Discursive Strategies of Cyberbullying in Nigerian Online Space

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has emerged as a pervasive and significant social issue in online communities globally. And the Nigerian online space, where digital communication platforms are increasingly widespread, is no exception. This paper investigates the discursive strategies cyberbullies employ across diverse Nigerian online spaces in cyberbullying incidents to understand the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to engender online harassment and intimidation. The paper also examines how discourse strategies contribute to cyberbullying in Nigeria, the prevalent forms of cyberbullying in Nigerian online spaces, and how socio-cultural and political factors contribute to cyberbullying in the context of Nigeria. This research contributes not only to our understanding of the complex dynamics of cyberbullying as a global issue but also as a localised phenomenon that requires context-specific intervention strategies, with implications for developing effective methods for intervention, prevention and mitigation of cyberbullying in the Nigerian online space. The findings reveal that cyberbullies in online spaces in Nigeria deploy diverse discursive strategies such as insults, name-calling, sarcasm, gaslighting, ridicule, to achieve their goals and target victims. Additionally, the research highlights the role of sociocultural and political contexts in shaping the discourse of cyberbullying in Nigeria.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Discursive Strategies, Nigerian Online Space, Socio-cultural contexts, Platforms

Introduction

The increased connectivity experienced in the world today is premised on the advent of internet and social media. This emergence has not only revolutionised the way people communicate, interact, and share information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), but has equally fostered cyberbullying, a new form of harassment and intimidation. Cyberbullying is a form of bullying; bullying itself being an intentional aggressive, harmful, manipulative or negative behaviour intended to harm one. Cyberbullying refers to the use of technology to intimidate, harass, or threaten others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). It involves hurting a target through the use of information and communication technologies such as social websites, email, chat rooms, mobile phone texting, picture messages, instant messages, blogs, social media, internet forums and the likes, by posting disparaging comments, sending harassing, annoying, or frightening messages, posting humiliating pictures, sending intimidating or hostile messages and so on (Charisse Nixon, 2014; Olonode, 2022; Putri & Satvikadewi, 2017).

Cyberbullying cuts across different strata of the society and happens to people of all ages. Measures for intervention and protection of victims have been recommended by different scholars including, legal, moral, formal education, multi-stakeholder, psychological and media and information literacy models (Olonode, 2022). Cyberbullying is a prevalent phenomenon.

Several studies exist on the prevalence of cyberbullying across different regions of the world as instanced by Slonje and Frisen, 2012 (Sweden), Salmivalli & Pöyhönen, 2012 (Finland), Hinduja and Patchin, 2014 (America), and from Nigeria, we have studies such as Adesola Olumide, Patricia Adams & Olukemi Amodu (2015), Adomi, Eriki, Tiemo, and Akpojofor (2016), Olasanmi, Agbaje, and Adeyemi (2020). Additionally, a study by the Pew Research Center, 59% of teens in the United States have experienced online harassment (Anderson, 2018), and in a study by the Cyberbullying Research Center, 34% of Nigerian youth reported experiencing cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019).

Despite this growing prevalence, cyberbullying remains a poorly understood phenomenon in Nigeria. Although, there is a growing body of research on cyberbullying globally (Smith et al., 2018; Tokunaga, 2010), there is the need for more context-specific studies that examine the unique cultural, social, and linguistic factors that shape cyberbullying in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2020). One vital aspect of cyberbullying that requires further examination is the discursive strategies employed by cyberbullies. Discursive strategies denote the language and communication patterns used by people to achieve specific goals or effects (Fairclough, 2015). In the context of cyberbullying, discursive strategies may include the use of threats, insults, or intimidation to harass or silence victims (Hertz, Jelen & Wilfert 2017). Understanding the discursive strategies of cyberbullying is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it can provide insights into the motivations and intentions of cyberbullies, which can inform the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017). Secondly, it can help to identify the linguistic and cultural factors that contribute to cyberbullying, which can inform the development of culturally sensitive and effective anti-cyberbullying initiatives (Kowalski, Giumetti & Foo, 2014).

This study addresses the knowledge gap in research on cyberbullying in Nigeria by examining the discursive strategies of cyberbullying in Nigerian online space. Using a Content Analysis approach, this study will investigate the language and communication patterns used by cyberbullies in Nigeria, and explore the cultural, social, and linguistic factors that shape these patterns.

