

## Perceptions, experiences, and positions on gender violence in social media. Results of a survey of Andalusian young people

*Percepciones, experiencias y posicionamientos sobre la violencia de género en las redes sociales. Resultados de una encuesta a la juventud andaluza*

*Percepções, experiências e posicionamentos sobre a violência de gênero nas redes sociais. Resultados de uma pesquisa com jovens andaluzes*

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The study analyzes the perceptions, experiences and positions of Andalusian young people on violence against women in social media. A survey shows that, in these spaces, young people find a discourse of hate, legitimized in the digital culture itself. An organizational dimension of violence can also be seen, as many of the practices related to harassment or humiliation are organized in the manosphere, going beyond the virtual world to be carried out in the offline scenario.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender violence, social media, cyber-aggression, feminism, hegemonic masculinity.

*El estudio analiza las percepciones, experiencias y posicionamientos de la juventud andaluza sobre la violencia que se ejerce contra las mujeres en las redes sociales. A partir de la realización de una encuesta se obtiene que, en estos espacios, la juventud encuentra un repertorio de prácticas violentas, legitimadas en la propia cultura digital. Se aprecia también una dimensión organizativa de la violencia, en tanto muchas de estas prácticas relacionadas con el acoso o la humillación son organizadas en los entornos de la manófera, llegando a traspasar la virtualidad para ejecutarse en el escenario offline.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Violencia de género, redes sociales, ciberagresión, feminismo, masculinidad hegemónica.

*O estudo analisa as percepções, experiências e posições dos jovens andaluzes sobre a violência contra as mulheres nas redes sociais. Com base em uma pesquisa, constata-se que, nesses espaços, os jovens encontram um repertório de práticas violentas, legitimadas na própria cultura digital. Aprecia-se também uma dimensão organizacional da violência, pois muitas dessas práticas relacionadas ao assédio ou à humilhação são organizadas nos ambientes da manófera, indo além da virtualidade para serem realizadas no cenário offline.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Violência de gênero, redes sociais, ciberagressão, feminismo, masculinidade hegemônica.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing social concern and scientific interest in gender-based violence in adolescence and youth, as well as the forms that violence takes in the digital era (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018; Esteban-Ramiro & Gómez-Medrano, 2022; Molnar, 2022). The focus on violence targeting younger women is driven by the need to provide knowledge on the state of the art and, thus, foster the development of appropriate prevention responses (Rebollo-Catán et al., 2022) aimed at mitigating its impact on women's lives.

Moreover, academic interest underscores an approach that allows for the construction of counternarratives to the stories that blame the victims of gender-based violence (Naezer & Van Oosterhout, 2021). This approach seeks to provide tools to diminish the fear characterizing public spaces for women, including virtual public spaces (Vemuri, 2020), and highlight the use of social media for raising awareness and mobilizing against gender-based violence through cyberactivism (Galarza-Fernández & Castro-Martinez, 2022; Nuñez-Puente, 2022; Sosa-Valcarcel et al., 2019; Sued & Hernández-Garza, 2023).

Gender-based violence occurs along a continuum connecting various forms of violence—physical, psychological, sexual, economic, social, and symbolic—which occur in offline and online women's lives, as both spheres are interconnected in information societies. To comprehend the scope of violence against women, we must examine the uses of technology and social media. Two situations can arise; firstly, they may serve as tools for extending violence occurring outside digital environments, where perpetrators use technological means to perpetuate and/or amplify control, harassment, and aggression. Secondly, these platforms may become a means through which women experience harassment and/or cyber aggression. In other words, violence transpires beyond screens, and other violence is manifested solely in digital environments.

The analysis of violence on social media becomes even more imperative in the context of young people as the available macro-level data from the latest *Macrosurvey on Violence against Women in Spain* (Delegación de Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2019) showed that, while women of diverse age groups are exposed to online

violence, young women belonging to the digital native generation are most afflicted by online aggressions.

This research focuses on various forms of gender-based violence occurring on digital social media, where they have become ingrained in the broader social fabric. This study aims to analyze how young people perceive, experience, and react to the multiple forms of violence against women, not only explicitly but also symbolically, in the space of communication and interaction that online social media represent.

