

Perceived Motivation Differences for Cyberbullying of University Students in Thailand: Impact of Urbanization

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Abstract

Urbanization causes both prospects and challenges; urban settings can lead to significant inequalities and social problems. Cyberbullying is a major social problem and presents a dangerous threat in today's digital world to youth and adults alike. The objectives of this study were to study cyberbullying experience and the perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students. In addition, this study investigated the difference in cyberbullying experience and perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas. This study employed cross-sectional design and conducted with university students who were 18-25 years of age with a sample of 392. Results indicated that there was no difference between the proportions of university students in urban and rural areas reporting both cyberbully perpetrators and cyberbully victims. However, students in urban areas tended to perceive anonymity as a motivation for cyberbullying more than students in rural areas. On the other hand, students in rural areas tended to perceive enjoyment as a motivation for cyberbullying more than those in urban areas. The findings help promote understanding of motivational factors, which may assist in prevention and intervention when dealing with cyberbully perpetrators.

Keywords: Urbanization, Settlement Difference, Cyberbullying, Perceived Motivation

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Introduction

Urbanization refers to the mass movement of populations from rural to urban settings and the consequent physical changes to urban settings (Kilenthong and Odton, 2014). Cities are known to play multifaceted functions in all societies. For instance, they are the heart of technological development while at the same time serving as a breeding ground for inequality, psychological disease, and social problems (Srivastava, 2012).

Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of technologies by an individual or by a group of people to upset deliberately and repeatedly someone else (Childnet International, 2016). The prevalence of technology and its integration within our lives makes electronic communication tools a convenient medium for people to express their emotions. Living in a social hierarchy that encourages competition, anyone can be susceptible to bullying, whether they are the perpetrator or the victim. The frustrations from the pressure of outperforming others, overcoming obstacles or interaction in general can be let out using various ways, such as crying, talking, exercising as well as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying involves embarrassment, humiliation, harassment, and threat toward a person (Ghosh and Pramanick, 2021).

The forms of cyberbullying are diverse. Similarly, the motivation behind persons committing cyberbullying could be different. The typical motivations behind the cyberbullying acts are anger, frustration, revenge, entertainment, and boredom (Hamuddin et al., 2019). Those who are involved in cyberbullying became a perpetrator often due to low self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety and aggression (Balakrishnan and Norman, 2020). Cyberbullying obstructs the development of adolescents, either the perpetrator or the victim. The motives influence cyberbullying might differ by the context, such as students who live in urban areas or rural areas due to the different characteristics of urban and rural community. These characteristics influence the perceptions and attitudes of the residents. If the difference in cyberbullying motivations between these two groups of students exist, different prevention, intervention and coping strategies need to be applied.

Research Objective

1. To explore cyberbullying experience of Thai university students.
2. To investigate the difference in cyberbullying experience of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.
3. To study the perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students.
4. To investigate the difference in perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Literature Review

Use of Internet in Thailand

The number of Internet users in Thailand reached 42.4 million (66.7 percent of the population) in 2019. The proportion of people using the Internet continues to climb, but nearly one in three still does not use the Internet. Bangkok had the highest number of users, followed by Central, Southern and Northern Thailand, with the lowest being Northeastern Thailand. Twelve percent more municipal than non-municipal households had access to the Internet (National Statistical Office, 2020).

There are variations in Internet connectivity between provinces within regions. It is reported that schools in Central and Southern Thailand were relatively better connected than those in Northern and Northeastern Thailand. For example, the connectivity rate in schools in the Northern provinces of Phrae, Mae Hong Son, Lampang, Nan and Phayao was lower than the regional average. Furthermore, provinces with a higher Gross Provincial Product (GPP) per capita had a lower percentage of schools without Internet. Only 59 per cent of households in provinces in the bottom quartile of GPP per capita had an Internet connection in the home, compared to 79 per cent in the top quartile (ITU, 2021). The traditional economic fault lines were also evident when it came to connectivity (ITU, 2021). Additionally, National Statistical Office data showed that the percentage of Internet users in different age groups was rising steadily, with the highest percentage 93.5 being observed among those aged 15 to 24.

