpetrator and the situation that the victim is defenseless (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Nevertheless, some researchers suggest that the aspect of repeatability is not essential for CB to occur since when something is uploaded online, it could be seen by thousands of users, especially on FB which bears public friendly features and could be particularly challenging for cyberbullies (Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013). In all, CB definition is still unclear, especially in the field of SNS, where the criteria are numerous and complicated (e.g., Dredge, Gleeson, & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014).

Cyber-bullying is carried out through the use of mobile devices or personal computers (Smith et al., 2008) including behaviors such as flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion and cyber stalking (Willard, 2007). Nocentini et al. (2010) proposed four categories of CB through SNS: written or verbal behaviors which could be occurred with instant messages through FB, voice messages, comments and chats, visual behaviors by uploading or posting material such as pictures or videos on FB, segregation by intentionally excluding someone from a FB group and impersonation by imitation, stealing passwords and invading into someone's FB profile account. Other examples of FB bullying include offending or ridiculous comments, invading photos, liking a humiliating photo or reposting it, sending abusive inbox messages, posting false information about others, hacking someone's

Abbreviations: SNS, Social Network Sites; FB, Facebook; CB, Cyber-bullying; ICT, Information and Communication Technologies; N, Neuroticism; E, Extraversion; O, Openness to Experience; A, Agreeableness; C, Conscientiousness; CFA, Confirmatory Factor Analysis; CFI, Comparative Fit Index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis Index; SRMR, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; RMSEA, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CI, Confidence Interval; PC, Personal Computer.

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¹ Also called electronic bullying, cyber harassment, internet bullying (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015; Brown, Demaray, & Secord, 2014), cyber mobbing, virtual bullying and harassment via Internet or mobile phones (Nocentini et al., 2010).

profile, underrating someone's reputation, uploading publicly nasty and embarrassing photos of someone, posting public humiliating status in someone's profile page, sending cruel or threatening private messages to someone (Dredge et al., 2014).

Although there seems to be a consensus on the behaviors that constitute CB, the measurement of the construct is typically guided by the aim and purpose of each study, with self-report assessments most commonly being used (both paper and pencil, as well as online surveys) since they are easier to implement, better at gaining the individual's perspective and therefore are more likely to reflect intention and power imbalance (Furlong, Sharkey, Felix, Tanigawa, & Green, 2010). However, the majority of cyber-bullying instruments lack the minimum psychometric standards of scale development as a recent review of 44 cyber-bullying instruments concluded, since only 12 of them had been derived using exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis (Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2014). Additionally, almost half of the instruments included in the review did not use the explanation of the concept of cyber-bullying in the instructions (Berne et al., 2013). In terms of measuring cyber-bullying through SNS, there have been limited efforts worldwide to investigate the phenomenon, but research regarding CB in FB exclusively is extremely limited. For example, Kwan and Skoric (2013) only investigated FB bullying behaviors in secondary school students using a questionnaire based on the scales developed by Cassidy, Jackson, and Brown (2009) and Patchin and Hinduja (2010).

Facebook reported that the number of active monthly users reached 1.06 billion globally in December 2014 (Facebook, 2015), with 890 million daily active users, and 745 million mobile daily active users, with approximately 82.4% of the daily active users to be outside the US and Canada. Tam (2013) reported that of the 193 million U.S. and Canada users, the 25–34 (24.4%) and 18–34 (23.7%) age groups appear to be the two largest groups of the North America users. What is more, U.S. college students reported using FB an average of 10–30 min daily (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Greece has a total population of almost 11 millions, and average Internet penetration (56%; approx. 6 million users; European average 68%; global average 34%) (We Are Social, 2014).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) offer college students many opportunities to communicate with their peers. However, in their social interactions via FB, students can be confronted with undesirable phenomena such as cyber-bullying. Thus, while many FB related studies have explored the reasons behind FB use, there has been a lack of systematic investigation examining factors that might explain users' engagement in risky FB use, such as CB. Previous researchers have looked at the association between personality traits and Internet use, in general (Devaraj, Easley, & Crant, 2008) and social media, such as FB, in particular (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), suggesting that certain personality features are better predictors of FB use than others (Moore & McElroy, 2012). However, it is not yet clear if the same personality dimensions are also responsible for online aggression through FB. Therefore, the present study set out to investigate the role of big five personality factors (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness-to-Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness), and Narcissism in relation to FB bullying. Moreover, while personality traits may potentially influence the way individuals use FB, it is not clear how attitudes toward FB may be associated with CB involvement. While there has been plenty of research looking into CB across different platforms, a limited number of studies, particularly among adolescents, have specifically examined bullying over FB. Since university students are among the heavy FB users, it is not yet clear how prevalent this type of aggression is among this group of users. Therefore, this study will also provide evidence regarding this issue.

