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PECULIARITIES OF ANONYMOUS COMMENTS' MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN NEWS PORTALS

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Abstract. In the world of today's information technologies, data may spread through cyber space at the speed of lightning. News portals constantly update the information available at their disposal by posting new articles. In order to attract new readers and to retain existing ones, in addition to focussing on publishing quality content, portal managers work on continuously improving their sites. These websites may have various interactive features, among them the opportunity to comment on an article. In some news portals, the number of anonymous comments is particularly high. The activities of online commenters and the issues related to their anonymity have always generated heated discussion owing to a number of reasons, including the content of the comments, the right of the commenters to remain anonymous and the extent to which the portal manager could be held liable. News portals equipped with an anonymous commenting function give rise to a culture of online bullying and hate-mongering where the cyber-criminals feel immune from punishment and existing control measures are insufficient for addressing the problem. The advocates of anonymous commenting argue that it promotes freedom of expression and portal administrators claim they can control defamatory and offensive anonymous comments by deleting them. The article discusses the theoretical aspects of anonymity, anonymous commenting and anonymous comments. Based on a case study of the most popular news portals in Lithuania, and, in particular, on a comparative analysis of the privacy policy and the environment for commenting in three of them, the authors offer empirical data on the ratio between the number of comments and that of the commenters. The main purpose of the article is to reveal the peculiarities of anonymous comments' management of the news portals that enjoy the greatest popularity in Lithuania.

Keywords: anonymous comments; hate speech; privacy; news portals, Internet

1. Introduction

According to Ferry (2002), the word "anonymous" was introduced into the English language during the sixteenth century. Meaning "without a name" or nameless, it was borrowed from the Greek and referred to writings whose authors were unknown or concealed. Throughout history individuals have been writing in anonymous or pseudonymous ways. Anonymous and pseudonymous expression allows individuals to express unpopular opinions, honest observations, and otherwise unheard complaints. Anonymity has long been thought to encourage

bad behavior, either by changing the salient norms (Reicher et al., 1995), or through reducing the subjective need to adhere to norms by dampening the effect of internal mechanisms such as guilt and shame (Zimbardo, 1969).

In the digital age, the news media gives voice to anonymous speakers in two ways: reporters may extend confidentiality to sources in exchange for newsworthy information, or a news website may host an online comment function that allows readers to post their reactions to content pseudonymously (Hanamirian, 2012). The virtual environment is constantly changing (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018), every individual can communicate online without connecting their online identities with their offline identities.

The issue of anonymity on the Internet divides opinions. On the one side there are many who maintain that anonymity on the World Wide Web is an essential feature of its nature, and of its freedom. On the opposite side are those who consider the Internet to be the same as any other public forum, where anonymity can only be the exception, not the rule (Zeno-Zencovich, 2014). The dark side of anonymity becomes apparent when it is used to shield the individual from accountability. It can be used to deceive (either maliciously or playfully), falsely accuse others, or evade responsibility for one's actions (Weicher, 2007; Šišulák, S. 2017).

The article is based on the case studies of most popular news portals in Lithuania, which were carried out with a view to the websites' most appropriate privacy policies and options related to commenting functionality.

The article revolves around the **scientific issue** posed by the lack of research on the peculiarities of commenting and comment management in the selected three Lithuanian news portals. News portals employ different privacy policies, anonymous users have an opportunity to write numerous comments and are thus able to shape the other readers' opinion. In addition, anonymous commenters are more likely to use taboo language, etc.

The **main purpose** of this article is to reveal the peculiarities of anonymous comments' management of Lithuanian news portals. This purpose was achieved through a variety of **tasks:**
1. Investigated the theoretical aspects of anonymity, anonymous comments, and situations of anonymous commenting.
2. Carried out a comparative analysis of the privacy policies adopted by Lithuanian news portals and the functionality of their respective commenting environments.
3. Completed an empirical study which revealed the ratio between the numbers of comments and commenters on a specific article in a news portal.

The study presented in the article was carried out using the following **methods**: comparative analysis, systematic analysis and quantitative empirical analysis.

