Online Threats to Journalists in Sweden and the US

An investigation into the organizational protections of journalists in an era of outrage-culture

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Abstract

The growing presence of social media in our modern-day world has changed the nature of journalism, as the introduction of Twitter as a tool in modern newsrooms has introduced new threats against journalists. This subject of Twitter in the newsroom has been thoroughly researched in the past; however, the research has largely been quantitative and the consequences of the behavior of journalists using Twitter somewhat less explored. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions: How has twitter affected the newsroom? How do journalists cope with online threats and hate on Twitter? and How do Aftonbladet (Sweden) and The New York Times (US) protect their journalists from threats and hate on Twitter? The research methods for this study have mainly been from semi-structured qualitative interviews with six journalists. Interviews were chosen to get a deeper understanding of individual experiences at large news organizations. It explores two different newspapers, the Swedish based Aftonbladet and US based The New York Times. The theoretical framework consisted of the Spiral of Silence Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. The findings indicate that (1) Twitter effects the newsrooms in terms of online threats, causes journalists and news organizations to cater to the few, Twitter can negatively affect people, and creates the opportunity for journalists to become brands outside of their employer; (2) journalists cope with online hate and threats by reporting threats, ignoring threats or hate, filtering social media, turning off their phones and avoiding topics; and lastly (3) Aftonbladet recognized that social media use is up to the journalist and that there should be less reliance or emphasis on the platform, they protect their journalists by offering training for the current online environment (threats training, persona training). While training is unknown for The New York Times, the organization put too much emphasis on the platform as a reporting and feedback tool which led to providing little protection for journalists who receive hate and threats on the platform (unless threats are deemed as a physical danger to the journalist).

Key Words: Agency-Based Gratifications, Corporate Censorship, Online Threats, Parasocial Relationships, Spiral of Silence, Self-Censorship, Twitter, Uses and Gratifications
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1 Introduction

As newsrooms have become increasingly digital and journalists are present and accessible online for the public like never before (Nielsen et al., 2016), a new threat to the journalist’s safety and career has emerged. In the world of journalism, threats have mostly been seen as physical and determined by the journalist’s assignment or location. As the online public sphere has grown and users gain more power over information, an emerging online phenomenon has gained momentum. This phenomenon has been able to infiltrate the newsrooms through the journalists’ use of social media, mainly Twitter, as a means of being present online for the readers and for reporting purposes.

The phenomena cancel-culture has been a topic of discussion in newsrooms and universities around the world in recent years. The term has not yet been defined but has been described as “when many people jump on an individual who has, for example, questioned a belief or conviction held by most of one's peers or society in general” (TheWrap, 2021). This research was inspired by an aspect of cancel-culture, outrage-culture. This term has not yet been defined but described as “a way for people to jump on a digital bandwagon to attack or harass someone who has been seen to have done something inconsequential” (The Wrap, 2021). This term can be closely linked with Thorsten Quandts (2018) own observation of what he calls ‘dark participation.’ He defines it as the opposite of what newsroom scholars believed would be the idealism of citizen engagement with news organizations and journalists (Quandt, 2018). The online platform, Twitter, has given people the power to be anonymous and impulsive with the 280-character limit. They can now say whatever they want on the internet to whomever they want with little to no consequences. This is however not limited to Twitter but a main social media feature.

Twitter is a tool used in journalism around the world and plays a vital role in promoting journalism. Some newspapers require or strongly encourage their journalists to be present online. Previous research has shown that journalists are prone to be targeted if they are defined by specific social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion (Waisbord, 2020).
This paper will explore Swedish and US journalists’ experiences and the largest newspapers in each respective country. Due to the researcher being half American and half Swedish and consumes news from both countries, the topic was of interest for the researcher to explore. The researcher is also aware that Sweden and the US have different media landscapes, law systems and significant difference in population size. This study will however not focus on these aspects. It will focus on the role Twitter plays in online hate and threats against journalists but mainly how newspapers protect their journalists from this. It will try to understand the online threats against journalists and the protections news organizations provide in each respective country.
2 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the adverse effects of Twitter on journalists and on news organizations. It will also explore what systems are in place to protect journalists. To research this topic, the area of study has been narrowed. To answer and explore the questions, this study will be looking at the Swedish based newspaper Aftonbladet and the US based newspaper The New York Times.

R1: How has Twitter affected the newsroom?
   - Aims to answer if the online platform affects journalists in the newsroom.

R2: How do journalists cope with online threats and hate on Twitter?
   - Aims to answer if the online working environment for journalists needs to be improved or better adapted to the current online environment.

R3: How do Aftonbladet and The New York Times protect their journalists from online threats and hate on Twitter?
   - Aims to answer the question of what systems and policies are in place in the newsroom to help deal with online threats (routines, training, support).

This research will attempt to connect the journalistic areas that have been explored in previous research. It will fill the gap of exploring the effects of Twitter on individual journalists’ behavior and the newsrooms handling of that behavior. To get a deeper understanding of threats to journalists, US and Swedish journalists will be interviewed. This in the purpose of exploring if the experiences are similar in these countries or not. The hypothesis is that both newspapers take online physical threats very seriously, but Swedish news organizations are less reliant on Twitter and support their journalists who have suffered from online hate. While American news organizations rely heavily on Twitter as a part of the journalists’ day-to-day work, and the reputation of the newspaper comes first. In the wake of the 2016 US election and the #MeToo movement in Sweden, both newspapers have been heavily criticized. The researcher observed overtime that both newspapers had highly controversial moments which inspired the choice of the two newspapers.
3 Background

This research is interested in analyzing research questions from the perspective of technological changes and the societal changes in our collective behavior. To do so a contextual background has been constructed to understand how newspapers and journalism have changed. It is important to go through the changes that have occurred in the past forty years. In this chapter the newspaper and its structure will be examined throughout this period. It will look at the introduction of computers into the newsroom, the introduction of the internet, how Twitter has been adopted in the newsroom, US and Swedish media landscapes, cultural changes, and lastly online threats that may change the way we perceive our traditional preconceptions of threats against journalists.


In the 1970s the process of printing newspapers would go from journalist to editor, to publisher, to the pressman who would give the green light for printing. In the printing press process, linotype would be used. In this process, articles would be retyped giving the opportunity for corrections or rewrites to be able to create the molds for the font and type size for the newspaper molds. There was a clear informational hierarchy, and the newspapers were the gatekeepers of information.

In the 1980’s, when the computer was introduced to newsrooms, it changed the way newspapers were produced but also the entire publishing industry (Carter, 1984). This shift in the news organizations created low cost and easy printing of newspapers. This led to the new photodecomposition method where the characters and images were cast as photographic positives for creating the plate for the letterpress. The computer allowed for combining texts, photographs, and charts to a document before printing. Computer programs allowed editors to use digital dummy sheets to organize the newspapers layout before sending it to be printed. Editors could review stories as “they are transmitted, call them up instantly; edit, and send the copy electronically to the photocomposition system in composing within seconds” (Garrison, 1983, p.7). The computer was acting as the central figure of information, transforming information inputs into information outputs. It could also process information rapidly which could then decentralize the decision making in the news organization (Carter, 1984). This shift in the newsroom also created rapid increases in the number and types of information sources.
for journalists. Reporters started to become researchers and human scanners of databases (Garrison, 1983). The new tool provided the opportunity for news organizations to create internal databases of news stories to be used as sources in reporting of new stories of similar topics.

As mentioned previously, the traditional informational structure of a newspaper was the informational hierarchy of reporters working with their editors and the editor sending all the material to be approved by the publisher who had the last say. The newspaper was the sender of the message and had control of the information coming in and out. The following organizational chart is relevant for this study to understand what a traditional newspaper informational hierarchy looked like:

Diagram 1. Newspaper traditional informational flow visual.
(Source: Personal Collection)

The publisher acted as the disseminator of information coming from the newspaper itself. This structure existed as a function to ensure the information published was fact checked and edited prior to being printed in the newspaper. The public had very little direct access to newspapers and were receivers of the information. The executive of Harte-Hanks Newspapers, Robert Harte, was quoted in a 1980 bulletin saying that computers will be “either the major threat to
our business or the key to our future. Why? ... We're really information providers" (Garrison, 1983, p. 18).

3.2 The Technological Revolution (1995-)

The following section will explore the technological advancements in the newsroom.

3.2.1 Online Newspapers and Comment Sections

The birth of what we know today as online newspapers was born in 1994-1995. The Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet was the first to go digital in Sweden in 1994. The American based newspaper The New York Times first published its online newspaper in 1995 (Shedden, 2013). Desktop publishing could now cut down on the time and cost required to produce a newspaper. Now articles can be published at a much faster speed, accelerating the news cycle. It should be mentioned that the period between 1995 and 2000 is known today as the .com bubble.

In 1998 a revolution started with Rocky Mountain News, which was the first news outlet to introduce comment sections for their articles online. This invited the public to take part in the news production process (Santana, 2011). This led to a monumental shift. For the first time a reader could immediately respond to what was written by the journalists/news organizations. This meant that news could now reach the reader within minutes of being published online and readers could respond within minutes via the comment section. An opportunity for a direct dialog was created, instead of the previous one-way communication flow. This also meant that readers for the first time could communicate directly with each other via the comment section. In 2007 the New York Times followed other online newspapers by introducing a comment section for their articles (Santana, 2011).

3.2.2 Twitter

In 2006, a microblogging platform called Twitter was introduced to the public. The concept was described by one of the founders Jack Dorsey as being able to write "a short burst of inconsequential information", and make it seem like "chirps from birds" (Sarno, 2009). The platform allowed the user to “Tweet” a maximum of 140 characters (today that has been increased to 280 characters). In 2008, the Barack Obama presidential campaign was the first
presidential candidate to use Twitter as a campaign tool. By 2008, 75% of the top 100 newspapers were using Twitter in the US (Chen & Pain, 2017). According to recent Twitter audience research, in 2022 43.6% of Twitter's users were female and 56.4% were male (Statista, 2022a). A little under 80% of Twitter users are under the age of 50 (Statista, 2022b). Twitter has 396 million active users and 206 daily active users (Statista, 2022c).

Twitter markets itself towards news organizations as a tool to reach and engage with the news organizations audience. They encourage a range of tools to use including user relevant hashtags, pin tweets, threaded tweets, use of emojis and photos, build a Twitter list of journalists and create a poll (Twitter, n.d.). It should be noted that at the time of this writing, Elon Musk may become the new owner of the platform (Roumeliotis, April 26, 2022). The future of how Twitter will operate is unknown.

### 3.2.3 The Effects of the new digital landscape

Digitization and the digitalization of newsrooms changed the structure of the information flow through the new digital landscapes (Gobble, 2018). Not only did the newspaper become a digital product but digitization also changed the way a reader would communicate with the news organization. The difference between composing, writing, and mailing a physical letter to a news organization compared to composing and sending off a quick email, is monumental.

