



HATE SPEECH ONLINE

INTERNET DISCUSSIONS

IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Multicultural Center Prague

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BRICKS

BUILDING RESPECT ON THE INTERNET BY COMBATING HATE SPEECH

National Study Czech Republic

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INTRODUCTION

The main distinguishing characteristic of online discussions is that they do not happen face-to-face – they are anonymous. As a result, these discussions are often full of hateful, insulting, xenophobic and racist statements. Given the huge impact the Internet currently has on young people in particular, one cannot ignore this phenomenon and let this be a socially acceptable way of expression for some people. The report presented here was created as a part of an international project: Bricks - stop hate speech, co-funded by the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Program of the European Union. The project responds to growing hate speech on the Internet with a focus on online discussions. The project's aims were to describe the pros and cons associated with discussions on the Internet, to map out the way Czech Internet media regulate hate speech in discussion forums, and to reflect on the possible impacts of hate speech. The report is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the definition of hate speech, its place in legislation and judicial practice, and its overall prevention. The second part includes five case studies, where the nature of the online discussions and the forms of moderation on specific online media sites are described using the examples of the selected articles. The third part presents the results of qualitative research that took place in particular among editors and journalists who moderate online forums. The fourth and last part, presents suggestions and recommendations that might help moderators/administrators of online discussions in their efforts to build a serious discussion platform.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

MAIN TERMINOLOGY

- *Hate speech*

The definition of the term “hate speech” is not embedded in either the Czech or international legal systems (Kročilová, 2015). Most often when working with this concept one is referred to the Council of Europe document from 1997, in particular, to the recommendations from the Committee of Ministers on hate speech where it is understood as including: “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin”¹. This definition is limited and does not cover all forms of hate speech. In addition to the aforementioned groups, victims of hate speech may also be homosexuals, women, the homeless, people with mental or physical disabilities, or pensioners. The demarcation of these groups, however, is variable and is subject to a socio-historic context. This definition also does not include hate speech directed at individuals, which is very common (such as hate speech directed at public figures). It is not always possible to include it in cyber bullying, a form of hate speech that is directed primarily at individuals.

- *Cyber hate*

To describe hate speech on the Internet, the term “cyber hate” is also used. This term includes spreading hate speech through social networks and the creation of hate websites.

- *Cyber bullying*

The term cyber bullying primarily defines hate speech directed at individuals. Cyber bullying is characterized by intentional hurtful statements, harassment and psychological abuse over the Internet. Young people can come across cyber bullying, for example, in the environment of online gaming.

- *Hoax*

A scaremongering message containing misleading information, purposefully modified half-truths or a combination of half-truths and lies. It spreads via mass e-mails and social networks. Neither the author nor the source of the information is stated. Instead, people will point to a friend or acquaintance, etc. as the origin of the message. It is possible to find hoaxes circulating in the Czech Republic on www.hoax.cz.

¹ Recommendation no.R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on “hate speech” [online]. Available at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/hrpolicy/other_committees/dh-lgbt_docs/CM_Rec%2897%2920_en.pdf>

LEGISLATION

Legal framework

Criminal Law. Hate speech, including in an online form, is prosecuted in the Czech legal system based on several criminal offences. All of them share the common characteristic of defining hate speech as being aimed at a group of people who share an unchangeable characteristic, it must also be voiced publicly (Výborný, 2011). These offences include:

- defamation of nation, race, ethnic or other group of persons (§ 355 of the Criminal Code),
- incitement to hatred against a group of persons or restriction of their rights and freedoms (§ 356),
- establishing, supporting and promoting a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms (§ 403),
- expression of sympathy with these movements (§ 404),
- denial, questioning, approving and justifying of genocide (§ 405).

In the case of the offences (§ 355, § 356 and § 403 of the Criminal Code), the new Criminal Code from 2010 stipulates that instances of hate speech, committed by means of a publicly accessible computer network, fall under the category of strict liability in criminal law, thus, allowing higher penalties (Výborný, 2011). Punishment ranges from 6 months to 3 years. Hate speech on the Internet is clearly criminalized in the Czech legal system, the enforcement of the law, however, does not work very well (Výborný, 2011). This is connected with difficulty in finding offenders and the proportionality test, which always applies in cases related to the restriction of freedom of speech (Výborný, 2011).

Other legislation.

In terms of other legislation the Act no. 480/2004 Coll., on certain Information Society Services is particularly important. It governs the responsibilities, rights and obligations of persons who provide information society² services and disseminate commercial messages³.

Police.

The Information Crime Department, of the Police Headquarters and the Department for Combating Organised Crime are responsible for prosecution and monitoring of hate speech on the Internet. However, as one of the survey respondents stated (who is also an employee of one of the above mentioned institutions): “there is no special team, it is an activity that falls within the job description of pretty much all investigators in the department. In total there are about 130 people.” In addition to the investigation of reports submitted through a special “Hotline”, detectives also have to actively search the problematic posts. Their activities are not confined to print and Internet resources, but to all open sources dealing with extremism, including television broadcasts. The police are also trying to establish direct cooperation with the operators of social networking websites to come to agreements determining who would be responsible for the removal of hateful messages, etc. According to one of the police officers, hate speech is especially used as a resource for monitoring extremist groups. Collected hate speech manifestations then serve as evidence for later prosecution of those groups or individuals. Information on the number of accused people is not available to the public.

² Act no. 480/2004 Coll., on certain Information Society Services and on Amendments to some Acts

³ § 1 Subject of the regulation, Act no. 480/2004 Coll., on certain Information Society Services and on Amendments to some Acts

Judicial practice

A groundbreaking court ruling regarding the promotion of extremism in the Czech Republic happened in 2012, when five young men received a suspended sentence of three years⁴ for promoting Nazism on their Facebook profiles. In September 2014, a former MP Otto Chaloupka⁵ was conditionally sentenced for insulting comments about Roma people posted on his Facebook profile. In August 2015, a similar punishment was announced for a Communist Party member Michal Kesudis⁶, who was accused of expressing sympathy with a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms (Afghan Taliban) and of endorsing a criminal offence on the public network Facebook. A criminal complaint was filed against a woman from Dačice who spread false and alarming reports about migrants, however she was not prosecuted⁷. One of the turning points in judicial practice was a case from January of this year (2015), when legal action against the company Our Media (the publisher of *Parlamentní listy*), filed by an activist called Jaroslav Suchý, succeeded at the Municipal Court in Prague. Suchý sued the publisher for racist insults. He eventually succeeded in the European Court of Human Rights, and sued them for 150,000 Czech crowns (about 5,500 Euros)⁸. A legal precedent that occurred in June, 2015, when the European Court of Human Rights upheld the liability of the operator of the Estonian Internet portal Delfi for the offensive comments of its users⁹, could have played a certain role in the ruling. The court decision in the case of the large Estonian news website might have an impact on the functioning of web portals in all member states of the Council of Europe, including the Czech Republic.

MONITORING AND PREVENTION

Monitoring

The Interior Ministry and other competent authorities primarily deal with hate speech in society, including hate crimes. The Interior Ministry issues an annual Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic and a policy paper called the Conception in combating extremism and its evaluation¹⁰. Both documents also deal with hate speech on the Internet, although only marginally. For the year 2013, in section 3.3.3 “Criminal activity”, the report only mentions the website White Media, which is a distinctly xenophobic and racist information portal. Furthermore, the report only mentions an increase in activities aimed at stealing personal information and data online, when personal e-mail accounts, social networks profiles, websites and personal internet banking data of “ideological enemies” are attacked. The Security Center of the Jewish Community in Prague is also concerned with hate speech. Every year, it publishes an Annual Report on manifestations of Anti-Semitism (hereinafter referred to as the “Annual Report”). According to the Annual Report manifestations of Anti-Semitism on the Internet doubled in 2013, compared to previous years. Specifically, the report says: “Thus the trend registered for the first time in 2011 has been continuing, with mainly right-wing extremists showing a clear shift in their activities to internet forums”¹¹. The Institute for Criminology and Social

⁴ <http://in.nova.cz/clanek/pozor-co-pisete-za-komentare-na-facebooku-muzete-jit-do-vezeni.html>

⁵ <http://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/soud-potrestal-chaloupku-podminkou-za-vyroky-o-romech/r~43a23506336611e49b2b002590604f2e/>

⁶ http://www.denik.cz/z_domova/exkomunista-kesudis-dostal-podminku-za-schvalovani-vrazd-ceskych-vojaku-20150831.html

⁷ <http://echo24.cz/a/wskUJ/za-vymyslenou-zpravu-o-uprchlicich-zenu-soud-neceka>

⁸ <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/prelomovy-verdikt-za-rasistickou-diskusi-maji-parlamentni-listy-zaplait-150-000-korun>

⁹ <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/zahranicni/evropsky-soud-pro-lidska-prava-za-urazky-v-internetovych-diskuzich-je-zodpovedny-provozovatel-webu>

¹⁰ <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/extremismus-vyrocní-zpravy-o-extremismu-a-strategie-boje-proti-extremismu.aspx>

¹¹ http://www.kehilaprag.cz/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=176&Itemid=276&lang=cs

Prevention deals with the dissemination of extremist ideological content to minors over the Internet. The Institute points to a certain radicalization of young people compared to the 90's. According to the Institute, youths are not very tolerant of ethnic minorities, with a negative attitude towards the Roma dominating in particular (Holas, 2011)¹².

Prevention and organizations dealing with hate speech

The Interior Ministry and the Police of the Czech Republic

The Ministry of the Interior and the Police of the Czech Republic are marginally engaged with the issue of hate speech distributed over the Internet, especially in the context of the issue of extremism and the manifestation of extremist violence. In the policy paper, *Conception in combating extremism*, point 1.2 (Internet without hate propaganda) is mentioned in connection with one of the first five pillars of combating extremism (Using communication against demagogy). A concrete step in achieving this goal is the operation of an Internet Hotline, which can be found at <http://www.horkalinkaczi.cz/>. It receives reports from users regarding illegal and inappropriate content on the Internet. The Hotline has been operated by CZI, Ltd. since 2009, in the framework of the Saferinternet.cz project, which is implemented with the support of the European Commission and the Police of the Czech Republic¹³. The Hotline evaluates the content of the reports and passes information to such institutions as the police, mobile operators, Internet service providers or the international organization INHOPE.

Non-governmental and other organizations

In Iustitia (<http://www.in-ius.cz/>) is a legal organization, a first of its kind in the country that specifically deals with hate violence in all its forms. Among other things, it provides free counselling and legal assistance to victims of hate crimes.

Romea (<http://www.romea.cz/en/>) is an organization that supports human rights, development of tolerance in society, and the fight against racism and prejudice. The organization focuses especially on the Roma, but deals with other groups in need as well. In cooperation with the NOS-OSF it implements a marketing campaign called “don't #MASTURHATE!” - Don't satisfy yourself with hatred. Details on the campaign can be found at: <http://idontmasturhate.com/o-nas>.

The Czech Government Agency for Social Inclusion is implementing a project called Hate Free Culture (<http://www.hatefree.cz/o-nas/o-hate-free>). Its activities include the creation of so-called “Hate Free Zones”, refuting false messages (hoaxes) and stereotypes, and providing online media and social network monitoring, etc.

The Multicultural Center Prague (<http://www.mkc.cz>) implemented a project called “Together against racism” in 2015: <http://spolecneprotirasismu.mkc.cz/>, which was also aimed, among other things, at hate speech on the Internet directed against the Roma. In the framework of this project an Analysis of portraying Roma in the local, North Bohemian media was created¹⁴.

¹² Holas (2011). *Současná situace v oblasti extremistických hnutí v ČR s důrazem na jejich potenciální podporu u mladistvých a na šíření extremistických ideologických obsahů po internetu*

¹³ And other relevant authorities

¹⁴ Available for download in PDF on the project's website (in the Czech language): <http://spolecneprotirasismu.mkc.cz/cz//analyza-zpusobu-zobrazovani-romu-v-lokalnich-severoceskyech-medich>

NESEHNUTÍ (<http://nesehnuti.cz/>) implemented a project called Hate Goodbye - goodbye prejudices: <http://spolecnekrozmanitosti.cz/projekty/> in 2015. The main objective of the project was to bring about change in social thinking, especially among young people. Youth are the most important target group, and at the same time victims of populist and short-sighted solutions. This can cause radicalization of young people regarding multicultural issues and increase the 'normalization' of hate speech in public discourse.

