

How many seconds does it take you to respond with a cutting retort to an offensive comment that has personally offended and attacked you on social media? What if you paused and tried a breathing exercise that would bring you from the overwhelming future back to the present, allowing your mind to recover from the emotional shock and focus on rational solutions? The hate speech we are often exposed to online can become traumatic if we don't learn to moderate it and manage its effects.

In today's issue, we talk about the effects of exposing journalists online, but also about ways to deal with the consequences.

## "There is no point in trying to convince everyone that we are not who they think we are."

Natalia Melnic's 'dream team' is full of ideas, plans and a great deal of mutual support when the videos produced by Glossa journalists receive negative or absurd comments. In the chat with this name, Natalia and her colleagues have conceived a unique media project in Moldova, a platform of economic news and explanations published exclusively on social networks. The project was launched in April 2024, and for Natalia, who has more than 25 years of extensive experience in the Moldovan press, it was a huge challenge.

In her career, Natalia has worked with several newsrooms in Moldova, during which time she realized that she enjoyed writing about economic issues. She has made it her personal mission to educate people about these complicated issues because, she says, the better people understand these things, the more informed their decisions will be. **Glossa** publishes news and economic explanations in Russian in a simple and accessible format on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok and YouTube. "This constant communication with the audience is completely different from what we have been doing. **You open up a lot more, you show yourself, and that's a big challenge.** In the beginning it was scary, but now it is easier," Natalia says.

**The immediate interaction with the audience and the feedback received in comments is one of the challenges of doing journalism on social networks,** especially since Glossa's followers are different. "Our older viewers follow us on YouTube and Facebook. On YouTube, for example, the audience is predominantly Russian-speaking and made up of nostalgics for the Soviet past, probably pensioners who also watch other Russian channels, including pro-Russian ones. But we are not discouraged and continue to show them what is really happening. On TikTok, we have the youngest audience, made up of people between the ages of 25 and 44. It is a challenge to understand their interests because they are so different." Although it is an online project, the Glossa journalists' exposure took shape in reality when people began to recognize them in public. "I am proud that our work is appreciated, on the one hand, because everyone who has recognized us has thanked us for the educational and informative content we provide. I feel a great responsibility, on the other hand. We have to check the information dozens of times because people trust us."

Of course, there were issues that provoked waves of hatred against the editorial staff, especially during the presidential election campaign. Natalia was also the target of personal attacks when she criticized visits to Moscow for young people organized by a political party. After several such interactions, journalists realized that they should avoid negative or absurd comments and **focus only on constructive questions that help clarify information.** "For example, in the run-up to the elections on Telegram there were many people who insulted each other in comments. Such users were blocked after we warned them for not following the community rules."

"Some accuse us of being government-funded, others think we are pro-Kremlin. There is no point in trying to convince everyone that we are not who they think we are. This approach helps us maintain a certain psychological comfort. **We have decided not to respond to these accusations.** We are concentrating on our work: educating people step by step, explaining economic news in plain language." **In return, the team welcomes positive feedback.** "We always highlight it, copy it, and share it with our group. We ignore the hate speech and focus on the appreciation. We put it first to give us the moral strength to continue what we are doing."



**Doina Ipatii**  
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## Tips on how to better manage the stress caused by messages received on social networks

### How do we control the constant desire to check the comments and reactions we receive online?

It is important that online reactions are not our only 'mirror'. If it is, then our self-esteem will depend very much on what we receive there. The advice is to have a **real-life reference group of friends, co-workers, and family** who can provide validation and support. Ideally, people have an internal structure that allows them to self-validate, but some people are so dependent on external opinion that they are heavily influenced by what is said about them in networks. Hence, the tendency to always check what's going on in that environment may be a sign that there really aren't many other 'mirrors'.

### How do we respond to negative comments in a healthy way?

**When we receive a negative comment, we want to react immediately and feel an urgent need to respond.** This is when the sympathetic nervous system is activated to defend and fight back in a situation that is dangerous to us. Because so much energy is focused on survival, the rational side functions less efficiently during these times. In this context, it is important to calm our body so that our mind can metabolize what is happening to it. **We need to realize that not all incoming messages require an urgent response.** In the meantime, we can do breathing exercises and focus on our own bodies so that we can come back from anxious thoughts about the future that didn't happen. The task is to bring the mind into the present, here and now. When you come back to where you are, down to earth, the solutions appear. A useful grounding exercise is to name five objects you see around you, four things you hear, three physical sensations, two smells, and one taste.

### Can we draw a line between our personal and professional lives on social networks?

The professional work we publish is a part we take very seriously. There is usually a team behind a story, and the comments we receive are expected. But when we are attacked for our personal life, we are not prepared to defend it because we are not prepared for it to be attacked, and that makes us vulnerable. That is why **it is important to make public posts about our personal lives in a way that we can control** and understand how vulnerable one piece of information or another can make us. In the short term, it can increase our anxiety and stress levels, force us to self-censor to avoid inappropriate comments, make us feel that our public image is at risk, and give us a constant sense of anxiety. In the long run, it can affect our sleep, lead to depression, addiction, mental health problems.

### How can media managers help journalists who are victims of online abuse?

Newsrooms promote the idea that journalists must be ideal people who can do no wrong, and that is a great vulnerability. All journalists go through difficult moments when they make mistakes or things do not go the way they want. If these moments are always criticized, the journalist is left without a safe space to feel vulnerable. Managers must provide support and room for mistakes. **People need to feel that they are valuable not only when they are ideal, but also when they make mistakes.** In addition, it would be good if comments were moderated by someone other than the author of the material. It is also very important that journalists be given time off to recover during difficult times. Online abuse can cause psychological trauma. In general, our psyche is strong enough to deal with complicated moments, provided **we are not alone and give ourselves enough time to process all the emotions.** Breaks after these complicated situations are therefore very important. In addition, managers could encourage or facilitate the journalist's meeting with a mental health professional.



Try **this** relaxation exercise recommended by Doina Ipatii, useful for reducing panic attacks, intrusive thoughts and dissociation after traumatic events.

#### Useful tip!



Journalists and media outlets can receive grants of up to €2,500 for team-building activities, including psychological counseling and anti-burnout activities. Click [here](#) for details.

#### Opportunity!

*If you'd like us to include one of your announcements or opportunities for journalists that fit into the topics of this newsletter, send us a message at [info@api.md](mailto:info@api.md).*



If you are experiencing ongoing stress and anxiety, you can request a free and confidential consultation with a psychologist [here](#). You will be connected with a specialist within 48 hours.

#### Get Help!

**If you liked what you read, please recommend our newsletter to a colleague. Feedback helps us get better. Let us know what you think about the newsletter at [api@api.md](mailto:api@api.md).**

