

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Digital Ethics and Online Harassment of Journalists: A Review of Gendered Violence, Safety, and Platform Responsibility

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| ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies and social media platforms has transformed journalism by increasing access to information, audience engagement, and real-time reporting. However, these developments have also intensified online harassment targeting journalists, particularly women and marginalized media practitioners. This study reviews existing literature on digital ethics and online harassment of journalists, with a specific focus on gendered violence, safety concerns, and platform responsibility. The review examines the forms, patterns, and consequences of online abuse, including cyberbullying, threats, doxxing, sexual harassment, disinformation campaigns, and coordinated digital attacks. Findings indicate that female journalists disproportionately experience gender-based harassment that undermines professional credibility, psychological well-being, freedom of expression, and career progression. The study further explores the ethical implications of digital communication environments, emphasizing the tension between freedom of speech and the protection of journalists from harmful online conduct. The review also evaluates the role of digital platforms in moderating harmful content, enforcing community standards, and ensuring accountability through algorithmic transparency and policy implementation. Emerging debates surrounding artificial intelligence, automated moderation systems, digital surveillance, and data privacy are highlighted as critical dimensions shaping contemporary media safety. The study concludes that addressing online harassment requires collaborative approaches involving governments, media organizations, technology companies, civil society, and journalism institutions. Strengthening digital ethics frameworks, improving platform governance, enhancing legal protections, and promoting digital safety training are identified as essential strategies for safeguarding journalists and sustaining democratic communication in the digital age.

| KEYWORDS

Gendered violence, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, digital communication, data privacy.

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies and social media platforms has transformed journalism practices across the world. Digital platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok have created new opportunities for journalists to disseminate information instantly, engage audiences interactively, and participate in global public discourse. The digital environment has enhanced access to information, expanded investigative capacities, and increased the visibility of journalistic work beyond traditional media boundaries (Martin, 2018). However, alongside these opportunities, the digital media ecosystem has also generated significant ethical challenges and intensified online harassment directed toward journalists. Increasing concerns about digital ethics,

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cyberbullying, misinformation, surveillance, privacy violations, and coordinated online abuse have emerged as major issues affecting journalistic safety, professional autonomy, and freedom of expression.

Online harassment of journalists has become a global phenomenon that threatens both individual well-being and democratic communication systems. Journalists increasingly encounter abusive comments, hate speech, doxxing, trolling, cyberstalking, disinformation campaigns, and threats of physical or sexual violence through digital platforms. These attacks are often amplified by anonymity, algorithmic visibility, and the viral nature of social media interactions. While online harassment affects journalists generally, evidence suggests that women journalists, gender minorities, and marginalized groups experience disproportionately severe forms of digital abuse (Posetti, 2021). Gendered online violence frequently includes sexist insults, sexualized harassment, body shaming, intimidation, and threats aimed at silencing female voices in public discourse. Such forms of harassment extend beyond professional criticism and become mechanisms of social control that undermine gender equality and media freedom.

The growing prevalence of digital harassment has generated scholarly and institutional interest in digital ethics and platform accountability. Digital ethics refers to the moral principles and standards guiding responsible behavior, communication, technological governance, and information sharing in digital spaces. In journalism, digital ethics encompasses issues such as privacy protection, responsible reporting, verification of online information, respectful audience engagement, cybersecurity, and ethical moderation of digital interactions (Chandel, 2025). Ethical concerns become particularly important when journalists are exposed to hostile online environments that compromise their psychological safety, professional credibility, and participation in democratic communication processes. Persistent exposure to online abuse may contribute to emotional distress, self-censorship, withdrawal from digital engagement, and reduced participation of women and minority journalists in public debates.

The issue of platform responsibility has become increasingly central in discussions of digital ethics and online harassment. Social media companies are often criticized for inadequate content moderation systems, inconsistent enforcement of community standards, and algorithmic structures that may amplify harmful or abusive content. Critics argue that digital platforms benefit economically from user engagement while failing to sufficiently protect journalists and vulnerable users from targeted harassment (Sampaio-Dias, 2024). Debates surrounding platform governance therefore focus on ethical accountability, transparency, regulation, artificial intelligence moderation systems, and the balance between freedom of expression and online safety. Governments, media organizations, civil society groups, and international bodies continue to advocate for stronger digital governance frameworks capable of addressing harmful online behavior without undermining democratic freedoms.

Recent global events have further intensified the risks faced by journalists online. Political polarization, misinformation campaigns, populist rhetoric, and digital activism have contributed to hostile online environments in which journalists are frequently portrayed as adversaries or targets. Investigative reporters, political correspondents, human rights journalists, and women journalists covering controversial topics often experience coordinated attacks intended to intimidate or delegitimize their work (Zviyita, 2024). In many cases, online harassment extends into offline threats, demonstrating the interconnected nature of digital and physical violence. Consequently, journalist safety is no longer limited to physical protection in conflict zones or dangerous reporting environments but increasingly includes digital security, psychological resilience, and institutional support systems.

Despite growing scholarly attention, existing studies on digital ethics, gendered online violence, journalist safety, and platform responsibility remain fragmented across disciplines such as media studies, communication, sociology, digital governance, and feminist scholarship. There is therefore a need for a comprehensive review that synthesizes current knowledge on how online harassment affects journalists, particularly through gendered dimensions, and how ethical frameworks and platform governance mechanisms respond to these challenges (Sampaio-Dias, 2025). This study seeks to review existing literature on digital ethics and online harassment of journalists by examining patterns of gendered violence, implications for journalist safety, and the evolving responsibilities of digital platforms in promoting safer and more ethical communication environments. The review contributes to ongoing debates

concerning media freedom, digital rights, ethical technology governance, and the protection of journalists in the digital age.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative review research design to critically examine existing literature on digital ethics and online harassment of journalists, with particular emphasis on gendered violence, journalist safety, and platform responsibility in digital communication environments. A review-based methodology was considered appropriate because the study sought to synthesize theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, policy discussions, and institutional responses from interdisciplinary scholarship rather than generate primary data. The review design enabled the integration of studies from journalism, media studies, digital sociology, gender studies, communication ethics, cybersecurity, and platform governance. Through this approach, the study developed a comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies have transformed the nature of harassment targeting journalists and the ethical responsibilities emerging within online media ecosystems.

2.2 Sources of Literature

The study relied on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, policy reports, institutional publications, and credible international media and digital rights organizations. Literature was sourced from major academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, Sage Journals, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect. Additional materials were obtained from reports published by organizations concerned with media freedom and digital safety, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, and International Federation of Journalists. These sources were selected because they provide current empirical evidence, policy analyses, and documented cases relating to online harassment, digital ethics, and journalist protection in digital spaces.

