Social networking sites – (un)trustworthy news sources?

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Summary: *The impact of social networking sites on journalism is increasing in Croatian journalism. The journalists are balancing between using social networking sites as free and fast news sources, and maintaining the professional standards in news reporting. The aim of the paper is to examine whether social networking sites can be considered trustworthy news sources and consequently, whether the media content in which social networking sites are used as news sources should be trusted by the media audience. The study presents a content analysis of media reports in three Croatian daily newspapers and on three Croatian news portals on the 17-year-old Croatian girl's disappearance in June 2011, in which Croatian journalists used the Facebook page created by the missing girl's family as a source. The results of the study have been used to evaluate whether journalists have been following professional standards while using social networking sites as news sources, and whether their practice is in accordance with the four-dimensional model of trust in news media introduced by Kohring and Matthes (2007). Our evaluation shows that the main professional standards and all of the four dimensions of trust in media have been violated in the analysed articles.*

Keywords: *audience, journalism, news source, social networking sites, trust*

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Introduction

Under the influence of digital technologies and a long-lasting financial crisis, modern journalism has been increasingly turning to free, available and fast sources, web sites, blogs, social media sites and social networking sites. As a result of these changes, journalism practice is characterised by a great number of violations of professional standards and professional codes of ethics.

We believe the role of professional standards is dual – on the one hand, they help journalists do a professional job of informing the public and, on the other, they enable the audience to trust in journalism relying on these standards in order to make daily decisions.

The unique perspective of this paper lies in exploring the question of audiences' trust in media in a rather non-standard way. This paper is based on the research of media content through the method of content analysis, and not on the research of the audience. We have conducted a content analysis of media reports on the 17-year-old Croatian girl's disappearance in June 2011 published in Croatian daily newspapers and on news portals, which used the Facebook page *Nestala Antonia Bilić (Missing Antonia Bilic)*, created by the missing girl's family as a news source.

The results of the study have been used to verify whether the journalists have been following professional standards when using social networking sites as news sources, and whether their practice is in accordance with the four-dimensional model of trust in news media introduced by Kohring and Matthes (2007). The final aim of the paper is to determine whether social networking sites can be considered trustworthy news sources and consequently, whether the media content in which social networking sites are used as news sources can be trusted by the media audience.

We believe the findings of this paper will help to emphasise the growing problem of trust in the era of social networking sites and demonstrate the emerging problems which, as we argue, make it difficult for the media audience to trust the offered media content.

The impact of social networking sites on journalism

Basic claim of news reporting is that an author should be trusted. In order to trust a journalist, audience needs to understand what s/he is reporting about. In their stories, journalists must provide the audience with sufficient evidence to allow them to see the case for themselves, as well as to understand why

they should believe the evidence displayed in the story (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011: 73). If s/he wants to be understood, a journalist needs to meet the requirements of good writing – to be correct, consistent, concise, concrete, clear, coherent and creative (Kennedy et al., 1993: 68).

Journalists are also required to follow professional standards of journalism. They are reflecting a time in which they originate, and main principles of modern models include *fairness* and *accuracy* (Bennett, 2009; Fuller, 2010; Malović, 2005; Itule & Anderson, 2003). The list of principles introduced by Dan Gillmor, who identifies thoroughness, accuracy and fairness as the core principles of quality journalism in new age of online (Gillmor, 2004: 134), along with the subsequently added *transparency* (Gillmor, 2005), has proved to be the most adequate for exploring this field. For Gillmor, the first goal of the best reporters is to learn as much as they can, stressing that they "… always want to make one more call, check with one more source" (2005). But today thoroughness is more than asking questions. As Gillmor puts it, "… it means, whenever possible, asking readers for their input" (2005). Accuracy requires a journalist to get facts straight and "… to say what you don't know, not just what you do". Ibelema and Powell stress that "the standards of accuracy and source attribution establish trust between traditional news media and their audiences, and trustworthiness in this context has been shown to establish credibility" (Ibelema & Powell, 2001, in Messner & Garrison, 2011: 123). Gillmor (2005) also defines *fairness* as listening to different viewpoints and incorporating them into journalism. In order to be transparent, a journalist needs to disclose certain things, such as financial conflicts of interest. Thus, "…another way to be transparent is in the way we present a story" (Gillmor, 2005). Journalists should link to source material as much as possible, bolstering what they tell people with close-to-the-ground facts and data.

