

# مجلة البحوث الإعلامية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدرها كلية الإعلام بجامعة الأزهر



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## قواعد النشر

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- يطبق تقييم مارس 2020 للمجلات على كل الأبحاث التي نشرت فيها قبل 1 يوليو 2020
- يطبق تقييم يونيو 2020 للمجلات على كل الأبحاث التي سنكشر فيها بدء من 1 يوليو 2020 و حتى صدور تقييم جديد في يونيو 2021
- المجلات التي لم تتقدم بطلب إعادة تقييم سيظل تقييم مارس ٢٠٢٠ مطبقا على كل الأبحاث التي سنكشر بها وذلك لحين صدور تقييم جديد في يونيو 2021
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**Cost of online connection:  
Digital threats for the Egyptian journalists and their  
awareness of the techniques used to attain their  
safety: A qualitative study**

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● **التحديات الرقمية ضد الصحفيين المصريين ووعيهم بالآليات  
المستخدمة للحفاظ على سلامتهم: دراسة كيفية**

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## Abstract

The online connection became one of the main features of our life today, whether between people or in the media sector. As the online connection yielded many benefits, it also caused different undesirable effects on people, media, and journalists.

In Egypt, there are many problems in the media sector which are related - to a great extent - to the online connection and its uses and consequences on journalists' safety, media credibility, and professional practices, so these threats or problems can be considered as a tax or cost of the digital age and increased online connection.

Based on in-depth interviews with 60 journalists from the different Egyptian newspapers and news sites (partisan, state-owned and private), and focus groups discussions with the journalists, the study will present a comprehensive overview about the actual digital dangers and challenges which Egyptian journalists face because of their journalistic work, seeking to clarify to what extent Egyptian journalists have awareness about all kinds of digital dangers and its undesirable consequences on their professional practices and their safety. Moreover, how do they combat these dangers in terms? The study investigates the legal framework, which regulates digital media and online communication in Egypt.

**Keywords:** Digital threats - Egyptian journalists – Online connection undesirable consequences – press regulations – Professional practices against digital threats.

### ملخص الدراسة

تستهدف الدراسة رصد وتوصيف أهم التهديدات الإلكترونية التي يعاني منها الصحفيون المصريون في الصحف المصرية المختلفة، وتوصيف مدى وعي الصحفيين بالآليات المختلفة التي تستخدم لمواجهة تلك التهديدات، وتقييم دور المؤسسات الصحفية والنقابة في تطوير مواجهة الصحفيين الفعالة لتلك التهديدات والتي تؤثر سلباً على أدائهم بكفاءة لعملهم، وتحليل التشريعات التي تختص بالصحافة والإعلام وحماية الصحفيين إزاء تلك التهديدات. اعتمدت الدراسة على مقابلات متعمقة مع الصحفيين في الصحف المصرية المختلفة (القومية، والحزبية، والخاصة)، وكذلك على جماعات النقاش المركزة؛ لرصد وتوصيف التجارب المختلفة التي مر بها الصحفيون، ومدى وعيهم ورؤيتهم من أجل تطوير أدائهم. توصلت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج منها: وجود عدد من النصوص القانونية المهمة التي شرعت مؤخراً لمواجهة المخاطر في العصر الرقمي. أن عدداً كبيراً من الصحفيين مر بالفعل بتجارب سلبية جراء هذه التهديدات الرقمية. أن عدداً منهم يحتاج لمزيد من التدريب لمواجهة وفهم التحديات والمخاطر التي تواجه الصحافة في العصر الرقمي. كلمات مفتاحية: التهديدات الإلكترونية – الصحفيون المصريون – الآثار السلبية للعصر الرقمي – الممارسات المهنية – تشريعات الصحافة.



## introduction

The online connection became one of the main features of our life today, whether between people as ordinary citizens or in the media sector. As the online connection yielded many benefits, it also noticeably caused different undesirable effects on people, media, and journalists.

When trying to evaluate the online connection's consequences, it can be considered that the Internet is a pathway for information sharing and a virtual meeting square where individuals can provide contrary information and views, critical debate issues, and associate with each other, offering the opportunity for people to realize the right to freedom of expression and association like no other time in history (Jennifer R. Henrichsen et al., 2015). On the other hand, some diversified threats and dangers occurred as a result of this online connection and internet usage such as illegal digital surveillance, character assassination, hacking personal and formal institutional accounts, website deformation, theft of digital resources, and many other undesirable dangers and threats.

Regarding the Egyptian media in specific, there are different noticeable problems which are related - to a great extent - to some of the irresponsible practices for the online connection and some unaware also use from the journalists which cause considerable problems and affect the journalists' safety negatively, media credibility and professional practices. Such threats or problems can be considered a tax or cost of the increased online connection in the digital age. In this respect, while journalists have to be aware

enough of all kinds of dangers of digital attacks to protect themselves, also having different techniques, media policies and well- prepared regulations to combat these dangers of digital attacks are very necessary to support the journalists and protect them, their sources and their work.

Journalists' awareness of digital threats and the different policies and regulations to guarantee their safety and protect their work, their sources, and the media institution became essential and crucial. If the journalists are not aware enough by the digital threats and the various newspapers cannot develop efficient strategies to combat the threats of digital attacks, this can lead to the destruction of newspapers' infrastructure and deterioration of its professional practices and performance, in addition to the undesirable adverse effects related to the journalists' unsafe environment.

Journalists often are, and increasingly have become the target of harassment, intimidation, and violence. Such attacks include threats to them and members of their families. Security and confidentiality have become more of a problem to journalists as the latest technology makes it easier and cheaper to hack into email accounts and mobile phones, where vital information concerning stories and sources is frequently held (International news safety institute, 2013).

Various studies and scholars tried to explain and categorize the threats that journalists are subjected to in many different regions in the world. Some scholars put three areas of threats, as the following<sup>(1)</sup>:

- Direct harassment refers to things that people do directly to one another, like being threatened physically, and being stalked.

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<sup>1</sup> - Michelle Ferrier, Attacks and harassment: The impact on female journalists and their reporting, the International Women's Media Foundation and Troll-Busters.com, 2018, p.12.

