Research Article

An examination of cyberbullying among Zimbabwean female social media influencers

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	With technology and online interactions increasingly shaping our lives, there is a need to comprehend how cyberbullying affects individuals in online spaces. The predominant focus of cyberbullying studies has been on students, yet this scourge affects all groups of people, including social media influencers. There is a knowledge gap in how cyberbullying affects social media influencers. The study borrows from cyberfeminism concept to examine forms of cyberbullying among Zimbabwean social media influencers. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse posts which were purposively extracted from three social media influences' pages, namely, Ketty Masomera, Queen of Peace and Patricia Jack. The extracted posts were published between May 2023 and June 2024. The analysis reveals that the main forms of cyberbullying among the selected social media influencers are denigration, sexting, and flaming. The article argues that female social media influencers have become perpetrators of cyberbullying and toxicity and use their Facebook pages to reproduce patriarchal hegemony as demonstrated by consistent harassment of fellow female social media influencers. The study concludes that although the dominant literature portrays women as victims of cyberbullying from men, they are also perpetrators of bullying online, and this bullying happens to be directed at fellow women. **Keywords:** cyberbullying, cyberfeminism, Facebook, gender, social media influencer, women

INTRODUCTION

The predominant focus of cyberbullying studies has been on students (Abaido, 2020; Baldry et al., 2017; Bauman et al., 2013; Sorrentino et al., 2019), yet it is not limited to students alone. Cyberbullying affects all groups of people, from children, teenagers, youths and adults; this also includes girls, boys, women, men and the LBGTIQA[t] community. Thus, cyberbullying affects people of all ages, including adults, in various contexts such as workplaces, social media platforms, and online communities. Cyberbullying occurs when an individual or a group of people intentionally send messages or post hate text, or pictures utilising digital technologies i.e. social networks, instant messaging platforms, electronic mails, and web pages to harass or threaten another individual or group (Alim & Khalid, 2019; Mabika & Dube, 2017; Mason, 2008; Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015; Saengprang & Gadavanij, 2021; Tokunaga, 2010). With technology and online interactions continuing to shape our lives, there is an increasing need to comprehend how cyberbullying affects individuals in online spaces. This is because previous studies highlight that cases of cyberbullying have become prevalent due to the rise in social media usage over the years (Alim & Khalid, 2019; Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). Social media platforms, i.e. Facebook and Twitter, are popular among users; these platforms continue to review their policies in a bid to safeguard users' experience (Abaido, 2020). Although such measures have been established, users are still vulnerable to cyberbullying. The worst part of cyberbullying is that it reaches users regardless of geographical distance, damaging and harmful information can be stored, shared and redistributed when the need arises (Abaido, 2020; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Due to the digital revolution, a new group of users known as social influencers emerged and the numbers of these influencers continue to rise. These influencers are "a group of distinct digital content creators distinguished by their substantial online followings, which positions them as pivotal figures for brand collaborations" (Duffy, 2020, p. 1). Influencers have a role to play in society as they have become opinion leaders capable of influencing people's decisions regarding food, fashion, etc. They act as role models and provide advice and inspiration to their followers (Duffy, 2020). Previous research revealed that these social media influencers are not exempt from being victims of cyberbullying (Das et al., 2020) and also, become cyberbullies (Ramdane et al., 2024). Thus, there is still a knowledge gap in how cyberbullying affects social media influencers.

Cyberbullying has detrimental effects on the victims, it can cause depression, self-harm, and drug abuse, and it has contributed to the rise of cyber bullycide (Ouvrein et al., 2019; Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015) even among celebrity influencers and social media influencers. Cyber bullycide refers to the case whereby a person commits suicide and one of the reasons is due to the effects of cyberbullying (Betts, 2016). Several cases have been reported of influencers who may have passed on as a result of cyberbullying. For instance, in 2020, the British Broadcasting Cooperation Corporation (BBC) reported a case of a Japanese reality television star and wrestler, Hana Kimura who is believed to have taken her life due to online harassment as it was prevalent in her previous tweets (BBC News, 2020). Olivia, a former host of a reality show in the United Kingdom, is suspected of having taken her own life after falling into depression as she received a negative spotlight in the press and malicious comments on social media (Saengprang & Gadavanij, 2021). Thus, cyberbullying can result in devastating psychological effects on the victim(s) as information is stored online and that will be a constant reminder of such traumatic experiences when compared to traditional bullying. In extreme cases, it results in bullycide as reflected in the cases of celebrities who took their own lives to escape trauma. In one instance, according to a report by H-Metro (2024), a local Zimbabwean newspaper, in March 2024, about 28 people were jailed for up to 18 months for harassing Magali Berdah, a lifestyle and fashion influencer in France. French rapper Booba was accused of instigating cyberbullying, he led a campaign against "thieving influencers" and encouraged the influencer's clients to post hateful and insulting messages.

