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## **DIGITAL TRAUMA: REPRESENTATION OF ONLINE VIOLENCE AND CYBERBULLYING IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE**

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### **Abstract**

*The increased incorporation of digital technologies into the lives of adolescents has led to new types of psychological vulnerability, and cyberbullying and online harassment appear to be a significant source of digital trauma. The Young Adult (YA) literature, which has long been concerned with the emotional and social issues of the youth, has also started to take up the issues of online violence and investigate them. This paper reviews the topic of digital trauma in the chosen YA novels published between 2010 and 2025 and how authors portray cyberbullying, reputational damage, digital surveillance, and the emotional disorientation of the adolescent characters. The study is based on the trauma theory, cyberpsychology, and narrative analysis to examine the narrative techniques that depict online aggression and its long-term impact on the psychology of users. The results indicate that common themes are shaming by the masses, identity misrepresentation, social isolation, and the merging of digital and real-world trauma. The chosen readings also provide an example of a continuum of coping strategies, ranging from silence and withdrawal to building resilience, telling the truth, and digital resistance. The paper has contended that beyond reflecting digital anxieties of the modern-day youth, YA literature can also be used as a pedagogical site of developing critical digital citizenship, empathy, and awareness. Through foregrounding digital trauma, YA stories have been playing a part in the continued discourse on the emotional environment of adolescents in an increasingly networked world.*

**Keywords:** Digital trauma; cyberbullying, online violence, Young Adult literature, digital identity, theory of trauma, cyberpsychology, public shaming, adolescent mental health, digital citizenship.



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## Introduction

The growing use of digital technology in the daily lives of teenagers has radically changed the way in which young people communicate, negotiate identity, develop social relationships, and cope with emotional issues. In the last ten years, smartphones, social networking sites, gaming communities, and messaging platforms have taken the centre stage of youth culture, and not only provide a platform to be creative and socially interact with each other, but have also exposed adolescents to new levels of psychological vulnerability. One of these emerging issues has been cyberbullying, online harassment, doxxing, group-based digital hostility, and public shaming, which have become widespread phenomena with an unquestionably significant impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of youths (Hinduja and Patchin, 2018). Contrary to the traditional type of bullying, digital violence is defined by permanence, anonymity, virality, a broad audience, and loss of space and time, becoming more brutal, chronic, and hard to get away (boyd, 2014).

With the digital age decimating the line between personal and public lives, adolescents are finding themselves in an online world that is both empowering and threatening. Studies reveal that cyberbullying may have long-term emotional impacts, such as anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, self-blame, and, in the worst scenario, suicidal thoughts (Slonje, Smith, and Friesen, 2013). Most notably, this is not only trauma that exists in the digital realm, but in many cases, online violence transfers to offline life, and it determines how adolescents feel about themselves, their relations, and their social experiences. The recent increase in the awareness of digital trauma as a phenomenon describing emotional pain caused by online aggression is an indication of a dire necessity to conduct interdisciplinary research that would connect psychology, education, digital studies, and literature.

A genre focused on exploring the social, emotional and psychological experiences of adolescents, Young Adult (YA) literature has emerged as an influential tool of expressing the realities of the digital age. In the past, YA fiction has dealt with such problems as bullying, mental health, identity crisis, social injustice, and trauma (Cart, 2016). Over the past few years, with cyberbullying cases becoming more common worldwide, YA authors have started to add to their narrative worlds digital harm, online shaming, group-rooted cyberbullying, identity misstatement and a culture of surveillance. The authors provide the reader with subtle information about the nature of online violence on young people through emotional storytelling approaches. These literary depictions not only assist adolescents in making sense of their digital worlds but also enhance empathy, resilience, and critical digital citizenship.



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Although this movement in YA fiction is on the rise, only a handful of scholarly studies have been done to explore the way digital trauma is built, told, and expressed in literature. A lot of the current studies on the topic of cyberbullying revolve around either a psychological or sociological approach, and this has created a gap in the literature where the narrative conventions, symbolism, and emotional representation of online violence have not been fully addressed. This disjunction highlights the importance of an extensive literary exploration of the way that YA writers depict the psychological effects of digital harm and the way that characters find their way through digitally induced trauma that emerges in online environments.

Although some studies recognise that YA literature is a reflection of real issues teenagers experience in the real world (Anderson, 2019; Cart, 2016), little is done on how novels construct digital aggression, emotional disruption, and coping/resistance. In addition, the intersectionality of online violence as to how gender, identity, social class, and cultural expectations influence the digital experiences of adolescents is a significant topic in the literature that is still largely ignored by literary critics. This oversight prevents a more profound comprehension of how stories influence the perception of digital risks and youth resilience by the readers.

