Blessing or curse of the digital world — perceptions of online anonymity in Polish daily newspapers

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ABSTRACT: With the Internet's political importance on the rise, anonymous online deliberation has become a vital form of citizen participation in the public discourse. Proponents of the right to anonymity argue that it helps secure users' privacy, autonomy and freedom of speech. Critics, on the other hand, maintain that anonymous content is usually offensive, deceptive and of little value. While the advantages and threats of online anonymity have been widely researched, little has been said about the role of the media in determining the future of anonymous communication. Through the analysis of 300 articles related to online anonymity, published in the Polish quality press, this paper explores how this contested issue is constructed in the Polish media discourse. It is argued that Polish newspapers paint a mostly negative and highly simplified picture of online anonymity, which might have damaging consequences for online privacy and freedom of speech.

KEYWORDS: online anonymity, democracy, Poland, media, Internet, content analysis

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INTRODUCTION

There is a broad agreement amongst media scholars that the Internet has a great impact on the shape of modern democracy (Papacharissi, 2010; Dahlberg, 2001, 2011; Fuchs, 2008; Mossberger et al., 2008; Hacker & Van Dijk, 2000). The development of tools enabling online deliberation, such as comments on media sites, online discussion forums, e-mail lists, web discussion boards, chat channels, blogs, wikis and social networking sites (Dahlberg, 2011), have led to the unprecedented, favorable circumstances for citizens and readers participation in a public discourse (Nielsen, 2014).

One aspect of this participation, which triggers heated academic, political and media debates is the possibility of Internet users to remain anonymous. Proponents of the right to anonymity argue that it helps secure users' privacy, autonomy and freedom of speech, as well as facilitates resistance to the omnipotence of the state, market and, in some cases, oppressive social norms. Critics, on the other hand, see the act of withdrawing identity information as a way to limit or avoid responsibil-

ity for one's actions. In Poland, Michał Boni, the former Minister of Administration and Digitization, responsible for developing Internet regulation, stated in an interview that "[a]nonymity provides security for the devil, for the evil; for demons and destruction" (*Anonimowość*, 2012).

Such negative rhetoric, according to a growing number of scholars, can be seen as part of a broader trend towards limiting or even completely eliminating anonymity from the new media environments (Froomkin, 2011; van Zoonen, 2013; Bollmer, 2012; Lovink, 2012). While a lot has been written about economic and political forces working towards abolishing anonymous online communication, little has been said about the role of the media in this process. Moreover, it appears that the media debate about online anonymity has never been discussed in the post-communist context.

This paper aims at closing this gap. It focuses on the importance of media discourse for understanding the future of anonymity on the Internet and investigates if the media debate in Poland is contributing to the anti-anonymity rhetoric. Based on an analysis of 300 articles related to online anonymity, published in Polish newspapers in the years 2006–2012, this paper argues that the Polish public is offered a mostly negative, partial and superficial view of the issue at stake. In the media, online anonymity is mainly associated with illegal and offensive content, and rarely discussed in the context of privacy, surveillance or freedom of speech.

The results presented here are part of a broader study focused on the public discourse around online anonymity in Poland. The main aim of this study is to explore cultural contexts of the debate, as well as power struggles involved in shaping the future of anonymity on the Internet.

THE ROLE OF ONLINE ANONYMITY IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Definitions

The controversies related to online anonymity start with determining what it means to be anonymous on the Internet. It is often the case that those who oppose and support online anonymity do not specify what they actually mean. The phrase "online anonymity" is used equally in relation to the situations in which the author's legal name is not known to other users (e.g. due to using a pseudonym, which could be however easily linked to the legal name via the Internet Protocol (IP) address) and when the person uses various encryption services, which make the identification much more difficult, even for the state authorities.

