

# *Analysis of the Phenomenon of Cyberbullying in China and Its Countermeasures*

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of the Internet and various media platforms, the phenomenon of cyberbullying has emerged and intensified, causing great harm to individuals, families and even the whole society. This paper analyzes in detail the reasons for the occurrence of cyberbullying, explores the solutions to cyberbullying in response to these reasons, and proposes multiple means such as national legislation, social restraint, education and guidance, and technical support from platforms to jointly prevent and manage the growing phenomenon of cyberbullying.

**Keywords:** cyberbullying, laws and regulations, platform technology, education, social restraint

## 1. Introduction

At present, most studies on cyberbullying in China are conducted from a single perspective, such as public opinion research from moral and ethical aspects or sentencing research from legal aspects. But cyberbullying is a complex social problem involving moral, legal and psychological aspects.

Aiming at the problem of single research on cyberbullying, our study analyzes the causes of cyberbullying from multiple perspectives, and gives countermeasures against cyberbullying from social morality, platform technology, national legal norms, education level and social moral constraints.

In this study, we designed and published a questionnaire about cyberbullying, recovered more than 300 valid results, and analyzed the questionnaire results with sample characteristic behavior analysis method. The results confirmed the correctness and effectiveness of the theoretical analysis and countermeasures. These countermeasures and suggestions have some implications for the research and policy making of cyberbullying.

## 2. Background

With the rapid development of the Internet, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.051 billion according to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) reporter, and various Internet platforms have become the mainstream daily social and speech gathering place for Internet users. There are not only positive online phenomena, but also cyberbullying and cyber violence such as insulting and abusing, spreading rumors and so on.

In April 2022, a woman asked a courier to deliver food to her hearing-impaired father during an epidemic quarantine in Shanghai. After paying the courier and expressing her gratitude, many netizens still considered her petty and insulted and attacked her, causing her to jump to her death. They are just the tip of the iceberg of cyberbullying and cyberbullying. While hundreds of millions of people are using the Internet to improve themselves and their lives, more and more Internet users are abusing others and making inappropriate and excessive comments without any knowledge or understanding.

### 3. Questionnaire Feedback Data

In this study we designed and published a questionnaire on cyberbullying, and 312 valid responses were collected. The basic characteristics of the respondents include: 1. Gender: about half male and half female; 2. People aged between 18 and 40, accounting for about 75%; 3. Educational background: in-service personnel account for 50%, undergraduate and postgraduate students account for 35%.

The following are some questions of the questionnaire and the results of the feedback data:

How long do you think it will take victims of cyberbullying to recover? (one-choice question)

Table 1: The result of this question.

Option	Numbers	Proportion
Within a week	32	10.26%
Within a month	68	21.79%
Within half a year	82	26.28%
years	73	23.4%
irrecoverable	34	10.9%
It depends	23	7.37%

How do you think cyberbullying affects victims? (multiple choice question)

Table 2: The result of this question.

option	Numbers	Proportion
defamation	164	52.56%
Cause psychological harm	134	42.95%
Influence personal values	162	51.92%
Mood depression, serious can lead to suicide	164	52.56%

This table shows about 53% believe that online violence damages one's reputation, and about 53% believe that online violence can make people depressed, which can lead to suicide.





How do you think to help victims of cyberbullying? (multiple Choice question)

Table 3: The result of this question.

option	Numbers	Proportion
Give psychological counseling	74	23.72%
The law punishes the abuser	162	51.92%
Ignore, time will forget everything	76	24.36%







This table shows about 52% said laws that punish abusers severely are needed to help victims. What kind of response do you take when you are bullied online? (multiple choice question)

Table 4: The result of this question.

option	Numbers	Proportion
Fight back with legal action	158	 50.64%
Just scold back	28	 8.97%
Take revenge in the real world	33	 10.58%
ignore	93	 29.81%

This table shows some 50.6% said they should take legal action against online violence abusers. Now the phenomenon of Internet violence is becoming more and more serious. What do you think is the best way to maintain the Internet order? (multiple choice question)

Table 5: The result of this question.

option	Numbers	Proportion
The government promulgates Internet laws	104	 33.33%
Organize civilized online publicity activities	93	 29.81%
On one's own consciousness	90	 28.85%
Website platform and other maintainers to strengthen supervision and management	87	 27.88%
Strengthen school education	162	 51.92%
Strengthen family education	168	 53.85%
Existence is reasonable, do not interfere	0	0%

This table shows about 52% and 54% people believe that the best way to maintain good order on the Internet is to strengthen school education and family education, and about 33% think that the government promulgates Internet laws and regulations is the best way.

