

Research report

Forum: General Assembly Six - Legal

Issue: “Establishing limitations on the excessive use of social media to prevent cyberbullying.”

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Introduction

With the rapid rise of social media which began in the early 2000s, a huge problem has emerged for those who have grown up with it. Whilst bullying was already a problem at our schools and playgrounds, the internet has since made the act easier to perform. Hidden behind the comfort of fake profiles or plain anonymity and without the difficulty of having to face a victim in real life, it is now easier than ever to cause emotional and psychological harm upon others. The concerning rise of cyberbullying and its effects should be discussed.

Since we are the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly, we will discuss the legal aspects of our given issues. In this research report you will find information about the topic and its issue, how we will perceive them and from what perspective we will be debating. If you still have any questions about this topic or anything else concerning the conference, please feel free to get into contact with the chairs.

Definition of key terms

Cyberbullying:

the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.

Social media:

websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

IP-address:

a unique string of characters that identifies each device using the Internet Protocol to communicate over a network.

General overview

Cyberbullying is an umbrella term, meaning it has many different forms. These forms are including but not limited to sexual harassment, blackmail, misinformation, embarrassment, impersonation, threats or damaging someone's reputation. As stated before, a cyberbully usually is completely anonymous and attacks in a virtual environment and in that way not confronting the victim and having a lower chance of

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being caught. The virtual environment gives cyberbullies the opportunity to do as they please with a lower chance of facing consequences.

Cyberbullies do however leave a digital footprint, often in the form of an IP-address when using a website or application or an email address linked to their account. This digital footprint can be used as evidence to determine who, when and where has committed an act of cyberbullying.

When cyberbullying takes place the victim can feel unsafe no matter where they are, even inside one's own home. With an ever-increasing degree of connectedness and online presence, further stimulated by a high degree usage of mobile devices and near-worldwide network coverage, practically anyone anywhere anytime can become a victim of cyberbullying. A need to have an online presence makes for a paradoxical situation in which certain victims fail to see an escape. This can lead to concerning mental - and in due course physical - problems.

The Issue

The increased use of social media by children, teens and young adults makes them more vulnerable for becoming victims of cyberbullying, or even becoming a cyberbully themselves. There are very few limitations on social media platforms as to what their users are allowed to say, post, view and share. These few limitations are often also easy to circumnavigate by actions such as but not limited to lying about one's age, distorting images, using capital i's instead of lowercase l's et cetera.

The amount of traffic going through big social media platforms such as Meta's Facebook or Instagram is also not monitorable due to the vast quantities; let alone the privacy implications of going through people's personal conversations. Algorithms are often used to filter undesired or harmful content out of users' feeds, but their usefulness and the storage of the data the algorithm collects is often up for debate.

Many academics have linked certain rises in suicide rates to cyberbullying, especially among children, teens and young adults. Due to the anonymity of the perpetrator, victims are often unable to stand up for themselves and put an end to the harassment. Certain states have caught onto the trend as well, stimulating schools to educate and help victims get through the process. Since the early 2000s mental health institutions have also increased their capabilities to help with the issue. There are few states that have laws set in place to tackle cyberbullying, seeing as they often include aspects of censorship or other far-reaching measures. A global response is needed to try to put an end to these cybercrimes.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Educational institutions from all over the world have tried to battle (cyber)bullying since it first became a problem, by for example educating their pupils on how not to fall prey to it or campaigning against it. Education programs throughout elementary schools and high schools have helped young people to realize what consequences their actions in real life and online can have. These programs are also useful to their parents. Through raising awareness on the issue, they will be more conscious of their children's online activity. They will be able to notice the signs of students being cyberbullied on time and offer the right resources to help them. Help for victims of cyberbullying remains the most important since, even with proper education about the subject, the act still takes place.

Possible solutions

Whilst raising awareness on the issue is extremely important, it is only a part of the solution. Not everyone everywhere will have access to the same amount of awareness, let alone that it is not always effective. One might be fully aware of the effects of cyberbullying and still want to for example take revenge on someone, have an intrinsic sense of hate towards someone or simply act without thinking clearly.

One of the more controversial solutions is the authority of parents. They could monitor their children's devices and online activities more strictly, to either catch their child with cyberbullying, or help when their child is being cyberbullied. A parent could notice their child feeling down much earlier than their teacher since they have the opportunity to be more in touch with them, which could certainly help in the prevention. The issue of parental control over their children has always been up for debate, both in terms of the child's growth and the parents' duty.

Furthermore, social media platforms could monitor their platforms and establish more strict mandates in order to prevent cyberbullying from happening. This could be in the form of extensively verifying users, developing thorough algorithms or making the reporting of other users easier.

In conclusion the factors which we can influence are the behavior of the user, the surroundings of the user or the medium which is being used itself.

Further reading & Bibliography

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