

Campus Bullying on Digital Platforms: A Forensic Linguistic Analysis



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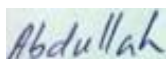
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Abdullah".

Abdullah Al Mahmud, PhD

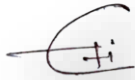
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I declare that this thesis presents my original research work. All contributions and information from others have been acknowledged properly through citations and references.



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my supportive family and friends, for their constant support and motivations throughout the research journey. To my supervisor, for being there by my side and to guide me. And finally, to myself, for staying strong and never giving up.

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First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to the Almighty for His blessings, and for granting me wisdom and knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the phenomenon of campus bullying on digital platforms through a forensic linguistic analysis of linguistic and nonlinguistic markers and patterns. With the rise of social media and digital communication, bullying words and taunts have taken on new forms and impacting psychological well-being of students. To gain a holistic understanding, this paper employs a mixed-method approach. Data is collected through surveys and interviews that capture insights from students, while a corpus analysis is conducted to identify specific linguistic and nonlinguistic features, and patterns used to increase or mitigate aggressive behavior and reflect underlying social dynamics. The findings reveal distinct patterns in language usage that are linked to cases of cyberbullying, providing insights into the communicative tactics employed by bullies, such as - strategic use of sarcasm, emojis, humor, insults, or backhanded compliments. This enhances our understanding of how these choices affect victims and perpetuates a culture of bullying within digital environments. Ultimately, this paper seeks to Inform educational policies and interventions to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities of digital bullying in academic settings. By shedding light on these dynamics, the paper aims to enhance strategies to create safer and more supportive digital environments for students.

Keywords: Campus Bullying, Cyber Safety, Digital Platforms, Discourse Analysis, Forensic Linguistics, Social Media

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Shift from Physical to Digital Bullying

Bullying has traditionally been a social phenomenon. Primarily confined to physical spaces within institutional settings, such as hallways, classrooms, playgrounds, or during breaks. Historically, bullying was easily identifiable through certain acts, like pushing, shoving, kicking, mocking, hitting, name-calling, or harsh words, and stealing or damaging personal belongings, and was easy to spot and recognize who the bully and victim were (Sanders & Phye, 2004; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2007; Jahan, 2022). Teachers, peers, and even sometimes bystanders could intervene and stop these behaviors before they went too far (Peebles, 2014). These incidents were often brief and confined within those physical spaces and ended when the bell rang (Sanders & Phye, 2004). However, the digital age has drastically changed this landscape, and questions now arise that what happens when the walls of the classroom no longer contain bullying and the audiences of the oppressors are no longer limited to just the people nearby, but the entire world? What happens when those hurtful words don't disappear with the bell but remain in the digital world, accessible to anyone with a screen?

As technology has become deeply embedded in everyday life, bullying has shifted from physical spaces to online platforms (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, 2006). Unlike face-to-face encounters, digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, texts, Email, Messenger groups, and Google Classroom enable attackers to target victims anywhere at any time (Peebles, 2014; Bauman, 2009). This shift is not merely a change in the form of bullying or some isolated acts but a systematic abuse of power that involves a consistent and deliberate attempt by one or more people who are physically or socially stronger to assert control, harm and degrade weaker individuals (Espelage, 2014; Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Sanders & Phye, 2004; Carter, 2013; Farida et al., 2024). The turn has not just made bullying less visible to campus authorities but amplified its emotional and psychological impact as well, leaving scars that are invisible but deeply felt (Brewer et al., 2012; Farida et al., 2024).

Bullying on online platforms can take both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal bullying includes - teasing, insulting, threatening, harassment, spreading rumors, mocking, or

taunting, while non-verbal forms include excluding someone from a group, ignoring, or using hashtags, emoticons, or strategic tagging to degrade the person (Peebles, 2014). According to Supardi and Muchtar (2024), Brewer et al. (2012), Irma and Carolina (2021), and Jahan (2022) cyber-bullying can have devastating psychological impacts, leading to anxiety, frustrations, stress, trauma, low self-esteem and largely hindering victims' ability to progress. While significant research has focused on the psychological and emotional impact of bullying, the specific linguistic and non-linguistic communication markers and patterns used in digital platforms by bullies to contribute to the said harmful impacts remain underexplored.

As Austin (1975) explains, language does more than just convey information; it carries the power to communicate intent. In the context of digital bullying, language becomes a tool for performing acts of aggression, such as - sarcasm and insult. These two linguistic tools are commonly used online under the guise of humor or praise. For instance, in a group chat, if a student asks a question and another responds with "Oh, great question" accompanied with an eye-rolling emoji (🙄), while others react with "ha-ha". This is not an appreciation but rather a mockery. This can lead the recipient to feel humiliated and embarrassed in front of others. Linguistically, sarcasm often involves saying the opposite of what one means, and emojis reinforce the context by visually mimicking facial expressions (Viola, 2024). Similarly, Memes and GIFs, two popular forms of visual communication on social media, are also being used to isolate and humiliate an individual (Milosavljević, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2023), such as a meme might be shared to mock someone's appearance and actions or a photoshopped GIF with embarrassing pictures of the victims might be shared to bully the person. Together, these linguistic and nonlinguistic elements are being weaponized against victims, making it harder for them to escape the harassment and providing bullies more control over the victims' psychological state.

By analyzing these markers and patterns of both linguistic elements, such as sarcasm, irony, insults, and manipulative language, as well as non-linguistic cues, such as emojis, memes, GIFs, hashtags and strategic tagging, this study aims to fill the gap in existing research by unfolding psychological tactics that bullies use to exert their control in digital platforms. Furthermore, by understanding how these linguistic and non-linguistic communication elements function as manipulative tools, the study will provide insights into potential strategies to mitigate the harmful effects of digital bullying within educational environments, support students, and promote safer online spaces.

1. 2 Research Aims

In today's digital era, bullying has evolved from physical encounters in hallways to more insidious and universal forms online (Bauman, 2009). This shift has introduced new challenges within educational settings, which is impacting students' mental health and learning experiences (Supardi & Muchtar, 2024; Brewer et al., 2012; Irma and Carolina, 2021; Jahan, 2022; Ahmed et al., 2023). This study aims to conduct a forensic linguistic analysis of the psychological and emotional impacts of digital bullying on students, focusing particularly on how both linguistic and non-linguistic communication elements are weaponized by bullies to manipulate individuals. For a long time, verbal abuse has been a common tool in bullying, however, the strategic use of language through memes, emojis, sarcasm and other online tactics has emerged as a form of insulting, taunting or degrading individuals. A forensic analysis of these digital interactions reveals that the use of images, videos and memes are tools for targeted harassment (Ahmed et al, 2023).

For example, when a victim's pictures or videos are shared in a group chat, tagging that individual with a caption like - "When you try to be smart but fail miserably" or when memes of animals are posted with the victim being tagged and accompanied by phrases like - "your family is looking for you" or "Here's the lost calf of the cow family" with laughing emojis, these actions are not mere jokes, rather calculated efforts to humiliate, isolate and emotionally hurt the person. By analyzing these interactions, this study aims to provide a clear understanding of how online bullying tactics are systematically used to harass victims and cause psychological scars by making the victim feel powerless. Ultimately, it seeks to address and mitigate the growing issues of digital bullying and provide insights needed to create safer and more supportive online spaces for students.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The specific questions to be addressed in this research are as follows.

- a. To what extent, and in what ways, do linguistic and non-linguistic markers contribute to cyberbullying among university students in Bangladesh?
- b. What interventions or strategies can educational settings implement to mitigate the effects of digital bullying?

Accordingly, the research objectives are:

- a. To find out the extent and the ways in which linguistic and non-linguistic markers contribute to cyberbullying among university students in Bangladesh
- b. To explore possible interventions or strategies that educational settings can implement to mitigate the effects of digital bullying

1. 4 Forensic Linguistics: A Basic Understanding

Forensic linguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the language of crime and its application in investigative contexts (Umiyati, 2020; Ariani et al., 2014). It focuses on analyzing language use in written, spoken, or digital forms to uncover patterns, meanings and intentions (Correa, 2013). According to Coulthard and Johnson (2007) while approaching a text in a forensic context, it is crucial to consider its similarities and contrasts with texts in other contexts. As well as to determine which theories and methods are most appropriate for its analysis. By studying elements like syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse, forensic linguistics helps to understand evidence such as confessions, threats, bullying, plagiarism and more (Umiyati, 2020).

As bullying heavily relies on language to harm, belittle, humiliate or manipulate individuals, forensic linguistics can play an essential role to uncover the truth and provide evidence in legal contexts (Correa, 2013). Linguistic and nonlinguistic evidence, such as text message, email, sarcasm, memes, GIF, emoticon, social media posts, and tagging can reveal patterns of bullying behavior. For example, in emergency calls or voice notes related to cyberbullying, the victim's tone, hesitation, or choice of words can indicate his/her emotional state, like fear or distress. In threatening messages or abusive texts, emails, or posts, it analyses syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and vocabulary to determine whether the threats are genuine or fake (Ariyani et al., 2014; Umiyati, 2020).

Additionally, it provides insights into distinguishing harmless or casual communication. As well as the multimodal or strategic use of linguistic patterns by bullies. This includes the repeated use of derogatory terms or specific styles of messaging that convey aggression or manipulation. For example, a bully might repeatedly use phrases like:

"Everyone knows you're a joke, but you think you're something, huh?"

Here, forensic analysis will focus on the repetition of "everyone knows", which is used to create the illusion of widespread agreement to isolate the victim. Although the comment may seem

subtle, it is significant and intentional implying that the victim is not only being bullied but also socially marginalized.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study attempts to conduct a forensic linguistic analysis of campus bullying on digital media using a variety of theoretical frameworks. These frameworks together offer a comprehensive understanding of how language, power dynamics, and multimodal elements contribute to digital bullying. These frameworks include Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Speech Act Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Politeness Theory, and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). Each of these focuses on specific aspects of digital bullying, such as power dynamics, emotional harm, and how verbal and non-verbal elements interplay to amplify aggression in digital spaces.

1.5.1 Overview of Theoretical Frameworks

This section provides an overview of each theoretical framework used in this study. It explains their relevance to the analysis of campus bullying on digital platforms and their respective contributions to understanding the interplay between language, power and multimodal elements.

1.5.1.1 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT): Convergence and Divergence

Communication Accommodation Theory provides valuable insights into how language and communicative behavior in general are adopted in social interaction in a variety of contexts (Coupland & Coupland, 1991). The theory suggests that individuals adjust their behavior and speech patterns, either through convergence or divergence, in response to social dynamics such as power, identity, and group norms (Giles et al., 1991; Giles & Ogay, 2007; Elhami, 2020; Dragojevic et al., 2015). In the context of digital bullying, CAT offers significant insights into how bullies may adapt their communication style to assert dominance and victims may change their responses to avoid conflict (Elhami, 2020). Convergence refers to adapting one's communication to become more similar to others, often to establish rapport or solidarity (Giles et.al., 2023; Giles & Ogay, 2007). However, in digital bullying, bullies may consciously or unconsciously mirror the victim's speech patterns, tones, or accents not to create rapport, but to exert control and reinforce the power imbalance. As Giles et al. (1991) state "communication

is a medium through which individuals negotiate their identity," so when a bully imitates the victim's language or tone, it manipulates their Identity, intensifying their sense of inferiority.

On the other hand, divergence occurs when individuals emphasize differences in their communication (Elhami, 2020). In cyber-bullying, bullies may deliberately use language to isolate or mock the victim, to create a clear distinction between themselves and the victim. For instance, if a student says, "I don't no (know) why this is happening to me," and another responds, "You don't no? Maybe because you're dumb". By highlighting the victim's mistakes, the bully reinforces their own perceived superiority and further isolates the student. According to Giles et al. (1991) "communication is not just a conduit for information transfer but it is a medium through which individuals negotiate their identity", and bullies strategically use communication to target the victim's social identity.

That's why, this framework is useful for analyzing the dynamics of digital bullying by focusing on the strategic use of convergence and divergence to humiliate the victim.

1.5.1.2 Speech Act Theory

A speech act is a communicative act performed through language, where the speaker conveys meaning to achieve a specific purpose, such as making a request, giving a command, insulting, mocking others, expressing emotions and more (Nordquist, 2024). It involves real-life interactions and suggests that simply linguistic knowledge isn't enough to fully grasp a conversation, broader awareness of social dynamics and contextual understanding is essential (Yule, 2010; Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, n.d.). Speech acts differ in their purposes, focusing on - real or potential facts, future or past events, the roles of the speaker or listener, and their appropriateness (Kreidler, 2002). In the context of cyberbullying, this framework reveals how bullies strategically manipulate utterances to serve functions that deviate from their literal meanings. For example, a question may appear to seek information but is actually used to mock the victim. Similarly, a command might be disguised as a joke, and sarcastic sentences may be weaponized to dominate the victim.

By analyzing the function of utterances in digital bullying, this theory provides valuable insights into the subtle yet powerful ways that language can be used to harm others and influence social interactions.

1.5.1.3 Politeness Theory

Politeness theory analyzes how individuals use or violate politeness strategies in communication, focusing on the concept of "face". Here, "face" refers to the image of ourselves that we present in different social contexts (Goldsmith, 2008). It's not something fixed within us but is created through social interactions, showing how we manage our behavior to maintain positive relations or avoid conflict (Locher & Watts, 2005). Digital bullying often involves face-threatening acts, such as insults, threats, or exclusion. By applying this framework, I can better understand how offenders may use politeness strategies that threaten the victim's face, either directly (e.g., insults) or indirectly (e.g., passive aggressive comments) in digital spaces.

1.5.1.4 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical discourse analysis analyzes how language constructs, reinforces, and challenges power and ideology in society (Wodak, 2014). It views the use of discourse in speech and writing as a form of "social practice", indicating that it both influences and is influenced by the social structures and contexts in which it occurs (Hibatulloh et al., 2023; Wodak, 2014). As CDA examines how language can support or reinforce power dynamics, and in bullying, language is used to belittle others and maintain power within the group, this framework helps gain insights into how bullies use language and non-verbal forms to marginalize and treat others unfairly.

