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Editors' Introduction

New technologies have a complex and evolving relationship with communication, media, and democracy, offering opportunities and challenges. They can enhance citizen participation, facilitate communication, and improve government transparency, but also pose risks of misinformation, surveillance, and inequality. While the technology is changing, the people's goals and motivations seem to remain the same. In a highly competitive environment, everyone attempts to create a positive image to attract attention and persuade others. Politicians try to win voters' hearts (and votes) with rhetoric, promises, and programs, while companies fight against each other with more or less subtle public relations instruments. Even countries are constantly developing their national branding to gain attention from investors and tourists.

All these needs and aims become even more urgent in times of challenges and crisis. While political actors want to gain and keep power, the media face contradictory expectations. On the one hand, they serve as the primary sources of information to the public and the watchdogs who monitor the elites. On the other hand, political and economic pressure limits journalists' freedom and autonomy. Citizens are no longer just the recipients of the messages spread by politicians, businessmen, and journalists. They became active participants in the process of information and disinformation flow.

As scholars, we need to address challenges related to a combination of traditional needs and new possibilities technology offers. We start Fall 2024 CEJC issue with a cross-country comparative study on election campaigns in the era of social media. The study by Delia Cristina Balaban, Xenia Farkas, and Mihnea S. Stoica provides findings from the analysis of political campaigns on Facebook during the European Parliament (EP) elections in 2019 and the national elections held between 2020 and 2022 in Germany, Hungary, and Romania. The study clearly shows that although prevalent topics of the campaigns vary considerably across countries, social media contribute to equalizing political communication in all these places.

Although social media has become an important platform for political communication, television is still a crucial source of domestic and foreign news for a significant part of many societies. The case described by Mariana Kitsa

and Oleh Haliv shows that TV stations may start a close collaboration to meet audience expectations during crisis, such as war. In their study, two Ukrainian scholars captured a phenomenon called the United Television Marathon (Telethon), which was launched after the beginning of the 2022 full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine.

Two other papers in this issue focus on the content and style of political communication from two different perspectives. Magnus Tomas Kevisas examines the attitudes Lithuanian editors-in-chief have towards populist rhetoric used by political actors. His study proves that perceptions vary depending on the audience structure of the publications they oversee. Specifically, the study reveals a pronounced divergence from the negative views of populism of large urban and regional newspapers to the ambivalent views of local newspapers. Marta Kobylska, on the other hand, focuses her attention on actual acts of speech by a political actor, namely the former US President, Bill Clinton, and the rhetorical devices he used to define enemies while justifying the US military engagements. Despite different perspectives employed in these two studies, both papers recognize factors (either organizational or contextual) that affect the perception and expression of political issues.

The way one perceives the political, social, or business aspects of reality may be, to some extent, affected by experts in public relations and branding. In their paper, Gianina Vulpe and Kirill Filimonov present a critical discourse analysis of strategies undertaken by the Invest Moldova Agency, the governmental institution in charge of Moldova's brand communication. Moldova serves here as an example of a country with a high internal diversity that seeks a strategy to build a consistent self-image and national brand. In a following paper, Markéta Kaclová offers insights into those who actually work in the public relations field by conducting a study among the Czech public relations practitioners.

With the last paper, by Jakub Nowak and Johanna E. Möller, we refer again to technology and how it affects citizens' lives in general and privacy in particular. In their study, Nowak and Möller interviewed Polish and German activists who engage in privacy-conscious social and professional relations to understand how self-determined privacy is realized in datafied environments.

In the section on Methods and Concepts, Aneta Duda shows that combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in a discourse analysis may facilitate a nuanced examination of how language reflects, reinforces, or challenges dominant narratives surrounding specific opinions or attitudes. Her study focuses on two divergent strategies to drive culture towards the extremes: one involving a starkminimalism and the other, gaudy maximalism. While the critical discourse analysis provides a framework for examining the power structures, ideologies, and cultural values embedded in minimalist and maximalist discourse, corpus

linguistics offers empirical tools to identify linguistic patterns, frequency distributions, and co-occurrence of key terms within large text datasets.

The interview with Professor David L. Altheide, an outstanding scholar and expert on the role of mass media and information technology in social control and qualitative methodology, offers additional insights into changes we are experiencing and challenges we are facing these days. The interview title: *Through the Lens of the Media: Media Logic, Fear, AI* reflects a revolution in the media and technology and the psychological aspects that still drive the media business.

With this issue, we proudly announce the winner of the Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award 2024. We also present book reviews and a report from the ECREA General Conference, which took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia in September 2024. Members of the Polish Communication Association not only presented their papers at this conference, but also significantly contributed to the structure of the ECREA.

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Campaigning for European and National Elections. A Cross-Country Comparison between Germany, Hungary, and Romania

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Abstract: National elections – or "first-order elections" (FOEs) – are regularly the focus of research studying election campaigns, whereas supranational elections are often handled as "second-order elections" (SOEs). Social media tend to normalize existing power relationship and equalizing political competition during election. This paper analyzes political campaigns on Facebook during the European Parliament (EP) elections 2019 and the national elections held between 2020 and 2022 in Germany, Hungary, and Romania. From a cross-country perspective, the research investigates the volume of campaign content conducted on Facebook during the EP and the national elections. Results of a manual content analysis of (*N*=5934) posts of 20 political parties that gained seats in the EP and national parliaments suggest that Facebook contributes to equalizing political communication. However, the prevalent topics of the campaigns vary considerably across countries. Our research contributes to the discussion on normalization and equalization theses and addresses FOEs and SOEs from a comparative perspective.

Keywords: content analysis; cross-country analysis; EP elections; Facebook; national elections

INTRODUCTION

Political communication is often investigated during election campaigns (Blumler & McQuail, 2001). Nevertheless, the focus often remains on national elections, meaning local and transnational election campaigns are rarely examined (Strömbäck et al., 2011). Furthermore, research focusing on cross-national comparisons or looking at multiple elections in the same country is somewhat limited (e.g., Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008; Haßler et al., 2021; Tønnesen et al., 2023). However, European Parliamentary (EP) election campaigns provide an outstanding opportunity for cross-national comparisons with their hybrid – European and national – nature (Strömbäck et al., 2011). Hence, the present study aims to contribute to political communication research with a comparative perspective on the 2019 EP election campaigns and the subsequent national elections.

Previous literature has intensively focused on political communication on Twitter – now: X – (e.g., Larsson, 2015; Nulty et al., 2016; Ramos-Serrano et al., 2018). However, Facebook plays a more significant role in the media diets in most European countries (Newman et al., 2022) and represents the prevalent communication platform for European political parties (Klinger & Russmann, 2017; Magin et al., 2017). Moreover, after taking their first steps on Facebook during the 2014 EP election campaign (Koc-Michalska et al., 2021), by 2019 political parties from the EU. member states intensively used the platform for campaign purposes (Haßler et al., 2021a).

Elections for the EP are seen as „second-order" elections (SOEs) with less attention from the voters, political actors, and the media, compared to the "first-order" (FOEs) national elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1984; Van Der Eijk & Franklin, 2004). Therefore, in our research, we examine the meso-level and the level of political parties and consider the volume of Facebook communication during the national and 2019 EP election campaigns.

Considering Facebook's prevalence in SOEs, investigating the volume of party communication on the platform can contribute to the normalization and equalization literature: whether online campaigning normalizes existing power relationships in politics (Lilleker et al., 2011) or whether the new technology equalizes political competition (Gueorguieva, 2008).

Furthermore, our research aims to investigate the dynamic of topics during the EP and the following national elections, considering 2019 and 2022 elections coincided with disrupting events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

To answer our research questions, we applied manual content analysis on the posts of German, Hungarian, and Romanian political parties that gained seats in the EP and national parliaments. The selection of the country sample is based

on several criteria. First, each country joined the EU at important phases: Germany was a founding member in 1993, Hungary joined during the 2004 large ten country enlargement, and Romania in the two country enlargement in 2007). Second, previous research stressed the differences in political cultures between countries that conduct election campaigning, and in Central and Eastern Europe where party systems show volatility reflected by reorganizing, fusions, and the arrival of newcomers (Andrews & Bairett, 2014). Third, becoming an EU member state was a crucial goal in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s for most of the new EU member states, such as Hungary and Romania, who engaged in reforms to consolidate young democracies. However, in some Central and Eastern European countries such as Hungary, scholars point out that populist communication targeting the EU (Csehi & Zgut, 2020) and democratic backsliding (Orhan, 2022) do occur. Fourth, as Tønnesen et al. (2023) highlight, there are significant differences concerning prevalent topics during national election campaigns in the Western European countries and the new EU member states.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

FIRST-ORDER-ELECTIONS VERSUS SECOND-ORDER-ELECTION, AND THE NORMALIZATION OR EQUALIZATION THESES

Political communication research (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Van Der Eijk & Franklin, 2004) often emphasizes that national elections are treated as FOEs, while European, local, and regional elections – are considered SOEs. During SOEs, the stakes are lower, the voters are less interested than in the case of FOEs, and the lower electoral turnout reflects the SOE perspective (Reif, 1984). However, since the EP elections have a hybrid character, addressing both national and European issues, „research on political communication during election campaigns for the European Parliament is particularly interesting and important" (Strömbäck et al., 2011, p. 5).

Previous studies on political communication during EP elections have mainly focused on the role of traditional media, which generally pays less attention to SOE than FOE campaigns (Wilke & Leidecker, 2013). News coverage of EU-related topics is less visible (de Vreese, 2003), given that media coverage focuses more on domestic issues (de Vreese et al., 2006; Weber, 2007). Furthermore, political actors tend to be more professional in their communication during national elections, as a previous study concerning Germany showed (Tenscher, 2013). The lower commitment of parties to EP elections and „low-key campaigns" with a smaller staff, lower budgets, and fewer time resources reflect the SOE perspective (Holtz-Bacha, 2005). However, research stresses that EP elections

have become more relevant in the past decade, and parties need to take them more seriously (Somer-Topcu & Zar, 2014; Branea & Boicu, 2017).

In the last decade, the relevance of social media platforms for political campaigning has increased (Bimber, 2014). While in U.S.-based social media political communication, X (former Twitter) is the most popular platform, for most European countries, Facebook is prevalent (Klinger & Russmann, 2017; Magin et al., 2017), which is valid for both FOEs and SOEs. Nevertheless, X and Facebook have become integral parts of EP campaigns (Nulty et al., 2016; Haßler et al., 2021a), which might open up new opportunities for SOE campaign communication. Social media not only provide political actors with various resources to reach their voters directly (Bossetta, 2018), but compared to the resource-intensive traditional media channels, social media, especially Facebook, can be a good fit for the low-key EP campaigns of the parties (Russmann et al., 2021). The literature on social media-based EP election campaigns showed that both Twitter and Facebook are used for communication, showing signs of the normalization thesis (Ramos-Serrano et al., 2018; Koc-Michalska et al., 2021). However, Facebook provides an open network structure with sophisticated matching, targeting, analytics, and a relatively cheap platform – without advertising activities – for direct communication, which can also contribute to equalization. Accordingly, political actors can use this platform for strategic purposes (Kreiss et al., 2020) during SOEs.

The literature shows mixed results on the role of the internet in normalization and equalization: the first wave of studies – mainly focused on Web 1.0 – supported the idea that the new technology normalizes the existing inequalities (e.g., Gibson and McAllister, 2015), while works focusing on social media describe the presence of both normalization (Klinger, 2013), and equalization (Larsson, 2016). In the most recent study on the topic in the context of SOEs, Bene (2023) suggests that "larger parties dominate Facebook in terms of visibility, but social media are still able to level the playing field and decrease smaller parties' structural disadvantages" (p.1710).

While our study does not directly test the normalization and equalization theses, it can contribute to the literature with its cross-country focus on the Facebook communication of parties during FOEs and SOEs. For that, we first looked at the overall volume of the election campaigns and asked:

- *RQ1.* Are there differences in the volume of Facebook communication between the parties in the investigated countries between the national and EP election campaigns?

Second, we focus on the content-related differences at the post level. Considering the investigated topics of political communication research on EP campaigns, the focus often remains on the presence or absence of EU-related issues (e.g.,

Jalali & Silva, 2011; Senninger & Wagner, 2015). Although in FOEs, EU-related topics can become a central topic of the campaign (e.g., Kriesi, 2007; Adam & Maier, 2011), the literature points out that during SOEs, political parties addressed less European issues (de Vreese, 2009; Hoeglinger, 2016). In the case of EP elections, issues are often framed from a national perspective (Pérez & Lodge, 2010; Bolin et al., 2019). Voters have no choice but to decide who represents them in the EP based on electoral discussions on domestic issues. Some of the campaign topics are the focus of political actors during more than one election campaign, while other topics are not appealing to political actors, and the relevancy of issues changes over time (Spoon & Klüver, 2014; Eugster et al., 2021). However, Maier et al. (2021) examine the 2019 EP Election Expert Survey and focused on all 28 EU member states' 191 parties. The study contradicted the SOE perspective based on the observation of an equal balance of EU, national, and regional focus.

Previous studies on EP elections showed that prevalent issues and topics differed across member states (Haßler et al., 2021a). Tønnesen et al. (2023) point out that in the context of prevalent campaign topics, there are significant differences between Western European countries such as Germany and Hungary in the campaigns for national elections. Moreover, our sample included Hungary with strong Eurosceptic communication in the EP, and national elections (e.g., Csehi and Zgut, 2020) might focus on different topics in the FOEs and SOEs. Therefore, we ask:

- *RQ2.* What differences are between the national and EP election campaigns regarding the prevalent topics in the Facebook communication of the parties in the investigated countries?

Finally, differences between the types of actors also seem relevant. As a significant factor, differences between government and opposition parties are highlighted. The reason for this is multi-layered. In general, in the case of government parties, voters focus on their recent performance, while opposition parties are evaluated more on their campaign communication (Somer-Topcu & Zar, 2014). Furthermore, in EP elections, government parties receive fewer votes than in the previous FOEs (Hix & Marsh, 2007). The literature demonstrates that challenger parties position themselves strategically on EU issues as political entrepreneurs (Van De Wardt et al., 2014). Also, incumbency status influences social media usage: the online presence of incumbent candidates seems more intense (Lorenzo Rodríguez & Garmendia Madariaga, 2016). The social media accounts of governmental parties usually have more followers and publish fewer attack tweets than challengers (Evans et al., 2014). Nevertheless, Maier et al. (2021) suggest surprising similarities exist between government and opposition parties emphasizing EU issues. To better understand the differences, we formulate our third research question as follows:

- *RQ3.* What differences can be identified between the national and EP election campaigns in the Facebook communication of opposition and government parties in the investigated countries?

THE ELECTIONS' CONTEXT AND OUTCOMES

The 2019 EP election took place between May 23 rd and 26th. During the previous mandate of the EP, the migration crisis in 2015, the vote for Brexit in 2016, and Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential elections in the same year were the major international events. Moreover, the issue of climate change started to become more relevant while populist parties were also on an upward trajectory in several European countries (Bolin et al., 2019). These events were reflected in the campaigns for the EP election in some of the EU-member states (Haßler et al., 2021a).

In Germany, the 2019 European elections were deemed to have been the least second-order EP elections in history (Partheymüller et al., 2020), as they marked quite a few significant developments that shaped the political landscape of the country, as well as reflected broader trends across the EU Germany has 99 seats in the EP. One of the most surprising outcomes was the performance of the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), which came second at the ballot box, capitalizing on approximatively 20.5% of the total votes. Their result not only had the most significant impact on the size of the Green group in the EP (Pearson & Rüdig, 2000) but also indicated a growing concern about environmental issues, especially about climate change, showcasing a heightened prioritization of sustainability and environmental policies among the electorate. In contrast to the ,green surge,' traditional German political powerhouses faced a decline in support: although the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) finished first with 28.9%, they lost five seats as compared to previous EU election results, while the Social Democratic Party (SPD) gathered only 15.8%, losing a staggering 11 seats. The rise of the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) was another noteworthy aspect of the 2019 EU elections. The AfD became the fourth largest party sent to Brussels by the German electorate – which thus highlighted the existence of a significant segment of the population willing to support a more nationalist and anti-European discourse. The AfD's campaign heavily relied on personal attacks against domestic and European political leaders and post-truth narratives related to the EU (Conrad, 2022). Overall, the results of the 2019 EU elections also revealed a continued fragmentation of the political landscape in Germany, which was also visible in the 2021 national elections.

However, the latter presented a surprising shift in the political landscape, with the SPD, with 25.7% of the votes, emerging as the largest party. For the first

time since 1998, the CDU was just the runner-up with 24.1%, along with the Christian Social Union (CSU). The Greens with 14.8% of the vote secured their position, and with 10.3% of the votes, the AfD also consolidated its position. Academic research suggests the 2021 national elections, with a turnout of 76.6%, consolidated Germany's six-party system but reshuffled the country's political landscape and left the electorate deeply divided on significant issues (Dostal, 2021). After the September 26th, 2021, national elections, the federal government included the Green Party, SPD, and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the latter gaining 11.5% of the votes.

Hungary joined the EU in 2004. Hungary had nine parties running in the 2019 EP election, from which parties five succeeded in gaining 21 seats in the 2019–2024 European Parliament: Fidesz-KDNP with 13 seats, Democratic Coalition (DK) with 4, Momentum Movement (MM) with 2, Hungarian Socialist Party--Dialouge (MSZP-Dialogue) with 1, and Jobbik also with 1 seat. From these parties, Fidesz-KDNP is the ruling party coalition led by Viktor Orbán, who is one of the main characters of European populism (Moffitt, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The Hungarian political system can be best described as a „Plebiscitary Leader Democracy" (Körösényi et al., 2020), where competitive, free elections legitimize the charismatic authority, but the resources, media access, and electoral rules are strongly unbalanced (Batory, 2014). Accordingly, the government's Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant 2019 EP campaign's main slogans were „Hungary comes first for us in Brussels as well," „Let us stop Brussels," and „Do not let Soros have the last laugh" (Róka, 2019). That being said, the main goal of Fidesz was to campaign against the European elite in general (Bene et al., 2021). The opposition "had diverse programs. They all defined themselves as opposed to Fidesz and campaigned mainly against it, emphasizing their pro-EU position in contrast to Fidesz's Eurosceptic stance" (Bene et al., 2021, p. 124).

The 2022 national elections were held on April 3 rd, with a turnout of 69.59%. Hungarians elected 199 members of Hungary's National Assembly: 106 in single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting and 93 in a single nationwide constituency by proportional representation via a partially compensatory system. However, proportionality does not mean that seats are allocated in an utterly proportional manner: the surplus votes of successful candidates and those of the losers in the FPTP constituencies are added to the party list vote totals. The electoral threshold is 5% in general, 10% for coalitions of two parties, and 15% for coalitions of three or more parties. The running parties were Fidesz, United for Hungary – which was a six-party opposition coalition with Jobbik, Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Politics Can be Different (LMP), Democratic Coalition (D.K.), Momentum Movement (MM), Everybody's Hungary Movement (MMM), and Párbeszéd (Dialogue), Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), and Our Homeland (MH). From these parties, the MKKP did

not get any seats in the Parliament, and neither did MMM. Fidesz got 135 seats, the coalition parties without the MMM got 57 seats, and the MH got 6 seats. As for the other important contextual factors, it is worth noting that just four weeks before the elections, Russia invaded Ukraine. Due to this disruptive event, the issues and topics of the campaign were broadened into the direction of war (Scheppele, 2022).

The 2019 EP elections represented Romania's fourth political experience since joining the EU in 2007. The election outcome for the 33 seats that Romania has in the EP produced quite a few surprises. First, the turnout (51%) was the highest compared to all other elections for the EP held in the country. Moreover, even if only for a while, it reconfigured the power dynamics within the domestic political arena, with the National Liberal Party (PNL) securing victory, marking the first instance in the country's post-communist history when the Social Democrat Party (PSD) ranked second in a political competition of this type.

The results proved to be nothing but a moving picture since one and a half years later, in December 2020, the parliamentary elections would significantly alter the political landscape: PSD (28.9% of the votes) would regain much of its political force and win the elections, while PNL (25%) would rank second. The 2020 national election had the lowest turnout (33.24%) in the country's recent history. However, the main surprise of the national election held on December 6th, 2020, was the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR), a populist anti-EU party that unexpectedly secured over 9% of the vote. Most pollsters and analysts noticed this ‚stealth party' success (Stoica et al., 2021). A significant reason for AUR's success was its extreme position during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the outbreak, they heavily criticized the government's response, called for a loosening of lockdown measures, and aggressively campaigned against face mask rules, downplaying the severity of the virus.

METHOD

We applied manual quantitative content analysis to the Facebook posts (N = 5934) of the political parties that gained seats in the national Parliaments in Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), and Romania (RO) after the elections that took place in 2020-2022, as well as in the EP after the 2019 election. We investigated the EP and national election campaigns in an established Western European democracy, Germany, and two Central Eastern European Countries with less democratic experience: Hungary and Romania. Moreover, the EU membership history among those three countries is different. While Germany was a founding member, Hungary joined in 2004 during the most significant enlargement, and Romania in 2007. Besides, the country sample included countries with differences

in the vote percentages of the Eurosceptic parties represented in the government and the opposition. Hence, after the 2021 national election in Germany, *Alternative für Deutschland* built the second-largest opposition group in the national Parliament, in Hungary; after the 2022 election, Fidesz, with more than half of the votes, remained the main governmental party, and after the 2020 elections, in Romania AUR became an opposition party in the national Parliament.

**Table 1. Published posts during the national and EP elections
in Germany, Hungary, and Romania**

Country	Party	EP election	National election
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)	110	160
	Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU)	79	270
	Christlich Soziale Union (CSU)	133	225
	Die Linke	54	55
	Freiheitliche Partei Deutschland (FDP)	124	117
	Die Grüne	95	80
	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland (SPD)	70	122
Hungary	Demokratikus Koalíció (DK)	211	64
	Magyar Szocialista Part (MSZP)	234	145
	Momentum Mozgalom (MM)	121	123
	Jobbik	171	122
	Fidesz	210	278
	Párbeszéd Magyarországért (PM)		164
	A Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP)		93
	Lehet Más a Politika (LMP)		118
Romania	Partidul Social Democrat (PSD)	35	182
	Partidul National Liberal (PNL)	342	392
	Uniunea Salvați Romania (USR)	155	305
	Alianța pentru Uniunea Romanilor (AUR)		93
	Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România (UDMR)	263	219
	Pro Romania	101	
	Partidul Mişcarea Populara (PMP)	99	
Total		2607	3327

We analyzed 3327 posts (DE—1029; HU—1107; RO—1191) from the national and 2607 posts from the EP elections (DE—665; HU—947; RO—995). The analyzed posts were published on the official Facebook pages of the parties (*N*=20) four weeks before the elections. Hence, we collected data, including Facebook posts during the national election campaigns (DE—2021; HU—2022; RO—2020) and the 2019 EP elections. CrowdTangle was applied to extract the

links to the posts considered analysis units. Table 1 shows the number of posts per party for EP and national elections.

The research focus was on the campaigns' topics, so we coded (for the absence 0, for the presence 1) topics (e.g., economy and finance, health, policy for families and children, labor and social issues, criminality, political radicalism/religious fanatism, corruption, domestic policy, immigration and integration, transport and infrastructure policy, environmental policy, energy policy, cultural policy, defense, war and military conflicts between countries, foreign policy, international relations, media policy and digitalization, agriculture, development, gender policy, and LGBTQ+ policy). The categories applied in the present research were developed according to Haßler et al., (2021b) for EP and national elections. However, in the EP election, environmental and energy policy were coded together, while in the national elections, environmental policy and energy policy represented two different categories.

Coding was performed separately for the EP and national elections. Coders from each country participated in similar training sessions to share a common understanding of the meaning of each category. Reliability tests were performed separately for the EP and national elections. For the reliability test, 100 posts in English from the 2019 EP campaign were coded by all coders. The reliability test (Holsti's C 0.7) was robust for the EP election coding (Haßler et al., 2021b). Intercoder reliability was performed for each country based on approximately 10% of the sample for the national elections. Like other research (Tonnesen et al., 2023), we calculated Brennan and Prediger's kappa for our interrater reliability test, which provided high reliability. In our case, values were higher than 0.8 for each category representing one of the abovementioned topics.

FINDINGS

Our first research question focuses on the volume of Facebook communication. Overall, we observed that the number of posts published during the national election campaign was 28% higher than those published during the 2019 EP election campaigns. However, as we observed in Table 1, some Hungarian and Romanian parties did not gain seats in both national and EP elections. When we considered for the analysis only parties represented in the EP and national Parliament after the election, our total number of posts for the EP elections was 2404, while the total number of posts for the national election was 3163. The results were similar: Political parties published 24 % more posts during the national elections than during the 2019 EP election.

Moreover, if we look at each country's overall posts, during the national election campaign, the number of posts increased by 55% in Germany, in Hungary

by 17%, and in Romania by 20%. Looking only at the parties that gained seats in both elections, we observed no differences for Hungary and an increase of 38% for Romania.

As for our second research question, during the 2019 EP election campaign, only two topics were present among the prevalent topics in all three countries: 1) economy and finance and 2) labor and social issues. The first topic was also prevalent in all three countries in the national elections. In Germany, the topic primarily discussed in the EP was environmental and energy policy, and in the national election, it was economy and finance—in Romania, economy and finance ranked first as campaign topics. In the case of Hungary, migration was a prevalent topic in the 2019 elections, and there were military conflicts between countries during the national election. While the prevalence of migration as a top issue originated from the FIDESZ anti-migration rhetoric targeting the EU, the focus on war during the national election is related to the fact that the election took part shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine. Health was also a relevant topic in Romania, where the national election took place in December 2020, in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 shows prevalent topics in each country's EP and national elections.

Table 2. Prevalence of the topics in the 2019 European Parliament and national elections in Germany (2021), Hungary (2022), and Romania (2020).

EP election		
Germany	**Hungary**	**Romania**
Environmental and energy policy (18.9%)	Labor and social issues (16%)	Economy and finance (13%)
Labor and social issues (17%)	Migration (15.5%)	Labor and social issues (8%)
Economy and finance (14%)	Economy and finance (3%)	Domestic policy (4%)
Domestic policy (8%)	Environmental and energy policy (2%)	Transportation and infrastructure (3%)
Infrastructure policy (7%)	European policy in general (2%)	European policy in general (3%)
National elections		
Germany	**Hungary**	**Romania**
Economy and finance (22.9%)	War and military conflicts between countries (18.8%)	Economy and finance (31.8%)
Labor and social issues (19.7%)	Economy and finance (10%)	Health (26.3%)
Environmental policy (17.6%)	Foreign policy (8.2%)	Corruption (18.2%)
Foreign policy (6.4%)	Energy policy (5.5%)	Developmental policy (12.5%)
Domestic policy (5.5%)	Corruption (3.3%)	Education policy (9.5%)

Turning to our third research question, except for Hungary, where FIDESZ was a governing party, the componence of the governments changed in 2019 compared to the time before national elections in Germany and Romania. Therefore, the party status changed in the two elections. However, when we look only at parties that gained seats in both elections, the number of opposition parties (*n*=10) and that of the governmental parties (*n*=6). Hence, our findings must be interpreted as aligned with this observation. The results showed an increase of 4% in the posts published by opposition parties in all countries in the national elections compared to the 2019 EP elections. As for governmental parties, the increase in Facebook posts is even higher at 59%. The results showed that overall, there is a tendency toward significance that opposition parties posted more during elections than governmental parties ($t(30)$ =.71, p = 09).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our comparative analysis of the 2019 EP election, alongside the national elections in Germany, Hungary, and Romania, offered valuable insights into the dynamics of what the literature called SOEs. Compared to the EP election campaign, the communication volume on Facebook during the national election campaigns is higher. Hence, the perspective of the EP as SOE stands, at least in the context of posting activity of parties on Facebook. However, there are country differences. While we observed an increase in the overall number of posts in Germany and Romania, communication volume on Facebook did not suffer significant modifications in Hungary.

The present investigation of the two types of campaigns proved that Facebook is a relevant platform for both types of elections. By focusing on the EP, and national elections from a cross-country comparison, the present research expanded previous knowledge generated by single-country studies (e.g., Bene, 2023). Thus, regarding the volume of campaign communication, Hungary is an example of where campaigning for EP and national elections were addressed in a similar number of posts. However, it was noted that many posts in both campaigns in Hungary originated from the Facebook page of the governmental party Fidesz.

We observed that some topics are consistent during the EP and national elections, while others reflect circumstances of a challenging international context. The topic of environmental and energy policy was discussed in Germany during the EP and national elections. Hence, environmental and energy policy were pivotal topics for the German elections during the COVID-19 pandemic and before the war in Ukraine, highlighting the consistent approach of political parties in the EP and national elections. In contrast, in Hungary, the topic of migration was prevalent in the 2019 EP elections, while war and conflicts

with other countries dominated the 2022 national election that took place four weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Economy and finance, as well as labor and social issues, were addressed to different degrees during both campaign types across the analyzed countries. Furthermore, our research highlighted the asymmetries across all the election campaigns by examining opposition and governmental parties. Our findings aligned with previous research (Van De Wardt et al., 2014), showing that opposition parties posted significantly more content during both elections.

While our study did not precisely aim to examine the relationship between differences in posting activity, campaign communication volume, addressed topics, and their effects on electoral outcomes, some general observations can be made. Although a higher volume of social media posts by political parties can increase visibility and engagement, its direct influence on electoral outcomes is shaped by various factors, including political and temporal contexts. It should be noted that the EP elections occurred in 2019 across all analyzed countries, while national elections took place at various times: in Romania in 2020, Germany in 2021, and Hungary in 2022. Hence, the elections in Romania were held amidst the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in one of the lowest voter turn-out in recent history. The right-wing extremist party AUR, for the first time elected in the EP in 2019, also gained seats in the Romanian parliament. The same trend towards environmentally friendly parties observed in the case of Germany in 2019 continued in the national elections in 2021 with the high percentages gained by the Green Party. Russia invaded Ukraine four weeks before the Hungarian national elections. The topic was instrumentalized by FIDESZ and resulted in a high number of votes.

Further, our study looked at the normalization and equalization theses by analyzing Facebook communication across three countries and two election types. The results provided empirical evidence on how these manifest in diverse contexts. Our findings show that in Germany and Romania, the volume of Facebook communication increased during the FOEs, which might be a sign of normalization, while the Hungarian data, without significant volume changes, showed equalization.

Our research comes with limitations. We focused only on campaigning on Facebook. In the last few years, social media usage in the analyzed countries further developed, so during 2019 and 2022, election campaigns were also conducted on other platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Moreover, we focused on the official Facebook pages of the political parties and did not include those of frontrunners and relevant political representatives of the party. Therefore, future research should focus on a cross-platform approach and encompass other relevant political communicators, such as frontrunners, to capture the complexity of election campaigns. Furthermore, through the perspective of the SOE, of the

normalization and equalization theses, national and EP election comparisons also consider additional elements such as budgets, human resources, and traditional media. Future research comparing election campaigns on Facebook for EP with national elections must examine the dynamics of engagement metrics.

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To Be or Not to Be: The United News Marathon as a Source of Information and Object of Criticism during the War in Ukraine

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the analysis of the phenomenon known as the United Television Marathon (Telethon), which was launched after the beginning of the 2022 fullscale invasion of Russia into Ukraine. Ukraine's leading nationwide TV channels joined together to inform citizens about events in the country—24/7—around the clock. However, despite the apparent advantages of such a phenomenon, the United Telethon has also been a subject of criticism due to noncompliance with journalistic standards and engagement. In our article, we analyzed the content of the telethon during the most significant events that took place in the Autumn of 2022. For the study, we chose separate slots for all the Ukrainian TV channels involved in the production of the television marathon. The subject of the study concerned the approaches to inviting guests to the audiovisual recording studios of the channels, the indicators (in percentage ratio) regarding specific categories of guests, the tendency of invitations to the guest studios of speakers from political parties, state organizations, and independent experts. The next stage was the analysis of the uniqueness and importance of the information broadcast on the telethon air. To find out how often Ukrainian media refer to information from the telethon as a primary source, we conducted a content analysis of Ukrainian online media regarding the sources of information they refer to in their materials.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, United Telethon, TV, on air, critics, journalistic standards.

INTRODUCTION

Russia's fullscale invasion of Ukraine fundamentally changed the latter nation's information space. From the outset of the war, the largest national TV channels began to work within the framework of „The United News" („Edyni Novyny") a single television marathon (henceforth the Telethon) . The Telethon offers viewers depictions of events at the frontline, an analysis of the problems faced by Ukrainian refugees, an explanation of how the war in Ukraine is perceived beyond its national borders, and an examination of the geopolitical situation and economic problems caused by the Russian invasion.

The Telethon started on the first day of Russia's fullscale invasion of Ukraine, on February 24, 2022, to inform Ukrainians about the progress of the war (United Media 2022, February 27). Throughout 2022, there were multiple producers of the Telethon as each had a certain onehour slot for TV production every day. The Telethon became not only a challenge for large national TV channels to maintain 24/7, but also resulted in significant changes in the editorial policy of the channels. The key aspect is primarily the guests who were present on the air of the channels in a certain period. The usual practice of the privately owned TV channels was to invite political figures close to their owners as guests who agreed with the TV channel to manage their broadcast. This practice changed in the conditions of the Telethon. The guests were to be exclusively people who either had important information or were able to present analyses of ongoing events. These were all military experts, soldiers, representatives of authorities – as the primary source of information, international observers, European leaders, ordinary Ukrainians. Nevertheless, there were a lot of critics of the Telethon:

> A project that initially received much praise as a rare display of unity among Ukrainian broadcasters, the United News marathon is now increasingly criticized for incomplete and sometimes inaccurate reporting, as well as for the presence of former staff of proRussian channels among the presenters. There are also fears of censorship disguised as necessary wartime restrictions. (Lyushnevskaya, 2022).

