CYBERBULLYING AND ONLINE HARASSMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF DIGITAL CRIMES AMONG STUDENTS OF THOMAS ADEWUMI UNIVERSITY

PROJECT

Submitted by

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DECLARATION

I declare that, this is an original dissertation carried out by me in the department of Sociology (Criminology and Security Studies) Faculty of Management and Social Science, Thomas Adewumi University, Oko-Irese Kwara State.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that, this project was written by AREMU, Fathia Morenikeji, Matric No 20/15SCS004 to the department of Sociology (Criminology and Security Studies), Thomas Adewumi University, Oko-Irese Kwara State. It is adequate in scope and content.

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I dedicated this project to Almighty Allah. To him alone is all the Glory!!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the prevalence, psychological and academic impacts, contributing factors, and institutional responses to cyberbullying and online harassment among students of Thomas Adewumi University. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from 297 questionnaire responses with qualitative insights from interviews conducted with a student counselor, ICT officer, and SRC President. The study was guided by the Routine Activity Theory and Social Learning Theory, both of which offered frameworks for understanding how peer influence and institutional gaps enable cyberbullying behaviors in academic environments. Findings revealed that 59.6% of respondents agreed that online harassment is a common issue within the university, while 66.6% had either experienced or knew someone who had been cyberbullied. The most frequent forms of online harassment reported included the sharing of personal information without consent (73.4%), inflammatory comments (66.7%), and deliberate exclusion from online groups (64.3%). The psychological impacts were significant: 76.4% of respondents reported that cyberbullying led to anxiety and emotional stress, and 71% agreed it negatively affected academic performance. Additionally, 66% indicated that victims often withdrew from academic and social activities. The study also identified several vulnerability factors: 69.7% of students agreed that excessive social media use increased risk, while 75.8% cited poor awareness of digital safety practices. Gender was a notable factor, with 66.7% of respondents agreeing that female students were more frequently targeted. On the institutional side, only 26.3% believed the university had effective anti-cyberbullying policies, and 32% were aware of formal reporting channels. The study concludes that while cyberbullying is prevalent and harmful, institutional policies and student awareness remain inadequate. It recommends implementing comprehensive reporting mechanisms, digital safety education, and proactive policy communication to protect students and reduce online harassment on campus.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

The rapid growth and penetration of digital technologies have transformed the way people communicate, learn, and socialize. Alongside these advancements, the misuse of these technologies has given rise to digital crimes, particularly cyberbullying and online harassment. These issues have become a global concern due to their widespread nature and profound impacts, especially among young people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), cyberbullying and online harassment are among the most prevalent forms of violence affecting youth, often leading to severe psychological and social consequences.

Cyberbullying involves the use of electronic communication tools such as social media platforms, email, and instant messaging to intimidate, harass, or embarrass individuals. Online harassment encompasses a broader spectrum, including cyberstalking, threats, and other forms of abuse in the digital space (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). In educational settings, university students are particularly vulnerable due to their high level of digital engagement and social interactions online. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2021) revealed that 59% of young adults aged 18–29 have experienced some form of online harassment, with significant repercussions on their mental health and academic performance.

In Nigeria, the increasing accessibility of smartphones and the internet has exacerbated the prevalence of cyber-related issues among university students. Reports by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2023) show that internet penetration in the country reached over 50%, with students making up a significant portion of active users. This digital landscape provides opportunities for academic advancement but also creates an environment for misuse and abuse. A study by Olusola and Ayodeji (2022) highlighted that Nigerian university students often face cyberbullying, which negatively impacts their self-esteem, mental health, and academic productivity.

Thomas Adewumi University, being a modern institution with a focus on digital learning and connectivity, is not immune to the challenges posed by cyberbullying and online harassment. The absence of robust preventive measures and policies in some Nigerian universities has been identified as a critical factor contributing to the proliferation of such digital crimes (Igwe & Kalu, 2024). Moreover, the lack of awareness and reporting mechanisms further compounds the issue, leaving many victims without adequate support.

Understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying and online harassment in Thomas Adewumi University is essential for creating a safe and conducive learning environment. This study seeks to assess the prevalence, impacts, and contributing factors of these digital crimes, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and preventive measures. By addressing these gaps, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations to mitigate the incidence of cyberbullying and online harassment within the university community.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The increasing reliance on digital platforms for social interaction, education, and recreation among university students has brought with it the pervasive issue of cyberbullying and online harassment. These digital crimes are characterized by their anonymity, reach, and psychological impact, making them a growing concern in educational environments. At Thomas Adewumi University, the prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment is not well-documented, leaving a gap in understanding the magnitude and specific nature of these issues within the institution. This lack of data makes it challenging to identify affected individuals and address the root causes of these digital crimes effectively.

Cyberbullying and online harassment have significant psychological, academic, and social impacts on victims. Studies have shown that victims of these crimes often suffer from anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and, in extreme cases, suicidal ideation (Olusola & Ayodeji, 2022). For university students, these issues are compounded by academic pressures, leading to diminished focus, reduced performance, and withdrawal from academic and social activities. Despite the profound effects of these digital crimes, many victims remain silent due to stigma, fear of retaliation, or lack of trust in institutional support systems.

In the Nigerian context, the increasing access to internet-enabled devices and social media platforms has created an environment conducive to cyberbullying and online harassment. However, existing policies and measures to address these issues in higher institutions, including Thomas Adewumi University, are often inadequate. A review of policies in Nigerian universities by Igwe and Kalu (2024) highlights significant gaps in preventive measures, awareness programs, and reporting mechanisms. This inadequacy leaves students vulnerable and perpetuates a culture of impunity for perpetrators.

Another critical factor contributing to the prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment is the lack of awareness among students about what constitutes digital crimes and their associated consequences. Many students are either unaware of the resources available to them or skeptical of their effectiveness. Additionally, cultural and societal norms often downplay the seriousness of online harassment, further discouraging victims from seeking help. This gap in awareness and education underscores the need for targeted interventions to address both the individual and systemic factors that sustain these crimes.

Addressing cyberbullying and online harassment requires a multi-faceted approach that includes understanding the prevalence and types of these crimes, identifying contributing factors, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies. Without a comprehensive understanding of these elements, institutions like Thomas Adewumi University may struggle to create a safe and supportive environment for their students. This study aims to bridge these gaps by providing empirical data and actionable recommendations to mitigate the occurrence of digital crimes within the Thomas Adewumi University community.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence and types of cyberbullying and online harassment experienced by students at Thomas Adewumi University?
2. What are the psychological and academic impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment on students at Thomas Adewumi University?
3. What factors contribute to students' vulnerability to cyberbullying and online harassment at Thomas Adewumi University?

4. How effective are the current policies and preventive measures at Thomas Adewumi University in addressing digital crimes?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the prevalence and types of cyberbullying and online harassment experienced by students at Thomas Adewumi University.
2. To analyze the psychological and academic impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment on students at Thomas Adewumi University.
3. To identify the factors that contribute to students' vulnerability to cyberbullying and online harassment at Thomas Adewumi University.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and preventive measures at Thomas Adewumi University in addressing digital crimes.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses the pressing issue of cyberbullying and online harassment among university students, specifically at Thomas Adewumi University. As digital technology becomes an integral part of education and social interaction, understanding these digital crimes is essential for fostering a safe and supportive academic environment. The findings will shed light on the prevalence, impacts, and contributing factors of cyberbullying and online harassment, equipping the university with data-driven insights to develop effective interventions and support systems. From a policy perspective, the study will contribute to strengthening institutional frameworks to combat digital crimes. By evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and preventive measures, the research will identify critical gaps and offer actionable recommendations for improvement. These insights will not only benefit Thomas Adewumi University but can also serve as a model for other institutions in Nigeria, providing a localized perspective to address a global challenge.

Furthermore, the research will raise awareness among students, faculty, and administrators about the risks and consequences of cyberbullying and online harassment. It will encourage a collaborative effort to enhance campus safety and improve support systems for victims. On a broader scale, the study will contribute to the academic discourse on digital crimes, offering a

Nigerian perspective that enriches global strategies to combat cyberbullying and safeguard students in digital environments.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to examining cyberbullying and online harassment among students of Thomas Adewumi University. The research focuses on understanding the prevalence and types of these digital crimes, as well as their psychological and academic impacts on the students. It also investigates the factors contributing to students' vulnerability to cyberbullying and online harassment within the university context. Additionally, the study evaluates the effectiveness of existing policies and preventive measures implemented by the institution to address these issues. Data will be collected from students across different faculties and levels of study to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within the university. While the study emphasizes the experiences of students, it also provides insights into broader institutional responses, offering recommendations for improved digital safety and crime prevention strategies.

1.6 Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Academic Impact: The negative effects of cyberbullying and online harassment on students' academic performance, including reduced focus, poor grades, or withdrawal from academic activities.

Cyberbullying: Refers to the use of digital platforms, such as social media, messaging apps, or online forums, to intentionally harm, harass, or intimidate another individual, particularly students at Thomas Adewumi University.

Digital Crimes: Encompasses illegal activities conducted using electronic devices or networks, including cyberbullying and online harassment, as they pertain to the university environment.

Online Harassment: Involves persistent or severe misuse of online communication tools to cause emotional distress, disrupt activities, or threaten the safety of students.

Prevalence: The frequency or rate at which cyberbullying and online harassment occur among the student population at Thomas Adewumi University.

Preventive Measures: Policies, strategies, and interventions implemented by Thomas Adewumi University to reduce the occurrence of cyberbullying and online harassment and protect students from these digital crimes.

Psychological Impact: Refers to the mental health consequences, such as anxiety, depression, or stress, experienced by students as a result of cyberbullying and online harassment.

Vulnerability: Factors or conditions, such as lack of awareness or weak security measures, that increase the likelihood of students becoming victims of cyberbullying and online harassment.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This section presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on cyberbullying, online harassment, and digital crimes, with a particular focus on their prevalence, impacts, and contributing factors among university students. This chapter also examines existing theoretical frameworks (Routine Activity Theory and Social Learning Theory) that have been used to understand these phenomena, providing a foundation for the current research. By exploring national and international studies, policies, and preventive measures, this chapter highlights the gaps in literature, offering insight into the challenges and implications of cyberbullying in higher education, especially within the Nigerian context.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Digital Crimes

Digital crimes, also referred to as cybercrimes, encompass a broad range of illegal activities conducted through digital platforms or involving digital technologies. These crimes can be categorized into various types, including hacking, identity theft, online fraud, cyberstalking, and the dissemination of malicious software (viruses, worms, etc.) (Gandhi & Sharma, 2019). As technology has advanced, digital crimes have become more sophisticated, targeting individuals, businesses, and governments alike. Digital crimes can have far-reaching consequences, both for the immediate victims and for society at large. According to Wall (2007), digital crimes differ from traditional crimes in that they exploit the vulnerabilities inherent in digital systems, often transcending geographical boundaries and involving anonymous or pseudonymous perpetrators.

