

A Comparative Study of Cyber bullying among Online and Conventional Students of Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan

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Abstract

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have become a part of daily activities in the higher education institutions. The use of these technologies has become not only a necessity for students and other people, its use is growing at a rapid pace. The academic use of ICT is the necessity for online students. The students of conventional universities are also using these technologies for various purposes. These digital modes are also being used for bullying known as cyber bullying which is making its way into the higher education institutions as well. The purpose of this survey research was to compare the cyberbullying experiences of online and conventional universities' students, and to explore gender differences in such experiences. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. The population of the study consisted of all students (1809) enrolled in Spring Semester 2019 at the Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab as conventional participants whereas, all students (1139) enrolled in the Department of Education, Virtual University of Pakistan as online participants. Sample was selected using random sampling technique. It was found that more than 58.7% of the students had experienced cyber bullying in different forms. Exclusion and Flaming were the two topmost forms of cyberbullying. It was more common among the students of conventional university as compared with their counterparts in the virtual university. Impersonation was the least prevalent form of cyberbullying. No significant differences were observed between the experiences of male and female students.

Key words: *Cyber bullying, Online learning, Conventional learning, Internet, Technology*

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Introduction

Innovations in technology have changed communication styles and mode of interactions among students. Social networking sites, chats and phone calls have become preferred modes of communication for young people. They prefer to engage with others via technology using electronic devices to connect through different social media sites (Erentaitė, Bergman, & Zukauskienė, 2012). The communication technology is also being used for bullying (Kraft, 2006). Campbell (2005) stated that "With the increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICT) a new form of bullying has been emerging which may be called as cyber bullying or electronic bullying" (p. 2). Kowalski, Giumetti, and Schroeder, (2014) also stated that ICTs have generated a new genre of bullying during this decade which is known as cyberbullying. This term was used for the first time by Poland (2010) as cited by Notar, Padgett & Roden (2013). Tokunaga (2010) defined cyber bullying as "any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others" (p. 278). Willard (2004) came up with a similar definition of "sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices" (p. 1). Willard (2007) categorized cyber bullying as under:

- Flaming: Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.
- Harassment and stalking: Repeatedly sending cruel, vicious, and/or threatening messages.
- Denigration: Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.
- Impersonation: Breaking into someone's e-mail account and using it to send vicious or embarrassing material to others.
- Outing and trickery: Engaging someone in instant messaging, tricking him or her into revealing sensitive information, and forwarding that information to others.
- Exclusion: Intentionally excluding someone from an online group. (Willard, 2007)

Cyber bullying has become an issue of concern for students, teachers and other stakeholders in the higher education institutions (HEIs). Incidents related to digital harassment are reported daily in the news (Elledge, Williford, Boulton, Depaolis, Little, & Salmivalli, 2013).

A recent research stated that cyber bullying is an extension of traditional bullying; many of those who experienced bullying online had experienced it in the real world. By contrast, other researchers (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016; Larranaga, Yubero, Navarro, Ovejero, 2019) consider that cyber bullying and traditional bullying are two different

types of bullying and occur in different ways. Since cyber bullying can invade all aspects of a target's privacy anytime, it could affect one in educational institutes as well as at home or in social circle. Furthermore, in cyber bullying the performers can choose to hide their identity, so the sufferer remains ignorant about the bully but in traditional bullying the identity of perpetrators cannot remain hidden. It is easier for perpetrators of bullies to target their victims using cell phone or a computer as compared with face-to-face bullying. They usually post or expose material that is confidential or extremely private for personal envies or just for fun (Smith, 2010). Cyber-bullying can cause profound harm as it can quickly reach a wide audience, and can remain accessible online indefinitely, virtually 'following' its victims for life. It has been observed that bullying and cyber-bullying are linked with each other to form a continuum of damaging behavior (Ahmed, 2019).

