

**(MIS)USE OF ANONYMOUS SOURCES IN THE TABLOIDS
IN SERBIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT
OF SERBIAN TABLOIDS *BLIC* AND *KURIR***

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Abstract. *The already problematic ethics of the tabloids can further be questioned in terms of the use of anonymous sources. The use of anonymous sources in the service of spreading rumors and unverified information is not only justifiably criticized, but in terms of professional ethics, it is also unacceptable. Communication using rumors has become the primary way of communication in the tabloids, which use unverified or premeditated information and transmit them from the ordering party to the manipulated readers. The subject of this paper is the use of anonymous sources in tabloid dailies Blic and Kurir, with special reference to their abuse, while the main goal of the paper is to determine the extent to which anonymous sources are misused. A comparative analysis of the contents from Blic and Kurir (between December 16 and 29, 2013) confirms the initial hypothesis that the tabloids tend to abuse anonymous sources, and it also confirms the tendency to misuse these sources in both tabloids.*

Key words: *anonymous sources, newspapers, tabloids, rumors, ethics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With no sources there would be no journalism. Any written document, audio or video recording used by a journalist to obtain relevant information on the subject to report on or investigate can be considered a source. However, the most important source of information and also the most controversial source are the people. These can be protagonists of an event, eyewitnesses, anyone who in some way has something to do with the subject being reported on and anyone who can provide relevant information on the topic. In theory, the relationship of journalists with sources is a frequent discussion topic. Instructions and guidance on the relationship between journalists and the sources of

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information can be seen in the *Code of the Journalists of Serbia*,¹ where Article 5 (*Relationship with the sources of information*) stipulates: “The sources of information the reporter talks to are not always aware of the power of the media and the consequences that their statements may have for them personally as well as for the people they are talking about. Journalists must not abuse the information they receive, and they should be aware that their carelessness could have as a possible consequence the abuse of their interlocutor”. Thus, this code clearly specifies how the journalists should communicate with their sources, especially with those who have no experience in dealing with the media, and who can easily be called “ordinary people”.

These are most frequently eyewitnesses to an event or people who are not public figures. However, this does not mean that a journalist can treat public officials and public figures in any other manner, except that in the case of such people any possible abuse is less possible, due to the nature of their jobs and their experience in making statements to the media.

The attitude of journalists towards anonymous sources is a topic discussed in great detail²; however, that relationship is the most questionable one. The Code states: “The use of anonymous (confidential) sources of information is generally not recommended unless there is no other way to obtain information of great public importance”. The above statement clearly says that anonymous sources are sometimes necessary in order to obtain information that is essential to the public, and in this case their use is justified. However, “the anonymity/ confidentiality should be enabled only to sources that can provide “first hand” information, or to documents that directly support the hypothesis, or which constitute the information of great public importance” (*The Code of the Journalists of Serbia*, article 5). This then limits the use of the anonymous source to only those who possess strong evidence for assertions made in public, even though they want to remain anonymous. It is an indisputable fact that the anonymous sources are often the backbone of investigative journalism. “The goal of investigative journalism is to present to the public the unknown details, the actual causes or intentions of persons involved in corruption or malfeasance” (Todorović 2002, 41). If the topics that are the subject of research are mainly related to the disclosure of information that someone wants to hide from the public, the person who is the source of that information can certainly be compromised by exposing illegal activities (they could even put their life in danger by doing this). “Without the promise of confidentiality or anonymity, which the source can rely on, investigative journalists would not be able to obtain proof of corruption or some very important information about the scandals” (De Berg 2007, 233). In this case, hiding the identity of the source is not only a recommendation, but the duty of the journalist.

The use of anonymous sources can lead to another issue – their abuse. Although the Code clearly stipulates that these sources can be used only when there is no other way to obtain information of public importance, in practice, anonymity is often used to outline speculation, rumors, and sometimes completely false (fictional) information.

