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Reframing Bullying in the Digital Age: A Phenomenological Study of Family, School, and Media Roles in Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the spectacle of social media and online games shapes children's lived experiences of school life and interpersonal relationships, particularly within the Indonesian cultural framework of Tri Sentra Pendidikan—family, school, and society. Anchored in a qualitative phenomenological approach grounded in Husserlian tradition, the research aims to uncover how digital behaviours are embedded in systems of imitation, symbolic power, and meaning-making. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 21 adult informants (nine parents, nine teachers, and three principals) from three elementary schools in Yogyakarta, selected purposively for their daily proximity to children. Using epoché, reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis, the analysis reveals that digital platforms are often perceived by children as more trustworthy than familial or school authorities. Findings highlight three key dynamics: (1) the normalisation of aggression and spectacle in digital spaces, (2) the displacement of educational authority by algorithmic content, and (3) children's shifting moral orientation shaped more by screen-based narratives than by institutional guidance. Rather than offering definitive solutions, this paper foregrounds the voices around the child—listening closely to their meanings of safety, humour, and resistance—and situates them within broader discourses of power, identity, and character education in a spectacle-saturated world.

Keywords: bullying, digital culture, phenomenology, childhood studies, education, symbolic power

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains a global educational problem, not only because it harms students' psychological well-being, but also because it reveals how power, belonging, and exclusion are learned in everyday school life. International evidence shows that bullying occurs across education systems and takes verbal, relational,

physical, and digital forms. UNESCO's global synthesis reports that school violence and bullying remain widespread and are shaped by gender, disability, poverty, ethnicity, migration status, and school climate (UNESCO, 2019). OECD's PISA 2018 report similarly found that 23% of students across OECD countries reported being bullied at least a few times a month, while several participating countries, including Indonesia, reported rates above 40% (OECD, 2019). Comparable patterns emerge in urban-school studies that document the persistence of bullying across cultures and grade levels (Atkins et al., 2020). These figures position bullying not as an isolated behavioural problem but as a social and pedagogical issue that must be understood across contexts.

The state of the art also shows that bullying is being reconfigured by digital environments. In Europe and North America, intervention research has increasingly examined cyberbullying, bystander behaviour, digital citizenship, and school-based prevention programmes (Álvarez-García et al., 2021; Polanin et al., 2022). Recent reviews further indicate that digital technology use shapes children's empathy and attention capacity, with implications for how they regulate moral feelings towards peers (Flecha et al., 2020). In the Asia-Pacific region, cyberbullying intervention research has developed more slowly and remains uneven in terms of stakeholder involvement, delivery mode, and long-term evaluation (Kamaruddin et al., 2023). Studies in primary education have begun to show that cyberbullying-related roles can appear from the first years of children's contact with digital technologies, yet many interventions still focus more on risk reduction than on the moral meanings children attach to imitation, joking, peer pressure, and online visibility (Chicote-Beato et al., 2024). Cyberbullying has also been linked to lower resilience and weaker emotion regulation in early adolescence (Gianesini & Brighi, 2015), and to social-media exposure that intensifies online victimisation among Indonesian students (Utami & Baiti, 2018). Across continents, therefore, the problem is not merely that children use digital technologies, but that digital cultures offer symbolic models of aggression, humour, status, and recognition that may be normalised before adults understand their social effects.

Indonesia provides a particularly important context for examining this problem. PISA 2018 placed Indonesia among the countries where more than 40% of students reported being bullied at least a few times a month (OECD, 2019). National monitoring by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission has shown that complaints concerning children as victims of physical violence dominated reported cases in recent years (Dihni, 2022), while the Yogyakarta regional planning body has tracked persistent violence against women and children across districts (Bappeda D.I. Yogyakarta, 2022). Media coverage has likewise highlighted that university observers consider social media a trigger for bullying in school environments (Harususilo, 2020). Previous research in Yogyakarta has identified verbal, physical, relational, and cyber forms of bullying, including teasing, pushing, hitting, threatening, exclusion, and online harassment (Dardiri et al., 2020; Febiyanto & Khodijah, 2022; Muhopilah et al., 2021; Nurlia & Suardiman, 2020; Pratiwi, 2016). Local studies have also linked bullying with depression, weak peer relations, inadequate empathy, retaliatory responses, and the influence of family and school environments (Ballerina & Saloka Immanuel, 2019; Marela et al., 2017; Rahayu & Permana, 2019; Waliyanti & Kamilah, 2019), and have shown the heightened risk of anxiety and disrupted social interaction among Yogyakarta secondary students (Privetera et al., 2020). Sociological readings further underline that bullying in Indonesian schools must be read through multiple perspectives, not only as individual misconduct (Efianingrum, 2018). At the elementary level, similar dynamics have been described (Saptono, 2022), and family involvement has been repeatedly identified as an important condition for children's emotional growth (AL Zbon & Smadi, 2017). These studies are valuable, yet many of them remain focused on prevalence, risk factors, or older students. Less attention has been given to how bullying is interpreted by adults who stand closest to elementary students and who must respond to children's behaviour in the ordinary spaces of family and school life.

