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Published online: 19 Aug 2020.

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"The first combat meme brigade of the Slovak internet": hybridization of civic engagement through digital media trolling

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes a locally bound and hybridized form of civic engagement through digital media. Based on an explorative case study of a Slovak Facebook page called *Zomri*, engaged mostly in both mockery and denunciation of societal and political actors, the paper aims to challenge existing conceptual definitions of social media-based civic engagements, pointing to its hybridization. Through in-depth interviews with its founders and a survey of its supporters, we position the group and its activities through three separate lenses (trolling, digital vigilantism, and citizen journalism) that constitute an emergent category of dynamic and politically influential civic society actor.

KEYWORDS

Trolling; digital vigilantism; citizen journalism; shaming; hybridization

Introduction

Digital technologies including social media represent new tools for dissatisfied citizens to engage in change of their political or social reality. Political engagement through social media is of particular scholarly importance, notably as a hybridization of established practices. Prominent concepts may not be sufficient in fully describing and understanding such practices. Even terms such as trolling that by definition lack a clearly defined purpose may develop into a significant political and social force.

This article considers a specific case of citizen action in Slovakia, and through Facebook. At first, *Zomri*,[1] as the page is titled, is not substantially different from countless social media pages whose main function is to produce memes and satire in order to entertain their audience. During its early stages, the page almost exclusively engaged in mocking and ridiculing (aspiring) celebrities and other public-facing individuals, for public amusement and as a subtle criticism of certain cultural values. However, after a gradual shift to

political and social affairs, the page has become prominent in public and political discourse, a development that itself is widely discussed in the public sphere.[2] We argue that this case exemplifies a hybridized form of vigilant and politically engaged trolling.

The aim of this explorative case study is to challenge existing conceptual definitions and to draw attention to the hybridization of the modern forms of civic engagement as a consequence of the digitalization, emphasizing certain ambiguities when it comes to particular features of their existence. This focus on conceptualization and discussion of theoretical assumptions is necessary to understand the potential societal and political impact of this new type of civic actor. Our central argument is that depending on which feature we focus on when we unpack the characteristics of the group, different guiding concepts might seem to be suitable and appropriate. If the focus is centered on the tools and the forms of engagement of actions, i.e. *how* they operate, we may understand the groups as a specific example of *trolling behavior* that is politically motivated and uses memes as a tool for coordinated disruption. Secondly, looking at their motivations and drivers behind their actions, i.e. *why* they do what they do, evokes an account of a *vigilante* initiative, given the (self)-portrayal as a "civic self-defense" in terms of self-appointed guardianship of moral values in society, or "making stupidity visible" (Refresher, 2017), as well as channeling citizens´ frustration with public affairs and politics through an "end justifies the means" approach, with bad practices being adopted with good intentions. And finally, if we consider *what* is the broader socio-political impact the group is mobilizing, we should consider the *citizen journalist* as a key concept, mostly through building the image of collective authorship and relying on a trusting community, for which admins have become agenda-setters and gate-keepers at the same time.

Media, politics and satire in the Slovak context

Political satire as an example of freedom of speech is an indispensable part of all democratic societies. This genre experienced its first significant wave of popularity in Slovakia in the nineties in the form of satirical television programs and cartoonists in newspapers and underscored prominent pro-democratic societal forces. In recent years televised political satire, targeting mostly politics and social affairs remains a successful TV format worldwide, for instance, in the case The Daily Show or The Last Week Tonight with John Oliver in the US, The Mash Report in the UK, and This Hour, has 22 Minutes in Canada. Despite the prevailing understanding of the *Zomri* page as the latest

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[2]This involves wide media coverage and numerous media statements and interviews with admins that have been conducted in recent period as well as the level of controversy their actions caused.

iteration of political satire,[3] it would be too simplistic to simply define it as political satire and neglect the aspects that give the page its hybrid character.

It is worth considering these additional aspects that go beyond the traditional understanding of political satire. The ambiguity of *Zomri* is reflected in the way its followers perceive the page, alongside comparable initiatives around the world (see, e.g., Jonas, 2018). In terms of the nature of the humor, especially the shaming and mockery, the page resembles user-generated content communities such as those found on Reddit. The anonymity of its creators coupled with the collective identity behind content authorship and the sense of collective ownership strongly resembles groups like Anonymous.

Looking specifically at the context of the Slovak Republic, the scholarly relevance of the group comes primarily from their role in online public mockery and shaming of the far-right representatives and supporters, as well as their anti-conspiracy and (paradoxically) anti-trolling'[4] motivation. This relates to a relatively strong social polarization along pro-establishment/anti-establishment or pro-democracy/anti-democracy lines. Memes in general have become a tool for political communication, bearing specific cultural contexts and collectives (Milner, 2013) and have been a characteristic feature of recent political mobilization. Beyond the Slovak context, the 2016 US Election is another example of memes being used as a tool for political mobilization of a grass-roots and user-generated nature with a substantial impact on the voters ´ behavior, bypassing traditional gate-keepers (Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2019).

Why Zomri?

The primary reason for our interest in the *Zomri* page is reflected in its ambiguity and inability to provide a clear conceptual definition. Looking at the perceptions of its followers, the "*one of a kind*," "*Slovak original*" and "*unique case*" attitudes prevail; mostly emphasizing a persistence in their humor (Respondent 55, R55 hereon), an uncommon and unique concept of action (R120), a community that has formed behind the page (R147) or simply the fact that the admins of the page are anonymous and they only appear in the public with bags on their heads (R39).[5]

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[3]Most of the media label the page as satirical page (see for instance Plus 7 dní, 2018; Forbes, 2018; Aktuality.sk, 2018c; and others).

[4]I.e. aimed against more conventional forms of right-wing trolling.

[5]The ambiguity of the *Zomri* page is also reflected in various functions the page performs. As seen below, it includes elements from satirical meme pages, news services and online social movements. There are numerous satirical pages on Slovak social media environment, producing memes, jokes and mocking politicians and other public figures. However, most of them are centered around a specific person who provides these memes and jokes for their audiences, lacking the element of community production which will be elaborated below. Moreover, *Zomri* sometimes acts as a news page as it often posts breaking news; and often closely cooperates with NGOs and charities as a way of utilizing its social capital acquired during the growth of the page.

