

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TITLE BLOCKS ON NEWS PORTALS: THE CASE OF THE CRIME COLUMN

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Abstract

A large number of news portals and social networks in the everyday communication environment has significantly influenced the change of the traditional genre structure, but also the technique of collecting, selecting, processing and distributing information. Under the pressure of productivity and clickbaiting, crime cases columns in market-centric media are becoming an increasingly important part of daily reporting. Hence, the title blocks on the portals are the subject of this paper, with the hypothesis that their visual and textual contents differ significantly from those in traditional newspapers. The informative core of the message, characterized by sensationalism and intent to awaken curiosity, and visually enriched with photographs of actors and capital letters, greatly influences the audience's choice. This paper, through the case study of the disappearance of a 27-year-old young man from a neighboring country, determines the basic characteristics of news headlines and reports published on the news portal "Serbia Today" (Serb. „Srbija Danas”). The results of quantitative and qualitative content analysis are also relevant for other portals, because a large number of texts are shared between the different portals. Emotionally and expressively marked words aimed at the attention of users awaken the users' empathy and desire to actively participate in a social chronicle that excites and upsets the wider community. Qualitative analysis also indicated a close connection between the headline and the content of the report, with a predominantly sensationalist tone, as well as a clear commitment to constant public attention.

Key words: news portals, crime column, headlines, keywords, audience

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КАРАКТЕРИСТИКЕ НАСЛОВНИХ БЛОКОВА НА ИНФОРМАТИВНИМ ПОРТАЛИМА: СЛУЧАЈ ЦРНЕ ХРОНИКЕ

Апстракт

Велика заступљеност информативних портала и друштвених мрежа у свакодневном комуникацијском окружењу значајно је утицала на промену традиционалне жанровске структуре, као и на технике прикупљања, селекције, обраде и дистрибуције информација. Под притиском продуктивности и кликејтинга, црне хронике у тржишно-центричним медијима постају све важнији део дневног извештавања. Стога је насловни блок на порталима предмет овог рада, уз хипотезу да се визуелни и текстуални садржаји портала значајно разликују од садржаја класичне штампе. Информативно језгро поруке карактеристично по сензационализму и буђењу знатижеље, визуелно обогаћено фотографијом актера и крупним словима, у великој мери утиче на опредељење публике. У раду се кроз студију случаја нестанка двадесет седмогодишњег младића из суседне државе утврђују основне карактеристике наслова вести и извештаја објављиваних на информативном порталу „Србија Данас“. Резултати квантитативне и квалитативне анализе садржаја релевантни су и за остале portale, јер портали често преузимају текстове једни од других. Емоционално и експресивно маркиране речи циљале су на позорност корисника, будући њихову емпатију и жељу за активним суделовањем у друштвеној хроници која узбуђује и узнемирава ширу заједницу. Квалитативна анализа указала је и на високу повезаност наслова и садржаја извештавања, при чему преовладава сензационалистички тон, као и на јасно опредељење за непрестаном пажњом јавности.

Кључне речи: њуз портали, црна хроника, наслови, кључне речи, публика

INTRODUCTION

Well-known American futurist and communicologist Alvin Tofler was among the first to suggest that, in the new millennium, societies are recognized through a tripartite system of power: the agrarian economy at the bottom (in underdeveloped and patriarchal societies); smokestack economy in the middle (in former post-communist and socialist countries unwilling to adapt to changes in the environment) and “knowledge-based economies, or economies of the Third Wave, which, at least for a time, occupy the top of the global pyramid of power” (Tofler & Tofler, 1998, p. 93). The bloodstream of the new society consists of information, electronics, digital communications and the increasingly noticeable *mediatization* - the distribution and number of channels of mass diffusion of messages. The average man with a computer and internet access now has more information than both world powers in World War II (Lorimer, 1988, p. 78). A specific paradox is being created between society and the media: the world has never been richer in the amount of news and meanings, but at the same time their authenticity and objectivity are decreasing. In the old world, man exclusively produced meanings; in a networked society,

mental representations are increasingly created by the mass media, indirectly influencing the shaping of the consumer environment.

The age which we live in could already be called digital, because the Internet, which the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells metaphorically claims has become the “connective tissue of our lives” (2003, p. 11), is at its center. Thus, we can assume that online media are gradually setting new trends in journalism, taking over attention from traditional media. Non-linearity in the approach to work (storage and display of information in a special schedule), various possibilities of presenting news, linking and shortcuts, data archiving, immediacy and interactivity are just some of the advantages provided by the Web (WorldWideWeb, WWW). Although in our communication practice a complete takeover of the online community as the primary source of information is yet to occur, the fact that among 2,608 media there are as many as 850 Internet portals and 89 editorially designed websites indicates that that moment is approaching¹. The young generation of Zoomers, or post-millennials, who are fleeing the real world seeking refuge on the Internet, have already focused social networks as the principal sources of news through which they get information. Their attention lasts less than ten seconds, including large photos and few accompanying words, because the speed of information technology has become a decisive component of the success and quality of work, and the Internet as the infrastructure of a global society, “with the system of its packages, enabled the transmission of data in the shortest possible way, and when congestion occurs, in alternative ways as well” (Milenković, 2019, p. 37).

New media are a consequence of the technological revolution. Their main feature is a virtual space that offers a sense of closeness and trust, and which is seemingly free to the audience.² In theory, they denote various types of digitized content, regardless of whether they are static or dynamic files - digital images, graphics, video files, sounds, texts and the like. In his work *The Language of New Media* (2001), theorist Lev Manovich lists their basic categories: “Internet, web presentations, multimedia, video games, virtual reality ... Communication through new media implies the exchange of messages via a computer network ... with the possibility of reciprocal exchange of roles of broadcasters and recipients

¹ In the first six months of 2021, the number of media in Serbia increased by 5.7 percent. Among them is the largest number of newly registered editions of Internet portals, as many as 128, as well as editorially designed websites - a total of nine, according to the Business Registers Agency. Thus, daily and periodical newspapers reached the number of 941 issues, radio programs were broadcast by 335 stations, and television programs were broadcast by 243 stations. News agency services were provided by 27 media houses, while 123 companies were classified as “other” and “undefined”.

