

HATE SPEECH TOWARDS ROMA CHILDREN IN DIGITAL SPACE: DISCOURSE ANALYSES OF USERS' COMMENTS

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The article explores new modes of textual articulation of long-existing discourses towards a specific segment of a racialized ethnic minority, the Roma children. Considering the interactive dynamic nature of digital media portals, which allows users to interact with media producers, algorithms, and themselves by posting comments, authors seek new ways to explain this phenomenon, which further endangers the precarious social position of the youngest Roma. The article shows how the hidden aspects of minority children's lives are fantasized in the texts (re)generated by the readers, who became producers of media messages through digital technologies. Besides centuries-old stereotypes and interpretations of selective everyday experiences about Roma children, the article points out how irresponsible and unethical journalism can encourage the emergence of hate speech towards a specific group of children already in a disadvantaged social position.

KEY WORDS: Roma children / discourse analyses / hate speech / digital media

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1. PUBLIC RECEPTION OF MEDIA'S REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN

Themes concerning children have drawn the attention of the media reports since the very beginning of modern mass communications. It is almost paradigmatic to remember that one of the first waves of moral panic in 17th century Europe was caused by reporting about the fate of a boy belonging to an ethnic minority. Šimon Abeles, a twelve-year-old Jew from Prague, was allegedly murdered by the hands of his father in 1694. This event sparked the public's attention in many European countries, quickly fanning flames of anti-Semitic hatred (Marek, 2014).

Nevertheless, public awareness is not only quickly occupied by the texts in which children are depicted as victims. The same is true for reports in which children are stigmatized as those who commit a crime, mainly when such behavior is attributed to members of minority groups. Some authors rightly underline that traditional and digital media are essential for promoting and protecting children's rights (Pavlović, 2018: 93). On the other hand, empirical research in this field clearly shows that media reports about children, concretely about child labor, remain highly sensationalist (Stevanović, 2017).

The development of digital technologies has shaped a new symbolic reality of communication, comparable only to McLuhans' "Gutenberg galaxy" (McLuhan, 2011). Unlike Gutenberg's contemporaries, who have witnessed the democratization of the literary public (people who are able to receive messages), we are witnessing the democratization of authorship (ability to produce messages) (Prodanović, 2019: 205-206). Summarizing debates about the relationship between literacy and the development of digital technologies, authors in this field underline that its ever-evolving nature, which introduces new features and daily updates, means that actors need to adapt to those changes in order to remain competitive and use new means of communication efficiently, responsibly and productively (Stepanović, 2019: 47). These dynamic changes offer researchers an opportunity to understand better how readers qualitatively comprehend messages that mass media conveys to them, which was mainly hidden until now.

In the most extreme cases, such discourse articulations may represent hate speech, which is defined by its ability to incite hatred or prejudice towards a specific group; as a verbal act that threatens hostility, violence, discrimination, or exclusion; finally, hate speech slanders and stigmatizes whole groups (Kolaković-Bojović & Paraušić, 2020: 36). Also, it is essential to note that the Legislative in Serbia (Action plan for Chapter 23) recognizes the need to protect the rights of vulnerable groups among children, including Roma children in particular (Kolaković-Bojović, 2018: 177-178). Again, authors who have analyzed empirical aspects of this

problem emphasize that the (self) regulation of media is not working properly and that the Press Council is too weak, and social media operators do not prevent and eliminate hate speech (Müller, 2017: 18).

Having this in mind, the theme of this article is not only directed discrimination or concrete acts of hate crimes, speech, verbal violence, bullying, etc. It is also dedicated to reproducing unfavorable discourse, which forms the basis for further discrimination. This article's focus is thus discourse that jeopardizes children's rights and interests in the digital media space.

