

Stance and Engagement in the Discourses on Intimate Partner Domestic Violence in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
The discourses on intimate partner domestic violence (IPDV) have become ubiquitous across the globe, owing to the prevalence and seriousness of the social menace. Such discourses are often replete with diverse perspectives, not only on IPDV itself but also on the human persons involved in or affected by the scourge. Through pragmatic lens, this study investigates the subjective positions of Nigerian social media users on IPDV in order to appraise general opinion about the menace and the persons involved in or affected by it. Working within the framework of Hyland's (2005) model of Stance and Engagement, the study examines twenty purposively selected news items on IPDV, including their comment trends taken from three popular social media platforms: Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter) and Instagram. The study reveals the abundant use of affective and evaluative stance, depicting that IPDV is ingrained in most Nigerian cultures, and largely supported by religious and cultural institutions. KEYWORDS: Stance And Engagement, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Affective Stance, Evaluative Stance.	Published On: 17 February 2026 Available on: https://ijiissh.com/

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner domestic violence (IPDV) is a term that specifically refers to an array of infringements or abuses that occur between individuals who have romantic relationship and share the same abode. This annihilating and pervasive problem is one of the most common forms of violence against humanity in our contemporary time (Sardinha, et al. 2022), occurring in diverse settings and among various socio-economic, religious and cultural groups. It is a menace that bears far reaching consequences on the health, social and economic welfare of the victims and long term effects on their children, their families and society at large. While it has been submitted that IPDV is not gender-based, research has shown that women, more than men, are victims of IPDV. Fact Sheet on Violence against Women produced by WHO in 2024 revealed that approximately 30% of ever-partnered women experiences physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Hester (2009) studied

perpetuators of domestic violence by tracking cases made to the Northumbria police from 2001-2007 and revealed that the number of women who perpetuated domestic violence increased slightly when compared to past research; however, the greater number of cases examined were perpetuated by men. Other studies such as Bakare, Asuquo and Agomoh (2010); Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode (2013) revealed that women are usually victims of IPDV, and this is not unconnected to gender inequality. Exposure to IPDV has been associated with increased morbidity and is documented as the third leading cause of mortality, especially among women of reproductive age (Umana, 2014). Men and women experience different forms of DV, including physical, psychological, emotional and sexual violence (Silva et al, 2015; Oseyemwen et al, 2019).

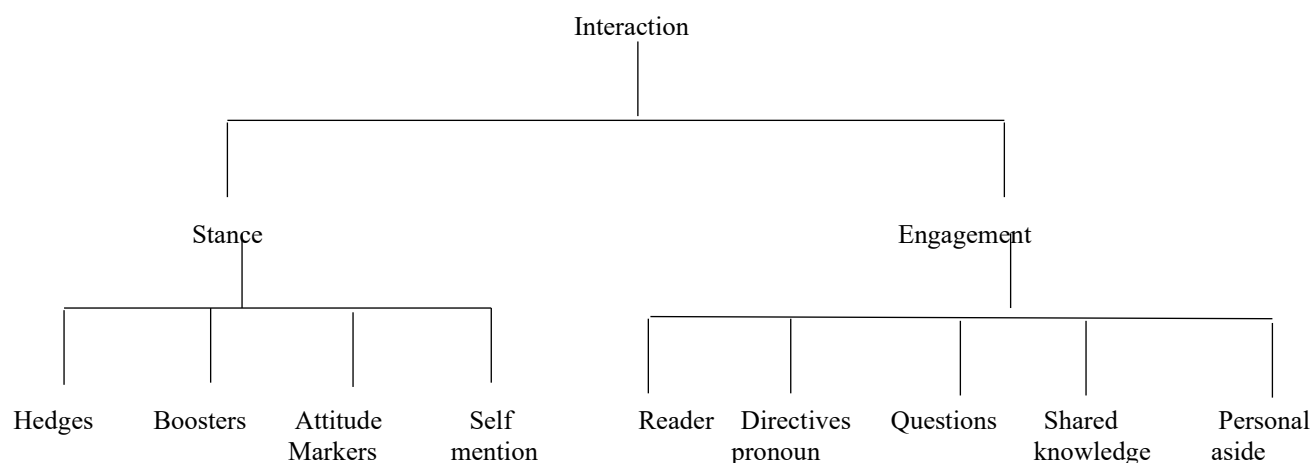
The study conducted by World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) identified reasons victims of IPDV stay in such relationships as fear of retaliation, lack of alternative means of economic support from family and friends, fear of losing custody of children and hope that the partner would change. Scholars such as Fawole, Okedare and Reed (2021); Onyebuchi, Nwagbara, David and Welche (2021) also studied the direct effect of COVID-19 on the peaceful co-existence of partners in domestic environments. They studied media reports from an organisation that responded to violence against women in the southern part of Nigeria during lockdown. Onyebuchi, Nwagbara, David and Welche (2021) carried out a content analysis of news coverage of domestic violence during the lockdown. Both studies are pointers to the fact that the poor economic situation due to COVID-19 led to increased number of domestic violence at that time.

