Online Harassment and its Implications for the Journalist–Audience Relationship

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Abstract

Amid growing threats to journalists around the world, this study examines the nature of online harassment, the types of journalists most likely to experience it, and the most common forms of response to such abuse. Through a representative survey of U.S. journalists, we find that nearly all journalists experience at least some online harassment but that such harassment is generally infrequent overall and especially in its most severe forms. Nevertheless, online harassment against journalists disproportionately affects women (particularly young women) and those who are more personally visible in the news but not necessarily those who work for larger newsrooms. Moreover, it is clear that the more often a journalist is harassed online, the more likely they are to take a dim view of the audience by seeing them as irrational and unlike themselves, and to perceive interaction with them as less valuable. Additionally, as greater targets of the worst forms of abuse, women face a greater burden in deciding if and how to respond to online harassment. Conceptually, this paper advances the literature on journalists and audiences by extending the concept of reciprocal journalism, which emphasizes individual-level perceptions that shape the quality of person-to-person exchanges. We explore how the experience of online harassment may complicate the way that journalists think about and act toward their audiences, offering a window into the "dark side" of encountering audiences online.

Keywords

Audience, engagement, gender, homophily, journalists, online harassment, reciprocity, survey

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Introduction

A great deal of research on journalism has focused on the potential for networked connections to make possible and even empower productive forms of collaboration between journalists and their audiences—from 2000s forms of citizen journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009) and user commenting on news websites (Domingo et al., 2008), to 2010s efforts by news organizations to connect with users on social media and develop audience engagement initiatives (Nelson, 2018; Xia et al., 2020). In much of this research, there is an implicit suggestion that closer interactions between journalists and publics would likely lead to greater mutual trust and understanding, and even reciprocal forms of benefit sharing and community formation (Borger et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2014; Sjøvaag, 2010). That assumption, however, is now being questioned amid a broader reckoning about digital media and society. As concerns multiply about a host of deleterious dynamics online—from organized disinformation campaigns to the threat of persistent surveillance, to name but a few—there is a growing sense among scholars, policymakers, journalists, and citizens alike that erstwhile hopes for social and democratic progress associated with networked technologies may have been premature, if not woefully misguided (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018).

Thus, while research has examined the journalist–audience relationship in all its pro-social potentiality, much less is known about the more sinister side of such online interactions (Quandt, 2018)—in particular, the extent to which journalists are subject to abuse from hostile publics, and how such treatment may be affecting their work. Online harassment has long been a topic of interest to scholars studying human communication, with research exploring online name-calling (Coe et al., 2014), unwanted sexual messages (Barak, 2005), doxing (Douglas,

2016), and other forms of antisocial behaviors. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how such behaviors manifest at the intersection of journalists and their audiences, with recent exceptions such as Chen et al. (2018) and Stahel and Schoen (2019).

The issue of online harassment against journalists is important at a time of historically low trust in the news media (Mourão et al., 2018), concerted efforts to delegitimize journalists (Carlson, 2018), and heightened concern about the security of newsworkers (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016). Even in supposedly "safe" places of the developed world that have historically prized press freedom, journalists find themselves challenged by information warfare and socio-political strife that make the news media a prime target (Waisbord, 2018). Such developments not only seed antipathy toward news professionals but contribute to a frenetic and conflicted media ecology where political norms are unsettled and journalistic labor becomes more emotionally taxing (Miller & Lewis, 2020). Most recently, scores of journalists were assaulted by police during 2020 protests around the U.S. against police violence and racism, reinforcing the overall level of threat to journalists' safety.

Harassment online can represent the leading edge of abuse that may become more vicious and pernicious offline. In light of this, it is important to conduct a systematic accounting about (1) the nature of online harassment faced by journalists, (2) the types of journalists more likely to be harassed online, and (3) the implications of such abuse for how journalists perceive and act toward news audiences. This study examines those three elements through a representative survey of U.S.-based print, broadcast, and online journalists. We focus on the incidence of different forms of online harassment; the impact of three key attributes—gender, personal visibility, and organization size—on incidence of harassment; and the impacts that harassment

appear to have on how journalists envision and engage with their audiences. Additionally, we also consider the means by which journalists respond (or not) to online harassment.

Conceptually, this paper advances the literature on journalists' relationship with their audiences at a time of significant interest in all things "engagement" (Nelson, 2018, 2019). Specifically, we examine the possibilities and limits of *reciprocal journalism*, a type of idealized journalism based on pro-social, mutualized sharing and interaction between journalists and audiences (Lewis et al., 2014). Given how reciprocal journalism is closely associated with improved *digitally based* encounters between journalists and audiences, and given how reciprocal journalism also focuses on the social-psychological attitudes of journalists at the individual level of analysis (Coddington et al., 2018), we explore how the experience of online harassment may complicate the way that journalists as individuals think about and act toward their audiences—ultimately offering a corrective to the idea that interactions with audiences may be mostly (or even inherently) positive developments for journalism.

Literature Review

Online Harassment and the Experience of Journalists

Online harassment involves "threats of violence, privacy invasions, reputation-harming lies, calls for strangers to physically harm victims, and technological attacks" (Citron, 2014, p. 3). Such tactics range from one-off threats that land in one's email inbox or social media feed, to more pernicious forms of large-scale harassment, such as when an angry mob mobilizes online to ruin a person's reputation. A survey of more than 3,000 Americans found that nearly half had personally experienced at least some form of online harassment, and nearly three-quarters had witnessed the harassment of others online (Lenhart et al., 2016).

Considerably less is known, however, about the character of such harassment against journalists. While online harassment of journalists is as old as the internet itself, it appears to have become considerably more widespread in the social media era (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018; Miller & Lewis, 2020; Sobieraj, 2018). "Harassing journalists," Reporters Without Borders (2018, p. 3) summed up, "has never been as easy as it is now." This is particularly so because journalists, pushed to promote themselves and their work on social media platforms, increasingly feel obligated to be more visible online—to build a brand, develop a following, and altogether create more dialogical relationships with audiences (Finneman et al., 2019). As journalists use their personal social media profiles to increase their reach, they make themselves more vulnerable to trolls and hackers intent on exploiting the personal information they disclose (Reporters Without Borders, 2018). Overall, multiple reports (Carlsson & Pöyhtäri, 2017; Henrichsen et al., 2015) outline the growing breadth and intensity of harassment against journalists—online or otherwise—around the world, most inimically in authoritarian political environments but also in the United States and other developed democracies. This leads to our first research question:

RQ1. What is the nature of online harassment that journalists experience?

