

Othering, Stereotyping and Dehumanization– Online Discourse on Minority Groups in Slovakia

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how online media present minority groups that are, to various degrees, critically perceived by the public. Using qualitative framing analysis of the coverage of four online media portals over three time periods, the thesis presents evidence of negative framing, othering and stereotyping adopted in portrayal of the Roma, refugees, the Hungarian minority and the LGBT community. Results suggest that coverage on the minorities, mostly the Roma and refugees, relies on framing of their differences vis-à-vis majority population and related threats, and in some cases even denies these group the uniquely human attributes. However, data also suggest a softening of rhetoric for the Roma, and partly for the already accepted Hungarian minority, in periods succeeding the emergence of refugee crisis. These findings suggest the possible less out-group status of these groups, following the arrival of a culturally more distant “other”. Similar trends are also observable in the user conversations underneath the articles. The quality of comments is, however, even more uncivil, with frequent occurrence of dehumanization, related to some of the article characteristics. Relations between media and extremely negative attitudes of public call for the more responsible and inclusionary coverage of the minorities in Slovakia.

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1 Introduction

"A white man only has to work, work and work ... On the other hand, the state generously, with literally motherly care, supports the Gipsy asocial parasites," declared governor of the largest Slovak region, Marián Kotleba, at a pre-election meeting in 2010¹ (Aktuality 2010). His far-right party currently has 14 seats in the parliament, with its popularity rising by almost 10% compared to the 2012 elections to National Council².

The presented statement does not only rely heavily on stereotyping and othering of a minority group but referring to any group of people as "parasites" is also a classic example of dehumanization, a phenomenon of perceiving others as having lesser value than humans. Rhetoric of this type can justify racism, discrimination, and human right violations. Racism and discrimination present an exceedingly widespread problem worldwide and are reported as "tremendously on the rise in Europe" by EU Commissioner Franco Frattini³. Discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin continues to be regarded as the most widespread form of discrimination in the EU (64%), and it is more likely to be seen today than was the case in 2012, with an increase by 8 percentage points. Ethnic discrimination is closely followed by discrimination on the basis of the sexual orientation (Eurobarometer 2015).

In the case of Slovak Republic, no less than 37% of people consider relations between people from different cultural or religious backgrounds or nationalities as rather bad (European Commission 2008). Such attitude can be related to the political discourse as well as to what is

¹ Translated from: "Biely človek musí iba robiť, robiť a robiť... Naproti tomu sa štát veľkoryso, s doslova mamičkovskou starostlivosťou, stará o cigánskych asociálnych parazitov."

² While in 2012 elections the party had 1.58%, in 2016 it entered parliament with 8.04%, and according to the latest polls it currently has support of 10.4% (SME 2018).

³ See the whole speech at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-07-526_en.htm

presented to audiences by media. The interest of this research is observing the way media present minority groups that are, to various degrees, critically perceived by the public.

The level of prejudice of the majority society is reported to be extremely high towards its Roma minority. According to estimations, Roma comprise 7.4% of the population in Slovakia⁴ (Klimovský et al 2016), living highly segregated from the majority population. According to opinion polls from 2009, 78% of Slovaks have unfavorable views of the Roma minority (Pew Research Center). A majority of Slovaks (58%) would not want their child to have classmate of Roma origin compared to 34% average in the EU (Eurobarometer 2012). The report by the Open Society Foundations claims that majority of people rank Roma among dehumanized groups, not perceiving them as members of the human race (Mareček and Stanek 2014). The most commonly repeated negative features associated with the Roma included: lack of hygiene, tendency toward criminality, poverty and unemployment, tendency to cheat, Illiteracy or aggressiveness (Open Society Foundations 2005). Accordingly, a large majority of the Slovak population would accept more restrictive measures against the Roma, often discriminatory and violating human rights- such as segregation, limitation of reproductive rights, etc. (Mareček and Stanek 2014). However, more recent opinion polls or studies measuring Slovak attitudes towards the Roma minority are not available, suggesting possible lesser interest in the topic.

The Roma minority is, however, not the most populous one— Hungarian minority accounts for 8.5% of the population. Although the Hungarian minority was being famously attacked by the leader of Slovak National Party Ján Slotá during the 1990s, recent data shows that nowadays the majority of people do not identify with his negative statements (Papcunová 2013). According to László Sólymos, a member of the inter-ethnic party representing interests of Hungarian minority, as stated in 2015, the tension towards Hungarian minority has decreased

⁴ According to the census from 2011, it was only 2% of the population

considerably over recent years, which however, cannot be said about other minorities. Sólymos, for instance, points out the rather aggressive campaign against people with other sexual orientation followed by the referendum about the definition of family and adoption rights in 2015 (Most Híd webpage 2015). Slovakia is indeed among the EU member countries with the highest percentage of violent incidents directed towards LGBT community (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). Such attitudes can be explained by quite conservative character of the country, with 76% of its citizens being believers⁵ (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic 2011).

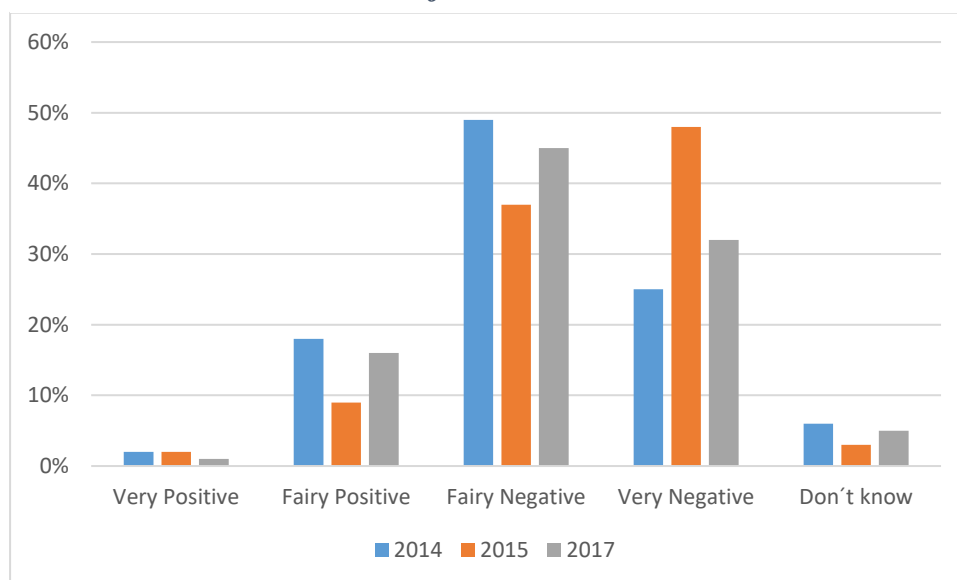
However, with the refugee crisis beginning in Europe in 2015, an increasing number of opinion polls has been carried out regarding attitudes towards immigration and Muslims. Although Slovakia has an almost non-existent Muslim minority⁶, in political and public discourse, Muslims are dominantly associated with threatening of cultural values and security of the majority (Lášticová et al 2015), with following 63,4% of people believing that refugees directly present a safety threat for its citizens (SITA 2015). Results from Eurobarometer show corresponding negative attitudes of Slovaks towards immigration from outside of Europe. While in 2014 the most frequent answer in the survey was the “fairly negative” attitude, accounting for 49% of respondents, in 2015 most respondents (48%) marked the answer “very negative.” The most recent poll conducted in 2017 shows that the attitudes remain far from positive, but the most frequent answer is again the “fairly negative,” accounting for total of 45% of respondents. Results from Eurobarometer throughout the mentioned time periods can be fully compared from Figure 1. Moreover, in 2015 a referendum was organized in the Slovak town Gabčíkovo, whose residents refused to establish a temporary refugee camp by 96.67 % of the vote (Hospodárske Noviny 2015). The approaches towards migrants were similar on the side

⁵ Out of which 76,2% are believers of Catholic Church (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic 2011).

⁶ According to 2011 census, there are only 1934 Muslims living on the territory of Slovak Republic

of the government— the country received worldwide criticism for its willingness to accept only refugees of the Christian religious beliefs (Tharoor 2015).

Figure 1: Change of Attitudes Towards Immigration Outside of the EU



Source: Eurobarometer

Are these negative attitudes towards minorities also present in the media discourse? Mareček and Stanek (2014) claim that the Roma are often inappropriately and unprofessionally depicted in the media, which contributes to further stereotyping and creates an environment conducive to multiple discrimination. The media indeed shape public debate in terms of setting agendas and focusing public interest on particular subjects in a particular way (Happer and Philo 2013). Public agenda, by the theory of agenda-setting is supposed to be focused on the issues emphasized by the media agenda, similarly as the frames media adopt frequently influence how public makes sense of events and actors around them. Supposing that the way media informs about the minorities is of crucial importance for the formation of public opinion, the responsible depiction of the minorities by media is an unavoidable component for the fight against discrimination, violence and segregation. Frames adopted by media regarding the minority

groups can be negative, but if found also dehumanizing, there is a danger of justifying and legitimizing the immoral acts that are adopted by the majority population and political elites.

In this thesis I study how negative framing, othering and stereotyping is adopted by online media in portrayal of minorities and immigrants/refugees, and how these are intervening with the comment section occupied by the user reactions. The main research question is: *Are articles about minorities and refugees framed in negative, stereotyping or dehumanizing way?* Several further questions will be considered for the analysis: *Is the Roma minority exceedingly targeted by negative or dehumanizing framing when compared to other traditional ethnic or sexual minorities, as mirrored in the public opinion polls? Has reporting on the Slovak minorities changed with the introduction of the more distant “other”- the refugees, immigrants and Muslims? Do frames adopted for the traditional Slovak minorities differ from those adopted for the refugees?* In addition to newspaper articles, I intend to look at the user comments, to see which articles produce higher number of reactions and how negative and dehumanizing discourse is present among the readers. *What is the relation between articles and comments? Do certain topics provoke more comments? How does tone of the article influence the direction of the debate? Is the commenting sphere presenting deliberation or hate speech? How do these two interact? What characteristics of the media intervene with the quality of user reactions?*

To answer the research questions, the online version of four news media were chosen for an in-depth content analysis– *SME*, a quality liberal newspaper, *Pravda*, a quality pro-government newspaper, *Topky*, a tabloid news portal without declared ideological stance, and *Hlavné Správy*, a conservative “alternative” news portal accused of spreading fake news (Goda 2018). An online search using keywords will be used to identify articles, dividing the coverage into three time periods: 2013, before the refugee crisis in Europe started, 2015, when it has reached its peak and 2017, when people might already feel saturated by the topic. This will provide for sufficient gap between the time periods, to enable me to compare the developments in the trend

of reporting on the refugees, but how the changing context influenced the coverage on the ethnic and sexual minorities in Slovakia.

Qualitative content analysis will be used to look for signs of dehumanization in forms of portraying these people as animals, deviant, savage, sick, dirty, mentally handicapped, less intelligent, amoral, inferior, criminal, or passive, mindless, lacking of individuality, cold and emotionless. Further frames typically adopted for the minorities will be searched for and identified, providing further insight into the coverage on the minority groups in Slovakia. Finally, the section on user comments will try to outline the public discourse on the minority groups and its interference with the article characteristics.

I will argue that, with the emergence of the new and more distant “other”, the rhetoric for the remaining ethnic minorities is softening, possibly explained by the changing perception on who is a member of “us” and “them”. Although there were studies observing media context and minorities previously carried out in and outside of Slovakia, it appears that the aspect of how emergence of new “other” can affect the previously stereotyped groups is under-researched, therefore this thesis tries to contribute to the scarce literature on this topic.

The thesis is structured as follows. After the introductory chapter, two blocks will provide a theoretical background for the research. The section on identity politics will approximate the concepts of the “othering” and its extreme version- dehumanization. It will provide further insight into what exactly will be understood behind dehumanization and the classification that will be used for the empirical part of the thesis. The second theoretical block presented in the third chapter will focus on the theories of political communication, outlining the importance of media in opinion shaping, brief history of the research on the effects of political communication with further focus on framing. Previous research on framing of minorities will be outlined, important for developing framing scheme used in subsequent chapters. Moreover, the political

communication chapter will introduce the recent theory on user comments and the factors influencing their quality.

The fourth, methodology chapter will introduce and justify the data selection, present the coding patterns, and conclude with expectations of the research, relying on the insights from the literature. The fifth chapter will present the results comparing the media representation of minorities across the given time periods, comparing the pre- and post- refugee crisis coverage. The sixth chapter will present the results from the analysis of user comments, and approximate how their quantity and quality relates to specific article-comment and comment-comment relations. Finally, the seventh chapter will summarize the main finding and conclude.

2 How We Form Identity and Define the Others

2.1. *Us and Them*

“Homo sapiens is inescapably a tribal animal.”

(Berreby 2005: 327)

Feeling of belonging in a group is a baseline characteristic of human beings— people have always organized themselves into seemingly similar, culturally and geographically close units in order to harmonize their actions, easily exchange communication, and better fight the threats of the outer world (Berreby 2005). People recognize various categories and levels of belonging, and their thinking in terms of groups is a necessary ingredient for preserving specific traditions, culture and symbols (Berreby 2005).

For the very emergence of identity, people inevitably identify themselves vis-à-vis others. Their perception of themselves as individuals and the members of specific groups, institutions and organizations is achieved by inherent differentiation between “us” and “them,” the “others” (Zahavi et al 2004). The identification of the “others” as opposed to “us” is a distinction built up deeply in one’s mind, and Berreby (2005) claims that no people in the history of human kind ever lacked such demarcation of social relations. The recognition of “us” serves as guideline for whom to consider suitable for the reliable exchange of goods, information, and services belonging to the life in a community (Berreby 2005).

Human groups are based on differences in race, ethnicity, religion, language, class or culture, which all provide different meaning for inclusion. For instance, ethnic belonging is one of the important components in the process of construction of self-awareness, being an “outcome of deeply felt personal and historical meaning of belonging” (Nakata 2013:128). Moreover, ethnic

belonging often is visible and clearly recognizable, marked by the differences in the color of skin, clothes, language or other symbols (Berreby 2005). Being easily noticeable, these differences often seem to be given, natural or even essential. Essentialism, also referred to as psychological essentialism, is a theoretical stance that suggests that there are core qualities and characteristics of each group of people creating the “essence” – a deep, and often unobservable and nonobvious property (Smith 2014). Human groups, according to this view, constitute innate born-with characteristics, “hidden truths” about the people that cannot be questioned or modified (Berreby 2005: 60). Phillips (2010) points out to the obvious critique of the essentialist thinking– there is a problem of simplification, stereotyping, and consequential incapability to consider characteristics not fitting the given preconceptions, which leads to discrimination. Moreover, ascribing a static essence to the differences among the groups completely ignores the possibility of historically or socially created origin of such differences (Phillips 2010). Accordingly, there is an opposing theory accounting for the differences between the human groups. Constructionism considers creation of identity and relations to the other groups as forms of social achievement, cultivated by historical and cultural traditions, which can be effectively altered or completely eradicated (Gergen 1999). Constructionists thus believe that we approach our identity through interactions with family, peers, institutions, organizations or the media. These relations help to construct our perceptions of the differences of the “others,” but these considerations are not stable and can change depending on the specific social context. The dividing line between “us” and “them” is rather imprecise and shifts back and forth depending on which characteristics of human groups are relevant at the moment. Moreover, given that people adhere to different groups at once, they can effectively switch among the various belongings and forms of identity according to the current circumstances and corresponding preferences (Berreby 2005).

Being constructed in the process of identity formation, certain groups get assigned subordinate positions. By creating a line between “us” and “them,” people often demarcate the other group as inferior, bad, untrustworthy or less powerful (Berreby 2005). Schwalbe et al (2000) refer to so-called “oppressive othering,” which is a process of creating power relations, with a dominant group seeking advantage by “defining another group as morally and/or intellectually inferior” (p.423). Using the othering in discursive processes serves to justify the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and consequently questions the position of subordinates (Jensen 2011). In extreme cases, the “others” can be defined in so negative and stereotypical way that they are ultimately being dehumanized (Zahavi et al 2004).

2.2. Dehumanizing the Other

Dehumanization is a psychological process of denying an individual an agency connected with basic aspects of being a human (Khamitov et al 2016). These basic aspects and traits of an agency, as identified by Khamitov et al (2016), are the following: planning, imagination, cognition and intelligence, rationality, self-restraint, emotional warmth, uncivility and ability to act intentionally. Smith (2014) classifies dehumanization as referring to any perception of others as subhuman creatures, whether in rhetorical practices metaphorically likening humans to animals or objects, or in direct treatment of people in a manner which denies them the distinctively human attributes.

The occurrence of dehumanization can be approximated by the closer look at how “others” are being attributed feelings— for instance, the study carried out by Leyens et al (2000) demonstrates that in relation to the out-group members, people predominantly express primary emotions⁷,

⁷E.g. joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, or surprise.

which are typical for both humans and animals, in contrast with the uniquely human, so-called secondary emotions⁸. More familiarity with the in-group members naturally provides for the higher attribution of secondary emotions. Moreover, recent studies on dehumanization explain this phenomenon using the above-described theory of psychological essentialism, referring to unchangeable innate characteristics of human groups (Smith 2014, Haslam 2006). Smith (2014) claims it is impossible to understand dehumanization without considering essentialism, because dehumanized people are explicitly perceived as lacking the human essence– “that special something that makes one human” (p.821).

Dehumanization can be further classified into two categories. Haslam (2006) distinguishes between animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization occurs when a person or a group is not recognized the human attributes, such as civility, maturity or rationality, distinguishing humans from animals. Metaphorically or directly likening people to animals serve to create mental processes of despise and disgust, leading to social distance. On the other hand, mechanistic dehumanization encompasses the denial of characteristics separating humans from machines, depicting individuals as passive, lacking individuality, cold or inert. Such rhetorical processes are associated with consequent indifference and restraint of emotions. Smith (2014) describes similar differentiation, distinguishing between assigning the other the subhuman essence (animalistic dehumanization) or the non-human essence (mechanistic dehumanization).

Looking at the concept from the historical point of view, dehumanization has served as an effective measure to deny basic human traits to specific groups of people. It has been commonly used as justification for occupation of territory during the colonizing era, legitimization of slavery, human right violations, wartime propaganda, or preceding strategy leading to genocide

⁸ E.g. affection, admiration, pride, conceit, nostalgia, remorse, or rancor.

and mass killing. As early as in ancient Greece, the representation of “barbarians” was created as opposed to Helens, first in regards to Persians, but later adopted in relation to all enemies. The word originally served to describe people whose mother tongue was unintelligible, but soon became to suggest cultural inferiority, backwardness, and even the lack of spirit– for which “they remained subjects and slaves” (Huang 2000: 563).

In the Middle Ages, Jews were commonly linked with lepers (Resnick 2012). Promoting connections to sickness and death is one of the common forms of dehumanization identified by Berreby (2005), as it effectively entails the isolation and triggers the contamination emotions. Moreover, medieval theology was using biblical sources understanding leprosy as “spiritual and physical infirmity,” therefore such references served to create feelings of humiliation and outcast status of the affected group (Resnick 2012: 93). During colonialism, early writings describe primitive people resembling apes (Dapper 1688, quoted in Goff et al 2008), and African slaves were regarded as subhuman creatures, brute beasts with resemblances to humans but “indeed no Men” (Godwyn 1680, quoted in Smith 2014: 815). The US have long history of dehumanization of their black population, sufficing to mention the 1787 Constitution clause ordering to count slaves as three-fifths of a human being (Goff et al. 2008).

From modern history, the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide are considered to be preceded by government-led campaign characterized by extensive usage of dehumanization– Jews were depicted as rats, while Tutsis were referred to as cockroaches. Moreover, during wars, it was very common to classify enemies as things, as mere numbers or pieces of paper in a file cabinet (Berreby 2005). Despite all of the atrocities linked with the dehumanization, similar processes are still persistent, even in developed liberal democracies. Kteily et al (2015), in an experiment showing the depiction of the “Ascent of Man,” ask respondents to rate individual groups on the scale of evolution. Their findings suggest that while Americans are rated as being highly evolved species, Muslims, Mexican immigrants and Arabs are considered as being less evolved.

