SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INCIDENCE OF CYBERBULLYING IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR CREATING A SAFER ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Social media has become an integral part of communication and information sharing worldwide, including Nigeria. However, despite its benefits, social media platforms also pose risks, with cyberbullying emerging as a prevalent and concerning issue. This article reviews incidence, forms, consequences, and approaches to promoting safer online environments in Nigeria. Using a qualitative research design, a comprehensive literature review and thematic analysis of secondary sources were conducted. The findings revealed that cyberbullying is prevalent in Nigeria and exists in various forms such as outing, trickery, trolling, and verbal and visual/sexual cyberbullying. Meanwhile, the phenomenon has negative emotional and psychological consequences. The review highlights the lack of awareness and understanding of cyberbullying among stakeholders, leading to the underestimation and underreporting of incidents. This emphasizes the need for specific policies and comprehensive preventive measures. While the current legislation addresses certain aspects of cyberbullying, a dedicated policy on cyberbullying management is lacking. To promote safer online environments, this study suggests involving various stakeholders and developing tailored prevention and intervention strategies. This includes educating students and staff on cyberbullying, implementing reporting mechanisms, and providing support systems. Further research is needed to explore the role of social media platforms in cyberbullying experiences, involvement of technology companies and stakeholders, and effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Cybercrime, Social Media, Trickery, Trolling.*

A. Introduction

The past few decades have seen significant growth in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the widespread use of social media platforms. The rapid increase in internet usage has transformed Nigerians into active participants in cyberspace. Social media has become an essential tool for young people to build and enhance social connections and to learn technical skills. In today's technologically advanced world, social media has infiltrated almost every aspect of human life. Studies have emphasized the relevance of social media to political efficacy and political participation (Akinyetun, 2022)

and youth participation and activism (Akinyetun, 2021). Social media is a veritable tool for enhancing communication and has increased the chances and ability of young people to aggregate their interests, articulate their thoughts, and demand for social and political change.

Despite the advantages that social media offers for development, its facelessness has raised serious concerns about its susceptibility to manipulation to promote violence, hate speech, misinformation, and undermine democracy. In addition, recent pessimism associated with the proliferation of social media includes its potential to exacerbate the incidence of cyberbullying, which poses emotional and psychological distress to users. In some cases, anguish experienced on social media platforms has led to irrational and potentially harmful decisions, including contemplating suicide (Adebayo & Ningga, 2021). Put differently, while advancements in social media offer convenience and freedom in online communication, it also gives rise to substantial challenges such as cyberbullying, which negatively affects individuals (Xu & Trzaskawka, 2021). The Internet has broken down barriers to communication, allowing anyone to be targeted by cyberbullying regardless of their status or background. The phenomenon of cyberbullying has also called into question the place of society role models in dealing with cyberbullying in empowering ways, without suppressing their own thoughts and behaviours (Hackett, 2016), and in creating a safer online environment.

Cyberbullying is a growing issue in Nigeria, although accurate data on its extent are difficult to obtain due to underreporting, especially when it occurs outside controlled environments such as schools. It is a truism that social media usage is growing exponentially in Nigeria. In 2019, Nigeria had 98.39 million internet users, with 54 per cent accessing the internet daily and 12 per cent having active social media accounts. WhatsApp is the most used social platform, followed by Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, YouTube, and Twitter. With the increasing use of computers and the internet in Nigeria and the minimal inhibitions on social media, online spaces have become breeding grounds for cyberbullying. The widespread use of digital technology has made many users experience cyberbullying either as victims or perpetrators (Adediran 2021).

Cyberbullying poses a significant challenge to the ideals of free-flowing information and discourse on social media. This involves the use of digital means to intimidate, annoy, frighten, or create a hostile environment for the victim. This unwarranted contact disrupts

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the free exchange of ideas and undermines the online environment's intention (Olonode, 2021). Meanwhile, the incidence of cyberbullying has increased significantly following the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in increased screen time for children and young people. With school closures and containment measures, families have relied on technology for online classes and socialization. This heightened virtual presence exposes children to risks, such as online sexual exploitation, grooming, exposure to harmful content, and cyberbullying (UNICEF, 2020).

