



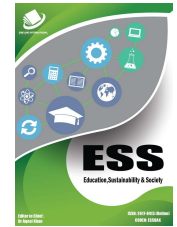
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# FREQUENT SOCIAL MEDIA USE AS PREDICTOR OF CYBERBULLYING AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

## ABSTRACT

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The manifestations of electronic bullying behaviours among university students is generating concerns among scholars and various stakeholders in recent times. This category of bullying staged through the cyberspace could largely be aided by undergraduates' frequent use of the social media platforms. This study examined frequency of social media use in predicting cyberbullying among undergraduates, with samples drawn from three purposively selected Universities in Kwara State, Nigeria. Two research questions were raised, while three null hypotheses generated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The study adopted a quantitative method of research and a survey design for the field work. A total of 200 undergraduates drawn from the three purposively selected universities participated in the study. Researchers-designed questionnaire titled "Frequent Social Media Engagement and Cyberbullying Questionnaire (FSMECQ)" was the instrument used to elicit information from the selected respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The findings revealed that respondents subscribed to the fact that frequent social media engagement is a predictor of cyberbullying behaviours among university undergraduates. Respondents did not differ significantly in their responses to each item and it also indicated that they appreciated an effectively staged counselling intervention as a veritable strategy for reducing incidence of cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. Among recommendations proffered were; full integration of counselling services, with particular emphasis on concentration on electronic bullying which is fast replacing the traditional type of bullying, thus, creating serious emotional torture for youngsters than the physical type of bullying.

## KEYWORDS

social media, cyberbullying, university undergraduates

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The physical world is fast turning to a virtual entity occasioned by the changes in technological know-how that has subsequently given rise to the use of the internet and different social media platforms by different users in the cyberspace. This has largely changed the way youths and adolescents make friends as well as meet new individuals. However, these changes have also changed the way people assault others, especially, those who seem to be less physically powerful than them; thus, the obvious changes in the way individuals bully others. This is largely due to the frequent visits to social media platforms by university undergraduates [1].

The advancement of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought a new dimension to the phenomenon of bullying. Thus, professional counsellors are presented with new breeds of clients to attend to in contemporary times. Bullying has evolved in another trend with internet use, as well as the different social media platforms and chat rooms. Social media engagement has continued to put youngsters more in their own self-designed world than in the established norms, tradition and custom of the society [2]. Youngsters are however not to blame as their generation has been classified as the net or Z generation that does its things basically through the cyberspace. This does not however guarantee the use of the

social media platforms through the cyberspace as an instrument for destroying or assaulting other individuals' reputations and personalities.

A seemingly neglected area of study with dearth of researchers' concentration in the past decade is the increasing rate of technology-induced harassments, which include embarrassing experiences, inconvenient jesting through unhealthy pictorial or symbolic description of personalities, mean text messages: resulting to serious emotional trauma, psychological torture, self-inflicted isolation due to group rejection, and even suicidal thoughts and performance of same; all as a result of deliberate attempts by youngsters to use sophisticated information and communication technologies to cause harms, pains, and long-term injury to others, without physically meeting them. This situation is no other than the menace called social media bullying, which in this study is regarded as cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying affects the society at large; it can cause irreparable psychological damage to people, ranging from low self-esteem, depression, feelings of inadequacies, poor self-concept as well as suicide ideation. The broad term of bullying is seen as a global and widespread phenomenon occurring in different social contexts: school yard, workplace, and more recently, technology (cyber).

It is worthy of note that the phenomenon called cyberbullying does not have regard for the status, age, social strata cum class or group to which an individual belongs. In recent times, the very last born of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America was reported to have been electronically bullied by a journalist during the January 21, 2017 inauguration ceremony of his father, Trump as the U.S. president. Reports from various news outlets across the globe indicate that electronic bullying is on the rise, with its attendant consequences. For instance, *the Punch news* of Sunday, June 4, 2017 reports that a 16-year old Italian adolescent murdered his 19-year old friend because the latter liked the former's girlfriend's Facebook photo. This was initially a case of cyberbullying, metamorphosing to loss of life of the innocent teenager. Another 12-year old British girl resorted to suicide when her Facebook friends kept mocking her physical appearance in September 2012 (The CBS News, September 14, 2013 at 22:24hours).

A number of ways exist by which youngsters electronically assault and cause other children/youths serious emotional trauma, which often breeds different ideations in victims, ranging from suicide, isolation, aggression towards others in the environment and negative orientations about life. This corroborates the earlier findings of Topcu, Yildirim and Erdur-Baker (2013) which indicates that the new millennium technology has become an everyday part of human life, thus, the increasing sophistication of technology has continued to change the way adolescents bully each other; thus, making cyberbullying become the newest form of bullying, beyond physical, verbal, and relational types of bullying.

