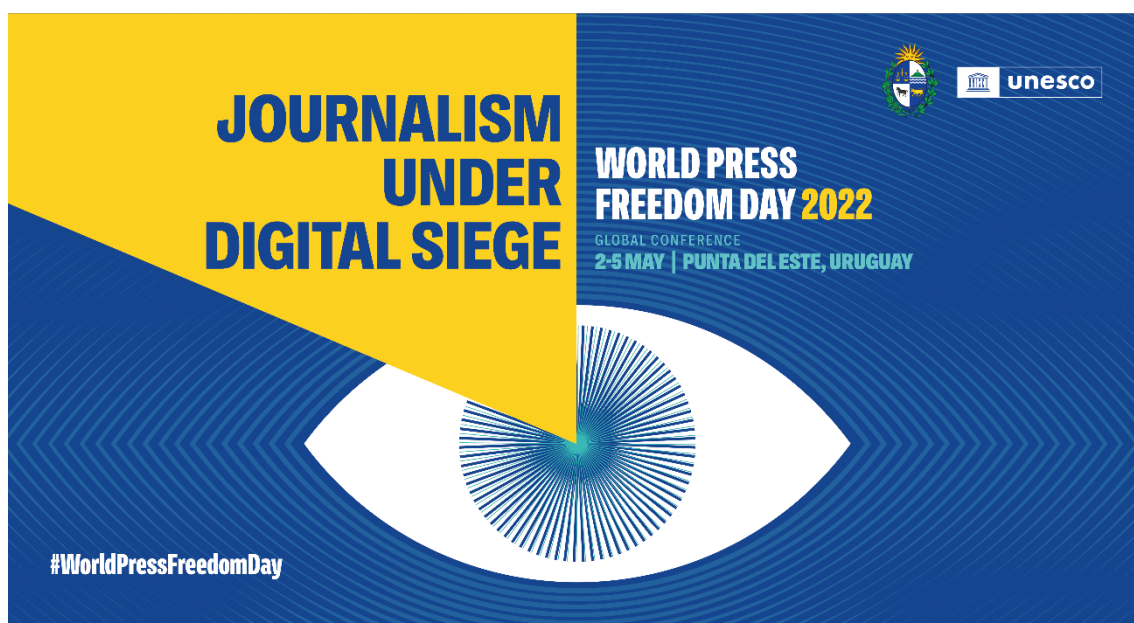


Women journalists in the pandemics of digital hate:

A time where less is more

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Abstract: Digital platforms quickly became prevalent over physical public space, allowing debates, interactions, and activism to flourish. With women journalists contributing significantly to the formation of a vibrant digital public space, offline violence has adapted and evolved with digital platforms. Since 2015, the safety of journalists has profiled as an object of research in the field of communication sciences. Researchers identify, explore, and analyze the nature, prevalence, mediums of support and impacts, both personal and journalistic, of new aggressions specific to the digital environment, which aim to discredit, condition, and silence female participation. However, the wide diversity of terms and definitions used by academics has made it difficult to identify the phenomenon of digital violence against journalists and what would be the appropriate way to legislate it, to guarantee a protection of rights adapted to the digital environment. Based on scientific papers that have carried out a systematic review of terms used in previous research to characterize digital violence against women journalists, we intend to identify the best way to conceptually characterize the phenomenon and which issues need to be considered for a legislation of journalists' safety in digital arena.

Keywords: Safety of journalists, women journalists, digital violence, legislation, protection of rights.

Introduction

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Digital platforms have rapidly become prevalent over physical public space, assuming themselves as multimodal, participatory, interactive, and circular spaces in networks, and thus without clearly defined boundaries in interpersonal communication. In counterpoint to the linear messages of traditional media, a consistent flow of shares, interactions, debates, activisms, and others, from top to down and from below to above, is created. This opening to participatory communication and decentralization of power has opened new possibilities for the expansion and action of prosumers, users known for being both consumers and producers of content and information (Amaral, 2016).

