

## Youth Violence and Social Media

Vivek Tripathi

*Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi,  
Delhi 110 021, India*

*Mobile: 9716474831, E-mail: <vivektripathi21@gmail.com>,  
<geographydse2012@gmail.com>*

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**ABSTRACT** India is a country of youths. These youth are so involved with their virtual life that the boundary between real and reel has become quite thin. They share all their emotions of love and hate, aggression and violence over these social media platforms. These youngsters regularly find themselves in a violent virtual space that has negatively influenced their daily real life. This paper tries to understand young people's attitudes and behaviour over social media platforms and attempts to explain the social media as an uncontrolled and violent platform for the youths. Structured questionnaire survey method has been used to understand the behaviour of the youths. It has been found that cyberbullying has become a very negative part of the social media life of these youngsters. The real life street violence has transformed into cyber-crime and cyber bullying. Youngsters, who have been victimised earlier, are also actively participating in the social media violence. Proper education and awareness need to be encouraged in the schools and colleges.

### INTRODUCTION

The country India is a vast land with growing population size in the category of youths (15-30 years). Indian youth is the new power brigade of the country that is evolving through different dimensions, and this age group is the most active and sufficiently energetic (Modi 2017). When this energy does not find its due utilization, it expresses itself in the form of aggression and violence. Violence as defined by World Health Organisation (WHO), "the deliberate use of physical constraint or power undermined or genuine, against oneself, someone else, or against a gathering or group that either result in or has a high probability of bringing about damage, passing, mental mischief, mal-improvement or hardship." Youth violence is very noticeable amongst the most distinct types of crime in the public arena. When such violence is committed over virtual space of \*social media, it is known as social media violence. Social Media Violence can be defined as "any badgering or

tormenting (prodding, telling untruths, ridiculing somebody, making inconsiderate or mean remarks, spreading bits of gossip, or making debilitating or forceful remarks) that happens through email, a talk room, texting, a site (counting online journals), or content informing."

One of the most seeable forms of violence in the society is the youth violence. Around the globe, daily newspapers and the electronic media report day by day on violence by groups, in schools or by youngsters in the city. Though violence is not a new phenomenon on the face of this earth, we are confronted with the new form of violence which does exist in neither the streets nor the societies. This new platform is the social media. Youth Brigade is venting out its energy through social media (Poulos 2017). Today's youth walks on the streets but travels in the virtual world through his mobile phones, tablets, and other electronic gizmos. This way he plays his second identity in the space of social media. Physical absence at social media platforms is replaced by mental exposure and more deeply connected with our emotions (Chaudhary 2016). Social media has become a renowned platform that allows people to express their feelings with the added advantage of being in disguise and perpetuate acts of violence against their

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*Address for correspondence:*  
Vivek Tripathi  
B-32, Street No - 3,  
Ambika Vihar, Karawal Nagar,  
Delhi 110 094, India

peers, such as bullying, harassment, dating aggression, and gang-related crimes. Also, social media has also been used as a vehicle for inflicting self-harm- most notably, cyber-suicide (Cash et al. 2013). Youngsters of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot live without the internet and social media sites - for example, Facebook, Twitter. More than ninety percent youths use the internet daily, and approximately seventy percent have active accounts on one of the social media sites (Subrahmanyam et al. 2009). Research recommends that youth use the virtual space for exploring the relevant information related to their real lives (Subrahmanyam et al. 2009).

The acts of face-to-face and verbal violence are still more widespread than virtual violence. Research suggests that most children and adolescents (65-91%) report little or no involvement in violence over social media platforms (Kowalski and Limber 2007). Virtual world violence, do, however, represent a growing problem in need of additional research and prevention efforts (David and Hertz 2007).

