

Social Media Use and Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Persons in Rivers State

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Abstract:

This study examined social media use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. The study was guided by four objectives, research questions and corresponding null hypotheses, which examined the relationships between WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised married persons in Rivers State, whose exact population was considered unknown because there was no unified register containing all married persons in the State. A sample of 400 married persons was selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Social Media Use and Domestic Violence Questionnaire (SMUDVQ), which was validated by experts and subjected to reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that WhatsApp use had a positive and significant relationship with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State ($r = 0.214, p < 0.05$). Facebook use also had a positive and significant relationship with domestic violence ($r = 0.287, p < 0.05$). Similarly, TikTok use had a positive and significant relationship with domestic violence ($r = 0.176, p < 0.05$), while Instagram use had a positive and significant relationship with domestic violence ($r = 0.231, p < 0.05$). Based on these findings, all four null hypotheses were rejected. The study concluded that social media use is significantly associated with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. It recommended, among other measures, the integration of responsible social media use into marital counselling and domestic violence prevention programmes.

Keywords: social media use, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, domestic violence, married persons, Rivers State

Introduction

Domestic violence remains a significant social and public health problem affecting individuals, families and communities across the world. It encompasses different forms of abusive behaviour occurring within intimate or family relationships, including physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse. Although domestic violence may affect both men and women, women continue to experience a disproportionate burden of intimate partner violence in many settings. The World Health Organization estimated that about one in three women globally had experienced physical or sexual violence, either by an intimate partner or a non-partner, demonstrating the widespread nature of violence within intimate relationships. Beyond physical injuries, domestic violence may produce psychological distress, undermine family relationships, affect economic wellbeing and create long-term consequences for individuals and children exposed to violent family environments [1].

In Nigeria, domestic violence constitutes an important concern within marital and intimate relationships. Evidence from the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey has shown that intimate partner violence is associated with several individual, family and social factors. Solanke, using data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, found that experiences within the family environment were associated with women's risk of experiencing intimate partner violence. Such evidence suggests that domestic violence cannot be understood solely as a private disagreement between spouses, but as a social phenomenon influenced by relationship patterns, social norms, previous exposure to violence and broader environmental conditions [2]. The persistence of domestic violence also presents difficulties for accurate measurement because many incidents remain undisclosed due to fear, stigma, economic dependence, social expectations and the perception that marital problems should be resolved privately.

The increasing use of digital communication has introduced another important dimension to marital relationships. Social media has transformed the manner in which individuals communicate, maintain relationships, share information and interact with people outside their immediate physical environment. In Nigeria, social media use has expanded considerably, with millions of people accessing social networking platforms through smartphones and other internet-enabled devices. DataReportal reported substantial growth in the Nigerian social media population between 2023 and 2024, reflecting the increasing importance of digital platforms in everyday communication. For married persons, social media can provide opportunities for communication, emotional support, social connection and access to information [3]. However, its use may also introduce new sources of interpersonal tension, particularly where online interactions become associated with jealousy, suspicion, secrecy, monitoring, perceived infidelity, public embarrassment or disagreements about appropriate online behaviour.

WhatsApp is particularly relevant to marital relationships because of its emphasis on private and direct communication. Married persons may use WhatsApp to communicate with spouses, friends, relatives, colleagues and other contacts through individual messages, group chats, voice calls and status updates. The private nature of some WhatsApp interactions can create concerns when one partner suspects that the other is maintaining inappropriate conversations or relationships. Disagreements may also arise over delayed responses, online status, contacts, photographs, group participation or the interpretation of messages [4]. Consequently, social media use may become incorporated into existing patterns of marital conflict. However, it is important not to assume that using WhatsApp causes domestic violence. Rather, the relationship between social media use and domestic violence may depend on how platforms are used, the quality of marital communication and the social and psychological circumstances surrounding the relationship.

Facebook also provides a major environment for social interaction among adults. Through posts, comments, private messages, photographs, groups and other interactive features, Facebook enables users to maintain relationships and publicly present aspects of their personal lives [5]. Within marriages, disagreements may emerge around online friendships, comments from other users, photographs, relationship status, public interactions and perceived attention given to people outside

the marriage. At the same time, Facebook can serve a constructive role by providing access to information, social support and awareness campaigns concerning domestic violence. The dual nature of social media is therefore important because the same platform that may become a source of marital disagreement can also provide opportunities for education, advocacy and support.