2. Theoretical Aspects of Anonymous Commenting Situations

American scholar (Ekstrand, 2013) attempted to identify motives for speaking or publishing anonymously that were either beneficial or harmful. Beneficial motives included following convention, safety, engaging in spirited rhetoric, gamesmanship, disguising class or gender, and protecting privacy. Harmful motives included intimidation, insulation, concealment, and crime or fraud.

In contemporary environment in conditions of globalization predicting of development peculiarities and external factors' impact becomes especially urgent issue (Tvaronavičienė, 2018). In many parts of the globe, online comments have become an essential ingredient of a thriving news publication: readers feel that they have a right to make their contribution in an online environment that is becoming increasingly more dialogue-based than one-way broadcasting. The ability to comment on news articles or in discussion forums offers readers the chance to

indulge in debate on hot topics hosted by their favourite news organisations with other readers from all over the world. For news organisations, online comments can be an extremely valuable resource. They provide additional detail and insight to articles from informed readers who are passionate about the subject, offer a wide range of supplementary opinions and give newsrooms a window into how their readers see both their journalism and the world around them. Their feedback and perspectives can also broaden the publication's coverage from their vantage point, inspire new stories and provide possible sources or ways to address an issue (Goodman, Cherubini, 2013). Mass media plays a key role in shaping public opinion. With the increase in Internet use, mass media has become a tool for people to express their perspectives and read the opinions of others. Readers can participate in shaping opinion not only as information seekers, but also as information providers, because Internet news websites provide users with spaces to interact with the news, responding to stories and sharing their opinions with other online news participants (Ahn, 2011).

An individual's perception of others' opinions is one of the important components of public opinion. According to social comparison theory, public opinion is shaped continuously as people compare their opinions to those of others. When no objective criteria exist for evaluating their own opinions, people have a tendency to compare themselves to others. In other words, people are motivated to determine socially acceptable opinions by assessing the perspectives of others compared to their own (Festinger, 1954). Individuals join social environments in order to access others' opinions, and consequently, their attitudes and behaviors often change (Kim, Sun, 2006).

The Internet is an anonymous environment where it is easy to seek out and explore one's niche, however idiosyncratic. Consequently, antisocial individuals have greater opportunities to connect with similar others, and to pursue their personal brand of "self expression" than they did before the advent of the Internet (Buckels et al., 2014). As people read news on the Internet, they are also exposed to other readers' comments in response to the news stories. The comment forums on news websites offer a sphere where readers can ommunicate as both providers and receivers, and the comments provided may influence how news readers shape their opinions. An important problem plaguing websites that allow users to leave feedback, having a negative impact on their online business and overall user experience (Djuric et al, 2015). Comparing the tone of thousands of online comments posted by anonymous and nonanonymous users following online newspaper stories, Santana (2014) found that 53.3 percent of anonymous comments included language that was vulgar, racist, profane or hateful; only 28.7 percent of non-anonymous comments were found to be uncivil.

Hate speech is a particular form of offensive language that makes use of stereotypes to express an ideology of hate. Nockleby (2000) defines hate speech as "any communication that disparages a person or a group on the basis of some characteristic such as race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or other characteristic. Many people are resentful and dissatisfied with the subpar quality of their lives: the poor working conditions, the extra financial burdens arising from bank loans, the unsatisfactory relationships with their spouses or partners, all of which produce high stress levels and depression. For such angry individuals, the bullying and hate-mongering on social media platforms becomes a form of rebellion and self-realization. Users deliberately incite hatred and engage in bullying online because they are sure they will be able to avoid punishment. The managers of online social media platforms, on the other hand, do not have access to any effective method for curbing inappropriate comments and ensuring user protection. The virtual social network model is primarily based on the collection and sharing of personal data by the data subject. (Limba, Šidlauskas, 2018).