#### 4. The Analysis of Cyberbullying and Its Reasons for Occurrence

##### 4.1. The Definition of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of violence with serious harm and bad influence. It refers to a type of speech, text, pictures and videos published on the Internet by Internet users with five characteristics: defamation, slander, violation of reputation, damage to rights and interests, and incitement. This type of speech, text, pictures and videos can cause damage to the reputation, rights and interests of others, including online speech violence, online rumor spreading, irrational human flesh search and other types, in the form of text, pictures, videos, etc., through the unconfirmed or confirmed online events, the online publication of inaccurate or excessive statements, causing damage to the person's reputation; in the online public the person's real-life. "The person's personal privacy is made public on the Internet, infringing on his or her right to privacy; the person's personal rights are infringed upon by actions and comments that intrude on the normal life of the person and his or her friends and relatives" [1].

One of the most typical of these is the arbitrary judgment of others without knowledge or evidence. In such cases, people make malicious assumptions and stigmatize people they have never met with various accusations. When public opinion tends to be lopsided, people lose the ability to think independently and follow it to produce excessive remarks, malicious slander, and personal attacks on others. This in turn causes psychological damage to the abused, and even has more serious consequences such as suicide.

## **4.2. Analysis of the Reasons for the Occurrence of Cyberbullying**

### **4.2.1. Extensiveness and Convenience of Online Comments**

On August 31, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 50th Statistical Report on the Development Status of China's Internet (hereinafter referred to as: "Report") in Beijing. The Report shows that as of June 2022, the size of China's Internet users was 1.051 billion, and the Internet penetration rate reached 74.4% [2]. China has entered the era of universal Internet. Among them, the proportion of using cell phones to access the Internet reached 99.6%. In today's cell phone does not leave the hand, anyone can use the cell phone at anytime and anywhere to publish comments on a certain event a certain person, comments published with unprecedented convenience.

### **4.2.2. Lack of Platform Supervision and Defective Recommendation Mechanism**

The Internet is growing rapidly, and social media platforms are mushrooming. Short video platforms are the preference of the younger generation. According to the report, the user scale of short videos has grown the most significantly, "with an increase of 28.05 million from December 2021, and by June 2022, the number of Internet users using online videos (including short videos) had reached 995 million, with the usage rate of online videos at 94.6%" [2]. Most of the platforms providing online video services use "recommendation algorithm" mechanism to provide personalized works to users. The principle of the algorithm is to analyze the data to find out the type of works users like, and then keep feeding the same type of works. This mechanism tends to cause users to receive only their favorite works or works with a single point of view, and the system will block out works with different points of view and different types of works, resulting in the information cocoon effect. If some online violent comments take the lead, users who are pushed to this work will follow the clouds without knowing the whole story, they ignore some rational and questioning voices, and just see that most people have posted comments that fit their own psychology, so they follow the same comments, and even become a "group emotional venting bucket" for such users. They even become the "group emotional venting bucket" of such users, thus causing cyberbullying.

On the other hand, most platforms are not regulated enough or have no regulatory mechanism at all. They allow unverified content and remarks to be posted on the platform, which amplifies the spread of such information through recommendation algorithms. Some platforms even take the initiative to spread hashtag language with cyberbullying and promote events to pursue user fervor. All these indirectly lead to cyberbullying.

### **4.2.3. The Anonymity of Cyberbullying**

Anonymity has become a shield of cyberbullying. The anonymity of users of online platforms protects the privacy of users who comment, but this creates a situation where people can be irresponsible with their comments, "no one knows who posted them anyway" is a thought that many people have when posting comments. People say what they want without thinking about the

consequences. The secrecy of Internet users reduces the risk and cost of cyberbullying, and people do not have to pay any legal price for their comments, which makes it easier to indulge in their argumentative nature and ignorant enthusiasm, and even the darkness and malice of human nature.

