



Social Media Framing and Victim-Blaming in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

This study investigates social media framing of gender-based violence (GBV) incidences in Trinidad and Tobago. It specifically explores how GBV cases are framed and interpreted within the online sphere of Facebook. This research was guided by two objectives: (1) to analyse how news outlets frame GBV in their article previews on Facebook, and (2) to examine how Facebook captions frame GBV incidences. This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of framing theory. It employed contemporary global and Caribbean studies that implemented the framing theory in social media discourses. The theory was also utilized to uncover how media framing and language can promote and publicize pro-victim-blaming attitudes online.

Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative research design using Social Media-Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS). This allowed for the critical analysis of framing patterns, language use and text within the realm of Facebook. Six Facebook posts published between 2020 and 2025 (one post for each year) were purposively selected.

The findings revealed that each of these Facebook posts framed the GBV incidents in ways that shifted responsibility onto the victims. Firstly, the findings revealed that the use of sensationalist and morally suggestive headlines within the framing of GBV on social media by newspaper houses. In each of the stories, the woman was framed by the headlines as either engaging in irresponsible behaviour, and on that premise, responsible for her own sexual abuse or death. With most related studies concentrated in the Global North, this paper seeks to address the academic gap on the intersections of GBV, victim blaming and Facebook in Trinidad and Tobago.

Keywords: Facebook; Victim blaming; Gender-based violence (GBV); Framing theory; Social Media-Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS)

INTRODUCTION

Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive and prevalent social rights issue. GBV has been described as “violence that is directed against a woman, because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately” (Walby *et al.*, 2017). Globally, an estimated 840 million women- nearly 1 in 3- “have experienced partner or sexual violence during their lifetime” (WHO, 2025). Given its violent colonial history, Caribbean societies are certainly no exception to global GBV statistics. Reports uncovered lifetime rates among women who experienced any form of GBV: 55% in Guyana, 48% in Suriname, 44% in Trinidad and Tobago and 39% in both Grenada and Jamaica (CWC, 2020). While Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) can be commended for having

relative gender equality, its high levels of GBV/IPV rates create a serious paradox.

For decades, researchers have illustrated a direct link between high GBV/IPV levels and victim blaming (Sardinha and Nájera Catalán, 2018). The Canadian Research Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) describes victim blaming as “the devaluing act that occurs when the victim(s) of a crime or an accident is held responsible-either in part or in whole- for the crimes that have been committed against them” (CRCVC, 2009). Like GBV and VAWG cases, victim blaming beliefs are “disproportionately held towards women and girls reporting abuse as they are disproportionately affected by violence and abuse” (HS, 2024).

Victim blaming is caused by a multitude of historical and contemporary factors. Psychologists have proposed the ‘Just World Theory’ and ‘Cognitive Dissonance’ as a potential

explanation (Bos and Maas, 2009), whilst Sociologists mainly attribute victim blaming to deeply rooted patriarchal cultures such as rigid gender roles, male dominance, violence and the hypersexualising of women (Reddock, 2010). The consequences of victim blaming are dire. Victim-blaming ideologies facilitate negative implications for survivors- including loss of self-esteem, extreme shame/guilt, anxiety and “*subsequent symptoms of depression and PTSD*” (Sigurvinsdottir *et al.*, 2019). Institutionally, these victim-blaming narratives inevitably lead to legislative issues: the underreporting of crimes, biased trials and investigations and lower conviction rates for perpetrators (Campbell, 2006). Economically, there have been direct consequences of workplace disruptions, decreased productivity and increased costs for public health (Hargrave *et al.*, 2024).

As of 2025, there are 5.24 billion social media users globally (Petrosyan, 2025). Within the 1.3 million population, there are a staggering 793,000 Facebook users currently in T&T (Kemp, 2025). Being the most widely used social networking site in the nation, Facebook acts as a forum where public discourse on topics- such as crime and violence- can unfold (Joseph and Jones, 2022). While Facebook facilitates dialogue, “*observers blame victims for their plight and participate in revictimization and exclusion*” (Petter and Giddens, 2023). Individuals have utilized Facebook to “*accept or normalize sexual harassment and exhibit a high potentiality to engage in sexual assault*” (Naguib, 2024). Researchers posit that rape is often only considered valid if it involves “*gang rapists, men who use or threaten to use deadly weapons, and, most importantly, strangers*” (Boux and Daum 2015). As a result, victim blaming and rape culture narratives are rampant on Facebook (Naguib, 2024) with men generally contributing more than women (Klein and Yamamoto, 2020).

