



## THE DYNAMICS OF CHARACTER ASSASSINATION THROUGH CYBERBULLYING ON TWITTER

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the dynamics of character assassination through cyberbullying on Twitter as an increasingly prominent social phenomenon in the digital era. As social media becomes a central space for public communication, individual reputations can be rapidly constructed or damaged. Character assassination on social media constitutes a form of digital violence that poses serious risks to victims' psychological well-being and social standing. Employing a qualitative approach, this research analyzes patterns of attacks, perpetrators' motivations, and victims' experiences through content analysis of tweets and in-depth interviews with individuals affected by cyberbullying. The findings indicate that cyberbullying on platform X is reinforced by key features of a network society, including anonymity, rapid information circulation, and global visibility. These factors intensify psychological harm such as stress and depression, while also undermining victims' social reputation and digital identity. Additionally, platform algorithms may unintentionally amplify negative content by prioritizing highly engaging posts. Addressing this issue requires collaborative efforts among social media platforms, government institutions, and communities through improved moderation systems, effective reporting mechanisms, and victim support services.*

**Keywords:** Character, Cyberbullying, Twitter.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-growing digital era, social media has become rampant as a means of interaction that is inseparable from everyday life, especially among young people (Cataldo et al., 2021). The freedom of communication offered by cyberspace, although providing benefits in terms of connectivity and information exchange, also brings a

number of negative impacts. Among them, the phenomenon of cyberbullying stands out as a fairly serious negative impact, affecting the young generation of Indonesia with around 45% of 2,777 children admitting to having been victims (Utami, 2022). This figure underlines how widespread the problem of cyberbullying is, indicating that it has become a serious issue affecting the younger generation. Cyberbullying, which involves the use of information technology to harass, intimidate, or personally attack an individual, has become a critical issue that requires serious attention from various parties (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022). Incidents of cyberbullying often create an unsafe and frightening online environment for many children, reducing their ability to learn and interact in a healthy and productive way. Furthermore, this phenomenon not only impacts the psychological well-being of victims but can also affect their social and academic development (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2020; Suhendar & Halimi, 2023).

The dynamics of cyberbullying in Indonesia also reflect a broader problem related to the identity crisis among the younger generation. In the multicultural context of Indonesia, this issue becomes even more complex because it involves sensitive aspects such as ethnicity, religion, and social stratification. This phenomenon shows that cyberbullying often aims not only to hurt individuals personally, but also to isolate or stigmatize certain groups, deepening social divisions and tensions (Byrne, 2021).

Addressing the phenomenon of cyberbullying requires an approach that prioritizes ethics and morals in online interactions (Gajda et al., 2023). In a global context, universal ethical principles in communication can be used as a basis for preventing and dealing with cyberbullying behavior. Integrating these ethical principles into digital education and public policy can be an important step in building more positive and inclusive online behavior (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Purba et al., 2025; Ritonga et al., 2024).

However, the challenge of integrating ethical principles in addressing cyberbullying reflects the need for more in-depth research. There is a gap in knowledge regarding how ethical values and norms can be translated into concrete practices that are effective in responding to the complex dynamics of cyberbullying. This suggests the importance of research to not only understand the psychological and social impacts of cyberbullying, but also to explore value-based solutions that can support children and adolescents in facing these challenges (Fatma & Agustina, 2023; Orizani, 2020).

Therefore, the urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to address the

negative impacts of cyberbullying in Indonesia, especially among young people. This research aims to fill this gap in knowledge and provide guidance for policymakers, educators, and the wider community in formulating effective intervention strategies, prioritizing approaches that are sensitive to cultural values and promoting ethical and responsible online behavior.

The novelty of this research aims to develop mitigation strategies or models that can help individuals and social media platforms in addressing and preventing cyberbullying that targets a person's reputation. This study is not only important for understanding the dynamics of character assassination through cyberbullying on Twitter but also for developing interventions that can reduce its prevalence and impact. By analyzing attack patterns and formulating mitigation strategies, this study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to social media platforms, policymakers, and online communities (Harianto et al., 2023; Ohorella et al., 2024).

