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Traitor, cheater, coward: The leaders of the two largest political parties in television newscasts during the 2023 general election campaign

Zdrajca, oszust, tchórz: liderzy dwóch największych partii politycznych w telewizyjnych serwisach informacyjnych w czasie kampanii wyborczej 2023 roku

Abstract

Strong social polarization is used by politicians during election campaigns, which at the same time strengthens this process. The aim of the study is to show that the news media is an active participant in these activities as well, which, based on the standard of journalistic integrity, should provide topical, true, detailed and unambiguous information. However, it has been observed that the journalism of fact is being replaced by narrative journalism, where the standard features are replaced by interpretative analysis and the opinions of the journalist (broadcaster). A media content analysis, indicating how selected TV news outlets present the leaders of the two largest political parties Prawo i Sprawiedliwość and Platforma Obywatelska, showed that the media during the election campaign are becoming a political. The media content was analysed for two news services – *Wiadomości*, broadcast by the public broadcaster Telewizja Polska and *Fakty* from the commercial station TVN. The analysis period covered thirteen days – from October 1, 2023, i.e. from the day on which the Million Hearts March took place, to the last day of the general election campaign – October 13. The article confirmed that the news messages strongly supported the narratives planned and promoted by the political parties.

Silna polaryzacja społeczna wykorzystywana jest przez polityków podczas kampanii wyborczych, co jednocześnie wzmacnia ten proces. Celem pracy jest pokazanie, że aktywnym uczestnikiem tych działań są także media informacyjne, które bazując na zasadzie rzetelności dziennikarskiej, powinny przekazywać aktualną, wierną faktom, szczegółową i jednoznaczną informację. Obserwując przekazy, widać jednak wyraźnie, że dziennikarstwo faktu bywa zastępowane dziennikarstwem narracji, w którym wymienione powyżej cechy zastępowane są analizą interpretacyjną, a przez to opinią dziennikarza wyrażającego stanowisko nadawcy. Przeprowadzona analiza medioznawcza wskazująca, jak wybrane telewizyjne serwisy informacyjne prezentują liderów dwóch największych partii politycznych Prawa i Sprawiedliwości oraz Platformy Obywatelskiej pokazała, jak media podczas kampanii wyborczej stają się narzędziem politycznym. Analizie zawartości mediów zostały poddane dwa serwisy informacyjne – *Wiadomości* emitowane przez publicznego nadawcę Telewizję Polską oraz *Fakty* z komercyjnej stacji TVN. Czas analizy objął trzynaście dni – od 1 października 2023 roku, czyli od dnia, w którym odbył się Marsz Miliona Serc, do ostatniego dnia kampanii wyborczej – 13 października. Artykuł potwierdził, że przekazy informacyjne mocno wspierały narracje zaplanowane i promowane przez partie polityczne.

Key words

narrative journalism, election campaign, information, television newscast
dziennikarstwo narracji, kampania wyborcza, informacja, telewizyjne serwisy informacyjne

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1. Introduction

The concept of narrative journalism reflects the condition of contemporary media. A departure from fact journalism in the academic sense, through commonly implemented interpretive journalism, towards narrative journalism, which can perpetuate social polarisation illustrates a media process of many countries, including Poland. The mediatisation of politics has led to an intensification of worldview divisions among voters with different political sympathies. The biased attitude of media coverage has, among others, caused sociologists to describe the phenomenon of breaking social ties or, in other words, fracturing social identity (cf. Cześnik and Grabowska 2017; Ruszkowski et al. 2020). The polarization of worldview that is supported by the media strengthens and perpetuates the antagonistic image of society, in which "we" are not only different from those whom we call "them," but, above all, "we" have a monopoly for the truth, being right and of our values and views. This type of media communication was clearly visible during the coverage of the 2023 general election campaign by the Polish media. The division into pro-government and anti-government media observed in recent years was then consolidated, and the recipients could feel as if they were in information reverberation chambers.

2. Narrative journalism

Academically understood information journalism stipulates creating journalistic content in compliance with the principles of *hard-news paradigm*. A statement prepared in this way will contain answers to basic informative questions, the content is created in accordance with the principle of the inverted pyramid, and comments will be separated from information. However, newscasts implemented this way are more of an exception than the rule. This statement does not make reference

to considerations on the criterion of objectivity in journalistic information. As Zbigniew Bauer (2000, 152) rightly emphasized, "the so-called pure information is only a peculiar theoretical construct" and objectivity is a peculiar myth, because journalistic (also newscast) content presents a selected fragment of reality reflecting the decisions, and thus the worldview or point of view of the journalist preparing a given content, as well as the publisher or owner of a given medium (cf. Canella 2023; Piekot 2006; Tarasewicz-Gryt 2012).