Attempts to improve online behavior through non-coercive means have followed one of two general approaches (Kiesler, 2012). Some websites try to directly influence social norms by explicitly stating the expected standards of behavior in their online community ("netiquette"). On the other hand, numerous newspapers and blogging sites motivate people to adhere to social norms by reducing anonymity through measures such as only allowing registered users to leave comments on web pages (Krysowski, Tremewan, 2015). To combat abusive language,

many internet companies have standards and guidelines that users must adhere to and employ human editors, in conjunction with systems which use regular expressions and blacklist, to catch bad language and thus remove a post (Nobata et al., 2016). Detecting abusive language is often more difficult than one expects for a variety of reasons. The noisiness of the data in conjunction with a need for world knowledge not only makes this a challenging task to automate but also potentially a difficult task for people as well (Table 1).

Table 1. Reasons why detecting abusive language is difficult

More than simple keyword spotting
Difficult to track all racial and minority insults
Abusive language may actually be very fluent and grammatical
Abusiveness can be cross sentence boundaries
Sarcasm

Source: Nobata et al., 2016

Hateful and insulting comments on social media platforms may be divided into several groups:

1. Unconscious (unintentional): The comment is spontaneous and occurs without any prior planning and without targeting a specific audience; the author of the comment does not realize that they are being hateful.
2. Conscious (intentional): The comment is made with the deliberate intent to insult someone or to incite hatred but it is not aimed at any specific target audience.
3. Targeted: The hostility is directed at a particular audience (such as Africans or Jews) that has been selected in advance.
4. Systematic/repetitive: The hostility is directed at a particular audience (such as blacks or Jews) that has been selected in advance and is constant, e.g. 100 comments written over 24 hours.

Frequently, the hate-mongering is directed against the disabled and individuals with non-traditional sexual identities, as well as against the representatives of other races, nationalities, religions, and cultures. Moreover, the discord may be instigated for economic purposes, for example, by systematically targeting a competitor in a particular business branch. The most common form of bullying and hate-mongering is recreational (done for entertainment) and may be directed at anybody for any reason, no matter how random, such as, for instance, an unusual physical appearance, one's rsonality, social status, etc.

The following factors may encourage users to incite hatred: distrust toward the state and its efficiency; biased opinions voiced by the media that do not coincide with the position of the vast majority; social inequality and poverty; poor education, low culture and lack of proper manners; low self-esteem and a desire to rebel.

Online news comments can be moderated in a variety of ways. One involves using automated filtering systems to block comments including swear words or foul language. This approach, however, is not always adequate – for instance, comments on sensitive topics (such as politics or religion) may be offensive without actually containing offensive terms. An alternative solution relies on crowdsourcing (Mishra, Rastogi, 2012), letting the set of commenters' selfdiscipline by – for instance – upvoting or downvoting a comment. Another approach consists in forcing commenters to publicly and personally identify themselves – under the expectation that public identification may lead to more civil discourse.

Commenters are more likely to use offensive words under the less identifiable conditions. Instead of either using excessive identification policy instruments or maintaining a state of high anonymity, suggest that the use of a Social networking services (next- SNS) account might naturally lead to self-disclosure of identity. Commenters

using their SNS account, therefore, are (consciously or unconsciously) less likely to be online flamers or trolls (Cho, Acquisti, 2013). Reader (2012) points out that if anonymous comments are not permitted on news sites, the comments will more closely approximate the journalistic quality of the news media on which they are posted. The expected advantage of not allowing anonymous comments is the improvement in quality, which subsequently leads to a decrease in moderation costs. The downside of not allowing anonymous comments is the possibility that divergent voices will not be heard.

Media try to improve the quality of comments by using a strict comment management strategy. House rules, registration, post-moderation, pre-moderation, report buttons to report abusive comments, and social media plugins (to login with a social media account) can be used. News media may even disallow any comments on their news sites or decide to close the comment features on sensitive or controversial news items. Bakker (2010) indicates that pre-registration leads to fewer complaints about comments, but also results in fewer comments as it takes more effort to post a comment with this system. Santana (2014) endorses this principle about the influence of pre-registration on the quality of comments. When comments are posted, news media can choose to moderate the comments before or afterwards. Pre-moderation is labour-intensive and therefore costly. Reich (2011) concludes that this could be the reason why large news businesses opt for post-moderation combined with pre-registration.

