



Male Perception of Female Participation and VAW on the Virtual Learning App – “Hallo”

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Abstract

This study explored men’s perception of women’s participation and VAW (Violence against women) on an online learning platform called “Hallo”. Based on the analysis of in-depth interviewed data collected from male users of the application, the study found that men hold an egalitarian view in respect of the participation of their female counterparts. Though the majority of the men perceived the platform as a tool for women’s empowerment through educative elements, exchange of knowledge, language learning opportunities, and development of communication skills, they did not fail to give proper attention to women’s safety on this digital podium. Emphasis was given on women’s ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘awareness’ to handle violence perpetrated by male users against them. Primarily, cultural and religious boundaries, strengthened by patriarchy, were marked as leading determiners of women’s communication leeway in the learning space. Besides that, the normalization of violence was found justified by divergent labels such as ‘mere amusement’, ‘right to freedom of expression’, or ‘temporary moral shift’. Moreover, the study discovered that women of Asian and Arab origins get victimized specifically for their stereotypical feminine temperament while rude talking patterns, fame motives, or dating intentions are considered liable for violence against women regardless of their race, color, creed, or location.

Keywords: male perception, online learning platform, patriarchy.

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INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, new media has unbarred immense opportunities for communicative, informative, and educational purposes. The expansion of new media is propagating the presence of fastest-growing users with ‘digital citizenship’ status. ICT- navigated new media has not constricted the virtual benefits within national boundaries and specific time sections. Rather, global commitments, responsibilities, and opportunities are shared across borders by the blessings of communicative functions with technological advances. Despite the fact that web-enabled amenities are supposed to be the tools to endorse equal digital rights for all, violence and discrimination on the basis of gender, race, caste, or creed is commonplace. The technology-driven era offers multiple available applications to install for specific use. As stated by Dermawan et al (2020), the need for the use of information technology to support online assessment. To serve the educative and knowledge-sharing purpose, the rise of different applications is embraced worldwide. For example the benefits of digital applications that help virtual learning (Simamora 2020). However, women are globally lagging behind men in internet adoption. For instance, 327 million fewer women than men can afford a minimum digital cell phone with internet access (OED, 2018). According to the World Wide Web Foundation and the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), an all-inclusive male presence is 21% more likely to be online than women’s and in the least developed countries it is estimated at 52% (The Guardian, 2021). No doubt, the reasons behind such a digital gender gap are related to socio-cultural norms, economic factors, and safety concerns. In this struggling digital journey, women who are trying to partake in the online world cannot be exempted from a pervasive phenomenon called ‘Gender-based violence’ concerning the affair of violent actions and attitudes online, women appear as a significant victim population. However, such victimization receives less attention and is intended to keep separated from real-world exploitation of women. The attempt of drawing the distinction between the “real” and “virtual” world demonstrates the exertion to reject the notion that cyberspace is a public domain (Todd, 2017). Vulnerabilities, inequalities, and violence in different forms experienced by women online are not discussed with the same importance that is given to gender-based violence in reality since virtual violence rarely brings about direct physical harm to victims in the first place.

Furthermore, the right to freedom of speech, lack of proper check on unregulated violence, and scope to maintain an anonymous identity allow men to practice hegemonic masculine culture, reinforced by patriarchy, online without getting restricted (Aziz n.d.). Apparently, physical harm has less association with online violence but mental health outcomes resulting from misogyny, bullying, harassment, hate speech, and abuse cause unbounded suffering in women's lives. For example the narrative presented by (Judge, 2020) illustrates that universities in Saudi Arabia are still dominated by traditional patriarchal consciousness. It is necessary to supplement that gender equality as a fundamental human rights concern, demands a place in ICT provisions alike other areas such as education, well-being, employment, and the decision-making process (Aziz n.d.) to favor the global community as a whole. Promoting gender equality through access to ICTs and SNSs (Social Networking Sites) secures women's digital empowerment and capacity to exercise agency. However, women's freedom of expression and speech as well as access to information, knowledge, and communicative content in virtual space confront challenges due to gender-based violence. The challenges women face on diverse online platforms are getting well-documented by growing research efforts. Nevertheless, men's perception of women's participation and violence against them still demands ample concentration. Considering the significance of understanding how men appraise the existing culture related to women's presence and VAW (Violence against Women) on learning application, this study has taken Hallo, a digital space, into account.

