

Celebrity Bullying Among Young College Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

The expansion of social media has transformed the relationship between celebrities and audiences, enabling direct interaction while simultaneously increasing exposure to online hostility. Although cyberbullying research has grown significantly, limited attention has been given to celebrity-focused bullying within African contexts, particularly from the perspective of young adult audiences. Hence, this study examines celebrity cyberbullying among young college students in Nigeria, with emphasis on students' perceptions, motivations and interpretations of negative engagement directed at public figures. The study adopted a qualitative design and utilized in-depth interviews with forty purposively selected college students who are active social media users. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in participants' narratives. Findings indicate high levels of familiarity with and involvement in celebrity cyberbullying. Participants described trolling, abusive commentary and ridicule as common practices within their online interactions. Motivations identified include perceived inappropriate behavior by celebrities, desire for online attention, jealousy, boredom and the affordances of smartphones and internet connectivity. Many respondents framed their actions as moral correction, humor or entertainment rather than harassment, revealing definitional ambiguities surrounding celebrity cyberbullying. The study concludes that celebrity cyberbullying is embedded within youth digital culture in Nigeria and is sustained by social media affordances, normative audience practices and perceptions of celebrity responsibility. It recommends enhanced social media literacy, stronger platform regulation and responsible celebrity self-presentation as key strategies for mitigating the practice.

Keywords: celebrity cyberbullying, social media, Nigerian college students, digital culture, online harassment.

1. Introduction

The growth of social networking platforms has profoundly reshaped patterns of communication, self-expression and social interaction among young people worldwide. As of 2025, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X attract billions of active users globally, with young adults representing one of the most engaged demographic groups in online participatory cultures (Statista, 2025). Within this environment, the boundaries between audiences and public figures have become increasingly permeable, giving rise to new forms of engagement that blend admiration, critique and hostility.

One of the most significant consequences of this transformation has been the normalization of aggressive and harmful communication practices online which is termed cyberbullying. Essentially, cyberbullying has emerged as a central concern within scholarship on digital interaction as it refers broadly to the intentional and repeated use of digital communication tools to harass, threaten, humiliate or harm others (Bastiaensens et al., 2014). To Tanrikulu (2014) citing Aricak (2011), cyber bullying encompasses all actions that target an individual, a group, a particular person, or a legal personality and put them in risk, either technically or interpersonally. Similarly, Umamah, Septiatik, and Fikri (2023) citing Shin et al. (2015) referred to it as the act of mistreating or mocking someone online through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or mobile phones. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying transcends physical boundaries, operates continuously and enables perpetrators to act anonymously or semi-anonymously. Research has consistently shown that words transmitted through digital media can inflict significant psychological harm, often with enduring consequences for victims' emotional well-being and self-esteem (Brown, 2017). While early scholarship on cyberbullying focused predominantly on adolescents within school settings, more recent studies have extended attention to young adults, including college students, whose online activities are often intense and highly visible.

Within this expanding field, celebrity bullying has emerged as a distinct and underexplored phenomenon. According to Ouvrein et al. (2017), celebrity bullying refers to the sustained targeting of public figures by online users through abusive commentary, mockery, harassment and coordinated attacks. Social media has collapsed the traditional distance between celebrities and audiences, enabling direct interaction while simultaneously exposing public figures to relentless scrutiny. This dynamic has normalized practices such as negative celebrity critiquing, where audiences feel entitled to publicly evaluate and denigrate celebrities' appearance, lifestyle, moral choices or professional competence (Ouvrein et al., 2017). Although celebrities are often perceived as resilient due to their fame, wealth or influence, evidence suggests that they are not immune to the psychological and reputational harm caused by sustained online abuse.

Existing studies on cyberbullying against celebrities have largely focused on influencers and entertainers within Western or Asian contexts. Juditha (2021), for instance, documents patterns of cyberbullying directed at celebrities on Instagram, highlighting how anonymity and algorithmic amplification intensify hostile user engagement. Similarly, Rashid et al. (2022) demonstrate that social media influencers are frequently targeted precisely because of their visibility, success and perceived privilege. These findings challenge the assumption that celebrity status provides adequate protection against online harassment. Instead, fame often increases vulnerability by attracting both admiration and hostility from diverse audiences.