### *Theoretical and empirical foundations*

Different studies show that cyberviolence has become a constant in the lives of many women and girls, with an estimated 58% of girls and adolescent females having been the victims of some form of digital violence (Plan Internacional, 2020). This cyberviolence encompasses different forms, including cyberbullying (cyber stalking), cyber control, sextortion, nonconsensual sexting, or flaming, to cite some of the new concepts that are incorporated as various forms of violent technology use become more complex. Moreover, it should be noted that the identity of perpetrators of violence varies, as both unknown men and acquaintances can carry out such actions. In the case of acquaintances, intimate partner cyberviolence emerges as one of the prevailing forms among young people (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2023), connected to ideals of romantic love characterized by jealousy and control towards one's partner. Social media and other technological tools further amplify the avenues for exercising control over partners or ex-partners (Fernet et al., 2023).

In the case of Spain, the latest macrosurvey on violence against women (Delegación de Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2019) reveals that 26.9% of women aged 16 and 17, and 28.6% of women aged 18 to 24 have reported experiencing physical violence at some point in their lives. Regarding online violence, the survey underscores that women aged 16 to 17 (26.4%), and 18 to 24 (26.2%) are those who most claim to have been the victims of stalking, which includes recurring forms of harassment through information technologies. Consequently, around 26% of women aged 16 to 24 have experienced frequent harassment in digital environments.

The work by Díaz-Aguado et al. (2021) emphasizes that, to understand the dimension of gender-based violence during adolescence, it is necessary to integrate an analysis of the relationship with information and communication technologies, because one of the most prevalent forms of violence, online sexual harassment, occurs through these technologies. The report's findings highlight a high incidence of this type of online harassment among young women, occurring both within intimate partner relationships and by aggressors without such connections. Therefore, the urgent need for preventive measures and protective interventions against online violence becomes evident (Díaz-Aguado, 2022). Furthermore, the data underscores the need for an analysis of social media risks for young people to incorporate a gender perspective consistently. This ensures a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions and aspects of multiple forms of violence and their impact on the lives of girls and adolescents.

Regarding social media, it is essential to contextualize violence within a broader framework, considering its integration into daily life as part of a hybridization process between online and offline life (Lasén, 2020). Young people engage with social media for various reasons, from seeking sociability and leisure, to staying informed and sharing personal content, to communicating with others (Tarullo, 2020). Consequently, these platforms play a fundamental role in shaping their identity.

Several studies emphasize that social media replicate gender norms and traditional power structures (Regueira et al., 2020). In other words, technology is not neutral, as it is integrated into the social order. Thus, online spaces mirror, manifest, and amplify offline power dynamics and gender hierarchies where hegemonic masculinity seeks to assert itself (Ranea-Triviño, 2021). Consequently, the gender order becomes virtualized through platforms, networks, applications, forums, etc., and, as a result, virtual environments must be analyzed as social arenas characterized by gender inequality.

In this sense, it is necessary to explore the role of social media in shaping hegemonic masculinity within contemporary societies. As García-Marín (2020) argues, “hegemonic masculinities find the perfect extension of their need to control on social media, which is one of the basic pillars on which to maintain their dominance” (p. 27).

Thus, it is relevant to explore the construction of hegemonic masculinity, among other aspects, particularly concerning the notion of authority and control over women and how technologies multiply the avenues for dominance through digital gender-based violence. This encompasses using digital environments and tools ranging from sending unsolicited messages and images, exerting direct control over women's content and networks by appropriating password surveillance through spyware, to orchestrating mass organized attacks, among others.

Moreover, the configuration of hegemonic masculinity is associated with visibility and acknowledgment in the public sphere, specifically within the digital space. It should be emphasized that, in this cross-border interplay between online and offline realms, the digital public space is characterized as more hostile and violent for women compared to men (Rosales, 2021). This is due to the reproduction of dynamics that divide the public and private domestic spheres and the attempts to exclude women from digital public space.

To comprehend the current context, we must consider the substantial rise of feminism, which gave rise to what is referred to as the fourth wave of feminism in the years preceding the Covid-19 pandemic (Cobo, 2019). In Spain, the widespread mobilizations surrounding the trial of the group sexual assault case widely known as "La Manada" brought the issue of gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, to the forefront of advocacy. A fundamental aspect of these mobilizations is the active engagement of young men and women in feminism who are concerned about these issues.

