

Hate Speech and Cyberbullying in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: A Sociological and Legal Approach to the Algerian Digital Society

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Abstract

This article examines the sociological and legal challenges arising from the intersection of hate speech and cyberbullying with artificial intelligence algorithms in the Algerian digital space. From a sociological perspective, the study explores how generative artificial intelligence tools and deepfake technologies have evolved into mechanisms for producing symbolic violence and exacerbating social stigmatization amid the declining role of traditional agents of socialization. From a legal perspective, the article assesses the adequacy of the Algerian legislative framework, particularly Laws No. 20-05 and 20-06, and examines its capacity to address challenges related to criminal evidence and the determination of criminal liability for AI-enabled crimes. The study concludes by proposing a comprehensive approach that combines enhanced legislative reform with digital education to protect the social fabric.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Digital Hate Speech & Cyberbullying; Algerian Digital Society; Socio-Legal Approach.

Introduction

The contemporary technological revolution has generated profound contradictions within the structure of contemporary society. While generative artificial intelligence technologies have opened unprecedented horizons for the flow of knowledge and interactive communication, they have, at the same time, reshaped patterns of violence and reconfigured manifestations of digital deviance. Within this context of growing complexity, the Algerian virtual public sphere has not remained isolated from these transformations. Cyberspace has evolved from merely being an environment for symbolic exchange into a fertile arena for the reproduction of hate speech and the practice of algorithmically enhanced cyberbullying.

The seriousness of this phenomenon lies not only in the expanding reach of hate speech and cyberbullying across social media platforms, but also in the capacity of artificial intelligence tools—particularly deepfake technologies and automated content generation—to distort reality, circumvent the boundaries of privacy, and undermine the bonds of social cohesion. These developments place traditional processes of socialization under a genuine test in the face of the growing power of the virtual sphere. In the midst of this sweeping algorithmic transformation, the Algerian legislative framework faces complex challenges that extend beyond conventional models of crime, raising pressing questions about the

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effectiveness of penal provisions and recent legislative reforms in accommodating emerging forms of digital abuse and defining the scope of criminal liability.

Research Problem

This study examines the research problem arising from the growing use of artificial intelligence and its intersection with the emergence of new forms of hate speech and cyberbullying within Algerian digital society. In this context, the phenomenon has evolved from a transient form of individual misconduct into an algorithmically mediated practice increasingly associated with symbolic violence and social stigmatization. This transformation occurs amid an academic and empirical gap, manifested in the disparity between the rapid pace of algorithmic and technological development and the limited capacity of socialization institutions and national legal frameworks to adapt to these developments and provide effective mechanisms of prevention and deterrence.

The study aims to deconstruct the mechanisms through which algorithms shape and amplify digital harmful practices, diagnose the gap between technological development and the adaptive capacity of social and legal systems, and assess the effectiveness of the Algerian legislative framework in mitigating emerging digital risks and protecting social cohesion and peace.

To achieve these objectives, the study advances a main hypothesis asserting that algorithmically mediated practices enabled by artificial intelligence contribute to the intensification of symbolic violence and social stigmatization as a result of the widening gap between the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the regulatory capacity of both legislation and socialization institutions. This main hypothesis gives rise to two sub-hypotheses: the first concerns the declining effectiveness of traditional socialization institutions in regulating digital behavior, while the second focuses on the challenges confronting the Algerian legal system in accommodating and addressing emerging forms of algorithmically enabled crime.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, the study adopts an integrated analytical approach that combines three complementary methodological perspectives. First, the descriptive-analytical approach is employed to identify and analyze the phenomenon, its forms, and its principal dimensions. Second, the sociological approach is used to deconstruct the mechanisms of symbolic violence, social stigmatization, and the transformations affecting social relations within the digital environment. Third, the legal analytical approach is employed to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of Algerian legislative provisions in addressing emerging digital and algorithmically enabled threats.

Main Research Question

To what extent do artificial intelligence technologies contribute to reshaping the dynamics of hate speech and cyberbullying within the Algerian digital environment, and to what extent are the national legal framework and social mechanisms capable of accommodating and addressing these emerging challenges?

THE FIRST TOPIC: Conceptual and Evolutionary Foundations of the Phenomenon (Conceptual Clarification and Technological Transformation)

A systematic study of virtual-space phenomena requires a precise conceptual framework that goes beyond simplified dictionary definitions. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence as an intervening and influential variable has not merely transformed the tools and means through which aggressive behavior is enacted; it has also reshaped the conceptual foundations of both cyberbullying and hate speech within the digital environment.

First requirement: Defining Cyberbullying and Hate Speech

Cyberbullying is defined in the sociological literature as an intentional and repeated form of aggressive behavior carried out through technological media and necessarily grounded in a “digital power imbalance.” This imbalance may take the form of superior technical skills, the algorithmically amplified reach of a follower base, or access to tools that enable anonymity and concealment.

By contrast, digital hate speech refers to any form of expression disseminated through virtual platforms that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence against individuals or groups on the basis of identity-related, geographical, or social characteristics.

The conceptual link between the two phenomena lies in their process of transformation: hate speech may shift from a general ideological expression into a targeted and direct form of bullying aimed at depriving the victim of dignity and the right to digital safety.

First section. Definition of Cyberbullying

The Linguistic Meaning of Bullying

In *Lisan al-Arab*, Ibn Manzur, in Volume 5, states that the expression *tanammara* is used to describe a person of bad character. The terms *tanammara*, *namira*, and *namara wajhabu* refer to changing one's facial expression and assuming a frowning or stern appearance. The expression *tanammara labu* means to change one's demeanor toward someone, become hostile or threatening, and issue a warning. The expression is associated with the tiger (*nimr*), an animal that is rarely encountered except in a state of hostility and anger. According to Ibn Barri, *tanammari* means to assume a hostile and intimidating attitude toward an enemy; the term derives from *nimr* (tiger), which is considered one of the most formidable and ferocious predatory animals (Manzur, 1956, p. 200)

The concept of incivility derives from the Latin *civilitas*, referring to social and civilized conduct. By contrast, *incivility* denotes a lack of civility and refers to behavior that fails to comply with the norms governing social life, including respect for others, public order, and appropriate social conduct. In this sense, incivility encompasses forms of behavior that fall short of what is generally expected from a civilized member of society.

second section: Bullying: Conceptual Definition

The Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus defined bullying as “the repeated and sustained exposure of an individual to negative actions by one or more other persons.” He further defined a negative action as the deliberate act of one person causing injury or discomfort to another, whether through physical contact, verbal communication, or other means. In 1978, Olweus provided one of the earliest and most influential definitions of bullying, describing it as a situation in which a student is repeatedly subjected, over a period of time, to negative behaviors perpetrated by another student or by several other students (Chetbi, 2014, p. 74)

Bullying is also defined as the misuse of actual or perceived power among students within the school setting. It occurs continuously and repeatedly with the aim of exerting control over others. Bullying, therefore, constitutes a negative form of behavior resulting from the misuse of power in interpersonal relationships.