Table 1 People using the Internet, by age group (%)

Year	Age group				
	6-14	15-24	25-34	35-49	>50
2015	58	76.8	60.1	31.8	9.6
2016	61.4	85.9	73.6	44.9	13.8
2017	63.4	89.8	80.3	54.9	18.2
2018	74.6	93.5	88.3	69.2	24.3
2019	73.9	93.5	92.3	79.1	33.2

Source: National Statistical of Thailand, 2020

Urbanization in Thailand

Thailand is during transforming itself from a predominantly rural country to an increasingly urban one. In at least ten years, the country has shifted from 36 percent urban to more than 50 percent urban, which means that half of the population now lives in cities and urban areas. In 2020, 51.8% of Thailand's population lived in urban centers, while 48.2% lived in rural areas. With the Bangkok urban area accounting for nearly 80% of the total urban area in Thailand, urbanization is dominated by Bangkok (Thailand: Urbanization from 2010 to 2020).

Urbanization in Thailand, as in many other developing countries, has proceeded rapidly since World War II, but growth has been highly uneven. The Bangkok Metropolitan Area and the contiguous cities of Samut Prakan to the southeast and Nonthaburi to the north, remains the dominant and only major urban center in the country. The total population of this area is some 30 times larger than that of Udon Thani, the next largest city, and several times larger than that of the next 10 largest cities combined. (Thailand: Urbanization from 2010 to 2020).

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become an integral part of modern life in all societies. ICT is a key driver of urbanization but can also create the digital divide that hinders urbanization. ICT positively affects urbanization and directly improves urbanization levels and efficiency. The application of mobile phones is an indispensable tool for future urban development. However, there are digital divides among areas. Less-developed provinces lag well-developed ones due to their poor basic conditions and low-levels of ICT perception among residents (ITU, 2021).

There are many examples of substantial benefits of ICT. However, these potentials imply that the disparities in access to ICT could potentially lead to economic and social inequality. Mobile phone adoption was generally high in both rural and urban areas in Thailand. In particular, the disparity in mobile phone adoption between rural and urban households could be negligible (ITU, 2021). On the other hand, the disparities in the adoption rates for other technologies has persisted. It was found that household composition, education, wealth, and occupation are key factors determining information and communication technology adoption (Kilenthong and Odton, 2014). Urban-rural disparity is a significant component of overall inequality in Thailand.

Urban Life and Personality

Personality is the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make a person unique. While there are many different definitions of personality, most focus on the pattern of behaviors and characteristics that can help predict and explain a person's behavior. Explanations

for personality can focus on a variety of influences, ranging from genetic effects to the role of the environment and experience in shaping an individual's personality (Ghosh and Pramanick, 2021). Urban life and personality of urbanites are affected by the physical and social conditions of urban living - heterogeneity, social distance, speed and tension, impersonal social interaction, mobility, etc. (Kowalski and Limber, 2013). These conditions produce impersonality, insecurity, and segmentation of personality, which affect the motivations for cyberbullying. Brief discussion on social conditions of urban life are as follows:

1. Heterogeneity. Urban population is heterogeneous. It consists of variety of people - different races, castes, classes, ethnic groups, religions, etc. Urban community is noteworthy for its diversity. There is great variety regarding the food habits, dress habits, living conditions, religious beliefs, cultural outlook, customs, and traditions of the urbanites. The heterogeneity of city life intensifies the sense of anonymity (Srivastava, 2012). The urban population do not care for their neighbors and have nothing to do with their miseries or pleasures.

2. Disorders. The range of disorders associated with urbanization is enormous. Some of the disorders are severe mental disorders, depression, substance abuse, alcoholism, crime, family disintegration, and alienation. The cultural transformation especially from rural to modern society is one of the reasons for psychological disorder. Stress caused by transition from rural culture to urban culture cannot be denied as one of the factors leading to stress-related problems (Srivastava, 2012).

3. Mobility. Urban life is dynamic. Social relations are temporary; permanency does not develop in urban relations. There is a high rate of geographical as well as social mobility in urban areas. Urban mobility influences our quality of life. The more people who can move around without cars, the better cities are for the environment, public health, and even for mental health. However, in Thailand one of the major problems in urban areas is traffic congestion. Traffic congestions lead to greater emotional health effects: stress, nervousness, and aggressiveness (Kowalski and Limber, 2013).

4. Individualism. The urbanites attach supreme importance to their own welfare and happiness. They hesitate to think or act for the good of others. Several theorists have therefore suggested that individualism could be expected to relate to higher levels of aggression than collectivism. Balakrishnan and Norman (2020) argued that members of individualistic cultures may be more likely to use aggression because this may facilitate the achievement of their individual goals.

