

Cyberbullying and online harassment among Facebook users in Papua New Guinea

Alythea Siraba

Abstract

This paper reports findings of a study on cyberbullying and online harassment among Facebook users in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The aim of the study was to identify whether cyberbullying and online harassment is existent among users in PNG, and how these users respond. A quantitative approach was employed through the use of two surveys: one was facilitated online via Survey Monkey and the other distributed as a hardcopy. The study comprised a total of 98 participants (50 female and 48 male) who are Facebook users; with the majority of participants aged between 21-25. The quantitative findings of the study support anecdotal evidence on the existence of cyberbullying among Facebook users in PNG and research studies in other countries. An important finding of this paper is that although Facebook users consider cyber bullying an issue of concern in PNG, the majority do not view themselves as victims to cyber bullying or online harassment. Furthermore, the findings suggest that female users in PNG experience cyber bullying and online harassment more often, compared to male users.

Keywords: Facebook, cyber-bulling, online harassment, communication, Papua New Guinea

Introduction

Statistics indicate that in 2016, that there were a total 3.42 billion internet users across the globe, of which, 2.31 billion are social media users (Asia-Pacific Digital Digest, 2016). The use of social media is a fairly recent phenomenon and it is still in the developing process with regards to its role in society. There are various types of social media, including: Blogs, Microblogs (Twitter for example); Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram); content sharing and discussion sites such as, YouTube and Reddit; and virtual worlds e.g. 'Second Life' (Murphy et al (2014). This research is focused on the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in Papua New Guinea (PNG) with a primary focus on Facebook.

The term SNS refers to sites that enable users to post photos, videos, notes and status updates to share with other users within their network, called 'Friends' (Murphy et. al., 2014). Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg (Abhyanker, 2011) and is currently the most popular platform used across the globe (Sagrasta & Matbob 2016; Asia-Pacific Digital Digest 2016; Abdulahi,

Samadi & Gharleghi 2014; Falk 2011). The use of Facebook has extended from being used only by individuals for personal communication purposes, to usage by businesses, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and interest groups. Businesses use Facebook for example, to market their products, communicate with business partners and to reach potential customers (Banday & Mattoo 2013; Vonderschmitt 2012; Abhyankar 2011).

Alongside the global uptake of SNS however, there has been a rise in cases known as cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is defined as “a repeated aggressive and intentional act, targeting a victim who cannot easily defend themselves and is carried out by a group or an individual using electronic form of contact” (Jacobs et al 2015). Cyberbullying is also often defined as online aggression by electronic means repeated over time (Strickland & Dent 2017; Livingstone, Stoilova & Kelly 2016; Nilan et al 2015). Such aggression is commonly associated with behaviour such as: flaming, harassment, defamation; impersonation; trickery, exclusion, cyber stalking and cyber threats (Asana, Hussain & Laidey 2017; Strickland & Dent 2017; Lee 2017; Nilan et al 2015; Nocentino et al 2013).

A similar concept relevant for this paper is ‘online harassment’, which is associated with offensive name-calling; purposeful embarrassment; stalking; physical threats; harassment over a sustained period of time; sexual harassment; trolling (sending menacing or upsetting messages); identity theft; doxxing (making available a person’s information); and accusing people of things they have not done (Strickland & Dent 2017; Duggan 2017; Lenhart et al 2016;). Lenhart et al (2016) simplifies the term as “unwanted contact that is used to create an intimidating, annoying, frightening or even hostile environment for the victim that uses digital means to reach the target”. For the purposes of this research project, the definition and activities that represent cyberharassment, is categorized as cyber bullying as both terms are similar in nature and interrelated.

While there is a lot of anecdotal evidence in reference to the existence of cyberbullying and online harassment among Facebook users in PNG, prior to this study, there is no literature relating to cyberbullying in PNG. However, the PNG Government has demonstrated that they are aware of the negative influences that are coupled with an increased exposure to the internet. Thus, in 2016 the PNG Cybercrime Code Act was passed, under which the act of cyberbullying and cyberharassment set as separate categories. Furthermore, the PNG Cybercrime Code Act (2016) defines cyberbullying as:

a person who uses an electronic system or device whether or not it is connected to the internet (with or without the aid of electronic writings, images, audio, visual or audio-visual recording) with the child subject of the bullying for the purpose of – (i) bullying, intimidating, threatening, demeaning, ridiculing or stalking, or causing emotional distress.

While cyberbullying is not restricted to a particular online platform, this study focuses on the largest and most used social networking site in the world, which is Facebook.