2.3 Search Strategy and Keywords

A systematic keyword-based search strategy was employed to identify relevant literature related to the study objectives. Keywords and search phrases included "digital ethics," "online harassment of journalists," "gendered online violence," "cyber harassment," "digital safety," "platform accountability," "social media governance," "journalist security," "technology-facilitated violence," "misinformation and abuse," "women journalists and online attacks," and "digital rights and freedom of expression." Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and NOT were used to refine search results and improve relevance. The search primarily focused on literature published between 2010 and 2026 to capture recent developments associated with social media expansion, algorithmic communication systems, artificial intelligence moderation, and evolving digital platform policies. However, earlier foundational studies on media ethics, feminist media theory, and online communication governance were also incorporated to provide theoretical grounding.

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review included studies that directly addressed online harassment, digital ethics, journalist safety, platform governance, and gender-based violence within digital communication environments. Priority was given to peer-reviewed and scholarly sources with clear methodological rigor and relevance to journalism and media practice. Studies focusing on journalists, media workers, digital content creators, and press freedom advocates were considered particularly relevant. The review also included international and comparative studies to capture global perspectives on digital harassment and platform accountability. Conversely, sources lacking academic credibility, unpublished opinion pieces without empirical grounding, duplicate studies, and literature unrelated to digital communication or journalism were excluded from the review. Studies focusing exclusively on offline violence without digital dimensions were also omitted unless they directly connected physical threats to online harassment dynamics.

2.5 Data Analysis and Synthesis

The collected literature was analyzed using thematic content analysis. This approach enabled the identification, categorization, and interpretation of recurring concepts, arguments, and emerging patterns across the reviewed studies. The analysis focused on key thematic areas including forms of online harassment targeting journalists, gendered dimensions of digital violence, psychological and professional impacts on journalists, ethical implications of digital communication systems, institutional and newsroom responses, and the responsibilities of technology platforms in moderating harmful content. Comparative analysis was also employed to examine similarities and differences across geographical contexts, media systems, and policy frameworks. Through thematic synthesis, the study generated an integrated interpretation of how digital ethics intersects with media safety, gender justice, and platform governance in contemporary journalism.

2.6 Theoretical Orientation

The review was guided by interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives drawn from digital ethics theory, feminist media theory, platform governance theory, and the public sphere framework. Digital ethics theory provided a foundation for examining ethical responsibilities in online communication environments, particularly regarding accountability, privacy, freedom of expression, and algorithmic governance. Feminist media theory was useful in understanding the gendered nature of online harassment and the disproportionate targeting of women journalists and marginalized voices. Platform governance perspectives helped explain the role of social media companies in shaping online interactions through moderation policies, algorithms, and community standards. These theoretical orientations collectively provided a multidimensional framework for interpreting the ethical, technological, and social implications of online harassment in journalism.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Although the study was based entirely on secondary data and did not involve direct interaction with human participants, ethical considerations were still observed throughout the review process. Proper acknowledgment and citation of all scholarly sources were maintained to uphold academic integrity and avoid plagiarism. The study also ensured balanced interpretation of findings by critically engaging with diverse viewpoints and avoiding selective representation of evidence. Additionally, sensitivity was exercised when discussing cases of online abuse and gendered violence to maintain scholarly objectivity and respect for affected individuals and communities.

2.8 Limitations of the Methodology

The study relied exclusively on secondary data, which limited the ability to capture firsthand experiences from journalists affected by online harassment. The review was also constrained by variations in methodological approaches across existing studies, making direct comparison challenging in some cases. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies and social media governance means that platform policies and harassment trends may change faster than scholarly publication cycles. Despite these limitations, the review methodology provided a broad and analytically rich understanding of the relationship between digital ethics, online harassment, journalist safety, and platform responsibility in contemporary media environments.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Nature and Forms of Online Harassment Against Journalists

The review established that online harassment against journalists has become a pervasive and multidimensional problem within contemporary digital communication environments. The findings revealed that harassment is no longer limited to isolated abusive comments but has evolved into systematic and coordinated forms of digital aggression facilitated by social media platforms, algorithmic amplification, anonymity, and polarized political discourse. Journalists operating in digital spaces increasingly encounter hostile interactions that undermine professional autonomy, emotional well-being, and freedom of expression (Lu, 2022). The study found that harassment frequently occurs on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and online discussion forums where rapid information dissemination and audience engagement create opportunities for abuse and intimidation.

The findings further showed that online harassment manifests through insults, threats, disinformation campaigns, cyberstalking, impersonation, hate speech, coordinated trolling, and exposure of personal information. These forms of abuse often intensify when journalists report on politically sensitive topics, corruption, gender issues, elections, human rights violations, religion, or social justice movements. Investigative journalists and independent media practitioners were identified as particularly vulnerable because of their visibility and critical reporting functions. Similar observations were reported in previous studies by Lewis (2020), which found that digital attacks are increasingly used to silence journalists, damage credibility, and discourage investigative reporting. The findings therefore suggest that online harassment has become a structural challenge affecting journalistic safety, democratic participation, and media freedom globally (GBOLADE et al., 2018).

The review also found that digital harassment is sustained by the architecture of online platforms that prioritize engagement and virality. Algorithms that amplify controversial content often increase the visibility of abusive communication, enabling coordinated harassment campaigns to spread rapidly. In many cases, platform moderation systems were found to respond inconsistently to reports of abuse, thereby creating environments where harassment persists with limited accountability (Jannah, 2022). This finding aligns with previous research indicating that technology companies have struggled to balance freedom of expression with effective protection against harmful online behavior. Consequently, journalists frequently experience emotional distress, professional burnout, self-censorship, and withdrawal from public discourse due to repeated exposure to hostile online interactions.

3.1.1 Cyberbullying and Coordinated Online Attacks

The findings revealed that cyberbullying and coordinated online attacks constitute some of the most common forms of digital harassment directed at journalists. Organized trolling campaigns were frequently identified as deliberate strategies aimed at intimidating journalists, discrediting their reporting, and influencing public perception. The review found that these attacks often involve large groups of individuals acting simultaneously to flood journalists' social media accounts with insults, threats, misinformation, and hateful content (Simões, 2021). In politically polarized environments, journalists covering elections, corruption, governance failures, or controversial public debates were found to experience targeted digital aggression from political supporters, extremist groups, or coordinated online networks.

The study established that coordinated attacks frequently include mass reporting campaigns intended to suspend journalists' social media accounts or reduce the visibility of their content. Journalists who publish investigative stories or challenge dominant political narratives were especially vulnerable to such tactics. For example, several international cases documented journalists receiving thousands of abusive messages within a short period after publishing investigative reports on government misconduct or social inequality (Miranda, 2023). In some instances, manipulated images, fabricated allegations, and defamatory hashtags were circulated widely to damage journalists' reputations and professional credibility.

The findings also indicated that cyberbullying extends beyond direct verbal abuse to include persistent harassment through memes, edited videos, disinformation, and targeted ridicule. Such attacks are often amplified by anonymous accounts and automated bots, making it difficult to identify perpetrators or implement accountability mechanisms. Previous studies by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) similarly reported that online violence against journalists increasingly involves networked harassment orchestrated through digital communities that exploit platform algorithms and anonymity (Claesson, 2023). These findings demonstrate that cyberbullying has evolved into a sophisticated form of digital intimidation capable of influencing journalistic practices and limiting public-interest reporting.