Digitalization created technological development in the newsroom such as online newspapers, engaging comment sections, and social media profiles for readers to interact with. Successful organizations learned how to integrate digital tools into the newsroom, and it helped them cut costs and be a competitor in the digital landscape (Gobble, 2018).

The hope of the journalism industry was that the technological advancements would engage the readers to contribute to the journalistic process via educated feedback and constructive criticism. In many cases this turned out to be true, but in general this turned out to be a utopian dream (Quandt, 2018). Instead, journalists often received overwhelming negative feedback and hate, often based on false information from unreliable sources.

The chart below was created to show how the information flow has changed and the way the public can now influence the newsrooms like never before.
As seen above, organizations lost control of their previous information flow process, and the walls have come down. Journalists now have more freedom and control over publishing and interacting with the readers or the public. The hierarchy has broken down and therefore created a decentralization of power. A New York Times columnist was quoted talking about the availability of journalists to go online saying “when we go online each of us is our own editor, our own gatekeeper” (Kristof, 2009, p. 1). Approximately 75% of journalists in Western society maintain a Twitter account (Laor, 2022). In 2022, 24.6% of the more than 360,000 current verified accounts on Twitter belong to journalists (Ahlgren, 2022). Verified accounts is the process of verifying if a Twitter account is owned by a specified real individual or organization. A blue verified badge is added to the profile, so the digital public knows that the account is authentic (Twitter, 2022).

With the internet’s growth and the increasing reliance on online media, many traditional newspapers were shut down. Local newspapers and smaller newspapers in big cities could not keep up with the technological advancements and make enough profit to keep the newsrooms
running. This created a high concentration of media power in large cities. Which meant relying less on local news outlets for information.

3.3 US and Swedish media landscapes

To give the reader an understanding of the two different media landscapes journalists are working in, a short explanation of their structure will be provided. Both countries have public and private media sectors. Sweden has public service (Sverige’s Television, SVT) while the US has non-profit public broadcasting service (PBS). All newspapers in both countries are privately owned. Both countries’ journalists and newspapers are protected under the Freedom of the Press law. This means that the government may not intervene in the process or publishing of journalism. Both countries have the freedom to criticize their governments without consequences. Sweden was one of the first to pass the Freedom of the Press act in 1766. (Weibull, 2021)

Sweden has a Press Council which is entirely voluntarily funded by four groups: The Newspaper Publishers Association, The Magazine Publishers Association, The Swedish Union of Journalists and The National Press Club. The Chief Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO), the chairman of the Swedish Bar Association and the chairman of the National Press Club appoint a Press Ombudsman (Press Council, 2006). The Press Ombudsman role is to make sure the Swedish print media stays in line with good journalistic practices. If they suspect that the rules of good journalistic practice have been violated, they will ask the editor in chief of the newspaper to answer the violations or give them a fine for those violations (Opitz, 2021).

The US and Sweden differ since the Swedish press collectively chose to appoint an Ombudsman to make sure the media stays in line with the journalistic ethics. Swedish media has a watchdog to make sure the Swedish press is held accountable for their mistakes. The US has no Ombudsman unless a newspaper decides to appoint their own. The New York Times had an ombudsman position for 14 years between the years 2003-2017 (Victor, 2017). When asked about why the position was removed, the then chairman of the New York times said the following; “Our followers on social media and our readers across the internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be,” and continues to say “our responsibility is to empower all of those watchdogs, and to listen to them, rather than to channel their voice through a single office” (Victor, 2017).
Individual print media journalists in each country are not held accountable for publishing due to every media outlet having a “responsible publisher” who is responsible for any work being published by their newsroom. This person is appointed by the owner of the newspaper. Both countries have code of ethics provided by a collective society or union for journalists. Sweden has the Swedish Union of Journalists, and the US has Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). In Sweden the code of ethics provided by the union, or the Medie-ombudsman is followed by all newspapers. In the US some newspapers may decide to create more in-depth versions of the code of ethics provided by SPJ (S, 2014).

3.4 Changes in culture

As Twitter was introduced to the newsroom, it changed the news organizations dynamic with the public. It also created the opportunity for journalists to be their own entity outside of their employer.

3.4.1 Individualization of journalists and Interaction with the public

As the newsrooms introduced the use of Twitter, most individual journalists were encouraged by their employer to create their own accounts to monitor the platform for activity (Jordaan, 2012). As the platform grew and the following for the journalists grew, journalists had increasing power on the platform outside of their employer. Nowadays they have direct access to their audience and the audience has access to them. Journalists use the platform to share their own work and share others' work. The rise in popularity of certain journalists has also given them the opportunity to use their influence in other areas outside of their profession as a journalist. This is of course if allowed by their employer.

The individualization of journalists has created an environment where a journalist may see it as problem or a benefit. The individualization may give the journalist an opportunity to create their own brand or persona. The decision between the journalist brand and the newspaper they are representing may become a struggle for some journalists.

3.4.2 Threats and Hate
The internet opens new opportunities for journalism, but it also widens the potential for threats and attacks using digital tools. For example, “journalists even in ‘safe’ countries may not generally need to fear kidnap or assassination for their work, but they are increasingly finding themselves the target of misogynistic and/or racist online abuse and threats – which can at least have an intimidating and traumatic effect” (Carlsson et al., 2017, p. 42).

With the rise of online shaming and cancellation, the level of threats or hate has risen for journalists. This can be in forms of racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, religious hatred, etc. Journalists can be targeted personally and have their family or loved ones threatened online due to the direct online access. Many of the women in a study done by Chen et al. (2018) reported that if they engaged with their online audience-- an apparent job requirement for many of them -- they would frequently receive sexist comments. These comments would “criticize, attack, marginalize, stereotype, or threaten them based on their gender or sexuality” (Chen et al., 2018, p. 878).

With the anonymity of the internet, the rise in attacks and harassment has been at an all-time high for those in the industry who are active online. The availability of jumping on a bandwagon of online hate has created something no one can seem to define concretely, outrage-culture. This study will not attempt to define it. Recently, for example, the German Journalists’ Association concluded in their report that online hostility against journalists has increased rapidly over last couple of years and that those “who work in the media need a strategy to cope with the hatred and aggression they are confronted with” (Post & Kepplinger, 2019 p. 2423).
4 Previous research

The following studies were chosen to help understand the current research within the topic of online hate and threats to journalists. The studies examine the social impact of Twitter, roles of journalists on the platform, and the impacts of Twitter on journalists.

4.1 From a Utopian Dream to Dark Participation

With the introduction of the internet in newsrooms, a shift in working conditions occurred. As Thorsten Quandt explored ‘Dark Participation’ in his 2018 study, he argued that there was a major shift in newsrooms in the early 2000s with the introduction of online newspapers and comment sections for articles. He was able to assess that the introduction of citizen participation in the journalistic process had the opposite effect of what was expected by newsrooms. There was a hope that citizens would be motivated to take part in the news process. What early scholars studying this new trend observed was the difference between idealized human condition and social reality (Quandt, 2018). They believed that people would become citizen journalists and therefore assimilate into the system of journalism. He proposes that the flip side of the utopian concept of citizen participation can be defined as “dark participation.” This refers to the non-positive or neutral contributions to the news making process. Instead, the newsrooms received deeply sinister or negative contributions that can be classified as “trolling” (Quandt, 2018, p. 40). These are usually collective global groups that have political extremists, religious, conspiracy theory or propagandist motivations to undermine the journalistic reputation and delegitimize the information coming from journalists (Quandt, 2018).

Before Quandt conducted this study, he was a co-author of the book Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers (2011) which explored how newspapers introduced the internet and citizen participation into the newsroom. The involved scholars mention that there were economic and journalistic incentives for the change but there was also a change to newsroom culture (Singer, 2011). In other words, the new digitization of newspapers required a change of newsroom culture even before the introduction of user-generated journalism. They argue that cultural changes happen slowly, and the newsrooms try to adapt to the changing media environment by successfully changing their culture (Singer, 2011).
Results of the study *From Prosumer to Prodesigner* (Hernandez et al., 2017) showed significant differences (by age, gender, and educational level) in the forms of participation, access and consumption of news. However, those participating in the culture of Web 2.0 show low-levels of user participation in news production. They go further to say that they are far from being proactive news designers. Their findings found that citizens are still in the lower participatory levels of their conceptual framework (Hernandez et al., 2017). This study, conducted between the two above studies, further strengthens the results of Quandt (2018) and their colleagues’ findings of citizens behaviors online.

4.2 Threats and Hate Against Swedish Journalists & Journalists’ adoption of social media and journalists’ social roles

Harassment and threats against journalists are usually documented by international organizations. According to Nilsson (2015) the focus is usually on the violence against journalists in authoritarian countries and wartime reports. She goes on to say that those who use violence against journalists are often organized crime groups, state or insurgent groups and usually focused on physical violence. In democracies many are not paying attention to the threats journalists receive. Sweden is often ranked at the top in freedom indices and independence of the press (freedom of the press and freedom of speech). Nilsson (2015) found that in her studied sample, at least one third of those journalists had received at least one threat in the past year and the majority received derogatory comments online. Many journalists are affected both personally and professionally when threatened or harassed online. It was clear that threats and hate against journalists is strategic in the goal to silence them (Nilsson, 2015). One fourth of the journalists she studied, avoid subjects to mitigate online hate and threats. She concludes that digitalization has opened the possibility of anonymity, transparency of journalistic work and a new way to harass journalists.

Ulla Hedman (2019) studied the social media use of journalists. She found that the use of social media has an impact on journalistic ethics and possibly brings a de-professionalization of journalists. The study also showed that social media had an immediate impact on Swedish journalists. Different social media platforms are now regarded as highly valued professional tools “in which the professional and personal continue not only to mix but perhaps also to merge” (Hedman, 2019, p. 55). The mixing of professional and personal life on social media creates personalized and aggressive types of threats and hate speech. Friends and family who
are visible in a journalist’s personal networks can become additional and easily identified targets. Most of the participating journalists in the study agreed that “it is important to keep the private and professional use of social media separate” (Hedman, 2019, p. 67).

4.3 “Not Their Fault, but Their Problem”: Organizational Responses to the Online Harassment of Journalists

Holton and their colleagues (2021) studied the Organizational Responses of the Online Harassment of Journalists. They concluded that the journalist’s employers lack a systematic approach to online harassment and tend to treat the threats as the journalist’s problem. In the study they discuss the findings from the interviews conducted with 31 active journalists from different US newspapers. It was briefly mentioned that male journalists received a smaller amount of harassment than female journalists. The journalists mention that harassment is seen as a part of their journalistic routine and try to “shake them off and move on” (Holton et al, 2021, p.8). They also mention that daily talks in the newsroom are highly focused on “connect, connect, connect” and hitting their marks with connection online (Holton et al, 2021, p. 9). If a problem related to harassment is brought up it is brushed off and the conversation goes back to “connect.” The organizations (which were not named) provide training and guidance but in forms of “simple solutions” such as:

- Ignoring the harassers,
- Engaging in a less defensive matter,
- Reporting the comments to the social media platforms,
- Talking to other journalists with harassment experience,
- Trying to decrease stress with different tools such as yoga, running or meditation,
- Or seeking medical mental health resources through the organizations provided insurance (Holton et al, 2021, p.9).