1.5.1.5 Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

Multimodal discourse analysis is an approach that explores how different modes of communication, such as spoken and written code, images, gestures, videos, signs, emojis, and even sounds, work together to convey meaning in interaction (O'Halloran, 2011; El-Hameed, 2024). It focuses on how different semiotic resources interact to convey meaning in different contexts. Nowadays, multimodal elements have become a more complex and powerful tool for bullying, as they combine various modes of expression to amplify aggression and humiliation. An emoji that may appear harmless at first can carry negative connotations depending on the context. A photo can be edited to make a person appear laughable, or a video can be captured in someone's vulnerable situation and spread with embarrassing captions, causing long lasting harm to their self-esteem and reputation. Eventually, MDA allows a more comprehensive understanding of how multimodal elements work together with language to intensify the emotional harm caused by bullying.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The rise of technology and digital platforms in education has brought significant advancement, making learning more dynamic and engaging (Parveen & Ramzan, 2024; Kumar 2023). Educating young minds has become more affordable and resourceful with the integration of The Internet of Things (IoT) (Kumar, 2023; Haleem et al., 2022; Yadav, 2024). According to Haleem et al. (2022) and Haider et al. (2022) both teachers and students prefer digital media as a vital part of teaching and learning, as it facilitates instant information sharing and provides an open space for communication. However, alongside these benefits, the incorporation of digital platforms into education has also opened the door of cyberbullying (Haider et al., 2022; Lee, 2022), where these tools are being misused to target and harm minorities in various ways, such as spreading rumors, passing judgmental or rude comments, harassing, humiliating, happy slapping, doxxing, fake profiles, trolling, and more (Peebles, 2014; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2007; Ahmed et al., 2023;). Several studies have showed psychological and emotional impacts of bullying, which range from anxiety, depression, academic downfall to extreme cases, such as suicide (Brewer et al., 2012; Farida et al., 2024; Supardi & Muchtar, 2024; Irma & Carolina, 2021; Jahan, 2022; Hibatulloh, 2023; Ajis et al., 2022; Hamuddin et al., 2018; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2007; Ahmed et al., 2023; Parris et al., 2020).

Despite this, there remains a glaring gap in research on how language, coupled with non-linguistic elements, is strategically used to impose them. The same language can carry vastly different messages depending on its intent and context, making it crucial to analyze the underlying tactics behind its use. For instance, comments like, "গাধা (Donkey), বলদ (Dumb/Bull), ছাগল (Goat), মূর্থ (Ignorant), কুত্তা (Dog), ভণ্ড (Fraud), অশিক্ষিত (Illiterate), Failure, Drama queen, Nerd, Stupid, Idiot, Bitch, Witch, Joker, Cartoon, No one cares about your opinion, just keep quiet, you're so annoying, just go away, nobody cares if you're here, why do you always look so ugly?" may seem like a harmless tease among friends, but when repeatedly used in every comment and chat with certain intentions, along with sarcastic GIFs, memes, tags, and emojis, it becomes a tool of systematic humiliation.

Take the term "Joker" as an example, it can shift its meaning depending on its tone and context. In a playful context one might say -

"Stop being such joker 😊 You always know how to make me laugh"

This is lighthearted and meant to bring a smile. Also, the laughing face emoji adds a playful and humorous tone. However, in the bullying context, the same word can be used to degrade someone. Such as,

“You're such a joker 😂 always messing & ruining things up, why don't u just die 😡?”

This statement is extremely harmful, insulting, cruel, and threatening, also intends to attack victims' self-worth. Moreover, the clown face and angry emoji add an extra layer of mockery and aggression.

As AI and digital platforms continue to develop, bullying strategies are becoming more sophisticated. AI can generate memes, edit images, or even suggest captions, making it easier for bullying to target their victims. This highlights the shift of our research focus from solely addressing and understanding the associated factors and outcomes of bullying to analyzing the language of bullying, including both linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects. How is language used with nonlinguistic elements to cause harm? How multimodal strategies turn simple words into tools of bullying? Understanding and identifying these linguistic features could help us prevent and reduce cyberbullying, particularly within the context of Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The advent of digital platforms has completely transformed conventional forms of bullying into cyberbullying, a major threat on university campuses. This transformation reflects a broader pervasiveness of social media, messaging apps, and other digital tools that have opened new avenues for harassment. Which is unconstrained by physical and temporal limits (Hamuddin et al., 2018; Gahagan et al., 2015; Maikano, 2024).

This chapter synthesized some of the existing research to provide a comprehensive understanding of campus bullying using digital platforms focusing on the psychological, academic, and linguistic dimensions. It explores the definition and motives, manifestations, prevalence, gendered nature, and cultural implications for cyberbullying in university settings. Studies have underlined how linguistic tactics, abusive language, aggression, and multimodal elements such as memes contribute to online harassment. Besides, this section emphasized the need to apply forensic linguistic approaches and technological tools such as including Machine learning and Natural Language Processing, to examine and address cyberbullying.

The findings suggest that there is an urgent need for institutional awareness, prevention strategies, and supportive policies to mitigate the impact of cyberbullying.

2.2 Synthesis of Cyberbullying in University Settings: A Multidimensional Approach

2.2.1 Understanding Cyberbullying in University Settings: Definitions, Manifestations, and Motivations

The rapid growth of digital platforms has dramatically changed the landscape of bullying, particularly at university settings (Carter, 2013; Haider et al, 2022; Mustapha & Ahmed, 2022; Ahmed et.al., 2023; Ajis et al.,2022; Maikano, 2024; Brewer et al., 2012; Ilmi, et al., 2024; Hamuddin et al., 2018). The digital age has brought in a new form of harassment, cyberbullying, which knows no boundary related to space and time. Cyberbullying is not only a topic of current concern but, for some time now, it has also become a serious issue influencing the students' academic performance and well-being.

According to Carter (2013) cyberbullying is a type of aggression that occurs via digital media and involves repeated harmful behaviors, often in an anonymous way. In explanation, Bauman, (2015) has pointed out that cyberbullying may manifest in different forms, such as harassment, imitation, spreading harmful content, and exclusion. As there is no face-to-face contact and immediate consequences, the aggressor is empowered to be more aggressive and relentless. This anonymity factor has not only made cyberbullying more widespread and long lasting but also more enduring because it can happen at any time, in any place, and more frequently.

In addition to this, researchers also explored the motives, types, prevalence, and nature of cyberbullying. For instance, Hamuddin et al. (2018) explain that in most cyberbullying situations, there is a power imbalance, whereby the aggressor bully people who are perceived to be weaker. Their motives are not one-dimensional but are often an intent to dominate, revenge, frustration, or sometimes mere fun. Interestingly, some forms of cyberbullying may not be intended to harm, but arise from either linguistic play or cultural misunderstandings (Hamuddin et al., 2018).

Regarding its manifestations, Hamuddin et al. (2018) and Gahagan et al. (2015) observe that cyberbullying manifests in various ways, including flaming, harassment, and exclusion, the common sites being Facebook and Instagram for such incidents. Furthermore, Khan and Asim (2020) highlight that social media platforms are often used as ideal grounds for cyberbullying, where most of the hurtful behaviors are subtly carried out. Moreover, as Oravec (2012) points out, these forms of cyberbullying are not only pervasive but also persistent due to the rapid rise and widespread access to mobile phones and global internet connectivity.

2.2.2 The Prevalence and Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying on University Students

In academic settings, particularly at tertiary level, cyberbullying continues to be a major concern. A number of studies indicate that the majority of students have either experienced or witnessed cyberbullying, showing how widespread it is (Bauman, 2015; Gahagan et al., 2016). Access to social network sites and increased dependency on digital communication have set situations where bullying can comfortably happen without the constraints of geographic boundaries. According to Ahmed and Rahman (2020) university students in Bangladesh who are victims of digital bullying suffer from symptoms like anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from society. They note that anonymity provided by online sites increases the negative impact

because it makes victims feel completely helpless and lonely. These findings are reinforced by Brewer et al. (2012), who indicate that cyberbullying enhances feelings of helplessness and anxiety, as a student feels trapped in continuous harassment online. Similarly, Carter (2013) illustrated the severe psychological trauma brought about by cyberbullying, emphasizing anxiety and depression as common among victims. This perspective is echoed by Haider et al. (2022), who detail the psychological consequences of abusive language and harassment, including emotional disturbances and suicidal thoughts. They emphasize that this abuse does not just demean victims but also has serious impacts on their mental health and relationships.

Based on these findings, Ajis et al. (2022) further add that the effects of cyberbullying can often be much worse than those of traditional bullying. They point out that the anonymity of the bullies and the permanent nature of online content amplify victims' emotional sufferings and makes it difficult to report incidents. This has been further elaborated on by Mutunga (2023), who noted that cyberbullying violates victims' dignity and educational opportunities, humiliating and isolating them with low self-esteem. From a psychological point of view, the impact of cyberbullying, as many scholars have discussed, does not only relate to emotional problems but also extends to academic difficulties. According to Irma and Carolina (2022), a victim of cyberbullying is very likely to suffer a serious decline in academic performance, because of poor concentration and engagement in their studies. This can be very upsetting for students and may lead to skip classes, poor grades, and even dropping out of school. Moreover, Oravec (2012) discusses how social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter contribute to cyberbullying by promoting negative behaviors like body shaming and Harassment. The communal nature of these platforms allows wider gossip to spread quickly and damage reputations, making cyberbullying far more pervasive.

2.2.3 Linguistic Strategies in Cyberbullying: Language, Power, and Multimodal Aggression

The discussion about the psychological and academic impacts of cyberbullying is closely intertwined with its linguistic components. Language is a powerful vehicle to inflict harm, by using direct verbal attacks as well as more subtle kinds of aggression. In that regard, Haider et al. (2022) employed Teun A. van Dijk's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze social media chat data to show how bullies use targeted, harsh and derogatory language to exploit and isolate victims. Likewise, Mutunga (2023) through

Speech Act theory, shows that language is a face-threatening act in cyberbullying and further erodes the dignity of victims.

Research by Yuan and Liu (2023) also analyzed the role of language in cyberbullying, showing how the relational processes are dominating in abusive comments. They indicate that in TikTok, the language of cyberbullying mainly uses relational processes to build up negative attribution. On the other hand, cyberbullying through Facebook relies heavily on direct insults and personal attacks for public humiliation. Instagram, on the other hand, often features visual elements with captions and derogatory comments to amplify emotional impact. Also, bystanders, supportive or not, could amplify the harm and thereby escalate the situation. More importantly, Maikano (2024) and Hibatulloh et al. (2023) highlight the role that cultural and technological dynamics also contribute to worsening in such impacts. Hibatulloh et al. (2023) used Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to analyze the influence of language on public perceptions about bullying in educational contexts. They show that media representations of bullying incidents contribute to the development of how people react toward such incidents.

Farida et al. (2024) present a semiotic approach to bullying discourses that explain how both verbal and non-verbal signs establish power relations. Negative comments such as rude and insulting phrases along with non-verbal features, helps to amplify power dynamics. While Mustapha and Ahmed (2022) included a forensic linguistic perspective by discussing how offenders use complex linguistic strategies such as deceptive or manipulative language to avoid detection. Their study also pointed out that forensic analysis is necessary to reveal the psychological and emotional damage to victims, particularly in campus settings.

Ahmed et al. (2023) finally contribute to a rather different perspective in the analysis of cyberbullying, memes as a multimodal form of online aggression. This work focuses on the detection of bullying memes in the Bengali language. According to them, the combination of text and images in memes makes the detection of bullying difficult, as the bullying message might not be explicit if the text and images are considered separately. The study further underlines the need for analysis techniques to detect such forms of cyberbullying, especially in languages and contexts where research has been scant.

2.2.4 Gender Differences in Cyberbullying: Communication and Victimization

In a gendered context, Rosen and Shoenberger (2021) pointed out that there are particular ways in which communication differs in the context of cyberbullying. Where girls are more relational in their aggression, excluding people or spreading rumors, while boys are more overtly verbal in their attacks. Lee et al. (2022) go deeper into the gendered nature of cyberbullying and claim that females tend to be more affected than male. Their study shows that gender-specific factors like peer support and parental involvement play a crucial role in mitigating the impact due to cyberbullying. Girls often benefit from more supervision and support, which can act as a protective factor. While boys get less parental monitoring, which makes them more vulnerable. These findings highlight the need for gender-specific interventions in both prevention and intervention efforts.

In contrast to these findings, Ajis et al. (2022) challenge the assumption that gender differences in cyberbullying are always striking. Their study among university students in Malaysia found no significant differences in cyberbullying victimization based on gender. This challenges previous assumptions and therefore calls for further research to understand the dynamics of cyberbullying across different contexts.

2.2.5 Technological Approaches to Detect and Prevent Cyberbullying

In recent studies, researchers have focused on using technology to detect and prevent cyberbullying. For instance, Maikano (2024) analyzed cyberbullying from a computational perspective, showing how machine learning algorithms can identify linguistic patterns related to bullying in different cultural and linguistic contexts. Similarly, Ilmi et al. (2024) examined the use of technology to prevent bullying, developing a mobile application that applies Natural Language Processing (NLP), converting speech into text. By incorporating machine learning algorithms, such as a Support Vector Machine, the application detects bullying patterns, which enhances not only the reporting process but contributes to more effective preventive measures.

2.2.6 Strategies for Addressing Cyberbullying: Awareness, Education, and Peer Support

Cyberbullying requires a multidimensional approach, such as awareness, education, and support mechanisms. Khan and Alvi (2023) highlight the role of peer support systems in fighting cyberbullying. They recommend designing safe virtual spaces and training, to recognize and respond to bullying behavior. Such peer support systems can be very crucial in

providing emotional and psychological support to victims. However, peer support alone, as noted by Al-Rahmi et al. (2019), may not be enough to deal with deep systemic problems like anonymity and lack of accountability.

Following this, Haider et al. (2022) have pointed out the importance of awareness and prevention in combating cyberbullying. The students can be made aware of the linguistic tricks of cyberbullies so that they will be able to respond to them appropriately, thus making a friendly atmosphere for victims. This aligns with Irma and Carolina's (2021) study that educators play a critical role in the identification and resolution of bullying. Educators should be trained in handling bullying, both physical and digital. In addition, by providing a reporting culture and awareness of the effects of cyberbullying, institutions can lead to a more proactive approach toward such incidents.

