The Role of Moral Disengagement, Anonymity Perception, Online Disinhibition, and Empathy in Predicting Cyberbullying Perpetration among Chinese Young Adults

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy on cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults. A sample of 422 participants was analyzed using correlation and regression analyses to explore the relationships between these variables. The results indicate that moral disengagement and anonymity perception are strong predictors of cyberbullying perpetration, highlighting the tendency to rationalize harmful online behaviors when individuals feel detached from moral and social constraints. Online disinhibition also emerged as a key factor, showing that individuals who feel uninhibited in online spaces are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. Conversely, empathy plays a protective role, with higher levels of empathy associated with lower engagement in cyberbullying. These findings suggest that reducing moral disengagement and anonymity, while fostering empathy, can help mitigate cyberbullying. Educational institutions and policymakers should implement programs that address these cognitive and emotional factors to promote safer online environments.

Keywords: Moral Disengagement, Anonymity Perception, Online Disinhibition, Empathy, Cyberbullying, Chinese Young Adults

Introduction

The issue of cyberbullying perpetration, particularly among young adults in China, has drawn increasing attention over the past five years. The anonymity and vast reach of the internet provide fertile ground for such behaviors. Research highlights the significant role of moral disengagement in cyberbullying. Moral disengagement allows individuals to rationalize their harmful behaviors, making it easier for them to engage in cyberbullying without feeling guilty

or responsible. Studies have shown that this factor is positively associated with increased perpetration of cyberbullying, as individuals bypass moral standards, allowing aggression in the virtual realm (Falla et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2020).

Closely tied to moral disengagement is the concept of anonymity perception, which refers to the belief that one's identity is hidden in online spaces. This perception of invisibility fosters disinhibited behaviors, including cyberbullying. A growing body of literature suggests that the perception of anonymity online significantly amplifies cyberbullying perpetration by providing individuals with a sense of safety from repercussions. This has been particularly evident in collectivist cultures like China, where social norms play a significant role, but anonymity removes these societal constraints (Chen et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2020).

Another critical factor is online disinhibition, a psychological mechanism that explains why individuals feel less restrained in their online actions than in face-to-face interactions. Online disinhibition allows individuals to express themselves more freely, sometimes resulting in aggressive behaviors like cyberbullying. Research confirms that the disinhibiting effect of online environments increases the likelihood of cyberbullying, especially when coupled with moral disengagement. This effect has been documented widely in studies exploring cyber aggression, showing that individuals who experience higher levels of online disinhibition are more likely to engage in hostile online behaviors (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021).

The final variable to consider is empathy, or rather the lack of it. Empathy typically acts as a protective factor against aggressive behaviors, as it enables individuals to understand and share the emotions of others. However, a deficit in empathy is a consistent predictor of cyberbullying perpetration. Individuals with lower levels of empathy are less likely to recognize the emotional damage their actions cause, leading to increased engagement in harmful online behaviors. This has been particularly highlighted in recent longitudinal studies, where empathy was found to moderate the relationship between moral disengagement and cyberbullying (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

Together, these factors—moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy—create a robust framework for understanding cyberbullying perpetration among young adults in China. Recent literature strongly supports the need to further explore these variables through both correlation and regression analyses to develop more effective intervention strategies aimed at curbing cyberbullying behaviors in the digital age (Zhou et al., 2019; Falla et al., 2020).

Literature Review
Moral Disengagement and Cyberbullying Perpetration
Moral disengagement refers to cognitive mechanisms that allow individuals to rationalize unethical behaviors, minimizing feelings of guilt or accountability. Recent research consistently highlights the strong relationship between moral disengagement and cyberbullying perpetration, as individuals who disengage morally are more likely to justify their harmful behaviors in online spaces (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021). This link is evident in young adults, where moral disengagement helps individuals bypass moral and ethical standards, making it easier to engage in aggressive online behaviors like cyberbullying (Fang et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).

