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An Assessment of the 'Safety' of Nigerian Women Journalists Online

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Abstract

Having a variety of online voices is good for democracy. The democratizing of information dissemination which the internet has brought, good as it is, continues to unveil some negative trends. Online bullying and threats are spreading and journalists are not spared. In Nigeria some women journalists have faced threats of rape; some have been attacked physically while others receive threatening graphic imagery in their inboxes or on social media platforms. Although this is evident for both genders, women appear to be more threatened. The harassment of women online is not a new concept, but in recent years it has become a cause for concern and has become a constraint for the freedom of expression for many women journalists. Nigeria, though a developing economy has seen a rapid rise in internet use. Although access to the world via the net is a good thing, there is a need to examine whether this freedom is being misused in Nigeria to stifle the freedom of expression of women journalists. There is also a need to assess the level of awareness among women journalists in Nigeria, of digital threats/harassment, if there are institutions enabled to address any case that may arise and what coping strategies exist when cases arise. The Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) adapted for this study explains a process of threat and coping appraisal in which the behavioral options to diminish the threat are evaluated. The decisions that are made in a way of protecting oneself are how people respond to perceived threats. A quantitative survey of 29 members of the National Executive Council of the Nigerian Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) was conducted. They were purposively

selected to fill in the structured questionnaire. The data was presented and descriptively analyzed using tables and percentages. The data revealed an average awareness of digital harassments mostly from social media. The data also revealed different levels of exposure to threats online and a lack of protective policies for Nigeria's women journalists. The paper notes the virtual absence of machinery to check such threats and recommends the creation of policies to protect women journalists and empower Nigerian Journalists Internet Rights Initiative (NJRI) to enforce protection and forestall a deterioration of the trend.

Keywords: *Digital Threats/Harassment, Women Journalists, Internet, NAWOJ, Freedom, Machinery*

Introduction

The internet today has made life easier for many of us in several ways. From the payment of bills to shopping online, keeping in touch with friends and keeping abreast of current affairs, all within cyberspace. The internet has also made easier, access to information that would, in the past, require a trip to a local, possibly distant library (Deuze, 2007). Network technologies have made it possible for audiences to send regular feedbacks to journalists and news organizations (Ashuri & Frenkel, 2017). However, the easy accessibility to information on the internet and the other advantages, have not been without an ugly side, among which is the issue of safety for users. In particular, is the reality that the use of digital technology has created new working patterns for journalists who are contending more with fragmented audiences (Archetti, 2010)?

Being active online requires an individual to practice digital safety. It is the fundamental human right for one to have freedom of expression and journalists make use of the internet and online tools on a daily basis for their professional tasks. As a result, safety for journalists which includes digital safety has become a growing public concern for their families, the practice of journalism, their sources, media institutions, civil societies and even the private sector (Freedom House, 2015). If the free flow of information is of value in our society then the safety of journalists must be central.

With the use of digital platforms, journalists' safety has become more complex (Nyarko & Akpojivi, 2017). New vulnerabilities have been opened up which are not separate from existing threats to journalists around the globe. Although journalists in general have been facing different forms of threats online, women journalists appear to be more vulnerable (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2016). Freedom House (2015) reports that globally, women have faced increasingly hostile environment with the rapid expansion of Twitter and other social media tools for journalism which have

created avenues for harassment.

This intimidation has proliferated and threatens to silence women's reporting on crucial topics including corruption, politics and crime. Although journalists covering such topics have always been vulnerable, women now encounter particularly vicious and gender-specific attacks ranging from smears and insults to graphic threats of sexual violence and the circulation of personal information (Freedom House Report, 2015).

Antonijevic (2016) corroborates the above noting that violence and intimidation of women in the real world have moved to the cyberspace and recounted the experience of different women journalists who had been abused and threatened for doing their work. She observes:

The idea that technology would provide a shield from gender-based violence and discrimination now appears a Utopian dream. The cyber world is not a safe haven. On the contrary, it is a dangerous and violent labyrinth for both men and women, and for female journalists in particular (Antonijevic, 2016, p. 10).

The situation has silenced many female journalists, forced them to go off their cyber platforms for months or to practice self-censorship to avoid further harassment, posing a serious challenge to freedom of expression that journalists are expected to champion. It is also widespread in many countries. Women journalists in Nigeria also experience some of the threats cited above but the forms and extent of such digital threats are yet to be fully investigated and documented in literature. This paper therefore seeks to fill this gap by investigating the level of digital threats or harassment faced by women journalists in Nigeria, the nature of such threats, the level of awareness among them to recognize these threats.

