# Analysis of **Representation** of the **LGBTIQ+ Community in online media**

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CONTENTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The first longitudinal study of comments on media portals about LGBTIQ+ people covered the period from 2012 to 2024. The research involved coding of comments by human coders, as well as coding through machine learning and model training.
- To collect all content relevant to LGBTIQ+ topics from the three selected outlets, a specialized software for automatic data collection (web-scraping) from the public media pages has been developed.
- 3250 media articles were analyzed on three media portals, *Vijesti, Analitika,* and In4s. The analysis included almost 35000 comments. The number of likes and dislikes on this number of comments in the observed period is 360 749.
- Throughout the observed period, LGBTIQ+ topics were the most frequent on the media portal *Vijesti* (68%).
- A **decreasing trend** in publishing content about the LGBTIQ+ community in the observed period is noticeable (in 2024, only 146 articles were published on these three media portals).
- Most media articles, nearly half, have been published in the Politics and Society section on media portals, while users of media portals showed the most interest in articles on LGBTIQ+ topics in this section (average number of comments on articles in this section was 15, and average number of views was 3371).
- Readers left at least one comment on two-thirds of articles (66%), while the remaining third of articles (34%) had no comments (an average of 11 comments can be found on articles on LGBTIQ+ topics).
- The public discussion in the comments under LGBTIQ+ articles is **extremely negative.** The linguistic expression of the comments **is negative in approximately 80% of cases.**
- The analysis indicated several peaks in the number of comments: 2013 on the eve of the first Pride Parade in Budva, then 2018, the year of the completion of work on the Law on Same-Sex Life Partnership and the organization of public debates, 2021, media reporting and monitoring of cases of attacks on LGBTIQ+ people. The jump in the number of comments on the media portal In4s 2021 mainly relates to topics from Serbia and the announcement of the adoption of a similar law on life partnerships as in Montenegro.
- The largest share of insults, violence, and ridicule was recorded on the In4s portal (26%), then *Vijesti* (23%) and *Analitika* (20%).
- On average, comments on traditional values, morals, and religions received

the most likes (~10), while comments of an offensive or violent nature received the fewest (~4). Interestingly, the highest number of dislikes was also found in the category of traditional values, morals, and religions (~5), suggesting that comments of this kind can have a polarizing effect on other portal readers.

- **A significant decrease in the frequency of insults and calls for violence** in comments. In 2024, the lowest share of this type of comment was measured in the observed period.
- **A significant increase in general comments, as well as comments from the category that includes politics** (parties, politicians, institutions), alleged lobbying (propaganda) efforts, and censorship in the media. In 2024, a record share of this group of comments was measured.
- Over the years, **criticism** directed at the LGBTIQ+ community **has moved from the category of explicit insults, non-acceptance, and attacks to the categories of politics, ideology, and censorship.**

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this report is to present the findings derived from a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of understanding public attitudes, media visibility, and community sentiment towards LGBTIQ+ issues in Montenegro from 2012 to 2024. This analysis aims to present research findings in a scientifically rigorous yet accessible manner, accompanied by recommendations for improvement in the area of media reporting and regulation.

The problems of negative media representation and hate speech in comments towards the LGBTIQ+ population have been identified, as well as the lack of research that would encourage changes in both the media and in the formulation of data-based public policies. Precisely, in the field of data, our research makes a significant contribution with a comprehensive analysis of media articles and comments and covers the period from 2012 to 2024. Our interest in media articles and especially in comments comes from understanding the context in Montenegro and the negative sentiment towards the LGBTIQ+ community. The fact that discrimination is particularly pronounced on the internet is also evidenced by the data that immediately after the adoption of the Law on Same-Sex Life Partnership, 219 reports were filed to the Ombudsman office in just three days regarding insults, threats, and hate speech on the internet. In addition, the largest number of reports of discrimination based on sexual orientation, registered with the Police Directorate, are related to comments made by citizens on social networks. In 2018, there were 94 such reports (out of a total of 102 criminal reports filed for discrimination based on sexual orientation), while in 2019, this number was 87 reports (out of a total of 100 criminal reports filed for discrimination based on sexual orientation).[1] According to the research conducted by the Center for Monitoring and Research (CeMI), every second Montenegrin citizen still expresses homophobic views, and recent surveys show that around 60% of the population holds "conservative" negative attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ people. Such attitudes and incidents of hate speech are inherently related to the way LGBTIQ+ people are framed in media articles' comments. As noted in the Strategy for the Improvement of the Quality of Life of LGBTI Persons in Montenegro (2024–2028), **media outlets - particularly online portals - frequently publish discriminatory and offensive content** that fosters hostility and hatred toward LGBTIQ+ persons.

[1] „Jednakost LGBTIQ osoba pred zakonom", Center for Monitoring and Research, available at: https://cemi.org.me/storage/uploads/tTM6KUfO7r9BJfr02OO0Sa5knldOc12qpRIwk4yS.pdf.

The attitude towards the LGBTIQ+ community is based on prejudice, further reinforced by conservative social attitudes, patriarchy, and shortcomings in the education system. Prejudices grow into social distance, as indicated by the presented data, which together lead to the active expression of hatred that is dominant on the internet. Although there are analyses of the media presentation of LGBTIQ+, which are mainly of interest to civil society organizations, detailed longitudinal research into comments on media reporting, with what tone, in what context, and with what reactions from readers, has not been conducted. This indicates both a lack of information for those who should shape media content, but also a lack of insight for designing targeted campaigns that address specific problems. It enables biased and inaccurate reporting to persist without public scrutiny and prevents the development of effective interventions, such as journalist training or media guidelines, as the scope and nature of the problem have not been fully documented. In other words, filling this gap is a cornerstone for smarter, targeted action to improve LGBTIQ+ representation and counter prejudice.

When the described state of society is reflected through online commenting, we get triggers for online violence, digital violence, discrimination, and disparagement. Additionally, this situation is an additional indicator of the importance of the work of the entire social community to strengthen media and digital literacy. Media and digital literacy are key tools for responsible behavior of citizens in the online space. Media and digital literacy are prerequisites for understanding the serious consequences of easygoing commenting that contains calls for violence, discrimination, and hate speech - acts that are punishable by law. The Media Literacy Index ranks Montenegro 26th out of 40 countries.[2] Although it has improved somewhat in this measurement, Montenegro is in the third cluster, where vulnerability to disinformation remains pronounced. The index shows a geographical pattern in which the most advanced countries are in Northern and Western Europe, including Estonia. In a broader context, this state of play in comments is part of the general state of media and digital literacy. This is indicated by the large number of negative comments that still exist online, which "bypass" the moderation of comments on media portals and continue to victimize individuals and entire groups.

The relevant time period of 12 years was covered by designing an innovative methodology that included machine learning and model training. The analysis included over 3,250 media articles on three portals in Montenegro - *Vijesti, Analitika, and In4s.* Approximately 33,000 comments were processed and analysed for this time period. Additionally, in addition to the previous arguments about the

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2 Index available at: https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Media-Literacy-Index-2026.pdf.

importance of analyzing comments on media portals, their "popularity" and readership are also evidenced by the mapped number of likes/dislikes on comments, which totaled 360,749 in the observed period. In the next part of the analysis, we will present an excerpt from the methodology for more details.

EXCERPT FROM THE METHODOLOGY[3]

Our methodology enables the identification of data-driven insights into the evolution of public discourse regarding LGBTIQ+ rights and the public's response, as reflected in comments and engagement metrics. This research is grounded in a corpus comprising online articles and corresponding user comments selected from major Montenegrin media portals. To ensure the representativeness of our findings, we selected three media outlets - *Vijesti, Analitika, and In4s* - each with over a decade of online publishing experience, encompassing a range of ideological perspectives within Montenegro. The digital archives of these sources date back to 2012, enabling analysis of variations in tone, framing, and audience engagement in relation to each outlet's political orientation, as largely perceived by the public.

To collect all content relevant to LGBTIQ+ topics from the three selected outlets, we **developed a specialized software for automatic data collection** (web-scraping) from the public media pages. The most crucial task at this point is defining the universe of "relevant articles". We decided to define relevant articles based on keyword-based[4] search criteria.

