This thesis studies whether women authors are disproportionately attacked and negatively affected by online reader comments. I designed a quantitative study that performed a content analysis of 1,600 reader comments posted to 16 authors who publish their political opinions online. Half of the authors were men and half were women. Half were conservative and half were liberal. Half wrote for legacy media websites and half wrote for blogs. Half of them wrote for sites that required readers to provide a valid, verifiable e-mail address before posting a comment, and half of them did not. I distributed a survey to the authors that would help shed light on my quantitative data, and 10 of the 16 authors responded.

The quantitative results of my study did not support the idea that women the women authors faced more negative reader comments. There also is not quantitative evidence that sites requiring readers to provide a valid e-mail address have a smaller number of comments that contain negative language. Conservative authors received more negativity than liberals in the comments and legacy media sites had more negative comments than blog sites. Qualitatively speaking, there is some evidence suggesting that negative comments affect the women political authors more so than their male peers.