Literature Review
Cyberbullying is a pervasive problem in online communities around the world, with Nigeria being no exception. A foremost study on cyberbullying was conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2009), and since then, numerous studies have investigated the prevalence, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying (Kowalski, Giumetti and Foo, 2014; Smith et al., 2018). However, few studies have examined the discursive strategies employed by cyberbullies, particularly in the Nigerian context. A study by Hertz, Jelen & Wilfert (2017) examined the language and communication patterns used by cyberbullies in the United States. The study found that cyberbullies often resorted to insults, threats, and intimidation to harass and silence their victims. Similarly, a study by Tokunaga (2010) examined the discursive strategies employed by cyberbullies in a Japanese online community. The study found that cyberbullies often used sarcasm, ridicule, and humiliation to harass and intimidate their victims. Furthermore, Haider, Yasmin and Ashraf (2022) explored the language of cyberbullies among some university students in Pakistan on Facebook and Instagram to unveil how bullies

exploited fellow students for dominance and the results revealed that the bullies exploited their victims through the use of harsh, offensive, abusive, and target-specific words to achieve certain goals like blackmailing and inferiority complex. These studies focused on the interplay between language and cyberbullying, highlighting language resources used in harassing victims online. Hertz, Jelen & Wilfert, (2017) identified insults, threats and intimidation while Tokunaga (2010) found sarcasm, ridicule and humiliation and Haider, Yasmin and Ashraf (2022), highlighted harsh, offensive, abusive and target specific words.

In rather conflicting studies, Waldron (2014), Putri and Satvikadewi (2017) and Kowalski, Giumetti and Foo (2014) examine cyberbullying outside the confines of language. For instance, Waldron (2015) explored the use of cyberbullying to socially construct moral panic and the findings revealed that newspapers coverage of the phenomenon occasionally exaggerated the magnitude and severity of the problem, thus, misrepresenting, misinforming, and oversimplifying cyberbullying as a more complicated and under-understood subject. From the perspective of underlying triggers, Putri and Satvikadewi (2017) investigated cyberbullying in an LGBTQ's Instagram accounts in Indonesia and found that the logic of truth behind the specific cyberbullying investigated was a natural logic underlying the perpetrator's mindset as it had been institutionalised in their everyday life through education, religion, social life and state regulations. Then Kowalski, Giumetti and Foo (2014) and Hinduja and Patchin (2017) examined cyberbullying in relation to the role and impact of technology. While the study by Kowalski, Giumetti and Foo (2014) examined the role of technology in harassment and bullying, Hinduja and Patchin (2017) examined the impact of technology on cyberbullying. The study by Kowalski, Giumetti and Foo (2014) found that technology can facilitate harassment and bullying by providing perpetrators with anonymity and mobility, and Hinduja and Patchin (2017)'s study revealed that technology can intensify the harm caused by cyberbullying by allowing perpetrators to reach a wider audience and to harass their victims more easily.

In Nigeria, Eburuaja (2024) examined cyberbullying discursive structure in the online comments of fans in the 2024 AFCON final match in Ivory Coast and the study found that cyberbullying had the forms of insult, threat, accusation, name-calling, defamation, and denigration. Equally, Anyanwu and Udoh (2021) considered impoliteness as a cyberbullying phenomenon and the result indicate that certain linguistic forms highlighted bullying, which manifested significantly at the levels of grammar, syntax and semantics with evidence of power relations. In another study, Ogunlesi (2019) examined the experiences of Nigerian celebrities who had been victims of cyberbullying. The study found that cyberbullies often used insults, threats, and intimidation to harass and silence their victims. The studies by Eburuaja (2024) and Ogunlesi (2019) corroborate those of Hertz, Jelen & Wilfert (2017), Tokunaga (2010) and Haider, Yasmin and Ashraf (2022) outside Nigeria in their convergence on types language resources cyberbullies use.

Even though, there are several studies Nigeria on cyberbullying, most of these studies are outside the purview of cyberbullying language, investigating the prevalence, incidence, characteristics, causes, severity, implications, and remedy of cyberbullying, in addition to the experiences of victims of cyberbullying. For instance, Adebayo (2020) and Olumide, Adams & Amodu (2015) focused on the prevalence of cyberbullying. While Adebayo (2020) examined

the prevalence and characteristics of cyberbullying among Nigerian youth, Olumide, Adams & Amodu (2015) in addition to prevalence, focused on cyberbullying perpetration correlates. The study by Adebayo revealed that 34% of the research respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying while Olumide, Adams and Amodu (2015) discovered that 23.9% of the adolescent respondents had harassed others electronically, 39.8% victimised and 21.0% were both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying; and that student respondents that had been victims and those that had daily internet access have a higher chance of being perpetrators of cyberbullying.