This paper aims to fill this gap by studying how digital trauma is presented in some of the YA novels published between 2010 and 2025. Through a study of the representations of cyberbullying, online shaming, digital hostility, and emotional reaction in literature, this study seeks to demonstrate the thematic and narrative processes by which literature expresses digital-era suffering. Using the theory of trauma, cyberpsychology, and narrative analysis, the paper explores the internalization of online violence in characters, the effects of digital violence on identity and social relationships, and the emergent coping or resiliency mechanisms in the story.

### **Problem Statement**

Alongside the growing significance of cyberbullying and violence on the internet in YA fiction, there is a significant gap in the literature researching the cyber trauma in Young Adult fiction. Current literature comprises more of sociological/psychological influence of cyberbullying and less on the presentation of digital trauma on the narrative, themes, and symbols in YA books. This lack restricts interdisciplinary awareness and ignores the possibility of literature in the formation of digital literacy, empathy, and resilience in adolescent readers.

### **Significance of Study**

This research has scholarly, social, and teaching implications. First, it contributes to an enlargement of the study of literature because it places YA fiction as a key location to investigate



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the current problems with technology, identity, and trauma. Second, the theory of trauma applied to the digital experiences expands the current scholarship of trauma to incorporate the possibilities of consuming harmful experiences in the virtual space (Caruth, 2016). Third, the results have a practical implication for teachers, counsellors, curriculum developers, and parents. Digital trauma in the YA novels can be employed as a learning resource to enhance digital responsibility, emotional intelligence, and safe internet use among teenagers. Lastly, the research adds to the general discourse of youth well-being by showing how literature may serve as a self-reflection, dialogue, and healing space.

### **Contribution of the Study**

This research is relevant to the academic literature in the following four ways:

- It offers one of the limited and extended literary analyses of digital trauma in YA fiction.
- It provides the patterns of recurring narratives and thematic frameworks according to which authors represent online violence.
- It provides an analytical insight into emotional patterns and coping styles among characters who have suffered digital damage.
- It supports teacher-centred pedagogical use of YA literature to enhance digital resiliency and awareness in young readers.

### **Research Objectives**

The following objectives are directly related to the research questions below:

- To examine the representation of cyberbullying and digital trauma in the modern YA novels.
- To determine the main themes, narrative devices and emotional schemes employed to reflect online violence.
- To examine how characters who have suffered digital trauma cope, the coping mechanisms, and their responses to the trauma.

### **Research Questions**

In line with the objectives above, the research aims to answer the following:

- What are the recent examples of cyberbullying and digital trauma in YA authors?
- What are the themes and narrative techniques to describe the emotional and psychological effects of online violence?



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- What are the reactions, negotiations or coping mechanisms of characters towards the trauma that has been caused by online aggression?

## **Literature Review**

Over the last twenty years, digital technologies have transformed the communication patterns and identity construction of adolescents and their social relationships fundamentally. With each intensification of these changes, scholars have observed that cyberbullying, online harassment, online shaming, and other digital-based aggression have also increased (Patchin and Hinduja, 2015). YA literature, which has long been a reflection of teenage fears, has started to address these digital threats more and more, which puts online violence in the role of a central narrative (Rosen, 2020). This chapter is a survey of the scholarly environment of digital trauma, online violence, cyberbullying, and its application in YA fiction, incorporating research into trauma studies, cyberpsychology, narrative theory, and studies of digital culture. The review brings to the fore key academic debates, themes, and gaps that this paper seeks to fill.

### **Digital Trauma Conceptualization.**

#### ***Trauma Theory and the Digital Turn***

The classical trauma theory formulated by Caruth (1996) and Herman (1992) views trauma as an overwhelming experience that interferes with the feeling of identity, memory and emotional stability of the individual. Though the theory of trauma was originally used to refer to situations like war, abuse, and other devastating situations, the theory has been applied to the situations that manifest within digital contexts (Cvetkovich, 2012). Digital trauma can be described as psychological distress that is caused by online communication, such as cyberbullying, exposure to violence, humiliation in public, and digital privacy violation (Bauman et al., 2013). In contrast to classic trauma, digital trauma is intractable, recordable, and has an international resolution because traces left on the internet can still be present even with the attempts by victims to move past them (Chouliaraki, 2015). The researchers distinguish between three different types of digital trauma, including continuity trauma, where an individual experiences constant reminders of the incident due to the existence of permanent online traces (Zimmerman, 2017); networked trauma, where distress increases due to the velocity and volume of online propagation (boyd, 2014); and identity-based trauma, where emotional fragmentation results because of public defamation, doxxing, or impersonation (Marwick and boyd, 2018). Such changing definitions underline the necessity of literary analysis, as the young adult novels tend to involve more such types of traumas in the characterisation and plotlines, as the multifaceted psychology and social relations of digital life are becoming more complicated.