¹ *Code of the Journalists of Serbia*, available at: http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_15730-1522-14-30.pdf?090217150738 (visited on 15/ 1/ 2015)

² If the journalists decide to use the information obtained from anonymous sources, they must respect the pre-established convention on the use of the obtained information. *On the record* means that everything can be published; *off the record*, nothing ought to be published; *in the background* means that the statements can be used, but the source cannot be named; *in the deep background* means that the acquired information can be used, but no sources can be quoted or named, so in this case, the material obtained can only be used to further investigate the subject.

The assumption is that those journalists who are prone not to comply with the ethical principles of the profession, use the phrase “anonymous source” as a good excuse to present unverified information. Therefore, the Code of Journalists of Serbia, foreseeing such (mis)use, included one more guideline in the Code: “Very frequently the use of unnamed sources of information is just a way the source or the journalist/ media present inaccurate, incomplete or insufficiently verified information. In the event that it is proven that hiding the source actually means the source does not even exist, the credibility of the journalists/media will seriously be undermined”. The above use of anonymous sources is usually done by tabloids who mainly report about sensations, trivia and rumors. However, although it is always questionable whether the tabloids comply with the rules of ethics, this cannot justify their manipulation of the sources of information, and ultimately their manipulation of the readers.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The already problematic ethics of the tabloids can further be questioned in terms of the use of anonymous sources. Namely, “unnamed sources are present in tabloid journalism to such an extent that, without exaggeration, one can say that it is largely based only on these” (Todorović 2013, 32). Reference was made concerning the necessity of anonymous sources, when this is the only way to provide the public with information of great importance. However, the use of anonymous sources in the service of spreading rumors and unverified information is not only justifiably criticized, but in terms of professional ethics it is also unacceptable. Comparing quality journalism to tabloids, Todorovic points out that “tabloid journalism differs in purpose, the methods applied, ways of using sources of information, in forms of journalistic expression, background checks”, adding that their aim is primarily to sell as many papers as possible, while “their methods are reduced to the observation and use of a single named source or, very often, of an anonymous source (“*Kurir*’s informant”, “as we heard”). This is done even in instances when it is not necessary to hide, protect the source” (Todorović 2006, 27). This type of communication is called “rumor communication” (from the English word “rumor”) since this communication is based on rumors. Communication using rumors has become the primary way of communication in the tabloids, which uses unverified or premeditated information and transmits it from the ordering party to the manipulated readers. “Rumors are complex and encrypted news, in a strange way outrageous and seemingly convincing at the same time” (Neubauer 2010, 243). Due to the inability to verify the published allegations coming from an anonymous source, rumors receive the power of truth, and they are shocking to the extent that they most likely expand further.

Examining the way rumors are generated, Neubauer offers two formulas. The first is taken from Allport and Postman and it reads $R = i \times a$ (i multiplied by a), where i is (importance), the importance of the news, while a is (ambiguity), the vagueness of the situation. So, if the source is unknown and the message is important, the rumor will be seen as credible (Allport and Postman 1947, according to: Neubauer 2010, 234). However, Neubauer's formula criticized the lack of subjective factors, and made reference to other researchers who added c to this formula, which stood for a “critical ability of the recipients of rumors: if their critical ability is high, the rumors will be accepted very hard; however, if the rumors encounter an uncritical audience, then the rapid reception and acknowledgment is guaranteed” (Neubauer 2010, 234–235).

Based on the available formulas, we can conclude that vagueness is necessary for creating a rumor, thus a journalist who publishes a rumor creates it by relying on the impossibility of accurately determining the general truthiness of the stipulations, which violates the basic principles of journalism: accuracy, conciseness, and veracity.

Furthermore, it is essential that the message conveyed by the rumor is strong, which means a journalist, who only has in mind the number of newspapers his rumor would sell, always relies on unverified information that will be powerful, draw attention and attract the readers, irrespective of the fact how problematic in terms of authenticity it might be. However, the last element of this formula, perhaps the most important for our analysis, refers to criticality. In the case of spreading rumors via newspaper articles, criticality can be seen as having two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the readers, that is, to their level of criticality and the ways in which they interpret the news they have read which is based on a rumor, and coming from an anonymous source. However, it is vastly related to the critical ability of a journalist. Namely, if a journalist who learns a rumor from a source who wishes to stay anonymous is sufficiently conscientious and critical, it is unlikely that this journalist would resort to such information, without first obtaining confirmation of its accuracy, that is, without previously checking it. On the other hand, if the criticality of the journalist is disregarded due to his desire to obtain scandalous and sensational information, even if it was based on a rumor or piece of information without any evidence of its authenticity, he/she will easily say it came from an anonymous source and this will directly make them a link in the chain of spreading rumors.

