

Cyberbullying in the 2024 AFCON Final Match: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has become worrisome in recent time especially in the face of attempts to mitigate or extirpate hate speech. This study focuses on cyberbullying associated with the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) final match with the purpose of describing the discursive structure that characterizes it. The data comprise ten comment threads of Instagram and Facebook posts of @instablog9ja and @mazitundeednut on Nigeria's loss to Ivory Coast at the AFCON final match, which have been observed for a period of six weeks. The principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been applied and it is discovered that cyberbullying take different forms, insult, threat, accusation, name-calling, defamation, denigration, etc. in its discursive structure. The effect of the discursive structure is social power abuse, control and domination of the more powerful social group of football fans over the less powerful football players. The study concludes that online communities, like @instablog9ja and @mazitundeednut, are social groups that abuse the social power they have over football players and bully them especially when their teams do not win their matches. It is therefore required that civility should be maintained in online interactions as a prerequisite for effective communication. Moreover, constructive criticism should be adopted in online football commentaries by football fans.

Keywords: *cyber bullying, football discourse, power, social power abuse, online communities*

Introduction

We live in an internet enabled world. Human interaction became unlimited with the invention of the cyber world. Technology gives its users real time global communication. Online interaction mimics face to face interaction, so the features of face-to-face interaction are also found in online interactions; features like bullying and insults. Bullies are found both in online and offline interactions, but made worse in online interactions, because they could be faceless or complete strangers that are afforded anonymity by the social media. Considering that cyber bullying is rooted in power and control, social media is the perfect avenue for bullies to exercise their assumed power over others.

Celebrities have decried the cyber bullying and trolling they have received from social media users constantly and consistently over the years. Some of them have gone to the extent of making some arrests, certain culprits have also been charged to court for cyber bullying and cyber abuse. Recently, a social media critic @verydarkblackman was arrested by a popular actress, Tonto Dikeh, for cyberbullying and trolling. Football players, just like other celebrities, are not immune to cyber bullying. These celebrities or popular persons have been recipients of cyber bullying in the form of harassments, (death) threats, trolling, cyber-mobbing, slut shaming, broke shaming and flaming. Sadly, ‘the internet never forgets’, so these instances of cyberbullying will forever leave a digital footprint (Chadwick, 2014) unless

they are deleted. The social media posts can always be shared to fan the flame of cyberbullying.

In the aftermath of the 2024 AFCON Finals, Nigerians took to social media to bemoan Nigeria's loss to Ivory Coast and criticise the players. The Nigerian players were not spared in the backlash; especially the Super Eagles' midfielder, Alex Iwobi, and Ola Aina. Alex Iwobi was cyber bullied for his assumed lack of expertise during the match. This cyber bullying made the player delete his Instagram posts and pictures. Interestingly, the players were venerated after the semi finals for their show of expertise having won the match, but were cyber bullied after Nigeria lost the final match to Ivory Coast. This research is occasioned by persistent threats and insults, which are tantamount to cyber bullying, the players received after the AFCON 2024 Final match that went viral on the Nigerian social media space.

Cyberbullying has eaten deep into computer mediated communication (CMC) and there exists some language-related studies on it. Anyanwu & Udoh (2021), Anyanwu (2023), Akinmusuyi (2023), Jones (2022) and Cleland (2014) are some studies on cyberbullying and football discourse. Concerted efforts have been made in combating cyberbullying with investigation into, impoliteness strategies in cyberbullying, and racist discourse in particularly English football. This study expands the scope covered by attending to cyberbullying involving players in African football competitions, especially the recent AFCON competition with the aim to identify forms of cyberbullying that manifested in the football discourse, and account for how they determine social power abuse, control and domination of a less dominated social group.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a deviant behaviour that is enacted and reinforced by and through technology in CMC using technological devices. Bullying, whether offline or computer mediated, centers on power and control. Kaya (2024) categorizes bullying into direct (pushing, hitting, kicking, strangling, wounding) and indirect bullying (name calls, ridicule, swearing, threats, and humiliation to psychologically harm the control mechanism of the person). The forms of indirect bullying are central to cyberbullying seeing that they do not require physical contact. Though indirect bullying/cyberbullying does not require physical contact, it does more harm than direct bullying as it puts the recipient's mental health at stake. Belsey (2008) believes that cyberbullying is an intentional and deliberate use of ICT (Information and communication technology) to support hostile and belligerent attitudinal behaviours by an individual or group, whose intention is to cause harm. Smith et al. (2008) believe that cyber bullying is on the one hand aggressive, and intentional, on the other hand, and it is primarily enacted act by a group or individual, using electronic intervention, and is consistently carried out. Chadwick (2014) asserts:

Essentially, cyberbullying is an extension of bullying which may occur at school but the person doing the bullying uses new technology such as websites, text messages, social networking sites and emails to embarrass, demean, harass, intimidate, or threaten other

people. Cyberbullying could be defined as the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. Cyberbullying usually involves systematic communication over a period of time. It has many similarities with offline bullying however it differs in the person/people engaging in bullying behaviours can be, for the most part, anonymous. Cyberbullying is wide reaching and the material sent or uploaded can be difficult to remove (p.3).

Cyberbullying is an anti-social behaviour that has eaten deep into the fabric of society. A notable aspect of cyberbullying or cyber-mobbing is verbal aggression (Jones 2022), although cyberbullying can present as threats, death threats, use of swear words, harassment, and trolling. Chadwick (2014) in her research identifies different forms of cyberbullying as direct harassment or intimidation; publication of malicious content; systems attack (hacking); manipulation of systems to exclude an individual; and false impersonation to misrepresent or defame, text based name calling; ‘flaming’ (overt attacks on a person), harassment or denigration; cyberstalking; using masquerade or exclusion; ‘outing’; and sending or posting humiliating photos or videos and sharing videos of physical attacks on individuals (p.4). Chadwick’s forms of cyber bullying encompass different aspects of CMC unlike the present study that focuses on cyber bullying on social media.

Hua, Hamid & So’od (2019) opine that “cyberbullying normally involves three parties (bully, victim and bystander)”

(p.50). These participants in cyberbullying are usually the younger generation who are normally tech and internet savvy. This can be gleaned from their profiles, profile pictures and diction, although they could be masquerading or disguising their personas. Cyberbullying is the unfortunate byproduct of the union of adolescent aggression and electronic communication ... there is no shortage of potential offenders or targets of cyberbullying because of the widespread availability of personal technological devices in the developed world (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012:p.viii). Chadwick (2014) concurs:

Young people report they will often use technology to ‘say’ things they would not normally say in a face-to-face conversation. This is also linked to a disinhibition related to the notion of anonymity. Young people have the ability to mask or withhold their identity online through the use of pseudonyms, impersonation, having multiple email addresses, using other mobile phones or having ‘blocked’ numbers (p.8).

Theoretical framework

The theory best suited for the present study is Van Dijk’s (2015) Socio cognitive approach to discourse. This theory is entrenched within a wider framework of critical discourse studies (CDS) which is traditionally named critical discourse analysis (CDA). On one hand, CDA considers language a form of social practice. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is “discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and

inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context?”. (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466)

It is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the existence of dominance, power, and control as it is shown in discourse and critically examines the role of language in the production and sustenance of societal inequality. On the other hand, CDS is a multidisciplinary approach that critically analyses social problems. The socio cognitive approach is applicable to researches that study social and political problems of utmost importance. Van Dijk (2009) asserts:

CDS is not just any social or political research, as is the case in all the social and political sciences, but is premised on the fact that some forms of text and talk may be *unjust*. One of the tasks of CDS is to formulate the norms that define such ‘discursive injustice’. CDS aims to expose and help to combat such injustice. It is *problem-oriented* rather than discipline- or theory-oriented (p.63)

Van Dijk’s socio cognitive approach is a triangular approach (discourse, society and cognition) to the critical study of discourse that investigates the relationship between discourse structures (text and talk) and social structures (power, domination, social power abuse) which are ultimately mediated by cognitive processes (socially shared ideologies and individual experiences). Al-aazzawi and Fathi (2022) concur: “according to Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach, discourse structures are

related to social structures via a complex socio-cognitive interface i.e. the relations between discourse and society are cognitively mediated. So, cognition is the necessary interface that links discourse as a language with social situations and social structures” (p.3). In simpler terms, people’s personal opinions or opinions of social groups they belong to, on certain socially or politically problematic topics that go against fundamental human or social rights, affect their production and reproduction of individual discourse.

