ONTHELINE PROJECT

Online Harassment:
Mitigating the emotional and professional impact of online hate

Dataharvest| Dec. 2, 2021

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TABLE OF CONTENT

3 MODULES:

1. **Why IPI has worked on online harassment and the different phases of our research (5 minutes):**

   – Is online harassment an issue for journalists safety press freedom?

   – What's the scope of the issue? Quantitative and Qualitative approach

   – What can we do as media network to combat online harassment? Measures for newsrooms, as first line of defence, and measures for individual journalists + Advocacy and raising awareness

2. **Types of attacks (10 minutes + Q&A)**

   – Content of attacks (gender-based violence)

   – Pattern of the attacks: How these attacks disseminate

3. **Building your own plan of action as a journalist (20 minutes + Q&A)**

   – Axis: Understanding the attacks and prioritising them

   – Create your individual plan of action

M1: PHASES OF IPI'S RESEARCH

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

2014 2015

Is this an issue for the press? We went from reporting about individual cases to carry out 2 press freedom missions: Circa 50 interviews in Turkey and Jordan. **Outcome: Yes.**

UNDERSTANDING THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

2016

What's the scope of the problem? Quantitative Approach: We created a database of the attacks based on the manual analysis of over 1000 tweets in Turkey and Austria. **Outcome: we spotted trends, topics, type of abuse, gender.**

2017

How these online attacks operate? Qualitative Approach: We joined forces with other researchers from Jigsaw, IFTF, and Global Voices. **Outcome: We identified the elements of coordinated attacks - hacking, phishing, hashtags, botnets, smear content -.**

MEASURES FOR NEWSROOMS AND JOURNALISTS

2018 2021

What can we do about it? Research of best practices in over 40 newsrooms across Europe + Development of the protocol + Development of the training workshops with newsrooms and journalists **Best practices in countering online hate.**

JAVIER LUQUE-MARTINEZ, IPI Head of Digital Communications | Dec. 2, 2021 I Dataharvest

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PRELIMINARY NOTES

○ **We have to discern between:** attacks by individuals and coordinated attacks / organised campaigns. **Different objectives + some distinctive elements.**

○ **Gender-based violence:** Women journalists are disproportionately more attacked than men, and the viciousness or violence of the online abuse directed at women is far way worse than the one targeting men journalists.

○ **A tool of a set of tactics to control the narrative:** Online abuse, specially organised campaigns, is part of a broader effort of propaganda to corner quality, independent journalism.

M2: TYPES OF ONLINE ATTACKS

ATTACKS BY INDIVIDUALS

○ **Threats of violence**

  ○ Death threats, threats of physical violence, threats of rape and other direct forms of violent intimidation, such as threats directed at relatives (children, partner, etc.) – The latter is a type of attack very distinctive on women journalists

  ○ Implied threats (70 percent), including doxing. SM, comments, emails, etc. Goal: Intimidate, silence + Impact: Both professional (self-censorship) and emotional impact (long exposition might result in PTSD symptomology).

○ **Abusive behaviour**

  ○ Insults, physical appearance, drop-drop-drop. "Trolling". SM, comments, emails, etc. Goal: Intimidate, silence. Impact: Emotional