The characteristic abundance of this digital communicational sphere shapes discourses and frames debates, but it also influences how individuals act and behave in networks (Pajnik & Sauer, 2018). In its detrimental aspect, this mass communication and connectivity (with everyone and to everyone) links to high levels of violence that are experienced within contemporary democratic societies. Nevertheless, its typologies are variable and depend on a certain degree of perceptibility. The difference between direct violence (physical or psychological aggression) to structural violence (domination, exclusion, inequality, and social injustice) and cultural violence (the legitimization of violence) concerns the possibility of identifying the perpetrator agent (easier in the first scenario), even if, in the second case, there are visible consequences for the development of skills in one or several parts of a society (Penalva & La Parra, 2008, p. 18). In the latter, the agent is linked to the social structure, and this to symbolic aspects of culture (non-material forms such as language and communication), which converge and sustain the motives of violence (direct or structural character). In this way, the operationalization of violence is characterized by its various ramifications and intersections.

In this regard, Penalva and La Parra (2008) argue that communication, when circulating in the media, legitimizes direct or structural violence when through its content "[it] provokes rejection, discrimination, or aggression against certain collectives, individuals, nations, sexes, etc." (p. 18). Given the centrality of digital media in today's mediated democracies, then, digital media practices both serve to share information, express views, disseminate ideals, values, norms, and lifestyles to mobilize and engage masses through mediated activism, but also to fragment, polarize, and radicalize the digital environment (Albaladejo & Figueira, 2021; Valera, 2012). Here, Eddington (2018) identified how the asynchrony of social media, particularly Twitter, allows it by offering members and supporters of extremist, conspiratorial, and prejudiced views of society "an opportunity to organize and converse with one another through

similar topics" (p. 9). With hate speech and incitement to violence being a regular presence on social media (Ben-David & Fernández, 2016; Eddington, 2018), an agenda of exclusion is found about groups generally marginalized and stigmatized by society, specifically minorities (ethnic, religious, and linguistic), migrants, women, and LGBT people, in which individuals are discriminated through their framing into collective imaginaries of others (Fejós & Zentai, 2021).

Following several constitutional rights, countries and parties have refused to legislate the digital public space, namely criminalizing hate speech, hate crimes, financing of discriminatory activities and belonging to organizations that promote and incite hatred, arguing the protection of freedom of expression, association, or assembly (Costa, 2021a). Without defined limits or legislation that is difficult to enforce due to its geographically defined jurisprudence, a sense of impunity is promoted regarding the perpetuation of online violence. As a result, hate speech, one of the main violent conducts online, continues to overlap locally and globally, functionalized through various forms and with diverse purposes (Wodak, 2018).

At the political and transnational level, these processes of societies' mediatization have led political actors to adopt populist communication strategies "that reproduce language, news values, and work routines that conform to both journalistic standards and public relations techniques" (Pajnik & Sauer, 2018, p. 1). As such, radical right-wing political forces find it easier to question and instrumentalize the fundamental values of democratic politics directly to citizens (Fejós & Zentai, 2021). To disseminate their ideological convictions of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism in public affairs (political propaganda), mobilize followers, and gain power, digital platforms are profiting from the development of new interactive ways to spread fear, anger, and hatred against "others" and "corrupt elites". Widespread among various spheres of society, hate is undermining the foundations of the political arena (Wodak, 2018).

Additionally, it has been found that the perpetuation of gender violence tends to follow the entire lifeline of women's universe. Women who already suffer in-person violence, those who challenge gender ideologies, adolescent girls, and those who have greater visibility and public relevance are usually recurring targets (Costa, 2020). With women journalists contributing significantly to the formation of a vibrant digital public space (Morena-Balaguer, García-Romeral & Binimelis-Adell, 2022), offline violence has adapted and, consequently, has been developed, expanded, and reproduced in line with the procedures of digital communication and the specifics of each digital platform (Freed, 2017). "The new censoring mechanisms of the digital age," as Costa (2021b, p. 53) calls them, aim to monitor, discipline, condition, and silence the voices and participation of women journalists.

