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Digital Subalternity under Algorithmic Governance: A Spivakian Reading of the EU Report on Gender-Based Violence

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Abstract

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1988 article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is a classic of postcolonial feminist discourse arguing that Western discourses have the power to silence the periphery and further limit its capacity to represent itself. Spivak's theory has a contemporary digital application because the communication technologies of today mirror subalternity in complex and almost imperceptible ways. The research analyzes the insults, the violence, and the hatred based on gender, race, and religion that migrant and minority women in Europe experience through Spivak's notions of subalternity, epistemic violence, and representation. The main source of data is the "EU Gender-Based Violence Survey: Key Results" report published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat). According to the report, one-third of women in the EU are victims of gender-based violence, and among various groups, Muslim, Black, and women from other vulnerable social groups suffer the highest level of discrimination and harassment on multiple fronts, including online. The research conducts a thematic analysis of the 2024 report to reinterpret its findings from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Melding together present-day EU statistics with Spivak's critical theory, the study reinterprets digital hate speech as reflecting the persistence of postcolonial power hierarchies. It argues that digital violence constitutes a form of epistemic harm, through which women may be conceptualized as occupying a position of "digital subalternity." In this sense, the study proposes an analytical lens that foregrounds recognition and representation dynamics in relation to debates over digital rights advocacy and content moderation.

Keywords: Postcolonial feminism, Digital subaltern, Digital violence, Algorithmic bias, European Union.

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Algoritmik Yönetişim Altında Dijital Maduniyet: Toplumsal Cinsiyete Dayalı Şiddete İlişkin AB Raporunun Spivakçı Bir Yorumu

Öz

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak'ın 1988'te yayımlanan "Madun Konuşabilir mi?" makalesi, postkolonyal feminizmin temel metinlerinden biridir. Spivak, Batı'nın hegemonik söylemlerinin ötekileştirilmiş grupların sesini bastırarak temsil imkânlarını sınırladığını vurgular. Günümüz iletişim teknolojileri ise maduniyeti ortadan kaldırmak yerine onu daha görünmez ve karmaşık bir biçimde yeniden üreterek Spivak'ın kuramına dijital bir boyut eklemiştir. Bu çalışma, Avrupa'da göçmen ve azınlık kadınların çevrimiçi ortamlarda maruz kaldığı cinsiyetçi, ırkçı ve dini temelli nefret söylemi ile şiddeti, Spivak'ın madunlaştırma, epistemik şiddet ve temsiliyet krizi kavramları çerçevesinde analiz etmektedir. Çalışmanın temel veri kaynağı, Avrupa Birliği Temel Haklar Ajansı (FRA), Avrupa Cinsiyet Eşitliği Enstitüsü (EIGE) ve Avrupa Birliği İstatistik Ofisi (Eurostat) tarafından yayımlanan "EU Gender-Based Violence Survey: Key Results" raporudur. Rapor, AB'de her üç kadından birinin cinsiyete dayalı şiddet yaşadığını; özellikle Müslüman, siyahî ve diğer kırılgan sosyal gruplardan gelen kadınların dijital platformlarda çok katmanlı ayrımcılık ve hedef göstermeye maruz kaldığını gözler önüne sermektedir. Nitel araştırma deseniyle yürütülen bu çalışma, raporun bulgularını tematik analiz yöntemiyle yeniden yorumlayarak dijital nefret söylemini geleneksel siber şiddet yaklaşımlarının ötesine taşımaktadır. Güncel AB istatistiklerini Spivak'ın eleştirel teorisiyle bir araya getiren bu çalışma, dijital nefret söylemini, postkolonyal iktidar hiyerarşilerinin devamlılığını yansıtan bir olgu olarak yeniden yorumlamaktadır. Çalışma, dijital şiddetin bir tür epistemik zarar (epistemic harm) teşkil ettiğini ve bu çerçevede kadınların "dijital maduniyet" (digital subalternity) konumunda kavramsallaştırılabileceğini öne sürmektedir. Bu anlamda çalışma, dijital hak savunuculuğu ve içerik denetimi tartışmalarında tanınma ile temsil dinamiklerini ön plana çıkaran bir analitik mercek sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Postkolonyal feminizm, Dijital madun, Dijital şiddet, Algoritmik önyargı, Avrupa birliği.

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Extended Abstract

Based on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?", this study examines how contemporary digital communication technologies reproduce postcolonial power structures and position immigrant, minority, and women from other vulnerable social groups in Europe as the "digital subaltern". Employing Spivak's theoretical framework of "subalternization", "epistemic violence", and the "crisis of representation", this research conducts a thematic analysis of the 2024 EU "Gender-Based Violence Survey: Key Results" report (by FRA, EIGE, Eurostat). Through this lens, it reinterprets digital hate speech and online violence. Our central argument is that digital violence is not merely a cybercrime but a manifestation of postcolonial domination in digital space and a form of epistemic harm that erases women's subjectivity. The research study is based on a critique of postcolonial feminism of Western-centric and universalist feminist discourses and colonial knowledge regimes. Spivak (1988/1994, pp. 76-77) claims that the subaltern is silenced not only in economic and political terms but also by being deprived of the right of representation and agency. Her notion of "epistemic violence" elucidates how the Western systems of knowledge production structurally silence the subaltern. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984, pp. 351-352) takes this critique a step further, arguing against the use of homogenizing categories such as the "Third World Woman" and insisting on the necessity of an intersectional approach. Digital subalternity literature has primarily addressed issues of digital activism and platform capitalism.

In contrast, a major issue remains unaddressed: how subalternity is maintained through official institutions and their knowledge-producing channels (reports, surveys). This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by conducting a thematic analysis of how an official report issued by a standard-setting body such as the EU transforms digital violence into a form of "epistemic violence." This study adopts a qualitative approach and relies on the 2024 EU Report on Gender-Based Violence as its core material. In a sense, the report is treated not merely as a source of data but also as a site of knowledge production that is highly biased towards the West. The data is examined in roughly the same order using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Coding and theme creation are based on Spivak's theoretical framework, and attention is focused not only on the quantitative findings but also on how the material is framed and organized, which categories are excluded, and what remained "unspoken". This approach enables the identification of the report's "silences" and the crisis of representation embedded in its discourse.

The thematic analysis identifies four interconnected dimensions through which the figure of the digital subaltern is constructed. First, digital violence often remains partially invisible within institutional and legal classifications, as practices such as cyber harassment, unsolicited messages, online stalking,

and non-consensual image sharing are frequently subsumed under broader categories like “harassment” or “stalking.” This produces what Spivak conceptualizes as a crisis of representation, in which the experiences of digitally victimized women become difficult to recognize within dominant institutional frameworks. Second, the findings reveal that digital violence disproportionately affects young women, migrants, minorities, publicly visible women, and other structurally vulnerable groups, supporting postcolonial feminist discussions of intersectionality and “double oppression” developed by Spivak and Mohanty. Third, although legal frameworks such as the EU Directive 2024/1385 formally prohibit forms of digital violence, the universalist and technical language employed in these regulations may fail to capture the contextual and subjective dimensions of women’s experiences, thereby reproducing forms of epistemic erasure. Finally, the low rate of institutional reporting and support-seeking suggests that platform moderation systems, automated responses, and complex reporting procedures may contribute to a broader condition of institutional silencing and digital epistemic violence.