This complexity led academics to create various categorizations of online anonymity. Froomkin (1995), for example, distinguishes between untraceable anonymity, untraceable pseudonymity, traceable anonymity and traceable pseudonymity, depending on the ability of the intermediary to identify the author (traceable versus untraceable) and the usage of a persistent screen name (anonymity versus pseudo-

nymity). The more detailed distinction is suggested by Marx (1999), who defines anonymity as a lack of certain identity traits: legal name, locatability, pseudonyms linked to name or location, pseudonyms that are not linked to name or location, pattern knowledge, social categorization, symbols of eligibility/non-eligibility. According to Marx, full anonymity means "that the person cannot be identified according to any of [those] seven dimensions" (1999, p. 100). Additionally, Ponesse (2013, pp. 336–337) argues that anonymity depends on the ease with which certain identity traits might, by themselves, be linked to a specific person. In this context she distinguishes between "Nonidentifying information" (such as gender or age), "Minimally identifying information" (such as alma mater) and "Uniquely identifying information" (such as a National Insurance number). Ponesse adds, however, that the categories are not fixed, and in certain circumstances the "Nonidentifying information" can become "Uniquely identifying information" (for example, when there is only one man in a group of women).

Overall, most of the scholars recognize that anonymity is complex and context-specific. Nissenbaum (1999) points out that being anonymous in the online world means "the possibility of acting or participating while remaining out of reach, remaining unreachable" (Nissenbaum, 1999, p. 142). Wallace, on the other hand, defines online anonymity as "noncoordinatability of traits in a given respect" (Wallace, 1999, p. 25, cited in Wallace, 2008, p. 168), and explains how people can remain anonymous in one respect (e.g., to the police) and not in another (e.g., to their family). Acknowledging this complexity and sensitivity to particular circumstances, anonymity on the Internet can be understood as the lack of uniquely identifying cues attached to a specific online activity in a given social context.

Online anonymity versus state control

While defining online anonymity proves to be a challenging task, establishing its role in a democratic society is even more disputable. The following sections of this paper introduce two interconnected areas of academic debate surrounding anonymity on the Internet: the relation between online anonymity and the controlling power of the state, and the role of online anonymity for the development of the democratic public sphere.

The polarization of the academic debate surrounding online anonymity has its roots in the dual role of a government in a democratic system. On the one hand, the task of a government is to ensure citizens' safety and protect their possessions, which may involve gathering personal data. According to Haggerty and Samatas, state surveillance "is both an inevitable attribute of democracy and a key component of liberal forms of governance" (2010, p. 6). In this context, anonymity is often seen as an obstacle to the fulfilment of the state's protective function. According to Leshed, "the main risk of anonymity is the loss of accountability. Those responsible for any misconduct cannot be identified and brought to justice" (2009, p. 245).

However, another function of democratic government is to ensure civil liberties, such as privacy or freedom of speech. Excessive state surveillance, it is argued, may serve as a tool of repression, cause invasion of private spaces, and prevent citizens from criticizing the powerful (Haggerty & Samatas, 2010; Taddicken, 2012). One of the most important arguments here is the role of anonymity in protecting citizens' privacy. The relationship between anonymity and privacy has been most famously established by Westin, who described anonymity as a state of privacy that "occurs when the individual is in public places or performing public acts but still seeks, and finds, freedom from identification and surveillance" (1967, p. 31). Based on Westin's approach, many authors understand online anonymity as a tool to achieve privacy on the Internet, and therefore as something worth protection (Woo, 2006; Steeves, 2009; Wallace, 2008; Taddicken, 2012). Akdeniz (2002, p. 233) notes that online anonymity "enables users to prevent surveillance and monitoring of their activities on the Internet from commercial companies and from the government." In fact, anonymity is often seen as the only form of sustaining privacy on the Internet (Moore, 2002; Woo, 2006).

Online anonymity and the public sphere

The second distinctive field of academic debate about online anonymity is related to a democratic public sphere and its two aspects: freedom of speech and discourse ethics.

The proponents of the right to anonymity on the Internet indicate a very close link between anonymity and freedom of speech. They see anonymity as a *tool* for ensuring freedom of speech, as it helps to limit political and societal pressure on the speaker and protects unpopular speakers from retaliation, or from being exposed to social stigma (Tien, 1996). The decision to withdraw an author's identifying information is also seen as an inherent *part* of the protected speech — the view that is mostly popular among legal scholars in the United States (Froomkin, 2003).