The digital dimension makes this gap more urgent. Social media and online games do not simply transmit content; they circulate practices, gestures, speech styles, and symbolic rewards. Children may learn not only what is funny or popular, but also how to humiliate, provoke, or display dominance through formats that appear

playful. Such imitative learning is a deep feature of childhood socialisation: humans acquire norms and behaviours by copying culturally salient models (Tomasello, 2016), which means that aggressive or humiliating online formats can be reproduced before children grasp their meaning. Critical sociology of media reminds us that these flows operate within larger structures of cultural production and consumption, not in a neutral technical space (Atmadja & Ariyani, 2018). Local studies in Indonesian junior high schools indicate that such mediated practices are by no means new; what changes is the speed and intensity of their circulation (Andrieam & Yati, 2018). This is important in Education 4.0 discussions because intelligent learning ecosystems cannot be reduced to platforms, devices, or adaptive technologies. They also require ethical governance, digital citizenship, and pedagogical mediation. Jordan and Natarajan (2024) argue that children's media policy has moved from television to social media and now toward ambient artificial intelligence, indicating that media environments increasingly operate around children in persistent and less visible ways. For elementary education, this means that the digital field has become part of children's moral ecology.

This study uses Tri Sentra Pendidikan as a cultural framework and Bourdieu's sociology as an analytic lens. Tri Sentra Pendidikan, associated with Ki Hadjar Dewantara, understands education as a shared responsibility among family, school, and society (Dewantara, 2013). Our previous work has shown how structural-functional roles of family-school-society shape character education in religious-and-cultural school contexts in Yogyakarta (Amaruddin et al., 2022). In the present article, "society" is read through the contemporary presence of digital media, including social media, online games, and viral online content. Bourdieu's concepts help clarify how this triadic relation works. Habitus refers to durable dispositions learned through repeated experience; field refers to the structured arena in which actors struggle over legitimacy and recognition; capital refers to social, cultural, economic, and symbolic resources; and symbolic power refers to forms of domination that are accepted as natural or ordinary (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The Indonesian sociologist Martono (2012) has shown how Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence in particular is productive for interpreting school-based forms of domination in our context. These concepts were not used as abstract decoration. They guided the formulation of interview domains, the coding of meaning units, and the interpretation of how adults understood bullying as a practice shaped by family discipline, school authority, peer status, and digital imitation.

The research gap addressed in this article is therefore threefold. First, previous Indonesian studies have documented bullying and cyberbullying but have not sufficiently explained how family, school, and digital media are interpreted as intersecting fields in the everyday life of elementary students. Recent classroom climate research in international settings underlines that this intersection matters substantially for whether bullying takes root or is interrupted (Dietrich & Cohen, 2021). Second, international intervention studies have produced important evidence on prevention programmes, but they often leave less space for phenomenological meanings of children's silence, imitation, retaliation, joking, or fear; recent phenomenological framings of how bullying is recalled and reinterpreted by participants illustrate the value of such readings (Stark et al., 2022). Third, gender and bystander perspectives are increasingly important in global bullying research (Useche et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022), but they are still underdeveloped in qualitative studies that examine adult meaning-making in Indonesian elementary education. Based on this gap, the objective of this study is to explore how parents, teachers, and principals interpret the family, school, and digital-media processes through which bullying is learned, handled, normalised, and resisted among elementary school students in Yogyakarta.

The central research question is: How do parents, teachers, and principals interpret the roles of family, school, and digital media in shaping bullying practices among elementary school students? This question is elaborated into four sub-questions: (1) What causes of bullying are identified by participants? (2) How do families and schools respond to students as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses? (3) How is digital culture interpreted as influencing bullying-related behaviour? (4) What intervention strategies can be inferred from the participants' accounts for basic education in the digital age?

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenology was chosen because the study did not aim to measure the prevalence of bullying, but to understand how adults who live close to children make sense of bullying, digital imitation, moral guidance, and school response. Following Husserlian phenomenological logic, the analysis began by suspending taken-for-granted assumptions about bullying as merely individual misconduct, then moved toward the meanings expressed in participants' narratives through reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Bourdieu's framework was used after this initial phenomenological reading to interpret how the meanings were embedded in social fields, unequal resources, and symbolic power relations.

