Female Journalists in the Digital Media Platform Environment

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the challenges faced by female journalists in the digital space, and to examine the safety threats they encounter, including online gender-based violence (OGBV), cyber trolling, and harassment. The study will also investigate the strategies employed by both female journalists and media organizations to address these issues. A mixed-methods approach will be used, qualitative methods. The qualitative data will be collected through in-depth document analysis of media safety protocols. The study will focus on digital space, which has not been extensively researched in terms of gender-based violence in journalism. By identifying the unique experiences and safety challenges faced by female journalists in this region, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue and provide recommendations for improving safety measures and gender-specific protection strategies. This research will offer valuable insights for media organizations globally in addressing the digital safety of female journalists and ensuring their well-being both online and offline.

Keywords: Female journalists, online gender-based violence, digital safety

INTRODUCTION

Religious inii The development of information and communication technology has transformed social and economic structures, including opening up greater job opportunities for women (Castells, 2010; Kumari, 2020). The job opportunities referred to here are platform-based jobs, including those in the platform-based media industry. Digital media platforms provide significant opportunities for female journalists to showcase their work without geographical limitations, empowering them in the global journalism industry (Ross, 2017; Sawicka, 2020). The global reach, in a short time, and the ability to reach a heterogeneous audience is highly possible due to social media. Social media and personal blogs allow female journalists to build their digital branding and interact directly with their audiences (Chen, 2020). This is supported by research showing that women are more active in using social media for journalistic work compared to men (Franks, 2013; Bayraktar, 2017; Learetta, 2021).

Technological advancements have provided both opportunities and challenges for women working in journalism. Platform-based media industries, such as social media and digital platforms, play a vital role in promoting accountability and increasing women's representation in the public sphere (Gillespie, 2018; van Dijk, 2020; Binns, 2021). By offering more open and publicly accessible platforms, platform-based media allow women to voice their opinions, build communities, and demand social change more effectively. This reduces the barriers that previously hindered women's involvement in the public sphere and enhances visibility and recognition of gender issues, bringing them into the news coverage. Additionally, these platforms

often provide mechanisms for responding to and addressing injustices, and spreading information quickly, which helps promote accountability in various social and political contexts (Paulino, 2021).

However, while the digital era has increased flexibility and remote work opportunities, and encouraged greater female representation in the public sphere, it has also increased job demands, economic pressures, and blurred the boundaries between professionalism and personal space, which can impact mental health (Kuijpers, 2020; Owusu, 2024). Studies by these researchers found that while remote work offers greater flexibility, it also brings new challenges. Work demands increase due to the expectation that workers are always available and can respond quickly, which can blur the professional and private boundaries. The pressure to stay online can lead to burnout and other mental health issues. For female journalists, online activity also increases the threats they face in the digital space. Female journalists face threats such as cyber trolling, racism, sexual harassment, and gender-based threats both online and offline (Zviyita, 2023; Helberger & Kruikemeier, 2021; Fink, 2020; McLaughlin & Lichterman, 2019; Langer, 2018; Thorson & Wells, 2021). In further research, Zviyita (2024) found that violence against female journalists in Namibia is underreported, and there is a lack of legislative, institutional, and specific measures to ensure the safety of female journalists. This results in self-censorship and withdrawal from the public sphere among female journalists (Zviyita, 2024; Yusof, 2021; Zaragoza, 2019; Gordon A, 2018; Ward, 2017).