One question that might be of great importance when talking about anonymous disclosures is the question of the credibility of newspapers which publish news like this. Since the “credibility of sources is one of the conditions of honest communication, confidentiality deprives the audience of the opportunity to decide for themselves the extent to which they will believe the information revealed” (Day 2004, 215). Serious newspapers will rarely use unverified information and sources who ask for a confidentiality agreement without any valid reason. However, when it comes to tabloids, the publications that rely only on anonymous sources can be found in every edition, even when there is no need for anything like that. When it comes to the abuse of anonymous sources, it is obvious that in the interpretation of the tabloids the concept of ethics is somewhat disregarded.

The connection between the announcement of verified information, known sources and the authenticity of the newspaper cannot be denied as evidenced by the research³ of Ksenija Žolf, who concludes that “there is a positive correlation between the reduced credibility and not revealing sources, that is, reduced credibility is most common when the sources are not revealed” (Žolf 2007, 88).

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The basic, initial assumption that this research was started with is that anonymous sources in the tabloids are used also when it is not necessary to use them, that is, they are primarily used with an aim of sensationalist reporting in order to increase the newspapers

³ Ksenija Žolf carried out a study where she dealt with the credibility of the media releases; as an example she used the releases about *Croatia Airlines*. The research was carried out in 2006, and it covered a 6-month period during which 394 releases were analyzed. On this occasion, she proved a high correlation between credibility and the named sources (Žolf 2007, 77–95).

sold, and much less for the sake of the public's right to know. The assumption is that journalists and editors often hide behind the so-called anonymous sources, as they do not have a responsible attitude towards the profession, which directly affects the overall credibility of the media.

The subject of this paper is the use of anonymous sources in tabloid dailies *Blic* and *Kurir*, with a special reference to their abuse, while the main goal is to determine the extent to which anonymous sources are misused, as well as in which topics, and in which context. The basic hypotheses with which the research was started are as follows:

1. The use of anonymous sources and the degree of tabloidization⁴ of a daily newspaper are in direct proportion.

2. Anonymous sources are the dominant ones in the tabloids and they are used even when that is not necessary.

In order to prove the abovementioned hypotheses, the content of daily newspapers *Blic* and *Kurir*, for a period of 14 days (December 16 to 29, 2013) was analyzed from the perspective of the use of anonymous sources.

These two newspapers were selected because of their number of readers, and accordingly because of the presumed great influence on the media and the public in Serbia. Namely, the daily newspaper *Blic* has been published since 1996, when it was considered to be an opposition newspaper, because it was the only newspaper which broadcast information about the student protests which were taking place at that time. Over time, it has often been seen as a newspaper that supports a democratic political opinion, and as being oriented towards the Western system of values. While *Blic* was previously categorized as a “semi-tabloid”, since in addition to dealing with trivialities and the use of tabloid rhetoric (sensationalism in the titles and texts, photos, large format photographs, a vast array of entertainment topics, news from the lives of celebrities, etc.) it was also possible to recognize elements of serious issues (dealing with relevant social and political issues), today it is actually closer to being a tabloid. *Blic* has been owned by a Swiss company *Ringier Axel Springer* since 2004, while their circulation⁵ exceeds 100,000 copies. Moreover, the *Blic* web page is frequently said to be one of the most visited in Serbia.