In recent years, studies that analyze this digital violence against women in general (EIGE, 2017) and those that focus on female journalists (Adams, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Koirala, 2020; Lewis, Zamith & Coddington, 2020) have increased. Regarding research of a broader nature, the European Institute for Gender Equality (2017) identified that experts avoided conceptualizing digital violence, arguing that it is a separate phenomenon from "real world" violence, when in fact it should be seen as a continuum of offline violence (EIGE, 2017, p. 1). This ambiguity promotes dispersion: it prevents a consensus on the most appropriate terminology, nullifies the possibilities of legislating and designing public policies that recognize and solve the phenomenon.

At the same time, research focused on digital violence against women journalists has been increasing and diversifying the terms and concepts used to define them: cyberbullying, hate speech, incivility, hostility, trolling, digital harassment, violent acts, violence facilitated by technology, cyber violence, misogyny, gender violence, sexist abuse, among others. As a result, the worldwide phenomenon has hardly been identified and treated properly. In order to analyze the main difficulties when addressing the issue, this paper discusses key lines that need to be considered to improve the ways to conceptually characterize and, especially, identify digital violence against women journalists, which may guide future legislation on the safety of journalists applied to the digital arena.

Hate and gender in the political phenomena of the new radical right

Although radical right-wing political forces, usually labelled "far right", "populist right" or "far right forces", are parties and groups that formally accept the norms and procedures of electoral democracy, including through their integration into the rule of law, they often question and instrumentalize the fundamental values of democratic politics (Fejős & Zentai, 2021). Their ability to undermine the foundations of the democratic political arena is expressed by ideological commitments and convictions of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, which are fed into new forms of digital hate speech. In this way, hate is stirred up and widely spread among various spheres of society (Pajnik & Sauer, 2018; Wodak, 2018).

We recognize that populism and right-wing radicalism are not synonymous, although they are often intertwined. While this distinction is not relevant to this research, it should be noted that over the past two decades, various forms of populism have emerged in Europe, across both the right-wing and left-wing political spectrums. For this reason, the conservative

character of a right-wing party does not automatically make it a populist party (Fejős & Zentai, 2021).

Holding different ideologies but common core values, right-wing populist forces promulgate a vertical view between people and elites, in the sense that "normal people" are betrayed by "corrupt elites". It means that by embracing the values of nativism and nationalism as a source of inspiration for public affairs, the transmitted political ideals and imaginaries ultimately assume a supposed defense of the people from groups that are generally marginalized and stigmatized by society (Fejős & Zentai, 2021, p. 8). Indeed, this happens because, in the process of distinguishing between groups, "corrupt elites" are represented or replaced by enemies belonging to the group of "normal people", within which stand out feminists, LGBTQI identity and rights activists, racial minorities, migrants, in addition to mainstream political opponents, where left-wing liberal ideas and groups are included. In this follow-up, anti-intellectual common-sense appeals from incitement to hate encourages the pursuit of an exclusionary agenda.

Therefore, while conceptually populism has no specific relationship to gender, gender differences, like all other differences within "pure people", may even be considered secondary or irrelevant to populist practice. But the truth is, as Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015, p. 16) sustain, that populist actors, often male gender, and figures of traditional masculinity, also operate within broader national cultural and ideological contexts, which determine the positions in relation to gender norms adopted by populists, alongside the fact that the populist masses are predominantly male. The authors identify that while populist actors in Northern Europe are predominantly right-wing and mobilize in highly emancipated societies, populists in South America are mainly left-wing and operate in strongly patriarchal societies. On the other hand, left-wing populists tend to be relatively progressive in relation to the traditional South American context, while right-wing populists defend the status quo in their progressive Northern European context (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015).

Our comparative analysis is not only interesting due to the different cultural contexts in which populist forces operate, but also because we contrast very different manifestations of populism. As a thin-centred ideology, populism seldom exists alone; in most cases, populist actors combine their populism with other ideologies, such as other thin-centred ideologies like nationalism or thick ideologies like socialism. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 19)

If the relationship between right-wing populism and gender politics is not yet adequately explored in theory and practice (Gwiazda, 2021), and the rhetoric of gender discourses of right-wing populist parties neglected (Wodak, 2015), even despite the rapid growth of authoritarian, illiberal, and anti-feminist populism, the truth is that this gender dimension gap does not occur with respect to far-right parties (Fangen & Skjelsbæk, 2020).

