

A Study on the Prevention of Cyberbullying in Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine workplace cyberbullying as a cybercrime. Based on deterrence theory and social influence theory, this study builds a model of antecedents to prevent cyberbullying in workplaces. For this, this article conducts a survey of 305 Korean workers and uses SPSS 18.0 for hierarchical regression analysis. The results of this survey being, first, the certainty of detection prevents employees' intention to cyberbullying in the workplace while the severity of penalty and has no effect. Second, subjective norms and descriptive norms prevent employees' intention to cyberbullying in the workplace. The results show that social influence is more important to control members' behavior in workplace cyberbullying than corporate policy. And, this article is the first to investigate the preventers of employees' intentions to cyberbullying in workplace in the perspective of cybercrime.

KEYWORDS

Cyberbullying, Cybercrime, Deterrence Theory, Social Influence Theory

INTRODUCTION

As information technology has been introduced in work environments, there is considerable evidence that cyberbullying in workplace has morphed into the preferred mode or style of harassment amongst employees (Borstorff et al., 2007). Cyberbullying is usually defined as using electronic media to inflict intentional and repeated harm to a target similar to conventional bullying (Chris, 2012). However, cyberbullying has some additional features that makes it unique from traditional bullying (Douglas et al., 2003).

The first characteristic, anonymity occurs when the victim does not know the identity of the perpetrator (Pettalia et al., 2013). The anonymity associated with the use of a computer offers perpetrators a certain level of freedom from social constraints and from moral responsibilities (Calvete et al., 2010). In addition, unlike traditional bullying where size matters, cyber bullies can be small in stature and physically weaker than their victims (Li, 2007; 2008). Consequently, anyone can become a bully in cyberspace. The second characteristic is publicity. Cyberbullying can involve a very large audience such as when video clips are circulated on the internet (Pettalia et al., 2013). Harmful messages can also reach huge audiences at an incredible speed causing maximum damage to targets quickly (Meredith, 2010). Finally, cyberbullying can occur at any time of the day and in any place (Li, 2008). Cyber bullies have unrestricted access to their victims in the form of email, mobile phones, social networking sites and instant text messaging (Pettalia et al., 2013). Therefore, it is difficult for individuals to escape the perpetrators without giving up the use of these technologies (Meredith, 2010; Pettalia et al., 2013). Consequently, the "bullying" continues even when victims are away from their work (Farley et al., 2013). Researchers have found that because of the unique

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characteristics of cyberbullying, a single offensive act is sufficient to constitute bullying behavior (Pettalia et al., 2013). Especially, Coyne, et al. (2016) suggested that cyberbullying exposure displayed a stronger negative relationship with job satisfaction when compared to offline bullying.

Investigations into bullying or cyberbullying have typically been conducted in school settings (Baruch, 2005). For example, Porhola (2016) explored the continuities in bullying from school contexts to university contexts and suggested that the ways in which engagement in bullying processes at school was associated with the development of individuals' peer relationships and their position within the peer group. In the context of workplace, most of researchers have examined traditional bullying in which an employee is systematically exposed to repeated negative treatment from supervisors (downward bullying), colleagues (horizontal bullying) or subordinates (upwards bullying) over a long period of time (Branch et al., 2013). And, Herchcovis (2011) identified three distinguishing characteristics of workplace bullying: it is persistent, frequent, and entails a power imbalance. Power imbalance indicates that aggression behavior can be labeled as workplace bullying only when the bully has more power than the victim. Power can be from either formal (e.g. higher organizational position) or informal (e.g. networks of people) sources (Branch et al., 2013).

For the past two decades, workplace cyberbullying has become a hot topic in the media and has triggered much discussion in enterprises (Branch et al., 2013). Although a lot of researchers of workplace cyberbullying argue that digital technologies used in the workplace increase in cyberbullying in workplace (Sprigg et al., 2012), it has yet to be substantially investigated (Privitera and Campbell, 2009).

Technoethics is an interdisciplinary field focusing on the moral and ethical aspects and repercussions of technology upon society (Luppiciini and Adell, 2008; Luppiciini, 2010). While the field encompasses all technology and is in no way limited to emerging technologies in general and in particular cyber communication technologies are of particular importance to workplace due to their heightened capacity to increase the work performance of employees, but due to the negative ethical issues that cyber communication technologies are enshrouded by. Especially, relevant researchers argue that workplace cyberbullying behaviors can be treated as a kind of crime, for it can produce a hostile work climate and violate organizational norms and policies (Sprigg et al., 2012; Privitera and Campbell, 2009). Therefore, this paper will examine workplace cyberbullying as a crime which is just committed in the cyberspace but can have serious repercussions on workplace. More specifically, this study assesses the influence of environmental factors such as deterrence and social influence. For this, deterrence theory and social influence theory are used as the theoretical foundation to build a model of antecedents to prevent cyberbullying in workplaces.

I begin this paper with a review of the relevant literature in order to lay the theoretical foundation for developing an integrated theoretical model that can be tested empirically. Next, I discuss the instrument development process and its validation. Thereafter, I discuss in detail the methodology used for this survey-based study. Finally, I provide a discussion of the findings and conclude with the implications for theory and practice in addition to avenues for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In this paper, I propose and evaluate an empirical model in order to understand the various preventers on employee intention to cyberbullying in the workplace. In general, issues related to cyberbullying behaviors, such as what motivates people to hesitate cyberbullying, what motivates people to carry out actions that are prescribed by organizations, etc., can be studied through the lens of theories borrowed from disciplines including psychology, sociology, and criminology that provide insights into behaviors, motivations, values, and norms.

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