Nonetheless, globally, interest in the journalism profession among women has been increasing recently (Adam et al., 2023). The development of information and communication technology has also contributed to the advancement of education and professions. The number of women entering journalism is higher than that of men (Franks, 2013). Unfortunately, this has not been accompanied by a significant increase in the number of women in leadership positions at the top levels of the media industry (Lundi, 2019; Ross, 2018; Gallagher, 2021; Huang, 2020). Female journalists still face significant challenges in reaching top positions. In Indonesia, for example, female journalists must demonstrate harder work and greater sacrifices compared to male journalists (Silaban, 2021). Women often struggle to balance their professional responsibilities with societal expectations and domestic duties. Globally, the number of female journalists compared to those holding top positions in media companies still shows a significant disparity, except in the US (Adam et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Percentage of women journalists vs. percentage of women top editors
Source: Adam et al., 2023
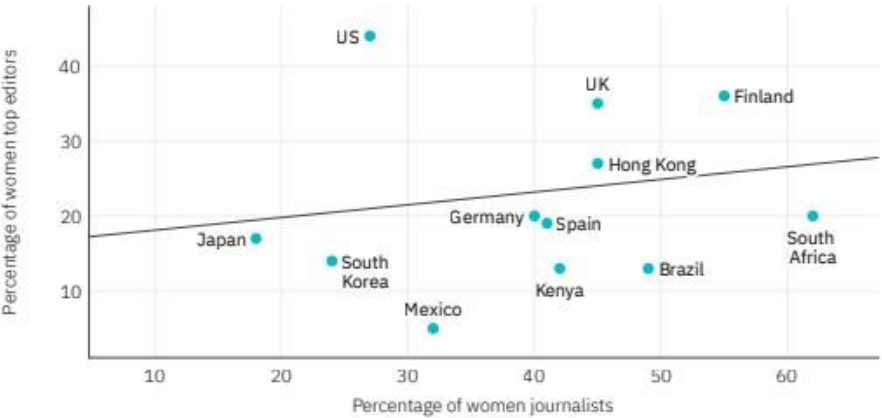
Similarly, when comparing the percentage of female journalists in top editor positions to issues of gender equality, the data below shows no positive correlation between broader gender equality and the percentage of female editors in top positions.

Figure 2. Gender inequality vs. percentage of women top editors
Source: Adam et al., 2023
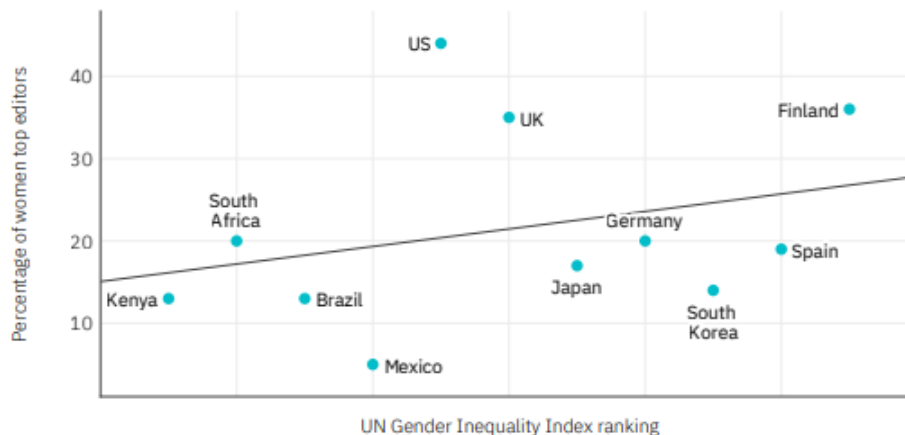
The digital era, with its diverse dynamics, has provided both advantages and challenges for women in the field (Byerly, 2013; Everbach & Flournoy, 2007; Gill, 2007). Certain digital tools and platforms have changed the gender dynamics in journalism. Understanding the gender dynamics within the media industry means not only highlighting ongoing issues but also encouraging further discussions on how to achieve equality in editorial spaces.

From the above description, the presence of women's journalism in the platform-based media industry presents several dimensions for discussion:

1. Digital platforms create opportunities for more women to pursue journalism as a profession. This, in turn, promotes accountability and greater representation of women in the public sphere.
2. The engagement of female journalists in the digital space, as a work-related consequence, also brings new challenges, such as safety threats to female journalists. This calls for strategic measures by both journalists and media companies to address issues threatening female journalists.

RESEARCH METHODS

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is a research aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, thoughts of people individually and in groups. This research is said to be qualitative because the data produced is descriptive by further exploring the data in the form of verbal statements narrated in writing (Moleong, 2009:3).