- Invasion of privacy refers to harms done to the victim through the unauthorized access to and exposure or spreading of information beyond the owner's control. Experiences and examples include: being hacked, having information about or images of
- person exposed online without their permission, being impersonated, being monitored, and being tracked online.
- Denial,
- if access occurs, and
- Someone uses the features
- of the technology or platform to harm the victim, usually by preventing access to essential digital tools or platforms. Examples include: sending a considerable number of unwanted messages, rendering the account unusable; misuse of reporting tools so that the person is blocked from using a platform.

Some scholars classified the varied threats facing media actors in today's technological environment into some scattered points: illegal surveillance, phishing attacks, fake domain attacks, Man in the middle attacks, denial of service, intimidation, harassment, and forced exposure of online networks<sup>(2)</sup>.

The international women's media foundation explained the professional safety and digital harassment and attacks for journalists, as shown in the following aspects <sup>(3)</sup>:

- Direct intimidation via email.
- Harassment on social media. (This may include instigating other individuals and groups to defame and question a journalist's character publicly.).

<sup>2</sup> - Jennifer R. Henrichsen, Michelle Betz & Joanne M. Lisosky, Building digital safety for journalism, UNESCO, 2015, pp.20-21.

<sup>3</sup> - The International Women's Media Foundation, An overview of the current challenges to the safety and protection of journalists, Prepared on the occasion of the UNESCO Media Leaders Conference on the Safety of Journalists, 2016, p.7.

- Trolling. (This includes posting deliberately offensive or provocative comments online to elicit an angry or upset response.)
- Leaked information or doxxing. (This type of abuse entails the public release of private information such as physical address or personal details.)
- Impeded or cut electronic communications and access.
- Hacking private accounts for identity theft or to send false messages that harm a journalist's standing.

Concerning journalists, "Digital security" can be identified as journalists' protection from the different risks and assaults committed by exploiting online communication through its applications and capabilities. On the other hand, "digital threats" as a concept means all assaults and crimes the journalists are subjected to because of their journalistic work and committed by depending on online communication and the new media as primary tools. Digital threats include invading privacy, extortion, fake domain malware attack, trolling, harassment on social media, etc. All these digital threats and assaults affect negatively – and maybe to a great extent- professional safety.

Professional safety - when talking about digital risks and threats - only as meant in this study encompasses two dimensions of safety; the journalist himself/herself from being threatened, harassed, or offended and his/her work safety from being lost, leaked altered or distorted.

The concept of professional safety is associated with many variables: the nature of media structure, media laws, media accessibility, media ownership, media literacy, journalism education, and training, etc. The new technological developments and increased online connection in the digital age allow attacking journalists depending on new techniques and using new ways of threats. Consequently, it is imperative to discuss such issues and

investigate Egyptian journalists' awareness and how such digital threats are handled by the legal framework and regulations in Egypt.

### **Research problem**

This study mainly seeks to demonstrate the actual digital threats that the Egyptian journalists suffer from in their work and investigate to what extent the Egyptian journalists have awareness about all kinds of digital threats. The study also explains how journalists avoid digital threats' undesirable consequences on their professional practices to protect their safety and protect their data, information sources, and credibility. The study will also analyze the legal framework that regulates the media and online communication in Egypt, clarifying to what extent it can be considered an efficient framework to attain the journalists' safety.

### **Literature review**

Various studies discussed the issue of journalists' safety and professional safety in different countries and communities from different sides, some of these studies discussed the issue, focusing on the legal framework which regulates journalists' rights and the professional safety, others focused on the media institutional policies and procedures to attain these significant rights. Other studies mainly investigated the different types of digital crimes perpetrated against journalists and some other studies that cared about the journalists themselves (their awareness, attitudes, opinions, and reactions); how do they manage their work and combat the different threats and dangers?.

The literature review will be divided into two main sections:

Section 1- The studies that focus on the crimes or assaults against journalists and their readiness to combat such crimes and the legal framework that works to protect them.

Section 2- The new trend of studies that focus specifically on the digital threats for journalists and how they manage their work under these

pressures, in addition to the laws and provisions that protect them from such dangerous threats.

Regarding section 1, in her study entitled **“Safety Threats, Impunity and Professionalism: Journalists' Dilemma in Pakistan,”** Sadia Jamil, 2018 tried to examine the impact of contextual factors on journalists' safety in Pakistan. Based on the quantitative method of survey and the qualitative method of in-depth interviews, the findings revealed that all surveyed journalists (100%) view the factors of government's and military's threats and pressure, impunity, the country's socio-political situation, and laws, religious extremism and social conservatism as most crucial in affecting their safety. On the other hand, 76% and 91% of journalists consider a lack of safety training and ineffectiveness of measures as important aspects causing safety risks to them.

In their study, Snežana Trpevska and Igor Micevski, 2018 discussed **“Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in the Western Balkans -Comparative analysis 2018”**. Depending on qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis of legal documents, the study tried to answer the following questions; are the associations of journalists and the media trade unions in Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia, and Herzegovina, more reliable and more organized to protect freedom of speech and journalists' safety? Are the authorities in these countries more responsible and responsive when it comes to freedom of speech and journalists' safety? The results demonstrated that the cases of attempted murder of journalists in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina are still unresolved and that numerous verbal threats against journalists in all five countries are not even on the agenda for police investigation, it can be undoubtedly said that impunity continues to present a problem for the journalists in the region. Journalists still live in fear as there is an absence of efficient, fair, and free judiciary.

Seeking to investigate young photojournalists' attitudes towards professional safety procedures, Maged Salem Terban (2018) tries to

answer the following question "how do photojournalists adopt the different procedures of professional safety? Moreover, to what extent do they aware of its importance in their journalistic life? The study conducted a questionnaire for 113 photojournalists. The study results revealed that 61.1% of the photojournalists have already adopted such procedures of professional safety. The main procedures which are adopted by the journalists as they mentioned related mainly to field tools such as the helmet, food, car, etc....

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights studied **the issue of violence, threats, and pressures against journalists and other media actors in the EU** (2016). Information collected by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that journalists and other media actors in the EU faced several types of attacks, threats, and pressures from state and non-state actors between 1 January 2014 and 1 September 2016. These include threats of violence, incidents in the context of public assemblies, alleged interference by political actors, pressures to disclose confidential sources and materials, interference through security and intelligence services, and financial and economic pressures.

