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DIGITAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW FROM A PSYCHO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Digital violence against women has escalated markedly with the rapid proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms, emerging as a pervasive and increasingly complex manifestation of gender-based violence in contemporary societies. This study sought to examine the phenomenon of digital violence against women from a psychosocial perspective by exploring the psychological, social, and cultural determinants underlying its proliferation, as well as its psychological and social repercussions on women. To achieve this objective, the study employed a descriptive-analytical approach based on a critical review of contemporary literature and recent empirical studies addressing gender-based digital violence. The findings indicate that digital violence represents a contemporary extension of structural gender-based violence and is manifested through diverse forms, including online threats, cyberstalking, defamation, blackmail, and hate speech. These practices operate within asymmetrical power relations sustained by entrenched gender stereotypes and sociocultural norms that normalize and legitimize violence against women. The study further demonstrates that digital environments have evolved into fertile spaces for the reproduction of patriarchal dominance, facilitated by anonymity, rapid dissemination, and weak legal and social accountability mechanisms. Consequently, women are exposed to profound psychological and social consequences, including heightened anxiety, persistent fear, social withdrawal, and diminished self-esteem. The study concludes by emphasizing the urgent need for a comprehensive and multidimensional response that integrates deterrent legal frameworks, digital empowerment initiatives, community-based awareness programs, and structural cultural reforms aimed at dismantling the normalization of violence against women.

Keywords: *Digital Violence; Violence Against Women; Gender-Based Violence; Online Harassment*

Introduction

The development and implementation of modern technology represent a digital revolution that has encompassed education, communication, entertainment, and various other aspects of life, contributing through its diverse tools to improving overall quality of life. Despite these technological advancements, the issue of violence against women remains one of the most pressing contemporary concerns in an ever-changing world. Incidents of violence against women have increased and have taken on new forms in light of digital transformation. Digital technology has thus become not merely a tool, but also an infrastructural system that generates a wide range of interactions (Barter & Koulu, 2021). Although this digital revolution offers numerous benefits, it is not without potential negative consequences associated with its use, including electromagnetic radiation and digital violence. These consequences have resulted in a range of physical, psychological, and social impacts, as well as several health-related problems such as cognitive confusion, addiction, insomnia, and other related disorders (Katende-Kyenda & Ani, 2025). While Duman (2023) noted that technological and digital phenomena have become an integral part of both professional and private life, as well as a key mode of communication among individuals, they have contributed to a reduction in face-to-face interaction and an increase in communication within virtual environments. This shift has led to changes in individuals' behavior compared to real-life interactions, the

emergence of new patterns of personality and conduct, and the appearance of various forms of violence.

Similarly, Polyzoidou (2024) emphasized that social media platforms and rapid digital development have shaped new patterns of human behavior and habits. In this context, Torp Løkkeberg et al. (2023) pointed out that the emergence of digital tools and platforms has begun to provide additional opportunities for initiating, developing, and managing relationships, thereby contributing to the escalation and increasing complexity of violence-related issues. Violence has become a serious issue affecting public health; it is present everywhere and is increasing significantly. It occurs in both private and public life and constitutes a major human rights concern through the suppression of individual freedom. It also varies according to the cultural and social characteristics of each country (Arikli, 2023). Moreover, it can be used in a threatening manner or be physically enacted in ways that endanger life or result in deprivation (Polyzoidou, 2024). Bjelajac and Filipović (2021) presented several philosophical interpretations of the nature of human violence, drawing on the works of Plato (2013), Hume (1896), Hobbes (2004), and Russell (1949). In these interpretations, violence is categorized as being linked to fundamental human instincts. Some theories suggest that violence is an inherent element of human nature and is not only a means of fulfilling human desires but may sometimes be the only possible means to achieve them. In this context, Özsungur (2021) noted that digital

transformation has become a potential means for the misuse of information through social media platforms, where women's private lives are increasingly exposed to exploitation, and their privacy is gradually eroded. This has disrupted the balance between their family and professional lives, exposing them to what is known as digital violence.