This rise of feminism and its presence in the media and political agendas has prompted a crisis of legitimacy and specific fragmentation in hegemonic masculinity. However, in response to this question, it should be noted that a period of patriarchal reaction is underway, characterized by an anti-feminist backlash. This contemporary patriarchal reaction shares similarities to those described by Faludi (1993) following the mass feminist mobilizations in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the production and dissemination of overtly anti-feminist discourses at the societal level. However, it differs in the digital realm. In the current context, the digital space, particularly the sphere that constitutes the manosphere, has emerged as the preferred arena where many young men create virtual communities that reinforce the anti-feminist patriarchal

imaginary (García-Mingo & Díaz-Fernández, 2022; Rubio Martín & Gordo-López, 2021). The far-right capitalized on this digital response, demonstrating adeptness at generating and disseminating anti-feminist messages and misinformation on social media (Álvarez-Benavides & Jiménez-Aguilar, 2021). The surge of antifeminism impacts younger generations by normalizing and legitimizing gender-based violence, including its digital manifestations.

## METHODOLOGY

From a quantitative perspective, this descriptive research employs data processing collected through a survey conducted among Andalusian youth aged 15 to 24 to analyze their perceptions, experiences, and perspectives on various forms of violence against women within the digital social media environment.

The diagnosis involved designing and implementing a questionnaire addressing the most relevant dimensions of the studied phenomenon. The questionnaire comprises 53 questions covering the following aspects: competencies and usage of digital environments; perception of the Internet as a violent space, including perceptions of network impunity; ideas and judgments about gender-based violence stemming from patriarchal norms toward men and women: experiences within virtual environments –whether as victims, perpetrators or witnesses of gender-based violence 2.0–, and responses and/or stances when confronted with or witnessing acts of gender-based violence 2.0.

Initially, the questionnaire was programmed and tested internally to ensure its validity before going out into the field. Access to the sample was obtained through the user panel of Netquest, a company specialized in data collection for research organizations. The survey was launched, and responses were collected from November 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

The study's unit of analysis focused on the young population of Andalusia, encompassing men and women residing in this region, aged between 15 and 24 years old. In 2020, the number of young people in Andalusia stood at 902 554, constituting 10.66% of the total population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021). Within this demographic,

457 932 were aged between 15 and 19, accounting for 50.74% of the young population, and 444 622 were aged between 20 and 24, representing 49.26%. Regarding gender stratification, census data indicate that, of the total number of people in Andalusia aged between 15 and 24, 51.55% are men and 48.45% are women (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021). These percentages remain stable over time and are similar in the two considered age subgroups.

A sample was selected from this population, constituting a subset of cases or individuals with the necessary number of subjects, both in total and by province, to ensure that the survey results represented the population. For this purpose, the following factors were considered: a) population size: 902 554 people; b) heterogeneity or dispersion of relevant variables in the research: for sampling purposes, gender variables (male and female) and age cohort (15 to 19, and 20 to 24); c) sampling error or acceptable deviation of the sample results from the population: 5%, d) confidence level or probability that the obtained result is accurate concerning the population: 95%.

Applying the relevant formula to the young population in Andalusia, aged 15 to 24, with a confidence level of 95% and a sampling error of 5%, yielded a sample size of  $n = 384$ .

$$n = \frac{Z_a^2 N p q}{e^2 (N - 1) + Z_a^2 p q}$$

During the survey implementation, the response rate slightly surpassed the sample size. This increase resulted in a sample of 414 individuals, of which 49% were men and 51% were women.

While this increase does not attain representativeness at the provincial level and in the gender distribution of the studied population, the overall estimates (both genders combined) closely align with the actual variations; that is, they correspond to the properties and characteristics of the population of interest (Table 1). As “ $n$  increases, the type I error decreases, and therefore, the precision error decreases, generating a narrower, i.e., more precise, interval, without compromising the sample’s confidence level” (Manzano, 1996, p. 8).