Eduardo Bertoni conducted a study (2015) about fighting **violence against journalists**. The study's results clarified that there are Special Bodies of Investigation in Latin American countries such as; the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists (FEADP) in Mexico which was created as part of the federal Attorney General's Office in 2006 via administrative agreement A/031/06 to address impunity in crimes against journalists specifically. Another example of a unique prosecutorial body, unlike any other in the region, is the International Commission against Impunity (CICIG) in Guatemala. CICIG is unique because it is a multilateral entity created in partnership with the United Nations to support the national government's efforts to combat impunity and violence. The results also explained that Latin American countries have combated journalist killings and impunity is by the federalization of crimes against journalists.

Sejal Parmar's paper (2014) **provides a review of the international and regional law on the protection of journalists**. Through its analysis of international human rights and humanitarian law as well as regional law emanating from the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, in particular, this paper seeks to identify the key components that should inform a comprehensive legal and policy framework to address the most pressing challenge facing journalists, namely actual or the threat of violence. The results demonstrate that multiplicity of sources – jurisprudence of regional courts, resolutions from UN human rights bodies, declarations and reports of international authorities and experts and the UN Plan of Action – together offer both a corpus of law as well as credible policy guidance for states in developing effective responses to violence against journalists and media workers around the world today and the related impunity that often exists.

In her study, Yamina Balalia (2006) demonstrated that there are many digital threats and challenges will face the journalists in their professional work in Algeria and in all over the world. The study compared between the different media laws in the Arab countries and some models of the European countries which put to regulate the media and journalism in a new era; digital era. The study demonstrated that Algerian journalism needs new laws and more advanced regulations to prevent all the digital problems and threats.

**Regarding Section 2**, Behlul Caliskan aims at his study to measure the level of digital security awareness of journalists in Turkey who use digital technology in their work. Depending on an online survey, the study seeks to describe the extent to which digital technology is used, the digital security tools employed, and the extent of digital security training undertaken. The study reveals that journalists in Turkey who are faced with security issues lack awareness of digital security risks. Only a small percentage have undertaken safety training to protect themselves and their sources in either the physical or digital worlds.



About digital safety in Turkey, Ataman & Çoban, and (2018) did 22 in-depth interviews with representatives of alternative media initiatives and citizen journalists. The study's results revealed that news collectives have a better understanding of digital security and offer training sessions on this subject to the citizen journalists who have collaborated with them. Despite the training they receive, citizen journalists are unwilling to use digital security measures unless their professionals compel them. Professional staff stated that they take extra precautions when using their phones, email, or messaging applications.

Some studies focus on the female journalists in particular as a target of attacks and online threats, such as Michelle Ferrier's study (2018) which describes how different actors are using physical and social media strategies against women journalists and media workers to intimidate, sow disinformation, discredit the journalist and the news media, and create significant professional harm. The study is based on a global survey on violence, attacks, and online abuse against women journalists and media workers. The survey was distributed to a global sample of media workers. The study collected from 597 women journalists and media workers revealed that online attacks against journalists have become more sophisticated. Many journalists clarify "having either abandoned their pursuit of specific stories" or "having difficulties with their sources" due to such threats. Younger journalists with fewer years in experience were also targeted; some thought about leaving the profession entirely.

Several diversified studies focus on the assaults and attacks against journalists from diverse communities and caring about digital threats in particular. The studies were collected together in a book edited by Ulla Carlsson and Reeta Pöyhtäri (2017) and entitled "The assault on journalism." Some studies focused on case studies for journalists in some countries; Turkey, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Mexico and Afghanistan (Bora Ataman and Barış Çoban, Sriram Arulchelvan, Sadia Jamil, Olunifesi Adekunle Suraj, and Olawale Olaleye, Sallie Hughes and Mireya Márquez-Ramírez, Elisabeth Eide-2017), while some studies paid

attention to the international level of combating the attacks against journalists (Silvia Chocarro Marcesse, Berit von der Lippe and Rune Ottosen, Thomas Hanitzsch -2017). Some studies concentrated on the research issue about threats and journalists' safety in the networked era (Thomas Hanitzsch, Reeta Pöyhtäri, and Jackie Harrison 2017). The book mentions that researchers have to broaden the theoretical and analytical frameworks to study such issues efficiently. In general, the studies confirm the danger of digital threats and how such threats seriously affect journalists in many regions and countries.

The study conducted by Zavier Garza Ramos (2016) about journalist security in the digital world was designed to measure how journalists worldwide take advantage of technology to enhance their security. The results reveal the diversity of the dangers journalists face across regions. The results demonstrate a general lack of awareness about the power that digital tools have to improve journalists' protection. The study suggests that journalists, nongovernmental organizers, and technology developers have to build digital tools for journalists' security.

Jennifer R. Henrichsen et al.'s (2015) study about digital safety for journalism discussed the digital surveillance that goes beyond international standards on privacy and freedom of expression. The study clarified that threats include hacking of data and disruptive attacks on websites and computer systems besides phishing, fake domain attacks, Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) attacks, and Denial of Service (DoS). The study demonstrated that journalists' movements are being exposed through cellphone-linked geolocation data, their personal lives being visible on social media, and their communications meta-data being mined.

The research conducted by the Pew Research Center in association with Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism (2015) which was applied on 671 members of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. demonstrated that two-thirds of the investigative journalists surveyed believe that the U.S. government has probably collected data on their phone calls, emails or online communications, and 80% believe that being

a journalist increases the likelihood that their data will be collected. Concerns about surveillance and hacking have led many journalists to change their behavior in the past year. Nearly half of those surveyed journalists said they have to some degree change the way they store or share sensitive documents. One-third of the participants echoed these comments about how they communicate with other reporters, editors, or producers. Also, among the 454 respondents who identify themselves as reporters, 38% said that in the past year, they had again to some degree changed the way they communicate with sources.

Other studies conducted by Freedom House and the International Center for Journalists (Sierra, 2013), with 102 journalists and bloggers in Mexico to show the extent and the different kinds of attacks against journalists. The results revealed that nearly 70% have been threatened or have suffered attacks because of their work. Besides, almost all (96%) said they know of colleagues who have been attacked. Surveyed respondents also demonstrated that they view cyber-espionage and email-account hacking as the most severe digital risks they face. Furthermore, while nearly all have access to and use the Internet, social networks, mobile phones, and blogging platforms, they also confessed that they have little or no competence in using digital security tools.