In Ukraine's state budget of 2023, UAH 1.6 billion was provided for the national Telethon. Discussions were held in Ukrainian mass media circles about the expediency of the Telethon in 2023 and the allocation to it of a significant quantity of taxpayers' funds, so it is important to analyze the relevance, uniqueness and importance of the content presented in the broadcasts of the telethon. While, the purpose of the Telethon was to refute fake news and disinformation, which Alyukov et al. (2023) argue Russia disseminates widely via many information sources.

METHODOLOGY

For the study, we chose the autumn period of 2022. It was at this time that the effective counteroffensives of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in Kharkiv region and Kherson, as well as massive Russian missile attacks on the country's energy infrastructure, occurred. Therefore, it is interesting to explore whether representatives of the government and the political elite often appeared on the air of private TV channels participating in the telethon to comment on the successes of the Ukrainian military, thus creating a positive image for themselves. Was the airtime sufficient so that the producers of the Telethon, which was broadcast on all TV channels, allocate times specifically to military experts and official representatives of the authorities, because during the war they were the official sources of information. The research consisted of several stages, of which the first was to analyse the theoretical developments and media materials regarding the operation of the telethon. Since the 24/7 Telethon is a unique phenomenon, there are few studies on this topic in the scientific field. At the same time, media materials about the Telethon mostly concern the allocation of funds for its operation. This initial stage employed the theoretical method, the methods of comparison, analogy, generalization, as well as the general philosophical methods of induction and deduction. The second stage involved the monitoring of the content of the Telethon. For our research, we selected individual sixhour slots of private TV channels that produced the Telethon. While most Ukrainian TV channels, from national to regional levels, broadcast the Telethon, a separate group of TV channels and media groups produce the content. The initial participants were *Suspilne Ukraine* (Ukraine's single channel National Public Broadcasting Company), *1+1 Media* (privately owned commercial; established in 1997; market leader has seven TV channels) (TV channel 1 plus 1 is a leader of watching in January 2022, February 1); *Starlight Media* (privately owned commercial; has six TV channels, such as *ICTV* and *STB*) and *Inter Media Group* (the smallest of Ukraine's privately owned commercial channels; has one TV channel). Also involved is the Directorate of Television and Radio Programs of the VRU, which belongs to the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine (Official webportal of the Ukrainian parliament). The TV channel, *We Are Ukraine,* established in November 2022 by the employees of two defunct TV stations (*Ukraine* and *Ukraine24*) joined the production team of the marathon in the same month.

The design of the research program for the analysis of the invitees to the guest studios (see Table 1) was based around the broadcasts of a TV channel for 6 hours per day for 1 week during 1 month in the autumn of 2022 (*1+1* in September; *ICTV* in October; and *We Are Ukraine* in November) and the newsworthy events that occurred in the region, see Table 1).

Table 1. Framework of the research program of guest studios during the Telethon in Autumn 2022.

TV channel Broadcaster	Month of 2022	Week	Main Newsworthy Events
1+1	September	714	The HQ of the political party United Russia was blown up in occupied Melitopol In the Kharkiv region, Ukrainian forces liberated the town of Balaklia and nearby villages Russian missile attack
ICTV	October	815	Explosion on Crimean Bridge to Kerch Repulse of Russian attacks in Bakhmut and Soledar; Massive Russian missile attack on the energy infrastructure Exchange of prisoners of war Resolution recognizing the regime in Russia as terrorist, Russian drone attack
We Are Ukraine	November	916	Moscow announced withdrawal of Russian forces from left bank of Dnipro River in Kherson. Successful Ukraine military action on the Kinburn Spit The extension of martial law and general mobilization in Ukraine The G20 summit, Russians fired on liberated Kupyansk

We analyzed whether the invitational approaches to guests to the audio visual recording studios of the channels differed, highlighted the percentages for certain categories of guests, traced the trend of invitations to independent speakers and those from politics, power organizations, and the military. The data processing method was manual. For the analysis, we used videos of the TV channels' slots on YouTube. The next stage was the analysis of the uniqueness and importance of the information broadcast on the air of the telethon. One of the criteria for the importance and novelty of information is a link to the original source in other media. To find out how often Ukrainian and world media refer to information from the telethon as a primary source, we conducted content analysis. In the Google search engine, we entered the keyword "telethon" and the phrase "about it on the air of the telethon", selected the heading "News" in the search results, and recorded the number of such links during the weeks of autumn 2022. Media that referred to information from the telethon were also singled out. The summarized results are in Table 2. Finally, using the data summarization method we summarized the results of the conducted research and identified any trends.

Considering that the Telethon is produced by several media groups, not all channels have the opportunity to produce a full sixhour slot every day. However, we were able to analyze individual channel slots that were available online.

RESULTS OF THE TELETHON: BENEFICIAL OR HARMFUL?

The pertinent TV broadcasters identified their guests to the audience, as and when they appeared in the studios, enabling the researchers to identify and categorise them (see Table 2). The 24/7 format enabled the broadcasters to bring knowledgeable people into the studios throughout the day and night to provide news updates and analyses.

Table 2. Studio guests of United Telethon broadcasters
in September, October, and November 2022.

	Category of Guests Number of Guests N = 100%	Politicians %	Independent Military Experts %	Government officials / official sources of information / other guests1 %
September 714, 2022 1+1 TV	N = 51	5.8	9.8	84.4
October 815, 2022 ICTV	N = 76	9.2	10.5	80.3
November 916, 2022 We Are Ukraine	N = 90	11.12	11.1	77.8

Notes:
1: Other guests included representatives of local selfgovernment bodies, advisers to official officials, observers, and experts from other fields who are authorized to comment on military issues
2: The politicians included representatives of two political forces – the pro government majority "Servant of the People" and "The Voice

At the end of 2022, there was a flurry of criticism regarding the allocation of funds from the state budget for the continuation of the United Telethon. The critics' main arguments concerned the marathon's pointlessness, its irrelevance, and the lack of new information (Pavlichenko, 2022). In order to confirm or refute these claims, we decided to find out the frequency that primary information appeared in the Telethon's broadcasts, and how often mass media outlets cited the Telethon as a primary source. In the first period, 714 September, a key news item was the information that the Ukrainian Armed Forces had liberated Kiselyvka and that only Chornobayivka separated them from Kherson. For the first time, Oleksandr Samoilenko, Chairman of the Kherson Regional Council, appeared on the broadcast of the Telethon and voiced his assessment of the news. Subsequently, the most popular of Ukraine's online mass media referred to the Telethon when reporting the news or cited Samoilenko and the Telethon by stating early in their reportage: "he [Samoilenko] stated this on air on the national [United] Telethon…". Overall, 16 online mass media referred to or cited the Telethon in their reportage (see Table 3, Column 1)

In the second period, 815 October, information from the Telethon's broadcasts were mostly concerned with several waves of Russian cruise missile attacks targeting Ukraine's energy sector and the heavy toll in lives lost. As with the news broadcast by the Telethon in September, Ukraine's online media outlets (see Table 3, Column 2) cited the Telethon as the primary source for their reportages.

Russia's barrage of missiles launched at Ukraine, the damage they caused on Ukrainian cities, counterbalanced by the liberation of Kherson dominated the Telethon in November. During this period, 24 of Ukraine's online media outlets cited the Telethon as the primary source for their reportages 916 November (see Table 3, Column 3).

**Table 3. Mass media outlets that referred to the United
Telethon as their primary source of information**

Analyzed weeks of 24/7 Broadcast of United Telethon	September 7–14, 2022	October 8–15, 2022-	November 9–16, 2022
Media Outlets	**(n=16)**	**(n=19)**	**(n=22)**
Armyinform (https://armyinform.com.ua/)	X	X	X
Dzerkalo Tyzhnia (https://zn.ua/)	X	X	X
LB.ua (https://lb.ua/)	X	X	X
New Voice (https://nv.ua/)	X	X	X
Radio Liberty (https://www.radiosvoboda.org/)	X	X	X
Slovoidilo (https://www.slovoidilo.ua/)	X	X	X
Suspilne (https://suspilne.media/)	X	X	X
TSN (https://tsn.ua/)	X	X	X
Ukrainska Pravda (https://www.pravda.com.ua/)	X	X	X
Ukrinform (https://www.ukrinform.ua/blocklastnews)	X	X	X
DW (https://www.dw.com/		X	X
Gordon (https://gordonua.com/ukr/)		X	X
Korespondent.net (https://ua.korrespondent.net/)		X	X
Pryamyy (https://prm.ua/)		X	X
Unian (https://www.unian.ua/)		X	X
Zahid.net (https://zaxid.net/)		X	X
RBC-Ukraine (https://www.rbc.ua/)	X	X	
Glavkom (https://glavcom.ua/)	X		X
Focus (https://focus.ua/)	X		
Slovoproslovo (https://slovoproslovo.info/)	X		
Zмina" (https://zmina.info/)	X		
Zbruch (https://zbruc.eu/)	X		
Fakty (https://fakty.com.ua/ua/)		X	
Hromadske (https://hromadske.ua/)		X	

Analyzed weeks of 24/7 Broadcast of United Telethon	September 7–14, 2022	October 8–15, 2022-	November 9–16, 2022
Media Outlets	**(n=16)**	**(n=19)**	**(n=22)**
BBC Ukraine (https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian)			X
Express (https://expres.online/)			X
Forbes.ua (https://forbes.ua/)			X
Interfax-Ukraine (https://interfax.com.ua/)			X
Obozrevatel (https://www.obozrevatel.com/)			X

DISCUSSION

The main aim of the creation of the National Telethon was to fight Russian propaganda and fake news. But, even before the outbreak of Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it was clear that modern online tools could be used for both accurate reporting and disinformation campaigns (Virostkova, 2022). Consequently, any approaches for refuting fake news must involve a wide range of means and methods. The most novel method was as Goldbart (2022) explains: "Ukraine's biggest media groups have united to broadcast one allencompassing news service to cover the conflict, as they urge the world to impose "media sanctions" and turn off Russian channels". Just as Selvarajah and Fiorito (2023) declare the first days of the Russian invasion were of extreme importance for the ensuing conflict, so too was the justified decision to start of United Telethon on the first day of the conflict.

The 2022 fullscale Russian-Ukrainian war not only resulted in deaths and injuries but also affected the lives and safety of the populace through the destruction of healthcare facilities and disruption to the delivery of healthcare and supplies (Haque et al., 2022). Putzyata (2023), after analyzing the structure of the national telethon, argues it consists of informational subplots concerning a broad range of sociopolitical, military, economic, medical, culturalhistorical, sports, scientific, and logistical topics (Putzyata, 2023). However, our research found the main themes of the United Telethon were military and sociopolitical. The United Telethon did highlight medical and humanitarian themes, but only when Ukraine liberated captured territories or new medical and social programs were provided Also, despite the argument that the economy is vital during wartime, the United Telethon mostly lacked any information and discussions on economic topics (Welfens, 2023).. Two of the most significant aspects of the United Telemarathon are its 24/7 broadcasting and the huge number of invited commentators, experts, and authorities.

A principal focus of research into the era of broadcast mass media pivots around the concerns of representation, which as Hoskins (2010) suggests include the

notions of accuracy, veracity and objectivity (Hoskins, 2010). Martial law has the tendency of restricting a great deal of available peacetime information. Indeed, "[u]nder martial law, the Ukrainian government imposes certain restrictions on the work of journalists covering the war (…) Reporting restrictions include the prohibition on publishing information that could endanger Ukraine's national security or harm the Armed Forces" (Reporting Ukraine Guide 2025). Despite being unable to determine or verify the accuracy and veracity of the information broadcasts by the Telethon, we did examine the objectivity of representations due to the quantity and core roles of the experts, whom the broadcasters invited as commentators or special guests.

The study discovered the majority of experts in the Telethon were members of the majority political party *Sluga Narodu* (Servant of the People). The dominant presence of these propresidential party is partly because they occupy the leading positions in the government and parliament, for which reason the broadcasting channels invite them as officials. The other reason is as Payne explains: "if the media are present, and they are undermining the political military strategy, it makes sense to control them. If they are behaving in a nonneutral way, it may even seem appropriate to target them". In May 2022, the government disconnected three TV channels— *Pryamiy*, *Pyatiy*, and *Espresso*—from the digital TV broadcasting network but allowed them to retain the ability to broadcast via satellite and online platforms. The government's stated reason was that all three supported the narcisstic former president and oppostion leader, Petro Poroshenko (Mahda, 2022). Such a policy does not strengthen muchneeded national and political unity.

Moreover, unity must be democratic, and not authoritarian, to be effective for the country. The authorities' rhetoric that now is "not the time" for other issues, apart from the war, may seem quite convincing to many citizens (Stepanenko, 2022). Indeed, during the first year of the war, the United Telethon played a significant role in supporting civic society, increasing both its patriotism and confidence in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In a comment to the BBC publication in the material "Telemarathon: how it changes the Ukrainian society and the media market", Volodymyr Paniotto, director general of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, and a professor at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, notes that "the uniformity of the information space contributed to the cohesion of society and improved attitudes towards state institutions and the president." In support of Paniotto, Korba (2022) argues "[t]his was influenced by both the war and the lack of opposition channels that constantly criticized the authorities and Zelensky personally".

Kulias (2022) declares that while the Telethon can be forgiven for overly emotional reporting during the war, it must still observe key journalistic standards. But as mentioned above, the most of the guests and commentators in the

Telethon represent one political party. Therefore, the expectation of the norm of a balanced argument was not met. The question, therefore, is how—during martial law—can the balance be maintained between adhering to the journalistic standards and the restrictions?

Connelly et. al. (2019) partially answer this question, although writing about US information restrictions in Iraq and Afghanistan:

> in this Information Age, it is not unreasonable to expect governments and other groups to conduct propaganda and censorship – in times of both war and peace (e.g., the Bush administration's ban on photographing coffins returning to the United States with the bodies of soldiers killed in action in Afghanistan and Iraq, or generally denying terrorist groups the oxygen of publicity). (Connelly et al., 2019).

The authors also explain that the new challenge for authorities is to struggle with propaganda and fake news, which in the Information Age are spread rapidly through digitized social media networks. Karpchuk (2022) argues that war creates an aggressive environment, which also affects the communication processes in the information sphere of the state, in particular, there is more emphasis on information, and less on deliberation. So, it is clear that government, especially during a war, tries to spread information that will have a positive, optimistic, and encouraging influence on society. In addition, our research indicated that the information in the United Marathon is unique and valuable, which is evdidenced the quantity of Ukrainian as well as international media (United Telemarathon, 2022) that cite use the information from the United News as their primary source. The United Telethon fulfilled its main aim of refuting Russian propaganda, as Oleinik (2023) argues: "it was determined that despite the severe restrictions imposed by the government, the war propaganda in Russia appeared to be relatively ineffective. President Putin's messages tended to be 'lost in transmission'.

Hybrid warfare coined in 2005 when used to describe Hezbollah's strategy in the 2006 Lebanon War (Kaldor, 2012) and comprises, as Bell (2023) explains, a type of conflict that blends conventional and unconventional methods, including military operations, cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, and economic pressure. Baker et al. (2023) argue that as the Russia's Ukrainian invasion clearly shows, the use of hybrid warfare should be met with a strong reaction from the international community at the earliest possible stage, especially from peace loving neutral countries. Otherwise, the future will be an expanded unlawful and barbaric military conflict (Baker et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

The research shows the success of the Armed Forces in the advanced positions of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine war does not significantly affect the list of guests invited to the United Telethon. Those broadcasts, that mention the major achievements of the Armed Forces, are not dominated by political figures, who are given time in the audiovisual recording studios, which could thereby shape their positive image in the eyes of society. As a rule, experts usually comment on military topics. Therefore, from the analysis of the selected slots (see Table 3, Columns 1–3), it can be seen that the speakers of most military topics are military experts – independent observers, or representatives of power structures, competent in understanding the situation at the frontlines.

The presence of politicians on average does not exceed 10–11% of the total number of guests. However, among them there are mostly representatives of the progovernment party and the majority in the Parliament or, as in the case of the TV channel *"1+1"*, the political group "For the Future", which many Ukrainian media associate with the owners of the TV channel *"1+1"*.

The presence of representatives of only the proruling party can be explained by their leadership positions in parliamentary committees. Politicians are often invited to the audiovisual recording studios as representatives of parliamentary committees, not political forces. On the other hand, the presence of opposition politicians in the broadcasts is rare, for which reason the Telethon is often criticized. According to observers and opposition politicians, the presence of representatives of nonruling parliamentary parties on the airwaves of the nationally broadcasted Telethon is limited because they could, on air, criticize the current government. This would negatively impact not only public consciousness but also society's perception of government and state institutions and during the period of martial law. This, in turn, could negatively affect morale and stability within the country, and lead as a result to defeats on the battlefield. The number of guests in the slots of differs from one broadcaster to another but essentially depends on the time of day when the content is produced, the situation at the front, social and political news, as well as the editorial construction of the slot. Some of the Telethon's broadcasters maintain the tried and trusted traditional format of guest studios, whereas others try new ones. For example, *"We Are Ukraine"*, prefer their guests to give expert analysis in a conversational format, as opposed to a data filled monologue. By contrast, *"ICTV"* distracts the audiences of the guest studios every hour with informational news releases – both short and fuller. However, there is a trend that despite the uneven saturation occurring throughout the information day, military experts and representatives of authorities, both competent in matters of military operations, remain

the main speakers of the Telethon. This strategy helps to maintain the expertise and keep the information field in line with the realities of war.

Ukrainian's trust in the United Telethon is declining. According to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the share of those who trust the news marathon decreased between May 2022 and October 2023, from 69% to 48%. By December 2023, this figure had dropped to 43%.

Simultaneously, during 4–10 December, 2022 a survey (N=1200 respondents) was conducted that sought to identify the level of trust the public had in the United Telethon, which revealed that approximately onethird of the respondents had lost all trust in the Telethoon (Trust the United Telethon (2023)[1]. The loss of trust by the audience can be explained by the unchanged format of the broadcasting of the Telethon. Since the beginning of the invasion, the creators of the Telethon have mostly used the same approaches to creating content, without offering viewers new variations of information and analytical programs. In addition, the Telethon is constantly criticized because of the participation of government officials in the programs and the absence of opposition politicians. Viewers associate this with media censorship and the government's desire to have absolute influence on the policy of the news Telethon.

It should also be remembered that television broadcasting in the early 2020s is experiencing a highly competitive environment with other platforms, both analogue and digital, that inform the public about the course of events. For example, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 44% of respondents now receive information from *Telegram* channels, 43% from TV (older respondents), 36% from YouTube channels, and 34% from online news outlets.

The information produced by *Telegram* channels can differ significantly from that presented by professional media outlets in the news Telethon. In particular, this applies to Ukraine's successes on the battlefield and in the international arena. Given the disappointment of Ukrainians with the promises made on TV in the first weeks of Russia's largescale invasion, they are now more attentive to both positive and negative information. Therefore, *Telegram* has become a place where you can get various data, including from Russian sources. In the Telethon, meanwhile, information is presented exclusively according to agreed rules that would not harm the information security of the state.

Many Ukrainians are also tired of the constant negative information generated by the invasion. So, they look for lighter, often entertaining, content, which poses another challenge facing the news Telethon.

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[1] The method of computerized telephone interviews allowed us to interview 1200 respondents living in all regions of Ukraine, except for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The sample also excluded both the residents of those territories temporarily not controlled by the Ukrainian authorities until February 24, 2022 (the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions), and Ukrainians citizens resident abroad.

Despite the criticism of the United Telethon, our research proved that it would continue to be an important source of information, particularly a primary source for many Ukrainian online media. So, this phenomenon will continue as long as it is in demand and useful for society. To avoid any negative criticism, the broadcasters should invite guests from across the political spectrum, particularly the opposition, as this strategy would support democratic values and be proUkrainian.

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Journalism and Populism:
The Attitudes Editors-in-chief Have Towards Populist Rhetoric Vary Depending on the Audience Structure of the Publications They Oversee

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Abstract: Populism is defined by its perception and is used by discussants in political debates, and by commentators and academic observers when they intend to unmask or disqualify certain propositions, political attitudes, campaign platforms or manifestos of political parties. Although Lithuania's media elites' perceptions of populism matter because their filtering of contents impacts on public opinion, research has not investigated the topic. This study is based on the findings of a questionnaire and a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected Lithuanian media elites. The study reveals a pronounced divergence from the negative views of populism of large urban and regional newspapers, to the ambivalent views of local newspapers. The study speculates the use of contrasting reader-feedback mechanisms may be the cause of the divide. The study places the findings within the broader context of information methodology practices in the press in both Lithuania and other countries.

Keywords: populism, journalism, editors-in-chief, regional press, local press.

INTRODUCTION

Populism is defined by its users' perceptions be they discussants in political debates, commentators, or academic observers particularly when they intend to discredit, disqualify or „unmask" certain propositions, political attitudes, campaign platforms or manifestos of political parties. Researchers investigating the phenomenon of populism often target these perceptions, focusing on certain

socio-demographic groups: politicians, political commentators, various segments of the electorate and researchers.

A certain set of perceptions of populism are characteristic of the members of newsrooms at the local, national and regional newspapers as a distinctive demographic group. Members of the editorial teams may use the notion of populism in their textual production (editorial articles, opinion pieces etc.), when participating in (broadcast) discussions on television or talk radio. Crucially, these perceptions may inform their decisions when selecting or rejecting op-eds for publication, inviting authors to contribute opinion pieces or commentaries, maintaining a network of contacts and collaborators etc.

The perceptions of populism that are characteristic of „media elites" as a clearly delineated, individuated, separate social, demographic group have never been investigated in a targeted way but they do matter. The editors' filtering of contents impacts public opinion. Their decisions concerning who can participate in the public discourse have consequences in the context of the distribution of authored opinions and the ensuing competition for domination in the public sphere. Research has shown that the editorial attitudes do indeed have a direct impact on the amount of populist rhetoric in the newspapers: most occurs in op-eds, opinion-oriented news stories and messages originating from politicians, all of which have been through the filtering of the newsrooms (Blassnig et al., 2019, p. 1122). The newsrooms' attitudes may vary like the pre-WWII German editors-in-chief who refused to sell advertising space to the Nazis on principle in an attempt to establish a broad media „cordon sanitaire" (Oja & Mral, 2013, p. 285). Furthermore research indicates that contemporary populist parties, despite initially facing abject disapproval by editors, have eventual acceptance throughout the EU: Sweden (Oja & Mral, 2013); Benelux (Cammaerts, 2018; de Jonge, 2021; Schafraad et al., 2012); and Portugal (Novais, 2022). In other words, the decisions of the editors-in-chief can define the nature and quality of public debate. These perceptions are also formative of the relation between the media channels and their audiences. The audiences also engender a certain perception of the „acceptability standards", „substantive, informative debate" and „pandering to the lowest common denominator" or engaging in demagogy, that the „media elites" may choose to subscribe to or to seek to challenge and change.

Numerous studies since 2000 investigate the attitudes of editors-in-chief or leading journalists (Andersson & Wiik, 2013; Bajomi-Lázár & Horváth, 2023; Groenhart & Bardoel, 2012; Ihlebæk & Larsson, 2018; Kitzberger, 2023; Niggermeier & Skóra, 2018; Panievsky, 2022 and von Krogh & Nord, 2010). However, research has never focused on either Baltic realities or the attitudes of editors-in-chief towards populism. The Lithuanian realities will also substantially nuance the picture formed so far for there are no universally recognized purely populist parties in Lithuania, at least not ones that the rest of the political

spectrum in its entirety has openly pledged never to work with. This study, based on a questionnaire and interviews, targets the perceptions of populism held by Lithuania's „media elites"—the editorial staff of newsrooms of various local and small or large regional newspapers.

Some Lithuanian researchers have focused on populism in the Lithuanian media. Matonyte (2009, pp. 172–173), for instance, places the rise in the amount of populist media rhetoric within the general post-Soviet trajectory of media developing commercialism. Likewise, Balcytiene (2012) links the emergence and domination of media commercialism to the rise of populism in the media. But these two studies are alone in targeting the relationship between populism and the Lithuanian media elites.

The target sample of regional newspapers (small and large) and local ones is pertinent since given the economic dynamics, there is a rich spectrum of such publications to investigate. Silva dos Santos and Santos de Miranda (2022) conclude that interviews with the industry representatives is among the most commonly used method for data collection.

The study found an unexpected divergence between the perceptions of populism of the smaller publications (the small local newspapers, the medium-size regional newspapers) and the larger (urban) publications.

The paper explores the setting and subsequent methods of the study, and then presents the results followed by a discussion and the conclusions.

NORMATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS POPULISM

Several conventions impacted the construction of this study. As the key was to explore the understanding of populism in the context of Lithuanian newsrooms, the study could not advocate any particular definition of populist politics, narratives, argumentation, themes etc. Nor would it be feasible. This is a public communication, mass-media study, whereas populism is most often investigated in political science (Hunger & Paxton, 2022, p. 622). Indeed, most of the more recent overviews of the definition of the concept (Benveniste et al., 2016; Gagnon et al., 2018) emphasise Mudde's definition of populism as an „ideology", indeed a „thin ideology" (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), focusing on the contents of the message, not on the communication practice. Hunger and Paxton (2022), in their survey of definitions, concur that, even if somewhat „deviating", the attempts to define populism as a „communication phenomenon", „communication style" are still rather ideational. This discourse-centred strand of research not only distinguishes between political actors, media and citizens as distinct participants in the populist discourse, but also between „populism by the media", media as activist organizations, „populism through the media",

and media as platforms for populist actors (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 431). The same team argues that „populism research traditionally paid little attention […] to the centrality of the media" (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 429). One of the reasons for neither advocating nor relying on any definition of populism during the design stage of the study, was to determine whether or not the representatives of the industry might tend to spontaneously converge on one.

We are aware, however, that there is a tendency to see populism as a rather negatively characterized strategy, capable of „doing damage to" and „perverting" numerous information and communications phenomena such as stories, narratives, frames etc. (Müller, 2023, p. 74). Still, individual authors do sometimes highlight the positive role that populism has played in stabilizing and consolidating countries in periods after political upheavals. Negativity as a preconception was the only one, with which the study challenged the editors-in-chief.

Research has long identified that however difficult it is to define such concepts, and however flexible they may be, the usage of „populism" and „mainstream" is rather consistent and stable across countries, ensuring the range of meanings is always interrelated (Steensen et al., 2023; Thornborrow et al., 2021a). We therefore expected our informants to be consistent in their answers.

When designing the questionnaire, control questions were included in order to ensure the coherence of the collected answer sets. The consistency of the answers was considered when deciding whether to treat a group of answers as a set of data-points for the study. Later during the interview stage, when it was vital to collect reliable information and access the informants' insights, the 10 interview questions were provided to the management newsrooms well in advance. The aim of this strategy was to indicate the general gist of the interview process, and give free rein to the interviewees to speak at their own pace in their own voice, and choosing whatever they might want to emphasize themselves.

METHODS

The initial stage of the investigation of the pool of the editors-in-chief and deputy editors (henceforth editors) of Lithuania's local and regional periodical publications' newsrooms (N=76) was conducted by Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka (LNMMB; Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania in March-July 2021. The aim of the LNMMB's survey was to identify issues concerned with the economics and finances of the publications as business ventures, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the 71 questions concerned content selection, professional standards, relationship with political and administrative authorities, the business owners (the elite power figures) within the publications' respective locations and regions etc.

The survey comprised mostly closed questions (yes, no, don't know) and only 3 of the 71 questions concerned the editors' relationship with populism.

The editors, two per newsroom, were sent a survey to complete and return. Anonimity was guaranteed because a few questions concerned the sensitive relationships between the newsrooms and the owners and regional public administrators and the latent promotion of political views. The completed surveys were collected between March 10th and April 2nd. The selection of the participants relied on data available in the registries of Lithuania's media outlets. Membership of various NGOs, professional organizations or associations of assorted interest groups did not exclude the editors from being sent the survey. The LNMMB identified 76 newsrooms, of which 47 (61,8 per cent) responded.

However, crucially, the completed surveys allowed the researchers to categorize the newsrooms as being „small" local outlets employing at most five journalists or support staff and „large" more substantive outlets published in cities or in more populous regions employing at least six permanent journalists or support staff.

The data collected at this stage had two shortcomings: (1) it was anonymous; (2) the preponderance of closed questions limited the freedom of the respondents to answer in their own words. The absence of open questions did not allow the respondents to emphasize or disregard certain aspects or areas or state their preference to discuss certain topics that mattered.

In order to gather more detailed, organic data, a selection of the newsrooms were contacted again and invited to participate in semi-structured interviews conducted by video conferencing. Permission to record the interviews was sought from and granted by the interviewees, who were assured any responses would be quoted in strict anonymity.

The newsrooms that participated in the in-depth interviews (mostly involved both editors). To off-set the anonymity that characterized the LNMMB survey, the design of the interviews controlled the demographic characteristics of the newsrooms. This enabled the researchers to ensure the participating newsrooms represented the entire pool in terms of their (1) geographic distribution, (2) number of permanent employees, (3) staff turnover, (4) frequency of publications and (5) the volume of a single issue.

RESULTS

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Three questions addressing the issue of populism were included in the structure of the interviews comrpising one open and two closed questions and posed in the following order:

- (Q15) „Even if populism is not a concept that is commonly used in your internal decision making, in your internal deliberations and discussions, how do you define it? What is populism?"
- (Q16) „Do you perceive populism to be something negative?" („YES"/"NO")
- (Q17) „How would you characterize your professional experience vis-à-vis populism: are you fighting populism?" („YES"/"NO")

The questions were placed in one uninterrupted block at the end of the first quartile of the structure, preceded by questions about (supposed and sought after) political allegiances of the publications and their target audiences, accusations of political „tendentiousness", and followed by questions about the newsrooms' attitudes towards „fake news" and their interactions with the manifestations of the „fake news".

The responses to Q15 were roughly comparable, indicating no divergence between small or large newsrooms. In their answers, the respondents tended to emphasize the context of communicative interaction rather than some inherent information-procedural characteristic producing the identity of populist contents. The most common response to Q15's last question 'What is populism?' followed along the lines of „saying what your audiences want to hear", „ingratiating oneself with the listener", „adapting to the expectations of the audience", „reading the audience" and so on, and consequently the responses were relatively neutral. A quarter of the responses were more normative, espousing an attitude towards the phenomenon, and then a negative one: „empty promises", „unfounded promises", „promises that are motivated solely by seeking to gain political dividends", „untrustworthy pledges".

An interesting, but unexpected, case comprised the few responses referring to curiosity, as in populism is the satisfying of: "the audiences' curiosity" and "the curiosity of society". We found just one research paper exploring the relationship between curiosity and democracy (Papastephanou, 2023) in which the author opens her argument by stating very little research exists concerning inquisitiveness and politics.. We interpreted these definitions of populism as indicative of a tacit endorsement of the strategy (somewhat positively charged definitions): if it merely addresses the audience's inquisitiveness, the audience's desire to learn something new, yet unheard of, populism might be seen to be something rather „innocent". As the subsequent interviews later revealed, a small proportion of the editors-in-chief think that a journalist openly disparaging „populism" might not be doing their job properly.

A note from the Lithuanian history of journalism research might be of relevance here. One of the „fathers" of Lithuanian journalism, Juozas Keliuotis, in his unpublished PhD dissertation „Lectures in journalism" (2000 [1942]), argues that the entirety or journalistic activities, in both the publication and reading

of news, the phenomenon of news must be investigated under the aegis of the „psychology of curiosity". The entire enterprise of news gathering, news distribution, news professionalism is an unavoidable byproduct of the interest in the unheard, unseen, and the not yet experienced. Keliuotis argues other frames, such as journalism and its role in democracy and relationship with commerce within the context of advertisement are secondary. As Lithuania's journalism students have since the early 1990s read Keliuotis' 'Lectures' it is reasonable to believe that the terminology of journalism in Lithuania might reflect the notion of curiosity (it might be more common compared to other traditions). The interviews with the representatives from the industry did not elucidate the link between curiosity and populism. Indeed some interviewees emphasised their use of the word „populism" involves „judgement", but that „journalists do not judge" although „journalists do report". Even so, this particular connection between „curiosity" and „populism" seems to call for further investigation.

Overall, the responses to Q15 did not meet expectations in providing either or both a definition and a strong category statement. Instead, they converged around a rather neutral category statement („populism is the saying of what the audiences want to hear") with some indicating a normative attitude.

The two closed questions, Q16 and Q17, clearly revealed the divergence of opinion with 40 of 47 responses viewing populism negatively and 35 of 47 responses claiming it their duty to „fight populism".

Figure 1. Perceptions on populism
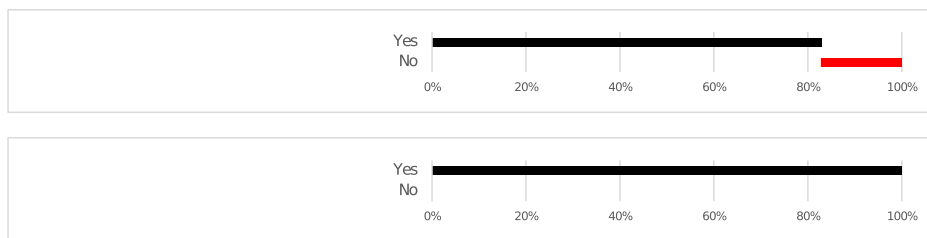
Source: own elaboration

Upper Graph: Industry representatives (small newsrooms; Q16): "Do you perceive populism to be something negative?"; n = 41

Lower Graph: Industry representatives (large newsrooms; Q16): "Do you perceive populism to be something negative?"; n = 6

This result cannot, due to the small sample size, be statistically significant, but interestingly, there was a clear correlation between newsroom size and response. Editors who view populism „sympathetically" (they do not think it a bad thing, they do not think it their duty to fight it) represent exclusively only the smallest, local publications. By contrast, the large newsrooms, invariably

condemn populism and fight it. A simple frequency distribution here will suffice to reveal the main finding.