Once a list of relevant articles from three media outlets was composed, designated software was instructed to collect the following data to be collected: **Title, Lead, Full article text, Author (if available), Publication date, Article length (word count), and the number of comments.** After the article-related data was collected, the software moved to collecting corresponding data from the comments section. Each comment associated with an article is collected and stored in a separate database, capturing both the content and structure of online discourse. Comment-related data includes: **Comment text, Status** (original comment or reply), **Timestamp, Commenter's pseudonym, and Number of likes/dislikes.**

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3 The detailed methodology is part of the project documentation and can be accessed by contacting the Center for Monitoring and Research
4 "LGBT", "LGBTIQ+", "homosexuality", "intersex", "Montenegro Pride", "Pride", "gay", "lesbian", "queer", "same-sex partnership/communities", "transgender", "law on gender self-determination", "Association Spectra", "Queer Montenegro", "LGBT forum Progress".

Once the dataset was assembled, we began a two-phase classification process consisting of **manual coding, machine learning, and model training.** Manual coding was conducted by three trained human coders.[5] The dataset used for training the model consisted of 25% (9.000) randomly drawn sample from the population of comments.[6] This was done to foster equal distribution across time and news portals, which made sure manual labeling was not biased towards a certain period or audience. To foster unbiased labeling of the data, before being given to coders, each comment was "standardized" in a way that makes it impossible for the coder to know from which portal or year the comment is. The first task was dedicated to **coding semantics.** Coders were tasked with labeling where a comment stands on a spectrum between affirmative and negative wording.[7] Coding scheme regarding sentiment included six potential labels: *positive* (tone or verbiage that indicates an affirmative stance or support for LGBTIQ+ community, rights, identity, etc.); *neutral* (informative or descriptive comment written without taking any stance); *negative* (hostile, dismissive, or discriminatory tone or verbiage when discussing LGBTIQ+ community, identity, rights, etc.); *unclear* (textual content that does not contain any sentiment-related wording or it is unclear to which category it belongs); *missing data* (comment is missing or lacks any content, either an empty, deleted comment, or a URL, etc.).

The second task was focused on the comment's theme or argumentation. Each comment was classified into one of the 18 themes, which were part of seven distinct groups of arguments listed below. Grouping was conducted in a way that fostered homogeneity within groups and heterogeneity between groups:

1. **Human rights and discrimination:** appeals to (1) equality, legal protection, (2) human progress, modernization, (3) call for better public policies, protests,

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5 The coders were provided with a detailed coding scheme, including examples, and were trained for the task. Manual coding began with a pilot phase, during which each coder annotated 300 comments. Following this phase, the coding scheme was refined to better distinguish borderline or ambiguous cases in which differing interpretations among coders had emerged.

6 This included removing any identifiable data (links, article ID, etc.) as well as transforming the way text is published and stored. For example, *In4s* is largely considered the most conservative of the three news portals included in our study. It is also the only news outlet that is, by default, published on Cyrillic. This posed a danger of coders (sub)consciously perceiving all Cyrillic comments as more conservative than they are.

7 In this task, coders were instructed to pay attention to wording and language structure, not the point comment was trying to make. This means that a comment is labeled as having negative sentiment if, for instance, uses derogatory terms regardless of whether it is directed towards LGBTIQ+ community or their critics. This should be taken into account when discussing results since it is a better measure of negativity/positivity of public debate surrounding LGBTIQ+ community, rather than being narrowly interpreted as negativity towards LGBTIQ+ community.

petition or (4) reference to personal experience with the LGBTIQ+ communi-ty or issues.

2. **Nature, biology and "normality":** appeals to (5) nature, biology, genetics, or references to (6) physical or mental health.

3. **Traditionalism and religion:** references to (7) religious doctrines, church and morality, (8) traditional, culture, social norms, or (9) family values or safety.

4. **Politics, lobbying, and attention:** references to (10) political parties, leaders, political ideologies or strategy, (11) lobbying efforts, censorship or media bias, (12) or calls to ignore certain issues or to redirect attention to a different topic.

5. **Ridicule:** comments containing (13) ridicule, satire or humor.

6. Insults, or call for violence: comments using outright (14) insults or (15) call for or support violent acts.

7. **General and other:** comments for which it is (16) impossible to determine the dominant argument or theme, (17) is not written on a topic of LGBTIQ+ issues, or (18) are missing.[8]

In our approach to **machine learning and model training,** we used manually coded data as our training set. We developed a supervised machine learning model to classify the remaining 80% of the data.[9] By learning from examples with labelled tones—such as positive, neutral, or negative—the model was able to identify similar patterns in language and framing. In its next stage, it applied this knowledge to classify the rest of the content into specific, predefined cat-egories (themes) based on those similarities. This strategy made it possible to efficiently sort the entire dataset while using strict metrics to ensure accurate

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8 Coders were instructed that in case that comment contains multiple arguments or themes to label it based on their impression which theme is dominant or central, instead of assigning "unclear" label.
9 Text preparation for this phase included replacing special characters (č, ć, ž, š, đ, ś, ź), removing stopwords (i, u, je, se, na, po, li, etc.), and replacing emoticons. The latter was particularly important to handle properly since emojis (e.g., 😝 🙃 🙏 🌈) provide significant context especially when determin-ing the sentiment of a given context. Each emoticon was classified to a particular emotion it signifies (laughter, anger, disgust, etc.) and replaced with corresponding word tag that indicates to intended emotion.

machine-based labelling.[10]

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10 Given our approach, quality of machine-based labeling is determined by evaluating reliability (consistency) and *validity* (precision) of the labeled data. Classification of sentiment reached more than satisfactory level with observed agreement between coders reaching 75%, which is significantly higher than by expected based on chance (54%). Based on this, Fleiss's Kappa score is 0.65 which is within a substantial agreement category. With respect to themes, coders were tasked with classifying comments into seven groups of arguments. Observed agreement was significant and substantial (75% observed agreement, Fleiss's Kappa 0.63). These reliability scores are satisfactory, especially having in mind the nature of labeled text. Namely, comments often lack structure and often tend to include number of arguments for or against LGBTIQ+ rights. This affects coding reliability and validity since one coder my put more emphasize on one part of the comment while different coder may focus on different dimension of the same comment. In addition, it is by the design of our methodology that not all categories are perfectly mutually exclusive. For instance, insults or call for violence, while a separate theme, are compatible and often baked into other topics, which additionally affects levels of between coder agreement. Our supervised machine model (Support Vector Machine) model classified data with satisfactory precision. Average Balanced accuracy across group of themes was 0.73, while No Information rate was at 0.41, with Kappa score of 0.61.

ANALYSIS OF MEDIA ARTICLES

The final population of relevant media content on LGBTIQ+ topics contains about 3,250 articles from three portals (*Vijesti, Analitika, and In4s*). The analyzed time frame spans 2012 to 2024.

Number of Articles Published per Year
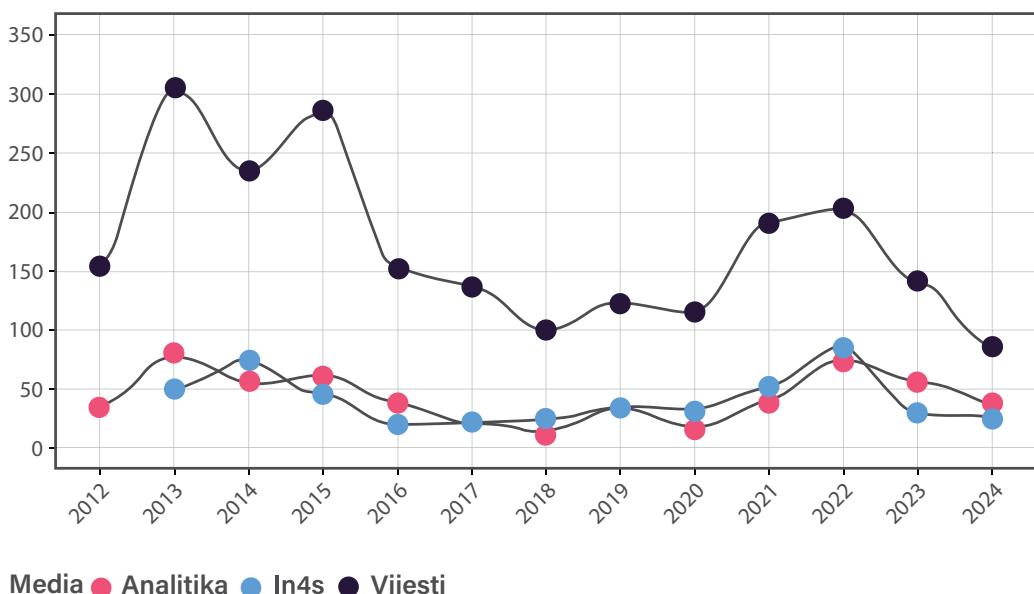
Graph 1. Number of published media articles by year