NCBI (the National Center for Safer Internet), among other things, aims to contribute to a safer use of the Internet and adoption of ethical standards in online communication. The organization implements a number of projects, the most important being Saferinternet.cz (<http://www.saferinternet.cz/>), a project that aims to raise awareness of safer Internet usage practices.

Asi-milovaní is an organization dealing with different educational projects and the promotion of active citizenship. In 2015, it implemented a project called Limits of freedom/Free2choose: <http://www.moznosti-demokracie.cz/free2choose/>. The project included lectures, seminars and a conference on the topics of human rights, extremism and the media.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Goals and methods

The aim of the following chapter is to show examples of how online discussions happen on specific online media sites and what the editors' approach is to their regulation. The selection of articles and discussions was preceded by a three-month monitoring of certain online news websites. Individual articles were selected based on the criteria defined by the partner and project coordinator (COSPE). The main criteria was the "popularity" of an article, measured by the number of people involved in the discussion and number of shares and likes. Two articles, which were not primarily focused on topics related to migration and minorities, were selected, since hateful reactions related precisely to these topics appeared in the discussions below. The other two selected articles deal with the most discussed Czech (ethnic) minority - the Roma. The method of retrospective manual monitoring was implemented while mapping out the content in the discussions. When analyzing the text and the related discussions, special attention was paid to the following:

- whether negative stereotyping or insulting statements appear in the article itself;
- whether hate speech can be found in the discussions below the article;
- how the online media sites design their discussion rules and how they make sure that these rules are followed;
- what the reactions are to hate speech from other posters, or from the author of the article;
- who the hate speech is directed at (the administrator, the author, the Roma, foreigners, Muslims, others posters...);
- whether editors are able to build a community that would be capable of discussing the topic in a polite way.

How to identify hate speech in online discussions?

When defining the characteristics for the identification of hate speech in online discussions, we relied on the definition of the Council of Europe (see p. 1)¹⁵ and the criteria described by S. Benesch in relation to hate speech which can be socially dangerous¹⁶. Unlike S. Benesch, we did not include a requirement that the statement should be voiced by a socially influential person in connection with some event among the criteria for the definition of hate speech. Hate speech also does not apply only to statements directed at a group, but also to statements which are directed at individuals. For the statement to be labelled as hate speech it needs to meet some of the following criteria:

1. The statement:

- compares a group of people with animals, insects, etc.;
- suggests that the audience faces a serious threat or violence from another group ("accusation in a mirror");
- suggest that some people from another group are spoiling the purity or integrity of the speakers' group.

2. The statement contains a call to action:

- to discriminate
- to expel, to evacuate
- to kill
- other

¹⁵ Recommendation no.R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on "hate speech" [online]. Available at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/hrpolicy/other_committees/dh-lgbt_docs/CM_Rec%2897%2920_en.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Dangerous%20Speech%20Guidelines%20Benesch%20January%202012.pdf>

CASE NO.1

Newspaper: Blesk

Date of publication: 21.1., 18.2.2015

Headline no. 1: Midnight madness in Kaufland: the Czech Republic experienced Tuesday's shopping fever

Html link: <http://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-udalosti/297705/pulnocni-silenstvi-v-kauflandu-cesko-zazilo-uterni-nakupni-horecku.html>

Headline no. 2 Mass hysteria in Kaufland: people pushed each other with shopping carts running over feet!

Html link: <http://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-udalosti/303305/davove-silenstvi-v-kauflandu-lide-do-sebe-strkali-a-voziky-si-prejizdeli-nohy.html>

Number of comments: (no. 1) 219 / (no. 2) 552

Number of likes: (no. 1) 4015 / (no. 2) increased to 465

Social networks: (no. 1) FB 4 thousand shares +684; 9 tweets; 10 g+1; (no. 2) 53 comments on FB; 48 shares; 2 tweets; 21 comments on FB

Introducing the medium

Blesk is a tabloid type newspaper. For a while it has been the best-selling and most widely read national daily newspaper in the Czech Republic (Snížková, 2012)¹⁷. The Media Project report for 2014 indicates that Blesk (in its printed version) was read by 1,107,000 readers, which is almost 46,000 fewer than in 2013 and over 119,000 fewer than in 2012. Therefore, Blesk confirms the general trend characterized by a loss of readers that has been observed in almost all the national daily newspapers¹⁸ for the last 6 years. The decreased interest in daily newspapers during this period is attributed by many experts to the emergence of new media, the overall transformation of media communication and changes in the way people spend their leisure time (Vojtěchovská, 2009: 56). Although Blesk has long reigned among printed media, its popularity on the Internet is lagging behind. According to the results of NetMonitoring, the most popular online media are Seznam.cz, Novinky.cz and iDnes.cz. Blesk is between 11th and 16th place and it is not even among the most popular tabloid media, where Super.cz¹⁹ clearly dominates.

Rules of discussion

In order to join discussions on the Blesk.cz website, one must first set up an account. You do not need to provide any personal information (not even a name), just an e-mail address, where an immediate confirmation is sent. At the same time you must accept the terms and conditions of Czech News Center,

¹⁷ After the now non-existent newspaper *Expres* it is historically the second Czech tabloid founded after 1990, precisely on April, 13th, 1992 by the Swiss publisher Ringier Axel Springer, which was later (in 2014) renamed to Czech News Center (Snížková, 2012). Blesk in its printed form also has several supplements, which are released on different days. These are *Blesk magazín* (*Blesk Magazine*), *Blesk Reality&Bydlení* (*Blesk Real Estate & Housing*), *Blesk pro ženy* (*Blesk for women*), *Blesk na víkend* (*Blesk for the weekend*) and *Nedělní Blesk* (*Sunday Blesk*), which come out in the form of a magazine.

¹⁸ A daily *Právo* is an exception

¹⁹ <http://online.netmonitor.cz>

which operates the website. This registration entitles you to join discussions on all the sites operated by the company (e.g. Reflex.cz). Afterwards, every time one joins a discussion, one must agree to comply with the discussion rules²⁰. These rules oblige users to behave decently, not to use vulgar or obscene words and insulting statements, not to be aggressive, not to humiliate, not to promote racial, ethnic, religious or other intolerance or discrimination, and to stick to the topic of the discussion. The website operator can delete a post without giving reasons and block a user who violates the rules repeatedly. Like in the case of many other Internet newspapers, significant restrictions in posting occurred after the outbreak of the refugee crisis at the beginning of this summer (2015). In the case of Blesk.cz there has been a significant restriction of anonymous posting. It is currently possible to post anonymously on topics that are not highly controversial. Readers can now express their opinion on all issues without restrictions only via comments using their Facebook profiles. This option has not been used much by posters up until now. In the view of the above-mentioned restrictions, however, it is being used more and more. The monitoring of anonymous discussions on the portal, which ran from January to August 2015 (i.e. before restricted access to anonymous discussions), showed that editors of Blesk did not pay much attention to compliance with the rules of discussion during this period and posts were deleted very rarely. The result of this was a large amount of vulgar and hateful comments, which were often completely off-topic and which mainly dealt with mutual score settling between “debaters”.

Introducing the articles

The selected article with the title *Midnight madness in Kaufland: the Czech Republic experienced Tuesday’s shopping fever*, which was published in Blesk on 21.1.2015, is not one of the “most favourite” articles (measured by the number of shares, likes and comments) in the newspaper, but its popularity is nevertheless quite considerable. The article was chosen because, despite the fact that migrants and ethnic minorities are not mentioned in the text, the hateful comments below the article are directed at these people. Since the article is short, it is introduced in its original version:

“Discounted offers in the retail chain store Kaufland triggered mass night shopping. On Tuesday the stores opened from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. (exceptionally) and lured people in for significant discounts on selected articles. Mainly, fruit and vegetables discounted to half price sold like hot cakes, as did UHT milk, which cost just under nine crowns. For example, customers in Hradec Kralove began gathering in front of Kaufland about half an hour before the start of the sale. At opening time around five hundred people were standing in front of the store. To avoid pushing, people were let inside progressively in small groups, controlled by a contracted security company. Several people from the security company also ensured the sale went smoothly by being present among the aisles.”

The article meets all the stylistic (preferences for “soft” news, priority is given to domestic rather than foreign news; short condensed description; information is presented in an entertaining way; use of simple language) and visual criteria (greater space is devoted to photographic documentation, emphasized headline), by which it can be classified as tabloid news (Snížková, 2012). The article, in an extended form, was published in Blesk a month later. There is no negative stereotyping or insulting remarks in the text itself. Through the use of the words “mass hysteria” and “shopping fever” in the headline the

²⁰ They can be found in section IV of the General Conditions for using the website

author makes the event somewhat dramatic. The readers are forced to believe that this was an extraordinary event, and that people who participated in it may have been somewhat mentally unsound. A sense of the seriousness of the event is further emphasized by the fact that readers are encouraged to send photos and videos from the “scene”, which also gives the impression that the event was quite extraordinary. Daily Mladá fronta DNES took the article up and published it under the headline Run over feet and sore butts. The crowd fought for discounted bananas.

Analysis of the discussion below the article

Generally, most of the comments on this article can be labelled as offensive, vulgar, and disrespectful to the rules of the discussion and decent behaviour. There are insults addressed directly at the “administrator” of the discussion, however, by far the most common insults are those exchanged between the posters. None of the comments below the article were deleted by the editor. Only one of the debaters was blocked for repeated violations of the rules of the discussion. Although the author of the article never mentioned the Vietnamese, the Roma or any other minority group, one can find comments with racist overtones in the discussion. In response to the opinion of one of the posters [cit.] “Pensioners also go after discounts. But those who are well-dressed and in luxury cars are there much more often, and then most often the Vietnamese, who buy cheaply and then sell for more!”, hate speech appeared under the article, inciting violence against citizens of Vietnamese origin and their expulsion from the country [cit.]: “Exactly so! There is no chance for our people to get to the cash register, because there are just Vietnamese there, each with two full baskets and they are rude! Slap them in the face and send them home to Vietnam!!!”. This statement, except for being a call to action, has other characteristics of hate speech, such as convincing readers that they are threatened by a certain group of people.

Although the Vietnamese are not mentioned in the article at all, the poster’s comment is not so surprising, especially if one takes into account the way this minority is widely presented in the Czech press. The Vietnamese are generally portrayed in the Czech media using various stereotypes. Some may be quite positive, such as the stereotype depicting the descendants of Vietnamese migrants as brilliant students whose academic performance often exceeds the results of other classmates. Far more often, however, we encounter negative stereotypes. The Vietnamese are often mentioned in the Czech media in connection with criminal activity, they are presented as street vendors, counterfeiters of designer goods, rapists, drug growers, etc. (Klvačová, Bitrich, 2013). The Czech political scene is often a major contributor to the reproduction of these stereotypes, as politicians are actively involved in both the creation and the spreading of the stereotypes. One example is a recent statement by the Minister of Finance, A. Babiš, who while speaking about the introduction of electronic records in sales, publicly called all the Vietnamese tax evaders²¹. The fact that he later apologized for this misleading statement does not excuse the gravity of this deed

Other comments in the discussion were directed at the Roma, particularly a family of quintuplets. One of the posters encouraged others with the statement: “Why not open a discussion about black leeches, you heroes?” Two other posters engaged in this, one replied: “You can vomit your racist shit here, if you need to relieve yourself.” In response to “so take it home” she said: “I am one of them.” The discussion on the Roma ended with this.

