GOMBE SAVANNAH

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES (GOSAJOLLCOS)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY
NIGERIA

Volume 3 No. 1
October, 2022

COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Examining the Perception of Youths on Cyberbullying Detection and Prevention in Nigeria

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is the act of an online user harassing and intimidating another person in the cyberspace. Cyberbullying is sending or posting negative, mean, hurtful or false messages about another person on the internet and on social media sites. Cyberbullying is a problem that arises as a by-product Cyberbullying of modern technology. Cyberbullying is a form of attack occurs when one or more individuals use abusive, false or harsh words on social media to intimidate or harm others. Despite the high-tech equipment that is currently popular among young people in Nigeria, there remains a significant gap in the literature on cyberbullying and its potential impact on social media users due to inadequate research in this area of study. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the possible ways of detecting and preventing cyberbullying on the social networking sites. This study adopts Conflict theory by Karl Max. While for primary data collection, the study uses a qualitative research method as a total of 30 participants categorized into groups based on demography in Nigeria were used for a focused group discussion. Results of this research show that cyberbullying occurs mostly among youths and teenagers as it hurts the victims and could lead to suicidal thoughts. Possible ways of detecting and preventing cyberbullying have been underlined in the study. Therefore, the study recommends among others, that regulatory bodies should look further into it and ensure there are adequate penalties for those involved in the act and compensations for the victims.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Cyberspace, Social Networking, Digital Technology

Introduction

Cyberbullying was not used or seen in the dictionary many years ago until after twitter was launched in July 15, 2006. The development of social

media was aided by the creation of the World wide web (www). Social media as it is fast does not need physical presence on digital devices such as computers, android phones, tablets etc. According to Sinder and Borel (2004), "Cyberbullying is bullying which uses e-technology as a means of victimizing others". It is the usage of internet media or mobile technologies like email, chat rooms, and discussion groups on the internet, mobile phones, mobile phone cameras, web pages, text messages, with the intention of harming other persons. Various forms of cyberbullying include texting offensive messages on mobile phones, with the bully showing the message to others before sending it to the target; sending threatening emails and forwarding a confidential email to all address book contacts, thus publicly humiliating the target. In a school environment, students can gang up against one of them and bombard him/her with "flame" emails. Another way to cyberbully is to set up a derogatory web site dedicated to a targeted person and emailing others the address, inviting their comments. In addition, web sites can be set up for others to vote on the biggest geek, or sluttiest girl in the school, (Sinder and Borel, 2004).

With the widespread availability of digital tools and equipment to the youth across cyberspace, children are at greater risk of being molested on the Internet than on playgrounds: a warning has been issued. Cyberbullying differs from other traditional forms of bullying because of the anonymity of criminals and the ability to harass victims 24 hours a day. The anonymity observed in many forms of electronic communication not only promotes playful disinhibition, but also reduces social accountability and makes it easier for users to engage in hostile and offensive behavior. This new technology makes it possible to attack victims anytime, anywhere. The invisibility and anonymity of persons behind cyberbullying complicate its management within a school system and open the door for more young people to engage in this type of behavior.

According to Mitchel et al. (2007), in a study carried out from 2002 to 2005, there was a 50% increase in the percentage of youths who were victims of online harassment. The number of victims and bullies steadily rising, can be positively correlated with the increase of technology usage by adolescents. Examples of these technologies according to David-Ferdon and Hertz (2007), include: cell phones, personal data assistant and computers for internet access. Moreover, these technologies are being used with increasing frequency to text

instant message, email, blog and access social networking websites. For example, people can send hurtful texts to others or spread rumors using smartphones or tablets or laptops. These days with availability of cameras on smartphones, pictures are being taken in bedrooms or bathrooms or any other location where privacy is expected and they are posted online for others to see, discuss or tag.