Even though the followers seem to be hesitant to clearly define the page, it is also clear that the page is perceived mostly through the lens of satire, humor, and trolling, which is also a starting point for our conceptualization. At the same time, the followers in general reflect that the page exceeds traditional understandings of these concepts in various ways. The most notable is that its satire is closely interrelated to a wider social impact ("*fun with a social overlap*" (R76)), public awareness ("a *prank that has grown into a opinion-forming medium*" (R81) and even mobilization ("*the way of mass reaching of the population with current political topics through the combination of harsh and vulgar humor*" (R61)). Moreover, the ideological preoccupation is also an important defining feature – for instance, *Zomri* as "*a black humor with democratic punchline*" (R48), "*protection of a democracy in a fun way*" (R64), "*counterweight to conspiracy*" (R122) or even seeing them as trolls-fighters ("*1st fighting meme brigade of the Slovak internet*" (R53)).

In general, there are two cross-cutting concepts that are crucial in terms of defining the initiative: visibility (of both the page and of the targets) and community. In this descriptive section, we introduce the key features of the page in relation to these concepts.

The literal translation of the name of the group is "die," a verb in the imperative, which was derived from the early phases of the group, where it was considered to be "*a short and concise answer to absurd conspiracy writings*" (Admin 4, A4 hereon). This refers to a disinterest to engage in fruitless discussions with opponents (and/or trolls) especially, as admins emphasize, when they feel that rational discussions fall short: "*when some 'prak***t*[6] ' *writes, I don´t know ... that Kotleba*[7] *is great, would you write to him that he is wrong? You won´t. That´s why 'Zomri.'*" (A3) As this imperative form is not used very often in the Slovak language, it proved to be very catchy, although the reference to death, though being purely metaphorical, is often pointed out by critics (and often targets at the same time) of the page.

Zomri began as a trolling initiative. Under its previous names, *Martin Jakubec* and later *Jakub Martinec*, it was established as a trolling page against Slovak celebrity Martin Jakubec, a singer with failed political aspirations. Starting with mocking and shaming of a public figure, the repertoire gradually expanded to showbusiness, celebrities, and tabloid-like topics in general, while still making mostly purposeless fun of the Slovak media landscape.

Typical for all context-specific meme pages, *Zomri* began to form its own community. Its community of followers were a crucial component from its

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[6]"*Prak***t*" is a made-up variation of a vulgar word *Zomri* (and its community) uses to label targets of their denunciation. Admins define them as "a person with misguided understanding and thinking, with outdated and narrow-minded ideas and values. They think that just because they are on Facebook, their opinion is interesting and beneficial and, unfortunately, they often express it publicly, whether it is about politics, immigrants or neo-Nazism." (Zomri, 2018).

[7]Marian Kotleba is a leader of the strongest far-right political party in Slovakia, Kotleba – People´s Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko).

beginning, as it emerged and grew through a series of internal jokes in response to the fake trolling profiles (some of them active at the time of writing). Initially, it was considered to be a "*micro community that understood the humor and (…) meaning behind the jokes that were all basically aimed just on the one celebrity (…) and it was awfully small number of people who understood what it was all about, because they needed to understand the background, how those persons behaved and why we highlight and exaggerate those feature that we highlight*" (A1). While it later grew in size and reputation, it continued to utilize crowd-sourcing practices.

The fake celebrity profiles initiated the first seed of the mystery around admins that accompanies the page until today. As A1 points out, there was no strategy behind this move, even though it is currently crucial for the page´s operation "*it has always been just a reaction, we would not even try to keep it a secret if others would not try to find out*" (A1). Anonymity behind fake trolling profiles of a single person seemed to catch people´s interest to the extent it endured for years to come. The page is run by four admins, who have remained anonymous to the public and continue to protect their anonymity, despite the heightened prominence of the page in 2018. This was accompanied by an intense media presence, including public engagements, media interviews, a book launch, and several public campaigns in coordination with NGO sector and charities.[8] This anonymity is motivated first and foremost by security concerns, given the harsh mockery the page directs against both private and public targets. Yet it is also driven by marketing, including efforts to maintain an intrigue surrounding the page. The admins emphasize their insignificance as individuals for the purpose of the page, highlighting that it has never been a strategic decision toward the development of the page to its current state ("*we all are just ordinary guys, who don´t mean anything, and never will. It´s just that even if some investigator finds out, he also finds out that 'I´m not going to find anything about this guy to write about'*" (A1)). They also point out that given the mystery is already a core characteristic of their page, people do not really care to seek their identities anyway ("*It´s like if you are looking for the guardian of the treasure. Is the guardian more interesting, or the treasure?*" (A3)). Moreover, the key part of their media presence is achieved by the merchandize, including clothing with their most popular catchphrases or memes. One of them is the "I am admin of *Zomri*" ("Ja som admin *Zomri*"), referring to the collective identity of the authors of *Zomri´s* memes and posts, as anybody can send their own suggestion, and have it posted on the page by admins.

As the page, at that point still functioning under the name *Jakub Martinec*, began to gain popularity and the number of page followers increased, the scope of targets of their memes widened as well, becoming

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Figure 1. Making fun of the online communities and individuals spreading conspiracy theories and hoaxes (such as are claims that civic society, including *Zomri*, are paid and controlled by George Soros), admins constantly emphasize that anybody can be admin of *Zomri*.

Figure 2. The picture of one of the leading representatives of the far-right political party Kotlebovci – People´s Party Our Slovakia, Milan Mazurek, is taken at one of their demonstrations. Mazurek is photoshopped onto a beach, with reference to the well-known Slovak fascist greeting phrase "On guard!", which in Slovak ("Na stráž!") rhymes with "To the beach!" ("Na pláž!").

increasingly involved in political issues and responding mostly to increased support for the far-right groups in the country. The online (counter)attacks against the far-right supporters were launched in the form of shaming and

Figure 3. This picture is part of a series of memes and jokes reacting to the unfavorable conditions of trains operated by the Slovak Railway Company, which includes frequent engine fires and huge delays that fans report directly to *Zomri* admins. This picture simulates a Christmas greeting by the Slovak Railway Company with first Advent candle being lit.

ridiculing the far-right movements´ leaders as well as their supporters, mostly by posting their pictures, accompanied by ridiculing texts or even photoshopping far-right leaders and followers into different contexts, see-mingly for amusement and to highlight the absurdity of their actions and ideas. After the *Jakub Martinec* page was taken down from Facebook as a result of coordinated reporting by the targeted community, citing the controversial content, the admins of the group switched to the newly established Facebook page, this time titled as "*Zomri*," as the page is known today. The agenda of the page expanded as well; with even wider social media support they targeted other aspects of the political and social environment they consider as principally wrong. They also shared and mocked content from private individuals taken from their FB profiles or groups that contained hoaxes or disinformation, with the intention to shame the hoaxers and internet trolls.