Rigby addressed bullying in terms of mischief, defining it through the following combination of elements: a desire to cause harm + harmful actions + an imbalance of power + repetition + the unfair use of power + an evident sense of enjoyment on the part of the perpetrator derived from overpowering and controlling the victim (Slee & Ken Rigby, 1999, pp. 324–339)

In its general sense, bullying has been defined as “a pattern of repeated negative behaviors intended to cause harm or distress, perpetrated by a stronger person against a weaker person” (Darwish, 2017, pp. 197–264)

Third Section: Definition of Cyberbullying

Despite the numerous services provided by social networking sites, their widespread use has also generated a range of adverse consequences for users, including online intimidation and abuse, commonly referred to as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a form of aggression carried out through modern communication technologies and Internet-based applications, including smartphones, laptops, tablets, video cameras, email, and websites. It may involve disseminating posts or comments intended to cause distress to the victim, circulating false information, or sending electronic messages to harass the victim, thereby causing psychological or material harm.

More broadly, cyberbullying refers to any behavior conducted through electronic or digital media with the intention of causing harm or distress to others. It is therefore regarded as an extension of traditional bullying, while acquiring distinctive characteristics as a result of the technological environment in which it occurs.

According to Olweus, bullying involves intentional and repeated aggressive behavior aimed at causing harm to others and associated with an imbalance of power. This conceptualization encompasses three fundamental elements: intentionality to cause harm, repetition, and power imbalance (El-Shenawy, 2014, p. 5). In the digital context, however, certain forms of cyberbullying may extend beyond the perpetrator's direct control because of the technological affordances of digital media. For instance, an image initially posted online by the perpetrator may subsequently be redistributed by other users, thereby extending its circulation beyond the perpetrator's original intention.

Bill Belsey is credited with formulating and defining the concept of cyberbullying as "the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group with the intention of harming other people" (Abdel-Gawad, Wafaa Mohammad & Hussein, Ramadan Ashour, 2015, p. 51)

In a similar vein, cyberbullying has been described as a pattern of repeated negative behaviors intended to cause harm or distress, perpetrated by a more powerful individual against another person with less power (Dalal Mohammad Al-Zoubi & Razan Ali Mhedat, 2014, p. 183).

Finally, Kieser and Rasminsky define cyberbullying as "a type of harassment or bullying conducted online through instant messaging, email, chat rooms, or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, in order to harass, threaten, or intimidate a person" (Almustafa, 2017, p. 238)

second requirement: Hate Speech

The concept of hate speech is composed of two terms: *speech* and *hatred*. Linguistically, *speech* and *address* refer to the act of communicating or exchanging words. The Arabic expression *kbatabahu bil-kalam* refers to addressing someone through speech, while *mukhababah* denotes reciprocal communication and dialogue. As for *hatred*, it derives from the Arabic root associated with disliking or detesting something, in contrast to love, acceptance, or approval. The terms *karh*, *karabah*, and *karibah* denote dislike, aversion, or, in certain contexts, hardship and severity in conflict (Mebarek, 2021, p. 3)

In the digital environment, however, hate speech is not confined to individual verbal violence; it also extends to racial discrimination as one of its most serious structural manifestations. Discrimination based on race, lineage, or geographical affiliation may be reproduced in virtual spaces through artificial intelligence technologies, thereby contributing to social division. Generative algorithms may be employed to model and disseminate racist stereotypes on a wide scale. The Algerian legislator has recognized this close relationship by adopting Law No. 20-05, which brings the prevention of discrimination and the combating of hate speech within a unified legislative framework aimed at protecting national cohesion. Hate speech can be defined as follows:

Racial Discrimination

Linguistically, discrimination refers to differentiation or unequal treatment. From a legal perspective, however, discrimination is not merely a difference in treatment; rather, it constitutes a distinction or disparity in treatment between individuals who occupy comparable legal positions, whether through granting certain advantages or imposing particular burdens, where such differential treatment is based on a prohibited ground (Alwan, Muhammad Yusuf & Al-Mousa, Muhammad Khalil, 2014, p. 41)

Discrimination may therefore be understood as any form of treatment involving preference or differential treatment based on characteristics such as race, color, religion, sex, language, opinion, belief, social origin, economic or social status, or any other characteristic that may prevent individuals from enjoying their rights on an equal basis. The right to non-discrimination may consequently be regarded as an integral component of the right to equality. Non-discrimination and equality before the law and under the law have long constituted fundamental principles of international human rights law. Human dignity cannot be fully realized without the principle of equality, which presupposes that all human beings are

entitled to enjoy their inherent rights and human dignity without preference or discrimination (Support, 2016, p. 6)

Third Subsection: Generative Artificial Intelligence: From a “Medium” to “Mediated Agency”

From a sociological perspective, artificial intelligence can no longer be understood merely as a “communication channel” or a neutral medium for transmitting information. Rather, it has increasingly acquired a form of “Mediated Agency.” This conceptual shift can be examined through two principal dimensions:

- **Deepfake Technologies and Automated Content Generation:** Deep learning algorithms have enabled advanced capabilities for processing, reconstructing, and generating visual and audio materials with a high degree of accuracy. This technological development has shifted cyberbullying from its conventional forms, based primarily on “textual insults or offensive comments,” towards the “fabrication of an alternative and manipulated reality,” thereby posing a serious threat to privacy and facilitating practices of blackmail and defamation.
- **Engagement-Driven Algorithms:** Contemporary social media platforms rely on algorithms designed to maximize user engagement by granting greater visibility to emotionally charged or controversial content. Consequently, these algorithms may contribute to the reproduction and amplification of hate speech and cyberbullying by increasing the circulation and dissemination of such content and enhancing the level of public engagement associated with it.