In summary, the unique urban characteristics are social heterogeneity, impersonality and anonymity of interpersonal relations, social and geographic mobility, and materialism. These lead to loneliness and isolation perhaps even more than to life in rural communities. The results of a

research show that Thai youths especially in Bangkok are exposed to more violent cyberbullying threats where the Internet technology is getting more advanced (Euajarusphan, 2021). Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, has the highest cybercrime statistics in Thailand (Office of Justice Affairs, 2017). Similar findings are found in Kolkata. Young generation get used to modern technology, media, and the cyber world from early childhood. The socio-economic environment is favorable for ample use of the internet. In addition to this, the breaking of traditional joint family structure, single parenting, and the adults' time-demanding work schedule has led to the increasing dependence of children on virtual relations. This is a perfect set-up for accelerating the cyberbullying problem and tracing the prominent psychological impact of cyberbullying on teenagers (Ghosh and Pramanick, 2021).

Motivations of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has been defined as “any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others” (Barlett et al., 2016). Like traditional bullying, it is intentional and repetitive (Compton et al., 2014). Cyberbullying may be more deadly than traditional bullying because cyberbullying can quickly reach wide audiences, can be perpetrated anonymously, and is not bound to in-person interactions. Varjas et al. (2010) investigated high school students' perceptions of the motivations for cyberbullying and provided a framework to conceptualize cyberbullying motivations. Motivations are conceptualized as internal motivations, being associated with the perpetrators' emotional states, and external motivations, being derived from factors specific to the situation or the target. The research found that the students in this study reported internal motivations with greater frequency than external motivations. In general, perpetrators' behavior usually stems from their own problems. They often have trouble controlling their emotions and impulses and find it hard to follow rules. Therefore, this research focuses on the internal motivations. Based on the literature on instrumental and reactive aggression, Gradinger et al. (2012) investigated four potentially relevant motives: power, affiliation, anger, and fun. Balakrishnan and Norman (2020) found revenge, entertainment, and empowerment to be the main motives for cyberbullying perpetration. Other motivations to cyberbully that were found in individual interviews among high-school students (15–19 years) are for example jealousy, rejection, revenge, boredom, to make cyberbullies feel better about themselves, to try out new persona, and to seek approval (Varjas et al., 2010).

Anonymity/Disinhibition Effects

Many research studies stated anonymity as a primary motivation for perpetrators (Hamuddin et al., 2019; Dordolo, 2014; Gradinger et al., 2012). Anonymity allows cyberbully perpetrators to

avoid facing their victims, so it requires less courage and provides the illusion that perpetrators will not get caught. Perceived anonymity on the part of perpetrators opens the pool of individuals who might consider engaging in cyberbullying. Additionally, perceived anonymity leads to a disinhibition effect that leads people to say and do things anonymously that they would not consider saying and doing in face-to-face interactions. Anonymity can protect students from the consequences of their actions in cyberspace. Varjas et al. (2010) combined anonymity and disinhibition since they found that the ability to be anonymous has a direct effect on feelings of disinhibition.

Fun/enjoyment

Enjoyment is defined as when the perpetrator cyberbullies someone else to make themselves feel better. Engaging in cyberbullying for fun and to relieve boredom was believed to be a motivator in the parent and student groups (Compton et al., 2014). The student perpetrators conveyed their belief that engaging in cyberbullying is a form of entertainment. In the discourse context of Hamuddin et al. (2019), the results of cyberbullying do not seem to be negative, and did not seem to cause feelings of discomfort, fear, worry, loneliness, or depression. Students simply want to have fun and a laugh with no actual intention to harm anyone.

Power

Cyberbullying contains the characteristics of negative behavior; one of these is the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and target (Dordolo, 2014). Cyberbullying can be a manifestation of social status. Students who are popular often make fun of friends who are less popular. Low self-esteem is a feeling of being unimportant, unworthy, and inept. It is true that individuals with low self-esteem are more prone to victimization by perpetrators. Victims of bullying tend to suffer from lower self-esteem.

Cyberbully perpetrators have a range of different motivations, but the general goal is to increase their own power by reducing the power of someone else. Compton et al. (2014) described that low self-esteem issues fed a need to gain power amongst peers through cyberbullying. However, a once-held theory that perpetrators have low self-esteem has been debunked in the past couple of decades by numerous research studies. New research shows that perpetrators tend to have inflated self-esteem and high confidence (Hamuddin et al., 2019). A key similarity across the groups of teachers, parents, and students was attributing a student's need for power and status as a motivation to cyberbully (Compton et al., 2014). People would attempt aggressive acts, such as cyberbullying, to demonstrate coercive power over others.