Research conducted by Patchin and Hinduja's (2013) shows growing cases of social media violence and cyber bullying. This study consisted of a random sample of 4441 youngsters between the ages of 10 to 18 from 37 schools. It was found that almost twenty percent of youths reported experiencing cyberbullying victimization in 2010, and twenty percent reported bullying by others through cyberspace at some point in their lifetimes. There have been increased incidents of criminal cases that were designed and executed explicitly on social media platforms like Facebook. The communication on social media is characterized by a greater amount of anonymity that provides fair chances of increased hostility in interpersonal interactions (McKenna and Bargh 2000).

Though concern towards the youth violence and social media are drawing the attention of people there is quite limited research done on this topic. This paper tries to explore the nature and possible repercussions of interaction between youth violence and social media.

### Objectives of the Study

- To understand young people's attitudes and perceptions toward social networking services.

- To find out whether social media has become a platform for expressing aggression and violence.
- To identify whether the risky behaviour of youths differs in real and reel life.

## METHODOLOGY

### Survey Design and Procedure

The research methodology used for this study is structured questionnaire survey method. The survey sample selection is based on the focus of contacting people who closely represent the target population, that is, the young internet users of Delhi.

A random purposive sample of 360 youths between ages of 16 to 30, consisting of fifty-five percent males and forty-five percent females were taken for the questionnaire survey. These respondents were active users of the internet who have, at least one time in a month for the past six months, used the internet. The respondents were the students of different colleges of the University of Delhi, who belong to various social and economic groups. Five hundred respondents were contacted, and only 360 respondents have completed the survey. Many of these 360 respondents provided valuable feedbacks that helped us to frame our observations more appropriately.

### Literature Review

Youth has always found public spaces for gathering, gossiping, competing for their social life, and spend some quality time with friends. However, websites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube provided a new medium of communication which is immediate, erases the constraints of public and private spaces and easily accessible (Wolff et al. 2011). The interaction with social media is not just restricted to informal dialogues; it extends to serious chats that sometimes go violent.

In the cyber world we have disembodied identities similar to the one shown in Movie avatar. The identity on the virtual space is an extension of the real self. That gets violated and can violate other identities with more broader and destructive ways. In this world of social media the physical and material force of city crime, the aesthetics of fear in the built environment, is re-

placed by other forms of victimization. Victimization of the body are replaced by victimizations of the virtual subject. The virtual space does not necessarily increase security since the spaces of exposure in the cyber are much greater, the ability to find the security bubbles offered in urban areas are much less. Nor does it necessarily follow that 'virtual' victimization is less in its effects; arguably, they are much greater and more pervasive (Brown 2003).

Hackett (2013) explains the level of Cyberbullying Statistics in the UK. According to him, cyberbullying is rapidly increasing and sixty-nine percent youngsters aged 13 to 22, had experienced cyberbullying out of which twenty percent had to face extreme cases of bullying. Thirty-seven percent of youngsters had to experience such extreme bullying cases frequently. The most likely possibility of experiencing extreme cyberbullying was over Facebook than any other social media platform with around fifty-four percent of youngsters being bullied on this site only. Hackett further added that a young transgender is more likely to experience such traumatic bullying than boys or girls. Hackett scaled 1 to 10 to test the impact of cyberbullying brings to their self-esteem with ten being astonishingly severe, 7.5 was the average. "It is having a massive impact on young people, and it is heart breaking to read," he said. Another research conducted by Steven Walker on the statistics of cyberbullying, found that over twenty-nine percent of youngsters experiencing bullying tried to stay away from school, while more than thirty-nine percent suspended meeting their friends outside the campus. Because of growing use of social media among the teenagers, the incidents of cyberbullying are most likely to increase in United Kingdom (Association 2011). The virtual space provided over the Internet has facilitated new mediums through which teenagers are bullied. Different studies produce varying dangerous patterns of cyberbullying that confirm that cases of cyberbullying are on the rise and this not limited to a particular country but the whole world is facing this problem. Almost half (42%) of lesbian, gay and bisexual people have experienced homophobic cyberbullying (Think Progress 2013).

