

## Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM) for Business Communication

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### Abstract

*The Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM) is proposed as a simple, instructional resource for college-level business communication classes to help teach students that Internet-based, cyberbullying messages can be redeveloped into harassment-free communication. With course-specific focus, the original Technology Assistance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) is this paper's theoretical framework. A qualitative post-assignment survey supports CCM and overlaps TAM's constructs of Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. The indirect, four-part message delivery predicates "real-world" message development and course usefulness. Mindfulness adds intentions for students' future use of course materials and learned skill sets. Survey data spans a two-year cycle. Study participants were lower-division business communication students. Conclusions detail CCM can assist professors in teaching students positive communication protocols and associated skills; thus, the circulation of cyber bullying messages is reduced. Internet systems are also improved for educational use. A professional online communication presence may, set positive examples for other students to follow? Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology MIS Quarterly (13:3), pp.319-340.*

**Keywords:** Cyber bullying, Business Communication, Correction Model, Negative Messages

## **1.0 Introduction**

The information highway continues to expand; constructive use of the Internet adds value to students' learning goals. Hence, pedagogy in higher education continues to embrace the use of communication technology. Students who abuse Internet-driven communication cause the system's value to flip from constructive to destructive. Academic value falters. An example would be the prominence of cyberbullying in higher education today (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Negative messages are routinely posted to online platforms (academic or otherwise) which convey derogatory and demeaning content. Cyberbullying soils reputations and victims many times, develop psychological problems. At its extreme, cases of suicide have been prompted by cyberbullying (Topping & Coyne, 2013).

Internet-driven bullying is an evolutionary phenomenon; one which unjustifiably targets students and professors alike (Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) convey, cyberbullying clearly heightens unstableness and hopelessness in students' minds. Professors experience loss of productivity and depression from the reviews of multiple cyberbullying comments. Spillover toxicity is well-documented (Daniloff, 2009).

Cyberbullies hide behind computer screens and Internet accessible, electronic devices. Accomplished offenders are skilled at using computer systems to slander others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Cyberbullying can include unwanted public sharing of information (true or false). Facebook, Twitter, etc., along with, e.g. personal websites, blogs, chatrooms, e-mail, newsgroups, text messaging, and so forth as popular outlets.

Over the years, significant effort has been exerted to eliminate cyberbullying in higher education. To date, cyberbullying knows no limits. Much of the published research on deterrents focus on identifying the behavior's prevalence (Olweus, 2014) and implementing academic conduct codes with a zero tolerance policy (Stover, 2006). That however, which seems to be a key deterrent, teaching students to understand the value of practices which include professional communication is thus far, underdeveloped in published literature. It's time to prompt change. Educators can play an important role in teaching cyberbullying prevention (Brown et. al., 2012). Cyberbullying should not rampant education (Minor, Smith & Brashen, 2013); it is antisocial; it is cruel; it is complex; and to date, it is without remedy. It remains part of higher education.

Within higher education, business communication classes can help define forms of cyberbullying and some of the solutions. Educators can teach their students proper negative message delivery. Few professors would disagree; academic environments are enhanced for all, when destructive student communication is minimized. The Internet is best used in educational environments to enhance learning by way of harassment-free exchange of information. In the text that follows, this paper presents research assumptions, a review of the Technology Assistance Model (TAM) as a theoretical framework, along with, subject-focused constructs. Suggestions for course materials are provided. Study parameters surround the Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM) and survey results are discussed with implications, limitations, and conclusions.

## **1.2 Research Assumptions**

Assumptions for this study's research rest under a couple back-to-basics concepts. The field of psychology suggests that intentions for future behavior are strong predictors of actual future behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Also, humans are active information processors and think about the relationship between their behavior and its consequences by way of cognitive processes and observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Students' attitudes after learning has occurred will determine their willingness to apply skills and knowledge within their "real-world" undertakings (Davis, 1993).

Study assumptions foresee that technology systems and communication practices have similarities. Like technology, communication skills taught in higher education prompt interaction and exchange of ideas, at times to help make willful decisions. Conversely, students can disregard the use of knowledge and skill obtainment (Bandura, 1993).