These solutions are individually focused and less of a systemic solution. They mention that the organizations the participants worked for, required them to be on social media. Breaks from social media have been adopted by some journalists but in small increments to make sure the organization does not notice the inactivity. They discuss further that the implications of this harassment can lead to self-censorship by avoiding topics that are more likely to result in backlash. They suggest that further research should “look into the changing structures of
newsrooms and their impact on labor relations” (Holton et al., 2021, p.12). Lastly, they conclude that the individualization of journalistic labor in the organization could threaten termination if the journalist does not manage “their social media profiles according to their individual popularity” (Holton et al., 2021, p.12).

4.4 The Promoter, Celebrity, and Joker Roles in Journalists’ Social Media Performance

Mellado and Hermida (2021) explored the journalistic ego in their article *The Promoter, celebrity, and Joker Roles in Journalists Social Media Performance*. They propose that there is a pressing need for research to analyze journalist’s role of promoter, celebrity, and joker on social media and how they perform outside of the traditional media spaces. There is a conflict between the traditional and social media specific roles of journalists. Further they proposed a few indicators to measure the celebrity role, those are the following:

- Reflected Fame (retweets about themselves, shares of material published by others, etc.)
- Fame by Association (mentioning or tagging celebrities or sharing pictures of themselves with other celebrities)
- Asymmetrical Communication (journalist will not reply to general followers but will only interact with some of them)

They conclude that in the traditional journalistic practice, news was published as a collective outcome in media outlets but on social media content can be published from the accounts of individual journalists. They go on to say that the role of journalists using social media may not align with what is known as traditional journalism roles. They believe that it's important to further understand how the different journalistic social media roles are played out in different media systems or different media organizations.
5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework chosen for this study will help explore and analyze these fundamental shifts to journalism in the newsroom and the organizational adaptability to the new online working environment. This field of study is seen as relatively new and under researched (Carlsson, 2017). Therefore, there is a lack of established theories to apply to this specific research topic.

Two overarching theories, which have been used in previous research within similar fields, will be applied: *The Spiral of Silence* and *Uses and Gratifications*. Within the theory of The Spiral of Silence, two concepts believed to be relevant will be explored: *Self-Censorship* and *Corporate Censorship*. Within The theory of Uses and Gratifications, *Agency-Based Gratifications* and *Parasocial Relationships* will be explored. It is believed that a combination of these theories has not been used in previous studies within similar research fields. Although separately the theories have been used in studies exploring similar topics.

The *Spiral of Silence* theory has been used over the years to understand the behavior within the digital public sphere but has not been applied to journalists' behavior in the newsroom with the increased interaction in the online public sphere. It should be noted that the theory has been explored in recent years but within the topic of *Freedom of Expression* at universities (Norris, 2021). *Uses and Gratifications* have been explored in the field of media audiences and their behaviors towards media organizations (Jian & Usher, 2014).

5.1 The Spiral of Silence Theory

The *Spiral of Silence* theory (SST) brought about by the German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) believes that if people fear separation or isolation from those around them, they tend to keep their attitudes to themselves when they think they are in the minority. The researcher has found in previous research papers that SST has been used in the field of journalism in the attempt to understand how individual journalists behave around certain topics but also how news organizations can be affected by the phenomena.

This theory is seen as one of the more researched theories in the fields of public opinion and mass communication (Hayes, 2007). After almost four decades of research on the spiral of silence, the support for the theory is still mixed. The reason for the mixed support is due to the
applicability of the theory. It can be argued that in today’s media environment the way you apply SST has shifted from understanding minorities silenced by the majority, to understanding which group is being silenced and how loud the minority voices are on the internet. To understand why there are instances of people being “silenced” in general, Pippa Norris (2021) used the Spiral of Silence to understand when this occurs. They were able to explain how interpersonal communications work within a group where the majority voices are amplified and minority voices quieted, there is fear of losing popular approval, social status, or power (Norris, 2021). In other words, people can feel pressure to conform to the popular sentiments on polarized issues (racism, sexism, sexuality, etc.). In a previous study it was argued that the spiral of silence might be observable locally, but highly unlikely to occur on a global scale. However, it may occur globally if the opinion represented in mass media becomes extremely homogeneous, individuals become hyperconnected, or both, the majority-minority opinion gap found locally escalate the silence of the minority globally (Sohn, 2019).

Table 1. Spiral of Silence, (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)

In the online environment of outrage culture minority voices have been proven to have more of an impact (Norris, 2021). It is believed by the researcher that journalists can experience the effect of the spiral of silence. In other words, the online public sphere has been shown to minimally hold back personal opinions whilst journalists are typically required by their employer or ethical guidelines within the profession to not express their personal opinions
online and offline due to their line of work (Bar-Tal, 2017). In other words, if journalists receive hateful and threatening comments they cannot respond. If they do respond to the audience, the consequences may be unpredictable. For example, some have argued that “it is not perceptions of the opinions of a shapeless public that matter when we decide whether or not to speak an opinion, but instead perceptions of the opinions of important reference groups or others that a person is likely to interact with on a daily basis” (Hayes, 2007, p. 787). In other words, this could be a politician, a celebrity, a blogger, influencer, journalists, etc.

5.1.1 Self-Censorship

Self-Censorship has been defined as “the act of intentionally and voluntarily suppressing information from others when formal barriers are absent” (Bar-Tal, 2017, p. 41). Self-censorship occurs at a conscious or unconscious level. SST has a recurring theme in studies; the threat of negative evaluation or a fear of criticism (Williams, 2002). With the increased use of Twitter in the newsroom and public access to journalists, controversial topics have for some been difficult to handle when the digital public sphere attacks or harasses them privately. The study conducted by Monica Löfgren Nilsson in 2015 showed that journalists in Sweden avoided certain topics to avoid being threatened or harassed online. Journalists are affected on a personal level as much as on a professional level; one fourth have avoided monitoring certain topics (Nilsson, 2015). Such a study has not, to the knowledge of the researcher, been conducted on the same scale in recent years or in the US.

5.1.2 Corporate Censorship

Corporate Censorship is censorship by corporations. It is “when a spokesperson, employer, or business associate sanctions a speaker's speech by threat of monetary loss, employment loss, or loss of access to the marketplace” (Goldberg et al., 1998, p. 207). In other words, corporate censorship can be applied to news organizations and their corporate interests. In 2020, the council of Europe surveyed nearly a thousand European journalists and one in five respondents said they shaped their reporting to suit their company’s political or business interests (Council of Europe, 2020). A similar study has not been conducted in the US in recent years, but many journalists have voiced publicly that it does exist and previously mentioned studies touch upon this problem.
5.2 Uses and Gratifications (U&G)

*Uses and Gratifications* theory (U&G) is an audience-centered approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. U&G discusses how users deliberately choose media that will satisfy specific needs and allow one to enhance knowledge, relaxation, social interactions/companionship, diversion, or escape (McQuail, 2010). This theory has roots in communication literature and has been used by many scholars to study the field of social media use (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Twitter has given journalists the ability to go beyond their publisher and use their platform to share information and content (Quandt, 2018).

In the study *Uses and gratifications, Journalists’ Twitter Use, and Relational Satisfaction with the Public* (Kim et al., 2016) they argued that communication scholars need to pay more attention to “how the relationship between journalists and the audience has changed since the advent of social media” (Kim et al., 2016, p. 504). The conclusion was that Twitter was reshaping the relationship between news organizations or journalists and the public. The results also might imply that individual journalists’ desire to be a personal media or to form their own brand as a one-person media in a digital media environment may play an important role in using Twitter for their professional activities. They suggested that future research should explore how journalists may take the public’s thoughts/ opinions into account when pursuing or writing news stories.

Within the theory, work by Sundar and Limperos (2013) explored how new media has created four new gratifications: Modality, Agency, Interactivity and Navigability based gratifications. *Agency-Based gratifications* will be used to explore journalists as producers of information and content (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The work of Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed the gratification of *Parasocial Relationships*. They argued that the audience or users develop emotional bonds with media performers (Dibble et al., 2015). These two theories combined can be used to assess the challenges journalists face with being present on Twitter as individuals and as employees of media organizations. These two aspects of uses and gratifications combined have not, to the knowledge of the researcher, been used in previous research.

5.2.1 Agency-based gratifications
Agency-Based gratifications argues that “new media gives people the ability to create and share information and content, giving everyone a certain amount of power” (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 513). This can satisfy needs such as agency-enhancement, community building, and the ability to tailor content to one's specific desires. In other words, an online bandwagon can be created where users follow each other based on their activity. The scholars argue that the role of gatekeeping has “historically been the domain of a privileged few, now anybody can serve as a gatekeeper of content on the Internet” (Sunday & Limperos, 2013, p. 513). Twitter now allow people to share their own content or give them the power to filter other content on the internet and in turn alter the sender-receiver process. Individuals on the internet share photos, videos, or text to their followers to receive validation from their peers or followers. They can receive likes and comments, or followers can repost or share their content.

<table>
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<th>Modality</th>
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<th>Interactivity</th>
<th>Navigability</th>
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<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Browsing/Variety-Seeking</td>
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<td>Coolness</td>
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Table 2. Possible New Gratification from Media Technology (Sundar & Limperos, 2013)

5.2.2 Parasocial relationships

Parasocial Relationships are defined by the National Register of Health Service Psychologists as “one-sided relationships, where one person extends emotional energy, interest and time, and the other party, the persona, is completely unaware of the other's existence” (M., 2022, p. 1). Parasocial relationships can be used to describe the way that consumers of media occasionally use it for the purpose of gratifying a need for social connection by becoming emotionally attached to characters seen in entertainment media, such as characters in a TV show (Modin & Broholm, 2020). In a recent study, researchers found that personas online could create parasocial relationships if they focus more on fostering relationship building with their followers. They argue that the online personas can achieve this by being more active by
engaging their audience in their live streams, videos, posts and stories. They go on with concluding that storytelling posts may intensify the effects of both opinion leadership and parasocial relationships (Farivar et al., 2021).
6 Method and Materials

In this chapter, the research design, research methods, collection methods, limitations, and liability and validity of this study will be discussed.

6.1 Research design

The aim of this thesis is to explore the organizational protections against threats of journalists in the US and Sweden. To be able to explore the research questions in this paper, qualitative research methods will be used as a useful means of collecting sensitive data and understanding insider perspectives. The qualitative research method focuses on meaning, both as an object of study and as an explanatory concept (Dudovskiy, 2018). The study will be exploratory which means that it will not aim to provide conclusive answers to the research questions but will merely explore the topic of research in more depth (Dudovskiy, 2018).