Conceptualization

Safety can be defined in different ways. It can be a condition of being safe, a device used to prevent harm, the act of protection from an accident, breakage or failure of some sort (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2019). This paper focuses on safety as a means of caution, or strategy used to avoid harm in the course of duty. The safety considered in this paper is that which journalists engage in when working online.

Digital safety is often referred to as online safety, media safety or cyber safety which encompasses many things. The core of digital safety is simply how we protect ourselves, our families and other people when we connect through

digital devices. Digital safety requires knowledge on how to safeguard your privacy and protect your family from predators when connected on line (Google, 2015). Stephen Balkam, in Scheff (2017) states that the origins of internet safety started with protection from three P's, namely porn, predators and pedophiles. With the advancement of the 21st century, many new social media and networking sites have created challenges of cyber bullying, sexting, over-sharing, over-use and several other digital issues and behaviors (Scheff, 2017). Some people feel that online safety is not to be viewed as a risk because in life generally a lot of the things we do are risky. According to Scheff (2017) digital or online safety is important in order to avoid:

- (a) Harmful content like porn
- (b) Companies tracking you for marketing or marketing scams
- (c) Predators, harassment, pedophiles and the likes
- (d) Over-sharing or providing too much information online

Research Questions

This paper addressed the following questions:

- i. What are some threats journalists face to their personal safety through their work interactions online?
- ii. Are there individual or environmental factors that encourage or discourage safety online for women journalists?
- iii. What are the effects of journalists' exposure to threats through their posts and interaction online?

Theoretical Framework

The Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) was adapted for this study. It was developed by Rogers in 1983 (Clubb & Hinkle, 2015). Although propounded before the Internet era, some of its arguments were adapted to suit the study. The theory explains a process of threat and coping appraisal in which the behavioral options to diminish the threat are evaluated. The decisions that are made in a way of protecting oneself are how people respond to perceived threats. This theory tries to describe and predict what motivates people to change their behaviour (Clubb & Hinkle, 2015). According to Clubb and Hinkle (2015, p.2) "PMT proposes that both individual and environmental factors can provide either encouragement or discouragement for engaging in protective behaviours and that the effects of such factors are mediated by individual cognitive processes". Clubb and Hinkle (2015) mention that PMT proposes five coping modes. The first being the inhibition of action where the individual chooses to not engage in any protective response. The other four modes are classifications of the number and the frequency of protective behaviours the individual engages in. For single acts, repeated acts or multiple acts, the individual will employ one or more potential protective responses carried out either in succession or simultaneously.

This theory is useful in clarifying how threats are appraised and what choices evolve from the appraisal made on what to do. The premise of the PMT is that information is first received (sources of information) which leads to an evaluation of it by the person receiving the information (cognitive mediating process) and finally to the person taking some action based on the information received (coping mode) (Clubb & Hinkle, 2015).

PMT proposes that the intention of an individual protecting him/herself is based on four (4) key factors namely:

- i. How the threatened activity/event is perceived (severity) by the individual. How grave or real is the threat?
- ii. How an individual perceives the possibility or vulnerability of a threat. Is the threat real and how vulnerable is the journalist to the threat? What areas in the life of the individual make them susceptible to a threat being carried out against them?
- iii. The value of the suggested preventive behavior by the victim. This is evaluating an adequate response to the threat being posed, a repeated threat or multiple threats. What protective action can be taken to ward off the threat or prevent it being carried out?
- iv. An individual's perceived level of confidence to undertake the recommended preventive behavior i.e. how confident one is to undertake recommended preventive behavior. Is the victim ready/able to carry out the 'protective' action(s) (Clubb & Hinkle, 2015).

PMT in the context of this study explains how journalists respond to threats (in this case, online) and what coping mechanisms they devise to such threats. Hence, if a journalist receives a threat of violence or any other threat online, this can generate fear or defiance and make her develop a coping mechanism (to limit or eliminate fear) through a number of possible responses that might be positive or negative. This could include, discontinuation of the 'offending' activity (investigating or publication of a story), which means the journalist has devised self-censorship as reaction to the threat; continuation of the 'offending' action, i.e. daring the 'aggressor' and calling his or her bluff; or possibly taking security measures such as disguising oneself, changing one's movement or any other measure to prevent oneself from physical attack.