○ **Smear attacks**

  ○ Doctored graphs (memes), pictures of the journalists, hit pieces. SM, comments, emails + propaganda sites. Goal: Discredit the message by discrediting the messenger + Impact: Both emotional and professional impact.
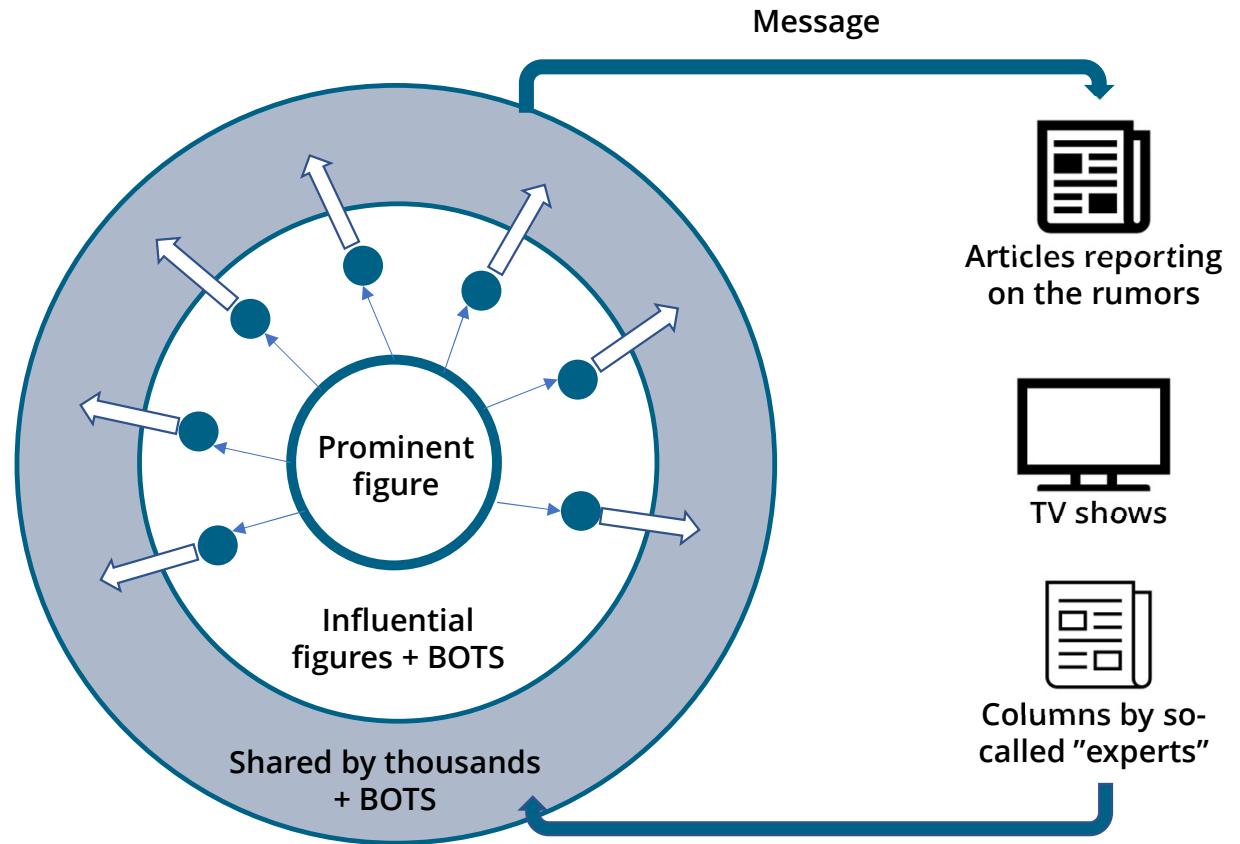
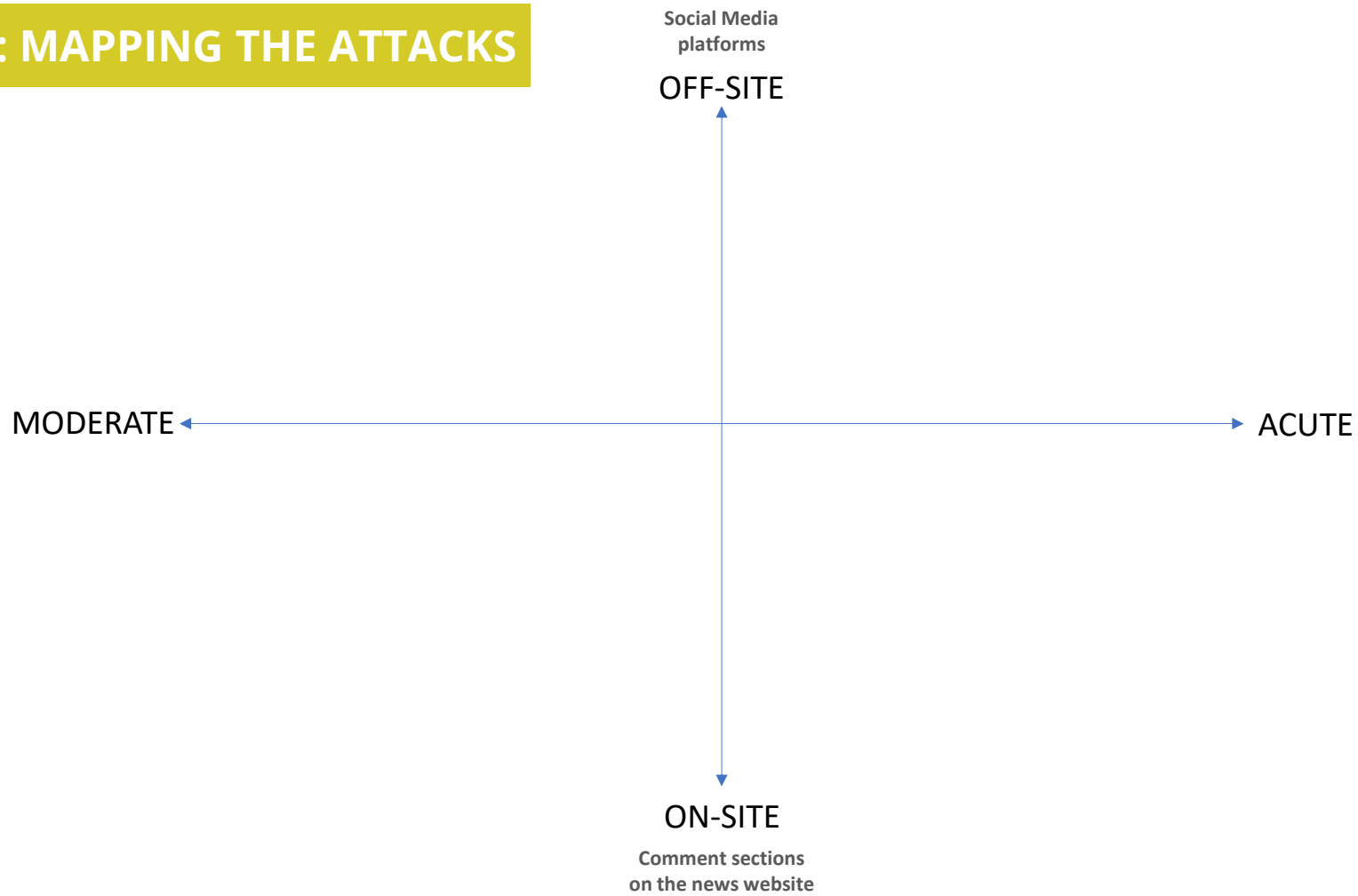# M2: TYPES OF ONLINE ATTACKS

