



Digital Media Use and Dating Abuse: An Exploration of Johnson's Typology of Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of digital media by undergraduate students in selected universities in Nairobi City County in perpetrating different types of violence as outlined in Michael Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence. Drawing data from a larger study, which used a cross sectional descriptive research design the findings presented here reveal certain important trends and patterns relating to perpetration of Cyber Dating Abuse (CDA). Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires from 315 respondents who were randomly sampled for the study. Additionally, 48 respondents provided qualitative data through focus group discussion. In line with Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence, data analysis reveals that while the students reportedly used a range of digital media, WhatsApp was the most used in perpetrating intimate partner violence and that the violence perpetrated covered all the four forms of abuse. Of these four, coercive control violence which involved monitoring and control was the most pervasive. The paper concludes that the proliferation and ready availability of different types of user-friendly digital technologies and social networks has enabled both males and females to easily access them and use them in ways that make it possible and, perhaps, easier to perpetrate CDA. The paper recommends the establishment of mentorship programs in universities in Nairobi City County to sensitize them on the negative social character of digital media technology particularly in relation to matters of CDA and how to prevent it.

Keywords: Cyber dating abuse, digital media, Johnson's typology

Introduction

Violence among intimate partners is widespread in today's society with rising cases every day. Intimate partner violence (IPV) initially thought to be a problem that only affects married couples, has been found to be rampant among dating couples as well. Consequently, while this phenomenon cuts across all age groups, young people such as undergraduate students at universities are at a greater danger of finding themselves in destructive relationships. According to Kline (2009) the phase when young adults are learning to form interpersonal relationships is often characterized by conflicts that are painful, complicated, and often dangerous.

Intimate partner violence exists in different forms consisting of physical attack and injuries which in extreme cases causes death, psychological aggression and sexual coercion. A new form of IPV that occurs in the form of the last two types of conflicts may not be widely reported, as these occur in 'silence' without outsiders being privy to it. This is especially true in this age of technological advancement which has revolutionized the way people connect with each other.

The availability of the internet, social media and mobile phones while easing communication among dating individuals, is also responsible for promoting several negative behaviours. Technology can be used to control a partner by monitoring their movements and keeping note of what they are engaged in and controlling their interactions by directing who they befriend and talk to. It can also be used in issuing threats to a partner and showing hostility to them. Individuals also use social media to publicly share their partners' sexual videos and photos with other people without their partners' consent. Others use social media or mobile phones to pressure partners to get involved in non-consensual sexual behaviour like sexting (Reed, Tolman & Ward 2016). All these forms of behaviour when perpetrated through technology constitute a kind of violence among intimate partners called Cyber Dating Abuse (CDA).

In the past few years, cases of intimate partner violence among undergraduate Kenyan students have been reported. Some of these cases have been directly linked to Cyber Dating Abuse. For instance, in 2017 a male student in their fourth year at one of the Kenyan university pursuing a degree in Arts was a victim of this. His girlfriend who was expectant at the time- a first year- schooling in the same university was enraged when he posted another girl's picture on his Facebook page (Chege, 2017). In 2019, a female student in her sixth-year pursuing Medicine at Moi University, was reported to have been axed to death by her frustrated 'supposed lover', a childhood friend and classmate, in a case of unrequited love. On the fateful day, the report stated that the perpetrator was infuriated by the woman's failure to answer his calls as she had switched off her phone, thus cutting communication between them. Going by the said reported cases, it is evident that technology contributes to intimate partner violence among dating university students.

Consequently, this paper sought first, to identify the types of digital media undergraduate students in selected universities in Nairobi City County use to perpetrate Cyber Dating Abuse. Secondly, to assess the type of intimate partner violence that the undergraduate students from the selected universities in Nairobi City County experienced. This paper therefore wanted to relate Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence to violence perpetrated digitally among courting