Setting and Participants

The study involved 21 adult participants: nine parents, nine teachers, and three principals from three purposively selected elementary schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. **Table 1** summarises the role-based profile of these participants and the three school contexts. The schools were selected because they represent different educational traditions and social contexts within the same regional setting. The sample was not designed for statistical representativeness but for interpretive depth across the family-school-media nexus. The article uses role-based anonymisation in line with the original dissertation's pseudonym scheme to protect participants. Detailed demographic variables such as participants' age, gender, occupation outside school, and number of children were not systematically tabulated in the manuscript dataset and are therefore not reported here.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Data collection was conducted during the fieldwork period in Yogyakarta in 2024. Interviews were conducted by the research team in private schools or meeting spaces agreed upon by participants. Each participant received information about the study aim, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, and the use of anonymised excerpts. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and checked for accuracy.

Table 1. Role-Based Profile of Participants and School Contexts

School code	School context used for sampling	Parents	Teachers	Principals/administrators	Total	Main perspective represented
TMNJ	Elementary school with a distinct local educational tradition and socially mixed student background	3	3	1	7	Family discipline, teacher mediation, institutional supervision
NUS	Community-based elementary school with religious-cultural orientation and heterogeneous family backgrounds	3	3	1	7	Moral guidance, student vulnerability, school-family communication
TMNS	Urban elementary school context with exposure to digital popular culture and varied peer relations	3	3	1	7	Digital imitation, roasting, monitoring, classroom response

The interview guide consisted of five core questions supported by follow-up probes. Its qualitative validity was strengthened through alignment between research questions, interview domains, and the theoretical framework. **Table 2** makes this alignment explicit by showing the number, focus, and conceptual basis of the questions.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted manually in five steps. First, the researchers used bracketing memos to identify prior assumptions about bullying, digital media, and school discipline. Second, transcripts were read repeatedly to identify significant statements and meaning units. Third, these meaning units were clustered into descriptive themes. Fourth, the descriptive themes were interpreted through Bourdieu's concepts: family, school, and digital media were treated as overlapping fields; repeated dispositions such as retaliation, imitation, fear, and silence were interpreted as habitus; parental attention, teacher authority, peer belonging, and digital recognition were read as forms of capital; and normalised joking, exclusion, and humiliation were interpreted as possible forms of symbolic violence. Fifth, the themes were synthesised across participant groups to identify convergences and tensions. **Table 3** shows how Bourdieu's framework was used in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, linking participants' meaning units with phenomenological meanings and theory-informed interpretation.

Table 2. Alignment of Research Questions, Interview Domains, and Analytic Concepts

Research focus	Core interview question	Follow-up probes	Bourdieu-informed analytic concept
Forms of bullying	What types of bullying have you observed or encountered in your environment?	Physical, verbal, relational, online, joking, exclusion	Field, symbolic power
Adult response	How did you or the institution respond to bullying incidents?	Reporting, mediation, punishment, dialogue, parent-school communication	Capital, institutional authority
Perceived causes	What do you perceive as the main causes of bullying among students?	Family stress, peer pressure, digital exposure, emotional regulation	Habitus, social capital
Digital influence	How has social media or digital content influenced students' behaviour related to bullying?	Online games, viral jokes, roasting, imitation, algorithmic repetition	Digital field, symbolic models
Meaning-making	How do you think students make sense of the bullying they experience or witness?	Fear, silence, retaliation, humour, shame, resistance, reporting	Symbolic violence, recognition

Table 3. Coding Matrix Linking Data, Phenomenological Meaning, and Bourdieu's Concepts

Participant meaning unit	Descriptive code	Phenomenological meaning	Bourdieu-informed interpretation
Family dissatisfaction is taken out on peers at school	Domestic pressure	Children carry emotional burdens from home into peer interaction	Family field contributes to habitus formation
Children imitate TikTok and game content with friends	Digital imitation	Online content becomes a behavioural script	Digital media functions as a symbolic field
Bullying persists in spaces teachers cannot supervise	Institutional limit	School authority is fragmented by time, space, and home context	School field competes with family and digital fields
Toxic online speech is copied as ordinary fun	Humour as aggression	Humiliation can be normalised as entertainment	Symbolic violence operates through playful recognition

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Credibility was pursued through triangulation of participant roles, namely parents, teachers, and principals, and through comparison across the three schools. Dependability was supported by coding memos, a thematic matrix, and an audit trail documenting how initial meaning units were reduced into themes. Confirmability was strengthened through peer debriefing within the research team and reflexive notes that recorded how interpretations changed during analysis. Member-checking was conducted informally through follow-up clarification with selected participants when meanings were unclear. Ethical procedures included informed consent, anonymisation, voluntary participation, and careful removal of identifying information from quotations.

