

Cyberbullying Behaviour of Library and Information Science Undergraduates in Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying behaviour as a menace is a rampant issue that can be perpetrated using several sources. This study examines cyberbullying behaviour of Library and Information Science (LIS) undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. The study was underpinned by Routine Activity Theory (RAT) and adopted a mixed-methods approach. The sample size comprised 558 respondents from a total population of 1329, selected using multistage sampling techniques. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Findings revealed that trolling (Mean = 1.79) was the most prevalent type of cyberbullying, while masquerading (mean = 1.52) was the least. The major source of cyberbullying was WhatsApp (mean = 2.37), and the most highly ranked cyberbullying experience was that I avoid or reduce my participation in online activities (mean = 2.45). Features that detect cyberbullying types should be improved to create safer online environments were suggested.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Behaviour, Undergraduates, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from physical interaction to internet-enabled communication across multiple domains, including education, healthcare, and entertainment, constitutes a significant shift in human interaction and survival. Despite the transformation brought about by the internet, there have been widespread reports of its misuse (UK Government, 2020; Martínez-Hernández & Lloret-Irles, 2024), notably cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, according to Akuneme and Nwosu (2023) is an act of using electronic means such as computers, smartphones, tablets, or other digital platforms to constantly and deliberately hurt, harass, or threaten others. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is characterized by anonymity, persistence, and the potential for wide audience reach. It manifests in various forms, including harassment, impersonation, denigration, cyberstalking, and trolling. These behaviours are particularly prevalent among young adults, who are highly active users of digital technologies. Although existing studies have examined cyberbullying of adolescents, there is limited research focusing on university students, particularly within specific academic disciplines such as Library and Information Science (LIS). This gap is especially evident in the Nigerian context, where empirical studies on cyberbullying among undergraduates remain scarce. This study conceptualizes cyberbullying behaviour through three dimensions: types, sources, and experiences. By focusing on LIS undergraduates in South-West, Nigeria, the study contributes to addressing gaps in both national and international literature.

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing internet penetration, cyberbullying remains an underexplored issue among university students in Nigeria. The anonymity and accessibility of digital platforms create opportunities for perpetrators while exposing victims to psychological, social, and academic risks. Existing studies in Nigeria have largely focused on secondary school populations, leaving a gap in understanding how cyberbullying affects undergraduates, particularly within specialized academic fields such as LIS. Furthermore, while previous research identifies the prevalence of cyberbullying, there is limited insight into **why certain behaviours occur more frequently** and how platform dynamics contribute to these patterns. This study addresses these gaps by examining the prevalence of cyberbullying behaviour of LIS undergraduates.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine cyberbullying behaviour of LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the types of cyberbullying prevalent among LIS undergraduates.
2. Examine the sources of cyberbullying.
3. Explore the cyberbullying experiences of LIS undergraduates.

Research Question

What are the types, sources, and cyberbullying experiences of LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying is widely defined as intentional and repeated harm inflicted through digital technologies. Core elements include intent, repetition, harm, and a power imbalance, often facilitated by anonymity (Bukhori et al., 2024; Ray et al., 2024; Cantone, 2015). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and reach a wider audience. Cyberbullying manifests in both direct (e.g., harassment and threats) and indirect (e.g., trolling and denigration) forms, which are often embedded within everyday online interactions, thereby making detection and regulation challenging. Indirect forms are increasingly common among young adults, as they are often perceived as socially acceptable or less harmful (Smith and Yoon, 2013). Importantly, cyberbullying is not limited to individual interactions; it may involve group dynamics and bystander participation. According to Chauhan (2019), cyberbullying behaviour can occur accidentally, as it is difficult in most cases to ascertain or detect the tone of the information. It can also be accidental in the form of a joke or teasing that might be harmful to the other party. Nevertheless, with a repeated pattern in such actions, it is called cyberbullying. Also worthy of note is the submission of Ray et al. (2024) that a group of people can be victims of cyberbullying. This implies that not only an individual can be a victim of cyberbullying, but others too, including family and friends. Additionally, adolescents and young adults were believed to be at higher risk of victimization, as were female individuals.