Racism in the digital environment can assume many different forms. On the one hand, it may be manifested in direct communication between users by taking forms of racist verbal/textual performances. This type of verbal manifestation of racism will not be tackled here because of the unavailability of material suitable for analysis, which usually remains hidden in private correspondences on the Internet³. The second form includes the production of the racist discourse in the digital format, again similar to "conventional" printed media texts. Analyses of these media reports show the steady disappearance of explicit racism toward Roma (particularly racist content about the children) and the presence of more indirect ways to convey messages about one's ethnicity and stereotypes tied to it (Kubiček, 2014; Kubiček, 2015).

This form of digital racism will be the primary focus of this article. First, as some authors show, non-Roma are usually unaware of the realities of Roma's private lives, including lives inside the family and childhood (Richardson, 2021), because they lack substantial social contacts. Following this assumption, it is highly improbable that adult non-Roma and Roma children have such communication by using digital channels of communication or that Roma children are reading media reports about their community and posted comments. This imbalance of power in virtual space, on the other hand, is mainly manifested through expertise in the use of modern information and communication technologies and the situational advantage that the abuser has over the victim (Milićević, 2021: 42).

2. DIGITAL PRACTICES OF HATE SPEECH

Discourse analyses focus not only on the content of the texts but also on modes that people employ in social communication. Digital technologies allow individuals, as was mentioned before, to employ text(s) as a practice, a way to perform

³ Still, one such case of private communication between two minors (one of them was Roma), ended in tragedy in 2010 and led to a racist pogrom in the village of Jabuka (Kubiček, 2022).

social actions (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015: 10). Namely, they can use narratives about Roma children to criticize institutions or specific cultural values; they can express their grievances, ask for protection, and claim moral or symbolic superiority. With this in mind, hate speech is far more than a manifestation of blind enmity. There is always more to it than it catches the eye in the first place.

Comments and media reports are intrinsically connected. For example, if the author of an article stresses ethnicity, the commentator will likely refer to it. Digital practices are interdependent, usually generated due to joint actions of individuals and bridging the gap between the physical and virtual world (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015: 3). Interaction is a new quality of discourse performance in the digital space, crucial for its understanding. This aspect of digital discursive practices can be understood in almost classical Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981).

Some authors rightfully stress that perpetrators of digital violence – and racism is by definition closely tied with power struggles – usually remain anonymous. Also, once produced, such texts can remain present for a long time, which prolongs the victimization of individuals, or in this case, whole groups. Individuals who participate in such activities can remain unaware of the negative consequences they produce (Milićević, 2021: 42). This observation is hard to prove in our case study concerning the authors' anonymity and unavailability, but it leads to one crucial problem in the research. Namely, discourse analyses ought to explore different strategies for neutralizing racist verbal actions.

Also, those who use hate speech do so without fear of facing the consequences, despite legal mechanisms and specific policies of digital media which can prevent its promulgation (Kolaković-Bojović & Paraušić, 2020: 36).

3. ROMA CHILDREN AS SPECIFIC TARGET OF RACISM

Unlike the other stigmatized ethnic communities, whose members share the same dispositions regardless of their age or gender, Roma tends to be represented in more specific categories concerning mentioned dispositions. As Vesna Trifunović shows in the case of ethnic jokes, it is not unusual that Roma women and Roma children are presented as independent characters, sometimes being main actors in jokes on their own, unlike Jews, Germans, Banatians, Bosnian Muslims, etc. (Trifunović, 2009: 98). From the first literary depictions of the ancestors Roma, clear distinctions were made between age and gender groups. Still, these distinctions did not have an analytical function. Instead, they were used to reinforce general-

ly and profoundly negative perceptions, as Miguel de Cervantes describes in one of his novels: “Born of parents who are thieves, reared among thieves, and educated as thieves, they finally go forth perfected in their vocation, accomplished at all points, and ready for every species of roguery. In them, the love of thieving and the ability to exercise are qualities inseparable from their existence, and never lost until the hour of their death” (Cervantes, 1881: I). In the following centuries, many influential authors who wrote about Roma rarely failed to mention Roma children, representing them in a very unfavorable manner similar to Cervantes (Grellman; 1807; Lombroso, 1911). As in was already mentioned before, contacts between Roma and non-Roma are usually tied to specific places (streets, fairgrounds, marketplaces, taverns...) and concrete functions (crafts, entertainment, and other services). On the other hand, the private family life of Roma remains unknown to most non-Roma, who rarely visit their settlements and houses. Thus, it is not uncommon for prejudices to arise from this realm of unknown (Ćirić & Drndarević, 2019: 23).