Several studies have recently been conducted on bullying and internet addiction, leading to illegal and proscribed online activities. According to a researcher, the advancement of information and communications technology often results in early adoption, followed by concern over a digital divide, which is succeeded by mass adoption and ultimately, though inevitably, abuse and misuse of that platform [3,4]. The most recent of these technologies is social networking services. The early adopters used Friendster and MySpace, and the masses now use Facebook and Twitter. The abuse of people on these platforms was called Cyberbullying in the case of the first two in the 2000s, and Internet trolling in the case of the second two in the 2010s. However, in Nigeria and Kwara State in particular, little has been done in the area of frequent social media engagement playing a predictive role that is suggestive of tendencies for cyberbullying activities by university undergraduates. Hence, the reason for this study. Thus, the present study is specifically designed to assess the frequency with which university undergraduates engage in social media activities and how this could predict the tendencies for cyberbullying in Kwara State, Nigeria.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Cyberbullying is an act of willfully harassing other individuals in the cyberspace without the identity of the abuser revealed to the person being abused. This new style of assault has gained considerable ground in recent times, particularly amongst teenagers, adolescents and university undergraduates. Several cases of social media assaults have been reported to have caused untold psychological breakdowns to people of both genders, particularly among youth of school-going age. Corroborating this, a researcher found that youngsters engage in social media use almost all the time within 24 hours. As the use of social media increases geometrically, the susceptibility of young university undergraduates to online bullying could become high. Thus, social media bullying is fast replacing the already well-known type of bullying called physical bullying, like face-to-face encounters, physical combats, and exchange of fists, amongst others. While youngsters nowadays find solace in the social media networking platforms, it is worthy of note to examine the havoc that extreme involvement in its use could cause the average individual, and more importantly, unsuspecting users of the cyberspace. This is as a researcher asserts that the cyberspace has raised new sets of clients for counsellors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus, increasing the challenges of practitioners in the helping profession [5]. Thus, counsellors are faced with entirely different breeds of clients in recent times.

A researcher's study revealed that forms of cybercrime among university undergraduates in Ilorin metropolis included: watching pornographic videos/tapes, cyber plagiarism, cyber tricks and credit cards/ATM frauds. According to the researcher, there was prevalence of social media engagement, but interpersonal bullying in the cyberspace among

undergraduates was not very pronounced or prevalent [6].

A group of researchers found that the new millennium technology has become an everyday part of human life, thus, the increasing sophistication of technology has continued to change the way adolescents bully each other; hence, making cyberbullying become the newest form of bullying, beyond physical, verbal, and relational types of bullying particularly in Turkey [7]. Also, another researcher found that social media engagement has continued to put youngsters more in their own self-designed world than in the established norms, tradition and custom of the society. In other words, youths in recent times make more friends through the cyberspace than physically, and as such, they tend to spend more time surfing the internet and the social media than in real physical situation [8].

There is the need to checkmate this trend as it is fast becoming a threat to the society. For instance, various negative social media content has been lately condemned by the Nigerian government and majority of these contents are social media connected; as a matter of urgency, the government through its security apparatus warned Nigerians against derogatory and hate speeches that have permeated the social media (The Punch Newspaper of Wednesday, August 23, 2017). In the warning handed down through the military spokesman, Major-General Eneche, the government classified abusive languages, attacks on any section/tribe in the country or against public officials as hate speeches; invariably, cyberbullying has assumed a different but dangerous dimension which must be tackled headlong before it destroys personalities of both the citizenry as well as government officials [9]. Cybercrimes, dubious and sharp financial practices have been perpetrated in the social media. The Punch newspaper Nigeria (Tuesday, August 22, 2017) reported that Nigeria ranks 3rd in the list of countries with cybercrimes and issues after the U.S. and U.K. It is largely held that the inability of the world powers to checkmate social media bullying and assaults contribute to the incessant attacks many of them are experiencing by their own citizens against other citizens in the guise of terror attacks across different states.

In order to assist Nigerian undergraduates, particularly those in universities in Kwara State to overcome the desire to engage in cyberbullying attacks/behaviours, the researchers deemed it necessary to undertake the current study in order to assist in eroding tendencies for cyberbullying in the teeming undergraduates in the university [10].

## 2.1 Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the conduct of the study:

1. To what extent do university undergraduates engage in social media activities?
2. Will frequent use of the social media predict undergraduates' cyberbullying behaviour?

