Case study:
Digital Violence Against Tunisian Female Journalists

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Acknowledgments

Contents

The Broad Context

The worldwide appeal of journalism and the methods employed in its practice are often showcased through the dissemination of periodic reports, either on an annual or monthly basis, by international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders, the International Federation of Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the National Union of Tunisian Journalists at the national level. These reports gauge the extent of press freedom violations and infringements, highlight their severity in certain societies compared to others, caution transgressors against repeating their actions until their names are publicly disclosed, and threaten to pursue legal action against them. Additionally, these reports emphasize the importance of accountability and transparency. They also evaluate the quality of press freedom and freedom of opinion and expression in a given society, providing examples of positive experiences that have emerged in societies that respect these freedoms, particularly those related to the press. These experiences serve as a benchmark for measuring the rate of democratic and pluralistic development in a country.

The international speeches in question also provided classifications of countries based on their respect for press freedom. Moreover, these speeches were not without detailing the dimensions of the press freedom crisis, including the types of crimes committed against journalists in several countries across the globe. These growing violent practices take various forms and shapes, both physical and moral violence against journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists' statement issued in New York, United States, on December 9, 2021, the number of imprisoned journalists worldwide reached a new record.[1] The statement also described 2021 as a particularly bleak year for defenders of press freedom. Furthermore, the "Measure of Violations against Freedom of the Press" report[2] published by Reporters Without Borders at the end of 2021 revealed that 40 journalists were killed, and 370 journalists were imprisoned worldwide.

However, in recent years, the increasing use of social media spaces, especially with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resort to using the Internet to manage daily life affairs and communicate remotely, has led to the emergence of cyber violence, which has permeated the international digital community and cast a shadow over the physical realm. This form of violence has targeted male and female journalists worldwide, threatening their safety and hindering them from fulfilling their professional responsibilities. For instance, since 2018, Reporters Without Borders has warned about the expansion of this new electronic threat to press freedom in its report entitled "Cyberbullying against journalists: When electronic armies launch their attacks," which was released on July 26. In this report, Christophe Deloire, Secretary-General of the organization, highlighted that "digital spamming is a phenomenon that is spreading internationally, and today it represents one of the most serious threats to freedom of the press."[3] Three years later, on November 2, 2021, which marked the International Day to End Impunity, IFEX emphasized the danger of electronic surveillance through advanced digital programs, noting that "illegal surveillance is the latest weapon in the ever-growing arsenal used against journalists and human rights defenders. It is a harmful activity that can easily shift from online

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[1] Committee to Protect International Journalists (2021).
[2] Reporters Without Borders (2021).
[3] Reporters Without Borders (2018).

harassment to physical attacks. It is illegal and disproportionately affects those who belong to the most vulnerable groups, whether because of their gender, sexual orientation, race, or origin."[4]

Cyberbullying and illegal electronic surveillance are distinct, and numerous digital crimes are practiced daily against professional and societal groups, including female journalists, who received attention from experts and international organizations. Women have been the focus of digital violence research for numerous years, but digital violence targeting female journalists has only recently been identified as a significant threat to their safety. In 2014, the International Women's Media Foundation and the International Institute for the Safety of Journalists conducted a study with UNESCO support, revealing that 23% of female journalists who participated in the survey had experienced online intimidation, threats, or abuse.[5] In 2017, the International Federation of Journalists[6] reported that 44% of female journalists had been subjected to digital violence. Furthermore, in 2018, the International Women's Media Foundation[7] found that 63% of female journalists who responded to the survey had faced threats or harassment at least once.

Two years later, in a survey study, titled "Violence against female journalists online: a glimpse into its spread and impacts at the global level," conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Center for Journalists, it was found that digital violence against female journalists has become a serious problem for many years and are now increasing globally at an alarming and uncontrollable rate.[8] The study found that 73% of female journalists who responded had been exposed to various forms of digital violence, including threats of sexual assault, physical violence, obscene speech, and harassment via private messages. Additionally, female journalists are also subject to threats to tarnish their professional or personal reputation, attacks on digital security, defamation through the publication of manipulated images, and financial threats. These attacks are increasingly linked to networks and organized attacks fueled by media misinformation methods.[9]

Tunisia is not exempt from the global context that jeopardizes the freedom of the press, particularly female journalists. The Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists issued its fifth annual report on the safety of journalists [10] between November 1, 2020, and October 25, 2021, on November 3, 2021, disclosing that during the aforementioned period, 220 individuals, including 86 female journalists and 134 male journalists, were subjected to attacks. Notably, there were 20 gender-based attacks on female journalists. The Monitoring Unit also documented the rise of digital violence in Tunisia and the proliferation of hate speech and incitement to violence against male and female journalists by social media users. These users were responsible for 20 attacks on Tunisian journalists, six of which were directed at female journalists. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Center for Research, Studies, Documentation, and Media on Women, Creedive, in December 2019, revealed that 89% of Tunisian women interviewed had experienced digital violence on Facebook, with many reporting multiple instances of such violence. This highlights the growing threat to the psychological, physical, and digital safety of women in Tunisia posed by digital violence.

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[4] Any Jime. "Tracking the Carrier: Ending Impunity for Illegal Surveillance." IFEX website (2021).
[5] International Women's Media Foundation (2014).
[6] International Federation of Journalists (2017).
[7] International Women's Media Foundation (2018).
[8] The International Center for Journalists (2020).
[9] International Center for Journalists (2020).
[10] "Unit for Monitoring and Documenting Violations Against Journalists at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists"

These statistical and descriptive data on a global and national level necessitate considering the dimensions of the true picture of what Tunisian female journalists face in terms of digital violence. The specifics of its manifestations, its psychological and physical effects, and its repercussions on female journalists and their professional practices and social environment remain undiscovered. Many Tunisian female journalists possess proficiency in information and communication technologies, and they are active on a significant number of digital platforms, including social media, which no longer serve solely as individual spaces but also function as virtual headquarters for numerous media institutions and digital spaces for disseminating media content and promoting published and broadcast material in traditional media. Female journalists must now adapt to this digital innovation and leverage it to enhance their competencies, achieve professional success, secure a prominent position for themselves in the digital professional and social realm, and engage with their audience.

However, these digital advantages come with limitations that could threaten the professional, social, and human lives of female journalists by exposing them to digital violence. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the various dimensions and backgrounds of this complex issue, to highlight the challenges that female journalists in Tunisia face in the context of practicing their profession, and to understand the ways in which they are affected by digital crimes that violate their rights as stipulated in international constitutions and treaties. Additionally, it aims to assess the degree of their awareness of their citizenship value and their role in participating in the political, economic, and social life of the country, without any form of exclusion or discrimination. The question remains: does digital violence target female journalists based on their gender or is it an attempt to undermine their professional activity in the journalistic field and belittle or harm it? What are the manifestations of digital violence directed against female journalists in Tunisia, and who is responsible for it and its aggravation? Can Tunisian female journalists today confront this issue through the rule of law, or are they subject to personal, societal, and/or institutional professional pressure to give up their rights? And, finally, what are the ways to reduce and address this phenomenon to respect the principle of freedom of the press, opinion, and expression?

The Theoretical Context

Considering the theoretical framework of this study on digital violence against female journalists in Tunisia, this study initially aims to elucidate the characteristics of the methodological approach, followed by defining the primary concepts within this study, and finally, to illustrate the reality of digital violence in the international experiences of female journalists.

