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Editorial: Examining bias-based cyberaggression and cybervictimization from a cross-cultural perspective

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Examining bias-based cyberaggression and cybervictimization from a cross-cultural perspective

During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals relied heavily on computer mediated communication technologies to perform personal and professional activities (Meier et al., 2021). Because individuals relied heavily on their electronic devices and the Internet, this made them more vulnerable to cyberaggression and cybervictimization (Wang et al., 2022), which lead to negative effects such as depression, suicide ideation, and low wellbeing (Kowalski et al., 2014; Keipi et al., 2018; Musharraf and Anis-ul-Haque, 2018). Cyberaggression includes cyberbullying perpetration (Zych et al., 2015), cyberhate (Bedrosova et al., 2022), cybergossip (Romera et al., 2018), and cybercrime, such as cyberstalking (Mikkola et al., 2020) along with other aggressive behaviors that occur in computer-mediated contexts.

Cyberaggression and cybervictimization studies have emphasized the prevalence rates across countries, especially when examining gender (Kowalski et al., 2014; Sorrentino et al., 2019). European studies report higher prevalence among Bulgarian youth in comparison to other countries such as Greek, Italian, Polish, and Spanish youth (Livingstone et al., 2011; Athanasiades et al., 2015; Sorrentino et al., 2019). Research examining the prevalence of cybervictimization and cyberbullying in Austria, Cyprus, and Romania, found that multi-item scales are more effective when engaging in cross-national comparisons (Yanagida et al., 2016). Another study found that cellphone ownership moderated the relationship between factors such as gender and cybervictimization among adolescents from Canada (Shapka et al., 2018). When examining cyberbullying and cybervictimization across 8 European countries, Sorrentino et al. (2019) found that boys were more likely to become perpetrators across

all countries, and cybervictimization was more likely to occur in Bulgaria and Hungary. In a cross-cultural comparison of college students between USA and Japan, US males were more likely to report higher levels of cyberbullying than Japanese males (Barlett et al., 2014). It's also been found that compulsive Internet use partially mediates the positive relationship between cyberaggression and impulsivity across Finland, Spain, and the United States (Zych et al., 2021). Further, a study comparing adolescents and young adults from Estonia, Italy, Germany and Turkey showed that the severity of cyberbullying is perceived differently across countries (Palladino et al., 2017). While studies have initiated the work in examining cross-national comparisons of cyberaggression and cybervictimization using survey and experimental methods and validating measures (e.g., Del Rey et al., 2015) and classification approaches (e.g., Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2014) across countries, a gap in the literature has been examining these issues from a cross-cultural perspective using various methodological perspectives. To address this gap, this collection will highlight the findings of cyberaggression and cybervictimization studies that will extend previous research.

This Research Topic

The objective of this special issue was to highlight cyberaggression and cybervictimization research from a cross-cultural perspective. This Research Topic compiled the following four research articles that address cyberbullying victimization across cultures.

Peker and Ümit Yalçin conducted a descriptive bibliographical approach to map cross-cultural research and cyberbullying victimization. Findings highlight the cross-cultural studies of cybervictimization across 74 countries and found that the countries that contributed the most literature of cross-cultural cyberbullying victimization were USA, Spain, England, China, and Canada. A total of 8 cooperation clusters were identified around the world. Cross-collaborations across institutions and authors were also illustrated to highlight the cross-cultural nature of cyberbullying as a global issue.

In their study, Nagar et al. compared youth from Canadian and Iranian cultural contexts in regards to their bystander behavior against cyberbullying perpetration. Because most cyberbullying research on bystanders behavior is conducted in Western cultures, comparing the evaluation of bystander behavior using an individualistic Western country (e.g., Canada) and a collectivistic Middle Eastern country (e.g., Iran) is beneficial (Machackova and Pfetsch, 2016). Findings illustrate that both Canadians and Iranians evaluated the assisting of the cyberbully negatively regardless of relationship type. When evaluating outsider behavior, Canadians evaluated the behavior more negatively when it was a friend; whereas Iranians were indifferent toward outsiders. Defending

behavior perceptions differed by country. In terms of moral responsibility, the relationship with the bystander mattered to both Canadians and Iranians. In this study, youth similarities and differences are detailed in regards to the evaluation of bystander behavior, which can inform cross-cultural bystander intervention programs.

Cañas et al. used the sociometry method to identify peer acceptance and rejection values based on six statuses: popular, preferred, rejected, controversial, ignored, and average. Findings of 29 studies revealed that the bully role was related to both positive status (e.g., popularity, acceptance, and social preference) and a negative status (e.g., rejection). With these findings, the status perceptions of the role of the bully can be better understood in traditional and cyber victimization problems that occur in cross-cultural social hierarchies among adolescents.

Finally, Schultze-Krumbholz et al. examined the ethnic-based motives of ethnic/racist cybervictimization of 349 adolescents. Those with a migration background were more likely to have victimization motives. The factor of ethnicity-based motives was a predictor of ethnic/racist victimization. However, dispute-related motives was a significant predictor of different forms of cybervictimization. Socio-cultural factors such as generation/migration status and ethnicity were shown to explain coping strategies when encountering cybervictimization. The most vulnerable to cyberbullying victimization were shown to be first generation migrant adolescents.

In sum, the papers in this issue offer several contributions. The cultural factors of bullies and victims such as social status and ethnicity can explain the interpersonal perceptions that perpetuate the bully-victim cycle. Next, cross-cultural differences based on cultural upbringing can explain bystander behavior based on the relationship they have with the perpetrator. It was found that moral emotions may differ on whether a country is collectivistic, or individualist, such that collectivistic countries might be more likely to engaging in bystander behavior to maintain the harmony of a group. Also, the ethnic/race and migration status of adolescents can explain the coping behaviors adopted against cybervictimization. Lastly, the visual network analysis demonstrated the strength of collaboration links of cyberbullying across the world using an illustration of 8 clusters, demonstrating that cyberbullying is a cross-cultural issue that requires increased cross-cultural collaboration.

Practical implications

Several practical implications can be derived from this collection. First, cybervictimization intervention programs need to consider cultural factors when tailoring their programs to bullies, victims, and bystanders. For instance, interventions need to adhere to cultural values, norms, and perspectives to improve

their cross-cultural content to maximize their prevention effectiveness. Second, education curriculums and programs need to take into consideration the cultural factors that explain why some individuals become targets of victimization. Ethnic-related cybervictimization can be addressed by promoting diversity and multicultural trainings and workshops. Third, prevention and intervention programs should pay special attention to more vulnerable and less popular students, and should also be directed to reduce popularity-motivated cyberbullying. Fourth, there is a need to improve cybervictimization policies and laws to protect individuals from targeted cybervictimization based on cultural factors.

Summary and future directions

Overall, this collection examined cybervictimization and cyberaggression from different cross-cultural approaches. Findings from this special issue demonstrate that researchers can conduct cross-cultural research using a variety of methods including descriptive bibliographical, cross-cultural comparison, sociometry, and descriptive prevalence-based. Future researchers may use these findings to develop or evaluate cross-cultural cyberaggression or cybervictimization interventions among adolescents and young adult samples. Future studies may also consider using qualitative methods of research such as focus groups, interviews, and diary studies to better understand the in-depth experiences of cyberbullies, cybervictims, and cyberbystanders from a cross-cultural perspective.

Author contributions

LR was responsible for writing the initial draft of the editorial. All authors listed helped with revising and editing this editorial. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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