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RESEARCH PAPER

Effects of Guardianship on Online Harassment: Case of University Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

[1] Asghar Ullah Khan   [2] Muhammad Imran Khan*   [3] Dr. Zain Ul Abiden Malik

1. Ph D in Mass Communication from department of Communication and Media Studies, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP Pakistan
2. Lecturer Department of Communication and Media Studies Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP Pakistan
3. Visiting Assistant Professor, Pir Mir Ali Arid Agricultural University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	The main objective of the research study was to measure the relationship of online guardianship with the chances of online harassment that faced by the universities students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The concept of guardianship was adopted from Routine Activity Theory (RAT). It was a descriptive and survey analytical research. The population of the study was all universities students of KP. 800 Students were selected from the 6 universities of KP. The collected data were processed, tabulated, explained and interpreted through multiple regression analysis. The findings of the studies reveal that the guardian's restriction of online activities and guardian's monitoring of online activities of the young adults decrease the likelihood of cyber harassment. In the light of the said findings, certain major recommendations were made in order to achieve the maximum benefits of the study.

Introduction

Internet has acquired central stage in modern human life, proving to be a catalyst of ideas and living style (Cohen-Almagor, 2018). The use of the internet and the social networking sites (SNS) are never without threats.

The online threats is a relatively vast concept, it may be categorized into two levels: macro (i.e. governments, institutions or multinational corporations) and micro (i.e. individual). The current study is limited to the extent of individual victim. Although there are many categories of online threats with many terms, the current study focuses only on cyber harassment.

Cyber harassment has appeared to be a hidden social crime (Kim, Colwell, Kata, Boyle, & Georgiades, 2018)which includes the spreading of harmful lies, giving rude or threatening remarks against individuals, spreading of humiliating rumors, posting of photographs or uploading videos intended to embarrass others(Marganski & Melander, 2018; Marret & Choo, 2017). Many cyber harassers have turned social media platforms

into forums of harassment and exploitation for other users, by threatening them to harm or kill them, or disclose sensitive information about them online (Marganski & Melander, 2018). More often in past researches, the term cyber harassment replaces the terms "cyber bullying, and cyber stalking. The current study also conceptualizes these terms under one heading of 'cyber harassment'.

In cyber communication world, the feelings and emotions are quite frequently injured, as no one can see the feelings and emotions of the user sitting on the other end, however such injuries can be avoided if the user is provided with the appropriate guardianship (Wright, 2015).Absence of capable guardians means the absence of parent/ guardian monitoring and constant restriction on the online activities of their dependent, over what he does (Wright, 2017). Guardianship is also recognized as of keeping check for what one does on the internet (Wright, 2015). In on-line communication, people are usually facing social threats and need social actions for guardianship. Therefore, this study includes how people safeguard themselves socially against cyber harassment.

The objective of the study is to measure the effects of guardianship on the chances of online harassment that students face.

Literature Review

Guardianship is one of the major concept of Routine Activity Theory (RAT), which is expected to decrease the risk of victimization. Theoretically, effective guardianship is expected to disrupt opportunity structures, while absence of effective guardianship is expected to increase the risk of harassment and, such as the other principles of RAT, the existing literature mostly supports these principles (Spano & Freilich, 2009). The guardianship element of the theory has arguably gone through the most theoretical refinement and empirical examination in past researches (e.g., Felson (1995). With the passage of time researchers have regarded guardianship as having social (e.g. presence of effective guardianships) and physical (e.g. target hardening) dimensions (see, for instance, Hollis-Peel, Reynald, Van Bavel, Elffers, and Welsh (2011), for a review). On the other hand, Hollis, Felson, and Welsh (2013) has called into question the manner of conceptualization and operationalization of guardianship in a past study, suggesting that each and every guardianship is social in nature.