## RESULTS

### *Use of social media*

The survey results indicate that WhatsApp and YouTube are the most widely used social media among young people in Andalusia, with 100% and 99% presence in the analyzed sample, respectively (Table 2). However, there are differences regarding the frequency of usage of these platforms, as 93.20% report using WhatsApp often, while only 62% acknowledged using YouTube with the same frequency. In this frequency range, Instagram ranks as the second most frequently used social media after WhatsApp, with an incidence of 76.30% in the examined sample. They were followed by YouTube and TikTok, which 44.50% of the respondents used often. More than 50% of respondents reported no use of Twitch (57.20%) and Telegram (54.30%), respectively. Additionally, 46.90% of the sample did not use Facebook, and 42.50% of respondents did not use Twitter.

The in-depth analysis of the most frequently used social media platforms indicates that women aged 20 to 24 exhibit a higher percentage of WhatsApp use. The highest consumption of this network was registered in Huelva, Cordoba, Seville, and Almeria, where over 87% of the surveyed individuals claim to use it often. Similarly, Instagram is predominately used by women, with a higher incidence in the 20 to 24 year-old cohort. There is an increase in the use of Instagram in Almeria, Huelva, and Malaga, where at least 62% of respondents report using it often.

Regarding YouTube, the analyzed data shows that it is predominately used by men, with a higher incidence in the 20-24 age cohort. Geographically, the areas with the highest consumption of this network coincide with those of Instagram. Huelva, Malaga, and Almeria are the provinces where at least 50% of respondents report using YouTube often. On the other hand, TikTok is more frequently used by women, with a higher incidence in the 15-19 age cohort. The provinces of Almeria, Seville, and Huelva exhibit the highest consumption of this social media platform, with over 33.3% of respondents in these regions reporting frequent use.



TABLE 1  
CORRESPONDENCE AT THE POPULATION AND SAMPLE LEVEL IN EACH PROVINCE OF ANDALUSIA

Andalusia	Provincia								
	Total	Almeria	Cadiz	Cordoba	Granada	Huelva	Jaen	Malaga	Seville
Population	8 464 411	8.60 %	14.70 %	9.23 %	10.86 %	6.90 %	7.46 %	19.92 %	23.04 %
Sample	414	8.21 %	14.50 %	9.20 %	11.35 %	6.03 %	6.52 %	20.04 %	24.15 %

Source: The authors.

TABLE 2  
FREQUENCY OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

	Social media								
	WhatsApp	Facebook	TikTok	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	Telegram	Twitch	
Total	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	
Never	0	46.90%	27.50%	42.50%	8%	1%	54.30%	57.20%	
Sometimes	6.80%	35.20%	28%	28.30%	15.70%	37%	36.50%	33.10%	
Often	93.20%	17.90%	44.50%	29.20%	76.30%	62%	9.20%	9.70%	

Source: The authors.

Regarding the risk of violence for women using social media, the results indicate that Instagram (61.8%), TikTok (56.3%), and WhatsApp (51.2%) pose the most significant risk. According to the participants, YouTube and Twitch are considered networks that do not pose any risk, with representations of 13% and 12.3%, respectively. Telegram and Twitch are the networks whose risk of harm to women is unknown to 36% of the surveyed sample.

If we focus on the data from social media that pose the most significant risk of violence for women –Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp– it is evident that, in all three cases, women aged 20 to 24 mainly consider these networks to be very risky for them. This heightened perception of risk is particularly pronounced in the cases of Instagram and TikTok, mainly in the provinces of Jaen, Granada, and Cordoba, with more than 88% (Instagram) and 77.8% (TikTok) representation in that gender and age cohort. Concerning WhatsApp, this elevated risk is observed mainly in Granada, Jaen, and Huelva by at least 66.7% of women aged 20 to 24.

It is also noteworthy that men aged 15-19 are the participants who demonstrate the most significant lack of awareness regarding the level of risk these three social media pose for women. Geographically, these men are predominately located in the province of Almeria, representing 44.4% on Instagram and WhatsApp and 33.3% on TikTok, respectively.

Regarding media literacy skills to address behaviors related to privacy, reporting, or recognizing violent content, 75.8% and 97.6% of the surveyed sample acknowledge possessing the skills to carry out these tasks.