Being perceived as less developed on the scale of evolution ultimately questions the human nature of the subjects in question.

The main implications of dehumanization stem from our consequent mind processes and moral considerations. For instance, perceiving someone as an inanimate object creates a “cognitive bias” translated in lack of feelings and empathy, given that objects do not activate the region of brain responsible for the social cognitive functions (Amodio and Frith 2006). Similar pattern can be expected towards animals, especially towards ones sharing few human attributes⁹. Consequently, the identification and sympathy with dehumanized people is reduced by considering them not anymore “as persons with feelings, hopes and concerns but as sub-human objects” (Bandura, 2002, p. 109). Not being considered as fully human, these people can be more easily placed lower on the moral hierarchy (Smith 2014), or completely excluded from the scope of morality and justice (Hodson et al 2014). Failure to adhere to regular emotions and moral considerations can stop us from establishing proper relations that would be otherwise governed by sense of morality (Berreby 2005). Buckels and Trapnell (2013) demonstrate that dehumanizing rhetoric decreases intergroup helping and justifies aggression towards members of other groups. Therefore, when likening humans to objects or organisms which do not invoke compassion and rules of morality, an excuse for immoral acts is effectively provided, reducing discomfort when treating the actual people in non-human way. Moreover, animalistic dehumanization can create stronger emotions of disgust and revulsion, especially when relating to organisms with typically negative connotations or contamination threats, such as rats, parasites, or cockroaches. Experiment on the effect of disgust by Wheatley and Haidt (2005) demonstrates that physically disgusted people are far harsher in their moral opinions. In overall,

⁹ Amodio and Frith (2006) point out to the previous research demonstrating that dogs, in fact, do activate social cognitive functions.

stripping people of their humanlike traits increases the likelihood of negative behavior towards these groups and individuals.

3 Political Communication– Between Media and Audiences

3.1 Media– Opinion Shaping or Minimal Effects?

Mass media provide the most fundamental means for information exchange and the communication bridge between public and political actors. At the same time, media can be active in constructing reality and in giving meaning to events and issues. They help to define political reality, and thus are believed to have various effects on citizenry, such as educating, persuading or opinion forming. Media do not simply report events in impartial way, they interpret happenings and thus facilitate subjective perceptions among public (McNair 2003). In line with constructivist theory, media thus play an important role in shaping our identities, values and perceptions of the others. Consequently, they also participate in the process of othering and dehumanizing, as I will demonstrate by reviewing the previous research.

Therefore, a closer look at the theory of political communication can help to understand the processes behind not only dehumanization, but also othering, stereotyping and hate speech in general. Moreover, even though media often rely heavily on stereotypes, it is difficult to distinguish to what extent they construct reality and to what degree they simply mirror the current moods among the wider population (Adoni and Mane 1984). To provide a link between the media and the public, crucial for the reflection of opinion polls on minorities in the presence in the media discourse, it is important to briefly discuss how media are believed to affect the public.

The influence of media on public opinion has been studied by a number of authors. The earliest way of thinking about political communication was to assume that the messages have immediate persuasion effects when “injected” to the receivers who directly accept them without questioning. This theory is known in political communication as hypodermic needle model (Iyengar and Simon 2000). The model has been challenged by the first quantitative study of

voting behavior conducted in 1940s by Lazarsfeld and colleagues, commonly known as the Erie County Study. Investigating the effects of the exposure to the media on the voting intentions in presidential elections, Lazarfeld et al (1940) concluded that the media, in fact, have minimal effects on public opinion.

However, the 1960s and 1970s present yet another turn in thinking about media effects by starting a cognitive effects revolution, refocusing the role of media on political cognitions. The change of focus is characterized by a well-known quote by Bernard Cohen (1963): “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p.13). The first reported cognitive effect of the media, agenda-setting, studied by McCombs and Shaw (1972), was found in a strong correlation between issue salience by media and the importance attributed to the issue by the audiences. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) managed to document related cognitive effect, priming, with which salient issues become the standards by which audiences evaluate and judge the political actors. In early 1990s, series of experiments by Iyengar demonstrated yet another cognitive effect by media, which was also put under the wider umbrella of agenda-setting—framing.

3.1.1 Framing

Framing is one of the techniques by which the media exercise considerable influence over the audiences. People, unable to fully understand and classify all the happenings, inherently rely on the help of media in order to make sense of the world around them. Media frames work with the basic idea behind the issue, explaining complicated events by using their simplified essence (Scheufele 2000). Media frames, adopted by even subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation, can effectively find their way into the audience frames— defined by

Entman (1993) as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (p.53). Framing is therefore understood as a direct link between media coverage and the framework audiences employ to interpret the events (Scheufele 2000).

Scheufele (2000) identifies five factors potentially influencing the frames adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by the journalists: social norms and values, pressures of interest groups, organizational pressures and constraints, journalistic routines, and ideological or political orientations of journalists. Moreover, based on previous research, he differentiates between three types of framing– diagnostic framing specifying a problem and attributing corresponding blame; prognostic framing which identifies the solutions to the problem; and motivational framing that calls for specific actions.

Framing, together with priming, is often regarded as extension of agenda setting, also referred to as “second-level agenda setting” (McCombs 2004). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), however, challenge this supposition, arguing that framing is based on different theoretical premise than agenda-setting or priming. Framing shapes how audiences think about an issue by offering an interpretive schema, not by making the issue more salient. The focus is not whether we think about the issue, but exactly how we think about it. It is not important which issues are given salience by news coverage, but how exactly they are presented. Framing relies on the simplification of messages by using labels and short descriptions of an issue, influenced by even subtle differences in the wording. Study of framing thus often requires more qualitative approach with attention to the specific formulation of the messages (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007).

3.1.1.1 Framing and Minorities

Given that the majority population does not frequently come into direct contact with the minority members, the formation of attitudes towards minorities is dependent on indirect sources of information, such as media. Therefore, the way media describes minorities to some degree influences people's perceptions of the others. Previous research demonstrates that an exposure to negative, othering and stereotypical media depictions of minority members can be mirrored in the negative attitudes and prejudice in society (Lubbers et al 1998, Meeusen and Jacobs 2017). Content analyzing Dutch newspapers, Lubbers et al. (1998) find that the ethnic hierarchy presented in the news was reflected in the public opinion, with majority members considerably less willing to interact with minorities frequently problematized in the media. Meeusen and Jacobs (2017) examined TV coverage on five minority groups in Belgium (LGBT, Jews, Eastern Europeans, North Africans, and Roma) and found similar patterns also in individual-level survey data.

Minority framing is omnipresent in media coverage promoting specific interpretations of the events (Meeusen and Jacobs 2017). Most simplistic categorization of the frames used for minorities is provided by the positive/negative distinction. Content analyses of news coverage directed on minorities demonstrate a rather negative depiction (Ter Wal et al., 2005, Meeusen and Jacobs 2017). Meeusen and Jacobs (2017) found that exposure to negatively framed stories enhanced negative attitudes of the majority members, whereas exposure to positive news promoted tolerance. In addition, they focused on minority framing that uses threat as a reference. Portraying ethnic minorities and immigrants as posing threats to society provides a specific presentation of a problem and with clear blame attribution to those allegedly responsible for this problem— such description corresponds to the characteristics of the diagnostic framing as identified in the previous subchapter. The authors further differentiate

between the three frames connected to the threat, namely the socioeconomic, cultural and crime threat. Socioeconomic threat refers to scarce goods, such as jobs, housing, or welfare and the competition over these goods, with minorities considered to undermine the economy. Cultural threat is linked with the perceived incompatibility of diverse cultures, religions, traditions and values. Last, the feeling of threat can be evoked by seemingly overrepresented minority crimes. The crime stories of minorities are typically framed episodically, ignoring the wider context, and thus attributing the full blame to the individuals.

Another example of minority framing is offered by Vliegthart and Roggeband (2007), who carried out a study about political immigration issues covered in the press and parliamentary reports in the Netherlands. They discovered five reoccurring frames. First, the multicultural frame focused on the positives of cultural diversity. The emancipation frame related to political and social participation of immigrants, promotion of their culture and religion. The restriction frame presented concerns about another wave of immigration. The victim frame emphasizes women's issues, namely the connection to the Islamic headscarves. The last frame, in accordance with the aforementioned study, relies on threat references, presenting Islam as threat to the country and the wider community.

Specific frames adopted for a Roma minority in five countries have been investigated by Kroon et al (2016). Content analyzing news articles from newspapers in the Netherlands, Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom for the time period 2010–2012, they distinguish between diagnostic and prognostic frames. With main contrasting line between perceiving Roma minority as perpetrators or victims, they identified following six diagnostic frames:

- a) Criminality frame referring to the criminal behavior of the Roma,
- b) Exploiters frame relating to the exploitation of the social welfare,

- c) Problematic behavior frame suggesting cultural otherness, differences in life priorities, moral codes and hygiene,
- d) Failure of authorities frame, directed at the authorities blamed for adopting insufficient integration policies or discriminatory laws,
- e) Social status frame recognizing low literacy, deficient education, or humiliating housing conditions of the Roma,
- f) Discrimination frame focusing on the hostility, stereotyping and inequalities experienced by the minority.

Six prognostic frames have been considered by the study, distinguishing between inclusion frames highlighting the need of long-term integration solutions and self-empowerment policies, and contrasting exclusion or legal frames, which provide typically short-term resolutions, such as more strict legal provisions or deportation of Roma minorities (Kroon et al 2016).

Furthermore, media often use dehumanizing framing to report on the minorities. For instance, Santa Ana (2002) argued that media are likening Mexican immigrants to insects by utilizing expressions such as “swarm” or “crawl”. Although average reader might not notice and rightly identify such implicit metaphor, the research shows it influences the subsequent perception of Mexican immigrants and issues connected to immigration as such. Following on this study, Goff et al (2008), researching the news coverage of Black death-eligible defendants, find that media make use of apelike depiction of these individuals and that the use of even subtle form of such metaphor during the course of ruling was associated with jury decisions to execute Black defendants. Esses and Medianu (2013), on the other hand, demonstrate that media’s negative depictions of immigrants implying a threat for the citizens of the country of destination, specifically in form of describing immigrants as fake claimants of asylum, terrorists and sources of infectious diseases, lead to their dehumanization by readers. Therefore, the authors claim that media’s inclination to cover negative rather than positive news related to

refugees/immigrants is sufficient to create extreme negative attitudes among public, affecting the societal perceptions of the human status of the affected groups and worsening the consequent behavior.

When it comes to the differentiation in framing depending on the media characteristics, some of the mentioned studies report on high proportion of the negative representation of minorities originating from the articles published by tabloid papers. Kroon et al (2016) found that tabloid newspapers rely more on perpetrator framing compared to quality newspapers. Similar findings are reported by several other authors— tabloids use negative headlines, tone and language to portray ethnic minorities, and thus reproduce existing prejudices of out-groups (see Van Dijk 2000, Poole 2002, KhosraviNik 2010, Bleich et al 2015). Moreover, the tabloid news are often accompanied by various levels of distortion, aiming for any form of sensationalism (McNair 2003). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) accused few British tabloid newspapers for provocative, discriminatory and offensive discourse. Specifically, the Sun and Daily Mail were identified as fueling prejudice, rising racist violence and hate speech against Roma, LGBT and other communities (Daerden 2016). Vergeer et al. (2000) found that readers of tabloid newspapers are more prone to hold negative views of minorities and consider them as threat.

The observed studies thus provide an example of expected frames the media adopts in its discourse on the minority groups. The choice of frames is country and situation dependent, but certain repeating patterns should be observed. Developing on the identified frames by the presented studies, I want to look at the proportions of *positive*, *negative* and *neutral* framing in connection to the minorities. Furthermore, using the definition of dehumanization, I am interested whether articles on minority groups contain *dehumanizing framing* or not. Moreover, I am expecting to find both diagnostic and prognostic framing related to chosen minorities. Diagnostic framing is expected to be found in forms of “threats” as identified earlier: *cultural*,

socio-economic or *security threats*. On the other hand, minorities can be presented as being “*victimized*,” combining the failure of authorities frame and the discrimination frame identified by previous research, when minorities are depicted as victims of hostility, stereotyping and inequalities. Moreover, the minorities were shown to be attributed several differences in these studies. I will code these in form of “*problematic behavior frame*” and “*social status frame*.” Alternatively, the differences can be identified in form of “*value of diversity*,” inspired by the multicultural frame, when being different is framed as not only acceptable but to be further promoted. Minorities can be, however, also presented as “*not so different*,” emphasizing they are people just like us, attending same school, paying taxes, believing in the same God, being members of the one human race.

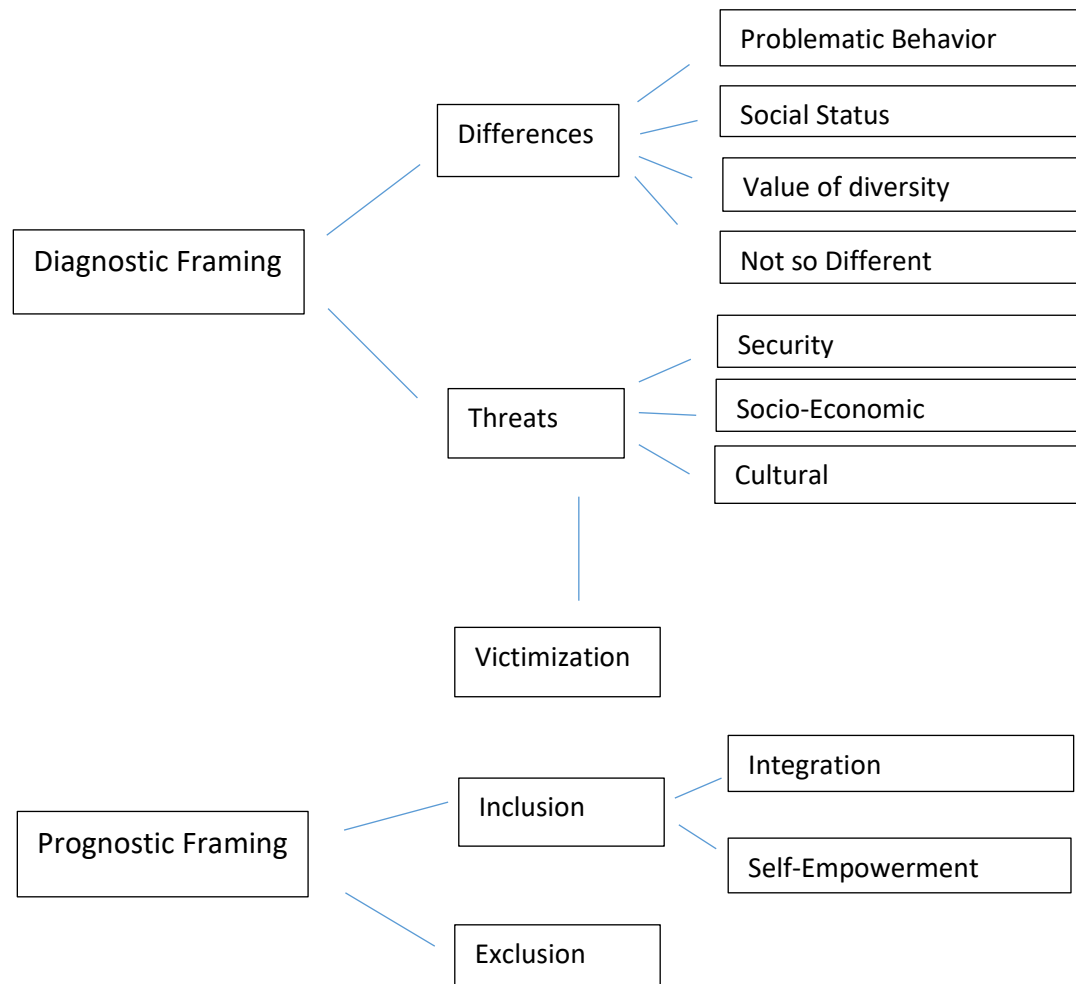
When it comes to prognostic frames, combining the knowledge from previous studies, I will expect both the inclusive and the exclusive prognostic frames. The inclusion frames will be expected to be found in forms of either *integration*, suggesting policies directed at the integration of these different individuals— such as investment into promotion of education and employment; or *self-empowerment* policies (or the identified emancipation frame), calling for political representation, promotion of the minority culture or religion and celebration of differences. The *exclusion frame*, on the other hand, includes complete refusal of the differences and promotion of the segregated status, strict legal provisions or deportation of minorities.

Motivational framing was not identified by previous studies on minorities, and I am thus not expecting to find the instances of newspapers to be calling for specific actions, given that I am considering only news stories for the analysis, excluding the opinions, commentaries or blogs, where such calls could be more apparent.

Following the outlined framing theory, the adopted frames are anticipated to serve as framework guiding the processing of information of the audiences, gradually enrooting and

finding a stable place in the public frames. Similar framing can thus be expected in user comments too.

Figure 2: Framing Scheme



3.2. *Online Commenting Sphere: Deliberation or Incivility?*

With the accomplishments of the Internet and the current digital culture, audiences tend to desire more often to be active participants rather than passive consumers of the news. Comments sections have, thus, become a common feature and interesting component of online news portals. They offer unique opportunities for both media and audiences, as they allow people to voice their personal opinions and express intense emotional reactions, and at the same time, provide valuable feedback for journalists and their work (Meyer and Carey 2014).

The meaningful interpersonal interactivity in online environments, moreover, leads to social engagement and create roots for development of successful virtual communities online, where users engage with one another. Over time, seeing online commenting space as community can contribute to development of loyalties that strengthen social capital, lead to higher levels of trust and consequently increase the frequency of site visiting (Meyer and Carey 2014). All of these aspects entail some form deliberation, which is being enforced by interpersonal interactions in these virtual environments.

Deliberation is often considered an ideal for online citizen engagement (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013; Stroud et al 2015). Participation in deliberative forums has been demonstrated to enforce knowledge and familiarity with different views and directly influence the consequent attitudes of the users (Stroud et al 2015). In general, deliberation involves people “exchanging views on a matter of public importance in a respectful manner, reasoning through their claims, and listening to the perspectives of others” (Stroud et al 2015: 190). Drawing on Habermas’ (1989) notion of a public sphere, rational, constructive interactions between people are crucial for well-functioning of democracy. Commenting platforms thus have potential to strengthen democracy and deliberation by providing citizens with virtual space for exchanges in opinions on public matters, enforced by deliberative aspects of commenting forums such as their egalitarian access,

relative independence from institutional framework and interconnectedness (Dorostkar and Preisinger 2017).

However, user comments posted in response to news articles do not always live up to the ideals of deliberative opinion exchange. Instead of productive, reasoned discourse, reactions from readers are often offensive, uncivil, and irrelevant (Stroud et al 2015). Comments often violate the ethical standards, stereotype social groups and compromise the freedom of speech (Naab et al 2018). Incivility in online discussions is defined by Papacharissi (2004) as “set of behaviors that threaten democracy, deny people their personal freedoms, and stereotype social groups,” in close relation to impoliteness, including name-calling, aspersion, pejorative speak, vulgarity, and further behaviors of not adhering to an etiquette (p.267). Ksiazek (2018) characterizes online hostility as comments “intentionally designed to attack someone or something and, in doing so, incite anger or exasperation through the use of name-calling, character assassination, offensive language, profanity, and/or insulting language” (p.652). Such posts are believed to worsen the image of the newspaper, reduce the benefits expected from deliberate discussions and considerably decrease the engagement of the users (Ksiazek 2018). Moreover, incivility in online discussions can polarize the attitudes in given society, increase negative intergroup emotions and even confuse people’ conception of general public opinion (Naab et al 2018). Civility, as the opposite term, can be described by Herbst (2010) as “constructive engagement with others through argument, deliberation, and discourse” (p.19).

