

# A Study of Online Misbehaviors on Social Media and Its Relation to Campus Racial Climate in Higher Education

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**Abstract:** We are interested in studying these three online misbehaviors (Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking) that is related to race and/or ethnicity because we want to find out what are the students' perceptions of these online misbehaviors to better understand what relationship may exist in relation to the dimensions of Campus Racial Climate.

*Keywords:* social media, campus climate, cyberbullying

## 1. Introduction

A social phenomenon, social media, has allowed the world to stay connected and up to date with the click of the fingertip. Unfortunately, social media is also associated with negative online misbehaviors: Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking impacting the population that uses it the most, the college and university students.

Social networking has been used to help connect users digitally (Lenartz, 2012). McKinnon & Dougherty (2019) cited that social media is a form of online communication used daily by 70% of the adult population. Martínez-Alemán & Wartman (2009) estimated that 85% of college and university students are using Facebook. Unfortunately, social media is also associated with negative online misbehaviors: Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking. Linvill (2019) identified mental health concerns as one of the potential dangers posed by these online misbehaviors. These findings have implications not only on the students' personal well-being but also on their learning and development.

Online misbehavior is an ongoing issue in Higher Education and affects students in so many ways. These factors cause mental health concerns in students feeling lonely, depressed and rejected. The purpose of this study is to gain a richer understanding of students'

perception of their Campus Racial Climate by using these three examples of online misbehaviors (Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking) in order to improve diversity in higher education.

## 2. Online Misbehaviors

In the United States, the role of social media has fostered a hostile environment in colleges and universities, particularly Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking. According to Baldasare et al. (2012), Cyberbullying is a broad range of behaviors or actions in which a person uses technology in a way that is perceived aggressive or threatening to another person. Mahler (2015) pointed a reported case of Cyberbullying by an anonymous user who have posted a message on the app called Yik Yak to initiate sexual violence at Kenyon College's women's center. Another online misbehavior is Racial Hostility, which is defined as a verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignity, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Bucceri et al., 2007). For instance, reports stated that two white Babson College students posted a video on Facebook of themselves spitting on a black student on the Wellesley campus (Dickerson & Saul, 2016). The last example of online misbehavior is Stalking, which Petrocelli (2005) defines as the use of the internet, e-mail, or other electronic communication device to create a criminal level of intimidation, harassment, and fear in one or more victims. Stalking takes many forms such as threatening, online verbal abuse, leaving improper messages, etc. (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2010). A recent report of an online student at Louisiana State University was arrested for Stalking after sending inappropriate and menacing e-mails to the victim, after learning that she did not meet the academic requirements to be accepted into graduate school (Carpenter, 2020). These are just the common incidents of online misbehaviors in colleges

and universities. According to Linvill (2019), in a place that promotes learning and development these series of online misbehaviors can be very destructive to the student experience and overall campus climate.

### **3. Campus Racial Climate Dimensions**

Hurtado et al. (1999) raised a number of issues concerning the direct impact of students' perception on overall Campus Racial Climate. Campus climate has been defined as the current patterns of behavior in a campus community and how behaviors are perceived (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Campus Racial Climate can be assessed in four dimensions: 1.) Structural Diversity, 2.) Historical Legacy of Inclusion or Exclusion, 3.) Psychological Climate, and 4.) Behavioral Climate (Hurtado et al., 1999). These four dimensions influence one another and shape attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions about race and diversity in a specific community.

The first dimension is Structural Diversity, which is the numerical representation of people of color on campus. Majority of the institutions focus on attaining a diverse student body and hiring diverse faculty or staff to improve college and university experiences. However, some studies (Loo & Rolison, 1986) have supported a conclusion that campuses with high proportions of certain racial groups can cause alienation towards a smaller population of peer groups. Thus, the larger the relative size of a certain racial group, the more it will be in conflict with other members of their peers due to competition and feelings of disconnection (Blalock, 1967). In relation to the Babson College incident, it is a few miles from Wellesley and considered as a predominantly white institution consisting 45.8% in population (Brennan, 2005). This substantiates the students' perception impacting Structural Diversity, causing Racial Hostility through the use of social media in the campus community towards people of color.

