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# Exploring cyber misogyny and women journalists' work and practice in South Africa

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**Title:** Exploring cyber misogyny and women journalists' work and practice in South Africa.

**Main research question:** How does cyber misogyny affect women journalists' practice?

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7 March 2024, Johannesburg, South Africa

University of Witwatersrand

**Supervisor:** Prof. Glenda Daniels

**Written Declaration**

I, Tarisai L. Nyamweda, the undersigned, declare this dissertation a product of my original work. Any ideas that are not my own that have been used in this piece of work (either from a printed source or the internet) has been explicitly acknowledged through references and citations. It has not been previously submitted in any form to another university. I have checked this work to ensure there is no instance of plagiarism with the work. My ethics clearance number is as follows H22/11/67.



7 March 2024

Tarisai L Nyamweda Date

**Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Ms Thokozile Mhlanga and Mr Jonathan Kutaura Nyamweda who have never stopped believing in me and instilled in me the value that work never betrays the worker.

I also dedicate this piece of work to all women in the media who persist despite the pushback they face. *A luta continua*!

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I am truly grateful to my supervisor Professor. Glenda Daniels for the consistent invaluable guidance, insightful feedback and support throughout this journey. It moulded and enriched this piece of work into what is today.

I acknowledge the influence of organisations such as Gender Links where I spent 12 years of my life. This is where my passion in gender and media research was nurtured and it remains work that is very close to my heart. Thank you for sparking my interest in this research topic.

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I am deeply indebted to the media, media development organisations as well feminist organisations that I spoke with for this research. I am deeply grateful to you for availing yourselves and providing this research with such rich insights. I also extend my gratitude to the copy editor who worked tirelessly to assist me with editing text for this dissertation.

**Abstract**

Women journalists are increasingly facing cyber misogyny. However, there is a paucity of research and evidence, particularly in the global South, on this worrying phenomenon. This research study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on cyber misogyny and its effect on women journalists' practice through documenting their experiences of cyber misogyny and how it affects journalism work and practice as well as contribute to new insights on recommendations to deal with the issue. It uses in depth interviews with selected media development and feminist organisations to understand the phenomenon of cyber misogyny as it relates to women journalists who have encountered cyber misogyny, to collect information to inform this study. Data collected has been augmented by content analysis of selected X posts generated by journalists and the responses from audiences on the selected X posts. The data collected from the in-depth interviews was analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The research is grounded on feminist theory, the concept of the role of the media in democracy and hegemonic masculinity, and uses the concept of journalistic routines as a lens through which to examine the effects of cyber misogyny on journalism practice.

**Key words:** Cyber misogyny; Women journalists; Gender; Online violence; Social media; Harassment; South Africa.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to this study on exploring cyber misogyny and women journalists' work and practice in South Africa. The main research question for this study is how does cyber misogyny affect women journalists' practice? This chapter provides a background on the topic, the main research questions within which the study is grounded, and sets out the objectives of the study. It also provides the rationale for why the study was undertaken by the researcher.

### 1.1 Background: Locating the study

Globally, women in the media are increasingly being vilified online in various ways for their practise of journalism. International studies conducted mainly in the global North show that women journalists are facing varying forms of anti-feminist backlash through social media (Daniels, 2020). This backlash seeks to push them out of journalism, silencing them and the stories they report on, and has a chilling effect on their reporting. These cyber-based anti-feminism practices are imbued with misogyny and show a strong tendency to gendered, personal attacks on women journalists.

The vilification is becoming more visible (Ferrier; 2018) as journalists use social media to tell stories, distribute content and engage audiences. Research conducted by the International Women's Media Foundation and Troll busters in 2018 shows almost 75% of women journalists who responded to their research said they had suffered online abuse. All this is happening in a context where there is little protection for women. Baker and Jurasz (2019:96) contend that "existing socio-legal structures and systems are failing to deal with this phenomenon and are instead perpetuating the harassment and discrimination that occurs online."

This global backlash on women journalists is echoed in South Africa. Women journalists are facing the brunt of cyber-attacks that may deter news reporting (Posetti, 2021), but may also seek to delegitimise the targeted journalists (Lewis, Zamith & Coddington, 2020). The 2018 Gender Links report titled *Glass Ceilings: Women in South African Media Houses* argues that cyber misogyny is on the increase and is disproportionately affecting women journalists. Rodny-Gumede and Rao (2020), in their study on *Gazing past the glass ceiling: Indian and South Africa female journalists' perceptions of their role and power in the newsroom,* also argue that the safety of

women journalists is of major concern. Rodny Gumede and Rao (2020:71) assert that women journalists have experienced cyber misogyny through threats and trolling online which “might lead to female journalists withdrawing from online platforms, further depriving an already male-dominated public sphere of female voices.”

Notwithstanding the discussion above, there are some technological affordances gained through social media platforms. Technological advancements in the media have created new ways of practising journalism in terms of finding news leads, news sources, disseminating news content and engagement with news audiences (Koirala, 2020). Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton (2012) validate the importance of social media in journalism, highlighting that incorporating social media, such as X, in journalism work is becoming the norm. It has also provided the opportunity for journalists to have more freedom of expression and to be transparent with their audiences. Social media has not only benefited journalism practice but these benefits have extended to the general populace who use these platforms. Mabweazara and Mare (2021) argue that social media has facilitated more participation and amplified the voices of ordinary people who are rarely heard in mainstream media. However, these advancements also serve as tools for hate speech and incivility. They open new ways of displaying online violence, which manifests itself in various forms including cyber misogyny. This has influenced scholars like Mantilla (2013) to contend that the advent of new technologies has enabled new forms of virulent sexism.

Cyber misogyny is manifesting itself through offensive posts, gender trolling, the manipulation of photos, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, sexual harassment, cyberstalking, doxing and more (Ging & Siapera, 2018; Mantilla, 2013; Daniels et al., 2018). While men experience slightly higher levels of online harassment such as name-calling and physical threats, women are much more likely to experience severe types of gendered forms of abuse (Ging & Siapera, 2018). When it comes to cyber misogyny, gendered patterns emerge as women are the most targeted (Hackworth, 2018; Daniels et al., 2018). These gendered patterns of abuse manifest as women “frequently encounter sexist comments that criticise them, stereotypes or threaten them based on gender or sexuality” (Chen et al., 2020:878).

Over the past decade, online harassment became regarded as a growing threat to women journalists all over the world (Edström & Djerf Pierre, 2016; Ferrier, 2018; Gardiner, 2016; Eberspacher, 2019). Daniels et al. (2018:65) contend that cyber misogyny "may well be an emerging phenomenon in South Africa, but like the speed of the social media that spawned it, is guaranteed to spiral out of control if not addressed seriously."

Cyber misogyny which occurs in online media, against which there is little protection for the women journalists, is an increasingly threatening form of silencing women in media (Daniels, 2021). Online violence against women journalists has been dubbed the "new frontline in journalism safety" - a particularly dangerous trend for women journalists who are at the epicentre (UNESCO, 2019). While sexual harassment has remained of major concern for women journalists (Daniels et al., 2018), online spaces have now become the focus of attention for researchers as it poses a huge risk for women journalists.

Women journalists were traditionally disproportionately affected by sexual harassment perpetrated by co-workers in newsrooms, leaders and even news sources (WANIFRA, & City University London, 2022). This violence that happened offline has now transcended to online spaces, without changing its basic nature (Antonijevic, 2016). Notwithstanding the continuities identified, Antonijevic, Ging and Siapera (2018) argue that, beyond changing the site where violence occurs by extending it to the online space, this violence actually intensifies. The victims are disproportionately women journalists, for whom freedom to express their opinion about the world and politics represents the essence of their work and lives (Antonijevic, 2016). In a 2021 report titled *The chilling: global trends in online violence against women journalists,* Posetti et al. (2021) argue that attacks on women journalists' safety and wellbeing go beyond this to threaten even diversity of the press and freedom of expression. This leaves little or no doubt that online violence experienced by women journalists has material effects on the way they practice journalism.

Mabweazara and Mare (2021) argue that online harassment of women journalists reveals the dark side of online participation which may impact the way news is reported and disseminated by journalists. They frame the concept based on Quandt's (2018)

ideas of dark participation. Quandt (2018) defines dark participation as the malicious side of citizen engagement which encompasses negative aspects such as trolling. Mabweazara and Mare (2021) argue that the dark side of online participation is patriarchal, toxic, and violent. They observe that "women journalists are participating in toxic patriarchal and polarised political environments" (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021:90), and have been impacted by cultural and symbolic violence on social media platforms. Their assertions are in line with Posetti et al.'s (2021) argument that cyber misogyny has a detrimental effect on journalism. They argue that the presence of cyber misogyny has inadvertently contributed to threats against media freedom which suggests that digital media platforms can be used in ways that replicate and amplify existing negative socio-political and cultural practices. It is, therefore, important to note cyber misogyny creates harmful outcomes that undermine the health of democracy.

### 1.2 Research problem

The advent of new media poses a new frontier in journalism safety, particularly for women journalists. Cyber misogyny against women journalists has increasingly posed a threat not only to their safety and wellbeing but also to their practice. This then impacts on the diversity of the press and freedom of expression (Posetti et al., 2021). Although women journalists persistently experience cyber misogyny while carrying out their duties, this topic is yet to receive significant focus by researchers. While research on the subject is gaining momentum globally (for example, the UNESCO & ICFJ 2021; and IWMF 2018 global studies), there is a paucity of studies, especially in South Africa, examining the nature of online violence meted out against women journalists and the impact on their practice.

Further lacking is an understanding of the specific strategies women journalists, as well as the media houses they work for, are using to negotiate this violence. This dissertation will argue that, if not addressed, cyber misogyny against women journalists will increasingly become a clear threat to free expression and participation, and negatively impact the ability of women journalists to practice journalism. Cyber misogyny must be understood within the broader context of violence in society (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). Online misogyny is happening in a broader context where violence in the physical world remains pervasive in South Africa and is extending online in

various ways. This research study seeks to understand how this is extended to online violence, its impact on practice, and how women are negotiating this violence.

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research study is to investigate and analyse the effects of cyber misogyny on women's journalism practice in South Africa. The study will examine cyber misogyny against women journalists in South Africa, and explore its bearing on their work and practice. It will ascertain what forms of cyber misogyny women journalists are facing, what effect cyber misogyny has on journalists' ability to disseminate the news, and document ways in which journalists negotiate this violence. Furthermore, the study also seeks to give insight into strategies used by women journalists, as well as the media houses they work for, to mitigate online violence.

### 1.4 Key research questions

This study, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists in South Africa?
- How does cyber misogyny against women journalists affect their journalism practice?
- What strategies have women journalists developed to respond to cyber misogyny?
- What strategies have media houses developed to respond to the problem of cyber misogyny?

### 1.5 Rationale

The most fundamental reason for carrying out this research study is that women journalists are an important entity in journalism as they contribute to diverse views in the media and to the role of the media in a democracy. The rationale for this thesis is grounded on freedom of the media. Women journalists play a fundamental role in shaping public discourse through their contribution in their practice of journalism and holding those in power to account. Cyber misogyny threatens this ability to report on the news or to participate in discussions on news topics freely, thereby undermining the fundamental role of the media in a democracy. Furthermore, the rational from this study is grounded in the promotion of gender equality in the media. Generally, when it comes to representation of gender equality in journalism in South Africa, it is

balanced but a closer look at the dynamics within this representation and diversity brings nuances that suggest pervasive inequality. It is fundamental that the media achieves gender equality. Globally, there has been underrepresentation of women in the media both as news sources and as media workers (Edstrom & Djerf, 2020). It is important to ensure women continue working in the media. However, in the face of online attacks, this may hinder women's journalism practice.

The ways in which women journalists are undermined and silenced through online attacks is explored in this research. The ways in which they negotiate this violence is also explored. This thesis, therefore, enables a better understanding on the cyber misogynist experiences of women journalists, how this undermines women's contribution to journalism, this it undermines and inhibits women's participation in online spaces, how it affects journalism practice, and the role that media can play in a society.

Another significant reason to undertake this study was to add to the theoretical understanding on cyber feminism, particularly within the context of journalism. Throughout this study, the theory explores the intersection of feminism and technology, foregrounding the effects of the way social media use in journalism has extended gender inequalities into the virtual space.

The paucity of research in this area has created a deficit of information relating to cyber misogyny in the media. Therefore, the thesis will contribute new and academic perspectives to the journalism and media landscape in terms of highlighting women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny, their responses to it, the position of media companies on this phenomena, as well as well as providing a critique of how this impacts journalism practice and on the role of media in a democracy.

Another reason for undertaking this study is that this topic is increasingly getting attention despite the continued normalisation of this phenomenon (Simoes, Alcantara & Carona, 2021). Therefore, this is an important opportunity to get the perspective of the issue from the global South.

## 1.6 Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, this dissertation will look closely and critically assess cyber misogyny, with a focus on the forms of cyber misogyny suffered by journalists, analysing the impact on women's journalistic work, if any. This dissertation will draw attention to women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny that emanate from their use of X in their journalism practice. Women journalists' experiences will be revealed through case studies written on their experiences. The case study information is collected from various information sources, including archival documentation. In addition, the dissertation also looks at how women journalists negotiate this violence. In depth interviews with media development organisations and feminist organisations, as well as media companies will further inform the research. Specifically, providing insight into the strategies being deployed to respond to women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny. Evidence on the action and strategies will also be derived from archival information in the public domain such as interviews, speeches, news reports, statements, and social media content. The dissertation also provides recommendations to counter this phenomenon. This holistic examination of what is occurring in journalism related to cyber misogyny and the measures in place to counter it, ensure this dissertation contributes to the South Africa journalism environment where cyber misogyny is increasingly becoming a pertinent issue to address, particularly in relation to the role of the media in a democracy and the safety of journalists.

## Chapter Two: Literature review

### Introduction

The previous chapter presented the introduction and background to the problem. In this chapter, the available literature on cyber misogyny, specifically, as it relates to journalists, is discussed. It gives context on the existing media environment. The chapter begins by exploring the media in South Africa, the status of women working in the sector, as well as the voices of women reflected in the South Africa news media. It proceeds to review the core subject of this dissertation, borrowing from several other global contexts, to give a solid understanding on cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists and its resultant impact.

### 2.1. The South African media landscape a contextual background

South Africa enjoys a vibrant media environment (Geertsema- Sligh, 2013; Milton & Fourie, 2015; Freedom House, 2022). However, this has not always been the case. The history of the South African media is an important characteristic to note as it created the landscape which paved the way for the South African media to be what it is today and to be able to understand the role the media plays in a democracy.

The South African media environment has evolved since the country gained independence in 1994. The pre-1994 era was characterised by systemic media censorship and tyrannical laws which encouraged a gag on media freedoms (Wasserman, 2016). In such a repressive environment, it can be argued that the media could not fully flourish and play its role in society, for instance, as a watchdog over those in power because those in power deliberately muzzled the media. The media was also not representative of society, and lacked diversity and plurality. The media had to reconfigure itself in the face of a new, legitimate government following democratisation in the country (*ibid*.). Post-1994, the media transformation agenda, which included transformation in terms of ownership and race, became a priority (Rodny-Gumede & Rao, 2020). Gender transformation, which was not equally a factor, increasingly overtime began to be prioritised as a major transformation issue,

in particular, being put on the agenda by feminist media organisations in the country.[1] The country has transformation targets in redressing the imbalances of the past. Although so much progress has been made, remnants from the country's history remain and also creep into and influence the gender dynamics of the media today, (Geertsema- Sligh, 2013).

The media in the country plays an important political as well as social role (Wasserman, 2020). The media in South Africa are committed to safeguarding democracy, as such, playing their watchdog role of holding those in power to account through investigative journalism (Wasserman, 2020). Freedom of the press and of expression is guaranteed in South Africa's Constitution which has helped the media to contribute to democratic debate and fulfil its normative watchdog role. Equality for all is also guaranteed under South Africa's progressive constitution (Geertsema- Sligh, 2013). The South Africa government has signed up to and upholds regional as well as international instruments that support freedom of the media (Fesmedia, 2018). With a high internet access penetration, social media use is on the rise (Wasserman, 2020).

The World Press Freedom Index[2], collated annually by Reporters Without Borders, shows that South Africa ranks 25th out of 180 countries analysed in the 2023 index. This makes it one of the countries with the strongest and most enabling press freedom environments in the Southern Africa region after Namibia. Although the media seemingly enjoys a conducive environment, benefitting from constitutional provisions which guarantee free expression (Wasserman, 2020), the media has recently been argued to be marred with increasing harassment and attacks on journalists, including by political players (Finlay, 2021; Finlay, 2022; Reporters Without Borders, 2022), creating an apprehensive environment for media freedom.

Wasserman (2020) concurs with this observation, arguing that there has been an increase in attacks on the media and these are increasingly being extended to online spaces such as social media. Reid, Daniels and Skinner (2020) argue that journalists

[1] It is feminist media organisations in the country that periodically continue to carry out gender audits of editorial content as well as composition of newsroom and institutional practices of media houses in the country which they use to advocate for transformation in the media.

[2] The World Press Freedom Index is a Barometer on the environment for journalism in 180 countries from across the globe

are on the receiving end of physical violence and harassment, including online harassment of women journalists, from multiple angles such as from political actors, citizens and from the media sector itself. They contend that the harassment and physical violence against journalists are factors inhibiting media freedom in South Africa.

### 2.2 Status of women in South African media

Journalism has often been regarded as an incompatible occupation for women (Geertseman- Sligh, 2018), and this has influenced the pervasive gender inequality in the media globally (Macharia, 2020). There is a consistent, dramatic under-representation of women in media, as news sources, subjects, as well as workers in the media (Nyamweda, 2020; Macharia, 2020). This under-representation is more prominent when it comes to leadership roles in the news media. Women's voices in the news media in Southern Africa remain very low at 21%, indicating that only one in every five people quoted or heard in the news media is a woman (Nyamweda, 2020).

In South Africa, women sources follow similar trends with women's voices, accounting for 24% of news sources (Nyamweda, 2020). This under-representation of women's voices has inspired the start of gender and media organisations who seek to correct this anomaly. Some of these organisations include *Quote This Woman*, which seeks to encourage diversity in voices in news media, and organisations such as Gender Links, which continues to take the pulse of media representation of diverse voices in news. Feminist media scholars have also argued that the media continues to perpetuate gender stereotypes and sexist discourses that fuel gender inequalities through media content. Women are often misrepresented and under-represented in news content (Ndlovu & Nyamweda, 2015).

The undermining of women's voices and participation in news can also be observed through the numerous challenges women journalists continue to face in media practise, including sexism, sexual harassment, gender pay gaps, and gendered division of labour. Harmful behaviours such as sexism are pervasive and remain a constant factor in the media. Sexism in the media holds women back in their work and has contributed to women not rising to top echelons in newsrooms (Daniels *et al.,*

2018). More recently, new threats and impediments linked to online harassment and cyber misogyny are also emerging via social media (*ibid*.).

In terms of historic participation, across the globe, men have dominated journalism jobs. Geertsema- Sligh (2018), argues that media house cultures continue to reflect a very masculine environment. Although women have edged forward now, more than ever before, in the media industry they continue to hit the glass ceiling[3]. The glass ceiling has limited women's options for advancement into higher and more influential echelons in the media, and also sustained the gender pay gap amongst media workers.

However, over time, there seems to be some progress being made towards achieving gender equality. In South Africa, regarding the gendered breakdown of women and men in general, there is an indication that numerical parity in the media has been reached. The 2018 *Glass Ceiling: Women in South Africa Media* study conducted by Gender Links and the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) revealed that 49% of respondents surveyed from 59 media houses were women (Daniels *et al.,* 2018). Women journalists are, however, under-represented in reporting on certain news beats, in particular, those that are considered high status such as politics, business, economics and sports, and their participation as decision makers in the top echelons of media house structures remains limited. Of course, it is not only the numbers of women in the media that counts, other factors such as the roles they play, the importance of their voices and their ability to effect change in the industry must always be considered.

Leadership roles take on a more strategic responsibility including devising policies and guiding institutional practices, therefore, it stands that with fewer women in decision making positions, women have the least control and power in defining policies that guide social media use in undertaking journalistic work.

[3] The glass ceiling is a metaphorical term used to describe the invisible but real hurdles that stand in the way of women's progression particularly in their careers. This can include patriarchal attitudes and belief, sexism, institutional practices gender pay gap and more.

The latest South Africa *State of the Newsroom* report showed the proportion of women editors has edged up to 36% in 2022 after experiencing a stagnation at 33% which was recorded 2021 and 2020 (Finlay, 2022). This data was compiled from across 39 national and regional commercial newspapers. When it comes to board of directors, the same report notes that women in 13 media company boards, including the public broadcaster, accounted for only 29% in 2022, an improvement from 26% in the previous year.

The under-representation of women across different levels in media house structures can be seen as a form of exclusion from full and effective participation and advancement in the media. The media cannot be separated from society and, therefore, such an occurrence can be argued to be a reflection of women's exclusion in the broader society (Daniels & Skinner, 2022). Notwithstanding the numbers discussed above, there are still underlying barriers to the advancement of women in the media sector which fortify gender inequality experienced in the sector.

In addition to ascertaining the proportions of women in the different echelons of the media, the 2018 Glass Ceiling study discussed above (Daniels *et al.,* 2018) also found that the gender wage gap, sexist attitudes, perceptions and practices still prevail as much as they did just over 10 years after the first Glass Ceiling research was conducted in 2006. Beyond the disproportional relationship between men and women in the media, the 2018 Glass Ceiling study also argues that one constant that continues to be present even in a climate of a rapidly changing media landscape is the old boys network (Daniels *et al.,* 2018). The research notes that one effect of sexism in the media is that it continues to discourage women from going into "hard" news beats where they are most likely to make their mark and enter into senior decision making positions. The study found that, in the South Africa media context, the challenges for women are becoming less numeric hurdles, and more about rooted sexism in the media, with new threats like cyber misogyny developing (Daniels *et al.,* 2018).

### 2.3 Social media in South Africa

In South Africa, social media is increasingly becoming popular, as more people subscribe and participate on social media platforms to access and distribute

information; a phenomenon which is contributing to promoting freedom of expression and participation (Paradigm Initiative, 2022) on social media. Bosch (2021) argues that social media has deeply infiltrated the fabric of day to day life. Recent research titled *Social Media Landscape 2022* reveals that half of South Africa's population is on social media with numbers increasing since the pre-pandemic period; a growth which has been spurred by increased internet access amongst the population. Some of the most popular social media platforms in South Africa include X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and WhatsApp.

In South Africa, there are pieces of legislation which are used to guide online activities including social media use. The legislation includes the Cyber Crimes Act of 2020. This piece of legislation is argued to not specifically mention online violence in its provisions, however, it is suggested that it provides an opportunity to protect women online from practices such as gender trolling or image based sexual abuse loosely referred to as revenge porn, (Nyamweda 2021).

Social media news consumption is generally a popular phenomenon and continues to increase. In general, social media is viewed as an alternative space for communication. Wasserman (2016) argues that in the African context, social media sites such as X, Facebook and WhatsApp are important platforms that can encourage differential views. Social media use in the African context is argued to have the potential to upset dominant hetero-normative narratives in society (*ibid*.).

In South Africa, one cannot have a conversation about online media use without the inclusion of X as an important player in the social media terrain because of its large following and the influence it has on driving conversations and narratives. X launched in 2009 (as Twitter) and the platform was recently acquired by Elon Musk. There has been increasing hate speech and threats to freedom of expression being observed since the new acquisition (Benton *et al.,* 2022). This study will focus on cyber misogyny on X, although it also recognises that cyber misogyny is not limited to a single social media platform.

Social media in South Africa has, at times, been used for the greater good. It has been at the core of some notable social movements that have leveraged platforms like X.

Some of these campaigns include #EndRapeCulture, TotalShutDown #MenAreTrash, amongst others, which have contributed to a shift in narratives. These served to bring into the spotlight pressing social issues and allowed participation of the ordinary folk in these online space.

Participation in online platforms in South Africa has not come without its limitations. In general, gender norms continue to determine how women and men represent themselves and interact with each other in online spaces. It can be argued that since the rise of social media platforms, the abuse of journalists, in particular, female journalists increased (Finnemann & Jenkins, 2018). Since the media has traditionally been male terrain, and women have not traditionally held positions of power and covered non-traditional topics typically covered by women in the media, their ability is often challenged online in an uncivil manner. Finnemann and Jenkins (2018) also argue that social media has changed the relationship and interactions that exists between journalists and their audiences who now have power to provide instantaneous feedback and comment (*ibid*.). As in other parts of the world, social media platforms such as X are regarded as toxic environments.

In 2022, for example, an online baseline survey conducted by Gender Links, which surveyed 100 women from across the country aged between 18 and 65 years old, claimed that 50% of women surveyed self-reported having experienced some form of online violence. The most common types of violence reported by women in this survey included cyberstalking, sexual harassment, gender trolling and misinformation. It also showed that the main perpetrators of online violence were overwhelmingly men who were strangers or unknown to them. The same survey showed that women were concerned about their safety online as they navigated this violence by self-censoring as well as reducing the participation and engagement online.