Research reports variation in the balance between civil and uncivil comments depending on certain characteristics of the news stories. What features of article or news site influence the quality of the comments? Probably the most fundamental factor responsible for differences in comment characteristics is the topic of the article in response to which users are commenting (Stroud et al 2015; Ksiazek 2018). Some topics, for example, promote more cognitive elaboration, while some may be controversial in nature, affecting both the amount and the

quality of user comments (Ksiazek 2018). Coe et al. (2014), for example, found more uncivil comments responding to hard, as opposed to soft, topics of news stories. Ksiazek (2018), similarly finds that controversial political topics provoke not only more discussion, but also lead to less civil debate.

Another aspect influencing the user comments is a degree of reader's perception of the relative objectivity in writing. Depending on whether the article is perceived by audiences as objective or not, users may be more or less motivated to comment, influencing also the levels of civility in their speech (Ksiazek 2018). Moreover, the degree to which the story format, regarding its multimedia features, engages the audiences with the story may also influence whether and how a user chooses to leave a comment. Articles containing multimedia features were found to be invoking larger volume of comments, yet of lower quality (Ksiazek 2018).

In addition to article characteristics, the extent of organizational commenting policies that the news media adopt further explain the features of commenting space. Stroud et al (2015) argue that sites where users are required to use real names when commenting have lower levels of incivility compared to news media allowing anonymity of commenters. Similarly, Dorostkar and Preisinger (2017) find that low requirements of access to commenting, such as anonymous postings, while allowing for a broad participation, decrease the ethical standards by contributing to racism, discrimination and flaming. The anonymity signals the lacking social mechanisms for sanctioning which can promote the use of discriminatory language without fearing the repercussions (Dorostkar and Preisinger 2017). Ksiazek (2018) finds that advanced organizational policies such as user registration, reputation management, pre- and post-moderation, or private messaging all predicted higher-quality of comments. Dorostkar and Preisinger (2017) argue for extending of the media features such as requiring more information about the users, such as including of profile image or user information, could contribute to more seriously taken internet presences that would ensure more quality of speech. Moreover,

including also information about reported or editor-deleted postings, would, according to them, pose commenters to the pressure of the community. Organizational policies are therefore important for ensuring the quality of interactions, moreover the research shows that discussions full of poor-quality comments may discourage further users to leave a comment (Ksiazek 2018), and that they are more willing to participate in news portals that indicate some form of moderation (Stroudel et al 2015).

Furthermore, the research shows that the involvement and direct participation of a representative of the news organization can further affect the behavioral norms in a given comment section (Stroudel et al 2015). It can be explained by the pressure of being watched, which can promote more polite behaviors (Stroudel et al 2015). Moreover, Stroudel et al (2015) find that the participation of journalist as opposed to unidentified member of news organization, decreases the probability of an uncivil comment, explained by the greater status of reporters and their direct involvement in the creation of the story.

Finally, the online behavioral norms can be also affected by what other users post. Following on previous studies, Stroud et al (2015) conclude that a single person's behavior can highlight a norm and subsequently influence how others behave. Even with moderation and directives coming from the news organization, commenters may decide to rather follow the normative lead of other users, given that collective norms develop in created communities among individuals participating in communicative interactions. Sukumaran et al. (2011) conducted an experiment, in which participants were supposed to leave comment in response to an article, while being randomly assigned to different conditions. One group of participants was supposed to respond to a comment section consisting mainly of civil comments, whereas the other assigned group was participating in comment section consisting of mainly unthoughtful comments. Participants left more substantive comments under the condition of civil debate compared to unthoughtful condition, indicating the dependence of one's response on the

behavior of previous commenters. Moreover, this phenomenon can be also explained by the theory of spiral of silence, which assumes that people tend to conceal their opinion if they believe it is an opinion of a minority but are more likely to express themselves if they consider their opinion conforming to the majority's view (Soffer and Gordoni 2018). The comment sections can distort the perceptions of broad public opinion, and therefore negative reactions can be following the negative comments because people are encouraged by thinking their opinion is shared by others.

Out of the mentioned reasons, the user comments generally have controversial status. On one hand, they allow deliberative aspects, such as broad participation and exchange of arguments and opinions. On the other hand, uncivil and discriminatory characteristics of the comment sections oppose basic ethics of discourse, essential to the success of deliberative exchange (Dorostkar and Preisinger 2017).

4 Methodology

4.1 Data

The data for the analysis is made up by news articles extracted from the four online news media. In order to assure a balanced data for analysis, I decided to include representatives of media from both liberal and conservative political spectrum, pro- and against the current government, and of both quality and tabloid structure, including also more extremist, alternative type of news portal, given the popularity such media experience in current online sphere. The liberal/conservative divide can be translated in different stance towards minorities, especially when it comes to LGBT groups, given the perceived conflict of its demands with the conservative values such as traditional family or religion. Tabloid news are, following on previous research, considered to be more sensational and often inappropriate towards minorities, and therefore such distinction is crucial for proper media analysis.

When it comes to further differentiation between pro- and anti- governmental stance, the positioning of the newspapers serves as an additional important characteristic, given that the ruling party SMER-SD led by Róbert Fico, although economically leftist, is ideologically a conservative party associated with a rather problematic stance towards the chosen minority groups, that has been in government during the three periods covered by the research. During its very first governance in the period 2006-2010, it has been in coalition with HZDS¹⁰ and SNS¹¹, the parties famous for their nationalistic and anti-Hungarian sentiments during the 90s¹² (Žihlavníková 2012). During the later governance, Róbert Fico has made several negative

¹⁰ Movement for Democratic Slovakia from original Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko

¹¹ Slovak National Party from original Slovenská národná strana

¹² Apart from the aggressive statements by Ján Slota directed towards the Hungarian minority, the government in which both parties participated passed a controversial language law banning the use of minority language in the official communication; or the division of the territory into counties, markedly decreasing the political representation of the Hungarian minority (Žihlavníková 2012).

statements about the Roma minority¹³ (Kapusta 2016), and following the refugee crisis he, as the Prime Minister, was vehemently opposing the quotas, warning about security threats connected with the Muslim communities and committed the country to accept only refugees of the Christian faith (Koník 2016). Most recently, in February 2018, Fico was refusing to submit the Istanbul Convention for ratification, referring to the protection of the traditional family (SME 2018).

The first newspaper, SME¹⁴, is a quality paper with rather long tradition in Slovak media. It has been established almost simultaneously with the birth of the independent Slovak Republic in January 1993. It is a liberal newspaper that positions itself to the economic right but keeps strong social emphasis. The daily strikes to be “critical, honest, attractive for readers, but at the same time with clear opinion” (Čobejová 2013). It has both printed and online version. By printing 39,760 papers per day, it is the third best sold newspaper in Slovakia. In overall, it is believed to have 270,496 readers, out of which 78.9% have at least high school education (PetitPress n.d.). According to a webpage value calculator, it has 67,200 unique visitors and 470,400 pageviews per day. It provides newscast from Slovakia and the world, with articles focusing mostly on politics, economics and culture. I have decided to choose SME as a representative of liberal quality paper, given its long tradition on market and stable readership. Moreover, the newspaper is positioning itself quite critically against the government of Róbert Fico and can therefore be considered as anti-governmental for the purposes of the research.

The second newspaper, Pravda¹⁵, is a nationwide paper with the longest tradition in Slovakia. It has first appeared on September 15, 1920 and became a newspaper of Slovak-speaking Communists (Jancura 2010). After the change of regime, it has lost its political orientation and

¹³ Claiming Roma are distorting the unemployment figures, or that the Roma are exploiting the social benefits (Kapusta 2016).

¹⁴ Although written with capital letters, the name is not an abbreviation; word “sme” in Slovak means “we are”.

¹⁵ Standing for word “truth”.

profiled gradually as a left-liberal “mind-setting” media (Pravda.sk). The average print load in 2017 was 54,078 copies, and the online version of pravda.sk has 1,608,116 real users according to the current AIM numbers for March 2018. Each edition of Pravda, according to its webpage, is read by about 265,000 people, representing 6 percent of the population aged 14 - 79 years. This is in accordance with the webpage value calculator used for SME, according to which it has 35,815 unique visitors per day and 268,612 pageviews per day. About 59 percent of the readers of the Pravda are men (Pravda.sk). Although it is profiling itself to be a liberal newspaper, it is often considered to have link with the leaders of the conservative SMER-SD, and to be rather pro-governmental in its positions (Czwitkovics 2011).

The third medium, Topky.sk, is a tabloid news portal that offers articles not only from the political and economic sphere, but also informs about celebrities, lifestyle or fashion. It originates from 1997 and does not offer a clear ideological stance. The webpage calculator estimates its visit rate for 48,445 unique visitors and 242,225 pageviews per day, making it second most visited tabloid news portal on market. Topky has been previously criticized for inappropriate coverage on minority group, when in 2014 it published an article with a sensational title: “Couple having sex right in front of the kids on the street: perverted performance ended only by police!!!”, emphasizing the Roma origin of the “performers,” only later to be found to be an actual rape scene (Marek 2014). Topky has been thus chosen for its strong position among tabloid news portals regarding its readership, while at the same time problematic history of minority coverage.

Finally, the fourth chosen medium is called Hlavné Správy, which in literate translation means “Main News”. It is rather recent news portal that serves only from 2011 and has only an online version. It declares itself to be conservative daily paper providing “real and open” news but is often accused of spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories (Smatana 2016). Although it is a less established media source, it is one of the few national daily portals with a clear

conservative ideological stance. Moreover, the journalist Jakub Goda, in his recent article, identifies Hlavné Správy as “the most influential and the most productive disinformation medium in Slovakia” (Goda 2018). The medium is believed to support the extremist far-right party led by Marián Kotleba (Goda 2018). The visit rate of its webpage according to the same source as used for other three media servers is 16,299 unique visitors and 97,794 pageviews per day. I identify it as semi-tabloid news source, given its clearer political focus, but less sophisticated style of reporting than seen in established quality papers. I choose to include Hlavné Správy in my analysis in order to achieve balanced ideological representation, as well as because of its extremist position and association with fake news, given that such news sources are currently gaining on popularity.

I used keywords search to find articles corresponding to three time periods. Coverage of months June, July and August for 2013, 2015 and 2017 was chosen for the analysis. Given the even and sufficiently large gap between the time periods, I aimed to see the differences between the coverage on minority groups over time. Summer months of 2015 serve as a reference point for an expected change, due to the peak of refugee crisis in this period. The chosen time range should enable me to see possible development of discourse, ranging from pre-refugee crisis period, followed by period of refugee crisis peak, and a period two years later when people might already feel saturated by the topic. Three months of coverage for each year should provide sufficient amount of material to assure a reliable sample.

I included national and foreign news articles corresponding to the time periods and keywords identifying each of four minority groups, excluding editorials, columns, commentaries, interviews or blog articles. Altogether, I have accessed and content-analyzed 1,456 articles corresponding to the given criteria. The qualitative content analysis has been carried out without usage of software, as an individual and thorough approach was required to determine the tone, frames and dehumanizing aspects.

Figure 3: Summary Table for Sample Newspaper

News Portal	Newspaper Characteristics	Unique Visitors ¹⁶	Page Views ¹⁷	Number of Articles			
				Roma	Refug.	Hungar.	LGBT
SME	Liberal, pro-opposition	67,200	470,400	311	337	8	28
Pravda	Liberal, pro-governmental	35,815	268,612	64	298	0	17
Topky	Abloid	48,445	242,225	46	158	5	21
Hlavné Správy	Conservative “alternative”	16,299	97,794	56	74	7	26

4.2 Coding

I have coded each article based on several variables. First, I have identified a type of title connected to each article, as I believe the tone of title often decides the overall impression of the topic; it often serves as clickbait; and might be the sole piece of information viewed by some readers before they decide to comment under the article. I have coded the title as either negative, neutral or positive and then included an extra variable determining whether the title is sensational or not. Sensationalism can be defined as the presence of news features that provoke emotional responses and physiological stimulation or arousal among the members of the audience (Grabe et al. 2001). An example of what I coded as sensational title is following: “Brutal drama in the Roma settlement: Neighboring disputes were solved by a chainsaw!” as

¹⁶ Per day.

¹⁷ Per day.

opposed to more reasonable, not sensational title: “The police addressed conflicts in settlements in Čakanovce and Jasovo.”

Similarly, I have also assessed the overall tone of the article— as either neutral, positive, negative, or mixed, when the tone was not unambiguous¹⁸. Subsequently, I have identified the main topics and frames used to inform about minorities. The topic of the article was made out of short description of the themes it is covering, while the frame has been determined according to the framing scheme outlined in the section 3.2.1. on Framing and Minorities.

The dehumanization aspect of the articles is covered by more subcategories. First, I have decided whether the article does or does not contain dehumanization, based on characteristics outlined in the theory part. Subsequently, the type of dehumanization was categorized as animalistic, mechanistic or other (e.g. contamination fears or backwardness). The same pattern was used for identifying presence of dehumanization in user comments. I read comments in each discussion until the point when I came across the first dehumanizing comment. The time of identifying the first dehumanizing comment differed from article to article, but for the articles with high number of comments it was generally not difficult to find such comments rather early in discussion. Each article was thus coded as either containing dehumanizing comment or not, without further specification on how many of such comments are present in discussion. Such coding was decided given the time limitation, as some discussions have as many as 1000 comments.

The variable suggesting occurrence of dehumanization in user comments has been further used for simple quantitative analysis trying to assess its relationship with the tone of the article and the sensational title of the article. Given that all these variables are categorical, chi-square test has been used as a suitable analysis to assess the goodness of fit between a set of observed

¹⁸ Therefore most often combining positive and negative tone, or in some case positive with neutral, and negative with neutral tone.

values and those expected theoretically. Given the hateful language used in the user comments, lot of articles had disabled discussion. In such case I have marked dehumanization in comments for a given article as N/A, and such articles were excluded from the analysis. Some articles, even when having enabled discussion, had some comments marked as deleted because of having breached the ethical code, and their content was no longer accessible. In this case I went through remaining comments until I found dehumanizing comment, coding the article as containing dehumanizing discussion; or if no such comment was present in discussion, I marked this variable as N/A, given I could not be sure whether the discussion has not contained dehumanizing comments prior to intervention by the admin. Again, articles marked as N/A were not considered for the analysis.

Moreover, the number of comments under each article was indicated, creating a variable that can suggest amount of interest in the article. Such variable was also used for observing the relation between number of comments and the tone of the article, sensational title, presence of dehumanization in the article, and the topics the article covered. These relationships are assessed only by presenting descriptive statistics and corresponding charts, where I assessed the approximate number of comments per article with each type of tone, sensational and not sensational title, dehumanization or no dehumanization. Regarding the relation between number of comments and specific topics, given that most of the articles were coded with more than one topic¹⁹, in order to save time I only looked at the articles with more than 100 comments, thus those considered as raising public attention, and evaluated the topics that were being repeated.

Moreover, given the high number of observed articles and the long discussions following some of them, for a more detailed analysis of the user comments I have decided to use second sample.

¹⁹ For example, one article could be coded as containing topic of criminality, but also aggressiveness, and problem-solving.

I have looked at 12 random discussions from my original sample more closely to observe how hateful comments are generated and what characteristics of the media can affect such hostility. I have chosen the articles from 2015, from all four media sources about the Roma, refugees and LGBT with bit over 100 comments each.²⁰ These presented altogether 1617 comments (with average of 135 comments per article).

I have coded chosen comments following the definitions of incivility, which characteristics seem to incorporate dehumanization and provide wider conceptualization of hate speech. Many comments were marked as deleted and were no longer available for reading, and I have automatically considered such comments as uncivil, given that the stated conditions for breaching ethical codex were intersected with the characteristics of uncivility. I have then coded comments as either posted as reactions to the article (and then whether they are followed by reactions by other users or not) or as reaction to other user's comment. I have looked at the subsequent comment threads and observed the behavior and the quality of comments there, coding the thread as either civil (made out of purely civil comments), uncivil (containing only uncivil comments) or mixed (containing both civil and uncivil comments). Moreover, I have marked whether the thread in question was started by a civil or uncivil comment. The additional sample on user comments, thus, allows me to observe how deliberation and uncivility interact together.

For the summary of coding and the further details on individual variables, see the Codebook in Appendix.

²⁰ I have not included Hungarian minority articles, as those did not provoke such long discussions.

4.3 Expectations

Developing on the theoretical framework, this research will help to explore several expectations. Given that I compare the coverage of different minority groups, *I expect that media coverage of specific minority group depends on the group's social distance from the host society*. Therefore, reflecting the opinion polls and political situation, I expect to find negative, stereotyping and dehumanizing framing related to Slovak minority groups, targeting the Roma predominantly.

Also, *the type of newspaper is anticipated to matter for the coverage*. Tabloid types of media are, as found in previous studies, expected to report on minorities in sensational and stereotypical way and to make use of negative framing, othering and dehumanizing in larger extent than quality newspapers. Moreover, the liberal/conservative divide should translate in harsher reporting on some minorities, especially the LGBT community.

Furthermore, *the refugee crisis as a societal shock can change the traditional process of othering*. Although the literature or previous research does not provide much guideline on what happens with the “old other” with the emergence of the “new other”, some intuitive expectations can be formulated. Based on the constructionist theory, the sense of who is “us” and who belongs to “them” is created depending on the current context and situation. Berreby (2005) similarly claims that the distinction between in-group and out-group members is made by an imprecise dividing line shifting back and forth depending on which characteristics of human kinds are relevant at the moment. The cultural, historical and social distance between new anticipated minority and the Slovak majority should affect the perception of the “other,” especially if perceived as associated with new threats. Therefore with changing political context, the traditional minorities can become to be considered as less out-group with the

appearance of more distant and unknown other. Consequently there can be a softening of the rhetoric, especially for the previously highly stigmatized Roma minority.

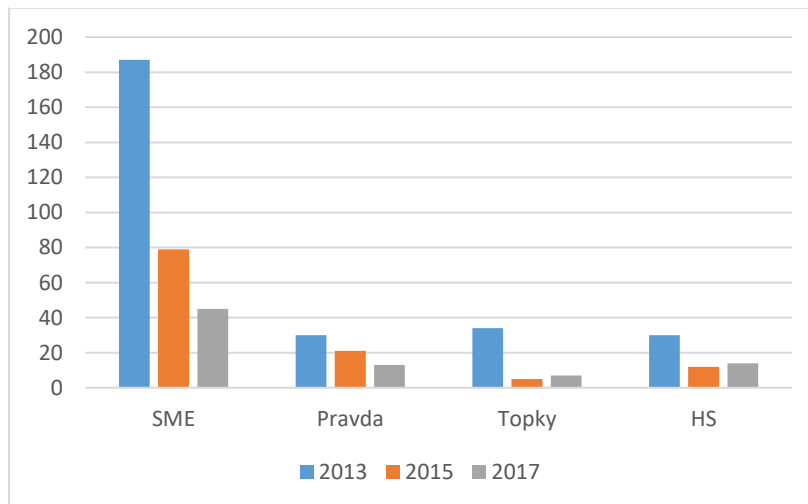
Specific hypotheses can be made regarding the user comment section. I expect several associations between the article and corresponding comments, as well as interactions between the individual reactions within the commenting threads. First, *I expect the quality of the article to affect the length and quality of the user discussion underneath it*. Negative tone, sensational title, dehumanization and negative topics and frames of the articles are expected to increase the number of comments and worsen the occurrence of dehumanization in discussion. Moreover, as outlined by the theory on user comments, *I expect certain characteristics of the commenting forum to determine the quality of the discussion*, namely the adopted organizational commenting policies, involvement of the journalists, but also the behavioral norms set by other users. Therefore, *deliberative threads of comments could be less susceptible to uncivil behavior of commenters*, given that they presuppose a civil exchange of arguments, increased sense of community and development of loyalties between the users.