## 2.2 Research Hypotheses

In line with the problem statement, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between male and female university undergraduates' use of the social media and cyberbullying behavior
2. There is no significant relationship between university undergraduates' use of the social media and cyberbullying behaviour from the point of view of their courses of study.
3. There is no significant relationship between undergraduates' use of the social media and cyberbullying behaviour in Kwara State, Nigeria.

## 3. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study is to determine the relationship between frequent use of social media platforms and cyberbullying behaviours among university students in Kwara State, Nigeria.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted quantitative method and a research design of the survey type for gathering the required data for the study. An inventory entitled "Frequent Social Media Engagement and Cyberbullying Questionnaire (FSMECQ)" was used. The inventory had two sections, A and B. Section A sought the demographic information, while section B had 15 items on social media engagement and cyberbullying in Kwara State, Nigeria. The instrument had a reliability co-efficient of 0.73 which was established through a Cronbach method of reliability. The instrument consisted of a Four-point Likert Scale format on a 4-1 scoring. The highest score obtainable was 60, while the lowest was 15, thus, the midpoint was 30. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the 200 university undergraduates that participated in the study; the respondents were undergraduates drawn from University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, Malete, and Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State. Purposive sampling was used because of the peculiarities of the three universities in Kwara State, i.e., a federal, state and private university respectively; and in order to have a fair representation of all the universities regardless of ownership or control, there was the need to enlist the three selected universities. The researchers directly administered the inventory on the respondents. Descriptive statistics, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tools were used to analyze the data collected. The two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

#### 5. RESULTS

##### 5.1 Demographic Data

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents by Gender, Course of Study and Use of the Social Media

Variable	Percentage (%)	Frequency
Gender		
Male	110	55
Female	91	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Course of Study		
Engineering	91	45.5
Social Sciences	109	54.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Use of the social media		
Frequent	170	85
Not frequent	30	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1 above revealed that 55% (110) of the respondents were males, while 45% were female undergraduates. Furthermore, it revealed that 45.5% (91) were engineering students, while 54.5% (109) were social science undergraduate students. It also showed that 85% (170) of the respondents were frequent users of the social media, while 15% (30) were not frequent users of social media platforms.

Research Questions: To what extent do university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria engage in frequent use of the social media platforms?

**Table 2:** Mean and Rank Order of Respondents' Opinions

S/n	As far as I know; I;	Mean	Rank
1	use the social media everyday	2.61	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	operate more than one social media account	2.55	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	must access my social media accounts almost all the time	2.53	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	often use my feeding money for data plans to stay connected online	2.52	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	have more friends in the cyberspace than physically	2.52	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	cannot do without accessing the cyberspace at short intervals	2.52	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	study more when I have internet browsing facilities	2.51	7 <sup>th</sup>
8	often get bored or sick whenever internet connection has problems	2.50	8 <sup>th</sup>
9	enjoy using the social media because no one knows my true identity	2.50	9 <sup>th</sup>
10	see the social media as a faster avenue through which I could connect to the outside world	2.34	10 <sup>th</sup>
11	encourage my parents to join the league of social media users	2.30	11 <sup>th</sup>
12	do not make friends with anyone who is not a social media fan	2.27	12 <sup>th</sup>
13	make use of both laptop and smart phones in chatting with my friends	2.21	13 <sup>th</sup>
14	sometimes use the social media platforms to expose illegal activities in my school	2.18	14 <sup>th</sup>
15	communicate more with family and friends through the social media	2.11	15 <sup>th</sup>

The results in Table 2 revealed that "I use the social media everyday" ranked 1<sup>st</sup> (2.61) among the items listed in relation to frequency of social media as predictor of cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. Thus, that provides answer to the research question raised. Hence, university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria are frequent users of the social media platforms. On the other hand, "I operate more than one social media account" and "I must access my social media accounts all the time" ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. In particular, other items from 4<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> had mean scores of between 2.52 and 2.11, indicating that all the items in the instrument had influence in predicting

frequency of use of the social media for cyberbullying tendencies among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. This is because all the items had means above 1.50 which was the cut-off point.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between Male and Female University Undergraduates' use of the social media and tendency for cyberbullying

**Table 3:** Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis on Frequent Social Media Use and Cyberbullying Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Cal. r-valuedf	Sig.
Frequent Social Media Use	200	44.5	4.77	.288	198
Cyberbullying	200	41.0	4.55		.009

\*significant; p<0.05

The results in Table 3 revealed that the PPMC yielded .288 and p-value .009 < 0.05 for gender. This indicated that there was significant relationship between frequent use of the social media and cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender. Thus, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between male and female undergraduates' use of the social

media and cyberbullying was rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between university undergraduates' use of the social media and tendency for cyberbullying from the point of view of course of study