Rafał Klepka (2019), describing the way of presenting political issues (which are also the research material of this work) in contemporary media, pointed to the transformation of fact journalism through interpretive journalism to narrative journalism. The latter has been defined by Susanna Salgado and Jesper Strömbäck (2011) as the opposite of fact-and source-focused journalism. It is a type of news coverage in which the journalist focuses on explaining why something happened, explaining the meaning of the information communicated, showing it in the context, and also making an assessment thereof. Karolin Soontjens (2019, 954–955), while reviewing the literature on interpretive journalism, distinguished its four aspects: (1) focusing on the journalist and their stance while simultaneously going beyond facts, which results in a high level of the so-called political interventionism; (2) speculating on meanings, motives and results to answer the question why something happened; (3) evaluating actors or political events by using negative connotations; (4) speculating on the future developments. Thus, the information becomes a ready-made product, which, after being delivered to the recipient, does not require independent analysis, or taking a position, but only adopting the imposed interpretation. Even more so because the journalist, moving outside the role of an observer of facts, becomes an analyst, or perhaps rather a commentator of the existing reality, who does not just refer to verifiable facts any longer. In their research on interpretive journalism, Ewa Jaruga-Wosik and Inga Oleksiuk (2022) found that 83% of the surveyed local press materials and 68% of the nationwide press materials contain journalistic interpretations.

Frank Esser and Andrea Umbricht (2014) traced the evolution of news journalism in the United States of America, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, France and Italy from the 1960s to the first decade of the 21st century and demonstrated what kind of change this type of expression had undergone from neutral information provision to an engaged one, known as precisely narrative journalism. They pointed out that both in America and Europe, at different rates and intensity, a modification of the classical principles of information construction occurred through attaching interpretive analysis and moving away from the static aspect of statements through the presence of opinions. The details concerning timeframes and individual countries undergoing this process were described in the authors'

publication; in this text, the transformation process was reduced to borderline events.

In the first decade of the 21st century, information materials were much more focused on the analysis and answering the question "why?" and, while describing political events, the media focused on the causes, consequences and connections important for the broadcaster. This led to the emergence of hybrid forms of journalism, in which the elements of traditional factual journalism were combined with a new form of fluid and attractive storytelling about events, which nowadays we call narrative journalism. Narrativity combines information with interpretive analysis and a transparent expression of opinion by a journalist in an informative statement. It is emphasized that there is a clear departure from the paradigm of reliable information based on facts, although, some scholars point out, this is not a change that should be assessed only in negative light; however, it is worth noting that attempts to define this type of statement often refer to ethical considerations (Tulloch 2014; van Krieken and Sanders 2021; Jaruga-Wosik and Oleksiuk 2022). In the context of the lack of a boundary between facts and opinions, boundaries between informing and storytelling or the pursuit of objectivity and of relativism grow fuzzy. Therefore, some scientists question the narrative forms of communicating information, pointing to their negative impact on journalistic reliability (Dunn 2005; Ujma 2019).

Erik Neveu (2014, 537–538) emphasises that narrative storytelling is not a betrayal of journalistic practice; on the contrary, it is the ability to transform facts into journalistic news. Importantly, it allows combining many facts in one news release, which, according to the author, is one of the key skills (they are key because they are indispensable) and challenges of modern journalism. Narrative journalism is also perceived as a response of classic (traditional media) journalism to the challenges posed by new media. Its power lies in attracting and maintaining the attention of the recipient through the construction of news item referring to the structure of a story recounted by an engaged narrator. Compared to traditional journalism, narrative journalism engages the recipients emotionally, imparting a broad context to news events (van Krieken and Sanders 2017, 1365).

When reviewing the research on narrative journalism, Kobie van Krieken and José Sanders (2021, 1404–1407) define this type of expression as a journalistic genre or subgenre in which narrative techniques of storytelling are used, namely voice, point of view, character, surroundings, plot and/or chronology, in order to report on real world events through a subjective lens. They also consider two other perspectives on what narrative journalism is, recalling the understanding of "narrative" as a synonym for "news" and as a synonym for "metanarrative." However, they consider the first perspective to be the most justified. It should

also be emphasized that the authors distinguish reportage as a narrative genre, but when talking about narrative journalism, they do not limit themselves to reporting only, but write about the ways of journalistic presentation of facts.

Referring to the above-mentioned techniques, Marie Vanoost (2013), describing the idea of narrative journalism, defines a journalistic statement as a story in which its heroes perform activities or participate in events at a time specified by the journalist. When creating a news item, a journalist uses writing techniques that bring the recipient closer to the characters and events, such as attention to detail, expressive statement of thoughts and feelings, etc., as well as techniques that are aimed at attracting and maintaining the readers' attention, which include building tension, exposing conflicts, presenting solutions, etc. The unfolding narrative is intended to make the audience understand the news release in the context of the interpretation imposed and to impart significance to the events presented.

However, focusing on television news broadcasts, the examples of which will be analysed in the present study, narrative journalism will be understood as a discursive strategy of presenting information, in which the media present seemingly "matching interpretations, which are often products of (...) ideology. Narratives construct collective ideas, explain history, fill the knowledge gap, build myths, become the content of politics in the era of an unoriented voter, but also allow for distinguishing oneself, leading to polarisation" (Klepka 2019, translation mine). The use of the phrase "strategy" serves to emphasize the purpose of the news item, which is designed to create a specific representation of the world based on facts, but going beyond them. A journalist, who may also be called a narrator, builds a picture of reality by recalling selected facts which create a coherent narrative, closing in on a preferred interpretation of the reality presented. The use of persuasive techniques in such a news release leads to the construction of a metanarrative that offers the recipient an unambiguous representation of events or, more accurately, an image of the interpretation of events. The range of techniques used in such a narrative process is wide and, as some sources indicate, it is difficult to establish a homogeneous list (cf. Czechowski 2018; Gruner 2024; Rutkowska 2013). More importantly, in the case of political campaigns in which the level of emotionalization of news releases is high, current events become merely a minor contribution to building a story, often only loosely related to the facts to which the journalistic material refers in the introduction (announcement). The metanarrative created in such a way is, of course, the result of the interests and ideologies of the broadcaster, the vision of the producer and publisher of a given programme, and the interpretation of a given event by a journalist.