Instagram similarly places considerable emphasis on photographs, videos, personal presentation and social interaction. Its visual orientation may expose users to carefully presented images of relationships, lifestyles and personal achievements [6]. Among married persons, frequent interaction with other users, comments on photographs, direct messages and the public presentation of personal relationships may sometimes generate suspicion or disagreement. Nevertheless, Instagram can also facilitate awareness of domestic violence and provide channels through which information about abuse, healthy relationships and available support can be disseminated. A study conducted in Southeast Nigeria by Odenigbo et al. found that social media messages concerning domestic violence were widely encountered by adult internet users, with Facebook and Instagram among the platforms through which respondents reported receiving such messages. The finding demonstrates that social media should not be viewed exclusively as a potential source of marital conflict because it can also function as a medium for increasing knowledge and shaping attitudes toward domestic violence [7], [8].

TikTok represents a newer dimension of social media use, particularly because of its short-form video format and highly interactive content environment. Although much of the literature on social media and domestic violence has historically concentrated on platforms such as Facebook and other established networks, the rapid expansion of TikTok makes it increasingly relevant to contemporary social relationships. TikTok allows users to encounter and share relationship advice, entertainment, personal experiences, social commentary and discussions concerning gender and family relationships [9]. Such content may influence perceptions of acceptable behaviour within intimate relationships. It can also provide an avenue through which individuals discuss experiences of abuse and access information that challenges the normalization of violence. The increasing prominence of TikTok therefore suggests the need to examine social media use beyond the platforms that have traditionally received scholarly attention.

The relationship between social media and domestic violence is consequently complex and multidirectional. Social media may contribute to conflict through excessive monitoring, online jealousy, communication misunderstandings, perceived emotional or sexual infidelity and disputes over interactions with other users. Technology may also extend controlling behaviours beyond the physical home into digital spaces [10]. Research on information and communication technology-based interventions has, however, demonstrated that digital technologies can also be used to provide information, support, screening and interventions for intimate partner violence. This dual role makes social media an important factor for investigation rather than an inherently harmful or beneficial influence.

Recent Nigerian evidence further demonstrates the need to examine the relationship between social media and intimate partner violence. Ajonye et al. in a study of married persons in Benue State, examined social media use alongside intimate partner violence and marital infidelity, showing that social media has become sufficiently embedded in marital relationships to warrant empirical investigation. Similarly, Odenigbo et al. found substantial awareness of domestic violence messages among adult internet users in Southeast Nigeria, with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok identified as channels through which such messages were encountered. Ajaegbu et al. also observed that social media has become an important avenue for the reporting and framing of domestic violence in Nigeria, although attention to male victims remains comparatively limited. These studies indicate that social media is increasingly connected with both the experience and public understanding of domestic violence [11].

Despite these developments, important gaps remain in understanding how specific social media platforms relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Existing Nigerian studies have often examined social media generally, focused on awareness and attitudes toward domestic violence, or investigated other states and populations. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence concerning whether and to what extent the use of specific platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram is associated with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. This is particularly important because patterns of social media engagement may differ across geographical, cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Examining these platforms individually may therefore provide a clearer understanding of the digital factors associated with marital conflict and domestic violence [12].

Rivers State provides an important setting for such an investigation because of its substantial urban population, expanding digital connectivity and culturally diverse communities. As social media becomes increasingly integrated into everyday communication, interactions that previously occurred primarily within physical social networks are increasingly taking place through digital platforms. Understanding how WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram relate to domestic violence among married persons can therefore contribute to a more contemporary understanding of marital relationships in the State. It can also provide evidence for family counsellors, social workers, policymakers, community organizations and other stakeholders seeking to address domestic violence while recognizing the changing communication environment in which modern marriages operate [13]. The present study therefore examines social media use, specifically WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, and its relationship with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Domestic violence remains a serious social problem that affects the wellbeing of married persons, families and communities. Despite efforts by government agencies, non-governmental organisations, religious institutions and other stakeholders to prevent and respond to domestic violence, incidents of physical, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse continue to occur within marital relationships. The problem is particularly concerning because domestic violence may remain hidden within the family due to fear, stigma, economic dependence, cultural expectations and the belief that marital conflicts should be handled privately. Consequently, many cases may not be reported to relevant authorities, making it difficult to determine the full extent of the problem.