The role of bystanders is particularly central to this phenomenon as cyberbullying research increasingly recognizes that online harassment rarely occurs in isolation between perpetrator and victim. Instead, it unfolds within networked environments where audiences actively observe, endorse, ignore or challenge abusive behavior. Bastiaensens et al. (2014) demonstrate that bystanders' behavioral intentions are shaped by social norms, perceived responsibility and anticipated outcomes. In celebrity bullying contexts, college students often

occupy ambiguous positions as both fans and critics, making their responses especially complex. Brody and Vangelisti (2016) further argue that bystander intervention is influenced by emotional involvement and perceived severity of harm, suggesting that bullying directed at celebrities may be trivialized or justified due to assumptions about their social power.

Gendered dimensions also warrant consideration. Umamah, Septiatik and Fikri (2023) draw attention to the disproportionate targeting of females in cyberbullying contexts. This is a pattern echoed in celebrity studies where women are frequently criticized for appearance, morality and conformity to gender norms. Nigerian female celebrities often face intense scrutiny rooted in cultural expectations, religious values and patriarchal standards. Moreover, the globalization of celebrity culture through social media has facilitated the circulation of norms and practices across borders. Nigerian college students consume and interact with global celebrity content alongside local figures, potentially adopting transnational patterns of online behavior. Statista (2025) illustrates how dominant social networking platforms standardize modes of engagement, thereby shaping how bullying manifests across contexts. However, cultural specificities remain influential in determining what is considered acceptable or offensive (Domínguez-Hernández et al., 2018).

In the light of above gaps, the present study focuses on celebrity bullying among young college students in Nigeria, examining it as a socially embedded digital practice rather than an incidental form of online misbehavior. Essentially, the study seeks to foreground students' perceptions, interpretations and responses to celebrity bullying, with particular attention to how harm is constructed, justified or dismissed within online interactions. In other words, the current study addresses these gaps by systematically examining celebrity bullying among young college students in Nigeria, focusing on their perceptions, interpretations and engagement with bullying behaviors directed at public figures.

Celebrity bullying has become an increasingly visible outcome of contemporary social media engagement, manifesting through persistent negative commentary, ridicule, harassment and coordinated verbal attacks directed at public figures (Juditha, 2021). According to Domínguez-Hernández et al. (2018), within digital environments, celebrities are subjected to intense scrutiny that often transcends legitimate critique and evolves into sustained patterns of harmful interaction. Among young college students, whose social media use is both frequent and expressive, interactions with celebrity content often involve evaluative commentary that normalizes hostility as entertainment, accountability or humor. As a result, celebrity bullying has become embedded within everyday digital practices, raising concerns about how harm is produced, justified and reproduced within youth-driven online cultures.

Scholarly engagement with cyberbullying has expanded considerably over the past two decades, with substantial attention devoted to its forms, consequences and mechanisms. Studies have consistently documented the psychological and emotional harm associated with cyberbullying, emphasizing its capacity to inflict distress through repeated and visible online attacks (Brown, 2017). Research has also highlighted the structural features of digital platforms that facilitate cyberbullying, including anonymity, persistence and rapid content circulation (Dinakar et al., 2012). More recent scholarship has shifted attention toward audience roles and bystander behavior in cyberbullying contexts. Bastiaensens et al. (2014) demonstrate that bystanders play a critical role in either reinforcing or discouraging bullying behavior, with decisions shaped by social norms and perceived responsibility. Similarly, Brody and Vangelisti (2016) argue that emotional involvement and moral judgement significantly influence whether observers intervene or remain passive. These findings suggest that cyberbullying is sustained not only by perpetrators but also by broader patterns of audience engagement which is particularly relevant to celebrity-focused interactions.

Within celebrity studies, scholars have examined how negative commentary has become normalized within fan and audience cultures. Ouvrein, Vandebosch and De Backer (2017) identify negative celebrity critiquing as a socially accepted practice among young audiences, often framed as opinion-sharing rather than harassment. Juditha (2021) further illustrates how social media platforms such as Instagram enable the amplification of abusive discourse against celebrities through comment sections and algorithmic visibility. Research on influencers has reinforced these observations, with Rashid, et al. (2022) showing that visibility, success and perceived privilege frequently trigger cyberbullying, challenging assumptions that celebrity status mitigates vulnerability. In Nigeria, empirical study has focused predominantly on adolescents and peer-based cyberbullying. Okoiye, Anayochi and Onah (2015), for instance, examine the psychological well-being of in-school adolescents exposed to cyberbullying and established significant emotional consequences between their emotional wellbeing and exposure to cyber bullying.