Similarly, in 2020, *Pollicy* conducted a cross-sectional study across Johannesburg which surveyed 536 women. The survey found that 23% of women in the South Africa survey had experienced online violence mainly through social media platforms (Iyer, Nyamwire & Nabulega, 2020). Despite the experiences and occurrences of online violence reported by women in the aforementioned separate survey findings, the two surveys were consistent on the fact that social media platforms are unsafe for women

users and that they are predominantly the sites where cyber violence is taking place (*ibid*.). Although online violence on X maybe more prominent in countries like South Africa, other African countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria have Facebook as one of the more popular digital media platforms where women experience online violence. This is arguably because they may be more Facebook users in those countries than other digital media platforms (Iyer, Nyamwire & Nabulega, :2020; Walulya & Selnes, 2023; Uwalaka & Amadi, 2023).

## 2.4 Cyber misogyny

### 2.4.1 Misogyny

In this research study, it is important to, firstly, understand misogyny broadly and then narrow it down to how it can be understood in the context of online social spaces as this phenomenon has evolved and is now far reaching into the virtual world (Moloney & Love, 2018).

The research borrows some of its understanding of misogyny from the way Manne (2017) describes it. Manne, in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny,* dismisses the understanding of misogyny as merely hatred or hostility towards women. She looks at the conceptualisation of misogyny in this manner as a naïve and basic approach to understanding women's struggles in particular violence. Manne (2017) argues that misogyny is the "law enforcement branch of patriarchy", which is coercive or violent in nature and serves to reinforce the subordinate role of women in society. She describes misogyny as being explicit but at times also subtle.

Echoing Manne, Johnson (2014 cited in Moloney & Love, 2018) also argues that misogyny is far from being a flaw or feeling but is a culturally embedded phenomenon that fuels men's sense of superiority, and justifies their aggression towards women. Both Manne and Johnson, in defining misogyny, argue that misogynist behaviour or attitudes seem to suggest that there is a supposed place where women are supposed to be confined to and, that by getting out of this pigeonhole women are then punished for it.

## 2.5 Cyber misogyny against women journalists

When it comes to online violence, it is also noted that online harassment is a major hindrance to freedom of expression for journalists (Baker & Jurasz. 2019). Holton *et al.* (2021) argue that while newsrooms may have made strides in addressing sexual harassment offline, these efforts have not extended to online platforms. Online violence is considered one of the greatest threats to journalism and democracy (Baroni, d'Haenens & Lo, 2022:59). Socio-cultural and political practices are re-enacted in the online space. New technologies have ensured an extension of offline challenges for women practising journalism as it is increasingly evident that the experiences in the real world are creeping into the online world. Simoes, Alcantara and Carona (2021), in their scoping review of cyber misogyny against women journalists, argue that, the internet has created new avenues for attacking journalists, in particular women journalists, which has impacted their credibility and hindered women's participation. Reiterating this assertion, Walulya and Selnes (2023) argue that, social media platforms function as channels through which historic patterns of oppression against women journalists are perpetuated.

There is often a continuum between offline and online violence against women. Jane (2016) contends that there is a similarity between contemporary gendered cyber hate and key social problems (namely, rape, domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment) addressed by second-wave feminists. It may be contended that gendered online harassment is a reflection of the cultural understanding of gender and women's inferior place in society. Gendered online hate is rooted in "old" misogynistic discourses that insist on women's inferiority to men (Jane, 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that online and offline harassment feed off and into each other in complex but systematic ways (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021). In their report on misogyny on X, Bartlett *et al.* (2014) argue that, although the internet was viewed through a utopian perspective in the earlier days, it was evident that real world inequalities would be transferred online. As was foreseen, the internet rapidly developed into a platform which increasingly became hostile, especially for women (Barker & Jurasz, 2019).

Several international research studies show that women journalists are increasingly targets of cyber misogyny compared to their male counterparts. Posetti *et al.* (2020) affirm this noting that women journalists are the prime targets of online violence but

also first responders when this has occurred. Tandoc *et al.* (2021) echo this assertion arguing that, historically, harassment was gendered in nature and has always disproportionately affected women journalists who are on the receiving end more often than their male counterparts. Global trends on online violence against women as researched by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and Troll Busters in 2018 reveal that nearly two out of three journalists surveyed in their global study had suffered threats and harassment online, and slightly more reported having encountered physical threats of violence (Ferrier, 2018). Furthermore, of the women journalists in the IWMF and Troll Busters study, one third consider leaving the profession due to online attacks and threats. A study by the International Federation of Journalists in 2018, which surveyed 400 women journalists in 50 countries, found that 44% of women journalists surveyed in this study had experienced online violence in their practice of journalism (IFJ, 2018). UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) (2020) report estimates that globally 73% of women journalists have suffered online violence, and 20% of women journalists have had online violence spill over into their offline lives.

Cyber misogyny is a broad phenomenon that will be used to explain the different forms of violent and non-violent behaviour which have been harmful to women's existence in online communities. Although cyber misogyny is a relatively recent phenomenon (Moloney & Love, 2018), it can be argued there has been a significant increase in online misogyny (Jane, 2016; Bartlett *et al*., 2014). Ging and Siapera (2018) note that online misogyny is a broad concept within a political context which captures the effects of online abuse such as chilling, silencing or self-censorship. Ging and Siapera (2018) define cyber misogyny in a similar fashion, grounding its definition on the unequal power relations, and discriminatory and harmful nature of this practice with a similar target group, namely women and girls. Etherington (2015) defines cyber misogyny as online gendered hatred, harassment and abusive behaviour targeted at women and girls via the Internet which occurs within a context of power and marginalisation, and which draws attention to the discriminatory nature of this behaviour. Ging and Siapera align to this definition, defining cyber misogyny as involving harm, "either directly in the form of psychological, professional, reputational, or, in some cases, physical harm; or indirectly, in the sense that it makes the internet a less equal, less safe, or less inclusive space for women and girls" (2018: 516).

Cyber misogyny involves different types of violence and the intensity of this violence also differs ranging from “large-scale attacks or extreme threats at a moment in time, through to the slow burn of networked gas lighting, which involves constant lower level abuse” (Posetti *et al.,* 2021:12). Building on this argument on intensity of manifestation of online harassment, this varying intensity is argued to fall into three categories, namely, acute, chronic and escalatory or perennial violence (Amadi & Uwalaka, 2023; Holton *et al.,* 2021).

Cyber misogyny, expressed via online sexual harassment, stalking and threats of violence, appears to be a psychological as well as a potential physical risk to the safety of women journalists; particularly when death and rape injunctions are thrown into the mix. In addition, cyber misogyny or hatred of women expressed online is also a threat to the active participation of women in social or civil debate. Barak (Moloney & Love, 2018) also describes cyber misogyny as encompassing online sexual harassment, gender harassment and unwanted sexual coercion which are offshoots of broader online sexual harassment.

Cyber misogyny not only affects the individual journalist but the profession as a whole as it curtails the attainment of gender equality in the media sector. This is because “having more women journalists and editors in the profession is associated with greater equality in the news,” (Djerf-Pierre & Edstrom, 2021).

Describing what cyber misogyny is and the magnitude of this phenomenon, Mabweazara and Mare (2021:90) extend the above observations arguing that cyber misogynists hide behind the cloak of anonymity and fake accounts. They have resorted to “attacking, threatening, smear campaigns, and flooding the social media and email accounts of female journalists with messages in ways that inadvertently contribute to rising threats unsettling changes against media freedom,” (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021:90-91). This superficial sense of anonymity and unaccountability afforded by cyber spaces seems to make trolls at ease to harass journalists. This creates a scenario as argued by Gqola in her 2021 book the *Female Fear factory* whereby there is a sense of safety of violators vis-a vis -those who are “safe to violate” as there seems to be no or limited consequences for those who perpetrate violence

against women. Kilvington (2021) reinforces this assertion, arguing that, in addition to anonymity, the invisibility, dissociative imagination and rapid response in online spaces also encourage cyber harassment. Making the online space an environment where social norms are disregarded and where inappropriate behaviour and abuse prevails (*ibid*.).

Online violence has been described as the new frontline of attacks on journalists, with women journalists at the epicentre of risk. UNESCO argues in a recent report that within the journalism fraternity, online violence against women journalists is designed to belittle, humiliate and shame; induce fear, silence and retreat; discredit accountability in journalism and trust in facts; and chill their active participation (along with that of their sources, colleagues and audiences) in public debate. This amounts to an attack on democratic deliberation and media freedom, encompassing the public's right to access information. It cannot afford to be normalised or tolerated as an inevitable aspect of online discourse, nor considered a normal part of contemporary audience-engaged journalism (UNESCO, 2021).

Ging and Siapera (2016) note that cyber misogyny may not involve violence but almost always entails some form of harm. This is either directly in the form of psychological, professional, reputational or, in some cases, physical harm; or indirectly, in the sense that it makes the internet a less equal, less safe or less inclusive space for women and girls.

Interviews carried out in Germany, the United Kingdom and Taiwan with 75 journalists in 2020 by Chen *et al.* revealed that women journalists face rampant online gendered harassment that influences how they do their jobs. Many of the women report that if they aim to engage with their audience online – which is a job requirement for many of them – they frequently face sexist comments that criticise and attack them (Chen *et al.,* 2018). In similar research conducted by Cuellar and Chaher (2021) involving 66 journalists from seven Latin American countries: 10 from Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela; and 6 from Nicaragua, it found that digital gender violence in its varying forms was rampant.

Zorana Antonijevic, Advisor at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Gender Section, in an essay included in the 2016 report on *Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists,* contends that female journalists are experiencing this phenomenon because of the nature of their work, susceptibility of their positions and fragile job security. This makes them easy targets for those who do not comprehend that freedom and equality cannot survive if half of the world's population live and work in fear and danger.

McCully's (2019) work supports this assertion, arguing that there is no doubt that there is a link between the particular subject covered by a journalist and the ensuing level of hate that she receives through online channels. Coverage of certain sensitive, polarising topics carry a high prospect of harassment. Griffen (2019:2) observes that "journalists who report on contested social and political issues increasingly find themselves the target of abuse through social media, online comment fora and other online means, in some cases including violent threats of death and rape,"

Over the past decade in South Africa, cyber misogyny, trolling or online social media bullying has been on the rise (Daniels *et al.,* 2018). The aforementioned Glass Ceiling research shows that of the journalists surveyed, 30% of women and 9% of men agreed that women journalists do face cyber violence. While only a few women reported cyberstalking, quite a few said they had been victims of unknown email or cell phone correspondence issuing violent threats, bullying and trolling, often of a sexual nature (Daniels *et al.,* 2018).

Cyber misogyny has brought with it multiple challenges for women. Jane (2016) notes that cyber misogyny has significant offline consequences which are, amongst other things, professional as well as personal. It can, thus, be argued that cyber misogyny against women journalists stands in the way of equal participation in the field of journalism, thwarting freedom of expression, limiting journalism practice and stifling opinion amongst the journalists who suffer it. It usually sows disinformation and discredits journalists. This hostility shown against women is a direct attack, not only on the women journalists, but on the journalism profession as a whole.

To negotiate and counter their experiences of cyber misogyny, journalists are deploying a diverse range of strategies. These include steering away from certain topics; limiting what they post and their engagement online; and using technological tools to block certain posts on their social media pages (Chen *et al*., 2020; Posetti & Shabbir, 2022). This observation is further substantiated by Mabweazara and Mare (2021:91), who argue that in the African context, women "journalists have, adopted forms of resistance such as blocking, unfriending, unfollowing and using masked identities and pseudonymous profile names in order to protect themselves from male chauvinists on social media platforms." In Nigeria, for example, Uwalaka and Amadi (2023), however, argue that self–coping mechanisms that may be deployed by journalists may be risky and more intent should be put in how media companies approach this in a more systemic way.

Online interactions between producers and consumers of content has made recipients of media texts active participants as a result of their ability to engage through comments, likes, shares and so forth. However, the ability to have such close proximity to news journalists also brings a different dimension. Sometimes, incivility creeps into these interactions, with audiences attacking journalists as they post, respond or comment on issues and interact online. Lewis, Zamith and Coddington (2020) argue that when journalists encounter online violence, this may affect the journalist–audience relationship which is mainly built on the expectations of the engagement expected from journalists. In particular, online engagement is increasingly becoming a job requirement for many journalists (Chen *et al.,* 2020) and the online harm is offering a window into the downsides of encountering audiences online.

Given the intense severity of women's experiences of cyber misogyny as discussed above, research has focused on how journalists experience online violence and how they negotiate it. It is equally important to highlight how media organisations are dealing with cyber misogyny as it relates to women journalists. Ferrier (2018) argues that cyber misogyny is often underestimated by media management and, according to Eberspache (2019:143), "dismissed as just part of the job." In analysing the support that journalists get from news organisations facing online violence experiences, Holton *et al.,* (2021) argue that the approaches are not methodical. The problem is treated as an individual journalist's problem and not that of the organisation. Poletti and Shabbir

(2022:4) support this assertion as their findings reveal that journalists decry the handling of online violence by newsrooms as responses “appear to have been non-existent, ad hoc, or inadequate … and at times, they have even damaged the women journalists targeted”. In attempting to understand newsrooms' insufficient responses, Holton *et al.,* (2021) argue that this may be because online harms perpetrated by audiences often happen in social media platforms where media organisations have little control. Several studies have proposed recommendations for consideration by news organisations. Posseti and Shabbir (2022) put forward 26 recommendations on what news organisations could do, chief amongst them the recognition that online violence must be understood as real violence.

Posetti *et al.,* (2020) argue that big technology companies are part of the problem when it comes to online misogyny. They view the internet as the vector through which online misogyny is practiced and sustained. Internet companies with social media platforms have facilitated the normalisation of violence on their social media platforms with their lack of responses and actions to stop the incidents that are reported on their platforms; and this is a challenge for press freedom and safety of journalists (Posetti *et al*., 2020).

This research study aligns with Ging and Siapera’s (2018) position to use cultural perspectives to online violence which show the effects on cyber misogyny including silencing and self-censorship. “This cultural—rather than legal—approach captures manifestations and effects of online abuse that go beyond violence, such as the chilling, silencing, or self-censorship effects that this phenomenon has on women, and enables us to consider manifestations of online misogyny in the broader political contexts of the online culture wars,” (Ging & Siapera, 2018).

### 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview on cyber misogyny and discussed this in relation to women journalists. It set the scene on the environment in which women journalists globally, in the Southern African region, as well as in South Africa are operating. It also provided local, national and regional references to research studies that inform the argument that various forms of cyber misogyny persist and that it is affecting women journalists in various ways and at different levels including in their professional lives.

The chapter relied on mostly global literature on cyber misogyny showing that the global literature on cyber misogyny against women journalists in all its forms is vast in other parts of the world, however, in South Africa this literature remains very limited. Although this is the case, there is an imminent interest in understanding this phenomenon, in terms of how it manifests, proliferates and impacts on social media users such as journalists. Their jobs require them to engage when audiences seek news stories and sources, and to be active online, a situation which exposes them to people with similar but also varying standpoints on issues covered by the media.

## Chapter Three: Methodological Approach and Research design

### Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodological approach and research design used in this study. It will outline some of the general principles of research approaches, design and sampling. This section will also provide a detailed explanation of how the data collection was conducted including an outline of the processes that were followed in the selection of interview participants. It will also outline the ethical research considerations made by the researcher during the research process. This chapter will also detail the analytical tools used in the analysis and interpretation of the research data collected.

This research explores this timely and important issue through a qualitative approach. It uses interviews and case studies, as well as social media content analysis of purposively selected X (formerly Twitter) posts. The journalists' cases under study are journalists who have experienced cyber misogyny.

### 3.1 Research Approach

There are different types of research methodologies. These include qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:6) define qualitative research as interested in "understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences." They further argued that qualitative research goes beyond the what, where and when aspects that are usually analysed in quantitative research, and seeks to understand the why and how aspects behind human behaviour. Brennen (2021) argued that qualitative researchers are concerned with looking for meaning and suitable ways to discuss encounters that happen in specific historical, cultural, economic and political contexts.

This dissertation focuses on women journalists as the subjects, as well as on the effects of cyber misogyny on the work and practice of women journalists. In order to capture journalists experiences, the dissertation uses case studies and in-depth interviews. As such, this study is qualitative in nature as it enables the researcher "to understand a social or human problem rather than being based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analysed with statistical

procedures” as occurs in the quantitative research” (Creswell, 1994:1-2). Therefore, in this particular research, the qualitative methodology is used to understand cyber misogyny and its effects on women journalists’ practice. It focuses on women journalists as subjects and seeks to understand the effects of cyber misogyny using the lived experiences of women journalists. Therefore, it is best suited by a qualitative design because it enables the researcher to understand a social problem using lived experiences.

### 3.2 Research design

This study used a case study research design which enables the research to understand the effect of cyber misogyny on journalists’ practice. This is a multiple case study design using ten cases of South Africa women journalists who have experienced cyber misogyny on X.

Yin (2018:50) defines a case study as an “empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.” He further points out that a case study relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion.

As such, this research used in-depth interviews with media development organisations and feminist organisations as well as editors in media houses. It also used content analysis of X posts. When conducting the case study research, data can be collected from varying sources including “documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artefacts" (Yin, 2018:173). This cross pollination of sources of evidence for the case study will ensure the research acquires meaningful answers that provide a substantive understanding of the cases at hand.

A case study research design was chosen for this study because, as Tight (2017:12) argued, “case studies are in-depth, detailed and particular; they allow a close focus on the case, which the researcher thoroughly studies.” Tight (2017) concurs with Yin (2018), arguing that case studies are desirable in that they are rigorous and can be used for triangulated findings to ensure information-rich cases. The use of multiple

case studies was advantageous as the information collected from the varying cases was more robust and provided better comprehension of women journalists' experiences.

### 3.3 Data collection

The data collection for this research took place in several ways. Firstly, this included selection and collection of case study information which comprised reviewing archival data including interviews, research reports, news articles and X content derived from journalists' profiles, and from their responses and engagements with audiences.

The second component of the data collection process comprised in-depth interviews. The research used individual, qualitative, in-depth interviews which were semi-structured in nature with media development and feminist organisations as well as editors in media organisations, who have been purposively selected from a wide range of mainstream news media as a form of data collection. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with media development organisations and feminist organisations while one was in-depth interview was conducted with an editor in a media company. The interviews with the media development organisations uncovered and explored the occurrences of cyber misogyny and how journalists were responding to these occurrences. The in-depth interview with the media houses uncovered the strategies media houses are using in responding to cyber misogyny**.**

Neuman (2014) argued that through in-depth interviews, researchers are able to learn people's beliefs or opinions. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), in their book *Feminist Research Practice,* argued that in-depth interviews are an instrument to "explore a particular topic and gain focused information on the issue from the respondents," (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007:115). Therefore, the study utilised in-depth interviews to get information-rich cases to understand the lived experiences of the research participants, as well as the effects of cyber misogyny on women's journalism practice.

The in-depth interviews with media development organisations and feminist organisations investigated the effect, the nature and the form of violence experienced by women journalists. In-depth interviews were conducted with editors of media

houses to ascertain what measures media houses have put in place if anything at all, to respond to online violence against journalists, and female journalists in particular.

### 3.3.1 Participant interviews

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured in nature. “The semi-structured interview (SSI) employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions” (Newcomer, Wholey & Hatry, 2015:493).
The in-depth interviews drew on an interview guide. The in-depth interviews were carried out online via the Google Meet platform, as well as telephonically. The participants with whom the in-depth interviews were successfully conducted were:

Jillian Green, Managing Editor, *Daily Maverick*
Thandi Smith, Programme Manager, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA)
Kubi Rama, Executive Director, Gender Links (GL)
Judy Sandison, KwaZulu Natal regional coordinator South Africa National Editors Forum (SANEF)
Rose Viljoen, Programme Manager, Internews
Amanda Strydom, Senior Programme Manager, Code for Africa.

Emails were sent to the respondents prior to the interview in order to familiarise them with what questions that would be asked during the interview. The interviewees provided this research with rich, insightful data to help better understand journalists’ experiences as well as media companies responses.

Following the data collection phase with the media development organisations, feminist organisation and the media companies, the data was coded and categorised to enable analysis and interpretation of the data into broad categories. These illustrated general topics and observations which will then be further narrowed down and coded into specific themes that are dominant throughout the interviews.

The study also used online ethnography to collect information from purposively selected X posts. Online ethnography is described as a qualitative approach to data collection in virtual communities which aims to look beyond amounts and distributions,

and to unearth the deeper reasons for behaviours or sentiments (Skågeby, 2011.) The study used online ethnography to understand the nature of online violence experienced by women journalists in South Africa so as to then analyse the content posted by journalists and the engagements they have with audiences. This will provide a qualitative understanding of the journalists' experiences. Through employing online ethnographic methods, the researcher is immersed in and navigates the online world where the selected journalists participate and engage audiences. The research will purposively identify social media posts on X, where cyber misogyny is evident and use this to corroborate the experiences shared by the journalists interviewed.

The research also undertook collected data derived from archival data, research reports, interviews, news articles that have been previously documented in order to derive a qualitative understanding of the cases of cyber misogyny and how women journalists are experiencing it, as well as how media institutions are responding to online violence in media houses.

The methods described were used to complement each other in the data collection process. Using these methods assisted in triangulating the information provided in the study in order to improve accuracy but also ensure diverse viewpoints on the issue.

### 3.4 Sampling

The research used a purposive sampling technique to identify and select the journalists whose cases are written on as well as the media development, feminist organisations as well as media houses that were interviewed. Neuman (2014) defined purposive sampling or judgmental sampling as a non-random sampling in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific population. He further highlighted that purposive sampling is used to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation to gain a deeper understanding. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:18) concurred, noting that “sample selection in qualitative research is usually (but not always) non-random, purposeful, and small, as opposed to larger, more random sampling in quantitative research”.

The study focuses on ten women journalists who have been purposively selected from a broad range of mainstream news media outlets in South Africa including TV, radio,

online and print. These media houses include *Daily Maverick*, *News24, City Press, eNCA, Eye Witness News,* 702, and the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The selected journalists whose case studies are written on will come from different types of media ownership including private and public. The research focuses on women journalists, as recent global studies (UNESCO & ICFJ 2021) show that women journalists are disproportionately affected by online violence.

The research study will target ten women journalists through purposive sampling. The women journalists chosen for the study are those that have experienced cyber misogyny in their journalism practice and have spoken publicly about their encounters with cyber misogyny. This will assist in understanding their perspectives and the impact this has on their journalism practice. The sample of journalists whose case studies are written on is based on case study information gathered from secondary sources which include online news articles, X posts, research studies, webinars to collate information for the journalist's experiences will include women with diverse and intersectional backgrounds, including diversity of race. The intersectional view of how women journalists may experience cyber misogyny was considered in this study as advised in Hackworth's (2018) work. This recommends employing an intersectional approach in studying online violence against women. The selected journalists are known by the researcher through following them on social media as well as reading their stories. The research study will access the journalists' posts through their social media profiles they use, in particular X profiles.

The main consideration for selection of this sample is whether the women journalists have experienced cyber misogyny and have been impacted in their journalism practice. Of less consideration are the news topics they cover or the number of years they have practiced journalism.

Although this sample size may be deemed small and non-representative, this research is case study based, and so the priority is on telling the in-depth stories of the women. The research chose this number of journalists on the basis of capturing nuances of cyber misogyny and women journalists' experiences. This number of journalists is also chosen on a convenience basis, supposing it may be easier to reach this number of journalists. Through the ten journalists who are purposively selected, the study will get

different experiences and wider perspectives on how journalists are experiencing cyber misogyny and negotiating this violence. Following this, the research study supposes that a saturation point may be reached in which patterns begin to form and similarities can be identified.

Furthermore, a total of five media development and feminist organisations were interviewed. The recruited organisations were purposively selected and have worked with individual journalists as well as with media organisations in various process including in developing media guidelines, conducting workshops on journalists' safety, and supporting journalists who have experienced cyber misogyny. Since this dissertation is centered around the experiences of cyber misogyny and the responses, these organisations were fit to be part of this research. When it comes to media houses, the sample for the media houses to be investigated in this study hinged on which media houses the selected journalists work for.

### 3.5 Data analysis

To analyse the data from the in-depth interviews and the collected X posts, the study deployed Braun and Clarke's (2021) inductive thematic analytical approach to generate themes. The findings of the research will then be discussed through themes generated from the media development and feminist organisations and media company responses from editors. To interpret the data gathered in this study, the research used the theories and concepts of the role of the media in a democracy, cyber feminism, hegemonic masculinity as well as journalism routines as a lens to understand cyber misogyny against women journalists.

In their 2006 paper titled 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Braun and Clarke argued that there is no clear universally agreed upon definition of thematic analysis. They posit, however, that "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic," (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). They further argued that thematic analysis works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of "reality". The research data analysis consisted of listening to recordings of the

interviews, and reading notes from the interviews derived from transcripts of the interviews.

Following the data collection phase, the data was coded and categorised to enable analysis and interpretation of the data into broad categories. The qualitative analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's framework for thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis enables researchers to capture important components of the research question and from these the researcher is able to determine a particular trail to form an argument.

The analysis revealed general topics and observations which were then further narrowed down and coded into specific themes that are dominant throughout the interviews. Codes are defined by Saldana (2009:3) "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data."

The thematic coding resulted in the emergence of several codes derived from the research questions as well as the interview questions which guided the interviewees in their responses. The major codes that emerged from the interviewees with media development organisations include complexity of cyber misogyny; interconnected nature of online and offline misogyny; influences on work and practice; newsroom responses; complex phenomenon; drivers or influencers of cyber misogyny; effects on journalism practice; gendered nature of online violence; coordinated attacks; and types or forms.