The study makes three major contributions by integrating Spivak’s postcolonial feminist theory with contemporary researh on digital violence. First, it moves beyond conventional cybercrime analyses, treating digital violence as an extension of postcolonial power relationships and as an epistemic form of violence that creates “digital subalternity”. Second, it addresses a significant gap in the literature by demonstrating, through thematic analysis, how subalternity is reproduced through formal mechanisms of knowledge-production (the EU report). Finally, it offers an intersectional perspective centered on recognition and representation, providing a conceptual framework for digital rights advocacy and content moderation policies. The research concludes that digital violence is a result of systematic silencing that keeps women in the digital subaltern position. But then again, feminist digital solidarity networks, for example, #MeToo, demonstrates the potential for resistance by creating spaces in which women can make their voices heard despite conditions of this absolute subordination. This paradigm emphasizes the need for digital platforms, legal regulations, and support mechanisms in ways that place women’s subjectivities and voices at the central focus.

Keywords: Postcolonial feminism, Digital subaltern, Digital violence, Algorithmic bias, European Union.

Introduction

One of the most foundational works of postcolonial feminist theory is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak (1988/1994) argues that subaltern groups are silenced and that hegemonic discourses in Western-centric modes of knowledge production shape their representation in silence. The term "epistemic violence" refers to the ways in which knowledge systems define the boundaries of what is considered legitimate within discourse, determining who is recognized as a credible speaker and whose voice is marginalized, ignored, or rendered unintelligible. From this perspective, rather than fully realizing their democratizing potential, new communication technologies increasingly reproduce existing relations of dominations in digital spaces, rendering subaltern positions less visible, more complex, and more systematically entrenched (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 115).

Online hate speech (sexist, racist, and religiously motivated) has become a contemporary face of this contradiction in the European context. Women from migrant, ethnic, and religious minorities, along with other vulnerable social groups, encounter this violence in disproportionately layered forms. The EU Gender-Based Violence Survey – Key Results (2024), published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and Eurostat, maps women's experiences of gender-based violence across the European Union. It also shows that particularly those from migrant, ethnic, and religious minority backgrounds, as well as other vulnerable social groups, face layered forms of discrimination and targeted harassment on online platforms (FRA et al., 2024). While such reports make subaltern experiences visible through statistical data, the very act of translating lived realities into predefined institutional categories raises questions about representation. In this sense, these documents risk reproducing what Spivak (1988/1994) conceptualizes as epistemic violence: a mode of representation in which the subaltern subject remains silenced even as she is ostensibly given a voice.

This study examines the EU Gender-Based Violence Survey: Key Results (2024) not only as a data source but also as a product of a Western-centric knowledge production process. A thematic analysis conducted within

a qualitative research framework reinterprets the report's findings by incorporating Spivak's ideas of underclass formation, epistemic violence, and crisis of representation. In this sense, the study attempts to answer the following research question: How can digital violence faced by women from immigrant, minority, and other vulnerable social groups in Europe on online platforms be understood and interpreted through the Spivakian framework outlined above?

Therefore, the study frames digital violence as a kind of continuation of postcolonial power relations reproduced in digital spaces. Digital violence, in this view, functions as epistemic violence that places women and other disadvantaged groups in Europe in a "digital subalternity" position. At the same time, this study aims to offer a different perspective not only on representation but also on recognition and subjectivity in the context of digital rights struggles and content censorship policies. Using the methodological framework and available data mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical framework of the study is explained in more detail in the next section.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Postcolonial feminism, historically, emerged as a sharp response to the limitations of mainstream Western feminism and the gender blindness seen in early postcolonial theory. The foundations of postcolonial feminism were laid in the 1980s by academics who criticized Western feminist research for creating a single, supposedly universal category such as the "Third World Woman." This singular, oppressed figure systematically ignored the complex material conditions and forms of agency that women navigated daily in postcolonial settings.

In her groundbreaking essay "Through the Western Eye" (1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty clearly demonstrated how Western feminism, by speaking on behalf of women in the Global South, could echo colonial stereotypes rather than truly speaking to them. Here, the Global South refers to historically colonized and economically marginalized places, encompassing mostly parts of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. Nevertheless, postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her 1988/1994 work, particularly in "Can the Subaltern Speak?",

argues that the most marginalized (e.g., poor and lower-class women, immigrants, women from ethnic or religious minorities, and other vulnerable social groups) are often silenced in practice. She suggests that this occurs, through the intertwined, overlapping structures of patriarchy and imperialism.

Therefore, postcolonial feminism naturally sits at the intersection of these critiques, examining how colonialism, racism, classism, and patriarchy operate not separately, but together. It also questions both feminist and anticolonial nationalist narratives, enabling narratives about women's lives to include not only general claims but also specific living conditions.

Both patriarchy and imperialism appear as interconnected mechanisms of domination that subordinate women and colonized peoples; therefore, they create a kind of structural affinity in the forms of resistance people take against control and inequality (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 206). This raises the question of whether gender or colonial oppression should be prioritized in understanding the everyday lives of women in colonized contexts. Postcolonial feminist scholarship argues, however, that rather than taking sides, the two are intertwined, and also critique the epistemological orderings through which feminist knowledge is produced and evaluated (Mohanty, 1984, pp. 334–336).

Within such a framework, Western feminism, often described as universalizing and Eurocentric, has been criticized for constructing the concept of "woman" as if it were a single, uniform, and homogeneous group. This approach can obscure how class, race, and geopolitical location shape the differences experienced. In other words, it can mislead us about what women in the Global South experience because it separates gender oppression from the economic-colonial conditions that shape it. This critique is further strengthened by Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer's (2024, pp. 21–24) account of how her struggles against economic exploitation and racial oppression in Bolivia are treated as insignificant or sidelined and are difficult to see in mainstream Western feminist narratives. Her narrative also suggests that some feminist frameworks can, inadvertently, perpetuate epistemic hierarchies by prioritizing certain types of oppression while relegating others to the background.

Postcolonial feminist theory addresses the epistemological resistance of women in non-Western places and, in a sense, those whose voices are unheard or altogether silenced. From this perspective, postcolonial feminist thought can be read as a kind of epistemological disobedience, a calm yet resolute rejection. In other words, epistemological disobedience means constructing alternative epistemologies to conventional Western methods of acquiring knowledge (Mignolo, 2009, pp. 159–160). From a slightly broader perspective, this same impulse can be seen echoed within feminist theory itself.