**Table 4:** Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis on Frequent Social Media Use and Cyberbullying Based on Course of Study

Course of Study	N	Mean	SD	Cal. r-value	df	Sig.
Frequent Social Media Use	200	44.5	4.88	.668	198	.002
Cyberbullying	200	41.8	4.02			

\*significant; p<0.05

The results in Table 4 revealed that the PPMC yielded .668 and p-value .002 < 0.05 for course of study. This indicated that there was significant relationship between frequent use of the social media and cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria based on course of study. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between undergraduates' use of the social media and

cyberbullying based on course of study was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between university undergraduates' use of the social media and tendency for cyberbullying from the point of view of use of the social media

**Table 5:** Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis on Frequent Social Media Use and Cyberbullying Based on Use of the Social Media

Use of the Social Media	N	Mean	SD	Cal. r-value	df	Sig.
Frequent Social Media Use	200	43.6	4.54	.236	198	.001
Cyberbullying	200	40.4	4.62			

\*significant; p<0.05

The results in Table 5 revealed that the PPMC yielded .236 and p-value .001 < 0.05 for use of the social media. This indicated that there was significant relationship between frequent use of the social media and cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria based on use of the social media. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between undergraduates' use of the social media and cyberbullying based on use of the social media was rejected. In other words, there is significant difference between use of the social media and tendencies for cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that university undergraduates in Kwara State were frequent users of the social media platforms. It further showed that owing to undergraduates' frequent visits to social media sites, they become highly susceptible to cyberbullying behaviour, thus, experimenting different vices in the cyberspace. Frequent use of the social media, operating more than one social media account, compulsively accessing the social media accounts almost all the time, and often using feeding money for data plans to stay connected online constituted the major engagements of undergraduates in the social media in Kwara State, Nigeria. The implication of the findings of this study is that youngsters at undergraduate level are exposed by virtue of unrestricted access to the internet and by extension, the social media to acts of cyberbullying. This could also contribute to undergraduates' incessant complaints about being stranded in school, after they may have spent their living allowances on data plans for social media engagements; thus, new breeds of counselees/clients are increasingly presented to counselling psychologists or practitioners to engage. This corroborates a researcher's assertion that the cyberspace has raised new sets of clients for counsellors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus, increasing the challenges of practitioners in the helping profession.

Furthermore, the three null hypotheses formulated were rejected, indicating that there was significant relationship between frequent social media use and cyberbullying among undergraduates based on gender, course of study and use of the social media. The findings support a researcher which reported that undergraduates in Ilorin metropolis were frequent users of the social media. The findings of this study also corroborate a group of researchers which found that the new millennium technology has formed an everyday part of human life, thus, the increasing engagement of adolescents in the cyberspace has continued to change the way bullying one another is carried out. The authors concluded that adolescents' engagement made cyberbullying the newest form of bullying,

beyond physical, verbal, and relational types of bullying. In essence, gender, course of study and use of (visit to) the social media have significant relationship with cyberbullying; invariably, the three variables predicted undergraduates' tendencies for engaging in cyberbullying in Kwara State, Nigeria. This supports the claims of a researcher that the Y generation, regardless of gender, status or race relies heavily on technology for entertainment, interpersonal interactions and emotional regulation and this is seen in their attachment to the social media platforms which ultimately lead them to cyberbullying activities among themselves.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusion were drawn:

- Undergraduates in Kwara State are frequent users of the internet and by extension, the social media platforms. Notably, they operate more than one social media account, cannot afford to stay unconnected, and could do away with food as long as access to the social media is guaranteed.
- There was significant relationship between frequent use of the social media and cyberbullying based on course of study.
- There was significant relationship between frequent use of the social media and cyberbullying based on use of the social media, that is, frequency of undergraduates' visits to the social media.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

- Adequate guidance and counselling should be put in place in order to guide against indulgence of undergraduates in cyberbullying activities since it is evident that they frequently and compulsively visit social media platforms.
- There should be periodic sensitization for counselling practitioners, particularly those in universities in order to keep them abreast with increasingly different breeds of clients to deal with and to also become versed on issues relating to the use of the social media if they (counsellors) will effectively assist the teeming youngsters overcome the temptation to cyberbully others.

- Universities should equip their counselling centers with requisite materials for better efficiency so as to be able to cater for the seemingly different breeds of clients that counsellors encounter.
- There should be a platform where counsellors could often discuss emerging issues and challenges in order to effectively fulfill their obligations and meet societal expectations.

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