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ARTICLE



Communicating intimate partner violence on social media: of hidden identities in storytelling and confessions

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been on the increase at an alarming rate across the globe. IPV is being experienced by both parties involved. Factors behind the increase are highly contested. However, the dearth of the support fabric in the family set up has been touted as one of the reasons why disgruntled partners and/or victims seek solace in the social media spaces for sympathy, empathy and advice. In hidden identities, partners divulge their predicament to the social media family with the hope to be assisted. However, the narratives have been understudied and theorized from a discourse-linguistic perspective. Deploying strands from the Appraisal Theory and Narrative Paradigm Approach, this netnographic study investigates the intimate partner violence reports on Facebook social group, Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions). The study displays the displacement of the *sekuru* (grandfather), *ambuya* (grandmother) and *tete* (aunt) with social media friend advisors. In hidden identities, the narrative voice confesses to a plethora of factors bedevilling partners in intimate relationships. The indispensable 'other' in intimate partners' lives has successfully been adapted in the social media public sphere and to people's contemporary existence.

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Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also known as Gender-based violence (GBV), is on the increase and becoming a common phenomenon not only in Zimbabwe but the world over. This IPV is being realized in both married and non-married partners. It is neither one-directional nor bi-directional. Social Networking Sites (SNS) seem to have offered the abused an emotional haven to pour out their grief, in hidden identities, in anticipation of getting help from fellow social media users. However, factors behind the rapid increase in this phenomenon, why they divulge their secrecy on social media and how they do it are highly contested. The paper takes an interpersonal appraisal (Martin & White, 2005) and narrative paradigm approach (Fisher, 1985, p. 47) to the analysis of the IPV narratives on Facebook's Zimbabwean Deep Secretes (Confessions) social media page. The paper

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argues that the Facebook page is a digital sphere affording the narrative voice, which is usually the aggrieved part, the communicative space to appraise their predicament and grief in hidden identities in search of advice from fellow social media users. Thus, this paper greatly contributes to the discourse-linguistic understanding of language used in narrative story-telling in conflict resolution and how the roles of grandfather (sekuru), grandmother (ambuya) or aunt (tete) have evolved in the social media communicative space. The paper also sheds light on factors behind these intimate partner violence incidences as narrated by the 'aggrieved' equipping policy makers and human rights organisations with a solid basis for making decisions on conflict management especially related to intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence

IPV is not a new phenomenon (Heisi et al., 2002; Muzavazi et al., 2022). It is a vicious ongoing cycle that seem to be on the rise and equally affecting both partners (Enakele, 2019) and going beyond nations, creed, economic strata or traditions. It is not a one-sided violence as some researchers have noted (Fidan & Bui, 2016). The nature of violence, as a phenomenon, manifests in different forms in societies (Andersson et al., 2007). Key forms of violence include physical, emotional and psychological though much emphasis has been placed on physical violence. In support of this position, Butler (2019) states that IPV is an act of physical savagery, psychological torture, sexual violation and domineering traits in an intimate relationship that results in bodily, emotional, or psychic injury. These forms of IPV have various corporeal and psycho-social implications that equally denigrate the abused's livelihood, health and emotional stability, and might possibly further endanger them to more abuse. The after effects of IPV may result in quite a number of untold and horrendous patterns of hostility and aggression with the abused being ostracized by the community and or members of their household. The risk of being abused again is amplified when one seeks protection, help, or access to justice. In the same manner, the UN Women (2020) states that IPV often occurs after lengthy periods of time of different kinds of repression, such as coercion, terrorisation and domineering such as restraints of the independence and autonomy, through blackmail, ostrasization from friends and family and enforcing boundaries to personal space.

Factors behind the causes of IPV are still debatable though some have been singled out pointing to issues like gender inequalities, substance misuse, low educational status and low socio-economic status among others (Shamu et al., 2011; Taillieu & Brownridge, 2010). Muzavazi et al. (2022, p. 4) state that 'gender; age; education; marital status; age at marriage; religion; employment status; the cultural belief that justifies the beating of a wife; access to media; alcohol drinking of the respondent; childhood experience of abuse; exposure to domestic violence; spouse controlling behaviour; and alcohol-drinking partner' are some of the factors. These factors are not universal nor are they applicable to all genders. However, the term IPV or GBV violence has been biased towards women and girls such that it has been equated to violence against women. Much publicity and stereotyping seemingly advocate for women as the most aggrieved and the majority of victims, but evidence has it that almost half, 40% of victims in Zimbabwe are men (Muzavazi et al., 2022). This seem to have been cemented by the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 which is presumed to be an act meant to protect women and girls from acts of

violence. Thus, it is the interest of this paper to assess the narratives submitted on Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions) Facebook page as the 'abused' pour out their grievances seeking help from the social media family. The paper makes an appraisal of the alleged factors in order to reach to the conclusions of what is driving IPV as confessed by social media users.