. Conceptual Transformation: The Emergence of “Algorithmic Bullying”

These transformations have culminated in the emergence of a hybrid phenomenon that can be conceptually framed as “Algorithmic Bullying.” This emerging form is based on the interaction between the human agency of the bully and the generative mechanisms of algorithms. Accordingly, it does not merely constitute a technological extension of traditional bullying; rather, it reflects a transformation in the nature, mechanisms, and potential scope of bullying practices.

On this basis, algorithmic bullying differs from conventional forms of bullying along three principal dimensions:

1. Automated Expansion of the Scope of Dissemination

Bullying content is no longer necessarily confined to a limited circle of users, as algorithms can amplify such content and redistribute it on a broad scale, thereby increasing the speed of its dissemination and expanding its potential audience. As a result, the social consequences of bullying may become more extensive and persistent.

2. Automated Content Generation and Manipulation

Bullying is no longer confined to the direct production of offensive content by a human actor. Artificial intelligence technologies can be employed to generate or manipulate textual, visual, audio, and audiovisual content. This makes it possible to produce fabricated materials that, in some cases, may be difficult to distinguish from original or authentic content.

3. Interaction Between Human and Algorithmic Agency

Algorithmic bullying is characterized by the interplay between human intent and technological mechanisms in the production, modification, targeting, and dissemination of bullying content. The bully remains the initiator and the holder of the underlying intent behind the act, while algorithms may perform functions related to content generation, modification, recommendation, or distribution. This interaction, in turn, complicates the determination of responsibility for the act and its resulting consequences when compared with traditional bullying.

Accordingly, cyberbullying is shifting from a form of direct aggression that is relatively limited in scope into a digital practice characterized by extensive capacities for content generation, amplification, and recirculation. This transformation calls for a reconsideration of the phenomenon from both sociological

and legal perspectives, taking into account the profound changes that artificial intelligence has introduced into the digital environment.

THE SECOND TOPIC: Forms of Cyberbullying in the Digital Environment

The forms and behavioral manifestations of cyberbullying vary according to the communication medium employed and the interactive context within new media. Its principal conceptual and empirical forms can be classified as follows:

1. **Flaming:** involves the exchange or transmission of hostile and inflammatory electronic messages containing angry, offensive, or abusive language directed explicitly at the victim or disseminated within virtual groups through email, text messaging, or interactive comments.
2. **Denigration:** Denigration refers to the creation and dissemination of insulting statements, posts, or false and disparaging comments that undermine the victim's dignity and personal worth, followed by their circulation among members of the virtual community with the intention of causing psychological or reputational harm.
3. **Outing and Privacy Violation:** Outing involves the deliberate disclosure, circulation, or publication of private and confidential data, messages, photographs, or documents relating to the victim without their consent, with the aim of exposing them publicly within the digital sphere.
4. **Exclusion and Social Exclusion:** Exclusion refers to the deliberate practice of depriving the victim of access to, or removing them from, groups, platforms, or social networking sites, while encouraging others to boycott or block them without an objective justification. It functions as a mechanism of social control and psychological isolation.
5. **Dishonoring and Defamation:** Dishonoring and defamation involve creating or redistributing false and misleading information or rumors about the victim with the purpose of undermining their social standing, damaging their reputation, and shaping public perceptions against them
6. **Impersonation:** Impersonation occurs when the perpetrator assumes the identity of the victim or another person by creating fake accounts or gaining unauthorized access to the victim's original accounts and publishing offensive content in their name, thereby exposing the victim to potential moral or legal consequences.
7. **Cyberstalking and Harassment:** Cyberstalking and harassment involve the repeated and intensive transmission of threatening or abusive messages, as well as unwanted sexual suggestions or insinuations, creating a state of intense fear and sustained psychological distress for the victim.
8. **Trickery:** Trickery involves deliberately deceiving and luring the victim through fabricated online interactions into disclosing personal secrets or sharing private photographs and information, which are subsequently redirected or publicly disseminated across digital platforms as a means of coercion, blackmail, or psychological pressure.

Smith et al. identified several technological methods of cyberbullying that have become prevalent among secondary school students, including the following (Darwish, 2017, p. 206):

- **Telephone Calls:** These include voice calls made via telephone or the web with the aim of intimidating the victim through insults, defamation, or threats.
- **Text Messages:** These frequently involve threats to disclose private secrets, fabricate scandals, or use abusive language, as well as attempts at blackmail in exchange for refraining from repeating the threats.
- **Images and Video Clips:** In this form, the cyberbully obtains or appropriates the victim's personal photographs or video recordings, which may have been shared online with friends without the victim being aware of the possibility that their account could be hacked or compromised.
- **Email:** The perpetrator gains unauthorized access to the victim's email account and views private messages, personal data, and confidential conversations. The perpetrator may also undertake inappropriate actions that cause the victim embarrassment and expose them to various social problems.

- **Web-Based Chat Rooms:** The perpetrator communicates directly with the victim through a fake online account and attempts to cause harm or gain unauthorized access to the victim's personal account. This may also involve publishing personal photographs or links to pornographic websites.
- **Deceptive Web Links:** The perpetrator publishes an attention-grabbing piece of information or headline and, once the victim accesses the link, gains the opportunity to publish inappropriate news or images on the victim's page.

THE THIRD TOPIC: The Psychological and Social Consequences of Cyberbullying

The consequences of cyberbullying are not confined to the immediate moment of the abusive act; rather, they extend beyond it, producing profound and reciprocal effects that affect both victims and bullies and undermine psychological well-being, social harmony, and institutional security within society. Based on psychological and social studies (Bahnassawi, Ahmed Fikry & Hassan, Ramadan Ali, 2015, p. 17_20), these effects can be classified as follows:

First requirement: Effects of Cyberbullying on Victims

The negative effects of cyberbullying on victims can be examined across three principal dimensions—psychological, behavioral, and academic-social—with physical and psychosomatic effects considered as an additional dimension.