The judgement on the part of the large newsrooms is even more pronounced in terms of the action, not just the attitude: 17 per cent of the editors of the small, local ones do not judge populist contents; 29 per cent do not do anything about it, but all of the large newsrooms both condemn and fight populism.

Figure 2. Perception on fighting populism
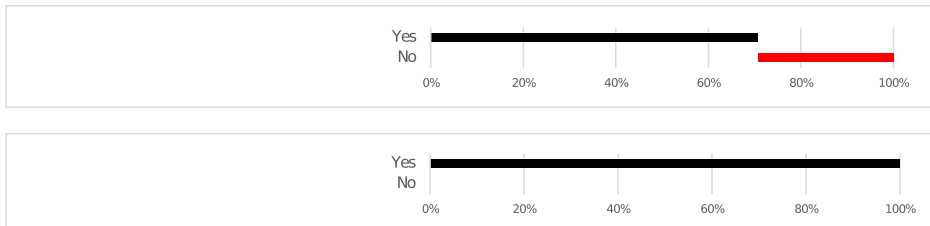
Source: own elaboration

Upper Graph: Industry representatives (small newsrooms; Q17): "How would you characterize your professional experience vis-à-vis populism: are you fighting populism?"; n = 41

Lower Graph: Industry representatives (large newsrooms; Q17): "How would you characterize your professional experience vis-à-vis populism: are you fighting populism?"; n = 6

Only a few other parameters delivered such a clear distinction, although there were exceptions. For example, all the large outlets have always been accused of „having clear political tendencies or allegiances", whereas this applied to only about half of the smaller ones. All the large newsrooms feel the competition of the social networks, whereas a quarter of the small ones do not, but as the causes have more to do with the political and economic context, they are somewhat less unexpected.

The attitude towards populism is a „standards, professionalism and ethics" category, and here the researchers expected something more of a universal coherence – which proved not to be the case. A similar, but less pronounced divergence was observed in the case of „fake news". Again, a small number of the editors at the smaller local publications do not think it their duty to fight fake news, to actively look for and to seek to unmask fake news, whereas all of the editors at the larger publications commit to such efforts. A more pronounced proportion of the editors at the smaller newsrooms, compared to the large ones, sense that their audiences do not engage in fake news. However, this „standards" dichotomy was not universal. For example, when asked whether the newsrooms check the information supplied by outside sources (Q20), the proportions of both the small and large newsrooms' had the same responses.

**Figure 3. Perceptions on efforts to ensure the accuracy
of information supplied by outside sources**

Source: own elaboration

Upper Graph: Industry representatives (small newsrooms; Q20):
"Information/content supplied by outside sources: are you organizing
and engaging in efforts to ensure the accuracy of it?"; n = 41

Lower Graph: Industry representatives (large newsrooms; Q20):
"Information/content supplied by outside sources: are you organizing
and engaging in efforts to ensure the accuracy of it?"; n = 6

The unexpected divergence in (some instances of) „standards, professionalism and ethics" is surprising. There are only a few institutions licensed to teach journalists at the level of a university in Lithuania, and most of the journalists working in Lithuania have undergone the same kind of professional training. Journalists who eventually enter employment contracts with regional outlets are members of the same professional associations as those working in the capital, and they are offered the same professional development services, they compete for the same awards and prizes in the field of professional distinction.

THE INTERVIEWS

The researchers expected the divergence to form a significant part of the in-depth interviews. Quite a few questions concerned the issues of „standards, profession-alism and ethics". The researchers also expected the issue of the trust in media to feature heavily. Lithuania is characterized by the significant distrust the audiences have towards the media. In 2000–2001, Vaisnys and Kevisas (2024) argue the Lithuanian media was the most trusted public institution in the country, topping the levels of confidence that the population usually reserves for the first responders; but now in the 2020s it is one of the most distrusted. However, overall, the interviewees placed a greater emphasis on the discussion of their

economic predicament[1] and the contentions and issues arising from their inter-actions with the political and business establishment.

None of the newsrooms voluntarily brought up the issue of populism during the interviews, even when close to the end of the interview the researchers asked whether there was an important, relevant or urgent issue that the discussion had omitted. This would suggest the issues the interviewees emphasized, such as the economics of newspaper publishing, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the occasionally tense relationship between outlets, political administration, and administrative authorities at the local level overshadowed the issues of profes-sional standards, journalism ethics, content selection criteria, relationships with the contributors and the audiences.

The most discussed issue of the „standards, professionalism and ethics" cate-gory was the question of trust. The conclusion of that discussion has already been summarized elsewhere (Vaisnys & Kevisas, 2024; see also Kevisas et al., 2020). In brief, the editors maintained they (1) understood the hazardous impli-cations of the high distrust that the audiences have towards the media outlets, and that they deplored the situation. But they also declared that it was (2) „not their issue", „not their problem", „they have nothing to do with it". The editors said they were small regional media, and knew their readers „not just well, but personally" and vice-versa so there was no foundation for any distrust, indeed „their readers do trust them". The distrust that sociologists highlight that does, indeed, give cause for alarm, is the „issue of „big press", the national broadcasters and the large daily newspapers, of the main Internet news sites".

In the context of any divergence in attitude towards populist rhetoric, the newsrooms all shared a similar response: the small regional, local newsroom „feels the pulse of community", following actual developments closely because the staff regularly engage in actual conversations with their subscribers. More often than not, the staff actually „write about their subscribers, report from their lives". The audiences feel free to contact the journalists, authors of indi-vidual articles, to express their appreciation, and occasional disapproval of, the contents published. This holistic interaction infrastructure reduces the need for the newsroom to develop an „abstract", „theoretical", „inorganic", „inauthentic" outlook or adopt the role of an „educator", „teacher" or a „moral authority". The editors of local and regional newspapers are neither incapable nor stopped from acting in a capacity of a moral and ethical arbiter. There is no need as the circumstances do not occasion such practices. They are not a part of the „big press". The position of capillary, local media channels forces them to be platforms

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[1] There was the hope that Lithuania's government might provide support measures against financial losses incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic

for populist contents, making unavoidable „populism through the media", but there is nothing regrettable about this tendency.

It is worth highlighting that these responses do indicate a rather high level of mature reflexivity. Here the editors' replies engender a certain distancing from the object under discussion, a capability to „abstract", „theorize", and adopt an „inorganic", an „academic" outlook. But this might be an artifact of the authors of the study having asked the interviewees to pre-reflect their answers to the questions under discussion.

Overall, the answers seem to indicate that the editors of local and regional newspapers in Lithuania claim to have access to a more advanced reader-feedback mechanism than that available for „big press" (the national media). The publishers and editors of national media, the supervisors of the outlets, do also base their decisions on the wealth of information about the behaviour of their readers. The subscription numbers and their dynamics and the website readership data do reflect the preferences, attitudes and reactions of the audiences. However F2F conversations with the members of the community are more beneficial, because despite being regarded as more "primitive", are less modulated and detached, and more direct and „honest".

DISCUSSION

From a certain point of view, the findings were rather contextual. Interestingly, the self-reflection offered by the interviewees matches the conclusions drawn by published research, though there are only a few studies where the authors actively investigate the relationship between populism and media regionalism. There is a tendency within the pool of the editors managing the smallest local publications to downgrade the question of populism to a second-tier problem. As a result, only a few researchers interpret populism as a mere procedural issue as opposed to a conceptual category. The setup of local news gathering and distribution, in particular the peculiarities of its reader feedback loop, makes it advantageous compared to larger news operations. In this context, the issue of populism is secondary.

For example, Meryl Aldridge in a study of city evening papers in the UK concurs that any attempt to simultaneously reach socially, demographically and culturally diverging audience segments results in the observed pattern of interpreting, framing issues in simplistic seemingly „common-sense" populist terms (Aldridge, 2003, p. 497). Müller (2017, p. 75) makes a similar argument using an economic interpretation in that part of the blame is due to the pressure to consolidate a highly competitive market. The logical course of this argument is that media outlets that target diverse demographics, i.e., large national rather than the small

local news outlets, are more prone to giving voice to populist rhetoric or space to populist contents. Yet, researchers still characterize populism as inherently negative. Although, the issue does not emerge in the context of a narrow, well-defined, targeted audience. Anecdotally, this echoes Fiorello LaGuardia, then the mayor of New York City, who in a discussion about classical politics argued the whole government should occur at the level of a mayor – „there is no Democratic or Republican way of fixing a sewer" (The Economist 2013). In other words, populism is, indeed, undesirable; the suggested replacement is „news minimalism".

These suggestions are also contextual within the more general discussion of the vital role played by local news in a democracy. This discussion views local news sympathetically not only as a bulwark against „news deserts" but as Ritter & Standridge (2019) argue also has the qualities of the most robust segment within the news industry. Indeed, local news is capable of preserving a high level of direct interactivity between audiences and outlets forming the bonds of trust between them (Ritter & Standridge, 2019). This argument allows Moore to grimly describe the closure of US local and regional newspapers over the past few decades as the „most alarming", „grimmest statistic in all […] journalism" (2021, p. 15).

However, the idea that local and regional news are somehow „immune" to populist rhetoric is also challenged and this could be considered as the prevailing tendency. The case of Germany's media is a fitting example. In Germany where the media structure of the country is decentralized, regional newspapers are a strong social institution and „national" outlets are mostly federalized public service broadcasting channels (Fawzi & Krämer, 2021, p. 3293). However, a representative computer-assisted telephone survey among Germans over the age 18 years has revealed that the regional newspapers are a target of populist attitudes (Fawzi & Krämer, 2021, p. 3308). In other words, populist content not only involves an anti-political and anti-establishment sentiment (the disappointment with politics), but also an anti-media attitude (the disappointment with media), and the trend is as strong in the media-wise decentralized Germany as anywhere else (Fawzi & Krämer, 2021, p. 3308). The authors suggest that the most effective countermeasure is not „news minimalism", but the opposite, an increase in the demographics represented, which generates „transparency", a more apt coverage of populism as a phenomenon for the elites (Fawzi & Krämer, 2021, p.3308). By contrast, Krämer and Langmann (2020, p. 5656), having investigated meta-journalistic narratives in Germany's national and regional press, argue that „professionalism" is the main countermeasure against the spread of populist contents in the news. Professionalism is possible as long as there is, indeed, a coherent profession (though the results of our study indicate that this coherence is not always real (see also below).

Niggermeier and Skóra (2018, p. 49) researched the regionalism of populism and conclude the German media market is, indeed, characterized by pronounced regionalization and regional fragmentation, and maintain that the increasing fragmentation exacerbates populism. The authors interviewed representatives of Germany's media industry and conclude that the audience being „region-ally limited" without any alternatives or room for diversification leads to the outlets gradually „adapt" to the viewpoints not only of the readership, but that of the majority of the audience, eventually producing „mainstreamization" (Niggermeier & Skóra 2018, p. 58). If the „mainstreamization" is the primary target of populism, then regionalization is hardly the solution.

More generally, in the context of the newsrooms' overall attitudes towards populism, the tendency to avoid the issue, observed during the in-depth inter-views, is unsurprising. Léonie de Jonge (2019) researched the populist radical right in the Benelux countries. She argues members maintain close personal contacts with politicians, but refuse to exclude or to judge any of them, and are gradually becoming more „accommodating" of their attitudes particularly those initially judged as too extreme to voice (de Jonge, 2019, p. 195, pp. 201–202). For example, media coverage of „Vlaams Belang", a Flemish right-wing populist political party, was initially hostile but over time became more nuanced (de Jonge, 2021, p. 608; de Jonge & Gaufman, 2022, p. 784; Schafraad et al., 2012, pp. 373–374); similar tendencies of a gradual thawing are observed in other countries (see Akkerman et al., 2016; Ekström et al., 2020; Krzyżanowski & Ekström, 2022; Thornborrow et al., 2021b). However, Farkas (2023, p. 431) argues that what the editors-in-chief say may sometimes just be posturing as distraction from the actual operations of a news outlet (Farkas, 2023, p. 431).

Another point highlighted by our research was that the interviewees were more willing to discuss the trust in media rather than their attitudes towards populism, which indicated their willingness to connect the two. This result echoed in Lithuanian research papers. Matonyte (2008), interestingly, sees the rise in populist rhetoric and the public distrust with the media as closely entwined. The rise begins as the media starts actively „taking sides along the lines of competing political elite and avoiding producing any public-interest related analysis, finally leading to relative disillusionment of the audience vis-à-vis the mass-media" (Matonyte, 2008, p. 140).

Finally, our finding of a divergence within the journalistic profession is not wholly new. For example, Schmidt (2023 argues the amount of politicization has grown more substantial in the US media even in the domain of medical news (during the pandemic), contributing to a spread of polarization, division and „alternatives" (2023, p. 41). However, these findings pertain to the contents. Studies, indicating similar trends to be the case for procedures, are more recent. Bajomi-Lázár & Horváth (2023, pp. 13–14) indicate there is a clear division into

„two journalistic cultures" within the Hungarian media landscape: the state-funded outlets echo the government's messages („collaborative culture"), while the media system still associates with the function of an independent watchdog („monitorial culture").

CONCLUSION

The study nuances the current understanding of the relationship between populism and „media elites". We find that not all editors-in-chief view populism negatively, indeed the smaller newsrooms have a „sympathetic" and „relaxed" viewpoint. We also find that those editors claiming to have a more direct access to their audiences, to interact with them with greater efficiency, claim to make use of a special, privileged feedback-loop, allowing them to have a tendency to disregard populism as a pressing issue.

This indicates a new paradigm of countermeasures against populism is likely be proposed. Instead of employing training, professionalism and high ethical standards to push back against populism, „news minimalism" should be employed and the development (both conceptually and economically) of small local news outlets as opposed to the hegemony of the „big press" and national broadcasters should be encouraged.

However, evaluating these ideas within a broader context of academic research we find that the self-reflections offered by the representatives of the media industry might not be well founded in scientific, rational reasoning, and that the peculiarities of the relationship between populism in media and media regionalism call for further research.

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Unpacking Presidential Decisions to Use Force: Rhetorical Definition of the Enemy in William J. Clinton's Justifications of Military Engagements

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Abstract: This article investigates the rhetoric of the enemy in former President William J. Clinton's justifications for the use of force. It examines the links between two themes from the perspective of David Zarefsky's persuasive definitions. The former President's responses to international conflicts demonstrate that the enemy drives presidential military decisions. Clinton's rhetoric shows that the descriptions of the enemy differ between presidential announcements of airstrikes and presidential statements of commitment of USA ground troops to the fight overseas. Content analysis of Clinton's speeches regarding the use of force in Somalia, Haiti, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, and Kosovo demonstrates these claims and indicates the role of language in the former President's effort to lead the American public on the use of force in post-Cold War foreign policy.

Keywords: enemy definition, threat construction, military engagement, political rhetoric, William J. Clinton

INTRODUCTION

When Bill Clinton entered the presidency, he advocated restraint in foreign policy and indicated a reluctance to military interventions. He came into office committed to domestic goals and convinced that foreign affairs were essential when managed for domestic purposes. Over the course of two terms, however, he actively developed foreign policy initiatives and took a strong military leadership in international conflicts. He strengthened alliances with Europe and Asia and built on the USA's relationships with Russia and China. He revised the USA's security agenda to address new threats posed by technological advances

and open borders and redefined the meaning of peacemaking and peace enforcement to adjust to the changes in the nature of conflicts. He actively used force. In 1993, Clinton continued USA intervention in Somalia. In 1994, he deployed USA ground troops to Haiti. In 1995, he ordered bombing missions in Yugoslavia. In 1993 and 1998, the former President employed a series of airstrikes on Iraq and in 1998 on Afghanistan and Sudan. In 1999 he intervened in Kosovo, using air power and ground troops.

Focusing on Clinton's activism in the area of military power, this study analyzes the rhetoric he employed when arguing for the use of force. The study takes the opportunity to examine the role of the enemy in the former President's language that offers a use-of-force justification to see whether, and if so, how his words drove his military actions. There are three primary aims of the analysis: 1. To search for Clinton's definitions of the enemy. 2. To identify the means used for the construction of the enemy definitions across critical situations. 3. To suggest the implications that enemy definitions had for the role the USA decided to play in international, particularly, military conflicts. The discussion attempts to provide answers to the following research questions: What exigences and constraints led the former President to act the way he did? Were enemy image constructions situationally bound or formatted by the rhetorical resources available to Clinton and used in interaction with the former President's particular approach to the use of force? What were the means of construction across critical situations? How, if at all, did the constructions inform of the decision-making process in the Clinton administration regarding the use of force?

The research questions, that the study asked, have evolved out of disparate arguments in the subject's literature. Research has shown that there is little consensus regarding the characteristics of Clinton's foreign policy. Critics describe the former President's approach to foreign affairs as coherent and multilateral (Schneider, 1997), indecisive and inconsistent (Greenstein, 1994), and some go further, arguing that it was nonexistent (Friedman, 1993). Discussions continue about the development of Clinton's approach to foreign policy. Some analysts argue that the former President started off confusingly but over the years developed a clear policy course (Brinkley, 1997), while others claim that just the opposite is the case. For example, Maynes (1996) suggests Bill Clinton entered the presidency with a well-defined worldview but in office he showed a lack of consistency in political action). A much-debated question is whether Clinton's use of force showed continuity or shifts in presidential war powers. Some critics find the former President's military policy to be similar to that of his predecessors' (Bacevich, 2000), while others see it as radically different from past practice (Yoo, 2000).

Research findings into the rhetoric of Clinton's foreign policy are also contradictory. Some scholars are very critical of the former President's language. For

instance, Linda B. Miller calls Clinton's discourse "rambling," the argument being that his rhetoric failed to "articulate foreign policy objectives clearly or to employ the various foreign policy instruments effectively in order to attain these goals" (1994, p. 625). Keith E. Whittington (2001, p. 201) makes a similar observation, suggesting that "Bill Clinton is unlikely to ever be known as the 'Great Communicator.' His speeches, even on formal occasions, are often of inordinately long duration. His instincts are 'wonkish,' favoring policy details over political vision" (Whittington 2000, p. 201). Harsh criticism comes also from Phillip Henderson who describes "Clinton-era speeches" as "devoid of ordered argument or reasoned analysis" and "heavily weighted in the direction of 'laundry lists' rather than conveying an underlying sense of conviction or direction" (2000, p. 227).

Contrary to the view that the rhetoric of Clinton's foreign policy lacked clarity, vision, and depth is the perspective that assumes that the former President's discourse had a consistent rhetorical perspective. Textual analyses, as exemplified by Kathryn M. Olson's (2004) examination of Clinton's rhetoric, show that the former President offered a unified democratic enlargement foreign policy frame argued to be a set of principles that coordinated the treatment of diverse particular cases in a way that served a unified vision centered on domestic prosperity (p. 313). Research, such as that undertaken by Carol K. Winkler (2006), also produces results that a coherent terrorist narrative was present across Clinton's public rhetoric. Located within the convention of the prophetic tradition, "the rhetorical frame presented terrorism as a crime against God, the community's rejection of it as a test of the faithful, and the government's response as a divine calling" (Winkler 2006, p. 136). Studies carried out, for instance by Jason A. Edwards and Joseph M. Valenzano III (2007), provide additional evidence suggesting that Clinton offered a comprehensive "new partnership" narrative for his foreign policy discourse: "Rhetorically, [it] can be found in a consistent set of themes" which "explained how he understood America's position in the world, the threats the nation faced, and the specific mission for American foreign policy in this new era" (Edwards & Valenzano, pp. 304–305).

Looking into the literature relating specifically to the issue of the enemy in Clinton's foreign policy rhetoric, however, there is again little consistency in findings. Olson (2004), for instance, argues that the former President named chaos as the enemy. Within Clinton's democratic enlargement's foreign policy frame, the author examines the nature of chaos and sets out the ways in which the language of chaos enabled the former President to choose, order, and execute foreign policy in general, and military interventions in particular. Olson's (2004) study of threat in Clinton's rhetoric differs from that of Winkler (2006) who analyzes the conceptualization of the former President's threat through the

notion of terrorism. In her work, Winkler (2006) traces how Clinton redefined the idea of terrorism, disassociating the enemy he faced from the one of his Cold War predecessors, how he reinterpreted its nature, reconsidering the means available to him to confront it, and how he renamed its representation, deinstitutionalizing it as a state actor.

The issue of the enemy, as Winkler (2006) explains, is marked by emphasis on presidential rhetoric that offers a use-of-force justification. It is suggested that Clinton's planning to undertake military action in response to diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, or security threats will define an enemy to justify an intervention, a rhetorical strategy designed to produce a fear of danger and, consequently, rally public support for presidential military policy. The rhetorical forms used to label and characterize an enemy will be case-specific, reflecting the constraints and exigencies of a particular situation and representing individual justifications for the use of force abroad. Still, the forms will repeat across situations with the same characteristics upon which the former President relied. If Clinton's rhetoric regarding Rwanda, where the USA did not intervene, was any guide, the avoidance of naming the enemy will express the former President's reluctance and, consequently, failure to take military action. The use of force in Somalia, Haiti, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, and Kosovo exemplifies that the former President's language that labels and characterizes enemies determine his decision to handle them via military action.

From the study of how Clinton defines enemies we can learn how rhetoric informs of presidential commitment to take military action. Analyzing ways in which the former President gives meaning to political actors and their actions is important for our increased understanding of the means through which presidential language leads public opinion on the issue of the use of force in foreign policy. As military interventions are a potential foreign policy tool, such research is useful to recognize when such a tool is being considered and is likely to be employed.

Studying the rhetoric of Clinton's foreign policy is merited by the frequency of the USA's military engagements during the former President's two terms in office. As Andrew J. Bacevich (2000) observes, "[a] striking characteristic of the Clinton era has been an increased American propensity to employ military power as an adjunct of foreign policy" (p. 375). The analysis is justified given the incidence of USA military uses in the context of the challenges of the 1990s facing the former President determined to manage international conflicts through nonmilitary measures.

METHOD

The study draws from basic assumptions which inform about the nature of presidential definitions and the choice of rhetorical resources available to the former President to fashion the definitions according to the circumstances. First, as J. Robert Cox (1981) explains, definitions are not situationally bound; they are rhetorical constructs. They are never fixed; they are a matter of choice and therefore could always be constructed differently. Second, the choice of definitions is primarily pragmatic. Definitions function to identify the constraints of a given decision, provide appropriate justification for action, and identify the target audience (Cox 1981, pp. 200–202). Third, as Edward Schiappa finds, definitions are political. A pragmatic view of definition highlights its political aspect in two respects, in that "definitions serve particular interest" and in that "definitions involve issues of power and influence" (2003, p. 169). Fourth, as David Zarefsky argues, definitions function persuasively "[n]aming a situation provides the basis for understanding it and determining the appropriate response" (2004, p. 611). Zarefsky links the power of definition to the presidency when he writes: "Because of his prominent political position and his access to the means of communication, the former President, by defining a situation, might be able to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed by the public" (2004, p. 611).

Discussing different roles of definitions in argumentation, Zarefsky refers to arguments about definition, "in which a proposed definition is the conclusion of the argument," arguments from definition, "in which a stipulated definition is the premise," and arguments by definition, "in which a definition is stated or implied as if it were uncontested fact" (2014, p. 115). Narrowing the discussion to arguments by definition, i.e., to ways in which USA Presidents give meaning to and shape understanding of reality, Zarefsky focuses on the strategies of associations, dissociations, condensation symbols, and frame-shifting. 1. Associations which are formed through linking one term with another and can be approached either through expansion of the meaning of a term which already has a precise meaning in a specific context or through application of connotation of a given term to a different notion. 2. Dissociations which are made by breaking connections between ideas, for instance, through the juxtaposition of concepts that are mutually exclusive in nature. 3. Condensation symbols which draw on a lack of clarity and definiteness of meaning and can be exploited through symbols and terms which unite supporters of seemingly opposite views. 4. Frame-shifting which places a given subject in a different perspective, for instance, by emphasizing one of its aspects over others or narrowing/expanding the scope of the argument (Zarefsky, 2014, pp. 124–126).

Zarefsky's (2014) distinction between the strategies of association and dissociation corresponds to Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's understanding

of the contrast between the argumentative techniques of association and dissociation. By techniques of association the authors understand "schemes which bring separate elements together and allow us to establish a unity among them…" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 190). By techniques of dissociation, they mean "techniques of separation which have the purpose of dissociating, separating, disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole…" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 190). As Perelman (1970) explains, establishing liaison between separate elements can be done through quasi-logical arguments, arguments based on the structure of reality, and arguments that aim to establish the structure of reality. Types of quasi-logical arguments include syllogism and incompatibility. Types of arguments based on the structure of reality deal with associations of succession and of coexistence. Types of arguments that aim to establish the structure of reality use example, illustration, model, analogy, and metaphor. Splitting elements, in turn, involves dealing with appearance and reality (Perelman 1970, pp. 290–296).

Application of the strategies to define the enemy will be examined in the following analysis of President Clinton's rhetoric of justification for the use of force. The analysis is based on the former President's statements delivered in response to specific conflict situations. The material for the study includes Clinton's statements in the context of the situations in Iraq in 1993 and 1998, in Somalia in 1993, in Haiti in 1994, in Bosnia in 1995, in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998, and in Kosovo in 1999. A close reading of the former President's language is followed by a discussion of the implications of his choices for presidential rhetoric that offers a use-of-force justification.

The analysis spans eight military interventions which occurred in different settings and for various reasons. During eight years of the Clinton presidency, the USA intervened forcefully in the Middle East, East Africa, Central America, and Southeast Europe. In Iraq in 1993, it retaliated for an assassination attempt of former President George H. W. Bush. In Somalia, Haiti, and Kosovo, it took action to make and keep peace. In Bosnia, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Iraq in 1998, it acted to deter and stop aggression. Force use constituted air power in Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Sudan as opposed to ground troops in Somalia, Haiti, and Kosovo. In all of eight cases analyzed, former President Bill Clinton got involved in military conflicts without first seeking congressional authorization for the use of force. While he acknowledged an obligation to keep Congress informed, he did not consider it necessary to obtain legislative authority for military actions. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan, Clinton used force independently of any mandate of the United Nations or support of NATO. By contrast, in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, he undertook operations under the auspices of the UN; in Bosnia and Kosovo, he acted with the assistance of NATO.

RESULTS

In presenting his justification for engaging the country in international military conflicts, the former President focused, predominantly, on pragmatic concerns. In all of cases examined, he justified his decision to use air power or commit troops to conflict areas with an ever-present necessity to protect the USA's national interest. On most occasions, this study finds, the expression national interest was used explicitly. Explaining the deployment of American troops to Haiti, Clinton (1994, September 15) insisted that "the United States must protect our interests." In an address to the nation announcing the strikes on Iraq in 1998, he argued that "Their purpose is to protect the national interest of the United States" (Clinton, 1998, December 16). He spoke in a similar tone when he claimed that the USA had to get involve in the war in Kosovo because "America has a national interest in achieving this peace" (Clinton, 1999, February 13). In other instances, statements of similar nature helped communicate the concept. National interest was made clear, for example, in Clinton's references to the USA taking military steps in Iraq in 1993 "to protect our sovereignty" (Clinton, 1993, June 26), in Somalia "to protect our troops" (Clinton, 1993, October 07), or in Afghanistan and Sudan to defend "our national security" (Clinton, 1998, August 20).

Previously published studies found that the former President's rhetoric did fit the profile of a dramatistic perspective, which Thomas A. Hollihan calls Power Politics (Stuckey, 1995). Under the paradigm, the USA assumes that all international actors are self-interested pragmatists who act to secure their own interests. Engaging in foreign affairs, America chooses cooperation over unilateral action and resolves international conflicts by negotiation so that military action can be avoided (Hollihan, 1986). Consistent with previous research, this study confirms that Clinton's language, which was characterized by an emphasis on pragmatism in international relations, focuses on benefiting the USA. At the same time, in choosing to secure the benefits through military action, as the former President's activism in military power demonstrates, this study suggests that Clinton's rhetoric contradicts the Power Politics drama in two important ways. First, while it promotes international cooperation, it maintains that unilateral action must be exercised to impose international rules of conduct on other nations. Air strikes in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Iraq are illustrative evidence. Second, while the former President's language calls for diplomacy, it communicates that military action is the means that effects real change, as exemplified by the use of air power in Bosnia and ground troops in Kosovo.

Across the cases examined for this study, Clinton consistently designated America's enemy. His representation most commonly finds itself associated with a state actor, as exemplified in an address to the nation announcing military strike on Iraq in which the former President named the enemy as "the Government

of Iraq" (Clinton, 1993, June 26); or in a speech to the nation on Haiti in which he called the enemy "Haiti's dictators" (Clinton, 1994, September 15); or in a letter to congressional leaders reporting on the deployment of the USA's air force to Bosnia in which he identified the enemy as "Bosnian Serb Army" (Clinton, 1995, September 01). At other times, designation of the enemy narrows to an individual. Clinton saw the enemy in the persons of Saddam Hussein, Raoul Cedras, Usama bin Ladin, and Slobodan Milosevic. Only on one occasion—in the case of Somalia—has this study found that the enemy was a non-state actor and was named as "armed Somalis gang" (Clinton, 1993, October 07).

In Clinton's choice of language, this study finds the construction of the enemy situationally bound. It sees the concepts of the enemy state and the adversarial state actor originate with events that had unfolded prior to when the former President addressed them. At the same time, the study argues that in most of cases analyzed the term enemy displayed for the former President a potential for rhetorical exploitation that he decided to develop. A strong example of Clinton's effort to sustain the enemy through his rhetoric is the case of Kosovo. Tracing the development in the former President's narrative from February to May 1999, we can see a shift of focus: rhetoric first driven by ambiguousness regarding the enemy named as Serbian (security) forces was ultimately supplanted by explicit talk about Serbia's leader Slobodan Milosevic.

An important aspect to note regarding the representation of the enemy is the broader threat and the narrow concerns of terror and inaction. Tracking the term enemy through relevant Clinton's statements leads to the perception of it as "anybody that threatens the security and the peace" and "the values that we [Americans] hold important" (Clinton, 1993, June 17). A narrower understanding of the term is found in the former President's talk about terrorists as "the enemies of everything we believe in and fight for: peace and democracy, tolerance and security" (Clinton, 1998, August 08). Clinton also clearly connected the enemy to the idea of inaction when he argued that "We face no imminent threat, but we do have an enemy. The enemy of our time is inaction" (Clinton, 1997, February 04). He spoke in a similar tone when he stated: "the enemy of our time is inaction" (Clinton, 1997, April 11).

Naming the enemy as threat, terror, or inaction, in turn, leads to looking at it as a construct rhetorically formulated by Clinton. Recognizing the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its ideology of communism, he himself suggested that naming the enemy threat, terror, and inaction was a political strategy more than a pragmatic concern dictated by circumstances. In a widely covered interview with *The Washington Post* on October 15, 1993, in which Clinton reexamined his foreign policy, he made a similar suggestion. By acknowledging that the task of defining America's role in the post-Cold War world "could take years" (qtd. in Devroy & Smith, 1993), the former President indirectly admitted the

challenges involved in assigning the roles and responsibilities of other international actors, including those who stand in opposition to the USA. Understanding of the enemy, in Zarefsky's (2014) words, was not a given but was something that Clinton constructed. The former President's references to the enemy actors were not obvious but were constituted by the former President in his communication (p. 121).

Past research which places Clinton's foreign policy rhetoric within the structures of Power Politics argues that the former President conducted foreign affairs in the absence of a clearly defined enemy (Stuckey, 1995), whom the drama describes as anyone who clings to the past world order and opposes change even if their opposition causes tension, stirs conflict, and leads to fights (Hollihan, 1986). While this study admits that, on some occasions, the enemy that Clinton described was weak, because of the difficulty in presenting it clearly, univocally, and consistently throughout time, the analysis finds that, in other instances, the description of the enemy suggested little ambiguity regarding its identity or the nature of its actions. The former President's language may at times have lacked the precision of the Cold War drama, in which the role of the villain indivisibly belonged to the Soviet Union, there are clues in Clinton's rhetoric that indicate that the former President clearly shaped—in one way or another—specific perceptions of the enemy, and that he did so to generate support for preferred—military—ways of confronting it.

This study's analysis assumed that in the process of shaping the view of the enemy Clinton relied on the rhetorical power of the argument. Zarefsky explains the kind of argument as

> non-neutral characterization that conveys a positive or negative attitude about something in the course of naming it. The name is, in effect, an implicit argument that one should view the thing in a particular way. But the argument is never actually advanced. Rather, the definition is put forward as if it was uncontroversial and could be easily stipulated. The argument in behalf of the proposed definition is simply 'smuggled in' through the use of the definition itself (Zarefsky 2014, p. 133)

Understood in this way, presidential argument by definition works to attract the audience's attention, shape their understanding of the subject matter, and form their moral judgments about it (Zarefsky 2014, p. 121).

