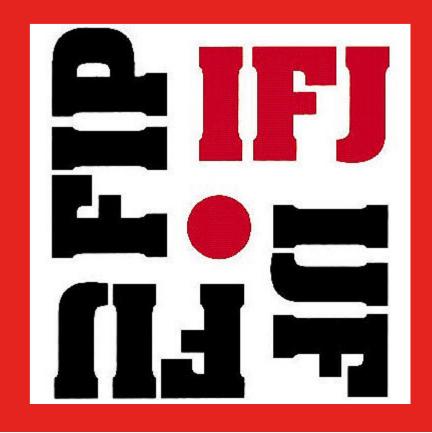# *Safer, Smarter Journalism:*

Survey on Digital Security in South Asia's Media

Executive Summary

Journalists and bloggers in South Asia are increasingly at risk of press freedom violations and security threats. Given these challenges in today's age of online communications, digital security has become one of the primary concerns journalists face. The results of the *Digital Security Survey of Journalists in South Asia* show that the use of technology and digital resources among journalists in South Asia is abundant, yet there is an overwhelming lack of knowledge. Use of many of the widely available strategies and tools that can increase digital safety.

In April 2016, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) conducted the Digital Security Survey of Journalists in South Asia. The purpose of this survey is to assess the understanding and awareness of digital security among journalists. There were 176 responses from eight countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in the survey. The respondents represent a range of journalists working for newspapers, online, TV, radio and more.

The survey led to the following key findings:

- Password security for email and social media accounts is a major concern. Journalists' emails are sensitive, yet half of the South Asian journalists who use organizational email addresses never change the default password. Two-thirds of journalists rarely or never change their passwords. One out of every 5 journalists does not use secure passwords and shares passwords with colleagues. Nearly one-third of journalists in South Asia do not lock their phone despite containing large amounts of sensitive data.

- Although encryption easily protects emails, one-third of South Asian journalists never encrypt emails. Internet browsers such as Chrome, Firefox or Safari track internet viewing history, and nearly half of the journalists indicated that they are unaware of or do not use tools to clean or hide browsing history.

- For more than one-third of journalists in South Asia, digital security violations is the biggest threat, yet more than two-thirds of journalists lack knowledge and training on digital security. Nine in 10 journalists think that they need orientation or training on digital security, as it is a big concern in the region.

The results of this survey help to identify a major gap that exists between journalists' use of digital technology and journalists' use of best practices in digital safety and security. As all journalists use digital resources in their work, it's imperative for them to receive proper training and orientation on digital safety and implement the existing tools and safety measures into their everyday life.

Introduction

South Asia is one of the most dangerous region in the world for journalists. Although all eight countries of the region – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – are democracies, the number of press freedom violation show that journalists are increasingly subjected to threats, intimidation, attacks and murders. The venerability of journalists in the region has great impact on professional duties and journalists live under an environment of constant fear while doing their job of informing people.