Meanwhile, digital technologies and media convergence have changed media and journalism dramatically: newspapers are not only publishing their articles in almost real time on their websites or tablet applications, but their audience can check video and audio materials of a certain event almost immediately after it ended. On the other hand, TV and radio channels are publishing online articles and commentaries, and their audio and video programmes are made available on demand in a short notice. News portals are the biggest rivals of all mainstream media since they do not have space or time restrictions, and can publish text, audio and video information. In recent years, social networking sites have also become the source of information. As Kovach and Rosenstiel

underline, more and more news today come second or third-hand, as journalists are kept at distance from original sources by communication "managers" (2011: 30). This brings new forms of violations of ethical and professional principles of reporting, as, for example, legitimising suspicious social networking site content as trustworthy news source (e.g. Scepanovic, 2012), or media covering a guerrilla marketing campaign based on a fictitious romantic story as a truthful news without prior verification (e.g. Krajačić, 2011). These and similar situations bring into focus the question whether the public can trust such media content.

Social network sites, as boyd and Ellison (2008: 210) define them, are

> "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system".

The rise of social media and their potential impact on news is undoubtedly one of the topics in technology attracting big attention. In a May 2011 report analysing online news behaviour, the researchers of the Pew Research Center "Project for Excellence in Journalism" concluded: "searching for news was the most important development of the last decade, sharing news may be among the most important of the next" (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Oriella PR Network's global digital journalism study, conducted in April and May 2012, showed that there is a significant number of journalists who are treating social media channels as news sources and as means of validation (Oriella PR Network, 2012). More than half of the surveyed journalists admitted to have drawn on social media posts from sources they know when looking for story ideas or angles (Oriella PR Network, 2012: 2). Globally, over half (54%) of respondents used updates from social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, while 44% used blogs they already knew to source angles for new stories. However, in the case of unfamiliar sources only 26% of journalists worldwide would use social media sites and 22% would use an unknown blog as a source (Oriella PR Network, 2012: 5).

The traditional media have been intensively searching for the best ways of dealing with the new, completely changed media landscape. Some of the world's most notable news organisations, such as Reuters, Washington Post and Associated Press, recognised the role of social media in informing the public, and they formed different guidelines for their use. BBC went even further by introducing the Social Media Representative as a mediator between social me-

dia users, on one side, and journalists and editors, on the other (BBC, 2012). Croatian media organisations still have not recognised the ambiguous impact of social media on journalism, thus the use of social media has not yet been regulated in Croatian journalists' codes of conduct.

This is one of the reasons why today trust in media news is probably more important than ever. The additional reason is the fact that modern journalism is 'journalism of aggregation', which is "…built not on producing news but on harnessing and organising existing information" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011: 52). Reasons can be found in financial, as well as in cultural capital, which is associated with class, professional status, expertise, along with legitimacy and credibility, gained through previous activities within the political and media fields (Fenton, 2010: 158).

With a view to cutting costs, news organisations are reducing staff, at the same time increasing the number of produced stories. The remaining journalists are increasingly expected to supply more and more material, taking it from free, available and fast sources to fill the gaps more quickly (Phillips & Witschge, 2012: 13). Phillips calls this new 'copy paste' culture "news cannibalism" (2012: 52). She emphasises that audience cannot know who wrote the original story, where the information originated from or how the source could be checked if journalists used material without checking it (Phillips, 2012: 56).

The question of trust in media

Since the beginnings of journalism, as a profession based on searching, checking and publishing information with the primary goal of informing society, audience's trust in news has been one of the central questions in this field. Luhmann sees trust as a solution to specific problems of risk (2000: 94), and points up its requirement of a previous engagement of a person (2000: 96). For Rosanvallon trust is "an institutional economizer" which "eliminates the need for various procedures of verification and proof" (2008: 4). Trust is a precondition of what Giddens refers to as "ontological security: belief in a stable and shareable reality" (Giddens, 1991 in Coleman, 2012: 36).

