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Hate and Threats Against Journalists

Consequences for Freedom of Speech and Democracy

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Hate and Threats Against Journalists: Consequences for Freedom of Speech and Democracy

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The more considerable corpus of research conducted on early Internet research uncritically ascribed high hopes for the democratic potential of new technologies (e.g., Etzioni & Etzioni, 1997; Grossman, 1995). It is now commonly understood that the Internet, although providing unprecedented access to information, is awash with regressive content (e.g., Lee, 2015; Turner, 2018). With this in mind, it is deeply problematic that digital environments are frequently perceived as spaces of exception for crime victims to obtain state protection (Citron, 2014). Thereupon, during the last ten years, journalists' exposure to online hate has been addressed in academic literature as a global phenomenon that is effective in silencing journalists and, thus, a significant concern for democratic societies (e.g., Binns, 2017; Chen et al., 2018; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Obermaier et al., 2018).

This paper will discuss journalists' vulnerability as crime victims in the digital society, and the potential implications of the professions' freedom of speech and democratic values in a broader societal context. So far, very little attention has been given to this issue from a broader democratic viewpoint. Hence, this PhD-project will, from a socio-legal perspective, focus on; (1) how journalists are affected by online hate and threats associated to an understanding of how they perceive the situation, (2) how the public opinion formation is affected by hate and threats by adopting a socio-psychological approach to self-censorship, and (3) the legal challenges concerning online hate and threats. In this paper, I will present findings from a systematic literature review and preliminary results of survey study concerning exposure to hate and threats, psychosocial work environment, and self-censorship amongst a representative sample of active journalists in Sweden.