Saengprang and Gadavanij (2021) observe that there is a scarcity of research focusing on cyberbullying directed at online influencers, more especially on Facebook. Abidin (2019) and Hassan et al. (2018) also agree by adding that patterns of cyberbullying among social influencers have not widely received attention. As stated before, previous studies focused on cyberbullying experiences among students, and this study investigates forms of cyberbullying experienced by social media influencers, particularly female social influencers on Facebook. Addressing this gap provides a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying, inform better strategies to prevent and respond to it across different demographics and settings. and offers insights into gendered cyberbullying. Saengprang and Gadavanij (2021) assert that different platforms engage different groups of people and different genders, emphasizing the need to understand cyberbullying in varied contexts and how it affects women. By using cyberfeminism as a lens, this study provides an understanding of the gendered nature of cyberbullying. Cyberfeminism perspectives are used to clarify the dynamics between gender and the use of technology. Gajjala and Oh (2012) contend that women's participation in online communities does not automatically result in women's empowerment but serves self-interest. The focus is on whether females are using digital technologies to empower themselves or to reproduce patriarchal norms and perpetuate violence against fellow women. Facebook is one of the most popular social platforms accessed worldwide, and several studies addressed bullying on the platform, but few of those studies focused on social influencers. The study, therefore, addresses the following research question. What forms of cyberbullying are on social media influencers' Facebook pages? This study does not seek to generalise the findings but to shed more light on the gendered nature of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying and Social Media Influencers

Previous research revealed that these social media influencers are not exempt from being victims of cyberbullying (Das et al., 2020). Social media influencers experience various forms of bullying online, such as outing, harassment, dissing, and masquerading (Hassan et al., 2018). In addition, a study by Ab Rashid et al. (2022) shows harassment, flaming, and dissing are forms of cyberbullying experienced by Malaysian social influencers. Saengprang and Gadavanij's (2021) study highlighted female celebrities face harassment and

denigration on social media, and in some cases, it has devastating consequences as they may commit suicide. A study by Takano et al. (2024) titled "Online harassment of Japanese celebrities and influencers" revealed that celebrities and influencers face harassment online. What is apparent in these studies is that influencers are harassed online, and the gap is on gendered cyberbullying as Saengprang and Gadavanij's (2021) are the ones that focused on female celebrities and not particularly social media influencers.

In another perspective, perpetrators of cyberbullying are at times unaware that they are committing crimes when they bully social influencers online (Ouvrein et al., 2017). Ouvrein et al. (2017) conducted a study to explore girls' attitudes toward critiquing celebrities, and the findings show that public figures should tolerate followers' behaviour because that is what being famous entails. Such tendencies encourage cyberbullying towards social celebrities as perpetrators categorise their comments as harmless and part of popular culture (Saengprang & Gadavanij, 2021). Although these social influencers are bullied online as portrayed in literature, is this always the case? This study offers a different narrative of cyberbullying in digital spaces.

Besides being an influencer, there are other reasons why women fall victim to cyberbullying. Although digital technologies offer platforms for self-expression to women (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015), they also perpetuate violence against women. Previous research shows that girls and women used to experience different forms of abuse offline, and this has permeated online spaces as they are more prone to cyberbullying due to patriarchy, discrimination and structural inequality (Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, 2022; Gustafsson, 2017; Kasahara et al., 2019; Navarro & Jasinski, 2013; Sorrentino et al., 2019). Literature shows that women are prone to bullying through the posting of sexually explicit videos and images, and they are critiqued negatively than men (Musharraf & Anis-ul-Haque's, 2018; Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015). A study by Ramdane et al. (2024) also revealed that cyberbullies evaluate women's behaviour against cultural norms of womanhood. This implies that women are bound by cultural norms even in digital spaces. The question that can be asked is whether cultural hegemony is depicted in cyberbullying posts that were analysed in this study?

Although the dominant discourse portrays female social media influencers as victims of cyberbullying (Abidin, 2019), a different perspective exists whereby these influencers have become cyberbullies (Ramdane et al., 2024). A study conducted by Ramdane et al. (2024) on Algerian influencer's role in cyberbullying indicated that influencers abuse their huge following and spread hate speech; electronic harassment emerged as the most prevalent form of bullying perpetuated by social media influencers with YouTube pages. There are a few studies that offer a perspective on cyberbullying perpetuated by social media influencers. Most studies portray social media influencers as victims of cyberbullying (Ab Rashid et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2018; Saengprang & Gadavanij, 2021; Takano et al., 2024), as argued previously. This demonstrates a knowledge gap. This study, therefore, fills the gap by offering a different perspective on cyberbullying. The study demonstrates that some social media influencers perpetuate cyberbullying.

