

# Content Analysis of Media Consumers Perceptions and Attitudes in Response to Domestic Violence

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gauge media consumers' perceptions and attitudes of domestic violence. Gabby Petito was reported missing on September 11, 2021, following a cross country road trip with her fiancé, Brian Laundrie. Following an investigation of her disappearance and the naming of Brian Laundrie as a person of interest, Gabby's remains were found in Wyoming. This event flooded the internet as social media users shared updates, thoughts, and opinions regarding the case through both the posting of content surrounding this case as well as comments in response.

## Methodology

### Data & Sample

- Data collection was done from 4 social media platforms, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok through media engagement in post and videos through comments. The sample size consists of enough post till saturation. Screenshots of posts and comments were saved from the social media sites the Gabby Petito case.

### Measures

- The variables are the attitudes and perceptions reflected through social media comments, in response to information regarding domestic violence in connection to the Gabby Petito case, the mainstream media's portrayal of DV, and social media as a cultural force. Attitudes and perceptions can be defined through certain verbiage used by the commenter, Empathetic language can be words/phrases. Mainstream media's portrayal can be defined through the verbiage used to describe the case, the perpetrator, and the victim. The influence of social media as a cultural force, which is highlighted by the different perspectives of the case that are most circulated and the influence on societal opinions.

### Data Collection

- The data was collected via the four social media sites in Spring Semester 2022, 7 months after the Gaby Petito case gained mass media attention in July 2021. The comments/posts that have been screenshotted are those that had the most engagement from each respected site. The comments are public, but username handlers have been blurred out.

## Literature Review

Media historically constricts the definition of domestic/interpersonal violence, which is discussed in Carlyle et al.(2014), Collins (2011), and Storer(2017), which displays how media portrayal conforms to gender roles and defines these issues as individual rather than a larger, systemic, issue. Additionally, Whiting et al.(2019), Rodriquez et al.(2018), and Storer et al.(2021) examined media consumer responses to different instances surrounding domestic/interpersonal violence, including responses to posts from the #MeToo, and #WhyIStayed movements. These studies highlight the significant influence that media has on both the portrayal and perception of instances of domestic/interpersonal violence as well as the potential impact that these responses can have on those experiencing domestic/interpersonal violence, either positively or negatively.

Carlyle, K. E., Scarduzio, J. A., & Slater, M. D. (2014). Media portrayals of female perpetrators of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(13), 2394–2417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513520231>  
Collins, R. L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go? *Sex Roles*, 64(3-4), 290–298.  
Storer, H. L., Rodriguez, M., & Franklin, R. (2021). "Leaving Was a Process, Not an Event": The Lived Experience of Dating and Domestic Violence in 140 Characters. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(11–12), NP6553–NP6580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518816325>  
Rodriguez, M. Y., & Storer, H. (2019). A computational social science perspective on qualitative data exploration: Using topic models for the descriptive analysis of social media data\*. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 38(1), 54–86.  
Storer, H. L. (2017). A year of bad choices: the postfeminist "restorying" of teen dating violence in young adult literature. *Affilia*, 32(3), 292–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109917704935>

## Limitations

- Unable to obtain demographics of commenters.
- Filtering out *Fake News*; a term used regarding the circulation of inaccurate information through the media.
- Unable to accurately clarify language and tone of emojis.
- Time frame of data collection being a few months after media popularity.

## Final themes

- Sympathy for Gabby and the Petito's:**
  - "So heart broken, my thoughts and prayers go out to her family"(Facebook)
- Information regarding the case:**
  - "Just saw an update from an hour ago saying authorities found human remains and they believe it's her and her family has been informed."(Tiktok)
  - "The FBI Says Brian Laundrie wrote in a notebook that he was responsible for killing #GabbyPetito. Investigators have now formally closed the probe into the 22-year-old's death after she went missing last year."(Facebook)
- Conspiracy surrounding the case information:**
  - "Hiding evidence? Conspiracy? Cause Brian died in Florida. Pretty simple."(Twitter)
- Criticism of law enforcement and the legal system:**
  - "FBI said this \*three laughing emojis\* since when did we start believing them ha."(Instagram)
- Comparison to other cases:**
  - "Yeah it's sad but what about coverage for indigenous people that go missing."(Tiktok)
  - "I was a victim of narcissistic abuse for 23 years. When I saw the police footage I felt her tears and confusion. I immediately started crying with her."(Facebook)
- Negativity towards Brian and family:**
  - "May Gabby Rest In Peace and may Brian BURN IN HELL. Fixed the headline!"(Instagram)
- Sympathy for Both Parties:**
  - "Their relationship turned out to be so tragic... may they both rest in peace."(Facebook)

THEMES	INSTAGRAM	TIKTOK	FACEBOOK	TWITTER
SYMPATHY FOR GABBY/THE PETITO'S	34	1	42	5
INFORMATION REGARDING CASE	10	20	35	10
CONSPIRACY SURROUNDING CASE INFORMATION	21	17	8	7
CRITICISM OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM	6	5	3	6
COMPARISON TO OTHER CASES	3	9	10	5
NEGATIVITY TOWARDS BRIAN LAUNDRIE/ FAMILY	8	14	11	6
SYMPATHY FOR BOTH PARTIES	2	0	4	0
NUMBER OF TIMES PRESENT IN POSTS AND COMMENTS				

## Discussion of Themes and Implications:

Our results showed that sympathy for Gabby and the Petito family as well posts containing factual information were most prominent. There was a concerning amount of conspiracy surrounding the case as well as comparison to other cases. This information highlights how racism, transphobia, and homophobia relates to how and if cases are presented in media. There is potential to skew information and interrupt investigations. From these findings, social workers, nonprofit organizations, and advocates can acknowledge the importance of media presence as well as implement the usage of proper language surrounding domestic violence.