The daily newspaper *Kurir* has been published since 2006 and its founder and owner is the controversial businessman Radisav Rodić. *Kurir* is a true example of a tabloid. This tabloid mostly reports about sensationalism, and shock that often resembles morbidity, presenting trivialities as relevant news, photos of large format which wish to provoke emotions (from sadness to outrage). One characteristic of *Kurir* that should be mentioned is the clear politicization. Namely, this tabloid newspaper has regular columns that are dedicated to political and social issues, but these topics are treated in the same way as the topics in the field of entertainment. The end result is the tabloidization of politics and politicians and the equalization of socially relevant topics with trivialities. *Kurir* is often

⁴ The daily newspaper *Kurir* is a paradigmatic example of the definition of the tabloid: “Small format, half the size of a standard newspaper format, mostly sensationalistic news about murders, scandals, rumors, violence, or news about celebrities.” (*Dictionary of Media and Communications*, 2009: 283), while the daily *Blic* could be considered “a quality and popular newspaper” (more market-oriented newspapers and magazines which include the elements of quality newspapers and tabloids)” (Todorović, 2006: 22). Based on the above mentioned, *Kurir* is categorized as more tabloid-like than *Blic*.

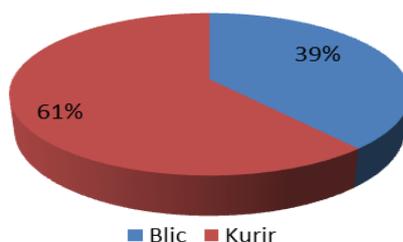
⁵ The results of the research conducted by the ABC company show that the circulation of *Blic* in 2012 was on average 115.770 copies.

The tabloid *Kurir* was not included in this research. In order to see a more detailed list please check: http://www.abcsrbija.com/images/stories/vesti/National_Newspapers_total_circulation_30_12_13.pdf (visited on: 23/1/2015).

referred to as having the highest daily circulation in Serbia. Based on the data we received from the marketing and sales department of *Kurir* for the purposes of this paper, the average daily circulation of this newspaper is 170,000 on the territory of Serbia. The same as *Blic*, it also offers an online edition which is also one of the most visited ones in Serbia.

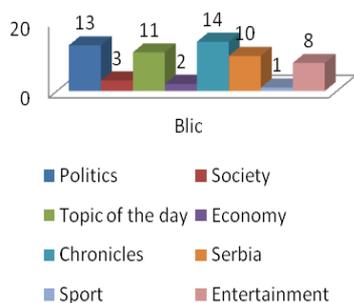
4. THE RESULTS OF THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT OF THE TABLOIDS *BLIC* AND *KURIR*

Within the analyzed time period, a total of 160 articles were used in which the anonymous sources were quoted - 98 of those articles were published in *Kurir*, while 62 were published in *Blic* (graph 1). The above mentioned shows that *Kurir* publishes seven news headlines with unnamed sources on average per day, while that number is half as much in *Blic*, which means that the latter tabloid publishes around four or five articles with anonymous sources a day.

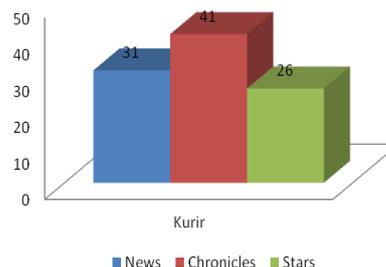


Graph 1 *Blic* and *Kurir* percentage ratios of articles with anonymous sources used as samples

Based on the obtained data, the hypothesis that stipulated that the anonymous sources are more present in tabloids has been confirmed to be true (considering that we said that *Kurir* has more characteristics of a tabloid when compared to *Blic*, based on the content it offers and its treatment of various topics).



Graph 2 Presence of anonymous sources per newspaper sections (*Blic*)



Graph 3 Presence of anonymous sources per newspaper section (*Kurir*)

Based on the data presented in the paragraph above (graph 2), it can be seen that in *Blic* most of the texts with anonymous sources were published in sections devoted to particular regular topics.