The rampant presence of victim blaming on social media is not accidental. Media illiteracy, platforms/journalist biases and generated algorithms all contribute to its prevalence. For instance, victim blaming can be “*fuelled by media bias, entrenched gender norms, patriarchal culture, and low public digital literacy*” (Ubino and Astuti 2025). Therefore, the public’s lack of media literacy and critical awareness about issues of consent, rights, and systemic inequality impacts victim blaming attitudes (Schacter and Juvonen, 2015).

Online algorithms also promote victim-blaming ideologies. They are designed to reflect the “*most popular content rather than provide an unbiased judgment of a particular situation*” (Matias and Wright, 2022). In other words, these algorithms curate content feeds that subsequently decide what people see and engage with (Baumann *et al.*, 2025). It is argued that media forms employ what is known as the ‘*psychological appeal of crime*’ (Reddy, 2025). This promotes the sensationalism of GBV, which “*exploit emotional responses*” (Gutu, 2025) in order to increase engagement and overall profits (Surana, 2023).

Research Questions

- i. How do news outlets frame GBV cases in their article previews on Facebook?

- ii. How do Facebook captions frame GBV incidences?

Research Objectives

- i. To analyse how news outlets frame GBV in their article previews on Facebook.
- ii. To examine how Facebook captions frame GBV incidences.

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary framing theorists have posited that media allows for the rapid spread of information, interactivity and participation. (Kostopoulos, 2020). Media theorist Robert Entman defined framing as “*selecting and highlighting some facets of events and issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution*” (Entman, 2003). Social media, specifically, can quickly disseminate information and foster discussions which help their frames and can have a significant impact on public opinion and behaviour (Güran and Özarslan, 2022). This is worsened by immediate feedback loops, “*algorithms and strategic technologies (such as digital analytics)*” (López-Rabadán, 2021), which amplify certain frames and narratives while silencing others. Some framing theorists have also uncovered gender inequalities on social media. According to them, specific framing and visibility structures on social media can replicate gendered stereotypes (Wilhelm, 2020).

This framework can also be adapted to the postcolonial society context of T&T. Many scholars have used framing theories to illustrate how Venezuelan diasporas (Simon-Roberts and Affonso, 2024), political parties (Bachan-Persad, 2014) and LGBTQ groups (Baker, 2015) are strategically framed in the media. These frames promote often unrealistic narratives and stereotypes that alter the attitudes of the public. Moreover, it is evident that the framing theory is an appropriate lens to observe issues related to the Caribbean’s social media usage and public perceptions reproduced or reconstructed therein.

Justification

The literature tells us that there is a clear connection between an online presence and real-world action (Stubbs-Richardson *et al.*, 2018). Victim blaming on social media can also foster cyberbullying both online and offline. These real-world narratives are carried onto online spaces, like Facebook, where they are further circulated and intensified. Victim blaming in media has dangerous impacts on survivors’ mental health and personal relationships (Sigurvinsdottir *et al.*, 2019), legislative/court rulings (Campbell, 2006) and even the socio-cultural climate, i.e. normalisation of VAWG cycles (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2025). These negative consequences across societal institutions are indicative of the severity of the issue at hand.

Furthermore, the bulk of research on victim blaming and GBV is based on the “*experiences of urban communities in high-income English-speaking countries mainly from the Global North*” (Bull *et al.*, 2020). However, while victim blaming research in the Global North is widespread, little attention has been given to the postcolonial context of the

Global South. In the Caribbean, there are very few statistics concerning victim blaming levels, and even scarcer research surrounding victim blaming in social media. Therefore, this paper hopes to fill this serious academic gap.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The methodology employs a qualitative design in the form of discourse analysis to capture the framing of news posts. It was specifically guided by the main principles of the Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS). This study will be analysing six (6) online posts (see **Appendix**) that were uploaded by the Facebook pages of different news outlets between 2020-2025. Both the Facebook captions of the posts and their 'article preview' headline will be analysed.