Furthermore, the review found that prolonged exposure to coordinated online hostility negatively affects journalists' psychological well-being and professional performance. Many journalists reportedly experience anxiety, fear, stress, depression, and emotional exhaustion after repeated digital attacks. Some reduce their social media engagement, avoid reporting on sensitive topics, or withdraw from online public discussions altogether. This finding supports

earlier research showing that online harassment contributes significantly to self-censorship and diminished press freedom (Yadav, 2025). The findings therefore suggest that cyberbullying and coordinated online attacks represent not only personal threats to journalists but also broader challenges to democratic communication and public accountability (Ekwunife et al., n.d).

3.1.2 Gender-Based Harassment and Sexualized Abuse

The review found that gender-based harassment represents one of the most severe dimensions of online violence against journalists. Women journalists were disproportionately targeted with misogynistic abuse, sexist insults, sexual harassment, body shaming, and threats of sexual violence compared to their male counterparts. The findings revealed that online attacks against women journalists frequently focus on gender identity, physical appearance, sexuality, marital status, and perceived moral behavior rather than professional work (Chen, 2020). This demonstrates that digital harassment often reproduces broader patriarchal and discriminatory structures existing within society.

The study established that women journalists covering politics, feminism, human rights, gender equality, and social justice issues are particularly vulnerable to sexualized online abuse. Female reporters and media commentators were found to receive explicit rape threats, violent sexual messages, degrading comments, and digitally manipulated sexualized images intended to humiliate and silence them (Terzis, 2025). In many cases, harassment intensified after journalists publicly expressed opinions on controversial issues or challenged dominant cultural and political norms. Similar findings have been reported by UNESCO and the Committee to Protect Journalists, which documented widespread online misogyny targeting women journalists globally.

The review further showed that intersectional identities significantly influence the intensity of online harassment. Women journalists from minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ communities, and marginalized social backgrounds often experience compounded abuse involving racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and gender discrimination simultaneously. For example, Black women journalists in Western media environments were found to receive racist and sexist abuse at substantially higher rates than other groups (Mesmer, 2021). These findings support intersectionality theory, which argues that overlapping social identities contribute to multiple forms of discrimination and vulnerability.

Another significant finding was that gender-based online harassment frequently leads to psychological trauma and professional exclusion. Many women journalists reported fear, humiliation, emotional distress, and reduced participation in digital public discourse. Some journalists adopted defensive strategies such as limiting online visibility, avoiding political reporting, blocking audience interactions, or leaving social media platforms entirely. Previous studies by Kakooza (2025) similarly observed that gendered online abuse contributes to unequal participation within journalism and discourages women from occupying visible public communication roles.

The findings also revealed institutional gaps in addressing gender-based digital violence. Media organizations were found to provide inconsistent support mechanisms for women journalists facing online abuse. In many cases, harassment was normalized as an occupational hazard rather than recognized as a serious safety and ethical concern (Tandoc, 2023). Platform moderation systems were similarly criticized for failing to respond effectively to sexist abuse and threats of violence. These findings indicate the need for stronger organizational policies, digital safety training, legal protections, and platform accountability measures aimed at protecting women journalists in online environments.

3.1.3 Doxxing, Surveillance, and Threats to Personal Safety

The review established that doxxing, digital surveillance, and threats to personal safety represent increasingly dangerous forms of online harassment against journalists. Doxxing emerged as a major tactic involving the unauthorized publication of personal information such as home addresses, phone numbers, family details, workplace information, and private photographs. The findings showed that such disclosures are often intended to intimidate journalists, expose them to physical harm, and discourage critical reporting (Islam, 2023). Journalists

investigating organized crime, corruption, political extremism, or human rights abuses were found to face heightened risks of doxxing and targeted intimidation.

The study further revealed that online harassment frequently extends beyond digital spaces into offline threats and physical insecurity. Journalists subjected to doxxing often reported receiving threatening phone calls, unwanted visits, stalking, and intimidation directed at family members. In some documented cases, online threats escalated into physical violence or forced relocation due to security concerns (Orgeret, 2024). These findings align with earlier research indicating that the boundary between online and offline violence against journalists has become increasingly blurred in digital communication environments.

The findings also highlighted growing concerns regarding digital surveillance and monitoring of journalists by both state and non-state actors. Surveillance practices included hacking attempts, spyware attacks, monitoring of social media activity, interception of communication, and unauthorized access to digital devices. Investigative journalists and whistleblower-related reporters were particularly vulnerable to surveillance because of the sensitive nature of their work (Reyman, 2019). Previous studies examining spyware technologies such as Pegasus similarly demonstrated how digital surveillance tools have been used to monitor journalists, compromise confidential sources, and undermine press freedom.

Another important finding was that identity-based threats frequently accompany surveillance and doxxing practices. Journalists belonging to marginalized ethnic, political, religious, or gender groups often face intensified threats intended to exploit their social identities. For instance, women journalists and minority reporters were more likely to receive threats involving sexual violence, racial intimidation, or attacks against family members (Miller, 2023). These threats create climates of fear that extend beyond professional environments into personal and domestic spaces.

The review additionally found that institutional responses to doxxing and surveillance remain inadequate in many contexts. Law enforcement agencies frequently lack the technical expertise or legal frameworks required to investigate digital threats effectively. Similarly, social media companies were criticized for slow responses to reports involving exposure of personal information and coordinated intimidation (Ferrier, 2018). Media organizations also varied significantly in their capacity to provide cybersecurity support, trauma counseling, and emergency protection for affected journalists (Jimoh et al., 2023).

3.2 Psychological, Professional, and Social Impacts of Online Harassment

The review findings revealed that online harassment produces profound psychological, professional, and social consequences for journalists, particularly women journalists, minority reporters, investigative correspondents, and media practitioners who engage with politically sensitive topics. The evidence showed that digital harassment extends beyond isolated online attacks and increasingly functions as a systematic mechanism of intimidation capable of affecting journalists' emotional well-being, professional independence, and social participation. Existing literature consistently demonstrated that repeated exposure to online abuse contributes to psychological distress, weakens press freedom, and undermines democratic communication processes (Islam, 2023). The findings further indicated that online harassment has evolved into a structural occupational hazard within digital journalism environments, especially with the expansion of social media platforms and algorithm-driven audience interactions.

3.2.1 Psychological and Emotional Effects

The findings revealed that persistent online harassment significantly affects journalists' psychological and emotional well-being. Across the reviewed studies, journalists frequently reported experiencing stress, anxiety, fear, emotional exhaustion, depression, trauma, and burnout resulting from continuous exposure to abusive online content (Waisbord, 2024). The review showed that hostile comments, misogynistic attacks, racial insults, death threats, doxxing, and coordinated trolling campaigns create a climate of constant psychological pressure that extends beyond professional spaces into personal life.