While previous studies are valuable, several critical gaps are evident in the existing literature. First, the bulk of existing studies on celebrity bullying and cyberbullying more broadly are situated within Western or Asian contexts, with limited attention to African societies. Two, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research examining celebrity bullying from the perspective of young college students, despite their central role as active audiences and contributors to online discourse. Third, existing studies have largely treated celebrities as peripheral to cyberbullying research, focusing instead on peer victimization, thereby overlooking how power, visibility and cultural legitimacy shape perceptions of harm. Fourth, there is limited contextual analysis of celebrity bullying within Nigerian digital culture, where social media use is widespread and celebrity engagement is deeply embedded in youth social life. Fifth, definitional ambiguities surrounding cyberbullying remain underexplored in celebrity contexts, particularly regarding how young adults distinguish between critique, accountability and abuse (Mischel & Kitsantas, 2023). Additionally, gendered dimensions of celebrity bullying have not been sufficiently examined within Nigerian scholarship. Research indicates that women are disproportionately targeted in online harassment, often subjected to moral and appearance-based attacks (Umamah, Septiatik & Fikri, 2023). Yet little is known about how Nigerian college students interpret or reproduce these patterns when engaging with female celebrities online.

2. The method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how young college students in Nigeria perceive, interpret and engage in celebrity cyberbullying. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation involves subjective meanings, moral justifications and socially constructed understandings embedded within digital culture. The interpretivist orientation of the study enabled an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences and detailed explanations of their online behaviours. The population comprised undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions who are active users of social media platforms. Using purposive sampling, forty students who demonstrated regular engagement with celebrity content online were selected to participate in the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' understanding of celebrity cyberbullying, personal involvement or observation of such practices, motivations for engagement, perceptions of celebrity lifestyles and suggested solutions for reducing the practice. Interviews were conducted face-to-face within the university environments and lasted between forty-five minutes and 1 hour. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and participation was strictly voluntary. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of data.

The data were analysed using thematic and descriptive analysis. Transcripts were read repeatedly to identify recurring patterns, meanings and explanatory categories. Initial codes were generated inductively from participants' narratives and subsequently organised into broader themes that captured motivations, enabling factors and perceived remedies for celebrity cyberbullying. This systematic analytical process allowed the researchers to preserve the richness of participants' accounts while identifying dominant patterns across responses. Ethical principles guiding social research were strictly observed throughout the study, including confidentiality, voluntary participation and secure handling of data.

3. Results

The emergence of portable digital communication devices and the growing internet penetrations across the globe have encouraged an increasing level of participation in "automated social relationships" (Sun & Lau, 2013: 205) among adults and young people. We found that more than ninety-two percent of our participants (37/40) expressed deep involvement in celebrity trolling. For example, a sophomore female student of a privately funded university stated that: "sure, I have tried to bully a celebrity in the past. But I don't do it anymore."

3.1 Practicing celebrity cyberbullying

From the interview sections conducted, we found that most participants are knowledgeable about celebrity cyberbullying. More than 87% (35/40) participants indicated that they have been involved in some forms of celebrity cyberbullying. Nevertheless, five dominant themes emerged from the views of participants regarding involvements in cyberbullying including those factors that serve as pull and push for young people towards engagement in such phenomenon. The emerging themes from the study include: *Familiarity with Cyberbullying, Inappropriate Behavior, Desire for Online Attention, Boredom and Smartphone Preponderance*. From our analysis of participants comments and views, these themes become important in partial understanding of our participants' awareness of and engagement in celebrity cyberbullying. Majority of the study participants asserted their familiarity with the concept of cyberbullying describing it as an act of trolling celebrities on the social media platforms with negative comments. For example, a third-year male student's response to a question asking him to describe what he understands by celebrity cyberbullying goes thus: "yes, I am familiar with cyberbullying. I believe it means passing negative comments or abuse on a celeb's posts". (IDI/21years/Male). A female student offered a specific example of a time she got engaged in an online trolling of an influencer:

There was this one time when my elder sister experienced negative comments on her Tiktok account on a trivial matter. Though my sister decided not to reply the influencer's insults, but I did on her behalf.

