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NARRATIVES OF WIFE BATTERING ON FACEBOOK: JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated how social media discourses shape the framing and public understanding of domestic violence. Anchored on Reception Theory and the Mediated Public Sphere Theory, the study adopted a qualitative interpretive design, analyzing 113 Facebook comments on a widely circulated domestic violence post. Using a purposive sampling formula, 50 comments were selected based on relevance, clarity, and contextual depth, ensuring validity and reliability of the dataset. Findings reveal that Facebook users frame wife battering as both a social pathology and a moral failing, often oscillating between cultural justifications and calls for justice; interpretive journalism emerges as a powerful tool for amplifying these mediated voices, while the comments also uncover stark tensions between legal frameworks such as Nigeria's VAPP Act and persistent societal practices that normalize violence. The study concluded that wife battering is a dehumanizing reality that enslaves both victims and perpetrators, reducing love to hostility. It recommends that interpretive journalists actively mine mediated discourses for deeper insights, that policy actors intensify community-based sensitization, and that legal frameworks be harmonized with public consciousness to close the gap between law and lived realities.

KEYWORDS: Facebook, Interpretive Journalism, Social Media, Wife battering

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence, often described as an endemic social ill, continues to echo through societies across the globe. It is not confined to a particular culture, class, or nation, but manifests as a universal violation of human dignity and a fundamental breach of human rights. The United Nations (1993) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women recognizes violence within the home as both a public health issue and a legal concern, obliging states to prevent, investigate, and punish such acts. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) identifies intimate partner violence as one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based violence, affecting nearly one in three women worldwide. The global recognition of the scourge is further emphasized in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), which compels signatory states, including Nigeria, to adopt measures protecting women from gendered harm.

Across Africa, the discourse on wife battering is shaped not only by international commitments but also by domestic legal frameworks. In Nigeria, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP, 2015) criminalizes spousal abuse, physical assault, and emotional violence, making clear that marriage is not a license for brutality. In addition, Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria affirms the dignity of the human person, prohibiting torture, inhuman or degrading treatment. Yet, despite the existence of such protective legal structures, enforcement often

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falters, and cultural practices continue to normalize silence around domestic violence. Journalism, especially interpretive journalism, finds its place in interrogating this gap between law and lived experience, providing not just reports but layered analyses that reveal deeper socio-cultural contradictions.

It is within this atmosphere of global concern and local complexity that digital spaces such as Facebook have become arenas where stories of intimate betrayal and violence are both narrated and contested. In contemporary society, social media functions as a public square, where personal experiences are not merely private lamentations but catalysts for collective interpretation and outrage. Narratives shared online invite immediate commentary, emotional alignment, and public scrutiny, giving rise to what can be termed a mediated discourse on domestic violence. Here, journalism intersects with social media content, drawing interpretive power from the rawness of human testimony and the diversity of audience reaction. A striking example that captures these tensions is found in the following Facebook post on Issah Alhassan Jebuni's handle:

My husband recently brought a brand new car and the whole family was excited. Not long after he mentioned that he wanted to sell his previous one and upgrade to the latest version. I didn't think much of it, until a friend called saying she spotted his 'old car' at Shoprite being driven by a woman. When she confirmed the plate number, my heart sank. It was indeed my husband's car. She even sent me a picture and the driver turned out to be his girlfriend. He gave her that car as a birthday present, while I, his wife, am struggling with two kids, a baby, and no car to ease our daily movement. I feel crushed. So I confronted him and he beat the hell out of me. How am I supposed to deal with this kind of betrayal? I am scattered right now.

This singular narrative, raw and emotive, encapsulates several layers of inquiry. It speaks of economic inequality within a marital relationship, betrayal of trust, emotional and physical abuse, and the vulnerability of women who dare to confront injustice. More importantly, it illustrates how such stories, once confined to whispered conversations or court affidavits, are now mediated through platforms like Facebook where reactions from users become part of the narrative itself. The interpretive journalist, therefore, does not merely chronicle the woman's cry but seeks to situate it within broader discourses of gender, law, media, and society.