There is a significant difference in the number of published articles on LGBTIQ+ topics by year on the three media portals observed (*see Graph 1*). The graph indicates that the topic's **frequency oscillates over time,** which is natural given the complex political and social context in Montenegro over the observed 12-year period. Also, a **decreasing trend** in publishing content about the LGBTIQ+ community in the observed period is noticeable. For example, 2024 was the year with a record low number of articles on this topic (146 in total). As already mentioned, throughout the observed period, LGBTIQ+ topics were the most frequent on the media portal *Vijesti*, but over time, the difference decreased due to a significant decrease in frequency on the portal Vijesti as well. For example, in 2013, there were approximately 5 times more texts on Vijesti than on the other two

portals, while in 2024 this ratio was approximately 2 times. The number of texts on LGBTIQ+ had its peak in 2013, which coincided with the organization of the very first Pride Parade in Montenegro (Budva). The same applies to the number of comments on LGBTIQ+ texts (see Graph 6), which we use as a measure of public interest.
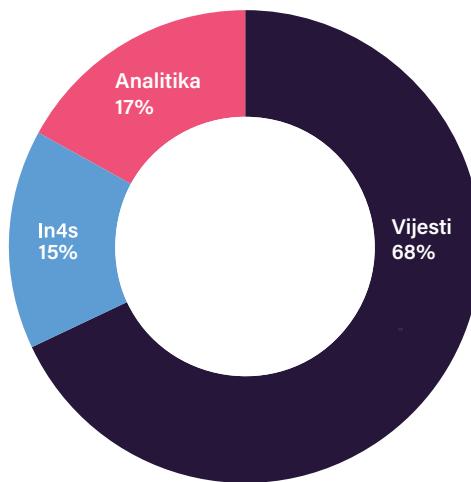
Graph 2. Share of analyzed media in the total number of analyzed media content

Graph 2 shows that the predominant number of articles related to the LGBTIQ+ population in the observed period were published on the media portal *Vijesti* (68%). It should be emphasized here that due to this distribution, the results obtained much more closely reflect the character of the narrative on LGBTIQ+ topics on this portal compared to the other two.

The analysis also included **sections** in which LGBTIQ+ topics were placed on the observed media portals. Based on the analysis of these sections, we categorized the sections into three larger groups, for easier analysis: *Politics and Society; Region and World; Culture, Entertainment, and Sports.*
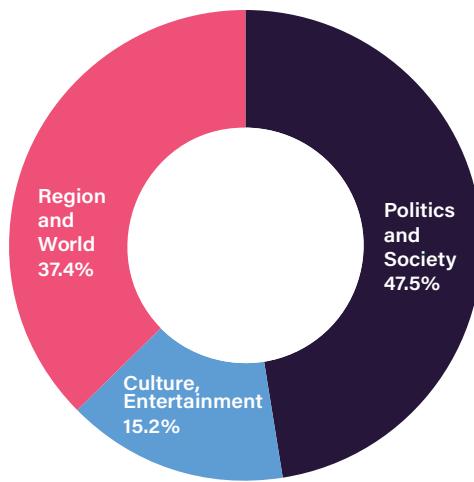
Graph 3. Share of the sections in all analyzed media articles

The majority of media articles, nearly half, are categorized under Politics and Society. This distribution should not be regarded as a significant determinant, considering that most pertinent social and political issues - including activist statements, proposed legislation, columns, and event announcements - are typically found within this section. Notably, over one-third of the topics appear in the World and Region section (mostly news from the region, Russia, Hungary, Poland and the law changes in those countries), which predominantly covers matters unrelated to Montenegro but related to LGBTIQ+ rights.

On average, users of media portals showed the most interest in articles on LGBTIQ+ topics that were found in the Politics and Society section. The average number of comments on articles from this section is around 15, while in the Culture, Entertainment, and Sports section (mostly news about LGBTIQ+ musicians and sportsmen and sportswomen), it is 9, and in the Region and World section, slightly below 5 comments. (*Graph 4*)

The situation is similar to article views (*Graph 5*). The average number of views of LGBTIQ+ articles by section, based on available data, is 3371 in Politics and Society, Region and the World 1,828, and Culture, entertainment, and sports 980 views on average. The difference to be noted here is that although articles in the Culture, entertainment, and sports sections were more commented on, they were viewed significantly less than articles from the World and Region section.

Average Number of Comments per Article
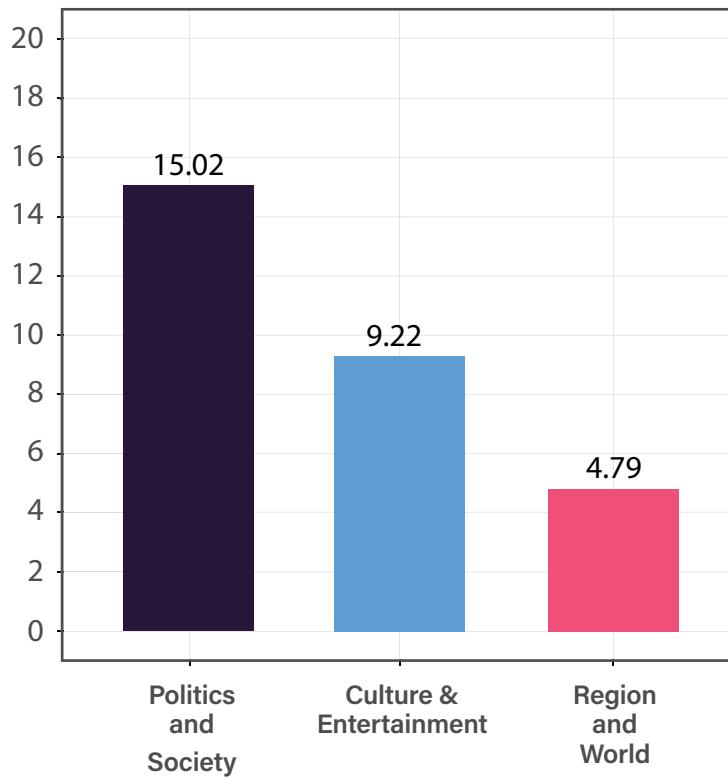
Graph 4. Average number of comments by section

Average Number of Views per Article
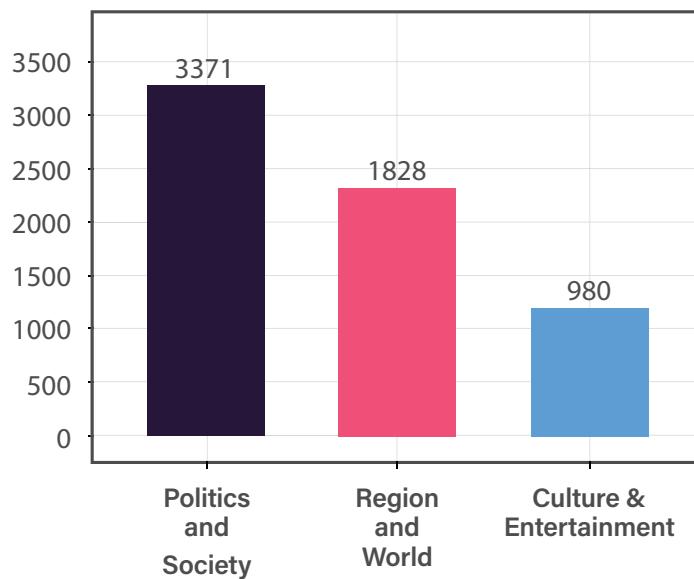
Graph 5. Average number of article views per section

ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS

In total, over 34,877 comments were collected in the observed period. As we have already mentioned, the number of published media articles on the three monitored portals is also followed by the distribution of comments on these portals. Most of them are on the portal *Vijesti,* which also published the most articles on LGBTIQ+ topics in the observed period. The largest number of comments occurred in 2013, on the eve of the organization of the first Pride Parade. oda, u prosjeku samo 12% komentara imalo je pozitivan ton (jezički izraz),