### **Comments on the previous studies**

- Since 2014, there has been a real increasing positive response from academia for specialized sessions on the safety of journalists in various countries within different international conferences. However, journalists' professional safety under the pressure of the digital era and all its technologies related to online communication did not take until now a great space from attention and discussion in Arab academic studies.
- The previous studies affirmed that all the new technologies related to online communication could be negatively used – and it is happened - to attack the journalists and threaten them because of

their work. This problem is a tremendously severe matter in many countries worldwide, as various studies mentioned.

- The majority of the studies correlated between the threats and attacks against the journalists and the efficiency of the laws and the different policies taken by international and local institutions to combat such assaults. In this respect, many previous studies analyzed the laws and the different legal actions taken to end impunity. On the other hand, journalists also are asked in some other studies through questionnaires and in-depth interviews to show their awareness and whether they are satisfied by the laws and different policies. There are also some studies aimed particularly at tracing the efforts exerted by the various institutions and organizations on the international and the local level to face the violence and assaults against journalists, some studies compared between the efforts done by the different organizations and the others compared between the efforts done by the same organization in different periods.
- A new trend of studies has been appeared investigating and discussing new methods of research to study the digital challenges and new digital attacks and threats (Measuring users' security behavior, analyzing Twitter uses and relationships, and different methods to analyzing the data used and uploaded by the journalists). From my perspective, such studies have to be conducted as collaborative research and in a global vision to consider all the developments and updates in the digital era. This issue has to be considered when planning to develop our research map and interests in Egypt and all Arab countries. It also pays our attention as media scholars to the necessity of cooperation with other scholars from the field of computer science and engineering to conduct more comprehensive and beneficial studies.
- As it is noticeable from reviewing the previous studies, the studies are unanimous in their recommendations of journalists' safety training courses and in giving more attention to new courses about

journalists' safety in the universities. Digital threats need more training courses, more knowledge, and more cooperation between journalists, researchers, and engineers.

### **Significance of the study**

- In the digital age, it is unacceptable to deny the need to study the issue of journalists' safety without considering the new technological updates in the online connection and how it can be exploited in a negative way to threaten the journalists. News organizations and individual journalists do not often know or share that they have been victims and under pressures of digital attacks because some might be worried that revealing sensitive information might lead to further victimization. They could also be concerned that sources could be unwilling to make contact because of their apprehension that the journalists cannot keep sensitive information confidential. So such issue must be studied and combated by scholars and researchers.
- Journalists' awareness of their safety and how to protect themselves from the different attacks and dangers because of their journalistic work is a considerable demand in Egyptian society after many problems, threats, and deadly dangers they have been subjected to recently.
- If threats and attacks against journalists can be stopped, it will encourage freedom of diversity, freedom of expression, and it will also attain the right to know in society. In this respect, before journalists are excited and keen to depend on all digital tools, they should be acquainted with digital security and how to protect themselves by law and practice.
- There are many Egyptian society cases for journalists and those who work in media who were subjected to different types of threats and some digital threats. Regarding these cases, it is deserved to study how to combat such dangers and raise journalists' awareness

to manage their work in the digital age, avoiding digital threats and dangers.

- All countries need to promote journalists' rights and develop new guidelines for protecting journalists. Moreover, it is crucial in the Arab countries to think about how to develop the legal framework to efficiently protect journalists, making the provisions consistent with the actual context and the whole societal circumstances, and this is the study seeking to work for.

### **Objectives of the study**

- Describes the main digital crimes & threats which threaten the Egyptian journalists, as they explain.
- Describe the Egyptian journalists' awareness of digital threats, meaning, ways of protection, and how to deal with them.
- Correlates between journalists' awareness from one side and the essential journalists' needs and demands to raise their awareness and skills.
- Realizes and investigates the policies in the number of Egyptian press institutions which put to combat the digital threats.
- Compares between the different provisions in the Egyptian legal framework to investigate the comprehensiveness or the shortage in the various sides of this legal framework.
- Suggests the appropriate plans/strategies protect the journalists and consequently, the profession in Egypt from such digital threats.

### **Questions of the study**

- What are the main digital threats/crimes which threaten the Egyptian journalists because of their journalistic work?
- How much digital threats affect Egyptian journalists and their work?
- Do the Egyptian journalists aware of the different types of new digital threats?
- To what extent do the Egyptian journalists know the ways of protection (legal and technological) from such threats and assaults?

- How do the Egyptian journalists deal with such threats according to their awareness and their institutions' system?
- What are the essential plans and strategies which the Egyptian journalists need to, in order to attain their safety from such threats?
- Which provisions are included in the Egyptian laws that can effectively protect the journalists from the violence and threats?
- What are the essential extra plans and deeds from press institutions, legislators, policymakers, and journalists to combat such threats?

This descriptive and analytical study seeks to describe the new types of attacks and threats against the Egyptian journalists, which are related to the increased dependency on the Internet and all the new technological tools of online communication. The study also seeks to describe the Egyptian journalists' awareness of such digital threats. From the other side, the study aims to analyze the press institutions' policies and the legal framework in Egypt which the journalists can rely on to combat such digital threats.

### **Methodology**

The study depends on in-depth interviews as a qualitative research technique. It involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a limited number of journalists to describe their perspectives on this particular topic to reach the best possible proposal to protect the journalists and combat these kinds of digital threats efficiently.

The study depends on "Focus groups discussion" with the journalists from diversified Egyptian newspapers; governmental, private, and partisan newspapers. Each group consisted of 8 participants. The researcher managed the discussion based on the objectives of the study, taking into consideration the main points they agreed on and confirmed by them altogether. In media studies focus groups are regularly used to gather preliminary information to assist in development of media performance and to help in understanding the journalists' awareness and behavior. It helps the researcher to know numerous experiences from the journalists

about the digital threats. It helps also to know accurately the guidelines which the journalists follow and their reactions to such violations and threats.

In-depth interviews and focus groups are significant methods that take an important place in qualitative research in many disciplines, including journalism and mass communication, especially when the study seeks to explain some personal cases and to make in-depth analysis and accurate description for the phenomenon under scrutiny. So this study depends on such methods to provide rich information about the journalists' experiences with the digital threats and to help in clarifying how they make sense of such threats and how they exactly deal with such threats according to their personal awareness and their institutions' systems.