ORGANISED ONLINE ATTACKS

○ Message might contain a hashtag, labelling the journalist

○ First wave usually lasts 24 to 48 hours

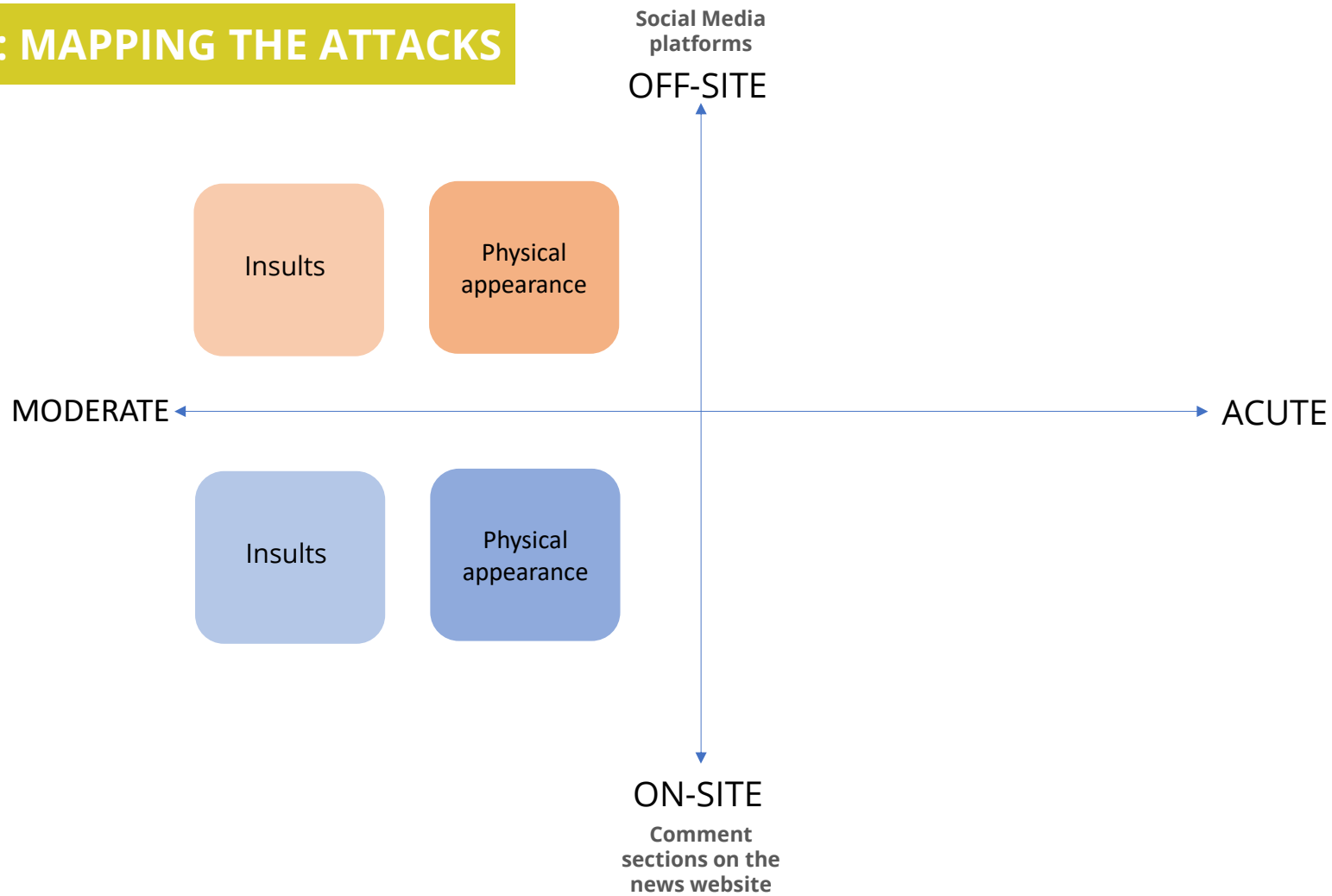○ From then on, the same journalist will be labelled and targeted with the same message

GOAL

○ Create a suffocating atmosphere

○ Give the impression that the rumor that is shared by a few thousands is what most of the society thinks