The research will be exploratory in nature, aiming to uncover the specific experiences of female journalists in the digital space. It will seek to identify the threats they face, including online harassment, cyber trolling, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence, as well as how media organizations address these challenges. The study will also explore the unique protection strategies that may be required for female journalists working in this specific local context

1. **Female Journalists in Media Platforms: Empowering Women through the Digital Space**

Digital platforms have brought significant changes to the world of journalism, opening up broader opportunities for women to pursue this profession and enhancing accountability and representation of women in the public sphere. In India, digital platforms have provided easier access for women to enter the world of journalism (Prasad & Kumar, 2016). This technology enables women to share their own news and stories without relying on traditional media, which is often male-dominated. This not only increases the number of female journalists but also enriches the perspectives and content shared with the public.

Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) highlight that digital platforms have created new opportunities for women to build careers as journalists. In the digital environment, women have more freedom and flexibility to explore topics and issues that are important to them. Furthermore, digital platforms allow female journalists to interact directly with their audiences, build communities, and receive constructive feedback. This contributes to greater accountability, as journalists can be more responsive to the needs and expectations of the public.

The long journey of women in the journalism world and how the digital era has become a catalyst for more inclusive change is described by Ross and Carter (2011) in their scholarly article *Women and News: A Long and Winding Road. Media.* Ross and Carter state that digital platforms offer a space where women can express themselves freely and equally, overcoming barriers that previously hindered their involvement in traditional media. It also allows women to take leadership roles in the media industry, creating examples and inspiration for the next generation of female journalists.

Women's representation in the media is also discussed by Steiner (2014) in one of the chapters of his book *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*. In the chapter on *Feminist Media Studies*, Steiner examines the role of digital media in increasing women's representation in the public sphere. Digital media not only provides a platform for women to speak but also helps change the existing narrative about women in the media. With more women participating as journalists, media coverage becomes more diverse and inclusive, reflecting women's realities and experiences more accurately.

Radcliffe and Bruni (2021) highlight how social media and other digital platforms shape news and promote gender representation in news coverage. Social media allows women to leverage the power of networks and online communities to advocate for gender issues and demand accountability from influential institutions and individuals. This not only increases women's visibility in the public sphere but also ensures their voices are heard and considered in public discussions.

Overall, digital platforms have become a powerful tool in opening opportunities for women to become journalists and promoting accountability and representation in the public sphere. By utilizing digital technology, women can more easily access the journalism profession, overcome structural barriers, and contribute to more inclusive and equitable social change.

2. **Online Violence against Female Journalists: A New Form of Violence for Female**

Journalists

The involvement of female journalists in the digital space as part of their work brings various new challenges, especially concerning safety. Female journalists are often targeted by online harassment, cyber trolling, and threats of violence (Chen & Pain, 2017; Zviyita, 2023; Helberger & Kruikemeier, 2021; Fink, 2020; McLaughlin & Lichterman, 2019; Langer, 2018; Thorson & Wells, 2021). These threats not only affect their mental and emotional health but can also hinder their ability to report the news effectively. These studies highlight that active involvement in the digital space requires female journalists to develop strong self-protection strategies, while media organizations must also play a crucial role in providing adequate support and security policies.

Research conducted by the World Association of News Publishers (2020) found that 40% of women and gender-non-conforming individuals reported experiencing physical, verbal, or digital violence, compared to 14% of male respondents. This study also found that nearly two-thirds of the 900 journalists surveyed experienced digital violence. This data indicates that female journalists face risks several times greater than their male counterparts (https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/ICFJ%20Unesco_TheChilling_OnlineViolence.pdf, accessed July 20, 2024).

A study by Zviyita, I., & Mare, A. (2024), titled *Same threats, different platforms? Female journalists' experiences of online gender-based violence in selected newsrooms in Namibia*, investigates the online gender-based violence (OGBV) experienced by female journalists in selected Namibian newsrooms. This article highlights the disproportionate levels of online gender-based harassment faced by female journalists compared to their male counterparts. Zviyita identifies various forms of harassment, such as name-calling, body-shaming, cyber trolling, deep fakes, verbal harassment, sexual extortion, and sharing intimate images without consent. The study, which focuses on Namibia—a context that has been less explored in this regard—uses an intersectional approach to analyze data collected from interviews with female journalists. The research finds that although the prevalence of OGBV in Namibian newsrooms is relatively low compared to other contexts, it remains a significant issue. Violence is underreported, and there is a lack of legislative, institutional, and specific measures to ensure the safety of female journalists. This leads to self-censorship and withdrawal from the public sphere among female journalists in Namibia.