² Virtual space, or cyberspace, denotes an imaginary space in which communication is performed by technological means and by means of the Internet.

in real time or asynchronously” (Radojković & Miletić, 2008, p. 167). Thus, the differences between the classical forms of communication practice, especially interpersonal and mass communication, become negligible on the Internet.

The term *new media* is constituted as the opposite of the term *traditional media*, which denotes channels for mass distribution of information characteristic of the pre-technological revolution, i.e. the press, radio and television. The old media functioned “on the relation one to many, while the Internet together with social networks brought a new multidirectional system - one to one, one to many and many to many” (Jevtović, Vulić & Pavlović, 2012, p. 263). There is also the standpoint that new media are not the rivals of traditional media, but their upgrading, i.e. summarizing. Thus, news portals, i.e. internet newspapers, apart from the text and static illustrations characteristic of the press, have photographs, video files and sound recordings, similar to television and radio reports, which significantly expands the range of communication. The essence of their functioning is in the number of clicks (so-called Clickbaiting³), because, thanks to them, news portals become visible in the wider media market. Web 2.0 has created many forms of audience exploitation, creating supervisory capitalism as a new economic order of “appropriating human experience as a free raw material for supervisory business practices of data mining, forecasting and sales; the parasitic economic logic according to which the production of goods and services is subordinated to the new global structure for behavior modification” (Zubof, 2020, p. 7). Shoshana Zuboff pays special attention to the media and social networks that are becoming “markets of future behavior” (Zubof, 2020, p. 18) and platforms for selling behavioral surplus (information on the behavior of their sales and users are the core economic strength of these platforms).

Considering Garrison’s division of online media into four types of functioning, we will try to bring them as close as possible. The ‘Twenty-four-hour continuous news model’ denotes online media that works on the principle of publishing news throughout the day, peaking at the time of the highest attendance, between midday and 5 p.m. The second is the ‘Community bulletin board site model’, which, in addition to news, also offers news about theater performances, literary evenings, concerts, weather forecasts and news from the marketing sphere. The ‘Complementary news site model’ used by many local online media uses unlimited

³ By this term we mean the planned skillful design of headlines that encourage readers to click on a hyperlink or previous link, in order to stay on our portal as long as possible. “This is the craziest thing you could imagine ...”, “You will never believe what happened ...” or “You have to know this if you want to be informed ...” are just some of the lures that catch your attention.

space on the Internet to expand classic media content. The ‘Exclusive news site model’ is used by online media for content that has not been published elsewhere. This model is expensive and economically difficult to maintain (Garrison, Salwen, Driscoll, 2005, p. 15).

For the purposes of this paper, we define online media as specific Web pages for informing users, regardless of the type of content (information-political, economic, artistic, sports, entertainment or other content) and regardless of whether it is a digital edition of classic media or a new channel of communication. By the phrase *news portal* we mean a specific type of twenty-four-hour production where placing information on digital platforms relativizes the space to the limitations of recipients, and where a proactive, sensitive approach to data processing aims to awaken empathy and the ability of consumers to reconstitute reality in a way relevant to themselves.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWS PORTALS JOURNALISM

The working environment, as well as the reporting context of the contemporary journalist, has changed significantly. Increasingly, going out to the field, and talking to witnesses and participants are replaced by browsing content on television websites or social media posts, so that *copy-paste journalism* is becoming an embedded element of journalistic reality⁴. Journalists are expected to engage in multimedia, which means that, in creating their texts using camera footage or audio recordings, they reproduce the event by skillfully selecting facts and assumptions, which allows the users to ‘immerse’ themselves in the offered content. Unlike journalism in classic media, which creates distance between itself and its users, journalists are now expected to emotionally introduce visitors to the topic by applying modern technologies, stimulating their curiosity, and keeping them on the platforms for as long as possible. That is why the title block received an essential mission - to attract the consumer, that is, to ‘buy’ his time. At the same time, one rule is important; never deceive the audience, because trust is the only money with which you pay for the users’ attention.

⁴ We see *copy-paste journalism* as a synonym for piracy, or the theft of other people’s texts or photographs (video clips), which are downloaded and broadcast without the author’s permission. Traditional media often accuse news portals of making a living from such models of unauthorized broadcasting, but according to Nino Brajović, Secretary General of the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS), “even large Belgrade newsrooms download texts from Serbian portals without permission”. Tabloids, mostly when it comes to events from the crime column, print these texts without crediting either the author or the editorial board (Politika, April 15, 2016).

An increasing number of info portals, along with tabloids and similar market-oriented media, are introducing *infotainment*, whose goal is not to present and confront opinions, but to relativize, generalize and to put social criticism to rest. Blood, sex, fear, scandal, sensation, death, accidents, serious illnesses, pandemics, natural disasters and similar topics are increasingly dominating the media. Unlike classic journalism, in which a journalist reported on facts in an impartial way, media journalism insists on arousing emotions, so that the development of narratives aims at the longest possible involvement with the recipient. The content of messages blocks the mind, inflames emotions, and awakens fear and mysticism, so that by focusing on deviant behaviors, extreme phenomena and violence, the public space becomes a testing ground for numerous speculations. The three principles of the news portal - informing, persuading and connecting - are also reflected in the field of shaping information that is created in accordance with the metrics of receiving clicks, which often means ignoring the facts.