Cas Mudde (2019) explains that "like all political phenomena, the far right is deeply gendered. However, it is gendered in a much more complex manner than its often simplistic and stereotypical public image suggests" (p. 132). With the (heterogeneous) far right being situated at one end of the spectrum and being structured by nativism, while being ethnically and racially situated (Mudde, 2019, p. 133), issues related to gender ideology (abortion, family policy, women's responsibilities, sex education in schools, teaching gender studies in universities, among others) are strongly contested through various interpretations of family and women's role in society.

Since most extreme right-wing groups hold a traditional view of women, in which they are seen exclusively as mothers (or predestined to be mothers) and discouraged from working (Mudde, 2019), we see a resurgence of conservative Christian family values, accentuated the growth of anti-feminist and anti-gender equality sentiments (Fangen & Skjelsbæk, 2020). This means that (good) women should be adored and protected by (muscular, aggressive, dominant, and powerful) men, with the first required to serve the latter with a heterosexual family. Nicknamed "the heart of the nation or race" (Mudde, 2019, p. 133), women and girls are then seen as the womb of the nation, the mother of children, and responsible for the moral and physical education of the next generation.

Along this line of mobilization more explicitly in the pure populist extremist strand than in just one populist strand, and particularly online, ideas of male supremacy and the "manosphere" characterize the articulation of "benevolent" and "hostile" sexism, so-called ambivalent sexism. Following Mudde's (2019, pp. 133-134) line of analysis, benevolent sexism sees women as morally pure but physically fragile. As these groups aspire to revitalize male domination, the growing hostility of (online) sexism departs from the open debate of politicized rape fantasies, morphing into rhetoric that focuses on the harm of feminist ideology to male benefits and the general welfare of society, as well as on male victimization, resentment, and grievances (Johnson, 2017). They slowly re-establish the instrumentalization of women's rights with new nationalist policies and rhetoric (Fangen & Skjelsbæk, 2020), with the goal of objectifying and degrading women in society.

In certain online communities, men self-identify as “beta males,” physically weak and unattractive to women, in contrast to the traditionally masculine “alpha male.” These views are closely related to a combination of toxic *masculinity* – in which manhood is defined by violence, sex, status, and aggression – and *misogyny* – a hatred of women – which is omnipresent online but also offline. (Mudde, 2019, p. 134)

This most violent *modus operandi*, in which politicians and their constituencies of the radical right across the globe, as well as male and female individuals, accuse women of being morally corrupt and politically powerful because they are seen as a threat, albeit implicitly and politically, rather than explicitly and physically. For this reason, they are attached to academics, artists and journalists as members of the elites and the left, but mainly named as “anti-national” and therefore traitors of the motherland - “the worst insult for a nationalist” (Mudde, 2019, p. 41), which promotes the incitement, frequency, legitimization and normalization of violence against the female universe not only on digital platforms, as is the case with women journalists (Costa, 2021a, 2022a, 2022b), but also physical violence.

Against such background, Kantola and Lombardo (2021) consider that a new form of patriarchy is emerging with new norms of revitalizing traditional gender values and imaginaries. With these purposes outlined, common strategies among radical right parties are the framing of gender equality to demonization (harmful), Euroscepticism and subsidiarity, flexing to other issues (such as migration) and goals, self-victimization, and blame (diverting the focus away from gender equality), and the depoliticization of gender from biological arguments (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021, p. 576).

Safety of women journalists as an object of academic research

Technological possibilities based on anonymous and distant self-publishing and participation opportunities have brought with them possibilities to disproportionately develop and perpetuate, from the particularities of each digital platform (accessibility, diffusion, reach, visibility, among others), violent behaviors, through insults, hatreds, and threats, against women journalists with impunity (Everbach, 2018; Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018). They particularly

affect younger women (Lewis et al., 2020) and professionals who bring to the public information related to controversial social issues (Costa, 2021a, 2021b).

With the awareness that women in media have been increasingly subjected to attacks over the past decade, and how this poses a challenge to press freedom and to freedom of expression by constraining society's access to a diverse range of information and perspectives (Chocarro, 2019, p. 6), in the year of 2012, the United Nations (UN) Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity called for the beginning of initiatives that focused on gendered approaches in order to have an increased knowledge about the safety needs of women journalists (Chocarro, 2019).

