

Addressing Intimate Partner Violence: Using Vlogging for Art Therapy

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Abstract: *This study is rooted in the persistent issue of intimate partner violence and the need for strategies that empower women to share their experiences and seek assistance in conjunction with the information digital era. The research primarily explores the potential of vlogging as an art therapy approach that enables women to courageously express emotions and seek support when facing intimate partner violence. The methodology employed involves a dual analysis, examining both the comments left on vlogs and the narratives presented by the vloggers themselves, shedding light on how they convey their experiences, gain support, and navigate their journey towards recovery. The findings of this study reveal that vlogging serves as an effective medium for women to express their emotions, find validation, and receive encouragement from viewers who share similar experiences or provide emotional value. By demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach, the study aims to encourage more women to bravely embrace vlogging as a means to express their emotions, seek help, and contribute to breaking the silence surrounding intimate partner violence. This research contributes to the broader discourse on digital activism and the role of technology in supporting survivors and promoting social change.*

Keywords: *Intimate Partner Violence; Art Therapy; Vlog; IPV; Self-therapy*

1. Introduction

Almost one in three women globally also face intimate partner violence and sexual violence, according to WHO estimates.^[1] On December 27th, 2015, Chinese laws were implemented using a gender-inclusive approach when enacting the country's inaugural "Anti-Domestic Violence Law" under the People's Republic of China (PRC). While women are primarily the victims of domestic violence in China, less attention has been given to Chinese women^[2] who experience IPV. In China, the different sentencing standards for domestic violence compared to intentional harm inflicted by outsiders, as well as backward notions such as "family disgrace should not be exposed," exacerbate many women's silence about experiencing IPV.

IPV does not only occur within families^[3], but practical measures must be implemented to reduce and mitigate its impact on health.^[4] As the status and position of Chinese women continue to improve, women may become less accepting of abusive behavior from their partners.^[5] Thus, efficient approaches are needed to encourage seeking help when faced with IPV. Art helps to humanise medical treatment^[6], especially vlog therapy as a secure and innovative platform for individuals to share their injuries, aiding in healing and recovery, which can contain amorphous traumatic experience within.^[7] Therefore, this study aims to investigate two main research problems: Research Problem 1: In the context of Chinese society and culture, how to make women who suffer from IPV dare to seek help? Research Problem 2: What can be done to better support women suffering from IPV? By examining these two research problems, this study aims to analyze vlogs created by IPV survivors in China, identifying methods for incorporating vlog therapy into psychological recovery strategies, ultimately providing better support for women experiencing IPV.

2. Methods

We choose a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to specifically analyze two hot cases on China's TikTok platform because currently most people in China use TikTok as a social media to obtain information, and these two cases have also received much attention.

2.1. Chinese Pregnant Woman (Ms. Wang) Cliff Fall Incident in Thailand

On June 9th, 2019, a pregnant Chinese woman and her unborn child were tragically pushed off a 110-foot-high cliff in Thailand by her heavily indebted husband. Falling from the top of the cliff at a distance of 34 meters, she was fortunate to be impeded by trees during the descent, causing fractures to her left thigh, left arm, left clavicle, hip bone, and knee. Despite the incredible survival of her fetus, she unfortunately lost the child during subsequent treatments. During her rehabilitation period, she shared her experience on social media platforms, demonstrating her determination to proactively undergo treatment and unwavering pursuit of bringing the perpetrator to justice. Her actions embody resilience and courage, inspiring widespread support and concern from netizens. In her vlog on September 22nd, 2020, she explained that there were two reasons why she created short videos: first, she felt that news reports often presented incomplete information due to editing; secondly, she wanted to share hope with those feeling discouraged or unfulfilled due to various circumstances through telling her own story.

2.2. A woman (Ms. Xie) who suffered 16 episodes of domestic violence over two years in China

In Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, Ms. Xie endured 16 instances of domestic violence over the course of two years of marriage, with five of those severe enough to require police intervention. Beyond these documented cases, many lesser incidents went unreported. Trapped under constant surveillance, financial manipulation, and physical abuse by her husband, she felt cornered with no way out. After sustaining injuries that left her with a grade seven disability due to beatings, Ms. Xie sought help from the media as a last resort to gain attention and prompt an official response. In an interview, she disclosed her struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), characterized by frequent emotional breakdowns at night followed by periods of recovery, only to relapse again.

3. Findings

Two survivors emphasized key points regarding self-healing in their respective video diaries, which can be broken down into four themes: (1) Feeling supported and acknowledged; (2) Shifting societal perceptions; (3) Re-expressing and sorting out thoughts, and; (4) Vlog Communication Effectiveness. These pivotal aspects make it possible for both survivors to become successful practitioners of this self-recovery method through vlog content.