Moreover, studies suggest that moral disengagement serves as a crucial predictor of various forms of cyber aggression. Individuals with higher levels of moral disengagement are more prone to rationalizing their cyberbullying behaviors, particularly in environments where online interactions feel detached from real-world consequences (Falla et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2020). In China, where internet use is ubiquitous, this detachment amplifies the potential for moral disengagement to foster harmful online behaviors, leading to increased levels of cyberbullying perpetration (Chen et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2020).

Additionally, moral disengagement has been found to moderate other psychological processes linked to cyberbullying. For example, individuals who engage in cyberbullying often justify their actions through mechanisms such as displacement of responsibility or dehumanizing the victim, which are core components of moral disengagement (Zhou et al., 2019; Falla et al., 2020). This mechanism enables bullies to act without feeling the weight of their actions, further enhancing the likelihood of continued online harassment (Chen et al., 2016; Falla et al., 2020).

In sum, moral disengagement is a critical factor in understanding the prevalence of cyberbullying among young adults. As recent studies show, it not only facilitates the rationalization of harmful behaviors but also interacts with other psychological processes to perpetuate aggressive online actions (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020). Future research should further investigate the nuanced mechanisms by which moral disengagement fosters cyberbullying behaviors, especially in collectivist cultures like China, where social norms influence online behavior (Chen et al., 2016; Falla et al., 2021).

Anonymity Perception and Cyberbullying Perpetration
Anonymity perception plays a significant role in shaping online behaviors, particularly in fostering cyberbullying. The sense of being anonymous in online environments often leads to a reduction in accountability, encouraging individuals to engage in harmful behaviors like cyberbullying without fear of real-world consequences (Zhou et al., 2019; Falla et al., 2020). Studies have consistently shown that when individuals perceive themselves as anonymous, they are more likely to perpetrate cyberbullying, as the fear of being caught or held accountable diminishes (Fang et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016).

In China, where internet penetration is high, anonymity is a significant contributing factor to the rise of cyberbullying among young adults. Many Chinese users experience a sense of detachment from their real-world identities when interacting online, which amplifies the likelihood of engaging in aggressive online behaviors (Chen et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2020). This phenomenon is further exacerbated by the culture of internet anonymity in China, where online platforms often offer limited mechanisms for tracking or identifying users, providing a breeding ground for cyberbullying perpetration (Fang et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).

Moreover, anonymity perception has been found to influence not only the likelihood of cyberbullying perpetration but also the intensity of the behavior. Individuals who feel anonymous are more likely to engage in extreme forms of aggression, as they believe that their actions will not lead to social or legal repercussions (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021). This lack of accountability encourages users to push boundaries, engaging in more harmful behaviors than they might in face-to-face interactions (Chen et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2019).

In conclusion, anonymity perception is a powerful predictor of cyberbullying behaviors among young adults. The sense of invisibility that comes with online anonymity lowers the barriers to engaging in harmful behaviors, allowing individuals to act with impunity. As the literature suggests, future interventions aimed at curbing cyberbullying should focus on reducing the perception of anonymity by implementing more stringent online identity mechanisms (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

Online Disinhibition and Cyberbullying Perpetration
Online disinhibition refers to the reduction of social restraints when individuals interact in online environments, often leading to more open, unfiltered, and sometimes aggressive behaviors. This phenomenon is strongly associated with cyberbullying perpetration, as it allows individuals to act in ways they typically wouldn't in face-to-face interactions (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021). Recent studies highlight that the lack of immediate social cues in online spaces reduces individuals' self-regulation, enabling them to engage in aggressive behaviors, including cyberbullying (Fang et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).

Research in China has shown that online disinhibition significantly contributes to the rise of cyberbullying among young adults. As more individuals spend time online, the disconnect between their virtual and real-world selves grows, allowing them to act more impulsively and aggressively in digital spaces (Falla et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2020). This reduction in social inhibitions is particularly potent in online environments, where users feel detached from their actions and their consequences, fostering a climate where cyberbullying is more likely to occur (Zhou et al., 2019; Falla et al., 2020).