undergraduate students. It investigated the use of technology in the perpetration of diverse kinds of violence as delineated by Johnson in his typology of intimate partner violence. Johnson's typology tries to explain violence from an integrative perspective. He asserts that there are four (4) types of violence which can be viewed from the feminist and family violence perspectives. The first is Coercive control Violence which results out of traditional patriarchy which grants men control over their women. It involves a partner's dominance over the other. The controlling partner employs controlling tactics, keeps watch and establishes rules which, if flouted, lead to punitive action (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Although it is a form of violence which can be carried out by both males and females, in heterosexual relationships males are more likely to perpetrate it more than females. The second one is Situational Couple Violence, explicated from a family violence perspective, is as a result of conflict that gets out of control. Such conflicts occur in a situation (Johnson, 2005) as a reaction to anger or frustration and, in heterosexual relationships, is likely to be done by both partners. The third one is Violent Resistance. This one occurs when a victim of Coercive Control Violence retaliates with violence in self-defense. In heterosexual relationships, it is primarily carried out by females. The fourth kind of violence delineated by Johnson is Mutual Violent Control. This kind of violence happens when two intimate partners like control and resort to violence against each other (Melander, 2010).

1.1 Method

The research design for this study was a cross sectional descriptive survey. Cross sectional studies make it possible to collect data at a point in time to illuminate current conditions or to reveal relationships between events (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). This study used a self-administered questionnaires to gather quantitative data from 315 respondents. For qualitative data, the study utilized a focus group discussion (FGD) which aimed at 'drawing attention on the given experience of the respondent and its effects' (Kothari, 2004). A total of 48 members drawn from Six FGD groups took part in the discussion. Every group consisted of a homogeneous sample of either gender comprising 8 members each. Given the sensitivity of the topic of research it was imperative to separate the respondents by gender to encourage open dialogue among the participants. The respondents interacted freely and, based on their own experiences and observations, they explained the different forms of digital dating violence they had perpetrated or had experienced. The FGD was appropriate for this study as it allowed for the voices and feelings of the respondents to be heard as they shared their experiences. Also, the method allowed for the use of language adapted to the ability and age of respondents to avoid misinterpretations of questions. FGDs save on time and enable the gathering of a lot of data in a short duration. (Morgan, 1988 ascited by Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

Findings and Discussions

1.4 Kinds of digital technologies used in perpetrating different forms of Cyber Dating Abuse

Analysis of the quantitative data showed that all the 315 respondents owned phones. Majority (99.7%) of the respondents used their phones to connect to the internet. This was supported by findings from the focus group discussion which affirmed that the respondents owned tablets, laptops and smart phones. A focus group discussant reported that almost every student owned a smart phone as they were cheaper compared to owning a laptop or tablet. Reed et al. (2016) in their

study also found that all their respondents owned mobile phones.

According to Mayoyo, Ogeno and Malenya (2020), the percentage of Kenyan university students owning mobile phones had increased compared to the number recorded in earlier studies. This finding could be attributed to the falling prices of smart phones. Besides given the fact that these students were based in Nairobi County which is a commercial hub, indicated that they had access to cheap and readily available smart phones. Besides, the Communication Authority of Kenya in one of its reports indicated that the Kenyan mobile market had experienced an exponential growth in 2018 (Mayoyo, Ogeno & Malenya, 2020). Equally this could be due to the apparent necessity of a smart phone for this level of studies as it is part of the facilities students require for their studies. The phones come in handy during registration of courses online, as well as attending online classes. Equally communication about courses is done via email or social media, lecturers also post assignment online which are done and submitted online. The respondents reported that they communicated using short messaging services, calls and social media. This paper further highlights the extent to which the respondents used the said communication technologies.

1.4.1 Messaging (Texting)

The study found out that the extent to which the sampled undergraduate students communicated with their current partners or ex-partners via Short Messaging Services (SMS). Almost a half of the total group adding up to One hundred and fifty four (48.9%) respondents reported that they exchanged up to 20 SMSes daily. Another group, of one hundred and one (32.1%) respondents reported exchanging up to 200 texts. A further 19 (6%) respondents exchanged up to 250 texts daily. Lastly another 23(7.3%) exchanged up to 500 texts daily. Only 18 (5.7%) respondents reported not to use text messages daily. The results therefore revealed that texting was popular among these respondents as 297 (94.3%) of them frequently communicated with their romantic partners via SMS. About half of them (45.4%) exchanged over 20 messages daily.

1.4.2 Phone calls

The respondents were also asked if they corresponded via phone calls. The results of the study indicated that 52.9% (163) of the respondents called their partners at least once every day. One hundred and thirty five (43.8%) respondents called their partners several times a day while 7 reported to call several times an hour. Only 3 respondents reported not to communicate via phone calls.