Factors Contributing to Online Harassment

Research has found several asymmetries in who gets harassed online and the kinds of harassment they receive (e.g., Finneman & Jenkins, 2018; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Stahel & Schoen, 2019). While many of those findings have been extended to journalists—both empirically and logically—the supporting evidence is less substantial or clear. Of particular

relevance to this study are three factors that might impact the nature and volume of online harassment: gender, personal visibility, and newsroom size.

Gender

Women generally report a higher incidence of online harassment than men (Eckert, 2018; Mijatović, 2016; Stahel & Schoen, 2019). Women have also historically experienced higher rates of offline harassment (Harris et al., 2016; Idås et al., 2020) while being less likely to report it (North, 2016). However, some research has also found slightly elevated rates for men (e.g., Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019).

Much of the existing research on the incidence and forms of harassment faced by journalists is qualitative in nature and offers a thick description of the experiences they face. For example, in interviews with female journalists from around the world, Chen and colleagues (2018) found evidence of rampant online gendered harassment, including comments that criticized, marginalized, or threatened them based on their gender or sexuality. Similarly, Eckert (2018) interviewed bloggers who wrote about feminism and maternity politics and found that the vast majority had negative social media experiences that ranged from abusive comments to death threats and unpleasant offline encounters. Everbach (2018) found that female sports journalists generally had positive social media experiences but regularly encountered harassment and gendered attacks from a small percentage of users. Koirala's (2020) interviews with female journalists in Nepal found that the majority experienced some sort of abuse online. In a survey of female technology journalists, Adams (2018) found that nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported being abused online, and one-third of respondents said the abuse had worsened in recent years. Pain and Chen (2019) found that, among female Taiwanese television journalists, gender-

based characteristics were more prominent in online interactions with sources and audiences than in offline ones. Ultimately, as Mijatović (2016) argues, online harassment "has become a particular cause for concern and a deterrent to free expression for many female journalists."

The literature on gender role socialization theory (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Matud, 2004) proves fruitful here. It underscores that gendered expectations (e.g., that women should be more deferential and accommodating, and should 'stick' to certain genres) influence public reaction to professional work, and in turn how professionals respond to that reaction. Drawing on that theoretical framework, Stahel and Schoen (2019) found that female Swiss journalists were more likely to be harassed with gendered attacks (e.g., sexist comments) than their male counterparts, though a significant difference was not found in their likelihood of being physically threatened (e.g., threats of vandalism). This led them to conclude that their study, at least in Switzerland, "contradicts the image of women as the main target of particularly severe attacks" (cf. Binns, 2017; Stahel & Schoen, 2019, p. 15). Additionally, scholars have found that gendered harassment, both online and offline, is particularly prevalent and pronounced for young female journalists (Everbach, 2018; Idås et al., 2020; Koirala, 2020).

While the scholarship offers some contradicting empirical findings regarding the prevalence of online harassment among male and female journalists, the balance of evidence and gender role socialization theory leads to the following hypothesis:

H1. Women are more likely to experience overall online harassment, even when controlling for relevant contextual factors.

Personal Visibility

The extent of a journalist's personal visibility in the news—that is, whether physical markers such as their face or personal characteristics such as their voice are routinely displayed alongside or as part of their journalistic work—may also impact the incidence and type of harassment received by a journalist. Indeed, surveys of adults in the general population have found that one's physical appearance is among the most commonly cited bases of harassment (Duggan, 2017a).

An extensive stream of literature has observed that female journalists working at television outlets have long been judged by their appearance (e.g., Ferri & Keller, 1986). These observations persist today and in many ways become magnified on social media. For example, Finneman and Jenkins (2018) found in a survey of U.S. television journalists that more than three-quarters of respondents received viewer criticism about their appearance—and that female journalists were far more likely to receive such criticism than their male counterparts, a finding echoed among Taiwanese female television journalists in a study by Pain and Chen (2019). Finneman and colleagues (2019) also analyzed Facebook posts by female broadcast anchors and consistently found repeated comments about aspects of their appearance (e.g., clothing, weight, and hair) regardless of the type of post they shared. They argue that these comments also arise from gendered expectations and, in turn, reinforce them through repetition on social media. This raises important ethical considerations for news organizations because of the harm that their employees face by participating in social media. Indeed, nearly all U.S. television newsrooms now have formal or informal social media policies for journalists, though the sophistication of the policies and the expectations of engagement varies considerably (Adornato & Lysak, 2017).

While comparable evidence on the part of radio broadcasters and podcasters is sparse (cf. Koirala, 2020), it is logical to expect that the more information there is about a journalist's

personal attributes, the more likely it is that the journalist will be subjected to online harassment due to the increased potential for expectation violation (Burgoon, 2015), especially in light of social role theory and gender stereotyping (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Matud, 2004). Put another way, a byline (reporter's name) provides less contextual information that can violate a receiver's expectation or serve as the basis of animus than a picture (which offers physical markers) appearing alongside the byline. As additional markers are offered, the incidence of harassment is expected to increase. Indeed, some empirical evidence suggests that journalists working in broadcast media tend to be harassed more often than their print counterparts (Chen et al., 2018; Koirala, 2020). As such, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *H2.* Journalists who are more personally visible in the news are more likely to be
>
> subjected to overall online harassment.

Newsroom Size

Small, often locally oriented news organizations have historically been characterized by their connection to their audiences, whether through a sense of community or of cohesion based on a sense of place (Lauterer, 2006). They are more often viewed by their audiences as advocates, and their journalists tend to identify themselves as "part of the community we cover, not outside it" (Lauterer, 2006, p. 26). This close connectedness to audiences that has tended to characterize smaller news organizations would seem to be an element mitigating harassment of journalists, as audiences may identify more strongly with the journalists providing them with news. In addition, journalists at larger news organizations typically have larger and more diffuse audiences from which harassment might spring, making journalists working for them more accessible targets. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3. Journalists at larger news organizations are more likely to be subjected to overall online harassment.