The thematic data analysis was conducted with the assistance of the qualitative analysis software NVIVO. The software allowed for importing interview transcripts into the tool and generating codes related to the interviews data. Codes were created using the research questions as the basis. For example, what is the nature of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists in South Africa? Such a code led to the broad coding theme of "nature of violence". Each broad theme also had subcategories which assisted to further analyse the topic. This was all drawn from the interviewees' assertions during the interviews.

The study used a two-step coding process beginning with initial coding (where the researcher focused on reading the entire text for familiarisation), followed by focused coding (focusing on line by line coding and categorisation of texts) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). At an entry level, texts were analysed to generate manifest codes and meanings. Manifest coding is interested in generating surface meanings from texts and is useful in enabling a broad understanding of the text. The second level of analysis involved latent coding, where texts are analysed to generated connotative and implied meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021).

### 3.6. Research ethics

The research study entailed capturing sensitive and distressing information on journalists' experiences on cyber misogyny. The research used information that is already in the public domain through various sources to capture the examples of misogynist experiences. Furthermore, some of this information has been republished by the journalists themselves as a way of raising awareness on the attacks they were facing. It also involved undertaking in-depth interviews with research respondents, in this case, respondents from media development organisations, feminist organisations and media companies. As such, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Witwatersrand Ethics office and it was granted. The Ethics clearance can be found on Appendix A.

The following ethical considerations were adhered to:

- Permission to conduct the study.
- The research will ensure that there is no harm or exploitation of respondents.
- The researcher will guarantee that the selected participants/respondents give full and informed consent to their participation.
- The researcher will ensure that respondents independently decide without any influence to willingly to take part in the study.

Upon receiving ethical clearance, the researcher contacted possible research participants. The interview participants were contacted via email and telephone. The participants were given sufficient time to agree to be part of this study and consent forms were shared with the interview participants. Permission to record the interviews

was also requested from each participant to ensure that the views of the participants and the nuances from their perspectives were adequately captured during the interview as well as data analysis process. All the recorded interviews were then transcribed and incorporated into the study's direct quotations from interviewees adding to the richness of the findings. All ethical consideration as per the regulations of the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) were taken into consideration and met.

## Chapter Four: Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this research which will guide the analysis of cyber misogyny and women journalists' work and practice in South Africa. This chapter is organised into four parts which discuss the four theories that underpin this study and their relevance is further elucidated. The research study will use concepts from the role of the media in a democracy, feminism, hegemonic masculinity, and the concept of journalistic routines as lenses to examine the effects of cyber misogyny on journalism practice and interpret the data collected from the women journalists' cases.

### 4.1. Role of media in a democracy

In a functioning democracy, the media plays various roles. As building blocks of democracy, the media are not just information providers, but creators of public opinion as well. They are gatekeepers of fundamental freedoms and also the agenda-setters. Mouffe (Daniels, 2021) argues that the role of the media extends past the aforementioned notion of them as "watchdogs", to being gate-openers rather than gate-closers. The media bring accountability into public life, as well as being bearers of information that can guide decision-making, provide a vehicle for freedom of expression, and play a facilitating role in public debate.

The media also play a role as a public sphere in society where plurality, diversity, equality and cultural multiplicity are foregrounded. The Habermasian notion of a public sphere is a normative ideal that is an accessible and independent realm in which each voice is equal to one" (Gillwald, 1993:65). In a public sphere, mass media are representative of the citizenry and accessible to all, serving as a key barometer of democracy (*ibid*.). Ideally, there is shaping of opinion in the public sphere by varying players whose voices carry the same worth, promoting divergent views.

In concurring with this ideal of multiplicity of voice and how this deepens democracy, Mouffe, who postulated the idea of a radical democracy, centralises the plurality of voices, particularly the side-lined voices, in contributing centrally to enhancing democracy (Daniels, 2018).

Although Habermas and Mouffe may have been writing in a different era and context to that which is experienced in South Africa, their theorising still applies.

Instead of the civil discussions envisioned in the public sphere by Habermas, in the face of cyber misogyny, civil engagements are comprised of engagement that becomes denigrating and dismissive of women journalists. As Chen et al. (2020) posit, the conversations emanating from participation in online spaces often turn acrid. These conversations inhibit the space for interaction and delegitimise women journalists.

Djerf–Pierre and Edstrom (2021) argue that there are positive connections between gender equality in the news, media freedom and democracy. The exercise of women's right to freedom of expression and opinion derives from the role of this right in achieving effective gender equality and the strengthening of democracy. However, women's voices have come under attack in the most disturbing manner online through cyber misogyny facilitated by social media platforms.

To apply this theorisation of democracy and the public sphere into the South Africa context, scholars such as Daniels, Reid, Rodny-Gumede (2020) and Lowe Morna bring forward arguments related to the intersection of women's voices in a democracy and free expression. Nyamweda (2023) argues that women's voices, which have traditionally been silenced in the media in news contexts, are equally important in the functioning of a democracy; and gender equality cannot be achieved when there is no freedom of expression for women. The plurality of voice is a key factor in reconstructing the media through a gender lens as it recognises that certain voices have been pushed to the periphery and these voices need to be heard in order for media to reflect and serve all constituencies.

Having a diverse workforce in the media also contributes to a functional public sphere, as it helps shift what the media prioritises by incorporating different perspectives into news coverage (Daniels et al., 2018). This supports the assertion by Reid that "the value of a diverse spectrum of media, particularly news media content, is widely recognised as integral and at times regarded as synonymous with a well-functioning

democracy in which an informed citizenry is actively able to participate," (Daniels et al., 2018:28).

Effective participation by women in all spheres of life is important for any democracy to thrive. The presence of women's voices as media actors and as news sources deepens democracy and contributes to diversity of the media, (Daniels et al., 2018; Daniels, 2020). Without accurate and appropriate representation of a plurality of voices in society, the level of democracy can be questionable. Media users will lack an understanding of the "market place of ideas" which a plural and diverse media must afford its audiences. For women to play an important part in practising freedom of expression and participation, there ought to be an enabling environment within the media industry to allow them to practice in a safe manner.

It is, thus, important to problematise the role of the media in the context of the digital public sphere. This is significant as a part of the press is unable to freely express themselves and the way they practice journalism is limited because of hindrances such as cyber misogyny which they experience. With increasing reports of cyber misogyny, women journalists' freedom of expression and participation online become limited. This may also create a ripple effect and hamper open access to information by the general populace who consume the news. It can, furthermore, be argued that the existence of cyber misogyny inhibits the role of the media in a democracy when participating journalists' voices are stifled as "online harassment has become a new way of censoring journalists in Africa" (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Democracy thrives when a plurality of voices is heard. However, the existence of cyber misogyny does not facilitate diversity in the voices of women who practice journalism.

### 4.2. Feminism and technology

This dissertation will also deploy cyber feminism theory to understand women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny and how it affects journalism practice. It will use nuances of cyber feminism to illuminate the nature as well as responses to cyber misogyny by journalists as well as media companies.

Feminist theories are proposed for their all-encompassing approach to a range of ideologies that focus on women's issues. This research acknowledges the different

strands of cyber feminism(s) and makes use of in particular “radical cyber feminism” (Hall, 1996:159) to understand women journalists’ experiences online. Radical feminism is a strand of cyber feminism that views the internet through a dystopian lens, recognising the reality of harassment that takes place online. Radical cyber feminism is argued to be a response to cyber masculinity which was characterised by aggressive stylistics, and churned hostile and insulting messages to women in online platforms like bulletin boards and emails (Hall, 1996). Radial cyber critics argue that “cyber-space is not an arena inherently free of the old feminist struggle...” noting that “new media are embedded in a framework of pan-capitalist social relations and economic, political, and cultural environments that are still deeply sexist and racist,” (Wilding, Fernandez & Wright, 2003:24).

**History of cyber feminism**

Cyber feminism was coined in the 1990’s following increasing concern about the gendered implications of digital technologies. The cyber feminist manifesto for the twenty-first century created by VNS matrix set the scene for cyber feminism(s) and did so from a very techno utopian perspective (Wilding, 1998; Samanataray & Mohanty, 2017.

**Contestations in definition**

Daniels (2009) argues that there is no one particular single definition of cyber feminism(s), but the existing definitions find a common basis as they emphasise gender, digital technologies and feminist practices. Consistent with Daniels position on defining cyber feminism, Wilding (1998) in the research paper, *Where is Feminism in Cyber Feminism?* brings forward the argument that the definition of cyber feminism is a contested one, creating a delicate debate on what it is and how it can be formulated. Wilding (*ibid*.), in her reflections, also argues that there is no one particular definition of cyber feminism. This dissertation argues that there is an opportunity to renegotiate its meaning in line with the current prevailing conditions that exist in digital spaces, in particular the prevailing misogyny.

Hawthorne and Klein (1999:12) argued that “Cyberfeminism is a philosophy which acknowledges, firstly, that there are differences in power between women and men specifically in the digital discourse.” Celik’s (2024:227) definition is in alignment with

the above definition, positing that “cyberfeminism is a movement that seeks to explore the interaction between technology and gender equality”. Celik furthered this argument noting that cyberfeminism aims to “challenge gender bias that manifests itself in any platform, and to create a more inclusive and egalitarian online world” (2024:227). Celik further argued that cyber feminism recognises that digital platforms such as new media peddle sexist tendencies and misogyny online and extend the gender prejudices that are already a play in society.

The theoretical position of radical cyber feminism as discussed by Hall (1996) perceives the internet as a space which deviates from its original utopian view as a liberating phenomenon but perceives the online space as one that is sexist, misogynist and dominated by men. Milford ( Bailey & Steeves, 2015) argues that early cyber feminism reduced the problem of inequality to just a problem of material access to equipment, wiring and technical training. He further states that issues of online inequality extend to broader socio-political contexts that impact the construction of cyber spatial environments on a cultural level, where narrative discourses of linear patriarchal, colonial and capitalist progress are furthered within these constructions.

These discourses have the potential to restrict women’s agency online, potentially undermining their equal participation in a digital society. Using the concept of postmodern feminism will also cater for the intersectionality of struggles that a diverse range of women in the media face.

Looking solely at the gender-specific elements of violence against women such as gender trolling, bullying, harassment, misogyny and sexist online harassment is argued to be ignoring the experiences of women whose harassment falls into other categories. These are experiences that are multi-layered, and both simplifying and silencing, contributing to the erasure of the experiences of women. This leaves a gap in analyses that do not allow for adequate exploration of the nuances of online behaviour and discrimination (Vickery & Everbach, 2018). To counter this, this study will encompass in this research the race dimension to determine the sometimes intersectional struggles that women face.

### 4.3. Hegemonic masculinity

The study will use the concept of hegemonic masculinity to argue the dominance of certain online voices that want to suppress and get women offline. This concept is grounded in the works of Cornell which generally saw that attitudes, perceptions and practices of men as influential in the suppression of women. The concept will also explain the use of violence by men who are at the top of the power hierarchy but seek to stifle women's voices and their participation in certain public discourses. Hegemonic masculinity preserves the domination of men over women at the base of power hierarchy. Within the context of cyber misogyny, the concept of hegemonic masculinity suggests that certain deep-seated masculine ideals drive cyber misogyny. Journalists are subject to socialisation within particular prevailing institutional structures and ideologies (Daniels & Skinner, 2022). Their experiences of cyber misogyny also cannot be isolated from the context in which they are taking place. The concept is used to argue the rationale for the persistent undermining of women's voices and participation in public discourse.

### 4.4. Journalistic Routines

This concept argued that in journalism, media workers conduct their jobs following a set of practices including gatekeeping, working on deadlines, and relying on official sources (Khan & Haider, 2015). It is these journalistic routines that influence the way media content is produced. According to Shoemaker and Reese (2014) who postulated the concept, influences on media content include factors such as media workers' attitudes, journalistic or media routines, media organisational influences, as well as influences from outside the organisation. Chen et al. (2020) argue that with the increasing use of new technologies, in particular social media, the routines or behaviours in journalism have also shifted. They note that routines have extended to include the engagement of audiences reading and responding to comments on social media. Using this concept, the research will analyse the nature of cyber misogyny that may come out through gendered incivility emanating from comments received by women journalists as they interact with their audiences on X in the face of shifting journalistic routines. It will also examine how cyber misogyny may influence the changing journalistic routines and the effect this has on women journalists' practice.

### 4.5. Conclusion

In this dissertation, theoretical as well as conceptual insights including the role of the media in a democracy, feminism, hegemonic masculinity and the concept of journalistic routines were discussed. A comprehensive analysis of each of the theories and concepts is explored. Together, these frameworks will be used as a lens through which cyber misogyny is explored in order to see its impact on women journalists' work and practice. This dissertation will argue that online violence against women is not just empty words passed on virtually. Instead, it is real violence happening to real people and having an impact on their right to free expression and safety in a space that is increasingly regarded as the go to platform for everyday news and public discussion by news consumers. In the following chapter, the dissertation presents cases of women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny that uses these theoretical frameworks and adds to the evidence on cyber misogyny discussed in the literature review.

## Chapter Five: X – a dark realm for women journalists

The aim of this chapter is to move towards answering the research questions, through an analysis of women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny using a case study approach for data collection. It discusses their experiences of cyber misogyny in an environment that is structured around masculine standards. It details their experiences which highlight significant intensity and ferocity of cyber misogyny. The chapter also exposes how cyber misogyny works to denigrate but also discredit women journalists and shatter public trust in their journalism practice.

The chapter is based on case study information gathered from secondary sources which include online news articles, tweets, research studies, documentaries, and webinars to collate information regarding the journalists' experiences. In addition, this will include analysing the types of comments and messages that women journalists received on the X (formerly Twitter) platform.

The chapter will pay attention to the cases of 10 journalists which involve the cyber misogyny they have encountered, their responses and negotiation of these misogynistic attacks online. The chapter also uses posts and comments which have been purposively selected over a period of 10 years since 2013 to bring out the nature of violence that exists, the way these are negotiated by the journalists and the impact this has on their practice of journalism. This period has been selected based on the idea that cyber misogyny has become an increasing threat to women journalists' freedom of expression over the past decade.

Collating these cases will allow this dissertation to provide concrete, contextual and in-depth examples of the cyber misogynistic occurrences. The themes that emerge from the analysis are based on the key research questions:

- What is the nature of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists in South Africa?
- How does cyber misogyny against women journalists affect their practice?
- What strategies have women journalists developed to respond to cyber misogyny?

Inductive thematic analysis has been used to reflect on and unpack women journalists' experiences. This created a rich and multifaceted image of the situation which emerges from the cases gathered from secondary sources which include online news articles, research studies, and webinars. These are used in analysing the types of comments and messages that women journalists received on the platforms. The chapter argues that these findings will add concrete evidence and recommendations to growing calls for more attention to be paid to the safety of journalists by media companies, big technology companies, government, as well as civil society organisations, particularly, those focusing on cyber misogyny to protect women journalists from the harm they face in their work.

The data gathered through this study is unique but also very similar to and corroborates findings from other research findings. It further draws on the evidence in the literature review that argues that cyber misogyny indeed impacts journalism practice. It is clear that cyber misogyny is existent in various formats, is experienced by journalists at varying degrees and has impacted all of the journalists written about in this dissertation. Although a few examples have been used, the experiences give an understanding of how cyber misogyny manifests online, the nature of cyber misogyny, as well as providing evidence of individual agency on how women journalists are negotiating this violence,

The chapter uses the concept of newsroom routines to argue the changing environment in journalism, where there is increased engagement between journalists and audiences, opens journalists up to cases of incivility. It also deploys theoretical frameworks contained in democratic theory such as the role of the media in a democracy, freedom of expression, and gender equality as well as cyber feminist theory. It also uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a lens to show the way toxic masculine tendencies impact the gender-based cyber-attacks on women journalists, creating an environment where women's voices are silenced and freedom of expression is limited.

### 5.1. Contextual Background

The selected journalists whose cases are written on are all South African women journalists from different backgrounds, ages and race. These journalists include Ferial

Haffajee, Daily Maverick; Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick; Karima Brown, 702; Qaanitah Hunter, News 24; Matshidiso Madia, Eye Witness News; Sophie Mokoena, South Africa Broadcasting Corporation; Julia Madibogo, City; Lindsay Dentlinger, eNCA; Karyn Maughan, News 24; and Silindelo Masikane, eNCA. These journalists work in different roles in their various media outlets. They also tend to report on politics or are political editors, except for Julia Madibogo who is a senior entertainment reporter.

With the increase of communication technologies, media personnel have also adopted these tools in their line of work to disseminate news, comment on news stories and engage audiences. Having an online profile, in particular a X profile, with a large following means the news gets to a larger audience. For journalists, this may also mean popularity of their views as they generate public interest and influence public discourse but also greater recognition within their practice.

The Glass Ceiling 2018 research introduced cyber misogyny as an emerging threat to women journalists' online violence experiences. In that study, a few examples were used to describe cyber misogyny but also collected voices of women journalists in particular and how they viewed cyber misogyny. An article published in 2019 by Angela Quintal of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) discussed how social media platforms were spreading disinformation to discredit journalists but also confirmed that journalists had to contend with cyber misogyny in their line of work and contend with toxic social media.

The following sections use examples to show in detail a set of themes which emerge from the cyber misogyny experiences of women journalists. Women in these case studies highlighted the kind of cyber misogynistic abuses they encounter. Their cases show the sexist and misogynistic vitriol directed at them from audiences and politicians.

### 5.2. The X attacks that keep coming: Case studies on women journalists' experiences of cyber misogyny

### 5.2.1. Ferial Haffajee

This case study delves into the experiences of Ferial Haffajee, a prominent journalist and editor, who encountered the pervasive phenomenon of cyber misogyny. It examines specific instances, responses and implications One of the most sustained and abhorrent online attacks on women journalists in South Africa has been experienced by Haffajee. Haffajee has had an illustrious career in journalism as former editor of *Mail & Guardian*, *City Press*, *Huffington Post* and now associate editor of *Daily Maverick*.

Haffajee has suffered long drawn damaging attacks from different kinds of racist and patriarchal X trolls and bots amidst her distinguished career. Racist slurs, death and rape threats, name calling, and gendered disinformation are some of the features of the online attacks suffered by Haffajee. She has increasingly spoken out about the misogynistic attacks endured online.

Haffajee has constantly documented her experiences on various platforms and spoken publicly about these experiences including on international platforms. One of her most recent in-depth accounts of her experiences appeared in the recently released book *Women Journalists in South Africa* (Daniels and Skinner, 2022). Haffajee calls herself a veteran of these attacks.

Examples of the online abuse include Haffajee being labelled a “Prestitute” by some X users. “Prestitution” is a word combining press and prostitute, usually used to label journalists accused of being inappropriately aligned to and influenced by political or business interests. This sort of labelling seeks to cast doubt on the journalist’s professional ethic. In addition, Haffajee was attacked on X using deep fakes images where her face is superimposed onto naked and sexual images showing her in compromising positions with various men including business men and politicians. This kind of misinformation sought to smear and discredit the journalist. Commenting on these deep fake images that promoted misinformation about her in an article she wrote titled The *Gupta News Factory and Me*, (Haffajee, 2017), published in the now defunct *Huffington Post South Africa,* Haffajee noted that:

> *For months, I've looked at them when I'm alone. Quickly, like a dirty secret. The images make me wince with their distortions and insults. I snap my phone shut*

*and move to another screen. Or make a cup of tea. Images are powerful and the designers have very specific messages. That I am a whore, a harridan, an animal and a quisling. I feel shame, and fear that my family will see them and not understand their genesis.* (Haffajee, 2017).




Figure 1: Example of a response from a X user calling Haffajee a Prestitute on from X.

There are X accounts that have been dedicated to trolling Haffajee and used to show her in this manner. To date, these accounts seem to now be defunct which proves that these were used as weapons with a particular purpose to attack and silence stories that were topical at the time. In addition to the army of trolls who have unleashed violent attacks on Haffajee, politicians have also played a big part in this misogyny. In a 2017 article by Raborife, published in *News 24,* Haffajee noted that the attacks were deliberate and coordinated campaigns. Figure 1 shows some of the vitriol experienced by Haffajee where she suffered being labelled a “prestitute” and an unethical journalist.

Haffajee gives an account of her experiences of online violence which is written from a space of viewing it as a traumatic experience for her in her career as a journalist and editor for many years. The attacks she received online were often intersecting with race and gender. In addition, these attacks received online created so much noise as they were received as a barrage of messages. Furthermore, she has suffered death threats, for example, an X user wrote into Haffajee’s inbox in 2018 saying Haffajee “deserve(s) a bullet in the head”.




Figure 2: A message published by Haffajee showing a death threat she received in her X inbox.

**Impact on journalism practice**

In a 2019 interview she conducted with the Center for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), Haffajee noted that, although she continues to practice her journalism and reporting critically, she acknowledges self-censorship happens at times. She also noted that when one covers a story you have to get off there for a sometime otherwise the attacks are vicious and not – stop (Section 16, 2022). However, journalists are fighting back and refusing to be silenced by deploying tactics that can help protect them as they practice journalism. Haffajee has often used the tactic of calling out perpetrators as a strategy to circumvent the attacks and the misinformation that emanate online. Haffajee called herself the "Troll Hunter" who would be on a mission to find the origins of the posts and the account from which they came. The aim was to take back the power from the trolls and water down their efforts.

Journalists have felt that their reporting to the platforms as a mechanism was not working well to deal with these misogynist trolls that were constantly attacking them. For example, Haffajee condemned how X was not taking complaints she had reported to the social media platform. A response to the complaint as can be seen in the figure below shows that the platform did not see anything wrong with the posts which had flagged as abusive but rather indicated that they permitted parody on the platform.




Figure 3: An X post by Haffajee which shows a response received from the social media platform after she had reported abusive X posts to the social media platform.

Journalists have also refused to be silenced in their reporting and standing up for their practice of journalism. Their refusing to be intimidated and calling out perpetrators seems to further anger the trolls for being called out on their abusive activity. These X posts are often met with sarcasm, ridicule and more resistance. Some audiences have called this a sign of "weakness".

### 5.2.2. Pauli van Wyk

Pauli van Wyk is an investigative journalist at the *Daily Maverick*. She does investigative reporting on business and justice. In the short film *Section 16,* Van Wyk describes herself as a journalist whose reporting is at the intersection of money and power and the power behind politics and private business Section 16, 2022). In an interview published by Jamlab, written by Maseko (2022), van Wyk describes her journey in investigative reporting as difficult, exciting and traumatic. Van Wyk has also suffered immeasurable misogyny on X. Speaking about personal attacks, harassment and distrust of her journalistic work in the above-mentioned interview, Van Wyk describes her experience saying: *"Personal attacks happen because perpetrators and their supporters cannot argue on the merits of the case against them. Rather than taking me to court to prove that I am wrong, they call me Satan, a witch, and say things like I should be raped and hanged. All this suggests I'm on the right track and stepping on sensitive, criminal toes,"* (Maseko, 2022).

In 2019, she was singled out by Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) supporters calling her "white bitch" and "white cunt" following her investigative reporting on the VBS Mutual Bank which became insolvent in 2018 after huge industrial scale looting which led to the collapse of the bank leaving thousands of their clients defrauded of their money. van Wyk had written extensively about alleged corruption practices by two of the EFF political party leaders involved with VBS Mutual Bank and, as a result, suffered ongoing misogynistic attacks on X. She has also received rape and death threats, and has been called names such as "whore", "witch", "bitch", and "cunt". Some EFF supporters were calling for van Wyk to be raped and attacked.

Rabe in her book *A Luta Continua: A history of media in South Africa* documented that, the EFF President, Julius Malema had posted to his followers to "go for the kill and to hit hard". This was considered as a disguised threat as it does not point out to who the threat was directed to (Rabe, 2020). Speaking at the African Investigative Journalism Conference 2019, van Wyk highlighted the following:

*"People on social media threatened me by saying that I should be raped and hanged. Political leaders like Julius Malema called me Satan and Dali Mpofu told me that he is not my garden boy,"* (Marnce, 2019).




Figure 4: A post by a user labelling van Wyk her as a fake journalist.

Van Wyk has also been accused of peddling fake news by some EFF party supporters because of her investigative reporting on a corruption case involving the party leader. This sort of engagement from followers was meant to discredit the work that she was doing on this case. Speaking in the documentary *Section 16,* an initiative of *Daily Maverick* which exposes online attacks faced by women journalists in South Africa, van Wyk describes the attacks she has faced. Van Wyk describes some of the insults she has received where she was called the "green eyed monster must go to hell," "waphapha[4]" "the witch is burning".

### 5.2.3. Karima Brown

The late Karima Brown was a seasoned journalist with an illustrious career in journalism and political reporting. She was an eNCA commentator as well as a 702 radio presenter. She too became a target of cyber misogyny in her practice of journalism when she received a brinjal emoji symbolising a penis and conveying a depiction of sexual violence when she was doxed.

In March 2019, the now late veteran South African broadcaster and journalist Brown was doxed by EFF leader Julius Malema during the 2019 elections campaign when her phone number was publicly shared on X. From this, other forms of attacks emerged where she was harassed off the platform. Brown had mistakenly shared a media brief onto the opposition parties WhatsApp group. The sharing of her phone numbers resulted in Brown being exposed to rape and death threats, and threats of extreme violence. Brown reported this incident to the police and the case was brought to the South African High Court.