Analysis of the findings indicated that whereas 94.3% sent between 20-500 texts every day only slightly over half of the respondents (53%) corresponded with their partners via phone calls at least once a day. Evidently texting was given preference over making phone calls by majority of the respondents. This was affirmed in the focus group discussion.

I communicate with my boyfriend daily. Sometimes I make phone calls, but let say I text more than I call. (Female respondent, Nairobi).

Yes, texting is more convenient first, it is cheaper than calling. Then I can always text from anywhere, even when in a public place because there are things you don't want people to hear (Male respondent, Nairobi)

I guess most of us like to SMS more than call. The offers we get are just a deal. I can text

and text all day (Female respondent, Nairobi)

The respondents justified their choice pointing out that texting was inexpensive as compared to calling. This was made possible by the many options presented by Service providers which enabled them to choose tariffs that were pocket friendly. For instance one service provider for instance, provided 400 text messages a week for only 30 shillings or 200 text messages for 10 shillings per day. Moreover, communication by SMS was highly favoured because it afforded respondents privacy when communicating with their intimate partners when in public places. Respondents also enjoyed the convenience afforded by texting which could allow them to multitask and text from any location.

Types of social media used by students

This study also highlighted the range of social media the respondents used to connect with their partners. Figure 1 illustrated the findings as follows:

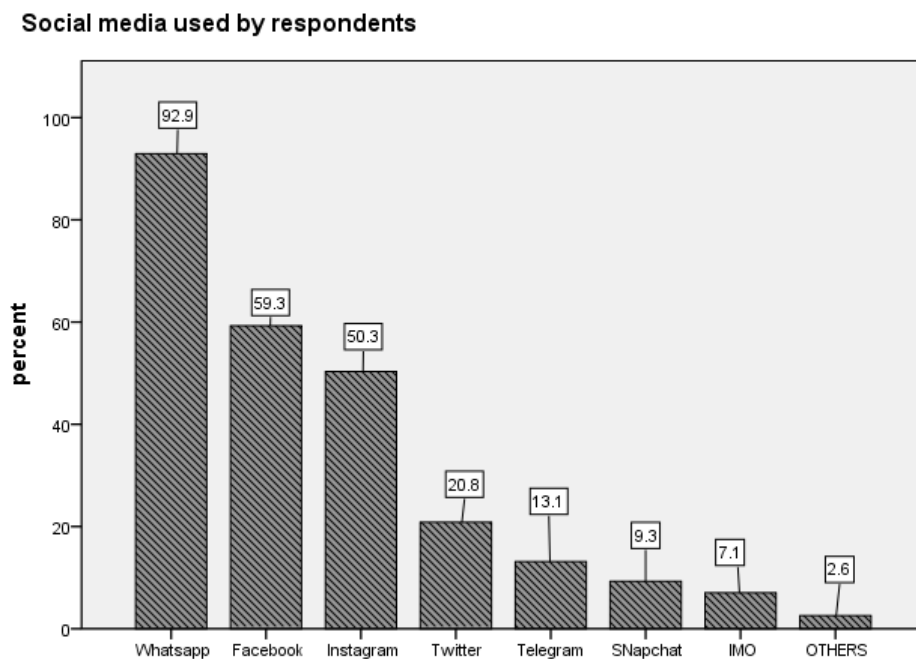


Figure 1: Different types of social media used by respondents

The findings indicated that WhatsApp was the most commonly used as reported by 92.9%. Facebook was second favourite as reported by 53.9%. Half of the respondents (50.3%) used Instagram.

My favourite social media...what I use most with my partner and friends is Whatsapp. But we also use Instagram and Facebook. (Female respondent, Nairobi)

There are quite a number of social media. I have like all of them, Facebook, Instagram Whatsapp, Weibo, WeChat, Tiktok. WhatsApp remains on top (Male respondent, Nairobi)
I have tried Weibo and Skype, but they are not as popular as Facebook. WhatsApp though

is good for that one on one communication especially with my girlfriend (Male respondent, Nairobi)

As revealed from both quantitative and qualitative data, the respondents utilized a variety of social media. Apart from Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram, they also used other social media like Twitter, TikTok, LinkedIn, Telegram, Messenger, Snapchat, WeChat, Skype, IMO, Viber, Google Duo, Line, and Weibo. Majority of the respondents reported that WhatsApp was mostly used to digitally perpetrate the different forms of intimate partner abuse. The respondents spent quite an amount of time utilizing social media and this prolonged interaction exposed them to abuse.