Reciprocal Journalism and the Evaluation of Audiences

Journalists, like everyone, must navigate a daily set of interactions with other people, whether positive or negative in nature. The concept of reciprocity from social psychology reinforces the importance of these patterned exchanges: to the extent that we feel others treat us well, we are inclined to return the favor to them and others—or, by contrast, to trade forms of retribution when we feel wronged (Molm et al., 2007). Applying this concept to journalism and the particular question of how interactions with audiences might be improved, Lewis and colleagues (2014) introduced the concept of reciprocal journalism, which suggests that greater trust, community, and shared values will be achieved to the extent that journalists (and audiences, too) can re-imagine their relationship in a more mutually constructive way. Whereas much of the literature on audience involvement in news has focused on "participatory journalism" in a broader, more diffuse sense, often with a lofty and unrealistic set of norms and ideals associated with audience involvement (Peters & Witschge, 2015), the concept of reciprocal journalism directs attention to individual-level human psychology: namely, to the important role of individual perceptions about other people that are presumed to shape practices toward them (Coddington et al., 2018). Thus, to understand the possibilities for positive reciprocity to develop between journalists and audiences requires understanding more clearly the *conditions* under which such interactions occur and the individual-level evaluations that arise as journalists, in this case, make sense of their audience.

In the original conception of reciprocal journalism (Lewis et al., 2014), such conditions were assumed to be mostly positive. As digital media facilitated growing interactions with and awareness of audiences, the thinking went, those closer connections and improved understandings would lead to more productive exchanges between journalists and their audiences or communities. Such ideas about pro-social outcomes from networked encounters were, of course, not unique to reciprocal journalism; rather, they were part of a much broader pattern of thinking about social media as a force for good, in journalism and in society broadly (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). Since then, a different picture of has emerged—one in which participatory media are co-opted for "dark" purposes (Quandt, 2018), journalists (especially women) struggle against online abuse (e.g., Chen et al., 2018; Eckert, 2018; Finneman & Jenkins, 2018; Koirala, 2020), and the pressures of audience engagement (Nelson, 2018) and "personal branding" (Holton & Molyneux, 2017) present their own kind of drain for journalists. These conditions call for re-evaluating the nature of journalist–audience interactions online.

Journalists have long resisted worrying too much about their audience (Gans, 1979), but when they have thought about their readers and viewers, they have been known to develop a jaundiced, even cynical, perspective—one that leads them to question the fundamental rationality of their audience. Rationality refers to the quality of being in accordance with logic or reason, and for journalists who work in audience-facing roles—such as those handling letters to the editor in the past or the online comment sections of today—there is a tendency to define the audience through the experience of dealing with readers or viewers who are deemed "cranks," "nut cases," "crazy bastards," and the like (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002, p. 192). While journalists may not actually believe that readers or viewers are insane, they nevertheless draw on the idiom of insanity for interpreting their audiences (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002). As such, it's little wonder

that journalists have historically preferred to keep their audiences at arm's length and been reluctant to expand opportunities for audience inclusion in news-making (Singer et al., 2011). Even as more "relational" forms of journalism have begun to flower recently (Lewis, 2019), and as engaging audiences by developing more reciprocally oriented relationships of benefit-sharing has come to be seen as an important form of doing journalism in the 21st century (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019), journalists still tend to be cautious in their perceptions of and practices toward engaging audiences in news-making processes (Nelson, 2018).

However, while journalists may question audience rationality, they also have been known to visualize their audience as composed of people like themselves, their family, friends, colleagues, and others close to them—substituting the values, tastes, and interests of their social circle for those of the imagined news audience (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997). As a result, journalists may envision and evaluate their audience according to perceived homophily, or the natural inclination among people to seek out and associate with others like themselves (Calanni et al., 2015). Homophily can develop around any number of affiliations (real or perceived), from demographic characteristics such as age, nationality, or gender to cultural factors such as religion, sports, or political identity. By engendering a sense of belonging, homophily is seen as an important element in the formation and perpetuation of community (Calanni et al., 2015). However, a high degree of homophily can also be counterproductive, contributing to excessive insularity within social networks and a blinkered perspective about out-groups (McPherson et al., 2001). Journalists' perceived sense of similarity with their audiences, therefore, is partly a reflection of how they feel about their audiences, positively or otherwise.

Just as people are likely to better communicate with someone else they like personally, the judgments that journalists develop about their audiences—e.g., about their rationality or

homophily—matter because they contribute to shaping the quality of journalist–audience interactions. In that sense, the experience of being harassed online, particularly when it's frequent and/or vicious in nature, is assumed to have a profoundly negative effect on journalists' perceptions of audiences, leading them to see readers/viewers as irrational, unlike themselves, and with little interest in cooperative activity. Presumably, this too would have an impact on news engagement practices, leading journalists to avoid opportunities for participating with audiences because they expect few quality interactions in return. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

> *H4.* Journalists who experience more overall online harassment are less likely to see news
> audiences as (a) rational and (b) like themselves, and (c) having an apparent desire to
> participate with journalists, and also less likely to (d) expect quality interactions with
> news audiences and to (e) seek to engage with news audiences.

Responding to Online Harassment

Evaluating the implications of online harassment against journalists also involves assessing what, if anything, journalists do about it. According to a survey of U.S. adults (Duggan, 2017a), about 60% of people who experience online harassment simply ignore it. Of those who do respond, roughly half choose to confront the person responsible online and/or unfriend or block the person, and about a quarter of such people report the offender to a website or online service. Relatively few choose to take other steps such as changing a username, withdrawing from a platform, or contacting authorities. Scholars have also pointed to technical affordances like individual, crowdsourced, and algorithmically generated blocklists that automatically tune out antisocial actors (Geiger, 2016). Overall, online harassment can have a

chilling effect, curtailing future visibility and engagement online. For young women in particular, online abuse can lead them to self-censor and even accept such harassment as a "normal" and inevitable outcome of being a woman online (Duggan, 2017b).

Responses to online harassment may be different for journalists, who, in comparison to ordinary internet users, have more prominent profiles and therefore may be more at greater risk for more recurring and hazardous forms of abuse. At the same time, journalists may also feel more obligated to "remain online" regardless of the abuse they receive because their job demands it (Adornato & Lysak, 2017; Molyneux, 2019), thereby leveraging distinct technical affordances and professional choices to simply better cope. Those choices may in turn result in disengagement with audiences (e.g., avoiding reading comments or limiting social media use) and may have downstream consequences for how they report and whether they remain in the field (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Stahel & Schoen, 2019). In particular, female journalists report higher likelihoods of leaving the profession, changing positions, withdrawing from social media platforms, and self-censoring in response to online and offline harassment—even as they are encouraged "to develop 'thick skin' to cope with the harassment" (see also Everbach, 2018; Idås et al., 2020; Koirala, 2020, p. 53). To further explore this matter, a final research question is posed:

RQ2. What is the nature of journalists' response to online harassment?

