Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics
ISSN: 2345-3303 – E-ISSN: 2588-3887 – https://rals.scu.ac.ir
Published by Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

Please cite this paper as follows:
Iqbal, N., Nor. N. F. M., & Shaari, A. H. (2026). 'She's doing it for attention!': Understanding victim-blaming discourses against working women sharing harassment experiences on social media. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *17*(1), 205-223. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2025.48715.3445

Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz



Research Paper

'She's Doing It for Attention!': Understanding Victim-Blaming Discourses Against Working Women Sharing Harassment Experiences on Social Media

Nayab Iqbal[1], Nor Fariza Mohd Nor[2], & Azianura Hani Shaari[3]

[1]Corresponding author, Centre for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia; *nayabiqbal20@gmail.com*
[2]Centre for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia; *fariza@ukm.edu.my*
[3]Centre for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia; *azianura@ukm.edu.my*

Received: 11/01/2025 Accepted: 25/04/2025

Abstract

Victim-blaming remains a persistent barrier to addressing online harassment, particularly in professional digital spaces where women's credibility and behaviour are scrutinised. This study examines victim-blaming discourse on LinkedIn, a platform designed for career networking, to understand how professional norms intersect with gendered narratives of blame. Using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), the study analyses comments on posts, where working women in Pakistan shared experiences of online harassment. The analysis identifies four recurring discursive patterns: shifting responsibility to the victim, minimising harassment, defending the harasser, and dismissing gendered aspects of harassment. These patterns reflect how social expectations around modesty, professionalism, and public visibility shape responses to women's disclosures. The findings point to the role of online discourse in discouraging women from speaking out and sustaining gendered expectations in professional spaces. This contributes to ongoing discussions about how online environments influence women's visibility and engagement, with implications for future policies aimed at fostering safer digital participation.

Keywords: Victim Blaming; Online Harassment; Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis; Working Women; Gendered Expectations.

1. Introduction

Social media has become an essential space for working women, as it enables professional networking, self-expression, and career advancement (Tsao et al., 2021). However, this very visibility that aids professional growth also exposes women to online harassment. Many working women report receiving vulgar or unsolicited messages from strangers on professional platforms like LinkedIn (Kocabaşoğlu et al., 2023). When they attempt to expose this harassment by sharing screenshots of these messages, instead of garnering support, they frequently face victim-blaming responses (Bin Zulkifli & Bakar, 2024). Rather than holding the harassers accountable, these discussions shift the focus to questioning the women's motives, their online presence, or their professional credibility.

For working women, social media is more than a platform for casual engagement; it is an indispensable tool for career development (Jacobson, 2020). Establishing a visible presence is necessary for networking, thought leadership, and industry recognition (Azhar et al., 2024). However, public profiles and frequent engagement often make them vulnerable to harassment (Kim et al., 2022). The issue is not just the existence of these messages but the response to them. When women speak out, they are frequently met with accusations of seeking attention, being too sensitive, or provoking the harassment themselves (Harmer & Lewis, 2022). Such responses contribute to a broader culture of victim blaming that discourages women from addressing their experiences.

Victim blaming plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes towards online harassment. It shifts responsibility from perpetrators to victims, which reinforces harmful gender norms and silences women who seek accountability (Flynn et al., 2023). While existing research has extensively examined victim blaming in traditional media, public discourse, and global movements such as #MeToo and #YesAllWomen (Bogen et al., 2021; Clark-Parsons, 2021; Hu et al., 2020), there is limited focus on working women navigating these issues in professional digital spaces. Unlike other social media platforms where personal and professional boundaries are often blurred, LinkedIn is explicitly designed for professional engagement. Yet, it has not been immune to gendered harassment and the subsequent victim-blaming discourses that emerge when women publicly call out such behaviour. Understanding the specific ways in which victim-blaming manifests in this professional setting is crucial to addressing the broader issue of online harassment.

In Pakistan, where traditional gender norms heavily influence digital interactions, these challenges are amplified. Women already face barriers to digital participation due to cultural expectations of modesty and obedience, creating what can be termed a 'digital double bind.' This means that not only do women have to justify their professional presence online, but they must also navigate scrutiny when they speak out against harassment. DRF Report (2023), published by the Digital Rights Foundation, highlighted that 40% of Pakistani women experience online harassment, including cyberbullying, moral policing, and threats. This environment discourages women from engaging freely in digital spaces, further deepening gender disparities in professional and economic opportunities.

This study examines how victim blaming is constructed in response to working women sharing their harassment experiences on LinkedIn. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was used to identify recurring narratives, such as shifting responsibility, minimising harassment, and defending perpetrators, that sustain victim-blaming attitudes in professional digital spaces. The focus on a specific platform and context allows for a closer look at how sociocultural expectations around gender and professionalism shape public reactions to harassment disclosures. While the study does not offer prescriptive solutions, the findings offer useful direction for future research and policy discussions on improving online safety for professional women.

1.1. Research Objectives

This research study is guided by the following objectives, which aim to examine the patterns, sociocultural influences, and gendered dynamics of victim-blaming discourse in professional digital spaces.

1. To identify recurring themes in victim-blaming discourse directed at working women in professional digital spaces in Pakistan.
2. To examine how gender norms and expectations around professional behaviour are expressed in victim-blaming responses toward women.
3. To identify how sociocultural values are reflected in the language of victim blaming in online professional interactions.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines the multifaceted nature of online harassment, emphasising its gendered dimensions, the phenomenon of victim blaming, the specific context of LinkedIn, and the application of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) in understanding these issues.

2.1. Online Harassment: Forms and Manifestations

The increasing integration of digital platforms into everyday life has brought numerous benefits, from professional networking to social interactions and information exchange (Azhar et al., 2025). However, this digital expansion has also given rise to a significant challenge; online harassment. Unlike traditional forms of harassment, online abuse operates through virtual spaces, often shielded by anonymity, and can reach victims across geographical boundaries. This has intensified the scale and impact of harassment, making it more persistent and difficult to escape (Abarna et al., 2022).

Online harassment encompasses a wide range of aggressive behaviours, including targeted abuse, coercion, intimidation, and threats, often amplified by the connectivity and permanence of digital spaces (Wagner, 2019). It is not

limited to isolated incidents but frequently takes on a systemic nature, which reflects deep-rooted societal power imbalances. Women, marginalised communities, and public figures are particularly vulnerable, as their visibility on social media and professional platforms exposes them to sustained abuse (Sjöholm, 2022).

One of the defining characteristics of online harassment is its ability to transcend digital boundaries into real-life consequences. Victims often experience psychological distress, professional setbacks, and reputational damage, sometimes leading them to withdraw from online spaces entirely. The psychological effects can be severe, ranging from anxiety and depression to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Munir et al., 2021). The ease with which perpetrators can target individuals without facing immediate consequences exacerbates the issue, enabling a culture of impunity.

Among the various manifestations of online harassment, two forms are particularly relevant to this study: trolling and hate speech. These forms are not only widespread but also play a key role in shaping digital discourse, particularly when women speak out about their experiences of harassment (Sudajit-apa, 2025).

Trolling is a form of deliberate provocation where individuals post inflammatory, offensive, or disruptive comments to provoke emotional reactions from victims (Demsar et al., 2021). While some trolls justify their behaviour as humour or free speech, research suggests that online trolling is often rooted in misogyny, racism, and power dynamics (Demsar et al., 2021). On professional platforms, trolling can take the form of discrediting women's expertise, questioning their achievements, or making derogatory remarks about their career choices (Doerfler et al., 2021). The consequences of trolling extend beyond emotional distress; it can silence individuals, erode their professional credibility, and reinforce gendered hierarchies in digital spaces (Marciotto Oliveira & Miranda, 2022; Ortiz, 2024).

