

Cyberbullying and Online Safety: A Systematic Review from a Cybersecurity Perspective

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has evolved into a significant digital threat, impacting various age groups across social media platforms, online gaming, educational portals, and communication networks. Traditionally studied through psychological and sociological lenses, cyberbullying is now increasingly recognized as a cybersecurity issue due to its association with privacy violations, identity theft, data manipulation, doxxing, deepfake harassment, and social-engineering attacks. This systematic review synthesizes global research published between 2015 and 2024, analyzing cyberbullying through a cybersecurity framework. Based on 91 peer-reviewed studies selected from Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar, the review evaluates the forms, mechanisms, and risks associated with cyberbullying, along with detection technologies, legal frameworks, and preventive strategies. Key findings reveal growing complexity in cyberbullying, including the use of anonymity tools, AI-generated deepfakes, multimodal harassment, and cross-platform abuse. Although AI-based detection and machine learning models show promise, significant gaps persist, such as dataset limitations, inadequate cross-platform detection, and weak legal enforcement. The review underscores the need for comprehensive cybersecurity integration in cyberbullying mitigation, emphasizing the importance of AI-enhanced moderation, stronger legal frameworks, and improved digital literacy. The paper concludes by recommending further research on multimodal detection, virtual environments, and the

development of standardized global policies for combating cyberbullying.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Online Safety, Cybersecurity, Deepfakes, Multimodal Detection

Introduction

The digital transformation of communication has brought unprecedented opportunities for social interaction, learning, and entertainment. However, it has also given rise to significant risks, with cyberbullying emerging as one of the most pervasive online threats. Cyberbullying refers to intentional, repetitive aggressive behavior conducted via digital platforms, aimed at causing emotional, psychological, or reputational harm. It manifests across various platforms, including social media, online gaming environments, instant messaging apps, and more recently, immersive technologies like virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) and the metaverse. Traditionally, cyberbullying has been studied primarily from psychological, sociological, and educational perspectives. However, the intersection of cyberbullying with cybersecurity has gained increasing attention. With the rise of sophisticated digital threats such as identity theft, account compromises, doxxing, deepfake manipulation, and social engineering tactics, cyberbullying is no longer merely a behavioral issue. It poses serious cybersecurity risks that undermine individual privacy, safety, and security in the digital space. The use of anonymizing tools like VPNs, TOR networks, and fake accounts further complicates the identification and

prosecution of cyberbullies, making them difficult to trace and hold accountable.

This systematic review aims to address this gap by analyzing cyberbullying through the lens of cybersecurity, evaluating the technological, psychological, legal, and societal implications. By reviewing studies published between 2015 and 2024, this paper synthesizes current knowledge on cyberbullying, detection technologies, and prevention strategies, with a focus on integrating cybersecurity principles into mitigation frameworks. The review also explores future research directions, emphasizing the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to combating this complex digital threat.

Review of Literature

The literature on cyberbullying from a cybersecurity perspective has evolved significantly, particularly in response to the increasing complexities associated with digital harassment. This section presents a comprehensive review of key studies, identifying various forms of cyberbullying, technological interventions for detection, and challenges related to privacy, security, and legal frameworks.

Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be classified into various forms, including harassment, impersonation, doxxing, and non-consensual image sharing. Studies have consistently identified online harassment as a prevalent form, often involving threats, abusive language, and repeated attacks (Kowalski et al., 2014). Additionally, the rise of deepfake technologies has added another layer of complexity to cyberbullying, where manipulated media is used to harass and intimidate victims (Hancock et al., 2020). Harassment can occur across multiple platforms such as social media, instant messaging, and online gaming, with cross-platform abuse becoming an emerging concern (Chatzakou et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the anonymity provided by digital platforms plays a crucial role in encouraging cyberbullying behaviors. VPNs, anonymous forums, and bots often mask the identity of perpetrators, making it more difficult to track and respond to incidents (Berne et al., 2019). This anonymity contributes to an environment in which

cyberbullying can thrive with limited accountability for the perpetrators.