Bauman (2015) further supports the importance of having clear policies on how to address cyberbullying. He also recommended developing "Acceptable Use Policies" and involving parents in supervising technology use can create a safer environment for students. However, the limited evidence of their effectiveness shows the ongoing difficulties in tackling cyberbullying. In the same way, Oravec (2012) also emphasizes the need for multidimensional solutions, such as policymaking, educating those involved, and creating supportive structures. Clear rules and regulations regarding online behavior might allow and encourage victims of such incidents to come forward against cyberbullying.

Moreover, Gahagan et al. (2015) extend this discussion by emphasizing the role of bystanders in cyberbullying incidents. They pointed out that bystanders can either support a victim or reinforce a bully. In addition, Rosen and Shoenberger (2021) introduce forensic linguistics as a tool to analyze the language of cyberbullying, indicating how language patterns influence the shaping of bullying behaviors and inform targeted interventions.

Lastly, Al-rahmi (2021) has mentioned the importance of creating a caring community where empathy and digital literacy are nurtured. He argues for including emotional intelligence training and responsible digital behavior in curriculum to help students tackle bullying.

2.3 Research Gap

While much research has been conducted on cyberbullying in higher education, several key gaps still exist in addressing its multidimensional nature. One of the least explored

dimensions of cyberbullying is the linguistic one. While most of the previous studies focused on language strategies alone, such as face-threatening act, aggression, and impacts (Haider et al., 2022; Hibatulloh et al., 2023; Mutunga, 2023; Mustapha & Ahmed, 2022; Maikano, 2024; Rosen & Shoenberger, 2021, Ahmed et al., 2023), linguistic and nonlinguistic patterns remains underexplored. For instance, no study has investigated which linguistic phrases or non-verbal hints act as a trigger for the bullying behaviors or further particular harmful narratives. Similarly, the role of linguistic ambiguity, which in many cases hides harmful intentions, has not been thoroughly investigated. Moreover, Ahmed et al., (2023) focused mainly on memes as a medium of communication. However, most of the bullying behavior is expressed through a variety of different multimodal elements, involving GIFs, visuals, videos, and audios, combined with humorous captions. These elements can enhance the message and can make bullying more focused and insidious. Yet these multimodal aspects have not been explored in the context of cyberbullying and online harassment.

Another limitation is gender dynamics, which require more nuanced inquiry. Some literature shows women being more bullied than men (Lee et al., 2022), while others suggest the opposite gender differences are not significant in cyberbullying (Ajis et al., 2022). Also, most of the studies failed to address people with marginalized genders and sexual orientations, although these individuals are highly vulnerable to bullying.

Furthermore, interventions, such as peer support and the awareness program, are recommended (Ar-rahmi, 2019; Irma & Carolina, 2021; Haider et al., 2022; Rosen & Shoenberger, 2021; Bauman, 2015; Oravec, (2012); Hamuddin et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022), but their long-term impact is rarely evaluated. Also, there is limited focus on how these interventions work overtime. Although some works have been done to point out the bystander's importance, we still cannot tell how they react across different platforms (Gahagan et al., 2015).

Lastly, technology at the level of machine learning can detect cyberbullying but usually struggles with memes and other mixed-media forms. Another concern is technological solutions, such as machine learning algorithms for detecting bullying, may not work perfectly in all contexts. These tools, if not adapted for different cultures, will miss certain nuances and not be able to address the particularities of cyberbullying in various settings.

To address these, future research should be truly interdisciplinary, combining both verbal, and non-verbal, cultural, psychological and technological perspectives. The expansion

of studies on diverse languages, platforms, and sociocultural settings will provide a more holistic view of cyberbullying at universities.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological framework, like approach and strategies employed in this study to explore the phenomenon of digital bullying within university campuses in Bangladesh. As digital bullying is a complex issue (Kowalski et al., 2014), this study used a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and corpus analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of how linguistic and nonlinguistic markers and patterns are used in bullying, its social dynamics, and its impact on individuals. The chapter also covers the research design, data collection methods, techniques for analysis, and ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Research Design

To find the answers to the research questions, this study uses a mixed-method research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This methodological approach was chosen for its flexibility, as it allows a combination of numerical data and personal experiences to ensure in-depth understanding of this phenomenon (Hands, 2022).

Qualitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire, to explore frequency, verbal and non-verbal features, and factors of digital bullying. The survey was randomly distributed among students from national, public and private universities to ensure the data was unbiased and representative. On the other hand, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and corpus analysis. The interviews offered valuable insights from individuals who have experienced or observed digital bullying, focusing on its impact and social dynamics.

Additionally, corpus analysis was employed to analyze linguistic and nonlinguistic markers, such as emojis, memes, happy slapping, doxxing, cyberstalking, trolling, flaming, and crayfishing, along with visual elements, to uncover how bullying manifests. This method helped to identify common themes, patterns and emotional tones in the participants' responses and offered insights into the cultural and emotional aspects of bullying.

3.3 Participants

This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select a diverse group of participants from various types of universities, including two private universities, two public

universities and two national universities. The survey was conducted online and a total of 45 students participated, with 20 students from private universities, 15 from public universities and 10 from national universities. The participants were aged between 18 and 28 ensuring that the focus was on young university students who actively use digital platforms. University students were chosen as the primary participants because they are highly engaged in social media, group chats and online learning platforms.

In addition to the survey, a total of 10 participants were chosen for in-depth interviews, including 5 female and 5 male students from public, private and national universities. The students were selected for interviews based on their personal experiences with or observations of digital bullying in academic environments and the teachers were chosen based on their experience in addressing and observing incidents of digital bullying.

The inclusion of both experienced and witnessed students offered a holistic perspective on the issue of digital bullying.

Table 3.1: Demographics and Selection Criteria of Participants

Category	Total Participants	Male	Female	Public University	Private University	National University	Selection Criteria
Students Survey Participants	45	15	30	15	20	10	- Aged 18-30, actively use digital platforms such as social media, group chats, and online learning tools
Students Interview Participant	10	05	05	02 (students) referred as: SA1, SA2	01 (student) referred as: SB1	--	- Personal experiences or observations of digital bullying in academic environments

3.4 Settings of the Study

The study was conducted within university campuses in Bangladesh, focusing on students and teachers from a mix of private, public and national universities. These universities were chosen to reflect diverse education environments. This ensured a better understanding of how digital bullying occurred across various Institutional contexts and demographics. Data collection mostly took place in online environments where students actively engage, such as Facebook posts, comments, group chats, WhatsApp and other digital sources, to identify strategic use of language and nonlinguistic markers in bullying. The university settings served as a relevant context for exploring how digital communication is strategically used to bully within university communities.

3.5 Instruments

To analyze the strategic use of language and non-linguistic markers in digital bullying, this study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques (Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Taherdoost, 2022).

In December 2024, a survey with 28 items was distributed across six universities in Bangladesh using Google Forms. The questionnaire contained both close-ended and open-ended questions to elicit diverse perspectives (Schuman & Presser, 1979; Reja et al., 2003). The close-ended questions provided measurable Insights into patterns, frequencies, impacts, and trends of digital bullying. These included multiple-choice and Likert scale items, which were analyzed statistically (Taherdoost, 2019; Nemoto & Beglar, 2013). Meanwhile, the open-ended questions invited participants to share personal experiences, specific examples and perspectives to enrich the study with deeper qualitative insights (Reja et al., 2003). It was a multifaceted instrument with various sections. Section A covered demographics, Section B addressing general bullying, Section C focused on verbal bullying, Section D explored non-verbal elements, Section E examined social dynamics and strategies, Section F discussed psychological impact, Section G discussed reporting and prevention. Section H and I included open-ended questions that explored language patterns, such as specific phrases and strategies, as well as personal reflections or thoughts on bullying.

Besides the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather more insights into digital bullying. The interviews allowed flexibility to provide personal insights into the strategic use of language and non-linguistic markers in digital bullying (Longhurst, 2003).

Additionally, corpus analysis was used to explore digital communication platforms, such as social media posts, group chats, and messages. This involved systematically reviewing text, images, memes, emojis, and non-linguistic elements to identify patterns and strategies used in bullying.

Together with the survey, these tools provided both qualitative and quantitative data to deepen the overall findings of the study.

3.6 Data Collection

In this research, a mixed-method approach has been used to collect data through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and corpus analysis. A questionnaire consisting of 28 items was distributed across six universities in Bangladesh and 85 participants aged 18-30 years. The participants were active users of digital media such as social media, group chats and learning tools. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students in order to add further depth. These interviews focused on personal experiences or observations of digital bullying in academic environments and how participants dealt with or observed such incidents. It also applied corpus analysis to digital platforms to identify linguistic and non-linguistic communication patterns and markers, providing a holistic understanding of the issue.

3.7 Data Analysis

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze data from surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Which allows a deeper understanding of the complexities of digital bullying in academic environments (Saraswati & Devi, 2023).

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and trends in bullying. The close-ended questions, such as Likert scale and multiple-choice questions, provided measurable insights into the frequency and impact of bullying in diverse contexts. While, qualitative data from open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically. Responses were coded and categorized based on experiences, strategies, and emotional consequences of bullying. Corpus analysis was applied to examine the findings from various digital platforms, focusing on both linguistic and nonlinguistic markers.

To further clarify these findings, the study employed a combination of theoretical frameworks, including Communication Accommodation Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis,

Speech Act Theory, and multimodal discourse analysis. These frameworks guided the analysis of how language and power structures shape the dynamics of digital bullying.

By blending mixed-method approach and theoretical frameworks, this study has ensured triangulation of multiple methods and perspectives to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. This approach not only underlines the complexity of digital bullying, but also demonstrates how experiences of the participants in bullying are formed by language, power, and online interaction.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the research is ethically sound, several ethical principles were followed throughout the research process. Firstly, informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement. They were provided with detailed information about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of their participation. They were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences.

Secondly, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Personal information about participants, responses, and other identifying tools were protected by using pseudonyms or codes during data analysis and presentation of findings.

Thirdly, a safe and supportive environment was ensured. As bullying may be emotionally distressing for participants to recall, great care was taken during interviews and surveys to make the environment as comfortable and non-judgmental as possible. Participants were also informed that they could stop or withdraw at any moment without any obligation.

Fourthly, ethics in data collection and usage were strictly followed. Interviews, surveys, and analysis followed strict rules to protect data and ensure privacy. All records, physical or digital, were kept with access allowed only to persons concerned. For content analysis, only publicly available digital data were used to endure violation of any privacy. Also, the study obtained clear permission from participants before using sourced sensitive or non-public information. Additionally, transparency and honesty were maintained throughout the research. Participants' experiences and perspectives were shared accurately, without bias, or misinterpretation during analysis.

Lastly, it follows all the ethical policies set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and relevant legal framework, such as the data protection laws. Such regular reviews helped the study conform to both academic and legal ethical standards throughout its duration.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction to the Findings and Analysis

The focus of this chapter is to present and analyze the results derived from the survey, and interview. It discusses how linguistic and non-linguistic markers contribute to the creation of power dynamics and bullying behaviors on digital platforms among university students in Bangladesh. Also, it aims to answer two research questions:

- To what extent, and in what ways, do linguistic and nonlinguistic markers contribute to cyberbullying among university students in Bangladesh.
- What interventions or strategies can educational settings implement to mitigate the effects of digital bullying?

To ensure the analysis is comprehensive and effective, the findings will be analyzed using diverse theoretical frameworks. Which are divided into interconnected sections. The first section focuses on the survey results, which included both open-ended and closed-ended items on the various forms of bullying that were encountered by the respondents. Based on the close-ended responses, this section will discuss the frequency, strategies, emerging forms, dynamics, and type of bullying. It will also shed light on how digital communications contribute to power imbalances, psychological stress, and social exclusion. Likewise, based on the open-ended responses from participants, it will investigate how bullies often use linguistic strategies that are subtle yet deeply wounding. This includes, for instance, the use of ambiguous or veiled threats to insult or threaten victims with words that appear ambiguous or harmless. In addition, visuals, such as charts and graphs, are included to present the findings and aid in the comprehension of the data.

The second section focuses on the interview findings, providing a deeper understanding of how bullies use language as a strategic tool to target, harass, and humiliate their victims. This section will analyze participants' responses, which reveal how bullies carefully choose words to ensure dominance and reinforce power hierarchies. Additionally, it will explore how the weaponization of language is intentionally used to break down victims' self-esteem, leaving them feeling powerless and inferior. As well, the analysis will investigate the findings of non-verbal behaviors, which also play an important role in bullying. Participants reported the

incidents of exclusion from online groups or deliberate actions like "seen-zoning" on messaging platforms, which intensified feelings of isolation. How these seemingly minor but intentional behaviors silently contribute to harassment and intensify the sense of alienation will be examined.

Lastly, this chapter will cover the use of abusive language, manipulative visuals, and the development of complex and multimodal bullying strategies. For instance, strategic uses of emojis or hashtags often add a hidden layer of aggression or sarcasm to messages that at first glance appear innocuous.

These findings are significant within the context of Bangladesh, where digital communication tools are becoming more common in both academic and social spheres. However, it is not always realized how many ways they can be misused. This chapter, therefore, bridges the gap between data collection and the results by organizing findings in a structured manner.

4.2 Findings from the Survey

The survey is designed to investigate the role of digital media in campus bullying, comprising a total of 28 items, including both open and closed questions. The study has been conducted on a total of 45 participants from six different universities to understand how digital platforms enable bullying behaviors. The focus was on understanding the interplay between language and non-verbal elements, and the uses of these tools to perpetuate bullying in subtle or overt ways.

4.2.1 Overview of the Survey

The survey explored a wide range of bullying situations that happen over digital platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Instagram, which are commonly used for academic and campus related communication. It included both verbal and non-verbal strategies that bullies engage in including sarcastic comments, inside jokes, and vulgar language, while images, memes, GIFs, and emojis are ways to amplify their messages. Participants were asked to detect emerging forms of digital bullying, such as fake profiles, doxxing, spreading rumors, and digital exclusion as a tool for social isolation.

