

Cybercrime: Concepts and Theories

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Abstract:

This study provides preliminary insights into the value of concepts and their role in scientific research. To this end, we examined the phenomenon of cybercrime and related concepts such as cyberbullying, cyberviolence and cyberharassment, as well as the harasser and the harassed (the victim). We also considered emotional competencies and emotional intelligence.

We also emphasised the importance of theories in scientific research, in terms of their well-founded explanations of constructed problems, and their usefulness in examining reality through these explanations and testing them against reality.

To this end, we presented three theories that we consider relevant, which researchers may draw upon for both interpretation and empirical examination. These include: Bandura's social learning theory; the theory of white-collar crime; and the broken-window (or broken-bottle) theory.

Keywords: cybercrimes, cyberbullying, cyberviolence, emotional intelligence, social learning, white-collar crime, broken-window theory.

Introduction

This article addresses the social issue of cybercrime, which has emerged as a result of major developments in global information and communication technologies. We describe it as a social phenomenon in order to distinguish it from a social event. A social event occurs once or a limited number of times, is then forgotten, and its effects fade. By contrast, sociologists argue that a social phenomenon does not come into being unless the social event spreads widely, exerts pressure on individuals, persists for a certain period of time and leaves clearly visible effects on society.

Digital communication media were originally created to facilitate communication among individuals. However, as with any technology, it will not only be used for positive purposes. Rather, intensive and continuous unregulated use will quickly lead to social incidents that will evolve into fully developed pathological social phenomena in no time.

In this research, and specifically in the first section, our aim was to provide novice researchers with a simplified methodological and epistemological outline. We emphasise the importance of familiarising oneself with the key concepts circulating in the field of cybercrime, which has become widespread in many countries in recent times.

Concepts are abstract frameworks that condense phenomena in a theoretical manner, retaining only the essential characteristics while dispensing with secondary details so that they can be applied broadly to different but similar, closely related domains.

To this end, we presented a set of related concepts and attempted to make them easier for beginners to grasp by relying on the most up-to-date formulations in their definitions. In this context, we defined the concepts of cyberbullying, cyber-violence, sexual harassment, the harassed person or victim, and concluded with emotional competencies or emotional intelligence.

In the second section of this research, we aimed to highlight the immense value of theories in scientific research within the wider academic community. Just as concepts allow us to interpret reality in an abstract way by using them across different but related ‘phenomenal vocabularies’, scientific theories offer researchers highly plausible hypothetical solutions that they may overlook if they ignore them. In other words, theories (or hypotheses) whose credibility has been repeatedly confirmed by reality can be used as tools for investigating reality. If they are validated, they receive a measure of reinforcement (corroboration). Likewise, we can test theories against the reality under study; if they fail, they move towards falsification (refutation).

In this context, we highlighted three theories: social learning theory, the theory of white-collar crime, and broken windows theory.

To address the issues raised above, we must answer the following question: What are the most important foundational concepts and potential scientific theories that frame social research in the field of cybercrime, and what value do they add to the scientific discourse?

1. Abstract concepts for understanding the phenomenon of cybercrime

In all types of scientific research, concepts are important tools that cannot be overlooked. Researchers and scholars understand a concept to be a ‘container’ that brings together all phenomena that share the same form and meaning. For example, the word ‘table’ does not refer to a specific table (a particular phenomenon). Instead, it functions as an abstract name, detached from concrete objects and encompassing all tables in the world. By contrast, if I say ‘the table I sit at’, then the term is no longer an abstract scientific concept; it becomes the label of a particular phenomenon.

A concept derives its value from its capacity for abstraction, which enables it to encompass all similar details across the world within its meaning. Additionally, concepts are important because they guide researchers in determining what to observe in reality when testing proposed hypotheses.

In this framework, a concept represents the portion of the hypothesis that corresponds to a given phenomenon, namely that which will be subjected to operationalisation (i.e. breaking the concept down into its dimensions and indicators). In other words, this involves moving from the abstract to the concrete, in order to observe the measurable parts of the phenomenon in tangible, observable reality.