Methodology

In the methodological approach section, we aim to establish the research approach, research methodology, suitable technique for producing the academic article, and the study participants.

Methodological Approach

Exploring the research problem related to the journalistic profession and its dimensions necessitates examination within the context of media and communication sciences. The investigation of the issue of violence has been linked to social sciences, which have been viewed as a breeding ground for research on social problems, including gender issues, in recent decades. However, this study highlights a different methodological approach introduced by the journalistic angle of the piece, as it incorporates the problem of violence against Tunisian female journalists in digital spaces within the context of media and communication sciences. It is essential to maintain this natural framework for the research findings to be of scientific and professional benefit. The scientific and professional domain of media and communication sciences is supported by its intersection with other non-scientific sciences, such as social sciences.

In terms of the violence that female journalists experience in digital spaces, it is not appropriate to use a passive verb such as "are directed" because violence in these spaces is perpetrated by individuals or groups, and their motivations must be examined. Investigating digital violence against female journalists requires exploring the intuitive relationship between the sender of a media message and its recipient through a media medium. In this relationship, the female journalist is the producer and sender of the media content to the public, and according to the cybernetic approach, is expected to interact with her audience through feedback by sending their opinions or comments via a digital medium, such as a social media platform, website, or messaging app. However, the nature of this communication between female journalists and the audience has become marred by a growing culture of violence that takes various forms, posing a threat to journalists' professional careers and their status as active participants in society.

Prior research in the field of media and communication sciences has primarily focused on the demographic characteristics of audiences, including their age, geographical distribution, and preferences for media content, as well as their level of engagement with these products. However, these studies have not specifically addressed the concept of a violent or tyrannical audience. The integration of media and communication sciences with other human sciences, such as social sciences, political sciences, legal sciences, linguistics, semiotics, and others, through a multidisciplinary approach, has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the audience's characteristics. This has led to the emergence of new images of the audience that have been shaped in modern digital spaces using information technologies and artificial intelligence. These images are characterized by tyranny and

oppression, as evidenced by numerous international reports, including those that document the experiences of female journalists.

Although numerous media establishments worldwide are eager to implement the media conciliator's plan, which focuses on resolving audience grievances directed at the institution against its male and female journalists, a section of the audience has made its way into open digital spaces. These spaces witness negative interactions that breach the principles of freedom of opinion and expression when dealing with media message creators and presenters. The audience has traditionally been viewed positively, with journalists often referring to it possessively, such as claiming, "my audience." However, today's audience has evolved into a perpetrator of digital violence that can escalate into physical violence against journalists, particularly female journalists, across various criminal aspects. Unfortunately, perpetrators frequently evade accountability for such actions. How can media institutions hold their audience accountable when they invest substantial sums of money to attract their attention, attain high audience ratings, and develop competitive strategies in the media market, all thanks to the audience? However, can we today present a new image of the audience that follows media and journalists, using digital spaces and smart technologies to act with impunity, transgressing the boundaries of freedom of opinion and expression to commit crimes against media institutions and journalists, whether male or female?

Therefore, with regard to the methodological approach employed in this study, the problem of violence against female journalists in digital spaces is situated within the field of media audience studies and combines a gendered perspective with instances of digital violence inflicted by the general audience upon female journalists in Tunisia.

In the past four decades, the gender perspective has been employed in various scientific fields, particularly in social, legal, and philosophical disciplines. By utilizing this perspective to investigate the violence directed at female journalists, we aim to draw attention to the potential risks and challenges that this group may face as a socially and culturally vulnerable population. As female journalists are expected to perform their roles in the journalism sector without infringement of their rights, attack on their psychological health, or threat to their physical safety, it is crucial to monitor the violence directed at this group. Additionally, using a audience approach to address digital violence against female journalists will help to uncover the origins of the violence, its various forms, and the characteristics of the perpetrators, who are members of the audience.

Method and Study Participants

This study employs a case study approach to investigate the occurrence of violence against female Tunisian journalists in digital spaces. It explores both individual and collective cases to identify the sources of the issue and collects information that can help understand the reasons behind digital violence. By conducting a qualitative analysis of the collected data, this study aims to unravel the complex situation faced by female journalists who have been subjected to digital violence within the context of the journalistic and social environment in which they operate. This study serves as an exploratory study that examines some noteworthy cases to uncover the various angles of the phenomenon of digital violence against Tunisian female journalists and formulate hypotheses related to this issue. In doing so, the following steps are utilized:

First, cases that illustrate the issue of digital violence against Tunisian female journalists are selected. To select the sample for this study, the monthly reports issued by the Occupational Safety Center's

monitoring unit at the National Union of Tunisian Journalists are used. These reports, which are published on the website [www.protection.snjt.org], provide detailed information on all attacks directed against Tunisian journalists, including the names and institutions of the journalists involved. In addition, the nature of the attack and the party responsible are specified by the media outlets that the journalists work for. More specifically, the selected sample of this study is based on reports that have been published in the last three years. In selecting the cases, this study considers the diversity of media institutions, including public, private, and association-based outlets, as well as the geographical diversity across the country. Additionally, the sample considers the type of digital attacks directed at female journalists. The following table presents a sample of female journalists who have been exposed to digital violence in the last three years, categorized according to their media institution, geographical presence, and the date of the assault.

Table 1: Selected Female Journalists

Journalist	Media Institution	Location	Date
Reem Triki	Najma FM Special Radio	Sousse	August 19, 2021
Iman Essid	Tunisian Public Television Corporation	Tunis	May 25, 2021
Sanaa Al Majri	Channel 9	Tunis	January 31, 2021
Naima Khalisa	The Private Tunisian Dialogue Channel	Medenine	January 15, 2021
Hanan Kirat	Al-Sabah Newspaper	Tunis	December 31, 2020
Lamia Bayoud	Tunisian Public Television Corporation	Tunis	December 22, 2020
Marwa Al-Raqiq	Al-Diwan Private Radio	Sfax	December 11, 2020
Amal Al-Rashidi	Al-Shabab Public Radio	Tunis	December 1, 2020
Farah Ben Amara	EFM Special Radio	Tunis	November 28, 2020
Nadia Rtibi	Tunisian Public Television Corporation	Kasserine	July 29 & August 5, 2020
Latifa Lanour	Amal Association Radio	Tunis	June 14, 2020
Hanan Abbasi	Tunisian Public Radio Corporation	Zaghouan	May 12, 2020
Amal Chahed	Tunisian Public Television Corporation	Tunis	April 8, 2020
Fadwa Chtorou	Tunisian Public Television Corporation	Tunis	March 6, 2020
Beya Al-Zordi	Al-Hiwar Al-Tunisi private channel	Tunis	November 23, 2019
Buthaina Gouaia	Tunisian National Public Radio	Tunis	November 1, 2019

Second, the collection and verification of information are conducted through the employment of directed individual interviews and content analysis, subsequently formulating hypotheses that facilitate the investigation and culminate in precise findings.

The investigation into the experiences of Tunisian female journalists who have faced digital violence begins with the hypothesis that the content produced by female journalists and presented to the audience plays a significant role in the severity of the reactions they receive from the online community who do not approve the content. This study is grounded in the analysis of individual interviews conducted with female journalists, either in person or over the phone, as well as an examination of the monthly reports from the Occupational Safety Center at the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists. Additionally, past comments posted on social media platforms such as Facebook were also taken into consideration. However, as the data was collected, two additional hypotheses emerged.