Forms of Cyberbullying

Literature shows two types of cyberbullying; the first one focuses on the roles of individuals, while the second type focuses on the aggressive acts of individuals. Regarding individual roles, cyberbullying is then categorised into three types: victims, perpetrators, and bystanders (Zhang et al., 2022). Another role of cyber defence has been identified, and this explains the behaviour of users shielding cyberbullying victim(s) (Pozzoli & Gini, 2020). In terms of aggressive behaviour, written or verbal, visual, character impersonation, and exclusion were identified types of cyberbullying. In addition, other scholars group behaviours into specific types/characteristics namely flaming (also referred to as roasting), cyberstalking, jokes, harassment, trickery, denigration, defamation, sexting, commenting on explicit photos and videos posted by perpetrators and outing (Law et al., 2012; Willard, 2007; Zhang et al., 2022).

Flaming is detected when one posts offensive, intimidating, insulting, threats. In this case, the offender(s) post provocative or abusive messages, which may contain capital letters and punctuation marks, to social media pages (El Asam & Samara, 2016). Harassment implies continuously sending offensive messages to victims (insulting someone using their physical or social attributes) (Abaido, 2020; Willard, 2007). Cyberstalking means repetitive tracking of the victim's activities on the internet with the intention to scare the victim and also sending threats to the victim (Paunović, 2020). Denigration takes place in instances whereby one posts

and or share distorting information (maliciously editing of photos/videos) that is aimed at destroying the victim's reputation and relationships (Zhang et al., 2022). Sexting refers to the posting of sexually explicit texts, videos or photographs through digital media platforms without the owners' consent (Abaido, 2020).

Different studies have been conducted to analyse the aforementioned forms of cyberbullying. A study by Rachoene and Oyedemi (2015) that examined cyberbullying among South African youth on Facebook shows that different types of bullying, such as sexting, attacks on intelligence and physical attributes, outing and threats, manifested online. Chen and Chen's (2020) study revealed that cyberbullying was prevalent among adolescents, and online insults were the dominant form of cyberbullying in Chinese societies. Rachoene and Oyedemi's (2015) study focused on the youth while Chen and Chen's (2020) study focused on adolescents. This study, therefore, offers a different narrative as it focuses on social media influencers and also offers a gendered perspective of cyberbullying.

Cyberfeminism Perspectives

Cyberfeminism advocates for women's use of digital technologies to improve their lives and express themselves (Lestari et al., 2020) because they open platforms for women's empowerment (Kanai & Dobson, 2016). Evident is the mushrooming of female social influencers who have taken advantage of digital technologies to shape conversations as an agency in the digital space through their huge followings. Haraway (1998), one of the cyberfeminists, believes that the internet is a liberating space for women as it offers avenues for more democratic gender relations. Milford (2015, p. 55), an advocate of cyberfeminism argues that cyberspace can become a "utopian site of unrestricted, transcendent emancipation from gender-related constraints". Women have harnessed the power by becoming producers of media content as opposed to being previously portrayed as consumers of media products (Lestari et al., 2020).

However, authors such as Gajjala and Oh (2012) contend that women's participation in online communities does not automatically result in women's empowerment but serves self-interest. In line with this view, Ellcessor (2017) adds that online spaces may reproduce and amplify prejudices and cultural stereotypes. Although digital platforms empower women to express themselves, some women end up abusing their power and reproducing patriarchal norms. In the context of this study, Women social influencers who have garnered a huge following on social media create and share content that perpetuates cyberbullying to assert their dominance and reap the rewards of such behaviour from the increased engagements from such content. This denotes that the intersectionality that women experience on social media is also influenced by multiple factors and, by extension, the perpetuation of cyberbullying activities. Consequently, this, in turn, is also associated with the marginalisation and oppression of others being bullied on social media platforms. This qualifies Ellcessor's (2017) and Gajjala and Oh's (2012) views that digital technologies offer a space for serving self-interests. Influencers are opinion leaders, and they are role models, yet they use their power to abuse others (Ramdane et al., 2024), especially fellow women. Cyberfeminism perspectives are used to clarify the dynamics between gender and the use of technology. The focus is on whether females are using digital technologies to empower themselves or to reproduce patriarchal norms and perpetuate violence against fellow women. The concept offers a gendered perspective of cyberbullying, and it is used to either validate or refute findings. The following section discusses the research methodology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a qualitative research design whereby qualitative data was purposively collected from three selected social influencers' Facebook pages. Willard's (2007) classification of cyberbullying and Braun and Clarke's (2020) thematic analysis guided data analysis.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was utilised in selecting three social influencers' Facebook pages for analysis. Three female Zimbabwean social influencers pages were selected for the study, and they are as follows; Ketty Masomera, Pattricia Jack and Queen of Peace. Ketty Masomera's Facebook page has the highest number of followers, which is about 346,000 followers. Queen of Peace's page has approximately 203,000 followers while

Pattricia Jack's page has 69,000 followers. The selection of pages was based on the acrimonious relationship between the influencers which provided rich data on cyberbullying.