Average Number of Comments per Article
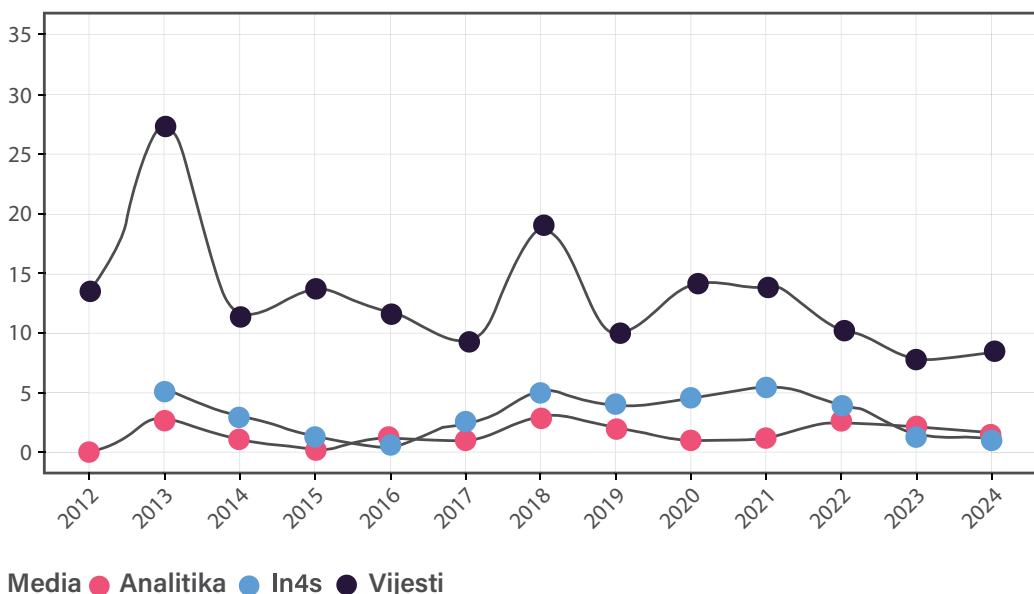
Media ● **Analitika** ● **In4s** ● **Vijesti**

Graph 6. Average number of comments per article per year

When it comes to comments, readers left at least one comment on two-thirds of articles (66%), while the remaining third of articles (34%) had no comments. On average, 11 comments can be found on articles on LGBTIQ+ topics. It is essential to note that the number of comments is not normally distributed, as a large proportion (more than one-third) of articles do not have any comments, while a smaller number of articles receive hundreds of comments. Graph 6 shows several peaks in the number of comments. These are 2013, when the first Pride Parade was organized, and 2018, when the adoption of the Law on Same-Sex Life Partnership in Monte-

negro was announced, and public consultations were organized. There is also an evident increase in the number of texts in 2021, which is a result of the number of attacks on LGBTIQ+ people from the end of 2020 and media coverage of cases and reporting during 2021. For the analysis of media reporting, it is important to note that the number of comments on the In4s portal peaked not in 2018, when Montenegrin law was discussed, but in 2021, when the adoption of a similar law in Serbia was announced. From all LGBTIQ+ related articles published this year on In4s, more than half were about Serbia. A series of articles in that period were published, including the opinion of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the defense of traditional values, family health, and legal defenses of the Constitution.
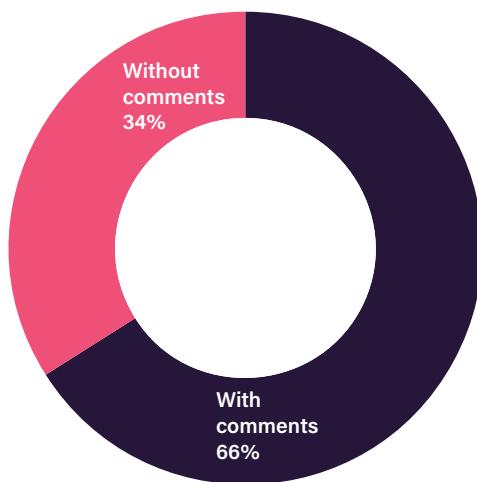
Graph 7. Share of articles per number of comments

The distribution of comments within the database is predominantly skewed towards Vijesti, accounting for approximately 90% of the total entries. Of the initial dataset, 1,936 comments were removed by administrators (5.5%) likely due to violations of commenting guidelines regarding hate speech, insults, and the promotion of violence. Deleted comments were replaced by a note "deleted by administrator".

Considering that many undeleted comments also meet criteria of hate speech, it is reasonable to infer that those deleted were exceptionally explicit. Media portals Vijesti and Analitka have "Terms and conditions of commenting" published on their websites, while In4s within the impressum only states that it is not responsible for the content of the readers' messages, as well as their comments,

and that the content of the messages does not reflect the opinion of the editors. Vijesti and Analitika expressly prohibit the publication of hate speech, calls for violence, discrimination, homophobic comments (Analitika), violation of citizens' privacy, and misrepresentation, stating that such comments will be deleted (or the administrator will attempt to do so - in the case of Analitika). Efforts to enhance media self-regulation have been initiated at various periods; despite the establishment of the first Code of Ethics and attempts to form self-regulatory bodies over two decades ago, media organizations remain vulnerable to both political and commercial pressures. This situation can significantly influence the spread of inaccurate, unverified information, the manipulation of facts, raising tensions, intolerance, discrimination, and hatred, all we could observe happening within the comments. Research[11] shows that a significant number of citizens still read comments (mainly on posts of portals on social networks), and that almost no one has ever reported a comment containing hate speech or calls for violence.

When we talk about the **sentiment of comments,** the general conclusion is that the public discussion in the comments under LGBTIQ+ articles is **extremely negative.** More precisely, the linguistic expression of the comments is negative in approximately 80% of cases. However, it is important to note that the identified negative sentiment in the comments is not directed only at the LGBTIQ+ community. Although the largest number of comments "target" the LGBTIQ+ community, a significant number of comments expressing solidarity with LGBTIQ+ people and standing in their defense were also negative in the sense that they implied insulting people who, for example, physically attacked a member of the LGBTIQ+ community. In addition, in some comments it is not clear to whom the comment itself refers, although it is clear from its content that it is a negative comment.

The dominantly negative tone of commenting on LGBTIQ+ topics applies to all portals, but it is possible to rank portals by the intensity of negative comments. The In4s portal has a slightly higher share of negative comments, then Analitika and finally Vijesti. The general sentiment of the comments, however, changed over time. In the first two years of the observed period, on average, only 12% of comments were positive in their sentiment (linguistic expression), while in the last two years, this average increased to 23%. This is important to highlight and represents a significant input for shaping communication strategies primarily of civil society organizations (CSOs), but also of public administration towards citizens on the topic of LGBTIQ+ rights. This orientation should be the basis for

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11 „Samoregulacija u Crnoj Gori: Izazovi i prilike", DAMAR, OEBS, Ministarstvo kulture i medija, 2024, available at: https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/9/a/578869.pdf.

strategic cooperation between CSOs, the Government and the media. The role of the media through this type of cooperation is crucial and has the potential to encourage changes in the media itself and strengthen the commitment to a media space free of hatred, discrimination and calls for violence.

For those comments for which direction (pro- or against- LGBTIQ+) could be determined, we identify some variation across media platforms and time. Namely, the largest share of comments that are identifiably pro-LGBTIQ+ could be found on Analitika (32%), Vijesti (17%) and smallest share on In4s (2%)[12] (Graph 8). More interestingly, we see diverging developments over time. Namely, while overall, public discussion in the comments section surrounding LGBTIQ+ issues is becoming somewhat more positive (or civil), we should be less optimistic regarding the share of identifiably pro-LGBT comments, which decreased in the last couple of years (Graph 9).