3. Methodology

Two news broadcasters – *Wiadomości* (*News*, Polish daily news public-service programme) broadcast by the public broadcaster Telewizja Polska (Polish Television) and *Fakty* (*Facts*) broadcast by the commercial TVN station were analysed with regard to their media content. The temporal scope of analysis covers thirteen days – from October 1, 2023, i.e. from the day on which the Million Hearts March took place[1] to the last day of the general election campaign on October 13, 2023. The choice of observation time was deliberate, because the selected thirteen days were the time of the greatest activity of politicians during the campaign, and thus their greatest presence in the media. The selection of the research material results from the clearly polarized news releases of both television stations in the period analysed. The public broadcaster presented materials strongly favouring the then ruling Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (henceforth Law and Justice or PiS) party and the Council of Ministers, at the same time discrediting the opposition parties, consistently calling them "total opposition." The commercial broadcaster supported the activities of the opposition, simultaneously criticizing the ruling party during the election period of Koalicja Obywatelska (henceforth Civic Coalition or KO (commonly interchangeable with its biggest party's name Platforma Obywatelska, henceforth Civic Platform or PO), Trzecia Droga (henceforth Third Way) and Lewica (henceforth The Left).

The way of presenting these parties' platforms was strongly linked to statements and actions of their leaders, around whom the news coverage was often focused. Talking about a person, and not only about a political group, allowed for creating an image (visual and verbal) which used mechanisms of persuasion imposing an unambiguous interpretation of events. Therefore, the manner in which Donald Tusk (PO) was presented by TVP and Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS) by TVN will be analysed. Such a selection of research material will allow for gaining insights about these politicians in the context of narrative journalism. The choice of television news broadcasters was motivated by the willingness to undertake an analysis of news, i.e. a communication of news that should, by definition, statically convey facts in a faithful and reliable manner. Additionally, the form of television broadcast allows for the analysis of both the verbal and visual communication, with the latter strengthening the significance of the verbal form.

The aim of the study is to examine how the selected television news broadcasters presented the leaders of the two largest political parties, Law and Justice and Civic Platform (also referred to as Civic Coalition) during the general election campaign,

1. An anti-government protest, organized by the Civic Platform before the 2023 parliamentary elections. It took place on October 1, 2023 in Warsaw. According to the organizers' assumptions, the protest was intended to serve as a manifesto of Polish unity, symbolizing a rebirth following the eight years of PiS in power.

in reference to the characteristics of narrative journalism. In order to achieve the goal indicated, the following research questions were formulated:

Q1: How did TVP's *Wiadomości* talk about and show Donald Tusk?
Q2: How did TVN's *Fakty* talk about and show Jarosław Kaczyński?
Q3: What topics did the selected news broadcasters use to talk about the specific leader?
Q4: Did the selected TV news broadcasters use the mechanisms which are employed when narrative journalism is implemented? If so, which ones?

When building the categorisation procedure, the following features were taken into consideration: date of release, positioning of the material in the newscast, content of the news ticker, subject of journalistic material, content procedures, rhetorical repetitions, archetypes. The last three categories require detailed explanation.

Content analysis procedures have been adapted from an analysis by Karolin Soontjens (2019), who conducted a study on narrative journalism in the Belgian press. Following the model of the source given, an adaptation of the applied method was made, i.e. verification whether a given material implemented journalistic narrative that employed at least one of three content procedures and how many (and which ones) occur in a given message:

1. explanation: focusing on strategies, motives or reasons for action in the information material, thus explaining retrospectively why something happened or why the politician reacted in the manner shown;
2. rating: a journalist expresses their opinion about actors or political events, uses valuation terms presenting assessments relevant from the point of view of the broadcaster, evaluates people or activities as positive or negative, good or bad;
3. speculation: a journalist interprets the possibilities or potential consequences of current events.

A recipient that follows an given broadcaster is flooded with an unambiguous and homogeneous content favouring the promoted ideology, along with negating the opposite ideology. One of the reinforcement techniques for news items is the repetition of the same content. Therefore, the analysis took into account whether broadcasters used the repetition of the same negative content (*echo chambers*), including archival materials.

Referring to a statement by Van Krieken and Sanders (2017, 1366), who claim that in narrative journalism, information narratives often depict actors using mythical archetypes such as: victim, scapegoat, hero, good mother or cheater, thus providing cognitive shortcuts to myths deeply rooted in our culture, the analysis

aims to answer the question of whether archetypes were used in the news releases under study, and if so, which ones. Archetypes will be understood as an element of the collective unconsciousness of the society, which Carl Gustav Jung – the author of this concept – when referring to the issue of power and leadership, defined as an objective psyche, nature derived from the experiences of our ancestors (primordial image). This means that archetypes are mediators in the transmission of important and uniformly recognizable cultural and psychological concepts by a given community, directing the perception and assessment of reality (Izak 2013, 57–59; Sherman 2014, 56; Zasuń 2009, 67–68). However, it should be noted that "the typology of archetypes functioning in contemporary political discourse is not the classic typology by Carl Gustav Jung who distinguishes: the Shadow, the Anima, the Animus, the Great Mother, the Wise Old Man and the Self (Jung, 1970), but a variant changed for commercial marketing, which was then adapted to the needs of political communication" (Wrześniewska-Pietrzak and Kołodziejczak 2017, 231, translation mine).