In a dissimilar study, Akuneme (2023) explored literature on cyberbullying to synthesise varying perspectives on the concept, prevalence, outcomes and interventions of cyberbullying. The outcome indicates that even though, some Nigerian researchers have made worthy efforts in the investigation of cyberbullying, the author raises the concern that the operational definitions of cyberbullying may lead to the use of cyber aggression interchangeably with cyberbullying, and that in contrast to most countries, no intervention programme has been designed to address cyberbullying in Nigeria. Akeusola (2023) reviews incidence, forms, consequences, and approaches to promoting safer online environments in Nigeria. The findings revealed that cyberbullying exists in various forms such as outing, trickery, trolling, and verbal and visual/sexual cyberbullying with negative emotional and psychological consequences. Akeusola (2023)'s study aligns with Adebayo (2020) and Olumide, Adams and Amodu (2015) in their focus on cyberbullying incidence, severity, causes, remedies and prevalence while conflicting with Akuneme (2023)'s focus on cyberbullying literature.

This literature review has examined the existing research on cyberbullying, with a focus on the discursive strategies employed by cyberbullies in Nigerian online space. While there is a growing body of research on cyberbullying globally, and the reviewed studies have presented diverse perspectives on cyberbullying, including the language used, there is not only a dearth of studies on the language and strategies used in cyberbullying, the studies have also not examined the broader cultural and social factors that contribute to cyberbullying in Nigeria. There is therefore a need for more context-specific studies that examine the linguistic and the unique cultural, social and political factors that shape cyberbullying in Nigeria. This is the focus of the current research.

Method

This research used content analysis to examine the discursive strategies of cyberbullying in the Nigerian digital space. The data consisted of 5 comments each from Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Opera News and X (formerly Twitter), making a total of 25 comments. These comments were randomly and purposively selected from these platforms guided by relevance (posts and comments that were relevant to the topic of cyberbullying were selected), domain (posts and comments made on Nigerian platforms were selected) and study context (posts and comments that provided sufficient context for analysis were selected).

The data were first selected and copied from the online platforms. These were then categorised according to the platforms from which they were derived. Following this, the data were coded, followed by pattern identification and contextual analysis. The data were coded

using the coding scheme TS1-20; TS standing for the text samples used in the analysis. Following this, the coded data were then analysed to identify patterns of discursive strategies of cyberbullying. Finally, a contextual analysis of patterns and themes was conducted within the context of the online posts and comments to gain a deeper understanding of the discursive strategies, linguistic resources, cyberbullying forms and socio-cultural factors embedded in the data. The units of analysis included lexical items, phrases and sentences.

Results

This section presents the outcome of the study, highlighting the key trends and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the data. The results are subsequently discussed based on the forms of cyberbullying, discursive strategies, linguistic elements along with the social, cultural and political factors identified in the data.

Data presentation

The following tables present the data, identified forms of cyberbullying and language use, including underlying factors identified in the data.

Table 1: Text samples data from the X platform

S/N	X
TS1	Face the facts and live tribalism. Tribal he goat.
TS2	Ethnic warrior at work. Get life. Outside of Lagos and Oyo, which state is doing well in the South West?
TS3	Enpty vessel....Open seaports there and it's game over for Lagos
TS4	Southeast is nowhere to be found
TS5	Coalition is or everyone. Obi should do it himself and see. Idiots with fish brain

The above table contains a set of five text samples coded TS1 to TS5. These text samples are comments/posts derived from the online interactions of Nigerian users on the X platform. The language samples are short English sentences.

Table 2: Text samples data from Opera News platform

S/N	Opera News
TS6	why is it that all this News of killing maid is common in igbo land very wicked people if u can't take care of them why take them for the first place
TS7	I know no matter how hard we try mad man will surely find is way to comment, animal
TS8	Look at what this idiot is saying nobody is threatening you it's your conciense that is judging you
TS9	Who's this bingo to be compared with Queen May
TS10	The toddler will keep frustrating himself

Table 2 comprises five text samples derived from comments/posts of interactants on the Opera News platform, and these have been coded TS5 to TS10. The comments are in English. The Opera News platform is