Postcolonial feminist studies argue that women's marginalization operates not only through material exclusion but also through epistemological structures that determine whose voices, experiences, and knowledge are recognized as legitimate, a process Spivak conceptualizes as "epistemic violence." Ayaz (2023, pp. 63–64) argues that feminist studies within Abrahamic religious traditions demonstrate how the underclass is reproduced through cultural and theological discourses that frame women as objects rather than as interpreters. Drawing on Spivak, Ayaz further shows how feminist reinterpretation and deconstruction function as forms of epistemological resistance against patriarchal representational regimes. Together, these arguments reinforce that postcolonial feminism is not only a struggle against material disadvantage, but also a struggle over how knowledge is produced, circulated, and legitimized.

The concept of subaltern emerged as a term used by Antonio Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks to describe the rural proletariat and marginalized classes under Italian fascism (Crehan, 2016, pp. 198-199). However, Spivak's (1988/1994) foundational essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", significantly reconfigures the concept by shifting the analytical focus from socio-economic marginality to epistemic and discursive exclusion, particularly the impossibility of subaltern subjects to achieve representation within dominant knowledge systems. In this text, Spivak designates not only the economically or politically oppressed, but also those deprived of the possibility of representation and subjective status. The subaltern has been imprisoned in a "crisis of representation," a condition in which marginalized subjects are denied the possibility of self-representation and are instead spoken for through colonial, nationalist, or Western epistemological frameworks (Spivak, 1988/1994). Central to

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's analysis is the concept of epistemic violence, which refers to the ways colonial and dominant Western discourses construct the subaltern as the "Other" while simultaneously excluding marginalized subjects from intelligibility and self-representation within hegemonic systems of knowledge (Spivak, 1988/1994, pp. 76-77). In this sense, colonialism operates not only through political or economic domination, but also through representational and epistemological practices that silence and then marginalize subaltern subjectivity. The digital age provides a valuable opportunity to revisit Spivak's ideas from a new perspective. Although it is often claimed that digital communication technologies open up spaces for participation and visibility in more equitable ways, these promising claims are severely limited by platform capitalism, algorithmic governance, and unequal digital infrastructures. The term digital subalternity emerged by revisiting Spivak's framework and was applied to the digital realm in practice to enable a closer examination of contradictions.

More recent research also implies that the digital subaltern cannot be read just as an abstract continuation of older patterns; it has to be taken together with algorithmic governance and data hegemony. For instance, Yetişkin (2016, p. 30) frames the idea of new subalternity as emerging through data extraction, digital surveillance, and network-based control systems built into platform infrastructures. From this perspective, digital technologies are not merely neutral channels of communication,but as technical infrastructures that shape visibility, participation, memory, and power. Through algorithmic procedures that systematically privilege certain forms of information while marginalizing others, they actively configure what becomes visible, who participates, how collective memory is constructed, and how power is distributed. In the digital era, therefore, subalternity extends beyond exclusion from discourse to encompass an asymmetrical mode of incorporation into data-driven systems, in which marginalized subjects are rendered "visible" mainly as sources of usable and exploitable data. This perspective is particularly useful for feminist analyses of digital violence, as women's experiences may be highly visible on digital platforms while remaining structurally excluded from institutional channels of recognition and protection.

Machine learning systems exacerbate, or at least systematize, structural inequalities by reproducing biases already embedded in training data and system design (Crawford, 2021, p. 134). These findings demonstrate that algorithmic systems do not merely reflect existing inequalities but actively shape digital visibility and participation through discriminatory forms of classification and amplification. Since negative material often generates higher engagement rates, algorithmic systems may unintentionally amplify harassment and hateful rhetoric (Gillespie, 2018, pp. 207-208). Consequently, women, particularly public figures and feminist activists, frequently become targets of coordinated digital harassment campaigns. Within this environment, platform mechanisms commonly referred to as "rabbit holes" can steer users from relatively innocuous content toward increasingly extreme forms of violence and hate (Govers et al., 2023, p. 3). Furthermore, algorithmic systems are trained on datasets that encode sexist stereotypes, thereby reproducing and reinforcing structural biases that disproportionately amplify harmful content targeting women (Noble, 2018, pp. 99-100). Together, these interconnected mechanisms of amplification, exclusion, and algorithmic bias are illustrated in Figure 1.

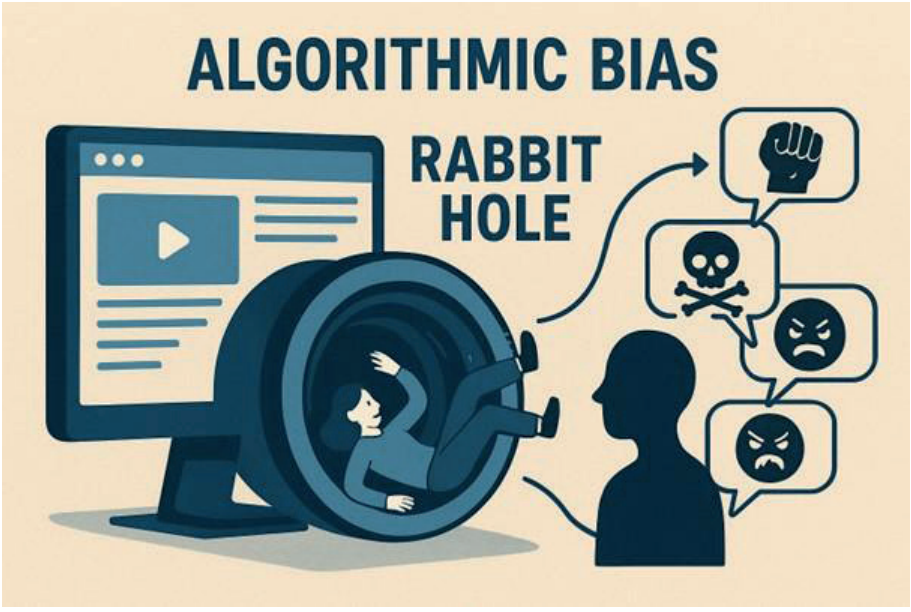


Figure 1. *Algorithmic Bias and Rabbit Hole, Created by the author* (2025)

Research on digital subalternity approaches the subject from multiple perspectives, often with overlapping areas of focus. One strand of research examines how the past and the identities embedded in digital platforms, archives, and databases are rendered less visible. In her work, "New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy," Risam (2018) offers a postcolonial critique within digital humanities. She argues that digital archives, when they reproduce only a limited range of perspectives, risk marginalizing subaltern histories and rendering them progressively less visible. Similarly, Sinha (2024), in an analysis of India's Aadhaar digital identity system, demonstrates how the expansion of digital infrastructures enables states and corporations to classify, monitor, and govern marginalized populations. From this perspective, marginalized subjects are increasingly represented not as politically autonomous agents with epistemic agency, but as sources of extractable data and objects of predefined institutional categories.