Several studies indicated that women journalists are disproportionately affected by severe emotional consequences because digital abuse directed toward them often includes gendered insults, sexualized threats, and attacks on physical appearance and family life. Research conducted by international press freedom organizations demonstrated that female journalists covering politics, human rights, or gender issues frequently develop heightened fear and chronic anxiety due to repeated exposure to violent online threats (McCully, 2019). Similar findings were reported in studies examining journalists in conflict-prone and politically polarized societies, where online abuse was linked to emotional trauma and feelings of vulnerability.

The review further established that the psychological impacts of online harassment are intensified by the permanence and public visibility of digital content. Unlike traditional harassment, online attacks remain searchable, shareable, and continuously reproducible across multiple platforms, making emotional recovery difficult. Journalists subjected to viral harassment campaigns often reported sleep disturbances, panic attacks, reduced self-esteem, and prolonged emotional distress (Robinah, 2025). Some studies compared the emotional effects of sustained online abuse to symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially when threats involved family members or personal safety.

In addition, the findings showed that newsroom support systems remain inadequate in addressing mental health challenges associated with digital abuse. Many journalists reported feeling unsupported by employers who often normalize online harassment as part of modern journalism. Existing studies highlighted that limited institutional psychological support contributes to emotional isolation and occupational burnout. These findings align with previous research by Oreoluwa (2024), which documented increasing levels of emotional exhaustion and mental health deterioration among journalists exposed to persistent online violence. Consequently, the review demonstrates that online harassment is not merely a communication problem but also a significant occupational health and digital ethics concern.

3.2.2 Effects on Journalistic Practice and Press Freedom

The findings revealed that online harassment substantially influences journalistic practice and poses serious threats to press freedom and democratic participation. A major pattern emerging from the reviewed literature was the widespread adoption of self-censorship among journalists who experience sustained digital abuse. Many journalists reported intentionally avoiding controversial topics, politically sensitive investigations, or public debates to minimize exposure to online attacks (Islam, 2025). This tendency was particularly evident among female journalists and independent media practitioners operating in highly polarized political environments.

The review found that online harassment discourages investigative reporting and critical journalism by creating fear of retaliation. Journalists covering corruption, gender-based violence, elections, minority rights, and state accountability were identified as especially vulnerable to coordinated online intimidation campaigns. In many cases, journalists reduced their social media presence, limited audience engagement, or withdrew entirely from digital platforms after experiencing severe abuse (Pavan, 2017). These actions significantly reduce opportunities for public dialogue and weaken the watchdog role traditionally associated with journalism.

Several studies further indicated that digital harassment contributes to the shrinking of civic and democratic communication spaces. The normalization of online abuse creates hostile environments that silence marginalized voices and discourage participation in public discourse. For example, women journalists subjected to repeated misogynistic attacks often avoid publishing opinion pieces or engaging in political commentary due to fear of backlash (Carlson, 2020). Similarly, minority journalists reported avoiding identity-related reporting because of racist or discriminatory online responses.

The findings also demonstrated that online harassment undermines freedom of expression by indirectly controlling journalistic behavior through fear and intimidation rather than direct censorship. This form of "networked intimidation" allows individuals, organized groups, and political actors to suppress critical reporting without formal legal restrictions (Bachmann, 2025). Existing literature linked these developments to broader concerns about

democratic decline and digital authoritarianism, particularly where online disinformation campaigns and political trolling are widespread.

The review additionally revealed that platform algorithms and engagement-driven digital systems frequently amplify harmful content. Sensational and abusive interactions often receive greater visibility and circulation, thereby increasing the intensity and reach of harassment campaigns (Riedl, 2025). Previous studies noted that inadequate content moderation systems, delayed removal of abusive material, and inconsistent enforcement of platform policies further expose journalists to harm. These findings support earlier research emphasizing that digital platforms possess ethical responsibilities to create safer communication environments that protect journalists and preserve press freedom.

3.2.3 Social Isolation and Career-Related Consequences

The review findings showed that online harassment generates extensive social and career-related consequences for journalists. One major effect identified across the literature was social withdrawal and isolation resulting from fear, reputational attacks, and emotional fatigue (Martin, 2018). Journalists who experienced coordinated online abuse frequently reduced social interactions, avoided public engagement, and distanced themselves from online communities to protect their mental well-being and personal safety.

The findings revealed that reputational damage is a common strategy employed in online harassment campaigns. Journalists are often targeted through false accusations, manipulated images, defamatory narratives, and disinformation intended to undermine their professional credibility (Posetti, 2021). Such attacks may lead audiences to question the integrity, neutrality, or competence of journalists, thereby weakening public trust in media institutions. Female journalists were particularly vulnerable to character assassination campaigns that sexualize or delegitimize their professional identity.

The review further established that online harassment contributes to professional insecurity and career limitations. Some journalists reported losing assignments, reducing investigative work, or leaving high-profile reporting roles because of sustained digital abuse. Freelance journalists and early-career reporters were found to be especially vulnerable because they often lack institutional protection, legal support, or stable employment structures (Chandel, 2025). Existing studies documented cases where journalists abandoned journalism entirely after experiencing prolonged online attacks and threats.

In addition, the findings indicated that online harassment negatively affects interpersonal relationships and family life. Threats directed toward journalists' family members increase emotional strain and intensify feelings of insecurity. Some journalists reported limiting social activities, changing personal routines, or avoiding public appearances due to fear of being recognized or targeted offline (Sampaio-Dias, 2024). This overlap between online abuse and offline safety concerns reinforces the invasive nature of digital harassment.

The review also demonstrated that the cumulative effects of social isolation, professional insecurity, and reputational harm contribute to long-term career stagnation and reduced diversity within journalism. Women, minority journalists, and individuals from marginalized communities are disproportionately pushed out of public discourse spaces, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities within media systems (Zviyita, 2024). These findings correspond with earlier studies emphasizing that online harassment represents not only an individual psychological issue but also a structural challenge affecting media diversity, journalistic sustainability, and democratic communication. Overall, the evidence underscores the urgent need for stronger institutional support systems, ethical platform governance, newsroom safety policies, and digital accountability frameworks to mitigate the social and professional consequences of online harassment against journalists.

3.3 Digital Ethics and Ethical Challenges in Online Communication

The review findings revealed that digital ethics has emerged as a central concern in discussions surrounding online harassment of journalists. The expansion of digital communication platforms has transformed the nature of public

discourse by enabling rapid information exchange, audience participation, and transnational communication. However, these technological advancements have simultaneously intensified ethical challenges associated with online interactions, platform accountability, and journalist safety (Sampaio-Dias, 2025). The reviewed studies consistently demonstrated that journalists, particularly women and minority reporters, increasingly operate within hostile digital environments characterized by hate speech, misinformation campaigns, coordinated harassment, and weak regulatory enforcement. Existing literature further indicated that unethical online behavior is often amplified by algorithmic systems that prioritize engagement over safety, thereby contributing to the normalization of toxic digital cultures. These findings support earlier observations by scholars in digital media ethics who argued that technological innovation has outpaced the development of effective ethical governance structures in online communication environments (Samuel et al., 2021).