Crime section (14), followed by the Politics Today section with 13 articles that rely on the statements from the anonymous sources, the next one is The Daily News (11), Serbia (10), Entertainment (8), Society (3), Economy (2) and the last section on this list is Sport with one article that mentions an unnamed source. However, the section The Daily News that brings the most important news from the previous day on page 2 and 3, actually showed social and political events that were taking place in the country within the time period covered within the scope of this research; thus, a conclusion could be made that (including the articles from The Daily News and the Society pages) there were 27 articles which used anonymous sources to cover the topics relating to politics and society, i.e. the topics of public interest.

5. DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown the dominance of anonymous sources in the analyzed daily newspapers, whose primary purpose is not to inform the public, but to create pseudo-research discourse in the tabloids. Spreading rumors and speculation in the areas of politics and society points to the lack of transparency in political and social institutions, which, as a rule, have insiders who are in collusion with the tabloids who then reveal certain news to the audience (readers). However, the purpose of this news is not to inform the audience, but to make them think in a certain way. In this way, the tabloids are used for political quarrels and clashes, to convince the audiences' to think in a certain way, to skillfully manipulate the reader's attention, all under the guise of "well-informed sources".

An example of the manipulative use of unnamed sources can be seen in the Politics section where a source was named as "one of the close associates of Vučić". This is a hybrid text (*Vučić will decide on the elections by Christmas, 17/12/2013*) which consists of two interviews. The text consists of a string of statements of an anonymous source and the political analyst Đorđe Vuković, connected through the paraphrases of their statements. This example shows that the reporter obtained the information on calling for preterm parliamentary elections from "a close associate of Vučić", although there was no need for concealing the identity of this source, given that the published information is of public importance and should be transparent. On the other hand, the disclosure of this information, which comes from the highest level, but from an unnamed source, can be interpreted in two ways: first, that the reporter resorted to rumors, secondly, that the journalist published his own speculations. Both cases are unjustified, particularly because the information could have been obtained by direct contact with the office of the first Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, in order to avoid disclosure of speculation and ruining the credibility of journalists and newspapers. Some other examples are: "by a source close to Tadić said to *Blic*", "a source of *Blic* close to the ruling coalition", "said by a prominent member of the SNS, who insisted on anonymity", "says *Blic*'s source close to the former vice-president of the party", "says a source of *Blic* from the Parliament of Serbia", "one of the associates of the Deputy Prime Minister told us", and so on. What is common to all these cases is the unjustified use of sources "behind the curtain", because each of the topics covered in these texts was of public importance, and

therefore it should have necessarily been transparent. Moreover, partial information could have been obtained in some other way (the last resort could have been the reference to the Law on Free access to Information of Public Importance). The only positive side of sources being named in this way is the fact that the political stream the source belongs to is emphasized, which helps critical readers to at least indirectly discern what the motives of the source might be. However, the conclusion that emerges is that the priority of the newspapers' analyzed was not respecting professional ethics and offer credible information, but the publication of the so-called exclusive news, although their veracity is questionable.

When we are talking about *Kurir* (graph 3), the majority of texts with anonymous sources were published in the thematic Crime section (41), the next one is the News⁶ (31) and Celebrities⁷ (26). Given the unequivocal orientation of *Kurir* towards sensations and shocking information, the fact that most anonymous sources were used in sections Crime and Entertainment (total 67) is not unexpected. Namely, the topics covered in these columns are the most susceptible to sensational edits, which further contribute to the generally shocking statements of anonymous sources. Anonymous sources in the Crime section can roughly be divided into sources from the police and ordinary people (witnesses, participants, sources close to the participants, etc.). A closer observation and comparison of these two groups of anonymous sources can provide us with a twofold conclusion. When journalists make references to anonymous sources from the Serbian Ministry of Interior, that can suggest that police personnel, mostly called "sources involved in the investigation", act as journalists' informants, providing them with information that otherwise would not have been offered at regular press conferences. On the other hand, by making reference to the second group of sources we call "ordinary people", the journalists give the news the element of HI⁸ (*human interest*) which brings the text closer to the ordinary tabloid reader. An example of unsubstantiated use of anonymous sources in the Crime section is a hybrid text called *The child hijacked itself* (18/12/2013). The text is based only on the statements of anonymous "sources involved in the investigation", followed by the journalist's comments and paraphrases of the source's statements. Relying only on an anonymous source, without using more different, named sources, proves ease of abuse of anonymous sources in the tabloid *Kurir*, whose journalists do not hesitate to trivialize the news and to use irony supported by speculation to ridicule a child, without thinking about the consequences. It is clear that this article could be analyzed on several levels in terms of ethics, but at the moment the most important element for our analysis is the use of unnamed sources. The phrase "a source involved in the investigation" is used in order to administer an apparent authenticity to the uncritical readers, because if a source is familiar with the facts of the investigation, why would he or she not be believed. However, failing to name the source does not help the reader get an insight into the motives of sources, and even in the motives of the author of the text, who uses rumors to trivialize the news and offers only selected, shocking details. In the articles we analyzed, *Kurir* also used the following phrases: "our source from the police says", "the source involved in the investigation said to *Kurir*", "*Kurir* has