This study will help in creating more effective protection mechanisms for individuals, while maintaining the online space as a place for constructive and free exchange of ideas. Therefore, the urgency of this study lies in the urgent need to address and prevent character assassination on social media, which has become a disturbing phenomenon in contemporary digital society. By deepening the understanding of cyberbullying and developing effective solutions, this study contributes to the broader effort to promote online safety and prevent the destructive impacts of toxic online behavior. This is an important step towards establishing a more inclusive, safe, and supportive digital environment for all users.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODE**

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to understand the subjective experiences of individuals in viewing character dynamics in cyberbullying practices. This study aims to understand how cyberbullying can damage a person's reputation and identity in the digital public space and what strategies victims can use to deal with or overcome such attacks. This research will be conducted in cyberspace, specifically on the social media platform Twitter, which is the main medium for cyberbullying and character assassination. The geographical focus is not limited because Twitter allows cross-border interaction, but the research

will include the Indonesian language to identify and analyze the dynamics of cyberbullying in the local Indonesian context. In addition, interviews and online surveys will be conducted with participants domiciled in Indonesia to obtain perceptions, experiences, and responses to cyberbullying on Twitter. This digital research location allows for extensive and in-depth data collection on the phenomenon of cyberbullying without being limited by the physical location of the researcher or participants. At this stage, the author tries to collect sources or data through field research methods (Bailey, 2023). Research using the library method aims to obtain written data through books, archives, articles or other written sources. Written sources in this case are divided into two, namely primary written sources and secondary written sources, while direct data sources are obtained from direct observations to the research location (primary data) and re-observations are carried out (Creswell, 2021). Primary data used for research is data obtained by being collected by the researcher himself and directly on the object being studied. Also secondary data, namely from data collected by other people or agencies that are packaged in the form of publications, or other forms of reports. The data collection techniques used by the author in this study are, Conducting observations at the designated research location. In this study, the researcher used participant observation and non-participant observation. Through participant observation, researchers learn about behavior and the meaning of that behavior. The researcher conducted observations which at this level were Twitter media to collect and analyze the phenomenon of character assassination due to cyberbullying. Second, Conducting interviews with several competent informants to produce valid data. Third, Documentation Taking data and analysis with documentation in the form of archives, photos, sound recordings and others. Fourth, Reviewing library literature periodically to enrich the reference treasury. This research was conducted by means of description in the form of words and language in a specific natural context and by utilizing various scientific methods to provide explanations or interpretations through the library research method. This paper forms a description of the approach with conceptual studies that stand on the type of literature review (Weyant, 2022). The analysis process is carried out by looking at several communication science studies in forming a perspective that is specifically designed to look at literature that is oriented towards a deductive-interpretive perspective.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### **Character Assassination Due to Bullying**

Character assassination through bullying, especially in the digital space, is a form of violence that utilizes sophisticated technology to spread lies, slander, and misleading information with the aim of damaging an individual's reputation (Zhang et al., 2022). This is not just an attack on someone's identity, but a systematic dismantling of their trust and integrity in the eyes of the public. With a single click, a career built over years, relationships carefully maintained, and a closely guarded self-image can be shattered into pieces, leaving the victim isolated and deeply stigmatized.

This act of character assassination is often carried out under the guise of anonymity provided by the internet, giving perpetrators the courage to spread hatred without fear of immediate consequences (Yu & Riddle, 2022). Ironically, even though the perpetrators can hide, the impact felt by the victims is very real. Victims can experience anxiety disorders, depression, and even thoughts and actions to harm themselves due to unbearable pressure. The victim's social and professional circles are also threatened, as the spread of negative narratives goes unchecked.

Furthermore, character assassination on social media not only damages individuals, but also poisons the online environment as a whole. This creates a culture of fear, where anyone is a potential target for attack. Freedom of expression is stifled due to fears of being harassed or slandered. As a result, healthy and productive online discussions are stifled, hindering the exchange of ideas and limiting the progress of collective thought.

Cases of character assassination demonstrate the failures in social media platforms' content moderation and policy oversight systems (Arora et al., 2023). Too often, reporting and handling mechanisms feel slow and ineffective, leaving victims feeling helpless and unprotected. This raises questions about the platforms' responsibility to protect their users and their commitment to building healthy and supportive online communities (Fauzan et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2025; Suhendar et al., 2023).