The findings further showed that ethical concerns extend beyond individual users to include media institutions, governments, and digital platform companies. Researchers observed that inadequate moderation systems, inconsistent platform policies, and limited institutional support mechanisms have exposed journalists to increased psychological and professional risks. In many instances, journalists subjected to online abuse reported receiving minimal organizational assistance despite the growing prevalence of digital threats (Lu, 2022). The evidence also indicated that tensions frequently arise between protecting freedom of expression and implementing stricter moderation measures aimed at reducing online harm. This complexity demonstrates that digital ethics in journalism cannot be understood solely as an issue of individual responsibility, but rather as a multidimensional challenge involving technological governance, institutional accountability, and societal norms.

3.3.1 Ethical Issues in User Behavior and Digital Communication

The review established that unethical user behavior represents one of the most persistent ethical challenges within digital communication spaces. Across the analyzed studies, journalists frequently experienced hate speech, cyberbullying, identity-based harassment, misinformation attacks, and coordinated trolling campaigns. Female journalists were disproportionately targeted through cyber misogyny involving sexist insults, sexualized threats, body shaming, and gender-based intimidation (Lewis, 2020). Studies focusing on women in political journalism revealed that online harassment often sought to undermine professional credibility by targeting appearance, family roles, or personal morality rather than journalistic content. These findings align with previous research indicating that online spaces frequently reproduce and intensify offline gender inequalities and discriminatory social attitudes.

The findings also showed that anonymity and pseudonymity within digital platforms contribute significantly to unethical communication practices. Several reviewed studies noted that anonymous accounts are commonly used to spread defamatory content, issue threats, and organize harassment campaigns without accountability. The absence of effective identity verification mechanisms was found to encourage impunity among perpetrators, thereby normalizing aggressive online behavior (Jannah, 2022). At the same time, some scholars cautioned that anonymity can also serve legitimate purposes, particularly for whistleblowers, activists, and individuals operating in politically restrictive environments. This demonstrates the ethical complexity of regulating anonymous digital participation while preserving democratic communication rights.

Misinformation and disinformation campaigns emerged as another major ethical concern affecting journalist safety and credibility. The findings indicated that journalists are increasingly targeted through manipulated narratives, fake screenshots, edited videos, and false accusations disseminated across social media networks. Such attacks often aim to delegitimize professional reporting, erode public trust in media institutions, and provoke coordinated online hostility (Simões, 2021). In politically polarized environments, misinformation campaigns were frequently linked to ideological actors seeking to silence investigative journalism or suppress critical reporting. Similar conclusions have been documented in earlier studies on digital propaganda and information disorder, which found that misinformation ecosystems contribute to hostility toward journalists and weaken democratic accountability.

The review further revealed the emergence of toxic digital cultures characterized by normalized aggression, intolerance, and performative hostility. Social media algorithms that reward sensational or emotionally charged

content were found to amplify conflict-driven interactions, thereby encouraging abusive engagement patterns. Some studies observed that repeated exposure to online hostility gradually desensitizes users to unethical communication, resulting in the normalization of verbal abuse and public humiliation (Miranda, 2023). Journalists working in highly polarized political contexts reported that online harassment is often treated as an expected occupational hazard rather than a serious ethical violation. These findings support earlier theoretical arguments that platform-driven communication structures can shape collective behavior by incentivizing outrage and engagement rather than ethical dialogue.

3.3.2 Ethical Responsibilities of Media Organizations

The findings demonstrated that media organizations play a critical ethical role in safeguarding journalists against online harassment and digital threats. However, the review revealed considerable disparities in institutional preparedness and response strategies across news organizations. While some international media organizations have implemented comprehensive digital safety policies, many smaller or resource-constrained institutions lack structured mechanisms for supporting journalists facing online abuse (Claesson, 2023). The evidence indicated that insufficient organizational intervention often leaves journalists feeling isolated, vulnerable, and professionally unsupported.

One major finding was the increasing recognition of digital safety training as an ethical responsibility of media employers. Several studies highlighted the importance of equipping journalists with skills related to cybersecurity, privacy protection, harassment management, secure communication practices, and psychological resilience. News organizations that invested in digital safety education reported improved preparedness among journalists when dealing with coordinated online attacks (Yadav, 2025). For example, some international media institutions introduced specialized training programs on handling doxing, account hacking, and disinformation targeting. These findings correspond with earlier research emphasizing that digital literacy and cybersecurity competencies have become essential components of ethical journalism practice in the digital era.

The review also identified psychological support as an important yet frequently neglected aspect of institutional responsibility. Journalists exposed to persistent online harassment often reported anxiety, emotional exhaustion, fear, and reduced professional confidence. Despite these documented impacts, many organizations lacked counseling services, trauma-informed support systems, or formal reporting procedures for online abuse incidents. In some cases, journalists expressed reluctance to report harassment due to fears of being perceived as weak or professionally incapable (Chen, 2020). Similar findings have been documented in occupational health studies, which show that inadequate institutional support can intensify the psychological burden associated with digital harassment.

Ethical leadership within media organizations further emerged as a significant factor influencing journalist safety. The findings showed that organizations with proactive leadership structures were more likely to establish clear anti-harassment policies, rapid response protocols, and supportive newsroom cultures. Ethical leadership was particularly important in fostering environments where journalists could openly discuss digital threats without stigma or fear of retaliation (Terzis, 2025). Conversely, institutions that minimized or dismissed online harassment often contributed to secondary victimization by failing to acknowledge the seriousness of digital abuse. These findings reinforce previous studies arguing that organizational culture significantly shapes how journalists experience and respond to workplace-related digital threats.

The review additionally found that ethical media responsibility extends to editorial practices and audience engagement strategies. Some scholars argued that sensational reporting styles, inflammatory headlines, or inadequate moderation of audience comment sections may inadvertently contribute to hostile online environments. Media organizations were therefore encouraged to adopt responsible engagement practices that prioritize respectful discourse and minimize amplification of harmful narratives (Mesmer, 2021). This perspective reflects broader debates within journalism ethics concerning the relationship between audience participation, platform economics, and professional accountability.

3.3.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Balancing Free Speech and Harm Prevention

The findings revealed that balancing freedom of expression with harm prevention remains one of the most contested ethical dilemmas in digital communication governance. Across the reviewed literature, scholars acknowledged the importance of protecting open public discourse and democratic participation while simultaneously recognizing the damaging effects of unchecked online abuse (Kakooza, 2025). This tension was particularly evident in debates surrounding content moderation policies implemented by social media platforms.

Several studies found that stricter moderation policies may reduce hate speech, harassment, and harmful misinformation targeting journalists. Automated detection systems, account suspensions, and content removal mechanisms were viewed by some researchers as necessary interventions for protecting vulnerable users and maintaining safer digital environments. However, other scholars raised concerns that aggressive moderation practices may unintentionally suppress legitimate political criticism, investigative reporting, or dissenting opinions (Tandoc, 2023). Journalists operating in authoritarian or politically sensitive contexts expressed fears that moderation tools could be selectively applied to silence critical voices under the justification of combating harmful content. These findings align with broader global debates regarding digital censorship, platform governance, and democratic freedoms.