It is noticed that, in practice, news from the crime column cause the most reactions within the social community, and that most portals continue to reproduce them with only minor modifications. Copy-paste journalism has become a common practice of the news portals that often download such content. Theorists have already noticed that such crime columns contain neither police statements nor information on whether the journalist tried to obtain official information, which overlooks the fact that many readers do not read the news beyond the headline (Brandenstein, 2011, p. 8). Furthermore, headlines are also a type of message that one should know how to decode, because due to the headline's brevity, the reader must know, in advance, the broader context from which the headline derives (Taiwo, 2007, p. 223). Visualization plays an important role in attracting attention; consequently, headlines on portals are characterized by an enlarged and bold font, while the repetition of select words aims at keeping an individual's attention on the rest of the text for as long as possible. Another theoretical difference is noticeable here: while the press, by means of the title block, primarily develops *allocation* (speech) as a pattern of information flow, the focus on portals is on *consultation* and, especially, *conversation* (Radojković & Miletić, 2008, p. 164). In the new media, as in no other media before⁵, all four patterns of information

⁵ By *allocation*, Radojković and Miletić mean one-way distribution of information whose time and place are determined by broadcasters. *Registration* is based on storing information in one center, often without the knowledge or approval of individuals. *Consultation* is explained as a selective "withdrawal" of information from the central stock / library, media, data banks. In this pattern, time, place and content are determined by information users, while *conversation* is an individual exchange of information in interpersonal communication (Radojković & Miletić, 2008, p. 164).

flow are observed to exhibit a maximum decentralization of time choices, and the merging of individual and central 'stocks of information'.

Unlike traditional, critically intoned and credible journalism, which measured its influence through newspaper circulation, news portals measure popularity by the number of posts, clicks, comments and likes. In the traditional press, the circulation of sold copies could already be measured at newsstands, which served the publishers as proof of the impact of the marketing packages they sold. Everything is different on portals: the Internet statistically processes the number of clicks (action) that open the content page, at least for a period. This is a confirmation that the reader saw the text, and thus the power of the market grows with the number clicks. Thus, metrics determine the attractiveness of the title blocks, while sharing content through Facebook and similar networks strengthens the identities of the portals, which are compared among themselves by the number of visitors or page openings they record (unique user and page impression).

Technological changes brought about by information technology and digital tools have changed the nature of journalism, but this fact is still unnoticed by many. Instead of proven, informatively rich and interpretive genres, news and reports on spectacular, unusual, unexpected and exciting events are preferred, especially if they contain elements of conflict and negativity. Theorists single out sensationalism, which is defined in relation to headlines as "a strategy of shaping information so that it seems more interesting and relevant" (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013, p. 173), as the tool used for selling what is often not present in reality. In practice, this implies a different approach to the audience "so that they feel included and more connected to the story" (Jones, 2017, p. 6), which guarantees that they will consume similar content in the future. The distance that existed between the author and the reader is now disappearing, because, by thinking about the habits and preferences of the audience, the journalists working for news portals directly shape the content that the user expects. Traditional newspapers have never been able to activate all the senses of the audience, while news portals do so, so successfully that the consumer has a false sense of participating in the chain of events. Storytelling in the digital world has taken on a new dimension in the audience's ability to use different platforms as sources of information and, at the same time, check the credibility and communicativeness of the media by comparing headlines, photos or videos. Deepening contacts with recipients usually depends on the attractiveness with which the title block creates this reversible relationship, which shows the importance it has in the structure

of each genre and section (Mitrović & Vasiljević, 2021, p. 133)⁶. A radical change is observable in portals, which make content more emotional, and draw it closer to the sensibility of users, building the impression that such information is something that the recipients needed for their understanding of the news and its wider context.

THE MOST COMMON TOOLS FOR MONITORING PORTAL VISITS

Built on a commercial basis, portals must cover the activities of information production, which is the costliest part of business. Money is made from online advertising, banner placement, sponsorships, or other forms of digital marketing, provided that they have a sufficient number of visitors, or clicks. Today, all editorial offices of news portals have at their disposal tools that precisely monitor the attendance of their users, which means that the metrics of the popularity of the headline direct their retention in public space. Management is especially interested in tracking: the length of the retention of the headlines and the text itself, the frequency of content sharing, the tendency to open similar topics, the reactions to specific information, and the sentiment caused by contact with specific content. The editorial board is also interested in whether their portal is trusted, or whether the users check current information on other sites. This is done by the means of technological tools that detect users' behavior without the users knowing it.

Google Analytics is a tool that Web content owners can use to access any genre's tracking statistics at any time. It provides information on the total number of clicks, the unique number of visits, what people like to read the most, where and from which device they access Web content, as well as how long they stay on the site and what content they prefer. The professional challenge is finding a way to 'package' information so as to present it as current and important, and sell it successfully, no matter how trivial the information is. Journalism on portals is diametrically different from traditional journalism, because it revolves around attention instead of quality, thus cyberspace headlines attract the audience and get additional importance.

By means of internet tools, it is easy to establish a list of the most frequently read texts (during a given day, week, month, etc.). In that context, the fact that the crime column is always at the top indicates the high positioning of this topic in the field of editing, especially since its competition consists of: political news, economics, culture, science, fashion, entertainment, sports and the like. In this case study, at least a quarter of the

⁶ Internet users can discover the intentions behind real, displayed behavior by changing their status on social networks and publicly sharing their reactions (Mitrović & Vasiljević, 2021, p. 133).

