The Politics of Anonymity

Poland's Media Discourse on Anonymous Communication Online

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Abstract

Online anonymity has been an important element in scholarly debates on the role of the internet in modern day democracy. Proponents of the right to anonymity argue that it helps secure users' privacy, autonomy and freedom of speech. Critics, on the other hand, see the act of withdrawing identity information as a way to limit or avoid responsibility for one's actions.

Despite large amount of evidence that the role of anonymity on the internet is diverse and context sensitive, researchers have observed a unidirectional trend towards its limitation or even complete elimination. The process, which might be called *de-anonymisation* of online spaces, is influenced by what Lessig (2006) described as four main forces shaping internet's architecture: law, technology, market and social norms. But it also features at the level of discourse, which so far has received very little academic attention. The meanings, values and power struggles underlying the debate on online anonymity have also been largely ignored in Central and Eastern European contexts.

In order to close this gap, this study examines a case from Poland, in which an identity of an anonymous blogger was revealed by a mainstream newspaper. It also investigates the broader characteristics of the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish press. By employing content and discourse analyses, and drawing on the work of critical internet scholars, it offers first empirical evidence that newspapers in Poland can be agents of *de-anonymisation*. Specifically, the findings reveal the debate on online anonymity is characterised by four key conflicts: 1) a conflict over the status of journalists and internet users in online deliberation; 2) a conflict over the vision of the digital public sphere; 3) a conflict over Poland's democratisation process; and 4) a conflict of values underlying perceptions of online anonymity.

Acknowledgements

When I started my research adventure, I had no idea how long and tumultuous the road will be. I did not realize how challenging it is to 'theorize' and 'measure' one's own interests, to change one's spontaneous inquisitiveness into a rigorous research procedure.

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CHAPTER 1 | Introduction

Over six years of work as an editor and reporter in the local media outlets in Poland have taught me to appreciate the value of anonymity on the internet. Anonymous comments, though occasionally offensive and off-topic, often provided us with interesting clues and helped identify issues that were only visible to people deeply immersed in the local context.

I knew this context well. It consisted of a network of economic, political and professional dependencies, some powerful figures and quite a few vulnerable people. In this environment, where everyone knows everyone, where being 'different' means being stigmatized, and the retaliation for any form of critique directed towards the powerful can be severe, anonymity created the conditions for forms of expressions that would not occur otherwise.

I also associated anonymous communication with Poland's communist era, when texts in underground oppositional publications were often signed with pseudonyms to protect their authors from oppressive authorities.

Not least do I value anonymity in the contemporary context of omnipotent state and commercial surveillance which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to retain control over the information one is willing to share with others.

Yet, when I started talking to people about anonymity, I was surprised how little value they attribute to it. A sociologist told me that "one cannot change the social order anonymously", a lawyer said that "there is no such thing as the right to anonymity", an online publisher explained that "for the media anonymity is a curse – the more information about your readers you have, that happier your marketing department will be", and a technology journalist claimed that "online anonymity is long gone anyway and there is nothing to miss".

People older than me, who still remember well the times of Poland's oppressive regime, told me that they associate anonymity mostly with secret informers and denunciations, rather than a way for dissidents to communicate their messages to the public. I also noticed that even those who were deeply concerned about their privacy and aware of the ubiquitous surveillance on the

internet had no problem advocating for the 'real name' policy as a way to bring more 'civility' to online discussions. They did not see it as a contradiction.

My particular interest in the mass media discourse surrounding online anonymity was inspired by the gripping case of blogger Kataryna, which brought the issue of internet users' anonymity to the front pages of almost all Polish media. The case, which started in 2009 and which is still seen as one of the key moments of the online anonymity debate in Poland, is an example of what can be called 'media doxing'. It involved a quality daily newspaper *Dziennik* indirectly revealing the real-life identity of a political blogger after she had criticised the Polish Minister of Justice.

The story sparked a heated discussion about the newspaper's conduct and blogger's right to anonymity. I was convinced that this debate, as well as the general media coverage of anonymity on the internet, deserves an in-depth, critical inquiry. I wanted to find out what values, interests and power struggles guide the debate and what it all means for the future of Polish democracy. I also wanted to uncover the local flavours of the debate and the cultural meanings that shape it.

1.1 Context and rationale for the study

There is broad agreement among media scholars that the internet has had a great impact on the shape of modern democracy (Papacharissi 2010; Dahlberg 2011; Fuchs 2008; Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal 2008). The advent of tools enabling online deliberation has led to unprecedented, favourable circumstances for citizen participation in public discourse (Nielsen 2014).

One aspect of this participation, which often triggers heated academic, political, and media debates is the possibility of internet users cloaking their identity. Proponents of the right to anonymity argue that it helps secure users' privacy, autonomy and freedom of speech, and it facilitates resistance to the omnipotent control of the state, market and, in some cases, to oppressive social norms.

Critics, on the other hand, see the act of withdrawing personal information as a way to reduce or avoid responsibility for one's actions. In Poland, Michał Boni, the former Minister of Administration and Digitization, responsible for developing

internet regulation, stated in an interview that "[a]nonymity provides security for the devil, for the evil; for demons and destruction" (zś/kdj 2012)[1].

But the Polish minister is not alone in this opinion. Despite mounting evidence that anonymity is used for many different ends and in a wide range of contexts, researchers increasingly observe a clear trend towards its limitation or even complete elimination (Froomkin 2015; van Zoonen 2013; Bollmer 2012; Lovink 2012; Hogan 2013).

This process, that this study calls the *de-anonymisation* of online spaces, has its roots in the political and economic interests driving the collection of data on internet users. In fact, in many democratic countries, online anonymity is legally restricted. Governments often justify this by citing the need to tackle bullying, paedophilia or terrorism (Baym 2010; Fuchs et al. 2011; Kerr, Steeves and Lucock 2009; Froomkin 2015; Carey and Burkell 2007; Nicoll and Prins 2003).

De-anonymisation is also related to the growing popularity of social networking sites that impose 'real name' policies and promote users' so-called transparency. As Bollmer (2012, p.2) observed, "[t]he ability to speak truth and have that truth recognized politically depends on one's willingness to fully reveal one's fixed and totalized identity".

According to Lessig (2006), digital identity technologies are crucial for controlling the internet and therefore exercising power. Online anonymity has therefore become a stake in the battle for power and control that takes place in various arenas, including the legal, the economic and the technological. But it also features at the level of discourse, which, surprisingly, has so far received very little academic attention. Yet, the way online anonymity is constructed in public discourse can influence the way it is understood, regulated and used.

Mass media play a key role in shaping this public discourse. And still, as Sell (2013) notes, the relationship between the media and online anonymity is strongly under-researched. Notable exceptions include Reader's (2012) study on journalistic essays discussing online anonymity in American newspapers, Carey and Burkell's (2007) analysis of depictions of anonymity in Canadian newspapers, and more general investigations of journalists' attitudes towards new media, in

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[1] All translations of Polish texts into English are my own.

which online anonymity was indicated as one of the essential factors (e.g. Meltzer 2015; Nielsen 2014).

None of these studies, however, made an attempt to analyse the power relations embedded in the discussions on anonymity and approach them from a critical perspective. Moreover, most of the existing if scarce research concerning discourses around online anonymity has been conducted from a Western perspective, where the cultural context of such debates is either omitted or taken for granted.

Considering all the above, this study focuses on the media discourse surrounding online anonymity in Poland – a Central European country where the memory of the post World War II communist regime is still alive and often features in public debates. Moreover, in the course of the 26 years since that regime fell, the Polish media system has been shaped by two parallel and ongoing processes – the emergence of the internet and its popularisation and the transition to democracy. While the growing delegitimisation of online anonymity in the Polish media can surely be linked to very similar trends across Europe and around the world, the debate surrounding this issue is at least equally influenced by domestic circumstances such as the country's communist past, the historical perception of journalists as agents of democracy, as well as the struggle of traditional media, especially newspapers, to define their role in society in the age of user generated content.

The investigation of media discourse surrounding online anonymity is also crucial, since Poland is still developing a regulatory framework in relation to new technologies. Some of the recent developments, such as the anti-terror law that came into force in July 2016, were fiercely criticised by several watchdog NGOs for posing significant threat to privacy and freedom of speech. The most contentious regulations included the mandatory registration of pre-paid SIM card users, unrestrained access for the domestic intelligence agency to Polish citizens' records from state institutions, or the right to conduct surveillance of foreign citizens without prior court approval (Panoptykon, 2016).

1.2 Study focus, aims and research questions

In his groundbreaking manifesto on the social determination of technology approach, Langdon Winner (1980) asked if "artefacts have politics," thus challenging the main premises of technological determinism. By 'politics', he meant the "arrangements of power and authority" (1980, p.123) and the processes that determine which technologies will be utilized by society and how. "In the processes by which structuring decisions are made," Winner argued, "different people are differently situated and possess unequal degrees of power as well as unequal levels of awareness" (1980, p.127).

The **'politics'** referred to in the title of this study follows Winner's logic. I consider anonymity on the internet as a social construction and an object of power struggles that shape the way new technologies are designed and used. These struggles take place in the economic and the political spheres (whose exploration lies in the domain of political economy), but they are also happening in the realm of discourse and the meaning making process.

The study therefore focuses on the discourse surrounding online anonymity, but in a very specific context. First, it looks into the **mass media discourse**, which, despite being only one element of public discourse, reflects what Mautner (2008, p.32) calls "the social mainstream" and reveals the most influential voices in the society. As it will be argued further in the study, mass media also play an important role in determining the future of anonymity on the internet. It needs to be noted, however, that in order to provide a point of reference for the mass media discourse in the context of the "Kataryna case", the study also explores the discourse of the blogging community.

Second, while focussing on the online anonymity debate in **Poland,** the analysis investigates the interplay between global and local forces and the power struggles that underlie it. It becomes evident that although the internet is a global medium, the way it is regulated, used and talked about is also influenced by local political and cultural contexts.

The final and most important focus of this thesis is **online anonymity**, or rather the way it is constructed in Polish media discourse. Therefore, despite making an attempt to create a working definition of online anonymity in Chapter 2,

I describe it here as a 'floating signifier' – a concept that is open to interpretation and an object of struggle of various forces that try to fill it with meaning (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

Summing up, the study has the following theoretical and empirical **aims**:

1. *to establish the role of online anonymity in democratic society;*
2. *to investigate the trend of de-anonymisation and establish the media role in it;*
3. *to investigate the general characteristics of the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish media;*
4. *to investigate the power struggles underlying the discursive construction of online anonymity in the Polish media;*
5. *to determine whether, and how, the Polish media discourse on online anonymity contributes to the process of de-anonymisation.*

The two overarching **research questions** that guide the empirical part of the investigation are:

1. *What is the media discourse about online anonymity in Poland?*
2. *Do the media in Poland contribute to the de-anonymisation process?*

The analysis uses two methods – content analysis and critical discourse analysis – and it therefore has two additional sets of more detailed research questions, relevant for each stage in the research process.

For the content analysis, the main research question is:

How was online anonymity covered in the Polish quality newspapers in the years 2006-2012?

More specifically, the study seeks to find out:

1. *What are the dominant contexts in which online anonymity is discussed?*
2. *What types of anonymous activities dominate the coverage?*

3. What sources are cited in the media coverage of online anonymity?

4. What are the main evaluative statements concerning online anonymity?

The critical discourse analysis at the next stage of analysis set out to address the following research questions:

1. Which actors are involved in the media debate surrounding the 'Kataryna case'?

2. What kind of identities do the actors involved in the debate present for themselves, and how do they view others?

3. How is anonymity represented in the context of the 'Kataryna case'?

4. What are the dominant interests and values driving the debate?

5. What are the dominant conflicts and power struggles involved in the debate?

1.3 Research design

As Charles Ess (1996) observed, building a theoretical framework for a research project concerning new technologies carries a lot of risk. In his words, one may find herself riding "a raft cobbled together from whatever one finds available, whose pieces fit together badly and constantly threaten to fall apart" (1996, p.2). This is undoubtedly the biggest threat to a study attempting to embrace the social, political and cultural complexity of a phenomenon as multifaceted as online anonymity. However, a carefully designed, multi-layered investigation can yield observations that could not be made by focusing exclusively on one aspect of said phenomenon.

Kincheole (2001) talks in this context about the need for research approaches that recognize that "[a]ny social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger ongoing process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of its meaning(s) as an entity in the world […] (2001, p.682).

In the broadest sense, this study builds on the critical internet studies approach, and draws on theories of the digital public sphere, surveillance and power relations in new media environments. Online anonymity is analysed here through the prism of the theoretical concept of *de-anonymisation*, developed based on the work of, among others, Lessig (2006), Froomkin (2015), Lovink (2012) and boyd (2012). The notions of the journalistic 'blind spot' (Reader, 2005) and paradigm repair (Ruggiero, 2004) are used to discuss journalists' approaches to the anonymity of internet users.

Since the pilot empirical analysis demonstrated that the Polish media discourse about online anonymity is strongly influenced by the rhetoric of post-communist democratization, the theoretical framework was expanded by the work of, among others, Dobek-Ostrowska (2011a; b) and Kowalski (2010), focusing on the role of the media in democratic transition.

The overall methodological perspective chosen for this research is critical discourse analysis, which for Fairclough (2001, p.121) is "as much theory as method". This approach is intended for "studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach" (Wodak and Meyer 2009, p.2).

To explore the discourses surrounding online anonymity in the Polish media I carried out a two-tier analysis. First, I conducted a content analysis of the coverage of online anonymity in two mainstream Polish daily newspapers. The main objective of this analysis was to identify the dominant news contexts within which anonymity was featured, to determine the prevalent value judgments in the coverage, and, ultimately, to set the ground for the critical discourse analysis.

The study then focuses specifically on the 'Kataryna case,' which offered a unique opportunity for journalists and bloggers to negotiate the meaning of online anonymity and its role in Poland's contemporary public discourse. At this stage, Fairclough's (1995) model for critical discourse analysis is used for exploring media and blogger discourses at the level of text, discursive practice and socio-cultural practice.

1.4 Research findings and claims to originality

Overall, the study combines three fields that have so far been under-researched:

1. the process of *de-anonymisation* of online spaces and the media role in it,
2. the discursive construction of online anonymity with underlying interests, values and power struggles,
3. the debate surrounding the internet in Central and Eastern Europe.

While all three are relevant and topical, their combination offers valuable insights for the future of internet usage and regulation, as well as the future of online deliberation in democratic states.

First, by drawing on the writings of critical internet scholars, this study seeks to build a solid argument on *de-anonymisation* – a process that takes place on various levels including law, market, technology and social norms, and leads to delegitimizing and eventually reducing anonymity in the online environment. Although this argument is not new (see, for example, Hogan 2013), theoretical work critically investigating its complexity is so far very limited. Moreover, this study contributes an original insight into the role of the media in this respect, suggesting that the media's relationship with online anonymity has three interconnected aspects: media influence on the public agenda and on audiences' knowledge and attitudes; media control over access to the public sphere; and journalists' struggle for a privileged position in the new media reality.

Second, by combining content and discourse analysis this study shows that Polish mass media indeed contribute to the process of *de-anonymisation*, but this contribution is not clear cut, and it is driven by a range of factors. The content analysis of press coverage shows that anonymity on the internet is predominantly associated with criminal and undesirable behaviour, and viewed negatively. The critical discourse analysis of the media debate surrounding the 'Kataryna case' demonstrates that anonymity is repeatedly used by journalists to discredit citizens' contributions to the public debate. The study reveals, and then discusses, several areas of conflict that emerged from the debate around online anonymity.

Moreover, to my knowledge this is the first study that provides an in-depth analysis of the so called 'media doxing', where professional journalists use their investigative resources to involuntarily expose the real name of an anonymous blogger.

Lastly, the study's key novelty is in its focus on the debate surrounding online anonymity in a post-communist context. It demonstrates that the media discourse is as strongly influenced by Poland's authoritarian past as by its digital future. As a result, Polish journalists are faced with a dilemma where, on one hand, they see themselves as agents of democracy and freedom of speech at a time of political transition, and, on the other, try to secure their privileged position as opinion leaders at a time of technological change. Identifying those aspects of the online anonymity debate not only allows us to better understand the media coverage of the issue in Poland, but also offers rich and novel material for comparative analysis with other cultural contexts.

Ultimately, the empirical findings of the study help inform and advance the theoretical debate on both the role of the media in the social evolution of the technology, and journalistic strategies in the confluence of political transition and technological change. As such, this investigation offers a novel contribution to the field of (new) media studies and advances the academic discussion on the relationship between the mass media and online anonymity.

1.5 Study structure: an overview

The first three chapters of the thesis lay out the context of the Polish media discourse on online anonymity. I begin by establishing the place of online anonymity in a democracy, then discuss the role of the media in the process of *de-anonymisation*, and eventually shift the focus to the local factors that could be shaping the debate.

All three dimensions serve as a conceptual framework for the empirical analysis, presented in three empirical chapters. In between those two parts, the methodology chapter outlines the overall approach of this investigation, which is Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.

The detailed structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of online anonymity and discusses different ways of defining it. It also outlines the main characteristics that distinguish anonymity on the internet from its offline forms, with special attention to Marwick and boyd's (2011) concept of 'context collapse'.

The discussion then focuses on the uneasy relationship between online anonymity and democracy. Through the prism of two value orientations towards online anonymity - the statist and libertarian approaches (Lee 2006) – two key areas of this relationship are explored. First, the chapter examines the link between online anonymity and the power of state and market. Anonymity on the internet is said to be a crucial tool to enhance internet users' privacy (Woo 2006; Steeves 2009; Wallace 2008; Taddicken 2012), at the same time challenging the state's ability to identify and prosecute criminals.

Second, the place of anonymity in the digital public sphere is explored. The chapter looks into the relationship between anonymity and freedom of speech, and also the influence of anonymity on online deliberations' quality and inclusiveness. Earlier empirical evidence suggests that while anonymity might in some cases decrease the quality of public debate, it also makes such online discussions less exclusive.

Anonymity, this chapter finds, is a genuinely multidimensional and complex concept, and despite undeniable challenges, it is an important aspect of privacy and freedom of speech. It is also instrumental for the creation of an inclusive and pluralistic public debate.

Yet, **Chapter 3** shows that anonymity is being gradually eliminated from the online environment. The discussion begins with the presentation of arguments of leading internet culture scholars who observe a trend toward the promotion of unified, 'real' online identities (van Zoonen 2013; Bollmer 2012; Lovink 2012) which push anonymity to the margins of online communication.

Using the conceptual framework of Lessig (2006), I then explore four groups of factors that influence online anonymity: law, market forces, technological infrastructure, and social norms. These forces, the chapter argues, contribute to the process which can be described as *de-anonymisation* of online spaces.

There is, however, one potential aspect of *de-anonymisation* – the discursive one – which often escapes scholarly attention. Therefore, in the second part of the chapter I make the case for the need to investigate the relationship between online anonymity and the mass media.

After discussing the role of anonymity in a democracy, identifying general trends in online cultures and establishing the role of the media in shaping the future of online anonymity, **Chapter 4** places the concept in the specific context of the Polish media system.

It starts off by describing the ambiguous role that anonymity played during the communist era in Poland, suggesting that it might still influence its perception nowadays. The chapter then examines the characteristic of two transformations facing Polish society – the political and the technological – which influence how media and journalists perceive their role in the democratic public sphere and their relationship with the audience. It is argued that the confluence of the two transformations is reflected in the way the media depict online anonymity in their coverage.

The second part of the chapter is dedicated to other elements in the Polish media reporting on anonymity, such as legal regulations and media practices related to readers' identification. The chapter then presents a general overview of the online anonymity debate in Poland, focusing on a few selected events, including the then Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs' crusade against anonymous comments , as well as mass scale protests against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA).

Chapter 5 presents the overall methodological approach to the analysis and outlines two methods used: content analysis and critical discourse analysis. First, the content analysis is presented as an auxiliary method that allows for mapping out the cultural and social meanings associated with online anonymity in the Polish media discourse, as well as analysing the dominant contexts and evaluations in the reporting. This part of the chapter discusses the choices made in building the sample for the study and presents the rationale behind the analytical process.

I then present the argument for employing Norman Fairclough's approach (both theoretical and methodological) to critical discourse analysis for the study of the power struggles underlying the debate surrounding online anonymity in

Poland. I also explain the decision to study one specific discursive event, namely the 'Kataryna case'. Lastly, the chapter discusses the three levels of analysis - the level of text, discursive practice and social practice.

The following three chapters constitute the empirical part of the thesis. **Chapter 6** describes the findings from the content analysis which explored how online anonymity is portrayed in two mainstream Polish newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. The subsequent sections discuss these findings in light of the research questions. Among others, the chapter explores the contexts in which online anonymity appears in the Polish media, sources quoted by journalists, and general evaluations of anonymity on the internet identified in the analysis.

The results of the critical discourse analysis are presented in two following chapters. For context, **Chapter 7** outlines the story of Kataryna, an anonymous blogger, whose identity was disclosed by one of the Polish newspapers. The media coverage of the so called 'Kataryna case' was chosen as a case study for exploring the interests, values and power struggles shaping the online anonymity debate in Poland.

The chapter describes the findings from the first, textual (Fairclough 1995) level of analysis, focusing mostly on representations of actors, events and social relations involved in the 'Kataryna case', as well as the relevant characteristics of genres and styles in the sample material. The results are presented for each of the media platforms: three newspapers and their online editions, and two blogging platforms.

Next, the main conflicts and power struggles that emerged from the textual analysis are placed in the broader context of discursive and social practices in **Chapter 8**. The discussion is structured around four interconnected conflicts related to online anonymity that were identified in the analysis: the conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers; the conflict over the vision of the public sphere; the conflict over Poland's democratization process; and value conflicts underlying the online anonymity debate.

Finally, **Chapter 9** concludes the investigation, bringing together theoretical concepts presented in the first chapters with the results of both content and discourse analyses. After addressing the two main research questions guiding this

study, I discuss the implications for both theory and practice of online anonymity, as well as for democracy in Poland.

The reflections about the research process are then presented, and the study ends with recommendations and suggestions for further studies. Since online anonymity is a 'moving target' (Nissenbaum 1999) and new plots in the debate appear almost every day, this study is hopefully just the beginning of a broader academic debate about the relationship between the media and anonymity, particularly in Central and Eastern European contexts.

CHAPTER 2 | Online anonymity in the democratic society

Even for internet experts, the prospects for online anonymity remain ambiguous. In the fourth "The Future of the Internet" survey published in February 2010 by the Pew Research Center, 895 technology stakeholders and experts were asked about their vision of new media-related innovations and their impact on society by the year 2020 (Quitney Anderson and Rainie 2010). They were presented with 10 'tension pairs' and asked to point out the more likely scenario. In most cases it was easy to observe a dominant view: 76% of all respondents believed Google 'won't make us stupid', 80% agreed that innovations will keep catching people by surprise and 61% expressed the view that the internet in 2020 will remain the end-to-end medium. There was however one question which generated an almost split verdict. It was the question concerning the future of online anonymity: 55% of the experts stated that anonymous communication will still be possible in ten years' time, while the rest claimed that it will be heavily reduced or even gone.

A few years later, online anonymity remains a highly contested issue, whose definition, value and even mere existence are highly contentious. There are at least four reasons for this situation. First, there is a lack of agreement about what anonymity means and what actions can be described as anonymous (Wallace 1999; Nissenbaum 1999). This is an important point, as the way anonymity is defined may have significant consequences for the public's understanding of the issue and users' willingness to support particular regulations or technological designs enabling or restricting anonymity on the internet.

Secondly, debates surrounding online anonymity are based on ideological positions which are difficult to reconcile. These positions are rooted in classical political philosophy, and in the most simplified way, represent the long-standing dilemma between freedom and responsibility. Moreover, the variety of approaches towards online anonymity is a result of the diverse contexts, in which it appears in the online environment.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, studies and day-to-day experience show that anonymity can be both socially beneficial and harmful.

The main aim of this chapter is to introduce some order to the abovementioned plethora of aspects and contexts in which online anonymity is being treated by academics, predominantly from the field of communication, cultural and political studies. Bearing in mind Ponesse's (2013, p.323) advice, that we should not "seek more precision in our understanding of anonymity than the subject matter allows", in the first part of this chapter I will review some of the most common definitions of online anonymity, paying particular attention to the change from fixed to much more contextual approaches.

Next, the chapter examines the main fields of theoretical enquiry related to anonymous behaviour. Since this study examines the discourse surrounding online anonymity as it appears in Poland's news media, in its role as agent of democratic transition, the emphasis is put on theories and concepts related to the role of anonymity (and online anonymity in particular) in a democratic society. For this reason, two areas receive particular attention. One is the relation between anonymity and various forms of control and surveillance, exercised by the state and the private sector. The second area of concern includes the place of online anonymity within the digital public sphere. In both contexts, the positions of supporters, as well as opponents, of online anonymity are discussed.

2. 1 What does it mean to be anonymous on the internet

Defining the concept of online anonymity is problematic, mostly because it is a 'moving target' (Nissenbaum 1999). As Hogan (2013, p.4) summarized it, "when seeking to operationalise anonymity, new and clever forms of de-anonymisation constantly appear". Due to the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the question of what is really at stake when we talk about anonymity on the internet is being repeatedly raised by scholars representing various academic disciplines.

Most commonly, anonymity is seen as tied to the speaker's name. In turn, it is associated with "un-name-ability", "namelessness" (Wallace 2008) or "conducting oneself without revealing one's name" (Nissenbau 1999, p.141). Sell, for example, describes anonymous communication as "public communication

which would not reveal the 'true name' of the author/speaker/producer" (2013, p.3).

Such definitions imply that a person remains anonymous as long as their name is not revealed. They also correspond with the word's etymological roots: the Greek word *anonymos* means 'without a name'. Since in Western culture, the 'legal' or 'given' name has become the most common unique identifier, anonymity is often associated with a withdrawal thereof.

This way of defining anonymity is problematic for two main reasons. First, the 'legal' or 'given' name is not always unique, and knowing it does not always mean being able to link it to a specific individual.

Second, a person's anonymity may be compromised by the disclosure of pieces of information other than the 'real' name, such as exact address, bank details or phone number. As Wallace (2008, p.167) observes, the person "can be uniquely picked out even without having been named". For those reasons researchers investigating anonymity proposed several classifications of this condition, as well as stages on the spectrum between 'total' anonymity and 'total' identification.

2.2 Levels of anonymity and disclosure

One of the early classifications of 'namelessness' in the online environment, suggested by Michael Froomkin (1995), distinguishes between traceable anonymity, untraceable anonymity, untraceable pseudonymity, and traceable pseudonymity. Focusing mostly on the use of e-mails, Froomkin described traceable anonymity as the situation in which the recipient of the message cannot identify its author, but the author may be identified by an intermediary, such as a remailer or the internet service provider. If the author of the message cannot be identified by any of the mediating parties, it would be considered as untreaceable anonymity.

The two remaining categories suggested by Froomkin, traceable pseudonymity and untraceable pseudonymity, differ from the previous ones in that the author of the message may be using a persistent screen name (pseudonym), which allows him to build a reputation or history of online activities.

In the case of traceable pseudonymity, the author's identity is visible to the intermediary, while in the case of untraceable pseudonymity it is not.

This classical distinction appeared, with alterations, in the works of other internet researchers. Parker (2011) describes three ways in which a person's identity can be hidden on the internet. In the most common situation, website administrators have the ability to track the IP address or computer location of the user. The second level, according to Parker, occurs when users' information recorded by the website is transformed into an unreadable data or deleted. The third level is represented by self-installed encryption software, which hides identifiable information from other users, the site's administrators or even law enforcement.

A more detailed distinction is suggested by Marx (1999), who lists seven types of identity knowledge:

1. Legal name (a person's true/legal identity)

2. Locatability (physical address, e-mail address, telephone number etc.)

3. Pseudonyms linked to a name or a location (anonymous bank accounts, chat rooms etc.)

4. Pseudonyms that are not linked to name or location (for policy reasons or when the audience does not realize it's a pseudonym)

5. Pattern knowledge (distinctive appearance or behavior patterns)

6. Social categorisation (gender, age, class, employment, religion)

7. Symbols of eligibility /non-eligibility (possession of information (passwords, codes) or artifacts (tattoos, uniforms)).

According to Marx (1999, p.100), full anonymity means "that the person cannot be identified according to any of [these] seven dimensions".

While such categorisations are quite useful in simplifying the issue of online anonymity and estimating its level, they do not always capture the complex relationships in the new media environment. For example, describing a certain online activity as 'traceable' or 'untraceable' anonymity is rather arbitrary, since it all depends on the perspective from which this action is being assessed. While

state agencies might have tools to identify the author of a comment posted online, other website users usually do not have such a capability.

Moreover, some authors see pseudonymity as a variation of anonymity in which the name of the author is substituted by another, while others make a clear distinction between those two notions (Froomkin 1995)[2]. There are also those stating that anonymity on the internet does not exist at all, (Kling et al. 1999; Woo 2006) and that successful identification only depends on the time and resources of those who do the tracking. Such absolutist understanding of anonymity is, however, quite rare, and a growing number of researchers adapt some form of relative approach.

2.3 Anonymity as a context-specific concept

The growing complexity of new media environments, increasingly ubiquitous identification mechanisms, as well as the variety of ways in which people engage with the internet, has encouraged researchers to search for more complex and context-specific approaches towards online anonymity. Nissenbaum (1999) was one of the first scholars who asked what is really at stake when people call for the protection of online anonymity. Her answer was that in a computerized world it is much more than the right to act without revealing one's name. In her words:

> *"[T]he value of anonymity lies not in the capacity to be unnamed, but in the possibility of acting or participating while remaining out of reach, remaining unreachable. Being unreachable means that no one will come knocking on your door demanding explanations, apologies, answerability, punishment, or payment"* (Nissenbaum 1999, p.142)

The contribution of this approach is in the acknowledgement of links between various pieces of information in the online world which, combined in a particular way, may result in compromising the state of anonymity on the internet. This state is understood as "unreachability" which means "withholding the

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[2] An interesting take on the differences between anonymity and pseudonymity is presented by Hogan (2013, p.4), who describes anonymity as 'a state' and pseudonymity as 'a practice'. Pseudonyms, Hogan explains, can serve as a way to maintain anonymity, but they can also be used for other purposes. As an example Hogan refers to Bob Dylan, who kept on using a pseudonym, although it was well known that his real name is Robert Zimmerman.

information or constellation of information it now takes to get at, or get to, a person" (1999, p.142).

People are anonymous not through complete withholding of personal information, but through the lack of connection between them. In this context, Nissenbaum introduces the concept of "opaque identifier", which is a "sign linking reliably to a person – chosen, assigned, or arising naturally – that, on the face of it, carries no information about the person" (1999, p.143). In line with this reasoning, the internet user, who acts under a pseudonym or a screen name is still anonymous as long as the links between the 'opaque identifier' and the 'reachable person' are not made.

While defining online anonymity as "unreachability" illustrates the nature of the problem in a more adequate way than the definitions discussed earlier, it fails to acknowledge that there are situations in which anonymous users want to and can be reached. For example, an anonymous blogger may provide an email address in order to allow their readers to send them feedback. Does it mean that anonymity has been compromised? The question is far from obvious and the only way to answer it is to apply a more context specific definition of anonymity on the internet.

One such attempt has been made by Wallace (1999, p.25, cited in Wallace 2008, p.168) who defines online anonymity as "non-coordinatability of traits in a given respect". She further defines a 'trait' as "any feature, action, or location of a person that can serve to get reference going" (Wallace, 2008, p.169). A person is anonymous as long as others are "unable to coordinate some known trait(s) with other traits such that the person cannot be identified (…)" (2008, p.170).

This approach is similar to the one suggested by Nissenbaum (1999) in acknowledging the network of connected pieces of information, which, when exposed, may link the anonymous behaviour with an identifiable person. However, the key contribution of this perspective on anonymity is in highlighting the importance of the context. This part of Wallace's definition solves the problem of the relative character of anonymity and explains "how someone could be anonymous in one respect (…) and not in another (…)" (Wallace 2008, p.170).

In the complex and interconnected new media environment this relativity is particularly important. Assuming that various identity traits of the internet user

are already available to some actors (be it law enforcement or an internet service provider), the future of anonymity depends on their willingness and/or legal obligation to reveal those traits to other parties.

This way of defining anonymity solves the challenges posed by 'absolutist' understandings of the concept. Anonymity on the internet does not mean that no identity traits are available. It means that people seeking anonymity can be in control of their identity traits and that those who have access to those traits will protect them and will not make them available to third parties.

As Ponesse (2013, p.344) observes, "what anonymity concerns should focus on is not how much information about ourselves we let escape into the public domain but on how we manage that information once it is in that domain". For her, anonymity is "a result of a specific exercise of control, in which true pieces of information about a person are concealed from others with an effect of dissociability" (2013, p.323).

Another challenge for understanding the concept of anonymity acknowledged by Wallace (2008) is the discrepancy between actual anonymity and users' presumption of it. Online communication can make people feel anonymous, while in fact their actions may be easily linked to other identifying traits.

The distinction between 'being' and 'feeling' anonymous is also described by Kennedy (2006) in her study of internet use by minority ethnic women. Kennedy challenges the common understandings of the concept of anonymity, seeing it as a "limited as [a] starting point for carrying out the analyses of internet experiences" (2006, p.859). After studying websites established by African women taking part in the educational Project Her@, she noticed that participants had ambivalent attitudes towards anonymity. On the one hand, students intentionally revealed many aspects of their identities (name, gender, ethnicity) and were aware that they are not anonymous. On the other hand, a number of students were "extraordinarily frank and revealing" (2006, p.869), which made Kennedy conclude that they 'feel' anonymous in the online environment. This dichotomy led her to the conclusion that "the concept of anonymity is more complex than it seems at first glance – there is a distinction between feeling and being anonymous, and there are degrees of anonymity which are varied and situated" (2006, p.872).

The discussions presented above lead to the conclusion that anonymity online is a multidimensional phenomenon, which needs to be considered in a specific situational context. Combining Ponesse's (2013) and Wallace's (2008) definitions, anonymity can be seen **as *a state in which a person, having control over their data, decides to dissociate uniquely identifying cues from a specific online activity in a given social context.***

As shown in the following section of this chapter, the notion of context is particularly important for highlighting the difference between anonymity in the online and offline environment.

2.4 The novelty of online anonymity

After discussing the ways anonymity on the internet can be defined and understood, it is crucial to ask how anonymity in an online context differs from anonymity in the offline world. This question is particularly important at a time when internet scholars are almost unanimously proclaiming the end of the 'toaster studies' era (Grey 2012), which means seeing the internet as an isolated environment and a mere technological innovation.

Departing from the 'toaster studies' approach means seeing activities and relationships on the internet as conducted by real people, with real intentions and experiencing real consequences. The only difference is that they are mediated by ICTs. This could potentially indicate that there is no point in studying anonymity on the internet as something distinct from anonymity in offline contexts.

There are, however, several arguments for recognizing the uniqueness of anonymous behaviour in the online environment. First, as Sell (2013, p.9) put it, anonymous communication online "reaches more people with less cost and has a greater potential power" than offline communication. It therefore becomes an object of controversies and power struggles on a much larger scale, involving powerful actors, such as governments or large, transnational corporations.

Second, the reduction of personal and social cues in computer-mediated communication creates an environment in which anonymity is relatively easy to obtain. For example, expressing one's opinion without signing it with a 'real' name is much easier than it was in the pre-internet era. There is, however, the other side

of the coin, contributing to one of the key paradoxes of the internet: although it gives users more possibilities to achieve anonymity, it also, more than ever before, enables identification. The variety of forces and factors, more or less apparent to internet users that may undermine the state of anonymity has led Wallace (2008) to conclude that anonymity in the online environment is easier to 'assume', but not necessarily easier to 'obtain'. In other words, the relationship between anonymity and identifiability in the online world is much more ambiguous than it is offline.

Another fundamental difference, crucial for the discussion on anonymity, concerns the context of online and offline behaviour (van der Nagel and Frith 2015; Hogan 2013; Marwick and boyd 2011). As van der Nagel and Frith argue (2015), "the presentation of self offline is more territorially bounded", and therefore people have more control over the audience of their actions. Various audiences (school friends, family members etc.) are usually located in different territorial settings, making it relatively easy for people to adjust to the specific social situation and separate their social roles.

The situation online is different, since, as Hogan (2013) pointed out, a big part of online communications is persistent and available to anyone, anywhere and at any time. Marwick and boyd (2011) described it as "context collapse" – a situation in which the boundaries between social roles and audiences become blurred.

As van der Nagel and Frith (2015) explain, "context collapse refers to the tendency online for people to have to interact and construct identity in front of their entire social network, not the segments that are typical offline". Since such a situation leads to tensions and problems with managing one's self-presentation, internet users may use anonymity as a strategy to navigate within the "collapsed context" (Marwick and boyd 2011). While offline it is possible for people to adjust their behaviour to a certain physical context, obscuring one's 'real' identity might be the only way to achieve it online.

Overall, anonymity online is much more complex and difficult to assess than it is with older forms of anonymity such as anonymous phone calls, journalistic sources or pamphlets. While most research findings, both theoretical and empirical, concerning anonymous behaviour in the 'real world' might be applicable to internet studies, the recognition of new possibilities and challenges is inevitable.

2.5 Anonymity and democracy – an uneasy relationship

As the previous section of this chapter demonstrated, defining anonymity on the internet is a difficult task, mostly because of its relational and context sensitive character. Trying to establish the role of online anonymity in democratic societies is similarly challenging, although numerous attempts have already been made.

The following paragraphs explore two key areas of academic debate surrounding the relationship between anonymity and democracy. One is the relationship between online anonymity and surveillance, understood as a controlling power of the state and market.

A second area concerns the role of online anonymity for the development of "a zone of mediation between the state and the private individual" (Roberts and Crossley 2004, p.2): a democratic public sphere. The following paragraphs will introduce key theoretical concepts and empirical findings related to these debates. It must be noted, however, that the main aim of this distinction is to systemize the scholarly work on online anonymity, and not describing two exclusive fields of enquiry. On the contrary, the borders between those two research fields are blurred and arguments made in favour of, or against online anonymity in both contexts are often rooted in similar theoretical and philosophical traditions and represent similar value orientations towards anonymity.

Three positions on anonymity

In order to systematize the normative debates surrounding anonymity in both contexts, I will use three value orientations towards new technologies developed by Rob Kling (1996) and adapted to the discussion about anonymity by Ya-Ching Lee (2006): a statist model, a libertarian model and a private enterprise model. The models are useful to understand which social goods are favoured in the debate surrounding online anonymity, which are considered secondary, and how the public interest in the context of anonymity is defined.

The **statist approach** towards online anonymity describes views which consider collective values such as security or complying with social norms as

superior to individual freedom (Kling 1996). From this perspective, online anonymity is seen as undermining the state and society's ability to tackle criminal or unsocial behaviour, and therefore it is seen as undesirable. As Lee (2006, p.5) observes, "[t]he Statist position gives law enforcement agencies the obligation to prevent crimes and to prosecute criminals", and citizens' freedom is subordinate to this obligation.

In the **libertarian approach**, the prerogatives of the individual and individual freedom of choice are privileged over collective goals and norms (Kling, 1996). Anonymity is viewed as a tool for enhancing privacy, autonomy and freedom of speech. Other values, such as state security, profitability or compliance with social norms are secondary.

The debate between the proponents of the statist and libertarian models has its roots in the dual role of the democratic system and the role of surveillance. On the one hand, the task of democratic government is to ensure citizens' security, which may involve gathering personal data. Scholars representing the surveillance studies tradition, who argue for seeing surveillance as a neutral concept, provide a number of examples in which state control, to which online anonymity may be an obstacle, "is both an inevitable attribute of democracy and a key component of liberal forms of governance" (Haggerty and Samatas 2010, p.6). Taddicken (2012, p.257) points out that the state's interest in 'watching' citizens is the "effective organisation of bureaucracy and the effective prevention of crime".

On the other hand, as proponents of libertarian approach often highlight, the role of the democratic state is to ensure civil liberties, such as privacy and/or freedom of speech. Excessive state surveillance, they contend, may become a tool of repression, cause a breach of private spaces and prevent citizens from holding the powerful to account (Haggerty and Samatas 2010; Taddicken 2012).

The third approach listed by Kling, the **private enterprise approach,** also offers a negative view on online anonymity, although for different reasons. The focus here is on information as a commodity and a profitable strategic resource (Lee 2006). Anonymity, which may hinder commercial companies' ability to collect customer data, is seen as unfavourable. The leading value here is profitability, while customers' privacy and security are secondary.

The following section will discuss some of the theoretical arguments and empirical studies that support the above approaches in the context of control and surveillance, and a democratic public sphere. The focus is mostly on the statist and libertarian views, since the private enterprise approach is rarely promoted in academic literature. It is visible rather in the actions of companies pushing towards *de-anonymisation*, which will be explored in the next chapter.

2.5.1 Anonymity in the context of control and surveillance

Anonymity versus accountability: the statist view

The relation between anonymity and the controlling power of the state is not a new issue and has been debated in the works of classical, political philosophers of various theoretical disciplines. However, as De Hert (2003, p.47) notes, "screening the masters of philosophical thought, one will find surprisingly few proponents of a right to privacy or a right to anonymity". Anonymous speech and action remained on the margins of the public debate.

In ancient Greece and Rome privacy had predominantly negative connotations and implied deprivation rather than a right or privilege. Consequently, anonymity was associated mostly with deceit and lack of responsibility.

One of the most famous accounts of such an approach is Plato's parable of the Ring of Gyges described in "The Republic". It is the story of a shepherd named Gyges, who finds a ring that allows him to become invisible. He takes advantage of his new power to seduce a queen and kill the king. Glaucon, the narrator, concludes, that "no man is just of his own free will, but only under compulsion, and that no man thinks justice pays him personally, since he will always do wrong when he gets a chance" (Plato, *The Republic* 2.360c). Morality is here perceived as a social construction – only external norms prevent people from wrongdoings.

The devaluation of anonymity and the private sphere, even if not explicitly, is mostly present in the writings of republican thinkers. As De Hert points out, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as well as Jürgen Habermas and Hannah

Arendt shared the "sharp normative public (as positive) – private (as suspicious) distinction" (2003, p.52). Anonymity was not considered as something that merits protection, as republican thought favoured transparency. This view was amplified by Kantian rationalism which considered the truth to be the highest value and rejected all forms of deceit.

Most famously, arguments against anonymity were coined by utilitarian thinker Jeremy Bentham, who believed that full transparency of society's members will increase morality and the level of compliance with laws. Placing security at the top of government tasks, he argued for extended social control over citizens and encouraged preventive laws. His model of the Panopticon Penitentiary System was later famously adopted by Foucault (1977), who used it as a metaphor for describing modern systems of discipline.

Statist arguments frequently appear in contemporary academic debates surrounding anonymity on the internet. The main value here is the protection of individuals and society from slander, bullying, libel, defamation and other forms of crime in the new media environments.

In order to do so, the government should be able to access citizens' personal data. This point of view is well summarized by Leshed (2009, p.245), according to whom "the main risk of anonymity is the loss of accountability. Those responsible for any misconduct cannot be identified and brought to justice".

The role of accountability is also highlighted by Davenport (2002), who sees it as the main fabric of society. He stresses that "[a]ccountability requires those responsible for any misconduct be identified and brought to justice" (2002, p.34) and that all communication should be traceable and "available to courts subject to due process" (2002, p.35).

Openness and honesty are, according to Davenport, essential factors in just societies, in order to fight criminal and anti-social behaviour. Moreover, he points out that the right to anonymity leaves victims of internet crimes such as harassment, identity theft or virus-infection, helpless. Similarly, Levmore (2010), who argues that all websites should require identification of their users, states that the lack of anonymity "would surely reduce the problem of juvenile communications as well as that of vengeful rather than informative consumer (and other) reactions" (2010, p.62).

Although psychological studies on anonymity are not the main focus on this work, it is important to mention that the political critique of online anonymity often draws from results of early studies in the field of social psychology, combining experimental evidence with ideological positions.

As Sell (2013) points out, during the 1970s, anonymity was seen negatively, mostly in relation to the research of Philip Zimbardo. According to Zimbardo's de-individuation theory, the situation in which a person cannot be identified as a single individual "weaken[s] internalized controls, such as guilt, shame, fear and commitment and leads to a greater expression of otherwise inhibited behaviors" (Christopherson 2007 p.3044). Traditionally, de-individualisation has been defined as "a state of reduced self-awareness, or even loss of self, often associated with immersion in the group or crowd" (Lea, Spears and de Groot 2001, p.526) and associated with disinhibition leading to aggressive behaviour.

However, as Suler (2004) suggests, disinhibition in online environments may have other implications. He distinguishes between toxic and benign disinhibition. The first one relates to situations in which people engage in illegal or offensive behaviour which they would normally avoid in 'real life' contexts. Benign disinhibition, on the contrary, may indicate "an attempt to better understand and develop oneself, to resolve interpersonal and intra-psychic problems or explore new emotional and experiential dimensions to one's identity" (2004, p.321). According to Suler, online anonymity is one of the principal factors that create both types of the disinhibition effect.

Overall, statist thought portrays anonymity on the internet as being at odds with users' accountability and a tool used by criminals to evade persecution. The list of the forms of potential harm linked to online anonymity, identified in the survey conducted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) included: spam, deception, hate mail, impersonation and misrepresentation, online financial fraud, criminal organisational recruitment and theft of intellectual property (Kling et al. 1999).

Anonymity and the protection of privacy: the libertarian view

It has already been indicated that the ambivalent attitude towards online anonymity results, among others, from a dual role of democracy. While those opposing anonymity on the internet often relate to 'security' concerns, its proponents focus on the protection of civil liberties, particularly privacy and freedom of speech. The issue of free speech is explored in the next section of this chapter, which concerns the role of anonymity in the democratic public sphere. The following paragraphs focus on the relationship between anonymity and privacy and the perception of anonymity as a tool to circumvent state control.

Benjamin Constant, one of the earliest scholars to defend anonymity (De Hert 2003), opposed any attempt of the state to impose moral values on its citizens, especially through legal enforcement, prevention and public order policing. According to him, only in cases of an indication of crime does the state have a right to interfere in people's lives. Unlike Kant, he contended that there could be legitimate circumstances in which lying and withholding information about oneself are legitimate, especially in order to avoid intrusive state surveillance.

In the context of current debates surrounding new technologies, the relationship between anonymity and privacy is explored frequently. The link between those two notions has been most famously established by Westin (1970, p.7), who defined privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others".

Westin distinguishes between four types of privacy: solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve. Anonymity is described as a state of privacy that "occurs when the individual is in public places or performing public acts but still seeks, and finds, freedom from identification and surveillance" (1970, p.31).

The positive effects of privacy enhanced by anonymity were confirmed by studies from the field of social psychology. According to Pedersen (1997), anonymity as a vehicle for privacy has three main functions: recovery, catharsis, and autonomy. Anonymity, understood as "being among others but without personal surveillance by them" (1997, p.148), was said to be helpful for people

with social injuries, to address the fear of social evaluation and to encourage experiment with new social behaviours.

Based on Westin's approach, many authors understand online anonymity as a tool to achieve privacy on the internet, and therefore as something worth protecting (see Woo 2006; Steeves 2009; Wallace 2008; Parker 2011; Taddicken 2012). Akdeniz (2002) notes that besides having many advantages, the internet has become a surveillance tool that serves commercial institutions and government agencies (including law enforcement). Their actions pose a serious threat to users' privacy, which may be countered by anonymity. According to Akdeniz (2002, p.233), online anonymity "enables users to prevent surveillance and monitoring of their activities on the internet from commercial companies and from the government".

Some authors argue that anonymity may be in fact the only way to safeguard privacy on the internet (Moore 2002; Woo 2006). In the pre-internet era, when the biggest threats to peoples' privacy came from easily identified entities, such as governments, mass media or large commercial companies, writes Woo (2006), it was sufficient to establish external regulations which guaranteed privacy. Yet, in the new media environment, where people's privacy is threatened by numerous, often unidentifiable entities, it is crucial that they can actively protect themselves, without being forced to abandon particular services.

One tool to achieve this is anonymity, which may counterbalance the controlling power of more or less known privacy invaders. According to Woo, online anonymity may be "the only way for ordinary individuals to protect themselves from governments' and private corporations' active use and profiling of their personal information in the networked environment" (2006, p.936). He therefore calls for a social permission to "defensive lying" (2006, p.965) used for privacy protection. Similarly, Sell (2013) sees online anonymity as "an opportunity to regain privacy inside the realm of public communication while actively taking part in the negotiation processes of the public sphere" (2013, p.4). She argues that at the times of ubiquitous surveillance, anonymity can be seen as a recommendable form of resistance. Such observations are particularly important in the situation of "context collapse", discussed earlier in this chapter.