RESULTS

The results are organised around the subthemes summarised in **Table 4**: family-related stress, digital imitation, mediation and moral restoration, tracing roots, protective retaliation and empathy, early warning signs, and roasting and online trends. Each subtheme is presented below with participant quotations and interpretive analysis. All quotations are drawn from the verbatim interview transcripts and are reported with the participants' anonymised role-based codes.

Family-related Stress

The first subtheme in **Table 4** concerns family-related stress. Participants did not describe bullying only as a visible school incident; they repeatedly connected it with emotional experiences that children bring from home into peer interaction. One mother of a sixth-grader explained how unresolved dissatisfaction at home can be displaced onto peers at school:

> *"For me, it starts from the family first. If there is dissatisfaction inside the family and the child cannot refuse or resist it, because it is taboo, not allowed, or simply uncomfortable, the child becomes afraid, and in the end takes it out on friends at school who can be bullied." (DWH, Parent of a Grade 6 student, TMNJ)*

This excerpt indicates that domestic experience may become part of children's relational disposition. The family field shapes habits of speaking, reacting, defending, and releasing anger. In Bourdieu's terms, these repeated experiences contribute to the formation of habitus, not as a fixed personality, but as an embodied tendency that can later appear in the school field. Comparable readings from international research on family socialisation underline that what is learned in everyday family interaction extends into peer relations and identity work outside the home (Vanderstraeten, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). The same parent added that a child who absorbs this pressure may become either a perpetrator or, alternatively, a withdrawn and low-confidence target:

> *"On one side, the child becomes a perpetrator, releasing the dissatisfaction from home onto others; on the other side, the child who is unhappy at home becomes low in self-esteem and is at risk of becoming a victim at school."(DWH, Parent of a Grade 6 student, TMNJ)*

Several participants, therefore, interpreted bullying as an event whose roots may lie before the school incident itself. The act seen by teachers may be the visible end of a longer emotional chain. This reading aligns with sociological accounts of bullying that emphasise its multilayered character rather than a single point of cause (Efianingrum, 2018), and with the long-standing argument that the family is a primary site of children's emotional growth (AL Zbon & Smadi, 2017).

Table 4. Themes, Subthemes, Evidence, and Interpretation

Theme	Subtheme	Participant evidence (selected)	Interpretive meaning
Causes of bullying	Family-related stress	"*If there is dissatisfaction inside the family... the child takes it out on friends at school*." (DWH, Parent, Grade 6, TMNJ)	Domestic pressure becomes part of children's relational disposition
Causes of bullying	Digital imitation	"*Small children... copy those movements because of TikTok. The visual really sticks with them*." (LH, Grade 4 Teacher, TMNJ)	Digital content provides behavioural scripts outside adult mediation
Handling bullying	Mediation and moral restoration	"*If we need to mediate with the parents, we will share it with them... the child is handled with student affairs accompanying us*." (DWK, Grade 5 Teacher, NUS)	Teachers interpret conflict and involve families before relying on punishment
Handling bullying	Tracing roots	"*I look for the root of the problem... who did it first, and the reason." (ADS, Grade 5 Teacher, NUS); "Outside school we cannot reach them*." (JKI, Principal, NUS)	Institutional response seeks causes rather than only visible acts
Evaluation	Protective retaliation and empathy	"*If my child becomes a victim, I settle it that very day... I ask what really happened first." (DWW, Parent, Grade 5, NUS); "I prefer that he resolve it himself... I give input*." (GLN, Parent, Grade 4, TMNJ)	Parents negotiate between protection, restraint, and resolving conflict
Evaluation	Early warning signs	"*I know the victim because the child is low in confidence... and from drawings of violence, again and again*." (ADS, Grade 5 Teacher, NUS)	Teachers read vulnerability through affective and expressive signs
Digital era	Roasting and online trends	"*It is picked up from TikTok... someone speaks harshly, so they all imitate it*." (KRN, Grade 5 student)	Ridicule is normalised as entertainment and reproduced in peer relations

Digital Imitation

The second subtheme is digital imitation. Participants described gadgets, games, and social media as sources of gestures, words, and conflict styles that children may carry into face-to-face relationships. A fourth-grade teacher described how strongly visual content from TikTok is reproduced by young children:

> *"I feel very concerned seeing the children's condition. Small children like to dance, and they copy those movements because of TikTok. There is even a fifth-grader who is clever at directing his friends to dance, simply because of what he saw there. The visual really sticks with them." (LH, Grade 4 Teacher, TMNJ)*

A student in the same setting confirmed that imitation moves easily from screen to body, including physical fighting styles taken from animation:

> *"The skills and the powers... about hitting and winning. Yes, I once hit for real. It was from the anime One Piece. We thought it was just play, he hit back, but not really, like playing." (ABY, Grade 4 student, TMNJ)*

These statements show that the concern was not technology in itself, but the weak mediation of digital content. Digital material becomes meaningful when it is repeated, laughed at, admired, or rewarded by peers. The digital field, therefore, provides symbolic scripts: how to mock, how to appear brave, how to be seen as funny, or how to gain recognition. This is consistent with developmental accounts of imitation as a core mechanism of

cultural learning in childhood (Tomasello, 2016). Empirical work has shown that exposure to visually risky or dangerous information can directly influence children's tendency to copy what they see (Zhao & Sang, 2020), and a wider body of brain-and-behaviour evidence cautions that intensive digital technology use during childhood interacts with attention, mood, and impulse control (Small et al., 2020). Indonesian studies of adolescent social-media use have reported similar dynamics, with cyberbullying behaviours being shaped by what is normalised in popular feeds (Utami & Baiti, 2018). The subtheme of digital imitation, therefore, reflects a movement from screen to peer culture, in which children may not distinguish clearly between playful digital performance and harmful social action, especially when adult guidance arrives after imitation has already become part of daily interaction.

Mediation and Moral Restoration

The third subtheme is mediation and moral restoration. Teachers did not present themselves merely as punishers of students. Their accounts showed an attempt to stop conflict, involve families when needed, and rebuild damaged peer relationships through school procedures. One teacher described a graduated response that moves from school handling toward parental involvement:

> *"Because there is a victim and a perpetrator, it is processed according to school rules; I report it to student affairs. If we need to mediate with the parents, we will share it with them, give advice for the time being, and if it continues, the child is called in and the problem is handled with student affairs accompanying us." (DWK, Grade 5 Teacher, NUS)*

This response places intervention between discipline and restoration. The teacher does not aim only to identify a guilty child; the goal is also to return the peer relation to a more ordinary and safe condition, drawing in the family when the school's own measures are insufficient. In phenomenological terms, the incident has to be understood from the meanings carried by the students: anger, embarrassment, retaliation, fear, or an attempt to belong. Mediation becomes a moral practice because it asks what happened, why it happened, and how the relationship can be repaired. International evidence on classroom bullying climates suggests that this restorative orientation is more effective when it is supported by a wider classroom culture of relational care, not only by ad-hoc teacher response (Dietrich & Cohen, 2021).

Tracing Roots

The fourth subtheme, tracing roots, appeared strongly when participants insisted that visible incidents should not be treated as isolated acts detached from family, peer, and digital contexts. One teacher described searching for the origin of a conflict before deciding on any sanction:

> *"I look for the root of the problem: what it is, why the bullying happened, who did it first, and the reason. After I find the root, I give direction and guidance about the impact of bullying and about the religious prohibition against it, and only then a sanction." (ADS, Grade 5 Teacher, NUS)*

A principal pointed to the institutional limit of school supervision, noting that bullying tends to grow in the gaps of space and time that adults cannot watch:

> *"At school, we carry out full supervision at break time, arrival, and departure, because bullying of any kind will still arise if the child is not accompanied. Outside school, however, we cannot reach them; usually, we bring both sides together and dig into the problem first." (JKI, Principal, NUS)*

These quotations show why the school field cannot work alone. The school has rules, teachers, and routines, but children's dispositions are also formed outside of classroom time. Tracing roots means connecting what appears at school with experiences in family life, peer recognition, and digital consumption. It also prevents a narrow response in which a child is labelled only as "victim" or "perpetrator" without understanding the

conditions that make the behaviour possible. Comparative studies of family-school-community relations confirm that such root-tracing depends on shared institutional vocabularies between parents and teachers (Hämäläinen & Wang, 2024; Lemessa et al., 2023).