Media content users have to deal with such risks on a daily basis. Since media deal with the distant world, audiences "usually find it difficult to verify media reports with non-media sources" (Tsfati & Peri, 2006: 170). As Kohring and Matthes put it, "the less an issue relates to personal experience, the more significant is the role that trust plays in the relationship between the media and their users" (2007: 248). If the users have alternative sources, the importance of

trust in media news is smaller. On the other hand, if the users, despite common belief, have no alternative in social networking sites, as it will be presented in this article, "… media dependency becomes crucial: in this case, citizens need to trust mass media as the sole provider of information" (Jackob, 2010: 590).

Trust in media is considered to be a decisive variable by communication researchers (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Tsfati & Peri, 2006; Kohring & Matthes, 2007), since it facilitates media use, moderates the relationship between media users and content, and, by doing this, enables direct media effects. What is more, mass media exist specifically to provide information to their public. The societal function of news media consists of selecting and conveying information about the complex interdependencies of modern society. By doing so, news media enable their public to fulfil their need for orientation to their social environment and to adjust their expectations regarding other social actors. Trust in news media is therefore a necessary condition for trust in other social actors (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 238). If they fulfil these roles without following the basic rules of profession, primarily the responsibilities of trustworthy and truthful reporting about events and information, media are losing credibility, which results in "losing audiences, societal influence, and legitimacy" (Jackob, 2010: 590).

This is why trust in media is becoming increasingly important as a scientific research topic. Even though the scholars previously concentrated mainly on the question of credibility of the media, lately there have been more and more studies focusing on the trust in media. Stephen Coleman believes the trust in media operates on two levels (2012: 36). "First-order trust involves an expectation that news producers will do what they are supposed to do: that they will try to tell us true stories and not made-up ones" (Coleman, 2012: 36). Second-order trust applies to news producers and news audiences agreeing on what the news is supposed to do.

> "This second-order problem of trust is at the core of a prevalent tension between contemporary news production values and news consumption frustrations. This tension matters because news only works as a sustainable feature of democratic culture if and when producers and audiences are on the same wavelength" (Coleman, 2012: 36).

Another model of trust in news media, introduced by Kohring and Matthes, assumes that news media are "continually aware of whether events of one specialized part of our differentiated society potentially may evoke consequences in other areas of the society" (2007: 239). Kohring and Matthes choose

the term "selectivity" as the theoretical basis for analysis, while "trust in news media means trust in their specific selectivity rather than in objectivity or truth" (2007: 239). The authors believe that recipients' assessment of trust in news media is based on four dimensions: trust in the selectivity of topics, trust in the selectivity of facts, trust in the accuracy of depictions and trust in journalistic assessment (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 239). We have chosen this model as the most appropriate for treating this topic, and we shall deal with it in a more detailed way. The first dimension – "trust in the selectivity of topics" – is associated with the selection of reported topics, implying that the recipients trust that the news media will focus on the topics and events that are relevant to them (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 239). The factor of trust in the selectivity of topics describes the role that trust has in making certain topics subjects of public discussion in the news media (2007: 246).

To be recognised as news, a story needs to be relevant, useful and interesting (Ricchiardi & Malović, 1996: 4). Different scholars introduce different values that determine newsworthiness, but mostly the lists of values include: impact, conflict, unusual components, prominence, proximity, timeliness and the audience (Ricchiardi & Malović, 1996: 5).

The second dimension of trust in news media is "trust in the selectivity of facts" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 239). This dimension applies to the selection of facts or background information pertaining to a topic that has already been selected, and it comprises the contextualisation of events. It is the way in which an event is contextualised that is relevant to this dimension (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 239, 246).

Along with the greater flow of data encountered by the public, there is a growing need for identifiable sources to be used to verify the reported information, as well as to highlight the most important and filter out less important aspects and information. Instead of sorting through information themselves, the public requires sources for which they can be certain to provide them with true and significant information (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011: 48).

The third dimension of trust in news media, "trust in the accuracy of depictions" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 240), applies to trust in verifiable and approvable accuracy of depicted facts: "… although observations are highly selective and their classification into 'right' or 'wrong' is not objectively assignable, a number of observations allow a standardized classification into 'right' and 'wrong' and are therefore verifiable" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 240). This dimension solely includes the empirical verification of factual information (2007: 246).

The statements offered in news that are not attributed to the individuals and institutions providing them can provoke suspicion (Carlson & Franklin, 2011: 1). Sources supply news stories with legitimacy and authority (Carlson & Franklin, 2011: 4).