It is noteworthy that, in five out of the six options in the questionnaire –blocking people who bother you on social media, modifying the privacy conditions of the social media you use, reporting inappropriate photographs, recognizing dubious messages of unknown origin, and reporting violent or offensive content–, women are in the majority, representing levels ranging from 82% to 98.6% of women. Only in the case of deactivating the geolocation of mobile phones to prevent tracking where you are do men constitute the majority, represented by 83.2%. The sample also shows that, in general, individuals aged between 20 and 24 are more adept at dealing with the behaviors above.

### *Perception of social media as violent environments*

Concerning the perception of virtual spaces as violent environments, 89.1% of the sample identifies that people are more violent on social media than face-to-face. However, this figure drops considerably to 41.1% when respondents are asked whether improper behavior is punished on social media. In both cases, there is a higher representation of 20 to 24-year-olds, especially men, indicating that they have a higher perception of people's violent behavior on social media (90.6%) and the punishment they receive for such behavior (43.3%).

The questionnaire also inquired about who should intervene if violent acts against women occur on social media. The responses indicate that the values with the highest incidence point to the police (79.2% of the sample), a body specialized in these crimes (62.6%), and the public administration (36.5%), as the actors whose intervention is deemed necessary, especially in the opinion of women. The province of Granada registers the highest number of individuals who believe no one should intervene, comprising 4.3% of the young people surveyed in that territory.

From a proposed list of 11 actions on social media, rated on a scale from 0 to 10—where 0 indicates not violent at all and 10 signifies very violent—the total average of each action ranges between 8.16 and 9.30. This suggests that, at the sample level, the participants consider these actions highly violent (Table 3).

In the gender-based analysis, a slight decrease in the mean scores is observed in men's perception of the level of violence of the proposed actions, ranging from 7.79 to 9.11. However, the data on women's perception show an increase in the means, both with respect to men and the sample as a whole, with scores ranging from 8.50 to 9.49. These mean values are also higher when compared to those for each age cohort, ranging from 8.27 to 9.33 for the 15-19 cohort and 8.03 to 9.26 for the 20-24 age cohort. This indicates that the younger segment of the analyzed sample has a heightened awareness of the level of violence inherent in actions occurring on social media.

In all cases, the highest mean values correspond to "posting humiliating photos or videos of girls", which is considered by both the total sample and the subsamples stratified by age and gender as

TABLE 3  
ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENT ACTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media situations	Sex		Age		Province								
	Total	H	M	15-19	20-24	Almeria	Cadiz	Cordoba	Granada	Huelva	Jaen	Malaga	Seville
Total	414	203	211	206	208	34	60	38	47	25	27	83	100
Posting a photo of myself	5.08	4.81	5.34	5.41	4.76	4.94	5.07	5.29	5.40	4.36	4.96	5.07	5.13
Posting a video featuring me	5.51	5.31	5.71	5.84	5.18	5.85	5.48	5.42	5.94	4.60	5.59	5.48	5.47
Having a public profile on social media	6.02	5.63	6.40	6.27	5.77	5.74	6.23	5.55	6.34	5.32	6.37	5.84	6.25
Sharing personal information on social media (where you live, where you study, your phone number, etc.)	8.21	8.02	8.40	8.51	7.92	8.32	7.83	8.16	8.38	8.44	7.44	8.49	8.27
Chatting repeatedly with someone whose identity is unclear	7.32	6.90	7.72	7.77	6.87	7.32	7.37	7.11	7.19	6.80	7.04	7.40	7.56
Meeting a person I have been chatting with for a short time	7.61	7.01	8.18	8.12	7.11	7.47	7.52	7.08	7.62	7.52	7.70	7.89	7.68

Source: The authors.

the most violent action on social media from the proposed catalog in the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the lowest mean values correspond to actions considered to be the least violent and differ based on gender and age groups. According to the total sample of men and individuals aged between 20 and 24, the least violent action of all those proposed is “participating in pages or groups where feminist women are spoken ill of”. On the other hand, for women and respondents aged 15-19, expressing opinions such as “go and do the dishes” or “go to the kitchen” is considered the least violent action.