Beyond these historically accumulated and deeply rooted stereotypes about Roma children, sociologists have described more realistic social conditions which affect their lives. Thus, it is crucial to understand these phenomena to explore further the discursive articulation of stereotypes and fantasies that form the basis of hate speech in the digital space.

First of all, in both sedentary and non-sedentary (now almost extinct nomadic groups), marriages were most commonly contracted between minors: girls around 12 to 13 years of age and boys who usually had 14 or 15 years. Only a tiny minority of better-off families would be able to leave their parents and establish a separate household. Others would live with their husbands’ parents as long as they were alive. Such households are deeply patriarchal, and the prevailing emotion among members is the expression of gratefulness for providing for life needs. Values concerning children also are transitionally different than in the surrounding society. Roma have the proverb that they love their children above all other things in life, which is a projection of clear indicators of one family’s success: having numerous, healthy and happy offspring. In this context, Roma families do not enforce strict discipline on their children in order to compensate for the harsh material realities (Mitović & Zajić, 1998: 60-61).

Studies about most deprived Roma children – those engaged in street economic activities⁴ – shows their striking exclusion from wider society. However, they

⁴ Which may include collecting secondary raw materials (paper, metal and plastics), as well as cleaning of car glasses, selling of petty goods or pauperly. Other psychically intensive services are not that common in larger urban centers. However, some older children do them as well: wood splintering, coal-carrying, clearing of basements and attics, or different kinds of help to green market sellers (bringing water, cleaning counters etc.).

are physically engulfed by it on the everyday level on a much larger scale and more visible than their non-Roma peers, who spend their time at home, in the kindergartens, at school and with their parents. Roma children's activities start early in the morning and last until around 5 pm. It is not hard to conclude that they do not have free time and cannot participate in important social activities like other children, which severely affects their life prospects. Both boys and girls collect secondary raw materials. If they are alone, they search in the vicinity of their homes, but if they go with their parents, the area they cover can be pretty significant. These children, in most cases, use some part of their earned money for their basic everyday needs. Life on the streets is harsh and unforgiving since it carries many hazards, such as injuries, compromised health due to weather conditions, and exposure to microorganisms. Concerning everything described until now, Roma children differ from their peers in many aspects (Simpson-Herbert et al., 2006: 69-78). Their social capital is lower than non-Roma, thus being deprivileged and ultimately more vulnerable to victimization (Pavićević & Bulativić, 2018: 296), which should be taken as the starting point in analyses of discursive representations of Roma children.

4. METHODOLOGY

The primary corpus of texts for discourse analyses are comments posted on digital media portals in Serbia concerning news about Roma children. Focusing on comments with elements of hate speech towards this particular segment of the minority population, only negative texts aimed directly at the children will be considered. Since such comments are relatively rare, a broader time frame must be covered, beginning from 2010 to this day (2022). That means that discourse analyses have total coverage of this particular type of digital text.

Still, most of the preliminary analyzed material shows that only a minor part of the comments are directed against children. Besides texts that show compassion for their fate or criticize institutions or society as a whole, most negative comments are aimed at parents.

A more detailed reading of data, which was done using search engines⁵, showed that most comments suitable to be included in the corpus come from

⁵ Applying both Google and portal search engines, authors searched for particular words. In the first phase of data collection, the phrase "Romani children" (*Romska deca*) was used. In the second phase, all articles tagged with the word "Roma" (*Romi*) were listed, and comments from those with children-related titles were included in the corpus.

two media portals: *Kurir* and *Telegraf*. Two more media portals, *Blic* and *Novosti*, contained one example, while most others (like *Politika* and *Danas*) did not have any data collection. That can mean that these portals have stricter policies of censoring hate speech or that their articles do not provoke malicious comments. For this reason, these two cases – *Kurir* and *Telegraf* – are chosen for they offer plenty of examples and rich qualitative data. Among them, only the most representative and illustrative examples are presented and analyzed in order to avoid repetition. Gathered material shows homogeneity, and the main themes are very compact and follow the same lines of argumentation. That made it easier to present them in the thematic order.