Sixty journalists have been interviewed 12 journalists from different newspapers and news sites (Alwafd (12) – Algomhoreya – Akhbar Elyoum (24) – Elmasry Elyoum - elyoum elsabea (24), from different departments. The selection of the journalists was determined considering the different types of the newspapers (partisan, private and governmental institutions) besides the gender and years of experience. The in-depth interviews depend on some prepared questions used to aid in finding answers for the research questions. The questions were divided into some sections organized according to the objectives of the study. Sections included journalists' awareness of digital threats, dangers and negative effects of such threats, main techniques to combat such threats, institutional policies to combat such threats.

The study also depends on the legal document analysis method to analyze the legal framework in Egypt. This method is always used for qualitative analysis of the different legal documents - legal acts, by-laws, and reports of Journalists' syndicates. In this study, all the legal documents which are under scrutiny will focus on the Egyptian laws.

This study gets benefits from the concept of "Best Practice," which can be used as a beneficial approach for clarifying some of the considerable techniques being adapted to address the ethical complexities of digital



media (Lawrie Zion, 2012). The concept of “Best Practice” means the best way to do whatever needs to be done. The concept was used heavily by the early 1970s in many different fields such as business management, engineering, science, technology, and media. The concept of “Best Practice” mentions any techniques or methodologies that, through experience and research, have proven to lead to the desired result reliably. A commitment to using the best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to ensure success (Stephen Codrington & Li Po Chun, 2004). Digital safety is strongly related to the best practice as an essential concept in this matter, showing to what extent journalists can use online communication to avoid the digital threats and get benefits, to a great extent, from this online communication.

Depending on this concept of “Best Practice” the study proposes that journalists can do their best to reach their audience with the accurate information and news, and at the same time can efficiently use all the possible techniques and skills in order to protect themselves from whatever threats and dangers, besides, to protect their work and their institutions from being threatened and devastated. As digital technology is a present reality in all sectors of our lives, it makes digital skills necessary and essential to function effectively in the media environment.

The study also gets benefits from the concept of digitalization of the media in the digital age. “Digitalization” refers to the adoption or increase in the use of digital or computer technology by an organization, industry, or country. “Digitization” can be described as a shorthand phrase that explains the process of transforming an object into an electronic version that can be stored or displayed on a computer and disseminated over networks or the World Wide Web (Shekar Bandi & others, 2015).

The process of “digitalization” has tremendously changed the work of journalists. This shift to digitization in the contemporary media world has created new challenges and implications for traditional mass media decisions. Although there are various positive consequences of

digitization, but also it has posed challenges and risks to journalists in terms of data security and individual privacy.

The more technology advances, the more converged the regality of mass media will become with less need for traditional communication ways. Consequently, Journalists have to be more aware of the new techniques to manage their work digitally, including the best ways or techniques to combat the digital threats, offenses, and assaults that negatively affect them, their work, and consequently the press institutions they work in. For a professional journalist, it is very important to conduct a risk assessment, which means "deciding which threats the journalist is going to take seriously and which may be too rare or too harmless. This can effectively help the journalists combat the digital dangers carefully". So one of main points aimed in this study is to know if the journalists conduct actually a risk assessment and how do they conduct it. The study also depending on the journalists' discussions can put some cautions and guidelines to help the journalists in combating the most risky threats in their work.

### **Results of the study:**

**To explain the journalists' awareness and experiences towards the digital threats, the study depended on the responses of the journalists derived from the in-depth interviews. It revealed the following results:**

**First:** - All the journalists (interviewees) use the Internet and social media in gathering the information, taking data, discovering their news' details, following the news' sources, producing their news stories and to be aware of the audience's reactions and responses to their articles and news, but at the same time do they know well how to protect themselves and their work while using the online communication? When talking with them, it is essential to clarify their awareness; one of the main points that clarify their awareness is their knowledge about online threats.

### **The "online threats" as defined and explained by the journalists:-**

Some journalists cannot explain and define what is meant by digital threats (35% journalists) from different newspapers. Those journalists

who cannot define the digital threats pay attention to the importance of the continuous training courses and the benefits of advanced programs for digital media, media technology, and computing to increase the journalists' awareness. It is not a luxury anymore to ask for more development in media education and advanced training courses for journalists.

Some journalists (15%) define digital threats as a source for leaks, spreading rumors, and fake news that devastates security and social peace. Those journalists do not have enough information about digital threats towards journalists. They look at the digital threats from only one side; as a dangerous source to mislead the people and devastate society's security.

Some journalists (50% journalists) define the digital threats as smear campaigns, journalists' privacy invasion, phishing, Online surveillance, Man in the middle and accounts' hacking besides fake domain malware attack, disinformation against the journalists, attacking the personal computers and accounts by viruses. Some journalists explain that some people used to outdistance the journalists depending on manipulation, disinformation, and extortion as types of digital threats.

**Second: - Most of the journalists (83%) who were interviewed clarified during the discussion that they are being threatened online.**

According to their answers, the study demonstrated that journalists in the different news media institutions were subjected to Online surveillance, Phishing, Fake domain malware attack, Man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks, Denial of service attacks (DoS), Disinformation against journalists, Online sexual harassment, including sexist comments and violent threats, Slander and offensive words, Threats for family members through the online connection, Invading privacy as putting private photos-private family news- some hidden private details the journalists' family.

The problem is that all such kinds of threats lead to reduce the people's trust of the journalists and also negatively affect the credibility of the newspaper/news site. These threats can devastate the relationship between journalists and their sources who will be afraid of leaks or changing their

wordings and quotes due to MIM and hacking. Accordingly, all these problems can negatively affect the right to know and the whole society.