The second dimension is Historical Legacy of Inclusion or Exclusion, which is defined as the campus' past treatment of marginalized groups with a strong emphasis on its mission and policies. The institution's response in accepting a diverse student body and providing educational opportunity to accommodate

them is reflective upon its Campus Racial Climate. Students are able to learn in an environment in which race does not function 'as a stigma in their performance' (Smith, 2005). Thus, diversity increases learning and development, but without guidance and support it leads to hostility, tension, and distance on campus. Kaplan (2010) made a study that only 13% of colleges and universities out of 500 institutions have student guidelines or policies for social media. Moreover, another study by Kind et al. (2010) examined that 96.97% of 132 accredited schools in the U.S. have general student policies online; however, only 10.16% were found for social media guidelines. With the exponential usage of social media, serious implications of Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking on campus are prevalent. Therefore, it is evident that a significant number of institutions do not have guidelines or policies on cyber etiquette in place or implemented. The solution lies in the establishment of policies, standards, and laws in colleges and universities that furthermore eradicates negative perceptions of campus climate.

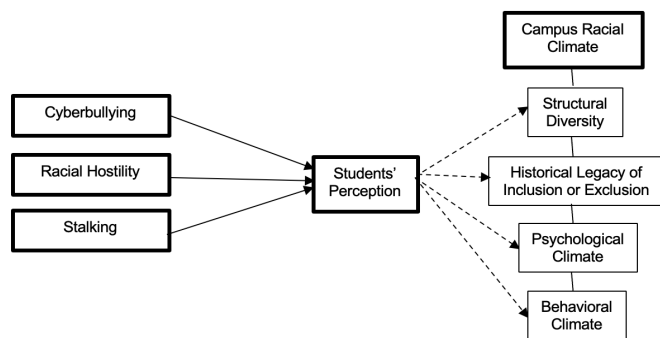
The third dimension is Psychological Climate, which is defined as perceptions of racial and ethnic tension, discrimination, and attitudes towards others from different racial backgrounds. Research suggests that students' perceptions of Racial Hostility have affected their social experiences on campus; however, even if students of color feel marginalized, they learn how to deal with personal discrimination and retained through graduation (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). In contrast to this statement, a white undergraduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, posted a video online expressing her racist comments about the Asian American students on campus in 2011 (Museus & Truong, 2013). This sparked an outrage in the Asian American community, which eventually led to her dropping out of the university.

The last dimension is Behavioral Climate, which focuses on the social interactions among individuals and groups from different racial and ethnic backgrounds on campus, as well as the nature and quality of these intergroup relations (Hurtado et al., 1999). If students have the opportunity to engage with other students from different backgrounds, they are more likely to show growth on campus. Juicycampus.com is a defunct

college gossip website that became a source of controversy on campuses in the U.S. as a result of derogatory comments about physical appearance, ethnicity, and race (Kraft, 2010). It also reported serious incidents of Cyberbullying and Stalking in which victims have suffered clinical depression, fear of going back to school, and academic decline. JuicyCampus introduced a darker element to college student interaction, which created a backdrop of degradation and became destructive to the culture and Campus Racial Climate.

#### 4. Linvill’s Study as Framework

Our research builds on behavior and interaction that takes place online. We needed to find a frequently used social networking platform where online communication is common. With the focus of further expanding on Linvill’s research, we decided to focus on three specific online misbehaviors: Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking. We also decided to focus on the realm of social media which is a heavily used form of online communication by students. Linvill’s research identified these online misbehaviors had a negative implication on campus climate. We wanted to further Linvill’s study by trying to determine if these online misbehaviors on social media had any implications on Campus Racial Climate using this framework (Fig. 1).



*Fig. 1.* Online Misbehavior and CRC Framework. This figure demonstrates the causal influence of Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking on Students’ Perception with possible relation to Campus Racial Climate.

We are interested in studying the perceived climate of a college or university in terms of race and/or ethnicity

when online misbehaviors on social media might be prevalent. To identify a potential relationship, we focused on Hurtado’s Campus Racial Climate theory. Hurtado et al. (1999) stated the understanding of racial dynamics on campus is one of the ways that can assist researchers to decipher why certain perceptions of one’s environment may develop. Hurtado’s theory focuses on four dimensions: 1.) Structural Diversity, 2.) Historical Legacy of Inclusion or Exclusion, 3.) Psychological Climate, and 4.) Behavioral Climate (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Williams (2010) summarizes Hurtado’s theory and provides data indicators that relate to each dimension. Hurtado’s theory, as defined by Williams, will be used in this research to relate the last two dimensions of Campus Racial Climate (Psychological and Behavioral) with online misbehaviors found in social media. Since this research will survey students, we thought it was appropriate to focus on the Psychological and Behavioral dimensions since they both focus on the lived experiences of an individual.