Marc-Adélar Tremblay argues that ‘a concept is an abstract idea that designates or represents a broad reality’. Benoît Gautier, on the other hand, states that a concept is ‘an abstraction that covers diverse events, a mental structure that brings together the attributes of reality in order to understand and distinguish it from other realities, an initial category for classifying theoretical regularities, or a designation of a complex phenomenon that is not reduced to what exists within the reality that is meant to be explained’ (Depelteau, 2011, p. 175). (Depelteau, 2011, p. 175).

It is clear from the foregoing that a concept is not merely simple or a matter of terminological convention. Rather, it functions as an abstract construction through which researchers seek to understand reality. For this reason, it does not retain all the details of reality, but instead limits itself to

what is most significant from the researcher's perspective. Consequently, it is often said that a concept is a selective construction (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2006, p. 115). (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2006, p. 115).

For this reason, we often hear the well-known statement among specialists: 'Reality is always richer than its theoretical expressions.'

Following this introduction, this theoretical research aims to present a set of fundamental concepts to the reader, particularly researchers, that are frequently required when addressing cyberbullying or related phenomena. These concepts include the following:

1.1 Cyberbullying (Le cyberharcèlement): Cyberbullying is also referred to as cyber harassment. It is the most modern form of harassment, introduced through the increasing use of technology among adolescents.

Although the term 'cyber' is now widely understood and linked to prevalent digital communication processes, both social and non-social, authors do not agree on a single definition of 'cyber harassment'. However, it is important to note that this concept always involves an intentional, hostile act carried out by an individual or group through electronic communication media against a victim who is unable to easily defend themselves. The power relationship between the two parties is clearly imbalanced in such situations, with the perpetrator exercising a form of authority over the victim. (Beaud & Pillonel, 2017, p. 3).

In our view, this definition is particularly important because it encompasses the core characteristics of cyber harassment: The repetition of the act, the use of electronic communication media, the presence of perpetrators and victims, and finally the imbalance of power.

Furthermore, the relative incapacity of the legal deterrent system to curb the growth of this pathological social problem encourages the commission of this type of crime in our developing countries, intensifying the phenomenon and spreading it widely among young people and adolescents in particular.

In the same context, researchers also draw attention to the property of concealment among those who commit these crimes due to technological communication, which further encourages and exacerbates the phenomenon. Additionally, the system of social values and norms is almost paralysed in a cyber environment where harassment is entrenched and expanding while hiding the identities of the perpetrators. This makes the perpetrators feel secure with respect to both informal social control and formal legal proceedings, thereby complicating the nature and scope of the phenomenon.

In the same context, it is worth noting that our preliminary field observations have shown that families are unable to rescue their adolescents from the grip of this phenomenon for reasons that are believed to merit research and analysis. These reasons include the following:

- The cyber sphere tends to isolate adolescents, removing them from the family sphere almost by default. Victims experience a sense of alienation that they cannot, and do not want to, break free from. This prevents them from seeking help from their parents or guardians.
- Due to what we refer to in other research as the 'generational gap', adolescents and young people believe that their elders, who belong to the older generation, are not in touch with the spirit of the age in which they live. Consequently, in their view, these elders are not qualified to solve their problems or understand their reality.
- Many adolescents and young people identify as part of what some refer to as the 'digital generation'. Studies have shown that the brains of this generation differ physiologically and chemically from those

of older generations and continue to change as a result of increased exposure to electronic stimuli. (Mansouri, 2014, p. 36).

1.2 Cyberviolence (la cyberviolence): This related concept emerged alongside the concept of cyberbullying at the beginning of the 1990s. It has been the subject of several studies, with researchers concluding that no clear or meaningful definitions have been established. However, some scholars distinguish cyberviolence from cyberbullying: the former is characterised by the repetition of harm inflicted on victims over a relatively long period, whereas the latter refers to a set of attacks carried out online using electronic communication tools which are not necessarily repeated and may be short-lived.