Table 3: Text samples data from the TikTok platform

S/N	TikTok

TS11	Gen z parents nawa. ALLOW the child to grow please
TS12	what I see about you is this you too dey make yanga to man ladies what do you want now?
TS13	you are not sure of what you are looking for, you look like a born again child of God and you don't bother wheater your potential husband is a Moslem if only he's prayerful when bible says be not unequivocally yoke unbeliever You need proper counseling don't let pride of money deray you in life. It's well with you
TS14	Idris are you getting married to a man or woman?
TS15	Since she wanna be natural U for no add wig just pack her natural hair

Table 3 also consists of five sets of posts/comments derived from interactions between Nigerian users on TikTok. These have been labelled TS11 to TS15. The language samples present a mix of English and Nigerian pidgin English, with a mix formality and colloquialism.

Table 4: Text samples data from Facebook

S/N	Facebook
TS16	When it is a politician, EFCC will follow rules. But if it is a random average Nigerian, EFCC will burst into the person's house at midnight like armed robbers. It is one rule for politicians and another rule for Nigerians, A criminal lunatic agency
TS17	Why this song for ur mum who is just trying to help? you urself go and stay in the village and see let alone small child who will like to see and touch everything. abeg rest thank God say you even have a mother let alone helping you.i hate this kind of thing
TS18	hmmm the youths of this country has copied from their politicians that ritual is the only way out to make money as politics is the only way out for illiterates to make quick money
TS19	She was just an idiot, teachers are not trained to correct a child with such beating. A child could not write, simply hold on to is hand and show him how to write, he must surely be able to write after five attempts by holding is hand with smiles and encouragement
TS20	Madam to say you advertised the cream without opening your body I for like it but opening your body only 3kids and not that is smooth is mess. There are many women age 60 with 6 even 7 children that have smother body and Tommy more than that thing you opened publicly in the name of selling cream some of you are shaming your husband in public. So close it bcos the Tommy is streak

This table contains five posts/comments from Facebook interactions labelled TS16 to TS20. The samples in this set comprise comments/posts with long sentences and groups of sentences with a mix of English and Nigerian Pidgin English.

Table 5: Text samples data from YouTube

S/N	YouTube
TS21	Dangote a Fulani man could be that sharp to fool all Nigerians. What a pity
TS22	That's why you go fear women -The girl fit dey visit the guy -Make the guy never visit her b4 and mind you she use Maxwell lie so una no go question her
TS23	This is what happens when the church in Africa prioritises prosperity and replaces the gospel with motivational talks, focusing on earthly success rather than salvation and righteousness
TS24	Everyone in that room has committed similar heinous crime
TS25	The Pick meeeees are already begging to be picked. Shameless! Talking trash about Annie. She has bleached her brain not just her skin.

Table 5 contains five comments and posts derived from YouTube which also contain a mix of English and Nigerian Pidgin English, formality and informality.

Table 6: Key forms of cyberbullying in data

1	Name-calling
2	Harassment/Insulting
3	Personal attacks
4	Stereotyping
5	Mocking/Ridicule
6	Dehumanisation/Condescension/Belittling
7	Exclusion/Marginalisation – religious, ethnic/tribal
8	Hate speech/Scapegoating
9	Sexism/Objectification/Homophobic/heteronormative bullying

Table 6 presents key types of cyberbullying identified in the data. The table contains nine forms of cyberbullying, including name-calling, harassment, insulting, personal attacks, stereotyping, mocking, dehumanisation, exclusion, hate speech and sexism found in the data.

Table 7: Key Discursive strategies/language types in data

1	Judgemental/Accusatory language
2	Belittling tone/demeaning/dehumanisation language
3	Shaming language- body-shaming, parent-shaming
4	Objectification tone
6	Sexist/misogynistic language
7	Criticism and insult
8	Use of slurs, epithets, labels etc.
9	Use of stereotyping/generalising language
10	Flaming

This table presents 10 key discursive strategies and language types that emerged from the data. These language elements include language use that accuse, demean, shame, objectify, insult, and criticise targets. In addition, the table also indicate the use of negative labels, flaming and stereotyping language.

Table 8: Key contextual factors underlying cyberbullying discourse in the data

1	Social factionalism -tribalism/ethnicity/regionalism/ethnic profiling
2	Negative attitude/wrong mindset
3	Current social-cultural/societal issues
4	Cultural norms/beliefs/expectations
5	Religious beliefs/expectations
6	Governance issues

Table 8 highlights six key socio-cultural and political factors that shape the discourse of cyberbullying in Nigerian online spaces that were identified in the data.