Types of Online Threats

Online safety begins with acknowledging risks and recognizing the culture of responsibility required when online. Being proactive and creating awareness in all realms of cyber reality are key factors for online safety (Scheff, 2017).

What kinds of threats do journalists face online? There are several threats online but this paper will outline a few:

1. Identity theft – this is the use of stolen identification details to gain access to an individual's personal items like credit cards, email accounts etc. in

order to impersonate. Such details can be used to take control of all existing accounts of any individual.

2. Identity fraud – the use of an individual's details to create a fictitious person in order to defraud other people, clients, family etc.
3. Surveillance and mass surveillance – this is the “monitoring inception, collection, preservation and retention of information that has been generated, stored and relayed over communication networks” (Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky, 2015, p.22). It involves “indiscriminate collection of information or the communications of all possible sources” (Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky, 2015, p.22). It makes sources not to trust journalists with information because they cannot ascertain confidentiality. Journalists' freedom of expression is hampered because their information is being monitored.
4. Software and hardware exploitation from unknown sources. Surveillance technology has so developed that it can now be used to infect computers. Some attacks are carried out through journalists' location data. A physical bug or hidden microphones can be inserted in a journalist's communication device or on a person. Many have resorted to the use of encrypted technologies which is not fool proof for protecting sources.
5. Phishing campaigns – this is the use of links containing malware sent through the email or social media. Some sophisticated malware are resistant to anti-virus software. The challenge of phishing campaigns is that it can compromise a journalist's personal information, result in blackmail or misuse of personal information and lead to self-censorship (Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky, 2015).
6. Fake domain attacks – these attacks usually consist of either an injected malware or provision of fake content which attacks the credibility of news organizations and journalists.
7. Man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks –this happens when an attacker places itself between a user and a target site. In such an attack, information is silently obtained from both sides and content can be changed without either knowing. This exchange continues while the attacker in the 'middle' watches. These attacks can be through WiFi hotspot connections which look legitimate but provide the attacker access to online banking, email, credentials etc. for future use. A journalist's browser can also be attacked by malicious codes planted on the machine in the browser. The attacker uses the browser to record data sent between the browser and several target sites.
8. Denial of service attacks (DoS) – this attack is used to intimidate and limit a journalist's freedom of expression. This attack is done by one computer and one internet connection flooding a server with packets in order to

overwhelm the site and make it inaccessible to others. Another form of attack is through denial of service. This attack hinders the dissemination of information which results in indirect censorship. It could result in financial loss to the journalist online. It causes the journalist to seek for technical assistance thereby resulting in extra cost. This attack also results in the public and journalist to think that the publication, information or site is no longer existent.

9. Website defacement – attacks to websites run or used by journalists are often done by MitM through compromising legitimate user accounts. Vulnerabilities in the websites web server software could also be attacked. This attack is often carried out against media organizations.
10. Compromised user accounts – here the attacker steals information through user accounts like the email, social media, skype and so on. An attacker could state a phishing attack and install malware on a journalist's device to capture passwords and use them to access the real website. A journalist here can help herself by using a two-factor authentication. This requires the use of a password and a code to allow the device access. Although this can be by-passed, it's a good attempt at curbing this menace.
11. Intimidation, harassment and forced exposure of online networks –even though these are not new threats, a lot of journalists today experience this across multiple platforms. A lot of these threats when made are a precursor to the killing of journalists which is a major issue.
12. Disinformation and smear campaigns – although disinformation is not new to journalists, smear campaigns are troublesome because they have a long life online and spread far quickly (Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky, 2015). Smear campaigns can be both online and offline. It includes setting up fake websites for disinformation or intimidation of a journalist by using compromising photos or videos. Some websites are clones. Readers become confused, credibility and legitimacy of news organizations are affected, cyber impersonation and so on is all results of disinformation and smear campaigns.
13. Confiscation of a journalist's product – because journalists store vast amounts of information on portable devices like laptops, mobile phones and so on, the confidential sources and information are at risk. The confiscation of any of these devices exposes the journalist to the danger or sources being revealed along with other personal or confidential information.
14. Data storage and mining – data storage is cheaper and more efficient these days. Data from emails texts and other communications are collected and stored for longer periods of time. This storage facilitates the process of data mining. Once this data is attacked a journalist and their sources could

become intimidated, the rights of a journalist and their sources are invaded upon. Also, detention, arrest, prosecution, imprisonment amongst many other challenges could occur.