If the administrator of the news portal decides to disable the anonymous comment feature, there may be a significant decline in the overall number of the comments. In this case, the option to comment could be reserved for registered users. There are two possible ways to identify a user:
1. Identity verification through an online social networking platform, such as Facebook or Google;
2. Identity verification by means of logging into a registration system managed by the service provider, where the user has to specify his or her name, surname and e-email address.

However, these methods do not guarantee that a person will enter their genuine data, either while registering a profile with a social network or while registering as a new user in the provider's system. However, they do at least make it more difficult to post large numbers of anonymous comments. Theoretically, of course, one can register multiple fake profiles, but it is time-consuming and complicates the process of logging in, entering the comment, logging out and logging back in with another username. If every service provider in Lithuania introduced this as a compulsory requirement for registration, the total number of comments would be reduced considerably, since in order to write anonymous comments in abundance one would need to have hundreds of registered user accounts.

3. An Analysis of Commenting Environments and Commenting Policies

News portals constantly update the information available at their disposal by posting new articles. In order to attract new readers and to retain existing ones, in addition to focussing on publishing quality content, portal managers work on continuously improving their sites. These websites may have various interactive features, among them the opportunity to comment on an article. The exact features intended to ensure commenting functionality depend on the particular news portal.

Login and Identification one of the first questions news organizations must consider with respect to publishing online comments is the login and user identification process. The main task of access control is to control which entities have the right to access specific system resources (Šidlauskas, 2017). Identification procedures can be classified into three broad categories, depending on whether they:
1. Allow readers to create a customizable username or pseudonym and comment anonymously without registration to the website. This type of sign-in gives users complete freedom to leave anonymous comments;

2. Require readers to log in via a social networking account. When a user logs in, the data from their profile on the social networking platform are used to verify their identity. The exact personal data requested may vary from one news portal to another. For example, when logging in through the Facebook platform, one is typicaly asked for the user's email address and public profile (required) - their name, profile picture, age range, country, language, gender and other public information. The login method may be regarded as ambiguous insofar as personal privacy is concerned, since the social media profile may be authentic, i.e. contain the user's actual name and other data, or the user may hide behind an alias.

3. Require readers to log in to website and use their real names when posting comments. In theory, the user is supposed to submit their personal data (name, surname, e-mail) to the news portal during the registration process and to think of a password to be used for logging in. No guarantee exists that the user will provide their actual data.

Upon assessing the methods used to identify users and to log in, one can argue that users are given an opportunity not to reveal their true identity and to remain anonymous while commenting (Fig. 1).
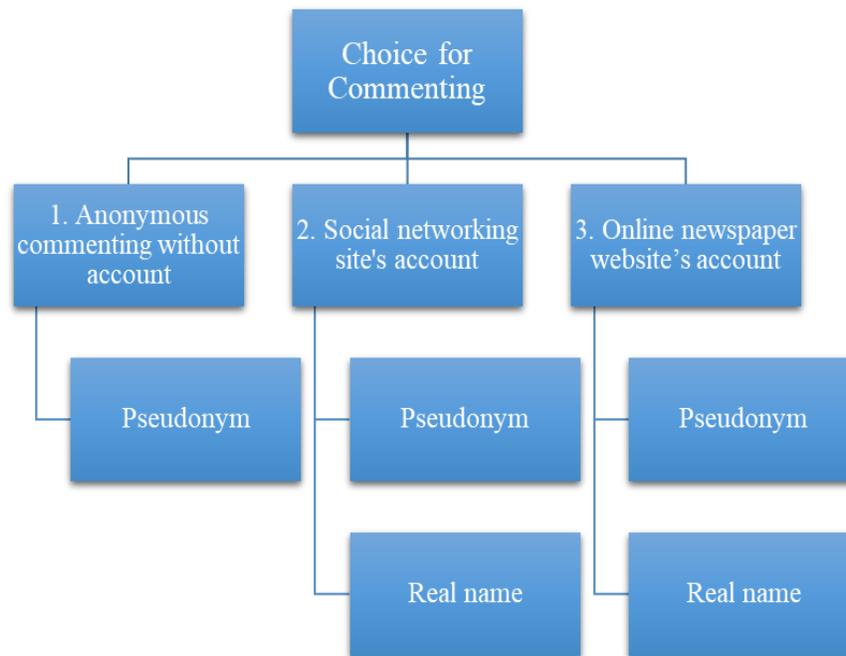