While a positive role of anonymity on the Internet is widely recognized, some scholars and new media practitioners argue that it is outweighed by its drawbacks (Davenport, 2002; Levmore, 2010; Zhuo, 2010). Most significantly, the act of withdrawing identity information is seen as an attempt to avoid legal or social responsibility for one's actions, and therefore as something contrary to the free speech ideal. Accordingly, communication-related crimes and abuses on the Internet, such as hate speech, libel, defamation, slander or bullying cannot be detected and perpetrators cannot be held accountable.

Apart from discussing a link between online anonymity and freedom of speech, academics investigate the potential of anonymous speech to produce valuable, civic public discourse. For example, Dahlberg (2001) attempts to assess online discourse against the requirements of the public sphere and rational-critical discourse, de-

veloped from the work of Habermas. His conclusions, supported by an empirical study of the Internet forum in Minnesota, are ambiguous. On the one hand, according to Dahlberg, the lack of anonymity on the forum helped to develop respectful deliberation and sincerity. This observation is confirmed by more frequent studies on anonymity and civility of public discussions online. In his study of users' comments on the news sites, Santana (2014) found that non-anonymous comments are more civil than anonymous ones. However, Dahlberg's study also showed, that full identification of users made a forum less inclusive. He points out that "participation is, in fact, both quantitatively and qualitatively, dominated by those already powerful offline (politically active, educated, white males)" (2001, p. 626). Here anonymity could perhaps ensure more diverse and representative opinions, as hegemonically defined "quality" and "civility" of public discourse may come with the price of exclusion and elitism.

DE-ANONYMIZATION HYPOTHESIS

The discussions outlined above indicate that anonymity is a highly complex and controversial feature of the online world, leading to both problematic and desirable outcomes. In the "post-Snowden" reality, in which Internet users have become aware of the omnipotence of governmental surveillance, using anonymizing tools might be the only way to preserve privacy on the Internet and protect protesters and whistleblowers. Research conducted by Kang, Brown and Kiesler (2013) showed that people use online anonymity mostly with the intention to protect themselves from online predators, governmental and business organizations, as well as from the harassment and privacy abuses by other users.

Despite those benefits of remaining anonymous while engaging in certain activities on the Internet, growing number of scholars observe a unidirectional trend towards restriction or even complete elimination of anonymity from online spaces (Froomkin, 2011; van Zoonen, 2013; Bollmer, 2012; Lovink, 2012). This trend, which might be described as a process of *de-anonymization*, is motivated by commercial and political interests, but also, which this paper is mostly concerned with, by the cultural shift towards promoting unified, fixed online identities (van Zoonen, 2013) and the growing social legitimization and promotion of the so called "true self." As Bollmer notes "[t]he ability to speak truth and have that truth recognized politically depends on one's willingness to fully reveal one's fixed and totalized identity" (2012, p. 2). Lovink acknowledges a similar tendency. He suggests that "[n]o longer encouraged to act out a role, we are forced to be 'ourselves' (in a form that is no less theatrical or artificial)… There is no alternative identity" (2012, p. 13). Van Zoonen (2013) observes that online anonymity is being constructed as a "risk factor" and that various forces are working towards promoting one fixed identity. The main aim of this study is to investigate if and how the Polish media are contributing to the process of delegitimization of online anonymity.

ANONYMITY AND THE MEDIA IN POLAND

While it is easy to find examples of online anonymity being presented as a "risk factor," little systematic research has been done on the discourse surrounding the issue at stake, especially in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, understanding how the media talk about online anonymity is important for several reasons.

Firstly, the way online anonymity is constructed in the media is influenced by numerous political and economic interests. This is particularly important in a post-communist context, where the level of political parallelism between media and policymakers is relatively high (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012). Understanding how media talk about anonymity can lead to better understanding of interests and values that underlie the debate.

The discursive construction of online anonymity also influences users' understanding of the issue at stake and their evaluation of it. This corresponds with the argument made by Baym, who believes that communication about technology may be even more important than technology itself, as it "can give rise to understanding of technology and to policy decisions which in turn shape the uses" (2010, p. 44). It is therefore important to investigate how online anonymity is defined by Polish media and if readers are offered a sufficient understanding of it. This, according to Nissenbaum, is crucial for people to be "more cautious, more guarded, more mindful of the information they divulge to others in various transactions and, as a result, more capable of protecting the possibility of anonymity" (1999, pp. 143–144).