Since 2015, the safety of women journalists has assumed itself as a research object, attracting more and more interest from researchers to identify, explore and analyze the nature, prevalence, means of support and personal, journalistic, and democratic impacts, crossing online and offline contexts, of the new specific aggressions of the digital environment (Simões, Alcantara & Carona, 2021). As of 2019, there is an accelerated growth regarding the publication of new studies focused mostly on the Western context, namely in the United States, United Kingdom, and European countries, and on qualitative approaches, with semi-structured interviews, case studies, among other qualitative methods (Simões et al., 2021, pp. 360-361).

The studies support the (scientific) importance of increasing the recognition of instituted violence against women journalists (Simões et al., 2021), not only in countries known to be dangerous for journalists, but also states with high democratic indices (Chocarro, 2019). First, since it occurs due to the profession and, consequently, for gender motives (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018). Second, individuals and groups seek to denigrate, condition, and silence female participation (Costa, 2021a, 2021b). Third, there are increasing democratic setbacks and the revival of the new radical right (populism and the far right) that have hostile claims towards women in general, as sought to be demonstrated in the previous section. On the other hand, women are more likely to report receiving insults or threats and have stronger emotional reactions to violence than their male counterparts (Binns, 2017).

It has thereby become clear that this online threat is multifaceted (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018), in the sense that it does not only include violence and hatred, often in the form of sexual assault, "but a wider variety of attacks and entrenched behaviors that severely challenge women's ability to practice and progress in the profession. These take many forms: sexual harassment, unequal working conditions, and relentless online abuse" (Chocarro, 2019, p. 6). In this regard, Pain and Chen (2019) identified that comments made on journalistic content

are openly uncivil and abusive by focusing primarily on the appearance and attributes of female professionals.

Therefore, digital platforms can serve to reify ideological gender dynamics (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018). If they structure the offline world, the establishment of online gender violence ultimately promotes the normalization of the phenomenon and its impacts on victims, since these gender biases and stereotypes are socially established, including under different power relations (Everbach, 2018). For example, in Taiwan, cultural norms of a patriarchal nature still expect women to be subservient (Pain & Chen, 2019).

On the other hand, the dominant culture within newsrooms may prove to be marginalizing and hostile towards women or just unprepared to ensure gender-specific safety issues (Chocarro, 2019; Costa, 2022a, 2022b; Everbach, 2018), coupled with the absence of responses from law enforcement agencies due to the fact that there is no specific legislation to investigate and punish perpetrators of violence, along with hate, on the Internet (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018, p. 313). Consequently, violence is no longer reported in formal complaint and whistleblowing.

The higher frequency and violence of attacks, victims' orientation tends to prioritize the choice of topics for journalistic texts that are less susceptible to hostility from audiences (Costa, 2021a). Although the emotional reactions that women journalists report at the assault contact, such as fright, intimidation, upset, and fury, can be described as "emotional labor", this is a concept that does not meet consensus in journalism. For the professional class, the workplace is seen as a rational environment where emotions get in the way of common sense. With a penchant for the masculine characteristics of objectivity, independence, and detachment (Binns, 2017), "neutral observers of events" are expected not to become participants in the news they cover. This therefore presupposes that they hide their emotions or, when this is not possible, reveal a minimum degree of emotion (Miller & Lewis, 2020).

Even if the number of positive comments on social media far exceeds the violent ones, harassment causes distress owing to its threatening and abusive nature (Everbach, 2018, p. 137). In that sequence, the fear inflicted eventually can instigate victims to self-questioning about abilities and work produced (Everbach, 2018), to move to another city and profession (Binns, 2017; Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018), culminating in a self-censorship not always perceptible to victims (Costa, 2021a). For this reason, there is still a need to add the aspect of emotional labor to the research, aiming to analyze the work underlying the management of one's own emotions,

as it is a necessary condition for journalists to be able to negotiate this type of violence, while trying to mitigate and prevent new abuses (Miller & Lewis, 2020).