Cyberbullying is not targeted towards some particular individuals, but the persons who are weak and vulnerable, that is, someone, the perpetrators are confirmed, would not go against

them or take help from his peers. New research proposes that often cyberbullying is not peculiar to a particular gender; both females and males are equally vulnerable. Most of the youngsters found Facebook to be more associated with bullying than any other social media sites.

Cyberbullying has proved quite detrimental for the self-pride of more than seventy percent of young people. As per an estimate, around 5.43 million youths have experienced cyberbullying in the UK, with over 1.26 million had to face extreme cyberbullying regularly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How a person interacts with social media is greatly dependent on the responses he/she receives from his activities on it. A positive response takes the journey of a youth over social media platform to a more personalised way. The youths experiencing positive response spend more time with social media, and their experience remains entirely different in comparison to those who experience adverse treatment. The youngsters, who do not get expected result or get a negative and violent response after their online interaction with other users they tend to, reduce spending time over social media platform. The cases of bullying and violence over the virtual IDs of such youth affect their use of social media and further deteriorate their real life.

### Significance of the Social Media in Youth's Lives

Social media has become an integral part of today's youth. It is not just a medium to stave off boredom or works as a time-filler, it has started to mark a significant impact on their education, knowledge, and exposure to new experiences. It has become a universal medium of interaction wherein almost all youths are participating. The students of Delhi University responded that getting an internet connection is essential. "If someone is unable to get access to the internet, he finds himself out of the group. Having a high-speed internet is a status symbol nowadays. In today's time, no one seems to be without the internet. Almost most of the youngsters are always online spending time in surfing internet, reading stuff or engaged on Facebook", was the response of another respondent. During the survey, seventy-five percent respondent

said they spend more than one hour per day on social media, while twenty percent spend more than 4 hours per day over social media. Social media has become an extension of their real self (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Average time spent over social media platforms**

<i>Time spent over social media by youths</i>	<i>% people</i>
>1hour	25
1-2 hour	33
2-4hour	22
<4hour	20

### Virtual Violence

Engagement with violence over the virtual world is something which is personally relevant, and it varies significantly among young people in different age strata (age group 16-30). Respondents responded that due to more awareness about social media platforms, youngsters spend more time on them. "We often experience violent exposure on social media, sometimes they are very personal and might include some unwarranted exposure to inappropriate content or bad contacts," said a 20-year-old girl from Delhi University College.

Youths identify the social media platform as the online areas where cyberbullying is most prevalent. Forty-seven percent respondents witnessed violence over social media platform in various forms. This harassment included bullying, calling names, sharing private information, threatening, sending violent text, images, and videos. More is the 'distance' between two online users, the more it becomes easier to bullying online. It allows for youths to be bolder and more aggressive without the fear of immediate consequences. Moreover, online interaction is devoid of fear of facing immediate reaction for the people engaging in bullying or violent behaviour. Therefore, youths keep bullying others without any constraints. Conversely, in the offline world, someone bullying might stop or feel immediate regret on seeing a victim breakdown, cry or otherwise be negatively affected.

It has usually been observed that people often hesitate in sharing their personal experiences (Kohls 2010). Such behaviour is reflected during the survey in the field when forty-seven percent respondents witnessed violence or harassment over social media, yet only seventeen

percent have said to experience harassment personally. More than seventy percent respondents apparently denied of being harassed over social media. Eight percent respondents were confused to say anything about whether they had witnessed harassment or violence over social media, and eleven percent could not conclude whether they were harassed or violated online or not (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Youth and social media**

<i>S. No</i>	<i>Interaction of youths over social media platforms</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Can't say</i>
1	Ever witnessed violence	47	45	8
2	Ever been harassed	17	72	11
3	Harassment by known person	42	35	23
4	Violated by same person	5	89	6
5	Social media as a new weapon	72	8	20
6	Share violent content	2	72	8

Radford et al. (2011) note that likelihood of reporting violence decreases if perpetrated with a peer, with eighty-three percent of those who experienced violence from a peer not telling anyone compared to thirty-four percent of those assaulted by an adult. More recently, Beckett et al. (2013) found that only 1 in 12 young people felt that someone of their age would be likely to report, or talk about, experiences of violence or exploitation. Where they did choose to tell someone about their experiences, this would most often be to a peer rather than anyone in a position of authority.