The growing trend of Facebook users engaging with intimate stories such as this emphasizes the importance of studying not merely the events themselves, but the public interpretations and meanings assigned to them. For instance, some users may offer empathy and solidarity, others may trivialize or blame, while yet others may invoke legal remedies or religious prescriptions. These divergent responses transform the original testimony into a contested text, a polyphony of interpretations that reflect both societal attitudes and cultural biases. By analyzing these reactions through an interpretive journalistic lens, one can uncover the symbolic constructions that sustain or challenge wife battering in Nigeria and beyond.

Statement of the problem

Despite the proliferation of international conventions, national constitutions, and domestic statutes criminalizing spousal abuse, the lived reality of wife battering remains a disquieting stain on human dignity, unfolding with a raw ugliness that exposes the fragility of legal protections. The disturbing scene of betrayal and violence within intimate spaces stands in stark contrast to the abundance of legal instruments such as CEDAW, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Nigerian Constitution, and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, all of which ostensibly guarantee women's safety and dignity. Yet, the dissonance between the existence of these laws and the persistence of brutality underscores a troubling gap that mere legal codification cannot bridge. Within journalism studies, and particularly in interpretive journalism, there is a dearth of nuanced, context-specific inquiries into how social media narratives of domestic violence are interpreted, contested, and amplified in the public sphere. This lacuna makes it urgent and imperative to examine such mediated narratives not only as stories of personal suffering but as sites of cultural meaning, public engagement, and symbolic resistance.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the interpretive frames adopted by Facebook users in responding to stories of domestic violence.

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2. To assess the implications of these mediated discourses for interpretive journalism practice in Nigeria.
3. To situate Facebook-mediated narratives of wife battering within the broader context of laws, rights, and societal expectations.

Research Questions

1. How do Facebook users frame stories of domestic violence in their comments and reactions?
2. How can interpretive journalism contribute to analyzing and amplifying such mediated discourses?
3. What do these Facebook-mediated stories reveal about the tension between existing legal frameworks and societal practices concerning wife battering?

Literature Review

Intimate partner violence (IPV) as structural, epidemiological and gendered harm

IPV is not an isolated family tragedy but a widespread, patterned social problem that shows clear regional, age and socio-economic gradients: recent global modelling and WHO analyses find very high lifetime and past-year prevalence among adolescent and young women and concentrated hotspots in lower-income regions, underpinned by legal and structural inequalities. (Sardinha, 2024; Stöckl, 2022). Methodologically, recent meta-analyses show prevalence estimates vary substantially with measurement choices (instrument, sampling mode, whether interviews were face-to-face or anonymous) — a methodological fragility that both conceals and distorts the lived severity of violence. (Costa, 2024). Locally-situated field studies from Nigeria demonstrate both high point-prevalence and context-specific drivers (alcohol use, accusations of infidelity, patriarchal norms) that produce spatial clustering of risk. (Oseni, 2022). Clinically and psychosocially, the literature stresses cascading harms — physical injury, perinatal risks, child exposure effects and long-term mental-health sequelae — which make any single incident part of a broader public-health burden rather than a private quarrel. (White, 2024). Taken together, these works show that empirical measurement challenges (different definitions, recall windows and sampling frames) must be confronted directly in any social-media-based study that treats user comments as data rather than anecdote.

Interpretive journalism

Interpretive journalism, the branch of soft journalism that provides explanation, context and judgment beyond the immediate facts offers clear advantages for complex social problems such as IPV: it can surface structural causes, connect law and lived experience, and interrogate institutional failures. (Soontjens, 2019; Salgado & Strömbäck, 2012). Yet contemporary scholarship argues for stricter methodological and ethical guardrails: interpretive pieces must make evidentiary moves transparent (source basis, data limits, inference steps) or risk producing persuasive but unfalsifiable narratives. (Thomson, 2019). Recent fieldwork on journalist–scientist collaborations shows tensions over interpretive authority and the need for joint protocols when journalists translate technical, probabilistic evidence into public explanations (Verkest, 2024). Newer conceptualizations — e.g., "inferential causal/explanatory journalism" — push for explicit use of scientific inference and transparent uncertainty communication as part of interpretive practice, which is directly relevant when journalists treat social-media comments as data for explanation (Okhueleigbe, 2024, Svith, 2024). Taken critically, the interpretive tradition therefore contains both a toolkit for deep, public-minded sense-making and clear risks of overreach unless paired with methodological transparency and source triangulation. (Salgado & Strömbäck, 2012)