20 most frequently read texts during the observed seven-day period are part of the crime column.

ip/zadruga	156,642 (3.56%)	52,865 (1.47%)
esti/drustvo/nestao-matej-peris-matej-peris-policija-snjega-drustvo- taga-najnovije-2022-01-03	131,653 (2.99%)	122,723 (3.40%)
esti/drustvo/matej-peris-splicanin-nestanak-gotik-kluh- matej-peris-2022-01-03	131,575 (2.99%)	120,003 (3.33%)
esti/drustvo/kraj-potrage-nije-bitno-koliko-je-neko-dobar-plivac- i-video-2022-01-03	123,790 (2.82%)	113,080 (3.14%)
esti/drustvo/policija-ustla-u-trag-kontaktata-i-lokacije-spl- -mestu-nestanka-2022-01-02	89,191 (2.03%)	79,731 (2.21%)
esti/drustvo/i-nestao-kao-matej-pa-nikad-nije-pronaden-jezivo-pokla- -i-njega-snimile-kako-2022-01-03	87,316 (1.99%)	75,311 (2.09%)
esti/drustvo/oglasili-se-taksisti-i-ocevidici-riko-nije-jurio-ne- -prvo-ledno-2022-01-03	77,791 (1.77%)	68,129 (1.89%)
esti/zvet/sta-pricas-orno-dete-dao-mi-je-10000-dinara-posle-jos- -bezazlene-stvari-2022-01-03	69,018 (1.57%)	62,515 (1.73%)
ip/zadruga/dalila-dejan-dragojevic-tajni-razgovor-zadrugovizji- -je-sta-da-2022-01-03	56,245 (1.28%)	47,438 (1.32%)
ip/zadruga/dalila-i-filip-obavili-razgovor-pakuje-stva- -je-sta-da-2022-01-03	55,295 (1.26%)	45,616 (1.27%)
esti/drustvo/otkriveno-sta-je-pronadeno-u-zardinjeri-na-savskoj-pron- -staj-i-z-istrage-2022-01-04	51,003 (1.16%)	46,393 (1.29%)
ip/zadruga/ostali-smo-goli-i-bosi-taki-mannkovic-pr- -jo-kuci-i-vikao-2022-01-03	50,811 (1.16%)	44,103 (1.22%)
esti/drustvo/nestao-matej-peris-matej-peris-beograd-sj- -simci-kamere-devojka-2022-01-04	49,331 (1.12%)	39,783 (1.10%)
ena/zdravlje/kraljica-silikona-tinaja-djuric-kako-izgleda-danas- -i-2022-01-03	45,012 (1.02%)	42,990 (1.19%)
ip/zadruga/deniz-dejm-stefan-mihic-intimni-animak-zad- -2022-01-03	44,915 (1.02%)	39,685 (1.10%)
ip/zadruga/filip-car-vredjanje-na-nacionalnoj-osnovi-zad- -2022-01-03	44,794 (1.02%)	37,438 (1.04%)
esti/drustvo/tuzna-objava-matejevog-oca-redaju-se-komentari-svim- -vaseg-sina-foto-2022-01-03	40,185 (0.91%)	35,768 (0.99%)
esti/zvet/dosta-sam-na-fakultet-srela-devojku-koja-izgleda-identici- -i-za-datum-2022-01-03	39,503 (0.90%)	34,618 (0.96%)
esti/drustvo/mozda-nikad-nije-izasao-iz-kluba-i-ovi-ga-sj- -2022-01-03	37,640 (0.85%)	30,815 (0.86%)

Figure 1. List of the most read texts on the portal “Serbia Today” („Srbi-
ja Danas”) 5.1.2022.

Digital media is significantly different from classic media - it speeds up the delivery of news and similar content instead of checking it through a powerful gatekeeping process. The audience does not wait, and because of its speed, digital media sacrifices the quality of information by selecting only that information which is interesting to it. The management of news portals skillfully uses this by employing certain programs to emphasize the content that the audience wants. The Alexa program, created in 1996, has just such capabilities: it tracks the daily number of unique visitors and the average number of pages viewed. Page ranking is done by a methodology that combines the daily number of unique visitors and the average number of pages viewed. The program offers additional data that provides a more detailed insight into the habits and behavior of users, such as: the Bounce Rate, Daily Pageviews per Visitor, time spent on the site (Daily Time on Site), demographic display of visitors and locations, information on which text the users read before the text from a specific portal, etc.

Because a good selection of search terms increases the number of clicks and the visibility of the portal, *Google Trends* analyzes the history of terms, the frequency of keyword searches by selected criteria, as well as the choice of keywords in headline construction. New audiences expect an immediate distribution of information, and if the portal is open 24 hours a day, every year, there is a clear need for a continuous ‘refreshment’ of information. Thus, unlike classic newspapers, online media are

trying to appear on portals with numerous modifications and more than a dozen times during the day.

Through social networks, digital marketing, whose task is to improve the visibility of the communication channel, has imperceptibly entered the sphere of journalistic text processing. It includes recommendations, comments and content sharing in order to build a media brand. Also, it appears on the market for consumers looking for specific content. While classic marketing addresses a wide population, users of news portals are targeted through a precise analysis of personal data collected during the consumption of content. The already mentioned tools make user profiles by identifying their habits, activities, interests, needs and desires. Based on this data, precisely measured advertisements aimed at recognized expectations are added to the media content (Tregove, Malczyk & Beneke, 2011).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWS PORTAL TITLE BLOCKS

In classic newspapers, the composition of a headline represents the identity card of the editorial office, and its appearance, structure and content indicate the core of the information shared in the text. Theorists believe that “good headlines with a noticeable expressive-logical and graphically designed identity, in addition to informative, also have aesthetic values important for better newspaper sales” (Jevtović, Petrović & Aracki, 2014, p. 56). This highlights the three basic functions of a good headline – the headline informs, values and contributes to the appearance of the article. The title block is structurally divided into several elements (upper headline, headline, subtitle and intertitle), and it can appear as complete or combined depending on which of these elements are used.