Digital security of journalists has become as important as physical security in today's world. With technology being used in all aspects of journalism, journalists have to be aware of the risks arising from digital tools and technologies. Digital insecurity compromises not only the safety and security of the journalists and their sources but also the integrity of the profession. Digital tools and technologies that a journalist uses contains huge amount of meta-data, creating their own individual digital footprint. The lack of knowledge of digital security put journalists and his sources in greater risks.
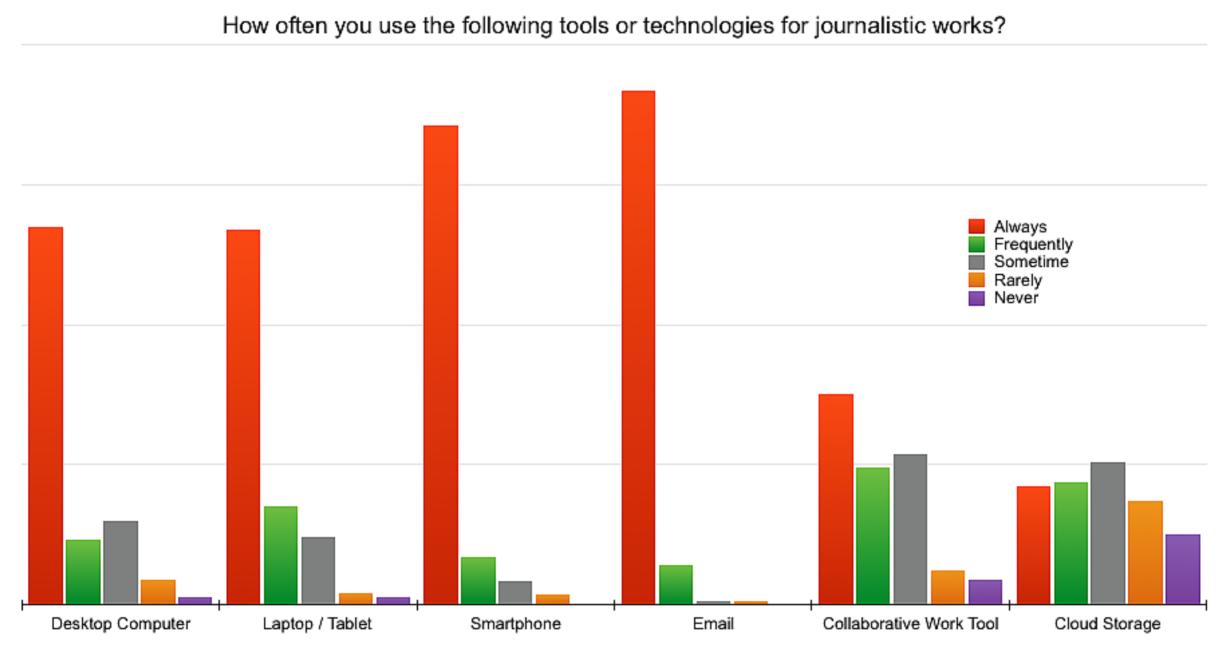
The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) conducted the Digital Security Survey of Journalists in South Asia in April, 2016, to assess the understanding and awareness of digital security among journalists. All journalists in South Asia use digital tools and technologies for their job and it's necessary to understand how secure they are with those tools and technologies to ensure they are capable of using digital security measures in their everyday life for their, their family's and sources' safety.

Credit: Noah Seelam/AFP
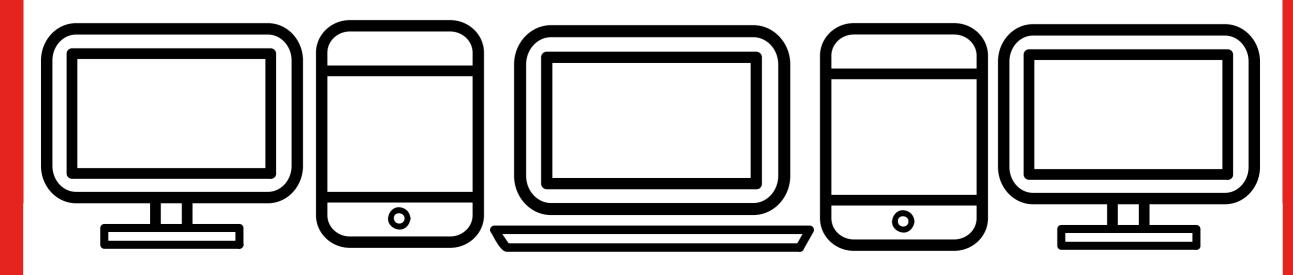
Regional Analysis

Use of gadgets and internet platforms

The use of gadgets or internet platforms among journalists in South Asia is high. In the Digital Security Survey of Journalists, the majority of journalists acknowledged that they always use one or more internet connected devices. The devices used include desktop computers, laptops or tablets, and mobile phones. Mobile phones are the most widely used gadget, with 85.5% of respondents saying that they 'always use.' Still a high percentage of journalists (67.5% and 67%, respectively) indicate that they 'always use' desktop computers and laptops or tablets. Clearly, South Asian journalists use of gadgets is substantial.