6.2 Criteria for Selection

Two newspapers have been chosen for this study to be able to get a deeper understanding of the organizational protections of journalists and create a framework for future studies in this field. The researcher will be exploring the Swedish based newspaper Aftonbladet and the American based newspaper the New York Times. It can be argued that these newspapers hold different political, cultural, structural, and quality standards which the selection could be seen as difficult to justify. The newspapers were chosen because of the following criteria:

- **Has similar popularity in each prospective country:** Aftonbladet is the largest newspaper and most popular digital newspapers in Sweden (Orvesto konsument, 2021). The New York Times is the most popular digital newspaper amongst US consumers (Reuters Institute, 2021).
- **Are established newspapers and seen by the journalistic community as holding a high professional standard**

  **Note:** This study is not interested in the political leaning of the newspapers, even though it could be argued that it is a factor. This choice is strictly in the interest of understanding how each respective newspaper deals with online threats to journalists.
Criteria for the selection of journalists:

- Works or has worked for the newspapers selected.
- Has extensive experience in the field of journalism.
- Has knowledge of internal policies or guidelines.
- Has knowledge of one or both newspapers selected.

Note: Each journalist was interviewed based on availability and matched at least two of the criteria above.

6.3 Collection methods and implementation

6.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of the interview subject’s selection was for their existing extensive experience within the field and knowledge of the newspaper industry. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. This method is “used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” but may also have special knowledge within the phenomena the study is exploring (Kelly, 2010, p. 317). The participants were contacted via email and LinkedIn. The interview guide was developed to be customized for each participant due to their experience, current employer, and relevance. Certain questions were not asked if it wasn’t relevant for the participant. Follow-up questions were always asked if relevant. Two interviews were specifically tailored to better understand the organization’s training and policies.

The following are some examples of the questions:

- What, in your opinion, has been the largest challenge to journalism in the last 20 years?
- What online and offline threats do you believe journalists face today in a more increasing online environment?
- Do you think journalists in general avoid certain topics due to fear of being attacked? (See Appendix D for the Interview Guide)
Semi-structured interviews were used with the six participating journalists. This method of interview was more open-ended, allowing for open questions and chances for follow up questions. Each participant received a description of the study and was informed of their rights before the interview. A consent form was emailed to all the participating after their interviews and all forms were signed through email. It is very important for the validity and reliability of this study that the researcher has obtained informed consent (Stokes, 2012). As a researcher you are handling people’s own thoughts and responses to questions; people’s opinions and attitudes which can be a sensitive matter. Five out of the six participants agreed to be named in this study and the sixth wished to remain anonymous for personal reasons.

As previously mentioned, some participants suggested other participants who have the knowledge and experience to take part in the study. This means snowball sampling was used in the process of the collection of participants. The interviews were conducted via phone calls in Sweden and WhatsApp, video, and audio Zoom calls for the participants overseas. Two interviews were conducted in Swedish, and the rest conducted in English. The interviews conducted averaged around 35-45 minutes and were done between February and April. Five out of the six interviews were recorded via Zoom or on the phone. The one interview not recorded was with the retired journalist living in Sweden and notes were taken during the call instead. An interview guide was created for each interview. The guides were customized for each participant but included several questions that were used in all interviews. Each interview was transcribed, averaging around 5 hours for each.

6.3.2 Organizational Policies and News Articles

Organizational Policies

J. Scott (1990) created criteria for assessing the quality of documents. These are those he suggested: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Even though these are usually applied to personal documents they can also be applied to official organizational documents. Most documents issued by private organizations are authentic, credible, and meaningful. It can be argued that documents collected from an organization may not be representative of the whole organization itself but provide enough information to understand how the organization works. The documents for this study have been obtained via the organization's own websites and through their own articles that may extend the information given in the policies and guidelines. The policies and guidelines have been collected from
Aftonbladet and the New York Times own websites. Three documents were collected, two for the New York Times and one from Aftonbladet. One organizational document was in Swedish.

**News Articles**

Online news and opinion articles were used with the purpose of filling in information gaps from each perspective news organization. Articles containing interviews with previous employees or current high-ranking employees discussing the organization's handling of certain situations helped in the process of understanding the organization's reactions. Four separate articles were collected for this study for the purpose of filling information gaps and to provide examples. Two articles about The New York Times and two about Aftonbladet. Two news articles were in Swedish.

### 6.4 Method of Analysis

#### 6.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were transcribed using the intelligent verbatim style. This style of transcription is a stricter version of verbatim style, which means it excludes grammatical errors, repetitions, false starts, and fillers (um, uh, hmm, etc.). Due to the interviews being transcribed by one individual, the transcriptions have been reviewed and corrected after the initial transcription. The interviews were analyzed by using thematic coding which helps find patterns and helps create categories for a framework of thematic ideas (Gibbs, 2018). Two interviews were translated from Swedish to English by the researcher for the language to be coherent.

#### 6.4.2 Organizational Policies and News Articles

Document analysis is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Document analysis requires that the collected data be examined and interpreted to gain an understanding, to extract meaning, and to develop empirical knowledge. Document analysis gives the opportunity to receive data—excerpts, quotations, or entire passages. The data found can then be split into major categories, themes, and exemplified cases specifically through content analysis. This method is and can be used to triangulate data in research which in this paper would be the conducted interviews (Yin, 1994). Triangulating data can help the
researcher increase the study’s credibility. When the data is collected through different methods, it can aid the researcher in authenticating the finding across the data sets. This may help with reducing potential biases that can exist in a single study (Bowen, 2009). Thematic coding was used as a tool to help analyze the documents to find patterns and meaning for the study’s research questions. If important information or themes arise unrelated to the research questions, they will be mentioned in the final remarks. The Swedish articles and documents were translated by the researcher to be able to coherently interpret the data.

6.5 Limitations

Previous research within the field of online hate and physical threats towards journalists in Sweden was limited. This can be due to the population size, difference in urgency or that it may be less of an issue in the country.

This paper cannot represent all journalists in the US and Sweden. Contacting journalists in different positions at each respective chosen newspaper was also not possible for this study's length. Due to The New York Times non-disclosure policy, the researcher was unable to directly contact current employees of the newspaper to discuss the current policies and training for journalists in place at the newspaper. Attempts to contact two separate newsroom emails and two corporate emails at The New York Times to gather more information on internal documents was unsuccessful.

A limitation with the documentation collection method was that there was no direct access to the essential documents. Many organizations have documents and policies which are not in the public domain. Therefore, this study had to rely on public-domain documents. Due to this factor, interviews with previous or current employees provided more information about the policies which are not in the public domain. Articles published by the newspaper themselves or other news outlets about leaked information provided some missing information. Articles containing interviews with previous employees also added more information.

A limitation with semi-structured interviews is the method in which they are held, which may affect the outcome. Due to the difficulties of having to conduct interviews with participants overseas, multiple interview methods were needed to guarantee an opportunity to conduct the interview. The expense of calling overseas creates the need to use a platform such as WhatsApp
and the online video provider Zoom as means of communication with the participants. Due to the three different methods used to contact, it can be argued that the responses to the questions may have been different if the contact method was consistent. There are also some common problems that arise when creating an interview guide, the creation of leading questions and speculative questions. This needed to be observed by the researcher to try to avoid such questions for the interviewee. Some follow-up questions may have been classified as leaning due to the subject matter but were avoided as much as possible.

6.6 Reliability and Validity

For this study 22 journalists were contacted, six of which were willing to take part in the study. Three were contacted at Aftonbladet via email (one cultural journalist, one political editor-in-chief, and one publisher) of which two were willing to participate. One journalist and the Political Editor & Chief were willing to participate from Aftonbladet. Nine journalists with different positions were contacted at the New York Times with no response on LinkedIn. Three retired journalists with extensive experience in the Swedish newspaper industry were contacted with only one responding and willing to participate. The last Ombudsman at the New York Times between 2016 and 2017 was contacted via LinkedIn and willing to take part in the study. The publisher of Axios was contacted through email as a suggestion from another participant and was willing to participate. From there one journalist was willing to provide contact information for a journalist with in-depth knowledge of The New York Times. The lack of response or willing to participate could have been due to the high demand in the news cycle after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. However, out of the 22 contacted, those who responded and participated were the most experienced and highly regarded journalists.

It is argued that between 6-12 interviews is a good amount of data for a qualitative study to reach the saturation needed to give it variability (Guest et al., 2006). This study conducted six interviews with six separate participants, but one participant was interviewed twice due to confusion around GDPR. In the end, this participant did not have to be interviewed a second time but due to the content of their previous interview the researcher of this study thought that an extra short interview could give more concrete information from the participant for certain questions from the previous interview. Five men and one woman were interviewed which can be argued as being less diverse in the data collection process. In previous research, it has been
found that women are more often victims of online violence than men. Gender was not a variable at first but due to the lack of women in this study and the comments from the journalists, gender became a variable. Two interviews, one organizational document, and two news articles were translated from Swedish to English which could result in misinterpreting some parts of the data.
7 Analysis and Results

In this chapter the outcomes of the interviews, organizational documents and news articles will be analyzed. The chapter is structured by research questions. The chapter will conclude with a comparison of the US and Sweden. The results from each question will be analyzed with the help of the Background and Theoretical Framework chapters. Five of the six participants will be referenced by their last name, and one will be referenced as Anonymous. The six participants were highly experienced and highly regarded professionals in their field. Three were Swedish and three were American. The average experience in the journalism industry is 29 years and the roles in the newsroom were varied. The Swedish journalists have experience from Aftonbladet and Expressen. The American journalists have experience from The New York Times, The Washington Post, Columbia Journalism Review, Bloomberg, and Axios.

Introducing the five participants who agreed to be named in this study:

The Swedish journalists: **Lars Thalén** (Former lead writer for Aftonbladet and former President of the Swedish Union of Journalists), **Robert Aschberg** (Journalist at Aftonbladet and President of Publicistklubben), and **Anders Lindberg** (Political Editor & Chief at Aftonbladet).

The American journalists: **Elizabeth Spayd** (Previously Managing Editor at The Washington Post, the last Ombudsman of The New York Times and currently Lecturer at Georgetown University School of Journalism) and **Nicholas Johnston** (Publisher of Axios, previously Managing Editor Bloomberg).

The collected data was coded to be able identify themes to organized and present results for the research questions. Themes found while structuring the interviews, articles, and document data:
Table 3. Themes
(Source: Personal Collection)

7.1 How has Twitter affected the newsroom?

The reader is referenced to Appendix A for the interview quotes and Appendix B for quotes from news articles.