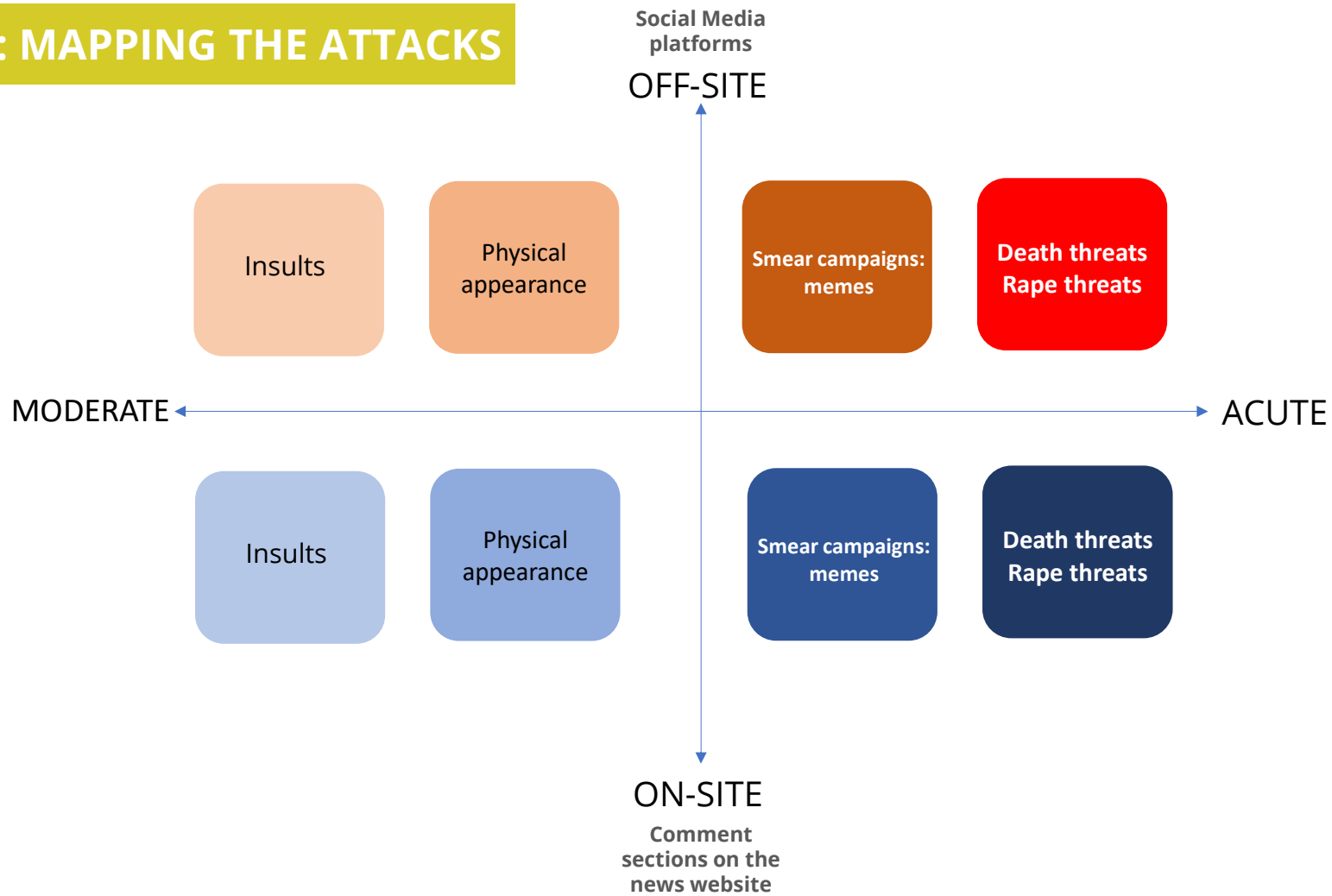○ Discredit the messenger + bring her to silence

Message

Prominent figure

Influential figures + BOTS

Shared by thousands + BOTS

Articles reporting on the rumors

TV shows

Columns by so-called "experts"

M3: MAPPING THE ATTACKS

Social Media platforms

OFF-SITE

MODERATE ← → ACUTE

ON-SITE

Comment sections on the news website

M3: MAPPING THE ATTACKS

Social Media platforms

OFF-SITE

Insults

Physical appearance

MODERATE ←————————————→ ACUTE

Insults

Physical appearance

ON-SITE

Comment sections on the news website

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M3: MAPPING THE ATTACKS

Social Media platforms

OFF-SITE

Insults	Physical appearance	Smear campaigns: memes	Death threats Rape threats

MODERATE ← → **ACUTE**

Insults	Physical appearance	Smear campaigns: memes	Death threats Rape threats

ON-SITE

Comment sections on the news website

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AUDIENCE MODERATION

○ Moderating online abuse ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

   ○ Twitter

     ○ **Muting**: When it comes to online abuse, moderators tend to mute rather than block accounts. This option dilutes the direct impact of the abuse as the target will no longer receive notifications from the muted account. It also prevents a possible angry backlash as the muted user has no knowledge of the muting. Finally, muting allows moderators to still see content produced by muted accounts and therefore remain vigilant to any potential credible threats against the media outlet or a journalist.