5 The Effect of the Refugee Crisis on Media Coverage

5.1 Changes in Coverage and Tone

More than half of all sampled articles is made by the news on refugees. While refugees or immigrants were not of the focus of Slovak media in 2013, with the coming of the refugee crisis, 2015 presents an unforeseen popularity of articles informing about not only refugees, but also immigrants and Muslims. In 2017, the refugee crisis still remains a “hot” topic, however, there is almost a 50% decrease in the number of articles compared to 2015, suggesting a general saturation of the topic. On the other hand, the sample peak for the articles about the Roma was in the summer of 2013 with 59% of the articles published during this period, and coverage dropping to less than half in 2015, and even further in 2017 (See Figure 4). The decrease in coverage may logically stem from increased concern over refugee crisis, but at the same time it suggests the lesser preoccupation with the Roma, the already known and familiar “other”.

Figure 4: Amount of Coverage on the Roma



Similar as with the Roma, the majority of articles about the Hungarian minority were written in 2013, with the coverage dropping in 2015 and 2017. However, the Hungarian minority attracted

very little coverage during the overall selected time period²¹, implying a decreasing salience of the topic, and possibly lesser perception of “otherness” vis-à-vis Hungarians. By contrast, there was an increasing number of articles related to LGBT groups from 2013 to 2017 by all four media portals, which, contrary to expectations brought by refugee crisis, can be possibly explained by the local political context. In 2015, a conservative group backed by the church called Alliance for Family gathered signatures for organizing referendum seeking to strengthen a ban on marriages and child adoptions by same-sex couples. Although the referendum was unsuccessful, the topic of the traditional family became salient during the months preceding and following the referendum, which might be responsible for the increase in coverage. On the other hand, the gay community has seen the result as a chance to push for more demands and improvement in their rights (Lopatka 2015).

The changes in the volume of coverage approximate well the salience of the topics connected to minorities during the time periods, however it is also important to assess the potential changes in the tone of reporting. When it comes to the representation of refugees, it makes sense to compare the periods of 2015 and 2017, given that in 2013 there were almost no articles published on this minority. As for all four newspapers, 18% of the sample articles written on refugees in 2015 had a negative tone of reporting²². However, while the quality papers SME reported on refugees in neutral tone in 91% of its articles, and Pravda in 54% of time, tabloid Topky used negative framing in 30% of its articles and Hlavné Správy in as many as 70% of articles²³. Although there was a decrease in the number of articles in 2017, the tone of the articles, nevertheless, became only increasingly negative²⁴. The percentages of articles about refugees by tone and four news portals for years 2015 and 2017 can be seen in Figure 5. The

²¹ Only little bit more than 1% of the sample.

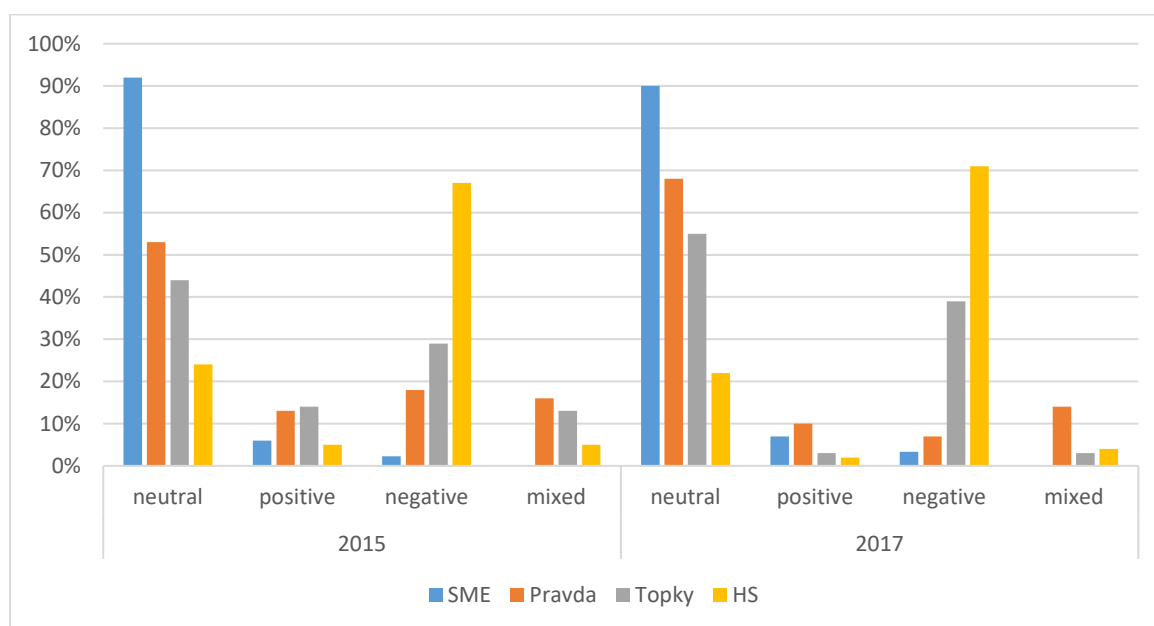
²² Most articles have neutral tone (65%), 9% positive, and 8% mixed.

²³ Percentage of articles by the newspaper for all time periods together.

²⁴ The proportion of negative articles arose to 24%, while the percentage of positive articles decreased to 5%.

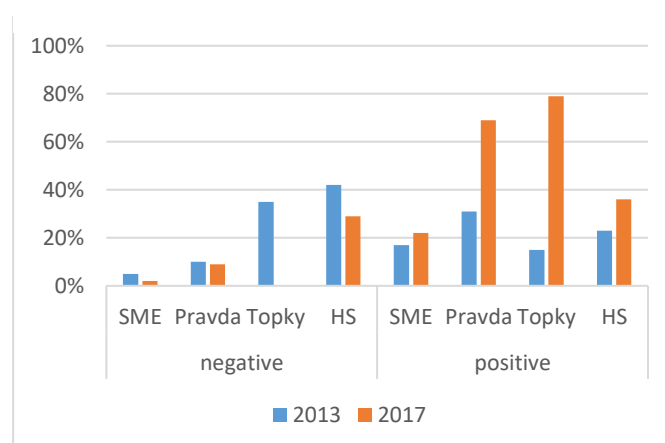
increasingly negative tone of articles about refugees is interesting mostly because there was almost a complete lack of experience with actual refugees coming to the country— in 2017 there were 2,706 people illegally crossing the borders, but only 166 sought asylum, which was finally given to as few as 29 applicants (IOM 2018).

Figure 5: Percentage of Articles about Refugees by Tone and Newspaper during 2015 and 2017



The tone of articles on the Roma changed even more considerably when comparing the coverage from 2013 and 2017, as can be seen in Figure 6. The percentage of positive articles increased by more than two times, and the percentage of articles with a negative tone decreased from 14% to 6%. Such change in tone can suggest less negative perception of the minority due to the emergence of a more distant and threatening “other”. Figure 6, in addition, shows the divide between the quality press and the tabloid and semi-tabloid media, similarly to the case with refugees, the later having higher share of articles with negative tone. However, quite surprisingly, even tabloid press starts with more positive coverage.

Figure 6: Tone of Articles about the Roma



The coverage on the LGBT group, on the other hand, is characterized by a fairly neutral overall representation of this minority²⁵ and no major changes in the tone of articles. The conservative semi-tabloid daily is, however, presenting LGBT community in negative manner—precise half of its articles for all three time periods are negative. Given that the representation of the tabloid Topky is not so negative, the coverage by Hlavné Správy suggests it influenced by its conservative orientation rather than semi-tabloid character. Hungarian minority, similarly, is presented mostly in neutral tone, with changes in tone within the time periods being impossible to assess, due the very low numbers of posted articles.

5.2 Changes in Topics and Frames

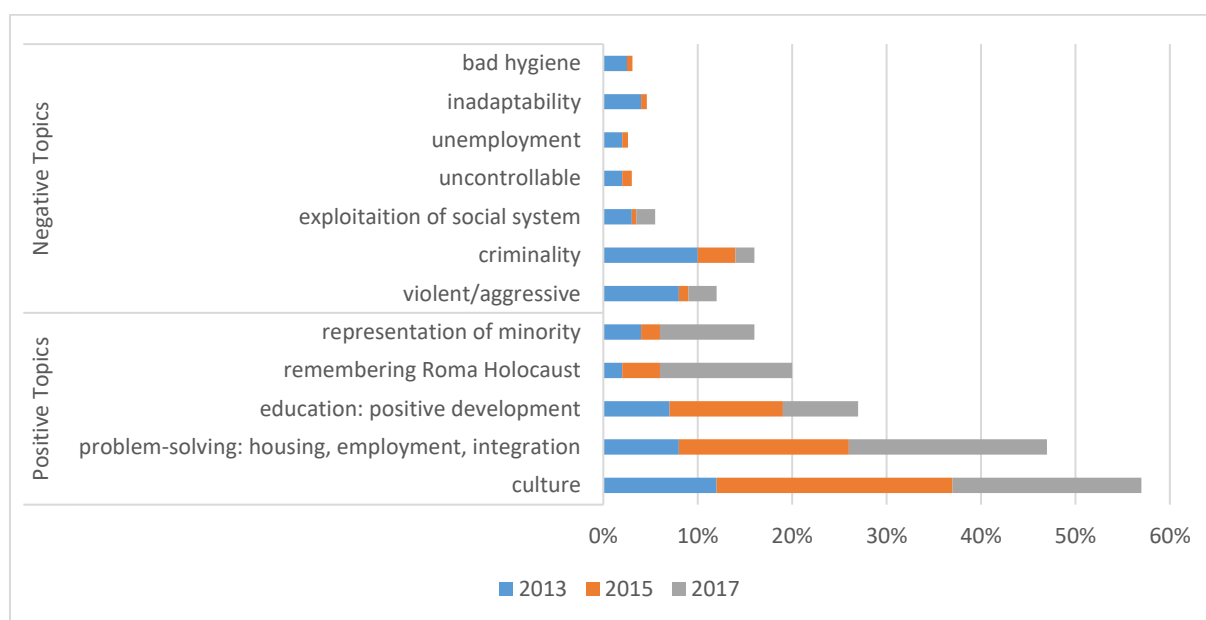
Several topics were identified during the article analysis. The Roma minority was predominantly presented by semi-tabloid and tabloid media as inadaptatable, violent, criminal and destructive. Reappearing topics included the *exploitation of social benefits*, *aggressive behavior* or *illegal occupation of territories*. The quality paper SME focused on presentation of

²⁵ Specifically, 81.5% of articles have neutral tone.

more sophisticated topics such as suggesting *solutions to the actual problems*, promoting the *education* or informing about Roma *culture* and art. Pravda focused on coverage of both positive and negative topics quite evenly. Within the time periods of 2015 and 2017, there was general rise in positive topics and decrease in the negative topics in the articles by all four media portals, as shown by Figure 7.

A similar change in topics occurred within the articles on the Hungarian minority, although it is again difficult to make any conclusions, given the very small number of articles. Some articles from 2013 focused on *tensions between the minority and majoritarian population*, the *too exigent nature of the demands* by the Hungarian minority, or *nationalism*, which were no longer present in articles from the later periods. In the few articles from 2015 and 2017, the Hungarian minority was presented mostly in connection with the *political representation*, *language* and *education*.

Figure 7: Roma Topics in Slovak Media



The articles from the sample informing about refugees used the power of numbers, focusing on sheer number of incoming people. Numbers were included in the titles of the articles, and repeatedly in the text itself. Generally, even if presented in the most neutral manner, they served

for suggesting that there are simply “*too many*” people coming, a threat to society. The reference to *economic migrants* was typical for the vast amount of articles, connecting to the *exploitation of social benefits* frame so commonly used for the Roma minority. Similarly to Roma, refugees were also depicted as *violent, aggressive, destructive, out of control* and *criminal* people. Refugees were also connected to *terrorism* and *unknown diseases*. The current reemerging topic was thus *protection of borders, building of walls* and *restrictive policies on immigration*. Again, we can observe a split between the tabloids and the quality newspapers. While the former dedicated most of the coverage to the mentioned negative topics, the latter focused with much higher intensity on topics such as *solidarity, helping the refugees, shipwreck tragedies, discrimination* and overall *victimization*; far-reaching consequences of *trafficking* and its inhuman conditions, and *problem-solving* and *integration*. Special attention by quality press was given to articles *confronting misinformation* among the public that was widely spread. Most of the articles focused on the LGBT minority informed about topics such as *gay parades, legalization of registered partnerships or marriages, or adoptions* by the same-sex couples. The LGBT community was depicted by the conservative extremist news portal Hlavné Správy as *unworthy of further human rights* or *incompatible with religious beliefs* and traditions. Some of its articles presented homosexuality as *illness* or focused on spreading of diseases by the LGBT community— namely HIV. More neutral articles by the remaining three media outlets emphasized the importance of *representation* and support, condemning *discrimination* or *homophobia*. There topics adopted for either refugees or LGBT group were rather constant across the time periods.

Connected to the described topics are also the frames used to report on minority groups. All of the chosen groups were framed in terms of differences and threats with corresponding prognostic framing calling for specific solutions. The Roma were framed as being different mostly in terms of their *social status* in 2013. Readers of online news could easily get the

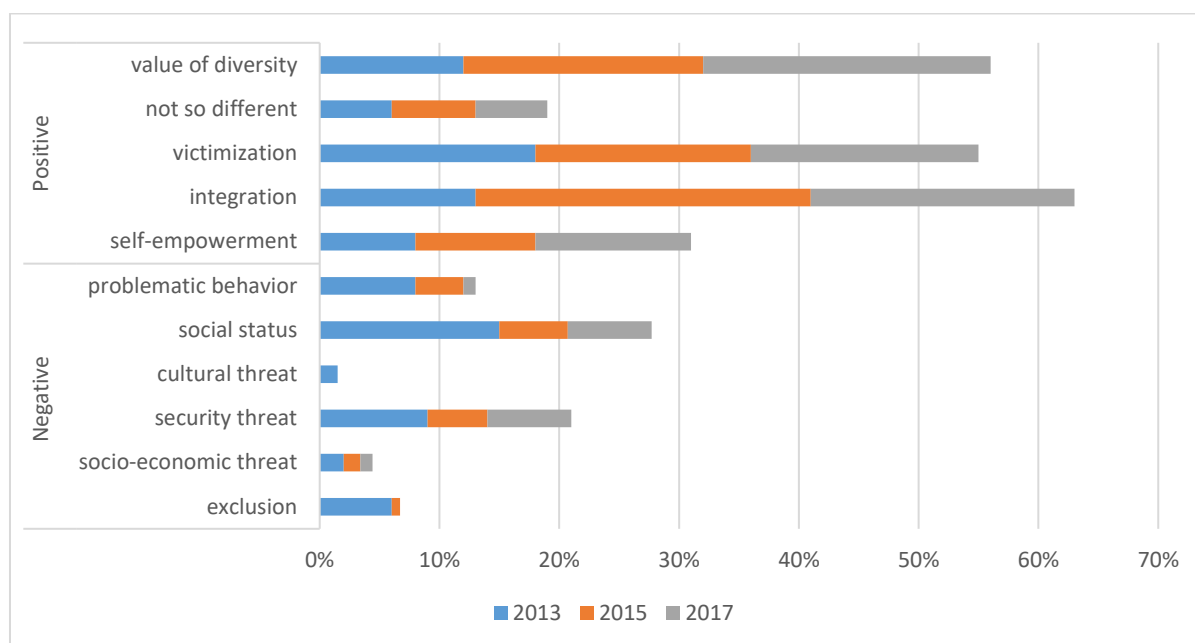
impression of the Roma being illiterate, unemployed and living in poor conditions in miserable dirty settlements. Differences were accompanied by frames of threat– most notably the *security threat*, emphasizing overrepresentation of the Roma crimes. Subsequent prognostic framing was adopted– as either the efforts for *integration* or *exclusion*, suggesting certain problem-solving policies for the problem simply referred to as the “Roma issue”.

Inclusive prognostic framing included policies directed at the *integration* of these different individuals– such as investment into promotion of education and employment. Such efforts were followed by stories of “success,” when members of the Roma community managed to be like “us”– they succeeded to learn a foreign language, to find a good work, or to have finished a reputable university. On the other hand, the exclusive prognostic framing suggested further promotion of the segregated status of the Roma– with building walls between “our” and “their” settlements, special schools for “their” children, restrictions on “their” reproductive rights or the ultimate deportation from “our” territory. One of the examples of exclusive framing is an article supporting a village in “looking for a way to move out the inadaptable Roma as soon as possible” (Hlavné Správy 2013) or praising French for “not bothering with it” and destroying illegal Roma settlement without remorse (Hlavné Správy 2013).

From 2015 onwards, however, the Roma started to be increasingly framed in terms of *value of diversity*. Their differences are still being acknowledged but not as necessarily bad anymore. Quite the contrary, some differences can also be enriching and promoted, stressing the quality and uniqueness of Roma music, dance and culture. The prognostic framing for *exclusion* decreased and there was an increase in frames of *inclusion*. However, complimentary to *integration* solutions, a new framing of inclusion started to gain on popularity– *self-empowerment*. The differences of the Roma started to be increasingly promoted by covering topics informing about the Roma newspaper, a Roma candidate for presidential elections, and organizing Roma music and dance festivals. The proportion of the *self-empowerment* frame

effectively grew alongside the *integration* solutions in the prognostic framing of the Roma. The frame of threat decreased considerably with some threats losing its appearance altogether. The detailed development of frames following the time periods can be further observed from the Figure 8.

Figure 8: Frames on the Roma



Similarly, in relation to refugees, the media adopted the rhetoric of differences, this time between the “us,” the Christians, the white, the civilized promoters of superior Europeans traditions; and “them,” the Muslims, the dark-colored, the Arabs, those with low education and primitive culture. Interestingly, the exceptionality of Slovaks was no longer promoted so vigorously as before— as opposed to Hungarians or Czechs; but the reference towards “us” changed into more inclusive frames of members of the same group, the Europeans. The arrival of the threatening number of the distant “others” was therefore framed in terms of what Huntington (1996) referred to as “clash of civilizations,” the complete incompatibility of different cultural and religious identities. Refugees present a threat— in terms of spreading their

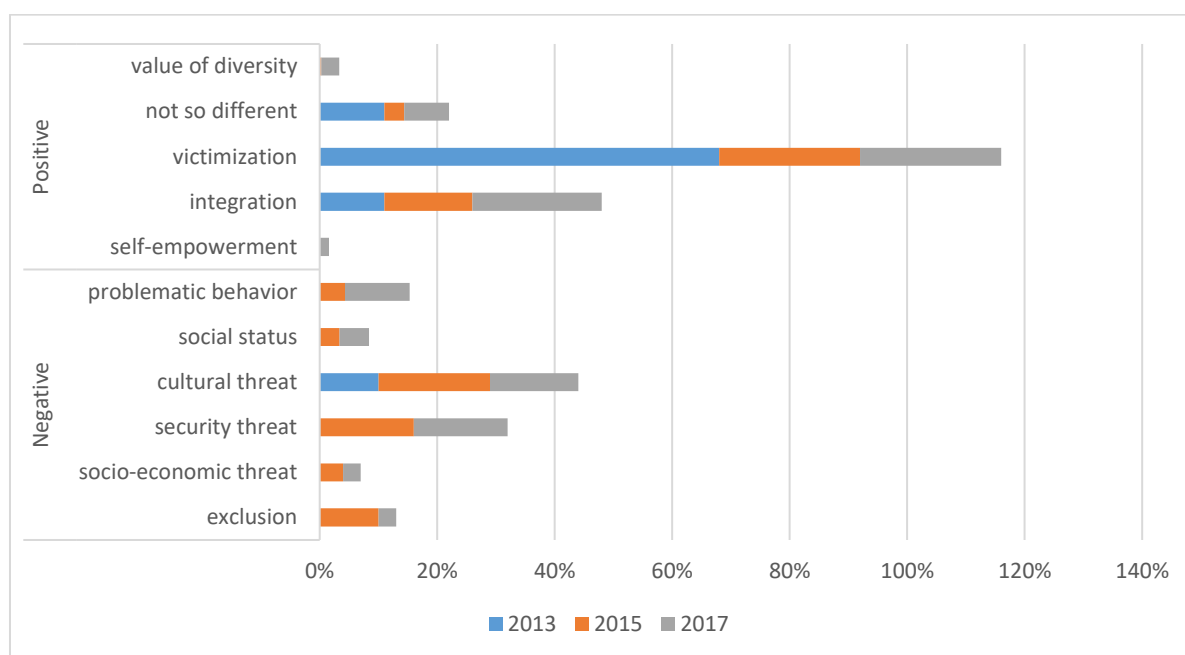
religion and culture to the point when it suppresses or completely replaces “our” traditions and habits, our religion— a *cultural threat* frame present in the two time periods²⁶.