Literature on moral and cognitive development of undergraduate students foresees that exposure to perspective complexity is often not useful (Blanchard-Fields, 1989). Therefore, simple, basic constructs work best. Judgment and perspective increase a commitment to other's thoughts. Activities which expose students to peers' thoughts and experiences are invaluable to the growth process. Learning by writing and rewriting captures an ongoing experience to course content (Mills, 2001).

### 1.3 Framework and Assumptions

The Technology Assistance Model (TAM), “predicts the user acceptance of end-user applications by specifying causal relationships among belief and attitudinal constructs that subsequently influence usage behavior” (Hubona & Geitz, 1997). TAM is a remarkable resource that has been utilized for many types of technology related subjects and research projects. TAM citations are 700, plus (Bogozzi, 2007) and exponentially increasing. TAM has been revamped many times, yet the original model continues to be used in current research (2007). Researchers that have explored areas of student-technology usage in relationship to TAM are many and diverse. They range from learning support and student adoption of technology (Saade & Kira, 2009) to delivery of academic materials (Park, 2009), cultural differences within learning environments (Yoo & Huang, 2011), onward to mobile communication systems in classrooms (Tsai et al, 2011), and numerous topics in-between. Expansion of these diverse frameworks sees TAM can be applied to business communication and technology systems used for message delivery, perfectly.

Empirically validated, influential in use, TAM extends Ajzen and Fishbien’s Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Fred Davis and Richard Bogozzi originally developed TAM. Its behavior-based elements assume that when someone forms an intention to act, they act freely without limitation (Davis & Bogozzi, 1989; Davis & Warshaw 1992). In addition, favor or disfavor toward a specific behavior describes an attitude and links the causal relationship between beliefs and behavior (Gordon, 1935). Acting freely without limitation is a behavior specifically applicable to the use of computer systems for improper negative message delivery (cyberbullying). Students establish their online behavior based on their attitudes and their beliefs.

TAM is traditionally used for explaining and predicting user acceptance of an information system. How that information system will be used is defined with two key variables, “Perceived Usefulness” along with, “Perceived Ease of Use.” Perceived usefulness is clarified by Davis as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her...performance,” and he defined perceived ease of use as, “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis, 1989). The prediction views an information system acceptable in that, it can predict and identify the modification of tools brought into the system. The modifications of tools for this paper are external, because they are brought into the system by class materials and student learning outcomes. TAM also implies that constraints are present in “real-world” situations that can limit freedom and can restrict behavior (Lee et al., 2011). Therefore, this paper assumes an inverse relationship is present. If limited freedom can restrict behavior, full-freedom can enhance behavior; for example, modern day Internet systems allow communication freedom.

In section summary, the original TAM advocates the system has a direct effect on future system use (Davis, 1993). Students apply usefulness and ease of system use as a way to recognize communication freedom; but must realize, systems can harm others (with or without intent) if and when, communication is used improperly. Multiple studies support the use of TAM (Davis et al., 1989; Taylor and Todd, 1995). This study perceives TAM as a tool for business communication instruction and as a starting point to initiate the new, Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM).

### 1.4 Model Constructs

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), adopted from Davis, Bogozzi, and Warshaw (1989) is presented as Figure 1. TAM’s definitions based on Venkatesh et al (2003) are presented below:

- External Variables. Target Stimulus
- Perceived Usefulness. The degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help him or her attain gains in...performance.
- Perceived Ease of Use. The degree of ease associated with the system.
- Attitude toward Using. The individual’s positive or negative feeling about performing the target behavior (e.g., using a system)
- Behavior Intention to Use. The degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform some specified future behavior.
- Actual System Use. Behavior Response

The perceived course-specific TAM and its variables follow:

- External Variables. The target stimulus of utility to convey a negative message.
- Perceived Usefulness. The student’s belief in his or her ability to construct a negative message.

- Perceived Ease of Use. The degree of ease with the system's message delivery.
- Attitude toward Using. The student's feelings about performing the target behavior.
- Behavior Intention to Use. The degree to which a student has formulated conscious plans to constructively convey future negative messages.
- Actual System Use. The student's behavior conveys a response of professional communication.