Each Facebook post was selected using a purposive sampling technique. These posts were selected as they were all: publicly available on Facebook, published by news outlets in T&T, concerned a GBV-related incident between 2020-2025 and had article/article previews that were morally suggestive. Notably, each post covered a separate GBV instance, with one post selected from each year between 2020 and 2025.

Moreover, this study will analyze the headlines and captions for each of these six posts from Facebook using the SM-CDS. This design allows for the qualitative exploration of Facebook captions, i.e. 'frames', by uncovering underlying victim-blaming connotations. The discourse analysis approach facilitates a holistic understanding of how Facebook discourses influence blaming attitudes toward victims in a Trinbagonian context.

Data Collection Plan

Before officially collecting data, a method from SM-CDS called double contextualization was used. Therefore, there was an ethnographic, issue-oriented and situationally focused observation (KhosraviNik, 2017) of the Facebook pages from the leading news outlets in T&T. After this observation, six specific Facebook posts from these pages were selected. Each post published a Facebook article regarding some form of GBV occurrence: either femicide, rape, assault or a combination of assaults. Of the six Facebook posts, two are from Trinidad Express Newspaper, two from Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, one from CCN TV6 and one from the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian. These posts were selected for variety in years, news outlet and GBV type.

To officially begin collection, screenshots and screen recordings were manually taken of the posts. These screenshots/recordings noted all metadata such as the date, source, and caption. This digital data was then placed into a secure, password-protected research document. Noting metadata such as the date, source, and caption. Guided by the SM-CDS, all identifying information was anonymized.

Data Analysis Plan

As a newer branch of analysis, SM-CDS develops from the foundations of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. CDS employs textual analysis, discursive practice and social practices to analysis

data. However, the SM-CDS utilises more comprehensive and holistic principles that relate closely to digital discourse research. The six (6) principles of the SM-CDS, informed by KhosraviNik (2017), include:

1. Multilevel Analysis: Text, Discursive, and Social Practice
2. Double Contextualization
3. Critical Focus on Power and Ideology
4. Reflectivity
5. Ethical and Responsible Analysis
6. Analytical Flexibility

These principles were used to ethically uncover the complex dynamics that occur on social media, especially where power and ideological differences are involved. A coding process (initial, axial, and selective coding) identified key themes which allowed for the critical examination, understanding and interpretation of the discourse, particularly within the socio-cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ethics and Reflexivity

In accordance with SM-CDS principles, researchers should adhere to the rules and regulations outlined by their associated institution (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018). Therefore, before this research began, ethical approval was obtained from the University of the West Indies, St Augustine. Furthermore, while information on social media is technically 'public', the SM-CDS principles insist that researchers have an obligation to grant anonymity where appropriate (Unger and KhosraviNik, 2016). As such, the writers/authors of these posts, and the persons within the respective comment sections, were anonymized.

During this research, I recognized that my own assumptions and expectations may influence how I interpret the data. KhosraviNik implies that reflexivity must be an explicit, ongoing part of the SM-CDS research process (KhosraviNik, 2017). For this reason, I continuously reflected on my biases and assumptions. The SM-CDS model also stresses that researchers should reflect on their own positionality (institutional, ideological, cultural) and how that affects interpretation (Unger and KhosraviNik, 2016). Therefore, due to my positionality as a woman in a society with high GBV rates, it was very important that I stayed as close as possible to the guiding analytical research models.

FINDINGS

The findings of this examination were subjected to the use of SM-CDS, where the "micro communicative patterns and macro-discursive regimes, which constitute the culture" are examined as part of understanding the socio-political context (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018). This involved the horizontal contextualisation of discourse, which concentrates on narrower intertextual discursive practices, while the vertical contextualisation focuses on the wider socio-political context of the Facebook posts (KhosraviNik, 2017). Combining these two is referred to as "double contextualisation" (KhosraviNik, 2017), necessary for understanding discourse in the digital age. Therefore, by using the SM-CDS, this study uncovered valuable insight concerning Facebook postings and victim blaming.