Based on these findings, it is concluded that the respondents' desire to continue associating contributed to the constant use of a variety of digital technologies. The varied needs of the respondents dictated their particular choice of digital technologies. Furthermore, the accessibility to free Wi-Fi in all the three Universities sampled made the regular usage of digital media possible. Additionally, there were students whose rented hostels had free Wi-Fi. Even in the absence of Wi-Fi, the respondents relied on the use of cheap data bundles to access the internet.

These findings were in agreement with those of Burke *et al.* (2011) and Borrajo *et al.* (2015) which showed that WhatsApp and Facebook were mainly used to digitally abuse intimate partners. With the advancement of technology, respondents found that they could conveniently utilize instant messaging and short messaging services to keep in touch with their partners in real time. Their synchronous nature favoured this. WhatsApp was also reported to be very reliable even when the network signal was weak (Mayoyo, Ogeno & Malenya, 2020). Besides, use of social media afforded respondents the privacy desired. It equally enabled them to enjoy the many features like use of emoticons which made communication enjoyable. They also were able to share videos, pictures and status as well as video call each other. It is this enhanced flexibility and constant communication that made individuals susceptible to cyber dating abuse. This continual use of technology amongst the respondents contributed to digitally perpetrated intimate partner abuse which corresponded to the forms of violence outlined by Johnson in his typology of abuse among intimate partners.

1.4.2 Forms of intimate partner violence experienced by undergraduate students

The study also highlights the different kinds of cyber dating abuse experienced by the respondents. The study sought to establish the prevalence of cyber dating abuse amongst the respondents. Accordingly, based on the CDA perpetration and victimization scale, respondents were asked to show how frequently they had perpetrated and experienced victimization of the different forms of cyber dating abuse. An analysis on their responses is as displayed in table 3.

Have you ever perpetrated CDA or been a victim of CDA?								
	Perpetration				Victimization			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Access to partner's online accounts	164	52.1	151	47.9	158	50.2	157	49.8
Sent abusive messages	127	40.3	188	59.7	98	31.1	217	68.9
Spread rumours, gossip & jokes	66	21.2	245	78.8	69	22.0	244	78.0
Posted status/comments to elicit jealousy	92	29.2	223	70.8	95	31.1	220	69.8
Threats of physical harm	22	7.0	293	93.0	33	10.5	282	89.5
Sent message to threaten them	49	15.6	265	84.4	55	17.5	259	82.5
Used information from SNS to ridicule partner	70	22.2	245	77.8	68	21.6	247	78.4
Pressure for quick response	218	69.4	96	30.6	202	64.1	113	35.9
Monitoring partner's whereabouts	199	63.2	116	36.8	185	58.7	130	41.3
Too many messages making partner uncomfortable	148	47.0	167	53.0	166	52.7	149	47.3
Pressure for passwords	85	27.1	229	72.9	117	37.3	197	62.7
Snooped on partner's messages, call logs	164	52.1	151	47.9	174	55.2	141	44.8
Pressure to sext	55	17.5	260	82.5	68	21.6	247	78.4
Shared intimate information without permission	50	15.9	264	84.1	53	16.9	261	83.1
Pressurized to have sex or engage in sexual activities online	76	24.1	239	75.9	88	28.0	226	72.0
Sent sexual photo partner did not ask for	32	10.2	283	89.8	45	14.3	269	85.7

Table 3: Prevalence of CDA perpetration and victimization per behaviour among dating respondents:

It was established from the study that Coercive Control Violence, which entailed control and manipulation, was the most common amongst this study's sample. Over half of the respondents (52.1%) admitted to accessing lovers' accounts without permission and snooping in on their accounts to check whether they were behaving properly. Equally 50.2% reported to have been victims of the same. More than half of the respondents (63.2%) also indicated that they monitored their partner's online activities to keep track of their whereabouts and to control who they interacted with while 58.7% reported to have also suffered from the same. Findings from focus group discussion corroborated this was so as respondents resorted to tracking their partners' phones and hacking their online accounts to find out what they were doing and with whom. A participant by the name *Cherise* (Pseudonym) on suspecting about their boyfriend's infidelity made it a habit to snoop on his phone. When she did not unearth anything she went further to hack his phone:

Well, when I noticed he had started changing, I made it a habit to check his text messages, call logs and social media. Of course there was nothing there...seemingly he was deleting all their conversations. So I decided to hack his phone...what I saw...anyway, my fears were confirmed... he was cheating on me. Not with one girl, but many girls... (Female respondent, Nairobi).