1.1. The prevalence of FB bullying

Given the dearth of research on CB through FB among college students, an overview of CB prevalence will be presented. Research with adolescents (13–17 yrs old) shows that more than half of FB users have experienced at least one form of FB bullying in the past year (Kwan & Skoric, 2013). Nevertheless, although CB has been theorized to peak in early adolescence and then to significantly decrease after high school (Tokunaga, 2010), CB among college students ranges from 8% (Slonje & Smith, 2008) to 9% (MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010). Cyber-bullying research among university undergraduates in Greece showed rates of perpetrators varying between 16% and 14% (Sygkollitou, Psalti, & Kapatzia, 2010; Kokkinos, Antoniadou, & Markos, 2014). Cyber bullies/victims in the latter study represented 33% of the participants. In the US, Gibb and Devereux (2014) found that 14.3% of their participating college students were cyber bullies. Likewise, Whittaker and Kowalski (2015) found that almost 12% of their undergraduate participants committed CB, whereas CB and cyber-victimization were positively related.

Nevertheless, rates of victimization have been higher – between 22% (MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010) to over 50% (Gibb & Devereux, 2014), or from 9% to 34% (Baldasare, Bauman, Goldman, & Robie, 2012). Arıcak (2009) and Dilmac (2009) found that over half (54.4% and 55.3%, respectively) of Turkish college students had been cyber-bullied in their student life, and approximately one-fifth (19.7% and 22.5%, respectively) had cyber-bullied others. Although prevalence rates among college students vary widely, the results from all the studies suggest that a substantial portion of college students are victims and/or perpetrators of CB.

Thus, although the quantification of CB prevalence rates among college students has been attempted by a number of researchers, the findings vary from study to study due to the use of different CB definitions, time frames (from lifetime prevalence to the last two months), item wording and number, response options, as well as the behaviors studied. Nevertheless, the existing evidence shows that CB is not unknown among college students.

1.2. ICT penetration and online aggression

Greece is a country with average Internet and social media penetration compared to the rest of the European countries, whereas in terms of the global average it is well above. Therefore, one would expect that increased Internet use would be linked to online aggression. Recent evidence with a Greek sample of university undergraduates showed that the frequency of Internet use was positively associated with CB, especially in the case of cyber-bully/victims, who also used chat-rooms more frequently, as well as IM programs, and SNS compared to pure bullies and pure victims (Kokkinos et al., 2014). Findings from similar research suggest that time spent on SNS, the most common medium of CB among college and university students, predicts involvement in CB (Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011). Thus, there appears to be systematic evidence linking time spent online and CB prevalence, confirming that Internet use (e.g., via mobile devices) is a strong predictor of CB and aggressive online behavior (e.g., Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Rosen, Whaling, Rab, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013; Suler, 2004). Juvonen and Gross (2008) reported that ICT are not the reason nor the motive of CB but the means used to bully others, suggesting that the more electronic communication tools someone uses, the more the odds for him/her to use them antisocially. Livingstone and Haddon (2009), De Haan and Livingstone (2009) and Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson (2011) linked Internet connection with online opportunities and risks, meaning the more opportunities someone has on the Internet, the more dangerous it could be. On the other hand, O'Neill and Dinh (2015) indicated that ICT penetration is simply one of

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