Cyberbullying encompasses various forms of aggression conducted through different online platforms including text messages, emails, chat rooms, and social media. Social media platforms enable users to create and share content while engaging in social interaction with large or small communities. Common examples of cyberbullying include sending abusive messages and posting inappropriate information. Victims of cyberbullying repeatedly experience intentional aggression, often due to a power imbalance with the aggressor on social media (Agustiningsih & Ahsan, 2023). To address this growing concern, Nigeria has introduced cyberlaws, dubbed the Cybercrimes Act, aimed at combating these unlawful activities (Uba, 2021). The enactment of the Nigerian Cybercrime Act of 2015 addresses various online criminal acts, including child pornography, cyberstalking, and cyberterrorism. Additionally, the introduction of protection from Internet falsehoods, manipulations, and other related matters bills aims to criminalize the promotion of false information on social media (Olonode, 2021).

This study's rationale is grounded in the significance and urgency of addressing cyberbullying and promoting safer online environments in Nigeria. Cyberbullying can have severe consequences for individuals, affecting their mental well-being, self-esteem, and social interactions. Moreover, cyberbullying incidents can escalate and result in offline harm, making it crucial to understand the specific consequences faced by Nigerian individuals.

The growing incidence of cyberbullying on social media in Nigeria reveals a research gap that requires further attention. Existing literature primarily focuses on the challenges of cyberbullying without providing comprehensive solutions or evaluating policy implications. This study aimed to address these gaps by exploring the incidence and

severity of cyberbullying, examining its emotional and psychological impacts, and proposing evidence-based recommendations for promoting safer online environments in Nigeria. By examining the specific nuances of cyberbullying within the Nigerian context, this study contributes to the development of targeted interventions that effectively address cyberbullying and ensure safer online experiences in Nigerians. Additionally, this study adds to the existing literature by examining the incidence of cyberbullying behaviours in depth and informing policymakers, educators, and social media platform providers in designing interventions and policies.

B. Literature Review

1. Definition and conceptualization of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a complex phenomenon with varying definitions. It is commonly described as an aggressive and intentional act carried out through electronic means, targeting a victim repeatedly over time. The use of the internet, cell phones, or other devices to send text or images with the intention of hurting or embarrassing someone is also recognized as cyberbullying. In Nigeria, cyberbullying is defined as the use of technology to send harmful or embarrassing content (Xu & Trzaskawka, 2021). Cyberbullying encompasses various behaviours, including persistent harassment through emails or texts despite the recipient's request for no further contact. It can also involve public actions such as threats, defamation, ridicule in online forums, hacking or vandalizing online content about a person, spreading false statements to discredit or humiliate the target, spreading rumors with the intention of inciting hatred, and disclosing personal information to defame or humiliate victims of crime (Ifeoma, 2022).

The term cyber stalking is sometimes used interchangeably with cyberbullying, referring to conduct directed at causing fear in a specific person. While there are shared elements such as intent and repetition, scholars have not reached a consensus on the defining properties of cyberbullying. Additional features include power imbalance, direct and indirect forms of cyberbullying, the victim's perception, and harm inflicted. Cyberbullying, a detrimental consequence of technological advancement, takes place primarily on online platforms, particularly social media. The absence of inhibitions in the online environment allows for rapid and widespread victimization (Adediran, 2021).

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Cyberbullying refers to the use of technology to harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, and intimidate others. It must incorporate the essential elements of bullying, including being intractable, recurring, causing harm perceived by the target, and being perpetrated via computers, phones, or other electronic devices. Cyberbullying primarily occurs among young people, but when adults are involved, it may be categorized as cyber-harassment or cyberstalking (Irabor & Osebor, 2022).

The definitions provide a comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying, highlighting its aggressive and intentional nature through electronic means. They recognize the use of technology such as the Internet and electronic devices to harm or embarrass others as a key aspect of cyberbullying. These definitions do not explicitly address the role of anonymity in cyberbullying, which can contribute to the harmful and widespread nature of this behaviour. Anonymity allows perpetrators to act without fear of consequences and may impact the power dynamics between the bully and the victim. However, these definitions provide insights into the prevalence of cyberbullying using technological tools, including social media.

2. Incidence of cyberbullying

The incidence of cyberbullying among young people in Africa is of significant concern. This was captured in a recent poll conducted by UNICEF and the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. The poll, which surveyed over 170,000 individuals aged 13-24 across various countries, including both high- and low-income nations, revealed that one in three young people in the surveyed countries experienced online bullying. Disturbingly, one in five respondents reported school absence due to cyberbullying and violence. These findings challenge the subsisting notion that cyberbullying is predominantly prevalent in high-income countries, as 34% of respondents from sub-Saharan Africa reported being victims of online bullying (UNICEF, 2019). Social networking platforms, including popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, have been identified as the most common spaces in which cyberbullying occurs. Furthermore, the poll revealed the existence of private online groups within school communities where information about peers is shared for the purpose of bullying (UNICEF, 2019).