Fig. 1. Model for selecting user commenting options

Source: authors

It may seem odd that news organizations, which generally embrace or demand transparency, also often champion a right to publish stories based on anonymous sources or sponsor websites that allow readers to comment on stories anonymously or through assumed names (Heatherly et al., 2014). For instance, strict identity verification policies (i.e., the absence of anonymity) could deter users' online participation (Cho, Kim, 2012). In contrast, some studies paradoxically highlighted that highly anonymous conditions can discourage voluntary contributions because individuals are less motivated in the absence of social interactions and recognitions by others (Andreoni, Petrie, 2004). In addition, elements of anonymity may or may not produce a high likelihood of antinormative behaviors (Suler, 2005). Online news organizations' choice between anonymous, pseudonymous, or fully

identified commenting systems may have significant effects on readers' choice to participate in them and on their subsequent commenting behavior.

Researchers and practitioners argue that real names can help "promote trust, cooperation, and accountability" (Millen, Patterson, 2003), whereas anonymity may make communication impersonal and undermine credibility (Rains, 2007).

When a user writes a comment, the commenter's name is indicated nearby. Other information pertaining to the user and the comment may also be provided, including the time, country, comment number and IP address. An IP address is unique address that identifies a device on the Internet or a local network. It allows a system to be recognized by other systems connected via the Internet protocol (Christensson, 2011). Legal scholar Daniel Solove (2007) has noted that online, true anonymity usually is unavailable. Because every computer portal to the Web has a unique Internet Protocol (IP) address that is logged every time a user visits a website, one's anonymity is nearly always traceable. Anonymizing services can help obscure or erase Internet footprints, but most people do not take advantage of such services, which also are not fool-proof.

Comment rating and sorting is a widely used feature on news portals. Users are given an opportunity to rate comments by marking them with "like" or "dislike", which is how the comment gains popularity. The sorting function enables the user to choose which comments to give priority to while reading. The individual options for sorting comments depend on the news portal and may include the latest, the oldest, the best and the worst.

Some news portals allow users to respond to a specific commenter's comment. Through exposure to the responses and feedback of other readers, online news consumers gain a broader and more comprehensive experience than would be possible by reading or viewing other types of news (Yang, 2008). A common consequence of using this function is that users deviate from the main topic of the article and concentrate on the thoughts of a particular person, which, in the presence of diverse and often contradictory opinions, increases the likelihood that abusive language will become prevalent.

An important control mechanism used by news portals to limit comments that violate the commentary rules is the option for a user to flag an inappropriate comment. Users can report the comment to the news portal, which can assess the situation accordingly and, if necessary, delete it from the system.

For the sake of efficient comment management, many news portals formulate commentary rules and introduce them to the users. Such rules may specify (Table 2).

Table 2. Commenting guidelines

Comment purpose	Expressing an opinion on an article published by the portal, sharing additional information and ideas, debates with one's opponents.
User identification and login type	Anonymous commenting without any registration or login required; commenting after logging in through a social networking platform; commetning after logging into the news portal's system.
Data on the comment and the commenter	Time, country, comment number, user IP address etc.
Comment management	Rating, sorting, deletion, responses to a given comment etc.
Publishing period	News portals publish comments for a limited period of time (e.g. 14 or 30 days) on the grounds that later they become irrelevant.
Storage period	Based on legislation.
Comment administration	Every comment is evaluated prior to being published in the news portal by the person responsible for doing so; comments are evaluated after being published by the person responsible for doing so; specialized software is used to identify and delete the comments that violate the comment policy.

Specifies the reasons behind the refusal of the news portal to publish a particular comment	Taboo language; the browser does not support cookies; the user has been banned for violating the rules on commenting.
Comment blocking (depriving a user of the right to comment)	Specifies the reasons for banning a user and the duration of the ban.
Prohibitions used by news portals as a basis for deleting comments	Comments that incite national, racial, religious, sexual and other hatred; taboo language; offensive or threatening comments; advertisements.
Liability	Specifies a user's liability for inappropriate comments, as well as the liability of the news portal.
Options for informing the news portal about an inappropriate comment	Marking inappropriate comments provided the relevant technical opportunities are present; informing the news portal via email.