Figure 4. After former Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini met with US President Donald Trump in 2019, admins photoshopped themselves into the picture as well. The bag on the head as a way of protecting their identities is a well-known distinguishing feature of Zomri admins.
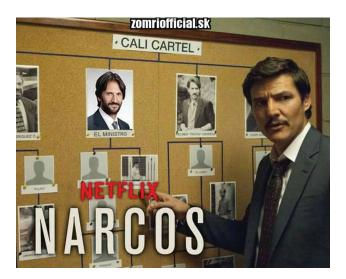

Figure 5. Adjusting the picture taken from the Netflix show Narcos, the picture of former Minister of Interior, Robert Kaliňák (whose nickname is Kali), is photoshopped in with a reference to his numerous questionable corruption incidents that forced him to resign in 2018. His resignation was one of the outcomes of mass protests and a discussion on Slovakia's resemblance to a "mafia state" following the murder of an investigative journalist in early 2018.

The page has developed into a significant (social and political) force with more than 216 k followers as of October 2019, one of the biggest Slovak language Facebook pages. In March 2019, *Zomri* also appeared on the second place of the Storyclash Social Media Rating in Slovakia, with more than 3.7 million interactions monthly. In addition to becoming a major channel for people´s social and political frustrations, and their up-to-date satirical reflection of current affairs, the page started to actively exploit the

social capital it has gathered over the past 3 years. This is reflected in a number of campaigns launched in collaboration with charities and Slovak NGOs,[9] suggesting that the aim of the group is not just to comment and reflect, but to actively – and atypically – engage in social and political matters. In one of their media engagements, the admins suggested that they consider themselves as a form of "*civic self-defense*" (Aktuality.sk, 2018a), which suggests a form of a guardian-like role of the self-defined moral values in society and denouncing and shaming all individuals, whether public or private, who endanger those values.

On digital media and possibilities for civic engagement

The connection between digital media and democracy remains contested (Papacharissi, 2010). Social media create the possibility of a new form of public sphere, allowing the exchange of political ideas, and enhancing civic participation. Yet in practice, these technologies tend to enhance the opportunity for the political discussion, not its quality (Papacharissi, 2002). Although the internet and social media greatly facilitate political participation, they also created a number of unprecedented forms of civic engagements.

The concept of "hybridization," referring to the process of adaptation by established institutions to the new (political) environment created by the social media, reacts by adapting traditional concepts to this new environment, often providing brand new contexts for traditional concepts such as political mobilization and/or participation (Chadwick, 2007). Generally, we are referring to a very specific type of contemporary or new *social movement*, adopted to a digitalized environment. Groups such as *Zomri* resemble "new participatory civic movements" that do not organize formally (e.g. as formal political parties), but still express their demands very clearly, which, as Tufekci (2014) argues, is rather symptomatic for the social media era, as technological innovation enables citizens to organize more easily and even effectively compared to formal institutions. Social media are therefore an emerging means of organization for contemporary social movements as they provide an opportunity for active participation and individual empowerment (Tufekci, 2014). Such an approach is in line with conceptualization of new social movements through communication, by which means the understanding of the "collective" is being challenged, increasingly defined on the basis of the process rather than the outcome (Kavada, 2016). This is, among other things, related to the personalization of the collective action as a result of growing individualization,

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[9]For instance, in March/April 2018 admins encouraged their followers to take part in the series of street anti-government demonstrations following the murder of the investigative journalists, organized by the civic initiative For a Decent Slovakia (Za slušné Slovensko); in December 2018, the admins actively supported the crowdfunding campaign of the NGO People in Peril and their humanitarian projects; in January 2019 they also supported the crowdfunding campaign of the NGO Vagus, dealing with the issue of homelessness.

with digital technologies being crucial for networking individuals with diverse affiliations, identities, and ideologies based on individual causes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011). That is where the concept of "new" social movements in the digital era differs from the traditional understanding based on the identity and coordinated action. Forms of communication thus replace the formal organizational structure in shaping collective action (Gerbaudo, 2012).

This study considers bottom-up forms of civic political participation and argues that, as a "new hybrid social movement," *Zomri* combines elements of different concepts – including trolling, vigilantism, and citizen journalism – all manifest as practices of mediated visibility. In addition to the understanding of the term in line with the concept of vigilantism, i.e. as a means to harm political targets (Trottier, 2017), "mediated visibility" also refers to the visibility of actions as a form of strategy (Thompson, 2005) that serves to augment their impact and social recognition and thus gain and leverage social and political capital (Myles & Trottier, 2017). The network that is created, ultimately, may also be utilized for security practices (Dupont, 2004). For *Zomri* the role of such a community as a vital and engaged base of support is crucial. Moreover, it is not a product of deliberate strategy, and the admins of the page do not intentionally seek to formalize their action, nor do they seek to justify their presence and actions to the public as would be expected of more formal structures (such as, e.g., a political party). The current version of the page has been formed by a gradual and unexpected accumulation of social capital, while becoming a significant civic society actor with relevance in social, political but also security affairs. It is an ambition of this study to unpack the diverse layers of this hybridized entity and study its relevance in relation to the followers and supporters of the page.

Methodology and research design

This paper is an explorative qualitative case study of a context-specific social media initiative, aiming to better understand the forms of political and social actions in which trolling initiatives engage. Even though it offers limited immediate opportunities for generalization, we believe it is a valuable insight into locally specific social media activities that challenge existing conceptual frameworks. The analysis is based on two data sources.

Firstly, for the purpose of this study, four in-depth semi-structural interviews with *Zomri* page founders and administrators were conducted. The four admins, three of them being also founders of *Zomri*, are key persons when it comes to the every-day functioning as well as long-term decisions about the page´s content and activities and, most importantly, also key persons defining its ideological profile. Following the rapid increase of the page's reach and influence, admins are (at the time of writing) to a much greater extent involved also in public support and promotion of charities and NGO work as well as

a number of awareness-raising and educational projects (for instance related to the most recent political affairs, elections, extremism, conspiracy theories, and propaganda). Their perspectives and motivations are therefore crucial in analyzing the nature as well as impact of the page.