**Third: - The most essential repeated (frequent) digital threats, which the journalists are subjected to, as they mentioned came –in order- as the following:**

- Fake domain malware attack (90%)
- Disinformation against journalists (67%)
- Phishing (67%)
- Denial of service attacks (DoS) (67%)
- Slander and offensive words through the news sites (25%)
- Man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks (13%)
- Threats for your family members through the online connection (17%)
- Invading your privacy (putting private photos- private family news- some hidden private details about your family, etc.) (25%)
- Online surveillance (15%)
- Online sexual harassment, including sexist comments and violent threats (15%)

**Fourth:-According to the study's results, the most important and impressive bad experiences/cases that the journalists knew or personally (interviewees) were subjected to, are:**

- *"Someone obtained the access to the news site's system and tamper with data, showing fake data against the government through computer network attacks and exploit that for antagonistic purposes"*—a male head of the department from a partisan news site.
- *"We were subjected to denial of service attack from a foreigner hacker after a series of news coverage accused his country of some international crimes."* A male journalist assured the hacking for the news site.
- *"Someone accessed the news site from my private system and uploaded libelous and defamatory postings for the editor in chief"*

and the president of Alwafd party; I was accused of distorting these persons while it was one another's deed. The real unbearable digital threat".

- "Someone hacked the WhatsApp and stole some important interviews, then put them on Facebook, and various confidential information was revealed." A female journalist mentioned how digital threats could harm the journalist and his/her sources.
- "Someone hacked my account and put some nude photos on my account. Such deeds misrepresent me and distort my reputation in my institution and front of my audience". A male journalist offended by hackers.
- "Some people use disinformation against my colleagues and me on the news site to ruin the good relationship between the news site and the audience." A male journalist targeted by intended disinformation attacks.
- "Some photos from our site were stolen, and the water sealing was electronically removed. Nowadays, some programs can professionally delete even the water sealing". A female journalist from Alwafd site suffers from the wrong usage of the advanced technology.
- "Because of my bravery in writing some important articles about serious and critical issues, someone threatened me by uploading my private telephone number on the site, so anyone can invade my privacy, call me personally at any time, and annoy me." A female journalist was targeted by some persons to invade her privacy online.
- "I received numerous repeated comments full of slander and offensive/unacceptable words, because of my strong stance in some critical issues"-It is like a war through comments." Online comments targeted male journalists.
- Someone stole my video from my Facebook, and uploading it on the news site which he works for without any permission from me

*or any mention of my efforts in making this video". A female journalist from Algomhoreya.*

- *"The news site was hacked, and it was a critical period because the site was not under any control from the journalists of the site.*
- *"I was threatened and intimidated by publishing photographs and leaking confidential information of my sources. I was asked for immediate payment or will be exploited for unlawful acts such as disclosure confidential information of my sources". A male journalist who was put under threats to get immense illegal payment*
- *"When your family members are threatened and always distorted, it is something very troublesome and unbearable. Those who say it is not a deep problem, that it is just a threat, have never experienced it"—a male journalist who suffers from online harassment for his family.*
- *"Some nasty sexual comments threat the relationship between me and my husband, my marriage, and my whole life." A female journalist was targeted by online harassment.*
- *"Someone hacked my Facebook account, which is followed by four million followers, then the hacker put some fake news and slanderous words to distort me." A male journalist complains from hacking.*
- *"My email was hacked, and different important documents were taken." A male journalist was targeted by electronic blackmail.*
- *"My photos and the details of the news story were stolen by some sites." A female journalist from Alwafd news site.*

*"We were attacked by denial of service attack for one week which is one of the essential problems for online media actors especially journalists because this attack/threat prevent information from being distributed and viewed, consequently the journalists have been taken offline, and our audiences are unable to access the website." A mail journalist complains from being attacked with a denial of service attack.*

- *"My iPad was subjected to malware attacks and virus-infected everything."* A female journalist from Alwafd lost all her data and documents.

According to these kinds of threats, it is clear that journalists became real victims for many different kinds of digital threats. Regarding these threats, it is crucial to think about the risk analysis, which depends on calculating the chance that threats might succeed. Hence, journalists know how much effort they need to spend to protect themselves from the most expected digital threats. For a professional journalist, it is dangerous to conduct a risk assessment, which means "deciding which threats the journalist is going to take seriously and which may be too rare or too harmless, this can effectively help the journalists to combat the digital dangers carefully."

**Fifth: - When the journalists asked to clarify whether they know well the protection techniques to combat the digital threats or they need to be more educated and trained, their answers clarify that** only 22% from them know how to protect themselves and they can use professionally the different techniques and programs which help them to avoid the digital risks, while the others 78% do not know how to use the different appropriate techniques to secure their data and to avoid the undesirable digital threats. Even those limited percentage who know how to combat digital threats know some limited specific techniques. Only ten journalists (~17%) out of the 60 journalists know diversified techniques to combat digital threats. In contrast, the others know only fundamental techniques to protect themselves, and their data, such as the strong passwords and the reactions can be taken to protect their emails. This is a real problem, mainly because most of the journalists said they are not aware of the programs or techniques to combat digital threats.

**Sixth: - When the journalists asked for Explaining if they agreed or not with some statements related to their work and the digital threats, their answers were as follows:**

- **“Social media have become a battlefield.”** 92 % agree that – 5% neutral- 3% don't agree. (This answer is significant and relevant to this topic because if the majority of the journalists see that social me.dia and the online communication is a battlefield and risky, they have to be ready to combat the digital threats and the institutions' policies have to be developed to meet the new circumstances).
- **"Online threats are dangerous, like offline threats."** 85% agree - 12% don't agree - 3% neutral. (This answer confirmed the importance of raising journalists' awareness in digital journalism and to be more skillful in combating digital threats, even those who do not see that the online threats are dangerous like the offline threats they do not deny the seriousness of these threats and the significance of being ready to combat such threats).
- **"Journalists must be well trained to combat online threats effectively."** Only 98% agree, and only 2% neutral. (It was an expected answer because all the journalists have to be and of course want to be more skillful to protect themselves and their work).
- **“My institution policies to prevent such threats are sufficient and successful.”** 56% do not agree – 7% neutral – 37% agree. (Those who agree do not want to criticize the policies in their institutions considering that training and raising their awareness is the Syndicate's job, especially since there are financial crises in the different journalistic institutions.)