Ketty Masomera is a Zimbabwean social influencer based in Ireland who has been involved in various controversies, one example is related to the explicit leaking of videos and images of Mai Tt, a fellow influencer, in 2023 (My Zimbabwe News, 2023). Her page mainly focuses on advertising, designing, and selling wigs. Queen of Peace's AKA Fungai Mutisi is based in Scotland, United Kingdom. Her Facebook page focuses on motivational speaking; she aims to educate people on societal issues. However, she has also been involved in disputes with Mai Tt, a fellow socialite. Pattricia Jack's page Pattricia Jack's page focuses on live streams and posting of scandals; she has also been implicated in leaking nude pictures of a fellow influencer, Mai Tt. She has been recently arrested for allegedly cyberbullying Mai Tt. These three socialites have caught the public eye as they teamed up against a famous social influencer, Mai Tt, who has about 1.5 million followers on Facebook. Mai Tt has been accused of defrauding her followers of vast sums of money taking advantage of her popularity (Nehanda Radio, 2023). The three selected influencers rallied the public against her and believed that justice should be served; she was arrested and served her term in 2023. In a quest for justice, their posts have negatively portrayed Mait Tt, the posts sparked widespread public interest in Zimbabwe. This prompted the researcher to examine forms of cyberbullying on three selected popular Zimbabwean social media influencers.

Data Collection

The data collected for analysis is publicly accessible and this has no ethical implications for research. According to Wolfinger (2016) posts and associated comments published on pages or groups are regarded as public data, therefore, researchers can freely utilise the data. Data for this study was extracted from content posted on three Facebook pages of three popular female social media influencers from Zimbabwe, a country in Southern Africa.

This study focused on selected posts between May 2023 and June 2024 because this is the period whereby Mai Tt's fraud case was under scrutiny from Facebook users and other influencers have teamed up against her and spread hate posts on their social media pages. Smith et al. (2008) argue that cyberbullying can last for a week, a month, or even 6 months. Thus, there is no universally agreed standard time frame for measuring cyberbullying. The time frame selected is most appropriate for getting several posts that point to cyberbullying. The posts were purposively selected; therefore, the time frame was appropriate. The aim was to select posts that are related to cyberbullying, and the main goal of the study was to examine forms of cyberbullying on the selected Zimbabwean social media influencers' pages.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used to select posts that were relevant to the research question. For instance,

(1) the first filter was to select posts between May 2023 and June 2023, being the period when Mai Tt's fraud case was under scrutiny from Facebook users, and other influencers teamed up against her and spread hate posts on their social media pages and

(2) the second criterion was to select posts related to the cyberbullying of influencers.

All posts that were posted before May 2023 and June 2023 or those unrelated to cyberbullying, were excluded from the analysis. In addition, all users' comments were excluded since the focus was the posts of the social media influencers themselves and not those of their followers.

Extraction of Posts

The researcher extracted posts related to cyberbullying on Ketty Masomera, Pattricia Jack and Queen of Peace's Facebook pages. The first filter that was used was to enter the year 2023 and then select the month of May. Facebook does not allow the selection of several times or years simultaneously. So, after May, June was selected until all the months selected were covered. This process was repeatedly done for all the pages. To search for posts related to cyberbullying, keywords that were used were as follows: bully, bullying, *kutuka* (insults)/name calling, fraudster, and thief. The aim was not a comprehensive search but a purposive search to retrieve posts related to cyberbullying on the three selected social influencers' pages. Therefore, about 152

posts were purposively extracted from Ketty Masomera's Facebook page, 134 posts were extracted from Patricia Jack's Facebook page and about 38 posts were extracted from the Queen of Peace's Facebook page.

Data analysis

The next step was to use thematic analysis to identify thematic categories from the posts. The researcher was guided by steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2020), such as

(1) familiarizing with data by reading through the posts,

(2) generating code categories,

(3) aligning themes, and

(4) reviewing themes.

Willard's (2007) classifications of cyberbullying also guided the formation of themes, which are the forms of cyberbullying prevalent in the posts. According to Willard (2007), cyberbullying can be classified as follows; flaming, harassment, denigration, and sexting.

The first step was to familiarise myself with the data of each set of posts, i.e. Ketty Masomera's 152 posts, Patricia Jack's 134 posts and 38 posts from Queen of Peace's Facebook page. The next step was to generate codes, to do this, all the posts that indicate bullying were first labelled cyberbullying. Afterwards, the researcher was guided by Willard's (2007) classifications of cyberbullying, themes were generated. This data classification was done using a deductive approach guided by Braun and Clarke's (2020) phases of conducting a thematic analysis. The forms initially identified from the posts were as follows: harassment, denigration, flaming and sexting. The last step was to refine the thematic categories and the final themes were denigration, flaming and sexting. From these three themes identified, flaming was more common on the selected posts. All the identified themes negatively affect the lives of the victims; cyberbeing affects mental health and social life, and in some instances, results in bullycide.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the posts from the selected social media influencers' Facebook pages yielded the following themes: harassment, denigration, flaming and sexting. Due to space concerns, this paper only discusses the following three themes, namely, denigration, flaming and sexting. In instances where the posts were written in Shona, a vernacular of Zimbabwe, the posts were translated into English. This section, therefore, discusses the forms of cyberbullying in Facebook posts. To make it easier to report data, the influencers were referred to as follows: Ketty Masomera is referred to as Social Media Influencer A (SMIA), Patricia Jack is referred to as (SMIB) and Queen of Peace is referred to as (SMIC). The victim of cyberbullying means the individuals who were bullied in the posts are referred to as victims 1, 2, and 3.