Hallo is a learning application that brings global learners to a real-time platform with a view to assisting them in improving their competence in English. It ensures interactive communication between English language learners and qualified teachers with linguistic expertise through live classes, one-on-one room, or group talk arrangements. The learners from one place also can easily connect and converse with others from different geographical locations through Instamatch (person-to-person) or Livestream (airing a session to have a conversation with a group of people) options anytime. Costless conversation facilities between users and low-price English learning classes have aided Hallo to attain worldwide popularity expeditiously over the years. Since its inception, Hallo has been devoted to preserving a safe, pleasant, and friendly environment for global users with

updated guidelines. It retains a firm commitment to refrain and safeguard individuals from violence, threats, harassment, and hateful conduct based on race, faith, nationality, ethnic origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, and physical aspects, injurious to physical and mental health. Furthermore, it has adopted an uncompromising stance against impersonating content and compartments, sexually explicit materials, obscene activities, and spiteful conduct. Discussion on sensitive issues including religious and political beliefs, swearing remarks, and romance are highly discouraged on the platform to conserve the goodness of the learners' community. Breaching the code of conduct results in suspension of different lengths and ban evasion may bring about unspecified suspension, as per the policy of this application. However, to which extent Hallo is successful in Policy implementation cannot be acknowledged without analyzing the real experiences of the users in regard to communication with strangers from anywhere with different intentions.

Literature Search and Justification of the Study

Gender-based violence in virtual space adopted different names such as gender-based online violence (GBOV) or online misogyny and myriad forms that apply the "silencing strategies" toward women (Zaman, 2021a). According to General Recommendation 19 of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), women get affected by violence because of their gender identity, and such violence in different forms harms women physically, mentally, or sexually. CEDAW General Recommendations 35 additionally manifested that gender-based violence occurs in every sphere of interaction and setting, from public to private zones including technology-mediated domains and digital environments (CEDAW, 1992 as cited in Van Der Wilk and Natter, 2018). Myriad forms of violence like abuse, hate speech, cyber-attack, cyberbullying, hacking, stalking, intimidating and controlling, doxing (exploring and publishing private data), flaming, trolling, outing, upskirting, violation of privacy, sending hurtful messages, image manipulation, online pornography, insult, threat, humiliation, aggression, sexual and discriminatory comments, revenge porn, denigration, digital voyeurism, rape threat, and facilitation of sex trafficking have their breeding ground in the digital space. (Todd, 2017; Melović et al. 2020; Musso, 2019; Özsungur, 2021; Van Der Wilk and Natter, 2018; Zaman,

2021a; Thakur et al. 2015). Apparently, the range of VAW online and its meaning cannot be covered by a single definition, given that it absorbs evasive and newly appearing dimensions (Musso, 2019; Melović et al. 2020). The common intentions of VAW online include targeting women and girls to denigrate, embarrass and frighten them. It is estimated that 80% of women face online threats daily (Henry and Powell 2016). Women of the 18-24 age range have been found as a vulnerable category in many studies whose experience of online violence, abuse, and sexual harassment is higher than that of other age groups (Melović et al. 2020; Thakur et al. 2015; Duggan, 2014; PRC, 2017 as cited in Musso, 2019). In their study, Melović et al. (2020) showed that single and divorced women are more exposed to online violence than married ones and higher academic qualifications of women decrease the chances to be victimized since educated women are cognizant of better usage of digital resources, handling private information and securing their own presence online. Relatedly, a study found that women's behavioral changes such as censoring their own posts, modifying strategies to use the platforms, curbing interactions, and even permanent retirement from the platforms crop up just after they experience violence on the internet (Amnesty International, 2018). Virtual violence has an immediate impact on women's physical and psychological health. It leads to 'real' aftermaths in the forms of panic attacks, sleeping disorders, headaches, anxiety, depression, isolation, and embarrassed mood that bring adverse effects to women's health metabolism. (Amnesty 2017 as cited in Musso, 2019; Ehman & Gross, 2019; Martínez-Montegudo et al. 2020; Özsungur, 2021)

Patriarchy determines women's socially constructed inferiority to men's power position as well as different communication patterns for both genders (Zaman, 2021b). The socialization process in patriarchal culture put the genders under the compulsion of using verbal and non-verbal expressions distinctively (Nelson and Brown, 2012) which reflects women's engagement in "rapport talk" or "private talk" and men's engagement in "report talk" or "public talk" (Tannen, 1990). Tannen (1990) also emphasized that status-seeking efforts are visible in men through their task-oriented talk while women's efforts go for seeking intimacy through relationship-oriented talk. Stereotypical and normative behaviors of women are expected in a male-authorized setting even if it is a virtual platform