[4] Waphapha is a colloquial word for overzealous

Brown self-reported her experience of this vicious cycle of online violence following the X post about her. She noted that she was:

> *threatened with rape, with sexual assault, with violence. I was called a 'whore' and told people will deal with me. That I must leave the country and 'f**k off back to India' She added that who had threatened her were "clearly EFF members", adding that she did, however, suspect some of the threats were sent by bots (fake accounts) or by those tweeting under a false identity or from multiple accounts (sometimes known as "sock puppets").* Friedman, 2019.

The attack on Brown by one of the leaders of the opposition, in this case the Economic Freedom Fighters, who commands a huge following online, is a classic example of how one act ignited a trail of personal attacks on the journalist. As pushback against the attacks she faced, Brown took legal action against the EFF. Brown, who won this case, describes this victory not as an individual victory but a victory for the media profession. She noted the following*: "This is a victory for media freedom, a victory against sexism and it is victory for women in journalism and protection and freedom of the media,"* (Chabalala, 2019).

### 5.2.4. Qaanitah Hunter

Qaanitah Hunter is an Assistant Politics and Opinion Editor at News 24. According to *News 24 (2019)*, Hunters astute political reporting earned her a Nat Nakasa Journalism Award in 2019 and 2020X. Hunter is also a mental health champion in the media industry. Her reporting has seen her taking on some of the biggest names in politics. In a book chapter she wrote titled *Threats to Rape and Kill Me* in 2022, in the book *Women Journalists in South Africa* (Daniels and Skinner, 2022), these threats were coming as a resulting of the expose that she was undertaking.

In 2018, Qaanitah Hunter, whilst still investigative political journalist at *News 24*, was sent an image of a toy gun inscribed with the words "stay classy" by the secretary-general of the ANC Women's League, Meokgo Matuba. Hunter was investigating an alleged plot to overthrow high-ranking ANC officials aligned with former president Jacob Zuma.

However, Matuba denied she had sent the image. Figure 5 below shows the image of a gun which was sent to her inbox on X and which Hunter then shared publicly on her X profile.

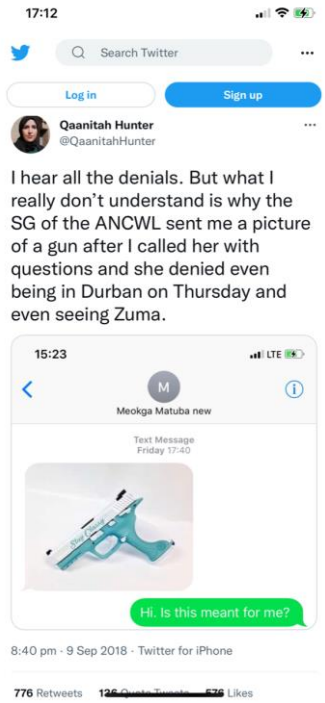



Figure 5: A post shared by Hunter on her X profile after receiving an image of a gun in her inbox. X, 9 September 2018.

Hunter, who is among the youngest editors in the country, has also found herself being attacked for her age. She has been shamed for being a young journalist with some calling her a child in the early years of her career. In writing about her experiences on cyber misogyny, Hunter (2022:80) noted that, *"To the Guptabots[5], I was a "young bitch" who "knew nothing". Some politicians, too, joined that bandwagon. I recall a trade union leader refusing to be interviewed by a "child"."*



Figure 6: A post shared by Hunter in her X profile after being body shamed. on X, 1 June 2019.

Hunter has also suffered body shaming in her trolling by African National Congress cadres who mocked and ridiculed her appearance on WhatsApp, something she let her followers know on her X profile. In her post, she brought up how this was mentally exhausting and resulted in herremoving herself and take a break from social media.

In the above mentioned book chapter which was a self-reflection of her experiences with misogyny in her work and practice, Hunter (2022:78-79) noted that:

> *For the first time, it made me question whether the price of harassment we pay for the journalism we do was worth it. I recall the panic it evoked in me, the numbness in my legs and the heaviness in my chest. Anxiety bubbled in my core every time I logged on to social media—which was often because of the nature of my job.*

### 5.2.5. Matshidiso Madia

Women journalists have shared instances of where cyber misogyny is triggered by how they look. Matshidiso Madia is an Associate Editor Politics at *Primedia Broadcasting*. Madia has had to contend with recurrent body shaming on X, regardless of what she writes about on in her professional capacity.

Madia continues to receive personal attacks on her body from online audiences. In an interview with CPJ in the above-mentioned article, Madia confirmed that she was

[5] Guptabots were groups of botnets and X accounts that were used to drive propaganda on state capture and frequently attacked journalists who were critical on this issue.

indeed body shamed on X. She noted: “I get mocked for my weight”, (Quintal, 2019). This can be seen for example in a series of posts on X that seem to want to divert and disrupt Madia’s news reporting. In the example, an X user constantly sent a barrage of close to nude pictures of a woman whom he likened to Madia. Some of the body shaming comments put on Madia’s news posts showing the volleys of body shaming messaging include the following

> *“Go lose weight wena you weigh more than a car,” ( X, 10 June 2022).*
> *“Fat or fart you can do better than that,” (X, 10 June 2022).*
> *“Invest in herbal life and gym wena mafutha uyekel ndaba ezingekhoyoo (Invest in herbal life and gym you fat one and leave non-issues)* (X, 16 November, 2022*).*
> *Wena round face …* (X, 16 November 2022).
> *“Get a Venda man sisi, you will start thinking better” (X, 16 November 2022)*

### 5.2.6. Sophie Mokoena

Sophie Mokoena is the foreign editor for the public broadcaster the SABC. Harassment towards women journalists is indeed gendered and also often intersects with age. For Mokoena, uncivil comments received on her X profile included name calling, gendered harassment, as well as age shaming.

As foreign editor, Mokoena’s cyber misogyny experiences seem to extend beyond borders. As a senior political editor and journalist, Mokoena has been a survivor of constant attacks by politicians and political party followers on X. An example of this is when Zimbabwe Presidential Spokesperson George Charamba, in one of his replies to a tweet made by Mokoena, insulted the journalist calling her a “menstruating idiot”. Charamba, who is said to be the owner of the Jamwanda2 account, insulted Mokoena in Shona saying *“ndikapindura dinga iri rinoenda kumwedzi masikati machena. Ini zvangu tonhoo semunhu akabva kune vanhu”.*




Figure 7: Insults hurled at Sophie Mokoena by @ Jamwanda who is understood to be George Charamba on X, 6 November 2020.

Translated in English this means, ‘If I answer this Idiot she will start menstruating in broad day light. Let me keep quiet as a person who comes from a decent background.’ Mokoena was attacked after she commented on a broadcast, stressing that government officials will be given the right to respond. This attack created such an uproar, where journalists and media freedom groups such as The South Africa national Editors Forum rallied behind Mokoena arguing that this form of intimidation of journalists curtails freedom of expression.

Mokoena has been constantly demeaned by politicians who have called her “Little girl”, “home wrecker”, “Obsessed with reporting on Zimbabwe”. Name calling is one of the main, constant forms of abuse levelled again all the journalists whose cases are analysed in this study. It is meant to dissuade journalists and eat away at women’s self-esteem when attacked in this manner.

Mokoena has also been labelled a ‘Prestitute’ in her line of work, for example, on X. In addition, she has been accused by Tafadzwa Mugwadi, a ZANU PF cadre, of being the concubine of a senior ANC leader, and accused of sleeping with top ZANU PF political leaders, and an “embattled marriage wrecker”.

### 5.2.7. Julia Madibogo

Employed as a senior reporter at *City Press,* Julia Madibogo is another example of how cyber misogyny can have ripple effects. Madibogo is a journalist who has suffered a doxing case. In a recent incident in 2022, Madibogo was doxed by a social media influencer and media personality Faith Nketsi, who shared Madibogo’s number with followers. Madibogo had approached the social media influencer for comment on a story about her then rumoured pregnancy. Some followers accused Madibogo of having provoked the social media influence. Madibogo has also previously been doxed in 2021 by media personality Somizi Mhlongo who also put the journalist’s mobile number online for his followers to see. This resulted in the journalist receiving rape threats and threats of violence. Madibogo had approached the former South Africa Idols judge for comment on allegations that he was divorcing his husband, Mohale Motaung-Mhlongo.

The doxing shows the ripple effect that occurs when personal information of journalists gets onto public platforms and how dangerous exposing such personal information can be on the safety of journalists online as well as in the physical world. From the one single account and X post, hundreds of attacks were born. To counter this attack, Madibogo took legal action as she opened a case of harassment and violation through the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). She also received support from her media house which published a statement condemning this act and calling for the socialites to apologise. Other industry players such as the South African National Editors Forum also called out the socialites and called for an apology to Madibogo.

### 5.2.8. Karyn Maughan

Karyn Maughan is a legal journalist and writer who has tackled some high profile legal cases involving high profile politicians in the country. She recently faced legal threats from the former President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma. In a recent article on *News 24* titled *Jacob Zuma tried to silence me*, Maughan (2023) lamented the abuse she faced. Maughan indicated that,

> *A thing, a bitch, a lying bitch, a white bitch, a witch, a racist, a pig, an alcoholic, a criminal, a hypocrite, a propaganda journalist, a racist, a servant of white privilege, a hack and an askari...These were some of the things I was called after former president Jacob Zuma launched his now invalidated private prosecution against me and state advocate Billy Downer in October last year,… (Maughan, 2023).*

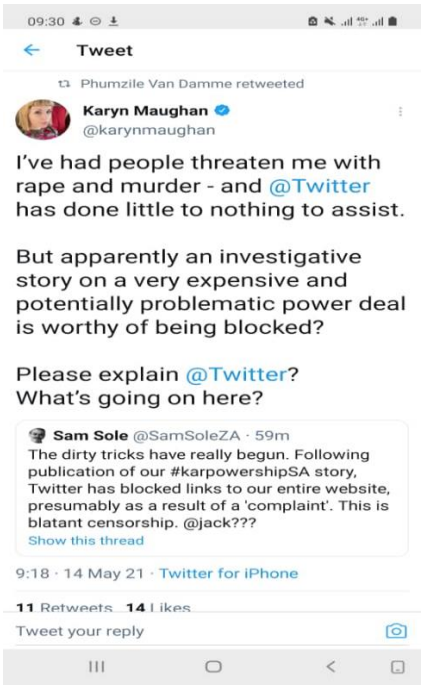



Figure 8: A post shared by Maughan on her X profile after receiving death and rape threats for doing her investigative journalism work and no action was taken by the social media platform , X,14 May 2021.

Maughan has received rape and death threats from X users. However, as shown above in Figure 9 her efforts to seek help from X did not yield any results.

A torrent of vicious online attacks was unleashed on Karyn Maughan as she faced a now invalidated private prosecution by former President Jacob Zuma. In an article in *News 24*, Maughan (2023) noted how the threats she was receiving were using rape as a weapon to silence her. Maughan highlighted that,

> *…those threats were often laden with references to sexual violence. I was going to be repeatedly raped when I was jailed, I was told by one anonymous X user. Close family members deleted their social media profiles. I was, at one point, too scared to stay at home*. *(Maughan, 2023).*

### 5.2.9. Slindelo Masikane

Slindelo Masikane is a broadcast journalist working as a news reporter on eNCA. Masikane's experiences of cyber misogyny can be seen to show the complexity and

interconnectedness of offline and online harassment of women. Masikane experienced thousands of social media posts which were bullying and threatening her following her tweeting of the violence she had encountered while on site covering a protest.

In an interview on online violence against women journalists with Fray Intermedia, Slindelo Masikane reported having been affected by this as it led her to limit what she can share online, and she no longer chooses to share her opinions online on X This shows how women journalists have had to self-censor information because of the harassment they fear receiving from online audiences. The gendered disinformation that also arises ultimately also limits critical reporting from journalists.

#### 5.2.10. Lindsay Dentlinger

Lindsay Dentlinger is an eNCA journalist who has experienced harassment and racist slurs. Dentlinger received widespread backlash following post budget interviews she was conducting during the height of COVID-19. As a result, she had been accused of racism in her treatment of black and white interviewees. In addition, she reported having received rape threats following this incident. Social media users took to X to show their criticism of the act and some of the comments quickly turned to cyber bullying. Dentlinger faced death threats from users on the platform. These attacks were also intersected with ageism, with users on X calling her “gogo”.

### 5.3. Forms of cyber misogyny

The experiences documented in the above cases show that there are multiple and converging online attacks levelled against women journalists. It is not only one form of abuse that a journalist may experience and the forms of abuse often intersect. This will be discussed further below.

#### 5.3.1. Rape and death threats

Some women journalists were threatened with death threats when they posted on social media. The research shows that rape and death threats are some of the most popular forms of gender trolling of women online. Death threats instill a sense of fear and anxiety, not only for the journalists own safety but also for those around them. Unlike other forms of misogyny peddled through social media, life threatening

comments and messages may feel more severe, pressuring the journalists to refrain from covering or reduce their coverage of certain stories.

The intensity of rape and death threats indicate a propensity of these forms of attacks to escalate (Posetti, Maynard & Shabbir, 2022). The intensity of these threats are also argued by Lumsden and Morgan (2017) to be part of the lingua franca of trolls. Gqola (2021) also solidifies the argument regarding the intensity of rape threats noting that rape threats effectively serve as a reminder that women's safety and bodily autonomy are not guaranteed. With this kind of threat coming from usually male trolls rape threats represent an exercise of power of women. In addition, these form part of rape culture, in essence, mirroring the violence that occurs against women offline. Thus, feeding into the hegemonic notion that masculinity condones physical and emotional sexual aggression against women.

### 5.3.2. Weaponising words: Interpellation[6] or hailing

Women journalists are also facing name calling and shaming on X. Name calling is often a tactic used by online trolls to demean and defame women journalists into silence. Words such as "bitch", "cunt", "whore", and "sfebe[7]" have been used to attack journalists whilst they do their work.

This name calling, hailing, and subjecting an individual to a particular identity can be understood as interpellation (Daniels & Skinner, 2022). The implication of interpellation is how it undermines the role of the media in a democracy. It undermines the role of the media as it expects the subjects, in this case the journalists, to conform to certain standards and expectations. Its purpose is to subjugate and muzzle them from speaking on certain topics and the consequences have been reported to be serious for example in the disinformation about journalists such as Haffajee discussed above. Interpellation can have also have detrimental mental health effects on the journalist.

[6] Interpellation involves name calling, derision, hailing shaming and subjecting an individual to a particular identity ( Daniels & Skinner, 2022)

[7] Sfebe is used as colloquial for prostitute,

Furthermore, these demeaning utterances targeting women seek to undermine them by using their bodies and natural occurrences in the life of a woman for example in the case of Madia and Hunter as well as Mokoena discussed above. This signals patriarchal tendencies of devaluing women and women's roles in society. They play into cultural taboos on issues for example such as menstruation, which in many cultures has for very long been seen as shameful and embarrassing; and does not allow women to participate meaningfully in social activities during their menstrual cycle. These attacks also serve as a warning and are used as scare tactics for other journalists who question politicians and who seem to want to dig deeper into issues.

Ageism also manifests in name calling that has been experienced by women journalists in the mainstream media. This feeds into the narrative of journalism being for youthful, beautiful women on the television screens**.** Journalists such as Lindsay Dentlinger and Sophie Mokoena have been constantly called "gogo"[8] on X.

**Interpellation (or Name calling and shaming)**

***Prestitution***

Accusing women of prostitution to get ahead in life has been a strategy used by misogynists to also undermine and discredit women by invoking morality issues against women who dare to speak out, have a voice and are a force to be reckoned with. Calling women prostitutes undermines women.

### 5.3.3. Body Shaming

Another form of gender abuse that the journalists discussed above was body shaming. Body shaming fits into the stereotypical perceptions that certain standards of beauty are expected of women. By personally attacking journalists about the way they look, this nature of insult seeks to degrade and ridicule them, and erase their confidence but also divert attention from the critical issue they are raising in their reporting.

### 5.3.4. Fake images

Fake images as can be seen from the case studies above, is another form of online misogyny suffered by women journalists. Posetti and Shabbir (2022) noted that deep fakes are a new weapon used to target women journalists. This can be seen in the

[8] Gogo is the colloquial term for grandmother

images and experiences highlighted in Ferial Haffajee's case study. The effect of these fake images on journalists is to ridicule and shame them from reporting. These fake imaged are also used in conjunction with other forms of misogyny such as gender trolling and name calling to attack women.

### 5.4. Cyber misogyny toll on women journalists

#### 5.4.1. Threat to journalists' credibility

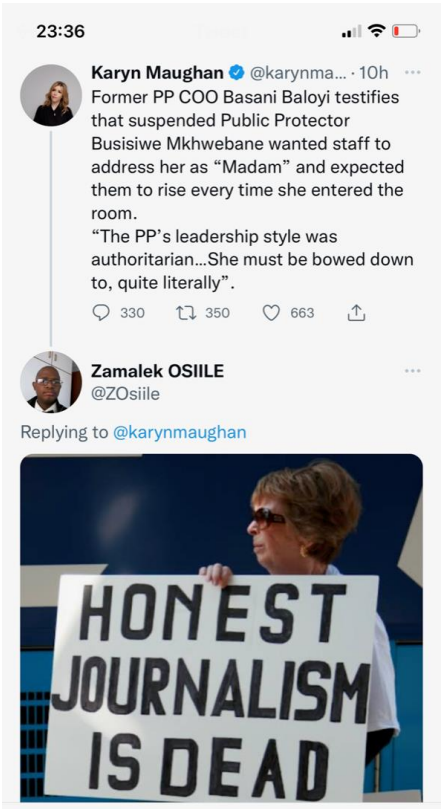



Figure 9: Karyn Maughan's news X post is discredited by a follower.

The women journalists are constantly told they have no credibility, are liars, are biased and peddle fake news. They have also been called "trash journalists" and that they don't know journalism practice. For example, Maughan has been dismissed and discredited by followers as shown in Figure 10, where a follower sent under Maughan's X post a meme suggesting honest journalism is dead. Another example is of Sophie Mokoena. She has been constantly told she has lost credibility while others argue that she never had it in the first place. Other X users have called her "Tsotsie Mokoena", replacing her name with the term Tsotsie which means crook. She has also been warned by X users to stop "poking" her nose in affairs of neighbouring countries, yet, reporting on other countries is part of her job. Mokoena, who is the Africa editor at SABC, reports on regional stories but has been accused of having an "obsession "with reporting on neighboring countries and that the media house must restrain and rein in Mokoena. Some X users have called on the SABC to fire her; in essence, discrediting her work.

This can be argued to amount to gendered misinformation about journalists which seeks to portray them as unreliable sources of information, undermining and drowning out the real reporting that they are doing on the ground. Consequently, gendered

misinformation portrays women journalists as incompetent in their different lines of reporting.

### 5.4.2. Silencing journalists

Journalists who are attacked seem to have written extensively on contentious news topics, in particular politics. In an interview with *News 24*, Haffajee (2017) highlighted that she and other journalists who had written about State Capture were being trolled in a bid to silence them. Other political stories that seem to heighten the attacks are party politics in the ruling ANC party but also when politicians in the opposition such as the EFF are questioned.

### 5.4.3. Mental damage

Although some journalists have accepted this as part of the job, others have exposed how damaging this has been on their mental health. Hunter, for example has come out describing the traumatic experiences of misogyny online on her. She has become a champion of mental health support in the media industry.

## 5.5. Response strategies

This section documents the resistance strategies deployed by journalists in response to the cyber misogyny they are experiencing on X. As much as women journalists have been experiencing cyber misogyny, all the women discussed in this chapter have attempted to find resistance strategies. Journalists are pushing forward on the push back and this is being deployed in various ways in response to the misogyny faced online. Women journalists have found various ways to counter and negotiate this misogyny as a way to continue with their work. Some of the journalists have viewed this as part of the job and the sacrifices demanded to make a mark or as a “badge of honour” in journalism. Others have resisted this narrative, opting to push back, and seek support in ending the cyber misogyny they have been experiencing. Women journalists have acted by slowing down their X use while not totally leaving the practice because of these attacks. This in itself is a sign of resistance from being pushed out in an environment where they should be able to exercise their freedom of expression and participate equally.

### 5.5.1. Report, block, delete

In her book chapter *The Hounding,* in the book *Women journalists in South Africa* (Daniels and Skinner, 2022) which was a personal account of her experiences in journalism, Haffajee (2022:10) writes that *"Online abuse has become so commonplace that taking it in and blocking is part of the daily routine now. Just occasionally, you have to fight back."* This shows how cyber misogyny has become so prevalent and normalised that it is considered a routine part of journalism, and blocking has become an essential survival skill for women journalists.

Women journalists resort to blocking profiles of users who attack them in a bid to counter the persistent attacks they were experiencing. Some of the journalists, for example, Madia has indicated on X that she now uses this option to resist the attacks as she continues to receive attacks from perpetrators. She noted in the X post below




Figure 10: An X post by Madia showing how she will silence trolls on her page, X, 7 June 2022

Mokoena has also used X to warn X followers that she will use blocking as a tactic to silence the trolls who are standing in the way of doing her job. Figure 12 pose she made on how she will deal with trolls.

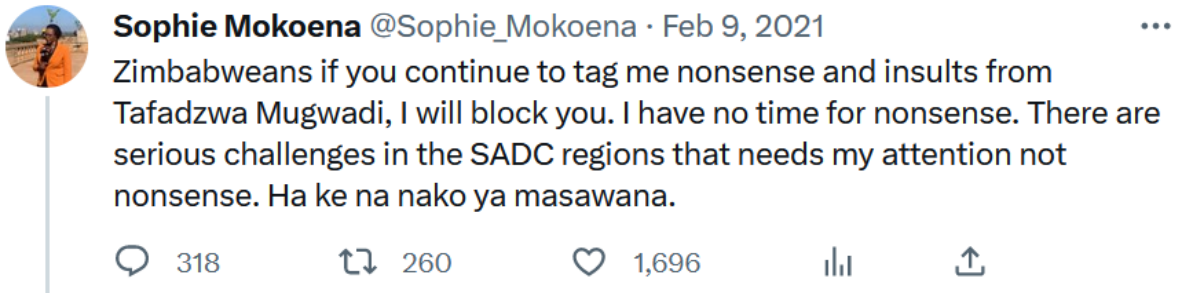



Figure 11: An X post by Mokoena warning trolls that will block them for incivility on her X posts., 9 February 2021.

In an interview with Fray Intermedia (2023), Masikane advised other journalists that a survival technique when faced with online violence is to ignore the noise. Block and delete anything that does not serve you.

These strategies seem to be built on the need to shield oneself from the noise that comes from the attacks on X. This can be argued to be a short term solution which does not solve the systemic violence on this platform as the trolls reincarnate themselves in new profile when they are blocked and the vicious cycle starts again. However, as it provides a moment of silence from the perpetrator, it is one of the most readily available solutions.

### 5.2.1. Reporting harmful X posts

Several of the journalists have also mentioned reporting the posts to the X platform. This solution was argued by Maughan as ineffective to stop the harms they face online, with no clarity on how these attackers are blocked or reported persons are dealt with. She tweeted:

> *I have had people threaten me with rape and murder and @Twitter has done little to nothing to assist. But apparently an investigative story on a very expensive and potentially problematic power deal is worthy of being blocked. Please explain @Twitter? What's going on here? (Maughan, 2021.)*

Maughan has received rape and death threats from X users. However, as shown it is evident that the mechanisms provided for by X seem to be laced with double standards. This suggests a lack of trust in the way the reported harms are dealt with.

### 5.2.2. Taking legal action

It can also be observed from the above cases that some journalists took the online attacks, in particular where there were incidences of doxing, to the police. Pursuing legal action could prove to be an effective action against perpetrators, as in some instances journalists can be seen to be winning the cases, for example, in the case of Karima Brown. However, legal action may not be as effective if a journalist does this on her own. McCully (2019), argues that, because journalists often face legal action in their line of work with cases being brought against them, they cannot be expected to pursue this proactively on their own. This is where the support from the media house they are associated with may come in. Another challenge arising from legal action is still the weak mechanisms that are associated with reporting an incident that has happened online, even in cases where one cannot easily identify the attacker.

### 5.5.3. Reaching out to the trolls

According to Haffajee (2022) journalists such as Maughan have also resorted to engaging some of the trolls or accounts who have attacked her and joined the X mob. “I sometimes message people who threaten to kill me…My experience is that people back down. I’m never rude or abusive,” Haffajee (2022:74). Journalists such as Haffajee and Hunter are committed to taking on not only the perpetrators who have attacked them but also fighting on behalf of other journalists. Haffajee, while still editor of the *Huffington Post South Africa*, was reported to have to be on mission to take on online attackers. She gave herself the responsibility of finding the perpetrators as a means to protect not only herself but journalism as whole.

None of the journalists in the case study have entirely removed themselves from the X platform. This might be because, although it is not a requirement for their jobs, social media platforms such as X have become an integral part of their work. In line with the changing journalistic routines, these platforms are a lifeline for journalists to be able to share content and engage audiences.

### 5.5.4. Journalists do not respond to these comments

Ignoring the attacks and responding to the trolls seems to be a strategy that stops the abuse from carrying on but this is seen by the perpetrators as a way of running away or validating the claims being made about the journalists. Not responding to the trolls

feeds into the common advice of “do not feed the trolls” in an attempt to not engage with the inflammatory comments and is a way to diminish the impact of the misogyny.

