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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Investigating Cyberbullying in Electronic Communication: A Descriptive Study

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**ABSTRACT**

Cyberbullying is widely used nowadays in electronic communication. It takes different forms, and it is considered a serious problem that faces all communities. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to discover cyberbullying with its types found in one type of electronic communication, "Facebook". The data are as type of screenshots and collected from an archived formal page on Facebook called "BBC News". The data of the study encompass (10 comments) samples "screen shots" from different posts on "BBC News". The analyses reveal "four" different types of cyberbullying which are employed in the data. The types are flaming, which is a reply directed towards other people's comments; rumour spreading which is directed towards the posts or the channel; trolling, which is directed towards a specific post or the topic of discussion; and tagging, which occurs by making tags to other people with their usernames. Thus, cyberspace creates new different social environments that allow different online users from all over the world to contribute to electronic communication and cause many forms of cyberbullying.

**KEYWORDS**

Traditional bullying, Cyberbullying, Types of Cyberbullying, Electronic Communication, Facebook

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**1. Introduction**

The rapid growth of technology and electronic devices has raised many cases of cyberbullying to emerge. Electronic situations allow everybody to connect constantly from all over the world, so this leads to different types of electronic aggressions appearing with modern technology. Although cyberbullying occurs less frequently than traditional bullying, it becomes more widespread with the development of new technologies.

The current study focuses on electronic bullying that happens in one of the electronic communication mediums that occurs in postponed time, "facebook". Cyberbullying is considered a serious problem that threatens teens, "boys and girls", youth and even adults since cyberbullies use different tools, such as hiding their identity, using fake accounts, spreading rumors, post photos or videos of others, etc., to achieve their absurd goals.

This study has limitations in that it focuses on one of the electronic mediums, which is "Facebook"; the size of the data is also limited "10" screen shots for (10) different comments on the publications of English "BBC News" that has an achieved formal page on Facebook. The main goal of this study is to highlight different types of cyberbullying and how these types occur in Facebook comments.

The main research questions that this study tries to answer are:

1-Which types of cyberbullying occur on Facebook, and what are the most frequent ones?

2-How and why do these types of cyberbullying happen?

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The current study aims to:

- 1-To know and understand different types of cyberbullying.
- 2-To clarify how cyberbullying occurs and give the reasons behind it.

This study also hypothesizes that:

- 1-Different types of cyberbullying may occur on Facebook, such as "rumor spreading, flaming, trolling, impersonation and tagging". The most frequent ones are flaming and trolling.
- 2-Types of cyberbullying may happen on Facebook through posting or commenting while other people comment or reply to those posts or comments in a way that is embarrassing or insulting to other people.

## **2. The nature of traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying**

Ross (2002: 105) declares that traditional bullying has been a societal problem for hundreds of years. Although it has been a serious problem for many centuries, it is not given attention until the 1970s when the scientist Olweus focuses on this significant topic by contributing scientific data in Scandinavia and generating many research interests Smith & Morita (1999: 2). However, this term exists only for a short time, and in social psychology, there are many kinds of "mobs" such as the aggressive mob "the lynch mob", the panic-stricken mob "the flight mob", and the acquisitive mob "the hoarding mob" Olweus (2010: 9) and Olweus (1993: 8).

In the 1990s and the current decade, bullying has become more volatile and occurs more often than it was in the past. It occurs in different circumstances; it occurs in workplaces, homes, prisons, schools and nursing homes. Bullying in schools occurs in many educational settings, especially in boarding schools Smith & Sharp (1994: 2). It is sometimes said that bullying is a natural and indispensable feature of the way nature works. It serves an evolutionary purpose: it ensures that the fittest survive Rigby (2002: 19). Bullying is characterised by two features: a.it involves an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim resulting from differences in physical strength or status in a job hierarchy, b.it is carried out repeatedly and over time Krahé (2013: 148).

On the other hand, Cyberbullying is similar to traditional bullying in many ways, but there are also some ways it is not similar. Cyberspace has created a new social environment for it, such as texting, posting, chatting, social media and other means of electronic communication, which are always advancing (Simon & Olson, 2014: 58). One of the main factors that contribute to the cyberbullying problem is those who seek to cause harm to other people can be still virtually anonymous. It is difficult to determine the identity in netspeak because of pseudonyms. Those aggressors can express sentiments of malice behind that anonymity by using the internet Hinduja & Patchin (2015: 54).