7.1.1 Results

The increased digitalization that occurred during the latter part of the twentieth century has changed the information flow and the nature of journalism. The introduction of Twitter in the newsroom is a recent (in the last 10-15 years) occurrence and was initially thought to serve as a democratizing tool for increased journalistic participation of the public.

Based on the data collected from the various interviews, the results will be presented in five categories that represent the studied journalists’ perception on how Twitter has affected the newsroom. This is visually represented in the bar chart below.
Bar chart 1. How Twitter affects the newsroom

The data from the interviews will be clustered by relevance and presented as quotes from the participants. This presentation’s purpose is to make it easier for the reader to understand the quotations and their context.

When speaking about Twitter as a platform, Anonymous states that “There is something about the nature of the technology that makes some people just behave really badly.” Spayd says “Social media has great potential to influence journalists, some may be positive but I'm more concerned about the negative ways that journalists can be influenced” and goes on to say that Twitter is “…a beast we haven’t figured out how to manage yet.”

Anonymous comments on how Twitter has been used in the newsroom by saying “There have been real disciplinary actions including people who have gone on probation and threatened of being fired for being too out there on Twitter.” Johnston states that “…media managers or newsrooms have been idiots about the way they treat some of their reporters who are present online.”

Johnston says that when speaking to his reporters he reminds them to “Be very careful with what you post on Twitter because what you do on social media will be weaponized and used against you by foreign governments, by internet trolls, by American political parties.” Johnston goes on to say that he believes that “…the enemies of a free press will use it to delegitimization you’re reporting.” Aschberg believes that there is real “danger in
when lone wolves on the internet get influenced by the internet bandwagons and campaigns that want to act on their own.”

Spayd believes that in some cases outrage culture can cause, “…people to fire you but they are only doing so because they feel socially compelled to do so.” She goes on to say that outrage-culture is a “terrible free speech problem.” When speaking of online attacks Lindberg believes there is “more with Twitter.”

Anonymous highlights the use of Twitter in the newsroom by stating “The danger is that you're writing for these few 100 000 highly engaged, highly opinionated people, not normal humans.” They go on to say that you “may not get a full sample” of what the opinions are if you “just follow the reactions.” A New York Times columnists wrote about the newspaper’s journalists Twitter use stating, “Journalists are living on a more Twitter-obsessed planet than normal people.” Thalén believes that newsrooms have become more interested in reactions on social media “…both the negative and the positive.” They go on to say that it can be in the “form of likes, retweets, and clicks.” Thalén also mentions that journalists “care about how they write, the reactions, and if they will get backlash or not for their reporting.”

Spayd comments on the influence of Twitter in the newsroom by stating that “…they [journalists] can write to their bubble of friends and influence… their online bubble.” Johnston says “who has the brand that’s lifting who? In the olden days, it would have been the name of the publication. But it's different now because you can follow not necessarily the New York Times or The Washington Post, you can make a distinct decision to follow Maggie Haberman.” He continues by saying that the “connection to a journalist is very different” today. As a New York Times columnist wrote referring to a former journalist at the Times “…his Twitter account gave him the power to flee the Times and take his followers.”

Johnston believes journalists behavior on Twitter “can damage trust in journalism brands.” Spayd mentions that at the newspapers where they have worked the attitude has always been “you want your reporters to be out there having a presence, becoming personalities.” Aftonbladet social media manager was interviewed by Resume in 2015 and stated, “I think that journalists should be present online because you can reach people with your articles
and use it as a source.” Lindberg concludes by saying “The legal protection for the freedom of the press does not apply to my Twitter account.”

7.1.2 Analysis

According to my observations and analysis of the results, Twitter can create threats to journalists. Tweets could be weaponized against the journalist both professionally and privately, leading to fear and hesitancy to publish. This can be attacking an individual journalist or a whole organization. Journalists can be affected psychologically by consistent online harassment, which may lead to seeking mental health professionals for help. However, not only can journalists be threatened by online users, but from their employer (news organizations) which may be unhappy with the journalist's behavior on Twitter. This creates a potential threat of loss of employment for certain journalists who are not behaving according to the news organization's policy. The news organization and its executive editors can feel compelled to let them go when a journalist is gaining too much negative attention.

News organizations have systems in place to protect journalists against physical threats. However, journalists are now exposed online like never before. Now individual journalists and their families may be threatened. It should be mentioned that journalists are not legally protected by their employer on Twitter and the newspaper is not liable for the publishing of tweets on that account. This can lead to lawsuits against a journalist or large public backlash for what they have said on Twitter. As the participants emphasized, many employers stand behind their journalists if they receive public backlash for something the news organization can stand behind. There may not be any support if it is seen as something damaging to the organization.

Twitter can create threats to journalism, as journalists and the newsrooms place increasing importance on Twitter reactions. Newsrooms may become more interested in reactions on Twitter. It can be in the form of likes, retweets, and clicks. The newsroom might also put too much emphasis and value on Twitter in their reporting. This can lead to over-reporting or underreporting based on the feedback they receive. The news organization may not prioritize their resources correctly. The emphasis can amplify topics or stories that may not be that important for the public or might even be false. Journalists can start catering to their followers instead of serving the public. They can develop sources on Twitter by broadcasting their views
and finding allies. Journalists have themselves become brands on Twitter. In other words, start to tailor their content to their followers for validation and reactions in turn seeking *Agency-Based Gratifications*. Journalists want their stories to be shared and reach a wide audience. Journalists can now interact with readers’ views on their own work and the newspapers work through their Twitter accounts. It must be noted and emphasized that journalists are humans, in turn making them audiences themselves. By tailoring their content to their audience, they seek gratification.

There seems to be a negative effect of Twitter on people. Technology lowers the barriers for people with anger issues and impulse control. When they have the anonymity of the internet people can hide behind the screen. They can now write whatever they want. The bandwagon mentality based in the *U&G* theory is relevant to understanding the effect this technology has on people. Twitter users feel like they are a part of a community and if someone in that community decides to attack someone, the rest will follow. According to *Agency-Based Gratifications* the online audience can seek collective opinions of others to feel accepted into this community.

Referring to the online development, it is now much easier for someone to immediately send an email or a tweet. The interaction with the audience is more personal than in the past. The audience may create *Parasocial Relationships* with the journalist, believing they know them personally. Due to the nature of their profession the relationship may be seen more malign than benevolent due to the excessive amount of online harassment the journalists face daily. This could be dangerous for the journalist. In the past a person sending a letter to the newspaper did not communicate with the journalist in real time. Now with Twitter you can attack journalists professionally and personally. As mentioned in 3.2.3, there is a lack of a cool-off period for the readers. They no longer need to make the effort to construct and write a letter. The time between writing and dropping off a letter in the mailbox was often 24-48 hours in which the writer often regretted harsh language or comments and chose to refrain from sending the letter or rephrase it. Now you can tweet within seconds which leads to unfiltered and impulsive outrage being tweeted with no cool-off period. It should be noted that those who criticize, attack, or harass journalists online may be people who would never make the effort to write a letter or an email.

It should be noted again that this paper is not looking at the positive effects of Twitter, it is focusing on the threats, but it should be mentioned that the interviewees did believe there are
some positive aspects to the technology. Some believed it is an effective way to receive direct feedback they did not previously receive, making them much more aware of the conversations around their articles.

7.2 How do journalists cope with online hate and threats on Twitter?

The reader is referenced to Appendix A and B for interview quotes and news article quotes.

7.2.1 Results

Four of the six participants in this study have had personal experience with hate or threats online or in person as a journalist. The following bar chart represents the participants' views on how journalists cope with online threats and hate. Based on the data collected from the various interviews, the results will be presented in six categories that represent distinct areas of coping with online hate and threats. This is visually represented in the bar chart below.

Bar chart 2. How journalists cope with online hate and threats on Twitter

The data from the interviews will be clustered by relevance and presented as quotes from the participants.

Two Swedish journalists working for the same organization, Aftonbladet, speak about their own experiences with online threats. Aschberg states that “My (telephone) number was
thrown out on the internet, and I was victim of a lot of threats and hate campaigns, but I don’t care that much.” He goes on to say “…but for many other journalists it's very sensitive and that could be a reason for them avoiding certain topics or removing their name from an article.” Lindberg mentions that “three people have been convicted in court for threatening me personally and similarly with other people in my department.” Aftonbladet wrote about one of their colleagues being threatened online by an anonymous Twitter user stating “the purpose of hate and threat is to silence journalists. You can’t say whatever you want anonymously online.” Lindberg also mentions that “people attack journalists to get topics off the air.”

Spayd mentions “I was bullied all the time on Twitter.” This was while she was working as the Ombudsman for The New York Times between 2016-2017.

When speaking about journalists dealing with online threats in the industry Aschberg continues with saying “It would be ridiculous to say the online presence doesn't affect journalists consciously or unconsciously, some are afraid of it, others adapt, or others ignore it, but many are in between.” Spayd believes that outrage-culture online “is a terrible free speech problem” and goes on to say, “I think we bring out this sledgehammer or sword that is off with everyone’s head.” Johnston has observed in his own organization that “the harassment is relentless, particularly for women.” Thalén says, while talking about journalists dealing with online hate and threats in news organizations, “…there is self-censorship” when dealing with individuals and competing news organizations.

Spayd experienced while at The New York Times that sometimes after an article had been published, the newsroom would have to “change the top of the story because the newsroom was getting bullied on Twitter.” Johnston mentions that he can encourage someone experiencing harassment on social media to “turn off your phone for the weekend.” Lindberg mentions that “we [Aftonbladet] use filtering systems to filter your phone, email, and social media” from spam accounts.

7.2.2 Analysis

According to the results and my observations ignoring threats seems to be a common occurrence for high profile journalists and most see it as part of their job. However, the
participants believe that many journalists are in between or are afraid of the threats and hate they may receive. The news organizations may need to aid their journalists in some way. This may be in the form of giving them advice and guidance on how to handle the traffic they receive or the mistakes they may make.

Receiving threats and hate can lead to **Self-Censorship** when journalists feel like it is not worth the aftermath of publishing an article. This can be very dangerous because of the societal role of journalists. Dealing with harassment can be an issue for many journalists who have private online accounts when working at a news organization. They may feel that the online users are trying to silence them. This may also lead to some journalists avoiding certain topics when drafting articles to avoid the hate or threats that may follow. As one journalist experienced, newsrooms may change the top of their story because the newsroom was bullied on Twitter.

Many journalists report serious threats and hate, however the number of threats reported by journalists to their employer are not public. One factor that may determine if journalists report hate and threats may be the newsroom culture. Since the newsroom may require or encourage journalists to be on Twitter some journalists may decide to either ignore the hate, or just avoid certain topics. In some newsrooms it may be seen as the journalist’s problem to deal with, since their account is outside of the organization. One tool that newsrooms provide for journalists is filtering systems. Those who may receive an overwhelming amount may even turn off their phones for a period.