Lastly, the media contribute to shaping the public debate by legitimizing or delegitimizing certain voices and forms of participation, first, in the way they are featured in the news coverage; and second, by news outlets themselves adopting particular technologies for online participation. For instance, a growing number of Polish media platforms implement Facebook's social plug-ins, such as "Like" buttons and commenting features, only allowing comments from users who have a Facebook account. Consequently, the media are in a powerful position to influence the future of online anonymity on a both normative, as well as practical level.

For the reasons stated above, this research investigates how online anonymity was portrayed in two quality Polish daily newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. While the traditional, general audience media are only one platform of public debate surrounding anonymity on the Internet, they serve as a good indicator of dominant struggles over its role in a democratic society. During the last ten years of systematic study of the most opinion-forming media in Poland, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* were always in the top three of the most influential media outlets (see, e.g., Najbardziej opiniotwórcze polskie…, 2013).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main aim of conducting content analysis of the Polish newspapers' coverage of online anonymity was to draw a map of cultural and social meanings associated with the issue at stake, as well as to investigate how online anonymity is evaluated. According to Deacon et al. (2007), content analysis helps to produce a "big picture" of studied phenomenon. By analyzing the frequency of certain contexts, actors, topics and events that occur in the corpus, content analysis can be used as a map for further studies.

The main aim of this investigation was to explore how online anonymity was covered in Polish quality newspapers between the years 2006 and 2012. The specific research questions included:

RQ 1: What are the dominant contexts in which online anonymity is discussed?
RQ 2: What types of anonymous activities dominate the coverage?
RQ 3: Who are the actors involved in the debate?
RQ 4: What are the main evaluative statements concerning online anonymity?

METHODOLOGY

The exploratory nature of the research questions, as well as the lack of previous studies on Polish media coverage of online anonymity, determined a decision to adopt an inductive approach to content analysis. It means that coding categories were developed not prior to, but in parallel with the analytical process, and were constantly tested and revised. Carey and Burkell (2007) talk in this context about qualitative content analysis, which is used to discover and characterize patterns in analyzed texts. In order to draw a map of meanings and contexts in which online anonymity is debated in the Polish public discourse, this study analyses content of two national, daily, quality newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*.

Gazeta Wyborcza is a leading daily, quality newspaper with an average daily sale of 171,876 (*Wyniki kontroli*, 2014). It was established in 1989 as the voice of the Solidarity movement and became the first legal, oppositional newspaper outside the control of the communist regime. Its political profile is broadly social-liberal and represents mostly an "optimistic" approach towards the economic and political changes that happened in Poland after 1989 (Bobrowska, 2012). *Rzeczpospolita* is the second biggest Polish quality newspaper in terms of total sale, which amounts to 46, 174 (*Wyniki kontroli*, 2014). It is moderately conservative and sometimes seen as an adversary to the center-left *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Apart from sections about national and foreign politics, the newspaper offers extensive coverage of business and legal issues. It therefore claims to be highly influential among Polish political and economic elites (*O Rzeczpospolitej*, 2014).

The analyzed time span covers the years 2006–2012, a starting date being an average time when Poles started using the Internet (*World Internet Project*, 2011,

p. 13); marked with a launch of the first mass-scale Polish social network, nasza-klasa.pl.

The sample for this study has been constructed using the relevance (purposive) sampling technique (Krippendorf, 2004). The sampled material was obtained through the newspapers' online archive in the case of *Rzeczpospolita* and Nexis-UK database in the case of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The keywords included: anonimow(!) (Engl. 'anonym(!)' (with open ending, including anonym(ous), -(ity) etc.)) and 'interne(!)'. However, due to a large number of stories related only to anonymity in the "offline" context, only those stories were selected, in which "anonymity" and "internet" appear in the same paragraph (anonimow! w/p interne!). The final, manual refining eliminated all stories that did not relate to online anonymity and led to establishing an ultimate sample size that amounted to 300 stories — 115 (38%) from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 185 (62%) from *Rzeczpospolita* — published between January 2006 and December 2012.