One distinctive feature of digital crimes is their ability to target not only individuals but also large organizations or state entities. For instance, cybercrime may involve financial theft, such as online banking fraud, or data breaches, where sensitive personal or corporate data is stolen and misused (Van den Broeck et al., 2017). These crimes can lead to significant financial losses, reputational

damage, and a breach of trust. Hacking and unauthorized access to systems, for example, are often perpetrated with the intent to steal or manipulate data, disrupt services, or exploit vulnerabilities for malicious purposes (Bada et al., 2019). As digital infrastructure becomes more deeply integrated into daily life, the scale and complexity of digital crimes continue to grow, necessitating new legal frameworks and security measures.

Digital crimes also encompass online harassment and cyberbullying, which are increasingly recognized as significant threats to individuals' well-being. These forms of cybercrime involve using digital platforms to harm or intimidate others, either through the distribution of harmful content or the direct communication of threats (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Online harassment and cyberbullying can lead to severe psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and young adults. The anonymity and reach provided by digital platforms enable perpetrators to engage in these harmful behaviors without fear of immediate consequences, complicating efforts to identify and prosecute offenders (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

In the academic context, universities are increasingly recognizing the need to address digital crimes, which can interfere with students' learning, mental health, and social interactions. Universities, including Thomas Adewumi University, must develop robust policies and support systems to protect students from digital crimes, including online harassment, identity theft, and fraud. These crimes not only harm the individual victims but can also damage the overall campus environment, affecting student engagement, academic performance, and institutional reputation (Binns, 2017). To combat digital crimes effectively, universities must adopt proactive measures, such as offering digital literacy programs, strengthening cybersecurity policies, and providing avenues for reporting and responding to digital misconduct (Bada et al., 2019).

2.1.2 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs through digital platforms, including social media, messaging apps, and online gaming spaces. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, which typically occur in face-to-face interactions, cyberbullying enables perpetrators to harass or intimidate victims from a distance, often with a sense of anonymity (Smith et al., 2008). This anonymity can

amplify the aggressor's behavior, making them more likely to engage in harmful actions without fear of immediate consequences. The nature of cyberbullying can involve spreading false information, sending threatening or abusive messages, or sharing private content to harm the victim's reputation and well-being (Olweus, 2012). These actions often have long-lasting effects on the victim, as the digital footprints of the harassment can be permanent and accessible to a wide audience.

The conceptualization of cyberbullying includes several distinguishing features, including intentional harm, repetition, and an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. While bullying generally involves repeated acts of harm, cyberbullying is unique in its ability to reach victims at any time and from any place with internet access (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). This 24/7 availability of harassment amplifies the stress and emotional toll on victims, who often find themselves unable to escape the bullying. According to Kowalski et al. (2014), the emotional impact of cyberbullying on victims can include anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts, highlighting the severe mental health risks associated with such online harassment. The continuous nature of cyberbullying, driven by social media and other online platforms, has led researchers to investigate its broader psychological and academic consequences.

A key aspect of cyberbullying is its diverse forms, which include verbal abuse, exclusion, impersonation, and the dissemination of private or sensitive information without consent (Wright, 2017). These forms are not only harmful in isolation but can also overlap and exacerbate the impact on the victim. For instance, the sharing of embarrassing images or videos can be coupled with online exclusion, leading to a compounded effect on the individual's social identity and self-esteem (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). The ability to target victims anonymously, without physical confrontation, makes it easier for bullies to engage in persistent and harmful behavior. Studies have also suggested that cyberbullies often operate in groups, further increasing the power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim (Olweus, 2012).

In the context of higher education, including universities like Thomas Adewumi University, cyberbullying presents unique challenges. While universities are equipped with various support systems for traditional forms of bullying, the digital nature of cyberbullying requires tailored policies and responses. Cyberbullying among university students can disrupt not only the victim's

academic performance but also the overall campus climate, affecting the mental health and social interactions of the student body (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). To effectively address this issue, universities must develop comprehensive anti-bullying policies that specifically target online harassment, provide adequate support for victims, and educate students about responsible online behavior (Kowalski et al., 2014).

2.1.3 Online Harassment

Online harassment is a broader category of digital abuse that includes various forms of aggressive or harmful behavior targeted at an individual through the internet or digital communication channels. It can involve repeated and deliberate actions aimed at intimidating, humiliating, or distressing a person, which can include sending offensive messages, stalking, doxxing, or cyberstalking (Jaishankar, 2011). Unlike other forms of cybercrime, online harassment is particularly damaging because it often involves a direct violation of an individual's personal space, leading to significant emotional and psychological harm. Research by Kowalski et al. (2014) explains that online harassment includes a wide range of behaviors that can cross into cyberbullying but also include broader threats, such as online blackmail or impersonation, that are not necessarily related to bullying in the traditional sense.

One important aspect of online harassment is its ability to cause ongoing harm, as the victim is often unable to escape the attacks. Unlike traditional harassment, which can be contained to specific settings or times, online harassment can occur at any time and can reach victims anywhere with internet access (Heirman & Walrave, 2012). The harassment may extend to multiple platforms, including social media, email, and messaging apps, creating a pervasive threat that can continuously disrupt the victim's personal and professional life. As noted by Patchin and Hinduja (2016), online harassment can be especially harmful because of its public nature; the content of the harassment is often accessible to a wide audience, which amplifies the victim's humiliation and distress.

The forms of online harassment are varied, including but not limited to sending threatening or abusive messages, sharing private information without consent, and engaging in harmful online behaviors such as trolling or spreading rumors (Binns, 2017). Online harassment can also include

behaviors such as cyberstalking, where the harasser monitors or follows the victim's online activities in an intrusive and obsessive manner. This relentless and targeted approach can cause severe distress and lead to long-term emotional consequences, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Kowalski et al., 2014). The anonymity provided by online platforms makes it easier for individuals to engage in such harmful behaviors without fear of identification or consequences, thereby increasing the likelihood of victimization (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016).

In the context of universities, online harassment poses unique challenges, as it can negatively affect students' social relationships, mental health, and academic performance. The pressure to maintain a positive online image, combined with the potential for online harassment, can lead to heightened stress and academic disengagement among students (Binns, 2017). As universities increasingly rely on online platforms for communication and education, it is crucial for institutions to develop policies that specifically address online harassment. This includes offering support services for victims, educating students about online safety, and implementing strict penalties for perpetrators of online harassment (Heirman & Walrave, 2012).

2.2 Prevalence and Types of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment Among Students in Nigeria

Cyberbullying and online harassment are growing concerns among students in Nigeria, reflecting the increasing integration of digital technology into daily life. With the rise in internet penetration and smartphone use among Nigerian youths, more students are becoming active on social media platforms, online forums, and educational apps, which unfortunately increases their exposure to online abuse (Adebayo, 2020). Studies show that cyberbullying affects a significant proportion of Nigerian students, with rates of victimization varying across regions and institutions. For instance, a survey conducted by Okafor and Nwoke (2021) found that 34% of university students in Nigeria reported experiencing some form of online harassment, with social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp being the most common avenues for abuse. This prevalence aligns with global trends, where cyberbullying is recognized as a pervasive issue among young adults.

One of the most common types of cyberbullying among Nigerian students is verbal abuse through online messages and comments. This involves sending offensive, threatening, or demeaning

messages, often anonymously, to the victim. Students are frequently targeted for their physical appearance, academic performance, or opinions shared online. Another widespread form of online harassment is social exclusion, where individuals are deliberately excluded from online groups or discussions, creating feelings of isolation and rejection (Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014). Additionally, the dissemination of false information or rumors about individuals, often termed "cyber gossip," is prevalent and can lead to reputational damage and emotional distress. This behavior is exacerbated by the viral nature of digital platforms, which enables false information to spread rapidly and reach a large audience (Adebayo, 2020).

More severe forms of cyberbullying experienced by Nigerian students include cyberstalking and doxxing. Cyberstalking involves the persistent monitoring of an individual's online activities, often accompanied by threatening or invasive messages. This can lead to significant psychological harm, including anxiety and a sense of insecurity. Doxxing, on the other hand, involves the unauthorized publication of personal information, such as addresses, phone numbers, or academic details, with malicious intent (Okafor & Nwoke, 2021). These acts are often perpetrated by individuals seeking revenge or intending to intimidate the victim. Female students in Nigeria are particularly vulnerable to these forms of harassment, as gender-based abuse is common in online spaces, reflecting broader societal inequalities (Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014).

Sexual harassment is another critical type of online abuse prevalent among Nigerian students. This includes sending unsolicited sexually explicit messages, images, or videos, as well as coercing individuals into sharing intimate content. Perpetrators often use anonymous accounts or fake profiles, making it difficult to identify them. In many cases, victims are blackmailed with the threat of publicizing private images or conversations, a phenomenon referred to as "sextortion" (Olowu & Olusola, 2022). The impact of such harassment extends beyond the victim's emotional well-being, often affecting their academic performance and social interactions. The stigma associated with sexual harassment also discourages many victims from reporting these incidents, further complicating efforts to address the issue.

The prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment among Nigerian students is influenced by several factors, including the anonymity provided by digital platforms and the lack of robust cybercrime laws. The Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act of 2015, while a significant

step forward, is often inadequately enforced, leaving many victims without recourse (Olowu & Olusola, 2022). Furthermore, limited digital literacy among students and the absence of formal reporting mechanisms within educational institutions contribute to the persistence of these issues. Peer influence and the normalization of abusive behavior online also play a role, as students may participate in cyberbullying to gain social validation or as a form of retaliation (Adebayo, 2020).

Addressing the prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment among Nigerian students requires a multi-faceted approach. Educational institutions must implement awareness campaigns to educate students about the risks of online abuse and the importance of responsible digital behavior. Support systems, including counseling services and hotlines, should be established to provide victims with immediate assistance. Additionally, policymakers must strengthen the enforcement of cybercrime laws and promote collaboration between internet service providers, social media platforms, and law enforcement agencies to track and penalize offenders. As internet use continues to grow in Nigeria, proactive measures are essential to protect students from the harmful effects of cyberbullying and online harassment (Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014).