Hate speech involves targeted verbal abuse, slurs, and discriminatory language aimed at marginalised groups based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Studies indicate that women in public and professional spaces face disproportionate levels of hate speech, often aimed at delegitimising their presence or authority (Al-Rawi et al., 2024). The normalisation of hate speech contributes to hostile digital environments where women feel unsafe expressing opinions, engaging in discussions, or advocating for their rights. A study by Cover (2023) shows that hate speech can have adverse psychological impacts on victims, including emotional distress and social withdrawal, as well as broader societal effects, such as normalising prejudice and inciting violence.

Together, trolling and hate speech play a critical role in shaping online harassment narratives. They reinforce victim-blaming discourses, discourage women from sharing their experiences, and perpetuate digital gender inequalities. Understanding these forms of harassment is essential for analysing how victim-blaming discourse operates, particularly in professional spaces like LinkedIn, where women's credibility and career progression are at stake.

2.2. Gendered Nature of Online Harassment

Online harassment is not a neutral phenomenon; it is deeply shaped by gender dynamics, reflecting broader societal inequalities that extend into digital spaces (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2021). While men and women both experience online harassment, research consistently shows that the nature, frequency, and severity of this harassment differ significantly based on gender (Phillips et al., 2023). Women, particularly those who are visible in professional, social, or activist spaces, face disproportionately high levels of harassment, often of a sexualised or misogynistic nature (Hooda et al., 2022). The gendered nature of online abuse is not merely an incidental aspect of digital culture; it is a direct extension of offline gender-based violence, discrimination, and systemic power imbalances.

Empirical studies have shown that women are more likely than men to be subjected to severe and sustained forms of online harassment (Haslop et al., 2021). Vogels (2021) published a report for Pew Research Centre which found that 41% of women have experienced some form of online abuse, with young women (aged 18–24) particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, cyberstalking, and targeted threats. In contrast, men are more likely to encounter milder forms of online conflict, such as name-calling—insulting or derogatory labels directed at a person's character, intelligence, or appearance—or general arguments, but not threats of sexual violence or systemic intimidation campaigns (Buchanan & Mahoney, 2022).

One key difference in how harassment is gendered is the type of language and threats used. While men might experience insults related to intelligence or competence, women are far more likely to receive threats of rape, sexual assault, and physical harm (Taylor et al., 2021). Researchers argue that this stems from historical patterns of gender-based

violence, where controlling women's behaviour, both offline and online, is deeply ingrained in patriarchal societies (O. Alichie, 2023). Harassment serves as a tool to reinforce gender hierarchies by discouraging women from public and professional participation.

On platforms like LinkedIn, which are intended for professional networking, women report receiving inappropriate messages, sexual comments, and persistent unwanted attention (Darban & Kabbaj, 2023). Studies suggest that such interactions serve to delegitimise women's professional identities, framing them not as experts or leaders but as objects of male attention (Novais & Araújo, 2024). This objectification creates an environment where women must navigate professional interactions with an added layer of caution, often limiting their engagement to avoid harassment.

Beyond the immediate distress caused by online abuse, gendered harassment has long-term consequences for women's digital participation, career progression, and mental health (Rothman et al. 2023). Many women, especially those who experience sustained abuse, resort to self-censorship, limiting their online engagement, making their profiles private, or withdrawing from digital spaces entirely. Research on digital gender divides shows that women often curate their online presence more cautiously than men, weighing the risks of potential harassment before sharing opinions, engaging in discussions, or responding to controversial topics (Hooda et al., 2022).

This forced invisibility contributes to broader gender inequalities by silencing women's voices in professional, social, and political discussions. When women hesitate to express themselves freely online due to fear of backlash, their professional visibility, networking opportunities, and career advancement suffer. The long-term effect is a digital ecosystem where male voices dominate, while female voices are disproportionately silenced or punished for visibility.

In Pakistan, the issue of online harassment against women is both pervasive and deeply concerning. A study by Ahmmad, Iqbal & Naz (2024) revealed that female university students in Sindh, female students have encountered cyber harassment, resulting in emotional and psychological distress. Similarly, research by Li et al. (2023) delves into the challenges faced by political journalists on Twitter, particularly focusing on harassment from users affiliated with political parties. The research highlights that such online harassment not only undermines the credibility of journalists but also poses significant threats to press freedom in Pakistan. Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) has been instrumental in addressing this issue; since the launch of its cyber-harassment helpline in 2016, it has received over 16,000 complaints, which underscores the widespread nature of the problem.

2.3. Victim Blaming in Online Contexts

Online harassment does not exist in isolation; it is often compounded by victim-blaming narratives that shift responsibility from perpetrators to those who experience abuse. Victim blaming occurs when individuals facing harassment, discrimination, or violence are held responsible for their suffering rather than the aggressors (Johnson et al., 2021). In online contexts, this phenomenon is pervasive, which discourages victims from reporting their experiences, seeking support, or holding perpetrators accountable. Victim blaming not only intensifies the psychological toll on individuals but also perpetuates a culture of silence and impunity, where harmful behaviours continue unchecked (Sorrentino et al., 2024).

At the core of victim blaming lies a set of cognitive biases that influence how individuals interpret events. One of the most well-documented biases is the Just-World Hypothesis (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021), which suggests that people have a deep-seated need to believe in a fair and predictable world. According to this view, individuals assume that people get what they deserve; good things happen to good people, and bad things happen as a result of one's own actions. In cases of online harassment, this belief system leads observers to rationalise the abuse by suggesting that victims must have done something to provoke it (Kiral Ucar et al., 2024).

Another contributing factor is cognitive dissonance, a psychological discomfort that arises when people hold contradictory beliefs. When individuals are confronted with evidence of harassment but simultaneously believe in a world where people are treated fairly, they may experience dissonance. To resolve this discomfort, they subconsciously shift blame onto the victim rather than acknowledging the unsettling reality of gendered abuse and online misogyny (Slakoff, 2023).

Research also points to the role of social dominance orientation (SDO) and system justification theory in victim blaming (Rollero et al., 2021). Studies have shown that individuals who support hierarchical social structures are more

likely to rationalise harassment, dismissing it as normal behaviour or trivialising its impact (Palmieri et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant in digital spaces, where power dynamics influence whose voices are amplified and whose experiences are dismissed.

Victim blaming in online spaces can take multiple forms, from overt accusations to subtle forms of delegitimisation. One of the most common ways this occurs is through scrutinising the victim's behaviour instead of addressing the perpetrator's actions (Cricenti et al., 2022). Women who share their experiences of online abuse are often asked why they were active on certain platforms, why they responded to harassers, or why they did not simply block the individual in question. These reactions suggest that it is the victim's responsibility to avoid harassment, rather than society's duty to address it.

Another prevalent form of victim blaming is the minimisation or trivialisation of harassment. Women who report digital abuse frequently encounter dismissive responses that frame their experiences as exaggerated or inconsequential (Bedrosova et al., 2023). Many are told that online harassment is "just the internet" and should not be taken seriously, or that comments made online do not constitute real harm (Osborne et al., 2021). Others are accused of being overly sensitive or misinterpreting interactions, with harassing messages being excused as jokes, sarcasm, or harmless banter (Buglass et al., 2021).