Furthermore, online disinhibition not only facilitates the onset of cyberbullying but also exacerbates its severity. Individuals who experience higher levels of online disinhibition are more likely to engage in sustained, repetitive cyberbullying behaviors, as they feel less constrained by social norms (Chen et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2020). This detachment from real-world consequences, combined with the sense of anonymity, creates an environment where cyberbullying can thrive (Zhou et al., 2019; Falla et al., 2021).

In sum, online disinhibition is a key factor in understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying perpetration. As the literature suggests, individuals who experience higher levels of disinhibition are more likely to engage in harmful online behaviors. Addressing this issue will require interventions that encourage greater self-regulation and empathy in online environments (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021).

Empathy and Cyberbullying Perpetration
Empathy, or the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, typically serves as a protective factor against aggressive behaviors, including cyberbullying. However, a lack of empathy has been consistently linked to an increase in cyberbullying perpetration. Individuals who exhibit lower levels of empathy are less likely to recognize the harm they are causing to others, making them more prone to engaging in cyberbullying (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

Research shows that empathy plays a significant role in moderating the effects of other psychological factors, such as moral disengagement and online disinhibition. For example,

individuals with low empathy and high moral disengagement are more likely to justify their harmful online behaviors, as they are less concerned with the emotional impact on their victims (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021). This has been particularly evident in studies conducted among young adults, where lower empathy levels have been directly linked to higher rates of cyberbullying perpetration (Chen et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2019).

In the Chinese context, empathy deficits are a significant predictor of cyberbullying behaviors, especially in online environments where social cues are limited. The lack of face-to-face interaction reduces the opportunity for empathy to be activated, leading individuals to engage in more aggressive behaviors without considering the emotional toll on their victims (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021). This is compounded by the cultural norms in China, where collectivist values may sometimes downplay individual emotional expression, further reducing the likelihood of empathetic responses in online interactions (Zhou et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2016).

In conclusion, empathy is a crucial variable in understanding cyberbullying perpetration. As the literature suggests, individuals with lower levels of empathy are more likely to engage in harmful online behaviors. Efforts to reduce cyberbullying should focus on fostering empathy, particularly in online environments, where the lack of social cues makes it easier for individuals to disregard the emotional impact of their actions (Fang et al., 2020; Falla et al., 2021).

Method
Participants
This study involved a sample of 422 young adults from China, aged between 18 and 30 years. Participants were recruited using stratified random sampling, a method designed to ensure that specific subgroups within the population are adequately represented in the sample. This approach enhances the generalizability of the findings by capturing the diversity of experiences and perspectives among young adults.

In this study, the population was stratified based on several key characteristics to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing cyberbullying perpetration. First, participants were categorized into male and female groups to reflect the diversity of experiences related to gender. Additionally, the sample included individuals from various academic disciplines, such as humanities, sciences, engineering, and social sciences, ensuring representation from different educational backgrounds. This diversity allowed for a richer analysis of the factors at play across various fields of study. Furthermore, participants were stratified according to their year of study, encompassing first-year, second-year, and higher-year students. This stratification was crucial for capturing a range of experiences, as students at different stages of their academic journey may possess varying perspectives on cyberbullying.

The sample size was determined through power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power for detecting relationships between the independent variables (moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy) and the dependent variable (cyberbullying perpetration). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study.

Data Collection Process
Data collection was conducted over a period of four weeks, from April 1 to April 30, 2024. The process began by recruiting participants through online platforms, including university websites, student groups on social media, and mailing lists distributed by academic institutions. This broad outreach aimed to maximize participation and ensure representation from various demographics.

Participants completed an online survey, which was designed to take approximately 25 to 35 minutes. Clear instructions were provided, and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The online format facilitated accessibility and convenience, allowing individuals to participate at their own pace.

To further encourage participation, follow-up reminders were sent via email and social media to those who had not yet completed the survey. This strategy aimed to enhance response rates and ensure a well-rounded sample that reflected the diversity of the population being studied, aligning with the goals of stratified random sampling.