Hinduja and Patchin (2011) reported that "Cyber bullying is a growing problem because increasing numbers of young people use computers, cell phones, and other interactive devices as their main form of social interaction" (p. 49). Brady and Conn (2006) said that, "cyber bullying-related activities are increasingly difficult to monitor and regulate." (p. 10).

Cyber bullying is an upsurge interest among students of colleges and universities in many countries like Canada, Finland, USA and UK (Myers & Cowie, 2019) and is a critical issue for significant proportions of students. Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder (2014) on the basis of metanalysis of studies on cyber bullying stated that cybervictimization ranges between 10 and 40% among youth. But very few studies have been conducted to assess cyber bullying at the online HEIs (Eskey, Taylor, & Eskey, Jr., 2014a; Eskey & Eskey, Jr., 2014b; Smith, Minor, & Brashen, 2012).

Cyber bullying in Pakistan has become prevalent among the students in higher education (Shahid, 2014). In the last five years a significant increase has been observed in bullying in educational institutions of Pakistan ("Bullying in Pakistan", 2018). It has been reported in 2018 in an e-magazine of Pakistan that bullying is an issue of high concern in the educational institutions almost around the world. But research on this issue is very scanty in Pakistan.

Recently Pakistan was placed 22nd in a list of 25 countries studied on the rate of cyber bullying. It was found that every fourth student faced this issue at least once or more in their academic life in Pakistan. This report suggested that it is the responsibility of government, educational institutes and civil society and the social media to spread awareness among students about this issue. If cyber bullying cannot be stopped, at least individuals should know that how to respond to cyber bullying. They should also know the laws about cyber bullying ("Bullying in Pakistan", 2018).

In a comparative study on cyber bullying among school students of Sweden and Pakistan, diverse reasons have been identified. The study revealed that occurrence of

cyber bullying is more common in Pakistan as compared with that in Sweden. The boys use different ways of cyber bullying to embarrass women in public. Another most important finding of the study was about the ways of responding after being cyber bullied. The Swedish students know well how to respond to the person who is trying to bully them whereas Pakistani student don't know as to how to respond, they ignore it or request the bully to stop bullying (Imran, 2014).

There are cyber-crime laws in most of the countries of the world. In Pakistan the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, was passed in 2016. Offences and punishment have been prescribed for various categories of cybercrimes from fine to imprisonment of different periods. Clauses 18 to 21 of this Act are related to cyber bullying for which the fine varies from Rs. 1 million to five million with imprisonment of three to ten years. (The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016)

Cyber bullying and gender differences. A very substantial role in cyber bullying is played by gender across the academic lifespan, particularly at the university level. Women in Pakistan have been harassed using indirect communication and frequent use of social media has added additional pressure in their lives (Magsi, Sahito & Magsi, 2016). In Pakistan women are harmed more than men (Bullying in Pakistan, 2018).

A study conducted in Sindh province to understand cyber bullying and to know its causes and effects on female students concluded that female students experience cyber bullying frequently in universities and that on the average each girl was cyber bullied at least 10 times in her academic life (Magsi, Agha & Magsi, 2017). Boulton, Lloyd et al. (2012) found that the proportion of cyber bullied is higher among female students as compared with male students and most of them are cyber bullied by male students. Adams (2010) found young girls have more chances of being cyberbullied as compared with boys. But according to Cunningham et al. (2015) and Erdur-Baker (2010) male students were more cyber bullied than their female counterparts. Moreover, it was found that girls mostly spread rumors while offended boys post pictures, posts or videos. More boys' cyber-bullied girls, so large number of girls are being victimized of bullying online.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have become a part of daily activities in HEIs. Bullying is a common phenomenon in educational institutions of Pakistan and with the growing use of ICT it has turned into cyberbullying. It is an emerging issue in the milieu of higher education. This study was conducted to explore the comparative experience of cyber bullying among the male and female students of online and conventional HEIs of Pakistan.

