
KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

NAVIGATING CYBERBULLYING IN NIGERIA'S DIGITAL SPACE: PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR NOLLYWOOD CELEBRITIES

Joyce Austen Onyekuru¹ & Godslight Thomas Sese²

¹Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8313-8821>, +234 8035507504, Email: onyekuruja@fuotuoike.edu.ng

² Department of Cybersecurity, Faculty of Science, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3497-0635>, +234 8069659313, Email: sesegt@fuotuoike.edu.ng

Citation: Joyce A. Onyekuru & Godslight T. Sese (2026). Navigating cyberbullying in Nigeria's digital space: Psychological, Social and Economic implications for Nollywood celebrities. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 58-71.

ABSTRACT

Technology has become the driving force in every aspect of human engagement including the entertainment industry. It provides different digital platforms for artists to showcase their creative content, build professional networks and engage with diverse audiences across the globe. Different entertainers in Nigeria such as content creators, artists, comedians, influencers and Nollywood celebrities now relay on various digital platforms to advance their career. This current dependent trend on technology comes with lots of twists and turns as it exposes celebrities to a wide range of cyberbullying or online harassments as well as increased fan engagement. This study examines the psychological, social, and economic implications of cyberbullying on Nollywood celebrities within Nigeria's digital space. Anchored on General Strain Theory, the paper interrogates how repeated online abuse generates emotional strain, behavioural adaptation, and professional vulnerability among Nollywood celebrities. A mixed methodological design combining historical-analytic inquiry, semi-structured research questions, and discourse-oriented content analysis of public digital interactions was employed. Results indicate that cyberbullying in Nollywood is systemic, gendered, and culturally mediated, creating anxiety, reputational instability, emotional withdrawal, and economic disruption which sometimes paradoxically amplify celebrity visibility and monetization opportunities, creating a dual scenario of harm and benefit. Among the recommendations of this study is the need to create an enhanced digital literacy, legislating platform accountability, and mental health advocacy within the Nigerian entertainment industry. Effort should be geared towards calls for industry-wide support system and policy formulation to safeguard the mental well-being and digital safety of Nollywood celebrities.

Keywords: Cyber-bullying, Celebrity Culture, Digital Safety, General Strain Theory, Nollywood

INTRODUCTION

Cyber bullying and harassment has become a reoccurring phenomenon in today's global digital environment even though it has existed long before the emergence of social media. Ahmed (2024) attributed this phenomenon to what he called "digital transformation" describing cyber harassment "as a pervasive and often devastating form of abuse that exploits online platforms to threaten, intimidate, and harm individuals" (p.15). European Institute for Gender Equality (2022)

further identifies cyber harassment as a sub category of online abuse, involving the use of digital communication tools to target and harm individuals psychologically or emotionally. It varies in different geographical regions of the world and perpetrated across different cyberspaces, including social media platforms, messaging apps and discussion sites. Cyber bullying entails harassing, threatening, and embarrassing people using digital technology. The use of derogatory names, spreading untrue rumours,

posting graphic content without permission, stalking, and threatening others are just a few examples of how cyber bullying manifest itself (Oladimeji & Hakeem-Bakere, 2024).

The progressive increase in the use of internet in Nigeria has created fertile ground for both fan engagement and digital abuse of celebrities. Celebrities in this context simply refers to persons who are widely known or famous for what they do. Anybody can become a victim of cyber harassment especially if that individual is being targeted because of identifiable traits or actions that make him or her more visible or vulnerable online. Ahmed (2024) posits that certain high-profile individuals such as politicians, celebrities and influencers may be more commonly targeted due to various factors (p.17). Nollywood celebrities, given their high visibility, are disproportionately targeted through online harassment, cyber bullying, defamation, and other related cybercrimes. With estimated 2,500 films produced annually in Nigeria, Nollywood according to Haynes (2016) becomes Nigeria's second-largest film industry globally by volume as well as promoter of Nigeria's culture and tradition. The proliferation of online platforms has amplified the visibility of Nollywood celebrities, enabling them to connect with fans and build their brands. These online platforms are largely referred to as the social media. Ogbonna and Ihentuge (2024) admit that:

In recent times, the social media theatre has emerged. It is powered by the new media. To some extent, the social media theatre is devoid of the spatial limitations of the physical theatre...Actors, influencers and users access the social media more freely than is the case with the physical theatre or orthodox media. The speed of communication and exchange, the cyber community it can create, the interactive nature and options for exchange of various forms of communication as well as its believability cannot but be applauded (196-107).