Method

This study involved a national survey of U.S. journalists in May 2018. The researchers drew the sample using data from the CisionPoint Media Database, a comprehensive listing of media contacts in the U.S. that has been used to draw representative samples of U.S.-based

journalists (e.g., Molyneux, 2019). Only those contacts with newsroom job roles that indicated full-time work and who were associated with non-niche news media were included. The sample was further reviewed to exclude entries unlikely to represent our target population. From that sampling frame, 7,272 journalists were randomly selected to be invited via email to take the survey to ensure a sufficiently large but not overpowered sample. A total of 65 partially completed surveys and 544 completed surveys were submitted, yielding a response rate of 8.4% according to AAPOR's (2016) Response Rate 4. This rate is consistent with those in recent surveys of U.S. journalists, and reflects an overall trend of decreasing response rates in such surveys (Molyneux & Zamith, 2020). However, the sample's demographic characteristics are similar to those in comparable, 'gold standard' surveys (e.g., Vos & Craft, 2017; Weaver et al., 2019), and the methodology adheres to recommended practices for surveys of journalists (see Molyneux & Zamith, 2020).

For additional detail on the survey's sampling approach and for the exact phrasing of the questions and response options described below, see Appendix A.

Variables

Online harassment. This was measured through nine items using a seven-point Likert-type scale measuring the frequency of harassment ('never' to 'all the time') personally experienced by the respondent in the course of their work. The first item measured general online harassment, with the subsequent eight items measuring particular forms of it that ranged from attempts to embarrass to sustained threats. Descriptive statistics for each item can be found in Table 1. The nine items were combined into an index ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 19.74$, $SD = 9.49$).

Gender. This was measured by asking respondents which gender they most closely identified with, with the binary of female (1) and male (0) computed for statistical modeling.

Personal visibility. This was measured by asking respondents to self-report the ways in which their likeness appeared alongside their work. The responses were used to compute an ordinal scale ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.26$), with appearing on camera operationalized as the highest level of visibility (4), followed by having their voice (3), photograph (2), and byline (1) included alongside the work, or none of the above (0).

Newsroom size. This was measured through a five-point ordinal variable ranging from 1-5 journalists to more than 50 journalists (median = 21-50 journalists).

Perceived audience rationality. This was measured through four items on a seven-point Likert-type scale measuring agreement ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') with statements about the audience's intelligence, rationality, reasonability, and thoughtfulness. The items were combined into an index ($\alpha = .82$; $M = 18.77$; $SD = 4.06$).

Perceived audience homophily. This was measured through three items on a seven-point agreement scale with statements about the audience's attitudinal, belief, and behavioral similarity to the respondent. The items were combined into an index ($\alpha = .82$; $M = 12.22$; $SD = 2.97$).

Perceived audience participatory desire. This was measured through five items on a seven-point agreement scale with statements about the audience's desire to discuss and share news, and work with the respondent in different ways. The items were combined into an index ($\alpha = .77$; $M = 23.58$; $SD = 4.84$).

Perceived audience interaction quality. This was measured through four items on a seven-point agreement scale with statements about the positivity, civility, and productiveness of

the respondent's interactions with their audience. The items were combined into an index (α = .82; M = 19.54; SD = 4.65).

Participatory journalistic behavior. This was measured through five items on a seven-point agreement scale with statements about the extent to which the respondent seeks to engage with their audience or include audience contributions into the respondent's work. The items were combined into an index (α = .80; M = 20.57; SD = 5.99).

Responses to harassment. This was measured by asking respondents to select whether they did or did not adopt nine different actions and technological affordances in order to protect themselves in the course of their work. These ranged from using reporting mechanisms on the sites to changing online behaviors to using blocklists to seeking help from different groups of people. Totals for each item are listed in Table 4.

Other Variables. To limit the influence of potential confounding variables, the study employed several control variables measuring personal and professional elements of journalists and their environments. These included age, race, education, and income, with the aforementioned gender, newsroom size, and personal visibility variables also included in the regression model for H4. Education was measured through a six-point ordinal variable (median = four-year bachelor's degree) and income was measured through an 11-point ordinal variable (median = $60,000 to $80,000). Political orientation was measured through two items gauging journalists' self-description on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strong liberal, 7 = strong conservative) on social issues and economic issues, which were combined into a single index (r_{SB} = .80, M = 6.20, SD = 2.55). Primary media type was measured by asking respondents to select their organization's primary media vehicle from three options: print (55.6%), broadcast (25.0%), and online (19.4%). Journalists' social media use were measured through two variables asking

about the frequency of use on a seven-point Likert-type scale ('never' to 'all the time').

Facebook use ($M = 5.33$, SD = 1.97) and Twitter use ($M = 5.68$, SD = 1.94) were kept as

separate variables in analysis.

Results

RQ1 examined the incidence and nature of the online harassment that journalists

experience. "Overall" online harassment reports were fairly low ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.47$)—though

only a small minority (6.9%) reported no harassment across all nine survey items. The most

commonly reported forms of harassment were being embarrassed on purpose ($M = 3.24$, $SD =$

1.74) and being called offensive names ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.82$); those forms had means that

exceeded the "overall" item, which may indicate that some respondents did not consider name-

calling or intentional embarrassment to be harassment. On each of those types of harassment,

only about one-fifth of the respondents reported that it had never happened to them. The portion

of respondents who reported either a 6 or the maximum of 7 on the scale was well below 10%

across all the harassment variables, except for being called offensive names (12.8%) and having

someone try to embarass them (10.8%). The least commonly reported form was threats of

physical sexual violence ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 0.89$), with threats of physical non-sexual violence the

next lowest ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 1.23$). Eighty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that threats

of physical sexual violence had never happened to them, and 66.8% indicated the same for

threats of physical non-sexual violence. As shown in Figure 1, those two items were positively

skewed and leptokurtic, indicating that the number of respondents reporting substantial

frequency was quite low. This was also the case, though to a lesser extent, with most of the other

forms of harassment. However, there was a notably more even distribution for the two most

common items, with higher reports of moderate amounts of harassment. Independent-samples t-tests, shown in Table 1, indicated that women were more likely than men to report several forms of harassment, including overall harassment ($t(543) = -3.59$, $p < .001$), unwanted sexual messages ($t(546) = -8.44$, $p < .001$), threats of physical sexual violence ($t(545) = -2.40$, $p < .05$), being hurt emotionally or psychologically ($t(546) = -4.29$, $p < .001$), having information from their social media profile used in a way that made them feel uncomfortable ($t(546) = -3.14$, $p < .01$), and repeatedly being contacted in a way that made them feel afraid for unsafe ($t(546) = -5.99$, $p < .001$). Men were more likely to report being called offensive names ($t(545) = 2.09$, $p < .05$).