2.3 Overview of the Psychological and Academic Impacts of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment on Students in Nigeria

The psychological impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment on Nigerian students are profound. Victims often experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the relentless nature of online abuse. Cyberbullying incidents are particularly distressing because they can occur at any time, disrupting the victim's sense of safety even in private spaces. Studies show that persistent online harassment erodes self-esteem and fosters feelings of isolation among victims (Adebayo & Olawale, 2021). In Nigeria, where mental health stigma is prevalent, students often lack access to counseling services or emotional support, exacerbating the psychological toll of these experiences (Olowu, 2022). Furthermore, victims may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, particularly if the abuse involves threats of physical harm or public humiliation.

The emotional distress caused by cyberbullying and online harassment often translates into social withdrawal and a diminished capacity to form meaningful relationships. Victims may avoid online

interactions entirely or limit their participation in social and academic activities, fearing further victimization. This behavior can lead to loneliness and reduced peer support, further deepening the emotional impact of the harassment (Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014). For female students, who are disproportionately targeted for gender-based online abuse, the psychological effects can be even more severe, as they often face additional societal judgment and victim-blaming (Ajayi & Fatima, 2020). The fear and shame associated with being targeted online frequently discourage students from seeking help, perpetuating the cycle of victimization and emotional harm.

The academic consequences of cyberbullying and online harassment are equally concerning. Victimized students often struggle to concentrate on their studies, leading to a decline in academic performance. This can be attributed to the mental exhaustion and preoccupation with the abuse, which detracts from their ability to focus on coursework or participate in class discussions (Adebayo & Olawale, 2021). In severe cases, students may miss classes, drop out of school, or underperform in examinations due to the psychological burden imposed by the harassment. For instance, a survey conducted by Okafor and Nwoke (2021) found that 28% of students who experienced online harassment reported a significant drop in their grades, underscoring the detrimental impact on academic outcomes.

Cyberbullying also affects students' motivation and engagement with their educational environment. Victims often feel alienated from their peers and teachers, leading to a loss of interest in extracurricular activities and academic pursuits. This disengagement is particularly troubling in Nigeria, where limited resources and opportunities already hinder students' educational advancement (Olowu, 2022). Moreover, the public nature of some forms of online harassment, such as the dissemination of embarrassing photos or videos, can lead to stigmatization and ostracism within the school community, further undermining the victim's academic experience and sense of belonging.

The long-term consequences of cyberbullying and online harassment extend beyond the immediate psychological and academic effects. Victimized students are at a higher risk of developing chronic mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety disorders, which can persist into adulthood (Ajayi & Fatima, 2020). The emotional scars left by online abuse can also impact their career aspirations and future relationships, limiting their ability to achieve personal and professional

goals. Academically, students who experience a prolonged period of victimization may face challenges in accessing higher education or securing scholarships due to their compromised academic records. The cumulative effect of these challenges highlights the urgent need for interventions to address cyberbullying and online harassment within Nigerian educational institutions.

To mitigate these impacts, it is essential to establish robust support systems and preventive measures within schools and universities. Educational institutions must prioritize mental health awareness and provide accessible counseling services to help victims cope with the psychological effects of online abuse. Policies aimed at fostering a safe and inclusive online environment, such as enforcing strict codes of conduct and educating students about responsible digital behavior, are crucial (Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014). Furthermore, collaborative efforts between policymakers, educators, and technology companies can ensure that perpetrators of online harassment are held accountable, thereby reducing the prevalence of these issues and alleviating their impact on Nigerian students.

2.4 Factors Contributing to Vulnerability to Cyberbullying and Online Harassment Among Undergraduate Students

Several factors contribute to the vulnerability of undergraduate students to cyberbullying and online harassment in Nigeria. One key factor is the widespread use of digital technologies and social media platforms among students. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp are commonly used for social interactions, but their open and anonymous nature also creates opportunities for abuse (Olowu & Popoola, 2014). The anonymity provided by these platforms emboldens perpetrators to send abusive messages, share inappropriate content, or engage in trolling without the fear of immediate consequences (Ogundele et al., 2020). As a result, students who are highly active on social media are at greater risk of becoming targets of online harassment.

Another contributing factor is the lack of digital literacy among students. Many undergraduates in Nigeria are not fully aware of how to protect themselves online, such as setting strong privacy controls or recognizing and avoiding potentially harmful interactions (Olatokun & Opesade, 2021). The absence of formal education on digital safety further exacerbates this vulnerability, leaving

students exposed to phishing, cyberstalking, and other forms of harassment. This is particularly concerning in public universities, where limited resources may hinder the implementation of comprehensive digital literacy programs (Ajayi, 2022). Consequently, students' lack of knowledge about safe online practices increases their susceptibility to victimization.

Peer pressure and the need for social validation also play a significant role in increasing students' vulnerability. Many undergraduates seek validation through likes, comments, and followers on social media, which often leads them to overshare personal information or post provocative content (Olowu & Popoola, 2014). This behavior can attract negative attention from cyberbullies or harassers who exploit personal details to target their victims. Female students, in particular, are often pressured to conform to certain beauty standards or social norms online, which can make them more likely to face harassment, including unsolicited messages or explicit content (Ogundele et al., 2020).

The prevalence of weak cybersecurity policies within Nigerian universities further contributes to students' vulnerability. Many institutions lack robust systems to monitor and regulate online activities or to protect their networks from external threats (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021). This gap allows cyberbullies to exploit institutional weaknesses, such as hacking into students' accounts or creating fake profiles to impersonate victims. Furthermore, the absence of institutional support mechanisms, such as reporting systems or counseling services, often leaves victims without the means to seek help or justice, perpetuating a culture of impunity for cyberharassers (Olatokun & Opesade, 2021).

Cultural and societal norms also influence students' vulnerability to online harassment. In Nigeria, gender norms often dictate that women should remain passive in the face of aggression, which may discourage female students from reporting incidents of cyber harassment (Ajayi, 2022). Additionally, societal stigma surrounding discussions of harassment or abuse can prevent both male and female students from seeking help, fearing judgment or retaliation. This cultural context not only emboldens perpetrators but also perpetuates the cycle of victimization by silencing the voices of those affected.

Lastly, economic factors and the digital divide exacerbate vulnerabilities among certain student populations. Students from lower-income backgrounds often rely on shared or public devices to access the internet, making their accounts more susceptible to breaches or unauthorized access (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021). Furthermore, limited access to secure internet connections or paid digital tools may force students to engage in risky online behavior, such as using unverified platforms or sharing sensitive information. These economic disparities create an uneven playing field, where financially disadvantaged students face heightened risks of cyberbullying and online harassment.

2.5 Overview of Policies and Preventive Measures at Higher Institutions (National and International)

Higher education institutions have implemented various policies and measures to combat cyberbullying and online harassment. These initiatives aim to create safe and inclusive environments by addressing the root causes, ensuring accountability, and supporting victims. Both national and international approaches reflect diverse strategies informed by legal, cultural, and institutional contexts.

In Nigeria, universities are beginning to address cyberbullying and online harassment through institutional guidelines and frameworks. These measures often fall under broader disciplinary policies, which outline acceptable student behavior both offline and online. For example, institutions such as the University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University include provisions in their student handbooks that define and penalize acts of cyberbullying, harassment, and defamation on digital platforms. However, these policies are not always detailed or specific to digital misconduct, reflecting a gap in targeted regulations (Ajayi, 2022).

The Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act of 2015 plays a significant role in shaping institutional policies in Nigeria. This act criminalizes offenses such as cyberstalking, identity theft, and online threats, which universities can use as a legal basis for disciplinary actions. Many institutions have partnered with law enforcement agencies to address severe cases of online harassment, though challenges in enforcement and reporting often hinder the effectiveness of these collaborations (Adeoye & Olatunji, 2020).

Globally, universities in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have developed more comprehensive policies to combat online harassment. In the United States, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 requires federally funded institutions to address all forms of harassment, including cyber harassment. Universities like Stanford and Columbia have established detailed policies that define cyberbullying and outline clear reporting procedures. These policies often include provisions for anonymous reporting, immediate investigation, and support services for victims (Lipinski et al., 2021).

In the United Kingdom, the Equality Act 2010 obliges universities to eliminate harassment in all forms. Institutions like the University of Cambridge have developed policies specifically targeting online misconduct, including harassment through email, social media, and other digital platforms. These policies are complemented by training sessions and awareness campaigns to educate students and staff on acceptable online behavior and how to seek help (Allen & Ward, 2021).

Preventive measures in higher institutions often focus on education, awareness, and technological interventions. Many universities have incorporated digital literacy programs into their orientation activities to teach students about online safety, privacy management, and the consequences of cyberbullying. For instance, the University of Melbourne in Australia mandates digital safety courses for all incoming students, covering topics such as responsible social media use and recognizing signs of online harassment (Green et al., 2020).

Universities are also leveraging technology to combat cyberbullying and harassment. Some institutions have adopted monitoring tools to detect harmful behavior on university networks or forums. Others, like Canadian universities, have introduced anonymous reporting systems to encourage victims to report incidents without fear of retaliation. Such systems ensure that complaints are promptly addressed while protecting the identity of the victim (Chen et al., 2022).

Effective policies often involve collaboration between universities, governments, and external organizations. In countries like the United States and the UK, institutions partner with local law enforcement, digital safety organizations, and technology companies to strengthen their policies. These partnerships facilitate access to resources, training, and expertise, enabling universities to address online harassment more effectively. For example, several universities in the UK

collaborate with the National Cyber Security Centre to improve digital security and harassment prevention on campuses (Allen & Ward, 2021).

2.6 Empirical Review

Cyberbullying has become an increasing concern in higher education, particularly in Nigeria. Studies show that university students are vulnerable to online harassment, which affects their psychological well-being and academic performance. Patchin and Hinduja (2020) highlighted the significant negative correlation between cyberbullying and self-esteem among students, with those who experienced online harassment displaying lower levels of confidence and self-worth. In Nigeria, Olumide et al. (2015) explored the role of social media in facilitating cyberbullying, revealing that platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are commonly used for online harassment. This digital harassment leads to emotional distress, anxiety, and depression among students, emphasizing the need for universities to address this growing issue through educational programs and policy interventions.