Denigration

One of the forms of bullying detected on the social influencers' Facebook pages is denigration. Denigration takes place in instances whereby one posts and or shares distorting information to destroy their victim's reputation and relationships (Zhang et al., 2022). In most cases the information will be derogatory and untrue in some instances. Denigration also involves posting maliciously edited photos and videos. The following post shows that denigration was one form of cyberbullying on Ketty Masomera's Facebook page, referred to as social media influencer A (SMIA).

> "Maguru kuchikurubhi! Gwembe Guru Inda Tsikidzi Zvindakwenya, chemhe yacho kunge bako rekuchinhoi caves …????" (SMIA) (*cow intestines in jail, you have an itchiness caused by bedbugs and jigger flea, the private parts are deep like Chinhoyi caves*).

The post above shows that SMIA made derogatory comments about another female social influencer's appearance. In this case, SMIA posted distorted information which is aimed at destroying Victim 1's (V1) reputation, and social and sexual relations. The posts were meant to embarrass Mai Tt as images of her nudes were previously circulated online and thereafter name calling started as images of her private parts (vagina) were compared to tripe (cow's stomach that is consumed as food by humans) because of the state it was

portrayed in the images and videos circulated online. V1 was compared to "maguru/tripe", and also posted that "… the private parts are deep like Chinhoyi caves", this is derogatory as this was used to mock V1, the social influencer expressed that "*maguru kuchikurubhi*/cow intestines to jail", meaning that she referred to V1 as tripe herself and this intentionally shames the victim. Thus, the term *maguru* or *guru* referred to in the extracts is symbolic of V1's private parts. The last extract contains derogatory text as the social influencer uses vulgar language to insult V1's private parts and also compared the vagina to famous Chinhoyi caves. What is interesting from a gender point of view is the use of female genitalia to humiliate another female person. It reveals something about the female body and how it is used as a source of shame. The female body is a site of hegemonic struggle: a site of empowerment and disempowerment, an object of the female gaze. What we see here is the objectification of the female body to disempower the victim. While the female body is a target of male desire and exploitation, it can also be an object of shame.

Denigration is also evident on Queen of Peace's Facebook page referred to as SMIC. The influencer posted information that may embarrass another influencer. The post was directed to V1 as well. The post below portrays the victim as a pathological liar who often accuses males of being abusive to her. This post was in accordance with another female social influencer, Madam Boss, who had attended the 2024 Black Entertainment Television (BET) awards in America. The following post is derogatory as it may harm the reputation of V1, who is a fellow social influencer.

> "Dei ariye akaenda totonzwa Akon akandibata zaamhu,Will Smith andibata Ti akandikisa. Usher akandishevedza kuroom kwake" (SMIC) (*If she had gone, we would have heard her saying Akon touched my breasts, Will Smith touched my private parts. Ti kissed me … Usher called me to his room*).

This post is also similar to the above posts by SMIA, who posted about V1's leaking of nudes. Objectification has become the order of the day on these social media influencers' Facebook pages.

In addition, the posts by Pattricia Jack, referred to as SMIB are derogatory as she also labeled V1 as a pathological liar, a thief, and also a whore because she always mentions her sexual relationships and also because she has been married multiple times.

> "Aka kanhu kanonyepesa. Aewa we are still very bitter Feli uri mbavha pathological liar" (SMIB) (*This person is a liar. Yes, we are still very bitter Feli you are a thief, pathological liar*).

> "Kamuchacha wakaroyiwa ne … haupedze sentence usina kuti murume" (SMIB) (*Kamuchacha you are bewitched, you don't complete a sentence without mentioning man*).

Kamuchacha, being referred to above, is a Nickname that usually implies a motormouth. What is apparent in Ketty Masomera's, Pattricia Jack and Queen of Peace's Facebook pages is that their posts are derogatory as they may harm V1's reputation and may have psychological implications. V1 is a fellow social influencer; therefore, in this instance, the analysis points out that social influencers team up to bully each other. This justifies cyberfeminist perspectives that women abuse digital technologies as they utilise them to perpetuate violence on fellow women, thereby reproducing patriarchal hegemony. What is significant is that these are female social influencers who are using language that is normally used by men against women. These female social media influencers are not showing solidarity with a female social influencer, hence promoting the notion that a woman's number one enemy is another woman. The hatred among these female social media influencers does not inspire the girl child, i.e., negative role modelling for the girl child. Such cyberbullying has the potential to promote gender-based violence which is a serious problem in society.