A research study carried out by the National Center for Social Research NCSR 2009, analyzed bullying among more than 10,000 secondary school pupils aged 14 - 16 in England. The research revealed that cyberbullying, where children face taunts, threats, and insults via the Internet and mobile phones, is now the most common form of bullying. These technologies are increasingly being used to access text and instant messaging, email, blogs, and social networking sites. The availability of smartphones, also known as camera phones, jeopardized the possibility that photos of students in the room would be emailed around the school or even posted on websites. With these mobile phones, teens can take pictures of their peers, send emails, send text messages, and post to public websites anytime, anywhere. This is what happens to young people across the country every day.

Cyberbullying can be based on hatred and prejudice. That is, bullying others because of race, religion, appearance, or sexual orientation. There are some online video games known as 'Fortnite', 'Counterstrike', 'Overwatched', 'Valorante', etc., which are a kind of cyberbullying known as 'griefing' which teens play. Teenagers see such cyberbullying as entertainment, but it is a game where players intend to hurt others. The game's way of doing cyberbullying is to use the game's website, or PC and console games with online components. Online cyberbullying is commonly referred to as "griefing," and bullies are referred to as "griefers," using instant messaging (IM), chat, and voice chat features to annoy or mock other gamers. It's pretty common among young online gamers who play.

It is a well-known fact that face-to-face bullying can cause long-term psychological damage to victims. However, the damage caused by cyberbullying can be greater than the damage caused by traditional face-to-face bullying, as online communication can be very slow. There is no escape for those who are being bullied online. Cyberbullying material which can be distributed around the world is often irreparable. Cyberbullying is almost anonymous and may require participation from unknown friends. In most

cases, bullied teens are emotionally traumatized or do not want to be disturbed by their mobile or internet use, so they tell adults what is happening online on their mobile phones. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to: To investigate the experiences among social media users and their consequences, identify possible ways of detecting cyberbullying on social media sites, investigate the methods used in preventing cyberbullying and how effective they are.

Research Questions
This paper attempts to answer the following questions:
1. How do social media users experience cyberbullying and the consequences?
2. How can cyberbullying be detected on the social networking site?
3. What methods or strategies could be used in order to prevent cyberbullying in social networking sites?
4.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on *Conflict Theory*. According to conflict theory, dominance and power, not agreement and conformity, preserve social order. Conflict theory holds that people who are wealthy and powerful try to maintain their position by any means necessary, most notably through repressing the weak and helpless. The theory's fundamental tenet is that members of society will compete with one another to gain the most wealth and influence possible. Karl Marx is credited with propounding the conflict theory, which holds that competition for few resources causes society to be perpetually at war. There are teenagers on the pinnacle of the ladder and they're considered 'top class' or the famous teenagers. The humans at the lowest rung of the ladder are the 'decrease class' or occasionally referred to as losers. The teenagers on the pinnacle really need to live there and preserve their reputation, in addition to looking to distance themselves from teenagers who are visible to be at the lowest. The teenagers at the lowest rung of the ladder really need to climb up the social ladder in order to become famous. When we examine this from the angle of cyberbullying, the warfare idea might say that warfare occurs among those social tiers. Teens will do what they want to do with a view to boost their reputation. Conflicts appear to stand up whilst reputation and strength are erratically dispensed among businesses or cliques Peer groups that may take the shape of cyberbullies attempt to suppress the

bad kids who may be at the bottom of the social ladder in order to maintain the status quo, essentially so that they can continue to live at the top.

Conceptual Framework
Cyberbullying

It is not always easy to define what constitutes an act of cyberbullying. According to Shariff (2008), cyberbullying is highly based on the views expressed by those who define it. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2014), cyberbullying is "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices." Hines (2011) argues that "physical bullying is an aggressive form of bullying". This is more violent and can take the form of hitting, punching, kicking, shoving, pinching, or any other behavior that can inflict physical pain on an individual.

Belsey (2008) defined cyberbullying as the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. It can be as simple as a continuous act of sending an email to someone who says they do not want to contact the sender anymore, by threatening, sexually commenting, using derogatory words, forum ridicule, and false statements may be posted as in intended act in order to humiliate the person. Olumide and Amodu (2015) investigated the prevalence and correlates of the perpetration of cyberbullying among in-school adolescents in Oyo State, Nigeria. It was discovered that about a quarter of students were perpetrators of cyberbullying, and the correlates of perpetration were history of cyber victimization and daily Internet access.