Protective Retaliation and Empathy

The fifth subtheme concerns the tension between protective retaliation and empathy. Parents did not offer a single moral language. Some responses were shaped by the wish to protect children from becoming passive, repeated targets; others emphasised restraint and resolving conflict without confrontation. One parent described handling victimisation promptly while still investigating what actually happened:

> *"If my child becomes a victim, I settle it that very day. I pick him up, he tells me, and I take him to the principal's office and ask what really happened first; only after I know do I resolve it." (DWW, Parent of a Grade 5 student, NUS)*

Another parent described a more cautious, non-interventionist stance, preferring to let the child resolve peer conflict but offering moral guidance rather than direct confrontation:

> *"If he has a conflict with a friend, I prefer that he can resolve it himself; I will not interfere in his business with his friend. At most, as a parent, I give input that he should behave like this, or that he does not have to behave like that." (GLN, Parent of a Grade 4 student, TMNJ)*

In one urban-school family, the moral message leaned explicitly toward non-violence: the parents reported teaching their child not to answer aggression with aggression, but to ask the other child what had gone wrong, on the principle that hostility softens when it is met with a human response. Together, these accounts reveal that families negotiate a difficult moral border. They want children to be safe and not endlessly targeted, but they also worry that retaliation may reproduce the same violence. This subtheme is important because bullying intervention at the elementary level is not only a matter of school procedure. It also depends on the moral vocabulary children hear at home: whether they are told to fight back, report, forgive, endure, or care for others. Recent typologies of bully-victim experience indicate that the line between defender, bystander, victim, and perpetrator is often blurred in everyday peer interactions (Potard et al., 2022), and meta-analytic evidence shows that anti-bullying programmes with an explicit parent component yield stronger effects than school-only models (Huang et al., 2019).

Early Warning Signs

The sixth subtheme is early warning signs. Teachers interpreted bullying not only through direct reports but also through subtle changes in students' confidence, sociability, and classroom expression. One teacher explained how victimisation becomes legible through withdrawal and even through what children draw:

> *"I usually know the victim because the child is low in confidence, stays more on their own, and does not want to gather with friends, especially the majority. I also know from drawings: in every drawing lesson there are children who repeatedly draw violence, one child fighting another, with the weapon, again and again, and never anything else." (ADS, Grade 5 Teacher, NUS)*

These statements suggest that evaluation is not limited to recording incidents after they occur. It includes the careful reading of subtle signs: withdrawal, silence, loss of confidence, emotional instability, and changes in how students represent themselves through speech, writing, or drawing. In this subtheme, teachers' sensitivity functions as cultural and institutional capital. It allows the school to notice vulnerability before it becomes a larger crisis. Phenomenological framings of bullying memory and meaning further suggest that early warning signs are often legible to attentive adults but missed by routinised disciplinary procedures (Stark et al., 2022).

Roasting and Online Trends

The seventh subtheme concerns roasting and online trends—online humour that ridicules or insults someone for entertainment, often presented as playful speech. A student described how toxic talk from games and social media is copied among peers:

> *"It is picked up from TikTok, because now even adults like to say rude words, and if you do not follow your friends... In Free Fire you can play online together and there is voice chat, and sometimes someone speaks harshly, so they all imitate it." (KRN, Grade 5 student, TMNS school context)*

A principal confirmed that imitation of viral content shows up at school in both verbal and physical forms, with playful dance trends spilling into the classroom:

> *"It can be both. What is done most often at school is verbal. As for the physical, the trending content like the TikTok dances does get practised at school." (SNW, Principal, in an urban school context)*

This subtheme helps explain why symbolic violence is difficult to identify. When humiliation is framed as humour, the injured child may be accused of being too sensitive, while the audience's laughter becomes a form of approval. The harm is therefore not always produced by an openly aggressive act; it may be produced by a joke that the peer group accepts as normal. From a Bourdieusian perspective, roasting becomes symbolic power when it decides who may laugh, who becomes the object of laughter, and whose discomfort is ignored (Martono, 2012). Public commentary has framed social media as a structural trigger for bullying among school-age children (Harususilo, 2020), and resilience research suggests that children's capacity to absorb such online ridicule is uneven, depending on emotion regulation and supportive peer ties (Gianesini & Brighi, 2015).

Gender and Student-Witness Perspectives

A final analytic note concerns gender and student-witness perspectives. Because this article reports the adult interview corpus, it cannot support a robust statistical comparison between boys and girls; it would be methodologically inappropriate to claim such differences from these accounts. The limitation is meaningful: the results capture adult interpretations of bullying, but they foreground adult meaning-making rather than the direct, systematically sampled voices of student witnesses. Future research should therefore combine phenomenological interviews with a validated student-bystander instrument, such as an adapted Student Bystander Behaviour Scale, to examine defending, passive bystanding, and pro-bullying responses among elementary students (Álvarez-García et al., 2021). International work on adolescent bullying further shows that gender shapes participation patterns (Useche et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022); however, our adult-focused design intentionally centres family-school-media interpretation rather than student behavioural counts.