Discussion
Cyberbullying Forms and Discursive strategies
This study has been guided by the four objectives of identifying the forms of cyberbullying, discursive strategies and linguistic resources in the data including the social, cultural and

political factors underlying cyberbullying language use. The text samples (henceforth TS) contained diverse forms of cyberbullying and these included name-calling, harassment, mocking/ridicule, personal attacks, stereotyping, dehumanisation, condescension, belittling, exclusion/marginalisation, sexism, insulting, ethnic, religious, hate speech, scapegoating, objectification etc. Most of the online commenters deployed name-calling as a strategy to bully targets. This is evidenced in lexical items such as *Tribal he goat*, *Ethnic warrior*, i*diot*, *mad man*, *animal*, *wicked people*, e*npty vessel (i.e.* empty vessel), *bingo*, *toddler*, *Pick meeeees* (i.e. pick me). Name-calling is the use of slurs, labels, insults and epithets on others.

The commenters in TS 1-3, 5, 7, 8-10 and 25 deployed these lexical items above to bully their targets. For example, the tribalistic slur, *tribal he goat* is not only derogatory, but also dehumanising as the referent is implied to be primitive, ignorant and stupid. In addition, the overall tone of the language is aggressive and confrontational as the speaker seems to have the intent of intimidating and belittling the target. Calling one an *idiot*, a *bingo* or an *animal* for example, is striping that person of his or her humanity, thus reducing the person to ordinary beasts and objects. Also, the use of the word, *toddler* is a form of infantilisation and belittles the target's maturity, actions, intelligence and opinion. This means that the target of the language is not capable of rational thought and action. Even labelling someone an empty vessel reduces such a person to mere objects for ridicule, implying the person lacks weight, substance, thoughts and feelings, with nothing to offer. The word, *Ethnic warrior* is dismissive, and implies that the person's argument or opinion is uninformed, biased and predictable. These name-calling elements are linguistic elements that are intentionally hurtful, demeaning, belittling, and negative, highlighting a flaming form of discursive strategy that involves posting hostile, insulting and aggressive messages to annoy targets. This phenomenon was common in the data.

Furthermore, personal attack was another form of cyberbullying found in the data as instanced by TS 5, 7-8, 12, 17, 24, and 25. Personal attacks are forms of criticism that target the character, personal qualities and personality of the person in question while derailing from the ongoing issue. The statement, *She has bleached her brain not just her skin* in TS 25 is a personal attack showing an insult to the target's appearance and intelligence. Referencing the target's skin tone is hurtful and even racist, implying that the skin tone is not natural. Alluding to the brain also insults the target's intelligence, thus implying intellectual inferiority. The commentator has deployed a damaging metaphorical extension by extending the semantic content of the word *bleach* from its normal usage with skin to usage with the brain. The commenter also used denigration as the comment in question denies the self-worth and intelligence of the target and presents a rather derogatory and demeaning image. The language is also dehumanising as the writer has simply reduced the person's worth to their physical appearance. TS5 is another example of direct personal attack.

The statement, *Obi should do it himself and see. Idiots with fish brain* uses the strategy of direct personal attack in the elements *idiots*, *fish brain*, which are forms of insulting, belittling and demeaning construction. the language is dehumanising, so provocative, condescending and disdainful. In addition, the writer, apart from throwing a provocative challenge in *Obi should do it himself* uses a superiority tone that implies he is more knowledgeable and experienced, thus conveying disdain and disrespect. Further, personal

attacks also exhibited as aggressive, confrontational and accusatory tone, thus creating an undertone of hostility as we find in TS7, 8 and other text samples in this category. Instead of focusing on the immediate matter, the writers of the texts focus on insulting their target, dismissing the feelings or concerns of the other persons. A classic example is in the use of the word *conciense* (conscience), whereby there is a seeming shift from the target's actions to his internal state. This is also gaslighting, so that the target is denied of his emotional experience which is attributed to his 'conscience judging' him. A milder form of personal attack is found in TS 17 where the writer rebukes the addressee for being ungrateful and unappreciative *... you urself go and stay in the village...thank God say you even have a mother let alone helping you.i hate this kind of thing*. This attack is actualised via an accusatory tone that would place the addressee in an emotional state of guilt as the commenter leaves the issue being discussed to confront the target directly.