IPV is a social issue that is cross-cutting, negatively impacting both developed and developing nations. Mthembu et al. (2021, p. 2) state that IPV is 'any act of physical and sexual aggression or harm, sexual coercion, controlling behaviours, psychological/emotional abuse within an intimate relationship by a current or former partner/spouse.' It is within the broader discourse of gender-based violence (GBV). Thus, it has been touted as one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world, infringement of fundamental human freedoms and a fatal livelihood and security issue (UNDP www.unfpa.org/genderbasedviolence). Since time immemorial, IPV has been experienced in societies between or amongst partners and it is deeply rooted in gender inequality. In recognition of this problem, the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) has been in the forefront in championing the discourse and policies of zero tolerance to GBV. The campaign against GBV has also cascaded in the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Committee (SADC) where Zimbabwe is a member. The Zimbabwean parliament subscribe to and have passed policies to stamp out gender-based violence, but the phenomenon seems to be on the increase (Zimbabwe National Gender Based Strategy 2012–2015). Varied measures have been advanced and publicised in an effort to alleviate the problem. Campaign awareness programs on the radio and national television have also been made to no avail as the problem of IPV is on the rise (Mthembu et al., 2021). IPV is not one-sided, both genders experience it. As opposed to Mthembu et al. (2021) who only focused on adolescent girls and young women, this paper argues that IPV is widespread across sexes and genders. Furthermore, this study contends that narratives of the abused provides deep and rich data for a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Partner aggression is a common practice in Zimbabwe and the world over. Traditionally, in African societies, including Zimbabwe, ways to manage this violence has been through the involvement of *tete* (aunties), *sekuru* (grandfathers), uncles. The role of these members of the society was to maintain a strong social supporting fabric in crises like these. Partners were taken through some psycho-social support training and teachings at various forums. However, this does not imply that IPV was not there (Shamu et al., 2011). Violence was there but the advent of modernisation and/or globalisation has been touted as one of the causes for dearth of this social fabric that has the social support system for the family, society and the individual in need of help. The question that might be posed is that, isn't it that the violence is now only widely publicised? Though this is not the focus of the paper, the research appraises and evaluates social media reports submitted in an effort to discern the root causes and possible factors behind intimate partner violence.

Social media communications

The role of the media and particularly social media cannot be over-emphasised. We are in the digital phase and in each and every moment we are confronted with loads of information and possibilities. It is well documented that 'Social Networking Sites (SNS)

have broadened and widened communities, relationships and connections of users' (Jakaza, 2020, p. 1). These widened communities have not only done a blow to the traditional community fabric, but seem to have reinvented the roles and functions of the aunties, and uncles on social media. Instead of visiting biological aunties and uncles or having a chat online, 'new' aunties and uncles have been found on social media performing the roles and duties of 'biological' aunties and uncles. Thus, users with internet access are afforded an opportunity to share and exchange ideas, thoughts and 'grieving' with social media friends, people who might not be their relatives. Social media *sahwiras* (friends) seem to have taken over the role of advisor, and the shoulder to cry on. The rapid increase in online/social media usage and participation (Ntini & Mangeya, 2020) is evident with a number of 'social' groups sprouting though having different mandates and purposes. Social media affords its users minimal gate keeping in their online media platforms, and hence no discursive constraints though there are moderators and site administrators to oversee the online discourse. Thus, internet-based technologies have afforded participants with dialogic spaces to freely interact (Wegerif, 2011), giving unlimited access and unlimited opportunities (Campbell, 2013).

The instantaneous responses of individual opinions on a particular subject or topic shape and are also shaped by others. Varied topics of dialogic engagement are posted and deliberated on, among these topics are those to do with IPV. In these communications, people seek information from others, if they do not have information on a certain subject (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). However, the authenticity and validity of the information shared on the online spaces is a subject of debate. The 'Online spaces not only provide participants with anonymity but also with an opportunity to construct their own virtual identities' (Ntini & Mangeya, 2020, p. 13) or what Jakaza (2020) referred as obfuscation of identities. The pseudonyms are used to conceal the participants' identity. However, the good thing with the identities is that the users are enabled to actualise and freely share their psychological self and expressively contribute to the ongoing dialogue. Open and unconstrained debates, especially on social media, are poised to provide rich sources of data for the analysis of appraisal and narrative discourse.

Social media narratives on the Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions) Facebook page are in hidden identities. The page has administrators. Aggrieved parties send their stories to them and request the administrators to conceal their identities, which they do. The subject of identity and identity formation remains topical taking new shapes and forms, and always being defined and redefined but still slippery and confusing. As observed by Hall (2003, p. 222),

Rather than speaking of identity as a finished thing, we should speak of identification, and see it as an on-going process. Identity arises, not so much from the fullness of identity, which is already inside us as individuals, but from a lack of wholeness, which is 'filled' from outside us, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by others.