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center revealed that nearly half of United States teens aged 13 to 17 have experienced at least one form of cyberbullying. The most common behaviour reported was name-calling, with offensive names directed towards 32 percent of the teens. Other prevalent cyberbullying behaviours include the spread of false rumors (22 percent), receiving unsolicited explicit images (17 percent), constant monitoring by someone other than a parent (15 percent), physical threats (10 percent), and the sharing of explicit images without consent (7 percent). Moreover, 28 percent of teens have experienced multiple types of cyberbullying. Gender differences emerge, with older teenage girls (15-17 years old) being more likely to face cyberbullying compared to younger girls and boys of all ages. In terms of motivation, physical appearance is the most commonly cited reason for targeting, followed by gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political views (Vogels, 2022).

A cross-sectional analysis of US adolescents aged 10–13 years revealed that experiencing cyberbullying was associated with suicidality, while perpetrating cyberbullying was not. This association remained even after accounting for other factors such as offline peer aggression. This study suggests that identifying cyberbullying experiences can help clinicians assess suicide risk in adolescents and inform prevention strategies. Cyberbullying, conducted primarily online through smartphones and the Internet, is linked to greater psychopathology and increased suicidality among youth. Both targets and perpetrators of cyberbullying are at a higher risk for suicidality, with evidence indicating that those who both experience and perpetrate cyberbullying are particularly vulnerable (Arnon 2022).

According to surveys conducted in various countries, including Canada, Russia, Japan, and India, parental awareness of cyberbullying varies. While parents in Russia and Japan expressed high levels of confidence that their children were not experiencing cyberbullying, Indian parents reported increasing concern about their children being cyberbullied. In general, more parents are becoming aware of their children's negative experiences with cyberbullying both at school and online. A significant percentage of parents reported that their children were bullied, with the highest percentage among older age groups. Bullying has been reported in various settings, including schools, social media sites and apps, text messages, video games, and non-social media websites. Some parents have even witnessed cyberbullying (Cook, 2023).

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According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2019), more than one in ten adolescents across the OECD countries have experienced cyberbullying. The highest rates were observed in Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, and the United Kingdom (Scotland), while Greece had the lowest rate. Cyberbullying, which involves offensive messages, rumors, exclusion, and harassment, is associated with negative outcomes, such as depressive symptoms, substance use, suicidal thoughts, and attempts. Teenage girls are more likely than boys to be victims of cyberbullying, with notable gender differences between Ireland and the United Kingdom. Data on cyberbullying refer to responses from 11, 13, and 15-year-olds who reported experiencing cyberbullying through messages or pictures at least once (OECD, 2019).

3. Overview of social media usage in Nigeria

Social media is an interactive online platform that facilitates communication and connections among users. This serves as a space for individuals to engage, share, and establish relationships for various purposes. It enables the formation of social networks based on shared interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Through social media, individuals interact with, create, and exchange information and ideas within their networks (Tayo et al., 2019). Social media is becoming increasingly important in Nigeria, particularly among young people. The mobile phone industry has responded to this demand by offering affordable smartphones in the Nigerian market, whereas communication companies have introduced cheaper data plans to capture their share of the market (Mbanasol et al., 2015).

As of January 2023, Nigeria has a total population of 221.2 million. Internet penetration in the country was 55.4 percent, with 122.5 million internet users. Additionally, 31.6 percent of social media users were in Nigeria, accounting for 14.3 percent of the total population. Furthermore, the number of cellular mobile connections reached 193.9 million, representing 87.7 percent of the total population. Breaking down the population by age group, 16.1 percent were between 0 and 4 years, 21.9 percent were between 5 and 12 years, 11.6 percent were between 13 and 17 years, 13.1 percent were between 18 and 24 years, and 13.6 percent were between 25 and 34 (Kemp, 2023).

In terms of social media usage, 25.8 percent of Nigeria's internet users engaged with at least one social media platform. Of the social media users, 44.7 percent were female and 55.3 percent were male. Facebook had 21.75 million users, YouTube had 31.6 million users,

Instagram had 7.1 million users, Facebook Messenger reached 3.5 million users, LinkedIn had 7.5 million members, Snapchat had 12.35 million users, and Twitter had 4.95 million users in Nigeria as of January 2023. There are fluctuations in the potential ad reach of these platforms between 2022 and 2023. For example, Facebook's potential ad reach decreased by 16.7 percent, YouTube decreased by 4.0 percent, Instagram decreased by 21.5 percent, Facebook Messenger decreased by 13.6 percent, LinkedIn increased by 19.0 percent, Snapchat increased by 30.0 percent, and Twitter increased significantly by 1,421 percent (Kemp, 2023).