In a survey carried out by Monks and Wordlidge (2012), the authors investigated the emergence of cyberbullying among primary school students. The results indicated that cyberbullying was experienced by children within the age group of 7 - 11 years. It was observed that there were some overlaps between cyberbullying and traditional bullying; with children most likely to take the same role (i.e., traditional bully and cyberbully or traditional victim and cyber victim) across the two settings. The study also revealed that most commonly endorsed coping strategy for victims was to tell someone, which is in line with government guidance within schools.

Consequently, with the progress of technology and its ever-increasing age, bullies are discovering new ways to bully their victims. Cyberbullying, is

the practice of using contemporary tools like computers and the internet to harass and snoop on other kids. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) argue that computer system and internet enabled bullies to expand the reach of their hostility and threats beyond physical settings. Cyberbullying is similar to bullying in that it is intentional, repetitive, and intended to isolate victims. Shariff (2008) opine that in the act of cyberbullying, there are three key actors who play important roles, just as there are in regular bullying namely: the cyberbully, the cyberbullied, and the cyber bystander are their names.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative method was used because it provides a more in-dept view of the subject. The goal of taking a qualitative approach was to practically engage with people in order to directly understand their knowledge and feelings regarding cyberbullying and learn more about the subject. By carrying out the focus group interviews or conversations with semi-structured questions, the participants had the opportunity to elaborate and develop their responses, as well as discuss them with others inside the group.

Adopting the method of Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), face-to-face interviews were deployed in conjunction with audio recording so that the researcher could listen and active during the interview rather than writing since the recorded material was going to be converted to a written form afterwards. In collecting data for this paper, a focus group discussion was held with 30 participants, divided into 5 groups of 6 participants per group and labelled A1-A30. Each group discussion was carried out on different days. The participants were selected based on their knowledge of the new media and its devices. Below is a table containing information of the participants of the focus group discussion.

Table 1: General Information about the Participants

S/N	No. of Participants	Age group
1	30	17-29

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Figure 1 shows the general information about the participants; the total number of participants and their age range. Thirty (30) discussants within the age range of 17 and 29 years took part in the discussion.

Result and Analysis

Table 2:   **Socio-demographic**s of the Participants

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	18	60
Female	12	40
Total	**30**	**100**
Age (Years)		
17 – 20 years	9	30
21 – 25 years	15	50
26 – 29 years	6	20
Total	**30**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1 shows the analysis of the socio-demographics of the discussants. 18 participants representing 60% of the discussants are males while 12 females representing 40% of the participants partook in the discussion.

Majority (50%) of the discussants fall within the age range of 21 to 25 years while 30% of the participants that is, nine (9) discussants took part in the discussion. The least number of participants six (6) representing 20% of the participants are aged from 26 to 29 years.

The focus of analysis is on certain themes related to the focus group discussion and interview guide. Thematic analysis, as defined by Patton (2002), is the process of analyzing different situations in order to organize them into different themes. The focus group revealed that majority of the people were members of various social media sites who used them on a daily basis. Every day, several of the people spent a couple of hours on the internet.

Q1: Understanding of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is defined as the act of harassing another person over the internet. The definition of cyberbullying was a frequent topic of discussion among the people. Many of the groups agreed that traditional bullying and cyberbullying should be distinguished. In responding to this, Participant A2 stated:

> I believe cyberbullying occurs when you feel exploited or uneasy on the internet. Cyberbullying occurs when a group of individuals are mean to a specific person, such as when a group of people are disagreeing with one person.

Participant A3 described cyberbullying as an imbalance of power, similar to traditional face-to-face bullying. She stated that the individual has no power while being bullied, only the bullies do, and that those who are subjected to bullying must defend themselves and establish that they are victims of bullying.

