

NEW MEDIA AS A MEANS OF SPREADING ETHNOCENTRISM IN THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: The paper deals with the presentation of the media system as not only a platform enabling mass social interaction but also spreading hate-speech regarding promoting the superiority of one's group (such as ethnicity, nationality, values or other). The article focuses on the topic of spreading ethnic stereotypes (e.g. those related to Jewish ethnicity). Attention is also focused on the issue of the credibility of such media content and its creators. The authors use a theoretical base to clarify several innovative possibilities brought not only technologically, but also culturally reformed "new digital age", the so-called Web 2.0, or Web 3.0. in Central European context.

Keywords: new media, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudices, heteroimage, imagology

1 Introduction

In culturally and linguistically globalised Central Europe, its multiethnic basis, as well as the currently constantly ongoing mixing of cultures, are the starting points for accompanying negative phenomena, such as the polarisation of society and the associated undesirable extreme forms of ethno-significant elements in the means of expression. One of the most sensitive topics raised in the region is antisemitism and anti-Zionism as part of the global problem of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance (especially towards ethnic and religious minorities). Central Europe was home to many Jews living on the Old Continent for a substantial period of modern history. Therefore, there is an assumption that the Central European cultural environment will be characterised by a low tolerance for manifestations of ethnocentrism, especially in connection with phenomena aimed at antisemitism. Nevertheless, in the countries of Central Europe, a negative attitude towards other ethnic, racial, and subcultural groups also exists due to strong nationalistic tendencies and the unclear line between harmless humour and slander, which fluctuates as a result of various well-known examples in the media.

One of the scares of today's society has gradually become an internet platform offering so-called microblogging – the creation of short messages and posts intended for publication and distribution online. Social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), etc., have become the most popular forms of this new type of social interaction online. Websites and apps predominantly utilize them for portable gadgets, facilitating convenient and, most importantly, temporally and spatially adaptable interaction in contrast to eras when hot media were linked with financially and technically much more demanding apparatus such as television or computers intended for use in a single fixed location. However, the availability of these online platforms for sharing information and the possibility of unreservedly creating and disseminating contributions to them has also brought various risks, even threats. The list includes internet fraud, cyberbullying, as well as manipulative strategies.

Naturally, the average Internet user focuses more on the benefits and possibilities of the Internet. Several useful tools, such as the already mentioned blogging, instant messaging (programs offering not only text messages but also voice messages in the form of links or video calls, including the transfer of other types of files), interest groups or live chat are among the most used

forms in everyday life. The intensity of online interaction has taken on such a dimension that there is perhaps no topic in the virtual environment that is not discussed by users. Among them, some topics polarise society and bring hateful elements to the virtual and real world.

At the level of social communication taking place through hot media, it is also interesting to observe how users present their opinions and distinctive, often cultural or otherwise conditioned specifics. Users of social networks and other media platforms often uncritically present their own cultural patterns and their elements, and peculiarities of functioning, which they consider superior or universally valid. Manifestations of nationalism, chauvinism and ethnocentrism appear in a milder, but also radical form. Their dissemination is made possible by the nature of Internet communication and the multiple features it possesses, such as varying degrees of anonymity of communicants, indirect nature, generally limited control of hate speech, etc. The anonymity of participants in communication mediated by the Internet and the resulting appearance of absolute freedom of expression and its moral imperative has become a socially frequently discussed topic. Serious negative phenomena therefore include the radicalisation of opinions and the creation of communities whose creative content of various formats (text posts, images in the form of so-called memes, etc.) incites a hateful environment in the online space. It is indisputable that "extremism, of course, keeps up with the times and uses the Internet mainly to spread ideology, gain new sympathisers, but also serve as a tool for organising activities in real life" (Smieško 2017, p. 14).

The topic of morally questionable, hateful, and extremist content is currently receiving considerable attention from experts and the public alike. Media coverage is widespread, with certain channels promoting such content while others seek to highlight it as an issue. Extensive domestic and foreign literature and various research initiatives provide alarming statistics and information on specific aspects of this issue. This study delves into the characteristics of disputed media content in light of contemporary realities, drawing from historical experiences that have significantly influenced the prevailing sentiment in Central European society. It also explores the information behaviour of Internet users and other factors stemming from the technical aspects of modern media.

