Gender Disinformation & Implications for Democracy:

Aims, Tactics and Resistance

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Embajada de los Estados Unidos de América
Santiago, Chile

TechCamp Chile

Multitudes

Part 1: Understanding gendered disinformation

Evolution of Attacks

85% of women politicians use social media (sample of 107 countries, HKS)

41.8 % of women parliamentarians have seen humiliating or sexually charged images of them on social media (sample of 39 countries, IPU)

Young women report social media is a disincentive to entering politics (IGNITE and others)

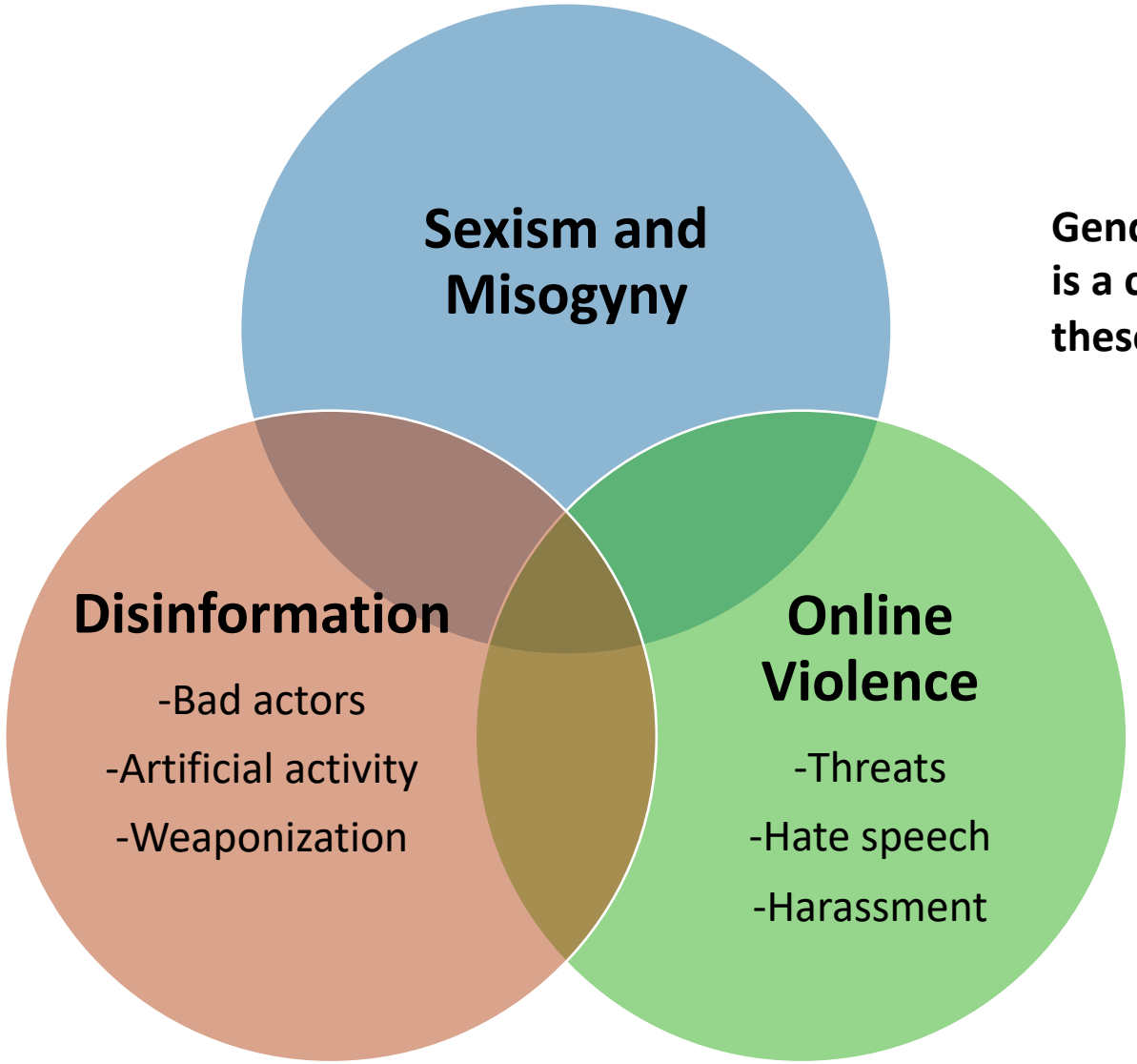
Data analytics shows that female primary candidates are attacked more than men by "inauthentic actors" (Di Meco)

Evidence of gendered disinformation campaigns in 3 countries (Jankovicz 2021)