First section: Psychological and Emotional Effects

- **Feelings of rejection and inferiority:** Victims may experience a profound sense of being unwanted within either the virtual or physical community. This may undermine self-confidence and negatively affect their self-image and self-esteem.
- **Persistent psychological disorders:** Victims may suffer from severe depression, social and emotional isolation, psychological loneliness, generalized anxiety, persistent anticipation of virtual threats, and unjustified fear.
- **Loss of security and acute psychological crises:** Cyberbullying may cause mental distraction and psychological trauma and may, in severe cases, lead to suicidal ideation. Statistics indicate an increasing prevalence of suicide-related behaviors among minors and young people in digital contexts.

second section: Physical and Psychosomatic Effects

- **Physical health problems:** Victims may experience sleep disturbances, chronic insomnia, tension-related headaches, and stomach pain resulting from psychological stress.
- **Panic attacks:** Victims may experience sudden episodes of intense fear and panic when using smart devices or hearing notifications from digital platforms.

Third Section: Behavioral and Relational Effects

- **Withdrawal and social isolation:** Victims may increasingly withdraw from family and community activities and gradually become silent and reserved in an attempt to avoid social interaction.
- **Loss of trust and persistent suspicion:** Victims may experience difficulty developing relationships based on security and trust and may view others with persistent doubt and suspicion as a result of the communicative trauma they have experienced.
- **Compensatory aggressive behavior:** Accumulated psychological pressure may lead victims to engage in retaliatory violence as a defensive mechanism, potentially transforming them over time from “victims” into “bullies” or perpetrators of violence within either the digital or real-world environment.
- **Avoidant and addictive behaviors:** Victims may resort to excessive digital use or substance abuse as maladaptive means of escaping psychological distress.

Fourth Section: Academic and Educational Effects

- **Declining academic achievement:** Mental distraction and reduced concentration may result in declining academic performance and educational attainment.

- School dropout and avoidance: Victims may completely refuse to attend school or remain in public social spaces because of fear of direct confrontation with bullies or exposure to defamatory images and content.

second requirement: Effects of Cyberbullying on Bullies

Cyberbullying should not be regarded as a transient or isolated behavior. Rather, it may indicate a structural dysfunction in socialization and constitute a form of antisocial behavior that weakens moral norms and the social controls governing interpersonal conduct. Its effects on bullies include the following:

First section: Behavioral and Legal Deviance

- Involvement in criminal activities: Bullies may become involved in organized criminal groups or engage in unlawful behavior because of weakened moral restraints.
- Addictive behaviors: Increased rates of substance use and alcohol consumption may occur as maladaptive attempts to escape personality-related disturbances.
- Early deviant practices: Engagement in early sexual activities and other behavioral deviations may be associated with weak self-control.

second section: Psychological and Educational Effects

- Normalization of violence and moral desensitization: Repeatedly harming others and violating their privacy may lead to the normalization of violence and the erosion of moral sensitivity, particularly with the availability of artificial intelligence technologies such as deepfakes. This may diminish the perpetrator's human empathy and social conscience.
- Academic and professional failure: Academic and professional competence may decline as mental energy is consumed by activities related to harassment and digital concealment.
- Future social isolation and maladjustment: Despite the false sense of power displayed by the bully online, the individual may subsequently experience personality-related disturbances and difficulties in developing stable family or social relationships based on mutual respect.

THE FOURTH TOPIC: Forms of Hate Speech, Discrimination, and Cyberbullying

The research literature and sociological scholarship identify multiple, overlapping forms of hate speech and cyberbullying in the virtual environment. These practices vary according to the technological medium employed and the interactive context within new media networks. The behavioral manifestations of cyberbullying are closely intertwined with the structural transformations brought about by modern communication technologies at the individual, family, and societal levels.

First requirement: Forms and Patterns of Cyberbullying and Electronic Discrimination

Forms of communicative deviance in the digital sphere vary according to the mechanisms and media through which they are practiced. They can be classified into the following principal forms:

1. Flaming: Flaming refers to the transmission or circulation of emotionally charged, hostile, and inflammatory messages through interactive media, such as email, text messaging, or comments, with the aim of directly insulting the victim or mobilizing virtual groups against them.

The Psychological and Sociological Dimensions of Flaming and Digital Withdrawal

In this regard, educators and psychologists warn against excessive dependence on the Internet and emerging technologies because of their potentially destructive effects on social values and norms and their contribution to the spread of antisocial behaviors, including crime, violence, and disorder.

Persistent exposure to such digitally charged interactions may also expose children, particularly adolescents and young people in secondary schools and higher education institutions, to various psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety, psychological loneliness, and social isolation, accompanied by increasing psychological pressure and diminished self-confidence

(Abdel Hady, Mohamed Mohamed, Matar, Abdel Fattah Ragab Ali, & Ghonaim, Adel Salah Mohamed, 2005, p. 64)

The Structural Transformation of the Family and Virtual Society

This reality has also affected the structure of the modern family. In the contemporary nuclear household, consisting of parents and children, each family member increasingly has separate means of accessing their own communication

resources (Laban, 2000, p. 195). Given the wide range of services provided by information and communication technologies and their powerful embodiment of the concept of the “**virtual society**,” individuals have become increasingly immersed in these spaces at the expense of face-to-face interaction, resulting in their gradual withdrawal from the physical community.

This has contributed to the formation of parallel virtual communities within an increasingly fragmented social structure, undermining family communication and social relationships among friends. Individuals may now gather physically within the same household while remaining largely disconnected from one another in terms of meaningful interpersonal engagement, resulting in an almost complete disruption of direct intellectual and verbal communication.