This approach accounts for the relationship between discourse (text and talk), cognition (mental models, personal experiences, attitudes, knowledge, ideology, shared backgrounds) and society (power, social power abuse, domination, inequality). It also advocates an integration of the triangular concepts that employ the cognitive, discursive and social components in the analysis and interpretation of discourse. Cognition is the linkage between discourse (spoken or written) and certain social practices like dominance and power abuse.

Van Dijk (2017) summarises thus:

Critical Discourse Studies typically goes beyond such a classical study of the structural properties of text or talk, and relates these discourse structures to social structures. A socio-cognitive approach to discourse is a particular application of a more general theory or philosophy of social constructionism, which holds that social and political 'reality' are constructions of social members. Socio-cognitive Discourse Studies more broadly

relates discourse structures to social structures via a complex socio-cognitive interface. (p.14)

Empirical studies

Jones (2022) researched profanity and play in the discourse of cyberbullying. The problem of CMC becoming a medium for personal aggression, online vilification, trolling and abuse of sorts motivated the study. The study focuses on a particular aspect of cyber bullying called cyber-mobbing. The study focused on a Facebook group “Todd Carney is a wanker” of 1,269 members. The group is solely created to attack and cyber bully a prominent Rugby player, Todd Carney. Result of findings reveal that the group members use certain impoliteness strategies to cyberbully the rugby player and expressed solidarity among themselves using humour, play and profanity. The research concludes that anonymity breeds cyber bullying and helps the participants show in group solidarity. This study is similar to the present study.

Akinmusuyi (2023) analyses impoliteness strategies in cyberbullying commentary targeting Harry Maguire. The objective of the study was to examine the prevalence of impoliteness strategies in cyberbullying-laden football commentary on Harry Maguire, a player in English football. The data for the study comprises 100 comments on a post on X made on 7 November 2021. Jonathan Culpeper’s (2005) Impoliteness theory is applied. Findings show the use of four out of Culpeper’s five strategies to attack the player. The study concludes that commenters employed positive impoliteness and bald-on-record impoliteness to attack the player’s face when his performance on the field is deemed below par.

Kaya (2024) examines the relationship between fanatic levels of football fans and verbal, physical and cyberbullying behaviors. The study attends the verbal, physical and cyberbullying behaviors of football fans using the general survey model; a relational screening model. Three hundred and eighty-eight football fans were selected for the study using the simple random sampling technique. The covers 2020-2021 football season of the Turkish football super league. Using the verbal physical and cyberbullying behaviors of sports spectators' scale that was developed by Karaca (2019), the verbal, physical and cyberbullying behaviours of sports spectators are measured. Analysis reveals a notable tendency of football fans to be potentially violent and this increases their verbal, physical and cyberbullying behaviours.

Overall, there is the need to expand the scope of cyberbullying as it involves football in terms of perspective, methods, areas, and groups involved. The present study fulfills this.

Methodology

The data for the study comprise ten comment threads on Instagram and Facebook posts of @instablog9ja and @mazitundeednut on Nigeria's loss to Ivory Coast at the AFCON final match. The interactants in the comment sections of these social media pages are aggrieved Nigerian football fans. The comment sections are observed over a period of six weeks. The comments selected as data for the study were purposively chosen to eliminate cases of repetition.

Data presentation and analysis

Polarization

1. @Boniface Obiagah: Wrong accusations, Alex was never the problem of the team. Aina and Zaidu and coach was what cost us the trophy. But they are tried there best. One love

@Eze Nwata: If he is depressed; wetin Onana and Maguire gosome be, Dead? Entertainers should know that their job comes with so much hypes and criticisms.