Q2: Experience of cyberbullying by users of social media

During the cause of the discussion, the participants made it known that they had never experienced any form of cyberbullying but, have seen other people experience it. A few participants expressed the opinion that social media is highly superficial and causes tension and anxiety. They also went further to say that it is only superficial on platform such as Instagram popularly known as 'IG'. One of the participants went further to explain that Instagram is a social media application in which one can simply submit a photo or video, and other people who are linked on the Instagram can like the photo or video by pressing a button. As a result, the quest for the most likes on one's Instagram posts or videos becomes a competition that cause anxiety and tension.

Participant A3 affirms:

> The thing about Instagram photos and likes is that you only upload them when you're having fun or looking good. I believe it spreads jealousy because when someone has a lot of likes, you just sit there and think to yourself, wow, that person looks to be having so much fun while I'm at home bored. This can lead emotions of loneliness. You just put out pictures of your best side all of the time, which puts a lot of pressure on you.

Q3: Effects of cyberbullying on an individual (victim)

Cyberbullying has a number of negative consequences that extend into the real world. Participant A7 stated that "Depending on the intensity of the victim's impact, cyberbullying can lead to a variety of bad emotions such as melancholy, rage, frustration, or even suicidal thoughts." Participant A8 added, "It may harm the victim both physically and mentally, and it also scares away the confidence in them," such examples that could cause these are body shaming and blackmailing the victims.

Cyberbullying results in distrust among individuals on social networking sites, as a result, this creates a toxic and unhealthy virtual environment for all those present. Furthermore, other effects of cyberbullying may include threats from the bullies, assault or sexual exploitation.

Participant A26 stated that, the effects of cyberbullying are comparable to those of traditional bullying, however, unlike traditional bullying, which ends when school lets out, there is virtually no escape from online bullying. Regrettably, many children bully and abuse one another online and on social media platforms.

A participant, A22 mentioned that it has been observed that as a result of cyberbullying, the victims are left with no choice but to commit suicide, especially when the reputation and image of the victim has already been damaged or nudes' pictures have been released and spread throughout the internet. Mental health problems, elevated stress and anxiety, sadness, acting out violently, and low self-esteem are additional effects of cyberbullying. Even after the bullying has ended, cyberbullying can have long-lasting emotional impacts.

Q4: Why cyberbullying is becoming a major issue.

Because of technology improvements, increase in digital services and the growing number of people who use and appreciate internet interactively, cyberbullying is becoming a bigger problem.

Participant A14 said:

> The majority of individuals use their mobile devices to access the internet. They use this for a variety of reasons, including schoolwork, keeping in touch with friends, playing games, learning about celebrities, sharing information and creativity.

Because internet communication tools have become such an important part of people's lives, it is not surprising that some mischief makers have chosen to use them for harmful or malicious purpose. Teens are vulnerable to victimization because they are always linked to technology. Because some adults have been hesitant to respond to cyberbullying, many people believe that detecting, identifying cyberbullying and sanctioning it is impossible.

The ability to stay anonymous directly affects how individuals behave online. According to psychology, the anonymity offered by the internet enables people to act and speak things they otherwise would never do. Although this candor might be beneficial in some circumstances, it can also have negative psychological effects, especially on younger victims who are less able to understand the fears that underlie these actions. Cyberbullying has even caused sadness and suicide in some instances.

Q5: Areas where cyberbullying majorly occurs

In summary, most of the participants agreed that cyberbullying occurs in a variety of locations and media in cyberspace, and it is no surprise that it is most common in places where teenagers congregate. Many youths/wards/teenagers nowadays hangout in chat rooms where the majority of the harassment occurs. Many young people have recently been interested in social media platforms such as Instagram, snapchat, tiktok, twitter, and video trending platforms and streaming sites like YouTube. As a result of these trending behavior, there have been more complaints of cyberbullying in those settings.