Ultimately, the analysis aims to identify and describe the narrative that broadcasters use in television news broadcasts to talk about the leaders of the two largest political parties in Poland. Only the footage was analysed without the announcement of the journalist running a given edition of the news program. This is due to the assumption that the announcement is a separate journalistic genre (cf. Wojtak 2004, 101–102). The study includes solely the content pertaining to the leader, i.e. phrases containing his name and surname or terms directly indicative of him; hence, statements referring to an entire party or government were omitted.

4. Analysis results

During the observation period, i.e. within thirteen days, TVP broadcast 165 items (including editions encouraging voting in the general elections), and TVN – 135 (including editions encouraging voting in the elections, excluding interviews). The public broadcaster TVP prepared an average of almost 13 news items per broadcast (12.7), while the commercial broadcaster TVN prepared an average of 10 (10.4). In *Wiadomości* Donald Tusk was featured in 77 journalistic materials, constituting 47 percent of all news items. In *Fakty*, Jarosław Kaczyński appeared in 44 materials, which accounts for 34 percent of all news items. It is evident that the TVP utilized the Civic Platform leader significantly more frequently in its broadcasts, with news items featuring his involvement accounting for nearly half of all news items aired.

News items featuring Donald Tusk constituted a significant part of *Wiadomości*. They were absent in the first journalistic material only three times over the period

of thirteen days. In the majority of cases, the structure of the news broadcast was established in accordance with the principle that the Civic Platform leader would be introduced at the beginning of the news, in the initial news segments and then at the end – in two or three news items constituting the final portion of the broadcast, but not in the very last one. Similarly, in *Fakty*, Jarosław Kaczyński was not present in the first material three times. However, the pattern does not appear to allow one to indicate the repeatability of placing a politician within the structure of news broadcast.

One of the elements influencing the nature of the narrative are the so-called news tickers, which accompany the first stage of the broadcast, i.e. during the announcement of journalistic material, and in this case refer to the specific material that was subject to analysis. They act as headlines, which, in accordance with their characteristics proposed by Wojtak (2004, 21), perform a nominative, descriptive and pragmatic function. The latter role is of particular importance in the context of the analysis conducted. The persuasiveness of the news ticker and simultaneously the legitimacy of the analysis of its construction is derived from three premises: (1) its position in the text as an element notifying about the event and its assessment; (2) susceptibility to ritualization, i.e. clichés, discourse-fixed phrasemes, linguistic stereotypes, and (3) the recipient's attitude towards being informed, which hides the broadcaster's agitational intention, thus strengthening the more persuasive nature of the news release (Kłosińska et al. 2018, 23–25). Therefore, the presence (or absence) of the news ticker is already significant in terms of the nature of the message designed by the broadcaster. Conversely, the linguistic means employed to influence the tone of speech directly impacted the designed narrative. The news tickers played an integral role in the materials presented in *Wiadomości*. Each item was preceded with such a headline and 52 of the news tickers (67.5%) carried a negative message. They used pejorative terms, such as "The march of venom and aggression," "The opposition exploits women," "The streets, foreign countries, i.e. plotting treason" (the original word "Targowica" was used as the last segment of this slogan, which, by the way, rhymes neatly and has clear historical connotations with treason or betrayal in Poland). 16 news tickers (20.8%) were neutral in character, using a static form of expression, such as "Electoral television debate," "New commanders in the Polish army," "About migration in referendum." 9 news tickers (11.7%) can be considered to carry a positive message because they used terms indicating a positive aspect of some activities, e.g., "Loan instalments will be lower," "Poles are better off now," "Border barriers pass the test." It is easy to notice that the negative headlines concern the activities of the opposition, while the positive ones – of the ruling party. In the case of *Fakty*, only 12 news tickers appeared (27.3%), of which 10 were neutral, while 2 were negative. The indicated

neutral statements were built on understatements, e.g. “to be or not to be,” “deeds and words,” “voice power,” and two negative ones referred to the government’s actions: “more billions jeopardized” and “bazaar diplomacy.”

Each of the stations used clearly different topics in the materials analysed. The public broadcaster focused on covering the campaign using mainly negative content. The highlighted topics are as follows: the negative assessment of Donald Tusk (18 news items); threats related to the change of government (16); the subject of migrants (11); connections with Russia, Germany, Belarus (10); the assessment of the Civic Platform and Polish People’s Party coalition government (7); the support of PiS (Law and Justice) for Poles (5); scandals surrounding Civic Platform politicians (4); the Million Hearts March (3); and the general election campaign (3). It is important to note that the predominant subject area was distinguished in each news item, as the majority of news releases were multithreaded and covered a variety of topics.