Threat is presented in terms of economy too, “the others” stealing our jobs or depending on our welfare system, similarly to the previously noted use of *socio-economic threat* frame for the Roma. Finally, and the most frequently, the threat is framed in terms of terrorism and exotic diseases, a *security threat*, thanks to which they pose an even higher existential threat. The proper solution is therefore to reject all refugees/immigrants, to send them back from where they came, or alternatively, to let the former colonizers from Western Europe take care of the problem that they are, after all, responsible for. Such framing can be recognized as the prognostic frame of *exclusion*.

On the other hand, the quality liberal paper tried to present the other side of differences. Unlike in the case with the Roma, when the media actually tried to appreciate the existence of differences, the positive side of the difference frame for the refugees relies on stressing that they are *not so different* after all. They believe in God just like we do; they are members of the same human race; they are affected by terrorism as well; and they are also workers who can contribute to the joint welfare system. The strategy of framing refugees as “people just like us” is currently winning over the frame of *value of diversity*, which would be celebrating the differences and variety. The consequent positive prognostic framing of inclusion is most often translated in terms of *integration*, rather than the rare calls for *self-empowerment*, in contrast to the rising tendency of such frame for the Roma minority. The minor differences between the time periods in terms of framing of the refugees can be further observed from the Figure 9.

²⁶ Given that refugees were not really covered in 2013 period.

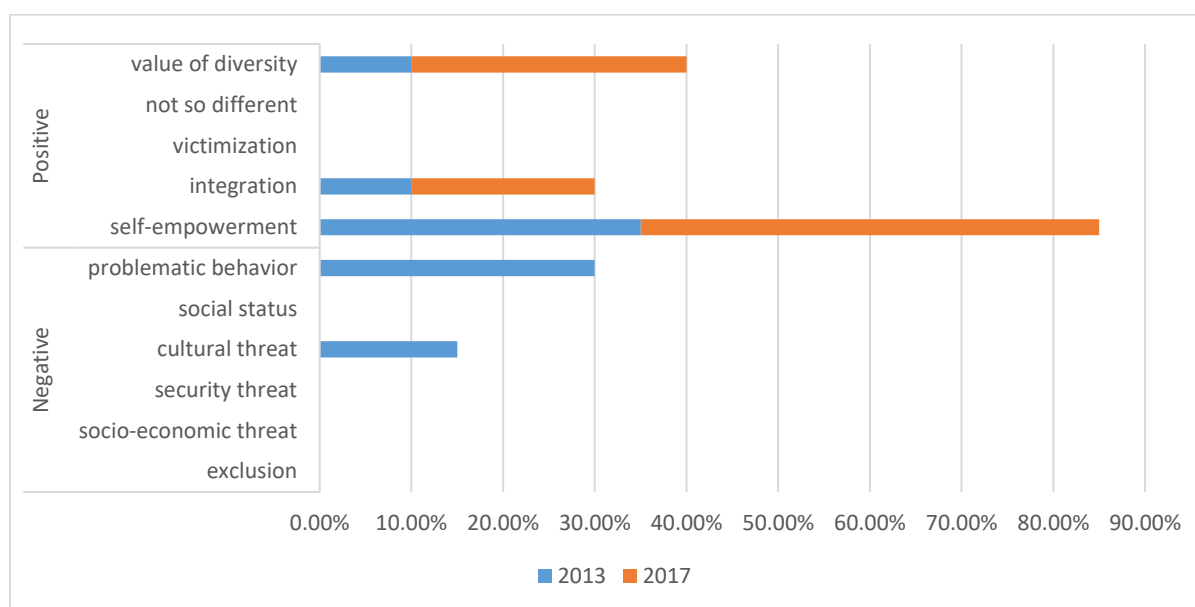
Figure 9: Frames on the refugees



The framing of Hungarian minority also refers to differences between the two ethnic groups. On one side, media demand the adaptation and *integration* of the minority group, by indirectly forming the image of “too demanding” Hungarians, who were already enabled to study in their language, to keep the street signs in their native language, and can even represent themselves politically on the national level. Such framing goes in line with the popular Slovak saying that suggests that when on Slovak territory, one should speak and act in the “Slovak way”.²⁷ On the other hand, similarly as in the case of the Roma, the other way of framing differences of the Hungarian minority is in accepting them, together with their minority status, rights, culture and representation. Such framing of *self-empowerment* was presented predominantly in the articles from 2017. Figure 10 shows the development of the framing in the few articles about Hungarian minority from 2013 to 2017. The time period of 2015 is not included in this figure, given that only one single articles has been published on Hungarian minority during this period.

²⁷ From original saying: Na Slovensku po slovensky; similar to When in Rome do as the Romans do.

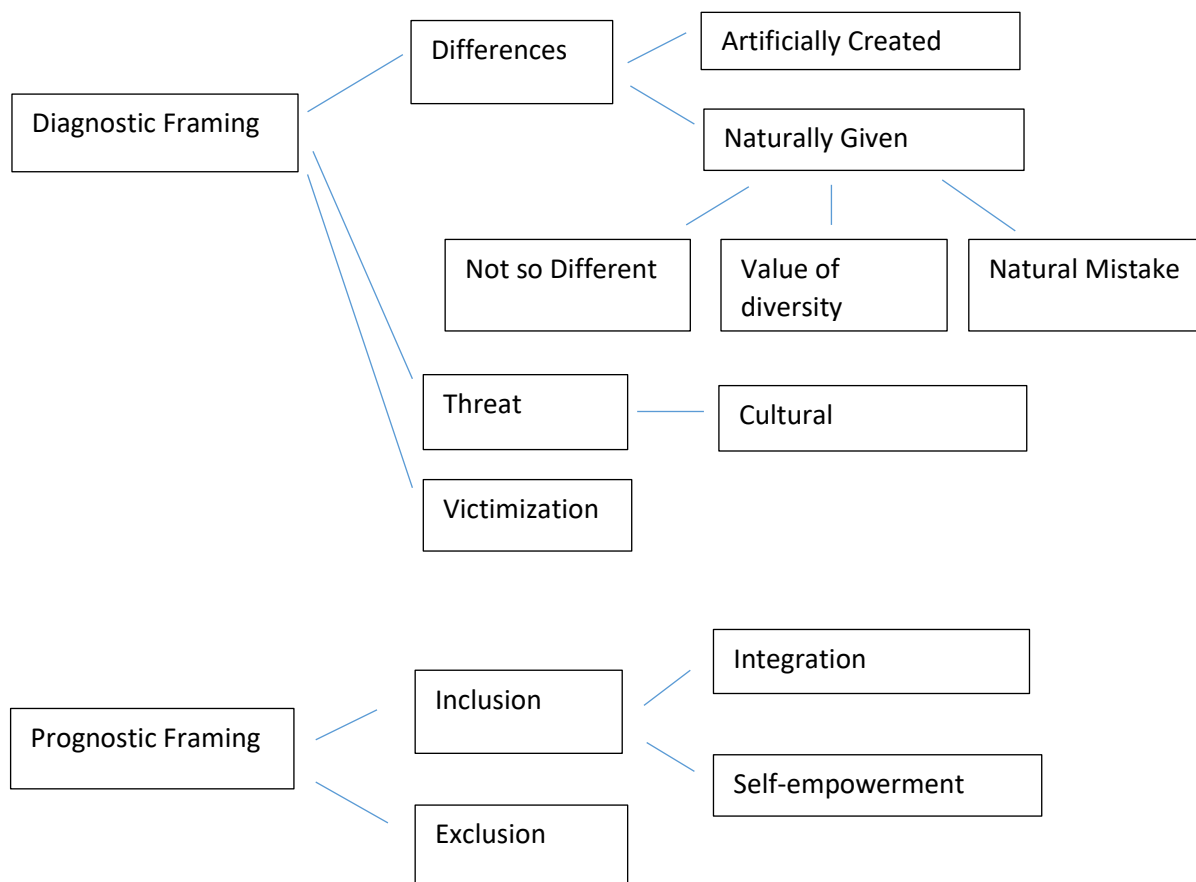
Figure 10: Frames on the Hungarian minority



Finally, the LGBT community, being an altogether different type of minority group, not accompanied by ethnic, religious or racial differences, presents some variation in media frames. Here the differences of the minority are framed by the divergence between an *artificially created condition* and a *naturally given variation*. The conservative paper framed homosexuality as a whim that can be developed, spread and treated (*artificially created*). Homosexuals can adopt homosexuality simply by seeing the “trend” in TV or at street, and that is why children should be effectively protected from such images. Homosexuality is something abnormal, a temporary psychological disease or an “insignificant short pleasure” contradicting “natural and divine order” (Hlavné Správy 2015). An article from 2017, for example, criticizes sexual pedagogy in schools, which helps young people to integrate the different sexuality into their personal lives, referring to it as “radical gender indoctrination...propaganda of homosexuality...a twisted activity of culture that is attacking the foundations of our family cohabitation...seeking to end the heterosexual system”. Consequently, the article follows with statistics of decreasing percentage of teenage girls considering themselves as heterosexual (Hlavné Správy 2017).

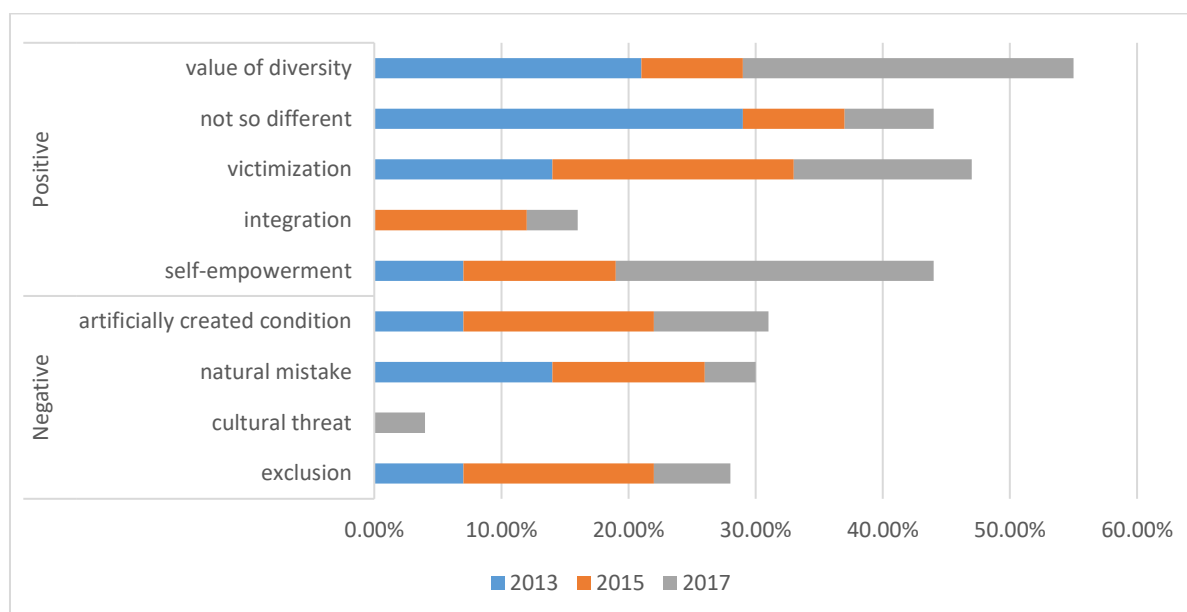
The contrasting view presents homosexuality as a *natural difference*— a simple type of sexuality that is given, born with. Homosexuality has always been here and always will be. Here three distinctive framing options of naturally given distinction has been recognized. First, media can acknowledge that homosexuality forms a difference, but this difference is not relevant for division between “us” and “them” as it belongs to one’s intimate life that should stay private and respected (*not so different*). Second, media can welcome the promotion and celebration of the difference (*value of diversity*) by referring to events such as gay parades. Alternatively, media can also acknowledge that the difference is not temporal but born with, however referring to is a “*mistake of nature*,” a deficiency similar to when people are born with disabilities. Consequently, such people should be pitied for their suffering, and to be to the differing levels either *integrated* or segregated (*exclusion*).

Figure 11: LGBT Framing Scheme



When it comes to comparison of individual frames according to time periods, in 2017 there was increase in both *value of diversity frame* and *self-empowerment frame*. *Not so different* framing and the *natural mistake* framing, on the other hand, decreased as compared to 2013 period. The complete results of the framing analysis can be observed in Figure 12.

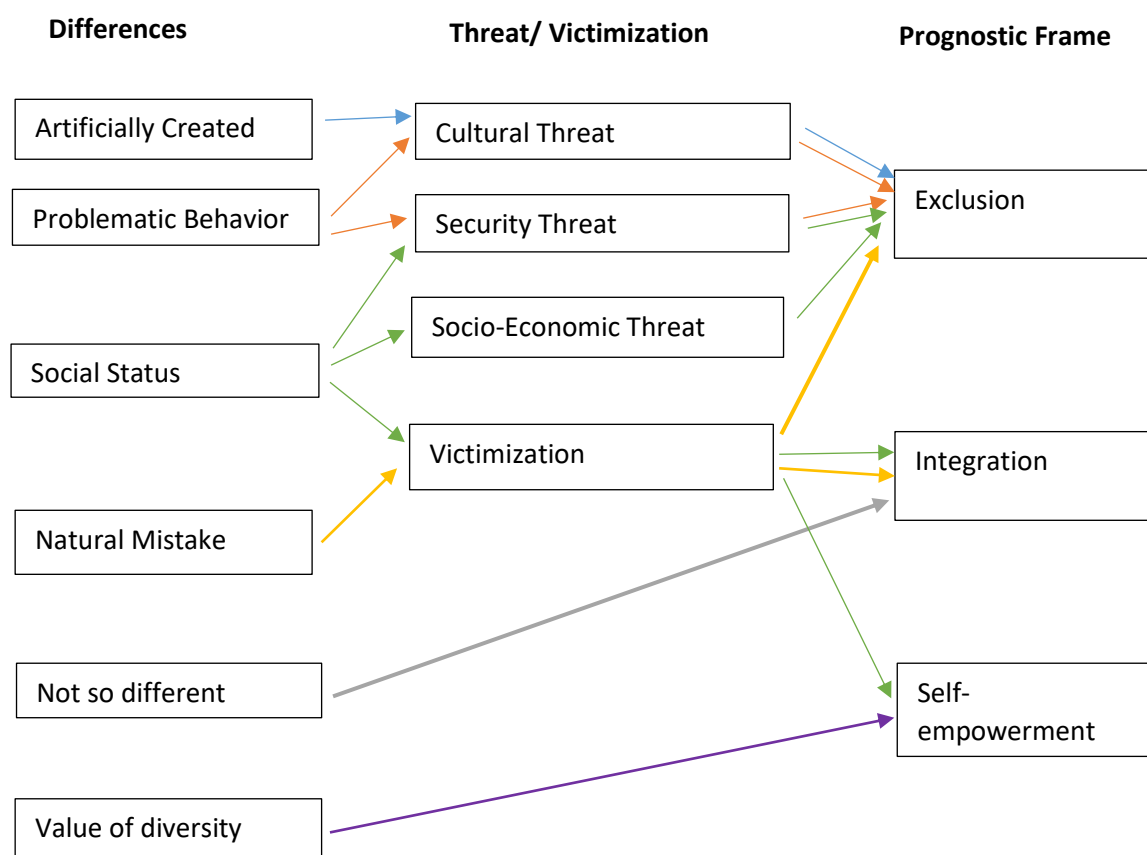
Figure 12: Frames on the LGBT community



Moreover, examining the frames, it is noticeable that some frames were often accompanied by others within the same article, implying some relation between them applicable to all minority groups. *Problematic behavior* frame was, for example, often associated with related *cultural* and *security threat* frames, which frequently led to prognostic frame of *exclusion*. *Social status* frame, on the hand, was associated with *security* and *socio-economic threat* frames, leading to *exclusion*; or to the *victimization* frame that eventuated in either *integration* or *self-empowerment* prognostic frame. Framing minority as *not so different* led exclusively to prognostic frame of *integration*, while the *value of diversity* frame was related to *self-empowerment*. Two additional frames adopted uniquely for the LGBT community, were the *artificial created difference* frame, which was associated with prognostic frame of *exclusion*; and the *natural mistake* frame often leading to *victimization* that was further translated in

prognostic claim for either *exclusion* or *integration* policies. Therefore, unlike in the case of other minorities, framing the LGBT group as *victimized* could also lead to prognostic frame of *exclusion*. The complete scheme is outlined underneath, indicating the possible links between the frames of difference, threat or victimization helping to explain the adoption of different prognostic frames.

Figure 13: Interconnectedness between Frames



5.3 Dehumanization in Articles

Dehumanization was altogether present in 69 articles, which makes only 5% of the sample. Such proportion seems very small, however, newspapers should keep to a certain level of standard, and dehumanizing framing is unacceptable even in the online form of media. Also,

the low number of dehumanizing references could be explained by the fact that the sample articles were formed strictly of news articles, which should be mostly informative and objective, and did not contain commentaries, blogs or editorials, where more of the opinion of the authors could be expressed and accompanied by use of foul language. Out of the chosen media, it was mostly extremist Hlavné Správy and tabloid Topky that chose such forms of expression in a few of their articles. In the quality media, dehumanization was less evident, with daily Pravda having a few problematic articles, mostly using mechanistic form of dehumanization, referring to tide, wave, flood or burden instead of more human descriptions. For all dehumanizing articles, however, dehumanization was mostly implied, and thus possibly hardly recognizable for the average reader.

There were 46 dehumanizing articles informing about refugees overall, 15 about the Roma, eight about LGBT and zero about the Hungarian minority. Examining the articles in more detail, one notices that the Roma and refugees are dehumanized in similar manner. For example, in 2013, Topky informed about a terror in a local neighborhood by Roma “clan”, supported by their “crazy” relatives and loud shrieking of their wives under influence:

They will not stop from anything! The Roma clan in the settlement of Zadky in Havířov, Czech Republic, has been terrorizing the local population for years. The last time it went so far that they did not hesitate to stand up to police men who had come to the place to make order. They had to call for reinforcements as they were trying to calm down the aggressive men and hysterical women (Topky 2013).

The article further emphasized that not only men and women are aggressive, but also kids, which suggests that aggressiveness is connected to the Roma in general, not the individuals. Such description of people being absolutely out of control again implies the animalistic nature. Similarly, an article by Hlavné Správy depicts refugees as being out of control, aggressive, threatening to rape or jugulate the workers of the camp, implying animalistic dehumanization:

Working with refugees is definitely not a job for everyone. It is quite common that they swear, try to jump out of the windows, threaten the medical staff and anyone

in the uniform to cut their throat. Especially Afghans, who are mostly uneducated...are threatening in a following way: “Wait, you white pigs, when there are more of us, we will cut throat of all of you!” a source described his experience...(Hlavné Správy 2015).