Identity is not a predetermined concept nor is it confined to certain parameters. What is of essence is that it is an evolving concept encompassing a variety of understandings. It is neither finished, stable nor mutable. In hidden identities, intimate partners who find themselves entangled in violent relationships narrate their pickle to fellow social media users expressing the affect, judging and appreciating the whole process. The gap being filled by this study is on how the abused appraise and evaluate their ordeal, sharing this

experience with a social media community and mostly in hidden identities. Thus, cause and experiences of IPV are not only presented but also appraised. Evoking the Appraisal theory and the Narrative Paradigm, the paper taps from the aggrieved as they pour out their affect, judgement and appreciation rhetorically aligning the readers to their positioning.

Methods

The paper takes a qualitative interpretative approach to the analysis of intimate partner violence narratives on social media. Quantifying discourse-linguistic analysis is problematic 'because there is no simple correspondence between individual words as there is 'no one-to-one correlation between form and function' (Hunston, 2007, p. 35). The qualitative paradigm has been optimised based on the understanding that 'it is often the case that discourse studies challenge corpus findings by showing that generalities about given words or phrases can be disproved by a more detailed study of individual examples' (Gozdz-Roszkowki & Hunston, 2015, p. 6).

In order to realise its objectives, the paper utilises the Appraisal- discourse analysis design. The design provides contemporary tools for an empirical study of texts evaluating how discourse-semantic texts are communicated (Jakaza, 2020). It is a qualitative design that augers well with the analytical approach taken in this study. Data for analysis was purposively sampled. The researcher purposively sampled narrative confessions on Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions) Facebook page based on whether the confessions have been made by a partner story-telling their ordeal of IPV. The page is managed by administrators. It is a page consisting men and women Zimbabwean participants who are scattered all over the globe. It is open for any Zimbabwean to join, though the administrators do some gate-keeping in authorising the whole process. Participants on this Facebook page join on their own capacity, having different intentions. However, the purpose and general rules of conduct for the page are well stated. Ethical considerations in the selection, presentation and analysis of IPV data extracted from the Facebook page have been considered. The contributions and screen-shots taken are on the digital public sphere. Only screen-shots of narratives in hidden identities have been selected. Discourse analysis informed the analysis as interest in this paper is to have a critical understanding of the nature and causes of IPV. Thus, a thematic approach has been taken in the analysis and presentation of findings. Themes emanating from data have been used to structure the presentation of findings.

Appraisal theory

The analysis of IPV narratives on social media is informed by the Appraisal Framework. The theory is an off-shoot from Halidayian SFL theory developing the interpersonal meta-function. In developing the interpersonal meta-function, the theory came up with three sub-systems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation (Martin & White, 2005). It argues that writers/speakers construe certain identities for themselves and others through dis/aligning processes, adopting certain stances towards both the material they present and those with which they communicate (Bednarek, 2006; Jakaza & Visser, 2016). Of the three sub-systems, this paper employs the attitudinal sub-system. Attitude includes values by which

speakers pass judgements [\pm judgment] and associate emotional/effectual [\pm affect] responses with participants and appreciate processes [\pm appreciation]. The research argues that confessors and social media community family express their emotions and give judgement on the parties involved in the act being narrated. Thus, social media confessors express their affect (emotions) and pass judgements on their presumed 'abusers'. Participants in the narratives also appreciate the whole process either negatively or positively. The research also understands that 'affect clusters or patterns in text'. Thus, what should be explicated is the nature of affect so that one will be able to see where it patterns in text (positive/negative, explicit or implicit). This position is supported by Martin and Rose (2003) who state that interpersonal meanings are often realised not just locally but tend to sprawl out and colour a passage of discourse forming a 'prosody' of attitude.

Narrative paradigm

The Narrative paradigm is a concept in communication theory that was developed by Walter Fisher. The concept was adopted from the oldest form of communication which is story telling. Fisher argues that all meaningful communication is in the form of story-telling. The narrative paradigm is "a philosophy of reason, value, and action" (Fisher, 1985, p. 47). In support of this, McClure (2009) posits that ideas are created and communicated through stories. Thus, meaningful communication is realized through reporting of events or storytelling. Fisher (1985) further posits that narratives are more persuasive than arguments. People's past experiences influence our need for communication and also base our behaviour. Thus, narrative paradigm is very significant in the analysis of the nature of human communication. The theory makes four assumptions;

- The logic of good reason also known as values do not need to be expressed in traditional argumentative structures.
- Reasoning may be discovered in symbolic action in form of metaphor and trope.
- Stories of history constitute good reasons (values) when they satisfy demand of probability and fidelity in movies, songs, poetry and novels.
- Ethics and politics are narratives built over time (Fisher, 1985).