In the majority of cases, the news items focused simply on showing Donald Tusk in a critical, hostile manner. It is crucial to note that these were not news items concentrated on one information thread. It was a whole long story, referring mainly to historical events and recalling archival television materials or videos from the Law and Justice electoral campaign. One material combined, for example, such threads as raising the retirement age, cutting the canal through the Vistula Spit and Tusk's appropriation of the authorship of this idea, the claim of a lie about the cooperation of the Civic Platform leader with Lech Kaczyński when Tusk held the office of Prime Minister, problems with keeping the promises made, the issue of migrants (October 12, 2023, news ticker: “Electoral smoke screen”).

Another pattern was the repeated use of a fragment from the television debate, in which a clearly upset Donald Tusk did not make a successful TV appearance, having abruptly finished his speech after a sound signal announcing the end of his speaking time. Commentaries were added to this very fragment, such as “it is not as easy as it seems to answer questions, and the most important questions for Poles are: security, retirement age, migration, unemployment, social benefits, and privatization.” Then the material about aggressive migrants is introduced and a journalist poses a question “what do the two most important players have to say about this?” followed by a re-appearance of Donald Tusk who was shown running out of time and the comment “did not respond” was heard (October 9, 2023, news ticker: “Electoral TV debate”).

Similar themes were used in news items, which clearly emphasized the threats posed by the potential takeover of power in Poland by the Civic Coalition and Donald Tusk, as its leader. The main theme was the threat of another increase in the retirement age, called "plan 67" (Figure 1) which was repeated multiple times. Other threats include possible withdrawal from social programs, selling off national assets, a threat to Poland's security, lack of border protection, and raising taxes. Such materials were accompanied by news tickers "Threat of return of 'plan 67'" (October 7, 2023), "PiS warns against 'chaos coalition'" (October 4, 2023), "67, or a hidden Civic Platform plan?" (October 2, 2023).



Figure 1. *Wiadomości* 02.10.2023[2]

According to TVP journalists, migrants who are storming Europe are also a threat, and Tusk along with Weber are willing to let them in, including their reception in Poland. Apart from migrants, there appeared the theme of Germany, which, in the public broadcaster's narrative, would govern Poland through Tusk. However, the Civic Platform leader was also shown as Putin's friend, accepting gifts from him, as well as a friend of Alexander Lukashenko, who was hoping for a change of government in Poland. One characteristic feature of all the above-mentioned themes is their intermingling and reliance on historical events and archival resources, both with migrants (Figure 2) and the leaders of the countries mentioned above. Tusk appeared alongside Angela Merkel (Figure 3) and Vladimir Putin (Figure 4).

2. All images come from the analyzed news programs and were captured as screenshots by the Author from streaming services provided at www.player.pl or www.vod.tvp.pl respectively.



Figure 2. *Wiadomości*, 11.10.2023



Figure 3. *Wiadomości*, 11.10.2023



Figure 4. *Wiadomości*, 03.10.2023

TVP also used archival footage when preparing topics related to the assessment of the Civic Platform and Polish People's Party coalition government. They

reminded viewers of the botched privatisation and sale of national assets, rates of unemployment, low wages, junk contracts, and the liquidation of military units. On the other hand, it was shown how Poland had grown under the Law and Justice government using the motifs of the development of rural areas, endorsements of satisfied citizens, and a better situation of the military.

Fakty (TVN) covered a similar number of topics in fewer stories in which Jarosław Kaczynski was presented. In the case of this broadcaster, it was easier to determine the theme because the news items were not as multithreaded as in the case of TVP, but at the same time considerably more diverse. The predominant topics included reports on the general election campaign (11 news items) and recurring scandals involving PiS (8), the European Union (6), the TV debate (4), political agenda of PiS (3), Mateusz Morawiecki's (Prime Minister's) private assets (3), election-related manipulation by PiS (3), women (3), pre-election polls (2) and self-promotion of the program *Fakty* (1) announcing interviews with party leaders who, according to the polls, would enter the parliament, combined with the information that PiS refused to participate in the program.

In the segments covering the general election campaign, Jarosław Kaczynski could be seen at closed meetings with exclusively PiS supporters. Journalists often emphasized that during these meetings, the PiS leader frequently mentioned Donald Tusk, scared voters with migrants, and deprived voters of other parties of Polish identity. The video footage accompanying the news items was up-to-date and informative in nature (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Fakty*, 2.10.2023

When referring to the theme of PiS scandals, *Fakty* discussed the visa scandal, the dismissal of generals, and the PiS politicians use of the army to build their personal and party image, as well as the donations of state-owned company employees towards the PiS campaign in exchange for new positions or retaining

the existing ones. In addition to these issues, fuel price manipulation was also strongly emphasized as part of the electoral campaign. The theme related to Mateusz Morawiecki's personal assets was also used, accusing the PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński of breaking his own promise to make it mandatory to disclose politicians' spouses' assets.

The European Union issues form another context used by *Fakty*. Journalistic materials mainly focused on the lack of funds from the KPO (The National Recovery and Resilience Plan – a reform package to be financed from the EU), the dispute over the rule of law in Poland and PiS actions indicating a desire for "Polexit." While informing about the pre-election debate, TVN mainly highlighted that the PiS leader would not participate in it. Matters such as the monthly commemorations of the Smolensk air disaster and relations with Ukraine also emerged as part of the PiS policy. The women-related issues in which Jaroslaw Kaczynski was mentioned were shown as a critical review of the statements made by the conservative PiS leader talking about the current government's health and legal protections for women. The news items also reiterated the PiS leader's "erroneous" slips of the tongue resulting in his use of pejorative terms for women in general as well as his archival statements alluding to excessive alcohol consumption among young women.