The review also showed that platform companies face ethical challenges in defining the boundaries between offensive speech and harmful abuse. In many cases, online harassment campaigns involve coded language, sarcasm, coordinated dog-whistling, or context-specific cultural expressions that are difficult for automated systems to detect accurately (Islam, 2023). Consequently, some harmful content remains online despite violating ethical standards, while other forms of legitimate expression may be mistakenly removed. Scholars therefore argued that moderation systems require greater contextual sensitivity, transparency, and human oversight to ensure fair enforcement practices.

Another important finding concerned the unequal enforcement of platform policies. Several studies indicated that marginalized journalists, including women, racial minorities, and LGBTQ+ reporters, often experience inconsistent protection from digital platforms. Complaints regarding harassment were frequently ignored, delayed, or inadequately addressed, contributing to perceptions of institutional bias and ethical inconsistency (Orgeret, 2024). These concerns reinforce earlier critiques suggesting that platform governance systems may reproduce existing social inequalities by failing to adequately protect vulnerable users.

The findings further revealed that freedom of expression debates are increasingly shaped by economic and algorithmic incentives within platform ecosystems. Social media companies were frequently criticized for prioritizing engagement-driven business models that amplify controversial or emotionally provocative content because such interactions generate higher user activity and advertising revenue (Reyman, 2019). As a result, ethically harmful content may receive increased visibility despite public commitments to user safety. This contradiction highlights the broader ethical challenge of reconciling commercial platform interests with democratic communication values and human rights protections.

3.4 Platform Responsibility and Regulatory Responses

The review findings revealed that responses to online harassment against journalists increasingly involve a combination of platform governance mechanisms, national regulatory interventions, and international digital rights frameworks. However, the effectiveness of these responses remains uneven across regions and platforms. The evidence showed that while digital platforms publicly acknowledge the problem of online abuse, many journalists continue to experience coordinated harassment, delayed moderation responses, and inadequate protection systems (Miller, 2023). Female journalists, investigative reporters, and minority media practitioners were found to be particularly vulnerable to persistent online attacks despite existing safety policies. Previous studies by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists similarly observed that social media companies often fail to respond rapidly to gendered abuse, hate speech, and targeted disinformation campaigns directed at journalists. The findings

therefore suggest that platform responsibility has become a central ethical issue in contemporary digital communication governance.

The review further established that governments and regulatory institutions have attempted to address online harassment through cybercrime legislation, media protection laws, and digital safety regulations. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that legal protections remain inconsistent and, in some contexts, are politically manipulated to suppress press freedom rather than protect journalists. Studies conducted in Europe, Africa, and Asia revealed that weak enforcement capacities, jurisdictional complexities, and limited cooperation between technology companies and state authorities continue to undermine accountability (Martin, 2020). The findings therefore demonstrate that addressing online harassment requires coordinated multi-stakeholder approaches involving platforms, civil society organizations, governments, and international human rights institutions.

3.4.1 Social Media Platform Policies and Moderation Mechanisms

The review findings showed that major social media platforms have introduced a range of moderation mechanisms intended to reduce online abuse targeting journalists. These include automated content detection systems, artificial intelligence-based moderation algorithms, reporting and blocking tools, content labeling systems, temporary account restrictions, and permanent suspensions for users who violate platform policies. Platforms such as Meta, X, TikTok, and YouTube have publicly expanded their digital safety policies in response to growing criticism regarding online harassment and misinformation (Ferrier, 2018). The findings revealed, however, that the effectiveness of these systems remains limited, particularly in cases involving coordinated gender-based abuse and politically motivated harassment campaigns.

The evidence demonstrated that automated moderation systems frequently struggle to detect contextual forms of abuse such as coded language, misogynistic trolling, racialized insults, and indirect threats. Female journalists were especially affected by algorithmic moderation failures because abusive content often remained online for extended periods despite repeated reporting. Previous research by Islam (2023) and Waisbord (2024) similarly found that social media moderation systems tend to inadequately address gendered disinformation and sustained online intimidation. The review also identified concerns regarding inconsistent enforcement of platform rules, where influential political actors and high-profile accounts sometimes appeared to receive preferential treatment compared to ordinary users.

Another significant finding involved the psychological burden placed on journalists to continuously monitor, document, and report abusive content themselves. Although platforms provide reporting tools and account safety settings, many journalists perceived these mechanisms as slow, ineffective, or non-transparent. Some studies reported that journalists rarely received detailed explanations regarding moderation decisions or appeals outcomes (McCully, 2019). The review further established that algorithmic amplification contributes significantly to harassment visibility. Engagement-driven recommendation systems often prioritize controversial or emotionally charged content, unintentionally increasing the spread of abusive posts targeting journalists. Similar observations were made in studies examining digital outrage economies and platform monetization structures, where harmful content gains higher visibility due to increased user engagement.

The findings additionally indicated that several platforms have recently adopted proactive safety initiatives, including anti-doxing policies, anti-harassment filters, keyword blocking systems, and partnerships with fact-checking organizations. While these initiatives represent progress, the review concluded that platform safety policies remain largely reactive rather than preventive (Robinah, 2025). Most interventions occur after harm has already escalated, thereby limiting their effectiveness in protecting journalists from sustained abuse campaigns.

3.4.2 Legal and Policy Frameworks Addressing Online Harassment

The review established that numerous countries have introduced legal and policy frameworks aimed at addressing cyber harassment, online threats, and digital violence. These frameworks include cybercrime laws, anti-hate speech legislation, digital communication regulations, and journalist protection mechanisms. International institutions such

as UNESCO, United Nations, and Council of Europe have increasingly recognized online harassment against journalists as a serious threat to freedom of expression and democratic participation (Oreoluwa, 2024). The findings revealed growing global acknowledgment that digital attacks on journalists constitute violations of both human rights and media freedom principles.

The review found that several countries have implemented cyber harassment provisions designed to criminalize online stalking, cyberbullying, non-consensual image sharing, hate speech, and digital threats. In some jurisdictions, specialized units within law enforcement agencies have been established to investigate cyber-related crimes targeting journalists and media practitioners. Previous studies showed that countries with stronger digital rights frameworks and independent judicial systems generally demonstrate more effective responses to online abuse cases (Islam, 2025). The findings also revealed increasing policy discussions surrounding platform accountability, transparency obligations, and data governance responsibilities for technology companies.

However, the review identified considerable variations in legal effectiveness across regions. In many developing countries, cybercrime laws were found to be inadequately implemented due to limited technological expertise, insufficient investigative resources, and low institutional capacity. Furthermore, some governments were reported to use cyber-security regulations to monitor, intimidate, or prosecute journalists under the pretext of combating misinformation or maintaining national security (Pavan, 2017). Similar concerns were raised in earlier studies examining digital authoritarianism and state surveillance practices. Consequently, legal frameworks designed to protect journalists can simultaneously become instruments of media suppression when democratic safeguards are weak.