(Houser, 2005; Zaman, 2021b). Women's emancipation in digital space gets obstructed by patriarchy that legitimates violence against women (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller, 1999 as cited in Özsungur, 2021). Like offline VAW, online abuse is normalized in comprehensive discourse that nurtures the dominant gender relations model (Hlavka, 2014). In the attempt to separate the real world from the internet, male online users' violent attitudes, actions, and speech become overlooked or concealed either due to a lack of identification arrangements, absence of integrated regulations and accountability, or in the name of promoting freedom of expression (Van Der Wilk and Natter, 2018). Perpetrators of the vast majority of the cyber crimes against women are men and this fact is easily condoned. Özsungur (2021) strongly claimed that the goal of such perpetration is to destruct women's career development, suppress them emotionally and psychologically, and damage their dignity, reputation, and social position. He, further, denoted that VAW in digital space occurs and increases rapidly through tools like computer games, social media, cyberwarfare, e-contents, and mobile applications. Moreover, he pointed out mere entertainment, psychological instability, the extremity of faith, racist outlook, and impersonation as motivations for VAW online. In the huge world of virtual networking, conserving the nomadic status is a five-finger exercise. Absence of identification grants perpetrators the privilege to spend moral holidays in virtual space. However, Van Der Wilk and Natter (2018) believe that anonymity facilitates easy access to the virtual world for women, especially, in cases of executing political engagements, different activism, and movement as well as seeking information from varied online resources. When ensuring safety rules with specialized mechanisms by private entities and intermediaries is proved hard, instead of confirming safety for women online, advice to exercise caution is provided since new media is considered a risk zone for women (Rai, 2017). In their study, Thakur et al. (2015) suggested women use digital tools confidently, be cautious while sharing any stuff on social media applications, and maintain their own safety by using feasible and protective passwords and security software. Feminist scholarship criticizes the existing research on VAW online due to some facts such as the subject area lacks gendered analysis, VAW online is considered different from offline ones, and victims' experiences and its influence are hardly ever taken into account for conventional scholarly discussion (Lewis et al. 2016).

Academic effort and grey literature in diverse scientific disciplines rarely ever demonstrated collaborative dialogues regarding VAW in digital space. Existing Scientific pieces of literature largely concentrate on definition, typology, methodological resemblances, and differences with regard to the topic namely experience of violence on virtual platforms, empirical evidence of victimization of women in cyber socializingpodiums, violation of women's digital rights, discrimination in digital citizenship, suggestive guidelines for women's safety online, determinants of perpetrator and victim behavior, etc. On a sad note, literature on legal frameworks and mechanisms taken by internet intermediaries provides directions on a local basis ignoring the borderless nature of the internet. Though vast literature on women's challenges of digital participation and VAW online have been developed epitomizing women's experiences, investigating men's perception of the very subject is unavailable. Moreover, VAW online appearsmostly, in reference to women's partaking in popular social media sites and platforms. Learning sites and applications with added 'socializing' features have almost never been considered to scrutinize women's exposure to violence. To fill the knowledge gap, this study aimed at inquiring about how men view women's participation and gender-based violence directed at their female counterparts on the learning application called 'Hallo'.

Conceptual Underpinnings

This study has employedsome concepts from existing literatures and tried to interlink them to achieve the goal of the study. Along with the conceptualization of power relations and VAW in the communication vernacular, the role of patriarchy in cyber violence and women's exclusion in digital space has been discussed. Moreover, an attempt was involved to inspect the barriers to women's empowerment, rights, and access to the virtual realm. Execution of the analysis has been done based on these conceptual underpinnings.

Communication, Power Relations, and VAW

Views of communication, having their origin in religion, received prominence in the parlance of transferring messages. From the consideration of Carey (2008), the transmission model of communication aspires to hold sway over space, individuals, and society as a whole through the movement of information.

Maintenance of society in a given time appeared back-to-back, under the aegis of a ritual view that concentrated on the portrayal of shared belief, common attributes, and companionship. Imparting information reinforced by expressions such as social integration, cohesiveness, association, participation, and ownership of shared faith has feasible significance in social transition and collective transformation (Foucault and Melican, 2007 as cited in Zaman, 2021a). On a different note, Mumby (1989) confirmed that ideologically, the process of constructing meaning-led communication denotes and engages in the production and reproduction of relations of domination. Communication yields and distributes dominant ideological texts related to social reality for the majority of the population and seeks approval even from the oppressed to ensure stable social order (Cloud, 1996 as cited in Mumby, 1997). As a component of shared beliefs, religious ideology along with male chauvinistic ethos attempts to control the freedom and agency of women. (Zaman, 2021a). SNSs as the station of “social and cultural reproduction” resemble the archetype of the real space (Williams, 2006) where styles of communication, abuse, and victimization differ based on gender identity (Herring, 2004; Halder and Jaishankar, 2009). Resolute exhibition of masculine mannerism is commonplace on SNSs that attempt to seize women’s ‘digital citizenship’ with absolute victimization (Vrooman, 2002; Citron and Norton, 2011). On another note, Kelly (2013) argued that the concept of violence itself is gendered and patriarchy offers the natural comprehension of violence through masculinized language and culture. Putting men in the position of a perpetrator of violence does not necessarily portray women as victimized figures without criticism. The notion demonstrated by Kelly (2013) showcased women’s feverish and provocative behavior as responsible for cyber abuse and victimization.

