

DIGITAL PRACTICES OF JOURNALISTS IN DISTRESS

Below are listed the many digital practices that journalists in distress employ during their work, personal lives and search for assistance. Together, they reveal many vulnerabilities to which journalists in distress can be exposed in cyberspace—but they also suggest some strengths and indicate their particular concerns and reasons for behaviours that put them at risk. Specifically, they show that in certain contexts journalists in distress are often not able or willing to fully mitigate those risks. Given that all the journalists surveyed think it is possible to improve their digital security, this inability or unwillingness is not attributable to negligence or indifference but instead to a host of other factors, such as financial constraints and concerns about family and friends.

ACCESSING THE INTERNET

- Journalists in distress use a mobile phone they own to access the Internet more often than a computer they own.
- Using computers at Internet cafés is much more common than at libraries.
- The preferred web browser of choice is Google Chrome, followed by Mozilla Firefox.
- While on the Internet, journalists in distress make use of a number of social media platforms but the most popular by far is Facebook.
- With respect to instant messaging applications, WhatsApp is by far the most popular.

USING CYBER DEVICES

- More journalists in distress own a mobile phone (that has Internet access) than a computer or laptop.
- Few journalists in distress share their devices with others.
- More than half of journalists in distress worry about sharing their own devices with others out of concern for their safety.
- Only a quarter have thrown away a device because they no longer felt safe keeping it.
- More journalists in distress do *not* have security software installed on their devices than those who do.
- Almost a fifth do not know if they have security software installed on their devices, and over 70 percent do not know if their devices are free of harmful software.

GOING TO INTERNET CAFÉS

- Over half of journalists in distress make use of Internet cafés, the majority of whom use a computer available there rather than bringing their own.
- A sizeable majority do *not* have to show identification in order to make use of a computer at the Internet cafés they visit.

- Almost a third of journalists in distress do not clear the browser history and cache on the café computers they use. A further 20 percent do not know what the history and cache are in the first place.
- More than a third visit cafés that have surveillance cameras pointed directly at the computer screens. In addition, more than a third have never looked to see if there are cameras pointed at the cafés computers they use.
- A majority of journalists in distress never feel safe at Internet cafés, but only about half have left a café because they did not feel safe.
- Journalists in distress feel unsafe at Internet cafés due to the sensation of being watched and tracked, suspicion of Internet café employees, fear of security round-ups, and worry about the ethnic attitudes of other Internet users at the café.

ORIENTING TO DIGITAL SECURITY

- Almost two fifths of journalists in distress think about digital security all of the time. The remaining think about it frequently or sometimes.
- Almost all journalists in distress worry that their Internet communications are being monitored.
- With respect to the actors responsible for monitoring their communications, journalists in distress have a number of potential suspects in mind—with the government of their home country at the top of their list, followed by intelligence agents, the government of the country in which they currently reside (if they have fled to another country) and police.
- Almost half of journalists in distress have had at least one of their devices stolen. However, only a quarter have had a break-in at their home or office.
- Almost two thirds of journalists in distress have *not* had a device taken by authorities.
- For those who have had a device taken, police have been responsible in a majority of incidences, with intelligence agents responsible for the rest. No one reports that airport or border security agents were responsible for taking their devices.
- Just over half of journalists in distress believe that the passwords on their devices and accounts are definitely or probably complex. Only a small percentage have never thought about the strength of their passwords before, while a quarter admit to having weak passwords.
- When asked if they want to improve their digital security, a sizable majority indicate they do and the rest indicate they have never thought about it before. No one reports not wanting to improve their digital security.
- 100 percent of journalists in distress think it is possible to improve their digital security.

COMMUNICATING WITH EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS

- Email is by far the most common mode of communication for journalists in distress to communicate with CJFE or other international human rights organizations.
- WhatsApp and Skype are the most common instant messaging applications to be used, and Signal and Telegram follow up with the same smaller frequencies of use.

- Almost twice as many journalists in distress report feeling safe when they communicate with international human rights organizations compared to those who only sometimes feel safe.
- Despite no one reporting they feel unsafe communicating with international human rights organizations, in a follow-up question just less than half report that they communicate with international human rights organizations *even when they feel unsafe*. By a slim margin, just over half report deciding not to communicate when they feel unsafe.
- Many journalists in distress have withheld information from international human rights organizations when seeking assistance because they feared it was not safe to share.
- The most common type of information withheld is their plans to flee the country, followed by the names of their family members. Journalists seeking assistance are approximately twice as likely to withhold the names of their family members as their own name.