This aligns with Barter and Koulu (2021), who argue that the relationship between gender-based violence (GBV) and technology is not new. The 1938 play *Gas Light* provides a realistic depiction of abusive behavior by a Victorian-era husband, who manipulated the domestic gas lighting—causing it to flicker or dim unpredictably—as a means of convincing his wife that she was losing her sanity. From this, the term “gaslighting” emerged, which is now widely used to describe a form of psychological abuse in which the perpetrator manipulates false or distorted information to make the victim doubt their memory and judgment. Similarly, Polyzoidou (2024) emphasized that gender-based violence, particularly violence against women and domestic violence, has become a source of violations and infringements of fundamental human rights, whether occurring online or offline. To this end, Emezue (2020) emphasized that violence against women will remain a central issue related to social justice, human rights, and public health. It has also been noted that although efforts to understand and address violence against women have a long history, significant challenges persist in dealing with this phenomenon due to the

complexities associated with attitudes and behaviors (Zaganelli, 2025). Violence against women not only causes suffering to victims and their families, but also harms society as a whole, as the rehabilitation of survivors constitutes one of the most significant costs borne by societies (Tavassoli et al., 2022).

The importance of this study becomes evident when compared with previous research, which has predominantly focused on traditional forms of violence in their various manifestations. Although digital technologies have become an essential part of daily life, earlier studies largely concentrated on analyzing human behavioral patterns in a direct and explicit manner. In contrast, recent studies have revealed the emergence of new and evolving forms of violence against women, such as coercion, abuse, blackmail, threats, impersonation, and other forms that are facilitated through digital means. Moreover, the forms and patterns of this violence vary across different cultural, social, and political contexts. Accordingly, this research represents a qualitative shift, as it contributes to filling a knowledge gap, reshaping our understanding of the dynamics of abusive relationships in the digital age, and interpreting them from a psychological and social perspective.

Literature Review

Digital Violence

Digital violence is considered one of the forms of violence that has become increasingly prevalent in recent years (Duman, 2023). The United Nations has defined digital violence against women, whether in public or private life, as any act

of gender-based violence directed at women and girls that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm. It also includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty (Jagayat & Choma, 2021). Moreover, it is not confined to any specific geographical area, race, ethnicity, age group, or social class (Eisenhut et al., 2020). This was further confirmed by a United Nations study on digital violence, which indicated that this form of violence represents an extension of emotional abuse, as it can be used by an intimate partner to maintain a relationship as a means of exerting pressure and exercising control over women (Sheriji & Mahdi, 2024). Digital violence against women has become a widespread and concerning phenomenon in the current digital age (Arikli, 2023). It is closely linked to gender-based violence, as perpetrators exploit digital platforms to carry out abusive behaviors, taking advantage of the perceived anonymity and the wide reach provided by the internet (Ayinla et al., 2024). In line with this, Jurasz and Barker (2020) noted that the widespread use of social media and digital platforms has led to a significant increase in forms of abuse and violence directed at women online, such as gender-based hate speech, online harassment, threats, and abusive textual communication. Similarly, Cebecioğlu and Altıparmak (2017) stated that such behaviors fall under what is known as digital violence, a modern form of violence that has become a serious threat to individuals' psychological and social well-being, particularly women and other vulnerable groups in society.

Digital violence in romantic relationships is considered an innovative, multifunctional, widespread, and highly effective strategy when compared to traditional abusive behaviors within relationships. Such violence may include a wide range of abusive practices, starting from online harassment, hate speech, unauthorized disclosure of personal information (doxing), cyberstalking, image-based abuse, and extending to gender-based disinformation (Torp Løkkeberg et al., 2023). Barter and Koulu (2021) further emphasized that technology can be used as a tool for psychological violence against women. In this context, Srivastav et al. (2022) noted that digital emotional violence is a behavioral pattern aimed at threatening, intimidating, discrediting, or undermining a woman's sense of self-worth in subtle ways, thereby endangering her psychological safety. Digital communication technologies have fundamentally transformed social interactions and emotional relationships. Although advances in digital tools and technologies have enhanced communication and connectivity, they have also been appropriated as instruments of emotional abuse (Løschenkohl, 2025). Consequently, digital violence has come to manifest as a series of controlling and coercive behaviors, such as threatening phone calls, online harassment and bullying, smartphone-based location tracking, social media stalking, and the non-consensual sharing of private intimate images (Duman, 2023; Malanga, 2021). Similarly, Polyzoidou (2024) highlighted that women are highly exposed to digital

violence and experience multiple and severe forms of physical, psychological, and emotional abuse. To this end, Henry and Powell (2015) emphasized that digital violence in romantic relationships involves harmful behaviors facilitated through the use of technology—such as smartphones, social media platforms, tracking applications, or any other form of digital technology—for purposes including blackmail, control, coercion, harassment, and humiliation. In a similar vein, Özsungur (2021) noted that the misuse of information-sharing features on social media has increasingly generated negative messages targeting women, who represent a fundamental pillar of society in terms of cognitive and cultural formation for future generations. Although gender and technology issues continue to evolve alongside societal change, their intersection raises serious concerns regarding the transformation of digital tools into new means used to perpetrate violence against women (Barter & Koulu, 2021).