### Lack of Knowledge in Dealing with Cyber Crime

People using social media are unable to define violence or harassment over it. Thus, they often get confused whether they have ever been victims of cyber-crime. Lack of guidelines and knowledge about cyber law makes people vulnerable. They often can't decide what to do in such a situation. Respondents were also hesitant in stating whether they know someone who threatens or perpetrate violence online or not. Sixty-one percent reported that they don't know any such person who harasses others in a virtual world or commits online violence thereon (Table 2). Seventy-two percent said they don't know anyone who shares violent contents to others. This result reinforces the concept of fear of crime. Though nowadays youths know some guidelines about social media, however, there remains

a significant gap between their knowledge and its practical application.

Pavan Duggal, a cyber-law expert, agrees that most of the youngsters possess mobile phones and are connected to the internet which makes them a soft target for the attack. The social stigma attached to bullying stops the youngsters to report any such incident. When in some cases the situation gets out of hand, these youths confide in their parents or friends. However, parents too are unwilling to engage in any legal battle for such incidents. That is why more than ninety percent cases of cyber bullying go unreported. If some of them try to report the cases, they face further harassment, or no action is taken against their complaints. In a study conducted by Pasricha (2016), thirty-six percent respondents said they reported the cases, but no action was taken by the law enforcement agencies.

### **The Real World is Different from the Virtual World**

The impact of online violence is more psychological than physical. People who are victimized by someone online are quite less likely to be harassed in real life. The important fact is that the same person does not harass a person on social media platforms but different people at different times. A majority of eighty-nine percent youths confirm this fact during the survey. The most probable reason behind it is the power that a user gets at these social media platforms. If someone is harassing, he can be blocked to make sure it does not get repeated. However, one of the parents' greatest fears concerning online safety is the risk of "online predators" that entice youths to offline encounters. Parents are particularly worried that adults would coerce their teenagers into offline sexual encounters, abduct them, or worse.

There have been cases reported in news media where few online solicitations drive to offline meetings. In reality, these solicitors are there merely to abuse and abduct the naive youngsters and sexually violate them. Sometimes these online encounters convert into real life friendship and sexual relationships among the youth couples older than 20 years of age (Wolak et al. 2008). A respondent told how her uncle's daughter was tricked by an aged man living in a different state. The senior man posed himself as a young boy who belonged to a

wealthy family and wanted to marry the girl. The girl fell in love with the man and left her home to meet him. Her parents lodged a police complaint, and after a week the guy and the girl were caught from a hotel where the girl was gang raped by the man she used to talk and his friends. Sometimes same offender attacks on the same target due to lack of stringent measure for curbing cyber-crime. The offenders find it easy to commit a crime once and roam freely without any fear of punishment.

### **Social Media: A Medium of Violence**

Today's youth are using the virtual platform for various objectives. Given the large and uncontrolled arena of social media, it has become dangerous. Very similar to the cyberbullying incidents, multiple social media platforms are becoming a medium for youth violence.

Pasricha (2016) writes in her report that a social activist G. Nair, a Facebook user, was attacked in 2015 for criticising late Ex-President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. Attackers tried to hack her account, created a new Facebook profile in her name, used a vulgar profile photo, depicting her as a prostitute and also abused her children.

At the more dangerous level, extremist groups like ISIS are using social media in propagating their terrorist strategy. Twitter has recently announced on its blog (August 18, 2016) that it has suspended 360000 accounts engaged in promoting terrorism and violence.

A news report by Swamy published in Indian Express newspaper on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015 stated that ISIS is targeting Indian youths through social media platforms. Such dangerous terrorist organisations create groups over different social media platforms and lure innocent youngsters to join them.