Media Frames

As previously mentioned, the Facebook posts under analysis were derived from six newspaper articles, with one post selected from each year between 2020 and 2025. All posts were collected and transcribed on the 8th of March 2026; anything thereafter was not included.

Each post consists of a caption written by the Facebook page and a preview headline from the linked article- both of which frame the incident for the users on Facebook. The 2020 post by Trinidad Express Newspapers, captioned *"This is how it could end:"* with the article preview entitled, *"Women Warned about toxic love."* (2020_toxic love). The 2021 post, shared by Trinidad and Tobago Newspaper, displayed the caption: *"Police said Shadie Dhasrath and a close male relative got into an argument around 11 pm about a love mark on her neck."* The article preview then read: *"Police probe death of La Romaine woman- Trinidad and Tobago Newspaper"* (2021_love mark). In 2022, a post by CCN TV6: Trinidad and Tobago published an article by the Trinidad Express Newspaper which captivated high engagement. The caption stated: *"A rendezvous with a man who was not her boyfriend ended in tragedy for 18-year-old Jada Wilson"*, and the article preview was labelled, *"Deadly Rendezvous"* (2022_deadly rendezvous).

Furthermore, the 2023 post from the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian was captioned as *"A 33-year-old Sangre Grande woman who went to meet a man whom she had known for only one week and who promised to buy her children's stationery for school – was beaten, tied up and raped on Sunday"*. The article preview states, *"Woman raped in Sangre Grande"* (2023_only one week). The 2024 Newsday post captioned, *"POLICE are investigating the circumstances which led a Princes Town woman to being assaulted and left in the bushes early on the morning of September 24"*. This post included an article preview reading, *"Liming with stranger ends with woman being dumped in Clifton Hill Beach bushes"* (2024_liming). Finally, in 2025, a post by Trinidad Express Newspapers, captioned: *"According to police, the woman reported that she was last month at the Gasparillo home of the man with whom she had been conversing on social media"* with an article preview: *"Teen meets Facebook man 5 times: Raped, buggered"* (2025_5 times).

Horizontal Contextualization

As mentioned, horizontal contextualization refers to *"the technological architecture of digital platforms and its possible repercussions on discourse practices online"* (Jiapei and Janet, 2023). Each post was crafted for Facebook-a platform driven by online engagement. Facebook depends on the constant interaction and circulation of its information-through online reactions, likes, comments and sharing features. To ensure this engagement, journalists use a plethora of strategies.

Firstly, is the tactic of fear mongering displayed in the 2021 caption, *"This is how it could end"*. These words were likely utilized to scare female audiences about how *"toxic love"* can end in GBV occurrences. There is also the intentional

absence of context for a nuanced understanding of the event, thereby creating ambiguity. For example, the 2021 headline speaks of an *"argument"* about a *"love mark"* on the victim. This headline implies an affair was involved in the case, making the victim somehow responsible for her victimization. Contrastingly, there is also the tactic of including irrelevant information. In the 2022 post, the victim's perpetrator was described as *"a man who was not her boyfriend"*. These captions act as *"hooks"* to capture audiences' attention and eventually *"exploit emotional responses"* (Gutu 2025).

The article preview format is also a key discursive feature. It provides a summary that primes the reader's interpretation before they even access the full story; for instance, the article preview in 2024, *"Liming with a stranger end with woman being dumped"*. The 2025 article, *"Teen meets Facebook man 5 times: Raped, buggered"*, intentionally highlights the victim's repeated visits with the perpetrator whilst failing to acknowledge the likely grooming done to the victim. By omitting details about the cause of death or any contextual circumstances, the preview constructs a narrow and morally suggestive narrative that becomes the primary lens through which the event is initially understood.

The highlighting of certain words, whilst omitting critical information are strategic lexical choice designed to maximize virality. This therefore invites the audience to fill the gaps and potentially reinforce prejudicial assumptions about the victim's behaviour. The platform's structure thus incentivizes and shapes sensational framing over neutral reporting.