#### **4.2.4. The Varies Quality and the Weak Legal Awareness of Internet Users**

The Report shows that as of June 2022, the percentages of Internet users aged 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49 were 17.2%, 20.3% and 19.1%, respectively, higher than those of other age groups; the percentage of the Internet user group aged 50 and above was 25.8% [2]. There are Internet users of all ages, with varying degrees of education. The legal awareness of many Internet users is weak, and the relevant provisions in “the Civil Code, the Personal Rights Part and the Tort Liability Part, the Criminal Law, the Network Security Law and other regulations” are enough to show that the law attaches importance to the problem of cyberbullying. This only shows that “it is the Internet users are not familiar with these legal regulations, and the legal awareness of network security is not really established in the heart of every Internet user” [1].

### **5. Countermeasures Against the Phenomenon of Cyberbullying**

#### **5.1. Platform Technology Level**

In response to the surge in cyberbullying deaths in the past two years and the pressure of public opinion, some online media platforms have taken some measures. Such as ShakeYin in each comment box added "the good words to make good karma, and evil words hurt people's hearts" message; The official of Tik Tok encouraged to inform against malicious comments and excessive speech. These acts play a certain role in warning and punishing before and after the events. Meanwhile, people hope that the timely filtering of user comments and private messages can kill the malicious comments in the cradle.

##### **5.1.1. Instant Blocking Mechanism for Malicious Comments**

From the technical level, people can use the opinion analysis method of machine learning to sub word the user's comments and then evaluate the emotion of each sub word. If the words are negative, malicious or slanderous, it will return the warning information to inform the user that the comment has unfriendly tendency and will not be published. Thus, the users' comments are blocked at the time of commenting on the web storm speech.

##### **5.1.2. Comment Association Use Permission Mechanism**

When users post comments, the machine learning analysis method is used to evaluate the danger of users' comments and private message information, to rate users' speech according to the malicious rating of speech and frequency of malicious speech. The user's comment rating is automatically associated with the user's comment authority. For example, users with a slight malicious speech level are automatically banned to comment for one day; with a moderate malicious speech level are banned for one month; and with an extremely severe malicious speech level are permanently banned of using the platform.

Of course, from the view of profit, the platform surely hopes to retain more users, and may be reluctantly adopting such initiatives resulting in the loss of users. Consequentially, weighing between the harm to society even the country and the platform's own economic interests is important. When necessary, the platform needs to make concessions, or rely on national laws to restrain the behavior of the platform.

## 5.2. National Legal Level

### 5.2.1. Vigorously Promote Relevant Laws and Regulations

Although the part of cyberbullying has been contained in the Civil Code of personality rights and tort liability through national legislation, in like "Criminal Law", "Network Security Law" and other regulations introduced, the phenomenon of cyberbullying is endless, even more and more intense. Since Internet users' weak legal awareness is one of the reasons, it can be solved by a variety of news media power, in which to vigorously promote the relevant laws and regulations and establish public legal awareness is most significant. In the construction of network legal ethics, society must continue to strengthen the popularization of law and education. It can be improved on citizens' ability to discern the content of online information and abnormal public opinion guidance, thus not to be led by public opinion or being prejudiced and form a critical spirit. Continuously enhance network security and moral awareness is still a long and hard process.

### 5.2.2. The Increasing of Violations' Cost

According to Article 246 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Punishment for Public Security Administration, "Anyone who publicly insults another person by violence or other methods or fabricates facts to slander another person, and the circumstances are serious, shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than three years, detention, control or deprivation of political rights"; according to Article 42 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Public Security Administration Punishment, "Anyone who commits any of the following acts shall be sentenced to detention for not more than five days or a fine of not more than five hundred yuan; if the circumstances are more serious, he shall be sentenced to detention for not less than five days and not more than ten days, and may be fined not more than five hundred yuan: (a) writing threatening letters or threatening the personal safety of others by other means; (b) publicly insulting others or fabricating facts to slander others; (f) spying, secretly filming, eavesdropping, spreading the privacy of others."