²¹ “We’re talking about restaurants and retail. By the way also shops. Also the Vietnamese, who, as we are aware, do not pay taxes”

CASE NO. 2

Newspaper: **Krajské listy**

Date of publication: 18.1.2015; 11.2.2015

Headline: A farmer sent Roma quintuplets organic food. You won't believe what happened next

Html link <http://www.krajsekelisty.cz/ustecky-kraj/7503-farmarka-poslala-romskym-patercatum-sve-biopotravinu-co-se-stalo-pak-tomu-nebudete-verit.htm>

Headline no.2 : Quintuplets: unbelievable story continues in this article, which has been deleted

Html link: <http://www.krajsekelisty.cz/stredocesky-kraj/okres-nymburk/7698-patercata-neuveritelna-story-pokracuje-timto-clankem-ktery-byl-smazan.htm>

Number of comments: (no. 1) 90 / (no. 2) 36

Number of likes: (no. 1) 6300 (has doubled since March!)/ (no. 2) 217

Other social networks, shares: (no. 1) 6 tweets; ? shares on FB /comments on FB. Blog Michal Malý: 98 626 reads, 1769 recommendations

Introducing the medium

Krajské listy reports from all regions of the Czech Republic. Approximately 13 articles appear daily on their website. Anna Vančová, the editor-in-chief of this online newspaper, is the author of most articles. Judging by the standard of the articles, Krajské listy can be positioned on the border between tabloid type and “serious” media. The daily is released only online. It is not included in NetMonitoring nor the Media Project and its editor-in-chief refused to be interviewed or fill out a questionnaire due to time constraints. Data on readership is not known and cannot be presented. Judging by the number of “likers” and posters, the newspaper’s popularity is not too great. The FB profile of this newspaper has only 889 supporters. Krajské listy received great attention by publishing a controversial article about the family of quintuplets.

Rules of discussion

The rules for posting on Krajské listy are very unrestrictive. It is enough to simply register under an anonymous name and you can immediately gain access to discussions. When you log in to a forum you can read the information that editors “reserve the right to shorten or delete text that have elements of criminal offence regarding defamation of race, nation and belief, or messages containing profanity and insults.” If one looks at the posts that appear under the individual articles, it is clear that the editorial staff does not concern itself too much about the racist statements of its readers. It is not uncommon for statements and opinions, which are explicitly racist, and meet several other criteria on the basis of which hate speech is identified, to appear under the articles authored by the owner and editor-in-chief of the newspaper. These statements include comparing humans with animals, insects, etc. and con-

vincing readers that their purity, integrity, or identity is threatened by a certain group of people. Often there is also a call to action to discriminate, expel, evacuate, kill (using gas) etc. Editors do not interfere with these or any other posts, and we can say that compliance with the rules is not monitored.

Introducing the article

The article titled *A farmer sent Roma quintuplets organic food*. You won't believe what happened next was authored by a regular contributor to the newspaper: Zdeňek Svoboda. This article is among hundreds of others that came out in response to the observational documentary about Roma quintuplets and their family, which was filmed and broadcast in 2014 by Czech Television. In the article, which has elements of a fairy-tale narrative, the author states that he heard a story in a pub from a lady whose friend was allegedly going to send quintuplets organic food from her own production. The food that was supposed to be sent by post, was refused by the family. The disappointment of the donor and her friend is depicted very emotionally by the author when he writes: "We were both quite surprised at this, we were caught off guard, we were very upset. Next time we will not help anybody like this for free. There is a lot of work behind all this. Tests, recipes, sale, selection, going to the post office, packing, paying, and all free of charge, from the heart, and in my spare time. I wish the family all the best and I don't want to hear more about them." The author committed several errors in relation to journalistic ethics in his article. Firstly, the information is based on the testimony of a so-called third party, whose identity cannot be verified. Secondly, a statement that the source cannot be published out of fear of retribution from "Roma media and activists" gives the impression that the Roma, Roma media, and activists are enemies of the entire non-Roma population. And thirdly, it does not provide space for comments from the main party involved - Ms Kiňová (the mother of the quintuplets), so the whole situation is presented only through the opinion of the farmer. There is also no information in the article indicating that the acceptance of gifts of food (the origin of which is unclear) is not something that should be taken for granted. This issue was even mentioned in the discussion below the article. Similarly, it is not mentioned that the family of quintuplets have received countless death threats, including threats of poisoning, so from this point of view their concerns about accepting gifts of food are quite legitimate. Given the above, the nature of the article can be considered quite manipulative, attempting to suggest to readers that the family of quintuplets are ungrateful people who do not deserve help. The publication of this article, which was also immediately taken by the Blesk.cz site, caused a huge wave of hateful reactions directed at the Kiňový family, and all Czech Roma. The question that needs to be asked in this case is why was such an article ever written? After the release of the documentary film the family of quintuplets had to withstand a wave of hatred that gradually weakened. A new stage in this racist manhunt, however, was stirred up by an interview with a social worker and former patron of the quintuplets, Klára Rulíková Vítková, which according to analysts from Romea.cz, literally sparked a media lynching. [Cit.] "Some smaller websites have begun to compete in absurdities written about the family" (Romea.cz, 2014). The question is whether the Krajské listy site published this highly manipulative article for the very reason of benefiting from the wave of hatred that was directed towards the family of quintuplets. Both articles, which lacked any evidence and contained information which could not be verified, were deleted. This happened after the parents of the quintuplets announced that the information was untrue, and following demands made by Romea organization and the family's attorney. The following statement then appeared on the website: "The article was deleted at the request of the family of quintuplets and

their lawyer.” By doing this, the editors managed to give the impression that they had not done anything wrong. The article, thus, could be added to the list of other rumours and hoaxes, which are shared by thousands of people, despite the fact that the events described have nothing to do with reality. The fact that the article about the organic food and family of quintuplets continued to spread, despite its falsity, can be proven by the popularity of the text *Beaten up for helping children*, that was published by Michal Malý in his blog shortly after the removal of the article on January 25th, 2015. The blog has been repeatedly subjected to criticism by the administrator (orders for its deletion etc.) <http://michalmaly.blog.idnes.cz/c/445194/za-pomoc-detem-pres-drzku.html>. The article, which the author edited, had over 190,000 views by 10.11.2015. The text can be read in its original version on the *Pravý prostor* and *Skutečnosti.cz* sites, where it has 2,600 likes and 159 shares. The style of the article on the Roma quintuplets is nothing unusual for the Czech media. The Roma are often the subject of articles and they are almost always negative in sentiment.

The following organizations have been engaged in issues regarding the depiction of the Roma on the Internet in recent years: the government’s Agency for Social Inclusion (the Agency), the non-profit organization *Romea.cz*, the media company *Newton Media*, and *Multicultural Centre Prague*. The research done by these organizations, which was focused on monitoring the media in relation to the Roma, has consistently confirmed that the presentation of Roma in the media is flawed, especially in relation to the requirements of objective and balanced reporting, which are expressed in Czech media legislation²². The author of the study made by the Agency, for example, states that more than half of reports on the Roma in the period that she monitored (1.7.2011–31.5.2012) were associated with crime. The reason for the publication of the information regarding the criminal offence was not its severity, but the ethnicity of the offender, which in those cases played a crucial role (Křížová, 2013). Analysis by *Newton Media* focused on the first eight months of 2013. There were several organized events throughout the country at that time where citizens expressed their negative attitudes towards the Roma. Therefore, not surprisingly, the majority of articles in this period were connected with growing “anti-Roma sentiments”, demonstrations, etc. The second most common topic during this period was culture. The authors of the study done by *Romea* focused on a deeper analysis of individual cases. According to them, the media often exerts negative influence on public opinion in relation to the Roma. They do it, for example, by publishing completely fabricated reports (the example of a Roma cashier); by publishing statements made by publicly known people, most of them politicians, who attack Roma verbally or by using one-sided information (allegations made by one group/person are often presented as the truth); by frequent generalizations (often in the case of a criminal offence committed by an individual, the media talks about the Roma minority as a whole); by stating the ethnicity of the offender for no particular reason; or by using expressions that are commonly used pejoratively in relation to the Roma, for example: “maladjusted”, “untouchable”, “Gypsy”.

²² *Paragraph 4, art. 2 Law no. 468*

Analysis of the discussion below the article

Most of the contributions to the discussion below this article can be described as hostile, either to the Kiňový family, or to Czech Roma, or directed at both simultaneously. Twenty out of ninety comments also feature explicit racism and proclamation of hatred. The following words are used: “black whores, gypsy Molly, the black plague, rats or parasites.” The posts encourage destruction, expulsion, and confinement in “Adolf’s camps.” Besides Roma, Muslims and migrants are also attacked in four posts. On the other hand, there are also 16 responses in which readers try to see the situation from the “other” side, encouraging others to be decent and pointing out the journalistic dilettantism of the author. One of the posters even asks the administrator to have the article, with such “hateful and calculated” content, removed immediately. In contrast, in the discussion that the article triggered on Facebook, most comments question its seriousness or advocate for the family. None of the hateful posts were deleted by site administrators and no poster was blocked. The operators of the website clearly failed to control compliance to the rules of discussion in this case.

CASE NO. 3

Newspaper: iDnes.cz

Date of publication: 24.2.2015, 13:55

Headline: A gunman killed eight people in a pub in Uherský Brod, he died as well

Html link: http://zlin.idnes.cz/strelba-v-hospode-v-uherskem-brode-d5o-/zlin-zpravy.aspx?c=A150224_135231_zlin-zpravy_ras

Number of comments: 1927

Number of likes: impossible to determine

Other social networks, shares: impossible to determine

Introducing the medium

After Novinky.cz, the iDnes site is the second most visited news website on the Internet. The website is visited on average by 270,000 real users²³ monthly. The iDNES.cz site simultaneously employs several trends in the field of online journalism. These include various types of weblogs, a Facebook page (which had 78,000 friends by 25.5.2015), and a variety of multimedia files (videos, photos, 3D animations, maps, etc.). Regarding interactive communication channels, in addition to discussions, the iDNES.cz news site also uses polls, a chat, online interviews and testing.

Rules of discussion

The iDnes.cz site is very popular among posters. About 2,000–7,000 comments appear on the website daily. An article covering the US army convoys and their visit to the Czech Republic was among the most discussed in 2015 (until May) with 6,772 posts. Historically the most discussed was the article covering the football match with the Newcastle team in Dubnica from 2013 (a total of 1,540,976 comments). Articles can be tagged as favourites, and you can share them on Facebook, Twitter or Google Plus. The information about how many people have done so is not displayed. It is possible to post in the forums under individual articles on the website, and comment on posts on the Facebook page or in blogs. In order to discuss the articles on the website, a user must register using an e-mail address (under a real name), which also serves as a login name. The user also has to agree with registration rules. The website administrator Jan Dvořák refers to the rules on the website, adding: “Dear readers, we value your opinions. However, we would like the discussions to be meaningful. Therefore, we ask you to discuss the subject of the article in a polite manner. Posts that have no place in decent and cultured discussions will be deleted²⁴”. Discussions are bound by rules/a Code, and in case of the Code’s violation the post can be deleted. Since 2013, unrestricted access to discussions is only granted to registered users who have a credit of at least 1,000 ‘i’s. ‘I’s can be obtained as part of a loyalty program, e.g. for the number of pages viewed (1 ‘i’), for participation in polls, for sending suggestions to the editors (500 ‘i’s) and so on. Newly registered users who do not have a sufficient amount of ‘i’s can post once in three different discussions. For every post deleted by the administrator 100 ‘i’s are automatically deducted from the user’s account. If after such a deduction, the amount of ‘i’s in the account falls below 1000 it is

²³ The data was acquired using online application from NetMonitor; <http://online.netmonitor.cz/>

²⁴ <http://muj.idnes.cz/Pravidla.aspx#diskuse-pravidla>

automatically blocked. If 10 posts are deleted during 90 consecutive days, the system automatically and permanently prevents further posting regardless of the number of previously obtained 'i's. The user can lose the account if he/she is denied access to discussions on other grounds. This rule also applies to accounts linked to Facebook. A request for reactivation of the account can be submitted in half a year at the earliest. Regarding discussion moderation, iDnes.cz also uses time limitation on discussions and offers other participants an opportunity to evaluate or report abusive posts. Currently, more discussions that are considered too controversial and full of hate speech are being closed. This happened, for example, in the case of the article Better death than deportation. Refugees in Drahonice started a hunger strike ²⁵. This article was published on 10.11.2015, and around 200 comments quickly appeared below. Many of them were hateful, wishing death upon the refugees and calling on them to leave the Czech Republic. Rules for the regulation of discussions on the Facebook profile are less strict. The most commonly used tactic is "hiding" the post, which then can only be seen by friends of the poster. The above-mentioned discussion about refugees was cancelled that same day. Generally speaking, the moderators of the iDnes.cz website manage the discussions quite well, taking into account their overall numbers. Many posters behave decently and comment on the topic of the article. On the other hand, many posts relating to controversial issues (refugees, Islam, Roma) are "on the edge". Their authors insult and ridicule different cultures, ethnicities, religions, make generalization and so on. Relative to the total amount of posts, comments that are clearly hateful appear less frequently. It is also obvious that many hateful posts are removed by the moderators, exactly how it is done is not known. In order to discredit opposing views, humour and ridicule are used rather than profanity and insults, as often happens in other cases. Also the community of posters appeal to the trolls to stop posting their comments.