Cyberbullies cause their harmful behaviour via electronic communication tools such as mobile phones, internet pages, instant messaging, chatgroups, etc. They try to insult others by sending or posting stories, photos, and videos to put their victims in embarrassing situations. So cyber, bullying becomes more widespread with the development of new technologies ( Salmivalli & Peets (2009: 324).

## **3. What is Cyberbullying**

Lohmann & Taylor (2013: 1) define Cyberbullying as a type of bullying that occurs through the use of electronic devices such as texting, instant messaging, e-mailing, posting on social media etc. they also add that that cyber bullying can be in different forms: threatening someone by text messages or on social media sites; revealing someone's secrets online to embarrass or humiliate that person; gossiping or saying things online while pretending to be someone else; taking inappropriate photos of other people and posting them online without permission from those people (ibid: 14). Taylor (2014:1) defines Cyberbullying as "the situation wherein a person; usually a minor undergoes a situation wherein he is subject to tormenting, experiences a certain threat or harassment, or becomes a target of embarrassment or humiliation and the chosen medium for proliferating such an activity is the Internet or any other form of mobile or digital technology like smartphones or computers".

Louisiana, cited in Hinduja & Patchin (2015: 5), defines cyberbullying as "the transmission of any electronic textual, visual, written, or oral communication with the malicious and willful intent to coerce, abuse, torment, or intimidate a person".

Aftab, cited in (ibid: 16), defines cyberbullying as "when a minor uses technology as a weapon to intentionally target and hurt another minor". (ibid: 13) define cyberbullying as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and electronic devices".

#### 4. Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can take different types as there are many popular devices and online environments. Bullies can post hurtful messages on public online platforms or send direct anonymous messages over and over to individual targets. According to Hinduja & Patching (2015: 62-76), there are ten types of cyberbullying:

1-*Rumor spreading*: this form is commonly perpetrated by using social media, texts, posts, gossip and hearsay about someone can be disseminated very easily online. Rumour spreading tends to be an activity used more frequently by girls than boys because of the relational aggression and social sabotage that occur commonly between girls when rivalries arise.

2-*Flaming*: This type occurs when someone sends or posts hostile, angry or annoying messages or comments to inflame the emotions and sensibilities of others. These messages and comments do not advance or contribute to the discussion at hand, but instead, they are attempted to wound another person socially or psychologically and to assert authority over others. Most flaming occur in electronic communication forums, especially the comment section of articles covering news, sports, celebrities or current events.

3-*Trolling*: trolling is similar to flaming, but it is different in that it is directed at the subject of discussion, whereas flaming is directed at another participant or other participants in the discussion. Trolls attempt to cause maximum disruption, annoyance and arguments in the online thread and their words and actions have no sincere basis. Flaming, on the other hand, involves being harsh and hurtful when conveying what one thinks is true or right.

4-*Posting Pictures and Videos*: everyone has his/her own private pictures, and he/she does not want strangers to see them because they may have the opportunity to capture someone else in a moment of awkwardness, shame, ugliness or pain. In this behaviour, we find many people are embarrassed, or other people will have a negative view toward that target person.

5-*Captions, Commenting and Messaging*: this type usually occurs in cases of disinhibition and deindividuation. Some electronic users try to harm other users directly by using overt name-calling, insults and obscenities, or indirect and subtle through passive aggressiveness, barbed sarcasm and twisted wordplay or anonymously by using a pseudonym or fake account to mask the aggressor's identity or the one who is bullying do not care that his/her identity is revealed and feels free to hurt others from his/her own account. Some cyberbullying incidents occur through the use of hashtags or photoshopping. For example, some users might include mean or hateful hashtags under something they post "in the caption or comments" or that another person posts "in the comments," such as dork, loser, fuglyslut, whore, etc.

6-*Information Spreading*: one of the major problems with online communication and interaction is that content sent, posted or shared can be seen in a short amount of time by a large number of people. As a rule, each participant has his own private information such as contact information "phone number, e-mail address or home address". There is also some other information related to something that the user does not want to broadcast, like sexual experiences, sexual orientation, physical or medical issues, family problems or anything which is not comfortable to discuss. Thus, sometimes those with malicious intentions find out what teens or other users do not want to be revealed and have tried to keep it secret and figure out a way to use it against them. Other times, youth may be careless with what they have posted to their online friends or followers or "texted to someone they believe he/she can trust", but somehow it gets into the wrong hands and is disseminated well beyond the intended audience.