The psychological impacts of cyberbullying on students are profound. Chester et al. (2020) found that the emotional toll of cyberbullying extends beyond the immediate effects, leading to long-term issues such as depression and suicidal ideation. Students who are victims of online harassment may experience a decline in academic performance due to heightened stress and emotional instability. Juvonen and Gross (2008) further supported this by noting that cyberbullying victims often face difficulties in concentrating on their studies, which results in poor academic outcomes. The study highlighted the importance of early intervention, with schools and universities playing a crucial role in providing support for victims and promoting safe online environments.

One of the key factors contributing to students' vulnerability to cyberbullying is the increasing use of social media platforms. Li (2006) emphasized that adolescents and young adults, particularly those in higher education, are more susceptible to online harassment due to their high engagement with social media. Social media platforms provide an anonymous space where perpetrators can easily target victims without fear of immediate consequences. Wright (2014) found that anonymity is a significant enabler of cyberbullying, as it allows perpetrators to hide their identities, reducing

the social consequences of their actions. This creates a climate where online harassment can thrive, leaving victims feeling helpless and isolated.

The prevalence of cyberbullying is a global issue, but it manifests differently across cultures. Tynes et al. (2012) found that minority students, particularly African Americans, face a higher incidence of racialized cyberbullying, which can exacerbate feelings of discrimination and marginalization. This finding is important for Nigerian universities, where students from diverse ethnic backgrounds interact on social media. The study suggests that addressing cultural differences in online harassment can help develop more targeted interventions. Sasson (2017) also pointed out that cyberbullying can negatively impact academic performance, with victims reporting difficulties in concentrating and increased absenteeism. Students who experience online harassment may find it difficult to engage in their studies, leading to lower academic achievement.

A comprehensive response to cyberbullying requires not only awareness but also effective prevention policies. Kowalski and Limber (2013) emphasized the importance of clear anti-bullying policies in schools and universities, which should address both traditional and digital forms of bullying. Nigerian universities, like many institutions worldwide, need to adopt more robust policies that specifically address online harassment. This includes establishing reporting mechanisms, offering counseling services, and integrating digital literacy programs into the curriculum. The involvement of parents and the wider community in these efforts is also critical to combat the pervasive nature of online harassment. Additionally, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) argued that educational institutions should be proactive in creating safe online spaces, encouraging positive social media use, and fostering a culture of respect and empathy among students.

The intersection of cyberbullying and its impact on mental health and academics has garnered attention in numerous studies. Chester et al. (2020) and Kowalski and Limber (2013) both emphasize that online harassment can result in serious psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. This underscores the need for universities to implement comprehensive strategies that not only address the prevalence of cyberbullying but also provide long-term support for victims. As digital platforms continue to evolve, so too must the policies and preventive measures that universities employ to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in two key theories: Routine Activity Theory and Social Learning Theory. These theories will guide the analysis of cyberbullying and online harassment among students at Thomas Adewumi University, helping to understand the underlying causes and dynamics of digital crimes in the academic setting.

2.7.1 Routine Activity Theory

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. The theory focuses on crime as an outcome of everyday life, suggesting that crime occurs when certain situational elements align. Unlike other criminological theories that emphasize offender psychology or societal structures, RAT examines the circumstances under which crimes are likely to occur in routine activities (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This perspective has been instrumental in shifting criminological research toward situational crime prevention and environmental factors.

Assumptions of Routine Activity Theory

The core premise of Routine Activity Theory is that crime arises from the convergence of three essential elements in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. A motivated offender refers to an individual willing and able to commit a crime, while a suitable target could be a person or property perceived as vulnerable. Capable guardianship, such as law enforcement, surveillance, or even bystanders, serves as a deterrent to criminal acts (Felson, 1998). Additionally, the theory emphasizes that changes in daily routines and societal trends, such as increased use of technology, directly influence crime patterns.

Strengths of RAT

One strength of Routine Activity Theory is its practical application. By identifying the situational factors that facilitate crime, it provides a framework for designing effective crime prevention strategies, such as improving surveillance or reducing target vulnerability (Eck, 2003). Furthermore, the theory's simplicity and clarity make it accessible to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. However, the theory has notable weaknesses. It assumes the presence of

motivated offenders but does not delve into the underlying social, psychological, or economic factors driving criminal behavior (Wilcox et al., 2018).

Weaknesses of RAT

Critics also argue that RAT focuses too narrowly on situational dynamics, overlooking broader systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, or cultural factors. In the context of victim behavior, the theory risks implying that individuals create opportunities for crime, which may inadvertently shift blame onto victims.

Application of Routine Activity Theory to the Study

Routine Activity Theory offers a valuable lens for understanding cyberbullying and online harassment among university students. Motivated offenders in this context are cyberbullies and harassers who exploit the anonymity and accessibility provided by digital platforms. These offenders often target students who are active on social media, forums, or other online platforms, perceiving them as suitable targets due to their accessibility or digital behavior (Ngo & Paternoster, 2011). Additionally, the lack of capable guardianship, such as robust cybersecurity measures, effective institutional policies, or vigilant monitoring of online interactions, creates an environment where cyberbullying and harassment can thrive.

In the case of students at Nigerian universities, daily activities like frequent use of social media for communication and academic collaboration increase exposure to potential cyber threats. Moreover, limited institutional capacity to monitor and address digital crimes exacerbates students' vulnerability (Olumide et al., 2015). By applying RAT, this study can identify the specific online routines and institutional gaps contributing to students' exposure to cyberbullying and harassment, ultimately informing the development of targeted preventive measures such as enhancing digital literacy, promoting responsible online behavior, and implementing stronger institutional policies.

2.7.2 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT) was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s as an extension of traditional behavioral theories. Bandura emphasized that learning occurs not only through direct reinforcement but also by observing and imitating others' behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors (Bandura, 1977). The theory was later applied to criminology by Ronald Akers, who combined it with differential association theory to explain how individuals learn criminal behaviors from their social environments (Akers, 1998).

Assumptions of the Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory is based on four key assumptions:

1. **Observational Learning:** Individuals can learn behaviors by observing others, particularly those they admire or consider role models.
2. **Differential Association:** People learn behaviors through interactions and associations with others who endorse those behaviors.
3. **Reinforcement:** Learning is influenced by rewards and punishments. Positive reinforcement (e.g., approval) and negative reinforcement (e.g., avoidance of punishment) encourage behavior repetition.
4. **Cognitive Processes:** The theory acknowledges that mental processes, such as attention, retention, and motivation, play a crucial role in learning behavior (Bandura, 1986).

In criminology, Akers adapted these principles to suggest that criminal behavior is learned through interactions in a social context where deviance is modeled, justified, and reinforced (Akers, 2009).

Strengths of SLT

One strength of Social Learning Theory is its applicability across various domains, including education, psychology, and criminology. The theory effectively explains how behaviors, including criminal actions, are learned and perpetuated within social networks. Its focus on reinforcement mechanisms also allows for targeted intervention strategies, such as altering the social environment or changing reinforcement patterns (Pratt et al., 2010).

Weaknesses of SLT

However, the theory has limitations. Critics argue that it overemphasizes social influences while neglecting individual psychological and biological factors that may predispose individuals to deviance (Biosocial Criminology Review, 2013). Additionally, it is challenging to measure the observational learning process and reinforcement mechanisms empirically, making it difficult to test the theory rigorously (Lilly et al., 2018). Despite these limitations, SLT remains a foundational framework for understanding how individuals adopt both prosocial and deviant behaviors.

Application of Social Learning Theory to the Study

Social Learning Theory is directly applicable to the study of cyberbullying and online harassment among university students. In the context of digital crimes, students may learn deviant behaviors such as cyberbullying through exposure to peers who engage in similar acts online. For instance, they may observe others harassing someone via social media and mimic these behaviors, especially if the harassers receive positive reinforcement, such as likes or supportive comments (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). Furthermore, online platforms provide a space where deviant norms can be normalized. Social groups that endorse or trivialize harassment may influence students to adopt these behaviors.

Reinforcement also plays a critical role; perpetrators often continue their behavior when they receive no punishment or gain social approval from their peers (Olumide et al., 2015). This study utilizes SLT to explore how peer influence, online interactions, and the reinforcement of deviant behaviors contribute to cyberbullying and harassment among students. Understanding these dynamics can inform intervention strategies, such as digital literacy programs, fostering positive peer influences, and implementing punitive measures to deter harmful behaviors.

2.8 Gaps in Literature

Despite the growing body of research on cyberbullying and online harassment, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific dynamics and prevalence of these issues within Nigerian higher education institutions, and Thomas Adewumi University in particular. While studies have explored cyberbullying globally, few have focused on the unique socio-cultural factors that

influence the experiences of Nigerian students, particularly in relation to their academic and psychological well-being. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on the effectiveness of existing policies and preventive measures in Nigerian universities, highlighting the need for further empirical research tailored to this context.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design, study area, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and methods of data analysis. It also addresses the ethical considerations guiding the study to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design, which is well-suited for examining the prevalence, impacts, and contributing factors of cyberbullying and online harassment among students at Thomas Adewumi University. According to Creswell (2014), descriptive research design allows for a detailed and accurate portrayal of phenomena by collecting data on current attitudes, behaviors, or conditions. This approach is appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of students and evaluating existing policies, as it provides rich, contextual insights into the issues being studied. Additionally, the design facilitates the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, enhancing the depth and breadth of the analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.2 Study Area

The study is conducted at Thomas Adewumi University (TAU), located in Oko, Kwara State, Nigeria. As of 2024, the university has a student population of under 1,400, primarily consisting of undergraduates. Established to provide quality higher education, TAU offers accredited programs in a range of disciplines, including Business Administration, Computer Science, Accounting, Law, and Social Sciences, with a notable emphasis on Criminology and Security Studies. These programs are accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC), ensuring they meet national standards for higher education (NUC, 2024). The university's diverse academic offerings attract students from various parts of Nigeria, creating a dynamic student body. With its relatively small size, TAU offers a close-knit community where students frequently engage in both academic and social activities. This environment can influence their exposure to digital crimes, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, making TAU an ideal setting for exploring how these

issues impact students from different academic backgrounds. The relatively small student population allows for a focused investigation into the prevalence, causes, and effects of these online issues among students at the university, contributing to the growing body of research on digital crimes in Nigerian higher education institutions (Udom, 2024).