1. The general audience has not historically demonstrated a commitment to the free and unbiased expression of their opinions, which can lead to extreme viewpoints that may result in violent attacks on journalists, causing significant psychological consequences for the victims.
2. The general audience frequently targets female journalists based solely on their gender, with the intention of subjecting them to abuse in digital spaces. This violence is not a result of their professional performance, but rather a consequence of the widespread tendency to insult women and reject their participation in audience life.

Third, the initial diagnosis of the factors driving the phenomenon of digital violence against Tunisian female journalists is conducted based on the above hypotheses that are developed by analyzing images of violence against these journalists in digital spaces. Starting from their professional and societal present and returning to their previous experiences with these attacks, this analysis aims to explore the dimensions of the phenomenon of digital violence. Accordingly, the main question this study seeks to address is: Why does audience target female journalists in digital spaces?

Fourth, recommendations to combat violence against female Tunisian journalists are suggested, encompassing short, medium, and long-term solutions. It is necessary for the state, media institutions, society, and the female journalists themselves to collaborate to eradicate the digital violence faced by female journalists in Tunisia.

Definition of Concepts

Our adoption of a methodological approach that combines "the audience approach" with "the gender approach" hinges on defining the meaning of "the audience" as provided by modern approaches, which includes the electronic audience (E-Audience), remote audience, and networked audience who is ubiquitous and can be present everywhere without being geographically located (U-Audience).[11] Due to advancements in information technologies, the audience today has become "an active audience" that is not subject to the logic of "influence" during the reception process, but rather to the logic of "interactivity" that enables it to practice the behaviors it desires. This trend has unfortunately led to an increase in violence on digital spaces, as evidenced by international reports.

On the other hand, gender refers to the social dimension of sexual identity and was first introduced in feminist studies by American Ann Oakley[12] in the 1970s. In his book "Sex and Sexuality: On the

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[11] Ubiquitous Audience, Mark Weiser.
[12] Ann Oakley (1972). Sex, Gender, and Society. London. Temple Smith.

Development of Masculinity and Femininity," Robert Stoller utilized the term "gender" to describe the complexities of behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and inquiries related to gender that have no biological connotations.[13] Gender encompasses the social, cultural, and psychological traits and behaviors that are considered appropriate for individuals of a particular society,[14] and these characteristics dictate roles and behaviors that are shaped by socialization mechanisms and institutions that vary across different cultures, historical contexts, and societies. Therefore, the gender approach was adopted to analyze and deconstruct the relationships between men and women and to examine the social and cultural structures that perpetuate discriminatory divisions between them.

The concept of violence has been widely recognized as a form of gender-based discrimination. This study is focused on exploring the notion of "digital violence," which is also known by various other terms such as "cyberviolence." This study aims to investigate the complex nature of digital violence, with the intention of identifying its various forms within the selected cases. Understanding the intricacies of this phenomenon is crucial for assessing its detrimental effects on female journalists.

In a report published in 2018, digital violence was defined as "is any violent act that is perpetrated through the use of information and communication technology, such as mobile phones, smartphones, the internet, or social media platforms and email, to target or disproportionately affect women because of their gender." This definition specifically pertains to acts of violence against women that occur on the internet.[15]

The term "digital gender violence" is used to describe the phenomenon that is the focus of this study on female journalists. According to the Arab Center for the Development of Social Media in Palestine, which issued a document on combating digital gender violence in 2018,[16] this phenomenon is rooted in the social imbalance in roles between men and women and is supported by patriarchal and authoritarian social concepts in any society. It is reflected in the digital world and has dimensions and consequences in the non-virtual world. The center defines "gender-based violence" as any act of physical, psychological, or social violence, including sexual violence, which is committed or threatened (such as violence, threats, coercion, exploitation, deception, manipulation of cultural concepts, use of weapons, or exploitation of economic conditions) that stems from gender inequality and affects women.

In its report issued in 2020, entitled "Violence against Female Journalists on the Internet: A Global Overview of its Spread and Impact,"[17] the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined "digital violence" as "violence committed via the Internet" or "assault via the Internet." UNESCO categorized digital violence against female journalists into two main types: abuse and hate language, and harassment through unwanted private messages. Additionally, the report identified exposure to threats of defamation of reputation, physical violence, damage to professional standing, sexual violence, surveillance activities, and abuse using photos as other forms of digital violence. According to the report, female journalists are targeted with digital violence on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. The perpetrators of digital violence against female journalists, as identified by UNESCO, range from unknown or hidden individuals to government officials, politicians, competing media institution employees, and colleagues.

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[13] David Glover and Cora Kaplan, Homosexuality, Dar Al-Hiwar for Publishing and Distribution, Syria, 2008, p. 27.
[14] Anthony Giddens- Philip Sutton, Basic Concepts in Sociology, translated by Mahmoud Al-Thawadi, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut, October 2018, p. 158.
[15] Reem Benarous. "Violence on the Internet: Screens of Shame." European Neighborhood Portal (2018).
[16] "A package of workshops against digital gender-based violence." The Arab Center for Media Development in Palestine (2018).
[17] International Center for Journalists (2020).

The most significant impacts of digital violence on female journalists, as outlined in the UNESCO report, include psychological deterioration, loss of physical safety, the need for medical or psychological support, damage to professional reputation, and absenteeism from work due to fear of physical harm. In response to digital violence, female journalists may take various actions, such as informing work officials, reducing their online presence, enhancing their physical security, concealing their identities, or even leaving their journalism careers altogether.

The transition of professional responsibilities to digital platforms due to the Covid-19 pandemic or even prior to it has resulted in the migration of negative human behaviors and practices that subjugate women to the online space. New terminology has emerged to describe various forms of harassment present on the internet. "Cyberbullying" is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent and well-known of these terms. It refers to any form of abuse or harm that is intentionally inflicted by one person upon another individual or group, using electronic platforms such as social media sites, discussion forums, and blogs. The bully employs strong language, insults, curses, and even defamation to intentionally harm the recipient's image and psyche. In extreme cases, this behavior can lead to depression and even suicide as a means of escape from this violence.[18] A theoretical study of dimensions and practices has identified various forms of cyberbullying, including:

- **Digital anger**, also known as sending angry messages to a victim via electronic means, such as email, messaging applications, or online comments, is a form of online aggression. This type of behavior is harmful and can have serious consequences for the victim.
- **Digital sexual harassment** is the use of technology to harm, intimidate, or exploit someone sexually. Sexual misconduct of this nature constitutes a symbolic rather than physical violation.[19]
- **Digital argument** can involve threats of violence or other forms of abuse and insults through online digital conversations or arguments.
- **Digital humiliation** involves sharing hurtful, humiliating, and false statements about a person online.
- **Disguise or impersonation** by a bully involves assuming the identity of another person and sending messages or posting content that is detrimental to the victim's reputation.
- **Deception** is the tactic employed by a bully to build trust with the person being targeted, with the aim of obtaining confidential information and sharing it with others or disclosing it online.
- **Violation of privacy** involves divulging confidential information about the perpetrator without their approval, with the intention of publicly disclosing embarrassing or disturbing details through posts or recordings that include private messages, images, or information about the victim.
- **Exclusion**, whereby the bully endeavors to banish the victim from virtual spaces and solicits others to do the same, without any justifiable reason other than to wield power over the victim or to subject her to mistreatment.
- **Stalking** refers to the practice of persistently following and monitoring an individual online, including sending false threats and accusations that may lead to causing physical harm in the real world.[20]
- **Trolling** refers to the deliberate act of posting inflammatory or insulting comments on the internet with the aim of causing distress and inciting a similar response from the recipient.