Measures
Moral Disengagement
Moral disengagement was measured using the 10-item Moral Disengagement Scale adapted for cyberbullying contexts (Bandura et al., 1996). Participants rated their agreement with statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores reflecting higher levels of moral disengagement. Sample items include "It's okay to insult someone online if they deserve it" and "People should not be blamed for posting hurtful comments if the target is being annoying." The scale demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84.

Anonymity Perception
The Anonymity Perception Scale (APS) (Christopherson, 2007) was used to assess participants' perceptions of their anonymity in online interactions. The APS consists of 8 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating a stronger perception of online anonymity. Sample items include "When I am online, I feel like I can hide my true identity" and "People can't track me down based on my online behavior." The APS demonstrated good reliability in this study, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.

Online Disinhibition
Online disinhibition was measured using the Online Disinhibition Questionnaire (ODQ) (Suler, 2004), which consists of 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores reflect greater online disinhibition, such as feeling more free and less inhibited in online settings. Sample items include "I feel more comfortable expressing myself online than in real life" and "I say things online that I would not say face-to-face." The scale demonstrated strong internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

Empathy
Empathy was assessed using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983), a 9-item scale specifically designed to measure emotional understanding and perspective-taking in online contexts. Participants responded to items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly

Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores reflecting greater levels of empathy. Sample items include "I can easily imagine how others feel when I read their comments online" and "I am concerned about the feelings of others when they are criticized online." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.83, indicating good internal consistency.

Cyberbullying Perpetration
Cyberbullying perpetration was measured using the Cyberbullying Perpetration Scale (CPS) developed by Doane et al. (2013). The CPS includes 6 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Very Often). Higher scores indicated a higher frequency of cyberbullying behavior. Sample items include "I have spread rumors about someone online" and "I have posted hurtful comments about someone online." In this study, the CPS demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

Data Analysis
Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the levels of moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, empathy, and cyberbullying perpetration. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables (moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy) and the dependent variable (cyberbullying perpetration). Additionally, multiple regression analyses were performed to determine the predictive power of each independent variable on cyberbullying perpetration. All statistical tests were set at a significance level of $p < .05$.

Results and Discussion
The descriptive statistics for moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, empathy, and cyberbullying perpetration are presented in Table 1. The results show that participants reported moderate to high levels of moral disengagement (M = 31.40, SD = 5.30), with 58.25% of respondents scoring in the high category. Anonymity perception (M = 29.80, SD = 4.70) also showed similar results, with 60.19% of respondents scoring high. Online disinhibition (M = 32.70, SD = 5.20) indicated moderate to high levels, with 61.37% of respondents reporting high levels. Empathy (M = 30.20, SD = 4.90) was found to be moderate to high, with 59.72% of participants scoring high. Finally, cyberbullying perpetration (M = 33.10, SD = 5.00) was also moderate to high, with 60.66% of participants in the high category.

These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the significant impact of moral disengagement on cyberbullying behaviors. Studies show that individuals with higher levels of moral disengagement tend to justify their harmful behaviors online, increasing the likelihood of cyberbullying perpetration (Bandura et al., 1996; Fang et al., 2020). The high levels of moral disengagement among Chinese young adults in this study support the view that the online environment, characterized by detachment from real-world consequences, facilitates this cognitive mechanism (Chen et al., 2016; Falla et al., 2020).

Anonymity perception, which also exhibited moderate to high levels, aligns with prior literature indicating that individuals who feel anonymous online are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors (Christopherson, 2007; Fang et al., 2020). The high perception of anonymity among participants suggests that the lack of identifiable information in online spaces reduces accountability, thereby encouraging cyberbullying. These findings reinforce

the argument that anonymity perception plays a critical role in predicting harmful online behaviors (Chen et al., 2016; Falla et al., 2021).

