JOURNALISTIC SOURCES ON THE ISRAEL/HAMAS CONFLICT IN THE CROATIAN MEDIA

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SUMMARY

This report is part of the research activities carried out as part of the "Adria Digital Media Observatory project, funded by the Digital Europe Program. The aim was to identify the journalistic sources used by the Croatian mainstream media during the first three days of the conflict between Israel and Hamas to determine the presence of journalistic sources previously identified as purveyors of disinformation.

Key findings:

- During the first three days of the conflict, the analyzed media used 167 different journalistic sources (N=167), including the news agencies HINA (N=94), Agence France-Presse (AFP)(N=59), European Pressphoto Agency (EPA) (N=58), Profimedia (N=42) and Reuters (N=7), international media such as BBC (N=25), CNN (N=15) and Al Jazeera (N=7), Croatian media such as danas.hr (N=15) and HRT(N=7), and official Israeli sources (N=9).
- The online sources used were mainly from X (Twitter) (N=65) and other online media (N=47), less often from Instagram (N=5), Facebook (N=4) or Youtube (N=4).
- In rare cases, the analyzed media referred to journalistic sources that were described as purveyors of disinformation (N=17).

INTRODUCTION

Fewer and fewer media outlets can afford their own foreign correspondents, leading some authors to claim that foreign correspondence is a dying profession (Hannerz, 2007). As a result, the media is increasingly relying on sources such as news agencies, global media, the internet and official governmental and non-governmental sources (Williams, 2011). Online sources play a particular role in this, as many foreign reporters do not travel to the countries they are covering and instead surf the internet and social media to find information for their reports. Furthermore, the constant need to be first and live (Bivens, 2008) pushes journalism towards online sources. This practice is a potential source of misinformation and disinformation, as there is limited ability to verify information in the case of international breaking news.

"The quality of what is on the net is highly dubious and the anonymity of the source of what is posted makes assessment of the credibility and accuracy of what appears problematic. The net is more susceptible than offline media to the dissemination of distortion and misinformation, as spam emails, hate mail and corporate and political propaganda hurtle across the web." (Williams, 2011, p. 177)

The aim of this research is to identify the journalistic sources used by the Croatian mainstream media during the first three days of Israel/Hamas conflict and to determine the presence of journalistic sources previously identified as disinformation sources. The research questions were developed on the following basis:

RQ1: What journalistic sources were used by the Croatian mainstream media to report about Israel/Hamas conflict?

RQ2: Did the analyzed media use other news media as journalistic sources in reporting about Israel/Hamas conflict?

RQ3: Did the analyzed media use journalistic sources that were previously labeled as disinformation sources?

METHODOLOGY

A mixture of methods was used for this report: digital methods and content analysis. Digital methods were used to retrieve the articles on the Gaza conflict and to analyze the data. The first sample was compiled using the online tool Retriever (https://retriever.takelab.fer.hr/) using the keyword "Israel" in Croatian and filtered to the first three days of the beginning of the Gaza conflict (October 7-9, 2023)[1] and four Croatian mainstream media outlets:

- Index.hr (Online)
- Net.hr (Online)
- Dnevnik.hr (TV network)
- Jutarnji.hr (Print)

Criteria for the selection of media were the number of monthly users according to Gemius rating and the equal coverage of traditional and online-only media. The content analysis was carried out by a coder. The aim was to determine the presence of journalistic sources

[1] Contribution of ADMO project associate Marko Roško.

in the news articles published in the respective online media. A total of 252 articles (N=252) were retrieved and analyzed. As some of the articles were live blogs, the number of journalistic sources was limited to a maximum of first 5 sources per page counting from top of the page to the bottom including video, photo and embed content.