2. Denigration: Denigration involves formulating and disseminating insulting, harmful, and unfair statements or posts about the victim through virtual platforms, with the intention of degrading their status and undermining their human dignity before a digital audience.
3. Outing and Privacy Violation: Outing involves the deliberate publication, reproduction, or circulation of highly private and confidential information, photographs, documents, or messages relating to an individual's personal life, with the aim of exposing their secrets and placing them in a socially compromising position.
4. Exclusion and Social Exclusion: Exclusion occurs when the cyberbully undertakes various efforts to deprive the victim of access to and remove them from online groups, block them from social networking sites, or encourage other users to boycott them without any objective justification, thereby exercising control and exerting psychological pressure on the victim.
5. Defamation: Defamation involves producing and disseminating rumors and false or misleading information concerning a particular individual and circulating such content extensively with the aim of damaging their reputation and undermining their social and institutional standing.
6. Impersonation: Impersonation occurs when the cyberbully pretends to be another person or assumes the victim's own identity by creating fake accounts and publishing offensive or prohibited material in their name, thereby exposing the victim to potential moral or legal consequences that threaten their security.
7. Cyberstalking and Harassment: Cyberstalking and harassment involve the repeated and intensive transmission of threatening or abusive messages through email and digital applications. Such conduct frequently takes the form of sexual harassment and virtual stalking, creating a persistent state of fear, intimidation, and perceived threat for the victim.
8. Trickery and Disclosure: Trickery and disclosure involve deliberately luring the victim through deceptive conversations into revealing secrets or exclusive and potentially embarrassing information, followed immediately by the redistribution and widespread dissemination of such messages across digital platforms as a means of social coercion and blackmail.

THE FIFTH TOPIC: Technological Transformations and the Construction of the Phenomenon: From Traditional Bullying to Algorithmic Bullying

Digital crime and deviance have undergone significant structural transformations as a result of the rapid development of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) and Deep Learning technologies. The digital environment can no longer be understood merely as a neutral technological space in which conventional forms of aggressive behavior are reproduced. Rather, it has become an interactive environment capable of generating, modifying, amplifying, and redistributing content through

increasingly sophisticated algorithmic mechanisms. This transformation has contributed to a gradual shift from forms of cyberbullying primarily based on the individual initiative of the perpetrator toward more complex forms in which human agency intersects with the generative and distributive capacities of algorithmic systems. This emerging configuration can be conceptually framed as Algorithmic Bullying.

Deepfakes and Automated Content Generation: The Construction of a Fabricated Digital Reality

Deepfake technologies have brought about a qualitative transformation in the production and manipulation of digital content. Attacks on an individual's image or reputation are no longer necessarily dependent on the use of authentic material that has been taken out of context or repurposed. Instead, it has become possible to generate fabricated images, audio recordings, and video materials that imitate individuals' facial features and voices with varying degrees of realism.

From a sociological perspective, this development represents a significant transformation in the nature of harm associated with cyberbullying. Victims may no longer be confronted merely with offensive content whose source can be readily identified and verified; rather, they may be exposed to synthetic content that is difficult for audiences to distinguish from authentic material. This increases the potential for reputational damage, social stigmatization, blackmail, and violations of privacy.

In the Algerian context, these technologies may be particularly significant in cases involving children, adolescents, or individuals with a visible social presence. Images publicly available on digital platforms can potentially be appropriated and manipulated to produce fabricated content, which may subsequently be circulated through private groups or public pages. Similarly, Voice Cloning technologies can be used to imitate individuals' voices and generate synthetic recordings that may serve purposes of reputational harm, coercion, or blackmail.

Accordingly, Deepfake technology should not be viewed merely as a technological advancement in the tools of cyberbullying. Rather, it contributes to a fundamental transformation in the relationship between truth, image, identity, and reputation within the digital sphere, making the fabrication of alternative realities an emerging mechanism of symbolic violence and social stigmatization.

1. Automated Accounts and Algorithmic Amplification: From Content Production to the Expansion of Harm

The implications of Artificial Intelligence for cyberbullying are not limited to the production of abusive content; they also extend to the acceleration of its circulation and the expansion of its potential reach. In this regard, automated accounts (Bots) and algorithmic mechanisms can facilitate the generation of large volumes of messages or comments and the repeated redistribution of particular forms of content.

The coordinated use of such technologies may transform cyberbullying from a relatively limited individual practice into a digitally organized campaign with a much greater capacity for repetition and exposure, particularly when it targets a specific individual, social group, regional community, or identity-based category. In such circumstances, the harmfulness of the act lies not only in the content of the abusive message itself but also in the technological capacity to reproduce it and expand its circulation.

At the same time, recommendation systems and Engagement-Driven Algorithms play an important role in determining how digital content is made visible to users. Content that generates strong emotional responses, controversy, or conflict may receive high levels of engagement, potentially increasing its visibility and circulation. Consequently, the algorithmic environment may function as an amplifying mechanism for hate speech and cyberbullying, even when the algorithm itself is not the original source of the abusive content.

The phenomenon therefore moves beyond the mere production of cyberbullying content toward a more complex process involving its amplification, recirculation, and expanded reach, thereby increasing its potential psychological and social consequences.

2. The Reconfiguration of the Digital Actor: Toward Algorithmic Bullying

These technological transformations have prompted a reconsideration of the concept of the social actor within the digital environment. In conventional forms of bullying, the human perpetrator is directly

responsible for producing and directing the abusive message toward the victim. In AI-mediated digital environments, however, certain stages of content generation, modification, and distribution can be automated, giving rise to a form of agency that may be described as a Tech-Augmented Actor.

This does not imply the disappearance of human agency or the transfer of responsibility to algorithms. Rather, it refers to a transformation in the relationship between human actors and technology in the production of cyberbullying. Users may determine the intended purpose, target, or general nature of the content, while algorithmic tools may perform some of the processes associated with its generation, modification, or dissemination. Algorithmic bullying therefore emerges as a complex form of action in which human agency is mediated and technologically enhanced by algorithmic systems.

This transformation entails several important sociological and regulatory implications:

a. Reduced Perception of Direct Responsibility:

The distance separating perpetrators from the immediate consequences of their actions, particularly when automated content-generation tools are employed, may reduce their awareness of the harm experienced by victims and foster the perception that the technology itself is responsible for producing the abusive content. Nevertheless, technological mediation does not necessarily eliminate human responsibility for the intentional use of such tools.

b. Increased Complexity in Identifying Perpetrators and Establishing Responsibility:

Determining responsibility becomes more difficult when fake accounts, automated tools, identity-concealment techniques, and Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) are combined with the production and dissemination of abusive content. This creates significant challenges for law-enforcement authorities and judicial institutions in identifying the source of the act, establishing the relationship between the user and the content, and determining the relevant criminal intent (*Mens Rea*).

c. The Expansion and Persistence of Harm:

The networked nature of digital content enables it to be reproduced and circulated long after its initial publication. Consequently, the effects of cyberbullying may persist even after the original post has been removed. This problem becomes particularly significant when the content is fabricated or AI-generated, as repeated circulation may reinforce false perceptions among increasingly larger audiences.