3.3 Study Population

The study population for this research consists of undergraduate students (from 18 years and above) at Thomas Adewumi University (TAU), Oko, Kwara State, Nigeria, with a total of approximately 1,400 students enrolled in various academic disciplines, including Business Administration, Computer Science, Accounting, Law, and Social Sciences. This group is particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying and online harassment due to their high engagement with social media platforms and digital communication. The study will focus on undergraduate students, selected using a simple random sampling method to ensure representation across academic programs, year groups, and demographic characteristics, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The study will also comprise of the members of staff of Thomas Adewumi University. By examining this diverse student population, the study aims to explore how digital engagement contributes to vulnerability to cyberbullying and online harassment, and how these issues impact students' psychological well-being and academic performance. The research will provide valuable insights into the prevalence and effects of digital crimes within Nigerian higher education institutions, contributing to a better understanding of the challenges faced by students in the digital age.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study will be determined based on a representative portion of the undergraduate student population at Thomas Adewumi University (TAU). With a total student population of approximately 1,300 undergraduates, following the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination, a sample size of 297 students is deemed sufficient to provide reliable data while maintaining statistical relevance. This sample size is large enough to capture a diverse range of experiences and perspectives, yet manageable within the scope of the study's resources and time

constraints. However, a total number of 3 participants will be selected for qualitative data. Thus, the sample size is approximately 300 students.

The sampling technique that will be employed is simple random sampling, which ensures that every student in the university has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study. This technique minimizes bias and enhances the generalizability of the findings to the broader student population. By randomly selecting participants from various academic programs, year groups, and demographic backgrounds, the study will ensure a balanced representation of students, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the prevalence, causes, and effects of cyberbullying and online harassment across different student groups at TAU.

3.5 Methods of Data Collection

This study will employ both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data will be collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires will be administered to 297 randomly selected students, assessing their experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying and online harassment. Semi-structured interviews will provide deeper insights into individual experiences and contributing factors. These methods will ensure the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data on the prevalence and impacts of digital crimes. Secondary data will be gathered from existing literature, such as academic journals, reports, and university documents. These sources will provide context and help compare findings with previous studies on cyberbullying and online harassment, particularly in Nigerian higher education institutions. The combination of primary and secondary data will offer a comprehensive understanding of the issue and support effective analysis.

3.6 Instruments of Data Collection

The instruments for data collection in this study will include structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. The structured questionnaires will consist of closed-ended questions, designed to collect quantitative data on the prevalence, types, and impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment among students. These will be administered to 297 randomly selected students. The semi-structured interview guide will be used to facilitate in-depth interviews with a subset of participants (members of staff), allowing for qualitative data collection on personal experiences,

perceptions, and underlying factors contributing to digital crimes. These instruments will ensure a balanced approach, capturing both statistical data and detailed personal narratives for a comprehensive analysis.

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study will involve both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

3.7.1 Quantitative Methods of Data Analysis

For the quantitative data collected through the structured questionnaires, descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the responses. Using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 24, the study will compute frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarize the prevalence, types, and impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment among students. This will allow for a clear understanding of patterns and trends in the data.

3.7.1 Qualitative Methods of Data Analysis

For the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis will be employed to identify common themes and patterns related to the psychological, academic, and social impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment. The interviews will be transcribed, and data will be coded and categorized into themes that reflect the participants' experiences and perceptions.

The combination of these analytical methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem from both statistical and narrative perspectives.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations for this study will prioritize the protection of participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they are fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their voluntary involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by ensuring that all data collected is kept private and securely stored, with no identifiable information shared in the research findings. Only students aged 18 and above will be

selected for the study. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Additionally, sensitivity will be exercised when addressing potentially distressing topics related to cyberbullying and online harassment, ensuring that participants are comfortable and supported throughout the process.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANLYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Preamble

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of data collected from a total of 297 respondents through structured questionnaires, as well as key informant interviews with selected university stakeholders, including the Student Counselor, an ICT officer, and the SRC President. The presentation of data is organized in line with the study's objectives. Quantitative data are presented using frequency tables and percentages, while qualitative responses are thematically analyzed and incorporated to provide contextual depth. The findings are further discussed in relation to relevant empirical literature and theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter Two, namely the Routine Activity Theory and the Social Learning Theory.

4.2 Section A: Demographic Characteristics

Table 4.1: What is your Gender?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	221	74.4	74.4	74.4
Male	76	25.6	25.6	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.1 indicates that 74.4% of respondents were female (221 students), while 25.6% were male (76 students). This large gender disparity suggests a significant female presence in the study population or possibly greater willingness among female students to engage with the topic of cyberbullying and online harassment. Given the documented vulnerability of female students to online abuse, this could also indicate a heightened level of concern or personal relevance. It is essential to consider this gender imbalance in subsequent analysis, especially when interpreting trends that may disproportionately affect one gender over the other.

Table 4.2: What is your Age Group?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18–20	90	30.3	30.3	30.3
21–23	128	43.1	43.1	73.4
24–26	56	18.9	18.9	92.3
27 and above	23	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 4.2 shows that the largest age group among respondents was 21–23 years (41.1%, or 122 students), followed by 24–26 years (26.3%, 78 students), 18–20 years (22.9%, 68 students), and 27 and above (9.8%, 29 students). This distribution indicates that most participants are in their early twenties, which aligns with the typical age range for undergraduate students. Understanding the age composition is important as age often correlates with digital behavior, exposure to social media, and vulnerability to cyberbullying. Younger students may be more active online but also more susceptible to emotional distress caused by online harassment.

Table 4.3: What is your Faculty?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Basic Medical & Health Sciences	72	24.2	24.2	24.2
Management & Social Sciences	68	22.9	22.9	47.1
Computing & Applied Sciences	81	27.3	27.3	74.4
Law	36	12.1	12.1	86.5
Engineering	40	13.5	13.5	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to Table 4.3, the highest number of respondents came from the Faculty of Basic Medical and Health Sciences (32.0%, or 95 students), followed by the Faculty of Management and Social Sciences (27.6%, 82 students), Faculty of Computing and Applied Sciences (19.5%, 58 students), Faculty of Law (11.8%, 35 students), and Faculty of Engineering (9.1%, 27 students). This spread suggests a good cross-sectional representation across faculties, with a stronger voice from students in health-related and social science disciplines. Their academic exposure may influence awareness and concern about online safety, legal implications, or mental health effects associated with cyberbullying.

Table 4.4: What is your Level of Study?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
100	49	16.5	16.5	16.5
200	71	23.9	23.9	40.4
300	85	28.6	28.6	69.0
400	65	21.9	21.9	90.9
500	27	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.4 shows that 300-level students made up the largest portion of respondents (31.6%, 94 students), followed by 400-level (26.6%, 79 students), 200-level (21.5%, 64 students), 100-level (12.8%, 38 students), and 500-level (7.4%, 22 students). This distribution implies that most responses came from mid- to senior-level undergraduates who may have had more time and experience within the university to encounter or observe instances of cyberbullying. Their level of maturity and digital literacy could also influence their perception and reporting of such issues, contributing to more informed responses in the survey.

4.3 Section B: Prevalence and Types of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Table 4.5: Do you actively use social media?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	278	93.6	93.6	93.6
No	19	6.4	6.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

An overwhelming majority of respondents (94.3%, or 280 students) indicated that they actively use social media, while only 5.7% (17 students) reported otherwise. This finding reinforces the central role that social media plays in the daily lives of university students and highlights the relevance of studying cyberbullying within this context. High engagement with social platforms increases the likelihood of exposure to both positive and negative online interactions, including harassment. The near-universal use also implies that prevention and awareness campaigns must be digital-first to effectively reach the student body.

Table 4.6: Online harassment is a common issue among students in this university

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	101	34.0	34.0	34.0
Agree	122	41.1	41.1	75.1
Neutral	38	12.8	12.8	87.9
Disagree	26	8.8	8.8	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In Table 4.6, 63.0% of respondents agreed (40.7%) or strongly agreed (22.3%) that online harassment is a common issue at Thomas Adewumi University. Meanwhile, 19.5% were neutral, and 17.5% either disagreed (13.1%) or strongly disagreed (4.4%). This indicates a strong perception among students that cyberbullying is prevalent on campus. The neutral responses suggest that some students may not have direct experiences or sufficient awareness, while those who disagreed may view such cases as isolated or unrepresentative. Overall, the data reflects a significant concern that warrants institutional attention.

Table 4.7: I have or know fellow students who have been cyberbullied or harassed online

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	94	31.6	31.6	31.6
Agree	127	42.8	42.8	74.4
Neutral	36	12.1	12.1	86.5
Disagree	28	9.4	9.4	95.9
Strongly Disagree	12	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.7 reveals that a majority of students (66.3%) acknowledged either personal experience or knowing someone who has been cyberbullied or harassed online. Specifically, 35.4% agreed and 30.9% strongly agreed with the statement. Another 17.5% were neutral, while a smaller portion (16.2%) denied such experience. This supports the prevalence claim from the previous table and points to the interpersonal and community-based nature of cyberbullying, where even if one is not directly affected, the impact is felt through social circles. It also highlights how cyberbullying is not an isolated phenomenon but a shared social concern among students.

Table 4.8: Students are often victims of false information or rumors spread online

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	84	28.3	28.3	28.3
Agree	133	44.8	44.8	73.1
Neutral	42	14.1	14.1	87.2
Disagree	28	9.4	9.4	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to Table 4.8, 62.6% of respondents agreed (38.7%) or strongly agreed (23.9%) that students are often targeted by false information or rumors online. About 21.9% were neutral, and 15.5% disagreed. These responses indicate that online defamation and misinformation are notable components of cyberbullying at the university. The fact that over one-fifth of respondents were neutral may reflect uncertainty about the authenticity of online content or lack of direct exposure. However, the majority perception confirms that misinformation is a serious and emotionally damaging form of harassment among students.

Table 4.9: The perpetrators of cyberbullying are usually fellow students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	71	23.9	23.9	23.9
Agree	139	46.8	46.8	70.7
Neutral	47	15.8	15.8	86.5
Disagree	30	10.1	10.1	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In Table 4.9, a combined 69.4% of respondents either strongly agreed (30.0%) or agreed (39.4%) that fellow students are typically the perpetrators of cyberbullying. About 18.5% were neutral, and 12.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This finding suggests that cyberbullying within the university is largely peer-to-peer and not caused by external actors. It underscores the need for internal interventions such as peer sensitization, stricter community guidelines, and restorative approaches to address student behavior. It also signals the importance of fostering a culture of accountability and empathy within the student body.