Additionally, the findings highlighted the social dynamics of bullying, where individuals are targeted based on academic achievement, gender expression, or even reluctance to engage in group interaction. Moreover, the findings analyzed the psychological impacts of

bullying on victims, such as shame, frustration, isolation, and fear. Finally, the survey discusses the strategies the victims apply, the reasons for not reporting the bullying issue, and suggestions from participants to deal with these issues within educational institutions.

4.2.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

In terms of age, the majority of respondents (82.9%) aged between 25-30 years. This shows that the survey reached students in a more advanced academic stage. A smaller portion (17.1%) was between 18-24 years and there were no respondents below 18 years of age. Regarding gender, the majority respondents identified as female (65.9%), with 34.1% identified as male. There were no non-binary respondents, suggesting that the sample mainly included male and female participants.

When asked about their usage of social media for campus communication, 97.6% reported frequent use. Among the platforms used for academic related communication, Facebook emerged as the dominant platform, with 70.7% respondents using it, followed by WhatsApp at 22%. While platforms like Discord and Instagram were less popular, 4.9% and 2.9%, respectively.

Lastly, 90.2% respondents reported experiencing or witnessing bullying involving language or multimodal elements on digital platforms, which indicates a strong presence of digital bullying in academic environments.

The following table presents a concise summary of the demographic data collected:

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Response option	Percentage (%)	Number of respondents'
Age Group	18-24 years	17.1%	8
	25-30 years	82.9%	37
Gender	Female	65.9%	30
	Male	34.1%	16
Social Media Use for Campus Communication	Yes	97.6%	44
	No	2.5%	1
Most Used Platform for Academic Communication	WhatsApp	22%	10
	Facebook	70.7%	32
	Discord	4.9%	2
	Instagram	2.9%	1
Experience with Digital Bullying	Yes	90.2%	42
	No	9.8%	4

4.2.3 Exploring the Close-Ended Findings: A Quantitative Perspective on Campus Bullying

In a world where digital platforms have become a crucial medium of academic and social interactions, a troubling issue has come to light - "Digital bullying" (Peebles, 2014; Sabrina, 2022). This section presents and analyzes the findings from the closed-ended questions of the survey, offering a quantitative perspective on the experiences and perceptions

of students within campus group communication. The survey was carefully designed to capture the experiences of participants from six different universities regarding how digital media enables bullying through both verbal and non-verbal strategies.

4.2.3.1 Digital Bullying Experiences

As outlined in the demographic data, 97.6% of respondents claimed that they use social media for academic-related communication, with platforms like Facebook (70.7%) and WhatsApp (22%) being most used. While these platforms facilitate interaction and collaboration, they have also triggered digital bullying behaviors. A shocking 90.5% of participants admitted witnessing or experiencing bullying in digital spaces. It involves targeted language, visuals, or multimodal elements. However, a smaller of 9.5% respondents stated that they had not encountered such bullying, suggesting that while the issue is widespread, some participants may have been unaware about it or did not perceive such behaviors as bullying. This significant percentage is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below:

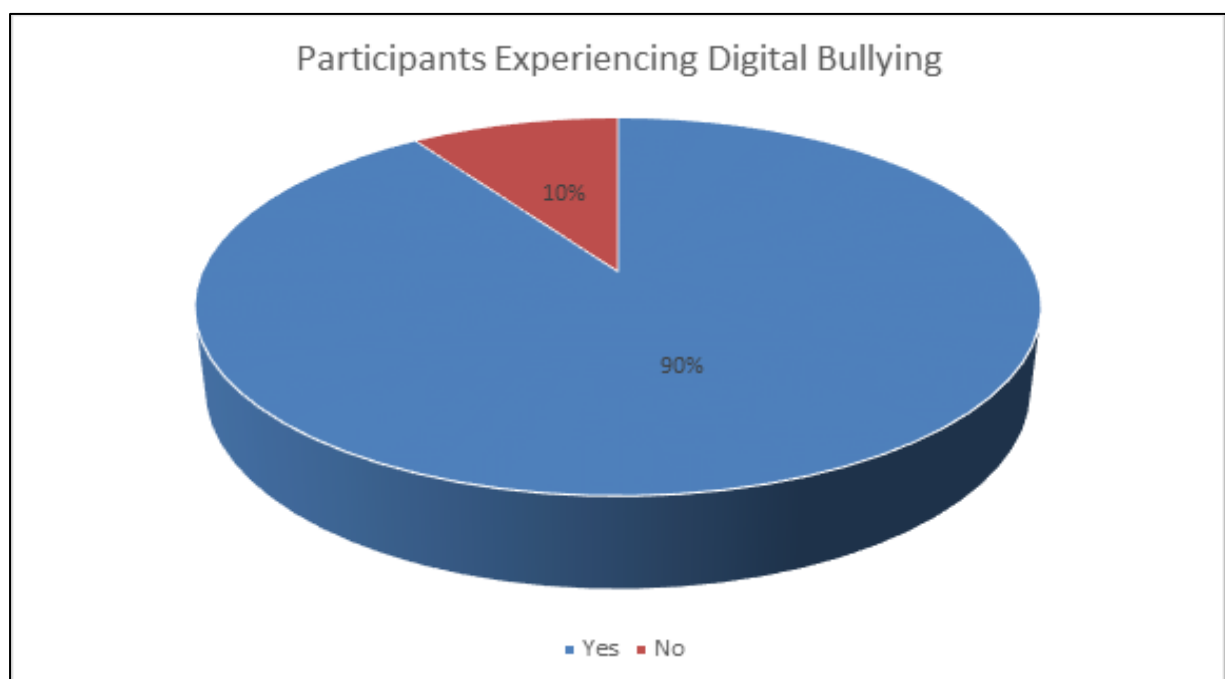


Figure 4.1: Percentage of Participants Experiencing Digital Bullying

4.2.3.2 Forms of Digital Bullying

The findings identified various forms of bullying such as sarcastic comments, teasing remarks, and vulgar language, with non-verbal elements to amplify these behaviors. Nearly, 52.4% of respondents acknowledged the use of all these elements in bullying interactions.

When asked about the particular forms of digital bullying they had encountered, body shaming emerged as the most frequent tactic. 88.1% of participants mentioned experiencing body shaming, such as being called with derogatory terms like, "মোড়া (Fat)". The body shaming is not limited to just the term "মোড়া", there are other deeply hurtful terms, such as "গোবর গাছ (Cow dung tree)", "শুটকি (Dried fish)" "হাতির বাচ্চা (Elephant calf)", "বোল্টু (Shorty)", "গিটুটু" (Mocks a short individual by insinuating his joints are not yet developed). Additionally, sharing embarrassing and vulgar pictures becomes a normalized form of bullying for 71.4% of respondents. It's often justified as harmless "fun" during birthdays, group jokes or Facebook posts. However, this behavior can lead to emotional consequences as what seems to be innocent fun can have long-lasting effects on the person at whom it is directed. Moreover, 59.5% of participants reported receiving vulgar memes or inappropriate texts, which went beyond humor to harassment. A significant 69% participants mentioned derogatory nicknames (e.g., Pig or Cow) were often paired with sarcastic comments, emojis, GIFs, or visuals to make the bullying impact less serious or target individuals. It also includes terms or mocking expressions like, "গোবর গনেশ", "রামছাগল", "লালা", "মখা (Instead of "মগা")", and various others. Recently, the name of social and political figures, such as "হাসিনা" (Hasina), "ওবায়দুল কাদের" (Obaidul Quader), ছাত্রলীগ, "পলইক্লা" (Palak), or "দীপু মনি", "জলিল" (Ananta Jalil) or "হিরো আলম" (Hero Alom) are being highly used in digital bullying. Another phenomenon is the use of personal names to bully, such as individuals named "হারুন" can be seen mocked being called "হাউন আংকেল" (Haun Uncle). Students reported that they felt very angry when referred to by these nicknames in mocking or sarcastic contexts.

Other common forms included exploitation of personal fears. 45.2% of respondents talked about being targeted through personal fears or phobias, such as sending disturbing images to phobic individuals. Also, a significant portion of participants (42.9%) reported witnessing or being bullied for sexual orientations. Furthermore, 64.3% of participants stated that the spread of rumors and taunting comments is also a common form of bullying.

Apart from the primary categories, some participants mentioned other less frequent but equally harmful forms of bullying in the "Other (Please specify)" section of the survey. These included bullying based on skin color (2.4%) and personal attacks against a person's personality or judgmental remarks (2.4%). While less frequent, these behaviors represent the ways in

which bullying can occur through diverse and deeply personal means, underscoring the varied nature of digital bullying beyond the main categories.

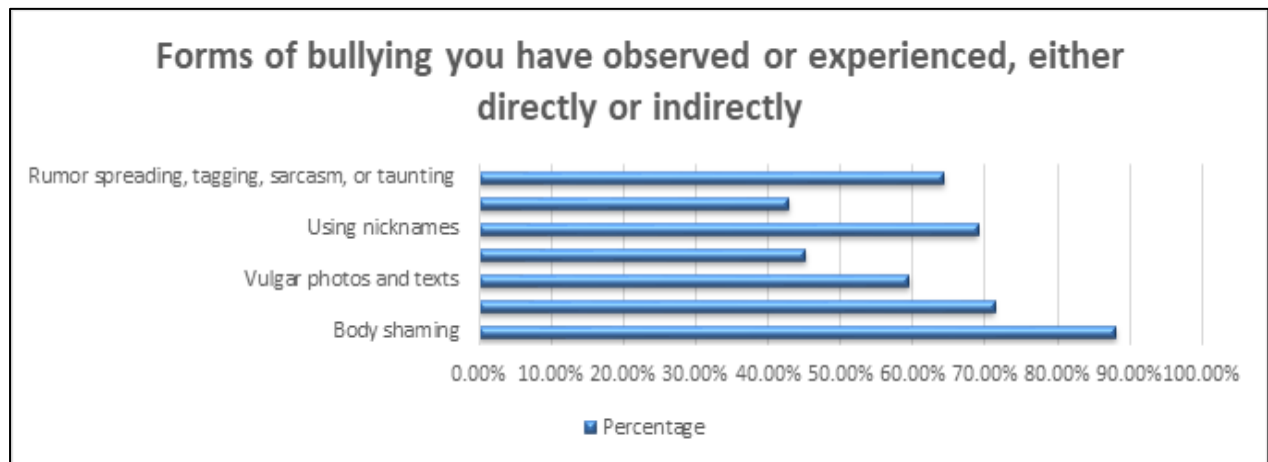


Figure 4.2: Common Forms of Digital Bullying

4.2.3.3 Emergence and Evolution of Digital Bullying

Digital bullying is no longer limited to traditional methods, it has evolved into a more complex and insidious phenomenon. A large majority, 95.2% of respondents reported that new forms of bullying, such as creating fake profiles, doxxing, digital exclusion, nitpicking, and even using deepfake videos are becoming more common. These tactics are more creative and harder to identify. However, 4.8% of participants disagreed with this notion and reported that they have not encountered or do not believe that new forms of digital bullying are emerging.

When it comes to verbal bullying, 59.5% of participants say that they have experienced or witnessed all forms of verbal bullying, including sarcastic comments, taunts, vulgar language, and rumors. More specifically, 9.5% mentioned rumors or false information, 14.3% reported teasing, and 11.9% mentioned sarcastic comments. While vulgar language was notably less reported at 2.9%, showing that this type of bullying has decreased.

The lower percentage of vulgar language indicates that bullies are now using subtle ways to hurt victims. Instead of using direct offensive language that can be easily recognized as bullying, they now often use sarcasm, humor, or hints to disguise their intentions, making it appear as a joke or harmless comment to outsiders. This is shown in the figure below:

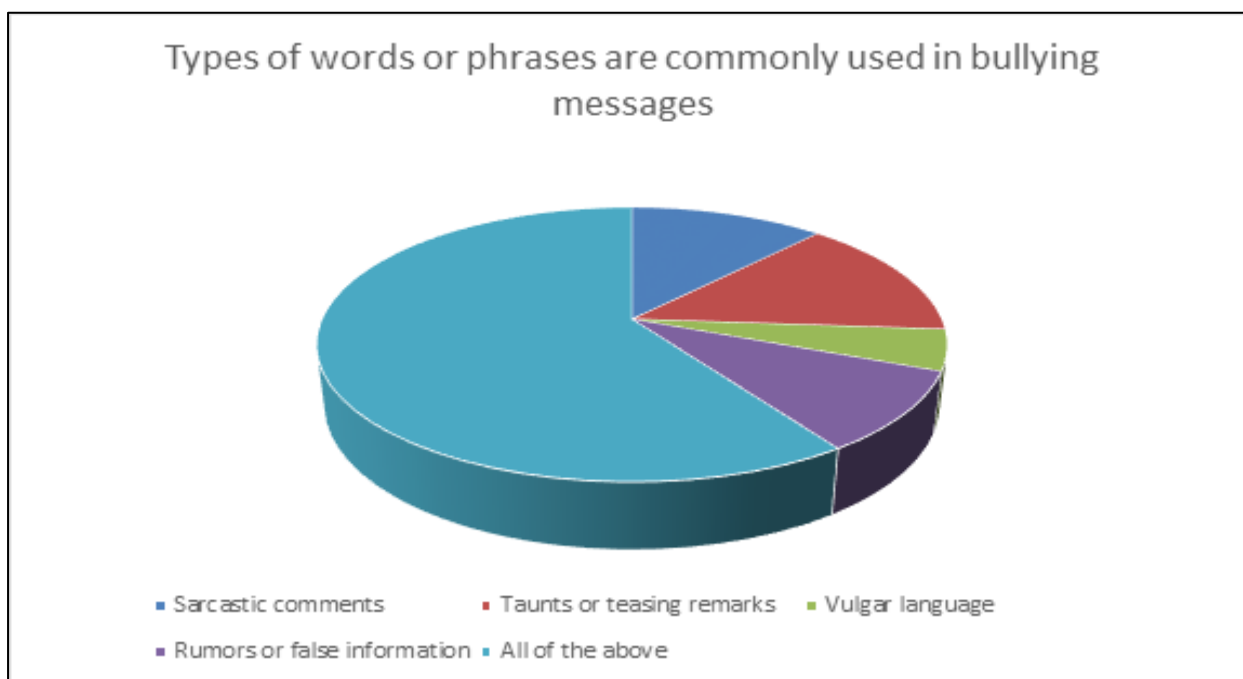


Figure 4.3: Common Forms of Verbal Bullying

Along with these, a significant number of respondents, 78.6% reported that they have encountered the use of specific verbal strategies like "shipping", as a form of digital bullying. It involves pairing people, either with classmates or with a teacher, with the intent to intentionally tease or humiliate the victim. On the other hand, 21.4% of participants reported that they had not seen or experienced "shipping" as a form of verbal bullying.