Vertical Contextualization

Vertical contextualisation looks at the wider socio-political context of the Facebook posts. It requires researchers to move beyond the micro-level examination of linguistic features and towards the broader socio-political, historical, and cultural contexts that shape, and are shaped by, digital discourse (Jiapei and Janet, 2023).

As a post-colonial society, Trinidad and Tobago has a long patriarchal history of misogyny, rape culture and slut-shaming as a result of their high GBV levels (Reddock, 2010). These cultural scripts render women particularly susceptible to public scrutiny and blame in cases of sexual violence, as their actions are evaluated against moral standards that are rarely applied to male perpetrators. The headlines and article previews of the selected six Facebook posts exemplify this plight.

The 2021_love mark posts betray a societal *'just world'* belief that the death of a female who is suspected of having an *'outside man'* is perhaps justified and can serve as a lesson to other women. Men's *"emotions"* are socially constructed in 2021_love marks as dangerous if they are crossed. The insult to the man's emotions when the woman comes home with a love mark is *"a plausible reason which this [death] happen."* (2021_love marks). Similarly, is the 2020_toxic love post, in which the article preview sought to warn other women that, *"This is how it could end"*.

Societal rape cultures also criminalize seemingly *'reckless'* behaviours (Elvy, 2016). For instance, *"man who was not her*

boyfriend" (2022_deadly rendezvous), "liming with a stranger" (2024_liming) and the meeting of "a man she known for only one week" (2023_only one week) are all highlighted to highlight the victims' lack of familiarity with their predators. This was done to spotlight the decisions and behaviours of the victims rather than the crimes at hand. T&T's rape cultures ignore the occurrences of psychological abuse and grooming of women (Dawkins-Cavazos and Morris-Francis, 2025), even if they are a teenager. The article preview labelled, "Teen meets Facebook man 5 times", ensures to emphasise how many times the teenager met her eventual rapist.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Facebook functions as a key site for the production and reinforcement of victim-blaming discourse in cases of GBV. The findings revealed that different news outlets did utilize Facebook postings to negatively frame cases of GBV. This was done through the employment of sensationalist and morally suggestive headlines/captions and article previews. Through the application of the SM-CDS framework of horizontal and vertical contextualisation, this research demonstrates how victim-blaming narratives are systematically constructed and reinforced through digital media framing.

Horizontal Contextualisation: The Digital Architecture of Victim Blaming

The horizontal dimension of analysis reveals how the technological affordances of Facebook shape the discursive practices of news outlets in ways that promote victim-blaming frames. Each of the six posts employed distinct linguistic strategies designed to maximise engagement within Facebook's algorithm-driven ecosystem (McLoughlin and Brady, 2023). These findings align with the SM-CDS's assertion that social media communication is shaped by both the "specific communicative affordances" (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018) and the cultural context within which it occurs.

The study identified several key discursive features that construct victim-blaming narratives. First, fear-mongering, which refers to the "increasing (of) fear while not improving understanding" (Klemm *et al.*, 2017) within media coverage. This tactic was evident in the 2021 caption "This is how it could end," which explicitly frames GBV as a cautionary tale directed at women. As previously mentioned, this strategy "exploits emotional responses" (Gutu, 2025) or the "psychological appeal of crime" (Reddy, 2025), designed to increase engagement and circulation.

Second, intentional ambiguity was employed in the 2021 post mentioning a "love mark" and an "argument," implying infidelity without providing contextual evidence. This failure "to contextualise these crimes" (O'Brien and Culloty, 2020) means audiences can now fill the narrative void with prejudicial assumptions. This subjects the victims and their bodies are left to that "face criticism instead of empathy" (Hansen, 2025). This ambiguity is particularly dangerous within the arena of social media. Digital discourse often

"teaches speed and certainty. It trains us to respond before reflecting and to assume before asking" (Hansen, 2025).