In online editions, the creation of new genres gained in intensity because it enabled current information to appear in a short period of time, unencumbered by the traditional composition of the title unit. On the Internet, headlines are uploaded and arranged chronologically by programs, in order to make it easier to follow the time sequence of events, whereby the content is easily updated with newly received data without previous data being deleted. Predrag Bajić (2017, p. 73) singles this characteristic out as an important difference between online news and traditional news and reports, because the arrival of new information implies a longer re-writing process in traditional news than it does in chronological online reporting. The audience focuses on news portals at a significantly higher level as compared to the traditional press, because you only need an internet connection to access the data. Therefore, the task of management is to ensure their portal’s placement among the leading portals, especially

when one takes into consideration the rule of social networks: “the best takes it all” (the winner takes it all).⁷ Although websites are numerous, in practice and over time, a concentration of the most popular ones takes place. Thus, in the world of digital communications, habit is an important component in choosing an Internet portal. By analyzing internet content, Biljana Vitković proved that “according to all measuring instruments, internet contents lead to a higher level of audience concentration than the one in traditional media” (Viteković, 2010, p. 44), which is especially noticeable by comparing news portals with identical print media. The audience of the portals is already focused on the conducted analyses of their expectations, so that by skilful use of the “law of the majority” (Shirky, 2004), popular sites take all the marketing prey. That is why headlines have an even more important role in news portals than they do in the classic press, because they create the first contact with the recipients.

In the *Linguistic Features of Newspaper Headlines*, Lana Hudeček sees the ability to “attract the reader’s attention and warn him succinctly, interestingly and intelligently about the main idea of the following article” (Hudeček, 2006, p. 297) as the basic explanation of the newspaper headline function. The editors of the portals are well aware that the audience of social media is looking for fast-paced information in the most concise and dynamic form, so they try to shape the perception of users in relation to that cognition. Media commitment to selected topics and actors influences the attention of readers, i.e. their decision to set aside their time for a particular portal.

HEADLINE CHARACTERISTICS ON THE PORTAL “SERBIA TODAY” („SRBIJA DANAS”)

This paper, through the study of the case of the disappearance of a 27-year-old young man from a neighboring country, determines the basic characteristics of news headlines and reports published on the information portal “Serbia Today” in the first seven days of the search (between 1/1/2022 and 7/1/2022). The section “Crime Column” has a large readership on daily content, so that quantitative and qualitative analyses of the content can be conducted on the characteristics of the title units. Addi-

⁷ This rule was taken from the Internet, where it was noticed that the first ten portals have a higher flow of audience than all the others. According to the research of the largest European internet research company “Gemius” (Gemius Audience), among the top ten most visited websites in 2020 were: blic.rs 3,037,965 (first), kurir.rs 2,884,863 (second), hello.rs 2,388,259 (fourth), novosti.rs 2,298,190 (seventh) and informer.rs 1,985,242 (ninth). The portal srbijadanas.com was in fifth place, with 2,361,518 visitors, and it is the only website that does not have a classic, printed edition.

tionally, certain genre comparisons can be made with the classic press. The essential difference in writing for news portals is redefining the concept of timely news publishing and proximity rules, which the British journalism theorist Richard Craig sees through two basic differences – “online media offer multimedia benefits and the ability to update stories with the latest data” (Krejš, 2010, p. 25).

Unlike classic press, in which the title block is static, the portal, using digital advantages, creates a dynamic whole that attracts at the first sight. The emotion is real and sensibility seems natural, while suggestion builds a bridge between the young and the old audiences. The thematization of harmony takes place according to the invisible rules of the crime column: the victim’s family always has priority over other sources of information. A cursory review of several characteristic headlines is proof of these assertions. “Portal Serbia Today” (Jan. 6, 2022 at 15:55) published the headline: “‘I have a feeling that he will appear from somewhere’. Mateja Periš’s girlfriend opened her soul: If he was drugged, someone poured it into his drink”. Emotionality is an important feature of the crime column, so social tension is raised by informing the readers about the pain of the closest family members. The hunger of the public is great; a few hours later (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 6, 2022 at 18:48) the number of people close to the tragically missing young man increased: “The Mother is desperate, won’t leave the church! Grandmother and grandfather of the missing Matej: ‘It is hardest for her, she will not stop praying’”. The illustration of the text in the close-up shows the head of a missing young man peeking just above the water, while a patrol boat was skillfully inserted in front of his face with a clearly visible sign reading: “POLICE”⁸

Unlike the fixed nature of content in classic newspapers, news portals can add information, and enrich it with multimedia audio-video recordings, and images from Instagram or Facebook. The same is the case with the headline: “The father of the missing citizen of Split does not lose hope: ‘I WILL RETURN WITH MATEJ TO SPLIT’. ‘I am not leaving without him’” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 7, 2022), accompanied by a photo background combining a picture of a young man running along the banks of the Sava with a picture of his father staring into the distance. The pain of the family is immeasurable, but since there is no official information, the media amplifies the mystery and plays on the understandable desire of the public to find an answer by transferring emotions.

Interest shifts from the closest family members to a wider circle of people who knew the victim, and to those who use the tragedy for their own gains. Accidents and personal destinies increase readership with in-

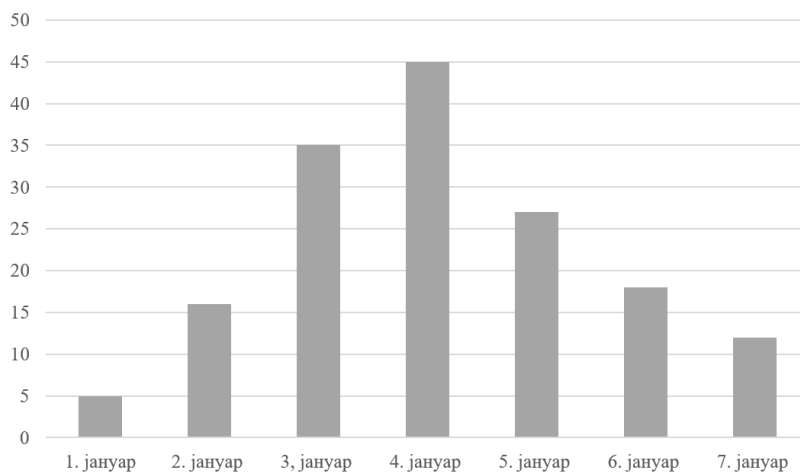
⁸During the monitoring, we noticed that the photos necessarily highlighted the young man’s eyes, which was meant to be a comment on his youth, while, in the texts themselves, the emphasis was on his age (27).