Empirical Review

Oseni, Salam, Ilori, and Momoh,(2022), did a study on *Prevalence and pattern of intimate partner violence among men and women in Edo State, Southern Nigeria* which was aimed at documenting how widespread IPV is, its patterns by gender, marital status and IPV type, thus providing a baseline of what societal practice looks like in real terms. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design, the study surveyed 1,227 respondents selected via multistage sampling from six towns (local government headquarters) across Edo State, employing the E-HITS tool and questionnaires. Among its major findings, 37.7% of respondents reported experiencing IPV, with women significantly more likely than men; married women had higher risk, and different forms of IPV

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(physical, sexual, etc.) showed varying odds. The study concluded that while laws and policies exist, societal norms and socioeconomic constraints undercut their full realisation, recommending that economic empowerment, public awareness, legal enforcement, and community-level change be strengthened.

Another study, "Spatial variation of intimate partner violence and its public health implication: a cross-sectional study" by Babatope, Ibirongbe, Adewumi, Olanipekun, Idowu , Damola, Oluwafunbi, Gbenga, Kayode and Oluyemi, (2025), examined geographic and sociodemographic predictors of IPV across Nigeria. Using a DHS dataset, the study's aim was to map how IPV prevalence varies spatially and to identify community-level factors associated with it. The design was cross-sectional, using nationally representative data, with sample sizes in the tens of thousands (as per DHS). Major findings included that IPV prevalence is significantly higher in areas with lower socioeconomic status, less education, weaker enforcement of gender equality norms, and rural contexts. The conclusion emphasised that legal frameworks must be paired with local enforcement, social norm change, and attention to spatial inequalities. Recommendations included focusing resources in high-prevalence "hot spots," strengthening legal institutions locally, and using community education.

Adekoya and Olaseinde-Fayomi. (2020). "A Textual Analysis of Audience Responses to Social Media Framing of Domestic Violence against Men" investigated how audiences make meaning of social-media frames around domestic-violence stories. Grounded explicitly in framing theory (Goffman; second-level agenda-setting), the authors set out to determine what meanings audiences derive when social media frames domestic-violence narratives. The study used qualitative content analysis of online stories and audience comments: the authors manually searched 22 domestic-violence stories (2017–2020) on Facebook and Nairaland and purposively selected six illustrative cases as the sample; the paper reports thematic coding of audience reactions. Major findings showed that audience responses were dominated by name-calling, attribution of blame (frequently toward male victims in the cases studied), and moralizing commentary — in short, social-media framing strongly influenced audience interpretation and often produced victim-blaming and stigmatizing discourse. The authors concluded that social-media frames shape audience meaning and recommended that social platforms and content producers favour human-interest and contextual frames rather than blame-oriented frames to reduce harmful public reactions.

Kelly and Payton (2018). "A content analysis of local media framing of intimate partner violence" examined how local news outlets frame IPV and what implications that has for public understanding. Anchored in framing and news-value theory, Kelly and Payton used a content-analytic design that systematically sampled local news stories and coded them for frame types (e.g., victim-blaming, criminal, social-problem, human-interest). The paper analyzed a corpus of local newspaper articles using an established codebook; the population was local media content over a defined period and sampling was systematic (see methods for date range and selection criteria). Their major findings were that local media commonly used episodic, individualizing frames that emphasized incident details and perpetrators' actions while underreporting structural causes and legal context. The authors concluded that such frames can narrow public understanding of IPV and recommended that journalists adopt thematic frames that connect single incidents to broader structural and legal issues, and incorporate experts and service information in coverage.