     ○ **Blocking**: Moderators tend to block accounts that persistently spam or send scams.

     ○ **Reporting**: Moderators generally report tweets or accounts to Twitter that disseminate potentially credible and imminent threats or contain violent imagery – **Important for legal purposes.**

     ○ **Hide replies**: Tweet authors have the option to hide replies to their Tweets. Everyone can still access hidden replies through the hidden reply icon, which shows up on the original Tweet when there are hidden replies. Additionally, the Tweet author can unhide a reply at any time. When a Tweet author hides a reply, the author of the reply will not be notified.

     ○ Select **who can Reply to your tweets**: Everyone, Accounts that YOU follow or accounts that are Tagged in your tweet. + "**Silence**" the whole conversation, so you don't receive notificiations.
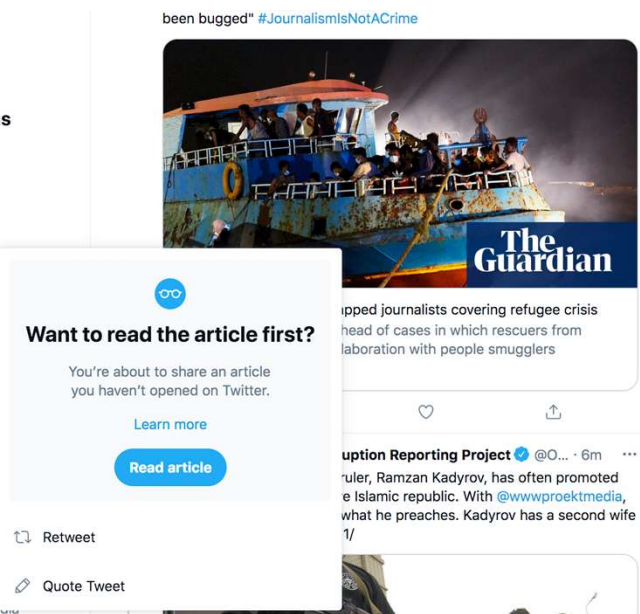
PREVENTION

- Disable any geolocation features on social media. Avoid posting messages on social media that make your daily routines obvious.

- Revisit your social media accounts and consider removing photographs with identifiable locations that could reveal your patterns or personal information (anything from identifying surroundings to license plate numbers). Do the same for information about family members on your accounts: Women journalists in particular are prone to receiving comments directed at their family members.

- Disable permission for tagging or mentioning your account on social media.

- If you are doing confidential work, use encrypted channels to communicate with sources.

- Where possible, **take part in formal and informal peer support mechanisms** within the media organization or colleagues. Peer support networks have proven to be an important tool to minimize the emotional toll on those who are targeted with online violence.

REACTION

○ **In the event of immediate danger or physical threat:**

  ○ **If you are away from the newsroom, contact the police immediately, followed by your editor, the online safety expert and any relevant peer support groups.**

  ○ **Consider asking another person to take screenshots to document all the threats or intimidating posts as way to limit your exposure to the material.**

  ○ **If you are in the newsroom, immediately contact your editor and stay in the newsroom until adequate measures have been put in place and contact your family.**

  ○ **https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/freelance-journalist/**

REACTION

○ **In case you are the target of a smear campaign or wave of hate consider taking the following steps:**

○ Document the abuse (e.g., take screenshots) or ask a colleague to do so. Avoiding excessive exposure to these kinds of posts is a good strategy to minimize further emotional and professional impact.

○ Silence the whole conversation especially in the first 24-48h, but have someone who can monitor it from another account in case there are more credible threats.