Disguising one's identity can help in separating various audiences online and gaining control over one's self presentation. This might help creating online communities in which people can express authentic needs and interests. Although anonymity is often perceived as an obstacle to community building, there are studies proving the opposite. In their analysis of the /b/ discussion board at 4chan.org, researchers showed, that anonymity, as well as ephemerality do not contradict the idea of online community (Bernstein et al., 2011). Quite the opposite. After analysing over five million posts they concluded that anonymity may help shape communal identity among forum users. Among other benefits, anonymity "may provide a cover for more intimate and open conversations", and encourage creativity and experimenting, by "masking the failure" and "softening the blow of being ignored" (2011, p.56).

The libertarian discourse is also present in the proceedings of the AAAS's Conference on Anonymous Communication on the internet (Teich et al., 1999). Although conference speakers acknowledged that some form of regulation of online anonymity may be necessary when it harms individuals or the state, they agreed that "individuals and organisations (including online communities) should be free to determine the level of anonymity that they deem appropriate for those with whom they engage in voluntary interaction" (1999, p.76). In summary, the positive aspects of anonymity indicated by respondents in the AAAS's survey listed investigating journalism, whistleblowing, self-help, personal privacy protection and avoiding prosecution.

Anonymity and commercial interests: the private enterprise view

Although representatives of both libertarian and statist positions are concerned with the controlling power of both state and market, the emphasis is put mostly on the former. For this reason, Lee (2006) distinguishes a third perspective towards online anonymity, which he calls "the private enterprise model". Representatives of this view also reject online anonymity, but for different reasons than political thinkers. As Lee (2006, p.5) explains, "the lure of profitable electronic commerce has driven firms to use or sell customers' information in order to make a profit.

Other social goods such as consumers' privacy or the need of the government to acquire data are then secondary".

Online anonymity, in this view, does not hamper law enforcement or taking responsibility for one's actions. Rather, it is depicted as disrupting corporate surveillance, which aims at gathering information about "staff and consumers in order to optimize working process and maximize profits" (Taddicken 2012, p.257). One of the purposes of this surveillance is to establish patterns of consumer preferences in order to target them with individualized information and advertising (Wallace 2008). While it may bring some beneficial effects (Moore 2002) many argue that it is not only a breach of privacy, but also a significant reduction in possible options and the free exchange of ideas (Wallace 2008).

It is difficult to find proponents of the private enterprise approach towards online anonymity among academics (at least those representing the field of social, political and cultural studies). This way of thinking about anonymity is common among businesses operating online, although some of them try to mask it with statist arguments to create a positive image.

2.5.2 Anonymous voices in the digital public sphere

The previous section explored the academic debate surrounding online anonymity within the context of control and surveillance. It focused on arguments concerning tensions between surveillance in democratic societies and citizens' right to privacy, and presented online anonymity as an important way of protecting privacy in online environments, characterized by the "collapse of context" (Marwick and boyd 2011).

The second field of academic enquiry related to online anonymity focuses on its role in online deliberation, taking place in comment sections on news sites, online discussion forums of political interest groups, e-mail lists, chat channels, blogs, wikis and social networking sites (Dahlberg 2011). These platforms are particularly important for deliberative concepts of digital democracy, which effectively make the internet a digital public sphere.

Although views on the internet's potential to serve as a new public sphere are deeply divided (Dahlberg 2001a; b, 2011; Papacharissi 2010; Dreyfus 2001)

there is no doubt that online communication has become an important element in democratic discourse. After countless anonymous voices entered the public sphere, the link between anonymity and online deliberation has become crucial.

Yet, as Sell (2013) observes, only a little academic work has so far been done to directly investigate the relationship between anonymity and the public sphere. The following sections will discuss two fields of academic inquiry relevant in this context: the relationship between anonymity and freedom of speech, and the impact of anonymity on discourse quality.

Anonymity and freedom of speech

The previous section, focusing on the controlling power of the state, distinguished between two main value orientations toward online anonymity: libertarian and statist. This distinction is also useful when describing the academic debate around the relationship between anonymity and freedom of speech. In short, proponents of the libertarian approach see online anonymity as a valuable tool that might enhance free speech, whereas statists focus on problems for prosecuting authors of illegal or harmful content which anonymity is said to facilitate.

According to Gelber (2010, p.305), free speech is an essential feature of the democratic system, "because effective democracy is dependent on citizens' ability to criticize the government and to participate actively in deliberation over issues affecting them". Since the internet has become one of the most ubiquitous tools for citizens to assess and criticize those in power, many authors have recognized that ensuring freedom of speech online should be of particular concern. As Hamelink (2006, p.128) puts it, "[t]he Net needs all the free speech protection it can get, because it is so eminently suited for the exposure of today's great liars in politics and business".

Based on this assumption, proponents of online anonymity use two main arguments, which can be called an 'instrumentalist' approach and an 'essentialist' one.

The 'instrumentalist' approach depicts online anonymity as a *tool* for ensuring freedom of speech. It often draws on the classical work of John Stuart Mill (1859, p.8), who contended that threats to freedom of speech come both from

governments and from 'the majority' understood as "the prevailing opinion and feeling". In line with this reasoning, online anonymity is considered valuable because it helps to mitigate political and societal pressure on the speaker and therefore encourages and enhances free expression. In other words, anonymity on the internet protects unpopular speakers from retaliation, or from being exposed to social stigma (Tien 1996). The most common examples given in this context include whistle-blowing that uncovers power or human rights abuses, or speech that concerns socially controversial or delicate issues, such as sexuality, addictions or traumas.

On the other hand, the 'essentialist' approach towards the relationship between online anonymity and freedom of speech treats anonymity, or rather withdrawal of certain identifying information, as an inherent *part* of the protected speech. This way of understanding online anonymity is particularly common among legal scholars in the United States, who often draw on the ruling of Supreme Court in the 'McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Commission' case from 1995. The Supreme Court ruled that the Ohio Elections Commission's decision to fine a citizen who distributed anonymous pamphlets opposing school tax was unconstitutional. Justice Scalia explained that "an author's decision to remain anonymous, like other decisions concerning omissions or additions to the content of a publication, is an aspect of the freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment" (in Froomkin, 2003, p.17).

Anonymous online speech also receives support from the supporters of the libertarian approach. Parker (2011) evaluates anonymous speech on three levels, considered fundamental to freedom of speech: utility, autonomy and equality. She argues that although, in terms of utility, anonymity can have an ambiguous impact on online discussions, the other two values speak for its preservation and protection. She argues that "citizens should be given the autonomy to speak freely and make moral decisions based on the speech they hear because this is part of treating them as responsible moral agents" (2011, p.30). As for equality, Parker argues that anonymity creates a situation in which communication acts are not assessed based on authors' identities and social status. Consequently, public deliberation becomes more equal and inclusive.

Hate speech, trolls and flames

While the positive role of anonymity on the internet is widely recognized, some scholars and new media practitioners argue that it is outweighed by its drawbacks (Davenport 2002; Levmore 2010; Zhuo 2010). Most significantly, as already described in the context of the statist position toward online anonymity, the act of withdrawing identity information is seen as an attempt to evade legal or social responsibility for one's actions. Accordingly, communication-related crimes and abuses on the internet, such as hate speech, libel, defamation, slander or bullying cannot be detected and perpetrators cannot be held accountable.

It is also argued that even well-intended anonymous speech has only a small chance to produce significant effects. According to Davenport (2002), anonymous speech is usually not relevant for public debate. He states that "messages sent anonymously are unlikely to have much impact on their own" and that "[c]owering behind a cloak of anonymity hardly seems an auspicious basis for profound social upheavals" (2002, p.34).

Moreover, while most 'anonymity sceptics' acknowledge that there are areas, such as psychological or medical forums, where people should be granted the right to stay anonymous, Davenport challenges this kind of intervention as well. His argument starts with a valid observation, that there is always a risk that our online anonymity may be compromised and our most personal confession will become linked to our name. However, his approach suggests that instead of advocating for more effective privacy mechanisms on the web, people should just accept full transparency on the internet or find other venues to express themselves. Similar arguments are made by Levmore (2010), who states that although limiting online anonymity may result in a loss of opportunities for criticism, this loss is not worth much mourning. Those who want to reveal socially important information anonymously should be able to contact particular institutions which can take the necessary action. The attachment to hierarchies and communication via intermediaries visible in Davenport's and Levmore's arguments is another characteristic of statist views on anonymity.

While such approaches point toward the evident challenges to anonymous online communication, the main problem with them is that they view anonymity as

an absolutist concept. Anonymity, understood as a complete withdrawal of identifying cues may indeed be problematic for the functioning of a democratic state. If we, however, see anonymity on the internet as the lack of connection between various identity traits (Wallace 2008), those arguments lose their strength. Calling for limiting online anonymity would mean endorsing unchecked surveillance by various powerful actors, without agreeing on carefully defined limits to this access.

The 'quality' vs. 'inclusions' argument

The debate about the relationship between online anonymity and freedom of speech has accompanied the development of new media from its very early stages. Just as the previous paragraphs highlighted, the main concerns have been about striking the balance between citizens' right to free expression and the right to protection from illegal and offensive speech.

While those concerns remain relevant, the advent of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s with new kinds of user generated content such as blogs, comments on news sites or social networking services, has introduced new elements into the debate. Scholars have begun focusing on the quality and 'civility' of anonymous online discussions, their inclusiveness, as well as the social (rather than legal) responsibility of anonymous authors.

The aim of this section is to discuss some of the theoretical concepts and empirical studies on the role of anonymity in the democratic public sphere, which set the ground for analysing and assessing the public debate surrounding online anonymity in Poland. While, as Sell (2013) noticed, the relationship between anonymity and the public sphere still lacks a coherent theoretical framework, some conclusions might be drawn from the work on the internet in general and its potential to serve as a forum for democratic deliberation.

Anonymity, or rather the lack thereof, can influence the functioning of a local public sphere. Dahlberg's study (2001b) assessed online discourse against the requirements of the public sphere and rational-critical discourse developed from the work of Jürgen Habermas.

Following Habermas' work, the author suggests six ideal requirements for a public sphere discourse: exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, discursive inclusion and equality, autonomy from state and economic power (2001b, p.623). Dahlberg then suggested that although the exchange of critique of political claims is common in online communication spaces, the fulfilment of the other requirements is much less frequent. One of the reasons is the fact that in online spaces "it is difficult to verify identity claims and information put forward" (p.623). Anonymity may therefore be seen as an obstacle to creating a sincere online deliberation.

This claim seems to be confirmed by Dahlberg's empirical study of Minnesota's e-democracy initiative, which he considers to resemble the public sphere ideal. One of the suggested reasons for this positive evaluation is the fact that anonymous and pseudonymous posts on the initiative's forum are forbidden, and participants are obliged to sign with their real name, e-mail address and the city. This, according to Dahlberg, helps to develop respectful deliberation and sincerity.

The negative impact of anonymity on the quality of online deliberations has also been observed by Nagar (2011) who investigated the quality of opinion in users' comments under news stories. She analysed comments posted under stories concerning climate change published on mainstream news sites in the UK (*Daily Mail* and *Guardian*) and Israel (*Yediot Achronot* and *Haaretz* – in English and Hebrew). In this study, the quality of opinion was measured on three levels: relevance (for a topic of the article), opinion and argumentation (are they present in the comment?) and clarity (is the opinion expressed in a clear manner).

The study showed that the quality of comments on the sites that required some level of identification (registration with email address, user profiles) is higher than on those where registration was not necessary.

Similarly, the study of anonymous and non-anonymous comments under stories on immigration in American newspapers conducted by Santana (2014) showed that a much higher percentage of anonymous comments was uncivil (53%), than was the case with non-anonymous comments (28%).

Online communication spaces in which participants have to identify themselves are often presented as those closest to public sphere ideals. But the

lack of anonymity can also bring less desirable effects. In his study of the Minnesota e-democracy initiative, Dahlberg (2001b) observed that although most of the Habermasian criteria for an ideal public sphere are met, the forum is farther from the ideal in terms of inclusion and equality. He points out that "participation is, in fact, both quantitatively and qualitatively, dominated by those already powerful offline (politically active, educated, white males)" (2001b, p.626). Here, as opposed to the previous arguments, anonymity could perhaps ensure more diverse and representative opinions.

Another small scale study which aimed at answering the question of how anonymity impacts online discussions was conducted by Leshed (2009), who investigated the intra-corporate message-board community. Upon establishment, anonymous participation in the forum was allowed. At a later stage, as a result of managerial decisions, identity disclosure was enforced. One of the most notable effects was a 25% monthly drop in posting frequency. Moreover, the manner of discussion also changed. As Leshed (2009, p.247) points out, "(…) discussion threads turned flatter after the change: whereas before the change a posted message was likely to initiate a hierarchic chain of message deliberating on an argument, after the change messages often remained solitary with no responses".

The studies mentioned above bring us to the conclusion that identity disclosure may help create reflexive, informed and sincere deliberative spaces that resemble the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere. According to Gardiner (2004, p.35), transparency is an inherent part of the Habermasian model on two levels: "that of the individual (because autonomous action is premised on subjects knowing their intentions through rational reflection), as well as social (interlocutors must know the motivations of other speakers via rational discussion in a shared vernacular, because any motive apart from the desire to participate fully in the collective search for truth is ruled out of court. (…))".

Although the Habermasian model of the public sphere is often presented as a normative ideal, it has also been subjected to a critique expressed mostly by feminist scholars. Fraser (1990, p.63) points out that not only was the bourgeois public sphere discriminatory on the basis of gender, ethnicity, and material status, but it also "was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequalities". She argued that at the end of the

twentieth century this model is no longer feasible and that an alternative is needed. Papacharissi (2010) brought the critique of applying the classical public sphere model to new reality into the contexts of the internet. She argues that too often "we neglect the point that these past ideals frequently were exclusive and elitist, forming around spheres of gender, race and class" (2010, p.12).

What do these discussions tell us about the role of anonymity in online public spaces? First, we need to remember that hegemonically defined 'quality' and 'civility' of public discourse may come with the price of exclusion and elitism. Moreover, as Roberts and Crossely (2004, p.11) suggest, "(...) modern communication techniques are not simply a medium of thought and argument but also a potential source of power, domination and oppression". Manipulating the levels of anonymity on the internet is a powerful tool of controlling the access to public discourse. In this context, Sell (2013, pp.8-9) points out that "the risk of silencing those who bring in vital and at times controversial or even undesirable argumentation into the public discourse is higher than the risk of exposing someone to defamatory trolling under the anonymizing veil of untraceable digital communication". The public debate, she claims, can contain unwanted speech, and the presence of socially undesirable content gives people a chance to recognize and oppose it.

2.6 Summary

The theoretical background and empirical studies on online anonymity reviewed in this chapter paint a highly complex picture of the issue. This complexity begins on the level of defining the concept of anonymity and accompanies every attempt to assess its implications.

The main conclusion from the review of definitions presented in this chapter is that anonymity on the internet is profoundly a context specific concept, and any attempt to give it a fixed definition risks oversimplification. To sum up the key observations, anonymity on the internet has a social character; it involves a dissociation between various identity traits, among which some are uniquely identifying; it also depends on the context; and it is in its essence an exercise of control over one's social presentation.

The ambiguous role of anonymity in a modern democratic society stems from the fact that on the one hand, anonymity may hinder the work of state security forces, and on the other, in the context of ubiquitous surveillance from both the state, and the private sector, it might be the only tool for citizens to protect their privacy.

As boyd (2012, p.30) observed,"[w]anting privacy is not akin to wanting to be a hermit", and anonymity offers the possibility to keep one's privacy in public, especially in online environments characterized by "context collapse". As van der Nagel and Frith (2015) argued, "[w]hile safety concerns about anonymity are real, it is also true that real names can make people feel less safe and can inhibit behaviours they engage in online."

The role of online anonymity in the democratic public sphere was discussed in two contexts: freedom of speech and public discourse's civility and inclusiveness. The discussion between supporters and opponents of online anonymity showed that the relationship between anonymity and freedom of speech is ambiguous. Yet, the analysis of the 'instrumentalist' and the 'essentialist' approaches to this relationship demonstrate that the importance of anonymity for free speech is undeniable. Moreover, it was shown that the debate about the role of anonymity in the public sphere is in fact a power struggle and comes down to deciding "who is able to publicly utter what in which context and with what impact on the public opinion making process" (Sell 2013, p.16). Understanding this struggle is crucial for the analysis of online anonymity coverage in traditional media, which play a central role in the public opinion making process.

As a final note, it is worth pointing out that although theoretical and empirical academic literature concerning online anonymity is quite rich and spans various disciplines, the degree of influence it has on the popular, media debates is uncertain. There is always a risk, as Mansell (2012, p.11) highlights, that representations of new media developments which emerge from theory and empirical research "may not resonate beyond academy". Moreover, although the images of online anonymity constructed in the public discourse might be rooted in various ideological traditions or supported by empirical evidence, they are also strongly related to the particular interests of the actors involved.

Therefore, the theoretical context of my study includes factors influencing people's ability and willingness to be anonymous in the new media environment. Chapter two explores four groups of such factors, based on Lessig's (2006) model of forces regulating behaviour in cyberspace: law, market, technological infrastructure (the code), and social norms. It also explores an additional dimension: media discourse.

CHAPTER 3 | The de-anonymisation process and the role of the media

> *"I think anonymity on the Internet has to go away... People behave a lot better when they have their real names down. ... I think people hide behind anonymity and they feel like they can say whatever they want behind closed doors."*
>
> Randi Zuckerberg, Facebook's former Director of Market Development and Spokeswoman[3]

The previous chapter showed online anonymity as a complex phenomenon, which can be both beneficial and damaging for democracy and the democratic public sphere. In the context of surveillance, anonymity might prevent state and various commercial entities from fulfilling their constitutive roles (such as fighting crime or delivering services), but it can also help people secure their privacy and make autonomous decisions about what information they are willing to disclose. In the context of the public sphere, anonymity might on the one hand serve as a vehicle for defamation, hate speech, and generally lower the quality of the debate, but on the other it can encourage people to discuss sensitive or controversial topics, protect dissidents from retaliation and bring attention to the message, erasing various burdens tied to the identity of the author. As Reader (2012, p.497) suggested, the research results of studies focusing on online anonymity indicate that it is "clearly harmful in certain contexts (…) is useful or even necessary in others (…), and is simply a matter of personal choice in many other contexts (…)".

While there is ample evidence that the role of anonymity on the internet is diverse and context sensitive, a growing number of researchers observe a unidirectional trend towards its limitation or even complete elimination (Froomkin 2015; van Zoonen 2013; Bollmer 2012; Lovink 2012; Hogan 2013). In the first part of this chapter I will review some of the recent theoretical discussions about the notion of 'the real self'(van Zoonen 2013) and, borrowing Lessig's (2006) theoretical framework, investigate some of the legal, technological, commercial and normative forces working to challenge or eliminate anonymity from online spaces. I will then argue that those forces can be seen as part of a

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[3] As quoted in: CBS News (2011) *Facebook: "Anonymity on the Internet has to go away"*. cbsnews.com [online], 2 August. Available at: http://www.cbsnews.com/news/facebook-anonymity-on-the-internet-has-to-go-away [Accessed: 10 July 2015].

broader process of delegitimisation of online anonymity, which is also happening at the level of discourse. In the second part of the chapter I will discuss the importance of discourse for the future of online anonymity and for understanding the current interests and power struggles underlying the debate. In particular, I will focus on the role of media discourse in influencing the way people understand and evaluate online anonymity. I will also explore other relations between media and online anonymity, such as technological solutions that media implement on their online platforms, as well as the concept of 'doxing' and the media involvement in the struggle for dominance in the public sphere. I will conclude the chapter with one of the main research questions informing the empirical parts of my investigation, namely: *Do the media contribute to the de-anonymisation process?*

3.1 Towards an authentic 'self'

In recent years, a number of internet scholars identified a trend in online culture characterized by the promotion of a 'true self' and growing opposition to anonymity. Liesbet von Zoonen (2013) observes that increasingly, people's online identities are expected to be unified with their offline, 'real' ones. Anonymity, which breaks the link between multiple identities, becomes particularly dangerous. Van Zoonen observes that "Nowadays (…) the anonymity of the internet and the construction of online personas that do not reflect offline identities have been reconstructed as 'risk factors' of internet users" (2013, p.45). Lovink (2012) talks in this context about a "culture of 'self-disclosure'" (2012, p.38), encouraged by owners of social networking sites. He observes that the culture of identity play and exploration, typical for the early years of the internet, has been replaced by the culture of self-promotion and transparency. According to Lovink (2012, p.13), "No longer encouraged to act out a role, we are forced to be 'ourselves' (in a form that is no less theatrical or artificial)…There is no alternative identity". Similar tendencies have been noticed by Bollmer (2012), who analysed a controversy surrounding a blog entitled "A Gay Girl in Damascus"[4], run by an

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[4] In summer 2011, the world's media widely commented on the case of Tom MacMaster, a 40-year-old American man and a Middle East peace activist, who created an online persona in Amina Araf, a lesbian girl in a war-torn Syria. For several months he ran a blog called "A Gay Girl in Damascus", where he described the life in Syria in the time of the Arab Spring

American man, Tom MacMaster. He observed that the current internet culture dominated by social media demands the usage of fixed, unified online identities, and encourages full transparency:

"The freedom to speak the 'true' self while remaining hidden is replaced with the belief that liberation comes from the 'complete' revelation of self, fully connecting to the totality of the network, defined by the limits of social technologies. The ability to speak truth and have that truth recognized politically depends on one's willingness to fully reveal one's fixed and totalized identity" (2012, p.2).

According to Bollmer, those who refuse to adjust to the demand of total transparency are being marginalised, excluded or erased from the network. The hierarchy in the networked culture is being constructed based on subjects' willingness to expose themselves fully and to connect. Bollmer notes, however, that the top of the hierarchical structure is reserved for those who can observe others while staying out of sight. In this system, anonymity is seen as an obstacle to achieving the ideals of transparency and connectivity, and therefore it is seen as an "unnatural too[l] of frauds and liars" (2012, p.10). Only revealing one's 'true' self might be empowering. Bollmer reminds us though, that when it comes to marginalised identities, "to be visible [...] is also to become the possible object of regulation, imprisonment, and violence" (2012, p.5).

Internet scholars also identify the forces which "actively work against multiplicity and towards the fixation of single identities" (van Zoonen, 2013, p.44). Van Zoonen names three such forces: state interests emerging from challenges that have arisen after the 9/11 attacks, the increasing economic importance of online transactions, and cultural struggles around identity. Lovink (2012) and Bollmer (2012) focus mostly on the rise of social networking sites, which promote connectivity, self-disclosure and self-promotion. They both acknowledge, however, that the growth of social networking services, such as Facebook, was a tactical response of business to surveillance and control industries that emerged at the beginning of the 21st century. According to Lovink (2012, p.40), internet companies responded to increasing state surveillance with offering their

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protests, and the experience of a lesbian girl who was half-Syrian and half-American. After Amina had been identified as MacMaster, he was harshly criticised for deceiving thousands of his followers.

customers "coherent, singular identities in sync with the data owned by police, security and financial institutions". In the following section, using a framework constructed by Lessig (2006), I will discuss some of the forces working against online anonymity in a more detailed way.

3.2 Forces working against online anonymity

In his seminal book "Code: Version 2.0", Lawrence Lessig (2006) suggests that cyberspace is regulated by four interdependent forces, which constrain or enable certain forms of behaviour: legal framework, market forces, technological infrastructure (the code), and social norms. Each of these forces works in a different way: legal regulations, such as defamation law or copyright law constrain through the potential punishment; market forces make certain forms of behaviour more profitable than others; the code or architecture (software, hardware) enables some online practices, while making others impossible; lastly, social norms restrict behaviour by the stigma, intolerance or exclusion imposed by a group. The four forces are strongly interrelated and might support, as well as undermine one another. It is also important to notice that they can influence both the behaviour of those who provide online services, as well as those who use them.

The framework constructed by Lessig can be successfully applied to the analysis of forces that influence the possibility of acting anonymously on the internet. As figure 1 demonstrates, the law, technology, market and social norms influence the sole possibility and the level of anonymity people can obtain online. As the growing number of internet scholars suggest, they can potentially all work to make anonymity increasingly difficult to achieve.
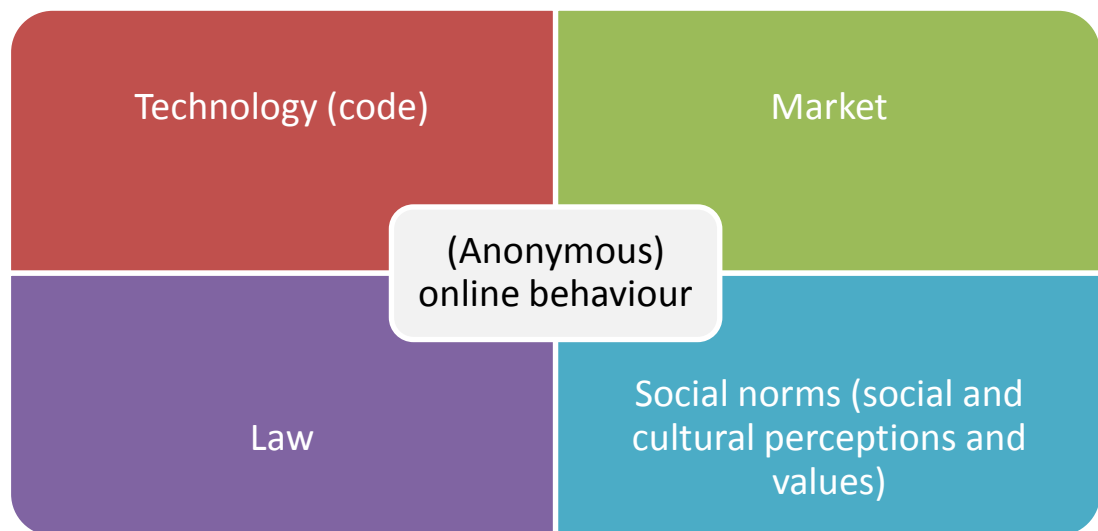
FIGURE 1 FORCES INFLUENCING PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOUR ONLINE. ADAPTED FROM LESSIG (2006)

3.2.1 Online anonymity and the law

The ability of internet users to remain anonymous on the internet is heavily influenced by the law. One of the most extreme example comes from South Korea, where the government made an attempt to drastically increase the level of authentication of internet users (Pfanner 2011). In 2007, it implemented a real-name policy, forcing every website with over 100 000 visitors per day to verify the identity of its users. Those who wanted to join and contribute to websites had to submit their Resident Registration Numbers (Lee 2011). The policy was abandoned in August 2011, the main reasons being continuous protests from local and international internet users, internet companies and freedom organisations, as well as a few spectacular cases of identity thefts.

The example of South Korea demonstrates that attempts to legally restrict online anonymity in a direct way are often met, at least in democratic countries, with strong opposition. However, the law can influence the level of internet users' anonymity in many other, more subtle ways. According to Froomkin (2015), there are three main areas of legal regulations of online anonymity: chokepoint regulations, identification requirement and data retention.

First of all, being aware that direct regulation of individual internet users' behaviour is difficult and might be welcomed with protests, governments focus on intermediaries, such as Internet Service Providers (ISPs), software and hardware

makers, or domain name registrars. A good example of regulations targeting internet intermediaries and aimed at limiting anonymity is international agreements enforcing identification to curtail file sharing. According to Mansell and Steinmueller (2013, p.2), the demand from creative industries and copyright holders that ISPs help identify users, has become "a principal tool in an escalating war on copyright infringement". In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, the law obliges ISPs to reveal the identities of their customers, exposing them to "civil liabilities of varying and uncertain severity" (2013, p.2).

Secondly, identification is often required in order to monitor communication for national security or law enforcement purposes. The case of South Korea, described above, is the best example of such a practice. Similarly, in metropolitan Tokyo, a law was introduced in 2010 which required customers of internet cafes to identify themselves by showing a national ID (Kuchikomi 2010).

Lastly, in order to secure the possibility to access internet users' data, which might be used for crime detection, many governments impose data retention laws. In the European Union this was regulated by the Data Retention Directive, which ordered member states to require communication providers to store citizens' telecommunication data for a period between 6 and 24 months. In April 2014 the directive was struck down by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), which came to the conclusion that the directive is a breach of privacy and interferes with the right to protection of personal data.

However, the law remained a part of many national telecommunication regulations. In Poland, for example, no new regulations have yet been implemented, despite the Constitutional Tribunal's call for larger control over the authorities' access to retained data (Bychawska-Siniarska and Warso 2015). In addition, governments' interests in creating identifiability online stems from the gradual transition towards e-governments and making more state services available online. The question of identity verification is a key element of those processes.

Aside from overt regulations reducing internet users' possibility to control the level of disclosure online, Froomkin (2015) also points out the covert ones. The NSA internal documents leaked by Edward Snowden showed that intelligence

agencies have access to many more types of communication data than the public is aware of.

3.2.2 Online anonymity and the market

Market constraints and market opportunities are another type of force that regulates anonymity on the internet. They also often influence legal regulations, technological solutions or social norms promoted in an online environment.

As has already been mentioned, internet user's anonymity is problematic for copyright holders and creative industries who wish to protect their sources of income by deterring and punishing those who infringe copyrights (Mansell and Steinmueller 2013). The representatives of creative industries claim that their revenues decline due to illegal file-sharing, and therefore they push towards regulations that expedite identification and enable larger control over the usage of copyright materials.

Secondly, anonymity is being limited because identity information is of a high commercial value. With the growth of targeted online advertising, companies want to know as much as possible about potential targets. They are interested in basic social characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, place of living), tastes, preferences, habits, and patterns of online behaviour (Froomkin 2015; Wallace 2008; Edwards and Howells 2003). As Froomkin (2015, p.17) points out, "[f]irms, especially those seeking to monetize online social networking increasingly require that users identify themselves not just to the provider, but to each other". What some authors call 'radical transparency' (Dibbell 2010; boyd 2012; Bollmer 2012) is a raison d'etre of most social networking sites, which achieve financial profit by "tailoring advertisements to the consumption interests of the users" (Fuchs 2013). The social character of services such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Google+ encourage users to establish networks of friends, acquaintances, work partners and hence merge their online identities with offline ones. Establishing this link makes users' data even more valuable for advertisers, who can precisely select their targets (see Campbell and Carlson 2002 on 'panoptic sort' and determining the economic value of people) and then trace their behaviour across various online platforms. Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, is a devoted advocate of merging online and

offline identities. He famously stated that people have only one identity and that having more "is an example of a lack of integrity" (Kirkpatrick 2011, p.199). This statement has become a symbol of forces working towards eliminating anonymity and alternative identities from new media environments and replacing them with verifiable 'real' ones. But the 'real name' policy promoted by Facebook goes far beyond this Harvard-campus-originated site, mostly due to the popularity of Facebook's social plugins such as 'like' buttons and commenting features. In August 2011, more than 400 000 websites implemented Facebook commenting systems (Facebook 2011), requiring commenters to use their 'real' Facebook identities. Although often justified by the need to increase quality of discussion and discourage online trolls (e.g. Soni 2013), this move brings media companies economic benefits, such as lower moderation related costs or an increase in referral traffic (Sonderman 2011).

3.2.3 Online anonymity and the "code"

Online behaviour is also regulated by software and hardware (the 'code'), which constrain some types of actions while making other possible (Lessig 2006, p.125). The influence of code is clearly visible when it comes to the possibilities of internet users to achieve certain levels of anonymity. According to Grosser (2014), the way "software is designed by its creators determines the ways the users can (and cannot) craft their online representations".

For instance, as mentioned above, many online services require users to sign up with their social media account in order to access content or leave a comment. This is a technological choice, which also embeds certain values, such as visibility and connectivity. Websites can choose from many different software designs, some of them allowing greater levels of anonymity, others requiring identification.

In his analysis of software underlying the most popular social networking site, Facebook, Grosser identified several aspects of technological design that influence users' self representation and "expects and enforces that users will only craft profiles based on their 'real' identities, using real names and accurate personal details [...]" (2014). The requirement that users sign up with their 'real

names' (Facebook 2015) encouraging users to connect with their real-life friends and share their real-life experiences, and self-define by using pre-determined and fixed categories describing gender or language, all, according to Grosser, limits diversity and identity play and encourages the creation of unified, verifiable identities which are easy to "sort, search and advertise to". He concludes by observing that Facebook "employs its tools of singular identity, limited self-description and consistent visual presentation in order to aggregate its users into reductive chunks of data" (2014). Similarly, Bodle (2013, p.22) observes that increasingly, ad-funded online industries use embedded tracking capabilities which help to identify and monitor people via "social plugins and networks, HTTP cookies, Open APIs (application programming interfaces), search engines, browsers, operating systems, wireless networks, cloud services, mobile applications and devices, Global Positioning Systems, Internet and mobile service providers, and other intermediaries".

3.2.4 Online anonymity and social norms

Lessig (2006, p.340) describes social norms, another group of factors that regulate people's online behaviour, as "normative constraints imposed not through the organized or centralized actions of a state, but through the many slight and sometimes forceful sanctions that members of a community impose on each other". Those sanctions might include disapproval, criticism, sarcasm, shame, stigmatisation, ridicule, discrimination, or even ostracism and exclusion from the community. When internalised, social norms are highly effective in regulating behaviour, which is why they are an attractive point of reference for business representatives or law makers who attempt to change citizens' or consumers' behaviour.

Many new media researchers explore the link between anonymity in online communities and social norms. Most famously, Sherry Turkle (1995), in her seminal book "Life on the Screen" highlighted the importance of breaking the connection between online and offline self for early internet users. Anonymity, often in a form of pseudonymity, was an accepted social norm. In the early nineties, thinking about one's identity was dominated by the images of "multiplicity,

heterogeneity, flexibility and fragmentation" (1995, p.178)). For Turkle the internet was a place of growth, with identity being a flexible self where "lines of communication between parts of self are open" (1995, p.261). She also stressed the liberating aspect of the online interactions, where the social categories such as gender, class or race might be lifted. As Collins (2013) observes in his popular analysis of internet culture, pseudonymity was a 'cultural expectation' in online interactions by the turn of the century. In communities such as Second Life, asking someone for information about an offline identity was perceived as offensive.

The change happened in the years 2003-2004, when the rise of social media, especially Facebook, and the blogosphere brought what Geert Lovink (2012, p.38) calls "a culture of self disclosure". As has already been discussed in a previous section related to anonymity and the market, social networking platforms' owners have a vast interest in encouraging users to avoid anonymising strategies online and splitting identities through different platforms, as this can "mes[s] up the clarity and coherence of their data" (van Dijck 2013, p.212). One way to do so is to promote transparency, connectivity and unification of online and offline identities as an accepted norm of social relations online. According to van Dijck (2013), social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn are successfully shaping normative behaviour online. He observes that "[t]he subtle adjustments of interface strategies over the years show how platforms deploy users' needs for connectedness to stimulate lucrative connectivity, and how they push narrative forms to enhance the traceability of social behaviour" (2013, p.212). As Lovink (2012) observes, the profit oriented promotion of connectivity and disclosure as accepted norms of online interactions was a market response to larger political changes related to the financial crisis in 2001, the war on terror and the subsequent rise of the global surveillance industry. Overall, he observed the "techno-libertarian utopia" with its flexible identities turned into "the bureaucratic security regime of the Web 2.0 age", where internet users are expected to use their real names, and where revealing private information is, as Taddicken (2012, p.258) put it "rewarded with social gratification".

One of the most important gratifications is the possibility to connect and interact with others, delivered by social networking sites. Very often, the condition to participate in the network is to reveal one's legal name. According to boyd

(2012) the strongly normative character of Facebook's real name policy steams from the fact that at the beginning it was a private, intimate extension of Harvard's campus life. Later the site's popularity grew immensely, but the new users adopted the same practices and norms as the early ones. That allowed Facebook to become a de facto identity gate to the rest of the internet, without much protest. The situation was different for another company that aspires to the status of identity provider – Google. When in 2011 Google launched its social network Google+, the site started enforcing the 'real name' policy by expelling users who provided names that did not seem to follow the policy. Internet users responded with anger and Google's decision triggered a heated debate (commonly referred to as 'nymwars') concerning the right to anonymity and pseudonymity on the internet. Eventually, Google executive Vic Gundotra announced at the Web 2.0 summit in San Francisco that Google+ will support using pseudonyms and other types of non-standard names (Galperin and York 2011). According to boyd (2012, p.30), users were outraged mostly because Google's push towards real names was "purely driven by market and reinforced by corporate policies and technology", instead of being a social norm accepted by users. Despite the 'nymwars', however, real names remain an expected form of presence within the Google+ network. As stated on the Google+ help page, using one's first and last name while starting a profile helps "friends and family find you online, and helps you connect with people you know" (Google 2016).

3.3 The concept of de-anonymisation

The four forces described above (law, market, technology, social norms), which together work towards eliminating or discouraging various forms of anonymity on the internet, might be seen as tools in the ongoing struggle for power and control in society. As outlined in the previous chapter, the possibility to identify citizens is one of the most important domains of political power. Secondly, by gathering and processing customer's data, large corporations gain control over people's economic choices. Lastly, the possibility to control one's social interactions and to distance oneself from unwanted encounters is an important aspect of social power. As Baym (2010, p.34) points out, many members of the upper and middle classes

"view social divisions as a useful and necessary means of protecting themselves and their families from unwanted outside influences and dangers".

Since all those forms of power and control are challenged by anonymity, there are continuous attempts to eliminate it from online spaces. As boyd (2012, p.31) observes, when people can be easily identified, the power shifts to the observer: "The observer, armed with a search engine and identifiable information, has greater control over the social situation than the person presenting information about themselves". Therefore, internet users' ability to shape and control their online identities is increasingly restricted and various online venues of self-expression are now confined to a unified, 'real' identity. Other forms of alternative identities are on the fringes – the mainstream is derived from the common perception of the internet as a so-called extension of 'real life', not a separate, alternative space of interaction.

Considered together, the interests and forces working against the possibility of internet users to remain anonymous towards the state, corporations or other users might be described as a process of ***de-anonymisation*** of online spaces. In technological jargon, the concept of *de-anonymisation* is not a new phenomenon. Oxfords' "Dictionary of Computer Science" describes it as a data mining strategy, "in which anonymous data is cross-referenced with other data sources to re-identify the anonymous data source" (Butterfield and Ngondi 2016). The concept is linked to a process of data anonymisation, which means removing names, addresses and other distinctive characteristics from data sets. Usually, the companies or public entities that handle large amounts of data are required to anonymise them in order to prevent identification. Consequently, *de-anonymisation* allows one to compile the data in a way that allows the connection of them to a particular person.

However, *de-anonymisation* can also serve as a metaphorical description of the process described in previous sections of this chapter – the process of gradual elimination of anonymity from online spaces and the turn to 'the real name web' (Hogan 2013). The legal regulations allowing extensive surveillance, economic interest behind promoting real name policies, followed by technological adjustments and promotion of identification as a social norm lead not only to

actual (legal or technological) restrictions of anonymity, but also to its stigmatisation and degradation of its value in social consciousness.

Certainly, *de-anonymisation* is not the only trend. As boyd (2012) notes, the control over online identities is dispersed; it "is not in the hands of any individual actor – designer, user, engineer, or policy maker – but rather [it is] the product of the socio-technical ecosystem" (2012, p.31). Countertrends to *de-anonymisation*, or, in other words, forces promoting anonymity and internet user's control over their online identities, are present at every level: legal, economic, technological, and normative.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, anonymous speech is protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which means that laws requiring people to disclose their names in relation to expressing opinions are considered unconstitutional[5].

In the European context, the Data Protection Working Party, responsible for preparing recommendations for the reform of data protection rules in the European Union recognised the value of data anonymisation "as a strategy to reap the benefits of 'open data' for individuals and society at large whilst mitigating the risks for the individuals concerned".[6] The popularity of mobile apps such as SnapChat, Yik Yak or Whisper, which are marketed as enabling anonymous communication, show that anonymity might be profitable.

Various levels of anonymity can also be secured by using proxy servers, TOR (The Onion Router) network, or a Virtual Private Network (VPN), which help to obscure one's Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and make identification difficult. In fact, the usage of the TOR network increased significantly after Edward Snowden revealed the scale of NSA's surveillance[7] (Preibusch 2015).

Lastly, there are numerous examples of online platforms (such as 4chan.org – a popular bulletin board with highly dedicated users), where anonymity remains a social norm and nobody is expected to sign their contributions with a real name. Moreover, internet users engage with various tactics of obfuscation (e.g. Brunton

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[5] See for example: McIntyre, J., Executor of Estate of Margaret McIntyre, Deceased, Petitioner v. Ohio Elections Commission, 514 U.S. 334 (1995).
[6] Article 29 Data Protection Working Party, 2014. *Opinion 05 /2014 on Anonymisation Techniques WP216.* Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/article-29/documentation/opinion-recommendation/files/2014/wp216_en.pdf> [Accessed 24 Jul. 2016].
[7] Preibush (2015) observes, however, that TOR continued to be a niche technology.

and Nissenbaum 2011; Larsson, Svensson and Kaminski 2012), in order to resist commercial or political surveillance.

Yet, although the listed examples demonstrate countertrends to the *de-anonymisation* process, they are placed on the margins of ICTs' development. The popularity of real-name social networking sites, social and commercial benefits from revealing one's data, powerful actors benefiting from internet users' identification, as well as the relatively high level of technological knowledge needed to conceal one's real life identity online, all work against anonymity on the internet.

What needs to be acknowledged, however, is that the future of online anonymity is not yet fully determined. According to Feenberg (2014, p. 117) the internet, with all its features, is still an immature technology and a mix of "competing layers of meaning and function that combine different affordances of the medium for different purposes". The way online identities are constructed is not yet fixed, and, as Cole Stryker (2012, p.16), an author, activist and defender of the right to anonymity suggests "[t]he Web will continue to see warfare in the coming decade", in which a "primary battleground will be the identity space".

One of the areas of this battle, that so far has received little scholarly attention, and which crosses through all other dimensions described by Lessig (law, market, technology, and social norms) is the area of **discourse, and media discourse in particular.** In the following section I will discuss the importance of seeing online anonymity as a discursive construction, and I will outline key aspects of the relationship between online anonymity and the mass media.

3.4 Online anonymity as a discursive construction

As shown in the previous sections of this chapter, the possibility for internet users to obtain various levels of anonymity is influenced by technology, market, law, and social norms, which are underpinned by the amalgamation of political, economic and social interests. The picture, however, is missing one important tool for influencing the future of anonymity, namely **discourse,** which can be used to promote or justify certain technological solutions, laws, economic interests or norms guiding online behaviour.

While users' ability to be anonymous on the internet and shape their online identities is indeed determined by factors described in the previous section of this chapter, it also depends on the meanings that are attached to anonymity itself. Those meanings are shaped in long-term social, political and cultural processes and negotiated within the public discourse. Moreover, as Baym (2010, p.23) suggests, discourses surrounding online behaviour do not only reflect already existing meanings, but might also generate new ones. She observes that "[t]hrough communication, people assign symbolic meanings to technologies", which, in turn, shape the way technology is understood and used.

Studying the process of *de-anonymisation* from this perspective involves acknowledging that changes in online environments are underpinned by a meaning creation process. This process is influenced by political, economic and social actors who have particular agendas, interests and expectations. While the investigation of those interests is a domain of the political economy, the perspective adopted in this thesis focuses on studying discourses, in order to understand the changes in the online environment, uncover their ideological underpinnings, and anticipate future developments.

The mass media are one of the forums where various social actors "struggle over the definition of social reality" (Gurevitch and Levy1985, p.19 in Gamson 1992, p.25) and thus, which is crucial to this study, over the role of online anonymity in a democratic society. In the following sections I will present the key aspects of the relationship between the media and online anonymity and discuss studies which support the claim that discourse, next to law, technology, market and social norms, is another force influencing the process of *de-anonymisation*.

3.5 Online anonymity and the power of the media

So far, little systematic, academic attention has been given to the media discourse surrounding anonymity on the internet. Some useful conclusions can be drawn from studies conducted in the field of journalistic ethics. Bill Reader (2012), an American media scholar, analysed journalists and editors' opinions regarding anonymity on the internet. He analysed six journalistic essays in which authors criticized anonymity in online forums, and internet users' responses to those

essays. He found that there are significant differences between the way journalists and members of the audience perceive the role of anonymity in the public sphere. The three key rhetorical strategies used by journalists included portraying anonymity as "filth" (perceiving content written anonymously as worthless); dehumanizing the "trolls" (describing anonymous authors using words like 'reptilian' or 'swine'); protecting the "village square" (suggesting that anonymous authors are a threat to an idealised vision of the public discussion, which should be civil, polite, and articulate). On the other hand, the opinions expressed by readers focused on highlighting the power of the people (forum users should be able to manage the rules of the forums by themselves, and not have them imposed by the media); stressing the importance of privacy (by expressing concerns about revealing private information online); and identifying anonymity with freedom (by highlighting that thanks to anonymity people can express their views freely). Overall, Reader's work offers valuable analysis of journalistic rhetoric regarding online anonymity, but by selecting six essays openly critical of the issue at stake, the author provokes the findings he obtained. Since his analysis is purely qualitative, there is no indication of anti-anonymity rhetoric being characteristic to a wide group of journalists. Also, the findings of the study, while useful for guiding further research, are limited to the very specific cultural environment of media in the United States.

Another important example of studies investigating online anonymity and media relationship is a study of representations of anonymity and the internet in stories published by Canadian newspapers between the years 1994 and 2003 conducted by Carey and Burkell (2007). The researchers found that in newspaper stories, online anonymity is mostly associated with privacy, paedophilia and internet crime.[8] They also identified four main themes that appeared in articles in which online anonymity was discussed: the public discourse theme (anonymity seen as an important element of free speech), the parity theme (anonymity erasing social differences), the social chaos theme (anonymity facilitating destructive behaviour) and the surveillance theme (anonymity being only illusory due to various surveillance mechanisms). Overall, the study provides a good overview of

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[8] It is not quite clear why the researchers decided to treat internet crime and paedophilia as two separate categories. If considered together, they would constitute the dominant context in which online anonymity was discussed in Canadian newspapers – 35%, compared to the second biggest category, privacy (20.9%).

the media debate surrounding online anonymity, but falls short of critical discussion of its ideological underpinnings. In fact, the authors summarize their findings as obvious, by stating that "the fact that the preponderance of stories in this sample tend to associate 'the anonymity of the Internet' with malign or dangerous phenomenon is not surprising" (2007). Counter to this, it needs to be stated that the way media portray online anonymity should not be taken for granted and that we should carefully and critically analyse the values, interests and contexts underlying the debate. Moreover, Carey and Burkell's study covers debates on online anonymity that took place in the years 1994 and 2003, before the rise of social networks and the culture of 'radical transparency'. Thus, new investigations of the debate are necessary.

In line with Carey and Burkell's (2007) observation that "anonymity is a crucial warrant in most rhetorical constructions of the Internet's social value", some indications of media attitudes towards anonymity on the internet can be found in the studies that investigate journalists' general attitude towards the internet and online communication. Meltzer (2015), for example, found out that journalists see anonymity as one of the key reasons for the incivility in online discussions. Another recent study, based on interviews with 583 US journalists, showed that 73% of them agreed that online comments should not be anonymous (Nielsen 2014). The attitude towards online anonymity, however, was only one of many questions asked by the researcher, and the quantitative results were not discussed in a critical and in-depth manner. The researcher did not explain what exactly is understood by 'anonymity', what are the main reasons for journalists' reluctance to users' anonymity, or what are the social, political or cultural factors that influence this attitude.

While the studies indicate a predominantly negative attitude towards anonymity among journalists, more in-depth and critical analysis is needed. In the following section I will discuss the importance of critical analysis of media coverage of online anonymity and identify the main fields of power struggle involved. It will be argued that mass media participate in shaping the future of online anonymity because of 1) their symbolic power and influence on knowledge, public agenda and attitudes; 2) their control over access to the public sphere; and 3) their struggle for domination in the new media reality. The power of the mass

media will be then understood not only as influencing audiences, but also, as van Dijk (1995, p.9) suggests, as an important role "within the broader framework of the social, cultural, political, or economic power structures of society".

3.5.1 Media and symbolic power

In the field of discourse analysis, mass media power has been described as symbolic and persuasive, "in the sense that the media primarily have the potential to control to some extent the minds of readers or viewers, but not directly their actions" (van Dijk, 1995, p.10). Among the main, interconnected aspects of mass media influence, van Dijk (1995) points towards the control of knowledge and understanding; setting the agenda and making certain events more or less prominent; and the control over attitudes and evaluations. The media can, therefore, influence the way people understand what online anonymity is, in what contexts it appears and how audiences perceive its value.