2 New Media as Constructs of Social Reality

The media are included in the group of institutions, but at the same time, they are also understood as abstract systems and socializing factors. Traditional media (e.g. newspapers) present on the Internet acquire the characteristics of multimedia and interactivity, as well as the possibility of customisation of distribution, addressed to precisely defined groups, and become sources of information about events in the world, thus fulfilling not only their basic informational but also socialising function. It represents the transfer of value systems across users, while its thematic or other emphasis focuses on a specific target group of its audience.

Social media is understood as a dynamic type of mass communication, characterised by the fact that thanks to the possibilities they offer, communication between the author and the audience becomes symmetrical – while in the past mass communication was predominantly one-way, or typically indirect and delayed feedback, the communication feedback that social media offers today is essentially immediate and anonymous to varying degrees. Social media platforms are distinct from other types of media because they are primarily used for sharing content. Even though they have numerous benefits, the unregulated nature of this content has led to increased unease and distrust towards the media.

According to Anna Remišová (2010, p. 20), the term media system designates the essence of the social system: the media-social system has a great influence on the thinking and behaviour of wide segments of the population and the quality of the entire social system. The mass media is not simply viewed by the public as an object or institution but is also seen as a contributing influence in shaping public opinion. The importance of the media is fundamental for today's information society, which confirms the validity of the constant need to update media research of an interdisciplinary nature.

The media create a certain media image of society and have a very important role in shaping the image of us, how we perceive ourselves and our relationships in society. According to Giles, "We may never know the true extent of this impact: we may never be able to confirm it, let alone measure it" (Giles 2012, p.18). According to McQuail (2003, p. 266), the media are a cultural indicator, as the media image is to some extent also a reflection of social and cultural values. However, these are specific to each culture. Therefore, we quite often encounter situations in which it is possible to detect or at least acquire a strong suspicion that the behaviour of individuals or groups, realised not only on the Internet media, is strongly influenced by ethnocentric and xenophobic views.

Nowadays, the issue of morally questionable, hateful or extremist content is given quite a lot of professional and lay attention. Domestic and foreign literature or other research initiatives on partial problems associated with this issue are full of alarming statistics and information. These were the impetus for the creation of this study, which contributes to the discussion of the topic with its comprehensive view of the specifics of the disputed media content concerning historical experience and current social development affecting the general mood in society and also the specific information behaviour of users coming from Central European countries. For the study, we territorially identify it with the V4 countries.

Central Europe lies at the crossroads of the West and the East, both physically and mentally. It has often been characterised by the changing position of unstable centres and peripheries, which resulted in its specific character based on principles of mutual connections with both East and Western cultures, but moreover, political aspects, are often understood as opposite. Its experience with three totalitarian regimes is important to note as it is yet still an actively present phenomenon thanks to those who, e.g. survived the holocaust during WW II, but also via their second or third generations, then also a post-war Soviet postcolonial context and other aspects all attributes unique characteristics to the region. Besides others, they include experience with the utopian cult of personality of Joseph Stalin and the media as a tool of propaganda as well as restrictive methods of self-presentation during communism. The media in the past contributed to the promotion of power and they drew a solid line between governors and governed.

From the specifics of this cultural and geopolitical area, we also put in the foreground its heterogeneous character, which is characterised by the mixing of not only Slavic and non-Slavic but also various religious and cultural patterns. Central Europe can be described as "an extremely complex conglomerate of historical deposits, rational and irrational complexes and prejudices, various burdensome historical experiences, but also completely legitimate and significantly different interests of individuals and entire nations that live in Europe and the states that make up Europe" (Klaus 2010, 45). It is prejudices that arise based on established sets of signs that deform the ability of society (or its parts) to reflect on what is happening around it. Thanks to technical progress, these ideas and opinions can be materialised and disseminated through the online space, which brings with it the aforementioned risks.

Today, when even these longitudes are dominated by the "third generation" information society (the so-called Web 3.0) and a well-built Internet infrastructure, the Internet user also becomes an active participant and creator of media content. This is done

through various web blogs, commentaries, discussion platforms and community groups designed to share opinions and ideas. Such a user is not bound by journalistic ethics, which allows him to "test" (or even abuse) his "right to freedom of opinion and expression: this right does not allow anyone to suffer harm because of his beliefs and includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas by any means and regardless of frontiers" granted to him by Art. 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ and to which the user invokes in many disputed cases.