Several authors, such as Chimchiuri (2024) noted that cyberbullying behaviour is being aided by freedom of speech, thereby preventing the successful implementation of cyberbullying behaviour policies and practices needed to reprimand the perpetrators. While definitions vary (Kumar and Goldstein, 2020), scholars consistently emphasize its psychological, social, and academic consequences. Victims, because of these consequences, may experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. In academic contexts, such consequences can reduce participation in online activities, thereby limiting access to learning opportunities (Yurdakul & Ayhan, 2022; Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022). For this study, Routine Activity Theory (RAT), propounded by Cohen and Felson 1979 underpinned the study, RAT explains deviant behaviour as the convergence of three elements: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. In digital environments, these elements are often present due to anonymity, accessibility, and limited regulation. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding cyberbullying, particularly in explaining why certain platforms and behaviours are more prevalent. Although cyberbullying has been widely studied globally, there is limited research focusing on LIS undergraduates in Nigeria. Additionally, few studies integrate both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative component involved questionnaires, while the qualitative component involved interviews.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population comprised 1,329 LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 572 participants, out of whom 558 responded. For the qualitative component, five participants were purposively selected as key informants. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire (Cyberbullying Behaviour Questionnaire) and an interview guide. The questionnaire measured types, sources, and experiences of cyberbullying using a 4-point Likert scale. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Analysis of Demographic Data

The name of the university, gender, age range, and level of the respondents are summarised and presented in Table 1. The demographic information was analysed using frequency counts and percentages from descriptive statistics.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 *Socio-demographic Profiles of the Respondents*

Socio-Demographic	Categories	Frequencies (N= 558)	Percentages (%) Characteristics
University	Federal University Oye Ekiti	281	50.4
	University of Lagos	63	11.3
	Federal University of Agriculture	115	20.6
	Obafemi Awolowo University	34	6.1
	University of Ibadan	65	11.6
Age Range	≤ 20 Years	259	46.4
	21–25 Years	239	42.8
	26–30 Years	49	8.8
	31 Years and above	11	2.0
Gender	Male	272	48.7
	Female	286	51.3
Level	100	146	26.2
	200	160	28.7
	300	168	30.1
	400	84	15.5

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The socio-demographic characteristics of LIS undergraduates revealed variations in their distribution across the selected Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria. The uneven distribution regarding the population of LIS undergraduates in various institutions supports Aina (2021), who noted that LIS student enrolment in Nigeria varies significantly across institutions due to differences in programme capacity, awareness, and institutional attractiveness. Despite this imbalance, all selected universities were represented, thereby supporting the generalizability of the findings within the region. In terms of age distribution, the findings contrast with Issa (2020), who reported a higher concentration of older students in LIS programmes, particularly at the postgraduate level. The present study, however, reflects the typical structure of undergraduate education, where younger individuals dominate enrolment. The gender distribution indicated a slight female majority. Although the difference is marginal, it suggests near gender balance with a minimal tilt toward female participation. This finding partially aligns with Ocholla (2022), who reported female dominance in LIS programmes; however, the present study demonstrates a more balanced representation, suggesting increasing gender inclusivity in LIS education. Finally, with respect to the level of study, this is consistent with Onyancha (2021), who observed that

students at higher levels are often more engaged in academic and research-related activities due to increased exposure and experience.

Analysis of the Research Question

The corresponding objective was to examine the cyberbullying behaviour (types, sources, and extent) of LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. To answer the research question and achieve the objective, the respondents were asked to respond to ten items on the types of cyberbullying prevalent among LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. The given options were Always (A), Sometimes (S), Rarely (R), Never (N), and they are presented in Table 2. Also, the respondents were asked to respond to six items on the sources of cyberbullying, with the given options: Very Often (VO), Often (O), Rarely (R), or Not at all (NAA), and are presented in Table 3. Lastly, four items were provided to describe the cyberbullying experience of LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West Nigeria. The given options were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) are presented in Table 4. The results comprise the values of frequency, percentage (%), mean, standard deviation, and rank.

Table 2 Types of Cyberbullying Prevalent among LIS Undergraduates in Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Types of Cyberbullying	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Masquerade	23 (4.1%)	50 (9.0%)	100 (17.9%)	385 (69.0%)	1.56	0.86	10th
Doxing	26 (4.7%)	53 (9.5%)	116 (20.8%)	363 (65.1%)	1.65	0.9	9th
Flaming	52 (9.3%)	45 (8.1%)	78 (14.0%)	383 (68.6%)	1.67	1.03	8th
Exclusion	37 (6.6%)	59 (10.6%)	112 (20.1%)	350 (62.7%)	1.73	0.95	7th
Denigration	35 (6.3%)	75 (13.4%)	97 (17.4%)	351 (62.9%)	1.74	0.96	6th
Cyberstalking	41 (7.3%)	61 (10.9%)	120 (21.5%)	336 (60.2%)	1.76	0.97	5th
Harassment	46 (8.2%)	83 (14.9%)	85 (15.2%)	344 (61.6%)	1.78	1.04	4th
Impersonation	46 (8.2%)	64 (11.5%)	120 (21.5%)	328 (58.8%)	1.79	1	3rd
Outing and Trickery	34 (6.1%)	104 (18.6%)	92 (16.5%)	328 (58.8%)	1.82	1	2nd
Trolling	48 (8.6%)	88 (15.8%)	87 (15.6%)	335 (60.0%)	1.83	1.05	1st

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Weighted Mean = 1.63, Standard Deviation = 0.95. Key: Always (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2), or Never (1). Decision Rule: 1–1.74 = N (Never), 1.75–2.49 = R (Rarely), 2.5–3.24 = S (Sometimes), 3.25–4 = A (Always). The criterion mean = 2.5, i.e. $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$. This implies that any score below 2.5 indicates Rarely or Never. The overall result falls within the “Never ” category.