The interviews took place in March and April 2019, with three of them (A1, A2, and A3) conducted face-to-face and one (A4) conducted online, upon the request of the respondent. These interviews have been pseudonymized for the reasons of confidentiality as the identities of the administrators are strictly protected due to safety concerns. Much from the existing research on trolling and vigilantism often focuses on the content rather than actors (see, e.g., Castle & Parsons, 2017; Fuchs, 2013; Schneider & Trottier, 2012; and others) – mostly also based on the anonymity as well as inaccessibility of respondents as a significant research limitation. Personal interview with trolls is therefore a rare opportunity. Phillips (2015) also points that in terms of trolling, online and offline personalities tend to be quite different, which may pose an important research dilemma. In this research, we decided to proceed with personal interviews due to the fact that despite wanting to preserve their anonymity, the admins are relatively open about their authorship as well as the nature of their activities even in their offline world, which makes this distinction less important.

Additionally, we collected 148 questionnaires from followers and supporters of the page in an open-ended online survey. The questionnaire, consisting of 12 questions,[10] was distributed to a random selection of followers of the page mostly through the *Zomri* Facebook direct messaging channels.[11] This was a strategic decision in order to limit the spread of the questionnaire outside of the *Zomri* fandom; it was not our intention to achieve a representative sample of the broader Slovak population, as we are primarily concerned with the community formed in relation to the page. Moreover, as the page itself as well as their activities are considered to be rather controversial, public attitudes involving their performance are very polarized and it was our intention to eliminate the possibility of contested dataset. The questionnaire responses (pseudonymized as R1-R148) supplement the perceptions of admins on their performance and impact and further explore relevant aspects of the page's operations that emerged during the interview stage.

The interviews and open-ended questionnaire followed this three-part structure, focusing on the three key concepts that were selected to explain

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[10]The structure of the questionnaire follows the main structure of the results section below, i.e. the first part focused on how the followers define what the page is doing (e.g. How would you define the *Zomri* page in one sentence?); the second part focused on what followers define as the key motivation behind the page (e.g. Who or what would you say the page targets primarily? Why do are they[?] targets?); and the third part focused on the social significance of the page (e.g. What meaning does their activity have for society (if any)?).

[11]Using non-probabilistic convenient sampling, the questionnaire was sent out randomly by the moderators of the page to 250 fans (out of 200 k overall followers) who contacted the page during the duration of the data gathering process. As a result, 148 questionnaires were collected and used as a supplementary data source for the analysis.

the initiative: (1) What are they doing? (trolling) (2) Why are they doing it? (vigilantism) and (3) What is their purpose? (citizen journalism).

Empirical analysis

In the following section, three guiding concepts will be introduced, along with a set of reasons why the framework is or is not entirely applicable for the given case.

What are they doing? (tools: trolling)

Phillips derives the word "trolling" from the original meaning of the word, which refers to "fishing for the flames" (2015, p. 15). Humor and amusement are seen as the key functions of the page, by both admins and the followers, which is an understandable consequence of its origins as a fake profile for trolling celebrities. As already indicated, the origins of the page reflect a lack of intended purpose similar to how trolling is generally understood and defined: *"just like that, it happened; at first, we were mocking the celebrities, because we wanted to"* (A2) or *"we were just bored on Facebook and somehow it all happened"* (A4). Even though the page has changed over time, the trolling aspect in different forms remained present. Admins admit a tendency toward provocation, claiming they enjoy *"to inflame the topics that no one cares about, that they are f**ked up"* (A3) and *"p**s off the people that you want to p**s off with the post, that´s very motivating"* (A3).

Although a coherent and generally accepted definition is lacking, the term *trolling* broadly refers to online activity with certain specific features, such as disrupting online interaction and debates and luring others into fruitless arguments (Coles & West, 2016), while lacking an interest in leading meaningful debate (Koerner, 2013), provoking and even abusing others for self- or even collective amusement (Bishop, 2014). It may even refer to antisocial behavior characterized by the form of online bullying and harassment (Craker & March, 2016). Trolling is assumed to be driven by *"the logic of lulz,"* meaning the *"ironic and critical logic (that) often antagonizes the core identity categories"* (Milner, 2013). Here it is important to stress that the term troll may seem to be equally suitable to be used for both the page and some of their targets/opponents, suggesting a sort of a 'false equivalence' in terms of practices between trolls such as *Zomri* and trolls from political opponents. Despite the normativity of this claim, we suggest that the ideological profile is crucial to be taken into the account, as *Zomri* and its community are openly pro-establishment, pro-European, and pro-democracy oriented (A1), which substantially distinguishes this page from other trolls. At the same time, we believe that this further supports our claim that it is important to closer study

such hybrid online initiatives from different theoretical perspectives, as existing concepts alone are not sufficient to cover all the crucial aspects.

As mentioned above, memes are not only a crucial means to troll, but they are becoming a resource for political mobilization. As Milner states, memes "*constitute a formal 'media lingua franca,' bearing multiplicities of content to dispersed collectives*" (Milner, 2013) When coupled with trolling, memes "*are unique sociotechnical products that are both shaped in context and impact context*" (Sanfilippo, Yang, & Fichman, 2017). Memes, therefore, reflect a certain form of shared cultural identity. For *Zomri* and its followers, memes are not only a means of expression and carriers of certain (political) messages, but also a manner of shared identity. The internal jokes that transcend *Zomri's* growth are impossible to understand without regularly monitoring the page. "*(Zomri) is sort of a memory book, memory book of all that malice that people did. Maybe it was written about in the media, but if you have it summed up in three memes, about what some politician did, you don´t need to read all those articles. Simply striking, fast, reactive, reacting to a specific thing*" (A3).

Trolling-like behavior is not restricted to memes about public and private individuals. In line with a basic understanding of satire, i.e. highlighting and further exaggerating certain characteristic features about individuals, a significant share of the page´s content includes fabricated statements by individuals that are obviously not true – at least for regular fans who follow the page (while a broader audience may be confused by this content). This is in line with the origins of the *Zomri* page, i.e. fake profiles of Slovak celebrities, when the fun was based on guessing which profile is true and which one is fake (A1). Such posts then pick up the most humiliating aspects of one´s behavior and repost them indefinitely.

However, the term trolling assumes an inability to define a clear motivation for practitioners and therefore also challenges the potential that trolls can be political. Phillips points out that the definition of trolling and its anonymity is too varied and diverse in terms of behavior and purpose to be able to verify that trolling is political, even if it might be true (2015). Yet *Zomri* supports an understanding of trolling as political, in a way that it seeks to "*polarize discussions and stoke arguments, which generates outrage*" (Sanfilippo et al., 2017, p. 2313).

Why are they doing it? (motivation: vigilantism)

Even though what *Zomri* does may be considered as disruptive toward the public discourse; it would be a mistake not to perceive this disruption in the wider context of political and social confrontations that have been increasingly polarized at the time of writing, and which also shed insight into *Zomri's* motivations.