The behaviour of creators and disseminators of media content that may appear to be "questionable" becomes problematic – these are mainly posts on the verge of political, ethical or moral correctness, or tabloids, aimed at a person or group, which can be defined based on protected characteristics listed in the definition of hate speech. Thanks to the anonymity, ingenuity and creativity of contributors, the control or tracing of controversial Internet behaviour is often limited: in the contexts of various topics, specific linguistic situations arise using globalisms, neologisms, occasionalisms or linguistic twists that are very difficult to detect or unambiguously interpret, and thus sanction – e.g. the use of composite or contaminated expressions and puns, e.g. „iSSraHell“ (Israel, by doubling „s“ it is strikingly reminiscent of the abbreviation SS – Schutzstaffel – a major „protection squadron“ under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party), „Jewstice“ (justice) or the use of placeholders „xid/Xid“ for Czech words „žid/Žid“ (a Jew) (Mikulášek 2021, p. 3). The existence of fake accounts is also problematic, which causes obstacles in trying to sanction the author of an offensive or otherwise inappropriate post.

Even the topic of various forms of cyberbullying, from hidden (indirect) forms of discrimination to explicit manifestations of xenophobia,² has become a practically constant subject of discussion at various levels in recent years – political, social, cultural or media. The need to increase the level of media literacy and general education in this area is reinforced by the constantly increasing worldwide manifestations of racially or ethnically based hate speech. Not only is their number increasing, but the nature of the means of disseminating stereotypical images is also changing, e.g. podcasts, blogs, comments and other hybrid Internet "products" offering interaction between the author of the content and the user or between users.

2.1 Antisemitism and the Digital Age

The presented study contributes to this extensive society-wide discussion in a way that is based on an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of spreading manifestations of ethnocentrism in new media. As it is a dynamic system with significant interdisciplinary overlap, the aim is to provide a comprehensive view of the state of Central European society in terms of constructing, spreading and tolerating hate speech in the Internet space.

The authors are also interested in the manifestations of antisemitism and anti-Zionism and their unique position in the Central European cultural environment, which the authors follow from the point of view of ethnocultural specifics tied to this region, its inhabitants and their history. The diachronic and transmedia approach to this topic is the starting point for the correct interpretation or disclosure of suspicious Internet behaviour with elements of racism or xenophobia, which lies at the centre of our attention. Through specific expressive representations extracted from media content, we draw attention

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/slo.pdf

² In the context of ethnically or religiously based forms of discrimination, it is mainly the so-called flamingo, i.e. hostile and offensive behaviour towards an individual or a group of Internet users, which stimulates further discussion by verbal provocation, often of a rude or even vulgar nature. The attacker intends to worsen the social relationships of the participants in the discussion, create a hostile environment towards the opponent or radicalize the group in which the discussion takes place.

not only to the manifestations of prejudice and negative mental images of ethnic significance spread by the Internet but also to the reactions they provoke. By conducting this research probe, the study offers an overview of such manifestations of media content that in various forms verbally or otherwise negatively comments, insults, or defames the Jewish religious and ethnic minority.

Capturing the demonisation of Jews as “creators of evil” and their subsequent defamation cannot be “measured” by conventional methods. We agree with the statement that “antisemitism is an attitude, and like all attitudes, it exists in society at different levels of intensity, and with different shades to it. The elastic view explicitly takes this into account: some people may be strongly antisemitic, others less so; and while still others may not fit into either of these categories, they may still hold certain attitudes – even if these are small in number and weak in intensity – that have the potential to make Jews feel offended or uncomfortable. Thus, no single figure can capture the level of antisemitism in a given society” (Staatsky 2017, p. 3). The statistics that attempt to do so are rather an effort to capture the experience and perception of antisemitism. We do not deny that their results are our cognitive support, which points to the extent of the occurrence of this large-scale society-wide problem. However, while respecting their validity, we focus on different dimensions of the issue – since antisemitism is essentially a way of seeing the world that uses hateful rhetoric against the Jewish community, often based on prejudice, there is no rational core. The stigmatisation of the Jewish community, regardless of whether or not they have a demonstrable connection with the phenomena with which the authors of such content associate them, is a problem that has persisted for centuries. However, the power of modern technology is to spread such manifestations more efficiently and effectively. Anti-Israel campaigns, Holocaust denial, and bullying ethnocentric comments directed at this minority leave irreversible consequences on their reputation. It is therefore important to consider the thematic structure of these media contents in connection with the means of expression used by communicators, the context of the creation of media content, as well as its possible semiotic overlap with cultural and other realities, not only today but also past. Thanks to the current dynamics of information dissemination, it is also not necessary to limit ourselves to regional realities but to take into account the possible global nature of influences as well as the dissemination and impact that were or are the impetus for the creation of this extracted media content.