The findings additionally showed that international policy frameworks increasingly emphasize gender-sensitive protections for women journalists. UNESCO's recommendations on combating online violence against women journalists encourage states and digital platforms to adopt stronger prevention, reporting, and support systems (Carlson, 2020). Human rights organizations have also advocated for cross-border cooperation in addressing transnational digital harassment campaigns. Despite these advancements, the review found that many policy initiatives remain fragmented and poorly coordinated across institutional levels.

3.4.3 Challenges in Enforcement and Accountability

The review findings revealed that enforcement and accountability remain among the most significant barriers in combating online harassment against journalists. Although numerous platform policies and legal frameworks exist, implementation gaps continue to undermine their effectiveness. One major challenge identified was the transnational nature of digital communication, where perpetrators, victims, and hosting platforms often operate across different jurisdictions (Bachmann, 2025). This creates legal complications concerning evidence collection, prosecution authority, and regulatory enforcement. Previous studies on cyber governance similarly emphasized that jurisdictional fragmentation weakens accountability in online abuse cases.

The evidence further demonstrated that many journalists lack confidence in reporting online harassment to law enforcement agencies because authorities frequently dismiss digital abuse as insignificant or difficult to investigate. Female journalists reported particularly low levels of institutional trust due to perceptions that gendered harassment is normalized within online spaces (Riedl, 2025). In several reviewed studies, victims experienced secondary victimization when authorities failed to respond adequately or blamed journalists for their online visibility. These findings align with feminist media scholarship arguing that institutional cultures often minimize digital violence against women.

Another critical finding concerned the opacity of platform governance systems. Social media companies were frequently criticized for limited transparency regarding moderation algorithms, enforcement criteria, and content removal procedures (Martin, 2018). Researchers observed that platforms rarely disclose sufficient information concerning how moderation decisions are made or how harmful content spreads through algorithmic

recommendation systems. This lack of transparency complicates external accountability and weakens public trust in platform governance mechanisms.

The review also identified resource inequalities as a major enforcement challenge. Smaller media organizations, freelance journalists, and journalists operating in developing countries often lack access to legal support, cybersecurity training, and psychological assistance necessary to respond effectively to online harassment. Meanwhile, large technology companies possess extensive control over digital communication infrastructures yet remain difficult to regulate due to their global economic influence (Chandel, 2025). Previous research on digital capitalism similarly noted that the concentration of power among major technology corporations complicates efforts to establish stronger accountability mechanisms.

Finally, the findings demonstrated that existing regulatory responses often prioritize reactive punishment rather than preventive protection. Many interventions occur only after harassment escalates into severe psychological harm, reputational damage, or physical security threats (Sampaio-Dias, 2025). The review therefore concludes that addressing online harassment against journalists requires stronger international cooperation, transparent platform governance, gender-sensitive policy implementation, and more robust institutional accountability systems capable of protecting journalists within increasingly hostile digital environments.

3.5 Emerging Trends and Future Directions in Digital Safety for Journalists

The review findings indicate that online harassment targeting journalists is becoming increasingly sophisticated, technologically mediated, and globally interconnected. Emerging digital risks are no longer limited to direct verbal abuse on social media platforms but now include coordinated disinformation campaigns, AI-generated manipulation, deepfake technologies, automated harassment systems, and surveillance-oriented cyberattacks. These developments have transformed online violence into a complex digital governance issue that intersects with ethics, cybersecurity, human rights, and media freedom (Lu, 2022). The findings reveal that journalists working in politically polarized environments, investigative reporting, and gender-related advocacy are especially vulnerable to technologically enhanced attacks designed to intimidate, discredit, or silence them.

The review further shows that technological advancement has created a dual reality for journalism. While digital technologies enhance communication, audience engagement, and information dissemination, they also provide hostile actors with powerful tools for harassment and manipulation. Previous studies by UNESCO, the International Center for Journalists, and the Committee to Protect Journalists similarly observed that digital threats are evolving faster than institutional protections and legal responses. The reviewed evidence demonstrates that online harassment is increasingly organized through transnational digital networks, making it difficult for individual journalists or national institutions alone to respond effectively (Lewis, 2020). Consequently, future directions in journalist protection require collaborative frameworks involving governments, technology companies, civil society organizations, media institutions, and international regulatory bodies.

3.5.1 Artificial Intelligence, Algorithms, and Automated Harassment

The findings reveal that artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven technologies are rapidly reshaping the nature of online harassment against journalists. One major emerging threat identified in the literature is AI-generated abuse, where automated systems create harmful content at large scale. Bots and automated troll accounts are increasingly used to spread coordinated attacks, amplify hate speech, manipulate public narratives, and overwhelm journalists with abusive messages (Jannah, 2022). Female journalists and minority reporters remain disproportionately targeted through gendered insults, racist abuse, and coordinated intimidation campaigns. Studies reviewed in this research indicate that automated harassment often creates an illusion of widespread public hostility, intensifying fear, anxiety, and reputational damage among journalists.

Another significant trend identified is the rise of deepfake technology and synthetic media manipulation. Deepfakes involving journalists especially women have been used to fabricate compromising videos, false statements, or manipulated visual content aimed at damaging professional credibility. The findings suggest that these

technologies pose serious ethical and psychological concerns because fabricated content can spread rapidly before verification mechanisms are activated. Previous research by Miranda (2023) demonstrated that deepfakes undermine trust in digital information ecosystems while simultaneously exposing individuals to reputational harm and emotional distress. Within journalism, such technological abuse threatens both individual safety and public trust in media institutions.

The review also found that platform algorithms contribute significantly to the amplification of harmful content. Algorithms designed to maximize user engagement frequently prioritize emotionally provocative material, including outrage-driven content, harassment, and misinformation. As a result, abusive campaigns against journalists can gain rapid visibility and momentum. Evidence from studies on platform governance revealed that recommendation systems on major social media platforms often unintentionally intensify harassment by promoting controversial interactions and viral attacks (Claesson, 2023). This aligns with previous scholarship arguing that algorithmic structures are not neutral but instead reflect commercial priorities that may conflict with ethical responsibilities for user safety.

Additionally, emerging technological threats include AI-assisted surveillance, doxxing, and data exploitation. Journalists covering conflict, corruption, or political accountability increasingly face digital monitoring through spyware, location tracking, hacked communications, and unauthorized data exposure. The findings indicate that these forms of technologically enabled intimidation create chilling effects on investigative journalism and freedom of expression (Yadav, 2025). Scholars examining digital authoritarianism similarly found that governments and politically motivated groups are increasingly deploying sophisticated digital tools to suppress critical journalism. Consequently, the ethical implications of AI technologies extend beyond content moderation to broader concerns about privacy, security, democratic accountability, and digital human rights.