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### **Online Aggression and Cyberbullying: Social and Psychological Aspects**

The studies on cyberbullying emphasize the peculiarities of digital aggression: anonymity, permanence, a wide range of audience, and the lack of physical proximity (Kowalski et al., 2014). According to the empirical data, anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, self-harm, and poor academic performance are closely associated with cyberbullying among teenagers (Hinduja and Patchin, 2018).

According to psychologists, there are numerous types of cyberbullying, such as harassment based on repeated uncivil messages, flaming based on short tropes of violent insults, outing through the distribution of personal data, masquerading or impersonation, and ostracisation or social isolation on the internet. The trauma caused by such acts can be as great as traditional bullying because of the ubiquity and infallibility of online content (Sticca and Perren, 2013). YA literature is a mirror of these psychological conditions, as the protagonists are characterized by emotional instability, broken friendships, and mistrust after being attacked online (Rosen, 2019). Irrespective of this, there is insufficient scholarly discussion of the representations of such experiences in YA fiction.

### **Development of Digital Themes in Young Adult Fiction**

Digital technology has changed a lot of YA fiction. Although the earlier literature has focused mostly on the issues of school bullying and interpersonal conflicts, the recent YA fiction has been working with the topics of social media interactions and virtual identities, online dating and sexting, cyberbullying and cyber humiliation, and the pressure of the digital popularity index. According to scholars, YA performs the role of a cultural collection, with youth anxieties and social interactions in the digital environment (Gibbons, 2017).

### **Narrative Strategies Employed to Respond to Digital Trauma**

The authors use various narrative strategies to describe digital violence and trauma, such as multi-modal narration using texts, screenshots, and chat logs; fragmented narrative structures, reflecting psychological disorientation (Garcia, 2021); dual timelines, comparing pre-trauma and post-trauma life; and changing perspectives to reflect the collective presence in digital spaces. These methods enable authors to recreate the disorganized, cluttered, and usually disorienting pulse of cyberbullying.

### **Common Motifs of YA Cyberbullying Novels**

Digital shame and public humiliation (Ringrose et al., 2013), lack of control over own identity, passivity of bystanders made possible by online anonymity, the ambiguity of the morality of digital



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spectatorship, and recovery through community support, mentorship, or activism are all common tropes in YA cyberbullying novels. Thirteen Reasons Why, Speak, The Story of You and Me, and Tell Me Something Real are some examples of novels that depict digital trauma as a subset of a bigger problem in adolescence. Although this kind of narration is widely used, there is still a lack of scholarly research on literary portrayals of digital violence.

### **The Digital Identity, Surveillance, and Reputation**

The digital identity literature implies the stressors that adolescents experience when it comes to maintaining publicly acceptable online images (Livingstone, 2018). Social media requires top-notch visibility at all times, which contributes to self-monitoring tendencies and increases anxiety (Marwick, 2015). YA fiction reflects these dynamics by having characters create perfect online selves, having identity struggles when their information gets leaked, or getting stalked by their peers, teachers or by unknown forces. According to scholars, digital selfhood usually overlaps with trauma, especially when identities are turned against one, mocked, or stolen (Papacharissi, 2015). Nonetheless, limited literature has focused on how YA narratives address the effects of damage to digital reputation, even though it is the core of adolescence.

### **Intersectionality: Gender, Race, and Vulnerability Online**

Research demonstrates that online violence disproportionately targets:

- Girls (sexual shaming, body-related harassment)
- LGBTQ+ youth (outing, identity-based threats)
- Ethnic minorities (racialized insults)
- Youth with disabilities (mockery and exclusion)
- (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Abreu & Kenny, 2018)

YA literature often highlights these vulnerabilities, but scholarly analyses seldom explore how intersectional identities shape the representation of digital trauma. Existing studies focus primarily on white, middle-class protagonists, revealing a gap in understanding diverse experiences.

### **Digital Citizenship and Resilience in YA Narratives**

Recent research in digital pedagogy emphasizes the importance of digital citizenship, including responsible online behavior, empathy, and critical media literacy (Ribble, 2015). YA literature contributes to this discourse by showing characters learning to:

- Navigate privacy risks



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- Identify toxic online environments
- Build supportive peer networks
- Advocate against cyberbullying
- Develop resilience and agency

Nevertheless, the pedagogical potential of YA fiction remains under-examined in scholarly work.