It is the regional specifics related to the occurrence of the stereotype of the Jew in Central Europe that bind many persistent stereotypical ideas to the Jewish community. As far as the Visegrad Four countries are concerned, there is a lack of a regionally specific understanding of modern antisemitism. Although the main discussions, themes, and actors that dominate modern antisemitic discourse in the region have been explored (Barna - Felix 2017; Barna et al. 2018), it is still not properly understood how modern antisemitism is rooted in the cultural and political heritage of the region, or how much it differs from Western European patterns. No detailed research has yet been conducted on the regional specifics of the interconnectedness of the different subtypes of modern antisemitism (Barna et al. 2018). In addition, there have been few efforts to collect specific empirical data from all the Visegrad Four countries using the same methodology, which prevents systematic comparisons between the four countries. In 2010, a book entitled *Modern Antisemitism in the Visegrad Countries – Countering Distortion* was published, which also brought the results of a survey from the V4 countries on attitudes towards antisemitism. Following a description of the primary findings of the online focus group research, the most important research conclusions were summarised, which served as the foundation for policy debates.

Harsh Holocaust denial and rejection of the historical truth about the Holocaust did not occur during group discussions in all V4 countries, and participants considered opinions about harsh Holocaust denial to be absurd and unacceptable. They also

unanimously condemned the Holocaust, considered it a tragic historical event, if not the most tragic event of the twentieth century, and saw it as part of their history. Participants considered educational programs about the Holocaust to be important, and especially the Czech participants of the focus group were indeed overwhelmingly in favour of a more comprehensive school curriculum that would include teaching about the Holocaust. In addition, when discussing the Holocaust as a historical event – although it was less observable in the case of the Czech and Slovak focus groups – participants overwhelmingly avoided words such as Jews, terms describing the political ideology of the perpetrators or national collaborators, and even the word antisemitism. Instead, they usually used common narratives in which the Holocaust appeared as a symbol of universal suffering and as a historical event from the distant past, with the only contemporary consequence being a vague moral lesson. Another important finding was that the level of sensitivity to antisemitic content was high in all four Visegrad countries. Participants were particularly sensitive to antisemitic narratives, but there was often a lack of willingness to openly disagree with anti-Jewish comments. Antisemitic statements were often met with indifference and silence. Even seemingly non-antisemitic participants were unable to present counterarguments to antisemitic content. Second, although less observable in the Slovak focus groups, participants generally had insufficient knowledge of issues related to Jews, Jewish culture and history, Zionism, the history of Israel (including the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), the Shoah, and the various forms and motivations of antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion (Barna et al. 2021, p. 18-24).

2.2 The Language of New Media as a Means of Spreading Ethnocentrism (With an Emphasis on Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism)

Various forms of hate speech can be encountered in the online realm. It can be comments, jokes, blogs, and Facebook posts in the form of hoaxes, but also disinformation that is published on portals that imitate news websites and give the impression that it is the work of a journalist. The risks associated with the spread of harmful content and the low journalistic and ethical standards of disinformation media are particularly problematic. A self-proclaimed expert who passively, uncritically adopts other unverified ideas puts himself in the role of an alternative source of information to which an ordinary user does not have access to.

The World Jewish Congress monitored the most popular Internet social platforms such as X/Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and others. It states that of the approximately 382,000 antisemitic posts identified in 2016, most of them appeared on the original Twitter platform (63%), followed by Facebook (10%) and Instagram (6%). In 2018, the same institution reported that the total number of antisemitic posts on the Internet increased by one third compared to the same period in 2016 (Kršková 2018). From the countries that were monitored in the research, we can mention e.g. Poland, which has also seen a significant increase in the number of antisemitic “tweets” (The Rise of Antisemitism on Social Media - Summary of World Jewish Congress 2016).

The aforementioned Twitter (now X) is often referred to as a “toxic environment”, as evidenced, for example, by the alarming 17,000 uses of the so-called hashtag #HitlerWasRight in one week (Antisemitism on Twitter: Reactions to Middle East Conflict 2021). Through this hashtag, the topic of the extent to which Adolf Hitler’s actions concerning the Jewish minority were legitimate was heated was discussed. Numerous consensual opinions of the debaters have spread through this hashtag (or its alternative versions) in response to the open fighting between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, among them such extreme forms: “I think #Hitler was right when it comes to #Holocaust. Some people just don’t deserve to live and Israeli are at the top of this list. British just collected the scum of the whole world and dumped it at the holiest of places. #PalestineUnderAttack #GazaUnderAttack #IsraelTerrorist”, „not all Jews are Zionists.