How often you use the following tools or technologies for journalistic works?

	Always	Frequently	Sometime	Rarely	Never

Desktop Computer Laptop / Tablet Smartphone Email Collaborative Work Tool Cloud Storage

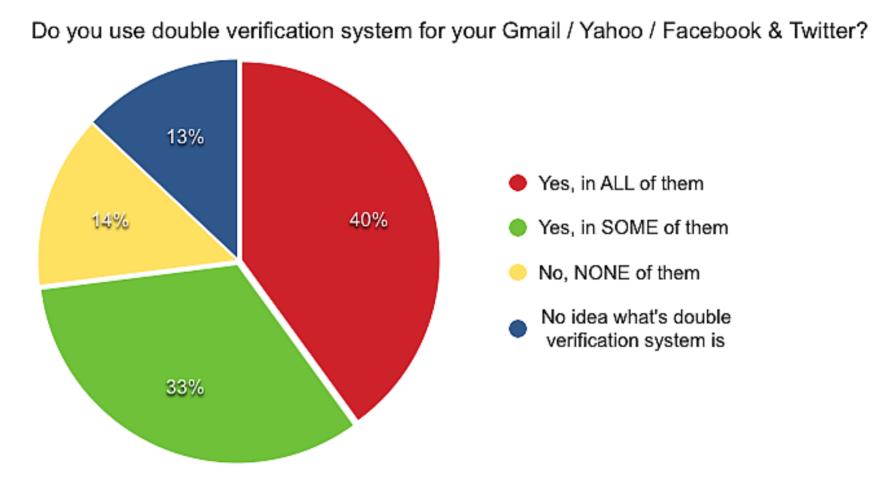Graph 1 - How often do you use the following tools or technologies?

Nearly every journalist responded that they use email, with 92% who 'always use' and 7% who 'frequently use.' Aside from email, journalists often use collaborative work tools such as Google Docs and cloud storage tools such as Dropbox. 88.5% of journalists at least sometimes use collaborate work tools, while 68% at least sometimes use cloud storage. For external storage, 94.5% of journalists at least sometimes use devices such as external hard disks or pen drives. Again a high number of the journalists (86.5%) indicated that they use audio or video recorders. The percentage of journalists who acknowledge that they always, frequently or at least sometimes use gadgets and internet platforms demonstrates the importance for digital security in the South Asian region.
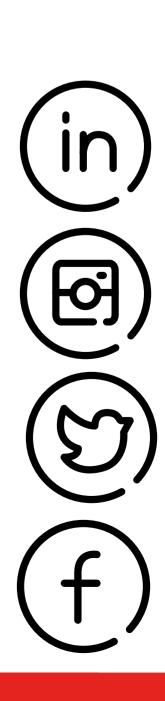
Email and Social Media

While use of gadgets and internet platforms, including email and social media, among journalists is high, best practices and general knowledge of digital safety within email and social media is alarmingly low. Of the 29% of journalists who use the email provided by their organizations, more than half of them (55%) have never changed the default password provided. Despite encryption protecting potentially sensitive emails, more than one-third (36%) of journalists never encrypt emails and only 23% always encrypt their emails.

All journalists responded that they always use or frequently use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedin, yet 25% of journalists have never changed their privacy settings. Passwords to platforms like social media and email should always be unreadable and very secure. Despite this, 18.5% of journalists don't use secure passwords (combination of numbers, letters and symbols). Additionally, almost two-thirds (64.5%) of journalists rarely or never change their passwords to these accounts and 18% of journalists have shared their email or social media passwords with colleagues. Systems like double verification can help to protect passwords, but 27% of journalists have either no knowledge of or don't use this system. 40% of journalists do use double verification systems in all accounts.