The aforementioned list of digital violence is not exhaustive, as there are additional potential risks and dangers that female journalists may confront in the digital space.

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[18] The lives of Charara and Malika Hassi. "Cyberbullying: A theoretical study into its dimensions and practices" (2019)
[19] "Cyber Sexual Harassment: A Study of Patterns and Motives" (2018).
[20] "What is cyberbullying" (2021).

The Global Reality of Digital Violence Against Female Journalists

The focus of this study is on the current situation regarding crimes that endanger the safety of female journalists worldwide shedding light on the severity of the issue and provide insight into the extent of the problem of digital violence against Tunisian female journalists in comparison to the global scenario.

Undoubtedly, one of the most notable instances globally is the case of Maria Ressa, a Filipino-American journalist and recipient of the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize for 2021. Since 2016, Ressa has faced serious threats of rape and murder, in addition to being constantly bombarded with offensive, racist, and defamatory digital comments that undermine her dignity and question her credibility. She has also been accused of promoting fake news, leading to numerous arrests and detentions, as well as potential prison sentences.

There are reports indicating that some of the attacks on Ressa are orchestrated by the government and fueled by the rhetoric of Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte and the bloggers and influencers who support him. The head of the international legal team defending Ressa reported that the authorities are distorting her reputation, and the Philippine President has contributed to an increase in cyberattacks against her. Additionally, online violence leads to further persecution of Ressa, as there is a mutually reinforcing correlation between the violence she is subjected to online and the progress in legal harassment on the ground.21

According to this journalist, the most effective method for curbing digital violence against female journalists is to hold digital platforms accountable, including their supervisors who are responsible for tolerating the perpetrators of such attacks that have caused significant changes in her life.

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21 "A new study reveals the violence that Maria Ressa was subjected to online." International Journalists Network website.

Results

The present study delves into the subject of digital violence perpetrated against female journalists in Tunisia and is structured into three distinct sections. The first section focuses on elucidating the various dimensions of digital violence directed at Tunisian female journalists, while the second section attempts to identify the underlying factors contributing to the proliferation of this issue to recommend some evidence-based recommendations to combat digital violence against women, particularly female journalists, in the third section.

A Reality of Digital Violence Against Female Journalists in Tunisia

The journalist is not professionally disconnected from the media organization she works for, as she is privy to its daily operations and details. Therefore, this study is interested in scrutinizing the nature of digital violence inflected upon a representative sample of media institutions, with the aim of offering a better understanding of the collective violence that female journalists may face, which could have severe consequences for their well-being.

Digital Violence Targets Media Institutions and Harms Female Journalists

Tunisian female journalists have faced harm from digital campaigns targeting the media institutions in which they work. They have also endured the challenges faced by their professional institutions and confronted numerous digital crimes directed against them.

On July 25, 2021,[22] President Kais Saied's announcement to freeze the work of the parliamentary institution and implement exceptional measures in Tunisia was met with an incitement campaign against the Arabic news channel "Al Jazeera" in Qatar, organized by the President's supporters on social media pages in major states of Tunisia. Throughout July, these individuals shared news headlines and video recordings from Tunisia, accusing the channel of collaborating with foreign agendas and serving as a traitor. The channel's field correspondent in Tunisia, Maysaa Al-Fatnassi,[23] received a large number of insulting and offensive comments, including " Find something else to speak about" and "she has nothing to do about this (useless) broadcaster. she only talks about Tunisia 😔😖 those cheap women." Also, "Maysa borrowed a phone to make this phone call after the police took everything away from her 😂 the poor woman, any Tunisian working for Aljazeera lacks patriotism." Additionally, thousands of negative comments were directed at Ms. Al-Fatnassi.

On December 1, 2020,[24] Radio Monastir initiated a digital incitement campaign through its involvement on the "Facebook" social media platforms. This campaign followed the "Opinion and Dissenting Opinion" program, which had previously broadcast content related to the "possibility of the National Army intervening to disperse sit-ins in the country." The program presenter, Alia Rahim, guided the discussion towards "a call for military intervention," drawing from comparative experiences. As a result

[22] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (July 2021)
[23] "The latest developments with Al Jazeera's correspondent in Tunisia, Maysaa Al-Fatnassi." Al Jazeera channel video (July 27, 2021)
[24] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (December 2020)

of this, numerous political actors and citizens, including many digital comments, subjected journalists working for Radio Monastir to a campaign of digital insults, cursing, and incitement. Consequently, the radio's director, Lilia Ben Sheikh, the programming officer, and her assistant were suspended from work, along with the program presenter Alia Rahim. On the Tunisian Radio's Facebook page,[25] many accusations, threats, and insults were directed at the radio, particularly towards Alia Rahim, who was accused of "encouraging a coup" and "speaking on behalf of the people to stop it for a while."

Based on the insights derived from a small number of media establishments that have been subjected to digital violence, some preliminary observations regarding the nature of this form of violence can be gleaned. That is, it is conducted through organized and systematic campaigns, typically involving paid pages that Tunisians refer to as "blue flies." These campaigns are launched intentionally and then disseminated by individuals, groups, and structures on Facebook who hold similar viewpoints, thereby amplifying the campaign's reach and impact through thousands of comments and posts, some bearing the real names of their authors and others using pseudonyms disguised as fictitious personas. This digital violence, primarily directed at media institutions for professional reasons, also affects female journalists, who may be subjected to a range of insults and threats that undermine their emotional well-being and professional work.

Digital Violence Targets Female Journalists

The purpose of this research is to reveal the reality of the digital violence inflicted upon female journalists in Tunisia. The objectives of this study are grounded in the hypotheses presented and serve as the basis for categorizing the results obtained. It is worth noting that media content serves as a starting point for the audience's reliance on it in practicing digital violence against female journalists. Moreover, the prevalent culture of violence in society has contributed to the audience's gender-based violence against female journalists.

Audience Content-Based Violence Against Female Journalists

Media content is often the driving force behind digital violence perpetrated against female journalists in Tunisia, and in numerous instances, it serves as a crucial contributor to the occurrence of such acts.

Activists on Facebook launched a campaign against Farah Ben Amara, a journalist at the private EFM radio station, on November 28, 2020.[26] This campaign followed the publication of a flash by the private Ninth television channel regarding her presence on the Dima Labas program concerning the social and sexual topics she raised in her program. Upon the release of the episode, it was met with criticism from both male and female activists on the social media platforms. They not only insulted and defamed the female journalist but also attributed to her statements that she did not make during the program, according to the Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists.