While Spivak (1988/1994) famously argued that the subaltern cannot speak within dominant structures of representation, more recent research has complicated this position by demonstrating how marginalized groups use digital platforms to produce counter-narratives and establish networks of resistance. From this perspective, digital media can be understood as more than just sites of exclusion and control; it also serves as a space for expression and visibility, even though this visibility is not fully shared or equally distributed. For instance, Thakur (2020), in her work "New Media and the Dalit Counter-Public Sphere," suggests that Dalit movements strategically mobilize Twitter, Facebook, and similar channels to challenge caste-blind storylines in mainstream media and, in the process, form what she calls a digital counter-public sphere. Likewise, Aouragh (2012, p. 530), focusing on Palestinian digital activism, argues that digital tools may help ease the spatial and physical barriers imposed by occupation and restrictions. Yet, it also notes that these platforms remain centralized and, in practice, are still largely governed by corporate interests, therefore, structural limits keep showing up, even in what looks like open spaces. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that digital spaces can partially disrupt the conditions behind the silence of the subaltern, but they do not completely correct the power imbalances highlighted by Spivak; rather, they rearrange them in new and sometimes contradictory ways.

Similar dynamics have already been observed in the Turkish context. Examining women-oriented campaigns on Change.org, Kiraz and Kestel (2017, pp. 157-158) argue that digital communication technologies can act as spaces that go against the dominant power structures. They emphasize that through these technologies, women can challenge the subaltern positions shaped by dominant political, institutional, and media discourses in Türkiye. Inspired by New Feminist Criticism through Spivak and Gramsci, the authors argue that digital activism encourages subaltern women to voice their collective claims, enhancing the visible presence of those facing violence and counteracting patriarchal silence through different modes of participation and networks. They note simultaneously that the digital spheres do not erase structural inequalities, as visibility and participation continue to be mediated by capillary hegemonic and technological conditions. This aspect is particularly relevant for analyzing contemporary feminist movements such as #MeToo, where digital visibility creates opportunities for counter-hegemonic articulation and mobilization while also exposing women to renewed forms of vulnerability and online harassment.

Hashtag-based digital feminist activism, as exemplified by movements such as #MeToo, has been lauded for its ability to create transnational solidarity networks and build a culture of collective political articulation (Jackson et al. 2020; Mendes et al., 2019). From this perspective, digital platforms are framed as extending feminist visibility and interconnectivity across space. However, recent scholarship shows that this visibility should not be understood as an unequivocally positive development. Rather, it is shaped by structural and political constraints that may ultimately limit its influence. For example, Baer (2018) argues that online feminist protest is increasingly incorporated into neoliberal logics of individualization in which collective political struggle is reframed through commodified personal narratives. Along with this critique, Clark-Parsons (2021) argues that visibility through networks is often basic and transient with little means of producing durable institutional accountability. Similarly, Banet-Weiser (2018) also conceptualizes the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny as dialectical, arguing feminist visibility is often met with organized forms of backlash. Şener (2021) additionally illustrates that even though digital platforms have the potential to become spaces for solidarity in the Turkish context, they also increase activists' risk of burnout, secondary trauma and scrutiny by the state. Collectively,

these studies point to a rethinking of celebratory accounts of hashtag activism, arguing that while digital subaltern or feminist subjects can achieve ephemeral visibility, they often do not receive equal epistemic recognition and structural change.

Another area of research is shaped by studies on platform capitalism and digital labor. This body of research mainly examines the economic aspects of digital subalternity. Specifically, it emphasizes the position of Global South users as data sources and, in a sense, cheap labor for platforms. Arora (2019, pp. 69-70), in her book "The Next Billion Users: Digital Life Beyond the West," demonstrates how large tech platforms employ "exploitative design" tactics against non-Western users, and these tactics are not merely neutral features. While these users may be understood as "data underclasses" used for advertising revenue, they remain largely excluded from platform governance, with little or no influence over decision-making processes or the prioritization.

Couldry and Mejias (2019, p. 276), in their book "The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism," coined the term data colonialism. They argue that digital capitalism extends historical colonialism, in which raw data is appropriated as a source of inference, which is then used to justify subsequent appropriations, even when people treat it as everyday technology.

Two influential works in digital subalternity studies are those of Gajjala (2019) and Karatzogianni (2015). Gajjala (2019), together with her students, in their analysis of digital culture, gender, and globalization, highlight the women's labor, identity formation, and the fight for representation in the digital sphere of the South Asian digital diaspora. By contrast, Karatzogianni (2015), examines conflict, resistance, and social movements in cyberspace, investigating how digital communication becomes a double-edged sword for subaltern groups in the Global South, simultaneously creating both opportunities for empowerment and new forms of surveillance.

The literature review above demonstrates the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of digital subalternity studies. However, a significant gap exists in this field. Most existing studies focus on the visible agency of subalterns in the digital sphere (activism, resistance) or the macrostructures that render them invisible (platform capitalism, algorithmic bias). Yet one of the most structural manifestations of subalternity, namely the systematic

production of silence, continues to be reproduced through the very institutions and knowledge-production mechanisms that are intended to render it visible rather than dismantle the conditions that sustain it. This is a contradiction that has not been adequately researched.

The study itself enters the literature on digital subalternity, but not in a conventional manner; the emphasis is not on how marginalized individuals gain visibility in digital spaces, but rather on how institutions reproduce silence through official regimes of information and representation. While existing scholarship has largely focused either on digital resistance practices or on macrostructures such as platform capitalism and surveillance, this study examines how epistemic violence is reproduced through institutional reporting mechanisms that claim to provide objective representations of women's experiences. Rather than focusing exclusively on digital violence itself, the study investigates how such violence is recorded, categorized, or omitted within the official reports of a normative supranational institution such as the European Union. Drawing on Spivak's (1988/1994) concept of the "crisis of representation," the analysis examines how institutional documentation practices may themselves reproduce forms of silencing by determining which experiences become visible, legible, and politically recognizable.

The EU report is presented as an objective and unbiased data source. This study demonstrates how the report's methodological choices, definitions, and categories exclude women's experiences of digital violence, presenting a concrete and institutional example of epistemic violence. This shows the subaltern's "inability to speak" is already present in the very structure of the devices that claim to reflect their experiences. Moreover, it shifts the digital subalternity debate in literature towards the intersectional analysis of gender and violence against women. It regards the digital subaltern as a non-uniform category formed by the overlapping of gender, class, ethnicity, and geography.