### **Identified Research Gaps**

Although the topic of digital culture and the young adult (YA) literature has gained increased attention, there are a few gaps in the existing studies. First, the limited attention is paid to the issue of digital trauma as an abstract concept, and the majority of studies consider cyberbullying as a social problem, instead of discussing its psychological and narrative aspects. Second, little has been done in terms of representation in literature; not many researchers have explored the representation of digital violence through the lens of narrative structure, use of styles and themes. Third, there is a lack of intersectional views, and little consideration is given to the impact of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality on the experiences of online trauma among characters. There has also been little consideration of the digital permanence and network effects in the development of character trauma, yet it is important in comprehending how online harassment is lasting and public. Lastly, the pedagogical power of YA novels is underutilised, especially in terms of their ability to cultivate digital citizenship, empathy, and resilience in their readers. The latter gaps highlight the significance of the current research, which will attempt to deliver a multi-layered and holistic examination of the concept of digital trauma in the YA literature, touching upon both experienced and represented aspects thereof.

### **Research Design**

This quantitative research design is based on a qualitative descriptive design, namely a literature textual analysis to analyze the chosen young adult (YA) novels in terms of their digital trauma representations. The qualitative methodology is especially suitable in that it makes it possible to explore narrative material, the experience of characters, and thematic representations in a more detailed manner, and this is not achievable by the quantitative measure. The study is consistent with an interpretivist epistemology as it emphasizes interpretation and meaning-making and aims at discovering the meaning of cyberbullying and online harassment in literary works. Furthermore, such a method allows conducting an extensive study of the narrative strategies, the development of characters, and thematic structures, which can be enriched with extensive information about the ways of reflecting on digital trauma and how it is experienced. Informed by a phenomenological



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approach, the study focuses on the lived lives of the characters in a digital setting as portrayed and construed by the authors, thus preempting the subjective and experiential aspect of online communication and implications of the same on the psychological and emotional levels.

### **Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling strategy is used, and the choice of YA novels directly dealing with cyberbullying, online oppression, or digital trauma is taken. Purposive sampling will be used to make sure that the texts are pertinent to the research objectives and bring valuable content to the analysis (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### **Inclusion Criteria**

- Between 2010-2025, representing the modern culture of digital.
- Composed in English, in order to be linguistically consistent.
- YA novels in which central characters become the victims of cyberbullying, cyber-harassment, or other types of digital trauma.
- In print or electronic format.

### **Selected Texts**

- The selected texts to be analyzed are the following:
- Tease - Amanda Maciel (2014)
- Backlash - Sarah Darer Littman (2015)
- Don't Read the Comments - Eric Smith (2020)
- The List - Siobhan Vivian (2012)
- Speak (Updated Edition) - Laurie Halse Anderson (2019)

The novels offer a wide array of online violence, such as social media shaming, anonymous harassment, and identity theft.

### **Data Collection**

#### ***Procedures***

Reading and Annotation: All the readings were completed in their entirety, and all the passages that reflected the subject of cyberbullying, cyber harassment, cyber shaming, or experiences of identity-based trauma were also annotated.



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Removal of Relevant Passages: The passages in the text that captured online interactions, emotional responses, coping strategies, and character reflections were extracted in a systematic manner.

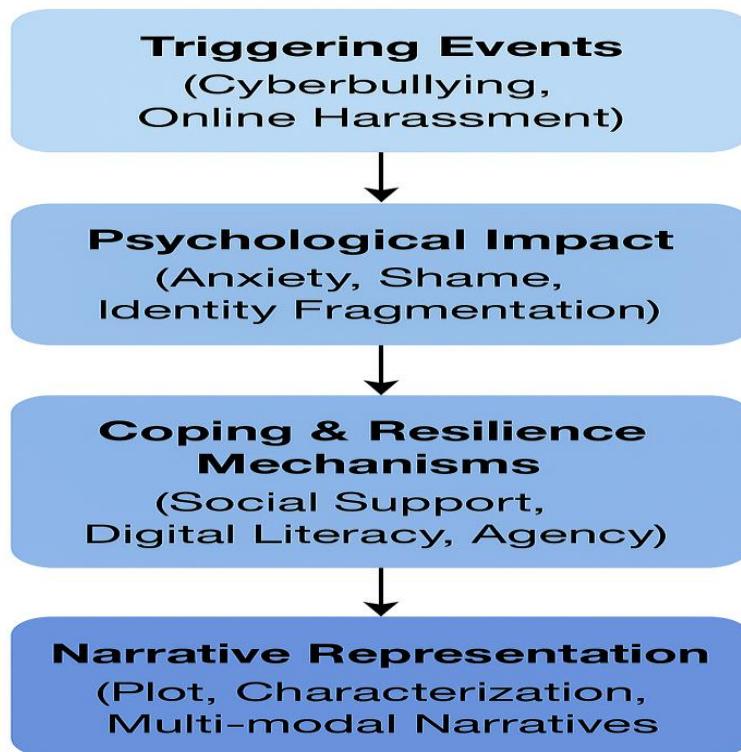
### Organization of Data

Coding software (NVivo) was used to assign extracted passages to themes that were to be analyzed.