Therefore, we can see that the Roma and refugees are both framed as dangerous and violent, questioning the human agency’s ability of self-restraint and control. An article from 2015 provides another dehumanizing representation of both Roma and refugees as being uncivil and without proper manners. A story of how “Roma can disgust (destroy) an otherwise nice day,” describes the experience of a visitor of the local swimming pool. The article says that “[Roma] behavior cannot be compared at all with the behavior of ordinary people”, and that “the odor of their bodies could not be covered by any deodorant” (Hlavné Správy 2015). Their loud conversations and no manners allegedly contributed to disgusted people suddenly leaving the pool. Here we can see not only the animalistic implication of abnormal individuals with strong odor, but also the effect of being disgusted from them. The articles concludes with saying that “the Muslim community is showing something similar,” establishing a comparison between the Roma and Muslims, indirectly pointing to the logic of “us” already having “our” problematic Roma, therefore not needing any more questionable newcomers.

Moreover, the common representation of not only refugees and Roma, but also for the LGBT group was a one suggesting contamination fears, therefore a threat of spreading illnesses. For example, already mentioned article by Hlavné Správy from August 2015, informs not only about verbal threats experienced in the Czech refugee camp, but also diseases ranging from Chlamydia to HIV. Similarly, another article by same portal from July 2015 was dedicated to epidemic disease brought by refugees, which is “typical for backward nations”. Here we can again see contamination fears together with backwardness, implying lesser development on the human scale. On the other hand, sexual minorities are presented to spread the illness connected to their own homosexuality, which is sometimes presented as infectious, or emphasized to once

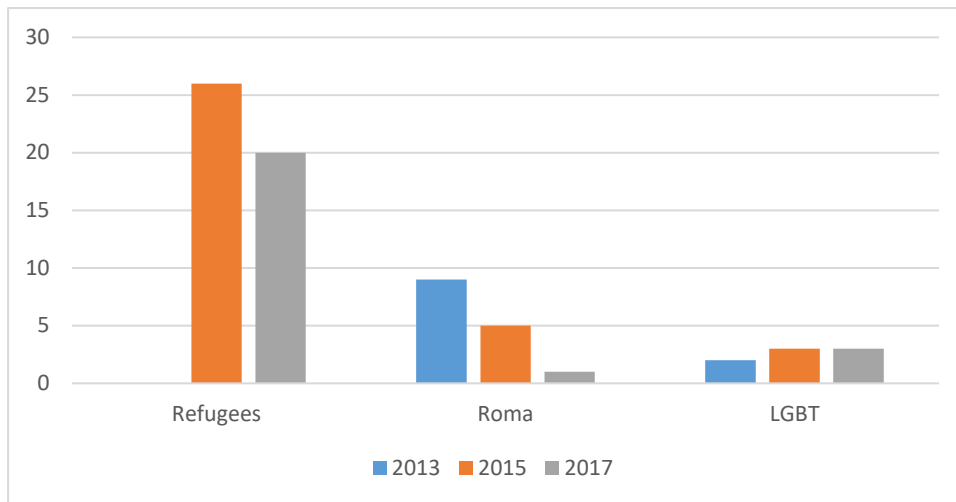
have belonged to the list of mental diseases. Alternatively, homosexuals are presented as threat of transmission of sexual diseases such as HIV, as in an article opposing legalization of same-sex marriages, claiming:

When AIDS spread in the 1980s, homosexuals were able to get in the consciousness of society as "a threatened minority." Another effects included condom campaigns to prevent AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, which, have begun to spread again after decades of retreat because of increased promiscuity (Hlavné Spravy 2015).

The article is further comparing the legalization of same-sex marriages to the absurdity of legalizing the marriages between siblings, arguing for its possible destructive effects on the very concept of marriage. Spread of diseases is again listed as contamination fear, with comparisons to the marriage of siblings and promiscuity implying the inability to control abnormal sexual impulses.

When it comes to the development of dehumanizing frames throughout the time periods, there was a slight decrease of dehumanizing articles about refugees in 2017 compared with 2015 period, while for the Roma a decrease of dehumanization was apparent for both 2015 and 2017 periods, confirming a softening trend of reporting on this minority. There was no dramatic change in proportions of dehumanizing articles related to LGBT community, which could be approached using a refugee crisis reference. Interesting is also to point out that all above mentioned articles dehumanizing the minorities were published without including the name of the author, creating space for anonymity and less social pressure on the type of language used in the article.

Figure 14: Dehumanization according to Time Periods



5.4 Discussion

The presented results confirm some of the stated expectations. Tabloid and semi-tabloid media presented minorities, namely the Roma and the refugees, in more than third of its articles in a negative tone, as well as made use of sensational titles, dehumanizing framing and negative and stereotyping topics. Contrary to expectations, the dehumanizing framing has been found also in connection to the LGBT community, although in much lesser extent. There were very few articles written on the Hungarian minority, mostly with neutral tone of reporting. These results seems to mirror the opinion polls and tendencies described in the introductory chapter, which suggested especially negative attitudes towards Roma minority and refugees, discriminatory tendencies towards LGBT community and subdued tension between the Hungarian minority and majority population.

More interesting are the findings confirming the softening of rhetoric for the Roma in 2015 and 2017 articles. Such change is evident from the decreased amount of coverage, less negative tone of the articles, the rise in positive topics and the decrease in negative ones, a shift in framing

towards the value of diversity frame and corresponding self-empowerment prognostic frame, and a lower percentage of dehumanizing articles, as compared to 2013. There is also a softening trend for the portrayal of the Hungarian minority, but the coverage on this minority was already very low in 2013, which suggests less “other” status of this minority group. It therefore indeed seems like the sense of who is “us” and who is “them” is created depending on the current context and situation, with the refugee crisis bringing feelings of threat and fear of a more distant and unknown “other”. The dividing line between “us” and “them” shifted depending on what groups and which characteristics of groups were most relevant at the given time periods.

With the rise of refugee crisis, the feeling of “us” changed from the ethno-national identification towards a broader demarcation group – “us” as Slavs, Europeans, Christians or the white, depending on which reference was suitable at the moment. Shifting the perception of “us” towards a broader one, the Roma can thus become considered as less out-group with the appearance of a more distant other. Their culture, work and education achievements, and tradition of historical coexistence might contribute to calls for integration into the community vis-à-vis the migrants, who do not share such experience and predispositions.

Belonging to the Hungarian minority, on the other hand, can even more evidently cease to be an important factor– Hungarians are, after all, also Christians, Europeans, white, neighbors with similar culture, traditions and physical appearance. Moreover, Hungarians also belong to the Visegrad group together with Slovaks, presenting similar politics and attitudes opposed to immigration and quotas. Therefore, the Hungarian minority can become somehow more acceptable to us than before, even belonging to “us” in many instances. If the minority group is different, then it is a difference in a good sense, as it is contributing with its own unique culture that can be promoted as a coexistent and complementary with ours.

Nevertheless, the coverage on LGBT community is following different trends, influenced mostly by the conservative/liberal divide and local political context and increased demands for

broadened rights for this group. In June 2014, an amendment to the Constitution was adopted, which defined marriage as a bond between a man and a woman²⁸. In 2015 there has been an unsuccessful referendum trying to restrict already narrow rights of the minority, provoking heated debate on the matter. Consequently, there has been increased coverage throughout the years, attracting more negative presentation from conservative news media. Slovakia still has no legal status for same-sex partnerships, with the question dividing society and media alike. The emergence of the new “other” in form of refugees did not seem to have any effect on the coverage of sexual minority, possibly because of the different nature and characteristics of such group.

In overall, it also has to be noted that the coverage on the chosen minorities by the online news portals was more responsible than expected, and did contain dehumanizing references only in 5% of the coverage. The most common tone of the articles on all minorities was neutral and facts based, without expression of clear position or negative attitude. As argued, dehumanization was mostly present in articles, which did not enclose the name of the author. However, such practice is rather rare and authors are usually writing under their real names and are often under public scrutiny and pressure, as was in the case of broad criticism following the inappropriate article on the Roma mentioned in the methodology part. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the commenting section under articles provides for anonymous space full of uncivil and inappropriate representation of minority groups.

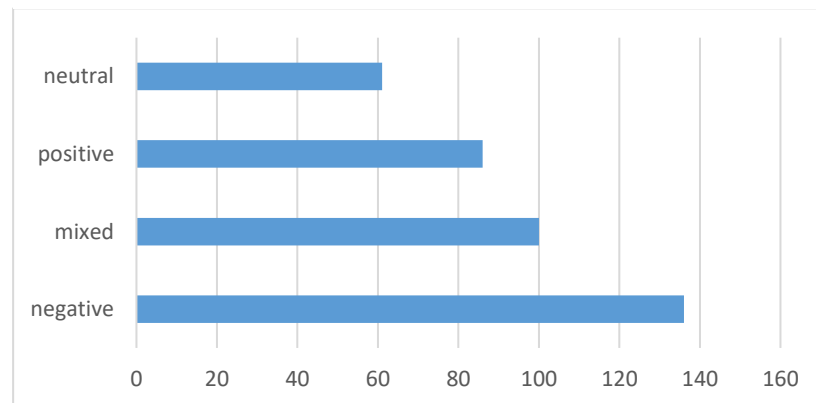
²⁸ Amnesty International (2014) defined this amendment to be discriminatory.

6 Representation of Minorities in Online Comments

6.1 Article Characteristics and the Quantity of Comments

The number of comments can suggest how much of public attention, user engagement or upheaval the article has created (Ksiazek 2018). By commenting on a story, users are demonstrating a heightened interest by actively participating in expressing their opinion and position. In other words, more comments signify higher user engagement and interest in a story. Therefore, it is interesting to consider which article attract more public attention translated in the number of comments. How does the quantity relate to tone of article, type of title and the occurrence of dehumanization? Furthermore, which topics and frames provoke most of the comments?

Figure 15: Number of Comments per Article according to Tone

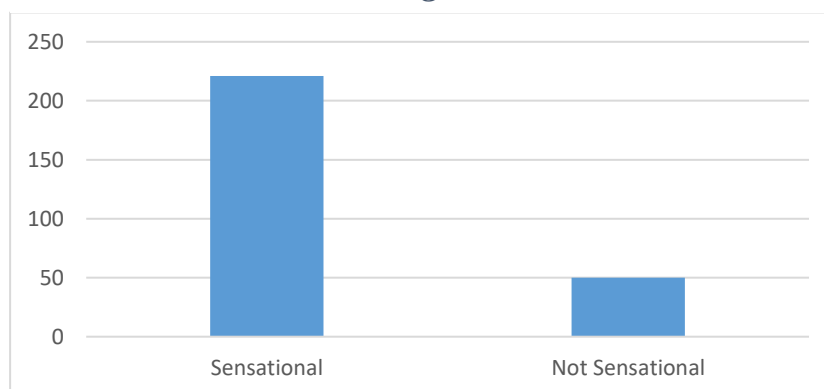


As can be seen from Figure 15, the average amount of comments per article is highest for articles with negative tone (specifically, average close to 140 comments). Articles with mixed tone generate 100 comments in average, while the positive tone also provokes fairly passionate

discussion (around 80 comments on average). The articles with neutral tone are followed with least of the reactions, showing that neutral tone provokes the least reaction from the readers.

On the other hand, the articles with sensational title provoke more than four times as many comments than the articles without sensational title, as can be seen in Figure 16. It should be noted that there are differences between the media types and the titles they choose. The title of more than half of the articles published about minority groups by tabloid Topky is sensational. Semi-tabloid Hlavné Správy published 18% of its articles with sensational title, while for Pravda it is only 0.5% and for SME it was mere 0.3% of the articles. Consequently, the articles by different media attracted varying levels of comments. While for SME and Pravda it has been on average only 23 and 45 comments respectively for an article, an average article by Hlavné Správy attracted 114 comments and tabloid Topky provoked as many as 185 comments per article. This finding can be connected to the clickbait argument, when sensational titles, by attracting more readers, provide larger number of users ready to express their views in comments.

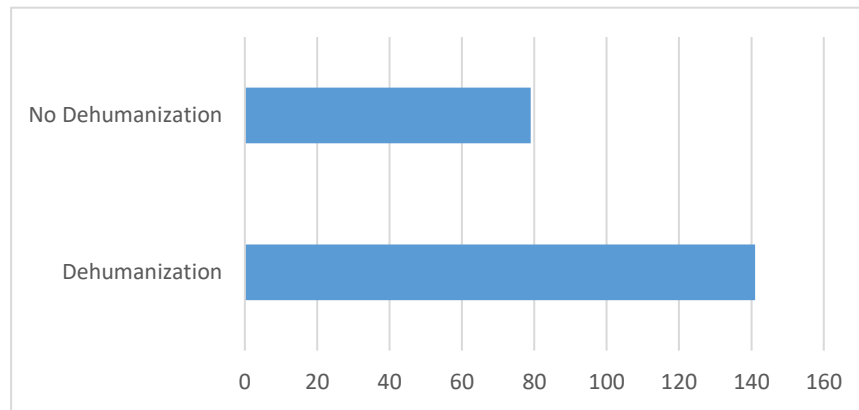
Figure 16: Number of Comments per Article according to Title



As figure 17 suggests, the number of comments is also considerably higher for the articles with the occurrence of dehumanization. This can be explained by people being either motivated or outraged by reading such inappropriate articles. The subsequent subchapter will develop more

on the likelihood of occurrence of dehumanizing comments underneath the dehumanizing article.

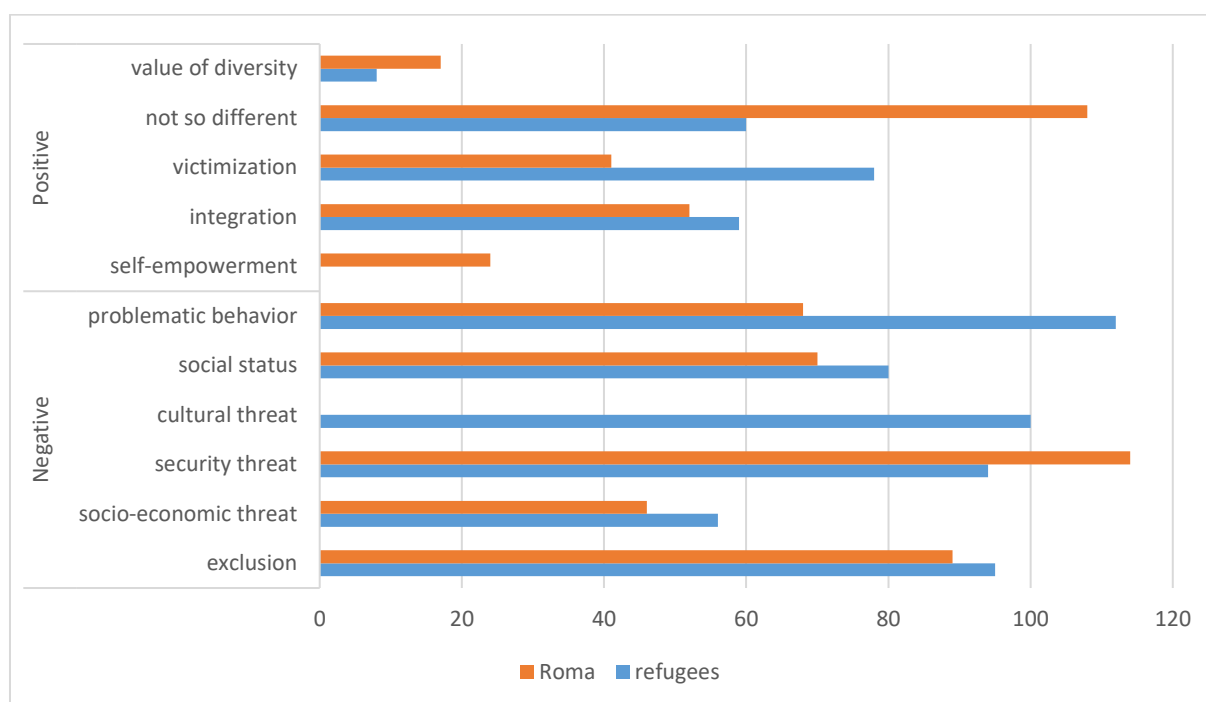
Figure 17: Number of Comments per Article according to Dehumanization



The topics and frames that provoke most of the comments are different among the minority groups. For the Roma and refugees alike, the most reaction provoking topics are criminality and aggressive behavior connected to the related *security threat* and *problematic behavior* frames. Commenters are also reacting in high quantities to the topics of exploitation of social system and economic implications, translated in *socio-economic threat*. However, for refugees, unlike for the Roma, the topic that attracted more than 100 comments most frequently, is the topic of “too many,” which includes articles informing about rising number of newcomers, or the present or future overpopulation of Europe by refugees. The *cultural threat* thus belong to the most discussed frames related to refugees, while for the Roma such topic does not attract attention.

At the same time, the articles framing the Roma as *not so different* and refugees as *victimized* also provoked quite numerous discussions, suggesting that positive frames make users well engaged in predominantly negative discussions. In terms of prognostic framing, the frame of exclusion was connected with the highest amount of reactions in relation to both minority groups. Figure 18 lists the average number of comments per frame for the Roma and refugees.

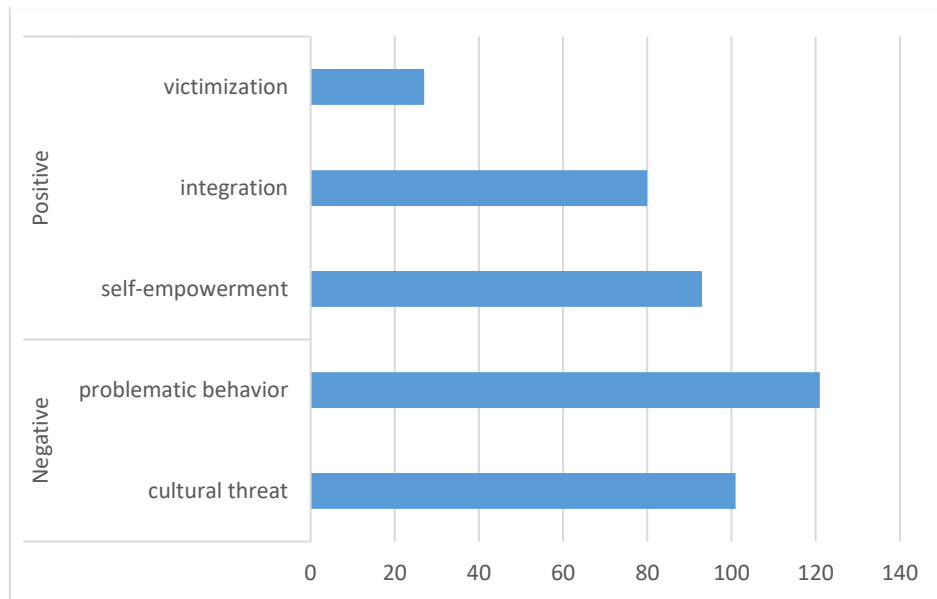
Figure 18: Number of Comments per Frame for the Roma and refugees



Topics provoking most reactions for the Hungarian minority are different from the ones presented above. The most discussed articles relate to the Slovak-Hungarian relations, and political representation of the minority. This latter finding is also logical, given that the party representing Hungarian minority is currently part of the governmental coalition²⁹, and in 2013 and 2015, although in opposition, the Hungarian party was still an important actor on the Slovak political scene. The prognostic frame of self-empowerment frame thus logically attracted lot of attention, and although the coverage on the Hungarian minority was very low, there was nevertheless an occurrence of the cultural threat and problematic behavior frames, as can be seen in Figure 19. The frames are, therefore, similar to ones adopted for other groups, however, in much less quantity due to the small number of articles.