Acts of *violence* against female journalists, both online and offline, demand media organizations to be aware and create a safe environment. This is emphasized in a UNESCO report written by Posetti and Storm (2018). The recommended strategies include digital security training, rapid response protocols to threats, and psychological support. The report also stresses the importance of gender awareness in journalistic safety policies, which can help reduce risks and provide better protection for female journalists.

The impact of violence against female journalists can extend beyond the digital realm if not addressed promptly. Security is holistic, meaning that when a journalist faces violence in the digital space, it can affect their psychosocial and physical security, exacerbating the gender gap and posing *significant* threats to the rights and safety of female journalists, both online and offline. Clark and Grech (2017) add that the psychological effects of digital harassment can be severe, including anxiety, stress, and depression. Therefore, media organizations must understand the holistic security of journalists, not only focusing on the physical aspects of safety but also

supporting digital security and mental health for female journalists. This can be achieved by providing counseling, peer support, and comprehensive wellness programs. This holistic approach is essential to ensure that female journalists can work safely and remain productive.

Further, regarding the digital security of journalists, a report by Mijatović (2019) for OSCE also highlights specific threats faced by female journalists in the digital space, such as doxing and gender-based *attacks*. The report suggests practical steps like using encryption technology, enhancing digital literacy, and implementing strict policies against online harassment. Additionally, media organizations are expected to take proactive measures to protect the identity and personal data of female journalists.

Finally, Lewis and Zamith (2020) evaluated various protection strategies used by media organizations and found that the most effective approach is one that combines security *technology*, training, and safety-oriented policies. They emphasize that media organizations must continually adapt to evolving threats in the digital space and adopt best practices to protect female journalists.

Overall, the involvement of female journalists in the digital space as part of their work brings serious safety *challenges*. To address this, a strategic approach from the journalists themselves, along with strong support from media organizations, is required. By adopting comprehensive and proactive protection measures, female journalists can work more safely and continue to contribute to gender representation and accountability in the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of female journalists in the digital space as a consequence of their work brings about new challenges, such as safety threats that demand strategies from both journalists and media organizations to address these issues. Studies show that female journalists often face online harassment, cyber trolling, racism, sexual harassment, and gender-related threats, both online and offline (Chen & Pain, 2017; Zviyita, 2023; Helberger & Kruikemeier, 2021; Fink, 2020). These threats not only affect their mental and emotional health but can also hinder their freedom to report the news effectively.

Media organizations need to develop strong self-protection strategies for female journalists. This includes digital security training, rapid response protocols to threats, and psychological support. UNESCO emphasizes the importance of gender awareness in journalistic safety policies to reduce risks and provide better protection for female journalists (Posetti & Storm, 2018). Additionally, a report by the OSCE highlights specific threats faced by female journalists in the digital space and suggests practical steps such as using encryption technology and enhancing digital literacy (Mijatović, 2019).

The review of literature in this section will serve as a reference for the planned research. The proposed study on the deconstruction of oppression faced by female journalists in Flores, Indonesia, within the platform-based media industry, will demonstrate novelty from several perspectives. First, this research will focus on the local context in Flores, Indonesia, which may have different social, cultural, and political dynamics compared to the global contexts that have been widely researched. This study will help fill the knowledge gap regarding the specific experiences of female journalists in Indonesia in facing digital threats.

Second, the research will explore how the challenges faced by female journalists in Flores may require unique and different protection strategies from those applied in other countries. This includes adapting security policies that consider the local context and the specific needs of female journalists in the region. Thus, this research is also expected to provide a platform for female journalists in Flores to voice their concerns.

Third, this study will provide valuable insight into how local media organizations in Flores respond to threats against female journalists and whether there are policies or best practices that can be adopted to improve their safety and well-being. Therefore, this research will not only offer new insights into the situation in Flores but also provide recommendations relevant to media organizations worldwide in facing similar challenges.

Overall, this research will contribute to the existing literature by adding new perspectives on the experiences and challenges faced by female journalists in the digital space, particularly in the local context of Indonesia. This will enrich the global discussion on the safety and representation of female journalists and encourage the adoption of more inclusive and effective protection strategies worldwide.

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