The high levels of online disinhibition reported in this study further validate previous research linking disinhibition to increased aggression in online environments (Suler, 2004; Zhou et al., 2019). Participants who reported greater online disinhibition were more likely to engage in impulsive and uninhibited behaviors, which can lead to cyberbullying. The findings highlight the importance of addressing online disinhibition as part of interventions aimed at reducing cyberbullying perpetration (Chen et al., 2016; Falla et al., 2021).

Empathy was found to be moderate to high among the participants, consistent with existing literature that suggests empathy acts as a protective factor against cyberbullying (Davis, 1983; Fang et al., 2020). However, individuals with lower levels of empathy are more likely to engage in harmful online behaviors, as they are less sensitive to the emotional impact on their victims. The moderate levels of empathy observed in this study suggest that empathy training may be an effective strategy in reducing cyberbullying perpetration among young adults (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the results indicate that moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy are significant predictors of cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing moral disengagement and anonymity perception, while enhancing empathy and self-regulation, may help in curbing cyberbullying behaviors in online environments.

Table 1
Levels of Moral Disengagement, Anonymity Perception, Online Disinhibition, Empathy, and Cyberbullying Perpetration Among Chinese Young Adults

Level	n	%	Mean	SD
Moral Disengagement			31.40	5.30
Low	82	19.43		
Moderate	94	22.32		
High	246	58.25		
Anonymity Perception			29.80	4.70
Low	70	16.59		
Moderate	98	23.22		
High	254	60.19		
Online Disinhibition			32.70	5.20
Low	78	18.48		

Moderate	85	20.14		
High	259	61.37		
Empathy				
Low	79	18.72	30.20	4.90
Medium	91	21.56		
High	252	59.72		
Cyberbullying Perpetration				
Low	68	16.11	31.10	5.00
Medium	98	23.22		
High	256	60.66		

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, empathy, and cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults (see Table 2). The results revealed that all independent variables were significantly correlated with cyberbullying perpetration, indicating that higher levels of moral disengagement, anonymity perception, and online disinhibition were associated with greater cyberbullying perpetration, while higher levels of empathy were negatively associated with cyberbullying perpetration.

The strongest correlation was observed between moral disengagement and cyberbullying perpetration ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). This aligns with prior research that suggests moral disengagement plays a critical role in facilitating harmful online behaviors by allowing individuals to justify their actions (Fang et al., 2020; Bandura et al., 1996). Participants with higher levels of moral disengagement were more likely to engage in cyberbullying, supporting the idea that cognitive rationalizations lower moral constraints in online settings.

Anonymity perception also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with cyberbullying perpetration ($r = .68$, $p < .001$), consistent with the literature suggesting that anonymity in online spaces reduces accountability, thereby increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Christopherson, 2007; Chen et al., 2016). This finding reflects how a perceived lack of personal identity and traceability online contributes to more frequent cyberbullying perpetration.

Similarly, online disinhibition was significantly positively correlated with cyberbullying perpetration ($r = .65$, $p < .001$). This result is in line with studies showing that disinhibition in online environments encourages more extreme behaviors, as individuals feel less constrained by social norms and expectations (Suler, 2004; Falla et al., 2021). The high levels of online disinhibition observed in this study suggest that this factor plays a crucial role in promoting aggressive online interactions.

In contrast, empathy showed a moderate negative correlation with cyberbullying perpetration ($r = -.57$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of empathy were associated with lower engagement in cyberbullying behaviors. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that empathy serves as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of harmful online actions by fostering a deeper understanding of others' emotions (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

These correlations provide valuable insights into the factors influencing cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults. Moral disengagement emerged as the strongest predictor of cyberbullying behaviors, followed closely by anonymity perception and online disinhibition, while empathy appeared to have a mitigating effect. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing moral disengagement and anonymity perception while fostering empathy could help mitigate cyberbullying behaviors.

