



KRYSS Network's Research Methodology

Gendered Disinformation
Phase 2

Background and Context

In 2022, KRYSS Network conducted interviews with female political candidates to understand how gendered disinformation was weaponized against them during Malaysia's 15th General Election. This research, in collaboration with Dr. Ross Tapsell from the Australian National University (ANU), led to the publication *Gendered Disinformation and Election Campaigning: A Malaysian Case Study*. Building on this work, KRYSS Network is now entering Phase 2 of its ongoing gendered disinformation research, focusing on secondary data analysis, such as law reviews and policy frameworks, to expand the understanding of this issue. This phase will culminate in a targeted campaign to raise awareness and advocate for stronger measures against Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV).

The consequences of gendered disinformation are severe, affecting not only the mental health of individuals—leading to stress, anxiety, and depression—but also creating real-world dangers, including threats of violence and harassment.

Moreover, gendered disinformation exacerbates existing gender stereotypes, portraying women as less competent in leadership and political roles. This perpetuates gender inequality, particularly in Malaysia's political environment, where traditional gender roles and cultural norms limit women's opportunities. Although women make up a significant portion of Malaysia's civil service workforce, their political representation remains low. Gendered disinformation continues to act as a barrier, undermining their progress.

Addressing gendered disinformation is essential to dismantling harmful stereotypes and promoting a more equitable society. Furthermore, this issue undermines democratic integrity, as disinformation campaigns targeting women skew public opinion and influence electoral outcomes, eroding trust in democratic processes.

Phase II of this research will assess Malaysia's current legal frameworks and policies on disinformation and other secondary research materials as well as interviews with four Malaysian politicians, exploring how they address gendered disinformation as a form of OGBV. While there have been efforts to counter cyberbullying, gendered disinformation remains largely overlooked in legislative agendas. Laws and policies alone cannot change societal attitudes, which is why awareness-raising is equally critical.

To fill this gap, KRYSS Network accompanies the research with a campaign on gendered disinformation to encourage political will and strengthen government commitment to this issue. Research has shown that gendered disinformation drives women out of political and public participation, including young women and female athletes.

In Malaysia, where digital media consumption is rising, media literacy programs that address gendered disinformation are crucial. By educating the public to identify and challenge such disinformation, KRYSS Network aims to reduce its spread and create a more informed, engaged society. The goal is to drive positive changes in media practices and ensure that gendered disinformation no longer undermines women's roles in politics or public life.

Definitions

1. **Gendered Disinformation**

Gendered disinformation refers to the spread of deceptive or inaccurate information and images that target women—especially political leaders, journalists, and female public figures. This form of disinformation often draws on societal stereotypes and misogyny, framing women as untrustworthy, unintelligent, emotional, irrational, or overly sexualized. The intent behind gendered disinformation is not only to distort public understanding of female politicians' track records for immediate political gain but also to discourage women from pursuing political careers or leadership roles (Disinformation.eu, 2024). This type of disinformation can take various forms, including harmful graphics, misleading narratives, and conspiracy theories (WIIS Global, 2024). Research indicates that gendered disinformation campaigns typically employ two contrasting strategies: portraying women leaders as either enemies or as victims without agency (WIIS Global, 2024). These tactics often focus on gendered stereotypes, such as emotionality or politeness, instead of attacking policy decisions or political ideologies, which are common targets for male politicians.

2. **Disinformation**

Disinformation, in the context of gendered disinformation, is the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information to manipulate public opinion. When disinformation targets women specifically due to their gender identity, it is considered "gendered." This form of disinformation not only impacts the political landscape but also reinforces harmful gender biases and stereotypes. As such, it poses significant risks to women's participation in politics and governance (Veritasia, Muthmainnah, & de-Lima-Santos, 2024).

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are twofold. First, the research aims to enhance the scope of KRYSS Network's OGBV Toolkit by providing actionable knowledge and guidance on the issue of gendered disinformation. By examining the dynamics, strategies, and impact of gendered disinformation, the research will offer critical insights that can be directly applied to the OGBV Toolkit, strengthening its utility as a resource for individuals, organizations, and policymakers working to address this pervasive issue. The goal is to ensure that the Toolkit is both comprehensive and practical, providing clear recommendations and strategies to identify, prevent, and combat gendered disinformation in various online spaces.

Secondly, the research aims to provide a robust baseline of data and information that will inform KRYSS Network's gendered disinformation campaign. By collecting and analyzing data on the prevalence, types, and effects of gendered disinformation—particularly in the context of political engagement—the research will offer a strong foundation for advocacy and outreach efforts. This will enable KRYSS Network to develop targeted campaign strategies, raising awareness of the

harmful impacts of gendered disinformation and empowering women to challenge these practices in both political and public spheres.

Through these objectives, the research will not only contribute to expanding the understanding of gendered disinformation but also help in creating tools and resources that promote greater awareness and action against this form of Online Gender-Based Violence.