### Conceptual Framework

The analysis has a cohesive conceptual model composed of the theory of trauma, cyberpsychology, and narrative theory. It assumes that the following factors influence digital trauma in YA literature:

- Categories of Stimuli: Cyberbullying, online harassment, and digital identity violation.
- Psychological Effect: Anxiety, shame, depression and fragmented identity.
- Mechanisms of coping and resilience: Social support, online literacy, activism and empowerment.
- Narrative Representation: How writers tell the story of trauma using the plot, characterization, and figurative elements.





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**Fig: Conceptual Framework Diagram No. 1**

## **Data Analysis**

The method of studying the chosen YA novels was thematic analysis and narrative analysis in one, which enabled to have a thorough review of both the content, i.e. themes of digital trauma, and the narrative depiction of the experiences of cyberbullying. The thematic analysis followed the six-step model discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006), and NVivo software helped to organize the data systematically and code it according to the themes. At the first stage, every novel was read, and the passages presenting the cyberbullying, online harassment, and identity-related trauma were highlighted and annotated, with a focus on emotional reactions, coping mechanisms, and the use of narratives. Excerpts were then coded according to the observable phenomenon, e.g. public shaming, anonymous harassment, identity fragmentation, isolation, and resilience strategies, e.g. engaging in friendship, digital literacy, activism, or personal empowerment. These codes were then further divided into more general themes that can apply to digital trauma. The concept of public shaming and social visibility became a prominent theme and demonstrates that social media enhances humiliation and peer pressure, which are reflected in *The List* (Vivian, 2012), where a personal video is made public and mocked by many, and in *Tease* (Maciel, 2014), where a web of gossip spreads anxiety and hypervigilance. The other theme was identified as identity fragmentation, which is the struggles of characters to live completely online and offline, such as in *Speak* (Anderson, 2019), where the protagonist cannot say anything online but is forced to live with high pressure in the real world, and in *Don't Read the Comments* (Smith, 2020), where negative comments on the internet distort self-esteem. There were also emotional and psychological effects, such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal, such as the case of school withdrawal because of online harassment as described in *Backlash* (Littman, 2015), or panic attacks because of viral posts as described in *Tease* (Maciel, 2014). The presence of coping and resilience strategies was also present, as the characters sought social support, were activists, or found creative ways of expression, as in the case of *Don't Read the Comments* (Smith, 2020) and *Speak* (Anderson, 2019). Themes were also checked to be consistent throughout the texts, and minor narrative details that were not related to digital trauma were also not included to ensure focus. The themes were narrowed down to reflect experiential and representational elements, and sub-themes were peer-mediated harassment, technology-facilitated isolation, and digital identity reconstruction. Thematic patterns were incorporated with the textual evidence, displaying the major themes, sub-themes, and the illustrative examples, including the cases of public shaming and viral humiliation (*The List*), online-offline tension (*Don't Read the Comments*), anxiety and depression (*Backlash*), and peer support and agency (*Speak*).



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The narrative analysis also examined digital trauma narration in terms of point of view, chronology, and multimodal narration. The first-person narration was also used to make readers have more emotional attachment to the main characters, like in *Don't Read the Comments*, where one can feel the anxiety of the character. The disjointed nature of online harassment was captured in non-linear timelines, as is the case with *Backlash*, which features flashbacks of the buildup of abuse and its psychological impact on people. Multi-modes such as social media posts, screenshots, and chat logs were used to realistically reflect the online world, like in *Tease*, where text conversations and screenshots are intended to bring immediacy and intrusion. This method of narration shows that digital trauma in the YA literature is not only related to the events but also the ways in which the events are experienced and shared.

Lastly, the results were overlaid on the conceptual map of the study, which indicated that the key triggering events are cyberbullying, social media shaming, and identity theft; the psychological effects include anxiety, shame, isolation, and identity fragmentation; social networks, digital literacy, and activism as the main sources of coping and resilience; and the narrative representation which utilizes multi-modal storytelling, first-person perspectives, and fragmented chronology as the most effective means of portraying the lived experience of cyberbullying. The interdependence of these elements highlights the cyclic aspect of the digital trauma, which aligns with the theory of trauma and the principles of cyberpsychology.