The growing use of social media has introduced a new dimension to marital relationships. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram have become important channels through which married persons communicate, maintain friendships, share photographs and videos, express opinions and interact with people outside their immediate households. While these platforms can strengthen communication and social connection, their use may also create circumstances that contribute to marital disagreements [14]. Suspicion arising from private messages, interactions with other users, photographs, comments, online friendships, perceived infidelity and excessive monitoring may generate conflict between spouses. In some circumstances, such conflicts may escalate into different forms of domestic violence. At the same time, social media can be used to disseminate information about domestic violence, challenge harmful social norms and connect victims with sources of support, making its relationship with domestic violence complex rather than inherently negative.

The concern is that social media use has expanded rapidly, while empirical understanding of its relationship with domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State remains limited. Existing studies have provided evidence concerning domestic violence in Nigeria and have increasingly examined the role of social media in marital relationships and awareness of violence. However, much of the available evidence treats social media as a general phenomenon rather than distinguishing between individual platforms. This creates an important gap because WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram differ considerably in their communication features, levels of interaction, privacy arrangements and forms of content sharing. Consequently, the way married persons use each platform may have different implications for marital relationships and domestic

violence.

Furthermore, available studies have concentrated on other geographical locations or broader populations, making it difficult to determine whether their findings adequately represent married persons in Rivers State. The cultural diversity, changing patterns of digital communication and increasing dependence on social networking platforms in the State provide reasons for examining the issue within its specific social context. Without empirical evidence from Rivers State, stakeholders may have limited information with which to understand whether social media use is associated with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons and whether particular platforms warrant greater attention [15].

The problem of the study, therefore, is the insufficient empirical evidence on the relationship between the use of specific social media platforms, namely WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. It is against this background that the study seeks to examine social media use and prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, with specific attention to WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between social media use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, with specific focus on WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which WhatsApp use relates to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.
2. Examine the extent to which Facebook use relates to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.
3. Determine the extent to which TikTok use relates to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.
4. Examine the extent to which Instagram use relates to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent does WhatsApp use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does Facebook use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does TikTok use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?
4. To what extent does Instagram use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between WhatsApp use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between Facebook use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between TikTok use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

H04: There is no significant relationship between Instagram use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Social Media Use

Social media use refers to the engagement of individuals with internet-based platforms that enable users to create, share, receive and interact with information and with other users. Social media has become an important component of contemporary interpersonal communication because it allows individuals to maintain relationships, exchange messages, share photographs and videos, participate in groups and express personal opinions without the limitations of physical distance. The increasing integration of social media into everyday life has consequently altered the manner in which people establish and maintain social relationships. Montag et al. found that WhatsApp constituted a substantial proportion of smartphone activity among users, demonstrating the importance of mobile social communication in everyday life. Similarly, Menon found that users of WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook employed social media stories for purposes including social sharing, self-presentation, disclosure, entertainment and social influence. These findings indicate that social media is not simply a technological tool but an important social environment through which individuals communicate and manage interpersonal relationships.

Social media use may produce both constructive and problematic consequences for interpersonal relationships. Through social networking platforms, individuals can maintain contact, express affection, obtain social support and participate in communities beyond their immediate physical environment. However, the interactive and persistent nature of online communication may also create opportunities for misunderstanding, jealousy, surveillance and interpersonal conflict. Tandon et al. in a systematic review of 45 empirical studies, identified partner behaviour, individual characteristics, rival interactions and platform features as important factors associated with social-media-induced jealousy. Daspe et al. further found that Facebook jealousy was associated with intimate partner violence perpetration, suggesting that online interactions can have implications for offline intimate relationships. Thus, the relevance of social media use to married persons lies not merely in the amount of time spent online but also in the nature of interactions, communication patterns and behaviours occurring through particular platforms.