All comments are translated into English as precisely as they could be done. Some aspects of the original (writing mistakes, improper use of capital letters) could not be transcribed into presented English material. However, the original composition of texts and punctuation marks are followed closely.

5. DISCOURSE ANALYSES OF COMMENTS

5.1. Education

Children's education is the first topic that provokes hateful comments about Roma children. In one such text, reporting about the boycott of a school of non-Roma parents, one reader posted:

Let's ask the teachers in Padinska Skela how it is for them when the Roma who received free books interfere with their classes and other students, how it is when the same Roma curse them and attack them in front of other children and they can't do anything to them because they are protected like polar bears.⁶

The example clearly shows grievances towards “a system,” which is understood as unfair, yet the educational system is one of the places where Roma and non-Roma anecdotally meet. Also, the comment's author is arguing with the journalist, who does not approve actions of parents who segregate Roma children from their own. The interactivity of discourse performance can be noted in alleged hands-on experience, which is denied to the journalist and possibly to uninformed fellow readers. The actual content of presented stereotypes is well known: Roma (chil-

⁶ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/2989445-skandal-u-bujanovcu-roditelji-ne-zele-da-im-deca-idu-u-skolu-sa-romima-oko-25-djaka-i-dalje-van-klupa/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

dren) are supposedly aggressive and indecent, they jeopardize “normal” activities (learning) and are bestialized: compared with polar bears. A similar narrative can be found in the following example:

I work in a school that has Roma children. They always get free books and school accessories at the beginning that most of them don't even open. They get free snacks, excursions, and wardrobe packages ... Who forbids them to study? I can't say they don't have conditions.⁷

Here author informs the audience about her supposed professional life experience. Again, the notion that Roma children are unjustly favored (by getting free schoolbooks).

5.2. Begging

Begging is the theme that is the most extensively referred to in comments. As mentioned before, besides formal institutions such as schools, most readers come in contact with Roma in a very different, informal type of institution: the street. In the text from *Kurir* from 2014, which generated some of the most exemplar cases of hate speech, one reader is refereeing to his own everyday experience, with an emphasis on his physical bravery:

They want to spit on you and even throw stones at you, I stood in the protection of a girl at the station who pulled out 20 dinars and gave it to a little Roma girl, and then the others started attacking her and dragging her by the purse, and one.⁸

The stereotypical repertoire of this example shows the merging of begging, stealing, and aggressive and uncivilized behavior as the same thing. Still, there are topic quotations that emphasize only the begging, such as: *When you offer to buy them food, they refuse, they just want cash⁹, or Begging is their profession¹⁰.*

⁷ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/2964751-tviter-gori-zbog-rasisticke-objave-rom-kinja-nije-morala-da-uci-jer-je-srpska-deca-ugrozavaju-ucenjem-pa-mora-da-bude-ravnopravna/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

⁸ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/beograd/1165747/upozorenje-za-vozace-u-bg-romska-deca-se-bacaju-ispred-vozila-kako-bi-iznudila-novac/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

⁹ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/beograd/1165747/upozorenje-za-vozace-u-bg-romska-deca-se-bacaju-ispred-vozila-kako-bi-iznudila-novac/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

¹⁰ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/2891827/uzasno-deca-prosjaci-su-zrtve-kriminal-aca-malisani-na-ulici-ni-zakonom-nisu-zasticeni>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

The narration of personal experiences can assume bizarre forms, as can be seen in the following example:

In Bor, I saw a little gypsy (ciganče) run out, and quite risky, in front of a bus carrying workers just to draw attention to a rather scantily clad “lady” (about 50 years old) who was huddled at that moment and threw out her tattooed “drumstick”... I have to admit that the scene was extremely comical, although when I think about it ... God, save me!¹¹

Details about the place, irony, and dramatic depiction of the event convince readers about the authenticity of the anecdote. The author summons the narratives from Charles Dickens’s novels about begging children involved in prostitution and shows them as a part of a broader marginalized milieu. A similar narrative is presented in the following illustrative comment, which contains echoes from the quoted Cervantes novel:

These children are victims of their parents who use them for begging from birth and later learn and force them to steal and harass innocent citizens. And we are their victims.¹²

Personal experience in the following case is narrated in order to draw the moral boundaries between “Us” and “Them”:

And I always wanted to buy them pastries in the bakery, they never wanted to, they just want money, that’s what they tell. When I once bought three pastries for them (they were in a group), they threw them at my feet.¹³

The person who wrote the comment stresses her compassion showed for children and her benevolent nature (“I always want to buy”), contrasted with their alleged arrogance and ungratefulness.

While sitting and eating in the restaurant, these small and slightly older Roma are harassing you, blackmailing you, hanging over your head, counting bites, showing crippled arms and legs, etc.¹⁴

¹¹ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/1236736-decja-mafija-decaci-ubili-starca-opljackali-preko-300-gradjana-a-policija-im-ne-moze-nista-foto/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

¹² <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/1618442/maja-gojkovic-deca-na-ulici-su-zrtve-a-ne-prestupnici/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

¹³ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/srbija/355139/tuzba-protiv-mekdonaldsa-zbog-diskriminacije-roma/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

¹⁴ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/srbija/329249/mekdonalds-ispitacemo-slucaj-diskriminacije/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

The writer of quoted lines narrates his everyday experience in dramatic tones. Roma children are depicted as foreign and profoundly threatening to the pleasant scene of eating at the restaurant. This is achieved by addressing the public with “You,” implicitly meaning “Us,” who are trying to enjoy the meal, while “Them” poses an innate threat. Perceived injustice and strongly negative depiction of children are merged in the following example:

*If my child went somewhere naked and filthy, they would put me in a madhouse and him in a social institution! Right? That’s right!*¹⁵

“My child” here actually means “Our children” who are dressed and clean, while “We” are depicted as repressed and punishable by highly harsh measures.

5.3. Arraigned children marriages

Sensationalist reports that the patriarchal custom of child marriage is also a common trigger for elaborated hate speech. In the first example, the narrative is again used as a means of explaining generalized stereotypes about Roma children:

*Young Roma enters into sexual relationships. They get married young. The reason why young people get married? For a simple reason. You pay her, and she has to make that money. How? Well, theft, fraud, begging. Up to 18 years of age, she is not responsible for the committed acts because she is a minor.*¹⁶

Presented in the quasi-didactic form of questions and answers, the author reenacts the centuries-old narrative about supposed child slavery and employing children for criminal activities, which was mentioned before. “Us” and “Them” speech, with “normality” as a symbolic border between the two, can be noted in the following example:

*Well, her mother gave birth to her at 15 also, that is normal for them.*¹⁷

The final comment is also short yet proves to be very interesting for analyses:

¹⁵ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/srbija/328539/stop-za-male-rome-u-mekdonaldu/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

¹⁶ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/3103969-romski-obicaji-o-braku-sa-devojcica-ma-jaci-od-zakona/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

¹⁷ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/svet/3104263-devojcica-12-rodila-bebu-ocu-20-preti-za-tvor-njena-majka-je-postala-baka-sa-27-godina/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

*This should be punished. Parents to prison, and cubs to (juvenile detention) center. What is this, we are not in India and Pakistan.*¹⁸

The reader here does not try to inform others. Instead, he expresses his capacity to determine who should be punished. Again, we are witnessing the bestialization of Roma by using the word “cubs” (*mladunčad* in original) and strong Orientalist discourse in distancing from South Asian countries. The genetic connection between the countries of Roma ancestors’ origin and their present customs is a common strategy used to exoticize this minority.