Revenge and Anger

Several research studies found one common motive of cyberbullying was anger (Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Gradinger et al., 2012). Revenge has been known to be another motivation behind cyberbullying (Kowalski and Limber, 2013). Parents frequently discussed their opinion that some students engaged in bullying because these students were themselves victims of bullying, and so would lash out in anger (Compton et al., 2014). Individuals who have been victims of cyberbullying are more likely to commit cyberbullying in the future, via the process of learning from and reproducing other bullies' behavior.

Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses of this research are

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in cyberbullying experience between Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in perceived cyberbullying motivation, anonymity, between Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in perceived cyberbullying motivation, enjoyment, between Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in perceived cyberbullying motivation, power, between Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in perceived cyberbullying motivation, revenge, between Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional study design, carried out in January - May of 2022. We assessed demographic information, ICT use, cyberbullying experiences, and students' perceptions of the motivations for cyberbullying.

Population and Sample

The population of this study is university students in Thailand aging 18-25. There are 1,676,982 students studying in higher education institutions in 2021 (MHESI, 2021). With 95% confidence level, the calculated sample size is 385. The final sample size of 392 is more than large enough for a study of this magnitude. The sample consisted of 185 students living in rural areas (47.2%) and 207 students living in urban areas (52.9%). The mean age was 21.14 years.

Research Instrument

The online surveys were developed and used for this research. Students received an invitation to participate in the survey.

Data Collection

The researchers disseminated the surveys online using convenience sampling by posting on social media platform LINE, which ranked second among the leading social media networks in Thailand as of February 2022, with the penetration rate of around 92.8 percent (Statista, 2022). One of the limitations of using an online survey is lack of quality random sampling. However, due to the sheer number of the population, it was the most cost-efficient choice. The other advantage is the ability to access to students in distant locations.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to study the cyberbullying experience of Thai university students, the difference in cyberbullying experience of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas, the perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students and the differences in perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas. Also, Independent samples t-test was applied to compare settlement on perceived motivation to cyberbullying.

Findings

1. The cyberbullying experience of Thai university students.

The data showed that 55 percent of respondents have conducted actions which can be constituted as cyberbullying behavior in the past year. 62 percent of the respondents have been bullied by the others. 73 percent have been aware of cyberbullying. These results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentages of student experiences of cyberbullying

Experiences of cyberbullying	Percent experiencing
Cyberbully perpetrator	55
Cyberbully victim	62
Aware of cyberbullying	73

With focus on social media, 68 percent of the study sample confirmed the existence of acts of cyberbullying on social media with Instagram (48 percent) and Facebook (42.5 percent) in the lead. It is quite common for university students to experience having their sensitive and/or private messages/motion pictures/photos uploaded online or distributed via mobile phone. The media through which cyberbullying can occur are equally diverse, including instant messaging, e-mail, text messages, web pages, chat rooms, social networking sites, digital images, and online games.

2. The difference in cyberbullying experience of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of students' cyberbullying experiences by settlement

	Experiences of Cyberbullying		
	Cyberbully perpetrator	Cyberbully victim	Aware of cyberbullying
Urban Areas	54 (26.3%)	85 (41.2%)	118 (57.2%)
Rural Areas	42 (22.9%)	68 (36.8%)	103 (55.6%)

n = 392

Table 3 presents the observed frequency distribution. According to a chi-square test of independence, there is no significant difference between the proportions of students in urban areas and students in rural areas who reported cyberbully perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 3.21, p > .05$). However, more students in urban areas (26.3 percent) reported cyberbully perpetrator than those in rural areas (22.9 percent). Also, there is no significant difference between the proportions of students in urban and rural areas who reported being cyberbully victim ($\chi^2 = 3.43, p > .05$). However, more students in urban areas (41.2 percent) reported being cyberbully victim than those in rural areas (36.8 percent). Hence, null hypothesis 1 is failed to reject.

3. The perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students

Frequencies were run to gain percentages for the data. Enjoyment (35 percent) had the largest percentage of perceived motivation while revenge had the lowest percentage (14 percent). These results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Motivation for cyberbullying

Motivation for Cyberbullying	Percent
Anonymity	31
Enjoyment	35
Power	20
Revenge	14