The indicators of the behaviours were ranked in order of magnitude from low to high based on the overall mean score and standard deviation. This was measured against the mean score of each of the items on cyberbullying types. The findings indicate generally low levels of cyberbullying across all identified forms. However, trolling emerged as the most prevalent behaviour. This suggests that indirect and socially normalized forms of cyberbullying are more common than overt aggression. From the perspective of Routine Activity Theory, trolling may be more prevalent because it requires minimal effort, occurs in accessible digital environments, and often lacks effective guardianship (e.g., moderation). The relative anonymity of online platforms further reduces the perceived risk for perpetrators. This pattern highlights that cyberbullying types of undergraduates is less about overt hostility and more about **subtle, socially embedded interactions**, which are often overlooked but still harmful. This finding aligns with Smith (2022) who noted that indirect and less confrontational forms of online aggression, such as trolling, are increasingly prevalent among young adults due to their normalisation within online interactions. Overall, although certain forms like trolling and outing appear more common, the findings suggest that cyberbullying among LIS undergraduates is generally infrequent.

Table 3 Source(s) of Cyberbullying Prevalent among LIS Undergraduates in Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria

Sources of Cyberbullying	Very Often	Often	Rarely	Not at all	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Gaming platforms	54 (9.7%)	66 (11.8%)	116 (20.8%)	322 (57.7%)	1.73	1.02	6th
Websites	84 (15.1%)	73 (13.1%)	105 (18.8%)	296 (53.0%)	1.91	1.12	5th
X (Formerly Twitter)	69 (12.4%)	96 (17.2%)	116 (20.8%)	277 (49.6%)	1.92	1.08	4th
Instagram	83 (14.9%)	113 (20.3%)	96 (17.2%)	266 (47.7%)	2.02	1.13	3rd
Facebook	103 (18.5%)	124 (22.2%)	79 (14.2%)	252 (45.2%)	2.14	1.18	2nd
WhatsApp	174 (31.2%)	86 (15.4%)	73 (13.1%)	225 (40.3%)	2.37	1.27	1st

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Weighted Mean = 2.02, Standard Deviation = 1.13, Key: Very Often (4), Often (3), Rarely (2), or Not at all (1). Decision Rule: 1–1.74 =NAA (Not at all), 1.75–2.49 = R (Rarely), 2.5–3.24 = O (Often), 3.25–4 = VO (Very Often). The criterion mean = 2.5, i.e. $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$. This implies that any score below 2.5 indicates Not at all or Rarely. The overall result falls within the “Rarely” category.

WhatsApp emerged as the primary platform for cyberbullying, followed by Facebook and Instagram. This finding reflects the role of **closed and semi-private digital spaces** in facilitating repeated interactions. Routine Activity Theory helps explain this trend: **Suitable targets**: peers within close social networks; **Motivated offenders**: individuals within the same communication groups; and **Lack of guardianship**: limited monitoring in private chats. Unlike open platforms, WhatsApp enables persistent and direct communication, increasing opportunities for repeated harassment. This explains why cyberbullying is more prevalent in communication-driven environments rather than less interactive platforms like gaming sites. This aligns with recent findings by UNESCO (2023), which indicate that instant messaging platforms are increasingly becoming major channels for cyberbullying due to their accessibility and perceived anonymity in group interactions. Similarly, a study by Pew Research Center (2022) found that private and semi-private digital spaces tend to foster more frequent peer-to-peer harassment than open platforms.

Table 4 Cyberbullying Experience of LIS Undergraduates in Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria

Cyberbullying Experience	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Rank
I have been harassed from time to time	56 (10.0%)	118 (21.1%)	111 (19.9%)	273 (48.9%)	1.92	4th
I have been harassed by anonymous	62 (11.1%)	166 (29.7%)	114 (20.4%)	216 (38.7%)	2.13	3rd
Cyberbullying has a negative effect on me	78 (14.0%)	156 (28.0%)	113 (20.3%)	211 (37.8%)	2.17	2nd
I avoid or reduce my participation in online activities	124 (22.2%)	151 (27.1%)	135 (24.2%)	148 (26.5%)	2.45	1st

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Weighted Mean = 2.24, Standard Deviation = 1.07. Key: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Decision Rule: 1–1.74 = SD (Strongly Disagree), 1.75–2.49 = D (Disagree), 2.5–3.24 = A (Agree), 3.25–4 = SA (Strongly Agree). The criterion mean = 2.5, i.e. $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$. This implies that any score below 2.5 indicates Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The overall result falls within the “Disagree” category.