First of all, media play an important role in helping people understand and give meaning to the reality which surrounds them. According to Baym (2010, p.23) "[t]he messages in popular media (…) show the social elements we bring to understanding new communication technologies and help to shape how people understand new technology". It is especially important when it comes to highly complex issues, to which anonymity on the internet undoubtedly belongs. As Caciattore et al. (2012) suggest, mass media are often the most accessible source of meaning for the lay publics. This is particularly important in the case of technology-related issues, which are usually difficult to understand for people lacking expertise in a particular area. By presenting the problem in a simplified and understandable way, traditional media become a primary source of meaning for the broader public. The question of users' anonymity online is a good example, as only a small part of society really understands the software architecture. Most people do not have enough technological knowledge to assess their level of anonymity online, neither are they aware of the legal regulations concerning identity disclosure.

Secondly, mass media influence which events become a part of the general public debate and how relevant they will seem to the audience. According to the

agenda setting theory, "elements prominent in the media's pictures become prominent in the audiences' picture" (McCombs and Ghanem 2001, p.67). Additionally, as van Dijk (1995) suggests, journalists can manipulate the importance of certain information, by "displaying it more or less prominently in the news report, headlines, leads, or photographs" (1995, p.14) or, conversely, they can "deemphasize the causes or consequences of events or the properties of news actors" (1995, p.15).

Last, but not least, media can shape attitudes, which later influence evaluations of certain events, groups or processes (van Dijk 1995). One of the ways in which media influence an audience's attitudes, which will be discussed in the methodological part of this thesis, is by creating the contrastive dimensions of 'us' versus 'them'. By using such contrasts in the coverage of online anonymity, media can influence the attitudes of members of the audience, which later influence evaluations.

3.5.2 Media and control over access to the digital public sphere

Another important aspect of the mass media's relationship with online anonymity is the media's control over the access to the public sphere. As van Dijk (1995, p.12) suggests, mass media can "essentially determine who may say (or write) what, to whom, about whom, in which way and in what circumstances". In this context I would like to suggest two different ways in which media can influence the fate of online anonymity: 1) by giving access to different voices that speak **'about' online anonymity** and 2) by (not) giving access to the public sphere to **anonymous voices**. Those two elements correspond with what discourse theorists (e.g. van Dijk2009) describe as a division between **controlling text** and **context**. In other words, media do not only control which facts and opinions about online anonymity will be transmitted to the broader public (text), but they also have the means to determine the level of disclosure required in order to participate in online discussions (context).

The first aspect of the control over access to the public sphere is strongly related to the agenda setting role of the media, described in the previous section. Traditional media, which still hold a powerful position among news sources

publicise certain voices about online anonymity, while silencing others. Their power lies in the ability to decide which voices, social actors, and interests will be represented in the coverage.

There is, however, another way in which media can determine the fate of anonymous access to the public sphere. Since for most of the traditional media nowadays having an online edition is standard, they can determine the level of disclosure needed for their audience to engage with the content and thus participate in the online public sphere. The options which media can offer to their audiences are numerous: in order to post a comment on a website, users can be required to register with an official ID number, login through social networking sites such as Facebook, Google+, or LinkedIn or have their email address confirmed. In other cases, no registration might be required at all and some media websites are even actively working towards securing users' anonymity.[9] Although the practice of media websites vary, some general trends can be observed. In the Word Editors Forum's study "Online comment moderation: emerging best practices" (Goodman and Cherubini 2013), online news editors at 91 news organisations across the world shared their insights about whether or not requiring registration from their users (mostly for commenting) is a good idea. As the authors concluded, "[t]here is a general feeling that requiring real names leads to better quality of conversation, though smaller in terms of number" (2013, p.7). As an example, the report quotes *The Wall Street Journal's* community editor who stated: "Most of our commenting is constructive. We are a real name community so our readers are not the average web reader hiding behind a cloak of anonymity. We have real name standards here and commenting histories and profiles are visible, so it's almost like a social network" (2013, p.31). It has to be noted, however, that overall the issue of allowing anonymous commenting is divisive and many respondents acknowledged that anonymity might be important to those who, for various reasons, cannot express their opinions freely.

While media companies can determine the level of disclosure required from their readers while engaging in online public discussions, they can also use their investigative capacities in order to expose the real life identities of anonymous

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[9] For example, American *Gawker Media Network*, tries to ensure users' anonymity by providing them with the anonymous 'Burner' method (Goodman and Cherubini 2013). As Goodman and Cherubini explain, the method "involves the site issuing a 16-character key for a one-time only login. *Gawker* doesn't store the key, any of the user's information or their IP address" (2013, p. 32).

internet users. There are already several examples of a phenomenon commonly referred to as 'doxing'. According to Ryan Goodrich (2013), doxing, which is an abbreviation of 'document tracking', is the act of "using publicly available information to identify individuals with the goal of publicly sharing or exposing their personal details". While the word was originally used for describing the strategy of hackers who infiltrate secure databases and expose personal information of various individuals, it is now also applied to other types of exposing uniquely identifying data without a person's consent. One group of such practices is what can be called *media doxing* and involves mainstream media publishing the identifying data of previously anonymous internet users. The examples of *media doxing* include the identification of Reddit's user, violentacrez, as Michael Brutch by Gawekr's Adrian Chen; the disclosure of the real name of British blogger Girl with a One-Track Mind, who was writing about her sex life in London, by the *Sunday Times*; or the revelation of the identity of NightJack, a blogging policeman from Lancashire, by *The Times*. The examples of doxing also include the case of a Polish blogger, Kataryna, whose real life identity was disclosed by journalists of a daily newspaper *Dziennik*, and which will serve as a case study for investigating the debate surrounding online anonymity in this thesis. All these stories are very different in terms of reasons for doxing, the ways in which journalists got the information about previously anonymous users or the consequences which the outing had had. What they have in common is that they illustrate a situation in which mainstream media claimed the right to challenge the anonymity of internet users and revealed their 'real life' names to the public. Moreover, they all triggered a heated debate about the value of online anonymity and the dangers that come with it. Better understanding of this debate, which this analysis aims to provide, is necessary for recognising the main forces involved in the struggle surrounding online anonymity, as well as the power relations that underlie this struggle.

3.5.3 New challenges to the symbolic elites

The leading role in the meaning making process, as well as the control over access to the public sphere discussed in the previous sections traditionally gave journalists, editors, and media owners a privileged position of 'symbolic elites'

(van Dijk 1989). However, in the era of new technologies journalists are no longer the only gatekeepers and their ability to control access to the public sphere and set the agenda for public debates became limited. Unsurprisingly, the reaction of journalists to new content producers (such as bloggers or participants of various online forums) was sceptical. As Dohle and Bernhard (2014, p.254) pointed out, "[t]he emergence of the Internet [...] caused negative reactions among journalists depicting online media as non-credible, unreliable, or unprofessional" (2014, p.25). As previous studies showed (e.g. Meltzer 2015), one of the factors by which journalists explain the low quality of online debates is anonymity of the participants. It therefore seems justified to assume that challenging the value of online anonymity might in fact be a strategy for journalists to secure their privileged position in the public sphere.

This assumption, which will be tested in the empirical part of this study, can also be supported by the theoretical concept of **paradigm repair**. Drawing from the work of Stephen D. Reese (Reese 1990, cited in Ruggiero 2004), Thomas E. Ruggiero observes that "in protecting the cultural authority of their profession, journalists engage in 'paradigm repair', or the maintenance of the cultural boundaries of journalism" (2004, p.92). The 'paradigm repair' is here understood as the attempts of journalists to identify and correct violations of central tenets of the mainstream news product. Ruggiero argues that when faced with the rising importance of the internet and practices that threaten "the conventional news paradigm by calling into question its limitations and biases" (2004, p.93), journalists are trying to restore their privileged position within the public discourse. He also observes that the most common tenets of journalistic product, which traditional media try to preserve, include news content authenticity, news content credibility, journalistic authority and journalistic accountability. According to Ruggiero, journalists use those four principles in order to call for a 'paradigm repair', as they are not eager to share their "authority as disseminators of news" (2004, p.102) with those who traditionally were at the receiving end. Although Ruggiero does not mention online anonymity in the context of his study, the link is evident. As the previous chapter showed, anonymity's opponents often set it against the exact qualities which Ruggiero lists within the context of 'paradigm repair': authenticity, credibility, authority, and accountability. It can then be

assumed that journalists' critical attitude towards online anonymity would be driven by their perceived need for 'paradigm repair' and their eagerness to "protect[t] their 'professional turf" (2004, p.95).

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the early work of Bill Reader (2005), which explored the opinions of journalists in the United States about anonymous letters to the editor and compared those opinions with some key tenets of the "Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics". He analysed 30 essays published in trade journals by media practitioners and conducted 16 interviews with editors. His main conclusion, which he described as a journalistic **'blind spot'**, was that media professionals fail to acknowledge the positive value of anonymity and that a journalist's perception of anonymity is contrary to journalistic ethical guidelines, such as giving voice to disadvantaged groups or "promot[ing] the free exchange of views, including views they find repugnant—or, if you will, views submitted in a manner they find repugnant" (2005, p.73). Reader found that editors predominantly perceive anonymous contributions as "tawdry and shallow" (2005, p.68), they assign "considerable moral value to the act of signing a letter, arguing that the act gave the opinion more credibility" (2005, p.70) and that for them only contributors who are willing to provide their names "deserve to participate in the forums, and that identifying oneself is a foundation of democratic speech" (2005, p.69). Reader does not devote a lot of attention to identifying potential reasons for journalists' and editors' negative attitudes towards anonymity, but some of his findings are closely related to the 'paradigm repair' concept. For instance, he observes that many journalists see anonymous contributions as "heretical to the ethical ideals of journalism" (2005, p.65) and that journalists and editors "perpetuate and perhaps exacerbate a mythology by which journalists assume moral certitude when denigrating missives from the masses" (2005, p.73). Those two points – seeing anonymous contributions as incompatible with journalistic ethical principles and perceiving journalists as being morally superior to the masses and occupying a privileged position in the public sphere are exactly what Ruggiero's interpretation of 'paradigm repair' is about. Additionally, Reader observes that in relation to anonymity, journalists expect anyone who wants to participate in public debates to follow their standards.

Overall, by combining both theoretical concepts – Ruggerio's take on 'paradigm repair' and Reader's 'blind spot'- it seems justified to argue that journalists, who want to protect their privileged position in the public sphere, engage in 'paradigm repair' by calling for the preservation of traditionally accepted tenets of journalistic practice (such as authenticity, credibility, authority, and accountability). One of the factors which journalists and editors see as undermining those tenets in the digital world, is online contributors' anonymity. Consequently, by turning a blind eye to the potential advantages of anonymity, journalists close the door to the public sphere for those who, for various reasons, refuse to disclose their names, and who could also potentially challenge journalistic authority.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter began with an outline of key aspects of the process leading to elimination of anonymity from online spaces, which is often described as a move towards 'the real-name web', or the process of *de-anonymisation*. According to Hogan (2013), a turn towards a real-name web is not only a technical one – it is political, social, and it is based on a very specific set of values, among which connectivity, sharing, and self-exposure, dominate. Using Lessig's (2006) theoretical framework, I discussed economic, technological, political and normative factors influencing the gradual marginalisation of anonymity and constituting the process of *de-anonymisation*.

While all of these factors have been already thoroughly researched, it was argued that one aspect of *de-anonymisation* – a discursive one - remains unexplored. Yet, understanding public discourse surrounding anonymity is crucial, since it is both being shaped by and shaping all other forces influencing people's online behaviour: law, market, technology, and social norms.

Mass media are one of the platforms where the meaning of online anonymity is being constructed and negotiated. I showed that there are at least three aspects of media – an online anonymity relationship that requires attention: media, thanks to their symbolic power, can influence how online anonymity is represented in the public sphere; mass media with an online presence can control

the access of anonymous internet users to discussions on their websites; journalists can use online anonymity in their struggle for domination in the new media reality. The concepts of 'paradigm repair' and 'blind spot' indicate that journalists are attached to what Sell (2013) described as "a traceable and identifiable authorship", seen as related to "authority, mirrored in the normative value of authenticity" (p.5) and therefore demonstrate a mostly negative view of online anonymity. Considered together, the empirical evidence and the theoretical concepts presented in this chapter set the ground for investigation of whether media discourse contributes to the process of *de-anonymisation*.

However, this research project is set to investigate meanings attached to online anonymity in a very specific context of Poland's post-communist society. Since the studies and debates presented so far were placed mostly in a Western, Anglo-American context, it is legitimate to expect that the debate on online anonymity in Poland will include new, unexplored plots and meanings. The following chapter will therefore outline the main characteristics of the Polish media system and the particularity of Polish public discourse, which influences the way anonymity on the internet is constructed by the media. In particular, two processes affecting the development of the Polish media system will be discussed – the political transition to democracy and the technological revolution linked to the popularisation of the internet.

CHAPTER 4 | Media and online anonymity in post-communist Poland

One question that new media researchers need to ask themselves concerns the geographical scope of their investigations. It is often mistakenly assumed that because of the internet's global character, it is possible to study it as an entirely isolated environment, with no connection to local cultures. This way of looking at the internet might also be related to the dominance of the North American or Western European academic discourses, often taken as universal or global (Sparks 2013). Most studies on online anonymity, and its social, political and economic contexts, circulated in mainstream academic publications, come from scholars focusing on the English speaking world. Yet their results are often framed as universally applicable.

Increasingly, however, researchers express the need to step away from this supposedly universal perspective which all too often becomes synonymous with the Anglo-American one. Gross (2014) for example, suggests that media studies should focus more on the cultural contexts of the problems they engage with by paying more attention to local cultures, and elite cultures in particular. He thinks that: "[the] elites, in particular, are very affecting of the way systems and institutions function (...) That is, culture (values, beliefs, attitudes) translates into behaviours and practices that shape whatever a system or institution is officially meant to be, represent, and do" (2014, p.292).

Another possible step towards the needed change is to promote comparative new media research, which would highlight similarities and differences in (new) media cultures across different countries. Before this is possible, however, more effort needs be put into the analysis of forces that influence the development of the internet around the world and in specific social, cultural and political settings.

These are some of the reasons why this analysis focuses on the public discourse surrounding online anonymity in the context of Poland – a Central Eastern European democracy in which the memories of the totalitarian, communist regime are still relatively vivid. My aim is not to suggest that the usage of anonymity or the attitudes towards it among Poles are in any direct way

influenced by the country's communist past. Young users, the most active participants in the new digital reality in Poland (Czapliński and Panek 2015), have only vague memories of the totalitarian regime, or do not have them at all. However, as Bendyk (2012, p.26) observes, young people in Poland are affected by both the "universalizing impact of the web and pop culture" and "ideologies and discourses prevailing in the Third Republic (Poland after communism – K.T.)". Moreover, as will be shown in this study, the media and political elites, who actively participate in the creation of public discourse regarding the issue of anonymity on the internet, often draw from discourses related to Poland's communist past. Moreover, it is worth noting that the Polish debate about online anonymity is taking place at the time of two major media transitions, political and technological, which could affect media coverage of anonymity and anonymous internet users.

Taking this under consideration, in this chapter I will present a brief overview of the transition of the Polish media system, while paying particular attention to the development of the online anonymity debate. First, I will discuss some key elements of the Central and Eastern European (CEE), post-communist context, which influence current debates on internet governance, highlighting those aspects unique to Poland that make it particularly interesting for analysis. I will then introduce two aspects of the Polish media system's transition – adaptation to the new democratic reality and challenges related to the rise of the internet - which, as it will be argued, influence the contemporary media discourse surrounding online anonymity. I will then discuss the place of online anonymity in the current Polish media debates, by examining several discursive events related to this issue.

4.1 Online anonymity and communist legacy

In his seminal book "Domination and the Arts of Resistance", James C. Scott (1990) observed that anonymity is one of the key tactics of resistance used by subordinate groups to speak directly against the powerful. Peasants, slaves, prisoners, and other groups that are not free to openly speak their mind create what Scott calls the 'hidden transcript' – a secret discourse developed behind the back of the

powerful, which serves as a platform of 'shared critique of domination' (1990, p.xi). Although the 'hidden transcript' is largely dissociated from the official, 'public transcript', subordinate groups often manage to transmit their critical message from one discourse to another, for example by publicising critical opinions developed in the private sphere. For this, as Scott observes, anonymity is one of their key tools, since it limits the fear of retaliation which normally prevents the 'hidden transcript' from spreading beyond disempowered groups. This is why, Scott claims, "the subordinate groups have developed a large arsenal of techniques that serve to shield their identity while facilitating open criticism, threats and attacks" (1990, p.140).

Although Scott does not directly refer in his work to totalitarian regimes, the mechanisms of power and resistance he describes can be applied to the context of oppressive regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. In a similar manner, researches investigating Soviet societies have identified two variants of the public realm: the official and the informal one (Zdravomyslova and Voronkow 2002). The so-called official public arena was controlled by "party-state ideological norms and regulated by the relevant rules of communication and social integration as established by the state" (p.50), while the informal one was mostly governed by common and unwritten law and constituted by "places of individual freedom" in which communication was independent from the state (p.52). Such "places", according to Zdravomyslova and Voronkow, include among others the samizdat and magnitizdat[10], underground publications, counterculture, dissident groups, intellectual movements or ethnic groups. Since dissidents were commonly persecuted and criminalized by the authoritarian communist regimes, anonymity, as in the contexts discussed by Scott, often served to transmit the dissident message to the official public sphere, challenging the 'public transcript'.

However, before discussing how the communist past and the post-communist present might influence the media debate surrounding online anonymity, it is important to consider the specificity of the Central and Eastern European context and Poland's position within it.

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[10] *Samizdat* is a word used for describing the clandestine reproduction and distribution of censored and underground publications in the communist countries of eastern Europe, while *magnitizdat* covers a practice of producing "self-made recordings and tape recordings" (Zdravomyslowa and Voronkov 2002, p.52).

First, the CEE region is not homogeneous, both in terms of its past, as well as current media developments. While developing classification of media systems in Central and Eastern Europe, Dobek-Ostrowska (2015) examined 21 post communist countries in central, south eastern, northern and eastern Europe, which, after the communist regime collapsed between 1989 and 1991, embarked on a transition toward democracy which was more or less successful. As she highlights, the shape of the media in the region is an outcome of interactions between "historical heritage, politics and political culture, economic development, media owners and journalistic culture, social culture and civic society, and also of the implementation of and access to new technologies" (p.13). It is also influenced by international political, economic and technological contexts, of which the internet is possibly the most striking example.

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyse the (new) media development in all CEE countries, but Dobek-Ostrowska's model of four types of media systems provides a good overview of the regional media landscape[11]. After pointing out to the differences in (new) media developments in this region, I will discuss the common post-communist heritage, which can potentially influence the way anonymity is constructed in the public discourse.

The media landscape in Poland, like in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia was assigned by Dobek-Ostrowska (2015) to the **'liberal hybrid model'** which evolved in countries that made the most advanced transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one. All these countries are members of the European Union and have relatively high levels of media freedom, with Estonia being among the countries with the highest level of internet development in the world. However, the internet governance in these countries is still very much "influenced by the historical and political material process within which it is produced" (Karatzogianni, Miazhevich and Denisova 2016, p.15), which involves challenges different to countries with longer democratic traditions.

Estonia, for example, has earned much international recognition for its introduction and popularisation of various e-solutions (such as, for example, electronic identity cards, e-voting, paperless government or e-health). However, as

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[11] Dobek-Ostrowska (2015) created the four models of media systems in CEE based on the comparative study of five data sources: Democracy Index 2015 (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited), Freedom of the Press 2015 (Freedom House), World Press Freedom Index 2015 (Reporters Without Borders), Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2014 (The International Monetary Fund) and Penetration of Internet 2014 (Internet Live Stats).

Murumaa-Mengel, Laas-Mikko and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2015) suggest, the lack of concern over potential threats to privacy caused by collection of citizens' personal data by the government, can be, at least partially, explained by the country's totalitarian past. First, according to Murumaa-Mengel, Laas-Mikko and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt's study, many Estonians (70% among 25-34-year-olds, 79% among 65-74-year-olds) adopt the 'I have nothing to hide' attitude, which the authors describe as a distancing and coping mechanism of self-censorship, originated from "Estonia's totalitarian regime history and people's experiences and past everyday practices that many still remember" (p.203). Second, the positive attitude towards Estonia's e-state can be explained by the fact that after years of foreign rule, "'Estonia's own state' is regarded with trust and sense of ownership that allows less uncritical attitudes" (p.203). Here again then, the current discourse surrounding new technologies is heavily influenced by a totalitarian past.

The second model identified by Dobek-Ostrowska, **'the politicized model,'** found in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia, can be characterized by high levels of political influence on media, relatively low internet penetration and overall a rather early phase of democratic development. For example, the 2016 internet freedom report by Freedom House (2016) described the internet in Hungary as overall free, while emphasising numerous issues related to privacy and surveillance. Among others, the report stated that "[t]he lack of judicial oversight for surveillance of ICTs, combined with evidence revealing that the Hungarian government has purchased invasive surveillance technologies from Hacking Team and other companies, raises concerns about the degree to which the right to privacy online is fully protected".

A third group of CEE countries including Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Ukraine, was associated with what Dobek-Ostrowska called **'the media in transition model.'** Media systems of this kind are characterized by limited autonomy – that is, heavily influenced by both politics and business – and a low degree of journalistic professionalism. Media systems characterising this model are at an early stage of transition (p.19), and media freedom in all the countries is classified in international rankings as 'partly free.'

Some scholars argued that it is in fact difficult to assess internet freedom in part of CEE region, due to massive discrepancies between regulations and their implementation. In the context of media laws in Balkan countries, Lani (2011) wrote that "it is not a rare occurrence in the Balkans for laws to be written according to European standards and then to be applied according to Balkan standards" (p.47). Similarly, the authors of Freedom House's 2016 report noted that it is difficult assess the levels and specificity of online surveillance in Ukraine, since "[t]he Security Service of Ukraine can initiate criminal investigations and use wiretapping devices on communications, but existing legislation (for example, the Law on Operative Investigative Activity) does not specify the circumstances that justify interception of information from communication channels nor the time limits of any such interception" (Freedom House 2016).

Dobek-Ostrowska's classification concludes with **the 'authoritarian model'** which she identified in Belarus and Russia – countries recognized by international press freedom rankings as 'non-free' and authoritarian (2015, p. 33). As Karatzogianni, Miazhevich and Denisova (2016, p.11) explain, when analysing digital activism in Belarus, new media function differently in post-Soviet context. The key element here is weakness of civil society, which manifests online "as a pronounced self-censorship, fear and mistrust" as well as the fact that activists' anonymity can be uncovered relatively easily by the oppressive state. Karatzogianni, Miazhevich and Denisova point out that authorities in Belarus, similarly to Russia, use various types of internet control mechanisms including online surveillance, data mining, forced registration of websites, dissemination of propaganda, misinformation and compromising material online (p.11). On the other hand, as the authors observe, people turn to online media outlets when they seek "nonconventional sources of information, opinion and political ideas" (p.6).

What this brief overview of four media models in CEE shows is that countries in the region differ significantly in terms of progress on the democratisation process as well as media freedom and development. Poland enjoys a rather advanced position in this assessment, being considered as 'democratic', 'free' and sharing many characteristics with Western democracies. At the same time, like other post-communist countries it has a long history of an oppressive, authoritarian regime, omnipotent surveillance and life under the

watching eyes of the "Big Brother," as well as decreased social trust and state owned media riddled with propaganda and limited by state censorship.

This is then the departure point when considering to what extent this legacy has been influencing Poland's current media debate surrounding online anonymity. In the following paragraphs I will discuss two aspects of Poland's communist legacy that might be responsible for the ambiguity characterizing current media discourses around online anonymity. One is the long tradition of surveillance and the substitution of the fear of the state with the fear of crime; and the second is the influential underground media, practices of counterculture and anonymous resistance.

4.1.1 A toxic legacy of surveillance

Earlier chapters in this thesis have already established the close link between anonymity and surveillance. Yet, the historical prevalence of state surveillance practices and mentalities in Central and Eastern Europe has helped shape contemporary discourses and attitudes towards anonymous behaviour in more than one way.

As Zdravomyslova and Voronkow (2002, p.50) observe, the omnipotent communist surveillance, enabling an almost total social control, was aimed at the creation of a Soviet individual who was motivated by fear. Surveillance practices were designed to induce fear, erode trust, destroy social solidarity, and ultimately humiliate and break individuals (Łoś 2010). It also led people living under communism to adopt a coping strategy described earlier as the "I have nothing to hide" attitude. Being a good citizen meant "being as inconspicuous as possible – to the point of 'transparency,' that is, so that there was nothing about you to hide from the 'community' (which stood as a synonym for the state)" (Zabuzhko 2002, pp39-40).

As some scholars from the region argue, such attitudes were later transmitted to the post-communist times, making for fertile ground for new, technologically sophisticated modes of surveillance and creating suspicion towards those who wanted to avoid it, for example by concealing their identities. Several observations made by Łoś (2010) in her analysis of the influence of

communist surveillance on the current (new) media system in Poland, prove such claims legitimate. Her study also highlights the important differences between the CEE region and Western democracies.

First, some of the new forms of online surveillance resemble to large extent the omnipotent control from communism times, and they activate similar coping strategies, such as the "nothing to hide attitude". As Łoś (2010) argues, "[t]he post-Communist countries' new surveillance landscape, with its omnipresent cameras, unobtrusive identity checks, and aggressively marketed electronic security systems, contributes to the continuation of a culture of suspicion and division. The opacity of the new surveillance harkens back to the secrecy and murkiness of the old Communist practices" (p. 182). Like in times bygone, people are again overwhelmed with the omnipresence of invisible control, leaving little room for negotiations or resistance. As a result, we see the resurgence of old habits, such as resignation and acceptance for transparency in line with the "good citizen has nothing to hide" slogan.

Such attitudes are particularly common in post-communist states, which bypassed the development of the democratic modern state and citizens embracing values such as personal growth or privacy protection (Łoś 2010). Instead, Łoś argues, "their much anticipated experience of the market has exposed them, with little warning or preparation, to aggressive strategies to marketize human subjects, converting them—and often encouraging them to convert themselves— into digital traces ready to be bought, sold, stolen, or played with. [...] This, to the extent that it prevents anonymity and promotes uniformity, is reminiscent of Communist surveillance" (pp. 184-185).

But it is not only the nature of current control mechanisms that activated the 'old habits' and coping mechanisms in post-communist societies. In her analyses of the situation in Poland, Loś (2010, 2002) argues that the new political elites made a significant effort to "perpetuate the 'fearing subject'" (Łoś 2010, p.183). After the regime had changed, the fear of anonymous state power was replaced with the fear of anonymous crime. Fear of crime, Łoś (2010) contends, is "a hallmark of the post-totalitarian transitions, made possible by the rapid expansion and legitimization of new control systems, and ensured that the emerging surveillance culture grew out of the old foundations" (p.188). It has been

used by various state authorities in order to legitimize surveillance. In 2009 the number of requests from state agencies for retained data in Poland was the highest among all EU countries that made their records available (European Commission 2011*)*. While for example in Ireland these cases numbered 283 and in Denmark 4066, in Poland they amounted to over a million. The fear of crime, which led to legitimisation of surveillance in post-communist societies, was also fuelled by the media. After years of governmental restrictions on covering crime, commercial media outlets started exposing, not only crime, but also the failure of state agencies to address it. Łoś (2002) describes it as a transition "from *good news* state propaganda to *bad news* private media" (p. 166), leading to the escalation of fear of crime in the post-communist societies, and consequently, limited criticism of state surveillance. Anonymity was then seen rather as a tool for criminals, not as a resistance instrument, that could protect people from breach of privacy.

Moreover, during communism, anonymity was also often associated with denunciations and secret agents working for the government. In Poland, the regime recruited (often through the use of threats and blackmail) thousands of secret collaborators who helped gather intelligence about 'potential threats' to the system, but also to break down social structures and ferment fear and distrust. The negative attitude to "anonymous denunciations" survived in modern times, and is now reflected in the difficulty of translating the concept of 'whistleblowing' into Polish context. As Lewicka-Strzałecka (2011, p.175) observes, "[c]ontempt for informing the authorities has been enlarged on all kind of informing and is deeply internalized by the Polish people".

4.1.2 The legacy of anonymous resistance

State surveillance is but one aspect of the murky communist legacy that influences the current shape of societies in Central and Eastern Europe. Unlike the "I have nothing to hide" attitude, the authoritarian past "has also left people with the practices of counterculture, hidden meanings, double thinking and practices" (Murumaa-Mengel, Laas-Mikko and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2015, p.203). In this sense, Poland is a particularly interesting case, as the scale of oppositional, underground publications of significant circulation was much bigger than in other

countries in the region (Dobek-Ostrowska 2011a; Curry 1990). Anonymity was one of the tools deployed in the fight against the state's total control of the means of communication in the country.

The Polish United Workers Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR), which came into power after the Second World War took total control over public communication channels and forced those who wanted to speak against the regime to go underground and use a disguise to communicate oppositional messages to broader audiences.

As in other totalitarian regimes, control over mass communication channels in the Polish People's Republic (Polska Republika Ludowa, PRL) was a key priority for the state apparatus. The government viewed information as a main tool of influence (in the form of propaganda), and, at the same time, as the biggest threat, if it was coming from dissident sources.

The media were effectively in the hands of the PZPR, which controlled them via the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Komunikacji i Widowisk), which was created in 1964. The responsibility of the office was to issue concessions (authorising publishing or broadcasting) but also to directly intervene in the content in the form of censorship. Although in 1989 there were around 3000 publications on the market (Mielczarek 2007), all of them, due to censorship, were representing one political viewpoint. This of course also applied to state broadcasters, which included two television channels and four radio stations.

It needs to be noted, however, that the Polish media were rather atypical, in comparison to other communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe at that time (Dobek-Ostrowska 2011a; Curry 1990). As Dobek-Ostrowska (2011a, p.30) highlights, the Polish public had access to a wide range of underground publications of sizeable circulation, which "broke up the monopoly of the official propaganda and state information". It is estimated that in 1981 in Poland there were between 1500-1800 titles published beyond the reach of the official censorship (Łabędź 2004).

The 'second circuit' publications (also called 'bibuła', which in Polish means semi-transparent blotting paper; in the countries of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics it was known as 'samizdat') was produced on a mass scale by various

opposition groups. The most prominent of them was 'Solidarity'[12], but the publications were also created by religious groups, student and youth organisations and others. The Polish underground press included periodicals focused on news and commentary, socio-political publications of various ideological groups, titles focused on society and culture and titles published by certain social groups, such as students or workers (in general or at specific institutions). The 'second circuit' was one of the main weapons of the Polish opposition, serving two main goals: fighting the regime's information monopoly and informing the public about the activities of opposition groups. Anonymity had a prominent position in this clandestine parts of the media system.

As Rudka (2001) notes, due to potential harassment or other forms of repression, anonymity of the underground press's authors was the norm. This is one of the reasons why professional journalists were not eager to publish their work there, as "it would mean a partial resignation for a longer period of time from their professional achievements" (Rudka 2001, p.26). Therefore underground publications were mostly a channel for various dissident groups which consisted of non-professional writers. In his analysis of the underground press in the city of Wrocław, Rudka describes dominant strategies of disguising the identity of the authors, among which three groups of pseudonyms were the most prominent:

1) 'inside pseudonyms' (pseudonimy wewnętrzne) – used in internal communication by organisations' leading activists working underground, known only to a small number of people; they were changed very often, due to the risk of revealing them to the security services by members of the organisation who were arrested;

2) 'publishing pseudonyms' (pseudonimy publicystyczne) – known by more people, used by underground activists who were not hiding from or 'wanted' by the state apparatus;

3) 'political pseudonyms' (pseudonimy polityczne) – used by political leaders who had to remain incognito (2001, p.31).

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[12] NSZZ Solidarność (Independent, Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity") is the union born out of the popular protests in communist Poland, led by Lech Wałęsa. The union, which grew to become a popular social movement opposing the communist regime, published numerous titles at the local, regional and national level, among which the most prominent was "Tygodnik Solidarność" which was distributed at a national level and had a circulation reaching up to 1 million copies (Łabędź 2004, p.46).

Those various levels of concealing one's identity led to a situation in which people used several pseudonyms at the same time. Other forms of disguise mentioned by Rudka included 'sex change' (a man publishing as a woman and vice versa) or a few people publishing under the same pseudonym[13].

The abovementioned examples demonstrate the paradoxes and ambiguities that appear when attempting to determine the potential influence of the communist legacy on contemporary debates surrounding (new) media and anonymity in Central and Eastern Europe. They also show the significant differences in media freedom and media development across the region, with some countries being 'stuck' in an unfinished transformation towards free and independent media, with some even experiencing deterioration" (Kostadinova 2015, p.460), while others making significant progress on media autonomy and freedom. This is particularly evident for those countries that are part of the European Union, whose legislation is intended to harmonize media governance across Europe - for example, regarding privacy and the protection of freedom of speech. Yet, despite global and 'Western' influences, the development of media in the CEE region has been primarily shaped by a repertoire of distinct cultural experiences, attitudes and behaviours originating from the communist, authoritarian past. It is therefore likely that these particularities would also emerge in media discourse surrounding new media development in general, and online anonymity in particular.

The case of Poland, discussed in this study, is a fascinating example of new media development in the CEE region influenced by both a communist, authoritarian history and 'global' presence; and at the same time being unique. All of this also applies to current debates surrounding online anonymity.

On the one hand, after decades of state surveillance, the „I have nothing to hide" attitude is by now deeply rooted in the mentality of Polish people, which might result in less criticism towards governmental and commercial surveillance in the post-communist reality (Murumaa-Mengel, Laas-Mikko and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt's 2015), compared to Western democracies with a longer tradition of

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[13] It needs to be noted, however, that in the Polish People's Republic, anonymous and pseudonymous publications were often received with great suspicion, since Poles were aware that they could also be created by the regime. It was a well-known practice of the government's security services to create so called 'fakes' ('fałszywki'), disinformation publications which were designed to look like oppositional publications. They included fake or incomplete pieces of information, and were produced to discredit, ridicule or confuse the regime's opponents.

self-determination and human rights. It is also fuelled by underdeveloped civil society and the feeling of resignation and lack of self-agency in the face of incomprehensible surveillance. Anonymity might then not be considered as an instrument of resistance, but as a tool for hiding anti-social behaviour and, consequently, as something suspicious. Moreover, the perception of anonymity might be influenced by the way it was used by the government in non-democratic times: to manipulate society, discredit dissidents, and to enable secret informers and denunciators.

On the other hand, Poland has a uniquely strong tradition of oppositional samizdat publications (Kostadinova, 2015), where concealment of authors' identities was a widely used practice. Anonymity was a tool used by the opposition to transmit messages to the public outside official channels, and without putting their authors at risks. In a more contemporary context, popular dissidence was articulated by the mass protests, larger than in any other country in the region, against the planned ratification of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), discussed further in this chapter. This spontaneous and unforeseen protest introduced new, or rather previously unnoticed, voices into the discussion about internet freedom in Poland. Consequently, the issues of online surveillance, privacy and anonymity became an important part of public debate.

As will be shown in the empirical part of this study, current debates surrounding online anonymity in Poland are shaped by both groups of meanings inherited from the authoritarian past. However, since this thesis primarily looks into Polish journalists' discourses, the focus is on factors influencing the perception of online anonymity by this particular group. The following paragraphs discuss two groups of such factors, or, in other words, two major transformations that the Polish media faced after the collapse of communism - the political and the technological. In this context, the uniqueness of Polish journalists as a professional group will also be highlighted.

4.2 The transformation of the Polish media system after 1989

After the collapse of communism, Polish media and journalists faced two transformational processes, which forced them to redefine their roles in society.

The first was a process of democratic transition which involved a fundamental change in all aspects of the social system. For the media, the most important aspects of this transition included changes from centralisation to pluralism, from censorship to freedom of speech, from nationalisation to privatisation and from political dependence to autonomy (Mocek 2005).

The second process, which Polish media faced almost simultaneously, resulted from global technological changes and, most of all, the popularisation of the internet. The new medium revolutionised content production by democratising access to it. Traditionally defined 'media' ceased to be the only source of information for the public (Jakubowicz 2012) and were forced to redefine their place in the new digital reality.

Both processes significantly influenced the way journalists view their roles and duties, how they define their professional identity, as well as how they perceive and interact with their audiences. In this section I will describe some of the key aspects of both transformations which shaped the media in Poland after 1989, paying particular attention to shifts in the role of the media and audiences in the Polish public sphere. I will argue that these two processes have a significant impact on the way the Polish media discourse surrounding online anonymity is constructed.

4.2.1 The democratisation process

The media played a crucial role in the peaceful revolution that led to the overthrow of communism in Poland in 1989. As highlighted by Frybes (2005), journalists, together with industry workers, were some of the key groups that contributed to the collapse of the authoritarian system. Their prominent role in rebuilding the Polish public sphere in a new democratic reality, after more than forty years of censorship and media restrictions, was not without significance for the shape of modern journalism.

Combined with a high level of political engagement, journalists' sense of mission has often taken the shape of 'mentorship' and 'moralizing' (Mocek 2005). This was observed by researchers analysing the Polish media at the beginning of the democratic transition, and it is still true today. As Dennis and Heuvel described

it in 1990, "the greatest weakness of the Polish press is the conviction of most journalists that their job is not merely to report the news, but to shape it with opinion and to advance a particular political line" (1990 p. 21 in Sasińska-Klas, 1994). Twenty years later, Dobek-Ostrowska (2011b) noted, that the Polish press is characterised by external political pluralism[14], manifesting itself in biased and politically affiliated journalism.

This pluralism in Poland, however, has a very particular shape. What is interesting, is that media outlets in Poland have not been divided along 'post-communism' versus 'post-opposition" (or "post-Solidarity") lines. Rather, their support has been distributed among the two main political parties, who both have their roots in the "Solidarity" opposition movement: central-liberal Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform) and conservative Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice). Since the key element of the dispute is the assessment of the changes that happened in Poland after 1989, a sociologist Sergiusz Kowalski (2010), speaks in this context about 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' voices in the Polish public sphere. Kowalski's categorisation is worth exploring, since the two narratives have been dominating public discourse from the beginning of the transformation in 1989, and still serve as interpretative frames for discussing most political issues in Poland by media, politicians, and academics (including the issue of online anonymity).

As Kowalski describes it, the representatives of 'optimistic' discourse are content with the outcome of the democratic transition; they see Poland as a democratic country with good prospects, a growing economy, a strong position within the European Union, enjoying full democratic freedoms. This view is mostly associated with PO, the party that ruled Poland between 2007 and 2015.[15] Seeing Poland as a country that enjoys unrestricted freedom of speech is particularly important for the analysis of discourse on online anonymity. It led some of the

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[14] External pluralism describes a system where media favour specific parties or political groups. As indicated by Dobek-Ostrowska (2011b, p.74), it is a system in which "every, or nearly every political party has its allies among journalists and friendly media, but also hostile and unfavorable media". External pluralism is a manifestation of the high level of political parallelism between the media and the world of politics. Its opposite is internal pluralism, describing the situation in which in one medium various political views are represented, and journalists maintain the distance to the described events.

[15] The material for the empirical part of this study was collected mostly at the time when PO, representing an 'optimistic' discourse, was a ruling party. However, Kowalski emphasizes that the existence of two discourses is not dictated by a momentary position of a specific group in the structure of political power (2010), and therefore PO remained a representative of the 'optimist' voice also after elections in October 2015, won by PiS. PO's critique focuses on changes introduced by the new government, and not the achievements of democratic transition in Poland.

'optimistic' commentators to challenge the value of anonymity based on observed threats to free speech.

The 'pessimistic' discourse, associated mostly with PiS, views the situation differently. Democracy is perceived here as constant conflict, and the existing political order is seen as dysfunctional. The representatives of 'pessimistic' discourse think that the political system which emerged after 1989 is based on secret connections and deals between the communists and the current political elites and mainstream media, which work together to protect each other's interests. The 'pessimists' have become even more critical after the Polish presidential plane crash in Smoleńsk in 2010, blaming Russia and the PO government for the tragedy. For the 'pessimist', freedom of speech in Poland is restricted, and anonymity in the public discourse is needed to protect citizens from retaliation.

In the media sector, the differences between 'transition optimists' and 'pessimists' can be exemplified by the two most prominent Polish national quality dailies, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*[16].

Gazeta Wyborcza was the first nationwide, independent, quality newspaper in post-Communist Poland, representing the views of the "Solidarity" opposition movement, and it is strongly opinionated and politically engaged. The paper was founded as a result of the Round Table Talks between Solidarity representatives and the then-government. The opposition was granted the right to establish its own nationwide paper representing Solidarity's position at the time of the political transition. At the beginning of the 1990s, due to conflicts and divisions within the Solidarity movement, ties between *Gazeta Wyborcza* and Solidarity loosened. The newspaper was forced to take its own stand on key issues in the Polish socio-political reality (Mielczarek 2007). The paper's editorial line can be generally described as central-left, pro-European, liberal and 'optimistic', when it comes to assessing the outcomes of the Polish transformation. Since 2005, when the Polish political scene became divided between the two political parties PO and PiS, *Gazeta Wyborcza* largely supported the former and consequently criticised the latter.

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[16] During thirteen years of systematic study of the most opinion-forming media in Poland, conducted by the Instytut Monitorowania Mediów (Institute of Media Monitoring, IMM), *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* were always in the top three of the most influential media outlets.

Rzeczpospolita, *Gazeta Wyborcza's* main rival was established in 1982 as an official channel of the then-government, focusing on legal issues. After the regime had changed, the newspaper established itself as an important, quality daily with a particular focus on business and law. According to Dobek-Ostrowska (2011b), until the change of the editor-in-chief in 2006, the newspaper managed to stay politically neutral and highly professional. In the following period it often supported conservative politicians (mostly representing PiS), representing a 'transition pessimistic' worldview.

Conservative political leanings are also represented by a daily *Dziennik*, which appeared on the Polish market in 2006 and three years later merged with niche, legal newspaper, *Gazeta Prawna*. The two remaining largest national dailies, *Fakt* and *Super Express*, which are both tabloids, do not represent clear ideological worldviews, but support or criticise various political actors and decisions ad hoc, in accordance to perceived social expectations (Dobek-Ostrowska 2011b). The situation looks similar when it comes to the largest private television (*TVN* and *Polsat*) and radio (*RMF FM* and *Radio Zet*) stations. The political parallelism is visible in the Polish broadcasting media sector, although it has a different character than the press one. Since the beginning of the democratic transformation in Poland, public broadcasting has remained under direct political influence via a regulatory body called The National Radio and Television Committee (Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji), whose members are appointed by the president and parliament.

Summing up, there are two main characteristics of journalists in post-communist Poland which have to be considered when establishing the broader context of the Polish media discourse. First of all, Polish media, especially when it comes to the leading dailies, are strongly polarised in relation to assessing the quality of democracy achieved 25 years after the fall of communism. The division between 'transition optimist' and 'transition pessimist' strongly affects the media coverage of various political issues and thus cannot be ignored in the context of debates related to freedom of speech and anonymity in Poland.

Secondly, journalists of traditional media, especially those who actively participated in the democratic transition, are convinced about having a unique role in shaping public opinion. As Karol Jakubowicz described it, Polish journalism

combines "a didactic journalistic norm, leadership and guardianship/stewardship roles vis-à-vis the audience, a special form of the social responsibility paradigm, [and] a critical/dialectical role in society, assigning to the audience mostly the roles of 'pupils,' citizens, partisans, and followers" (1998, p.16 in Gross 2014, p.124). This might be one of the reasons why some of journalists are highly sceptical of the changes described in the next section of this chapter, namely the technological transition and anonymous users' contributions that came with it.

4.2.2 The technological change

While Polish media and journalists were facing social, political, and economic changes related to the democratic transition, they were challenged by another revolution, namely the technological one. As observed by Olszański (2006, p.12), "democracy and the internet revolution in Poland are almost like peers".

The development of tools enabling online deliberation, such as comments on media sites, blogs, online discussion forums, social media sites, e-mail lists, blogs and wikis opened up the public discourse to citizens' participation (Nielsen 2014), increased interactivity and creativity.

At the same time, democratisation of access to content production which resulted in a rise in types and number of media platforms, led to the crisis of the role of traditional media and journalists. Among the most significant challenges, scholars list an abundance of media outlets which leads to polarisation and fragmentation of the audience, new generations of audiences which chose the internet over television or newspapers as a source of news, as well as changes in the advertising market, which favours new media platforms (Jakubowicz 2013; Picard 2010). Journalists ceased to be the only source of information directly reaching the mass public, and thus had to redefine their role and distinguish themselves from other content creators.

As summarised by Jakubowicz (2012), Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe do not differ from the West when it comes to the directions of new media expansion, "except that because of lower levels of economic development and a late start, they are behind the more developed countries in terms of new media and technologies penetration and use, and the

development of new types of services" (2012, p.142). As already mentioned, the evolution of the internet in Poland was parallel to the process of democratisation. The first online publications, which appeared already in 1989, were initiated by academics and addressed Poles living abroad (Olszański 2006). Traditional media, such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* entered the web in the mid-1990s. At the same time, three main internet portals were created - Wirtualna Polska (*wp.pl* created in 1995), Onet (*onet.pl* created in 1996) and Interia (*interia.pl* created in 2000) - and remain key players in the internet media landscape today.

The popularisation of the internet in Poland began in 2005. One of the factors that contributed to its mainstreaming was the launch of the first Polish social media site, *Nasza-Klasa* (now *nk.pl*) in November 2006. At the turn of the century only 7.8% of Poles had access to the internet, in 2003 it was already over 21% and in 2009 over half of the population were online (Szynol 2012). Since then the increase in internet users has been more steady and reached 66% of the adult (over 16 years old) population in 2015. The percentages are highest among younger Poles (16-24 years – 97.5%, 24-34 - 92.9%) and significantly lower among the oldest (65 years and over – 17.8%) (Czapliński and Panek 2015). Although there is no direct correlation between the two processes, the rise of the internet in Poland occurred in parallel to the drastic fall in press readership. In 2005, the average daily sales of national newspapers was 1.6 million copies, while in 2013, their sales dropped to 900,000 copies (Kopacz, Sędek and Małuch 2014). The internet has also become a primary source of information, especially for the young population. According to the report of The National Radio and Television Committee, 55% of Poles aged 18-55 chose the internet as their main source of news, compared to 36% that chose television, 5% - radio and 5% - press. Although all Polish news media have an online presence, only 23% of internet users choose websites of traditional newspapers for the news (Garlicki et al. 2015).

The most crucial transformation of the Polish media system caused by the internet was the rise in content produced and published by common citizens, without the mediation of professional journalists or editors. In Poland, as in other parts of the world, the public activity of citizens started on discussion groups and internet forums which have been gaining in popularity from the mid-1990s. One of the most popular discussion groups in Poland was *forum.gazeta.pl*, the platform

created by Agora, the publisher of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Forum users were mostly anonymous, and the use of one's real name was treated with scepticism and suspicion. However, anonymity did not prevent some of them from becoming widely recognised and attracting regular readers and debaters.

When political blogs became popular in Poland in the years 2004-2005, many forum users moved their activity to the new platform. Around the same time, blogs became popular among politicians, who used it mostly for self-promotion, or traditional journalists, for whom blogs served mostly as an extension of their normal reporting. As indicated by Olszański (2006), the true development of independent blogs in Poland started after the launch of aggregated blogging platforms, such as Agora's *blox.pl* or *blog.onet.pl. Blox.pl*, launched in 2004, was a platform where one of the most famous Polish bloggers, Kataryna, started her career.

In his analysis of Polish political blogs, Karnkowski (2012) notes that their development "is a form of a 'vote of no confidence' against classical print and broadcasting media" and that "one of the main motivations of people starting blogs is a desire to publicise information which they feel the media overlook, and to correct information which they feel is being distorted" (2012, p.18). Olszański (2006) describes Kataryna's case by stating that "she owes her popularity to the critique of statements made by press and television commentators" (2006, p.49), challenging them and pointing out inconsistencies. For this reason Kataryna's story, which will be described and analysed in later parts of this thesis, remains one of the best examples of the clash between bloggers and traditional journalists, in which anonymity played a crucial role.

4.3 The place of online anonymity in the Polish public discourse

In the previous section of this chapter I outlined some of the key transformations of the Polish media system that have occurred since the fall of communism in 1989. The two processes of particular importance included *political* (*democratic) transition*, understood as the process of establishing the role of the media as more or less independent watchdogs, and *technological transition*, which, among others, led to a broadening of the access to public discourse and allowed citizens to have

their voices heard without mediation from traditional content providers. In the context of these changes, internet users' anonymity – its meaning, technical feasibility, social legitimacy and legal or ethical restrictions – became an important issue of public debates and regulatory initiatives. After outlining some of the key areas of legal regulations and media practices influencing the use of online anonymity in Poland, I will focus on selected discursive events that have shaped the Polish public debate on this issue.