Accordingly, the transition from conventional cyberbullying to algorithmic bullying represents more than a shift from one technological tool to another. It reflects a transformation in the structural configuration of the phenomenon itself, as cyberbullying has become increasingly amenable to automated generation, amplification, and recirculation. Understanding this transformation therefore requires a sociological and legal approach that moves beyond the individual perpetrator to examine the algorithmic environment, content-production mechanisms, distribution networks, and forms of social interaction that facilitate the visibility, circulation, and impact of abusive digital practices.

THE SIXTH TOPIC: A Sociological Approach: Symbolic Violence and Social Dynamics in Algeria

The dimensions of virtual bullying and algorithmically amplified hate speech cannot be adequately understood in isolation from the structural and psychological configuration of Algerian society. Modern media are not merely communication tools; rather, they function as a “mirror and amplifier” of underlying social fractures and interactions. From this perspective, this section seeks to unpack the sociological dimensions of the phenomenon by examining the transformations affecting traditional institutions of socialization, the mechanisms through which symbolic violence is reproduced, and the psychology of digital actors within the Algerian virtual sphere.

1. The Predicament of Digital Socialization and the Decline of Family Authority

In Algeria, the family and educational institutions are experiencing a profound structural crisis manifested in their limited capacity to keep pace with the rapid technological transformation, thereby generating a “generational and social gap.” As a result of this transformation, socialization has shifted from its traditional framework, based on parental control and direct guidance, toward what may be termed

“algorithmic virtual socialization.” Networked platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have increasingly become primary agents in shaping the values and behavioral orientations of children and adolescents.

2. The Risks of Directed Entertainment and the Disruption of the Value System

The sociological danger posed by new media lies partly in their deployment of “virtual entertainment,” particularly when such entertainment is consumed casually, without a clear purpose, or in the absence of critical awareness. Entertainment content and smart applications may be used to introduce hybrid value systems or undermine prevailing moral norms through carefully designed forms of communication that audiences perceive as humor or spontaneous amusement, while functioning, at a deeper level, as directed communicative practices with objectives extending beyond their apparently humorous manifestations.

Although some mass media initiatives have sought to promote balanced behavioral models and raise public awareness, personal communication media and websites have also played a disruptive role in weakening family cohesion. They have capitalized on audiences’ perception of entertainment as an activity free from guidance or ideological direction, thereby facilitating the introduction of emerging behavioral patterns and unconsciously reshaping individual practices.

3. The Structural Fragmentation of the Algerian Family and Networked Isolation

Within the contemporary nuclear family structure, consisting of parents and children, each individual increasingly has independent means of accessing their own communication resources (Sherif Darwish Al-Laban, 2000). As a result of the diverse services provided by the digital environment and its concrete embodiment of the concept of “virtual society,” individuals have become increasingly immersed in these spaces at the expense of physical interaction, leading to their gradual withdrawal from the material and face-to-face social environment.

This reality has given rise to parallel virtual communities that have contributed to the fragmentation of the social fabric and the erosion of direct family communication. Individuals may now merely coexist physically within the same residential space, while meaningful sensory and interpersonal engagement is increasingly absent, accompanied by a sharp decline in direct intellectual and dialogical exchange.

1. The Reproduction of Symbolic Violence, “Imagined Communities,” and Transformations of Identity

In the sociological theorization of Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic violence operates through concealed and indirect mechanisms that establish domination and perpetuate stigmatization against particular groups. Within the Algerian context, artificial intelligence tools have been employed to intensify local sensitivities and reproduce social differentiation and identity-based tensions.

2. Benedict Anderson’s Thesis and the Construction of Virtual Belonging

Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s conceptual framework in his thesis of “Imagined Communities,” technology plays a pivotal role in shaping and establishing a “sense of shared belonging” among members of the national community by reshaping individual and collective perceptions of the factors that constitute common identity.

While the sense of a “shared internal identity” is grounded in historical identity markers—such as language, religion, ancestry, and geographical boundaries that safeguard national identity—communication networks and the Internet contribute to a reverse dynamic manifested in the strengthening of a “shared external identity” at the expense of national internal cohesion.

This networked sense of belonging develops through two interactive pathways:

1. A conscious and functional pathway: This emerges through an explicit individual choice based on considerations of personal interest or utility that the individual may be unable to fulfill within their material national community.
2. An unconscious and cumulative pathway: This develops through recurrent digital interactions in which individuals express the self they aspire to become or prefer others to perceive them as being, rather than their material reality.

Accordingly, reciprocal perceptions within the digital environment play a fundamental role in reshaping individuals' social identities, of which national identity constitutes an integral component and through which it is also reflected

3. The Strategic Use of Stigmatization and Group-Based Discrimination

- **Aggravation of Regional and Local Tensions:** Generative artificial intelligence may be exploited to produce visual materials, satirical audio content, or caricatures that ridicule the dialects and traditions of particular Algerian regions and provinces. Such content may then be disseminated extensively through automated accounts in an attempt to create a **“trend”** driven by mutual insults, contempt, and derision.
- **Deepening Gender-Based Discrimination and Stigmatization:** Deepfake technologies may be extensively directed against women and girls—including students, professional cadres, and women speaking in the public sphere—where notions of honor are instrumentalized as a form of “symbolic violence” to deprive them of their right to expression and participation in the digital sphere. This may compel many of them to withdraw involuntarily from the digital environment.

4. The Dynamics of the Illusion of Anonymity (Deindividuation) and the Fragmentation of Social Bonds

The virtual environment may provide users with a false sense of deindividuation and immersion in anonymity. The use of artificial intelligence algorithms to create fake accounts and conceal users behind pseudonymous identities may weaken the moral and psychological restraints that would otherwise inhibit individuals from engaging in direct confrontation.

