

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF  
GENDER BASED  
HARASSMENT IN MEDIA  
“The case of Online Media”

**August 2019**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the Global Conference celebrating World Press Freedom Day in Addis Ababa the capital city of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia that was held from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2019, held several panel discussions on various topical issues under the major Theme “ Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation”.

A panel discussing a topical issue relating to safety of women journalists and specifically online threats and harassment that female journalist and women that are active online face, presented a real threat to freedom of speech since it creates “chilling effect” whereby women are discouraged to participate; professionally, socially, and economically online as noted by one of the panellists from Kenya-Madam Jacqueline Ondimu<sup>1</sup>. It's against that background that RMC carried out this study to investigate harassment done online against women and particularly female journalists.

As stated by the Media Law No. 02/2013 of 08/02/2013 in its article 4, RMC has a mandate to regulate “the daily functioning of media and conduct of journalists” as the official Media Self regulatory Body in Rwanda. It's on the basis of this mandate that RMC undertakes such studies to produce accurate and empirical content analysis reports in mass media basing on either on thematic issues or trending complaints and potential violations of the code of ethics.

Hence, RMC's media content monitoring exercise takes the form of *Complaints-based monitoring* whereby particular media content is scrutinized for any breach of the Code of Ethics upon a complaint being submitted to RMC, *Pro-active monitoring* whereby RMC staff scrutinize print, broadcast and online content on daily basis and propose issues that are worth investigating that relate to public interest in media and *Communication impact monitoring* where Media monitoring services are undertaken for public relations and communication clients.

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<sup>1</sup> source: notes taken by, Emmanuel Mugisha, Executive Director of RMV, participant to the conference representing RMC

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

From the discussion by the panellists and discussants at the Addis Ababa Global Conference, it was noted that women face online harassment resulting from their identity as women. It was further noted that online harassment is relatively new phenomenon and hence gender-based online harassment is not well understood and the effects of this harassment on women can be devastating both to their personal lives and to their professional careers. The absence of literature specific to this problem is considered to be a significant challenge and gap in studies relating to gender based violence.

Therefore studies need to be undertaken to produce key insights on harassment done against women online and specifically female journalists to inform policy, legal and other possible actions. RMC undertook this study using the approach of media content monitoring and analysis to contribute to the limited research in this area as a basis for peer review discussion sessions and other platforms of discussion to influence a positive change.

## **3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

This study assumes that persistent online harassment against active women online and particularly female journalists creates a chilling effect which may lead to violation of fundamental and constitutional press freedoms that both men and women should enjoy equally. A chilling effect may lead to avoidance in reporting or covering certain stories by mainly the harassed for fear of the online fury they would receive.

It is also assumed that such irresponsible behaviour may negatively affect women journalists' career and profession in journalism or discourage young women from joining the profession of journalism. The ultimate result of women being discouraged to have an active and participatory role in media is their limited ability to participate in democratic process which depends on a free and fair press for all without discrimination. Linked to this assumption is that, online harassment may prevent women journalists from serving in their capacity as media watchdog in public interest matters.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

Only online media content was collected for analysis and the methods used to analyse the content were both qualitative and quantitative. Twenty (20) media outlets and websites were sampled and a total of sixty-five (65) content items for analysis were identified, including news stories, tweets, comments as well as talk shows.

The variables and units of analysis used by the monitors to assess the identified content items for a report were:

- Being called offensive names
- Intention to embarrass someone
- Words of physical threats
- Having been stalked( keep following someone in annoying and frightening manner)
- Having been sexually harassed online
- Having been bullied (using manhood superiority complex to threat a woman

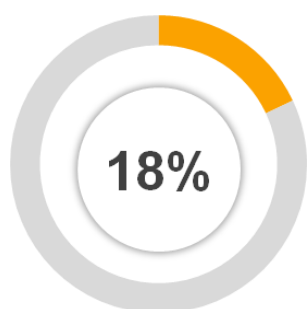
### **Time/ Period of the report**

This report details the findings and analyses of the media monitoring done in the period of August 2019. The monitoring was done on various media available online during the month of August.

## 5. FINDINGS

Findings of this monitoring exercise are presented according to the units of analysis above-mentioned.