Victim blaming also intersects with societal expectations of women's online behaviour. Women are expected to navigate digital spaces in a way that avoids provoking harassment, often being advised to "ignore it," "stay private," or "not engage with strangers" (Toffoletti et al., 2023). This places an unfair burden on victims to self-censor or withdraw, while perpetrators face little to no consequences. In professional environments like LinkedIn, victim blaming takes on a reputational dimension, where women who report inappropriate messages or workplace discrimination are labelled as "too sensitive," "unprofessional," or "difficult to work with" (Bates, 2022).

Beyond personal distress, victim blaming also plays a structural role in maintaining gender inequalities in digital spaces. When women are blamed for the harassment they face, they are more likely to withdraw from online discussions, limit their professional visibility, or self-censor their opinions (Ghayedi Karimi et al., 2021; Marwick, 2021). This disproportionately affects women in leadership roles, journalism, politics, and activism, where being vocal is necessary for career progression but also increases exposure to abuse (Riedl et al., 2024).

Victim blaming undermines collective efforts to address online harassment. It shifts the focus away from systemic solutions, such as platform accountability, stronger policies, and legal protections, and instead places responsibility on the individual. As a result, digital abuse is normalised as an inevitable part of online life. When victims expect to be blamed, they are less likely to report their experiences, which allows perpetrators to continue without consequences (Duffy et al., 2023).

2.4. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) by Michelle Lazar

Developed by Lazar (2007), FCDA emphasises that discourse is not neutral; it is deeply ideological and embedded within social hierarchies, patriarchal structures, and systems of domination. The framework builds upon Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which traditionally explores how power and ideology are maintained through language (Bouvier & Machin, 2018). However, FCDA moves beyond a general critique of power to centre gender as a fundamental organising principle of discourse (Lazar, 2007). For example, Peng, Wu and Chen (2024) employ FCDA to analyse discussions from Hupu, a prominent Chinese-language sports fandom platform, which uncovers the discursive strategies employed by male users. The findings reveal that these fans often sexualise sportswomen and downplay their athletic achievements, which reflects entrenched gender power imbalances within China's sports fandom culture. This study highlights how such online communities serve as spaces where traditional gender hierarchies are both expressed and perpetuated through language.

While FCDA examines how discourse is used to maintain gendered inequalities, it also highlights resistance and counter-discourses that challenge these narratives (Rahimpour et al., 2018). Online feminist activism, hashtags like #MeToo and #BelieveWomen, and collective efforts to expose misogynistic behaviour serve as powerful discursive interventions that seek to disrupt dominant narratives and reshape public discourse (Hoeber et al., 2024). For example, a study by Chen & Gong (2024) examines the emergence and usage of the term 'baby man' on Chinese social media

platforms, which reveals how feminists employ the term to challenge gender norms and authoritarianism. Similarly, Nartey (2021) employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to identify how Ghanaian feminists employ resistance strategies in their blog posts to critique systemic gender privileges and inequalities. The study reveals that these feminist bloggers employ discourse to foreground their voices and challenge patriarchal structures within Ghanaian society. By analysing these competing linguistic strategies, FCDA provides insights into how language functions not only as a tool of oppression but also as a site of contestation where new meanings and feminist counter-narratives emerge.

In the context of victim blaming and online harassment on LinkedIn, FCDA provides a critical framework for examining how discourse shapes perceptions of harassment, influences public responses, and determines whose experiences are validated or dismissed. It enables an in-depth analysis of how victims of harassment are framed, whether their accounts are believed, whether their credibility is questioned, or whether their experiences are trivialised as exaggerated or insignificant. Additionally, it helps reveal how perpetrators are linguistically absolved, often portrayed as misunderstood or engaging in "harmless" behaviour rather than facing accountability.

By applying FCDA to the language used in responses to online harassment, this study examines how victim-blaming discourse operates in professional digital spaces, shaping narratives around accountability, gender norms, and online participation. The application of FCDA in this study was guided by the following principles:

1. Feminist Analytical Activism: Emphasised analysing how discourses of victim blaming sustain patriarchal norms and disadvantage of women in professional spaces.
2. Gender as Ideological Structure and Practice: Explored how victim-blaming comments reflect deeply ingrained gender ideologies that normalise harassment and shift responsibility onto women.
3. Discourse in the (De)construction of Gender: Investigated how victim-blaming comments reinforce or challenge gender roles and societal expectations.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative thematic analysis approach to examine victim-blaming language in responses to harassment-related posts on LinkedIn. Thematic analysis is a widely used method for systematically identifying and interpreting patterns within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which makes it well-suited for exploring how victim-blaming discourse unfolds in professional digital spaces (Shokri, 2016). Given LinkedIn's focus on career networking, the language used in victim-blaming comments may reflect workplace norms and professional etiquette, which distinguishes it from similar discourse on more informal social media platforms.

The study is based on observational data collection, where publicly available LinkedIn posts discussing experiences of online harassment were identified, along with the comments they received. This naturalistic approach ensures that victim-blaming narratives are examined in their authentic context, capturing how these discourses emerge organically without researcher intervention.

By applying thematic analysis within a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) framework, this study critically examines how victim-blaming language functions to delegitimise women's experiences, reinforce gendered norms, and absolve perpetrators of responsibility. The methodological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of both explicit and implicit victim-blaming narratives and provides insight into how professional digital environments contribute to the broader normalisation of harassment.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

In the initial stages, the viral hashtag #LinkedInisNotTinder was instrumental in locating posts where working women shared their experiences of receiving unsolicited vulgar messages on LinkedIn. This hashtag surfaced after several women publicly discussed inappropriate behaviour on the platform, leading to broader conversations about online harassment in professional spaces. These discussions provided a starting point for the sampling process.

Once these initial posts were identified, further screening was conducted to ensure relevance. This involved carefully analysing whether the posts contained instances of victim blaming in the comments. Posts that did not include such interactions were excluded. From the analysed posts, additional hashtags and keywords were identified, including #Flirting, #OnlineHarassment, #SafeSpaceForWomen, and #SayNoToOnlineHarassment. These terms were then used to broaden the search and capture more diverse discussions.

The following criteria were applied to ensure the selection of posts most relevant to the research objectives:

1. Victim's Demographics: The process of identifying victims began with a focus on LinkedIn posts authored by women working in Pakistan. Posts were filtered to ensure the authors explicitly identified themselves as professionals, either through their LinkedIn profiles or within the content of their posts. This involved reviewing professional titles, job descriptions, or contextual clues within their posts to confirm their professional roles.
2. Content: The selected posts provided detailed accounts of online harassment, specifically incidents involving unsolicited vulgar messages or abusive comments directed at the authors. Many of these posts included screenshots of the messages to substantiate their claims and highlight the nature of the harassment. These narratives were often shared to raise awareness or seek support from the LinkedIn community.
3. Engagement: Identifying posts with meaningful engagement involved more than just looking at the number of comments. The focus was on finding victim-blaming responses within the discussions. Each post was reviewed carefully to determine if the comments contained examples of victim-blaming language. If a post had fewer than 20 comments, it was excluded, as it often lacked enough interactions to provide a variety of perspectives.
4. Timeframe: To ensure the study reflected contemporary attitudes and current discourse on online harassment, only posts published between January 2023 and December 2024 were included. This two-year timeframe was selected to capture recent discussions and interactions, as societal attitudes and digital conversations evolve over time.