The last, fourth dimension of trust in media news is "trust in journalistic assessment" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 240). In addition to the journalists' selection of an event or information, this dimension includes explicitly emphasised assessments, especially in a commentary structure, which "…offer advice as well as assessments of and appeals for action" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007: 240). It covers usefulness and appropriateness of journalistic commentary not only in reference to the display format of commentary: "…commentary enables an evaluative and thus highly informative classification of events" (2007: 246). The problem with comment is its ability to infiltrate in a news story, without the reader's, and sometimes the writer's, awareness, and also its ability to be "…dressed up as a straight reporting" (Randall, 2011: 225).

Online sources have become primary sources of information, many of them being quality publications (Li, 2006), and they have changed audiences' perceptions of media credibility. For example, already in 2001, Kiousis found that people perceived online news to be more credible than television news although less credible than newspapers (Nah & Chung, 2012: 717). In recent years this phenomenon spread throughout the world, including Croatia (Čuvalo, 2010). In a survey conducted in 56 countries, when asked which forms of advertising they trusted the most, 92% of more than 28,000 people answered "…recommendations of people I know" (Nielsen, 2012). Today, most of those recommendations people get through different social media from their 'friends'.

Quandt calls this phenomenon of growing trust in social media "network trust" and describes it as trust "based on an accumulated perception of 'personalized', individual trust. Social media users generally do not expect the other participants of social media to have a hidden agenda or to be 'puppets' of a larger institutionalized entity in the background" (2012: 14). The question of media credibility in eyes of news audiences is critical today given that the users are increasingly able to select from a large number of sources (Nah & Chung, 2012: 718), which results in another problem:

> „widespread idealised notion of networked communication and network trust seems to miss some problems of social media and a 'participatory' network society – leading to a rather contradictory situation, where trust is

given to mostly unknown, anonymous voices on the web, whereas there is a lingering suspicion that institutionalized media are manipulative and not trustworthy" (Quandt, 2012: 14–15).

Croatian media landscape

During the transitions of the 1990s, media policy in the European post-socialist countries has been developing in three, occasionally overlapping phases. The first one, being characterised by delinking the media from the state, achievement of freedom and independence from the political realm in most of the countries comprised of the creation and restructuring of public service broadcasting systems and introduction of structures that guaranteed its independence from the political and economic forces (Jakubowicz, 1995: 137 in Peruško & Popović, 2008: 169). The second phase was marked by attention focused on market developments and included liberalisation of telecommunications and broadcasting markets, as well as the increased entry of the foreign capital in media markets. The attention started to shift to threats from market developments, and the realisation that pluralism was at lesser risk from political than market pressures. The third phase was characterised by European integration with harmonisation of media legislature with the EU *acquis* in the audio-visual field as a main activity. In this phase more attention is given to the implementation of media legislation, which proved to be a sore point for many countries of the region (Peruško & Popović, 2008: 169).

However, we believe these processes have not had a positive impact on the quality of journalistic practices in Croatia, for several reasons – primarily the authorities' lack of interest for quality and professional journalism, followed by the media corporations in foreign property which control most of the Croatian media market, as well as journalists being divided along political, educational and professional lines. These reasons have led to journalism in Croatia, as well as in most South East European countries (Lami, 2011; Vilović, 2011), being less ethical and poorer in quality in comparison to the journalism in, e.g., West Europe or the USA, due to the domination of semi-tabloids and sensationalism. Nonetheless, the development of journalism in Croatia reflects the trends that can be seen in the UK and the USA, and that are present on a global level as well (e.g. Davis, 2009; Donsbach, Rentsch & Schielicke, 2009; Fuller, 2010; Jones, 2011; Kovach & Rosensteil, 2010; McChesney & Pickard, 2011).

Methods and presentation of the empirical data

The area of trust in media content in the age of digital technology has been up to now examined mostly from the perspective of the audience, usually with the survey as a research method. This article aims to offer a somewhat different approach to this topic. By analysing primarily the media content and, additionally, the social networking sites' content, it tries to examine whether the media content is trustworthy. We have selected a case that received significant media attention in 2011, and was, to a considerable extent, characterised by the journalistic use of Facebook as a news source. The disappearance of a 17-year-old Croatian girl Antonia Bilić provoked rather intensified media coverage during the second half of 2011. Immediately after the girl's disappearance, her family published a Facebook page *Nestala Antonia Bilić*[3], which soon reached nearly 44,000 page fans. The page served as a communication channel of the girl's family with the public, while journalists used its content for reporting.