RESULTS

The analyzed media used 167 different journalistic sources (N=167) in the first three days of the conflict. The most important sources for the reports were the news agencies HINA (N=94), Agence France-Presse (AFP)(N=59), European Pressphoto Agency (EPA) (N=58), Profimedia (N=42) and Reuters (N=7), international media such as BBC (N=25), CNN (N=15) and Al Jazeera (N=7), Croatian media such as danas.hr (N=15) and HRT (N=7), official Israeli sources such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (N=9) and other sources.
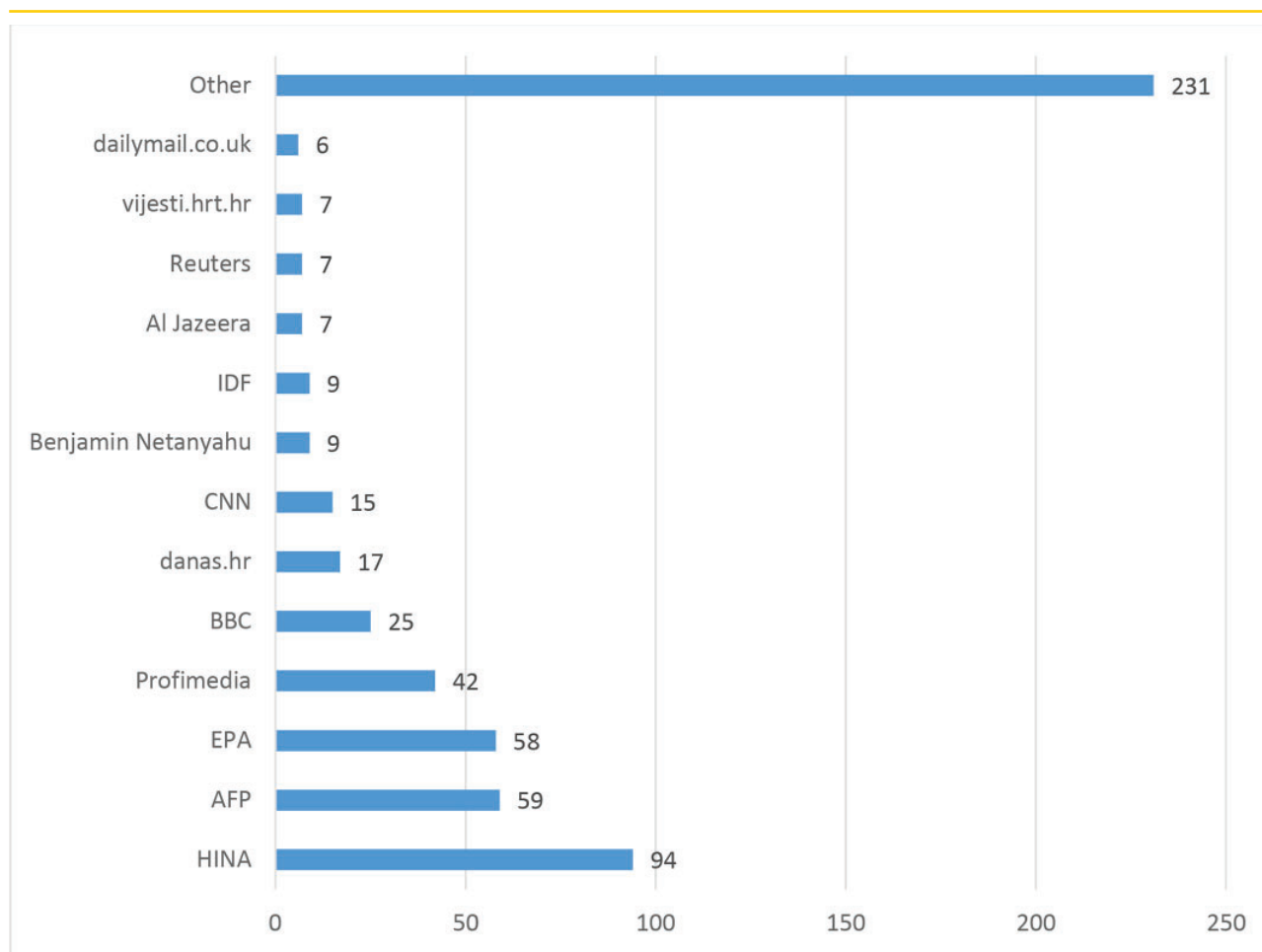