4.3.1 Anonymity in the Polish legal system

The aim of this section is not a detailed analysis of the legal regulations concerning anonymity on the internet. My attempt is merely to draw attention to a few aspects of Polish law which often constitute a background of public debates on anonymity.

As observed by Piotr Waglowski (2012), one of the most influential Polish lawyers specialising in internet regulations, Polish law does not explicitly give citizens the right to anonymity on the internet. However, some authors (e.g. Węgrzyn and Rzucidło 2012) infer this right from regulations concerning two other elementary rights, namely privacy and freedom of speech, which occupy a central place in the Polish legal system.

The Polish constitution guarantees all citizens freedom and privacy of communication (Art. 49). It further states that, unless the law indicates otherwise, nobody can be obliged to disclose personal information, and that public authorities "shall not acquire, collect and share information on citizens other than necessary in a democratic state ruled by law." (Art. 51). Article 54 guarantees that everyone has the freedom to express their opinions and to acquire and disseminate information. If we consider a decision to remain anonymous as a way to protect one's privacy online, or we treat it as an inherent part of a communication act or a condition under which the communication can be truly 'free', we can then read those constitutional provisions as securing the right to anonymity.

However, what is much more often discussed in the context of online anonymity in Poland, are regulations concerning responsibility for content published online and the procedures and conditions under which the 'true' identity of internet users can be disclosed. These issues are highly controversial, mostly

because of the contradictory legal regulations and the lack of unified interpretation of them (e.g. Płoszka 2014; Bychawska-Siniarska and Warso 2015).

One of the areas of legal regulations, which creates controversy in the context of anonymity on the internet, is a problem of disclosing users' data by Intermediary Service Providers. Polish law, as pointed out by both researchers (e.g. Płoszka 2014) and organisations monitoring freedom of the internet (e.g. Bychawska-Siniarska and Warso 2015), is not consistent in this respect and leaves itself open to abuse. This problem is best exemplified by the situation in which an individual or a company feels offended by anonymous content published online.

Firstly, there is an issue of determining accountability. In essence, the Polish law on providing electronic services, which is an implementation of EU law, removes the liability for the illegal content posted on the site by third parties from the site's administrator, unless he receives a notice about the alleged illegality (i.e., notice and take down policy). However, on several occasions Polish courts have ruled otherwise, stating that the responsibility for illegal content published anonymously lies with websites' administrator[17]. Overall, as Bychawska-Siniarska and Warso (2015) note, in Poland "the legal rights and responsibilities of online editors and publishers are not clear and depend on the approach of prosecutors and courts", which might cause concern among website administrators and lead to increased censorship and restrictions on anonymity.

Another controversy in the context of internet users' anonymity is the fact that in Poland individuals and companies often use civil and criminal proceedings in order to eliminate unlawful content, and judges do not make sufficient use of the 'notice and take down' procedure (Bychawska-Siniarska and Warso 2015). An individual or a company, who feel that their reputation has been damaged by online content, can bring a civil action against the author. For this they need to obtain the personal data of the alleged offender. Since website administrators are in principle only obliged to give the identifying data to state authorities, the complainant might ask the Inspector General for Personal Data (GIODO, Generalny Inspektor Ochrony Danych Osobowych) to request from the intermediary to deliver the data, after careful investigation of the case. However, due to the fact

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[17] See for example: a judgment of the Court of Appeal in Lublin of 18 January 2011 (ref. Act I ACa 544/10).

that in Poland defamation is also subject to criminal prosecution, punishable by imprisonment of up to one year, there is another way of obtaining identifying information about internet users, which is susceptible to abuse. If the complainant launches criminal proceedings, the prosecutor can obtain information identifying the author of the problematic content, which are attached to the case files. As Bychowska-Siniarska and Warso (2015) explain, "once the data has been provided, criminal proceedings are usually dropped, and complainants can use the information to pursue civil remedies" (2015, p.5). Maj (2016) points out that this tactic is often used by politicians or companies in order to intimidate and threaten users who post critical comments online.

Lastly, organisations monitoring internet freedom in Poland claim that there is no solid data on the frequency with which various state authorities turn to internet intermediaries to disclose users' identifying data, and that the grounds for such requests are not clear (Bychawska-Siniarska and Warso 2015).

In conclusion, in Polish law there are no provisions explicitly granting citizens the right to anonymity, and the rules (as well as practices) regarding the disclosure of internet users' identity are often unclear and contradictory. Due to the fact that this area of Polish law is still evolving, decision-makers often rely on their beliefs and values, which are influenced by- and at the same time influencing public discourse. This is one of the reasons why the analysis of the discourse surrounding online anonymity is crucial for foreseeing its future. As the concept of the forces shaping online anonymity borrowed from Lessig (2006) demonstrated, the law is an important factor, but not the only one influencing it.

4.3.2 User identification on news websites

As stated in the previous chapter, the mainstream media's relationship with online anonymity has two aspects. First, the media construct the meaning of online anonymity in their discourse; and second, the media create the conditions for public debate (in comments sections under news content, or in forums), where they can encourage or restrict anonymous contributions. So far none of these dimensions has received much academic attention. This study aspires to close the

gap in relation to media discourse surrounding online anonymity, but it is also worth taking a general look at media practices in this respect.

All Polish mainstream news outlets (online editions of traditional media, as well as online media without offline presence) have platforms for audience participation. In most cases there are comments under content produced by the medium's staff, but they also include forums dedicated to particular topics or blogging sections. The table below gives an overview of the 'identity options' for users who want to leave a comment in some of the most popular Polish news websites[18].

Website	Type of media outlet	No registration required	Registration required	Facebook	Google+	Twitter
onet.pl	Web portal	+	+	+		
gazetawroclawska.pl	Print newspaper	+	+			
wp.pl	Web portal	+	+			
gazeta.pl	Print newspaper		+	+	+	
interia.pl	Web portal	+	+			
tvn24.pl	Private TV channel		+	+	+	+
se.pl	Print (tabloid)		+	+	+	+
natemat.pl	News website			+		
msn.com/pl-pl/	Web portal			+		
tvp.info	Public TV channel			+		
polsatnews.pl	Private TV channel			+		
polskieradio.pl	Public radio channel		+			
wpolityce.pl	Online news site	+	+			

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[18] The list was created based on the study conducted in December 2015 by Megapanel PBI/Gemius, listing the 20 top online publishers in the area of information and political commentary. Where the publisher owns several website, I selected one example. I also removed one of the results, since it was a TV programme website, with no possibility to post comments on political matters.

Website	Type of media outlet	No registration required	Registration required			
radiozet.pl	Private radio channel			-		
trójmiasto.pl	News website	+	+			
niezalezna.pl	News website		+			
dziennik.pl	Print newspaper	+				
rp.pl	Print newspaper	+				
wprost.pl	Print weekly	+		-		

TABLE 1 IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMENTING ON CONTENT ON THE MOST POPULAR POLISH INFORMATION WEBSITES. TABLE BASED ON A STUDY BY MEGAPANEL PBI/GEMIUS (2016).

As has already been established in earlier chapters, when it comes to people's activities online, we can hardly ever talk about absolute anonymity or absolute identifiability, since almost all data might be falsified and even the most advanced anonymising technologies can be challenged. However, internet users might be offered solutions which require more or less information about themselves to be disclosed to websites' administrators, as well as to other users.

As the above table shows, Polish media vary significantly in terms of regulating users' engagement with online content. At one extreme, there are websites that allow comments without any form of registration, and at another – those that condition the ability to comment on logging in via social media platforms such as Facebook, Google, or Twitter.

The data shown in the table indicate that on the websites of traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television channels) the requirements for posting comments are more restrictive, and thus the level of anonymity is lower. Some websites, such as *gazeta.pl* (the online version of a daily newspaper), *tvn24.pl* (private TV channel) or *se.pl* (daily tabloid newspaper) give their users a choice between registering on the website or logging in via social media accounts, while others, including tvp.info (public TV channel*), polsat.pl* (private TV channel) or *radiozet.pl* (private radio channel) only allow comments posted by users logged in via Facebook. This corresponds well with the open reluctance of some editors regarding online anonymity. During one of the debates about hate speech, the

deputy editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* stated that "[a]nonymity on the internet is a curse and the cause of all misery" (Nałęcz 2015).

There are, however, two exceptions among traditional media. Two websites related to daily newspapers (*dziennik.pl* – the online version of the daily newspaper *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* and *rp.pl* – the online edition of the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*) are the only two websites analysed that do not require any form of registration for those willing to leave a comment, and at the same time do not offer any alternative to anonymous commenting.

Online-only news outlets (such as *trojmiasto.pl, wpolityce.pl, interia.pl, wp.pl, onet.pl*) usually give their users more freedom to choose how to engage with the content, allowing both unregistered and registered participation. The three largest and oldest Polish web portals (*interia.pl, wp.pl, onet.pl*) are well known for defending unrestricted online debates (e.g. tw 2015), although their motives are usually seen as commercially, and not ideologically driven.

The exception among the popular online-only information services which is worth mentioning is *natemat.pl*. The founders of the website, which was created in 2012, from the beginning opposed anonymity and only allowed comments published by users signed in via a Facebook account. It is important to notice, however, that the website was created by experienced traditional journalists and was conceived as an alternative to uncivil, in their view, discussions held on other websites.

Ultimately, Polish news websites adopt a wide range of practices regarding the identification requirements for users who wish to participate in the debate. There is undoubtedly a need for more research to investigate the political, legal, technological and economic reasons for these strategies. However, based on this brief overview it is safe to conclude that users face more restrictions when they want to engage with content published on traditional media websites. The notable exceptions include conservative websites (*rp.pl* and *dziennik.pl*), described earlier as representing a 'pessimistic' attitude towards Polish democracy, which do not require any form of registration.

4.3.3 Online anonymity in the mainstream political discourse

One of the observations which motivated this study, which has so far received little or no academic attention, is that in the discourse of mainstream media and political elites in Poland, online anonymity is seen rather as a curse, and not as an important element of civil liberty or democracy. There are numerous examples supporting such a claim, and although no empirical conclusions can be drawn from them, they undoubtedly deserve attention.

In Polish public discourse, anonymity has been repeatedly denounced and associated with hate speech. One of the most explicit condemnations was voiced by Michał Boni, who in the years 2011-2013 served as the Minister of Administration and Digitisation in the cabinet of Donald Tusk. His role is particularly significant in this context, since his ministry was[19] responsible for the development of the internet in Poland, and participated in the international negotiations regarding the future of telecommunication systems.

In November 2012, the Polish parliament debated proposed changes in the Polish penal code concerning the definition of hate speech. During a regular meeting between the government and the episcopate, minister Boni asked churches and religious organisations to join in the efforts to eliminate the language of aggression from public life. Commenting on his appeal on one of the television programmes, he famously described online anonymity as a root of online hate: "anonymity provides security for the devil, for the evil; for demons and destruction" (zś/kdj 2012).

The usage of biblical language is not accidental, as the church in Poland plays an active part in shaping the discourse about the internet, including online anonymity. This issue frequently appears in sermons, which sometimes take very innovative forms. In one of the cases, the media reported on a priest, who began his online sermon about anonymity, wearing a ski mask. In his sermon, the priest called for the rejection of anonymity, which he associated with denunciations in the time of communism or with rats that bite and then burrow into hiding. The priest argued that the human face is a gift from God and should not

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[19] In December 2015 the Ministry of Administration and Digitisation was transformed into the Ministry of Digitisation, after some of its competencies were distributed among other departments.

be obscured like a surname which people inherit from their ancestors, and the name that they receive at baptism. (*W obronie Twojego...* 2012).

IMAGE 1 SCREENSHOT OF THE PRIEST PREACHING ABOUT ONLINE ANONYMITY (W OBRONIE TWOJEGO... 2012), PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN GRANTED BY THE AUTHOR.

Similarly, father Adam Boniecki, one of the main intellectual authorities of the church in Poland, who for many years was editor-in-chief of the respected catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, referred to the issue of anonymity on the internet by stating that "judging and assessing someone anonymously is morally very questionable" and that for him "the only form of anonymity which is permissible is the anonymity of a penitent in the confessional" (Boniecki, 2009).

A similarly negative attitude towards online anonymity, portraying it as the main cause and facilitator of hate speech and defamation on the internet, has been frequently expressed by the former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski. In the years 2011 - 2015 Sikorski engaged in court battles against the publishers of several Polish media outlets (including the tabloid *Fakt*, the opinion weekly *Wprost* and business daily *Puls Biznesu*), who, in his opinion, were responsible for (mostly anti-Semitic) content smearing his good name that was posted on their websites. In addition to obtaining an apology and compensation, one of Sikorski's main objectives was to eliminate anonymity from public debate. He formulated his goal in an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

"My aim is to induce the owners of the sites to comply with the law and their own regulations. On top of removing the offending entries, this can be achieved by changing registration procedures on internet forums, for example by requiring users to provide a verifiable telephone number or other data that prevent anonymity from the administrator. I'm convinced their sense of anonymity goes a long way to encouraging users' loutish behaviour on internet chatrooms" (Siedlecka and Wroński 2011).

Although Sikorski failed to convince the court to recognise the liability of the publishers, his actions had a visible impact on commenting policies in several media in Poland. Some of them have completely suspended the possibility for users to comment on published content (e.g. PAP 2011) while others, such as business daily *Puls Biznesu* introduced a registration requirement for users who want to comment on news items. In line with the minister's argument, limiting the anonymity of internet users has become a weapon against abusive content.

Sikorski's opinion on online anonymity was later echoed by his wife Anne Applebaum, a recognised author and journalist (writing for amongst others *The Economist* and *The Washington Post*), who also called for the elimination of anonymity from the web. In a piece published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which also appeared in *The Washington Post*, she argued that rude anonymous comments under journalistic texts influence the way people think of them, and make readers more critical and suspicious towards journalistic work. Applebaum sees it as problematic and proposes a solution in the form of eliminating anonymity from news websites:

"Sooner or later, we may also be forced to end Internet anonymity or to at least ensure that every online persona is linked back to a real person: Anyone who writes online should be as responsible for his words as if he were speaking them aloud" (Applebaum 2014).

The above-mentioned examples mostly concern the way Polish elites (political, media and even religious) view and construct the picture of online anonymity in mainstream media discourse. Anonymity is here portrayed dominantly as a factor that influences online discussions in an undesirable way. But online anonymity appeared in the Polish public discourse also in a different context, namely during the popular protest against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) that took part in Poland in early 2012. Since anonymity, in its

various aspects, was an important symbol and characteristic of the movement, the events cannot be ignored in the discussion about the place of anonymity in the Polish public discourse.

4.3.4 Tango down: anonymity and the Polish anti-ACTA protests

For a short while in January 2012, Poland became a centre of global protests against regulations limiting internet freedom. Demonstrations against ACTA[20] mobilized hundreds of thousands of mostly young people who took to the streets, creating a movement that was later described as the largest social mobilisation since the 1980s' "Solidarity" (Gierej 2013). The scale and intensity of the protests exceeded the expectations of academics, journalists, politicians, but also protesters themselves (Bendyk 2012).

The decision of the Polish government to sign the ACTA treaty was met with the unprecedented opposition of Polish internet users, supported by the global hacktivist collective *Anonymous.* On January 21st, 2012, several official websites of the Polish government, parliament, and army became unavailable, and the ominous message 'sejm.gov.pl – tango down' appeared on Anonymous' Twitter account.

The opposition to ACTA focused mostly on the way it was devised[21] and the impact it could have on regulating privacy and anonymity on the internet. In particular, non-governmental organisations and digital activists pointed to article 27, which, they feared, could potentially allow internet intermediaries to disclose

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[20] The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) was an international trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland, and the United States of America. It was designed to strengthen international enforcement of intellectual property rights, predominantly in regard to copyright infringement on the internet, generic medicines and counterfeit goods. The document was harshly criticised for its potential to limit fundamental rights (such as privacy and freedom of speech), restrict access to generic medicines in developing countries, as well as for the secrecy of the negotiation process. The agreement's parties signed it at the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012. It was met with social protests on a mass scale (particularly in Europe), which eventually led the European Parliament to reject ACTA on July 4th, 2012.

[21] Despite the fact that ACTA was an important piece of legislation, designed to establish a new international framework for the enforcement of intellectual property rights, it was negotiated without public consultation, in secrecy. This triggered a harsh critique from various non-governmental organisations (such the Free Software Foundation (FSF), the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), the European Digital Rights (EDRi), or Polish Panoptykon Foundation), as well as the European Parliament. One of the most figurate examples was the fact that the information about the Council of the European Union's decision authorising the signature of ACTA was published on the last page of the press release from the meeting regarding 'Agriculture and Fisheries'.

identifying information about the uses to the copyright holders, based on allegations and outside the judicial order.

Despite growing protests, which initially were expressed mostly online, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced that he will not be threatened by 'blackmail' and Poland will sign the treaty. This statement encouraged the protesters to move from online forums to the streets. On 24th and 25th of January thousands of people gathered in Warsaw, Kraków, Wroclaw, and many other Polish cities to express their opposition to ACTA.

Although the Polish ambassador in Tokyo eventually signed the treaty on behalf of the Polish government, the continuing protests diminished the authorities' confidence in the agreement and forced them to slowly withdraw their support for it. Their confusion and changing attitude towards ACTA can be illustrated by the way the opinion of the Polish Prime Minister evolved. As Bendyk (2012) described it:

"On January 24th , the Prime Minister firmly stated that he will not surrender to blackmail; two weeks later, on February 6th (...) he asked: Tell me what this is all about?; and finally, on February 17th he admitted: I knew too little, the government withdraws its support for ACTA, I agree with critics of this agreement" (2012, p.11).

The confusion of the Polish political and media elites, representing, as Bendyk (2012 p.30) phrased it, an "old, analogue world of hierarchy" was not particularly surprising for researchers analysing the anti-ACTA protests. Much more academic attention was paid to the protestors and the symbols they used. Anonymity occupied an important place in those analyses since, together with a short life span, a lack of leadership and the use of mixed global and local cultural codes, it was one of the main characteristics of the STOP ACTA movement in Poland (Kołtan 2014). It took the shape of the Guy Fawkes mask[22], with which Polish protesters frequently covered their faces during demonstrations and other anti-ACTA events. According to Kołtan, the masks highlighted the lack of political

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[22] The Guy Fawkes mask, which became a recognisable symbol of recent anti-governmental protests, and, most famously of the hacktivist collective Anonymous, was created by illustrator David Lloyd, and appeared in the 1982 comic book *V for Vendetta*, as well as in the 2006 movie of the same title. It represents Guy Fawkes, a member of the Gunpowder Plot, which was a failed assassination attempt against the English king, conducted in London on 5th November, 1605.

face of the movement, turning the missing social and political identity of the protesters into their power and an identity in itself.

Although some authors saw the mask as merely a cover for the weak ideological foundations of the protests or as an 'emergency exit' through which the protestors could back off at every moment, without any harm to their image (Rakusa-Suszczewski 2014), Kołtan (2014) suggests more positive reasons why anonymity became such a key characteristic of the Polish STOP ACTA protests. First, for a generation that grew up in the internet era, masks and fluid identities are natural for creating and managing the 'self'. Therefore it should not be surprising that when this generation took to the streets, the masks came with it. Additionally, unifying masks were part of the broader 'no logo' strategy, utilised by the protestors in Poland. It was essential for anti ACTA activists to distance themselves from established political forces, which resulted in few instances of politicians being hooted by the crowd, when they tried to join the protests (*Protestowali przeciw ACTA...* 2012). Masks and, at least symbolic, anonymity allowed for setting aside the ideological differences and create a movement in which conservative football fans and left wing activists went hand in hand.

Polish opposition parties did not give up their attempts to score points by expressing criticism towards ACTA. In a famous photo, which appeared in media reports abroad (see Image 2), members of the oppositional Palikot Movement (Ruch Palikota) showed up in the Polish parliament wearing Guy Fawkes masks. Their leader, Janusz Palikot, was one of the politicians who were booed by the protesters when he appeared at rallies in Warsaw.

IMAGE 2 MEMBERS OF THE PALIKOT MOVEMENT IN THE POLISH PARLIAMENT HOLDING GUY FAWKES MASKS, AS AN ACT OF PROTEST AGAINST THE ANTI-COUNTERFEITING TRADE AGREEMENT (ACTA). CREDIT: WOJCIECH OLKUSNIK / AGENCJA GAZETA, PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN GRANTED BY AGENCJA GAZETA.

Lastly, and most importantly, Guy Fawkes masks in the context of the anti-ACTA protests can be seen as a symbol of resistance to the omnipotent control of the state and the market in online spaces, by allowing visibility and invisibility at the same time. This, as Kołtan (2014) observes, is the main political power of this symbol.

What is the meaning of the anti-ACTA protests for the Polish public debate surrounding online anonymity? The protests were an important moment of realisation for the political and media elites in Poland that the freedom of communication on the internet is a vital right, which citizens are ready to defend on the streets. Since the end of the communist regime in 1989, no other issue has mobilised Poles on such a scale. A crucial part of this freedom is anonymity, or rather the possibility to choose ones identity in online interactions. People are ready to defend this right against governments' or corporations' attempts to limit it.

Moreover, the protests and accompanying debates showed that the Polish discourse on internet freedom in general, and anonymity in particular, is a mixture of global and local forces, as well as global and local cultural codes. Next to the globally recognised Guy Fawkes masks, Polish protesters were using symbols of the Polish Underground State from the Second World War (for example the "Kotwica" (anchor) sign), and the Solidarity movement of the late 1980's, re-loading them with new meanings, remixing, and adapting them to the fight for

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freedom in the digital world. It is yet another argument for the need to study discourses surrounding anonymity on the internet in a very specific, local context.

4.4 Summary

The main aim of this chapter was to present a broad context of the Polish media debate over anonymity on the internet and consider factors that could potentially have an impact on how modern media construct the issue in their reporting. Some current examples of the online anonymity debate were also discussed.

Historically, in the times of the communist regime in Poland, anonymity was an important element of communication, thanks to which various oppositional groups could transfer their messages to a broader audience, and Polish citizens could receive information that did not appear in the state controlled media. Various strategies of identity concealment helped oppositional authors to avoid retaliation and repression from the state.

The examples of how online anonymity is portrayed in contemporary debates show that those positive functions of identity disguise are rarely considered in the discourse of political and media elites in democratic Poland. In the case of the media, some potential explanations can be drawn from two processes that the Polish media system went through since the collapse of communism in 1989: the political and technological transitions.

First of all, the sense of the 'mission' among journalists during the democratic transition and high levels of their political engagement led to a strong polarisation among journalists and particular media. The main axis of dispute was an assessment of the quality of the new political system in Poland. The representatives of the 'optimistic' voice claimed that Polish citizens enjoy unrestricted democratic freedoms, including freedom of speech. This view sometimes leads to the conclusion that anonymity is no longer needed, since the threats to free speech disappeared together with the authoritarian regime.

Secondly, the technological transition, which in Poland went hand in hand with the political one, posed new challenges to traditional media and journalists. It was argued that, confronted with a new situation in which almost everyone gained access to shaping the public discourse, journalists were forced to redefine their

qualities that distinguish themselves from other contributors and justify their privileged position in the public sphere. The anonymity of internet users became one of the tools used to highlight the authenticity and professionalism of traditional media and discredit new competition.

For a long time, however, the issue of freedom on the internet did not constitute a particularly important topic among both political elites and in the coverage of traditional media. The situation changed during the mass protests against ACTA, the scale of which surprised even the participants themselves. Politicians, especially those representing the opposition to the PO government (who signed the treaty), and media supporting them, realised that issues such as privacy, anonymity and other aspects of internet freedom had become unexpectedly important for Polish citizens. Therefore, supporting them seemed like a reasonable political strategy. Taken together, all these elements influence the current media debate surrounding online anonymity in Poland and make it worthy of a detailed analysis.

CHAPTER 5 | The Polish media discourse on online anonymity: method and material

So far, this work has demonstrated how highly contested an issue online anonymity is, how many factors influence it, and how complex power relations underlie its development. It has been argued that the struggle for the future of online anonymity is ongoing, and that one of the most important areas of this struggle is public discourse, where the concept is constantly re-constructed and filled with meanings. Anonymity then has what Feenberg (2014) calls an 'interpretative flexibility' – it can be and is filled with different meanings by various social, political, and commercial actors. In its complexity, it can be described as a "floating signifier" – a concept which is open to redefinition, an object of the constant struggle between various discourses which try to "invest [it] with meaning in their own particular way" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, p.28).

In order to understand how Polish media discursively construct the concept of online anonymity and understand conflicts, interests, power struggles and ideological positions that underlie the debate, this study adopts the critical discourse analysis approach, which, as Wodak and Mayer (2009, p.2) explain, is "not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach".

Using the approach to critical discourse analysis developed by Norman Fairclough (discussed later in this chapter), I conducted an in-depth, synchronic analysis of a body of texts related to a selected discursive event which was crucial to the Polish debate on online anonymity – the so called 'Kataryna case'.

The choice of the case, however, has been partially determined by the results of content analysis, which I conducted at the earlier stage of this research. Combining content and discourse analysis has been recommended by Gamson (1992), Deacon et al. (2007), as well as Galasiniski and Marley (1998) as a methodological strategy providing rich and multidimensional description of the phenomenon at stake. The obtained results "can be used to inform each other and provide a unified interpretation in which the insights of each method are complementary" (Galasiński and Marley 1998, p.586). Due to a lack of academic

work exploring Polish media coverage of online anonymity, preceding CDA with content analysis helped to establish the necessary context for the study. Additionally, the purpose of using a mixed method approach can be described as 'development' (David and Sutton 2011), meaning that the results from one method (content analysis) helped to develop and inform the other method (CDA) in terms of sampling and interpretation.

The methodological chapter will then be divided into two parts. First, I will discuss the content analysis of the coverage of online anonymity in two daily quality newspapers: *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*. This study has mostly a supporting nature and its role is to outline a broader picture of media debates concerning online anonymity. I will then focus on the design of the main part of the investigation, the critical discourse analysis of media texts related to the 'Kataryna' case. After discussing some of the key characteristics of the CDA approach, I will explain how it was adjusted to serve this study's purpose.

5.1 Content analysis: establishing the context

Since no systematic studies of Polish media coverage of online anonymity have so far been conducted, and therefore all the observations about the negative attitude towards anonymity were rather anecdotal and speculative, it was important to verify it via systematic investigation. Content analysis was selected as a method that is most adequate for outlining general characteristics of online anonymity coverage in a large body of text, in order to identify main contexts and evaluations present in the reporting.

The main aim of conducting content analysis of newspapers' coverage of online anonymity was to draw a map of cultural and social meanings associated with this issue. According to Deacon et al. (2007, p.119), content analysis helps to produce a 'big picture' and "offers a possibility to identify trends, patterns, provide a map for further studies." Its drawbacks, such as the inability to analyse a meaning-making process and latent meanings was overcome by supplementing it with discourse analysis conducted at the next stage of this investigation. As Barker and Galasiński (2003, p.26) suggest, preceding CDA with content analysis "can

provide information as to the frequency with which, and the contexts in which, certain kinds of actors, topics, issues or events occur in the corpus".

Content analysis has been employed in order to answer the following research question:

How was online anonymity covered in the Polish quality newspapers between the years 2006 and 2012?

The more specific research questions explored in this analysis are:

1. *What are the dominant contexts in which online anonymity was discussed?;*
2. *What types of anonymous activities dominate the coverage?;*
3. *Who are the actors involved in the debate?;*
4. *What are the main evaluative statements concerning online anonymity?.*

Additionally, the analysis investigated how media 'define' or assess the possibility of online anonymity, and how selected variables influence evaluations.

The exploratory nature of the research questions, as well as lack of previous studies on Polish media coverage of online anonymity, determined a decision to adopt an inductive approach to content analysis. It means that coding categories were developed not prior to, but in parallel with analytical process, and were constantly tested and revised. Carey and Burkell (2007) talk in this context about qualitative content analysis, which is used to discover and characterise patterns in analysed texts. Similarly, Schreier (2012, p.7) argues that in the case of qualitative content analysis, the researcher is always "to some extent concerned with describing the specifics of [their] material", and therefore the coding frames are to some extent driven by data.

It is important to notice, however, that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis is problematic. Krippendorff (2012) perceives it as artificial, given that the process of analysing a text always requires a transformation of qualitative information. He suggests that it is more useful to talk about a discourse analysis approach to analysing content. Moreover, content

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analysis conducted here has mostly an auxiliary character and its aim is to map the field of discursive practices and identify main thematic contexts in which online anonymity has been debated. Critical discourse analysis will later be employed in order to investigate the text in its interactional and social context, as suggested by Fairclough (1989; 2003).

5.1.1 The choice of media and timeframe

In order to draw a map of meanings and contexts in which online anonymity has been debated in Polish media discourse, this study analyses content of two national, daily, quality newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita.*

Both titles were already described in Chapter 4, as representing 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' approaches to the Polish transformation. Just to sum it up, *Gazeta Wyborcza* is a leading daily, quality newspaper with an average daily sale of 171, 876 copies[23]. It was established in 1989 as the voice of the 'Solidarity' movement and became the first legal, oppositional newspaper outside the control of the communist regime. Its political profile is broadly social-liberal, and represents the 'optimistic' approach towards the political and economic changes since 1989.

Rzeczpospolita is the second biggest Polish quality newspaper in terms of total sales, which amounts to around 46, 174 copies[24]. It is moderately conservative and sometimes presented as an adversary to the centre-left *Gazeta Wyborcza.* Apart from sections about national and foreign politics, the newspaper offers extensive coverage of business and legal issues. It therefore claims to be highly influential among Polish political and economic elites.

The choice of analysing traditional media in general, and quality newspapers in particular, has been influenced by several factors. In Chapter 3, I discussed the role of mass media in influencing the future of online anonymity, arguing that media shape people's knowledge and understanding, set the public agenda and make certain events more or less prominent, and influence attitudes and evaluations (van Dijk 1995).

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[23] See *Gazeta Wyborcza* in: *Wyniki kontroli marzec 2014* [Control Data March 2014]. ZKDP. Available at: https://www.teleskop.org.pl/zkdp/index.jsp?p=publicDataNoReg [Accesed: 28 April 2016].
[24] See *Rzeczpospolita* in: *Wyniki kontroli marzec 2014* [Control Data March 2014]. ZKDP. Available at: https://www.teleskop.org.pl/zkdp/index.jsp?p=publicDataNoReg [Accesed: 28 April 2016].

As Gamson (1992, p.24) highlights, although traditional media are only one of the forums where public discourse about each policy issue, including online anonymity, is carried on, their discourse dominates the way in which those issues are discussed. Mautner (2008, p.32) suggests that since high-circulation print media influence "widely shared constructions of reality" and reflect "the social mainstream", they are worth turning to for dominant discourse, rather than dissident or idiosyncratic ones.

Not only do traditional media produce meanings, ideas, and symbols that constitute public discourse about certain topics, but they also serve as a platform on which various social actors "struggle over the definition of social reality" (Gamson 1992, p.25). Moreover, as Cacciatore et al. (2012) suggest, mass media is often the most accessible source of meaning for lay publics. This is particularly important in the case of technology-related issues, which are usually difficult to understand for people lacking expertise in a particular area. By presenting the problem in a simplified and understandable way, traditional media have become a primary source of meaning for the wider public. The question of user anonymity online may serve as a good example, as only a small part of society really understands the software architecture, which, according to Grosser (2014), "determines the ways that users can (and cannot) craft their online representation". Most people do not have enough technological knowledge to assess their level of anonymity online, neither are they aware of the legal regulations concerning identity disclosure.

The need for studying mainstream media also comes from the specificity of the Polish media landscape and journalistic practices. It often happens that particular issues are not present in the media until they become covered by the dominant newspapers, TV channels or radio stations. As Skarżyńska (2009, p.406) observes, Polish journalists spend more time following other media' coverage of various events than actually researching those events on their own. Together with a lack of reflexivity and criticism on the publics' side, this results in the high levels of homogenisation and simplification of media messages. Skarżyńska's observations are confirmed by monthly media monitoring research conducted by the Instytut Monitorowania Mediów (Institute of Media Monitoring, IMM). During ten years of systematic study of the most opinion-forming media in Poland, *Gazeta*

Wyborcza and *Rzeczospolita* were always in the top three of the most influential media outlets.[25]

In addition to the arguments presented above, the research conducted in three post-communist counties: Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary by Tworzecki and Semetko (2012) proved a positive relationship between use of 'quality' newspapers and political engagement. Although this study does not indicate that the 'quality' press is the main source of information for those who take an active part in the political process, it seems safe to assume that the 'quality' press still plays a significant role in shaping the opinion of the politically engaged sectors of Polish society.

All of the above suggests that traditional, quality newspapers will serve as a good source of general meanings given to online anonymity, which this content analysis attempts to explore. The time span which will be analysed covers the years 2006 - 2012, the starting date being the real beginning of Web 2.0 in Poland, marked with a launch of the first mass-scale Polish social network, *nasza-klasa.pl* and popularisation of the internet among Polish citizens.

5.1.2 Construction of the sample

Constructing the sample for content analysis proved to be a challenging task. The main reasons for this were lack of coherent databases of Polish newspapers and the fact that anonymity is used in a great number of contexts, in most cases not related to the internet and the online environment. The main challenge was to identify the right key words which would deliver a majority of relevant stories and limit the number of 'false positives' (Deacon 2007).

After considering various options, the sample for this study has been constructed using the relevance (purposive) sampling technique. This technique, according to Krippendorf (2012), helps to create a sample that is manageable,

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25 See for example: Najbardziej opiniotwórcze polskie media w 2012 roku [The most opinion-forming Polish media in 2012] (2013). *Raport Instytutu Monitorowania Mediów* [Report of the Institute for Media Monitoring]. Available at: http://www.imm.com.pl/sites/default/fi%20les/raporty/ra%20port_najbardziej_opiniotworcze_media_2012.pdf [Accesed 10 June 2015].

identify textual units that are relevant for answering particular questions and eliminate those which do not contain relevant pieces of information.

Both *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* have their (paid) online archives (databases), which I was able to access from the library of the University of Wroclaw. However, their search engines work differently and only the archive of *Rzeczpospolita* allows for the 'open-ending' search that shows results for various forms of inflexion (which is crucial in getting the exhaustive amount of results in the Polish language). For this reason I decided to search the online archive of *Gazeta Wyborcza* using the Nexis-UK database, which offers the 'open-ending' search function (more on using the electronic newspapers' databases can be found in Deacon 2007; Deacon et al. 2007).

The keywords I decided to use are: **anonimow(!)** (Engl. 'anonym(!)' (with open ending, including anonym(ous), -(ity) etc)) and **'interne(!)'**.

In my first attempts I also included words such as 'cyber', 'web' and 'online' but it proved to result in many irrelevant hits and usually the word 'internet' was also present. However, using these two phrases still resulted in many stories that included 'internet' and 'anonymity' but referred only to an anonymous, journalistic source or other cases of anonymity in 'offline' contexts.

The final decision was to search for stories in which 'anonymity' and 'internet' appear in the same paragraph (anonimow! w/p interne!). This combination delivered a manageable sample size and significantly limited the amount of irrelevant stories ('false positives'). Overall, I was left with 211 stories (217 including doubles, moderate similarity) from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 284 (297 including doubles) from *Rzeczpospolita* (total: 495).

At the last stage, the sample was manually refined, in order to eliminate all stories that did not relate to anonymity in the online environment. This procedure led to establishing a final sample size that amounted to 300 stories – 115 (38%) from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 185 (62%) from *Rzeczpospolita* – published between January 2006 and December 2012.

At the initial stages of the analytical process, which served to establish general contexts for discussing online anonymity in Polish newspapers, each story was treated as a unit of analysis. However, since one story often mentioned online anonymity in more than one context, the dominant part of the analysis focused on

particular assertions made about anonymity. Overall, in 300 analysed stories 412 assertions about online anonymity were identified; 140 of them (34%) in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 272 (67%) in *Rzeczpospolita*. Further details of the analytical process and the results of content analysis will be presented in Chapter 6.

5.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: the 'Kataryna case'

While the content analysis of Polish quality newspapers' coverage of online anonymity was useful for establishing dominant contexts of mainstream media debates surrounding the issue, the investigation of power struggles, interests and implicit ideological subtexts required a more critical and qualitative approach. This is why this study adopted critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an overall methodological perspective.

For Fairclough (2001, p.121) CDA is "as much theory as method", while Wodak and Mayer (2009, p.2) observe that it is interested in "studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach". This approach was selected as allowing the most in-depth and adequate analysis of the complexity of meanings underlying the debate surrounding online anonymity in the context of a selected discursive event – the "Kataryna case".

The critical discourse analysis approach is rooted in the constructivist tradition, in a way that sees discourse as both constituted by, as well as constituting, social relations (Schroder 2013). In other words, the discourse is seen as reflecting the power relations, struggles, and inequalities that are present in a society, but also legitimising (and therefore sustaining) or challenging them. Consequently, the critical analysis of discourse aims to uncover the power relations underlying the discourse, but also deliver a critique of consequences that particular elements of discourse can have on society. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p.2) highlight, CDA is 'critical' because it "investigate[s] and analyze[s] power relations in society and formulates normative perspectives from which a critique of such relations can be made with an eye on the possibilities for social change".

The 'critical' character is one of the key features of CDA, which are common to its different types[26]. Other important characteristics include:

- seeing cultural and social structures and processes as to some extent linguistic;
- seeing discourse as both constituted and constitutive;
- analysing language in its social context, by focusing on relationships between micro-structures (texts and discursive practices) and macro-structures (social reality).
- focusing on ideological functions of discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

The relationship between discourse and ideology is crucial for the CDA tradition. Fairclough (2003, p.218) defines ideologies as "representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation". Discourse then functions ideologically, as it fixes meanings in ways that are desired by certain groups. As Barker and Galasiński (2003) summarise it:

> *"If meaning is fluid - a question of difference and deferral- then ideology can be understood as the attempt to fix meaning for specific purposes. Ideologies are discourses which give meaning to material objects and social practices, they define and produce the acceptable and intelligible way of understanding the world while excluding other ways of reasoning as unintelligible. Ideologies provide people with rules of practical conduct and moral behaviour. "* (2003, p.66)

Through the analysis of text in its broader social context, critical discourse analysis aims to uncover ideological frames and power relations underlying discursive practices.

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[26] Wodak and Mayer (2009) list six methodological and theoretical approaches to CDA: discourse-historical approach (Wodak and Reisigl), corpus-linguistic approach (Moutner),social actors approach (van Leeuwen), sociocognitive approach (van Dijk), dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough) and dispositive analysis (Jäger and Maier).

5.2.1 Norman Fairclough's approach to CDA

There are several reasons why Fairclough's approach towards discourse analysis has been chosen as the most adequate way to study media discourse surrounding the issue of online anonymity.

First of all, Fairclough offers both a theoretical model and methodological tools for analysing discourse in relation to a broader social, political and economic context. Therefore, discourse analysis requires both linguistic textual analysis and social theory related to the particular topic of interest. In case of media discourse surrounding online anonymity, it is necessary to combine the analysis of media representation of the topic with theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapters: libertarian and statist approaches to anonymity, *de-anonymisation*, 'blind spot' and 'paradigm repair.' It is also important to link the textual analysis with the Polish contexts of discussing online anonymity presented in Chapter 4.

Secondly, Fairclough's model of analysis is concerned with social aspects of written and spoken language, which distinguishes it from a 'formal' linguistics focusing on abstract ideas (Fairclough 2003). The importance of 'language in use' also distances Fairclough from the more theoretically oriented approaches to CDA, such as the one developed by Laclau and Mouffe.

Another advantage of Fairclough's CDA is its strong focus on power relations underlying analysed discourses. As has been argued before, the debate surrounding anonymity on the internet reflects the power struggle over the control of people's data (for both economic and political reasons), as well as the struggle between traditional and new media over the access and control over public discourse. The approach suggested by Fairclough will allow for a critical investigation of those struggles.

Moreover, Fairclough makes a clear distinction between discursive and non-discursive elements of social life. He suggests that social reality is shaped by various forces: economic, political etc, within which discourse is just one element. In the context of online anonymity, it corresponds well with Lessig's approach - new media are shaped by market, law, technology, and social norms – all of these elements have their discursive aspect, which this study focuses on.

Last but not least, the analytical model suggested by Fairclough offers a wide range of easily operationalised techniques and tools, which can be adapted for specific research problems. It is important to mention that Fairclough's CDA is best suited for research problems which are controversial, involve relations of dominance and concern "what we can loosely refer to as the 'losers' within particular forms of social life" (Fairclough 2001, p.125). The issue of online anonymity can certainly be described as such, as it often protects disadvantaged people from social, political, or economic abuse, and forcing people to use their real names can be often seen as an "authoritarian assertion of power over vulnerable people" (boyd 2011).

5.2.2 The choice of the case: a debate which shook the Polish internet

Critical discourse analysis requires a close, in-depth investigation of chosen texts, which are preferably selected in the process of research on the topic and a preliminary survey of relevant material (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

This is the main reason why this study focuses on one discursive event, which triggered a heated debate about online anonymity in the Polish public sphere – the so called 'Kataryna case'. To put it briefly (a detailed description of the case is provided in Chapter 7) in May 2009 Kataryna, who gained a national reputation as "the most mysterious Polish blogger" (Mazurek 2008), accused the Polish Minister of Justice of dishonesty. In turn, the son of the minister demanded that she revealed her legal name. This triggered a controversy across several newspapers and blogging platforms. In the course of this controversy the Polish newspaper *Dziennik* exposed Kataryna's 'real life' identity, thus inflaming a new debate about the legitimacy and the ethical dimensions of the newspaper's conduct.

The debate surrounding the 'Kataryna case' offers rich, dense and highly relevant material for analysing media discourse related to online anonymity. There are, however, numerous other issues that influenced the selection of this particular case.

First of all, the choice was directed by the results of content analysis conducted beforehand, indicating that the dominant contexts of Polish media discourse surrounding anonymity are related to anonymous online speech. Investigating the 'Kataryna case' will permit a better insight into the discursive construction of online anonymity within the context of the democratic public sphere.

Secondly, the debate involved a confrontation between traditional media platforms and new ones. This will not only allow the comparison between how anonymity is constructed on those two platforms, but it will also show power relations and the mechanisms of struggle for domination in the Polish public sphere. Studying a debate which has a dialogical character (traditional media and bloggers) will hopefully provide interesting insights into the way antagonisms are constructed in the discourse.

Moreover, most of the events that became parts of the 'Kataryna case' took place in a relatively well-defined period of time, which makes it easier to define the sample for the study.

Lastly and most importantly, the 'Kataryna case' is widely recognised as one of the most notable events in the history of Polish internet (Karnkowski 2012) bringing together, among others, questions of the right to anonymity, bloggers' responsibility and the relationship between traditional and new media.

5.2.3 The construction of the sample: the choice of media

Although the main objective of this study is to analyse traditional media debate surrounding anonymity, with a particular focus on daily, quality newspapers, the sample for critical discourse analysis also included selected texts representing the blogger's perspective on the case. The reason for this was mainly the fact that the debate had to a large extent a dialogical character – the news stories and commentaries of traditional newspapers were often published as a reaction to bloggers' texts and vice versa. It would be difficult to interpret newspapers' coverage of the 'Kataryna case' without considering the bloggers' voice too. Additionally, I decided to extend the search for relevant stories to the online versions of the newspapers.

The main idea behind constructing the sample was that the sampled texts are relevant to the discussion of online anonymity, that the sample represents media which were directly engaged in the 'Kataryna case' and that it keeps the balance between traditional media' and bloggers' voices.

Therefore, in the first place, I decided to include texts from *Dziennik* – the newspaper that revealed Kataryna's offline identity and the blog posts from *salon24.pl*, where she published her critical comments about the Polish Minister of Justice. Other bloggers writing for *salon24.pl* were extensively discussing the case and expressing their views on online anonymity.

Because *salon24*.pl is a blogging platform associated mostly with the centre-right part of the Polish blogosphere, I decided to also include the coverage of the 'Kataryna case' received on the other blogging platform, *blox.pl,* where she was also publishing, and which has a more leftist political orientation.

I also included stories about Kataryna published by two main Polish quality dailies: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, which I already analysed in a more general way in a previous part of this study. This time, however, I also included stories which were published in their online editions (*wyborcza.pl* and *rp.pl*), as well as stories published on a news website, *gazeta.pl*, which served as an online edition of *Gazeta Wyborcza* until 2006, where *wyborcza.pl* came into being.

While **Gazeta Wyborcza** and **Rzeczpospolita** have already been characterised earlier, the following paragraphs will introduce the remaining media platforms.

While it has never been a dominant newspaper in Poland, **Dziennik** was definitely one of the main actors in the 'Kataryna case' and therefore cannot be excluded from the sample. The newspaper, whose full name is *Dziennik Polska-Europa-Świat* (English: Daily Poland-Europe-World) was published in 2006 by Ringier Axel Springer. The newspaper's political profile was dominantly centre-right, although it offered a wide range of political views on its pages. In September 2009, *Dziennik* was merged with specialist *Gazeta Prawna* (English: Legal Newspaper) and together they formed a new daily *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* which in January 2015 had an average daily sale of 57,374 copies[27].

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[27] See *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* in: *Wyniki kontroli styczeń 2015* [Control Data January 2015]. ZKDP. Available at: https://www.teleskop.org.pl/zkdp/index.jsp?p=publicDataNoReg [Accesed: 11 Jan2016].

Dziennik interviewed Kataryna anonymously on different occasions, and later tried to convince her to start regular cooperation with the newspaper. When she disagreed and publicised the message she got from one of *Dziennik*'s journalists, the newspaper published a story in which it indirectly disclosed the blogger's identity. The article was widely disapproved of by the Polish media and blogosphere. The debate became even more heated, once *Dziennik's* editor-in-chief, Robert Krasowski started his response to the critics with the words "Kiss my ass...".

Calling itself an "independent forum of publicists," **salon24.pl** is a blogging platform established in October 2006 by Igor Janke and his wife Bogna Janke. The platform has a mainly socio - political character, featuring, among others, sections on politics, economy and business, education, history, media and the internet, church, religion and the plane crash in Smoleńsk. It features blogs by famous Polish journalists, many of them associated with conservative media, such as Paweł Lisicki, who was editor-in-chief of *Rzeczpospolita* in the years 2006 - 2009. The website creator, Igor Janke, was also working for *Rzeczpospolita*, where he edited a section on politics. Although the website is generally perceived as a forum for conservative intellectuals, it also features blogs written by left-wing politicians and members of the general public of various political opinions. There are now 22 000 blogs on the platform, which is visited monthly by 600,000 unique users and has 7 million monthly views (salon24.pl 2016). Although those numbers do not place *salon24.pl* amongst the most popular Polish political websites, comments written by its authors often reach mainstream media and are widely discussed on other platforms.

Posts written by Kataryna are just one example. She started writing on *salon24.pl* just after it had been established, but left for a short while due to the first wave of criticism towards her decision to remain anonymous. She returned a few months later and has kept blogging till today. Her post about the Polish Minister of Justice started a heated debate, which brought the question of bloggers' anonymity onto the front pages of the Polish media. Igor Janke, the owner of the platform, fully supported Kataryna's right to anonymity.

The last platform which will be analysed in this study is the blogging platform **blox.pl**. It belongs to Agora S.A., the owner of, among others, *Gazeta*

Wyborcza, *wyborcza.pl* and *gazeta.pl*, and in July 2016 it hosted 579229 blogs[28]. The platform was chosen for the study for three main reasons. First of all, it is the place where Kataryna initiated her blogging activity in September 2004 and where she continues to blog until now. Consequently, the 'Kataryna case' triggered a heated debate among other users of the platform.

Secondly, *blox.pl* emerged from one of the first and most important community of users actively commenting on Polish political life, namely the forum of *gazeta.pl*, created in 2001. A number of significant Polish bloggers, including Kataryna, were posting comments on *gazeta.pl's* forum, before starting their own blogs.

Lastly, analysing debate among bloggers on *blox.pl* will create a higher political diversity in the sampled material. Through its connection to *gazeta.pl*, *blox.pl* attracts bloggers with more leftist political views, than *salon24.pl*. Although this is not a rule, and both platforms host blogs expressing different political views, many conservative bloggers switched to *salon24.pl* after it was created in 2007. As one of them stated: "I moved it [my blog, K.T.] later to S24 [*salon24.pl*, K.T.], as I didn't want to collaborate with Agora" (Karnkowski 2012, p.25).

5.2.4 The choice of timeframe and relevant stories

The process of creating a manageable sample of relevant texts related to the 'Kataryna case' and focused on the issue of online anonymity had several stages.