The questionnaire also included a question asking respondents to rate, on a scale of 0 to 10, the extent to which certain situations that often occur on social media pose a danger to themselves, with 0 indicating not dangerous at all and 10 signifying very dangerous. As a result, the overall mean for each situation ranged from 5.08 to 8.21. This suggests that, at the sample level, participants considered the proposed conditions to be dangerous for themselves.

In the gender-based analysis, similar to the previous question, a slight decrease in the means of men’s perception of the extent to which the proposed situations constitute a danger to them was detected, ranging from 4.81 to 8.02. Also, the data on women’s perception, specifically regarding the danger these situations pose for them, show an increase in the means concerning men and the total sample as a whole, fluctuating between 5.34 and 8.40. However, these means are lower compared to the 15 to 19 age cohort, which ranges from 5.41 to 8.51. The same is not true for the 20-24 age cohort, which fluctuates between 4.76 and 7.92. Consequently, the youngest individuals in the sample examined have the highest level of perception of the danger posed to them by the situations raised in the questionnaire.

In all cases, the maximum mean values correspond to “publishing personal information on social media (where you live, where you study, your telephone number, etc.)”, which is considered by both the total sample and the subsamples stratified by age and gender as the situation that could pose the greatest danger to themselves, from the catalog proposed in the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the lowest mean values correspond to “posting a picture of me”, understood by both the total sample and the stratified subsamples as the situation that may pose the least danger.

Regarding the analysis by province, the results reveal that the lowest average perception values of the phenomenon range between 4.96 and 7.44 and are registered in Jaen. It is confirmed that “publishing personal information on social media (where you live, where you study, your telephone number, etc.)” constitutes the action posing the greatest danger for young people surveyed in the eight provinces that comprise the sample. Additionally, “posting a photo of myself” is considered by those participating in all the provinces in Andalusia to be the situation that generates the least danger for them.

#### *Experiences of gender-based violence on social media*

The questionnaire also incorporated a series of questions about specific experiences related to gender-based violence (Have you been insulted on social media because of your sex life? Have you been harassed for appearing provocative on social media? Have you been insulted about your physical appearance? Has your photo been shared on social media as a sexual object?, etc.). The aim was to ascertain whether the respondents had had such experiences and whether these incidents were attributed to men, women, or unknown individuals defined as trolls.

The data analysis shows that both at the total sample level and the subgroups (gender, age, and province), the percentage of incidence of such experiences in the participants varies depending on the executing actor: women, men, or trolls. In the case of actions carried out by women, for example, the overall incidence ranges from 4.8% to 28.5%, while men’s action fluctuates between 7.2% and 40.3%, and actions by unknown individuals between 6% and 28.3%. However, it is notable that the same experience –having received sexually explicit content– is the one with the highest incidence values in the total sample despite being carried out by distinct actors.

Other situations most experienced by the general sample, with similar levels of incidence in terms of the executing actor, include having been insulted about one’s physical appearance (22.9% by the

action of women, 21 % by the action of men, 21.5 % by the action of trolls); being criticized for defending feminist ideas (17.6 % for the action of women, 24.2 % for the action of men, 16.2 % for the action of trolls), and being insulted for their sex life (17.1 % by the action of women, 19.6 % by the action of men, 21 % by the action of trolls).

Regarding the gender of the individuals who have experienced the situations mentioned above, regardless of the perpetrator, the data shows that women have experienced it 73.6 % of the time. In comparison, men account for 26.4 % of the time. The situations most experienced by women include receiving sexually explicit content (perpetrated 54.5 % of the time by men and 32.7 % by trolls); being criticized for advocating feminist ideas (perpetrated 34.6 % of the time by men, 24.2 % by women and 20.4 % by trolls), and being insulted about their physical appearance (perpetrated 28.9 % of the time by women, 25.6 % by men and 26.1 % by trolls).

On the other hand, men have received sexually explicit content more often, executed 33.5 % of the time by women, having a partner attempt to check their mobile phone for messages and inspect them 29.1 % of the time by women, and having a partner attempt to monitor their use of social media (who they talk to, who their friends are/blocking friends, the content they share, information they like, knowing their passwords, etc.) executed 22.7 % of the time by women.