Stereotyping, another type of cyberbullying in the data involves making generalisations and assumptions on account of inaccurate or limited information. TS 2, 6, 21 and 23 reflect stereotyping. The choice of language in TS2 highlight pejorative labelling used to condemn the target's perceived ethnic bias; an imperative tone that expresses frustration or annoyance; a rhetorical question that challenges the receiver's ethnic sentiments and a sarcastic tone indicating that the target's ethnic sentiments are foolish. Further embedded discursive strategies are ethnic labelling with the use of *ethnic warrior* perpetuating a negative stereotype of individuals that express strong ethnic identity and sentiment; and the use of words like *Lagos* and *Oyo,* and the rhetorical question are a reflection of regional generalisation indicating that states outside these two are not viable, thus oversimplifying and making generalisation about regional development and challenging the person's ethnic views. Further, the phrase, *Get life* is a way of shaming the person for holding views that are perceived to be outdated or foolish. So, there is implied superiority in the tone of the speaker, suggesting that the speaker possesses more informed views than the addressee, and this also reinforces cultural and intellectual superiority. TS6 is a hate speech as it promotes hostility and bias against the Igbo people, demonstrating the lack of tolerance and understanding for the Igbo people. This is a form of ethnic negative stereotyping that associates the Igbo people with wickedness and brutality. The writer generalises by making a sweeping remark about an entire ethnic group based on an isolated incident, thus indicating a regional bias and prejudice.

The structure also contains emotive elements such as *killing*, *wickedness, and can't take,* which evoke strong emotions. These convey a sense of condemnation and outrage. The pejorative phrase *Igbo ... very wicked* is also derogatory, discriminatory and inflammatory with a tint of underlying accusatory tone implying that Igbo people are responsible for the mistreatment of maids. Another form of stereotyping is highlighted in TS24 where the writer uses accusation and generalisation in the comment *Everyone in that room has committed similar heinous crime*, in reference to the dismissal of an erring officer from the Nigerian Police Force. This generalisation reflects a general view of the Nigerian Police Force as a corrupt agency of corrupt individuals, without exception. TS23 reflects religious stereotyping a sweeping generalisation is made of the church in Africa. The writer criticises the African church that *prioritises prosperity and replaces the gospel with motivational talks,* thus projecting the image of materialism, lack of focus and abandoning their primary duty of preaching salvation

and righteousness. Stereotyping can perpetuate prejudice and negative attitude, induce harm or contribute to a hostile environment.

Additionally cyberbullying also manifested as mocking/ridiculing. This is another type of harassment whereby an individual is subjected to mockery, ridicule or humiliation via teasing, taunts, sarcasm, irony, embarrassing content etc. For example, TS 16 uses a sarcastic tone to mock EFCC, implying that the organisation is not doing its job properly. The ironic phrase *criminal lunatic agency* is used to accuse EFCC of being criminal while supposedly fighting crime. The entire statement indicates an exaggeration of EFCC's actions to make them look ridiculous. The language also highlights harassment, defamation and hate speech. Not only is the language aggressive and accusatory, targeting EFCC, a particular organisation and implying they are corrupt and abusive, the statement is a serious accusation of EFCC as a lunatic agency, aiming at damaging their reputation. The tone and language therefore promote hatred and intolerance against EFCC, and by extension, the government. Included also in the language use are emotive terms like *burst into*, *armed robbers*, *criminal* and *lunatic* that evoke a sense of condemnation and strong emotions. TS15 also exhibits mockery through the use of colloquialism, sarcasm and wordplay. Such words as *wanna*, and *just pack* are informal and give the statement a casual tone. Then the speaker also deploys sarcasm and a mocking tone through the structure, *since she wanna be natural* to question and mock the person's decision to wear a wig instead of her natural hair.

TS 18 also has an underlying mocking tone of ridiculing Nigerian youth for supposedly coping the behaviour of Nigerian politicians. The use of *hummmm* at the beginning of the statement creates a sarcastic tone that suggests that the speaker is ridiculing the situation. Although this structure presents a mockery of the situation, the use of pejorative forms like *illiterates* and *ritual* portray negative connotations that suggest that Nigerian youth and politicians engage in unacceptable behaviour. Also embedded in the construction are stereotyping and insults whereby Nigerian politicians are stereotypically presented as engaging in ritualistic practices for financial gains and the youth are following suit. This is a form of generalisation about Nigerian youth and politicians because this may not be the case for all youth and politicians in Nigeria. It is therefore insulting as Nigerian politicians are considered illiterates who can only make money through politics. While the sentence is a critique of societal issues, the mocking tone, stereotyping and insults present it as a type of bullying.