Both individuals have not only experienced IPV, but they also had to face the terrifying aftermath of near-fatal incidents. They became viral sensations on social media as a result. They are incredulous about the suffering they themselves have experienced, As Ms Xie said that I haven't hurt anyone, I've never done anything bad. Why do I have to go through all this? What do I have to do to get justice for myself?

3.1. Feeling supported and acknowledged

The two survivors shared on social media. To a certain extent, creating and publicly sharing videos seemed to be employed as a tactic for reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.^[8] We obtained the first 1500 comments on Ms. Wang's self-narrative video posted on September 20, 2020 as our initial dataset. After carefully screening and eliminating irrelevant evaluations, we arrived at a total of 1299 valid comments.

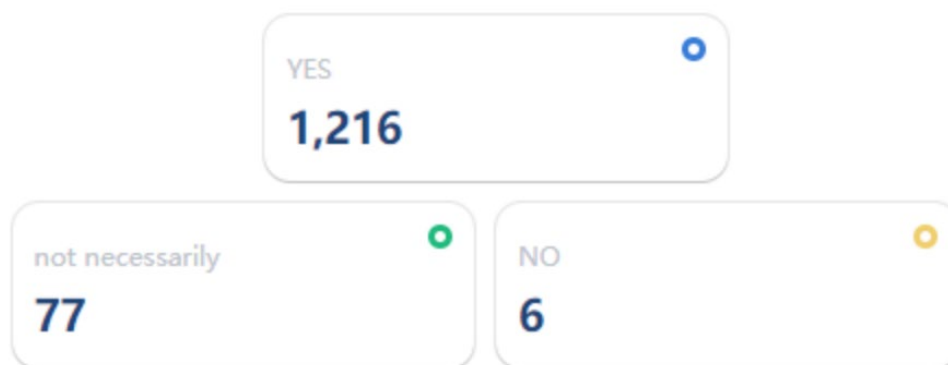


Figure 1: Sum of the number of support Ms. Wang

Approximately 93.6% of the 1262 individuals in our dataset expressed support for Ms. Wang, as illustrated in Figure 1. In addition, in the video posted by Ms. Wang herself on September 20, 2020, she said: First of all, I would like to sincerely thank the netizens who have been concerned about this news event for a long time, and who have always left messages supporting me, caring about me, and encouraging me... The messages you guys left for me are really a kind of energy that has supported me through this darkest journey.^[9]

We also collected the first 2015 comments on Ms. Xie's self-narrative video posted on June 19, 2023 as our initial dataset. After screening the comments, we obtained a total of 1301 valid comments.

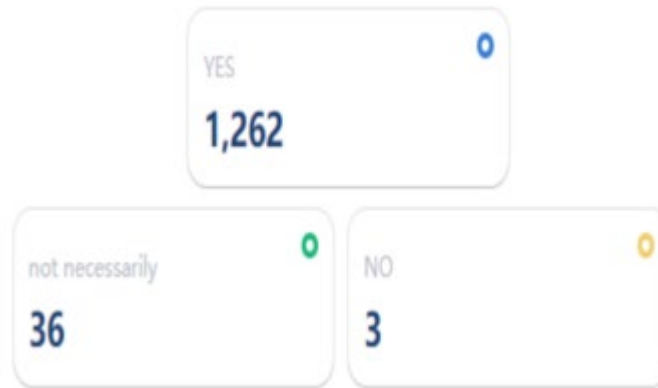


Figure 2: Sum of the number of support Ms.Xie

In Ms. Xie's comment section, 97% of the people expressed support for her according to the data in Figure 2. On June 25, 2023, she said: I am truly grateful for everyone's help. When I saw the media reports, I was really moved to tears. Finally, someone is speaking out for me, finally making me feel less helpless. I realized that ending my life is not the only path available to achieve the results I want.^[10]

The data and personal statements of the two survivors can give a preliminary determination that sharing self-narrative vlogs on social media can gain support and recognition.