In all cases, both at the general sample level and the stratified subsamples, the age cohort most affected by each of the experiences raised in the questionnaire is that between 20 to 24. Regarding the subsamples by province, the results reveal that Jaen and Cadiz are the territories with the highest number of respondents affected by the actions of women, men, and trolls in any of the experiences included in the questionnaire.

### *Responses to situations or gender-based violent behaviors on social media*

To determine how young individuals in Andalusia respond when confronted with insults, threats, or other violent behaviors that may arise in the social media environment, survey participants responded to the question "How have you acted if"... you have been insulted on social

media because of your sex life, you have been harassed because you look provocative on social media, you have been coerced or threatened on social media to have a sexual relationship, you have received sexual content, etc. (Table 4).

Among the various responses provided in the questionnaire, participants mainly favored the option of “blocking the profile or telephone number of the aggressor”, especially in instances where they received sexual content (34.8%) or have been insulted on social media because of their sex life (31.4%) or physical appearance (29%).

Participants also acknowledged “asking the aggressor to stop” as a form of response, particularly in situations related to intimate partner violence, such as when one of their partners has persuaded or forced them to remove photos of friends on social media or to stop chatting to someone (15.9%), trying to control their use of social media (20.3%) or checking their mobile phones for to messages and inspect them (22%).

In response to personal experiences of gender-based violence, young people in Andalusia choose to “tell their mother, father or a teacher”, particularly in instances where they have been insulted on social media about their physical appearance (8.9%) if videos or photos have been posted on social media without their permission (8%) or if they have been insulted on social media about their sex life (7.7%). To a lesser extent, they decide to report the incidents to the police, a response reserved for cases where videos or photos of themselves have been disseminated on social media without their consent (8.9%), if they have been blackmailed with their photos through social media (7.7%) or coerced or threatened on social media to have a sexual relationship (6.5%).

Some individuals also choose to do nothing, especially when they are sent sexual content (10.1%) when a partner tries to check their mobile phone messages and inspect them (7%) or monitor their use of social media (7.5%).

Overall, women tend to exhibit a higher level of proactive responses compared to men across all the available options in the questionnaire, as well as individuals in the 20 to 24 age cohort.



**TABLE 4**  
**RESPONSES TO SITUATIONS OR BEHAVIORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Answers	How have you acted if...												
You have been insulted on social media because of your sex life?	You have been harassed because you appear provocative on social media	You have been insulted on social media because of your physique	Your photo has been shown on social media as a sexual object	You have been told “go do the dishes” or “go to the kitchen” for expressing your opinion on social media	You have been coerced or threatened on social media to maintain a sexual relationship	You have been sent sexual content	You have been blackmailed with photos of yourself through social media	Your videos or photos have been disseminated without your permission on social media	You have been criticized or insulted on social media for defending feminist ideas	One of your partners has tried to control your use of social media	One of your partners has tried to check your mobile phone to see your messages and inspect them	One of your partners has persuaded or forced you to remove photos of friends on social media or stop chatting with someone	
Total	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414	414
Asking them to stop	10.9%	8.2%	11.1 %	4.3%	7.2%	5.3%	9.4%	4.1%	8.7%	11.4%	20.3%	22%	15.9%
Telling my father, my mother, my teacher...	7.7%	6%	8.9%	5.1%	5.6%	4.8%	5.8%	5.8%	8%	7%	7.5%	6.5%	5.6%
Blocking the profile or phone number of the aggressor	31.4%	22.2 %	29%	15.9%	25.1%	15%	34.8%	14%	14.5%	24.4%	12.1%	9.2%	10.6%
I report it to the police	5.3%	5.8%	4.8%	6.5 %	3.6%	6.5%	4.8%	7.7%	8.9%	4.1%	5.3%	4.6%	4.3%
I do nothing	2.4%	1.7%	3.9%	0.7 %	2.9%	0.2%	10.1%	1.2%	1.7%	1.4%	7.5%	7%	4.1%
It hasn't happened to me	61.4%	71%	60.4%	78.5 %	66.4%	78.7%	48.6%	78.3%	74.2%	67.4%	62.3%	63.8%	70.8%

Source: The authors.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research utilizes data processing collected through a survey to analyze the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of young people regarding various forms of violence against women in the context of digital social media. Moreover, it examines the connection between the phenomenon of gender-based violence and the characteristics of contemporary digital sociability and social interaction, investigating how this relationship contributes to the reproduction of the patriarchal structures dominating offline society.