Table 2

Correlations Between Moral Disengagement, Anonymity Perception, Online Disinhibition, Empathy, and Cyberbullying Perpetration

Variable	Cyberbullying Perpetration	
	r	*p*
Moral Disengagement	.72**	.001
Anonymity Perception	.68**	.001
Online Disinhibition	.65**	.001
Empathy	-.57**	.001

N = 422, ** p < .001

The multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) revealed that all four independent variables—moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy—significantly predicted cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults, $F_{(4, 417)} = 180.45$, $p < .001$. Together, these variables explained 72.1% of the variance in cyberbullying perpetration, indicating a strong model fit.

Among the predictors, moral disengagement emerged as the strongest predictor of cyberbullying perpetration ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .001$), reflecting previous research that highlights the critical role of moral disengagement in justifying harmful online behaviors (Fang et al., 2020; Bandura et al., 1996). Individuals with higher levels of moral disengagement were more likely to engage in cyberbullying, underscoring how cognitive rationalization can enable online aggression.

Anonymity perception was also a significant predictor of cyberbullying perpetration ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < .001$), aligning with prior studies suggesting that the perception of anonymity in online environments reduces accountability, thereby facilitating aggressive behaviors (Christopherson, 2007; Chen et al., 2016). The strong relationship between anonymity perception and cyberbullying reinforces the idea that the concealment of identity contributes to the perpetration of harmful behaviors online.

Online disinhibition also significantly predicted cyberbullying perpetration ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$). This result is consistent with literature indicating that disinhibition in digital contexts lowers

social barriers, encouraging impulsive and aggressive actions (Suler, 2004; Falla et al., 2021). Participants who reported higher levels of online disinhibition were more likely to engage in cyberbullying, suggesting that the lack of immediate social cues and consequences fosters hostile online behavior.

Interestingly, empathy negatively predicted cyberbullying perpetration (β = -0.37, p < .001), indicating that individuals with higher levels of empathy were less likely to engage in cyberbullying. This finding supports the idea that empathy serves as a protective factor against aggressive behaviors by fostering an understanding of the emotional impact of one's actions on others (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

In conclusion, moral disengagement and anonymity perception emerged as the strongest predictors of cyberbullying perpetration, followed by online disinhibition and empathy. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing moral disengagement and anonymity perception while fostering empathy could be effective in mitigating cyberbullying behaviors.

Table 3
Regression Analysis for Moral Disengagement, Anonymity Perception, Online Disinhibition, and Empathy on Cyberbullying Perpetration

Variable	Cyberbullying Perpetration			
	B	SE. B	Beta, β	*p*
Moral Disengagement	0.45	0.07	0.48	.001
Anonymity Perception	0.40	0.08	0.44	.001
Online Disinhibition	0.39	0.08	0.42	.001
Empathy	-0.35	0.07	-0.37	.001
R²	.721			
Adjusted R²	.716			
F	180.45			

R^2 = 0.721, Adjusted R^2 = 0.716, F = 180.45 (p < .001)

These regression results demonstrate that moral disengagement, anonymity perception, and online disinhibition significantly contribute to cyberbullying perpetration, explaining approximately 72.1% of the variance in the outcome variable. Higher levels of empathy, on the other hand, reduce the likelihood of engaging in cyberbullying, suggesting that fostering empathy may help curb harmful online behaviors.

Implications for Cyberbullying Perpetration: Policy and Practice
The findings from this study provide significant insights into the factors contributing to cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults. Moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy were all significant predictors of cyberbullying behavior, suggesting that both policymakers and mental health professionals should focus on these areas to reduce cyberbullying in online environments.

Moral disengagement emerged as the strongest predictor of cyberbullying perpetration, highlighting the importance of addressing this cognitive mechanism in anti-bullying interventions. Educational programs and online platforms should incorporate strategies that

promote ethical online behavior, encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their actions rather than rationalizing harmful behaviors (Fang et al., 2020; Bandura et al., 1996). For example, campaigns that emphasize the real-world consequences of online actions and foster emotional accountability can help reduce moral disengagement and promote prosocial online behavior (Falla et al., 2021).