The term vigilantism in the conventional understanding refers to a form of informal policing (Johnston, 1996) in which a group of citizens engage in activities that are generally understood (and legally defined) as the competence and responsibility of the police and other branches of the state. However, with new opportunities offered to citizens by social and digital media, the concept of vigilante activity has expanded. Digital vigilantism has been defined by Trottier (2017) as "*process where citizens are collectively offended by other citizen activity, and coordinate retaliation on mobile devices and social platforms*," while this process is "*driven by a range of criminological motivations, including responding to criminal events as well as the prevention and deterrence of potential transgressions*" (Trottier, 2017, p. 56). Instead of the (threat of) violence, harm is primarily evoked by unwanted, enforced, and enduring visibility (Trottier, 2017). Admins admit that visibility is a form of "punishment" for targets, claiming that "*if you show all those morons, sometimes they realize themselves*" (A2). Yet because admins are gate-keepers of the page who decide who is being mocked and who is not (for instance, following their own rules that private persons only appear on the page if they deserve it by their actions "*we don´t hit directly common people, if they directly don´t ask for it, for instance that they write some comment to us*" (A4)), we may observe a specific form of executing their own perception of justice in deciding who does and who does not deserve to be the target of the mockery ("*Sometimes I feel sorry for some of them, but they deserve it*" (A3)). Here, once again, the role of ideology in the context of the community of followers needs to be emphasized, as the community is relatively coherent about the targets and the legitimacy of the mockery that is directly based on the ideological profiles of the persons involved. "*when we get into Kotleba, then of course, they won´t say that we spread hatred about him. Basically, we are, but in the name of good. For the greater good.*" (A3)

Admins are motivated by a degree of frustration and perceived lawlessness, which, under the influence of the rapid increase of their fan base, turned into a sort of mission: "*I would be very happy to lose this job (…) if only we were not driven into it by that quantum pieces of sh*t that exist and that quantum of injustice, the quantum of frustration from the current situation … I would be very happy. (…) But this will not disappear*" (A3). As is the case with conventional vigilantism, perceived lawlessness is considered as important driver in case of digital vigilantism, mainly given the lack of legal authority over the internet (Dunsby & Howes, 2018). Despite connotations of lawlessness, vigilante activities often intend to support conventional police work. In the case of the 2011 Vancouver riot, digital media users sought to identify rioters, consequentially helping official police forces to bring rioters and criminals to justice (Schneider & Trottier, 2012).[12] Also, despite the supposed distinction between vigilante and state activity, the possibility for formal or informal cooperation between civil society and states complicates this distinction

(Trottier, 2017). Recent cases also point to harmful consequences of the online vigilante initiatives, exercising their social power over others and enforcing their ideologies while terrorizing marginal communities (Kasra, 2017). Discussions over societal implications of very diverse online vigilante initiatives often evoke ethical dilemmas and require further inquiry.

From this point of view, the crucial point of departure when analyzing the activity of a page such as is *Zomri* is their own self-perception as "*civic self-defense.*" The admins understand self-defense through various meanings: either with "*humor and jokes as the way of self-defense*" (A2), as a place to vent frustration ("*It´s a sort of relief.*" A3), but also as a form of self-assurance that injustice is being punished ("*self-defense meaning that people see how politicians are scolded. That we give them sh*t. And they are more satisfied, that something is happening*" (A2), "*we pay attention to those things, we won´t let them go down with the ashes*" (A3)). This suggests a specific sort of vigilante activity, insofar as it serves as guardianship of specific moral principles in the public environment, using denunciation as a punishment imposed by an online community. Johnston acknowledges in his conceptualization of vigilantism that the concept does not necessarily have to be linked to the attempts to regulate criminality, but also social or moral norms (Johnston, 1996). It is exactly this self-proclaimed role as guardians of their own definition of morality that evokes the vigilante nature of the page.

The definition of digital vigilantism assumes that the enforced visibility of individuals is understood as a form of punishment for their actions, a judgment pronounced by the (anonymous) online community. "*Targets are politicians who have the biggest impact on people, also extremists, whatever kind, whether it´s politician or common person … and so on. And also, some trends that suck, we would 'hate' those as well*" (A3). However, it is true that in case of the *Zomri* page visibility takes rather different form: it is more about visibility of certain patterns of behavior that are targeted, which is delivered via (again) enforced visibility of the representatives of such behavior, whether they are public personas (e.g. politicians) or private individuals. Using the wording of the admins, their aim is "*to make stupidity visible*" (Admins in the interview for Refresher, 2017). However, even such forms of visibility can serve as a weapon, as, in line with Trottier (2017) conceptualization, such visibility is supposed to be *unwanted, intense*, and *enduring*. Considering the private persons, the visibility (for instance accompanied by doxing) may have harmful effects; yet already visible figures can experience harm through further mediated exposure. Visibility can be a double-edged sword (Brighenti,

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[12]Similar activity, involving urging of the community to help or find somebody, appeared on the page several times. For instance, in May 2019 the page posted a call for people to identify a group of violent attackers of an elderly couple in the night bus; or in January 2019 the admins published a call by one of its followers who was looking for a girl he met in a bus. The girl was then found based on his own drawing, which itself became a target of general amusement.

2007). In one of its extreme embodiments in political scandals, visibility becomes an opportunity for those who built their careers on it – a form of "*maddened visibility (…) with sometimes tragicomic if not grotesque effect*" (Ibid., p.335). In the era of social media, mediated visibility may become part of the repertoire for citizen struggles, meaning that for political leaders it can bring both helpful and harmful effects (Thompson, 2005). This double-edged principle is reflected in the relationships the admins have with some politicians: "*Those who understand, they applaud us, and that´s great (…) those understand what we are trying to do. And maybe they will not like us anymore once they start to crap and we start to throw dirt on them, one that belongs to them and that is well deserved. That´s when it will probably end*" (A3).