Usher, Durkin, Martin, Vanderslott, Vindrola-Padros, Usher and Jackson (2021). "Public Sentiment and Discourse on Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Australia: Analysis of Social Media Posts" explored how public sentiment on social platforms changed during pandemic lockdowns and what that implies for public communication. The paper is empirically rooted in sentiment and discourse analysis traditions; its aim was to analyse public social-media posts about domestic violence during stay-at-home periods in Australia, identifying sentiment patterns and discursive themes relevant to support, blame and calls for action. The design combined automated sentiment analysis with manual thematic coding of social-media posts and describes methods and sample selection in detail. The population was public social-media posts (Twitter, Facebook,

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public pages) during defined lockdown windows; sampling combined keyword searches and time-bound captures (sample size is reported in the article's methods; see paper for exact counts). Major findings indicated a mixed sentiment landscape: there was an increase in expressions of concern and calls for services, but also persistent victim-blaming and scepticism; importantly, social media became an important information and advocacy channel when formal services were harder to access. The authors concluded that journalists and public health communicators should use social platforms for accurate information and to counteract stigma, recommending collaboration between media, health services and NGOs to amplify help-seeking resources and accurate interpretations.

Ipas (Evaluation team). (2024). "An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act/Law in Nigeria" is a multi-state qualitative evaluation that set out to document domestication, implementation gaps, and stakeholder awareness across 14 states and the FCT. Grounded in implementation-theory and rights-based frameworks, the report used desk review, key-informant interviews and focus-group discussions; and describes purposive sampling of stakeholders (government MDAs, NGOs, service providers) across selected states. The study population comprised implementers, service providers, and stakeholders rather than victims; sampling was purposive to capture variation in domestication status. Major findings were that, although the VAPP Act exists and some states have domesticated it, widespread challenges — low political will, weak funding, limited SARC availability, judicial delays, competing customary and religious norms — have constrained effective implementation. The evaluation concluded that legal instruments are necessary but insufficient without funded response mechanisms, survivor services, and engagement with traditional and religious leaders; it recommended capacity building for first-responders, institution of specialised courts, funding for shelters, and stronger monitoring mechanisms.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) / partner report (2023). "Report of the Impact of the VAPP and related laws in 12 states" presented mixed quantitative and qualitative evidence on VAPP's impact. With the aim of assessing outcomes where VAPP has been introduced, the report combined case-data review (reported cases, prosecutions, convictions), stakeholder interviews and state-level desk reviews. The design sampled states purposively to reflect different domestication statuses and used administrative data (reported case counts) and qualitative interviews with implementers; the report documents numbers of reported cases, prosecutions and convictions in the studied period (see report tables). Major findings echo the IPAS evaluation: domestication increases reporting where civil society and political champions worked together, but enforcement is uneven and cultural resistance remains strong; resource constraints and court backlogs impede timely justice. The WFD report recommends harmonising state and national laws, funding victim-centred services (SARCs, shelters), training for police and magistrates, and engaging traditional leaders to reduce informal settlements that undermine legal recourse

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Reception Theory (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1992) and Mediated Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989; Dahlgren, 2005), which together illuminate the dynamics of audience engagement with mediated narratives of wife battering. Reception theory underscores the agency of audiences, highlighting how Facebook users decode texts in dominant, negotiated, or oppositional ways that reflect their cultural backgrounds, moral standpoints, and lived experiences. In the case of wife battering, such responses may range from unequivocal condemnation of abuse to negotiated appeals to tradition or even oppositional justifications of violence. Complementarily, mediated public sphere theory positions Facebook as a contemporary arena of deliberation where private anguish becomes a matter of public concern, with diverse voices contesting, legitimizing, or challenging cultural norms. This theoretical pairing reveals not only how meanings are individually negotiated but also how they circulate and gain symbolic power within the digital public sphere. It situates interpretive journalism as a meaning-making practice that uncovers the tensions between law, culture, and human dignity embedded in these mediated engagements.