Unfortunately upon this discovery, the respondent broke up with her boyfriend. In retaliation the boyfriend who was not ready for the break-up shared her nudes in their class WhatsApp groups.

Other common controlling behaviours that were reported to be a constant source of conflict were sending partners too many messages which made them to feel uncomfortable as reported by almost half (47%) of the respondents. Equally 69.4% of the respondents indicated that they pressurized their partners for quick responses to their messages, calls and chats with 64.1% reporting to have been victims of the same. From the focus group discussion a respondent narrated how nagging and annoying partners could be when they pressurized a partner for immediate response.

“Someone is in class; lecturer is busy teaching then you get a text...followed by another... Why are you not replying my text?” (Female respondent, Nairobi).

This behaviour though deemed to be a norm among respondents could be an indication of obsession among perpetrators. It could also point to impatience and lack of understanding among them. Findings from the FGD also revealed that some respondents professed that their partners dictated who to interact with, including whom to study with and hold academic group discussions with. Some females claimed that when asked to avoid specific classmates by a boyfriend they were serious with, they obeyed the orders. Given that both males and females reported of controlling their partners, it can be assumed that these respondents perpetrated Mutual Violent Control. With both partners controlling the other through use of digital media.

Centered on these findings, it is evident that the availability and use of technology to contact partners provided the respondents with opportunities to perpetrate different kinds of violence. The prolonged use of digital media demonstrated by the frequency at which they texted and called their partners provided openings for partners to monitor, harass and control their lovers. This made Coercive Control Violence to be the most pervasive form of abuse among both males and females. Notably, their casual nature of relationships as reported in focus group discussion, contributed to mutual distrust amongst respondents. This ultimately made them to harbor suspicions against their partners and hence the high incidents of coercive control violence reported.

Moreover, the nature of the relationships among majority of the respondents exacerbated the control and manipulation of a partner. The casual relationships contributed to feelings of uncertainty as respondents were not sure whether their partners were serious with them and if their relationships had a future. This heightened the need to monitor their partners so as to be sure they were being faithful to them. Additionally, according to the Psychological theory of attachment individuals subscribed to different attachment styles. Preoccupied individuals exhibit insecurity and may resort to being controlling in their romantic relationships. This is due to anxiety that their partners may reject them (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

The finding that this abuse was carried out by both males and females, differs with Johnson's (2006) assertion that Coercive Control Violence was often perpetrated by men supporting the notion of masculinity for this kind of violence among romantic partners. This finding seems not to tally with Johnson's conclusion that the perpetration of Coercive Control Violence was the preserve of men. It therefore, conflicts with the gendered view that traditional patriarchy empowers men with authority to control their female partners (Johnson, 1995) since females in this study were found

to equally perpetrate monitoring and control through digital media. This is attributable to the repeated use of technology by both males and females which presented prospects for either party to control their partners. This is in agreement with the finding by Melander (2010) that coercive control violence could be reinforced and perpetrated using technology.

Moreover, research which applies gender theory to Coercive Control Violence states that males are likely to commit this abuse by virtue of their big sizes and strength relative to that of women in most heterosexual relationships (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). However, this does not seem to apply to Cyber Dating Abuse which is typically perpetrated technologically. Irrespective of size and strength users hide behind the keyboard, type messages and make demands which ordinarily they may not do in a face-to-face situation. This gives equivalent authority to both partners- male and female- engaged in a relationship to control each other. Also, in face-to-face interactions, partners' reactions to abuse are likely to deter them from perpetrating violence. However, technology gives individuals the courage they would otherwise not have. Consequently, in moments of anger and frustration, individuals may type, click to share information to shame their partners, without second thought, actions that they may regret later.