Do you use double verification system for your Gmail / Yahoo / Facebook & Twitter?

40%

33%

14%

13%

● Yes, in ALL of them

● Yes, in SOME of them

● No, NONE of them

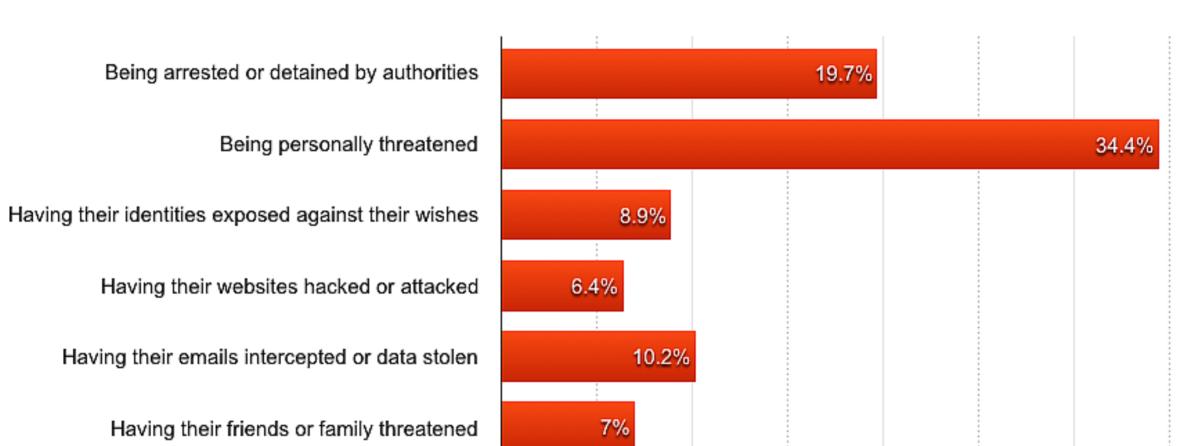● No idea what's double verification system is

Graph 2 - Do you use double verification systems?

If done unsafely, internet browsing can cause insecurity for journalists. Almost one-fourth (22%) of journalists never clean their browsing history while almost half (46%) of journalists have never used "No History Tab", "Incognito Mode" or "Invisible Mode" while browsing the internet. Simple changes like clearing browsing history can be implemented to increase digital security for journalists. There are many more concepts of internet safety that journalists should be aware of such as GPS, geo-tagging, keylogger, VPN or proxy servers, firewalls, and backup systems. More than half of journalists have either no knowledge on use or concept of geo-tagging (57%), keylogger (63%), or VPN or proxy servers (51%).
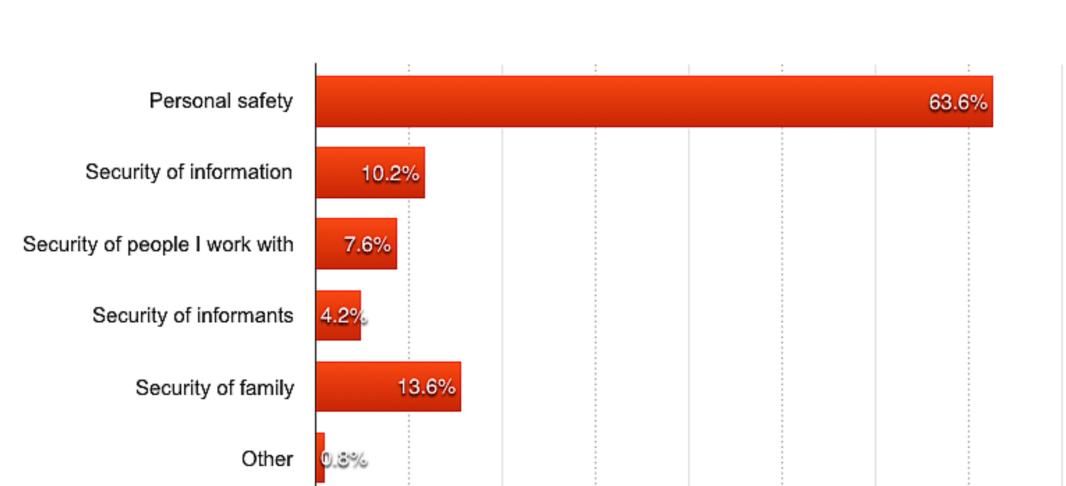
Threats