*Table 1: Summarizes key themes, sub-themes, and representative examples:*

Theme	Sub-theme	Representative Example
Public Shaming & Social Visibility	Viral humiliation	The List: Video shared without consent (Vivian, 2012)
Identity Fragmentation	Online-offline tension	Do not Read the Comments: Negative comments affecting self-image (Smith, 2020)
Emotional & Psychological Impact	Anxiety, depression	Backlash: School withdrawal due to harassment (Littman, 2015)
Coping & Resilience	Peer support, agency	Speak: Participation in art activism (Anderson, 2019)



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This discussion demonstrates that digital trauma is reflected in digital novels as a multi-dimensional problem. The thematic patterns emphasize emotional and psychological outcomes of the cyberbullying, whereas the narrative techniques show how difficult it is to express the experience in literature. The results are relevant to the objectives of the research, as they explain the causes, consequences, and narrative representation of the digital trauma, which serves as a strong background to further chapters discussing the implications and their impact on pedagogy.

## **Discussion**

The current paper investigated digital trauma in young adult (YA) literature using a thematic and narrative analysis, offering some insight into the ways in which cyberbullying and online harassment are depicted in literature and experienced by young adult characters. As the findings have shown, the phenomenon of digital trauma is multifaceted, and it includes not only the emotional and psychological aftermaths but also the manner in which these experiences get narratively formed.

### **Digital Trauma Thematic Patterns**

The thematic analysis showed that social visibility and public shaming are common to YA novels and are indicative of the heightened effect of social interactions over the Internet. Viral content usually causes characters to feel humiliated and socially overlooked, which is in line with the previous study that found social media to be an effective location of adolescent stress and peer pressure (Patchin and Hinduja, 2015). As an example, in *The List* (Vivian, 2012) and *Tease* (Maciel, 2014), the anxieties and hypervigilance caused by the online dissemination of personal information are generated, which demonstrates the widespread character of online scrutiny. This observation serves to highlight the importance of social visibility in cyberpsychological studies in proving that digital trauma is not restricted to a single experience but is influenced by the collective observation and engagement.

Another major theme that came out was identity fragmentation, which featured conflicts between online and offline selves. Characters are often struggling with conflicting self-representations, which result in distorted self-perception and a lack of authenticity. These trends are in line with the theoretical models of identity formation in the digital world, where youths broker various identities (Turkle, 2011). In *Speak* (Anderson, 2019) and *Don't Read the Comments* (Smith, 2020), the online silence or online exposure to negative remarks of the protagonists led to a sense of fragmentation of self, which proves that digital platforms may reinforce internalized stress and vulnerability.



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The mental effects of cyberbullying were also seen in texts and it took the shape of anxiety, depression and social withdrawal. The results mentioned above are consistent with other research, which has shown that the phenomenon of cyber victimisation has a close relationship with emotional distress and psychological issues in teenagers (Kowalski et al., 2014). The role of the agency is further signified by the inclusion of coping strategies, including peer support, activism, and digital literacy. The resilience strategies of characters, including Speak (Anderson, 2019) and Don't Read the Comments (Smith, 2020), imply that good social interactions and active use of digital tools may offset the negative impact of cyber life, which is also the result of trauma-informed research in education (Hinduja and Patchin, 2018).

### **Narrative Representation of Trauma**

Narrative analysis demonstrated that YA authors use first-person narratives, non-linear chronology, and multi-modal forms of expression of digital trauma. The first-person narration creates feelings of empathy and emotional involvement, giving the reader a chance to experience the anxiety and shame of the protagonist firsthand. Equally, the use of non-linear timelines, integrated social media materials, including chat logs and screenshot captures, and the fractured and ubiquitous characteristics of online harassment. These storytelling elements get aligned with theories of trauma representation, which hold that narrative structure is essential in the expression of psychological complexity (Caruth, 1996). These storytelling techniques contribute to the knowledge of the lived experience of cyberbullying by mimicking the immediacy and intrusion of the digital world.

### **Connections between Findings and the Conceptual Framework.**

The results can be plotted onto the conceptual scheme of the study to show how the triggering events and psychological influence, coping strategies, and story representation interact. Social media shaming and cyberbullying are the major stimuli which result in identity fragmentation and emotional distress. The mechanisms against these effects can be offered by resilience strategies such as peer support and activism, whereas the narrative structures can be used to communicate the temporal and experiential aspects of trauma. This cyclical model is consistent with the theory of trauma and cyberpsychology since it emphasizes the multifaceted interrelationships between experience, coping, and narrative expression (Bakker et al., 2019).

