# Domestic Violence Discourse As Political And Civic Engagement: A Textual Analysis Of Comments On Social Media

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## Abstract

Domestic violence continues to be an issue around the globe, particularly in Africa; this research study works to analyze the role of online discourse as a form of political and civic engagement when talking about topics such as domestic violence. Social media platforms encourage the mass sharing of ideas, views, and opinions that may influence behavioral changes on a societal level. This study explores the factors that make online discourse an effective medium by analyzing language use. Using NVivo software, reactions and actions in these comments are coded by highlighting the use of adjectives and verbs, respectively. Qualitative discourse analysis allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of language use in particular contexts on social issues, which in the case of our study is domestic violence. Given how recent this form of data collection is in analyzing language use in domestic violence discourse, grounded theory is adopted to give way for themes to emerge naturally from the discourse. We gathered data from the comment sections of thirteen discussion threads on a Nigerian news and information blog on Instagram, Instablog9ja. Two thousand of these comments were cleaned, collated, and eventually analyzed to understand how these comment sections serve the purpose of being a space for dialogue and their potential as catalysts for cultural and religious reforms.

## Introduction

In 2021, the World Health Organization reported that 30 % of women have been a victim of domestic violence with 38 % of all murders of women having been committed by intimate partners. This study is focused on political and civic engagement, youth participatory culture and social/digital media. More specifically, our research team is studying the effectiveness of online discourse as a medium in civil discourse, particularly surrounding the topic of domestic violence. Our study can be described as a mixed-method research project given that the data we collect constitutes as qualitative while we use different mediums, such as Instagram and NVivo software and sources to gather information and results.

Our group first gathered data from an Instagram information and news blog, "Instablog9ja", and gathered a total of 85,006 comments to explore and analyze. Through the use of NVivo software, The research team was able to input these comments into the software which gave us access to information about the semantics of the comments, highlighting and decoding verbs and adjectives, actions and reactions, along with their connotations. This was carried out in hopes of analyzing and exploring the impact of online discourse on important issues that surround our everyday lives. In addition, we want to understand the role of online discourse as a perpetuator for cultural and religious reforms.

The following definitions can assist audiences in understanding our research a little better.

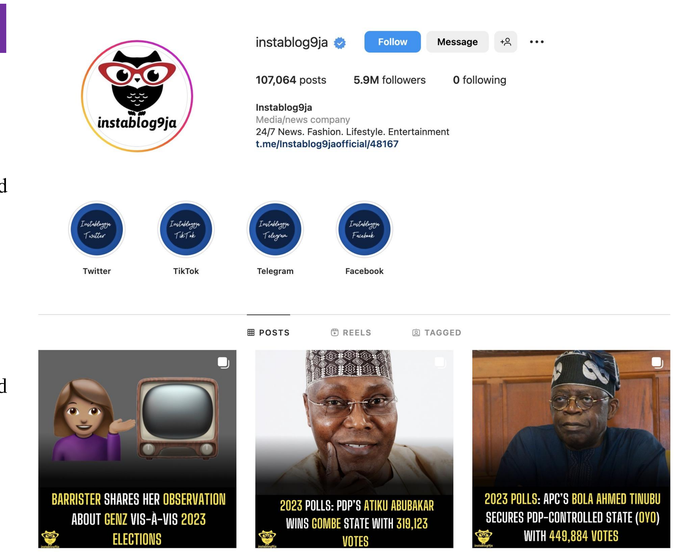
- **NVivo Software**: a qualitative analysis computer software that helps researchers to organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data.
- **Domestic Violence**: violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner.