In those stories, 412 assertions about online anonymity were identified; 140 of them (34%) in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 272 (67%) in *Rzeczpospolita*. Using a single assertion as a unit of analysis was necessary, as it often happened that online anonymity was referred to in just one or two sentences, or was mentioned more than once and in various contexts.

FINDINGS

RQ1: Contexts of discussing online anonymity

Investigating the contexts in which online anonymity is discussed in Polish newspapers does not only help to map the field of meanings associated with the issue, but it also provides some initial indications about its evaluation.

As has been argued earlier in this text, academic literature regarding online anonymity is mostly concerned with two interconnected areas: anonymity and its relation to privacy and surveillance and anonymity as an aspect of online deliberation. The analysis of contexts in which online anonymity was discussed in the Polish quality press shows that the newspapers pay much more attention to the second area. In nearly 70 per cent of analyzed assertions online anonymity is placed in the context of some form of online deliberation.

The second biggest group of assertions, which constitutes 14 per cent of all cases, describes online anonymity as a tool for criminals. Statements in this category mostly refer to criminal activity in general (19%), e-fraud (18%), hacking (16%), cyberbullying (14%) and pedophilia (12%).

In only 6% of the analyzed statements is online anonymity mentioned in the context of privacy and surveillance. This is a surprising result providing that in the academic literature this area usually receives significant attention. The remain-

ing contexts of discussing online anonymity in the Polish quality press are rather marginal.

Table 1. Contexts in which online anonymity is discussed in the Polish quality press

Category	Percentage	Number
Deliberation	68	282
Crime	14	57
Privacy/surveillance	6	24
E-commerce	3	11
Internet	2	10
Protest	2	9
Cryptography	1	5
E-government	1	4
File sharing	1	3
Online dating/Porn	1	3
Other (less than 1%)	1	4
Total	**100**	**412**

Source: author.

Since the group of assertions which place online anonymity in the context of online deliberation is so significantly higher than the other, it requires additional exploration.

The 282 assertions included in this category were analyzed further and assigned to five categories. The biggest group of statements, which constitutes 42 per cent of assertions related to anonymous online deliberation mention anonymity in the context of offensive, low quality or illegal online content. The prevalent message is that anonymity lowers the quality of online discussions and facilitates speech regarded as undesirable or illegal, as e.g.:

> It is necessary to limit online anonymity. It may help to heal a debate on the Internet, which today comes down to throwing insults and mud at each other. (Wybranowski et al., 2011)

The second largest group of assertions are those that mention online anonymity in the context of presenting opinion, evaluation or critique. While in some stories anonymity is shown as a useful feature for whistle-blowers, others point towards ethical controversies involved in publishing anonymous assessments, as e.g.:

> Doctors are doomed when it comes to verifying anonymous information posted about them on the Internet. Anyone looking at the ranking can see the doctor's name and the address of his/her

practice, but the person posting an assessment is anonymous - is hiding behind the online nickname. (Bukowski, 2010)

In 17 percent of all cases related to deliberation on the Internet, online anonymity is mentioned in the context of an unspecific/general form of communication, as e.g.:

In its roots, the problem relates to the right to anonymous communication. The development of communication technology is moving towards elimination of anonymous communication on the Internet, due to the need to identify those responsible for posted content. (Kosiarski & Wikariak, 2007)

The two contexts of online deliberation that received the least attention from the Polish quality newspapers include self-help and sensitive content (7%) and freedom of speech and censorship (5%). Figure 1 summarizes the categories of statements about online anonymity in the context of anonymous deliberation.
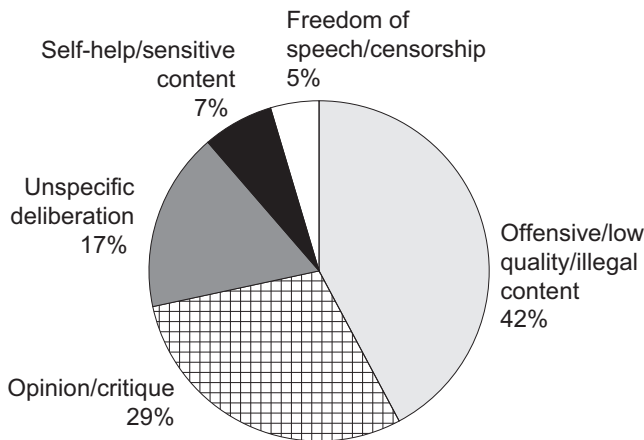
Figure 1. Contexts in which online anonymous deliberation is discussed in the Polish quality press

Source: author.