Q6: Ways of detecting cyberbullying on social networking sites

Reynolds et al. (2011) has affirmed that machine learning is the most common method for detecting cyberbullying on social networking sites. Machine language is a field of study that gives computers the ability to learn without being explicitly programmed. Arthur Samuel (1959). The study presented by Arthur Samuel included methods to program a computer "to behave in a way which, if done by human beings or animals, would be described as involving the process of learning." This machine learning language can now be used to find more intricate and subtle patterns in the data as a result of advancement in computing and communications technologies. The majority of machine learning methods are supervised. Detecting cyberbullying primarily entails

distinguishing between bullying and non-bullying posts. The characteristics/features/nature of posts that are bullying are easily identified by their offensive and intimidating purposes which all the participants in this study agreed to, and which were also discussed earlier. However, the problem is typically handled as a binary classification task with the positive class. Agreeing with the general view of most of the participants, Participant A11 stated:

> Cyberbullying is not only rampant among children but adults too. A lot of people use social media today and for instance, twitter, through some certain algorithm detects the use of abusive, harsh and harassing language and prevents you from sending such information online to the public or targeted person.

Q7: Preventive measure against cyberbullying.

Social media sites should involve people in anti-bullying preventive activities, according to the strategy adopted by the anti-bullying organization Friends (2016). According to the interviews, people did not feel included in social preventive measures. The social media policies should be made available to address this issue and have direct impact on its users.

During the FGD, participant A11, observed that the crucial preventive step in stopping cyberbullying is through first teaching the school, community, and society members at large about accountable use of their gadgets at all times.

Participant A11 affirms that "People need to realize that everyone's style of bullying is incorrect and that individuals who have interaction in harassing or threatening behaviors might be subjected to discipline."

Participant A7 also went further to state that:

> CEOs of social media platforms should also suspend users that are involved in cyberbullying, and other users so as to stigmatize bullies and also stop all interactions and engagements in their pages and posts. It is critical to talk about concerns like proper internet communication in various sections of the general curriculum. These themes should of course be repeated in schools that use technology more often.

Q8: Preventive measures taken against cyberbullying

During another discussion with a participant, he said, the most important preventive measure that the school can do is to educate the entire student body on how to use their device responsibly at all times. Furthermore, Participant A7 stated that:

> People must understand that all forms of bullying are unacceptable, and that those who participate in harassing or threatening behavior will face consequences. As a result, it is critical to talk about concerns like proper internet communication in various sections of the general curriculum.

Q9: Obstacles in the fight to prevent cyberbullying

Today, there are two major obstacles that make it difficult to prevent cyberbullying. First, despite the fact that this problem has been for nearly two decades, some people still do not recognize the harm it does.

Participant A10 mentioned that "Some people try to dismiss or ignore cyberbullying because they are more concerned about more serious types of aggression. If cyberbullying is not addressed, it will simply get worse."

The other issue is determining who is willing to take the lead and accept responsibility for responding to inappropriate technological use.

Q10: Role and regulations of law enforcement agencies against cyberbullying

The National Assembly passed the Cybercrimes Acts 2015 (prohibition, prevention, and other measures) to address a wide range of technology-based dangers. The cybercrimes Act's goal is to create a uniform legal, regulatory, and institutional framework in Nigeria for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution, and punishment of cybercrimes. While the cybercrimes Act does not specifically mention it, it does penalize two types of cyberbullying: Cyberstalking and racist/xenophobic actions. Only cyber-stalking and racist/xenophobic remarks, which are two types of cyberbullying are included by the Cybercrimes Acts.

In addition to preventing and responding to cyberbullying law enforcement officials and bodies have a role. To begin with, they must be aware of constantly changing state and municipal regulations governing online activity and be equipped with the skills and expertise to intervene as needed.

The law only outlaws the dissemination of information that is excessively offensive, pornographic, indecent, obscene, or untrue, or that puts another person in danger of death, violence or physical injury. Other forms of cyberbullying, such as satire or trolling are not covered under these laws because they do not have to be untrue, offensive or create fear of death or violence.

Discussion

The goal of this investigation was to unveil the discussants' experience with cyberbullying. The specific objectives were to identify how social media users experience cyberbullying and the consequences, how cyberbullying can be detected on the social networking site and find out the methods or strategies that could be used in order to prevent cyberbullying in social networking sites.