⁶ The column News publishes society and politics related news.

⁷ The column Celebrities shows the news about the celebrities (mostly singers, models etc.).

⁸ "Newspaper content that contains emotional intensity as well as factual material about an individual case" (Todorović 2006, 21).

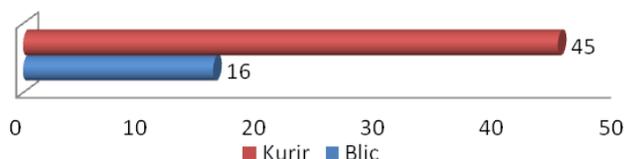
learned from sources involved in the investigation”, “a source from the Belgrade Palace of Justice said to *Kurir*”, “a source from the court said to *Kurir*”, etc.

We found 26 texts with unnamed sources in the section Celebrities in *Kurir*, which is more than three times the number of anonymous sources used in *Blic*'s section Entertainment (8), which indicates that *Kurir*, due to the already mentioned content covered, gives more space to interesting facts from the lives of celebrities, while the Celebrities section, similar to the Crime section are used to publish unverified news. We would not be wrong if we called the articles published in this section rumors deprived of any information-worthy value. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that such information and such articles have their target group that certainly wants to be provided with accurate and verified information. Unnamed sources indicated with phrases such as: “the folk singer’s close friend”, “*Kurir* learned from Bojana’s close friend”, “a source close to the organizers of Ceca’s concert”, “says a source who happened to be in the club last weekend”, “revealed by our well-informed source”, “a source close to the singer told *Kurir*”, “says the source of *Kurir* who happened to be in the restaurant”, etc. All these were found in all the analyzed copies of *Kurir*. As noticed above, there is a practice of using sources that are “close” to certain persons, sources who were present at the time of the event, with the aim to provide credibility; however, these allegations are nothing but spreading rumors using anonymous sources, whose existence is often questionable, as covers.

The politicization of tabloids is a trend that has already been mentioned. *Kurir* is a paradigmatic example of such a practice. Namely, although clearly being a tabloid, this newspaper does not only deal with “soft news”, but the first ten pages present where the News section important news from the sphere of social and political life is published. However, although dedicated to serious topics, this column is seen as not much, or not at all different from the Celebrities column because of the way in which the texts are published. Turning politics into show business is most visible in the way *Kurir* talks about politicians; it writes about the juicy details from their private or public life, dramatizes the events from political and social life, with the inevitable sensationalism that is visible in each title and text (*Miško goes to London, Cvijan follows him! SNS dumps socialists all across Serbia! The daughter of the minister Saša Radulović beaten up! Đilas made Sapić watch his mistress’s training!* etc.). The number of anonymous sources in the News column (31, 5 more than in the Celebrities column) shows how disrespectfully the significant topics are being treated. One example that represents all the above stated concerning the way politicians are treated in *Kurir* is the text *Cvijan insulted Vučić and cursed his mother* (19/12/2013). The main heading *itself: CHAOS DRAMA AT THE PRESIDENCY MEETING OF SNS*, and the subheading: *Tense! A few members of SNS wanted to assault Cvijan physically but Vučić did not let them* actually show what the rest of the text will be like. However, the impression is reinforced by the fact that the author of the article relies only on the statements of an anonymous source, “the source told *Kurir* and described in detail how it all happened.” The author wanted to reinforce the impression of credibility by using the allegation that the source was present in the meeting, and that the source was the direct witness of the event. In this case, the motives of the interviewee (provided that there is one) are obvious, at least to a critical reader, but it does not justify the manipulative use of unnamed sources.