Introducing the text

The article comments on the tragic events that occurred on February 24th, 2015 in Uherský Brod, when a mentally unstable man shot 8 people in a local pub. One woman who was shot survived her injuries. The perpetrator of the attack was not initially known. The identity and the intent, however, were later clarified on the day of the shooting. The assailant was a man who lived in a local suburb, and was struggling with psychological and social problems. He wanted to draw attention to himself by committing the crime, because he felt that no one (especially the authorities) was willing to help him. The assailant then turned the gun on himself and committed suicide. The case drew the attention of both Czech and international media, including Internet websites. The article is written in the form of a news report, it is factual, strict, and without emotion. The author draws no parallels or references to "similar" cases, and does not speculate (apart from speculation about the mental health of the gunman). This article clearly only aims to be informative in nature.

Analysis of the discussion below the article

Most posts in the discussion are not hateful in nature and relate to the legalization of weapons possession, the social situation and mental state of the shooter and the reasons that led him to the crime. Given that the shooting took place less than two months after the terrorist attack in Paris, posters initially also referred to this event. It is not clear, however, whether some of these posts are serious, or whether they are intended to be ironic. However, in some comments the exaggeration is obvious. An example can be seen in the reaction of one poster to the statement: "Arabs are already in Brod?". They wrote: "Yeah,

²⁵ http://zpravy.idnes.cz/cast-uprechliku-z-drahonice-udajne-zahajila-hladovku-f8z-/domaci.aspx?c=A151110_224752_domaci_kha

sure. The primary goal of the Arabs is to attack spit-covered pubs of the 4th category in Slovakia.” What is clear is that there are two definite camps of rival opinions among the debaters on this issue. Some consider all Muslims as terrorists and do not hesitate to present their views stating: “Only lunatics or Islamists shoot people when they are at lunch.” “No, not only Islamists do this, but they do this every day. No one condemns all Muslims for terrorism. But in the same way that we keep away from the decent Nazis, it is also necessary to keep away from the decent Muslims.” Others who try to ridicule the previous opinions through ironic statements like this: “Sure, it was a local Muslim connected to IS, hm, maybe not, but how come we are still not organizing a manhunt for all men in their 60s? Then for all men? Then for all those bloodthirsty Czechs.” It seems that this tactic worked quite well and an attempt to pull the topic of Islam and terrorism into the discussion was not very successful. Although some extreme views were present in the discussion, which, for example associated all Muslims with terrorism, we don’t find clearly hateful reactions here. There is also no evidence that a post was deleted. Since we do not know the exact moderation strategy of the site (it is not clear whether so-called “pre-moderation” exists, when a discussion post is published only after being approved by the moderator), it is not possible to say with certainty whether it indicates that statements that would require editorial intervention did not appear, or whether they were deleted. In the case of this discussion, posters managed to comply with the rules set by the editorial staff. Whether it was because of the well designed and successful moderation strategy, or because the iDnes site managed to build a community of polite posters who discuss subjects while staying on-topic.

CASE NO. 4

Newspaper: Parlamentní listy
Date of publication: 22.2.2015, 22:58

**Headline: You can work, you're white, said a Roma at Jílková's.
There is so much theatricality here, I feel sick ...**

Html link: <http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Vam-praci-daji-vy-jste-bily-volal-u-Jilkove-Rom-Tady-se-dela-tolik-saskaren-az-je-mi-z-toho-mdlo-355524>

Number of comments: 223, dropped to 221
Number of likes: 135 on FB (has not increased since January)
Other social networks, shares: 0

Introducing the medium

Parlamentní listy has existed since 2008. It provides quite a unique service: in addition to news reports, it also offers politicians, institutions and municipalities an opportunity to establish their own profile where they can publish posts without editorial interference and communicate with their readers. In order to ensure active participation of its readers, in addition to discussions of a traditional format, Parlamentní listy also tries to hold regular polls and votes. In the section “Politicians, institutions and municipalities” it is possible to ask politicians questions directly (if their profile is active) and evaluate them. As of this year, the company Our Media, Inc., which also manages EUportal.cz, EUserver.cz, Eportal.cz, EURabia.cz and Freeglobe.cz, publishes Parlamentní listy. Although Parlamentní listy claims on its website that it is committed to serious and balanced journalism, media analysts often call it a political tabloid²⁶. In 2013, Parlamentní listy won sixth place in the Křišťálová Lupa (Crystal magnifying glass) anti-awards, in the category of alternative online media for “violating the principles of serious journalism”. In 2014, the newspaper received third place. The fact that the former chairman of Dělnická strana (the Workers’ Party of Social Justice) Václav Prokůpek published on the website until recently also shows its focus and the orientation. Prokůpek published several anti-Roma articles on the website, the best known of which is a falsified article about a Roma cashier from 2012. It is necessary to add, that all articles by this author were later deleted from the website and he was given a notice from the editorial board. According to the Romea.cz organization, which deals with the media image of the Roma, Parlamentní listy is clearly an anti-Roma oriented newspaper. According to Romea.cz, in addition to the above-mentioned case, the fact that some of the contributing authors on this website are extremist-minded people also supports this supposition. It includes such people as Radim Panenka, a deputy editor of the newspaper (also a former candidate for the extremist Národní strana (National Party), Adam B. Bartoš (known as the author of the list of “truthlovers”) and Lukáš Petřík, a founder of Mladá pravice (the Young right-wing), who attended the event of the extremist Vlastenecká fronta (the Patriotic Front). The orientation of Parlamentní listy’s opinion is also apparent from their open support of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim political parties, such as Blok proti islámu (Block against Islam) and Úsvit – Národní koalice (Dawn - the National Coalition), whose banners appear on the website. As to

²⁶Urban (2015) http://byznyis.lidovky.cz/parlamentni-listy-jsou-radikalni-listy-f0d-/media.aspx?c=A150817_124641_In_nazory_ELE

the nature of news reports, one cannot say that all the articles are consistent in their views. The space is also given to various opinions and reports of neutral character. According to a news report content analysis conducted by the columnist Tomáš Urban for the organization Člověk v tísni (People in Need) from May - July 2015, the opinion section and articles from editors are clearly dominated by anti-American, anti-European and anti-immigration²⁷ views. *Parlamentní listy*, which currently publishes over 100 articles daily, has recently managed to attract new readers and its popularity is growing²⁸. *Parlamentní listy* is especially popular on Facebook, where its articles are among the most shared. This year the server has been ranked three times among the 10 most popular websites on Facebook in the Czech Republic, when its articles received the highest number of likes, shares and engagements within 24 hours. Each time these were articles with anti-Muslim and anti-immigration topics (Urban, *Lidové noviny*²⁹).

Rules of discussion

In order to make posts, it is necessary to register by submitting a password and an e-mail address, which is not open to the public and serves only as a username. It is also necessary to agree to the “*Parlamentní listy.cz* Terms and Conditions of Service” (hereinafter referred to as Terms & Conditions), and agree to comply with “the Code of Ethics for posting” (hereinafter referred to as the Code of Ethics). The Code of Ethics establishes different rules for the profile of “citizen”, “politician”, “institution” and “municipality”. Under a “citizen” profile the posters are encouraged to comply with the laws of the Czech Republic and generally accepted standards of appropriate expression. They are also encouraged not to insult politicians or each other, all accusatory arguments should be sustained using evidence and there should be no post flooding, e.g. it is necessary to stick to the topic and not to repeat oneself unnecessarily. In addition, it is stated in the Terms & Conditions that “publishing posts or other content with pornographic, racist, anti-Semitic³⁰ or Nazi content is not permitted, nor is content that violates generally binding regulations (e.g. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Constitution of the Czech Republic, law No. 52/2009 Coll., and other applicable laws of the Czech Republic) or generally accepted moral rules.” Each visitor also has an option to anonymously report content that does not comply with the Code of Ethics and alert the SuperAdmin via the “Report inappropriate content” link. The website operator has the right to cancel the registration of a user violating the Code of Ethics. The Jaroslav Suchý case³¹ shows the willingness of the server to follow its own rules. Jaroslav Suchý went to court last year after he failed in his appeal to the administrator of *Parlamentní listy* to remove insulting comments about himself in a discussion. He did not like that other posters often referred to him with the following statements: “Obama gunmen should have shot this punk!”, “This Gypsy needs a good beating, and also needs to work more - with a pickaxe until he blacks out”, “I would love to caress him - with a hobnailed boot in the ass. Son of a bitch”, “this fool will be annoying until someone hits him properly”, or “I would throw Suchý into the river, so he is no longer such a bore”, etc. (Romea.cz, 2015). The victim succeeded at court and the *Parlamentní listy* site was sentenced by the European Court of Human Rights in October 2015 to pay CZK150,000 in compensation to the complainant.

²⁷ http://byznys.lidovky.cz/parlamentni-listy-jsou-radikalni-listy-f0d-/media.aspx?c=A150817_124641_ln_nazory_ELE

²⁸ According to *NetMonitoring*, in March 2015, the website was visited by more than 6000 people

²⁹ http://byznys.lidovky.cz/parlamentni-listy-jsou-radikalni-listy-f0d-/media.aspx?c=A150817_124641_ln_nazory_ELE

³⁰ In reality, the word *antisemitic* is used, we assume this it is a typo

³¹ www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/prelomovy-verdikt-za-rasistickou-diskusi-maji-parlamentni-listy-zaplattit-150-000-korun

It became the first Czech site that was punished for insults in anonymous discussions³². In its statement regarding the above-mentioned case of Mr. Suchý and the regulation of discussions on the Internet, Parlamentní listy said the following (under the name of the author signed as “jih”): “The ParlamentníListy.cz site has been striving from the very beginning to be liberal while evaluating the contributions of users in discussions, enabling diversity of views and no censorship. However, the site demands that users respect the rules to which they committed. In case of the violation of the Code of Ethics of the service and the posting of an offensive contribution, it is necessary to resort to the blocking of the user’s account. If the user agrees that it will not happen again, usually the account can be conditionally reopened.” The monitoring of discussion posts on the website indicates that the removal of inappropriate posts and blocking of users occurs only very rarely, even if it is a clear violation of the Code and the Law. Comments are often hateful in nature, users are vulgar and debaters with opposing views are challenged.

Introducing the text

The article describes the course of the debate on the “You have the word” program on Czech Television, presented by Michaela Jílková. The topic of the discussion was the abuse of housing benefits and a recently prepared law on social housing. The author of the article describes the different reactions from the audience, including those addressed towards “maladjusted residents.” The author also briefly mentions what the new social housing concept is all about. Overall the article has no informational value and provides no information on the basis of which the reader can make up an opinion on the issue of social housing. It is, therefore, not clear what the editors’ intention was in publishing such an article. On the other hand, it should be noted that editors quite often give space to this kind of tabloid material. From this perspective, it is no longer so striking. Taking into account the proclamation by the editors of Parlamentní listy on their website that “the aim is to be established as a quality and reputable news portal, which focuses only on political news, mainly national, providing quality and original contributions,” the question is to what extent did this article fulfil this ambition?