Method

The research design and approach of this study fall within the qualitative research paradigm. A qualitative approach was adopted because the study aims to develop a contextual understanding of digital violence that cannot be captured through numerical data alone. Thematic analysis was used as a qualitative data analysis technique in the study. Thematic analysis is a method that is both flexible and powerful for identifying, analyzing, and

reporting recurring patterns (themes) in a particular dataset. In practice, the coding process largely relied on careful reading of the EU report; this was achieved by manually highlighting meaningful passages of the text and assigning descriptive codes in an iterative manner. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial feminist work, particularly her concepts of the subaltern and epistemic violence, has shaped the interpretation phase of analysis.

The primary data source for the research is the report "EU Gender-Based Violence Survey: Key Results," published in 2024 by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and Eurostat, all official institutions of the European Union. This report is a comprehensive and recent study conducted on 114,023 women from 27 EU countries. It examines the extent and types of gender-based violence, as well as the extent to which victims resort to institutional mechanisms. The report is particularly valuable for this research because it reveals the "invisible" dimension of digital violence within the context of conventional, more familiar categories of violence.

Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 87-93) six-stage thematic analysis procedure:

1. Familiarization with the Data: The report was read repeatedly in its entirety, from the introduction to the annexes, and the major findings and points of interest were recorded.
2. Generating Initial Codes: The report's content was carefully analyzed through a Spivakian theoretical lens, leading to the formation of initial codes on digital violence, silence, representation, institutional response, and inequality. The quotes and report meanings were the main focus of the coding.
3. Theme Search: The generated codes were merged to form interconnected patterns and converted into potential themes aligned with the research question. This step addressed how the codes in the entire dataset interlinked to form a semantic network.
4. Theme Review: The proposed themes were evaluated using the extracted coded data and the whole dataset. At this stage, the themes were examined for overlaps, differences, and supporting data, and the combinations and splits needed to reach the final group of themes were determined.

5. Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme was defined in an unambiguous way, its range delineated properly and given a name that worked with the study's theoretical framework, digital subalternity, and felt meaningful in the text itself.
6. Creation of Report: The analysis presented here was developed into a coherent and consistent narrative, with each theme supported by representative data extracts and interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework.

The coding process was conducted inductively, and no predetermined thematic categories were applied before analysis. Following the completion of the initial coding, an inductive interpretation phase was conducted, in which Spivak's conceptual framework served as a guide rather than a predefined coding structure. The thematic structure presented in this study was therefore developed after coding, through iterative refinement. This interpretive orientation was complemented by a systematic coding procedure involving close reading and manual segmentation of the data.

The analysis also considered how data were structured, categorized, and presented in the report, including what was emphasized and what was omitted. This allowed for a critical examination of whether institutional reporting practices may reproduce forms of epistemic violence.

One of the principal limitations of this research is that the analysis relies on a single document (the official EU report). However, this very limitation guarantees the study's concentration and thoroughness.

Findings and Discussion

This research analyzes the findings on digital violence in the European Union's EU Gender-based Violence Survey – Key Results (FRA, EIGE, & Eurostat, 2024) report through the lens of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory. The concept of subaltern, developed by Spivak in her text "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988/1994), opens up discussion of the position of women whose voices are denied at the intersection of colonialism and patriarchal order. In this context, digital violence should be considered not only as an individual crime or violation of rights, but also as an epistemic practice of silencing. Spivak (1988/1994, pp. 76-78) defines epistemic violence as the remotely orchestrated, far-

reaching, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. Digital violence, when examined through this lens, operates through analogous mechanisms: it is often remotely orchestrated (via online platforms, algorithmic systems, and coordinated online networks), it is heterogeneous in form (ranging from non-consensual image sharing to doxxing and AI-facilitated abuse), and it systematically constitutes the victim as a silenced Other whose speech is rendered inaudible or excluded from digital public spheres. Unlike physical violence alone, digital violence thus produces a specific epistemic effect: it undermines the victim's capacity to speak, be believed, and participate in knowledge-producing spaces. In this sense, digital violence is not merely a violation of individual rights, but a contemporary instantiation of epistemic violence, where silencing operates through technological and institutional structures.

Table 1. *The Coding Template and Grouping Strategy*

Theme	Main Codes	Subcodes (Examples)
Theme 1: Types of Violence	Cyber Harassment	Hate speech, threats, sexually explicit messages
	Visual Revenge (Non-consensual image sharing)	Sharing private images, manipulated materials
	Cyber Stalking	Constant harassment, digital tracking
Theme 2: Gender Inequality	Target Audience Differentiation	Young women, activists, public figures
	Intersectionality	Increased risk based on age, profession, and social status
Theme 3: Legal Gaps	Legal Inconsistencies	Definitions vary by country, and the inadequacy of criminal sanctions
	The Impact of International Agreements	Istanbul Convention, EU directives, and implementation problems
Theme 4: Security and Rights	Lack of Digital Security	Inadequacy of platform policies, lack of functioning complaint mechanisms
	Silencing and Withdrawal	Women's withdrawal from the online space, self-censorship
	Lack of Support Mechanisms	Psychological support, legal aid, and refuge areas

Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory, when juxtaposed with the findings of the EU report, allows one to consider digital violence as a method of silencing at the intersection of patriarchy, digital capitalism, and colonial information regimes. From this perspective, digital violence is not simply one person harming another or a mere violation of individual rights, but rather a more systemic form of postcolonial domination. Women's presence in the digital sphere can be strengthened through collective struggles and alternative epistemologies that can resist the reproduction of this domination. For example, collective struggles include movements such as #MeToo, online feminist counter-publics, and digital safety networks organized by activists. Alternative epistemologies refer to community-based data practices, victims' storytelling platforms, and feminist knowledge-sharing initiatives such as Chayn and Feminist Internet, which prioritize subaltern voices over institutional metrics and seek to reconstruct dominant regimes of knowledge production.

This part of the study aims to support the argument that digital violence functions as a mechanism of silencing on a transnational scale and positions women within forms of digital subalternity by interpreting the findings of the EU report through Spivak's theory of subalternity (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Comprehensive Thematic Analysis (EU Gender-based Violence Survey, Key results – Online/Digital Violence)*

Theme	Subcodes / Examples	Evidence from the Report	Analytical Comment
Theme 1 Types of Violence	- Cyber harassment (hate speech, threats) - Non-consensual image sharing - Cyberstalking - Sexual messages	EU Directive (2024/1385) clearly defines forms of digital violence: "non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyberstalking, cyber harassment and cyber incitement to violence or hatred by reference to gender."	This finding illustrates diffuse and multidimensional character of digital violence against women. By formally recognizing multiple forms of online abuse in the EU Directive, the legislation kind of frames digital violence not as a few isolated personal incidents, but as a wider structural phenomenon, embedded in today's digital environments.
Theme 2 Intersectionality and Double Oppression	-Women and structurally vulnerable groups are disproportionately targeted by digital violence -Young women (18–29 years old) are at higher risk - Women activists and public figures face increased exposure to coordinated online attacks - Muslim respondents report discrimination based simultaneously on religion, ethnicity, skin color, and migration background	According to the report, 41.6% of women aged 18–29 have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. The findings further indicate that discrimination intensifies when gender intersects with religion, ethnicity, migration background, and minority identity.	The findings suggest that digital and gender-based violence are not experienced uniformly but are shaped through intersecting structures of gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, migration status, and public visibility. These overlapping forms of vulnerability support postcolonial feminist arguments concerning "double" or multiple oppression, in which marginalized groups become disproportionately exposed to harassment, exclusion, and epistemic silencing.