5.4. Theft

Theft has already been registered as one of the most common stereotypical contents, sometimes inseparable from other similar depictions. In the following comment, thieving is referred to on its own:

*Does anyone ask how they can be such big thieves and how little they are??? Do you know what all these little ones do? How much they steal and cause damage, no one can do anything to them!!*¹⁹

The comment’s author raises moral panic by rhetorically posing a series of dramatic questions. The problem of minor theft is exaggerated and presented as an unsolvable problem. Supposed powerlessness or lack of will to solve this problem is also a common topic seen in most comments. Even more negative event narrated from personal experience is shared in the following example:

*I am personally afraid even of those little children!!! Three boys entered my shop, and each of them was holding a bag with glue. They were drugged and stole a cake and flew out!!!! And who should I complain to!!! Terrible, but everything is getting worse and worse...*²⁰

This comment is posted on the equally negative report titled *Monsters among us drug child beggars to earn money*. The media report itself is critical of adults

¹⁸ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/2982074-buduce-mlade-imaju-najvise-13-godina-i-prodaju-ih-za-700-evra-i-boks-cigareta-sklapanje-decijih-brakova-u-srbiji-ne-prestaje/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

¹⁹ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/srbija/329249/mekdonalds-ispitacemo-slucaj-diskriminacije/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

²⁰ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/952851/monstrumi-medu-nama-drogiraju-de-cu-prosjake-da-bi-zaradili/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

who exploit children, but it causes strong emotions of fear in some readers. It is crucial to note the dehumanization of this particular group of children, as the context in which they are referred to is abnormal – adults typically aren't afraid of children. Emphasis on drug use adds to the grotesque picture in someone's workplace. As in the previous comment, the author also complains about his powerlessness because supposed child thefts are tolerated. The following example is particularly representative because it offers a more elaborated explanation of the analyzed topic:

*She must have put her hand in her bag; what kind of racism (you are talking about), gypsies try to get away with that, they steal as soon as they open their eyes.*²¹

The reader of the media article problematizing racism and violence against the children claims to know what really has happened, based on stereotypes that Roma girls steal. Stylistic diminishing of the act of beginning (“putting the hand in the bag”) should be understood as a sarcastic contrast to what follows – the claim that Roma supposedly steals from the very moment they are born (as an innate category). From the perspective of discourse analyses of racism, this example is paradigmatic. One fervently denies the racist nature of others' actions while simultaneously – literally in the same sentence – exhibits strong racist beliefs.

5.5. Aggressiveness

As the theft, the supposed aggressiveness of the Roma children was an essential part of the racist discourse repertoire in many previous examples. It is generally an essential topic in racism as an ideology. Threats are even more dramatic when supposed aggression is aimed at the other children, especially ones belonging to our group:

*I should beg the “little Roma” to stop harassing my child and robbing his money, and if I react immediately, it is on a national basis.*²²

The perceived injustice of this position is alleviated by irony (“I should beg”), plus we again find strong criticisms of the concept of minority rights, or at least of manipulations done with it. Some readers openly question ethical media standards:

²¹ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2518503-sahranjen-spaljani-beskucnik-njegova-decanisu-dosla-na-sahranu-ali-je-procitano-njihovo-pismo/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

²² <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/srbija/329249/mekdonalds-ispitacemo-slucaj-diskriminacije/komentari>, accessed on 14.4.2022.