Analysis of the discussion below the article

The discussion under the article, in most cases, is focused on complains about politicians, the Roma, immigrants and other groups. A lot of posts refer to the Roma as lazy, thieves, cunning, abusing welfare benefits, etc. On several occasions the Roma are compared to animals, and “animal” behaviour is attributed to them. Posts say that they cannot be “trained”, that they can only reproduce/multiply. They are branded as rabble, stinkers and bedbugs. One of the posters says that if given the power, he could straighten them out. Another would send the Roma to Switzerland. There is a poster who says that one is not allowed to talk about the real solution to the “Gypsy question” in our country, because it is deemed as “criminal”. One contribution is extreme, and states: “hey ... I have just imagined buying 200 grams of a Roma woman at the butcher’s on the corner... Dr. Lecter.” This contribution was not deleted by the editors, although it appeared only 20 minutes after another contribution had been deleted for violation of the Code of Ethics of Parlamentní listy (its content could not be determined).

³² www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/vrchni-soud-potvrdil-prelomovy-verdikt-parlamentni-listy-musi-zaplacit-odskodne-za-rasisticke-diskuze-pod-clanky

Conclusion

The year 2015 brought about significant changes in the way discussions are treated and moderated. In the case of the websites monitored, Aktuálně.cz and Blesk.cz were affected by these changes the most. In general, both sites mentioned made their approach to discussions stricter, especially by using the strategy of not opening discussions under highly controversial issues, such as the Roma, refugees, Muslims, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, etc. There might be two explanations for these changes. One is the refugee crisis, which resulted in a considerable increase of hateful comments. The second explanation would be two groundbreaking court decisions made in June and October 2015. In the first case the European Court of Human Rights upheld the liability of the operator of the Estonian Internet portal Delfi for the offensive comments of its users. The second was the case mentioned above involving Jaroslav Suchý, who won vs. Our Media.

As to content and moderation techniques in online media, in general, iDnes.cz is doing the best in moderating discussions. Even though users can openly discuss all issues, and the amount of contributions is quite considerable, the moderators of this website have managed to ensure that posters behave in a relatively decent manner and comment only on the issue at hand. Many comments that appear under controversial issues (refugees, Islam, the Roma) are “on the edge”. However, considering the overall amount of comments, those that are explicitly hateful do not appear frequently. A relatively complicated moderation strategy based on the principle of building a community of readers via a loyalty program is behind this “success”. It is complemented by time limitations for discussions and the closure of some discussions if they develop in an undesirable way

The Aktuálně.cz site also manages to eliminate, or at least reduce, the numbers of hateful and insulting posts. The fact that it is not possible to discuss some controversial issues on Aktuálně.cz helps.

One can discuss anonymously, directly below articles, or through a FB profile on the Blesk.cz site. In the case of anonymous discussions, a large number of violations of the rules set by the website operator occurs. People insult each other in discussions, use vulgar vocabulary, and hate speech is not uncommon. Although some regulation occurs, especially through removal of inappropriate posts on the website, it is clear that this is an example of failed moderation.

The removal of inappropriate posts and the blocking of users occurs quite infrequently on the Parlamentní listy site. This happens despite the fact that many posts on this website are hateful, violating not only the Code of Ethics for posting on the Parlamentní listy site, but often also the law.

By far the worst situation is on the Krajské listy.cz portal, which does not delete any comments, even though the contributions are often extremely hateful and illegal.

CHARLIE HEBDO CASE

Newspapers: Aktuálně.cz + Blesk.cz, Krajské listy, IDnes.cz, Parlamentní listy

Date of publication: 7.1.2015, 12:20

Headline: An attack in Paris. 12 people did not survive the shooting at the headquarters of the magazine

Html link: <http://zpravy.aktualne.cz/zahranici/pri-strelbe-v-sidle-casopisu-zemrelo-10-lidi/r~86100b82965f11e498be002590604f2e/>

Number of comments: 2454 originally -263 remained

Number of likes: impossible to determine

Other networks, shares: impossible to determine

The Charlie Hebdo case in selected media

On 7.1.2015 an armed attack on the editors of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo happened in Paris. The attack resulted in 12 dead and 10 injured. The assailants were two brothers who shouted slogans such as: “We have avenged the Prophet Mohammed” and “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is great) during the shooting. Two policemen were also among the dead, one of them a Muslim. Charlie Hebdo is a magazine that publishes provocative, anti-religious and left-wing comics, jokes, stories and essays, causing frequent controversy and contradictory reactions from the public. In one of the editions in 2011 a caricature of the Prophet Mohammed was published, which led to the magazine’s former headquarters being burned down by unknown perpetrators.

The following chapter deals in detail with the Charlie Hebdo case. The following matters are discussed: the extent to which this case is reflected in the five selected online media; which sections most often refer to this case; whether a significant amount of comments are connected to this case; whether hate speech appears among these comments and other debaters respond to it.

Aktuálně.cz

Aktuálně.cz reported on the event for the first time on 7.1.2015 with a report containing the headline An attack in Paris. 12 people did not survive the shooting at the headquarters of the magazine. The report is written objectively, without emotion, its aim is to inform the audience. Nevertheless, some misleading information appears in the article, when the author states that the magazine was known to have made fun of radical Islam. This is not entirely correct, since the magazine made fun of Islam in general, not only of its radical branches. The article continues with online coverage of the events ending with an entry at 5:25 on January, 8th. The coverage, which is written in a similar way to the initial article, is conceived of as a “five-layer” report with the following interrelated elements: important events, Twitter, comments, interesting facts, aktuálně.cz.

The rules of discussion

Access to discussions on the Aktuálně.cz site went through significant changes in the last two years, and can be characterized by more restrictive and rigorous moderation of discussions. Since 2014, Aktuálně.cz uses the Disqus software, and discussions are opened only under issues that are not highly controversial³³. There are no discussions, for example, on the subject of refugees, Ukraine or Islam. The discussion is closed in a majority of articles related to the Roma. It is written on the website that “Aktuálně.cz is interested in providing a space only for civil and decent discussions” and that “with their access to the discussion, posters commit themselves to the Code of Debaters³⁴”. In this Code “messages that incite violence against specific people or groups of people; racial, ethnic and religious hatred” are forbidden. By failing to comply with the rules a debater risks having the post “hidden” by the moderator. In case of repeated violations of the Code, access to discussions can be completely blocked. Monitoring of discussions below articles showed that this strategy of combating hate speech has been effective. Hateful comments are almost absent, and if they appear, they are quickly removed. This happened, perhaps, also due to the readers’ ability to report abusive posts (including unregistered users). On the other hand, it is worth noting that a large number of articles have no discussion at all (it is not open). Both of these factors probably led to the loss of posters who have low tolerance for the tightening up of discussion rules, which is evident from the reactions in the monitored discussion forums.

The nature of online comments on articles related to the “Charlie Hebdo” case

On 31.3.2015 a total of 2,454 comments could be found in the discussion below the article and online coverage. Only 263 comments reappeared below the article after some graphic corrections and a temporary closure of discussions on the website. Most of the contributions were deleted by editors after the changes that occurred on the server due to the transition to the new system. No reason was given for the removal, despite the fact that most of the posts were not hateful in character. Only a few posts that match the definition of “hate speech” appeared in the debate. One deleted post could be an example: “There should be a reality show on Al-Jazeera, where the contestants are executed by suicide. They could hold the rope from the guillotine until they faint. The Qur’an is uncompromising regarding suicide, also the blade should be soaked in pig blood.” Other contributions were most likely removed because the discussion quite quickly, already within the first ten comments, deviated from the main theme (the terrorist attack) to the issue of the Roma and Communists (Bolsheviks). At the same time, the posts became very personal and debaters started to attack and insult each other. By 31.10.2015 the Aktuálně.cz site published a total of 178 articles about Charlie Hebdo. The majority of articles were published by the end of January, when interest in the case gradually began to fade, both on the side of the reporters and the posters. The last article was published on October 31st and covered the conviction of a radical Muslim in Norway, who approved of the attack in Paris. A discussion on this article was never opened.

Blesk.cz

The Charlie Hebdo case also dominated the news on the Blesk.cz site, which reported it, similarly to Aktuálně.cz, through online coverage. A total of 866 posts appeared in the forum under this reportage. The coverage was shared 4 times and “liked” 20 times. The site had Charlie Hebdo as one of the

³³ During that year, when the transition to the new system was taking place, it was temporarily possible to discuss only through the so-called “discussion forum”. Open discussion was shut down and posts were sent directly to the editors.

³⁴ www.aktualne.cz/kodex-diskutujicich/

main themes/keywords in the search engine. More than 50 articles on the topic of Charlie Hebdo were published on the website by 30.7.2015. Most of them were published in January, which is when the majority of the comments in the discussions appeared as well. In the coming months, the frequency of articles on the case declined, as did interest in the subject among debaters. Individual contributions in the discussions were often full of swear words and insults, however, most of them cannot be labelled as hate speech according to the criteria above. The posters most often insulted each other. The last article was published on July 17th and it reported on the editorial decision not to draw cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in the future. The author of the article is presented as 'mb'. The article was shared 95 times on Facebook and once on Twitter. There were no comments below.

Krajské listy

The Krajské listy site did not report on the event itself. The first article on the topic of Charlie Hebdo appeared the next day in the form of an emotional commentary by Oldřich Szaban, a journalist and a member of the editorial team. The articles on this topic can be searched for on the site by typing "masacre in Paris." Overall, fifteen articles can be found, all are under the News heading. Most of them, however, only refer to Charlie Hebdo. The articles mostly promote views from famous people who believe that Islam is the greatest evil currently facing Europe. The opposing opinions (e.g. a speech by Tomáš Halík) are ridiculed. The last article that refers to the topic was published in February 2015 and covered the shooting of 8 people in Český Brod. The reference to the event occurs already in its title: "I felt like I was at Charlie Hebdo," said a direct witness after the massacre in Brod, trembling with terror. Eight dead, hostages and suicide, the Czech Republic is in shock. Survivors will receive compensation." Despite the author's "challenge", only one poster mentions the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo in the comments. Similarly, it works with other articles, which are generally one-sided and often manipulative. Although authors clearly seek to impose their point of view, it is not always successful. This is evident from the discussions, where you can also find posts that are trying to promote a more balanced view. The most discussed article on the topic of Charlie Hebdo was a text published on 7.1.2015: A well-known journalist, JXD, said aloud what was previously only whispered. A big war with Islam is awaiting us, under which 87 comments appeared. Besides the large number of posts that have nothing to do with the topic (they mention communism, the Roma etc.), we can also find very offensive and hateful comments. Most often these are calls to action and threats of physical elimination or deportation.

Parlamentní listy

Similarly to Aktuálně.cz and Blesk.cz, the Charlie Hebdo affair made it to the foreground on the Parlamentní listy site. Using one keyword, a total of 231 articles could be found on this website by 31.10.2015. The last article was published on September 18th and covers cartoons that depicted a drowned Syrian boy. All discussion forums on this topic were closed on the website during monitoring, therefore, it was not possible to conduct an analysis.

iDnes.cz

The Charlie Hebdo case dominated the news on the iDnes.cz site, which also reported on it in online coverage. A total of 3,507 comments appeared in the discussion under the coverage. Most of them were decent, with hateful remarks occurring only rarely (they usually called on Muslims to leave Europe). Participants could contribute until 11.1.2015, after that the discussion was closed. Keywords, which allowed for articles on the topic to be searched for, were “an attack on the French newspaper Charlie Hebdo” and “Charlie Hebdo”. By 31.10.2015 a total of 199 of such articles were published (of which 9 are from the period preceding the event). The vast majority of the articles follow the immediate developments in the case. The last article referring to this topic was published on October 14th and it spoke of the magazine’s financial difficulties. As to the sections, most of the articles were published in the news section, 7 in the culture section, 3 in the sports section, 2 in the economics section and 1 in the travelling section. In general, we can say that the posters behaved decently, vulgar comments were scarce and hateful comments occurred only rarely. Contradictory opinions often occurred and trolls were encouraged to leave. In order to discredit opposing views, humour and ridicule were often used.

Conclusion

Generally, it can be said that the attacks on the editors of Charlie Hebdo in Paris caused an unprecedented response among Czech readers and debaters. According to the analysis by the Yeseter Now organization, conducted for the Hate Free project, there were around 180,000 posts related to minorities in January (usually there are around 60-100,000). The debate about Muslims has intensified more than tenfold and has significantly shadowed the traditionally widely discussed so-called Roma issue³⁵. The lead did not last for a long time, though, and by February the trend began to level out “in favour” of the Roma. The case also came to the forefront in the above-mentioned media. Most of the articles were written on Parlamentní listy (231 texts), and the fewest were on Krajské listy (15 texts). The most discussed article was published on the iDnes.cz site with 3,507 comments, fewer comments (2,254) appeared below reports published on the Aktuálně.cz site. The articles appeared throughout the month of January. In early February, however, interest in the subject began to wane.