RQ2: Form of online anonymity

Online anonymity appears in newspapers' coverage mostly as a general concept, not related to any particular activity. This type of statements constitute 34% of all assertions identified in the coverage, as e.g.:

The feeling of anonymity in the global Internet creates a situation in which people don't keep a civilized language in their heads. (SW, 2006)

When anonymous activity is described in a more precise way, it mostly relates to anonymous online comments (24%) and blogging (17%). This corresponds well

with the finding that the main theme of discussions concerning online anonymity is the participation of anonymous voices in the online public sphere.

The following groups are statements which relate to anonymous emails (9%), transactions (4%) and online polls (4%). Anonymous data, as e.g.:

> Both giants bowed to pressure: Google has already announced in June that after 18 months the data will become anonymous, and that it will be impossible to connect a search history with a particular user. (tigi, reuters, 2007)

are mentioned only in 2% of all cases, while browsing and gambling both constitute 1% of the coverage. The category "others" includes all other forms of anonymity that constitutes less than 1% each. Figure 2 shows the dominant forms of online anonymity mentioned in the coverage.
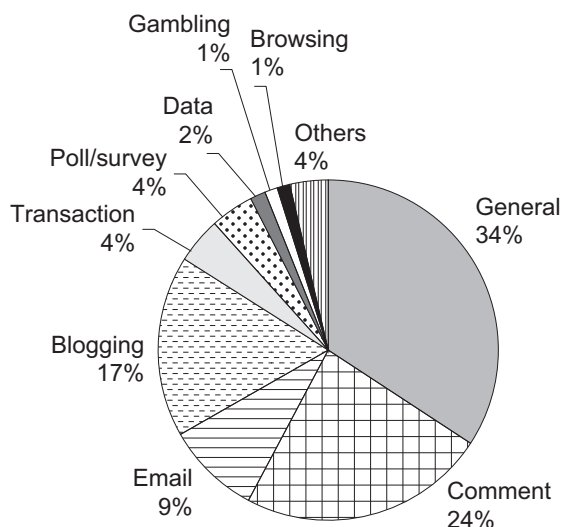
Figure 2. Forms of anonymous activity covered in the Polish quality press

Source: author.

RQ 3: Source of assertions about online anonymity

Within the categories of sources to which assertions about online anonymity have been attributed, the most common one is that of no attribution at all. This category includes statements about online anonymity made by the authors of analyzed stories, without attributing it to any particular source.

The most common categories among assertions that are attributed include police officers and law officials (lawyers, legal trainees, judges), Internet users and bloggers, as well as academics. Representatives of those categories made 6 percent of assertions about online anonymity each. A slightly smaller share of all assertions

(5%) was made by public officials and politicians, as well as journalists (quoted in the story) and representatives of various business sectors. Activists and people representing civil society were directly and indirectly quoted in 4% of the cases. The sources most commonly appearing in the coverage are represented in Figure 3.
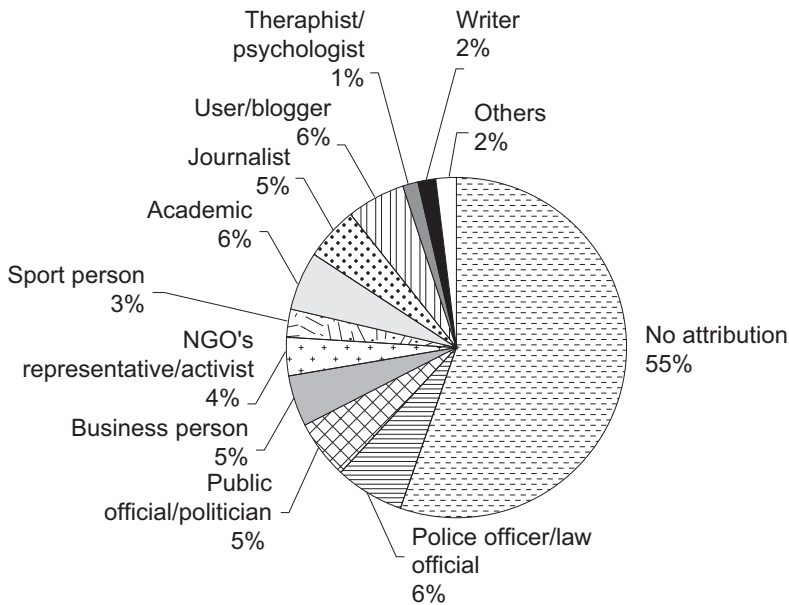