Accordingly, the two concepts are related to some extent. From this perspective, cyberbullying is a single, isolated incident; if it is repeated and occupies a significant amount of time, it may become cyberviolence. This terminological interpretation is adopted by some researchers. Therefore, some researchers argue that cyberviolence includes bullying, meaning it comprises its constituent elements. At another level, cyberviolence refers to the exchange of unwanted messages, threats or insults between two or more individuals. Unlike cyberbullying (cyber harassment), it does not necessarily involve an imbalance of power between the parties involved (Balaya, 2015, p. 2). (Balaya, 2015, p. 2). Whether the issue is cyberbullying or cyberviolence, these phenomena should be studied in the specific technological and digital context from which they emerged. We also believe that these phenomena are not merely ordinary aggressive acts transferred from their usual social setting to a new digital space. This is because the digital context has its own languages, norms, symbols and meanings — dimensions that are truly understood only by those accustomed to them.

For this reason, we believe that the particular context of these phenomena lends itself to an interpretive approach more than any other. If the researcher can place themselves in the position of someone subjected to cyber aggression and understand the psychological and social effects of the symbols used in that context on the recipient, this helps probe the phenomenon's depths and grasp how it actually unfolds in real life.

On another level, it is clear that distinguishing between cyberbullying and cyberviolence is useful. This can benefit lawmakers and judges by helping them to qualify criminal acts and identify appropriate penalties.

It is unreasonable for the punishment for cyberbullying to be the same as that for cyberviolence. If we are dealing with cyberviolence, then its examination must take into account the repetition of the criminal act and its extension over time. In this case, the legal concept of 'recidivism' (the return to crime) may be applied, which entails stricter penalties, as it involves the repetition of the same offence by its perpetrator. By contrast, when the matter concerns cyberbullying, lawmakers and judges will typically find no indication that the act involves repetition; therefore, the legal classification of this act would be more lenient than that of cyberviolence.

This distinction is also meaningful for sociologists. Whether or not the act is repeated affects how sociologists conceptualise it: repetition and spread move the behaviour from the domain of an isolated social event, which psychology initially examines through description and analysis, to the domain of a social phenomenon — one that becomes active and interpretively significant within society. (See Émile Durkheim's study of suicide, in which he treats it initially as a psychological phenomenon in order to explain it through other social phenomena.)

In the same context, researchers emphasise the distinction between bullying and violence, since the former must involve an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This imbalance may affect the perpetrator legally when the criminal act is classified, in the same way that repetition affects its classification. By contrast, cyber-violence usually occurs between parties that are relatively equal in their possession of immunity-related power, which legal scholars argue may constitute a mitigating circumstance for punishment.

In any event, the imposition of authority by one party over another, the implementation of material or moral sanctions, the threat of such sanctions, or the equal sharing of authority — whether in relative or absolute terms — has long been the subject of sociology or one of its branches, as discussed by Max Weber and others.

Therefore, we can conclude that both bullying and violence are phenomena that fall within the scope of multiple disciplines, most notably psychology, sociology and legal studies. This aligns with calls from many academics for cooperation between the human and social sciences to adequately grasp such complex phenomena. The rationale for this approach is that topics within the human sciences typically converge with psychological, social, legal, historical and even philosophical and ideological conditions.

1.3 The Harasser (Le Harceleur): The harasser is the student or group of students who initiates acts of aggression without having been subjected to them. In this regard, reference should be made to related research (e.g. Al-Zaydi & Khawaja, 2024, p. 257). Several studies have shown that students predisposed to becoming harassers usually exhibit traits such as aggressiveness, instigation and authoritarianism. They also display a degree of irritability or provocativeness that exceeds the norm, alongside non-cooperative and less socially oriented behaviours. Such students are typically less anxious and less disturbed, and they tend to feel safer than others. Moreover, the same studies indicate — somewhat paradoxically — that this group may nonetheless demonstrate the ability to form friendly relationships, and they may feel more supported by their peers than students who are not involved in harassment.