C. Methodology

The methodology for this study involved a qualitative research design that utilized secondary sources. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to gather relevant information on social media and cyberbullying in Nigeria from academic journals, reports, articles, and online sources. Data collection involved extracting and compiling key findings, theories, case studies, and qualitative insights related to cyberbullying incidents, consequences, and approaches to promoting a safer online environment. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights within the collected data, which were organized into meaningful categories and sub-themes. The analysis was guided by the research objectives, allowing for a critical evaluation and exploration of the relationships between different themes and perspectives. The results are reported in a clear, organized, and coherent manner, synthesizing the identified themes and providing critical insights derived from the analysis. The findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of social media and cyberbullying in Nigeria to enable the development of recommendations for promoting a safer online environment.

D. Findings

While there is a dearth of research on cyberbullying in Nigeria, empirical research indicates its prevalence. A university study found that around 50 percent of students surveyed reported experiencing some form of cyberbullying. These findings suggest that cyberbullying is a significant concern in Nigeria, warranting attention and further research to address this harmful phenomenon (Adediran, 2021).

1. Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying encompasses a range of behaviours such as spreading rumors, making threats, engaging in sexual remarks, revealing personal information, and using derogatory labels, including hate speech. However, distinguishing between offensive expressions, hate speech, and cyberbullying can be challenging as boundaries become blurred. The evolving nature of cyberbullying, driven by new tools and methods for online attacks, adds to this complexity (Adediran, 2021). Cyberbullying can take various forms such as direct cyberbullying (insulting messages) or indirect cyberbullying (rumors and fake news) (Iqbal & Jami, 2022). Several forms of cyberbullying have been identified in the literature (Adediran, 2021; Iqbal & Jami, 2022; Ifeoma, 2022; Kaspersky, 2015; Matulewska et al., 2020; Public Safety Canada, 2015; Xu & Trzaskawka, 2021), which are discussed below.

Table 1. Form of Cyberbullying

No	Forms Of Cyberbullying	Defenition
1.	Outing	A form of cyberbullying that involves the unauthorized sharing of private or embarrassing information for malicious purposes. In Nigeria, outings are commonly performed using imagery and video.
2.	Trickery	A form of cyberbullying in which the victim is deceived into revealing personal information that the cyberbully intends to share or use as a threat. In Nigeria, a common manifestation of trickery is revenge porn, which involves the leaking of sex tapes or nude pictures.
3.	Trolling and Roasting	Common forms of cyberbullying that involve disruptive behaviour and deliberate provocation online. Trolling is characterized by purposefully causing discord and annoyance, whereas roasting entails multiple individuals attacking a single victim to humiliate them. These forms of cyberbullying often blur the line between harmless comments and harmful intentions. Interestingly, research suggests that trolling is often seen as a form of entertainment by those who engage in it.
4.	Visual/Sexual Cyberbullying	This involves the misuse or editing of private photos to humiliate them. The act of sharing intimate or embarrassing visual content without consent falls under this category. It aims to degrade and shame victims by leveraging their personal photos.
5.	Verbal Cyberbullying	This includes insulting messages, hate speeches, and derogatory labels. It encompasses behaviours such as spreading rumors, threatening, engaging in sexual remarks, and using offensive language online. Verbal attacks through comments posted on the Internet are a form of verbal cyberbullying often faced by victims.
6.	Exclusion	A form of cyberbullying that involves intentionally leaving someone out of social gatherings, online conversations, or specific platforms. Cyberbullies aim to inflict emotional harm through exclusion by isolating individuals and denying their participation.