But all zionists are terrorists“, „Adolf Hitler was right, Jews are animals, not humans and now the whole world is watching the proof #GazzaUnderAttack #PalestineUnderAttack“, „zionists deserve nothing but miserable deaths just like every other white supremacist“ (Ibid.). Such generalisations are not only negative media portrayals of Jewish cultural heritage but are downright dehumanising. To demonstrate, we present other examples of the occurrence of such posts that contain antisemitic sentiments and which, especially on online portals, confirm the spread of the antisemitic context, often with manipulative expressive rhetoric or graphics evoking a negative attitude towards Jews.

However, modern times have brought many innovative means for society and its associated interest groups or individuals to create a space for themselves to present their attitudes and ideas. This space is provided by the means of mass communication, which, due to its many advantages, is described in the first part of this study. It is important to note that these are not only explicitly verbalised antisemitic attacks or comments with a hateful or discriminatory background. One popular way to spread antisemitic propaganda is through images (World Jewish Congress 2016, 169). Currently, these are mainly cartoons and collages, often with combined (visual and verbal) content (memes). These popular forms of media content can be considered as a kind of modern successors to traditional caricatures. These were (especially in the past) a means of deliberate distortion of persons and phenomena, not only because of their expressive visuality. It aims to exaggerate the characteristics of phenomena occurring in society or to ridicule them.

However, this is not a new concept of harbouring prejudices in Central European realities. The society of Central Europe has been “cultivating” a negative attitude towards the Jewish minority for a very long time. With the gradual increase in the representation of the Jewish population, especially in large settlements, the general awareness of their activation in terms of the cultural, social and political life of the city was also strengthened in the past. In doing so, they stood in a kind of special position; their appearance and culture were often put in opposition to the domestic Hungarian convention. The relationship with this minority deteriorated after the adoption of the Patent of Toleration. It is not surprising that artistic stylization evolves with the times. However, its content images about Jews often remain unchanged, or only modified, as can be seen in some of the following examples.



Figure 1: Cartoon *Juda-pesti bulváron* (On the Judapest Boulevard) published in newspaper *Herkó Páter* on 29 July 1894 (Vörös 2003)

For a mutual confrontation of the historical and contemporary treatment of the topic, we bring you an older topos “Juda-pesti”,

the author of which is allegedly the Austrian lawyer Karl Lueger. He appeared in the Hungarian satirical periodical *Herkó Páter* in the mid-90s of the 19th century. It depicts a group of people in front of a café with a pair of men in the foreground. In addition to the general socio-cultural context of the drawing presenting the Jew as a wealthy cosmopolitan, a naturalised citizen of a big city, who leads a community life, his stereotypical depiction is also typical – his physical features – a distinctive nose, large protruding ears and dark hairiness, etc. The visual presentation of the typology of the character of the dominant characters (greed, sly, cunning, etc.), through captured gestures and facial features – an overexposed indication of an incoming handshake as a symbol of an agreement, a closed business or friendship, which such a heteroimage is supposed to all connect with Judaism, are also represented in this 130-year-old caricature. Although this drawing was probably a reflection of the unwanted assimilation of the middle class of the Jewish population in Budapest at the time of its creation, it is currently analogous to the caricatured depiction of Jewish cultural elements. Only the form and, naturally, the context have been updated. The most common depictions are defamatory or ridiculous depictions that are now predominantly found in electronic media, as a reaction to some stimulus – this is usually a specific impulse from political or social events, as is the case in the following examples.

KARIKATÚRA Eurofondy vs. pokuty za kvóty



BRATISLAVA - Brusel rozhodol.

Figure 2: You stay here for now, Ali Hasan.