The first national public television channel broadcast a report about "suspicion of corruption in the maintenance process of the nursing home in Kasserine." This prompted male and female activists on "Facebook" to launch a campaign of insults, cursing, and incitement against the female journalist Nadia

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[25] Posted by Tunisian Radio on December 1, 2020.
[26] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (November 2020)

Rtibi, a correspondent of the Tunisian Television Corporation in Kasserine, on July 29, 2020.[27] They accused her of concealing the information. On August 5, 2020, journalist Nadia Rtibi was again subjected to direct threats and harassment by a group of people against the backdrop of her protest against this campaign targeting her. As one of the supervisors of some pages on "Facebook," one of the assailants moved with 15 people to the neighborhood in which the journalist resides threatening her husband and stressing that he would continue to defame her on Facebook. According to the journalist, this is what the assailant said during an interview. The assailant led a defamation campaign targeting journalist Nadia Rtibi, accusing her of "covering up corruption." He also published these accusations on more than five Facebook pages, which sparked a campaign of insults targeting her. As a result, the journalist filed a complaint against the assailant at the security center in Kasserine. Journalist Nadia Rtibi informed the professional union authorities of what had happened to her and remained in contact with them for follow-up. Nonetheless, the media institution she collaborated with failed to provide any response to the event. She also filed a case to hold the assailant accountable, but the ruling was not issued until she was interviewed in December 2021. This incident left her with profound psychological effects at first, especially since the matter caused confusion in the neighborhood in which she lived, as some people told her, "It's better for you to stay in your home."

The journalist from the Amal Association Radio, Latifa Lanour, was subjected to verbal assaults on "Facebook" on June 14, 2020,[28] by individuals who intentionally organized a public digital defamation campaign against the journalist in the aftermath of her coverage of the political event that occurred in front of the People's Assembly headquarters in Tunis. One of the activists on this platform posted a photograph of the journalist during her field coverage, mocking her appearance, alleging that she pursued political agendas, and employing derogatory language in reference to her. This picture was circulated and distributed on Facebook pages, but the perpetrator subsequently apologized to the journalist. On December 17, 2020, Facebook pages linked to or allegedly affiliated with security unions initiated a digital violence campaign against Latifa Lanour, reportedly in response to her coverage of a march on Habib Bourguiba Street in the capital city. In her reportage, she provided on-the-spot coverage of the events transpiring there, a claim that these pages had previously doubted, as confirmed by the journalist during our interview with her. The journalist chose not to initiate legal proceedings due to the belief that pursuing such actions would not prove effective in achieving practical results in the Tunisian context. Nevertheless, her media institution demonstrated solidarity with her and devoted an entire morning radio segment to denounce the repeated attacks against her. These cyberattacks have a detrimental impact on her, causing her distress, particularly when her family members learn about the content posted by Facebook activists. Her son urged her to give up journalism, but she refused.

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[27] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (July 2020 and August 2020)

[28] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (June 2020)

Residents of Bir Mashharqa in the state of Zaghouan accused journalist Hanan Al-Abbasi, a correspondent for the Tunisian Public Radio Corporation, of reporting false news about a case of idleness and failure of some shops to adhere to the legal timing of closure imposed by the state of emergency and quarantine in the country on Monastir Radio. The journalist had broadcast news on the national radio the day before about the situation in the municipal market in Zaghouan, and some citizens who reported it promoted false news. Consequently, on May 12, 2020, she experienced harassment and defamation from some citizens on Facebook.[29] The "Bir Masharqa's page on this site published a blog post in which it denounced the false allegations against journalist Hanan Al-Abbasi, which insulted her. Despite informing the professional union authorities of the violence to which she was exposed, they refused to help her file a case against the assailants, considering that they belong to the area where she lives and for fear of being exposed to physical attacks. The journalist also informed the director of Monastir Radio of the recent updates, who contacted the governor of Zaghouan asking for her protection. To correct fake news, the journalist published videos and recordings to prove the truth of what she said on the radio. According to her account, Hanan Al-Abbasi initially faced great psychological anxiety and even fear of escalating public anger against her. However, she found support from her colleagues, who told her that the profession of journalism required great steadfastness, even though she was still at the beginning of her professional path.

Following the airing of an episode of the program "The National Gives You the Truth" on April 8, 2020,[30] on the first public television channel, Amal Al-Shahed, a journalist, was subjected to an attack by Facebook users after suggesting that the Ministry of Education help students who lack digital capabilities by printing lessons and exercises and sending them to their homes with the assistance of the Tunisian Post, which previously succeeded during the Covid-19 quarantine period in the country in delivering mattresses to the elderly to their homes. This proposal was made in support of the principle of equal opportunities and equality among all students. However, some teachers and citizens took her words out of context and launched a campaign of insults and slanders against her on Facebook. Despite reaching out to the Anti-Cybercrime Squad in Aouina with the assistance of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists, the journalist was unable to obtain a complaint number to follow up on or receive an invitation to present their grievance. This 3-day campaign left the journalist feeling frustrated and exhausted, as she had to review the comments with the help of an executive officer and file the complaint. Upon the end of the campaign, political activist, Thamer Badida, circulated a photograph of journalist Amal Chahed in the company of Samir Beltayeb, the former Minister of Agriculture, during one of her television interviews with him. The photograph was accompanied by a news story regarding Beltayeb's arrest along with his mistress. As a result, journalist Amal Chahed became a target, and her reputation suffered damage. Upon Chahed's clarification, Badida removed the photo and apologized, acknowledging the mistake. The journalist subsequently sought redress through the judicial system by filing a complaint, although no results have been reported as of yet as stated by the journalist during her interview with us. The news institution for which Chahed was employed planned to file a legal complaint; however, the attorney responsible for the case passed away and was not succeeded by another legal representative.

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[29] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (May 2020)

[30] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (April 2020)

Impact of societal violence culture on audience sentiment towards female journalists

The culture of violence prevalent in society has had a significant impact on the incidents of violence against female Tunisian journalists in digital spaces. Such occurrences are often the result of a failure to respect the principles of freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the values of tolerance, diversity, and cultural difference. As a consequence, female journalists have been targeted for expressing their personal opinions and viewpoints on various general issues.

On January 31, 2021,[31] a group of security personnel reportedly threatened and insulted journalist Sanaa Al-Majri of the private "Ninth" channel with obscene language in private messages on Facebook. The messages also allegedly contained a threat to use security forces to retaliate against the journalist, as stated in the report of the Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists.

On December 31, 2020,[32] Hanan Qirat, a journalist at Al-Sabah newspaper, was threatened and received insulting messages on her Facebook account from a follower of a private radio station. The comments were a response to her remark on an article published by the radio station, which covered the battle against corruption and the part of the media in ensuring that members of parliament who engage in unethical behavior are held accountable. According to Qirat, the attacker's language was highly offensive and warranted criminal punishment. Following the incident, Qirat contacted the professional union bodies and proposed filing a case against the attacker; however, her proposal was met with rejection. To avoid any further repercussions and to protect her family, Qirat chose not to inform her media institution of the attack. The incident had a significant psychological impact on Qirat, leaving her in a state of shock and causing her to refrain from making any further comments on social media, particularly in the political field.