Despite these efforts, identifying suitable posts required extensive screening and refinement due to the sporadic nature of such discussions on LinkedIn. Many potential posts lacked sufficient engagement or did not include instances of victim blaming, which further narrowed the dataset. A total of 35 posts were selected for observation, representing a diverse range of professional roles and industries. The search process involved exploring LinkedIn's search functions and browsing trending hashtags related to harassment and empowerment. Each identified post was documented, and its comment section was captured for further analysis. The sampling strategy emphasised inclusivity while maintaining a manageable scope for in-depth observation. This study employs a qualitative thematic analysis approach to examine victim-blaming language in responses to harassment-related posts

3.3. Data Collection

This study systematically gathers LinkedIn posts and their corresponding comments to analyse victim-blaming discourse using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). FCDA, as introduced by Michelle M. Lazar, examines how power and gender inequalities are enacted and contested through language, making it an ideal framework for studying online harassment and victim-blaming behaviours in professional digital spaces.

LinkedIn is distinct from other social media platforms in that it is primarily designed for professional networking, career advancement, and industry-related discussions. Unlike more casual platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, LinkedIn emphasises formal interactions, credibility-building, and personal branding (Smith & Watkins, 2023). This professional setting influences how harassment unfolds and how individuals respond to it, often shaping victim-blaming discourse in ways that reflect workplace norms and corporate culture.

The platform's affordances, such as real-name identity verification, profile visibility, and networking features encourage users to maintain a professional image and engage in discourse that aligns with workplace expectations (Hosseini, 2022; Maleknia et al., 2022). However, these same affordances create vulnerabilities, as women on LinkedIn receive inappropriate messages, sexist comments, and condescending advice disguised as professional feedback (Salerno-Ferraro et al., 2022). The commenting feature allows for public discussions where victim-blaming responses may emerge, reinforcing gendered power imbalances while discouraging victims from speaking out.

Analysing LinkedIn's discourse through FCDA helps uncover how victim-blaming narratives manifest in professional contexts, how language is used to invalidate women's experiences of harassment, and how gendered norms shape the acceptability of online interactions. By examining these discourses within LinkedIn's unique socio-professional landscape, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how online harassment is normalised even within spaces that are ostensibly designed for professional growth and career development.

For this purpose, each selected post, along with its comments, was meticulously documented. Screenshots were captured to preserve the context, while the textual data was imported into NVivo software for analysis. Metadata, including the author's professional role, the post's publication date, and engagement metrics (e.g., number of comments and likes), was recorded for each entry to provide additional context for the analysis. Furthermore, NVivo software was used to streamline the analysis process. All textual data from posts and comments were imported into NVivo, which helps ensure systematic coding and efficient organisation of themes. NVivo's query tools enabled the identification of key phrases and patterns, facilitating a detailed examination of victim-blaming language.

The comments analysed in this study were made by a Pakistani audience, reflecting the sociocultural norms and gendered expectations prevalent in the country. Given LinkedIn's public commenting feature, the individuals responding to harassment-related posts may or may not have been familiar with the women who shared their experiences. Unlike closed social media networks where interactions often occur within established personal or professional circles, LinkedIn's structure enables public engagement from both direct connections and strangers. This open interaction dynamic means that victim-blaming comments could come from colleagues, industry professionals, or completely unfamiliar individuals, adding another layer of complexity to how women navigate digital professional spaces.

Additionally, gender differences in victim-blaming discourse were examined. The findings suggest that while men were the predominant contributors to victim-blaming narratives, a notable percentage of women also engaged in such discourse. This reflects internalised gender norms, workplace socialisation, and cultural conditioning, where women, particularly those in professional settings, may adopt conservative attitudes toward digital engagement to align with societal expectations. Women engaging in victim blaming often framed their responses as advice or professional guidance, reinforcing the notion that women must adjust their behaviour to avoid harassment rather than demanding systemic change.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Preliminary Insights into Victim-Blaming Patterns

The LinkedIn posts analysed in this study were categorised into four distinct themes (see Table 1), each reflecting a specific type of harassment experienced by working women. These categories highlight the various contexts in which professional women encounter harassment, as well as the different ways victim-blaming discourse manifests in response to their experiences.

The first category, "Sharing Screenshots of Unsolicited Messages," comprised posts where women publicly shared screenshots of inappropriate messages they received from male LinkedIn users. These messages often included unsolicited advances, sexual innuendos, or outright propositions that were incongruous with LinkedIn's professional purpose. Many of these posts were accompanied by expressions of frustration, calls for stricter platform policies, or warnings to other women about the behaviour of certain individuals. However, the responses to such posts frequently contained victim-blaming rhetoric, with commentors questioning why the women were engaging with strangers, or why they chose to post the messages instead of ignoring or blocking the sender.

The second category, "Flirting Masked as Professional Queries," focused on instances where women were approached under the pretext of job opportunities, industry networking, or mentorship, only for the conversation to shift toward personal or flirtatious interactions. This form of harassment is particularly insidious as it exploits professional expectations and creates uncertainty about the intent behind messages. Women posting about such experiences frequently received comments questioning their ability to discern between genuine professional interest and personal advances, subtly placing the blame on them for not "handling the situation better."

The third category, "Harassment Faced at Workplace Posts," included posts where women shared their experiences of inappropriate behaviour, sexist remarks, or workplace harassment. These posts often detailed how they were dismissed, gaslighted, or retaliated against when they reported such incidents. Victim-blaming responses to these posts took different forms, including suggestions that the women misinterpreted interactions, accusations of overreacting, or arguments that workplace culture inherently comes with challenges that one must "toughen up" to handle. In some cases, comments implied that reporting harassment was "career-damaging" and that women should prioritise maintaining professional relationships over speaking out.

The final category, "Harassment by Recruiters During Job Applications/Interviews," addressed incidents where women faced inappropriate comments or behaviour from recruiters, interviewers, or hiring managers. Despite the clear ethical violations in these cases, victim-blaming responses often suggested that women should have been more "assertive" in shutting down such behaviour or should have "expected" these risks when engaging in the job market. Some comments went further to imply that women might be leveraging their looks or gender for career advancement, which reinforced harmful stereotypes about women in professional spaces.

Table 1. Comments *Categorised by Post Types*

Category	Number of Posts	Total Comments	Victim-Blaming Comments	% Victim Blaming by Men	% Victim Blaming by Women
Sharing Screenshots of Unsolicited Messages	12	160	34	82%	18%
Flirting Masked as Professional Queries	7	100	22	85%	15%
Harassment Faced at Workplace Posts	10	140	31	79%	21%
Harassment by Recruiters During Job Applications/Interviews	6	96	19	87%	13%

4.2. Analysis of Engagement and Victim-Blaming Trends

To better understand the patterns of victim-blaming discourse on LinkedIn, this section examines the engagement levels across different categories of harassment-related posts. Table 1 presents key figures on the number of posts, total comments, and the distribution of victim-blaming responses by gender. The data reveals that the "Sharing Screenshots of Unsolicited Messages" category has the highest number of posts (12) and the greatest number of total comments (160), significantly outnumbering other categories. A possible explanation for this is that posts containing visual content, such as screenshots, tend to attract more engagement compared to text-based posts. Research on social media engagement suggests that images draw more attention, evoke stronger reactions, and encourage more interactions than plain text posts (Li & Xie, 2020).

When women share screenshots of unsolicited messages, it provides tangible evidence of harassment, making it harder to dismiss or dispute. This visibility likely triggers a mix of reactions; with some supporting the victim and condemning the harasser, while others engage in victim-blaming discourse by questioning why the messages were shared publicly. The public nature of these posts may also contribute to a larger volume of victim-blaming comments, as people feel compelled to express opinions about the appropriateness of exposing private conversations, leading to debates in the comment sections.