As discussed, YA literature offers a subtle portrayal of digital trauma, and the insights can be applied to both literary and educational research. The depiction of emotional and psychological outcomes and narrative techniques, which simulate digital relationships, highlights the opportunities of literature as a means of increasing awareness and enhancing the digital resilience



of adolescents. Such results contribute to the aims of the research by explaining the reasons, outcomes, and narrative presentation of cyberbullying as a basis of the applied study of pedagogical interventions and additional studies on digital trauma in literature and learning.

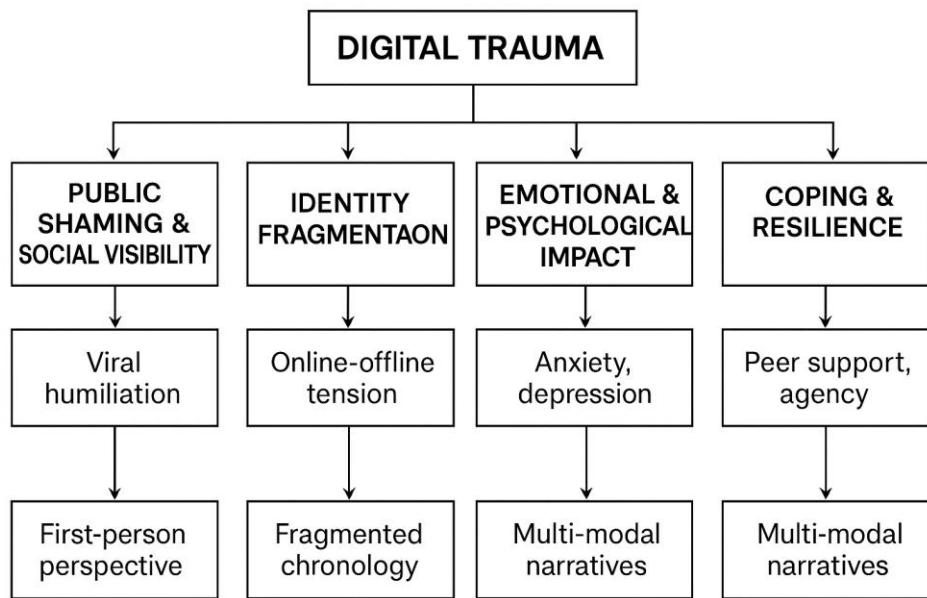


Fig. 2, *Digital trauma theme map diagram*

## Results and Findings

The discussion of the chosen young adult (YA) novels indicates that the occurrence of digital trauma can be observed as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes emotional, psychological, and social levels of trauma manifestation. The findings of the thematic and narrative analyses are presented in this section, which identify patterns, sub-themes, and main findings related to cyberbullying and online harassment.

### Thematic Analysis Findings

Fourteen major themes regarding digital trauma in YA novels were found in the thematic analysis, performed according to the six-step model of Braun and Clarke (2006) with NVivo software.

Public Shaming and Social Visibility became a major cause of trauma, in which social media magnified individual content and subjected characters to humiliation in society, peer mockery, and even social isolation. In *The List* (Vivian, 2012), the personal video of one of the protagonists becomes viral, leading to massive embarrassment, and in *Tease* (Maciel, 2014), the online gossip



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is easily spread, which leaves everyone anxious and hypervigilant. These illustrations lead to the role played by online presence in amplifying the emotional effect of cyberbullying and how digital trauma becomes more public.

Another dominating theme was Identity Fragmentation as the characters could not find a balance between their online and real self, causing tension and difficulty with self-image. The absence of online talk in the protagonist in *Speak* (Anderson, 2019) is a contrast to the socially pressured life, and in *Don't Read the Comments* (Smith, 2020), the negative presence on the internet misinterprets the self-esteem of the protagonist. These results highlight the role of online sources that help to fragment identity experiences as they reflect the psychological depth of online interactions.

Emotional and Psychological Impact was also apparent throughout the texts, and cyberbullying caused anxiety, shame, depression, and withdrawal. As an example, *Backlash* (Littman, 2015) shows a character dropping out of school because of bullying on the Internet, and *Tease* (Maciel, 2014) represents panic attacks caused by posts on social networks. These are just a few examples of the actual psychological impacts of experiencing online harassment, which correlates with trauma studies among adolescent groups.

Coping and Resilience were also revealed as one of the most important problems, as characters used the following strategies despite the trauma: peer support, counselling, activism, digital literacy, and creative expression. In *Don't Read the Comments* (Smith, 2020), the counselling sessions and peer support can be used to regain confidence, and in *Speak* (Anderson, 2019), the focus is on using art activism as a coping strategy. These results indicate that resilience measures have a buffering effect on digital trauma and proactive coping with issues.