Flaming

Flaming is evident in some of the Facebook extract posts on SMIA's Facebook page. Flaming is detected when one posts offensive, intimidating, insulting, threats. In this case, the offender (s) post provocative or abusive messages, which may contain capital letters and punctuation marks to, social media pages (El Asam & Samara, 2016). The SMIA shared information on Facebook which may be offensive to the victim. In this instance, abusive posts show intolerance of people of other genders (LGBTIQ[t]) community. This denotes homophobic characteristics from the social influencer. The following extracts show flaming in posts.

"... broke ngochani gara pasi Street father" (SMIA) (... *broke transgender, sit down homeless father*).

"Buda munyaya dzevakadzi uri murume!" (SMIA) (*Do not be involved in women's affairs*).

"Rombe rakafambira kusviden kunogura ... nemache ... shuwa kukwirira ndege kunodanana nemastreet kids ekusweden kukwirira ndege kuzo babysitter imbwa dzemu chando vamwe vachirova shift" (SMIA) (A destitute who went to Sweden to remove manhood. To go to another country to date street kids in Sweden and babysit dogs while other people are working).

"Zingochani renzaranzara kuramba ... nekuda kwenungo" (SMIA) (*A poor transgender who cut off manhood because of laziness*).

"Stay clearance otherwise tinokupa dzako 366 again unotiziva hauwudzirwe!" (SMIA) (*Stay away otherwise I will harass you for 366 days, you know me*).

In the posts, SMIA insulted V2, a transgender who is a fellow social influencer, through name-calling using words such as ngochani, a derogatory Shona term that refers to the LGBTIQ[t] community and also the way V2 underwent a medical procedure to remove male genitals and became a female. Not only that, SMIA even uttered the following words in referring to V2 "*Do not be involved in women's affairs*". In this instance, SMIA insulted the V2 saying that he is a man, yet he is part of the LGBTIQ[t] community. The social influencer, also called V2 lazy, and expressed that it is the reason why he removed his manhood so that he becomes a woman who is on the receiving end financially. Not only that, but the social influencer also threatened to continue posting about V2's life for 366 days, implying the whole year. The analysis revealed that flaming is prevalent in SMIA's posts directed at another fellow social media influencer who is transgender. This shows intolerance of other groups of people and a continuation of violent tendencies against people of other genders. These homophobic remarks promote violence against homosexuals, which has implications for the society. The society may continue to harass members of the LGBTIQ[t] as is the common trend is most developing countries therefore such behaviour is uncalled for.

Furthermore, the SMIA repeatedly posted offensive messages targeted at fellow social influencers in consecutive months. Examples of extracted public posts from Facebook are as follows:

"Mbavha ine mazimhuno anenge edhongi iyi? iwo maziwoko anenge mapango kunge maoko emurume ????" (SMIA) (*A fraudster with big nose like a donkey, hands that look like poles as if they are a male's hands*).

"Ketile wafaka pressure kusvika kaaku editor tugalo netukumbo okusalayo une tukumbo hauna confidence" (SMIA) (*Ketile pressurise her until she starts editing her behind, you have thin legs, you do not have confidence*).

As shown from the selected posts, the social influencer uses fellow influencers' social and physical attributes to insult them using animal imagery. The mentioning of the words such as *mbavha/thief and mazimhino/big, mawoko anenge emurume/hands that look like male's hands* nose denotes insults and continuously posting such provocative messages that are offensive may harm V1. The other statement, "... give pressurise her until she starts editing her behind," is insulting and denotes that SMIA will continue insulting the V1 because of her looks.

In addition, the bullying goes to the end of wishing for someone's death. One of the extracted post shows that SMIA even wished V1 to die because of rumours that she is a thief who uses her fame to rob fellow citizens of their hard-earned income. An example is of the following post.

Icu or mortuary, where are your cars? Fraudster, pay ... otherwise Chikurubi maximum prison or doves Morgan! (SMIA).

The extract above indicates that the social influencer labelled V1, a thief, a fraudster, who deserves to die or rot in jail. The words mortuary and Doves Morgan are associated with death. Doves Morgan is a funeral responsible for repatriating a dead body and burial. Although V1 might have committed a different crime, a

wave of posts with insults and even death wishes can have devastating impacts on one's human rights. Continuously harassing a victim on social media is a form of cyberbullying. From the selected posts discussed on SMIA's Facebook page, it is clear that she bullies fellow influences irrespective of their gender. The influencer assumes a male role, that of domination and subverts the common narrative that women are vulnerable and bullied on digital platforms. Women have become oppressors as they perpetuate violence against fellow women and those who belong to the LGBTIQ⁺ community. Thus, cyberfeminism perspectives align with these findings as they argue that women abuse digital technologies by serving self-interests.