Although reported levels of harassment are moderate, the behavioural impact is significant. The most prominent outcome, reduced participation in online activities, suggests that cyberbullying affects not only emotional well-being but also academic engagement. This withdrawal behaviour reflects a coping mechanism in which victims avoid digital spaces to minimize exposure. However, in an academic context, this may limit access to

collaborative learning and information sharing, thereby reinforcing negative outcomes. This finding is in line with Yurdakul and Ayhan, (2022); Giumetti and Kowalski, (2022) that cyberbullying not only affects emotional well-being but also restricts digital participation, which is particularly concerning in an academic environment where online engagement is essential. Kowalski et al. (2023) similarly reported that victims often withdraw from online spaces as a coping mechanism, potentially affecting academic collaboration and access to digital resources.

Qualitative Analysis

In addition to the demographic information, interview responses from LIS undergraduates were collated to provide more insight into the study.

Cyberbullying Behaviour (Types, Sources, and Experiences)

Can you please mention the types of cyberbullying you are familiar with?

In addition to the types of cyberbullying prevalent among LIS undergraduates in South-West, Nigeria, other types, as mentioned by respondents, were spreading rumors, body shaming, sending threatening messages, and posting embarrassing content about someone without their consent. Others included device hacking and unauthorized access/monitoring of personal details, and below are two of the responses:

Respondent 1: *Some types of cyberbullying I'm familiar with include online harassment, spreading rumors, body shaming, trolling, sending threatening messages, and posting embarrassing content about someone without their consent.*

Respondent 4: *Cyberstalking, blackmailing, harassment, social media threats, trolling, denigration, device hacking, and unauthorized access/monitoring of personal details.*

What other sources do you think cyberbullying takes place?

On other sources where cyberbullying takes place, respondents, in addition to those in this study, mentioned TikTok, group chats, or school-related platforms. Few of the responses were:

Respondent 1: *I think cyberbullying happens mostly on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp. It can also happen in group chats, online gaming spaces, and even school-related platforms.*

Respondent 2: *Other places it happens: X/Twitter quotes tweets, TikTok, Facebook.*

Can you please share your cyberbullying experience?

Regarding the cyberbullying experiences of the respondents, as gathered in the interview session, most of the respondents shared their experiences, while only one had not experienced cyberbullying. Respondents stated the effects of cyberbullying behaviour, which include dropping out of school, embarrassment, isolation, and others. The responses were:

Respondent 1: *Personally, I've had a mild experience with cyberbullying. It wasn't too extreme, but I've had moments where people made unnecessary or hurtful comments online. It made me feel uncomfortable and more cautious about what I share.*

Respondent 2: *My experience: I've not been bullied directly, but I've seen classmates private chat screenshot and nude photos posted on Facebook, she dropped out of school.*

Respondent 3: *I remembered when I was in secondary school. It started in my class when some students in my department would mock me during lessons, they would call me names and make fun of me clothes, which made me feel embarrassed and isolated.*

Respondent 5: *I was harassed and stereotyped before, because I did not conform to the believe of my friends.*

The qualitative data provides deeper insight into the experiences behind the quantitative patterns. Participants described cyberbullying as including body shaming, rumour spreading, and unauthorized sharing of personal content. More importantly, the interviews reveal **contextual realities** not captured in survey data, such as:

- Cyberbullying often occurs within **peer networks and group chats**;
- Victims experience **embarrassment, isolation, and reputational damage**; and
- In extreme cases, consequences include **academic withdrawal**.

These narratives reinforce the idea that cyberbullying is not merely an isolated behaviour but a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by peer dynamics and digital culture.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The findings reveal that cyberbullying types of LIS undergraduates is generally low in frequency but significant in impact. Trolling and other indirect behaviours are the most common forms, while WhatsApp serves as the primary platform. Although not all students experience cyberbullying, those affected often reduce their online participation, highlighting important academic and social implications.

Conclusion

The study concluded that cyberbullying behaviour of LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria is a serious issue that affects the respondents emotionally, mentally, and sometimes even physically. As technology continues to grow, so does the responsibility to use it respectfully and safely. It is important for individuals, schools, and communities to work together to raise awareness, promote kindness, and act against harmful online behavior. By encouraging empathy, reporting abuse, and supporting victims, society can help create a safer digital environment where everyone feels respected and protected.

Recommendations

The findings of this study show the types, sources, and experience relating to cyberbullying of LIS undergraduates in federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that features that detect trolling, impersonation, and harassment should be improved, alongside stricter enforcement of community guidelines, to create safer online environments.

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