The cartoon from 2016 with the descriptions “Bratislava – Brussels has decided” and “EU funds vs. quota³ fines” depicts a European official to whom the hunched representatives of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland bring money. The cartoon responds to the European Commission’s proposal that states that refuse to accept refugees based on allocated quotas will be able to “redeem” themselves by paying fines. The “Brussels decision” in the cartoon is embodied by the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, known for his critical attitude towards the refugee crisis. The picture, however, has distinctive features strikingly reminiscent of the already mentioned Jewish heterostereotypes. Although the caricature was supposed to be an ironic commentary on the quotas proposed by Brussels, it incorporates the visual of the usual heteroimage. The “Jew” in the cartoon was also recognized by most of the readers who reacted to the picture – some indignantly, others with enthusiasm, and there were also antisemitic comments. However, the cartoon was withdrawn after numerous critical reactions and the editors apologized for its publication: “The cartoon was in no way intended to spread antisemitism or create a connection with the World War II cartoon that some critics were looking for on the Internet. The cartoon, which had evoked unwanted associations among many critics on the Internet, was immediately withdrawn” (ibid.). The editors also promised to

³ Šéfredaktor sa ospravedlnil za kontroverznú karikatúru so Židom. Topky.sk/Omediach.sk. [online], 2016. Available at: <https://www.omeiach.com/i/neternet/9040-sefredaktor-sa-ospravedlnil-za-kontroverznu-karikaturu-so-zidom>.

pay increased attention to the treatment of controversial topics in the future.

In December 2023, a political cartoon published in the Canadian newspaper Toronto Sun attracted attention, its editors apologized on the magazine's website for publishing a cartoon of Zelensky, which again used established stereotypes.⁴



Figure 3: Political cartoon of Zelensky stealing from Biden⁵

This now unavailable cartoon depicted the Ukrainian president, who is of Jewish origin, reaching into the pocket of US President Joe Biden. In its statement, the editors note that the cartoon incorrectly implied US aid to Ukraine, which it portrayed either as theft, while others interpreted the cartoon as a bribe from an ally. In both cases, however, it was considered offensive not only to Canadians of Jewish descent and the Jewish people in general but also to Ukrainians who are currently facing Russian aggression.⁶

As we have already mentioned, not only is the number increasing, but also the form of means of spreading (not only antisemitic stereotypical images in contemporary society. While in the past it was first oral literature, later the already mentioned social or political-satirical drawings, graphics, and later caricatures disseminated by the press, nowadays various other modern forms spread through various media channels are widespread, thanks to which stereotypes are spread, they are typical of the masses: podcasts, blogs, comments and another internet "products" offering interaction between the author of the content and the user or between users. At the end of 2022, the Media Services Council initiated administrative proceedings against Hlavné správy for Boris Mesár's blog, which was published on their website hlavnespravysk.com under the title A Jewess from Tel Aviv exposes the falsification of the Holocaust story. In it, the author refers to the Holocaust as "fraud and manipulation" (Struhárik 2022). Even though the text was published in the form of a blog, which is defined in terms of genre as a post with the subjective attitude of the author and allows authors (registered users) to share their opinions, they should meet a certain ethical and moral standard. However, the content is based on a rather speculative and provocative basis: claims appeared in the blog that "during World War II, the number of Jews in the world did not decrease, but increased by 2 million" or "the Holocaust took place decades before World War II." He adds that "against the background of the genocide of the Russian population of Donbas, organised by the Zionists led by the president of the European Jewish Union, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, this report looks, to put it mildly, strange" (Kernová 2023, online). This text was published for several months and was among the most read on the site. Council for Media Services labeled the blog as illegal content, had the text withdrawn and fined the site. The case was also subjected to a police investigation with the suspicion that by publishing and disseminating the text, the crime of disseminating extremist

materials or defamation of the nation, race and belief was committed (Ibid.).

It must be said that although in the above case, it was a blog message strikingly reminiscent of the ideas spread by Russian propaganda, in an older blog by the same author entitled The Jewish Question: A Historical View, there were numerous other defamatory claims directed at the Jews: "every country that emancipated its Jews was soon taken over by the Jews", "a huge number [of Jews] continue to live in foreign countries, where, by their dominant presence, overrepresentation in key professions, a tendency to network and their constant involvement in fraud and financial machinations continue to fuel antisemitism" (Struhárik 2022). The texts were published on the website of Hlavné správy until the author's blogging activity was stopped. In a statement, the editors of Hlavné správy objected to his controversial texts with the following words: "Everyone can blog on Hlavné správy, but only under their name, with their photo and at their own risk. [...] The editors of Hlavné správy do not edit or check the blogs." The blogger bears full responsibility for the content of his blog, but at the same time by registering he agrees, among other things, to point 7. The Hlavné správy Blogger's Code⁷ states: "In particular, a blogger is prohibited from: promoting violence and inciting hatred, openly or covertly, on the grounds of sex, race, colour, language, faith and religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, membership of a nationality or ethnic group; [...]" (Ibid.).