Detection Technologies

In terms of detection, machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP) have become central to identifying and addressing cyberbullying. Earlier research predominantly utilized traditional machine learning algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Random Forests, with mixed results in terms of accuracy (Al-Garadi et al., 2019). More recent developments have incorporated deep learning techniques like Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN), and Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT), which have significantly improved detection accuracy, especially for context-dependent forms of harassment (Chen & Cheng, 2020).

Multimodal detection methods, which analyze text, images, and videos, have emerged as an effective solution to address the increasingly complex nature of cyberbullying (Feng et al., 2021). However, these methods face challenges related to dataset scarcity, data privacy, and the need for large, annotated datasets for effective training of AI models.

Cybersecurity Risks and Digital Forensics

Cyberbullying poses significant cybersecurity risks, including data leakage, account compromise, identity theft, and social engineering attacks. Unauthorized access to personal information is common, with cyberbullies exploiting weak security measures to gather sensitive data on victims (Gillespie, 2015). Digital forensics plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges, particularly when it comes to evidence acquisition, metadata analysis, and cross-platform tracking. However, digital forensics in the context of cyberbullying faces its own set of hurdles, such as issues related to cross-platform data recovery and challenges posed by encryption and privacy laws (Bocij et al., 2018).

Blockchain has been proposed as a potential solution for reporting and evidence timestamping in cyberbullying cases, providing immutable proof of harassment while respecting privacy concerns (Panda & Jain, 2022). However, its integration with

existing legal and technical frameworks remains in the early stages of development.

Legal Frameworks and Policy Responses

Legal responses to cyberbullying have been fragmented, with different countries implementing varying levels of regulation and enforcement. In Europe, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provides strong privacy protections but does not directly address issues like cyberbullying (Gillespie, 2015). The Online Safety Act in the UK emphasizes platform accountability, with provisions for quick content takedown and clear guidelines on harmful content (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). In contrast, India's Information Technology Act (IT Act) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act focus on cyber harassment but often face challenges in enforcement, particularly with respect to anonymous attacks (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Despite these efforts, cross-border enforcement remains a significant challenge, particularly when cyberbullying occurs across multiple jurisdictions. Legal frameworks also suffer from a lack of coordination between countries, creating a barrier for consistent enforcement (Kowalski & Limber, 2021).

Prevention Strategies and Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has been highlighted as a key factor in preventing cyberbullying. Educating users about the risks of online interactions and equipping them with the skills to navigate digital spaces responsibly has been shown to reduce incidents of cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2019). Schools, workplaces, and social media platforms have increasingly adopted digital resilience programs aimed at fostering safer online environments. These programs often focus on empathy-building, conflict resolution, and reporting mechanisms. AI-driven moderation systems, integrated with human review, have shown promise in detecting harmful content more effectively than purely algorithmic systems (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). However, concerns about privacy and overreach have raised questions about the balance between safety and freedom of expression online.

Gaps and Future Research Directions

Despite significant advancements in detection and prevention, several gaps persist. First, the

lack of large, cross-platform, multimodal datasets remains a significant barrier to improving detection accuracy (Feng et al., 2021). Additionally, the integration of AI-driven models with existing legal and policy frameworks is still underexplored, limiting the effectiveness of automated systems in real-world scenarios.

Future research should focus on addressing these gaps by developing more comprehensive datasets, improving the explainability and fairness of detection models, and integrating cybersecurity frameworks into broader digital safety programs. Moreover, the rise of emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and Web3 will introduce new challenges in the detection and mitigation of cyberbullying, warranting further investigation.

