"The Go-between of Liaisons": The Social Dynamics of Mobile-phone Text Messaging and Implications for Intimate Partner Based Violence in Botswana

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Abstract

Access to mobile telecommunication networks has become a necessity rather than a luxury for millions of people worldwide. In contemporary Botswana the mobile phone technology growth rate has been phenomenal with subscriptions exceeding 100% teledensity since 2009. Text messaging is a popular non-voice application to reach people who are unable or unwilling to talk face-to-face. Although text messaging has grown in popularity as a form of communication technology, the social impact of this form of communication especially in intimate partner relationships has not been systematically documented in Botswana. The overall objective of this paper is to identify and analyse social dynamics emerging from text messaging in the context of gender based violence in intimate relationships in Botswana. A total of 33 stories around text messaging were collected from digital archives of three national newspaper publications. The stories (data pieces) precipitated one or more reactions which were coded. Inter-coding between three researchers generated eight themes/patterns from text messages. About 25% of the text messaging stories made reference to incidences of physical violence; 23% alluded to invasion of privacy and or personal space; 13.6% related to the use of text messaging to manage multiple relations, 8.4% to emotional/psychological abuse, the destruction of property/handset and intensified romance account for 7.3% of the messages and the remaining stories alluded to either avoidance of face-to-face interactions or emotional absence. The results of the study provide both favourable and unfavourable implications of the use of text messaging in intimate relationships. Given Botswana's high mobile phone density there is a need to create public awareness of the potential contribution of communication technologies to intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender based violence (GBV) in Botswana.

Introduction

Different cultures in Africa have different mediums of expressing feelings of love, intimacy, desire, longing, connectedness, fear, anxiety, betrayal or rejection. In contemporary societies worldwide, mobile telephone networks allow people separated by distance to keep in touch and operate business more efficiently (Kelly & Minges 2012). In Botswana, at least 95% of the population have network coverage. According to Kelly & Minges (2012), more people, especially in developing countries, have access to a mobile phone than to a bank account, electricity or clean water. According to the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) (2015), over the past ten years mobile telephony in the country increased from 823 070 in March 2006 to 3 405 887 in March 2015 (representing a 314% increase). Botswana has one of the world's highest mobile phone density rates, beating industrialized giants like the United States of America (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Germany (Kelly & Minges 2012). Mobile innovations such as multi-SIM card phones, low value recharges and value added services such as mobile payments not only empower individual users to make choices and decisions due to expanded information flows, but they enrich their lifestyles and livelihoods in

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general. In their study Vetere *et al.* (2005) explored the use of internet and mobile phone technology to convey messages. Text messaging facilitates the 'present-in-absence' feeling in intimate relationships when partners are separated by distance or time (Vetere *et al.* 2005; Byrne & Findlay 2004). Lenhart *et al.* (2010) particularly looked at how cell-phone text messaging, rather than face- to-face or direct phone conversations, has become a preferred channel of basic communication in intimate relationships. Some authors suggest that text messaging creates and or strengthens intimate relationships as well as coordinating related activities such as staying connected with loved ones and managing day to day household activities (Anderson, 2005; Byrne & Findlay, 2004). Others reinforce this argument by saying that texting provides a platform for social and personal satisfaction and a feeling of connectedness with loved ones (Donn & Sherman 2002; Katz & Aakhus 2002).

Text messaging is also a popular platform for emotional and social support between intimate partners (Ling & Yttri 2002). While short messaging service (SMS) have accorded people increased accessibility to information and other social benefits, they have also brought about increased interpersonal intrusion (Burke *et al.* 2011), such as intimate partner harassment, emotional and physical abuse, social conflict, and cyber stalking especially by a former intimate partner (Avins 2000; Gregorie 2001; Short & McMurray 2009). It has been observed that harassment by texting is more prevalent than direct harassment of another individual (Alexy *et al.* 2005)

In Botswana, although text messaging is increasingly popular among intimate partner relationships, there is little research on how this platform impacts the social dynamics of intimate partners. This study attempts to fill that knowledge gap. The paper addresses the following research questions: a) how does text messaging impact intimate relationships and b) does text messaging contribute to intimate partner violence (IPV) and or gender based violence (GBV)?