The physical theatre is the traditional theatre in the true sense of it where the audience gathers either inside a building, arena or village square to view

performances. Gone are the days when the pleasure of seeing a performance was only by going to the theatre. The digital era has changed the narrative as all that the audiences require are smart phones. iPads, laptops, computers, data and internet to view performances across the globe as well as interact and connect with celebrities and influencers of their choice. Elaborating on this point, Omoera and Guanah (2023) argue that the "concept of social media in Nigeria is linked to mediums of social interactions that allow people to have personal interactions with others using their phones or laptops" (6-9).

The rise of social media, streaming services, and digital performance spaces has provided celebrities with unparalleled opportunities to expand their reach and visibility. This shift has enabled artists and celebrities to overcome geographical barriers, engage with global audiences, and experiment with new forms of creative expression. However, the growing reliance on digital space also presents a host of vulnerabilities. From privacy concerns and intellectual property theft to cyber harassment and negative online feedback, artists, film actors, celebrities and influencers face significant risks as they navigate the dynamics of online exposure. As Kulesz (2017) points out, the digital environment is both an enabler of creative freedom and a potential source of exploitation, especially for creators. The balance between these cyber risks and online harassment is critical for celebrities seeking to harness the power of digital platforms while protecting their work and personal well-being.

The use of digital technology has made information dissemination and sharing of videos, photos, music, artistic works, literature, cartoons, and lyrics very fast and easy. Artists and celebrities' biographies, family life, achievements, movies, films, escapades, bereavements etc., are shared online and accessible to the public. This exposes them to cyber risks. The digital technology according to Ogbonna and Ihentuge (2024) has "birthed the new online theatre

platforms with their attendant gains and losses to theatre practice” (196).

These online platforms have become essential for artists to showcase and promote their work, engage with audiences, and network globally. Nigerians as well as Nollywood celebrities leverage on digital platforms such as Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, You Tube, WhatsApp and other social media platforms to engage their audiences. Hakeem-Bakere & Oladimeji (2024) observe that more than 40% of Nigerians who use social media regularly claim having been victim of cyberbullying with Facebook as the most popular platform, followed by X (previously Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram. However, this digital openness also exposes celebrities to a new wave of cyber risks and online harassment.

Despite the existence of extensive scholarship on cyber harassment globally, Nigerian-focused research remains comparatively underdeveloped, particularly as it regards to celebrities who are often the vulnerable demographic. Most existing studies focus on adolescents, students, or general social media users, while limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of entertainers and media personalities. This study addresses that gap by examining how cyberbullying affect Nollywood celebrities psychologically, socially, and economically within a digitally mediated environment. It further investigates how gender and cultural context shape their experiences and to what extent Nigerian legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms offer protection and strategies that could be developed to encourage safer digital engagement.

Literature Review

The rise of digital technology has significantly reshaped the entertainment industry, providing vast opportunities for exposure, collaboration, and audience engagement. Boyd (2014) argues that the expansion of digital communication technologies has transformed social interaction by creating networked publics where audiences can participate

directly in the production, circulation, and consumption of media content (P.8). While these digital platforms have enhanced celebrity visibility and fan engagement, they have also intensified exposure to cyberstalking, trolling, hate speech, body shaming, and other forms of online abuse. Boyd (2014) and Ahmed (2024) observe that the architecture of social media encourages replication, persistence, and scalability of online interactions, making harmful content difficult to control or erase. This permanence often heightens the psychological effects of online harassment on victims.

According to Kowalski et al (2017), cyberbullying produces serious psychological consequences including anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, and fear. Although early studies on cyberbullying focused largely on adolescents and students, recent scholarship has expanded attention to celebrities, influencers, journalists, and public figures who experience harassment due to their visibility within digital spaces. Jane (2014) contends that online abuse has become normalized within digital culture, particularly against women, through misogynistic language, sexualized insults, rape threats, and coordinated trolling. This form of abuse extends beyond casual online conflict because it functions as a mechanism of intimidation, humiliation, and social control.

Inside Nollywood, celebrities are especially vulnerable because their professional survival depends heavily on constant public engagement. Baym (2015) explains that social media has blurred the distinction between celebrities’ public and private lives, thereby intensifying emotional exposure and audience surveillance. Celebrities are expected to remain accessible and interactive online despite the risks of harassment and reputational damage. As a result, many public figures experience emotional strain arising from continuous online monitoring and hostile audience interactions.

Again, studies have established strong connections between cyber harassment and mental health

challenges. Hinduja and Patchin (2015) note that persistent online victimization often leads to emotional distress, sleep disorders, depression, and social anxiety. In the same vein, Henry and Powell (2017) posit that digital technologies have transformed violence into networked forms that extend beyond physical environments to include cyberstalking, revenge pornography, and image-based abuse. Such forms of violence are particularly damaging because victims remain psychologically exposed even within supposedly private spaces. The emotional consequences are further intensified by the viral and permanent nature of digital content. Interestingly, gender has emerged as a central theme in cyberbullying scholarship. Feminist researchers argue that women experience online harassment differently from men because digital abuse is often shaped by patriarchal attitudes and gendered power relations. According to Jane (2014), female public figures are disproportionately targeted through slut-shaming, body shaming, sexual objectification, and threats of sexual violence. In African societies where, cultural expectations surrounding morality and femininity remain influential, female celebrities often face intense criticism regarding sexuality, marriage, and bodily appearance.