Figure 3. The source of assertions about online anonymity in the Polish quality press

Source: author.

RQ 4: Evaluation of online anonymity

Investigating value judgements usually involves a high level of interpretation and is therefore problematic within the content analytical framework, which is mostly concerned with a denotative level of meaning. Although the qualitative, rather than quantitative, character of this analysis leaves more space for researchers' interpretation of evaluative statements concerning online anonymity, the reliability of the measure requires transparency and consequence. In this study, the types of evaluative statements are borrowed from Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis and include:

1) evaluative statements, which consist of evaluative noun phrases or adjectives (e.g. "Keen thinks that anonymity of the authors is the biggest curse of Web 2.0" (Rosiak, 2007).

2) statements with deontic modalities (e.g. "They (bloggers, KT) should not be anonymous, because then they might be accused of not being independent" (Kamińska, 2007).

3) statements with affective mental process verbs, which include affective evaluations (e.g. "I hate anonymous bloggers. If you are so canny and write rubbish about another person, don't be afraid of confrontation" (Red., 2009).

4) statements with value assumptions embedded in the text (e.g. "Today, the Internet is the place where young people start their participation in a public debate. If we believe this is a positive thing, and we know anonymity is one of the factors that makes it easier, we have an answer" (Janke, 2012).

By identifying the various types of evaluative statements, the assertions concerning online anonymity were coded as dominantly positive or negative. A separate category was created for assertions which portray online anonymity as positive and negative at the same time, as e.g.

> Anonymity is a value, but at the same time the disadvantage of the Internet — thinks Jonathan Zittrain from Oxford University. (NB, KU, 2007)

All remaining assertions, which cannot be categorized as evidently negative or positive, were coded as lacking clear evaluation: e.g.

> Freenet guarantees complete anonymity; Today, anonymous file sharing involves not only music, but also movies, programs, photos and even e-books. (GB, 2006)
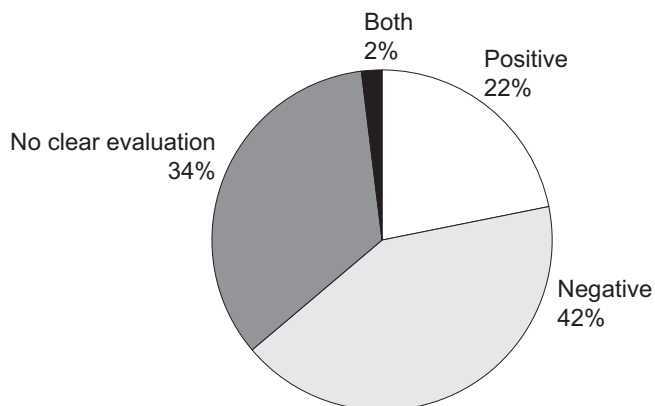

Figure 4. Evaluative character of assertions concerning online anonymity in the Polish quality press

Source: author.

As Figure 4 indicates, assertions in which anonymity is portrayed as negative are the most common in the sample and constitute 42 percent of all cases. It is approximately twice as much as assertions evaluating online anonymity positively (22%). In over one third of the analyzed statements no manifestly positive or negative evaluations are made (34%). Only 2 percent of all assertions portray online anonymity as both positive and negative.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The battle over anonymity on the Internet is ongoing. Although achieving absolute anonymity in the online environment is difficult, the technological solutions, legal regulations, and most importantly, social norms, may enable users to conceal their identifying information or prevent third parties from accessing it. The media play an important role in this context, as they not only influence how people view online anonymity, but also facilitate certain forms of online behavior.