Several characteristics distinguish digital violence from other forms of violence, including:

- **Anonymity:** The perpetrator often remains unidentified, making it difficult to trace or hold them accountable.
- **Distance:** The victim and offender do not need to be in the same physical location, as spatial distance does not hinder the commission of digital violence, which can occur from anywhere.
- **Automation:** Digital violence is carried out within virtual environments

using technological tools and systems, enabling rapid and large-scale execution.

- **Accessibility:** Due to the widespread availability and ease of access to technology, perpetrators can easily reach and track victims without physical presence.
- **Diffusion and Persistence:** Digital violence spreads rapidly within online environments and can be viewed by large audiences. Moreover, its effects persist over time, as online content is difficult to fully remove or control once it has been disseminated (Duman, 2023). Lawal et al. (2024), Wilk (2021), Phillips and Roos (2025), Katende-Kyenda and Ani (2025), and Akhtar and Bhowmik (2025) noted that digital violence against women is not merely an extension of what occurs in offline settings; rather, it possesses distinct characteristics that increase its severity, such as rapid dissemination, global accessibility, and the difficulty of erasing digital traces. It also encompasses several forms of gender-based violence, including:
 - Cyber harassment, such as abusive messages or repeated online threats.
 - Cyberstalking, including location tracking or monitoring a victim's online activities.
 - Online sexual harassment, such as sending unsolicited sexual images or messages.
 - Digital sexual extortion (sextortion), involving threats to publish private or explicit content.
 - Non-consensual sharing of images or personal information, sometimes referred to as "revenge pornography."
 - Incitement to hate or violence against women in digital spaces.

- Digital intrusion into the victim's life, such as hacking accounts or identity theft.

Psychological and Social Factors of Digital Violence Against Women

The literature indicates that gender-based violence is rooted in gender inequality and the prevailing patriarchal system in society, where such inequality is manifested through the subordination of women and discrimination against them in decision-making processes, including those related to sexuality. Accordingly, violence against women is not merely an act of aggression but a manifestation of social domination (Kavishe & Naidu, 2022). The widespread use of digital technology has contributed to an increase in sexual, physical, and psychological violence occurring offline, as well as the proliferation of gender stereotypes and misogynistic discourses across social media platforms, thereby clearly exposing violations of women's and girls' human rights (Güneş, 2024). Moreover, digital technologies have provided men with additional opportunities to exploit women's bodies, enabled greater anonymity, and imposed restrictions on women seeking to enter technological fields by pressuring them to abandon aspects of their feminine identity (Wajcman, 2010).

Some in-depth studies have shown that women are more vulnerable to digital violence (Ward, 2021), as digital violence has become an extension of traditional forms of violence. It is also rooted in deep structural features of human interaction and emerges from entrenched dynamics of power and control within human nature (Bjelajac & Filipović, 2021). Furthermore,

prevailing cultural and social norms reinforce gender-based violence, making technology a fertile environment for reproducing control and abuse (Chikwe et al., 2024). In this context, Almenar (2021) noted that digital violence against women, within the framework of gender-based violence, resembles other forms of violence against women, as violence is used as a tool to maintain and reinforce male dominance over women within social structures. Duman (2023) stated that digital spaces constitute suitable environments for carrying out harmful cyberattacks against women, involving destructive and deceptive behaviors. Individuals who perpetrate such violence are often described as divorced, obsessive, or jealous. In this regard, Kavishe (2024) noted that perpetrators may suffer from psychological problems stemming from certain personality traits, mental disorders, or antisocial behaviors.

There are several social and cultural factors that contribute to the increase of digital violence against women:

1. **Family upbringing:** The family is the first social system an individual encounters, and it possesses its own characteristics and functions that influence society. It represents the basic unit that transmits culture, values, customs, and prevailing attitudes within society. The role of the family in shaping individuals and its success in socialization functions as a form of social control. Conversely, the failure of family socialization cannot be compensated for by any other social system, as family breakdown is considered a major cause of deviance and aggressive or violent

behavior (Hamad et al., 2022). In the same context, Alsadi (2024) indicated that the family constitutes the primary source of early experiences in shaping individuals' evaluations and perceptions, and plays a crucial role in the development of social support skills.