A female politician or journalist is harassed on Twitter every 30 seconds in the UK and US – and nearly all cybercrimes go unpunished (Amnesty International)

Evidence of US Congress races shows female candidates attacked 10 times more than men on FB (ISD). Coordinated attacks in Poland and the Philippines (Demos)

Threats Facing Women Leaders on Social Media



Gendered Disinformation is a combination of all these things

Research Findings on Attack Lines

Leadership Bias

- **Untrustworthy** – They are liars, hypocrites, or too ambitious
- Unqualified – They are stupid, inexperienced, weak, or incapable
- **Unlikable** - Difficult to get along with, annoying personality
- **Uncontrollable**– They are angry, crazy, or evil

Sexualized Attacks

Within these themes are a high volume of sexualized content–memes, graphics, or accusations of women "sleeping their way to the top."

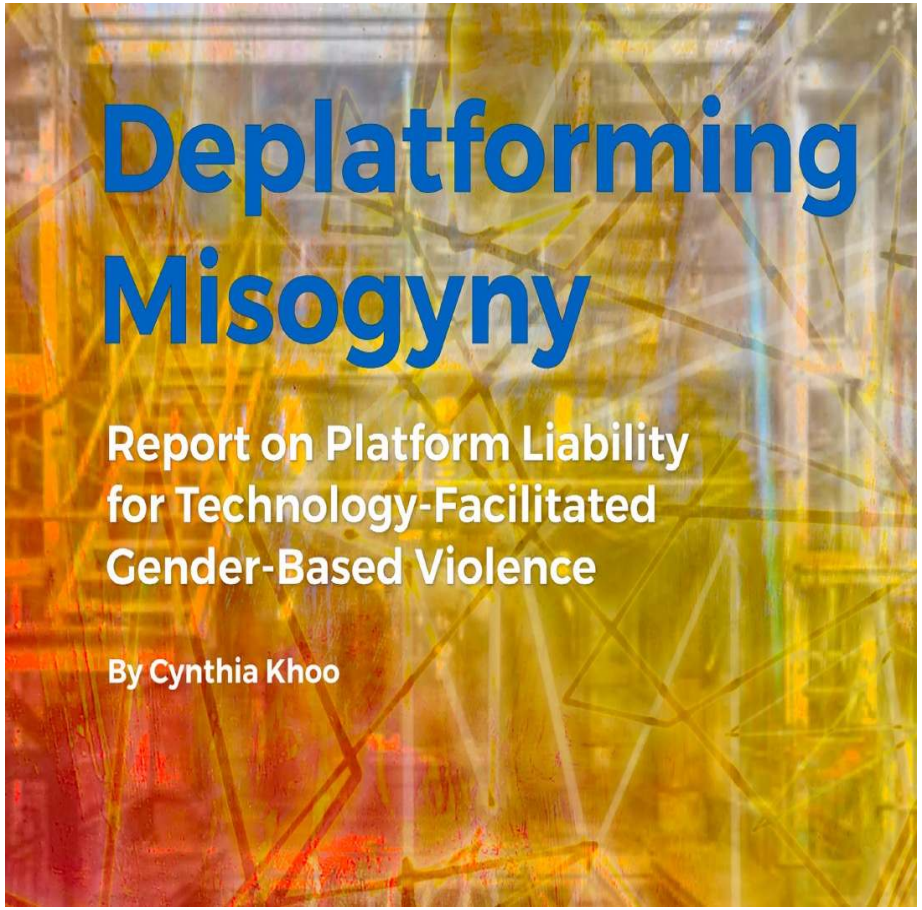
Less Fact-Based

Attacks against women are more likely to focus on character and not include facts.

Accentuates existing bias in traditional news coverage of women in politics

WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER
WMC

CHART OF REVERSIBILITY	
Said to Women	**Said to Men**
Cunt	NONE Girl / Woman
Whore	NONE Man Whore
Bitch	NONE
Slut	NONE
Prostitute	Player / Pimp
Man-Eater / Aggressive	Driven / Motivated
High-Strung / Temperamental	Powerful
Too Emotional	Sensitive / Caring
Mean Girl / Bully	Powerful / Decisive
Ice Queen / Cold	Hardworking / Commanding
Nagging / Shrill	Determined
Opinionated / Uppity	Knowledgeable / Passionate
Hot / Sexy / MILF	Handsome / Attractive
Ugly / Mannish / Dyke / Lesbian	NO ATTENTION GIVEN
Varicose Veins / Cankles / Wrinkled	Distinguished / Seasoned
General Menstruation Jokes:	
Moody / PMSing	Angry
General Comments on Appearance:	
Plunging Neckline / Short Skirt / High Heels / Hairstyle	Oh, look, he's wearing a red/blue tie "and an American flag pin"