Within the Nigerian context, studies on cyberbullying remain relatively limited despite the rapid growth of social media usage and celebrity culture. However, emerging scholarship suggests that online harassment has become increasingly prevalent within Nigeria's entertainment and political spaces. Haynes (2016) admits that Nollywood's expansion into global digital culture has increased celebrity visibility and audience participation, thereby exposing actors and actresses to intensified online commentary and scrutiny. Nigerian celebrities frequently experience trolling, cyberstalking, misinformation, and invasive commentary from online audiences. Such experiences are amplified by blogs, gossip platforms, and fan-driven social media

cultures that thrive on sensationalism and controversy.

Research on mental health within Nigeria further indicates that victims of emotional and psychological distress often face stigmatization due to limited awareness surrounding mental health issues. Onyemelukwe (2017) observes that mental health discussions in Nigeria are still heavily constrained by cultural stigmas and inadequate institutional support systems. Consequently, celebrities experiencing cyberbullying may suppress emotional pain to avoid appearing weak or vulnerable before audiences. This aligns with Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour, which explains how public figures regulate emotions to satisfy professional expectations despite internal distress.

Then coming to the coping mechanisms and institutional responses to cyberbullying where studies have shown that victims often adopt strategies such as social media withdrawal, content moderation, legal action, therapy, emotional resilience, and digital detoxification to manage online harassment (Powell and Henry, 2017). Governments and legal institutions across different countries have also attempted to address cyber harassment through legislation and digital safety policies. In Nigeria, the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act provides legal provisions against cyberstalking and online harassment, although scholars argue that enforcement remains inconsistent and sometimes politicized.

Theoretical Frameworks

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) formed the basis of the study and supported by perspectives from feminist digital studies, emotional labour theory, and media ecology to explain the psychological, social, and economic implications of cyberbullying among Nollywood celebrities. The integration of these theories provides a better understanding of how online harassment operates within contemporary digital culture and how celebrities negotiate emotional distress, gendered abuse, and public visibility in cyberspace.

Agnew's GST (1992) explains that individuals experience strain when exposed to negative stimuli, humiliation, social rejection, or situations that threaten valued goals and identities. Such strains often produce emotional reactions including anger, anxiety, frustration, depression, and emotional withdrawal. Unlike earlier criminological theories that focused mainly on economic deprivation, GST expands the concept of strain to include emotional and interpersonal stressors arising from everyday social relations. Within the digital environment, cyberbullying represents a recurring form of negative social stimulus capable of inflicting emotional trauma through trolling, cyberstalking, hate speech, doxing, sexual harassment, and body shaming.

For Nollywood celebrities whose careers depend heavily on public visibility and social media engagement, online abuse creates persistent emotional strain because their identities and reputations are constantly subjected to public scrutiny. Boyd (2014) argues that networked digital platforms amplify harassment because online content can be rapidly circulated, replicated, and permanently archived across multiple audiences. This permanence intensifies emotional distress since abusive comments and defamatory narratives can continually resurface. Agnew (2006) further notes that strain becomes more harmful when it is perceived as unjust, severe, and difficult to escape. Cyber harassment fits these conditions because online attacks are often anonymous, repetitive, and publicly consumed. Consequently, victims may experience anxiety, depression, fear, emotional exhaustion, and reputational insecurity.

The study also incorporates feminist theories of online misogyny and digital violence to explain the gendered nature of cyberbullying in Nollywood. Jane (2014) observes that digital spaces have normalized misogynistic abuse through sexual insults, rape threats, slut-shaming, and degrading commentary directed primarily at women. Female Nollywood celebrities are often targeted based on their bodies,

sexuality, marital status, and personal lifestyles, reflecting broader patriarchal expectations within society. Similarly, Henry and Powell (2017) argue that digital technologies have transformed harassment into networked forms of violence such as cyberstalking, revenge pornography, and coordinated trolling. These theories complement GST by showing that cyberbullying is not experienced equally but is shaped by gendered systems of power and social control.

Also, the study draws on Hochschild's (1983) Emotional Labour Theory to explain how celebrities manage emotional pain while maintaining socially acceptable public identities. Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labour as the regulation of emotions to satisfy occupational expectations. Celebrities are expected to appear glamorous, confident, and emotionally stable despite personal distress. Victims of cyberbullying therefore suppress emotional pain while continuing to engage audiences online for career survival, endorsements, and public relevance. This process becomes psychologically exhausting because outward emotional expressions often conflict with inner emotional realities. Hochschild's concept of "surface acting" is particularly relevant because celebrities frequently perform emotional stability publicly while privately struggling with fear, humiliation, and depression.