No	Forms Of Cyberbullying	Defenition
7.	Flaming Harassment	Refers to the act of engaging in heated and aggressive arguments online, often involving offensive language and insults. It aims to provoke and incite negative emotions in the target individual.
8.	Denigration	Involves spreading cruel gossip or rumors with the intention of damaging someone's reputation. Cyberbullies may use false information or make derogatory comments about victims to humiliate and belittle them.
9.	Impersonation	The act of creating fake profiles or pretending to be someone else online. By assuming another person's identity, cyberbullies can engage in harmful activities such as posting content in the victim's name to deceive and cause harm.
10.	Cyberstalking	Involves the transmission of threatening or harassing communication through computers. It induces fear of death, violence, or bodily harm in the targeted individual, and can escalate from online threats to real-life situations.
11.	Cybermobbing	Refers to a phenomenon in which a group criticizes or targets individuals or ideologies on social media, which sometimes leads to real-life conflicts. It involves collective online attacks and can have severe consequences for the targeted individuals.
12.	Hate speech	This is a prevalent form of cyberbullying, where offenders use derogatory language to offend their victims, based on characteristics such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. It involves public expressions of animosity or disparagement of individuals or groups.
13.	Internet trolling	Here, individuals provoke reactions, cause disruption, or seek personal amusement by engaging in online discussions with offensive language and insults. Trolls actively search for contentious topics to attack others verbally.
14.	Harassment	Entails persistent and intentional messaging via the phone or Internet.
15.	Fraping	Involves impersonating victims and posting content in their names.
16.	Dissing	Entails spreading cruel gossip or rumors to damage someone's reputation. Cyberbullies may also use photos, screenshots, or videos to belittle and draw attention to the victims' negative qualities.
17.	Catfishing	Occurs when someone steals another person's online identity, typically by using photos, to create deceptive social networking profiles.
18.	Memes	Matching words with images for entertainment and making derogatory comments about a person.
19.	Others	Cyberbullying encompasses a range of other behaviours, including teasing, cyber-smearing, impersonation, hacking or vandalizing online content about a person, rating individuals, and creating derogatory websites.

2. Consequences of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is associated with negative emotional and psychological consequences, such as low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration, and other related problems. Research indicates that cyberbullying is linked to various real-world issues, including problems at school, anti-social behaviour, substance use, and

delinquency. Despite the prevalence of cyberbullying, traditional bullying remains common. There is a close relationship between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, as individuals who experience bullying at school are also likely to experience bullying online, and those who engage in bullying behaviour at school are prone to bullying others online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2021).

In a report by Xu and Trzaskawka (2021), which explored the impacts of cyberbullying, several concerning consequences for victims were found. The report stated that 37 percent of the victims experienced social anxiety, while 36 percent reported symptoms of depression. Disturbingly, 24 percent of the victims reported having suicidal thoughts and 23 percent engaged in self-harm. These psychological effects highlight the severity of cyberbullying and its potential to harm individuals both mentally and emotionally. In addition to the psychological impact, cyberbullying also manifests as negative behaviours among victims. The study found that 21 percent of victims skipped classes, indicating the interference of cyberbullying in their education. Furthermore, 12 percent of the victims developed antisocial behaviours, indicating a potential impact on their social interactions and relationships. This study also revealed that cyberbullying had an effect on physical health. Approximately 10 percent of the victims developed eating disorders, which can have long-term consequences for their well-being. Additionally, 10 percent of the victims reported running away from home, suggesting that the distress caused by cyberbullying can lead to drastic measures (Xu and Trzaskawka, 2021).

Cyberbullying has a significant emotional impact on teenagers' academic performance and social relationships. Social media bullying raises ethical concerns, including post-traumatic disorder (PTSD), invasion of privacy, emotional harm, and risk of suicide and physical violence. It has negative impacts on various aspects of children's lives, such as increased alcohol and drug use, school absenteeism, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and difficulties with emotional and social adjustment. Recollections of cyberbullying are complex and remain with victims, sometimes leading to severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and potential acts of harassment or violence. Privacy ethics are violated in cyberbullying as they involve intimidating, embarrassing, and humiliating others (Irabor & Osebor, 2022).

Moreover, cyberbullying can impact student attendance particularly when it occurs both online and in traditional school settings. Students may resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as substance use, to manage the stress associated with cyberbullying. In severe cases, individuals may struggle with self-harm or suicidal thoughts as a consequence of cyberbullying (Abramson, 2022).

Victims of online attacks and cybercrime may experience emotional trauma, leading to symptoms of depression and Acute Stress Disorder (ASD). Instances of virtual sexual assault in online virtual worlds have shown evidence of intrusive memory, emotional numbing, and upset. Identity theft can leave victims feeling violated, betrayed, vulnerable, angry, or powerless. Victimization can also result in outrage, anxiety, a preference for security over liberty, and loss of confidence in cyberspace. Victims may go through stages of grief, anger, and self-blame, and experience a sense of shame. Extortion is an example of how the victimization process unfolds (Ogunkuade & Kenku, 2023).

Studies have shown that cyberbullying can negatively impact sleep and mental health. Teenagers who experienced cyberbullying were more likely to experience poor sleep and depression. Additionally, victims of cyberbullying have reported feeling depressed with only a small proportion being able to find helpful resources online to improve sleep (Cook, 2023).