Source: authors

Publish and update discussion guidelines, comment policies, or community rules. According to the WAN/IFRA study, discussion guidelines should consist of "clear, thorough, transparent suggestions that enable the news organization to host an intelligent discussion and defend [its] moderation decisions". Comment policies should explicitly forbid any and all forms of hate speech and illegal content. At the same time, rules should not overwhelm commenters with a long list of 'don'ts,' but provide proactive guidance, including:

1. Details about the discussion environment that is sought;
2. Clear definitions of hate speech, defamation, libel, etc.;
3. Promotion of dialogue and opportunities for response;
4. Encouraging commenters to back up their opinions with data and facts;
5. Keeping the commenters focused on the issue at hand, rather than on attacking individuals.

As news organizations find the balance between strategic priorities and cost, it is important that each continues to try to re-engage directly with their audience and maintain control of user data, which is increasingly valuable. In the age of social media, user behaviours change rapidly and the urgency for news organisations to adapt and change is everpresent (Huang, 2016).

News portals are completely free to devise any commenting environment they prefer and to choose the functions to be used to manage that environment, as well as the commenting rules that must be followed by the users. Šidlauskas (2015) states that very important to have high quality and consumption expectations which justify the web page. Alavijeh et al. (2018) states that the value can be maintained through high service quality. Each portal may have different objectives, such as ensuring a convenient environment and quality comments, preventing inappropriate comments, maximizing the number of readers, etc. According to the statistical data obtained from Alexa.com, the three most popular news portals in Lithuania are Delfi.lt, 15min.lt and Lrytas.lt. The table below contains a comparison of the commenting environment, its functional features and the comment policy among these three portals.

Table 3. Functional peculiarities of the commenting environment and rules for commenting

Peculiarities	Three of the most popular news portals in Lithuania		
News portals	Delfi.lt	Lrytas.lt	15min.lt
Login/commenting variety	1. By logging into the local system of the news portal. 2. No login required (anonymous). 3. Through a social network.	1. No login required (anonymous).	1. By logging into the local system of the news portal. 2. Through a social network.
Comment publishing period	30 days	14 days	No information
User familiarization with the rules for commenting	Yes	No	Yes

Norms for inappropriate comments formulated	Yes	No	Yes
Liability for inappropriate comments	User	User	User
Comment control/management	Pre-moderation	Post-moderation	No information
Comment sorting	Yes	Yes	Yes
Responses to comments	Yes	No	Yes
Button for flagging inappropriate comments	Yes	No	Yes
Commenter IP address displayed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Comment rating	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: authors

The following conclusions may be drawn from Table 3:
1. Two out of the three portals have the option of commenting anonymously without logging in. Only registered users are permitted to leave comments on the third portal;
2. Delfi.lt news portal publishes comments for 30 days, while Lrytas.lt does so for 14 days. The 15min.lt website does not specify a particular deadline for publishing comments;
3. Lrytas.lt news portal does not familiarize its users with the rules for commenting, the privacy policy does not specify which comments are inappropriate and there is no opportunity to report inappropriate comments with a single click.
4. The news portals do not accept any responsibility for inappropriate comments, users are liable under the relevant legislation;
5. All of the three news portals display the commenter's IP address and allow users to rate and sort comments;
6. The conditions on the news portals are conducive to publishing inappropriate comments and other manipulating information in other ways, since comment control is carried out only after the comment is posted and becomes visible to the public.

4. Peculiarities of Commenting in Lithuanian News Portals

The option to leave anonymous comments allows news portals to increase their popularity and readability ratings. Users are eager to read and write comments, but the question is whether these comments always reflect the actual opinion of most commenters.
Research methodology: To carry out this quantitative empirical analysis, the authors in March 2018 chose an article on the same subject in each of the three most popular Lithuanian news portals and proceeded to analyze the comments. According to the statistical data obtained from Alexa.com (2018), the three most popular news portals in Lithuania are Delfi.lt, 15min.lt and Lrytas.lt.