Gender Perspectives of Safety Online

Women journalists are sometimes victims of the two sides of one coin because they are not just journalists but also female. Henrichsen, Betz and Lisosky (2015, p.43) report that “nearly two-thirds of every female journalist surveyed in a recent study said they had experienced acts of 'intimidation, threats and abuse' in relation to their work”. Nearly half of these women said they had experienced sexual harassment at their jobs. Online abuse against women is a growing international concern which takes the form of sexual harassment, rape threats, violent threats, cyber-stalking, sexist comments and gender-based hate speech. Research shows that women can be harassed without any communication from their side (Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky, 2015, p.43).

Women journalists who experience such challenges have psychological convenience and financial costs to battle with. Such threats cause journalists to be more concerned about their personal security and some start using pseudonyms when they publish, some stop writing on certain topics entirely, some change their locations of reporting, some relocate while others leave the job entirely. Such threats can leave women emotionally distressed and many fall into depression psychologically (Doveling, Harju & Sommer, 2018). Some women have to spend money on legal fees to fight online predators in court. Others purchase protection services while some experience a loss of income because they are too psychologically traumatized to continue in the profession.

Sexist's comments toward women journalists may impact their wellbeing. Some experience increased anger, depression and diminished self-esteem based on the level of their exposure to sexist behaviour (Harju, 2014). Women journalists are also vulnerable to mob mentality. When they are dealing with a group of individuals in online forums, taking a varied position in the group could lead to a gang up of group members against the journalist in the group.

According to Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky (2015), several campaigns have been run and are taking place in order to address the safety of women online. Such campaigns are set to:

- (i) Create digital spaces that are not only safe but protect everyone's right to participate freely without any harassment or threat to their safety.
- (ii) Create awareness of women's rights to “shape, define, participate, use and share knowledge, information and ICT” (Henrichsen, Betz, & Lisosky, 2015, p.48).
- (iii) Create an intersection which addresses communication rights and women's human rights especially as it relates to violence against women.
- (iv) Create awareness of the historical and critical participation and

contribution of women to the development of ICT.

Methodology

This paper undertook an empirical study to gain a deeper insight into Nigerian women journalists' perception of online safety. A total of 29 women journalists, who were officials of the National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), were sampled. These women were purposively sampled. This method of sampling was used in order to assess journalists who conducted any of their work processes on line. Women journalists who worked in the central (or Middle Belt) and northern regions of Nigeria. This was done because in the past few years these regions in Nigeria had experienced violent conflicts about which journalists have had to report. This paper sought to investigate whether women journalists experienced safety challenges on line while working in these regions during the period under study.

A questionnaire was drawn with open and close ended questions. The questionnaire sought to ascertain the following:

- (a) The level of awareness of online harassment and threats.
- (b) Types of online harassments/threats that have been received and their effects.
- (c) Factors (individual/environmental) that encourage or discourage safety for women journalists online.
- (d) The available policies to ensure digital safety for women journalists online.

The copies of the questionnaire were distributed purposively to participants while they attended a national conference. They were retrieved from each participant during break periods or at the end of sessions. A total of 30 copies of the questionnaire were distributed with 29 returned and analyzed for this study.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented below:

The women journalists fell between the ages of 25 and over 46 years of age. Twelve (41%) of the women (which is a larger percentage of those sampled) were over 46 years of age.

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Age	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
26-35	5	17%
36-45	11	35%
46 and above	12	41%
No response	1	4%
TOTAL	29	100%

Educationally, most of the women have a higher level of education ranging from diploma (8 – 28%), to a degree (13 – 44%) or Masters (8 – 28%).

Table 2: Education level of respondents

Educational Level	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Diploma	8	28%
Degree	13	44%
Masters	8	28%
TOTAL	29	100%

The marital status of the women indicated that 21 (72%) were married, 5 (17%) were single, 1 (4%) was divorced and 2 (7%) were widowed.

Table 3: Marital Status of the respondents

Marital Status	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Single	5	17%
Married	21	72%
Divorced	1	4%
Widowed	2	7%
TOTAL	29	100%

When asked how often they use the internet to disseminate news, the women journalists revealed that 19 (66%) use it daily, 6 (21%) use it weekly, 1 (3%) use it monthly and another 1 (3%) said they do not use the internet at all to disseminate news. Two respondents did not respond to the question asked.