2. Social factors outside the family include several influential domains, most notably the media. The media constitutes one of the most powerful agents in shaping individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and is widely recognized as a key external driver in the dissemination and normalization of violence across societies. It contributes to the reproduction of violence against women through the circulation and amplification of violent imagery and narratives, as well as through the dissemination of sexually explicit content that objectifies and devalues women. In doing so, it reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and sustains patterns of inequality, thereby playing a significant role in the persistence and expansion of violence against women (Picarella, 2024).
3. Political authoritarianism: This is regarded as one of the main causes of violence against women, as it hinders societal development and acts as an obstacle to progress. Recurrent wars and the accompanying culture of violence, alongside widespread killing and violations of human rights, lead to devastating consequences that negatively affect stability, cohesion, security, and social peace. They also contribute to unemployment, poverty, and deprivation, all of which intensify and perpetuate

violence against women (Sheriji & Mahdi, 2024).

Digital violence against women can also be analyzed through Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which posits that gender is not an innate or biological trait but rather a learned and repeated behavior shaped by social expectations associated with masculinity and femininity. Within both physical and digital spaces, women are expected to perform femininity through traits such as submission, sensitivity, and emotionality, whereas men are expected to perform dominance and control (Ali & Adshead, 2022). In this context, Phillips and Roos (2025) noted that societies often portray women as nurturing mothers, passive, and physically and emotionally weak. These societal constructions of masculinity and femininity do not reflect biological differences but are socially constructed concepts that are continuously reproduced through institutions, media, and language, thereby establishing socially "acceptable" roles for both women and men.

Digital violence against women can also be explained by examining the motivations and intentions underlying such behaviors. These motivations refer to the emotional, functional, or ideological drivers that lead perpetrators to commit acts of digital abuse, which may include a desire for revenge or a persistent intention to harm the victim (Malanga, 2021). Gender-based violence may also be linked to social inequality and deeply rooted patriarchal culture (Kavishe, 2024).

Ali and Adshead (2022) further argued that digital violence is not merely an individual

act; rather, it is the product of entrenched stereotypes that construct women's bodies, appearance, and relationships as legitimate targets for evaluation, control, and public shaming.

Psychological and Social Impacts of Digital Violence against Women

The use of digital tools has brought numerous positive changes to society, such as enhancing social communication, improving access to information, and facilitating the exchange of knowledge. However, this digital transformation has also contributed to increased digital addiction and a rise in emotional problems (Kavishe, 2024). Psychological and behavioral issues have emerged among women exposed to this form of violence, and the severity and nature of these issues vary according to individual personality traits, particularly the degree of psychological resilience in coping with stress (Mitsu & Dawood, 2022). Almenar (2021) noted that digital violence against women has negative effects on both their emotional and psychological well-being, a condition often referred to as emotional distress. This may lead to psychological trauma, an excessive fear of leaving the home, social anxiety, depression, and other related conditions. Arikli (2023) further indicated that women exposed to digital emotional violence often exhibit characteristics such as low self-esteem, shyness, depressive moods, difficulty in forming social relationships, and reduced self-confidence. These factors contribute to significant negative psychological outcomes that require urgent intervention. In this regard, Arikli (2016) and Baker and

Algorta (2016) emphasized that digital violence has a profound impact on individuals' psychological states, manifested through intense fear, panic attacks, and acute stress and anxiety. When individuals fail to manage these negative emotions, they may lose their sense of purpose and daily motivation, leading to a deterioration in mental health. On the other hand, the use of gender-based violence through technology—such as social media platforms, mobile phones, or the internet—has severe consequences for women's lives, including their mental and physical health, livelihoods, physical safety, and reputation (Wilk, 2021). Digital violence can also be used as a tool for intimidation, humiliation, or control, thereby transforming technology into an effective means of inflicting sustained psychological trauma and intensifying women's fear and loss of control over their private lives (Güneş, 2024). In this context, Malanga (2021) noted that digital violence has impacts across social, physical, economic, and psychological domains. Similarly, Boukemidja (2018) and Hearn and Hall (2022) emphasized that digital violence can lead to a range of behavioral, emotional, and physical problems, as well as intimidation and coercive control. Harju and Huhtamäki (2021) further stated that digital emotional violence undermines women's psychological well-being, gradually resulting in disorders such as anxiety, depression, social isolation, and low self-esteem, along with physical manifestations of psychological stress, including insomnia, headaches, and

gastrointestinal or immune system disorders.