4.2.3.4 Bullying Based on Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation

The findings of the survey indicate a disturbing trend of bullying against students whose gender expression is different from the traditional norm. Especially for boys who are seen as "girlish". Whereas 14.3% of the respondents indicated that they did not witness such bullying. A small number (2.4%) voluntarily mentioned exploitation through intimidation based on sexuality in the "Other (please specify)" section.

Among those who observed such bullying, the most common forms marked as inducing derogatory nicknames (67.3%), like being called, "আপু (sister)", "sissy", "half ladies", "gay", and "হিজড়া". Moreover, 73.8% reported teasing or mocking behavior towards them, and 64.3% said others made fun of them with memes or GIFs. Respondents also said they were often excluded, as 45.2% described being left out of activities. Physical intimidation was also mentioned by 45.2% of respondents.

The following chart visually represents the data on bullying related to gender expression and sexual orientation.

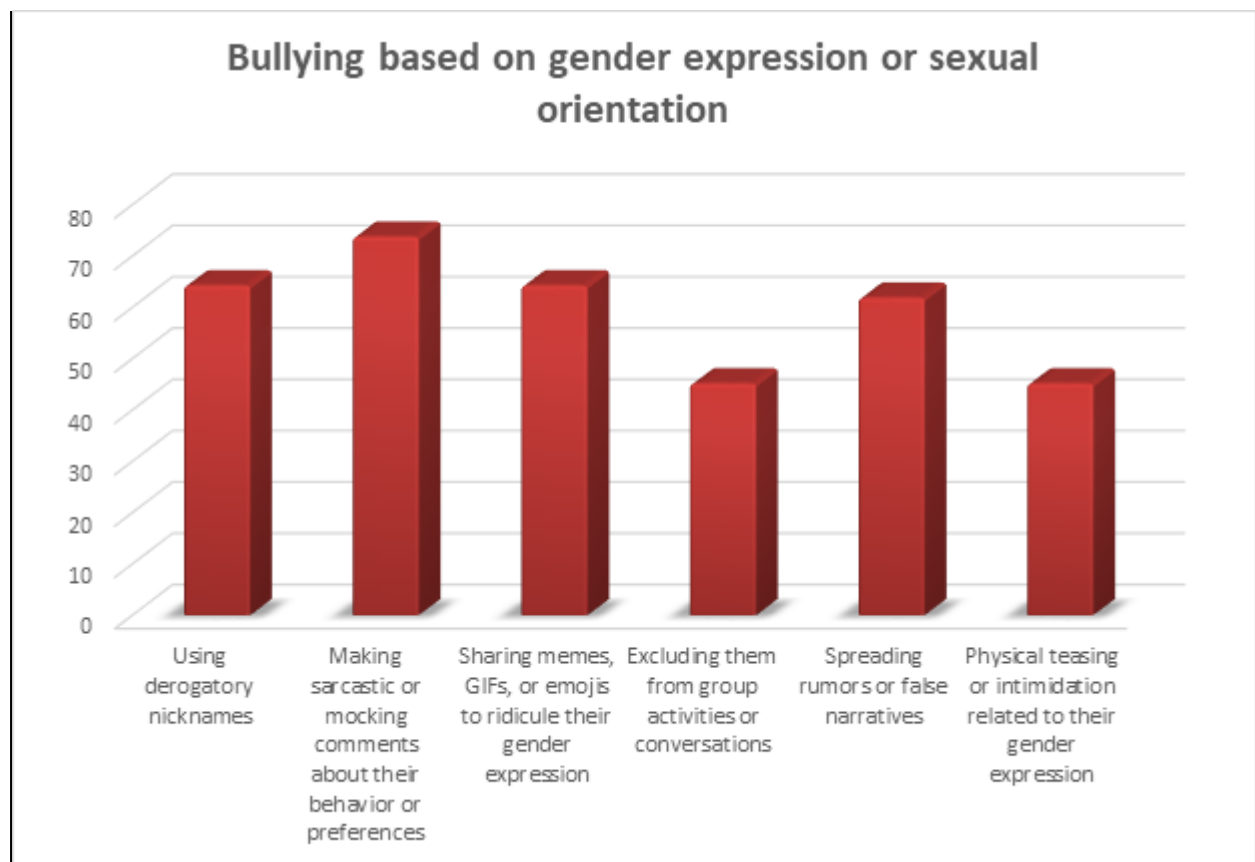


Figure 4.4: Forms of Bullying Based on Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation

Along with the previously mentioned forms of bullying, 61.9% respondents found spreading rumors or false stories to be the most pressing issues related to individuals with certain gender expression.

4.2.3.5 The Role of Non-Verbal Elements in Bullying (Images, Emojis, Memes, GIFs)

The findings also point out that there are a lot of other elements to digital bullying other than just the verbal element, such as images, emojis, memes, videos, and more. These are used to insult, belittle, and isolate the targets. Among the most used non-verbal tactics, memes were reported by 19% of participants, 52.4% used emojis (e.g., sarcastic reaction like "ha-ha" on serious posts), while 7.1% cited GIFs, and 21.4% reports to photos or videos as common tools of bullying.

Further emphasizing the use of photos in bullying, when asked if they had ever witnessed people sharing awkward or vulgar pictures to target someone, 83.3% of the

respondents replied that they had seen such a thing happen, which again speaks volumes about the prevalence of visual-based harassment.

This corresponds to the questions about whether the non-verbal elements can make people think that bullying is harmless: 92.9% (42.9% strongly agreed and 50% agreed) participants agreed, and only the minority part-disagreed (4.8% disagreed and 2.4% strongly disagreed). The results put into evidence the devious nature of this kind of bullying, maybe harmless-seeming for observers but so painful for those who experience it.

In Diagram 4.5 and 4.6, the data is visually represented on non-verbal bullying elements and perceptions of harmlessness.

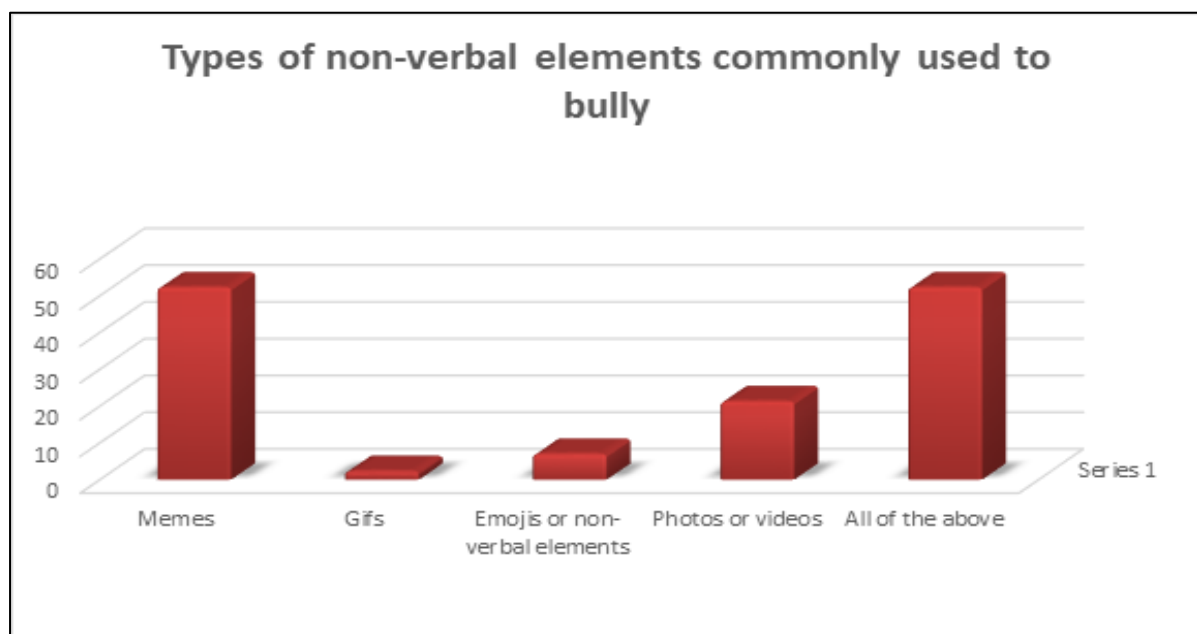


Figure 4.5: Distribution of Non-Verbal Bullying Elements

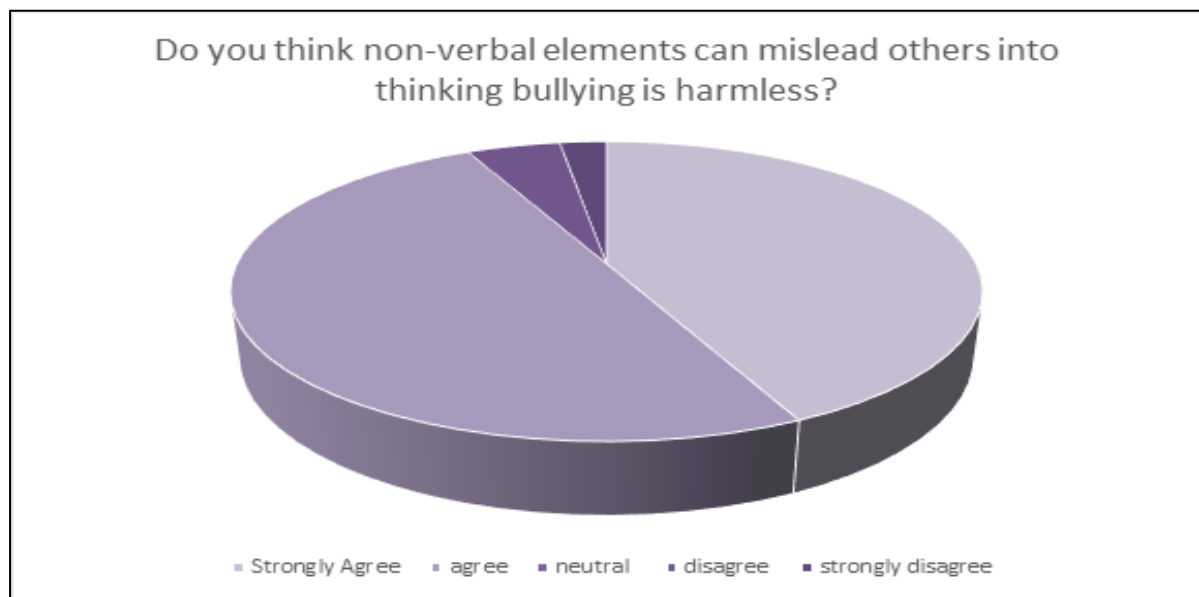


Figure 4.6: Perception of Non-Verbal Elements as Harmless

4.2.3.6 Social Dynamics and Strategies in Digital Bullying

The survey results reveal a variety of social dynamics that contribute to digital bullying on campus. Respondents identified a variety of reasons why people get targeted online, reflecting more pervasive social perceptions and group behaviors. A significant 76.2% of respondents suggested that "High achievers" - those who excel academically, get frequently bullied, probably due to jealousy or resentment related to their success.

Another 90% indicated those students who, in other people's perception, are considered teachers' favorites, claiming that this serves as one of the means to develop targets for ridicule and exclusions online. Interestingly, 54.8% identified students who refuse to join in the bullying, suggesting thereby that not following group norms can make a person vulnerable. Moreover, 61.9% reported that the ones who like to keep silent in group chats become targets, since their silence is interpreted as a sign of social detachment.

Furthermore, two participants voluntarily shared additional insights in "Other (please specify)" sections in the survey. One pointed out that even minor behavior, such as grammatical errors, can also be a cause for bullying. The participant mentioned that any small mistake or difference can be exaggerated and mocked in online interactions, with others using the wrong word in every interaction on purpose. Another participant summed up the answer saying

"Anything and everything" can become the reason for bullying, emphasizing the arbitrary and unpredictable nature of digital bullying.

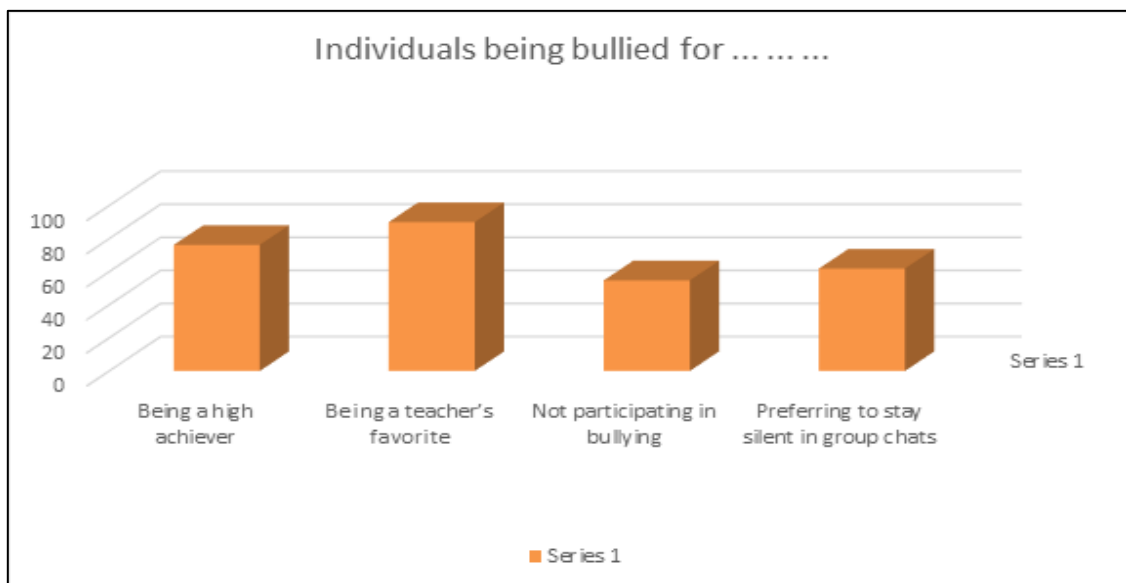


Diagram 4.7: Factors in Digital Bullying

Also, the findings reveal that targeting someone disliked by a group is often used as a strategy to gain acceptance into that group and 90.5% participants supported this view. This suggests that bullying can be a tool in fostering group cohesion at the expense of an individual. Similarly, 90.5% stated that some who do not understand a joke of the group, or lag behind in participating at group gatherings, become the targets of other peoples' jokes.