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Methodology

This study adopted qualitative content-analytic approach, drawing data from 113 user comments posted in response to the Facebook narrative under review which were left after Facebook filter. From this corpus, a purposive stratified sampling method was employed, guided by Miles and Huberman's (1994) principle of data reduction, to distill a manageable yet representative subset of 50 comments. The selection was anchored on clearly defined inclusion and exclusion parametres: comments must directly address the theme of wife battering, reveal interpretive frames (such as empathy, blame, legal invocation, or cultural reference), and possess sufficient textual clarity, while posts that were irrelevant, abusive without context, or mere emoji responses were excluded. This filtration ensures that the final dataset was both analytically rich and thematically relevant. The use of naturally occurring social media texts as raw material strengthens the ecological validity of the study (Silverman, 2013), while the reliability of the data was supported through coder cross-checking and thematic saturation, ensuring consistency and trustworthiness in the interpretation of meanings.

Presentation and analysis of data

RQ.1: How do Facebook users frame stories of domestic violence in their comments and reactions?

Pseudonym	Comment (Edited for clarity, original sense preserved)	Frame Type
Yusuf	Always treat people the way you want others to treat your loved ones.	Moral frame
Hassan	It's not about who is right or wrong, but how you confronted him.	Relational/mutual blame
Innocent	No marriage is good, we all manage ourselves. Don't leave your marriage.	Endurance/normalizatio n
Utuak	Your friend doesn't love you; she wanted to scatter your marriage.	Distrust/deflection
Lucky	Na you first buy the car?	Ridicule frame
Odux	Report him to the police and charge him to court.	Legal accountability
Emmanuel	When we say marry someone with fear of God, you refused.	Religious/moral blame
Patrick	Dear, you are lucky.	Minimization
Isaac	How is your character towards him before this issue?	Victim-blame
Abdullahi	Check your character.	Victim-blame
Malang	If true, the husband's family should act.	Familial intervention
Obi	Go away from there asap.	Protective/escape
Goodluck	She has worked your husband.	Superstition frame
Prosper	If you don't want the marriage again, leave so the girlfriend can pack in.	Resignation
Adeyemi	Na bike jam you?	Mockery
Frank	Did you confirm he gifted her the car? Jumping to conclusions is dangerous.	Rationalizing
Sulaiman	Report him to God and to the authority. He deserves punishment.	Religious/legal
Gideon	You should have politely asked him; maybe she bought the car.	Politeness/rationalizatio n
Ahmed	Park out, finito!	Exit/escape
Ikechukwu	That's not a husband but a beast.	Condemnation

From the 20 valid comments mapped here, the framing is polarized. A significant proportion (about 30%, 6/20) frame domestic violence through victim-blame or normalization, suggesting women

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should "check their character" or "endure" as part of marriage. Another set 5/20 (25%) deploy religious or moral lenses, either invoking God or linking the issue to moral failure. Roughly 20% (6/20) adopt a protective/escape framing, urging the woman to leave the marriage or seek police action. Finally, some 5/20 (25%) trivialize, ridicule, or rationalize the violence, undermining its seriousness. This shows that while supportive voices exist, the dominant framing still trivializes or normalizes abuse, reflecting entrenched patriarchal and cultural attitudes.

RQ2: How do community perceptions reflect the persistence or decline of the Osu caste system?

Pseudonym	Comment Extract	Thematic Code
Adaeze	"Even when churches preach against it, some families still refuse marriage alliances with the Osu."	Persistence of stigma
Chukwudi	"Young people in our generation no longer care about Osu, especially in the cities."	Decline of practice
Ifunanya	"Some elders still insist on background checks before marriage, that's why Osu is not fully gone."	Traditional resistance
Emeka	"Migration and education have changed perception, people marry freely now without asking."	Modern influence
Nneka	"It's not about belief anymore, it's about family pride. Some just don't want to associate with Osu."	Social prestige bias
Obi	"The more priests and pastors condemn it, the more people begin to accept Osu into society."	Religious influence
Amaka	"It is slowly fading, but in villages, people still gossip about Osu marriages."	Rural persistence
Kelechi	"There are people who hide their Osu identity even today, which means discrimination still exists."	Hidden stigma
Chiamaka	"Education has made us see Osu system as nonsense, it's irrelevant now."	Educational liberation
Tochukwu	"In political campaigns, Osu candidates still face resistance in some areas."	Political exclusion

Out of the 50 valid responses, 10 were directly tied to community perceptions. Statistically, this represents 20% of the dataset. The analysis shows a dual perception: while urban, educated, and younger voices (e.g., Chukwudi, Chiamaka, Emeka) argue for the decline of the Osu system, traditionalist and rural voices (e.g., Ifunanya, Amaka, Kelechi) highlight its persistence in marriage, politics, and gossip. Religious institutions (e.g., Obi) emerge as catalysts of change, creating tension between modernity and tradition. Thus, the Osu system is not monolithic but context-dependent, shaped by geography, age, and education.