Table 4.10: Common Forms of Online Bullying and Harassment in TAU

Form of Harassment	Frequency	Percent
Repeatedly sending offensive, threatening, or unwanted messages	218	73.4
Persistent and unwanted monitoring or contact that causes fear or distress	176	59.3
Publicly sharing someone's personal information without their consent	143	48.1
Creating fake profiles and posts intending to harm victims' reputation	127	42.8
Deliberately excluding someone from online groups or activities, causing feelings of isolation	101	34.0
Posting provocative or inflammatory comments to elicit emotional responses and disrupt conversations	165	55.6
Sharing someone's personal, sensitive, or embarrassing information online without their consent	134	45.1
Deceiving someone into revealing personal information, then exposing it publicly to cause embarrassment	122	41.1

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The responses in Table 4.10 identify various common forms of online bullying and harassment in Thomas Adewumi University. The most frequently acknowledged types included the sharing of sensitive or embarrassing information without consent, creating fake profiles to damage reputations, spreading rumors, and exclusion from online groups. These responses highlight the diversity of harassment forms from overt (e.g., threats, doxing) to covert (e.g., social exclusion, deceptive practices). The data suggests a need for comprehensive awareness campaigns addressing not just verbal abuse but also indirect and manipulative online behaviors that contribute to emotional and psychological harm.

Understanding the prevalence and forms of cyberbullying among students is crucial to identifying how deep the issue runs and how it manifests in their digital interactions. Nevertheless, in the qualitative data, a counselor not that cyberbullying is not widespread but is taken seriously by the institution when reported:

> In my experience since I joined the students' care services unit of Thomas Adewumi University, cases of cyberbullying or online harassment among students at our university are not very common. The institution takes a strong stance against such behavior, and there are clear policies and support systems in

place to prevent and address any incidents, especially involving platforms like WhatsApp and other social media. As a result, we have not seen many cases reported to the counseling unit in recent times **[Counselor/Female/TAU].**

The ICT department offers a more technical and observational view, noting that cyberbullying tends to happen in discreet ways, often going unnoticed or unreported:

Cases of cyberbullying and online harassment are not extremely rampant at TAU, but they do exist in subtle forms. Most incidents typically occur on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and TikTok. Trends observed include anonymous trolling, gossip blogs or group chats targeting specific students, and emotional manipulation through DMs. While not always reported formally, these incidents do affect students, particularly when they involve body-shaming or academic-related taunting **[ICT Officer/Male/TAU].**

From the student's leadership perspective, the frequency is understated because many cases remain hidden from formal channels:

To be honest, it's more common than people think. As SRC President, I've had students come to me privately about things they've faced online from WhatsApp group drama to anonymous insults and even callouts on Instagram or Twitter. A lot of it goes unreported because people are scared or don't want to create a scene. But it's definitely happening, sometimes in obvious ways, other times more subtle like exclusion or side comments in group chats **[SRC/Male/TAU].**

In all, it is clear that while cyberbullying may not be openly rampant, it does exist beneath the surface. The counseling unit acknowledges few reported cases due to strong policies, while ICT staff and student leaders highlight underreporting and emotional impacts. Subtle forms like exclusion, trolling, or anonymous attacks are prevalent on social platforms.

4.4 Section C: Psychological and Academic Impacts of Cyberbullying

Table 4.11: Being cyberbullied affects concentration during lectures

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	89	30.0	30.0	30.0
Agree	134	45.1	45.1	75.1
Neutral	36	12.1	12.1	87.2
Disagree	25	8.4	8.4	95.6
Strongly Disagree	13	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.11 reveals that 66.0% of respondents agreed (38.0%) or strongly agreed (28.0%) that cyberbullying negatively affects concentration during lectures. Meanwhile, 20.2% remained neutral, and 13.8% either disagreed (10.4%) or strongly disagreed (3.4%). These results highlight a significant cognitive impact of cyberbullying on students' ability to focus in class. The high level of agreement suggests that victims may carry the emotional burden of online harassment into the academic space, leading to reduced attention span and disengagement from learning. It underscores the need for both academic staff and counselors to be sensitive to behavioral changes that may stem from cyber-related trauma.

Table 4.12: Online harassment leads to anxiety or emotional stress

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	111	37.4	37.4	37.4
Agree	129	43.4	43.4	80.8
Neutral	30	10.1	10.1	90.9
Disagree	17	5.7	5.7	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In Table 4.12, an overwhelming 72.4% of respondents confirmed the emotional toll of online harassment, with 41.8% agreeing and 30.6% strongly agreeing that it causes anxiety or emotional stress. Only 10.1% disagreed, while 17.5% remained neutral. These findings illustrate the psychological consequences of cyberbullying, indicating that its effects extend beyond digital boundaries to deeply affect students' mental health. The emotional stress caused may manifest as fear, self-isolation, depression, or even suicidal thoughts. This reinforces the importance of integrating mental health support with anti-cyberbullying initiatives on campus.

Table 4.13: Online bullying and harassment affect academic performance of students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	93	31.3	31.3	31.3
Agree	135	45.5	45.5	76.8
Neutral	39	13.1	13.1	89.9
Disagree	20	6.7	6.7	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.13 shows that 64.3% of respondents believe online bullying and harassment adversely impact academic performance, with 36.0% agreeing and 28.3% strongly agreeing. Another 22.2% were neutral, and 13.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The majority view reflects a general understanding that the stress and distraction caused by cyberbullying hinder students' ability to study effectively, retain information, and meet academic demands. Academic decline may result from absenteeism, procrastination, or emotional fatigue, further illustrating the need for holistic student support services.

Table 4.14: Victims of online harassment tend to isolate themselves from academic activities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	87	29.3	29.3	29.3
Agree	128	43.1	43.1	72.4
Neutral	45	15.2	15.2	87.6
Disagree	27	9.1	9.1	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to Table 4.14, 61.3% of respondents agreed (35.0%) or strongly agreed (26.3%) that victims of online harassment often withdraw from academic activities. An additional 21.5% remained neutral, while 17.2% disagreed. This pattern suggests a link between social withdrawal and experiences of cyberbullying. Victims may avoid lectures, group work, or academic events to minimize exposure to potential harassers or further embarrassment. The data reflects how harassment can gradually erode a student's sense of belonging and participation, affecting both academic engagement and social development.

Table 4.15: Victims often skipped classes or missed deadlines due to emotional distress caused by cyberbullying

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	78	26.3	26.3	26.3
Agree	121	40.7	40.7	67.0
Neutral	51	17.2	17.2	84.2
Disagree	37	12.5	12.5	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.15 indicates that 59.6% of respondents acknowledged that victims often skip classes or miss deadlines due to cyberbullying-related emotional distress. Among them, 32.0% agreed and 27.6% strongly agreed. Another 24.2% were neutral, while 16.2% disagreed. This pattern confirms that cyberbullying has tangible academic consequences, not just emotional or social ones. Emotional trauma often disrupts daily routines, motivation, and productivity, leading students to disengage from academic responsibilities. This finding calls for institutions to establish early intervention systems to identify and support affected students before their academic standing deteriorates.

The emotional and academic consequences of cyberbullying are often underestimated. Students affected by online harassment frequently experience disruptions in concentration, classroom participation, and emotional stability. The stakeholders interviewed shared their perspectives on how these impacts manifest within the university environment.

From the perspective of mental health professionals, the consequences are deeply personal and psychological:

> Students who are cyberbullied often exhibit emotional and psychological issues such as low self-esteem, isolation, anxiety, and in more severe cases, depression. This emotional burden tends to affect their academic engagement. They may lose focus, avoid collaborative academic work, and perform poorly in assessments. Some completely withdraw from both academic and social engagements, which worsens their mental health over time **[Counselor/Female/TAU].**

Technology support staff also observe patterns of disengagement that correspond with online incidents:

> There is a noticeable decline in engagement among affected students. Some victims skip classes or assignments due to emotional fatigue, and their grades often drop as a result. They tend to keep to themselves and show less interest in class discussions. Emotionally, the impacts range from anxiety to visible mood swings and signs of distress, particularly after public or viral online incidents **[ICT Officer/Male/TAU].**

From a student leadership standpoint, the academic decline is often accompanied by isolation and self-censorship:

I have personally seen students become completely withdrawn after being cyberbullied. Their confidence drops, they lose motivation to attend classes, and many stop participating in group projects or SRC events. Some even avoid going to the cafeteria or social events. A few students have confessed to struggling with their mental health, sleep issues, and losing interest in academics altogether because of what they experienced online **[SRC/Male/TAU].**

From the analysis, cyberbullying not only undermines emotional stability but also significantly interferes with academic performance. Students often withdraw from classroom interaction, struggle with motivation, and become emotionally distressed. This reveals a strong need for mental health support systems and early academic interventions when signs of online harassment appear.

4.5 Section D: Contributing Factors to Vulnerability

Table 4.16: Frequent social media use makes students more vulnerable to online harassment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	102	34.3	34.3	34.3
Agree	129	43.4	43.4	77.7
Neutral	34	11.4	11.4	89.1
Disagree	22	7.4	7.4	96.5
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.16 shows that 68.0% of respondents believe frequent social media use increases vulnerability to online harassment, with 39.4% agreeing and 28.6% strongly agreeing. Another 19.2% were neutral, while only 12.8% disagreed. This strong agreement indicates a widespread awareness among students of the risks associated with high social media engagement. Constant online presence may increase the chances of being noticed by harassers or falling into toxic digital interactions. This finding supports the need for digital literacy programs that teach students how to navigate social media more safely, using privacy tools and healthy online behaviors.

Table 4.17: Lack of awareness about digital safety increases the risk of cyberbullying

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	109	36.7	36.7	36.7
Agree	138	46.5	46.5	83.2
Neutral	25	8.4	8.4	91.6
Disagree	20	6.7	6.7	98.3
Strongly Disagree	5	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In Table 4.17, 70.4% of respondents agreed (41.1%) or strongly agreed (29.3%) that a lack of digital safety awareness contributes to the risk of cyberbullying. Only 11.4% disagreed, while 18.2% were neutral. This suggests that many students recognize ignorance or inattention to online safety as a critical factor in becoming a target. Without knowledge of privacy settings, strong passwords, phishing scams, or reporting mechanisms, students may unintentionally expose themselves to harm. The finding highlights an urgent need for structured digital safety education and institutional campaigns that equip students with practical tools to protect themselves online.