From linguistic perspective, Leong (2011) carried out a critical discourse analysis of newspaper reports of cases of domestic violence in Malaysia. He adopted Van Dijk's social cognition framework and came up with the fact that the linguistic elements deployed in the reports ideologically reflected news actors covert gender-bias in the representation of male or female perpetrators of domestic violence. He also observed that the vulnerability of the women are often foregrounded by the text producers and represented the female gender as victims in a male dominating society.

Abochol and Adeboye (2015) examined the semantic implication of media report of domestic violence in Nigeria. They employed Halliday's scale and category theory to study semantics of words and expressions of selected newspaper headlines, and noted that violence words used in paper headlines had semantic implications because they created fear and anxiety in the minds of readers. Aragbuwa (2021) used Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis to study discursive strategies employed in 15 victims' weblog narratives of domestic violence. The finding showed that the victims ideologically represented themselves as the dominated group while their assailants were constructed as the dominant group. In this way, the narratives functioned as discourses of resistance against inequality. Mostly, scholarly attention has been paid to the prevalence, causes and impacts of IPDV while orienting epidemiological, psychological and sociological frameworks. Comparatively, little attention has been given to how IPDV is discursively constructed in narratives, particularly how speakers and writers position themselves and their audiences through stance-taking and engagement strategies. This relative neglect of interactional and evaluative meaning-making points to a crucial lacuna in literature, occasioning a stance and engagement analysis of IPDV narratives to uncover how IPDV are framed, legitimised, resisted or normalised.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study orients to Hyland's (2005) Stance and Engagement – a theoretical paradigm which explores how writers' confidence, attitude, persuasiveness, shared knowledge and mutual interaction with the readers are exhibited in a communicative piece. Though originally developed for the investigation of "positioning" or "point of view" in academic writings, stance and engagement features have been applied to other life domains as communicative devices with which the correspondence between texts, readers and social contexts are structured for the main aim of presenting the intricacies of rhetorical functions. Here, this theoretical guide is used to investigate how writers and speakers on IPDV project their feelings and judgment in what they produce. While *stance* encapsulates a number of devices and linguistic features writers use to relate their own authority and mask their opinion, *engagement* is the involvement dimension where writers, in recognition of audience's presence, seek to pull them along in their argument and directing them into certain interpretations as discourse participants. Put together, therefore, *stance and engagement* features are devices for structuring the triadic connection between texts, readers and social context in order to exhibit the nuances of rhetorical functions in texts.



Hedges are used to show caution or uncertainty; for *example*, may, might, possibly, seems.

Boosters show confidence or certainty.

Attitude Markers reveal the writer's feelings or evaluation; for instance unfortunately, surprisingly, important, interesting.

Self-mentions make explicit reference to the writer. This is usually done with the use of first person pronouns: I, we, my, our.

Reader Pronouns directly include the reader. Examples are: you, your, we.

Directives tell the reader to do something or guide them. "Consider", "note that", "remember" are some of the examples.

Questions engage the reader by prompting thought. For example, "what does this mean?" "Why is this important?"

Shared Knowledge assumes common understanding with the reader.

Personal Asides may include brief comments directed at the reader. Examples: by the way, it should be noted.

METHODOLOGY

Twenty narratives of IPDV published on social media platforms together with the train of comments they generated were purposively selected from three social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and X) owing to their currency. The comments were then edited to rid them of grammatical infelicities that may impede understanding. This was done without altering the meaning being projected by the commenters. The data were subjected to pragmatic analysis using Hyland's (2005) model of stance and engagement as theoretical anchor.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data revealed the abundant use of stance markers to condemn IPDV as well as its perpetrators and victims, implicate complicity of religion and society; and engagement markers to induce IPDV victims' resistance.