The present analysis demonstrates how Clinton used this rhetorical power to shape public perceptions of the enemy, thereby soliciting support for the use of military means of confronting and defeating it. Examination of his statements suggests the use of dissociation by way of the Cold War foe and the post-Cold War foe to (re)define the concept of the enemy. Dissociations were most common

across statements regarding Afghanistan and Sudan (10) and Haiti (5). They were less popular across messages regarding Iraq (3), Kosovo (2), and Somalia (1). The former President emphasized that having won the Cold War, the USA no longer had "the great enemy of the Soviet Union" (Clinton, 1994, July 30). "The old enemy, communism [was] not there anymore," he stressed (Clinton, 1995, February 28). Exploiting the dissociative pair the old era enemy-the new era enemy, Clinton argued that Americans were left without an enemy to "define our every move" (Clinton, 1994, July 30) and without "a common way of organizing ourselves and thinking about how we should relate to the rest of the world" (Clinton, 1995, June 27). As a reinforcement of the theme, there was the separation of a clear enemy from enemies with many faces. In contrast to his predecessors' effort to define the enemy through the Soviet Union, Clinton's rhetoric struggled to identify the enemy through anybody and anything that threatened the USA's security, prosperity, and values. As his messages explained, America was no longer facing "a known big enemy" (Clinton, 1994, September 21) or "a single implacable foe" (Clinton, 1997, April 11) but many "different enemies" (Clinton, 1993, June 17), "a host of scattered and dangerous challenges" (Clinton, 1995, July 14).

Clinton described the nature of the enemies and their actions through associations, most of which were found in statements regarding Haiti (20) and Kosovo (9) and some in messages regarding Afghanistan and Sudan (6), Somalia (6), Iraq (5), and Yugoslavia (2). Common were labels of a tyrant (Saddam Hussein), a dictator (Raoul Cedras), a terrorist (Osama bin Laden), and a war criminal (Slobodan Milosevic). Popular was expansion of the meaning of the term enemies to include inaction—the enemy of America's "peace, freedom, and prosperity" (Clinton, 1997, February 04), terror—the enemy "of everything we believe in and fight for" (Clinton, 1998, August 08), and threat—the enemy to the USA's "national security" (Clinton, 1998, August 20). Associations also occurred when Clinton identified armed Somali gangs with "anarchy and mass famine" (Clinton, 1993, October 07). Haiti's dictators with "terror… desperation, and… instability" (Clinton, 1994, September 16), Bosnian Serb Army with forced displacement (Clinton, 1995, September 01), terrorist groups with "war against America" (Clinton, 1998, August 20), and the Iraqi regime with the use of chemical weapons (Clinton, 1998, December 16). Perhaps a more powerful form of association was by way of comparison of former President Milosevich's "ethnic cleansing" of the Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims to Hitlers' "ethnic extermination" of European Jews. As Clinton explained, the two "[were] not the same" but "[were] related, both vicious, premeditated, systematic oppression fueled by religious and ethnic hatred" (Clinton, 1999, May 130).

Continuation of the effort to convey who the enemy was and what it did shows in the use of condensation symbols (Jasinski, 2001, pp. 99–100). These were observed in statements regarding Kosovo (2), Somalia (1), and Iraq (1). The

former President was able to expose the image of the enemy as a "police [thug]" by emphasizing the symbol of the USA as "the world's [policeman]" (Clinton, 1994, September 15). Use of buzzwords related to national security interests (Clinton, 1998, December 16) helped him contrast the enemy's actions with those of the USA to stress the differences in goals and ambitions. References to chemical weapons (Clinton, 1993, June 26) worked to justify a USA response to the enemy's activities. Exploitation of stereotypes, for instance of a migrant and a refugee, warranted any type of response, including military.

Clinton strengthened the military argument using frame-shifting, as noted in statements regarding Haiti (2), Kosovo (2), and Somalia (1). For the use of force in Haiti defined from the perspective of Cedras' dictatorship, two frames of reference were suggested. One that of force as prevention of "a mass exodus of refugees," and a "tide of migrants" at America's door; and the other, which showed a military intervention in the light of USA regional primacy: "Beyond… the immigration problems… the United States also has strong interests in not letting dictators, especially in our own region, break their word to the United States…" (Clinton, 1994, September 15). A similar frame shifting was employed in the case of Somalia. Following the failure of a humanitarian mission there, the former President encouraged to look at the military engagement in view of USA global standing. He justified taking military steps for "aggressors, thugs, and terrorists will conclude that the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people." "Our own credibility with friends and allies would be severely damaged," the former President argued. "Our leadership in world affairs would be undermined" (Clinton, 1993, October 07).

DISCUSSION

When analyzing Clinton's rhetoric, we can learn that in responding to the challenges of a post-Cold War world the former President did not seem to offer options beyond using force. While economic and diplomatic measures were considered and taken, as in the cases of Haiti or Kosovo, presidential power turned out to be largely military power. Moreover, acting militarily, Clinton did not offer justifications that fell outside of the argumentation driven by the concept of the enemy. While his rhetoric in many aspects replaced the Cold War narrative of his predecessors, it continued to promote the idea of the enemy as a political exigency necessitating military action. Some elements of the concept of the enemy have changed, but its political and rhetorical functions persisted. Identifying an enemy was more challenging, but doing so for the purpose of rallying people behind the use of force was a continuum of presidential rhetorical practice.

Breaking Clinton's definitions of the enemy we can find a trend in the former President's justificatory rhetoric, which favors naming the adversary. Specifically, we can see a strong preference for personalizing the enemy in the announcements of strikes and deployment of combat troops. It is suggested that the tendency is revealing of how Clinton linked the use of force to the enemy. It is indicative of how he found the names of dictators, terrorists, and war criminals rhetorically effective in justifying his military decisions. These findings are consistent with earlier studies in that the former President lacked a single foe and bounced between different enemies. The results of security research support the view that post-Cold War politics was marked by continuing efforts to rearticulate and reinterpret the meaning of danger. Addressing the difficulties in identifying a threat after 1989, David Campbell (1998) writes about "the varied attempts to replace one enemy with (an)other" (p. 8). The findings differ, however, in that across his formal announcements Clinton was consistent in giving faces to threats against which he decided to act militarily. Attaching the face of Hussein to aggression, the face of bin Ladin to terrorism, or the face of Milosevic to war crimes are representative examples of the approach.

Of the strategies being used for defining the enemy, associations and dissociations were most common, while condensation symbols and frame-shifting were less popular. These observations further support the idea that Clinton's rhetoric had a sense of the enemy, one pertinent to a new political landscape in which language was used with the purpose to change the terms in which people thought about the enemy. Use of dissociations which provide the actual meaning of a concept as opposed to the old and obvious usage (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, 444) and associations which help to build links and establish connections between ideas that, in turn, enable people to relate to new conceptualizations (Jasinski, 2001, p. 65) are evidence for commitment to identify, define, and use a particular concept of the enemy in order to build a persuasive case for a military intervention. This is merely confirmed by the avoidance of condensation symbols which work to multiply meanings, representations, and connotations (Zarefsky, 1986, p. 11) and of frame-shifting which changes points of perspective, expands the scope of argument, and extends the choice of dimensions (Zarefsky, 2014, p. 126).

Characteristically, associations occurred in the announcements of USA deployment of combat troop. Most common were associations of coexistence which united the enemy and their actions (Perelman, 1970, p. 293). That unity was established on three basic levels: political, where the enemy was linked to the abuse of power which led to anarchy, instability, chaos, and disorder; economic, where it was blamed for theft which caused destruction and isolation; and human rights, where it was accused of violence, brutality, and terror, of beating, torture, rape, and mutilation, of slaying, killing, murder, and execution. On each level

the former President's rhetorical choices aimed to define public perceptions of the enemy and evoke particular responses to them. Attaching lawlessness to the enemy served to arouse in the American society, based on the rule of law, the need to restore control and order in the conflict areas. Associating the enemy with economic collapse functioned to trigger in the audience, focused on economic growth and prosperity, the desire to support economic recovery and sustainability in troubled spots. Tying the enemy to horrifying accounts of atrocities meant to deepen in the American public, led by moral order, the understanding for the use of any means of power required to defend and secure human rights throughout the world.

Shifting attention from the enemy as a political actor to the enemy as an idea, Clinton's rhetoric described the post-Cold War enemy in broad terms. The descriptions usually drew on pairing of two opposed ideas, most characteristic of which were dictatorship vs. democracy, terror vs. peace, chaos vs. security. These observations match those made in earlier studies in that Clinton's rhetoric relied on an elastic, pliable, and open definition of the enemy. They complement previous research in adding another pair of terms inaction vs. action, which develops understanding of the enemy to include brutal force, economic instability, and political disorder. Clinton labeled inaction an enemy when he talked about peacekeeping operations in general (Clinton, 1997, March 10) and when he announced USA military strikes on Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq and Kosovo in particular. He repeatedly talked about inaction in opposition to acting: "the risks from inaction, to America and the world, would be far greater than action" (Clinton, 1998, August 20), "the costs of action must be weighed against the price of inaction" (Clinton, 1998, December 16), "the dangers of acting must be weighed against the dangers of inaction" (Clinton, 1999, March 23). Reading into the former President's statements reveals that while Clinton favored naming the enemy, he did not underestimate the role and impact of abstract ideas. The choice of the notion of inaction suggests strategic and tactical use of language, aimed at exploiting a popular American expectation to do something in critical situations and appealing to a strong American belief in the agency of the USA to shape international politics.

To conclude, research tends to focus on Clinton's difficulty in defining the enemy and consequently in rallying support for international military interventions. Studies expose the former President for shifts in the rhetoric of the enemy and a lack of rhetorical patterns (Reeves, 1996). Few examinations reveal elements of continuity in Clinton's rhetorical action (Butler, 2002).

This analysis offers an opportunity to demonstrate that despite the absence of a single clear foe in the post-Cold War world order the former President was consistent in the characterization of the enemy. It finds that across different dramatic situations he chose similar strategies to shape understanding of and give

meaning to the enemy and thus explain military measures needed to confront it. The study also suggests that Clinton enjoyed support for his use of force decisions which was similar to that of his post-Cold War successors'. An average of 63 percent of approval for Clinton's military interventions (Newport, 2017) was lower compared with support for George W. Bush's military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, which reached an average of 83 percent approval. However, it was in line with support indicated for military actions undertaken by Obama in Libya, Iraq, and Syria—an average of 52 percent of approval and by Trump in Syria—50 percent of approval. Typical was also lower level of support—averaging at 45 percent (Logan, 1996)—for Clinton's decisions to send troops to combat than for his orders of airstrikes (Potts, 2022).

Implications of the findings are threefold. First, Clinton's rhetorical action reflects continued need for the enemy in presidential use-of-force justifications. This study suggests that when persuading the American public to support military interventions post-Cold War former Presidents find negative argumentation more reliable. Second, Clinton's rhetorical choices reveal the difference in presidential commitment between airstrikes and deployment of USA ground troops. When informing of the decision to send the USA military for combat operations Presidents are more graphic and explicit, exposing the enemy for its evil actions. Third, Clinton's rhetoric of the enemy demonstrates a systematic and sustained effort to lead public opinion on the use of force in foreign policy. This indicates that communicating military decisions in the context of a new world order Presidents consistently use language for translating the American public's fear of a threat into responsiveness on the intervention issue.

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Diversity for Sale? Moldova's Nation Branding in the Age of Commercial Nationalism

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Abstract: In a region haunted by grave geopolitical tensions, Moldova's nation branding is an over-looked research topic, despite the country's long-standing self-promotion efforts. Addressing this gap, our article presents a critical discourse analysis of strategies undertaken by Invest Moldova Agency, the governmental institution in charge of Moldova's brand communication. Here, beyond a traditional post-socialist melange of market-oriented and globalist discourse, we find a strategy to build a consistent self-image in high internal diversity. Although the presence of the separatist pro-Russian region of Transnistria disrupts the consistency of the image of Moldova as "transition society", it also encourages the promoters to rethink the Soviet legacy. The article contributes to understanding commercial nationalism as a framework for managing political and cultural heterogeneity through commodification.

Keywords: Moldova, nation branding, post-socialism; commercial nationalism; post-politics

INTRODUCTION

Moldova, a country that has unfairly remained in the margins of scholarly attention, has recently been propelled to the focus of international attention against the backdrop of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Together with Ukraine, the status of Moldova's application to the EU has been swiftly changed to Candidate Country in June 2022. Western leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden, brought up the issues of Moldova's national sovereignty amidst the ongoing geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe (Bose & Hunnicutt, 2023; Kirby, 2023).

The image of Moldova in Western scholarship has oscillated between (somewhat pessimistic) accounts of the allegedly failed post-Soviet transit amid a struggling

economy and weak state institutions (Crowther, 2023); unresolved disputes over the Russia-backed autonomous region of Transnistria (Potter, 2022); and the lasting political and cultural influence of Romania over Moldova's national self-identification, resulting in a split within elites and political movements (Tkachuk et al, 2022). Within cultural studies, Moldova has rarely been singled out among several post-socialist Eastern European states — primarily Ukraine — in analyzing its various attempts to address the international (mainly European) audience. In particular, the Eurovision Song Contest has been studied as one arena where notions of the self — often stereotypical and grotesque — can be displayed for the gaze of the European "Other" (Iglesias, 2018; Miazhevich, 2012).

This article seeks to address the research gap in Moldova's posited self-image, a promising endeavor concerning a country that finds itself in a highly complex regional and national context. We aim to carry out a discourse analysis of Moldova's nation branding efforts as manifest in the social media content by the governmental Invest Moldova Agency, as well as in-depth interviews with the agency's representatives. We find the notion of commercial nationalism (Volčič & Andrejevic, 2016) applicable to explain how the Agency strategically utilizes nation branding with an eye to managing multiple internal contradictions and present a coherent narrative for external audiences. To unpack our argument, we begin with a brief detour across Moldovan history and the current political landscape.

MOLDOVA AND ITS BRANDING

MOLDOVA AT THE INTERSECTION OF ROMANIA, RUSSIAN EMPIRE/USSR, TURKS AND THE EU (HISTORY OVERVIEW)

Throughout its history, Moldova and its different parts have been repeatedly contested and claimed by its powerful neighbors. Established in 1359 by Voivode Bogdan I, the Principality of Moldavia initially spanned the Prut River basin and later expanded to the Carpathians, Danube, and Black Sea. The Romanian principalities shared intertwined political, economic, and cultural ties with Wallachia and Transylvania.

From the 14th century, Moldavia faced threats from the expanding Ottoman Empire, becoming a vassal state for over 300 years while retaining internal autonomy. In the 18th century, the Russian Empire set its sights on Moldavia, annexing the eastern part in 1812, and renaming the area between the Prut-Dniestr interfluve as „Bessarabia" (King, 1994). The annexation was framed as liberation from Ottoman subjugation (Baar & Jakubek, 2017, p. 63), although that view

was not universally shared. Romanian statesman Nicolae Iorga explains "[t]he Romanian people never asked the Tsar to be liberated" (Ghimpu, 2002, p. 370).

Despite over a century of Russian occupation and attempts at Russification and denationalization (Baar & Jakubek, 2017; Tîcu, 2016), the people of Bessarabia chose to reclaim their Romanian identity. In 1918, the Moldavian Assembly voted to reunite with Romania, making Moldovans part of Greater Romania until 1940, when the Soviet Union re-annexed Bessarabia. Although Romania regained control of Bessarabia in 1941, it was forced to cede it to the Soviet Union again in 1944 as the USSR expanded closer to the West.

Under the Soviet Union (1940–1991) Moldova was renamed the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). Moldovan elites supporting Romanian culture were purged, followed by "re-education in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism" in education and employment circles (Baar & Jakubek, 2017). The Cyrillic script replaced the Latin alphabet, and Romanian was rebranded as Moldovan. The goal was to create a new Moldovan nation that would sever ties with its Romanian identity and become a proud socialist republic. Nevertheless, the population grew divided. Some backed the Soviet nation-building efforts, while others refused to relinquish their Romanian past, culture, and identity.

MOLDOVA'S CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE (POST 1991)

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moldova was confronted with a critical choice: creating an independent state or reunification with Romania. Ultimately, through a parliamentary vote, Moldova chose the former, declaring its independence in 1991. The Declaration of Independence denounced the annexations of 1812 and 1940, thus highlighting Moldova's dedication to maintaining its territorial integrity and historical ties with Romania (Tîcu, 2016).

The years that followed had the Republic of Moldova "muddling through the geopolitical schism" (Morar & Dembińska 2020, p. 293) between two diametrically opposing political, economic, and cultural blocs: the European Union on one side and Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on the other. The absence of a shared Moldovan national identity remains a significant challenge, with cultural divisions reflected in the media, religion, politics, and electoral campaigns. This issue is compounded by the separatist region of Transnistria and the autonomous Gagauzia, both closely tied to Russia. Moldova's reliance on both the West and Russia further exacerbates the situation, as the country is drawn into the ongoing discursive struggle between the West and the East.

Moldova's European trajectory and growing inclination towards a future with the EU are becoming more potent in all discourses emerging from the

country, and the fact that the country recently gained Candidate status to join the EU further reinforces that. In this article, we show how Moldova seeks to construct a coherent self-image of its otherwise heterogeneous society for external audiences. Their efforts, we argue, align closely with the notion of commercial nationalism, to which we turn next.

COMMERCIAL NATIONALISM: TOWARDS THE POST-POLITICAL AND BACK

The confluence of neoliberal and nationalist discourses, reflected in the notion of commercial nationalism, suggests that "states start to think of themselves through the lens of the nation as corporations" (Volčič & Andrejevic, 2016, p. 5). Thus, rather than being confined to the domain of political ideology or propaganda, nationalism is reconfigured and expressed in and through the discourse of the global economy (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Volčič, 2012; Volčič & Andrejevic, 2016). Aligned with the neoliberal perception of the nation brand as an asset valuable in the global competition for investment, trade, and tourism, the nation is viewed as a resource requiring management (Aronczyk, 2018, p. 3). Rather than replacing nationalist ideology, which remains an object of domestic consumption, commercial nationalism extends branding processes to external audiences, attracting foreign investments and promoting tourism. Whereas the commercial industry takes on the task of constructing a national identity, the act of identifying with the nation is viewed as a form of consumption (Castello & Mihelj, 2017). Empirical studies of commercial nationalism take scholars to contexts as diverse as Australia (White, 2018), Canada (Rettie, 2017, Quail, 2015), Colombia (Sanín, 2016) and Japan (Kobayashi, 2023), demonstrating the increasing uniformity of nation branding.

However, little has been studied on the challenges of dealing with inevitable ruptures that stem from the internal social contradictions, particularly in countries with a relatively young statehood. In this article, we bring attention to how commercial nationalism is strategically utilized to manage political cleavages *within* countries. Multiple authors (Aronczyk, 2009; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011) have argued that commercial nationalism seeks to advance a post-political logic, "where the nation remains necessary not as a democratic resource for active participation or equal recognition, nor as a geopolitical force to mediate international conflict, but as an ensemble of non-threatening fragments of culture, history, and geography determined by committee" (Aronczyk, 2009, p. 294). In other words, commercial nationalism is seen to privilege a technocratic and solutionist approach to identity building, as opposed to the view that national identification is a result of ongoing ideological struggles, and any claim over a single "identity" is inherently contestable. In discursive terms, this process

may be understood as the erasure of the surplus of meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) in order to create a coherent discourse on a nation-state.

Our paper seeks to offer a contribution to the discussion on commercial nationalism by highlighting how its neoliberal logic of consumption facilitates a transition from the political to the post-political. With the political, we refer to Mouffe's (2005) ontological notion of the conflictual dimension where political actors and institutions are embedded and power struggles take place. The post-political vision, in turn, suggests a condition where ideological ruptures have been overcome. To reclaim the space for the political in our analysis, we bring attention to the multiple discursive struggles that underlie the "post-political" nation branding process and offer a consensual, non-conflictual version of the self. In order to do so, we direct our gaze towards the postsocialist context of Eastern Europe and specifically Moldova, where a relative absence of "the full discursive and symbolic repertoire of the nation state" (Turner, 2016, p. 14) makes the push for the post-political most visible.

MOLDOVA AND COMMERCIAL NATIONALISM IN POST-SOCIALIST EUROPE

Nation branding has become a prevalent worldwide phenomenon, attributed to the growing global competition that nations face in domestic and external markets (Dinnie, 2016, p. 6). The nation brand stems from conscious efforts made by a nation to present itself favorably to attract investment, tourism, trade or talent. These efforts take various forms (campaigns, movies, presence at expos, etc.) but, fundamentally, as a communications strategy and a practical initiative, nation branding enables countries to manage and shape the image they present globally (Aronczyk, 2008).

Transitional countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, have displayed a greater propensity for engaging in nation branding initiatives (Kaneva, 2012). This goes in line with White's (2017) observation that countries with younger statehood show a stronger tendency to incorporate national symbols into advertisement, as they seek to make sense of their history and affirm their identity. Most Central and Eastern European countries have rebranded themselves to attract EU interest, foreign investment, tourism, and other industries. (Sussman, 2012). For post-communist national elites, commercial nationalism has offered a visible and seemingly easy solution to the pressing demand of dismantling communist identity markers and building new national subjectivities.

Drawing from the complexity of Moldovan national identity, the country has encountered challenges in creating a cogent narrative about its own identity. Early 2000s' nation branding efforts struggled to reshape Moldova's international image. The 2005 campaign *Moldova: Feel at Home in the Heart of Nature* was

quickly dismissed, and the subsequent *Discover Us* campaign also failed to make an impact (Florek & Conejo, 2007). Both lacked the power to persuade audiences and were unable to distinguish Moldova. In 2014, the *Tree of Life* brand campaign, with the slogan *Discover the Routes of Life,* was introduced, initially focusing on tourism. By 2018, the *Tree of Life* evolved into Moldova's official Country Brand, serving as a visual representation consolidating all efforts to boost trade, tourism, and investment.

Still, Moldova's efforts at nation branding were minimal compared to other post-socialist nations. This led Saunders (2017, p. 234) to conclude that "of all the former Soviet republics, Moldova seems to have done the least to make itself known and lays bare the truism that 'if you do not brand your nation, someone will do it for you.'" To our knowledge, the topic of Moldova's nation branding has not been developed in empirical literature. Our article seeks to address this gap, focusing on Moldova's intensified self-promotion in recent years.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The aim of this paper is to understand how nation branding helps articulate a country's self-image (where commercial nationalism would emerge as the crucial interpretative framework). Moldova, a country with a relatively young statehood, offers a fascinating starting point for an empirical investigation. To operationalize our theoretical framework, we asked the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: How is Moldova presented in its official branding campaigns?
- RQ2: How do these campaigns support a consistent self-image?

To answer these questions, we gathered and analyzed a data corpus that includes material produced by the key actor of Moldova's branding campaigns.

The data for this study comprise a series of materials by Invest Moldova Agency (henceforth the Agency), the governmental body charged with promoting Moldova's image abroad. Their primary tasks consist of promoting and strengthening the country's brand, exports, tourism, investment, and economic diplomacy (Invest Moldova, 2023b).

The main part of our corpus consists of 196 Facebook posts from two pages administered by the Agency spanning from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, and a third page with a tourism profile, covering the same time frame. Although the effects of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is not the target of our interest, this time frame enables us to include both the pre-invasion and post-invasion period (24 February 2022), as well as to compare the discursive dynamic of the branding campaigns which, as we will show, was affected by the war. Facebook

was selected as the primary platform for analysis due to its considerably broader outreach, tenfold the follower count compared to Instagram (second place). The first page, Agenția de Investiții/Invest Moldova Agency[1], is the agency's official page on Facebook, with over 14,000 followers as of March 2024. The second page, NeamPornit[2] focuses on a nation branding campaign created and executed by the Agency, primarily targeting an internal audience (some 13,000 followers in March 2024).

The third page, Moldova Travel[3], is the official Facebook page for promoting Moldova as a tourism destination (around 44,000 followers in March 2024), developed in partnership with the Agency.

The posts were a mixture of textual content (varying in length) and images. In addition, five documents obtained from the Agency's official website, where they were publicly available and downloadable at the time of this article's submission: the Touristic Brochure (four documents) and the Investment Brochure (one document). Lastly, textual content analysis was supported by one in-depth semi-structured interview with two Agency representatives, recorded on March 15, 2022. The 87-minute interview was carried out, transcribed and analyzed by the first author. It was conducted in Romanian (native language of the first author and interviewees), and later transcribed and translated to English.

The research utilizes publicly available data, including social media posts and official documents on the Agency's associated webpages. This eliminates the need for anonymity and prior consent concerning this portion of the corpus. Consent for recording was obtained for the interview, and respondents' anonymity was preserved by omitting their names.

Approaching the promotion of particular interpretations of a country brand as an act of power, we opted for critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the method for analysis. The CDA—more specifically, Fairclough's (1995) model—was chosen as a framework that enables a continuous analytical iteration between a given textual corpus and ideology, which is essential in understanding a branding campaign that builds on a set of prior cultural and political notions. The CDA frames a text "within situational and sociocultural contexts and… incorporate[s] textual, discursive and social levels" into analysis (Henderson, 2005, p. 20).

Indeed, through the use of Fairclough's model, we paid close attention to the three aspects inscribed in the model: text, discursive practice and social practice. In the process of textual analysis, we focused on the formal features characterizing a discourse linguistically. This involved examining elements such as vocabulary, syntax, sentence cohesion, and also delving into valuable techniques like the

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/investmoldova
[2] https://www.facebook.com/neampornit/
[3] https://www.facebook.com/MoldovaTravelMoldovaTravel

utilization of interactional control, metaphors, nominalization, and modality. For example, the repeated usage of "Small country, big heart" as a stereotype breaking metaphor (the small size of the country vs. the goodness of its people), a juxtaposition of antagonizing concepts (small/big), are seen as creating a new articulation of the country.

Next, we identified a number of discursive strategies articulated through the production and distribution of texts by the Agency. Following Fairclough (1995, p. 76), by discourse we mean "a particular way of constructing a particular (domain of) social practice"; by putting it in terms of "discursive strategies", we accentuate the purposeful signification of the country as a brand. Consequently, at the level of social practice, we sought to continuously relate the identified discursive strategies to the extralinguistic dimension, such as the ongoing geopolitical events and processes, to better understand the context which constitutes – and is constituted by – particular statements.

We employed abductive strategy, moving between the data and existing theories to identify patterns and develop the most plausible explanations (Kennedy, 2018, p. 52). The aim of this approach is to remain receptive to the data, while drawing upon pre-existing theories not as a means of mechanically formulating hypotheses for testing (as in deductive analysis), but rather as a source of insight, recognition, and interpretation of patterns (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2008, as cited in Kennedy, 2018, p. 52). Following the initial coding phase, inspired by Emerson et al. (2011), the theoretical categories were refined to account for the emerging patterns in data (e.g., the presence of the political/post-political dynamic), and a subsequent review of the data ensued to build the final coding system. Furthermore, some preliminary observations were made with regard to the period after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, using the analytical framework developed for this study which focuses on the period prior to the full-scale war.

MOLDOVA'S NATION BRANDING STRATEGY

In this section, we present the prevalent themes identified through critical discourse analysis of the reviewed materials, and connect them with the wider interpretation of commercial nationalism within the post-socialist milieu. Three main strategies were identified. The first one illustrates the efforts to inscribe Moldova within the globalized neoliberal economy, by which the Agency is arguably seeking to appeal to investors, partners, and tourists. The second strategy presents the cultural component of nation branding, with a heavy emphasis on its ties with the West. Finally, the third theme addresses the efforts to integrate Moldova's internal diversity into a consistent image directed to external audiences.

BELONGING TO THE GLOBAL CAPITALIST SYSTEM

Volčič and Andrejevic (2011) highlight that commercial nationalism partly consists in the state using marketing techniques to brand itself and subsequently shaping the nation's image on the global stage. For Moldova, the first step to shaping its image would be to articulate a new post-socialist self and choose the characteristics the country wants to be known for on the global stage. That involves focusing Moldova's nation branding strategies on economic integration into the global capitalist context.

The Agency focuses on several commercially-oriented discourses. First, Moldova is framed as advantageous and worthy of investment, with nominalizations such as "your next destination for investment," "advanced," "digital," "attractive," and evaluations like "Moldova's strategic geographic positioning permits connecting to the global economic network" (Invest Moldova, 2023a). Secondly, the Agency seeks to promote Moldova as a reliable partner, emphasizing its positive attributes to the international community as an exporter:

> "Moldova's goods exports increased in 2021 by 27.5%, for the first time ever surpassing the billion threshold. [...] We will join efforts to reposition Moldova on the regional economic radar." (Invest Moldova, 2022a)

The Agency cultivates the image of a reliable partner through a dual-focused strategy: enhancing existing partnerships and establishing new ones. The first direction involves strengthening pre-existing relationships:

> "The development of trade relations with partner countries is a priority for the government." (Invest Moldova, 2021a)

The second consists in establishing new relationships:

> "The Republic of Moldova accepted the invitation to participate in the Texas CEE – Tech Summit [...] This event connects Texas tech companies that are looking for suppliers from CEE, with whom to initiate partnership relations." (Invest Moldova, 2021b)

Through this two-pronged approach, the Agency furthers the point that not only does Moldova belong to the global community, but in this network they can be counted on as advantageous and reliable partners.

These two elements of the branding campaign – investment attractiveness and reliability as a partner – align with commercial nationalism by providing a key point of identification, positioning Moldova within the international economic order, in contrast to its previous position. The focus on Moldova's branding efforts

to become part of the global capitalist landscape through economic integration also emerged during the interview:

> "Promoting the country image serves as the backbone for all our other initiatives because you can attract investors, help exporters, bring in tourists only when you have a strong country image to project on the international stage." (Interview)

Thus, nation branding has two key tasks: developing a strong country image (drawing, among others, on national identity markers) and "selling" it to the outside world to attract investment, tourism, and exports. In addition, it sets the "international stage" (in the informant's words) as the evaluators of the effectiveness of the nation brand.

Lastly, the articulation of belonging to the global capitalist system involves a demonstration of an active engagement and participation in global affairs and international events. Utilized as instruments for enhancing the country's image and impact, trade missions, global conferences, and summits offer Moldova the chance to amplify its global presence. Such initiatives can enable developing countries to "punch above their weight" (Hurn, 2016, p. 80) and increase their international standing.

Moldova's efforts to amplify its global presence through international events are showcased on the Facebook page, both visually and textually, and were also highlighted during the interview:

> "We go to over 15 international exhibitions every year, all related to different sectors." (Interview)
> "Between November 1–4, The Republic of Moldova participates for the first time ever at Web Summit 2021." (Invest Moldova, 2021c)

Consequently, the act of participating in international events, when viewed as a facet of nation branding, is emphasized through discourse, positioning the country as a reputable and eligible member of the international community. As we show in the next section, the "international community" Moldova aims to belong to, is, in large, the EU and the West.

CULTURAL BELONGING TO THE WEST IN A GEO-POLITICAL SCHISM

As previously discussed, commercial nationalism is particularly significant for countries with younger statehood striving to prove their belonging to the global community (White, 2017). Moldova is no exception, and the affirmation of its belonging to the international economic system is only part of its discursive strategy.

The second part consists in a continuous identification with the "Western", which the branding campaign uses synonymously with "the global". This manifests itself both at the level of linguistic choice, but also reliance on Western actors in producing and spreading the message. This positioning is carefully crafted alongside presenting Moldova as the "bridge" connecting the East and the West.

The Agency's efforts predominantly center around Europe or the broader Western sphere. For instance, the Agency's official Facebook page features significantly more references to expos, projects, and events involving Western actors compared to other regions:

> "At the proposal of Invest Moldova, a meeting is set to be organized with the Investment Agencies of Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia." (Invest Moldova, 2022b)

This persistent alignment with the Western dimension suggests a strong inclination towards identification and affiliation with it. Moreover, it is Western recognition that is desired:

> "We have signed very important international treaties with the EU, which allows us very easy access to the European market. We also must highlight that Moody's, for three years in a row, has ranked our country as a stable economy – which is a big accomplishment." (Invest Moldova, 2021d)

A good score from Moody's, an American rating agency, is perceived as bringing the country one step closer to the Western association it seeks.

Although the focus is on being recognized as a European/Western nation, one that embraces European values, there is still a reminiscing effort to situate Moldova as the "bridge" between the East and the West, as linguistic choices from the *Moldova Travel* and the travel brochure show. On the aforementioned Facebook page, posts are predominantly written in three languages – English, Romanian, and Russian. The emphasis on English (text and visuals) clearly targets Western audiences. Romanian is a natural choice as the official language, while the inclusion of Russian suggests the need for a balancing act, addressing unresolved political, cultural, and ethnolinguistic tensions.

The effort to position Moldova as a "bridge" between East and West has been highlighted in this post, as well:

> "We've been talking for a long time about the possibility for Moldova to become a bridge between the countries in the West and the East. Today, we are at a point in time that is very favorable for us to consolidate this wish." (Invest Moldova, 2021d)

This statement was made prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At the time, seeking a compromise between the two opposing camps was viewed as favorable, as it presented the country as strategically positioned on the economic map (being close to both the EU and the CIS countries was highly advertised in the Investment Brochure). Predictably, the war in Ukraine has galvanized a change in rhetoric. While an in-depth study of this change is beyond the scope of this article, it is already apparent that the pro-Western view has gained even more potency while conferences in Russia and exports to Russia have been cut drastically from the point when the invasion started forward. The only mention of Russia is in the context of cutting ties: "The value of exports to European destinations increased by 32% […]. Exports to Russia fell by 31% in a single year" (Invest Moldova 2023d). The last positive reference to Russia on the Facebook page is dated 22 February 2022 (two days before the invasion started) and it was a post detailing Moldova's participation at an International Fashion Expo held in Moscow. After that, no more posts acknowledging partnerships or consolidation of ties have been made.