Tactics: Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence, Abuse, and Harassment

Doxing	Hate speech	Threats and intimidation	Trolling
Voyeurism	Impersonation	Spying and monitoring through account	Hacking or interception of private communications
Online mobbing	Coordinated flagging campaigns	Sexual exploitation resulting from online	Luring
Defamation	Non-consensual distribution of intimate	Image-based abuse (including both deepfakes and shallow fakes	Sextortion

Silence Women = **Erode Democracy**

- Used by authoritarian leaders and illiberal actors to push back against the progress made on women's and minority rights.

- U.N. Human Rights Council "the corrosion of women's human rights "is a litmus test for the human rights standards of the whole of society"

Tactics used by Putin in **Russia**, Duterte in the **Philippines**, Orban in **Hungary,** Erdogan in **Turkey,** Bolsonaro in **Brazil,** Trump in the **US**

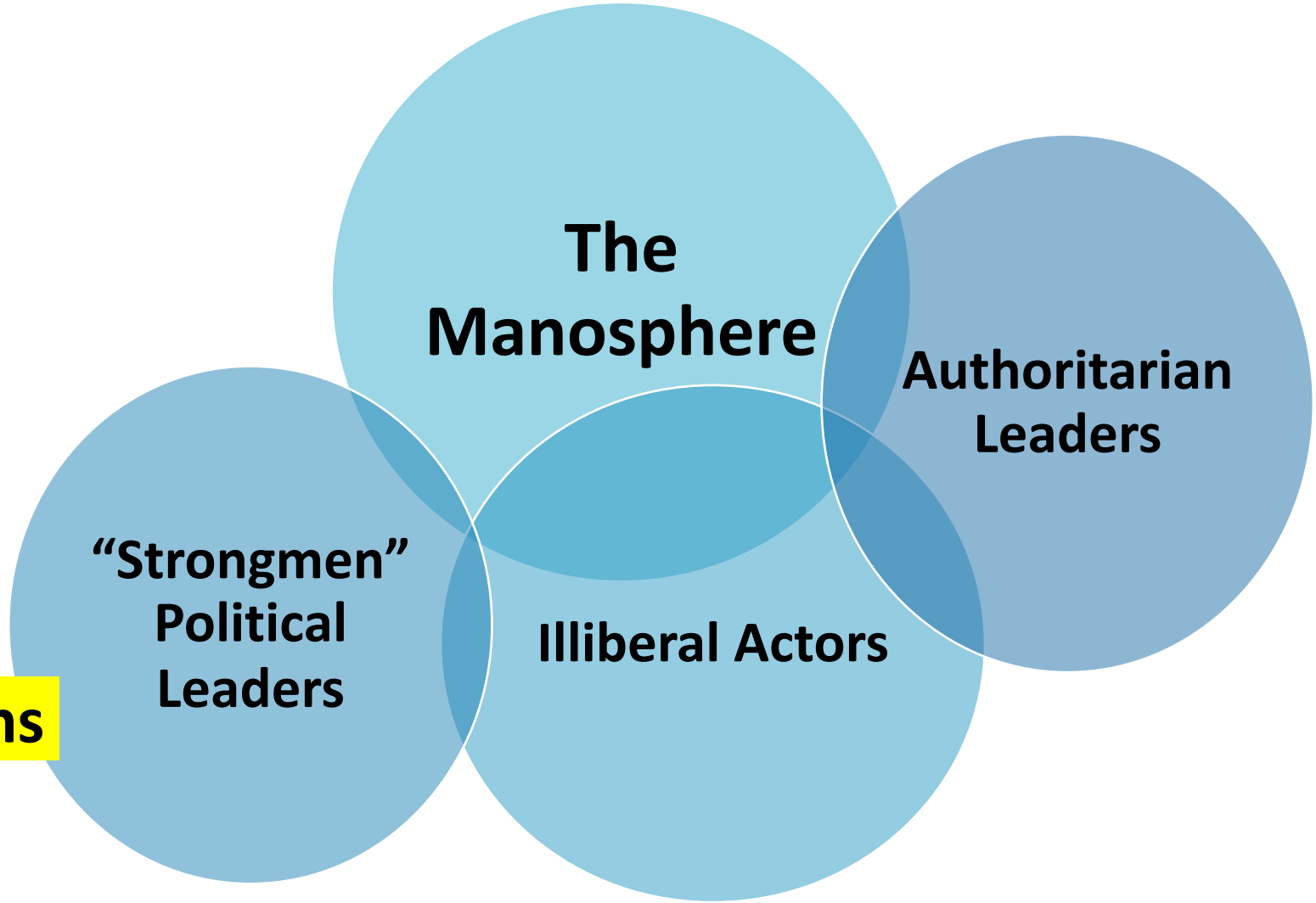
Gendered disinformation is a national security problem