3. Attempts at Promoting Safer Online Environments

Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Pakistan have taken steps to combat cyberbullying and protect vulnerable individuals. In Nigeria, efforts have been made to address the negative impact of computer and internet use through legislation. While there is no specific law dedicated to cyberbullying, certain acts of cyberbullying are considered offenses under the existing criminal laws. The Cybercrime Act of 2015 criminalizes cyberbullying, and the elements or methods associated with cyberbullying are also addressed in the Criminal Code Act and the Penal Code Act.

a. Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 (Cybercrime Act)

Section 24(a) of the Cybercrimes Act in Nigeria criminalizes the sending of grossly offensive, pornographic, indecent, obscene, or menacing communication through computer

systems or networks. This provision can be linked to cyberbullying when the content of the messages used falls under these categories. Section 24(b) prohibits the intentional transmission of false information about another person to cause annoyance, harm, or anxiety. Additionally, Section 24(2)(a) makes it an offense to transmit communications that bully, threaten, or harass another person, causing them to fear death, violence, or bodily harm (Cybercrimes Act, 2015). While these provisions do not cover all forms of cyberbullying, they are applicable to the common types seen in Nigeria. Cyberbullying is widely recognized to have detrimental effects on victims' mental health, including anxiety and suicidal behaviour.

The Act defines cyber stalking as conduct directed at a specific person that would cause fear in a reasonable individual. The Act considers the transmission of any communication through a computer to bully, threaten, or harass another person, causing fear of death, violence, or bodily harm, as cyber stalking. The Act criminalizes such behaviour and imposes penalties of up to N7,000,000.00 in fines or imprisonment for a maximum of 3 years, or both, on individuals who knowingly or intentionally send grossly offensive, pornographic, indecent, obscene, or menacing messages via computer with the knowledge that they are false. The purpose of such communication is to cause annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill will, or unnecessary anxiety to another person (Cybercrimes Act, 2015).

The Act also includes provisions for severe penalties regarding specific forms of cyberbullying and threats transmitted through computer systems. It stipulates a punishment of up to 10 years imprisonment and/or a minimum fine of N25,000,000.00 for individuals who intentionally bully, threaten, or harass another person through computer communication that instills fear of death, violence, or bodily harm. This includes transmitting information that contains threats to kidnap, harm, or demand ransom for the release of a kidnapped person, with the intent to extort (Cybercrimes Act, 2015).

Furthermore, the Act specifies a term of 5 years imprisonment and/or a minimum fine of N15,000,000.00 for those who intentionally transmit information through a computer system containing threats to harm the property or reputation of the recipient or others, or to falsely accuse them of a crime, with the purpose of extorting money or other valuables from individuals, firms, associations, or corporations. These provisions reflect the

legal measures taken to address cyberbullying and related offenses in Nigeria. In addition to the aforementioned provisions, the Act allows courts to issue orders to protect victims of cyberbullying and prevent further harassment or acts that cause fear of violence, death, or bodily harm. Violating such orders can result in a fine of up to N10,000,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of up to 3 years (Cybercrimes Act, 2015).

b. Criminal Code Act and Penal Code Act

The Criminal Code Act and Penal Code Act are the major criminal laws in Nigeria and are applicable to different regions. They criminalize the distribution and projection of obscene articles. These laws and provisions apply to cyberbullying cases that involve the dissemination of obscene content. Chapters 21A and 17 of the Criminal Code Act provide a legal framework for addressing obscene publications and offenses related to posts and telecommunications, respectively. Chapter 21A of the Criminal Code Act defines 'obscene articles' as any material that is capable of being viewed, read, or heard, and tends to deprave and corrupt individuals who may come into contact with it (Chapters 21A, 233 B). This definition sets the foundation for identifying and classifying content that promotes cyberbullying and falls within the scope of law. According to Section 233C of Chapter 21A, an article is considered obscene if, taken as a whole, its effect tends to corrupt or deprave individuals (Chapters 21A and 233C). This provision establishes a standard by which the offensiveness and harm caused by cyberbullying content can be assessed.

To address the distribution of obscene articles, Section 233D of Chapter 21A stipulates that individuals who distribute or project such material, whether for gain or not, commit an offense (Chapters 21A and 233D). This offense carries penalties, including fines not exceeding N400, imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or both. These provisions can be used to hold cyberbullies accountable for their actions and to discourage the dissemination of harmful content.