Data is the empirical basis for any research, and it can be specified that only the data collected in an appropriate manner are reliable and reasonable (Kardelis, 2002). The qantitative empirical research done by analysing data collected via web news portals. The analysis of the comments enabled the authors to calculate:
1. The ratio between anonymous comments and single sign-on comments.
2. The ratio between the number of the commenters and that of the comments.
3. The shaping of a minority opinion (in the case of Delfi.lt news portal).

Results: The total numbers of the registered and anonymous comments are presented in Char 1. One can see that the anonymous comments are more numerous. The news portal 15min.lt only permits comments from users who are logged in, whereas in the case of Lrytas.lt news portal, all comments are anonymous.
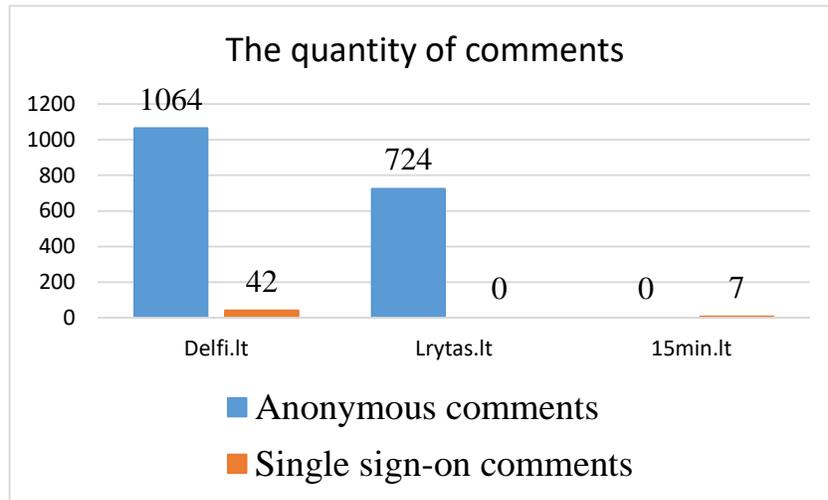

Chart 1. The number of registered and anonymous comments

Source: compiled by authors

The number of anonymous comments and the respective commenters is presented in Char 2. The example of the news portal Delfi.lt illustrates that the number of comments exceeds that of the commenters severalfold, as the same person usually writes two or more comments.
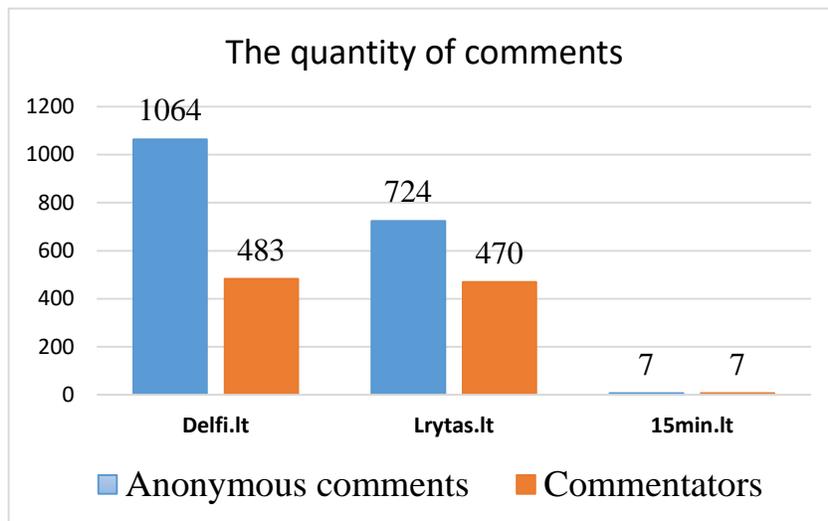