Sheriji and Mahdi (2024) also highlighted that digital emotional violence has severe psychological consequences, including a distorted self-image among girls and women, which may lead to suicidal ideation, self-harming behaviors, and, in some cases, attempts to escape or leave the home. Furthermore, Hearn and Hall (2022) pointed to a form of social disconnection experienced by victims both before and after exposure to violence, accompanied by persistent fears regarding their physical safety in real life, indicating that digital violence is closely interconnected with offline realities rather than being separate from them. Digital emotional violence is also manifested through humiliation, the use of offensive language, and the devaluation of self-esteem, which profoundly affects victims without the physical presence of the perpetrator. This intensifies its impact and makes it more difficult to investigate and contain its spread (Zaganelli, 2025). Moreover, digital technologies have contributed to the production of gender-biased behaviors that encourage the use of physical violence through comments and interactions in virtual environments (Sousa, 2022). In this regard, Özsungur (2021) emphasized that digital violence directed at women often involves portraying women as sexual symbols through clothing, nudity, and revealing attire. This aims to construct a negative mental image of women, undermining their dignity and social status, and negatively affecting their roles within work,

family, and society. Such psychological and social consequences may also result in early onset of menopause-related conditions, strained family relationships, and significant setbacks in professional development.

Digital technologies have also contributed to the emergence of violent practices such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation by facilitating the use of digital platforms for recruiting victims or enabling their transportation and exploitation processes (Duman, 2023). Moreover, violence within virtual environments combines abusive practices against women with structures of male dominance, reinforced through users' own participation in legitimizing and disseminating such content (Zaganelli, 2025). Accordingly, gender-based digital violence is recognized as a significant source of psychological and health-related harm to victims (Hicks, 2021). Digital violence also contributes to the distortion of victims' public image as well as their current and future professional standing, leading to severe and damaging economic consequences, particularly in cases involving non-consensual intimate imagery. Given the near impossibility of fully removing unwanted content once it has been disseminated online, women may be forced to leave their current jobs, lose promotion opportunities, or even be excluded from future employment prospects. This may further lead them to withdrawal and social isolation in order to avoid threats of exposure of private information or images that could trigger victim-blaming responses (Almenar, 2021).

It can be argued that these practices illustrate how digital environments have become new arenas in which both traditional and emerging forms of violence are enacted, highlighting the need for deeper understanding as well as more effective legal and awareness-based interventions (Duman, 2023). Digital violence is also not gender-neutral; rather, it reflects entrenched power imbalances between genders and is often used as a tool to control, silence, and humiliate women in digital spaces (Polyzoidou, 2024). Araújo et al. (2022) further noted that the development of legal frameworks addressing online violence against women faces significant challenges due to the slow evolution of digital legislation, resulting in a lack of effective legal mechanisms to protect individuals from harmful behaviors in the digital sphere.

Strategies for Addressing Digital Violence against Women

Digital violence against women (CVAWG) has emerged as a rapidly growing global concern. This form of violence is characterized by its complexity, including the rapid dissemination of abusive content and harmful material, as well as the difficulty of controlling or removing such content once it is circulated, which in turn causes significant psychological harm to victims. The increasing academic and human rights attention to this issue has contributed to the production of a growing body of knowledge on its forms, underlying drivers, and impacts, with the aim of informing prevention strategies and mitigation measures (Rigotti & McGlynn, 2025). This form of violence constitutes a

clear violation of human rights, given its detrimental impact on women's ability to fully enjoy their fundamental rights (Srivastava et al., 2023). These rights include human dignity, sexual autonomy, privacy, physical safety, mental health, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of association and assembly (Bailey et al., 2021). Digital platforms play a significant role in exacerbating the culture of digital violence by amplifying harmful content through algorithmic systems and by the weakness of reporting and moderation mechanisms (Tzvetkova, 2025). Moreover, a fundamental issue lies in the governance and structure of technology companies, where the design and management of digital technologies remain largely male-dominated and embedded within patriarchal societal frameworks. Existing biases and structural inequalities help explain the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior positions within the technology sector (Suzor et al., 2019). Accordingly, there is a critical need to improve content governance, strengthen self-regulation mechanisms, and establish strict community standards addressing harassment and hate speech (Harris & Vitis, 2020). It is also essential to identify the digital tools and mechanisms used in perpetrating online abuse, alongside defining clear principles of privacy and digital safety specifically for women (Özsungur, 2021).