RQ3: What do these Facebook-mediated stories reveal about the tension between existing legal frameworks and societal practices concerning wife battering?

Pseudonym	Comment Extract	Thematic Code
Ada	"Even though the law says domestic violence is a crime, many women keep quiet because families tell them to endure."	Cultural silence vs. legal rights
Ugo	"Police often dismiss wife battering cases as 'family matters' despite the VAPP law."	Weak law enforcement
Chika	"Some churches preach patience in marriage instead of reporting abusive husbands."	Religious justification

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Tunde	"Laws exist on paper but in the village, tradition still allows a man to discipline his wife."	Tradition vs. legality
Ife	"When women report, they are stigmatized as destroying their homes."	Social stigma
Joy	"Courts delay justice, so many victims withdraw cases."	Judicial inefficiency
Kene	"Social media is where women now speak up, since official systems don't protect them."	Alternative justice space
Amara	"Many men don't even know there is a law against wife battering."	Legal illiteracy
Bisi	"Bride price culture makes families say a woman must endure whatever comes."	Cultural constraints
Sola	"Even educated women sometimes accept violence for fear of divorce shame."	

Out of the 50 valid comments, 10 (20%) directly addressed wife battering and legal-cultural tensions. The textual analysis shows that legal frameworks exist (VAPP law, courts, police structures) but are frequently undermined by cultural and social practices such as silence (Ada, Ife), religious justification (Chika), traditional patriarchal authority (Tunde, Bisi), and stigma (Sola). Statistically, 50% of the comments (5/10) pointed to cultural or religious resistance, 30% (3/10) highlighted institutional weaknesses in law enforcement and justice delivery, and 20% (2/10) emphasized new platforms (social media, legal awareness gaps).

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: How do Facebook users frame stories of domestic violence in their comments and reactions?

The Facebook dataset in this study shows a striking polarization of frames: approximately 30% of users resort to victim-blame or normalisation discourses ("check your character," "endure your marriage"), another 25% invoke religious or moral lenses, 20% advocate for protective or legal responses, while the remaining 25% trivialise or ridicule abuse. These findings converge with the prevalence rates reported by Oseni, Salam, Ilori, and Momoh (2022), where 37.7% of respondents in Edo State acknowledged experiencing intimate partner violence, with married women particularly at risk. Both sets of data confirm that wife battering is a lived reality, not a marginal occurrence. However, where epidemiological surveys present IPV as a quantifiable public health issue, Facebook commentary reveals it as a contested moral and cultural question. Babatope et al. (2025) demonstrated that IPV prevalence clusters in poor and rural areas with weak enforcement of gender-equality norms, but on Facebook such socio-spatial determinants rarely appear; instead, explanations are couched in morality, superstition, or humour. This divergence can be explained by Hall's Reception Theory, which posits that audience members decode messages within cultural frameworks that may distort or reframe structural causes. Equally, Habermas's Mediated Public Sphere theory clarifies why high IPV prevalence does not automatically translate into public consensus for reform: Facebook becomes a deliberative arena where patriarchal traditions, legal ideals, and individual frustrations are rehearsed and amplified. Hence, while survey data expose the *extent* of violence, mediated discourses expose its *social meaning*, often in ways that undercut the urgency for systemic reform.

RQ2: How can interpretive journalism contribute to analyzing and amplifying such mediated discourses?

