

UPSTANDERS AND THE EMOTIONAL EFFECT OF THE HAUNTING BLUE TICKS

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Abstract: Most of today's youth communication happens online, thus representing a big part of their lives. Commuting from offline to online communication, creates a bunch of difficulties, misunderstandings, gaps, in other words not realizing how our words are being received. When online communication goes wrong, in terms of youth virtually hurting other youth - bully-victim situations - there are always witnesses or bystanders who participate passively and do not take action. An upstander is a person who participates in an online aggression and acts, standing against any act of injustice or intolerance and intervening on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied. Our research team has developed the project Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying, ID 2016-3-TR01-KA205-036619 aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of different cyberbullying aspects in online environments among youth, by creating an online questionnaire composed by single item research, questions related to core concepts and perceptions about cyberbullying motives and effects. Our focus is in analyzing the effects of "seen" messages emotional impact on upstanding behavior in cyberbullying incidents, in 507 high school students from Romania, Belgium, Turkey and Spain. Results show that when modelling effects of "seen" messages on upstanding behavior, the curvilinear model (3%) is more consistent than the linear model (2%), even if both models show statistical significance. Psychological and methodological conclusions and implications are discussed.

Key words: cyberbullying, dynamic relationship, upstanders, blue ticks

Introduction

From the beginning of human existence till present, communication has seen a continuous development. With the advancement of technology, the virtual environment communication has exceeded any barrier. The emergence of the Internet has brought about an explosion of mass communication. Diversifying ways of communication in the online environment, starting with the written language, which has the added potential of transmitting emotions and advancing with the addition of visual / auditory content, has enabled the Internet to become one of the most important alternatives to oral communication. Thus, online has become a continuous dialogue between people, the opportunity to provide feedback through a click of the interlocutor. The birth of social networks has achieved remarkable success today by satisfying all ages, languages, cultures, becoming an important component of human interactivity.

This research focuses on the online sender's response to the unavailability / refusal of the recipient to respond with the “seen” feature enabled, and voice activation to those who witness online bullying.

Introducing the “seen” function into online communication can result in obligations, expectations, and responsibilities for our online partners. Thus, we may notice that the “seen” function has led to new expectations for our online partners as well as to the perceived obligations to respond immediately after reading a new message, both of which are influenced by the need for user affiliation and the fear of exclusion. The perceived obligations were, however, higher than the expectations of others. We do not know if our online partner is waiting for an instant response, but we know he can see when we read a message and therefore we can sanction a slow response. (Mai, L. M., Freudenthaler, R., et. al. 2015). Noteworthy, that the promptness of the response can be negatively influenced by the lack of physical and random proximity to the categorization of people around us. It was also found that only in weak relations and in conversations with higher ranked social partners the obligations were perceived greater than the response to expectations, while in close or equal relations, the opposite.

Any additional exhortation in text-based communication may be interpreted by users. So if our online partner sees that we have read the message and interrupt it, this has an additional meaning in the same way that emoticons can be used to express how we feel. In this way, additional clues give users the ability to improve their day-to-day communication, but at the same time they

can and complicate things.

Online communication has brought along with benefits, positive and negative effects. Technology-mediated behavior often stands in conflict with the reality social norms, referred as the informal understandings that govern the behavior within a society, crucial for the feeling of togetherness and social cohesion. The potential conflicts between technology use and social norms are the so called “disrespectful technologies” (Diefenbach, S., Ullrich, D., 2018). Individuals worry that the ubiquity of smartphones has deteriorated social relationships since face-to-face conversations are replaced by superficial short messages on electronic devices (Turkle, 2011). On the other hand, youth value the possibility to be permanently connected with their network and the new ways of maintaining relationships (Pettegrew & Day, 2015; Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Online space, inevitably, cannot be bypassed by violence, cyberbullying on social networks in our era knowing alarming odds. Referring to the behavior of individuals in online violence contexts, we are interested in their ability to take action, to intervene, to stop inappropriate behaviors, to get from simple passive onlookers, or bystanders to active people with attitude, upstanders.

Therefore, against the above mentioned, the activation / non-activation of the upstander voice after assisting to an online aggression can dynamically relate to the online sender's reaction to the recipient's unavailability with the enabled “seen” function. Blabst and Diefenbach (2017) study highlights correlations and differences of the usage and experience of specific WhatsApp features (single chats and group chats, Last Seen and Read Receipts) with perceived communication quality and wellbeing, also drawing relations to psychological theory such as human needs framework and need to belong. Perceived stress was significantly higher among participants with active usage of Read Receipts than with passive usage and especially participants who feel stressed by Read Receipts, agreeing to be more relaxed without them, considered WhatsApp communication a waste of time (Blabst, N., Diefenbach, S., 2017)

Research methodology

The Erasmus project *Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying*, ID 2016-3-TR01-KA205-036619, was developed by our research team, with the purpose of deeper understand the dynamics of cyberbullying in online environments among youth. Among the first research questions purposed by our team was the identification of the existent relationship between upstander behavior and the emotional effect of the haunting blue ticks in cyberbullying. In this regard, we have designed an online questionnaire aiming to gather descriptive data, general perceptions about cyberbullying phenomenon and perceptions about the safety

of the educational environment, bystander motives of keeping silent, perceived parental support, and an auto evaluation scale centered on self-efficacy perceptions.