According to the quantitative study conducted by the media monitoring group News Point (see Figure 2 below), Polish media started covering Kataryna's story on 10th May 2009, when she published a critical piece on the Minister of Justice in her blog on *salon24.pl*. The amount of coverage then peaked three times:

- on 15th May – after Kataryna had received legal threats from the son of the Polish Minister of Justice;
- on 22nd May – after the article disclosing information identifying Kataryna had been published by *Dziennik;*
- on 25th May – after *Dziennik's* editor-in-chief, Robert Krasowski , published his opinion piece entitled "Open letter to Kataryna's

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[28] According to a blog count available on blox.pl website on 25.07.2016.

defenders" which started with words: "Kiss my ass…" and then declined to reach its lowest point on the 8th June.
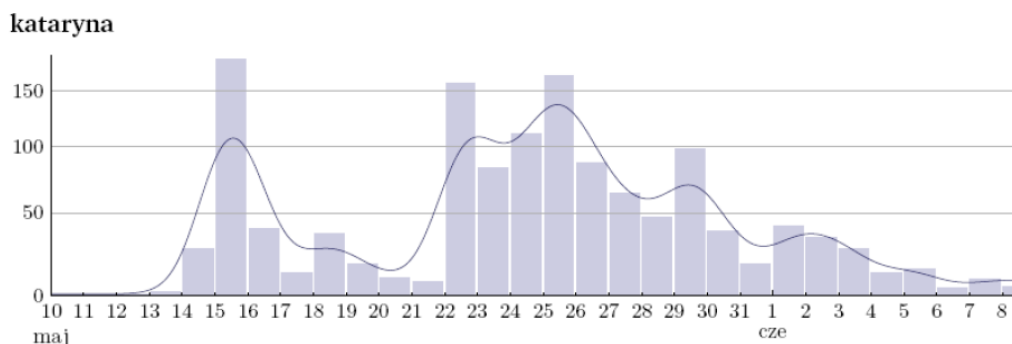
Initially, I planned to include in the sample all texts containing a keyword "Kataryna" in any inflected form, and published on five platforms described earlier between 10th May and 8th June. The texts' selection process had to be sligtly adapted to each of the medium.

Gazeta Wyborcza

The stories from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *wyborcza.pl* (online edition) were selected using a paid archive of the newspaper, available for free in Wroclaw University's library. There were 3 texts published in a print edition and 5 texts published in the online edition. Since the 'Kataryna case' was widely commented on on the internet, I decided to also include stories that were published on *gazeta.pl* – another news platform connected to *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Using the website search engine, I identified 17 stories. Since some of the stories were published on more than one platform, the number of stories from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and its online editions reached **23**.

Rzeczpospolita

A similar procedure was followed in the case of *Rzeczpospolita* and it's online edition *rp.pl*. I first used the paid archive (free in the University of Wroclaw library) and identified 9 stories in the print edition and 15 stories in the online one. However, when I double checked the results with the website's search engine, I realised that 8 stories about Kataryna were also published on blogs which belong to *Rzeczpospolita's* journalists and are part of the *rp.pl* website. Following the same procedure as in the case of *Gazeta Wyborcza* I recorded **18 stories** overall.

Dziennik

The construction of the sample from *Dziennik* was slightly more problematic, as there is no online archive of its print edition. I therefore decided to create the sample based on *Dziennik* website's (*dziennik.pl*) search engine, which only shows articles published online and does not specify if they were also published in a print edition. In a given period, there were **35 stories** including the keyword 'Kataryna'.

salon24.pl

Due to the large amount of blog posts published on *salon24.pl* in a given period, the selection of the stories had to have two steps. First, the search engine was used, which generated 273 stories which included the key word 'Kataryna'. In order to reduce this number, I decided to consider stories with the highest amount of comments underneath. I recorded **the top 20 posts** with the number of comments oscillating between 499 and 88.

blox.pl

The procedure described above was repeated for the blog posts published on the blogging platform *blox.pl*. For the analysis I selected **20** posts with the highest number of comments.

Since the number of 116 relevant texts was still too large for in-depth analysis, I have later limited it to **25 texts, 5 from each media platform**. I did it by limiting the time span to 5 days which were crucial to the development of the

'Kataryna case' (between 22nd and 26th May 2009) and selecting only those texts which explicitly discussed the issue of online anonymity. In the case of blogging platforms, I again used an additional criterion of the number of comments. The selected stories were chosen from the top ten most commented on entries (see Appendix 1 for the list of all stories selected for analysis).

5.2.5 The analytical procedure: text, discursive practice, social practice

For Fairclough, discourse analysis means oscillating between the analysis of specific texts and what he calls the 'order of discourse' - " the relatively durable social structuring of language which is itself one element of the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practice" (2003, p.3). He therefore suggests that texts should be studied on three distinctive, although interconnected, levels: text, discursive practice and socio-cultural practice. This is presented in Figure 3 below:
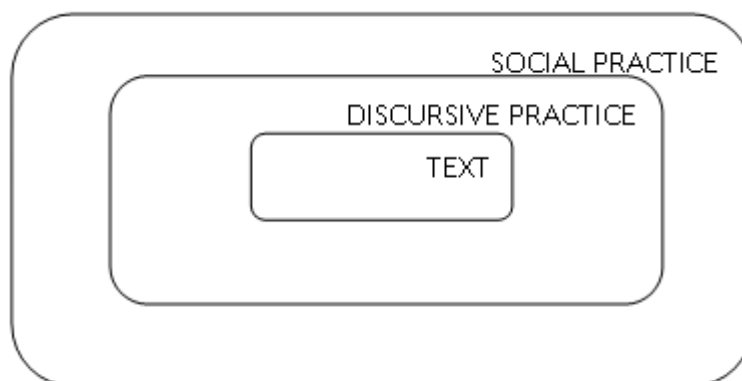
FIGURE 3 THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS OF A COMMUNICATIVE EVENT (ADAPTED FROM: FAIRCLOUGH 1995, P.59)

In the most general sense, the analysis on the textual level focuses on the linguistic features of a communicative event. On the level of discursive practice it is concerned with the process of text production and consumption, while at the level of social practice, the analysis looks at "the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is a part of' (Fairclough 1995, p.57). Using Fairclough's model, I will therefore:

1) analyse the selected textual features of each text;
2) analyse the discursive practices that lead to the creation of texts;

3) link the identified textual features with the broader social and political contexts of the 'Kataryna case' and the issue of online anonymity.

The level of text

Fairclough's repertoire of possible analytical tools, which might be used for investigating particular discursive events, is mostly based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics associated with Michael Halliday. In Fairclough's approach, however, the linguistic analysis is strongly related to the social analysis. This means that the choice of textual elements which will be analysed must be compatible with the specific social issue investigated and the particular questions that need to be answered.

Fairclough (2003) suggests that the textual analysis should focus on three dominant ways in which we can see discourse as a part of social practice:

- ways of acting – reflected in genres;
- ways of representing – reflected in discourses (discourse is here understood in the most specific sense, as a "way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, pp.66–67);
- ways of being – reflected in styles.

Consequently, the particular grammatical categories or semantic relations identified in a text can be seen as associated mostly with genres, discourses or style. My textual analysis will follow this distinction, although Fairclough makes it clear that the distinction is not fixed and that certain textual features might be associated with more than one category.

Text as action: genre

I will start the textual analysis with the identification of genres. Genres, according to Fairclough (2003), can be understood as discursive forms of action. They might

be more or less stable and fixed, but overall they play a crucial role in "sustaining the institutional structure of contemporary society" (2003, p.32).

The analysis of genres is significant for they constitute the relations between the author and the audience of the texts (i.e., 'power' versus 'solidarity'), influence the dialogicality of the text (i.e., interview versus debate) or its modality (i.e., one-way communication versus two-way communication). As the sample for the analysis consists of traditional, as well as new media texts, investigating their generic construction and the way they mix different genres may provide interesting material for comparison of the meaning making process.

Text as representation: discourse

While the main aim of this study is to investigate a discursive construction of online anonymity in the Polish media, the analysis of the representations is a crucial aspect of the textual analysis.

In the model suggested by Fairclough, the analysis of representations is closely related to the analysis of discourses present in a text. Here, discourses are understood in a specific sense, as "ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world" (Fairclough 2003, p.124). In terms of online anonymity, we may for example look for libertarian, statist or entrepreneurial discourses, or the discourses of activists, hackers, politicians etc.

The analysis of discourses included in a text requires identifying the main elements of the social world represented and then investigating from what perspectives or points of view they are represented. The main focus of this analysis will be on representations of social actors, social relations and social events.

In the analysis of the representation of social actors, Fairclough proposes seven general areas of investigation:

1) which actors are included, which are excluded (by suppression or backgrounding)?;

2) are social actors described using pronouns (we, he etc.) or nouns?;

3) in what grammatical roles are they placed (participants in a clause, within circumstance, described through a possessive noun)?;

4) are they 'activated' or 'passivated' (i.e., authors of the process or affected/beneficiaries)?;

5) are they presented in a personal or impersonal way (i.e., 'curse' as an impersonalising term for bloggers)?;

6) how are social actors named or classified?;

7) are they represented as specific actors or in a generic term (Kataryna vs. bloggers).

One of the ways in which media influence audience's attitudes, particularly important for the analysis of the representation of social actors, is by creating the contrastive dimensions of 'us' versus 'them' or 'self' and 'others', where 'us' and 'self' mean 'good' while 'they' and 'others' mean 'bad' (van Dijk 1988). In the media coverage of new technologies and online anonymity, this contrast sometimes takes the shape of 'cyberphobia' and 'cultural panic', which, according to Sandywell (2006, p.40) are "articulated around metaphors of boundary dissolving threats, intrusive alterities, and existential ambivalences created by the erosion of binary distinctions and hierarchies that are assumed to be constitutive principles of everyday life". Since anonymity on the internet is eroding real life differences (such as gender, age, race, social status), those who use it become a threat, become 'others'. Those 'others', hiding behind online anonymity in the dystopian discourses about new technologies can be depicted as online trolls, haters, terrorists or paedophiles. In the traditional media discourse, portraying anonymous bloggers as suspicious 'others' might be a way of achieving "paradigm repair" as described by Ruggiero (2004).

The exploration of the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy is also crucial for the analysis of social relations between various actors involved in the 'Kataryna case' (such as journalists and bloggers). At this stage I will also focus on the representations of online anonymity, seen as an aspect of social relations, leading to socially productive (as the proponents of 'libertarian' view on anonymity argue) or undesirable (as seen by advocates of 'statist' approach) outcomes.

Lastly, when analysing the representation of **events**, such as the case of *Dziennik* revealing Kataryna's identity, I will be looking at three main elements:

1. which aspects of the event are included in a text, which are excluded and which are the most and least prominent?;
2. on what levels of abstraction are the events represented (specific or general)?;
3. how are the events re-contextualised (is the event part of a broader chain of events?, what is explained, what is added?, how are the events ordered?).

The ways in which different representations appear in a text vary. The most obvious one is through vocabulary and semantic relations between words. Laclau and Mouffe (1985 in Jørgensen and Phillips 2002), for example, suggest that some words and phrases in a text serve as 'nodal points', 'master signifiers' and 'myths', which organise discourses and have a relatively stable meaning (i.e., democracy, the West), while others are presented as 'floating signifiers', which get their meaning from the association with other concepts. 'Anonymity' is a good example of a 'floating signifier', as its meaning is constructed through its relationship with other concepts – such as democracy, privacy, freedom of speech or crime.

Secondly, representations can also be studied through the analysis of grammatical features, such as differences between nominalisation and verb, transitive and intransitive verbs, as well as the differences between specific and generic noun phrases (i.e., anonymity on the internet versus the specific use of pseudonym in a given context).

Apart from the implicit representations of events, social actors and social relations, Fairclough highlights the importance of the analysis of assumptions. He defines assumptions as "[t]he implicit meanings of texts" (Fairclough 2003, p.212), and distinguishes between existential assumptions (about what exists), propositional assumptions (about what is the case), and values assumptions (about what is desirable and what is undesirable).

Text as identification: style

The third element of textual analysis in Fairclough's model is style, which he describes as a specific way of using discourse, which "constitutes particular ways of being, particular social or personal identities" (Fairclough 2003, p.26).

Two such elements of identity construction will be analysed here: modality and evaluations. They both play a significant role in constructing a social and personal identity of an author (for example as an expert or a member of a specific group) and the author's relationship with the represented social actors, structures, practices, or events.

Modality, which can be described as a speaker's assessment of probability or obligation (Fairclough 2003), is usually marked by the presence of 'modal verbs' (can, must, should etc.) but it might also take other forms. A modalised statement may, for example, be constituted by modal adverbs expressing various 'levels of commitment'. Fairclough distinguishes three levels of commitment in relation to truth (epistemic modality): high (certainly), median (probably), low (possibly), and three in relation to obligation (deontic): high (required), median (supposed), low (allowed). Modality might also be expressed through other verbs (for example 'seem', 'appears' and adverbs (for example 'usually', 'often', always'). Modalised statements reflect the degree of commitment to truth made by the author (i.e., confident – high degree of commitment to truth, or hesitant – low level of commitment to truth).

The second group of elements influencing the meaning of a given text and establishing the author's position towards particular statements are more or less explicit forms of evaluation. Fairclough (2003 p.171) lists four categories of evaluation:

- Evaluative statements – include evaluative adjectives or noun phrases; might be explicit or more context specific ('Anonymity is positive.')

- Statements with deontic modalities – construct obligations ('We should all do this.')

- Statements with affective mental process verbs – include affective evaluations ('I like him.')

- Value assumptions – values deeply embedded in a text ('Anonymity helps people to open up.')

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It is important to notice, however, that while the normative attitudes of the author towards a certain topic are an important element of authors' identity, they are also an important element of the representation discussed in a previous section.

The level of discursive practice

The textual analysis outlined above is just one part of the analytical framework proposed by Fairclough. He suggests that a text needs to be analysed within a context of discursive practice, in which he distinguishes between the institutional process and the discursive process.

Due to a relatively large number and variety of texts included in the sample, which would make the analysis of the institutional processes of their production difficult (if not impossible, especially when it comes to anonymous blog posts), this analysis will focus mostly on the level of discursive process. At this stage the investigation will focus of identifying what discourses and genres were drawn from when the texts were produced and what elements of them can be identified in a text. This is a continuation of the analysis of genres and discourses done on the textual level, but this time the task is to "locat[e] the text in relation to social repertoires of discourse practices, i.e., orders of discourse" (Fairclough 1995, p.61).

The order of discourse, according to Fairclough, is "[a] particular combination or configuration of *genres*, *discourses* and *styles* which constitutes the discoursal aspect of a network of social practices. As such, orders of discourse have a relative stability and durability – though they do of course change" (Fairclough 2003, p.220). Various discourses are of different importance in current societies, which is closely related to the concept of hegemony. According to Fairclough, hegemony is "[a] particular way (associated with Gramsci) of conceptualizing power and the struggle for power in capitalist societies, which emphasises how power depends on consent or acquiescence rather than force, and the importance of ideology" (2003, p.218).

In practice, the analysis at the level of discursive process focuses on two related concepts: intertextuality and interdiscursivity. As Fairclough (2003 p.218) put it, "[t]he intertextuality of text is the presence within it of the elements of other

texts (and therefore potentially other voices than the author's own) which may be related to (dialogued with, assumed, rejected, etc.) in various ways (...)". Intertextuality can be observed by looking at examples of direct quotes, reported speech, but also more subtle forms, such as irony. Interdiscursivity, on the other hand, can be investigated through the analysis of the mix of genres, discourses and styles upon which the text draws. This level of analysis mediates between linguistic analysis and social analysis.

Moreover, Fairclough (1995, p.60) suggests investigating "the polarity [...] between broadly conventional and broadly creative discourse processes, involving either a normative use of discourse types (genres and discourses) or a creative mixture of them". Creative use of discourses, which might be observed in texts with heterogeneous forms and meanings is said to be tied to social conditions of change and instability. The conventional one, usually characterised by the homogeneity of forms and meanings, is usually tied to stable and fixed social practices and may signal that the established order is being reproduced (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

The level of social practice

The analysis of the communicative event on the social or socio-cultural level requires connecting the text with the broader context. It can be an immediate situational context, context of institutional practices, as well as the "wider frame of the society and culture" (Fairclough 1995 p.62), with a particular focus on power relations and struggles. As Witschge (2008, p.79) observes, at this stage of analysis "it is necessary to examine the implications of the text for the social context and examine the social (power) relations reflected, altered and reinforced in the discourse".

On the practical level, my analysis will aim at connecting the discourses identified at the level of text and discursive practice (interdiscursivity) with various ideological positions which constitute a debate surrounding the issue of online anonymity. I will therefore situate analyzed texts in the context of global and local power struggles surrounding online anonymity described so far in this thesis, including 1) value conflicts between representatives of 'statist' and

'libertarian' approaches to anonymity; 2) the process of *de-anonymisation* and the role of the media in shaping the future of online anonymity; 3) the local power struggles in Poland related to processes of democratic transition and technological change.

5.3 Summary

The analysis of the Polish public debate surrounding online anonymity presented in the following pages of this thesis consists of two interrelated parts. First, I will discuss the findings of the content analysis, whose main aim was to investigate the dominant context of the coverage of online anonymity in Polish quality newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. The analysis also explored how online anonymity is evaluated and what factors influence this evaluation.

The second and central part of this study involves critical analysis of the way online anonymity is represented by traditional media and bloggers in the context of the so-called 'Kataryna case'. Using the analytical approach proposed by Norman Fairclough, I investigate 25 texts related to the case, which were published by three traditional media platforms and two blogging platforms.

At the level of the text, the analysis focuses mainly on the representation of social actors, events and relations, but it also involves exploration of genres and styles of the texts, in order to investigate the construction of authors' identities and their relationship with the audience. The main aim of the analysis is to establish what groups and interests appear in the discourse and what are the dominant lines of conflict between various stakeholders.

At the level of discursive and social practice, the textual features are placed in the context of competing social discourses ('order of discourse') and broader contexts of power struggles related to online anonymity (global and local) discussed in previous chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 6 | Online anonymity in the Polish quality press: findings of the content analysis[*]

The content analysis of the Polish quality newspapers' coverage of online anonymity was designed to serve as a background for an in-depth, synchronic and critical study of the way online anonymity has been constructed in Polish media discourse. While online anonymity has received much academic attention in various disciplines – law, computer science, psychology, sociology – the study of the topic from a media perspective has so far been limited. Moreover, the number of studies examining the media coverage of online anonymity with a specific geographical focus is even smaller – the studies of Reader (2005, 2012), Carey and Burkell (2007), Nielsen (2014) and Meltzer (2015), which were discussed in earlier chapters, are basically the exceptions that prove the rule. Besides, all of the mentioned studies focus on debates surrounding anonymity in the Western context.

Therefore, this inquiry, focusing on the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish quality newspapers, is inevitably exploratory. As such, the content analysis is intended to draw the contours of media discourse around online anonymity in Poland. Its descriptive findings then form an essential step before the closer look that is the critical discourse analysis presented in the following chapters.

The content analysis was meant to answer questions about the general characteristic of the way online anonymity is portrayed in the Polish media. It first explores both the general and the specific thematic contexts of the coverage. The review of academic work on the relation between online anonymity and democracy showed that it mostly appears in the contexts of control/surveillance and the public sphere. Therefore, the analysis here sought to establish whether similar topical areas appear in the Polish media coverage.

Next, the investigation focused on the forms of anonymous activities mentioned in the media text, as well as the most common sources quoted in

relation to this topic. The analysis also looked at the evaluation of online anonymity in order to determine if claims about the media's contribution to the process of *de-anonymisation* can be empirically supported in the context of Polish media discourse. As discussed in Chapter 3, studies conducted in United States showed that journalists express predominantly negative attitudes towards anonymity on the internet and frequently call for its reduction.

Lastly, the analysis focused on two additional variables, namely the geographical reference of the coverage, as well as the way online anonymity is explicitly or implicitly defined in the reporting. While the academic debate on the definition of online anonymity and the assessments of its very possibility are not yet settled, it is important to see if mass media audiences are offered a sufficient understanding of the issue.

Several trends can already be identified in the composition of the sample data. For one, within the period examined, 2006-2012, both *Gazeta Wyborcza* (gw) and *Rzeczpospolita* (rp) differed significantly in the amount of coverage online anonymity received. The number of stories in *Gazeta Wyborcza* was at its highest in 2006, it then declined until its lowest point in 2009, and then started growing again.

In the case of *Rzeczpospolita*, most articles concerning online anonymity appeared in 2009 and 2010, when the story about the right to anonymity of conservative blogger Kataryna emerged. In 2012 the newspaper again devoted much attention to the topic when it was debated in the context of the protests against ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement). Figure 4 shows the number of stories in both newspapers in each analyzed year.
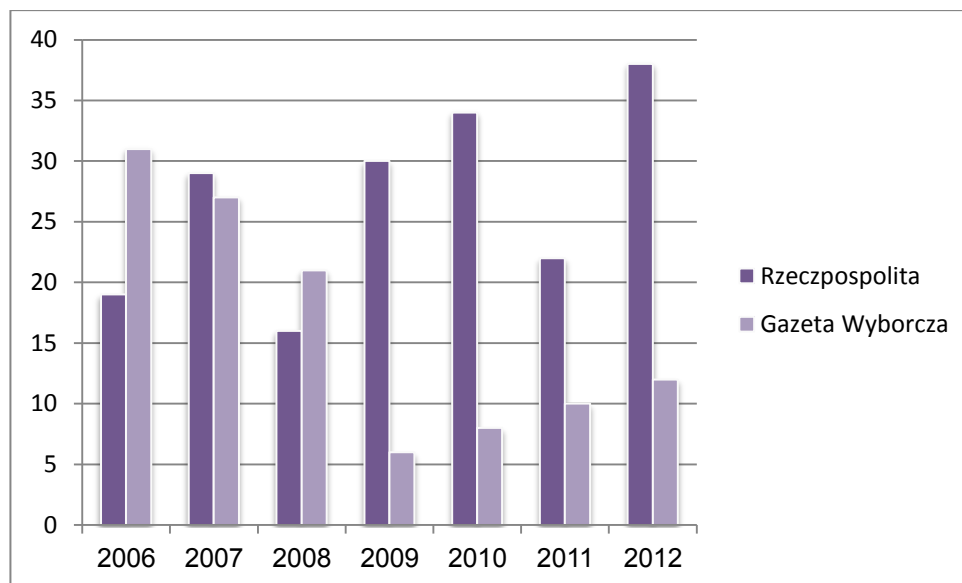
FIGURE 4 THE AMOUNT OF STORIES CONCERNING ONLINE ANONYMITY IN RZECZPOSPOLITA AND GAZETA WYBORCZA, 2006 – 2012

6.1 General contexts of reporting online anonymity

The presentation of the results of the content analysis has to start with an observation that online anonymity appears in the media reporting in two ways: explicit - as a main topic of a journalistic story, and implicit - as a subtopic of other issues, such as hacking, paedophilia, hate speech etc.

The sample for content analysis includes both types of stories, as the implicit associations and evaluations of online anonymity also play a key role in the media construction of its meaning.

A story was categorized as having anonymity as a central topic, when the term appeared in a headline, lead or more than twice in the body. Overall, only 37 out of 300 stories (12%) were categorized as such; most of them appeared in *Rzeczpospolita* (28), while only 9 were found in *Gazeta Wyborcza.* This shows that online anonymity only rarely receives in-depth coverage, and most of the time (88%) appears in the shadow of other issues.

The larger number of stories in *Rzeczpospolita* may be explained by the newspaper's focus on legal matters. Many of the stories where online anonymity is the main topic focus on the legal liability of the anonymous internet users.

While online anonymity is rarely the sole or even main subject of media stories, placing it in other contexts means that journalists fill it with particular meanings, which are not explicit and which can only by uncovered by systematic

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analysis. The 'interpretative flexibility' (Feenberg 2014) characterizing anonymity makes it particularly susceptible to meanings imposed by the context.

Knowing that online anonymity appears mostly in the context of other issues, the analysis attempted to identify these contexts and investigate to what extent the media coverage of online anonymity corresponds with the academic debates mentioned earlier in this study.

At first, the analysis examined the overall topic of the story within which online anonymity appeared. A data chunk coded in order to identify a 'general topic' included the story's headline, lead and the opening paragraph. According to van Dijk (1985, p.77), headline and lead paragraph "are used to express or infer the theme or topic" of the analyzed text.

The list of categories was partially built based on the topics identified in the literature (such as 'surveillance/privacy', 'crime' and 'public sphere'), and partially developed in the process of analysis. Overall, the analysis revealed 11 main topical areas in the texts where online anonymity was mentioned (see Figure 5).
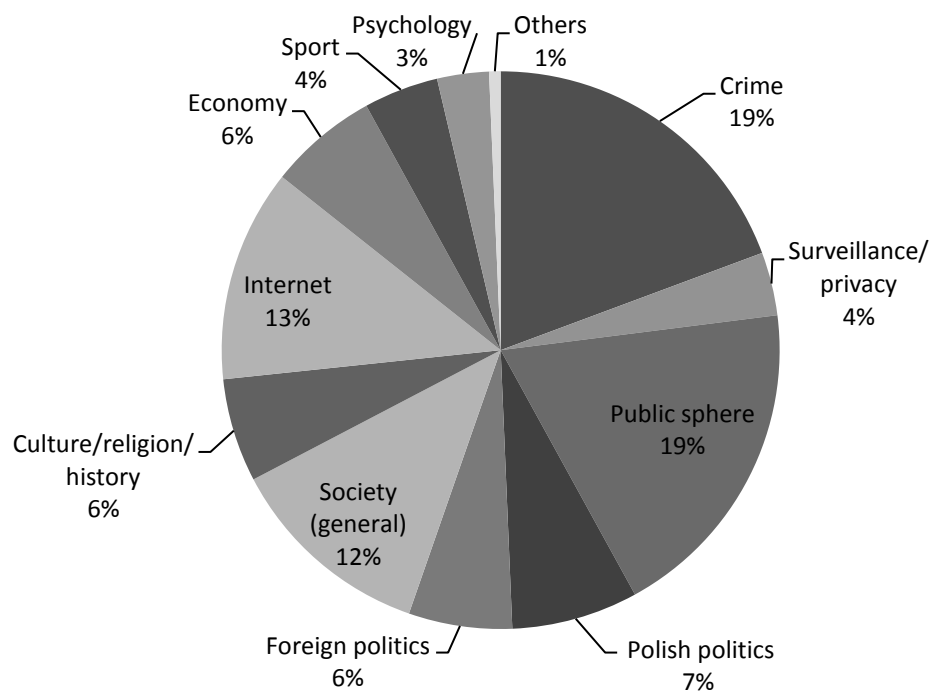
FIGURE 5 THE GENERAL TOPIC OF STORIES MENTIONING ONLINE ANONYMITY

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The analysis shows that anonymity appears most commonly in stories related to 'crime' and 'public sphere', which together constitute almost 40% of the sample.

The first group includes stories about various types of crimes and offences, whether internet-related or not. Since it was the single largest category (in absolute terms), I further analyzed the types of criminal activities involved. The most prominent ones included: e-fraud (16%), paedophilia (14%), and hacking (14%), followed by corruption (10%), cyber-bullying (7%), bullying (7%), crime in general (7%), terrorism (5%), drugs (5%) and piracy (5%). The remaining types of crimes covered in the stories constitute less than 1% each and were grouped under the 'others' sub-category.

The second largest category of stories that featured online anonymity was labelled "public sphere". This group included stories related to freedom of speech, censorship, trolling, political criticism and other issues associated with public debate. I also placed here stories about 'speech-related crimes', such as hate speech or defamation. The reason not to include such stories in the 'crime' category was that the legal status of speech-related wrongdoings is often unclear and disputable. For example, the dividing line between 'defamation' and 'criticism' can be very thin.

Proponents of the statist approach to online anonymity, which is widely represented in the academic literature, often portray it as an obstacle to security agencies' fight against criminal activities. Therefore, it is probably no surprise that 'crime' is the largest category of media stories featuring online anonymity. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that only 4% of stories in the sample are related to surveillance or privacy.

At the same time, among the stories where online anonymity is the central topic, the most common general themes are 'public sphere' (41%), 'internet' (19%) and 'crime' (16%).

6.2 Immediate contexts of online anonymity in media texts

The main topic of a journalistic story was determined based on the story as a whole, with a particular emphasis on the title, lead and first paragraph. While this

method gives a general indication of the context in which online anonymity is mentioned, the immediate context can often be significantly different. For example, in stories in the 'crime' category, online anonymity may be portrayed as something negative (e.g. facilitating a criminal activity), or positive (e.g. encouraging people to report crime). Moreover, online anonymity often appears in a single story multiple times, in different contexts and invoked by different sources.

Therefore, the further stages of this analysis focus not on the story as a whole, but on individual instances of statements related to online anonymity. The basis for identifying an assertion was the presence of the keyword 'anonym!' linked with the internet. The units of analysis varied, as online anonymity appeared in stories in many different ways. Borderlines of an assertion have normally been drawn based on sources to whom the assertion has been attributed or by the thematic context. A sentence including a word 'anonym!' was usually treated as a coding unit and the paragraph was used as a context unit. Overall, within the 300 analysed stories 412 assertions about online anonymity were identified; 140 of them (34%) in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 272 (67%) in *Rzeczpospolita*.

The immediate context of online anonymity was one of the most crucial categories in the coding framework. Not only does this category help to map the field of meanings associated with online anonymity, but it also provides some initial indications about the evaluation of anonymity in the coverage.

The categories here were initially built around categories identified by Carey and Burkell (2007), which included: privacy, paedophilia, internet crime, internet (general), sexuality, e-commerce, e-counselling, fandom, free speech and e-health. However, this framework had to be substantially modified. The main reason, apart from different geographical setting (the study mentioned above was conducted in Canada) was that their research analysed coverage of online anonymity in the years 1994-2003, when user generated content, social media and other services characteristic of the web 2.0 era were still in their infancy, thus the context of reporting online anonymity was different.

As it was already shown earlier in this study, academic literature on the role of anonymity in democracy is mostly concerned with two interconnected areas: anonymity and its relation to privacy and surveillance, and anonymity as an

aspect of online deliberation. The analysis of the immediate contexts in which online anonymity was discussed in the Polish quality press shows that the newspapers pay much more attention to the second area. In nearly 70 percent of the analysed assertions online anonymity was placed in the context of some form of online deliberation.

In the second biggest group of assertions, 14 percent of all cases, online anonymity is depicted as a tool for criminals. Statements in this category mostly refer to crime in general (19%), e-fraud (18%), hacking (16%), cyber-bullying (14%) and paedophilia (12%).

In only 6 percent of the analyzed assertions is online anonymity mentioned in the context of privacy and surveillance, despite earlier studies that showed this area usually receives significant academic attention. The remaining contexts of where online anonymity appeared in the Polish media texts were rather marginal.

Category	Percentage	Number of appearances
Deliberation	68	282
Crime	14	57
Privacy/surveillance	6	24
E-commerce	3	11
Internet	2	10
Protest	2	9
Cryptography	1	5
E-government	1	4
File sharing	1	3
Online dating/Porn	1	3
Other (less than 1%)	1	4
Total	100	412

TABLE 2 CONTEXTS IN WHICH ONLINE ANONYMITY IS MENTIONED IN THE POLISH QUALITY PRESS

Since the group of assertions which place online anonymity in the context of online deliberation is significantly bigger than others, it merits additional exploration.

The 282 assertions in this category were further analyzed and assigned to five sub-categories. The biggest group of statements, 42 percent of assertions related to anonymous online deliberation, relate to offensive, low quality or illegal online content. The prevalent message is that anonymity lowers the quality of

online discussions and facilitates speech perceived as undesirable or illegal. For example:

It is necessary to limit online anonymity. It may help to heal a debate on the Internet, which today comes down to throwing insults and mud at each other. (rp128)

In the second largest group, 29% of assertions, online anonymity appears in the context of voicing opinion, evaluation or critique. While some stories portray anonymity as useful for whistle-blowers, others point towards ethical conundrums around the publication of anonymous reviews. For example:

Doctors are doomed when it comes to verifying anonymous information posted about them on the Internet. Anyone looking at the ranking can see the doctor's name and the address of his/her practice, but the person posting the assessment is anonymous, hiding behind an online nickname. (rp121)

In 17 percent of all cases related to deliberation on the internet, online anonymity is mentioned in the context of unspecific/general form of communication. For example:

In its roots, the problem relates to the right to anonymous communication. The development of communication technology is moving towards the elimination of anonymous communication on the Internet, due to the need to identify those responsible for posted content. (rp 43)

The two contexts of online deliberation that received the least attention from the Polish quality newspapers include self-help and sensitive content (7%), and freedom of speech and censorship (5%). Figure 6 summarizes the categories of statements about online anonymity in the context of anonymous deliberation.
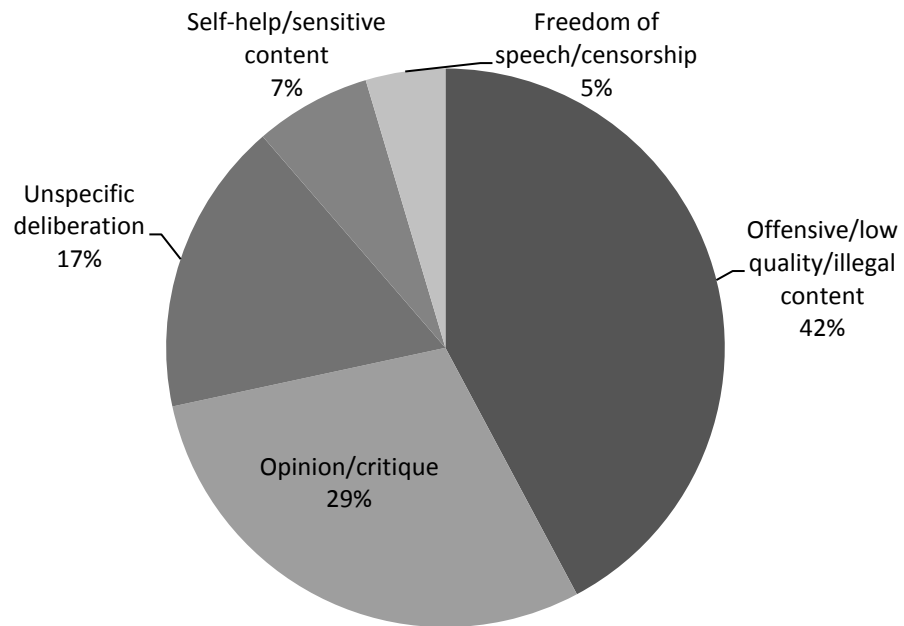
FIGURE 6 CONTEXTS IN WHICH ONLINE ANONYMOUS DELIBERATION IS DISCUSSED IN THE POLISH QUALITY PRESS

6.3 Forms of anonymous activity featured in Polish quality press

Online anonymity appears in newspaper coverage mostly as a general concept, not related to any specific use. This type of statement constitutes 34 percent of all instances. For example:

The feeling of anonymity in the global Internet creates a situation in which people don't keep a civilized language in their heads. (rp 9a)

When anonymity is attributed to a specific use, it mostly relates to anonymous online comments (24%) and blogging (17%). This strongly corresponds with the finding that the main theme of discussions concerning online anonymity is the participation of anonymous voices in the online public sphere.

The following groups are statements which relate to anonymous emails (9%), transactions (4%) and online polls (4%). Anonymous data (e.g. *Both giants bowed to pressure: Google has already announced in June that after 18 months the data will become anonymous, and that it will be impossible to connect a search history with a particular user* (gw 68a).) are mentioned only in 2% of all cases, while browsing and gambling both constitute 1% of the coverage. The category

'others' includes all other forms of anonymity that constitute less than 1% each. Figure 7 shows the dominant forms of online anonymity mentioned in the coverage.
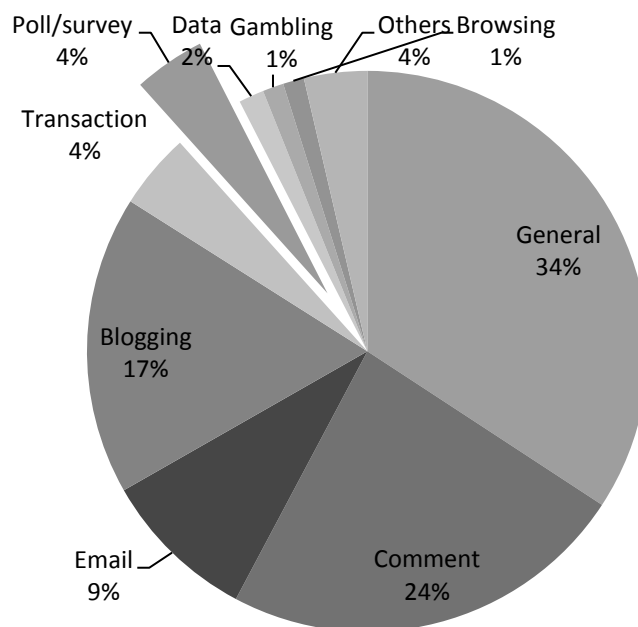
FIGURE 7 FORMS OF ANONYMOUS ACTIVITY MENTIONED IN THE POLISH QUALITY PRESS

6.4 Sources of assertions about online anonymity

Within the categories of sources to which assertions about online anonymity have been attributed, the most common one is that of no attribution at all (55%). This category includes statements about online anonymity made by the authors of the media texts, not attributed to any particular source. For example:

Aggression on the internet is stimulated by technological factors, such as [...] a sense of anonymity and impunity of perpetrators hiding behind pseudonyms; and the psychological ease with which one can humiliate a person they do not have to confront face to face. (gw 80)

Making assertions without attributing it to any particular source implies a 'common sense' approach toward online anonymity. According to Linde (1993, p. 222), common sense is a "set of beliefs and relations between beliefs that speakers may assume are known and shared by all competent members of the culture". The

power of common sense arguments lies in that they are not perceived as a set of beliefs but facts, true reflections of reality. Fairclough (1989, p.2), who puts particular stress on 'common-sense assumptions', sees them as a basis for "conventions according to which people interact linguistically, and of which people are generally not consciously aware". The fact that journalists write about online anonymity without referring to any particular source creates the impression that these statements are 'obvious' and do not need to be backed up by experts.

Assertions that are attributed to a specific source most often cited police officers and law officials (lawyers, legal trainees, judges), internet users and bloggers, as well as academics, each of them representing 6 percent of the sample. A slightly smaller share of all assertions (5%) was made up by public officials and politicians, as well as journalists (quoted in the story) and representatives of various business sectors. Activist and people representing civil society were directly and indirectly quoted in 4% of the cases. The sources most commonly appearing in the coverage are represented in Figure 8.
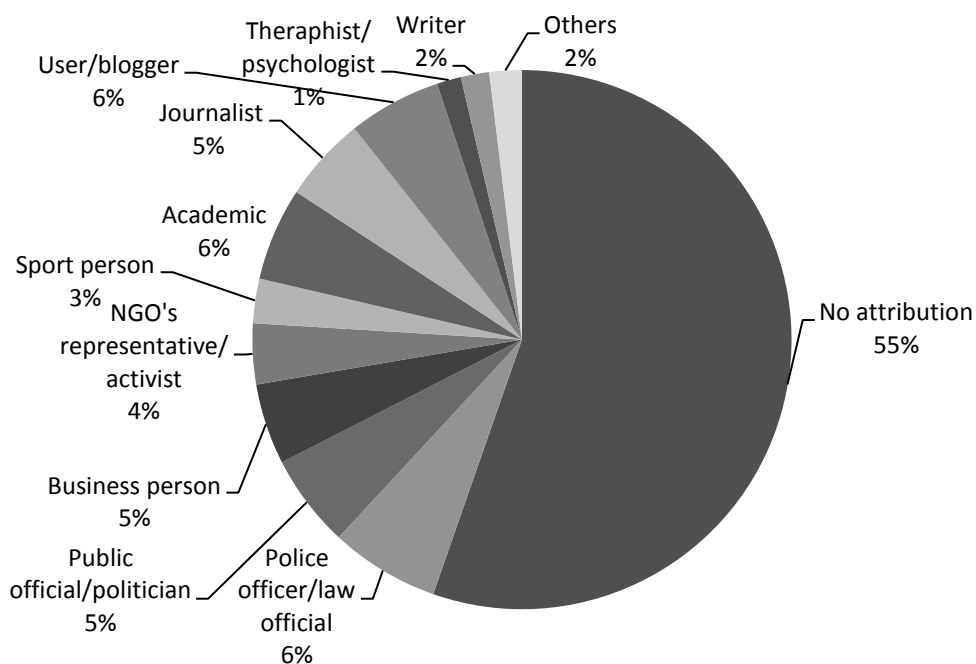
FIGURE 8 THE SOURCE OF ASSERTIONS ABOUT ONLINE ANONYMITY IN THE POLISH QUALITY PRESS

6.5 Evaluations of online anonymity

Distinguishing value judgements usually involves a high level of interpretation and is therefore problematic in standard content analysis, which primarily looks at a denotative level of meaning. The qualitative, rather than quantitative, character of this analysis leaves more space for the researcher's interpretation of evaluative statements concerning online anonymity. However, the reliability of this methodology requires transparency and consequence in applying certain analytical categories. In this study, the types of evaluative statements are borrowed from Faiclough's (2003, p.171) approach to critical discourse analysis and include:

1) statements that consist of evaluative noun phrases or adjectives (e.g. *Keen thinks that anonymity of the authors is the biggest curse of Web 2.0, an invitation to evading responsibility over the message, the guarantee that those responsible for stupid or aggressive content will remain unpunished* (rp 35a));

2) statements with deontic modalities (e.g. *They* (bloggers, KT) *should not be anonymous, because then they might be accused of not being independent (…)* (rp40a));

3) statements with affective mental process verbs which include affective evaluations (e.g. *I hate anonymous bloggers. If you are so canny and write rubbish about another person, don't be afraid of confrontation* (rp 83));

4) statements with value assumptions embedded in the text (e.g. *Today, the Internet is the place where young people start their participation in a public debate. If we believe this is a positive thing, and we know anonymity is one of the factors that makes it easier, we have an answer* (rp 175b)).

By identifying the various types of evaluative statements, assertions in the sample were coded as being either dominantly positive or dominantly negative. A separate category was dedicated to assertions that portray online anonymity as both positive and negative (e.g. *Anonymity is a value, but at the same time the*

disadvantage of the Internet – thinks Jonathan Zittrain from Oxford University (rp 22)).

The remaining assertions, which could not be categorized as immediately negative or positive, were coded as lacking clear evaluation (e.g. *Freenet guarantees complete anonymity* (rp89); *It might happen in the future, that people who want to stay anonymous won't be able to take part in public discussions on the Internet, because all the attempts to communicate anonymously will be blocked by technology* (rp43a)).

As Figure 9 shows, assertions in which anonymity is portrayed as negative are the most common in the sample and account for 42 percent of it. This is approximately twice as many as assertions evaluating online anonymity positively (22%).

In over one third of the analysed statements no obviously positive or negative evaluations are made (34%), and only 2 percent of all assertions portray online anonymity as both positive and negative.
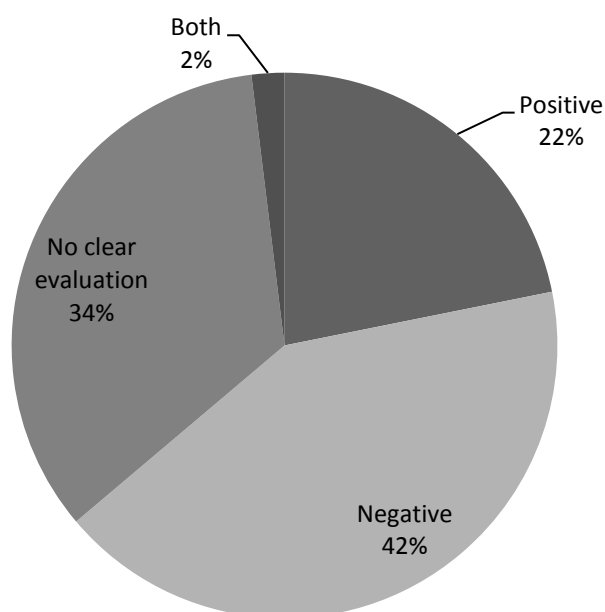
FIGURE 9 VALUE JUDGMENTS IN ASSERTIONS CONCERNING ONLINE ANONYMITY IN THE POLISH QUALITY PRESS

The proportions of each type of value judgment of online anonymity are largely consistent in both newspapers. In *Rzeczpospolita*, 42 percent of all

assertions show online anonymity as negative and 36 percent do not indicate clear evaluation. In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, anonymity is portrayed as negative in 41 percent of all cases, while 31 percent of statements lack clear evaluation.

Evaluation / Title	*Rzeczpospolita*	*Gazeta Wyborcza*	Total
Positive	19% (n=52)	27% (n=38)	22% (n=90)
Negative	**42% (n=115)**	**41,5% (n=58)**	**42% (n=173)**
No clear evaluation	36% (n=97)	31,5% (n=44)	34% (n=141)
Both	3% (n=8)	0	2% (n=8)

TABLE 3 EVALUATIONS OF ONLINE ANONYMITY IN RZECZPOSPOLITA AND IN GAZETA WYBORCZA

An interesting picture emerges when correlating the category of evaluation with the sources quoted in the stories, and also with the form of anonymity mentioned. In the first case, as Table 4 shows, most sources most of the time talk about online anonymity in a negative way. The top groups of sources which assessed anonymity as predominantly negative include writers (86%), police officers and law officials (74%), sports people (73%)[29], journalists (67%) and politicians (61%).

At the same time, internet users/bloggers talked about online anonymity in positive terms in 43% of assertions and were the only group that viewed it mostly favourably.

In half of the statements attributed to therapists and psychologist no clear evaluation can be discerned. Interestingly, an explicit value judgment was also absent in 42 percent of the statements that were not attributed to any source and in 43 percent of statements expressed by NGOs' representatives quoted in the analysed newspapers.

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[29] This type of statements usually involved a sportsman complaining about negative anonymous comments which appear online.

Source / Evaluation	Positive	Negative	No clear evaluation	Both
No attribution	25%	32%	**42%**	2%
Police officer / legal official	19%	**74%**	7%	0
Public official / politician	13%	**61%**	26%	0
Business person	5%	**55%**	40%	0
NGO's representative / Activist	40%	27%	**43%**	0
Sport person	9%	**73%**	18%	0
Academic	13%	**57%**	17%	13%
Journalist	10%	**67%**	24%	0
User / blogger	**43%**	26%	30%	0
Therapist / psychologist	33%	17%	**50%**	0
Writer	0	**86%**	14%	0
Others	12%	**50%**	38%	0

TABLE 4 RELATIONS BETWEEN EVALUATIONS AND QUOTED SOURCES

Among the different forms of using anonymity, positive evaluations are most strongly associated with anonymous data (83%) and emails (62%). On the other hand, anonymity is shown as predominantly negative in relation to online comments (66%), to anonymous transactions (44.5%), and when a general notion of online anonymity is mentioned (44%). In the remaining cases of anonymous

actions, the highest percentage of assertions presents no clear evaluation. The detailed percentage share is summarized in Table 5.

Form / Evaluation	Positive	Negative	No clear evaluation	Both
General	25%	**44%**	27%	4%
Comment	4%	**66%**	28%	2%
Email	**62%**	16%	22%	0
Blogging	18%	30%	**52%**	0
Transaction	11%	**44.5%**	**44.5%**	0
Poll/survey	23.5%	23.5%	**53%**	0
Data	**83%**	0%	17%	0
Gambling	0	40%	**60%**	0
Browsing	20%	20%	**60%**	0
Others	20%	33%	**47%**	0

TABLE 5 RELATIONS BETWEEN EVALUATION AND FORMS OF ANONYMOUS ACTIVITY

One of the recurring themes in debates around online anonymity concerns the value of anonymity for democracy. While there is often an agreement that anonymity is valuable in authoritarian regimes, where any form of critique can be met with harsh sanctions, the issue of anonymity in democracy is much more controversial and it is often seen as problematic. To examine this observation, I tested the correlation between evaluations of anonymity and the geographical area with which the assertion concerned, with particular emphasis on the level of democracy.

To do so, I first allocated each assertion to one of the three main categories: 'democratic country', 'non-democratic country' and 'general'. In most cases, the judgment was made based on the whole paragraph which included the analyzed

statement about online anonymity. Under the first category, 'democratic country' were all the assertions mentioning online anonymity in relation to a country ranked as 'free' in the 2015 Freedom House report (Freedom House, 2015). For example:

In South Korea, where the problem of online abuse led to famous suicides, the government responded with taking away anonymity from internet users. (gw 72a)

This category also included assertions which had a manifestly Polish context (e.g. *Several million Polish anonymous bloggers will have to officially register and give their personal information* (rp 34)), and also those that concerned the European Union. If the statement was related to a country which was not ranked as 'free' in the Freedom House report, it was placed in the 'non democratic' category. The last category labelled 'general', gathered general statements, which referred to no specific country, or when this context was unclear.