We chose content analysis as the most appropriate research method to be applied in the selected case to evaluate whether the Croatian journalists have been guided by professional standards in their reporting – using trustworthy news sources, which is their professional obligation. In this paper the social networking site Facebook is observed primarily as a news source.

The analysis included three Croatian most read daily newspapers – *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list*, *24 sata*, as well as three Croatian most visited news portals – index.hr, net.hr, tportal.hr – in the period between 9th June and 26th June 2011. The selected time period included the initial phase of news reporting on this case; from the first report on the disappearance to the arrest of the main suspect for the potential crime when the focus of journalists was transferred mainly to him. In the selected period, we have found 24 articles on this topic in *24 sata*, 25 in *Jutarnji list*, 19 in *Večernji list*, whereas among news portals there were 17 of these articles on index.hr, 40 on net.hr, and 22 on tportal.hr, making a total of 147 analysed articles.

In addition to media content analysis, the posts (N=248) and the associated fan comments (average of 157.1 comments per post) published on the Facebook page *Nestala Antonia Bilić* in the same period were also included in the analysis.

Our intention was to examine if Facebook was used in the analysed articles as a source of opinion, source of speculation, source of information, or was it, in

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[3]　URL: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Nestala-ANTONIA-BILI%C4%86/216460628385318.

fact, the article topic. As our study showed, when journalists used Facebook fan page content as news source, they primarily reported on opinions and speculations which were expressed by page visitors in the comments. News portal index.hr was the only one not to use Facebook as a source of speculations, but it did serve as a source of information in 11.8% of the articles and as an article topic in 17.6% of them. Daily newspaper *Večernji list* used Facebook as a source of information in 15.8% of the articles, and in equal portion as an article topic. *Jutarnji list* is leading when it comes to using Facebook: the fan page content was equally used as a source of opinions, speculations and information (12%), while it served as an article topic in 24.0% of the analysed cases.

The number of sources used in the analysed articles was also one of the questions we were interested in determining since one of the basic journalistic principles is checking the information from at least two sources independently from each other. American scholars suggest using even the third source to obtain the maximum objectivity (Obad, 2004: 118). Our research showed that three or more news sources were used by most of the media; ranging from 30.0% of the articles on net.hr to 45.8% in *24 sata*. The exception was tportal. hr, with 18.0% of articles containing three or more news sources. The articles containing two sources took second place, ranging from 25.0% of the analysed articles in *24 sata* to 44.0% of these articles in *Jutarnji list*. The results show that news portals dominated in the number of articles with one news source; 29.4% of these articles was found on index.hr, 32.5% on net.hr, 36.0% on tportal.hr. Daily newspaper *24 sata* did not publish any such an article, while *Jutarnji list* stands out among the newspapers with 16.0% of the articles with one source used. While *Jutarnji list* and news portals index.hr and tportal.hr did not publish any article with a named source, these articles were present in a significant portion in *24 sata* (16.7%).

Our aim was to determine which news sources were used by journalists in the analysed articles: was it Antonia Bilić's family, her acquaintances, the alleged eyewitnesses, i.e. people who claimed to have seen her, the police, suspects for her disappearance, experts and other institutions, agency, other media and also was it an editorial article, a journalist who occupied the role of a source, or did the source remain unnamed. The results of our analysis showed that two daily newspapers – *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list* along with two news portals – index. hr and net.hr, mostly used the police as a source (ranging from 65% to 93% in their reports), then to a slightly smaller extent they used the family and acquaintances of the missing girl along with experts and other institutions. These

sources were used by all of the analysed media. With the exception of tportal.hr, all daily newspapers and news portals used Facebook as a source. This practice was most frequent in *Jutarnji list* with 32.0% articles in which Facebook served as a source. *Jutarnji list* also proved to be a negative extreme with 80.0% of the articles in which journalists occupied the role of sources, which indicates the abuse of their function and position. In addition, unnamed sources were used in 40.0% of the articles.