On an emotional level, the individualization of suffering occurs, with professionals deciding whether and how to respond to attacks (Lewis et al., 2020). Women journalists who remain in the profession in the long term develop supportive strategies to cope with violence, such as bonding with other women, forming organizations, and using social media tools to block or ignore abusers (Everbach, 2018, p. 145).

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Summarizing, online violence impacts the offline personal sphere of victims, but also produces costs for news companies, as professionals limit interactions that could be mutually beneficial in interacting with the public (Chen et al., 2020), going on to develop a negative and expendable view of the public (Lewis et al., 2020), where there is ultimately a silencing of the diversity of voices in the media and the abandonment of lines of inquiry (Binns, 2017; Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018).

Objectives and methodological approach

The categorization of digital violence against women journalists has gone through a wide range of terms, concepts, and derivations, making it difficult to establish a common conceptualization and performance framework within academia, which consequently raises a whole set of complexities to ensure the protection of journalists, in a time marked by the resurgence of the new radical right and the normalization of hate on digital platforms.

Based on two scientific studies that conducted a systematic review of terms and concepts used in academic research to characterize digital violence against women journalists (Morena-Balaguer et al., 2022; Simões et al., 2021), the aim of this study is to identify the appropriate way to conceptually characterize the phenomenon and the elements that need to be considered for future legislation on the safety of journalists in the digital age.

The study by Simões et al. (2021) presents a semi-exhaustive and representative review of the most relevant research on online violence against women journalists published in the Web of Science database between 2010 and 2020. First, the researchers conducted a computer-based search to identify the studies through combinations between the following keywords: online abuse, online harassment, online hate, journalism, journalist, and women (Simões et al., 2021, p. 359). Consequently, they combined a meta-analysis with content analysis to present quantitative and qualitative balances of the literature.

For their part, Morena-Balaguer et al. (2022) identified the main trends to elaborate a genealogy of the main concepts currently used to designate digital violence against women, more broadly and not only directed to women journalists. By conducting an initial literature review of the available literature, they identified a set of recurrently used terms. Digital gender violence, online hate speech, online misogyny, cyber gender violence and cyber antifeminism were subsequently used as keywords to conduct the search for research published in the Web of Science during the period 2016 to 2022.

These studies were coded and interpreted with a purposeful set of variables focusing on the terminological and conceptual approach by combining a meta-analysis with a content analysis (Bardin, 1995). Drawing upon a feminist perspective, we conducted this study guided by the following research questions: 1) What terms and definitions of digital violence against women journalists have been employed by academia? 2) What variations are observed between the two systematic reviews of research published in the Web of Science database? 3) What elements need to be considered to conceptually characterize and legislate the object of study?

Results

The research collected by Simões et al. (2021) and Morena-Balaguer et al. (2022) illustrate that published studies on violence against women are consolidating their importance in the academic community, showing rapid growth. And research on violence against women journalists is no exception. Although the first study was only published in 2015, the truth is that it quickly occupied a prominent place as an object of study.

Regarding the studies published in the Web of Science database on digital violence against women journalists, Simões et al. (2021) focused on the period 2010-2020, which resulted in the extraction of 13 articles for coding and analysis. In parallel, Morena-Balaguer et al. (2022) went beyond violence directed at journalists and, therefore, their research considered digital violence on the entire female universe between 2016 and 2020. Using the same database, they identified a total of 115 publications.

While Simões et al. (2021, p. 359) conducted the computer-based research by combining the keywords online abuse, online harassment, online hate, journalism, journalist, woman, and women, Morena-Balaguer et al. (2022, p. 703) used digital gender violence, online hate speech, women, online misogyny, sexist cyber violence, cyber antifeminism, cyber harassment, and cyberbullying.

According to Morena-Balaguer et al. (2022, p. 710), the areas that have most worked on this theme are communication and sociology. Each area of knowledge favors one or another terminology considering its own tradition. While law tends to opt for hate speech, sociology leans towards misogyny. Based on these assumptions (Morena-Balaguer et al., 2022, pp. 704-710), the main concepts currently used to designate digital violence against women are essentially the conceptualization of digital gender violence, digital hate speech against women, digital misogyny, cyber gender violence and cyber antifeminism.