Based on these assumptions, it can be noted that humans use stories and various media channels including social media to shape their own narratives. These stories are translations of experience into a narrative (Van Batenburg, 2018). This translation is often cosmetised in order for it to be selective, creating what is known as selective reality. This selective reality often sets agendas giving the audience what to think about and the need to pass on this reality onwards to others creating what is known as the two-step flow of information. Furthermore, the narrative paradigm values aesthetic criteria and common-sense interpretation arguing that we judge stories on our narrative rationality and how the story affects us. It also states that you do not need to be a scholar to communicate well and understand communication. The theory is an apt tool to engage IPV narratives submitted on Facebook social media page as narrators tell their stories re-incarnating their experiences. The submitted narratives are taken as meaningful

communications with the intent to persuade fellow social media members to align with the victim.

Off hidden identities in story telling

The paper appraises IPV narratives in hidden identities on social media. The analysis takes a thematic- discourse analytical approach that is also informed by the theoretical tools from the Appraisal theory and Narrative paradigm. Most of the confessions start with, *chitupa vigai* (hide my identity), *musandiburitsa* (don't remove me), *ndivigeiwo mune vekuziva* (hide me, they are people who know me) in identity concealment practices. These introductions, which the administrators of the page adhere to, give the narrator the latitude to express their feelings, give judgment and appreciate the whole process without fear of victimisation as they tell their story.

Spiritual predicament: untold voices

The human being is a spiritual-being. The Shona people believed, and still some do believe, in the dead communicating with the living on matters to do with their everyday practices, it is an African philosophy and epistemology (Mwandayi, 2011; Sande et al., 2023). This philosophy seems to be predominant in the narratives as victims in the IPV make implicit evaluations of the situation. In [Figure 1](#), the husband of the deceased wife

Admin post for me
mugrup.Usandiburitsi.Ndirimurume ane 46 years
ndakashaikirwa nemukadzi five years back ,Manje
akudzoka kwandiri daily achinditi nditore
Munin'ina wake.Chirikunetsa Munin'ina wacho
akaroorwa asi ndakamuudza iye akati kana naiye
anorota mukoma vachimuti siya marriage yauri ,
problem murume wamainini hasikuzvitambira
avekutomhanya mhanya kunovhara zvido zvemufi
kuvaporofita, akutofunga Kuti mweya yakaipa
instead yekuzadzisa shungu dzemufi . Mukadzi
arikuda kuuya zvole zvirongwa zvoripo Ini
namainini tiri kugaidwa nemufi zvino takutyira
Kuti bamunini vakaramba vakaomesa musoro
panogona kuita rimwe dambudziko hombe ,
mumwe akzofa nenharo handichaziva zvekuita
nekuti bamunini havasikuda kusunungura mainini
nekuvachenura



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Figure 1. Husband and the deceased wife.

narrates his predicament and communication with the departed wife. The writer invokes anxious feelings about what the husband of his wife's sister is doing. The married sister is judged as fair and just [+propriety] yet the brother-in-law is evaluated as immoral and unjust [–propriety]. The writer voice appeals for help from fellow SNS as he thinks that his right is being violated. The writer, the aggrieved husband of the deceased wife, narratively manoeuvres through the Shona traditional cultural perspective, especially the position that the voice of the dead should be listened to. However, the narrator forgets that it is the same culture that states that, *charehwa mutupo chaera* (if one is married no one should have a say on them apart from their husband). He wants the wife's sister to leave her family, husband and children, and be with him as it is the wish of the departed sister, his deceased wife.

Figure 2 is another narrative which is spiritually appraised. In a guise to assist a soul, a university girl student gave hand to a boy/man who was weak and lying on the ground vomiting blood. The narrator appraises the self as a prayerful, highly spiritual, and caring young lady. *Ndaibva kugomo kuma prayers zuva rovira ... ndainzwa kuda kuita prayer ndobva ndapinda mutoilet ndikanata ...* (I was coming from the mountain for a prayer during sunset ... I felt like I should make a prayer then I went into the toilet and I prayed ...). The gentlemen who was assisted is appraised as being also spiritual and belonging to the Ndebele tribe. The cat thaws and heads in the fridge negatively judges