7-*Impersonation*: it occurs when someone assumes another person's identity online. For example, some users create a social media profile and pretend to be you. They might pose or post as you to say or do hurtful things to others while interacting online in a way that ruins your reputation and gets you into serious trouble. Another impersonation that can lead to cyberbullying is through a practice called "catfishing". Catfishing refers to the practice of setting up a fictitious online profile mostly for the purpose of luring another into a fraudulent romantic relationship.

8-*Tagging and Untagging*: tagging ties or connects a person as "represented by his/her online profile or account" to a specific piece of content on social media for those unfamiliar. Most individuals are tagged when they appear in a particular image or video. So, cyberbullying happens when the target is tagged or "linked to a statement or picture or video" that the person really does not want to be associated with. For example, a person can caption a gross, disgusting or otherwise insulting or demeaning photo with a target's username and perhaps a negative sentiment. However, anyone can be tagged; he/she can remove or hide that tagged picture or video from his/her profile, like Facebook.

9-*Cyberstalking*: it means using technology to induce fear, threaten, annoy or otherwise harass someone else. It is a crime or unlawful for a person to use in electronic communication any words or language threatening to inflict bodily harm to any person. It is also unlawful to communicate electronically to another repeatedly, whether or not conversation ensues, for the purpose of

abusing, annoying, threatening, terrifying, harassing or embarrassing any person. Finally, cyberstalking is also unlawful to communicate electronically to another and to knowingly make any false statement concerning death, injury, illness, disfigurement, indecent conduct or criminal conduct of the person electronically mailed.

*10-Physical Threats:* sometimes, there are instances of cyberbullying that involve threats to a person's physical safety and well-being, and this type of cyberbullying warrants immediate attention and response by law enforcement to determine whether it is actually a threat with merit, as people often say things to one another that should not be construed as threats.

## **5. Electronic communication**

Electronic communication is the process of sharing information, ideas and messages with others at a particular time and place by using electronic devices(Olubode-Sawe, 2010: 564). Electronic communication may be divided into two dimensions synchronous, which happens in real time or asynchronous, which takes place in postponed time(Crystal, 2006:11 and Baron, 2008:14). Electronic communication without social contact is being digital without humans or going online without leaving the safety of the electronic bunker(Holmes, 2005:94).

Electronic communication that is written on keyboards and read on screens has many characteristics of both speech and writing, such as telephone conversations. Electronic discourse is supported by a delivery system that replaces face-to-face communication with writing that stands in place of voices, such as messages(Davis and Brewer, 1997:2).

Electronic communication involves strategies and skills which are different from the ones employed to face to face exchange. Computer-mediated communication cannot take advantage of certain social aspects of oral interaction, such as nonverbal cues 'facial expressions' and prosodic features 'intonation'(Lee, 2009: 129). Electronic communication can be useful in circumstances where there is little or no opportunity for real life contact with native speakers. Therefore, it may be used to learn more about the culture in chat sites or chat groups(Todd and Walker, 2000:64).

## **6. Facebook**

Facebook is a social network site that allows users to create profiles and link with others, such as friends within the system, as well as allows users to post and comment on each other profiles. The profile serves as an individual's digital representation of his/her tastes, fashion and identity. By using Facebook, individuals can upload photos, indicate interests, list favorite musicians and describe themselves textually through associated media (Shariff, 2008: 35-6).

Moreover, Baron (2008: 84) adds that Facebook is one type of asynchronous electronic communication that occurs in postponed time, and it is "one-to-many". It is a social utility that helps people better understand the world around them. Facebook develops technologies that facilitate the spread of information through social networks allowing people to share information online the same way they do in the real world. Facebook also affords its users another kind of conversational clout by minimizing the amount of time one needs to spend communicating with someone else. It is created as a cross between a tool for meeting new people and a platform for networking with people you already know(ibid).

The main social networking features of Facebook cluster into three categories: information about yourself, social affiliations, and online interaction. Facebook enables users to personalize privacy by blocking particular individuals from accessing the user's Facebook page (ibid: 81-2).