There is scant research on how communication technologies such as text messaging impact intimate relationships in Botswana. In recent years, there have been media reports about increasing incidences of gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Jankey *et al.* 2011). According to Mercy and Roos Van Dorp (2012), in Botswana, more than 67% of women have experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime while 44% of men are reported to have perpetrated violence against women. Furthermore, those authors indicate that 29% of the women in the study had experienced IPV in the 12 months prior to the study. Although there is an indication of high prevalence of gender based violence in Botswana, there is also evidence of severe under-reporting. For instance the Mercy and Roos Van Dorp (2012) study indicated that only 1.2% of women reported cases of GBV to the police against a prevalence rate that was 24 times higher. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prevalence is less likely to be captured in official statistics due to victim under-reporting. However under reported personal stories are likely to be captured in mass print media, regarded in the context of this paper as a form of indirect 'reporting' and public information dissemination to different types of audiences (Buckingham 2003). Print media reports capture topical events/personal stories including intimate partner violence triggered by text-messages (Lindsey 2011). In Botswana, national newspapers are an alternative avenues for capturing social dynamics of everyday life such as IPV stories which are less likely to be captured in official statistics. This paper attempts to fill a major knowledge gap in Botswana regarding the use/influence of cell phone text messaging in intimate partner violence narratives/ stories.

Materials and Methods

This report is an exploratory qualitative study, designed to discover insights about a relatively new phenomenon (Rubin 2000; Bryman 2015). A qualitative approach is important in this regard for its

wide use of collection tools to solicit respondents' individual and collective experiences which in turn provide a basis for a comprehensive understanding of the new phenomena (Rubin 2000). The qualitative approach gives the researcher a chance to obtain data without the restrictions usually imposed by predetermined ideas usually found in quantitative approaches (Patton 1990).

In this study, we followed Rooney (2012) categorisation of the newspaper landscape of Botswana based on three features, namely: the editorial content, ownership/target advertising market and professional journalism. On one side of the continuum are what Rooney refers to as 'tabloid' newspapers which characteristically have short feature articles which are crafted for the less educated readership, the layout utilizes capitalized and or bold print and featured stories do not require the reader's prior knowledge of subject matter. The advertising is geared towards mass consumption. These newspapers, such as *The Voice*, tend to pay little attention to education and politics and concentrate on sensation, human interest, sports and entertainment; they also give prominence to scandals and misconduct (Rooney 2012). The middle of this continuum is mid-market newspapers/weeklies, which appeal to moderately educated readership, at the far end of the continuum are newspapers characterised as 'non-tabloid' and are considered to be 'serious market newspapers'.

On the basis of editorial content, ownership/ target advertising market and professional journalism, Rooney characterised *The Sunday Standard* and *The Weekend Post* as 'non-tabloid' or as 'serious market' newspapers. These newspapers, according to Rooney, pay particular attention to education, business and politics. 'Mid-market' newspapers have characteristics of both the types of newspapers with a mixture of education, business, politics, entertainment, human interest and scandal, as well as short articles (with text run from 300-1000 words) which appeal to a moderately educated readership. Rooney's categorization of mid-market newspapers/ weeklies include: *The Monitor/Mmegi, The Botswana Gazette, Botswana Guardian, The Echo, Global Post, The Midweek Sun, The Ngami Times and The Patriot.*

In this study we first followed Rooney's categorisation of Botswana's newspaper landscape in a continuum, namely, tabloid, mid-market/weeklies and non-tabloid. Secondly, we considered internet availability and accessibility of the newspaper. Thirdly we also considered accessibility of digital archives of these newspapers. At the time of our study three newspapers met these criteria as judged from editorial content, professional journalism and target market, namely: *The Voice*, considered a 'tabloid' newspaper; *Mmegi/The Monitor*, representing 'mid-market' and weekly; and *Sunday Standard* considered to be 'non tabloid' and a 'serious' newspaper.

Three researchers used *Google*, an internet search engine, to download stories from the online versions of the listed newspapers. We searched on the following key words "text messages and intimacy," "texting and love relationship", "violence and relationships", and "mobile phone, love and relationship". In order to establish credibility and minimise bias in the selected stories, three researchers separately read and re-read each story using the following criteria: (1) the story should reflect either misunderstanding or violence or relationship problems as a result of sending and/ or receiving text messages and (2) that those involved in the story should be intimate partners. The search generated 33 text messaging related stories from the three newspapers as shown in Table 1.