When asked to expatiate on what happened, she said:

So, on that particular day, I checked my sister's page profile and I found the picture of the celebrity wearing old-fashioned clothes and bad makeup. So, I insulted her and even asked her if her parents were dead and had no one to advise her on her dress sense. (ID5/25/Female)

As far as celebrity trolling is concerned most young people in the study expressed adequate knowledge of this online practice and confirm that they have sufficient knowledge of the phenomenon. Yet, our findings suggest that not all of the participants are fully familiar with the issue. In fact, some expressed confusion showing that the phenomenon might not be comprehensible to all youth online due, perhaps, to the nomenclature given to the phenomenon or the manner of its occurrence. For instance, a final-year female student said: "I am not sure I

have been involved personally but it is a very common practices among colleagues. I don't know the practice as cyberbullying; I know it as online harassment" (IDI/23 years/Female). A sophomore male student shared this view:

Most people are aware of cyberbullying and may have witnessed it but they may not recognize it when they witness it due to different forms it takes. (IDI /21 years/Female)

Many participants ascribed their awareness of celebrity cyberbullying to the number of hours and efforts spent on social media platforms all days to check comments, posts, and socialize beyond the four walls of their classrooms. Nevertheless, and in keeping with the findings of Ouvrein et al. (2017), virtually all our participants believe that celebrities themselves have to be blamed for the ways they get trolled or bashed online. This may imply that a single explanatory variable cannot explain online celebrity bullying, instead, it is the case that diverse variables account for this phenomenon among the participants. Issues such as inappropriate behaviors, boredom, attention seeking, free access to online platforms and many other factors were preponderance in the comments of the participants. Most participants feel irritated about what they referred to as "the promotion of indecency by and the fake lifestyles" of the Nigerian celebrities. For example, a participant says:

Haaa! to me, what makes young people engage in celebrity cyberbullying is that some of us are online to correct some bad behaviors of our celebrities. But no matter how we talk, I am not sure they are ready to change. (ID13/21 years/female)

Celebrities, in the views of many of the participants, "ought to be purveyors and upholders of good moral conducts". Behaviors that appear outside the cultural mainstream seem to irritate and prompt quick-fire responses and provocative thoughts from followers and friends of the Nigerian celebrities on social media platforms. In addition, we found that all the youths that participated in the study expressed profound disgust at the "unrole-model-like" acts of celebrities and believe that many "celebrities are overreaching themselves. Hence, in the view of one of our participants, the youth engage their platforms to tell the "offensive' celebrity that what he/she were doing is not right". Citing a typical example of how perceived disapproving behavior serves as a motivation behind involvement in celebrity cyberbullying, a participant expressed that she engages in celebrity trolling in protest against what she tagged a "war on fellow woman" while another said it was done to condemn a gross miscount in the presence of a minor. Their words:

I was prompted to pass a negative comment on a celebrity's page because she was involved in snatching another person's husband and she was happy about it. So, I just felt like what she did was very bad because I don't feel a woman should do that to a woman like me and herself. (IDI/23yrs/Female)

The other participant says:

I was pushed to troll a celebrity online because she (the celebrity) posted a photography where she was half-naked with her boy-child of 3years online. I was like what is she trying to teach the innocent boy. (IDI/20yrs/Female)

In spite of the role of the individual celebrity in their trolling, all participants acknowledged the fact that other motivating factors behind celebrity cyber bullying by young people online include the desire to be known celebrities and other members of the online community. All the participants asserted that they engage in throwing jibes and insults at celebrities on social media platforms based on their desire to attract the attentions of certain celebrities they admire. Twisted as this may sound, a participant says thus: "Actually, some youths do seek attention of others on media. So, they always see that they comment on celebrity's pages" (IDI/21yrs/Male). This desire for attention on social media community also takes the form of feeling of jealousy towards the lifestyles of the celebrities. The feeling of jealousy, according to

most of the participants, comes as a result of self-awareness and measuring of oneself up by the lifestyles displayed by celebrities. Hence, the trolls and abuse/negative comments:

Celebrities always come online with trending items and conspicuous materials that most people cannot afford. This result into jealousy sometimes and causes people to make jest of them. (IDI/25yrs/Female)

Nevertheless, it was generally revealed that celebrities' lifestyles expose them to cyber bullying. Participants considered celebrities' "fake lifestyle" as abhorrent. Being a celebrity is made to appear connected to affluent life. Many celebrities on social media have a way of portraying the lives of rich and famous on their social media handles. This behavior appears to frustrate if not irritate most of the interviewees as many of them believe that they have no idea of what is real about their celebrities. Celebrities are believed to hide their real beings away from the glare of online communities.

Most celebrities don't have a luxury life. It is fake life they are living. Though, celebrities also deserve respect, but the way they carry themselves, if they are seen in real life, some of them have nothing. (ID4/21 years/Female)

The "fake lifestyles" being portrayed by celebrities on social media, according to the respondents, have a lot of implications on young people perceptions about life. Many celebrities are seen as role models to which many of their youthful fans wish and desire to emulate. Hence, interviewees note that apart from being a source of cyberbullying towards, the "way they carry themselves" online, celebrities' fake lifestyles lead young people to indulged in illicit acts in the name of copying their role models while others who could not cope have developed mental health problems. A male participant offers an insight to what youth think about celebrity lifestyles: "all these celebrities are misleading some of the youth, not all the youth, but most of the youth". Another young male student says:

Though, it is their lives, they can live it the way they want, but these lifestyles are disturbing many of us. (ID19/23 years/Male)

Yet, another says:

Some of the celebrities have led youths into depression and their lifestyles have lured some young people to get involved in illegal dealings. (ID13/21 years/Male)

Another emergent theme on the reason for engaging in celebrity cyber bullying is boredom. Some participants ascribed their involvement in celebrity cyber bullying to boredom and desire to enliven their bored emotions and catch fun in the process of chatting online and engaging with celebrities' comments, reactions and posts. "For me, I only troll celebrities for fun; this allows me to be relieved of boredom".

In addition, it was very common for our interviewees to note that their constant presence and engagements on social media through smartphones and availability of internet connectivity have offer them platforms to freely express opinions, troll, and even invade celebrities' privacy. They suggest that social media platforms are spaces where they often freely vent anger, opinions and thoughts away from the encumbrances of the society. For celebrities, therefore, social media spaces have become a double-edge sword. While the "free" space status appears to give the celebrities their fames and popularity as a result of the fact that majority of their artistic works and lifestyle are posted on social media platforms, it is also a space of challenges because of opportunities and affordance to do anything and everything with little or no restriction online. A participant offers this view: "Social media is where someone can pour out one's mind even to the president without fear". (IDI/24 years/Female)

3.2 Reducing celebrity cyber bullying among young people

Having understood the reasons young people in the study engage in and practices celebrity cyberbullying, we then sought to establish whether the interviewees thought this practice can be reduced to a barest minimum among young people. As our analysis would shortly reveal, three dominant themes: social media literacy; restriction to media use; and acting responsibly, emerged as the main antidote to the practice of celebrity cyberbullying in the views of our participants. Social Media Literacy: this theme pervades our participants views concerning possible solutions to curbing celebrity cyberbullying. Most participants thought education and proper awareness are key to social media users' reflexivity and that being aware of the consequences of what they do online would afford a more responsible online culture. The response of a male participants who appear conscious of the fact that young people need to be better educated captures the general views of most participants:

Many youths online need education. Not the type of educate we have in schools. Education about online behavior and a better socialization on the implications of their actions. (ID15/22 years/Male)

Social media literacy, beyond surfing the net, content sharing, and making comments on shared contents, is a task for school communities as a whole. Online behaviors have legal implications and young people have the right to know. Female participant advised that such awareness and education should spell out the rewards of maintaining responsible media culture while also teaching the youths the right channels to report bullying on the social media platforms.