³⁵ www.hatefree.cz/analyza-homoklady-musulmani-a-tmavocesni-online

INTERVIEWS' RESULTS

HOW TO HANDLE HATE SPEECH IN ONLINE DISCUSSIONS?

Goals and methods

The presented study is based on the analysis of 16 qualitative, semi-structured interviews, supplemented by literature research and a four-month monitoring of online discussion forums. The selection of the online media publishers and respondents was determined by their willingness to participate in the research. The interviews were conducted with representatives of Aktuálně.cz, iDnes.cz, Novinky.cz, A2larm, Deník Referendum and the weekly publication Respekt. Other interviews were provided by representatives of the NGOs Romea.cz, Nesehnutí and Člověk v tísni (People in Need), representatives of the government project Hate Free Culture, the Yeseter Now organisation, and with a representative of the Ministry of the Interior (The Police of the CR). Due to ethical requirements of the research, we preserve the anonymity of respondents. Due to the requirement of some editors, specific information related to certain online media publishers will not be disclosed. Given the size of the sample it is not possible to generalize the results of the research. The aim of the research was to describe some of the processes in more depth and to obtain data that could serve as a basis for further exploration. The research results were also used to formulate specific recommendations for journalists and to create a methodology for secondary schools dealing with the issue of hate speech.

Introduction to the topic and main research questions

What distinguishes online media from other forms of media is its high interactivity. This way the readers have some opportunity to influence the final form of the published text through direct communication³⁶ (Jirák, Köpplová, 2003). The main tool of direct communication is participation in ongoing discussions under various articles. People can express their views freely there and then, in turn, learn something about what others think about the topic. The possibility to anonymously³⁷ express one's opinion on any subject, however, brings with it some negative phenomena, which undoubtedly include hate speech. The question that arises is whether Internet discussions are really beneficial, and whether the advantages can outweigh the disadvantages connected³⁸ to online discussions. In addition to questions about the benefits of discussions, the study aims to explore the following: which topics generate the most hateful comments on the Internet in the Czech Republic; what social impact this might have; and what ways of discussion moderation are used the most by Czech online media.

Topics that lead to hateful reactions

The topics of articles that cause negative and hateful reactions are dependent on current political events in society and are quite variable. According to the respondents' statements, in 2014, the post-

³⁶ *In discussions, via e-mail, by voting, in polls and so on.*

³⁷ *Meaning without direct contact with other debaters and readers*

³⁸ *The most recent study which highlights the negative impact of hateful comments on the psychological well-being of users of social networks was conducted at the University La Sapienza in Rome in 2014: <http://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1408/1408.3550.pdf>; studies that show a link between the rise in hateful and racist expressions with the increase in hate crimes were produced, for example, in the US: http://questromworld.bu.edu/wise2013/files/2013/12/wise20130_submission_35.pdf*

ers were mostly targeting the Roma and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in their hateful comments. On the contrary, in January, after the attacks on the Parisian magazine Charlie Hebdo, the most discussed topic with the most “hate” was Muslims and Islamic terrorism. This is also confirmed by a quantitative analysis that was conducted by the organization Yeseter Now as part of the Hate Free Culture project. The study states that Muslims in the period of January-March 2015 were even well “ahead” of the Roma, who are often the dominant topic of both negative and hateful comments³⁹ in online discussions. According to the study, the topic of Muslims was mainly discussed on Facebook and on the iDnes.cz news site. A large share of the commenting was done as part of the movement Islám v České republice nechceme (We do not want Islam in the Czech Republic), which has over 140,000 supporters and its members are also active bloggers on an iDnes.cz news site (Kučera, 2015). Since the outbreak of the so-called “refugee crisis” (in May 2015) one of the most represented topics, both in the news and in the discussions, has been refugees and migrants. The monitoring done by the Yeseter Now organization for the months of May and June shows that although most of the comments on this topic are more negative and more hateful than on any other topic, the highest rate of negative sentiments on the Internet at this time were still attributed to the Roma. This is also confirmed by testimonies from most respondents. The respondents also agree that by far the most hateful reactions in relation to this minority were induced by articles about the family of quintuplets. Among the more surprising topics causing a wave of hate speech among Czech debaters in the recent months was the death of Stanislav Gross. According to some respondents, posters also express hatred, for example, at people who lost their lives in traffic accidents, or on the topic of Czech foreign aid. As one respondent says: “When something from the Czech Republic does not work for the Czechs, but it works for people from abroad, people get very touchy.” A never-fading star of the negative commentary is also social issues, which usually quite quickly turn to “the issue of the Roma”. Several respondents even believe that almost every discussion has a tendency to turn to hateful commentary, regardless of what the article is about.

Some respondents also think that there is a link between the increase in hateful comments against multiple groups. This view is supported by the results of the above-mentioned analysis by Yeseter Now⁴⁰. One of the respondents commented as follows: “There is a tendency to always hate something in society, and when hatred of one group increases abruptly, it tends to increase in relation to other groups as well.”

The respondents of the research do not only come across hateful reactions in discussions under the published articles, but also in attacks on their editorial team. Sometimes attacks are aimed at specific members of the editorial staff, including the respondents themselves. One of them, for example, states: “The moment you support minorities or refugees, they consider you a traitor. The reactions vary: name-calling, insults, sometimes an email arrives saying that something might happen to you...”

Do discussion make sense?

Respondents’ answers to the question related to the purpose and benefits of discussions were different. Most of them, however, said that they want to provide a space for readers to be able to actively participate and express their own opinions. One of the respondents said he was confident about the

³⁹ *The study focused on three minorities: the Roma, Muslims and gays; available for download: <http://www.hatefree.cz/blo/analyzy/959-hejt-chutna-podelit>*

⁴⁰ *www.hatefree.cz/blo/analyzy/1049-analyza-verbez*

purpose of the discussions, adding: “The discussions often bring added value to the article, both on the informative side (which does not happen often) and by refining the point of view and opinions on the issue.” A well-represented opinion was that discussions help people to get out of their “bubbles” and get to know opinions other than those they are used to hearing due to communicating with like-minded people. Also the added value of certain comments was noted. Comments may provide interesting information, refer to new facts or notify the author of the article/editorial team of a factual mistake. On the other hand, most respondents also agreed that valuable contributions that further develop the discussion are not very frequent. So-called trolling, when people try to sow discord among posters by using irony (although often doing so with good intentions), also does not contribute to the meaningfulness of the discussions. This leads to a situation where, in the end, we do not know who is genuinely behind which opinion, and who’s just having fun pretending to have that opinion. The whole discussion is thus heavily disrupted and becomes meaningless. Therefore, some respondents add that discussions can only be meaningful if they are regulated. One of the editors of a prominent Czech medium added to this: “In principle, it is good to have a discussion, to have some feedback, but it is not easy to have it under control. The idea is to build and maintain a loyal group of readers and discussion plays a certain role here.” According to the editors of smaller news websites and most other respondents, discussions in the major media are hard to manage. One of the respondents pointed out: “The point is that the reader of the article would learn more. I feel that for large sites, discussion is just a tool to increase web traffic. To attract people who then talk nonsense there. Some people do not even read articles and go straight to the discussions. It is enough for those sites because the user is on their website. He/she sees the ads, can click on them, and read them. I guess we do not all have the same goals. Of course traffic matters if it is a site that makes money. The question is how far should one go.”

This “economic argument”, according to which the discussion is presented as a tool to increase traffic, was not confirmed by any of the respondents representing an online newspaper with a large number of readers. All of them, however, presumed that the increase in readership is one of the reasons why readers are allowed to discuss on the websites. According to most respondents, in the case of smaller newspapers this argument is not very relevant. According to the estimate of one of the respondents, the number of page views on their website would fall by 2-4% with the removal of discussions and that would not endanger their traffic significantly.

Another question with regard to the meaningfulness of discussions is related to the nature of discussions and the extent to which they can retroactively affect readers’ perception of the article. Some of the respondents believe that this happens quite often. It is also not ruled out that unregulated discussions full of racist and xenophobic comments could cause distaste and distrust among some readers towards certain online newspapers. Therefore, they would stop reading the articles appearing on them out of principle.

Can online discussions be dangerous for society?

We can ask not only whether the discussions reflect public opinion, but also whether they can influence the overall atmosphere in society. According to some respondents too much importance is attributed to discussions. Others pointed out that, e.g. the statement “gypsies to gas chambers” somewhere in the

discussion below an article, does not mean that someone would go out and kill Roma people. Nevertheless, the impact of such things on public opinion should certainly not be underestimated. According to most respondents, Facebook and some popular blogs in particular have great importance in this respect. “It is true that these days it’s unlikely anyone normal will join in the discussions, they are frequented by the same people who have a need to reassure themselves, and I would not overestimate all this. Facebook, however, has big influence, such statements receive wide publicity there,” said one respondent, adding: “With the advent of social networks racism did not increase, but it has been given far greater room to manoeuvre. These statements clearly create an atmosphere in which some idiot could snap and go and murder a Roma; the impression is created that all this is something normal and acceptable.” Another respondent goes even further by warning that if we do not prosecute hateful and aggressive behaviour on the Internet, people can get the impression that what they say online is fine and that it is also justifiable in real life. One respondent, who is an officer of the Police of the CR and works in a team that is in charge of combating racist and extremist manifestations, said that anti-Roma demonstrations that took place during 2013 reached such a scale thanks to the Internet. The Internet became a means of connection and mobilization for people, as well as a means to assert one’s opinions. “It is clear to everyone these days that it is a means to influence people, it is a public space. Therefore, hate speech has no place on the Internet,” said another respondent. Most other respondents agreed with the need to combat various manifestations of hate speech in online discussions, so that there is no impression that it is a social norm. The question of how to approach this situation is discussed in the following chapter.

Possibilities and approaches to the regulation of Internet discussions

Most online news media in the Czech Republic address the question of the cultivation of discussions below articles and on social networks in various ways. As one of the respondents stated: “It is a serious problem which has been on the rise over the last two years, in connection with the situation in Ukraine, this issue is receiving a greater social significance.” Approaches to solving this problem are different and vary depending on whether posts are in discussion forums or on social networks. The main role is played by the size and popularity of a particular medium (the number of readers, whether it is a daily or a weekly). Frequency and quantity of published articles and the related number of posters are also very important. There exist, for example, news sites like Aktuálně.cz, Novinky.cz and iDnes.cz where about 2,000-7,000 posts appear daily in the discussions. The management of such a large number of comments, which are being posted 24 hours a day, cannot be handled by one person or even by several people who would do this as a secondary activity in addition to editorial work. That is why online media publishers recruit staff who only deal with discussion moderation. According to the respondents, sometimes up to 4 people may be hired. Apart from them, reporters in charge of each section are also involved in moderation, and possibly other people from the newspaper, or even the authors of articles themselves. Cooperation with readers who can actively point out to the “harmful content” is also used. In the case of smaller or opinion-based sites, the reporters are mainly responsible for moderation/regulation of discussions. Only rarely do we come across someone whose only job description is discussion monitoring and moderation. In the case of comment regulation, editors and reporters have quite a lot of room for the application of different strategies. The main issue that usually needs to be addressed is whether a discussion below articles should be open at all.

To have or not to have a discussion?

The strategy of complete cancellation of discussions under articles, or basically not opening them, has not been very popular with the Czech Internet media until now. However, with the increase of negative and hateful posts in discussions since late last year, the attitude of some of the online media publishers on this issue is beginning to change. An example can be a gradual reduction in discussions on the popular Aktuálně.cz site. In the beginning of the year, the site initially decided to close the debate on selected issues (Ukraine, the Roma, president Zeman). With the outbreak of the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015, when hateful comments spread, more topics were gradually added. Currently the opportunity to discuss on this site is rather limited. Under the influence of the refugee crisis and the rise of hateful comments, other news sites have been gradually changing their strategy as well. One can no longer freely discuss on the Respekt.cz site. It accepts comments and only publishes the most interesting ones. The possibility of anonymous posting has become very restricted on Blesk.cz, which instead offers its readers the ability to send suggestions or remarks directly to the editor. Anonymous discussions are only allowed on topics that aren't highly controversial, or through the Facebook profile. Earlier (in 2014), discussion posts under articles were cancelled in some local daily newspapers. For example, Mostecký deník took this step because of the exceeding number of intolerable posts, since “the vast majority of them contain racist innuendos, gossip or vulgar insults aimed at specific people⁴¹”. Other Internet newspapers, which for a long time have not been allowing reader discussions, are Britské listy and tabloid daily Super.cz.