As for textual devices, the journalists mainly used explanations which clarified the subject of the news items. The recipients were able to find out about the causes of certain facts, most often supported by arguments, explaining how a given issue should be understood and what the role of the presented political party leader was. Significantly, in some cases, especially in *Fakty* news reports, the explanation did not directly concern Jaroslaw Kaczynski, and his name was not even mentioned. Instead, in the background of the narrative, there was footage featuring the leader, which imposed the connection between him and the topic in question. An example of this is furnished by the footage discussing the visa scandal and reports on the closing of borders and restrictions in the Schengen area, with a brief image of Jaroslaw Kaczynski in the Polish parliament in the background (October 3, 2023). That same day, in the material covering the lack of funds from the KPO and jeopardized investments the image of the PiS leader sitting alone in government benches reappeared in the background (Figure 6).

Wiadomości, on the other hand, utilized the method of cut-off statements. The commentary on the support of the European People's Party for the Migration Pact was accompanied by a statement made by Donald Tusk, who during a debate said: "I will tell you about this migration scandal once more" (October 11, 2023), and the news report on the attacks directed at John Paul II is accompanied by a short statement "no one should in any way accept this" (October 13, 2023), and it was left

unexplained what these words referred to, or when and under what circumstances they had been spoken. Explanations did not appear only in two *Wiadomości* reports: one concerning the Million Hearts March, which was a compilation of negative behaviour of the march participants and did not include any commentary from a journalist (October 2, 2023) and a news item concerning the film *Na sprzedaż* (For sale) which depicts the stories of people who were victims of privatisation at the time of the PO-PSL government (October 7, 2023).



Figure 6. *Fakty*, 3.10.2023

In *Wiadomości* the explanations were composed of multiple threads. In a single news item, the following topics can be distinguished: Donald Tusk, with Germany's approval, introduced privatisation in Poland, carried out the German Chancellor's orders, reset relations with Russia, raised the retirement age, agreed to accept illegal Islamic immigrants. In addition, it was featured that Germany financed the Liberal-Democratic Congress where Tusk's career commenced. This was all announced with the news sticker "Berlin's Man in Warsaw" (October 1, 2023). The viewer was guided through various topics, often without any distinction being made between current information and archival footage, with the latter being used very frequently. Therefore, in the case of information about the European Union, which, according to the narrative of the broadcaster, is ruled by Germany, as well as in items related to migrants and the migration pact, Donald Tusk was shown in Angela Merkel's company (Figure 3), who had not been German Chancellor since December 2021. The leader of the Civic Platform (PO) party was also repeatedly reproached for his connections with Russia whenever the topic of Poland's security was brought up. On this occasion, it was recalled that FSB (Russia's principal security agency) officers were allowed into Poland in 2012, that Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, who had connections with the KGB was invited, and that Tusk had allegedly agreed that Poland's border would be established along

the Vistula in the event of an armed attack against Poland. These reports were accompanied by videos showing hugs, embraces and walks with Vladimir Putin (Figure 4).

As a content-related procedure, assessments appeared in 10 news items on TVP (13%) and five on TVN (11%). In *Fakty* assessment refers to three instances of Kaczyński being labelled a coward who was afraid to participate in the electoral debate, and in one instance, he was labelled a liar who deceived people by saying that only 60,000 people had taken part in the Million Hearts March. One of the assessments comes from the Civic Platform (PO) party leader, who said that "Kaczyński is probably the only person in the world who would give all his tanks to his neighbour. And once he has handed over all the tanks, he will declare war on them" (October 13, 2023). In the case of *Wiadomości*, just like in TVP, an assessment was used to conclude that Tusk was lying when making electoral promises or saying that he was the originator of the concept of cutting a canal across the Vistula Spit.

Speculation was used in 18 news items on TVP (23%) and in 6 news items on TVN (14%). *Wiadomości* warned against Tusk raising the retirement age to 67 (Figure 1), the return of attacks disparaging John Paul II, the consent to the influx of immigrants presented as rapists and troublemakers to Poland, the return of privatization and re-granting of high pensions for former communist officials, and the certainty of a conflict between the leader of the Civic Platform and President Andrzej Duda. *Fakty* mainly speculated about the plans of PiS and Kaczyński for Poland's exit from the European Union, the rising fuel prices after the elections and the actions that public television would take to hinder Donald Tusk's participation in the debate.

A frequent pattern was also the repetition of the same footage, including archival ones, and the repetition of the same news content. In the case of TVP, this concerned 45 news items (58%), and in the case of TVN – 14 news items (32%). *Fakty* revisited three times the fragments of an interview with Jarosław Kaczyński in the items devoted to reporting the election campaign, the upcoming TV debate, and the absence of the PiS leader therein. This interview was supposed to justify the narratives about the politicization of public television and the cowardice of Kaczyński, who did not want to participate in a debate even on a television channel favourable to him. Excerpts from the PiS convention in Katowice, which took place on October 1, were also repeated multiple times. These were probably the most easily accessible video materials that could be attached to many statements about the campaign and the leader of PiS. They were up-to-date and contained universal content.