In terms of the cyber harassment literature, the effects of guardianship on harassment have been conflicting. Research that has included measures of firewall usage, antivirus programs, or other forms of online capable guardianship have yielded null or theoretically contrary results (e.g., (Holt & Bossler, 2013; Holt & Turner, 2012; Ngo & Paternoster, 2011; Reyns & Henson, 2016). Yet, these findings may be a reflection of measurement choices, or aberrations given the populations under study. Based on prior research examining online victimization, guardianship routines likely to reduce harassment are those that protect individuals' personal information and/or undercut the targeting behaviours of motivated offenders in crime and situation-specific ways.

It is clear that previous routine activity research and cyber harassment findings underscore the importance of further investigating guardianship as a person based concept. Therefore, the present study uses the previously discussed rationale to assess the effects of guardianship on cyber harassment among university students. Specifically, we

focus on the effects of the parent/guardian restriction on the dependent online activities by restricting online activities on only specific days of the week, to use recommended websites, filtering software to protect from unwanted materials and by regularly checking the websites they visited. These activities are associated with varying levels of responsibility for guardianship among guardians, as described by Felson (1995).

This study investigates the effect of guardianship on individual victims ofcyber harassment of six top ranked universities (i.e. Khyber Medical University Peshawar, University of Peshawar, University of Agriculture, Peshawar, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, University of Engineering and Technology Peshawar and Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan) students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan by applying RAT. The concept of guardianship which adopted from RAT is the parent/guardian restriction on online activities to protect their dependent from online harassment.

Hypothesis: It is more likely that students who use internet under higher level of guardianship will face significantly lower level of cyber harassment.

Material and Methods

This study adopted cross-sectional survey research method to explore the phenomenon. The data was collected from the students of six leading universities of KP province of Pakistan. Student data was obtained from their respective universities. The total number of students enrolled at the time was 51887. The sample of 800 students was selected using stratified sampling method. A close-ended questionnaire measuring the concepts of the study was distributed among the selected sample. To ensure that respondents fill the questionnaire appropriately, each questionnaire was administered separately and the respondent was requested to fill the questionnaire at spot so that if any problem they face during the process, the researcher will help them to sort it out.

Measurement of Concepts

Cyber harassment was measured by set of questions adapted from Akbulut, Sahin, and Eristi (2010). The measure included seventeen (17) statements asking respondents about those instances where individuals receive messages and materials through instant messaging software, email and social media which are threatening, mocking, and insulting messages and materials include bad things about the receiver or his friends, and also blocking or ignoring from certain social groups. The cumulative mean value was the individual's answer of how often they faced cyber harassment. Chronbach Alpha of cyber harassment was .86.The statements were answered through using five point Likert-scale, where 1 means never, 2 means rarely, 3 means sometimes, 4 means often and 5 means very often.

The central premise of the current study was to more fully examine the role of guardianship in the chances of cyber harassment.This variable of guardianship was measured through two questions. The questions are measured at ordinal level. The first question was how often your parent/guardian restricts your online activities, having three statement which included (a) Restrict your online activities on only specific days of the week (b) restrict you to use recommended Websites (c) Using filtering software to protect

you from unwanted materials? While the second question was how often your parent/guardian monitor your online activities by regularly checking the websites you visited? The questions were answered through five response options of ordinal categories, where 1 means never, 2 means rarely, 3 means sometimes, 4 means often and 5 means very often.

Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis, multiple regression was used. No collinearity was found between the independent variables. The alpha level is .05.

Table 1
Multiple regression analysis for effects of guardian's restrictions and monitoring on cyber harassment

	Mean	SD	SE	β
Guardian's restriction of online activities	2.03	1.00	.02	-.28***
Guardian's monitoring of online activities	1.67	1.06	.02	-.16***
Adjusted R²= .137				
F= 64.24				
p= .000				

N=800; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Multiple regression was performed to predict the effects of guardian's restriction of online activities and monitoring of online activities by regularly checking the websites respondents visited on cyber harassment. $F_{(2, 797)}$, = 64.238, *p*= .000 shows significant relationship between the variables. Adjusted R^2= .137 suggested that the overall model explains 13.7% of the variation in the cyber harassment due to guardian's restriction of online activities and parent/guardian monitoring of online activities by regularly checking the websites respondents visited. One unit increase in guardian's restriction of online activities will decrease cyber harassment by .28 unit, and parent/guardian monitoring of online activities by regularly checking the websites respondents visited will decrease cyber harassment by .16 unit.