### 5.5.5. Supporting each other

Journalists amplified each other’s stories and also sympathised with each on these experiences. For example, as shown in Figure 13, van Wyk showed her public support for a fellow journalist. The post also reiterates a strong conviction about the role of the media in a democracy and the importance of journalism practice within a democracy.




Figure 13: X post from van Wyk standing up for Maughan who was abused online, X, 22 March 2023.

According to Trionfi and Luque (2019), colleagues and friends are the best support system to counter attacks. Women journalists identified support from peers and the organisation they are associated with as some of the coping strategies.

The support from fellow journalists appear to be in the form of comments of solidarity where journalists have stood together or encouraged and praised each other for not giving into the attacks. Even male journalists and editors stand up for the women journalists when being attacked online. A sense of community of women who are surviving this on a day to day basis seems to be there and journalists openly support each other.

### 5.5.6. Conclusion

This chapter detailed the online misogyny that women journalists are routinely exposed to. Through the evidence collected in this study, it can be seen that online media which was argued by early internet theorists, through a utopian view, to be an environment known for its freedoms which will enable equality can be detrimental for women journalists who have received varying forms of misogyny online.

The findings in this chapter show that online platforms are a dark place for women. It shows that cyber misogyny in its varying forms is being experienced by women journalists in South Africa with specific characteristics similar to those identified globally, including sexist attacks. These forms of misogynistic attacks have included sexualised attacks such as rape and death threats, attacks using sexual innuendos, doxing and name calling, as well as more symbolic forms of violence such as the devaluation of women. There is also no doubt that these experiences are triggered by the stories that the journalists cover. Certain topics, in particular politics and the coverage of some political elites, are key triggers for abuse. There is also no doubt that these attacks have been deployed by perpetrators as silencing strategies that seek to remove the journalist from participation and dissuade them from freely expressing themselves and from writing about the stories they cover.

The experiences collated in this chapter show that cyber misogynistic attacks on women journalists have been experienced at both at a professional and personal level. It is clear that women journalists are trolled and abused for posting any kind of content, and for sharing news stories and comments on pressing news stories of the day. In this chapter, it is shown that women's experiences of cyber misogyny impact their practice of journalism in various ways. The chapter also demonstrates that women journalists' strategies to negotiate this violence, although useful, may not be adequate as the attacks continue to escalate.

The examples of the different forms of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists are a sign of unchecked sexism which has been allowed due to a lack of legal and policy mechanisms, a lack of action from big technology companies, and insufficient or lack of policies in media houses. It also demonstrates that these orchestrated cyber misogynistic attacks impact on the credibility of women journalists in an era where there is a lot of misinformation and a struggle for the truth online. This inevitably attempts to portray women journalists as incompetent in their different lines of reporting. The cases of cyber misogyny in this chapter show the traumatic impact on women journalists, intersecting all aspects of their lives including individually, professionally and personally.

The findings in this chapter suggest that women journalists are vilified because they are women, it is a gendered attack. In addition, they are then sexualised and vilified for the way they look, their bodies, their age, and their race in an attempt to shut them up and put their work in disrepute. The misogyny outlined in this chapter is not happening in a vacuum. It must be understood in relation to the violence that occurs in the broader society. It mirrors the gender-based discrimination, victimisation and gender power dynamics that characterise women's experiences on a day to day basis whether in society or in the media itself. It redeploys existing manifestations of gender-based violence in society onto a different platform with much greater intensity, reach and speed. According to Unesco and UN Women (2019), GBV is regarded as one of the worst human rights abuses. Violence against women in South Africa is very pervasive. It is reflective of the environment in which women journalists thrive in order to do their jobs. This gendered trolling that occurs is also, therefore, intersectional in nature and not one aspect is used to degrade and vilify women journalists. Beyond gender, women were being attacked for their race and age too. This shows how the experiences of cyber misogyny intersect with many variables of women identities. Furthermore, the chapter shows that platforms such as X, also facilitate the perpetuation of patriarchy across borders (as in Sophie Mokoena's case) demonstrating its ubiquitous nature. This argument builds from Gqola's assertions in her book the *Female Fear factory* where she argues that "patriarchy does not respect national boundaries. It is unabashedly promiscuous in its influences and tethers" (Gqola 2021:46).

Findings from this chapter also show that women have a marked tendency to resist the violence they face online. Women journalists are deploying various defensive tactics in order to negotiate the cyber misogyny they face. This feeds into changing journalistic practices as new practices of evading and pushing back against audiences when one feels unsafe are surfacing. This goes against already morphing journalistic routines which, theoretically, argued that there would be more engagement of audiences, afforded through the use of social media. Holton and Bossio (2023) buttress this perspective as they point out that the resistant strategies which are deployed by journalists as they experience social media fatigue are influencing new professional practices. This includes disconnecting from social media use and, thus, a disconnection from the pool of audiences afforded to them by platforms like X. As

demonstrated, some journalists respond with strategies such as blocking, not responding, and taking legal action. These occurrences and stepping back or reduction in posting or engagement shows how the misogyny is proving to be successful in silencing women voices and impinging on their freedom of expression in public debate and conversations on issues.

As Jane (2018) argued, cyber misogyny derails women's work lives and this can be seen here, where journalists have had to refocus on defending themselves and steering away from discussing certain issues. Misogynistic and patriarchal hegemonic practices aimed at limiting women's public participation which exist offline are replayed online through platforms like X. To avoid such attacks, journalists censor or mute themselves.

The political orientation of some of the audiences comes out when their leaders are criticised in the news, making politics one of the drivers in which audiences express their hegemonic power over journalists. It was discernible in this chapter that cyber misogyny became pronounced during heightened political situations or when there are pressing stories involving politicians. For example, the VBS Mutual Bank money scandal investigations by van Wyk; and the Gupta scandal written on extensively by Haffajee. Politicians and their supporters seem intolerant to the mentions of their names and involvement in such stories, and, as such, the journalists become the easiest targets because of their investigations. However, despite the attacks that kept bombarding the journalists because of these stories, they did not back off their investigative reporting of these stories. Attacks are designed by individuals but also groups who rally behind certain political forces.

Observing these experiences through a radical cyber feminist lens, it can be argued that it is evident that the internet and its tools such as social media are not free from the innate, old, patriarchal struggles that women contend with. The pervasiveness of online violence that is unleashed on women journalists when they report affects the diversity of the press making it unappealing and leaving fewer women journalists to cover the "hard" stories and more male journalists tackling political stories. This may reinforce the gender imbalance that is already found in newsrooms including the gendered division of labour as discussed in the literature review. It also reinforces the

stereotypes that political news coverage is for men and women cannot handle the pressures of such a newsbeat. If online threats continue to dispossess women of the practice of journalism, it, in turn, disadvantages society from receiving news from diverse voices and impinges on the role of the media in a democracy.

Globally and societally we must create more strategies to respond to the misogyny faced online. The responsibility does not lie on the survivor to ensure they are safe online. Responsibility must be taken by multiple parties including media houses, the big technology companies, governments and more.

**Chapter Six: Cyber misogyny on X is alive and well**

This chapter synthesises the findings from the interviews with five media development as well as feminist organisations. These organisations work throughout South Africa on various media development issues, chief among them to strengthen media practice in various capacities. They are some of the few organisations in the media space who are raising their voices and advocating for the end of cyber misogyny against women journalists in the country.

The chapter comprises a discussion on the themes emanating from the thematic analysis. Thus, providing examples of women's experiences and linking the findings of the data to the literature on this topic as well as the theoretical frameworks and concepts used for this research. The chapter brings together responses from the civil society organisations in an attempt to answer the research questions for this study. Interviewees helped to answer this dissertation's research questions on the nature of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists in South Africa and how cyber misogyny against women journalists affects their practice. It also gave insights into the strategies women journalists deploy to negotiate cyber misogyny. These interviews also corroborate the evidence found in the personal experiences of women journalists**.**

The following questions were asked of the media development organisations and feminist organisations:

- Are journalists experiencing cyber misogyny on Twitter[9]? If yes, what is the nature/form and extent of this in South Africa?
- Can you describe what you have observed of women journalists being targeted and vilified online?
- How do you think cyber misogyny against women journalists affects their journalism practice?
- Can you identify and describe the usual perpetrators of this violence? Are they organised?
- What news topics usually trigger cyber misogyny for women journalists?
- What strategies are journalists using to negotiate cyber misogyny they are experiencing online? Have they worked?
- What kind of support have you given to journalists who have experienced cyber misogyny as they practice journalism?
- What support mechanisms exist in media houses in the country when women journalists have reported experiencing online violence?
- What actions can be taken by the media houses, technology platforms, the government, the state, NGOs, the UN or its agencies to curb the problem of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists on Twitter?

The chapter uses the conceptual framework of the role of the media in a democracy to understand the impact of cyber misogyny against women journalists in South Africa, on journalism practice as a whole and on women journalists. It relates the findings to the intersection of women's voices in a democracy and free expression. It also deploys the cyber feminist theory which links gender and online cultures as well as hegemonic masculinity to understand how women are being pushed out of online media platforms such as X. The subsequent discussion is derived from themes and subthemes emanating from the data collected from the in-depth interviews. Direct quotations from the research participants responses are an integral part of this chapter so as to add depth and corroborate evidence as well as add meaning to the discussion in line with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as literature on the topic.

[9] Twitter changed its name to X. The platform is still popularly referred to as Twitter and the posts generated from it as tweets.

## 6.1. Nature of cyber misogyny

### 6.1.1 Cyber misogyny is alive and well and unfolding in multiple ways

Online toxicity against women journalists can generally be argued to be a phenomenon that existed as media organisations migrated to websites and traces of toxicity against women journalists were already apparent even though there were ways to moderate this online.

Asked whether observations from their work and knowledge about the industry showed that journalists are experiencing cyber misogyny when engaging on the platform such as X, all interviewees unanimously agreed that X was a platform where women journalists were experiencing varying forms of cyber misogyny. This includes, sexual harassment, dog whistling, body shaming, rape threats, death threats, and doxing.

In an interview with SANEF's KZN regional coordinator, Judy Sandison, she points out the following, *"Twitter has become a very big thing. It is just very toxic to such an extent that sometimes it is very useful for bringing, stories … unfortunately, it seems a lot more toxic than it is beneficial. "(*Sandison, Johannesburg, 22 May, 2023).

Sandison's assertion reflects a common understanding of how the X platform is becoming a harmful environment more than it is benefiting journalists who use it to promote their work. Sandison's perspective shows the Janus-faced aspect of platforms like X, and highlights the conundrum that lies between its usefulness in journalism such as finding sources and disseminating news with the harmful toxicity abound on the platform.

In another interview with Media Monitoring Africa Programme Manager, Thandi Smith, she summed it up saying that:

> *The straightforward answer is yes, absolutely. We see trends in the fact that it seemed to be getting more and more difficult to actually pin down clear forms of like harassment and abuse online, it's becoming quite as if the perpetrators are using almost subtle forms of harassment. So it's not something clear that you can, you know, take and, and open a case and the perpetrator is found and stops, and that's it, but sort of subtle forms of harassment, that is difficult to, to*

*stop and take down. And it's almost, it almost makes it more traumatic and, and harder to deal with, because it's something that you can't get rid of very easily. (*Smith, Johannesburg, 3 August, 2023*.)*

Smith's observations confirm that, indeed, women journalists are experiencing cyber misogyny online. An important factor arising here is the way cyber misogyny manifests is morphing into sometimes subtle ways. This can create a challenge in identifying how it manifests its different evolving forms of misogyny and may also make it difficult to address.

This finding is indeed consistent with how cyber feminist theory views online spaces, arguing that online spaces cannot be regarded as categorically liberated spaces which was the view offered by early cyber feminists. More recent cyber feminism theory argues that online technology is operational in an environment that is still very masculine. As a result of the masculine nature of the environment there is a tendency of aggression in these spaces, and subjugation of women and their views and voices.

### 6.1.2. Gender as the initial focus

Another interviewee confirmed that, indeed, cyber misogyny was waged against women journalists and this was of a gendered nature which goes to the crux of how misogyny works and what misogyny is grounded on. Amanda Strydom, Programme Manager, Code for Africa noted the following, "M*ale journalists and young male journalists very often don't face that level of which I guess is the very definition of misogyny I guess. They don't face that same level of extreme sort of hatred that is shown towards women" (*Strydom, Johannesburg, 14 June 2023). Strydom's assertion shows that, it is women journalists who are disproportionately affected by cyber misogyny compared to their male counterparts in the industry who do not receive commensurate levels of vitriol and incivility as that directed to women journalists.

Thandi Smith (2023) also concurring highlighted that,

*To, sum it up, yes, absolutely. This is cyber misogyny. And it's in clear forms of harassment online, which takes then a gendered nature. So it's a sort of form of online sexual harassment against women and against female journalists, specifically, I think another key trend to, to sort of notice is that it's often against*

*female journalists, who are sort of challenging anyone in power. (*Smith, Johannesburg, 3 August 2023*.)*

Smith's assertion articulates that the forms of violence experienced by women journalists are unequivocally identified as cyber misogyny. It manifests in explicit forms such as harassment and has a gendered dimension. It is particularly targeted at women and women journalists, especially those individual journalists who challenge positions of power.

These observations are in agreement with Jane (2014), Etherington (2015), and Ging and Siapera (2018), whose positions are that cyber misogyny is gendered online hate. This finding echoes Mantilla's (2015) assertion on gender trolling that recognises that although men also encounter violence online it is mainly about what they say. This is compared to women who are attacked on the basis of them being women where various gendered insults are unleashed on women in order to silence, demean and deter them from participation.

The study also sought to understand who the perpetrators are and whether this contributes to the nature of cyber misogyny and how it manifests. Similar to the argument raised by Mantilla (2015) that men also experience attacks online, but by its very nature misogyny is targeted primarily at women and they were facing these varying forms of misogyny online because of the fact of being women.

Therefore, these findings point to the fact that cyber misogyny in its various forms is riddled with gendered complexities. Online media platforms such as X mirror and magnify the already complex ingrained patriarchal system and its practices in society. This patriarchy is also at play in the media, as the media is a microcosm of society. As such, this patriarchy is also likely to reflect in journalism and journalism practice.

### 6.1.3. Cyber misogyny as a complex phenomenon

It is gathered from the interviews with select media development organisations that there is not one face to cyber misogyny and neither it should not be looked through a one dimensional perspective. The responses emanating from the interviews show that cyber misogyny is a complex phenomenon, whether looking at how it manifests itself,

or how different facets can respond to it. It is evident from the responses that cyber misogyny against women journalists is not happening in a single form but multiple forms that happen concurrently. Additionally, it does not happen in isolation but create a barrage of attacks on women journalists which, at times, are difficult to track. Interviewees also note that cyber misogyny in itself is also ever changing which adds to the complexity in understanding how it manifests and how journalists can protect themselves and also how newsrooms themselves can respond to this phenomenon. While it can be responded to, there is not one clear way to achieve this. This argument is consistent with Sampaio-Dias *et al.'s* (2024) perspectives on online violence against women journalists which argue that this phenomenon carries unprecedented complexity for journalists. This includes the fact that it is global, has differing regional dimensions where journalists are targeted differently, thus, has multiple causes and requires multiple responses.

### 6.1.4. Rooted in patriarchy: A continuum of violence against women

It also emerges from the interviews that by its nature cyber misogyny is rooted in the already existing patriarchal system, reflecting inequalities that women have traditionally faced. Barker and Jurasz (2019) argue that cyber misogyny is not simply an online problem but it is interconnected with what happens in both offline as well as online society.

As Mabweazara and Mare (2021) write about online harassment, hate speech and ethnic stereotypes, online and offline harassment feed off and into each other in complex but also systematic ways. This shows the symbiotic relatedness of what occurs offline and online, and the kind of systems upon which it is grounded. In this case, the patriarchal system that, loosely put, demeans women and perceives women as subservient and less equal to men. In relation to this, interviewees noted that women journalists in the country are encountering various forms of cyber misogyny which are closely linked to the violence that happens against women in the offline world. For example, Amanda Strydom (2023), said, *"You cannot be looking at just what happens online in isolation of the "normal" patriarchy that happens in newsrooms, and who is who and look at who is in leadership, particularly in South Africa," (*Strydom, Johannesburg, 14 June 2023).

The above perspective underscores the importance of not treating online and offline violence as a dichotomy, that is, as two separate phenomena. This violence is occurring from and is embedded in the broader context of entrenched patriarchy within newsrooms and also within society itself. It also brings out the need to comprehensively understand and scrutinise the prevailing gender dynamics at play in the media sector when it comes or leadership and power in South Africa's media.

In a separate interview, and speaking in agreement to the above assertion, Viljoen (2023) highlighted the following:
*So there is online misogyny that happens and that cannot be separated. It happens hand in hand with the social norms and values that are set in those newsrooms by their own colleagues. And I think when we look at what is happening online, we cannot discount that level of misogyny that is actually happening and reinforces the challenges that women journalists face, because it's both in the workplace, and it's online. (Vlijoen, Johannesburg, 7 June, 2023).*

In concurring with Strydom's assertion, Viljoen's perspective notes the inextricability of online misogyny from the established social norms and values that are in operation in the newsroom. It can be derived from this perspective that cyber misogyny coexists within the culture that exists in the media already, as online misogyny is a reflection of what happens offline. It underscores the compounding effect of misogyny, arguing that as it manifests online within the physical workspace in the newsrooms, it is reinforced by online dynamics as women journalists navigate and work and practice online.

Sandison also noted that there's still a lot of sexism in our society, particularly for Black Women Journalists. For them, it is even worse, because they have a double burden online (Sandison, 2023). Sandison's perspective suggests that society, as it stands today, reflects its sexism onto online platforms and is still grappling with significant amounts of sexism. And, in particular, black women journalists are experiencing heightened levels of such sexism. She also contends that this sexism is exacerbated by a dual burden experienced by women journalists particularly as they operate in online spaces. Sandison also points to the heightened experiences of sexism at the intersection of gender and race contributing to increased challenges for women journalists.

These findings are consistent with Jane's (2016) argument that offline social problems are consistent with the new and emerging gendered online hate, where there has been an extension of the existing social problems into the online world. This argument is in alignment with Mabweazara and Mare's (2021) assertion that online and offline violence feed off each other in complex manifestations. It also confirms Jane's (2016) argument which posits that there is a similarity between present day gendered cyber hate and key social problems (namely rape, domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment) that are happening in broader society. Therefore, cyber misogyny is not happening in isolation of society nor happening in silos, but is connected and taking place as one broad complex phenomenon.

In addition, these findings which point to the interrelation between what is happening online and offline is also consistent with Lori Kendall's counter argument to the idea that the internet is a utopian environment where women can flourish (Daniels, 2009). Kendall argues that internet technologies reflect and replicate masculine and hierarchal structures of power that play out in society. As such, it can be argued that hegemonic masculinities, which define hierarchical power structures, are at play favouring dominant voices which are that of men and stifling women's voices and participation in online spaces. Thus, contributing to limiting the role of the media. It can, therefore, be argued the cyber misogyny is rooted in power and control. There are those who think they have more power to speak and be heard compared to others.

### 6.1.5. Driven by politics and political actors

Asked what influences cyber misogyny in South Africa, interviewees unanimously argued that cyber misogyny manifests itself not just by politics. Interviewees noted that, in its nature, cyber misogyny is driven by politics, crime and corruption. It is triggered when for example, journalists are uncovering stories or are asking the hard questions. While Uwalaka and Amadi (2023) divert from the idea that gender is not a key factor in these attacks, they point out that politics and investigative reporting is a triggering factor to online harassment experienced by journalists.

Sandison (2023) noted that,

> *If it is to do with corruption, often, people who've been charged with corruption, and unfortunately, the court case has dragged on and on. And those people tend to have a lot to lose, because they've made a lot of money out of it, and they want to make more money out of it. Or they're stealing taxpayers' money stealing state money, cetera. So corruption is a big one, but also, any kind of it can be businesses who feeling threatened, and they don't want to be exposed. So then they threaten the journalist who is now writing stories about them. Yeah, so there's a range of topics, unfortunately. (*Sandison, Johannesburg, 22 May,2023).

These comments show a multipronged discourse surrounding cyber misogyny. This perspective illuminates the pervasiveness of cyber misogyny, and how it is triggered by questioning those who hold power. It shows that cyber misogyny is concerning as numerous interconnected issues such as power, corruption and business may trigger these attacks against journalists when they write about a range of topics in their work. Furthermore, the discourse emanating from Sandison's assertions reveals an interplay of this corruption by those in power, fear of exposure and a desire to silence critical voices within journalism which may be deemed a threat to the interests of those in power.

Another respondent further concurred, noting that cyber misogyny is offset when women bring power to account. The respondent noted the following:

> *When women call politicians to account. And, you know, when they call male dominance and power to account, like, for example, Ferial and others, then they see there's a lot of backlash from men and parties and politicians, and it's almost as if women should not try to put this that we should not, you know, who are we to call some powerful men to account*? (Rama, Johannesburg, 7July 2023).

The above standpoint outlines a discourse on the challenges faced by women journalists who hold powerful figures accountable, particularly in the political sphere. It suggests that when women, exemplified by seasoned journalists like Ferial Haffajee, challenge male dominance and political power they encounter backlash from men and their political allies, political parties and political following. This argument implies a

societal resistance to women questioning or holding influential men accountable, reflecting deeply ingrained gender dynamics. This discourse, thus, also highlights the tensions that exist between gendered dynamics, power structures and societal expectations that continuously question women's roles in holding the powerful to account.

Still in alignment with the above assertion, Thandi Smith Programme Manager at Media Monitoring Africa also showed how corruption, power, and politics are a major trigger of cyber misogyny and how it unfolds. She highlighted the following:

> *I think another key trend to, to sort of notice is that it's often against female journalists, who are who are sort of challenging anyone in power. So if a female journalist exposes a story about a sort of corruption scandal, or some kind of expose against a politician, or someone in a powerful position, you'll often find that kind of triggers a response*. (Smith, Johannesburg, 22 August, 2023).

These findings also mirror what is transpiring at a global scale. Global studies, such as that done by Posetti *et al.* (2022), also found that the themes which influence the most heightened misogynistic attacks are ones they were reporting on including gender, politics, elections, human rights and special policy. The findings also suggest that the misogynist experiences encountered by women journalists aim to suppress women's participation on public and political discourse. And, in doing so endeavour to mute their voices when it comes to topics such as politics. This then essentially diminishes women's visibility in journalism and reinforces the gender imbalances that are already in existence in journalism, particularly in an environment where women journalists who are political reporters or editors are scarce. This threatens women's practice in journalism as they might find these topics to offset attacks on them and as such steer away. This may close women out from this topic category, again limiting the diverse voices which are paramount for the functioning of a democracy.

### 6.1.6. Coordinated but at times random

The nature of cyber misogyny is that, at times, it manifests as coordinated attempts to attack and discredit women journalists. Posetti and Shabbir (2022) also argue that when it comes online violence, it is often coordinated and or orchestrated. From the

interviews in this research, it can be revealed that although there are organised attacks there are also often random cyber misogyny attacks that take place.

Thandi Smith (2023) noted the following: *So there are isolated incidents, you'll see kind of ad hoc comments and people who just have some kind of personal vendetta and personal agenda. But where you do see very coordinated attacks, or kind of networks is when it comes from more of a political base.* (Smith, Johannesburg, 22 August, 2023).

These sentiments by Smith infer that, indeed, there may be isolated incidences arising from individual grievances. On the other hand, there are also more organised and systematic attacks that women journalists face which may be derived from political affiliations that audiences may have. Although these kind of attacks against women seem to co-exist side by side, there is a distinction in terms of influence between the sporadic, ad hoc criticisms that may occur versus the more organised online vitriol campaigns that may be driven by a broader agenda.

Concurring with Posetti and Shabbir, respondent Amanda Strydom (2023) highlighted the following:

> *Some of it is very coordinated, you know, that is kind of like tagging, someone on the post and going like, hey, look, what, you know, X person is saying about, I don't know, X person, you know, or y person, and then tagging both of those things. And, of course, anyone who then sees that tweet kind of goes on onto that very dog whistling mechanism.* (Strydom, Johannesburg, 14 June 2023).

This discourse emanating from the above sentiment shows that there are distinct patterns when it comes to misogynist attacks online. There is a phenomenon of coordinated behaviour such as tagging others to join in on threads which draws attention to specific content, allowing abusive audiences to easily join in. The mention of dog whistling shows although the violence may not be explicit, it can be subtle communication that is targeted to a certain audience who may quickly join in on the attacks, but in a subtle manner where they are not easily noticed. It can be argued that through dog whistling, the coordinated attacks as devised by perpetrators can easily

spread and normalise misogynist attitudes and perceptions on platforms like X without it being immediately apparent.

### 6.2. Digital battlefield: Understanding Forms of cyber misogyny

*Women journalists are experiencing numerous types of harassment, from doxing, sharing of personal information online, to just threatening messages, to images, really degrading and dehumanising images being published* (Smith, Johannesburg, 22 August, 2023).