The framework is further enriched by media ecology perspectives advanced by McLuhan (1964) and Turkle (2011). McLuhan's argument that "the medium is the message" suggests that communication technologies fundamentally shape social behaviour and interaction (p. 7). Social media platforms therefore do not merely host cyberbullying; they actively intensify it through anonymity, virality, and algorithmic visibility. Turkle (2011) also contends that digital communication increases emotional isolation because online interactions often lack empathy and accountability. Within celebrity culture, this encourages para-social

relationships where audiences feel entitled to invade celebrities' emotional and private boundaries.

Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding cyberbullying among Nollywood celebrities as a complex interaction between emotional strain, gendered violence, emotional performance, and digitally mediated social power. While GST explains the psychological consequences of persistent online abuse, feminist digital theories reveal its gendered dimensions, Emotional Labour Theory highlights the burden of sustaining public emotional performance, and media ecology demonstrates how digital technologies intensify visibility and emotional vulnerability. The merging of these perspectives therefore enables this study to critically examine how Nollywood celebrities experience, negotiate, and resist cyber risks within contemporary Nigerian digital space.

Gendered Dimensions of Cyber Bullying

The digital space commands an unrestricted access to a wide range of information and other forms of content. This unrestricted access is not limited to any gender as both men and women who have access to the internet can both be victims of cyber bullying. Regardless of one's identity or status, digital platforms have often provided equal chances for public self-expression but in most cases, not everyone is welcomed in the cyber space (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). In recent times, women face, public harassment, sexually explicit body-shaming, and threatening content globally and locally than their male counterparts (Powell & Henry, 2017). In the Nigerian context, these actions correlate with our conservative socio-cultural norms, customs, traditions and values that scrutinize the choices, appearances, and autonomy of the female gender. Furthermore, EIGE (2022) adds that it also leads to withdrawal from the digital sphere, silencing and isolation and eventually losing opportunities to build their education, professional career and support networks (p.7).

However, this study is not limited to female celebrities alone as both male and female genders

are prone to cyber risks and online harassment at different times as contained in online public domain. Such instances include the cases of Speed Darlington, a Nigerian musician who was arrested for defaming Burna Boy after sharing a video suggesting Burna Boy had untoward affiliations with American rapper Diddy. Comedian Yomi Fabiyi was accused of sexual harassment by a woman sparking controversy and discussion. A Tik Toker, Ogunsanwo Olumide John popularly known as 'Seaking' faced backlash for insulting Pastor Adeboye sparking a debate about online harassment and the need for accountability (www.ekohotblog.com). Omoni Oboli shared her experience of sexual harassment in Nollywood and emphasized the need for support and protection for victims. Other celebrities like TY Bello has revealed how she was molested at eight years old and spoke about the challenges of sharing her story (www.aocsolicitors.com.ng).

Cyber Bullying in Nollywood

Nollywood celebrities have often been victims of cyber bullying. Musa (2025) reports the arraignment by the Police of the controversial social media influencer Martins Ortse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan (VDM) for alleged cyberbullying of two Nollywood actresses, Iyabo Ojo and Tonto Dikeh as well as a producer and singer Samuel Oguachuba, popularly called Samklef by intentionally posting videos on his Instagram handle claiming that Iyabo Ojo was having an immoral affair with her daughter. The post clearly contained grossly offensive, indecent, obscene information against the actress which made her to charge VDM to court. VDM was also accused of intentionally publishing a false claim that Tonto Dikeh was involved in the criminal conversion of the proceeds from the crowdfunding for the "Justice for Mobad Movement" and was equally the brain behind the Gistlover Blog. This bullying remarks no doubt became very traumatizing for the victims snowballing into a torrent of hate, death threats and viral shaming within hours on their social media platforms. Recently too, Tonto Dikeh has been in the eye of the storm for her new role as

a born-again Christian. Tonto had received serious backlashes over her evangelical roles as her bullies have accused her of using the Church to cover up her alleged promiscuity. However, one remarkable twist in this cyber bullying was that the actresses' profiles gained rapid escalation with more fans, followers, likes and shares on her social media handles who were enthusiastic on following up her story. With the social media monetization policy, this increased fan base translates to financial gain. The cases became content for skit makers who depend on trending stories to equally increase their Facebook/ You Tube monetization.