The war in Ukraine and especially the subsequent refugee crisis have created an opportunity to reiterate Moldova's commitment to a shared outlook with the West. One post details:

> "The people of Moldova have met with open hearts and doors hundreds of thousands of refugees […]. Today, Moldova is appreciated by the international community as a small country with a big heart." (Invest Moldova, 2022c)

Interestingly, the "international community" serves as the receptive audience for targeted and, in this case, non-targeted branding endeavors. This lexical construction ostensibly refers to a broader global audience yet often implicitly signifies the Western community, as that is the sounding board towards which most branding efforts are directed.

In a strategy that reinforces the post-political nature of the process, the Agency regards nation branding as a tool that requires skillful administration by experts. Also here, at the level of discursive production, we see an identification with the West, by introducing Western branding consultants.

"We want to work with Bloom Consulting. We hope this collaboration will give us a set of realistic instruments that are tailored to our needs." (Interview)

The Agency recognizes its own limits and sees external (Western) support as the answer to their discursive shortcomings. Whether it is a promotion on the BBC (the British broadcaster), getting a shoutout from Jolie (Holywood, the USA), or their desire to collaborate with Bloom Consulting (Western nation branding consultants) whose level of expertise is seen as trumping current

discourses, Moldova's nation branding strategies are exhibiting a growing reliance on the West.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND COMMODIFICATION OF DIVERSITY

The third discursive strategy of Moldova's nation branding relates to representing the country's image while handling the heterogeneity that this endeavor entails, given the numerous stakeholders that produce meaning, internal and external audiences and the unique message that needs to be tailored to them.

In the context of tourism as a key element of nation branding (Dinnie, 2016; Anholt, 2007) the Agency shifts away from a political interpretation of diversity towards a post-political view focusing on the "diversity of consumption", bringing into the spotlight the wide variety of possible consumer experiences. A range of tourism forms is highlighted, each molding a distinct rendition of reality. For instance, Moldova is portrayed as a go-to destination for wine tourism, rural getaways, and dynamic pursuits like cycling, hiking, and kayaking:

> "The authors [of Times Travel] highlighted the excellent tours at local wineries as well as the wonderful rural locations and architectural monuments. And this is just a small part of all that you can discover by visiting our country." (Moldova Travel, 2022b)

In line with the neoliberal view of nation brand as a valuable asset in global competition for investment and tourism, different facets of the nation are exploited to appeal to different (albeit, in the end, complementary) goals. By intertwining modernity and tradition in their discourses, the Agency is subsequently adding a new layer to the diversification of consumption.

The Agency juxtaposes visually and textually rustic rural scenes with contemporary infrastructure and emphasizes both heritage and modern advancements. For example, the touristic brochure introduces this passage:

> "Moldova is the country where fruits have flavor, its wines are highly valued at international competitions, and the internet speeds are among the fastest in the world." (Invest Moldova, 2023c)

An urban and cutting-edge setting could draw in investors, whereas a rural and culturally traditional representation might appeal to tourists. To ensure a synergy in the nation branding messages, the Agency arguably seeks to strike a balance within this dichotomy.

Highlighting unique cultural attributes of specific regions within the country, notably Gagauzia and Transnistria, comes at the expense of being seen as the exotic "Other." For example, an excerpt from the Touristic Brochure reads:

> "People passionate about the Soviet period can visit the Transnistrian region, where things have changed very little in the last 30 years. The monuments of Vladimir Lenin, the sickle and the hammer – the symbols of the communist party, as well as the wide and orderly boulevards of Tiraspol, bring you into the atmosphere of the Soviet Union" (Invest Moldova, 2023c)

The brochure excerpt highlights the distinctiveness of this area of Moldova, which offers visitors an opportunity to step into a place where the Soviet legacy remains prominent. Here, one can experience Otherness through the enduring "atmosphere of the Soviet regime." This point is reiterated on the Moldova Travel Facebook page:

> "Be our guest to the Transnistrian region which became recently a must-go place. Time travel and live an authentic USSR experience." (Moldova Travel, 2021)

Another aspect of the Soviet legacy of contemporary Moldova – two Christmas days, one left from the Julian and another from the Gregorian calendar – also becomes an object of celebration as a cultural experience, rather than the result of complex political entanglements: "In Moldova, we celebrate two Christmases: on the 25th of December, as well as on the 7th January, according to the old tradition." (Moldova Travel, 2022a)

In sum, the region's history and intricate relationship with its Soviet heritage are utilized as discursive tools to appeal to an audience continuously seeking unique experiences and exotic encounters. Monuments of Lenin—important material elements of the discourse on the continuity between the (Soviet) past and the present—are presented in a rather playful way. This helps avoid an upfront, political reading of contemporary tensions, instead confining them to the domain of consumption.

CONCLUSION

Moldova's nation branding campaign by Invest Moldova Agency bears resemblance with the rather traditional patterns of commercial nationalism (Volčič & Andrejevic, 2016). Indeed, we find the discourses of self-promotion as a reliable, progressive and unique country that belongs in a broader international community,

understood synonymously with the Western community. The more traditional components of cultural expressiveness (Dinnie, 2016) are also present, with the celebration of cultural heritage, arts, cuisine and landscape. Overall, as we summarize in the table below, Moldova's nation branding efforts reproduce a neoliberal and globalist discourse characteristic of nation branding as a particular promotional genre, and projects the image of a successful post-Cold War transition society. The Agency has also painstakingly represented Moldova as a cultural and economic bridge between the West and Russia, an effort that has largely been abandoned following the latter's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Moldova's portrayal as a 'bridge' is not unique for the Central European region; Romania and Bulgaria have similarly used nation branding to emphasize the tension between their pre-communist historical heritage and a new identity shaped by Western, capitalist modernity. Both countries have at times framed themselves as "a bridge between past and future, tradition and modernity, East and West" (Kaneva & Popescu, 2012, p. 200).

Table 1. Invest Moldova Agency's strategies of nation branding

	Discursive strategies of nation branding		
	Belonging to the global capitalist system	**Cultural belonging to the West in a geopolitical schism**	**Acknowledgment and commodification of diversity**
Articulations of discursive strategies of nation branding	Investment attractiveness	Identification with the West (synonymous with the "international community")	Diversity of consumption
	Reliability as a partner		
	Contribution to the global economic dialogue	Moldova as a bridge between East and West	Commodification of historical legacy

At the same time, as a country navigating multiple identitarian struggles, including the presence of a breakaway region within its sovereign borders, Moldova has to face a series of unique challenges in its nation branding. We argue that commodification becomes a strategy of softening the tensions. Commercial nationalism provides the Agency with a common denominator for the diverse elements underpinning contemporary cultural and political landscape of Moldova: it is "nationalism" insofar as the Agency seeks to present a cohesive Moldovan self-image to the outside world and advocate for its interests abroad; and it is "commercial" to the extent that internal contradictions are managed through celebratory or consumerist frames. For example, the articulation of Transnistria as "the last Soviet destination" recognizes the existing diversity while at the same time embedding it in the overarching discourse of commercialization. Simultaneously, this tongue-in-cheek, exotified designation of Transnistria leads

to marginalizing the alternative agendas. Minimal effort is made to meaningfully engage with the contradictions, although the Agency briefly acknowledges the existence of thorny and multifaceted socio-historic conditions underlying the branding process (i.e. recognizing the Soviet era tensions).

Our analysis offers an empirical contribution to the understanding of commercial nationalism as part of a broader post-political apparatus. Rather than confronting the multiple struggles characteristic of the national identification process, nation branding instead embeds national imaginaries within a skillfully crafted framework of commodification, providing commercially advantageous interpretations of historical memory and contemporary conflicts to appeal to external audiences. Particularly in the post-socialist context of Eastern Europe, this reinforces not only a coarticulation of Western values and capitalism, but also market discourse as an appropriate signifying frame for the domain of political participation and international relations.

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A Descriptive Inquiry of the PR Professionals in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: The paper addresses the scarcity of demographic data in the Czech PR market, aiming to inform both academic research and industry management. Drawing from established European surveys, the cross-sectional quantitative study from late 2022 responded by PR practitioners with diverse organization background investigates the composition of the Czech PR workforce, their gender distribution, levels of experience, ongoing education pursuits, and job roles. While estimating the total number of PR professionals remains challenging, 463 online survey respondents suggest a substantial presence. The average age aligns with global trends, with most professionals transitioning from the media industry and finding the quarter of the professionals, those youngest, starting directly in PR. Despite a high percentage of university graduates, a significant proportion abstains from further education, possibly due to time constraints or differing perceptions of continuing education. Notably, media relations remained the primary focus, followed closely by communication strategy development and copywriting.

Keywords: Public relations, strategic communication, communication, Czech Republic, PR professionalization

INTRODUCTION

The public relations market in Czechia boasts an annual volume of approximately EUR 39 million (APRA, 2020). However, despite this significant market size, there remains an eminent dearth of knowledge regarding the individuals comprising this industry. Managers, in particular, pose numerous inquiries for which answers remain elusive. There is not only a lack of understanding regarding the total workforce within the field, but there also exists ambiguity concerning their educational backgrounds and job titles. The two primary professional organizations involved in the sector—APRA, representing predominantly PR agencies, and the PR Klub—only scratch the surface with their data collection efforts. The former offers insights into average salaries and rates (in agencies), while the

latter minimally extends its analysis beyond basic information such as names, positions, and employers. Previous research by Beurer-Zeullig et al. (2009) provides some insight into the Czech labor market by surveying communication managers. However, only 9.9% of the respondents hailed from Eastern Europe, a category inclusive of the Czech Republic for the purposes of the study. Similarly, the European Communication Monitor, supported by EUPRERA, struggled to attract substantial participation from Eastern European nations. Out of 1,771 PR professionals across 43 countries, that responded in 2022, only 245 originated from Eastern Europe (Zerfass et al., 2022).

Hence, this paper endeavors to address crucial questions: Who constitutes the Czech PR professional? What is the scale of this profession within the Czech Republic? What levels of experience do they possess, and do they actively pursue ongoing education? What defines their job roles? Are they predominantly female, as observed elsewhere in Europe? This research aims not only to establish a foundational database for future inquiries but also to provide valuable insights for the industry itself, aiding in understanding PR's competitive landscape, gauging the influx of younger professionals, and more.

Existing studies have primarily delved into the dynamics between PR and journalists in the Czech Republic, focusing on ethical considerations, additionally, the historical evolution of the field in the Czech Republic has received attention (Kopová, 2017; Ortová, 2017; Pařík, 2009). However, calls have been made for the inclusion of a demographic profile of the profession (Hejlová, 2023; Ortová, 2017; Pařík, 2009). Previous studies have examined the role and development of the PR profession in the Czech Republic (Hejlová, 2014; Hejlová, 2023; Hejlová & Klimeš, 2019; Kasl Kollmannová, 2013), as well as the public affairs profession (Kasl Kollmannová & Matušková, 2014). Thus, this work seeks to complement existing literature by providing a much-needed demographic perspective, akin to the comprehensive datasets available in countries like the United States (via the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Public Relations Society of America), the United Kingdom (through associations like the State of the Profession by CIPR and the PR and Communications Census by PRCA), the Netherlands (as exemplified by Van Ruler, 2003), Germany (as evidenced by Bentele & Wehmeier, 2003), and the European context (as observed through the European Communication Monitor by Zerfass et al., 2021).

PR PROFESSION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic, situated in Central Europe with a population of 10.5 million (Eurostat, 2024), is a member of both the European Union and NATO. It operates under a parliamentary democracy and boasts a robust market economy characterized by a longstanding low unemployment rate (CZSO, 2024). According to data from the World Bank (2024), the Czech Republic ranks as the 37th richest country globally.

Despite enduring setbacks during the communist regime from 1948 to 1989, PR as a field has solidified its presence in the Czech Republic (Kasl Kollmannová, 2013). Its initial development faced challenges, yet academic study began to emerge in the 1960s under the guise of economic propaganda at the University of Economics in Prague. By the 1970s, a dedicated specialization was established at the Faculty of Journalism of Charles University in Prague (Hejlová, 2014). The foundational text on PR, composed by Alfons Kachlík in 1969, initially catered exclusively to students at the University of Economics (Kachlík, 1969). However, until 1989, the development of the PR profession in the former Czechoslovakia was limited due to the totalitarian state and its propaganda (Hejlová, 2014; Hejlová & Klimeš, 2019). The professional fields of PR and public affairs began to grow after the transition to democracy in the 1990s. Gradually, the demand for professionalization and high-quality education in the field also increased (Hejlová, 2015).

Presently, PR education is available through four bachelor's and one master's program. These programs are offered at various institutions including two private (Schools of International Relations in Prague and the University of New York in Prague) and two public schools: Tomas Bata University in Zlín, and the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University in Prague, which offers the most comprehensive specialized education in the field. Their bachelor's degree program was inaugurated in the academic year 2004/2005, with a subsequent master's program titled Strategic Communication introduced in the academic year 2020/2021 (FSV UK, 2023). Consequently, individuals seeking university education in PR, with few exceptions from abroad, are typically born after 1985. Meanwhile, professionals entering communication departments and agencies often come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, primarily business administration schools and journalism.

The first professional organization for PR practitioners emerged in 1983 at the Brno Trade Fairs and Exhibition Centre under the moniker *Klub práce s veřejností* (Public Relations Club) (Kačena, 2012). Notably, the most prominent PR association, the Association of Public Relations Agencies (APRA, now called Association of Public Relations), traces its roots back to 1995, followed by the establishment of the PR Klub in 1998, which primarily caters to individuals (and

as of 2022, agencies and communication departments), and the PR Chamber in 2004, catering to small agencies. In 2003, APRA adopted the Stockholm Charter as its ethical code, followed by the adoption of the Helsinki Declaration in 2017.

CZECH PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

The membership of APRA comprises approximately two dozen agencies, collectively representing around 400 employees, while the PR Klub accounts for an additional three hundred members. However, data from the Czech Statistical Office indicates approximately 2,600 employees within the communications industry. Given the subjective interpretation of job roles across businesses, what one organization perceives as marketing might be construed as communication elsewhere and a position labeled as a PR representative in one context might be categorized as a business role elsewhere (Cutlip et al., 1985, p. 59). Therefore, it's essential to recognize that PR professionals may operate under assorted job titles and can be found among other specialized fields, such as marketing, which boasts nearly 9,000 employees. Consequently, the employee count reported by the CSO may not provide a comprehensive overview of PR practitioners.

Despite this, the Czech Republic has roughly 150 registered PR agencies, with an undisclosed number of professionals working independently. Utilizing Falconi's (2006) estimate, which suggests that one in every 700 workers in developed democratic nations engages in PR, the Czech Republic would theoretically harbor around 15,000 PR professionals.

But it is not only agencies and employees who make up the market of PR professionals. Public relations practitioners can be found across various sectors, including institutions, companies, and independent consultants, often referred to as freelancers. It is imperative to acknowledge both employees and freelancers as integral components of the workforce in this field.

In 2018, approximately 16% of economically active individuals aged 15 to 74 pursued freelance work, a figure only marginally higher than the European Union average (Eurostat, 2019). By comparison, the United Kingdom reports that 11-13% of surveyed professionals engage in freelance work (CIPR, 2022).

COMPARISON WITH BORDERING COUNTRIES

Research on PR professionals' demographics in neighboring countries – Austria, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia – is conducted sporadically. Germany has seen repeated studies by Bentele (Bentele & Seidenglanz, 2013; Bentele & Wehmeier, 2003) examining trends like professionalization, specialization, and feminization,

highlighting that Germany has over 20,000 PR professionals (Bentele & Wehmeier, 2003). While most PR professionals hold higher education degrees, only 15% studied PR specifically. German PR agencies are represented by GPRA (36 agencies, 2,800 employees) and the DPRG association, while communicators are unified under BdKom (Bundesverband der Kommunikatoren).

In Poland, Tworzydło et al. (2019) assessed the profession's status through three surveys (2017–2018). The country has 934 PR agencies, though nearly a quarter operate as single-person consultancies. Agencies are represented by ZFPR, which establishes ethical standards. PR can be studied at multiple institutions, offering PR, marketing, and media programs. Three organizations serve Polish PR professionals: ZFPR, SAPR (agency associations), and PSPR (communication professionals).

Austria, with approximately 10,000 PR professionals, sees a third working in agencies or as consultants and the remainder in institutions or corporations (Haas, 1987; Zowack, 2000). PRVA, founded in 1975, is the primary association. Since the 1980s, the average age of Austrian PR practitioners has been 39 years, with 89% holding university degrees, primarily in journalism, media, or economics (Nessman, 2004).

In Slovakia, PR professionals often transition from journalism or related fields. PR studies are offered at five institutions in combination with media or marketing. The APRSR (18 members) represents agencies and publishes an ethical code. However, no estimates exist for the total number of Slovak PR professionals (Žáry cited in van Ruler, B. & Verčič, D. ed. (2004)).

These findings reflect both commonalities and national distinctions in PR professionalization across Central Europe.

ACTIVITIES

European communications professionals dedicate most of their time to media relations, followed by providing consultancy to top management and strategic communication planning (Beurer-Zuellig, 2009). Tasks such as coordinating with colleagues and journalists, drafting press releases and other written materials, monitoring activity outcomes, and organizing events consume an average of 36.2% of a PR's time. Younger professionals (under 29 years) and women allocate more time to these operational duties, with 45.1% and 38.1% respectively, while men focus more on coordination, occupying an average of one-fifth of their working time (18.8%). Additionally, management responsibilities account for approximately 27.8% of their time, while coaching and consulting members of their organization or clients, including media preparation, comprise the remaining fifth (17.2%) (Zerfass et al., 2016).

In contrast, research conducted in Britain places greater emphasis on copy-writing (82%), campaigning (69%), and strategic planning (68%), with media relations ranking fourth (64%). Over half of the respondents also mention engagement in community relations (54%), internal communications (54%), crisis communications (54%), and social media management (51%) (CIPR, 2022).

Interestingly, both lower-level team members and senior PR executives spend a significant portion of their time communicating with the media, with the former dedicating 46.6% and the latter 29.6% (Zerfass, 2016). This active involvement in day-to-day media relations, even at the senior level, is characteristic of the PR field. Senior managers often engage directly in media communication, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as financial results (Moss & Desanto, 2005).

While a systematic description of tasks within the Czech Republic's communications sector is yet to be undertaken, insights can be gleaned from a survey among PR agencies conducted by APRA (STEM/MARK, 2021). Media relations emerge as the primary focus, accounting for 30% of agencies' workload, followed by product PR (14%), digital and social media management (12%), crisis communications (10%), internal communications (8%), corporate identity (8%), content marketing (4%), public affairs/government relations (5%), influencer marketing (3%), and social responsibility and philanthropy (4%).

METHODOLOGY

Based on previous research, two main research questions (RQ) were identified with hypotheses (H) below:

- RQ1: What is a demographic profile of Czech PR practitioners?
- H1a: Czech PR professionals are, like 80% of PR professionals in Europe (Beurer-Zuellig et al., 2009), university educated.
- H1b: Czech PR professionals are most often educated in the social sciences, communication and journalism (according to Beurer-Zuellig et al., 2009 in Eastern Europe: 26.2% in communication, 29.4% in social sciences, 11.1% in journalism).
- H1c: For most Czech PR professionals, PR is not their first profession.
- H1d: As in other countries (66% in the USA (Grunig et al. (2001, p. 50) and in the UK (CIPR, 2022), 53% in Germany (Fröhlich et al. 2005, p. 80), women also predominate among Czech PR practitioners.
- RQ2: What is the job description of Czech PR practitioners?
- H2a: Most Czech PR professionals (36.2%) are frequently involved in media relations (according to Zerfass et al. (2016).

The cross-sectional quantitative study collected data through an online questionnaire comprising 26 mandatory questions in the Czech language, divided into four sections. Twenty respondents were pretested over three weeks in August and September 2022, following which the final revised version was distributed for six weeks in October and November 2022.

Respondents were selected via purposive sampling, utilizing email and the professional networking platform LinkedIn. The questionnaire was disseminated through various channels, including the Faculty Alumni and student network, professional organizations such as APRA and PR Klub, the PR Academy for NGOs, the #Holkyzmarketingu group on Facebook, and P.R.ciny on LinkedIn.

The outreach efforts extended beyond professional organizations to ensure a diverse sample. A total of 710 PR professionals were directly contacted via email and LinkedIn. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed to senior staff of APRA member agencies and members of the PR Klub with publicly traceable addresses. To maintain objectivity and minimize bias, recipients were encouraged to share the questionnaire with their colleagues.

Respondents were assured that the data collected would remain completely anonymous in both the accompanying letter and the introduction to the online questionnaire.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The survey's respondents comprised 463 Czech PR professionals, with 40.39% identifying as men, 59.18% as women (one respondent indicated a different gender, and one chose not to specify), with an average age of 39.6 years. The capital city, Prague, boasted the highest representation among regions, with 76.89% of participants primarily working there, followed by the South Moravian (6.91%) and Moravian-Silesian regions (3.89%). Some respondents had accrued 30 years of experience in the industry, with an average tenure of 11.08 years (median 10 years).

In terms of employment sectors, the largest proportion of respondents hailed from government and contributory organizations (28.3%), followed by those from commercial firms (26.57%), agencies (23.97%), and self-employed individuals (12.53%). Additionally, 7.99% of respondents worked in the non-profit sector.

RESULTS

COMPETENCIES

Of the respondents, 87% reported holding a university degree, with 6 out of 10 PR professionals possessing an MA, and 6.7% having a PhD. More than half of the university-educated respondents pursued a social science discipline such as media studies, sociology, or economics. Business studies were pursued by 13.39% of the surveyed PR professionals, while arts and humanities, which include linguistics or history, were studied by 10.8%. Other disciplines were represented by less than 5%.

Except for the 23.76% of respondents who have not undertaken any additional PR courses, respondents displayed an inclination toward staying abreast of the latest developments in the field. Notable activities mentioned more frequently included media training (cited by 199 participants; 43% of respondents), in-house training (188 PR professionals; 41%), and professional lectures and workshops (referenced by 177 respondents; 38%). The highest number of non-participants in training activities was observed among self-employed individuals. Interestingly, 30.63% of agency staff and 27.03% of NGO staff reported not participating in any PR courses (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. No, I have not been to any courses in PR. – categorized by organization
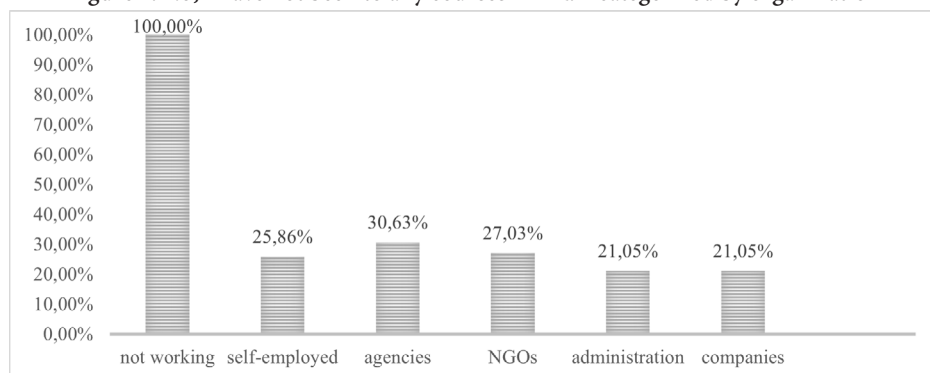
Source: Own elaboration, N=109, p<0,001

NOT THEIR FIRST PROFESSION

The survey encompassed both newcomers to the field and seasoned professionals with up to 30 years of experience. The average industry tenure was 11.08 years. However, participants had an average overall work experience of 17.06 years. This indicates that the majority, nearly 74%, transitioned into PR from another field.

The most prevalent route into PR, identified by 36.29% of respondents, was from the media. Marketing served as the entry point for 15.77% of respondents, followed by administration (7.78%) and teaching (5%). Additionally, 24.41% of participants commenced their careers directly in PR. As illustrated in Table 1, the average age of individuals entering PR directly is notably lower (35.42 years) compared to other categories. Conversely, workers with a teaching background had the highest average age (43 years).

Table 1. The initial profession and the average year of these respondents (N=463)

| Previous profession	%	Average age in years
media	36.29	41.9
first profession	24.41	35.4
marketing	15.77	38.5
business administration	7.78	40.6
different	7.13	41.0
education	5.62	43.0
management	1.51	39.9
HR	1.08	41.6
event management	0.43	41.5

Source: Own elaboration

WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION

The questionnaire yielded a response rate of 40.39% from men and 59.18% from women (with one respondent indicating a different gender and one opting not to disclose). Notably, the distribution of the gender of respondents across organizational types did not exhibit significant variance (see Figure 2). Slightly more women were engaged in the non-profit sector and freelance work and demonstrated a higher frequency of client-oriented roles. Conversely, men were more prevalent in civil service positions and significantly more represented in agencies.

Figure 2. Gender distribution among Czech PR practitioners in organizations (N=461)
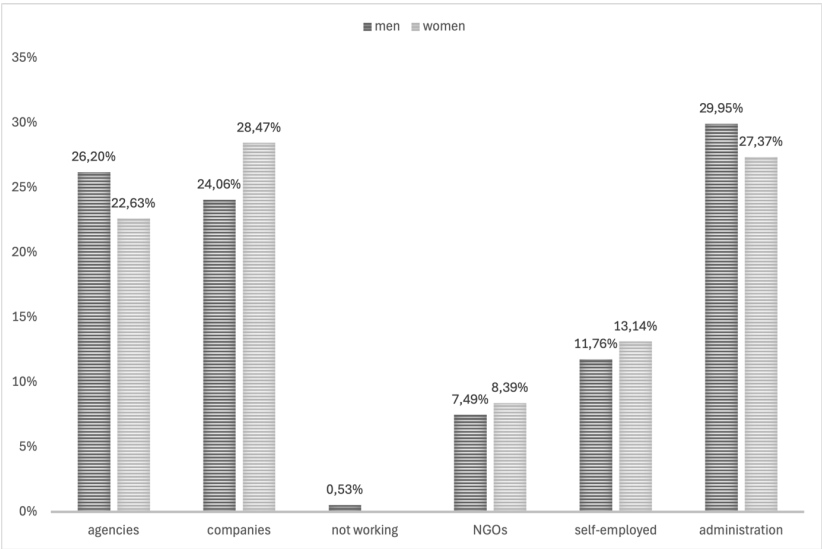
Source: Own elaboration

However, a highly significant difference (p< 0.001) was observed in their distribution across positions (Figure 3). Female representation across all positions in PR was evidently higher, except for top managers, where men and women have swapped positions.

Figure 3. Gender distribution among Czech PR practitioners in positions
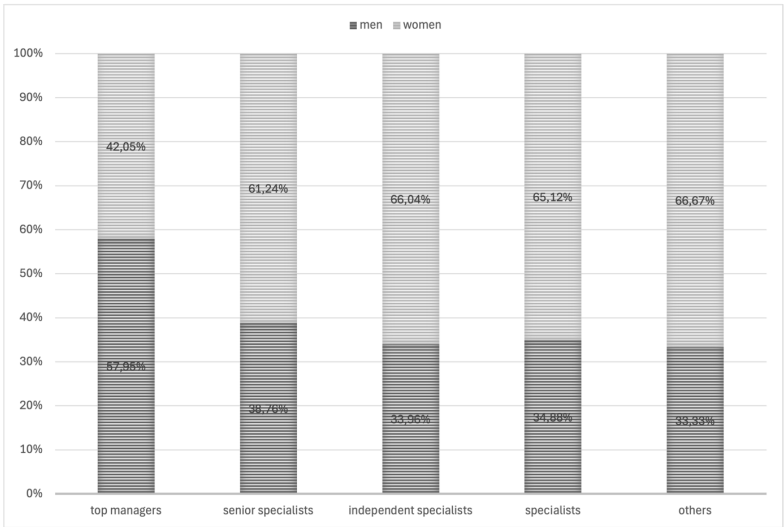
Source: Own elaboration; % reflects the number of persons in this position among all men, resp. all women, N=461, p< 0.001

WHAT DO THEY ACTUALLY DO?

When considering the activities undertaken by Czech PR professionals, it becomes evident that media relations—encompassing press releases, press conferences, and publicity—remains the cornerstone of their daily responsibilities, irrespective of their gender, position or level of experience.

A closer examination of the most common activities based on seniority reveals distinct trends (as outlined in Table 2). Top managers primarily focus on communication strategies, media relations, and team management. Senior specialists predominantly cite media relations, followed by strategies and the role of spokesperson. Independent specialists are most frequently engaged in media relations, followed by working with text, with communication strategies ranking third most common. Moreover, top managers also oversee management functions, while both top managers and managers are actively involved in shaping communication strategies. Independent specialists and specialists are often tasked with working extensively with text, with the latter incorporating monitoring and reporting responsibilities.

Analysis of data related to experience levels in the field further reinforces the prominence of media relations across all career stages, except for the most experienced professionals (as seen in Table 3). Newcomers are typically tasked with text and social media management, while after five years, their focus shifts to communication strategies, and another five years later, representing the company in the media emerges as a key responsibility. For professionals with 15-19 years of experience, team management becomes increasingly important, and after another five years, the focus returns to text-related tasks. Respondents with over 25 years of PR experience notably engage in crisis communications as a key activity. The most seasoned professionals (with over 30 years of experience) predominantly engage in communication strategy development and internal communication.

An analysis of activity representation in the sample further highlights gender disparities (see Table 4). Men are more likely to be involved in media relations, crisis communication, and team management, with statistically significant differences noted in crisis communication and management. Conversely, female PR professionals are more likely to engage in event management, monitoring, and social media management, with significant differences observed in event management.

Examining less frequent tasks reveals divergent roles between male and female professionals. Women are three times more likely to work in CSR, while men are three times more likely to engage in lobbying. This observation aligns with the Grunig model, which suggests that men are more inclined toward managerial roles, while women tend to gravitate toward technical roles (Grunig et al., 2001).

Table 2. The most common activity, categorized by positions (N=463)

Position	Activity 1	%	Activity 2	%	Activity 3	%
Top managers	Communication Strategies	59.09	Media relations	55.68	Team and project management	44.32
Senior specialists	Media relations	70.22	Communication strategies	35.96	Spokesperson	33.71
Independent specialists	Media relations	76.42	Copy-and Ghostwriting	44.34	Communication strategies	36.79
Specialists	Media relations	65.52	Copy- a ghostwriting	57.47	Monitoring, reporting	35.63
Others	Event management	50.00	Copy-and ghostwriting	50.00	Social media and community management	50.00

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3. The most common activity, categorized by experience in PR (N=463)

Years in PR	Activity 1	%	Activity 2	%	Activity 3	%
0−4 years	Media relations	69.79	Copy-and ghostwriting	44.79	Social media and community management	34.38
5−9 years	Media relations	72.50	Social media and community management	38.33	Communication strategies	37.50
10−14 years	Media relations	66.67	Communication strategies	35.35	Spokesperson	32.32
15−19 years	Media relations	62.67	Communication strategies	49.33	Team and project management	30.67
20−24 years	Media relations	63.83	Communication strategies	48.94	Copy-And ghostwriting	36.17
25−29 years	Media relations	65.22	Communication strategies	47.83	Crisis communication, issues management	34.78
More than 30 years	Communication strategies	66.67	Internal communication	66.67		

Source: Own elaboration

Table 4. The most common activities in the Czech PR – categorized by gender (N=461)

Men		Women	
Activity	%	Activity	%
Media relations	73.26	Media relations	63.87
Communication strategies	36.90	Communication strategies	38.32
Copy- and ghostwriting	35.83	Copy- and ghostwriting	32.12
Spokesperson	30.48	Social media and community management	29.93
Team and project management	29.41	Spokesperson	25.18

Source: Own elaboration

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The primary limitation of the study pertains to the questionnaire, the number of completed questionnaires, and the sample size, alongside the broad interpretation of PR and associated activities as articulated by respondents.

Given the absence of precise figures for the number of Czech PR professionals, the study relied on data from the Czech Statistical Office (which registers 2,600 employees under this classification) and information from APRA and PR Klub, representing several hundred professionals each, to establish a foundational population.

The sample's composition may have been influenced by the data collection method. Prior to the survey's commencement, collaboration was established with the two largest professional organizations, APRA and PR Klub, who disseminated the questionnaire via their respective channels, including newsletters and social media platforms. Additionally, invitations to participate were circulated on LinkedIn and Facebook by individuals and professional groups, such as Bohuslav Bohuněk's PR.ciny or PR Klub. Furthermore, directors of APRA member agencies, other agencies, individual members of the PR Club, and representatives from the public and commercial sectors, including spokespersons from various organizations, were reached out to. However, despite efforts to diversify outreach, certain organizations may have been inadvertently omitted, particularly those with non-public contacts or at lower administrative levels. Attempts were made to address this imbalance by encouraging respondents to share the questionnaire with their colleagues.

Some respondents expressed uncertainty regarding their eligibility as "PR professionals" or were taken aback by the term "professional", echoing findings from research among American PR practitioners (Hazleton & Sha, 2012). The perceived ambiguity surrounding the definition of PR, as also noted by Hejlová (2014), led to divergent perceptions among respondents regarding the scope of PR activities, which occasionally overlapped with those of public affairs professionals or human resources managers. For instance, discrepancies arose when evaluating activities such as agency management, team management, or administration, with varying interpretations among respondents.