Like the Criminal Act, the Penal Act addresses the question of obscene materials in Nigeria. Section 463 of Chapter 34 which relates to posts and telecommunications focuses on the act of sending dangerous or obscene items. According to the Section, individuals who intentionally send items by that have the potential to cause harm or enclose obscene

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materials commit offenses. The items mentioned include those that are likely to cause injury to a person or object during conveyance, as well as those that contain obscene books, pamphlets, papers, gramophone records, drawings, paintings, representations, or figures. The punishment for this offense is imprisonment for up to one year, a fine, or both, as determined by the court.

While these Acts (Criminal Code and Penal Code) address the dissemination of obscene materials through post and telecommunications, they do not mention cyberbullying which occurs primarily through digital means such as social media platforms, messaging applications, and online forums. However, by employing this provisions, Nigerian authorities can take legal action against individuals who engage in cyberbullying by sending harmful or obscene content through a postal system.

c. Educational initiatives

To address bullying in schools, The Minister of the State for Education, Hon. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba in 2019 released a press statement indicating the government's intolerance for bullying citing its implications to the psychological, mental and social wellbeing of its victims. However, the policy falls short of addressing this issue effectively. First, the statement emphasizes the broader concept of bullying without specifically highlighting cyberbullying as a distinct and significant problem. Cyberbullying, which occurs through digital platforms and technology, requires specific attention and strategies, owing to its unique characteristics and widespread prevalence among young people. Furthermore, the statement lacks concrete actions or measures intended by the government to address cyberbullying in schools. While recognizing the responsibility of the entire society, including the government, in raising responsible and empathetic children, the statement fails to outline specific initiatives or programmes that will be implemented to tackle cyberbullying. Moreover, the absence of mention of awareness campaigns, educational programmes, or training initiatives for students, parents, and teachers suggests a lack of emphasis on prevention and proactive measures (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019).

Olonode (2021) emphasized the importance of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in addressing cyberbullying. The implementation of MIL education requires the participation of individuals and organizations. Individuals should develop responsible and ethical media usage, whereas organizations should provide policy guidance and interventions. The proposed strategies include expanding MIL education beyond the Mass Communication and Media Studies departments, integrating it into secondary school curricula, educating parents on appropriate online behaviour, establishing support organizations for MIL educators, and adopting UNESCO's MIL policy and strategy guidelines nationwide. These measures could contribute to addressing cyberbullying in Nigeria.

E. Discussion

The following are the themes arising from a review of the literature:

1. Lack of Awareness and Understanding of Cyberbullying

The first theme identified in the literature is the lack of awareness and understanding of cyberbullying among stakeholders in Nigerian institutions of learning. There is an emphasis on the need for increased awareness and suggested strategies for school authorities to improve their knowledge about cyberbullying (Ifon, 2023). This lack of awareness is a significant concern as it hinders effective prevention and intervention efforts. It is important to educate students and staff about the nature of cyberbullying, its impact on victims, and ways to address and prevent it. By raising awareness, school authorities can empower individuals to recognize cyberbullying behaviours, report incidents, and provide support to victims. More so, further research is required to investigate the extent, nature, and consequences of cyberbullying among different populations, such as students, adolescents, and the general public.

2. Prevalence of Cyberbullying and Underestimation of the Problem

The second theme identified is the prevalence of cyberbullying. Many incidents of cyberbullying go unreported, indicating a potential underestimation of the problem. The range of cyberbullying victimization rates reported globally suggests that a significant number of teenagers experience cyberbullying, with an average of approximately 21 per

cent having been victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2021; Ifon 2023). The underreporting of cyberbullying incidents suggests a gap in the understanding of the full extent of the problem. It is crucial for school authorities to conduct investigations and gather accurate data on cyberbullying prevalence to guide appropriate actions. By better understanding the scale and nature of cyberbullying, schools can develop targeted interventions and support systems to address this issue effectively.

3. Lack of Specific Policy for Managing Cyberbullying

The third theme is the lack of a specific policy dedicated to managing cyberbullying in Nigerian universities. Instead, existing Acts are targeted at addressing specific forms of cybercrime such as cyberstalking. This gap in policy highlights the need for a comprehensive policy dedicated to cyberbullying management. Having a specific policy on cyberbullying is crucial, as it provides clear guidelines and procedures for handling cyberbullying incidents, ensuring consistency and fairness in the university's response. Such policies can outline preventive measures, reporting mechanisms, disciplinary actions, and support services for victims (Ifon, 2023).