Method

One survey was facilitated via an online survey platform, “Survey Monkey” and the other was a hardcopy survey that was manually distributed. In total, 98 participants were involved in the study, 50 female and 48 male (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic information about participants

	Total	Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)
Survey 1 (Online)	19	20 or younger	0.47	0.53
	45	21 to 25	0.51	0.49
	14	26 to 54	0.43	0.57
Survey 2	13	21 to 24	0.46	0.54
	7	25 +	0.57	0.43

Mobile phone applications such as, Whatsapp, Facebook Lite and Messenger were used to circulate the online Survey Link to participants. Survey 1 was circulated to participants whom the researcher knew personally, which they then shared with their friends. Respondents to Survey 2 were people within the author’s personal network.

In terms of participant consent, the surveys were done anonymously hence, participant identity was safeguarded. The online survey was chosen in order to reach a wider audience on Facebook. There were ten (10) questions only because that is the maximum number of questions allowed to use the online tool, Survey Monkey, for free. The reason Survey Monkey was employed to facilitate the questionnaire was due to its simplicity on the part of the researcher and the participants. The age group for this study were between the ages of 21 to 55. However, an additional age group was included given that this survey was facilitated online. This was to ensure that the research is inclusive of all users, thus, the other age group was 20 and below.

For Survey 2, the initial number of participants was 30, however, only 20 out of 30 surveys were distributed and completed. This was mostly due to the shortage of resources to print surveys and surveys not being returned. The age group for this survey was between the ages of 21-55. Data was collected between the months of November 2017 to March 2018 at various locations based on the convenience of the researcher. These locations included Northern (Oro) Province, Port Moresby and Madang.

Given that the quantitative approach has been employed, the data was analysed using the convergent method of analysis. The responses of Survey 1 and Survey 2 were analysed separately. Questions and participant responses were

arranged in table format using Microsoft Excel and then categorized into themes as depicted in Figure 1.

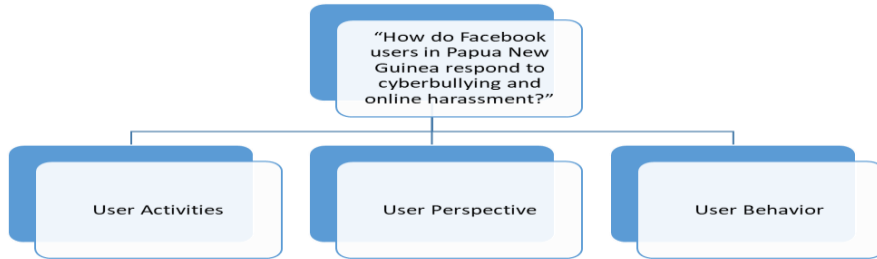


Figure 1 The thematic framework depicts the major research question and the three key themes that have been identified after the data had been analyzed.

Findings

Theme 1: User Activity

The information displayed in Table 2 illustrates that the main use of Facebook among PNG users is for communication, which is also the main reason given as to why participants had created their Facebook account in the first place. Other reasons for creating a Facebook account include peer pressure, business, information, chatting, and making new friends.

Table 2 Main use of Facebook among PNG users

Question	Total	Communication (%)	Information (%)	Making New Friends (%)	Chatting (%)	Peer Pressure (%)	Business (%)	Other (%)	
What do you mostly use Facebook for?		78	0.53	0.14	0.05	0.14	--	0.00	0.14
	Female	40	0.27	0.05	0.04	0.08	--	0.00	0.08
	Male	38	0.25	0.09	0.01	0.06	--	0.00	0.06
What was the main reason that caused you to create an account on Facebook?									
		78	0.62	--	--	--	0.19	0.01	0.18
	Female	40	0.32	--	--	--	0.1	0.00	0.09
Male	38	0.3	--	--	--	0.09	0.01	0.09	

Theme 2: User Perspective

Participants were asked about cyber bullying; online harassment; their opinion towards the issue; and whether or not they had been harassed or bullied online. Their responses are depicted in Table 3 below. The majority of the participants from both surveys who were Facebook users believe that cyber bullying is an issue in PNG. The findings indicate that this view is held confidently by female users. In contrast, the opinion of the male users towards cyberbullying being an issue in PNG swayed between ‘yes’ and ‘possibly’.

Table 3 – Shows responses of participants towards Cyberbullying (n = 98)

Question			Total	Yes (%)	No (%)	Possibly (%)	I do not know (%)
Survey 1	<i>Is Cyber bullying an issue in PNG?</i>	Female	40	0.35	0.00	0.13	0.04
		Male	38	0.24	0.02	0.20	0.01
			78	0.59	0.03	0.33	0.05
Survey 2	<i>Have you ever been a victim of cyber bullying?</i>	Female	10	0.35	0.00	0.15	0.00
		Male	10	0.3	0.00	0.2	0.00
			20	0.65	0.00	0.35	0.00
Survey 1	<i>Have you ever been harassed on Facebook?</i>	Female	40	0.11	0.27	--	0.1
		Male	37	0.05	0.32	--	0.1
			77	0.16	0.59	--	0.2
Survey 2	<i>Have you ever been harassed on Facebook?</i>	Female	10	0.25	0.25	--	--
		Male	10	0.05	0.45	--	--
			20	0.3	0.7	--	--

The data suggests that the majority of the participants have never been a victim of cyberbullying and online harassment. Those that did indicate that they have been victims of cyberbullying and online harassment, were predominantly female users.