This study's findings further show that both males and females applied controlling tactics on their partners. This concurs with the results from a study by Melander (2010) who found out that both partners used technology to control each other. It also corresponds to a study by Kaukinen, *et al.* (2012) whose respondents were found to be perpetrators and victims in mutually violent relationships. This could be ascribed to the fact that both males and females equally accessed technology and used it as such, hence were both able to use it to monitor their partners

The findings also revealed that respondents perpetrated Situational Couple Violence which arose out of occasional conflicts due to partners' reaction to anger or frustration. The findings indicated that the constant use of technology among dating partners was an avenue for them to get into conflicts with each other. For instance, respondents reported that they got offended when their partners failed to promptly reply to their messages. They explained that seeing their WhatsApp messages 'blue ticked' with no response forthcoming made them unhappy for being ignored. This was especially so when their partners' status showed that they were online. Partners were keen on the online platform and last seen statuses on WhatsApp to monitor their partners' online presence.

A female respondent stated that if they sent their partners messages and they were 'blue ticked' (meaning the message has been read but not replied to) and yet they could see them online, they also decided to ignore them by 'grey ticking' them when they later responded. To 'grey tick' a WhatsApp message meant that a recipient decided to ignore a message that was delivered to their phone. This could happen if the recipient deliberately failed to read it or if they had blocked the sender. Comments posted on their social media was another cause of Situational Couple Violence. Posts and comments made by respondents that were deemed harmless were a source of conflict and some partners would revenge by putting up even worse comments as retaliation (Mayoyo, Malenya & Ogeno, 2020). Equally, comments made on other people's posts or uploading of profile pictures were also a source of conflict among partners.

A respondent narrated of an incident which escalated and ended up being a disciplinary case forwarded to the administration. A male student reported of getting a suggestive comment on his social media post from a lady classmate who had a crush on him. The comment made his girlfriend suspicious, leading them to quarrel. The gentleman in his defense confronted the classmate who had posted the comment, and in the confrontation that ensued he yanked at his classmate's hand. The lady was offended and reported the case to the administration. According to the findings presented, situational Couple violence was found to be common and was perpetrated by both males and females. This finding was in harmony with Johnson's (2005) assertion that in heterosexual relationships, conflicts leading to Situational Couple Violence are likely to be caused by both partners.

Respondents also revealed of instances when they were forced to retaliate with violence against their controlling partners. For example, in cases where one partner demanded for passwords, the other partner also demanded for theirs an indication of mutual mistrust among respondents. Additionally, humiliating or threatening messages were reciprocated with even worse threats or insults. Equally, mean posts and status were also reciprocated with even more mean posts and status. Dobell (pseudonym) reported how he retaliated against his girlfriend:

When we had issues with my girlfriend, she put up a suggestive status and a profile picture of a male I did not know. I did not ask her about it...but I also picked a very nice picture of a female cousin of mine she does not know ... I then captioned it to keep her guessing.... a few days later she just brought herself back, we talked about it and resolved our issues. (Male, FGD).

Such incidents could be considered to be a form of violence that Johnson (2005) refers to as violent resistance.

Additionally, females who were victims of sexual coercion explained that they resolve to block their partners' from reaching out to them. This they did by making sure that their partners were not able to reach them on phone, through texts, calls and social media. Avoidance of a controlling partner at times served to worsen the situation and contributed to more cyber dating abuse. At worst, it could lead to extreme consequences like in the case of the university student who was allegedly murdered by her supposed 'lover' after she blocked him (Chege,2017).

Finally, analysis indicated that both males and females perpetrated Coercive Control Violence. This implied that for some of the respondents whose partners took part in the study, they were likely perpetrating Mutual Control Violence. However, further research involving dating couples could be better placed to shed more light if this were the case.

1.5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the research concluded that the explosion and accessibility of user-friendly digital media and social media made it possible for respondents to commonly use WhatsApp, SMS, and phone calls to perpetrate CDA. Equally their engagement in routine activities involving use of technology in their communication led them to spending a lot of time online, and

to perpetrate the different forms of violence as outlined by Johnson (2005) with Coercive Control Violence being the most pervasive.

1.6 Recommendations

The study found out that the students' use of technology enabled them perpetrate cyber dating abuse so it recommends that the university should include cyber dating abuse in existing policies such as the social media policy and on sexual harassment and interpersonal violence within the university. Equally to create awareness on the role of technology in perpetration of CDA they could incorporate awareness/ mentorship programmes into existing ones. This may be useful in preventing CDA thus promoting healthy dating among undergraduate University students.

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