WhatsApp Use

WhatsApp use refers to the use of the WhatsApp messaging platform for interpersonal communication through text messages, voice and video calls, photographs, videos, status updates and group conversations. Its relatively private and direct communication structure makes it particularly useful for maintaining personal and family relationships. Montag et al. in an analysis of smartphone behaviour among 2,418 users, reported that WhatsApp accounted for a considerable proportion of users' smartphone activity, illustrating its importance as a communication application. Similarly, Rosenfeld et al. examined more than six million WhatsApp messages and found differences in usage patterns across age and gender groups, including differences in group activity, response times and message characteristics. These findings suggest that WhatsApp provides a highly interactive communication environment in which patterns of frequency, responsiveness and participation can shape interpersonal relationships. For married persons, these features may facilitate communication between spouses but may also become relevant to misunderstandings or suspicion where online interactions are perceived as inappropriate or excessive.

Facebook Use

Facebook use involves participating in a social networking environment where individuals create profiles, publish posts, exchange messages, share photographs and videos, comment on other users' content and participate in social groups. Facebook has historically been one of the most extensively studied social networking platforms because of its capacity to make users' social interactions visible to others. Menon found that Facebook users employed story features for social sharing, self-presentation, disclosure, entertainment and social influence, demonstrating the platform's role in interpersonal expression and social interaction. More importantly for intimate relationships, Daspe

et al. found that Facebook jealousy mediated the relationship between Facebook use and intimate partner violence perpetration in their study, while Brem et al. found that Facebook-related jealousy and surveillance were associated with relationship aggression. These findings suggest that Facebook use may influence intimate relationships through mechanisms such as jealousy, monitoring and perceptions of partner behaviour rather than through mere platform membership alone.

TikTok Use

TikTok use involves creating, viewing, sharing and interacting with short-form videos through an algorithmically personalized social media environment. Unlike conventional text-oriented social networking platforms, TikTok places strong emphasis on audiovisual content, entertainment, self-expression, trends and rapid interaction. Montag et al. noted that TikTok has distinctive characteristics that shape patterns of user engagement and interaction, including its highly personalized content environment and emphasis on short-form video consumption. Tang et al. also found that TikTok use could contribute to positive emotions and relationship-related experiences, indicating that the platform can be used for social connection rather than merely passive entertainment. Similarly, Nemes, in an exploratory study of individuals in long-term relationships, found that TikTok could support relationship maintenance through self-disclosure, communication, shared activities, connection and humour. Thus, TikTok use among married persons may provide opportunities for shared interaction and expression, although the increasing role of the platform in personal and social relationships makes it relevant to understanding contemporary patterns of marital interaction.

Instagram Use

Instagram use refers to engagement with a visually oriented social networking platform through photographs, videos, stories, comments, likes, direct messages and other forms of content interaction. The platform enables users to construct and share aspects of their personal identity while simultaneously observing the activities and social interactions of other users. Zimmerman and Brown-Schmidt described social media as an increasingly important outlet for leisure and social interaction and used Instagram posts to examine how interaction with user-generated content shapes subsequent cognitive processes. Menon similarly found that Instagram stories were used for social sharing, self-promotion, disclosure, entertainment and social influence, indicating that the platform serves several interpersonal and self-presentational functions. In intimate relationships, these features may facilitate communication and relationship expression, but they may also make interactions with other users more visible and therefore potentially relevant to jealousy or misunderstandings. Tandon et al. consequently identified platform affordances and partner-related behaviours as important elements in understanding social-media-induced jealousy, providing a basis for examining Instagram use within the broader context of marital relationships.

Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence refers to patterns of physical, sexual, psychological or other forms of violence occurring within intimate or family relationships. Its prevalence remains a major public health and social concern because violence within the home can affect the physical safety, psychological wellbeing, social functioning and general quality of life of victims. The World Health Organization estimated that approximately one in three women globally had experienced physical and/or sexual violence, either by an intimate partner or a non-partner, while intimate partner violence constitutes a substantial proportion of violence experienced by women. The WHO prevalence estimates further demonstrate that domestic and intimate partner violence occurs across different countries, socioeconomic groups and cultural settings, although its magnitude varies considerably between populations. In Nigeria, domestic violence similarly remains an important concern, with evidence indicating that experiences of violence within families are associated with individual and intergenerational factors. Solanke, using nationally representative Nigerian data, found that exposure to violence between parents was associated with women's risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, highlighting the potential influence of family experiences on the persistence of

violence across generations.