Interviewees recalled a wide range of forms of cyber misogyny that women journalists are facing. The forms of cyber misogyny highlighted by the respondents range from doxing; gender trolling; dog whistling; sexual harassment; body shaming; deep fakes; death threats; and rape threats. Although some of these may not be deemed as spectacular, dramatic or severe compared to death and rape threats, they must be looked at as part of the same dynamic and seeking to produce similar outcomes in this context particularly of understanding the nuances of cyber misogyny and its influence on journalism practice.

The forms of cyber misogyny recalled here are consistent with the forms of cyber misogyny that journalists reported having experienced when they detailed their experiences through stories, research, and interviews used as part of the case study data in this research. Furthermore, the forms of cyber misogyny mentioned by the respondents are consistent with findings from extant studies from across the world, particularly in newsrooms in the Global North.

However, because of the paucity of data on this issue in Africa, it cannot be generalised as a sweeping trend of what is happening across the country or across the African content. However, it can be used as indicative data to show the existence of this phenomenon and how it is manifesting. These findings, however, do resonate with findings from Daniels *et al.* (2018, 2020, 2022) that highlight cyber misogyny as a new threat to journalism manifesting as sexual online sexual harassment, trolling, and threats of violence. Below are some of the forms of violence that interviewees alluded to.

### 6.2.1. Discrediting skills

Discrediting journalistic skills that women journalists have was another form of misogynist online attacks women encountered. The interviewees recalled cases of discrediting journalists of their subject matter knowledge. Interviewees noted that this discrediting of women journalists' voices on X happened particularly when the audiences disagreed with the content or when the journalists questioned certain politicians. This happened in particular for male politicians, resulting in attacks on their journalistic skills. Interviewees noted a double standard used when it comes to women and men journalists who were not treated the same on X:

The experience of female journalists is a form of abuse that we tend to call into question. Kubi Rama, Executive Director of Gender Links asserted the following:

> …*she's almost trivialised. Like who is she to be asking those questions? … I've seen such amazing coverage on load shedding and its implications and its causes … And then I noticed that when questions are asked on Twitter, by the same female journalists, they're not taken seriously at all. And then when males start to ask the same question, there's a level of almost Well, you know, not disrespect so much as okay, there's an acknowledgement these people may know what they're talking about. And I'm talking in quite generalized terms about but it's the topics that are following you know.* (Rama, Johannesburg, 7July 2023).

From the above insights it shows that on X there is gender bias abound in what women journalists are supposed to or not supposed to speak about in their practice of journalism, particularly through platforms such as X. The finding highlights the inequity that exists in the reception of what women and men journalists speak about and the reactions that audiences may have to these. Furthermore, the differential treatment of journalists voices on X reinforces the gender imbalances in journalism as they marginalise the voices of women journalists which impacts on the role of the media. Democracy hinges on the ability of journalists to speak truth to power, and contribute to and enhance public discourse. So, when certain voices are pushed aside and muffled in their attempt to play their role in democracy, it limits the diversity of the press

and of perspectives available in the public domain. This undermines the role of the media in providing an inclusive and balanced perspective.

### 6.2.2. Sexual harassment

Findings from this study also show that sexual harassment is used extensively to silence journalists on X. All the interviewees noted that, in their field of work, they have encountered reports and complaints from journalists who had received sexual harassment on X.

Sandison (2023) noted that attacks levelled against women journalists were sexual in nature. Sandison also argued that misogyny on X is crafted in such a way to intimidate journalists, particularly because they then tend to be sexual in nature. In alignment with this observation, Smith (2023) also notes that cyber misogyny includes attacks of a sexual nature.

She noted the following: *There is a form of online sexual harassment against women and against female journalists, specifically, coming from men … against that female journalist, and the easiest form of attack on the other female journalist is then that of a sexual nature*. (Smith, Johannesburg, 22 August, 2023).

Sandison (2023) also contended that attacks are often sexual threats. She highlighted the following: *often the sexual threats, and we've seen some very experienced and tough if you like, women, journalists actually leave the profession, or leave for a year or two and then come back, but get depressed, anxious, very stressed. It's, it's serious. That's why we have to show a lot of support. (*Sandison, Johannesburg, 22 May, 2023).

### 6.2.3. Deep fakes

Deep fakes can be loosely described as manipulation of images and audio-visual material to make fake images look realistic and, in this case, enable the abuse of women online. Rehman and Laffier (2023) argue that deep fakes represent a new way of perpetrating GBV and brings with it unique harms for women who experience it. Essentially, the vulnerability of women is worsening due to these new forms of perpetrating violence against women.

Deep fakes enable perpetrators to construct certain narratives about particular journalists. In this case, many examples were given about Ferial Haffajee. These narratives serve to ridicule and demean but also cast a shadow of doubt, sexualise and insult journalists, thus, undermining their work and credibility. For example, the fake images of Haffajee that emerged showing her in compromising sexual positions. This casts a light on the disinformation and misinformation spread about particular journalists and the agenda that they serve. For example, Haffajee was depicted as a pixie, she was shown in compromised positions to frame her as working for or as a lapdog for white monopoly capital. These attacks were related to the work that she did on the Bell Pottinger scandal. The deep fakes resulted in secondary victimisation or double victimisation when the pictures were posted on X and other audiences who saw these pictures began to also ridicule and insult the journalist.

Strydom (2023) had the following to say*: another way that has been seen done to someone like Haffajee for instance, she has had her reputation kind of laundered by people creating these terribly fake images of her sort of sitting on a man's lap, and, you know, kind of going into the very kind of sexual misogyny.* (Strydom, Johannesburg, 14 June 2023).

The argument presented by Strydom above brings forth an issue of gender-based harassment and image-based abuse. Particularly, she mentions Haffajee who, as discussed in the preceding chapter, experienced a protracted battle with trolls who were tarnishing her reputation using fake images of her which portrayed her in demeaning positions with powerful men. What is also illuminated from this finding is the nexus between misogyny and imagery, and how these can be used to sexualise but also create a web of lies that can easily be believable at first glance. This becomes a tool to discredit the journalists' work, and to sexualise and perpetuate stereotypes about women who have managed to break the glass ceiling and enter into non-traditional areas of reporting.

These findings resonate with findings from global research by International Centre For Journalists (ICFJ) write this out in full if you haven't done it earlier in the chapter and UNESCO (2022), which found that women are being subjected to numerous forms of online abuse which includes misrepresentation through the manipulation of images.

The manipulation of images creates a certain narrative that may seek to put the journalist into question and they may not be trusted by audiences because the journalist is depicted as not practicing independent journalism.

### 6.3. Effects of cyber misogyny on women journalists

#### 6.3.1. Self-censorship

Cronau (1995) posits that self-censorship is the most insidious gag on the media as it is extremely subtle as audiences would not catch what has been intentionally omitted. It can be argued that through the concept of journalistic routines an aspect of self-censorship creeps into content through the selection of angles and presentation of information. However, self-censorship that is forced due to circumstances that may be surrounding a story, which results in the journalist withholding information from the public, and, ultimately, impacts access to information by the public.

In the findings emanating from the interviews, one respondent noted that:

> *On the more extreme side…people stop posting, you kind of go into very solid self-censorship mode, and you're always trying to think of what is the wave that's going to offend the least number of people all thinking, you know, am I going to post about that, because it's going to kind of set people* (Strydom, Johannesburg, 14 June 2023).

From this argument, it can be observed that there is a chilling effect on reporting and use of social media by women journalists as they can hesitate to use platforms such as X in their reporting due to a fear of backlash. This, in essence, limits journalists work and undermines the role of the media in sharing information as it creates fertile ground for self-censorship, as journalists have to be overly cautious about what they write and what they post on X. This suppresses open dialogue and engagement with online audiences which the journalists have now adopted due to changing journalistic routines. It also suppresses diverse perspectives which women journalists bring to the journalism profession.

The consequences will also be that it limits the role of the media as it inhibits them from telling the full story due to them steering away from certain topics or aspects of

that particular story. This has serious effects for freedom of the media as well as a multiplier effect in the quality and quantity of information that reaches audiences who follow these journalists online.

In the same vein of self-censorship, Smith (2023) also noted that,

> *Self-censorship has a direct impact on media freedom genuinely. So what we see is, one instance of harassment on the female journalists which dire effects on media themselves and how other female journalists choose to engage and operate online. So it really does have a very serious impact on the way that female journalists operate.* (*Smith,* Johannesburg, 3 August, 2023)

The above observation confirms the relationship between cyber misogyny, self-censorship and media freedom. It also denotes the adverse effects of cyber misogyny not only on individual journalists but on journalism in its entirety. It can, thus, be argued that self-censorship leads to limited freedom of expression for women journalists.

### 6.3.2. Silencing women journalists

The consequences of cyber misogyny are that it tends to silence women journalists. In the findings, it emerges that audiences are using violent rhetoric against women journalists intended to silence and chill their reporting.

Strydom (2023) highlights that "*what that (cyber misogynist attacks) intends to do is to silence the person that is, trying to speak"*. This argument buttresses Ging and Siapera's (2018) assertions on paradigmatic misogyny where they argue that online misogyny, with its different forms or tactics of digital violence, goes beyond affecting that one individual woman. The outcome of misogyny is not only to silence but to deter other women who may be following these conversations online to speak. News media will not enjoy freedom of the press and fully play their role in a democracy if there is no equal voice and participation for women.

### 6.3.3. Women are leaving journalism or temporarily doing so

The media development organisations noted how women were affected by cyber misogyny in various ways. For example, Rama (2023) noted that: *"I would imagine islands of stress, anxiety. You know, I think there has also been lack of withdrawal*

*from the industry. If it gets bad enough, then the option is to leave, which is very sad, (*Rama, Johannesburg, 7July 2023). While Strydom (2023) also noted that "*women, journalists actually leave the profession, or leave for a year or two and then come back, but get depressed, anxious, very stressed. It's, it's serious. That's why we have to show a lot of support*, (Strydom, Johannesburg, 14 June 2023).

The exit of women from journalism affects the individual journalists and, by extension, the media sector and therefore plurality and diversity of voice. When women do not participate in their numbers, it limits the plurality of voices which is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy, as this dissertation argued in the Introduction, rationale and aim as well as the theoretical framework and literature review. This works against what the media should ideally be as a public sphere, where there are a plurality of players and voices that co-exist.

Rosemary Viljoen (2023) also noted the following *"there is a number of women who leave journalism, who end up being so kind of beaten down within the newsroom."*

Extreme experiences are argued by respondents to often lead to women leaving the industry in the worst case scenario. This, in itself, is a way to silence journalists as they stop writing and participating in the profession.

### 6.3.4. Withdrawal from X

The cyber misogyny discussed in this thesis is mainly centred on X. Most of the experiences identified by the respondents pointed to the different forms of cyber misogyny happening on X in various formats, whether it was in inboxes or comments on the X posts made by the journalists. The respondents pointed to X as one of the most toxic social media platforms. This concurs with Amnesty International 2018 research and Posetti *et al.* (2021), who argue that social media platforms such as X are the vectors and enablers of cyber misogyny against women journalists.

### 6.3.5. Psychological influence

Psychological harm is one of the most worrying consequences of misogyny on women. According to global research by the IFJ, one of the most worrying trends amongst women journalists who reported suffering online harassment was psychological harm

such as anxiety and stress. Of those surveyed in the IFJ study, 63% reported having experienced psychological effects. This shows the extent and intensity of mental ramifications brought about by cyber misogyny. Findings from this research resonate with this, noting psychological harm as a concern for women journalists. The respondents unanimously noted that as journalists were experiencing different kinds of harassment online this was affecting them psychologically. It had personal influences as well as an influence on journalism practice generally.

The interviewees noted many psychological effects that cyber misogyny seems to bring on the journalists which may include stress, fear and anxiety. Although women journalists push forward despite the pushback which shows the resilience they have, this does not mean there are no mental ramifications to this experience. Judy Sandison (2023) from SANEF reinforced this finding noting that, *we have seen some very experienced and tough if you like, women, journalists actually leave the profession, or leave for a year or two and then come back, but get depressed, anxious, very stressed. It is serious.* (Sandison, Johannesburg, 22 May, 2023).

This perspective shows the seriousness of the psychological impact that comes along with cyber misogyny on women journalists work and practice. It suggests that even the most experienced and resilient journalists have had to contend with the psychological effects which at times have had to slow down in their practice due to challenges such as anxiety and depression.

### 6.4 Conclusion: Forms of resistance against cyber misogyny

Media development organisations also noted that responding to cyber misogyny in the newsrooms is complicated, however, journalists had preferred ways of negotiating the cyber misogyny experiences which work for individual journalists.

The interviewees were asked what strategies women journalists developed to respond to cyber misogyny and if these are working to stop cyber misogyny. The interviews noted that journalists in South Africa are using various strategies to circumvent cyber misogyny. However, they also noted that these were not adequate and their efforts need to be complimented in order to be strengthened. These measure include ignoring and closing accounts, and exposing perpetrators.

### 6.4.1. Ignore

Smith (2023) noted that, *It's really disheartening, because what you tend to do is just ignore a lot of the harassment and attacks, and try and not engage and not fuel the harassment, and so I think, you know, first and foremost, you tend to just comb through the content and just tried to disassociate and ignore what has been in our mind*. (Smith, Johannesburg, 3 August, 2023)

This finding resonates as one of the most common response tactics used by journalists. This is also consistent with findings from other research where one of the most popular ways to negotiate violence was to ignore it.

### 6.4.2. Taking legal action

Barker and Jurasz (2019) argue that online platforms such as social media are the digital equivalents of the public sphere which was envisioned by Habermas. As such, even though cyber misogyny is a modern phenomenon, the laws that govern offline spaces must also be able to govern online spaces and the way they operate. This came out through the interviews with the respondents from the media development organisation and the feminist organisation. Journalists who are suffering misogyny are not taking the legal route as they see the inadequate protections provided by the law.

The respondents noted that very few women journalists had used the legal action route as a way to negotiate the violence they had experienced on social media.

Journalists seem to also only take legal action informed by the intensity of the violation. However, when they do, there seems to be support from colleagues and other stakeholders. Thandi Smith (2023) noted the following about the use of legal action:

> *Where it becomes a very real threatening action we have seen journalists going the route of getting interdicts or protection orders, but it becomes difficult if you don't know exactly who the person is, that is, that is posted in the comments. I mean, it's easy to get an interdict or get a protection order against a physical person or someone that you know, or can identify, but that is very difficult to do. If, if, you know, if it's if it's more than, than just a handful of people. Where*

> *journalists want to take legal action, that there we do see quite a lot of support in terms of certainly of supporting journalists.* (*Smith,* Johannesburg, 3 August, 2023).

This perception denotes the complexities around taking legal action against online trolls and abusers due to the supposed affordances of the veil of anonymity that the internet provides. This illuminates the hurdles that women journalists face when they have to navigate legal recourse processes. While one can get a court interdict or protection against an individual offline, this may not be an easy process when considering the online dimensions. Also of consideration are the troll armies which may consist a large number of people, some whom you one cannot easily identify through an X profile name alone. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities of support which journalists receive from various entities.

The argument put forward above suggests that there is a need for robust legal frameworks and mechanisms, that are easier to navigate in order to address cyber misogyny. If legal action was to be strengthened, then the misplaced idea of perpetrators hiding behind the veil of anonymity with a sense that no action will be taken against them will become an antiquated perception.

### 6.4.3. Final reflection

All the respondents from the media development organisations and feminist organisations interviewed acknowledged the presence of online violence that is being experienced by women journalists on X. X was regarded by all respondents as one of the most unsafe online platforms together with other social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp that journalists are also using. The abuse moves beyond the sexism levelled against women journalists to them being viewed as non- serious journalists belittling how they practice journalism or their skills in journalism.

As discussed in this chapter, misogynistic abuse undermines the role of the media in a democracy and also undermines the ideal of the internet as an inclusive participatory space as the online public sphere. Furthermore, the chapter shows the interplay between cyber misogyny, media freedom, as well as individual freedom of expression for women journalists.

The issue of cyber misogyny being a threat to journalism practice in the country came up very strongly in the interviews. The respondents from the media development and feminist organisations noted that the newsroom and media company responses are central in tackling cyber misogyny against journalists. As such, media companies need to develop such guidelines. It can also be argued that the interconnectedness of issues raised in this chapter is imperative for there to be a comprehensive response to cyber misogyny. This must include legal frameworks and mechanisms, society in itself, media houses, as well as digital platforms in order for this response to be multi-dimensional and create effective strategies.

## Chapter Seven: Media ecosystem blind to unbridled cyber misogyny

This chapter seeks to reach an in-depth understanding of what media companies are doing, if anything at all, in response to cyber misogyny against women journalists. This chapter coheres data from interviews with media development organisations or NGOs as well as editors and managers in media houses. It also uses archival information from news reports, seminars, discussions and research to understand how media companies are responding to the growing problem of cyber misogyny.

As discussed in previous chapters, women journalists have deployed various interventions to protect themselves online. However, the question is: should this be women journalists' responsibility? Any measures against cyber misogyny need to be grounded in institutional practice by the media companies who employ women journalists. This chapter begins to explore the various initiatives undertaken by media companies in response to cyber misogyny to stop the abuse, raise awareness and empower women in digital spaces.

The chapter uses the concept of newsroom routines to argue that the changing environment which exists in newsrooms and newsroom practices in journalism is the result of incorporation of digital technologies. It also makes use of the theoretical frameworks contained in democratic theory such as the role of the media in a democracy, freedom of expression, and gender equality as a lens to understand media house responses to cyber misogyny.

The following questions were asked of the news organisations:

- Does your news organisation require/expect journalists to have an online presence?
- Do you have any strategies in place to combat cyber misogyny? Please describe them?
- What support mechanisms exist in your media house when women journalists have reported violence in the newsroom?

### 7.1. The role of news companies

In earlier research focusing on the intersections of journalism and X (formerly Twitter) in Australia, United States of America and South Africa, Posetti (2009) found that media houses were sceptical about the use of platforms such as X in journalism, even though X was becoming a vital journalistic tool. With current changes in journalism, the relationship between journalists and X is becoming increasingly interconnected (Molyneux & McGregor, 2021). There is growing interdependence on social media platforms such as X which have become an important instrument for journalists and media companies. In South Africa, media companies are embracing technological affordances by extending their publications and broadcasts onto digital platforms, (Wasserman, 2020). There are even web only news platforms such as *News 24* that have become particularly popular and are significant media organisations in the sector with key stories breaking online before they appear on print or broadcast services. Of course, verification of what breaks online is a big issue.

### 7.2 Journalists being attacked simply for doing their jobs

As argued by Posetti *et al* (2020), women journalists are facing unprecedented levels of cyber misogyny as a direct result of their work. The 2018 Glass Ceiling research by Gender Links and SANEF also revealed that women journalists may be more susceptible to cyber misogyny due to the nature of their journalistic work. This is because they report on events and issues that are political and in the domain of male power, and this is what appears to attract undesirable and uncivil reactions.

With the above in mind, this research argues that, in a workplace setting, cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists is an issue that should be responded to both by local media companies as employers, as well as the international big technology companies such as X and Facebook, with the media company in the forefront. This is in line with Martin's (2018) argument which reasons that, online safety strategies must be considered as multi-pronged and not be framed as individual personal safety issues but rather as requiring better support from a cross section of stakeholders including peers, employers, legal and political stakeholders.

The argument in this dissertation is in tandem with this, that is to say, cyber misogyny should not be framed as a personal safety issue and a women's only issue. This is a

freedom of expression and misogynistic scourge that needs a multi-pronged response from both local and international media companies, governments and state actors, and civil society. This dissertation therefore also argues that aspects of media companies' responses to cyber misogyny must be seen as part of larger efforts of protecting the role of the media in a democracy and freedom of the press as cyber misogyny infringes on press freedom.

International scholars such as Posetti (2013) as well as local scholars (Daniels 2020; Rodny-Gumede 2018) have argued that it is paramount in a changing news environment for journalists to acclimatise and incorporate the use of digital technology tools such as Facebook and X to be able to practice their journalism including engaging audiences, researching, production and distribution. However, they have also pointed out the double-edged sword or the dark nature of the internet as this kind of engagement in the practice of journalism has brought with it as a snare for women journalists who are now in the middle of online attacks (Daniels & Skinner, 2022).

This chapter will, thus, answer one of the key research questions posed in this study: *What strategies have media houses developed to respond to the problem of cyber misogyny?* The subsequent discussion will deconstruct and pull out the emergent themes emanating from the in-depth interviews as well as the background archival data. This means that direct quotations from the research participants' responses will be used to add substance to the eventual analysis and argument in line with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as literature on the topic.

### 7.3. Newsroom practices in tackling cyber misogyny

The most recent international research report by Posetti *et al*. (2022) *The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence Against Women* (UNESCO/ICJF) revealed that, globally, newsroom responses to cyber misogyny seem rather ad hoc and inadequate. Similarly, this was also found locally, in the South African component of the study (Daniels, 2022), as well findings in the Glass Ceiling 2018 (Gender Links/SANEF) research alluded to earlier. This revealed that women journalists were calling for media companies to support victims of cyber misogyny and assist in locating cyber bullies and stalkers. Both the international and the local research cited above showed that women journalists were not aware of company or government policies on cyber

misogyny and, if they were present, they were appealing for any protection at all which media companies, local and international and governments could provide. Journalists in the same studies also revealed that they had not seen any documents elaborating their news company's stance on cyber misogyny.

In this dissertation, it can be noted that media development experts or feminists in the NGO space, argued that not enough is being done to ensure the safety and security of female journalists in particular from phenomena such as cyber misogyny. This assertion is in line with the international situation as highlighted above by Posetti and Shabbir (2022), who argued that media house responses in different countries around the world have been wholly inadequate. These inadequate and weak protection mechanisms available to women journalists then create an extra burden of emotional labour on them, as they take it upon themselves to deal with the misogyny on their own through different resistance strategies they deploy (Sampaio-Dias *et al.,* 2024).

According to an interview with Judy Sandison, newsroom responses to cyber misogyny differed across board with some media organisations argued to be doing more than others. In another interview with Media Monitoring Africa Programme Manager, Thandi Smith she highlighted that,

> *When we do see attacks happening, there is starting to be a bit more support from media houses themselves. I suppose especially when it's a result of specific stories, or specific content being published, under the names the media has, I think that we are seeing, you know, a bit more support coming from organisations.* (*Smith,* Johannesburg, 3 August, 2023).

The discourse that emanates from Smith's assertion suggests a nascent but growing acknowledgement of cyber misogyny by media companies and the support they are starting to give, particularly if the attacks are in relation to stories published under their newsroom names. This indicates a small but recognisable shift in the industry's recognition of the challenges associated with cyber misogyny in the media. Smith (2023) points back to the source of the abuse and attacks which is the stories being published, suggesting that, indeed, it is the work that journalists do that puts them in the line of attacks.

The little perceived support offered to journalists from the media companies' response, or lack thereof, to cyber misogyny have led to demands that more is needed to be done to support women journalists.

### 7.4. Social media use in journalism not a requirement

With the changing journalistic routines, the International Media Support (2023) has noted that reporters often need to uphold an online presence for sourcing, researching, promoting stories as an important aspect of their work. In 2013 and 2014 in the State of the Newsroom report, Daniels wrote that editors were requiring of journalists to have a social media presence, in particular they were being pushed to join X and promote their stories there, however, ten years later it has emerged from the interviews with editors and media development organisations that there is no particular requirement for journalists to be online.

The following question was asked of Jillian Green, managing editor of Daily Maverick: *Does your news organisation require/expect journalists to have an online presence?* Green pointed out the following:

> *We use social media through the Daily Maverick platform. But obviously journalists have public profiles and personal profiles from which they tweet or share stories from. We don't actively encourage them to do so. But by the very nature of journalists, you want to share your story and you want to get it out there. And so they are exposed to, to all sorts of cyber-attacks in various different forms, depending on the stories that come along.* (Green, Johannesburg, 5 September, 2023).

Green confirms that there is no particular requirement for journalists to be on social media. She also makes no specific reference to women journalists in particular. However, with the changing journalistic routines it can be argued that there would be a professional expectation from editors and media companies that comes with journalists being on social media platforms such as X or having one maintain an online presence in order to find sources, research, publicise stories, and engage audiences.

She also highlights that by virtue of the work that journalists do, they now exist online. However, the changing journalism routines put them in the firing line of online attacks. This finding is consistent with global literature on this topic which argues that violence comes because of the work they do, making work the driver of the misogyny experienced by women journalists. This also feeds into the changing journalism routines where journalists, because of the nature of the work, need to be on social media platforms and engage. When journalists are online, they attract engagement with audiences on the issues they write about in a way they previously did not operate. Furthermore, this can contribute to a new public sphere where engagements from diverse voices can be seen (Gardiner, 2015).

In an interview with SANEF's KZN regional coordinator, Judy Sandison, she points out the following, *"I think some newsrooms are obviously better than others. I mean, for example, News 24 was incredibly supportive (of Karyn Maughan),"* (Sandison, Johannesburg, 22, May,2023).

Sandison confirms that the way in which newsrooms deal with cases on cyber misogyny may differ across media companies with some more responsive to the problem compared to others. Her discourse shows that there must be more nuance and commitment attached to the way media companies address this issue. In this case, reference to *News 24* shows the support given to a journalist attacked online. Furthermore, as attested to by Hunter (2022), political editor at *News 24* in the book *Women Journalists in South Africa* (Daniels and Skinner, 2022), there was support from her seniors in the newsroom. Of course, media company practices and cultures differ, but it may be expected that despite this, serious and pressing issues such as cyber misogyny must not be tolerated as it amounts to gender-based violence.