In the data above, the discourse structure contains accusations counter accusation (wrong accusation, *Alex was never the problem of the game. Aina and Zaidu and coach was what cost us the trophy (trophy)*). The counter accusation absolves Iwobi of all the allegations leveled on him. The discursive structure also is that of polarization. Alex Iwobi is celebrated while Aina and Zaidu are derogated. He also polarizes African players against English players, Onana and Maguire, who have been cyber bullied over time. The cognitive structure of the text thrives on the socially shared ideologies of fan social groups that footballers ought to be bullied, especially on social media, whenever they are perceived to be churning out below par performance. The writer buttresses her point by calling out players that have been cyber bullied in recent times, Onana and Maguire. Also, at the macro structure level, the writer expresses the socially shared knowledge and ideology that entertainers, which consists of football players, ought to be used to criticisms and cyber bullying. At the societal macrostructure, the exploitation of power, dominance and control

of a more powerful group over a less powerful group on social media is at play. Strikingly, the more powerful group controls social media (public) discourse.

2. @Tz Tycobb Kyle: My grandma will do better than Iwobi.

The text above is short, but heavy with insult. The discursive structure is that of polarization; negative other and positive self-presentation. She presents her old grandmother as a better player than a young professional footballer. This derogates Iwobi. The player's surname is also started with lower case (*iwobi*) to show disrespect. The cognitive structure is built on the strength of the socially shared knowledge of the feeble and weak nature of grandmothers without which the message would be bereft of meaning. Old people are generally known to be under performers, therefore the assertion that the poster's grandma would do better than a young professional foreshadows the players below par performance and unprofessionalism. The societal structure is an abuse of power in terms of the freedom of speech on social media. The poster leverages on a fundamental human right, freedom of speech, to bully the football player, Iwobi, on social media.

3. @Anyanwu Ucee: Carry hair like sponge, Onyeka will tackle front, tackle for midfield still tackle for back and we get iwobi way dey do like shekeleke ... If not that Ndidi was struggling with injury, wetin for carry this Iwobi enter pitch?

The form of cyber bullying seen in the text above is insult/denigration. The writer insults Iwobi's appearance and claims that his colleague, Ndidi Wilfred, is a better player, who would have played better if not for sustained injury, than Iwobi. The discursive structure of the text above replicates the discourse structure of polarization; positive self and negative other or self-celebration and other derogation. Team members like Frank Onyeka and Ndidi Wilfred are celebrated while Iwobi is derogated. The discursive structure also harbours simile (carry hair like sponge, Iwobi wey dey do like shekeleke) and an emoji. The emoji drives home the writer's emotions. On the one hand, the implicated meaning of (*hair like sponge*) is suggestive of the health situation of what lies underneath the hair; the brain. On the other hand, *shekeleke*, cattle egret, is a bird that leeches on cows for food. Cognitively, this is suggestive of the writer's knowledge or ideology, at the micro structure of personal mental models (personal experiences) that the player leeches on team members' performance to victory. At the societal structure, the writer controls the minds of the members of the online communities with his polarizations and knowledge of the game in order to provoke herd mentality. This social power is exploited to bully Iwobi so he takes the fall for the goals that were conceded at the match. Also, at the societal macrostructure of social media, the player is less powerful than the social group of football fans.

4. @remyleeobi: @olaaina bro no cross Obalende sha ... Cos u go explain why u no fit hold down small Adingra weh drop those two crosses weh cause goal

@official_victorrich: Chill first bro

The discursive structure is made up of threat to life (*no cross Obalende sha*). Strikingly, this is a direct attack as the player's Instagram page is tagged to the comment. There is also a subtle polarization; Adingra is celebrated while Aina is derogated. Nigerian Pidgin is also employed to drive home the Nigerianness or seriousness of the threat. At the cognitive level, the writer employs his personal experiences and knowledge of the AFCON final match, at the micro structure, to claim that Adingra performed better than Aina at the AFCON final match, and that Aina's mediocre performance caused Nigeria to concede goals. At the social structure, the writer's abuse of social power leads him to directly tag the football player to his comment and even give him a subtle invitation to a physical exercise of power inasmuch as he is a trained athlete.