It was discussed that the texts that rely only on unnamed sources may be questionable in terms of ethics, but also from the point of view of the journalistic profession in general. This is why the last part of the analysis provides a quantitative display of texts from *Blic*

and *Kurir* which relied only on statements obtained from sources whose identity was not revealed to readers at the time this analysis was being carried out (Graph 4).



Graph 4 Comparative analysis of the number of texts in *Blic* and *Kurir* which rely only on statements obtained from sources whose identity was not revealed to readers at the time this analysis was being carried out

So, there were 16 such texts in *Blic*, while there were as many as 45 texts where only anonymous sources were used. In addition to not respecting the equal presence of all parties involved in a particular event (because the objectivity is an ideal journalists should strive for), relying only on an anonymous source brings into question the credibility of the information presented in a text by the author. Therefore, maybe the best thing to do is to make another division of newspaper genres, which would classify them into genres and pseudo-genres, where the latter would consist of such examples of newspaper articles that do not meet any journalistic criteria to be seen as one of the existing categories of newspaper genres.

6. CONCLUSION

The research in this study showed the dominance of anonymous sources and their unjustified use or misuse, as well as the abuse of anonymity in the tabloids. Also, frequent use of anonymous sources in *Kurir* proves that the degree tabloidization in daily newspapers is in direct proportion with the abuse of anonymous sources, given that *Kurir*, based on content that is published may be graded as “more tabloid – like” newspaper than *Blic*.

Namely, if the anonymity of sources is exploited for the purpose of sensationalism and attracting attention, the role of the newspaper text is not to inform the public, but to increase circulation. The proven hypotheses about the use of anonymous sources even when not needed can be interpreted as the laziness of journalists to search for a source that would come forward publicly, or as perfidious way of spinning. The existence of sources cannot even be proven, which only facilitates the placement of rumors and speculation which are, as a rule, useful for certain interest groups. The proven hypothesis of a greater propensity of more tabloid-like newspapers towards the utilization of anonymous sources is not surprising, given their dominant market orientation, but the concern originates from the perspective of ethics. The highest readership in Serbia have more tabloid-like dailies, which can be explained by low media literacy, and with a whole social atmosphere in which the tabloids were gaining in popularity. With low levels of education, uncritically minded, eager to escape from everyday life and gloating in the juicy details of other people's lives, tabloid readers unconsciously accept half-truths, often even misinformation, as the truth. The greatest danger lies in the fact that such “truths” are used in the management of their own lives, due primarily to the speculative news from the fields of politics and society.

The abuse of anonymous sources in the mentioned areas, in addition to manipulative functions in relation to the readers, has an additional function of tabloidization of politics and reality. The treatment of the social and political topics such as the topic of “entertainment” inevitably leads to an underestimation of politics and “serious” (important) news is undermined. This is the reason why the tabloidization of society is mentioned so frequently. The deceptive harmlessness of tabloid newspapers that are apparently dealing only with trivial issues leads to the conclusion that they cannot have a big impact on readers when it comes to serious social and political issues. On the contrary, seemingly non-influential tabloids have power, sometimes even more than daily newspapers and for several reasons. First of all, (semi) tabloids have a much greater circulation than serious news and political newspapers, and therefore a greater impact. Readers of (semi) tabloid newspapers, with their choice suggest that they are not too critical, generally not highly educated, nor media literate, and are easier to manipulate.

And finally, the subjects covered in Serbian tabloids are not limited only to celebrities, which then shows one more characteristic of Serbian tabloids which is a permanent tabloidization of politics, and politicization of tabloids.