Statement of the Problem

Cyberbullying has evolved into one of the most critical challenges of the digital age, affecting individuals across various demographics, including children, adolescents, and adults. While much of the existing literature on cyberbullying focuses on its psychological, social, and behavioral impacts, a significant gap exists in understanding cyberbullying through the lens of cybersecurity. With the increasing integration of technology into daily life, the scope of cyberbullying has expanded to include complex cybersecurity threats such as identity theft, data breaches, doxxing, deepfake manipulation, and digital harassment across multiple platforms.

The rise of advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), anonymizing tools (e.g., VPNs, Tor), and cross-platform abuse has further exacerbated the problem. Perpetrators are leveraging these technologies to mask their identities, engage in automated attacks, and evade traditional detection methods. As a result, current cyberbullying detection mechanisms, which primarily rely on text-based or manual reporting systems, have proven inadequate in addressing the emerging complexities of modern cyberbullying, particularly in multimedia-rich and virtual environments.

Furthermore, existing legal and regulatory frameworks struggle to keep up with the rapid evolution of digital harassment. Many

jurisdictions lack clear, harmonized laws regarding cyberbullying, and cross-border enforcement is often weak or inconsistent. While platforms have adopted various moderation strategies, including AI-based content filtering, these solutions often face challenges related to privacy concerns, data ethics, and the effectiveness of automated moderation systems.

Despite growing awareness and efforts to combat cyberbullying, there remains a critical need for more robust, multidisciplinary solutions that combine cybersecurity principles, advanced AI technologies, digital forensics, and clear legal frameworks to effectively detect, prevent, and mitigate cyberbullying in the digital ecosystem. Addressing these challenges is imperative to create safer online spaces for individuals across the globe.

Objectives

- Investigate the cybersecurity risks associated with cyberbullying, including identity theft and AI-driven threats.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current detection technologies, such as AI and multimodal systems.
- Analyze existing legal frameworks and identify areas for improvement in preventing cyberbullying.
- Identify research gaps and propose solutions for emerging technologies like AR/VR and Web3.

Research Methodology

This study employs a systematic review approach, adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The methodology encompasses the following steps:

Data Collection

- Databases Searched: Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar.
- Time Frame: Studies published between 2015 and 2024.
- Search Keywords: ("cyberbullying" OR "online harassment") AND ("cybersecurity" OR "privacy" OR "identity theft") AND ("detection" OR "AI" OR "machine learning").

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Inclusion Criteria: Peer-reviewed journals and conference papers addressing cyberbullying, cybersecurity, detection technologies, and legal frameworks.
- Exclusion Criteria: Editorials, non-academic content, and studies lacking cybersecurity relevance or methodological rigor.

Data Analysis

A narrative synthesis approach was used to categorize studies into the following key themes:

- Forms of Cyberbullying
- Detection Technologies
- Cybersecurity Risks
- Legal Frameworks
- Prevention Strategies

Each study was critically evaluated using a 10-item checklist, assessing clarity, methodology, reproducibility, and ethical compliance.

Quality Assessment

The studies were appraised for methodological rigor and classified into three categories: high, moderate, and low quality.

Data Synthesis

The data were synthesized through thematic analysis to identify emerging trends, gaps, and patterns across different regions, platforms, and forms of cyberbullying. This approach allowed for the comprehensive summarization of current literature and the identification of research gaps for future investigation.

The primary aim of this methodology is to synthesize the existing literature, assess the cybersecurity aspects of cyberbullying, and suggest future research directions based on the identified gaps in the field.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected through this systematic review was analyzed to extract meaningful insights about cyberbullying from a cybersecurity perspective. The analysis focused on key themes such as the forms of cyberbullying, detection technologies, cybersecurity risks, legal frameworks, and prevention strategies. The findings are presented below, with tables included where necessary for clearer presentation of data.

Forms of Cyberbullying

The analysis identified several key forms of cyberbullying prevalent in the literature. These include harassment, impersonation, doxxing,

deepfake harassment, and cyberstalking. The prevalence of each form and its associated cybersecurity risks were summarized.