Data processing and analysis

In the first step data pieces (text stories) were downloaded for identification of themes/patterns by using direct quotes or paraphrasing of common ideas (Braun & Clarke 2006). To identify themes/patterns, researchers brought together fragments of ideas and experiences from each story (Boyatzis 1998; MacNamara 2006). In developing subthemes the researchers combined and catalogued related patterns as

we detected it in the material (Lincon & Guba 2000). These identified themes were discussed by the three researchers for a period of four weeks until consensus was reached. Finally, the emerging themes from the stories were pieced together for content analysis and interpretation of the collective experience (Patton 1990; Bernard 1995). Where there was lack of consensus, it was acknowledged in this stage of the analysis.

From the 33 three stories, we coded a chain reaction of 95 incidences from the story line/ narratives. These incidences were then grouped thematically and analysed which yielded 9 themes/patterns of behaviours in these intimate relationships. Table 2 gives a rank ordered summary of the themes and incidences.

Table 1: Local newspaper articles

Name of Newspaper	Number of stories with text messages (2009-2016)	Percentage (%)
Mmegi/ The Monitor online	5	15
Sunday Standard on line	5	15
The Voice online	23	70 %
Total number of stories	33	100

Table 2: Analytical themes and incidence

Themes	Number of incidences	Percent (%)
1. Emotional reaction: Physical abuse/violence/intimidation/	24	25.2
2. Invasion of privacy/Personal space/violation of boundaries	22	23.1
3. Proxy for multiple and concurrent relationship management	13	13.6
4. Emotional Reaction: Psychological abuse/emotional blackmail	10	10.4
5. Physical Reaction: Destruction of handset/property	8	8.4
6. Intensified romance/Interactions between partners	6	6.3
7. Affordability/Accessibility of long distance relationships	5	5.2
8. Digitally dumped: Avoidance/replacement of face to face relationships break-up	4	4.2
9. Emotional absence during intimate moments	3	3.1
Total	**95**	**100**

Ethical consideration

Pseudo names of people in the stories have been used in analysis write-up to protect personal identities even though the stories were available for public consumption.

Results and Discussion

Emotional reaction: Physical abuse/violence/intimidation

In 25.2% of the incidences, intimate partners experienced violence over text messaging. In some stories, intimate partners fought (physically or verbally), some partners were beaten, and others had suicidal thoughts and or attempted suicide because they felt unloved and used by the cheating partner. Text messages found their way to the courts in physical abuse deliberations among warring partners or lead to police investigations. Some intimate partners build their trust in relationship by allowing each other

access to their cell phones, but if a breach of trust occurs, then the other party's behaviour is assumed to have changed. When these matters got out of control they resulted in gruesome murder or murder-suicide. As one man accused of murder lamented before the court,

> "….When she received calls, she did not feel free as usual. She always had to move from one place to another....One day when the girlfriend received a message on her cell-phone, he took it and read the love message.... *Will u visit me tomorrow? I love you so much and only death will do us apart.* I turned to her and grabbed her by the neck between the upper arm and the lower arm….the deceased was a giant woman despite her age" (sic) (*Mmegi/Monitor*, 04/05/2016)

In another incident of the same theme, a young man explained how he 'was bruised, broken, stripped and humiliated' by his girlfriend. The young man took courage by sending a breakup text message, but the girlfriend would not accept it, instead the violence escalated when she apparently locked him in the house with her, threw away the keys and

> "disconnected the pipe linking the gas cylinder to the stove and opened the cylinder knob to let the highly flammable gas out of the cylinder…she poured water into the electric kettle and boiled it and then took a matchstick and lit it… and we both landed on top of the bed causing the bedding to catch fire." (sic) (*Mmegi/ The Monitor,* 05/12/2014)

Threats of violence are also recorded from instances where the distraught partner, hunts down the other party after discovering an affair. In an incidence recorded in this study, one woman described how she feared for her life when she was 'held hostage' in a car, then driven far away to an unfamiliar place and had her phone confiscated by the cheated wife. In another story, a distraught wife attempted suicide because she could not take it anymore. She 'swallowed' all the medication that was in the house, locked herself in the bathroom, lost consciousness, and finally found herself hospitalised. A woman from Manyana, survived gunshot wounds after being shot eight times at close range. Her 'story' as recorded in   *Mmegi/The Monitor* indicates that