A less radical solution to the problem of regulation is not opening a discussion for controversial topics. Apart from the example mentioned with Aktuálně.cz, this step was also taken by the Novinky.cz and Blesk.cz sites. The latter newspaper, however, did not close discussions altogether, but gave readers an opportunity to send comments on relevant articles or suggestions directly to editors. The iDnes.cz site always opens discussions, but if discussions develop undesirably, it sometimes closes them.

A possible solution is also a time limitation to the discussion, meaning it is only open to readers leaving comments for a short period (e.g. 24-48 hours). After this period, the discussion is closed and it is no longer possible to post. For example, iDnes.cz uses this method.

This year, the weekly Respekt.cz, following the example of some foreign media, came up with a new and unique strategy for the Czech media environment. It cancelled traditional discussions completely and replaced them with moderated comments and opinions, which are sent to editors in advance. The approach used by Czech Radio is also unique; based on the model used by the BBC, it only rarely allows discussions and only on selected topics. Blesk.cz is behaving similarly with certain topics.

Technical solutions for regulation / ways to moderate discussions

There are different technical ways to moderate discussions. What most editors have in common is the fact that they react to contributions only after they are posted. Rarely do they read, modify or delete comments before they are published. There are a variety of systems that can be used to make the work of moderators easier. Disqus is one of the most used in the Czech Republic, however some editors use their own systems.

⁴¹ http://mostecky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/mostecky-denik-rusi-diskuse-na-webu-prekrocily-meze-unosnosti-20141222.html

Using the commenting service Disqus

Disqus is a system that is currently used by a number of sites. Rozhlas.cz (since 2011), Respekt.cz (temporarily until 2015) and the news site ČTK (since 2012) were among the first to use this service. Gradually others joined in, such as Aktuálně.cz (since 2014), Romea.cz (since 2015) and so on. This is a fairly sophisticated system, which makes the regulation of discussions much easier for the editors. To put it simply, it is as an automatic spam filter for comments. It is up to editorial staff which words they want to capture in the comments. The comments including keywords are automatically identified and moved into a “suspicious” comments folder. Editors can then work with them further. The list of forbidden words is called a “blacklist”. Usually, it contains about 20-30 commonly used inappropriate words. Some blacklists, however, might be very long and, due to the “creativity” of the posters, they need to be constantly modified and expanded. Obviously not all hate speech can be captured through blacklists. Some statements may initially appear harmless and their inadmissibility will only show itself in the context of the whole sentence or the previous post. A poster who finds themselves on the so-called blacklist can have their account completely blocked. It is obvious, however, that this is an expensive and time-consuming activity, the efficiency of which can never be 100% guaranteed. If posters sign up for the Disqus program, they automatically gain access to all forums run by sites using this system. At the same time, they are also more “supervised”. Every reader (including unregistered users) has an option to click on their name to find out how many times and where they have posted, including what they wrote. The Disqus service provides users with many benefits, but at the same time it also raises many questions, for example, related to the fact that this service is provided free of charge. The fact that the administrator of the system basically possesses a vast database of users, and this administrator knows what sites users post on most frequently is also questionable. The database is also publicly accessible.

Using one's own system

Besides Disqus, some sites (for example Novinky.cz, iDnes.cz) use their own independent systems that work on similar principles, such as creating a list of “forbidden words” and so on. More detailed information on the operation of these systems is not available.

Other ways to moderate discussions

One of the less frequently used options is manual removal of comments without technical assistance from systems such as Disqus. Another option is active involvement from other actors (journalists, readers), or a rather uncommon practice, when editors themselves write the first post.

The question of registration

Over time, as part of the effort to cultivate discussions, different sites also made reader registration necessary in order to join discussions. The previously mentioned site Novinky.cz (2009)⁴² was among the first to take this step when it introduced a relatively complicated correspondence registration process. Nowadays, almost all sites requiring registration work in this way. The only difference is whether they allow posters to use a nickname or whether they require a real name and a Facebook profile for registra-

⁴² www.novinky.cz/domaci/160046-diskuse-na-novinkach-ceka-vyrazna-zmena.html

tion. For example, the iDnes.cz site began requiring a real name in order to take part in discussions after the Code of Posters was proven ineffective. Another possibility that Czech online media sites still do not use is a fee for the ability to take part in discussions.

An alternative approach: Building a community

As mentioned above, the majority of respondents agreed that they perceive discussions as positive and shutting down discussions is not the direction they would like to go. According to many respondents, the purpose of the discussions is not only getting feedback, but also building a community. Managing discussions in such a way that readers would really bring something to others with their contributions is not easy and it is impossible without some regulation. One respondent said: “We see discussion as a part of our website. It should bring something to the readers. For this reason we are trying to delete and block all racist comments, not only those that violate the law but also those in which the author is insulted, or when posters insult each other.” The respondent assumes that they are successful, especially given the small number of comments - about two hundred a day. So how can we support serious posters and build a community when, in the opinion of most respondents, a large amount of people commenting on their sites do not really care about the real debate? How to attract the “decent and serious” debaters who would have something to say on the topic? According to several respondents, it is important that the sites give up on a marketing strategy when trying to get as many readers as quickly as possible. Instead they should focus on qualitative changes such as building a community of loyal and decent readers. This can only be achieved with very active discussion moderation. The moment the community establishes itself and develops some standards, it will all work through self-regulation. According to some respondents, the Czech NYX site or Hate Free Culture, where hateful and absurd comments were almost eliminated, are examples proving this is possible. As to the monitored news websites, the iDnes.cz site is doing relatively well in this respect. Posters still insult one another, but hate speech has been almost eliminated. Aktuálně.cz is quite similar in this respect. However, it is quite debatable whether we can talk about building a community on this site, considering the limited posting possibilities. Moderation is not only about the strict removal of posts and the blocking of users, but rather about expressing what is unacceptable and what is very beneficial. As one of the survey respondents said, ultimately, this strategy increases readership, because a serious discussion stimulates the motivation to read the article and find out more information on the matter. According to some respondents, interference with anonymity and introduction of complicated registration processes are also mistakes. Complicated registration and being incapable of posting anonymously not only deter haters and trolls, but also serious debaters who could sway the discussion in another direction. Tips on how to build a community and promote quality discourse in discussions (to generate high-quality discourse) are described in the Recommendations chapter.

The Facebook case

Options for the regulation of Facebook posts differ significantly from the moderation of discussions below articles. This is mainly due to the fact that readers comment on articles using their own Facebook pages that only they can manage. In this situation editors have only a few limited options. Most often, editors would just hide inappropriate posts on their website. In this case, however, the comment is only hidden on that website. It remains visible on the Facebook page of the user and it can also be seen by his/her friends. Another option that can be used is when an editor (the administrator of the page) comments on messages. Editors only use this option in exceptional cases. "I intervene sometimes when it is something that can be prevented with one sentence. Or when one question is enough to make a person think about what they wrote," says an editor of a popular Czech daily, adding: "When I catch a comment that I know will lead to an unnecessary chain of hateful reactions, I also intervene to try and calm things down." According to most respondents, editors also intervene in cases when hatred is directed at them or their editorial team. Some kind of regulation can also be traced in a positive assessment of interesting and factual contributions through so-called "liking". However, as one respondent stated, for it to have more significance, the entire editorial staff should join in.

Facebook has "Community Standards" on its page, where, among other things, the rules regulating hate speech are also described. The Standards say the following will be deleted "verbal expressions, which include content that directly attacks people based on their: race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or serious physical disability or disease." And further, that "organizations and people dedicated to promoting hatred against these protected groups are not allowed a presence on Facebook". At the same time, it is also noted that: "sometimes people share content containing someone else's hate speech for the purpose of raising awareness or educating others about that hate speech. When this is the case, we expect people to clearly indicate their purpose, which helps us better understand why they shared that content." Many, however, believe that the social networking site Facebook is not fighting hate speech vigorously enough. Recently, The Federal Republic of Germany, especially the Minister of Justice Heiko Maas, has been involved in this issue the most. In August of this year he sent a letter to Facebook's management in which he requested a reconsideration of the policy on racist and xenophobic posts directed at refugees, and suggested an approach similar to contributions depicting nudity (The Telegraph, 2015). Repeated arson attacks on refugee hostels in Germany, which had been preceded by a seditious campaign on Facebook, led the minister to take this step (Kábátová, Lidové noviny). The result of the meeting that took place at the company's European headquarters was the establishment of a "Task Force". It is based on the German branch of Facebook, and is financially supported by the Ministry. The group members' job description includes the evaluation of hate speech on the Internet and, mainly, monitoring whether or not these statements conflict with German law. Facebook also took action and organized a meeting with representatives of local communities, with the aim of finding a solution to this "complex" issue. At the same time Facebook introduced a policy that favours the promotion of "counter-statements" (counter speech) rather than the removal of problematic comments. In essence, this means that Facebook's intention is to support users in commenting even more. The founders of Facebook also believe that "people can use Facebook to challenge ideas, institutions, and practices. Such discussion can promote debate and greater understanding." The question is whether this proclamation is an attempt to

strengthen independent political debates on controversial issues, or a deliberate business strategy. Nowadays, the influence of Facebook is enormous and it will increase in the future. In May this year, nine media companies (The New York Times, BBC News, Bild, National Geographic, BuzzFeed, NBC News, The Atlantic, The Guardian and Der Spiegel) concluded an agreement with Facebook, in which they committed that they would publish some reports through Facebook exclusively. The new service will be called Instant Articles. Content publishers will be able to either insert adverts into articles themselves, sell it and keep all the revenue, or allow Facebook to sell advertising and keep 30 percent. Facebook will also allow content publishers to collect data about people who read the articles⁴³.

⁴³ <http://byznys.ihned.cz/c1-64006020-facebook-presvedcil-media-aby-cast-obsahu-zverejnovala-primo-pres-socilni-sit-zapoji-se-bbc-i-spiegel>

CONCLUSION

The aims of this study were to describe the pros and cons associated with discussions on the Internet, to map out the way Czech online media regulate hate speech in discussion forums, and to reflect on the possible impacts of hate speech. Interviews with the representatives of Czech online media revealed that the problem of hate speech in online discussions or on social networks is a topic a lot of them deal with. What unites most of them is the idea of media openness, which should allow readers to express their opinions freely in discussion forums, without censorship. On the other hand, nearly all respondents agreed that with the increase in hate comments, this openness has its limits. In short, the majority of respondents believe that discussions are meaningful, but only if they are well managed, generate quality content, and can be seen as a beneficial part of the article. What we are witnessing at the moment, though, is rather an attempt for even greater regulation than the proclaimed openness. Among the monitored sites, *Aktuálně.cz* and *Blesk.cz* were most affected by the changes in the approach to the regulation of discussions when they opted for a strategy of not opening discussions under highly controversial issues. So was the *Respekt.cz* news site, which introduced so-called pre-moderation and let editors decide in advance on the publication of posts. In addition to the increase in hate speech in connection to the refugee crisis, the shift towards stricter regulation of discussions might also be related to developments in judicial practice. Until recently, persecuting people for hate speech on the Internet had not been widely applied in judicial practice in the Czech Republic. The first conditional sentence was ruled only in 2012 and concerned the promotion of Nazism on the social network Facebook. This was followed by a suspended sentence for former MP Otto Chaloupek in 2014 for insulting comments about Roma people on Facebook, and a suspended sentence for Michal Kesudis in 2015 for expressing sympathy with a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms (Afghan Taliban) and endorsing a criminal offense on Facebook. Internet news site operators, however, were only affected this year. When a legal action by activist Jaroslav Suchý against Our Media (the publisher of *Parlamentní listy*) succeeded at the Municipal Court in Prague. Suchý sued the publisher for racist insults. He eventually succeeded in the European Court of Human Rights, and sued Our Media for 150,000 Czech crowns (about 5,500 Euros). In the ruling on this case, a legal precedent that occurred in June, 2015 could have played a certain role, when the European Court of Human Rights upheld the liability of the operator of Estonian Internet portal Delfi for the offensive comments of its users.