TS25, another form of mocking manifests through a mocking tone, shaming language, condescending tone and judgemental approach. The entire structure has an underlying mockery tone, ridiculing the persons being described. The use of *pick meeeees* is used to describe those individuals perceived as overly eager to be considered or gain approval. The condescending use of *are already begging* is suggestive that the speaker sees the individuals being described as pathetic. Then the statement uses shaming language to highlight that the individuals should be ashamed of their behaviour. The case of mockery in TS11 is achieved through parent-shaming, age-based discrimination and blaming. The targeted parent is shamed and blamed for his actions and decision in not allowing the child to grow and considered to be out of touch with the child's generation through the phrase *Gen z parents*. As a mocking form, the commentator uses contemptuous and ridiculing language to humiliate the parent, considered clueless and overly controlling.

Sexism equally displays as a type of cyberbullying identified in the data. TS 12-14, 20 and 22 indicate cases of sexism in the data. Sexism cyberbullying involves bullying or harassing targets online based on their sex, gender, perceived gender identity, physical appearance and so on. Sexism was achieved by sexist comments (that demean, stereotype or belittle targets based on their gender), objectification (with comments that reduce individuals to their physical appearance), misogyny (content that promote hatred/violence against women or girls), transphobic/homophobic comments (that stereotype individuals based on perceived or actual gender identity or orientation) and body shaming in the data. The comment in TS12 perpetuates a stereotype about the interest of women. Through an accusatory tone and confrontational intent, the woman's actions and motives are questioned, thus implying wrong doing. The use of the condescending and dismissive tone, blame shifting and objectification are all pointers to sexism. Thus, the comment reinforces harmful sexist attitude and perpetuate objectification and stereotyping of women. Similarly, TS22 also highlights a sexist and negative attitude against women through the use of *That's why you go fear women …she use Maxwell lie so una no go question her*, thus implying that the woman is not trustworthy and thus should not be trusted.

In TS 20, the writer uses body shaming, sexual harassment and personal attack. The commenter criticises the physical appearance of the target by referring to her body after childbirth and unfavourably comparing her to others, thus highlighting that the target is inadequate and inferior to others. The speaker launches a personal attack on the target with a focus on her physical appearance and supposed shortcomings. Th language is flaming because it is hostile and insulting, with derogatory and objectifying language like *that thing you opened publicly*, a sarcastic and mocking undertone reflected in the choice of *you are proud to hope your Tommy* (tummy) *and not that smooth is mess*. The statement also highlights patriarchal undertones and societal expectations implying that the woman is to prioritise her husband's feelings, reputations over her own feelings and autonomy and societies' expectations about women's body and modesty. Further, TS14 is a stereotype suggesting that the target's marital choice is noteworthy and unusual. The statement is not only an invasion of privacy, it contains an undertone of heteronormativity, perpetuates exclusivity and gender stereotypes. Implying therefore, that the marriage contract is a must between a male and a female, that the LGBT, non-binary and non-traditional relationship options are excluded from traditional relationships, thus reinforcing traditional roles and expectations. It is also homophobic as it shows discriminatory attitude and stereotypes hinged on gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, the data also contained exclusion/marginalisation bullying and these exhibited as regional, ethnic and religious bullying as evidenced in TS 2, 4, 6 and 21. Ethnic bullying is targeting persons based on their ethnicity, geographical region or nationality while religious bullying has to do with targeting individuals based on their religious beliefs, practices or affiliations. For instance, TS 13 is a form of religious bullying perpetrated via a judgemental language tone, moralising, patronising and advice-giving. The commenter deploys biblical elements like *born again child of God*, and *bible says* to create a sense of moral authority. In addition, juxtaposing blessing and cursing in the choice of *it is well with you*, even though appearing as a blessing, implies the speaker's disapproval may have negative consequences. In all, the language is exclusionary as the speaker uses religious teachings to judge and exclude the target's choices, so that they are not part of those who share the same religious beliefs. In

addition, the language use also suggests social exclusion in that the tone and linguistic units imply that the addressee does not deserve respect because of their choice. There was also ethnic exclusion and marginalisation. TS 2, 4, 6 and 21 indicate regional and ethnic bullying. The case of TS4, *Southeast is nowhere to be found*, for instance uses exclusionary language that implies that the Southeast is insignificant, invisible and irrelevant. The wordings are negative and omissive. This is some sort of regional marginalisation. The data coded TS2, 6 and 21, though have been categorised under other forms of bullying are classic examples of ethnic and regional bullying identified in the data (Fulani, Lagos, Oyo etc.) as the language use targeted people from certain ethnic groups and region and making generalisations based on their ethnicity.