Third, the inclusion of irrelevant or salacious details was consistently deployed across posts. The 2022 caption describing a "rendezvous with a man who was not her boyfriend" and the 2025 headline "Teen meets Facebook man 5 times: Raped, bugged" foreground the victim's behaviour rather than the perpetrator's violence. These lexical choices strategically highlight women's perceived "recklessness" while omitting critical contextual information such as grooming dynamics. This finding is consistent with researchers' postcolonial analysis of Caribbean legal systems. It documents how "sexual violence against women, including spousal abuse, is a significant problem" (Elvy, 2016) yet is often framed in ways that minimise perpetrator accountability.

Similarly, there is the tactic of impersonal reporting. Studies have revealed that media coverage of female victims are "typically not treated in personalized manner" (Anastasio and Costa, 2004). This impersonal reporting can be noted here, when four out of six of the Facebook posts did not include the victim's name. Instead, they referred to them as "woman" or "teen". Ironically, "descriptions that treat crime victims more personally produce greater empathy for the victim" (Anastasio and Costa, 2004) and therefore, decrease victim blaming. Therefore, using the victim's name, alongside other personalized information, can aid in their empathy. However, this ethical practice was not utilized in four of the six Facebook postings.

The framing of these Facebook posts also naturally links to the framing theory. The headlines/article preview format functions by "selecting and highlighting some facets of events" (Entman, 2023) to promote particular interpretations. The 2024 preview "Liming with stranger ends with woman being dumped" and the 2023 caption highlighting "a man whom she had known for only one week" prime readers to view the victim's actions as the cause of her victimisation. This framing strategy is particularly potent on Facebook because the preview is often the only content many users engage with before commenting, thus shaping initial interpretations that subsequent reading may not fully correct.

Vertical Contextualisation: Socio-Cultural Roots of Victim Blaming

The vertical dimension of analysis situates these discursive practices within Trinidad and Tobago's broader socio-political and historical context. The persistence of victim-blaming narratives in the selected Facebook posts cannot be understood without reference to the region's colonial legacy and enduring patriarchal norms. As previously mentioned, the post-colonial society of Trinidad and Tobago has a long, violent and patriarchal history that facilitates their high GBV cases. As a result, slut-shaming and rape cultures are prevalent in Trinbagonian society.

This cultural context is evident in the framing of the six posts. The 2021 post, with its focus on a "love mark" and argument, reflects what is identified as justifications for violence: men's emotional responses to perceived infidelity are treated as

understandable, even inevitable (Kerrigan, 2019). The 2020 post "*Women Warned about toxic love*" positions women as needing protection from their own choices, echoing the term "*femininity-as-fail*," (Barratt, 2018), where women are held responsible for the violence perpetrated against them regardless of the circumstances.

The consistent emphasis on victims' lack of familiarity with their perpetrators- "*a man who was not her boyfriend*" (2022_deadly rendezvous), "*liming with a stranger*" (2024_liming), "*a man she known for only one week*" (2023_only one week)- reflects a rape culture that constructs violence as only '*legitimate*' when perpetrated by strangers (Boux and Daum, 2015). This framing ignores the reality that most GBV occurs within intimate relationships and obscures the psychological abuse and grooming that often precedes sexual violence (Dawkins-Cavazos and Morris-Francis, 2025). The 2025 post's emphasis on "*5 times*" a teenager met her rapist exemplifies this tendency, shifting scrutiny from the perpetrator's actions to the victim's decisions.

Overall, each post enforced standards of respectability that women are expected to meet- and held accountable for failing to meet. Therefore, the Facebook captions analysed in this study exemplify the rape cultures of T&T.

Implications for Theory

The framing theory was utilised for this study. The framing theory posits that information is deliberately structured or '*framed*' to "*influence the choices people make about how to process that information*" (Chong and Druckman, 2007). It argues that the way information is shaped and formulated ultimately influences the public's understanding of reality and, by extension, their attitudes and actions. However, the framing theory has been critiqued by some for being Eurocentric (Oladeji, 2025) and perhaps not particularly applicable to the contemporary context of social media.