Meanwhile, *Wiadomości* kept repeating a lot of archival content. The references to materials showing Donald Tusk with Merkel and Lukashenko, as already mentioned above, were often visible, as were the archival photos of migrants. News items on this subject showed mainly images from 2015 and from the Polish Belarusian border as of 2022. These were mainly photos showing a group of aggressive men (sometimes juxtaposed with a photo of Tusk, such as in Figure 2) or wide frames showing a huge number of migrants. TVP repeated the presentation of the same photos several times. Equally characteristic was a fragment of a recording from the campaign period, in which Donald Tusk was walking clearly upset, surrounded by journalists, and not answering any questions (Figure 7). The surrounding darkness and the disturbing atmosphere caused this shot to be repeatedly used with thematically diverse news items.



Figure 7. *Wiadomości*, 06.10.2023

As an alternative to this shot, *Wiadomości* used the fragment mentioned earlier, in which the PO leader reacted nervously to the sound signal during a television debate. Showing Tusk nervous and silent when he still had some time to speak, and apparently clueless, accompanied both news items directly related to the debate and those in which it was repeated that the PO leader did not answer the questions asked by TVP journalists.

Referring to the archetypes, we can say that the news items of the public television station were dominated by two: the traitor and the cheater. In the commercial station references to a cheater and a coward also prevailed. In both stations, one can also talk about using a figure of an evil character. Donald Tusk was most often shown in reference to the archetype of a traitor (31 news items – 40%). His connections (also unclear, conspiratorial) with Germany, Russia and Belarus were highlighted and were said to adversely impact his future actions to the disadvantage of Poland. Also, with regard to issues of security, his earlier

pre-2015 and current activities were assessed as being contrary to Poland's best interests. It was repeatedly emphasized that the PO leader had agreed to receive migrants intimidated by financial penalties for the failure to meet this obligation, had liquidated military units and had agreed to the border on the Vistula line, in addition to privatizing state-owned enterprises and selling national assets. All of the indicated items aimed to emphasize that Donald Tusk's party winning the election was a threat to Poland. This image was complemented by the archetype of a cheater, who previously had not fulfilled his promises, so his current ones would not be kept by him either, especially those related to maintaining the retirement age and privatisation. It was also emphasized that women were used by KO and Tusk for political games and the aim of the reforms conducted by him was not to improve their fate. He was accused of lies in his statements about the Vistula Spit, about the cooperation with Lech Kaczyński and about the migration pact.

Jarosław Kaczyński was shown with the same frequency in *Fakty* as a cheater and a coward (8 news items per each descriptor, i.e. 18% twice). The PiS leader's lies were mainly pointed out in materials covering the disclosure of Mateusz Morawiecki and his wife's personal assets, as well as in those about scandals denied or downplayed by Kaczyński. He was shown as a coward mainly in materials regarding his absence during the television debate, which was linked to his fear of a very likely defeat by Donald Tusk (the last debate of both gentlemen in 2007 was recalled). The second point made was about Kaczynski's fear of meetings with voters who were not PiS supporters. It was emphasized that his meetings were never freely accessible and were available only to the party's supporters.

Not all of the news items revolved around one of the three aforementioned archetypes. This was due to the fact that in some news items the leader appeared so briefly that it would be difficult to determine the pattern created, which is why some news items remained without an assigned archetype. There were more such cases in *Fakty*, which, it seems, did not have a precise narrative on how to build the image of Jarosław Kaczyński, but sometimes used him for negative narrative about the government, the PiS party and the campaign conducted by them. In *Wiadomości* the communication of news was profiled to present a specific image of Donald Tusk as an anti-patriot, an externally controlled politician who cared about the benefits of the European Union and Germany, and whose potential leadership would be highly destructive for Poland.

5. Conclusion

Narrative journalism in English-language literature does not refer to news programmes or the structure of news as a journalistic genre as described in Polish

literature dealing with conceptual analysis of literary genres. However, it does refer to providing information through a selected form of journalistic expression, in the context of reporting or simply of using narrative forms of communicating factual information. At this point, it should be noted that also in the Polish media space, there is a transition from the classically understood news (academically understood factual journalism), which, at least in theory should be present in newscasts, to the genres of informative reportage, in which the narrative form of presenting facts begins to dominate. The most commonly used techniques are rhetorical figures behind the abandoning the topicality of the facts in favour of the persuasiveness seen in the events used and fitting the narrative nature of news communication. As noted by Van Krieken and Sanders (2017, 1366, translation mine): "text analysis usually focuses on the application and form of storytelling techniques in informational texts, such as anecdotal clues, writing from the point of view and emotional impact." All these elements were used in the observed research material.

Referring to the basic features of information-based reporting (topicality, credibility of facts, unambiguity, comprehensibility, brevity, vivid imagery), we can observe that the news items presented above do not feature them. Some news items here refer to outdated facts and lack conciseness. Their use of imagery is far more persuasive than what informative news releases should contain on account of their purpose of implementing an ideological argument. Ambiguous and speculative, with assessments or commentaries, are the persuasive elements that constitute the fundamental components of narrative news today.