Flaming is also evident in SMIB's Facebook posts. As stated previously, flaming involves the posting of offensive, intimidating messages, insults and threats. SMIB posted messages that threatened the victim as shown below:

> "My full time job is mai tt diaries, ndakapikira kumushanda kusvika ati twas Haaa kusvika kapetwaa Black sheep" (SMIB) (*My full time job is Mrs TT diaries, I will harass her until she is folded, black sheep*).

> It's a threat don't worry her days are number nekuti watorwa pic na President Munangagwa Ndevedu tese President havasi vekwa Murata (SMIB) (*It's a threat don't worry her days are numbered, just because you took a photo with President Munangagwa, he is a president of us all, he does not belong to your family*).

The other posts show that SMIB wishes death on V1, a fellow social influencer. The first post was a comment on an image portraying V1 and his boyfriend; the boyfriend was holding the victim's neck. That is why SMIB's post directs the boyfriend to twist the neck. This also shows that SMIB has accepted that violence is the solution to problems and encourages men to be violent against their partners. This means she believes in male domination in society and promotes violence against fellow women, thus demonstrating the applicability of cyberfeminism perspectives that argue that women use digital technologies to reproduce patriarchal norms. In the other post, SMIB wishes death on V1 as she stated, "… rest in peace", a saying that wishes someone who has passed on eternal rest. The posts being referred to are presented below.

> "Giri nyatso ku kavhuna mutsiba iwoyo uende paside, ancestor you have all our support" (*Giri please twist that neck until it bends, ancestor you have all our support*).

> "Deportation inopinza mu depression fast manje BAN inopinza mu ICU! Rest in peace" (SMIB) (*Deportation leads to depression quickly, a ban can land you in the ICU, rest in peace*).

Such posts may have detrimental effects on the victim's health and well-being if the bullying is not addressed.

Furthermore, cyberbullying is also directed at another social influencer referred to in this study as VC. The SMIA posted negative messages that were aimed at mocking the victim and, at the same time, praising another fellow social influencer who was involved in fistfights with the victim. The SMIA continued posting intimidating and offensive messages targeting V3; not only that, but it even posted threats aimed at exposing the victim of her alleged illegal dealings. The SMIA also insulted V3 using her physical attributes by saying that the victim has big sharp teeth. From these examples, it is clear that the SMIA harasses other influencers online.

> "Welldone my sister fix the kantiri next time huya utore nesando ubva wamubvisa mazizino iwawo anenge zvipikiri". (SMIA) (*Well done my sister, fix the country, next time you should get a hammer and remove her sharp teeth that look like nails*).

In the posts above, SMIA encourages violence; in this case, it is one female influencer against another. This can negatively affect the victim's confidence as she is embarrassed by the event. Thus, the posts indicate patriarchal hegemony; women believe that violence is the solution, and it shows dominance.

Sexting

Sexting is also a common form of online harassment which can have detrimental effects on victims. Sexting refers to the posting of sexually explicit texts, videos or photographs through digital media platforms

without the owners' consent (Abaido, 2020; Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015). Sexting, another form of cyberbullying on SMIA's Facebook page. The social media influencer threatened to release V1's nude photographs and sexually explicit videos and the images ended up online.

> "Ita sorry or else ma noodles ako ndoatenderedza fast Mangwana unoswera uchirira ?????? tuzamu kurembera kudaro kunge mapatata Kapeche kacho kakaunyana kapecheuswa" (SMIA) (*Say sorry or else I will circulate your sexual images and you will be trending tomorrow, our breasts are fallen as slippers, and your vagina is winkled*).

From the posts above, SMIA instructed V1 to issue an apology, threatening to release private and sexually explicit photos and videos if she refused to comply. As shown from the extract, the social influencer said, "*Say sorry or else I will circulate your sexual images and you will be trending tomorrow, our breasts are fallen as slippers, and your vagina is winkled*". With these words, the SMIA is telling users that they are going to view ugly images of the V1's private parts. Explicit content showing V1 in compromising positions was later circulated online, with the malicious intent to humiliate her and tarnish her reputation. This indicates that social media is being used as a tool to embarrass V1 and destroy her reputation. Sexting is a criminal offence; this behaviour has implications for the offender and the victim, as well as it may affect the victim's health and social and sexual relationships. Women perpetuate violence against their fellow women. As cyberfeminism argues that women perpetuate violence against fellow women instead of using digital technology to empower themselves and become role models to young girls and fellow women (Lestari et al., 2020). Thus, cyberbullying has the potential to perpetuate gender-based violence which has serious implications to the society.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine forms of cyberbullying that are prevalent on the selected social media influencers' Facebook pages. It is apparent that cyberbullying is among the three selected social media influencers' Facebook pages, which are as follows: Ketty Masomera, Queen of Peace and Pattricia Jack's Facebook pages. Different forms of cyberbullying, such as denigration, sexting and flaming, emerged from the analysis of posts from the selected social media influencers' Facebook pages. Although Vandebosch and van Cleemput (2008) argue that anonymity and the ability to utilise technology empower perpetrators of cyberbullying, in this particular study, the analysis showed that anonymity is insignificant as the perpetrators are using their public Facebook pages, which are open platforms to bully fellow social media influencers of different genders. The author observes that the ability to use technology and, in this case, Facebook, a social media platform that empowers the perpetrator to bully another person, is applicable and noticeable in this study. In addition, among the three influencers, Ketty Masomera's posts depict continuous violence against other women and even against a transgender as all identified forms of bullying were depicted on her Facebook page. For Pattricia Jack and Queen of Peace, two forms of denigration and flaming were depicted on their Facebook pages.