Despite its Eurocentric beginnings, this study was able to still critically apply the framing theory to unique, post-colonial contexts such as the Caribbean. It looks directly at how social media posts can be shaped and framed to promote a particular interpretation, in this case, victim blaming. This theory "*highlighted some facets of events and issues*" that "*promote a particular interpretation*" (Entman, 2003). With regard to social media specifically, information and discussions are quickly spread, with the resulting '*frames*' having a potential impact on public opinion and behaviour (Güran and Özarslan, 2022).

Implications for Practice

The research hopes to have positive practical implications. Firstly, it reveals the urgent need for more ethical and responsible reporting on GBV. The recommendations include:

- An urgent call for ethical reform in journalism- particularly in how GBV cases are framed within media. In a society with high GBV rates, Trinbagonian journalists and media outlets should adopt survivor-centre reporting. This ethical reporting will avoid implying victim responsibility, refrain from unnecessary details

about victims' behaviour, and prioritize the accountability of perpetrators.

- The need for stronger content online moderation strategies. Growing engagement-driven algorithms make the production and reproduction of victim-blaming attitudes too convenient and effortless (McLoughlin and Brady, 2023). Therefore, local platform administrators and page managers- especially those of news outlets- should actively moderate comment sections to discourage harmful discourse while promoting respectful and informed engagement. This will facilitate clearer community guidelines that address victim blaming, harassment, and the trivialisation of GBV.
- A demand for media literacy in education systems in Trinidad and Tobago. As the literature suggests, media literacy and critical thinking help individuals to identify and question biases, stereotypes and frames with victim-blaming content (Miao and Li, 2026). Therefore, education can help individuals be more critical and even challenge harmful narratives.

Implications for Research

This study opens several avenues for future research. Firstly, it uncovers the serious need for more Caribbean-centred research on the intersection of GBV, victim blaming and social media. VAWG levels in the Caribbean are disproportionately high compared to those of the Global North (Baker *et al.*, 2023). Yet the bulk of research on victim blaming and GBV is based on the "*experiences of urban communities in high-income English-speaking countries mainly from the Global North*" (Bull *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, future research should continue to explore how local cultural norms, postcolonial histories, and migration dynamics shape digital discourse across the Caribbean.

Secondly, the findings suggest the need for comparative research across different social media platforms. While this study focuses on Facebook, other platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) are certainly worth investigating. These different platforms may produce different forms of engagement, discourse styles and inevitably thematic concerns. Comparative analyses could reveal how different platforms and their specific demographics influence the intensity, form, and spread of victim-blaming narratives.

This study could also benefit from the inclusion of gender differences. According to studies, men are more likely to victim-blame than women (Smith and Short, 2025). However, with limited time and resources, this study was unable to add to that knowledge. Considering this topic revolves heavily on issues that disproportionately affect women: GBV and victim-blaming, gender is an extremely important aspect. It is hoped that future research can investigate the differences in gender with regards to online victim-blaming in Trinidad and Tobago and other parts of the Caribbean. This research can be extended to examine the experiences of women across different age groups with more qualitative explorations of how persons respond to these postings.

Finally, future research should consider more interdisciplinary research. While this is, at its core, a sociological topic, the complexity of this research makes it relevant to the contents of psychology, linguistics, media studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, etc. By involving other fields, this research can evolve to better understand the interplay among individual cognition, cultural norms, and digital communication practices in post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago.

CONCLUSION

Grounded in framing theory, this study explored Facebook postings and victim-blaming attitudes in Trinidad and Tobago. Using the SM-CDS, this thesis analysed the text in the Facebook headlines of six posts, one from each year between 2020-2025. Through the SM-CDS analysis, this study was able to answer its research questions and objectives.

Ultimately, the six Facebook posts did utilize morally suggestive, and sensationalist headlines/article previews to frame GBV cases. They did this framing through a range of discursive/media techniques including fear mongering, the inclusion of irrelevant or salacious details, the exploitation of 'emotional responses' (Gutu, 2025) and the promotion of "particular interpretations" (Entman, 2003). This was done within the socio-cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago, wherein many rape cultures and misogynistic values against women exist. Although media is meant to be an impartial institution, the six Facebook posts selected proved that even media reporters can have victim-blaming biases.