Similarly, the studies suggest that children who harass others often have parents who prefer physical punishment and appear relatively indifferent to problem-solving, while being more tolerant of violent behaviour from their children. Finally, these students tend to have poor adaptive capacity in the school environment in terms of both self-comfort and academic achievement, often feeling that teachers do not support them. (Delfosse, 2015, p. 11).

What distinguishes the cyber-harasser and makes their situation more dangerous than that of the ordinary harasser is their ability to conceal their identity from both their victims and potential witnesses. By adopting a fabricated identity and maintaining discretion about their own persona while engaged in criminal activity, cyber harassers gain an opportunity to act on their aggressive impulses against their victims without fear or psychological disturbance. This condition, which cyber spaces afford to aggressors, may attract an increasing number of aspiring amateurs who may become “professional” harassers. It can also encourage hesitant individuals to act and try their “luck” in exploring this “enticing” world, creating a snowball effect. (Al-Razu, 2007, p. 213)

For this reason, some researchers have adopted the concept of the “cockpit effect” (Effet cockpit), borrowed from the experience of fighter pilots during wartime. When a pilot raids enemy targets from his cockpit, he is unable to witness first-hand the horror of the killing and destruction caused by his actions. This detachment from the reality of his actions enables him to persist in and escalate them.

(Loriers, 2016, p. 4). Had he been confronted with the outcomes of his actions, perhaps his conscience would have restrained him. (See the fate of the pilots who took part in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the last of these reportedly died by suicide in 1978.)

1.4 The cyber harassed person / the victim (La victime)

A victim is an individual or group who has been subjected to cyber-harassment and who constitutes the weaker party in a communication relationship carried out through digital technological means. As a result, they suffer either material or psychological harm—permanent or temporary.

Victims are typically characterised by psychological and personal fragility, which encourages the harasser to target them and use this fragility as the basis for their abuse. The most important manifestations of this fragility are:

- Unusual physical appearance;
- Socially inferior or ‘backward’ racial origin;
- Speech disorders (especially stuttering) or other disabilities;
- A real or presumed sexual orientation;
- Belonging to a particular social group or religion;
- Certain special interests or styles of dress (Streel, 2019, p. 9).

The facts suggest that victims of ordinary (non-cyber) harassment differ from victims of cyber-harassment in at least two ways. The first level concerns the qualitative nature of the offence, characterised by the depth of harm and brutality of the attack. Thus, victims of cyber-harassment often experience more devastating and tragic effects, particularly on psychological and social levels, than victims of direct, non-cyber harassment due to the aforementioned factors (the harasser’s concealment and lack of witnessing the consequences of their actions).

The second level concerns the quantitative dimension: cyber harassers can inflict psychological and social harm on a large number of individuals within a short time owing to the ease with which they can reach them through virtual technological media. This is facilitated by the nature of the communication language employed, which is characterised by strong, compact symbols that are not as accessible in real-world communication.

Several studies have also described the psychological characteristics of harassment victims in general. These studies indicate that those who are harassed are unable to respond in kind to the assaults they receive. Child victims, in particular, tend to be more introverted, frustrated and anxious, and to exhibit greater caution and lower self-confidence than others. Conversely, young people who are victims of such harassment report feeling lonely and less happy at school than their peers. They also perceive that they have fewer friends. Children who had not experienced harassment confirmed this, stating that they avoided associating with the victims for fear of sharing their fate or losing their social standing within their peer group. Studies have also highlighted a strong link between a child’s personal vulnerability and parenting styles, suggesting that overprotection can reduce a child’s resilience to common forms of harassment. (Delfosse, 2015, p. 12).