Figure 1: The most frequently used journalistic sources

Analyzed media most frequently used X (Twitter) (N=65) as a journalistic source for their reports about Israel/Hamas conflict, usually in the form of a profile providing video, photo or textual content. Next by frequency of use were online media (N=47). Although one would expect Instagram, Facebook and YouTube to be more strongly represented, they only appear sporadically in the sample analyzed.
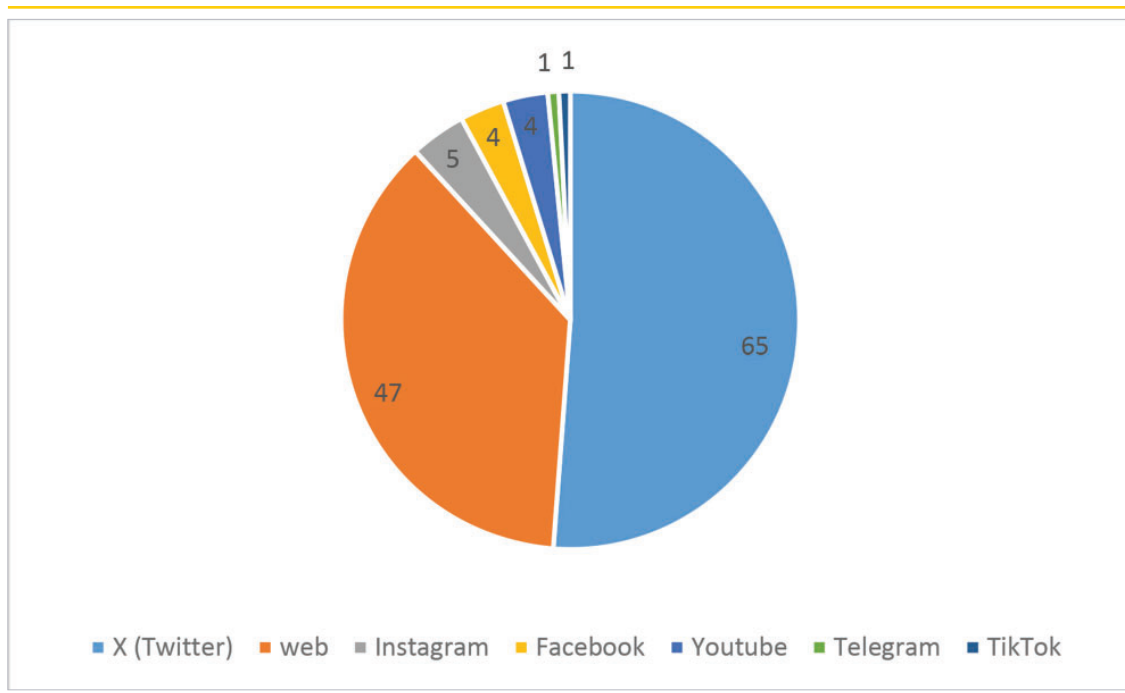

Figure 2: Journalistic online sources based on the platform from which they originate