On December 22, 2020,[33] Lamia Bayoud, a journalist at the Tunisian Television Corporation, fell victim to digital violence when she received messages filled with insults and attacks on her human dignity and reputation on her Facebook account from various fake accounts. This occurred following her expression of an opinion on the media content produced by her colleagues at the institution. It is essential to mention that this campaign against her began in 2019, but she did not report the incidents to professional union bodies until the end of December 2020, when she was promised assistance in filing a judicial complaint, which, unfortunately, did not come to fruition. Despite the efforts of her close colleagues to support her, the campaign against her persisted until our interview with her in late December 2021. This organized digital campaign had a profound impact on Bayoud's psychological well-being, as she periodically received messages from fake accounts that appeared to be from a woman, delving into the finer aspects of her personal life. As a result, she was compelled to step away from presenting television programs and supervising other work outside of her specialization in the field of journalism. Bayoud continues to work at the Tunisian Television Corporation, but she has suffered significant psychological distress and health problems as a result of the digital violence she experienced. Despite this, she remains committed to her job and hopes to recover from her ordeal.

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[31] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (January 2021)

[32] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (December 2020)

[33] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (December 2020)

On December 11, 2020,[34] Marwa Al-Raqiq, a journalist, faced a threat from a political party supporter on the "Diwan" radio station in Sfax due to her criticism of the head of a parliamentary bloc's opinion on dissolving Parliament. The attacker severely criticized her after she published a comment on the opinion of the head of the parliamentary bloc. In response, he sent her a private message on Facebook, threatening her that he would surprise her with his response to her statement and that it would not pass unaddressed, as she mentioned in her interview. The journalist informed her media institution's editor-in-chief and professional union bodies but did not pursue legal action. This systematic campaign against her continued for a week, during which the attacker, who was a journalist for the "Insan" channel, continuously published her pictures accompanied by offensive comments on several pages affiliated with the Ennahdha Movement and the Dignity Coalition. Many of the activists on these pages engaged in writing insulting and provocative comments that had a significant psychological impact on the journalist. At first, she did not take the matter seriously, but later became fearful of physical harm to her and her family. However, this unpleasant experience did not deter her from continuing her work with confidence or expressing her opinions freely.

The National Radio of the Tunisian Public Radio Corporation journalist, Bouthaina Kouaia, was the victim of a defamation campaign on November 1, 2019.[35] This occurred after she expressed her opinion regarding the performance of the President of the Republic, Kais Saied, on Facebook. Posts supporting Saied on the platform were filled with insults and slander directed towards journalists. The attackers even threatened to target Kouaia's family in an attempt to force her to change her opinion of the President and apologize to him. The journalist has faced ongoing digital violence since 2011 due to her critical opinions of a political party, which she shared on her personal Facebook account. In 2013, supporters of the Truth and Dignity Commission created a fake account in her name, falsely claiming that she was insulting a revolution martyr. Kouaia filed a case as a result, but the matter was not resolved until an interview with her in December 2021.The Tunisian National Syndicate of Journalists subjected Buthaina Quwai'a to a defamation campaign and physical attacks, as evidenced by the Professional Ethics Committee's statement, which mentioned her by name following an opinion she expressed in a digital blog post about MP Halima Al-Mualaj. Consequently, the Ministry of the Interior contacted her to inform her that she was being threatened. Journalists have continually insulted, cursed, and used profanity against her, even in religious institutions such as mosques. These attacks have focused on her age and gender, often referring to her as "old woman." The psychological effects of these digital attacks have caused her great pain and forced her to avoid leaving her house and to take extended periods of time off from work. Additionally, her family members have faced pressure, with some of her family preventing her from posting their photos on her personal Facebook account to prevent further attacks. Despite these challenges, Buthaina Quwai'a continued to conduct her work professionally.

Audience gender-based abuse of journalists

Digital violence originates from the violence that exists in society based on "gender" or social class, which frequently results in women being subjected to threats that undermine their dignity and safety. This form of violence is also experienced by female journalists who, due to their professional

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[34] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (December 2020)

[35] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (November 2019)

achievements, have been able to enter public spaces, as well as other young women and women who engage in online activities.

Journalist Reem Triki encountered bullying on August 19, 2021,[36] while appearing on Sousse's Najma FM radio. Activists on Facebook targeted her for wearing the hijab, with viewers of the "Morning Star" program on the radio's Facebook page referring to her attire as "Afghan-Taliban clothing" and calling her a "revivalist." Despite the journalist's efforts to report the incident and seek legal action, she decided against pursuing the matter due to professional concerns. However, her media institution stood in solidarity with her and filed a case against the primary aggressor, who had posted comments against her on the radio's Facebook page. Following a repeat offense in December 2021, her colleagues informed the individual that his actions had been brought to justice, resulting in him ceasing his behavior. Initially, Reem Al-Triki dismissed digital bullying, believing her status as a well-known journalist in the region would protect her. However, the repeated incidents caused her significant psychological distress. One of her female counterparts at the radio station faces the same issue, and other female journalists at stations such as "Mosaique" are subjected to digital bullying because of wearing the hijab. They are accused of being affiliated with the Ennahda movement and of being unprofessional in their coverage of political news. In the context of digital bullying due to wearing the hijab, a female television journalist in Tunisia was the target of a smear campaign on Facebook. Activists and citizens attacked her for removing the hijab, but she declined to include her experiences in this study.

On May 25, 2021, an unknown individual gained unauthorized access to Iman Essid's Facebook account, who is a journalist for the Tunisian public television company.[37] The hacker intended to disseminate "indecent" content to a group of Ms. Essid's colleagues and sources through her account, which resulted in significant reactions and embarrassment for Ms. Essid within both her professional and personal circles. Following extensive efforts, the account was restored, and a criminal complaint was filed against the individuals responsible for the attack, as determined by the Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists.

Journalist Naima Khalisa, a correspondent for Al-Hiwar Al-Tunisi channel in Medenine, was stunned when a Facebook post affiliated with security forces was published on January 15, 2021.[38] The post contained insults and defamatory remarks against her in the aftermath of a dispute that had occurred between her and a member of the National Guard the previous day. The post delved into slander about her private life, aiming to besmirch her honor and threaten revenge against her. The affected journalist contacted professional union bodies, but they did not provide her with any practical assistance until a month later, when the situation had subsided. This lack of prompt action contributed to the journalist's decision not to pursue legal action. She was also keen to prevent the situation from escalating and reaching a wider audience in her area. Hence, she refrained from informing her employer, the media institution for which she worked. This attack had a profound impact on her psychological well-being, as she noted during her interview with us, explaining that "the society in which I live is quick to believe all stories, and such offensive posts open the door to comments and insults, even from people who do not

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[36] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (August 2021)

[37] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (May 2021)

[38] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (January 2021)

know the targeted individual." Despite continuing her work with the security authorities, the journalist began avoiding the security union bodies in her area, as she believed that there was "no legal or moral deterrent to their actions."

The journalist at Al-Shabab Radio, who is affiliated with the Tunisian Public Radio Corporation, Amal Al-Rachdi, was the target of a defamation campaign on December 1, 2020.[39] A group of pages on Facebook defamed and distorted the journalist by publishing her pictures accompanied by sexual expressions, accusing her of inappropriate statements. This campaign was linked to her radio program, "Whispers of the Night," which resulted in significant social and psychological consequences. The campaign is still ongoing, as many pages, including the "Al-Gharaba Page," continue to publish pictures of her in the radio studio and accompany them with offensive sexual phrases. The interview with the journalist was scheduled to take place at the end of December 2021. The journalist encountered a profound sense of discomfort that significantly impacted her psychological well-being, prompting her to reach out to the head of the Tunisian Journalists Syndicate for assistance. With their help, she was able to connect with a Tunisian social activist in the digital field who resided in the United States of America. The journalist subsequently contacted the management of Facebook and was successful in removing offensive posts, comments, and videos within a week's time. However, the legal case that the journalist pursued at her own expense against the perpetrators was not received favorably by the court, and the case filed in her behalf by the National Union of Tunisian Journalists did not prove effective in achieving a practical outcome. The management of the media institution where journalist Amal Al-Rashdi is employed did not demonstrate any concern for the daily harassment she endured, despite the fact that several of her colleagues displayed their support by posting comments on suspicious pages that were subsequently removed. According to the interviewee, the individuals responsible for these digital attacks suffer from "severe sexual repression." It is important to note that during our interviews with Amal Al-Rashdi, both men and women participated in digitally harassing female journalists.