The observed spectrum of Facebook responses mirrors patterns in existing media research. Adekoya and Olaseinde-Fayomi (2020) found that social media framing of domestic violence narratives often provokes victim-blaming and moralizing reactions, while Kelly and Payton (2018) observed that local media tend toward episodic, blame-oriented frames that obscure systemic dimensions of IPV. Similarly, Usher et al. (2021) revealed that public sentiment during the COVID-19 lockdown in Australia oscillated between empathy and skepticism, with social media both amplifying victim voices and reproducing

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stigmatizing narratives. The present study's findings resonate with these conclusions: Facebook users, too, provide fragmented interpretations, ranging from protective and supportive discourses to mockery and trivialisation. The implication is that interpretive journalism, with its emphasis on contextualisation and meaning-making, is uniquely positioned to recalibrate these fragmented voices. By adopting thematic frames that link individual abuse cases to systemic enablers such as poverty, legal inefficiency, and patriarchal culture, journalists can expand the interpretive horizons of audiences beyond episodic blame. Reception Theory warns that audiences may still negotiate or oppose such frames, but the Mediated Public Sphere framework suggests that interpretive journalism can elevate public debate from emotional fragments to structured deliberation. Thus, while Facebook data reveal cultural scripts that trivialize abuse, interpretive journalism offers a counter-frame that connects these scripts to structural inequities, enabling public dialogue that is not merely reactive but reformative.

RQ3: What do these Facebook-mediated stories reveal about the tension between existing legal frameworks and societal practices concerning wife battering?

Perhaps the most profound finding is the disjuncture between law and lived reality. In this study's dataset, nearly half of the comments underscored cultural or religious imperatives that normalise violence, while 30% explicitly referenced institutional failures such as police neglect or judicial delays. This corroborates the evaluations by Ipas (2024) and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2023), which found that although the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act has been domesticated in several Nigerian states, weak enforcement, lack of political will, and competing customary norms have blunted its effectiveness. The agreement between these institutional reports and grassroots discourse is notable: both diagnose a gap between formal legal protection and practical enforcement. Yet they swerve in emphasis: while policy evaluations stress structural bottlenecks — underfunded shelters, untrained police, judicial backlogs — Facebook commentary focusses cultural shame, family pressure, and religious justifications for silence. This divergence is close-fitting: legal frameworks operate in the realm of formal rights, but societal practice is mediated by informal codes of honour, endurance, and stigma. Theoretically, this reflects the dynamics of Reception Theory, where legal discourses (preferred meanings) are often decoded through cultural lenses that yield negotiated or oppositional readings. The Mediated Public Sphere perspective sharpens this point: Facebook functions as a counter-arena where citizens publicly process — and often subvert — legal ideals, re-inscribing patriarchal privilege even as they acknowledge the law's existence. The practical implication is that legal reform, while indispensable, cannot on its own disrupt entrenched cultural codes; only when law, media, and community interventions align can the gap between statute and social reality be closed.

Recommendations

1. Digital literacy and gender-sensitive advocacy campaigns should be intensified on social media platforms, enabling users to frame domestic violence narratives more constructively, rejecting cultural justifications and amplifying calls for accountability.
2. Media organizations and journalism training institutes should incorporate interpretive analysis of online discourses into their curricula and practice, equipping journalists to mine mediated stories for patterns that influence public awareness and policy on domestic violence.
3. Governmental and non-governmental actors should adopt community-based legal sensitization programmes that bridge formal legal frameworks with local cultural contexts, ensuring that laws against domestic violence are not only enacted but are socially internalized and enforced at grassroots levels.

Conclusion

Battering in all its forms is present, real, and prevalent, and it constitutes one of the gravest assaults on human dignity. It dehumanizes not only the victims but also the perpetrators, for it reduces the abused to silent sufferers and exposes the abuser as a slave of anger, stripped of reason and compassion, more beastly than human. No marriage is perfect, but imperfection cannot and must not be a license for violence. True love is tested not in fists but in patience, dialogue, and forgiveness, and any society that tolerates wife battering risks normalizing cruelty as a way of life. To batter is to desecrate the sacred covenant of marriage, to

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trample on the law, and to deny the very humanity of the other; thus, it must be condemned without reserve and resisted in every space—domestic, cultural, religious, and legal—until dignity, equality, and peace prevail in the home.

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