### 5.1. Use of Offensive names



This unit was monitored to determine the extent to which offensive names are used as a tool of harassment intention against women in media. The analysis observed that 18% of analysed items had this form of harassment. During a workshop in which these findings were presented, most female journalists noted that the usage of offensive name-calling and attempts to embarrass female journalists and other women who are active online is common. The participants noted women use online media for many reasons such as marketing, sharing their lifestyle, etc. When they are embarrassed or harassed most of them may decide to withdraw unlike a few who suggested that the fight back and decide to stay. They also cited an example of a talk show that was aired and latter published on soundcloud where a pastor is preaching against women, comparing them to evil<sup>2</sup>. The following are some of the examples on name calling and embarrassing language used:

“Ikibazo abagore bafie uyu muni ni uko babaye indaya”- The problem that women have today is that they have all become promiscuous); “Umugore! icyiza cy’umugore ni iki ? wakivana he?”-what is good in women? You can’t find anything good in women. “Umugore! Umwicanyi mubi” Women! Bad assassins.

Participants at the workshop concurred that women are more likely to find online harassment very upsetting largely to its emotional impact on them. Persistent harassment through name calling that is embarrassing a reputation damage effect.

The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) that was represented at the workshop noted that there is legal remedy to that but those who are victimized hardly go for legal redress and that empowers the harasser who usually do it on intention. In the case of female journalist, it was noted that most are harassed just ot

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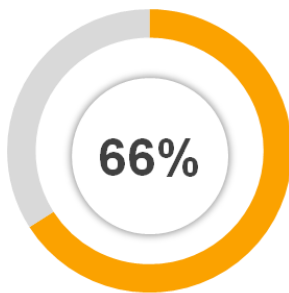
<sup>2</sup> (<https://soundcloud.com/ktradio/whatsapp-audio-2018-02-08-at-081226>)

discourage them from doing their work. This kind of harassment to female journalists may lead to undercutting of one's career prospects and the ultimate effect is women's voice exclusion from the digital public sphere.

Rwanda Media Commission believes that in order to address this problem of gender based online harassment we ought to invest into; digital literacy to empower victims, develop appropriate technological tools that discourage perpetrators, put in place policies that increase the awareness on the responsible use of social media platforms and introduce modalities of raising public ethics in using online based media/ social media.

## 5.2. Intentional embarrassment

Embarrassment is defined as the uneasiness that occurs as a result of a discrepancy between one's idealized role-identity and one's presented role-identity and the uncertainty that follows an incident<sup>3</sup>. Monitors assessed the content to see whether the words and language used had any intention to embarrass women. Among the 65 items assessed, 66% were found causing embarrassment to women.



An example illustrating such embarrassment can be taken again on the talkshow mentioned above, where the pastor was preaching against the women. He goes on saying: *"Reka nze mbabwire umugore uko agaragara imbere y'Imana. icya mbere afitanye ikibazo n'Imana. Mwumve rero ikibazo cy'umugore guhera mu itangiriro kugera mu byahishuwe..... wicare uzi ngo Imana ifitanye ikibazo n'umugore, ifitanye ikibazo n'abagore, ....niba utari unabizi ubimenye; Umugore ! mwebwe muramwitiranya. Umugore ni mubi ! noneho mbivuge. Umugore ni mubi"* - Let me tell you how a woman is seen by God from the Genesis up to the Revelation books. ....Just know that God has a problem with women! Women! You don't know them! A woman is very bad! Let me say it! A woman is very bad!

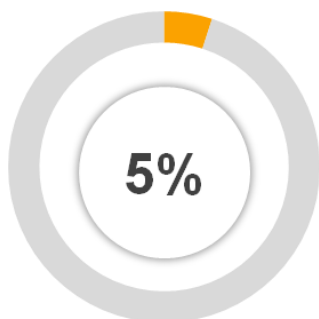
Most of this hate speech and embarrassing content was carried by on online media with an intention to attract viewers and not discouraging such negative attitude towards women. Women have initiated tweeter hashtags such as #mencallmethings where they describe and discuss the verbal abuse they have faced online from men. This also reveals that gender based harassment,

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<sup>3</sup> William F. Sharkey, *Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors* pp 57-90 (1997)

defamation, and hate speech online is on the rise and most likely to persist if nothing is done against it.