Form of Cyberbullying	Examples	Cybersecurity Risks
Harassment & Abuse	Threats, insults, hate speech	Data leaks, social engineering
Impersonation	Fake profiles, hacked accounts	Identity theft, unauthorized access
Doxxing	Public exposure of private information	Privacy violation, data misuse
Deepfake Harassment	AI-generated manipulated media	Misinformation, defamation
Cyberstalking	Repeated messaging, location tracking	Unauthorized access, privacy violations
Exclusion & Social Isolation	Deliberate removal from social groups	Digital exclusion, data manipulation

The most common forms of cyberbullying were found to be harassment and impersonation. These forms were frequently associated with privacy violations and identity theft.

The review also analyzed various detection technologies used to identify cyberbullying. These include traditional machine learning models, deep learning models, and multimodal detection systems. The effectiveness of these methods was evaluated based on performance metrics such as accuracy, precision, and recall.

Detection Technologies

Technology	Type	Effectiveness (Accuracy)	Limitations
SVM	Traditional ML	70%–80%	Limited by feature engineering
Random Forest	Traditional ML	75%–85%	Difficulty handling non-linear data
LSTM/GRU	Deep Learning (NLP)	80%–90%	Requires large datasets for training
BERT/Transformer Models	Deep Learning (NLP)	85%–95%	Computationally expensive, limited dataset coverage
Multimodal Detection Systems	Deep Learning (Multimodal)	85%–90%	Small datasets, integration challenges

Among the detection models, deep learning models, particularly LSTM and BERT, showed the highest accuracy. However, they were often limited by the availability of large datasets and the need for substantial computational resources. Multimodal detection systems, which combine text, images, and video, were also effective but faced challenges with dataset size and integration.

- Identity Theft: Often resulting from impersonation and doxxing.
- Privacy Violations: Linked to unauthorized access, location tracking, and doxxing.
- Data Misuse: Particularly through deepfake manipulation and social engineering attacks.
- Credential Compromise: Common in impersonation and cyberstalking cases.

Cybersecurity Risks

The review found that cyberbullying is closely linked to a variety of cybersecurity risks. Key risks identified include:

Cybersecurity Risk	Prevalence	Associated Forms of Cyberbullying
Identity Theft	High	Impersonation, Doxxing, Cyberstalking
Privacy Violations	High	Doxxing, Deepfake Harassment, Stalking
Data Misuse	Moderate	Deepfakes, Impersonation

Credential Compromise	High	Impersonation, Social Engineering
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The risks of identity theft and privacy violations were the most commonly cited in association with cyberbullying, with credential compromise being a significant concern in instances of impersonation.

The analysis also reviewed the legal and policy frameworks designed to address cyberbullying. These frameworks include national and regional laws focused on data privacy, child protection, and online safety. A comparison of key international laws and frameworks is provided in the table below:

Legal Frameworks and Prevention Strategies

Region/Country	Key Legislation	Focus Area
EU	GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)	Data protection, privacy
UK	Online Safety Act	Platform accountability, harmful content
India	IT Act 2000, POCSO Act	Cyber harassment, child protection
US	COPPA (Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act)	Child data protection
Australia	eSafety Act	Rapid content takedown

While these frameworks offer valuable protections, the review identified significant gaps such as the lack of cross-border enforcement and jurisdictional challenges related to anonymous cyberbullying attacks. There is also limited victim support and insufficient legal recourse for those affected by cyberbullying.

The analysis highlights significant progress in cyberbullying detection technologies, particularly through deep learning and multimodal systems. However, challenges remain in terms of dataset availability, cross-platform interoperability, and the legal landscape. The review suggests that while detection technologies are evolving, comprehensive prevention strategies incorporating stronger AI moderation, legal frameworks, and platform accountability are essential to addressing the growing issue of cyberbullying in digital spaces.