March 8, 2021 | Lucina Di Meco and Kristina Wilfore

BROOKINGS

Main actors & super-spreaders of gendered disinformation

Digital platform algorithms reward and amplify hate for profit



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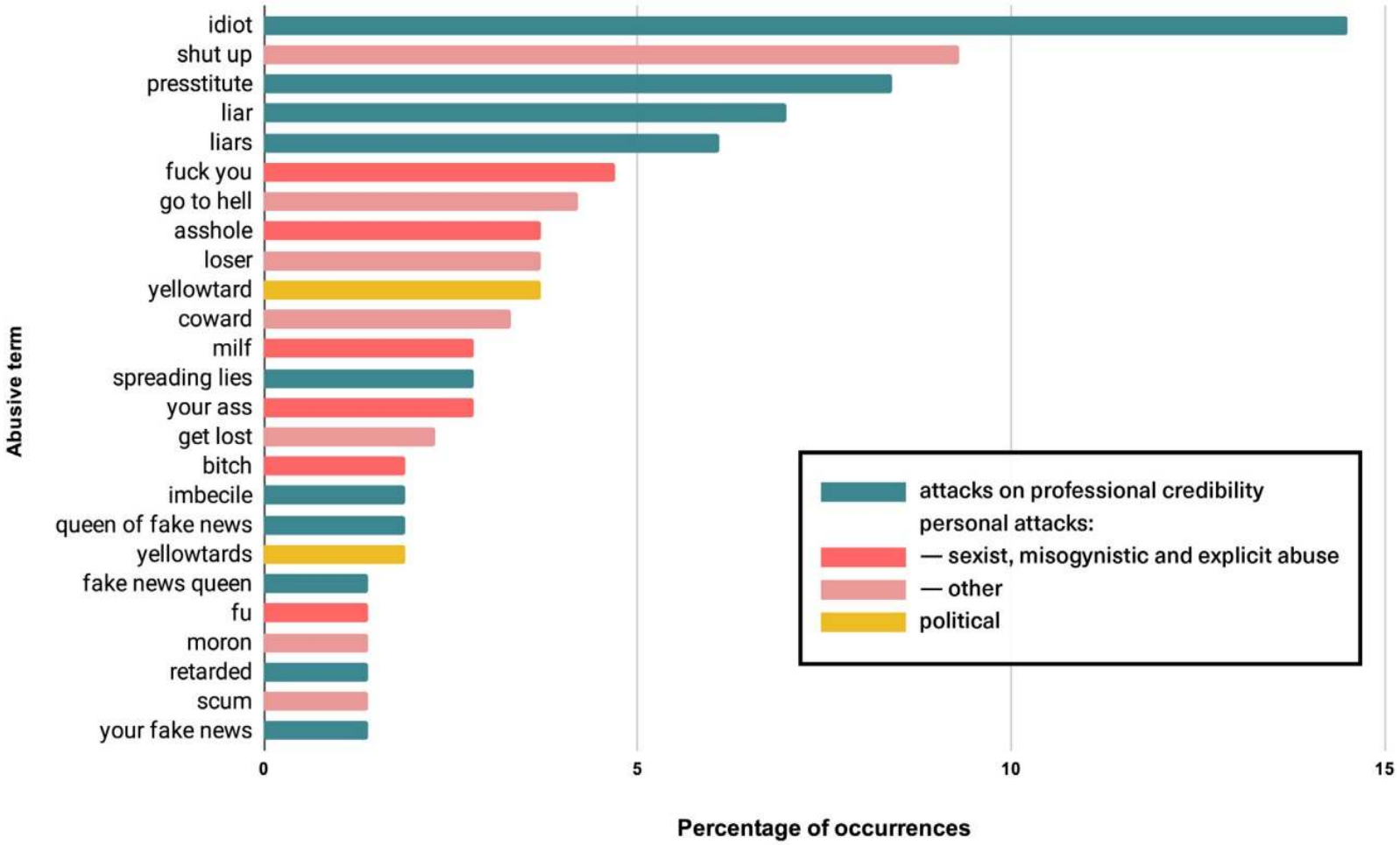
The Facebook “Cross Check” Special rules for VIPs

- A Brazilian soccer star, with more than 150 million followers on Instagram
- After a woman accused Neymar of rape in 2019, he posted Facebook and Instagram videos defending himself -- and showing viewers his WhatsApp correspondence with his accuser, which included her name and nude photos of her. He accused the woman of extorting him.
- Facebook's standard procedure for handling the posting of "nonconsensual intimate imagery" is simple: Delete it. But Neymar was protected by XCheck.