Analyzed media linked their reports the most frequently to Croatian (hrt.hr, jutarnji.hr, danas.hr) and international media (dailymail.co.uk, ft.com, sky.com, and reuters.com).
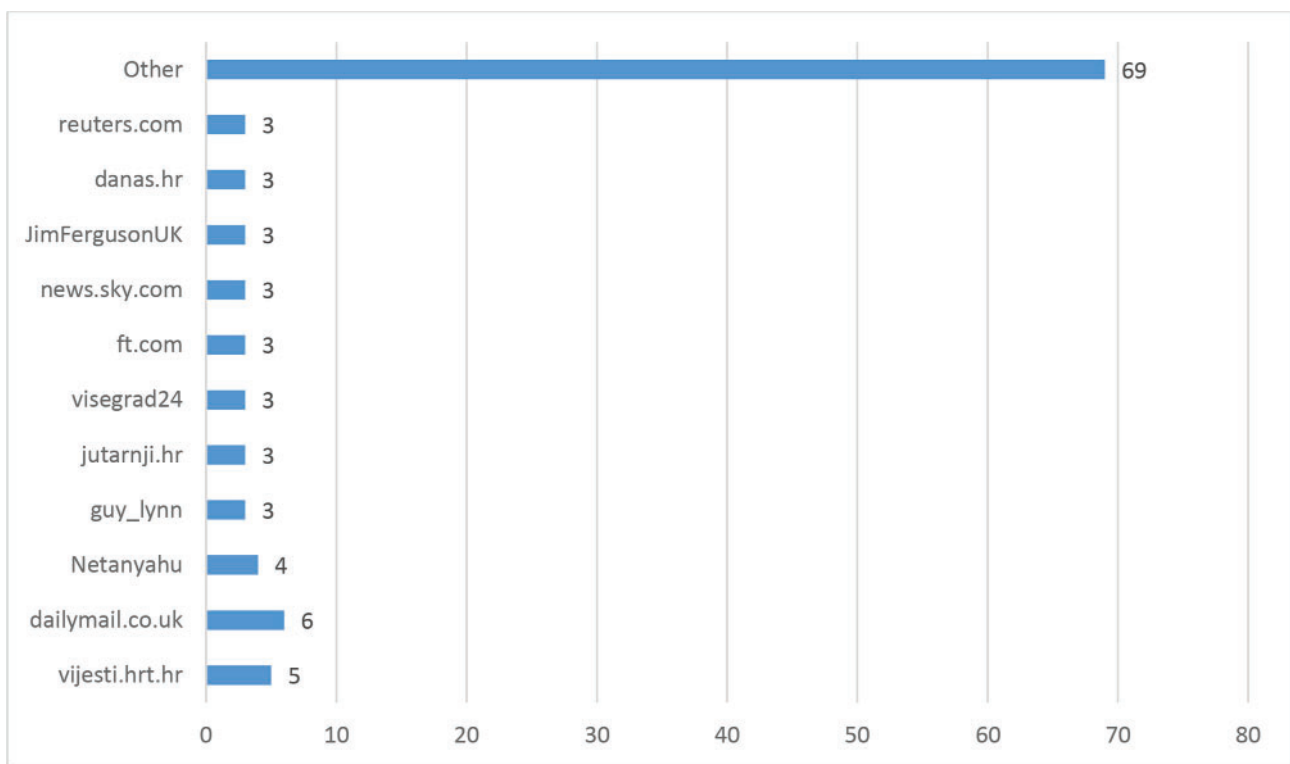
Figure 3: The most frequently used journalistic online sources[23]

The analysis of online sources revealed that the most frequently used online sources were media-related (N=54), personal profiles of public figures, including politicians and journalists (N=47) and organizations related to the conflict (N=10).

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[2] Netanyahu is the username of the official X account of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

[3] guy_lynn is the username of the official X account of senior BBC journalist Guy Lynn.
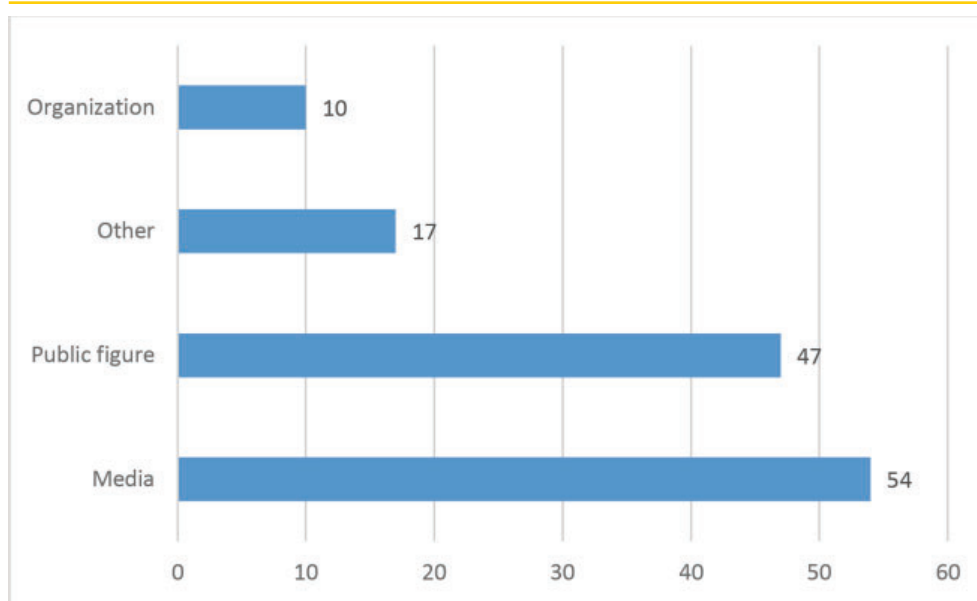
Figure 4: Types of online sources