Share (%) of pro-LGBTIQ+ comments
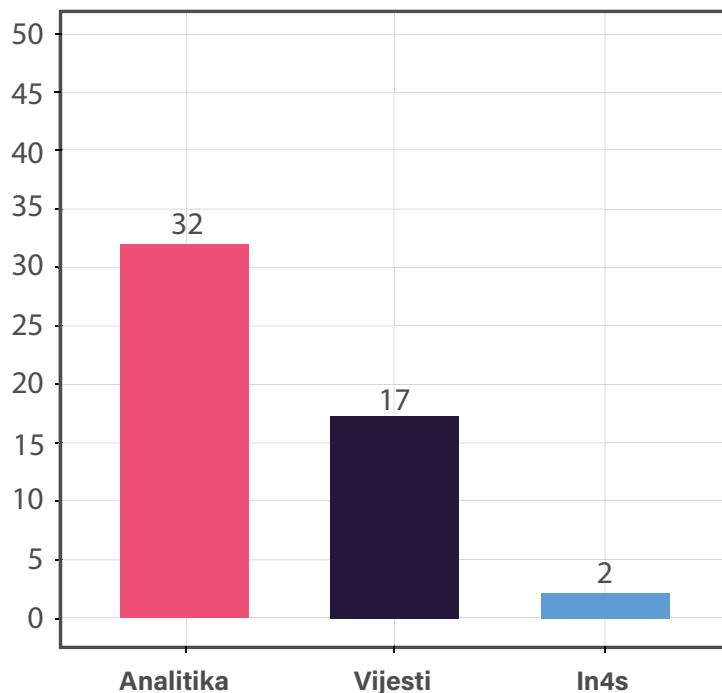
Graph 8. Share (%) of pro-LBTIQ+ comments

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12 It is important to note that a significant number of the remaining comments are negative, while a certain number are not clearly addressed. This means that the conclusion that the remainder of this number is anti-LGBTIQ+ is partially correct, considering this number of cases with comments for which it is not possible to determine who they are addressed to.

Share (%) of comments

● **affirmative of LGBTIQ**   ● **positive sentiment**
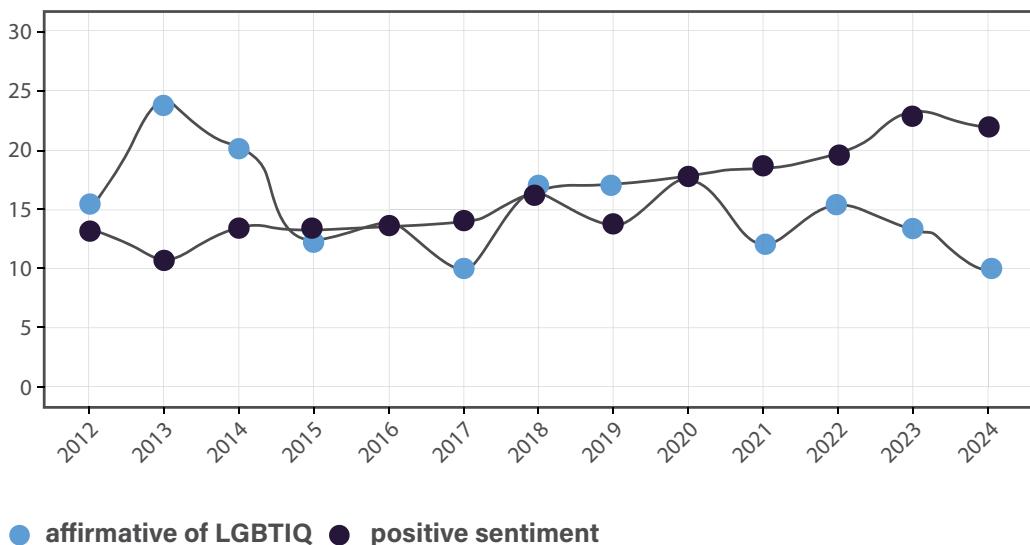
Graph 9. Percent of comments with positive sentiment/pro-LGBT per year

We can gain a more concrete insight into the narrative related to LGBTIQ+ topics in Montenegro based on the analysis of the topics that dominate the comments (see Graph 10). The largest share of comments falls into a category of General, which comprises comments that express support or criticism of the LGBTIQ+ community or issues, but without expressing a clear reasoning on why that is the case. From comments for which theme could be identified, the more dominant group of themes included: Politics, lobbying and censorship, Insults and violence, and Traditionalism and religion. The less common group of themes included arguments regarding Rights, discrimination, progress and Nature, normality, and biology. Also, the least frequent category was ridicule and humor. However, with respect to that, we should note that this distribution was affected by our coding scheme. Namely, humor and satire in general are extremely frequent in comments, but they so frequently reached the point of insult that they were recorded by another category.

- Politics, lobbying and censorship (~20%);
- Insults and violence (~19%);
- General (without a dominant topic) (~18%);
- Traditionalism (morality) and religion (~15%);

- Human rights, discrimination and progress (~12%);
- Nature, normality and biology (~10%);
- Ridicule and humor (~6%).
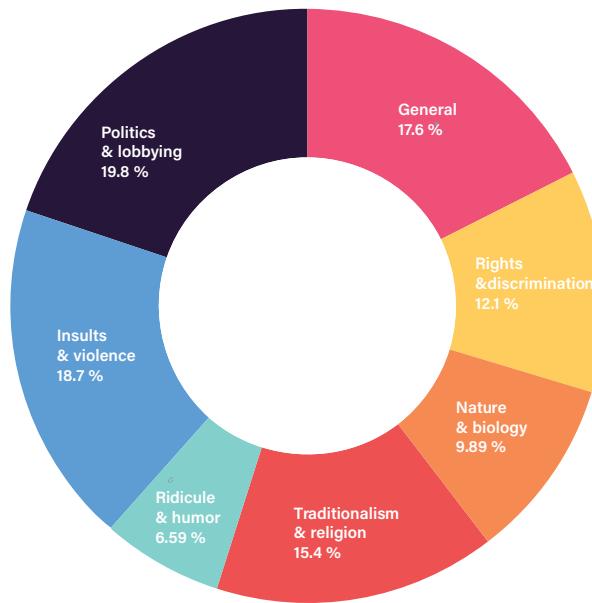

Graph 10. Main topics in the comments

With respect to themes, we observed certain differences in the size of these categories across portals (see Graph 11). Somewhat expectedly, the largest share of insults, violence, and ridicule was recorded on the In4s portal (26%), then Vijesti (23%) and Analitika (20%). On the other hand, the topic of traditionalism and religion was the most frequent on the Analitika portal (25%), In4s (16%), and only then Vijesti (14%).
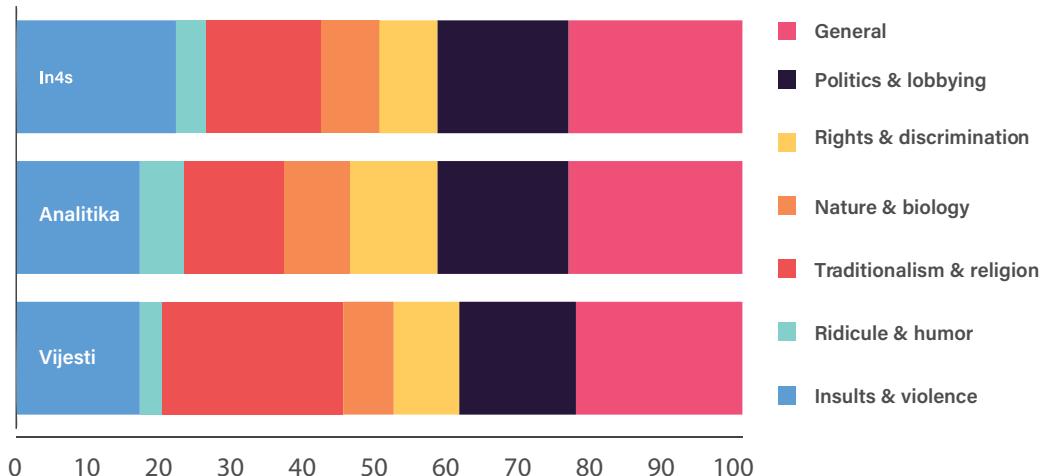
Graph 11. Share of themes by media portal

Analysis of the content of the comments indicates a key difference and points out the polarization not just in the media sector and editorial policies, but within the citizens' perception of that media according to their political views as well. Bear in mind that we already discussed that, on average, comments on Analitika were more frequently pro-LGBTIQ+ than on, for instance, In4s. Therefore, while comments on both portals fall into the topic of traditionalism or debate violence, they are very different. For instance, Religious topics on the Analitika portal predominantly contain critical content towards church dignitaries in relation to the LGBTIQ+ population, with regular references to reported cases of sexual harassment by the clergy. On the other hand, the content on the In4s portal from this category was more focused on preserving family values, morality, and honor.