It seems to be that most news organizations have some systems in place to aid journalists with online hate and threats, but journalists are still left on their own to decide what to do about it. There seems to be little done about trying to avoid it in the first place. None of the participants mention if there was anyone in the newsroom whose job it is to aid the journalists with their online presence. News organizations seem to underestimate the severity of this problem.

7. 3 How do Aftonbladet and The New York Times protect their journalists from online hate and threats on Twitter?

The reader is referenced to Appendix B and C for quotes from news articles and organizational documents.
7.3.1 Aftonbladet and The New York Times Results

*Aftonbladet*

While speaking about Aftonbladet's handling of online threats and hate Lindberg says, *“We see this very much as a workplace problem, like a dripping roof or ventilation that doesn’t work.”*

The following is Aftonbladet's guideline and policy on how they work with social media:

- Having a presence on social media is a given for us and that also includes many of our employees.
- Our journalists have as a requirement in their role to be impartial and objective.
- We expect our employees to also follow these guidelines on social media and use common sense.

Lindberg was able to expand and give me the following:

- Social media is voluntary for journalists at Aftonbladet.
- We offer training that includes how to write articles, how to deal with public appearance, how to create your own persona.
- We help with how to deal with threats by teaching journalists how the police and legal system works in the event they receive threats.
- This is all with the purpose of helping those in the program understand the environment they are going into.

Lindberg states that Aftonbladet *“use(s) filtering systems to filter your phone, email, and your social media.”* When speaking of journalists’ Twitter use, he goes on to say, *“the legal protection for the freedom of the press does not apply to my Twitter account… even though it says in my bio, Political Editor and Chief at Aftonbladet.”*

*The New York Times*

The New York Times has a very detailed and lengthy policy and guidelines for their journalists when it comes to social media. The social media guidelines and policy included the following:
• We want our journalists to take extra care to avoid expressing partisan opinions.
• Social media plays a vital role in our journalism.
• Our reporters and editors can promote their work.
• If our journalists are perceived as biased it can undercut the credibility of the entire newsroom.
• Newsroom employees should avoid posting anything on social media that damages our reputation for neutrality and fairness.
• Our journalists must not express partisan opinions, promote political views, etc.
• You may think your social media accounts are private zones and separate from your role at The Times, in fact everything we post and “like” online is public. Everything we do in public may be associated with The Times.
• Always treat others with respect on social media. If a reader questions or criticizes your work on social media posts, and you would like to respond, be thoughtful. Do not imply that the person hasn’t carefully read your work.
• If you feel threatened by someone on social media, please inform your supervisors immediately. The Times has policies in place to protect the safety of our journalists.

One part of the guideline stated the following: “Staff members may not disclose confidential information about the operation, policies or plans of The Times.”

The anonymous participant was able to provide the following regarding the safety policies for the newspaper:

• The newspaper may report threats to police or to the FBI.
• They might want to put a reporter and their family in a hotel for a couple of days in case they are worried about the person being in physical danger.
• They may monitor if the same person has also threatened other reporters.
• They respond quickly if there's reason to believe reporters are in actual danger.

While doing the research, an article was published by Insider revealing a memo leaked from The New York Times. In the memo they stated the following: “In recent months, more journalists- particularly women and journalists of color- have spoken out about the constant stream of harassment they face online. It can be harmful to our journalism when
our feeds become echo chambers. Your experience may be shaped by harassment and attacks.” They mention that numerous colleagues “told the heads of the newsroom that change was needed.” They discussed new views for the use of the platform:

- Presence on Twitter and other social media is now purely optional for Times journalists.
- Promoting our best-in-class journalism wherever our audience is, including Twitter.
- Social media needs to reflect the values of The Times.
- We will have a dedicated team to support with new training and tools.

When speaking of those who wish to stay on social media the Times state that they “will pay close attention to how all Times journalists use social media to ensure it is in line with our social media guidelines.” The memo concludes with, “We can all use this moment to reflect on our newsroom culture- both online and in person.”

7.3.2 Aftonbladet and The New York Times Analysis

I have observed from the results that Aftonbladet seems to have fewer issues with their journalists using Twitter. Their guidelines and policies were very short and from what Lindberg was able to disclose, the newspaper takes threats and hate very seriously. They seem to have recognized that social media use is up to the journalist and that there should be less reliance or emphasis on the platform. The newspaper wants their journalists to be aware of the online environment they are entering and provide in-depth training for the expected experience of being online as a journalist.

In The New York Times guidelines, they require their journalists to not disclose any information about their policies. This helped clarify why it was difficult to contact anyone at the organizations who would be willing to disclose how the organization deals with threats. This statement can be seen as Corporate-Censorship since disclosing any essential information could lead to loss of employment.

In The New York Times' guidelines and policies there was heavy emphasis on the brand of the organization. This formulation puts more responsibility on the journalists rather than the organization who may be strongly encouraging or requiring their journalists to be online for the newspapers benefit. After the memo was leaked announcing a Twitter reset for the
newsroom the policies may have been changed. They no longer encourage their employees to be active on Twitter. The organization seemed to recognize they had relied too much on Twitter as a reporting and feedback tool. After receiving many requests for change in their social media policy, The New York Times seems to have taken the complaints seriously. However, those who wish to stay on social media will now be policed by the news organization to ensure that their activity aligns with their social media guidelines. It is unknown what the consequences are of being out of line. There is limited information on how the organization deals with online hate and if there is any media training for their journalists on how to handle the online environment.

7.4 Similarities and differences between the newspapers

*Although this research did not set out to compare the newspapers, interesting differences and similarities between them which could contribute to future research was observed.

Twitter in the newsroom at Aftonbladet and The New York Times have differences and similarities. At Aftonbladet and The New York Times the Twitter accounts held by journalists are private and not covered legally by the newspaper. It is voluntary at Aftonbladet to have an account. Some Aftonbladet journalists have chosen to close their accounts because it interfered with their professional and private lives. It should be mentioned that The New York Times has, until recently, strongly encouraged their journalists to be online. This could be interpreted as having been a requirement for journalists at the newspaper to be present on Twitter, but this cannot be verified due to limited access of information on this matter. According to previous studies on this topic there are newspapers that require their journalists to be present on Twitter (Holton et al., 2021).

This new development further strengthens the dilemma and issues many newspapers face in supporting and training their journalists. It is unknown what type of aid The New York Times has recently put in place to support their journalists or if there are new social media guidelines. Those who wish to step down from social media at The New York Times will be supported and those who stay on Twitter will be policed by editors and mastheads. The strong emphasis on brand in their policies and responsibility they put on their journalists who could not disclose information about their working environment, could be seen as Corporate-Censorship.
US newsrooms tend to put more weight on Twitter as a means of promoting their journalists, thereby also promoting their corporate brand. It can lead to journalists being fired or put on probation by their employer for how they behave on Twitter. Swedish newsrooms are more interested in the use of Twitter and online tools for their own organizational brand rather than individual journalists accounts and brands. This puts less pressure on journalists to be present online and can lead to less issues regarding impulsive Twitter use.

Twitter has a considerable influence on the newsroom culture in the US, whereas there is negligible impact to the newsroom culture in Sweden. The heavy reliance on Twitter in the US creates more tensions in the newsrooms when journalists have large followings. Balancing big names has become more difficult when the journalist has their own publishing tool. This leads to journalists creating their own brands and as most participants agreed on, writing to their own online bubble. They are using it to gratify their need for acceptance and validation from their audience (Agency-Based Gratifications). This can be positive or negative, but the participants see it more as a threat and a problem that still has not been taken seriously by news organizations. Journalists are humans and have similar behaviors to other online users which means they are active online users outside of their employer. Many online users can like, comment, or share the journalist’s content on Twitter.

Dealing with big brand journalists seems to be a challenge for both Sweden and the US. Well-known journalists have gained huge followings to help bolster their own personal brands. Journalists can now leave their employer to start their own journalistic practice on, for example, Facebook or YouTube. This has come with risks for the newspaper's own journalistic brand. Additionally, readers may establish Parasocial Relationships with the journalists which could impact journalists’ safety. When their audience believes that the journalists are not behaving in line with their own expectation of how they should behave, they may react in a negative way. This could lead to an increase of hate and threats towards those exposed on Twitter.

Self-censorship within SST (Spiral of Silence Theory) is a problem in both countries but it seems to be more common in Sweden. Journalists avoid certain topics as they may fear the consequences of being subject to hate campaigns, dragged on the internet or subject to trolls. In other words, topics that may create a negative reaction may be avoided by the journalists which may result in self-censorship to protect themselves.
In the US journalists seem to have different coping strategies. The most common coping mechanism is to ignore hate and threats or turn off your phone if it becomes too overwhelming. If the threats are serious, they are reported by the journalist. It is unclear from the results and analysis the extent that US journalists self-censor. However, since newsrooms in the US may encourage or require their journalists to be present online, they may not be open about avoiding certain topics to avoid hate and threats online.
8 Conclusion and Future Research

Due to the nature of our technologically advanced world, our modern-day journalists are exposed to increased modes of communication which makes them more vulnerable to interactions from the public. Social media has changed the information flow of journalistic practices by providing new publishing tools. These changes have brought forth both positive and negative effects on the practice of journalism. Initially these changes were seen as a welcome change in the industry due to their time-saving and cost-efficient nature, however in recent years the dependency on social media has become a topic of debate. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the adverse effects of social media on journalists and news organizations, and the systems in place to protect them.

For my research, I chose the three following questions: how the newsrooms have been affected by Twitter, how journalists cope with online hate and threats and lastly how Aftonbladet and The New York Times protect their journalists from online hate and threats. I choose to explore this subject by interviewing journalists about their own experiences and perspectives on the current journalistic climate. To increase the validity and reliability of this research various documents and articles were analyzed. Out of the 22 journalists that were contacted, six highly experienced and highly regarded journalists chose to participate in my study. This final chapter will present the concluding findings for each research question and look at the future of this research topic.

Even though only six journalists were interviewed for this research, the general journalistic climate was often brought up in the interviews. However, it should be noted that only six journalists were interviewed, and they may not hold the same opinions and perspectives as all journalists at their respective organizations.

8.1 Conclusion

Due to the participants' vast experience and knowledge in the field of journalism, certain general conclusions can be made about the journalistic climate at Aftonbladet and The New York Times. At Aftonbladet, it is optional to use social media outlets which has reduced the reliance Aftonbladet has on social media. The interviews from Aftonbladet seem to highlight the hard policies that are in place to mitigate online hate and threats towards their journalists
through training and guidelines. In contrast, at the New York Times, there has been a heavy emphasis on social media presence in the past, however only recently this has changed. Journalists have come forth to voice their concerns and opinions of the adverse effects social media is having on not only their work but their own safety and mental well-being. The news organization has now made it optional to specifically use Twitter and put policies in place to monitor the active accounts. Although the two news organizations have varying policies regarding social media certain comparisons can be drawn for this study.