*A burned man was buried, right? I didn't notice
you wrote "gypsy" for a little vandal.*²³

The following more extended quote corresponds with the negative title of the media report *Child mafia – boys murdered an older man and robbed over 300 citizens, and police can't do anything*:

They are killing the elderly, attacking pregnant women and you can't do anything, no. I can't believe it's happening in our country, don't you see that these children are mindless and that they should be sent to a madhouse and keep them there forever.. it's terrible to watch children kill, they attack the street and you can't do anything, so I can't believe in something like that, so as an older person I'm not sure if I can leave the house anymore or ?? !!!²⁴

The quoted text almost recapitulates many previously noted contents in almost an apocalyptic tone. The same sensationalistic title provoked one more comment which contains elements of extreme hate speech:

*If they are not too young to do such things, they are not too young not to be responsible for them... So young and already a waste of society and should be removed from the streets.*²⁵

6. CONCLUSION

Specific digital discursive practices in the case of Roma children show somewhat similar patterns as “non-digital” racist practices concerning this segment of the Roma population. They are an object of representation, unable to respond and express themselves. Although they are ever-present in the Internet’s verbally articulated fantasies of anonymous authors, these readers know very little about these children. In a sense, these children were virtual beings for them even before digital technologies. That can be explained by the considerable divergence between the

²³ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2518503-sahranjen-spaljeni-beskucnik-njegova-decanisu-dosla-na-sahranu-ali-je-procitano-njihovo-pismo/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

²⁴ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/1236736-decja-mafija-decaci-ubili-starca-opljackali-preko-300-gradjana-a-policija-im-ne-moze-nista-foto/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

²⁵ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/1236736-decja-mafija-decaci-ubili-starca-opljackali-preko-300-gradjana-a-policija-im-ne-moze-nista-foto/komentari/svi>, accessed on 12.4.2022.

physical presence of these children in an everyday street setting on the one hand; and the gaping hole of symbolic exclusion and lack of any communication and feeling of solidarity with them. They have not become pictures or video content on the screens. On the contrary – they were perceived like that in the first place.

The second finding is even more important since it points out the responsibility of media in the digital age. Analyzed data is compact and straightforward in the depiction of children and categories attributed to them. People who use hate speech are not members of extreme groups (Marković, 2013; Marković, 2015) and speak from the position of “normal,” “ordinary” people. They do not employ elaborated racist theories, quasi-historical argumentation, narratives about conspiracies, etc. Instead, they call upon their everyday life experience, common sense, and general beliefs. Individuals who write hateful comments are incited to do so by sensationalist reports. In the most analyzed cases, they were actually provoked to comment on events they consider to be unjust, regardless of the involvement of children. That calls for greater responsibility for journalists, who can fan hatred even if they do not explicitly reproduce negative narratives. Analyzed data clearly shows that bare mentioning of stigmatized groups in sensitive and contested topics and events can be harmful.

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GOVOR MRŽNJE USMEREN PREMA ROMSKOJ DECI U DIGITALNOM PROSTORU: ANALIZA DISKURSA KOMENTARA KORISNIKA²⁶

U radu se ispituju novi načini tekstualne artikulacije već dugo postojećih diskursa prema specifičnom segmentu rasijalizovane etničke grupe – romskoj deci. S obzirom na interaktivnu dinamičku prirodu digitalnih medijskih portala, koji objavljivanjem komentara korisnicima omogućavaju interakciju sa kreatorima medijskih poruka, algoritmima i sa drugim korisnicima, autori rada traže nove načine da objasne ovaj fenomen, koji dodatno ugrožava nesigurni društveni položaj najmlađih pripadnika Roma. Rad pokazuje kako se prikriveni aspekti života dece pripadnika manjinskih zajednica fantaziraju u tekstovima koje (re)generišu čitaoci, koji su putem digitalnih tehnologija postali i proizvođači medijskih poruka. Pored vekovnih stereotipa i tumačenja selektivnih svakodnevnih iskustava o romskoj deci, rad pokazuje na koji način neodgovorno i neetičko novinarstvo može da podstakne pojavu govora mržnje prema određenoj grupi dece koja su već u nepovoljnom društvenom položaju.

KLJUČNE REČI: romska deca / analiza diskursa / govor mržnje / digitalni mediji

²⁶ Ovaj rad nastao je kao rezultat istraživačkog angažovanja prema Planu i programu rada Instituta za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja za 2022. godinu (na osnovu Ugovora broj 451-03-68/2022-14 od 17. 01. 2022 god.)