Professionalism

5. @Okolie Raphael Kinglove: Iwobi was so useless in that match, maybe he was paid to do so a professional footballer that can not even move ball front anytime he received ball from his team mate he will pass it to his opponent, his a clown he should just rest if he doesn't want to accept critics, he should rewatch that match and decide whether the performance doesn't deserve the critics.

The text employs insults, name calling, denigration (*Iwobi was so useless in that match, his a clown*) and an emoji of a clown to

drive home the point, and defamation (*maybe he was paid to do so*). At the cognitive level, on one hand, Iwobi is called a professional player and on the other hand, he is referred to as a clown. There is a shared sociocultural knowledge that implies that the Nigerian player Iwobi is incompetent and unprofessional, because clowns are not be taken seriously even in the field of entertainment which comprises football. Clowning also goes against the norms and values of football entertainment especially in the present-day football where betting is rife and persons have committed their monies to the professionalism of their chosen football clubs. The writer's attitude may also stem from his personal experiences or assessments of the player's past performances. The context model also features anger. At the societal structure, the writer exhibits verbal violence as a form of social power abuse which is tantamount to cyber bullying. He also exhibits the domination that social media affords fans over celebrities.

6. @Uchenna Henry Emereonye: He is not going through anything himself. @Alex Iwobi should do better. His performance was below average. Criticism is part of the game, because football is a game of emotions. Even Onana, CR7, Messi, Maguire and all footballers Dey collect when they play below average. Let the bantering motivate him to upgrade his performance. Stop all this petty nonsense.

The discursive structure of the text is made up of direct attack (*his page is tagged to the comment so Facebook would notify him of the comment*), accusation (*his performance was below average*). The cognitive structure is built on the strength of the

socially shared ideology and norms and values of football banter where football players are bullied under the guise of criticism whenever they perceive that the beloved football players are under performing. Social media affords football fanatics, due to its freedom of speech, the platform to exercise their abuse of social power and control at the macro structure. The writer goes ahead to name professional football players (Onana, CR7: Cristiano Ronaldo, Messi and Maguire) who have also tasted the wrath of football fans whenever they are perceived to *play below average*. Strikingly, these are award winning footballers, yet they are not spared from cyber bullying. At the macro structure of social groups, these fans, without bounds, express domination and power control over the football players.

7. @Akpo Kenneth Ify: No be u go tell us wetin to do!! The only difference between me and iwobi yesterday be say him dey field dey run around while me I sit dey watch (three laughing emojis)!! We go forgive am wen our mind touch ground abeg for now we go deal with am

@Hon Ejike Ilo Festus: To be honest with you, his performance was indeed very poor, he wasn't creative, he didn't even play like a holding midfielder, he doesn't even look like his uncle Jay Jay Okocha in the midfield.

The comment thread above is an outright insult on the professionalism of the midfielder player and a threat (*abeg for now we go deal with am*) and accusations (*his performance was indeed very poor, he wasn't creative, he wasn't even playing like a holding midfielder*). The discursive structure of the discourses

above is that of polarization; self celebration and other derogation (Van-Dijk, 2016). In the first discourse, the writer polarizes himself against Iwobi (*the only difference between me and iwobi yesterday be say him dey field dey run around while me I sit dey watch*) and the second writer polarizes Iwobi against his uncle Jay Jay Okocha, a retired professional footballer known for his dribbling expertise. He was also a midfielder like Iwobi. Okocha is celebrated while Iwobi gets derogated. The discursive structure consists of the political pronouns *we* and *us*. At the cognitive level, the adoption of the political pronouns also indicates membership of a social group. At the macro level of online communities and social groups (fan groups of football clubs and football players), there is a socially shared knowledge of Alex Iwobi's family relationship with the football guru, Jay Jay Okocha, so the writer exploits that socially shared ideology and attitude to exploit his personal experience of Iwobi's performance at the AFCON final match. The writer also exploits his LTM (long term memory) of Okocha's performances at the Nigerian team while still in active service. The societal structure is that of dominance and social power abuse. At the macro level, these social/fan groups possess social power against the football players and they exercise their power, as well as their ideologies (at the micro level of personal opinions), to criticise and bully the football players, especially the national players, inasmuch as the individual players are members of a team.