Results concerning the number of sides presented in the analysed articles indicate that usage of three or more sources does not necessarily mean that all sides included in a problem will be represented. None of the analysed media had all the sides represented in their articles even when there were more than two sources. In such cases 'more sides' were least represented in the articles found on tportal.hr (36.0%), while there were 80.0% of these articles in *Jutarnji list*. On the other hand, *Jutarnji list* published the least number of articles with one side of the story represented, and tportal.hr had the most, 64.0% of the articles with one side of the story.

In the case of representation of the sides included in the analysed case, the results show that the following three sides were most frequently represented: the police, family and independent experts. When analysed separately, it can be seen that there were primarily two sides represented in one article. Among the news portals, index.hr represented two sides included in the story – the police and family, net.hr mostly represented the police, while tportal.hr did not represent either side since its primary sources were agencies, and the articles published on this portal mostly represented one side. Among the newspapers, *Večernji list* represented two sides – the police and family or independent experts, *24 sata* also represented two sides – the police and family, while *Jutarnji list* did not actually represent any side since its primary sources were its own journalists as well as unnamed sources.

The case of the Croatian girl's disappearance included in our study was mostly covered by the media in an informative way. We found a minimal number of commentaries and analytic reports; they were present only in *24 sata* and *Jutarnji list*, amounting to 4% of the analysed articles. Nonetheless, the journalist's goal in 26% of the articles in *24 sata* was to analyse or comment the event, while these articles comprised 54% of the analysed articles in the daily paper *Jutarnji list*. However, the analyses and conclusions offered by the journalists in these newspapers could not be properly supported since most of the analysed articles were informative genres, such as news and reports. These genres, with a

goal to inform about the event, and not to analyse or comment on it, comprised 96% of the analysed articles in both of these daily newspapers. All other media included in our analysis, apart from news portal net.hr, contained some elements of the event analysis, even though, looking from the perspective of news genres, there was no article in a form of commentary. Despite the fact that news is not supposed to offer author's opinion (Malović, 2005: 194), it was present in 40% of the analysed news in daily newspaper *Večernji list*, in 12% on news portal index.hr and 10% of the articles on tportal.hr.

Since the news reporting was primarily induced by the disappearance of Antonia Bilić, the main thematic focus of the articles in all of the analysed media was expectedly the progress in search for the missing girl. It was present as an article topic in the range between 55% (*Jutarnji list*) to 82% (tportal.hr) of the articles. The goal of newspapers *24 sata* and *Jutarnji list* to induce an emotional reaction among their audience can be recognised from the range of topics dominating the articles. Along with the progress in search for the missing girl, other dominant topics in *24 sata* were Bilić's personal characteristics, her disappearance, her family and the reactions of the public to her disappearance. *Jutarnji list* showed an increased interest in the progress of searching for Bilić, her disappearance, family, reactions of the public, speculations on her destiny, as well as the support shown by the fans on the repeatedly mentioned Facebook page. All the analysed media, with the exception of the news portal tportal.hr, were interested in the support shown by the Facebook page fans, among them primarily *Jutarnji list* (28%).

To illustrate the articles, the analysed daily newspapers and news portals most frequently used a photograph showing Antonia Bilić which was first published on Facebook fan page of Bilić's family. However, in most cases it was not noted that the photograph was obtained from that page (see Image 1). The source of the photograph is not provided in more than a half of the articles in *24 sata* (56.3%) and *Jutarnji list* (64,4%), and in a slightly less number of articles in *Večernji list*. This daily newspaper cites Facebook page as the photograph source in one third of the analysed articles (36.4%). The news portals index.hr and tportal.hr name the source in more than 90% of their articles, while net.hr does not in 57.8% of articles. Still, Facebook has never been cited as a source, even though the family photo of Antonia Bilić was used in 24.8% of index.hr's articles, and 45.5% of the articles published on tportal.hr.