Theme 3 Legal Gaps and Policies	- Different legal definitions in member states - EU's new directives - Implementation of the Istanbul Convention	The EU included digital violence in the criminal category with the directive adopted in 2024: "The directive criminalizes certain forms of violence against women, both online and offline."	Even if Directive (EU) 2024/1385 represents a significant step toward legal harmonization, there are still variations in how national laws define things and in how Member States actually put it into practice, which may undermine the overall uniformity of the protection that victims receive.
Theme 4 Security and Rights	- The need for digital security - Restricting women's online presence - Lack of support mechanisms	According to the report, only 6.4% of women contacted a helpline or support service after violence.	The low rate of help-seeking reported in the survey may indicate institutional distrust, limited access to support, or fear of further victimization, which may discourage women's participation in digital public spaces.

Theme 1: Types of Digital Violence and Digital Subalternity

In the context of postcolonial feminism, digital violence, perpetrated by social structures (patriarchy, neocolonialism), communities, and institutions, is precisely the manifestation of this structural violence in the digital space.

The report's sections on "Stalking" (p. 27) and "Workplace Sexual Harassment" (p. 40) list behaviors that indicate cyber stalking. Specifically, the report defines stalking to include the following behaviors:

- Sending unsolicited messages (including social media messages), emails, letters, or gifts.
- Posting offensive or embarrassing comments about an individual on social media.
- Sharing highly personal photographs, videos, or other personal information on social media

Likewise, the report's section on workplace sexual harassment includes behaviors such as unwanted romantic moves through social media, unsolicited sexually explicit emails or messages, and non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit images or videos. Yet, these actions are not identified as forms of "digital harassment," and the data on the proportion of women affected by them is not provided. Instead, these activities are subsumed under the broader categories of "stalking" or "sexual harassment."

The report explicitly identifies the following types of online violence: they are (Directive [EU] 2024/1385) cyber harassment, online stalking, non-consensual image sharing, and sending sexually explicit messages. These violations show that women are also the victims of a patriarchal assault in the online world. Spivak's inquiry, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is pertinent here: Even if women's accounts of digital abuse are told, this narrative is usually made inaudible by the algorithms of predominantly male platforms and by legal discourse.

Taken together, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' reports on algorithmic discrimination (FRA, 2022), the findings of the EU Gender-Based Violence Survey (2024), and the FRA's 2025 Fundamental Rights Report demonstrate that gender-based digital harms persist despite evolving regulatory frameworks. While the FRA's 2022 findings primarily focused on algorithmic bias and discriminatory AI systems, the 2025 report expanded this discussion by linking online misogyny, platform governance, and systemic digital harms against women to broader fundamental rights concerns across the EU. The report examines algorithmic bias through two principal case studies: predictive policing and offensive speech detection systems. In the predictive policing case, feedback loops emerge when police algorithms repeatedly classify certain neighborhoods as "high risk." This mechanism reinforces discrimination by intensifying disproportionate police surveillance and overpolicing, particularly in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants and ethnic minorityt. According to the report, as algorithmically generated data is continuously fed back into the same systems, biases intensify over time and certain communities remain persistently categorized as "suspicious."

In the second case study, the report demonstrates that natural language processing (NLP)-based hate speech detection algorithms produce systematic bias against ethnic and religious identities. In particular, the report finds that identity expressions such as "Muslim", "Jew", "Roma", "foreigner", "African" are significanttly more likely to be marked as offensive content than other identity categories. It further notes that even neutral self-identifying statements such as "I am Muslim" or "I am Jewish" may be flagged as offensive content. In addition, the report indicates that the posts written in African American English were disproportionately classified as "offensive" by algorithms.

Empirical evidence of these dynamics can be seen in Şener's (2021) study on digital feminist activism in Türkiye. Her findings show that women's issues are regulated through a kind of hierarchy of visibility on digital platforms, with femicide and sexual harassment receiving more attention. Meanwhile, economic violence, working-class women's rights, abortion, and the rights of vulnerable groups are systematically underrepresented and consistently excluded. This regulation produces what subsequently becomes socially and politically "unrepresentable".

When these findings are considered together, algorithmically mediated visibility emerges not as a neutral distribution of information but as a form of epistemic power. This aligns with the theoretical perspective that the voices of the subaltern are not only suppressed but also rendered unintelligible within dominant knowledge production systems. In this sense, Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", becomes less about the existence of speech itself and more about the conditions under which speech becomes recognizable, credible, or socially intelligible.

Foucault's (1980) conception of the knowledge-power relationship further explains how regimes of visibility determine what becomes socially legitimate while marginalizing alternative forms of subjectivity. Spivak extends this argument by demonstrating how these exclusions intensify within gendered and postcolonial contexts, where women's voices are frequently reshaped through dominant epistemic categories. In digital environments, algorithmic systems further intensify these asymmetries by mediating visibility itself.

In parallel with these theoretical concerns, the FRA report notes that women remain disproportionately affected by online misogyny, harassment, and degrading content (FRA, 2025, pp. 15–16). Rather than isolated incidents, these patterns reflect how platform architectures and engagement-driven mechanisms may normalize gender-based hostility in digital environments. The report situates these concerns within the evolving regulatory framework of the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Artificial Intelligence Act, while also recommending that very large online platforms recognize misogyny as a systemic risk within DSA risk-assessment mechanisms (FRA, 2025, p. 46).

Overall, these findings suggest that digital violence against women should be understood not merely as online hostility but as a structural condition shaped by algorithmic visibility, unequal recognition, and platform governance practices.

Theme 2: Intersectionality and Double Oppression

Recent FRA findings and the EU Gender-Based Violence Survey further demonstrate that digital harms disproportionately affect socially marginalized women. The findings in these reports extend beyond women alone and also address the experiences of structurally vulnerable social groups, black communities, migrants, and religious minorities. However, the important point is that the report focuses especially on intersectional discrimination. In other words, gender-based discrimination becomes further intensified when combined with ethnicity, religion, migration status, sexuality, or minority identity. Postcolonial feminist theory highlights the fact that women experience different forms of oppression not only based on their gender but also in relation to the structures of colonization and global capitalism. Mohanty (2003, p. 104) claims that the plight of women in the Third World should be seen not only in the context of the patriarchal system but also as a result of structural historical relations like colonialism, class, and race. Literature often depicts such varied forms of oppression as double oppression. The notion of double oppression calls for the rethinking of feminist solidarity strategies since it represents a theoretical articulation of the manifold forms of domination that still exist today. Spivak (1988/1994, p. 287) similarly points out the epistemological implications of double oppression, contending that

women's voices are both muted by the patriarchal systems and obliterated by the colonial regimes of knowledge. Within this framework, the figure of the subaltern woman is in the subject position where double oppression is most intense; she cannot be represented in either the patriarchal system or the colonial discourse.