### **Findings of Narrative Analysis**

The narrative review examined the YA authors as depicting digital trauma, specifically the point of view, chronology, and multi-modal narrative.

The first person was mostly used, which greatly contributed to the emotional involvement of the readers in the experiences of the main characters. First-person narration in *Don't Read the Comments* (Smith, 2020) puts readers into the state of anxiety of the main character and demonstrates the internal consequences of cyberbullying. This demonstrates that narrative perspective is crucial to the expression of immediacy and intensity of digital trauma.

The chronology of the novels was not linear, and flashbacks and fragmented narrative were used to eloquently convey the time-based aspect of the persecution. Flashbacks in *Backlash* (Littman, 2015) show how cyberbullying has grown out of control, and the psychological effects of these



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experiences accumulate over time. Lapse in time in the story is therefore the reflection of the constant stress and trauma that characters go through.

Multi-Modal Formats and Fragmentation were widely used, and authors included social media posts, chat logs, and screenshots to recreate the digital space in the most natural way possible. The technique is exemplified by Tease (Maciel, 2014), in which the emphasis is placed on immediacy and vulnerability through conversations and posts via text. Multi-modal storytelling is the solution because it bridges the gap between the events of online space and its psychological effect on the reader, enabling them to perceive the intrusion of digital harassment with their own experience.

### **Connecting Findings to Conceptual Framework.**

The study was able to project findings onto the conceptual framework, which included triggering events, psychological impact, coping strategies and narrative representation. Digital trauma was always found to be instigated by cyberbullying, social media shaming, and identity threats. There were expressions of anxiety, shame, social withdrawal and identity fragmentation among characters as some psychological effects. Peer support, counselling, activism, and creative expression were coping strategies and resilience that were effective in recovery and empowerment. The lived experience of trauma was well presented through the use of first-person perspectives, non-linearity of chronology, and multi-modal form. All these interrelated aspects describe the cyclic nature of digital trauma, in which stimuli, emotional reactions, coping styles, and narrative strategies interplay, which is related to trauma theory and the principles of cyberpsychology (Bakker et al., 2019; Caruth, 1996).

### **Summary of Findings**

In general, the obtained results indicate that digital trauma is presented in YA literature as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which involves emotional, psychological, social, and narrative aspects. Cyberbullying causes severe mental health issues, and characters are hardy due to social support, digital literacy, and self-expression. Writers use the narrative techniques which create the illusion of the online space, developing the perception of the readers about the intricacies of digital trauma. The Results, Findings, and Discussion may be integrated into one continuous chapter, in essence a thesis-level format, and these findings, along with my own interpretation and literature, will merge into a single narrative that is easy to read and understand.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the digital trauma in young adult (YA) literature, paying attention to the thematic and narrative aspects of cyberbullying and online harassment. The study showed that



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digital trauma is a complex phenomenon, as it has emotional, psychological, social, and narrative aspects through a thematic and narrative analysis.

Thematic analysis established that public shaming, identity fragmentation, and emotional distress are some of the core experiences of the characters who have been victims of cyberbullying. The results are consistent with the current body of research on the risks of being vulnerable to online harassment and its consequences on mental health among adolescents (Kowalski et al., 2014; Patchin and Hinduja, 2015). Concurrently, resilience and coping mechanisms, such as peer support, digital literacy, activism, as well as creative expression were identified as important trauma mitigation mechanisms.

Narrative analysis also brought out the significance of literary styles in the depiction of digital trauma. The closeness, invasion, and multifacetedness of online harassment are well conveyed through first-person narration, non-linear chronology, and multimodal narration. The combination of narrative form and content enables the YA literature to present the psychological effects of cyberbullying, as well as to involve readers in the experience of being cyberbullied and gives them an opportunity to both sympathize and learn.

The application of the results on the conceptual model further highlights the cyclic behaviour of the triggering event, psychological effect, coping mechanism, and narration. Cyberbullying and social media threats are the main initiators with an emotional and identity impact, and the coping strategies and narrative approaches mediate the experience and image of trauma. This interconnection reinforces the importance of addressing both experiential and representational sides of the matter of studying digital trauma.

To sum up, YA novels offer a subtle depiction of digital trauma, which proves that cyberbullying is not just something that happens online but a phenomenon that has significant psychological and social implications. The research points to the opportunities of literature as an awareness-raising, resilience-building, and intervention-guiding tool to facilitate digital well-being in adolescents. These lessons are applicable to literary research and educational practice and provide the basis for further studies on the topic of technology, youth experience, and trauma-informed pedagogy.

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