[TABLE 1 GOES HERE]

[FIGURE 1 GOES HERE]

To test H1, H2, and H3, regarding the antecedents of online harassment for journalists, we conducted regression analysis predicting frequency of online harassment (see Table 2). With other variables controlled for, women remained more likely to experience online harassment ($\beta = .098$, $p < .05$), supporting H1. The strongest predictor of online harassment was journalists' level of personal visibility ($\beta = .173$, $p < .01$), which supported H2. In subsequent analysis, an interaction term between gender and age was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = -.198$, $p < .01$), indicating that young women were particularly likely to report high levels of harassment. Furthermore, independent-samples t-tests showed that women younger than the median age of the sample (43) who worked in broadcast were more likely than other respondents to report overall harassment ($t(539) = -3.34$, $p < .01$, $M_{younger} = 3.43$, $M_{older} = 2.69$) and across several forms of harassment, most notably unwanted sexual messages ($t(542) = -12.99$, $p < .001$, $M_{younger} = 4.48$, $M_{older} = 1.67$). Journalists in larger newsrooms were not more likely to experience online

harassment at a statistically significant level ($\beta = .103$, $p = .057$), so H3 was not supported. Though it was treated as a control variable, journalists' use of Twitter ($\beta = .114$, $p < .05$) also predicted higher levels of online harassment.

[TABLE 2 GOES HERE]

H4 examined the relationship between journalists' online harassment and their perception of their audiences' rationality (H4a), homophily (H4b), and desire to participate (H4c). As shown in Table 3, online harassment was a negative predictor of perceived rationality ($\beta = -.332$, $p < .001$), accounting for 9.7% of the variance in perceived audience rationality by itself. H4a was thus supported. Online harassment was also a negative predictor of perceived audience homophily ($\beta = -.168$, $p < .01$), accounting for 2.5% of the observed variance. H4b was thus supported. Online harassment was not a statistically significant predictor of journalists' perceptions of their audiences' desire to participate, so H4c was not supported.

[TABLE 3 GOES HERE]

H4 also examined the relationship between journalists' online harassment and their expectations for quality interactions with audiences (H4d) as well as their self-reported participatory behaviors in seeking to engage with audiences (H4e). Online harassment was a negative predictor of journalists' perceived interaction quality ($\beta = -.533$, $p < .001$) and accounted for 24.9% of the variance by itself. H4d was thus supported. Online harassment was not a statistically significant predictor of journalists' participatory journalistic behavior, so H4e was not supported. Notably, social media use—and the use of Facebook in particular—was associated with more positive perceptions of the audience and greater participatory behavior, though only some of those relationships were found to be statistically significant.

[TABLE 4 GOES HERE]

RQ2 examined the ways in which journalists responded to online harassment (see Table 4). The most common response was to change posting behaviors on social media (46.4%), followed by stopping engagement/posting with a social media account (33.2%) and reporting or flagging content posted about the journalist (32.0%). The least common responses were subscribing to a shared blocklist (3.5%) and deactivating or deleting an account (8.5%). Independent-samples t-tests indicated that women were more likely to engage in several responses to harassment: reporting or flagging content ($t(547) = -2.10$, $p < .05$), altering a social media profile ($t(547) = -4.32$, $p < .001$), changing posting behaviors on social media ($t(546) = -2.78$, $p < .001$), asking a friend or family member for help ($t(544) = -3.01$, $p < .01$), asking a colleague or supervisor for help ($t(546) = -5.09$, $p < .001$), and seeking help from police or other authorities ($t(544) = -2.58$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

Journalists face an increasingly hostile environment. While physical threats and attacks against them are especially troubling, the forms of abuse that journalists encounter in their everyday interactions online may offer a leading indicator of growing opposition, part of a social media environment in which trolling, bullying, doxing, and defaming is a concern for many people, women and minorities especially (Chadha et al., 2020; Ortiz, 2020; Sobieraj, 2018).

In this study, we investigated the scope and impact of online harassment against journalists through survey data from the United States. Descriptively, this includes a better accounting of the nature of such harassment, the types of journalists most likely to experience it, and the most common forms of response to such abuse. Conceptually, this advances research on the journalist–audience relationship by exploring how exposure to harassment may shape how

journalists think about and act toward their audiences. In particular, we build upon the concept of reciprocal journalism (Coddington et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2014), which emphasizes the role of individual-level human psychology in influencing how person-to-person exchanges unfold, for better or worse—in this case, revealing the potential "dark side" of digital interactions between journalists and audiences (Quandt, 2018). While much has been made of the potential for pro-social reciprocity through participatory forms of news, there remains much to be understood regarding the character and influence of hostile interactions—whether experienced personally by journalists or witnessed as something inflicted on their colleagues—and what they mean for catalyzing or curtailing forms of trust-building and community engagement.

The relatively low incidence of harassment (cf. Chen et al., 2018; Eckert, 2018; Koirala, 2020) found in this study is unlikely to reflect a decline in the amount of harassment faced by journalists (see Waisbord, 2018). Rather, it more likely reflects one of—or an interaction between—three patterns: First, it is plausible that journalists are becoming increasingly desensitized to the most common forms of online harassment, like being insulted or called names, perhaps to the point where they do not consciously think of it as harassment and thus underreport it. Second, journalists might be forming attitudes about audiences based on harassment that they see targeted at others, as opposed to harassment against themselves (i.e., seeing *other people* being harassed leads people to change their attitudes and/or behaviors). So, there is potentially a bystander effect here: Journalists may be dissuaded from certain interactions not so much because of what has happened to them personally but because of what they have seen directed at their colleagues or at high-profile journalists—particularly in gendered forms of harassment. Third, it is likely that the anecdotal evidence of exceptional toxicity found in popular accounts reflects the experiences of a subset of journalists—typically, prominent

journalists with large followings who spend much of their time online and among certain communities (Usher et al., 2018)—and is not representative of the diverse picture of U.S. journalists. Additionally, it is important to note here that these findings are consistent with surveys from other countries, too. For example, Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) found that 54% of the Swedish journalists they surveyed received no more than one abusive comment over the previous 12 months, Stahel and Schoen (2019) found that 44% of the Swiss journalists they surveyed were never attacked online, and Everbach (2018) found that the majority of their female sports journalists interviewees—a frequently targeted group—reported having mostly positive social media interactions.