Furthermore, all the women are using male language to abuse other women. This shows how women internalise oppression by men. It shows that digital media is promoting the dominant gender's world view rather than challenging it. This contradicts the notion that digital media is liberatory. The Internet is not always liberatory, but it is sometimes hegemonic; these influencers promote the dominant narrative (male worldview), of course, in this case, in the name of "entertainment of a different kind" or in the name of chasing fame.

There are three issues that emerge from the findings:

1. Unlike in previous studies we have woman on woman violence.
2. Wrong role modelling by female social media influencers.
3. How the lack of gatekeeping in social media and the hunger for fame is promoting harmful behaviours – anti-social behaviour.

Therefore, gender dynamics that are emerging from the analysis of findings are that cyberbullying is being perpetuated by females. Although literature portrays women and girls as vulnerable to cyberbullying (Gustafsson, 2017; Musharraf & Anis-ul-Haque's 2018; Navarro & Jasinski, 2013; Sorrentino et al., 2019) the

study findings show a different perspective as the findings contend the dominant narrative that portrays women as weak and vulnerable to bullying in cyberspace. Another emerging issue is that social media influencers also bully each other through their social platforms. Previous studies show that high profile figures and social celebrities are bullied by their followers (Hassan et al., 2018; Ouvrein et al., 2017; Saengprang & Gadavanij, 2021). However, although this is a common trend, this study offers a different perspective as it highlights that social media influencers have become cyberbullies as they use their social platforms, taking advantage of a substantial following to bully fellow social media influencers.

What is emerging from the analysis is that the three female social media influencers are at the centre of cyberbullying as they bully fellow social influencers who are also women. Haraway (1998) believes that the internet is a liberating space for women as it offers avenues for more democratic gender relations but in the context of this study, women have become oppressors themselves. Although cyberfeminism advocates for women's use of digital technologies to improve their lives, produce original content and freely express themselves (Kanai & Dobson, 2016; Lestari et al., 2020; Milford, 2015), results from this study reveal that digital platforms have thus become vehicles for disempowerment rather than empowerment. Some women are using digital platforms to dehumanise fellow women instead of empowering them. This can be referred to as a form of anti-social liberation, whereby these social influencers disregard the rights and freedom of fellow women on digital platforms.

Furthermore, the findings align with Gajjala and Oh (2012), one of the cyberfeminists' arguments that women's participation in online communities does not automatically result in women's empowerment but serves self-interest. In line with this view, Ellcessor (2017) adds that online spaces may reproduce and amplify prejudices and cultural stereotypes. From the analysis of three selected social media pages, findings, women social influencers abuse the power gained from having a substantial following on social media by creating and sharing content that perpetuates cyberbullying to assert their dominance and reap the rewards of such behaviour from the increased engagements from such content. In addition, the analysis revealed that women are violent towards their fellow women thus, woman to woman violence is evident. Influencers are opinion leaders, and they are role models, yet they use their power to perpetuate violence (Ramdane et al., 2024), especially fellow women. Consequently, this, in turn, perpetuates the marginalisation and oppression of women being bullied on social media platforms. This shows that contrary to the popular belief that social media is a space for liberation, it can also be a site upon which dominant ideologies such as patriarchy are endorsed, rationalised, and perpetuated.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the forms of cyberbullying on the selected social media influencers' Facebook pages. The analysis revealed that social media influencers experience different forms of cyberbullying such as denigration, sexting, and flaming. From the selected Facebook pages of social influencers analysed in this study, it is apparent that social media influencers have become perpetrators of cyberbullying as they use digital platforms to spread hate messages and target other fellow social influencers. Although the dominant narrative portrays women as vulnerable in the digital space, this study contends that women are also perpetrators of bullying in online spaces. This study, therefore, fills a gap in the gendered perspectives on cyberbullying in digital spaces. The study recommends further research to be carried out focusing on cyberbullying among other digital platforms such as Twitter and YouTube.

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