Recognizing the limitations inherent in survey methodology for elucidating complex social phenomena, the findings significantly contribute to this area of study, given the lack of scientific analyses on the triad of youth, social media, and gender-based violence, particularly in Andalusia. At the same time, they underscore critical implications by providing detailed insights into the potential toxicity associated with poorly managed digital social media, allowing for an accurate diagnosis for psychosocial intervention.

The results highlight that the purpose of using social media among young people is communication. However, they also reveal a repertoire of violent practices within these platforms, legitimized by the digital culture's tendency to react to, share, and comment on aggressions and insults stemming from these posts. The use of these spaces also reflects an organizational dimension of violence, as many practices related to harassment, humiliation, or coercion are orchestrated within the manosphere- forums, collective chats, social media groups, etc., and notably, extend beyond the virtual environment to manifest in offline scenarios.

The respondents in this study confirm the perception of the virtual space as a more violent environment compared to the physical space, where improper actions are not usually punished. This digital environment is identified as hostile to women, especially on Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, considered by over 50% of the analyzed sample as social media that pose the highest risk of violence for women.

Therefore, we agree with the approach by García-Mingo et al. (2022), who emphasize the “gendered” dimension of digital violence,

where female victims, particularly adolescents and young girls, are predominately targeted by male perpetrators. The survey data substantiates this reality, indicating that women have experienced violent situations like receiving sexual content, being criticized for defending feminist ideas, or receiving insults about their physical appearance, among others, 73.6% of the time, while men have experienced it 26.4%. In response to these challenges, Andalusian young people predominately resort to blocking the aggressor's profile or telephone number. However, this may not guarantee an end to the perpetration of the crime through alternative profiles or numbers created for such purposes. Other responses, such as asking the aggressor to stop, confiding in a family member or teacher, and/or reporting it to the police, are also recorded in the analyzed sample.

The fact that reporting to the police obtains a low percentage of responses –ranging from 3.6% to 8.9%– is directly related to the lack of regulations governing such practices, which negatively impacts young people's trust in the system when seeking a solution to situations of violence. Consequently, there is an urgent need for an international regulatory framework to sanction acts of violence against women in the context of digital social media.

The array of violent practices observed on social media has also impacted the sphere of romantic relationships. The results indicate that the affordances provided by platforms not only perpetuate the relational pattern where men seek to exert control over women, but also facilitate mechanisms that compromise individual autonomy by monitoring messages, checking the time of connection, overseeing the content shared or consumed by their partner, approving the list of friends or tracking their location, to name just a few examples.

While the findings indicate that most of the individuals surveyed (over 75%) possess skills to recognize and respond to sexist, violent content or behavior on social media, their perception of such violence is often influenced by “affective-ideological antifeminist discourses emerging from the Spanish manosphere” (García-Mingo et al., 2022, p. 1). These discourses aim to downplay, normalize, and legitimize various forms of violence against women. They represent denialist discourses of violence that cast men as victims in response to any

feminist action, both on social media and in broader society, while attributing blame to women for the patriarchal backlash that questions the existence of such violence.

As a result, young people tend to normalize specific patterns of Internet use, perceiving them not as risky practices but as circumstances inherent to the digital environment. This distortion shifts attention away from the true culprits, namely, the patriarchal system that has already socialized men and women into its power structure and uses legitimizing narratives in the digital space. The sexist socialization affecting both girls and boys and the continued influence of affective-sexual education further reinforce the construction of hegemonic masculinity models by positioning women as objects and men as subjects of social action.

Considering this scenario, questions arise, such as: to what extent is equality as a right protected in digital life? Have technologies erased the rules? If there was already silence and impunity in situations of gender violence, are we now witnessing silence and impunity 2.0? Undoubtedly, the answers indicate the need for a prevention and intervention strategy that involves all social actors to make visible and raise awareness about how gender-based violence is generated and how inequality is manifested today to eradicate it.

Future research should consider focusing on these issues and distinguishing the forms of violence that originate between content production and consumption practices. Such an approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon in each phase, mirroring social reality.

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