Top ranked word: “Presstitute” a combination of press and prostitute often used by Duterte supporters



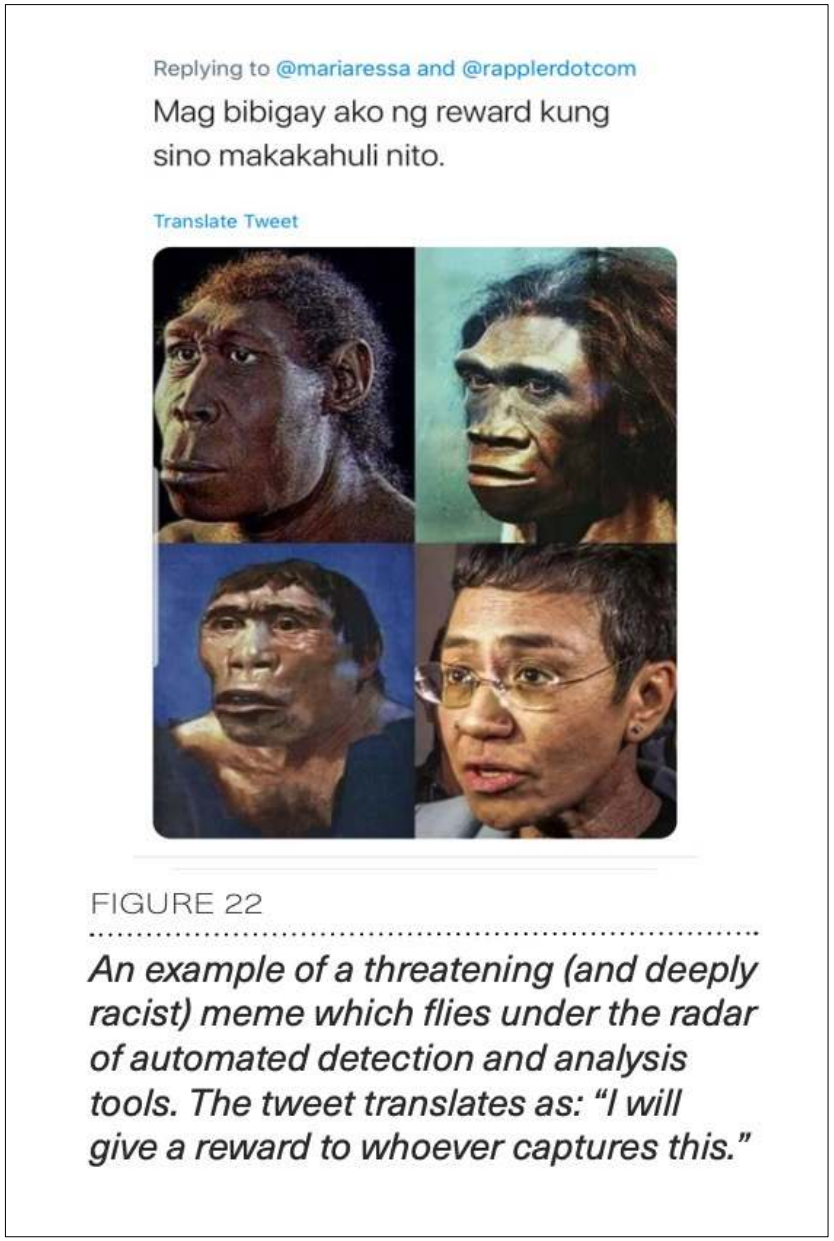
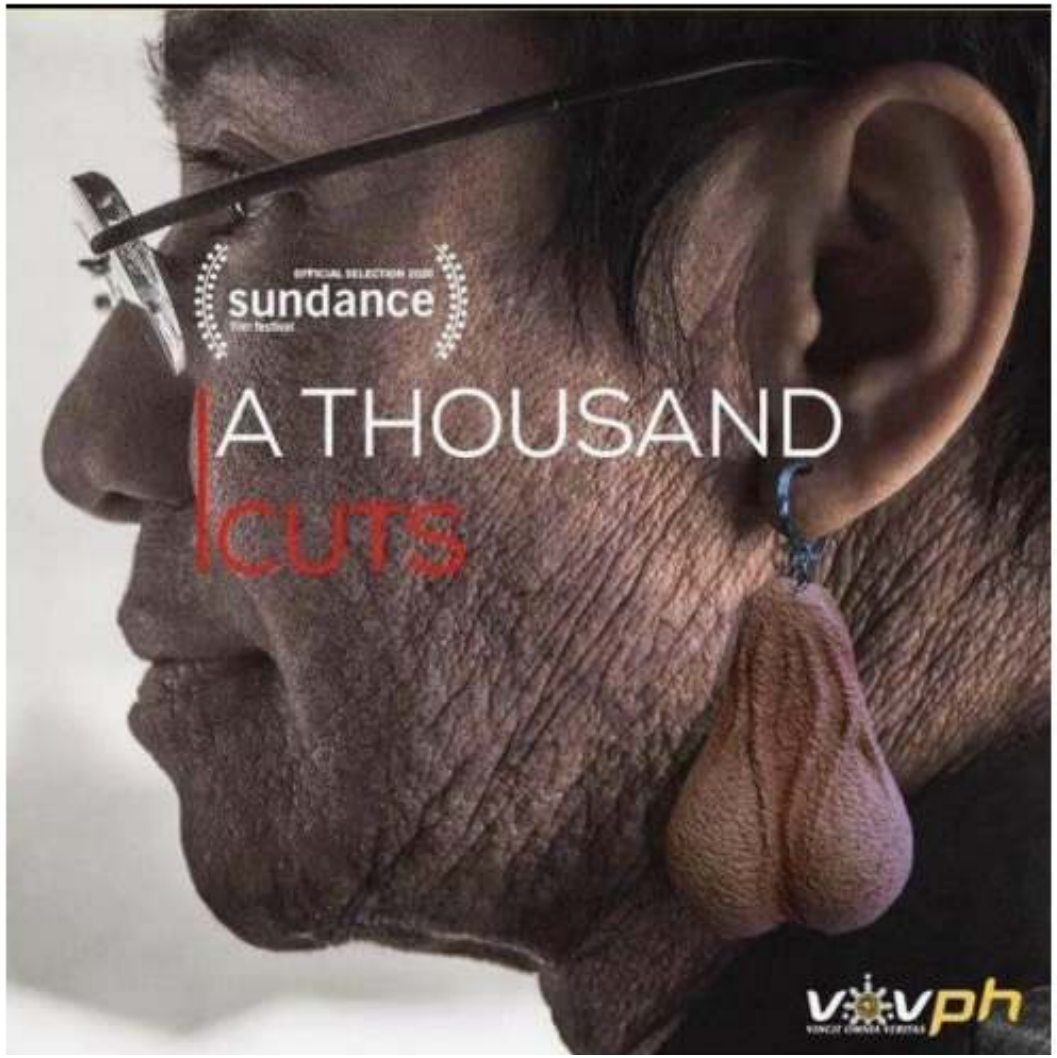