## 2.0 Classroom Activities

The stage is easily set. Today's students are experts at using communication systems for message delivery. Cyberbullying is a well-known social problem which is familiar to all students. The problem overflows into academia. Additionally, everyone encounters a situation where he or she needs/wants to convey a negative message. Therefore, negative message construction and cyberbullying are perfect communication topics. Usefulness of course materials is established by way of "real-world" applicable concepts. At lecture's start, it's an option to use and illustrate TAM's construct's (original, course-specific, or both). With or without review of TAM, the avoidance of adversarial consequences with negative message construction is a topic essential (Newman & Ober, 2013).

Classroom discussion can continue with five themes; (1) The reasons educated individuals need good communicate skills, (2) The importance of professional, responsible communication, (3) The destructive nature of cyberbullying, (4) The legal consequences of libel, and (5) The importance of building positive business relationships. Samples of cyberbullying messages are presented to students for review and revision. Message samples are ample on the Internet and easy to obtain by way of news clips and social networks. Now and again, motivated and/or previously cyberbullied students will volunteer to share their own messages. Sample content prompts engaged classroom discussions.

Goodwill should be maximized; badwill should be minimized. Messages are to be audience and topic appropriate. Standards implement many professional writing principles: tone, syntax, structure, audience analysis, and audience reaction. Most important is an emphasis on reader sensitivity (Newman & Ober, 2013). The direct and the indirect approach are negative message delivery standards detailed in almost all business communication textbooks. The direct approach is used when the communicator needs to get a point across quickly, and the news is not serious enough to cause harm (2013). Since cyberbullying causes harm, the indirect approach consumes most of the classroom attention. The indirect pattern is described in a four-part process; (1) Context or Buffer, (2) Explanation of Details, (3) Negative Message and, (4) Goodwill. (Oliu, Brusaw, & Alred, 2012)

Helping students to produce a professional message and take others feelings into consideration while doing so, requires attention to elements such as: the system, the delivery channel, and the word choices. Once all elements are discussed, the reconstruction/revision of the cyberbullying samples can be completed.

## 2.1 Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM)

After the previously stated lecture content and classroom revision activates are finished, the Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM) should be introduced. The model advocates future Usefulness and Ease of Use by discernment recognition of students' attitudes. CCM proposes a resource for positive communication with negative message development; thus, continued use of course materials and skills sets learned will be precedence. The CCM is presented in Figure 2. This model's constructs definitions are reviewed below. For research ease, referenced constructs are labeled as "Considerations" (1-7):

- (C-1) External Variables. The target stimulus of utility to convey a negative message.
- (C-2) Message Delivery Usefulness. The student's belief in his or her ability to construct a negative message.
- (C-3) Ease of System Use. The degree of ease with the system's message delivery.
- (C-4) Professional Communication Attitude. The student's attitude about professionally performing the target behavior.
- (C-5) Behavior, Four-Part Message Development. The degree to which the student has mastered the indirect message pattern.
- (C-6) Harassment-free System Communication. The negative message is constructed in a harassment-free manner.
- (C-7) Positive, Professional System Presence. The writer's response displays a positive, professional online presence.

Blending model determinates equals perceived usefulness of course materials along with, ease of use with improvement to “real-world” communication problems (result demonstrability) (Venkatesh et. al. 2003).

### **3.0 Data Findings**

Study assumptions previously reviewed detail technology use should be a means for a constructive communication platform.

Aspects of the TAM (1989) are used to examine students’ attitudes and beliefs in association to course materials (Usefulness and Ease of Skill Use)in conjunction with, the determinants outlined on the Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM). Harassment-free messages which display a positive, professional online presence result. Due to teaching assignments, the sample population was selected by convenience. Data for this study came from a post assignment survey administered to all students enrolled in an online, undergraduate business communication class, for two years consecutively (August of 2013 to June of 2015). Survey data was collected during Week 11 of the 16 Week class semester. The sample population consisted of students from Victor Valley Community College (VVC) in the State of California.

To ensure privacy of the instrument and responses, Blackboard, a commonly used educational platform within higher education, housed the survey. All students had access to the Blackboard platform. Measurements used correlate with CCM’s considerations (see Figure 2 and Table 1).Survey completion provided points toward the final grade totals; in accordance, 87 percent of enrolled students were enticed and completed the survey for a total of 74 students (24 males and 51 females). Gender represented Question 1 and was scored on a nominal scale (1=M, 2=F). Demographics for the campus as a whole state 57 percent of the campus is female and 43 percent is male (Chancellor’s, 2014). Data for this study did not represent the campus demographics as 34 percent of the students were male and 69 percent of the students were female. It is not known why the difference in gender ratios occurred?