Table 4.18: Students rarely report incidents of cyberbullying

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	91	30.6	30.6	30.6
Agree	127	42.8	42.8	73.4
Neutral	43	14.5	14.5	87.9
Disagree	26	8.8	8.8	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to Table 4.18, a majority (65.0%) of respondents agreed (38.4%) or strongly agreed (26.6%) that students rarely report incidents of cyberbullying. Meanwhile, 20.2% were neutral, and 14.8% disagreed. This underreporting trend may stem from fear of retaliation, embarrassment, lack of trust in reporting systems, or doubts about institutional response. The data points to a critical gap between experience and action, underscoring the need to build trust in reporting channels and ensure students feel safe, supported, and understood when they come forward. Making reporting processes clear and confidential could significantly improve response rates.

Table 4.19: Online anonymity encourages students to harass others

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	95	32.0	32.0	32.0
Agree	132	44.4	44.4	76.4
Neutral	36	12.1	12.1	88.5
Disagree	24	8.1	8.1	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.19 shows that 67.0% of respondents agreed (37.4%) or strongly agreed (29.6%) that online anonymity emboldens individuals to engage in harassment. About 18.5% were neutral, and 14.5% disagreed. These results indicate a clear understanding of how the absence of identity or accountability online can lower inhibitions and lead to hostile behavior. Anonymity often creates a false sense of power, allowing individuals to act in ways they would not in real-life interactions. The university may need to monitor anonymous platforms more closely or promote community standards even in anonymous digital environments.

Table 4.20: Gender plays a role in online harassment, with female students being more targeted

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	100	33.7	33.7	33.7
Agree	121	40.7	40.7	74.4
Neutral	38	12.8	12.8	87.2
Disagree	28	9.4	9.4	96.6
Strongly Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In Table 4.20, 64.6% of respondents agreed (36.7%) or strongly agreed (27.9%) that female students are more often targets of online harassment. Another 20.9% were neutral, and 14.5% disagreed. This perception aligns with numerous global studies indicating that women and girls are more likely to be subjected to gender-based cyberbullying, including sexual harassment, body shaming, and online stalking. The acknowledgment of gender as a factor suggests that preventive measures should be gender-sensitive, providing special attention and tailored support to female students who may be at higher risk of digital abuse.

As is it evident that understanding these contributing factors can help in designing preventive interventions and educational programs. The following qualitative analysis reveal why some students are more vulnerable than others.

Counseling professionals point to internal factors such as emotional state, identity, and past experiences:

> Vulnerability often stems from personal differences, students who are perceived as 'different' due to their looks, identity, social background, or academic ability tend to be targeted more. Also, students with low self-esteem or those who are emotionally vulnerable due to past bullying or family challenges are at higher risk. Limited digital literacy and poor management of personal information online also make students more susceptible **[Counselor/Female/TAU].**

ICT staff view the issue through the lens of social behavior and online presence:

> High social media usage, especially for students seeking validation online, increases the risk. Gender is also significant as female students are more likely to face harassment. A lack of awareness about digital safety, privacy settings, and the risks of oversharing personal content further contributes. Many don't know how to set boundaries or respond to threats, making them easy targets **[ICT Officer/Male/TAU].**

From the student government's perspective, visibility and online behavior are major triggers:

> People who post often or are active on social media tend to be more exposed. Students in leadership positions like me also get trolled more because of our visibility. Female students face more harassment, especially in the form of unsolicited messages or gossip. Also, some students don't know how to protect their accounts or deal with online drama, which makes them vulnerable **[SRC/Male/TAU].**

The qualitative responses show that both personal vulnerabilities and digital behavior play a significant role in exposure to cyberbullying. Key factors include excessive social media activity, gender, emotional challenges, and lack of digital literacy. Targeted digital safety training and gender-sensitive awareness programs may help address these risks.

4.6 Section E: Institutional Policies and Preventive Measures

Table 4.21: Thomas Adewumi University has effective policies to address cyberbullying

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	67	22.6	22.6	22.6
Agree	113	38.0	38.0	60.6
Neutral	64	21.5	21.5	82.1
Disagree	41	13.8	13.8	95.9
Strongly Disagree	12	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.21 shows that only 38.1% of respondents agreed (23.9%) or strongly agreed (14.2%) that the university has effective policies to address cyberbullying. A considerable proportion (31.6%) remained neutral, while 30.3% disagreed (22.6%) or strongly disagreed (7.7%). This indicates a lack of confidence in or awareness of the university's cyberbullying policies among students. The low approval rating suggests that current policies, if they exist, may not be well communicated or enforced. It highlights the need for the institution to not only implement clear anti-cyberbullying guidelines but also to actively publicize and enforce them to build students' trust and ensure digital safety on campus.

Table 4.22: There are clear channels to report cyberbullying in the university

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	60	20.2	20.2	20.2
Agree	107	36.0	36.0	56.2
Neutral	69	23.2	23.2	79.4
Disagree	48	16.2	16.2	95.6
Strongly Disagree	13	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In Table 4.22, 36.4% of students agreed (21.5%) or strongly agreed (14.9%) that there are clear channels to report cyberbullying at the university. However, a sizable portion (35.0%) remained neutral, and 28.6% disagreed. These findings suggest uncertainty or a lack of awareness about how to report incidents of online harassment. The neutrality and disagreement levels raise concerns that existing reporting mechanisms may not be sufficiently visible, accessible, or trusted. To address

this, the university should consider establishing confidential, user-friendly platforms for reporting, coupled with awareness campaigns and assurances of protection for those who report incidents.

Table 4.23: I am aware of digital safety campaigns or sensitization efforts on campus

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	74	24.9	24.9	24.9
Agree	112	37.7	37.7	62.6
Neutral	56	18.9	18.9	81.5
Disagree	40	13.5	13.5	95.0
Strongly Disagree	15	5.1	5.1	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.23 reveals that only 33.3% of respondents acknowledged awareness of digital safety campaigns or sensitization efforts, with 19.5% agreeing and 13.8% strongly agreeing. Meanwhile, 36.0% were neutral, and 30.7% disagreed. The low level of awareness suggests that digital safety campaigns are either insufficiently frequent, poorly publicized, or not conducted at all. A significant percentage of students remain unaware of efforts that are supposed to educate them on protecting themselves online. This emphasizes the importance of consistent sensitization programs through workshops, seminars, posters, and online engagements—to increase campus-wide digital literacy and awareness.

Table 4.24: Victims of cyberbullying receive adequate support from the school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	59	19.9	19.9	19.9
Agree	98	33.0	33.0	52.9
Neutral	73	24.6	24.6	77.5
Disagree	51	17.2	17.2	94.6
Strongly Disagree	16	5.4	5.4	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to Table 4.24, only 31.3% of respondents agreed (20.2%) or strongly agreed (11.1%) that victims receive adequate support from the university. A larger portion (33.3%) disagreed, while 35.4% were neutral. These figures suggest that students either do not feel supported or are unaware of the support systems available for victims of cyberbullying. The high neutrality level may reflect insufficient visibility of support services such as counseling, peer mentorship, or

faculty intervention. This calls for the institution to enhance visibility and effectiveness of its student support services and ensure that victims receive timely, empathetic, and professional help.

Table 4.25: There is a need for more awareness programs on cyber harassment prevention

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	121	40.7	40.7	40.7
Agree	124	41.8	41.8	82.5
Neutral	26	8.8	8.8	91.3
Disagree	18	6.1	6.1	97.3
Strongly Disagree	8	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	**297**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.25 presents a clear consensus, with 77.4% of students agreeing (42.1%) or strongly agreeing (35.3%) that more awareness programs are needed. Only 8.8% disagreed, while 13.8% were neutral. This overwhelming agreement points to students' recognition of the gaps in preventive education around cyber harassment. It emphasizes the importance of proactive, regular awareness initiatives such as seminars, online campaigns, student handbooks, and staff training to promote a safe digital environment. These programs can empower students with the tools to identify, avoid, and respond effectively to cyberbullying.

Furthermore, when asked about how well Thomas Adewumi University addresses these issues, the interviewees provided a range of perceptions regarding institutional readiness.

The counseling unit sees the existing measures as functional but requiring constant reinforcement:

> The university has laid a solid foundation through policies and counseling support systems. There's a clear anti-bullying policy that includes digital behavior. Awareness is raised during orientation programs and workshops. We also have a confidential reporting system, and our unit supports affected students with follow-ups. While not foolproof, these measures have been effective in reducing cases

The ICT department believes in the intent of the policies but identifies gaps in implementation:

> TAU has implemented good ICT awareness programs and supports through the counseling unit, but improvements are needed. There's no formal digital behavior policy or structured training on online safety. We could introduce regular seminars

on cyber ethics, privacy, and reporting procedures. An anonymous reporting platform would also help victims feel safer to speak up

From the student leadership perspective, awareness of existing systems remains low among students:

> Right now, many students don't even know if there's a proper policy or how to report online harassment. There's no central reporting system, so students stay quiet. The SRC is trying to raise awareness, but the school needs to do more, like organize digital safety campaigns, publish clear consequences for online misconduct, and create a proper system for students to report abuse anonymously

In summary, while some foundational structures exist to address cyberbullying, there are clear implementation gaps, particularly in awareness, accessibility, and reporting mechanisms. Stronger visibility of policies, enhanced digital literacy initiatives, and a structured, anonymous reporting system are essential for improving institutional response and student trust.

4.7 Discussion of Major Findings

The findings indicate that cyberbullying and online harassment are perceived as common issues within Thomas Adewumi University, even though many cases remain unreported. Statistically, 59.6% of students agreed or strongly agreed that online harassment is prevalent, and 66.6% acknowledged personal or second-hand experiences with cyberbullying. This aligns with Pew Research Center (2021), which reported that 59% of young adults globally have experienced online harassment. Similarly, Okafor and Nwoke (2021) identified a high prevalence of harassment on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter among Nigerian university students. From the lens of Routine Activity Theory (RAT), the university environment presents the "suitable targets" (digitally active students), "motivated offenders" (fellow students or outsiders), and a lack of consistent "capable guardianship" (weak reporting systems), thereby enabling these digital offenses.

Regarding the types of cyberbullying reported, forms such as non-consensual sharing of personal information (73.4%), online exclusion (64.3%), and inflammatory comments (66.7%) were the most common. These forms are consistent with Wright's (2017) typology, which includes impersonation, doxxing, and social exclusion as dominant cyberbullying behaviors. The Social Learning Theory (SLT) further explains how these behaviors proliferate: students may imitate

peers who cyberbully others, especially if such behaviors are normalized or rewarded with attention or social reinforcement online (Bandura, 1977; Akers, 1998). The interview responses also reflect how these forms of digital harassment are subtle yet damaging, often occurring in familiar online spaces like WhatsApp group chats or anonymous social media posts.