### 5.3. Words of Physical threats

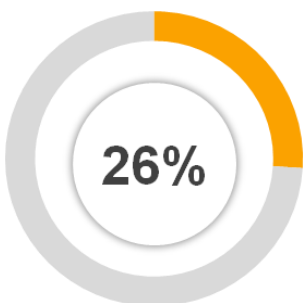


Among the tools used for harassment in media content include the use of words of physical threats. Though observed at a low rate of 5%, these need special attention as they might lead or incite actual physical attacks to targeted individuals. The following statement illustrates such language: “..... Abagore bamwe mbona ubwenge bwanyu bucuramye, hanyuma se azataha kwa nde? Ikigaragara by your statement umugore nta rugo agira

(urugo ni urw umugabo umugore agomba gucaho iyo ka stress kaje, smh”-I think some women don’t have a brain. To which home does she want to go? What is obvious in your statement, a woman has no home, the home is for the man. The woman must leave whenever there is stress, smh!)<sup>4</sup>.

During the workshop, it was noted that the use of pseudonyms and anonymous comments on pictures or content posted by women makes it easy for people to attack others without repercussions. The dark side of the internet is that it permits irresponsible behavior that yields to online harassment, hate speech and all related evils that abuse free speech. The big question according to the workshop participants was that who should hold website administrators and online content aggregators liable for content posted by abusive users and also do monitoring of bad behavior online? This means that this topic needs continued discussion for a lasting solution and the time to do that is now.

### 5.4. Having been stalked



In Rwanda, the Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cybercrimes, defines cyberstalking as an intentional use of a computer or a computer system to harass or threaten with the intent to place another person in distress or fear. Among the means used to do so include displaying, distributing or publishing indecent documents, sounds, pictures, or videos.

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/RtweetsG/status/1162837455046938625>



Among the 65 items assessed, 26% had images, picture or videos shared with a direct or indirect purpose of stalking women. An example can be taken on the article published on [www.umuryango.com](http://www.umuryango.com) a news website, talking about a Rwandan social media star who was accidentally sat in a wrong position discovering her underwear. The title goes: “supersexy-yicaye-nabi-afotorwa-ikariso-yambaye-iri-hanze (Supersexy sat badly and got photographed with a visible underwear)”<sup>55</sup>.

It is evident that media online does stalking on women with status in society or celebrities. Most media organ may do it with intention to attract audience and not necessarily to distress the victims. But even then that is unethical. Article 6 of the journalist code of ethics obliges a journalist to respect human dignity and privacy. This can only be exceptional if the purpose to publish or broadcast is in the interest of the public.

**Ifoto Ya Marina Yambaye Ipantalo Igaragaza Umubyimba N’imiterere By’igitsina**

*Iyi niyo Foto ya Marina yavugishije abantu ibitandukanye*

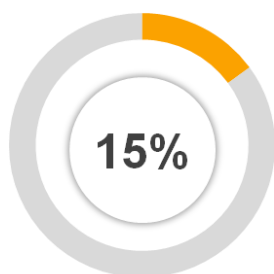
Muri iki cyumweru nibwo ku mbuga nkoranyambaga zitandukanye zo mu Rwanda hakwirakwije ifoto ya BadRama,QueenCha na Marina yambaye ipantalo igaragaza neza imiterere ndetse n’umubyimba w’igitsina cye,ibintu byagiye bivugisha benshi amagambo atandukanye atari meza kuri uyu muhanzikazi.

Iyi foto ikaba ivuzweho byinshi bibi bitandukanye nyuma y’andi mafoto ya Marina nayo yagiye atavugwaho rumwe n’abakunzi b’umuziki Nyarwanda,aho aya mafoto harimo ayagiye afatirwa mu bitaramo yabaga yaririmbyemo bitewe n’imyambarire ye,hakaza n’andi we ubwe yagiye yishyirira hanze nabwo yerekana mu buryo bw’ikimenyetso imiterere y’igitsina cye bamwe bagiyeho bahamya ko yabaga abikora nkana kugira ngo ashatore igitsina gabo.