3.2. Shifting societal perceptions

After Ms. Wang's news event sparked heated discussions on social media, it caught the attention of filmmakers. The movie "Lost in the star" was released on June 22, 2023 after purchasing the copyright from Ms. Wang, which once again ignited intense discussions among netizens about intimate relationships. Ms. Wang also shared her thoughts on this movie: I would like to share some insights with married or unmarried sisters. I want to tell everyone that when looking for a partner, you must keep your eyes open and see if the other person has any debt, previous marriages, or criminal records... The second thing is not to be love-struck... Constant compromise and concession will only harm yourself in the end. Remember that if you encounter a perfectly compatible person, it is likely that they are well-prepared... And one's family background is really important. Does he have a tendency towards domestic violence, extreme personality, etc. ? Don't think about changing a person. Adults should learn to make choices, not educate them... Love someone who is inherently good, not just someone who is good to you...^[11]

In the video posted by Ms.Xie on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, she mentioned: Today is November 25th, also known as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The essence of domestic violence is violence, not family. Violence can take our lives... Opposing domestic violence is not just a matter for any one of us; it's a matter for all of society. I hope more people will stand up to oppose domestic violence and protect the rights and interests of women and children. In the future, those women who have died from domestic violence, those who are currently experiencing domestic violence but dare not escape or do not know where to seek help, and those children who grew up in an environment of domestic violence. I hope everyone can bravely step forward and say no to domestic violence.^[12]

This vlog received 18,000 likes on TikTok, indicating that it was loved and recognized by a large number of viewers. In most cases, individuals are socially acclaimed for expressing beliefs that bolster the dominant opinion, while they are chastised for attitudes that deviate from their peers' consensus.^[13] Consequently, when the majority expresses their support, it often catalyzes increased group expressions of endorsement, which can be perceived as another manifestation of herd mentality behavior.

3.3. Repeated narrative and sorting out thoughts

Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work which centres people as the experts in their own lives. Narrative therapy is sometimes known as involving 're-authoring' or 're-storying' conversations^[14] alternative methods and possibilities. According to Elbert et al^[15], narrative exposure therapy is thought to reverse these detrimental conditions by strengthening connection to the context. Ms. Wang responded to some netizens' questions about why she kept repeating her own experiences: It wasn't until I went through the process of reviewing and analyzing it again that I realized the experience I gained could not be bought with money. Through this process, I was able to try different approaches at key points and achieve different results, finding alternative methods and possibilities.

The comparison of such tellings can allow us to zero in on the nature of underlying experience by showing what is constant and what variable.^[16] For instance, at different times a repeated narrative may be brief or more elaborate.^[17] Victims can pinpoint the underlying issue and uncover more effective solutions that could have been implemented at the time by examining their stories across various timeframes. This process helps to avert potential reoccurrence of victimization in the future. Also, both victims have attempted to reflect on and analyze the psychological activities of the perpetrator and the reasons behind the abuse. Through narrating this process, they have gained a certain distance from the memory and constructed a meaningful explanation for such events.^[18] Then, the transitional stories told by the victims will elucidate how women are able to draw upon different discourses as they attempt to give meaning to their experiences.^[19] In this way, the victim could learn that healing as "learning to live" with what has happened^[20], and uncover fresh purpose in life and subsequently undertake the process of rebuilding their inner selves.

3.4. Vlog Communication Effectiveness

As Raun said that^[21], new media technology create new possibilities for the visualization and communication of affect. Seize the opportunity to engage with the public via new media. This visual and emotional exchange will empower both parties involved in the communication process. On October 23, 2023, Ms. Wang responded to netizens' doubts about her regarding using her fall from a cliff as an online traffic-generating tactic: I've been interviewed by hundreds, if not thousands, of domestic and foreign media outlets. Every time they ask about it, every time I recall it, my heart is pierced and torn apart with pain. But when I think that many people will be alerted by my example and that my experience can give strength to those in low points or setbacks in their lives, I feel that this bit of suffering is nothing.^[22]

During an interview, Ms. Xie was queried about the driving force behind her determination to continue speaking out, and she shared: Seeing progress in my case brings joy and relief to many. It also instills hope, as there are numerous individuals like myself enduring domestic violence and struggling. This newfound hope is invaluable to them, just as I hope more people will courageously stand against domestic violence. Despite the perception of it being a hidden and shameful issue, I firmly believe that we must bravely step forward together.^[23]

The thoughts of the two survivors are consistent with the findings of Berryman and Kavka, These anecdotal videos are frequently framed as educational tools, intended both to raise awareness of the realities of living with anxiety and to assure similarly afflicted viewers that they are not alone in their experiences.^[24] Starting from April 2022, prominent social platforms in China have embarked on the implementation of displaying IP geolocations, a measure that has significantly enhanced the orderliness of the online realm and effectively curbed the proliferation of cyber violence and the dissemination of rumors.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate individuals who have experienced IPV, in order to explore the key factors that have been effective in their self-healing. Since trauma is stored in memory as imagery, expressive art processes provide an effective method for processing and resolving it.^[25] There is a possibility that traditional visual art media can evolve into digital visual art media, however, we have unavoidable come to view the production of videotape as an artistic process.^[26] Due to fears stemming from various causes, it was found that victims are exploring and seeking out mediums and safe spaces where they could speak up^[27], and vlogging is a suitable medium for this purpose. In the comment sections of social media, the better online communities can be at helping reduce IPV and also can help prevent

IPV in the digital age.^[28] The research findings indicate that using vlogs as a method of self-therapy is feasible.