- **"The legal framework needs to be amended /developed to be more efficient to combat such threats."** 95% agree – 3% neutral – 2% don't agree. (The problem is that a considerable number of the journalists do not accurately know the legal articles which are put to protect them and help them combat the digital threats).
- **"Such threats negatively affect sources."** 80% agree – 7% neutral – 13% do not agree

The answers mentioned above reflect the journalists' fear of digital threats; the majority say that online threats are dangerous, like offline threats (85%). The majority say that social networks have become a battlefield (92%). 80% from the journalists mentioned the risk of such digital threats on their relationship with the news sources, so 95% from them confirmed that the legal framework needs to be amended /developed to be more efficient to enable them to combat effectively such threats, and 56% of the journalists say that their institutions' policies to prevent such threats are not active or successful enough. As a logic answer, 98% of the journalists in the interviews explain their need for various professional training to be more aware of such digital threats and the professional ways to combat any type of such threats.

**Seventh:** - According to the journalists' responses, it seems that the journalists need to pay more attention to the digital security especially that there are 83% from them did not take any professional training courses to know how to protect themselves from the digital threats, while 17% only who took such training courses and they mentioned it is not a systematic process organized by the institution, it depends only on the journalist's desire and his endeavor. The journalists' training is the responsibility of various bodies, the Journalists' Syndicate, the news site, or the media institution itself and Supreme Council for Media Regulation to develop the training courses offered to the journalists to improve their performance. It can also be a joint responsibility of the Ministry of

Communication and Ministry of Media to develop the journalists' skills to combat all the different kinds of digital threats.

**Eighth:** - According to the journalists' explanation, it is also demonstrated that 42% did not know well all the laws which protect the journalists in Egypt from the digital threats. Journalists should take courses about media laws, take their rights, and digital combat threats. They have to know well the law of media regulation 2018, the law of information technology crimes 2018, and the law of penalties. There is a considerable law "Law of combating information technology crimes," which is known in the media as the law of combating internet crimes.

**Ninth: The most important laws and the media institutions' policies that are considered urgently needed as clarified by the journalists are:**

- Specific legal articles to prevent anybody from impersonating a journalist.
- Specific legal articles to prevent all kinds of hacking and extortion, especially for news sites and journalists.
- Specific legal articles to punish those who perpetrate crimes of disinformation against journalists and online sexual harassment.
- Harsher penalties for the crimes of invading the privacy and staling personal data from the journalists.
- Regarding the media institutions' policies, the journalists explain that they need more strict policies to efficiently combat digital threats and all the risks in the digital age. Some of them (48 journalists) explain their demands for strict rules in the news sites to prevent all kinds of violations and crimes. The other journalists express their opinions that they need a more strict application for the existent laws to prevent practically the violations and crimes.

- All the journalists confirm the real need for continual training courses for the journalists to know well the legal framework and how to protect themselves.
- All the journalists confirm that they have to be cautious when dealing with the Internet and when they use information technology.

### **Tenth: - The relationship with the sources, How it is affected by the problems of digital risks? :-**

The protection of journalistic sources is the cornerstone of the protection of information and journalists' independence. It works as a direct contribution and a real guarantee to the quality of the information. All the journalists (100%) say that it is vital to protect the news sources and respect them. Otherwise, we cannot attain the audiences' right to know.

Many of the journalists (80%) are afraid that digital threats may put their reputation and their sources' reputation at risk, and these threats can negatively affect their relationship with their sources. While some other journalists (20%) express their opinions, saying that not all the sources care about all the problems occur because of internet crimes and the different kinds of digital threats.

Some of the journalists (55%) said that they suffer actually from some disinformation campaigns and hacking cases that affect their relationships with their sources. Journalists clarify that some of the sources refuse to deal with some journalists and refuse to deal with some specific news sites according to uncertainty because of many problems as a result of the digital violations or the internet crimes.

### **Eleventh: - Do the legislations provide sufficient protection for the journalists?**

To answer this critical question, the researcher reviewed, analyzed, and evaluated the legal framework for journalism and media, mainly seeking to know its efficiency to protect the journalists from

the digital threats and to know to what extent provide them security in the digital age.

Regarding journalists' protection, it is essential to consider the Egyptian constitution and its amendments in 2019, besides Law n.180, which was recently issued in 2018 for journalism, media, and Supreme Council regulation, which includes different articles to protect the journalists and law no. 175, which was issued in 2018 of combating information technology crimes.

The Egyptian constitution confirms the importance of digital security (article n. 31), the constitution also confirms the privacy right and the electronic mails (article n. 57). Inconsistency with the constitution, there is mainly the number of specific articles in Law n.180/ 2018 that can be considered when discussing journalists' protection and digital security; article n. 58, which clarifies that any fault in media practice is the legal responsibility of the news site. This article put the burden and the responsibility on the news site itself, as the denial of service attack or any hacking problem has to be taken seriously from the media institution itself.

Article n. 71 (9) clarifies that to achieve its objectives, the Supreme Council has the right to establish training centers to develop workers' and journalists' skills. This article can be taken into consideration to develop the journalists' technical skills appropriate for this digital age. Article 100, by its role, clarifies that those who violate the journalists in their work or because of their work will be punished by imprisonment and fines (10000-20000 Egyptian pounds) or one of these two punishments.

The second law, which is considered significant regarding the journalists' protection and digital security, is Law n.175 for the year 2018 of combating the information technology crimes. This law includes many articles which were put to prevent the digital risks & threats, and it can be clarified as follows:-

Article 2 (c) confirms that who provides the service should secure the data and the information to protect its secrecy and not being hacked or damaged. According to this article, the burden and the responsibility to protect the data will be on the news site itself. Depending on this article, the news sites have to establish a robust and efficient information protection system to depend on it in protecting the journalists, their sources, and their work, consequently the site's credibility and performance.

Articles from 13 to 21 are specified to prevent the different kinds of violations against the various websites and information systems. These nine articles can be well considered when thinking about news sites and all journalists seeking the audiences' right to know.

