

Hate and Propaganda Media and Narratives in Montenegro



Hate and propaganda media and communication models



Complex social events, such as the coronavirus epidemic, elections and change of power in Montenegro, are reflected in the work of the media and the quality of their reporting.



The content is also disseminated through certain right-leaning Montenegrin online media established/edited by individuals recognized as anti-NATO activists.



The challenges, such as financial sustainability, the unregulated media market and lack of adequate self-regulation, became especially pronounced during these crises.



Pages on social networks with unknown organizations/structures financing them continuously release insults and hate speech against public figures in Montenegro.



Over the past few years, Montenegro has been facing a visible trend of a growing presence of offensive speech in the public space, which frequently escalates into hate speech, as well as the spread of disinformation and propaganda.



The deliberate creation and spreading of disinformation is not common practice for the established Montenegrin media.



Hate speech, disinformation and propaganda are created and released through media operating in the countries of the region that are read in Montenegro.



The comments sections of the established online media are becoming a space for spreading hate speech, conspiracy theories and disinformation by anonymous readers.

Hate narratives



The media and communication channels through which disinformation, propaganda and hate narratives are released in Montenegro are mostly the same regardless the target group – migrants, journalists, opponents of the authorities or advocates of important social issues.



The editorial content of the right-leaning media occasionally contain elements of hate speech. These media outlets nurture inflammatory rhetoric and incite additional spreading of hate speech, insults and conspiracy theories through unmoderated comments.



Hate speech is absent from the editorial content of established media. However, established online media are not successful in full adherence to professional standards. In fact, one of the serious challenges for the Montenegrin media is the inconsistent application of professional standards.



Unprofessional content is additionally disseminated via Facebook pages sharing the viewpoints and ideas of the right-leaning parties and interest groups.



Content in which different opinions of interlocutors are contrasted and which provide the public with a comprehensive overview of an important social or political topic has become a rarity in the Montenegrin media.



Civic activists, journalists and other public figures whose viewpoints are different from those advocated by these pages are labelled on these Facebook pages.



Readers' comments in the established online media frequently contain offensive speech against ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, and personal insults against political or ideological opponents of the anonymous commentators.



Responsible institutions largely remain passive in addressing dissemination of hate speech and disinformation in the media or on social networks. While arrests of those suspected of spreading disinformation are not acceptable, passive approach to the problem is also not adequate solution.

Media trust



Although most respondents in the 2021 opinion poll on media trust in Montenegro generally trust the media and consider that media outlets release correct and reliable information, they also express distinctly negative standpoints on the media.



The majority of the respondents follow television news daily and believe that this is the media type releasing correct and complete information.



Most of the respondents in Montenegro think that media does not contribute to the development of democracy or serve the public interest.



More than half of respondents in Montenegro use online media and social networks daily but there is distinct distrust for social media as a reliable source of information.



Respondents also believe that media outlets spread hatred, disinformation and political propaganda and that they are neither independent nor impartial.



There is large space for improving the work of the media in Montenegro and their adherence to professional standards as preconditions for strengthening public trust in the media.



Opinions are divided when it comes to trust the Public Broadcaster. The same percentage (48%) of respondents believe that this media outlet is delivering correct and complete information as those who have the opposite opinion.



Along with professional media, society needs also media literate citizens, capable of distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources of information. Both journalists and editors are recognized as important actors in promoting media literacy.

Policy recommendations



To produce a general societal response to the spreading of disinformation and propaganda, the Government must include the Media Literacy Strategy and the accompanying action plan in its Work Programme.



The established media, especially national television channels, should create professional and educational content that would serve as an adequate response to disinformation and conspiracy theories about the issues related to public health.



Institutions in charge of implementing the Media Law must take the necessary steps to enable the most efficient possible implementation of new regulations and resolve possible dilemmas.



Local media analysts and fact-checking platforms should continue to contribute to the fight against disinformation and propaganda and to strengthen their resources so that they can engage in more intensive monitoring and analysis of media content in Montenegro.



The divided media community should form a common self-regulatory body, which would address the examples of spreading hate speech, disinformation and propaganda and would promote professional standards.



Civic society organizations should continue activities in promoting media literacy, with an emphasis on the education system. CSOs should continue advocating the introduction of media literacy as a compulsory subject in all secondary schools in Montenegro.



Online media should take concrete steps to improve moderation systems of comment sections on their websites and social networks.



The synergy of CSOs and traditional media is the path towards improving media literacy and restoring public trust in the media.



Professional associations and professional media organizations should help in strengthening the capacities of the media for moderating comments, recognizing propaganda and providing fact-checking.



These are findings of the research on hate and propaganda models of media and communication in Montenegro and findings of the research on hate narratives and on media trust in Montenegro conducted, in 2020 and 2021, within the project "Resilience – Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey" in seven countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.