Share of Theme in Population (%)

Teme ● **Insults & violence** ● **Politics & lobbying**
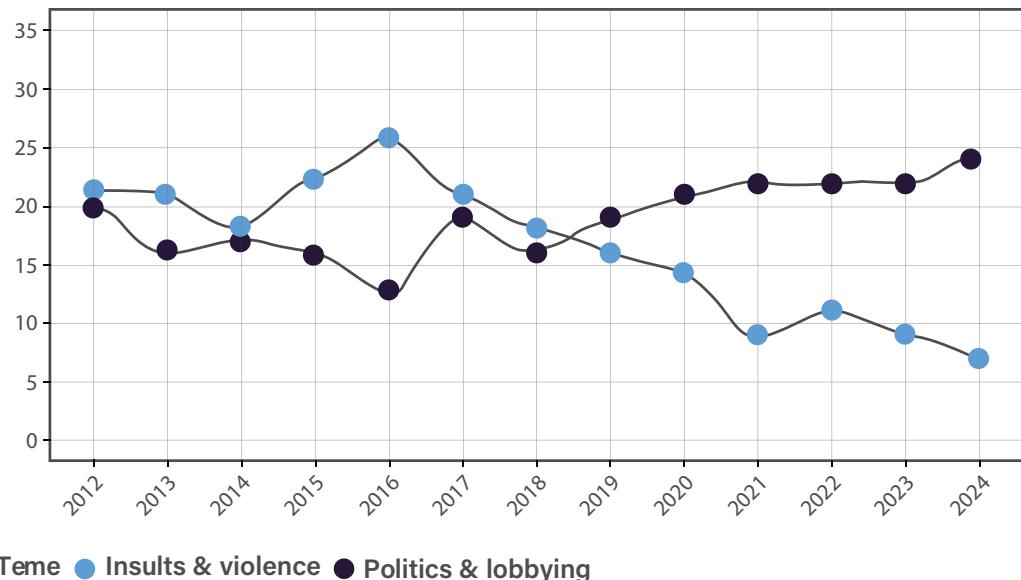
Graph 12. Share of themes Insults and Politics in population of comments per year

It is important to note that the main topics of comments have changed over time (see Graphs 12 and 13). The analysis has shown several significant trends:

- A **significant decrease in the frequency of insults and calls for violence** in comments. In 2024, the lowest share of this type of comment was measured in the observed period (see Graph 12);
- A **significant increase in general comments, as well as comments from the category that includes politics** (parties, politicians, institutions), alleged lobbying (propaganda) efforts, and censorship in the media. In 2024, a record share of this group of comments was measured (see Graph 13).

Bearing in mind that we previously pointed out that the majority of comments are negative in nature, we can interpret these two data in such a way that over the years, criticism directed at the LGBTIQ+ community has moved from the category of explicit insults, non-acceptance, and attacks to the categories of politics, ideology, and censorship. A typical example of this transition would be the large number of comments ranging from "They won't walk" (earlier period) to "Why are the media and politicians pushing and imposing the Pride Parade so much?" (more recent period). This seems to be partly driven by the fact that Pride became less a contentious topic than it was before, but also by the effort of comment

moderators. Namely, a larger part of the very explicit insults or threats were recorded in the period 2012 to 2015, despite registered efforts to remove many of such. However, we identified a number of comments in recent years that complain about administrators not "allowing people to comment freely". While there is no way for us to confirm this, it is our interpretation that a shift in framing of negative comments moved towards implicit negativity, in which the relative importance of LGBTIQ+ issues is disputed (call for ignoring) or they are delegated to nothing more than "lobbying efforts" of political structures.

Comments referring to human rights and discrimination are fairly equal in share throughout the observed period (8%-14%), but on a somewhat negative trend since 2019.

Share of Theme in Population(%)
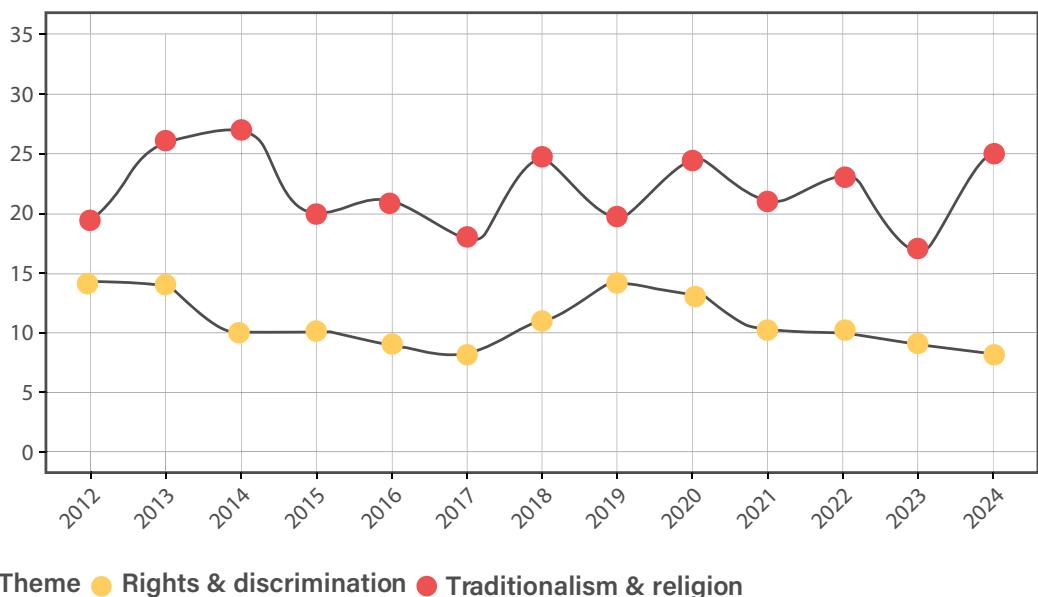
Theme ● **Rights & discrimination** ● **Traditionalism & religion**

Graph 13. Share of themes Rights and Discrimination, and Traditionalism in the population of comments per year

In addition to the share and frequency of sentiment and the topic of comments, we were also interested in how the readership reacts to this type of discourse on portals (see Graph 14). To measure this, we focused on the number of likes and dislikes, and the relative tone of reaction to the comment (number of likes - number of dislikes). For the purposes of this part of the analysis, we excluded comments from the section General because there is no specifically defined topic in it. We mapped a total of 360,749 likes and dislikes, of which 250,789 were likes, and the rest were dislikes. This data also indicates the readership of the comments themselves and the support of a significant number of users of media portals, who do not necessarily comment, but express their views with likes/dislikes.
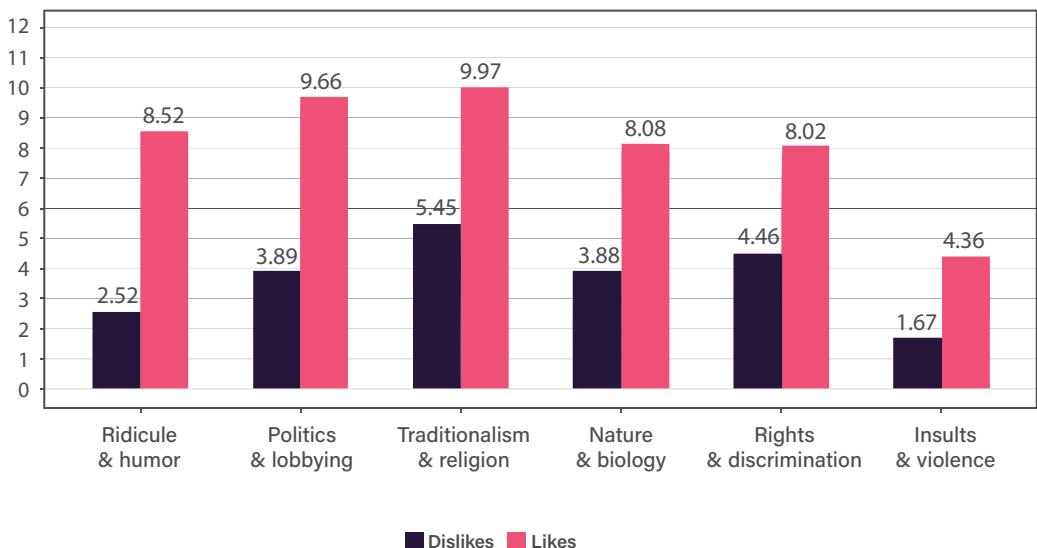
Graph 14. Average number of likes/dislikes on comments per section

On average, comments on traditional values, morals, and religions received the most likes (~10), while comments of an offensive or violent nature received the fewest (~4). Interestingly, the highest number of dislikes was also found in the category of traditional values, morals, and religions (~5), suggesting that comments of this kind can have a polarizing effect on other portal readers. The highest ratio of likes to dislikes — reflecting the overall tone of reactions — was observed in comments about Politics, lobbying, censorship, and humor, with an average of 6 more likes than dislikes. This indicates a trend toward shifting narratives from explicitly negative to implicitly negative, often using humor, satire, and ideological arguments instead of direct attacks or threats. Previous observations identified a rise in such narratives over the years, and it appears they also garner the most support from the audience.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this analysis, we have attempted to indicate changes in the attitude of media portal readers towards the LGBTIQ+ community over a period of 12 years. We are convinced that we have laid a strong foundation for the continuation of longitudinal research that would encompass a larger number of media outlets and that we have established a sustainable methodology that, with certain adjustments, could be applied to other media (newspaper articles, TV shows, etc.).