Furthermore, the data shows that this category received 34 victim-blaming comments, the highest among all categories, despite making up only 30% of the total posts analysed. This suggests that sharing visual proof of harassment provokes stronger reactions, possibly because it challenges societal tendencies to downplay harassment. The backlash against these posts may stem from discomfort with public exposure, cultural expectations around privacy, or deeply ingrained gender norms that discourage women from speaking out.

The data in Table 1 reveals that 21% of victim-blaming comments in the "Harassment Faced at Workplace" category were made by women, a significantly higher proportion compared to the other categories. One possible

explanation for this could be internalised gender norms and workplace socialisation, which influence how women perceive and respond to harassment. In professional settings, women are often expected to adapt to workplace culture, navigate challenges discreetly, and avoid behaviours perceived as "disruptive" to professional harmony. As a result, some female professionals may adopt a "just deal with it" mentality, believing that workplace harassment is something women should endure or handle privately rather than publicly discussing it.

Additionally, career survival strategies may shape these responses. Women who have faced similar challenges in the workplace might distance themselves from victims to align with dominant workplace norms and avoid being labelled as "difficult" or "overly sensitive." This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "horizontal hostility" (Verma, 2023) or "the Queen Bee Syndrome" (Mufti et al., 2021) occurs when women in professional spaces downplay gendered challenges to reinforce their own position within male-dominated work environments.

Another factor could be the perception of professionalism. In workplaces, women are often held to higher behavioural standards and may unconsciously enforce these standards on others. If a woman publicly shares a harassment experience, other female professionals may see this as unprofessional, attention-seeking, or a failure to handle workplace issues "maturely"—leading to victim-blaming comments.

These findings suggest that victim blaming in professional settings is not only shaped by male-dominated workplace cultures but also by gendered expectations that some women internalise and perpetuate.

4.3. Thematic Analysis

The analysis of victim-blaming comments highlights several recurring patterns that perpetuate harmful narratives about harassment. These patterns reflect societal tendencies to blame victims, trivialise their experiences, defend the harasser, and dismiss the gendered nature of the issue. Each theme reveals how language can reinforce inequality, making it difficult for women to challenge harassment and seek justice.

The themes, grounded in the comments analysed, show how societal norms normalise harassment and shift accountability away from perpetrators. The examples provided demonstrate how these harmful attitudes discourage victims from speaking out and maintain a culture where harassment is excused or ignored.

Table 2. *Victim-Blaming Themes in Harassment Posts on LinkedIn*

Theme	No. of Instances	Sample Comment
Shifting Responsibility	37	"If you keep such pictures as your dp, what else do you expect?" "You're just encouraging this by replying to strangers online." "You think you've done the right thing by sharing the screenshots? What if he loses his job?"
Minimising Harassment	23	"It's not a big deal, stop creating fuss over trivial matters." "All girls receive such messages in inbox; they don't post everything." "He's just admiring you; take it as a compliment."
Defending the Harasser	19	"He's just admiring you; take it as a compliment." "He might lose his job, and he could be the sole breadwinner."
Dismissing Gendered Harassment	18	"Everyone makes mistakes; why are you making this such a big deal?" "Men also receive these messages; I have never seen them posting online." "How girls nowadays can do anything for attention."

4.3.1. Theme 1: Shifting Responsibility to the Victim

A central theme in victim-blaming discourse was the recurrent tendency to shift responsibility away from the harasser and onto the victim. Women were often framed as responsible for provoking, inviting, or escalating the harassment they faced rather than as individuals deserving of protection and justice (Kazmi et al., 2023). This narrative

reflects patriarchal notions of female behaviour regulation, where women are expected to self-police their actions, appearance, and online engagement to avoid harassment.

One way this theme manifested was through scrutiny of women's physical appearance, where comments suggested that certain profile pictures or attire were inappropriate for professional spaces, thereby implying that the harassment they experienced was a natural consequence of their self-presentation. This reflects a broader societal expectation in Pakistan that women must conform to strict standards of modesty to be respected (Priola & Chaudhry, 2021), reinforcing the idea that those who deviate from these norms are inviting male attention. The assumption that harassment is avoidable if women simply present themselves "appropriately" shifts the burden of prevention onto the victim rather than addressing the problematic behaviours of harassers.

Another aspect of this theme was the critique of how women navigated online interactions, with comments suggesting that replying to messages, engaging with strangers, or even maintaining an active online presence made women vulnerable to harassment. This discourse restricts women's digital participation by instilling fear of backlash, reinforcing the idea that their presence in online professional spaces must be carefully managed to avoid becoming a target. In Pakistan's sociocultural context, where women's visibility in public and professional domains is already contested (Ali et al., 2022), such narratives further limit their ability to engage freely and network effectively.

Additionally, criticism of public sharing of harassment experiences was a recurring pattern. Women who exposed inappropriate behaviour were often accused of damaging the reputations of harassers, exaggerating their experiences, or being unethical for making private interactions public. This aligns with cultural expectations in Pakistan that discourage women from disrupting social or professional harmony by calling attention to gender-based injustices. The expectation that women should resolve such issues privately rather than demand accountability contributes to a culture of silence that allows harassment to persist unchallenged.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Minimising Harassment

A significant portion of victim-blaming comments sought to downplay the seriousness of harassment, portraying it as trivial, normal, or undeserving of attention. This theme reflects the broader normalisation of gendered harassment in Pakistan, where women are often conditioned to accept inappropriate behaviour as a routine part of life rather than a violation of their rights (Ahmed & Yilmaz, 2021).

One way this occurred was through dismissing harassment as insignificant, with comments suggesting that women were making an issue out of "nothing" or creating unnecessary drama. This reflects cultural attitudes that prioritise tolerance and endurance over confrontation, particularly for women, who are often discouraged from vocalising grievances that challenge the status quo. The suggestion that harassment is "not a big deal" discourages women from reporting or addressing it, ensuring that such behaviours remain unchecked.

Another strategy used to minimise harassment was generalising experiences, where commentors argued that all individuals, regardless of gender, face similar treatment online, implying that women should not be making gender-specific complaints. This erases the systemic nature of harassment targeted at women and dismisses the disproportionate ways in which professional women face sexualised, persistent, and credibility-undermining harassment in online settings. By equating men's and women's experiences, these narratives obscure how deeply rooted gendered power dynamics shape online interactions, particularly in patriarchal societies like Pakistan.

A particularly harmful aspect of this theme was the framing of harassment as flattery. Women were often told to take inappropriate messages as compliments rather than offenses, reinforcing a culture where male entitlement to women's attention is normalised. In professional spaces, this can blur boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate workplace interactions, making it more difficult for women to assert their discomfort without being labelled as overreacting or ungrateful.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Defending the Harasser

Another pattern observed in the data was the defence of harassers, often through comments that shifted concern toward their reputations, careers, or family responsibilities. This type of defence often reflects gendered assumptions that men's roles as breadwinners and professionals are more valuable or fragile, which results in greater concern for their

reputations than for the victim's safety or dignity. Such responses suggest an underlying bias in how accountability is distributed based on gender.

One common justification was that harassers might suffer severe consequences for their actions, such as losing their jobs, positioning them as victims rather than perpetrators. In societies like Pakistan, where men are often seen as primary breadwinners, this discourse aligns with traditional views that economic stability should take precedence over addressing gendered violence. The implication that a harasser's livelihood should not be jeopardised reinforces the idea that men's misbehaviour is excusable if it threatens their financial or social stability.