This is not to say that online harassment is a non-issue—far from it, as the findings show. Moreover, it is evident that some groups do indeed experience harassment, and especially its most violent forms, disproportionately. For example, journalists who have more personal visibility do tend to get harassed more, which is consistent with the propositions of expectation violation theory (Burgoon, 2015), especially in light of social role theory and gender stereotyping (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Matud, 2004), but is no less problematic. When it comes to gender, the results fall in line with expectations (e.g., Chen et al., 2018; Eckert, 2018; Finneman & Jenkins, 2018; Koirala, 2020) but also present some important considerations. On the one hand, not only do female journalists—and especially younger women who work in television—face a greater degree of online harassment, but they are also more often subjected to its worst types. On the other hand, however, when accounting for other factors, gender itself does not appear to be the kind of overwhelming determinant that might be expected, explaining less than 1% of the variance in online harassment. Put differently, the *context* within which one works seems to be more important, with the possibility that one gender is more often placed in

situations (such as audience-facing roles) that elicit greater possibilities for harassment, a difference that could account for much of their greater reported rates of harassment (see also Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Stahel & Schoen, 2019). The analytic models presented here do not discern between the types of harassment, though, and it remains possible that female journalists are more likely to receive the worst kinds of harassment regardless of context. Additionally, the analytic models do not account for individual-level variables like beat or position within an editorial hierarchy, or the ideological leaning of the publication—factors that warrant attention in future work (see Idås et al., 2020; Koirala, 2020; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016).

The impacts of online harassment become evident in how it affects how journalists think about their audiences. From a conceptual standpoint, it's clear that the more often a journalist is harassed online, the more likely they are to take a dim view of their audiences across several key dimensions: that is, to see their audiences as less rational and unlike themselves, and to see interaction with their audiences as less valuable. This, in turn, can have a corrosive effect on their image of the audience (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002), poisoning perceptions in a way that collectively undermines expectations for quality interactions between news organizations and the communities they serve (Lewis et al., 2014; Sjøvaag, 2010; Xia et al., 2020) and challenges the potential of more "relational" forms of journalism (Lewis, 2019; Nelson, 2018). The findings offer further evidence that social media exchanges are becoming an important input in shaping images of the audience, in comparison with typifications and encounters that previously informed how journalists envisioned their audiences (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997; Gans, 1979).

Paradoxically, however, while online harassment has a negative influence on journalists' perception of their audiences and their expectations for meaningful audience participation, it

does *not* lead them to imagine their news audiences as less participatory, nor does it appear to deter them from actually engaging with audiences. The former finding may be a case where harassment is interpreted as a misguided form of participation—but an indication of a desire to participate nonetheless. The latter finding, however, may be a case where the relationship runs in the other direction. That is, some journalists, by virtue of their position—say, as social media editors or community managers—might spend more time engaging with audiences online, and thus be more likely to be harassed as a function of more overall interaction with publics, hostile or otherwise. Indeed, this possibility is reinforced by the fact that Twitter use predicts one's experiencing online harassment, suggesting that the frequency of online harassment may be a result, at least in part, of *whether* journalists spend more time online and *where* they spend that time—in particular, on publicly oriented social media platforms like Twitter where public figures frequently are trolled (Geiger, 2016). To that end, it is notable that Facebook use tended to elicit more positive appraisals of audiences, suggesting that it may be a "safer" or "friendlier" space for journalists, relative to Twitter.

In the face of harassment, it is unsurprising to see most journalists adopting some sort of response. Unfortunately, the most commonly cited responses were to change what one posted (or how they acted) and to simply stop engaging with their social media account. This supports arguments that online harassment can be leveraged to strategically silence journalists and push them away from covering certain ideas and groups (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Waisbord, 2018). The findings also cast doubt on the efficacy of technological solutions to the issue (e.g., Geiger, 2016). Moreover, there were clear gender differences in how journalists react to online harassment, with female journalists being more likely to alter their behaviors and seek help from others—the latter suggesting that women may indeed be exposed to more extreme

forms of abuse. These findings echo concerns raised by Stahel and Schoen (2019) that "unequal gender reactions to attacks can systematically disadvantage women." That is, female journalists may limit their exposure on social media to be safer—but that may shortchange their career opportunities at a time when journalists are expected to build a personal brand online (Molyneux, 2019) and limit the diversity of ideas in broader social discourse (Koirala, 2020), not to mention short-circuit the normative goal of greater journalist–audience understanding (Lewis, 2019). Here, it is crucial to remain mindful of a likely interaction effect with offline harassment—that is, that female journalists may perceive a greater threat in online harassment, and react accordingly, because they are more often subjected to sexual violence and unwanted attention offline (Idås et al., 2020). In the end, "the original idea of involving the audience in news production, aimed at strengthening democratic structures and weakening exclusive gatekeeping ones ... might boomerang; it may promote inequality within the journalistic profession" (Stahel & Schoen, 2019, p. 16).

More broadly, however, these findings not only call attention to the challenges of doing journalism in the contemporary media environment but also raise questions about the "duty of care" that news organizations have in light of those challenges, especially given the role their organizational work routines and objectives play in this arena. If a journalist's mandated duties include audience engagement efforts—and a growing number of job roles appear to do so, in newsrooms large and small, urban or rural (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Nelson, 2018; Wenzel, 2018)—and given that journalists feel obligated to be actively involved on social media (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Molyneux, 2019), then it could be the case that journalists feel they must persist in audience engagement and on social media platforms regardless of the harassment they face because there's little alternative otherwise. That, in turn, raises important questions about

the emotional and psychological toll journalists are facing—never mind the economic precarity and employment instability characteristic of most newsrooms today—and how those impacts may result in the erasure of particular groups and certain kinds of stories (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016). Whatever the case may be, these findings suggest that the relationship between a journalist's experience with harassment and their desire (or ability) to engaging with audiences in productive ways deserves clarification—and underscores the growing need to empirically assess the "dark side" of participatory engagement online and its consequences for journalism and public life (Quandt, 2018).

In closing, it's worth stressing an obvious but important point: Though this paper addresses online harassment, it is not blind to the more pernicious forms of "offline" hostility, threats, and physical assault that journalists face in many parts of the world (e.g., Idås et al., 2020). This paper does not suppose that online harassment is somehow more important than other forms of attack. Rather, it builds on the premise that threats to the press as an institution and journalists as individuals, regardless of where or how they may occur, are worth examining in their totality because of the chilling effect they can have on reporting (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016). Charting online harassment of U.S. journalists, therefore, is part of a larger goal of understanding the scope and impact of a global pattern of assault on journalism (Waisbord, 2018)—to which an answer is sorely needed.