Threats are a huge problem faced by many journalists every day with digital security violations being one of the biggest. For more than one-third (34.5%) being personally threatened is the biggest threat while 20% identify being arrested or detained by authorities as their biggest threat. Regarding threats specifically connected to digital security, the biggest threats identified by journalists include hacking of their or their publication's website (14%), having their email intercepted or stolen (10%), and having their identified exposed against their wishes (9%).

Which of the following is the biggest threat facing journalists and bloggers?

Being arrested or detained by authorities	19.7%
Being personally threatened	34.4%
Having their identities exposed against their wishes	8.9%
Having their websites hacked or attacked	6.4%
Having their emails intercepted or data stolen	10.2%
Having their friends or family threatened	7%

Graph 3 - What are the biggest threats facing journalists and bloggers?

More than half of journalists (57%) feel that their work as a journalist or blogger has caused them security concern. The security concerns identified are personal safety (64%), security of family (13.5%), security of information (10%), and security of sources or informants (12%). More than three-fourths (74.5%) of journalists in South Asia have actually experienced threats as a result of their profession. 56% of these journalists have been personally threatened, whereas the remainder were threatened via SMS or email. 14% of journalists' family members or friends have received threats due to their journalism or blogging activities.
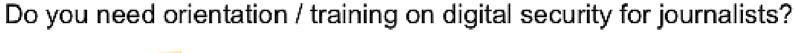
If yes, what types of issues are of concern to you as a journalist or a blogger?

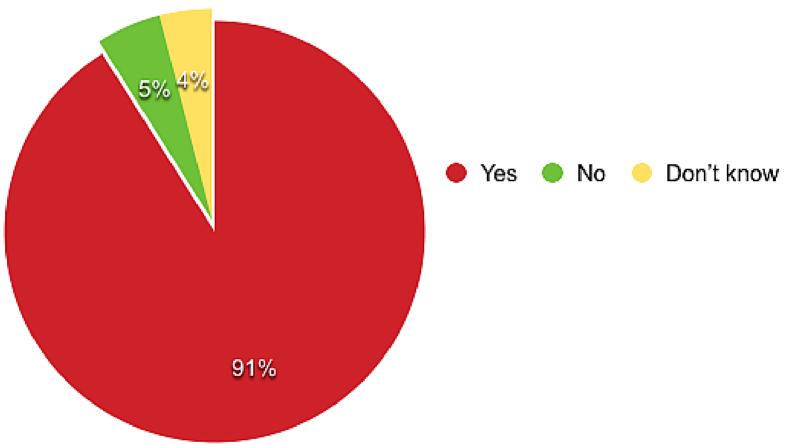|	
Personal safety	63.6%
Security of information	10.2%
Security of people I work with	7.6%
Security of informants	4.2%
Security of family	13.6%
Other	0.8%

Graph 4 - What type of issues are of concern to you?