Cyber bullying of Nollywood actresses is not only perpetrated by people outside the industry. It can also come from within the industry as is the case of Mercy Johnson and Angela Okorie. Angela Okorie who is also an actress and her friend known as Angel had in 2023 through her Facebook page called Mercy Johnson a witch stealing peoples destinies. Mercy Johnson in an online post by Niyongo Jaycob (2026) stated how Angela Okorie's cyber bullying has affected her career and family "I stopped acting because of these people. They are everywhere cyber stalking me, calling me a witch. At some point my husband started feeling uncomfortable in marriage until we had to sit and discuss the issue". She revealed painfully how other children avoided her kids both in school and at home because they said their mother is a witch. Meanwhile Mercy Johnson has initiated a legal action against Angela Okorie and was remanded in Suleja Correctional Centre before being granted a bail of five million naira.

The negative implication of this is that the industry has failed to protect or support their own. Rather than collaborate with relevant agencies to formulate policies and provide support against any form of bullying, the industry perpetrates bullying and is yet to clear its name on the alleged controversial issue of sex-for roles in Nollywood. This turns to anxiety, depression and financial loss due to withdrawal from the industry.

Then there is the public perception flip-flops facing Nollywood celebrities who dare to speak out. According to Nosa (2024), Nollywood actress Toyin Abraham faced social media backlash when she masterminded the arrest of some X (Twitter) users for cyberbullying, defamation of character and death threats. In what looks like a turn, the social media space tackled the actress for the arrest with few political figures like Isaac Fayose coming out to defend her actions pointing out that Toyin Abraham has constantly suffered cyberbullying for nearly two years. One therefore wonders why celebrities who have the boldness to take actions against cyberbullying receive backlash instead of encouragement often withdrawing public sympathy.

Materials and Methods

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research designs (mixed methods design) anchored in historical-analytic inquiry, semi-structured research questions and discourse analysis to investigate the psychological, social and economic implications of cyberbullying among Nollywood celebrities in Nigeria. The researchers considered the use of mixed method design as appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth survey of lived experiences, emotional responses and adaptive strategies within digitally mediated environments as well as offer generalizability and measurable patterns across samples.

Research Design and Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to select ten (10) Nollywood practitioners made up of five males and five females whose professional visibility and sustained engagement in digital spaces positioned them as relevant informants. Purposive sampling was adopted because it facilitated the intentional selection of participants with first-hand experience of the problem under investigation. The gender-balanced composition of the sample also ensured comparative insights into the differential ways cyberbullying manifests across male and female celebrity experiences. Participants were selected based on three principal criteria of sustained

involvement in the Nollywood industry, active presence on social media platforms; and documented or self-reported exposure to online harassment, trolling, or cyber-related abuse. This approach ensured that respondents possessed the experiential depth necessary to elucidate the complex nature of cyber risk in Nigeria's entertainment industry.

Data Collection and Procedure

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured research questions, administered through the secure online WhatsApp platform. The choice of WhatsApp was informed by its accessibility, familiarity among participants, and capacity to support flexible, confidential communication. The interview format enabled the researchers to guide discussion through predesigned thematic prompts while allowing participants the freedom to elaborate on personal experiences.

The interview guide was structured around four thematic domains:

Background information covering participants' career trajectories and social media engagement;
Experiences of cyberbullying as in forms, frequency, and nature of online harassment;
Psychological, social, and economic consequences covering effects on mental health, relationships, and professional life;

Coping mechanisms and institutional support covering strategies for resilience, legal recourse, and recommendations for policy reform.

All responses were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized through the use of pseudonyms in order to protect participant identities. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and the right of participants to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Secondary Data Sources

To complement interview data, the study drew on public digital interactions and online textual materials related to Nollywood and cyber harassment. These included social media comments,

posts, news reports, online publications, and relevant digital archives. Such materials were sourced through search engines, academic databases, and publicly accessible websites. These digital artefacts served as discursive evidence of how cyberbullying is enacted, circulated, and normalized in online spaces. They also provided contextual grounding for participants' testimonies, allowing for triangulation between lived experiences and publicly visible narratives.

Analytical Framework

The study adopted the discourse analysis framework, which examines how language, narratives, and symbolic practices construct social realities aimed at ex-traying cyberbullying along the structures of power, gender ideology, celebrity culture, and digital spectatorship. Public digital interactions were therefore examined as discursive sites where reputations are contested, identities negotiated, and cultural anxieties projected. This process enabled the study to interrogate both the content of abusive communication and the social meanings and ideological assumptions embedded within it. The analysis was further interpreted using General Strain Theory which provided explanatory depth by linking repeated exposure to online abuse with emotional strain, adaptive coping, and behavioural responses. The theory proved especially useful in understanding how cyberbullying functions as a persistent negative stimulus in the lives of public figures.

Data Analysis

A thematic coding procedure was applied to research questions and digital texts. Recurring patterns were identified, categorized, and synthesized into major analytical themes which includes:

- 1) Reputational and economic consequences;
- 2) Psychological and emotional strain;
- 3) Gendered dimensions and legal limitations;
- 4) Coping mechanisms and resilience strategies.

