

**Benchmark: Pairing Research Proposal**

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## **Pairing Research Proposal: Aggression and Abuse**

### **Introduction**

With the rise of social media platforms, and the easy access to the internet, there has been a rise in people interacting via these platforms. This has opened up the ability for people to communicate with others who are across the country and in some cases across the world. In many cases this can be a benefit as people are able to interact and learn more about other cultures and other opinions. However, with benefits there are always drawbacks. In this literature review we are going to be analyzing the question, with the rise of social media use how is aggressive or abusive behavior handled? Three specific areas will be examined, and these are social media and dark side communication, aggressive messages, and abusive messages.

### **Social media and dark side communication**

Dark side communication is a field that has allowed for people to research specific areas of everyday life such as aggression and abuse. However, social media is an area that has recently seen a growth of research done to discover more about the aggression and abuse that occurs everyday on this platform. Authors Tracie Farrell, Genevieve Gorrell, and Kalina Bontcheva examined the abuse that occurred specifically during the time of Covid-19 (Farrell et al., 2020). With the rise of Covid-19 there was also a rise of aggression and abuse that was seen on social media platforms. However, the study that was conducted saw this level increase concerning those who were in authority. The following article written by authors Karen Lumsden and Heather Morgan explains how a rise in research has been done on online abuse such as hate crime, trolling, and stalking (Lumsden & Morgan, 2017). The research that was specifically done in this article examines the abusive “silencing strategies” that occur when people on social media

are told to not feed into the abuser. However, normally this will end with silencing the person being abused, and a recovery from what took place never occurs. Social media has opened up a whole new avenue for dark side communication, as the research in this point has shown.

### **Aggressive Messages**

The next section that will be examined is the aggression that occurs on social media. This covers both the messages that are sent via private messaging and directly on posts. In 2017 there was an online movement where women were coming out about the abuse, specifically sexual abuse, that had occurred to them and the hashtag that was used was #MeToo. This movement allowed for a positive change to happen. However, the positive change also allowed for much negative information to come to the surface. Author Suyin Haynes explains how Twitter has algorithms that are put into place to detect the aggressive comments that are posted (Haynes, 2018). However, the activist who started the #MeToo movement, Seyi Akiwowo, experienced a large wave of aggressive and abusive comments on Twitter and many of them were not filtered due to the large amount that filtered in. The second article examining this topic is “Benchmarking aggression identification in social media,” in this article authors Ritesh Kumar, Atul Kr. Ojha, Shervin Malmasi, and Marcos Zampieri represent a study that was done on determining three types of aggressive texts that were found on Facebook posts (Kumar et al., 2018). In this study they concluded that detecting aggressive texts can be difficult due to the variety of aggression. The three types of aggression that were looked for were overtly aggressive, covertly aggressive, and non-aggressive texts.

## **Abusive Messages**

Moving into the last section the topic of abusive messages will be analyzed through two articles that explore what abusive messages look like and how they are addressed. Authors Josefina Erikson, Sandra Hakansson, and Cecilia Josefsson explored the gendered online abuse that occurs in Sweden (Erikson et al., 2021). In the research that was conducted it was found that women did not experience more abuse than men in the frequency rate, but they do experience more sexualized abuse via social media platforms. Another discovery that they made was that when abuse towards politicians occurs men are more likely to leave the political field than women. This leads back into the article and research that was done into the #MeToo movement. Author Suyin Haynes shared statistics on the number of abusive messages that are sent to women over one year. The number of messages was 1.1 million and these were sent to 778 women (Haynes, 2018). This continues to be a growing issue as social media continues to grow.

## **Conclusion**

Social media is like a double edge sword, there are pros and cons to it. Spreading social awareness is a positive, whereas the mask that many people wear along with the aggression and abuse that occurs drives a negative consequence. Dark side communication in regard to social media is still in area that is rarely researched, but it is an area that has many growing concerns. The aggression that occurs can come in different types of messages and levels of aggression. Abusive messages are often thought to be sent to mainly females, however, as we saw this is not true. Men and women both receive similar amounts of abusive messages, but the main difference is that for women they receive more sexual abusive messages. Social media use and how aggressive or abusive behavior is handled is a topic that is not widely research and is in continual need of research.

## **Proposal**

### **Introduction**

The field of communication is constantly coming up with new research to help individuals understand the concepts of life that affect us daily. Even while there is much research being released there are still many areas that still remain untouched. In the first part of this section the question that was explored was with the rise of social media use how is aggressive or abusive behavior handled? While researching this question it was quickly discovered that much of the research done on aggression and abuse on social media is in regard to romantic relationships. There is little research done on the hate and aggression done between individuals not in a romantic relationship. In this proposal there will be two questions examined and in the last point the methodology will be explored.

### **Should individuals increase security settings?**

In this first point the question that will be examined is should individuals increase their security settings on social media platforms? This is a concept that for some people might be a given. However, many individuals tend to download social media and not bother with security settings that are put in place to protect the individual. An example of this is on Instagram. It is possible to set the security to filter out the direct messages that are received in order to filter out aggressive or abusive messages, whether that is sexual or not. However, this is a concept that many people may not realize is a feature that they should take advantage of in order to avoid the aggression and abuse they may face on social media platforms.

## **Is there an increase in political and religious based aggression and abuse?**

As was introduced in the beginning of this proposal there is an increasing amount of research being conducted on individuals who experience aggression or abuse in romantic ways on social media platforms. However, over the last few years there has been an increase of aggression and abuse towards individuals who have differing political or religious opinions, and there is little research done in this area. In an article by authors Josefina Erikson, Sandra Hakansson, and Cecilia Josefsson they research Swedish politicians and their experience with aggressive and abusive messages, but the research is limited to the one specific group of individuals (Erikson et al., 2021). This is an area that has very limited research done and would benefit from more research done on it.

## **Methodology**

In this point the way that the two previous points will be researched will be examined. The first question is should individuals increase security settings on social media platforms? The first way that this will be researched is through asking individuals on social media if they are aware of the ability to increase their security settings to filter out aggressive or abusive messages? This will allow the researcher to know if social media sites should be more vocal about these settings or if individuals simply choose not to set their security settings high. The second question, is there an increase in political and religious based aggression and abuse? Similar to the first question, it would be beneficial to find out the number of individuals who experience unsolicited aggression and abuse via social media. Asking this question would allow the researcher to have a baseline for how they will continue the research and just how many people are affected by aggressive and abusive messages via social media.

## **Conclusion**

Research within the field of communication continues to be done daily and new topics are discovered that need to be examined. In this proposal it was shown that the topic of aggressive and abusive messages that are not tied to a romantic relationship is not widely researched. The two questions that were brought up give a baseline of where the research can begin, and the methodology is giving a baseline with how to begin the research. This is a topic that is in a growing need of furthering the knowledge on it.

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