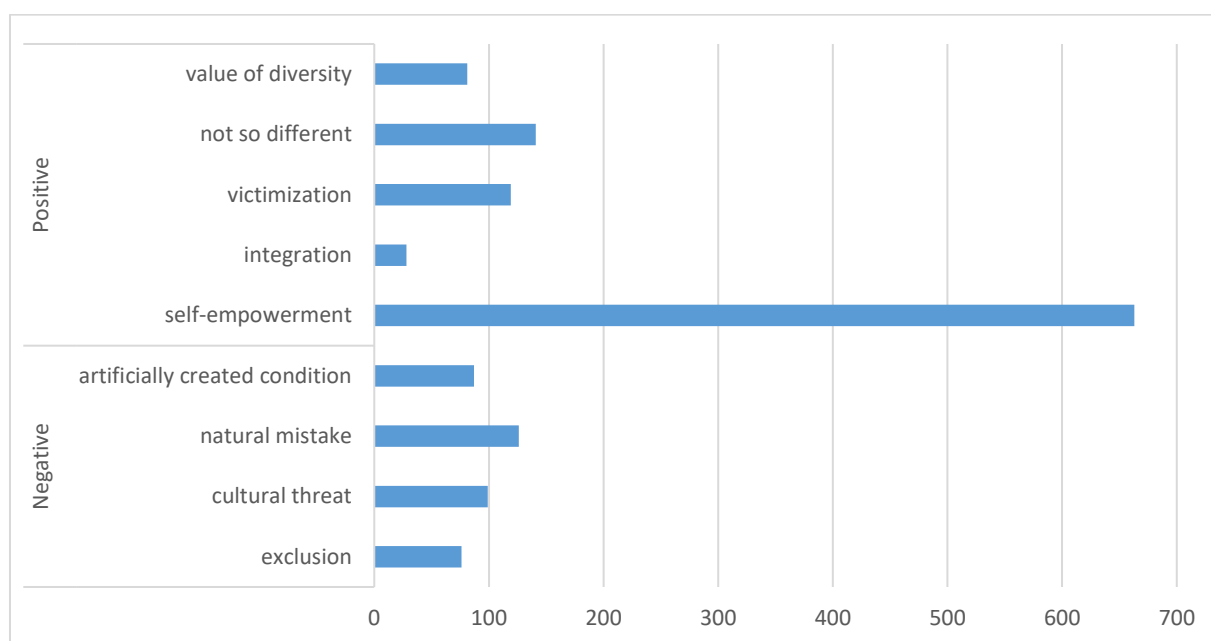
²⁹ Most-Híd is in government coalition from 2016 ongoing, but it was also part of the ruling coalition also in period of 2010-2012.

Figure 19: Number of Comments per Frame: Hungarian Minority



Finally, topics for the LGBT community differ from the ones adopted for the ethnic minorities. The most reactionary topics include gay parades, extension of rights and adoptions. However, the rising numbers of homosexuals was also among the most popular topic for commenting, and thus relate to the same fear of rising numbers and overpopulation adopted for the refugees. The perceived risk of replacing “us” by the spreading numbers of “them,” seems to attract lot of public concern translated in number of comments. Similarly, alike for refugees and LGBT, commenters were most active when articles referred directly to Slovak issues, the local gay parades and suggestions for extensions of rights in the country legislation. This is not surprising, as the cases directly referring to Slovakia present close proximity of threat, of coming in contact with the “others”, of legalizing their status. In terms of framing, the most commented articles on LGBT were those framed in terms of self-empowerment, which is again related to the calls for extension of rights. Such framing in average attracted 663 comments, which is considerably more than the frames for previous two minority groups. Further connection between frames and number of comments can be seen in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Number of Comments per Frame: LGBT



6.2 Quality of Discussion: Dehumanization and Uncivility

Even more important than the simple quantity of reactions is the quality of comments posted in response to articles. The quality of discussion is assessed by the presence of dehumanizing rhetoric and the broader concept of incivility of individual comments. The quality of discussion should be influenced by quality of articles, as news frames should effectively find their place into audience frames. Given that only 5% of the sample articles contained dehumanizing frames related to minority groups, I will look whether such low finding also holds for the user discussions. Questions covered in this section will thus include following: Are user discussions under articles containing dehumanizing references towards chosen minority groups? How do these develop over time? How is quality of comments related to article characteristics, such as tone of article, type of title, frames or the occurrence of dehumanization in article? How is quality of comments related to interactions between individual users?

Altogether, almost half of the online conversations were either disabled or contained deleted comments³⁰, while 60% of enabled conversation did contain dehumanizing references. Therefore, dehumanizing references are much more prevalent among public than in the news articles. The rising hate speech in user comments can be further observed by the efforts adopted by the news portals to curb these comments. Many user comments were deleted and unable to be viewed for others, justifying deletion with violating the code of conduct and ethical regulations. Nevertheless, despite these measures, it was still possible to find vast number of dehumanizing comments.

The Roma and refugees were predominantly targeted with animalistic dehumanization, with users making direct comparisons to animals, varying from monkeys, dogs, pigs, cattle, parasites, grasshoppers, vermin, etc. For the Roma, such references were present in discussions of 70% of the articles, while for refugees it was 74%³¹. Both minorities also attracted comments suggesting backwardness or less developed state of evolution. Refugees were often presented with contamination fears or reappearing references to “disease of society” or a “plague”. Mechanistic dehumanization was mostly seen in frequent comparisons to “genetic trash,” often adopted for the Roma, or “destructive tsunami wave,” well present under articles about refugees. The sexual minorities attracted dehumanizing comments in more than half of the discussions, mostly in form of being referred to as perverted, sick and twisted. And although the Hungarian minority has seemed more resilient towards dehumanization in articles, half of the articles with enabled discussion contained dehumanizing comment, predominantly in 2013, in form of mechanistic references to Hungarian as “schlock” or “dirt.”

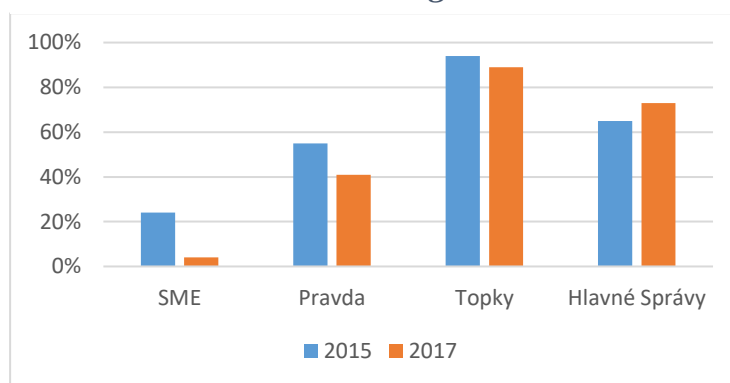
Changes in amount of dehumanizing discussions throughout the time periods were observed only for refugees and the Roma. Out of the few articles from 2013 informing about refugees,

³⁰ With no further dehumanization found in remaining comments, thus coded as N/A

³¹ It has to be noted I am talking about animalistic dehumanization present in the first found dehumanizing comment, therefore it could have been even higher percentage of occurrence in the article discussions.

there was no dehumanization present in discussion, whereas in 2015 as many as 64% of the user comments contained open forms of dehumanization. Moreover, if we would exclude articles by the quality newspapers from the dataset, this percentage would increase to a disturbing 89%. In 2017, the number of articles with dehumanizing comments in discussion decreased to 49%, but if we exclude the articles by the two quality papers again, the result is still less optimistic– 79%. The percentage of articles with dehumanizing discussion according to time periods across the four news outlets can be further observed in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Number of Articles about Refugees with Dehumanizing Comment



For the Roma minority, dehumanization was present in user comments of 73% of articles with enabled discussion in 2013. There is a decreasing trend, the percentage decreased to 59% in 2015, and then increased slightly again in 2017, accounting for 61% of articles. Lesser occurrence of dehumanizing discussions as compared to 2013 time period support the argument of softening rhetoric developed in the previous chapter. Moreover, there is again a difference between discussions present at quality papers and tabloid ones. The articles by tabloid Topky and semi-tabloid Hlavné Správy are followed by dehumanizing debate more often than the articles by quality papers, specifically in 85% of their articles on the Roma.

However, when assessing dehumanization in user comments, I used the discussion as whole as a unit of analysis, leaving the extent of inappropriate comments in such discussions unexplored.

Therefore, using a second sample of 1617 comments originating from 12 articles, I tried to use comments as units of analysis, assessing the share of inappropriate language present in a given discussion. For evaluating comments, I have used the definition of uncivility, which encompasses yet broadens the scope of hate speech. Out of 1617 coded comments, 686 were coded as uncivil, presenting 42.4% of this smaller sample. Such finding suggests that discussions usually do not contain only one dehumanizing comment, but are rather full of hateful speech towards minority groups. Following section will try to explain why this can be a case, and what characteristics of articles and newspapers contribute to the extent of inappropriate language.

6.2.1 Why Are People so Hateful in Their Comments?

6.2.1.1 Article and Newspaper Characteristics and the Quality of Discussion

As outlined, a clear majority of articles about minorities contains not only negative and hateful, but also dehumanizing discussion, full of uncivil comments. Negative attitudes towards minorities were already demonstrated by opinion polls, however high occurrence of dehumanization and uncivility suggests especially hateful pattern of behavior. Although dehumanization was present in few articles only, we have seen much higher occurrence of such rhetoric among the public. This sub-section will observe how certain article/newspaper characteristics can be related to the quality of discussion.

First of all, as outlined in literature review, certain policies of discussion forums contribute to low quality of comments, therefore a closer look at such characteristics adopted by individual newspapers is worth exploring. It can be observed that the chosen news sites have quite loose organizational policies. Users can comment anonymously, there is no possibility of reporting the uncivil comments by other users, and even though the uncivil comments are being deleted

by the administrator, the nickname of commenter whose post has been deleted is not enclosed and does not create social pressure on the future posts of this user. The three news portals, SME, Hlavné Správy and Topky, however, keep the deleted comments marked as deleted, warning of ethical breaches, whereas Pravda's deleted posts just disappeared from the conversation altogether. It is difficult to evaluate which method is more effective, given that although Pravda's commenting space seems less uncivil compared to the other three, there is no data available on how many comments have been deleted from the debate. Furthermore, the previous research also suggested that the involvement of journalist can contribute to the quality of discussions. However, in none of the observed discussions did the reporter or any member of the media team join the debate or respond to any of the user comments. These news specificities of commenting forums could have thus also contributed to the overall bad quality of discussions.

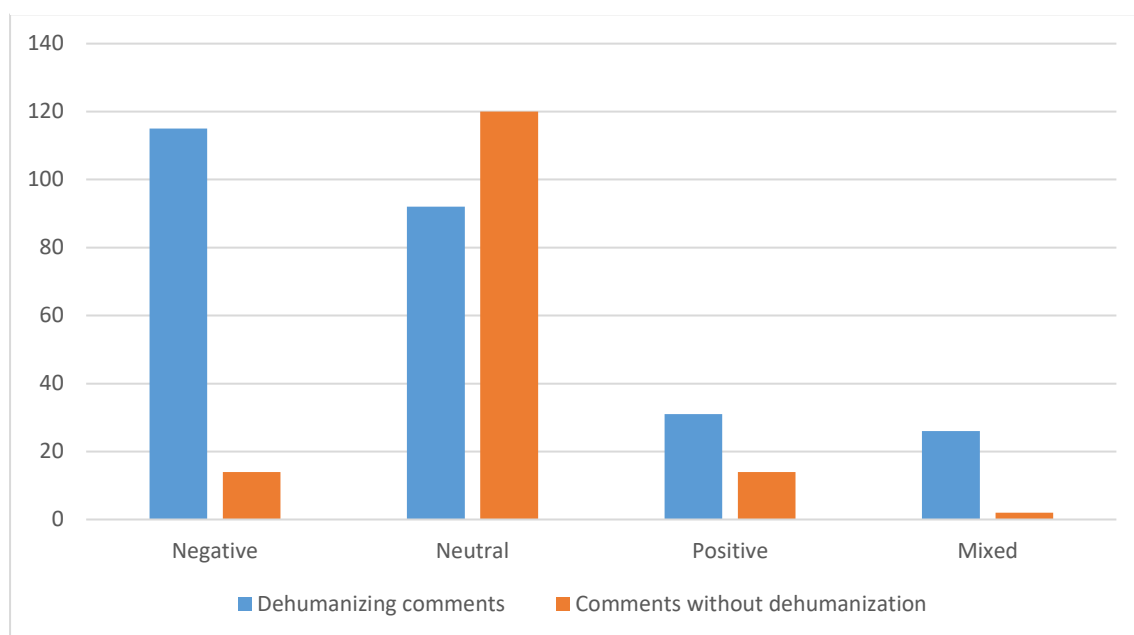
Moreover, specific characteristics of articles can relate to quality of comments. Although there were only few dehumanizing articles present in the sample, almost all articles (54 out of 57)³², also contained dehumanization in user comments. And even though dehumanization was present in discussions of as many as 60% of the sample articles, such ratio suggests that the occurrence of dehumanization in the article almost always leads to the occurrence of dehumanization in discussion.

When it comes to the relationship between the tone of the article and the occurrence of dehumanization in user comments, as can be observed in Figure 22, most of the dehumanizing comments are present in articles with negative tone, while the discussion without dehumanization most often follows from the neutral articles. The neutral tone, which is the most common tone of sample articles, is the only tone followed by more discussions without

³² Out of 69 total dehumanizing articles, 12 did not have enabled discussion or had deleted comments.

dehumanization. Negative and mixed articles are almost always followed by dehumanizing discussion. Surprisingly, articles with positive tone are more than two times more often followed by dehumanizing, rather than non-dehumanizing, discussion. This finding can be explained by the argument by Ksiazek (2018) claiming that the relative degree of perceived objectivity in reporting affects quality of comments. This aspect can be seen as problematic mostly for articles with negative or positive tone (as well as mixed, combining both of them), which can be seen as expressing certain preference and not being fully objective to the arguments of the other side.

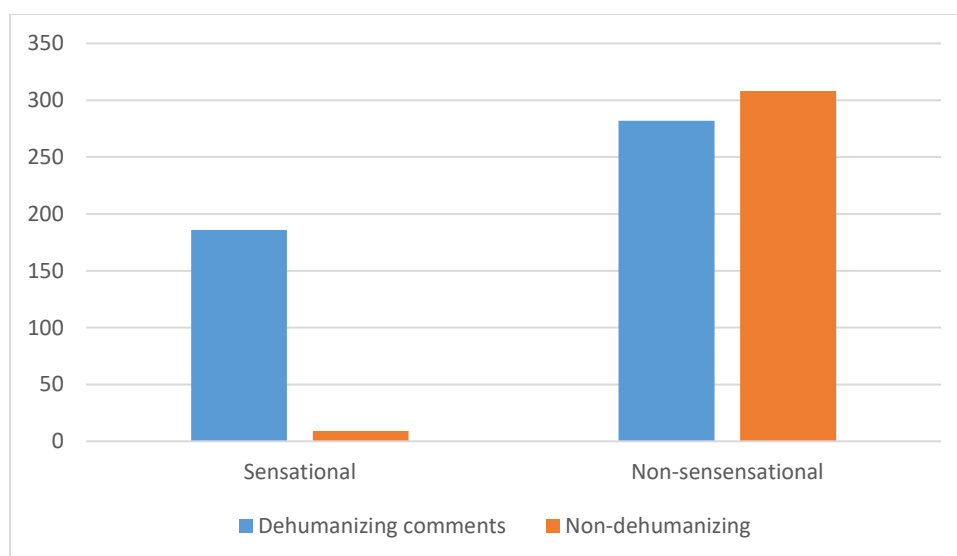
Figure 22: Tone of the Article and Dehumanization in Comments



Moreover, dehumanizing comments follow most often from articles with sensational title, as Figure 23 suggests. Articles with sensational title are almost 20 times more often followed by dehumanizing commenting than non-sensational titles, showing that sensational title almost always leads to dehumanization in comments. Articles with non-sensational title, which are

much more populous in the sample³³, are more often followed by discussion not containing dehumanization, although in almost half of the cases they are followed also by a dehumanizing comment. A statistical check of the relationship is confirmed, the chi-square analysis is marked by $p\text{-value} < 0.001$, implying the dependence between sensational titles and dehumanizing comments. The type of title does matter not only for number of comments following the article, but also for the quality of such discussion.

Figure 23: Sensational Title and Dehumanization in Comments



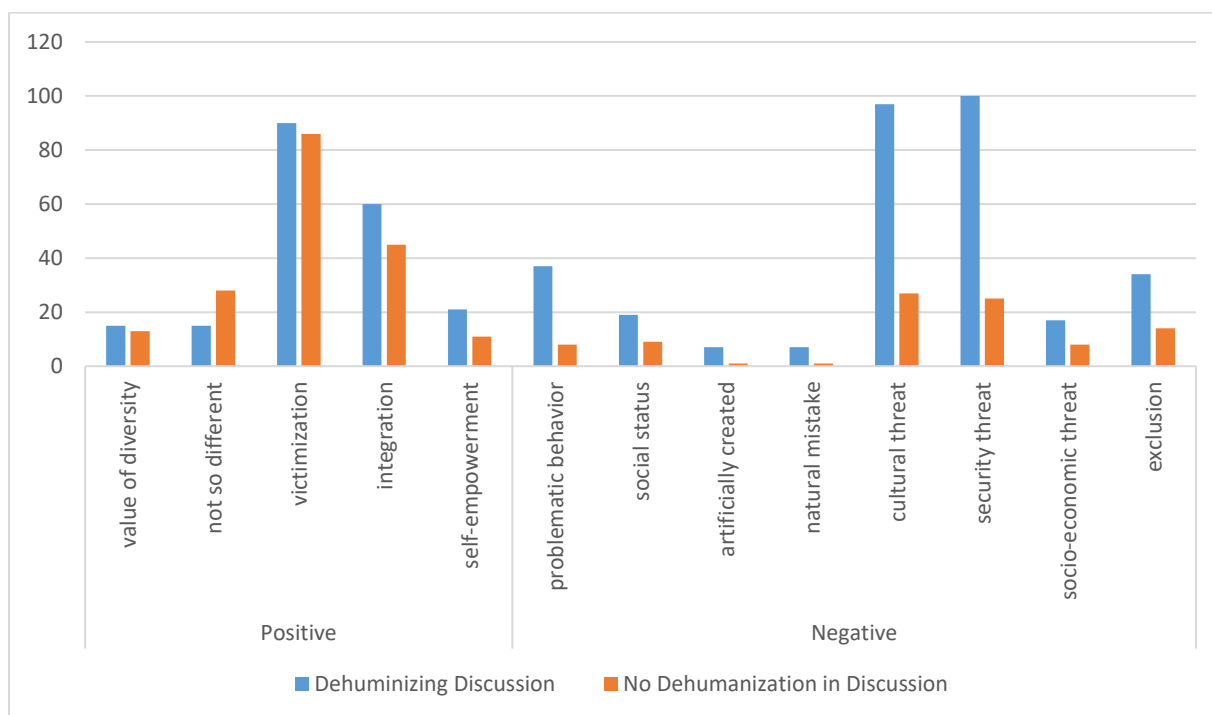
Furthermore, as suggested by in literature review on user comments in section 3.2., quality of user comments is to large extent affected by the topic of articles. Dehumanizing discussion was found to be the most frequently following articles with the following topics: *aggressiveness, criminality, too many, refugees in Slovakia, exploitation of the social system, terrorism, adoptions or the gay parades*. On the other hand, topics producing dehumanizing discussion

³³ Given that quality papers published more articles on minorities during the time period, and these do not use sensational title much, as shown before (also note that I am only using articles with enabled discussion and not deleted comments, so the representation is not precise).

least often or leading to the commenting space without dehumanization altogether, were the topics such as *problem-solving* (suggestion for improving the education, housing, or employment rate of the minority), *trafficking*, *political representation*, *shipwreck tragedies of refugees*, or *success stories*. The topics that were more polarizing and thus leading to both dehumanizing and non-dehumanizing discussions at the same rate were the *anti-minority extremism*, *confronting prejudice*, *solidarity*, or *remembering the Roma Holocaust*. It can be thus affirmed that the positive topics do not avoid provoking dehumanization in the user comments and in many instances lead to angry public reactions, relating again to the argument of perceptions objectivity of the given newspapers and their coverage on minorities.