Research Timeframe

The research for Phase II of the gendered disinformation project will be conducted from February to April 2025. During this period, KRYSS Network will focus on reviewing and analyzing a comprehensive bibliography of secondary materials, including legal reviews, policy documents, and relevant academic literature on gendered disinformation.

Additionally, the research will involve conducting interviews with four political candidates—three women and one man—to gain insights into their experiences with gendered disinformation and its impact on their political careers. This mixed-method approach will provide a well-rounded understanding of the issue, combining secondary data with firsthand accounts to inform KRYSS Network's ongoing work in the field of OGBV.

Baseline of Research

Phase II of KRYSS Network's research on gendered disinformation builds upon key baseline materials from previous research and resources. These include KRYSS Network's ongoing research and monitoring of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), the established KRYSS OGBV Toolkit, and the findings from Phase I of the Gendered Disinformation research conducted in 2022. Additionally, a desktop review of secondary research materials forms a foundational component of the current study.

The Phase I materials, which include interviews with female political candidates and case studies of gendered disinformation during Malaysia's 15th General Elections, provide crucial insights into the patterns and tactics of gendered disinformation. These resources offer an in-depth understanding of the ways in which gendered disinformation specifically targets women in political contexts, laying the groundwork for further exploration in Phase 2.

The desktop review of secondary research materials continues to provide valuable context, including an analysis of relevant legal frameworks, policies, and academic literature on gendered disinformation and OGBV. These materials serve as the baseline for Phase II, guiding the ongoing research and allowing KRYSS Network to expand its analysis and advocacy efforts related to gendered disinformation.

This comprehensive set of baseline materials will help inform the development of new insights and recommendations, contributing to the further strengthening of the KRYSS OGBV Toolkit and the success of KRYSS Network's future campaigns and advocacy initiatives.

Interview Pre-Briefing

Before each interview, KRYSS Network ensures that interviewees are fully briefed on the purpose and use of the video recording. This research builds on the work KRYSS Network conducted in 2022 with female political candidates to explore how gendered disinformation is weaponized against them, in collaboration with Dr. Ross Tapsell from the Australian National University, as part of the study of Malaysia's 15th General Elections. As a follow-up, the current interviews focus on gathering insights from politicians on the topic of gendered disinformation for KRYSS Network's gendered disinformation campaign and explainer video.

During the pre-interview briefing, interviewees are informed that their contributions will be used to help raise awareness about gendered disinformation and contribute to the broader campaign for greater understanding and action. They are assured that their participation is voluntary and that they have control over the content shared. In recognition of the emotional toll that discussing such topics may have, interviewees are reassured that they can choose to omit any responses or avoid sharing specific instances where they have personally experienced gendered disinformation or OGBV, particularly if these prompts cause discomfort or trauma.

Additionally, KRYSS Network offers interviewees the opportunity to review a preview of the video recording before it is published on social media platforms. This ensures that interviewees are comfortable with the content shared and allows them to make any necessary adjustments or requests before finalizing the video for public dissemination.

List of Interview Questions

1. When you were younger, did you ever imagine becoming a politician?
2. What inspired you to enter politics? Was there a moment that made you step up
3. Have you ever been told politics is “not a place for women” or pushed into “softer” roles instead of leadership? How did that shape your journey?
4. You've likely faced online harassment and gendered disinformation. What were some of the worst things said to you? Was there a moment that made you feel unsafe or question staying in politics?
5. How has this affected your mental health, your family, and your ability to do your job?
6. Beyond online hate, what are the biggest barriers stopping women from rising in politics?
7. Have you ever thought about walking away? And what made you stay?
8. Why is it critical to have women represented in politics? How would it change Malaysia?
9. What needs to be to tackle gendered disinformation? And why is this important to address?

Outcomes of Research ■

The research outcomes from Phase II will result in several key deliverables designed to raise awareness and drive action on the issue of gendered disinformation:

- **Special Section and Update to the OGBV Toolkit:** The research will contribute to a comprehensive update of the KRYSS Network OGBV Toolkit, incorporating a special section dedicated to gendered disinformation. This updated Toolkit will serve as a practical resource, providing knowledge, strategies, and tools to help individuals and organizations identify, address, and combat gendered disinformation in various contexts.
- **Information Video on Gendered Disinformation:** As part of the research outcomes, an informative explainer video on gendered disinformation will be produced. This video will provide a clear and accessible overview of what gendered disinformation is, how it is weaponized, and its impact on women, particularly in politics. It will serve as a key resource for raising public awareness and engaging a wider audience on the issue.
- **Gendered Disinformation Digital Campaign:** To further amplify the findings of the research, a digital campaign will be launched to raise awareness about gendered disinformation across various online platforms. The campaign will include:
- **Snippets of the Explainer Video:** Short, engaging video clips will be shared on social media to highlight key aspects of gendered disinformation and spark conversation among the public.
- **Infographics on Gendered Disinformation:** Three visually compelling infographics will break down complex information on gendered disinformation, making it easy for people to understand its nature, scope, and effects.
- **Final Infographic on the Impact and Policy Suggestions:** A final infographic will focus on the broader impacts of gendered disinformation and propose actionable policy suggestions to counter it. These suggestions will be derived from the accompanying policy brief, offering clear recommendations for addressing gendered disinformation at the legal and institutional levels.