Objectives of the study

The study intended to:

1. Determine the extent and nature of cyber bullying among students of HEIs.

2. Know the differences in the extent and nature of cyber bullying among students of online and conventional mode HEIs.
3. Find out the difference in the extent and nature of cyber bullying experienced by male and female students.

Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the extent of cyber bullying experienced by the students of online and conventional HEIs.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the extent of cyber bullying experienced by male and female students.

H0₃: There is no significant difference in the acceptance of cyberbullying as a social phenomenon by the online and conventional mode students.

H0₄: There is no significant difference in the extent of cyber bullying experienced by male and female students.

H0₅₋₁₀: There is no significant difference between the experiences of students of the two modes of study regarding various types of cyberbullying.

H0₁₁₋₁₆: There is no significant difference between the experiences of students of male and female regarding various types of cyberbullying.

The hypotheses were tested at $\alpha=.05$

Methodology

Population of the study

The population of the study was all the students (1809) enrolled in Spring Semester 2019 at the Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of the Punjab as conventional participants of the study whereas all students (1139) enrolled the same Semester at the Department of Education, Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP) were considered as online participants.

Research Sample

A sample of 605 students with distribution of 317 from the IER, and 288 from the VUP were selected as sample using random sampling method. The lists of students of the online university were readily available at its relevant interface while the lists of students of IER were obtained from the office at request. Data were collected through Google form from online students, and were collected through printed copies from the conventional students.

Research instrument

A questionnaire based on various forms of cyberbullying i.e., flaming, harassment and stalking, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery and exclusion was developed by the researchers and validated by two experts. It was developed on a four -point Likert-type scale and consisted of total 30 statements. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure its validity. The value of Cronbach alpha was 0.77. By factor number of questions is given in the following table:

Forms of cyber bullying	No of questions
Presence and exposure of cyber bullying	5
Flaming	5
Harassment and stalking	4
Denigration	5
Impersonation	4
Outing and trickery	4
Exclusion	3

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using software SPSS 21. Frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation were applied as descriptive statistics. Data are presented for overall experiences and by types of cyberbullying. Independent sample t-test was applied to assess the significance of difference between the degree of cyber bullying experience by the students in the universities using two different learning modes and the male and female students.

Response rate

Table 1 shows that a total number of 520 (86%) of the sampled 605 students returned the Questionnaire with a distribution of 280 from the online university and 240 from the conventional university. Female respondents constituted 70% of the total respondents which is due to similar overall gender distribution in the teacher education programs as teaching is a choice profession for women.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by type of university and gender

Teaching Learning Mode	Gender	Number	Percentage
Online	Male	98	35.0
	female	182	65.0
	Total	280	100.0
Conventional	Male	58	24.2

	Female	182	75.8
	Total	240	100.0
Total	Male	156	30.0
	Female	364	70.0
	Male+Female	520	100.0

Overall Cyberbullying. More than half of the students (58.7%) had experienced some cyber bullying. They were either bullied or had bullied others at different degree levels from rarely to frequently. A slightly more than three fourths of the students consider cyberbullying a social reality and felt that nothing can be done to stop it. The SD (1.05) shows a great variation in the views about its possible control.

Table 2: Overall percentage of students who experienced cyberbullying and their views

	% of Students	Mean	SD
Experienced Cyber bullying	58.7	1.87	.632
Views about cyber bullying as a reality	67.6	2.25	1.05

Bullies and Bullied. Further analysis of the experience of cyberbullying was explored through three questions. Table 3 shows that the percentage of students bullied by others was higher than those who accepted that they bully other students. It was interesting to find out that majority of the students were bullied by their close friends.

