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Cyber bullying is a crime, but open to interpretation: Expert

Neha Alawadhi, ET Bureau | Dec 2, 2014, 04.08AM IST

Tags: YouTube | Twitter | McAfee | Intel | Facebook | doordarshan | Cyber bullying | Bengaluru | Alivenow

NEW DELHI: The social media attack on a Doordarshan anchor who made a series of gaffes at the recent Goa film festival would qualify as cyber bullying, experts say, but hasten to add there is not much that can be done to prevent such behaviour online, given the humungous size of the virtual universe.



(Under Section 66 (A) of the...)

The anchor reportedly shut down all her online accounts following the slew of unflattering and personal comments that she was bombarded with after the video of the event went viral and was shared across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, among other such platforms.

Under Section 66 (A) of the IT Act, 2000, cyber bullying is a bailable offence, punishable with three years of imprisonment and fine. However, the complainant and police can interpret what constitutes offensive behaviour, said cyber law expert Pavan Duggal.

"Just as we don't regulate jeering and taunting of adults when it happens in person, as opposed to a threat of violence, unless there is a special case made out for the harm of online taunting, I don't think there is a case for a legislative response," said Pranesh Prakash, policy director at Bengaluru-based Centre for Internet and Society.

According to a recent report by McAfee, part of Intel Security, half of Indian youths have had some experience with cyber bullying and of these over a third (36%) have been bullied

themselves online.

IT and cybersecurity expert Rakshit Tandon recalled the trauma a young professor at one of the top colleges underwent when an old picture of her, from one of her social media accounts, went viral and became the butt of unflattering comments by students. "Once it goes viral, you can't track who is sharing or sending it," he said.

Tap of a Key

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COMPLAINANT, police can interpret what constitutes offensive behaviour

FIGURE UNHAPPY 50% of Indian youths have encountered it, says McAfee | 36% of them have been bullied themselves online

We have two personalities. We have an offline personality and we have an online personality, and this is true for anyone and everything—whether you are a brand, person, book or a movie

ADHVITH DHUDDU, Founder & CEO of AliveNow

"We don't have one personality anymore," said Advith Dhuddu, founder and CEO of digital marketing agency Alive-Now, which handles social and digital for brands online. "We have an offline personality and we have an online personality, and this is true for anyone — whether you are a brand, person, book or a movie," he added.

Several schools, NGOs and individuals are working towards educating children and young people about the dangers of sharing information online, but often find themselves at a loss when

confronted with real situations every day.

The approach AliveNow's Dhuddu takes is to "engage first and ban later". He said, "We try to reason with people. We always take any grievance offline, we don't try to solve a grievance online."

For individuals, however, the offline route may be impractical or infeasible. Tandon believes the only way is to "sensitise people", while CIS's Prakash says a person can "block abusive users, set one's account in private mode and just get off such social networks for a while till the situation cools off".

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