Similarly, harassment was often framed as an innocent mistake, with commentors urging victims to be more understanding. This narrative trivialises women's experiences and absolves harassers of responsibility, reinforcing the perception that misconduct should be forgiven rather than challenged. The expectation that women should be lenient rather than demand accountability reflects broader sociocultural values that emphasise women's role as peacekeepers, even at their own expense.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Dismissing Gendered Harassment

A recurring theme in victim-blaming discourse was the rejection of gender as a relevant factor in online harassment. Many comments sought to neutralise the issue by arguing that men also face harassment online, dismissing the idea that women experience disproportionate and gender-specific forms of abuse. This aligns with anti-feminist discourses that resist acknowledging structural inequalities, instead positioning men as equally affected victims. By denying the gendered dimension of harassment, these narratives invalidate women's experiences and make it more difficult to address systemic issues of digital misogyny.

Additionally, some comments framed women's public discussion of harassment as attention-seeking, portraying them as exaggerating their experiences for sympathy or validation. This reflects broader societal attitudes in Pakistan, where women's credibility is often questioned when they speak out about gender-based violence. The assumption that victims are fabricating or amplifying their experiences to gain public recognition further discourages women from reporting harassment or seeking support.

Another aspect of this theme was mocking feminist narratives, where commentors dismissed discussions of harassment as part of a larger feminist "overreaction" to normal interactions. This aligns with global trends of anti-feminist backlash, where gender equality movements are ridiculed as excessive or unnecessary. In Pakistan, where feminist discourse is often met with resistance, such dismissals reflect broader ideological tensions surrounding women's rights and digital activism.

5. Implications for Women's Online Participation

These findings demonstrate that victim-blaming discourse on LinkedIn reflects broader societal narratives that policewomen's behaviour, restrict their agency, and uphold male privilege. The pervasiveness of these themes creates an environment where women must carefully navigate their online presence, limiting their engagement out of fear of backlash. This has significant implications for professional women in Pakistan, as digital platforms are essential for career growth, networking, and visibility. If women are systematically discouraged from participating fully in these spaces, it reinforces existing gender inequalities in professional advancement and leadership.

Furthermore, the role of sociocultural values in shaping victim-blaming discourse highlights how traditional norms continue to influence digital interactions. Expectations surrounding modesty, professionalism, and male authority are deeply embedded in both offline and online spaces, which makes it more challenging to combat harassment effectively. Addressing these issues requires not only policy changes on digital platforms but also broader societal shifts in attitudes toward gender, accountability, and women's digital rights.

6. Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the understanding of victim-blaming discourse in professional digital spaces by examining how commentors responded to harassment disclosures on LinkedIn. The analysis identified recurring language patterns—such as shifting responsibility to the victim, defending the harasser, and minimising the severity of

harassment—that work to delegitimise women's experiences. These discursive strategies reinforce existing gendered power structures and may discourage women from speaking out or participating fully in professional online communities.

First, the study contributes to the scholarly discourse on online harassment by extending research beyond casual social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to a professional networking environment. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine gendered harassment in informal digital spaces, this research provides insights into how victim blaming manifests in professional contexts, where interactions are expected to adhere to workplace norms and reputational concerns. By revealing that victim-blaming rhetoric persists even in professional settings, the study challenges the assumption that LinkedIn, as a career-oriented platform, is inherently safer for women.

Second, this study identifies distinct linguistic patterns in victim-blaming discourse, demonstrating how moralisation, normalisation, and deflection are used to shift responsibility from harassers to victims. These patterns reflect how digital discourse reinforces societal attitudes toward gender and accountability. By uncovering these recurring strategies, this research contributes to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), offering empirical evidence of how digital language maintains and reproduces gender inequalities in professional environments.

Third, the study provides context-specific insights into victim blaming in Pakistan, where sociocultural values deeply influence perceptions of harassment and women's digital participation. The findings highlight how traditional expectations regarding modesty, professionalism, and gender roles shape online interactions, leading to narratives that discourage women from asserting their presence in professional digital spaces. By situating the analysis within this context, the study adds to regional and intersectional perspectives on digital misogyny, contributing to the broader literature on gender and technology in South Asia.

Finally, this research offers practical implications for digital platform policies, workplace diversity efforts, and online safety initiatives. The findings underscore the need for LinkedIn and similar platforms to refine their moderation policies to address gendered harassment more effectively. Additionally, the study provides valuable insights for corporate and organisational leadership to develop strategies that challenge workplace cultures that enable victim-blaming narratives, ensuring that professional spaces, both online and offline, become more inclusive and equitable.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

This study focused exclusively on LinkedIn, offering insights into how victim-blaming discourse unfolds in professional digital spaces. While this focus provides a specific and relevant perspective, it also means that the study does not account for how different professional hierarchies, industries, or corporate cultures may influence victim-blaming narratives. Future research could examine variations in victim-blaming discourse across different professional sectors to understand whether certain industries foster more hostile or dismissive responses toward women who speak out about harassment.

Another key limitation is the absence of direct victim perspectives. This study analysed publicly available posts and comments, capturing societal reactions but not the first-hand experiences of women navigating online harassment in professional spaces. Conducting interviews or surveys with women who have faced harassment on LinkedIn could provide deeper insights into how victim-blaming discourse affects their career progression, mental well-being, and willingness to engage in online professional communities. This perspective would help bridge the gap between public discourse and private impact.

Additionally, the study's selection criteria, which required a minimum threshold of comments and explicitly identifiable victim-blaming discourse, may have excluded subtler or less overt instances of victim blaming. Future studies could employ broader inclusion criteria and computational discourse analysis methods to identify more implicit, coded, or indirect forms of victim-blaming language that may go unnoticed in manual content analysis. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gendered biases operate in professional digital conversations.

Finally, age-based differences in victim-blaming narratives remain an area for future research. Younger women, early-career professionals, and senior leaders may experience harassment and victim blaming differently due to variations in professional authority, digital engagement patterns, and workplace expectations. Future research could explore how age and career stage shape victim-blaming discourse, offering insights that could inform age-sensitive strategies to combat harassment in digital professional spaces.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Centre for Research in Language & Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for their support throughout the course of this research.

Information on Informed Consent or any Data Privacy Statements

This study was based on publicly accessible LinkedIn posts and comments. No private or identifiable personal data was collected, and no direct interaction with individuals occurred. Therefore, informed consent was not required, and all data privacy standards were upheld in accordance with ethical research practices.

Author Contributions

Conceptualisation, N.F.M.N and N.I..; methodology, N.F.M.N. and N.I.; software, N.I.; validation, N.F.M.N., N.I., and A.H.S.; formal analysis, N.I.; investigation, N.I.; resources, N.F.M.N.; data curation, N.I.; writing—original draft preparation, N.I.; writing—review and editing, N.F.M.N. and A.H.S.; visualisation, N.I; supervision, N.F.M.N. and A.H.S.; project administration, N.F.M.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethics Board Approval Statements

This study involved the analysis of publicly available online content and did not involve direct interaction with human participants or the collection of private data. As such, formal ethics board approval was not required according to the guidelines of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

Funding

This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

Ahmed, Z. S., & Yilmaz, I. (2021). Islamists and the incremental Islamisation of Pakistan: The case of women's rights. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, *59*(3), 275–295. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2021.1948661

Ahmmad, M., Iqbal, N., & Naz, W. (2024). Cyberbullying and its impact on mental health among female university students in Sindh, Pakistan: A case study. *Media and Communication Review*, *4*(2), Article 2.