Morning Rasta, ndodzidza paMSU ndiri musikana
ane 24years, nezuro ndaibva kugomo kuma
prayers zuvarovira, ndakaona mukomana anga
akarara paside peroad achirutsa
akangondinongedzera kwaanga aparker mot ...
muroad ndikaitora ndakamutakura ndaida
kuenda naye ku hospital but akaramba
akangondipa chicard chaive nehouse number
ndakadriver kusvika ndapawana pamba pach
ndakasvika paine mukomana anenge garden
tikabatsirana kumusimudza kumuisa mumba
mumba akatanga kugwesha kusvika anosvik
mubedroom make akaita dzinenge 15minute
arimo akazobuda akutofamba ave fit akapfek
chinhuhoo mumusoro chedehwe sechinopfekwa
nema Ndebele, akabata kagaba keleather kaive
kakareba muruko, apa hana yangu yaive
yakungorova, zvikanzi my sister siya watibikirawo
something waita hako nekundibetsera,
ndakazvishingisa kunovhura fridge kuti ndione
usavi ungabikike, mufridge maive nenyama
dzandakafunga kuti ndedzetsuro ndobva ndabika
but ndainzwa vhudzi kumira hana ichirova, so
ndainzwa kuda kuita prayer chaiko ndobva
ndapinda mutoilet ndakanamata veduwe
nechemumoyo ndirimo mutoilet ndichinamata
kudaro mu cardboard yaive mutoilet
makangovhurika chidoor mobva matanga
kudonha tumakumbo, tumisoro twekiti
tunotosvika kuma50, ndakangobuda kudzokera
ku Kitchen nyama iya yandaive ndaisa mupoto
ndatanga kunyatsoona kuti mabody parts ezvikiti
chete. mukomana uva wekurutsa akabva

Figure 2. Girl in need of help.

[–judgement] the gentlemen as someone who was involved in some shoddy deals. On arriving at the gentlemen’s house, the narrator discovered that she had put herself in a wrong partnership and she does not know what to do. The whole encounter and activities at this house are negatively appreciated [–appreciation] as uncalled for.

Violence against women: the epitome

IPV has exposed women and the girl child. However, the WHO, other human rights groups and Zimbabwe as a nation have made calls to end violence against women and girls (Muzavazi et al., 2022; Sultana, 2011). Violence against women has been castigated and a number of factors that put women in this precarious position have been noted (Fidan & Bui, 2016). A number of narratives submitted on the Facebook page, Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions), negatively appraise and castigates marriage institutions where there is IPV. Men who impregnate and leave/divorce women are appraised as *benzi* (fools) because they do not know the pleasures and goodies that comes with the marriage union. The writer voice explicitly negatively judges men who abuse women and who do not value and appreciate women.

Women are evaluated as loving *vane rudo* (have love), as organised and focused. In one narrative, the writer, utilising the speech act of giving and receiving, notes that *ndakamupa mari unotowona kuti irikushanda* (if I give her money you will see that it is being used wisely). However, in Figure 3 below, one of the administrators of the page advises men not to physically abuse women. They inserted an image of a battered woman. However, for ethical considerations, the image has not been placed in this paper. Violence in all its forms and shapes is discouraged, but the picture (removed) and caption show the prevalence of IPV. As opposed to the findings in other studies on GBV (Wekwete et al., 2014), the reasons why the woman was bashed are not given. However, in Figure 4, it is the women who feel abused by the man, her husband who keeps referring to the incident of violence when he fought and was physically hurt by another suitor. In as much as he won in taking the woman, the violent incident is unforgettable and is haunting him. Past experiences and relationships are appraised negatively as impacting current relationships and peace in marriages especially if partners do not want to forget and move on. Thus, IPV also stems from previous experiences and/or violence.



Figure 3. Bashed women.

admin usandiburitse. Murume wangu wandogara naye akakuvadzwa nemumwe wandaimbo danana kare vachirikundirwira ndisati ndaroorwa akarohwa nebhemba paside penzeve apa pak...
 Zi injury zvekutoti kutobvuma kuroorwa naye ndanga ndakutomunyara semunhu akakuvad...
 Ini. Tatove nevana 2 vanofarira kutamba vachi vanga rikumeso kwababa iye obva ati mabas...
 aamai venyu vaida kundiurayisa, zvinhu zvinoudzwa Vana here. Ndakamuti vanhu vakakubvunza unoti wakaita accident asi ndopaanenge achiwoomoka kuvanhu hanzi mukadzi Aida kundiuraisa nyenyaya dzechihure, husiri humbwende hwake Dai arimurume chaiye aifanirwa kuzvivhikirira and matauriro aanoita Zvinoita kunge by that time ndiye aive mukomana wega asi iye achaziva Kuti aive paqueue sevamwe. Zvino vedare munofunga Kuti zvinosvika kupi ne abuse yaarikundiitira iyoyo ,last month ndakazo bhohwekana atanga kuudza varume vainwa Doro makuvariro aakaita ndopandakazomuudza Kuti Dai akakupedzisa unekamwe kamunyabvurira kasina Basa ,ndakutonyara nhaimi ndakutogaya Kuti dai ndakaroorwa namutemi zvangu panekuroorwa neakatemiwa.

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Figure 4. Women at the centre of violence.

The woman, in [Figure 4](#), who is the abused and narrator of the story, is at the centre of the controversy but now regrets their actions. IPV puts partners into a reflexive and interrogative appraisal of their actions, some regretting. In [Figure 4](#), both partners are emotive and negatively appraising their current status as wrong decisions. The husband is always belittled and reminded of his wife's other boyfriend the moment he sees her.

