

Chapter 1

Introduction

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present an introduction to this book. They explain the motivation that drove them in the research and draft an outline of the whole book.

MOTIVATION

Contributions of Information Technology (IT) to preservation, support and development of generally perceived public health are numerous. Some of the recent ones include analysis and prediction of the spread of epidemics (Aramaki, Maskawa & Morita, 2011), analysis of health data (Buntin et al., 2011; Kitajima, Rzepka & Araki, 2014) or construction of biomedical ontologies (Smith et al., 2005). However, most of these contributions address physical sphere of public health. The mental or psychological part, although equally important, has been mostly disregarded.

On the other hand, the recent decade has brought to light a problem of unethical behaviors in Internet environments, which has been greatly impairing public mental health in adults and, for the most, in younger users and children. It is the problem of *cyberbullying (CB)*, defined as exploitation of open online means of communication, such as Internet forum boards, or Social Networking Services (SNS) to convey harmful and disturbing information about private individuals, often children and students.

Although the problem of humiliating and slandering people through the Internet has existed almost as long as communication via Internet between people, the appearance of new devices, such as smartphones and tablet computers, which allow using this medium not only at home, work or school but also in motion, sometimes with different access points and simplified anonymity, has further exacerbated that problem.

Messages classifiable as cyberbullying, include ridiculing someone's personality, body type, or appearance, slandering or spreading rumors and insinuations. Some cases of cyberbullying lead the victims to self-mutilation or suicides, or on the other hand, attacking their offenders. In USA, a great focus on this issue began in 2006 after a 13-year-old girl from Missouri committed suicide after receiving bullying messages on Myspace (<https://myspace.com/>). Her story was a beginning of a wide debate over the use of and the influence the Internet has on young people (Megan Meier Foundation, n.d.). Similar cases have been noticed in other countries, including Japan, on which this research is focused. Growing number of cyberbullying cases around the world opened an ongoing public debate on whether such messages could be spotted earlier to prevent the tragedies from happening and on the freedom of speech on the Internet in general (Leets, 2001).

One of the countries in which the problem is considered as more severe in comparison with other countries is Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008), where bullying in general (including cyberbullying) has been considered as one of the most common cause of suicides among school pupils for many years (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2011, 2013).

The problem of cyberbullying in particular has become widely discussed in Japan after the so called Takigawa High School Incident, which happened in July 2007. In the incident, a 17 year old boy, after being bullied on an informal school Website by four of his classmates, committed a suicide, by jumping from the school roof during classes. The Takigawa High School Incident became a starting point for a country-wide discussion about cyberbullying, and gave birth to a national program for prevention of bullying and cyberbullying in schools, founded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, (2008). Within the program, during the same year 2007, Japanese school personnel and members of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)¹ have started monitoring activities under the general name Internet Patrol (later: net-patrol) to spot Web sites containing such inappropriate contents. However, the net-patrol has been performed manually as a volunteer work, while countless amounts of data on the Internet make this an uphill task.

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