The report demonstrates that young women are particularly affected: 41.6% of women aged 18–29 have experienced sexual harassment at work, including technology-facilitated forms of harassment such as inappropriate advances on social media, sexually explicit emails or text messages, and exposure to explicit images or videos (FRA et al., 2024, p. 40). The report further indicates that structurally vulnerable groups experience disproportionately high levels of hate-motivated harassment, while Muslim respondents frequently report discrimination shaped simultaneously by religion, ethnicity, skin color, and migration background. Women may become marginalized both through gendered power structures and through unequal global systems of digital representation and visibility. Digital violence, from this perspective, reflects not only gender inequality but also the broader asymmetries of global digital power structures, leaving structurally vulnerable women disproportionately exposed to stereotyping, exclusion, and epistemic silencing.

Theme 3: Legal Gaps and Policies: Western-Centric Discourse and Epistemic Erasure

The introduction to the report (p. 5) mentions Directive 2024/1385, adopted by the EU on combating violence against women. This is a significant milestone in the criminalization of digital violence by explicitly defining and punishing acts such as non-consensual sharing private or altered material, stalking, harassment, and incitement to cyber violence or hatred on the basis of gender. Therefore, lawmakers acknowledge the real, tangible manifestations of digital violence and the need to legally combat them. However, the empirical data used here are from the EU Gender-Based Violence Survey, Key Results (2024), jointly published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and Eurostat. Furthermore, since the

field research was conducted before the entry into force of EU Directive 2024/1385 in 2024, the dataset does not contain statistical information on the newly defined categories of cybercrime.

Western-centric universalism embedded in this legal regulation is one of Spivak's main critiques. Indeed, according to Spivak, Western feminist theory universally assumes that gender diffuses and that the oppression suffered by women is the same irrespective of cultural, historical, and class differences. So, it disregards the individual realities of women living in different parts of the world, treating them as everyone's "victim" and thus rendering an entire group unknowable (Amos & Parmar, 1984, pp. 14-15). Spivak labels such a scenario "epistemic violence," where the legal standards and classifications that claim to be universal (of Western origin) make local/individual experiences the case and re-dominate the subaltern under the guise of representing them. The dominance of Western intellectual traditions has often meant that the subaltern is recognized only through representation, while the forms of knowledge they produce preclude the possibility of speaking on her own terms (Spivak, 1999, pp. 277-278).

Consequently, the technical and universal language of Directive 2024/1385, such as "cyber harassment" or "manipulated material," may not fully reflect the relational character of gender-based harm. This becomes evident when legal classifications transform lived experiences of violence into standardized institutional expressions, which can diminish the space for victims to express and testify. Collins and Bilge's (2016) intersectionality approach explains the underlying dynamic of this tension. Gender-based violence is not merely a single event, but rather a multi-layered power relationship formed at the intersection of other structural disadvantage axes such as class, immigration status, and racialization processes.

In legal discourse, the institutionalization of harm functions as a kind of two-way process. It makes digital violence visible within regulatory frameworks, but it also silently standardizes and transforms these lived experiences into administrative categories that can restrict how they are practically recognized. In this sense, law, while being a protective tool, also acts as a translation regime in which experience is transformed into institutionally legible categories.

This dynamic aligns with Spivak's conceptualization of epistemic violence. According to this, the discourse of the lower classes is not only suppressed but also reshaped within dominant epistemic frameworks that determine what can be said and how it can be understood. Therefore, Spivak's theoretical contribution offers a perspective for examining the conditions under which speech becomes understandable within institutional discourse.

Theme 4: Security and Rights: Epistemic Violence and Institutional Gaslighting

According to the EU Gender-based Violence Survey report, almost one-third of women in the EU have experienced gender-based violence during their lifetime, while only 6.4% have contacted helplines or victim-support services (FRA et al., 2024). The findings also show that women are increasingly exposed to online harassment, stalking, and technology-assisted violence. When the report is reinterpreted through a postcolonial feminist perspective and read alongside the FRA's findings on algorithmic bias and fundamental rights, it suggests that women belonging to Muslim, immigrant, black and other vulnerable face intersecting forms of discrimination.

According to FRA's Fundamental Rights Report (2025), digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies pose significant risks in terms of fundamental rights and non-discrimination. In particular, hate speech detection, facial recognition systems and content moderation algorithms may produce discriminatory outcomes based on ethnicity, religion, gender and immigration status. FRA's report titled Bias in algorithms- Artificial intelligence and discrimination (2022) shows that content related to these groups is coded as "risky", "offensive" or "suspicious" at a higher rate. It is also emphasized that women are one of the most frequent targets of online hate speech, digital harassment and threats. This reveals that AI systems can deepen digital discrimination by reproducing social prejudices, demonstrating that digitalization is not merely a technical transformation but a political process that restructures power relations, social inequalities, and discriminatory practices.

Accordingly, institutional reporting mechanisms operate within broader technological infrastructures that include platform moderation systems, algorithmic filtering, and automated response procedures (Gajjala, 2019, p. 194). These systems may unintentionally contribute to the fragmentation and reduction of victims' testimonies into standardized administrative categories. This process can be interpreted through the concept of institutional gaslighting. The term captures this process of systematic invalidation, in which victims' accounts are delayed, questioned, or bureaucratically reframed, leading to diminished trust in formal reporting channels (Fricker, 2007, p. 43). The low helpline uptake (6.4%) can thus be interpreted in relation to broader FRA (2025) findings on unequal exposure to violence, digital harassment, and barriers to reporting across different social groups. Crucially, if even this aggregated baseline reveals minimal institutional engagement, the barriers are likely magnified for women at the intersection of multiple axes of disadvantage—whose experiences are precisely those rendered least intelligible within standardized reporting frameworks. Within this framework, institutional mediation becomes part of the epistemic environment through which digital violence is processed, filtered, and rendered partially visible.

Such dynamics align with this understanding of epistemic violence, in which subalternity is not only a condition of exclusion but also one of constrained intelligibility within dominant systems of knowledge production. In the digital sphere, this manifests as a narrowing of testimonial space within both technological infrastructures and institutional support systems, reinforcing conditions under which certain experiences of violence become less audible, less legible, and less actionable.