Influence of Patriarchy, Cyber Violence, and Women’s Exclusion

Gendered communication patterns in virtual space determined by patriarchal directives grant men the privilege of exercising the similar authority practiced in the real world. In a borderless arena of cyberspace, women’s choice of wording, topics of conversation, and way of verbal expression are expected to be representative of norms framed by patriarchy (Kramarae 1981). Power-privileged position of men in a patriarchal backdrop is the leading component that allows men to manage gendered communication focusing on triple objectives including

maintaining more superiority over women, exploiting women, and preserving their status quo (Zaman, 2021b). Patriarchy triggers a clear illustration of the gendered socialization process, female subordination, and sexism that have a succeeding contribution to violence against women in different forms. Pertinently, unequal gendered construction in the existing real world gets reproduced online and legitimizes the domination of masculine abuses towards women (Todd, 2017). Women's fear of exclusion resulting from men's operative control obstructs their digital citizenship as a means to avail the fullest freedom in cyberspace (Rukhsana, 2018 and Žegarac, 1998 as cited in Zaman, 2021b). Since cyberspace is considered an unlocked expanse for democracy and freedom of expression, violent perpetrations take shape by the motivations like mere entertainment, frustration, and joking by men, reflecting as efforts to exclude women from online public spaces; and sadly, exclusionary internet where gendered facts replicate the offline patriarchal values, women's appeal for online presence on an equal footing is deliberately ignored (Lewis et al. 2016).

Women's Access To Virtual Space, Empowerment, And Equal Rights

Virtual space is a podium to exchange borderless knowledge, perspectives, ideas, and thoughts. Though new virtual platforms have arrived to afford freedom and empowerment through exposure, it hardly could set off its image as an 'agent of social change' since its influence excludes the notion of gender neutrality and equal rights for all regardless of gender (Geniets, 2010 as cited in Rai, 2017). Zaman (2021b) demonstrated that virtual identity is mostly reflected by women's social class and image, personal preference, and academic literacy. The exploitation of women's participation in digital space runs under the control of the patriarchal setting and socio-economic circumstances determine their accessibility to virtual environments (Zaman, 2021b). Access to virtual provisions has nothing to do with worthwhile development and empowerment of women unless the most beneficial usage of the provisions acts as an indicator of confirming women's agency through their own process (Buskens and Webb, 2009). Gender-based violence online threatens women's agency and equal rights in the virtual space. According to United Nations's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting women's empowerment through enabling information and communication technology can be

attainable only if “End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls” (Goal 5, Target 5.1) is ensured (United Nations, 2015).

Normalizing Perpetrators’ Behavior vs Curtailing Women’s Rights

The approach to individual human rights in terms of freedom of expression has universal and inalienable nature which is protected by international human rights law. The right to freedom of expression without interference is not restricted but should follow the duties and responsibilities involved, to ensure respect and rights for all engaged parties (Aziz n.d.). Freedom of speech in virtual space too often engages in a skirmish with gendered violence online (Suzor et al. 2018). The idyllic perception of cyberspace as an intangible and borderless arena conceals abusive culture toward women that silence their voice by threatening their rights to speech and expression they are entitled to (Franks 2011). In accord with the dedication of International Human Rights instruments, open access to ICT platforms does not promote any individual’s freedom of expression with the sacrifice of women’s rights, freedom, and safety (Aziz n.d.). However, the consideration of virtual space as separated from real-world benefits abusers in disguising their identities and limits women’s capabilities to make the most beneficial uses of provisions online which is a limp denial of women’s human rights (Todd, 2017). The masculinized violent attitude and online misogyny conclude to silencing women by neglecting their rights to free speech and expression (United Nations, 2015). Biased policies and configurations by media on violence promote the normalization of the continuum of VAW (Violence against Women) from the gender-neutral and individual phenomenon. The gender-neutral phenomenon manifests cyberspace as an open ground to exercise freedom of speech for all regardless of their gender whereas the individual phenomenon indicates women’s responsibilities pertaining to protection against cyber violence. Both phenomena reflect that the silencing strategies in the disguise of normalizing violence against women keep the victim’s perspective well-concealed (Van Der Wilk and Natter, 2018). Furthermore, silencing policies and approaches benefit the perpetrators, contribute to women’s cyber disempowerment, and cause their consequential psychological disorders (Zaman, 2021a; Rai, 2017; Backe et al. 2018; Özsungur, 2021; Jane, 2014 as cited in Lewis et al. 2016). Additionally, anonymous identity acts as a boon for the perpetrators to harm women virtually and obstructs

women's rights to participate in online space (Van Der Wilk and Natter, 2018).

METHODS

The study aims at discovering the reality of women's engagement and violent treatment towards them on an interactive and educative podium, from men's perceptive understanding. To apprehend how men view women's presence, participation, and VAW on a web-mediated learning platform, Hallo has been chosen as an experimental study setting. Since the study aspired to unearth the findings from a global perspective, the selection of Hallo as the study context was utterly rational.