Arikli (2023) emphasizes the importance of resorting to legal mechanisms and filing criminal complaints with law enforcement agencies in cases of digital violence on

social media platforms. This also requires the establishment of dedicated legal departments specialized in digital violence, the creation of specialized units to address such cases, and the provision of training programs to educate women on safe internet use. In the same context, Barker and Jurasz (2020) argue for legal reforms that oblige digital platforms to address image-based abuse, alongside coordinated efforts to confront this phenomenon and ensure its explicit inclusion in policies, legislation, and enforcement procedures. Furthermore, Kaluarachchi and Trieu (2022) emphasize the necessity of strengthening digital ethics among individuals within society in order to transform unethical behaviors in the digital sphere. They argue that legislation alone is insufficient to regulate unethical conduct online; therefore, it is essential to educate individuals about the ethical and responsible use of technology.

Relevance to the Present Study

The theoretical framework for studying digital violence against women, as one of the manifestations of abusive relationships, holds substantial significance in explaining the deep and multidimensional nature of this phenomenon. Rather than merely describing its various forms, this framework seeks to deconstruct its psychological and social structures and to understand how it contributes to producing profound psychological impacts on women. Previous studies have indicated that digital violence is associated with a range of adverse psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, distorted self-image,

and suicidal ideation. Such outcomes threaten women's psychological well-being and undermine their ability to effectively fulfill their life roles. At the social level, this framework reveals the structural impact of digital violence, as it contributes to the fragmentation of social relationships, the weakening of social cohesion, and the erosion of interpersonal trust. It also reinforces patterns of aggressive behavior toward women, while simultaneously reproducing mechanisms of oppression and systems of social discrimination. In doing so, it entrenches forms of domination within digital spaces, reflecting the extension of traditional social structures into virtual contexts. Moreover, digital violence cannot be reduced to an isolated individual behavior; rather, it may evolve into a repeated practice, sometimes enacted without awareness of its harmful consequences, due to its embeddedness in complex psychological and social motivations that vary across cultural and societal contexts. Hence, there is an urgent need for comprehensive and in-depth investigation of this phenomenon in order to identify its dimensions and interpret its underlying drivers. Such understanding is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of preventive interventions and for developing mental health programs aimed at protecting women and reducing this form of violence.

Methodology

The present study, conceived as a systematic literature review, adopts a critical analytical methodology aimed at examining the scientific literature addressing digital violence against women

and analyzing its psychological and social dimensions within the context of abusive relationships. Accordingly, the study does not rely on the collection of primary data; rather, it is grounded in the analysis of credible secondary sources, thereby enabling a comprehensive and integrative understanding of this complex phenomenon. Furthermore, the sources included in this review are diverse and encompass peer-reviewed academic studies as well as reports issued by relevant international and local organizations. These sources were selected according to rigorous criteria, including their direct relevance to the research topic, as well as their recency and scientific credibility. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, whereby the literature was categorized into key themes reflecting the multidimensional nature of digital violence. These themes include the psychological and social drivers of digital violence against women, its resulting psychological and social impacts on women, and the role of social and cultural structures in shaping and reproducing such practices. The analytical process also involved examining the relationships between different variables, accompanied by a critical and in-depth interpretation that highlights both convergences and divergences in the findings. In this regard, the adopted methodology seeks to develop a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and its psychological and social consequences, thereby contributing to the construction of an integrated conceptual framework that supports scientific interpretation and

identifies directions for future research. This methodological approach is particularly appropriate given the complexity and multidimensionality of the topic, as well as the limited availability of structured empirical data, especially within certain cultural and social contexts that require context-sensitive and interpretive analytical frameworks. Consequently, the study provides a preliminary knowledge base that may inform future empirical investigations across different settings, while also supporting preventive interventions and mental health programs aimed at protecting women and mitigating the escalation of digital violence in online environments.

Study Problem

Digital violence against women has become an expanding global concern as a result of the rapid acceleration of digital transformation. It constitutes a form of gender-based discrimination and therefore represents a violation of fundamental human rights. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) reports that the digital revolution has produced both positive and negative gender-related impacts. On the one hand, it has facilitated access to information and essential services and created new educational and employment opportunities for women. On the other hand, growing evidence indicates that this digital transformation has exacerbated existing forms of gender-based discrimination and oppression, while also generating new forms of abuse and violations (<https://www.unwomen.org/>). In this regard, Akhtar and Bhowmik (2025)

argue that digital violence transcends geographical boundaries, enabling perpetrators to target victims across multiple platforms while evading legal accountability. Similarly, Ahmed (2025) emphasizes that digital platforms have become fertile environments for digital abuse and exploitation, particularly against women. The Council of Europe further defines digital violence as the use of technology to threaten, harass, manipulate, or intimidate individuals, resulting in severe economic, psychological, sexual, and physical consequences. This is consistent with Almenar (2021), who highlights that gender-based violence can occur across multiple contexts and through various means, and that the increasing integration of technology into both personal and professional life has facilitated the emergence of new modalities of violence against women.