> "The disagreements stemmed from trust issues, with most of them centred on cell phones. As the years passed by.... the disagreements escalated because of .... infidelity .... and physical violence... We broke up from time to time, but we always went back to each other. You keep coming back; it becomes a spiral of abuse. He said open up or I am going to kill you. Before I could even say anything he shot the door open, and gained entry into the house. It was a long, clicking sound. .. I didn't know whether he had shot me. But I was still alive" (Mmegi/The Monitor, 31/10/2011)

Police officers are often made aware of a murder/suicide case by following up on a text message sent to friends or relatives of the deceased. Cellphone text messaging has become a medium for all kinds of abuse in intimate relationships. The use of text messaging in the context of suspected infidelity in intimate relationships may become a trigger for violence (Jankey *et al.* 2011). The gravity and trauma of physical and sexual violence, intimidation, and blackmailing reaction is often triggered by text messages. Text messages have been finding their way into the law courts as evidence of betrayal and infidelity. In Botswana, 67% of women are said to have experienced abuse in their lifetime, a figure that is higher than the global average (Mercy & Ross Van Dorp 2012).

Invasion of privacy/personal space/violation of boundaries

The question might be posed: To what extent are cell phones private property and the information contained confidential and where access to it is only by consent. In 23% of the incidences analysed in this paper, intimate partners became agitated because they felt that their privacy/personal space and/or that their institutionally sanctioned social boundaries have been invaded. This happens when a suspicious partner steals the other's handset to scroll through the text messages, or demands and/or forces the partner to surrender their handset because they suspect infidelity in the relationship. This behaviour among intimate partners could escalate to physical violence in the relationship. As one woman laments "he read all my messages. I am living a strange life" and another man "…sometimes she takes my phone for the whole weekend to answer the calls and read messages sent to me…" There are examples of violation of marital boundaries as reported in the following incidence of a jealous husband who:

> "…secretly bought (a) SIM-card and send (sic) messages to torture his wife by sending her inappropriate text messages accusing her of having sexual relations with other men" (*The Voice*, 25/05/2015)

or a wife of 20 years, becomes suspicious and finds out that her husband has been seeing a younger woman when

> "…by accident I found pictures of her naked body parts and loads of text messages and calls on his cell phone" (*The Voice,* 06/02,2015)

It is not uncommon for wives to be subjected to intimidation and harassment by women involved in extra-marital affairs with their husbands. As one woman received such text from her husband liaison saying:

> "You can sue or e-mail what am (sic) about, or hear from the public latest technology, social network, the biggest scandal of the year thanx (sic) to *makgakga a* some people. …..sorry to involve you but some things are better said or put out there for people to have an idea of what they are ...(sic) (*Mmegi/The Monitor,* 06/02/2013)

Invasions of privacy are also reported in the 'tabloid' press, one partner who read the other's message without their consent complained:

> "Right now we have a problem because I came across some text message (sic) on her phone, sent by my friend with whom we spend a lot of spare time together" (*The Voice*, 19/04/2013).

Although text messaging provides social benefits, it also increases the propensity for interpersonal intrusion and or violation of personal space (Finn & Banach 2000; Kandell 1998; Spitzberg & Hoobler 2002).

Proxy for managing multiple and concurrent relationships

In general the analysed stories from the media consistently indicate that text messaging facilitates cheating in intimate relationships. In 13.6% of the stories, intimate lovers were involved in multiple concurrent relationships, where they lived double lives, lied, organised clandestine activities, and

manipulated each other for personal gain.

> "I had never been interested in my boyfriend's cell-phone until the day he left it behind and I got curious. All along I had been thinking that he was faithful, and I would have branded you blasphemous if you suggested that he was not. But what I saw completely shocked me. I realized that he was dating four other women, besides me, and he was chasing others. I think in a way the cell phone is a major contributing factor to so much unfaithfulness in relationships because it allows for easy and secretive communication" (sic) (*Sunday Standard* 14/10/2006).