credible speed. Due to the lack of information, journalists pay attention to the reactions of public figures who, by nature of their work, need to advertise themselves: “‘WE HOPE FOR THE BEST’ the Prime Minister of Croatia urgently said regarding the disappearance of Matej” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 6, 2022 at 14:39). This headline was accompanied by a photo of Andrej Plenković. However, the headline was not in line with the facts: the Croatian politician addressed the public only on the sixth day of the search, on the occasion of the traditional Christmas reception organized by the Serbian National Council in Zagreb. The circle of reactions becomes progressively wider, but remains related to the main actor in the story: “‘HIS WARM SMILE WAS WARMING US ALL.’ The words of Matej’s class teacher TEAR THE SOUL - the whole of Split is in shock because of the disappearance” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 4, 2022). Portals use the language of old media with the addition of new ways of accessing and formatting information. The genre remains the same, but the title composition is reshaped, because the number of clicks dictates the emotionality of expression. Narratives are woven like a web in the middle of which the fate of an unfortunate young man is hidden, so that mystery covers the content of the text: “‘MATEJ COULD NOT SAVE HIS FRIEND’ the young man from Split mourned for his friend - he was shaken by his death” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 6, 2022). The headlines that are marked as the most visited generate an increase in online communication, and journalists often revise the content in order to maintain a high level of interest. Every word in the multimedia block has its function, because in order to enable the understanding of the audience, it is necessary to place every concept or image where it makes the most sense. Journalists dig through the past, looking for details that could sell the story as a new one. Another headline read: “‘THE EIGHTH DAY OF THE SEARCH FOR MATEJ - NEIGHBORS FROM SPLIT SPOKE UP: One of their statements IS BLOOD-CHILLING’” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 7, 2022). A photo of Matej and the police searching the river indicates that the content of the headline and the text overlap, which is a great combination. It is a mistake to post a video or timeline, followed by long charts that make it difficult to understand the content. Readers should be gradually served parts of the informative mosaic so that they mentally take them in, piece by piece, in a linear order.

Immoderate sensationalism can also be an unforgivable mistake. With a sensible choice of words and packaging of data, sensationalism arouses interest, but it disappears as it moves away with the progression of the text. The frequent use of adjectives, adverbs and numbers enhances the impression of an unusual event, while giving a positive or negative tone to the report enhances the impression of readers. Everything is brought into rhetorical interdependence, a stylistically challenging combination of words that stimulates curiosity. Viral, fake news bring chaos

to the information environment, which, in the case of our research, means inserting misinformation, rumors, gossips and whispers into communication, because they provide greater traffic to the portal. *Clickbait* journalism looks for waves of information which flood the lonely consumer every hour. Getting as many clicks as possible is the only important objective, so the accuracy and reliability of the information cease being a priority. “WITNESS CLAIMS HE MET MATEJ: ‘He was wearing a jacket that was quite large for him. WE THOUGHT HE WAS SOME TRAMP’” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 3, 2022) is a headline leading the investigation on a false trail. Traditional media do not have the ability to monitor the speed and explosiveness of the portal, which intensify the effect of unverified data. Since almost all portals offer similar content, their information core is multiplied, creating the impression that the content is relevant. The amount of similar premonitions and assumptions grows like a balloon, which brings mysticism and tragedy, the inevitable companions of crime columns, to the audience: “FORMER INTELLIGENCE OFFICER EXPRESSES DARK FOREBODINGS: The case of the man from Split is similar to the disappearance of LITTLE BARBARA – ‘MAYBE THEY WILL NEVER FIND HIM’” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 3, 2022). According to the rhythm of publishing the headlines, the portals are most reminiscent of news agencies, but what marks a difference is the way and speed of adapting the content to the profiled audience. Journalistic processing, visual equipment, and keywords (hooks) are specific to the production of a good portal. The similarity in the content of different portals is unquestionable, because there is an unsigned agreement between the media houses on copying each other’s texts. Thus, the headlines of the crime columns of the portals: “Serbia Today”, “Kurir”, “Blic”, “Alo”, “Mondo”, “Informer”, “Jutarnji list”, “Dnevnik hr”, “Indeks”, “Slobodna Dalmacija”, “Večernji list” and “Tanjug” have almost the same meanings.

While observing the intensity of reporting on the case, which is the focus of this research, it was noticed that the media event was continuously growing and reproducing already well-known data, but always with a strong, stimulating tone that suggests interest and relevance. During the analyzed period, we noticed the dynamics of growth brought about by social attention – the sparse five articles available at the beginning of the crisis communication became a number of articles nine times higher in just a few days.