Presenting specific definitions of both Psychological and Behavior dimensions, Williams (2010) defines the Psychological dimension as ‘the extent to which individuals a.) perceive conflict and discrimination on campus, b.) feel somehow singled out because of their background, or c.) perceive institutional support and commitment related to diversity.’ The Behavioral dimension refers to the ‘reports of interactions or contact experiences between and among different groups, participation (or lack thereof) in campus programs, traditions and activities, and full engagement in the various systems of the institution’ (Williams, 2010).

Examining Linvill’s research will help us determine if Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking are common online misbehaviors on social media, if not, we will have the participants identify misbehaviors they feel are common. Then using Hurtado’s theory, as defined by Williams, we will determine if the Behavioral and Psychological dimensions have any correlation to these online misbehaviors. This will be a fruitful study in informing colleges and universities on whether or not perceptions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and sense of belonging in terms of race and/or ethnicity exist within

the realm of social media. We also hope this research will encourage future researchers to continue engaging in ways to promote a safe and healthy virtual campus environment in a world where online communication has become a need.

#### 4. Quantitative Research

This quantitative research will determine the frequency of online misbehaviors on social media in terms of race and/or ethnicity. We also want to determine if these online misbehaviors have any correlation on the Behavioral and Psychological dimensions of Campus Racial Climate. Since we are gauging frequency and correlation, this research is quantitative in nature.

Moreover, the approach of our research is quantitative since we are using Deductive Reasoning to connect Linvill's research of common online misbehaviors (Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking) on social media, to Williams' definition of Behavioral and Psychological dimensions, evolving from Hurtado's theory. Behavioral and Psychological dimensions of Campus Racial Climate are dependent on student's experiences and perceptions. Deductive Reasoning allows us to connect a general theory to our hypothesis (Ary et al., 2018). We will measure the responses students provide in terms of their experiences and perceptions of online misbehaviors related to race and/or ethnicity on social media. Students' perceptions and experiences determine the Behavioral and Psychological climate. Therefore, by Deductive Reasoning we can conclude a relationship between online misbehaviors on social media and the Behavioral and Psychological dimensions of Campus Racial Climate.

Another component that makes this research quantitative is the method on how we decided to gather our data. We are planning on using different types of scales throughout the survey on our questions. The demographic question on students' race and/or ethnicity will be an ordinal scale of 1-6:

- 1: Asian
- 2: Black or African American
- 3: Hispanic/Latino
- 4: Race and/or ethnicity unknown

- 5: Two or more races, Non-Hispanic
- 6: White.

This ordinal scale is used to rank the objects (Ary et al., 2018). This will help identify the race and/or ethnic group that experience online misbehaviors related to race and/or ethnicity on social media the most.

Then the actual survey questions will be a nominal scale. A nominal scale can assist with determining frequency (Ary et al., 2018). For the survey questions, we are looking for the frequency of students' perceptions and experiences of these online misbehaviors on social media in terms of experiences and support. The nominal scale can assist in determining which experiences are most commonly encountered by students. The value of the scales will be a 'Yes' or 'No'.

#### 5. Data Collection

The focus of our research deals with the college or university student population that is familiar with online forms of communication. We plan on sampling only 50% of the institution's college and university population since Experian Simmons, a consumer insight service, identified 98% of college-aged students use social media (Bess, 2019). This means we can still scale down the size of the research helping with the costs, but still have a chance of having significant student participants that are social media users without having to reach out to the whole student population. The sampling will be a random clustered sampling since we are focusing only on the college and university population that uses social media. Half of the student population of an institution will be e-mailed the purpose, intent, and actual survey of our research, but only the data for students that answer the survey and indicate that they use social media will be collected.

Thus, the constant for our research will be social media users. For the users of social media, the following question will ask what platforms of social media they use frequently. Asking about the platform will help us determine if online misbehaviors are focused on a very specific form of social media. The survey question asking about the social media platforms will have an option of 'Other', where they can indicate a platform that might not be mentioned. This will prevent

participants from feeling disconnected from the research and provide up-to-date information on relevant social media platforms that the researcher might not be aware of. Lenartz (2012) mentions one limitation of study that focuses on social media is the limited lifespan of some of these platforms.