The focus on the mockery and ridiculing of the far-right as the "private" form of engagement of the admins as frustrated citizens led to the first substantial shift in the purpose and activity of the group, as indicated above. This was a significant moment in the development of the page through a rapid increase of its recognizability, increasing their own visibility substantially. On the other hand, the group also used the visibility of the far-right scene itself in the "fight" against extremist voices in a manner that was unwanted and detrimental. Nevertheless, even the concept of vigilantism does not sufficiently capture *Zomri's* form of engagement. Besides the issues that might arise from understanding and the role of the notion of visibility in practices of the group, the diversity of targets of the *Zomri* page also challenges this theoretical framework. Vigilantism is understood as a form of horizontal surveillance (i.e. citizens watching other citizens), which as indicated above is not always the case with the page. Their jokes often concern politicians and political institutions, which also suggest a more bottom-up form of surveillance. Moreover, the page is increasingly engaged in activities that, in addition to making fun of targets, also shape the page as a source of information – or, a type of media. Interestingly, despite the high level of subjectivity regarding targets and their supposedly well-deserved punishments, the admins still seem to be aware of these potential side-effects. "*For me it´s mostly about the huge power I have through the impact of the page. Somehow, it seems unfair to me to put out there some poor guy who works hard and have this feeling that he has been forgotten by everyone, just this Magian [Kotleba] protects him. Those people are victims*" (A4).

What is their purpose/role? (purpose/role: citizen journalism)

With the increased fan base and higher share of fan-made content, the page itself changed significantly in two major aspects – trust and responsibility. Apart from inspiration for memes and jokes, *Zomri* started to post other content as well. As the admins became more aware of their reach and impact, they partially took on the role of the media. "*We don´t want to spread the*

hatred, for sure, in a sense that 'I hate you'. I always try to turn it to the humor, to throw those incidents to the people somehow, like I make a meme that is funny, let´s say, ha ha, but I also enclose a description from the newspaper. Like what exactly happened" (A2). For instance, in the page's photo album "*because that´s how it is in Slovakia*"[13] they publish various pictures taken by fans across the country that shows the level of public services in the country, such as the public railway's frequently delayed and nonfunctioning trains and unhygienic medical facilities. This refers to a different kind of mediated visibility, as suggested in the previous section.

While traditional journalism is considered as one of the pillars for democratic society through fostering political knowledge as well as political participation, this also applies to emerging forms of interactive journalism that no longer function exclusively in a one-way manner (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & de Zuniga, 2010). In this case, interactive audiences themselves participate in the creation of the content of the *Zomri* page, by sending leads and materials that often would go unnoticed by traditional media. The content is therefore largely shaped by the audience and through the page the audience becomes an important agenda-setter in public discourse. The high level of responsiveness, uncommon in traditional media, has further positive impacts on the strength of the community itself: *"It´s mostly about that interaction, when you see that the person reacts to what you write, that you send a message somewhere and you see that that person responds to that message, or even publish it, that he is paying attention to it somehow, and when ten people see it, they see that it is worth it. (…) That´s what I say is the reason why we are becoming sort of … media and why we are first to have so much information from the field, whether it is about burning trains, hospitals or whatever crap … because those people believe that if they send something to us, we react immediately, and it is worth it"* (A1).

Citizen journalism is another concept with multiple definitions. In the broadest sense, any news content produced by ordinary citizens, i.e. not by professional journalists, can be considered as citizen journalist content (Wall, 2015). At the same time, it involves investigative and reporting activities that are aided by new digital technologies (Campbell, 2014). This may, however, include a wide variety of cases, including individuals who happen to be at the right place at the right time as well as frequent contributors, bloggers, or individuals acting like journalists despite lacking press credentials (Wall, 2019). Wall also emphasizes that the understanding of citizen journalism as a concept varies depending on the context and political and social environment. For this very reason, it is important to reflect that citizen journalists operate in different conditions and with different motivations in democratic and non-democratic regimes (Wall, 2015). The motivation, as discussed

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[13]Original title in Slovak is *"lebo na Slovensku je to tak"*.

above, arises from the pro-establishment and pro-democratic ideological profile of the *Zomri* page and its admins. As already discussed, it involves more than just amusement and, at the same time, more than just revenge against wrongdoings. Admins *"don´t process things just to have an impact on people, or likes, but because it is important, and we believe it needs to be dealt with"* (A3). This reflects frustration with injustice, but also an interest to change the situation in some way and raise awareness in a way traditional media usually do, seeking for the audience *"to have the overview, to have the awareness. (…) so people have the information, so they see what´s going on. Not everything, of course, but the most important stuff* (A2). The gradual change of the role of the page is also reflected in a growing self-awareness and responsibility, which is uncommon in case of trolls or vigilante initiatives: *"We are becoming softer. We need to be careful, it´s a lot of people … it´s a huge audience, and I´m trying (…) to be aware of it"* (A2).

There are several important aspects to be highlighted in terms of the relevance of this concept for the object of this study. Firstly, compared to traditional journalists, the motivation of citizen journalists typically exceeds merely reporting in order to bring social and political change (Campbell, 2014; Wall, 2019). This possibly relates to their dissatisfaction with traditional journalism and their performance and challenging the state of mainstream media corporations (Goode, 2009), as studies suggest a relation between lack of trust and seeking alternative sources of information (Kaufhold et al., 2010). This suggests that citizen journalism is much more than just sharing pictures and videos of certain situations based on the coincidence that the citizen is "in the right place at the right time," which refers more to the origin of the source of the information that is anyway processed by the traditional journalist; citizen journalists process and share the information themselves.

This implies that citizen journalism is in its very essence, a form of citizen participation and activism. It is generally perceived as one of the by-products of mobile devices and social media platforms that make it possible for citizens to publish their ideas without the necessity of gatekeepers in the form of publishing houses. While in some cases, the activity may be motivated by efforts to correct the perceived shortcomings of traditional journalism, it can also be driven by community efforts to achieve some kind of social impact or influence the agenda-setting process by pushing certain issues to the center of the public discourse (Radsch, 2016). Moreover, even though journalism in general has always been perceived as a key component of democracy, acting as the mediator of the information and creating conscious citizens (Kaufhold et al., 2010), the participation of citizens in the agenda-setting process naturally opens the discussion on the potential democratization effect of the citizen journalism as a phenomenon. Citizens not only potentially influence the agenda in public discourse, but also engage in the discussion with each other about the content and meaning of the agenda (Goode, 2009). In line with

above-mentioned motivations of the admins and frustration related to the political situation, *Zomri* partially resembles what Wall introduces as resistance citizen journalism, defined as *"bringing together activists opposed to existing power structures"* (Wall, 2019).