It was challenging to eliminate deliberate errors in responses (e.g., one respondent provided an age of 999). Additionally, the mandatory nature of all questionnaire items may have prompted respondents to provide inaccurate answers intentionally. Moreover, the predominance of responses from senior specialists (38.4%) suggests a bias toward individuals with higher socioeconomic status, aligning with patterns identified in meta-analyses of similar surveys (Porter, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this paper was to address the dearth of demographic data within the Czech PR market, aiming to serve as a resource for further academic exploration and industry management. Drawing inspiration from two prominent European questionnaire surveys—the European Communication Monitor sponsored by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association and the State of the Profession by the British Chartered Institute of Public Relations—I adapted both instruments to the Czech context to address key inquiries: Who comprises the Czech PR workforce? How many PR professionals are active within the Czech Republic? Is there a predominant gender demographic, as observed in other European nations? What experience levels do they possess, and do they actively pursue ongoing education? What delineates their job roles?

Estimating the total number of PR professionals in the Czech Republic poses a challenge. While the Czech Statistical Office records 2,600 PR workers holding managerial positions and PR specialists across the state and commercial sectors, a notable percentage opt for freelance work, functioning as highly skilled independent contractors under a trade license—comprising 12.53% of respondents in the survey. Hence, it can be inferred that the field encompasses several thousand individuals. Therefore, the study conducted in late 2022, with a sample of 463 participants, can be deemed representative.

In Czech PR, women constitute a dominant presence, accounting for 59.18% of respondents, while men represent 40.39% of participants. This gender distribution surpasses that observed in the German PR market, where women comprise 53% of the workforce (Fröhlich et al., 2005, p. 80), yet falls below the figures reported in the USA and the UK, where women constitute 66% of the PR workforce (Grunig et al., 2001, p. 50; CIPR, 2022). Notably, women are more inclined to work in the non-profit and freelance sectors, with a pronounced presence in client-facing roles. Conversely, men are slightly more prevalent in government positions and exhibit a significant representation within agency environments.

The average age of Czech PR professionals aligns with global trends, with most individuals under 40 years old. While some seasoned professionals boast three decades of experience in the field, the average tenure is 11.08 years, with a median of 10 years. Remarkably, these professionals have an overall labor market experience averaging 17.06 years, suggesting that PR was not their initial career choice—a common occurrence given the nascent development of PR before 1989. Notably, PR professionals often transition from the media industry. At the same time, younger entrants frequently join the PR field directly, contrasting with the highest average age observed among individuals transitioning from

teaching—a phenomenon potentially influenced by limited university opportunities and low starting salaries for teachers in previous decades.

A significant proportion of Czech PR professionals hold university degrees, with only 13% lacking diplomas. Over half of them have graduated in social science fields such as media studies, sociology, economics, and business, arts, and humanities. Furthermore, three-quarters of respondents have pursued additional education, predominantly through media training, internal training, and professional lectures. Nonetheless, the notable proportion of PR professionals abstaining from educational pursuits (23.76%) raises questions.

Given the abundance of in-house lectures, conferences, and industry competitions replete with case studies—serving as sources of inspiration—it's perplexing that a noteworthy proportion of PR professionals opt out of educational endeavors in all types of organizations, even in PR agencies. One plausible explanation could be the time constraints imposed by the myriad clients and projects handled. This demanding workload may leave employees with limited bandwidth to engage in further education initiatives despite the enriching opportunities provided by their organizations. However, it's worth noting that this fast-paced work environment fosters innovation and the emergence of new trends. Additionally, there's a possibility that some PR professionals do not perceive in-house training or conferences as formal avenues for continuing education.

Despite the burgeoning influence of new media and online platforms, media relations remain the primary focus for Czech PR professionals, encompassing media communication, press release composition, and distribution. This trend persists across professionals of varying experience levels and organizational roles. Notably, creating communication strategies and copywriting emerges as the second most prevalent activity, a phenomenon potentially influenced by the considerable number of PR professionals transitioning from journalism—an industry closely aligned with these tasks.

One of the primary objectives of this study was to compile fundamental data for ongoing monitoring of the evolution of the PR profession. Regular repetition of the research would facilitate tracking changes in various aspects such as demographics, trends in gender representation, shifts in original professions, and attitudes towards continuing education. While collaboration with professional bodies was not pivotal in securing sufficient responses, it is noteworthy that such organizations hold a vested interest in shaping the industry's image and understanding the workforce profile. Understanding these dynamics is essential, as PR evolves as a profession and plays a broader societal role. Yang and Taylor (2013) examined the role of PR in society and concluded that it contributes by building relationships that foster social capital and support the development of democracy. Future research could similarly contribute by complementing this

micro-level perspective with insights from employers, including their expectations and future demands.

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Doing Privacy: Exploring the Limits of Self-Determination

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Abstract: Acknowledging the notoriously 'incomplete' nature of privacy has little effect on the considerable expectations the notion implies. Self-determined privacy points to reflexivity, critical practice and tech literacy. While privacy scholarship illustrates those points and explains how agents constantly fail in meeting these expectations, we ask the inverse question. What are the limits of privacy? Interviewing Polish and German activists who engage in privacy-conscious social and professional relations, this qualitative study strives to understand how self-determined privacy is realized. Focusing on how individuals shape their privacies as social agents, including the motivations and contexts of their practices, our insights serve as a case study highlighting the challenges of realizing the everyday endeavor of privacy in datafied environments.

Keywords: privacy, media practice, practice theory, activism, relational privacy

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies, the ability to shape privacy in a self-determined fashion gains increasing importance. Digitalization and datafication transform nearly everything, from relations or discourses to business models or politics. These transformations offer challenges and opportunities for individual privacy with surveillance as a problematic business model, practice, and norm (Lyon 2018; Zuboff, 2019) having impact on regular consumers and citizens.

Although self-determination is a key variable in this context, in datafied societies, people do not have equal opportunities to shape their own privacy. Even when considering that digital platforms' users can hardly avoid surveillance,

individuals do not seem to explore either their potentials for data security or alternative media use and their willingness to renegotiate privacy arrangements and thus shape their privacies in a more self-determined fashion. Awareness of the risks of privacy is a necessary precondition and the skills to reflect on media and technology as well as the ability to use and shape them are equally important (Büchi et al., 2017).

While research offers multiple insights into how individuals fail to cope with privacy challenges, there is a need to research the general limits of privacy in datafied societies.

Acknowledging that these limits exist, we focus on those agents who approach privacy as both crucial and prone to violation, and thus, would shape their communicative environment as needed. This paper presents a qualitative interview study with privacy experts, activists, and educators, analyzing their everyday privacy routines and challenges. We ask, where are the limits of self-determined privacy among agents who describe themselves as being privacy-savvy? How do they approach their privacies and what characterizes their activities? Answering these questions enables us to reconstruct broad and diverse repertoires of privacy-oriented media practices, which individuals who approach privacy as important and vulnerable perform. The answers also shed more light on the broader and still underdeveloped issue of the performance and limits of political agency in increasingly datafied online environments.

PRIVACY AS EVERYDAY MEDIA PRACTICES

Whereas research has traditionally focused on privacy as an individual problem, researchers have recently explored the collective aspects of privacy related self-determination. Scholars conceptualize privacy as 'doing' via complex repertoires of media practices, which acknowledge the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the phenomenon and position it in everyday media routines that are reflexive, contextual and inherently tied to activities of others.

FROM INDIVIDUAL TO RELATIONAL PRIVACY

Communication and media studies have a tradition of researching privacy as an individual challenge (see for overview Möller, 2024a). The privacy paradox—concerned with gaps between consciousness and risky practices, figures prominently in this tradition (Barnes, 2006). Understanding privacy as a strategy of individual control follows Westin's (2003) influential idea to understand it "as the claim of an individual to determine what information about himself or

herself should be known to others" (p. 431). Communication studies have further developed this perspective (Dienlin & Metzger, 2016; Trepte, 2021).

This approach that views privacy as an individual problem has been criticized as being an advocate of a liberal tradition that overlooks constraints caused by infrastructural injustices and imbalances (Gstrein & Beaulieu, 2022). The criticism is that this obfuscates views on digital platform societies while transferring liability for online outcomes onto end users (Sevignani, 2015). This also echoes the basic ideas of science and technology studies (Nahuis & van Lente, 2008) and critical cultural studies (Gillespie, 2010).

Limiting privacy debates to users' liability, though, would omit another important strand that sees privacy as mundane media-related practices. Practice-based approaches consider privacy as everyday routines in multiple social relations (Nissenbaum, 2009; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Möller, 2024b). Researchers in this field ask questions such as, what do users do (e.g. with media, technology, in relation to others…) when realizing privacies? Which meaning do they imply? Marwick and boyd's (2014) study on teenage privacy practices on Facebook, was an important initial step, which led to a corpus of similar studies (Balleys & Coll, 2017; Kumar et al., 2020).

SELF-DETERMINED PRIVACY

In users' self-determination, individualist privacy studies have researched relations between skills and practices. Traditionally, knowledge and consciousness related to risks have been promising variables that determine autonomous privacy. Privacy literacy, with its diverse reflexive and practical implications, plays a major role (Masur, 2020). In their everyday media-oriented practices, people construct a range of privacies for specific strategic purposes (Nippert-Eng, 2010). Individuals use several criteria to decide on how to do privacy, including 'who is involved' and 'what social roles are being played'; and the personal normative evaluation of 'fairness' of a particular situation or even common convenience (Kennedy et al., 2017).

Considering privacy as a process that emerges through practice, other researchers shift their focus to relations. Pink et al. (2018) show how household members share privacy care work, build regimes of "friendly surveillance" and shape each other's attitudes and practices. Other studies provide insights into how education can make a difference in this regard (Tiemann et al., 2021). Kumar et al., (2020) observed learning effects when children discuss privacy norms instead of rules and thus understand their active role in shaping their privacies.

Insights from privacy education hint at the importance of discourses shaping privacy perceptions. Scholars often use this argument, yet rarely discuss it in a more explicit fashion (Lyon 2018). Kumar et al. (2020) show how norms and trust

related to confidentiality play a key role in developing self-determined privacy. Similarly, "people who experience more perceived control over limited aspects of privacy sometimes respond by revealing more information, to the point where they end up more vulnerable" (Brandimarte et al., 2013, p. 340), which suggests that users can misuse discourses (Banks, 2015) and misplace trust (Brandimarte et al., 2013). Consequently, however users talk about privacy it has an impact.

Finally, infrastructures affect how privacy is performed. We find considerable overlaps with IT literature, focusing on how the design of infrastructures can foster reflexivity or decision-making. Dourish et al. (2004) argue that information sharing and hiding are two sides of a 'privacy' coin, yet do not appear on equal terms in user interfaces. Gallagher et al. (2017) suggest improvements of encryption technologies to secure online behavior. In the broader context, datafication driven by "the technical ability to turn increasing amounts of social activity and human behavior into data points that can be tracked, collected and analysed" (Hintz et al., 2019, p. 42), poses tremendous challenges to privacy as self-determination practices. To answer this challenge on the level of theory and research design, we introduce the concept of privacy as media practice in the next section.

PRIVACY AS (STRATEGIC) MEDIA PRACTICE

Understanding privacy as communication and media practices follows the initial research by Couldry (2004) on media practices as meaningful ways people do things with media. The underlying aim is to understand the role of media in contemporary societies, which resonates with a shift of focus on social phenomena and avoiding a centralization of the media. Based on the premise that any realm of everyday meaningful action is "mediatized" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), the media practice approach provides a general analytical framework to understand the creation of meaning within societies in and through media. A more detailed definition by Mattoni (2012, p. 159) specifies this view by explaining that media practices are:

> (1) both routinised and creative social practices that; (2) include interactions with media objects (such as mobile phones, laptops, pieces of paper) and media subjects (such as journalists, public relations managers, other activists); (3) draw on how media objects and media subjects are perceived and how the media environment is understood and known.

Media practices are often routinized but can also be used to realize citizen agency. Here, the media practice approach echoes structuration theory (Giddens, 1986), claiming that a key aspect of social order is constant reproduction (routine)

and production (potential change). So far, communication research shows a preference for using the media practice approach to investigate political agency and a change in dominant power structures. Recently, scholars have devised studies on technology activists (Milan & Hintz, 2013; Kubitschko, 2015) and political movements (Mattoni, 2012) and surveillance studies scholars have questioned how people interact with technology by analyzing tactics of resistance to surveillance (Ball, 2005; Martin et al., 2009).

The media practice approach treats media as a structured, yet malleable, context interrelated to social action. Thus, similar to the STS argument, technology can be regarded as 'displaced politics' (Nahuis & van Lente, 2008) and communication and media scholars have poured this emerging relation between politics and individuals into the concept of digital citizenship (Hintz et al., 2019), which denotes the realization of participation and democracy in the digital age. While some approaches to digital citizenship highlight the liberating forces of technology, complex sets of sociopolitical transformations of datafication – incorporating users' personal data into mechanisms of capitalist exchange and governance – pose a tremendous challenge to citizen agency. Hintz et al. (2019, p. 3) pursue the notion that

> [d]atafication may generate new possibilities for citizen action, but it may also create and reinforce inequalities, differences and divisions […], the processing of data has become a cornerstone of contemporary forms of governance as it enables both corporate and state actors to profile, sort and categorize populations.

Linking digital citizenship and media practices requires further operationalization. Among the most diverse approaches to grasping media practices stand out by distinguishing media practices according to their political quality (Kubitschko 2017; Kannengießer & Kubitschko 2017;). 'Acting with media' refers to practices of simple use of particular technologies or infrastructures. By contrast, 'acting on media' denotes media practices aimed at shaping media infrastructures, i.e. hacking (Kubitschko, 2017). Acting on media also addresses the discursive level of action that contributes to discourses on media, i.e. on surveillance technologies (Möller & Mollen, 2017). Finally, privacy, as media practice, implies not only technology-oriented action aiming at control over the flow of information but also individual or networked practices of non-use of particular media (we call these 'opting out of media').

Combining approaches to privacy as self-determination with the media as a practice approach, we define 'doing' privacy as technology-oriented human action aiming at control over the flow of personal information. As privacy implies media uses of acting with or acting on media, it is an act of self-determination

and an expression of participation and engagement in public. Beyond that, doing privacy not only depends on others and their communication practices but also impacts on others' privacies, and therefore is always collective.

METHODS

To explore self-determination and privacy as media practice, we conducted a qualitative interview-based study with privacy activists. We understand privacy as a concept referring to the management of informational flows in a critical manner. In other words, 'doing' privacy is to 'make attempts' to realize this via routinized practice and attached meaning. Guided by an in-depth open questionnaire, we sought to answer two research questions (RQs):

- (RQ1): What are citizens' repertoires of doing privacy? In particular: how is privacy achieved by acting with, on, and opting out of—media?

We analyze mundane repertoires of privacy media practice that consist of: (1) using predetermined infrastructures (both hardware and software); (2) setting up own tools or modify existing infrastructures by technological means like encryption; (3) resigning from particular media considered potentially risky in specific situations. The aim is to elicit responses that sketch the broader context of the limits of realizing self-determined privacy in datafied societies.

- (RQ2): Which contextual factors shape privacy practice? How is privacy approached as a relational construct?

This RQ addresses how particular socio-contextual factors play out in how people conduct their privacies. RQ2 reconstructs the ways media practice is given meaning as a private or public affair.

To answer these RQs, we conducted 35 in-depth semi-structured interviews (IDI) with German (n=4) and Polish (n=31) activists working in the fields of privacy, data protection and digital citizenship as members of various NGOs and art and hacker collectives.

Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and was conducted depending on the preferences of the interviewees either face-to-face or online via end-to-end encrypted communication. There were two tranches of interviews. The first comprising the four Germans and the first five Poles was conducted in 2018. The second comprised the remaining Poles occurred in 2022. The design of the study used inductive coding to analyse the interviews: starting with the distinction of acting with and acting on media practices. After the tranche of interviews, we reconsidered the coding scheme by deepening questions on self-determination

and agency in the context of datafication challenges that people active in online public environments have to overcome.

The activists were not only professionals working for privacy-sensitive non-profit organizations, but also independent activists promoting issues of cybersecurity, encryption and privacy. The study coded the interviewees to protect their anonymity, which enabled IG 1-4 for the German interviewees and IP 1-31 for the Polish ones. The study used the snowballing method to recruit remaining interviewees (n=22). The researchers conducted the IDIs in the participants' native languages structured around common contexts—cultural, social, technological—in order to produce rounded yet reliable understandings based on rich, nuanced and detailed data (Patton, 2002). However, despite having interviewees from two countries in the sample, a cross-national comparison was not our intention, as we explain below.

The study offers a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002, p. 45) that is based on three conditions. The interviewees: (1) reflect on their privacies on an everyday basis; (2) have a considerable level of technical expertise to let them reconstruct a broad repertoire of privacy-related media practices; (3) experience everyday tension regarding how to stay secure and remain visible to the public. Our sample fits Bennett's (2008) taxonomy of privacy advocates' roles: activists, technologists, consultants, researchers, journalists and artists, with a focus on the initial three (see Appendix).

By employing the IDIs, we sought to understand the privacy practices of people that are both highly skilled and aware of technological, political, and cultural aspects of privacy and its violations. The interviewees' views and practices arguably differ from those realized by larger populations on an everyday basis. Their expertise, however, is crucial to recognize not only how the most reflexively skilled understand, evaluate, and do privacy, but also provides nuanced insights into the contradictory nature of the phenomenon. The study seeks to reconstruct a holistic view of privacy, reaching beyond dialectical simplifications of "a them-and-us binary', where 'they' watch 'us', intrude on our privacy" (Lyon 2018, p. 173). The study also aims to reconstruct people's practices with detailed knowledge about their own environments, which will help to explain results previously seen as paradoxical (Kennedy et al., 2017).

FINDINGS

The subsequent analysis explains the interviewees privacy practices (in the following simple 'practices') along the dimensions of 'reflexivity', 'acting with and opting out of media' as well as 'acting on media'. Any of these practices illustrates the relational, contextual and compository character of privacy. Beyond

that, each of them hints at the dilemma of balancing data security and public participation. While the activists' most important motivation is to make sure they can control the flow of their individual or organizational information, they still wish to remain publicly seen and heard and to participate in social and political life. Against this background, privacy is regarded as a constantly evolving endeavor rather than a permanent solution or state.

REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Privacy is inseparably related to the reflexive analysis of communication infrastructures and individual routines. Reflection and analysis refer to four dimensions. First, the interviewees carefully and constantly consider threats, risks and benefits emerging from surveillant assemblages built into digital infrastructures. Reflection and analysis are not limited to challenges of individual data security, but always integrate the larger societal picture. Commercial and governmental agents leverage technologies to harvest and analyze sizeable amounts of user data. From the interviewees' viewpoint, both have political implications.

Overall, Polish activists tend to emphasize corporate surveillance with "no handbrake built in it" (IP2) while perceiving state institutions as incapable of mastering technological challenges (IP1, IP2, IP3, IP6, IP17, IP30, IP31). This alleged incompetence may lead to additional potential threats. One interviewee "would feel much better if people that invigilate [them] were competent (…) [because] state-harvested data leak eventually" (IP3), another (IP31) describes state institutions in terms of privacy protection as "stable as a paper house". German activists see threats through both commercial and state surveillance while repeatedly linking it to the historical experience of massive state surveillance in Eastern Germany (IG1, IG2, IG3), a sentiment, interestingly, shared by some Polish activists (IP3, IP5, IP16), referring to personal data storage during communist times. We find these attitudes interesting and coherent, yet also more as a starting point for more comprehensive research on how shared surveillance and privacy imaginaries are tied to historic surveillance experience of users.

Privacy activists have the conviction that the public do not have access to the detailed information on how this surveillance assemblage operates. Consequently, the activists strive to understand and extrapolate these implications. Most of the interviewees emphasise the rapid development of the assemblages during the COVID period and that post-pandemic the privacy-invasive solutions that replaced social contact were not dropped. In this context, not only is technology problematic, but also the political precedent of passing privacy-sensitive biometrical data of citizens to private companies like airlines, which "may lead to other acts of sorting people by the criterion of their health" (IP21), exposing in the broader context "conflicting values of privacy and public health" (IP19).

Beyond structural analysis, interviewees parse their own media and communication repertoires and consider whether they appropriately balance data security and participation options. Considering specific technological, political, and cultural conditions, the shared aim is to reach the highest possible level of data security without societal isolation.

The insight that there is no fixed privacy solution or general rule of use or non-use is key. A German interviewee, for instance, stated that an organization's refusal to respond to e-mails sent from a journalist's Gmail account, as '*simply ridiculous*' (IG2). By contrast, many interviewees' organizations use Gmail's infrastructure because it's stable and secure and, as an interviewee, IP1 explains "The NSA [US' National Security Agency] is not at the top of our potential threats list". Consequently, the need for analysis increases when crossing national borders. "[S]ome countries oblige me to reveal my passwords password [… I need to take care that the hardware I travel with is free of private data". The interviewees possess various sets of hardware for differing contexts. Many use separate computers for international travelling, because crossing national borders means entering new jurisdictions that require empty or better secured equipment. This complex relationship between physical space and privacy also influences decisions about whether to use (or avoid) specific software on mobile devices that easily collect geolocation data (IP26, IP30).

Everyday reflection on how to remain secure comprises constant decision-making on complex people-technology dialectics affecting individual privacy practices. Yet, "safety-wise, tools are comfortable or they are safe" said IP5. Though demanding considerable time and skills, building alternative media practices and privacy routines do not seem to put a strain on everyday communication: "If you are used to it, that is just daily business" said IG1. However, most interviewees recall decisions on compromising privacy because of the convenience of using less safe solutions: "I stopped encrypting e-mails, too lazy for that now" said IP19. A lack of resources, including money, is critical: "I can't afford professional graphics software and I use free one, so I pay for it with my personal data" explained IP8, or time safe solutions "[that] piss me off, because for me time is crucial" stated IP29). The latter tension may be dramatically serious, as IP16, an environmental activist, raged: "the world is coming down and if you want it to persevere a bit longer, you put all your energy into activism and there's not much space left [for learning new, safer solutions]".

Yet, the willingness to reflect and analyze surroundings and routines increases with experienced privacy interventions. When children become part of the game, for instance, "you become more vulnerable" said IG2, while public and private pressure to share data with doctors, daycare or family photo-sharing groups increases.

This leads us to reflection on the inherently relational nature of datafied privacy. If surveillance tools are embedded into online technologies, then managing the limits of own data flows also depends on the practices of other people. Simple actions like taking selfies, sending files, etc. become relevant, as they may weaken or destroy others' privacy. One aspect of this collective nature of privacy is revealed by technological choices: the "golden ideal is using 100% tools with the end-to-end encryption", explained IP1. Yet, there are unsecure communication situations that "can't change, because not everyone uses encryption" argued IG2. Another aspect, and one perceived by most interviewees as of increasing importance, concerns privacy violations by practices of other users. These may occur in professional contexts as after in the aftermath of the pandemic, distant working solutions like desk-time tracking apps or online meetings software may have led to power abuse by office managers or colleagues. However, privacy violations also occur in private (family, friends, etc.) networks, in which the new norm of sharing personal information (Lyon, 2018) is potentially harmful to everyone involved in such exchanges of photos or other personal content. The interviewees also felt other people violated their privacy by persistent demands to respond to their messages: "(…) today, we take away from each other the right to be unreachable" explained IP22. In other words, "it's a matter of awareness. […] [people] violate not only their privacy but also those of others. Like when taking photos at parties and posting them online […]. It's all about our decisions, of all of us" said IP1.

Privacy activists dispose of comprehensive resources to reflect over and analyze privacy risks. One challenge is that this is a constant endeavor, a never-ending story. While activists predominantly communicate within their privacy-aware networks, they save on those resources. Investing time and energy in the public engagement, they cannot rely on "secure" behavior in their networks. Thus doing privacy means constant reflection on how to balance "acting with" potentially unsecure media.

ACTING WITH AND OPTING OUT OF MEDIA

Acting with media denotes practices of managing the flow of information by use of existing, predefined media – both hardware and software. In privacy, acting with and opting out of media, i.e., decisions on not to use or omit particular media, are closely intertwined.

Balancing acting with and opting out practices means repeated decision-making between "being seen" and "being secure". This participatory privacy dilemma points to privacy as a norm on the one hand, while operating in datafied publics threatens individual data security on the other. This challenge is important to

both individuals and organizations that "play visibility games" to use Cotter's (2019) term, practices aiming at gaining attention while risking privacies.

Our interviewees unanimously criticized global digital companies for data harvesting business models, manipulating users' behavior, narrowing public discussion, supporting narcissism and voyeurism. Beyond that, they perceived platform users' everyday practices as a structural support for the social, economic, and cultural position of digital companies. Consequently, some interviewees had never had or deleted their private social media accounts in order to avoid present or future surveillance. They also had the option of paying digital companies with their data and either or both choose free and encrypted tools instead.

Despite their critical attitudes, many interviewees felt forced to use platforms not only by the normalization of being visible online or mutual sharing (Lyon, 2018) but also by direct suggestions made by other agents. For example, the publishing house that employed IG4 was not supportive in helping to realize the expectation to develop a professional Facebook profile. Many other of the interviewees recalled such negative sentiments and admitted they felt pressure from their bosses or professional colleagues expecting them publishing more private information (e.g., photos, and from private contexts like vacations) to gain more outreach in social media. A few interviewees intentionally published carefully chosen private information (like photos depicting their children or private spaces of their homes) to sustain relations with their audience. One interviewee confessed to revealing herself in a private context because "online communication has a native nature" (IP22) and this tactic reflects findings on the growing role of authenticity (the impression of 'realness') as the key resource for people seeking to engage with others (Marwick, 2013). These practices reflect that social media platforms have become the key tool for reaching targeted audiences and promoting projects. The interviewees used social media this way while admitting it also harmed their privacies as most digital platforms have been designed for personal information sharing. Performing professional (or civic) activities on those platforms makes private accounts overexposed to others: "Social media shatter my work-life balance" complained IP27. Post-pandemic platformization of educational activities leads to recording enormous volumes of video materials later published online and, as some interviewees noted agents offering marketing solutions for economic and political agents have already used that footage as bio- and psychometric data.

Yet, the interviewees knew the tools platforms offered came with a price that may affect an organization's integrity. To protect its supporters' privacy, for example, Panoptykon Foundation, does not embed YouTube videos in its website as it would enable extracting cookies of users just entering the site by Google, YouTube's parent company. Instead, the Panoptykon Foundation publishes audio-visual screenshots, links and the transcripts of complete materials. Nevertheless,

the Foundation's status in this context is ambiguous, as its primary field of operation is privacy protection and opposing excessive surveillance:

> Our position is complex. As a foundation, we do use social media […] and are aware that we pay – this way or another – for their services so that our content is visible. And yes, we are aware that these services are possible only because the company performs surveillance activities on its users. (IP4)

Another reason to opt out of media can be an application's sheer size. Even relatively secure technology may be regarded as dangerous when it becomes popular. An insightful case is reported by a German interviewee:

> The CCC [Chaos Computer Club] operates a Jabber server that was used for secure communication by Snowden and Manning. When this turned public hundreds of people started creating accounts. Finally, the CCC decided to close registration, as a bigger size would have meant following other (German) jurisdictions on operating services, such as implementing tools that can be used for surveillance. (IG2)

This tension is unavoidable. Progressing datafication makes acting with and opting out of media imply constantly balancing both with a view to being open to the risks of potential isolation from political communication. As IG2 suggested "I don't want to be [seen wearing] a tin-foil hat". In a similar vein, IP2 stated, "you eventually face the wall –using a mobile phone, you (…) are not going to carry a Faraday cage, are you". Yet, many interviewees who referred to 'sacrificing' their data security by using platform media, still emphasized the specific type of agency they gain through opting out practices. The potential media refusal in mind, they gain a feeling of control over the flow of their individual data. The interviewees mentioned a sense of freedom, despite or even through i.e. the avoidance of taking selfies with others at parties, and not talking to journalists in private surroundings. "This dilemma, in summary, is positive because it's a privilege to talk to the public and still a privilege to protect certain communication very strictly" (IG2). Feelings of self-determination, thus, do not result from definitive security, but from a constant reflection on acting with and opting out of media.

ACTING ON MEDIA

Finally, privacy-oriented media practices comprise various kinds of acting on media, that is, modifying pre-existing services and technologies or creating new ones. Most interviewees secure their communications with encryption of various degrees to achieve a "reasonable compromise" (IP2) between data safety and situational demands. The interviewees reconfigured software and hardware they used in particular contexts, and some of them implemented social mechanisms of improving safety, like organizing key-signing parties for social legitimization of Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) encryption users. Organizations represented by the interviewees create or adjust tools for their own purposes and provide remote configurations of routers for people (journalists, whistleblowers) with whom they communicate. These media interventions are political acts of their own, as they question predetermined ways of how particular technologies work. They are not only attempts to control own and others' private information, but also adjustments of how society deploys technology as a resource.

Our interviewees, however, emphasised how difficult it is to redesign established privacy ecosystems. First, corporate services are usually closed for external modification. Second, it is difficult for free alternatives to reach the needed critical mass of users. The interviewees perceive privacy ecosystems as relatively fixed and immune to direct change. This puts forward the awareness raising, education and discursive activities – the pursuit of privacy, more than technological, is perceived as an endeavor that is "cultural" (IP3), "inherently citizen" (IP26) as well as "discursive and democratic" (IP1).

Technology creates a context for human action that is malleable. The interviewed activists question privacy ecosystems by various acts on media – more often, however, on levels of reflexivity and education than on the level of direct technological adjustment. The issue is more concerned about decisions regarding, which predefined technological solutions to use and which to omit – always in particular contexts – than how to modify them. As the system is less malleable and less open than desired, the structural change in the long run becomes more routinized, mundane and integrated into daily customs and procedures, media practices.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reconstructs the everyday privacy management of privacy-aware agents and, against this background, reveals the potentials and limits of self-determined privacy in datafied societies. Our findings represent insights of agents that approach privacy as a contemporary key theme, and who realize their privacies are a part of professional and social networks with critical views towards

contemporary practices of data collection and analysis. Activists' practices, thus, arguably differ from those realized by larger populations in many regards. The interviewees repeatedly referred to the distinction between the more privacy-aware people and the 'others'. The insights derived from this case can still be used to reconstruct how skilled and aware citizens approach privacy, and in a broader context, to provide knowledge on tensions that datafied citizen agencies realize.

Conceptualizing privacy as media practices contributes to emerging directions in communication and media research. Pioneering studies in this field (Marwick & boyd, 2014) have shown that when trying to understand privacy related decision-making it is worth considering it in the context of everyday relations and affordances. In contrast to approaches that relate privacy practice to specific contexts, this approach shifts the focus to the complex and seemingly contradictory decisions people take to realize privacies. Thus, for instance, using four types of practices (reflecting on, acting with, opting out of and acting on media) may shed light on privacy as critical media practice. Using this background, the study also underlines that privacies of aware and skilled social agents, just like those that regular users realize, are notoriously incomplete. Privacy is not a state, but 'done' in dynamic contexts, and, thus calls for constant adaption. This concerns dynamic technological environments but our study also confirms earlier research on privacy attitude and practical differences (Trepte et al., 2017) across cultures.

Coping with the everyday endeavor that privacy represents, the interviewees explain the role reflection and analysis play for self-determining data and communication flows. Our study reveals various evaluations on whether privacy related care work is a particular burden. Some interviewees admitted, they do not secure their data sufficiently due to a lack of resources, including money, and time, or to a lesser extent, skills. To others, however, privacy work does not feel like a burden, and they acknowledge the investment of time and energy. It is rather a political or democratic attitude towards technology they put forward, a stance that subordinates technology to human needs. The remarkable aspect beyond that is that self-determination can but must not be based in conscious and skillful reflection and decision-making, as Masur 2020 suggests. Self-determination may be carried by networks of alternative media practices, in which reflection over privacy values and means is an inherent part of communication and offers secure spaces for the interviewees (e.g. families, see Kumar et al. 2020). Nevertheless, these networks do face limits. The communities of some of our interviewees grew too big and thus became insecure or the communication with the broader public was interrupted. In line with the earlier studies, the interviewees considered losses of control over their data. Data security is but one dimension of privacy, as building walls would equally mean social isolation or loss of public visibility.

Self-determined privacy, therefore depends on, and is limited by, others. This clearly leaves ideas such as the privacy paradox behind, as the paradoxical is not added to privacy but is inherent in social relations that determine privacy. Having a considerable level of technical expertise is not a precondition for self-determined privacy, but rather facilitates accessing privacy supportive networks.

Our study revealed the tension concerning a new norm and accompanied practices of visibility in datafied environments: staying visible online – and, thus accessible to a broader public when acting the role of a citizen – means constant everyday decisions on compromising privacy and gaining or sustaining social outreach. This tension becomes a complex and challenging aspect of datafied agency that emphasizes two aspects of privacy. First, the collective nature of privacy (an increasing number of others' practices can violate a person's privacy). Secondly, the socio-technological changes that have emerged after the pandemic, such as the introduction of distant working and learning solutions have further challenged people's privacies and tied them to how relations of power are executed.

As Kennedy et al. (2015) argue, "given the ubiquity of social media and its underpinning mechanism of datafication, we need to be attentive to the diverse engagements with data, especially within key fields of public space" (p. 2). In this broader context our research exposes complex, techno-cultural arrangements between people and their personal data flows. In this context, focusing on privacy practices as acts of self-determination helps switch from talking about losing privacy to managing (citizen) publicity, where scholars may consider doing privacy are carefully crafted practices of self-presentation (Marwick, 2013). It also helps keep a critical perspective of how these – reflexive and always contextual – practices are bound to material conditions of being online. Altogether, in the broader perspective, this study sheds light on privacy as an inherent element of datafied citizenship, the key dimension of future communication and media privacy research.