In most cases (48%), the assertions about online anonymity had a general character and were not made in relation to any particular country. The second biggest category (45%) contained statements relating explicitly to democratic countries, and predominantly Poland. Non-democratic countries, among which Belarus, Russia and China were most common, appeared in 7 percent of the statements.

Next, these findings were correlated with the results from the analysis of evaluations. The results confirmed that non-democratic countries were most often (41%) associated with positive views on online anonymity. When anonymity is mentioned generally, without having any specific local context, or when it is mentioned in the context of democratic countries, negative evaluations prevail (43% and 42% respectively). The summary of the results is presented in Table 6.

Evaluation / Area	Democratic country	Non-democratic country	General
Positive	25%	**41%**	16%
Negative	**42%**	37%	**43%**
No clear evaluation	33%	22%	37%
Both	0	0	4%

TABLE 6 THE RELATION BETWEEN ONLINE ANONYMITY AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF AN ASSERTION

6.6 The possibility to remain anonymous online

The last variable investigated in this analysis is the way newspapers present the possibility to be anonymous on the internet. As shown in chapter two, even academic and online experts find it difficult to agree on a definition of online anonymity, or on the very possibility of obtaining it in the online environment. Possible definitions range from an author simply withdrawing their real name from the message, through concealing any trait that could link a message to its author, to perceiving anonymity as a context dependent concept, which should be always analyzed through the prism of a particular social situation.

The way media present the possibility to operate anonymously online can influence the way internet users perceive anonymity and, consequently, the way they behave online. It is therefore important to establish whether readers are offered a sufficient understanding of the concept of anonymity. This, according to Nissenbaum (1999, pp.143–144), is crucial for people to be "more cautious, more guarded, more mindful of the information they divulge to others in various transactions and, as a result, more capable of protecting the possibility of anonymity".

The analysis of 412 assertions shows that the treatment that online anonymity receives in Polish newspapers does not reflect its complexity. Hardly

ever is anonymity presented as a relative, contextual phenomenon which has various levels and dimensions.

In 63% of all cases, online anonymity is simply presented as a given. For example:

Internet forums, due to their anonymity, are full of negative emotions directed especially toward successful people. (rp6)

Assertions on online anonymity in the media texts that made the second biggest group (25%) suggest that its existence depends on a certain actor (e.g. government or a company) or technology. For example:

As a response, the government has launched a special website, which apart from having a preventive function, was supposed to allow citizens to anonymously comment on and report incidents of corruption. (gw36);

One can also use the so called TOR network, widely used by intelligence, non-governmental organisations, but also paedophiles – all those who seek anonymity on the internet (rp 123);

This group of statements also include assertions implying that anonymity on the internet is possible, but can be restricted. For example:

The European Commission is already preparing legal regulations which will restrict online anonymity. (rp 165)

The remaining 12% of the assertions explicitly state that online anonymity does not exist at all:

Surely, nobody is anonymous on the Internet. In most cases, experts can easily and quickly find out the IP number of the computer from which an offensive comment was sent. (gw13a)

or argue that that it is nothing more than a myth:

The ostensible anonymity of the Internet makes it a favorable place for the frustrated. (rp116)

The fact, that in the majority of cases the ability to be anonymous online is taken for granted, is problematic since readers are not offered a full picture - for

instance, that internet service providers and state agencies might still have access to internet users' identifying data even if they are supposedly anonymous. This may lead internet users to think that their 'real life' identity can be fully concealed.

Such assumptions are supported by the findings of a survey conducted as a part of the World Internet Project (2011). According to the study, 62% of Polish internet users think that anonymity can protect people from being punished for illegal activities online.

6.7 Summary

The main objective of analyzing newspapers' coverage of online anonymity was to map out the meanings associated with this issue and to construct a frame of reference for the critical discourse analysis that follows. Moreover, this inquiry was designed to establish whether and in what respects Polish newspapers contribute to a trend of limiting or eliminating anonymity from online spaces.

The analysis of the main topic of the stories in which online anonymity was mentioned has shown a broad spectrum of representations where stories related to crime and public sphere were the most common. Yet, the analysis of specific assertions made found a much more homogenous picture. In 70 percent of the cases online anonymity was specifically associated with online public deliberation, and in 14 percent it appeared in the context of crime.

Further analysis revealed that people's anonymous participation in the public sphere is not highly regarded. Rather, the coverage predominantly linked online anonymity to offensive and illegal speech.

While a large number of stories also mention anonymity as a tool to express opinions, only in 5 percent of the assertions related to deliberation, is online anonymity explicitly associated with freedom of speech.

This last result might be surprising, as the media in democratic societies is expected to be at the forefront of freedom of expression and a pluralistic public discourse. Moreover, in only 6 percent of the analyzed statements is anonymity portrayed as a way to protect one's privacy online. In fact, the relatively high percentage of stories associating online anonymity with crime and harmful speech might lead to a conclusion that more surveillance is necessary.

Another important observation is that the Polish quality newspapers often adopt a 'common sense' approach in their reporting on online anonymity. This is demonstrated by the large share of assertions on online anonymity not being attributed to any particular source, as well as discussing anonymity as a general concept, without specifying what form of anonymous participation is being referred to.

The analysis of evaluative statements identified in the media texts also confirmed the dominance of the negative view of online anonymity. Where the text offers an explicit value judgment on online anonymity, only 22% of assertions were positive, while almost twice as much depicted anonymity as undesirable. A similar result was obtained for both analyzed newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*.

A correlation of the sources to whom assertions were attributed with value judgments of anonymity found that only statements made by internet users and bloggers put online anonymity mostly in a positive light.

Of the different uses of anonymity, only in the context of emails and data, was anonymity viewed favourably. Positive depictions of online anonymity were also often associated with statements concerning non-democratic countries. When a story concerned a democracy, or was not tied to any specific country, anonymity was seen as predominantly negative.

The last investigated area was dedicated to the way media portray the possibility of being anonymous online. The analysis showed that in most cases (63%) anonymity is portrayed as an inherent characteristic of an online environment, without any further reflection on its complexity and multidimensional character.

Overall, the study confirms that the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish quality press contributes to *de-anonymisation*, by often casting online anonymity in a negative light, both in terms of evaluations and contexts in which it appears. These findings, however, must be seen as posing questions, and not delivering answers.

While the study presents a general description of the debate surrounding online anonymity, the use of content analysis does not tell us anything about the meaning-making process and the latent meanings underlying the text. These

drawbacks, however, are overcome by complementing the content analysis with a more qualitative method, namely critical discourse analysis.

The choice of the case for discourse analysis was dictated by the findings of the content analysis, indicating that the Polish media most often mention anonymity in the context of online deliberation. The 'Kataryna case' involved an anonymous blogger who was threatened because of her critical opinion on a prominent politician, and was later exposed by one of the newspapers. It is therefore a fitting case for looking into the interests, meanings and power struggles underlying the online anonymity debate in Poland.

CHAPTER 7 | The Kataryna case: findings of the critical discourse analysis (part 1)

According to van Dijk (1998), the link between ideology and discourse can be explained in three general steps. First, ideologies shape and organize group attitudes; then these attitudes influence personal opinions, which might eventually be expressed in text. Critical discourse analysis allows reversing these processes: through analyzing text, uncovering the attitudes and underlying mental models, we can eventually see the work of ideologies that govern specific discourses.

The aim of the next two chapters is just that: by analyzing 25 texts from three newspapers and two blog platforms on the 'Kataryna case' I will explore the ideologies at play in the Polish media discourse surrounding online anonymity and how they manifest themselves in the discourse. I will investigate what social groups, power struggles and conflicts are reflected in the discourse, and what they mean for the future of online anonymity in Poland.

The analysis is divided into two main parts. First, I present the findings from the textual analysis of sampled stories, focusing mostly on textual representation of 1) the 'Kataryna case' in general, 2) the main actors involved in the case (journalists, internet users), and 3) anonymity on the internet. I also explore genres and styles that characterize each of the texts, insofar as they serve the construction of the identities of the actors involved and establish relationships between them.

The following chapter delves into the conflicts that have been identified. Following Fairclough's analytical model, I place the texts into a broader context of discursive practices and social practices. I then investigate various mental models that appear in the texts and link them to underlying ideological positions.

I begin with briefly describing the story of the anonymous blogger Kataryna, her struggle with Polish politicians and the media, and her ultimate, involuntary disclosure. The story includes quotes from an interview I conducted with Kataryna in March 2015 in order to better understand the case. Since the study focuses on the media discourse surrounding anonymity, this interview is not an official part of the sample and serves as an auxiliary to the analysis.

7.1 The story of Kataryna

The story of "the most mysterious Polish blogger" (Mazurek 2008) has shaken the Polish media and a big part of the Polish online community. It began in 2002 when a blogger only known as "Kataryna" started commenting on sporting events in an online forum on *gazeta.pl* – the internet platform of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Kataryna soon became active on forums about politics, and was particularly engaged with a forum dedicated to one of the biggest corruption scandals in post-communist Poland, the so called 'Rywin's affair'[30]. When *gazeta.pl* created its first blogging platform*, blox.pl*, one of the administrators asked Kataryna to join and she agreed. When asked about the reasons why she decided to write as Kataryna, she told me that back then it was a norm:

> I didn't think about it [anonymity, KT] completely. Kataryna is my old pseudonym. It was with me since forever, so I never put much thought into it. It was a natural thing to me, to introduce myself this way. I also didn't think of anonymity because back then everyone was anonymous. Yes. I think that if someone would write something with a name and a surname everyone would have thought that it is fake anyway (Kataryna 2015).

The corruption scandal changed Kataryna's political worldview. Before, as she stated in one of the interviews, she was not interested in politics, but rather in social matters, and the environment, and overall she was more 'leftist' (Mazurek 2008). The 'Rywin affair' made her much more sceptical towards the political order that was established in Poland after 1989. She became very critical of mainstream media and the political elite, and her views became more conservative. She also joined another blogging platform, *salon24.pl*, established in 2006 by a group of mostly conservative publicists.

On both of her blogs she was publishing in-depth analysis of various political events, revealing numerous inconsistencies in statements made by Polish politicians, as well as in the mainstream media reporting.

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[30] The 'Rywin affair' was a major corruption scandal in Poland, in which the editor of Poland's leading daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, was offered favorable changes in a draft of the new Broadcasting Act in exchange for 17.5 million dollars. The scandal involved prominent Polish politicians and media personas and revealed a clandestine network of connection between the political, media and business elites in post-communist Poland.

Kataryna's observations were widely discussed on other new media platforms, as well as in traditional media, raising numerous questions and speculations about her 'real' identity. Several journalists and politicians were thought to be behind the pseudonym.

For a long time, however, her legal name, as well as occupation, remained unknown. When asked about her anonymity, she told a journalist that her job involved contact with public officials, and she would not like them to look at her through the lens of her views (Mazurek 2008).

7.1.1 The conflict with the minister

Kataryna's anonymity, however, was about to be compromised. On the 10th of May 2009 she published a blog post on *salon24.pl,* in which she commented on media reports stating that the then Minister of Justice, Andrzej Czuma, travelled to the United States and met with a high ranking official to discuss personal issues related to his debts (Stankiewicz 2009). Although the minister denied the reports, Kataryna stated:

> *I'm quoting this [newspapers' articles, KT], because I'm strangely convinced that Newsweek's information will soon be confirmed and we will see that the minister departed from the truth again (*Kataryna, 2009a*).*

This short and seemingly innocent statement provoked one of the most heated debates in the history of the Polish internet. Following Kataryna's blog post, the blogging platform's owner, Igor Janke, was contacted by the son of the Minister of Justice, Krzysztof Czuma, who demanded that the post, which he called 'deceitful' and 'offending' be removed (Janke 2009). He also asked Janke to reveal the real name of Kataryna in order to file a lawsuit, or he would sue *salon24.pl*'s administrators.

Igor Janke refused to reveal Kataryna's personal data. He also blogged about the email exchanges he had with the minister's son, in which Krzysztof Czuma was demanding other posts be removed and calling bloggers 'son of a bitch' and 'horrid old cow' (Janke 2009).

Shortly after most of the Polish media had reported on the dispute between Kataryna and *salon24.pl* on the one hand and the minister's son on the other, the Minister of Justice intervened. He claimed that he didn't know anything about the planned lawsuit against Kataryna and was not aware of his son's actions. He also expressed his rather low opinion of online anonymity and defended his son who insulted bloggers in his previous emails to *salon24.pl*.

Initially, Kataryna was not willing to reveal herself, as she thought she could not count on having a fair trial:

> *Unfortunately, I'm afraid that in Poland everything might happen and I will quickly find out that as a citizen of the "country of love" I don't have the right to express my opinion about a minister's credibility, and trust a media report that is critical of him. Unfortunately, I'm not as rich as the state treasury. I cannot afford paying the minister thousands in compensation for the huge damage that I had caused with my blog post (…)*(Kataryna, 2009b)

Eventually, however, she announced that she was willing to reveal her real name and enable a lawsuit but under two conditions: receiving an official letter from the Minster of Justice and obtaining proof that the minister was really willing to sue her. She also gave another anonymous interview to the daily *Dziennik*, in which she discussed her anonymity. In the interview she stated, that disclosing her name would mean the end of her blogging career, as the lack of anonymity would seriously limit her freedom:

> *I cannot imagine writing what I write and doing what I do professionally. It's impossible to combine both. And it is easier to resign from the blog. Anonymity gives me huge freedom. Without it I would put a muzzle on my mouth, in order to avoid law suits* (Czubkowska 2009).

7.1.2 Kataryna outed by *Dziennik*

Initially, both traditional media and bloggers were unambiguously critical of Czuma's demand to reveal Kataryna's identity and his lawsuit threats. Yet, the case took an unexpected turn when on the 21st of May *Dziennik* published a story entitled "We know who Kataryna is" in which the authors revealed her real identity.

While they did not explicitly mention Kataryna's name, they gave enough details that finding out who she was offline became very easy. They mentioned, among other things, her age, place of birth, and the fact that she was the head of a foundation based in Warsaw that promotes democracy and civil society. The journalists also quoted parts of the foundation's charter, which provided readers with a direct link to the real life identity of the person blogging as Kataryna. She was subsequently identified as Katarzyna Sadło, the president of the Foundation for Civic Society Development.

The already controversial case became even more contentious, when Kataryna published in her blog a text message which she had received from a *Dziennik* journalist before the story revealing her identity appeared:

> *Ms Kataryna, please consider our proposal seriously. We don't want to ruthlessly reveal your identity and help the Czumas. We would prefer that you agree for this 'coming-out' on your conditions, which would include us hiring you as our columnist. But please, understand that this is "frustrating to know but not be able to write about it". I know that your identity is known to Fakt and they won't treat you so well – please, do not think of it as a blackmail. We really don't want to hurt you* (tan, 2009).

Kataryna, like many other bloggers and commentators, did see it as a blackmail because the tabloid *Fakt* is owned by the same publisher as *Dziennik*, Axel Springer. In my interview with her, Kataryna recalled this experience as a truly traumatic one:

> *It was a horrible moment of authentic panic. It is like, when one doesn't know what is going to happen and doesn't imagine different scenarios, then…I don't want to use big words…but it was like everything was collapsing on my head.*

> *And because she [the journalist, KT] was saying: yes, "Fakt" knows who you are, then, knowing what they are capable of, such as publishing horrible photos of people, one is imagining all this. That was one thing. Another was the thought that I will have to explain myself to everybody, to people I know, my friends (Kataryna 2015).*

In response to Karatyna publicizing the text message, *Dziennik* published a series of articles defending its decision to reveal Kataryna's identity, as well as a chain of commentaries representing various views and perspectives on online anonymity.

One of the most controversial pieces was a commentary written by *Dziennik's* editor in chief, Robert Krasowski. Titled "An open letter to Kataryna's defenders", the commentary started with the statement: "Kiss my ass," and continued to present a deeply critical view of anonymous internet users.

Dziennik's series of articles triggered a number of responses from other mainstream media, as well as bloggers, politicians and other public figures. The debate, that earlier focused on a dispute between a blogger and the Minister of Justice, turned into a public conflict between bloggers and traditional journalists, in which different visions of the role of anonymity, the public sphere and the role of the media competed.

In the next part of this chapter I will introduce how this debate unfolded on five different media platforms: *Dziennik, Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita, salon24.pl* and *blox.pl.*

7.1.3 Epilogue

After the media heavily criticized the move of the Minister of Justice's son, no lawsuit was ever filed against Kataryna. Rather, Kataryna decided to take *Dziennik* to court over the infringement of personal interests. The first hearing took place in January 2010 and again attracted much media attention. There was a widely shared expectation that the court ruling would clarify the position of anonymous online speech in the Polish public sphere. However, in October 2010 the case was closed following a settlement outside court between Kataryna and *Dziennik*, under undisclosed terms.

Kataryna explained that she decided to reach a settlement, because it was difficult to bring all defendants to court, and it seemed like the case was going to go on for many years. As she told me in the interview:

> *I was myself a bit disappointed that I gave up that way. It would be great to give the court a chance to comment on the issue. But I'm not even sure if the court would have this chance. (...) To be honest, looking at how it is all developing, the case would now be at the second instance or at the stage of revocation and I'm not so sure if I would win it. The courts are now so favourable towards disclosing people's identities... It would be a risk (Kataryna 2015).*

The debate, however, brought the issue of online anonymity to the front pages of Polish newspapers.

The case also had serious consequences for Kataryna herself. As she told me in the interview, after losing her anonymity she felt much more vulnerable in relation to people who wanted to harm her personally or harm the foundation she had led. Kataryna also stated that after the disclosure her satisfaction from writing decreased significantly:

> *It is something different now. I don't know, maybe it's stupid. I just like it when there is as little as possible chance of diverting attention from the topic. And anonymity provided that. The words were separated from a person.*
>
> **K.T.: And what about the relations with your readers? Have they changed?**
> *Yes, yes. It is easier for readers to personally attack me and make harsh remarks about me (Kataryna 2015).*

The circumstances in which Kataryna found herself after the involuntary disclosure of her real name are therefore a good example of "collapsed context" (Marwick and boyd 2011) – a situation in which separation between various social roles in which the blogger functioned, achieved by anonymity, disappeared. Kataryna ceased to be just an online commentator, but was now known as a head of a foundation, an employer, a friend, a neighbour, a woman.

7.2 The discursive construction of the 'Kataryna case'

The analysis begins with a general investigation of how the 'Kataryna case', as a series of events, was covered and commented on in each of the analyzed media platforms. This stage of the analysis is primarily intended to establish which aspects of the case are highlighted, which are not mentioned at all, which individuals, groups and conflicts are represented and what are the overall attitudes towards the case as presented by authors of the analyzed articles and posts. These findings then feed into the examination of the representations of the groups involved in the conflict over online anonymity in Poland and the depictions of anonymity itself.

7.2.1. Media discourse

Dziennik

The texts published in *Dziennik*, which was one of the main actors in the 'Kataryna case,' present a coherent version of the events that led to revealing blogger Kataryna's real-life identity. The most detailed account of the events is presented in the news story "We know who Katryna is," in which two *Dziennik* journalists presented detailed information about her offline life.

Although the text does not include the blogger's full name, the information about her position as a head of a Warsaw-based foundation and the extract from the foundation's charter are enough to establish her offline identity. Despite that, the news story, as well as all but one analysed stories, highlight that *Dziennik* did not disclose Kataryna's name, as the newspaper did not want to help the politicians she had criticized. This decision contributed to *Dziennik*'s 'watchdog' branding.

However, while denying they had disclosed Kataryna's real-life identity, *Dziennik* authors repeatedly tried to justify it. For example, by referring to the genre of investigative journalism, and suggesting that investigating Kataryna's identity was in fact done in the name of public interest.

The story "We know who Katryna is" is written as an investigative piece, in which the authors claim that in the years 2003 and 2004 the foundation led by Kataryna was organizing workshops for public broadcast journalists, while at the same time she was anonymously criticizing the head of the public broadcast on the internet.[31] In other words, she was anonymously criticizing the person with whom she was doing business at the same time. *Dziennik* portrays this as a highly unethical behaviour that raises questions about the value of anonymity.

The journalists claim they did not blackmail Kataryna, but only tried to convince her to discuss her 'double life' (implying that she had one) and 'the limits of anonymous critique' (implying the she probably crossed them). None of the texts mentions that *Dziennik* threatened Kataryna that her identity could be revealed by *Fakt*.

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[31] Those allegations were later denied by Kataryna and *Dziennik* was ordered by the court to publish an official correction.

Only one of the analyzed stories directly criticizes the fact that *Dziennik* 'outed' Kataryna. The journalists states that:

> *'Not disclosing', but revealing a number of biographical data is an insidious and not elegant play'.* (D4)

However, by calling the events 'a play' the authors downplay their significance. In another story the author supports the right to anonymity, criticizes the behaviour of the politicians who wanted to find out who Kataryna is, but does not refer to *Dziennik's* conduct.

Lastly, the representation of the events in *Dziennik* is strongly polarized, although the descriptions of the antagonists vary in each of the texts. First, there is a conflict between *Dziennik*, which uses academic discourse and blogger discourse to support its claims, and Kataryna, whose supposedly unethical behaviour *Dziennik* is trying to stigmatise. Second, *Dziennik* authors are putting themselves in opposition to anonymous internet users who refuse to take responsibility for what they write. And third, there is a conflict between journalists and politicians, whom journalists are not willing to help. Those three conflicts appear throughout *Dziennik*'s coverage with changing intensity. In only one text does the author situate journalists and citizens together on one side of the conflict, and politicians on the other.

Gazeta Wyborcza

The analysis of five texts published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and its online editions shows that this media outlet also presents a rather coherent viewpoint on the events constituting the 'Kataryna case.' All five texts contain a direct or indirect critique of *Dziennik's* actions that culminated in Kataryna's outing.

Gazeta Wyborcza journalists and commentators focus mostly on the dispute between Kataryna and *Dziennik*. The conflict with minister Czuma and his son is presented as a backdrop. The events are often described as a battle or war, such as in the title "The war of Kataryna who had her helmet taken off", which increases newsworthiness and is intended to get readers' attention.

In this battle *Gazeta Wyborcza* authors, while often distancing themselves from Kataryna's views, are in most cases taking her side. There are numerous evaluative statements describing *Dziennik* actions as "scandal", "mean blackmail", "abuse of trust", "lack of public interest". Even in the news article, the ironic portrayal of the *Dziennik* story in which *Dziennik* journalists "did and didn't" disclose Kataryna's identity indicates the journalists' negative opinion.

However, the conflicts reflected in *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s coverage are not limited to the dispute between Kataryna and *Dziennik. Gazeta Wyborcza* authors, while criticizing *Dziennik*, also distance themselves from Kataryna's defenders:

> *Kataryna, whose identity was almost revealed by Dziennik, is being defended by other 'anonyms'. They are supported by website owners who offer publishing platforms to Kataryna and her friends who hide behind pseudonyms.* (GW2)

By using the pejorative noun "anonyms" and the verb "hiding" implying cowardice, the author condemns anonymous bloggers. He also criticizes website owners, who support Kataryna. As the aim of the website owners is usually to make a profit, the implication of this statement is that their support for Kataryna and anonymity is merely instrumental.

Another set of conflicts, which are explored in more detail later in this analysis, can be observed in the interview that *Gazeta Wyborcza* conducted with a blogger, Wojciech Sadurski. Through the construction of questions, the journalist suggests that the Polish public sphere is divided into (good) liberal, leftist media like *Gazeta Wyborcza* and their audiences and (bad) conservative media outlets and audiences. The interviewee opposes this division and describes a different one: between common citizens and the symbolic elites, including journalists and politicians.

Finally, one commentary, written by a female journalist, highlights that the 'Kataryna case' is in fact a gender issue:

> *Why would you have to be more mature than those boys who pull your skirt. Maybe if you had a name and surname, they would quickly find the way to discredit you. And now it is difficult for them to fight with a ghost.* (GW5)

Although the author is generally sceptical towards anonymity, she understands why it might be needed. The "boys who pull [Kataryna's] skirt" are

powerful politicians and journalists, for whom it would be easy to disparage Kataryna's work. Here, anonymity is shown as a tactic that can protect women.

Rzeczpospolita

Overall, *Rzeczpospolita* authors condemned the actions of *Dziennik* towards Kataryna. The newspaper's commentators agree that the data published by *Dziennik* was sufficient to identify Kataryna and that this disclosure was done in a manipulative, immoral way.

The second element condemned by *Rzeczpospolita* authors is the way in which *Dziennik* tried to convince Kataryna to cooperate by suggesting that her identity might be disclosed by another newspaper. Those actions are described as an "execution", "nasty foul", or "filth". Some commentators argue that *Dziennik* staff did not deserve to be called journalists. In addition, a news story titled "Is 'Dz' blackmailing Kataryna" suggests that *Dziennik* did not have any proof that Kataryna behaved in an unethical way.

Rzeczpospolita commentators also devote a lot of attention to uncovering the motives of *Dziennik's* staff. First, they argue that *Dziennik* journalists were simply jealous that a blogger, who is not paid for her writing, delivers better quality content. As one of the authors observes, journalists working for *Dziennik* are afraid that a blogger can compromise their privileged position in shaping public opinion.

Apart from trying to eliminate competition, *Dziennik*'s actions against Kataryna are said to be aimed at boosting sales. It is suggested that *Dziennik*'s circulation was plummeting and that it needed a scandal to sell more copies. Lastly, outing Kataryna is described as a revenge of politically dependent journalists against someone who refused to play by their rules.

7.2.2 Bloggers' discourse

salon24.pl

Since Kataryna was herself a respected blogger on *salon24.pl*, most bloggers on the platform took her side in the conflict with minister Czuma, and later with *Dziennik*. In their posts many bloggers argue that there was no public interest in disclosing Kataryna's identity and that by doing this *Dziennik* took the side of minister Czuma. Kataryna herself describes the action of *Dziennik* journalist as 'luring' and 'threatening':

> *(…) luring potential sources by offering them jobs, then threatening them with colleagues from different newspaper and making offers that cannot be refused.* (B2)

Unlike journalists in the press, bloggers often highlight the relevance of the case for the tenets of democracy. It is claimed that *Dziennik* caused serious harm not only to Kataryna, but also to the freedom of speech in Poland. By revealing Kataryna's real identity, several blog posts note, journalists made it easy for anyone to take revenge on the blogger for her critical comments. At the same time, the outing could have potentially negative implications for freedom of speech in Poland, as other anonymous bloggers may start being afraid to continue writing.

Another perspective on the case is presented in one of Kataryna's blog posts where she states that the debate about anonymity is aimed at diverting attention from the issue of how *Dziennik* journalists acquired and used information.

Overall, blog posts on *salon24.pl* reflect the opposing interests of bloggers, who consider themselves as common citizens on one hand, and journalists trying to secure their elitist position on the other.

blox.pl

While *salon24.pl* is a standard blogging platform whose bloggers share a largely coherent worldview, *blox.pl,* is more of an aggregator of various blogs. However, all five *blox.pl* blog posts analysed in this study paint a similar picture of the 'Kataryna case.'

Although most *blox.pl* bloggers do not value Kataryna's work very highly, they all agree that *Dziennik* journalists did in fact out Kataryna, and that this disclosure was illegitimate. The act of outing Kataryna is portrayed in their blog posts as an abuse of trust that risks harming the whole journalistic profession. It is also seen as an infringement of privacy and autonomy, which cannot be justified by public interest.

Journalistic ethics is a recurring theme in these blog posts. The article revealing details about Kataryna is described in one of the posts as "a jabber and hypocrisy in tabloid aesthetics." Other comments on *Dziennik*'s actions include: "mean blackmail", "slander", "malice", "a nasty act", and "Stalinist methods". Additionally, it is suggested that the paper faces serious economic problems, and its days are numbered.

In only one case a *blox.pl* author focuses on Kataryna's motives and actions, rather than on *Dziennik*'s. While still criticizing the newspaper for the methods it used, the blogger accuses Kataryna of abusing her anonymity in order to avoid moral and legal responsibility.

Lastly, it is important to note that there is no agreement among bloggers when it comes to the overall significance of the 'Kataryna case.' While some argue that the story is nothing more than a typical 'media hype,' others claim it can be crucial for the issue of online anonymity.

Also, the analysis shows clearly that bloggers are much more interested in what happened between Kataryna and *Dziennik,* and pay little attention to the conflict between Kataryna and the Minister of Justice.

In sum, the discourse in *blox.pl* emphasises the differences between reliable, ethical journalists (mostly from *Gazeta Wyborcza*) and the unethical ones (from *Dziennik*). Yet, other conflicts also appear in blog posts. These include the clash between left- and right-wing bloggers and between bloggers and other internet users, often described as 'online trolls.' These conflicts will be explored in later parts of this analysis.

7.3 The discursive construction of journalist identities

The initial reading of the media texts selected for the analysis has indicated that the journalists themselves play a pivotal role in the debate about online anonymity. Almost all the authors writing for newspapers shared their personal experiences related to interactions with anonymous internet users, and on this basis they constructed authoritative opinions and evaluations. The debate around online anonymity became, in fact, one about the participation of various actors in the public sphere.

The following paragraphs focus on the way the identity of journalists is discursively constructed by both journalists themselves and by the bloggers. The analysis explores the representations of journalists and investigates expressions in the texts which define and describe their role, qualities and values. It also seeks to identify polarizing strategies that distinguish journalists from other groups. I also explore the style and genre of the texts in order to investigate the construction of authors' identity and the authors' relationship with their readership.

7.3.1 Media discourse

Dziennik

The identities, roles and qualities of journalists occupy a central place in *Dziennik's* discourse surrounding online anonymity and the 'Kataryna case.' Overall, I identified five main frames used for describing journalists and several types of discursive structures reflecting their relations to other groups.

First, journalists are represented as powerful **guardians of the public sphere.** As a result, they have the right to define its shape and decide on the rules of access. This is particularly visible in the bullish commentary "Open letter to Kataryna defenders*" by *Dziennik's* editor-in-chief, Robert Krasowski:

> *You say that we don't have the right to out Kataryna. Well, we do; we didn't do it only because we didn't want to act like allies of the government. But if we want to, we can out anyone. We are journalists, and not teddy bears like you. We have the right to enter every corner of the public sphere.* (D5)

Per Krasowski, the power to decide who can or cannot be anonymous ultimately lies with journalists. In this sense they are portrayed as very powerful members of the public sphere, with the right to control other participants. Since the new media opened up the public sphere to so-called common citizens, those taking part in public discussions have become an object of journalistic scrutiny.

The superior position of journalists is also evident in the way some *Dziennik* journalists address internet users, for instance by referring to them in a direct way ('you'). Again, the most extreme example is Krasowski's "Open letter to Kataryna defenders". He opens his commentary with a vulgar statement 'Kiss my ass…', which might be interpreted as a provocation and demonstration of power. As Lisowska-Magdziarz (2006) highlights, peoples' freedom to communicate directly, and sometimes impolitely often depends on their social status. The use of offensive, rude language is strongly related to power struggles and might indicate that the speaker is convinced of their privileged position.

Lastly, in all five texts, including those sympathetic toward Kataryna and other anonymous internet users, journalists act as moral guides, who have the authority to evaluate and define the rules of the public debate on the internet. They express mostly normative, not fact-based opinions, and put themselves in the position of experts on how the public sphere should function.

While the conflict between journalists and bloggers occupies a dominant place in *Dziennik's* coverage, the articles often stress the traditional role of journalists as **watchdogs.** *Dziennik* writers strongly underline their independence from politicians. They repeatedly state that the reason they disclosed Kataryna's offline identity was not because they wanted to take the side of the politician, with whom Kataryna was in conflict, but rather to assert the newspaper's independence. There seems to be an agreement that it is not acceptable that politicians use their power to demand the details of anonymous internet users.

However, the role in which journalists are represented much more often is that of **heroes**, particularly when contrasted with anonymous internet users. With one exception, all *Dziennik* texts represent journalists as superior to internet users, and mainly anonymous bloggers, mostly thanks to their "courage" and "accountability". This superiority is repeatedly constructed through the use of

contrastive vocabulary ("journalists' texts" vs. "internet users' flames"; "common citizens" vs. "journalists") and contrasting statements, in which the authors downplay bloggers' concerns about losing anonymity by contrasting them with journalists' responsibilities.

Similarly, a number of other *Dziennik* articles contain the assumption that internet users should be as accountable for their posts as journalists are for their stories. Only one commentator acknowledged that journalists actually enjoy much better protection from lawsuits than other citizens.

The call for equal responsibility also appears as part of another frequently used frame. While being shown as powerful facilitators of the public sphere, journalists also complain that they are **victims** of anonymous internet users who regularly criticize their skills or challenge their objectivity. *Dziennik* authors do not complain about the critique itself, but they present users' anonymity as the most problematic issue. They feel that due to anonymity, internet users have more rights than journalists and that this situation is unfair. They therefore call for equal obligations and accountability for both groups – professional journalists and internet users.

The sample of texts from *Dziennik* includes one isolated opinion depicting journalists as **public servants**, who should respect citizens' critique:

Journalism is a profession based on public trust, and must be subjected to public assessment. The opinions of internet users are one of the aspects of this public assessment. (D2)

In the commentary, citizens are presented as superior to journalists and served by them. This leads the author to the conclusion, that citizens should have the right not to have their real names disclosed, if they so choose, and the media need to listen to their comments. But this opinion article might be the exception that proves the rule.

In sum, the distinctive characteristic of the discursive construction of the journalist identity in *Dziennik's* texts is a strong contrast between journalists and internet users. This is achieved by various **polarisation** tactics, manifested in style, semantic choices and the selection of genres.

First, all *Dziennik* authors identify strongly with their professional group. In each of the five stories there is a repeated use of first person plural form 'we' relating to journalists. This personalized style, typical for commentaries, is also used in one of the news stories about disclosing Kataryna. The authors repeatedly speak in the name of all *Dziennik* staff or all journalists.

The strong identification with other journalists is highlighted by the opposition to both politicians and internet users. On the one hand, *Dziennik* authors position themselves as watchdogs and those who scrutinize the government. On the other, on numerous occasions, they highlight their superiority to internet users. This division, in which journalists occupy a more powerful place, is textually constructed in several ways:

- through the 'us versus them' distinction (e.g. *You assess our skills very harshly, accusing us of influence peddling and bias (…)* (D2))
- by addressing the other side directly (e.g. *Usually I don't talk to you, but this time I will respond.* (D5))
- by using contrastive statements (e.g. *(…) especially when someone is a common citizen, and not a publicist (…)* (D3))
- by explicitly stating difference and superiority (e.g. *(…) but if we wanted to, we can out anybody. We are journalists, and not teddy bears like you.* (D5))

Lastly, by using the commentary genre, the authors could direct their message to specific audiences, for example other journalists or anonymous critics. This was also achieved by combining the op-ed genre with a letter, as was the case with the *Dziennik*'s editor-in-chief commentary. In this strongly worded piece, the author directly addressed his adversaries (anonymous internet users), expressing harsh and in places rude critique. He then added a postscript at the end of his opinion piece in order to clarify that the letter was specifically addressed to a limited group of people.

Gazeta Wyborcza

The journalists of *Gazeta Wyborcza* were not actively involved in the 'Kataryna case,' and therefore their position is more nuanced than was the case with *Dziennik*. Still, some frames and contexts of describing journalists and their role in society are similar to those appearing in *Dziennik*'s coverage.

The major difference is the prevalence of critical comments directed at *Dziennik*, which I categorized as a frame of **professional malpractice**. *Gazeta Wyborcza's* articles highlight the absence of public interest in disclosing Kataryna's identity, and they describe *Dziennik's* actions as "moral abuse", "abuse of trust" and "meanness".

This negative evaluative rhetoric is also visible in the frequent use of informal and often sarcastic style when referring to *Dziennik's* conduct (for example: *How to scare someone with your mates; It gets even more interesting (...); Dziennik managed to conduct an admirable act* (GW 1)).

Gazeta Wyborcza's coverage also includes a mixture of **watchdog** and **virtuousness** frames. Some commentators state that the media had a right to investigate who Kataryna was, since this is their role. One author even lists journalists' duties and responsibilities, suggesting they should equally apply to bloggers:

> *Rights: critiquing the government, presenting opinions, revealing facts that are in the public interest. It is also freedom from censorship, guaranteed by the constitution. The duties include: writing the truth, due diligence, checking facts, giving voice to both sides.* (GW2)

A slightly more critical picture of journalists is constructed by the professor and blogger Wojciech Sadurski interviewed by *Gazeta Wyborcza*. According to him, traditional journalists, together with politicians, are part of the **elite class** which enjoys a monopoly over public discourse in mainstream media:

> *In this discourse two groups dominate: politicians and professional media. But there are so many people that would like to say something, ask something. How? They can write a letter to the editor, but they don't know if it will be published. Maybe a journalist on the street will catch a pedestrian, ask him a stupid question and get a stupid answer.* (GW4)

Journalists, according to Sadurski, decide on which voices get heard in the public sphere. They act as gatekeepers, selecting not only who is given the right to speak but also what the message is.

Much like in *Dziennik*, the representations of journalists, as well as their identities in *Gazeta Wyborcza* are constructed in opposition to other groups in the Polish society.

In particular, the frequent use of the first person plural 'we' stands out showing that the authors strongly identify themselves with the journalist group. However, this identification has two forms. *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalists identify with the journalistic profession as a whole, contrasting it with internet users and bloggers. On such occasions they tend to highlight their superiority, for example by addressing bloggers in the second person form 'you' *(e.g. I pity you and this society you are creating (...)* (GW2)).

At the same time they also put themselves in opposition to *Dziennik's* journalists whom they accuse of unprofessional behaviour. The negative evaluations of *Dziennik* are contrasted with positive evaluations of *Gazeta Wyborcza's* conduct. As one of the authors highlights, even though Kataryna had attacked *Gazeta Wyborcza* many times, he does not feel any satisfaction from her identity being revealed.

Rzeczpospolita

In *Rzeczpospolita,* the representations of journalists mostly revolve around criticizing *Dziennik*'s conduct. The dominant frame used is that of **professional malpractice**. Moreover, *Rzeczpospolita*'s coverage presents it as something typical for *Dziennik* and not at all surprising.

The outing of Kataryna is labelled an "execution" and *Dziennik*'s actions are described as hypocritical (i.e. *(...) one has to appreciate the unique talent of Dziennik, which without outing the blogger – outed her.* (RP2)). *Rzeczpospolita* journalists also point to numerous flaws and manipulations in *Dziennik*'s reporting, such as depicting Kataryna as "scared", "panicking" and "terrified".

While such evaluative statements are most prevalent in commentaries, the negative assessment of *Dziennik*'s conduct is also visible in the news story in the

sample. This story focuses on the investigation of the 'Kataryna case' by the Polish Council of Media Ethics, and it mostly cites the Council's members who are critical of both *Dziennik* and Kataryna. *Dziennik's* side of the story is left for the final part of the text and is limited to the statement of one journalist who admitted she does not have any hard evidence of Kataryna's claimed unethical behaviour. *Dziennik's* editor-in-chief refused to comment on the case, the news story concludes.

One of *Rzeczpospolita's* articles states that *Dziennik* has no right to act as the moral representative of the journalistic community. Additionally, *Dziennik* is frequently accused of using Kataryna to boost its sales, as the newspaper is facing financial problems.

Another recurring theme, also targeting specifically *Dziennik's* journalists, is that of **dogmatism**. I gave this label to statements suggesting that *Dziennik's* authors are overly attached to political divisions in Polish society and therefore need names to establish to which political camp the person speaking belongs:

> *'Dziennik' appealed to this sick habit – it doesn't matter what's Kataryna's argument, we want to know who she is and what family she comes from. And who gave her the right to comment anyway? Otherwise how can we assess if she's right?* (RP4)

One of the texts from *Rzeczpospolita* included in the sample presents edited extracts from blog posts and comments republished by the newspaper. The most frequent frame used for portraying journalists in those texts was that of an **elite class** whose members are afraid to lose their privileged position in the public sphere. Journalists are described as "holy cows, protected by pseudo-law and customs" or "licensed, money making publicists" who want to eliminate competition:

> *Journalists are not exposed to this kind of quality control. What's more, they are not used to others pointing out flaws in their craft or presented facts. They are informing, announcing (…). Taking anonymity away from bloggers is the last chance for them (journalists, KT) to get rid of uncomfortable competition.* (RP5)

> *I see your texts as statements of totally frustrated people, who are afraid that a 'common' blogger will take the 'opinion-forming prestige' away from you.* (RP5)

The journalists are here contrasted with bloggers, who are much better in their writing, even if they don't write professionally. Unlike journalists, bloggers

claimed they are subject to instant critique and judgment to which journalists are not used.

7.3.2 Bloggers' discourse

Salon24.pl

Like in *Rzeczpospolita*, blog posts on *salon24.pl* on the 'Kataryna case' mostly view journalists through the **professional malpractice** prism. Overall, bloggers on the blogging platform agree that *Dziennik* journalists had no good reason to out Kataryna since there was no public interest in doing so. Most bloggers think that journalists in fact helped politicians by taking revenge on Kataryna.

The sampled blog posts include two written by Kataryna herself, in which she uses numerous negative evaluations of the journalistic conduct. First, Kataryna explains what she perceives as journalists' double standards:

> *If the fact that people shape their opinions based on anonymous online comments is so harmful, it is even more harmful if those opinions are shaped by some 'anonymous sources' quoted by journalists who might only exist in journalists' heads.* (S2)

She suggests that the solution might be to abandon all types of anonymity, including the anonymity of journalistic sources. Although the statement is provocative, it demonstrates a deep distrust between bloggers and journalists.

Kataryna justifies her distrust with detailed descriptions of journalistic abuses. For example, she recalls a case when the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote a commentary on a controversial case he had been involved in which he published in the 'letter to editors' section of his own newspaper, signed with a pseudonym. Additionally, by criticizing the methods that *Dziennik* used to out her, Kataryna expresses her concerns about the state of Polish journalism.

Overall, her blog posts indicate a strong polarisation between journalists and bloggers. By using mostly the first person plural form 'we', Kataryna seeks to speak on behalf of all bloggers when addressing journalists directly:

> *You can think about us whatever you want, you can stop reading what we write, you can disrespect us, you can bridle at us, say we are cowards, but that is all you can do.*

*Stay away from our rights. The fact that Czuchnowski [a Gazeta Wyborcza journalist,
KT] or anyone else hallucinated that everyone must use real names, because they think
so, doesn't imply any obligations on us, because that is regulated by the law.* (S4)

Using a manifesto genre, she speaks as a defender of bloggers' rights. She reminds journalists that they do not have a right to influence the form of others' participation in the public discourse.

Bloggers' harsh criticism towards *Dziennik* journalists, and the newspapers' editor in chief in particular, comes mainly as a response to his commentary "A letter to Kataryna's defenders". One blog post titled "A tiny letter to Krasowski*"* uses an informal writing style, at places using rude language, to demonstrate the blogger's disgust with *Dziennik's* staff and to humiliate the paper's editor-in-chief Robert Krasowski. The text repeatedly addresses Krasowski with the seemingly polite, but in effect sarcastic and patronizing phrase 'Dear Robert', and describes him as a looser and poor manager of *Dziennik.*

Despite the attack being personal, the blog post is indicative of the strong polarisation between journalists and bloggers. Bloggers are shown as superior to journalists since they do the same things as journalists on top of their main work. Additionally, journalists are shown as those who 'fawn' on bloggers and 'beg' them for comments:

*So the indication of your moral values is the fact that you throw up on those who you
invite to write on your forum at the same time; that you threaten others with
disclosure, asking them to write anonymously for dziennik.pl at the same time (...).
Dear Robert, how many times did your newspaper beg for readers' opinions in order to
increase the number of clicks? How many times, even in relation to the Kataryna case,
were you asking bloggers for interviews?* (S3)

In the above quote, the author highlights *Dziennik's* hypocrisy and insincerity. Like Kataryna's argument, he states that journalists' attitude towards anonymity is inconsistent, and that the most important factor for them are financial benefits.

Blox.pl

Although some of the bloggers on *blox.pl* identify themselves as media staff, the overall attitude towards journalists in the context of the 'Kataryna case' is negative. The critique is mostly directed at journalists as a professional group, and specifically at right wing journalists, *Dziennik* journalists, and particular *Dziennik* employees.

Once again, **professional malpractice** is the most common frame in *blox.pl* blog posts. Specifically, the act of disclosing Kataryna's identity is seen as a symptom of the overall poor condition of Polish journalism, and particularly the lack of a journalistic etiquette. One *blox.pl* author expresses the view that the 'Kataryna case' should be resolved at court to set the standards for future media practice.

The harshest critique targets *Dziennik* and journalists engaged in outing Kataryna. They are referred to as "journo-dwarfs" or "journalists" (put in square quotes), and the story in which information about Kataryna was disclosed is dubbed "a monster" or "a pathetic scribble".

Cezary Michalski, the author of the *Dziennik* commentary "The lost honour of Kataryna" is described as mean and lacking ethical and even aesthetic standards. Similarly, *Dziennik's* Robert Krasowski is humiliated by bloggers who contend that he had wanted to prove his moral superiority by "flashing his naked butt". There are also numerous references to *Dziennik*'s financial troubles to imply, again, that the disclosure of Kataryna was a way for the newspaper to boost its sales.

Kataryna's outing was also used by *blox.pl* authors to criticize conservative media as a whole. They repeatedly stress that although Kataryna was always very critical toward *Gazeta Wyborcza*, nobody there tried to reveal her real identity, which, as some bloggers claim, was known to many people. She was eventually outed by journalists who shared her political worldview and whom in the past she had supported.

Additionally, *blox.pl* authors' representations of journalists include elements of the **guardians of the public sphere** frame. Journalists are presented as powerful actors that have access to internet users' data (such as IP number) and it is only their choice to challenge someone's anonymity.

Only in one blog post does the author portray journalists as **victims** of Kataryna. Her anonymity is described as a form of power over those she criticized. The blogger argues that she abused this power.

In sum, while there is no agreement about the value of anonymity on the internet, all analysed *blox.pl* posts criticize journalists for the way they treated Kataryna. This criticism is personal and political and it demonstrates a clear ideological aversion toward conservative media in general, and *Dziennik* and its journalists in particular.

7.4 The discursive construction of internet users' identities

The second most prominent group in the media discourse surrounding online anonymity are internet users. In the following section I first look at how newspaper journalists wrote about internet users, and then I analyze what identities internet users built for themselves. I also investigate the polarizing strategies used for distinguishing this group from others. The main aim of this section is to establish what roles, qualities and values were attributed to internet users by themselves and by Polish journalists.

7.4.1 Media discourse

Dziennik

One of the main characteristics of *Dziennik*'s coverage of the 'Kataryna case' is that it was mostly positioned within the broader context of internet users' anonymity. At times Kataryna is presented as an example of destructive online behaviour, and at times as an exceptional case of wit and intelligence in an online environment dominated by hate and trolling. Either way, internet users who do not use their legal names online are portrayed mostly in a negative way.

As indicated earlier, most authors of the analyzed texts from *Dziennik* show little respect to anonymous internet users. Often they are represented as frustrated individuals who never achieved anything significant.

One way of constructing this negative picture is by using irony and sarcasm in order to ridicule anonymous users and delegitimize their contributions to online debates. Journalists describe them in a caricatural way as *anonymous soldiers of the Polish internet* (D2), *merciless judges of the visible world* (D2) or *knights of freedom* (D5) who anonymously criticize various public figures, including journalists and politicians.

Those pompous images of 'soldiers', 'knights' and 'fighters' are then juxtaposed with images of small, weak and scared individuals who ventilate their real-life frustrations online:

> *They are bludgeoning their keyboards, at the attic or in the office, and living through their will to power until they hear the scream of their boss , or their mother's or wife's call to take out the trash or walk the doggie.* (D2)

In "A letter to Katryna's defenders," the author compares anonymous internet users to the grotesque 'small people' from the novels of Gogol and Dostoyevsky, who go online to attack others, spread hate and spit bile. He also makes reference to the movie "The Matrix," stating that Polish internet users have nothing in common with heroic Neo, and instead resemble Cypher – a cowardly agent and traitor. According to the author, internet users have never achieved anything in their fierce battle with the elites, as they lack competencies, strength and courage.

Additionally, in almost every story, *Dziennik* authors present a list of opinions, animosities or prejudices presumably held by anonymous internet users:

> *The controversy relates only to this noisy group, which will soon call me a traitor, Jew, gay, communist and German.* (D5)

According to the newspaper, Polish internet users are usually radical, anti-communist, anti-Semitic, Germanophobes, who fanatically hold one political view, fiercely criticising representatives of oppositional perspectives. Moreover, according to *Dziennik* authors, Polish anonymous users are particularly rude and aggressive, much more than users in the West. England and France are two countries that are repeatedly contrasted with Poland.