## **7. Data Collection and Description**

The source of the data is one of the asynchronous electronic communication mediums, "Facebook". The researcher chose one of the formal English news channels that have an archived page on Facebook called "BBC News". This channel publishes different types of news around the world daily on its page on Facebook, and it has a large number of followers, nearly "58 million followers". The researcher browses the channel with his personal Facebook account, and read the comments on posts on the channel's page and captured (10) comments in relation to this study from different posts. The links of the posts are also taken and put with the analysis for objectivity. Collecting data took more than 5 hours to read and check the posts.

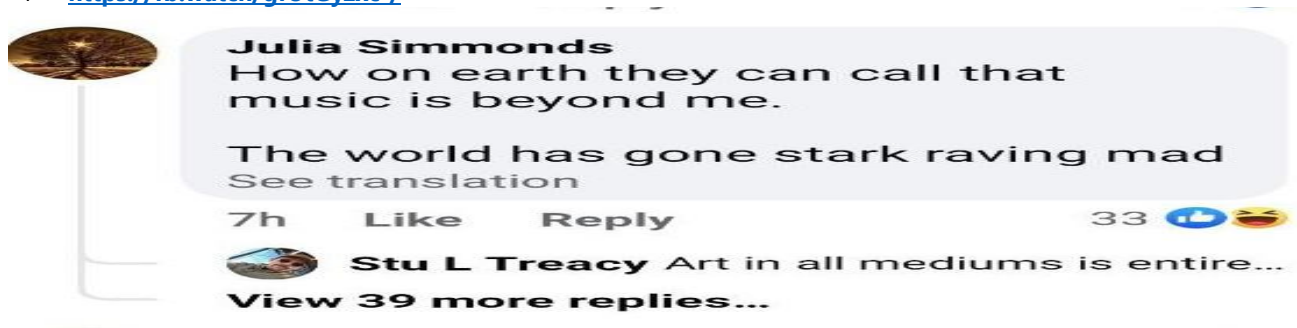
The reason beyond selecting "Facebook" as a source of the data is that Facebook is widely used all over the world, and most cyberbullying types occur in this medium since it has different online topics such as politics, news, advertising, shopping, sports, as well as many other personal or public things.



### 8. Analysis and Results

A quantitative-Qualitative descriptive analysis is carried out in analyzing the collected data. Hinduj & Patching (2015: 62-76) are the models that are adopted in this study in analyzing the findings of cyberbullying types with their descriptions. Cyberbullying power may simply stem from proficiency with the knowledge or possession of some content or posts such as “pictures, information or video” that can be used to inflict harm. So, anyone who has these possessions within an online context may be wielded through some forms of cyberbullying. Moreover, anyone who can use technology in a way that allows him/her to mistreat others in a position of power is also called cyberbullying.

1- <https://fb.watch/gfUtGyzxc-/>



This screen shot explains “Simmonds’s” comment on one of the BBC news, which is related to “the Rapper Little Simz who won the Mercury Prize”. In this comment, Simmonds attacks the post in a mockery way, and this type of cyberbullying is called “trolling” by attempting to cause maximum disruption, annoyance or arguments in the online thread. On the other hand, the other users replied to this comment, and this is called “flaming” because these replies are not contributing to the post itself but wound or inflame the emotions or the sensibilities of others.

2- [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0Kc2j38L1dGpY5KPv3sb5zE5gcoH2AoY8PTudC7LWJvn2tCj9Z2Kfix2CkMPKjtUSI&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Kc2j38L1dGpY5KPv3sb5zE5gcoH2AoY8PTudC7LWJvn2tCj9Z2Kfix2CkMPKjtUSI&id=100064620046507)



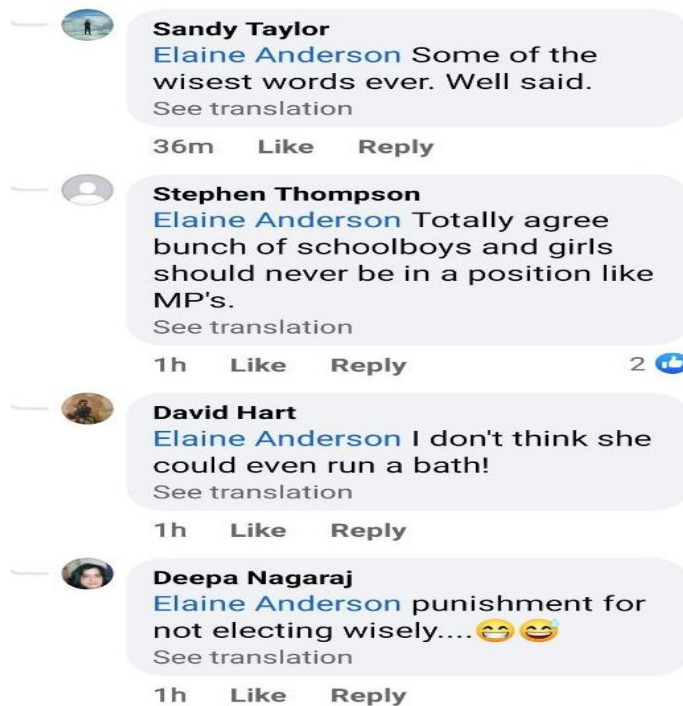
First, The person in this comment tries to humiliate, embarrass or ashamed the “BBC News” channel by pretending that it used an incorrect photo in its news post, and this is called “Rumor Spreading”. Second, the person who has this comment seems to have a fake account because he doesn’t put his real photo.