Article 13 tells that those who use wireless networks without the owner's permission will be punished by imprisonment and a fine or one of these penalties. In contrast, article 14 clarifies that individuals who hack a website, private account, or prohibit an information system will be penalized for a fine and imprisonment or one of these penalties. Also, Article 15 explains that anyone exploits the right to access a website or an account or an information system to violate this right inappropriately regarding the timing or the access limit. This will be penalized by imprisonment and a fine or one of these penalties. When also looking to article 16, we will find it very significant regarding combating digital threats as it states that anyone blocks or stops the way of data or information illegally will be punished by imprisonment and fine or one of them. Article 17 states that anyone hacks or cancels partially or totally without any rights. The programs or the data or the information of any information system will be punished by imprisonment and a fine or one of them. Article 17 is followed by article 18, which is also put to prevent hacking and cut off the communication without any right. Hence, it states that whoever hacks or destroys a personal account or website or email

will be punished by imprisonment and fine or one of them. It also increased the limits of the penalties in case of hacking the website of the private entity. Article 19 was put to punish those who destroy or slow or change the design of any website, whether personal or for a private entity. The law specifies article 20 for any attack or threat against the government information system and article 21 to punish those who work to destroy the net or work to make it out of order.

These articles mentioned earlier combat Phishing, Fake domain malware attack, Man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks, denial of service attacks (DoS), disinformation against journalists, Online sexual harassment.

Article 24 is specified for combating fake sites and fake private accounts. It clarifies the punishment for those who perpetrate this kind of crime to distort or offense Someone by imprisonment and fine (50000-200000 Egyptian pounds) or one of these two punishments.

Articles 25 and 26 explain the punishments for the crimes and violations against the privacy right beside the illegal content. These articles explain strict punishments, including imprisonment and fines (100000-300000 Egyptian pounds) or one of these two punishments.

There are many significant articles to combat digital threats. However, they have to be strictly applied and be well known from all the journalists to depend on them in case of any violation to avoid the digital risks and to avoid losing their credibility and their institutions' credibility.

## **Discussion**

While journalists' safety is a fundamental issue, the journalists' awareness of this issue still needs to be increased in the different Egyptian press institutions. Journalism plays a vital role in all societies around the world, acting as a watchdog on the state and

informing citizens about the decisions that affect their everyday life. Facing many new threats will limit the journalists' ability to fulfill their watchdog role and negatively affect journalism credibility. The actual problem in the Egyptian news sites, as the researcher noticed, is that there are notable numbers of journalists, especially those who are the eldest, do not know how to deal professionally with the digital threats and how to avoid digital risks.

The legal framework for “journalists’ safety”- as a considerable demand- needs to be well explained to the journalists in order to support them to efficiently combat all the kinds of threats that were previously mentioned as a result of the in-depth interviews. Such different kinds of threats can be explained precisely as the following:-

- Surveillance technology:

Which is used to infect computers with malware, allowing external entities to break into specific computer networks? Journalists can be targeted for surveillance through phishing campaigns. Phishing has become a sophisticated threat to everyone's internet security. Through gathering a small amount of information, attackers can produce a personalized email.

- Fake domain malware attack:

Those who attack the real site can create social media accounts to link to the fake site to attain a higher Google Page Rank of this fake site than the real site when people did their search.

- Man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks:

Such attacks occur when attackers insert themselves, or their technologies, between a user and a target site. Both sides exchange their messages while the man in the middle can smoothly observe them, get information, and change their content.

- Denial of service attacks (DoS)

DoS attacks are one of the essential problems for online media actors, especially journalists, because they:

- Prevent information from being distributed and viewed.
- Journalists have been taken offline, and their audiences are unable to access the website.
- Journalists, in such cases, bear extra costs for those who must seek technical assistance.
- Sometimes this affects the public who no longer think that the publication is in existence.
- Disinformation against journalists:

Depending on smear campaigns, some people or maybe institutions seek to defame journalists, consequently affecting their safety negatively online. Damage the credibility, integrity, and confidence of journalists – elements essential to successfully carrying out their jobs are dangerous deeds against journalists.

- Online sexual harassment:

Female journalists - in specific - often receive some offensive online comments which focus on the female appearance rather than professional performance.

According to the primary considerations of digital protection, there are some essential tips or common-sense, practical safety measures which have to be considered when thinking about digital security such as the following tips:

- It is crucially important to continually re-evaluate the security practices in all news sites and media institutions.
- Journalists' syndicates have to make a security plan that works effectively and efficiently for them and the risks they face.
- Encrypting the email so it will not get intercepted in transit will not protect the confidentiality of that email if the journalist stores an unencrypted copy on the laptop, and the laptop is stolen.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper shows that journalists have not enough awareness of the different kinds of digital threats. Journalists in the different newspapers –as demonstrated- from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions need to be more aware of all the digital threats besides the regulations to protect themselves and to combat the digital threats. The study demonstrated that a considerable number of journalists could not remove spyware, trojans, or malware. Some of the journalists suffer from blurring and obscurity in defining the digital threats and in dealing with such threats. Although there are some efficient articles in the Egyptian laws to protect the journalists, some noticeable numbers of journalists even do not know the regulations which are issued to protect them or the internet police detective (General Directorate of Information Technology – Ministry of Interior). They depend totally on some of their colleagues and acquaintances to combat digital threats. More efforts in training courses and newspapers' editorial policies have to be exerted.

## Recommendations of the study

- It is essential to make an annual report about journalists' safety, the most prominent threats and dangers they are subjected to, and how they professionally manage their work in this environment. Such a report will be a considerable opportunity to share experiences between journalists and provide legislators with actual different cases. Consequently, they can put well studied and developed laws and provisions. This report has to be conducted by experts from academics in media and law sectors in order to guarantee its correctness & accuracy.
- Safety and Protection skills are to be learned through numerous training courses and propose effective methodologies for delivering the training. The evaluation will

be carried out at the end of such training courses to assess the achievement of objectives and draw lessons for future improvement.

- The safety of journalists has to be a course taught to all Journalism students and journalists in various newspapers to prepare them well to be safe while working and avoiding threats and dangers. It is true to say that while journalists need additional training to improve skills, they also need additional education to deepen knowledge.
- All recent technological updates related to the media and journalistic digital threats have to be well taught to the journalists and all Journalism students in the different universities because many dangers for journalists' safety nowadays related to technological developments.
- Awareness-raising, which can be attained through the following:
  - Digital literacy must be taught throughout the academy, hence digital security training courses.
  - Journalists' Syndicate has to adopt the policy of "Hotlines" and "safety assistance" for all those who need for.
  - More reports and research papers about digital safety are needed.
  - All media institutions have to be cautious and prevent journalists from activating their social media when they cover news from dangerous places to decrease the vulnerability of being harassed online.

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