The main objective of analyzing newspapers' coverage of online anonymity was to draw a map of meanings associated with this issue and to investigate if and in what respects Polish newspapers contribute to a trend of limiting or eliminating anonymity from online spaces.

The analysis of the main context in which anonymity has been discussed shows that media link it mostly with citizen participation in the online public sphere (almost 70 percent of all analyzed statements). This is also supported by the high percentage of assertions being related to anonymous comments and blogging. Anonymous participation of citizens, however, is not highly appreciated. The dominant context in which anonymity is presented relates to offensive and illegal speech. While a large number of stories also mention anonymity as a tool to express opinions, only in 5 per cent of assertions related to deliberation online is anonymity explicitly associated with freedom of speech.

This last result might be surprising, as the media in a democratic society are expected to be at the forefront of freedom of expression and unrestrained public discourse. However, a recent study of American journalists proved otherwise. Nielsen (2013) found that 73% of them believed that online comments should not be anonymous. Similarly, in one of the most high profile Internet related controversies in Poland, the daily quality newspapers had disclosed the real life identity of a prominent political blogger, "Kataryna." In this conflict, the issue of anonymity has become the main weapon used by professional journalists in downgrading and delegitimizing bloggers' contribution to public discourse. The findings of the content analysis show a similar tendency, as Polish newspapers discuss online anonymity mostly in the context of offensive and illegal speech.

Moreover, in only 6 per cent of analyzed statements anonymity is presented as a way to protect one's privacy online. On the contrary, the relatively high percentage of stories associating online anonymity with crime and harmful speech might, in fact, lead to a conclusion that more surveillance is necessary.

The dominantly negative approach towards online anonymity has been confirmed by the assessment of evaluative statements made in the analyzed newspapers. In the instances when online anonymity has been explicitly evaluated, only 22% of assertions were positive, while almost twice as much showed anonymity as undesirable.

Another important observation is that Polish quality newspapers often adopt a "common sense" approach in their reporting on online anonymity. This is dem-

onstrated by the highest percentage of assertions about online anonymity not being attributed to any particular source, as well as discussing anonymity as a general concept, without specifying what form of anonymous participation is being referred to. According to Linde, common sense is a "set of beliefs and relations between beliefs that speakers may assume are known and shared by all competent members of the culture" (1993, p. 222). The power of common sense arguments lies in that they are not perceived as a set of beliefs but facts, true reflections of reality. Stating that anonymity has a particular effect in the online environment, without specifying a source of this assumption, may indicate this "common sense" approach among Polish journalists.

Additionally, journalists hardly ever indicate what is actually understood by the phrase "online anonymity." Due to the textual character of analysis it was impossible to identify the meaning intended by the authors, and establish what levels of anonymity the assertions concern. This is a task for an ethnographic study, which could potentially shed more light on journalists' understanding of the analyzed issue.

Overall, the study confirms that the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish quality press supports the de-anonymization hypothesis, by showing the discussed issue in a mostly negative way and in undesirable contexts. Those findings, however, must be seen as rather posing questions, and not delivering answers.

First of all, while the study presents a general description of the debate surrounding online anonymity, the use of content analysis does not tell us anything about a meaning-making process and latent meanings underlying the text. These drawbacks, however, could be overcome by combining content analysis with more qualitative methods, such as Critical Discourse Analysis. This is the main reason why the study presented here is only a small part of larger research project, in which the discursive events related to online anonymity (such as the case of blogger "Kataryna" mentioned above) will be investigated.

Moreover, this investigation offers a very limited insight into a broader political, economic and cultural context of the debate surrounding online anonymity in Poland. This debate is influenced by a wide range of political, economic, technological and cultural factors that have not appeared in this paper but undoubtedly deserve academic attention.

It also needs to be pointed out that the debate about online anonymity in the quality press is only a small fragment of the public debate surrounding this topic. It is possible and highly probable that an analysis of the coverage of online anonymity in tabloid newspapers, television or online media, would bring different results.

Last but not least, similar media analyses in other countries would allow for a more comparative approach, which would help understand local factors that influence the way anonymity on the Internet is understood, evaluated and, consequently, preserved or abandoned.

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