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During the studies on digital violence against women journalists, it is identified that several and different references have been used. As shown in Table 1, 25 concepts of violence were introduced for 13 studies. This corresponds to an average use of 2 concepts per study. There is a greater acceptance regarding online harassment and online abuse and their terminological derivations, which reveals a great diversity of terms and concepts.

Table 1. Concepts of violence against women journalists and terminological derivations applied. Source: Own elaboration based on Simões et al. (2021)

Articles extracted N=13	Simões et al. (2021) 2010-2020
Online harassment	7
Online abuse	5
Racism	2
Harassment	2
Sexism	1
Misogyny	1
Rape threats	1
Threats	1
Online hate	1
Sexual violence	1
Misogynistic abuse	1
Attack	1
Online attacks	1
Total concepts introduced	25

The published studies expose how violence against women journalists is strongly rooted not only in the cultures of countries known to be hostile toward journalists, but also in countries with high rates of democracy, particularly in the Western context (United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, among others), where the prioritization of freedoms of expression and press is given and often marked by a lack of regulation. Consequently, the sample of professionals who report not having suffered any type of online aggression is small.

The worldwide phenomenon is analyzed and disseminated from various methodological angles of approach (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed), with victims repeatedly experiencing (daily, weekly, and monthly) a wide range of hostile and violent practices over the course of their entire working lives. The incivility and hate perpetrated in public comment boxes hosted by the media have encouraged the rise of unpleasant conversations in these participatory spaces, morphing into new verbal practices of online violence that are highly gendered and sexual in nature, without requiring the substantial use of intermediary/supportive means to target victims. On the other hand, these aggressions can still be, in some cases, transposed from the digital to the physical environment.

Discussion

Since the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was launched and the Academic Research Agenda on the Safety of Journalists was created by UNESCO, the safety of journalism has emerged as an international academic issue and inspired new studies and collaborations. In the words of Kaitlin C. Miller (2021), to theorize hostility toward journalism is to examine a journalist's identity as a place of oppression that intersects with other identities of oppression, resulting in unique context-based experiences.

Although the impacts that these behaviors outside the newsrooms have on the practices of journalistic activity are well supported empirically, as well as the operationalization of violence normalization and self-censorship of the victims in the social and professional spheres, the same is missing with the management that women journalists have to do with the emotional work (the emotional reactions). This gap in academic research makes incomplete the understanding of the strategies that women journalists use to deal with violence, such as avoiding reading comments, adapting their news processes, and considering leaving the profession or digital platforms, among others, and that are often seen as an expected gender behavior (reification of ideologies and gender roles).

It is important to note that women workers are unable to leave the digital environment because journalistic routines depend on it, but also because reciprocal journalism is encouraged by media organizations to strengthen public confidence in the profession. On the other hand, it is women journalists who manage their profiles on digital platforms, being their use leveraged as a mechanism for public projection, sharing, activism, distraction and even entertainment (Morena-Balaguer et al., 2022). Considering these intersections in the uses of digital platforms, journalists are highly exposed and vulnerable to violent incidents.

The study by Simões et al. (2021) concludes that research indexed in Web of Science on digital violence against women journalists "shows the relative increasing importance of this issue in the last five years" (p. 367). However, the community does not share a common terminological framework to define violence practices, adding difficulties in establishing cross-country comparative studies, for example. This means that a robust theoretical basis and critical agenda for such research in countries considered to have democratically free journalism is still lacking (Miller, 2021).

Under these terms, researchers experience increased difficulty in locating literature in databases. As researchers are faced with the complexity of theoretical conceptualization, effective collaboration among scholars is complicated. Moreover, the lack of diversity in the situational contexts under study, particularly outside the Western context, promotes ignorance of violence's operationalization in different spheres of society and makes it difficult to relate the topic to the freedom of the media industry and the free expression of opinion in the online medium.

Bridging the weakness of not having a clear conceptualization of the phenomenon involves establishing what is meant by digital violence against women journalists. Conceptually established, the phenomenon must be investigated in a targeted manner to allow the identification of practices and their gender particularities. Through these dispositions, a possibility of elaborating a common framework for action is opened.