Another 69% agreed that some, like social butterflies or those in influential positions, are less likely to be bullied because of their status and power. It is often observed at campuses that individuals who possess good social connections, confidence, or perceived power, such as the popular students or the leading ones, are usually avoided by bullies, since their social influence serves them as a shield. However, 31% disagreed, which means that even the highest social status is not completely safe from bullying.

4.2.4 Exploring Perspectives: A Qualitative Analysis of Open-Ended Data

4.2.4.1 Emerging Forms of Digital Bullying: A New Era of Harassment

The dynamics of how we interact online has significantly changed in the digital age, new forms of digital bullying have emerged. In response to the question, "Do you believe there are new forms of digital bullying emerging?", most respondents answered "yes". The use of

Fake profiles, doxxing, spreading rumors, deepfake videos, digital exclusion, strategical tagging, and hashtag has become commonplace (Dhoray, 2023). These forms of harassment are not just emerging, they are spreading fast, hitting different individuals in different ways, sometimes with devastating consequences.

While some respondents acknowledged that these tactics are still being used in playful and humorous ways among friends, the majority expressed serious concern over these digital practices. Many respondents shared personal experiences or witnessed these forms of bullying first-hand.

- **The Pain of Fake Profiles and Harassment**

One of the most alarming trends today is the rise of fake profiles. These profiles have been used to manipulate, harass, and spread false information (Jones, 2022) and many respondents witnessed the disturbing effects of this.

A respondents shared:

"I have seen someone create fake profiles, using another person's photo. After that, he shared the private conversation and pictures between two persons, one of which was the holder of that fake profile. Which was very humiliating to the person"

Fake profiles are not just used to spread rumors or private messages, it is also used as a tool for personal attack. The identity of a person is stolen to make them appear guilty of actions they never committed. One respondent described a particularly devastating experience:

"One of my peers opened a fake account using my name and pictures. Then the account sent fake nude pictures and bad messages to my family and others. It spread lies about me, and people started to believe them. It felt like my life was ruined, and I couldn't stop it. This is a pain I will never forget."

- **Deepfake Videos: A New Kind of Humiliation**

Another emerging form of digital bullying that is gradually being used is deepfake technology. This AI-generated content allows realistic images and videos to be altered or fabricated in humiliating ways (Rohit, 2023). As one respondent put it:

"I have seen AI-generated images and videos of people being uploaded to social media without their permission. Even after requesting for them to be removed, these images and videos are still shared, just to get likes and make the post viral".

Other respondents shared her one of the most disturbing experiences with deepfakes that turned her life upside down:

"They morphed my photos into something unrecognizable. These fake images were uploaded online, and no matter how much I begged for them to be removed, people kept sharing them. It was a disgusting experience and I felt utterly exposed."

- **The Rise of Doxxing and Digital Exclusion in Modern Bullying**

Nowadays, when opinions clash or actions go against majority retaliation often takes the form of doxxing and digital exclusion. Nowadays, these are the most common weapons used for humiliation and isolation, both online and in campus communities (Hudson, 2024). One respondent narrated an incident from a campus group:

"A student voiced a different opinion during a heated discussion. That's why, the group started bombarding him with attacking questions and cancelled him. Later they scrutinized all his past activities and exposed him by sharing his personal information and conversations, making him feel isolated and humiliated".

Many respondents said that now people are being exposed and excluded without any proper reason. Whatever a person doesn't like or with whom he/she doesn't agree, he/she starts leaking their personal information or boycotting them without giving a chance to the person to defend. These actions often drive social media trends but it makes victims feel alone and helpless, as their existence is being erased from society ((Scottish Women's Rights Centre, 2022).

- **Strategic Tagging and Hashtags: New Tactics in Digital Bullying**

In addition to well-known forms of digital bullying- deepfakes, fake profiles, digital exclusion, and doxxing, many respondents pointed out a growing use of strategic tagging and hashtags to belittle, insult, or humiliate someone online. Although respondents did not give examples of this practice, the following visual helps to explain how this form of online harassment works.

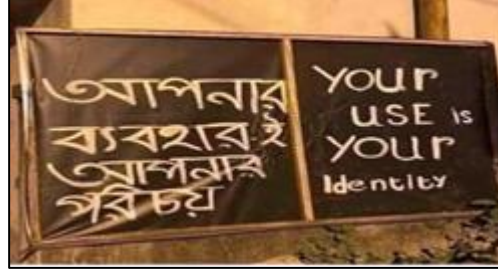


Figure 4.8: Image 1

In image 1, the English side of the poster contains grammatical errors. Specifically, the words "use" and "behavior" have been confused with one another, as both have a Bangla equivalent word for "ব্যবহার". Now think about someone who misspells the vocabulary or makes grammatical mistakes in a social media post. Because of this, the person is tagged in the image by others in their group, accompanied by sarcastic comments like, "ট্যালেন্ট দেখেই বোঝা যাচ্ছে, তোর হারিয়ে যাওয়া ভাই," or "তোমরা দুজন মিলে একটা নতুন ভাষা বানাতে পারো," or "তুমি তাহলে বিরল প্রাণী না, আর্থ এ তোমার মতো আর কিছু 'ট্রেজার' আছে দেখি 😊", "Aah that's why your "use" is so lame 😊", "Now I understood why your English is in such state". These mockery-filled moments can lead to deep feelings of shame and humiliation for the individual. In addition, hashtags like #NewLanguageHero, #GrammarChampion, #RIPtoEnglish, #GrammarCrimes, #IdentityCrisis, or #LearnToWrite would give it a coat of ridicule that would make the person an object of widespread digital harassment.

While some may find this kind of humor as funny, to the person being targeted, it can bring shame and isolation as they are being mocked publicly for something as personal as their language skills. This act of strategic tagging is an example of pragmatic power dynamics, where it is employed for humiliating and excluding a person without much care about how the victim would feel.

4.2.4.2 The Weaponization of Non-Verbal Elements in Online Bullying

When the question "How do non-verbal elements, such as memes, GIFs or emojis, combine with language (phrases, captions, or comments) to create a bullying context?" was asked in the survey, respondents provided diverse insights. Many responses saying that these elements, when combined with language through captions, phrases, or comments, enables bullies to convey mockery, sarcasm, or contempt in a way that verbal language alone cannot.

Some respondents pointed out that these tools make bullying look casual or humorous, which make it harder for the victim to confront or report such behavior. One respondent shared,

"I think that just merely insulting someone through comments is a thing of the past because it doesn't garner the reaction the bully wants. Instead, if the bully makes a meme or GIF, it stays public for a longer time, and more and more people find it hilarious, which can eventually force the victim to surrender. This must be probably the reason these elements have been brought into bullying."

Another response emphasized how often harmful opinions are silently expressed by using emojis or memes:

"If I want to tease someone about their gender orientation, instead of using language, I will simply use an emoji, meme, or GIF. The target already knows it's about them, but others will take it as a joke. Other members in the group will comment on it, but indirectly all the comments will hurt the victim because the meme itself is about them. This is how these non-verbal elements combine with the language to create a bullying context. The victim gets hurt but cannot express it back, as it appears as a joke other".

- **Amplifying Impact Through Memes, Captions, and Emojis**

Participants claimed that memes, along with captions and emojis, serve a significant role in bullying, targeting an individual or groups through humorous or ironic contents. Most of the time, they point out flaws or exaggerate stereotypes for common mocking (The Dark Side of Memes, 2021). The respondents shared some incidents and examples from the group chats where the use of phrases, memes, and emojis combine in creating a bullying context. These often appear together to raise the mocking tone, therefore making the bullying hurtful.

One of the respondents mentioned a phrase,

"তোমার dressing style তো পুরাই হিট  "

This comment was used to mock someone whose outfit was different from the group's usual style. The laughing emojis added a layer of ridicule, making it clear that the comment was not a genuine compliment but an attempt to belittle the person's dressing choices.

Another participant shared an example where a group member posted a meme in the group chat featuring a cartoon character failing an exam, with the caption:

"x এর নোট আনলে এভাবেই পাশ করবে 🐢, gold medal confirmed 🏆 🏆 "

Here, the sloth 🐢 emoji is used because the student's nickname is "sloth", because of being slower to grasp things. While the gold medal and trophy are used sarcastically as the group knew the student wasn't very good at studying. While it was a joke among friends, it still mocked the student's effort and could be hurtful, especially when others joined in the laughter.

One more participant shared an incident, providing a comment that mocked her peers sense of style:

"তোমার ফ্যাশন সেন্স দেখে তো ফ্যাশন দুনিয়া কেঁপে উঠলো🐭🪰"

Here, the rat and fly emojis added an extra layer of insult by directly attacking the person's self-esteem.

One more participant shared a personal experience where he/she posted a picture of a car on his/her timeline, reflecting his/her aspirations. However, bullies repeatedly commented sarcastically, which makes the person feel low:

1. "তোমার স্বপ্নের গাড়ি—পাড়ার রিকশা!"
2. "তোমার স্বপ্নের গাড়ি—পাড়ার রিকশা (2), (3) ..."
3. "If daydreaming had a face 🤪"
4. "গামলামুখের শখ কত 🐭"
5. "🤪 🐭"

● Subtle Mockery: The Mask of Humor

The most typical form of hidden mockery is probably the use of smiling emojis (😊) in combination with ironic comments. For example, a sentence like:

"Wow, that's so impressive 😊 "

This sentence becomes heavily ironic when somebody says this after the failure of another person. The cheerful emoji in this case creates an outstanding contrast that enhances the mockery. This combination makes it more difficult for the victim to immediately defend themselves, as the comment is disguised as positive while carrying a sting that undermines the confidence and self-worth of an individual.

- **Sexual Harassment: Weaponizing Emojis and Words**

Participants described one of the most disturbing forms of online bullying involves sexual harassment of individuals, particularly in group chats using emojis. One participant shared that in a group chat, a girl was being called a "tomato", with texts such as:

A: "Nice weather. টমেটো খেতে হবে"

B: "Yes, tomatoes are healthy and juicy 🍅🍅 "

A: "people need juicy 🍅 to survive 🤖 "

According to the respondent, these were not harmless comments about food but a backhanded way of objectifying the girl, with "tomatoes" hinting at certain parts of her body.

Several participants also gave examples of how such sexual innuendos are often emphasized with emojis to harass in group chats, such as:

🥥 (coconut) and 🍒 (cherries) were mentioned as being used to refer to specific features of the body. Likewise, 🍆 (eggplant), 🍑 (peach), 🌮 (taco), and 🐷 (boar) are quite common explicit sexual connotations. In addition, 🍯 (honey) and 🍩 (doughnut) are mentioned in group chats with texts like "আজ মধু লাগবে 🍯" or sharing memes or GIFs of these fruits or certain vegetables with captions like "lets cook some juicy X today", or "🍑 are the best when they are ripe". These are the subtle ways to sexualize and harass girls.

Here, even when victims realize that these elements are used intentionally, it is hard for them to react or respond due to the fact that the ambiguity allows the bully to deflect by saying, "I was just talking about fruits! now I can't even talk about fruits?" or use memes like Figure 4.8 (Women) to further roast them.



Figure 4.8: Image 2

Another respondent mentioned the practice of using a sugar pot emoji 🍷, along with memes on 'sugar daddies', generally associated with such expressions like: "তোমার জন্য একটা বড় সুগারপট এনেছি, or " তোমার মিষ্টিবাপী", makes girl feel much humiliated.

- **Mockery of Personal Identity**

Making fun of identities with memes, GIF, multimodal elements, and emojis is a kind of online bullying that hurts people. A respondent shared the story of how a boy named Arefin would be teased in group chats and social media posts using the nickname "Gayfin." Although he identified as straight, his name came to be associated with a bunch of LGBTQ-related jokes, making it a symbol of humiliation. The respondent said that the boy was harassed continuously on Facebook, where every post about him was filled with degrading memes, stickers and visuals, including emojis like 🦍 (gorilla), 🐷 (pig), and 🦿 (cripple) to mock his features.

These examples shared by the participants demonstrated how even apparently harmless emojis, memes, and words become a means of disrespecting and objectifying an individual. This harassment is disguised as humor in a way that victims find it hard to confront their offenders directly.

4.2.4.3 Language as a Tool for Bullying: Key Findings from Campus Survey Responses

The survey responses reveal various strategies of the use of language to humiliate and bully others on campus. Such linguistic strategies often mask cruelty with humor, sarcasm, or subtle remarks, which place the victim in a delicate position, making it quite difficult for them to confront the bullying directly. Below are some findings from the surveys' open-ended answers, showing how language is used to derogate others in different contexts:

- **Mocking a Student's Grade or Effort**

A student who is generally known for being a good student and helps others, may not face bullying initially. However, when their grades drop and cannot help anymore, they become targets for their academic downfall. The following examples illustrate how language is used to humiliate them:

1. "কি লাভ এতো পইরা, দিন শেষে তুই আর আমি সেম হুদাই কষ্ট"
2. "তোর জন্য আমি পরি নাই, এখন তোর জন্য আমি ফেইল করছি"
3. "কিরে স্যার তো তরে চু** দিলো"
4. "স্যার এর সাথে প্রেম শেষ নাকি?"