The prevalence of domestic violence is also difficult to establish precisely because many incidents are not disclosed or reported. Social expectations surrounding marriage, fear of stigma, economic dependence, concern for children and perceptions that domestic disagreements should remain private may discourage victims from reporting their experiences. This means that officially recorded cases may represent only part of the actual burden of domestic violence. Research has also demonstrated that domestic violence is not exclusively experienced by women, even though women experience a disproportionate burden of severe intimate partner violence. Busari et al. for example, examined domestic violence perpetrated against men in Ibadan and demonstrated the importance of considering male experiences when examining violence within intimate relationships. Similarly, WHO emphasizes that prevalence estimates depend substantially on how violence is defined, measured and disclosed. Therefore, examining the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons requires attention to the experiences of both men and women and to different manifestations of violence rather than restricting the concept to physical assault alone.

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura and formally pronounced in 1977, is considered appropriate for explaining the relationship between social media use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons. Bandura proposed that human behaviour is learned through the interaction of personal, behavioural and environmental factors, with particular emphasis on observation, imitation, modelling and reinforcement. The theory assumes that individuals do not acquire behaviour only through direct experience; they can also learn by observing the behaviour of others and the consequences that follow such behaviour. Behaviour that appears to receive approval, rewards or favourable outcomes is more likely to be imitated, while behaviour associated with negative consequences may be less likely to be reproduced. The theory further assumes that individuals are active processors of social information and that cognitive processes influence whether an observed behaviour is retained and reproduced. In relation to aggression, Bandura's work suggests that aggressive behaviour can be acquired through observation and modelling.

Despite its usefulness, Social Learning Theory has been criticised for placing considerable emphasis on learned behaviour while potentially giving insufficient attention to biological, structural and broader social factors that may influence behaviour. Critics also argue that observation of a behaviour does not automatically result in its imitation because individuals differ in their interpretation of what they observe, their personal characteristics and their expected consequences of performing the behaviour. The theory may therefore be less adequate when used as a single explanation for complex behaviours such as domestic violence, which can arise from the interaction of multiple individual, relational and social factors. Recent research on intimate partner violence has similarly noted inconsistencies when a single theoretical framework is used to explain the complex processes underlying violence and has recommended consideration of multiple interacting factors.

The relevance of Social Learning Theory to the present study lies in its explanation of how social environments can influence attitudes and behaviours within intimate relationships. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram expose users to numerous models of communication, relationship behaviour, conflict resolution and aggression. Married persons may observe, interact with or receive reinforcement for particular forms of behaviour through these platforms. Where hostile communication, controlling behaviour, jealousy or aggressive responses are repeatedly observed and perceived as acceptable or rewarded, such behaviours may potentially influence interpersonal conduct. Conversely, exposure to healthy relationship models, non-violent conflict resolution and messages discouraging domestic violence may support more constructive behaviours. The theory therefore provides a useful framework for examining how patterns of social media use may be associated with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, while recognising that social media exposure alone does not establish that violence will occur.

Ajonye et al. investigated social media use, intimate partner violence and marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design and collected data from 867 married respondents across four major locations in Benue State. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, simple linear regression and multiple regression. The study examined the interaction between social media use, intimate partner violence and marital infidelity, providing direct evidence that digital communication has become an important factor in contemporary marital relationships. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it focused on married persons and examined social media alongside intimate partner violence in a Nigerian setting. However, its geographical focus was Benue State and its main outcome was marital infidelity, rather than the prevalence of domestic violence. It also considered social media use generally rather than separately examining WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram.

Odenigbo et al. examined the influence of social media messages on adult internet users and issues relating to domestic violence against cohabiting and married women in Southeast Nigeria. The study specifically addressed the relationship between social media messages and domestic violence involving married and cohabiting women. The researchers considered social media as an avenue through which information concerning domestic violence is communicated and received, thereby drawing attention to its potential role in shaping knowledge and perceptions of domestic violence. The study is relevant to the present investigation because it was conducted in Nigeria and directly connected social media communication with domestic violence among married women. Nevertheless, its focus was primarily on social media messages and issues surrounding domestic violence rather than on the relationship between the use of individual social media platforms and the prevalence of domestic violence. The present study therefore extends this line of inquiry by examining specific platforms, namely WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, among married persons in Rivers State.