The next set of questions will survey the participants' demographics such as race, ethnicity, program, and degree. The Psychological and Behavioral dimensions, as defined by Williams, explore the lived experiences of an individual based on their background and/or culture. Thus, demographic information will be essential in providing a more granular story of a racial and/or ethnic group's perception and their institution's Campus Racial Climate, in relation to Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking. Also, the demographic information will help us determine if there are any biases in our sampling to ensure the validity and reliability of our research. The sample will need to properly represent the racial and/or ethnicity population of an institution or program since implications of online misbehaviors can be related to the racial and/or ethnic dynamics of the student and institution.

Following questions on demographics will be the actual survey questions related to Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking on social media in terms of race and/or ethnicity. Each question will have the following definition of Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking displayed as well as varying examples of each online misbehavior:

*Cyberbullying:* A broad range of behaviors or actions in which a person uses technology in a way that is perceived aggressive or threatening to another person (Baldasare et al., 2012).

Example: People have said or posted rude things on social media about me/someone else because of my/their race/ethnicity.

*Racial Hostility:* A verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignity, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Bucceri et al., 2007).

Example: I have seen people post racist images or statements on social media about me/someone else because of my/their race/ethnicity.

*Stalking (Cyberstalking):* The use of the internet, e-mail, or other electronic communication device to create a criminal level of intimidation, harassment, and fear in one or more victims (Petrocelli, 2005).

Example: I have been/seen people constantly threaten me/others on social media because of my/their race/ethnicity.

The actual questions that will be displayed to students in regards to the online misbehaviors will be separated into two parts. The first part will be questions that ask about the Psychological dimension of the Campus Racial Climate and the second part will be questions that ask about the Behavioral dimension of the Campus Racial Climate. Questions about the Psychological dimension will need to address three perceptions: 1) one's actual experience of the online misbehavior related to someone from the same institution, 2) whether or not they were singled out because of their race and/or ethnicity, and 3) how supported one feels about their institution's ability to address these online misbehaviors on social media in relation to race and/or ethnicity (Williams, 2010). The questions on Behavioral dimension will ask how much support one felt they received from other groups in terms of events, programs, or activities related to these online misbehaviors. Here are some sample questions of Psychological and Behavioral dimensions related to Cyberbullying:

- 1.) I have encountered Cyberbullying on social media personally or directed at someone else.
- 2.) I have experienced Cyberbullying on social media because of my race and/or ethnicity.
- 3.) I encountered my classmate(s) being Cyberbullied on social media because of their race and/or ethnicity.
- 4.) I encountered my classmate Cyberbullying another race and/or ethnic group on social media because of their race and/or ethnicity.

5.) I feel comfortable sharing these incidences of race and/or ethnicity charged Cyberbullying posts from social media with a faculty and/or staff member.

6.) I feel my campus will be willing to address these incidences of race and/or ethnicity charged Cyberbullying posts from social media.

7.) I feel my campus will adequately address these incidences of race and/or ethnicity charged Cyberbullying posts from social media.

The pattern of these questions will repeat for the other two online misbehaviors. A dichotomous nominal scale with a 'Yes' or 'No' option will be used to measure the students' experiences, depending whether the student answers 'Yes' or 'No' to a question.

Our survey will help determine the validity of Linvill's research on the frequency of Cyberbullying, Racial Hostility, and Stalking in social media. In addition, this will determine how frequent these incidents are in relation to race and/or ethnicity. Another way to ensure validity of the survey answers is to explain in the e-mail. The survey will not be tied to any identifiable information related to the student. We plan on having an algorithm that prevents multiple submissions of the survey, but students' e-mail addresses will not be linked to the survey data. One way we decided to determine reliability is if our results can be reproduced from one institution to another by comparing the results of one institution that may have similar racial and/or ethnic representation to another.