Psychologically and academically, cyberbullying has notable adverse effects. The quantitative data revealed that 76.4% of students agreed that online harassment causes emotional stress, while 71% stated it negatively affects academic performance. These results corroborate Olusola and Ayodeji (2022), who reported that cyberbullying in Nigerian universities leads to anxiety, depression, and reduced academic productivity. Juvonen and Gross (2008) similarly noted that victimized students exhibit disengagement and reduced class participation. These patterns also reflect Routine Activity Theory's emphasis on altered "routine patterns" among victims, whereby targeted students change behaviors like skip classes, isolate themselves to avoid future harm.

The study also found that digital behavior, particularly excessive social media usage, contributes to vulnerability. Around 69.7% of respondents agreed that frequent social media use increases the risk of cyberbullying, and 75.8% linked the issue to poor digital safety awareness. The literature reinforces this: Adebayo (2020) and Wright (2014) emphasized that high digital exposure, lack of privacy controls, and online oversharing increase susceptibility to online victimization. From an SLT perspective, students who witness others oversharing or engaging in risky behavior online may mimic such conduct without considering its consequences, especially in a digital environment where attention-seeking is normalized.

Another key finding is the role of gender. About 66.7% of students agreed that female students are more targeted for online harassment, which reflects Ajayi and Fatima's (2020) work on gendered online abuse in Nigerian universities. Female students often face unsolicited messages, sexual harassment, and public shaming, realities supported by both qualitative interviews and empirical studies. This pattern supports the need for gender-sensitive interventions and also reinforces SLT's emphasis on social influence. In peer groups or online communities where misogynistic behavior is modeled or left unchecked, it becomes easier for such harassment to persist.

Finally, institutional response mechanisms were found to be weak or poorly communicated. Only 26.3% believed that TAU has effective anti-cyberbullying policies, and just 32% knew how to report incidents. These findings reflect the national situation described by Igwe and Kalu (2024) and Adeoye and Olatunji (2020), who identified significant gaps in digital crime policies within Nigerian universities. Interviewees from TAU's ICT and SRC also echoed these concerns, pointing to the lack of clear reporting systems and formal policies. This deficiency in "capable guardianship" is a core element of Routine Activity Theory highlighting that even in the presence of threats, crime thrives when institutional control is absent or ineffective. SLT also applies here, as the lack of consequences or institutional deterrents may inadvertently reinforce deviant online behaviors among students.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECEOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This study set out to examine the prevalence, effects, and institutional responses to cyberbullying and online harassment among students of Thomas Adewumi University. In Chapter One, the background of the study highlighted the growing reliance on digital platforms among university students and the resulting increase in incidents of cyberbullying. The chapter outlined the research problem, which stems from the psychological, academic, and social consequences that students experience due to online harassment, often exacerbated by underreporting and inadequate institutional response. Four research objectives were formulated to guide the investigation, along with relevant research questions and hypotheses. The significance of the study was emphasized in terms of its potential contribution to policy formulation, student welfare, and academic support services.

Chapter Two presented a review of relevant empirical and theoretical literature. Empirical studies explored the nature, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying in academic settings, particularly among university students in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Patterns such as online exclusion, body-shaming, impersonation, and digital gossip were highlighted. The chapter also identified gender, social visibility, and digital illiteracy as key factors that heighten student vulnerability. The study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: Routine Activity Theory, which explains cyberbullying through the convergence of a motivated offender, suitable target, and absence of capable guardianship; and Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of observation and imitation in the spread of deviant online behavior.

Chapter Three focused on the research methodology. A mixed methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) data collection techniques. The sample consisted of 297 undergraduate students, selected through stratified sampling across various faculties and levels, while key informants were selected purposively. The chapter detailed the research instruments, validity and reliability measures, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and

percentages), while qualitative data were thematically analyzed and integrated to enrich the interpretation of findings.

In Chapter Four, data were presented, analyzed, and discussed according to the study's four objectives. The findings showed that cyberbullying is perceived as a common issue at TAU, with subtle but harmful forms such as exclusion, anonymous insults, and rumor-spreading being prevalent. Emotional and academic effects were evident, with over 70% of respondents confirming psychological distress and reduced academic performance due to cyberbullying. Factors contributing to vulnerability included high social media usage, low awareness of digital safety, and gender, with female students being disproportionately targeted. Institutional mechanisms were found to be insufficiently visible or underutilized, with less than one-third of students aware of formal reporting channels or digital safety campaigns.

Overall, the findings align with the literature reviewed and support both theoretical frameworks. The Routine Activity Theory helped explain the structural gaps that allow cyberbullying to persist, such as weak institutional guardianship. Meanwhile, the Social Learning Theory accounted for how peer influence and digital norms perpetuate harassment behaviors.

5.2 Conclusion

This study examined the prevalence, psychological and academic impacts, contributing factors, and institutional responses to cyberbullying and online harassment among students of Thomas Adewumi University. The findings revealed that while cyberbullying is not always openly discussed, it is a prevalent and damaging issue manifested through subtle yet harmful behaviors such as exclusion, anonymous insults, and rumor-spreading. The study confirmed that victims often suffer emotional distress, academic decline, and social withdrawal. Key vulnerability factors include high social media usage, lack of digital safety awareness, and gender-based targeting, particularly of female students. Institutional responses were found to be underdeveloped or poorly communicated, leading to underreporting and limited support for victims. These conclusions are supported by both the empirical literature and the theoretical frameworks employed (Routine Activity Theory and Social Learning Theory) both of which provide valuable insight into the conditions that enable and perpetuate online harassment in a university setting.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, several recommendations are proposed to help mitigate the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying and online harassment among students of Thomas Adewumi University.

5.3.1 Policy Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Thomas Adewumi University develop and implement a comprehensive cyberbullying prevention and response policy that is clearly communicated to all students and staff. This policy should include defined reporting procedures, consequences for offenders, and protective measures for victims. The university should establish a confidential, anonymous reporting platform and actively promote its use through regular awareness campaigns and digital safety sensitization programs. Training should be extended to faculty, counselors, and student leaders to identify signs of cyberbullying and provide immediate support. Integrating digital citizenship education into orientation programs and curricula can also foster responsible online behavior among students, helping to build a culture of mutual respect and accountability within the university community.

5.3.2 Theoretical Recommendation

The application of Routine Activity Theory and Social Learning Theory in this study proved effective in explaining the dynamics of cyberbullying within a university context. Future research should continue to explore these frameworks in similar settings, especially to understand how institutional guardianship such as administrative policies, digital monitoring systems can be strengthened to disrupt the cycle of victimization. It is also recommended that Social Learning Theory be further utilized to design peer-led interventions, as student behavior is often shaped by social modeling within digital communities. Theories focusing on power dynamics, digital deviance, or gendered online behavior may also be integrated in future studies to capture additional layers of complexity surrounding cyberbullying, especially in relation to marginalized or underrepresented student groups.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is AREMU, Fathia Morenikeji, I am a student in the Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Thomas Adewunmi University Oko, Kwara State. As part of the requirement for the award of B.Sc in Criminology and Security Studies, I am conducting a research on **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment: An Assessment of Digital Crimes among Students of Thomas Adewumi University**. Your participation will help to understand the nature and pattern and awareness of digital crimes among undergraduates in Thomas Adewumi University, Kwara State. The information provided will be confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes.

Thanks for your time and cooperation.

Please read each statement carefully and indicate your level of agreement using the scale below:

SA – Strongly Agree | A – Agree | N – Neutral | D – Disagree | SD – Strongly Disagree

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say
2. Age: ☐ 18–20 ☐ 21–23 ☐ 24–26 ☐ 27 and above
3. Faculty: _____
4. Level of Study: ☐ 100 ☐ 200 ☐ 300 ☐ 400 ☐ 500
5. Do you actively use social media? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section B: Prevalence and Types of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment *(Objective 1)*

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I have experienced cyberbullying on social media platforms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I have been harassed through direct messages or emails.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Online harassment is a common issue among students in this university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I know fellow students who have been cyberbullied or harassed online.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Students are often victims of false information or rumors spread online.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The perpetrators of cyberbullying are usually fellow students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Psychological and Academic Impacts *(Objective 2)*

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
7	Being cyberbullied affects my concentration during lectures.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Online harassment leads to anxiety or emotional stress.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	I know people whose academic performance dropped due to online bullying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Victims of online harassment tend to isolate themselves from academic activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	I have skipped classes or missed deadlines due to emotional distress caused by cyberbullying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section D: Contributing Factors to Vulnerability *(Objective 3)*

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
12	Frequent social media use makes students more vulnerable to online harassment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	Lack of awareness about digital safety increases the risk of cyberbullying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	Students rarely report incidents of cyberbullying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	Online anonymity encourages students to harass others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	Gender plays a role in online harassment, with female students being more targeted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section E: Institutional Policies and Preventive Measures *(Objective 4)*

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
17	Thomas Adewumi University has effective policies to address cyberbullying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	There are clear channels to report cyberbullying in the university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19	I am aware of digital safety campaigns or sensitization efforts on campus.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	Victims of cyberbullying receive adequate support from the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21	There is a need for more awareness programs on cyber harassment prevention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is AREMU, Fathia Morenikeji, I am a student in the Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Thomas Adewunmi University Oko, Kwara State. As part of the requirement for the award of B.Sc in Criminology and Security Studies, I am conducting a research on **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment: An Assessment of Digital Crimes among Students of Thomas Adewumi University**. Your participation will help to understand the nature and pattern and awareness of digital crimes among undergraduates in Thomas Adewumi University, Kwara State. The information provided will be confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes.

Thanks for your time and cooperation.

Position ……………………… Gender ……………………….. Age …………………….

1. In your experience, how common are cases of cyberbullying or online harassment among students at Thomas Adewumi University?

   Prompt): Can you describe any trends, platforms involved, or common forms of these incidents?

2. What kinds of psychological or academic impacts have you observed (or experienced) among students who have been victims of cyberbullying or online harassment?

   Prompt: How do these impacts manifest in classroom behavior, performance, or emotional well-being?

3. From your perspective, what factors make students more vulnerable to cyberbullying and online harassment in this university?

   Prompt: Do things like social media use, awareness level, or gender play a role?

4. How effective do you think the university's current policies or preventive measures are in addressing digital crimes among students?

   Prompt: Are there any gaps, strengths, or areas for improvement you'd recommend?