Cyberbullying Discourse and Contexts
The analysis of cyberbullying discourse in this study unveils a complex interaction of different factors that shape cyberbullying language in Nigeria. This section discusses the various contexts identified in the data that influence the discourse of cyberbullying, including social factionalism, cultural, social, political, attitudinal, governance and technological factors. By examining these contexts, Nigerians can better understand the dynamics of cyberbullying, identify potential areas for intervention and inform strategies for promoting a safer and more respectful online environment. The findings from the data indicate that social factionalism is a key factor that underscores the discourse of cyberbullying in Nigeria. Social factionalism stresses the fragmentation of society into competing groups according to diverse identities and affiliations. This is reflected in the data as tribalism, ethnicity, regionalism and elitism, regional competition, ethnic profiling, victim-blaming and regional stereotyping. These cases are indicated in TS 1, 2, 3, 4,6 and 21 where various ethnic/regional references are made. Additionally, current societal issues also shape cyberbullying discourse and these were revealed through ongoing social issues around Nigeria celebrities/influencers, and the educational system as instanced by TS9,10, 19 and 25. These text samples contain insulting comments about Nigerian celebrities and the educational system.

Further, cultural/societal norms, beliefs and expectations in Nigeria equally contribute to shaping the comments and posts of cyberbullying. For example, these were identified in the data through posts on marriage, respect for elders and social hierarchy, raising children, modesty and decency. Religionism also contributes to cyberbullying as commentators raised issues around religion as evidenced in TS 13 and 21 where the comments are centered around religion and the attitude of persons and the church. Governance issues is also another factor behind cyberbullying in Nigeria. This manifests as a social critique on institutional bias/prejudice, inequality in the treatment of citizens, and perceived moral decadence in Nigerian society, linked to corruption and the influence of politicians as we find in TS 5, 8, 16, 18, and 24. Additionally, attitudinal issue is another key context around cyberbullying in Nigeria. Some commenters have a negative attitude and wrong mindset, affecting how they talk to/about people. In this regard, we find elements of rudeness, insults, belittling language, mockery, misogynistic attitudes, victim-blaming and thoughtlessness in posts, irrespective of the gravity of the situation being discussed. Technological factors such as online anonymity is also a major factor behind cyberbullying. Commenters say things to/about big shots in the

society without bothering about being caught because of the element of anonymity found in the cyberspace.

Conclusion

This study examined the discourse of cyberbullying within the Nigerian online space, shedding light on the cyberbullying forms, discursive strategies and contextual factors shaping Nigerian online space cyberbullying discourse. The findings of the research reveal that cyberbullying manifests as name-calling, personal attacks, stereotyping, ridicule, dehumanisation, exclusion, hate speech and sexism within the Nigerian online space. The results also highlight the use of certain discursive strategies and language resources such as accusations, insults, shaming, flaming, criticisms, objectification tone, slurs, labels, and misogynistic, generalising, and demeaning linguistic resources. The study's results also emphasise the importance of understanding context in cyberbullying, particularly in Nigeria where sociocultural and political factors such as ethnicity, religionism, negative attitude and mindset, governance issues, cultural norms and so on, contribute to the perpetuation of harmful online behaviours.

This study ultimately aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of cyberbullying in the Nigerian online space, with implications for policy, practice and future research. As the internet continues to play an increasingly prominent role in Nigerian society, it is crucial that Nigerians prioritise efforts to create a safer and more inclusive online environment. By examining the discursive strategies of cyberbullying, we can better understand the language mechanisms that perpetrators leverage to exert power and control over targets, and through which harm is perpetrated online in order to develop more effective strategies for prevention and targeted interventions.

This research demonstrates the need for more discourse approaches to understanding cyberbullying and recommends future research aimed at addressing the knowledge gap in this study by examining the discursive strategies employed by cyberbullies in Nigerian online space, the intersections of language, power and identity in Nigerian online interactions, the relationship between cyberbullying language and mental health, as well as the role of social media platforms in perpetuating or preventing cyberbullying, and the broader cultural and social factors that contribute to cyberbullying in Nigeria.

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