A United Nations survey on digital violence (2022), conducted among women in Arab countries (Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen), found that 49% of women reported feeling unsafe due to online harassment, a figure that rises to 70% among women human rights defenders and activists. Additionally, 16% of women reported experiencing online violence at least once in their lifetime, while 60% of those who experienced digital violence reported incidents occurring within the past year (2021). Furthermore, 44% of women indicated repeated exposure to digital violence (<https://arabstates.unwomen.org/>). In this context, Ali (2022), in a survey

conducted by the Arab Center for the Development of Social Media at Birzeit University in Palestine, reported that 50% of female participants felt they were being monitored through social media platforms. In addition, 28% had experienced attempts to hack their social media accounts, while approximately 25% reported exposure to comments or forms of harassment (mockery or humiliation) explicitly directed at them on the basis of their gender. Similarly, a study by the Media and Women Development Foundation (TAM, 2023) found that the prevalence of gender-based digital violence reached 13%, while 50.2% of women aged 18 and above reported having experienced some form of digital violence (<https://ifex.org/ar/palestine-gender>).

Furthermore, Al-Ashqar and Basumi (December 2024) noted that manifestations of digital violence against Palestinian women intensified following the war on Gaza. Female journalists and activists have faced unprecedented levels of online threats, alongside defamation campaigns and blackmail. Digital media platforms have also been used as tools for disseminating misinformation and reputational harm, with allegations that occupying forces have exploited social media platforms to distort reputations and spread rumors (<https://sada.social/ar/post/alaanf>).

Moreover, there appears to be a clear gap in the existing literature addressing digital violence against women as a complex phenomenon with intertwined psychological, social, familial, and socio-political dimensions, particularly within

specific cultural and geopolitical contexts such as Palestine. In such settings, the pressures of lived social reality and the digital environment jointly contribute to the intensification of women's psychological and social difficulties. Accordingly, this study seeks to address this research gap by providing an integrated theoretical analysis of this phenomenon.

Aim of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the phenomenon of digital violence against women within the context of abusive relationships from a psycho-social perspective, with a focus on examining the psychological and social structures that contribute to the proliferation of such violence. It also sought to provide a comprehensive analysis of the psychological and social impacts of this form of violence, in addition to proposing preventive and therapeutic strategies to address and mitigate this phenomenon.

Discussion

The findings indicate that digital violence represents a contemporary extension of gender-based violence, manifesting in multiple forms including threats, cyberstalking, blackmail, and defamation. This form of violence most often occurs within asymmetrical power relations characterized by dominance and psychological coercion, which are further reproduced through gender-based stereotypes. In this regard, Afifah et al. (2026) emphasize that gender-based violence reflects a structural imbalance in power relations within both social and familial systems, and is further reinforced by cultural contexts that normalize and

socially legitimize control over women. The results also show that digital violence has profound psychological impacts on women, as a form of technology-facilitated aggression. It is associated with increased levels of anxiety, stress, and fear, as well as reduced self-esteem and a greater tendency toward social withdrawal. Similarly, Rakhmawati et al. (2026) note that digital environments contribute to the rapid dissemination of violent content, leading to severe social stigma and long-lasting psychological harm.

The findings reveal that the psychological and social motivations of perpetrators in digital spaces are closely associated with patterns of control, jealousy, and possessiveness. These dynamics are further reinforced by a prevailing social culture that may tolerate violations of women's privacy and the restriction of their digital freedoms, thereby creating a fertile environment for the persistence of such behaviors. In this context, Rodríguez-de Arriba et al. (2024) suggest that this phenomenon can be interpreted from a cognitive perspective through individuals' normative beliefs, which may legitimize the use of violence in specific contexts. According to Lo Cricchio et al. (2021), this reflects an advancement in the theoretical understanding of moral disengagement, a cognitive process through which individuals convince themselves that moral standards do not apply in certain situations. This is achieved through mechanisms such as moral justification, euphemistic labeling of behavior, the

dehumanization of victims, and victim-blaming.