The study is qualitative in nature that employed simple random sampling to gather representative respondents from the desired study population. The respondents of the study were picked randomly from the one-on-one conversation option of Hallo called instamatch. 78 attempts were made to reach the genuine respondents from instamatch. 23 of them were counted as non-response and were excluded due to the incompleteness of the information provided by the respondents. Incomplete interviews occurred due to some reasons such as network error, hanging up the call by the respondent in the middle of the conversation, and the disinterest of the respondent to carry on the conversation till the last minute. 55 complete interviews were considered to work on and thus N=55 arrived as the final sample size. The respondents of the study represent diversity in regard to geographical location, culture, customs, ideology, and beliefs. Since the Indian users are the majority in the application, they have represented the highest number (n=15) among respondents. Participation from Pakistan (n=10) followed by India, was portrayed as the second-largest respondent population. The following responses came from Indonesia (n=5), and Egypt (n=3) respectively. The random effort of the selection process reported the second lowest participation (n=2) from each of the countries namely Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Turkey. Russia, Mongolia, Finland, Iraq, Algeria, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Chili, Sweden, Netherlands, Hungary, Iran, and the UAE represented the lowest participation. Each of these countries displayed the least engagement (n=1). The majority of the respondents (n=23) were found pursuing a tertiary level of study at university. Very few (n=5) were found with 'jobless' status. The rest of the respondents (n=27) came from

different professional backgrounds. Four age groups were formulated to understand the propensity of availing of the application by the users. 20-29 age group was documented consisting of the highest participation (n=47). The second-largest response (n=6) was derived from the 30-39 age group. Single response (n=1) was obtained from both the 40-50 age group and the under 20 age -category.

In-depth interviews were conducted as a data collection technique to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of the respondents on the research topic in detail. Each of the 55 interviews, running for approximately an hour, was operated with a semi-structured questionnaire. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed later. Revising the transcribed data many a time was a requirement for generating initial codes to analyze the interviewed data thematically. The themes were taken from the narrations of respondents and delivered for the manual analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Men's Attitude towards Women's Participation on Halloapp

It is a well-established fact regarding gender relations that male-controlled power dynamics stimulate discriminatory treatment toward women. The prevailing gender ideology strengthened by patriarchy creates obstacles for women to participate in different areas of life including the web-mediated virtual world and such a notion is partially disproved in this study. The positive attitude of men towards their female counterparts in terms of participation on Hallo has covered the areas like women's rights, equal digital citizenship, access to digital platforms, empowerment, and advice for women to avoid unpleasant experiences. A handful of men's inclination was associated with religious precepts and cultural norms that determine the extent to which women are able to exercise their agency in virtual space.

Right to Equality

The preponderance of egalitarian view in the study evidenced a positive masculine spirit that advocates equal footing of women with men to secure a potent

learning community on Hallo. Having contemplated the very fact that all people, regardless of gender, have the right to be treated equally, the majority of the respondents supported women's equal participation in the application geared towards leisure pursuit, development of communication skills, learning English, fraternization with global circles, etc.

“We all are human and we deserve the same platforms and consideration. I suggest all my friends, both men and women use the application and get benefits from it.”- (Riaz, 24 years old, from India)

“In this world, women have the same rights as men. There is no difference between gender in terms of seeking opportunities and no restriction for anyone to use this application.”- (Ehsan, 24 years old, from Afghanistan)

The unbiased statements reflect the healthy approach of male allies for equal rights to digital citizenship regardless of gender. However, male dominance over women is obvious that has been condemned by a piece of an egalitarian mind-

“This application is available for everyone. But I found many ignorant men who will say women should not use this application. I question their mentality.”- (Ahmed, 23 years old, from Sudan)

Right to Digital Empowerment

The dogma of digital empowerment does not end up with pontificating about how accessible a platform is to its users. How much agency the users can exercise on the reachable podium is equally important to consider. Such a notion procured validation from many of the responses in this study. The interviewees indicated women's comfortability and self-confidence as preconditions for using the application and handling violent treatment from men towards them.

“Women have the right to improve their learning skills, exchange their perspectives, and develop their full potential. The Halloapp makes these provisions accessible to them. So, why will women lag behind in the process of empowering themselves through the scopes of learning and sharing knowledge?”- (Mustafa, 20 years old, from Pakistan).

In a virtual platform like Hallo, gaining borderless access to knowledge exchange and learning is an enormous lead for everyone to empower themselves worthfully. Some benefactors highlighted this boon of Hallo and echoed their

opinion in favor of women's empowerment.