A second emergent theme from the participants' views captures the need for social media regulation and monitoring. This they viewed as a very important mechanism if curbing celebrity cyberbullying among the youth is desired by the society. Nevertheless, government, parents and social media operators are jointly mentioned to be in a better stead to accomplish censorship of social media accounts and contents. One of the restrictions highlighted was to set a minimum age at which anyone can own a social media account in Nigeria. "The government should restrict some account online and they should know who can open account based on their ages as set" (IDI 18/22 years/Female). Another participant said: "social media operators should not tolerate bullying and anyone caught involving in it should be punished by blocking his/her account. Also, I believe there should minimum age for opening social media accounts. This should be restricted for some people based on their ages (ID14/19 years/Female). The last monitoring mechanism suggested by participants is for parents to have a complete censorship power over their children. It was viewed that unmonitored freedom by young people by parents leads the children to misbehave:

Parent should also be part; they should know the kind of children they will give phone too. (ID7/20 years/ Male)

This theme captures the suggestion on how to tackle celebrity cyberbullying by celebrities acting responsibly in their social media activities. As revealed, celebrities also need to recognize the impacts of their actions on the mental wellbeing of the youth. As such, they should portray and live a life worthy of emulation and full of virtues. This, according to the respondents, would give room to government and social media operators to appropriately take actions against online bullying towards celebrities. A participant's views summaries this: "Yes, it can be reduced if the celebrity caution themselves and act in a way that is good to the society" (IDI/19 years/Female).

4. Discussion of findings

The first research question examined the level of participants' involvement in celebrity cyberbullying and why. Findings revealed that majority of the participants are familiar with celebrity cyberbullying as it was identified as an act of trolling celebrities on the social media platforms with negative comments. Participants also gave personal examples of involvement in celebrity cyberbullying whether directly or indirectly. Furthermore, celebrity cyberbullying was ascribed to inappropriate behavior on the part of the celebrities, users' desire to gain online attention, boredom and the availability of smartphones for almost all the youth nowadays. This implies that celebrity cyber bullying is rampant among the youth nowadays with varied interests for the involvement. This finding aligns with the findings of Gaele, et al (2019) on people's awareness and involvement in celebrity cyberbullying. However, Rojek (2001) and Kowalski et al. (2014)'s findings that intense behavioral outcomes as well as alcohol and drug addiction is associated with cyberbullying, contradict the findings of this study. Specifically, in this study, addiction to alcohol or any other hard drugs, are not found as motivators for youth's involvement in celebrity cyberbullying. Furthermore, desire for online attention, as found as motivation for celebrity cyberbullying in this study, is also consistent with the findings of Festl and Qua (2013).

Research question two assessed the role of the internet, social media and smartphones in celebrity cyberbullying among the participants. Findings revealed that social media activities with smartphones via internet connectivity have made the social media space, a place for free airing of opinions and thoughts, both negative and positive. This gives the social media a double-edged sword status. As a double-edged platform, social media provide platforms for positive interaction (meeting people, friends and mentors) and negative interactions (cyberbullying). Then, from the findings, the preponderance of this cyberbullying on the social media, is ascribed to users' ability to be anonymous (not having their real identity revealed) on the platforms. It can be implied from the findings that social media assessed with smartphones via internet connectivity played a huge role in celebrity cyberbullying.

Research Question three evaluated respondents' views on how celebrity life styles lead to celebrity cyberbullying. Findings revealed that celebrity exposed themselves to cyber bullying through their fake lifestyles on the social media and the exposure of their personal and private issues on the social media platforms. As revealed, the celebrities' real-life appearance differs from their social media appearances. As such, an awareness of this contradiction spark reactions from social media users and sometimes lead to cyber bullying of a certain celebrities. This result indicated that celebrity lifestyles in term of living what is termed 'fake lives', nudity and publicizing private lives/affairs on social media platforms are factors of celebrity cyberbullying. This finding is in agreement with the findings of den Hamer, et al. (2014) and Meloy, et al. (2008). The former affirmed that people's exposure to negative news about celebrity lifestyles fueled cyberbullying while the latter revealed that negative behavior and lifestyles by celebrities may influence youth.