The Absence of Visible Consequences (Disinhibition Effect)

When a cyberbully disseminates abusive content or creates a fabricated image using artificial intelligence, they do not directly witness the victim's suffering or psychological pain. This may encourage the perpetrator to detach the act from its human consequences and perceive it instead as a “technical game” or a “virtual joke.”

The Normalization of Violence and the Erosion of Value-Based Controls

This behavioral pattern may gradually develop into a process of “normalization of violence,” whereby the repeated circulation of automated cyberbullying campaigns contributes to normalizing abuse and stigmatization among young people. Digital violence may consequently become a means of asserting the self and gaining social acceptance within closed online groups.

THE SEVENTH TOPIC: Legal Approach: The Algerian Legislative Framework and the Challenges of Criminal Legal Classification

A reading of the Algerian legislative framework governing digital violence from the perspective of the Sociology of Law reveals a “temporal and structural gap” separating written criminal law from a rapidly changing social reality evolving at algorithmic speed. While the legislator and the judiciary seek to restore social control within the virtual sphere, the behavioral practices of online actors are increasingly oriented toward developing new methods of evasion and circumvention. This places Algerian legislation and the judiciary before decisive practical challenges.

First requirement: An Analytical Examination of the Relevant National Legislative Framework

In recent years, the Algerian legislator has sought to update criminal legislation in order to keep pace with cyber-related forms of deviance and to protect the integrity of individuals and national cohesion. These efforts are reflected in three key laws:

1. Law No. 20-05 on the Prevention of and Combating Discrimination and Hate Speech

This law constitutes a pivotal legislative instrument aimed at protecting national cohesion and regulating the virtual public sphere against regional and identity-based tensions. However, significant challenges arise at the level of practical implementation when generative artificial intelligence is used to produce and circulate content. Hate speech and discriminatory publications may be formulated through hybrid expressions and symbolic forms of satire, including caricatures and dark humor, thereby circumventing the traditionally prohibited keywords.

This technological development requires the Algerian judge to adopt a broader interpretation of the material element of the offence in order to address automated, algorithmically generated forms of hate speech that may be socially perpetrated without being readily identifiable within the literal boundaries of existing legal provisions.

2. Law No. 20-06 Amending the Penal Code (2020 Amendment)

This amendment constitutes an explicit response to the concerns of conservative Algerian society regarding the protection of personal data, the sanctity of private life, and personal honor. Digital defamation may constitute a profound moral shock to the family structure. Its significance can be highlighted through two main aspects:

- **Article 303 bis and subsequent provisions in relation to Deepfakes:** This provision criminalizes the capture, recording, transmission, or publication of images and audio recordings without the consent of the person concerned. Doctrinal and judicial interpretations have expanded to encompass Deepfake technologies. The material element of the offence is established when fabricated content is created and attributed to the victim in the form of defamatory acts or statements, while the mental element is reflected in the criminal intent to damage the victim's reputation or subject them to blackmail. In the Algerian context, this practice has evolved from a mere violation of an individual's image into a "tool of comprehensive social stigmatization," whereby the victim—particularly a woman or a minor—may become subject to an immediate "social trial" before any judicial ruling of conviction is issued.
- **Criminalization of Fabricated Content and False News:** The legislation provides for deterrent penalties against the deliberate dissemination of fabricated videos or recordings that undermine public order or threaten the security of individuals through digital platforms.
- **Law No. 15-12 on the Protection of Children**
 - Algerian legislation provides special protection for minors against digital risks (Articles 88, 89, and subsequent provisions), in cooperation with the National Body for the Protection and Promotion of Childhood, and seeks to deter all forms of exploitation, harassment, or cyberbullying directed against children. However, social reality has revealed a striking paradox: minors are simultaneously "the group most vulnerable to cyberbullying and digital fabrication" and "a new generation of technologically empowered bullies." The widening generational and technological gap between parents and children may render legal protection merely formal unless it is supported by sociological and educational intervention within the family and school.

second requirement: Challenges of Criminal Classification and Criminal Liability

The judicial application of Algerian law encounters the algorithmic nature of emerging crimes, creating complex legal and procedural challenges for courts and judicial police authorities.

1. The Challenge of Legal Classification and Determining Criminal Intent (*Mens Rea*)

Criminal liability under traditional Algerian criminal law is based on the principle of the individualization of punishment and the structural correlation between the material element and the mental element, including direct criminal intent.

Doctrinal and legal issue: In crimes facilitated or amplified by artificial intelligence, the technological mechanism may intervene as an intermediary responsible for automated modification and dissemination. This interaction raises the question of how the perpetrator's conduct should be legally classified: should the act be treated as a directly intentional offence committed by the user, or should liability instead be considered in terms of negligence or failure to exercise due care?

Psychosocial dimension and identification of the perpetrator: The issue becomes more complex when cyberbullying campaigns are conducted through automated bot accounts that generate insults on the basis of machine-learning algorithms. Such technological concealment may provide the perpetrator with an "illusion of absence of responsibility," allowing them to claim that "the software generated the content." This complicates the judge's task of establishing the existence of definite criminal intent.

2. Complexities of Digital Evidence and Criminal Investigation

Judicial police authorities—including the central cybercrime units operating within the National Gendarmerie and the judicial police—face practical challenges that extend beyond their available capabilities and increasingly approach the limits of digital sovereignty.

Evidentiary value of digital evidence and judicial practice: The Algerian judge applies strict standards when assessing the admissibility and evidentiary value of electronic records and evidence in order to safeguard the rights of the defense. In a context characterized by sophisticated visual and audio manipulation, particularly through Deepfake technologies, the evidentiary reliability of a video or image may be significantly weakened. Establishing its authenticity or using it as a basis for conviction may therefore require complex and costly forms of digital forensic and biometric examination.

Challenges of jurisdiction and geopolitical anonymity: Emerging cyberbullies may rely on encrypted applications, Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), or automated accounts created through servers located outside the national territory. Such technological concealment makes identifying the perpetrator's IP address and establishing the real identity of the original offender particularly difficult. The process may be further complicated by the procedural delays associated with international judicial requests and mutual legal assistance. As a result, local victims may continue to suffer the psychological and social consequences of stigmatization without the benefit of rapid and effective criminal deterrence against the perpetrator.