The self-regulatory mechanism in the editorial offices of online media or hosting platforms, and thus the control of compliance with their codes of ethics, generally does not work effectively. Self-censorship by Internet content creators does not work either. However, the impact of such unregulated internet content also has consequences that can be life-threatening for both the individual and the community. One example is the tragic shooting on Zámocká Street in Bratislava on October 12, 2022, which claimed two victims and one injured person. Since this is a case that has not yet been clarified, it can be stated that the crime was probably committed as a result of radicalisation on the Internet by a nineteen-year-old student who presented several posts sympathetic to right-wing extremism on the social network X. Numerous homophobic, especially antisemitic, but also other extremist and neo-Nazi views are repeated not only in the document that the young man left behind but also in his other Internet posts.⁸ The report, prepared by the Media Services Council, states that "digital platforms played a significant role both before and after the attack. The offender's digital footprint clearly shows he had been radicalised via Internet" (Terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava: Immediate and preventive activities aimed at illegal and harmful content. Council for media services 2022, p. 4). The shooter was involved in anonymous discussion forums in the form of the so-called imageboard 4chan and its sister site 8chan (now 8kuna). Both are extremely popular among young users inclined to Internet subcultures, also because there is no content regulation in the discussion sections (Ibid.). Extremist or other ideas can be freely disseminated, shared, and commented on and thus their "enthusiasts" can be freely disseminated, who mediate materials with each other in text or image form. "A study by the RAND Corporation confirms that the Internet facilitates and offers more opportunities to become radicalised, as it allows you to connect with like-minded people and access extremist ideas from all over the world. At the same time, the Internet acts as an 'echo chamber'. This means that users regularly communicate their thoughts with people who have the same opinions, which confirms them in the long term that they are correct" (Behr et al. 2013).

The attacker, who also published a comprehensive manifesto on his profile, publicly called for violence against Jews or members

⁴ Elnézetést kért a kanadai újság, amiért antiszemita karikatúrát közölt Zelenszkijről. [online]. 2023. Available at: <https://mandiner.hu/kulfold/2023/12/elnezest-kert-a-kanadai-uj-sag-amiert-antiszemita-stilus-ur-karikaturat-kozolt-zelenszkijrol>.

⁵ Toronto newspaper cartoon depicts Zelensky stealing from Biden. [online]. [10.05.2023]. Available at: <https://disinfowatch.org/disinfo/toronto-newspaper-cartoon-depicts-zelensky-stealing-from-biden/>.

⁶ Sun apologizes for cartoon. [online]. 2023. Available at: <https://torontosun.com/opinion/sun-apologizes-for-cartoon>.

⁷ Kódex blogera Hlavných správ. [online]. [23.05.2024]. Available at: <https://blog.hlavnespravysk.com/kodex-blogera>

⁸ Polícia Slovenskej republiky: Mimoriadne: polícia vypátrala strelca zo Zámockej ulice. [status update], 2022. Facebook. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/policiaslovakia/posts/pfbid02Gvqb82qJGHN1Wq7y9vzHPgstFMmwRHigWmB5rSxeYaw1uhU71qnX9yi8L3mYicl>

of the LGBTI+ community, from which the victims of the aforementioned crime also came. Among other things, he also referred to conspiracy theories that speak of the efforts of Jews to dominate the world, destroy it and subjugate the white race (Terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava: Immediate and preventive activities aimed at illegal and harmful content. Council for media services 2022, p. 11). The extent of the consequences of such radicalization of a young grammar school student has become an alarming case not only for Slovaks. The solidarity that this tragic incident evoked on the part of a significant part of the public was unprecedented by Slovak standards – it brought many silent protests and commemorative marches for all victims of terrorism and homophobia.