4. The differences in perception of cyberbullying motivation of Thai university students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Responses regarding a specific motivation to cyberbullying ranged from 1 (very untrue of me) to 5 (very true of me). Results of the independent samples t-test show that mean scores of anonymities differ between students living in urban areas (mean = 2.79, SD = .62) and those living in rural areas (mean = 2.27, SD = .77) at the .05 level of significance [$t(390) = 2.34$, $df = 390$, $p = .05$, 95% CI for mean difference: 0.17 to 0.28]. On average, students living in urban areas tend to perceive anonymity as motivation to cyberbullying more than those living in rural areas. The effect size to see how substantially different between two groups' means is calculated. The value of 0.62 shows a medium effect size. Hence, null hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Results of the independent samples t-test show that mean scores of enjoyments differ between students living in urban areas (mean = 2.57, SD = .41) and those living in rural areas (mean = 2.81, SD = .38) at the .05 level of significance [$t(390) = 2.71$, $df = 390$, $p = .05$, 95% CI for mean difference: -.27 to -.19]. On average, students living in rural areas tend to perceive enjoyment as motivation to cyberbullying more than those living in urban areas. The effect size to see how substantially different between two groups' means is calculated. The value of 0.56 shows a medium effect size. Hence, null hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Results of the independent samples t-test show that mean score of power does not differ between students living in urban areas ($M = 2.87$, $SD = .31$) and those living in rural areas ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .35$) at the .05 level of significance ($t = 1.16$, $df = 390$, $p > .05$, 95% CI for mean difference .04 to .27). On average, students living in urban areas tend to perceive power as motivation to cyberbullying more than those living in urban areas. Null hypothesis 4 is failed to reject.

Results of the independent samples t-test show that mean score of revenge does not differ between students living in urban areas ($M = 2.81$, $SD = .34$) and those living in rural areas ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .41$) at the .05 level of significance ($t = 1.79$, $df = 159$, $p > .05$, 95% CI for mean difference -.23 to -.14). On average, students living in rural areas tend to perceive revenge as motivation to

cyberbullying more than those living in urban areas. Null hypothesis 5 is failed to reject. Table 5 summarizes the statistical findings of perceived motivation to cyberbullying of students living in urban areas and rural areas.

Table 5: Independent samples t-test comparing settlement on perceived motivation to cyberbullying

Motivation	Settlement						t	df
	Urban			Rural				
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n		
Anonymity	2.79	.62	207	2.27	.77	185	2.34**	390
Enjoyment	2.57	.41	207	2.81	.38	185	2.71**	390
Power	2.87	.31	207	2.74	.35	185	1.16*	390
Revenge	2.81	.34	207	2.93	.41	185	1.79*	390

**p< .05, *p>.05

Discussion

There is no difference between the proportions of university students living in urban areas and rural areas reporting both cyberbullying the others or being a victim of cyberbully. This finding is probably because cyberbullying has the potential to grow with the increasing use of laptop computers, tablets, and smart phones, and the growth of virtual social networks all over Thailand. Many young people in Thailand use mobile phones and the internet. Out of a population 69.88 million, 98.9 percent has a smart mobile phone of which 97.7 percent is mobile internet users, and 69.5 percent have internet access (Statista, 2022).

This study found that mean scores of anonymities and enjoyment differ between students living in urban areas and rural areas. Students living in urban areas tend to perceive anonymity as a motivation for cyberbullying more than students in rural areas, which is like the report of Childnet International (2016) that the ability to be anonymous has a direct effect on feelings of disinhibition. As the victim doesn't know who the bully is, the bully feels the disinhibition effect and says or does things they may not do face-to-face. The heterogeneity of urban life with its mixture of people of all races, occupations and ethnic origins heightens the sense of anonymity. While students in rural areas tend to perceive enjoyment to cyberbullying more than those in urban areas. This finding is consistent with Compton et al. (2014) that parents and students believed that fun and or boredom could be a factor for students engaging in cyberbullying. However, fun or enjoyment was not mentioned as a motive by teachers.

Suggestion

1. Suggestion for Research Utilization

This paper demonstrates the perception of university students on motivation of cyberbullying in Thailand that should promote greater understanding and potentially help reduce injury associated with the interpersonal violence that can result from cyberbullying. The ability to recognize motivational factors may assist in prevention and early intervention when dealing with cyberbully perpetrators. These findings have implications for both prevention and intervention strategies for cyberbullying in universities and for future research. University administrators need to discuss what constitutes bullying behavior. Understanding the motives of students, who are cyberbully perpetrator, is one way to address their behavior and to find appropriate coping strategies. Awareness about urbanization impact on mental health and more on motivation for cyberbullying will act as a facilitator of change for Thai societies.

2. Suggestion for Future Research

One limitation is there may be some overlap in motivations of cyberbullying and traditional bullying; it is difficult to tease apart the motivations of cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Additional research examining the unique and joint motivations in cyberbullying and traditional bullying is needed. Because this was an exploratory study, future research is needed to continue to develop an understanding of the motivations for cyberbully perpetrator among university students in urban and rural settlements. Future research should interview cyberbully perpetrators to confirm the initial findings from this study.

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