Table 4: Use of internet for news dissemination

Use of internet for news dissemination	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Daily	19	66%
Weekly	6	21%
Monthly	1	3%
Not at all	1	3%
No response	2	7%
TOTAL	29	100%

Source: Field Survey, February 2018

With reference to online harassments/threats received, the data gathered revealed that 14 (48%) women have received such threats while another 14 (48%) women have not received threats. There was one respondent (4%) who did not respond to the question.

Table 5: Receipt of Harassment/Threat Report

Receipt of Reports	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	14	48%
No	14	48%
No response	1	4%
TOTAL	29	100%

The types of online harassments/threats received were categorized and the respondents revealed that threats, sexual, male and police harassment were reported. There were also embarrassing statements and the use of reports written by the women to victimize them. An alarming point here was the inability of 21 (72%) respondents to identify types of threats received. Only 8 (28%) were able to articulate the types of threats received online which indicates either a lack of knowledge or possible 'spiral of silence'.

The respondents also revealed about the reasons they felt led to women receiving such threats was as a result of their gender (14-24%), 7 (24%) said it was from their work, 5 (17%) did not know why, while 3 (10%) felt that threats were received based on both gender and work.

Table 6: Types of Platform Online/Digital Harassment/Threat are Received On

Type of Platform	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Email	2	7%
Facebook	6	21%
Twitter	1	3%
WhatsApp	7	24%
Other	2	7%
No Response	11	38%
TOTAL	29	100%

The types of platforms online/digital harassments/threats are received on by journalists indicated in Table 6 reveal that 2 (7%) women had received threats by email, 6 (21%) had received threats through Facebook, 1 (3%) had received threats via Twitter, 7 (24%) had received threats on WhatsApp, 2 (7%) had received threats from other sources (although not online) like phone calls and 11 (38%) respondents did not indicate a response for this question.

Table 7: Reasons for Online Harassments/Threats

Reasons	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Gender	14	48%
Work	7	24%
Both Gender and Work	5	17%
No response	3	10%
TOTAL	29	100%

The level of online harassments when classified revealed that 15 (52%) women feel the level of threat is low, 6 (21%) feel it is average, 5 (17%) feel it is high, 2 (7%) could not classify the level while 1 (3%) respondent had no response to the question.

Table 8: Level of Threat

Level of Threat	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Low	15	52%
Medium/Average	6	21%
High	5	17%
I do not know	2	7%
No response	1	3%
TOTAL	29	100%

Threats online have a negative effect on women journalists. The data gathered revealed that 1 respondent felt the effect caused was fear of using the internet (3%), 1 respondent felt the avoidance of work (3%) and 1 respondent felt the fear of revealing their identity (3%) was the effect 3 (10%) said the effect was on poor performance, 6 (21%) said it demoralizes, 4 (14%) said it causes women to withhold important or known facts or information; 3 (10%) said it caused insecurity while 10 (34%) had no response to the effect caused.

Table 9: Effect of Online Harassments/Threats

Effects	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Fear of using the internet	1	3%
Poor Performance	3	11%
Avoidance of work	1	3%
Demoralization	6	21%
Withholding important information and known facts	4	14%
Insecurity (fear , intimidation & dominance)	3	11%
Fear of revealing identity	1	3%
No responses	10	34%
TOTAL	29	100%

Table 10 reveals that 19 (66%) women journalists indicated that there are no policies in Nigeria to protect respondents online. Three (11%) women said yes there are and 7 (24%) indicated no response.

Table 10: Availability of Policies to Protect Women Journalists Online

Availability of Policies	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	3	10%
No	19	66%
No response	7	24%
TOTAL	29	100%

When asked if they are aware of Nigerian Journalists Internet Rights Initiative (NJIRI), 25 (86%) respondents revealed they are not aware, 1 (4%) said yes to awareness and 3 (10%) indicated no response.

Table 11: Awareness of Nigerian Journalists Internet Rights Initiative (NJIRI)

Awareness of NJIRI	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	1	4%
No	25	86%
No response	3	10%
TOTAL	29	100%

Because a large percentage (86%) are unaware of this initiative, all the respondents felt that whatever policies were being promoted by the initiative had no impact on women's safety online.