Addressing this challenge requires collective action from all parties: individuals, online communities, social media platforms, and policymakers. Education on digital ethics, strengthening reporting and response systems for bullying, and stricter laws and effective enforcement are all important steps in addressing character assassination. We must move towards a digital environment where every individual feels safe to share and interact, free from fear of harassment or slander. Only in this way can we restore the integrity of the online space and ensure that technology remains a tool that connects and empowers us all, rather than divides or destroys.

### **The Spiral of Silence Theory as a Model of Silencing Character Assassination**

One communication theory that can help explain the silencing of character assassination is the Spiral of Silence Theory, developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, explaining the phenomenon where people tend to remain silent or not express their opinions when they feel that their views are contrary to the majority opinion (Gearhart & Adegbola, 2025). This theory is rooted in the fear of isolation; individuals worry about being ostracized or rejected by their social group if they voice unpopular opinions. In the context of social media, such as Twitter, where public dynamics and audience perceptions can change quickly, this theory offers valuable insights into how and why cyberbullying, especially character assassination, occurs and persists. In this study, the Spiral of Silence theory can be used to analyze how online public opinion influences individuals' tendencies to participate in conversations about cyberbullying cases or to defend victims (January Febro et al., 2024). Individuals who may initially want to voice support for the victim or oppose the perpetrator may hold back for fear of negative reactions from the majority or becoming the next target of attacks. This creates an environment where the voices of the victim's supporters are drowned out, strengthening the position of the perpetrator and deepening the negative impact of the attack on the victim (Indainanto et al., 2023).

Applying the Spiral of Silence theory to the context of character assassination through cyberbullying on Twitter also helps explain how perceptions of the 'majority opinion' are formed (Xu et al., 2021). On social media, this 'majority' is often shaped by the most vocal voices or by algorithms that promote certain content, rather than

necessarily reflecting the true views of the majority of users. This can leave individuals who genuinely hold dissenting views feeling isolated and unrepresented, further reinforcing the spiral of silence and allowing bullying to continue unchallenged.

Furthermore, the theory also emphasizes the importance of 'brave people', individuals who, despite the pressure of majority opinion, still choose to speak out. In cases of online character assassination, these brave people play a crucial role in breaking the spiral of silence, providing support to victims, and changing the narrative (Ettinger et al., 2023). They can play a vital role in challenging the power dynamics that allow cyberbullying to occur, offering alternative perspectives and encouraging more people to speak out.

Linking the Spiral of Silence theory to this research underscores the need for strategies that build collective courage in the face of cyberbullying and character assassination on social media. Building awareness and encouraging open discussion about the real impacts of online character assassination is essential to reducing the stigma associated with being 'different' in opinion and strengthening support networks for those who are targeted. Through this understanding, it can be hoped that more effective and sustainable efforts to combat cyberbullying can emerge, restoring safe spaces for online expression and interaction.

### **Cyberbullying Actions from a Network Society Perspective**

Cyberbullying is an act of bullying that occurs in the digital space through social media, messaging applications, or other online platforms. In the digital era dominated by global information networks, this phenomenon has become more complex because technology allows anonymity, rapid spread, and wide reach. To understand cyberbullying in this era, the network society theory developed by Manuel Castells is very relevant. This theory explains how modern society is connected through digital networks that define social interactions, including negative behaviors such as cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020).

In a network society, communication occurs in a network that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries. Digital technology allows cyberbullying perpetrators to take advantage of their anonymity, create false identities, and attack victims without direct risk to their identities. This anonymity gives perpetrators the courage to carry out actions that they might not do in the real world. In addition, digital networks allow harassment to occur globally, so that its impact on victims is wider. For example, negative comments or threats uploaded on social media can be seen by audiences from various parts of the world, increasing the shame, social pressure, and isolation felt by victims.

The speed of information dissemination in the digital era also increases the impact of cyberbullying. Messages containing insults or threats can spread virally in minutes, often without control. This adds to the intensity of the trauma experienced by victims, because social pressure comes not only from the perpetrator but also from the audience who may also spread or respond to the content. For example, in cases where someone's private video is disseminated without permission, the impact is not only in the form of local reputation damage but can also spread globally in a short time.

From a network society perspective, cyberbullying also shows how digital spaces can create social norms that are different from the real world. When ethical norms in online spaces are unclear or ignored, behavior such as cyberbullying can flourish without adequate supervision. This is exacerbated by the lack of effective regulation on many digital platforms, making it difficult to track or prosecute perpetrators.