Tunisian journalist Fadwa Shatoor, who works for public television, was subjected to a campaign of harassment on Facebook while reporting on the terrorist attack that occurred on March 6, 2020,[40] near the American embassy in Tunis. Both male and female activists circulated her photographs and criticized her appearance. In response to this, other activists organized a campaign of solidarity with the journalist, in which female journalists and civil society activists posted pictures of themselves without makeup. Despite the digital violence she faced, the journalist did not file a case in court, and the unions did not take any action. However, the president and general director of the Tunisian Television Corporation sent her a supportive message on her mobile phone, as she revealed in an interview with us. The journalist was deeply impacted in the initial hours of the cyberbullying campaign targeting her, to the point of shedding tears. Despite being under immense pressure to complete her video processing and prepare her press report for broadcast on the eight o'clock news, she received an outpouring of support, both in the form of messages and phone calls. Many Tunisian and Arab radio and television stations reached out to her, expressing a desire to restore her dignity. However, the journalist declined all offers and was grateful for the support she received, as it boosted her spirits. Unfortunately, the root cause of the issue was a professional error committed by her colleague, the technical photographer, who failed to capture her in a technically attractive manner. Despite this, the photographer was not held accountable and instead, the journalist was blamed for not using cosmetics

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[39] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (December 2020)
[40] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (March 2020)

before appearing on screen. This was particularly unfair, as she had always appeared in her natural state while covering terrorist and protest events, without drawing any significant criticism.

On November 23, 2019,[41] Clay BBG, a rapper, posted a song on YouTube targeting Beya Al-Zardi, a journalist and commentator on 'Ili Baadou' program on Al-Hiwar Al-Tunisi's private channel. This incident occurred amid a heated dispute between the two parties, which began as a conversation about former President Habib Bourguiba on Facebook and YouTube and escalated into a series of accusations. In his song "Clash," Clay BBG made derogatory and criminal remarks, including calling for the gang rape of a female journalist, which is a punishable crime under the law and constitutes a form of violence against women. As a result of the journalist's complaint, Clay BBG was suspended, and he subsequently filed a lawsuit against her for defamation and insult on social media platforms. This incident was documented in the report of the Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists.

Key Factors and Solutions for Digital Violence Against Female Journalists

The forms of digital violence against a number of female journalists in Tunisia validate the hypotheses of this study. The Tunisian journalists are subjected to digital violence as a result of the content they publish and broadcast and the lack of respect for their right to freedom of expression and opinion. Moreover, the prevalence of gender-based violence in society exacerbates the problem, leading to a range of offensive attacks against female journalists. This creates a challenging environment for them, where they are constantly questioned about their professional credibility and subjected to insults, cursing, and bullying. In extreme cases, they may even face indecent assault and other crimes. Overall, these factors combined make it difficult for female journalists in Tunisia to conduct their work safely and without fear of violence.

The insights gained from our discussions with the selected Tunisian female journalists who have experienced digital violence highlighted their deep-seated emotions regarding the abusive attacks they faced. Despite the significant time that has passed since these incidents occurred, these feelings remain raw and filled with a profound sense of sadness, heartbreak, and regret. These journalists described vivid and harrowing images of the attacks, which have had lasting psychological effects on them. They fear that these attacks may escalate into physical violence that could also endanger their loved ones. Despite their efforts to seek justice by filing criminal cases and complaints, they have not seen any practical results. In their view, the failure of the judicial system and the policy of impunity are the primary factors contributing to the rise of violent crimes online. Real progress in addressing and limiting these crimes can only be achieved by enacting and implementing effective legislative frameworks that require a genuine political will to uphold democratic values and principles.

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook in Tunisia, have been linked to the widespread issue of violence against female journalists. These platforms allow crimes to be committed online without prevention or punishment of perpetrators, and this is rarely addressed unless the victim insists strongly. Therefore, it is imperative that social media administrators assume their responsibilities and take the necessary steps to halt digital violence. There are numerous digital pages dedicated to organized attack campaigns, with tens of thousands of visitors and significant influence, yet they remain open on the

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[41] "The monthly report of the monitoring unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists." (November 2019)

Internet despite their hostile content. These digital crimes against female journalists are not limited to fake accounts but are also perpetrated by individuals with real accounts on Facebook. This demonstrates the extreme indifference of the network's administration, and even collusion, with underlying economic motives. This network thrives on high rates of views and shares, creating a vicious cycle of violence and exploitation.

The publication of offensive content online elicits a range of responses from various segments of digital society. This includes the perpetration of additional crimes without first verifying the accuracy of the information. Female journalists often characterize this society as a "herd," "militia," or "electronic flies," which direct hostility towards female journalists. This hostility is rooted in a cultural and social heritage that disproportionately targets women. It is not only men who engage in such behavior, as women can also be formidable enemies. Furthermore, colleagues within the journalism profession may also harbor hostile feelings towards their peers, contributing to the overall problem. The emergence of this digital society, which is governed by the spread of tense attitudes and emotions and fueled by self-centeredness and individualism, necessitates further study. This is a society where individuals hide behind their screens to attack others.

Female journalists in Tunisia face significant challenges in dealing with cybercrimes. Despite their courage and awareness, they often encounter disappointment and require support within their professional context. Media institutions have a responsibility to protect their female journalists, respect their rights, and offer moral, legal, and psychological support during difficult times. Such support can boost their self-confidence and help them succeed in their profession, enabling them to continue their work with determination and without fear.

Therefore, there is no longer any room for doubt that the audience played a significant role in perpetrating violence against female journalists. The audience could be categorized into three types:

- **Audiences of the media institution** have been known to attack journalists due to their affiliation with a specific media institution, even in the absence of any professional misconduct. For instance, the female journalists working for the "First National" channel has been subjected to bullying in digital spaces as a result of the audience's dissatisfaction with the channel's coverage of events, both in terms of form and content. Similarly, the female journalists associated with the "Al Jazeera" channel is commonly attacked by the Tunisian audience due to the channel's stance on various events in Tunisia.

- **Audiences of a newspaper** are the primary recipients and audience of the media content produced and disseminated by female journalists, including their broadcasts and publications through their affiliated institutions or personal digital spaces. This audience interacts with the female journalists based on their professional standing and public figure status, regardless of whether it pertains to their opinions, personal beliefs, or private life. Their audience comprises individuals who are not acquainted with them personally but follow their work through media and digital platforms or those who have direct knowledge of them, such as their colleagues.