“Women should be confident during interactive communication with men on this platform but they should not be convinced by men. They should be fearless of men's baleful behavior.” (Pavan, 27 years old, from India)

Women's Communication Leeway as Determined by Men

The shared belief and attitude of men concerning women's communication margin in a global society like Halo have been traced as an illustration of a partly positive masculine construction. Nonetheless, the study observed that the likelihood of producing and reproducing the relations of domination and subordination on the platform is not entirely absent. Patriarchal cultural norms and religious ideology are two leading elements that influenced some of the respondents' reflections on women's participation in the application-

“Women should not use this application. Their communication pattern might be polite and modest, but when they keep using this application on a routine basis, they will get deviated morally. I will never allow my daughter, sister, or wife to use it.”- (Ahmed, 30 years old, from Egypt)

The abovementioned assertion demonstrated that men discern their moral disposition as superiorly stronger than that of women. It also indicated men's domineering attitude toward controlling women's freedom and agency both in the private and public domain (e.g. -digital space)

“When you think about women grooming in the Muslim communities, you will find that they do not have enough opportunity to be confident in communication. This application might be a platform for them to socialize. But I think if a Muslim girl's family does not allow her to access the application, she should obey the family's decision. She should follow the Islamic boundaries.” (Shami, 29 years old, from Pakistan)

Patriarchal values in the dominant religious cultures contribute to impeding women's access to opportunities and resources. Communication with the opposite gender even in the case of necessity is discouraged by conservative cultural practices inspired by religious ethos. Women's submissive temperament and obedience to family judgment are expected by male-dominated religious cultures at the expense of deducting their goals and aspirations in life. However, it is important to note that the dominant Holy scriptures have not disallowed women from receiving

educative opportunities. Most of the time, mis (interpretation-analysis-understanding) of the sacred texts get employed for women's affairs only. The way the respondent named Shami approached the religious boundary for women was a clear mark of a double standard mindset. In Islam, if communication with the opposite gender encompasses certain guidelines, the guidelines are applicable to both men and women, not only to a specific gender. Sometimes, men create borderlines about women's presence and participation in different features of Hallo considering the features as threats to women-

“Girls should talk only on instamatch. No talk on chat. It's a problem. Slowly, slowly bad boys will send them texts and videos.” (Hamid, 29 years old, from Pakistan)

Like men, women have the right to freedom of expression. In addition, they have the liberty to choose the space and features of an application where they feel comfortable communicating. Excluding a feature due to the suspected probability of gender-based violence is ill-advised documentation, particularly when an application (Hallo) encompasses blocking and reporting options if needed.

Women's Safety

Nearly all of the responses in the study portrayed unanimous opinions on women's safety on Hallo. In accordance with their perceptions, the application is a safe platform for women since none can track their location, personal information, Id, photograph, or contact details unless they provide these willingly. Moreover, the respondents identified options like blocking the perpetrators and declining or disconnecting their calls as safety keys, in case the perpetrators try to flirt, abuse, or deliver bad comments or seductive content to the women. Apart from that, few responses reflected the strict policy of Hallo to protect its users –

“If anyone does something wrong, Halloapp management will take action against it. They will block or ban the person permanently. So, people are careful here.” (Muhammed, 26 years old, from India)

Considering the above-mentioned disclosure, it cannot be claimed that Halloapp is completely a violence-free platform. Notable incidents of violence occur on the application as assumed by one of the respondents –

“You know men are the majority on this application. 70% of users are male. Among them, you will find a huge number of dirty minds who target female users in different ways.” (Ahmed, 30 years old, from Egypt)

Though different security recourses and roles of the application’s safety policy were highlighted in men’s acknowledgment, women’s responsibility to ensure their own safety was emphasized with paramount significance. In this matter, religious aspects and assumed outcome of women’s intentions appeared through some narrations –

“Girls should take their own responsibilities. According to Islam, they should know what to follow and what not, what is prohibited and what not.” (Ben, 21 years old, from Iraq)

“If women limit to give the men the opportunity, none can harm them. On the other hand, if they share privacy and secrets of their life, men will definitely take chance.” (Behelol, 25 years old, from Pakistan)

On a different note, a generalized view concerning protection from violence has been noted also. Normally, societal norms conventionalize the significance of practicing good behavior which is deemed as a prerequisite to earning respect from others in return. However, norms are practiced unaccustomedly. In addition, violence against women is perpetrated in disguise and progressively became a stereotyped exercise. In this instance, for women, experiencing good manners from men without fail is a questionable matter.

“This platform is the same for both men and women. If you behave in a good way, you will receive the same behavior.” (Thime, 26 years old, from Nepal)

Indeed, Thime’s commentary illustrates a positive outlook. However, the very saying “courtesy begets courtesy” is not always a fact in reality. Since the world has been propagating the culture of gender-based violence for centuries, it became a normalized practice and unpreventable phenomenon. So, when violence against women is taking place irrespective of time and space, it is hard to expect that women will not face violence in any form, even if their behavior towards perpetrators is always well.