THE EIGHTH TOPIC (Prospective): Proposed Approaches to Address the Phenomenon (Toward a Comprehensive Strategy)

Addressing the complex risks posed by hate speech and cyberbullying in the age of artificial intelligence cannot be confined to ex post punitive measures. The extraordinary speed of technological development places legal provisions in a state of persistent “temporal lag” behind emerging forms of crime unless they are supported by an integrated preventive framework. Scientific necessity therefore calls for the development of a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy in which national legislation interacts with educational and technological mechanisms, individual responsibility, family awareness, and specialized criminal response units.

1. Enhanced Legislative Modernization and Procedural Regulation

The transition from conventional cybercrime to “algorithmic crime” requires a deeper updating of the Algerian legal framework:

- Introducing explicit provisions criminalizing the malicious use of artificial intelligence: General provisions concerning violations of privacy should not be considered sufficient. Rather, an explicit provision should be incorporated into the Penal Code to criminalize the fabrication and manipulation of visual and audio content through deep-learning technologies (Deepfake) when such practices are intended to facilitate harassment, defamation, or blackmail.
- Establishing the legal principle of “liability for generative acts”: An explicit doctrinal formulation should be developed to attribute criminal liability to the person who initiates the software or directs the algorithm, thereby preventing reliance on the “autonomy of technology” or the absence of direct intent during the generation of abusive messages or fabricated images.
- Developing judicial cooperation and coordination mechanisms with digital platforms: International cooperation agreements and legal frameworks should be activated to require social media companies, such as Meta and TikTok, to respond promptly to judicial notifications issued by Algerian authorities, remove AI-generated cyberbullying content, and suspend bot accounts (Bots).

2. Strengthening Media Literacy and Digital Socialization: Primary Prevention

Given the genuine challenges faced by families and educational institutions in confronting the expansion of the virtual environment, protecting individuals begins with the development of “digital citizenship.”

- Integrating digital literacy and technology ethics into educational curricula: A course on “Digital Safety and Cyber Ethics” should be incorporated into middle and secondary education curricula to raise

students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with digital abuse and the legal implications of fabricating images and circulating rumors.

- **Psychosocial support programs within educational institutions:** The role of social workers and educational guidance counselors should be strengthened to facilitate early intervention, identify victims of cyberbullying, and provide the necessary psychological support before behavioral consequences—such as school withdrawal or depression—become more severe.
- **Launching family awareness campaigns:** Awareness programs and applications should be developed for parents to introduce them to the principles of informed parental supervision and to promote ethical and humane ways of responding when their children are exposed to cyberbullying or blackmail, rather than resorting to punitive approaches that fail to take technological realities into account.

3. Developing Cyber-Forensic Capabilities and Intelligent Countermeasures

Effective intervention at the practical level requires technological tools that match or exceed those employed by perpetrators:

- **Developing Deepfake Detection Tools:** Cybercrime units within the judicial police should be equipped with biometric analysis tools and artificial intelligence technologies capable of examining digital content and identifying fabricated material with a high degree of accuracy, thereby facilitating its presentation as reliable evidence before the courts.
- **Establishing a National Observatory for Digital Safety and Cyberbullying:** A specialized body should be established bringing together representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Communication, and civil society organizations. Its functions would include collecting empirical data, monitoring algorithmic developments, and producing periodic reports aimed at strengthening the state's preparedness to address the phenomenon.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the intersection of hate speech and cyberbullying with artificial intelligence applications has introduced a fundamental transformation to the dynamics of digital deviance within the Algerian digital environment. Aggressive behavior is no longer merely an isolated individual act; rather, it has evolved into a form of “automated algorithmic violence” in which deepfake technologies and AI-generated content are exploited to reproduce social stigmatization and infringe upon the sanctity of private life. This transformation has occurred alongside a noticeable decline in the traditional socialization functions of the family and educational institutions, coupled with the growing influence of virtual platforms as agents of social regulation and value formation.

From a legislative perspective, the analysis demonstrates that, despite the significance of the Algerian legislator's efforts in adopting specialized legal instruments such as Law No. 20-05, Law No. 20-06, and the Child Protection Law, the practical application of these legal frameworks continues to encounter complex doctrinal and procedural challenges. These challenges relate primarily to the legal characterization of AI-assisted offences, the determination of criminal intent (*mens rea*), the attribution of criminal liability for algorithmically generated crimes, and the difficulties associated with digital evidence in light of the judiciary's rigorous standards regarding the admissibility and reliability of electronic proof.

The protection of social cohesion and digital security in Algeria cannot be achieved through reliance on punitive measures alone. Rather, it requires the adoption of a comprehensive preventive strategy that integrates continuous legislative modernization, the promotion of digital citizenship, the strengthening of media and digital literacy, and the enhancement of the technological and forensic capabilities of judicial police authorities. Only through such an integrated approach can society effectively confront the emerging challenges posed by artificial intelligence and ensure a safer, more responsible, and socially cohesive digital environment.

Final Recommendations

1. Legislative and Judicial Level

- **Explicitly criminalize the malicious use of Deepfake technologies and AI-generated media** under the Algerian Penal Code when such practices are used to violate personal privacy or undermine an individual's honor and reputation.

- **Develop judicial guidelines** to facilitate the legal assessment and classification of digital forensic evidence extracted from artificial intelligence applications and to ensure the accurate determination of criminal intent.

2. Social and Educational Level

- **Introduce a course on “Digital Safety and Cyber Ethics”** into the middle and secondary education curricula in order to strengthen learners' value-based resilience and promote responsible digital behavior.

- **Engage media organizations and civil society institutions** in organizing awareness campaigns targeting parents, with the aim of reducing family-level digital illiteracy and promoting informed and responsible parental protection practices.

3. Technological and Institutional Level

- **Equip specialized cybercrime units with advanced software and biometric analysis tools** for detecting fabricated content, particularly **Deepfake Detection Tools**, in order to strengthen their capacity to identify and investigate AI-generated manipulation.

- **Establish a “National Observatory for Digital Safety”** bringing together representatives from the legislative, educational, and technological sectors to monitor algorithmic developments, identify emerging risks, and provide proactive recommendations and periodic solutions.

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