- **Mocking Academic Behavior**

Sarcasm and ridicule are two common tactics used by bullies to target students who perform well academically. The phrases used by the bullies are also most times derogatory to their success, saying that such success was not well-deserved or that it came from somewhere else other than their efforts. Here are some examples:

1. "পা চাইট্টা কী লাভ হইলো?"
2. "Only because we cannot kissAss"

When the victim responds by saying: "What do you mean? I kissed his/her ass for grade?", then the bully counters with, " দেখছিস bro, she admitted she kissed his/her fucking ass". The bullying continues with others laughing and saying things like:

3. "Tell us, how does it feel"
4. "Teachers with benefits"
5. "Licking = grading"
6. " Where's humanity? Where's the link?"

Also, to make victims feel guilty and responsible for things they did not cause or to create a scene for something that went wrong, bullies use tactics of blame, such as

6. "দোষ তো ওরই"

- **Sarcastic Comments and Hidden Insults**

Bullies often use sarcastic comments to disguise their insults, making them seem like a joke, such as:

1. "তোমার মাথায় এত বুদ্ধি, কবে পাবলিকেশনের জন্য পাঠাবো?"

2. "তুমি তো বেশ ভালো, শুধু একটু বেশি কথা বলো!"

3. "Here comes the legend!" (A comment that ridicules a person known for making mistakes, suggesting that they're a joke.)

4. You are such a snake, you said you didn't study, how come you scored so much?

5. "Great job! I didn't realize failing could look so graceful"

6. "Wow, you're so competent today"

- **Mocking Physical Appearance or Gender**

1. "Oh, you're a woman? Go do the dishes and house chores, why are you playing video games?"

2. "You are so tall, what's your height 4?"

3. "You are so pretty but I wish your skin wouldn't be that dark"

4. "You were born to waste your parent's money, why are you studying so much? At the end you'll just get married and cook for your husband"

5. "তোর চলার সময় ভূমিকম্প হয় কেন?"

6. "তুই তো রাতে হারিয়ে যাবি, এত কালো!"

7. "তোর দাঁত কি ব্রাশ দেখেছে কখনও?"

8. "হাড্ডিমন্ত্রী"

9. "Oh sorry how you will understand anything you don't even have a brain to use"

10. "আরে ট্যালেন্টেড চইলা আসছে, কিরে কাল্লু"

11. "This is pretty decent, for someone like you"

12. "কোন গুদামের চাল খাস?"

In addition, boys who display slightly feminine traits are often bullied everywhere. Instead of their real names, they are referred as "শরিফা, হিজড়া, gay, and more. They are also mocked for their behavior, gestures and postures, by both boys and girls, with comments like:

1. "মাইগ্যা বলে কথা, ওর তো এমনই হবে"

2. "আরে তোর গলা তো মেয়েদের মতো হয়ে গেছে!"

3. "Girl's not allowed"

4. "Girls' turn hasn't come yet, why are you here?"

5. "Didn't expect to see you here, this is a boys' thing, not for girls"

- **Cultural or Regional Mocking**

Mocking of pronunciation or a regional accent is another kind of bullying that happens to be very common in campus groups, such as targeting the other person's culture or geographical location. Each of these comments aims to make the victim feel deficient, alienated, or at least ashamed of who they are. Below are some examples and contexts:

1. "কিরে ভাই, নোয়াখাইল্লা টান তো তোর ঘুমের মধ্যেও থামে না!"

2. "তুই কী ঢাকার লোক? এতো শুদ্ধ বাংলা কইরা কথা কস কেন?"

3. "পোটেলে থাকতে চাই, please suggest some potel! পোটেলে কি টিকিট কাটতে হয়?"

(Hotel)

- **Mocking Language Proficiency**

Bullies often mock others for minor language mistakes, spellings, and pronunciation unnecessarily to make them feel inferior and embarrassed:

1. "Before posting things in English, first learn how to spell"

2. "তুই ইংলিশ এ যেহেতু লিখছিস, ঠিকই লিখছিস" (Mocking a person's English writing/mistakes)
3. "ওকে নিয়ে হাসাহাসি করবেন না, God has sent him without a brain"

- **Personal Reflection from the Survey Respondent:**

"I've personally experienced being excluded from group chats and having inside jokes made at my expense. It can be incredibly hurtful to feel like you don't belong or that you're not good enough".

From the responses collected, it is clear that students face bullying both in physical and online spaces, and language tends to be the major tool for harassment. The use of sarcasm, mocking comments, and backhanded compliments targets several aspects of a student's identity, including academic performance, physical appearance, gender, and cultural background. Disguising such remarks as humor makes it difficult for victims to confront the bullying.

4.2.4.4 Victim Responses to Bullying: Insights from Survey Participants

The responses from the survey participants provide a comprehensive understanding of how victims of bullying normally respond when faced with harmful behavior. These reactions range widely, influenced by individual coping mechanisms, emotional state, and the intensity of the bullying. Below is an overview of the key language patterns and strategies that victims commonly use in response to bullying:

- **Defensive Responses**

A typical immediate reaction to bullying is defense. The victims may try to deny the allegations, clear up misunderstandings, or declare their innocence when an accusation is undeserved. These types of responses are indicative of the victim's need to defend their character and attempt to regain control of the situation. Examples include:

1. "I didn't do that!"
2. "You're lying. That's not true."
3. "That's not what happened"

- **Self-Deprecation or Internalization**

In contrast to defensive responses, some victims internalize the bullying by making light of their worth or accepting fault. The use of self-deprecating language can stem from low self-esteem or a coping mechanism to avoid further confrontation. Such as

1. "Yeah, you're right. I always mess things up."
2. "Maybe I'm just not good enough at this."
3. "I guess I'm just not cut out for this."

These responses show a deeper emotional struggle, where victims often doubt their worth or believe they somehow deserve the treatment they're receiving.

- **Seeking External Support**

Most victims seek help from others when the stress or pressure of being bullied becomes too much to handle or manage alone. This may be an overt request for help or confiding in a trusted individual. For instance:

1. "স্যার, ওরা আমাকে বিরক্ত করছে, আপনি কিছু বলুন।"
2. "Can you back me up? They keep making fun of me" (seeking help from friends)
3. "Can you talk to them with me?"

Many times, victims in these situations act out for validation and attention and just wish for someone to stop the bullying.

- **Silence or Avoidance**

Victims sometimes stay silent or try to ignore the situation to avoid further conflicts. They avoid verbal responses, eye contact and simply just walk away, hoping it will stop the bullying.

- **Sarcastic or Aggressive Retaliation**

Some victims respond with sarcasm or with an angry reaction to defend themselves or to regain some control over the situation. Such as:

1. "Yes, you all are so perfect, aren't you?"

2. "How do you know I don't have a brain? Have you seen my brain inside out?"
3. "তুমি তো এমন অনেক কিছু জানো, আমাকে শেখাও!"
4. "টোকাইদের সাথে আমি কথা বলি না?"

- **Stoic Responses**

Other victims may react with stoicism by centering themselves in their values and beliefs and not engaging in the fight. This may include acknowledging the words of the bully without an emotional response, setting boundaries, or changing the subject. Examples include:

1. "I see that you feel this way"
2. "I know who I am, and your words don't define me"
3. "I won't tolerate this kind of behavior"

- **Dismissal or Minimization**

Some victims try to make the bullying seem less serious or act like they don't care to avoid conflicting situations. Such responses include:

1. "Whatever, I don't care"
2. "It's all lies"
3. "It was just a joke, I'm not bothered"

- **Emotionally Driven Responses**

Some victims react to bullying with increased emotion, often out of frustration or distress. This may include crying, expressing hurt feelings, or confronting the bully directly with anger. Some of these emotional responses include:

1. "You're creating a fake scenario"
2. "You're lying"
3. "I'm just not good enough"

So, from the responses, it is clear that bullying affects people in many ways, and each person reacts differently depending on how they cope with stress. What is most important is that bullying must be stopped and victims need to be supported.

4.3 Insights and Analysis from Interview Findings

Digital bullying on campus is a complex and multilayered approach. It requires an understanding of the experiences of the direct victims and the general social dynamics that shape such incidents. This section involved interviews with 10 participants, from public, private and national universities. Among these participants, three shared in-depth personal experiences or observations with digital bullying, showing how bullying can be influenced by factors, like gender, ethnicity, academic performance and social dynamics.

The participants will be referred to as: SA1, a public university student who witnessed bullying against a fellow student, SA2 a public university student who personally faced digital harassment and SB1 a private university student who was harassed for her academic success.

The remaining participants shared valuable observations and reflections of their experience with digital bullying. Their contributions expanded the scope of the study to encompass aspects such as how language is used, non-verbal signals, and how university settings may contribute to or lower the levels of digital bullying.

4.3.1 Witnessing the Bullying: Public University Participant (SA1)

Among the shared stories, SA1, a student at a public university shared how a new Chakma student joining through the quota system was being bullied online. The Chakma student had become a victim of relentless harassment simply because he was a minority. Many in the group chat openly opposed adding him in the group saying, "Let's not include any Upojatis here". Others suggested making a separate group for him: "Just leave him out," while spreading vulgar comments and derogatory memes. When the boy was added to the group chat, it flooded with hurtful texts. They questioned the boy if he was "qualified enough to be here" and "stealing the seat of more deserving students". The harassment did not stop with the comments, it followed through with mocking memes and texts on the student. The student was always ignored or "zoned out" and nobody would make a conversation with him. Messages and memes such as "C for Ching Chong" and "Another day thanking God for not putting me

in Section C" were shared daily targeting the Chakma student, since he was from Section C. Below are some memes that were sent to the student in group chat:



Figure 4.9: Memes Targeting SA1

The findings indicate that both the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the digital bullying of the Chakma student go beyond their literal meaning (Yule, 2010). The use of language is, therefore, not merely informative but it performs an action with specific intentions to delegitimize the student and enforce ethnic and racial prejudice. Memes also take on a performative function, maintaining negative stereotypes and socially distancing the student. Together these verbal and visual elements create a hostile environment in which language and imagery are active participants in exclusion and discrimination, shaping the student's social identity.

4.3.2 Experiencing the Bullying: Public University Participant (SA2)

Another significant account came from SA2, a male respondent from a public university, who had been bullied and labeled "mama's boy" because his mother had always been around him and managing his responsibilities. One she complained about his peers to the authorities that made him even more ridiculed by his peers. This had led to mockery by others in the messenger group chats, attributing his actions to his mother's constant involvement. He shared,

"At first, I didn't take these jokes seriously. But at some point, the teasing started becoming personal, and the messages had taken on the form and tone of threats. The longer it went on, the more I felt isolated, ashamed and depressed."

After sharing his experience, SA2 shared the kind of memes and personal group chats that were used to further bully and harass him. He was ridiculed in these exchanges, where some memes

belittled the relationship he had with his mother, while others attacked his character. Below are some of the bullying messages and memes shared in the group chats:



Figure 4.10: Memes Targeting SA2

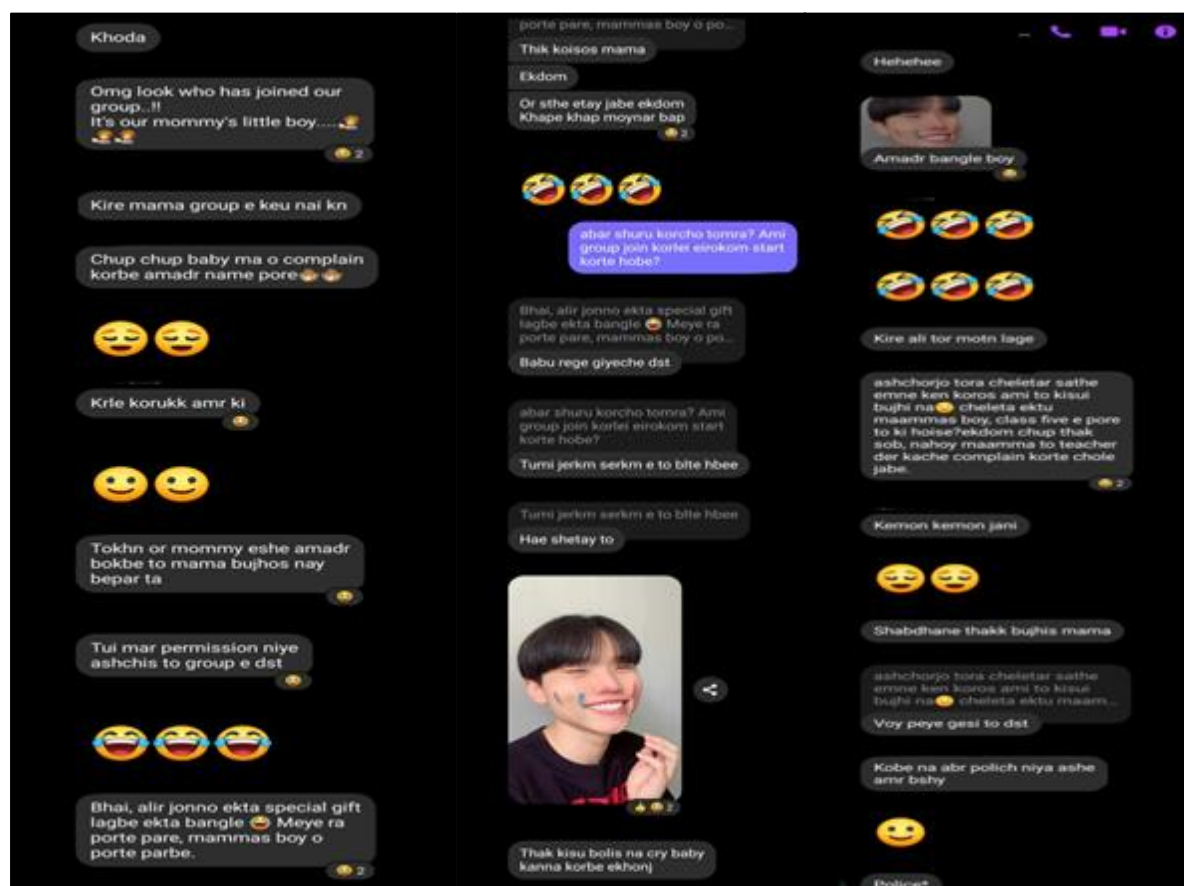


Figure 4.11: Group Chat Messages Targeting SA2

These incidents reported by SA2 expose the harmful nature of digital bullying, where all aspects-both linguistic and non-linguistic elements were used to insult his identity. Each incident in group chats with their particular meme culture reinforced hurtful stereotypes. These

conversations were often passed as casual humor that resulted in personal attacks, causing emotional harm and isolation. This means that it requires greater awareness and stricter measures in combating digital bullying to protect the victim from harshness and its damaging impact.