Violence Victimization of Women: Men's View from Women's Experiences

"As compared to other apps, this app is a bit safe. But regarding gender, people face problems. Specifically, if you are a girl, you will surely face difficulties from boys anywhere including online platforms." (Behlol, 25 years old, from Pakistan)

Violence against women is considered a commonly practiced norm far and wide. This fact was corroborated by the above statement. Hodgson and Hudson (2001) found a consistently highly significant negative relationship between women's subordination at the household level and national health outcomes. Another example comes from Indonesia. Asnawi et al (2018) stated that one of the injustices that women get is in the context of heirs. Daughters and wives or widows in the customary law of Lampung Pepadun Marga Anak Tuha are not entitled to inheritance rights. Even in the case of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation there is an unequal gender distribution. Falcon and Carmen (2022) stated that most of the victims were women and girls, and men were among the traffickers.. Even the respondent's emphasis on 'online space' specified the growing trend of victimization of women just because of the 'gender identity' they hold. Patriarchal ideology legitimizes violence against women in multi forms regardless of space and normalizes perpetrators' violent behavior. Since virtual space resembles the real world, violence against women occurring in the online space is taken into account as a normal phenomenon. Moreover, the violence (in the name of 'difficulties') women experience on online platforms, gets overlooked frequently for two reasons. Firstly, the violent action of men online does not seem to be as harmful as physical violence in the real world. Secondly, violent materials like bad comments, judgment, insults, or criticisms are delivered to women in a way that men recognize them as either joking or freedom of expression. Taking the events of violence lightly shrinks the learning process and communication range of women on popular platforms like Hallo. Furthermore, many women's presence and participation might fall at risk of getting compromised because of disrespectful attitudes and actions from many of their male speaking partners.

In the study, the aspects of gender-based violence were accumulated from men's narrations. These narrations have counted on the women's experiences of

violence on Hallo. The men came across the experiences of their female counterparts during the random talk on instamatch. The bright side noted was many describers did not expose the identities of their female speaking partners who went through violent victimization. Most of the respondents mentioned that verbal abuse, insult, bullying, receiving hurtful messages, and discriminatory comments are common forms of violence that women experience in the application. As per the thoughts of some respondents, a significant number of male abusers use the application to pass their time and harass women fervently. Moreover, among the informants, a few underscored 'frustration of the perpetrators' as one of the leading causes behind the occurrence of violence against women in the digital space like Hallo-

“Actually, some men are frustrated. When they cannot manage a relationship in real life, they just try to chase women on virtual platforms like Hallo.” (Bhupesh, 26 years old, from India)

“Some non-sense people get introduced and start chatting with vulgar words or sex talk. They want to keep girlfriends. They cannot propose to anyone in real life but wants virtual hug and kiss from girls.” (Raj, 25 years old, from Nepal)

Failure in a love relationship or the absence of an intimate companion in the real-world results in frustration among many men. Consequently, they prefer to enter in digital space and commit VAW in different manifestations. The anonymous identity is a privilege for these men that encourages them to regard the learning application as a dating site when in real life, they avoid chasing girls due to fear of rejection or humiliation. In this point of discussion, the appalling fact discovered is that not only the offline perpetrators of VAW but also the offline gentlemen, to some extent, target online to spend their moral holidays.

Normalizing Violent Actions

Although online space has emerged as a practical platform to produce and reproduce VAW, rejection of the term “cyber violence against women” on the basis of the distinction between the virtual and real world by many men, is a typical practice. As per their comprehension, it is utterly impossible for men to perpetrate

online violence against their female counterparts-

"I don't think that people can abuse through just an app." (Chris, 27 years old, from Finland)

Searching for emotional company on a learning application seems normal for many respondents. Since a learning application like Hallo has not confined its properties rigorously to learning and knowledge exchange only, many male users take the 'socializing' opportunity to spread their seductive thoughts and abusive contents. Surprisingly true, a small number of the respondents perceived that conveying vulgar content and provoking the female speaking partners is not a serious offense in spite of being aware of Hallo's 'code and conduct'. The men justified their offense either from the perspective of 'limitations of human beings' or 'enjoying life as a human right.' However, the dark side of such vindication is that the respondents attempted to excuse their perceptions in whatever way by sidelining how their female speaking partners suffer from their offense.

"Men are not actually bad. They are bad because of their mood. Sometimes, I am bad too. Human morals keep changing from time to time. It can't be the same every time. [...] To be honest, men search for sex online. (Ali, 29 years old, from Algeria)

"People should enjoy their lives everywhere. It's their right. They should not keep away from alcohol or talk about sex." (Sito, 25 years old, from Romania)

Location and Time-Based Usual Victimization and Perpetration

From the respondents' descriptions, it was confirmed that women from South Asia, South-East Asia, and the Middle East get victimized mostly on Hallo. According to their views, women from these locations own pleasant voices and soft personalities which attract the perpetrators to execute the episodes of violence. Inviting video calls, asking for victims' nude photographs and contact details, sending vulgar messages, using abusive words or sex talk in random conversation, requesting dating, bullying, and delivering harsh and discriminatory comments are the most regular activities of the perpetrators to harass women on the application.

The perpetrators sometimes use these activities for amusement purposes, as assumed by the respondents.

