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PR advocacy of autism

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There are a number of diverse sources of information on topics in the field of health, but it **is the media**, thanks to its main characteristics - speed, availability and influence on the audience's awareness - **that become the primary channel for delivering information** from senders to recipients, which allows them to *influence the perception of these topics in the public*.

However, not all topics deserve equal media treatment.

Autism

Although there are about **three thousand people living in Serbia** who have been diagnosed and registered with one of the developmental disorders from the **autistic spectrum** , the phenomenon of autism, as a media topic, **does not receive adequate attention from the local (Serbian) media.**

The spectrum of autistic disorders includes a number of developmental disorders that imply significant deviations in the development of children. It is believed that these disorders occur up to the age of three, and are characterized by a lack of understanding of social interaction, difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication with limited, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour.

As the condition of autism was recognized less than a hundred years ago and as even today **scientists have not been able to find the sure causes of this condition and a therapy** that would completely neutralize the condition of autism, **many people are not entirely clear about what it is.**

Mass media

The mass media is a very important channel through which the **public can become familiar with this topic and thus understand the phenomenon of autism spectrum disorders**.

The role of the media and PR is reflected precisely in **informing as many people as possible about a certain topic, with the aim of integrating knowledge about the minority group into the everyday life of the majority**.

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The aim of this work is a critical analysis of the media representation of autism and people with autism in reference online media in Serbia. More precisely, we will determine how the topic of autism is present in reference online media in Serbia and in which context.



Methodology

In this research, we will use two scientific research methods: **content analysis and critical discourse analysis.**

In this way, we will analyse the available media texts and determine **how people with autism and the topic of autism are presented in the observed media**; we will compare reporting on autism and reporting on similar phenomena and determine which are the **dominant discourse strategies in the media that contribute to the construction of the discourse on autism.**



Internet portals are becoming the leading sources of information in society, which is why their role is increasingly important



Journalists and journalism in online media



The development of internet portals and the transformation of journalism in the online sphere have irreversibly changed the world of reporting.

Journalists today, especially those who report for the editorial offices of internet portals, **make a selection of already available content**, process it in accordance with a certain journalistic form and present it in the medium they work for.

This indicates a **new role for journalists** - they are filters for checking the authenticity of news that comes as a result of public exchanges between actors on the Internet.



Autism / autistic

The sample of portals observed in this paper consists of the following portals: Mondo, B92 and Blic - a **total of 3 portals**.

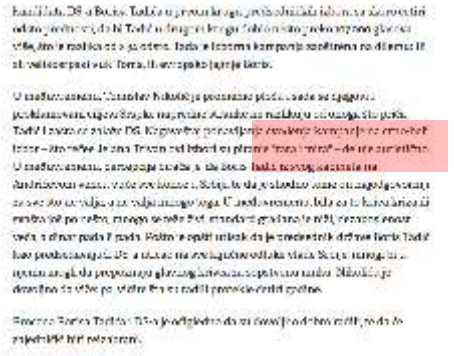
On all portals, the use of the words: autism, autistic **as a way to describe negative traits**, is common in the discourse of **politicians and other public figures** in our region, and **autism is mentioned mostly as a secondary topic** of the texts.

Some examples



Sport

When it comes to representation -Jokic acts autistic



Politics

…their campaign seems autistic.



Politics

Kurti is autistic



Glossy

She is an autistic trash



Sport

Stefanos seems a bit autistic



Conceptualizing the headlines has become a priority for internet media, because their earnings are based on audience access to pages with media texts - greater traffic can only be achieved with attractive headlines.

That is why a specific concept of writing headlines is emerging in online newsrooms, which is based on concepts that distance journalistic work from an ethically acceptable approach to reporting - these are so-called clickbait or clickbait headlines.



Inadequate use of terms leads to a wrong perception of them in the public. If a certain term, such as the term autistic, is repeated as a priori negative, it will most likely be accepted as such in a significant part of the audience, without the need to criticize or analyse the wrong use of the term.

When it comes to the sections in which texts about autism appear, the research showed that **this topic is not closely related to any section**. The most common journalistic forms in which content about autism appears are news, reportage and a mixture of several genres.



In the specific research, more than half of the interlocutors in all available texts are **parents of people with autism** (57 %), while the group of other interlocutors consists of **experts from various fields** directly related to the topic of autism (27 %), as well as **celebrities, representatives of state institutions and citizens as observers**, that is, participants in the event (16 %).

When it comes to the number of interlocutors in the sampled texts, **texts with one interlocutor are dominant** (41 % of the texts), and there are also texts in which **there is no interlocutor**, i.e. in which the statements of the interlocutor or the positions of a certain organization are completely paraphrased, or it is about press releases prepared for publication (15 % of texts).



Media focus

The reason for reporting on autism is most often a **current event**, which includes media reports on events that are indirectly related to World Autism Day, or **content on planned manifestations and public activities** in the fields of culture, science, and sports, and this group also includes reports that belong to the black community, chronicles.



The observed body of media content on autism revealed a **strong tendency of journalists to express themselves on the topic of autism** most often briefly and without the need to turn to experts in this field for help before writing the text, in order to clarify certain topics that are unclear to the general public.

By applying the comparison method, it was determined that certain discourse strategies (discourse strategy of the black chronicle, tabloidization, intimization, discourse strategy of pity and discourse strategy of hopelessness) are visible in online media content.

Also, there is a coincidence of discursive practices in the **construction of these narratives** - both people with autism and people with other forms of disability are constructed by the media as a problem and lack of society, and not as equal members of the community.



Conclusion

This research shows that the discourse about autism in the online media is built on rare and extremely superficial information.

Such media content is filled with claims of dubious credibility (allegations that are difficult to verify) which are mostly taken from unknown, or unnamed, sources. Texts designed in this way provide readers with information that is not based in real experience and knowledge, and that does not lead to an improvement in the public's general information about autism and topics related to the topic of autism.



People with autism, in most of the cases, are presented as **powerless and dependent** on parents and caregivers, that is, as a **source of negative feelings and experiences**.



Thank you

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