Student ages ranged from 18-55 with 72 percent being between the ages of and 22 and 34 (Question 2) scored with an open ended response. The average age of the student was 29.Age did follow the demographics for the campus as a whole. At the college, this communication class is a business elective. Reasons students selected the course is not study specific. Proper message development as a means to decrease cyberbullying is a goal along with, the development of a usable pedagogical framework. The required completion of course assignments (survey) is the independent study variable. The dependent variables are in the form of survey questions that examine the validity of the Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use in addition to the CCM considerations (1-7).With the exception of Question 1and Question 2, survey items were coded to reflect positive, neutral, and negative responses on a 5 point Likert Scale; (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4), Disagree and, (5) Strongly Disagree. Figure 3 provides the primary research instrument and its results for Questions 3-7, Considerations 1-7.

#### **3.1 Pearson Moment Correlations**

There were significant correlations between the need to communicate negative messages and the importance of positive online communication. The findings for this correlation were determined by using a Pearson Moment Correlation between survey questions3 and 4. The correlations were significant at level .05 (2-tailed) for Questions 3 and 4 both equaling .429.Running another Pearson Moment Correlation using Questions 5, 6and 7 revealed many positive outcomes. All questions in the string were established to hold significance at the .01 level (2-tailed) with results at or in-between .473to.883. These correlations reinforce those students who took this class improved their communication skills and would continue to use constructive practices for future delivery of online negative messages. As demonstrated by this study’s data, support for the Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM) is robust. The basic concepts associated with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provide a baseline for construct determination. Students who can perceive usefulness and ease of use are more apt to implement course materials and obtained skills sets into the future. Learning satisfaction seemed to be achieved by pragmatism. Students have moved from writing harsh online comments that cause harm to others, to successfully conveying negative messages with professionalism, free from cyber-harassment.

Due to this study, this course’s material and the CCM model can be applied with future business communication students. Online environments will be improved by students who properly deliver negative messages; which will in turn, help curb cyberbullying in higher education. Processes explored leave an open invitation for other instructors to try.

### 3.2 Continued Research and Limitations

This study is a start; it's not a cure-all. Business communication classes offer content which can teach students about message delivery techniques to curb cyberbullying in higher education. The study's results prompted an anticipated follow-up project with junior and senior business communication students at a state university. Its apparent further research on the topic would be beneficial; however, additional questions need to be probed:

- Would other instructors teaching the same or similar courses obtain different study results?
- Are significant differences present between lower-division community college students and upper-division university students?
- How many of the surveyed business communication students have been victims and/or perpetrators of cyberbullying?
- Would being a victim and/or perpetrator of cyberbullying create an increased or decreased attitude toward harassment-free communication?
- If cyberbullying wasn't addressed in lecture material, would students still use a four-part message delivery on Internet systems?
- Would the results of this study differ from college-to-college, student population-to-student population?

The course materials taught were at the discretion of one instructor with sixteen years of continual business communication instruction. In no way does this content attempt to answer or offer advice on all course materials that address negative message delivery and/or cyberbullying. It is not known if other assignments or classroom formats would create the same results? Other instructors could formulate effective instructional processes outside of this paper's themes.

It should also be noted that the initial TAM model was empirically validated but that it has been explained to use only a fraction of variance outcome (Mcfarland & Hamilton, 2006). The legacy of this model has been proposed for a paradigm shift (Bogozzi, 2007) and model revisions currently continue.

Little research is available to help instructors teach communication protocols that will curb cyberbullying practices; however, studies on cyberbullying also explore students' emotional and mental disorders and amendments to educational codes and federal legislation (Topping & Conye, 2013). This study did not examine mental health, educational codes, or lawful revision.

To thoroughly examine the outcomes of this model, students must be repeatedly surveyed during future semesters to increase the amount of data available and its interpretation. Statistical interpretations, frequencies and correlations were strong. It may be possible that the professor's review of the student surveys could have slanted the results and made participants reluctant to respond honestly. However, the reverse may also hold true?