The media analyzed during the first three days of the Gaza conflict referred to journalistic sources that were labeled as purveyors of disinformation (N=17). For example, the X account JimFergusonUK of "British social media influencer" Jim Ferguson disseminated the video showing Hamas soldiers with an American weapon "left behind in Afghanistan used to attack Israel". In fact, the video showed Taliban soldiers from 2021. The post is still available online and has more than 10 million views (Dixit, 2023). The X account visegrad24 has already been manipulating with information from the Ukraine war (Nagy & Król, 2023) and is operated by a right-wing Polish social media marketing agency (Zadrozny, 2023). The analyzed media also used content from WarMonitors which was previously labeled as disinformation source (Menn, 2023; Samuels, 2023). In addition, some of the social media accounts embedded in the reports originated from territories on other continents and not from Israel (erbmjha, VishalVerma_9, RccShashank).

CONCLUSION

The results have shown that the analyzed media report on international conflicts in accordance with common practice, relying on reports from news agencies and global media. As a rule, this practice reflects the official policy of the countries from which the media used as a source for reporting originate. Although it was expected that online sources would be increasingly used in the first three days of the conflict, such a practice was almost non-existent. However, the use of social media sources, previously labeled as disinformation sources, is concerning. Given the potential that user-generated content holds for journalistic reporting from countries where there are no correspondents, it is recommended that predetermined source verification practices are introduced and journalists are trained in newsrooms to eliminate use of sources whose information cannot be verified or which have previously been labeled as disinformation sources by fact-checkers.

LIMITATIONS

The study provides a brief insight into the practices of the Croatian media in reporting international news. Future research should focus on longer time periods and qualitative analysis to further deepen the study using in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation methods.

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ADMO

Project Adria Digital Media Observatory (ADMO) ensures the establishment and continuation of the Croatian and Slovenian hub operation for tackling disinformation and cooperation with EDMO on multiple levels by a multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach. As an effective response to the challenges for democracy and society, the project sees a combination of different expertise and methods - attacking sources/actors, networks, reasoning, and disinformation narratives from different spheres and combining techniques. The implemented activities will contribute to the general objective - creating and ensuring the long-term development of a broader Croatian/Slovenian hub on digital media composed of a multidisciplinary community of academic researchers, fact-checkers and media practitioners, journalists and civil society advocators capable of detecting and analyzing disinformation campaigns; and supporting the government and regulator in strengthening the collective response to disinformation threat to democracy.

The project comprehensively approaches the social, political, and health problem of spreading disinformation campaigns through research, awareness-raising, and capacity-building methods. The key projects' outcomes/deliverables are: the project's website and its integration with the EDMO platform, production of the continuous flow of fact-checks, publication of analytic reports on disinformation content, disinformation sources, origins of disinformation narratives, the role of international actors in spreading disinformation, disinformation acceptance and debunking, on the reasoning behind conspiracist and anti-conspiracist behavior, training for journalists and student of journalism, media literacy education activities for citizens, reports on Code of Practice on Disinformation in Croatia and on the financial viability of the Croatian and Slovenian news media sector.

European Digital Media Observatory

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