Findings

- **Forms of Cyberbullying:** Common types include harassment, impersonation, doxxing, deepfake harassment, and cyberstalking, each leading to privacy violations and identity theft risks.
- **Detection Technologies:** Traditional machine learning models (SVM, Random Forest) offer moderate accuracy, while deep learning models (LSTM, BERT) provide higher accuracy but require large datasets and computational power.

- **Cybersecurity Risks:** Cyberbullying is closely linked to identity theft, privacy violations, data misuse, and credential compromise, particularly through impersonation and doxxing.
- **Legal Frameworks:** Existing laws (GDPR, UK Online Safety Act, India’s IT Act) provide partial protections but lack consistency and effective enforcement, especially across borders.
- **Prevention Strategies:** Digital literacy programs and AI-driven content moderation show promise but need refinement. Platforms must enhance accountability and victim support mechanisms.

Discussion

This study highlights the growing intersection between cyberbullying and cybersecurity, emphasizing the increasing complexity of cyberbullying due to new technologies. Key findings and their implications are discussed below.

- **Complexity of Cyberbullying:** The study confirms that harassment and impersonation are the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying, often linked to identity theft and privacy violations. Emerging forms such as deepfake harassment and cyberstalking are also becoming significant threats, requiring enhanced detection methods. These findings align with previous research, suggesting the need for updated responses to these evolving threats.

- **Detection Technologies:** AI-based deep learning models (e.g., LSTM, BERT) and multimodal detection systems show significant promise, with accuracy rates of 80–90%. However, challenges remain in dataset size, integration across media types, and computational demands. These findings underscore the importance of larger, more diverse datasets for improving detection accuracy.
- **Cybersecurity Risks:** Cyberbullying is closely linked to identity theft, privacy violations, and data misuse. Credential compromise and social engineering were also common in cases of impersonation and cyberstalking. These cybersecurity risks emphasize the need for stronger protective measures, particularly around privacy and data security.
- **Legal Frameworks and Policy Gaps:** Existing laws like the GDPR and Online Safety Act provide some protection but are limited by cross-border enforcement issues and insufficient victim support. There is a clear need for more coordinated international legal frameworks and better support systems for victims.
- **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice:** Future research should focus on creating multilingual, multimodal datasets, improving cross-platform detection, and enhancing legal frameworks for global cooperation. Strengthening platform accountability and developing consistent reporting protocols would help address the growing challenges of cyberbullying.

Conclusion

Cyberbullying has become a complex and evolving challenge with significant implications for cybersecurity. This systematic review highlights that while traditional forms of cyberbullying, such as harassment and impersonation, remain prevalent, emerging threats like deepfake harassment and cyberstalking add new layers of risk. Detection technologies, especially AI-driven models such as deep learning and multimodal systems, have shown promise in identifying these behaviors across various platforms. However, challenges such as limited datasets, high computational requirements, and integration difficulties still hinder their full potential. Additionally, cyberbullying is closely tied to severe cybersecurity risks, including identity

theft, privacy violations, and data misuse, emphasizing the need for stronger preventive measures and improved digital forensics. Legal frameworks like the GDPR and the Online Safety Act provide some protection but are insufficient in addressing gaps such as cross-border enforcement, victim support, and jurisdictional challenges related to anonymous attacks. The findings suggest that combating cyberbullying requires a holistic approach that combines technological advancements, digital literacy programs, legal reforms, and platform accountability. This multi-faceted strategy is essential to address the growing and dynamic nature of online harassment and its cybersecurity implications.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- **Improve Detection Technologies:** Develop AI-driven, multimodal systems for accurate, real-time cyberbullying detection, supported by larger, diverse datasets and explainable AI.
- **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Create unified, cross-border legal frameworks to address cyberbullying, enhance victim support, and improve international enforcement.
- **Promote Digital Literacy:** Implement digital literacy programs in schools and communities to educate users on online safety and responsible behavior.
- **Enhance Platform Accountability:** Platforms should adopt AI-powered moderation with human oversight and improve reporting and support systems for cyberbullying victims.

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