Daspe et al. examined the relationship between Facebook use, Facebook-related jealousy and intimate partner violence perpetration in two studies. In the first study, 1,508 participants completed an online survey measuring Facebook use, Facebook jealousy and intimate partner violence perpetration. The second study adopted a dyadic approach involving 92 young people representing 46 couples. Findings showed that Facebook-related jealousy significantly mediated the association between Facebook use and intimate partner violence perpetration. The study further found that the relationship between an individual's Facebook jealousy and intimate partner violence was influenced by the level of Facebook jealousy experienced by the partner. The study demonstrates that activities occurring on a social networking platform may have implications for offline intimate relationships and aggressive behaviour. Its relevance to the present study lies particularly in its focus on Facebook as a specific social media platform and its connection with intimate partner violence. However, the study was conducted among adolescents and young adults rather than a broader population of married persons, and it focused specifically on Facebook rather than WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram. This limitation creates justification for examining the four platforms collectively among married persons in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the relationship between social media use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State without manipulating any of the variables. Specifically, the study examined the relationships between the use of WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram and the prevalence of domestic violence.

The population of the study comprised married persons in Rivers State. The exact number of married persons in the State could not be established from a single reliable administrative register because marriage records are maintained through different institutions and a substantial proportion of marriages are conducted traditionally or religiously without being captured in a unified database.

The population was therefore regarded as unknown for the purpose of determining the sample size. The study covered married persons residing in the three senatorial districts of Rivers State.

A sample size of 400 married persons was used for the study. The sample size was considered adequate for a correlational survey involving a population whose exact size could not be established. The sample was selected through a multistage sampling procedure. First, the three senatorial districts of Rivers State were considered as the major sampling strata. Second, selected Local Government Areas were drawn from the senatorial districts using simple random sampling. Third, communities within the selected Local Government Areas were selected, after which eligible married persons were identified. Finally, respondents who met the inclusion criterion of being legally, traditionally or religiously married and resident in Rivers State were selected through purposive sampling. The multistage procedure ensured that respondents were drawn from different geographical areas of the State rather than concentrating the study in one location.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Social Media Use and Domestic Violence Questionnaire (SMUDVQ)”. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on social media use and domestic violence. It consisted of two sections. Section A elicited demographic information from the respondents, while Section B contained items measuring the study variables.

The social media use component was divided into four subscales: WhatsApp Use, Facebook Use, TikTok Use and Instagram Use. Items in each subscale measured respondents' engagement with the respective platform, including frequency of use, communication with other users, sharing of content, participation in online interactions and exposure to relationship-related interactions. The domestic violence component contained items measuring experiences of domestic violence within marital relationships, including physical, psychological/emotional and controlling behaviours. A four-point Likert response scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) was used for the substantive items.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation. Copies of the questionnaire, together with the research objectives, research questions and hypotheses, were given to experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Sociology or related fields. The experts examined the items for clarity, relevance, adequacy of coverage and appropriateness to the variables being measured. Their observations and corrections were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire before administration.

The reliability of the SMUDVQ was established through a pilot test involving married persons who were not included in the main study. The responses obtained from the pilot administration were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and its subscales. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for the study. The reliability coefficients obtained for the individual subscales and the overall instrument were used to establish that the questionnaire was sufficiently reliable for the main data collection.

The researcher administered the questionnaires to the sampled respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents before administration. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that the information provided would be treated confidentially and used strictly for academic purposes. Because the study involved a sensitive subject, respondents were not required to write their names or provide information that could directly identify them. Completed questionnaires were retrieved after administration and screened for completeness before analysis.

Data collected were coded and analysed using appropriate statistical procedures. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the four research questions and test the corresponding null hypotheses. Specifically, PPMC was used to determine the relationship between WhatsApp use and prevalence of domestic violence, Facebook use and prevalence of domestic violence, TikTok use and prevalence of domestic violence, and Instagram use and prevalence of

domestic violence.