Table 3 Percent of students as bullied and bullying

Statement	% and N of students who experienced bullying	Mean
I bully other students through internet	51.7 (254)	1.72
I am bullied by close friends through internet	52.1 (252)	1.83
I am bullied by other students through internet	58.7 (276)	1.87

By Study Mode and by Gender Difference. Table 4 shows that contrary to the more use of online platforms by the online students for their studies, cyberbullying was significantly more prevalent among the students of conventional university as the calculated 't' is significant beyond .001. Thus, the H₀₁ was rejected. The SD of the conventional mode of students' scores show a greater within group variation as compared with their counterparts in the virtual mode. But no significant difference was

observed between men and women students as both the means are narrowly close. Therefore, H_{02} was accepted.

Table 4 By mode of study and by gender difference in the overall extent of cyberbullying experienced by students

Variable	Levels	Mean	SD	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed) $\alpha=05$
Mode of study	Online	1.58	.542	427	-7.426	.000*
	Conventional	2.01	.655			
Gender	Male	1.80	.618	427	.508	.607
	Female	1.77	.638			

Cyberbullying as Reality to Stay. No statistically significant difference was observed between the students of the two modes of study regarding the acceptance of cyberbullying as a social reality that will stay. Similarly, both the male and female students have accepted this phenomenon as a social reality not to be reverted. Thus, the H_{03} and H_{04} were accepted. However, the SDs for each of the four groups show a great within group variation in the feeling of intensity of experiencing cyberbullying.

Table 5 By mode of study and by gender difference in views of students about cyberbullying as social phenomena

Variable	Levels	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig. ((2-tailed) $\alpha=05$
Mode of Study	Online	2.22	1.02	492	-.664	.507
	Conventional	2.28	1.08			
Gender	Male	2.22	1.02	492	-.435	.664
	Female	2.26	1.06			

Types of Cyberbullying. Among the students who experienced cyberbullying in one or more of the forms, Exclusion was the most practiced with Outing and Trickery as the least practiced type. The data show that excluding a person from the social media group is a significant mode to bully others.

Table 6 Overall extent of various forms of cyberbullying experienced by students

Type of	% students	Rank by %	Mean	SD
Flaming	61.5	2	2.20	0.528
Harassment and stalking	59.9	3	1.70	0.507
Denigration	59.2	4	2.09	0.585
Impersonation	49.6	5	1.79	0.667
Outing and Trickery	42.6	6	1.75	0.661
Exclusion	66.7	1	2.40	0.736

Data in Table 7 show that the mean scores of the students of the conventional mode were higher than those of the online students on all six types of bullying. But the difference between the opinion of the students of the two modes of study was statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ on two of the six forms of cyberbullying, that is, Flaming and Exclusion. In the light of analysis, only H_{05} and H_{010} were rejected. More students in the conventional university were using angry and vulgar language as compared with the students of the online university. Similarly, they used exclusion from online groups as a mean of bullying others.

Table 7 Difference in the extent of various types of cyberbullying experienced by students of online and conventional modes of teaching and learning

Type of Bullying	Mode of study	Mean	SD	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed) $\alpha=05$
Flaming	Online	2.12	.553	318	-2.35	.019*
	Conventional	2.26	.493			
Stalking and Harassment	Online	1.66	.505	320	-1.21	.227
	Conventional	1.73	.508			
Denigration	Online	2.05	.583	312	-1.20	.231
	Conventional	2.13	.586			
Impersonation	Online	1.75	.729	297	-.763	.446
	Conventional	1.81	.601			
Outing and Trickery	Online	1.68	.665	285	-1.54	.124
	Conventional	1.80	.654			
Exclusion	Online	2.29	.748	327	.254	.012*
	Conventional	2.50	.713			

Table 8 shows that the mean scores were higher for female students on four of the six types of cyberbullying while Impersonation and Exclusion was experienced slightly more by the male students as compared with the female students. However, none of the gender differences were statistically significant. None of the H_{011-16} relating to gender differences could be rejected.