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Table 1: Journalists' reports of online harassment by gender, with independent-samples t-tests

Form of Online Harassment	Overall Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	Female Mean (SD)	t
Overall*	2.77 (1.47)	2.56 (1.43)	3.01 (1.46)	-3.59***
Embarrassed on purpose	3.24 (1.74)	3.20 (1.72)	3.25 (1.79)	-.302
Called offensive names	3.15 (1.82)	3.28 (.182)	2.95 (1.82)	2.09*
Unwanted sexual messages	1.93 (1.62)	1.45 (1.03)	2.56 (1.99)	-8.44***
Threats of physical sexual violence	1.28 (0.89)	1.20 (0.77)	1.38 (0.97)	-2.40*
Threats of physical non-sexual violence	1.68 (1.23)	1.75 (1.31)	1.56 (1.07)	1.81
Hurt emotionally or psychologically	1.99 (1.39)	1.77 (1.21)	2.27 (1.53)	-4.29***
Used information from your social media profile in a way that made you uncomfortable	1.99 (1.52)	1.81 (1.35)	2.22 (1.67)	-3.14**
Repeatedly contacted in a way that made you feel afraid or unsafe	1.74 (1.31)	1.45 (1.02)	2.10 (1.52)	-5.99***

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Male = 0; Female = 1.
Note: "In the course of your work as a journalist, how often have the following happened to you personally?" 1 = Has never happened, 7 = Happens all the time. N ranges from 559 to 562.
*"In the course of your work as a journalist, how often do you feel like you're being harassed when you hear from people via social media, online comments, etc.?"

Table 2: OLS least-squares regressions predicting journalists' reports of online harassment

	Online Harassment (β)
Demographics	
Age	-.074
Race (Hispanic/non-white = 1)	.080
Education	.012
Income	.012
Political conservatism	-.028
ΔR^2 (%)	4.8
Professional environment	
Broadcast media (vs. print)	-.102
Online media (vs. print)	.085
Facebook use	.094
Twitter use	.114*
ΔR^2 (%)	4.1
Gender	
Gender (Female = 1)	.098*
ΔR^2 (%)	0.8
Newsroom size	
Newsroom size	.103
ΔR^2 (%)	0.8
Personal visibility	
Personal visibility	.173**
ΔR^2 (%)	1.5
N	450
Total R^2 (%)	12.1

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized Beta (β) coefficients.

Table 3: OLS least-squares regressions predicting journalists' audience perceptions and behavior

	Perceived Rationality (β)	Perceived Homophily (β)	Perceived Participatory Desire (β)	Perceived Interaction Quality (β)	Participatory Journalistic Behavior (β)
Demographics					
Age	.080	.030	.070	.106*	.136**
Gender (Female = 1)	.050	.005	.058	.100*	.146**
Race (Hispanic/non-white = 1)	-.050	-.022	-.004	.027	.015
Education	.089	.054	-.037	-.014	.022
Income	.137*	.045	-.023	.065	-.016
Political conservatism	.012	.121*	.057	.028	.138**
ΔR² (%)	4.9	2.2	2.2	3.6	6.4
Professional environment					
Newsroom size	-.053	-.045	-.063	-.089	-.021
Broadcast media (vs. print)	.056	-.037	.112	.143*	.016
Online media (vs. print)	.047	.096	.148**	.019	-.015
Facebook use	.050	.098	.197***	.093*	.305***
Twitter use	.066	.071	.123*	.006	.102*
Personal visibility	-.002	.154*	.145*	.162**	.083
ΔR² (%)	1.0	2.8	11.0	8.4	12.1
Online harassment	-.332***	-.168**	-.039	-.533***	-.040
ΔR² (%)	9.7	2.5	0.1	24.9	0.1
N	445	464	447	446	441
Total R² (%)	15.6	7.5	13.3	36.9	18.6

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized Beta (β) coefficients.

Table 4: Journalists' reports of responses to online harassment by gender, with independent-samples t-tests

Response of Online Harassment	Overall %	Male %	Female %	t
Reported/flagged content posted about you without your permission	32.0%	28.4%	36.9%	-2.10*
Altered social media profile	20.8%	14.7%	29.7%	-4.32***
Changed what you post or how you act on social media	46.4%	42.3%	54.2%	-2.78***
Subscribed to a shared blocklist	3.5%	4.2%	3.0%	.73
Stopped engaging with a social media account	33.2%	33.0%	34.9%	-.46
Deactivated/deleted a social media account	8.5%	10.2%	6.4%	1.58
Asked friend/family member for help	10.4%	7.1%	15.0%	-3.01**
Asked colleague/supervisor for help	27.3%	19.5%	38.7%	-5.09***
Sought help from police/authorities	10.2%	7.4%	14.1%	-2.58*

$*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. Male = 1; Female = 2.
Note: "To protect yourself from online harassment in the course of your work as a journalist, have you:" "No" and "Does not apply" combined into "No." N ranges from 556 to 559.
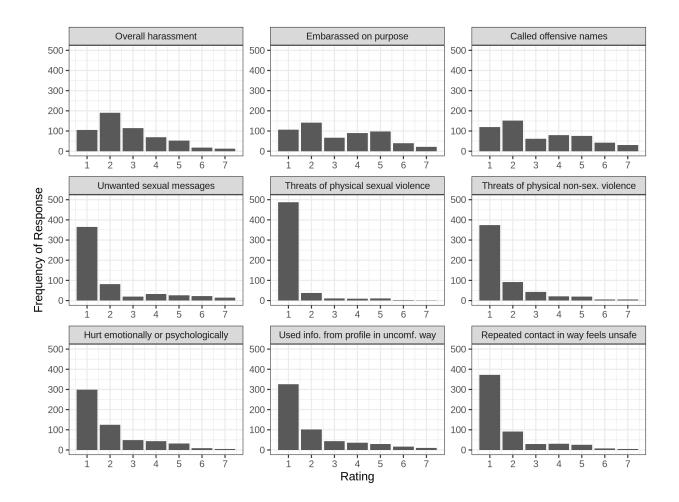
Figure 1. Histograms of journalists' self-reports on the incidence of different forms of harassment (1 = "Never," 7 = "All the time.")