To address this phenomenon, it is important to adopt a holistic approach. Digital literacy education is crucial to equip people with critical thinking skills and an understanding of internet ethics. Technology can also be used to detect and stop the spread of negative content through smarter algorithms. Stricter regulations are needed to ensure that perpetrators of cyberbullying can be given fair sanctions. In addition, building a positive digital culture by strengthening supportive and respectful online communities can help prevent this behavior.

Cyberbullying on social media X can be understood as one of the phenomena reinforced by the characteristics of the digital era in the theory of network society

(Rawanoko et al., 2021). In this context, social media becomes a platform where social interaction is no longer bound by space and time. One example of this is when someone uploads a photo or opinion that then becomes the target of negative comments or ridicule, which develops into online bullying. Features such as reshare, quote posts, or algorithms that prioritize interaction make the upload spread quickly, involving more people who do not even know the victim personally.

Anonymity is one of the key factors that makes cyberbullying perpetrators feel free to act without fear of consequences. Flexible digital identities allow perpetrators to attack without having to be directly responsible for their actions. In addition, the speed of information dissemination on social media X worsens the situation, because victims do not have enough time to respond or control the damage to their reputation. Negative information that spreads can expand its impact from the victim's social circle to a global audience.

In social media networks, algorithms play a significant role. Algorithms designed to increase engagement often prioritize content that attracts a lot of attention, including negative comments or posts. This makes content that is used as a tool for cyberbullying appear more often in other users' timelines, which ultimately increases social and psychological pressure on victims.

The impacts of cyberbullying on social media X can include psychological harm such as stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as social impacts in the form of isolation and a decrease in the victim's digital reputation. Victims' dependence on social media to maintain their social connections often worsens the situation, because they cannot completely get away from the platform that is the source of the problem. Cyberbullying on social media X is a phenomenon that is reinforced by the characteristics of the digital era in a network society, such as the anonymity of the perpetrators, the speed of information dissemination, and global reach. This action not only causes serious psychological impacts on victims, such as stress and depression, but also affects their social reputation and digital life. Platform algorithms often unknowingly worsen the situation by prioritizing content that receives wide attention, including negative content. To overcome cases like this, there needs to be collaboration between social media platforms, governments, and the community.

Social media X can improve the moderation and detection system for harmful content, provide more effective reporting mechanisms, and provide support to victims through counseling services or rapid removal of negative content. Digital literacy is also an important key to educating users about internet ethics, the potential impacts of cyberbullying, and the importance of creating a positive digital environment. This approach can help create a safer digital space, where behaviors such as cyberbullying can be minimized and victims receive adequate protection.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Cyberbullying on social media X can be linked to the Spiral of Silence theory and Network Society theory, which together provide a framework for understanding how this phenomenon develops in digital spaces. In the Spiral of Silence theory, individuals tend to hold back their opinions if they feel that their views are contrary to the majority, in order to avoid social isolation. In the context of cyberbullying on social media X, victims often choose to remain silent for fear of receiving more attacks from the perpetrator or an audience that supports the perpetrator. When negative opinions about the victim become dominant in the digital space, the victim feels a lack of social support and chooses not to fight back, strengthening the perpetrator's position within the network. This spiral continues because passive audiences also do not dare to speak up for the victim, which ultimately strengthens the culture of silence and normalizes cyberbullying. Meanwhile, Network Society theory explains how network technology forms new patterns of social interaction that are global, fast, and anonymous. In the case of cyberbullying, anonymity allows the perpetrator to act without a sense of responsibility, while the speed and reach of the network magnifies the impact of the attack exponentially. Social media X algorithms designed to maximize engagement often make the situation worse by spreading negative content more widely, creating additional stress for the victim. By connecting these two theories, we can understand that the phenomenon of cyberbullying on social media X is the result of the interaction between social dynamics, such as the spiral of silence effect, and the structure of the digital network, as explained by the network society theory. To overcome this, there needs to be a strategy that not only targets the technological aspect, such as content moderation and the removal of negative content, but also the social aspect, such as

encouraging the audience not to be afraid to speak up against the perpetrator. Thus, we can create a more inclusive and supportive digital space, where cyberbullying no longer has a place.

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