Table 8 Difference in the extent of various types of cyberbullying experienced by male and female students

Type of Bullying	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Flaming	Male	2.20	.554	318	.020	.984

	Female	2.19	.520			
Stalking and	Male	1.68	.569			
Harassment	Female	1.70	.480	320	-.267	.789
Denigration	Male	2.08	.646			
	Female	2.09	.559	312	-.201	.841
Impersonation	Male	1.85	.740			
	Female	1.76	.639	297	1.036	.301
Outing and	Male	1.73	.662			
Trickery	Female	1.75	.662	285	-.224	.823
Exclusion	Male	2.45	.785			
	Female	2.38	.716	327	.602	.548

Results

Results of this study show that cyber bullying is an issue of high concern for students of HEIs as more than half (58.7%) of the students had experienced cyber bullying in different forms. This percentage is more than the double reported earlier in Pakistan stating that every fourth student experience cyberbullying (“Bullying in Pakistan”, 2018). The most prevalent form was the Exclusion (66.7%) followed by Flaming and Harassment with Outing and Trickery at the tail end. The students of conventional university experienced significantly more cyberbullying as compared with their counterparts in the online university. All forms of cyberbullying were more common among the students of conventional mode as compared with the students of online mode but this difference was statistically significant only in the two most common types of cyberbullying i.e., Exclusion and Flaming. No significant differences were observed between the experiences of male and female students as overall and by various forms of cyberbullying.

Not only that cyberbullying has become common digital social feature, majority of the students consider that nothing can be done to prevent it.

Conclusion and Discussion

Recent researchers conclude that cyberbullying is a critical issue for significant proportions of students in their educational life spans around the globe (Myers & Cowie, 2019). It has been mentioned in different studies that excessive use of technology in routine life generated cyberbullying as a common phenomenon. Results of the present study show that cyber bullying is rapidly increasing in the HEIs in Pakistan as the proportion of students experiencing it has more than doubled as identified by “Bullying in Pakistan”, 2018.

A very limited number of studies have been conducted on cyber bullying in online HEIs. The present study is the first of its kind in Pakistan. The results of this study show that

different forms of cyber bullying exist among online students. Generally, it is speculated that cyber bullying would be occurring more frequently among the students of online mode of study as they are frequent users of various digital tools. But the results of the study show this phenomenon was significantly more common among the students of the conventional university. May be more engagement of the online students with digital tools for learning purposes helps them refrain from their negative use. Nonetheless it is matter of concern in both types of HEIs. More studies are needed to explore the reasons of indulging into cyber bullying and the ways to control it.

No significant differences were observed between the experiences of male and female students as overall and by various forms of cyberbullying. Earlier studies are also not conclusive about the extent of cyberbullying experienced by men and women students. Some studies have concluded that women students as more victims of cyberbullying as compared with the male students (Boulton, Lloyd et al. 2012; Adams, 2010; Magsi, Agha. & Magsi, 2017; “Bullying in Pakistan 2018”). While, Cunningham et al. (2015) and Erdur-Baker (2010) found that male students were more cyber bullied than their female counterparts.

The students consider cyberbullying as such a social reality to stay. It appears that they are not familiar with the Law on Cyberbullying i.e. the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016. As such they do not know how to protect themselves. It is assumed that instead of protecting themselves they indulge in the same activity by responding to the bully or they victimize other students.

Recommendations

It is apprehended that cyberbullying will grow further with the continuous advancement and availability of digital tools to the masses. So, cyberbullying needs to be addressed and understood in all levels and all types of educational institutions of Pakistan. It is recommended that:

- Cyber Law in Pakistan should be part of students’ discipline rules and advisory services in the HEIs. Similar to the Committees constituted under the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010, committees should be constituted to deal with the cases of cyberbullying in the HEIs.
- Pakistani media including social media and civil society activist should highlight this social issue and conduct awareness campaigns on cyberbullying in HEIs. Guidebooks should be prepared for students to understand and the ways to respond to the bullies and report to the relevant bodies.
- Cyberbullying affects adversely on students’ mental health and their academic life. Stakeholders of education should conduct more researches on various aspects of this issue.

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