Graph 1. Intensity of publishing texts about the missing young man⁹

A state of actuality is artificially created through a frequent repetition of specific words, used as baits, in the title block, which suggests the existence of exclusivity in relation to other media. On the second day of his disappearance, the portal “Srbija Danas” announced: “LATEST FINDINGS ABOUT THE MISSING CITIZEN OF SPLIT: It is suspected that Matej fell into the river?! One thing forced him to leave the bar”¹⁰. During the crisis situation, the same technique was often employed. Content modification is a feature of news portal reporting, while renaming is just a way to create an impression of originality. The discourse framework is unique for all media that report on this topic, but the headlines suggest that this portal is at the forefront of exclusivity: “LATEST INFORMATION FROM THE SPOT! Police divers on standby, many things make the search difficult (VIDEO)” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 3, 2022.). The same video was broadcast by all portals in Serbia, but since the audience’s attention was constantly kept awake, the headlines suggest that something new had been discovered. Television broadcasting agencies with a national frequency, which use the same material to build a value matrix, also contribute to the homogenization of the media image, so that the topic gathers the public in a narcotic way. The informative core of the message is poor, and there is very little precise data, so numerous speculations and interpretations help in the simulation that the investigation has made progress: “LATEST FINDINGS ABOUT THE

⁹ The fall of the texts in the research sample is not a consequence of the weakening of public attention, but of the Christmas atmosphere that settled on the pages of the portal.

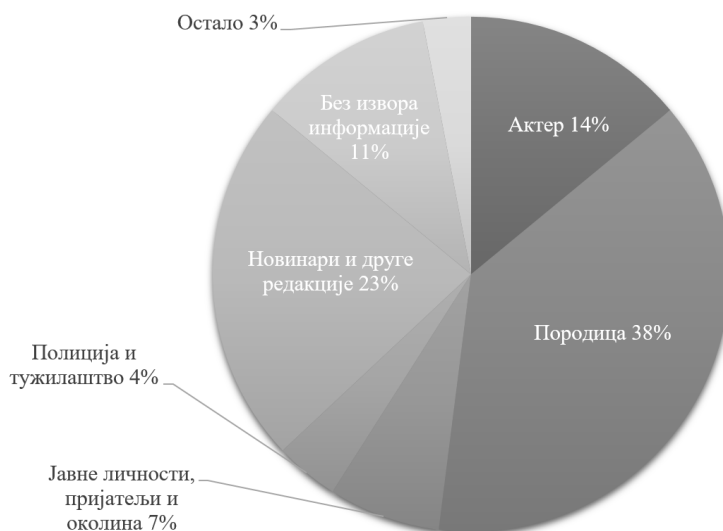
¹⁰ The portal „Srbija Danas“.

MISSING CITIZEN OF SPLIT: Matej spent an hour in the ‘SPANISH house’” (“Serbia Today”, January 4, 2022.).

Nearly half a century ago, media theorists Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw noted that “the mass media may not be so successful in convincing us *what* to think, what attitudes to have about various phenomena and people, but they are extremely successful in ordering us what to think about, what phenomena to form opinions and attitudes about” (as cited in Bogdanić, 1996, p. 121). Their assertion that the media determine the topicality and priority of topics for thinking set the theory of agenda (agenda setting theory), which only strengthens the thesis that media influence grows with the development of each new technology in modern society. The audience of the portal is young, but technologically educated, so it combines the multimedia of the message with the freshness of the content. “LATEST DETAILS OF THE SEARCH FOR THE CITIZEN OF SPLIT - Traces of drugs found in the apartment where Matej stayed” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 6, 2022) is a headline illustrated with a photograph of the young man with a police badge inserted over it, suggesting drama and an ongoing search. The metamedia society is based on the continuous distribution of information, i.e. the illusion that the user participates in the chain of meaning that circulates in public space.

While in print media there is a ready-made composition of the title block that is permanent and unchangeable because it is printed, on news portals, the same content, illustrated with a photo, is constantly being changed, enriched, refreshed and supplemented. Highlighting the feature of variability, Manovič pointed out that “the matter of new media is not forever established and unchangeable, but can exist in different, possibly endless versions, which indicates the character of post-consumer logic, which differs significantly from industrial society and in which numerous copies of the original that are identical are made, as it is the case with the press” (Manovič, 2015, p. 77-78). This can be seen in the example of the headline: “‘I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM MoI (MUP) MEETING’. The father of the missing citizen of Split has spoken again: ‘Please, spare my family’” (“Serbia Today”, Jan. 6, 2022.), where the face of a worried father is in the foreground, while a part of the video of the missing young man running along the streets of Savamala, and his photo from Instagram are in the background. In the observed time interval, as many as 34 front pages broadcast both this and similar information, which shows the high synchronization of content, as well as the frequency of broadcasting numerous variations of the same message. The technique of media framing is realized by combining factual and

visual elements, thereby determining the way in which the audience understands the topics being reported on (Goffman 1974, p. 21)¹¹.



Graph 2. Content indicators of title blocks according to the topics of reporting

Qualitative analysis of the crime column indicated a strong connection between the headline and the content of the report, with a predominant sensationalist tone as a motive for mobilizing the public. The search for possible reasons for the disappearance of the young man is more in the realm of speculation, but numerous headlines testify to how much the audience likes such speculations, which are far from serious, investigative journalism. The focus of the headline is the family and the people close to it, who have been later on connecting to the database by links, while the percentage that indicates the role of journalists in creating public is not negligible. Journalists take into account the wishes of the digital users and try to generate as much communication as possible by choosing words and photos. It is also interesting that the relevant sources of information (Police, Judiciary, Prosecutor's office) are silent; consequently, the public space is left to others, which allows for a flood of misinformation, rumors and false news.

¹¹Erving Goffman concludes that "media and journalists approach topics and events they report on using specific discourse, thus unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) determining the position from which the reader accesses the phenomena and data he or she is informed about" (Goffman 1974, p. 21).