3- <https://fb.watch/gfVWB8 7IG/>



The participant "Anderson" comments on a political post and uses "trolls" by describing those political people in an abusive speech to make other people angry or to get an aggressive response, or to provoke others. His comment also gets support from another participant, "flam".

4- <https://fb.watch/gfVWB8 7IG/>



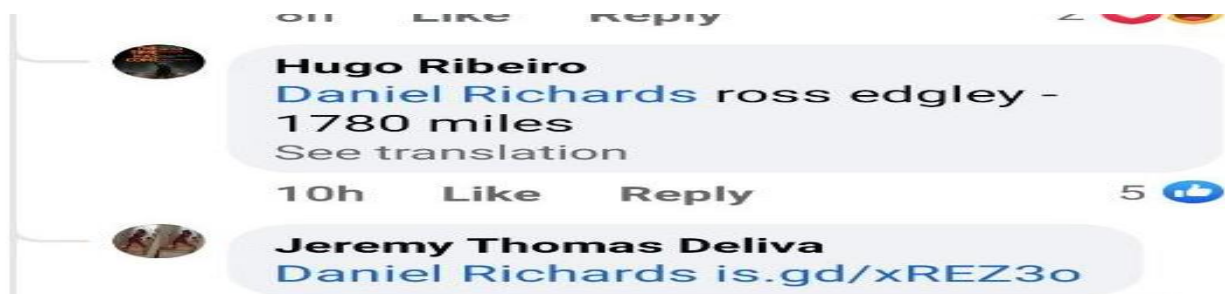
This screen shot shows that there are tags with target usernames for specific content or post on social media. So, this behaviour is considered as a type of cyberbullying because the tagged targets do not seem to be associated with that post, and this may cause negative sentiments to those tagged people.

5- [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0338zAub1q1RARsXmp976eb43MnfV6fdNXnaGtBRXmtS7BwYdzJ2mtZR83UXBGhb5el&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0338zAub1q1RARsXmp976eb43MnfV6fdNXnaGtBRXmtS7BwYdzJ2mtZR83UXBGhb5el&id=100064620046507)



In this capture, the user "Richards" expresses his opinion towards a post about swimming on "BBC", but the replies come to his comment from other people in a hurtful and harsh way. These replies "flaming" do not contribute to the discussion at hand, but they attempt to wound or inflame the emotions and sensibilities of others.

6-  
[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0338zAub1g1RARsXmp976eb43MnfV6fdNXnaGtBRXmtS7BwYdzJ2mtZR83UXBGhb5el&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0338zAub1g1RARsXmp976eb43MnfV6fdNXnaGtBRXmtS7BwYdzJ2mtZR83UXBGhb5el&id=100064620046507)



In this screen shot, the participant comments on a post on "BBC", but some other participant replies to his comment with a link for an indecent video to see it, and this reply does not contribute to the discussion at hand. So, this reply, "flam", is considered cyberbullying because it insults others.