FIGURE 22

An example of a threatening (and deeply racist) meme which flies under the radar of automated detection and analysis tools. The tweet translates as: "I will give a reward to whoever captures this."



Part 2: Case Studies

Brazil: Gendered disinformation used to cover and justify murder of political opponent

"We cannot wait another ten years [to have black women elected]."
Marielle Franco, Brazil, *assassinated*

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Italy: Laura Boldrini

"Today, in my country, threats of rape are used to intimidate women politicians and push them out of the publish sphere—even by public figures. Political leaders themselves unleash this type of reaction." Laura Boldrini, Italy

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Threats Remained on her FB Page

“Boldrini, you are a handicapped whore…”
”Why has no one killed this terrorist..”

WORLD

Meet The Politician Getting Death Threats For Campaigning For Women’s Rights In Italy

She’s been threatened with rape, burned in effigy, and been mocked by a major party leader using an inflatable sex doll. Now Laura Boldrini, the speaker of the Italian Parliament, stays in a secret location while running for reelection.

J. Lester Feder
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Alberto Nardelli
BuzzFeed News Investigative Reporter

Davide Maria De Luca
BuzzFeed Contributor

Reporting From
Milan, Italy

Posted on February 24, 2018, at 10:28 a.m. ET

Tweet Share Copy

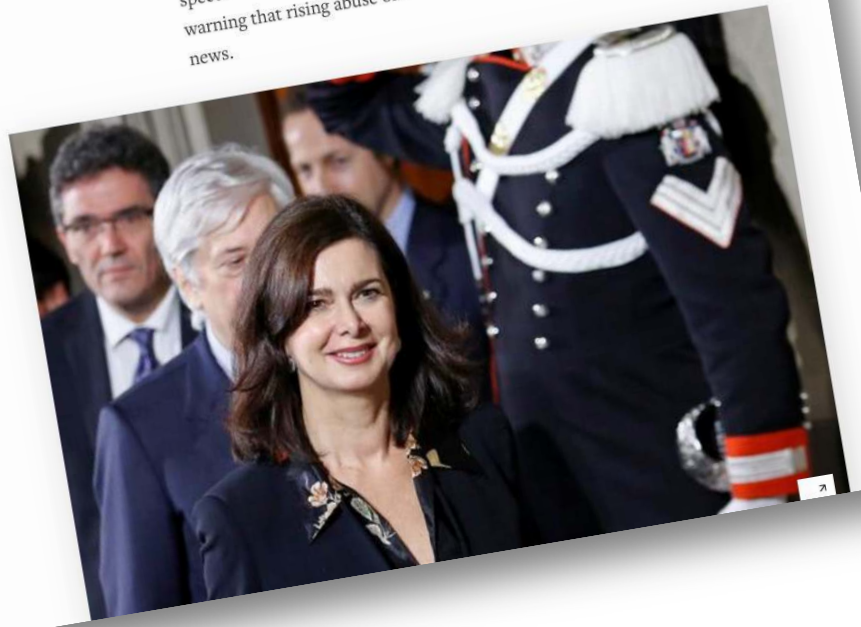
MILAN — Laura Boldrini didn’t worry much about the death threats until she received a bullet in the mail.

Top Italian official says Facebook must do more against hate speech

4 MIN READ

By Crispian Balmer

ROME (Reuters) - Facebook must do much more to stamp out hate speech on its site, the president of Italy’s lower house of parliament said, warning that rising abuse on various social media was being fueled by fake news.



Gender and Deep Fakes

96% of all existing deep fakes circulating online feature women in acts of nonconsensual pornography

Germany: Annalena Baerbock becomes prime target of sexist hate speech and faked nude images

Germany: Only female running had 5x disinformation aimed at her

alliance for securing democracy
G|M|F

GERMANY

Germany: Annalena Baerbock becomes prime target of sexist hate speech

Threats against politicians have sharply risen ahead of September's general elections. The leading candidate to replace Angela Merkel has rapidly become the prime target for misogyny, vitriol, and fake news.

It's been barely three weeks since Annalena Baerbock was nominated as the Green party's chancellor candidate. But it took only a matter of hours after her nomination on April 19 for disinformation and hate about her to begin spreading like wildfire online.

Green party election campaign leader Michael Kellner says the hate and fake reports have taken on a "completely new dimension."

Canada: Attacks Against the Minister of Environment

- Canada's environment minister faced with sexualized insults and threats against her family.
- In person she has been called an enemy, a traitor and a "communist piece of garbage".
- Assigned a security detail
- This is extremely rare in Canada

Turkey: Undermining Human Rights

Authoritarians favorite wedge issue – gender.

In March, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pulled Turkey out of the Istanbul Convention, a legally binding Council of Europe treaty to tackle violence against women and hold perpetrators to account. In Azerbaijan, authorities have used a smear campaign to target women's rights activists. This year Hungary and Poland successfully got the term "gender equality" removed from a European Union social summit in Portugal.

PART 3. How to Respond

5 Tips- Communication & Coalition Building Strategies

1. Never amplify a false claim!

Why?

Engagement is currency – every like, comment, and share signals to platform algorithms to show content to more people.

- Do not share.
- Do not comment.
- Do not retweet.
- Do not repeat it in a coffee shop!

Always default to amplifying accurate information on social media and encouraging others to do the same.

2. Evaluate

Evaluate the attack

REACH = Are real people seeing it?

IMPACT = Will it change the *offline* situation: votes, reputation, support?

Other questions to ask
• Time horizon? Immediate vs. long-term impact
• Who are the actors?
• Types of accounts? Bots, fake news, trolls, deep fakes, etc.
• Type of disinfo? True, false, out-of-context, character attacks
• Platform violations? Behavior vs. content
• Impact? Effective vs. attempted

GQR

Assign a breakout score

DSG

3. Focus on what you can control

Develop your own social media strategy
-10 core questions

1. What is your main goal behind social media?
2. Who is your audience?
3. Which social media platforms are best for you?
4. Who should set up and maintain your social media?
5. How often should you make updates?
6. What kind of content should you share on each platform?
7. How to ensure active engagement of citizens?
8. Should the regional offices have their separate Facebook pages?
9. How will you evaluate your effectiveness and success?
10. What is your strategy to deal with disinformation?