In any case, these developments raise the question: where is the line between freedom of speech and protection from hate speech? Does freedom of expression mean freedom to express hatred as well? The Internet and online discussions conceal a potential threat. Discussions are taking place in a public space, which entails the possibility of influencing people's perception of things, sometimes negatively. Therefore, content that is clearly illegal should not be given space in discussions. On the other hand, a respondent says: "If people with unacceptable views are treated in a way that involves either hiding or deleting their comments, they will get even angrier at us," and adds: "The editors should try and open the discussion to all and clearly support those who behave decently." It can be assumed that if this was achieved, we could continue to freely express our opinions without fear of being silenced, while the amount of hateful commentary would be limited as well. Is this idea just a naive unattainable illusion, or is it a step in the right direction? Restriction of hate speech on the Internet using all available resources

is necessary and important. At the same time, we should not forget that we cannot achieve the desired changes using restrictions only. Hate speech is based in society and its settings. Therefore, it is necessary not only to ban and punish, but also to educate and inform about how harmful the impacts of hate speech can be, not only on an individual level, but in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended primarily for editorial staff responsible for moderating discussions. Given that the issue of discussions should not only be tackled by moderators/administrators, some of the recommendations are also relevant to other members of editorial staff.

How to not get lost in the abundance of comments?

- *not opening a discussion on controversial topics*

Some topics generate hateful commentary more often than others. Therefore, it is up to the editors to decide whether it makes sense to open discussions or not. This is particularly relevant in situations where a number of articles are released on one topic in a short period of time. In this case it is possible to open a discussion, for example, only to one of the articles, and pay more attention to its moderation.

- *time limited discussions*

Contributions to discussions can be permitted only for a certain period of time (e.g. 24-48 hours). You can warn the debaters about the time limit in advance, so they are not surprised.

Ways of moderating hateful commentary, or how quality text can be generated

- *up-front moderation (pre-moderation)*

Pre-moderation (when comments do not appear directly below the text, but they are first sent to the editing room where they undergo selection or editing) is quite time consuming. It also does not inspire much confidence in the debaters, because the “selection policy” is not very transparent.

- *active involvement of other actors (readers, article authors)*

It is possible to involve readers/debaters in the moderation of discussions by giving them the ability to report abusive comments. Active involvement of authors means that they should be familiar with the moderation techniques and approaches practiced in the newsroom.

- *rewards and loyalty programs*

High-quality texts can be generated by using loyalty programs, in which users have a certain number of points that can be increased or removed if they violate the rules of discussion.

Technical possibilities for moderation

- *Using the Disqus comment system*

It is an automatic spam filter for comments. Editors are free to determine what words they want to capture in the comments. Comments including these keywords are automatically identified and moved to a blacklist. Editors can then work with them further. Not all hate speech can be captured through blacklists.

- *Using other/own software system*

Not all users have confidence in the Disqus system, especially because the system administrators possess a vast database of users and know which websites they post on. The information about what, where and how users are commenting is also open to the public. There are other software systems operating on a similar principle on the market. These include Livefyre, IntenseDebat, Google Plus Comments, Echo, Realtidbit and more. Alternatively, one can develop your own software.

The question of anonymity

Until recently, the ability to discuss anonymously was quite widespread. It also attracted people to discussions. Today this ability is greatly restricted by various sites, for example by allowing its readers to discuss only via a Facebook profile, or under their real name. Also, the issue of registration has become more complicated and in some cases correspondence registration is used, when a debater logs in with a password that is sent by editors in an email. Both restrictions have caused a decrease in the number of debaters, often including those whose comments were constructive and of high quality. In order for this to happen as little as possible, it is good to have a simple registration process and the ability to maintain anonymity, especially on issues that “require” this, such as homosexuality, domestic violence, illness, etc. In this case, however, some technical questions regarding the existence of two debating systems would need to be resolved.

Well designed rules

The rules for debating, which are often called the Code of posters, can only work if they are well designed and if their strict observance is required. If the Code is violated, it is enough to delete a post with a reference to the Code’s violation. No further arguments are needed.

Freedom of speech and how to defend against accusations of censorship

Without doubt, freedom of speech should be protected. That does not mean, however, that if people break the law in a public space (which the Internet is) it should be overlooked. Online media sites which are operated privately have the right to decide what to publish on their website and what not to publish. It is at their discretion which comments they want to keep or not on their website. In public media this may be a slightly more controversial issue, but even here, if the editors establish certain criteria (Code of posters), then they are entitled to enforce them. People also often violate the law by their comments, which has not been consistently punished so far. There are indications that this situation will change in the future.

Community building and support of quality discourse

The effort of most editors is to build a community of loyal readers and debaters who will be polite to each other, and their discussions will be beneficial both to the editors and other readers. Here are a few tips that can make this difficult task easier.

- It is not enough to simply delete and eliminate poor-quality comments. It is crucial to promote quality responses (e.g. by liking them) and therefore generate quality content (discourse).
- “Stickers/labels” and graphic notes, which notify debaters that they broke the rules, prove to be a good tool.
- These stickers/labels can take various forms: “Do not be rude,” “Behave yourself,” “Discuss the issue.” They can be also used instead of “liking” to convey specific messages: “An interesting thought,” etc.
- It is possible to announce the best comments/posters.
- Is it possible to welcome new users saying, “Hello, hi, welcome...”
- It is necessary to have well-designed and clear rules.
- Rules must be transparent and must indicate why posts may be deleted.
- Decency is a basic rule, irony and mockery from editors never works.
- The engagement of the entire editorial staff is required. They all bear responsibility.
- Exceptionally good comments can be presented on a FB page or newspaper website.

Responsibility of editors

Although many members of the editorial staff believe that it is not their task to educate readers and debaters, it is necessary to realize that the media has enormous influence on people’s minds and they repeatedly produce stereotypes and misconceptions about minorities, migrants, etc. Editors should try to humanize topics they write about, give space to minorities to express themselves, so they are not only being discussed. Journalists should be provided training and given clear information about how to write about these issues sensitively, without using censorship or hiding certain facts.

What hate speech is and what it is not

In online discussions and social networks we encounter messages that are vulgar, offensive, derisive, they reproduce stereotypes and so on. Sometimes it is very difficult or even impossible to determine the line between what constitutes hate speech or not.

What does the law say?

Some guidance in this respect can be found in the Czech criminal law, which considers hate speech, including its Internet version, to be a criminal offence, which is punishable by law. Offences related to hate speech committed through a publicly accessible computer network fall under the category of strict liability in criminal law and their punishment ranges between 6 months and 3 years.

From the perspective of Czech Criminal Law, comments can be regarded as hate speech when they include:

- defamation of nation, race, ethnic or other group of persons (§ 355 of the Criminal Code),
- incitement to hatred against a group of persons or restriction of their rights and freedoms (§ 356),
- expression of sympathy for these movements (§ 404)
- denial, questioning, approving and justifying of genocide (§ 405).
- All the offences are similar in the fact that hate speech has to be directed towards a group of people.

Examples of hate speech that can be prosecuted according to the Criminal Code:

“That’s great, but if there will be the same dirty degenerates as before the renovation, it was a ‘complete waste of time’ and money.” *(Official Facebook page for the town Ústí nad Labem, responding to an article about the reopening of a renovated pool)*

“So move out and live with them in their apartments they have air-conditioning for free because they already sold the windows what more could you ask for they are disgusting pigs I do not know how anyone can empathize with them and how come they cannot get work, if they want to they work!!!” *(mostecky.denik.cz, response to an article on local cleaning in district Chánov)*

“All you CAN DO is steal, plunder, commit crime, violence, spread disease, bother others with your stink, noise, mess, and dirt, and verbally assault and, unfortunately, often also physically assault, you do not appreciate anything and nothing is ever good for you!! In the Slovak Republic you would have lived in coated cardboard boxes and nobody would have given you anything, not as it happens here!! How do Chánov and other districts and houses look after your ‘integration’?? They are good enough for the demolition squad!!!” *(Krajské listy, a reaction to the article about quintuplets and organic food)*

What are the criteria used in identifying hate speech? ⁴⁴

Besides the law, moderators of discussions can use the following criteria in their difficult task of identifying hate speech. These criteria are based on forum monitoring, a definition by the Council of Europe, and the work of S. Benesch.

Criteria for identifying hate speech:

- Hate speech can be directed at groups or individuals.
- It can be implicit or explicit.

Hate speech contains:

- Degradation: comparing humans with animals, insects, pests etc.
- Convincing readers that they are threatened by a certain group of people (they represent security, economic, health threats, etc.). We can also include here blaming a group of people that they do not comply with certain habits, laws, rules, and that they are agents of criminal and pathological phenomena.
- Convincing readers that a certain group of people threatens their culture, integrity, identity and so on.
- A call to action (to discriminate, to expel, to evacuate, to kill and so on).

⁴⁴*In their formulation, we drew upon the results of the monitoring of discussion forums, conducted within research of Internet discussions in the Czech Republic, a definition by the Council of Europe and the criteria that were developed by S. Benesch in relation to hate speech that can be socially dangerous. Unlike S. Benesch we did not include a requirement that the statement should be pronounced by a socially influential person in connection with some event among the criteria for the definition of hate speech. Hate speech also does not apply only to statements directed at a group, but also to statements which are directed at individuals.*

Examples of anti-Roma hate speech:

- Comparison to animals (primates, rats, pigs, cockroaches, dogs, etc.).

“Roma are like dogs for Czechs, doggie will chew something, carry stuff away, make something dirty. A Roma would steal, destroy, take stuff to the junkyard and make a mess around the house. So they are also like pets that we have to take care of.” (*Official Facebook page for the town Ústí nad Labem*)

- Convincing readers that they threatened by a certain group of people (in this case economic and social threats) by blaming people for law violations.

“It is just the way it is, ordinary people have to work and they just go to somebody else’s land and steal.” (*Facebook, Naše Trmice*)

- Call for physical destruction, including wishes of misfortune or death.

“Drop a bomb there, they are just parasites.” (*e-mostecko*)

- A call to discriminate.

“Not that I am a racist, but for these maladjusted people I would have opened up Adolf’s camps. With everything that happened there. A full day slimming spa, practicing sleeping treatment, and especially the shower. So they learn cleanliness. I hope that you people understand this. After all, I think of their welfare. I do not want them to work. Just make sure they have good hygiene.” (*Official Facebook page for the town Ústí nad Labem*)

- A call for evacuation/expulsion

“Terasa is one of the last parts of Usti where there is a minimal amount of blacks, and they will kill it here too. I do not know why one would treat them to things when they do not appreciate anything, and all they can do is hold out their dirty, lazy paws. They should be finally expelled from the country, like in France!” (*Official Facebook page for the town Ústí nad Labem*)

- Convincing readers that a certain group of people threatens their purity, integrity, identity and so on

“It will be necessary to eliminate and expel immigrants - incl. gypsies and deal with those who favour them and support immigration and multiculturalism. - Czech lands are and must remain Czech!!! - Death to collaborators and traitors!!!” (*Krajské listy*)

“If this black plague will multiply so fast, this country will be called the Czech-Roma Republic in 50 years. Gypsies are not to blame for that, it’s because of the politicians and laws that were created by these idiots. One day they will not know what to do with them, but it will be too late. The state is kissing their ass, it fears the EU. We need politicians like Sládek who were not afraid to attack the gypsies, but our smart-ass intelligence, as always, stopped everything. And we will regret these mistakes.” (*Krajské listy*)

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ABOUT US

Multicultural Center Prague, z.s. (Czech Republic)

Multicultural Center Prague is a non-profit organization that aims at support and respect for human rights, support of political equality and reduction of social disparities. It is active in the fields of education, research, and public debate connected to migration and interethnic relations.

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