It is not only the politicians who are targets of rumors. Anonymous tips about the (un)important details from the lives of famous are a mandatory part of entertainment sections. Although these rumors cannot cause the society any damage nor can they be useful, except to the individuals who are mentioned in the news, one might assume that, because of their insignificance, news like this is less harmful.

However, the unjustified use of unnamed sources represents an abuse in whatever column it is used. The target audience of the columns that deal with “soft news” probably craves sensation, but it certainly does not want to receive information that is unchecked. Therefore, the authors of these texts have the same responsibility to the readers as well as other journalists. When it comes to the Crime section, which the analysis pointed out as one of the columns with the largest number of anonymous sources, the violation of ethical principles and the damage that can be produced is even more apparent. The anonymous sources in the Crime section mostly are the so-called ordinary people (“neighbor”, “eyewitness”, “a source close to the victim”, “a source close to the accused”, etc.), so their experience in relation to the media is negligible or non-existent. Unaware of the power of the media, but also of the consequences that their statements can produce, these sources often unconsciously offer half-truths. On the other hand, their anonymity removes their sense of responsibility, so they can declare something they otherwise would not have said if they were not anonymous but named. Journalist can, without fear of sanction, “sugarcoat” the statement and bring it up to the desired level of sensation. A responsible journalist and then the editor should reconsider all this before resorting to such information and publishing it.

Research has pointed to the vastly changed role of journalists in a tabloidized society. Once perceived as “guardians of democracy” and “supervisors of authorities”, tabloid journalists consciously accepted, without resistance, a newly imposed role of “guardians of profit” and “rulers’ poltroons”. Although this study shows numerous examples of individual dishonesty of some journalists in the tabloid media, looking at the wider picture of the use unnamed sources in the tabloids, the ethics of the entire journalist profession could easily be questioned. Especially given the fact that the quality media in transition societies, faced with unfair competition from the Internet, become tabloid-like in their struggle to survive. The media are the mirror of the society in which they reside,

which created them and which keeps them alive. However, only good quality media which see themselves as the pillars of democracy where their role is to protect society from the arbitrariness of the authorities and financial centers of power can actually grow into positive drivers of the desired social changes. That is why it is necessary to point out that the politicization of tabloids and tabloidization of politics is undesirable in the media, and it should not be a part of the social practice. The importance of critically minded and educated journalists and editors in a democratic society should also be emphasized. The prospects of achieving this in the future can be realistic only if special attention is paid to the formal and informal education of journalists, and if education institutions (schools, universities ...) work on media literacy. Maybe the most important initial action should be for the government to offer their support to national television and good quality media, to provide permanent and secure sources of funding.

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(ZLO)UPOTREBA ANONIMNIH IZVORA U TABLOIDNOJ ŠTAMPI U SRBIJI: KOMPATIVNA ANALIZA SADRŽAJA SRPSKIH TABLOIDA BLIC I KURIR

Već dovoljno problematična etičnost tabloidnih novina može se sa aspekta upotrebe anonimnih izvora i dublje problematizovati. Rabljenje anonimnosti u službi širenja neproverenih informacija i glasina je ne samo opravdano kritikovano, već sa aspekta profesionalne etike neprihvatljivo. Rumorna komunikacija postaje primarni način komuniciranja u tabloidima, kojom se neproverene ili unapred smišljene informacije prenose od nalogodavaca do izmanipulisanih čitalaca. Predmet ovog rada jeste korišćenje anonimnih izvora u tabloidnim dnevnim listovima Blic i Kurir, sa posebnim osvrtom na njihovu zloupotrebu, dok je osnovni cilj: utvrditi u kojoj meri se anonimni izvori zloupotrebljavaju. Komparativnom analizom sadržaja Blica i Kurira (u periodu od 16-29. decembar, 2013. godine) potvrđena je osnovna hipoteza o većoj sklonosti tabloidnijih novina ka zloupotrebi anonimnih izvora, ali je potvrđena i njihova neopravdana upotreba u oba analizirana lista.

Ključne reči: *anonimni izvori, štampa, tabloidizacija, glasine, etika.*