Stance markers

Attitude markers and boosters were deployed as stance markers to (i) condemn IPV/DV, (ii) register disgust for perpetrators of IPV/DV, and by extension the gender of the perpetrator and (iii) implicate the complicity of religious bodies, religious leaders and the society in the perpetuation of IPDV.

Use of Attitude Markers

These are indicators of the writers' attitude towards the propositions, conveying feeling such as surprise, sadness, happiness, agreement, frustration and so on. Subordinations, comparative, progressive particles, text location, punctuation, attitude verbs, sentence adverbs, adjectives are examples of the markers with which writers reveal their feelings concerning a material. The examples cited below, the writers deploy the use of adverbs, adjectives and punctuation to display their despondency towards IPDV.

Excerpt 1

I'm short of words; so it is domestic violence that shortened the life of this beautiful lady. **This is disheartening story!** I just wish she survived it; I would have advised her to walk away from the marriage. Anyway, let God judge on this.

Excerpt 2

So so sad. The news of your death pained me to the marrow.

Excerpt 3

...Your husband shortens your destiny. **God will judge him.**

Excerpts 1, 2 and 3 above instantiate the use of attitude markers in the narrative of IPDV in Nigeria. The use of the adjective "disheartening" in "[t]his is disheartening story", adverb "so" used repetitively in "so, so sad" and the expression "God will judge you" in these examples signal the writers' aversion and despondency towards the case of IPDV and the perpetrators of the crime. Specifically, the adjective "disheartening" and the repetitive use of the adverb "so" show the intensity of pain being felt by the writers. The expression "God will judge you" (the perpetrator of the case of IPDV) signal the assumption that the case is not just a crime against humanity but a sin against God, hence the invocation of the judgment of God on the perpetrator. By and large, the examples show the attitude of disdain, disgust and sadness towards the cases of IPDV as well as their perpetrators.

Use of Boosters

Boosters are involvement-oriented stance markers that allow the writers to display their certainty in what they are expressing, thereby soliciting the audience's agreement and solidarity.

Excerpt 4

It's now time Africans change their mentality about divorce and separation. Many victims of bad marriage would have left the marriage but the fear of what people will say, how people will judge them and other "people's" factors made them stay till they finally leave the world unprepared and people say "rest in peace". Again, religious beliefs/religion should allow anyone who desire to quit his/her marriage do so in peace without being tagged "the bad one". Religious leaders should stop encouraging abused spouse to pray and endure, no! Domestic abuse is no gender bias, any of the spouses can be a victim. This is common these days. I hope and pray everyone in a bad marriage finds strength to quit and become "deaf" to whatever the society would say.

The writer begins with a directive booster ("it is now time...") to signal urgency and more necessity. But more than that, the booster is used to present claims as facts and call out "African mentality" as one of the reasons people are trapped in abusive relationships. This expression that positions the writer as decisive registers IPDV as a serious problem that requires an urgent solution. Again, what is implicated in Excerpt 4 above is the victims' naivety and religious leaders' complicity in the prevalence

of IPDV. The writer makes use of categorical statements by deploying modal auxiliary verb “should” to condemn religious leaders’ subtle encouragement of IPDV under the guise of wanting to keep God’s mandate on marriage. “Religious leaders should stop encouraging abused spouses to pray and endure” is a statement that is expected to spur religious leaders to more action-oriented involvement in cases of IPDV.

Excerpt 5

*Some stupid women will still find a way of making excuses for the wicked woman. **Men, anything I tell you about women is true. I know women very well.** Later, they tell you “men can’t take what they dish out”... Men, I keep saying it: women very are wicked. I know exactly what I mean by that.*

Similar to Excerpt 5, Excerpt 6 above shows the writer’s expression of certainty in what he is saying. Unlike the examples presented in the other excerpts, the narrative of IPDV has a woman as the perpetrator. The writer says “men, anything I tell you about women is true. I know women very well.” to exhibit assurance and solicit the solidarity and agreement of the audience. “...anything I tell you about is true.” is a call to the audience to take as absolute his claim about women. The writer goes ahead to add unsubstantiated or pseudo epistemic proposition in an attempt to convince the audience about his claim on whom women are.