Our interest was in analyzing the relationship between upstander behavior and the emotional effect of the haunting blue ticks in cyberbullying type incidents, due to the fact that we consider that the emotional effect either positive or negative of the haunting blue ticks impact upstander behavior.

This research emphasizes that single item measures owns the same efficacy in identifying statistical trends like multiple items scales, regarding online measuring of youth opinions. Single item scales are usually used to represent global constructs (Wanous, Reichers, Hudy, 1997) that are conceptualized as mono dimensions, like the ones we have focused on, upstander behavior and the emotional effect of the haunting blue ticks.

The two items that measure upstander behavior and the emotional effect of the haunting blue ticks:

Item 31 – Please respond with “yes” or “not” to the following question:
Have you ever taken any action against daily aggression or harassment from the online environment?

1. No
2. Yes

Item 18 – Please rate your opinion regarding the following affirmation:
I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online.

1. Totally agree.
2. Agree.
3. Neutral.
4. Disagree.
5. Totally disagree.

Our hypothesis states that two research variables: upstander behavior and the emotional effect of the haunting blue ticks are in a curvilinear relationship. In order to test our curvilinear hypothesis, we have used SPSS' multiple linear regression analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects, where upstander behavior was the dependent variable.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 507 high school students: 98 from Romania, 130 from Belgium, 224 from Turkey and 50 from Spain, aged 17-19, of both sexes, 48.6% males and 51.4% females, from both rural and urban environmental origins.

Results

In order to test our hypothesis that states that between upstander behavior and the emotional effect of the blue ticks there is a curvilinear

relationship, we have used a confirmatory factor analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects. A curvilinear relationship is described as a relationship between two or more variables which can be graphically depicted by anything other than a straight line. A particular case of curvilinear relationships is the situation where two variables grow together until they reach a certain point (positive relationship) and then one of them increases while the other decreases (negative relationship) or vice-versa, the graphically representation of the function being an U or an inverted U shape.

This relationship can be easily identified graphically by a Scatterplot, choosing additional two representations of the regression line: Linear and Quadratic model, for depicting curvilinear effects. The Scatterplot diagram presented in Figure 1, indicates the curvilinear relationship between upstander behavior on the horizontal axis and the emotional effect of the blue ticks, represented on the vertical axis. The sample consists of 507 youth from Romania, Belgium, Turkey and Spain.

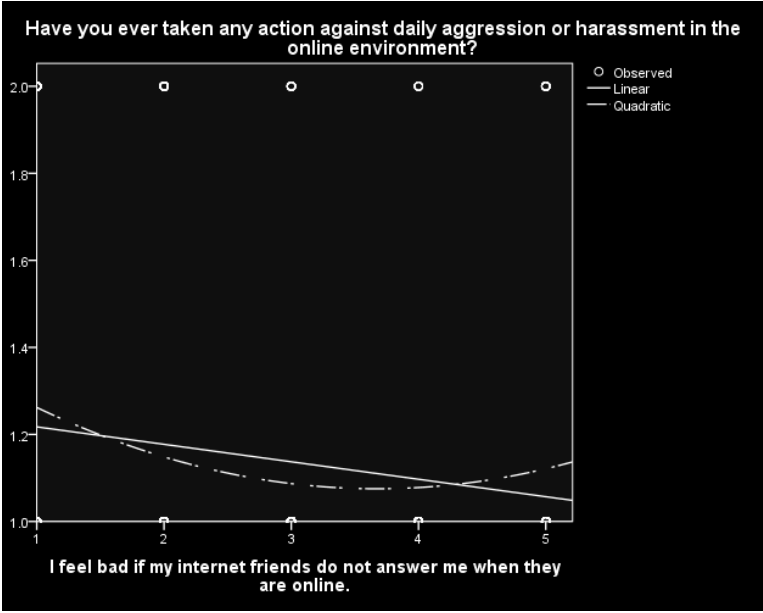


Fig. 1. The curvilinear relationship between upstander behavior (Item 18) and the emotional effect of the blue ticks (Item 31)

There is a very high correlation between upstander behavior – Item 18 ($m=1.15$, $SD=0.35$) and the emotional effect of the blue ticks – Item 31 ($m=2.65$, $SD=1.36$) of $r=-.153$ significant at a $p<.01$ which methodologically

allows us to proceed with multiple linear regression analysis.