The last research question examined how celebrity cyberbullying can be reduced. Findings revealed three dominant themes, which are; social media literacy, restriction of media use and acting responsibly. For the social media literacy, it was revealed that youth needs education and orientation on the more responsible online culture to portray while restriction, as a mechanism, harped on the government, social media operators and parents' collective efforts to nib the menace of celebrity cyberbullying in the bud by setting limitations, guidelines and rules. Also, celebrities are advised to act responsibly in their activities and interactions on the social media in a way that will take the emotional and moral wellbeing of the youth into consideration. The celebrities and bloggers are also advised to stop internal bullying among themselves on the social media, as this can fan the embers of cyberbullying among their different fans' blocs. It can be implied from this finding that celebrity cyberbullying can be reduced if necessary measures are considered and implemented as expected. This finding is consistent with the study of Ouvren et

al. (2019) which found that giving social support and education to people can help reduce the spate of cyberbullying.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined celebrity bullying among young college students in Nigeria, foregrounding students' perceptions, motivations and interpretations of online hostility directed at public figures. Based on the findings, the study concludes that celebrity cyberbullying is neither incidental nor marginal; rather, it is deeply embedded within youth digital culture. A significant proportion of participants acknowledged active involvement in trolling or negative commentary, often framing such actions as moral correction, entertainment, attention-seeking or emotional release. The study equally demonstrates that celebrity bullying is shaped by multiple intersecting factors. First, many participants justified their actions as responses to perceived inappropriate or morally questionable behaviour by celebrities. Second, social media affordances, particularly anonymity, constant connectivity and smartphone accessibility, amplify opportunities for engagement in hostile commentary. Third, emotional triggers such as jealousy, boredom and frustration contribute to the reproduction of online aggression. Fourth, celebrity lifestyles, particularly perceptions of artificiality or moral deviance, were frequently cited as catalysts for bullying behaviour.

Importantly, the findings highlight a troubling normalisation of hostility within online youth culture. Many participants did not initially conceptualise their actions as cyberbullying but instead as critique, correction or humour. This definitional ambiguity underscores the need for clearer digital ethics frameworks within Nigerian contexts. The study further concludes that reducing celebrity cyberbullying requires a multi-layered approach. Social media literacy emerged as a central intervention strategy, with participants emphasising the importance of awareness regarding the psychological and legal implications of online behaviour. Institutional regulation, parental monitoring and platform accountability were also identified as necessary structural mechanisms. Additionally, participants suggested that celebrities themselves bear some responsibility in shaping online engagement through responsible self-presentation.

Premised on the findings, the study offers a multidimensional and collaborative approach that combines education, regulation, platform accountability and responsible digital citizenship to address celebrity cyberbullying among young college students in Nigeria. First, there is a pressing need to institutionalise comprehensive social media literacy programmes within tertiary institutions. Such programmes should go beyond basic digital skills and focus on ethical online conduct, the psychological consequences of cyberbullying, legal implications of online harassment and critical media engagement. Universities should integrate digital ethics modules into general studies curricula and organise workshops that promote reflexivity, empathy and responsible participation in online discourse. Also, students must be equipped to distinguish between constructive critique and harmful abuse, especially in celebrity contexts where hostility is often normalised as humour or moral correction.

Second, regulatory and monitoring mechanisms should be strengthened through collaborative efforts involving government agencies, social media platform operators and parents. Policymakers should develop clear frameworks addressing online harassment while safeguarding freedom of expression. Social media companies operating in Nigeria must enforce community guidelines consistently, implement effective reporting systems and deploy content moderation strategies that discourage coordinated trolling and abusive commentary. At the family level, parents and guardians should play a more active role in guiding young adults' digital behaviour through dialogue, supervision and value orientation rather than relying solely on punitive control. A balanced regulatory structure that combines education with accountability will be more sustainable than censorship alone.

Third, celebrities and digital influencers themselves should adopt more responsible online engagement strategies. Since participants in the study frequently justified bullying as a response to perceived inappropriate or misleading celebrity behaviour, public figures must recognise their influence within youth culture. Responsible self-presentation, avoidance of inflammatory content and constructive engagement with audiences can reduce antagonistic interactions. Additionally, celebrities and bloggers should refrain from public feuds and internal online hostility, as such behaviour often legitimises aggressive fan responses.

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