1.5 Emotional competencies and emotional intelligence.

What is an emotion? What are joy, sadness, fear, anger and boredom? Emotions are automatic reactions to environmental stimuli or mental, emotional, behavioural and cognitive expressions requiring one’s own subjective experience of pleasure and suffering. Many phenomena — if not all — are largely governed by the determinants of this concept. Topics such as school harassment, ways to combat school absenteeism and psychological burnout — this contemporary and troubling affliction that

threatens us all — and the explosion of long-term absenteeism from work, are all subjects that have been discussed extensively and are available online. Many other topics have also been discussed, such as ordinary harassment, cyber-harassment and overindulgence of children.

All these phenomena are fundamentally social. At the same time, they appear to be primarily affected by the emotions and inner affective states that arise within individuals and groups. If this is confirmed, then emotions and emotional states become of paramount importance in our daily lives. Studies indicate that we spend nearly 90% of our waking time under the influence of these emotions. Yet many of us find it very difficult to identify, understand, use, express or regulate these emotions. These challenges impact many areas of our lives, particularly academic and professional success.

Given their significance, some ask: why do we not place greater importance on learning and developing these emotional competencies? In light of this, some scholars refer to the concept of ‘emotion management’, while psychologists introduce the notion of ‘emotional intelligence’. (Delfosse, 2017, p. 3).

Within the scientific and epistemological community, the theory is also defined as a set of logically consistent propositions that aim to encompass a portion of reality. Theories provide causal explanations and interpretations, as well as predictions. Academically, it is also defined as a set of general statements about real-world phenomena. Karl Popper likens theory to ‘a net that helps us to understand the world (i.e. real phenomena), making it intelligible, interpretable and subject to control’. He adds that theory serves this role by organising and systematising observed reality.

2. Theories explaining the phenomenon of cyberbullying:

An integrated theory is the highest level of scientific understanding. Building such a theory requires a broad knowledge base and a careful understanding of the research topic and its field dynamics. At its core, a theory is based on concepts that enable aspects of reality to be abstracted and incorporated into frameworks that summarise recurring, general and constraining phenomena. These concepts must also be generalisable; they should not be limited to a single case, but should describe a set of similar facts across a wide range of contexts and locations.

Once the concepts have been defined, the theory requires the researcher to reveal the relationships between them within analytical models — sets of hypotheses that follow a consistent logic. Ultimately, a theory must support deductive conclusions derived from its own logical relational structure.

Within the scientific and epistemological community, a theory is also defined as a logically coherent set of propositions that aims to capture part of reality. A theory provides causal explanations and predictions. Academically, it is described as a body of general propositions that describe real phenomena. Karl Popper likened a theory to ‘a net for understanding the world (i.e. real phenomena), making it intelligible, explainable and controllable’. Marie-Fabienne Fortin states that ‘a theory is a set of generalisations about concepts and propositions that assert relationships between variables, with the aim of explaining and predicting certain phenomena’ (Dépelteau, 2011: 129–130). (Dépelteau, 2011: 129–130).

Theories are important, and many researchers value scientific work mainly when it is theory-driven. Here, we note some theories related to bullying that can inform approaches to addressing this type of issue.

2.1 Social Learning Theory

Although Bandura was influenced by behavioural theory, he later distanced himself from it to develop social learning theory in the late 1960s. This new theory would have a significant impact on both

theoretical and practical scientific research. Unlike behavioural theory, which relies on objective observation as conditional stimuli, this theory is grounded primarily in the two factors of cognition (perception) and social influence as determinants of behaviour.

Bandura focuses on the process of learning through modelling. He argues that individuals form an idea of how behaviours are performed by observing the actions of others. This idea is then internalised and becomes a normative model that guides the production of further actions. In other words, when we witness a behaviour, we do not merely observe and repeat it, but rather take it as a model for generating other behaviours that follow the same pattern.