Moreover, people use this platform for insulting images of their target in front of a vast number of people in a second. A scot free image is most important for a person. If that image is attacked or maligned, that person becomes suicidal, and there are ample examples where people have committed suicide following the posts on social media about their private life. Therefore, social media can be termed as a new form of weapon to kill people. During the survey, seventy-two percent people have straightway replied that social media has become a new type of weapon to violate someone (Table 2). Twenty

percent were still confused to tell about the new kind of role that social media is playing. "Anyone can attack his possible target in a second without facing any real-time threat of being caught or punished", a respondent said. Social media provides an uncontrolled power to destroy somebody's image in a moment.

Another respondent Saurabh shared his traumatic experience over Facebook, where his friends used to bully him for being obese regularly. He used to feel suicidal due to regular humiliation at that point of time. However, he feels confident now because of regular support of his parents who helped him overcome that bad experience. Unfortunately, every youth is not as fortunate as Saurabh to get proper support and guidance at the right point in time. Such unfortunate behavioural issues are compelling the youngsters to commit suicide and get free of regular trolls and humiliations they are frequently facing over their virtual space.

According to Global Youth Online Behaviour Survey conducted by Microsoft (2012) reported that more than fifty-three percent children in India had faced cyberbullying. Globally India stands third in reported cases of cyberbullying. All kinds of violent activities targeting an individual to mortify, exasperate, stigmatise, undermine or affront, are a part of cyber bullying. Photoshopping target's face over pornographic pictures, posting and spreading defaming rumours and blackmailing the victim over his/her objectionable videos are typical examples of cyber-crime. Like other cases of bullying, children may not inform their parents of the cyber humiliation or the threat they suffer out of fear of social stigma. Results are depression, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem, fear and isolation.

### CONCLUSION

The Internet and social media have become an integral part of the life of today's youth. Social media has become an extension of their identity wherein they act or project themselves according to their desire. This fascinating journey of social media is full of risks and dangers that are still unknown to many of them. Irresponsible behaviour at social media might jeopardise their real identity as well. The current young generation is well aware of the usage of modern technology but weak in understanding the consequences of their behaviour at these social media

platforms. Regular reporting of the cases related to the cybercrime is the proof of ignorance about pros and cons of social media by its users and inability of law enforcement agencies to control the violence in the cyber world. Lack of strict laws for curbing cyber-crimes in India has also led to growing cases of cyberbullying. People are unwilling to report the cases of cyberbullying due to the stigma attached to such offences. Indian Police System is not well equipped to investigate cases of cyber-crime. Indian government's neglect can be assessed by the fact that the most recent development in cyber laws was in the year 2013 when Indian parliament framed cyber laws related to only online fraud and phishing scams, but no special laws have been framed to control the threatening cases of cyber bullying. Better technological infrastructure for the law enforcement agencies and awareness about the harmful effects of social media would help in reducing the cases of cyber-crime.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Indian government needs to focus on increasing cases of cyberbullying and take stringent actions to check it immediately. The dream of Digital India can only be a positive reality when the government implements proper scrutiny and controlling measures towards cyber threats.

There is an immediate requirement for a well-planned risk management strategy related to social media. At the institutional level, creating awareness about the behaviour on social media is indispensable. The approach of controlling the perpetrators cannot be of much use because of the uncontrolled and swift nature of social media. A better way to curb the social media crimes is to make aware the users about their behaviours at the social media platforms. Organised teams should conduct workshops at school and university level. Families need to understand the vulnerability of cyber-violence and deal their offspring in a more cordial manner which will help in increasing the chances of reporting of cyber-bullying and catching the culprits. Proper training programmes should be conducted for the law enforcement agencies so that they became well-equipped and prepared to counter any such case of cyber-violence.

## NOTE

- \* Social Media: According to Oxford dictionary, “website and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.” For example Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Google+, WhatsApp, Skype, Yahoo messenger, etc.

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