Notwithstanding the fact that violence against journalists is intertwined with a wide variety of terms and concepts to discuss the phenomenon, it seems that journalism studies have maintained a relative consensus on the use of harassment to describe these unwanted behaviors, as can be seen in the previous section results. What remains lacking, then, is a robust definition for what "harassment" means (Miller, 2021).

In this framework, it is worth noting that there is a clear difference between defining and describing the phenomenon. We propose that digital violence against journalists be

conceptually defined as the individual, collective and/or organized act of moral, sexual, political and economic harassment, which may be associated with gender, offense and incitement to hatred of others, capable of deliberately harming their fundamental rights, as well as surveilling, disciplining and silencing the freedom of the press, by undermining the sense of physical safety and psychological well-being in the personal and private spheres of the victim.

To constitute an act as violence and enact the criminalization provisions, it must be reinforced with one or more repetitions of the initial intent through any appropriation of digital tools. Only by considering the repetition of the incident can we prevent the punishment of one-off cases that have not thought about the impacts and consequences of their right to a free speech, such as individuals without media literacy. Some examples of known acts, as they are constantly changing (it is understood by description of violence): sending texts, messages, videos, and emails that are offensive, hostile, persecutory, threatening, sexual and misogynistic; publishing uncivil, offensive, and hateful content regarding and/or directed to the journalist.

Conclusion

In recent years, the rapid and diverse growth of academic research to study digital violence against women journalists, especially in the Western context, indicates recognition of the importance of analyzing how the global phenomenon is structured, produced, disseminated, and received in contemporary societies, with some investigations intersecting with analyses of power structures and gender ideologies. This means that the phenomenon will always need to be examined at the micro (forms of violence) and macro (forces, social dynamics, and systems of oppression) levels of intersectional identities (as contextually situated individual experiences), since they contribute to the formation of journalists' autonomy and security and are associated with the quality of their role in democracy.

However, the dispersion of terminologies and concepts used by researchers to refer to the object of study, in the absence of an established consensus, is assumed as a cumulative difficulty for States to legislate and develop public policies that recognize and solve the phenomenon that triggers personal and professional impacts, as well as provide an appropriate follow-up to victims. It means that the lack of a common conceptualization promotes a lack of legislative regulation for the criminalization of digital violence against journalists, while making it difficult for police and judicial entities to act.

Previously, it was proposed that the possibility of conceptually defining digital violence against women journalists as the individual, collective and/or organized act of morally, sexually, politically and economically harassing, which may be associated with gender, offense and incitement to hatred of others, that is capable of deliberately undermining their fundamental rights, as well as surveilling, disciplining and silencing the freedom of the press, by undermining the sense of physical safety and psychological well-being in the victim's personal and private spheres.

Although this is a step in the right direction, studies need to contribute to the expansion of the approach focused on the emotional work of victims, because states do not invest in their research and the phenomenon enjoys invisibility due to processes of violence normalization within the media companies themselves. Moreover, with the resurgence of the new radical right all over the world, even in countries with high democratic indexes and where there are setbacks at this level, the populist political communication and the communication of the extreme right proclaim journalists as propagators of "fake news", with the aim of delegitimizing them through campaigns of lies against them.

Hence, journalists today are highly watched and controlled by those who want to disregard and diminish the reach and importance of their journalistic content, and not only for issues of a nature closely related to gender violence. In this sequence, these campaigns end up legitimizing the encouragement of individual, collective, organized, and anonymous violence against women journalists. The violence is not only intended to assault, but to condition the freedom of expression on digital platforms.

As such, the academic community needs to continue researching the new threats that are and will emerge in the digital sphere, not relegating the importance of managing the different emotions that journalists are subjected to in their contact with violence over time, and especially what social and psychological damage is usually triggered and how this relates to the act of reporting.

Together with civil society, social institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations, the academic community must take an active role in the creation of initiatives to disseminate research results, around an agenda that promotes the safety of journalists as a goal of Agenda 2030 of the countries where they are located. Only by joining forces can legal and political approaches, effective denunciation mechanisms, and close monitoring of victims be created.

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