Politicized media frequently focus on the leader of the party which the broadcaster wants to show in a negative light in order to discredit or even demonize them. This was particularly evident in the case of the public broadcaster who showed Donald Tusk negatively in 47% of all news items in the period analysed. The criticism of Jarosław Kaczyński appeared in the news programs of the private broadcaster in 34% of news items, which is a clear difference between the two television stations. However, it should be emphasized that it still indicates a great interest taken in the negative portrayal of PiS leader. This difference may be due to the fact that TVP had a clearly planned strategy discrediting Donald Tusk. The strategy was consistent and based on recurring themes aimed at presenting the PO leader in a defamatory way, and his potential rise to power as a threat to Poland. It is important to note that the campaign coincided with the war in Ukraine which was continuously covered in the Polish media and with the armed conflict between Hamas and Israel that commenced at that time. Despite those two topical issues, *Wiadomości* prioritized the critique of the PO leader that featured in nearly half of the news items. It appears that TVN did not formulate such a distinctly

profiled strategy, instead utilizing the figure of Jarosław Kaczyński to provide coverage of topics associated with the presentation of the electoral campaign. However, it is crucial to highlight that the mere mention of the chairman imparted a negative connotation to the statements presented. The second reason for the lower frequency of references to Jarosław Kaczyński was the fact that PiS heavily utilized Mateusz Morawiecki as the prime minister and the second most important leader of the campaign after Kaczyński. Another reason is the fact that TVN's *Fakty* frequently showed Donald Tusk and concentrated on his actions presenting them in a favourable light. Jarosław Kaczyński was not such a regular a guest in *Wiadomości*.

The majority of journalistic materials treated the depictions of politicians as arguments for their ideological claims, while a portion of the materials was directly dedicated to the platforms of the two most significant parties in the electoral campaign. The figure of Donald Tusk was associated with three primary topics in TVP's *Wiadomości*: migrant threat, high unemployment rates, and increased retirement age, along with Poland's security concerns. The metanarrative was based on the archetype of a traitor and cheater, which accurately reflected the broadcaster's crafted image of the PO leader. In TVN's news broadcasts, Jarosław Kaczyński was presented mainly as a coward and a cheater, usually in the context of the campaign itself, but also with regard to scandals within the party and the European Union, and as an advocate for the potential Polexit. However, it should be stressed that, in contrast to TVP, the PiS leader was not as frequently the main subject of *Fakty*, but rather one of the few key arguments in a planned strategy of depicting PiS as unsuitable to rule.

The metanarratives reproduced by both stations exhibited a consistent utilisation of the cheater archetype. In the context of politics, this approach is a fairly transparent strategy, as the public generally believes that politicians tell lies (cf. Danielewski 2022; Wojniak 2015). Both TVP and TVN sought to prove that the (oppositional) party leaders were dishonest in their declarations, promises, statements, and assessments. Although the topics they lied about varied in the case of both politicians, the narrative was similar: both Donald Tusk and Jarosław Kaczyński lie. A difference appeared at the level of utilizing the archetypes of a traitor (Tusk) and a coward (Kaczyński). In an attempt to construct a credible narrative, TVP, both verbally and visually, depicted the PO leader as a traitor of the Polish national interest. Therefore, the items used images of Tusk in the company of Putin, German politicians, and declassified documents indicating the politician's consent to surrendering part of Poland to a potential aggressor. In accordance with this metanarrative, the issue of migrants was also exploited. All of these schemes were meant to demonstrate that Donald Tusk posed a threat to Poland, its security

and independence. Meanwhile Jarosław Kaczyński was depicted as a coward who hid from voters and surrounded himself solely with his supporters. The PiS leader was accused of being reluctant to engage in political debate and was shown either completely isolated or amongst his own party's politicians. In the broadcast of *Fakty*, as if in contrast to Kaczyński, Tusk was depicted amongst people both at open rallies and amongst voters who were both favourable to and critical of his platform. This visual device further consolidated the image of the cowardly PiS leader.

In certain instances, the identification of the primary topic of news items proved to be challenging, due to the multithreaded nature of the narrative. However, it is evident that the issues addressed differed with regard to a particular broadcaster. The newscasts at both stations were concerned with the same events and, from a meta perspective, were focused on the general election in Poland. However, the materials, which in principle should be informative, described reality in a completely different manner, choosing different fragments thereof in their descriptions of facts and in their assessments. TVP more frequently resorted to past events and cited archival materials, which further reinforced the pre-arranged metanarrative. Donald Tusk's statements in *Wiadomości* were frequently marked by incomplete sentences or fragmentary phrases which were ambiguous and matched the preconceived argument, but the editors could equally well deny their insinuations at a later point. In comparison, TVN demonstrated a stronger inclination towards covering current events, but frequently employed the image of Jarosław Kaczyński to provide a backdrop for the journalistic storytelling. Sometimes, the name of the PiS leader was even omitted, while the material discussed either the party as a whole or a specific politician affiliated with it.

In summary, the news items under study exhibited a strong tendency to support the metanarratives planned and promoted by the media outlets affiliated with the political parties in question. It might seem justified if we were to consider that the broadcasters reported on campaigns, i.e. on the manner in which individual leaders presented their political opponents. However, through the repetition of words, phrases and events, through recalling images that are arranged in a visual history (with a strong emphasis on archival materials in TVP) and through adding explanations, assessments and forecasts provided by journalist in news programmes, these narratives became entrenched. They further reinforced the ideological polarized political message, which should not be considered acceptable in an information programme. Consequently, broadcasters were engaged in the ongoing election campaign through their own news broadcasts, which evidently intensified the phenomenon of media politicisation.

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