She was of the opinion that it is sometimes necessary to invade one's partner's privacy, and that the cell-phone – not its owner – needs to be closely monitored because it 'is the go-between in all liaisons' (sic) (*Sunday Standard* 14/10/2006). The question still remain, are cell phones private property and couples' relationships should be based on trust? Furthermore, are partners aware of the likely consequences of crossing personal boundaries and invading each other's privacy. In one instance, a woman seems to have taken cognisance of undesirable effects of crossing privacy boundaries when she restricted herself to:

> "scrolling down contacts, but avoiding the text messages because of what I might find.... and I did not want to risk getting hurt by messages that would imply that he has another relationship elsewhere" (sic) *(Sunday Standard* 07/02/2009).

Similarly, she did not want her boyfriend 'to find anything in her phone that would make him change his mind about marrying her. It appears then that for this particular couple, the ultimate goal was to get married by building a relationship based on trust (*Sunday Standard* 07/02/2009). Avoiding snooping into each other's cell phone text message was one such strategy. However, for another man, trust became an illusion when he found out that his girlfriend

> "....was involved in a love triangle with him and another man... because when she received text messages, she did not feel free as usual. She always had to move from one place to another (sic)" (*Mmegi/The Monitor,* 05/2016)

In another incident, a man confiscated his wife's mobile phone, only to find sexually explicit text messages sent by her lover. In other stories, cheating partners created an environment to indulge in sexual fantasies. Texting was found to provide instantaneous gratification and contact *especially* for individuals who cannot stay faithful in intimate relationships (Guadagno & Sagarin 2010). What makes texting even more important to cheating partners is that the "sneaking around" adds to the excitement of the experience. As argued by Guadagno and Sagarin (2010) those who are cheating are provided with the instant sexual arousal as well as a present-in-absence feeling.

Emotional reaction: Psychological abuse and emotional blackmail
Analysis of text messaging indicated that 8.42% of incidences resulted in emotional abuse/blackmail, especially by ex-partners. Text messages would be used, for example, to disrupt the person's current relationship or, in situations where the relationship is unstable, to harass the ex-partner by continually sending irritating messages. In other instances, text messages would be used to make unsolicited/ unwanted proposals, especially when the relationship has been terminated as the following from a

'tabloid' newspaper shows:

> "Now she calls and sends text messages everyday but I have since stopped taking her calls and replying to her messages because I do not know what to say or do" *(The Voice*, 12/12/2012).

In another instance, a man laments how text messaging in a bad relationship

> "... really depressed me and sometimes I thought of committing suicide.... I started abusing drugs and alcohol to mollify the emotional suffering" (sic) (*Mmegi/The Monitor*, 05/12/2014).

Another girl would, after having a relationship with someone else's boyfriend, send a text message to the girl boasting about her "December ride who no longer wants you because you are old and ugly". Another woman emphatically states

> "I want my boyfriend to cut off all contact with his exes because I know exes are good-for–nothings who like to pounce on familiar territory once their current relationships goes haywire" *(Sunday Standard*, 28/02/2010).

Burke *et al.* (2011) argue that text messaging may be used to annoy, harass and cyber stalk an intimate partner. The originator of the text messaging may not be in physical proximity to the receiver but the intended result is to evoke feelings of fear in the receiver. According to a study conducted by Burke *et al.* (2011), both males and females could be the initiators or victims of such behaviour. In this instance, the initiator of the text message was female, while the recipient was male. After discovering a partner's infidelity, it is not always easy to walk away from a long term relationship, as one desperate wife stated "My husband and I were only 21 when we got married. We've been married for 13 years and are facing a problem because of his internet sex addiction. I discovered he was visiting x-rated sites and mastur-bating. I confronted him about it. I was devastated! We talked and talked about it. He was sincerely sorry and, made a promise not to visit such sites again. About a year ago I again discovered his internet infidelity and confronted him about it. I was so hurt, even more than the first time! Over and over again he has said he's sorry, there is no excuse. So divorce is definite this time… He is a great husband and the best father there is. What can I do?" (*Mmegi/The Monitor* 2/09/2013).