Excerpt 6

My wife doesn’t like cooking too, neither does she like any house chore for that matter and she gets so jealous and obsessed over a little thing. I’m really afraid for her, myself and our kids. Women, they’re mean and dangerous.

The writer’s comment uses emphatic language to construct personal perception as objective danger. The intensifier “really” in “I’m really afraid” acts as a booster that amplifies emotional certainty and legitimises fear as an unquestionable response, positioning the writer as a credible witness to threat. Specifically, the declarative generalisation “women, they’re mean and dangerous” functions as a maximal booster: it removes contingency, context, and individual agency, converting a claimed interpersonal conflict into an essentialised and universal truth about women. Here, the use of booster is ideologically significant because it closes down alternative explanations and instead constructs violence or risk as inherent and inevitable. By presenting fear and danger as self-evident facts rather than subjective interpretations, the boosters help justify surveillance, control, or pre-emptive defensive action, thereby reproducing discursive patterns commonly used to rationalise or normalise coercive responses within intimate relationships.

Excerpt 7

Mmmm, this is deep indeed.... Divorce in marriage is better than rest in peace **honestly**. Singles, pray with your spirit, soul and body when asking God to give you a life partner. God will **surely** answer your prayers. And be submissive enough to follow God’s direction for your own good.

In Excerpt 7, “honestly” and “surely” are sentence adverbs that show the writer’s surety about divorce and God’s devotion to the prayer of those who diligently seek him for partners. His expressions “being divorced is way better than being dead in the process of saving one’s marriage” is probably made to counter the popular African position that “facing all forms of challenges in marriage is better than having a broken home.

Engagement Markers

Using the interactional dimension of engagement, commenters on IPDV cases/ narratives used *reader pronoun*, *directives* and *questions* to appeal to the audience’s reasonability and induce IPDV victims’ resistance.

Use of Questions

Excerpt 8

When the marriage is not working please move out. People keep saying because of children, church and what people will say. Which one is better: to move out with your life or to end it with RIP? Domestic violence have send (sic) so many people to grave. May her soul rest in peace.

Excerpt 8 strategically employs a rhetorical question to position readers toward a preferred interpretation of intimate partner domestic violence. The question “Which one is better: to move out with your life or to end it with RIP?” functions not as a genuine request for information but as a dialogic device that actively involves readers while simultaneously constraining their response. By presenting only two alternatives - survival through separation or death - the question closes down dialogic space and guides readers to an unequivocal moral conclusion. In Hyland’s terms, this engagement marker simulates reader involvement while exerting strong authorial control, as disagreement becomes socially and morally untenable. Within IPV discourse, such questioning is particularly powerful because it frames leaving the relationship as the only rational and ethical choice, marginalising other perspectives (such as cultural, religious, or structural constraints) that are briefly referenced earlier in the text. The question thus operates to align readers with the writer’s stance, reinforcing urgency and legitimising decisive action through a seemingly interactive but ultimately directive form of engagement.

Use of Directives

Directives instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer. These are signaled by the use of imperatives and predicative adjectives.

Excerpt 9

Dear women, you have no reason to be in an abusive marriage, it is better to leave with your life than to leave in a casket. Stop playing virtuous woman when you should be running for your peace.

Directives, in the discourses on IPDV cases, are either subtly or strongly rendered. These are done with the use of imperatives to (i) spur the victims of IPDV to excuse themselves from abusive marriages (ii) to advise unmarried people to be mindful of the choice of life partners they make. In Excerpt 9 above, “stop playing virtuous woman when you should be running for your peace” is an example of cognitive act which allows for the audience to be guided through a line of reasoning, namely, leaving an abusive marriage/relationship.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the general public’s position on the narratives of IPDV as presented in three popular social media platforms (Facebook, X and Instagram) by investigating how they engage the issue of IPDV as well as their audience. It was shown that the writers’ comments on IPDV displayed disgust, sadness and frustration and also implicated the complicity of religious leaders and the society in the prevalence of IPDV in Africa. As a result, the discourse does not merely describe domestic violence but actively shapes readers’ understanding of it as an immediate, fatal threat that demands decisive action.

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