Chart 2. The number of anonymous comments and their commentators

Source: compiled by authors

The process of shaping a minority opinion (in the case of Delfi.lt news portal) is presented in Char 3. 32 anonymous commenters wrote 419 out of 1064 comments and thus formed 39% of the total comment content.
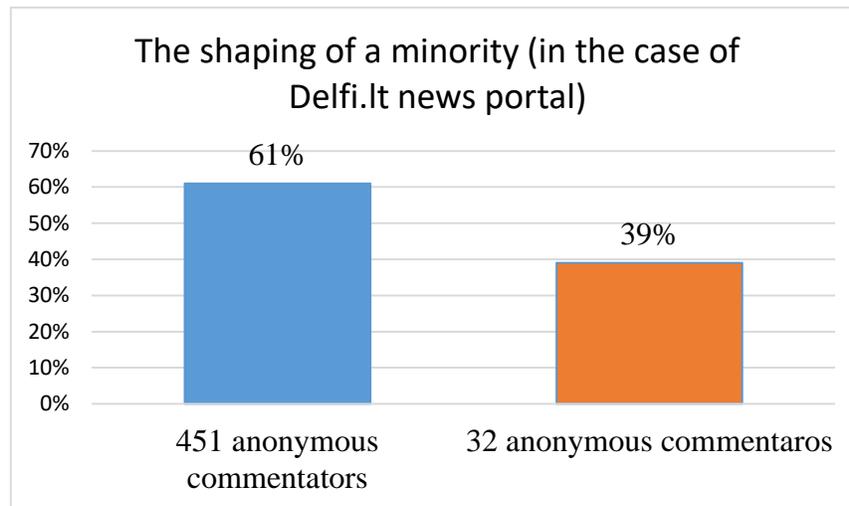

Chart 3. The number of anonymous comments and their commentators

Source: compiled by authors

The empirical study has shown that most visitors to Lithuanian news portals tend to leave comments anonymously and ignore other forms of commenting. The option of commenting anonymously without logging in enables commenters to post large numbers of comments under different aliases, thus generating the overall content of the information provided.

Conclusions

Upon analyzing the opinions expressed in the academic sources, one can argue that the commenting function plays an important role for news portals. Online comments can be quite a valuable resource for news agencies as users spend more time on the web page reading other users' comments and posting comments of their own. News portals are completely free to devise any commenting environment they prefer and to choose the functions to be used to manage that environment, as well as the commenting rules that must be followed by the users. Three commenting methods have been identified: anonymous commenting without prior registration, commenting after logging into a social networking platform and commenting after registration with the news portal.

Anonymous commenting is related to freedom of expression, but news portals do not provide any guarantee that the anonymous comments are authentic and had not been left by a group of interested parties who were requested to express a particular opinion in advance. The fact that the comments on a news portal are visible for a short time does not add to the transparency and serves as an obstacle to more extensive and detailed studies. The results of the empirical study point to the conclusion that the anonymous commenting feature gives rise to various abuses and enables certain parties to actively shape public opinion. Anonymous comments may be intended to have one social group develop an incorrect opinion about another, to promote disagreement and conflict, and to encourage distrust toward the state and its institutions, which is already a matter of national security.

News portals will delete inappropriate comments, but this only happens after the comment is posted and has been visible to the public for some time. The users of Delfi.lt and 15min.lt news portals are able to inform the managers of the news portal about inappropriate comments at the click of a button. Inappropriate comments include messages that incite national, racial, religious, sexual and other hatred; taboo language; insulting and threatening comments; and advertisements. The automated measures aimed at identifying inappropriate comments are not yet sufficiently advanced to ensure adequate protection. Since anonymous commentes feel free to act with impunity, such comments are a common sight on Lithuanian news portals. It is important to mention that, following the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in Delfi v. Estonia, it was determined that the provider of the internet services is to be held liable for offensive anonymous comments.

If the administrator of the news portal decides to disable the anonymous comment feature, there may be a significant decline in the overall number of the comments. In this case, the option to comment could be reserved for registered users. Of the three Lithuanian news portals analyzed, 15min.lt news portals is the only one not to have the anonymous commenting feature. By controlling the comments, the managers of information portals would make sure that inappropriate comments were not distributed before being posted and becoming visible to the public. And the final, small number of commentators using the option of anonymous comments can have a very significant effect on the overall context of the commentary and the formation of public opinion. This study is useful for further research in analyzing strategic proposals both in practical and theoretical aspects.

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