Using the Theory of Reasoned Action and Parental Mediation Theory to Examine Cyberbullying Perpetration among Children and Adolescents

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Abstract : The advancement and development of social media have inadvertently brought about a new form of bullying – cyberbullying – that transcends across physical boundaries of space. Although extensive research has been conducted in the field of cyberbullying, most of these studies have taken an overwhelmingly empirical angle. Theories guiding cyberbullying research are few. Furthermore, very few studies have explored the association between parental mediation and cyberbullying, with majority of existing studies focusing on cyberbullying victimization rather than perpetration. Therefore, this present study investigates cyberbullying perpetration from a theoretical angle, with a focus on the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Parental Mediation Theory. More specifically, this study examines the direct effects of attitude, subjective norms, descriptive norms, injunctive norms and active mediation and restrictive mediation on cyberbullying perpetration on social media among children and adolescents in Singapore. Furthermore, the moderating role of age on the relationship between parental mediation and cyberbullying perpetration on social media are examined. A self-administered paper-and-pencil nationally-representative survey was conducted. Multi-stage cluster random sampling was used to ensure that schools from all the four (North, South, East, and West) regions of Singapore were equally represented in the sample used for the survey. In all 607 upper primary school children (i.e., Primary 4 to 6 students) and 782 secondary school adolescents participated in our survey. The total average response rates were 69.6% for student participation. An ordinary least squares hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses and research questions. The results revealed that attitude and subjective norms were positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration on social media. Descriptive norms and injunctive norms were not found to be significantly associated with cyberbullying perpetration. The results also showed that both parental mediation strategies were negatively associated with cyberbullying perpetration on social media. Age was a significant moderator of both parental mediation strategies and cyberbullying perpetration. The negative relationship between active mediation and cyberbullying perpetration was found to be greater in the case of children than adolescents. Children who received high restrictive parental mediation were less likely to perform cyberbullying behaviors, while adolescents who received high restrictive parental mediation were more likely to be engaged in cyberbullying perpetration. The study reveals that parents should apply active mediation and restrictive mediation in different ways for children and adolescents when trying to prevent cyberbullying perpetration. The effectiveness of active parental mediation for reducing cyberbullying perpetration was more in the case of children than for adolescents. Younger children were found to be more likely to respond more positively toward restrictive parental mediation strategies, but in the case of adolescents, overly restrictive control was found to increase cyberbullying perpetration. Adolescents exhibited less cyberbullying behaviors when under low restrictive strategies. Findings highlight that the Theory of Reasoned Action and Parental Mediation Theory are promising frameworks to apply in the examination of cyberbullying perpetration. The findings that different parental mediation strategies had differing effectiveness, based on the children's age, bring about several practical implications that may benefit educators and parents when addressing their children's online risk.