4. The role of technology and social media platforms

The role of technology tools and social media platforms in cyberbullying and fostering an online safety culture in Nigeria cannot be undermined. The literature mentions the prevalence of cyberbullying incidents on Facebook, but does not extensively explore the role of other social media platforms in cyberbullying experiences in Nigeria (Ogolla et al., 2022). Further research is required to investigate the specific platforms, features, and dynamics that contribute to cyberbullying incidents in Nigeria. This can help to develop targeted interventions and promote safer online environments.

5. Influence of parenting styles on cyberbullying

A study involving Nigerian students found that authoritative parenting was associated with the lowest levels of cyberbullying, whereas authoritarian parenting displayed the highest levels (Ibrahim, 2021). This highlights the role of parenting style in shaping teenagers' engagement in cyberbullying and emphasizes the importance of promoting authoritative parenting practices.

6. Relationship between Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying

A study conducted among students at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria revealed a significant correlation between traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Olasanmi, 2020). This finding suggests that addressing traditional bullying can have a positive impact on reducing cyberbullying incidents and vice versa.

Prevalence of cyberbullying in other African countries: A study conducted in Kenyan universities found a high number of students who had either experienced cyberbullying themselves or knew someone who had (Ogolla et al., 2022). Also, South Africa has been found to have the highest incidence of cyberbullying among the 28 countries surveyed in a research (iTOO, 2021). This emphasizes the urgent need to address the incidence of cyberbullying not only in Nigeria but in other African countries.

A review of the literature reveals the dearth of research on cyberbullying in Nigeria, indicating a need for further investigation such as exploring the prevalence of cyberbullying on various social media platforms beyond Facebook, considering the diverse social media landscape in Nigeria. The relationship between traditional bullying and cyberbullying highlights the interconnected nature of these phenomena. Addressing traditional bullying can have a positive impact on reducing cyberbullying incidents and vice versa. This insight suggests the importance of adopting a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses both forms of bullying.

Moreover, parenting style plays a significant role in teenagers' engagement in cyberbullying. These findings emphasize the influence of authoritative parenting on reducing cyberbullying levels. Promoting authoritative parenting practices and facilitating open communication between parents and teenagers can help mitigate cyberbullying. It is essential to develop educational programmes and support systems that involve parents and to provide guidance on effective parenting strategies to prevent and address cyberbullying.

The high incidence of cyberbullying in South Africa and Kenya highlights the urgent need for intervention and support systems in these countries. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, educational institutions, technology companies, and civil

society organizations are necessary to effectively address cyberbullying and mitigate its negative impact on adolescents and teens.

It suffices to mention that this study is not without its limitations. For instance, there is an inherent subjectivity and potential bias in the interpretation of qualitative data (Suttin & Austin, 2015). Despite efforts to ensure objectivity and rigor, the researchers' perspectives and biases may have influenced the analysis and coding process. The identification and categorization of themes could have been influenced by preconceived notions or assumptions. Although measures such as peer debriefing and member checking were taken to enhance reliability, subjectivity remains a limitation that could have influenced interpreting the study's findings.

E. Conclusion

The incidence of cyberbullying among young people in Africa, particularly Nigeria, is a significant concern. Research and surveys have shown that cyberbullying is prevalent in both high- and low-income countries, challenging the notion that it is a predominant issue in developed nations. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter has been identified as a common space for online interaction among young people and where cyberbullying occurs. Major forms of cyberbullying have been examined including outing, trickery, trolling, visual/sexual cyberbullying, verbal cyberbullying, exclusion, flaming harassment, denigration, impersonation, cyberstalking, cybermobbing, hate speech, Internet trolling, harassment, fraping, dissing, catfishing, memes, and other behaviours. The consequences of cyberbullying are far-reaching and include negative emotional and psychological effects, academic and social impairments, and even physical health issues. Cyberbullying can also escalate into real-life conflicts and have a severe impact on victims' overall well-being. Efforts to address cyberbullying in Nigeria have been made through legislation such as the Nigerian Cybercrime Act of 2015, which criminalizes various forms of cyberbullying and provides penalties for offenders. However, there remains a lack of specific policies dedicated to managing cyberbullying in Nigeria, highlighting the need for comprehensive guidelines and procedures. Collaborative efforts involving parents, caregivers, schools, technology companies, and government

agencies are necessary to promote safer online environments and to protect young people from the detrimental effects of cyberbullying. Educational programmemes, support systems, and policies should be developed to address the unique challenges and dynamics of cyberbullying in Nigeria.

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