Ali, T. S., Ali, S. S., Nadeem, S., Memon, Z., Soofi, S., Madhani, F., Karim, Y., Mohammad, S., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2022). Perpetuation of gender discrimination in Pakistani society: Results from a scoping review and qualitative study conducted in three provinces of Pakistan. *BMC Women's Health*, *22*(1), 540. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-02011-6

Al-Rawi, A., Siddiqi, M., & Al-Musalli, A. (2024). Abusive metajournalistic discourse towards journalists on social media. *Journalism Studies*, *25*(10), 1117–1137. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2358116

Azhar, K. A., Wel, C. A., & Ab Hamid, S. N. (2024). Examining loyalty of social media influencers: The effects of self-disclosure and credibility. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, *18*(2). http://jespk.net/paper.php?paperid=4530&year=2024&volume=Volume%2018&issue=Issue%202

Azhar, K. A., Wel, C. A. C., & Hamid, S. N. A. (2025). The test of time: A longitudinal study of parasocial relationships with social media influencers. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*, *8*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.53894/ijirss.v8i2.5320

Bates, L. (2022). *Fix the system, not the women*. Simon and Schuster.

Bedrosova, M., Kvardova, N., & Machackova, H. (2023). Bystanders' victim blaming and minimizing consequences of weight-based cyberhate attacks: The roles of anti-fat attitudes, body-positive online content, and gender. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *38*(9–10), 6915–6941. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221140037

Bin Zulkifli, M. S., & Bakar, K. A. (2024). Language shaming on YouTube: Linguistic features, themes, and social implications. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *15*(1), 128–144. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2023.43456.3034

Bogen, K. W., Bleiweiss, K. K., Leach, N. R., & Orchowski, L. M. (2021). #MeToo: Disclosure and response to sexual victimization on Twitter. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(17–18), 8257–8288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519851211

Bouvier, G., & Machin, D. (2018). Critical discourse analysis and the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Review of Communication*, *18*(3), 178–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2018.1479881

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Buchanan, N., & Mahoney, A. (2022). Development of a scale measuring online sexual harassment: Examining gender differences and the emotional impact of sexual harassment victimization online. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *27*(1), 63–81. https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12197

Buglass, S. L., Abell, L., Betts, L. R., Hill, R., & Saunders, J. (2021). Banter versus bullying: A university student perspective. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, *3*(4), 287–299. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-020-00085-0

Castaño-Pulgarín, S. A., Suárez-Betancur, N., Vega, L. M. T., & López, H. M. H. (2021). Internet, social media and online hate speech: Systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *58*, 101608. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101608

Chen, Y., & Gong, Q. (2024). Unpacking 'baby man' in Chinese social media: A feminist critical discourse analysis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *21*(4), 400–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2023.2169726

Clark-Parsons, R. (2021). "I see you, I believe you": #MeToo and the performance of networked feminist visibility. *Feminist Media Studies*, *21*(3), 362–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797

Cover, R. (2023). Digital hostility, subjectivity and ethics: Theorising the disruption of identity in instances of mass online abuse and hate speech. *Convergence*, *29*(2), 308–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221122908

Cricenti, C., Pizzo, A., Quaglieri, A., Mari, E., Cordellieri, P., Bonucchi, C., Torretta, P., Giannini, A. M., & Lausi, G. (2022). Did they deserve It? Adolescents' perception of online harassment in a real-case scenario. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(24), Article 24. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192417040

Darban, K., & Kabbaj, S. (2023). Identifying behaviors and characteristics of social media sexual harassers on LinkedIn for AI NLP purposes. In Lahby, M., Pathan, A. S. K., & Maleh, Y. (Eds.), *Combatting Cyberbullying in Digital Media with Artificial Intelligence*. Chapman and Hall/CRC. DOI: 10.1201/9781003393061-12

Demsar, V., Brace-Govan, J., Jack, G., & Sands, S. (2021). The social phenomenon of trolling: Understanding the discourse and social practices of online provocation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(11–12), 1058–1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2021.1900335

Doerfler, P., Forte, A., De Cristofaro, E., Stringhini, G., Blackburn, J., & McCoy, D. (2021). "I'm a Professor, which isn't usually a dangerous job": Internet-facilitated Harassment and Its Impact on Researchers. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5* (CSCW2), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1145/3476082

DRF Report 2023. (2023). Digital rights foundation. https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/work/research/

Duffy, S., O'Shea, M., & Tang, L. M. (2023). Sexually harassed, assaulted, silenced, and now heard: Institutional betrayal and its affects. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *30*(4), 1387–1406. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12997

Flynn, A., Cama, E., Powell, A., & Scott, A. J. (2023). Victim-blaming and image-based sexual abuse. *Journal of Criminology*, *56*(1), 7–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/26338076221135327

Ghayedi Karimi, M., Jalilifar, A., & Bagheri, M. S. (2021). Sarcasm is the key: A gender-based study of impoliteness strategies in Persian and American comedy series. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *12*(1), 115–126. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2021.16728

Harmer, E., & Lewis, S. (2022). Disbelief and counter-voices: A thematic analysis of online reader comments about sexual harassment and sexual violence against women. *Information, Communication & Society*, *25*(2), 199–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1770832

Haslop, C., O'Rourke, F., & Southern, R. (2021). #NoSnowflakes: The toleration of harassment and an emergent gender-related digital divide, in a UK student online culture. *Convergence*, *27*(5), 1418–1438. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856521989270

Hoeber, L., Shaw, S., & Rowe, K. (2024). Advancing women's cycling through digital activism: A feminist critical discourse analysis. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *24*(5), 1111–1130. https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2023.2257727

Hooda, S., Agarwal, K., Chanda, A., & Srivastava, A. (2022). Sexual harassment and sense of entitlement: A relation representative of fractured society. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 126–138. https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v6nS4.2113

Hosseini, S. M. (2022). Self, face, and identity in the Iranian culture: A study on three lexemes. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *13*(2), 53–68. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2022.17803

Hu, Y., Mu, Y., & Huang, Y. (2020). The #MeToo narrative: Reconstructing the cultural intelligibility of female subjects. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *80*, 102365. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102365

Jacobson, J. (2020). You are a brand: Social media managers' personal branding and "the future audience." *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *29*(6), 715–727. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2019-2299

Johnson, V. E., Nadal, K. L., Sissoko, D. R. G., & King, R. (2021). "It's not in your head": Gaslighting, splaining, victim blaming, and other harmful reactions to microaggressions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *16*(5), 1024–1036. https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916211011963

Kazmi, S. M. A., Tarar, A. H., Nasir, A., & Iftikhar, R. (2023). Victim blaming, prior history to sexual victimization, support for sexually assaulted friends, and rape myths acceptance as predictors of attitudes towards rape victims in the general population of Pakistan. *Egyptian Journal of Forensic Sciences*, *13*(1), 20. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41935-023-00340-7

Kim, H., Kim, H., Kim, J., & Jang, J. (2022). When does it become harassment? An investigation of online criticism and calling out in Twitter. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact.*, *6*(CSCW2), 474:1-474:32. https://doi.org/10.1145/3555575

Kiral Ucar, G., O'Neill, A., & Sutton, R. M. (2024). The relationship between belief in a just world and antisocial behavior through anticipated guilt, victim deservedness, and punishment frame. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 08862605241299441. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241299441