Brott and Willis employed an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) case study method, discovering that critical self-reflection through vlogging can assist individuals in reshaping and reorienting their inner experiences.^[29] In addition, Bakøy's article suggests that vloggers provide a form of therapy for depression through their vlogs, which helps reduce intrusive thoughts and anxiety, alleviates their sense of loneliness, and the comments section also provides social support.^[30] Moreover, Mickles and Weare's research revealed that viewers share their experiences of mental health while watching video blogs, using the comments section to seek support and assistance.^[31] The essence of these three articles collectively points to a conclusion that commenters on vlogs published by vloggers can also share their stories, the vloggers can see they are not alone, and the others reading these exchanges may also feel like they are not alone.^[32] Some studies indicate that the use of technology in art therapy presents both immense opportunities and serious risks.^[33] However, Disclosing traumatic experiences of violence is also represented as an act of healing that provides solace and a sense of justice and personal power.^[34] This therapeutic process enables women to build on this newfound confidence through narrative art and explore the possibilities for their futures.^[35]

Social media utilizes algorithms to push similar content according to individual users interests.^[36] In the comment section beneath Ms. Wang's pertinent videos, there are instances where netizens urge her to extend assistance to Ms. Xie. Furthermore, Ms. Xie also mentioned in her vlog that some netizens requested her to pay attention to the news regarding Ms. Wu, who tragically succumbed to intimate partner violence recently. This observation leads us to deduce that when survivors share vlogs, they not only facilitate their own healing process but also effectively guide netizens to recognize and offer support to a greater number of individuals currently enduring violence through the interactive comments section. The limitations lie in the fact that the research subjects of this theory are selected from figures in news hotspots, potentially leading to survivorship bias. The research process may be influenced by subjective judgments, and the results may also exhibit variability due to changes in vloggers' behaviors, styles, and content over time, as well as personal factors and environmental influences. In addition, the portrayal of Ms. Wang and Ms. Xie in their vlogs may not be complete. This could be attributed to practical reasons, such as selective self-presentation, or the reservation of personal information for privacy protection. Consequently, these factors may result in an incomplete understanding, potentially leading to misinterpretations or omissions regarding the true circumstances of the vloggers. Future research will further delve into the exploration of the interactive influence between Vlogs and users, aiming to uncover new intervention strategies for subhealth populations in the context of the information era. We will be committed to understanding how Vlogs affect users' psychological states and how users can address and improve their suboptimal mental health conditions through interactions with Vlogs.

5. Conclusion

This article delves into how women experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can effectively seek help and whether creating and sharing Vlogs through self-media or user-generated media can facilitate self-healing and garner support. Historical lessons remind us that regardless of the societal context, the key lies in confronting reality and seeking solutions. In today's era, self-media or user-generated media has become a potent tool for us.

We conducted a meticulous analysis of the cases involving Ms. Wang and Ms. Xie, uncovering the crucial elements through which they achieved self-healing via Vlogs. The research findings indicate that utilizing Vlogs for art therapy is a method worth attempting. While this approach may have limitations such as survivorship bias, under current limited conditions, it offers a potential means of self-rescue for women enduring IPV.

As Hameed et al point out, we cannot definitively ascertain whether psychotherapy can improve self-efficacy, mental health, quality of life, social support, acceptance of healthcare services, safety plan formulation, or reduce the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and re-exposure to any form of domestic violence.^[37] Nevertheless, we hope that the cases of Ms. Wang and Ms. Xie can serve as a wake-up call for women experiencing IPV and provide insight to those like Ms. Xie, who yearn to escape but repeatedly face obstacles and are dismissed with phrases like "it's a family matter" when seeking assistance from relevant departments.

The essence of intimate partner violence lies in violent behavior, which is unrelated to the nature of the relationship between the parties; the same applies to domestic violence. We must clarify that any

form of violence is unacceptable, regardless of where it occurs or the relationship involved. By understanding and applying new self-help methods, such as vlog art therapy through self-media, we aspire to provide more diverse and effective support avenues for women experiencing IPV.

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