Although disappointing in most regards, the results provide an unambiguous insight into the perception of media portal users who leave comments on articles on LGBTIQ+ topics. Longitudinal research has enabled us to capture a change in the narrative from the dominantly traditional one that emphasizes the health of the family and nation, which is offensive and calls for violence, to one that is much more ideological and political. We believe that this has also indicated part of the political and social changes in Montenegro in general, not only towards the LGBTIQ+ community. It is also important to emphasize the significant change in the proportion of positive comments if the first two years of the observed period are compared with the last two years. This growth from 12% to 23% indicates a significant change in the way media portal users express themselves. Additionally, this information may indicate that stronger involvement of administrators enhances changing the framing. Although it cannot be generalized, this data alerts to significant, albeit slow, progress on which new strategic cooperation between the Government, the media, and CSOs should be grafted.

On the other hand, the observed change from explicitly negative to implicitly negative comments is worrying. The use of mockery, jokes, satire, and cynicism to belittle members of the LGBTIQ+ community significantly complicates the work of both the media, which should regulate comments, and the community, which should prepare a strategic response to this situation. Such phenomena, which, according to our analysis, also have greater support (through likes and dislikes) from other users of media portals, quietly and perfidiously introduce new moments into the community, expanding the space of acceptability of this type of relationship and expression of opinions towards LGBTIQ+ community. In addition, this progress regarding the culture of public discourse (from explicit to implicit negativity) should be interpreted with caution, since semantic positivity does not imply that held attitudes are changing, as evident from mixed evidence regarding the share of

pro-LGBTIQ+ comments over the years.

The polarization in the media field, which follows social and political polarization, is also reflected in the analysis of comments, which confirms that readers predominantly choose the media where they will find confirmation of their political views. This is indicated by the data in the difference in comparison to comments that use religion as an argument on the Analitika portal and the In4s portal, with Vijesti positioning in between. Additionally, for further research into the media in Montenegro, it is important to point out that the In4s portal has the highest intensity of negative comments (slightly more than others). If we add to this the fact of the role of this media in the generation and dissemination of disinformation and information manipulation, we get a fuller picture of the way of working, the role, and the instrumentalized actions of this media, far from professional standards.

In general, the situation indicated by our analysis is very challenging. The fact that predominantly negative, even explicit comments can be found on the portals in all years in the observed period is alarming. It is important to note that the findings of this research are being published in a year in which two important legal frameworks, the Digital Act and the Media Freedom Act, should see full implementation and consequences at the EU level. It also seems that the media in Montenegro have not caught up with the change that has been taking place for almost a decade in other countries, which are abandoning self-regulation to a model that is increasingly defined by statutory, government-mandated moderation, which emphasizes media accountability, strategic communication with citizens, and encouragement for reporting hate speech, discrimination, and calls for violence in comments. The findings of our research should be seen as an additional incentive in this direction.

Recommendations

1. The need for a strategic approach to planning and organizing media and digital literacy is recognized, through formal programs in the classroom and through training, but also through a system of informal learning and public campaigns. In a broader context, our analysis of the comments also indicates a worryingly low level of media literacy. The absence of critical thinking and knowledge of behavior in the online space, leads to the spread (or support) of hate speech and calls for violence and discrimination by users of media portals without awareness of the consequences, both legal and of the victimization of individuals and entire groups.
2. The government, in cooperation with the media, CSOs, and the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services, should initiate a strategic dialogue with the aim of

designing and implementing specific and targeted campaigns on hate speech and discrimination in the online space.

3. The responsibility of the media should be clearly indicated and monitored when it comes to moderating comments on their articles (through statutory obligations and other internal documents).

4. It is important to organize specific tailor-made training for journalists and ombudsmen in the media in the area of manipulation of information with elements of hate speech and recognizing such phenomena in readers' comments.

5. All online media platforms should establish detailed content moderation rules and commenting policies to reduce hate speech and disinformation.

6. The need for public discussion among media professionals about violations of ethics and professional standards has been expressed. This need is also recognized in the area of censorship and self-censorship, which occurs when management decisions, to increase views and readership, do not adequately regulate commenting.

7. In line with the changes in the field of media and freedom of expression at the EU level, a space has been opened for initiating a discussion on the position and role of the media in a technologically advanced world, especially considering AI technology. This opens space for strategic cooperation between governments, regulators, media, professionals, CSOs, and other associations, in the field of using these technologies and for the purpose of strengthening the level of respect for professional standards and regulation of comments in online media.

APPENDIX

Examples of comments that call for violence

CoronaVirus
18-12-2016 04:34h

Prijavi komentar

kokoske bolesne ubite se

+0   -0

ODGOVORI

piano1323618664
11-01-2016 02:44h

Prijavi komentar

treba vas ubit

+0   -0

ODGOVORI

piano35598
08-10-2013 02:36h

Prijavi komentar

Спремите глогов колац. Колац, К . . . . ! Неомашћен!

+0   -0

ODGOVORI

piano5253444481
15-09-2015 03:58h

Prijavi komentar

kurac cete šetati majku vam bolesnu

+0   -0
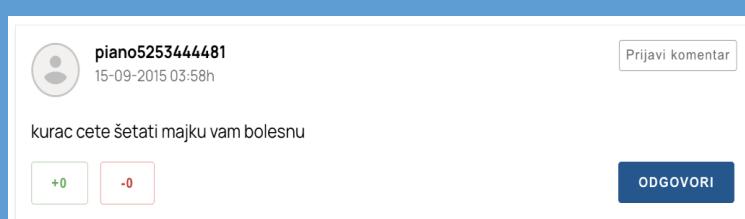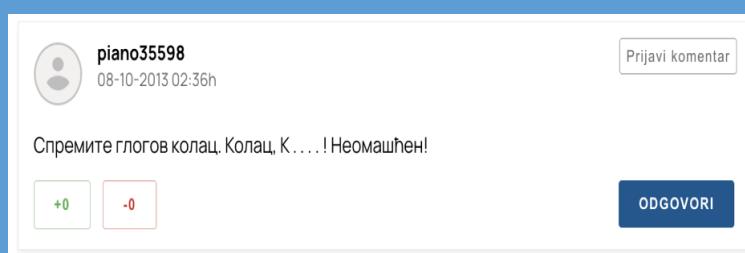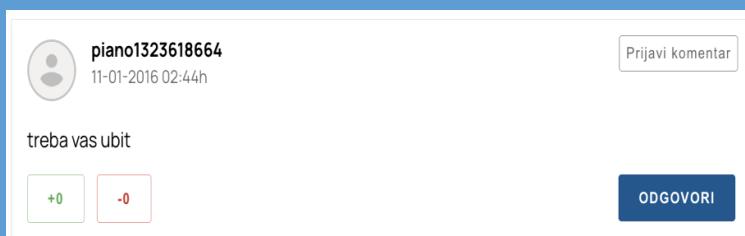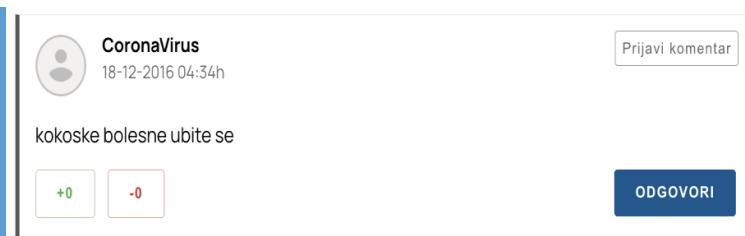
ODGOVORI

Examples of insulting comments

rari
03-01-2015 06:51h

Prijavi komentar

Ovi pederi sami sebe pretuku pa prijave n.n. lica... Nije mi ga žao ni malo.. Džabe im milo daje prava kad nikad slobode ođe neće imati!