**R1: How has Twitter affected the newsroom?**

- It effects threats…
- It causes journalists and news organizations to cater to the few…
- It has a negative effect on people…
- It gives the opportunity for journalists to become brands…

From the interviews and documents, I was able to conclude that journalists can be harassed and threatened online by Twitter users. Journalists can be threatened with being put on probation or fired by their employer. Twitter accounts are not legally protected by the news organization, in turn employers can fire journalists for their behavior on the platform. Tweets can be weaponized and used against journalists to delegitimize their reporting by foreign agents, trolls, and political parties. Online bandwagons attack journalists for what they have written and create a reaction such as outrage-culture to silence them.

Putting too much value and emphasis on Twitter can cause news organizations to be out of touch with the public and only hear a few highly opinionated voices. Twitter can cause issues for the journalism industry, the news organization, and individual journalists. Catering to and getting reactions and feedback from the few on Twitter can cause the public to feel left out. As news organizations put too much emphasis and value on Twitter as a tool in the newsroom, journalists may put too much focus on reactions leading to some seeking *Agency-Based Gratifications*. When journalists seek these reactions (likes, retweets, comments etc.) to their material, this can lead to them gratifying their need for acceptance which in turn may lead to tailoring their content to their online bubble. Journalists focusing on reactions can become out
of touch with the public outside of their online bubble, which can delegitimize the credibility of the industry. In turn, journalists can become brands outside of the news organization

The interaction with the audience is more personal than in the past since technology lowers the barriers for people with low impulse control. Individuals can now publish tweets within seconds which leads to unfiltered and impulsive outrage being tweeted with no cool-off period. This may lead to the bandwagon mentality within Agency-Based Gratifications, where Twitter users are made to feel like a part of the community and if someone in that community decides to attack someone, the rest may follow. Users will follow other users’ activity to feel that they are a part of a collective group. As discussed previously, many of the comments directed towards journalists are aggressive or negative which can be defined as outrage by the users.

The results from this study of how Twitter effects people, can be closely linked with the study ‘Dark Participation’ (Quandt, 2018), as he found that the utopian concept of citizen participation can be defined as “dark participation.” Negative contributions are used to undermine the journalistic reputation and delegitimize the information coming from journalists.

Nowadays a reader can follow their favorite journalist personally and create Parasocial Relationships with them. These relationships are usually one sided and the reader may feel like they know the journalists personally. If the journalist behaves out of line with how the reader expects them to behave, they may react negatively. The reactions may be harmful to the journalists, damage the credibility of the journalists, the quality of the journalism that is being created by the news organization and the news organization itself.

**R2: How do journalists cope with online hate and threats on Twitter?**

From the data collected, the journalists seem to have a multitude of different coping mechanisms for online threats and hate. The most common ones being; reporting threats (to the employer or the authorities), ignoring threats or hate, filtering social media, turning off their phones and avoiding topics.

Journalists report threats if they deem them to be serious for their own or their immediate circles’ safety. Threats may be ignored when they are not seen as a danger to themselves or others. These threats are usually inconsequential since they do not often materialize. Hate is
mostly ignored by more experienced and high-profile journalists who see it as part of their job. For most journalists it can be hard to ignore comments that target them personally; many use filtering systems to avoid seeing hateful comments but some decide to turn off their phones completely. A common coping mechanism for the Swedish journalists is to self-censor themselves by avoiding topics to avoid hate and threats online. In contrast, the common coping mechanisms for the US journalists are ignoring or turning off their phones.

The results from this study of common coping mechanisms, can be closely linked with the study ‘Threats and hate against Swedish journalists’ (Nilsson, 2015), as she found that one fourth of the journalists she studied, avoid subjects to mitigate online hate and threats. Similarly, the results found for US journalists can be closely linked to the results found in the study ‘Not Their Fault, but Their Problem: Organizational Responses to the Online Harassment of Journalists’ (Holton et al., 2021), where the author found that ignoring and reporting harassment or threats are common coping mechanisms for the participating journalists.

**R3: How do Aftonbladet and The New York Times protect journalists from online hate threats on Twitter?**

Aftonbladet and The New York Times attempt to protect their journalists from online hate and threats through varying methods. Aftonbladet allows its journalists to decide if they want to be present online or not. Some have removed their Twitter accounts or stopped being active online. Aftonbladet seems to put more emphasis on Twitter as a tool for the organizations’ own social channels, rather than their individual journalists. The New York Times on the other hand has strongly encouraged their journalists to be online, until recently. The organization realized they had put too much emphasis on the platform as a reporting and feedback tool. Aftonbladet provides extensive training for how to deal with the online environment. Training for journalists at The New York Times is unknown. Unfortunately, The New York Times has a policy in place where their employees are not able to share the current training and tools put in place to protect their journalists from online threats and hate. This research is missing the perspective of the newspaper and details on training and tools for the New York Times and therefore the NYT was not the ideal example for the research. Given the short 8 weeks to conduct this research it may not have been possible to change.
8.2 Future Research

The selected newspapers have a large difference in employee size but both countries have very similar problems when it comes to online hate and threats. Even though they may differ in scale, the impacts on the journalists are the same. Political leaning could be seen as a factor in specific types of threats against journalists. It suggested that this should be covered in future research. A larger sample of journalists and newspapers from both countries should also be compared.

Twitter can be a helpful resource to the organization but in the current online environment it seems to do more harm than good. Journalists may be less inclined to be active on the platform when most of the feedback is negative. This may lead to avoiding topics or removing their association with a story to avoid hate and threats. Many journalists already have demanding jobs and digital newsrooms are high paced. They may not have the time or effort to speak up on online hate and threats as they might see them as minor in comparison to physical threats journalists face in other countries and or in war zones.

As some participants mention, we cannot go back in time, the change has happened, and we must figure out how to live with it and adapt to it. I argue that online hate and threats to journalists need to be further researched. There needs to be collaboration between news organizations and academics to try to understand the nature of threats and the behavior of journalists on Twitter. News organizations need to collaborate with each other on how to deal with the relentless harassment.

News organizations need to understand that people are following people in this new online environment. Readers are now following the individual journalists and may not be as interested in the news organization they are working for. The news organizations need to readjust to the new media environment that creates talent and individual brands. In this new landscape journalists may have less loyalty to their news organization. They can leave their current employer and bring their audience to other platforms to promote their own journalism.

There seems to be a lack of understanding of the psychological effects Twitter use has on journalists. There should also be a better understanding of how journalists’ interaction with the online audience is affecting threats and harassment towards them. The conversation around
threats is still focused on physical threats but psychological effects could be as threatening to journalists and journalism. News organizations need to put more resources into understanding the effects of online threats and put effective systems in place to protect journalists. There needs to be a collaboration between the newsroom, sociologists, social psychologists, media scholars and journalism scholars for future research within this topic. To understand the relationships journalists, have with their audience and the effect that has on their work. Future research should also compare male and female journalists experience on the platform to get a greater understanding of the number of women that are harassed compared to their male coworkers.

The news organizations may want to create clearer policies and guidelines for the journalists to follow. If journalists are encouraged or required by their employer to be present online, news organizations should take responsibility and make sure they provide social media training and mental health support for those in need. It may also be useful to have a social media expert responsible for handling the journalists Twitter use in the newsroom (someone they can talk to for guidance or support).

This research contributed to the field of journalism by collecting different journalistic areas that had been explored previously. It was able to identify the problems at hand and the need for collaboration between news organizations and scholars to get a broader perspective of the problem. Even though it could not go into many of the other interesting areas mentioned by the journalists. I would like to mention what was observed though the interviews and by reading articles about news organizations struggles with Twitter. I suggest that further research should deep dive into the education of journalist students, the effects of opinion pieces, and “influencer journalists.”

Lastly, I would like to mention that smaller online media organizations such as Axios seem to have less issues with journalists on Twitter. There seems to be better conversations around the use of Twitter and more open support from editors. Due to the media organizations being online, those working for the organization might be more tech savvy and understanding of the online environment. Twitter may be officially purchased by Elon Musk. What impacts may this have on the current media landscape?
References

Books


Stokes, J. (2012). How to do media and cultural studies. SAGE PUBLICATIONS.

Electronic


**Video**


**Website**


## Appendix

### Appendix A: Interview Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Online Threats (Physical or psychological)</th>
<th>Internet (Twitter &amp; Outrage-Culture)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Anonymous</strong></td>
<td>“People can end up being the targets of abuse in unfair, terrible ways.”</td>
<td>“Something about the nature of the technology that makes some people behave badly”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There have been real disciplinary actions including people who have gone on probation and threatened of being fired for being too out there on Twitter.”</td>
<td>“The biggest Twitter followings of journalists tend to be a few 100 000”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There are physical threats online that the newspapers want to know about even if they may seem vague.”</td>
<td>“You’re not getting a full kind of sample of what the opinions are if you just follow the reactions.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Be aware that the entire world is reading your Tweets, you don’t have to have an opinion on everything when its and area outside your expertise.”</td>
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<td>“The technology lowers the barriers for people with anger or whatever drives them to say things I am skeptical they would say to a person they are talking to in real life.”</td>
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<td>“Much easier for somebody to send an email or respond to something on Twitter when they have the anonymity of the internet.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“We are much more aware of what the conversation is around out articles.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“You do get some feedback you didn’t use to get.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think is a risk that they might write to s specific audience. The danger is that you’re writing for these few 100 000 highly engaged, highly opinionated people not kind of normal humans.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Liz Spayd</strong></td>
<td>“Physical threats that’s disconcerting obviously- but there is this more subtle one that I don’t even think we see.”</td>
<td>“It’s a huge understatement to say it had a profound impact on all journalism everywhere.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I think that a lot of journalists and its just basic human nature but they can write to their bubble of friends and influence- their online bubble”</td>
<td>“The untatended consequences of it, It does have many postives but it's also a beast we havent figured out how to manage yet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I was bullied all the time on Twitter.”</td>
<td>“Social media has great potential to influence journalists some may be postive but I'm more concerned about the negative ways that journalists can be influenced.”</td>
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</table>
| Nicholas Johnston | “I was bullied all the time on Twitter.”
| | “It was a big issue while I was there. Just trying to figure out how to police social media and Twitter, mainly Twitter fankly.”
| | “They changed the top of the story because they were getting bullied”
| | “You want your reporters to be out there having a presence, becoming personalities.”
| | “You want them to behave themselves on Twitter”
| | “I think we bring out this sledgehammer or sword that is off with everyones head. Those people may be firing you but they are only doing it because they feel socially compelled to do so. It's a terrible free speech problem.”
| Robert Aschberg | “Opinion pieces are ammunition for your enemies.”
| | “The harassment is relentless, particularly for women.”
| | “Media managers or newsrooms have been idiots about the way they treat some of their reporters who are present online.”
| | “Everyone chases clicks.
| | “Backlash gets clicks.”
| | “That there is a filter bubble element… we are all writing for each other and tweeting for each other.”
| | “Be careful with what you post on Twitter because what you do on Social media will be weaponized and used against you by foreign government, by internet trolls, by American political parties. You will be dragged all over Twitter.”
| | “turn off your phone for the weekend”
| | “It’s here to stay and it should be taken seriously because the enemies of a free press will use it to delegitimize your reporting and it’s not hypothetical, it’s a real thing. Me saying “delete your account” is a joke. It’s here and it’s not going to be uninvented. Face it.”
| | “You can’t close the public out because we are dependent on it but I think that to many newspapers give too much room to many meaningless comments and opinions because most of it is just crap.”
| | “Newsrooms have emphasized and valued Twitter too much”
| | “They are also delighted by attracting attention to their work on the internet.”
| | “The short format of only 250 characters could be very impulsive and not thought through and could encourage only a reaction than a thoughtful post.”
| | “You can have biases be confirmed and strengthened.”