Physical reaction: Destruction of handset and other property

The stories show how intimate partners become suspicious of cheating. In 7.36% of cases intimate partners reacted by destroying or confiscating the handset to prevent further use. One male partner stated that

> "...... she would fly into a fit of jealousy, grab his cell phone while he was talking or texting someone and smash it against the wall. As a result, I lost three phones which were damaged beyond repair" (sic) (*Mmegi/The Monitor* 05/02/2014).

It is not unusual for some cheated partners to smash car windows and slash tyres of a third party in a jealous rage. Monitoring and controlling the partner's text messages usually sparks violent behaviour where the mobile phone handset is destroyed as the carrier of unwanted text messages (Avins 2000).

Text messaging intensifies romance between intimate partners
It was revealed that the use of text messaging intensifies romance between intimate partners. In 7.36% of the stories analysed, intimate partners used text messaging to stay connected, through calling each other, sending love notes, organising outings, and sending appeasement and/or apology notes. Text messaging facilitated intimate partners' expression of erotic fantasies and longing for romance "You are the one for me and I will marry you." This promise was repeated in many forms via SMS, or Internet to stay connected. In the following story, although the 'prophet' has several girlfriends in his church, text messaging assisted him to stay emotionally connected with all of them simultaneously. He intensified his romance on Valentine's Day through having them sit in the front row when preaching to all the women in his life which read

> "..... happy V-Day and showerz of love, Blezinz.. They found out that they were dating the same man of God after one of them caught him having sex with a sister at a hotel..... The prophet used to send text messages to all his girlfriends' instructing them to sit in the front row at church so that he could hover over them like a hen hovering over its chicks every Sunday in church...." (sic) (*The Voice*, 18/05/2012).

In other cases cheating husbands' girlfriend's erotic messages are read as evidence in customary court hearings. In these instances, sometimes these extramarital affair girlfriends are slapped with a monetary fine and are instructed to terminate the relationship with immediate effect to avert further escalation of marital conflict.

In other incidences considered during this study, text messages triggered emotional outbursts some of which were followed by expressions of regret/apology, appeasement for example: taking the partner out for dinner or a social outing, or calling on friends to intervene and buying of flowers or expensive gifts.

Some other text messages concerned more intensified sexual contact which could either be consensual or coerced. This theme is supported by literature that argues that text messaging, improves the coordination of activities of intimate partners (Byrne & Findlay 2004) (consensual or coerced). In addition, as evidenced in the literature, text messaging provides unique satisfaction, of the need to feel socially and personally connected to loved ones (Donn & Sherman 2002). The connection further strengthens intimacy in the relationship. Other studies have shown that text messaging assists in strengthening intimate relationships and allowing family members to stay connected. Vesterfelt (2013) contends that it has a great impact on the interaction of a couple in intimate relationships, where they may be constantly asking their partners to repeat sentences. With reference to the 'prophet' story, texting may become self-serving (for example the 'prophet' instructing his girlfriends to sit in the front row at church. Furthermore, texting in these instances has been noted to reduce sleep and intensify sexual contact whether it is consensual or coerced which could also result in social isolation. Other research has shown that texting someone in the same room has the potential to hinder personal connection (Przybylski & Weinstein 2013). One of the psychological impacts of texting is that superficially it seems to be improving lives but often leads to unintended consequences through replacing human contact with artificial or virtual connectedness (Rhonda & McEwen 2010). Research shows that texting comes at a cost to relationships with family and friends and can increase depression and loneliness (Kraut *et al.* 1998).

Texting encourages split consciousness that has the ability to limit social interactions and relationships (Misra *et al.* 2014). In addition, it increases a person's emotional arousal levels, causes

destruction, and impedes the quality of in-person conversations (Baron *et al.* 1978). Texting distributes an individual's attention and influences the behaviour of those surrounding the individual (Przybylski & Weinstein 2013). A study by Misra *et al.* (2014) on the effect of iPhone on the quality of in-person social interactions in the presence of mobile devices, shows that a conversation may be less fulfilling when a partner is texting than in the absence of a mobile device. Through the use of mobile phones, including texting, individuals have the potential to build wide relational networks across a geographical area and, in the process, establishing multiple relationships. Consequently, there is less time and energy for any one relationship (Immordino-Yang *et al.* 2009). When intimate partners use text messaging (that diminishes the quality of here and now interactions with their partners who are present) there is enormous potential to bring discomfort to the other party, given that they expect complete attentiveness from their partner (Humphreys 2005).