○ Carefully consider if you want to respond to any of the abusive comments. Generally speaking, the best course of action is to avoid engaging with users who have targeted you. Most experts have found that doing so does not lead to an improvement and may worsen the abuse.

○ If you do choose to respond, it is recommended to use extreme politeness, irony and humor as ways to diffuse the vitriol.

○ If it is not you but a colleague who is targeted, coordinate with other journalists to engage in online counter speech and show public support.

M4: BUILDING YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

ASSESSMENT	TYPE OF HARASSMENT	ACTION	MODERATION	DOCUMENTATION	COMMENTS
CHRONIC / OFF-SITE	Insults	NONE	**TWITTER:** .- REPORT IT .- MUTE / BLOCK IT **FACEBOOK / IG:** .- REPORT IT .- HIDE THE COMMENT AS WELL	DON'T	I WILL ASK COLLEAGUES TO TAKE OVER MY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ONLY IF THERE'S AN AVALANCHE OF INSULTS. I JUST DON'T FEEL LIKE DEALING WITH EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THE INSULTS
	Physical appearance	• RULE OF THUMB: Do not engage, but if I decide to engage, remember: Use irony, humor. Don't show it affects me. • Name and shame – Indirectly fosters positive reactions from my followers	**TWITTER:** .- REPORT IT .- MUTE / BLOCK IT **FACEBOOK / IG:** .- REPORT IT .- HIDE THE COMMENT AS WELL	• Document the abuse(e.g., take screenshots, name, URL) or ask a colleague to do so. • If I choose to report the attack, document the confirmation of report	I WILL ASK COLLEAGUES TO TAKE OVER MY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ONLY IF THERE'S AN AVALANCHE OF INSULTS. I JUST DON'T FEEL LIKE DEALING WITH EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THE INSULTS
ACUTE / OFF-SITE	Smear campaigns	• Coordinate with other journalists to engage in online counter speech and show public support. • Name and shame – Indirectly fosters positive reactions from my followers. • Ask your colleague to perform a quick doxing exercise of your digital footprint to understand if there's more information about you out there that can be used against you.	**TWITTER:** .- REPORT IT .- MUTE **FACEBOOK / IG:** .- REPORT IT .- HIDE THE COMMENT AS WELL	• Document the abuse (e.g., take screenshots, name, URL) or ask a colleague to do so. • Document the confirmation of report Take screenshot & Document smear articles.	I WILL ASK COLLEAGUES TO TAKE OVER MY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ONLY IF THERE'S AN AVALANCHE OF INSULTS.
	Death threats Rape threats	• **Away from the newsroom**, contact the police immediately + Then my editor or colleague: Telf Police: +123456 / Telf. Colleague/editor: +98765 • **In the newsroom**, immediately contact your editor and stay in the newsroom until adequate measures have been put in place and contact your family. As your colleague to anakyse if there's more personal details or those of your closest relatives that can be used to threaten you.	**TWITTER:** .- REPORT IT .- MUTE **FACEBOOK / IG:** .- REPORT IT .- BLOCK THE USERS	• Document the abuse (e.g., take screenshots, name, URL) or ask a colleague to do so. • Document the confirmation of report	I WILL ASK COLLEAGUES TO TAKE OVER MY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS TO MONITOR FURTHER CREDIBLE THREATS.

THE BIG PICTURE

- In general, it is useful to create some distance from your specific case. Try to view online harassment as a larger societal phenomenon rather than abuse directed at you personally.

- Understand that online aggressors are attacking you because of your work – even if the attacks refer to your personal life. This can be helpful in easing the emotional and personal burden.

- Consider putting your journalistic skills to work as a response to online harassment. We know that in many cases harassment is not organic but is planned or at least driven by a network of users linked to political parties or governments. Revealing these networks can help deprive them of their power and influence.

M3: MEASURES FOR JOURNALISTS

STEP 3: SUPPORT MECHANISMS

○ The aim of all these mechanisms is to ensure that targeted journalists can do their jobs safely.