It becomes evident that the digital sphere, particularly social media platforms, has evolved into an effective medium for psychological and social harm, in the absence or weakness of deterrent ethical and legal frameworks. This risk is particularly pronounced for vulnerable groups, especially women, who are disproportionately exposed to digital targeting and abuse. The findings further indicate that women represent the most exposed group to gender-based digital violence, reflecting the persistence of negative societal perceptions of women. Society also contributes to the reproduction of this form of violence through justification, silence, or victim-blaming, thereby creating a conducive environment for its continuation. Moreover, digital violence against women may lead to suicidal behavior and, in some contexts, has been used to justify femicide, particularly in cases involving conflicts related to the inappropriate use of women's images (UNFPA, 2025). Consequently, women may withdraw from digital spaces and discontinue their online activities; in some instances, they are exposed to severe threats, including threats of murder or rape (Ammar, 2023).

In this regard, Afifah et al. (2026) highlight a set of structural, social, and psychological factors that contribute to the escalation of this phenomenon, including social stigma, feelings of shame, fear of repeated victimization, and low trust in law enforcement institutions. The findings indicate that any behavior performed by

women that is socially interpreted as deviating from traditional gender roles—such as expressing opinions, asserting independence, or engaging in online political participation—renders them vulnerable to multiple forms of symbolic and direct punishment, including cyber harassment, defamation, blackmail, and hate speech. In the same context, Christsanda et al. (2026) note that politically active women are exposed to high levels of online harassment, including sexual abuse and threats that may extend to targeting their family members. The results further highlight that the digital space reproduces gender stereotypes on a broader and more amplified scale, due to the anonymity it provides and the weakness of accountability mechanisms, making it an environment that amplifies violence rather than merely reflecting it. Accordingly, digital violence reflects the persistence of patriarchal control patterns and their adaptation to contemporary contexts. In this regard, Afifah et al. (2026) emphasize that digital violence is characterized by a more concealed and repetitive nature, making it less detectable at both social and legal levels, and therefore allowing it to persist for extended periods before being identified or addressed. Similarly, Afrouz & Vassos (2024) argue that platform characteristics such as anonymity and lack of face-to-face interaction contribute to the creation of an environment that facilitates digital violence. Furthermore, McArthur et al. (2024) suggest that this leads to greater behavioral disinhibition in digital

environments, thereby increasing the prevalence of online violence.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that gender-based digital violence is a deeply rooted structural phenomenon embedded within the social and cultural fabric, taking multiple forms that contribute to the reproduction of unequal power relations. The digital sphere has consequently become a fertile environment for violence, characterized by rapid dissemination and weak accountability mechanisms, which increase women's exposure to persistent psychological and social risks. Accordingly, addressing this phenomenon requires a comprehensive approach that integrates legal reform, empowerment strategies, digital literacy, and the transformation of cultural structures that contribute to the normalization of violence.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the significance of the present study in examining digital violence against women from a psycho-social perspective, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied primarily on a descriptive-analytical approach and a review of existing literature, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the variables associated with digital violence. Second, the study focused largely on theoretical and conceptual analyses without incorporating extensive empirical or cross-cultural data, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings across different sociocultural contexts. Third, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies and online platforms may

influence the forms and mechanisms of digital violence, making it difficult for the findings to fully capture emerging patterns of abuse. In addition, the study did not extensively address overlapping factors such as age, socioeconomic status, race, or educational background that may have an impact on vulnerability to online abuse.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should prioritize empirical and longitudinal studies to better understand the causal pathways and long-term psychological and social consequences of digital violence against women. Comparative cross-cultural research is also needed to explore how sociocultural norms, legal frameworks, and technological environments shape the prevalence and manifestations of digital violence in different societies. Moreover, future studies should investigate the effectiveness of legal, educational, and technological interventions designed to prevent and respond to online abuse. Greater attention should also be given to intersectional perspectives by examining how factors such as age, class, disability, and ethnicity interact with gender to influence women's experiences in digital spaces. Finally, future research may benefit from exploring the role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems, in both facilitating and combating digital violence against women.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

All procedures were followed in accordance with the ethical standards of the University's Research Ethics Board and the Helsinki Declaration of 1975. This study

does not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data, and therefore, does not require ethical approval. No consent to participate was necessary.

Consent for publication

Not Applicable

Availability of data and materials

This study is based on an analysis of existing literature and secondary sources. As such, no primary data was generated or analyzed, and there are no datasets available. All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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