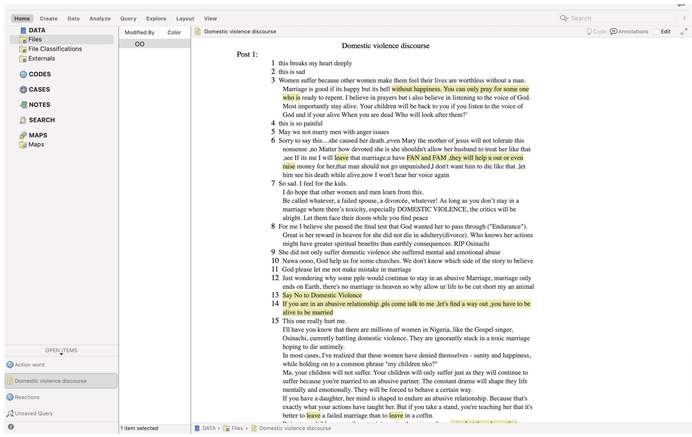
***The image to the right is a word frequency cloud generated by NVivo; this figure represents the frequency of certain words found in the collated data.***

## Methods

Our group gathered two thousand comments from thirteen Instagram posts from the blog account "Instablog9ja." We filtered the comment sections for users' comments regarding the domestic violence being reported in each post. Our group particularly picked comments that expressed users' opinions on the domestic violence case being displayed and reported in the posts and captions. In addition, the comments chosen to use had to be in English, complete sentences, and logical and rational to the subject. After the comment sections were filtered by the researchers, the comments were copied and pasted into a shared document by all the members in the group. We would later double-check the comments because social media is filled with illegible and emoticon-filled writing, so it was crucial to make sure the comments would be useful to our research findings. The document with the filtered data was later uploaded onto NVivo software. With this software, we were able to autocode and the comments were placed into positive and negative nodes.

In order to autocode, NVivo software takes the comments we filtered from the Instagram posts and places them in positive or negative nodes in accordance with the semantics used in the comment. A comment that expressed support for DV victims would be placed in the positive nodes while a comment that displayed a negative tone towards the Instagram post and harsh criticism of victims would be placed in the negative nodes section. From these nodes came the action and reaction words. Action words represent an act of will, something done, or the finishing of a task. A reaction word represents the way someone acts or feels in response to something that has happened and/or been said. After autocoding was completed, we went over the results and filtered which were accurate and which were inaccurate. Once these errors were fixed, our team was able to analyze the results and develop conclusions.




## Results

Using NVivo to analyze the data, diction such as people, marriage, abusive, and women were used the most in this discourse. We were able to analyze the data to separate words that denoted "actions" and "reactions." Each researcher focused on different words, and in one of our researchers' findings, there were 69 total references to "actions." There were words that express people's suggestions (how to address the domestic violence situation) as well as what they have done or will do. These words were classified as action and reaction words. Keywords included "leave, pray help, say, talk, divorce, blame, protect, and separate." 10.68% of the data contained action words. There were 34 total references to reactions found in their analyses, covering 9.03% of their data. These reaction words express how commenters felt about the news; including "sad, hope, mistake, hurt, angry, hypocrisy, painful, unfortunate, kudos, and marvels." From these results, the group was able to develop the following conclusions.

## Conclusion

There was a consensus among the majority of people of the dangers of domestic violence. However, religious and cultural efforts are not sufficient to curb the reoccurrence of domestic violence in the Nigerian society, or anywhere for that matter. In some of the comments, religion and culture are implicated in the perpetuation of committing domestic violence. Because of the seriousness of the effect of domestic violence on citizenship participation in governance, it impacts the mental and physical health of victims. As a step towards a solution, lawmakers in the Nigerian government need to intensify efforts to protect victims of domestic violence and these laws need to ultimately be enforced and executed.

It's important to note that social media can also provide a safe space where such discussions can take place. Citizens are able to exercise their political and civic agency on social media platforms, an affordance that may be difficult to get in physical spaces because of cultural and religious influence. In addition, victims of domestic violence, or friends and relatives of such victims, are also able to speak up by finding help or support on these platforms; this helps to create awareness about issues of social justice and incentivizes policy makers to develop effective advocacies. Nevertheless, this does not take away from the fact that social media allows people to condone domestic violence because constituents are able to exercise their discussions on these public platforms.

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