The screenshot above was taken from a story published on [www.umuryango.com](http://www.umuryango.com) a local news website. It talks about a celebrity and it says that she was photographed wearing a trouser clearly showing the form of her sexual organ. The journalist insisted on showing Marina's sex visible through her trouser. This is violation of the code of ethics and an element of stalking someone.

## 5.5. Sexual Harassment



Sexual harassment includes all behaviour characterised by the making of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks in any social situations and this was evidenced at a rate of 15% of the monitored content.

<sup>55</sup> <http://umuryango.rw/imyidagaduro/article/supersexy-yicaye-nabi-afotorwa-ikariso-yambaye-iri-hanze>

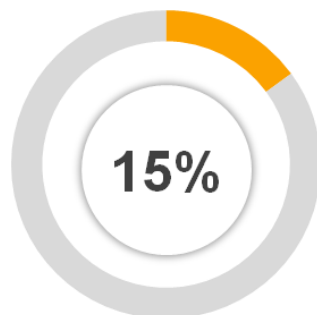
The screenshots below illustrate the findings, whereby a journalist who was interviewing a young girl started touching and looking at her buttocks in an inconveniencing manner.



## 5.6. Bullying

'Bullying' is defined as an intentional aggressive act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who can not easily defend him or herself (Olweus, 1993). The act might be directly addressed to the victim (physical, verbal, relational) and indirectly affecting the victim. As it is one of the forms of harassment, this monitoring also looked into the

analysed contents whether this form was used as well to harass women.



Findings indicate that among the 65 items analysed, bullying content was observed at the rate of 15%. As per the illustration indicated below, a man told a woman on twitter that her mind is ill-shaped.

"Abagore bamwe mbona ubwenge bwanyu bucuramye" (<https://twitter.com/RtweetsG/status/1162837455046938625>)

## 6. WORKSHOP PRESENTATION OF RMC'S MEDIA CONTENT MONITORING REPORT

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2019, The Association of Female Journalists in Media (ARFEM), Women@Web and Rwanda Media Commission (RMC) conducted a workshop as an event to discuss about the role of media in decreasing the digital gender divide in Rwanda. The event gathered leaders of media associations, policy makers, legislators, civil society institutions, relevant government institutions, among others under the theme “Media's Role in increasing Women's Participation Online”.

At this occasion, RMC made a presentation on the findings of this report which served as a curtain raise for discussion relating to safety of women on line and female journalists in particular against online harassment, hate speech, defamation slander and all related abuses.

On the basis of the shared RMC's media content monitoring report and personal testimonies of women who have experienced online harassment several recommendations were noted from both the panellists and discussants.





## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of findings of the current assessment, gender based harassment is among the issues that need to be tackled to enhance that Rwanda's media professionalism and limit the effects of such publications on the victims. Gender based harassment was observed under various forms including direct sexual harassment, bullying, use of offensive names as well as stalking. This analysis has come up with a number of recommendations formulated to ensure that Rwanda's media strive for professionalism, free from any form of harassment.

- There is a need to review the Rwanda's journalists and media practitioners' code of ethics and take into account the online media as the biggest number of media operating in Rwanda are online;
- As this was the case when raising awareness on the access to information law, there is a need for a strong campaign to raise the public's awareness on the law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cybercrimes;
- News reporters, radio & TV presenters should be particularly trained on law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cybercrimes;
- There is a need for a deeper research to show the status of gender harassment in Rwandan media, incorporating all media types and social media as well as the perception of victims and the public;

## 8. REFERENCES

- a. Rwanda Journalists and Media Practitioners' Code of Deontology and Ethics, Amended 5 April 2014;
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- d. MMP/ RMMP, Rwanda Media Monitoring Project : A Monitoring User Guide, Kigali, Media High Council, 2006;
- e. Debarati Halder (2016) Cyber Stalking Victimization of Women: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Current Laws in India from Restorative Justice and Therapeutic Jurisprudential Perspectives;
- f. William F. Sharkey (1997), Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors pp 57-90