8. @Kay Nwoha: I knew Nigerians were going to come after this maalu ... very useless player ... e remain that big for nothing defender called Ola Aina of Nottingham Forest ...not a single defensive acumen, absolutely nothing dey that im forest head.

@Dave Cee Uwanamodo: Like dis iwobi don retire from naija team

Discourse structure evident in these samples is made up of name calling/insults (*maalu* (cow), *very useless player*), (*not a single defensive acumen*), *absolutely nothing dey that im forest head*) and threats (*like this iwobi don retire ...*). The insults in the discursive structure imply Iwobi's lack of expertise. The implicated meaning of the threat is that the governing body ought to prematurely retire the player due to the writer's assumed incompetence of the player. The defender, Ola Aina, also comes under fire and receives insults for his perceived lack of *defensive acumen*. Cognitively, the comparison of Iwobi to a cow is exploited to influence people's perception of his expertise in the field of football. It also foreshadows the writer's ideology, norms and values towards the game of football and, probably, the lack of patriotism. The writers exercise and abuse the social power that social media afford them to bully their national players on a global platform at the societal structure. Considering the numerical strength of social fan groups and online communities at the macro level, these writers exploit the domination it affords them. The effect of the discursive structures and cognitive structures of the texts is social power abuse, control and domination of the more powerful social group of football fans over the less powerful football players on social media. They also exercise their fundamental human right of freedom of speech to cyber bully Iwobi and Aina while the players' rights are relegated. Unfortunately, the players are unable to resist such

powers. The persons that own and control the discourse in these online communities (@mazitundeednut and @instablog) also abuse their social power by allowing such comments thrive on their pages.

9. @Idinmachukwu Kelvin-minista: Like how on earth can a midfielder not count how many passes he gave to the striker (three sad emojis). Players whenever they know they are not fit for the play, they normally notify the coach. But this one go carry hair like street mad man dy run about Well, I also blame @okocha for giving us a half baked player as a midfielder just because he is a niece to him

@Jide Adeyemi: Honestly this isn't the iwobi I used to know at Arsenal

The text is composed of denigration (*like how on earth can a midfielder not count how many passes he gave to the striker*), and insults (*but this one carry hair like street m@d man, I also blame @okocha for giving us a half baked player as a midfielder*). Cognitively, the second writer uses his LTM (long term memory) to assess Iwobi's past performances as a professional football club at Arsenal football club and his present performance at the AFCON Final match. The statement, *this isn't Iwobi I used to know at Arsenal*, suggests that he played well at the English football team, but the reverse was the case at the AFCON final match. The writer's LTM (Long term memory) also helps him juxtapose Iwobi's past performances at the English premier league with his performance at the AFCON final match. At the

micro structure, he also assesses his performance with the knowledge of his personal experiences of the player's expertise as a football fan. The writer also writes on the strength of the socially shared knowledge that Alex Iwobi is Jay Jay Okocha's nephew to assume that Iwobi would not have stood a chance at playing for the national team if not for his legendary footballer uncle given his assumed mediocrity. The socially shared ideology also makes the writer blame Okocha for his nephew's performance at the AFCON final match. At the societal structure, there is social power abuse of a dominant group on social media (online community). They fly on the wings of their fundamental human right of freedom of speech to bully football players. These online communities equally control the social media football discourse given their numerical strength. Unfortunately, the dominated group (football players) is unable to resist abuse given the prevalent herd mentality on social media.

10. @iam_annystar: Aina was the bad luck here, guy was sluggish, couldn't attack, just zero efforts and all goals scored was through his wing.