Within this framework, Bandura examined aggressive behaviour through his well-known Bobo doll experiment. In this study, he had a group of children observe an adult woman assaulting a doll. The children were then allowed to play with the dolls separately. The results showed that the children reproduced the violent acts performed by the woman. However, the surprising finding was that they went beyond this, displaying more developed and intense forms of aggressive behaviour.

Bandura and his associates began with a hypothesis that predicted children who observed violence would reduce their own aggression and become more peaceful. However, the findings revealed an unexpected outcome that went against the researchers' expectations. The experiment was later repeated to either strengthen or refute the hypothesis, but the results showed that learning through modelling goes beyond simple imitation.

In 1965, F. Fenouillet conducted an experiment on three groups of children who watched a film showing episodes of violence involving the Bobo doll. In these episodes, the doll was subjected to aggressive behaviour, such as being hit by children. The children were then observed to see if they imitated the behaviour they had seen. The first group was rewarded for violent behaviour, the second was not, and the third was the control group.

After the film ended, the three groups were placed in a room and given all the tools used in the film's scenes. The researchers then observed the groups' behaviour without the children's knowledge. The results were as follows: the group that had been rewarded was the most aggressive, the group that had not been rewarded was the least violent and aggressive, and the level of aggression in the third group (the control group) fell between the other two. Based on these results, Fenouillet concluded that rewarding or punishing an aggressive act enhances or reduces the likelihood of it being repeated.

In the same context, Bandura argues that observational learning necessarily proceeds through four stages:

1) The attentional process: the observer must pay attention to the model being observed. If the observer perceives value in the model, this will provide stronger motivation to pay attention. Bandura also states that nothing should interfere with the observation process itself. If interference occurs, it becomes an obstacle to reproducing the observed behaviour. During observation, the individual selects elements that are meaningful to them from what is presented. This selectivity is grounded, on the one hand, in the individual's prior experience and, on the other hand, their experience directs them towards specific interpretations of the observed actions.

At this level, we enter the second stage, which is called:

2) The retention process: This refers to the ability to recall observed information. If individuals are generally influenced by their previous experiences in their immediate observations, this can only occur through experiences that they are able to remember. Bandura calls this the 'symbolic process'.

Accordingly, individuals store observed models in memory, anticipating using them later to produce and develop other actions that follow the same pattern.

3) The motivational process: The observing individual must develop a personal desire to imitate the observed model. In this context, reward and punishment are important in shaping motivation. Depending on how the observer perceives and interprets the reward or punishment associated with the observed action, they will either reproduce the action or refrain from doing so.

4) The reproduction process: If the observer pays attention to the model, they may successfully encode the presented information. In that case, the observer becomes capable of successfully reproducing the observed act — namely, learning (H. François; E. Botteman, 2015, pp. 520–538). (H. François & E. Botteman, 2015, pp. 520–538).

There is no doubt that researchers investigating cyberbullying will find this theory provides interpretive guidance, hypothetical expectations and abstract conceptual tools to help them study and analyse such phenomena by drawing on assumptions, analytical models and inferences to guide them and facilitate engagement with these topics.

2.2 White-Collar Deviance Theory

Sutherland's scientific position is considered exceptional within the field of criminology in the United States more broadly. After completing his criminological studies and defending his thesis at Chicago in 1913, he became—up to the present day—a reference that is difficult to surpass in criminology, even though his work and the issues he addressed did not receive much appreciation from sociologists. In the first edition of his book *Principles of Criminology* (1934), Sutherland attempted to adopt a Durkheimian perspective. To this end, he rejected the idea that criminal behaviour is driven by innate, instinctive (biological/psychic) motives. Instead, he argued that, as a social phenomenon, deviation can only be explained socially; therefore, psychological explanations must be excluded.

After leaving Chicago, he took up a leading position at Indiana University, where he gained recognition within a specialised criminology research group. In 1939, during a speech delivered in his capacity as president of the American Sociological Society, he developed his concept of 'white-collar deviance'. In that address, he demonstrated a dual critical sensibility: on the one hand, he accused the judicial system of being too lenient towards business crimes (*délinquance d'affaires*), and on the other, he criticised criminology for promoting an abnormal and biased view of the phenomenon of deviance.