### 4.0 Concluding Comments

As applicable to research, "A large journey starts one step at a time." Teaching cyberbullying and its correction methods in a business communication class prompts many new venues and future research opportunities. It's important to promote the use of the Internet in higher education as a safe, comfortable, harassment-free communication resource.

The Technology Assistance Model is this study's course-specific framework and prompts the newly developed, Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM). CCM seeks to guide a harassment-free message process. Supported with qualitative data that involved community college, online business communication students, this study's results concur, students when forced to examine the usefulness of a system and the negative effects of improper messages are more apt to replace adverse, negative communication (cyberbullying) with skills of positive, professional message construction.

A key component of a business communication class is teaching students professional communication protocols (Newman & Ober,). Examining and correcting unprofessional communication by firsthand observation produces "real-world" comprehension (result demonstrability) which is likely, to enhance future use of course material and developed skills.

The CCM as constructed is an instructional pedagogy. Its use is to decrease cyberbullying adversities that plague higher education. As better professional communicators, harassment-free communication equals an enhanced online presence. Positive communication may set precedence for others to follow?

Figure 1: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), adopted from Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989)

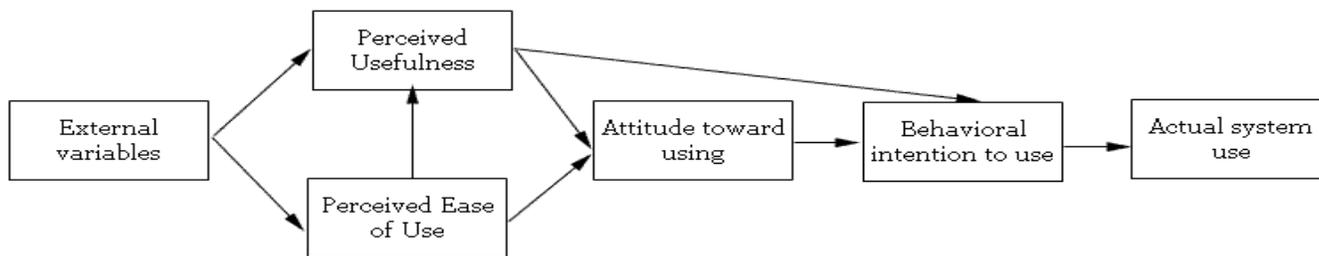


Figure 2: Cyberbullying Correction Model (CCM)

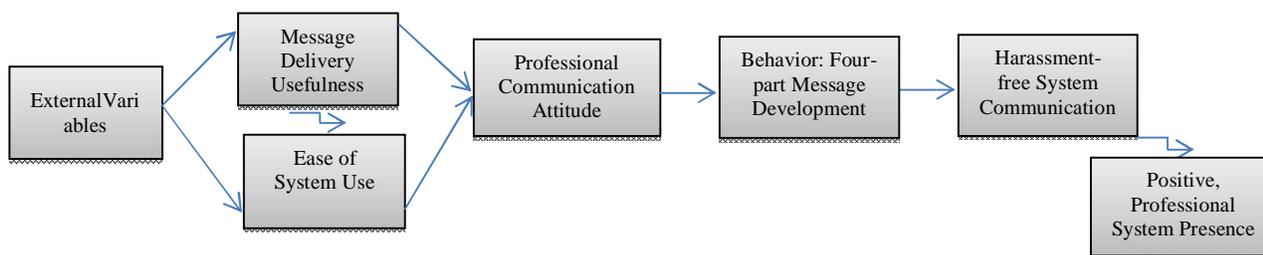


Table 1: Post Assignment Survey and Mean Scores

Question & Consideration Number(s)	Survey Questions	Mean Score
3.C-1 to 3	With negative message utility, I possess the ability to construct the message properly for use on online systems.	2.2
4.C-4	It was easy for me to learn the importance of positive online communication.	2.2
5.C-4	It is important to me to communicate in a professional manner.	1.9
6.C-5 & C-6	Learning the indirect message pattern has helped me to construct negative messages without cyber-harassment.	2.3
7.C-7	My online presence will be positive and professional, if I construct negative messages free of harassment.	2.1

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