The integration of thematic analysis with discourse analysis ensured both descriptive richness and interpretive depth.

Research Questions

- RQ.1. As a Nollywood celebrity, how have you managed your public image and reputation?
RQ.2. How did cyberbullying and online harassment affect your mental psychology, economy?
RQ.3. Do you think cyberbullying is gendered and do existing cybercrime laws in Nigeria protect celebrities from online abuse?
RQ.4. What coping strategies would you recommend for future policy and practice?

These questions were designed to elicit both subjective narratives and broader reflections on

institutional frameworks, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of cyber risk within Nollywood.

Results and Discussion

The findings revealed that cyberbullying in Nollywood is not occasional but systemic, implanted within the structures of digital celebrity culture. Participants described online abuse as repetitive, invasive, and emotionally destabilizing. Female respondents emphasized sexual harassment, moral policing, and objectification, while male respondents highlighted defamation and reputational attacks. In addition, the respondents’ answers to each of the four (4) research questions were recorded, collated and analyzed using simple percentage as reflected in these tables.

Table 1: Lived Experiences/ Management of Public Image and Reputation

S/No	Statement Question	Total No of Respondents	%	Respondents	%	Total
		Participants/ Percentage				
		10 = 100%	10	10		
1.	Nollywood celebrities’ lived experiences/ management of public image and reputation.	8	80%	2	20%	100

In analyzing RQ1 on lived experiences of cyber bullying, eight (8) out of a total number of ten (10) respondents representing 80 percent of both male and female said they have been in the film industry for over a decade, while only 20 percent of two (2) respondents have put in eight and six years respectively. All ten (10) respondents representing 100 percent admitted the several challenges they face as Nollywood celebrities. On further interrogation, each of the respondents identified some form of cyber risks as cyberbullying, sexual harassment, doxing and trolling to which the female respondents admitted being victims just like some of their colleagues in the industry. “In fact, the experience is not funny. You wake up each day feeling depressed because you don’t know what lies next. But, there is another twist to this whole cyber bullying which unconsciously appears positive. Much as it affects my mental health, it has also boosted my fan base. I have gained more fans as my social media handles are experiencing high traffic through likes and shares. This equally translate to more money for me

with Facebook and YouTube monetization policy”. This therefore becomes one of the positive twists of cyberbullying, indirectly boosting victim’s economic value irrespective of any harrowing experiences. This aligns with the paradox of visibility in celebrity culture where in digital attacks can simultaneously damage reputation and increase online engagement, generating financial returns through monetization systems. This duality complicates traditional understandings of victimization, suggesting that strain in celebrity culture may be both destructive and economically productive. However, some online sources like www.pulse.ng, www.mediatalkafrica.com, www.glamsquadmagazne.co listed Nollywood actresses such as Omoni Oboli, Eniola Badmus and celebrities like Ayra Starr, music Icon, Ubi Frankline as victims of cyber bullying. These celebrities according to these sources have publicly shared their individual experiences in the course of their careers and how they have suffered relentless online attacks most time based on sexual harassment. Some others have had their privacies

invaded through doxing, (publicly releasing private information) and this can be traumatising for them. Mummy Wa for instance, had taken to social media to speak about her experience with sexual harassment in the movie industry, revealing persistent unwanted advances from filmmakers which can be tiresome. Ahmed (2024) observes that ‘persistent trolling, hate speech, and

harassment can lead to feelings of powerlessness and self-doubt’ (p.17) and this can have a devastating impact on their career thereby aligning with GST’s digital permanence strain, where the victim’s distress is sustained by the enduring circulation of harmful narratives.

Table 2: Psychological Strain, Economic and Emotional Vulnerability

S/No	Statement Question	Total No of Participants/ Percentage	Respondents	%	Respondents	%	Total
		10 = 100%	10		10		
2	Psychological strain, economic and emotional vulnerability of Nollywood celebrities.		50	50 %	50	50 %	100%

All the respondents representing 100% while reacting to research Q2 admitted that they constantly live in fear and always conscious of their actions because they do not know who is trailing them at any time. This state of constant fear has affected their lives in that they find it difficult to freely associate with people or even comment on issues online. The result revealed psychological strain as a major challenge. Respondents reported anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, and emotional exhaustion. These findings align with GST, demonstrating how sustained exposure to negative stimuli erodes emotional resilience. The digital permanence of abuse intensified distress, as harmful content could be revisited and reshared indefinitely. Corroborating this stance, Ahmed (2024) admits that cyber risk and online harassment pose serious psychological and emotional threats. It permeates every aspect of a person’s life, from their mental health and social interactions to their physical well-being and professional or academic pursuits (p.18). He further identified four (4) major psychological impacts on victims categorized as follows:

1) Anxiety and Depression: Frequent and consistent online abuse contributes to low self-esteem, emotional depression, mental retardation and frustration. Victims often experience intense emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety, anger, and sadness. In other words, continuous harassment can lead to depression, anxiety, decreased self-esteem and in extreme cases suicidal thoughts (Ahmed; 2024, Business Day NG).