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

1

Use your trusted voice within your own network.

2

Share positive information.

3

Amplify content you want to spread.

4

Target your message when you can – tag friends, use DMs, use the platforms where your networks are.

4. Build a Community of Supporters

“I was able to change negative perceptions about me, using social media to promote my projects, and often receive messages from people I don’t know personally congratulating me for my work.”

Comfort Doyoe Cudjoe-Ghanash, Member of Parliament, Ghana

Empower your people online

The best digital infrastructures are self-sustaining and facilitate organic engagement from a network of people who operate as a community.

Building relationships with supporters can help create an army of allies and inoculators to share proactive messaging on your behalf.

Content shared by this community of allies will have a built-in layer of trust within their networks online.

5. Call out Misogyny on Social Media

Silence is not always the best strategy

- There's a longtime misperception that silence is a strong response when women experience sexism -- **research suggests otherwise**

- Ignoring or being perceived as turning a blind eye to serious incidents of sexism can potentially result in blowback against women candidates because **voters want to see strength and backbone.**

- In some cases voters view a woman candidate's responses to sexism as a **demonstration of her leadership and electability** – not something that weakens the perception of her electability.

BARBARA LEE FAMILY FOUNDATION

How to do it?

- **Be authentic**
- Use a **personal narrative** while addressing a sexist situation –
  - Can build a connection with voters by linking to universal values
  - A leader who focuses on equality, fairness, and what is best for all women and girls.
- Utilize validators
- Emphasize the **severity of the issue** and contextualize why it is harmful.
- A woman candidate's race and age can affect the way voters perceive her response to sexism

BARBARA LEE FAMILY FOUNDATION

Language for pushing back on media

- This has no place in the media
- My appearance is not news
- Don’t depict women as being less serious and having less to offer
- Much to offer my constituents
- Damages our political debate and democracy

#SilenceWillNotProtectYou

First Lady of Namibia Monica Geingos: “When there was a clear social media campaign of anonymous Whatsapp messages specifically targeting me in the most disgusting ways, and I was told not to respond but to ignore and I did. But it was a mistake, your silence will not protect you.”

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WOMEN ARE
ONLY MEANT
FOR
MOTHERHOOD
#BetterThanThis
Shining a spotlight on women's political participation in Kenya.
LEARN MORE

Hold Digital Platforms Accountable

Keep Putting Demands Forward!

- **Quickly remove posts** that threaten candidates with physical violence, sexual violence or death, and that glorify, incite or praise violence against women; disable the relevant accounts, and refer offenders to law enforcement, including if these accounts belong to political leaders
- **Eliminate malicious hate speech** targeting women, including violent, objectifying or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, and derogatory sexual terms
- **Remove accounts that repeatedly violate terms of service** by threatening, harassing or doxing or that use false identities to attack women leaders and candidates, and
- **Move manipulated images or videos** misrepresenting women public figures
- **Remove actors engaged** in coordinated inauthentic behavior
- **Reduce the distribution of content rated false**, including gendered disinformation against female candidates

“Psst, Hey Sheryl” Ad

In 2020, the first time, Sheryl Sandberg was targeted in an ad campaign. Ultraviolet, produced a direct appeal to Sandberg to stand up for women who lead and to hold Facebook accountable. The Message**: "Lean in" and #HaveOurBack**

Thank you!
Kristina@she-persited.org
Lucina@she-persisted.org

#SHEPERSISTED LINKS

- An Apolitical, Ms Magazine and here on the link between gender-based violence, gendered disinformation and democracy;
- Our latest interview about the role Europe can play in setting the state for reform
- An Ad campaign in support of improving attention to gender-based violence online and gendered disinformation, and a related article in Politico
- A hub of resources on European reform proposals - the People Vs. Big Tech
- An analysis of the German election and gendered disinfo
- The Ad campaign asking Sheryl to #HaveOurBack
- The US Congressional letter with specific demands, which is a good mode for improving their approach to gendered disinfo
- Website: #ShePersisted
    - Example of the Climate Minister in Canada pushing back at the Fox News of Canada for labeling her as Climate Barbie, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqK8JlHFKTg,
    - First Lady of Namibia issued this incredibly powerful video pointing out the attacks against her, but making the message clear, she will not be silenced and anyone who doesn't ALSO speak up, is also part of the problem - a great message for allies https://twitter.com/FirstLadyNam/status/1368975705938223107
    - Ad - "Ugly Words" in Kenya for the #BetterThanThis campaign to expose gender-based violence against women in politics https://www.facebook.com/1575472582465324/videos/1600021823343733