## 5. Data Analysis

In terms of our findings, we plan on using Descriptive and Correlation Analysis. Descriptive Analysis is the process of organizing, summarizing, and describing observations (Ary et al., 2018). This will help us determine the numerical value that represents frequency of the online misbehaviors found on social media compared to those that are specifically related to race and/or ethnicity. Also, this will help us determine if our sample properly represents the population of an institution in terms of racial and/or ethnic demographics. Descriptive Analysis will also help us determine if a specific race and/or ethnic group is more

prone to these online misbehaviors related to race and/or ethnicity on social media.

Correlation Analysis is the process that helps determine the relationship between two or more variables (Ary et al., 2018). This will allow us to determine the relationship of the following independent variables, racial and/or ethnic demographics of participants and online misbehaviors related to race and/or ethnicity on social media, to the following dependent variables, the perceptions of support and experiences of the Psychological and Behavioral dimensions of Campus Racial Climate. Each question will be assigned a -1 if the student answers 'No Experience' of an online misbehavior or the student feels they can be supported by their institution. A +1 is assigned to answers that indicate experiences of online misbehaviors or when a student feels no support is offered by their institution. We will then find the average of the survey by dividing the sum with the total number of questions to determine the correlation coefficient of the survey (Fig. 2).

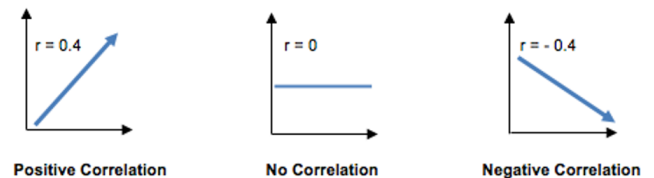


Fig. 2. Correlation Coefficient Formula. This figure demonstrates the possible correlations between Online Misbehaviors and Behavioral and Psychological dimensions defined by Williams.

We will then average the survey for each demographic group with total surveys submitted to determine the correlation coefficient for each demographic group. A coefficient range closer to 1 will indicate a positive correlation between online misbehaviors and the Behavioral and Psychological dimensions. A coefficient range closer to -1 will indicate a negative correlation between online misbehaviors and the Behavioral and Psychological dimensions. The only question in the survey that will not be assigned a value will be the first question that asks about a student's experience of the online misbehavior not related to race and/or ethnicity. These questions will be excluded from the correlation

coefficient average. The results of this question can be used in the future to determine the frequency of general online misbehaviors and online misbehaviors that relate to race and/or ethnicity.

## 6. Limitations

We envisioned this research to test the relationship between the student's perception and experiences of online misbehaviors on social media and to the Behavioral and Psychological dimensions of Campus Racial Climate. If a correlation exists, we feel further research can be conducted by analyzing the Structural and Historical dimensions of Campus Racial Climate. Hurtado et al. (1999) explains the four dimensions of Campus Racial Climate is interrelated. By not studying the Historical Legacy of Inclusion and Exclusion of an institution, a potential relationship, if any exists, to the online misbehaviors related to race and/or ethnicity may be overlooked. Also, by not identifying a relationship between the racial and/or ethnicity demographics of an institution to online misbehaviors, we might be overlooking a potential relationship that may exist, if any, to the Structural dimension of Campus Racial Climate. Therefore, the results of this research might not be applicable to other colleges and universities.

Another limitation is focusing on the online misbehaviors that take place on social media. Online form of communication is constantly evolving and extends well beyond the walls of social media. Lenartz (2012) identifies various forms of online communication starting with e-mails to online blogs. Especially with COVID-19, many colleges and universities going forward plan on increasing online instruction (Kim, 2020). Thus, it is important to study other forms of online communication for a holistic perspective when deciding on policies combating online misbehavior.

## 7. Conclusion

By understanding the ramifications of such online misbehaviors, educational leaders will be better equipped to respond to these issues. Museus & Truong (2013) made an excellent point that "toxic information that students encounter in the digital world is archived, long-lasting, and sometimes permanent, but

this also means that curricular and co-curricular activities that engage, produce, and disseminate information in the digital environment can also have an enduring and far-reaching positive impact." University administrators may leverage findings to implement policies and encompass cyber etiquette. Students' perception of hostility, conflict, and marginalization in campuses can have a negative impact on their academic success or completion. The role of student affairs professionals in promoting diversity, inclusion, and equality is very significant in this study. A more welcoming and hospitable campus environment creates opportunities for students to have a sense of belonging, enhances their ability to engage in racial understanding, and satisfaction of college and university experience.

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