7-  
[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02LUvPxM8ppGgtHH7WgwRKwiiU56dCdXJ3nR2kUZ3qCQ7KKX9kKQajcoUZHCVdum8l&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02LUvPxM8ppGgtHH7WgwRKwiiU56dCdXJ3nR2kUZ3qCQ7KKX9kKQajcoUZHCVdum8l&id=100064620046507)





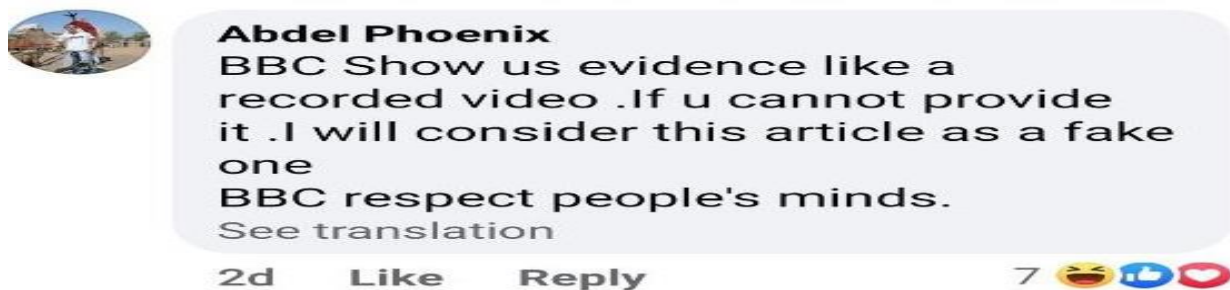
This capture shows those two participants attempt to cause maximum disruption, annoyance or arguments towards the publisher "BBC" and accuses it of lies without evidence. So, those replies or comments (trolls) have no sincere basis, and they are just rumours.

8- [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02LUvPxM8ppGgtHH7WgwRKwiiU56dCdXJ3nR2kUZ3qCQ7KKX9kKQajcoUZHCVdum8I&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02LUvPxM8ppGgtHH7WgwRKwiiU56dCdXJ3nR2kUZ3qCQ7KKX9kKQajcoUZHCVdum8I&id=100064620046507)



In this capture, one participant accuses the publisher "BBC" of "the police" when it published news about the police. So, this comment "flam" is considered an accusation that has no sincere basis. On the other hand, replies "trolls" come to that comment from other participants.

9- [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid031LuffD7MS5nMJF8bg6HMHQL4Qq7YTem5eTDukggSMeeLUZsxMwpuawUPVD1sijdAl&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid031LuffD7MS5nMJF8bg6HMHQL4Qq7YTem5eTDukggSMeeLUZsxMwpuawUPVD1sijdAl&id=100064620046507)



This capture shows a participant attempting to cause maximum disruption, annoyance or arguments towards the publisher "BBC" and accusing it of publishing a fake article and demanding the channel with evidence. So, this comment (troll) has no sincere basis, and it is just a rumor.

10- [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid012TJuQMmQNwqmZaZ9cdvXfhD71GQL2wZCgJLw2YHaa3iD8pU4AQjtjVN4nZR2bR1bl&id=100064620046507](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid012TJuQMmQNwqmZaZ9cdvXfhD71GQL2wZCgJLw2YHaa3iD8pU4AQjtjVN4nZR2bR1bl&id=100064620046507)





In this screen shot, the participant comments on a post on “BBC”, but some other participant replies to his comment with a link for an indecent video to see it or to put a like on it, and this reply does not contribute to the discussion at hand. So, this reply “flam” is considered cyberbullying because it insults, annoys and hustles others.

## 9. Conclusions

The analysis of the data showed there are four types of cyberbullying found in the analyses:

The first type is flaming, which is a strategy used by some online (Facebook) participants to reply to other people’s comments, and those replies do not contribute to the channel or the post itself, but they are directed to other participants’ comments to agitate, wound, inflame or insult them.

The other type of cyberbullying that appeared in the analyses of the data is “rumor spreading”, which is directed towards the post or the channel itself by accusing it of broadcasting or publishing lies or incorrect news without giving evidence for that accusation.

Trolling is another type of cyberbullying found in this study which is directed towards the topic of discussion or the “post” itself. This type is considered as an attempt to cause maximum disruption, arguments or annoyance towards the publisher, or it is used to make other people angry or to get an aggressive response or to provoke other people.

The last type of cyberbullying that appeared in the data is “tagging”, which is a method used by some participants by making tags to other people with their usernames towards specific content or a specific post on Facebook. Thus, those tagged people do not seem to be associated with or interested in that post or topic, and this may cause them negative sentiments.

Finally, the most frequent types of cyberbullying found in the data are “flaming and trolling”, and this explains the validity of the first hypothesis. The conclusions above also explained how and why these types of cyberbullying appeared in the analyses, and this also reinforces the validity of the second hypothesis.

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