Across all subthemes, the results show that bullying is shaped through repeated movement among family, school, and digital media. Family-related stress, digital imitation, school mediation, root tracing, protective retaliation, early warning signs, and roasting are not separate fragments. They are connected in the everyday moral ecology of elementary education. **Figure 1** is based on the main findings: family stress, school mediation, digital imitation, and the central position of student behaviour. It places the student and their possible roles—bullying, defending, silence, reporting, and imitation—at the centre of the analysis.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore how parents, teachers, and principals interpret the family, school, and digital-media processes through which bullying is learned, handled, normalised, and resisted among

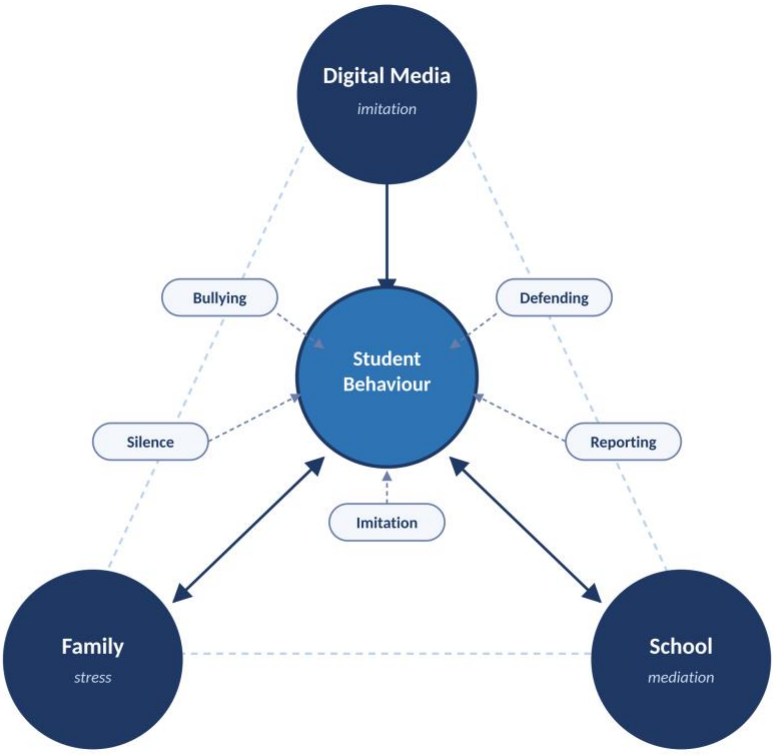

Figure 1. Revised Triadic Model of Family, School, Digital Media, and Student Behaviour (Source: Developed by the authors)

elementary school students in Yogyakarta. The findings answer the research question by showing that bullying in the digital age is not interpreted by participants as a single act or isolated misconduct. It is understood as a relational practice produced at the intersection of domestic dispositions, school mediation, peer recognition, and digital imitation.

First, the findings extend previous studies that have documented prevalence, forms, and impacts of bullying in Indonesia and other countries. Existing studies have shown that bullying can take physical, verbal, relational, and cyber forms, and that it is associated with depression, weak peer belonging, and social vulnerability (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Marela et al., 2017; Markkanen et al., 2021; Privetera et al., 2020; Saptono, 2022). This study adds a phenomenological contribution by showing how adults interpret the movement of bullying across settings. Family stress becomes visible at school; school conflict returns to family discussion; digital content enters peer interaction through jokes, games, and imitated expressions. The novelty is not the claim that family and school matter, but the demonstration that family, school, and digital media operate as overlapping fields of moral formation. Recent comparative work has likewise emphasised that the boundary between family and school is increasingly porous in today's mediated environments (Vanderstraeten, 2023; Hämäläinen & Wang, 2024), and family socialisation studies show how the home continues to function as a primary site of moral framing for peer relations (Wang et al., 2023).

Second, Bourdieu's framework helps explain why bullying can be normalised even when adults condemn it. The family field contributes dispositions of discipline, affection, supervision, or emotional neglect. The school field provides formal rules, mediation, and moral language. The digital field circulates symbolic rewards such as attention, laughter, visibility, and peer status. Children's habitus is formed through repeated movement across these fields, consistent with developmental evidence that imitation is a fundamental channel of

cultural learning (Tomasello, 2016). When humiliation is renamed as joking or "roasting," symbolic violence becomes difficult to identify because it appears ordinary, playful, or culturally acceptable. In this analysis, habitus, field, capital, and symbolic violence interpret the participants' accounts of domestic pressure, digital imitation, school limits, and peer recognition; Martono's (2012) Indonesian reading of Bourdieu underscores how symbolic violence operates particularly through forms of recognition that the dominated themselves accept as legitimate.