Appendix A: Methodological Supplement

Sampling Strategy

Searches were conducted on the CisionPoint Media Database to identify only those contacts who were listed as being in the United States; had the job roles of Reporter, Writer, Editor, Columnist, Correspondent, News Director, Producer, and Blogger; and were associated with newspapers, television stations, cable stations, radio stations, magazines, news websites, wire services, and news blogs were retained. To limit the impact of niche and non-professionalized outlets, only contacts who worked at magazines with circulations above 10,000, newspapers with circulations above 1,000, online outlets with at least 10,000 unique monthly visitors were kept—in addition to journalists working for wire services and TV and radio stations, which typically have more extended reach. To narrow the focus to full-time professional journalists, the sample excluded those whose titles were listed as "contributor" or "on-air personality/host" or who lacked institutional email addresses (e.g., @theindependent.com, @kut.org).

Online harassment

This was measured through nine variables adapted from a large-scale survey of online harassment, digital abuse, and cyberstalking in the United States (Lenhart et al., 2016). Each item was measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("this has never happened") to 7 ("happens all the time"). The first item addressed a more general measure of online harassment: "In the course of your work as a journalist, how often do you feel like you're being harassed when you hear from people via social media, online comments, etc.?" The next eight items measured particular forms of online harassment, asking, "In the course of your work as a

journalist, how often, if at all, have the following happened to you personally?": (1) "had someone try to embarrass you on purpose online"; (2) "been called offensive names online"; (3) "received unwanted sexual messages online (e.g., via words, images, etc.)"; (4) "received online threats of physical sexual violence (e.g., rape threats)"; (5) "received online threats of physical non-sexual violence (e.g., injury)"; (6) "had someone hurt you emotionally or psychologically online"; (7) "had someone use information posted to your social media profile in a way that made you uncomfortable"; (8) "repeatedly contacted online in a way that made you feel afraid or unsafe." The nine items were combined into an index.

Gender

This was measured by asking respondents which gender they most closely identified with, with options made available for "female," "male," "other (specify)," and "do not wish to disclose." This variable was later collapsed into a binary variable of female and male for statistical modeling as the other response options were not selected.

Personal visibility

This was measured by asking respondents to select all of the response options that applied to the question, "Which of the following applies to what you do for your organization": (1) "My name regularly appears next to my work (e.g., byline)"; (2) "My photograph or likeness regularly appears next to my work (e.g., beside a column)"; (3) "My voice is regularly used (e.g., on radio segments, podcasts, etc.)"; and (4) "I regularly appear on camera (e.g., as an anchor, host, or on-camera reporter)." These four items were combined into a single ordinal variable that took the highest level of visibility selected, with appearing on camera conceived as the highest

level of visibility (4), followed by voice (3), photograph (2), and byline (1). Those who answered in the negative for all four questions were assigned a zero.

Newsroom size

This was measured through an ordinal variable asking respondents to estimate the number of full-time news and editorial employees in their newsroom. The five response options included "1-5 journalists," "6-10 journalists," "11-20 journalists," "21-50 journalists," and "more than 50 journalists."

Perceived audience rationality

This was measured through four items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"): (1) "my audience is smart"; (2) "my audience is irrational" (reverse coded); (3) "my audience is reasonable"; and (4) "my audience is thoughtful." The four items were combined into an index.

Perceived audience homophily

This was measured through three items adapted from an attitude homophily scale developed by McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006). The items were measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"), stating, "My audience is made up of people who…": (1) "are like me"; (2) "behave like me"; and (3) "have similar values to me." A fourth, reverse-coded item ("my audience is made up of people who do not think like me") did not reliably vary with the others and was removed. The three remaining items were combined into an index.

Perceived audience participatory desire

This was measured through five items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"), stating, "My audience wants to…": (1) "discuss the news online"; (2) "share the news with people they know"; (3) "work with journalists in reporting the news"; (4) "give story ideas or tips to journalists"; and (5) "interact with me." The five items were combined into an index.

Perceived audience interaction quality

This was measured through four items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"): (1) "my interactions with my audience are positive"; (2) "my interactions with my audience are civil"; (3) "I am often insulted or criticized by my audience" (reverse-coded); and (4) "my audience is harshly critical of my work" (reverse-coded). The four items were combined into an index.

Participatory journalistic behavior

This was measured through five items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"): (1) "I often seek out interactions with my audience"; (2) "I often try to include information in my work that comes from my audience"; (3) "I often try to avoid my audience" (reverse-coded); (4) "I often try to let my audience have more of a say in the news"; and (5) "I often try to find ways to include some kind of participation from my audience." The five items were combined into an index.

Responses to harassment

This was measured through nine items asking, "To protect yourself from online harassment in the course of your work as a journalist, have you:" (1) "reported or flagged content that was posted about you on a website without your permission"; (2) "altered a social media profile (e.g., changed your name or profile photo)"; (3) "changed what you post or how you act on social media"; (4) "subscribed to a shared blocklist of accounts (e.g., a service or plugin that blocks trolls)"; (5) "stopped engaging (e.g., posting) with a social media account"; (6) "deactivated/deleted a social media account"; (7) "asked a friend or family member for help"; (8) "asked a colleague or supervisor for help"; and (9) "sought help from police or other authorities." Each item was measured with the responses "Yes," "No," and "Does not apply." The latter two options were combined to form binary yes/no items for analysis.

Age

This was measured by having the respondent select their year of birth from a list. The age was then estimated by calculating the time span between the provided year and the year the survey was administered.

Race and Ethnicity

Race was measured through a nominal variable that included the following options: "White"; "Black or African-American"; "Asian or Asian-American"; "Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native"; "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders"; and "other." Ethnicity was measured by asking, on a yes or no basis, whether the respondent was "of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Argentinian, or Spaniard."

For the purposes of analysis, this was later transformed into a binary variable comprised of Non-Hispanic Whites (0) and Hispanics or Non-Whites (1).

Education

This was measured through a six-point ordinal variable that included the following options: (1) "some years of high school"; (2) "high school graduate or GED"; (3) "some years of college or technical school degree"; (4) "four-year college degree/bachelor's degree"; (5) "master's degree"; and (6) "doctorate (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., or equivalent)."

Income

This was measured through an 11-point ordinal variable with ranging from "less than $20,000" to "$200,000 or more," with $20,000 intervals.

Political orientation

This was measured through two items gauging journalists' self-description on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strong liberal") to 7 ("strong conservative") on "social issues" and "economic issues." The two items were combined into a single index.

Primary media type

This was measured through a question that asked about "your organization's primary media vehicle." This item was split into three binary variables—print, broadcast, and online—of which print was used as a reference category in regression analysis.

Use of social media

Journalists' Facebook and Twitter use were measured through two variables asking, "How often do you use each of the following social media for your work as a journalist?" on Likert-type scales ranging from 1 ("never") to 7 ("all the time"). Those who said they had no account were combined with those who responded "never."