| Nicholas Johnston | “My number was thrown out on the internet, and I was victim of a lot of threats and hate campaigns, but I don't care that much.”
| | “But for many other journalists it's very sensitive and that could be a reason for them avoiding certain topics or remove their name from an article.”
| | “It would be ridiculous to say the online presence doesn't affect journalists consciously or unconsciously, some are afraid of it, others adapt, or others ignore it, but many are in between”
| | “Journalists avoid certain topics because they are scared of the consequences of being subject to hate
campaigns, dragged on the internet and subject to trolls.”
“It isn't just extremists its also the bandwagon mentality.”
“Metoo is a good example.”
“But I also think that it's a democracy issue.”
“It's dangerous when these lone wolves on the internet get roused or get intoxicated by the internet groups/bandwagons and campaigns that want to act on their own.”
“Writing to your online bubble doesn't sound impossible, if you don't do it consciously maybe you do it unconsciously and that's why you get affected by the traffic you receive online”
“Jumping on the bandwagon can lead to this cancel-culture and these platforms that the internet has created.”
“It can have a good affect, but it can get uncomfortable when it leads to an organized following (bandwagon)”

| Anders Lindberg | “More with Twitter”
| | “People attack journalists to get topics off the air”
| | “Three people have been convicted in court for threatening me personally and similarly with other people in my department”
| | “There is more criticism with Twitter”
| | “I don’t think anyone encourages anyone anymore, you very much chose yourself. Some people have closed their accounts, some don’t have accounts.”
| | “My account is my personal account. I have an open account. It even says that I am the political editor and chief.”
| | “The legal protection for the freedom of the press does not apply to my Twitter account”

| Lars Thalèn | “There is self-censorship”
| | “The newsroom is more interested in reactions on social media, both the negative and the positives.”
| | “Journalists also want reactions (how they write, will they get backlash or not for it, etc.).”

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand (Corporate and Individual)</th>
<th>Working environment (Newsroom culture)</th>
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</table>
| Anonymous | “That causes problems for the credibility of the organization.”
| | “The biggest Twitter followings have a few 100 000” |
| **Liz Spayd** | “You want your reporters to be out there having a presence, becoming personalities” | “I would hope that there are discussion between reporter and editor.”  
“Editors didn't want their reporters spending all the time looking at the comments, one of the early tensions when I got to the digital side.”  
“It was his biggest struggle, consistent struggle and sort of try to deal with that” |
| **Nicholas Johnston** | “The mixing of real journalism and opinion I think is bad. It damages their brands”  
“The internet has just completely changed that dynamic between viewer and journalists.”  
“Journalists are brands.”  
“The feedback loop on social media is different. It’s one tweet and you get a bunch of likes and retweets.”  
“Now you can follow not necessarily The New York Times or The Washington Post, you can make a distinct decision to follow Maggie Haberman.” | “There need to be a dialogue between journalists and people who run the media organizations about how useful social media is. I think this is more of a problem for newsroom managers than for journalists.”  
“Tension on who has bigger followings and who has the brand that lifting who, back in the day it would be the publication.”  
“How do you live your authentic self on social media, how do you do that in a way that is respectful of the newsroom, in way that doesn’t make it more difficult for your colleagues to do their jobs?”  
“Very much focused on social media policies.”  
“I think it is a challenge for news organizations. How do you balance someone like Maggie Haberman who is high profiled and has millions of Twitter followers with another journalist in the newsroom with a few thousand.” |
| **Robert Aschberg** | “It has to do with the validity of the publication” | “If a journalist says something damaging or does something outside of work, then it is a problem for the employer.”  
“Newsrooms have respected Twitter too much” |
| **Anders Lindberg** | | “Public Service sets a standard” |
| **Lars Thalèn** | | “Today you are attacked by other journalists more and criticize each other more. You Jump on each other.” |

**Appendix B: News Article Coding**

**Table 1.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Online Threats</strong> (Physical or psychological)</th>
<th><strong>Internet (Twitter &amp; Outrage-Culture)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Aftonbladet**  
Man charged for threats and hate against journalist Jonna Sima | “Jonna Sima was threatened on Twitter.”  
“The purpose of hate and threat is to silence journalists.”  
“It was extra serious since it was a threat towards a journalist with socially important tasks.” |
| | “The threat was published on twitter.”  
“You can't write whatever you want anonymously on Twitter.”  
“People who hide behind the screen.”  
“You have the opportunity to write whatever you want anonymously.” |
| **Resumé**  
“That journalists would be completely objective, no one believes” | “I think Sweden is still waiting for the big hit.”  
“You always here from haters.”  
“If you are young and don't want to use these online tools, you have no business being here.”  
“That journalists don't have opinions or are completely objective, no one really believes these days.” |
| | “Twitter isn't focusing on us because we are a small country.”  
“Its a big problem because there are so many friend bubbles, so if we are going to survive we have to correct one another.”  
“Right now we are online first and on our way to becoming social first.”  
“We train our staff on how to find, package, and spread journalism in this new world. Aftonbladet wants to reach larger social traffic.”  
“I think that journalists should be present online because you can reach people with your articles and use it as a source.” |
| **Insider**  
LEAKED MEMO: The New York Times has issued a Twitter ‘reset,’ urging reporters to meaningfully reduce how much time they spend on the platform | “In recent months, more journalists- particularly women and journalists of color- have spoken out about the constant stream of harassment they face online.”  
“Your experience may be shaped with harassment and attacks.”  
“Your experience may be shaped by harassment and attacks.”  
“It should only be one input out of many for reporting.” |
| | “There is no expectation that they individually need to be on social media.”  
“In the past, we've strongly urged you to use it to get our journalism in front of more people, engage with readers and uncover stories.” |
| **The New York Times**  
Survey says: Never Tweet | “Develop sources on social media by broadcasting their views and finding allies.”  
“Editor wrote to warn her that her tweets were profanity.”  
“There are different sets of rules for different people. ‘Stars get away with a kind of social media presence that low-profile workers would get in big trouble for.”  
“Pretend I don’t have opinions.” |
| | “A hazy line.”  
“Every editor and chief has a phone on their desk and is only one bad Tweet away from "ok let's shut this whole thing down.”  
“Journalists are living on a more Twitter-obsessed planet than normal people.”  
“He can get hundreds of requests from other journalists to tweet about their stories.”  
“Future of media is more distributed and about personalities.” |
## Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand (Corporate and Individual)</th>
<th>Working environment (Newsroom culture)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aftonbladet</td>
<td>“Before you would call the newsroom now you can post it on Facebook and encourage people to share.” “You have to be Sweden's most modern journalist if you work for Aftonbladet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumé</td>
<td>“That journalists would be completely objective, no one believes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>“Well known Times staffers have grown huge followings to help bolster their own personal brands.” “Promoting our best-in-class journalism wherever our audience is, including Twitter.” “Social media needs to reflect the values of The Times.” “In the past, we’ve strongly urged you to use it to get our journalism in front of more people, engage with readers and uncover stories.” “The standards department will pay close attention to how all Times journalists use social media to ensure it is in line with our social media guidelines”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>“His Twitter account gave him the power to flee the Times and take his followers.” “Journalists complain and marvel at the question of who gets away with what on Twitter.” “Trying to determine their own identities in a polarized nation.” “Less said on social media the better.” “Stern reminders of journalists need to keep their opinions to themselves.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix C: Organizational Documents Coding
Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Threats</th>
<th>Internet (Twitter &amp; Outrage-Culture)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Physical or psychological)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aftonbladet</strong></td>
<td>“In our training you earn how to deal with online threats, hate, or any online activity that may be malicious in any way”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We use filtering systems to filter your phone, email, and your social media.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We help with how to deal with threats by teaching journalists how the police works and how the functions of the legal system working in the even of them receiving threats.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The New York Times</strong></td>
<td>“Having a presence on social media is a given for us and that also includes many of our employees”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We expect our employees to follow these buildings on social media and use common sense.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
Aftonbladet  | “We see this very much as a workplace problem, like a dripping roof or ventilation that doesn’t work”
| “This training has the purpose of those in the program to understand this online environment they are going into.”

The New York Times  | “If journalists are perceived as biased it can undercut the credibility of the entire newsroom.”
| “Newsroom employees should avoid posting anything on social media that damages our reputation for neutrality and fairness”
| “No newsroom or opinion employee may do anything that damages The Times reputation for strict neutrality.”
| “Staff member may not disclose confidential information about the operation, policies or plans of The Times.”
| “IT security around hacking, and internet prevents that sort of thing, but also around trying to make sure they respond quickly, if there's reason to believe reporters are in actual danger.”

Appendix D: Interview Guide

This guide was made in the purpose of being able to customize for each participant due to their experience, current employer, and relevance. Certain questions were not asked if it wasn’t relevant for the participant. Follow up questions were always asked if something came up.

1. I would like to start off by asking you to briefly describe who you are?
   - I saw that you previously worked for (blank). What was your role there?
   - When you were working there, were there any big changes that occurred?
   - Were there any social media policies or media training for journalists?

2. How did you end up working at (blank)?
3. Do you know if the newspaper offers any media training for journalists on how to handle online hate or threats?

4. There used to be a cool off period for those frustrated with news pieces. Before the internet people had to make the effort to get in contact, do you think the internet had an impact on this?

5. What, in your opinion, has been the largest challenge to journalism in the last 20 years?

6. What online and offline threats do you believe journalists face today in a more increasing online and polarizing environment?

7. What do you think about journalists who have been canceled and let go due to opinions or their work?

8. Do you think that there has been an increase in self-censorship due to fear of public backlash?

9. One participant mentioned that she thinks one threat to journalism is that some journalists might write pieces for their own digital bubble. Would you like to comment on that?

Appendix E: Transcriptions

Contact the researcher if you wish to have access to the transcription and notes from the interviews.