+0   -0

ODGOVORI

A Anonimni korisnik

07.05.2013. 12:09

zamislite kome se narod moli kakva je to crkva kad su jojo naveci velikodostojnici pederi-ne znam koga amfilohije jebe ali sigurno sav srpski narod u glavu -no neka kad su im glave prazne srecno im bilo naka im bog drzi svijecu dok ih popovi jasu

👍 16   👎 3   ↩ Odgovori

kecman27
01-03-2017 08:04h

Prijavi komentar

Pederi, silovatelji i pedofili, rak svakog drustva!

+0   -0

ODGOVORI

Milan каже:
26.01.2024 у 11:03

Поклекнемо ли овдје а јесмо (хомићи и лезбејке) ће нам урнисати породичне вриједности . Запад нам ништа доброг није донио од Колумба на овамо. Не дајмо да се од нас праве сотоне да шака болесника (за мене је хомосексуалност болест, јер ни животиње то не раде између себе истог пола.) Уништи институт породица

👍 20   👎 4

Cojek
01-07-2020 21:43h

!

Da li ce parovi morati po tom modernom zakonu da se izjasnjavaju ko je u toj vezi topcija a ko furundzija ?

+18   -7

ODGOVORI

Examples of comments highlighting nature, normal/abnormal, disease

Milenko каже:

29.08.2022 y 17:14

Ko o cemu Evropa o pederluku i izopacenom i bolesno shvatanju

👍 30 👎 1

ozren каже:

29.08.2022 y 13:58

Za deviantnu Evropu su pederluk i zoofilija vrijednosti iznad drugih. „Hvala" za takvu Evropu.

👍 44 👎 2

JVUO
21-09-2019 15:23h

Prijavi komentar

Ко год има трун разума не може да подржава промоцију настраности!

+0   -0   **ODGOVORI**

GavriloPrincip
21-09-2019 16:30h

Prijavi komentar

,,Дрво које не даје плода,сјече се и у огањ се баца."

+0   -0   **ODGOVORI**

Examples of comments that emphasize tradition, morality, religion
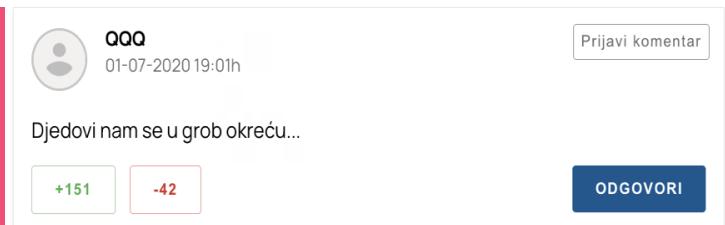
QQQ
01-07-2020 19:01h

Prijavi komentar

Djedovi nam se u grob okreću...

+151   -42

ODGOVORI
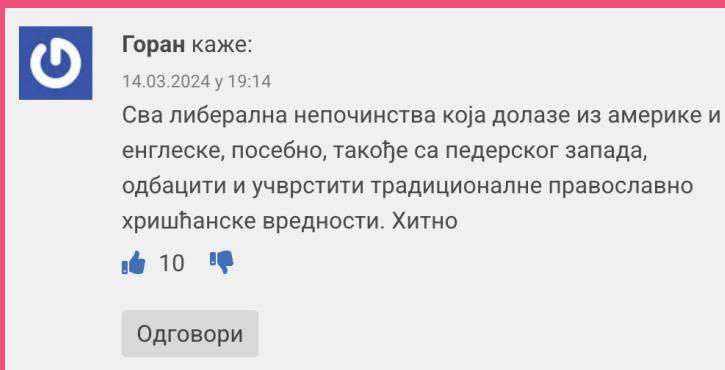
Горан каже:
14.03.2024 у 19:14

Сва либерална непочинства која долазе из америке и енглеске, посебно, такође са педерског запада, одбацити и учврстити традиционалне православно хришћанске вредности. Хитно

👍 10 👎

Одговори

ком
17-09-2022 20:16h
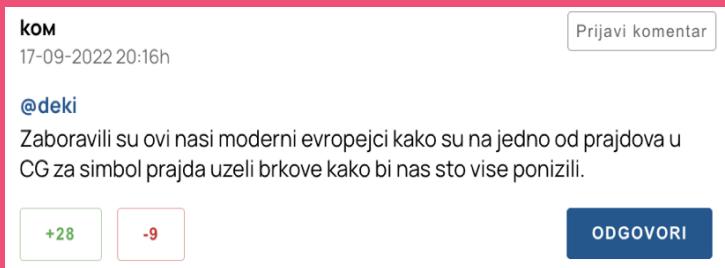
Prijavi komentar

@deki
Zaboravili su ovi nasi moderni evropejci kako su na jedno od prajdova u CG za simbol prajda uzeli brkove kako bi nas sto vise ponizili.

+28   -9
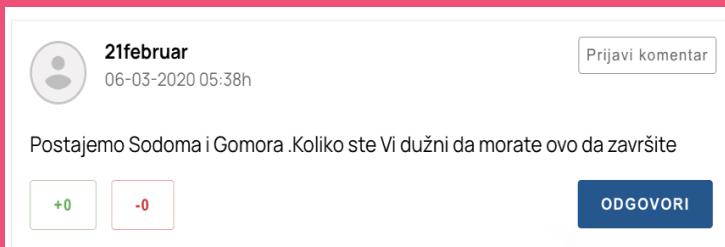
ODGOVORI

21februar
06-03-2020 05:38h

Prijavi komentar

Postajemo Sodoma i Gomora .Koliko ste Vi dužni da morate ovo da završite

+0   -0

ODGOVORI

Examples of comments highlighting politics, lobbying, and censorship

Bokelj73r
27-08-2018 05:31h

Prijavi komentar

To je taj evropski gejevski lobi koji udara na temelje tradicionalnih drustava.

+0 -0

ODGOVORI

I tako каже:

29.09.2014 у 10:42

Uzas. Ovakve stvari su sracunato uradjene kako bi izazvale reakciju druge strane. Gej lobi je najveca prevara i izrazito nasilnicna i netolerantna organizacija.

👍 👎

Родољуб
26-01-2017 10:22h

Prijavi komentar

Šta da kažem o ovim nakazama a da mi admin ne izbriše komentar

+0 -0

ODGOVORI

PadTiranina
15-07-2021 12:53h

Prijavi komentar

@vitezserbski
A ne ovo je pitanje svih pitanja, kakva nezaloslenost, kakva poskupljenja goriva zivotnih namirnica, lopovluk it'd. Ovo je najbitnije u CG I treba pod hitno da se rijesi u sto brzem Roku. Sve ostalo moze da ceka Ali promjena zakona o istopolnim brakovima ne smije da ceka.

+2 -1

ODGOVORI

Examples of comments highlighting ridicule or humor

cgStega
25-07-2021 16:45h

Prijavi komentar

Ima li koji svršeni matičar da objasni koje su to bračne obaveze partnera: da namažu nokte jedna drugoj, ili da plaču zajedno?

+12   -7   **ODGOVORI**

Napred Rayo
01-07-2020 20:53h

Prijavi komentar

Da Bog da ti sin uhvatio bidermajer.

+162   -10   **ODGOVORI**

Examples of comments highlighting rights, discrimination, or progress

piano5251393898
15-09-2015 05:03h

Prijavi komentar

Sta svaka cast? Sto policija nije sposobna da odbrani ustavom zagarantovana prava manjini gradjana? Sto su drzava i pravo jos jednom kapitulirali u nemogucnosti da objasne bijesnoj rulji da ne moze da ide okolo i prebija sugradjane koji samo traze da budu jednaki? Bez rijeci, stvarno.

+0   -0   **ODGOVORI**

Satirikon
29-09-2013 10:48h

Prijavi komentar

Homofobiju stvara neznanje, a ne parada.

+0   -0   **ODGOVORI**

piano5251393898
15-09-2015 05:03h

Prijavi komentar

Sta svaka cast? Sto policija nije sposobna da odbrani ustavom zagarantovana prava manjini gradjana? Sto su drzava i pravo jos jednom kapitulirali u nemogucnosti da objasne bijesnoj rulji da ne moze da ide okolo i prebija sugradjane koji samo traze da budu jednaki? Bez rijeci, stvarno.

+0   -0

ODGOVORI