An interesting finding is although the majority of participants did not feel they were victims of cyberbullying, none of the participants felt they had the liberty to openly express themselves on social media. The majority agreed however, that it depended upon the issue at hand, with most participants indicating that they were comfortable with sharing their opinion via Facebook status or photo updates. This is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: Shows Facebook user perspective on self-expression (n = 20)**Question: Do you feel you can openly express yourself on Facebook?**

	Participants	Yes (%)	No (%)	Depends on the issue (%)	I am not sure (%)
Female	10	0.0	0.2	0.3	--
Male	10	0.0	0.1	0.4	--
Total	20	0.0	0.3	0.7	--

Question: Are you comfortable with sharing your opinion through Facebook as a status/ photo update?

	Participants	Yes (%)	No (%)	Depends on the issue (%)	I am not sure (%)
Female	10	0.2	0.00	--	0.3
Male	10	0.25	0.1	--	0.15
Total	20	0.45	0.1	--	0.45

Theme 3: User Behaviour

As mentioned above, the majority of the participants did not identify themselves as being victims of cyber bullying or online harassment. Yet the findings illustrated in Table 4 suggest that this is not necessarily the case. The findings from both surveys indicate that the majority of the participants have blocked another user on Facebook due to inappropriate or offensive messages sent to them (see Table 5).

According to previous research studies, sending messages that may seem upsetting is a form of cyberbullying (Popovac & Leoschut, 2012). The data indicates that female users in particular, tend to block other users on Facebook due to comments on their photos or status updates more so than male Facebook users.

These findings suggest that Facebook users in PNG are victims of cyberbullying and online harassment but are unaware of it, or do not consider these labels appropriate for their experience. This finding supports the results of other research on understandings of cyber bullying among young people. Popovac and Leoschut (2012) for example, argue that “while adults use the term cyberbullying, young people do not necessarily identify with the term in the experiences they have online”. Furthermore, Marwick and Body [as cited in Popovac and Leoschut, 2012] state that young people tend to use terms such as ‘drama’ and dismiss negative online interactions because it lessens the importance of the conflict.

Table 5 Shows user responses to inappropriate behaviour of other users on Facebook (n=98)

Question			Total	Yes (%)	No (%)
Survey 2	Do you sometimes send messages that may seem offensive to others just to make a point to them?	Male	10	0.05	0.45
		Female	10	0.2	0.3
			20	0.25	0.75
	Have you blocked someone on Facebook because of offensive/inappropriate comments on your status updates/pictures?	Male	10	0.1	0.4
		Female	10	0.4	0.1
			20	0.5	0.5
	Have you blocked someone on Facebook because they send offensive or inappropriate messages?	Male	10	0.2	0.3
		Female	10	0.35	0.15
			20	0.55	0.45
Survey 1	Have you blocked someone on Facebook because they send offensive or inappropriate messages?	Male	38	0.26	0.22
		Female	40	0.49	0.03
			78	0.75	0.25

Summary

In summary, the findings of this research suggest that the main reason users create accounts on Facebook is for communication purposes. The majority of participants do not consider themselves to be victims of cyber bullying or online harassment, however the data suggest otherwise when analysed in the context of academic definitions of the two terms. This confirms Popovac and Leoschut's (2012) findings relating to cyber bullying in South Africa; "that many young people do not place themselves within a bullying rhetoric used by parents or educators" (Lee, 2017). A trending response to cyber bullying and online harassment on Facebook is taking the issue lightly (Popovac & Leoschut, 2012).

There are however, a number of notable limitations to this study. The first is the methods approach applied; given that cyberbullying and online harassment are evolving phenomena the quantitative approach gives a general overview. One concern raised from using the method of the online survey is that because it is quick, easy and the questions are very general, participants may not have answered questions truthfully but rather for the sake of answering. Also, had the participants required further clarification, the facilitator of the questionnaire would have been unable to make clarifications. Hence, while the responses may answer the major research question, it still leaves room for findings to be questioned. Other limitations encountered with the method used was that due to time, collection of questionnaires distributed manually was costly and time

consuming. The second major limitation to the study is the construction of the questions and the answers in the survey, some questions were not specific, and others had answers that provided shallow responses. The third limitation to this study was that an age group was not specified in the beginning of the research, so while the majority of the participants are below the ages of 25, it would have been better if the age group had been more specific and the number of participants distributed evenly across ages.