The threats have been carried out through physical violence, detainment or arrests, identity exposure, professional consequences, and through digital security violations. 12% of journalists in South Asia acknowledged that they experienced hacking of their blogs or publication websites. 13% have lost data due to computer viruses, and 8% have had their email intercepted or data stolen.
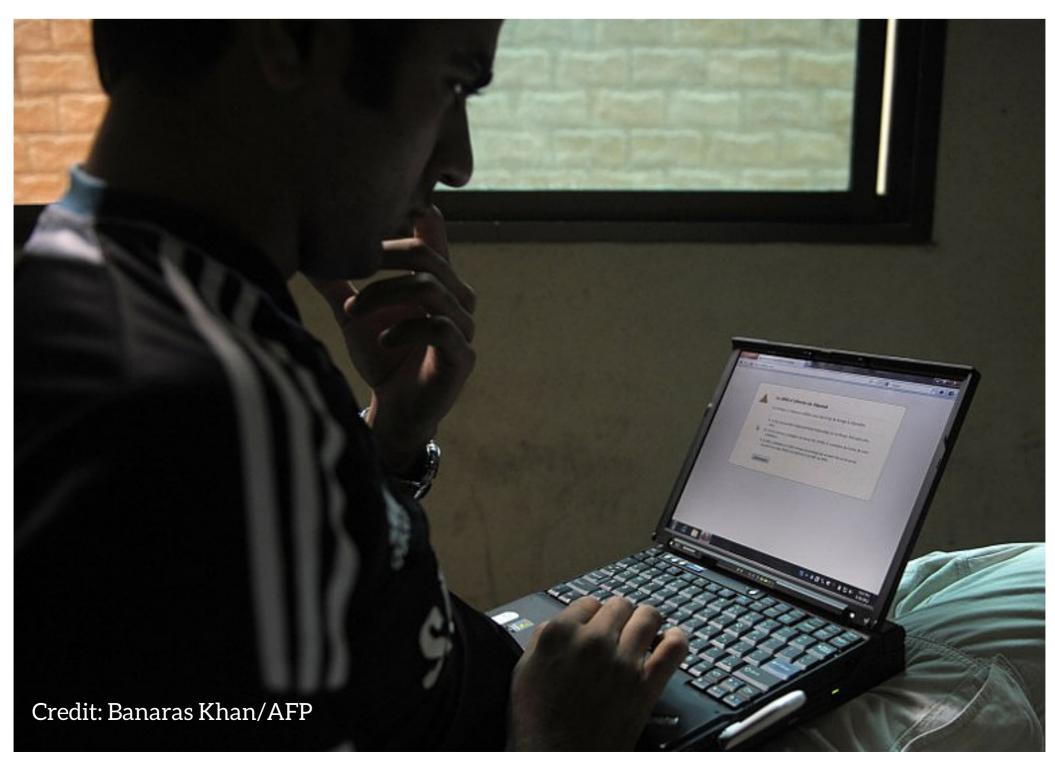
Digital Security Training

Threats and journalist insecurity are prevalent issues in journalism in South Asia. When considering the simultaneous use of digital tools and media in South Asian journalism, one can see the importance that should be placed on digital security awareness. 68% of journalists in South Asia have never been part of the orientation or training on digital security, and almost all journalists in South Asia (91%) think they need orientation or training on digital security.

Do you need orientation / training on digital security for journalists?

Legend: Yes, No, Don't know

5% 4%

91%

Graph 5 - Do you think you need training/orientation in digital security?

Credit: Banaras Khan/AFP

Country Analysis

Afghanistan

Password security is a main concern regarding journalists in Afghanistan as 1 in 5 journalists does not lock their smartphone with any passcode, two-thirds have never changed the default password of their email, and one-third does not use secure passwords for their email or social media accounts.

Bhutan

In Bhutan, two-thirds of journalists acknowledged that they never change the default password of their email and one-fifth has shared their password with a colleague. 25% of journalists never encrypt their emails and more than half leave their browsing history on public computers. These practices leave media accounts and personal safety vulnerable to a number of potential threats.

Bangladesh

One-third of Bengali journalists never encrypt their emails and are not aware of or do not use double verification systems in their email or social media accounts. Two-thirds of journalists do not lock their smartphone with any passcode.