There are limitations to our study – the sample members are arguably more skilled and aware than any larger population and thus, the study cannot make any generalized claims. Also, while interviewing citizens from two different countries, we do not highlight national differences on practices performed unless we can make credible arguments on how they affect a context of reconstructed practices. This strategy also let the study disregard any imbalance in terms of nationality in the sample. Similarly, we did not highlight the types of organizations, for which our interviewees worked, unless it helped to understand a particular communicative practice in question and thus served as 'telling' example supporting more general argument in line with the realist approach to qualitative research (Emmel, 2013). However, we still believe the outcomes are insightful, as reconstructing what people do with media helps to realize 'the opportunities and limitations of actors' practices related to media

technologies and infrastructures for political engagement in a media-saturated society' (Kubitschko 2017, p. 5).

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APPENDIX

Overview of the interviewees

alias	role	country	when conducted
IG1	activist	Germany	2018
IG2	activist, technologist	Germany	2018
IG3	activist, technologist	Germany	2018
IG4	activist, consultant	Germany	2018
IP1	technologist, consultant	Poland	2018
IP2	technologist	Poland	2018
IP3	activist, technologist, artist	Poland	2018
IP4	activist, consultant	Poland	2018
IP5	technologist	Poland	2018
IP6	activist, consultant	Poland	2022
IP7	researcher, consultant	Poland	2022
IP8	activist, consultant	Poland	2022
IP9	researcher, consultant	Poland	2022
IP10	technologist, consultant	Poland	2022
IP11	activist	Poland	2022
IP12	activist	Poland	2022
IP13	researcher	Poland	2022
IP14	researcher	Poland	2022
IP15	researcher, consultant	Poland	2022
IP16	activist	Poland	2022
IP17	activist, consultant	Poland	2022
IP18	lawyer, consultant	Poland	2022
IP19	lawyer, activist	Poland	2022
IP20	journalist	Poland	2022
IP21	researcher, activist	Poland	2022
IP22	consultant	Poland	2022
IP23	activist	Poland	2022
IP24	researcher, consultant	Poland	2022
IP25	lawyer, activist	Poland	2022
IP26	activist	Poland	2022
IP27	researcher, consultant	Poland	2022
IP28	activist	Poland	2022
IP29	consultant	Poland	2022
IP30	consultant	Poland	2022
IP31	lawyer, activist	Poland	2022

Critical Discourse Analysis of Maximalist and Minimalist Lifestyles: A Corpus Linguistics Approach

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Abstract: This paper undertakes an analysis of two divergent strategies aimed at driving culture towards the extremes: one involving stark minimalism and the other, gaudy maximalism. The former approach is predominantly embraced by the avant-garde, who possess the means to surround themselves with an array of commodities, thereby creating a distinguishing factor in a world characterized by excess. Conversely, maximalism, the origins of which can be traced back to the conception of luxury as abundance, seeks to eliminate fear. This study investigates the representation of minimalism and maximalism in a vast corpus of English-language articles. The research addresses two questions: 1) How are the representations of lifestyles expressed in the most popular articles related to minimalism and maximalism? 2) What meanings do these representations convey? The findings of this study shed light on the discourse surrounding minimalism and maximalism, as well as the motivations and justifications for adopting these lifestyles.

Keywords: minimalism; maximalism; corpus-assisted discourse analysis; lifestyles' representation; media representation

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Western culture, lifestyle is understood both as a form of self-expression and as a means of overcoming personal limitations (Giddens, 1991). The adoption of a particular lifestyle is often linked to the pursuit of authenticity and the quest for a coherent sense of self. Identity, a key concept in the study of popular lifestyles, can be defined as the subjective experience of an embodied self (Cote & Levine, 2002) or, as McAdams (1997, p. 63) puts it, "the story that the modern I constructs and tells about me." This dynamic meta-narrative of the self is shaped through subjective experiences and manifested in a set of identity-related senses, including integrity, distinctiveness, cohesion, and self-esteem.

To systematically investigate how these identities and aesthetic orientations are constructed and articulated, this study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) in conjunction with corpus linguistics methods. While CDA provides a framework for examining the power structures, ideologies, and cultural values embedded in minimalist and maximalist discourse, corpus linguistics offers empirical tools to identify linguistic patterns, frequency distributions, and co-occurrence of key terms within large text datasets. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, this methodology facilitates a nuanced examination of how language reflects, reinforces, or challenges dominant narratives surrounding minimalism and maximalism.

Material goods hold profound significance in consumer culture, where owning the „right" possessions is often linked to happiness and satisfaction (Kahneman et al., 2006). At the same time, objects are so embedded in daily life that they are easily overlooked in theoretical reflection (Dant, 1999).

In response, a growing scholarly movement advocates a 'return to objects' – acknowledging their material presence alongside digital and virtual representations. This shift is evident in everyday practices: minimalism, which emphasizes durability and extended use of possessions; the DIY movement, which promotes making and repairing objects; and maximalism, which values collecting and displaying material goods.

This study analyzes two opposing cultural strategies – minimalism and maximalism – each pushing lifestyle aesthetics to extremes. Minimalism, often an avant-garde choice in a world of excess, serves as a form of distinction and, at times, a crisis-response strategy. Maximalism, by contrast, embraces abundance, traditionally associated with luxury but also driven by a desire to counteract fear.

The research examines whether these lifestyles align with Giddens' (1991) concept *of* a reflective project of self-realization. Using CDA, it examines media frames and discursive structures to reveal how material culture is conceptualized beyond mere utility, highlighting the symbolic permanence of objects. Additionally, the study evaluates the usefulness of CDA and corpus linguistics methods in capturing the nuances of lifestyle discourse. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, it assesses whether these methodologies effectively reveal underlying ideologies, cultural values, and the role of language in shaping perceptions of minimalism and maximalism.

The paper begins with a literature review on the significance of objects and aesthetics in shaping identity-driven lifestyles. The next stage details key meaning categories, providing the foundation for the discussion on minimalist and maximalist discourse.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LIFESTYLE AND AESTHETICIZATION

The role of material goods in shaping identity has been extensively studied since the second half of the 20th century. Stephen Riggins (1994) and Tim Dant (1999) emphasize that objects hold significance beyond their utilitarian function, serving as mediators of personal, social, and cultural values. These objects reflect emotions, relationships, successes, and failures, and some sociologists argue that their importance in identity formation underscores the ongoing (re)negotiation of their meaning as symbols of social hierarchy. This critique often targets modern society's fixation on material consumption.

Gilles Lipovetsky adopts an individualistic perspective, introducing the concept of de-socialized consumption. This marks a shift from consumerism as a status marker, as theorized by Veblen and Baudrillard, toward consumption as a source of personal satisfaction. This transformation aligns with broader cultural trends valuing autonomy, uniqueness, and self-expression. Lipovetsky (1994, p. 145–147) describes this shift as neo-narcissism, where individuals prioritize self-image and identity construction over social norms. From this perspective, objects become tools of personal freedom rather than a means of alienation. However, some scholars challenge the notion of fixed identities, arguing that identity is superficial and transient – constructed through visual and spatial expressions.

This study examines how these perspectives are reflected in contemporary discourses on lifestyle. Are these discourses, as Slater (1997, p. 30) states, so superficial that they fail to engage meaningfully with the formation of identity?

The concept of aestheticization is closely linked to these discussions. A continuous shift in the means of expression is associated with a movement towards orality and iconicity in communication forms. Such forms are conducive to aesthetics, referred to as the aesthetics of synthesis. The distinction between aesthetics and function, or between aesthetics and ethics or truth, ceases to be valid. Consumer goods often lack technical or utilitarian functions, focusing instead on expression and semiotics. The line between ethics and aesthetics is increasingly blurred as consumer culture aestheticizes everyday life.

Richard Shusterman (1998, p. 317) argues that aesthetics become a constitutive part of ethics, rather than merely symbolizing it. In this context, one does not separately affirm beauty or good; instead, aesthetics and ethics exist in a synthetic, inseparable relation. The aestheticization of reality and human life represents a disenchantment of the world, leading to a renegotiation of values that legitimize human activity in a world dominated by mass-produced artifacts. This aesthetic focus suggests that taking care of appearances, such as the design of an apartment, becomes morally desirable, reflecting a significant shift in how values are perceived and prioritized.

Therefore, what senses and values accompany aestheticization processes in the discourses under analysis? What experiences and feelings do the authors refer to? Is it a self-referential, iconic discourse, a vehicle for prophecies or bellwethers put forward by post-structuralists and theorists of post-modernity regarding the simulacral character of the world?

METHODOLOGY: CORPUS-BASED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

The methodological framework of the study was formed by CAD, i.e., an inter-disciplinary approach that straddles social and humanistic sciences, that aimed to shed light on messages hidden in the discourse. In line with the adopted meth-odology, any text constituted a product of ideology, which promoted a specific system of values (Wodak 2008, p. 192). Within CAD, text-based hidden meanings and ideologies can be decoded. Besides, the methodology assumed that there was not a single universal research method and instead postulates a triangula-tion of methods, where the selection of research tools depends on what is most useful for analyzing a given material (Hart, 2018, pp. 402–403).

The study also relied on corpus linguistics methods, which facilitated working with large data volumes and reducing researcher bias. In the first stage of the study, a qualitative and quantitative analysis (Dörnyei, 2007) was performed to provide a multifaceted analysis of trends in lifestyle and to ground the results in more robust and context-sensitive interpretations. The quantitative analysis was performed using Wordsmith Tools 8.0. The expressions used to describe minimalism and maximalism were extracted from the corpus word list, i.e., a list of all the words that appear in a text or corpus, along with their use, frequency and the percentage value that the word contributes to the whole text (Baker, 2006, p. 51). Lists of frequency for the most frequently used nouns and verbs were analysed. The key terms extracted from the articles were selected on the basis of their topical relevance. The corpus comprised 170,662 words, selected from the most popular articles [N=108] (i.e., those that topped the Google search engine list), which dealt with the issues of minimalism (n=57) and maximalism (n=51).

In reference to minimalism, the most frequently (f=frequency) used words were: 'life' (f=437), 'things' (f=371), 'time' (f=313), 'de/clutter' (f=274), 'living' (f=223), 'space' (f=187), 'home' (f=151), 'lifestyle' (f=148), 'items' (f=149), 'stuff' (f=137),' mind/set' (f=135), 'change' (f=126), checklist (f=107), 'simple' (f=108), 'money' (f=101), 'simplicity' (f=94), 'possessions' (f=90), 'experience' (f=76), 'peace/ful' (f=62),' challenge' (f=52), and 'freedom' (f=52). The most frequently used phrasal verbs are: 'get(ing) rid of' (f=124). In the case of the discourse on maximalism, these are: 'design' (f=446), 'home' (f=382), 'like' (f=338), 'interior/s' (f=313), 'have' (f=299), 'style/s' (f=274), 'space' (f=211), 'things' (f=209), 'pattern/s' (f=207), 'room'

(f=194), 'love' (f=180), 'look' (f=162), 'art' (f=153), 'object/s' (f=131), 'colour/s' (f=115), 'house' (f=115), 'life' (f=115), 'bold/ness' (f=113), 'creative/ity' (f=90), and 'en/joy' (f=89). In corpus, the linguistics keywords in the target corpus are used significantly more frequently than those in the referential corpus (Scott, 1997, p. 236).

Table 1. Part of a sorted concordance which exemplifies the pattern 'WORD design' (by the order in which the texts appear in the corpus)

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
also share 5 lessons we can learn from Nordic culture – including	design	and cultural traditions that have helped make these countries
the world. What is Scandinavian minimalism? Scandinavian minimalism is a	design	and lifestyle philosophy that originated in the Nordic countries
aesthetic. Mix old with new A key element of Scandinavian	design	is mixing old with new to create quirky looks.
a maximalist design that portrays fullness. However, I believe minimalist	design	is timeless. There's something gorgeous about empty space.
appearance of minimalism, as in Jobs's house or the	design	of Apple's iPhone. But Jobs's empty living
The books' sameness of content is matched by a shared	design	of visual serenity. Their covers are all soft colours
the life-hack-minded authors or the proponents of minimalist	design,	that many people have minimalism forced upon them by
not for everyone. There's an argument for a maximalist	design	that portrays fullness. However, I believe minimalist design is
of optimising their spaces and turning storage solutions into striking	design	additions. Bring nature into the home Scandis love adding
that look cold and uninviting While there is a minimalist	design	aesthetic, often characterized by all-white rooms with little
as a style or technique (as in music, literature, or	design)	characterised by extreme spareness and simplicity. I interpret this
essential to have an inviting and stylish space. The Nordic	design	creates a warm and comfortable sanctuary out of limited
cables that certainly are not designed in pristine whiteness. Minimalist	design	encourages us to forget everything a product relies on
flooring Scandis, like the Japanese, are obsessed with wood in	design,	especially flooring. You'd be hard-pressed to find
you can design it the way you want. Read more:	Design	For White Space In Your Life It's not
are 5 minimalist lessons you can apply to your life, including	design,	hygge, Lagom, care, and sustainability. Let's look at
scene for a meal. If you're searching for minimalist	design	ideas, study the Scandinavians. They're experts in creating
take a look to the north for some beautiful minimalist	design	ideas. Here are some tips to get you started:
Minimalist Nordic design Scandinavians' love of minimalism extends to interior	design.	In a region where winters are long and dark,
to hit the reset button on life, so you can	design	it the way you want. Read more: Design For
YouTube sensation, fashion blogger, lifestyle influencer, vegan food, travel, and	design	lover. She's also the author of the book,
we should care about more than the big things. Good	design	makes a difference.'
story perhaps explains the rise in popularity of mid-century	design,	particularly Scandinavian. A pair of early Finn Juhl armchairs
minimalism From the 'KonMari method' to Apple's barely-there	design	philosophy, we are forever being urged to declutter and
Let's look at each in more detail. 1. Minimalist Nordic	design	Scandinavians' love of minimalism extends to interior design. In
massive deal — showing the impact and reach of Swedish minimalist	design.	This article will explore Scandinavian minimalism and how it
items you should own or how you should organize and	design	your environment. It's a mindset that should allow

Source: own elaboration

At the qualitative analysis level, we examined the selected concordance values (keywords in context), i.e., a list of searched words appearing in a text along with their collocations and contexts of use (one, two, three, or more words to the left or right of a keyword). Identifying patterns among the obtained concordances helped to establish the dominant discourses and discourse-related representations of a given phenomenon. I relied on a semi-automated technique to characterize salient patterns containing these words, cf. lexical bundles (Biber et al., 2004). Such concordances presented the most common sequences containing the word of interest, e.g., the word most frequently used in the maximalists' discourse, 'design,' sorted according to the surrounding words. They were useful in elucidating patterns, such as 'WORD design', where WORD can represent any word (see Figure 1).

Applying the aforementioned methodology, 84 lexical patterns were identified that highlight a variety of properties attributed to 'maximalist(s)/minimalist(s)' 'life', 'objects', 'time', 'living', 'lifestyle', 'home', and 'design' (the most popular keywords in the material). Of these, 48 were selected for an in-depth study (exemplary 21 patterns are presented in Table 1). Each pattern contains a filler,

i.e., WORD, WORD, and the keyword or the word and WORD, WORD. The balance of 37 patterns were ignored, i.e. those which were deemed peripheral to the main focus of the study or those whose fillers had low frequencies.

Thus, I proceeded with a semantic-pragmatic classification of the content words included in the patterns, based on a close reading of the texts (e.g., full sentences) and consideration of their contexts. Taking the most frequent fillers as a point of reference for the in-depth analysis, semantic groups of the top keywords were created by considering semantically related fillers. This led to a set of three main categories: 1) Identity and Lifestyle, 2) Home and Objects, and 3) Social Context of Lifestyle, along with six meaning subcategories that linked to the ways of justifying and realizing the minimalist and maximalist orientations. Table 3 illustrates the dominance of the 'Identity and Lifestyle' category in the discourse of minimalists and the 'Home and Object' category in the discourse of maximalists. The former relates to the processes of self-development, along with the rigorous techniques of the self, the essence of which is mindfulness, simplicity, and elements of therapeutic culture, including discovering one's 'true' needs, 'real' pleasures, and freedom, with elements of biographical transformation. The latter is dominated by interior design (1), decorating with 'anything that brings comfort' (4), 'filling up space in the room with a collage of colors, materials, and textures' (1), a 'curated hoarding' (2) of meaningful elements (3) and an 'ornate display' of personality (5). Both discourses exhibit clear references to the instability and unpredictability of the contemporary world, characterized by maximalism, and a lack of future vision beyond or under the capitalist imperative of perpetual economic expansion (6), exemplified by minimalism.

I realized that several of these words might belong to more than one (sub) category. For example, some words could belong to both the 'Identity' and 'Home' frames, such as 'space' and 'simplicity'. Words considered ambiguous were classified into a given group depending on their context of use and their dominant meaning.

Table 2. Largest semantic categories in the KeyWords list

Category	Subcategories	The most frequent key words, phrases
Minimalism		
Identity and lifestyle	Self-development and 'techniques of the self' projects	mind/set/full, meaningful, mental, full, fulfilling, simplicity (as a tool for spiritual growth), purposeful, relaxing, mental, true, real, rich, enjoying, slower, intentional, challenge
	(2) The rationality of control	self-control, discipline/more disciplined, effective, rationalize
	(3) The processes of conversion	change, improve, radical shift, choice/s, decision
Home and objects	Design: functionality and simplicity	organized home, decluttered/ clutter-free/ less-cluttered home, checklist, (white) space, (more) simplicity/ simplify, cut/ting out, reducing, get rid of, removing, small number, less than 100, reorganization, eliminate
	Anti-materiality	with less, little, fewer, non-essential, wrong, unnecessary, absence, happiness not through (things), focusing on little
Social context of lifestyle	Criticism of (over)consumption	Consumerism, pressures, (over)consumption, less is more, capitalism/tic
Maximalism		
Home and objects	Eclectic design	eclectic, chaotic creative, boldest, frivolous, visual, unconventional, different features, decorations, colors, fabrics, more is more, break style rules, go beyond
	Materiality and Excess	over/stuffed, excessive garish, bold, full, clutter, glorious
	Sentiment	meaningful, significant, museum/s, unique, memorabilia, objects to remember
Identity and lifestyle	Self-expression	express/ing yourself/myself, creative/ity, personalize/ing, display, individuality, self-designed, unique style, personal, unique story
	Self-acceptance and emotional well-being	love, joy, happy, comfort, proud, vibrant, fun, pleasure/able,
Social context of lifestyle	Escape from uncertainty	pandemic, escape, recession, crisis

Source: own elaboration

RESULTS

SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-ACCEPTATION: BETWEEN CHALLENGE AND PLEASURE

Minimalists and maximalists both engage with the self, yet they embody distinct approaches to agency, inwardness, and self-determination in the modern world. For minimalists, the question "Who am I?" is answered through intentional, reflexive choices – decisions aimed at simplifying life and cultivating self-improvement. These choices include reducing possessions (f = 124), adopting a new lifestyle (f = 148), enhancing personal growth (f = 21), and limiting overconsumption (f = 13). In contrast, maximalists adopt the perspective of "I am what I am, and I am proud of it" (proud, f = 12), emphasizing self-affirmation over self-transformation.

Minimalism is characterized by a continuous pursuit of improvement, redefining one's identity and needs, and rationalizing personal decisions – often shared through blogs, interviews, and literature. A central tenet of this philosophy is the "ideology of effectiveness" (effective, f = 13), encapsulated in the notion that "minimalism is a habit of highly effective people." Effectiveness in this context means optimizing life by eliminating unnecessary tasks and possessions and seeking the most efficient, cost-effective solutions. Minimalists take on challenges (challenge, f = 52) and embark on structured projects, such as "Take the 12-12-12 Challenge," "Minimalist Lifestyle Starter Tips," or "How to Start Decluttering When Overwhelmed: 9 Doable Actions."

The ethical framework of minimalism does not adhere to rigid moral codes or prohibitions but rather aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self" (1998). It focuses on self-regulation through practical techniques and strategies, enabling individuals to shape their lifestyles and identities independently.

In contrast, maximalism is a celebration of self-expression, presenting one's individuality as unique and exceptional: "Maximalism is appealing because it allows you to put yourself and your family on display – something to be proud of because it's YOU!" The core principle of maximalism is the desire to showcase (display, f=41) personality and individuality through bold expression (express/ion, f=45). This ethos extends to fashion – "Instead of wearing basics to simplify life, why not invest in clothing that truly represents your personality, no matter how extravagant?" – and home design – "A maximalist home stands out; it is creative, personal, and striking." Its owners embrace playfulness and bold gestures, living with vibrancy and pursuit of comfort and happiness."

Where minimalists opt for a "white box" devoid of excess, maximalists surround themselves with vibrant (f=25), gorgeous (f=9), and even garish (f=8) objects.

Their philosophy aligns with an Epicurean pursuit of joy (f = 89) and happiness (f = 68), prioritizing aesthetics and mood enhancement: "Things are good if they feel good." Possessions play a central role in this well-being – "Each object should make you happy: Surrounding yourself with beloved items instantly boosts your personal sense of well-being."

The act of decorating and adorning one's home with cushions, curtains, and memorabilia serves to foster pleasure (f = 25) and coziness (f = 15). However, the maximalist discourse portrays coziness not as an experience of communal warmth but as a means of achieving self-care and self-expression: "A maximalist home embodies your unique self – your wants, needs, daily habits, design values, and tastes." As a result, maximalists often derive satisfaction and security from collecting and preserving objects rather than from interpersonal connections.

Ultimately, minimalism and maximalism offer two contrasting yet equally valid paths to self-development and self-acceptance – one through discipline and intentionality, the other through abundance and self-affirmation.

SELF-LIMITING CHOICES AND UNLIMITED BOLDNESS

When it comes to the identity-related differences between minimalists and maximalists, it is worth noting that while the former exhibit a strong orientation towards control, the latter promote an element of unpredictability, a lack of control, and a disregard for rules: 'The key to maximalism is that there really are no rules.' Maximalism is supposed to be "the anti-minimalist trend that celebrates mess and creative chaos." Instead of forcing designers along well-trodden paths, maximalism allows them to unleash their creativity. Here, form follows feeling rather than function'.

Maximalism is not a modern orientation towards purposefulness and rationality but rather expresses a conviction that one cannot predict the future. Therefore, instead of 'cutting out and making sad sacrifices,' maximalists recommend: 'Pile it on, enjoy it all, forget the rules!' Maximalism is a stance to the world and to oneself. It is a stance rejecting self-limitation and self-denial built on the fear that a catastrophe is imminent (see: "Searching for escape"). The essence of maximalism is *boldness* (*bold/ness*, f=113)*, creativity* (*creative/ity*, f=90)*, excess* (f=49), and *passion/s* (f=20).

Minimalists' responses to the 'how to live?' question point to a certain model that is intended to promote greater discipline (f = 6). Individuals should be subject to greater control to maintain *order* (f = 31) and stay organized (f = 16): "The simple act of clearing, cleaning, and properly arranging has a strong psychological effect." If you struggle with this exercise, it may be worth deeper introspection and a more concerted effort to maintain order in your life and space'.

Minimalists strive to eliminate the chaos associated with excess, seeking to gain control over themselves and their lives through a purposeful and rational choice of basic goods. They offer advice to each other on how to rationalize their choices, reduce the amount of goods used, and decorate their apartment in a minimalist style, as well as how to eliminate unnecessary furniture or clothing. One of the most frequently used words in their discourse is 'de/clutter' (f=274) and 'check-list' (f=107) – with the latter referring to a list of items that constitute an ideal minimalist inventory. There are numerous descriptions of the content of their optimally-fitted 'capsule wardrobes'. Minimalists' skillfulness, optimality, and conscious management are confronted with visual mess and excess, associated with thoughtlessness, laziness, irresponsibility, and frustration: 'It's amusing that something so important and essential to their day-to-day life could be so disorganized – so much so that it actually causes frustration.'

Objects are meticulously (rationally, functionally) selected, and the list descriptions are presented on internet blogs. Subsequent steps, such as 'Decluttering, Organizing, and Paring Down' or '10 Simple Steps to Get Started with Eco-Minimalism,' crucial to achieving minimalist priorities, are described. Being in charge of objects, illusory to a greater or lesser extent, ought to correspond with potential cognitive and behavioral changes in various aspects of life. Minimalism, as a tool, helps to accomplish many, often overlapping, objectives, initially related to decluttering the living space and, ultimately, to 'getting in charge' of one's belongings and maintaining greater discipline.

MATERIAL AND TRANSCENDENT EXTENSIONS OF SELF

A minimalist's identity is defined by being free of materiality, which is all that limits, oppresses, and poisons. A ritual is defined as a cleansing, getting rid of things ('get rid of', f=124). For maximalists, collecting goods is a ritual. Maximalists negotiate identity through material objects. Numerous comments on the significance of objects ("We want only to be surrounded by things that have a purpose, that have been created for both their beauty and their meaning") and a focus on their 'interior design' (f = 142) validate the role of accommodation and materiality. This kind of setting, in relation to the world, is that of a home, which provides an existential ground for their embodied being; they are both in it and of it, acting in relation to it (cf. Marratto, 2012).

Stability of identity manifests itself as accumulated excess: 'Maximalism in an aesthetic of excess and redundancy'. If we assume that an act of getting rid of things is an act of self-identity, whereby minimalists reject certain aspects of 'self', then it is understandable why maximalists collect or expose things that remind them who they are, give testimony to their passions, experiences or skills

as a homeowner: 'People look at their homes as a way to share their personal stories, travels, family history, belief systems, and character'.

In the maximalists' discourse, the integrity and stability of identity guarantee an extension and 'exporting' of an individual – their memory, accepted values – to the outside, to the material spaces: '(…) our craving for happier and more personalized spaces that teleport us to the places we love'.

However, the minimalist's self is constituted by a sense of inwardness, which is best captured through inner depth. Life's goal is to eliminate anxiety from one's consciousness, to effectively cope with a crisis, and to restore inner peace ('peace/ful', f=62). An orientation towards contemplation, discovering oneself, and experiencing 'the true essence of the world' should serve as a metaphysical approach towards oneself and the world, where 'self', the universe, and absolute meld into one: '(…) people can be happier by aligning themselves more closely with nature and rejecting all mainstream desires'.

The maximalists' strategy is linked with another type of philosophy than the one promoted by minimalists, which places 'self' within a broader context. What is accentuated here is not the relationship between an individual and the universe or nature, but rather their place not only within a community (e.g., the family) but also as an idealized form of self-expression. The inhabited space, marked by its owner's personality traits, is an important element of the discourse. In the process of making the house interior private, hence in the process of progressive differentiation and spatial customization, individuals can find some room for boundless creativity and self-fulfillment:

We want our homes to stimulate us, too, and how much stimulation can you get from a white box? It's about creating a kind of fantasy, a fantasy that we can sink into, but one that excites and informs us, and emotionally uplifts us at the same time. (Votés, 2023)

Self-expression emerging from such a discourse, in the context of a lack of more important identity foundations ready to be extracted, seems to be a basic value and means of self-fulfillment. All that happens on the outside seems to be pale and pointless in comparison to the inner material world.

What is of importance is the sense that home objects were chosen personally or imbued with personal meaning (meaningful, f = 24). Their presence is supposed to be a source of satisfaction or pride. Privacy is a condition not only for confronting the domestic, safe fortress with a foreign exterior but also for confronting individual satisfaction derived from occupying a domesticated space filled with 'self.'

Minimalists view independence and mobility as more important than material goods. A need to be 'free' (f = 52) is tied to a need for change (f = 126) and mobility (f = 13), rather than safety (safety, security, f = 0). Not being attached to objects and being ready to change should provide minimalists with greater

liberty to generate 'programs of self-actualization' and ' mastery' (Giddens, 1991, p. 9). Instead of purchasing goods, minimalists prefer collecting experiences ('experience/s', f=117): 'I started questioning my stuff, removing one by one the unnecessary things from my life, eventually jettisoning 90% of my material possessions, replacing them with worthwhile experiences'. Minimalism is a theory that prioritizes experiences over possessions. Possessions are insignificant; what really matters is experiencing *real freedom*. However, 'to experience' encompasses 'to consume'. In lieu of possessions and status, the designations of which are predominantly virtual, a source of satisfaction for minimalists is undertaking enterprises and collecting experiences. Distinctive functions emerge from the sphere of experiences and emotions.

SENTIMENTAL AND FUNCTIONAL

In the discourse of minimalists, the home is an 'emotional warehouse' (Gurney, 2000), where various feelings, along with their wealth of functions, are experienced and stored. The most common ones are: scope for creativity ('creative/ity', f=90), a space that offers 'freedom' (f=52), security ('safe/security', f=26), bringing sensual 'pleasure' (f=26), evoking 'memories' (f=18): 'Through maximalism, homes become museums of personal interests, hobbies, and precious memories'. It is an intimate space; however, it is deficient in a context for close, caring relationships. When it comes to homes, the discourse of minimalism most frequently mentions functionality ('funcional/ity', f=15), good organization ('organize/ing', f=54).

Maximalism and minimalism are the bipolar points on the axis of individuals – objects stretched between emotionality and reflexivity. Although it is undeniable today that the traditional dualism between reason and emotion cannot be upheld, it remains clearly visible in the analyzed discourses. It results from the level of reflexivity of the relationship between individuals and objects. We employ two modes of acting, drawing inspiration from diverse sources. The ideology of functionality is juxtaposed with the one of sentiment and nostalgia.

Functionality clashes with sentiment and attachment, viewed as impediments to change. Minimalists subject the purchasing of or getting rid of things to scrupulous reflection. Their choices are strongly marked by a need to rationalize, justify, and seek possible motivations for their decisions. Such moments of reflection on things are most commonly linked with radical changes in minimalists' lifestyles, specifically through a form of conversion known as 'biographical transformation': 'A dramatic reorganization of the home causes correspondingly dramatic changes in lifestyle and perspective'. They describe dilemmas connected with imposing various forms of logic and narrative upon themselves. Oftentimes such a reflection required reworking new patterns of thought and

action, ultimately bringing satisfaction with the decision taken. Joshua Fields Millburn (n.d.) said:

> I had already simplified my life, paid off my debt, changed my spending habits, and radically reduced my cost of living. So I sold my house, paid off my car, eliminated nearly all my bills, and moved into a tiny $500-per-month minimalist apartment (…) Over time, I slowly became an "expert" on leaving the corporate world in the pursuit of dreams.

In the discourse of maximalists, arguments justifying the collection of things are derived from the past and memory: "Personally, I see it as a collection of emotions and memories." Objects help to organize and store memories, as the emotions evoked by a given object can be linked to one's closest and dearest relationships. Getting rid of those would be tantamount to betraying one's ideals and denying one's relationships. Conversely, minimalists express different sentiments: rationality, practicality, and minimalism being in vogue seem to be justified, dictating the rejection of emotions as a troublesome impediment to change.

What proved to be crucial in the clash between functionality and sentiment was to define problematic objects as either 'unnecessary clutter' (f=32), 'junk, or treasure/s' (f=26). The latter evaluation is justified: 'So we say never hold back with the personal objects, mementos, pictures, and paintings that evoke a memory or a story, as those are the things that transform a house into a home.' Unwillingness to discard such objects, according to Jonathan Culler (1988), is identical to the fear of forgetting one's past.

SEARCHING FOR ESCAPE

At a moment when ongoing climate change, economic uncertainty, mutating pandemic, and geopolitical crisis all threaten to destroy the things that the middle classes take for granted, there appears to be a renewed interest in things (maximalism) or 'new forms of inwardness' (minimalism). Both approaches are a manifestation of a desire for a 'different world': 'The world can be a grey, grim place, and in response, we want our homes to exist as a kind of joyful refuge' seems to be the maximalists' manifesto.

Embracing the thesis that Western society may be perceived as anomic[1], minimalists hold pessimistic views of global capitalism, which causes them to view their lifestyle as a form of escape, allowing for personal growth. Minimalists

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[1] Anomie is a sociological term used to describe situations where social „norms" are conflicting or non-integrated. At the individual level, anomia can be used to describe someone who feels alienated and unable to direct her/his life meaningfully in a social context (Roberts, 1978).

attempt to escape what they describe as a highly materialistic and morally flawed society and, as such, perceive a reversal of their previous conformist lives. The minimalists' life goals are determined by pursuing a project of self-improvement (f = 27). Such an experience of the authentic 'self' is described by Charles Taylor (1989, p. 130,176) as a 'radical turn' to the self as a self or first-person subjectivity, owing to which we are thus able to conceive of ourselves as having inner depths (2007, p. 539–40). Christopher Lasch (1991, p. 29) explains that as people lost hope in improving the world politically, they retreated into self-improvement.

In a time of crisis and social tension, the 'return to materialistic things' motto seems sound: 'In contrast to the optimism that accompanied the sleek minimalism of the nineties, the terrifying situation we live in today has conjured a desire for the wealthy to hide themselves away.' Objects help us feel comfortable in the world. Thanks to their materialistic dimension they are palpable and solid, hence are able to counter an excess of loosely drifting meanings and be used as support: 'In a changing world, where constants are being challenged, clutter core helps people ground themselves in the material, and in beautiful things that often hark from a more stable past'.

The functions of objects are grounded in various narratives (see above). By construing meanings that give them a sense of security, maximalists rely on certain goods to shield themselves from anxiety, stress, uncertainty, and risk. Maximalists envision and experience their home as a resource for 'finding one's own space' outside the social, political, and economic contradictions: 'We create a space in which we can retreat from all the terror outside.' In their discourse, a home serves as an idealized form of a safe, cozy stronghold where one can hide from the world: 'We want to feel safe, we want to feel comfortable, we want to feel protected and taken care of – things can act like a literal cocoon'. Since unpredictable things happen from time to time, it is advisable to be prepared in advance: '… the more money you spend, the more protected you can become, hidden amongst your excessive home décor.'