Being lied to: the quintessence

In Shona there is a proverb that says *rinonyenga rinohwarara, rinozosimudza musoro rawana* (when one is still proposing, they lie or do not say everything, they will show their true identity/colours when they are married/got what they wanted). These proverbs speak to the traditional African philosophy and epistemologies on how one behaves or carries themselves in different life encounters (Sande et al., 2023). However, they are not perpetrators of IPV as they were meant to bridge the gap in intimate relationships. A number of confessions retrieved from the Zimbabwean Deep Secretes (Confessions) Facebook page seems to be centred on being lied to: one not disclosing that they are married, have children, their health status, not being introduced to relatives, no sexual satisfaction (one round), not disclosing that they have other relationships among other non-disclosures. Appraisal resource of unhappiness emotional values is realised and the perpetrators are negatively evaluated as dishonest [–veracity], and judged as naïve [–capacity]. *Tsano* (brother-in-law), in [Figure 5](#), is being accused of spreading lies, telling his sister back home in Zimbabwe that there's another

Ndauya pano murandakadzi seeking for help.Ndiri
 guard ndoshandira kuno Joni , nzvimbo
 yandoshandira irikure nelocation saka ndakazouya
 ne idea yeku sheya neworkmate yechikadzi so that
 we can afford rent padhuze
 nepatinoshandira.Tinosheya 1 room iye anopinda
 masikati Ini ndichipinda manheru zvekuti
 hatiwonane tinongoonana pano nepano.Nguva
 yadarika ndakadana tsano vangu vaienda
 kumusha Kuti ndivabatise zvinhu zvemukadzi
 wangu zuva iri Roomate yangu yaiva pa
 off ,yakatopa tsano chi20 litre nesaga
 remakanyanisi Kuti vabatsirike kumusha ,lvo
 svikei kumusha votaura nepasipo hanzi tsano
 vakugara negirlfriend hanzi mukadzi wacho
 akandipa vharamuromo yema used oil
 nemakanyanisi,jizvi zvirikundibata nekuti tsano
 ndakavataurira arrangement yese iripo lvo
 vakunotaura twusipo .Munhu haabatsiriki
 ndirikuno kunge tsano varikuda kundirambisa
 nemukadzi munovaona sei tsano



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Figure 5. Untold lies being spread.

woman. However, in as much as the narrative negatively appraises this brother-in-law, the co-habiting that is going on contradicts the traditional and normative standards. Their relationship as co-workers raises more questions than answers. Thus, even if the narrator rhetorically persuades the readers to align with their line of argument, if the premises upon which the argument is being developed are false the argument is bound to be invalid and foiled.

Figure 5 presents a web of violence being brewed as a result of 'lies' about the possible relationship between the security guards. The narrative is infested with counterfeit accusations by the husband who negatively appraises *tsano* (brother-in-law) for peddling lies. From the traditional Shona practices perspective, the husband is shooting himself in the foot with this 'colleague'. However, though the narrative might be logically well communicated, it appears to be grounded on false premises and it becomes invalid.

Verbal violence: the root

The Christian bible says it is better to live on the corner of the roof of a house than to stay with a quarrelsome wife (Proverbs 21 verse 9). This is an iceberg of cases of verbal intimate partner violence. Narratives on the Facebook page confirm cases of verbal abuse, though they are one-sided as both husband and wife seem to experience it. Verbal violence seems to be only a result of a combination of factors that include untrustworthiness, disrespectfulness, pride, alcoholism, drugs among other aspects (Andersson et al., 2007). A reading of

Hi sis . Hide my ID pliz Ini nemukadzi wangu
 tinotukana kusvitsana kutsime zvekutukirana
 vabereki,saka musu uno ndakatukana
 ndakazodzika gejo ndobva afonera baba vake
 ndokuuya vanana tsano
 ndokuvanzvenga ,ndokuenda Kuna baba vangu
 ndokunovapira Kuti zvavaturawo nemukadzi
 wangu ,ndakazongowedzerawo zvimwe Kuti nyaya
 ibatike .Mama varikuita kuchema neshungu dad
 vakatoudza tezvara kuti yamatanga hamuipedze
 kutandanisa mwana wangu Pamba pake.
 Tambomiswa kuenda kunosanga Nana tezvara
 nemunyai nekuti arikuona Kuti hasha dzevabereki
 vangu dzakaraudzira panga panechakaipa
 pakuudza Hama dzangu zvekushungurudzwa
 kwangu nema in-laws uye zvekutukwa kwavo
 nemuroora semunhu akaudza vabereki vake
 zvandakavaturawo ndakutoty kudzokera kwangu
 Kumba kuvana