Despite these limitations, this study provides an insight into the use of Facebook among users in PNG. It shows that Facebook users in PNG do face forms of cyberbullying and online harassment but are unaware of it or do not use these labels to describe their experience. Moreover, female users tend to experience cyberbullying and online harassment more often compared to male users. Yet users of both genders have a weak understanding on the concept of cyberbullying and online harassment. This indicates the need for more awareness on cyberbullying and online harassment so that users are aware and are able to identify it. Understanding the forms of cyberbullying and online harassment will also enable users to exercise their rights in accordance to the 2016 PNG Cybercrime Code Act so that such online behaviour is not tolerated.

References

- Abhyankar, A. (2011). Social networking sites. *SAMVAD*, 2, 18-21.
- Abdulahi, A., Samadi, B., & Gharleghi, B. (2014). A study on asthe negative effects of social networking sites such as Facebook among Pacific university scholars in Malaysia. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5(10), p.133-145
- Asana, Z. Z. T., Hussain, I. A., & Laidey, N. M. (2017). A study on cyberbullying: its forms, awareness and moral reasoning among youth. *International Journal of Media and Communication*. 1 (1), 1-5. doi: 10.11648/j.ijmc.20170101.11
- Asia-Pacific Digital Digest. (2016). *The state of social media and messaging in Asia Pacific: Trends and statistics*. Retrieved from https://www.rvc.ru/upload/iblock/493/Social_Media_in_Asia_Pacific_Digest_.pdf
- Banday, M. T., & Mattoo, M. M. (2013). Social media in e-governance: A study with special reference to India. *Social Networking*, 2(02), 47-56
- Duggan, M. (2017). *Online harassment 2017*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/07/10151519/PI_2017.07.11_Online-Harassment_FINAL.pdf
- Falk, S. (2011). The rise of the digital citizen. *Zeitschrift fur Politikberatung (ZPB)/Policy Advice and Political Consulting*, 4,(4), pp. 157-161
- Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social media & mobile internet use among teens and young adults. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialcapitalgateway.org/content/paper/lenhart-purcell-k-smith-zickuhr-k-2010-social-media-and-young-adults-pew-internet-amer>
- Lenhart, A., Ybarra, M., Zickhur, K., & Price-Feeney, M. (2016). *Online harassment, digital abuse, and cyberstalking in America*. Retrieved from https://www.datasociety.net/pubs/oh/Online_Harassment_2016.pdf

- Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Kelly, A. (2016). *Cyberbullying: Incidence, trends and consequences*. London School of Economics and Political Science Research Online. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68079/1/Livingstone_Cyberbullying%20incidence%20trends_2016.pdf
- Murphy, J., Link, M. W., Childs, J. H., Tesfaye, C. L., Dean, E., Stern, M., et al. (2014). *Social media in public opinion research: Report of the AAPOR task force on emerging technologies in public opinion research*. American Association for Public Opinion Research. Retrieved from: https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/AAPOR_Social_Media_Report_FNL.pdf
- Nilan, P., Burgess, H., Hobbs, M., Threadgold, S., & Alexander, W. (2015). Youth, social media, and cyberbullying among Australian youth: "Sick friends". *Social Media + Society*, 1 (2), DOI: 10.1177/205630511560484
- Nocentini, A., Calmaestra, J., Schultze-Krumbholz, A, Scheithauer, H., Ortega, R., & Menesini, E., et al. (2013). *Cyberbullying: Labels, behaviors and definition in three European countries*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3443335/>
- Papua New Guinea National Government (2016). 2016 Cybercrime Code Act. Retrieved from http://www.parliament.gov.pg/uploads/acts/16A_35.pdf
- Popovac, M., & Leoschut, L. (2012). Cyber bullying in South Africa: Impact and responses. *Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 13*, Retrieved from <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/Research-Projects/Researching-Childrens-Rights/pdf/Issue-Paper-13---Cyberbullying-in-SA---Impact-and-Responses.pdf>
- Sagrista, M., & Matbob, P. (2016). The digital divide in PNG: Implications for journalism education. *Pacific Journalism Review* 22(2).
- Strickland, P., & Dent, J. (2017). *Online harassment and cyber bullying*. House of Commons Library, Retrieved from <researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7967/CBP-7967.pdf>
- Vonderschmitt, K. (2012). *The growing use of social media in political campaigns: How to use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to create an effective social media campaign*. (Bachelor dissertation, Western Kentucky University). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1366&context=stu_hon_theses

Author

Alythea Siraba completed her Bachelor of Arts in Papua New Guinea Studies and International Relations and graduated at Divine Word University in 2019. She is currently a Graduate Management Trainee with Steamships Trading Company Limited. She actively supports community engagement activities. She is passionate about contributing to the research body for Papua New Guinea and looks forward to more research opportunities. She may be contacted on email: asiraba08@gmail.com