However, similar incidents have also deepened the polarisation of society. While on the one hand, there are initiatives against racism and homophobia, e.g. Black Lives Matter⁹, RainbowLaces¹⁰, You Can Play¹¹, Me Too¹², on the other hand, a part of the public is also mobilized, which considers them an undesirable opportunity to point out marginalized groups and draw attention to “their problems”, at the expense of finding solutions to the problems of the majority part of society, which, according to them, remain neglected. In addition to posts and comments that downplayed the seriousness of the terrorist act from Bratislava's Zámocká Street, there was criticism of the media, public political, cultural, sports, and other representatives, who also began to engage in the issue of respecting basic human rights in connection with ethnic, sexual and other minorities. In predominantly conservative societies, such as the V4 countries, besides the nationalistic principle, the heteronormative principle is also still strongly rooted. It makes topics such as gender or sexual identity “undesirable” impulses for cultural and social dialogue, often associated with liberalism and progression.

The immediate reaction of the media themselves to the tragic act of the shooter from Zámocká Street, which was classified as a terrorist attack, was also controversial – it turned out that some journalists do not have the necessary experience or knowledge of how to communicate with the public about this type of news and its background. Several media succumbed to pressure and, to lead the way in information and to create a sensation, reported on the event in an unprofessional way, e.g. by spreading instructions on how to find the murderer's discussion on the 4chan platform, etc. In this way, they provided the public with information that potentially enabled the acquisition of illegal Internet content. The dissemination of extremist material as a result of such an act is particularly dangerous; The media used it to help the perpetrator fulfil his intention to shock the public and potentially inspire other individuals to carry out similar extremist acts (Terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava: Immediate and preventive activities aimed at illegal and harmful content. Council for media services 2022, p. 51).

Based on experience from abroad, it is possible to observe a diverse way of processing the facts: for example, while the attack by an ultra-right radical on the Norwegian island of Utøya in 2011 with 69 victims was covered by the media almost immediately, including the revelation of the identity of the attacker and other details, the public could learn about the shooting at a mosque in the city of Christchurch (New Zealand) in March 2019, in which 51 people died, although the public could learn directly from a live broadcast, which the shooter himself mediated via the Facebook platform, but his identity or details regarding the name or photo of the attacker remained non-public for some time. This was done not only in the interest of protecting the mental health of the survivors of the victims but

especially in the sense of the slogan “No name - No photo - No notoriety”¹³ or following the example of the “Don't name them” campaign from 2014, which the American FBI came up with¹⁴. Both were created in the interest of public safety to responsibly inform about persons who commit or attempt violent crimes. Currently, specific crisis mechanisms are in use, specially prepared in connection with terrorist attacks with an online element. „In spite of the fact that Slovakia is one of the signatories of Christchurch Call¹⁵, interviews with representatives of this initiative showed that the Christchurch Call Crisis Response Protocol was not initiated after the attack on Zámocká Street“ (Terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava: Immediate and preventive activities aimed at illegal and harmful content. Council for media services 2022, p. 64).

3 Conclusion

The modern digital media system is a platform that, in addition to the possibilities for searching and sharing information, mainly mediates mass social interaction. It allows individuals to actively participate in the creation of media content by adding their posts and comments. The volume of content generated in this way also brings with it an uncertain amount of unverified information in the form of opinions or subjective views on various subjects of social discourse, often presented as “facts”. Their enormous reach is enormous due to the interconnectedness of the hypertext media network, which brings with it many risks that have already been discussed. The presented study contributes to the topic of controversial media content through a transdisciplinary view of individual elements entering the system of interactive communication as a modern social phenomenon. Through selected examples, it demonstrates the risks of spreading those media products that are ethnocentric, hateful or directly extremist content that originated or has connotations with the Central European region.

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¹³ See: No Notoriety. <https://nonotriety.com/>

¹⁴ See: FBI to media: Don't name mass shooters. Available at: <https://www.kstat.com/news/2014/07/28/fbi-to-media-dont-name-mass-shooters-2/>

¹⁵ The campaign is based on motivating media and its representatives to rethink the way they report on tragic crimes in particular – the way should be to draw attention to the victims and not to the attacker. This will not fulfil their motivation to gain attention, fame or arouse public interest in their person and actions, which often have tragic consequences. See: <https://www.christchurchcall.com/assets/Documents/Christchurch-Call-Crisis-Response-Workplan.pdf>

⁹ The movement speaks out against police brutality and racial inequality directed against African Americans and Latinos. It was created in response to repeated cases of open discrimination.

¹⁰ A key objective of the campaign is to promote LGBT+ acceptance among children and young people involved in community and educational initiatives, such as England's Premier League Primary Stars and Premier League Kicks, and within football academies.

¹¹ A campaign of social activism that aims to eliminate homophobia in sport.

¹² A social movement to combat sexual abuse and harassment against women.

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