Discussion

Protective measures taken during internet use (measured under the theoretical construct of lack of capable guardianship) had an effect on the cyber harassment. The current study indicated that guardian's restriction and monitoring decrease the chance of being the victim of cyber harassment. Previous studies also reached at the same conclusion. For example Meier and Miethe (1993) stated that student's bonds with their family or their social capital might be able to proactively prevent the said victimization. In regard to measures examining lack of capable guardianship, findings from the study of Marcum, Higgins, and Ricketts (2010) indicated that protective software had no significant effect on online victimization for survey respondents. However, Marcum et al. (2010) revealed that, the presence of another person in the room during internet use was shown to have significant effects on students and Marcum et al. suggested that more active

monitoring of adolescents might allow parents and guardians to be proactive in preventing victimization.

In the study of Navarro, Serna, Martínez, and Ruiz-Oliva (2013) indicated that, no effects were seen for checking the web pages that youngsters visit on the internet or for installing software that filters or blocks websites. Navarro et al. (2013) argued that, this lack of significant effects on online harassment may relate to the fact that youngsters access the internet in places where internet use regulation is less restrictive or where it is not monitored.

However, findings obtained for the relationship between parental mediation and cyber victimization suggest that, the influence of restrictive mediation and checking and supervising the software installed shows a moderate protective effect on cyber harassment(Navarro et al., 2013). This is in line with current findings showing a significant effect of monitoring practices on preventing online harassment. For instance, parental supervision of the software installed in computers allows parents to know the type of interactive technologies their children employ so they can help them become more familiar with that software in order to make recommendations about its appropriate use. Parental monitoring may also prove worthy to identify and intervene early if they notice that their children may be targets of harassment, thus advising how to deal with this situation.

Conclusion

Guardian's supervision is a key factor for protecting the young users of internet against online harassment. Like the other two constructs of RAT, protective measures taken during internet use (measured under the theoretical construct of lack of capable guardianship) had significant effect on the chances of online harassment measured in the study. The analysis found support for the statement that online restriction would decrease the chance of harassment. University students who had this type of restriction were less likely to be harassed online. This study indicated that the guardian's restriction of online activities and guardian's monitoring of online activities by checking the websites their children have visited and they review their internet use decrease the likelihood of harassment measured in the current study. Result also accepted the hypothesis that "It is more likely that students who use internet under higher level of guardianship will face significantly lower level of cyber harassment".

Policy implications and Research Suggestions

From the knowledge gained through this study, hopefully more effective policies and programs can be introduced to educate internet user and their families about protecting themselves while online.

It would be ineffective to attempt to develop prevention programs that encouraged adolescence to decrease their use of the Internet. Use of the Internet is often vital for educational, information, entertainment purposes, and many young people use the Internet to socialize and connect with others. Rather than encouraging adolescence to discontinue socializing on the Internet, it would be more effective to educate adolescence on the threats present online so they are aware of the potential for victimization.

Youths using the Internet should be educated to only—participate in cyber communication with peoples they know and trust. If youths limit their online communication to peoples they know, the risk of victimization should be lower.

Educational institutions should introduce a separate office to stop cyber harassment of users. If there are strict rules to safeguard students and handle cyber harassment, the chances of reporting are higher that will eventually lead to handle to control the issue.

As this study was limited to few universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, studies with same variables can be carried out in other areas of the country.

Also there is a sufficient opportunities for future study in this area. Surveying a wider age range of young people, also those in different geographical areas, would add to the knowledge base.

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