Although *Zomri* contains the certain gatekeeping moment, the absence of the traditional gatekeeping mechanism also means, besides the agenda-setting function reflected in the change of the main source of legitimation of them as an information source. As Radsch points out, contrary to the traditional media with objectivity as a primary aim, citizen journalists, being characteristically more normative, rely more on trust and their legitimacy is based on the level of the achieved credibility (2016). This is, in the end, what the abovementioned trust is based on, that leads people to submit their stories to an anonymous Facebook page rather than traditional media. On the other hand, the bigger picture also suggests a concerning trend of accepting such social media-based pages as a sole information source, with such pages potentially serving as an exclusive social lens. This is worrying in case of strategically malicious pages, and also brings certain issues for *Zomri* as well: *"(Zomri) has certain impact on shaping the opinion of young people. And a lot of people don´t read news, they just follow 'Zomri'. And for me that´s a negative thing (…) because they won´t get impartial information, but information that are already processed. And often processed in a very negative way. And then someone could have this feeling that there are no good things around"* (A4). This points to a specific type of self-imposed "filter bubble" (Pariser, 2012), where users may voluntarily exclude alternate perspectives, rather than occurring automatically through algorithms.

Discussion: from trolls to a community

Through the concepts that were introduced above, we identify several relevant features that suggest the initial assumption that *Zomri* is more than simply trolls, and indeed that trolling more generally may be manifest as a kind of hybridized campaign.

The role of the community – trust and collective identity

"And fans somehow miraculously managed to identify with the page so much that they put into their profile pictures that they are admins and so on. That´s absolutely amazing. I think that in this, *'Zomri'* is an indestructible thing. Principally, we could tomorrow just pass on the torch and turn ourselves off. And people would not even notice that there has been some change. We as admins are less and less essential for the survival of *'Zomri'*" (A4).

The community of followers that has formed around the *Zomri* page is the crucial aspect that distinguishes it from typical trolling or vigilante

communities, and, at the same time, what also makes *Zomri* more than just trolls. It is also the main aspect that distinguishes the page from traditional satire channels as those are usually centered around specific figures (e.g. satirists, comedians) who are the main carrier of their message. Yet the anonymity of the admins combined with the collective authorship helps to overcome this one-way relationship with the audience. It is not only the public support for the type of humor and/or the type of activities the page has engaged in that matter; it is the aspect of collective identity that matters as in this case we can observe the group of followers that identify themselves with the page administrations, as they all are admins and they all can be admins. The relationship with the audience, that has become more than an audience, has been built over time and mirrors the shift in purpose and motivation that the page has undergone. Starting from the exclusive involvement of four people, *Zomri* has developed into a product of collective identity and authorship. The followers reflect this shift, which furthers their devotion to the page. "*The biggest shift is the huge involvement of the broader society in the creation of this site*" (R119). "*They will grow stronger. They enforce the philosophy that even their followers are admins of Zomri. Zomri will survive us all*" (R28). At this point it is also necessary to note the tension that seems to arise between this collective identity and the fact that technically it is still the four people that manage the page and decide its content. From this perspective, it is clear that the notion of collective ownership is mostly a means of strengthening the community.

The sense of collective authorship creates a unique community sharing clearly defined values and political ideology, who also share the common internal language, way of talking as well as humor. In the context of their fight against radicalization, *Zomri* is perceived as "a *wall against extremism and their practices*" (R27), "*uniting many people for the right thing*" (R80) with the developed mechanism to "*agitate society when it is necessary to resist or support something*" (R83).

Moreover, by acquiring trust of the audience, the admins accumulated significant social and political capital that they utilize when people turn to them for help, which they do more often as trust increases. As mentioned earlier in the context of aspects of citizen journalism, followers often choose to share information with the page rather than with the traditional media as a response is more likely – they "*help to draw the attention to current social problems and can often help where others could not*" (R28) and "*respond faster and bolder than journalists*" (R45). The admins' gate-keeping appears to reflect a more benevolent and less distanced manner compared to traditional media, and they also channel their followers´ agenda-setting ambitions. This, however, poses another kind of question: whether some of their actions may cause a similar effect as does the spread of hoaxes and conspiracy media, not just for the relatively high level of credibility the page seems to enjoy among its fans,

but sometimes also due to misunderstood irony.[14] Even among followers who perceive the page as a positive development, many reflect the other side of the "hype" that has been developed around the page as well. "*Some people see them as a serious and trustworthy page. Then people continue to spread it as true facts*" (R44).

Two-way mobilization: pushing society to be more self-defendant

"The power of it all is that before that, the space for these topics, or people, who are dedicated to protect the democracy, to some anti-fascist agenda (…) that they just were fragmented. And we created the space where they all connect to one center. (…) And I think that this may be a reason that it grows exponentially now, because people feel the power in themselves" (A1)

Zomri's mobilization functions in a two-way manner. On one hand, admins' crucial role lies in mobilizing their audience in various ways – whether through expressing disapproval of public matters (although sometimes in a very controversial way – "*shows that there is a healthy opinion; because anti-establishment politicians and supporters shout loudly, and moderate people do not want to argue with them. And then it seems that there is no moderate voice*" (R13)), informing and rising awareness ("*It is amusing, but it also opens my eyes many times about things I didn't know were going on around us*" (R83), often reaching the audience that is not targeted or reached by mainstream media, or through promotion of NGO projects and charities as their endorsement usually means a huge boost for crowdfunding campaigns of different kinds. Formed with a specific and always openly communicated ideological grounding, they have become a channel for frustration and, at the same time, turn apathy into political engagement ("*Partial loss of objectivity, replaced by engagement*" (R93)). The followers actively reflect the pro-democratic ideological orientation of the page, pointing out to the positive effects of the page toward the civic engagement, claiming that *Zomri* "*force people to reflect on and respond to the situation, not to be just a passive passer-by*" (R3), and "*keep together people who are aware of the moral, legal or human filth that is around. In other words, their aim may be to prevent people from being silent because of fear of lack of support from other people*" (R40). The strength of the community is just one aspect of this – the other being the constant reminders of offenses and wrongdoings of all kinds – in particular those of political actors. "*Therefore, these things are not forgotten, but people*

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[14]As an example, in an incident from October 2019, admins received a photo of a square with the central statue missing. They posted it on the page, asking people if anyone knows, what is going on. Very quickly, after realizing that the picture has been fake and photoshopped, they posted an apology, acknowledging the seriousness of the mistake and lack of effort to verify the information, especially since they are widely perceived as disinformation fighters.

will remember them after some time. Politicians are very happy to rely on people to forget. Thanks to Zomri we will not forget" (R115).