Journalism theorists usually single out two key tasks of the title block: rounding up everything that has been said, and attracting the attention of the readers (Ifantidou, 2009, p. 699). In practice, it is noticed that the headlines on the portals often have a larger audience than the contents of the crime columns, which can be easily proven by the number of clicks and the time taken to stay on the link. Headlines are shaped like hooks that get the users' attention, i.e. they are a multimedia message that suits their needs. Along with the rhetorical trap, a warm, ambiguous photo of the content actor is indispensable in the title block. The intention of the photo, which is by skillful montage brought into a different context, is to reinforce the journalistic thesis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In theories of journalistic genres, different authors (Slavković, 1979; Životić, 1993; Todorović, 1998; Jevtović et al., 2014; Vulić, 2018) notice that headlines in composition develop different functions and characteristics, but almost all of the authors state the importance of attracting the attention of readers, especially in the context of tabloid reporting. News portals apply a proactive model of convergent communication, which, by combining headline, text and photographs, creates a likable and intriguing narrative with an emphasis on the message, and not the author(s). The analysis of the title blocks during the reporting on the missing young man showed the power of the interaction of creating a message, digital technology and the audience, as well as the potential of the portal in crisis communication. The addition of video and audio recordings retains visitors to a significant extent, so it is advisable to publish them.

The crime column is among the most read sections of every portal, but in combination with short, effective headlines and affected keywords, it achieves a commercial effect as well. The skill is in highlighting the headline, and the hidden emotionality and sensibility with which the consumer is drawn into additional content. The short lead, which immediately goes to the home page (show window), should be further refreshed with new data, or new interpretations of both the actors who have contact with the story and the journalists. The basic hypothesis of this paper confirmed that the portals pay special attention to the tone of reporting, thus dragging the recipient into the trap of complicity. Creating a rhetorically and stylistically strong syntagma, the journalist ostensibly includes the readers in the text, carefully taking care that the key words correspond to the terms that are most often searched for. Visitors also pay attention to the design of the page, expecting easy and efficient navigation which does not require much engagement. The unobtrusive logo at the top of the

website has the sublime role of continuously returning the reader to a well-known address chosen in a sea of competing portals.

Single-layer information, without analytics and critical deepening, is a consequence of the speed it strives for, so it is not surprising that a large number of unverified data changes the previous content every hour. It is also noticeable that the upper headline has disappeared from the title block and that, as an accompanying technique, a metric of the most favorite and sought-after terms has been added to the genre structure. Printed newspapers themselves determine the hierarchy of texts, arranging them linearly, according to the degree of their importance, from the first page to the last one. In practice, this means that readers are often offered texts they did not ask for, especially if they appeared on the front page. Unlike them, news portals organize news into groups that meet the expectations of consumers, which indicates that the strategic goal of communication has been fully achieved.

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КАРАКТЕРИСТИКЕ НАСЛОВНИХ БЛОКОВА НА ИНФОРМАТИВНИМ ПОРТАЛИМА: СЛУЧАЈ ЦРНЕ ХРОНИКЕ

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Резиме

Иако у нашој комуникационој пракси онлајн заједнице још увек нису постале примарни извор информација, млада генерација пост миленијалаца већ је друштвене мреже фокусирао као прве изворе вести. Информациони портали, осим текста и статичних илустрација карактеристичних за штампу, поседују фотографије, видео фајлове и звучне записе налик на телевизијске и радијске прилоге, што значајно шири комуникационе могућности. Суштина њиховог функционисања је у што већем броју кликова, или кликбејтинга, јер захваљујући њима постају видљиви на ширем медијском тржишту.

Заступљеност информативних портала и друштвених мрежа у свакодневном комуникационом окружењу значајно је утицала на промену традиционалне жанровске структуре, али и на технике прикупљања, селекције, обраде и дистрибуције информација. Уочава се, такође, да је из насловног блока нестао наднаслов и да је, као пратећа техника, жанровској структури придодата метрика најомиленијих и најтраженијих појмова. Под притиском продуктивности и кликбејтинга, црне хронике у тржишно-центричним медијима постају све важнији део дневног извештавања. Рад разматра карактеристике насловног блока на порталима у оквиру студије случаја нестанка двадесет седмогодишњег младића из суседне државе, утврђујући специфичности наслова вести и извештаја објављиваних на информативном порталу „Србија Данас“. Резултати квантитативне и квалитативне анализе садржаја релевантни су и за остале portale, јер се текстови у великом броју међусобно преузимају.

Црна хроника међу најчитанијим је рубрикама сваког портала, али у комбинацији са кратким, ефектним насловима и погођеним кључним речима, остварује и комерцијални ефекат. Вештина је у истицању наслова, и прикривеној емоционалности и сензибилности којом се конзумент увлачи у додатни садржај. Једнослојна информација, без аналитичности и критичког удубљивања, цена је брзине којој се стреми, па не чуди што велики број непроверених података сваког часа смењује претходне садржаје. Кратак лид вести на порталу, који одмах иде на почетну страну стално треба освежавати новим подацима или интерпретацијама како актера који имају додира са причом, тако и новинара.

Квалитативна анализа указала је и на високу повезаност наслова и садржаја извештавања, при чему преовладавају сензационалистички тон и јасно опредељење за непрестаном пажњом јавности. Анализа насловних блокова у рубрици Црна хроника током извештавања о несталом младићу показала је моћ интеракције креирања поруке, дигиталне технологије и публике, али и потенцијал портала у кризном комуницирању. Наслови су обликовани као мамци који привлаче пажњу корисника и испуњавају сва њихова очекивања. Уз реторичку замку, све време извештавања била је приказана и вишезначна фотографија актера садржаја која је вештом монтажом постављана у контекст са текстом да би појачала новинарску тезу.

Резултати овог истраживања потврдили су да портали посебно воде рачуна о тону извештавања, чиме читаоца увлаче у замку саучествовања. Креирајући рето-

ричко-стилски снажну синтагму, новинар читаоце привидно укључује у текст, пажљиво водећи рачуна да кључне речи одговарају појмовима који се најчешће претражују. Емоционално и експресивно маркиране речи циљале су на позорност корисника, будући њихову емпатију и жељу за активним суделовањем у друштвеној хроници која узбуђује и узнемирава ширу заједницу.