Image 1: The identical photograph of the missing Antonia Bilić with differently cited sources published in different media (sources: index.hr, 9 June 2011; index.hr, June 10th, 2011.; Facebook fan page Nestala Antonia Bilić, June 9th, 2011; tportal.hr, June 9th, 2011).
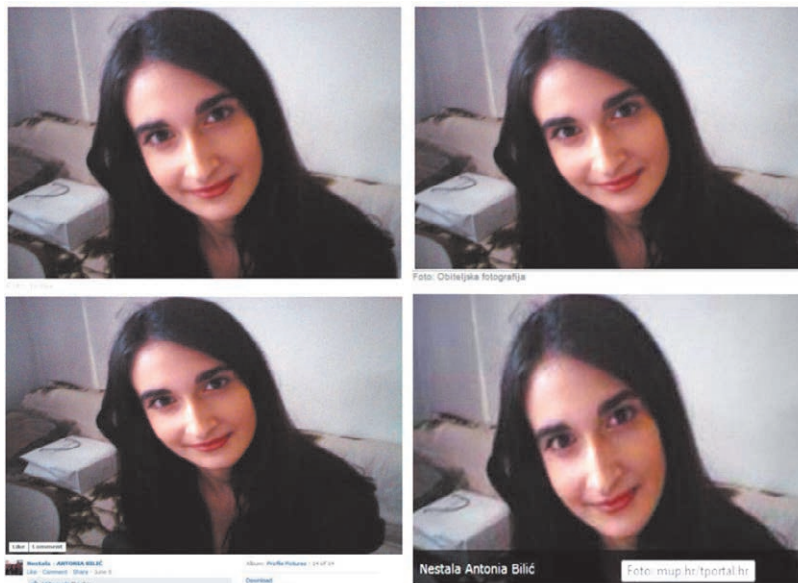
The results have shown that the question of authorship of the analysed articles was problematic as well. Two out of the three analysed news portals signed the articles as editorial text in 72% (net.hr), or 93% (tportal.hr) of the cases. The author of the articles on index.hr has always been signed with initials (100%).

Discussion

The results of our study will be analysed in relation to the basic principles of the journalistic profession. We will try to examine whether Croatian media follow professional standards introduced by Gillmor (2005), as well as the conditions of Kohring and Matthes's four-dimensional model of trust in news media (2007). The first standard, which Gillmor refers to as thoroughness, should be characterised by as many sources as possible in an article. Our research showed that most of the analysed media very frequently used three or more sources. Two sources used in an article were the second most common. Usage of only one source was dominant in the news portals, while the newspaper *24 sata* stood out with the rather high number of articles with no source specified. On the other hand, according to Gillmor (2005), for online media thoroughness it also means asking readers for their input. The results of our study showed that

Croatian online media do not allow the audience to provide their input – the social networking sites are rarely used as news sources in these reports, whereas the dominant sources are agencies or the reports are in fact editorial articles. On the other hand, their function is to a certain extent fulfilled by Croatian mainstream media, which, when using social media content, are mostly interested in reporting on users' comments and speculations, without prior verification, thus breaching professional standards.

Accuracy requires the journalist to get the facts straight. The facts need to be suppported by credible sources. And yet, among the news portals, tportal. hr mostly used agencies as news sources, net.hr used other media. While index. hr mostly used the police sources, the second most common news source was the author of the article him/herself. The dominant sources in *Večernji list* are the police and the girl's family, most of the articles in *24 sata* include the police and the author of the article as sources, while *Jutarnji list* mostly uses unreliable sources. The journalists were the sources in 80% of their own articles in *Jutarnji list*, while 40% of the articles in this newspaper included unnamed sources. These results show the violation of accuracy in the analysed Croatian media.

Fairness is characterised by listening to different viewpoints and incorporating them into articles. We found a minimal number of commentaries and analytic reports, which is not enough to make conclusions about fairness. Still, the journalists' goal in a quarter of news and reports in *24 sata*, and more than half of them in *Jutarnji list* was to analyse or comment the event. For that purpose, the authors of the articles used exclusively their own opinions, ignoring the professional obligation of using different viewpoints. On the other hand, as they mainly covered three sides (the police, family, friends and experts), in each of their reports there were two sources. The police and family were the dominantly covered sides on one news portal and in one newspaper, but in other analysed media there was always one irrelevant side along with one of the aforementioned sides. We have also found a number of articles with no sources of the author's viewpoint.