India

High percentages of journalists in India responses indicate that they don't properly practice digital safety and security. Every journalist uses email and social media, yet two-thirds never or rarely change their passwords and almost one-third share their passwords among colleagues. One-third of journalists never encrypt their emails and half of journalists have never heard of or never used "no history mode" when browsing the internet.

Maldives

Password security is a major concern when examining digital security among journalism in the Maldives. Three-fourths of journalists never change the default password in their organizational email account and 80% rarely change the passwords to their email or social media accounts.
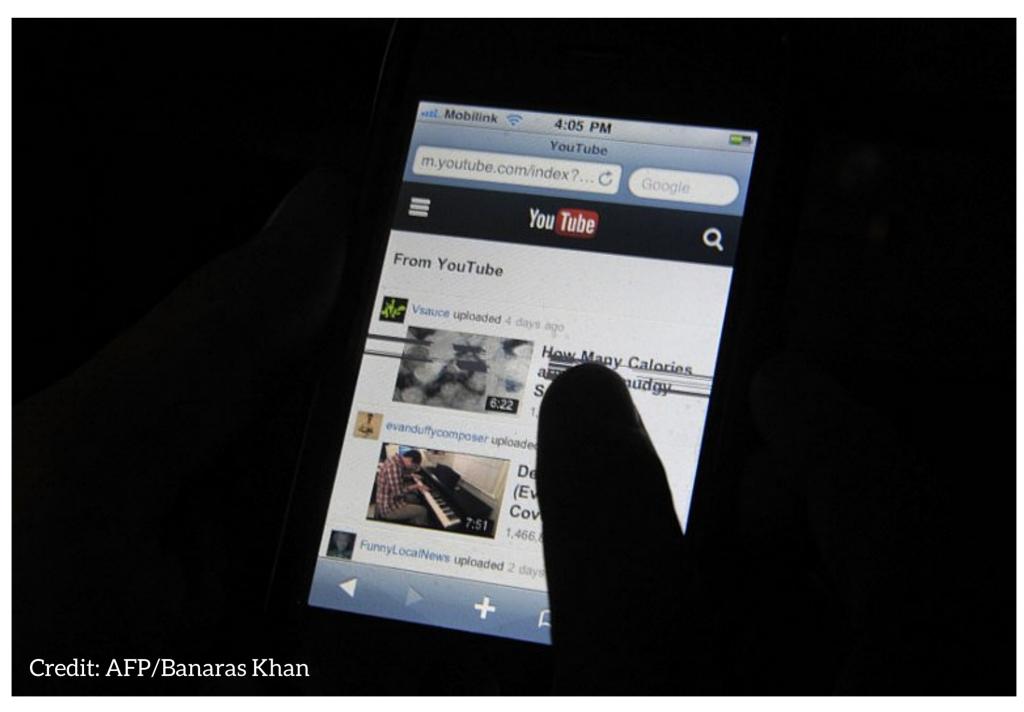
Nepal

Almost two-thirds of journalists in Nepal rarely change their email and social media account passwords, while one-fourth share their passwords to these accounts with colleagues, and 1 in 5 journalists do not use secure passwords. Concerning smartphones, nearly 1 in every 3 Nepali journalists do not use a pin, pattern or password to lock their phones.

Pakistan

Two in 5 journalists in Pakistan never change the default password for their organization-provided email account. Three-fourths of journalists in Pakistan never or rarely change their email and social media account passwords and nearly one-third do not lock their smartphones with any code. Additionally, almost two-thirds of journalists in Pakistan never encrypt their emails.

Sri Lanka

All journalists in Sri Lanka believe they need training or orientation on digital security issues. Nearly half of these journalists never encrypt their emails and more than half never or rarely change their passwords to email and social media accounts.

Credit: AFP/Banaras Khan

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