“[...] Some of my female fellows on this app complained showing screenshots about the intimate and intense stupid things they were harassed by.” (Sajid, 28 years old, from Pakistan)

“Girls experience violence from immature guys who have bad intentions. You know, for these guys, abusing women online is a fun activity.” (Owais, 33 years old, from Pakistan)

General understanding discerns that the perpetrators might attack the victims at any time to pursue their ill intentions. However, a shocking fact concerning the time schedule of perpetration has been detected in a couple of responses. Users on Hallo belong to different time zones. The perpetrators particularly prefer nighttime (according to their time zones) to abuse female users. Hiding wicked deeds from the real world would be the reason behind such time-specific pursuit.

“Some guys send abusive videos and texts to the ladies. It depends on timing, mostly at night. They target women and disturb them.” (Sharath, 25 years old, from India)

Women’s Loss of Determination and Self-Esteem

“One of my female friends used to talk with a man from UAE. At one point, the man started sending her tempting photographs on the chat box. [...] It was extreme for her to tolerate. She became depressed out of it and decided to quit the platform eventually.” (Shami, 29 years old, from Pakistan)

Constant abusive action and attitudes of perpetrators compel women to quit their learning on Hallo. Generally, it is hard to inspect a man’s temperament and intention in an introductory conversation. After the very first one-on-one talk, the users are allowed to chat for further communication. The chatting feature in the application is a tool for vile men to show their true color. Unfortunately, the less digitally educated women keep receiving abusive words and sexually provocative content repeatedly, due to their unfamiliarity with instant blocking or reporting options. Such an affair of embarrassment leads to damaging their self-esteem and occluding their educative ambition. In this study, the respondents referred to the young ladies under 20 who are mostly the easy prey of violence through chat. Women’s determination of learning English and developing communication skills

falls down exactly because of the discommodious situation they face on the application. As a consequence, they do not give a second thought to retiring from the rostrum for good.

Do Women Deserve Violent Treatment?

In a patriarchal world, an entrenched belief about women's victimization of violence has found its ground in women's clothing. Usually, the real-world perpetrators justify their offense of victimizing women on the basis of the tenacious myth that women's revealing or sexually provocative attire invite violence. Apart from that, women's rising voices against injustice and deprivation in every form, their empowered positions, and upgraded agency make them the target of myriad types of violence. Women's victimization online for all these reasons is not completely untrue. In fact, digital devices and platforms are handy tools for online vigilantes to repress women's right to choose and express themselves. However, in the case of a learning platform like Hallo, where the audio instrument is the most accustomed channel of communication, women are considered blameworthy for inciting the perpetrators through their pleasant voices and expression as indicated by the respondents of the study. Moreover, the responses from the informants hinted at women's dating intention, fame motive, and formal or rude speaking patterns as the causes behind their victimization on the application.

"Some girls are not polite. Some are here to make a relationship or increase followers. See their intentions. [...] Actually, their intentions make them victims," (Ali, 20 years old, from Turkey)

"Many sick women are here. Nuisance! Their intention is different – appeal or desire. They get victimized themselves and blame men unnecessarily." (Fahad, 29 years old, from Bangladesh)

CONCLUSION

Digitally mediated learning platforms aim at bringing the knowledge enthusiasts from different geography in one frame. Such a learning podium, Hallo, for instance, has been proved a blessing for ensuring women's digital empowerment and right to freedom of expression. In this study, the positive attitude of egalitarian men concerning female participation in the application reflected a slightly favorable

conversion in the mainstream patriarchal spirit. However, women's communication margin seems to be regulated by the patriarchally idealized cultural and religious boundaries. These boundaries, in conventionally groomed men's perception, are crucial to safeguard women's presence in the given digital platform. Additionally, particular emphasis was placed on women's self-responsibility and consciousness as a defense against violence performed by perpetrators. Nonetheless, the outlook that the men hold in an unbending religious community is non-viable for women from other faith communities. The majority of the respondents' strong stance against perpetrators is commendable. Yet, few informants' deliberate justifications in favor of perpetration stemmed from their self-manufactured ideas that have glossed over the suffering of victimized women. Though it seems that violence online transpires in different fashions compared to the real world, still the female features such as soft personality and voice texture along with famed presence are considered liable for exhorting the perpetrators to perform violence. Moreover, women's victimization based on specific territories indicated the dissimilitude between the women from East and West in terms of boosting self-worth and dealing with violence on the application. Apparently, women's voluntary early retirement from the platform cannot be the one and only solution to tackle the violence against them. All the safety advice, tips, and instructions given by their male counterparts would be proved abortive unless the penchant for patronizing the perpetrators comes to an end. The proclivity of normalizing violence as 'mere enjoyment', 'right to freedom of expression', or 'temporary moral shift' needs to be stamped out from the application. It is important to acknowledge that, to end all forms of violence against women on an online learning application, the role of male allies is salient. In fine, healthy masculine orientation is expected as it not only struggles to guide the women on how to be protected from violence online but also fits to secure an invulnerable environment for women everywhere.

About the Author

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