At that time, the field of criminology tended to focus on the deviance of immigrants and the popular working classes. However, Sutherland believed that attention was required for deviants 'in white collars' — those who did not fall under the appropriate sanctions imposed on ordinary offenders. When members of this group are punished, such measures are usually mitigated compared to those imposed on ordinary members of the public.

Ultimately, Sutherland sought to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework that would integrate the study of white-collar deviance with other common offences that violate current legislation, and then construct a theoretical model capable of accounting for all forms of deviance within society.

Sutherland, of course, was influenced by the anthropological-cultural perspective that dominated American sociology at the time. It was in this context that he began developing his theory, known as "differential association" (*association différentielle*). According to this theory, deviant behaviour is learned within the social environment as part of a subculture. It is learned through interaction with peers or relatives, and sometimes through reading newspapers and engaging with organisations.

In his 1947 book *Principles of Criminology* (*Principes de criminologie*), Sutherland argued against the idea, advocated by the pioneers of the Chicago School, that deviance is explained by social disorder. Instead of resulting from the weakness of collective norms and the rise of individualistic values, deviance is explained by differential social organisation (*differential social patterning*).

In institutions of socialisation, techniques of cheating and complex or simple forms of circumvention are learned (in the contemporary context, for example, in schools and among peer groups). Within these institutions, conceptions of what is 'normal' versus what is 'deviant' are incorporated and harmonised. According to this theoretical model of differential association, an individual becomes deviant when they come to believe that committing certain types of crimes is more positively valued by their surroundings than abstaining from them in the name of respecting the law.

After that, Sutherland emphasises that 'intelligent' criminals often violate the spirit of the law despite outwardly appearing to respect it. White-collar criminals exploit legal loopholes, making it difficult to prove their deviant acts in court. They benefit from the presumption of innocence that prevents those who truly deserve it from being punished. They also benefit from not being considered as having committed offences under the aggravating conditions associated with the concept of 'recidivism'. Consequently, they usually escape more severe penalties.

Thanks to Sutherland's work, the proportion of white-collar offenders convicted reportedly increased from 8% in 1970 to 25% in 1984. (Spire, 2013, p. 3).

2.3 Broken Windows Theory

This theory originally stems from an experiment conducted by Philip Zimbardo in the United States in 1969, within the field of social psychology. Zimbardo left two identical cars in two different neighbourhoods. One car was parked in a poor area known for occasional disturbances and insecurity, while the second was left in a calm, well-disciplined neighbourhood.

A team of social psychology researchers followed the fate of both cars and observed the behaviour of local residents towards them. They observed that the car parked in the poor neighbourhood was vandalised within only a few hours: its engine, rear-view mirrors, radio and wheels were stolen. Anything that could easily be carried was stolen, while anything that was harder to take was destroyed. In contrast, the second car, parked in the peaceful, affluent neighbourhood, remained unharmed.

In most cases, these two behaviours are interpreted as resulting from poverty and affluence. However, the experiment did not stop there. The research team broke the window of the car parked in the affluent neighbourhood that had remained free of vandalism, and continued to observe the subsequent developments in individuals' behaviour in that area.

After a certain amount of time had passed, a series of vandalistic acts emerged, similar to those that had occurred to the first car in the poor neighbourhood. These acts affected the car that was the subject of the experiment.

Following these observations, the research team asked themselves: Why did breaking a window of a car in a peaceful neighbourhood lead to criminal activity?