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Figure 6. Husband-wife verbal exchange.

the narratives submitted on Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confession) avails the evidence that as with physical or psychological violence, verbal violence is negatively appraised and disliked either by the narrator or the social network users as a whole. [Figure 6](#) below provides evidence that verbal violence can escalate and also hurt the extended family. It can spill to children and relatives ending up dividing families, and can also lead to physical violence. The dearth of the roles of *tete* (aunt) and *sekuru* (grandfather) is also evidently suppressed as the purported victims ditch them and run to their parents to seek help and have them address the purported verbal exchange between these partners. Though the narrative voice takes responsibility and admit this IPV to be two-fold, it quickly defends itself for taking the step of involving parents as a defensive mechanism hence positively judging the self and playing victim in the case. Thus, the writer voice strategically manoeuvres through the 'no option left' than to also be abusive. However, research have it on record that in cases like this the truth of the matter can only be realised if the other part is given an opportunity to also present their side of the story (Wekwete et al., 2014).

The marriage institution has been devalued and left vulnerable to attack as a result of a number of factors. The respect that both partners expect in their union has been lost. In [Figure 6](#), a husband confesses to verbal violence between him and his wife, *tinotukana kusvitsana kutsime zvekutukirana vabereki* (we scold each other seriously to the extent of even scolding our parents). Respect for the marriage union has been lost, partners no longer care about what they say to each other and even about their parents. These deep-rooted controversies are only recipes for suicides or murder if not handled well. Confessions to these scolding exchanges in the narrative is a call for further researches to understand the deep-

rooted causes of such fallout between intimate partners. The extent to which these digital spaces are suitable to handle and resolve these problems is a cause for concern. Further research on the nature of counsel and responses given by fellow social media users is a necessity.

Proxemics: intimate spaces encroached

Barika (polygamy) is a traditional African marriage practice that is still in existence even to the present day (Sultana, 2011). However, it has since taken different forms, shapes and sizes. Its acceptance and the dangers that come with it have also been appraised in different forums and researches. Human beings as with other animals, like their space. An encroachment to one's space or territory is tantamount to abuse and a call for defence. Women as well as men are mindful of the distance that their partners will have with the other sex, as proxemics communicates a strong message about the relationships.

A reading of the submitted narratives presents cases of men taking another woman without the knowledge or consent of the wife. Women are coming to the Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions) page seeking solace from fellow Facebook friends. Women are emotionally and psychologically hate as their marriage space is encroached and filled by another. The husband's actions are negatively appraised and castigated. The writer voice, the women, appraises the self as peace and family loving but only being 'abused' by the two who are involved in this extra-marital activity. At the same time, *barika* (polygamy) is negatively appreciated. It has been viewed as disempowering women and a haven for IPV against women (Fidan & Bui, 2016). As indicated in Figure 7, the narrative voice expresses emotional and psychological IPV cases prevalent as perpetrated by polygamy. The aggrieved voice positively judges the self as a marriage loving person [+propriety] and negatively appreciating what the husband and his relatives are doing.



Figure 7. Emotional and psychological violence.

Women are mostly on the receiving end when it comes to polygamous issues. Some men do not respect the incumbent wife and do the simplest act of informing them of their decisions to take a second wife. As indicated in [Figure 7](#) above, some wives do not have a problem with the second women coming, what they want from men is their space and sustenance of their marriage for the sake of children. They are left with no option but to accept the situation as it is. The paper argues that men who decide to go the polygamous route should be open and willing to engage with their fiancé/partners on the new development in an effort to minimise IPV.

Unlike poles repelling: tete (aunt) failing

The dictates of love and relationships are that one of the key defining factors are the two parties involved are supposed to be reciprocally exchanging love. Even if one was to be married either through the traditional forms of marriage such as *musengabere* (where the suitor will hurriedly take someone to their residents without their consent) or *kuzvarira* (where parents give away their girl child in exchange of food or other aspects), it was the expectation that love will develop between the two suitors (Mwandayi, 2011). Deep narratives on social media unbundle another dimension to relationships. The narrative voice presents a case of different 'likes' between husband and wife, hence they are always on a collision course. The problem is on what informs a relationship. For the wife, artificial add-ons like *magaro* (buttocks), *nzara* (nails), eye lashes et cetera are important and a necessity. Positively appraising the self and negatively evaluating the wife as unorganised and reckless [–normality] and [–tenacity], the husband presents a case of unlike poles repelling in a marriage union. The role of *tete* (aunt) is castigated as no-longer relevant. She is negatively appraised as incompetent [–tenacity]. *Tete* (aunt) is cited as saying the wife has a right to do whatever she wants with her body without the consent of the husband. Having reached this deadlock, the only reasonable option left for the narrative voice was to resort to SNS friends for advice, *ndibatsireiwo hama dzangu seumwe wenyu wekwasadza* (please help me as one of yours from the same country). Social media community has been elevated to relatives, *hama*. They are not only Facebook friends, but relatives. The husband wants to know what he can do with this wasteful, unorganised, uneconomic and not suitable wife material woman.