@xavierlucio60: like he was afraid self

@doinz1wpofcpt: Not his 4th, dat boy (Simon Adingra) better pass am and his a premiership player, nad boy run us and u can see he won man of d match

Ola Aina is cyber bullied in the texts by having insults thrown at him. Insult (*guy was sluggish, couldn't attack*) is also employed

in the discourse structure of the text. Suffice it to say that insult is a viable tool for cyberbullying. Football is a game that requires speed and tact, therefore pronouncing a player *sluggish* is tantamount to lack of expertise and energy. The player is also named *the bad luck*. Polarization is found in the discursive structure. The performance of Ola Aina, a Nigerian player, is compared with that of Simon Adingra, an Ivorian footballer, at the AFCON final match. Adingra is celebrated and Iwobi is denigrated. In the cognitive structure, the first writer employs her personal experiences to pronounce Aina the bad omen (*bad luck*) that made Nigeria lose to Ivory Coast. This social media user names Aina the cause of Nigeria's loss to Ivory Coast. Her personal norms and values are also let loose as she heaps insult on the player and blames him for the conceded goals. At the societal macro structure, social power abuse is represented and reproduced at the micro level of the interactions of these social members of the online community.

Conclusion

Online communities are social groups. On social media, their numerical strength, anonymity and real time communication afford football fans domination over football players. These social groups have power control and domination, so the less powerful is bullied at will on social media. They also control public discourse and the court of public opinion; hence power control and domination are exploited to cyber bully football players and other famous people. Therefore, they abuse the social power they have over these celebrities/football players and bully them especially when their teams do not win their matches. The

research recommends that civility should be maintained in online interactions. Positive and constructive criticism should be upheld while cyber bullying should be abhorred.

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Appendix


Some Samples of Comment Threads

1


 Wrong accusations, Alex was never the problem of the team. Aina and Zaidu and coach was what cost us the trophy. But they are tried there best. One love

6w Like Reply

 If he is depressed Wetin Onana and maguire go come be, Dead?

 Iwobi was so useless in that match, maybe he was paid to do so, a professional footballer that can not even move ball front anytime he received ball from his team mate he will pass it to his opponent, his a clown 🤡 he should just rest if he doesn't want to accept critics, he should rewatch that match and decide whether the performance doesn't deserve the critics'

6w Like Reply 5 🗨️

 ke O... nglove were oth...


View 1 more reply...

3


 He is not going through anything himself Alex Iwobi should do batter. His performance was below average.

Criticism is part of the game, because football is a game of emotions Even Onana, CR7, Messi Maguire and all footballers Dey collect when they play below average. Let the bantering motivate him to upgrade his performance. Stop all this petty nonsense.

6w Like Reply 7 🗨️

 ye They are...


Write a comment...

 My grandma will do better than iwobi


Write a comment...

4


5

 Top fan I knew Nigerians were going to come after this maalu...very useless player...e remain that big for nothing defender called Ola Aina of Nottingham Forest...not a single defensive acumen, absolutely nothing dey that im forest head 😞


6w Like Reply


 Like dis iwobi don retire from naija team

6w Like Reply

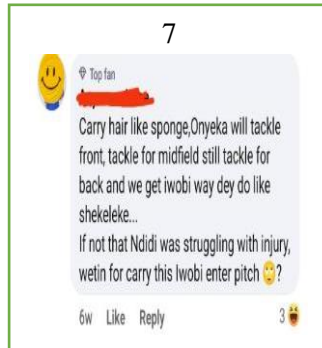
 No be u go tell us wetin to do!! The only difference between me and iwobi yesterday be say him dey field dey run around while me I sit dey watch 🤔😞😞!! We go forgive am wen our mind touch ground abeg for now we go deal with am

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 Ify \$ is 1500, a bag... View 1 more reply...

 To be honest with you, his performance was indeed very poor, he wasn't creative, he didn't even play like a holding midfielder, he doesn't even look like his uncle Jay Jay Okocha in the midfield

ika, Nigeria



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