### 7.5. Ignore the attacks

*Daily Maverick's* managing editor, Green, asserted that,

> *What we do try and encourage our writers is to let their journalism speak, rather than getting into mudslinging, argumentative debates on online with faceless trolls, essentially, you know, is don't engage there, there's no way you're going to convince somebody who is already there, taking that line of*

> *attack, that that deposition is flawed. It rather just let your journalism stand, let that lead the type of work and investigations that we're doing be the argument. But it's hard, because you know, when your name has been dragged through the mud, when you are being attacked on your personal in your personal capacity, it's hard not to shout back or to try and defend yourself. But we've seen that that nothing good ever comes up of getting into the mud with these kinds of people.* (Green, Johannesburg, 5 September, 2023).

The discourse conveyed in Green's assertions expresses a strategic approach to dealing with cyber misogyny against journalists, that is, to prioritise and focus on journalistic work and practices over engaging with trolls. The central message emanating from Green's perspectives discourages journalists from engaging in contentious and argumentative engagements with audiences on Twitter. Instead, the emphasis is on allowing the work they do to speak for itself, acting as a robust response to a cycle of misogynist attacks. This kind of action may be influenced by the evolving perception of social media as more of a toxic platform than a beneficial one which may prompt media companies to reconsider strategies or expectations on what journalists do when they share and engage online. However, the challenge arising from such a scenario where journalists do not engage is that this may be contradictory to how journalists themselves see this as an effective tactic to shut down the trolls and actually responding to the attacks.

Journalists may want to defend themselves when attacked, which is one of the strategies discussed earlier as a negotiating tactic deployed by women journalists of pushing forward on the pushback. Overall, the discourse underscores the tension between the desire to let journalistic work prevail above all else which is what keeps journalism alive. In essence, Green's approach advances the commitment to professionalism in journalism and the traditional journalism routines of gathering, telling and sharing the news without being immersed in new routines of engaging with audiences.

In an interview with *IWMF (*2022*),* Mia Malan*,* Editor in Chief of *Bhekisisa* (a health news organisation) also encouraged journalists to not engage in personal online attacks emanating from the stories that the journalists have written. Malan noted that:

*"Our response to the personalised attacks aimed at our journalists and editor-in-chief has been to not respond, which is sometimes a challenge in itself, as there is a feeling almost of helplessness in the face of the onslaught" (*IWMF, 2022*).*

The above reference to Malan's interview with IWMF contextualises the situation in the *Bhekisisa* newsroom, providing insight into the challenges faced in responding to cyber misogyny. Malan's assertions suggest a deliberate strategy of non-response to personalised attacks. However, Malan acknowledges the struggles of maintaining such an approach due to perceived sense of helplessness in the sustained attacks.

Non-response has been a strategy deployed by journalists as they negotiate violence by simply keeping quiet and not responding. However, Posetti and Shabbir (2021) argue that such a strategy, which borders on the practice of "do not feed the trolls", does not seem to work and was deemed an inadequate response in the face of cyber misogyny. Lumsden and Morgan (2017) concur with this argument, observing that the "do not feed the trolls" stance is, in itself, a silencing strategy which strips the victims of the power of resisting the abuse they encounter in an attempt to not further provoke the trolls. Newsrooms need deliberate action beyond the rhetoric of 'do not feed trolls', whether in their policies or institutional practices, in order for them to be able to protect journalism and safe guard media freedoms.

### 7.6. Acknowledgement of cyber misogyny

The starting point to addressing cyber misogyny must be to acknowledge its existence and to take seriously its implications on media practice, particularly on women journalists' freedom of expression in online spaces. Posetti and Shabbir (2021) indicate that globally, cyber misogyny is often given low priority by media companies even when its existence is acknowledged. This scenario makes it difficult to address when it occurs. Acknowledging that cyber misogyny exists and is real violence will enable media houses to have the know-how to respond to its occurrence in the media. Lumsden and Morgan (2017) also argue that online harm must not be separated from what is considered as "real" harm. Acknowledging it as such will help to counter its occurrences. Although concurring with Posetti and Shabbir (2021) on the importance of acknowledging this phenomenon amongst women journalists, other global research has also found that media companies do not have sufficient resources to dedicate to

fight these occurrences (Trionfi & Luque; 2019). Confirming the importance of organisational culture in recognising experiences of misogyny, Rose Viljoen, Internews South Africa Director, noted in an interview noted: *Firstly, if an organisation or your newsroom have a culture of misogyny in any event, I don't think they are going to take cyber misogyny seriously,* (Viljoen, Johannesburg, 7 June, 2023).

It is important to note that, from Viljoen's assertions, it can be derived that media companies need to have a strong foundation of acknowledging and addressing misogyny. There would be scepticism about how media companies are addressing misogyny in a newsroom which tolerates misogyny broadly. So, in an organisation where a culture of misogyny already prevails, the acknowledgment of this phenomenon as harmful may not be realised.

The *Daily Maverick* managing editor, Green acknowledges the gendered dimensions and disproportionate attacks that women journalists face highlighting that,

> *By the very nature of the type of work that Daily Maverick does, our journalists do become targets of this kind of attack. And, seemingly, it is mainly our women journalists who suffer the brunt of this, irrespective of whether they're the only ones doing that kind of reporting, the female journalists do to carry the weight of the attack,* (Green, Johannesburg, 5 September, 2023).

Green's assertion highlights the vulnerability that journalists have because of their work and practice. She acknowledges what has been brought forward by scholars (Posetti *et al.,* 2021; Daniels *et al.,* 2018), that it is the women journalists who are disproportionately affected by targeted attacks. The fact that it is women journalists who carry the brunt of misogynist attacks, prompts further thinking and discussion on the intersections of gender and professional dangers in journalism, especially harms within the online space.

### 7.7. Psychological support

The psychological implications of cyber misogyny cannot be underestimated. Cyber misogyny has the potential to impose significant psychological strain on women journalists, impinging upon their capacity to engage in their work and trigger fear of retribution from audiences who act in an uncivil manner online (Trionfi & Luque, 2019).

Recognising the importance of psychological support, some media companies such as *Daily Maverick* note offering mental health support to journalists in their newsroom. Reiterating the importance of mental health support, Sandison argued that,

> *Journalists need to get mental assistance, get a call hotline, to call, and, speak to a therapist, if you're able to, you know, whichever kind of mental support you're able to get. You can't expect them to do journalism and not have some sort of mental support structure within the organization*. (Sandison, Johannesburg, 22 May, 2023).

The discourse emanating from Sandison's assertions points to the fact that mental health support is a prerequisite of support to journalists suffering cyber misogyny if they are to cope with challenges associated with the practice of journalism.

In an interview with Green, she highlighted that at *Daily Maverick* they offer psychological support to journalists in the media house. Green noted that: *"At a basic level, they (journalists) are offered psychological support, we have an in-house counsellor that is available to them in terms of psychological support,"*
(Green, Johannesburg, 5 September, 2023).

Similarly, in the *Bhekisisa* newsroom, the editor in chief and executive director Mia Malan (IWMF, 2022) highlighted that because of the intense emotional toll that online attacks had on journalists it was important for the *Bhekisisa* newsroom to seek professionals to help journalists deal with online abuse.

In a book chapter titled *Threats to rape and kill me*, published in the book *Women in South Africa media (2023),* Qaanitah Hunter prioritised the importance of mental health support. Hunter gives a personal testimony about the support that she received at *News 24*, however, also decrying the lack of knowledge on this issue. Hunter notes the following: *"While my employer and the South African National Editors' Forums (SANEF) came to my defence, I never felt more alone in that ordeal. I knew I was not the only one facing this and I also knew that my seniors did not know how to navigate this terrain*." (Hunter, 2022:84)

In the interview, Viljoen concurred with this assertion pointing out that,

*"There has to be a quid pro quo in that, if women are being attacked, online, they (media houses) put up a couple of things. One is mental health support, which I think is lacking* (Viljoen, Johannesburg, 7 June, 2023). Viljoen's views on mental health support for journalists also show how important mental health support is for journalists and identifies that this is currently lacking in the media sector.

### 7.8. Legal protection, Policy guidelines and policy development

Legal support is a fundamental instrument to protect women journalists and ensure freedom of speech and journalistic integrity. As argued by George and Scerri (2018), providing legal aid can assist the survivors in reporting the violence they experience and support in pursuing legal action. In a similar vein, Trionfi and Luque (2019) note that the complex issue of attacks against journalists can only be partially dealt with through legal process and engagement with big technology companies.

In an interview, Viljoen noted that:

> *They (media companies) need to look at what the attack looks like, and see if they are able to have some sort of legal support. If they are expensive, then, use mechanisms like the South African Human Rights Commission, and use those mechanisms to hold those people to account.* (Viljoen, Johannesburg, 7 June, 2023).

The argument brought by Viljoen's assertion buttresses the importance of protecting journalists from online abuse and enduring the preservation of the role of the media in a democracy. This can be done through seeking support and utilising human rights mechanisms as a way to deter perpetrators and potential attackers in order to create a safer environment for journalists. Some media houses, for example, *City Press* have used their lawyers to demand a written apology in the doxing[10] case of *City Press* reporter Julia Madibogo which brought her in harm's way as online audiences inundated her with phone with calls and messages.

[10] Doxing is the malicious public sharing of someone's personal information including their email address or phone number or home address on the internet.

Although legal aid to journalists may be commendable, it may also be argued that the by the nature of the internet it may be difficult to pin down the perpetrators or be a long and protracted endeavour to undertake such investigations. This is because, as argued earlier in this thesis, perpetrators tend to hide behind the veil of anonymity.

### 7.9. Policy Development

The existence of policies and guidelines can be used as a preventative measure and support mechanism to targeted journalists. Speaking to IWMF in 2022, *Bhekisisa* editor Mia Malan highlighted the following:

> *It is important for newsrooms to have policies in place* to address online abuse so that staff know what to do if they receive threats and are the targets of harassment. *The policies should detail how to report online abuse and what the organization's responsibility is as the employer. In our case, the policies that IWMF helped us to put in place gave our staff a clearer idea about how to better protect themselves and where to go for help. Our policy requires our staff to share examples of online abuse which not only helps us to identify common trends but also allows our employees to more clearly see that the target of the abuse is the message rather than themselves. We've also included guidelines for how staff can protect their personal accounts. As a result of the training and the policies in place our journalists have said they feel safer and more equipped to respond to online abuse and to defend both themselves and Bhekisisa. (*IWMF, *2022*).

*Daily Maverick* is taking is similar approach to address cyber misogyny using policy mechanisms for the media company. The managing editor highlighted the following measures when it comes to policy responses on cyber misogyny.

> *We are currently in the process of developing a more formal approach and support system for them (journalists) in the event of these kinds of attacks, and more especially since Daily Maverick has grown over the past few years, you know, we now suddenly a much bigger newsroom, we need more formal structures in place to assist our reporters with this kind of experience. So I'm working with a group from the IWMF to set up a specific policy around cyber-attacks and online security and online experiences which will outline how they*

> *(journalists) can keep themselves safe.* (Green, Johannesburg, 5 September, 2023).

The discourse emanating from Green's argument shows that in media companies such as *Daily Maverick* and as observed by *Bhekisisa*, there is an organisational awareness of the emerging challenges of cyber misogyny, particularly as the media house grows. This is because measures to ensure the safety of journalists are becoming a priority. The articulation of developing formal approaches and support systems signifies a more proactive response to the evolving cyber misogynistic threats that women journalists are facing. The collaboration with the IWMF also shows a level of commitment to learning and sharing that can be done to strengthen the policy development processes so that the policies are not in isolation of the realities at the local or international levels. The discourse implies a commitment to institutionalising safeguards to enhance the protection of journalists online.

Of course, it can be argued that the Daily Maverick media company is a smaller one compared to other media companies operating in the country. However, this recognition of the problem that exists is a first step that all other news companies must be following.

In an interview with Gender Links, Executive Director, Kubi Rama, she notes the importance of policy frameworks in addressing cyber misogyny. Rama argued that,

> *The media houses themselves need to have policies but then also, from a technological perspective, need to be extremely vigilant, and actually check to identify to stop and to offer, psychosocial support women require. I think it's still very much hidden. And we need to challenge media houses to surface it (cyber misogyny). And what policies and strategies do you have in place to safeguard journalists.* (Rama, Johannesburg, 7July 2023).

Rama's assertions emphasise the multifaceted approach that can be taken by media companies from the point of identifying the threats against women journalists to the point where they are being addressed. It underscores the imperative of devising comprehensive strategies within media companies and this being the bedrock from

which everything else flows as it encompasses proactive measures to identify and prevent instances of cyber misogyny.

Developing policies as a media house response to the cyber misogyny is also coherent with Posetti and Shabbir's (2021) global research which argues that policies and protocols developed by news companies to respond to cyber-attacks on women journalists need to be adaptable and respond to the local contexts and emerging challenges. Digital resilience may be created when women journalists are protected through policies and institutional practices that seek to end cyber misogyny.

### 7.10. Guidelines

Some media companies, for example the biggest employer of journalists in the country the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), have guidelines for Personal Digital Media Accounts incorporated into the SABC Editorial Policy of 2020. These guidelines, however, do not mention any form of support procedures or interventions that will be followed or provided by the media house if journalists suffer attacks online. The guidelines, however, note that "any use of personal digital media platforms using work resources, including work time and facilities, is open to the organisation for scrutiny and remedial action, should this be required." The provision may border on the intent to monitor control and have oversight on journalists' social media platforms but also emphasise the importance of using these platforms responsibly and within boundaries defined by the organisation. What is not clear though is whether, in the scrutiny and remedial action mentioned in the guidelines, the monitoring goes beyond monitoring for compliance to providing monitoring for ensuring safety of journalists on digital platforms.

### 7.11. Advocacy: Prioritising Newsroom training and public awareness

There is some evidence of some media companies, for example *Daily Maverick* and *News 24* are prioritising online safety training for journalists in their newsrooms. According to the International Media Women's Foundation, newsrooms such as *Bhekisisa,* a news organisation dedicated to health and social justice reporting, have undergone online safety training for journalists to address the realities of online violence. The news company's former news editor, Joan van Dyk noted that social media use has become so common place in today's journalism, however the negative

implications of social media are rarely discussed and training session she had experienced gave practical ideas that could be implemented (IWMF 2022). Such training is good practice that more newsrooms could follow.

Some news companies also play a role in raising public awareness about the issue of cyber misogyny against women journalists. For instance, news companies are publishing stories, opinion editorials, commentaries on occurrences of cyber misogyny, and news on research reports which can be argued to be part of public awareness and attempts to get the issue to feature more prominently on the news agenda. An example of this can be seen where journalists have been given a platform to write about their experiences on news sites such as *Daily Maverick* or *News 24*.

Media companies such as *Daily Maverick* have taken this awareness strategy a step further. The media company commissioned a film on the online violence experienced by its women journalists who are routinely targeted in the course of their work, including van Wyk and Haffajee. The film is titled *Section 16* in reference to the South African Constitution, which protects freedom of expression with the exception of hate speech based on gender, race, ethnicity or religion.

### 7.12. Security and support systems

Evidence from global studies such as *The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence Against Women* as well as in the book *Women Journalists in South Africa* and the film produced by *Daily Maverick* journalist and Maverick Life editor, Emilie Gambade, show that online violence can easily morph into physical violence. More severe cases of harassment have seen women journalists being afforded security personnel by their media companies. *Daily Maverick's* Green noted that: *If the threat is no longer just online, but also likely to move into physical attack, we provide a safe place. So, removal from the current setting to somewhere not known by the potential attackers for a period of time. So, in other words, physical removal from direct line of attack.* (Green, Johannesburg, 5 September, 2023).

#### Public support through statements

Recently, the International Media Support (IMS) (2023) published an article titled *How media outlets can support journalists facing online abuse*. IMS points out that

journalists who have been attacked online may feel isolated and it is important for the media company to show support through public statements and standing firm against this phenomenon. News companies have publicly shown support for their journalists through publishing statements in support of women journalists who have experienced cyber misogyny. The statements have publicly castigated cyber misogyny as a hindrance to freedom of expression. Publishing press statements can be argued to show civility and as a means to garner public support to end future occurrences of cyber misogyny. It reinforces the media companies' commitment to cultivating a safe work environment but also serves as a powerful message against these occurrences. For example, *City Press* released a statement when its senior entertainment reporter Julia Madibogo was doxed by entertainer Faith Nketsi in 2022. This intervention is similar with how other newsrooms in the Global North are responding to cyber misogyny. Posetti and Shabbir (2021) posit that media organisations such as the *New York Times, Huffington Post UK* and *Washington Post* have used their platforms, editorial influence and released statements in support of their women journalists who have been attacked online.

### 7.13. Support systems

Gender responsive leadership in media companies can create a safer working environment for journalists who will feel supported in the face of cyber misogynistic attacks. UNESCO (2012) describes gender responsiveness as being gender aware or gender sensitive to the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of women and men. Editors, for example, can use their influence to challenge these harmful practices when they support journalists who have encountered cyber misogyny.

An example of this is detailed in the work by Posetti and Shabbir (2021), where Pauli Van Wyk, an investigative journalist for the *Daily Maverick,* noted the importance of support from media house leadership. Van Wyk credited the *Daily Maverick* Editor in Chief Branko Brkic for her survival as a journalist following the threats of sexual assault and murder she encountered online, van Wyk (Posetti & Shabbir, 2021) is quoted noting that the editor was "incredibly supportive. He really was quite amazing. He shielded me from attacks and he helped me to move around the country as well.

Without my editor, I can tell you now, I probably wouldn't be a journalist anymore," she said.

To concretise van Wyk's assertions, the *Daily Maverick* managing editor noted journalists have easy access to the senior editors within the organisation who can offer support in instances where they have encountered any kind of attacks whether online or offline.

On the other hand, journalists have not always experienced this kind of support from the top management or from their peers. Haffajee (2022) was frustrated, hurt and disappointed when she attempted to get assistance on the misogyny she encountered. She pointed out that when she started experiencing cyber abuse, which was fuelled by sentiments made by a male politician, all the people she turned to for support failed to defuse the attacks. She pointed out the following:

> *I tried to call the trade union representative at Avusa, a former colleague of mine with whom I thought I got on, and he said he would defuse it, but he didn't. I called the managing directors and told them to please correct the misinformation or disinformation drive to defuse the fire, but they didn't. I guess they were too scared of how their journalists had weaponised access to a radical politician who used these relationships in a transactional fashion. If he stood up for the workers (no matter the facts, no matter the truth, no matter the purpose), then they would give him acres of sweetheart space in their titles. This put the scares into media bosses, and in my case, they did not correct the misinformation, but instead told me it would 'blow over'. (*Haffajee, 2022:66).

Haffajee's experiences are evidence that the way media companies support journalists is uneven. It highlights a lack of responsiveness or support in addressing cyber misogyny. This makes the support patchy and inconsistent. Furthermore, it suggests that the lack of support on this matter is also based on external factors such as power dynamics, particularly concerning politicians. The assertion shows that how a cyber-misogyny case is dealt with or receives support is dependent on who the perpetrator is and this adds a layer of complexity to the situation. Some perpetrators are considered untouchable, buttressing the idea of hierarchical power that is associated with hegemonic masculinity which maintains this dominance over women. This kind of

occurrence is similar to that which happens with offline violence where some perpetrators of violence are protected by the mere fact of who they are in society and cases remain unreported or suppressed. Which leads to potential compromise on how cases are dealt with, if ever they are.

### 7.14. Conclusion: Uneven responses do not instil confidence

This chapter discussed measures implemented by media companies in South Africa in an effort to address cyber misogyny. It is disheartening that the occurrences and increased pervasiveness of cyber misogyny is all too often normalised as we see from the comments made by interviewees. The evidence of un-evenness of treatment across media companies is cause for concern.

In a theoretical synthesis to this chapter data, it is observed how the concepts of the role of the media in a democracy and the journalism routines are in operation. From the findings it is clear that there is no standard way or shared ideology amongst media companies to tackle misogyny. As such, they are responding to cyber misogyny in varying ways. There are various strategies media companies are using to fight cyber misogyny.

Data supporting this chapter acknowledges that to combat the rising tide of cyber misogyny against women journalists there are responses and strategies that have been used by media companies to address this phenomenon. They do, however, seem to be uneven and patchy considering that this is an emerging problem as evidenced in the literature on this topic. As such, newsroom policies are now only starting to integrate this into their policies and, in some instances, this does not seem to exist at all. This deficit in strategies and responses does not seem to respond adequately to the changing journalism routines which have moved to a more direct engagement of journalists with audiences online and where there is an encouragement of conversation with journalists and audiences from the media houses. Unlike in other parts of the world where it emerges that they have embraced technology in both institutional structures and also in their practices (Walters, 2021), it can be argued that in South Africa there is still a gap when it comes to embracing these platforms in terms of editorial practices that may help to protect and safeguard journalists.

However, the chapter also reveals that newsroom responses and measures to respond as well as support journalists are limited, except in a few instances. This puts into question the prioritisation given to the safety of journalists, and women journalists in particular. This finding is consistent to similar findings from global research by Holton *et al.* (2021), which also observed that there is a lack of or weak systemic efforts of support given to women journalists by media organisations when they have experienced misogyny online. The lack of these systems puts the responsibility on journalists to tackle this on their own and, yet, this must be a workplace issue.

It also showed that responses and handling of online violence against women journalists varied across media companies with varying strategies being used to respond to this phenomenon. According to the interviews, media company strategies differ and no one size fits all approach is being used. It can be argued that, although there are existing attempts by media companies to address this phenomenon, there is an urgent need to escalate and strengthen these institutional mechanisms to curb cyber misogyny. The findings amplify other studies which have recommended that news media organisations must develop gender sensitive policies that respond to the occurrences of online violence against women journalists.

The chapter shows that media houses need to begin to understand and appreciate that cyber misogyny against women journalists is a workplace issue as these women are receiving attacks because they are on a public platform as journalists. They are the victims of cyber misogyny based on the work they are doing as journalists, whether it is in breaking news stories, publishing news articles, or providing commentary and analysis. There also needs to be a better understanding that cyber misogyny goes beyond being a women's only issues; it directly endangers the fundamental principles of a pluralistic media and voices. It also undermines and endangers the fundamental principles of democracy. A vibrant democracy is reliant on a free and plural process, and these crumble when media workers, in this case women journalists, encounter gendered trolling and harassment. Silencing their voices through the various forms of cyber misogyny discussed earlier undermines the public's right to access plural voices from the media.

It is important to note that to be able to address cyber misogyny, media companies must start by acknowledging that it exists and women journalists are disproportionately suffering in various ways. If media companies negate the acknowledgment that this phenomenon is at play, affecting women journalists and freedom of expression, this can contribute to the normalisation of such occurrences at the expense of media freedom. On another hand, as newsrooms attempt to tackle cyber misogyny through various means discussed in this chapter, there needs to be a commitment in terms of sufficient resources to be used to fight these abuses in a more tangible way. This can be through legal support, psychological support, and so forth. Failure to provide these resources in already underfunded newsrooms may suggest that the abuse may not be tackled in a holistic manner.

This chapter reveals that the responses are happening in an ad hoc or inconsistent manner. This may suggest that women journalists who encounter misogyny online may be deterred from bringing this issue to the attention of their media house because of this inconsistency which may lead to the lack of trust, for example, as discussed in the case of Haffajee above.

Unlike other region of the world which have coordinated with big technology companies to address online abuse of journalists, South Africa still lags behind on this aspect (Trionfi & Luque, 2019). There seems to be no action picked up on this in the news companies under investigation.

It is clear form this chapter that there is urgent need for media companies to develop gender responsive policies and actions that can adequately protect journalists from online misogyny. As media companies put in place strategies to counter cyber misogyny these needs to be actionable, intersectional approaches to fight cyber misogyny.

## Chapter Eight: Concluding Reflections Shaping a safer future

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question and sub questions through a final analysis of the data, that is the interviews and the case study information. In addition, it aims to provide concluding reflections for this dissertation based on a theoretical synthesis. Furthermore, this chapter will offer recommendations to try solve the problem of cyber misogyny**.** It will summarise the findings, recounting the observations made throughout the research, and highlighting key patterns and insights related to cyber misogyny. Furthermore, it discusses the theoretical implications as well as highlights themes, and comparative analysis with existing literature from the region and across the globe. Thus, showing both the overlaps and the unique aspects that emerged from the study. It concludes by offering some recommendations for consideration in making online platforms safe for women journalists.

The main question in this research was**:** How does cyber misogyny affect women journalists' practice?

**The sub questions were:**

- What is the nature of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists in South Africa?
- How does cyber misogyny against women journalists affect their practice?
- What strategies have women journalists developed to respond to cyber misogyny?
- What strategies have media houses developed to respond to the problem of cyber misogyny?

The study was qualitative in nature. It presented women journalists experiences of cyber misogyny through case studies and in-depth interviews with media development and feminist organisations, as well as with editors. It uses archival data and publicly available information to draw out information on this phenomenon and to complement the findings from the interviews.

This dissertation endeavoured to analyse the pervasive issue of cyber misogyny against women journalists in South Africa. It explored the issue through interviews, which showed the negotiation tactics used by women journalists to protect themselves

from online harm, and revealed how cyber misogyny is affecting journalism practice and, in particular, women journalists' practice. It also traces media house responses to misogynist attacks happening online.