The first objective of the study sought to reveal how social media users experienced cyberbullying and the consequences it has on them. The participants discussed their experiences with cyberbullying. It should be noted that understanding the origin of this phenomenon is imperative in order to fully appreciate the discussion. It became clear throughout the discussion that the conventions are within the context of the research. Social conventions are established or created within a society. According to the participants, none of them has had personal contact with cyberbullying, only observational encounters. When something happens repeatedly, it starts to become the norm; for instance, if insulting words surface frequently on social media, it becomes a norm, and people are compelled to pay attention and deal with it. Perhaps harsh comments have been accepted as a risk that all social media users confront, and cyberbullying has become normalized to the point that it no longer affects us. This is probably the angle from which Shariff (2008) sees it when he states that "cyberbullying is highly based on the views expressed by those who define it". Lifetime

The second objective was designed to find out how cyberbullying can be detected on the social networking sites. The outcome of the discussion shows that detecting cyberbullying entails distinguishing between bullying and nonbullying posts. The characteristics/features/nature of posts that are bullying are easily identified by their offensive and intimidating purposes which all the participants in this study agreed to, and which were also discussed earlier. Arguably, Reynolds et al. (2011) affirmed that machine

learning is the most common method for detecting cyberbullying on social networking sites. Children and young people who are subjected to harassment and other violations by other children and young people their age, such as threats, assault, and sexual exploitation, are considered abused or in danger of damage. According to conflict theory, social and economic structures serve as weapons in conflicts between groups or classes, preserving inequality and the power of ruling class. Is today's approach to cyberbullying too naive? Schools might report it if they changed their opinions and took it seriously. The pupils' attitudes would be transferred even in cases of cyberbullying. The findings also demonstrated that by combining a range of variables, cyberbullying in social media may be detected automatically.

The third objective of the study is to find out the methods or strategies that could be used in order to prevent cyberbullying in social networking sites. Considering the impacts of cyberbullying on a person as identified in this research; a victim of cyberbullying may experience fear, rage, depression, and suicide thoughts. It could also make people lose faith in themselves. The result shows that the most important preventive measure that the school can adopt is to educate the entire student body on how to use their device responsibly at all times. Many individuals nowadays do not consider cyberbullying to be a crime. However, the outcome of the discussion points out that people must understand that all forms of bullying are unacceptable, and that those who participate in harassing or threatening behavior will face consequences. As a result, it is critical to talk about concerns like proper internet communication in various sections of the general curriculum.

Body shaming and blackmail have become commonplace in our society as some get away with causing injury or nuisance to others. Hence, the need to identify the strategies that could be applied to prevent or minimize cyberbullying and its negative impacts or consequences. It has also been pointed out that the Cybercrimes Act (2015) only covers cyber-stalking and racist and xenophobic cyberbullying, which should not be the case; other forms of cybercrime should be addressed seriously by the government and punished by law.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that cyberbullying is a problem that arises as a by-product of modern technology, and with the fast

rise of technology, cyberbullying is becoming more prominent in social networking sites. Future research will mostly be focused on recollection enhancement because the reduction of manual social media monitoring efforts is the ultimate goal of autonomous cyberbullying detection. The aim is to alert a network's moderator to as many online threats as possible.

Initiatives to prevent cyberbullying and promote cyber-safety are only now being created and evaluated. Parents may get information about how to effectively protect their children from websites, tip sheets, and other internet resources. The paper did not state a particular way of detecting cyberbullying on social sites, rather people especially youths and children need to be thought the use of good internet language and need to know that any form of cyberbullying is punishable. Cyberbullying can be reduced or prevented if the right preventive measures are taken; most especially if the law enforcements agency put together a law or an Act that covers other forms of cyberbullying in Nigeria.

In view of the aforementioned, the study recommends among others that:

1. schools should inculcate the habit of teaching students the proper way of online communications;
2. more policies and regulations should be enacted by the government or relevant regulatory body to guide online interaction and prosecute cyberbullies;
3. parents should be more flexible with their children by establishing a friendly climate of communication between them; and
4. social media users should be more careful and mindful of the kind of private information they post online.

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