Affordability and accessibility of long distance relationships
One theme found throughout the stories uncovered through our study was that text messaging assists in building wide networks across geographical areas. In 18% of the stories covered by the newspapers we used, intimate partners could now manage long distance relationships and even connect with individuals who are not within their social network. The example of an instance in the story below shows the building of a network of intimate lovers as a result of receiving a mysterious text message. Although the text message sender was not known, it did not deter the receiving party from making a connection. This is a graphic illustration of the building of wide networks across a geographical area:

> "Also giving testimony in court, 02 said he started communicating with the accused person early in 2011 after mysteriously receiving a text message. The message was just telling people to come and collect their presents, said 02 without explaining what kind of presents the people were being invited to come and collect" (*Mmegi/The Monitor, 06/02/2013*).

In this story although 02 was married, he decided to expand his network and add another intimate relationship given the convenience of text messaging in managing intimate relationships. As argued by Immordino-Yang *et al.* (2009). While there are other cheap means of communication such as 'Facebook' and ''Whatsapp', these communication platforms require more expensive handsets, connectivity and access to the internet. Given that texting can be done on the cheapest, most basic mobile of phone handset making text messaging cheaper and more accessible.

Digitally dumped: Avoidance/replacement of face to face breaks-ups
Although only 5.6% of incidences emanating from texting resulted in relationship break-ups, it was also apparent that some partners received the bad news via social media or email. Text messaging was used as a replacement for face-to-face emotional confrontation, especially for a breakup between intimate partners. As one man lamented in this example from our study

> "My ex (the mother of my child) broke up with me three weeks ago. She sent a text message telling me that its over between us. What the problem was, I have no idea. When I ask her she says she and I are too different in life...I'm also concerned that she does not call me like she used to; all she does is send text messages to give her money yet she earns a salary every month" (*The Voice, 17/08/12*).

A considerable number of young people globally are said to break up with their partners by texting them or leaving them voicemail messages.Text messages are regarded as providing a safety valve in case the intimate partner facing imminent 'dumping' becomes aggressive. This was especially the case if the partner's behaviour was perceived as unpredictable. As Vetere *et al.* (2005) argue, text messaging has replaced different ways of expressing affection/rejection in intimate relationships and avoids awkward face-to-face interactions (Lenhart 2010). Vetere *et al.* (2005) found that 25% of young people's relationships are terminated via text; 20% via social media; 18% via face-to-face interactions; 15% via phone calls; and 11% via email.

Emotional absence during intimate moments
The stories uncovered during the survey of this study indicated that text messaging distracts attention and influences the behaviour of those surrounding the individual without them being aware of the fact. In 9% of the stories reported in the three newspapers we used, evidence shows that during texting, there is lack of focused attention to any one activity. So we have the scenario of intimate partners, where sharing a space and giving each other undivided attention for intimate moments together is important, but a continually texting partner has his/her thoughts directed to other places, people, and contexts (Gergen 2002; Nicholson *et al.* 2005). This scenario may irk the other person present who may feel ignored and not given due attention by the texting partner. The following story from our study depicts a situation where an intimate partner's behaviour deprived the other partner of expected attention as a result of texting;

> "The phone and texting really got into her head. It took all her attention away and she no longer had time for me, yet she always demanded money for lunch and transport, he recalls" (*Mmegi/ The Monitor*, 05/02/2014).

What can be deduced from these stories is that intimate partners who feel ignored during texting become vulnerable, are emotionally charged and experience feelings of loneliness. They also feel marginalised, unloved, unappreciated/unrecognised, and humiliated. A partner becomes violent as a way of expressing frustration over the texting of the other partner. To have focused and fulfilling conversations, both verbal and nonverbal elements, of in-person communication are vital in intimate partner relationships (Misra *et al.* 2014). Those who are absorbed in texting in the presence of their partners are more likely to miss subtle cues such as facial expressions, changes in the partner's tone during conversation, and have less eye contact (Misra *et al.* 2014; Gergen 2002). As a result of this inattentiveness, the ignored person may want to know what/who is taking away their partner's attention, and feelings of suspicion and jealousy may influence the ignored partner to behave inappropriately such as being violent or even attempting suicide (Mazmanian *et al.* 2005).