Third, the findings contribute to Education 4.0 discussions. The problem revealed by participants is not simply the presence of technology in children's lives. It is the unequal mediation of technology. Digital media can become a competing authority when children believe that viral content, game logic, or online humour is more legitimate than parental advice or teacher guidance. This resonates with broader debates on children's media policy, digital citizenship, and cyberbullying prevention (Chicote-Beato et al., 2024; Jordan & Natarajan, 2024; Polanin et al., 2022). Neuro-developmental and psychosocial research adds that this technological saturation may also intersect with attention and emotional regulation in ways that condition how children imitate aggressive content (Small et al., 2020; Zhao & Sang, 2020). Therefore, intelligent learning ecosystems must be ethically intelligent as well. They must help children recognise when humour becomes humiliation, when imitation becomes harm, and when silence strengthens the aggressor. Phenomenological accounts that focus on how past bullying is later remembered and reframed support the importance of teaching children, parents, and teachers to interpret such moments rather than merely report them (Stark et al., 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, this study offers two types of recommendations: practical recommendations for basic education and recommendations for future studies. Practically, schools should develop a family-school digital mediation protocol that asks parents and teachers to discuss children's online games, social media content, and imitation practices regularly, not only after incidents occur. Teachers also need professional development in identifying symbolic violence, especially when bullying is disguised as jokes, nicknames, challenges, memes, or roasting. Elementary schools should create safe reporting and bystander-support mechanisms so that witnesses are not left to choose between silence and retaliation; the international literature on peer-support models, such as the buddy approach, indicates that structured bystander programmes can reduce school bullying when they are integrated into routine school practice (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019). Anti-bullying initiatives that include a meaningful parent component have also shown stronger effects than school-only models (Huang et al., 2019). Digital literacy should be integrated with character education, not as a technical skill alone, but as ethical interpretation: children should learn to ask whether content humiliates, excludes, threatens, or dehumanises others before they imitate it.

For future studies, three directions are particularly important. First, researchers should include student observers or witnesses, because bystanders may reinforce, interrupt, record, laugh at, or silently normalise bullying. A mixed-method design could combine adult interviews, student interviews, and a validated bystander questionnaire to examine why students defend, remain silent, laugh, record, or report when bullying occurs. Second, future research should use gender-sensitive designs to examine whether boys and girls differ in the forms, motivations, and social meanings of bullying involvement (Useche et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022). Third, longitudinal studies are needed to trace how digital habitus develops over time as children move between family rules, school norms, peer culture, and algorithmic media environments.

These recommendations clarify the practical contribution of the study. Anti-bullying policy should not be limited to discipline after a case appears. It should build shared routines across home and school, involve students as witnesses and defenders, and address the digital forms of symbolic power that now shape children's everyday interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that bullying among elementary school students in the digital age is shaped by the interaction of family, school, and digital media. Parents, teachers, and principals interpreted bullying as a practice that may begin from domestic stress, become visible through peer conflict at school, and be intensified by digital content that children imitate without sufficient mediation. The research question is therefore answered as follows: family provides early dispositions, school provides moral and institutional mediation, and digital media provides symbolic models of humour, aggression, status, and recognition.

The study contributes to existing research in three ways. Empirically, it offers qualitative evidence from Indonesian elementary education, a context less frequently examined than adolescent bullying. Theoretically, it integrates Tri Sentra Pendidikan with Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, capital, and symbolic power to explain how bullying is normalised across family, school, and digital media. Practically, it proposes that Education 4.0 should include ethical digital mediation, family-school communication, teacher training on symbolic violence, and student-witness support mechanisms.

The study has limitations. It reports the adult interview corpus and did not include systematically sampled questionnaires from student observers or student-level quantitative data, and therefore cannot claim statistical gender differences. The reported sample was limited to three schools in Yogyakarta, so the findings should be read as contextual and interpretive rather than generalisable. Future studies should include student witnesses, use gender-sensitive designs, combine qualitative interviews with validated bystander questionnaires, and examine how digital habitus changes over time through longitudinal research. In practical terms, schools should begin by treating digital literacy, empathy, and anti-bullying intervention as a shared responsibility among family, school, and the wider digital environment.

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