### 8.1. Summary of Findings

This study on cyber misogyny against women journalists in South Africa and its impact on women journalists work and practice confirms what academic as well as civil society research has revealed in previous studies, that women journalists are experiencing various forms of misogyny online which has a bearing on journalism as a profession as well as their individual practice of journalism. As Rosemary Viljoen of Internews South Africa noted, cyber misogyny is very diverse, and just as social media is diverse, the attacks on women are diverse (2023). The research, reinforced by existing literature which it largely borrows from, contends that cyber misogyny affects women journalists' practice in various ways. These ways, as found in this study, include silencing, self-censorship, and limiting of participation in online platforms.

All the women journalists written about in this research have been transparent about their experiences in various ways including through interviews, research, seminars and news articles focusing on their cyber misogynistic experiences and how they have handled them. This became the main source of information used to collate and analyse their experiences in this research. The increase in the number of women journalists who are speaking about their experiences is highlighting and increasing attention this issue is getting from various stakeholders including media development organisations, government and even media houses themselves. This makes it an increasingly cutting edge and niche area for research.

The forms of cyber misogyny that emerged in South Africa amongst women journalists are also consistent with those identified in previous global as well as regional research. The attacks range from sexual harassment, body shaming, rape threats, death threats, doxing, and dog whistling where there are online mobs called to attack individuals.
The dissertation also found that cyber misogyny influences women journalists' work directly as well as influences journalism and media practice. It also has very personal influences on mental health of journalists. The research finds that the influences on

journalism and media affect the profession, the industry and the rights and roles that the media holds.

### 8.2. Women negotiate the cyber misogyny terrain

This research has shown that cyber misogyny can strangle diversity of voice, as interviewee Thandi Smith (2023) of Media Monitoring Africa said: "*when you remove yourself from that space, your voice, as a journalist is then taken away. And so, it is a typical form of self-censorship. And that has a direct impact on media freedom genuinely,*" (*Smith,* Johannesburg, 3 August, 2023).

As demonstrated in this dissertation, cyber misogyny against women journalists continues to occur unabated. This research has shown that it has become so common place and normalised. Indeed, social media platforms such as X and Facebook have provided an opportunity for journalists to fulfil new journalism routines engaging with audiences, expanding their work, expanding their sources of information and their reach, and contributing to freedom of expression. However, it has also brought about the challenges that have been discussed in this dissertation, particularly for women journalists. This is the Janus face of social media or the double-edged sword as referred to by academics such as Mutsvairo (2016), Mabweazara and Mare (2021), and Daniels *et al.* (2020).

Cyber misogyny in platforms such as X aids and adds to violations against journalists in general, but this dissertation focused on the gendered aspect in particular. The findings and discussions explored within this dissertation raise several key points about this phenomenon, as highlighted in the chapter to follow.

The argument here is that, cyber misogyny undermines the role of the media in a democracy, decreases the voice of women and, therefore, plurality in the democratic space. This can be seen through the argument raised in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this this dissertation that brought out the different ways in which cyber misogyny is impacting on journalism practice. When women journalists, who are already underrepresented and undermined in terms of voice and control in the media, are unable to participate or their participation is hindered, it means that democracy itself is at stake. Cyber misogyny can easily be a predictor to offline violence as this may

spill or extend to real life experiences. The attacks on women journalists are a sign that platforms such as X, which have been argued by *Pollicy* (2020) as being toxic, become a vehicle to push incivility and critical and rationale debate. They risk becoming a threat to democracy where all voices are supposed to matter, as argued by interviewee Smith (2023), who said: "…one instance of her harassment on the female journalists has dire effects on how media themselves, how other female journalists choose to engage and operate online. So, it really does have a very serious impact on the way that female journalists operate."

This dissertation tallies with Daniels and Skinner's (2022) assertion that, within entities such as media companies, the state, police and government there is lack of understanding and knowledge on how to tackle cyber misogyny as noted by the authors that: "the gaps are that the state, police and media companies do not understand or take the problem of cyber misogyny seriously and do not know how to respond to it," (2022:13). There are deficiencies in understanding the phenomenon and inadequate responses regarding the issues of cyber misogyny, all which are do not create a conducive environment when it comes to addressing cyber misogyny.

The findings emanating from this dissertation, point out some instances of optimism and positive development amid the challenges posed by cyber misogyny on journalism practice. Some of the optimistic moments as discussed in this study are further highlighted in the following section.

## 8.3. Optimistic moments: Illuminating hopeful instances in the face of cyber misogyny

### 8.3.1. Legislative responses, policies and support

South Africa is legally more advanced regarding freedom of information and media freedom compared to other countries in the region given it has an overarching Constitution which protects these rights, including gender equality. Legislation such as the Cybercrimes Act of 2020 discussed in the literature review can be a stepping stone to pushing more advocacy on prevention of cyber misogyny in society at large but also can be used by the media. Within media companies themselves, although responses are patchy and at times reactionary in responding to cyber misogyny cases (as seen in chapter 7 which details newsroom responses), their actions can be argued to preserve the work of journalists and mitigate self-censorship amongst journalists if they feel protected and supported by the institutions they work for. This can be seen in the critical reporting journalists continue to do for their media companies.

### 8.3.2. Recognising cyber misogyny as real violence

This dissertation confirmed findings from other reports that women journalists are aware that there is cyber misogyny and are identifying it broadly as online violence. In addition, they are creating resistance strategies to push back against it, see chapter 5 and 6 which show the experiences of cyber misogyny as well as the resistance strategies that are being employed. This is unlike in other African countries, where research has shown that some journalists are not recognising cyber misogyny as broader violence in society but as “Facebook banter”, “Facebook show off” or “online notice me” (Uwalaka & Amadi, 2023). Such sentiments will ensure this phenomenon is not taken seriously because even the people who are suffering the violations are not calling it as such. By recognising it for what it actually is, the response strategies used may be directed and respond effectively to ensure the safety of women journalists. Furthermore, identifying cyber misogyny as real violence helps to prevent its normalisation or it being regarded as part of the job. It challenges the perception that it is not equal to real violence as it is not occurring in the physical world. In any case, this research has shown that women journalists have felt the threat of online violence spilling over into real life.

### 8.3.3. Activism amongst women journalists

Amongst the journalists and the editors whose cases are written about in this study, a number of the journalists including Qaanitah Hunter and Ferial Haffajee have been actively engaged in combating cyber misogyny as they play an active role in amplifying this issue through multi-dimensional activism. The journalists and editors centred public attention on this issue through, for example, news articles and research articles to shed light on the prevalence and impact of cyber misogyny, and give it public attention. Hunter, winner of the 2019 Nat Nakasa award for courageous journalism, was awarded for her work in highlighting mental health issues in journalism. This is something she has become a champion for because she spoke out on mental health issues after suffering depression, being body shamed, and threatened with rape and death. On the other hand, Haffajee has called herself the troll hunter, actively and deliberately taking measures to find out more about the trolls and holding perpetrators

accountable. All this contributes to creating a safer online public sphere where women journalists are able to practice their journalism safely.

### 8.3.4. Emerging support networks

While it may appear as all doom and gloom, there are glimmers of hope where there are newsroom responses and support from the top down. For example, there are attempts by editors (see chapter 7 on newsroom responses on cyber misogyny) to support their journalists. For example, *Daily Maverick* supported their journalists in various ways including through offering psychological support as well as physical support to some journalists. In addition, *City Press* publicly denounced cyber misogyny by sending out statements and assisting their journalists to take legal action. Media companies are stepping into the frontlines with their journalists to support them with psychological as well as physical protection after facing attacks. This shows organisational responsibility rooted in a changing and responsive institutional culture which may lack in many other newsrooms elsewhere, where journalists have been told to simply grow a thick skin (Chen *et al.,* 2018). There are also glimmers of hope when journalists support each other when it comes to calling out perpetrators as evidenced in the case studies in the way women journalists rally behind each other, calling out trolls and forming a barrier against the backlash they face.

## 8.4. Pessimistic realities in countering cyber misogyny

### 8.4.1. Thwarting journalism routines

In light of the changing journalism routines, the research shows that the more women journalists engage and share information on X, the more the uncivil comments seem to come. This has been seen in international research, and this research on South Africa shows the same. See, for example, Chapter 5 on the dark realm of cyber misogyny.  This is evident in the case of Maughan, Sophie Mokoena, Pauli van Wyk, and Haffajee who have encountered incivility from X audiences. This works against the changing journalism routines as women journalists attempt to delve into using social media as part of their work. This undermines women journalists' capacity to fulfil new journalism routines of interacting with audiences through comments and also impedes journalists' ability to carry out conventional journalistic tasks (Chen *et al.,* 2018).

### 8.4.2. Irregular response

The patchy responses point to the lack of a consolidated and strategic manner in which media companies can address this issue. Generally, by not having counter measures in place, it shows how the experiences of cyber misogyny are still being treated as individual responsibilities and not taken seriously by the media company. As recommended by Daniels and Skinner (2022), media companies must take cyber misogyny seriously, aid their journalists contending with cyber misogyny and be able to provide mental health support.

### 8.4.3. Negotiation tactics not working

Some of the negotiation tactics used by journalists do not seem to be working in the face of networked trolls and, hence, the attacks keep coming. For example, in the case of Matshidiso Madia, when the perpetrators were called out, even more harassment and insults were received. In addition, when Masikane took to Twitter to publicly speak out about her experience with harassment, even more harassment came from the audience (see chapter 5). These may be influenced by recurring factors such as under reporting and non-action from the platforms, meaning the true extent of the occurrences of cyber misogyny remain obscured. In some cases, such as blocking users, perpetrators continue to sprout again as they hide behind the veil of anonymity provided by the platforms which facilitates the ease with which perpetrators inflict cyber misogyny.

### 8.4.5. Insufficient cooperation from platforms

Journalists in the study, for example, the case of Haffajee and the case of Maughan, have highlighted having reported their encounters without any action being taken by the big technology companies such as X. There is inconsistency in the way their community guidelines may be enforced and in the way moderators of misogynistic content may not be aware of the nuances surrounding the abuses faced by journalists online which leaves women journalists susceptible to continued abuses.

## 8.5. Comparison with existing research on cyber misogyny

In a comparative analysis with existing literature and research, this dissertation confirms what other research studies have found out about cyber misogyny globally

and in the region. It confirms that, indeed, women journalists are suffering cyber misogyny in its various forms due to their practice of journalism, as shown in my case study of Hunter, who felt the need for a mental break because of the attacks or the case study of Maughan who noted that she had at some point become terrified of staying home. It confirms the different resistant mechanisms that they have had to deploy in order to respond to cyber misogyny. However, not all forms of cyber misogyny found globally can be traced in the South Africa context. Some other forms of cyber misogyny that have been identified in global research, for example, spoofing or digitally-enabled financial threats which have been identified in countries such as Brazil, Poland and the UK (Posetti & Shabbir, 2022) do not seem to emerge from the findings documented in this study. This suggests that when cyber misogyny occurs it does not take a universal characteristic but rather a more nuanced and context specific manifestation stimulated by socio-cultural factors.

Previous research such as the Glass Ceiling research by Daniels *et al*. (2018), Posetti and Shabbir (2022), UNESCO and ICFJ show the prevalence of cyber misogyny in journalism globally with some aspects of South Africa including in the research. This dissertation goes further to take a deep dive on South Africa with the various case studies used as evidence to analyse this phenomenon and show how this impacts women journalists and journalism practice. It also brings together the perspectives of media development and feminist organisations as well as news companies.

While the Glass Ceiling (2018) research shows the trolling and cyberbullying on one of South Africa's most prominent women journalists and editor, Haffajee, as an emblematic case, this study goes further to provide more cases of evidence on this phenomenon to add to the body of knowledge. This study further shows that cyber misogyny continues to increase in numbers with many more experiencing these attacks which may also be indicative of how these cyberattacks are gaining ground in journalism.

The current study provides depth by specifically identifying doxing (see the case study of Karima Brown and Julia Madibogo); body shaming (see the case of Hunter and Madia); insults such as "white bitch", "whore" or "cunt" experienced by van Wyk and

Maughan; threats of physical violence such as rape and death threats (see the case study of Haffajee, Maughan and Dentlinger in Chapter 5).

Findings in this dissertation emphasise a concerning trend on targeted name calling including the use of derogatory terms such as “whore”, “slut”, “bitch” and cunt”. For example, in my case study of van Wyk and the EFF where name calling was used as tactics to silence women when their content shared via X, which will be based on their reporting diverges from certain popular opinions, particularly related to politics.

The study identifies a significant deficit in existing literature but also in the actual strategies on media house responses to cyber misogyny which casts light on whether this phenomenon and addressing it is a priority to media companies. Similar to Nelson’s (2023) research on newsroom social media policies in the United States, this study also reveals that although journalists may be encouraged to participate in online spaces like X, which may carry personal and profession risks for these journalists, there is limited support in navigating this risk, as I have shown in the case of Haffajee who had initially not found any support from the organisation she worked for (see Chapter 7).

### 8.6. Unique nature of the findings

Unlike media houses in the United States and United Kingdom[11] that are well underway in terms of using strategies, policies and developing their own guidelines to protect journalists, South Africa lags behind. The findings point to a situation where media companies are still in the nascent stages of developing policies and practices that can protect journalists against cyber misogyny, as Daniels and Skinner (2022) argued. Although this might be the case, South Africa is, however, well ahead of many newsrooms in Africa when it comes to developing strategies, prioritising cyber misogyny and supporting its journalists. For example, research by Zviyita and Mare (2023) shows that in Namibia most newsrooms do not have institutional guidelines such as social media policies that can help to protect journalists. This makes them

[11] This study focuses mainly on South Africa. More indepth information on how media organisations in the global north are handling online violence can be found in case studies by Trionfi and Luque (2019); Posetti and Shabbir (2022)

susceptible to attacks which justifies the urgent need to have institutional frameworks that can enable the safety of journalists.

Of the media companies mentioned in this study, a few began the process of raising awareness in-house and also of developing the response strategies. The implications of this is that journalists do not have a solid support system in-house where they can raise this issue and have it addressed. The kind of support that has been discussed in this study appears to be reactive to situations that have presented themselves instead of proactive, deliberate and preventative.

Unlike in other research, particularly form the global north where journalists reported cases of cyber misogyny, the patterns of negotiating the experiences of cyber misogyny amongst the journalists in South Africa does not seem to echo this same standard except in a few instances where journalists like Maughan, Haffajee, van Wyk, and Hunter have spoken openly about it. This may be linked to the situation whereby survivors of gender-based violence do not usually report their cases in the country. This feeds in to the culture of silence which is directly related to GBV experiences that happen in the “real world” where survivors do not speak out. This also feeds into the newsroom culture of women not speaking out when they face harassment, whether from colleagues or news sources, which discourages discussion on cyber misogynistic experiences. Not reporting fosters an environment of self-censorship and constrains freedom of expression of women journalists. However, part of the problem is that women journalists don’t know where they should report, given that police do not know how to deal with it, media companies mostly are flummoxed and it is close to impossible to get the big international technology companies to take down hatred online. Furthermore, the culture of silence and not reporting to the platforms or media houses buttresses the culture of impunity, allowing perpetrators to operate without consequence and, as such, the cycle of abuse of women journalists flourishes. By not reporting the incidences of cyber misogyny, it impinges upon journalism more broadly by contributing to the normalisation of such behaviours within digital spaces. Women journalists are not only attacked for their stories but their bodies their cultures and their racial ethnic background.

**Racialised misogynist attacks**

This study also shows that the nuances of women journalists experiences of cyber misogyny intersect particularly with the issue of race, as shown with the case of Haffajee and Brown who were told to "go back to India[12]", and van Wyk and Maughan who were called a "white bitch". Evidence from this dissertation shows racial dimensions to the attacks received by women journalists in South Africa. For example, slurs like "white bitch" and "white hag" are used in reference to some of the white journalists like van Wyk whose cases are written in this study. Haffajee is also insulted as not being South African enough when she is told "go back to India. She is also referred to as a lapdog of "White Monopoly Capital".

This phenomenon of intersecting racialised cyber misogynist attacks may be influenced by the unique historical socio-political context of the Apartheid system in South Africa which was segregatory in nature and divided people along racial lines. These divisions seem to appear even in the way women journalists are attacked. This confirms Geertsema– Sligh (2013) assertion mentioned earlier in this dissertation that, remnants from the country's past remain and influence the gender dynamics of the media as well as society today. The intersectionality of gender and race in South Africa can be argued to be amplifying the already existing challenges faced by women journalists. While in South Africa the cyber misogynistic attacks are racialised attacks, the cases of cyber misogyny in other African countries, such as those well documented in Kenya, border on gendered attacks, and attacks on ethnic identities and appearance as argued by Posetti and Shabbir (2022).

### X as the vector of cyber misogyny

This dissertation focused mainly on cyber misogyny that takes place on the X platform. When compared to other African countries, X based attacks do not seem to be as prevalent as in South Africa. Research shows that in other African countries where alternative social media platforms may dominate, for example Facebook, Twitter may not be as prominent of an enabler of cyber violence. Global reports such as *The Chilling* argue that journalists reported more cyber misogyny attacks against women

[12] The question arises concerning to what extent xenophobia intersect with cyber misogyny, however, this dissertation did not delve into this issue.

journalists on Facebook where most journalists indicated they had experienced cyber-attacks.

## 8.7. A Theoretical synthesis

### 8.7.1. Cyber feminism, hegemonic masculinity, journalist routine and role of media

The study uses theoretical and conceptual frameworks contained in democratic theory such as role of the media in a democracy. It also uses the concepts of cyber feminism, hegemonic masculinity and journalist routines as a lens through which to examine cyber misogyny and its impact on women's journalism practice.

Drawing upon democratic theory, particularly on the role of media and diversity, the findings illuminate the deliberate interconnected relationship between a free and diverse media and a democracy, and how the attacks on women can hamper this. The spread of cyber misogyny against women journalists serves as a critical lens through which to recognise how the media's role becomes fragile in the face of abuses leading to potential erosion of media capabilities to play its role of providing diverse and pluralistic views and voices from different media players. It erodes the idea of an ideal online public sphere where ideally everyone's voice must matter. It replays the inequalities where some voices are seen to be more important than others, while others are silenced throughout due to the online incivility they suffer. The implications of this underscores the immense need to have journalists protected online whether through media policies on safeguarding journalists online but also by the technology companies who need to make online spaces safe for journalists in order for journalism to thrive.

In the context of cyber feminism, the dissertation also contributes to an ongoing discourse on cyber feminism, showing the interplay between gender equality journalism and digital technology. The manifestation of cyber misogyny underscores the relevance of cyber feminist theory and the importance of developing this theory further, comprehending multiple forms of misogyny online suffered by women journalists.

This study has also foregrounded theories of hegemonic masculinity, as it unveils how cyber misogyny perpetuates and reinforces traditional gender power dynamics. The theoretical implications extend beyond individual experiences, highlighting the broader societal ramifications of reinforcing hegemonic masculinity in digital environments. This analysis contributes to the theoretical understanding of how entrenched gender norms manifest in online spaces, influencing both the perpetration and reception of cyber misogyny. This contributes to a fertile ground for the incivility to go unabated and normalised as it is perceived by audiences. This dissertation also then limits possible engagement with audiences who may be treated with much suspicion by journalists, hampering opportunities for journalists to seek sources of information or leads that could benefit them in the future.

The study also incorporates or weaves in the concept of journalism routines. It is important to scrutinise the evolving journalism routines and how they fit into the broader discourse of safety and protection of journalists, particularly when faced with phenomena such as cyber misogyny. It is imperative to incorporate feminist perspectives into the changing daily routines of news production, fostering an environment conducive to challenging patriarchal structures in both online and offline engagement. The study prompts a re-evaluation of media house policies and strategies on the protection and safety of journalists to put into consideration, and to prioritise new and emerging concerns for media safety.

The theoretical underpinnings of this research could be explored further in light of this topic to give a broader and nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. There is a need for more theoretical refinement, particularly on cyber feminism and using it to comprehend the evolving social media space but also evolving forms of cyber misogyny and relating these to journalism practice and feminism.

The dissertation is not an end in itself. It goes further than the other research, for example, the *Glass Ceiling* (2018) research which was extensively referred to in this research only collected data on whether it was happening in media houses. Other research such as book chapters delved into documentation of personal accounts on cyber misogyny. This research takes the analysis a step further to examine cyber misogyny within the South Africa context by delving into media companies' institutional

interventions used as a response mechanism to cyber misogyny. More research can be done on this as not all companies have been interviewed in South Africa, nor all layers of management.

### 8.8. Recommendations

As cyber misogyny is a growing phenomenon, it will be important for media companies to prioritise the voices of women journalists that are being targeted by trolls and misogynists in online spaces and to ensure the safety of journalists that work in their media houses. Remedies should move beyond surface level interventions that act as a Band-Aid to the problem and go deeper to institutionalise and make the responses structural and embedded in the companies' values when it comes to the protection of female journalists. There is a need to focus on how entire institutions mitigates these challenges and do not treat it like a norm or cost that comes with doing the job.

Possible solutions also lie in news media leadership being representative of the people who constitute their newsrooms. It can be argued that solutions or tackling of cyber misogyny require not only one component. It will need the journalists, media houses, social media companies and civil society as well as government and the state to play a role to tackle online misogyny.

### 8.9. Limitations

There are several limitations that are evident in this research. This dissertation is qualitative in nature. It relied mostly on archival evidence such as speeches, social media posts, news reports, research chapters and interviews to bring together the case studies of women journalists. This researcher did not conduct first-hand interviews with individual journalists who are experiencing online violence. This could suggest the possibility of missing some nuances in the way journalists experienced these violations. Therefore, interviews with the journalists could also have added more value to the research. However, six in-depth interviews were conducted with five media development and feminist organisations, and one editor agreed to being interviewed. Interviews with more editors could also have provided inside information about their strategies, including plans for the future which may not be in the public domain yet.

The sampling strategy for the study had some limitations. The research chose to focus on only 10 women journalists and the harms they have experienced to put together the case studies. Further research could focus on more journalists perhaps in more quantitative-driven research. It is also possible that they were reluctant to be interviewed as they were caught on the back foot with the issue and have not devised workable strategies and solutions yet.

The limited results of this study capture a series of experiences that a few particular journalists have gone through. Although this cannot be generalised to the experiences of all women journalists in the country these findings are, however, important as they provide evidence that women journalists are experiencing cyber misogyny in their line of work and is impacting on journalism practice and that little, if anything, is being done about it.

The uniqueness of the cyber misogyny experienced by journalists in South Africa compared to the rest of the world has been shown in this research as being embedded on a combination of factors including cultural, social, and political factors. The media is an important role player in democracy, therefore, there is a strong need for strategic responses such as policies and concerted efforts aimed at safeguarding and protecting journalists from the deleterious impact of online trolls and the harms they bring.

The urgency to deal with this issue does not merely arise from the consequences suffered by women journalists individually but extends to cover broader implications for journalism as a practice, freedom of expression, gender equality, plurality and diversity of voice as discussed in the first few chapters of this dissertation, in the theoretical framework. The consequential harm brought about by cyber misogyny on journalism practice and on women journalists also poses an associated threat to citizens' rights to receive a diverse array of views and voices from a free media.

The gravity of the issue of online violence against women journalists as explored throughout this research calls for comprehensive and expeditious remedial actions from various stakeholders from government to media companies to civil society to big tech. The necessity for pressure on the technology companies in the form of regulation cannot be over emphasised. At the present, it is a free for all space for everyone and everything – including hatred of women, which is becoming more and more normalised.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Ethics clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**
R14/49 Nyamweda

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/11/67** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Exploring cyber misogyny and women journalists' work and practice in South Africa |
| **INVESTIGATOR(S)** | Ms T Nyamweda |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT** | School of Literature, Language and Media/ |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 25 November 2022 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved<br>Risk Level: Minimal |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 17 April 2026 |

**DATE** 18 April 2023 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Prof G Daniels

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **A SIGNED COPY** returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ 19/04/2023
**Signature** **Date**

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

**Appendix B**

Interview Questions for media development organisations and feminist organisations and media companies

Interview Guide Introductory general questions

- What is your position in your organisation?
- How many years have you worked supporting journalists? Experiences on cyber misogyny
- Are journalists experiencing cyber misogyny on Twitter? If yes, what is the nature/form and extent of this in South Africa?
- Can you describe what you have observed of women journalists being targeted and vilified online.
- How do you think cyber misogyny against women journalists affect their journalism practice?
- Can you identify and describe the usual perpetrators of this violence? Are they organised?
- What news topics usually trigger cyber misogyny for women journalists?
- What strategies are journalists using to negotiate cyber misogyny they are experiencing online? Have they worked?
- What kind of support have you given to journalists who have experienced cyber misogyny as they practice journalism?
- What support mechanisms exist in media houses in the country when women journalists have reported experiencing online violence?
- What actions can be taken by the media houses, technology platforms, the government, the state, or Non-Governmental Organisations, the UN and its agencies to curb the problem of cyber misogyny experienced by women journalists on Twitter?

**Appendix C**

Appendix Two: Interview guide- Media houses

- Does your news organisation require/expect journalists to have an online presence?
- Do you have any strategies in place to combat cyber misogyny? Please describe them.
- What support mechanisms exist in your media house when women journalists have reported violence in the newsroom?

## Appendix D

## Turnitin Report