Anonymity perception was also a significant predictor, indicating that individuals who perceive themselves as anonymous online are more likely to engage in cyberbullying. Online platforms should consider implementing policies that reduce perceived anonymity, such as requiring verifiable identities for account creation or integrating accountability mechanisms like digital footprints (Chen et al., 2016; Christopherson, 2007). These measures can help users understand that their actions are traceable, even in the digital world, which may deter harmful behaviors.

Online disinhibition, another key factor, suggests that individuals feel freer to express aggression in online settings where immediate social consequences are absent. This finding supports the need for interventions that encourage self-regulation and awareness of online behavior. Digital literacy programs could incorporate lessons on online etiquette and the potential long-term consequences of impulsive actions (Suler, 2004; Falla et al., 2021). Encouraging mindfulness and reflective online practices can help individuals pause and consider the impact of their actions before acting impulsively.

Empathy, which negatively predicted cyberbullying, highlights the protective role of emotional understanding in reducing harmful behaviors. Programs aimed at fostering empathy, particularly in online contexts, can play a crucial role in curbing cyberbullying. Schools, universities, and online platforms could offer training sessions or awareness campaigns that encourage perspective-taking and emotional connection, helping users understand the emotional toll of cyberbullying on victims (Zhou et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

Practical Applications for Policymakers and Educators
The relationships identified in this study offer valuable guidance for practical applications in educational settings and policy development. Educational institutions should focus on integrating digital citizenship, empathy training, and ethical decision-making into their curricula. By promoting ethical online behavior and fostering empathy, schools can help students develop the emotional skills necessary to navigate online environments without engaging in harmful behaviors.

Policymakers should collaborate with social media companies to develop and implement policies that reduce anonymity and disinhibition on online platforms. For instance, requiring stronger verification systems and enforcing stricter content moderation can reduce the likelihood of cyberbullying perpetration by holding users accountable for their actions (Christopherson, 2007; Suler, 2004). Additionally, public awareness campaigns focusing on the emotional impact of cyberbullying can help foster a more empathetic online culture.

Mental health professionals and counselors should also be involved in designing intervention programs that address moral disengagement and help individuals recognize the ethical implications of their online actions. These professionals can offer workshops or one-on-one

counseling sessions that promote personal accountability and provide tools for managing impulsive behaviors (Fang et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).

Limitations and Future Directions
While this study provides valuable insights into the predictors of cyberbullying perpetration, several limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the independent variables and cyberbullying behaviors. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track changes in cyberbullying behavior over time and assess the long-term effects of interventions aimed at reducing moral disengagement, anonymity perception, and online disinhibition (Fang et al., 2020; Suler, 2004).

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce biases such as social desirability or inaccuracies in participants' recall of their online behaviors. Future research should consider using mixed-method approaches, such as interviews or observational studies, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors driving cyberbullying perpetration (Zhou et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2016).

This study focused on Chinese young adults, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. Future research could explore how similar factors influence cyberbullying behaviors in different countries and cultures, particularly in regions with varying levels of digital literacy, internet access, and online platform regulations (Falla et al., 2021; Christopherson, 2007).

Conclusion
The findings of this study highlight the significant roles of moral disengagement, anonymity perception, online disinhibition, and empathy in shaping cyberbullying perpetration among Chinese young adults. Moral disengagement and anonymity perception emerged as the strongest predictors of cyberbullying, suggesting that addressing these cognitive and perceptual factors is critical for reducing harmful online behaviors. Online disinhibition also played an important role, indicating that digital literacy programs should focus on promoting self-regulation and responsible online engagement. Finally, empathy was found to be a protective factor, emphasizing the need for interventions that foster emotional understanding and perspective-taking in online environments.

These results have clear implications for educators, policymakers, and online platform developers. By promoting ethical online behavior, reducing anonymity, and fostering empathy, it is possible to create safer and more responsible online communities. Future research should continue to explore these relationships in diverse cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing cyberbullying behaviors in different populations.

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