On the other hand, the admins themselves are mobilized and shaped by their audience as well, which can be clearly seen on their trajectory of development, from trolls without purpose and ambition to the significant social player. They were pushed to the role of what they call "civic self-defense" and, in turn, push the society back to be more self-defendant by itself, by promoting and endorsing pro-democratic and pro-establishment attitudes as opposed to hoaxes and disinformation, but also by strengthening the community as well as by encouraging the civic engagement and inspiring others to mobilize. In general, followers appreciate this feeling, with *Zomri* being "*a place where I meet people with the same humor and values*" (R133), "*the wall against evil, hatred and extremism*" (R141), "*mobilizing people to resist what is wrong here*" (R120) Humor is not only a way to make information more appealing, nor just a strategic decision to catch the attention and attract more followers. It also reinforces a sense of community, as *Zomri* has developed a particular language that only regular fans understand, and they use it as a channel to express frustration ("*Ventilation of anger and sadness.*" (R91)) and encourage and cheer one another: "*humor is something that relieves the appalling reality – and also as something that reminds me that I am not alone in disagreement with the kotlebas[15]*" (R23).

Politically engaged vigilant trolls?

"And it´s the support from those people, that you must do it, you cannot mess it up, you cannot say I´m not doing anything (…) they are just happy with you. And they support you so … you have to do it" (A2).

Characteristic trolling techniques, that are in the Slovak public discourse usually understood in as disrupting the democratic principles, undermining pro-establishment and/or pro-European attitudes,[16] are in case of this group mobilized in order to protect democratic values. Moreover, they are trolls with very clear political purpose, message, and responsibility, backed by community and with media-like impact. The amusement and mockery is not purposeless, it is used as a tool for fight – and as a "mirror" for their targets: "*the mocking is at least some kind of a punishment*" (R9) "*to ridicule a human stupidity*" (R25), "*using jokes to point out the errors of the system*" (R30), "*to p**s off prak***ti*" (R109), "*Zomri sets the mirror of today's demented society*" (R126).

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[15]Derived from the name "Kotleba" and indicating the supporters of Marian Kotleba, the far-right politician.
[16]As an example, media brought information about new virtual initiative against disinformation and propaganda, "Slovak virtual elves", online activists, who declared themselves as "counterbalance to trolls", who are mostly coming from Russia. (Aktuality.sk, 2018b).

This point underscores the importance of the community. The positive normative perception of the page among its followers is heavily dependent on the fact that the target of their posts are people from other political camps, while reflecting that they see it more critically if the target is their favorite politicians. On the other hand, even though the political orientation of the page and the admins have been always clearly articulated and heavily subjective (which has also been openly admitted by the admins on numerous occasions), they have also proved that they are not hesitant to target individuals from all sides of the political spectrum. "*(Zomri) lives from human stupidity and only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity*" (R115) *"It's f**ked up here, so you need to respond appropriately and why not make it humorous"* (R85).

Self-defined perception of justice: taking justice into their own hands?

"Those extremists will get to the parliament, and we will see how loud they will be. And there is a possibility that if they go quiet, we will have to go quiet as well. It is possible that it all depends on how loud the counterparty is" (A1).

Although admins do not feel comfortable using militant terminology, with hesitation arising even around the self-used term "civic self-defense," it is true that their activities often do resemble policing of and through the digital world, as defined by the term "digital vigilantism." On the other hand, this perception seems to be still very common among the fans, seeing admins as "*warriors against evil and stupidity*" (R81), "*monitoring fools in society and politics*" (R89).

The most interesting but also potentially troubling aspect is the strength of the subjective belief about right and wrong – which also implies a subjective perception of who does and does not deserve justice. Given the strength of the community and trajectory of its development around the values of protecting the democratic society, it is not unsurprising that this strong belief is shared between admins and fans and is constantly mutually strengthened. "*(Zomri) ridicule any person who deserves it*" (R82) "*I am glad that someone will take the time to publicly denounce the unprecedented actions of our 'personalities' of political life without backbones*" (R124). "*They know who they should 'bully' because those people 'deserve social bullying'*" (R126).

The most controversial part is around the selection of the target that deserves to be mocked publicly, as the only judges are the admins of the page who decides who appears on *Zomri*. Even though their self-awareness in relation to the impact the page has led them to reevaluate posting information about private persons, to a certain extent their actions, while fueled by the community, are always guided by their own perceptions of what is just and what is not, before the "punishment" strikes. The limits of the public shaming and mockery as a punishment seem to be reflected by the fans mostly when

their favorite politicians appear among targets. "*It is great that they try to get young people to politics but at the same time I do not like that they ridicule everyone with a different opinion*" (R127). "*They have the power to destroy other careers, but also the power to make other careers*" (R128).

Conclusion

In this paper we contribute to existing conceptualizations in the context of regional social media-based activity, claiming that concepts like trolling and vigilantism are necessary but insufficient to capture all characteristics of modern social media-based social movements in different settings. *Zomri* is an example of a cohesive yet hybridized social media initiative shaped by trolling practices, but at the same time showing signs of vigilante character-istics and functioning as a source of information about current social and political events. This also further highlights the key implication of such hybridized social media initiatives in the regional context. The uniqueness and also strength of the community, as admins pointed out, is mostly in the creation of a page that brings together pro-democratic, pro-European and pro-liberal opinions among a distinct fan base. The combination of shared author-ship with the admins' gate-keeping helps to sustain the interest of followers. This enables followers to participate in the condemnation of unwanted and undesirable social phenomena as a means for discharging their own feelings of frustration with increasing regional far right and populist movements that often challenging basic democratic principles. At the same time, the page supports collective efforts against disinformation, hoaxes, and far-right hateful and hate-inciting social media content.

We demonstrated the unique role of the community of supporters as well as the role of visibility in various forms and meanings that distinguish the page from existing examples of trolling activities that are mapped and covered in existing academic literature. For these reasons, we advocate a reconsideration of trolls and trolling, especially given different social environments, and to study these in the wider context of their political and cultural implications. Following one of its supporters, *Zomri* is basically "*proof that we have not yet been able to grasp the impact of technology on society*" (R118).

We are aware of the limitations regarding the potential generalizations of the conclusions of this paper, given that it is a case study of a relatively minor social media initiative in a particular regional context. Yet it remains necessary to further address the conceptual issues raised in this paper and to further expand the empirical data on a hybridization of social engagements as a result of digitalization from diverse contexts. *Zomri* as a case study also raises more general questions about contextually specific online forms of civic engagement, particu-larly in relation to broader concepts such as democracy, polarization, and civil society. Even though we claim that *Zomri* is a unique case in terms of its functions

and methods, this development may be of importance in societies that have to cope with radicalization, polarization, or other forms of intra-societal conflict.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

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