Discussion and Conclusion

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has become one of the main theoretical interventions within postcolonial critique. Spivak shows that when colonialism and patriarchy meet, the voices of people who are marginalized, especially women, are not just muted. They are also made epistemically impossible to represent, an epistemological impasse at the level of knowledge itself.

Today, that same sort of silence is reproduced in digital spaces. While many platforms advertise inclusion and visibility, they also create new and more pervasive pathways for gender-based violence. Acts such as cyber harassment, online stalking, the circulation of non-consensual material, and hate speech function as structural mechanisms that constrain women's presence in the digital public sphere and contribute to their withdrawal from digital participation.

Looking at the EU Gender-Based Violence Survey (FRA et al., 2024), the analysis suggests that although the report acknowledges digital violence and also lays out a framework, the current methodology still does not fully capture the particularity of violence enabled by technology. In particular, bundling lived experiences like cyberstalking and online stalking into broad categories such as "harassment" and "stalking" blurs their differences at an analytical level, with the result that the distinct mechanisms of digital violence are partially hidden.

In addition, cross-national methodological differences in data collection processes, especially inconsistencies in the implementation of self-administered questionnaires across European Union Member States, undermine the comparability of data on technology-facilitated violence. This issue is particularly significant because digital violence constitutes a highly stigmatized research domain. Concerns related to privacy, fear, and shame may discourage participants from disclosing their experiences, thereby increasing the likelihood of underreporting. These findings suggest that digital violence is rendered invisible not only at the content level but also through data production regimes and institutional classification practices. Digital violence constitutes a structural inequality embedded within and reproduced through specific digital infrastructures, platform architectures, algorithmic design, and data regimes.

This study proposes the concept of "digital subalternity" to account for the specific configuration of epistemic silence described by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the digital context. In contrast to Spivak's classical formulation of subalternity, digital subalternity is characterized not only by invisibility but also by a contradictory condition of hyper-visibility coupled with a lack of epistemic recognition. The digital subaltern subject

occupies a structural position in which, despite being visible in online environments, their voice is not recognized as legitimate knowledge at institutional, algorithmic, and epistemic levels.

Women may become hyper-visible on digital platforms as victims of harassment, objects of algorithmic circulation, or subjects of viral content. However, this visibility is not reflected in mechanisms of institutional protection, political representation, or discursive recognition. Therefore, it is critical to develop independent oversight mechanisms, particularly for algorithmic visibility regimes that amplify online misogyny.

The analysis shows that digital subalternity is not a one-dimensional form of domination but is produced at the intersection of patriarchal structures, Western-centric algorithmic systems, and data colonialism. In this context, hashtag activism has emerged as a significant site of political intervention, particularly through digital feminist movements such as #MeToo. It renders women's experiences visible, expands transnational solidarity networks, and circulates practices of collective feminist witnessing. However, current findings indicate that digital visibility does not necessarily translate into structural transformation. The circulation of feminist discourse within platform capitalism may lead to the individualization of resistance narratives and the reconfiguration of political claims in accordance with algorithmic logics of visibility.

Similarly, such regimes often incorporate feminist demands into short-term attention cycles while failing to translate visibility into sustained institutional accountability. Moreover, the increased circulation of feminist content may simultaneously intensify anti-feminist mobilizations, online harassment, and digital misogyny. In the Turkish context, despite its capacity to foster feminist activism, solidarity, and counter-public formation, digital activism exposes activists to burnout, secondary trauma, online targeting, and surveillance mechanisms. For this reason, hashtag activism should not be understood as a fully emancipatory space; rather, it constitutes a contradictory terrain of struggle in which women's voices gain audibility while epistemic legitimacy and structural transformation remain fragile and contested.

The findings of this study suggest that digital violence against women cannot be adequately explained through individual safety strategies or platform content moderation policies alone. Rather, digital violence should be understood as a structural and epistemic form of inequality perpetuated through algorithmic visibility regimes, platform governance, and digital knowledge production processes. Consequently, transforming the conditions of digital subalternity requires coordinated intervention not only from policymakers and international institutions but also from technology companies, regulatory bodies, civil society actors, and transnational feminist networks. In this context, the development of multi-layered institutional, methodological, and governance-based strategies for the prevention of digital violence is of critical importance.

Accordingly, existing institutional frameworks for measuring, reporting, and preventing digital violence against women require a more inclusive and structural redesign. First, future research and survey designs should develop a disaggregated and dedicated module on such violence. These forms of violence should be categorized according to platform type, perpetrator–victim relationship, and the nature of harm, ensuring that experiences such as cyberstalking are not obscured under broad categories such as "harassment" or "stalking."

In addition, cross-national methodological differences in data collection processes, especially inconsistencies in the implementation of self-administered questionnaires across European Union Member States, undermine the comparability of data on digital violence. Standardizing such questionnaires across Member States would enhance the methodological reliability of comparative data on digital violence.

To enhance the institutional recognition of digital violence, technology-facilitated forms of harassment should be monitored as a distinct category in workplace-based research. In particular, inappropriate approaches, sexually explicit messages, and persistent online communication practices should be reported and evaluated independently of physical or verbal forms of harassment. In addition, helplines and victim support mechanisms across the European Union should be strengthened through specialized training programs addressing the psychological impacts of digital violence, online trauma, and digital evidence procedures.

Developing trauma-informed support mechanisms can contribute to the institutional recognition of not only physical but also epistemic and psychological harms experienced by women in digital environments.

However, recognizing that digital violence cannot be explained solely through individual user behavior, stronger regulatory mechanisms are required in the domains of platform governance and algorithmic accountability. Independent regulatory bodies, either within the European Commission or through transnational frameworks, should oversee social media platforms in relation to gender-based algorithmic bias, visibility suppression, and content moderation practices.

Such mechanisms should be capable of demanding algorithmic transparency, implementing corrective interventions, and mitigating the reproduction of gendered digital inequalities. Furthermore, rethinking digital literacy policies through a feminist digital citizenship framework can foster critical awareness among younger users regarding online misogyny, algorithmic manipulation, and digital safety.

The main limitation of this study is its reliance on aggregated survey data that does not differentiate digital violence from other forms of violence. Future research should therefore adopt mixed methods designs combining survey data with in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, and platform analysis. Comparative studies of platform ecologies, such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, and encrypted messaging applications, would further enhance understanding of how technical architectures shape women's digital visibility, vulnerability, and epistemic positioning.

This also points to a broader methodological and epistemological challenge for future research. Studies on digital violence, discrimination, and online hate cannot assume that institutional categories or standardized research instruments operate as fully neutral mechanisms of representation. Researchers themselves must remain critically attentive to the epistemic assumptions embedded in processes of data collection, categorization, and interpretation, particularly when working on issues related to race, ethnicity, religion, migration, and other forms of structural vulnerability. Otherwise, research frameworks may unintentionally reproduce the very hierarchies of visibility and exclusion they seek to critique.

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