- 2) Sleep Disorders and Fatigue: This occurs when celebrities constantly monitor online trends of cyber risk and harassment during the day and at night leading to fatigue and sleep disorder. This state of the body can induce headache, insomnia and other health issues affecting their overall wellbeing.
- 3) Emotional Withdrawal: Many celebrities reduce public appearances or deactivate social media accounts as a result of cognitive and emotional strains. This withdrawal from public view can lead to loneliness, depression, and a sense of alienation from friends and family.
- 4) Delusional Disorder and Fear: The lives of victims are surrounded by fear as they are apprehensive of when the next attack might occur. This hyper vigilance can be exacerbating affecting their ability to relax or feel safe even in their own homes.

One respondent admitted that constantly monitoring online activity or anticipating negative interactions can heighten stress levels and contribute to a sense of constant threat. A typical example is the known case of Nigerian President, Armed Bola Tinubu who said during the 2023 presidential election campaign that he no longer visits social media because he was scared shit with the type of attack directed at him. These psychological impacts are magnified by the Nigerian cultural context, where mental health is still stigmatized, and emotional vulnerability among celebrities is often seen as weakness. A female respondent further admitted that “Every tweet, every Instagram comment feels like a dagger... You smile

for the camera, but you’re drowning inside”. This narrative is not uncommon and shows the emotional labour and identity fragmentation Nollywood celebrities do face on daily bases.

Table 3: Gendered Patterns Abuse and Cybercrime Laws in Nigeria

S/No	Statement Question	Total No of Participants/ Percentage	Respondents	%	Respondents	%	Total
		10 = 100%	10		10		
3.	Female gender abuse and protective cybercrime laws in Nigeria.		5	50%	5	50%	100%

Reacting to RQ.3, all ten (10) respondents representing 100% admitted that indeed celebrities have been at the receiving end as far as cyberbullying was concerned but expressed worries that although Nigeria’s Cybercrimes Act provides legal avenues, enforcement remains inconsistent as celebrities often encounter public backlash when seeking justice. This weakens trust in formal mechanisms and normalizes online abuse. The respondents pointed out that the effectiveness of Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention etc) Act, 2015.depends on addressing the existing challenges and ensuring proper enforcement. According to The Cybercrime Act, this law amended in 2024, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing cybercrime, online harassment and related issues and offenders would be prosecuted. The respondents corroborated that the female gender is the most affected because of their constant online exposure. Gender therefore emerged as a defining variable. Female celebrities faced more invasive and morally charged abuse, reflecting

patriarchal expectations around sexuality and public conduct. Such attacks reinforced social controls over women’s autonomy.

Male celebrities by contrast, were more often targeted in relation to politics, ego conflicts, or personal scandals. This is supported by Hakeem-Bakere & Oladimeji (2024), where a Nollywood celebrity, Iyabo Ojo pursued a legal action against Very Dark Man, leading to charges under Section 24 of the Cybercrimes Act. Other notable cases via online sources, include a blogger, Chike Ibezim who was arrested for cyberstalking the Nigerian former Minister of Works, Babatunde Raji Fashols in 2023 while Dele Farotimi faced a legal battle and was charged with cybercrime and defamation based on petition filed by Afe Babalola in February 2025 (www.ekohotblog.com). With this development, individuals can become more responsible with their digital activities as they stand to be prosecuted for all forms of cyber harassments.

Table 4: Coping and Resistance Strategies

S/No	Statement Question	Total No of Participants/ Percentage	Responden ts	%	Respondents	%	Total
		10 = 100%	10		10		
4.	Coping and resistance strategies for future policy and practice.		5	50%	5	50%	100%

In responding to RQ.4, all ten (10) participants representing 100% lamented that coping with cyberbullying is the most difficult especially for female celebrities. A female respondent who has been a victim said that she felt betrayed by colleagues who did little or nothing to share her predicament. According to her, “Not even the people I call my own, I mean friends and

colleagues could stand by me. I was alone, depressed except for my family. This does not represent Nollywood well”.