The conclusions were as follows: Poverty is not always the cause of such acts. Therefore, there must be another cause related to individuals' psychology, behaviour and social relations in general. Seeing an abandoned car with a shattered window creates the impression of indifference. It conveys the idea of abandoning what is left unrepaired, signalling a lack of concern about it. In this way, the context suggests the absence of law, regulations, norms and rules — so nothing has value or deserves attention. Moreover, each act of vandalism tends to trigger further criminal acts: the more an attack occurs, the

more it encourages further offences. Ultimately, this results in an accumulation of unrestrained acts of vandalism beyond the control of the collective conscience, leading to irrational violence (Sebastian, 2000, pp. 388–389). (Sebastian, 2000, pp. 388–389).

This experiment was then developed in the field of criminology by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. They proposed the theory that crime rates are usually higher in areas of neglect, where dirt, disorder and violence accumulate. Proponents of this theory illustrate this further by saying that if a broken bottle in a building is not fixed, people will see this as permission to break more bottles, which will inevitably lead to more shattered glass in the same building. They then generalise this idea, stating that when a group fails to prevent vandalism at its earliest stages and no one intervenes to stop the chain of criminal events by repairing the damage or deterring those who perpetrate it, the logical outcome is an escalation of hostile events along the initial pattern. Thus, if a rule prohibiting parking cars in a specific place is breached, or if the maximum speed is exceeded or traffic signals are ignored, whether this is ordinary or cyberbullying, for example, without deterrent penalties being imposed, society will witness increasing and more severe infringements. With the abandonment of efforts to combat the disorder, individuals will consider evacuating the area due to sabotage and unaddressed attacks. At this stage, the offenders become dominant over the original residents, and the phenomenon reaches its peak. (Sebastian, 2000, pp. 388–389; Morvan, 2011, 1, 2, 3).

These three theories are cited for illustrative purposes rather than exhaustively, and researchers may draw on them when identifying hypothetical explanations for cyberbullying problems that are grounded in sound theoretical principles.

Conclusion:

For many scholars, scientific research requires strict epistemological and methodological commitments. Among these commitments — and perhaps the most important of them — is reviewing prior studies that have addressed the topic under investigation, given that science is cumulative and collaborative. For this reason, and others besides, it is necessary to familiarise oneself with concepts that can govern the observed data both theoretically and practically.

Concepts have the capacity to abstract specific facts from their secondary characteristics while preserving the fundamental attributes without which the fact would not exist. For this reason, the well-known statement that ‘reality—whatever its form (social, interpretive, historical, etc.)—is always richer and more abundant than its theoretical representations’ is often heard.

In service of this methodological and epistemological principle, this research addresses a contemporary subject. We adopted it as a model to demonstrate the importance and benefit of becoming acquainted with current concepts in the field of science and knowledge before embarking on any research project. This is reinforced by what methodologists emphasise: it is the duty of every researcher to familiarise themselves with the literature concerning their chosen field before conducting field investigations.

Accordingly, we alluded to the importance of concepts here, and then referred to some related to cyberbullying, including cyberbullying, cyberviolence and cyberharassment, and the roles of the harasser and the victim.

On the other hand:

Cataloguing theories in scientific research is an essential process for constructing a problematic and hypothetical framework for various research topics. This excludes the empiricists of the British tradition. Theories enable researchers, through their expertise and prior knowledge, to identify

interpretive propositions or analytical models for hypothetical problems that would otherwise be difficult to initiate or approach from scratch.

For this reason, the second section of this research proposes drawing attention to three theories developed by cybercrime researchers, to provide inspiration for interpretation and formulation of possible assumptions.

Social learning theory, in particular, can be useful when considering that cyberbullying, cyberviolence and cyberharassment occur as a result of a learning process involving exposure, such as interaction with peer groups, and the transmission or ‘contagion’ of bullying or harassment to other similar groups. The same applies to the theory of white-collar crime, even though this relates to offences committed in administrative or urban institutions by individuals typically belonging to groups with relatively high functional and social status.

Meanwhile, the broken window theory provides a useful reference for understanding how minor, neglected offences can gradually evolve into serious transgressions if those concerned do not promptly intervene to resolve the situation.

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