However, for these laws and regulations, victims need to submit a lawsuit and have a defendant before the court will accept it. Many of them are in grief and their families are unwilling to file lawsuits or simply do not know who to sue, so the case will be closed. Therefore, legal departments need to formulate legal constraints on the illegal behaviors of both media platforms and cyber violence parties, further refinement and quantification of illegal regulations, so that law enforcement is more operable and enforceable. In result, the perpetrators of cyberbullying can be brought to justice, rather than at the level of public opinion on the network violence powerless condemnation. At the same time the platform, as the event bearer, also has the obligation to assist the relevant departments of the law to provide data evidence and information on the perpetrators of violence.

In the previous cyberbullying case of Liu Xuezhou, although the Shake Out platform has also punished the network abusers afterwards, only a few accounts were blocked, and these network abusers opened a new account to live their lives as usual. They have not seen any legal repercussions so far. It is undoubtedly necessary to increase the punishment for cyberbullying, raise the cost of breaking the law, and better raise the legal awareness of netizens to exercise beneficial restraint on their own behavior.

### **5.3. Social Constraint Level**

#### **5.3.1. Real Name Comment Mechanism**

At present, Bilibili and lots of other platforms have displayed information about the regional origin of users in the comment area, people can see more "Beijingers", "Shanghaiers", "Cantonese people" and so on. Not to mention whether this kind of information display will cause regional discrimination and differentiation, on the private nature of cyberbullying, only displaying the region of the commenter is obviously insufficient, and even inappropriate. "Before the IP address was published, people only expressed their opinions on the content of the comments, but when the IP address was published, people's opinions changed depending on the location" [3]. For example, many attacks those who live in low-tier cities to mock their economic or educational level. In fact, user comments are private, and one does not represent the whole region. The region display does not play a good role in restraining the user's behavior.

The real-name system should be gradually deepened, and all information such as the ID of the real-name commenter is required when the user registers for an account. The degree of information displayed in user comments is tiered according to the user's malicious level, with users with high malicious levels displaying all their personal information when commenting and friendly users not displaying their personal information when commenting. This not only protects the privacy of users, but also provides a strong restraint on cyberbullying.

#### **5.3.2. Credit Linkage Mechanism**

Linking the malicious comment rating to the personal credit system, and for individuals with high malicious ratings, reducing their personal reputation based on their malicious online behavior, and restraining their online behavior through permissions to travel on airplanes, trains, abroad, loans, etc.

### **5.4. Education Level**

#### **5.4.1. Education's Influence on the Raising Users' Quality**

In compulsory education, not only knowledge-based education such as science and literature, but also moral and ethical education is always emphasized in the education sector. In the politics textbook for the second year of junior high school alone, there are several chapters on how to teach children to be civilized citizens on the Internet, which undoubtedly increases self-discipline and supervision of self-morality from a very early age and is an integral part of building a good online society. This improvement can also be achieved by broadening one's horizons. Family education has a role to play in instilling tolerance in children from an early age. Thus, educational institutions or schools have a responsibility to help students resist exclusionary ideas, such as religious education, which needs to be reformed to eliminate divisive ideas. Education can achieve this by helping young people develop critical thinking, independent judgment and moral reasoning. We all need a better understanding of human diversity, including broader differences (such as race, nationality, culture, gender and ethnicity) and individual differences (such as opinions, beliefs, values, abilities and assumptions).

In the old Chinese society, women were not allowed to study. Even at the beginning of the 21st century, the social phenomenon that women are still considered inferior to men in terms of study still exists. And in recent years, the percentage of women in graduate school has been steadily increasing. China Education Network's National Survey Report on Graduate School Enrollment in 2021 shows that in 1999, 26,000 women enrolled in graduate school nationwide, accounting for 36.5 percent of all graduate school enrollments nationwide. In 2009, the number of women pursuing

master's degrees began to exceed that of men. In 2019, 447,000 women pursued master's degrees, accounting for 55.1% [4]. This data supports the idea that education gives disadvantaged groups who are discriminated against enough opportunities to prove themselves, while reducing discrimination and contributing to a better quality of citizenship.