○ **Legal and Psychological support: Video Tutorials.**

   ○ **Coping with the emotional impact**

   ○ **Legal remedies to address online harassment**

PROTOCOL FOR NEWSROOMS

2018 – Working visits to 5 countries: Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain and the UK.

40 NEWSROOMS & JOURNALISTS ASSOC.

110 EDITORS, JOURNALISTS & SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS AND MANAGERS

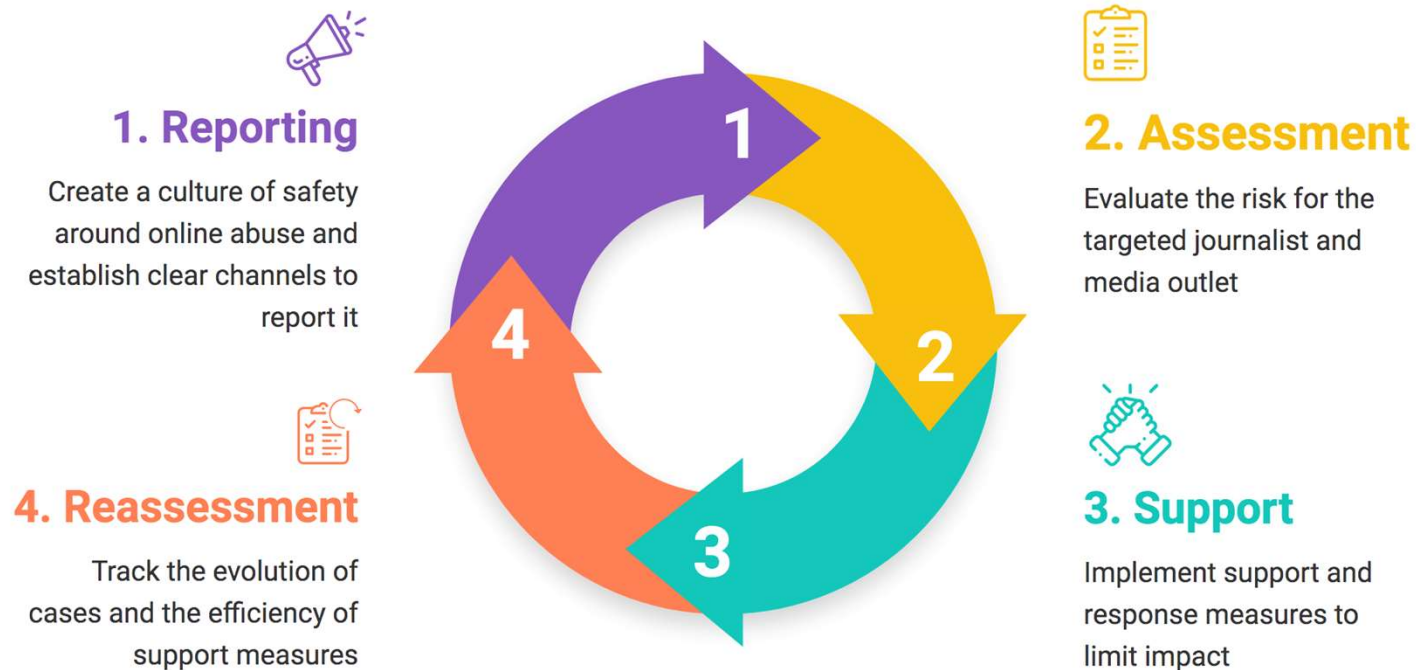**4** FOCUS GROUPS ON FREELANCERS

4 FOCUS GROUPS ON GENDER VIOLENCE

Feb. 2019 - Expert meeting in Vienna.

14 EXPERTS FROM ALL THESE COUNTRIES AND AUSTRIA JOINED TO HELP DEVELOP THE PROTOCOL FOR NEWSROOMS.

How does the protocol work?

1. Reporting

Create a culture of safety around online abuse and establish clear channels to report it

2. Assessment

Evaluate the risk for the targeted journalist and media outlet

4. Reassessment

Track the evolution of cases and the efficiency of support measures

3. Support

Implement support and response measures to limit impact

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