

The purpose of this project is to answer a question about what are the mechanisms conducting to the appearance of diffusion of responsibility in the internet are and what are the social psychology methods that can be used to minimize them. The diffusion of responsibility theory postulates that the more people witness some critical event (e.g. a car accident or an assault), the smaller is a chance that someone will help the victim, because the personal responsibility for response “diffuses” among all the bystanders. Main research in this subject were conducted by Darley and Latané on the cusp of the 60’s and 70’s. Results of their studies and the other studies showed that there is a lot of situations that can lead to diffusion of responsibility – starting with a real threat of health and life of a victim, up to everyday life situations like helping with using a computer equipment or holding the door.

However, there is a relatively small amount of research that can show what are the mechanisms connected with diffusion of responsibility in the internet. While the internet – especially social networking sites – became a place where many people engage into different social interactions. It is also a space where some internet users submit different requests for help from other users. Increasingly bigger group of the internet users cannot even think about life without internet. It is important to notice that those existing research mostly referred to diffusion of responsibility concerning an “unharmful” request, like filling a survey. The main idea of my experimental project is to test what are the dynamics of those mechanisms during a real critical situation, like brutal internet aggression. It seems the even more legitimate to – making use of social psychology methodology – conduct a series of basic studies which will show how the dynamics of forming the process of diffusion of responsibility in this environment looks like. It is also worth to mention, that consequences of diffusion of responsibility may have dramatic effects. Thereupon, except for determining basic mechanism of developing diffusion of responsibility, I would also like to empirically verify four methods of social reactions that may prevent it.

The main idea of my experimental project is testing, what the dynamics of those mechanisms during a real critical situation, like brutal internet aggression will be. I plan to conduct a series of basic studies, that will show how diffusion of responsibility develops in this environment. It is also worth mentioning, that consequences of diffusion of responsibility may have dramatic effects. Thereupon, except for determining basic mechanism of developing diffusion of responsibility, I would also like to empirically verify four methods of social reactions that may prevent it.

In social psychology there is widely known a topic of social influence strategies which can increase the possibility of getting a request redeemed. However, there is no such study which includes a usage of such strategies to fight with a diffusion of responsibility in the internet. The character of my project presupposes using an innovative software “Social Lab”, which allows creating a social networking site and other “users”, who will interact in a controlled way with a human. Therefore, a participant will have a feeling of participating in truly realistic computer mediated interactions. I plan to test four basic methods, that may lead to reducing diffusion of responsibility.

*Study 1.* Verifying if a personalized request for help, targeted directly at a particular user, will lead to reduction of diffusion of responsibility.

*Study 2.* Verifying if supplementing a request with a phrase “every gesture matters” (a social influence technique described by Robert Cialdini and David Schroeder), will lead to reduction of diffusion of responsibility.

*Study 3.* Verifying if supplementing a request with a phrase “it is my only request” (“Omega” communicational strategy), will lead to reduction of diffusion of responsibility.

*Study 4.* Verifying if presenting empathy igniting materials which also contain methods of effective reactions to a critical situation will lead to reduction of diffusion of responsibility.

The results will lead to a better understanding of diffusion of responsibility in the internet and get to know the ways of its reduction. It is even more important, thereupon there is a loophole in knowledge about this subject, while diffusion of responsibility is one of the most serious social problems. The results of those studies may be an important complement to the state of knowledge in this ground. It may also form some basis for future research projects investigating this topic.