#### **5.4.2. Education's Influence on Bridging the Gap**

Education helps to address some of the inequities that arise in society and offers the possibility of class change, which in turn eases people's discontent to some extent and eliminates the unfriendly atmosphere on the Internet. From the economic point of view, "hatred of the rich" is a common psychology of verbal attacks by Internet users. Many people hate the rich, including but not limited to criticizing their lives and making regional attacks. People with this mindset often believe that the rich have everything they need without any effort, even though they don't have to work hard to achieve it.

Indeed, education is an important tool to narrow this gap. 2010 household incomes for bachelor's and professional degrees were as high as \$75,568 and \$119,825, respectively, compared to \$38,976 for high school graduates [5]. Education and its related sectors are important sectors for labor absorption in China. It is estimated that schools at all levels can directly provide employment for 4% of the total workforce. Also, the direct contribution of education to GDP is generally estimated to be 4% to 7%, higher than many industries, and indirectly adds a significant amount of labor and jobs. Education can improve the economic standard of living, and when education reaches more people, it brings the possibility of narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, and as a result, people improve their income level, their satisfaction in life, and helps to eliminate the prejudice brought by this psychological distortion and alleviate their negative emotions.

#### **5.4.3. Education's Influence on Raising People's Awareness**

The CNNIC Report shows that as of June 2022, among the Internet security problems encountered by Internet users, the proportion of Internet users whose personal information was leaked was the highest, at 21.8%; the proportion of Internet users who encountered Internet fraud was 17.8%; the proportion of Internet users who encountered viruses or Trojan horses in their devices was 8.7%; and the proportion of Internet users whose accounts or passwords were stolen was 6.9% [2].

As you can see, in addition to cyberbullying, there are many other undesirable phenomena on the Internet that have the potential to endanger the safety of society. Cyberstalking and cyber harassment are more serious behaviors. Cyberstalking involves personal information and is therefore an invasion of privacy, as long as the target knows he or she is being followed, which is a form of intimidation. One in five adult women and one in ten male Internet users reported being harassed online [6], and as many as one in three girls reported being harassed online in 2011 alone [7]. In addition, fraud is a common means of breaking the law in today's online society.

Given the current prevalence of negative aspects of the online community, education can raise awareness of prevention and maximize self-protection. Kathryn Tarbox met 23-year-old "Mark" in an online chat room when she was 13 years old and developed a close relationship with him through a series of evolving e-mail messages. However, when she finally met him in person, she discovered he was a 41-year-old man named Frank Kufrovich with a history of pedophilia. He molested the girl in the hotel room [8]. Younger and older people are the main victims of online fraud and victimization. In 2020, more than 47% of Americans experienced identity theft. Children are among the most likely targets of identity theft, with approximately 1.3 million children falling victim to identity theft each year [9].



Fraud prevention education can reduce the likelihood of people becoming victims online. Good home and school education can increase a young person's sense of self-protection by telling them not to trust strangers or spend a lot of money on them, and to be very cautious if they encounter them. The earlier children are educated, the more mature and less gullible they will be. At the same time, although no one may be able to avoid the situation except by careful wording or avoiding communication with strangers on the Internet, as online harassment is often unprovoked, education enables the victim to handle the situation calmly, become aware of it in the shortest possible time, and be able to take a reasonable approach to resolve it.

In summary, education can improve the moral quality of Internet users, reduce people's dissatisfaction with their lives, and enhance their sense of protection. It is beneficial for all people to improve the online environment effectively through these aspects. Considered together, to prevent online social problems from harming users' emotions and safety, the education concerned needs to increase the content of online moral cultivation and self-protection awareness, and continuously address the bad online atmosphere caused by social inequality.

## 6. Conclusion

After analyzing the causes of the phenomenon of cyberbullying, we propose that the national legislature, social restraint, technical support from platforms and personal education in schools and families should be coordinated to prevent and control the spreading phenomenon of cyberbullying. These countermeasures and suggestions have certain implications for research and policy formulation related to cyberbullying, and we believe that with the increasing national efforts to combat cyber problems and the continuous improvement of related legal norms, as well as the joint efforts of all parties, we can definitely build a clean and healthy cyber ecological environment.

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