The null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected where the obtained probability value was less than 0.05, while it was retained where the probability value was greater than 0.05. The direction and magnitude of the correlation coefficient were also considered in interpreting the relationships between the variables.

Result

Research Question 1: To what extent does WhatsApp use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between WhatsApp use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Table 1. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between WhatsApp Use and Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Persons in Rivers State

		WhatsApp Use	Prevalence of Domestic Violence
WhatsApp Use	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.214
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	400	400
Prevalence of Domestic Violence	Pearson correlation	0.214	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	400	400

The result in Table 1 shows that there was a positive and significant relationship between WhatsApp use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, $r = 0.214$, $p < 0.05$. Since the obtained p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that WhatsApp use was significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does Facebook use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between Facebook use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Table 2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Facebook Use and Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Persons in Rivers State

		Facebook Use	Prevalence of Domestic Violence
Facebook Use	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.287
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	400	400
Prevalence of Domestic Violence	Pearson correlation	0.287	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	400	400

The result in Table 2 indicates a positive and significant relationship between Facebook use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, $r = 0.287$, $p < 0.05$. The p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

This indicates that Facebook use was significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: To what extent does TikTok use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between TikTok use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Table 3. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between TikTok Use and Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Persons in Rivers State

		Facebook Use	Prevalence of Domestic Violence
TikTok Use	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	400	400
Prevalence of Domestic Violence	Pearson correlation	0.176	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	400	400

The result in Table 3 reveals that there was a positive and significant relationship between TikTok use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, $r = 0.176$, $p < 0.05$. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that TikTok use was significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Research Question 4: To what extent does Instagram use relate to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State?

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between Instagram use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Table 4. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Instagram Use and Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Persons in Rivers State.

		Instagram Use	Prevalence of Domestic Violence
Instagram Use	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.231
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	400	400
Prevalence of Domestic Violence	Pearson correlation	0.231	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	400	400

The result in Table 4 shows that there was a positive and significant relationship between Instagram use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State, $r = 0.231$, $p < 0.05$. Since the obtained p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that Instagram use was significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between WhatsApp use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. This finding suggests that increased engagement with WhatsApp was associated with increased prevalence of domestic violence among the respondents [16]. The finding may be explained by the private and interactive nature of WhatsApp, which allows users to maintain direct conversations, share photographs and videos, participate in group discussions and communicate with persons outside their immediate household. Such interactions may become sources of suspicion, jealousy, monitoring or misunderstanding between spouses, particularly where one partner interprets another partner's online communication as inappropriate. The finding agrees with Montag et al. who established the substantial role of WhatsApp in everyday interpersonal communication, and with Tandon et al. who identified partner behaviour and platform-related interactions as important factors in social-media-induced jealousy. The finding is also consistent with the Social Learning Theory, which holds that behaviour can be influenced by social interactions and observed patterns of behaviour. However, the finding should not be interpreted to mean that WhatsApp use directly causes domestic violence, since the correlational design only establishes an association between the variables.

The study also found a positive and significant relationship between Facebook use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. Of the four social media platforms examined, Facebook recorded the strongest relationship with domestic violence. This finding indicates that interactions occurring through Facebook may be associated with conflict within marital relationships. Facebook provides opportunities for public comments, private messaging, photographs, friendships and interactions with people outside the marriage. These features may create situations in which spouses become suspicious of one another's online activities or engage in monitoring and other controlling behaviours. The finding strongly agrees with Daspe et al. who found a significant association between Facebook use, Facebook-related jealousy and intimate partner violence perpetration. It is also consistent with Brem et al, who reported an association between Facebook-related jealousy and surveillance and relationship aggression. The present finding therefore reinforces the argument that social media platforms can become relevant to intimate partner conflict when online interactions generate jealousy, suspicion or perceived threats to the relationship [17].