The question that can be raised on the alleged cause of violence in this relationship is: How did they become partners in the first place if they are unlike poles? Do we now have a case where people can just stay together when they are not in love? A reading of literature on relationships or intimacy has it that there seem to be a wave of partners cohabiting or staying together for other reasons other than love (Muzavazi et al., 2022). Most narratives that have been submitted on Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions) are from Zimbabweans in the diaspora and particularly South Africa. The socio-economic challenges that the diasporans encounter have forced some to cohabit as a strategy to minimise the cost of living. However, this does not rule out the fact that they are others who might have gotten involved in these relationships for serious and stable marriages.

Discussion and conclusion

The paper aimed at appraising and evaluating IPV narratives submitted on Facebook page Zimbabwean Deep Secrets (Confessions). It had the assumption that partners who submit their narratives on this social media page want advice from fellow social media users and thus unreservedly pour out everything as they tell their story. The analysis of the narratives revealed that IPV is a problem prevalent in today's society. Apart from the factors identified in other researches that include age differences, education; marital status; religion/cultural differences, employment status; spouse controlling behaviour; and alcohol-drinking partner (Muzavazi et al., 2022; Wekwete et al., 2014), the paper found out that *barika* (polygamy) or extra-marital affairs, different life tastes, no longer following our traditional African practices like appeasing the dead, some men are fools (*mapenzi*), partners' past experiences and relationships, use of pseudo identities during courtship, pride, untrustworthiness, as retaliation to violence, and the dearth of the social fabric (aunties and grandfathers) are also greatly contributing to IPV. The roles of *tete* (aunt) and *sekuru* (grandfather) are questioned as their advice is seen as irrelevant or not valuable. As shown in Figure 8, the role of aunt (*tete*) is questioned. Those who are supposed to be playing that role are not diligently

Mkoma Sydy, how are you doing and cousins? I borrowed Acc, pliz hide owner of this Account

maCousins makadii, ini ndiri right?
Ndine nhau yemukadzi wandogara naye. Tine maLikes akatosiyana I mean like in everything zvinoita kuti tipesane mune zvizhinji. Ini handifariri magaro ekuwedzererwa iye anomaita, twumaArtificial nails, make ups ini hapana chandinoda since ndakasangana naye asina zvese izvi izvozvo apa mari yangu yakuperera kuzvinhu zvisina basa izvi. I'm not attracted to artificial beauty at all and anozviziva but imwe yaava kuita haichaite

Since ndatanga kugara naye ndikuona kudzikira kwemafambiro ezvinhu zvangu nekuda kwemashandisiro ake mari. So ndakamboda kumusiya ndopaakaona ndakutanga natete vake hanzi ndakapiwa number dzenyu kuti ndikugadzirisei, ndikagaya kuti vachataura zvine musoro sateteka. But vakatowedzera maproblems coz ivo vanoti "zvaanoita nemuviri wake ikodzero yake saka taurai zvimwe kwete zvemuviri wake" So ndiri kuti pangaitawo imba here coz ini ndakuda munhu anoda zveimba, anoshandisa mari achiziva ramangwana because pane zvimwe zvese ari right but ipapo basi. AnaWasu, Wezhira, Mashangwe, Matoko, Mazezuru kuharare uko, samutoko, mapfumbi pamaranda apa ndibatsirei hama dzangu seumwe wenyu wekwasadza

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Figure 8. In marriage but with divorced tastes.

doing their job. However, an appraisal of SNS users' narratives indicates that counselling is a necessary approach as people want to share their experiences in anticipation of getting help from their online friends.

As espoused by Muzavazi et al. (2022), the reason behind partaking into these relationships is the other major cause of IPV. Instead of love, partners are engaging in these relationships for various reasons that range from financial to socio-economic benefits. The paper argues that these reasons have led to unlike poles coming together brewing a host of IPV cases. These factors have led to numerous forms of IPV that include emotional, psychological, physical, verbal among others.

One-sided appraisals of the violence weaken the chances of getting proper help. On top of that manipulation of socio-cultural practices in the narratives for the benefit of the writer voice impacts on how the problem can be resolved amicably. The paper makes the argument that in telling their story, the narrative voice rhetorically appraises the self and the purported 'abuser' strategically aligning the social media users to their preferred position and thinking. Social media narrative stories in hidden identities afford the 'abused' the room to freely express the affect, judgment and appreciation of the violence. The narrative texts are pregnant with explicit and implicit affect, appreciation and judgment. However, further research has to be carried out focusing on the nature of advice given by the social media community and also possibly carry out some interviews in order to have a broadened database.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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