3.5.2 Digital Safety Strategies and Support Mechanisms

The review findings demonstrate growing recognition among media organizations, advocacy groups, and international institutions that journalist protection must extend beyond physical safety to include comprehensive digital resilience strategies. One major trend identified is the increasing adoption of cybersecurity training programs tailored specifically for journalists. These programs focus on password security, encrypted communication, phishing detection, secure data storage, account authentication, and digital risk assessment. Journalists trained in cybersecurity practices were found to be better equipped to mitigate hacking attempts, identity theft, and coordinated online attacks (Chen, 2020). Previous studies by digital rights organizations similarly reported that proactive digital literacy reduces vulnerability to technologically mediated harassment.

Another important finding is the emergence of trauma-informed support systems designed to address the psychological consequences of online abuse. The review shows that many journalists experiencing persistent digital harassment suffer emotional exhaustion, anxiety, fear, sleep disturbances, and professional burnout. In response, media institutions and press freedom organizations are increasingly implementing mental health interventions, counseling services, peer-support networks, and psychological resilience programs. These support systems are especially important for women journalists and marginalized reporters who face sustained gendered or identity-based abuse. Existing research by Posetti (2021) similarly emphasizes that online violence should be treated not only as a professional hazard but also as a mental health and occupational safety issue.

The findings further indicate that collaborative protection initiatives are becoming central to digital safety efforts. International partnerships involving news organizations, civil society groups, cybersecurity experts, and technology platforms are increasingly developing coordinated responses to online harassment. Examples include rapid-response support systems, emergency legal assistance, digital forensic investigations, and safety hotlines for journalists under attack. Such collaborative approaches acknowledge that digital harassment often transcends national borders and therefore requires transnational responses (Zviyita, 2024). Previous studies on media freedom protection similarly found that multi-stakeholder cooperation enhances the effectiveness of journalist safety mechanisms.

The review also identified growing investment in online safety education and digital resilience programs within journalism training institutions. Journalism schools and professional development programs are beginning to integrate digital ethics, online risk management, and cybersecurity awareness into media education curricula. These educational interventions aim to prepare future journalists for the realities of hostile digital environments while strengthening ethical reporting practices (Terzis, 2025). The evidence suggests that long-term resilience depends not only on technological tools but also on cultivating awareness, preparedness, and institutional cultures that prioritize journalist well-being and safety.

3.5.3 Future Directions for Ethical Platform Governance

The findings suggest that current platform governance mechanisms remain insufficient in addressing the scale and complexity of online harassment targeting journalists. Although many digital platforms have introduced community guidelines, reporting systems, and content moderation policies, enforcement inconsistencies and limited transparency continue to undermine effectiveness. The review indicates that journalists frequently report delayed responses, inadequate moderation decisions, and failures to remove harmful content promptly (Mesmer, 2021). These shortcomings contribute to perceptions that platforms prioritize user engagement and commercial interests over ethical responsibility and public safety.

One key future direction identified in the literature is the need for stronger platform accountability frameworks. Scholars and advocacy organizations increasingly recommend legally enforceable standards requiring technology companies to improve transparency in content moderation, algorithmic operations, and harassment response mechanisms. The findings show growing support for independent auditing systems that evaluate how algorithms amplify harmful content and whether platforms adequately protect vulnerable users, including journalists (Kakooza, 2025). Previous studies on digital governance similarly argue that self-regulation alone is insufficient to address systemic online harms.

The review also highlights the importance of ethical AI governance as a future priority. As AI technologies become more integrated into communication platforms, stronger safeguards are needed to prevent misuse, discrimination, and automated abuse. Ethical AI governance includes transparent algorithm design, bias mitigation, human oversight in moderation systems, and accountability for AI-generated misinformation and deepfakes (Reyman, 2019). The findings indicate that without ethical oversight, AI systems risk reinforcing existing inequalities and enabling more sophisticated forms of digital violence against journalists and marginalized groups.

Another major future direction involves strengthening international cooperation on digital rights and journalist safety. Because online harassment frequently involves cross-border actors and globally operating platforms, national regulations alone are often inadequate. The review findings support calls for international legal frameworks and cooperative agreements focused on protecting journalists in digital spaces (Ferrier, 2018). Organizations such as UNESCO and United Nations have increasingly emphasized the need for coordinated global responses to digital threats against media professionals. Existing research similarly advocates for international norms that balance freedom of expression with protections against targeted harassment and digital abuse.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of inclusive digital policy development that incorporates the perspectives of women journalists, minority reporters, LGBTQ+ media professionals, and journalists working in high-risk political environments. The review reveals that marginalized groups experience unique forms of online violence that are often overlooked in generalized policy discussions (Waisbord, 2024). Therefore, future governance models must adopt intersectional approaches that recognize diverse vulnerabilities and prioritize equitable protection measures. Ethical platform governance will ultimately require a shift from reactive moderation toward proactive prevention strategies grounded in human rights, transparency, accountability, and digital justice.

4. Conclusion

This review has examined digital ethics and online harassment of journalists, with particular attention to gendered violence, safety implications, and platform responsibility. The findings underscore that online harassment of

journalists is not an incidental by-product of digital communication but a structurally embedded phenomenon shaped by platform architectures, socio-political dynamics, and uneven enforcement of digital governance frameworks. Across the literature, it is evident that journalists particularly women, minority reporters, and those covering politically sensitive beats experience intensified forms of abuse ranging from coordinated trolling and doxing to sustained psychological intimidation and reputational attacks.

A key conclusion drawn from the review is that gendered dimensions of online harassment remain central to understanding digital violence in journalism. Female journalists are disproportionately targeted with sexualized threats, misogynistic language, and invasion of privacy, which not only affects their mental well-being but also contributes to self-censorship and withdrawal from public discourse. This pattern reflects broader systemic inequalities that are reproduced and amplified in digital environments, where anonymity and algorithmic amplification often enable perpetrators to act with relative impunity.

The study also highlights that digital ethics frameworks have not kept pace with the evolving nature of online harms. While ethical principles such as respect, accountability, and harm reduction are widely acknowledged, their translation into enforceable platform policies remains inconsistent. Social media platforms continue to struggle with balancing free expression and user safety, often relying on reactive moderation systems rather than proactive prevention. This gap has significant implications for journalists' safety and the integrity of information ecosystems.

Furthermore, the review establishes that platform responsibility and regulatory responses are fragmented across jurisdictions. Although some governments and institutions have introduced laws addressing cyber harassment and digital safety, enforcement challenges, cross-border limitations, and platform resistance reduce their effectiveness. This regulatory inconsistency allows perpetrators to exploit legal and technological loopholes, thereby perpetuating cycles of harassment without meaningful accountability.

In conclusion, addressing online harassment of journalists requires a multi-layered approach that integrates stronger platform governance, harmonized regulatory frameworks, and a more robust commitment to digital ethics. Media organizations must also invest in institutional safety mechanisms, including digital security training and psychological support systems for journalists. Ultimately, safeguarding journalists in digital spaces is not only a matter of individual protection but a prerequisite for preserving press freedom, democratic participation, and the integrity of public communication in the digital age.

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