4.3.3 The Academic Achievement Harassment: Private University Participant (SB1)

One of the most detailed and intense accounts came from a private university student who faced bullying because of her academic achievements. Initially, her peers made seemingly harmless comments, like "Sir's favorite", "such a talented student", "ohhhooo, did he praise you again?", "extra ordinary", "you have special access", "marks thief", "His eyes were all over you throughout the whole class". At first, she took these comments as typical jokes about favoritism from the professor, and didn't take them seriously. However, the situation soon worsened and turned into outright harassment. Some students began to pick on SB1 in the group chats of her course, fueled by envy of her perceived success. They accused her of receiving special treatment by her professors and spread insulting rumors that damaged her reputation.

Below are some screenshots of the group chats shared by SB1, showing how the harassment escalated. The messages indeed give an insight into how the bullying she was suffering from was abusive in nature. It started with what might sound like harmless comments but transformed into full-blown personal attacks.

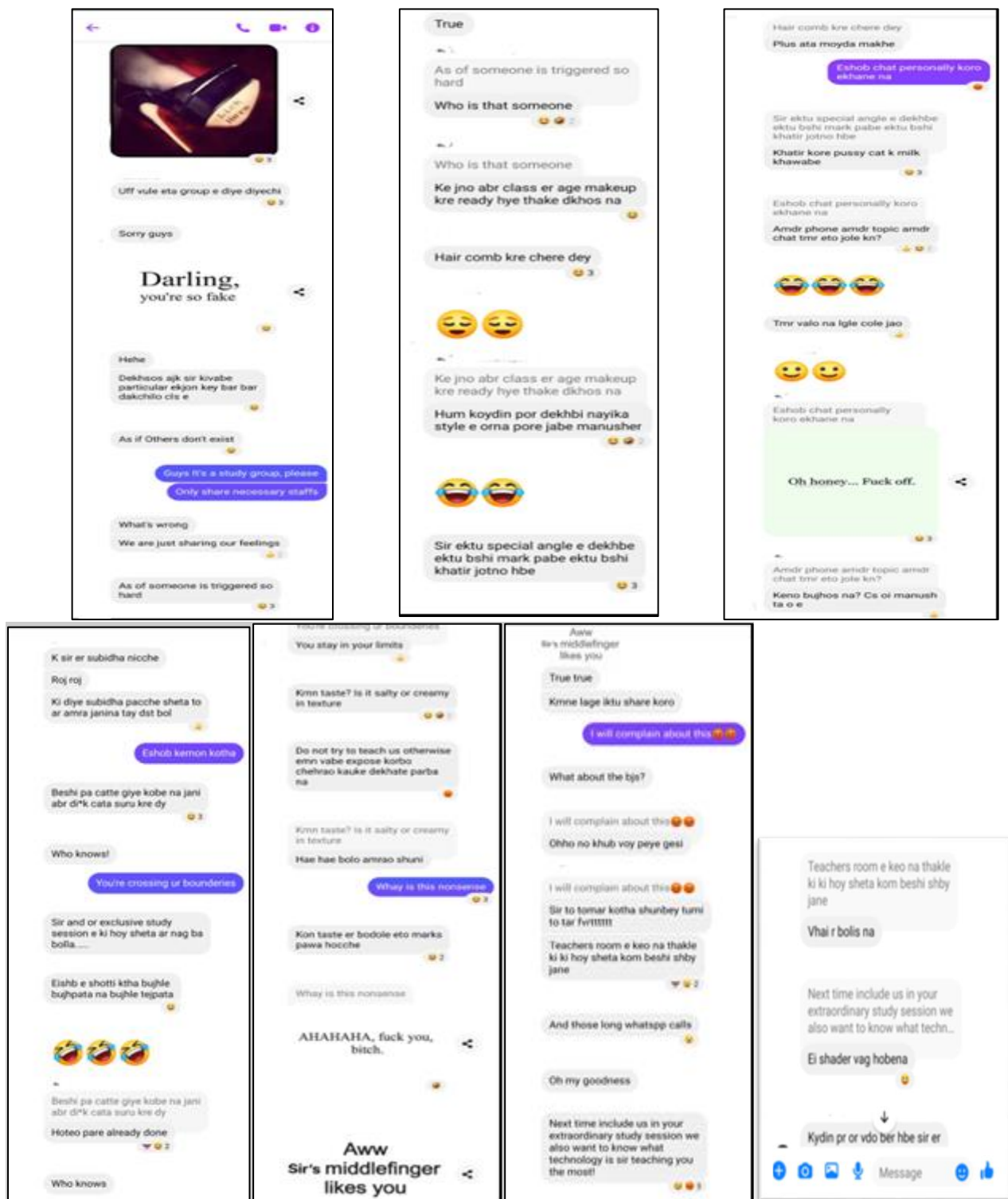


Figure 4.12: Group Chat Messages Targeting SB1

According to SB1,

"After all these incidents, I didn't know what to do. It became really hard for me to face Sir and my classmates. I stopped going to the counseling sessions and even skipped class. When I did go, I would only attend the last part of the class, and if Sir called on me, I'd remember all the hurtful things. I couldn't speak up because it was too embarrassing. I didn't know how to handle it, I just felt lost"

However, at the end, the situation took a turn as the group chat was discovered by the authorities and those responsible faced consequences for their actions.

Here the case of SB1 highlights how campus group chats can be used to victimize someone by making that environment toxic with use of language. It had all started with simple jokes-such as "Sir's favorite" and "marks thief" which sounding innocent had a jealousy connotation in them. Over time these comments turned to personal ones: accusations of receiving undue favor, even implying inappropriate behavior with her professor. They also worsened the matter through some disrespectful memes, even going to the extent of instructing her to "lick there" with a shoe, which was clearly meant to insult her. Whenever SB1 tried to confront them and tell them they were crossing their boundaries, they responded with threats, making her feel scared and powerless.

These acts show how language and non-linguistics elements were used to humiliate, isolate and scare her into avoiding class. Instead of supporting her, bullies used her success as a reason to target her. The group chat becomes a place for bullies to work together to humiliate her and cause emotional pain, and making it hard for her to focus on studies.

4.3.4 Bullying in Group Chats: Success, Identity, and Stereotypes

In each of these three cases, the group chat became a forum to target victims for academic success, ethnic background, and not fitting into the traditional societal standards for masculinity. Rather than these personal traits being used as a means to help others, they were used as reasons to isolate and belittle them. The language used, combined with non-linguistic elements such as memes, rumors, and threats, created an atmosphere of emotional distress and isolation. These combined elements of verbal and non-verbal bullying had a very serious effect on their confidence as students, making it rather difficult for them to cope with the harassment and continue studying.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview of the Research

This paper explores the phenomenon of digital bullying within an academic context by focusing on how it is influenced by digital platforms and resources. The integration of digital tools into educational settings has made bullying more insidious, harmful, and continuous (Lee, 2022; Brewer et al., 2012). Unlike traditional bullying, digital bullying is a systemic abuse of power that strategically includes both linguistic and nonlinguistic elements (Espelage, 2014; Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Sanders & Phye, 2004). Therefore, this paper aims to examine how both verbal and non-verbal markers, such as humor, sarcasm, memes, visuals, emojis and tags, are strategically used by bullies to create a unique and complex form of bullying.

The aim of this paper is to conduct a forensic analysis of digital bullying and to identify how linguistic and nonlinguistic patterns contribute to emotional and psychological impacts on victims. Additionally, this paper aims to explore some possible interventions to reduce bullying. To achieve these aims, it employed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected through survey (closed-ended and open-ended), semi-structured interviews, and corpus analysis with the lens of some theoretical framework, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, Communication Accommodation Theory and Speech Act Theory to analyze bullying strategies.

The key findings suggest that bullying strategies and patterns have evolved and non-verbal elements make bullying seem less harmful. The humor, memes, emojis, strategical tagging and the use of multimodal elements can make it difficult for victims to report as it appears to others as a joke. Along with verbal and non-verbal tactics, new forms of bullying have emerged, such as fake profiles, doxxing, digital exclusion, deepfake videos, spreading rumors and more. These new forms of bullying are harder to identify and more difficult for victims to confront so they suffer in silence. It also shows that digital bullying often starts with humorous insults or jokes to mock victims that later escalates into more brutal and intentional forms of harassment.

By highlighting the role of linguistic and nonlinguistic elements in perpetuating bullying, this paper aims to contribute in understanding how these elements shape digital bullying in academic environments.

5.2 Study Limitations: Challenges in Digital Bullying Analysis

This paper, "Campus Bullying through Digital Platforms: A Forensic Linguistic Analysis" explores the usage of linguistic and non-linguistic elements in digital bullying across various platforms. However, there were some limitations that occurred throughout this research that truly affected its depth and the carrying out of the research. These limitations can be grouped into four major areas, such as the availability of relevant literature, time constraints, participant engagement issues, and the limited range of digital platforms explored.

Firstly, one of the significant limitations encountered was the lack of available literature regarding the topic of linguistic and non-linguistic tactics of digital bullying. Though a lot of research exists related to the psychological impacts of bullying, only a few studies focus on the linguistic features, especially strategic uses of language and non-verbal elements such as emojis, GIFs, and other multimodal markers. Detailed descriptions in the exact mechanisms of how the act of bullying is done through language and non-verbal signs are missing. This gap in literature made it difficult to conduct a thorough forensic linguistic analysis, as there wasn't enough foundational research to guide the study.

Secondly, the short time frame allotted for conducting the study was another major limitation. Due to the time limitation, different data collection tools could not be employed. Consequently, the research was somewhat limited to surveys and interviews, in which the sample sizes were relatively small, only 45 respondents for the survey and 10 for interviews. If there were more time, the research would have reached more people, and also collected the perspectives of teachers by interviewing them.

Thirdly, participants' engagement was a significant challenge during the study. Many started the survey but never completed it. This could partly be because an email address was needed, which might have caused some to drop out. Besides, a number of participants were puzzled about the concept of digital bullying, which resulted in incomplete or unclear responses. Even in the interviews, although participants were quite open about their emotional experiences, they were reluctant to discuss the specific language or non-verbal elements used in bullying. Even though confidentiality was guaranteed, many were uncomfortable sharing

details or conversations due to fear or embarrassment. Others refused totally, as it requires going over and over in their minds something that they had wished never happened. These lack of engagements further restricted the collection of detailed language and non-verbal example gathering, thus limiting the depth of forensic linguistic analysis.

Lastly, the study was limited to mainly three digital media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, due to both time and access issues. As each platform has different features that might influence tactics of bullying, exploring more diverse platforms would highlight variations in bullying tactics across these contexts.

5.3 Recommendations for Mitigating and Addressing Digital Bullying on Campus

Based on the research findings, participants recommended several interventions and strategies to mitigate the effects of digital bullying in education settings. These strategies will help in addressing both the linguistic and non-linguistic markers of bullying while subsequently empowering both students and faculty to meaningful action.

- **Establishing Safe and Anonymous Reporting Mechanisms**

One of the shocking findings from the survey was that nearly 72% of participants never reported the incidents of digital bullying. The reasons include: fear of retaliation, privacy concerns, and the belief that it will bring no change. That's why educational institutions must establish secure and anonymous mechanisms for reporting. Such a system can enable students to report bullying incidents without any fear of retaliation while their privacy is guaranteed. Additionally, immediate support by trained counselors and clear follow-up action would help build trust in the reporting system.

- **Building a Culture of Accountability**

To tackle bullying, institutions should create a culture of accountability. Educational institutions should hold regular awareness programs regarding the challenge of bullying among students, faculty, and staff. Such programs could help challenge the belief that reporting "won't make a difference" by pushing collective responsibility and making campuses more supportive.

- **Peer and Faculty Support Networks**

It is necessary to create support groups of peers and prepare faculty to help victims. Peer networks provide emotional support, while faculty can help guide students through the reporting process, ensuring the victims feel listened to and protected.

- **Anti-Retaliation Policies**

There should be strict anti-retaliation policies to make students feel safe when reporting bullying incidents, without any fear of retaliation. These policies should be well communicated and enforced.

- **Enforcing Consequences for Bullies**

Bullying can be prevented only when the bullies are punished accordingly. There should be clear and mandatory disciplinary actions by the educational institutions against those found guilty of bullying. Punishment for bullying should be fair and serious enough to stop others from involving in the same activity. By holding bullies responsible and giving penalties for that, educational institutions can avoid bullying and show that they don't tolerate such an attitude.

By addressing obstacles of digital bullying, implementing strict consequences for bullies, and providing supporting systems for victims, educational institutions can foster an environment where bullying is not tolerated. It would ensure that the campuses become much safer and inclusive of all students, raising their voice and taking actions for or against digital bullying.

5.4 Conclusion

Students who are perceived as weak, or different from others, such as belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds, marginalized groups, and do not fit in with social norms, are often bullied in academic environments. It is usually disguised and appears as a joke to others, while harming the victims. To understand these nuances, this paper explored both linguistic and nonlinguistic markers that bullies employed to strategically humiliate victims. It found that both verbal elements and non-verbal elements, such as memes, GIFs, sarcasm, visuals and emojis, play a significant role in increasing the intensity of digital bullying. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the linguistic and nonlinguistic features and strategies that are being used in bullying. This study found very limited resources on this aspect, suggesting that future researchers need to concentrate on the linguistic and nonlinguistic features and patterns of digital bullying to understand the language strategies of the bullies. As the bullying is causing serious harm to the victims, findings pointed out the urgent need for interventions and clear policies to mitigate digital bullying and create a safer campus environment. To prevent the bullying study highlights the need for strong actions, such as

anonymous reporting systems, support networks, and clear rules to hold the bullies accountable. By implementing these measures, universities can hence ensure a safer and supportive environment for all students. Also, further research in this area could demonstrate how verbal and non-verbal elements together contribute to causing harm and may inform targeted interventions.

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