Kocabaşoğlu, Ö. N., Baş, Ö., & Emre, P. Ö. (2023). Digitalization of workplace harassment against white-collar women: An investigation in professional online platforms. *OPUS Journal of Society Research*, *20*(55), Article 55. https://doi.org/10.26466/opusjsr.1344239

Lazar, M. M. (2007). Feminist critical discourse analysis: Articulating a feminist discourse praxis1. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *4*(2), 141–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405900701464816

Li, M., Hussain, S., Barkat, S., & Bostan, H. (2023). Online harassment and trolling of political journalists in Pakistan. *Journalism Practice*, *1*(18). https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2259381

Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2020). Is a picture worth a thousand words? An eEmpirical study of image content and social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *57*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719881113

Maleknia, Z., Alemi, M., & Tajeddin, Z. (2022). Language teachers' gendered identity in ideologized spaces: A narrative analysis of their positioning. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *13*(1), 58–69. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2022.17425

Marciotto Oliveira, A. L. A., & Miranda, M. V. (2022). "Calling a spade, a spade": Impoliteness and shame on Twitter. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *13*(2), 22–32. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2022.17800

Marwick, A. E. (2021). Morally motivated networked harassment as normative reinforcement. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(2), 20563051211021378. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211021378

Mufti, R., Moazzam, A., & Basit, A. (2021). Queen bee syndrome a part of sexual politics or another gendered stereotype. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies*, *7*(4), Article 4. https://doi.org/10.26710/jbsee.v7i4.2005

Munir, A., Prihatin, P. S., & Junaini, W. (2021). The reality of multiple victims In case revenge porn. *Jurnal Kajian Pemerintah: Journal of Government, Social and Politics*, *7*(2), 12–19. https://doi.org/10.25299/jkp.2021.vol11(2).8982

Nadim, M., & Fladmoe, A. (2021). Silencing women? Gender and online harassment. *Social Science Computer Review*, *39*(2), 245–258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439319865518

Nartey, M. (2021). A feminist critical discourse analysis of Ghanaian feminist blogs. *Feminist Media Studies*, *21*(4), 657–672. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1837910

Novais, R. A., & Araújo, V. (2024). Targeted for being women and reporting on the presidency: Gendered-based violence against female journalists by populists in office. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *34*(0), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2421199

O. Alichie, B. (2023). "You don't talk like a woman": The influence of gender identity in the constructions of online misogyny. *Feminist Media Studies*, *23*(4), 1409–1428. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2022.2032253

Ortiz, S. M. (2024). "If something ever happened, I'd have no one to tell:" How online sexism perpetuates young women's silence. *Feminist Media Studies*, *24*(1), 119–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2185565

Osborne, J., Kavanagh, E., & Litchfield, C. (2021). Freedom for expression or a space of oppression? Social media and the female athlete. In A. Bowes & A. Culvin (Eds.), *The professionalisation of women's sport* (pp. 157–172). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-196-620211010

Palmieri, J., Emmelin, M., Svensson, P., & Agardh, A. (2025). Aware but confused: Conflicted between individual and collective responsibility. A grounded theory study of norms and organisational structures relating to sexual harassment among university students in southern Sweden. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, *20*(1), 2471667. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2025.2471667

Peng, A. Y., Wu, C., & Chen, M. (2024). Sportswomen under the Chinese male gaze: A feminist critical discourse analysis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *21*(1), 34–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2098150

Phillips, L. J., Pathé, M., & McEwan, T. (2023). Gender differences in stalking, threats and online abuse reported by Victorian politicians. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, *30*(6), 909–930. https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2022.2142975

Pinciotti, C. M., & Orcutt, H. K. (2021). Understanding gender differences in rape victim blaming: The power of social influence and just world beliefs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(1–2), 255–275. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517725736

Priola, V., & Chaudhry, S. A. (2021). Unveiling modest femininities: Sexuality, gender (in)equality and gender justice. *British Journal of Management*, *32*(2), 306–321. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12390

Rahimpour, S., Sotoudehnama, E., & Sasani, F. (2018). Investigating researcher identity in qualitative research articles in applied linguistics journals through the lens of CDA. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *9*(2), 74–100. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2018.13794

Riedl, M. J., El-Masri, A., Trauthig, I. K., & Woolley, S. C. (2024). Infrastructural platform violence: How women and queer journalists and activists in Lebanon experience abuse on WhatsApp. *New Media & Society*, 14614448241248372. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241248372

Rollero, C., Bergagna, E., & Tartaglia, S. (2021). What is violence? The role of sexism and social dominance orientation in recognizing violence against women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(21–22), NP11349–NP11366. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519888525

Rothman, E. F., Sheridan-Johnson, J., Maitra, P., Shulruff, T., Sniffen, C. K., & Mumford, E. A. (2023). Stress, suicidality, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional distress, and social isolation among U.S. adults experiencing online abuse or harassment. *Violence and Gender*, *10*(3), 144–152. https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2022.0053

Salerno-Ferraro, A. C., Erentzen, C., & Schuller, R. A. (2022). Young women's experiences with technology-facilitated sexual violence from male strangers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *37*(19–20), NP17860–NP17885. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211030018

Shokri, A. (2016). Peripheral themes in applied linguistics articles. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *7*(1), 138–157. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2016.11781

Sjöholm, M. (2022). The Internet: A gendered space. In M. Sjöholm (Ed.), *International human rights law and protection against gender-based harm on the internet* (pp. 15–74). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15866-7_2

Slakoff, D. C. (2023). "She did see warning signs but chose to ignore them": Perpetrator justification and victim-blaming narratives in true crime podcasts about intimate partner violence. *Feminist Media Studies*, *23*(8), 4347–4363. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2171086

Smith, S. A., & Watkins, B. (2023). Millennials' uses and gratifications on LinkedIn: Implications for recruitment and retention. *International Journal of Business Communication*, *60*(2), 560–586. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488420973714

Sorrentino, A., Santamato, M., & Aquino, A. (2024). Cyberbullying Through the lens of empathy: An experimental study on teachers' blaming victims. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-024-00272-3

Sudajit-apa, M. (2025). Dismantling the discursive representation of women in AI-generated life-changing narratives: A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *16*(1), 38–54. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2024.46100.3232

Taylor, B. G., Liu, W., & Mumford, E. A. (2021). Profiles of youth in-person and online sexual harassment victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(13–14), 6769–6796. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518820673

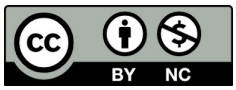
Toffoletti, K., Thorpe, H., Pavlidis, A., Olive, R., & Moran, C. (2023). Visibility and vulnerability on Instagram: Negotiating safety in women's online-offline fitness spaces. *Leisure Sciences*, *45*(8), 705–723. https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2021.1884628

Tsao, S.-F., Chen, H., Tisseverasinghe, T., Yang, Y., Li, L., & Butt, Z. A. (2021). What social media told us in the time of COVID-19: A scoping review. *The Lancet Digital Health*, *3*(3), e175–e194. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(20)30315-0

Verma, P. (2023). The prevalence of horizontal violence with different cultural dimensions. *Evidence-Based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*, *12*(2), 249–270. https://doi.org/10.1108/EBHRM-11-2022-0283

Vogels, E. A. (2021, January 13). The state of online harassment. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/01/13/the-state-of-online-harassment/

Wagner, A. (2019). E-victimization and e-predation theory as the dominant aggressive communication: The case of cyber bullying. *Social Semiotics*, *29*(3), 303–318. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2019.1587832



© 2026 by the authors. Licensee Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).