I just don't like you, envious people who have became the plague of the Polish internet.
Go to the websites of western newspapers; even in tabloids you won't find such
moronic comments as yours. (D4)

According to some of the authors, the explanation for this particularly aggressive behaviour of Polish internet users can be found in the communist past, as well as the long Polish history of occupation and partitions:

As a nation, we definitely were oppressed for too long for it not to leave a mark on our
psyche. When we speak using our real name, having something to lose, we are often
opportunistic, cowardly, 'cunning.' Only when we put on a mask, do we become brave,
mercilessly critical and radical. This is one of the secrets that explain the rage and
shouts in the Polish internet. (D2)

The above quote suggests that without anonymity Polish people are afraid to speak their mind. In fact, the frame of **cowards** is another common way to describe internet users in *Dziennik.* Authors use anonymity to avoid responsibility for their words. *Dziennik's* editor-in-chief concludes that the whole battle for anonymity is in fact a panic reaction of terrified cowards who are afraid that journalists will discover their real life identity as they did in the case of Kataryna.

This 'coward' frame is also applied to Kataryna, as she is most often described in the context of double standards and fear. First, Kataryna is shown as an important member of the Polish elite – a head of foundation who engages in business relations with public institutions, and at the same time a belligerent blogger who anonymously criticizes those whom she earns the money from. Journalists label this as unethical and claim that Kataryna is not in a position to criticize others. In fact, *Dziennik* journalists refuse to accept that Kataryna might influence the way internet users perceive their work. As one of them complains:

Internet users form their opinions about journalism, and particularly journalists, based
on her posts – and she does not take any responsibility for this. (D1)

Kataryna's anonymity is then used to delegitimize her opinions and contributions to the public debate, especially those which concern journalists.

Nearly as prevalent are depictions of Kataryna as a coward who is afraid that the opinions she expressed online might be connected with her offline

identity. The vocabulary related to fear ('panicked', 'scared', 'hide', 'afraid') dominates the way she is represented.

The negative image of anonymous internet users is also constructed through the comparison with professional journalists and politicians. In the first case, *Dziennik* articles stress that journalists are accountable for their actions and that they are not afraid to take the risk when fulfilling their watchdog role.

As for politicians, *Dziennik* commentators claim that their contributions to the online debate, signed with real names, even those of low value, are worth more than even the most eloquent anonymous texts.

While the contexts of **fear** and the label of **frustrated losers** dominate the representations of internet users, journalists also explain that they do not see all internet users the same way. This is frequently done by using apparent denials (van Dijk 1998). This semantic move describes a situation in which a big part of the text is dedicated to one strategy (i.e. criticizing internet users), and only a short disclaimer realizes another (i.e. expressing solidarity with them).

At the end of his "open letter" *Dziennik*'s editor-in-chief clarifies that he is addressing his critique only to the small but loud group of internet users who criticized the newspaper for outing Kataryna and he excludes those who use constructive arguments. Earlier in his commentary, however, he states that aggressive and 'frustrated' people dominate the Polish internet.

Lastly, only one of the *Dziennik* commentaries analysed describes anonymous internet users in a positive way as inquisitive, socially engaged **citizens** who need anonymity in order to freely express their opinions.

Gazeta Wyborcza

Despite opposing *Dziennik*'s disclosure of Kataryna's identity, *Gazeta Wyborcza* paints a largely negative picture of internet users.

First, articles frequently describe bloggers as **cowards** who 'hide' behind pseudonyms. They repeatedly argue that those who make even low quality comments but sign them with their names are superior to anonymous authors regardless of their interventions.

Another argument used by *Gazeta Wyborcza's* authors against internet users is that they aspire to become an **elite** seeking to shape the public discourse but without accepting the responsibilities that come with that. According to one article, bloggers have the same rights and responsibilities as professional journalists since they seek to influence politics, and therefore should not have more privileges than journalists. Similarly, it argues, Kataryna had provoked media attention since she supposedly crossed the line between a blogger and an aspiring public figure.

One story, however, presents a different view of internet users. In an interview with a blogger and academic, internet users are primarily portrayed as a **disadvantaged group** that needs to fight for their right to participate in the public sphere. Internet users, the interviewee says, are people outside elite circles who want to have their voices heard and who want a debate instead of having to listen to monologues. He also observes that bloggers are increasingly a threat to traditional journalists. An interesting aspect of the interview is a discursive struggle between the interviewer and the interviewee over the lines of polarisations:

> [Journalist:] [...] right wing internet users are convinced that the media is dominated by the liberal left and that they have no chance to get through. Apparently, Poland is ruled by "Wyborcza"...
>
> [Interviewee:] This conviction unites both right wing and left wing Internet users. Here we touch upon the most important issue, when it comes to the place of blogs in the public sphere. The blogosphere opened up an amazing space for people and opinions which haven't had a place in the public discourse. (...) This discourse is dominated by two groups – politicians and professional media. (GW4)

The extract above shows two different visions of the polarisations in the Polish public sphere. The journalist implies that the division lines fall between the 'left' and the 'right'. By using sarcasm and citing a conspiracy theory, she states that conservative bloggers believe that Polish media are dominated by representatives of the 'liberal left' and others have no access to the public sphere. In turn, the interviewee draws a different picture of the division. He suggests that the struggle to access to the public sphere involves internet users on the one hand, and

professional journalists and politicians, who now constitute the symbolic elite, on the other.

Rzeczpospolita

In contrast with the coverage in *Dziennik* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the image of internet users in *Rzeczspospolita* is mostly positive. However, there is a very clear distinction between Kataryna, bloggers in general, and those users who engage in uncivil speech in various forums:

> *It is as if Kataryna had been anonymously assaulting people on blogs and internet forums, instead of writing independent, sharp commentaries, for which in our country people are openly harassed, even at universities.* (RP4)

In this opinion article Kataryna is shown as an uncompromising **opinion leader** who worked hard to establish herself and built a large readership thanks to her skills and insightful comments. Moreover, she is said to write better than some journalists - those who want to discredit her driven by jealousy.

In addition to commentaries by *Rzeczpospolita*'s own authors – who are supportive of Kataryna – the newspaper also republished a number of extracts from various blog posts, where a distinct majority was also in favour of her. In these texts she is represented not only as an opinion leader and the 'voice of citizens,' but also as a **hero** and a **martyr:**

> *She was anonymous in order for us to find out what is really happening 'inside' the public life in our country. (RP5)*
>
> *If they destroy Kataryna, they would destroy us all. (RP5)*
>
> *We will monitor your history in the press and protect you from harm. (RP5)*

The above extracts highlight the strong polarisation between internet users and journalists, accelerated by the oppositional rhetoric. The bloggers quoted in *Rzeczpospolita* show solidarity with Kataryna and see her as their symbol. Moreover, they highlight the differences between themselves and journalists, stating that their involvement in the public sphere is much more challenging and risky.

In one exceptional negative opinion about Kataryna she is portrayed as a self-proclaimed member of the **elite.** One of the blog posts reprinted by *Rzeczpospolita* argues that Kataryna was not an anonymous blogger. Rather, her opinions had too big of an impact and she has become a public figure, and therefore she should not be surprised that journalists were interested in her identity.

7.4.2 Bloggers' discourse

Salon24.pl

Although the critique of *Dziennik's* conduct was dominant in *salon24.pl* blogs, the evolving discourse delineated the bloggers group as distinct from both traditional journalists and other internet users.

First, internet users are portrayed as the true **watchdogs** (in contrast to journalists) able to monitor both politicians and the media. Kataryna is shown as a good example for that. One blogger describes her as the "unofficial centre for monitoring of media freedom and reliability" (S5).

Positioning the debate within the broader context of the democratic transition, one author argues that bloggers have managed to weaken the post-communist media elites and they are the only guarantors of pluralism in the public sphere. A similar opinion is expressed in another blog post that describes the internet as the last bastion of free speech:

> *The internet is the last place where one can freely discuss everything and point out mistakes of politicians, even in a hostile tone.* (S1)

Apart from playing the role of watchdogs, internet users are also portrayed as common **citizens** for whom commenting on news and the society is not a profession but a pastime:

> *Those bloggers, whom you despise so much, are doing it all on the side. For a living they cure people, write books or court files, they have their own businesses (…). (S3)*

This is why, according to *salon24.pl*'s authors, they deserve extra protection and should have a right to write anonymously.

Overall, the posts demonstrate how bloggers built for themselves a distinctive collective identity. On one hand, it is the frequent use of the first person plural 'we', and referring to each other as colleagues (e.g. Kataryna is often called 'our salon's colleague'). At the same time, bloggers' collective identity is constructed in opposition to both journalists and other internet users, sometimes called 'trolls.' In the blog post "A tiny letter to Krasowski" the author challenges journalists' ability to attract readers to the content they produce:

> *Because we, few people on Janke's platform [Igor Janke, the founder of salon24.pl, KT], have a few million visits per week. And we don't do it professionally. How many visits do blogs on redakcja.pl [a blogging platform established by Dziennik's publisher [KT]) have?* (S3)

As for other internet users, the *salon24.pl* author contrasts Kataryna with online trolls, described as "intellectual rubbish" or a "rabble". Another blogger wonders if the media would be equally interested in Kataryna had she simply been one of the 'online trolls':

> *If Kataryna was one of the boors (one of those who lost their masks and now they are afraid), would half of Warsaw chase her like a Yeti? And would you like to have a boor in your newsroom?* (S3)

Blox.pl

For bloggers on *blox.pl* the story was mostly about *Dziennik* and its journalists, with only little attention to internet users as a group. Yet, their posts include numerous evaluations of Kataryna and her conduct.

Her blog posts are described as 'boring', 'too long' or 'resembling propaganda', and *blox.pl* contributors most often refer to her as a **conservative, right-wing** blogger. More specifically, all authors on the platform have either a negative or a neutral view of Kataryna, but at the same time, in the dispute with *Dziennik* they all take her side*.

The discourse on *blox.pl* repeatedly features polarizing strategies where authors point out differences between themselves - bloggers on the platform run

by *Gazeta Wyborcza* - and the conservative media and internet users at large. One blogger openly expresses satisfaction that Kataryna had been 'betrayed' by *Dziennik* journalists who, in principle, shared her conservative world view.

Blox.pl authors, while seeing in Kataryna an important figure, express mostly negative views of other anonymous internet users. Whereas Kataryna is considered one of the most famous bloggers in Poland, bloggers on the platform make sure to draw a clear distinction between her and so-called online trolls.

One blog post criticizes *Dziennik*'s editor-in-chief for equating Kataryna with such online trolls in his commentary. Recalling the time he had worked as a moderator of one online forum, the author paints a harsh picture of his experience with internet users:

> *(…) despite switching my brain off, after a few hours of separating shit (to go) from mud (can stay), I had a feeling I stink of something. And that 'never again', and 'where do those people come from' and 'they are not people, they are wolves', and so on.* (B5)

In another blog post Kataryna is described as a powerful member of the **elite** who refuses to accept responsibility for her actions. In this case she is portrayed as a political blogger who specializes in criticizing Polish politicians and journalists, and her fame stems from her sharp writing and anonymity which give her a certain clout. Comparing Kataryna to her 'victims,' the author states that while the people criticized were commonly known and had to face the consequences of Kataryna's accusation, she was avoiding both legal and moral responsibility for her words. He describes it as plain cowardice.

The author goes on to argue that Kataryna was in fact a public person. She had been interviewed in the media on various occasions and had written on different platforms. Therefore, the author concludes, the only reason for Kataryna to stay anonymous was to evade moral and legal responsibility. To support his claims the author brings quotes from Kataryna's interview in which she states that without anonymity she would be at risk of being sued, and that the opinions she expresses on her blog could threaten her professional contacts. For him it is a paradox, double standards and hypocrisy.

7.5 The discursive construction of online anonymity

The previous sections of this chapter examined the representations of the main participants of the debate around the 'Kataryna case' and the issue of online anonymity. The final stage of the analysis looks into how online anonymity itself is represented. As in the earlier sections, I analyze the dominant frames used in the discussion about online anonymity, the main arguments for and against it, as well as potential controversies and conflicts involved. The conclusions from this inquiry will inform the critical analysis of the main struggles around online anonymity described in the next chapter.

7.5.1 Media discourse

Dziennik

After effectively disclosing Kataryna's real identity, *Dziennik* embarked on a crusade against online anonymity in general. It published a series of opinion articles, written by representatives of various groups (e.g. academics, celebrities, actors), most of whom were very critical of anonymous speech on the internet. The criticism was already visible in the headlines which included "The internet is ruled by anonymous informers"; "Jacykow: On the internet everyone can be shit on"; "Do you also spit anonymously on the internet?", "Holowka: the frustrated love anonymity". Overall, the commentaries associated online anonymity with denunciation, hate speech and cowardice.

Most texts included in the sample have similarly negative overtones, although the positions toward anonymity were more nuanced. The sample contains one commentary in which the author openly defends anonymity. While this text might be a fig leaf, it was my intention to present the whole range of opinions expressed by *Dziennik's* authors.

The recurring claim in *Dziennik*'s representations of online anonymity is that it has an **adverse impact on the public sphere and democracy.** According to the authors, the anonymity of a participant in the public sphere makes

discussions impossible and creates highly unethical, asymmetrical discursive relations. As one author contends:

> *Those merciless judges of the sublunary world harshly criticize behaviors, texts, and statements of public figures from the safe position of anonymity. (…) While it is a form of direct democracy, because of anonymity it inevitably takes the shape of denunciations and insults.* (D2)

Related to the place of anonymity in the public sphere are reflections on the **professional conduct** of journalists and internet users. According to *Dziennik* authors, anonymity gives internet users more privileges than journalists have. One of the most prevalent themes in *Dziennik's* coverage of the 'Kataryna case' is a contrast between anonymous bloggers, who are perceived to be evading responsibility for what they publish, and traditional journalists, who are seen as fully accountable for their writings. On several occasions, commentators point to an open conflict between internet users and journalists. They feel bloggers are hostile towards them, and despise them even more than they despise politicians.

This open hostility, which sometimes becomes offensive, is said to be facilitated by online anonymity and caused by the lack of understanding of journalistic standards. Additionally, anonymity is often viewed as a panic reaction of cowards who refuse to take responsibility for their words.

In another group of arguments about online anonymity *Dziennik* authors claim that the **value of attribution** is higher than the value of a meaningful argument:

> *When [politicians, KT] Richard Henry Czarnecki, Janusz Palikot, Leszek Miller, Waldemar Kuczyński are blogging … they might be writing stupid things, but they sign them with their own names. With all respect to Kataryna's analytical skills, which she proved many times in her blog, I see it as an advantage over her.* (D2)

The second value highlighted by *Dziennik's* journalists is **accountability.** Online anonymity is immoral, they argue, since it allows critique without responsibility. It also poses legal problems – for example, when anonymous authors write lies or defamatory statements.

Interestingly, despite the explicitly negative evaluation of anonymity, visible on the lexical level, *Dziennik's* journalists often include a sentence or a paragraph in which they explain that, in fact, they support the right to anonymity:

Let's also clarify the issue of anonymity on the internet. I am for it. In many countries, also in Poland, an individual is too weak in comparison to the government or corporations, and the law is often only an illusion. (D5)

This is another example of the so called apparent denial (Van Dijk, 1998) where authors construct one dominant message, but include a statement that indicate otherwise. The possible explanation is that journalists feel that criticizing anonymity on the internet might be in conflict with the support for freedom of expression expected from them, or with their generally negative assessment of the condition of Poland's democratisation process. Some *Dziennik* authors point out that anonymity on the internet should in some situations be protected since the **Polish democracy is imperfect** and freedom of speech is limited.

One exceptional commentary, written by a senior *Dziennik* journalist, offers an outspoken defence of anonymity. Interestingly, arguments in favour of anonymity often use the same frames as the ones against it - that is, **the impact of anonymity on the public sphere** and **the professional conduct of journalist and internet users**.

The author emphasizes the role of online anonymity as an important factor in making the public sphere more inclusive and encouraging those who would otherwise not participate in a debate:

Anonymity ensures that the authors are not limited by their social position or their occupation. Let's imagine how careful a teacher from a small town would have to be. He would have to probably quickly resign from blogging because his posts would be reviewed by his school's principal, his pupils' parents or maybe his own wife. Let's think under what pressure would, let's say, a famous film director be if he decided to express his opinions. (D3)

The commentary also stresses that journalism is based on public trust and therefore it has to be accountable to the public. The anonymous opinions of internet users are the manifestation of this public scrutiny, and they should be accepted by journalists like any other form of opinion. Moreover, this article

depicts online anonymity **as a right and as a new value**, which came together with new technology. He portrays it as a gift of the 21st century, not a curse.

The author's support for anonymity, however, is not absolute. The text also includes a list of **conditions** under which anonymity should be compromised. Court should have the right to identify the author if there is a threat to public security, if this is a case of hate speech, or if the content is defamatory toward "the most important people in the country".

Finally, it is important to note that the most common journalistic genre used in *Dziennik* to reflect on the 'Kataryna case' is commentary, written either by *Dziennik* staff journalists or various guest commentators.

The prevalent choice of the commentary genre to cover the 'Kataryna case' and the related issue of online anonymity is understandable, as *Dziennik* was directly involved in the events. It also shows that the debate about bloggers' right to write anonymously was treated by journalist in a very personal way. Journalists considered themselves as experts on the topic, describing situations in which online anonymity had negative implications. Interestingly, positive accounts of online anonymity were mostly theoretical and hypothetical.

Journalists also hardly ever used external sources to support their arguments.. In rare occasions, when texts cite independent experts, they would be lawyers and academics or the texts would refer to legal regulations. In all those cases external sources are used to support claims against online anonymity.

Gazeta Wyborcza

The texts included in the sample show that *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s coverage of online anonymity was much more diverse than in *Dziennik.* Yet, despite encompassing a wider range of opinions in favour of anonymous communication online, it is evident that *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalists see anonymity as mostly problematic.

In a commentary titled "The sad case of Kataryna" the author states explicitly that **there is no place for online anonymity in a democratic public sphere.** Anonymity, he argues, is the antithesis of democracy and freedom of speech. In order to be credible and respectful participants in public debates must not conceal their identities:

In a democracy, the anonymity of a participant in a public debate is not a value and has nothing to do with freedom of speech. It is a caricature of this freedom. Telling people that it is not the case is brainwashing them and destroying the idea of democracy. (GW2)

A similar view is expressed in an interview included in the sample, where questions posed by the journalist reflect this kind of scepticism about the value of online anonymity, especially in democratic societies:

Anonymity in authoritarian countries protects people from persecution, but what is its role in a democracy? (GW4)

If anyone can write everything in a blog, then gossips equal facts. (GW4)

The debate surrounding online anonymity, as it appears in *Gazeta Wyborcza* texts, also essentially boils down to a conflict over values. First, like in *Dziennik's* coverage, the journalists value **attribution** more than the substance of the message:

I agree that if someone is making judgments they should do it transparently, especially when these judgments are negative. If you spit, you should do it with an open helmet. When the conflict between Kataryna and the son of minister Czuma started, I thought that the minister is embarrassing himself, but at least he did this under his own name. In that matter I see his superiority over Kataryna. (GW3)

Another set of values which anonymity was juxtaposed against includes **accountability, responsibility** and **courage.** Anonymous participation in the public sphere is described as "plain cowardice." The conflict between anonymity and responsibility is also implied in the news story "The war of Kataryna who had her helmet taken off." The subheading "Anonymity versus responsibility" and the selection of opinions also indicate that these two concepts are mutually exclusive.

However, despite online anonymity being described as undesirable, *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s authors write that the choice of how much information to disclose should be left with the author. As stated earlier, *Gazeta Wyborcza* describes the disclosure of Kataryna's identity by *Dziennik* was as illegitimate.

The only opinion that is fully supportive of online anonymity is expressed in an interview with an academic and blogger. Unlike *Gazeta Wyborcza's* own

journalists, he argues that **anonymity is also needed in the public sphere** of a democratic society:

> *The positive side of anonymity is the protection of the writer – not from persecution, since we live in a democratic country, but from negative reactions of various groups, from revenge. This is a protection of all the views which are not popular or which could lead to negative social sanctions, once the author's identity is revealed.* (GW4)

The interviewee also defends anonymity in response to arguments that it can lead to a situation in which facts would be difficult to be distinguished from gossip and slander. According to him this is not a problem, as the **free marketplace of ideas** would verify which opinions are valuable:

> *I believe in a free marketplace of ideas. We read anonymous texts in a different way than those signed. Anonymity is a sign for the reader to treat the controversial content with caution. Besides, the immediate response to every untrue or improbable text would be a dozen of rectifications, critiques and polemics.* (GW4)

Rzeczpospolita

In contrast to *Dziennik* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, commentators in *Rzeczpospolita* depict online anonymity as a mostly positive element in the public debate on the internet. Two commentaries written by the newspaper's journalists, as well as a collection of commentaries written by internet users and republished by *Rzeczpospolita*, present a dominantly critical standpoint towards *Dziennik* and take the side of anonymous authors.

According to *Rzeczpospolita's* authors, anonymity has an **important place in the public sphere** since it makes it more **inclusive.** First, it is argued that anonymity encourages participation in online discussion, especially of people for whom blogging is just a hobby outside work. Anonymity can help separate these two spheres and prevent problems that might arise from expressing certain views.

Additionally, *Rzeczpospolita* commentators observe that thanks to online anonymity the general public can get 'an insider view' of the political scene, and anonymous bloggers are therefore presented as **whistle-blowers**.

Rzeczpospolita's authors and commentators also discuss anonymity in the context of **professional values and rights.** They suggest that disclosing

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information about Kataryna by *Dziennik* qualifies as a breach of journalistic ethics and should be investigated by the Media Ethics Council. Anonymity is viewed as a right that cannot be restricted by journalists.

What also markedly differentiates the discourse in *Rzeczpospolita* from that in *Dziennik* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* is the emphasis on the value of arguments instead of the value of authorship. All three commentaries written by *Rzeczpospolita* journalists stress that **content is more important than authors' identities.** Responding to *Dziennik*'s accusation that it is impossible to argue with an anonymous author, one of *Rzeczpospolita's* journalists writes:

> *"Dziennik" authors assume that one argues with a surname. I thought you argue with an argument. That's why I don't mind that someone wants to remain anonymous as long as he behaves in a decent way.* (PR2)

The commentators also point out that some groups in the Polish society are so used to assessing content through the prism of the author's past and political affiliation that without this information they are unable to judge an argument on its own.

While anonymity is predominantly shown as a valuable characteristic of online public debates, all *Rzeczpospolita* authors mention **conditions** and **limitations** to its use. Yet, in most cases those limitations are not very clearly defined. Anonymity is viewed as valuable as long as internet users avoid derogatory speech, obey the rules, and observe the standards of decency.

Negative anonymous behaviours, however, are presented as a price to pay for internet freedom. As one of the authors points out, there are much more serious issues:

> *Anonymity is sometimes a problem, when it is used for throwing insults and insinuations. Unfortunately, this is the cost of internet freedom. The problem is that in a Polish debate there are powerful players who use their position and can do it using their own name, or the name of their clients. And they use courts to block critique directed at them. This is our problem.* (RP2)

There is only one comment featured in *Rzeczpospolita* that explicitly opposes online anonymity:

Making cowardice look like a value is an act of idiocy, and adding ideological arguments is embarrassing. If someone doesn't understand that anonymity does not expand freedom but threatens it, because anonymity has nothing to do with an intrinsic element of the human free will as well as respect – right and obligation to bear responsibility for one's choices – I will obviously not explain that, but can only deplore that (…). (RP4)

This opinion, however, appears among eight other blog extracts republished by *Rzeczpospolita* which almost unanimously describe anonymity as a valuable aspect of online debates.

7.5.2 Bloggers's discourse

salon24.pl

All five *salon24.pl* blog posts in the sample present a favourable view of online anonymity. Bloggers see it as a right and a valuable aspect of the public sphere, especially in Poland, where the level of democracy, in their opinion, leaves a lot to be desired.

To begin with, the bloggers describe a number of situations in which anonymity would play an **important role in the public sphere.** Kataryna lists three such situations: a gay blogger who might lobby for gay rights online; a watchdog blogger who monitors the conduct of local politicians; or a teenage girl who discusses her abortion experience. Using a number of rhetorical questions Kataryna asks what public interest there would be in disclosing their identities. Her answer is: none.

Other bloggers argue that anonymity secures a diversity of opinions in the public sphere. By helping separate authors' online identities from the offline ones, they say, anonymity protects citizens from social or political retribution.

This last point seems particularly important for *salon24.pl*'s bloggers since they all hold the opinion that **the Polish democracy is in a bad condition.** Anonymity is, therefore, an important aspect of freedom of speech:

Of course it would be better and nobler to speak openly, but Poland is not a country ruled by law where the truth always wins. (B5)

The above extracts exemplify the so-called pessimistic view of the democratic transformation in Poland, characteristic mostly of people with conservative views. Since they claim that free speech in Poland is restricted, and that political and media elites use their power to silence citizens, they see anonymity as a way to counter them.

Online anonymity is also discussed in the context of a **professional struggle between journalists and internet users.** According to *salon24.pl*'s bloggers, journalists have double standards when it comes to anonymity. They also accuse the media for frequently quoting anonymous sources in their stories and allowing anonymous comments on their websites. Bloggers see that as hypocrisy. They claim that attacks on online anonymity by journalists are in fact directed at citizens who are critical of the media.

Lastly, when discussing online anonymity bloggers show their attachment to **values** different to the ones expressed by most journalists. First, anonymity is viewed as a right and value on its own. According to Kataryna, the right to anonymity is an element of freedom which Poland gained with the fall of communism:

> *A free person is a person who decides about their form of participation in a public*
> *debate. Some do it for the parliamentary allowances, others for salaries in newspapers,*
> *and others do it for free, wherever they want. I think that's what the freedom we*
> *gained 20 years ago is all about.* (B4)

Secondly, bloggers value freedom more than respect and responsibility. As the excerpt below indicates, they just want to be independent and not forced to something not demanded by law:

> *We are not demanding respect, we don't expect anyone to see our comments as*
> *reliable. All we want is for our right to anonymity to be respected because in a*
> *democratic country and a healthy society nobody can be forced to do something that is*
> *not mandatory.* (B4)

Finally, like *Rzeczpospolita* journalists, bloggers show that they value content more than the identity of the author, which does not mean that authors

should have full immunity. According to bloggers, anonymity might be compromised only in extraordinary circumstances.

blox.pl

While there are significant differences in perception and evaluation of online anonymity among *blox.pl* contributors, the overall view is supportive. All authors agree that anonymity is a right, and that withholding identifying information is an author's autonomous decision.

Anonymity, according to *blox.pl*'s authors, is closely related to privacy. One blogger presents a hypothetical situation of a science-fiction writer who wants to remain anonymous because he is also an academic. In this case anonymity allows **the separation of two roles which might collide,** preventing the 'collapse of context' (Marwick and boyd 2011). The blogger states that even if some insiders knew the real name of the sci-fi writer, they would keep it for themselves to avoid a breach of trust. Online anonymity is here portrayed as an aspect of privacy and a personal right.

Online anonymity is also associated with freedom and being at ease when participating in a **digital public sphere**. One author observes that, ironically, it is *blox.pl* – a platform related to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which Kataryna so often criticized – where she did not have to worry about her offline identity being revealed.

There is only one post that openly depicts online anonymity as a negative feature of the internet. The author sees it as problematic that Kataryna used anonymity to criticize specific politicians and journalists. First, he states that anonymity makes it impossible to know the social status of a person. Therefore, people who were criticized by Kataryna couldn't know if she *was a minister or a toilets attendant* (B4). This, according to the author, **is a form of power**, allowing Kataryna to evade not only legal responsibility, but also a moral one**.** The author argues that Kataryna made it clear herself, stating that she uses anonymity to prevent lawsuits. He also claims that online anonymity leads to paradoxes, double life and hypocrisy, and also allows **cowardice** which is unacceptable in a democratic country.

7.6 Summary

The main aim of this chapter was to introduce the 'Kataryna case' and investigate how three traditional newspapers, as well as bloggers on two blogging platforms covered and commented on the events. Using Critical Discourse Analysis tools, I explored three areas of the debate: the representations of the case itself, the discursive representations of the main actors and the identities they built for themselves and lastly, the representations of the issue of online anonymity.

The results of the analysis can be summarized in five main points. First, the debate shows divergent views of the public sphere and the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved. The vision promoted by traditional media is more hierarchical, based on trusted sources and promoting rationality over inclusion. Bloggers saw this vision as elitist and oppressive. In their view, the most important aspect of the democratic public sphere is the freedom to choose the form of one's participation.

Second, a related conflict that emerges from the discourse is that of journalists' professional standards vis-à-vis the rules of conduct for internet users. In most cases journalists saw themselves as the guardians of the public sphere, heroes and watchdogs, who have the right to decide on the rules of access and participation in public debates.

Bloggers, on the other hand, frequently described journalists through the professional malpractice frame. They claimed that journalists abuse their positions and force disclosure of the identities of internet users who criticize their work. Those differences are frequently highlighted by both journalists and bloggers through the use of various discursive strategies of polarisation.

Another key conflict visible in the discourse is the conflict of values. In the most general way, using Kling's (1996) terminology, the journalists represent the 'statist' position towards online anonymity, while the bloggers demonstrate more 'libertarian' views. Values advocated by journalists include accountability, responsibility and courage. Bloggers, on the other hand, more frequently referred to inclusion, the freedom to decide on the form of participation and, most importantly, established a close link between online anonymity and freedom of

speech. In fact, free speech is a major value in the debate surrounding online anonymity.

However, it would be an oversimplification to conclude that the differences in values coincide with professional roles. The picture is much more nuanced, as some journalists, for example those in *Rzeczpospolita,* also called for protection of anonymity. The factor that might be useful in explaining those differences is authors' assessment of the democratisation process in Poland. Those, who believe that Poland is a successful democracy, the so-called 'transition optimists', tended to downplay the role of anonymity on the internet. At the same time, those who claimed that the Polish political reality is far from desirable, usually viewed the right to anonymity as a necessary condition of participation in the public sphere.

Lastly, the debate around online anonymity in the context of the 'Kataryna case' also shows a number of personal conflicts, rivalries and animosities, indicating that the support for anonymity often depends on who is anonymous. As some authors suggested, the disclosure of Kataryna's identity might have been personal revenge by *Dziennik's* journalists whom she had criticized in the past.

Overall, the analysis showed that the debate surrounding anonymity reflects a number of conflicts and competing group interests. These conflicts will be further analyzed in the following chapter, in which the findings of the textual analysis are placed in a broader context of discursive and social practices.

The main intention in this second analytical stage is to investigate if, to what extent, and how the media contribute to an anti-anonymity rhetoric and, more generally, to the process of *de-anonymisation*. I also explore in what ways the Polish debate on online anonymity is embedded in the two processes that shape the Polish public sphere: the process of digitisation and the process of democratisation.

CHAPTER 8 | The politics of online anonymity in the media discourse: findings of the critical discourse analysis (part 2)

The textual analysis presented in the previous chapter demonstrates that the debate on online anonymity in the context of the 'Kataryna case' involved a discursive struggle between journalists and bloggers taking place on many different levels. While the analysis of the texts seen as action, representation, and identification already provides a good overview of the rival positions, linking it to a broader discursive and social context (Fairclough 2003) can help reveal the full picture of the debate surrounding anonymity in the Polish media. Positioning this debate within its wider societal context would enable addressing the following research questions:

- What are the dominant power struggles shaping the debate?
- What are the dominant interests and values underlying the debate?

At the next stage, this analysis seeks to identify the "social repertoires of discourse practices" (Fairclough 1995 p.61) from which authors of the analysed texts had drawn when constructing their message. In other words, I will investigate the place of the texts in broader orders of discourse. Moreover, by adopting an even wider, socio-cultural perspective, this analysis is intended to locate the media texts within a social context and examine power relations reflected in, but also reinforced or challenged by the discourse.

The analysis explores four interconnected conflicts related to online anonymity which emerged in the process of the textual analysis:

1) a conflict over the professional status of journalists and bloggers;
2) a conflict over the vision of the public sphere;
3) a conflict over the democratisation process in Poland;
4) value conflicts underlying the online anonymity debate.

These conflict are rooted in more overarching debates and processes discussed earlier in this thesis: the ideological struggle between the statist, libertarian and private enterprise approaches to online anonymity, the *de-anonymisation* process and the role of the media in it, and the processes of democratisation and technological transition of the Polish media market.

The aim of this chapter is to place the textual analysis within these contexts and investigate if, how and to what extent the media coverage chosen for this analysis had contributed to the anti-anonymity discourse and, more generally, to the process of *de-anonymisation*.

8.1 Conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers

The textual analysis of representations of journalists and bloggers in the previous chapter demonstrated that online anonymity is an important element in the struggle over rights, responsibilities and the status of those who wish to influence public discourse. Journalists repeatedly pointed to anonymity in order to delegitimise bloggers' contribution to public discourse and to highlight the importance of traditional tenets of journalism, which, as Ruggiero (2004) summarises, include: authenticity, credibility, authority, and accountability. Journalists taking issue with bloggers' anonymity might be then seen as an aspect of 'paradigm repair' (Reese 1990 in Ruggiero 2004) – that is, an attempt to protect the boundaries of their profession.

Bloggers, on the other hand, claimed that they do not have powerful media organisations behind them, especially to protect them from potential lawsuits, and therefore they need anonymity to continue writing critically and unabashedly.

Before considering those arguments in more detail, it is necessary to recall the local, cultural context of this debate. When Poland's communist regime fell, journalists stood at the forefront of the democratic transition, setting the standards for public deliberation. After political constraints on free speech had been lifted, journalists saw themselves as public representatives who guard the democratic system, act as watchdogs monitoring political processes, warn society about potential threats, and promote the public interest.

They had a leading role in society until another barrier was lifted, this time the technological one. With the popularisation of Web 2.0 occurring in Poland in the mid 2000s, the space for public deliberation opened up to anyone with internet access, basic internet skills and something to say. Bloggers, citizen journalists and other internet users could now, at least theoretically, have their voices heard without traditional media as intermediaries. Clashes were unavoidable as some bloggers and journalists started producing similar content and competed for similar audiences. According to Lowrey (2006, p.478) bloggers and journalists "[e]ach claim some jurisdiction over the tasks of selecting events and issues for audience attention, commenting on these issues, and, to a lesser degree, gathering information for reports".

The analysis of the coverage of 'Kataryna' case shows that journalists were aware of the rise of bloggers in the public sphere. They engaged in a direct dialogue with bloggers and frequently quoted them in their stories, thus making bloggers even more influential. The media also devoted much of the coverage to justifying journalists' privileged position in the public sphere and undermining the contribution of bloggers and other internet users.

The text message that Kataryna had received from *Dziennik*'s journalists (in which she was offered a job at the newspaper) shows that traditional media recognise bloggers' potential and would like to appropriate it for their own needs. When Kataryna refused, *Dziennik* adopted a strategy to use anonymity as a weapon against her and other internet users, downplaying their contributions to the public discourse.

Even though *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalists criticised the act of revealing Kataryna's offline name and accused *Dziennik* of professional misconduct, they shared the view that there is no place for anonymity in the public sphere, and that transparency is a necessary condition for respect and credibility.

Eventually, only *Rzeczpospolita* voiced open support for Kataryna's right to anonymity and recognised her contribution. However, *Rzeczpospolita* journalists mostly used the debate about anonymity to criticise *Dziennik*, their direct competitor, rather than taking a position on anonymity in principle.

In fact, the 'Kataryna case' and the debate about anonymity that ensued served as an instrument in the longstanding commercial rivalry between the three

publications. The occasional support that Kataryna received from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* was often intended to discredit *Dziennik*, rather than supporting bloggers' right to anonymity.

Overall, journalists used the issue of anonymity to question the value of bloggers' participation in the public discourse and to clearly distinguish them from the traditional press corps. The conflict, which in its essence concerns the professional status of journalists and bloggers, had four main aspects.

First, journalists claimed that **bloggers have the same rights and responsibilities as journalists, and they should therefore act in a similar way and give up on anonymity**. According to some authors, publishing journalistic content without disclosing its author's identity is only acceptable in non-democratic countries:

> *Let's imagine that journalists start signing their texts with pseudonyms; that they publish commentaries, investigative pieces; that they expose scandals without putting their names to it, and that the media refuse to disclose authors' identities. This kind of situation is only acceptable in totalitarian regimes, where journalists risk their jobs, freedom, or even their life for writing the truth.* (GW2)

While some acknowledged that journalists are better protected from lawsuits (e.g., they have access to lawyers and media companies' financial resources, they have some protection guaranteed by the press law), the general message to bloggers was, if you want to be considered journalists, if you want respect and recognition, you need to abandon anonymity and take full responsibility for your words.

But most bloggers responded with a 'no, thanks.' Bloggers did not seek the status of journalists. As Kataryna stated, they also expected neither 'respect', nor for their statements to be perceived as 'credible.' Rather, what they wanted was to be left alone and be able to separate their blogging activity from other areas of their lives, to prevent what Marwick and boyd (2011) described as the 'collapse of context.'

This need for separation can also be interpreted as a need for privacy. Bloggers repeatedly described themselves as 'common citizens' who consider blogging a hobby, and who do not wish their political opinions to influence other aspects of their lives. For bloggers, anonymity was what Sell (2013, p.4) described

as an "opportunity to regain privacy inside the realm of public communication while actively taking part in the negotiation processes of the public sphere".

Another way in which journalists used anonymity to discredit bloggers was by claiming that **transparency and courage give journalists a privileged position in the public sphere**. As the analysis of their reporting showed, journalists constructed their image by frequently using the 'watchdogs' and 'hero' frames in order to establish the differences between themselves and bloggers and to justify their dominant role in shaping public discourse:

> *You are afraid, because for the first time in your heroic life you express your opinions using your own name. Dear heroes, we, journalists, are doing that every day. Day after day we write using our surnames. You laugh at us, but do you know that two lost court cases mean criminal liability? Do you know that most of us have to deal with a lot of such cases? But despite that we carry on writing texts that expose the government.*
> (D5)

For *Dziennik* editor-in-chief, using one's 'real name' is a virtue and a guarantee of quality and accountability. His words also reflected journalists' irritation with the criticism they receive from bloggers. Nevertheless, none of the journalists who complained about bloggers' critique actually addressed its substance. Instead, they chose to dismiss any such critique by pointing to bloggers' anonymity.

For bloggers, journalists' attempts to emphasise their privileged status in the public sphere demonstrated that journalists were not used to being criticised and that they refuse to accept that bloggers might produce content of equal or even better quality. As one blogger, quoted by *Rzeczpospolita,* commented:

> *It was obvious to me that the conflict between a blogger and a minister will be followed by licensed, profit-driven journalists calling to account someone who, despite acting pro bono publico, is much better than them.* (RP5)

The way bloggers had described journalists showed the deep mistrust between the two groups, accelerated by *Dziennik* disclosing Kataryna's offline identity. Bloggers seemed to believe they are part of a technological and social transformation which journalists refuse to acknowledge. This transformation ended what Lowrey (2006, p.478) called the "journalists' reign of sovereignty" and

opened up public discourse for new voices. Since many of these voices are anonymous, journalists turned to transparency and accountability in order to distinguish themselves from the new participants in the public deliberation.

This leads to another argument brought up by journalists, namely that the **anonymity of bloggers leaves room for abuse, and that the motives of those who engage in public deliberation should be made transparent.** Journalists argued that bloggers might represent interests that are contradictory to what they state in their texts. They used Kataryna as an example – in one of her interviews she admitted she had professional contacts with the head of the Polish public service broadcasting, while she was criticizing him in her blog posts.

Some journalists found it problematic even though Kataryna had stressed that she made no profit from this cooperation. The call for bloggers' disclosure of their identities turned out to be a strong weapon in the hands of journalists, since many bloggers would probably self-censor or stop blogging altogether if forced to reveal their names. One of *salon24*'s bloggers, quoted by *Rzeczpospolita*, openly admitted that:

> *If I were presented with a choice: blog or peace and quiet, I would probably give up blogging. And that is what journalists from "Dziennik" count on.* (RP5)

Bloggers repeatedly stated that it is important for them to separate their blogging activity from other areas of life. This does not mean, however, that they saw anonymity as a tool to avoid responsibility. In fact, they considered themselves more accountable than journalists:

> *Unlike journalists in all those weeklies and dailies, we are being constantly assessed. Non-stop and in many places. Everyone can comment on our post, show its weaknesses and simply compromise it. (…) Journalists are not subjected to this kind of quality control.* (RP5)

Accountability, as understood by bloggers, stems from the inherently social and interactive nature of blogs. Since the validity of posted content can be easily verified by others, the identity of the author becomes irrelevant. What bloggers did acknowledge, however, was that anonymity might be even more dangerous if

abused by journalists. In one of her posts Kataryna suggested that journalists have double standards when it comes to anonymity:

> *Maybe then, in the name of total transparency of the public debate, we should prohibit using anonymous sources in journalistic articles, where the potential impact and possibilities of manipulation are much bigger compared to even the most popular blog. Criticising someone's anonymity, while at the same time using anonymous sources in every article, is slightly inconsistent.* (S2)

Kataryna, like other bloggers, thought that journalists use anonymity in an instrumental way and criticise it only when it serves their interests. In this context it is interesting to consider another claim made by some journalists who indicated that **there is a certain level of influence achieved by bloggers, beyond which they cannot remain anonymous**. For some it is the moment in which bloggers are not only commenting on reality but starting to influence it**.** For example, *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalists stated that Kataryna *went far beyond the role of an anonymous commentator and got lost on the way between blogging and influencing politics* (GW1). The article did not clearly explain when commenting turns into influence, but it can be assumed that it is the point at which bloggers start being a threat and competition to professional journalists. In fact, all four arguments described above demonstrate that journalists are determined to keep their privileged position as opinion leaders, and that they use the question of anonymity to fight for it.

8.2 Conflicting visions of the democratic public sphere

In the 'Kataryna case' the discourse surrounding online anonymity can be seen as part of the struggle for control over the production of discourse in society. Journalists and bloggers expressed competing visions of the public sphere. These visions referred to distinctive rules of access, terms of participation, and conditions for being heard and respected. Only by obeying "the rules of discursive 'policing'" (Foucault, 1970, p.61) can one become a rightful member of the public sphere.

For journalists covering the Kataryna case, one of the most important rules of participation in the public debate was **transparency.** Most of *Dziennik* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* texts indicated that anonymous statements cannot be considered respected contributions to public debate. Journalists claimed that it is impossible to argue with authors who refuse to disclose their real names, and that anonymity creates asymmetric power relations, automatically putting an anonymous person in a privileged position.

> *[Kataryna, KT] always hides behind a pseudonym which doesn't allow any serious response from the authors she attacked. Her blog posts shape internet users' opinions about journalism and particularly journalists, and she doesn't take any responsibility for it.* (D1)

In this *Dziennik* news story, the journalist uses Kataryna's anonymity to delegitimise her critique of journalists' practices. This quote also exemplifies another necessary condition of participation in the public sphere, according to journalists, which is **accountability.**

The argument that anonymity is at odds with accountability and responsibility was repeatedly brought up by journalists. Accountability, often presented as an indication of 'civil courage' and freedom, was portrayed as a fundamental element of democratic deliberation. Only accountable individuals deserve to be heard:

> *Civil courage in democracy requires that we express our own views with an open visor. This is a key condition of credibility and respect (…).* (GW2)

> *Civil society is a society of free individuals - people, who are not afraid to take responsibility for their words.* (GW2)

Similar claims were made by American journalists who also assigned a considerable value to authorship, claiming that it makes texts more credible (Reader 2005, 2012). Accountability was therefore made the justification for authorship being a defining criterion of legitimate participation in the public sphere, or a condition for even accessing the public sphere.

At the same time, Polish bloggers and some journalists, particularly those from *Rzeczpospolita*, questioned the very necessity of a byline. They repeatedly

contended that it is **the content that matters, not authorship**. Moreover, the insistence on 'real' identities voiced by many journalists was described as a reflection of a long standing polarisation in Polish society. As one *Rzeczpospolita* author claimed:

> *There is a big, maybe even dominant, part of the audience, which is too lazy, or maybe not clever enough, to assess the arguments on their own. These people don't care what is being said, they only care who is speaking. If it is an authority (whoever created it) - they applaud; if it's someone rejected by the authority – they boo. For them, the only clear argument is a surname appearing under a text. That's why they have their newspapers, which they firmly believe in, even if they write different things each day.* (RP4)

According to the author, the call for transparency is similar to calling for maintaining the divisions in the Polish public sphere. These divisions, he claimed, help various authorities retain power over large segments of society. Arguments critical of the authorities are often dismissed by discrediting their authors, presenting them as agents of the oppositional group.

Anonymity, however, distorts this picture. Kataryna's identity was disclosed because her anonymity disrupted the traditional order of the public sphere, and as a result, the traditional relations of power. In challenging the value of transparency of the author, bloggers and some journalists advocated for a debate that involves less dogmatism and more critical thinking.

The debate about characteristics of the public sphere also saw **hierarchy** and **quality** pitted against **equality** and **inclusion**. The analysis of the representation of internet users and journalists showed journalists' preference for a **hierarchical** public sphere. Hierarchy, according to journalists, guarantees the quality of the discourse. In a *Gazeta Wyborcza* interview with a professor and blogger, the journalist made a telling statement:

> *If everyone can write everything on the blog, then gossips and slander become equal to facts.* (GW4)

In the quote above, the journalist's concern is that if everyone is allowed to contribute to the discussion, without pre-selection and established ways of verifying information (for example by professional journalists), then the quality of

public discussion will drop and it will be difficult to identify valuable content. Such rhetoric, implicitly suggesting that public expression, or at least blogging, should be restricted, corresponds well with Andrew Keen's argument in his book "The Cult of the Amateur". In the dystopian reality depicted in the book, the lines between "traditional audience and author, creator and consumer, expert and amateur" are blurring (2008, p.2).

The importance of **discourse quality** was also visible in the way journalists described internet users' contribution to the public debate.

> *Many times I read insults (because it is not possible to call it polemic) that anonymous internet users wrote [in comments] under my own and my colleagues' texts. You harshly judge our skills, accusing us of venality and bias, and all this under a pseudonym, without taking any responsibility for your words. This is a form of direct democracy, but because of anonymity it inevitably takes the shape of denunciations and insults.* (D2)

The author indicates that because of the 'uncivil' tone of the comments, they cannot be considered legitimate critique. Moreover, the anonymity of their authors necessarily turns them into "denunciations and insults". The "lack of quality" argument is often supplemented by accusations of a so-called lack of civility or rationality. Since all these notions are highly subjective, these arguments serve as a powerful tool for delegitimising and undermining the importance of diverse voices. In the 'Kataryna case,' journalists use it to challenge critique of their work voiced by bloggers.

For bloggers, however, the **hierarchical structure** of the public sphere, with journalists serving as the only gate-keepers, is **a relic of the past**. For example, bloggers on *salon24.pl* presented the public sphere as a **pluralistic space**, where different views and opinions should be promoted and no voices should have a monopoly on the truth.

> *The blogosphere is necessary for assuring the pluralism of opinions in the public space. Only pluralism, and not a monopoly of one of the sides, allows getting closer to the truth and expressing the interests of various parties involved in a debate. The Web is the future of the media. Right now, the rules of the game are being established. That is why the Kataryna case is a case of freedom of speech in Poland.* (S5)

Some bloggers were concerned that by disclosing Kataryna's identity, *Dziennik* had sent a message that they can also be 'outed,' consequently prompting self-censorship in the blogging community.

For them, anonymity can be a guarantor of inclusion, which is depicted as more important than discourse quality. Kataryna, for example, discussed three types of authors who might be discouraged from writing due to the threat of forced disclosure. First, LGBTQ bloggers might want to avoid unpleasant consequences of their writing, or they simply want to keep their gender identity private when engaging in discussions that concern them. According to Kataryna, they should have a right to do that. The second group that deserves protection are whistleblowers and bloggers who run various 'watchdog' websites. Kataryna gave an example of a blogger who was monitoring the activities of Warsaw's president. Lastly, she mentioned a controversial media story about a teenage girl who had an abortion. Kataryna stated she knew the address of the girl's blog, published under a pseudonym, but would never identify the author in order to protect her identity. In all these cases anonymity is said to make the public sphere more inclusive and accessible to those who would otherwise not participate.