For curvilinear relationship testing, the present study proposes a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the dependent variable being emotional effect of the blue ticks – Item 31, and the independent variable in step 1 upstander behavior (Item 18), and in step 2 upstander behavior (Item 18), and squared upstander behavior (Item18sqrt).

Table 1 presents the fitting of the two models, linear – Model 1 and curvilinear/ quadratic – Model 2. As we can see in Model 1 the model that supposes linear relationship, emotional effect of the blue ticks accounts for 2% of the variance in upstander behavior with an $F=11.982$ significant at a $p<.05$. In Model 2, the model that supposes curvilinear relationship, emotional effect of the blue ticks accounts for 3% of the variance in upstander behavior with an $F=9.894$ significant at a $p<.001$.

Table 1. Linear and curvilinear regression models for upstander behavior – Item 18 and emotional effect of the blue ticks – Item 31

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.153 _a	.023	.021	.355	.023	11.982	1	501	.001
2	.195 _b	.038	.034	.352	.015	7.647	1	500	.006

a. Predictors: (Constant), I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online.

b. Predictors: (Constant), I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online., Item18sqrt

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.507	1	1.507	11.982	.001 ^b
	Residual	63.010	501	.126		
	Total	64.517	502			
2	Regression	2.456	2	1.228	9.894	.000 ^c
	Residual	62.061	500	.124		

Total	64.517	502		
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- a. Dependent Variable: Have you ever taken any action against daily aggression or harassment in the online environment?
- b. Predictors: (Constant), I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online.
- c. Predictors: (Constant), I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online., Item18sqr

Coefficients^a

BetaModel	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.		
1BStd.	(Constant)	1.258	.035		36.377	.000
Error	I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online.	-.040	.012	-.153	-3.461	.001
2	(Constant)	1.428	.071		20.235	.000
	I feel bad if my internet friends do not answer me when they are online.	-.192	.056	-.732	-3.421	.001
	Item18sqr	.026	.009	.592	2.765	.006

a. Dependent Variable: Have you ever taken any action against daily aggression or harassment in the online environment?

All standardized coefficients of Beta ($\beta = -.153$; $\beta = -.732$ and $\beta = .592$) are significant at $p < .05$ which gives a high consistency to our both models. Changing Beta coefficient's sign from + to - means that the effect is growing in the opposite direction, which demonstrates that the relationship between the two variables: upstander behavior – Item 18 and emotional effect of the blue ticks – Item 31 is not linear, but curvilinear. The additional incremental predictive capacity of 1 percent, added by including the squared emotional effect of the blue ticks' variable which is accounting for the band in the regression line, indicates that there is a curvilinear relationship between upstander behavior and emotional effect of the blue ticks.

This curvilinear relationship demonstrates that extreme aspects, extremely reduced and extremely high levels of emotional effect of the blue ticks, significantly influences the activation of upstander type of response, meaning that the reaction weather positive or negative towards “blue ticks” will trigger upstanding in front of an online aggression, while situating on the neutral segment of emotional effect of the blue ticks, triggers the bystander response towards the victim in a cyberbullying event. Thus any emotional reaction towards the online “seen” without a response will incline youth towards an upstanding behavior when witnessing a cyberbullying incident and the emotional flatness towards just “seen” messages will incline them to choose a bystander type of reaction towards an online aggression.

Conclusion and implications

When social media started, the feature called 'blue ticks' was not even taken into consideration by users. Past online consumers could did not worry about a message that was been read and ignored, but nowadays this becomes a form of social media anxiety (SMA).

Social media anxiety can be considered a subset of a broader phenomenon called social anxiety, which typically involves feelings of distress relating to social interactions of any kind (Gale, C., Davidson, O., 2007). The social interactions causing distress, involving a fear of being judged by other people, can be offline or online, for example speaking in public offline or using social networking tools online.

This social distress causes distorted thinking that leads to excessively worry and obsessively thinking about how other people are monitoring and judging them, in most of the cases critically. Social *media* anxiety has not gained the same level of medical attention as this broader phenomenon of social anxiety, as it is often viewed as simply a part of these broader fears (Smith, M., Segal, J., Shubin, J., 2017).

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Until now, we are not aware of any research indicating a curvilinear relationship between emotional effect of the blue ticks and upstanding behavior, thus, this study may help expanding the current body of knowledge on psychological aspects of triggering upstanding responses towards the victims of online aggressions.

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