- **Audiences of digital pages** are accustomed to targeting women, regardless of their professional standing. These individuals seek out any offensive comments or posts directed at women and amplify them, disseminating them throughout digital spaces. A prime illustration of this is the blog posts produced by some union pages, such as those authored by political activists, which are subsequently broadcast by major news outlets, resulting in their audience engaging in digital defamation campaigns.

Currently, there is a perilous development, characterized by a shift in the rapport between journalists and the audience, which has led individuals to engage in various cybercrimes for the purpose of expressing their extreme views, and even resorting to violence against female journalists in digital social spaces. It is imperative that the concept of the "digital audience" to be revisited, particularly the nature of "interactions," as it pertains to the media and journalists as a whole, and female journalists in particular. In our view, it is essential to thoroughly investigate the issue of digital violence against female journalists by employing a more comprehensive audience approach, coupled with a gender-sensitive perspective, to obtain more precise and scientifically valid outcomes.

The audience's participation in perpetrating crimes against women in digital spaces, motivated by their profession and audience recognition, extends to female journalists and artists, such as singers and actresses, who are frequently targeted based on their external appearance or private life rather than their professional accomplishments. In recent times, many actresses and singers have faced defamation campaigns in digital spaces for various reasons and in different forms, which would not have occurred in the past when audiences were not digitally active and were impressed by the presence of a celebrity or attending a singer's concert. Given the current situation, it is essential to reassess the digital behavior of female professionals who regularly appear in the media and to identify the nature of the violence they experience in digital spaces, which has become increasingly prevalent.

Procedures and Recommendations

Among the procedures that can be performed are the following:

Developing training programs for first-line stakeholders, including legal professionals, to equip them with essential concepts, rules, and unique processes. These programs focus on reinforcing the rights of female journalists who experience digital violence and preventing perpetrators from evading accountability. This paper demonstrated that among the representative sample of female journalists who were selected, none received any communication or had their cases resolved, with a ruling being rendered. This underscores the need to enhance the skill set of lawyers and specialized teams dedicated to investigating crimes against women, to ensure that justice is served.

Organizing training programs specifically designed for female journalists, aimed at equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to safeguard their digital security. As the majority of those who fall victim to digital violence lack proficiency in this area, it is crucial to ensure they possess the necessary skills to protect themselves. Furthermore, it is imperative to enhance their understanding of relevant legislation and raise their awareness of the importance of confronting cybercrimes and holding the perpetrator accountable. This is in alignment with the findings of this paper, which highlighted the lack of awareness among female journalists regarding their vulnerability to digital violence. Additionally, it is essential to provide emotional support to female journalists who have had such experiences, as many of them experienced a profound psychological impact that they have been unable to overcome, despite resuming their professional duties and regaining confidence in their abilities.

It is imperative to establish medium- and long-term strategies that involve the participation of media institutions, state institutions, and international organizations to address any violence directed at female Tunisian journalists. To this end, the Center for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women in the Creed could collaborate with relevant bodies to devise cooperative initiatives aimed at combating digital space violence.

Media Institution Level

Media institutions must take responsibility for safeguarding the female journalists who work for them by guaranteeing the implementation of the provisions in their fundamental chapters that enshrine the journalist's right to protection and by updating their conduct and editorial codes to include provisions that shield journalists from cybercrimes.

Media institutions are responsible for developing and maintaining consistent media content within their programming schedules and strategic plans that condemn acts of violence against women, particularly female journalists. Such content should also promote the values of equality, cultural diversity, and the principles of freedom and difference within society.

Media institutions have also displayed a strong interest in providing training for female journalists, with the aim of enhancing their cultural awareness and knowledge of digital security and safety measures. This is achieved through the organization of training programs in collaboration with specialized media and civil society organizations, which are specifically designed to educate these journalists on how to protect themselves from digital violence.

State Institution Level

Revising the legal provisions pertaining to digital violence and cybercrimes, or enacting legislation that specifically addresses digital violence against women, has become a pressing necessity in Tunisia. This is crucial for ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable. While legal texts and laws are a crucial component, it is also essential to provide all necessary procedural mechanisms and to mobilize governmental and non-governmental interventions.

Civil society organizations fulfill a crucial function in informing society and reminding individuals of the boundaries of free expression and opinion online. They achieve this by organizing various initiatives, such as campaigns, seminars, discussion groups, and direct meetings. Additionally, they can educate children and young people by implementing a program that focuses on the responsible use of electronic media.

Considering the current climate, it is imperative to give serious thought to the institutionalization of the audience and the establishment of a context for self-modification of behavior when it comes to media content consumption and online interactions, to mitigate the cybercrimes. This may involve creating an audience council to determine ethical charters for the audience's dealings with the media within a specific framework and may also serve other socio-economic purposes.

International Institution Level

Governments must accede to international agreements and treaties that impose penalties for digital violence. Digital violence is a transnational criminal activity that demands a global summit to address it, with a focus on devising international measures to combat digital crimes, especially against vulnerable segments of society. It would be appropriate for certain Tunisian state institutions to spearhead this proposal and present it to an international forum.

Numerous international organizations, including UNESCO, must exert moral pressure on the management of social media platforms, in particular to discharge their primary responsibility for cybercrimes committed at any moment. This is because these administrations permit such crimes to be committed by neglecting to remove publications that violate the law, and it is their duty to revise their work strategies to delete all suspicious posts and punish those who promote them.

Given the increasing significance of digital violence against women, particularly female journalists, experts, and researchers in the Arab world should collaborate with universities, research institutions, and study offices to conduct comprehensive studies on this topic. Such studies are necessary to provide a more precise understanding of the extent and nature of the violations of freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of the press, as reflected in the statistics. Furthermore, given the digital nature of the work of female journalists, it is essential to include digital spaces in these studies to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

Conclusion

The necessity for societal awareness, political will, and legal repercussions in addressing acts of violence against female journalists in digital environments cannot be overstated. It is imperative that such crimes are met with appropriate consequences.

Although there is a lack of awareness regarding the seriousness of this crime in society, it is crucial to address it. In today's society, which heavily relies on artificial intelligence, the impact of a cultural and civilizational legacy that undermines women is still felt. It is essential to promote awareness among women, particularly female journalists, about their rights and empower them with the necessary knowledge and skills to combat digital violence.

Politics in countries often benefit from the chaos that prevails online, particularly on social media platforms. This is because they can exploit many gaps in digital society, including cybercrimes, to further their goals and manipulate public opinion. In this context, educational and civic activities play a crucial role in guiding public opinion and preventing it from being swayed by international trends that accept chaos and overlook cybercrimes. It is important to recognize that education and civic engagement are essential in promoting a culture of responsibility and accountability in the digital age.

The current state of disorder is exacerbated by the lack of legislation in many countries to address cybercrimes and hold online perpetrators accountable for targeting women and female journalists in particular. However, it is not entirely a vacuum as legislators are currently powerless to contend with the sophisticated technology that has given rise to cybercrimes conducted by parties that cannot be physically or geographically defined, necessitating the development of innovative solutions to combat digital violence in the digital age.

Digital violence in the international community is a form of organized crime that is facilitated by social media platforms. These platforms utilize individuals from the digital media audience as tools to perpetrate this heinous act against humanity. Despite the severe psychological, physical, and professional consequences that victims endure, these platforms continue to thrive, fueling an economic cycle that increases their popularity and the public's addiction to them. This poses a significant challenge to humanity today, as individuals become increasingly attached to these platforms in all aspects of their lives.