Journalists and bloggers also differed in their ways of perceiving **the link between anonymity and freedom of speech.** The dominant view among journalists was that the two have nothing in common. According to *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalist, anonymity constitutes an antithesis of democratic free speech, which requires transparency and courage:

> *In a democracy, the anonymity of a participant in a public debate is not a value and has nothing to do with freedom of speech. It is a caricature of this freedom. Implying otherwise means brainwashing and spoiling the idea of democracy.* (GW2)

Such a statement seems to support Reader's (2005) observation that professional journalists have a 'blind spot' preventing them from recognizing the important role of anonymity in enhancing freedom of speech. While Reader does not offer an explanation of this phenomenon, describing it as "knee-jerk biases against anonymous opinions" (2005, p.64), it seems reasonable to assume that for much of the Polish journalists anonymity is contrary to the vision of the public sphere, in which journalists and ordinary citizens are subject to the same

mechanisms of control. Their vision favours professional journalists, since in most cases they are protected by the media institutions that employ them.

Many bloggers see anonymity as linked to free speech in at least two ways, reflecting the 'instrumentalist' and 'essentialist' approaches discussed in Chapter 2. First, they view anonymity as a *tool* to ensure freedom of speech because it helps to limit political and societal pressure on the speaker and protects alternative voices from retaliation or from being exposed to social stigma (Tien 1996).

> *The Dziennik editorial team of intelligent and rational people prefers to ignore how much they have harmed free speech. After the Kataryna case many anonymous and valuable bloggers might be afraid of forced disclosure.* (S5)

Additionally, an author's decision to withhold their identifying information is seen as an inherent part of protected speech. Kataryna, for example, claimed that people should have a right to choose their form of participation in the online public sphere.

Overall, the debate surrounding the Kataryna case and online anonymity is in fact a struggle over the rules of access and participation in an online deliberation. In this contestation journalists attempted to assume the role of the gatekeepers of the public sphere, 'symbolic elites' (van Dijk, 1989), who try to retain their traditional power over public discourse.

According to van Dijk (2009), controlling the discourse means controlling both the text and the context, which he defines as various dimensions of communicative situation, such as the setting (time and place), social identities, relationships and roles of the participants, as well as their knowledge and goals.

The democratisation of access to the public sphere facilitated by the internet has created a situation in which the symbolic elites are gradually losing their control over the text. Now every member of the public who has some level of computer literacy and access to the internet can have their voice heard.

Yet, in practice, journalists and media owners, as well as other powerful players in the online arena, are still able to influence the context of communication. By de-legitimising anonymous contributions, or making online anonymity technically difficult to attain, the different symbolic elites can in fact influence the

future shape of the public sphere. Such attempts were evident in the traditional media discourse around the 'Kataryna case.'

Bloggers, who positioned themselves as representatives of the public, defended online anonymity as a means to create a more inclusive, equal and less hierarchical public sphere. By stressing the importance of content, rather than a name, they effectively challenged the established authorities and divisions in Polish society.

Curiously, however, the quality of the discourse was not a completely irrelevant factor for bloggers, even if they downplayed it when advocating for inclusiveness. Authors on both *blox.pl* and *salon24.pl* repeatedly made a clear distinction between Kataryna and other internet users, highlighting the high quality of her contributions:

> *It is astonishing that in the context of the Kataryna case, Dziennik wants to fight loutishness and intellectual rubbish on the web. As a matter of fact Kataryna is a shining example of language culture and sharp mind.* (S5)

Such comparisons indicate that bloggers, just like most journalists, see anonymity as conditional: a commentator should have the right to stay anonymous as long as they behave decently and offer valuable content. It might be argued that bloggers compete against journalists for the status of symbolic elites by differentiating themselves from the rest of internet users. Although they repeatedly position themselves as 'common citizens' who need anonymity to protect them against potential abuse, the close analysis of bloggers' statements demonstrates their occasional sense of superiority in relation to other internet users.

8.3 Conflicting visions of the democratisation process in Poland

The two conflicts described so far – one over the status of journalists and bloggers, and another over the vision of the public sphere – demonstrate significant differences in the way bloggers and journalists perceived the role of anonymity. Although some journalists showed support for anonymity, and some bloggers

opposed anonymous communication, the lines of conflict were mostly parallel to the journalists – bloggers division.

The sampled texts, however, included voices of support or opposition to anonymity that did not depend on the author's status in the public sphere (journalists or blogger), but rather on the broader opinion about the state of democracy in Poland and the assessment of the democratisation process.

Unlike the two previously described conflicts, this one is deeply rooted in the local context of the Polish democratic transition. Although the internet is a global network, and so are the forces influencing its development, the local contexts influencing a debate about online anonymity should not be ignored. As Nijakowski (2008, pp.113–114) pointed out, one of the important elements that needs to be considered when conducting critical discourse analysis is "the collective memory and debate about the past" which influenced the authors of the analysed texts.

As the textual analysis of the 'Kataryna case' showed, both journalists and bloggers often referred to communism, opposition to it and the Polish democratic transformation. Both Poland's communist past and its democratic present strongly influenced how various actors justify their position on the importance of anonymity on the internet.

In order to explain these influences, it is useful to again draw on the concepts outlined by the Polish sociologist Sergiusz Kowalski (2010), who identified two dominant groups in Polish public discourse. The ***transition optimists***, he explained, believe that democratisation in Poland was successful, and that Polish citizens enjoy all democratic rights, including unrestricted freedom of speech. In contrast, the ***transition pessimists*** argue that the process of democratisation has mostly benefited the liberal elite, and that Polish democracy is built on murky cooperation between old communist elites, current political elites and the mainstream media. The 'optimists' discourse is often associated with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, while the 'pessimistic' one with more conservative media such as *Rzeczpospolita* and *Dziennik*.

The analysis of the coverage of the 'Kataryna case' showed that the division can also be applied to the two analysed blogging platforms. While bloggers on *blox.pl*, the blogging platform owned by Agora (the publisher of *Gazeta Wyborcza*),

presented a mostly positive attitude towards the state of Polish democracy, bloggers on *salon24.pl* were often very sceptical.

As it appears from this study, attitudes towards the condition of Polish democracy are strongly correlated with the perspectives on online anonymity.

8.3.1 Transition optimists and online anonymity

The 'optimistic discourse' is visible mostly in texts published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and on the related website *gazeta.pl,* as well as, occasionally, in blog posts on *blox.pl*. It is important to recall that *Gazeta Wyborcza* was founded in 1989 as an outcome of the Polish Round Table Agreement between the Solidarity movement and the communist government. The newspapers' founders took an active part in influencing the state of Polish democracy and therefore it has been promoting the 'optimistic' view on the transition. Moreover, in May 2009 when the 'Kataryna case' took place, the government was led by Platforma Obywatelska, the party which *Gazeta Wyborcza* has endorsed.

The optimistic discourse's main characteristic perceives Poland as a successful, prosperous country, characterised by a consolidated form of democracy and where citizens can enjoy unrestricted freedom of speech. That leads some *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalists to conclude that in the Polish public sphere there is no place for anonymity, because democracy requires accountability:

> *Civil courage in democracy requires that we express our own views with an open visor. This is a key condition for credibility and respect (…). Civil society is a society of free individuals, therefore people who are not afraid to take responsibility for their words.*
> (GW2)

Here journalists of the mainstream newspaper, and hence a privileged member of Polish society, are in fact excluding those who chose to stay anonymous from the democratic discourse. The implied message here is that if one is afraid of the consequences of speech, then he or she should not speak at all.

Another tendency in the 'optimistic discourse' in relation to online anonymity is to compare the current situation in Poland to the times of the oppressive communist regime:

Hiding behind pseudonyms brings to mind communist times, when slandering the government using guerrilla methods was in itself a courageous act. But today we have a free country, freedom of speech. This kind of activity is therefore an expression of plain cowardice. (B4)

Those who drew from the 'optimistic discourse' imply that in contrast to communist times, citizens now have nothing to fear, that there is no more an 'us' versus 'them' situation. The state is 'us' and we have no reason to be afraid of it anymore. People can openly express their views without fear of prosecution. As one *Gazeta Wyborcza* author stated, anonymity is only needed in non-democratic regimes, where freedom of speech is restricted.

Moreover, some authors drew from the oppositional discourse, in order to stress that the right to openly state one's views was one of the stakes in the fight against the communist regime:

In the PRL (Polish People's Republic, KT) the dream of the opposition about a free media was not only a dream about freedom of speech, but also about the right to openly express one's views. Signing the texts in the underground newspapers with your own name was not only an act of courage, but also an act of protest. (GW2)

In the context of the 'optimistic discourse' about online anonymity, concealing one's name is at odds with the achievements of the democratisation process in Poland.

8.3.2 Transition pessimists and online anonymity

The remaining two platforms, *Rzeczpospolita* and *salon24.pl,* represent significantly different positions on the condition of Polish democracy, and in turn on online anonymity. The 'pessimistic discourse' also appears in texts published by *Dziennik*, where journalists occasionally tried to attenuate their harsh criticism of anonymous online users. The critical position towards the Polish political system is understandable, since all mentioned media were sympathetic to the conservative party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), which at the time of the 'Kataryna case' was in the opposition.

For conservative journalists and bloggers the 'us' versus 'them' division did not disappear after communism in Poland ended. Most of them believe that the country is ruled by the elite (dominating the political institutions, mainstream media and judiciary) that emerged in the early stages of the transformation. As one of *salon24.pl's* blogger put it:

> *Of course it would be better and nobler to act openly, but Poland is not a state based on the rule of law, where the truth always wins. The blogosphere also helps to weaken the post-communist system in the media, which was created when the cards were dealt in 1990 and is still interrupting free debate.* (S5)

Similarly, according to Kataryna, anonymity should be preserved in order to protect citizens from the media and politicians. She stated that the disclosure of her identity by *Dziennik* was clear evidence that Polish citizens do not enjoy freedom of speech:

> *There is one thing I envy them – this undisturbed belief that we live in a normal country. A country where there is no problem with expressing unpopular opinions, because our politicians and media are so painfully ethical that nobody would even think of prosecuting others for their views. As if Dziennik hasn't just proved how much beating one can get only for their views.* (S4)

However, in Kataryna's view, the need for anonymity is not limited to situations when expressing certain views might be problematic to the author. For her, one of the main benefits of Poland's democratic transformation is citizens' autonomy. Unlike supporters of the 'optimistic' perspective, she claimed that the freedom won by the opposition to communism manifests itself in the right of citizens to decide about their form of participation in the public debate.

In its essence, the disagreement between the 'optimists' and the 'pessimists' boils down to power relations in Polish society. In the context of the 'Kataryna case', anonymity was viewed as the weapon of the weaker, or, to be more precise, of those who perceive themselves as such. Those currently in power argued that anonymity as a form of protection is not needed since there is nothing to be afraid of.

8.4 Value conflicts underlying the online anonymity debate

The three conflicts identified so far in the media and blogger debate surrounding the 'Kataryna case' were mostly about competing interests. Journalists use anonymity to challenge the status of bloggers, accuse them of hidden agendas and lack of accountability, and ultimately, to secure their own privileged position. Using one's 'real' name when participating in online discussions was also viewed as a necessary condition for being recognised as a legitimised member of the public sphere. Lastly, the voices of democracy 'optimists' and 'pessimists' in the debate about online anonymity exposed the division between the powerful elite and the part of society that feels aggrieved by the political and social system created after the fall of communism in Poland.

However, the debate about anonymity in the context of the 'Kataryna case' also reveals conflicting values. Moreover, despite the case being tied to a specific time, location, and a set of circumstances, it can be used to outline a broader set of normative struggles which could influence the future of online anonymity.

In this context it is useful to come back to selected value orientations towards new technologies developed by Rob Kling (1996a) and appropriated to the discussion about anonymity by Ya-Ching Lee (2006): the libertarian model, the statist model and the private enterprise model. These models are useful for understanding which social goods are emphasised in the debate surrounding online anonymity, and which are considered secondary.

The analysis of representations of anonymity showed that the press, and *Dziennik* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* in particular, predominantly represent a **statist approach** towards this issue. Although journalists did not argue explicitly that the state should regulate internet users' ability to conceal their identities (on the contrary, some of them stressed that it is a free choice), the values they had cited – responsibility, accountability, civil courage – indicated that collective values such as 'civility' and complying with social norms and the law were deemed more important than individual liberties. Moreover, even on the occasions when anonymity is being defended as a tool helping people to avoid persecution, journalists highlighted its legal limitations. In line with the statist approach, law

enforcement agencies are responsible for preventing crimes and prosecuting criminals (Lee, 2006):

> *There obviously are exceptions when the intervention of state agencies - police, which establishes the identity of the author of an entry, and then potentially prosecutors and courts - is necessary: first, when a blog post threatens security or signals a threat; Second, when a blog post calls for racial, religious, or ethnic hate; and third, when a post offends the most important people in the country. But this is all stated in the penal code. I'm just reminding you of that.* (D3)

To legitimise statist arguments against online anonymity journalists often draw from the psychological discourse of negative disinhibition, claiming that withdrawing one's name makes people behave in a mostly negative way. Polish anonymous internet users are described as nationalistic, anti-Semitic and chauvinist. It is worth stressing that journalists do not quote external sources to legitimise those arguments, possibly because they believe that statements about online anonymity lie within journalistic expertise.

The analysis of bloggers' discourse about online anonymity suggests that they draw on a different set of values more characteristic of the **libertarian model**. Here the prerogatives of the individual and the individual's freedom of choice are privileged over the collective goals and norms. The best illustration of this approach is Kataryna's answer to journalists who stated that anonymous bloggers cannot expect respect:

> *We are not demanding respect, we don't expect that someone will see our comments as reliable. All we want is for our right to anonymity to be respected, as in a democratic country and healthy society nobody can be forced to do something that is not mandatory.* (B4)

In this telling statement, Kataryna was prioritising the right to anonymity over her contribution to the public discourse being recognised as reliable and respectful. Anonymity is seen here as a value and a right on its own merits. But the support for anonymity expressed by Kataryna and other bloggers as well as a few journalists is not only based on highly individualistic, libertarian values. Bloggers repeatedly highlighted the role of anonymity in creating a more democratic, pluralist and inclusive public sphere.

The last approach to online anonymity mentioned by Lee (2006) – **the private enterprise model** – is hardly present in the debate surrounding the 'Kataryna case'. Within this model, values such as protecting citizens' rights or protecting society from crime are secondary to the potential financial benefits of eliminating anonymity. This discourse is largely absent in the 'Kataryna case' debate, even though some bloggers did accuse *Dziennik* of outing Kataryna for profit.

8.5 Summary

I began this chapter with two questions about the online anonymity debate and the 'Kataryna case': What were the dominant interests and values featured the debate? What were the main power struggles underlying the debate? To answer these questions I looked into four conflicts identified in the textual analysis of the media coverage of the 'Kataryna case': the conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers, the conflict over the vision of the public sphere, the conflict over the democratisation process in Poland, and the value conflicts underlying the online anonymity debate.

The analysis has found that journalists used online anonymity as a means to delegitimise and sideline bloggers' contributions to the public sphere. The four main tactics adopted by journalists were: demanding that bloggers accept the same responsibilities as journalists, highlighting the privileged position of journalists based on their declared transparency, claiming that anonymity leads to conflicts of interests, and stating that once bloggers achieve a certain importance in the public sphere they need to give up on anonymity.

Additionally, journalists argued for a public sphere which comprises of transparent, accountable contributors, who produce 'quality' content, and where the hierarchical structure and the authority of experts is preserved. Online anonymity is said to undermine each of these characteristics, and therefore it is seen as problematic. Overall, the analysis of both conflicts shows that portraying anonymity as something undesirable, and thus contributing to the discourse of *de-anonymisation*, serves journalists' interests, since it helps them to distinguish

themselves from other participants in the public sphere and secure their own privileged position.

The remaining two conflicts showed, however, that the media discourse around online anonymity was not only motivated by journalists' professional interests, but also by the way they perceive the condition of Polish democracy and by their support for certain value systems. In sum, journalists' attachment to values such as responsibility, accountability, and civil courage can be interpreted as a representation of a mostly statist approach towards anonymity on the internet. It is seen as undermining the state's ability to trace malicious activities and hindering the possibility to call to account those who break legal and social rules. However, journalists of *Dziennik* and *Rzeczpospolita*, the newspapers that are generally critical of the current state of Polish democracy, also recognised that anonymity might be necessary for protecting individuals from powerful elites.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the two process discussed in Chapter 4, namely the political and technological transitions, had significant impact on the way online anonymity was discussed in the context of the 'Kataryna case'.

The important role that the Polish media played in the process of democratic transition made journalists feel particularly responsible for the shape of the democratic public sphere. My analysis also showed that the approach to online anonymity often depends on how journalists define what a democratic society and a democratic public sphere are, and how they view the effects of the democratisation process so far.

The second process, involving the popularisation of the internet, which allowed numerous new voices to enter the public sphere, forced Polish journalists to re-define their role and position in society. As the analysis of the 'Kataryna case' showed, the issue of anonymity became a useful tool in the struggle for dominance in the new digital reality.

It is important to stress, however, that the 'Kataryna case' itself, and all the findings that this analysis produced, remain only a local oddity, unless juxtaposed with a broader context of the media debate about online anonymity in Poland, and worldwide, which will be done in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 9 | Media and the future of online anonymity: conclusions and implications

This study was designed to explore how the issue of online anonymity is discursively constructed in the Polish media. It looked at both the explicit characteristics of the coverage of online anonymity, and the implicit meanings, values and power struggles underlying the debate. This study also sought to identify and explore different contexts in which current debates on online anonymity take place in order to achieve the five aims stated at its outset:

1. *to establish the role of online anonymity in the democratic society;*

2. *to investigate the trend of de-anonymisation and establish the media role in it;*

3. *to investigate the general characteristics of the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish media;*

4. *to investigate the power struggles underlying the discursive construction of online anonymity in the Polish media;*

5. *to determine whether, and how, the Polish media discourse on online anonymity contributes to the process of de-anonymisation.*

Therefore, on the most general level, I discussed the notion of online anonymity in theories of democracy, identifying two key fields of academic inquiry: control and surveillance, and the digital public sphere (Chapter 2).

Second, online anonymity was placed in the context of four forces, which, according to Lessig (2006), shape the way new technologies develop: law, technology, market and social norms. The concept of *de-anonymisation* was suggested as the one that aptly captures the process in which anonymity is gradually being forced out of online spaces.

On top of the four aspects of *de-anonymisation*, which has already been discussed in the existing literature, I proposed to add one more agent of this process, namely media discourse. The empirical part of this thesis was intended to test if media indeed contribute to the process of eliminating anonymity from online spaces (Chapter 3).

Finally, the local context of online anonymity debate was discussed, including the characteristics of the Polish media system and public debate. Particular attention was given to two processes that strongly influenced the evolution of the Polish media in the 21st century: a political transition after the fall of communism and a technological transformation related to the rise of the internet (Chapter 4).

This was also the context for the empirical part of the study, which sought to answer two overarching research questions:

1) What is the media discourse about online anonymity in Poland?

2) Do the Polish media contribute to the de-anonymisation process?

The research design (Chapter 5) included two separate analyses tied to two applied methods: content analysis and critical discourse analysis. Each was designed to answer a set of more specific research questions, and the findings were discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

In the following section, I will discuss the results of my investigation with respect to the two main research questions. I will also highlight the significance of these findings and their implication for theoretical discussions on online anonymity, for the future of online anonymity and, more generally, for Polish democracy. I will then reflect on the research process in order to shed light on its limitations and the main challenges I faced. I will conclude the chapter with the questions that this investigation has raised and recommendations for future studies of online anonymity.

9.1 Empirical findings

The main empirical findings of this study have already been summarized at the end of each empirical chapter. The aim of this section is to discuss how the results of the content and the discourse analyses, informed by theoretical concepts discussed earlier in this thesis, can help answer the two key research questions in this investigation.

9.1.1 RQ 1: What is the media discourse about online anonymity in Poland?

Chapter 2 introduced two aspects of the relationship between online anonymity and democracy. One was the contribution of anonymity to protecting internet users' privacy in an environment that might be characterized by the 'collapse of context' (Marwick and boyd 2011). Anonymity was also seen as a response to ubiquitous government and corporate surveillance. Those views were confronted with the 'statist' (Lee 2006) views on anonymity, seeing it as an obstacle for the democratic state to prosecute criminals (Davenport 2002).

The second aspect of this relationship was the role of anonymity in the digital public sphere. While some scholars portrayed anonymity as enhancing freedom of speech and making the digital public sphere more open and inclusive (Sell 2013; Parker 2011), others argued that it decreases the quality of online debates and creates favourable conditions for hate speech and trolling (Levmore 2010).

Both areas are crucial for the discussion on online anonymity and should be considered when making any policy decisions in this respect. Yet, Polish media seem to prioritize one context, while ignoring the other. The content analysis of the coverage of online anonymity in the Polish quality press, as well as the in-depth analysis of the discourse surrounding the 'Kataryna case' showed, that while the relationship between anonymity and freedom of speech and quality of the debate receives significant media attention, the link between online anonymity and surveillance and privacy appears very rarely in the Polish press. If it is mentioned, it is mostly in the context of a statist argument portraying anonymity as a tool in the hands of criminals.

Moreover, the newspapers analysed hardly ever link anonymity with privacy. Such associations feature occasionally in arguments voiced by bloggers who highlight the role of anonymity in separating their blogging activity from other areas of their life. Journalists seem to ignore the need for such distinctions, failing to recognize the multidimensional character of online anonymity.

The media are much more concerned with the effect that anonymity has on online deliberation. The picture of online anonymity that emerges from the content analysis is mostly negative, both in terms of contexts in which the topic appears in

the reporting, and in terms of more or less explicit value judgments. However, the discourse analysis found that the media image of online anonymity is very complex and lined with a plethora of interests, values and power struggles.

First, the analysis shows that online anonymity plays an important role in challenging power relations in the digital public sphere. Journalists used anonymity to undermine contributions of bloggers and internet users in general. In doing so, journalists made an attempt to influence not only the content ('text') of online debates, but also their 'context' (van Dijk 2008), for example by demanding that all participants use their real names. Journalists also engaged in what Ruggiero (2004) dubbed 'paradigm repair' by emphasising their own transparency and accountability – qualities that presumably justify their privileged position in the public sphere.

Another aspect of the debate uncovered in this analysis is strong polarisation between journalists, bloggers and other internet users. The first two groups engage in the discursive struggle for the position of opinion leaders, although it needs to be noted that it is in fact a form of interdependence. Journalists might be worried they could be dethroned by bloggers, but the latter probably would not have garnered such influence were it not for media attention to begin with. Nevertheless, journalists and bloggers were in agreement when it comes to the assessment of anonymous Polish internet users. Here, both groups used rhetorical tactics already described by Reader (2012, pp.500–501) as dehumanising the "trolls"' (using strongly derogatory terms when describing anonymous writers) and portraying online anonymity as "filth". Only in exceptional cases did journalists see anonymous internet users as citizens whose opinions should be respected.

Many of the media texts also indicate that journalists find themselves in a tight spot. On one hand, they see themselves as educators who feel it is their duty to shape of the public debate. With the fall of communism journalists were key agents of democracy, and therefore they do not like to be seen as the ones now restricting free speech.

On the other hand, the majority of journalists clearly rejected anonymity if only because they viewed these faceless voices as challenging that hard earned 'mentor' position (Mocek 2005). As a result, many articles included 'mixed

messages' endorsing anonymity, at least under certain conditions, and at the same time denouncing anonymous bloggers.

Additionally, the results of content analysis showed that the Polish media present online anonymity in a rather superficial way, often demonstrating a 'common sense' approach to it. Anonymity is predominantly taken for granted and journalists rarely elaborate on its different levels or its dependence on context, which is a key element in the current academic debates on the issue (Wallace 2008; Ponesse 2013). It is virtually impossible to derive a clear definition of online anonymity from the coverage in any of the newspapers examined. On the face of it, one would expect that such vague and at times conflicting understandings of online anonymity leave much room for interpretation for the readers. Yet, in practice, there were just a handful of case where the definition itself was openly contested. More importantly, even though most contributors – journalists and bloggers alike – never bothered to weigh in on what online anonymity actually means, all had expressed value judgments on it, the majority of which were negative.

Ultimately, most statements about anonymity, the content analysis showed, were very general and not attributed to any particular source, which suggests that journalists see the topic as lying within their own expertise. The highly personal tone of media texts written in relation to the 'Kataryna case' seems to confirm the observation that journalists see the issue of online anonymity as affecting them in a very direct way.

9.1.2 RQ 2: Does the media in Poland contribute to the de-anonymisation process?

In Chapter 3 I proposed that the current trends in the development of internet culture, already observed by numerous new media scholars (Froomkin 2015; van Zoonen 2013; Bollmer 2012; Lovink 2012; Hogan 2013), can be described as a process of *de-anonymisation*. What this concept denotes is a shift from a web where users' identities are fluid and flexible to the so called 'real names web' (Hogan, 2013), guided by values such as authenticity, transparency and self-promotion.

Using Lessig's (2006) framework I discussed four types of factors influencing *de-anonymisation*: legal regulations, market forces, technological

solutions and social norms. I then argued that discourse is yet another factor that needs to be considered in this context and made an argument for recognizing the role of the media in shaping the future of online anonymity. Based on earlier studies and the available but mostly anecdotal evidence, I hypothesised that media discourse in Poland plays its own role in the *de-anonymisation* trend. Overall, the results of the empirical analysis seem to confirm this proposition, although the picture is highly nuanced and mostly context-sensitive.

In Chapter 3 I proposed three interrelated aspects of the potential influence of the media on the trajectory of online anonymity: their symbolic power, their control over access to the public sphere, and their participation in the struggle for power and control in the new media reality. These three aspects constitute a useful framework for considering the media contribution to the *de-anonymisation* process.

First, as van Dijk (1995) argued, the power of mass media materializes in that they shape the knowledge and understanding of particular issues, set the public agenda and influence attitudes and evaluations. In Poland, as the content analysis showed, media often link online anonymity with crime and with offensive, low quality internet content. Similarly, a large part of the journalistic discourse surrounding the 'Kataryna case' associates anonymity with the lack of responsibility, lack of accountability and cowardice. The study also found that Polish newspapers in their agenda largely ignore the link betweenonline anonymity and internet users' privacy, focusing on the effects of online anonymity on public debates. That means that the public is rarely informed about one of the most important argument for preserving the anonymity on the internet. Moreover, both the content and the discourse analyses showed that the Polish media debate is dominated by negative attitudes towards online anonymity, which might in turn affect the way this issue is evaluated by the public. In the context of the 'Kataryna case' journalists repeatedly used the 'us' versus 'them' framing in order to highlight the superiority of content signed with the author's 'real' name and thus showing online anonymity as a domain of haters, trolls and cowards.

Another area in which the news media can enable or restrict internet users' anonymity is their control over readers' participation, primarily in comments under news stories. One aspect of this control is websites' ability to enforce a

certain level of identity disclosure through the technologies they use as an entry condition for those who wish to engage in the debate (e.g. Facebook plug-ins or unrestricted, anonymous comments).

Although this area is beyond the scope of this research, Table 1 in Chapter 4 provides a general indication that websites of traditional media prefer more restrictive requirements, and thus are more intolerant to anonymity.

However, this study finds that the media can also 'rhetorically' regulate the access to the public sphere and the context of communication by delegitimizing certain voices or forms of participation. As the discourse surrounding the 'Kataryna case' showed, newspaper coverage repeatedly delegitimized anonymous voices, favouring transparency and authorship. *Dziennik*'s 'doxing' of Kataryna by indirectly revealing her offline identity was also in itself an example of exercising control over the access of an anonymous blogger to the public sphere.

Lastly, the mass media's contribution to the de-anonymisation process is a result of newspapers' struggle to secure their position as 'symbolic elites.' According to Ruggiero (2004), journalists engage in 'paradigm repair' by seeking to preserve traditional tenets of the journalistic tradition (authenticity, credibility, authority and accountability) in order to restore their privileged position in the new media reality.

The analysis of the coverage of the 'Kataryna case' demonstrated, that Polish media indeed engage in a discursive contestation with bloggers in which the status of both groups is negotiated. Overall, journalists made four arguments:

- bloggers have the same rights and responsibilities as journalists, and they should therefore act in a similar way and give up on anonymity;
- transparency and courage justify journalists' privileged position in the public sphere;
- the anonymity of bloggers enables abuse. Rather, the interests of those who engage in public deliberations should be made transparent;
- there is a certain level of influence achieved by bloggers, beyond which they cannot remain anonymous.

These arguments suggest that journalists target bloggers' anonymity in order to undermine their contributions to public discourse and simultaneously stress their own importance and value.

Nevertheless, apart from the technological transformation that forced media outlets, in Poland and around the world, to adjust (and also shape) the new reality, Polish journalists' attitudes toward online anonymity are also the product of the democratisation process in the country. As the findings of the analyses show, those journalists who believed that the outcome of this transition is unsatisfactory and the condition of Polish democracy leaves a lot to be desired, were more in favour of online anonymity than publications and journalists representing the 'transition optimistic' approach. In other words, de-anonymisation was mostly supported by the groups already powerful in the society, since at the time of the 'Kataryna case' the 'transition optimists' were a dominant political power in Poland.

9.2 Contributions and implications of the study

The findings of this study have implications not only for the theory and practice of online anonymity, but also for the future of Polish democracy and the media's role in it. The study contributes to our understanding of several fields it touches on – namely internet studies, media studies, as well as the journalistic practice. It mainly contributes to the scholarship concerning online anonymity by offering novel perspective on the way media discourse influences its future trajectory.

9.2.1 Implications for theoretical discussions on online anonymity

As Chapter 3 demonstrated, there is solid evidence supporting the existence of the de-anonymisation process, mostly in the form of legal regulations, market forces, technological designs and changing social norms. Although van Zoonen (2013), Bollmer (2012), Lovink (2012) and other internet researchers mentioned that the turn toward a 'real-name web' (Hogan, 2013) is in part driven by discourse, earlier empirical evidence of media reporting contributing to de-anonymisation were

largely anecdotal, and rarely supported by systematic research. The few notable exceptions include small scale studies focused on Western media and journalists.

Building on those theoretical discussions, this study expands Lessig's model of the forces influencing the evolution of new technologies by stressing the important role of discourse. It also offers an original perspective on the relationship between online anonymity and the media by suggesting that this relationship should be analyzed on both material (practice) and symbolic (discourse) levels.

Second, this study contributes empirical evidence of online anonymity being increasingly delegitimized by being depicted in the media discourse mostly as a 'risk factor' (van Zoonen 2013, p.45) - a tool of crime and abusive, low quality speech. Moreover, this study contributes to theoretical discussions around online anonymity by revealing the complexity of the power struggles that influence the way this issue is portrayed in the media.

It demonstrates that anonymity is used by traditional journalists attempting to protect their privileged position in the public discourse. As the 'Kataryna case' showed, the press might use anonymity to discredit bloggers' contributions to online debates, but it can also be used to threaten and even blackmail a citizen who criticised their work.

Although *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* condemned *Dziennik*'s disclosure of Kataryna's identity, their dominantly negative attitude toward online anonymity indicates that this criticism was likely more driven by a desire to lash out at a competitor, and not necessarily by recognising the value of anonymity in the digital public sphere.

The local characteristics of the debate, revealed in this study, also problematize Reader's (2005) concept of journalists' ethical 'blind spot' in relation to online anonymity and gives it a political dimension.

First, it shows that journalists' negative view of online anonymity should not be generalized and that it depends on a particular medium's position in the power structure in the society. In the context of the 'Kataryna case', newspapers supporting oppositional parties were more inclined to observe positive effects of online anonymity than those associated with the ruling political elites.

Additionally, my study shows that it is not enough to argue that journalists' opinions on anonymous readers' contributions are based on "knee-jerk biases against anonymous opinions" (Reader, 2005, p.64). While one might agree with Reader that journalists, in their criticism of online anonymity, overlook some basic ethical journalistic principles, their positions on online anonymity are strongly related to struggles for power, status and control in the public sphere.

Ultimately, this investigation responds to Gross's (2014) call for media studies to focus more on the local cultural and political contexts of problems they engage with. The Polish online anonymity debate could not have been understood without considering the two processes, which the Polish media system faced at the turn of the century – the democratic transition and technological change. It shows that what Nijakowski (2008, pp.113-114) described as "the collective memory and debate about the past" can project into the contemporary discourse surrounding new technologies.

9.2.2 Implications for the future of online anonymity

The overall negative picture of online anonymity that emerges from the content and discourse analyses might indicate that traditional media in Poland would not oppose policies enforcing full identity disclosure on the internet and the rise of the so called 'real name web' (Hogan 2013). Obviously, the vast majority of media outlets are for profit businesses, so their positions would also depend on their commercial interests in restricting or enabling anonymity. Such analysis is beyond the scope of this study, but the results obtained allow the conclusion that if enabling anonymous readers' participation will not have economic value, then media will possibly not oppose de-anonymisation on normative grounds.

The highly confrontational style and polarising rhetoric visible in the media discourse surrounding the 'Kataryna case', which journalists use when addressing or describing anonymous internet users might indicate that journalists are not willing to engage with discussions with anonymous users, or focus on developing tools to make debates more constructive – for example by giving users more tools for self-regulation. In fact, journalists seem to be happy to keep their position as opinion leaders, superior to users. If anonymous readers are 'a plague', 'small

people' or 'cowards' then this position becomes justified. Additionally, given the absence of coherent interpretation of laws regulating internet users' identity disclosure discussed in Chapter 4, the lack of support for anonymity might indicate that newspapers are likely to comply with requests from the authorities to disclose users' personal data.

Yet, the precedent of the 'Katryna case' gives hope for other anonymous online contributors. The criticism that *Dziennik* journalists faced after they had semi-disclosed Kataryna's offline identity is likely to discourage other journalists from acting in a similar way in the future. Moreover, the 'Kataryna case' was seen as a breach of journalistic ethics by bloggers, the journalists of *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and even some of the *Dziennik*'s own staff. The general condemnation of the case by the journalistic community was also supported by a negative opinion about *Dziennik*'s conduct issued by the Council of Media Ethics. Yet, the analysis of the media discourse around the 'Kataryna case' showed that there is no obvious link between condemning Kataryna's disclosure and supporting online anonymity.

9.2.3 Implications for the Polish media and democracy

The analysis also has significance for the state of Polish democracy, its future and the role of the media in it. The findings from both content and discourse analyses show that we are witnessing a struggle for power and influence in the digital public sphere. Newspaper journalists are strongly attached to the hierarchical vision of the public sphere, and as was the case at the beginning of Poland's democratic transition, they see themselves as eligible to define its shape and conditions of access on their own terms. As a result, rather than promoting and embracing the pluralistic and inclusive debate, the try to preserve an outdated model of public communication.

The results obtained also raise questions about the extent to which Polish media serve citizens' interests and protect them from political and commercial abuses. Considering the observation which many internet scholars made (e.g. Moore 2002; Woo 2006), that online anonymity might be the only way to safeguard privacy on the internet and protect citizens from omnipotent

surveillance, the fact that the link between anonymity and privacy hardly ever appears in the media coverage rises serious concerns. That is accelerated by the way internet users' identities were constructed in the coverage of the 'Kataryna case', showing how little respect journalists have for citizens' voices, especially those which are anonymous.

Moreover, the study confirms Kowalski's (2010) observation, that the Polish public debate is dominated by the division between 'transition optimists' and 'transition pessimists.' This division, the findings show, also applies to the debate surrounding online anonymity, and the consequences of this observation are twofold. First, it is likely that support for or critique of online anonymity in the media will continue to be dependent on the broader political dynamics. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to observe if media which previously represented the 'transition optimistic' view and claimed that there is no place for anonymity in a democratic society have changed their view since the new, conservative government came into power. Second, considering the strong political polarisation on the Polish media scene, it seems reasonable to assume that anonymous voices, which challenge these traditional divisions, will be further marginalised.

9.3 Reflections on the research process

Since transparency and reflexivity are key to increasing the validity of qualitative inquiries (Mason 2002), the following section outlines some of the challenges and difficulties, which I encountered on my research journey.

At the initial stages of designing this study I was planning to use methodological triangulation and analyse the Polish public discourse on anonymity using content analysis, discourse analysis and interviews. I intended to conduct interviews with key stakeholders – editors, activists, politicians, website owners – in order to complement the textual analyses and widen the scope of the examined opinions on online anonymity.

In fact, I did conduct six in-depth interviews which helped me gain a better understanding of the issue of online anonymity and the local context of the debate. However, as the textual analysis progressed and I realized the particularities of the

media - online anonymity discursive relationship, and the importance of the local context for understanding it, I decided that this in itself deserved my full attention. The analysis required a coherent, focused conceptual framework which would be difficult to build had I expanded the variety of discourses.

Eventually, the only interview I included in the study (as background information, not as part of the sample) was the one I conducted with Kataryna. It helped me (and it would hopefully help readers of this thesis) to better understand the case and see it as an authentic life story, not only a media hype.

I also wanted to interview representatives of the other side of the story: *Dziennik* authors, but it proved to be difficult. One of them openly admitted to ignoring my emails, hoping it would discourage me. Eventually I obtained his permission for an interview, but facing such reluctance I decided I did not intend to go against anyone's will.

Ultimately, the text-oriented character of this study has several obvious limitations. The choice of two quality newspapers for the content analysis created a selective view of the ways online anonymity was portrayed in the Polish media, which is also a very elitist view. However, my aim was to capture what Mautner (2008) calls the 'social mainstream' for which the mass media are the most appropriate source.

Second, the decision to focus on print, and not broadcast media, stems from the fact that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to construct a satisfactory sample. I would have to analyse materials that are focused predominantly on online anonymity, which would prevent me from seeing in what way it appears in other contexts. Additionally, the coverage in print media is usually more developed and detailed, enabling the creation of a rich and diverse sample.

The choice of using critical discourse analysis to study one particular discursive event – the 'Kataryna case' – also allowed for an in-depth investigation of the online anonymity debate in a very specific context. However, this decision had its roots in the conviction that it is well-defined contextualisation, and not an ostensible 'universality', that makes a research project valuable and advances the field of new media studies.

Lastly, one major challenge in using critical discourse analysis was the fact that it is a method that has en embedded bias and, as Wodak and Meyer (2009) put

it, is proud of it. This methodology centres around what it openly calls a 'social problem' (Fairclough, 2001b), which in this study is the process of de-anonymisation. As a researcher I tried to keep a balanced view on online anonymity, discussing both its advantages and related problems. However, I am biased in seeing the overall trend of increasing tracking of internet users as a risk to freedom of speech, privacy, and consequently, to democracy. While this bias can provoke critique from quantitative scholars (as it did during conferences I had attended), it is an inherent element of a critical investigation of power and dominance in the digital world.

9.4 Directions for further studies

Online anonymity is still a relatively new object of interest for the media studies discipline, and one that is in a constant move. Therefore, my investigation has left me with a significant number of open questions, some of which can undoubtedly be transformed into research projects that would advance our understanding of the place of online anonymity in modern media systems.

First, my study focused on how media in Poland construct online anonymity in their coverage, which is just one aspect of the media's engagement with this issue. The mostly negative view of anonymity and anonymous internet users in news reporting, together with the implicit but dominant 'common sense' approach, raise questions about other applications of anonymity in the journalistic practice. As I argued in Chapter 4, not only can media shape audiences' understanding and perception of online anonymity, they can also actively enable it or restrict it on their platforms. This includes creating conditions for reader participation in the public debate (for example, in the comments sections or via social media), as well as facilitating direct contact (via emails or contact forms) between journalists and citizens who could also provide valuable leads. This sphere requires further investigation, as analysis of media coverage of online anonymity suggests that Polish journalists – especially those representing the 'optimistic' view on the Polish democratic transformation – might not fully acknowledge the benefits of anonymous communication, exhibiting what Reader (2005) called a 'blind spot' in relation to anonymity. The analysis of media strategies in this respect, as well as

ethnographic interviews or focus groups with journalists and editors, could definitely contribute to our understanding of the relationship between traditional media and anonymity.

Second, the analysis of the media discourse around the 'Kataryna case' showed, that the debate on online anonymity is extensive and multidimensional, even at the national level. Yet, the study of a single case, although complemented by content analysis, leaves many aspect of this debate unexplored

One avenue for further studies would be to critically engage with discourses of other actors, which can potentially influence the future of anonymity on the internet (such as policymakers, web developers, civil society), as well as common internet users who are not members of the media or blogging circles. Although, as Gross (2014) observes, researching the elites' cultural traits is crucial for understanding how media systems operate, internet users today have various tools at their disposal to control the degree of identity disclosure. An exploration of internet users' voices on online anonymity, embedded in a local cultural and political context, could undoubtedly enrich our understanding of emerging new media cultures in respect to anonymous communication.

Lastly, journalists' stands on online anonymity cannot be universalised. Even though there were sound reasons for my decision to focus on the Polish context of the online anonymity debate, a comparative study of similar debates in other countries could shed new light on the issue and help uncover other factors that influence the way media discuss online anonymity. For instance, I hope that following the analysis of the discourse surrounding the 'Kataryna case', researches will find it relevant to investigate other instances of 'media doxing.' Several cases from the past years (such as the cases of the "Girl with a One -Track Mind" blog and the blogger NightJack) suggest there is much potential for expanding this field of study. The ability to compromise someone's anonymity is a significant source of power and control, and it therefore warrants close academic attention.

Appendix 1 | Sample for critical discourse analysis

Code	Title (Polish)	Title (English)	Genre
Dziennik Polska – Europa - Świat			
D1	"Wiemy, kim jest Kataryna"	We know who Kataryna is	News story
Czubkowska, S. and Zieliński, R., 2009. Wiemy, kim jest Kataryna. *dziennik.pl*. [online] 21 May. Available at: http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/150114,wiemy-kim-jest-kataryna.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
D2	"Utracona cześć Kataryny"	Kataryna's lost honour	Commentary
Michalski, C., 2009. Utracona cześć Kataryny. *dziennik.pl*. [online] 22 May. Available at: http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/150239,utracona-czesc-kataryny.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
D3	„Internauta ma prawo być anonimowy"	An Internet user has the right to be anonymous	Commentary
Jachowicz, J., 2009. Internauta ma prawo być anonimowy. *dziennik.pl* [online] 22 May. Available at: http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/150246,internauta-ma-prawo-byc-anonimowy.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
D4	"Współczuję Katarynie"	I feel sorry for Kataryna	Commentary
Zaremba, P., 2009. Współczuję Katarynie. *dziennik.pl*. [online] 22 May. Available at: http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/150244,wspolczuje-katarynie.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
D5	„List otwarty do obrońców Kataryny"	An open letter to Kataryna's defenders	Commentary
Krasowski, R., n.d. List otwarty do obrońców Kataryny. [online] Available at: http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/89812,list-otwarty-do-obroncow-kataryny.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
Gazeta Wyborcza			
GW1	„Wojna o Katarynę, której zdjęto przyłbicę	The war for Kataryna who had her helmet removed	News story
Węglarczyka, A., 2009. Wojna o Katarynę, której zdjęto przyłbicę. *gazeta.pl*. [online] 22 May. Available at: http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,6640783,Wojna_o_Kataryne__			

	ktorej_zdjeto_przylbice.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].		
GW2	„Smutna sprawa Kataryny"	The sad case of Kataryna	Commentary

Czuchnowski, W., 2009. Smutna sprawa Kataryny. *wyborcza.pl*. [online] 24 May. Available at: http://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,6644164,Smutna_sprawa_Kataryny.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].

GW3	„Sprawa Kataryny – rozprawa o metodzie"	The Kataryna case – a tract about a method	Commentary

Wroński, P., 2009. Sprawa Kataryny - rozprawa o metodzie. *wyborcza.pl*. [online] 24 May. Available at: http://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,6644500,Sprawa_Kataryny__rozprawa_o_metodzie.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].

GW4	„Oj dana, dana, blog to nie folklor"	Oj dana, dana: blogs are no folklore	Interview

Jędrysik, M., 2009. Oj dana, dana, blog to nie folklor. *wyborcza.pl*. [online] 26 May. Available at: http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,6648433,Oj_dana__dana__blog_to_nie_folklor.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].

GW5	"Elfie uszy"	Elf ears	Commentary

Aksamit, B., 2009. Elfie uszy. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 May, p.4.

Rzeczpospolita

RP1	„Rozbieranie Kataryny"	Undressing Kataryna	Commentary

Kałucki, J., Haszczyński, J., Szczepaniak, K. and tyc, 2009. Rozbieranie Kataryny. *rp.pl*. [online] 22 May. Available at: http://www.rp.pl/artykul/309243-Rozbieranie-Kataryny.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].

RP2	„Żyj nam długo, Kataryno"	Live long, Kataryna	Commentary

Wildstein, B., 2009. Żyj nam długo, Kataryno. *rp.pl*. [online] 23 May. Available at: http://www.rp.pl/artykul/309942-Zyj-nam-dlugo--Kataryno.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016]

RP3	"Czy 'Dz' szantażuje blogerkę?"	Is 'Dz' blackmailing a blogger?	News story

Wybranowski, W., 2009. Czy „Dz" szantażuje blogerkę. *Rzeczpospolita*, 23 May, p.3.

RP4	„Kiedy myślenie boli"	When thinking hurts	Commentary

Ziemkiewicz, R., 2009. Kiedy myślenie boli. *Rzeczpospolita*, maja, p.2.

RP5	„Internetowy spór o Katarynę"	The internet dispute over Kataryna	Commentary

anie, 2009. Internetowy spór o Katarynę. *rp.pl.* [online] 26 May. Available at: http://www.rp.pl/artykul/310776-Internetowy-spor-o-Kataryne.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].

Salon24.pl			
S1	„Akcja "Dorwać Katarynę" w toku"	'Catch Kataryna' action in progress	Blog post
Grzegorz Wszołek - gw1990, 2009. Akcja 'Dorwać Katarynę' w toku. *wszolek.salon24.pl*. [online blog]. 22 May. Available at: http://wszolek.salon24.pl/106330,akcja-dorwac-kataryne-w-toku [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
S2	"I ujawnimy wszystkich obrzydliwców"	And we will disclose all the disgusting people	Blog post
Kataryna, 2009. I ujawnimy wszystkich obrzydliwców. *kataryna.salon24.pl*. [online blog]. 24 May. Available at: http://kataryna.salon24.pl/106856,i-ujawnimy-wszystkich-obrzydliwcow [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
S3	Liscik do Krasowskiego	A tiny letter to Krasowski	Blog post
galopujący major, 2009. Liścik do Krasowskiego. *Galopujacymajor.salon24.pl*. [online blog]. 24 May. Available at: http://galopujacymajor.salon24.pl/106860,liscik-do-krasowskiego [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
S4	„Wara wam od naszych praw"	Stay away from our rights	Blog post
Kłopotowski, K., 2009. Kataryna a wolność słowa w Polsce. *Kłopotowski.salon24.pl*. [online blog]. 26 May. Available at: <http://klopotowski.salon24.pl/107342,kataryna-a-wolnosc-slowa-w-polsce> [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
S5	„Kataryna a wolność słowa w Polsce"	Kataryna and the freedom of speech in Poland	Blog post
Kataryna, 2009. Wara wam od naszych praw. *kataryna.salon24.pl*. [online blog]. 25 May. Available at: http://kataryna.salon24.pl/106971,wara-wam-od-naszych-praw [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
Blox.pl			
B1	„Kataryna a etyka mediów"	Kataryna and media ethics	Blog post
wo, 2009. Kataryna a etyka mediów. *Wo.blox.pl*. [online blog]. 24 May. Available at: http://wo.blox.pl/2009/05/Kataryna-a-etyka-mediow.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
B2	„Zagadka kobiety z brodą rozwiązana"	The bearded woman mystery solved	Blog post
wo, 2009. Zagadka kobiety z brodą rozwiązana. *wo.blox.pl*. [online blog]. 22 May. Available at: http://wo.blox.pl/2009/05/Zagadka-kobiety-z-broda-rozwiazana.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
B3	„Przyjebiemy pani w białych rękawiczkach"	We hit you with velvet gloves	Blog post

Radkowiecki, 2009. Przyjebiemy pani w białych rękawiczkach. *radkowiecki.blox.pl.* [online blog]. 22 May. Available at: http://radkowiecki.blox.pl/2009/05/Przyjebiemy-pani-w-bialych-rekawiczkach.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
B4	„Kataryna – gotowy scenariusz filmowy"	Kataryna – a ready movie script	Blog post
Kurtnovotny, 2009. Kataryna - gotowy scenariusz filmowy. *Placebo.blox.pl.* [online blog]. 23 May. Available at: http://placebo.blox.pl/2009/05/KATARYNA-GOTOWY-SCENARIUSZ-FILMOWY.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			
B5	"katarynka"	katarynka (a barrel organ)	Blog post
Reputake, 2009. katarynka. *netto.blox.pl.* [online blog]. 25 May. Available at: http://netto.blox.pl/2009/05/katarynka.html [Accessed 27 Jul. 2016].			

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