Despite the challenges, she admitted that overcoming the psychological effects of cyberbullying is not easy as it takes a whole lot of effort and commitment. She

regretted that there are very little victims could do in terms of coping except the government remains committed in fighting cyber risks in Nigeria. However, studies have shown that victims including Nollywood celebrities employ adaptive coping mechanisms to reduce the risks of online harassment which include but not limited to the following:

- 1) Digital Detox: Temporary or permanent withdrawal from social media. Some victims of cyber violence have in most cases decided to pull down their social media handles as a way of stemming the harassment. They believe that when their presence is no longer visible online, the attack ceases to come.
- 2) Legal Redress: Use of Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act of 2024 as amended to pursue offenders. This is very necessary because when offenders are arrested and prosecuted, people would begin to respect other people's privacy. But in most cases the law has been used as a weapon to suppress critics and dissent voices rather than address the problem for which it was created. However, a court judgement was reported to have sentenced a Tik Toker for cyberstalking to demonstrate the potential of the law in protecting individuals from online harassment. (www.mondaq.com)
- 3) Therapy and mental health support: Some victims have undergone some therapy for their healing, though mental health services are limited and expensive in this part of the world. Even as some undergo this treatment, they still face stigmatization.
- 4) Social media management teams: In ensuring mental and emotional stability, celebrities now engage the services of social media influencers and professionals to manage their platforms to reduce cognitive and emotional strain. Sometimes they use pseudonyms to protect their identities
- 5) Use of Artificial Intelligence tools: The advancement of technology has made it possible for celebrities to employ Artificial Intelligence tools to report and block cyber harassment and abuse but option is yet to be fully deployed in Nigeria.
- 6) Counter-speech and advocacy, Celebrities now use their platforms to call out abuse and advocate for reforms. For instance, celebrities came together to launch the #FWDWithFacts Campaign to combat the spread of fake and misinformation online,

#SayNoToGenderDiscrimination# and #EndCyberAbuse# campaigns using these platforms to highlight the importance of media literacy and critical thinking in the digital age (www.aocsolicitors.com.ng).

These reactions align with GST's prediction that chronic strain produces both internalized distress and externalized coping mechanisms. However, celebrities who engage in digital literacy programmes are more resilient and are able to control their narratives online. Though, institutional support remains weak, legal recourse under Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act (2024) as amended is difficult to enforce due to inadequate police training and the non-existence of a constitutionally established independent agency for the fight against all forms of cyber and computer related crimes in Nigeria (Godslight, 2025).

Conclusion

Cyberbullying in Nigeria's digital entertainment sphere is a multidimensional phenomenon with psychological, social, and economic implications. For Nollywood celebrities, it generates some kind of long-lasting emotional strain, reputational instability, and professional vulnerability, while simultaneously operating within a digital economy that rewards controversy. For the Nigerian entertainment industry to thrive in the digital age, holistic interventions in such areas as legal, physical, social, economic and psychological interventions are urgently needed to protect those who bring stories to life especially in an era where technology has continued to shape human lives. The application of General Strain Theory in this study shows how repeated exposure to online abuse creates cumulative distress and adaptive responses. Yet, the findings also highlight the paradox of digital celebrity culture, where harm and visibility coexist. Addressing cyberbullying requires stronger legal enforcement, institutional accountability, digital literacy, and accessible mental health support. Without such interventions, the entertainment industry risks normalizing abuse as an inevitable cost of fame.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Digital Literacy and Ethical Journalism: Enhanced digital literacy training of bloggers and influencers

should be strongly encouraged to ensure responsible content dissemination just as government should make it mandatory for all social media influencers and bloggers to register with the relevant professional bodies such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) to ensure strict compliance to ethical and professional practice.

- 2) Policy Implementation, Legal Reforms and Accountability: The Cybercrime Act 2024 as amended is one of the legal frameworks instituted by the Nigerian Government to checkmate cyber harassment but beyond that measure, there is need by relevant authorities to strengthen its enforcement and ensure that offenders are prosecuted and made to pay penalties including fines and imprisonment. Adequate implementation of the Cybercrime Act and prosecution of offenders would no doubt minimize the spate of cyber harassment in Nigeria and celebrities would also have no physical or psychological limitations to living up their professions.
- 3) Mental Health Advocacy and Infrastructures: Victims of cyberbullying usually suffer from mental health and therefore need to undergo the rehabilitation therapy to fully recover from the trauma but in most cases, the rehab centres lack the necessary manpower and facilities to cater for the needs of victims. Where the facilities exist, the cost of treatment are unaffordable. There is therefore the need for the establishment of affordable mental health advocacy and support within the Nigerian entertainment industry tailored for cognitive and emotional strains to serve victims of cyber violence.
- 4) Industry Support to Victims: There is need for the industry to fully support their colleagues first by discouraging industry bullying often perpetrated by senior colleagues and ant other colleagues who suffer from all kinds of cyberbullying through calls, visits, prayers and counselling as these measures would help in quick recovery as well as safeguard the mental, social and economic well-being and digital safety of victims.
- 5) Above all, further interdisciplinary research and stronger institutional support are critical to protect Nigerian celebrities within the Nigeria's digital space.

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