Another finding was that TikTok use had a positive and significant relationship with the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. Although the relationship was weaker than those observed for Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, the result indicates that TikTok use was nevertheless significantly associated with domestic violence. The finding may be related to the increasingly social nature of TikTok, where users do not merely watch short videos but also comment, interact, follow other users and participate in trends and challenges. Such activities can become incorporated into marital relationships and may generate disagreements where spouses have different expectations concerning online interactions. The finding extends the observations of Montag et al. who noted the distinctive social and psychological characteristics of TikTok use, and is also related to Tang et al. who found that TikTok use could influence users' emotions and interpersonal relationships [18]. The present finding is important because much of the earlier research on social media and intimate relationships concentrated on older platforms such as Facebook, whereas TikTok represents a newer environment of digital interaction.

The study further revealed a positive and significant relationship between Instagram use and the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. The finding suggests that greater engagement with Instagram was associated with higher prevalence of domestic violence among the respondents. Instagram's emphasis on photographs, videos, stories, comments, likes and direct messages provides users with numerous opportunities for social interaction and self-presentation. These features may become relevant to marital disagreements when spouses interpret

online interactions with other users as inappropriate or threatening to the relationship. The finding is consistent with Menon, who found that Instagram users employed stories for social sharing, self-presentation, disclosure, entertainment and social influence. It also corresponds with Tandon et al., whose systematic review identified platform characteristics and partner-related behaviours as important factors associated with social-media-induced jealousy. The present finding consequently suggests that Instagram, like other social media platforms, may form part of the digital environment within which contemporary marital conflicts develop [19].

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the four social media platforms examined in the study were significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. The stronger relationship observed for Facebook compared with WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok may reflect differences in the nature and duration of users' interactions, the visibility of social connections and the range of relationship-related activities supported by the platform. The findings are broadly consistent with Daspe et al. who demonstrated that social media-related jealousy could be associated with intimate partner violence, and Tandon et al. who showed that social media-induced jealousy is influenced by partner behaviour and platform characteristics. They also support the relevance of Social Learning Theory because social media provides an environment in which individuals are continuously exposed to interpersonal behaviours, attitudes and patterns of interaction that may influence their own responses. Nevertheless, the findings should be understood as evidence of association rather than causation, since social media use may interact with pre-existing marital, psychological, cultural and socioeconomic factors in shaping domestic violence.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that social media use is significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons in Rivers State. Specifically, WhatsApp use, Facebook use, TikTok use and Instagram use each demonstrated a positive and significant relationship with the prevalence of domestic violence. This indicates that patterns of interaction and engagement on these platforms are associated with variations in the prevalence of domestic violence among married persons. The study further concludes that Facebook use had the strongest relationship with the prevalence of domestic violence, followed by Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok. This suggests that the different features and patterns of interaction associated with individual social media platforms may have varying implications for marital relationships. However, the findings do not imply that social media use directly causes domestic violence. Rather, social media may provide an environment in which issues such as jealousy, suspicion, monitoring, perceived infidelity and communication difficulties can emerge and become associated with marital conflict. Overall, the study establishes that social media has become a relevant factor in understanding contemporary marital relationships and domestic violence in Rivers State. Attention to the ways married persons use WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram is therefore important in developing more responsive approaches to marital counselling, domestic violence prevention and responsible digital communication. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: Marital counselling programmes should incorporate responsible social media use. Counsellors and family therapists should educate married persons on healthy digital communication, mutual trust, appropriate online boundaries and constructive ways of addressing misunderstandings arising from WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram interactions. Government agencies and non-governmental organisations should strengthen social media-based domestic violence awareness programmes. Since all four platforms were significantly related to domestic violence, awareness campaigns should use WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram to educate married persons about the consequences of jealousy, online monitoring, threats, harassment and other harmful behaviours that may escalate marital conflict. Community and religious organisations should promote healthy approaches to resolving social-media-related marital conflicts. Marriage enrichment programmes should address issues such as suspicion over private messages, interactions with other users, photographs, comments and online friendships, while encouraging couples to resolve disagreements through communication rather than intimidation,

threats or violence. Stakeholders should pay particular attention to Facebook and Instagram interactions. Since Facebook recorded the strongest relationship with domestic violence, followed by Instagram, counselling and prevention programmes should place particular emphasis on managing jealousy, surveillance, inappropriate online interactions and perceived infidelity associated with these platforms, while also addressing similar concerns arising from WhatsApp and TikTok use.

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