In terms of related frames of the articles, Figure 24 shows the ratio of dehumanization in comments according to the given frame of the article. As can be observed, the most common framing leading to dehumanizing discussion is *security threat*, *cultural threat*, and *victimization*, whereas *victimization*, *integration*, and *not so different* framing is also most often leading to non-dehumanizing discussion. We can thus see that framing minority as being *victimized*, leads to both types of discussions, again related to perception of objectivity. People react especially sensitively to articles they consider to be unfairly attributing a status of victim, rather than perpetrator, to a minority group. On the other hand, some frames seem to provoke dehumanizing discussion much more often than the non-dehumanizing one (such as *problematic behavior* frame, *cultural threat* or *security threat*).

Figure 24: Frame of the Article and Dehumanization in the Comments



6.2.1.2 Behavior of Commenters vis-à-vis other Users

Finally, the online behavioral norms in commenting forums should further affect the quality of subsequent reactions. Considering threads of comments as expression of deliberation between users, it is interesting to look at how commenters behave in relation to other users, and if their uncivil comments stand as reactions to articles or to the comments of other users predominantly.

Using the second sample assessing the civility of the comments, several findings shed light on the interactions between deliberation and uncivility. Out of uncivil comments, the majority were comments posted as reaction to an article—namely 69.7%, while 30.3% uncivil comments were posted as reaction to other comments. This suggests that when people are responding to already posted comments they might use more civil forms of argumentation than in their single reaction

to article. There were altogether 453 threads of comments present in discussions, and out of these 74.9% were purely civil and 25.1% contained uncivil comments too. Such difference in share of civility and incivility may again suggest that comment threads promote higher quality of deliberation and more civil discussion. Moreover, in most cases, the deliberative thread followed a civil comment rather than uncivil one.

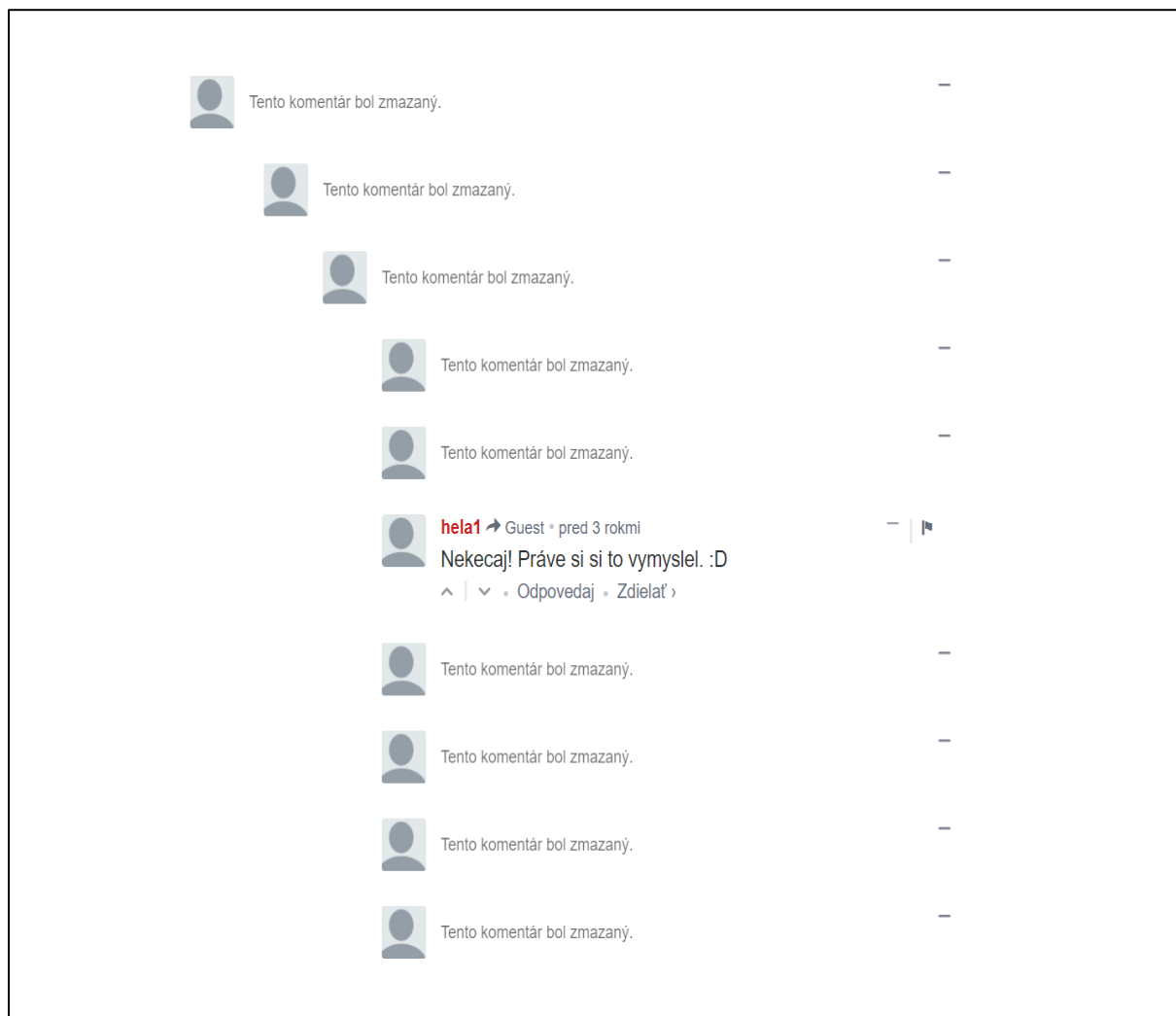
When uncivil comment has started the discussion, in 57.2% of cases, the thread of reactions following the uncivil comment was made out of only civil comments, whereas in 42.8% of cases the uncivil comment was followed by either only uncivil comments, or thread containing both civil and further uncivil comments. This finding is very weakly demonstrates that deliberation can, in some cases, moderate the hate speech by providing civil arguments enhancing the debate. However, uncivil comments also support further uncivil reactions in more than 40% of cases, which is in accordance with Stroud et al (2015) and Sukumaran et al. (2011), who claimed that the behavior of commenters affects the behavioral norms of others. This can be demonstrated by part of discussion depicted underneath in Figure 25, where comment marked as deleted is followed by a thread of further deleted, uncivil comments.³⁴

In most of the cases, however, uncivil comment was not followed by any reactions at all, standing as lonely response to the article. Such finding is in accordance with literature, as uncivility was demonstrated to make people less willing to participate in discussion (Naab et al 2018; Springer, Engelmann, and Pfaffinger 2015). Also, in very few cases (85 comments, which is about 12% of all uncivil comments), the uncivil reactions were present in a thread that started with civil comment to the article. Therefore, uncivil reactions in my sample were more likely to follow uncivil rather than civil comment. This can be also explained by previous research, suggesting that users follow the ethical standards set by antecedent commenter. The

³⁴ Tento komentár bol zmanazný means This comment has been deleted.

civil comment threads, therefore, can be considered to positively influence the qualities of deliberative opinion exchange.

Figure 25: Uncivil Behavior Following the First Uncivil Comment



6.3 Discussion

If articles presented mostly implied dehumanization without direct references to animals or objects, the opposite pattern can be observed when looking at the user comments. The vast majority of user comments contained direct comparisons to animals, varying from monkeys, dogs, pigs, cattle, parasites, vermin, etc. Moreover, a high share of comments in such

discussions were uncivil, and thus containing offensive language and inappropriate and stereotyping references towards the chosen minority groups.

From the trends found in data, it is evident that the way journalists write their articles does affect the audiences, their level of engagement with the article as well as the negativity they express in the comments. Article characteristics influence both the quantity and quality of the comments, with articles with neutral tone, non-sensational title and no dehumanization generating least of the reactions, and also less occurrence of dehumanizing rhetoric among public. Moreover some topics, such as criminality, aggressiveness, terrorism, adoptions by same-sex couples or overpopulation, were generating high numbers of comments, and more of dehumanization in user reactions. Related frames of cultural threat, security threat or victimization were provoking high quantity, and poor quality of comments.

These results generally confirm that media framing finds its way into audience frames. Also, it underlines the need for more responsible coverage on minorities if we want to stop the levels of prejudice and hate among the public. However, the direction of the relationship is not determined by the analysis. It is well possible that those with more negative attitudes simply choose to follow the more negative news portals. Also, the results can be distorted by the many disabled discussions. Moreover, developing an effective media strategy is quite problematic, as positive articles and positive topics and frames also provoked lengthy and negative responses. However, the partial answer for invoking less hate speech among the public can be achieved by reporting neutrally, not using sensational language and without prior dehumanization in the articles.

The occurrence of dehumanizing, vulgar and offensive language in the user comments was, moreover, disproportionate to rather low presence of dehumanization in articles. Additional factors are believed to have influence on the quality of comments, such as anonymity of the users and loose organizational policies governing commenting. Moreover, the behavioral norms

of users affect the levels of civility in subsequent reactions, with civil threads of comments attracting more reasoned and deliberative debate. The civil comment threads, therefore, can be considered to positively influence deliberation and more reasoned exchange of arguments and opinions.

7 Conclusions

In my thesis, I have studied how media report on minority groups and how the coverage on minorities changed due to the refugee crisis that brought the threat of another group, that of the migrants. I have outlined that some othering is necessary for identity creation, however in extensive form such processes lead to creation of power relations, justify discrimination and abuses of rights. Othering, or its extreme form of dehumanization, can be effectively promoted by media that use framing to simplify messages and define reality. These frames get gradually enrooted in public frames and serve readers to make sense of the complicated world around them. Readers in turn increasingly seek an opportunity to actively participate in this process by leaving comments to news stories, which however do not lead to a deliberative forum, but rather uncivil debate full of offensive language.

Using framing analysis, I have looked at how articles and comments on minorities developed over time, with cross-minority and cross-media comparisons. Let me summarize the main findings in the following paragraphs.

Tabloid and semi-tabloid media present minorities, namely the Roma and the refugees, using negative tone, sensational titles, dehumanizing references and negative and stereotyping topics. Minorities are framed in terms of differences and threats, often calling for subsequent policies of exclusion. Quality newspapers, on the other hand, follow more neutral and balanced representation of minority groups in all these respects.

The findings, however, suggest the softening of rhetoric for the Roma in 2015 and 2017 articles. Such change is evident from the decreased amount of coverage as well as user comments, less negative tone of the articles, the rise in positive topics and the decrease in negative ones, a shift in framing towards the value of diversity frame and corresponding self-empowerment

prognostic frame, and a lower percentage of dehumanizing articles and discussions, as compared with 2013.

There is also a softening trend for the portrayal of the Hungarian minority, but the coverage on this minority was already very low in 2013, which suggests already less apparent “other” status of this group with a long tradition in the country, and rather non-problematic, peaceful coexistence. Refugees and immigrants, on the other hand, present a more distant and unknown threat and fear, due to a different culture, religion, appearance and frequent prejudice. I therefore argued that the refugee crisis, bringing feelings of uncertainty, shifts the dividing line between traditional minorities and the majority population, making differences between these less important. Nevertheless, the emergence of the new “other” in the form of refugees did not seem to have any effect on the coverage of the sexual minority, possibly because of the different nature and characteristics of such a group.

Dehumanizing references were present in only small portion of articles overall. Nevertheless, the coverage, even if softening for some groups, contains frequent stereotyping, negative and othering references. User discussions, on the other hand, are characterized by direct references to animals or objects when referring to other groups. A disturbing amount of discussions compared the Roma and refugees to monkeys, dogs, pigs, cattle, parasites, grass-hoppers, and other non-human creatures. In addition, large portions of these discussions were made up of uncivil comments, implying overly negative perceptions of minorities by the public active in the online sphere.

The results further confirm that the way journalists write their articles does affect the audiences, their level of engaging with the article as well as the negativity they express in the comments. Article characteristics, such as tone, type of title, topics and frames do influence both the quantity and quality of the comments. The articles with neutral tone, non-sensational title and no dehumanization generate not only less reactions, but also less of occurrence of dehumanizing

rhetoric among the commenters. At the same time, articles using the frames of problematic behavior of minorities and related threats provoked high quantity, but poor quality comments. These results generally confirm that media framing finds its way into audience frames, implying a need for more responsible coverage on minorities if the levels of prejudice and hate among the public are to be moderated.

Moreover, the behavioral norms of users affect the levels of civility in subsequent reactions, with civil threads of comments demonstrated to attract more reasoned and deliberative debate. The analysis of the chosen news sites show the importance to improve some organizational features guiding the online conversation and engage the journalists and the members of the reporting team in dialogue with their audiences in order to enhance the quality of the discussion. The comment thread, accompanied by journalists' participation could positively influence the qualities of deliberative opinion exchange, which is fruitful to promotion of healthy democracy.

Although the results face several limitations, mainly due to the subjective nature of coding or the deleted discussions that are missing from the data that could be capable of distorting some figures, they point to the importance of studying media framing to be able to develop a responsible coverage on the minority groups as well as an effective strategy for decreasing the levels of hatred and prejudice among the public. Moreover, the finding of changing status of some groups in relation to more stigmatized new ones, calls for further studying of the trend in and outside of the region, to see whether it holds in relation to different country contexts and minority groups.

Appendix

Codebook

Variables:

- 1) **Newspaper:** SME, Pravda, Topky, Hlavné Správy
- 2) **Minority group:** Roma, Refugees, LGBT, Hungarian minority
- 3) **Year:** 2013, 2015, 2017
- 4) **Tone:** journalist's inclination towards more positive or negative (or neutral) style of writing and framing of the minority³⁵
 - partly but not completely dependent on the topic of the article; for example negative topic such as criminality of Roma can be covered also in neutral way, but most likely not in positive tone
 - Positive: presenting minority or members of minority in positive manner, referring to positive attributes (talented, kind), achievements (able to finish university, find job, win a competition), actions (helpful, saving someone), etc.
 - Negative: overall impression from the article creates negative image of and feelings towards the minority; e.g. the minority presented as irresponsible, incompetent, or undeserving
 - Neutral: whereas positive or negative tone contains certain sentiments, inclination, or even direct opinion of the author, the neutral tone provides a matter of fact information without expressing or invoking any emotions
 - Mixed: articles containing ambiguous sentiments, sending both negative and positive messages

³⁵ As inspired by the works by Ter Wal et al. (2005), or Meeusen and Jacobs (2017) from the literature review.

5) Title Tone: same pattern as above, coded as either positive, negative, or neutral (mixed category not expected here due to relative shortness of the title)

6) Type of Title: assessing whether the title is sensational or not

-Sensational: title that attracts attention easily, contains sensation, drama, scandal, exaggerated claims; often followed by exclamation mark

- sensationalism defined as the power to stimulate media audiences' senses³⁶, trigger emotional reactions in audiences³⁷

-an example: "Brutal drama in the Roma settlement: Neighboring disputes were solved by a chainsaw!"

-Not sensational: not containing the characteristics of sensationalism

-an example: "The police addressed conflicts in settlements in Čakanovce and Jasovo" or "The website informs about the life of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak language"

7) Topic: a very short description (preferably one or few words long only) of the main topic(s) the article covers, such as education, criminality, employment, criminality, housing, etc.

-mark reoccurring topics with the same word(s)

8) Frame:

³⁶ Uribe and Gunter 2007

³⁷ Mott, 1962; Adams, 1978; Ryu, 1982

Diagnostic framing³⁸	<u>Problematic behavior frame</u>	-differences in life priorities, moral codes and hygiene standards; aggressive or violent behavior
	<u>Social status frame</u>	-low literacy, deficient education, or humiliating housing conditions
	<u>Value of Diversity</u>	-being different presented as good attribute; focused on the positives of cultural diversity
	<u>Not so different</u>	-similarities with majority population, minority differences not so important, same religion, habits; success stories of achieving higher education, finding a job
	<u>Socioeconomic threat</u>	-refers to scarce goods (jobs, housing, social support) competition over them; minorities undermining the economy; exploitation of social benefits

³⁸ Specifies a problem and attributes corresponding blame; fill only if present

	<u>Security threat</u>	-criminal behavior, terrorism, overrepresented minority crimes; diseases-threat of infecting
	<u>Cultural threat</u>	-perceived incompatibility of diverse cultures, religions, traditions and values; including overpopulation threat- concerns about numbers, threat of spreading, increasing numbers
	<u>Victimization</u>	-authorities blamed for insufficient integration; hostility, stereotyping and inequalities experienced by the minority, discrimination, extremism, prejudice; minority as victim, tragedies
	<u>Artificially created condition</u> ³⁹	-homosexuals can adopt homosexually; temporary psychological disease
	<u>Natural mistake</u> ⁴⁰	-difference is not temporal but born with; “mistake of

³⁹ Frame only for the LGBT group

⁴⁰ Frame only for the LGBT group

		nature,” a deficiency, disability
Prognostic Framing⁴¹	<u>Integration</u>	-suggesting policies directed at the integration of minority– such as investment into promotion of education and employment -a gradual removal of identified differences
	<u>Self-empowerment policies</u>	-emancipation, political representation, promotion of minority culture or religion, celebrating the diversity
	<u>Exclusion frame</u>	- complete refusal of the differences; further promotion of the segregated status, language restrictions; rejecting minority- sending back; against the presence of differences in public

9) Dehumanizing framing:

-yes: directly or indirectly portraying people as animals, deviant, savage, sick, dirty, mentally handicapped, less intelligent, amoral, inferior, criminal, or passive, mindless,

⁴¹ Identifies the solutions to the problem; fill only if present.

lacking of individuality, cold and emotionless; spreading diseases or being mentally or physically backward

-no: not such references

10) Type of Dehumanization:

-animalistic: direct or indirect comparisons to animals, deviant, savage, sick, dirty, mentally handicapped, less intelligent, amoral, inferior, criminal

-mechanistic: passive, mindless, lacking of individuality, cold and emotionless;

-contamination fears- spreading diseases

-backwardness- being mentally or physically backward

User Comments

11) Number of comments

12) Presence of Dehumanization in comments:

-yes/no

-same pattern as for articles

-going through discussion until identifying the first dehumanizing comment- in this case marking the discussion as dehumanizing

-if not finding dehumanizing comment- marking the discussion as not containing dehumanization

-in case of deleted comments- if dehumanization is still present in other non-deleted comments marking the discussion as dehumanizing; if there is no further dehumanizing comment- marking as N/A, given that maybe deleted comment contained dehumanization

13) Type of Dehumanization:

-animalistic/mechanistic/contamination/backwardness/other

For the smaller sample of 12 chosen conversations

-Coding Comments:

14) Civility:

-uncivil: comments “intentionally designed to attack someone or something and, in doing so, incite anger or exasperation through the use of name-calling, character assassination, offensive language, profanity, and/or insulting language”⁴²

-vulgar, offensive comments, denying people or groups their personal freedoms, stereotyping minorities, social groups

-deleted comments

-civil: comments not containing above described characteristics

15) Responsiveness:

-single reaction- comment posted as reaction to the article, not followed by any other reactions; not forming a thread

-starting comment- comment posted as reaction to the article, followed by other reactions; starting the thread of comments

-response comment- comment posted as response to other comments, as part of thread of comments

Coding Threads of Comments:

16) Civility of Thread:

-civil- made out of purely civil comments

-uncivil- containing only uncivil comments

-mixed- containing both civil and uncivil comments

⁴² Ksiazek 2018: p.652

17) Start of Thread

- started by civil comment
- started by uncivil comment

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