From the data gathered, implications were drawn to show that a lot of women journalists (66% - Table 4) use the internet daily to disseminate news which is good to know that technology is facilitating their work processes. However, in line with the submission of Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), we see varied responses from women journalists to online threats. Although an equal number of women (48%) each said Yes and No for having received reports of online threats, Table 8 shows that levels of online threats are perceived to be low (52%). There were 5 (17%) of respondents who perceived that the rate of threats are high. These could be individual cases or cases that are concealed and not generally known or perceived in the zones. It might also imply that as PMT suggests, they might have developed coping mechanisms to threats and therefore feel it is unnecessary to report such threats. This could mean a cognitive process has taken place and a preventive behaviour has been selected or implemented.

The greatest effect of online insecurity for women journalists was demoralization (21%) and withholding of important/vital information (14%) (Table 9). Although these effects can only be expected from trauma, it was a little

alarming to note that 10 (34%) of the respondents did not respond or could not indicate what effect such online threats had on women. This could be a closed issue they might not want to articulate/indicate. This corroborates Clubb and Hinkle's (2015) proposition that the perception of a threat is very relevant to respondents' behaviours. Perhaps women journalists do not perceive some threats as real thus irrelevant for mention. Another possibility is that women journalists could lack the required confidence to undertake preventive behaviors or articulate effects. The lack of indicated effect (34%) poses a lot of possible challenges facing women journalists online.

Table 10 indicates that 19 (66%) of the respondents said there are no policies to protect women journalists online and 86% of the women sampled, said they had never heard of Nigerian Journalists Internet Rights Initiative (NJIRI). NJIRI is a blog dedicated to the freedom of journalists on the internet. It is a platform on which journalists can exercise their rights on the web. The main aim of this blog is to defend internet and digital rights as well as the safety of journalists online. The implication of responses here is that there are existing platforms but they appear not to have active policies that women can take advantage of in case of online threats. This also indicates a lack of awareness of a body which is dedicated in helping to protect women journalists.

Generally, though, leaders of the National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) do receive reports of digital threats online from women journalists, but they are largely unable to articulate what type of threats are being received. This indicates that there is a lack of articulated coping mechanisms towards threats which is not in line with PMT. A large percentage (52%) sees the occurrence of online threats in their zones as being relatively low (Table 8). This is very good but it also means that women journalists need to brace up, develop policies and create active bodies that address any case as they occur. The age range of respondents implies that since 12 (41%) respondents are 46 years and above this could indicate experience and exposure which could mean they can handle threats more maturely than younger colleagues. A large number (21 – 72%) are married which could imply their caution in writing and types of information shared in order to protect themselves and their families. This response aligns with the contention of PMT that protective actions are motivated in people to ward off perceived threats.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to establish empirically that women journalists in Nigeria, like their counterparts in other parts of the world are victims of cyber bullying which undermine their ability to freely practice their profession. It evidenced how, as the Protection Motivation Theory explains, female journalists respond to cyber harassments/threats and develop mechanisms to reduce or eliminate such threats. Officials of the National Association of Women Journalists

confirmed that they receive complaints of such harassments from their members even though they did not cite specific examples. This could mean that the victims are afraid to stand up to their rights by identifying the bullies or making comprehensive reports that could lead to appropriate actions being taken against the culprits. The paper believes that the recommendations could contribute to reducing the trend and enable female journalists pursue their legitimate professional duties without intimidation. For as Dunja (2016) notes, “any attempt to silence women online must be regarded as a direct attack on our fundamental freedoms”.

Recommendations and Coping Strategies

Based on the data gathered, the following recommendations are made:

1. Create protection policies that are strategic and interface with bodies like the National Assembly, NAWOJ and CSOs to initiate. These policies will aid in awareness, provide full rights for women in the work place, assist with insurance for women journalists, and possibly address cultural and religious practices that promote the spiral of silence, ensure conclusion and treatment of legal cases and ensure domestication of the gender equal opportunity bill.
2. Monitor social media activities especially those used by journalists to achieve their work.
3. Popularize NAWOJ's complaints committee to address cases.
4. Strengthen/Empower/Promote NJIRI to enforce protection.
5. Public enlightenment on the dignity and equal treatment of women journalists.
6. Reorientation and change of attitudes, both of the public and journalists to other journalists.

Suggestion for Further Research

This paper covered an aspect of digital safety through the eyes of the NAWOJ leaders. A study on the perceptions of women journalists, who are not leaders, could provide a comparative analysis for further insight into the problem at hand. Also, there are many other threats that women journalists face offline which could provide deeper insight into the challenges women face in their career.

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