These outcomes will contribute to KRYSS Network's ongoing advocacy efforts, supporting the fight against gendered disinformation and advancing the broader goal of reducing OGBV globally.

Usage of Secondary Materials as Research Source and Desk Review ■

For Phase II of the research, secondary materials have been utilized as a crucial component of the desk review to support the investigation into gendered disinformation and its broader implications. These materials encompass a wide range of academic literature, legal documents, policy frameworks, and case studies that provide valuable context and background on the issue.

By analyzing these secondary sources, including reports from KRYSS Network's ongoing OGBV research, academic publications, legal texts, and resources from reputable organizations, the desk review aims to deepen the understanding of the current state of gendered disinformation in

Malaysia. This process not only highlights existing gaps in knowledge and legal protection but also informs the development of actionable strategies for addressing gendered disinformation in future advocacy and policy initiatives. The comprehensive review of these materials ensures that the research is grounded in evidence, facilitating a robust and informed approach to tackling the issue.

Sources

1. **KRYSS Network OGBV Ongoing Research, Documentation, and Case Studies**
Internal research, documentation, and case studies collected by KRYSS Network as part of their ongoing work documenting cases of OGBV in Malaysia.
2. **KRYSS Network OGBV Toolkit**
A comprehensive resource developed by KRYSS Network that provides tools, strategies, and guidance on addressing OGBV, with a specific focus on gendered disinformation.
3. [Tapsell, R., & Chandrarao, J. \(2024\). Gendered Disinformation and Election Campaigning: A Malaysian Case Study. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, Volume 5, Number 1, Summer 2024.](#)
This academic article explores gendered disinformation in the context of Malaysia's 15th General Election, based on research conducted by Ross Tapsell and Jananie Chandrarao.
4. [EU DisInfo Lab \(2021\). Gender Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response.](#)
A report published by the EU DisInfo Lab that advances the understanding of gender-based disinformation and offers recommendations for responding to it.
5. [Government Communication Service \(GCS\) UK \(2021\). Resist 2: Counter Disinformation Toolkit.](#)
A toolkit by the UK Government Communication Service that provides guidance on countering disinformation, including gendered disinformation.
6. [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights \(OHCHR\) \(2023\). Report on Freedom of Expression and the Gender Dimensions of Disinformation.](#)
A UN OHCHR report detailing the intersection of freedom of expression, gender, and the increasing issue of disinformation targeted at women.
7. [Laws of Malaysia, Act 574, Penal Code of Malaysia](#)
The Penal Code of Malaysia, which outlines the laws related to defamation, harassment, and other legal protections that intersect with gendered disinformation.
8. [Laws of Malaysia, Act 840, Anti-Sexual Harassment Act 2022](#)
The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 2022, which provides legal measures against sexual harassment and is relevant to cases involving gendered disinformation that causes harm to women.
9. [Wong Chong Wah and Wong Chun-keat \(2018\). Defamation and Privacy Law in Malaysia. Wong & Wong, Lawyers.](#)
A detailed legal overview on defamation and privacy laws in Malaysia, relevant for cases involving gendered disinformation and its legal implications.

10. [Mah, R., & Toh, E. \(2018\). *The Basics of Defamation Law in Malaysia*. MahWengKwai & Associates.](#)
An article explaining the basics of defamation law in Malaysia, providing context for understanding the legal challenges related to gendered disinformation.
11. [Zulrafique & Partners \(2024\). *Key Amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act pursuant to the Communications and Multimedia \(Amendment\) Bill 2024*.](#)
A legal brief outlining the amendments to Malaysia's Communications and Multimedia Act, which will influence how online disinformation is regulated.
12. [Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission \(MCMC\).](#)
Official content and resources from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, which provides guidance on regulating digital media and online content in Malaysia.
13. [Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, Malaysia. *Official Portal of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Tribunal of Malaysia*.](#)
Official materials and content from the portal of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Tribunal of Malaysia, which provides resources and guidance on addressing sexual harassment, including in digital spaces.

Way Forward ■

This research by KRYSS Network into gendered disinformation provides essential insights into its impact on female political candidates in Malaysia. By combining primary interviews with secondary data review, the methodology has highlighted the various ways in which gendered disinformation is weaponized and the resulting consequences for women's political participation.

The findings have not only informed the ongoing updates to the KRYSS Network OGBV Toolkit but also contributed to the development of a digital campaign aimed at raising awareness and fostering political will to address this issue. Through these efforts, KRYSS Network aims to ensure that gendered disinformation is tackled in both policy and practice, promoting an informed and more equitable society.

Contact ■

KRYSS Network is always open to partnerships, insights, and contributions from individuals, organizations, and policymakers who share a commitment to creating a safer, more equitable digital space for all. For inquiries, collaboration opportunities, or to get involved in ongoing projects, please contact KRYSS Network at info@kryss.network