Overall, this study highlighted a serious academic gap. Due to its growing popularity, Facebook is not merely a platform for discussion and open dialogue. Instead, it holds significant power in shaping how victims, perpetrators, and violence itself are perceived by the public of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, this thesis highlights the urgent need for more Caribbean-focused research on the intersections of digital discourse, GBV, and victim blaming.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/ or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy, have been completely observed by the authors.

Life Science Reporting

No life science threat was practised in this research.

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APPENDIX

FACEBOOK CAPTIONS/HEADLINES

All posts/comments were collected and transcribed on the 8th of March 2026. Therefore, any likes, reactions or comments made after would not be included.

1. Facebook Post 2020

Facebook Page: Trinidad Express Newspapers

Article Source: Trinidad Express Newspapers

Date: 12th September, 2020

Post's URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/ExpressNewspapers/posts/this-is-how-it-could-end/10157656968880814/>

Post Caption: "This is how it could end."

Headline of article preview: "Women Warned about toxic love."

Reference handle: (2020_toxic love)

2. Facebook Post 2021

Facebook Page: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday

Article Source: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday

Date: 4th December, 2021

Post's URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/100077120600420/posts/1801758613350068/?rid=XDpBPUCuaF9j1za>

Post Caption: "Police said Shadie Dhasrath and a close male relative got into an argument around 11 pm about a love mark on her neck."

Headline of article preview: "Police probe death of La Romaine woman- Trinidad and Tobago Newspaper."

Reference handle: (2021_love mark)

3. Facebook Post 2022

Facebook Page: CCN TV6: Trinidad and Tobago's

Article Source: Trinidad Express Newspaper

Date: 24th December, 2022

Post's URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/CCNTV6/posts/a-rendezvous-with-a-man-who-was-not-her-boyfriend-ended-in-tragedy-for-18-year-o/8514006081974842/>

Post Caption: "A rendezvous with a man who was not her boyfriend ended in tragedy for 18-year-old Jada Wilson".

Headline of article preview: "Deadly Rendezvous".

Reference handle: (2022_deadly rendezvous)

4. Facebook Post 2023

Facebook Page: T&T Guardian

Article Source: T&T Guardian Date: 29th August, 2023

Post's URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/TTGuardian/posts/a-33-year-old-sangre-grande-woman-who-went-to-meet-a-man-whom-she-had-known-for-686350560188765/>

[old-sangre-grande-woman-who-went-to-meet-a-man-whom-she-had-known-for-686350560188765/](https://www.facebook.com/TTGuardian/posts/a-33-year-old-sangre-grande-woman-who-went-to-meet-a-man-whom-she-had-known-for-686350560188765/)

Post Caption: "A 33-year-old Sangre Grande woman who went to meet a man whom she had known for only one week and who promised to buy her children's stationery for school – was beaten, tied up and raped on Sunday."

Headline of article preview: "Woman raped in Sangre Grande"

Reference handle: (2023_only one week)

5. Facebook Post 2024

Facebook Page: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday

Article Source: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday

Date: 24th September, 2024

Post's URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/ttnewsday/posts/pfbid0wnsqfplSbmneqfHnMsDnTfTp9T2NLjyXQCBYwNj9HWFw3VVv3Nsp5FLkqzzeBKcl>

Post Caption: "POLICE are investigating the circumstances which led a Princes Town woman to being assaulted and left in the bushes early on the morning of September 24"

Headline of article preview: "Liming with stranger ends with woman being dumped in Clifton Hill Beach bushes".

Reference handle: (2024_liming)

6. Facebook Post 2025

Facebook Page: Trinidad Express Newspapers

Article Source: Trinidad Express Newspapers

Date: 7th April, 2025

Post's URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/ExpressNewspapers/posts/according-to-police-the-woman-reported-that-she-was-last-month-at-the-gasparillo/1067242608767276>

Post Caption: "According to police, the woman reported that she was last month at the Gasparillo home of the man with whom she had been conversing on social media."

Headline of article preview: "Teen meets Facebook man 5 times: Raped, bugged".

Reference handle: (2025_5 times)