The third professional standard introduced by Gillmor (2005) requires the journalist to link to source material as much as possible in order to be transparent. Beside the fact that one third of the articles had only one source, particularly on news portals, the analysed media, especially *Jutarnji list*, also showed to be non-transparent as they were using their own journalists as sources and unnamed sources. The last example of non-transparency is the photo of the missing girl which her family first published on the Facebook page. All the analysed media downloaded it and frequently used it, but in most cases it was not stated.

The aim of this paper was also to examine the results of our study in relation to Kohring and Matthes's four-dimensional model of trust in news media (2007). As was explained earlier in the article, the first dimension of trust is related to the selection of reported topics. The main thematic focus in the articles of all analysed media was expectedly the progress in search for the missing girl. It was present as an article topic in the range between 55% (*Jutarnji list*) to 82% (tportal.hr) of the articles. The rest of the topics were irrelevant, without the value of newsworthiness. Some media gave a significant space to irrelevant topics, such as fan comments retrieved from the Facebook pages, their speculations about the event, reactions of the public, etc. *Jutarnji list* was leading in the using of Facebook; the fan page content was equally used as a source of opinions, speculations and information (12%), while it served as an article topic in 24% of the analysed texts. All the analysed media, with an exception of the news portal tportal.hr, were interested in the support shown by the Facebook page fans. This was specially the case with *Jutarnji list*.

The second dimension of trust applies to the selection of facts or background information pertaining to a topic and it comprises the contextualization of events. The non-transparent use of photographs and unreliable sources, such as unnamed sources found in the analysed articles along with numerous similar examples, restrains this kind of trust in Croatian media.

Next to trust in the selectivity of facts, there is the third dimension which stands for trust in verifiable and approvable accuracy of depicted facts. Even though most of the articles are based on two, three or more sources, the articles with one or even no source are also present in all the analysed media, as was presented in our study.

The last dimension of trust in media news is the trust in journalistic assessment. In the analysed media a minimal number of commentaries and analytical reports were found. However, some of them, especially newspapers *24 sata* and *Jutarnji list* had a goal to analyse or comment the event in significant number of their news and reports. This kind of mixing information with the comments is not in accordance with journalistic ethical standards which require their strict separation. This practice misleads the audience, hindering it to trust the journalist's assessment.

In sum, the results of our study show that a significant number of articles in Croatian newspapers and on Croatian news portals is characterised by violation of professional standards of journalism and other requirements for the trust of the audience in the media. Therefore, we believe there are good reasons to doubt that audience will trust this kind of media content.

Conclusion

Digital technology innovations and economic crisis has brought changes in journalism, in functioning of newsrooms, as well as in the very profession. Online revolution brought about new media journalism and new platforms, giving the media an opportunity to chase the audience and enter the spaces where they can be found – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media.

As presented in our research, social networking sites are increasingly becoming a source that journalists mostly use for plagiarism and for taking users' opinions and speculations. Social networking sites and other social media have, therefore, become a new platform for spreading the "churnalism", as Davies defines the new practice of journalists becoming passive processors of whatever material comes their way, "whether real event or PR artifice, important or trivial, true or false" (Davies, 2009: 59).

Multiple increase of number of news media and apparent decrease of media content quality resulted in the greater, not lesser, need for truth in the new century, because the likelihood of untruth has become much more prevalent (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011: 48). This also brought about new challenges for audience, which – every time it uses the media – needs to ask itself: 'What can I believe here?'

The worrying decline in trust in media can be noted in Croatia. According to the survey conducted by GfK Croatia, one of the leading Croatian market research companies, at the end of 2011 only 21% of citizens trusted media. This number further decreased by September 2012, when the percentage of citizens who trusted media fell to 18%. The number of those who did not trust the media in 2011 was 54%, while that number reached 60% in 2012 (GfK Croatia, 2012: 2). In our research we have found some possible reasons that contributed to this situation. Undoubtedly, they primarily include violation the professional standards: thoroughness, accuracy, fairness and transparency (Gillmor, 2005), as well as incapability to satisfy the four preconditions of trust in news media: trust in the selectivity of topics, selectivity of facts, accuracy of depictions and journalistic assessment (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

The audiences give their trust to journalists, based on a sense of how likely or how well the trustworthiness has been performed. The question that inevitably arises after our evaluation is whether the Croatian audience can trust media which, by uncritically using social networking sites as sources, are seriously breaching professional standards of journalism.

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