Summary of findings
Text messaging in intimate relationships can be beneficial to intimate partners when used for positive impact such as checking in, sharing a joke, making plans and expressing intimate feelings (Burke *et al.* 2011). It is evident from our study and in the literature that sometimes partners, through text messages, engage in unacceptable relational behaviour (Spitzberg & Cupach 2007). Such behaviour includes repeatedly sending irritating text messages when there are problems in the relationship, insulting, harassing and stalking another partner, sending an excessive number of text messages, checking the partner's text messages, suicidal ideation, physical violence, emotional abuse, and destruction of

property including handsets (Burke *et al.* 2011, Wajcman *et al.* 2007). Attention towards destruction of property (for example cell phone handsets or arousal objects) is not irrelevant to the subject's needs for emotional attention (Parboteeah *et al.* 2005). In this regard texting leads to attentional conflict resulting in elevated stress and arousal levels (Muller *et al.* 2004). According to Wajcman *et al.* (2007), the most advanced reason for using text messaging is convenience and preference over a voice call. In addition, it may be used to mitigate feelings of loneliness where a partner communicates their feelings to another who is not present. Text messaging is generally considered to be quick, more efficient, cheaper and more convenient (Stewart 2003) than a voice call as messages are usually brief and to the point. Text messaging, as a conversational style, usually does not require a lot of time, effort or attention, unlike a face to face interaction (Gergen 2002).

Furthermore, text messaging increases social interaction in that it allows people more freedom to contact those that they do not see on a regular basis (Hogan *et al.* 2012). In addition it assists intimate partners in making connections and affirming their relationship without face-to-face interaction (Power & Horstmanshof 2005). When using text messaging, the physical, visual, and cognitive functions of the user are all engaged. The attention required to send a text message communicates to the reader that the sender had all their faculties present when sending the text message (Misra *et al.* 2014). However, senders of text messages are less likely to acknowledge the presence of other people in their environment which results in 'inattentional blindness' (Chihangas 2000). For example, the sender could communicate while engaged in other activities such as attending meetings, travelling or watching television (Chihangas 2000). Texting is a cognitively demanding activity when attempted simultaneously with other tasks such as paying attention to a physically present partner.

Conclusion and study implications

The results of the study provide both favourable and unfavourable implications of the use of text messaging in intimate relationships. Texting positively improves emotional connectedness in intimate relationships and enhances coordination of activities among partners. It intensifies romance; it serves as a personal proxy in multiple and long distance relationships. While these positives are acknowledged it has been shown in our study that text messaging has negative consequences in intimate relationships in the form of breached trust, jealousy, and unintended antisocial behaviours, such as violence and even suicides attempts. Text messaging is likely to contribute to gender based intimate partner violence in the context of suspected infidelity. Social workers and counsellors should be aware of these consequences of text messaging in intimate relationships in order to better assist couples who may be experiencing such practices.

There is evidence of the need to strengthen and implement policies that prohibit individuals from posting text messages through any electronic medium of communication without the recipient's/ victim's consent to reduce potential social conflicts including intimate partner violence. In addition, given Botswana's high mobile phone density, there is a need to create public awareness of mobile phone usage in relation to provisions of the Penal Code No.2 of 1964. Future research is required to systematically analyse the potential contribution of communication technologies to IPV and GBV in Botswana.

Study limitations

The first limitation of the study is that only three newspapers were sampled which were accessible through the *Google* search engine. During the study, the researchers realised that newspapers such as *The Mid-Week Sun, The Botswana Guardian*, and *Botswana Gazette* showed that the stories that could

have added to the analysis, but were not available online due to their websites being updated.

Another study limitation is that the researchers used mainly one medium of communication technology that being text messages. We did not include data based on communication through emails, social network sites and instant messaging. Most GBV and IPV stories are under reported to law enforcement authorities and hence may not be captured in both official statistical records and media reports. Furthermore, the print media might be selective in the stories they choose to print, they are likely to select those that will increase their volume of sales.

Qualitative data is open to subjective interpretation and the researcher may be biased in their analysis and what they want to focus on when developing themes. Future research should address how intimate partners cope with violence sparked by communication technology. This is important if researchers are to understand GBV and IPV issues in their broader sense.

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