However, Cohen and Taylor (1992, p. 15) raise an important observation: 'What 'the collapse of meta-narratives' implies is that there is no single meaning system or metaphor that we can use to obtain a sense of the world from which we want to distance ourselves or against which we want to construct an alternative'. Hence, post-structural thought argues that it is not possible to talk about escape when there is no all-encompassing reality from which to escape. As Rojek (1993, p. 212) cynically states in "Ways of Escape": "There is no escape."

AESTHETICS: TRANSPARENT SIMPLICITY – ECLECTIC ENCLAVE

The aesthetics of simplicity and functionality prevalent in the minimalist approach take the form of eclecticism and abundance in the case of maximalism, defined as a counter-aesthetic to the minimalist hegemony. A wealth of objects forms colorful mosaics, and a wealth of patterns, colors, shapes, layers, and materials becomes a synonym for warmth and 'coziness.' Minimalistic materials, such as glass or concrete, are often perceived as cold and inhuman, making them unwelcoming: 'These homes are impossible; they have no signs of life.'

Maximalism is 'a reaction against the muted tone and empty homes of minimalists'. Such an aesthetic stands in opposition to the formal codes of minimalism, which are expected to be 'rigid and lacking in personality'. Maximalists' apartments are equipped with everything needed. Therefore, one should be isolated from the external world, a symbol of instrumental, cold relations and unpredictable events, by means of curtains, shutters, and blinds. Those, in turn, wanted to be discarded by modernistic reformers, striving to replace the bourgeois with modern transparency. Such coziness and decorativeness have come under criticism from minimalists, who, following modernist architects and philosophers such as Walter Benjamin, claim that their objective is to free individuals from symbiotic and limiting structures (van Herck, 2005, pp. 124–127). Le Corbusier justified his attack on the cozy interior by a need to object to 'sentimental hysteria', Bruno Taut claimed that 'cozy practices are an almost primitive or neurotic ritual of 'rugglueing'', while Hannes Meyer believed that 'coziness (Gemütlichkeit) is something that should find its place in 'the heart of the individual' and not on 'the wall of his home'' (cited by van Herck, 2005, p.124). Such a belief contributed to promoting the model that is motivated by rationality and tidiness. Being separated and isolated was viewed by Benjamin as an expression of egocentric individualism. His model, ideal for the 20th century, was a house of glass, an epitome of openness and transparency (van Herck, 2005, p. 127). Consequently, a minimalist design aesthetic is characterized by 'white' (f = 47) rooms with minimal furniture or décor, and by 'extreme spareness and simplicity' (f = 94).

The discourse of maximalists leans towards the traditional vision of home, rooted in space, where objects are carriers of emotions, feelings, memories, and identity but also bring sensual pleasure. Coziness and abundance, reminiscent of Victorian times, can be viewed as a bridgehead for traditional ways of thinking about home, a bulwark against the expansion of the modern, uncertain, unpredictable, and turbulent.

CONCLUSION

The analyzed discourse re-emphasizes 'the self,' relying on individual worldviews to (1) redefine escape as a mindset (minimalism) or self-expression through home interiors (maximalism) and (2) shift 'objectivity' (truth/ethics) toward subjective experiences (minimalism) or aesthetic synthesis (maximalism).

Maximalist discourse, rich in imagery rather than deep meaning, celebrates excess, pleasure, and bold aesthetics. Aesthetic experiences, rooted in sensual pleasure, are subjective rather than ontological. While design can be a valid form of self-expression, equating self-expression solely with aesthetics may limit its depth.

For minimalists, self-care and inward focus shape identity, aiming for peace or pleasure through self-improvement. Their discourse aligns with the idea of *gnothi seauton* as an exercise rather than self-discovery. Minimalism promotes decluttering as a path to control, reducing life's complexity to psychological recommendations. It creates a myth of "happiness" achieved by discarding objects, equating simplicity with moral purity, yet devoid of moral content.

Maximalists, instead of rejecting the imperfect self, seek affirmation through self-expression. Both discourses exemplify expressive individualism, where self-fulfillment is not a privilege but an expectation. Socialization now demands self-articulation, making personal identity formation almost obligatory.

The maximalist ideal home serves as a topos – an aspirational model of identity and freedom. Home is not just a living space, but an extension of the self; yet, the pressure to achieve this ideal can lead to frustration, a reality often overlooked in maximalist narratives.

Both movements, despite rejecting external trends, operate within a system of institutional reflexivity (Giddens, 1991), which is influenced by expert-driven industries such as interior design. While Lipovetsky argued that status in consumerism has waned, maximalist decorativeness and minimalist luxury suggest otherwise. Both lifestyles align with middle- and upper-middle-class tastes, subtly reinforcing class distinctions while avoiding explicit discussions of cost or status.

As media-driven cultural trends, these discourses shape contemporary consumption, influencing the organization of space, leisure activities, and design. They reflect modern uncertainties rather than offering resistance or subversion. While they attempt to redefine biographies and deepen identity, they lack engagement with fundamental existential or moral questions, remaining largely aesthetic pursuits. Whether seen as fashionable escapism or a response to modern contradictions, their rejection of moral certainty presents its own challenges.

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Through the Lens of the Media: Media Logic, Fear, AI

Interview with Professor David L. Altheide

> Professor Altheide, your concept of Media Logic has deeply influenced media studies and related academic fields. Could you explain how it has evolved, especially with the rise of digital media and Donald Trump's rise to power, which inspired your latest book, Gonzo Governance: The Media Logic of Donald Trump?

The concept of Media Logic emerged over numerous conversations and research projects with my colleague and co-author, Robert P. Snow. He studied at the University of Minnesota with some of the premier sociologists and symbolic interactionists. We were both interested in entertainment and popular culture. Our interest in culture and media was influenced by Georg Simmel's conceptions of social forms. This led to our focus on media as a social form. My initial research was on TV news organizations, while Bob examined radio, particularly radio disc jockeys. Bob was very keen on the importance of radio grammar and rhythm in radio presentations. These media workers had ideas about how to connect with audiences. There was also research by others on para-social communication and how audience members connected with celebrities. I had also been studying professional sports spectacles and noticed how "new" (in the 1970s) sports stadiums were incorporating huge video screens. Moreover, my dissertation research on news organizations took me to both the Democratic and Republican conventions in 1972, as discussed in the book „Creating Reality." It was clear that the conventions were basically TV studios, with emphasis on lighting and acoustics. And politicians were operating with a script and costumes.

There were other changes afoot. Professional sports were changing rules and styles of play to accommodate television, and individual players were becoming more knowledgeable about sports reporter interviews. Indeed, my research with professional baseball players revealed that conflicts were developing between players and sports reporters, partly because TV coverage of games had changed the approach and focus of reporters, often getting more personal, "behind the

scenes," and this created conflict. We were also aware of changes in organized religion, especially as local (Phoenix, Arizona) televangelists were operating out of massive theaters, dressing like pop culture stars, and incorporating more entertainment and music into their services and productions. I was also involved in a study of the Billy Graham Crusade when it was held in our campus football stadium.

These foundations, and other insights that emerged from research projects with students over the next few years, suggested that a central organizing principle in mediated communication was format. Communication could only occur if there was a shared awareness about the format and basic rules of presentation. And, for audiences to participate or interact with the message-persona, they would have to share the guidelines or logic of the format. Most of our initial attention, then, was on radio and TV, the dominant medium at the time. But our subsequent work and publications made it clear that other electronic media, like computers, the internet, and digital social media, had somewhat distinctive formats and grammar. The challenge was to decipher the meaning process. The presenter and the audience had to share a foundational awareness about the time, place, and manner of the communication act. This included rhythm, grammar, pacing, and syntax. We argued that each medium operated with somewhat distinctive logic and formats. My research on how TV news covered the Iranian Hostage Crisis in 1979–80 revealed the foundation of the TV news code: that TV tells time with visuals. Advances in electronic databases enabled this and related projects. The coverage of the crisis and hostages differed according to the availability of visuals, but visuals that were accessible, conflictual, dramatic, and resonated with key cultural symbols and emotions were preferred. So, it became clear why conflict, violence, and war were almost always newsworthy; the challenge in another project was to examine how peace could be covered by TV news in an interesting or even entertaining way.

Social and digital media, as noted, can be instantaneous, visual, and personal. Their formats collapse space to meet technical limits. We adapted research methods to capture, meaningfully sample, and analyze large amounts of data. Several former students (e.g., Christopher Schneider and Ray Maratea) have excelled in delineating the media logic in digital media projects.

The success of fear in American popular culture and news was the foundation for my recent book, Gonzo Governance: The Media Logic of Donald Trump. There is a direct line from fear-as-entertainment to commercial TV ruled by ratings to Gonzo Governance. It was all about entertainment in a commercial media environment. Stories, reports, and images that strike an emotionally responsive chord were preferred. Fear was the ultimate draw in American TV, even more than sex, which was, until recently, largely restricted. Reports stressing fear have led local TV news reports for decades in the United States. And this meant that

crime reporting, especially brutal, violent crimes, was preferred to draw audiences. With fear and entertainment as the key, politicians could grab audiences and appeal to markets and sponsors. Our research on terrorism (see another question) made it clear that politicians liked promoting potential terrorism threats. Moreover, if enough people took for granted that threats and risks abounded, then audiences were primed to be played by propagandists promising that they could protect audiences from these fears. Moreover, propagandists, like Donald Trump, assured audiences that existing institutions of government could not protect them, so they would have to be changed and managed by a savior. Donald Trump's great success at being elected twice as President of the United States depended on an unyielding use of the discourse of fear on both mass media, but especially social media. Tens of millions of followers received daily brief messages about fear, corrupt institutions, false claims against Trump, etc. Most importantly, the audiences were well-versed in social media and had come to accept the logic and format of brief, abbreviated messages with memes and emojis. On Twitter (now X), the limit was 140, then 280 characters; it is now 4,000.

> In your 1977 book *Creating Reality: How TV News Distorts Events*, you explored how TV news shapes public perception. What do you see as the most significant shifts in news media practices since that time?

Creating Reality was one of the early studies of TV news production. Working with news crews who used 16 mm film to capture all-important visuals revealed how themes, frames, and angles helped organize brief and entertaining news reports. Some of the biggest changes in news production are economic and technological. Local news operations, like the ones I studied (although, I also looked at some national "network" work), have changed. Conglomerates, corporation, and syndicates now produce more of the "local" news; reports are sold to stations to air on their local channels. New technologies like video tape, video cameras, electronic processing (rather than editing film), electronic transmission, phone cameras and the internet have fundamentally changed production. Moreover, the expansion of digital media and more news outlets—24-hour platforms—have altered and expanded the entertaining production and dissemination of news. While putting on reports to attract audiences (e.g., ratings) was important for local news, the rise of digital media and access to more entertaining video reports from numerous online sources, promoted organizations to chase reports that would directly appeal to audiences, or "clickbait." Emphasis is on reports about crime, a trend also occurring in national network news. Sports reporting and weather reporting make up a larger chunk of airtime. Indeed, even major network news shows in the U.S. now incorporate weather reports. The expanded competition for viewers, even for a few seconds, encouraged hyping more fear-related

reports with sensational views featuring conflict, drama, and emotion, including violence, victimization, crime, and celebrities. Viewership has also changed; just as few people read newspapers, fewer citizens regularly view the network or local TV news. The TV interview format became very popular and taken for granted by audiences to such an extent that the interview is now a standard social form, meaning that people know what to say and do if given an opportunity for a "TV interview." Even the deaths of loved ones seldom stop people from conducting on-camera interviews expressing their grief.

We must also consider how this changing ecology of news and information alters the time, place, and manner of seeking real news. The portable media enable people to catch information here and there, on the go, while they are doing multiple things; attention is no longer more confined to a place and time to "watch" or to "read" the news, but rather, information is gathered almost incidentally, as brief multi-tasking attention spans gaze at screens or catch bits talked over popular songs, etc. Alternative news sites, like Podcasts, are very popular, and studies suggest that they are becoming a primary source of news for younger people. All these changes suggest that digital social media, with (mainly) brief, thematic emphasis on promoting popular beliefs and personalities, are becoming more important news sources. Moreover, few people involved in these outlets are trained journalists or social scientists, but are bent on grabbing clicks from followers, rather than a reasonable version of the truth, complexity, and significance of events and policies. People's trust in news sources and news has eroded. Institutional news sources are derided as "fake news" by elected President Donald Trump. Indeed, his preferred sources, such as Fox News and his social media account are preferred by a large portion of his followers. These sources give them the propaganda they expect. Part of their appeal is implicit and explicit claims that they are different, if not in sharp contrast, from conventional news sources such as major networks and established newspapers.

Trust has eroded in news sources and news people. Millions of Americans participated in the historic ritual after WW II, where people listened to or watched nightly newscasts. It was a common cultural information experience. Veteran CBS journalist and anchorman Walter Cronkite was regarded as one of the most trustworthy persons in the United States. No one is held in such high regard in the United States today. One factor is the multiple information sources available that accompany expansive information technologies like cable, the internet, and digital social "personal" media via cell phones. Some cable outlets, like Fox News, owned by Rupert Murdoch, drew viewers by claiming that the established network TV news was liberal and biased against conservative views. Few people would accept that Walter Cronkite's words were "fake news," but today, that is a common utterance of Donald Trump and his followers. Indeed, his preferred sources are Fox News, and his social media accounts provide the

daily propaganda that his supporters expect. Indeed, Donald Trump selected many members of his governing cabinet from Fox News.

> In your book *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, you analyzed how fear is used in media to influence public opinion. How relevant is this approach in today's political communication landscape?

Fear continues to be a dominant frame for media to attract audience and user attention. I have suggested that the reliance on fear is partly a byproduct of the entertainment orientation of most media. Fear remains powerful as more statements and emphasis involve anger and hate, which, with some exceptions, are largely based on fear. Targets and sources of fear are more likely to draw attention when they are presented as being closer to home and personal safety, both in terms of space—nearness—and time, with more immediate and short-term impact rather than longer time. An example of the former is threats to one's children; an example of the latter is the "future" effect of global warming. Real journalists, as well as numerous charlatans, use language and visuals (video) to grab attention. In the United States, popular topics like crime, drugs, gangs, terrorism, child safety, and immigrants are used. Most of these terms are used in such a way to prime audiences to include racial and ethnic minorities. Crime is commonly associated with fear, even though crime rates have been falling in the U.S. for several decades. But local newscasts continue to stress crime reporting.

The pervasiveness and cultural penetration of the discourse of fear is so basic in discussions of social, economic, and political issues that it is barely noticed. This can be seen in the 2024 Presidential Election, won by Donald Trump, whose three campaigns have focused on the threats of immigrants to American life, safety, economy, political stability, and even health. During his 2024 campaign, he and his running mate, J. D. Vance, proclaimed that legal Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, were eating the pets of residents. When confronted with the falsehood of these claims, Vance, a U. S. Senator, replied: "If I have to create stories so that the American media actually pays attention to the suffering of the American people, then that's what I'm going to do." Their repetitious lies about migrants contributed to their victory.

Numerous media reports claim that the economy was the main factor in Donald Trump's victory. But voter information from the Pew Research Center for the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections suggests that other issues were relevant, since fewer than 5% of voters cited only one issue in their decision. Voter data suggests that fear played a large role for Trump supporters. I review the significant data from three elections and then explain the role of fear. First, consider that the economy was the most frequently mentioned issue in each election, but Democrats and Republicans differed in their top three issues. For example, health care was the

top issue for supporters of Biden (2020 – 84%) and Harris (2024 – 76%), while Trump supporters stuck with the economy. But it was the 2nd and 3rd top issues that were revealing. Second, Republican voters' other top issues were terrorism (2016 – 89%), immigration (2016 – 79%, 2020 – 61%, 2024 – 82%), and violent crime (2020 – 74%, 2024 – 76%). These were not listed in the top three issues for Democratic voters in the three campaigns. Third, Republican voters increased their emphasis on immigration by 21% from 2020 – 61% to 82% in 2024. And Trump supporters were 30% more likely than Democrats to list violent crime as a top priority in both the 2020 and 2024 elections. Clearly, Republican voters were more concerned about migrants and crime, two issues that Trump promoted as fearful threats. Yet, the vast majority of media reports stress that the economy was the deciding issue.

Media and journalists could do a much better job of suggesting other sources of danger and risk. It is also important to note that when fear is associated with certain terms and issues, there are many others that are neglected. Gun violence is associated with criminals but not with accidents or massive numbers of suicides. The Surgeon General of the United States promoted an alternative version: gun deaths as a public health issue. However, many politicians continue to argue that this is an anti-gun message.

How do you view the role of algorithms and AI in transforming the relationship between media and audiences? Are there unique risks or benefits you see in this transformation?

We must adapt to the use and problems of algorithms and AI, or we will suffer. The major adjustments will be education and expansive media literacy to deal with these potential benefits and threats. Algorithms and AI have altered communication formats and led audiences to adjust to and evaluate messages. Algorithms enable a sender to personalize messages directly and address individual receivers (e.g., readers/viewers) of a message. The power of digital media rests in its format, transmission, and reception, namely that it is personal, instantaneous, and often visual. Most of these messages are shaped by screen technology (e.g., computer, tablet, phone, etc.,) and the audience's routine, approach, and pre-receptiveness of the message. The point is that the timing and meaning of the interaction between an audience and a message are heavily influenced and mediated by the message format. By pre-receptiveness, I mean the expectation, time allocation (usually brief), and mental and emotional orientation to apprehend and engage with the medium-providing-the-message. This media consciousness—the apprehension of its media logic—shapes defensiveness and resistance to new or contrary message content; it does not fit the normal paradigm of message-meaning engagement. Messages are reduced to noise, sort

of there, of some interest, but not significant enough to concentrate or reflect. These format considerations tend to level all messages, whether a one-line joke, a meme, a "breaking news report," or an advertisement. Message expectations become taken for granted and quickly become the baseline cognitive framework for messages. It is the glance and not the focused read/view that predominates.

The overall effect is to minimize the importance or significance of messages. As noted, in effect, messages are noise. This is already a problem that has led emergency responders and organizations that deal with public safety to add a signal, e.g., a beep or other tone, to messages that are deemed more important. Messages are increasingly regarded as redundant, unnecessary, since the casual recognition of the reader/viewer implies that you already know this, nothing new, just move on to the next. But the noise can be important and reinforces biases and prejudices that may be cultivated by previous messages. Curiosity, or perhaps a chuckle, may prompt a reader/viewer to forward the quip or joke or reinforcing bit to another person. This then enables the reader-to-become-a-sender, a semi-powerful and status-enhancing act of communication that can validate the sender as well as the message being forwarded. Ultimately, the message process plays on identity and status processes. Thus, recognizing and sharing a symbol of a huge meaning array—a meme—is like opening a package and being delighted again and again.

The format of such messaging is ideal for product promotion as "clickbait," meaning that when messages are sent, or someone "clicks" on a message link, money is made. There are some dire consequences of this messaging. The political use of digital media powered by algorithms in the U.S. and elsewhere is illustrative. When false information, misinformation, and outright lies are repeatedly pushed, they become more normal and expected. When the technical and organizational sources of these messages, such as platforms like X, Facebook, and others, carry falsehoods and refuse to fact-check, then distortion becomes a constructed vision and framework for issues, problems, etc. A metaphorical spiral of preparation, initial reception, familiarity, affirmation, and resistance to communication violations tends to preclude new information that would require awareness or a glimmer of insight that there are other directions, other views, and other realities. The Trump campaign skillfully used algorithms for political ends that were supported by Fox News, a more traditional news outlet. Quite literally, the same messages, symbols, and personalities flooded narrowcast personal audiences to such an extent that it made sense to many millions of Americans to not only vote for Trump but also affirm his policies and, perhaps most bizarrely, endorse his nomination of officials—who had been providing information to viewers on Fox News—for powerful government positions.

AI can do many wonderful things for daily living, education, science, medical treatments, etc., by managing information and even creating new syntheses.

Retrieval, integration, and creation. But AI can be used to distort our view of obdurate reality by altering images, distorting relationships between things, and contributing to propaganda and falsehoods. One of the most visible impacts is manipulating visual and aural reality, our primordial checks on truth and legitimacy. The capacity to play with perceptual checkpoints and manipulate them for profit and power is significant.

> **Media bias is frequently criticized today, especially in polarized societies. Do you believe this bias has intensified, or are audiences simply more attuned to it?**

The claims about media bias have intensified. But we seldom have much clarity about what bias means. Bias is related to distortions of the "truth" in whatever case we approach. Objectivity is often used in reference to a lack of bias, but we know that various measures used in an endeavor to obtain accuracy, or knowledge can also involve judgments and criteria in the instruments and measurements used. In my early work (e.g., Creating Reality), I argued that people claim political biases constantly, but there are other sources of bias and potential distortion, including occupational perspectives (e.g., physicians, scientists, journalists, and social scientists). I tried to set forth what I called the "news perspective." But most people define bias as a political bias, and in the case of the U.S., this means "liberal" or "conservative." Ultimately, the problem comes down to a breakdown in trust in institutions. Different media outlets and organizations do have agendas and values that they directly or indirectly promote. One approach to this problem is to try to state what those values are, but this is seldom done. Various media have also been used for propaganda purposes, to distort information in such a way to promote certain causes, policies, products, and political parties.

My research suggests that a major source of bias in U.S. media is profit and entertainment. The U.S. is a capitalist society and media organizations are profit-driven, which means that they seek to use their programming to attract audiences to sell advertising for products. The key element of virtually all programming in the U.S., therefore, is entertainment to attract audiences. And as I have argued in my work, the major ingredient in entertainment is fear.

Media proliferation in search of profits in the U.S. has generated claims of bias. A good case in point in the U.S. is the creation and funding of Fox News, an organization dedicated to conservative points of view. This grew out of the claim that established network TV in the U.S. was liberal and did not treat conservative policies, positions, perspectives, and politicians fairly. So, their alternative was to feature hard right-wing commentators, who often attacked established politicians and social institutions. Fox certainly shares a lot of the credit for the popularity of Donald Trump. He amplified Fox's claims of bias

against conservatives. Through the skilled use of digital social media and algo-rithms, he claimed that most social institutions put out fake news and false information, including law enforcement (FBI), the military, science, education, and journalism. He used this claim to deny all charges against him. The fact that he was elected to a second term as president suggests that his approach has worked quite well and that claims about media and news bias will continue.

Given the rise of influencer culture and social media, how do non-traditional voices impact traditional political communication channels?

Political communication has increasingly turned to digital media and non-traditional outlets. The key is the reputation and respect of the influencer or podcast's main voice. Of course, the political perspective of these individuals matters, but national politicians in the U.S. increasingly are appearing on select programs. At this point, they are not "game changers" for a politician or political point of view, but they can be reinforcing and validating to the cohort of viewers of certain programs. However, these media are quite popular, especially among younger people, and any successful national politician will likely have to be associated with some of the popular outlets.

Looking forward, what do you believe will be the biggest challenges and opportu-nities for media studies/political communication scholars in understanding the evolving media landscape?

I think the biggest challenge is to grasp the media logics of new media and how they converge with traditional media. The ecology of communication continues to change but there has not been enough attention to how this affects everyday life activities, organizations, and social institutions. Propaganda, power, and products are all mediated. The power and impact of social media platforms demand more attention, and I suggest stronger regulation. My former students' (e.g., Chris Schneider, Nicole Blanchett, Ray Maratea) investigations of how digital media influence social problems, social movements, journalism (pursuit of "clickbait" news stories), and law enforcement (e.g., body-worn cameras) are on track. Solid ethnographic studies of media use in everyday life, including work, fun, and crises, would help clarify how media fit in with meaningful activities, roles, statuses, and definitions of situations.

You have focused extensively on qualitative research methods during your academic career. What challenges or advantages do you think qualitative methods present in media studies today? How do you see the dominance of quantitative research methods in our research fields?

As noted above, qualitative ethnographic research is needed to both corroborate and guide quantitative research involving media use. Comparative studies are terrific. We need to understand how people actually use and rely on media and how social situations are increasingly infused with media formats, images, analogies, language, and perspectives. Qualitative media analysis (QMA) of news reports and other documents is very useful in capturing the meanings of reports and other presentations. I think some QMA is essential for any study, including quantitative analysis. Communications researchers and other social scientists would be advised to select the best method(s) to use that is/are appropriate for their research questions. However, we should not let a particular method determine our research questions.

David L. Altheide was interviewed by Norbert Merkovity in January 2025.

David L. Altheide, PhD, is Regents' Professor Emeritus on the faculty of Justice and Social Inquiry in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University, where he taught for 37 years of his 43-year teaching career. His BA is from Central Washington State College—now Central Washington University (1967), MA from the University of Washington (1969), and PhD from the University of California, San Diego (1974). His work has focused on the role of mass media and information technology in social control, and qualitative methodology. His most recent books are *Gonzo Governance: The Media Logic of Donald Trump* (Routledge, 2023), *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear (2nd Edition, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017),* and *The Media Syndrome (Routledge, 2016).* Dr. Altheide received the Cooley Award three times, given to the outstanding book in symbolic interaction, from the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction: In 2007 for *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear (2006)*; in 2004 for *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis (2002)*; and in 1986 for *Media Power* (1985). Dr. Altheide received the 2005 George Herbert Mead Award for lifetime contributions from the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, and the society's Mentor Achievement Award in 2007. In the fall of 2012, he was a Fulbright Specialist in Germany (Zeppelin University) and a Distinguished Research Professor in Australia (Law Faculty, University of New South Wales). He also received a Fulbright Specialist Award at The Catholic University in Lisbon, Portugal, in spring 2017.

RAFAŁ LEŚNICZAK, WIZERUNEK PREZYDENTA ANDRZEJA DUDY NA ŁAMACH „TYGODNIKA POWSZECHNEGO" (2015-2020) [THE IMAGE OF THE PRESIDENT ANDRZEJ DUDA IN THE „TYGODNIK POWSZECHNY" (2015-2020)]. THE CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING HOUSE, WARSAW 2023, PP. 304. ISBN 978-83-8281-133-9

The new publication by Rafał Leśniczak, titled *Wizerunek prezydenta Andrzeja Dudy na* łamach *„Tygodnika Powszechnego" (2015-2020)* [The Image of President Andrzej Duda in the "Tygodnik Powszechny" Weekly (2015-2020)], is a part of the body of research on political communication and the image of Polish political leaders. I experienced from the first pages of the book a truly remarkable encounter with an inspiring text that addresses important and topical issues. After reading the entire monograph, I can confidently state that this is a unique, outstanding, one-of-a-kind book for several reasons. Firstly, the author undertook a challenging task of analyzing the image of the head of state as portrayed in a weekly journal associated with the Catholic Church. In this initial context, Leśniczak does not fail to ask questions about the state of democracy in Poland and the role of the Polish opinion-forming media in shaping civic attitudes. Moreover, the author highlights and recalls the role of the President of the Republic of Poland as the guardian of the tripartite separation of powers. Secondly, Leśniczak's book has been introduced to readers at a time of increasing political polarization in Poland, and notably, during the parliamentary election campaign. Thirdly, the author maintains the researcher's perspective and objectivity towards the presented determinants of Andrzej Duda's image. Professor Leśniczak is remarkable for his erudition, insight, and commitment to language correctness. This is all out of respect for the reader and the discipline of this monograph. Notably, the book, published by the UKSW Publishing House, has been reviewed by prominent experts in Polish media sciences: Prof. Barbara Bogołębska and Prof. Janusz W. Adamowski. Their positive reviews of the text are most certainly another reason to read the book.

Rafał Leśniczak offers readers a reconstruction of President Andrzej Duda's image in the "Tygodnik Powszechny" weekly during the President's first term of office. In the author's own words:

> There is a paucity of media studies in the academic literature concerning the analysis of the content of the "Tygodnik Powszechny" weekly regarding its political involvement during the so-called PiS-PO political duopoly. Therefore, this monograph attempts to systematically reconstruct the image of the representative of the Polish right-wing Andrzej Duda during his first term as the President of the Republic of Poland (2015-2020), i.e. from the day he was sworn in (August 6, 2015) until the end of his first term (August 5, 2020). (pp. 19-20).

The analysis examined the weekly journal's perception of the declared achievements of the head of state in five key areas: foreign policy, military security, social policy, participation in the legislative process, and adherence to historical policy. The author undertakes the challenge to answer the question of the extent to which Andrzej Duda's presidency was perceived by "Tygodnik…" as autonomous from the Zjednoczona Prawica (United Right) party, which was in power. After reading the book, I can say that Professor Leśniczak succeeds in the task.

Leśniczak conducts a highly comprehensive source search, as evidenced by the bibliography. The research covered 255 issues of the journal, making the research sample representative. A total of over 350 press releases met the research criteria. Estimably, the author refers to the works of the following experts in media sciences: Andrzej Antoszewski, Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, Robert Entman, Norberto González Gaitano, Damian Guzek, Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, Iwona Hofman, Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, Sonia Livingstone, Mia Lövheim, Paolo Mancini, Winfried Schulz, Holli A. Semetko, Patti M. Valkenburg, Agnieszka Stępińska. Readers should appreciate the efforts of Rafał Leśniczak in selecting Polish and foreign scientific literature.

I highly rate the structure of the monograph. The book comprises 304 pages, consisting of an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, an appendix, a bibliography, a list of tables, and a summary. The concept of the book is well thought out. Leśniczak guides his readers adeptly through the complex twists and turns of our times.

I believe it is worth mentioning, when presenting the structure of the monograph, that in the first chapter, Leśniczak successfully presents and synthesizes the most significant achievements of Andrzej Duda's presidency, as declared by the politician on his official website, and confronts them with the viewpoint of political scientists. The second chapter, a conceptual one, details the factors conditioning the image of President Duda in the press, as well as the public relations activities he undertook. The presence and design of the methodological chapter deserve particular praise. Leśniczak meticulously presents and explains the research hypothesis, the independent and dependent variables, and the directional hypotheses. He further elaborates on the conceptual grid applied, the temporal scope of his analysis, and the criteria for including a press text in the

research sample. In my opinion, it is Rafał Leśniczak's expertise in the methodology of social sciences that especially reveals his scholarly maturity as a media science researcher. The fourth chapter presents the results of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of "Tygodnik Powszechny". In the fifth chapter, Leśniczak discusses the key determinants of President Duda's image. The author does not neglect essential issues on the public and political agenda, such as the President's attitudes towards the conflict surrounding the Constitutional Court in 2015 and the Supreme Court in 2017. The sixth and final chapter comprises the conclusions of the press analysis conducted and their interpretation. The author highlights the following issues of his research: The political involvement of "Tygodnik Powszechny"; the press image of the president vs. the communicative dimension of political leadership; President Duda's image vs. selected middle-range theories; the socio-political context vs. the image of the political leader; theories of mediatization metaphors; and President Duda's image vs. deontological journalism. The appendix to the monograph includes a classification key with its corresponding characteristics and categories. Notably, the author embeds his empirical findings in media science theories, including the theory of mediatization of politics, selection of information, middle-range theories, and the concept of framing.

However, Leśniczak's decision to omit the illustrative layer of press articles and to focus solely on the text is slightly questionable. Also, Leśniczak does not address the impact of the "Tygodnik Powszechny" weekly on its audience. However, this would require another kind of analysis, for instance, surveys or interviews. The author is aware of the above and therefore recommends further analyses of the topic and the inclusion of sociology experts in such studies. Moreover, Prof. Leśniczak argues for extending the research material to other nationwide opinion weeklies and social media to obtain a more precise reconstruction of the media image of Andrzej Duda. I agree with the author that:

> "The content analysis method, although laborious, time-consuming, and demanding in terms of precision, both at the stage of source queries and at the stages of research material categorization and interpretation, yields reliable conclusions." (p. 240).

Also noteworthy is the high consistency ratio (CR) between the two coders in the pilot sample (at 0.95), which confirms the reliability of the analysis results obtained (p. 137).

Having read the text, I can confidently state that it is a valuable and engaging work that combines theoretical and empirical approaches. Therefore, I highly value the content of the book. This applies to both the conceptualization, the theoretical part, and the methodological accuracy, as well as the meaningful

content of the monograph. The formal and linguistic aspects of the publication also deserve praise, with its carefully designed, coherent, and logical layout. The author maintains a proper perspective and objectivity towards the analyzed content. Those genuine research traits allow Rafał Leśniczak to identify the weaknesses and strengths of Andrzej Duda's presidency in "Tygodnik Powszechny", particularly in relation to fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law, and a free media. In the summary section, the author states the following:

> "The media image of President Duda during his first term of office, as presented in "Tygodnik Powszechny," was therefore not idealized (it was not one-dimensional – neither exclusively negative nor exclusively positive). The journal did not refrain from judgments and interpretations, but those were always factually substantiated." (p. 240)

Leśniczak proves that the image of President Duda in the journal depicted a non-autonomous politician, dependent on the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) party and its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński.

I firmly believe that *Wizerunek prezydenta Andrzeja Dudy na* łamach „*Tygodnika Powszechnego" (2015–2020)* will become a crucial point of reference in discussions among media scholars and political scientists who closely monitor the progressive polarization of the Polish political scene and the media representations of Polish political leaders. The monograph by Prof. Leśniczak also outlines directions for further research, i.e. the assessment of the extent to which the Polish President's political programs and activities during his second presidential term have been legitimized by the Polish opinion press and the Catholic media. It is noteworthy that the author carefully follows the political communication processes of the Catholic Church. This allows Leśniczak to argue that in the second and third decades of the 21st century, the Church has been a significant political actor, and the Catholic media should be treated as an alternative voice of the bishops. I hope that Professor Leśniczak will continue his media analyses, share his research results on the media image of Polish political leaders with the media science community, and inspire social science scholars to engage in an academic debate on the relations between politics and the media. I am convinced that his monograph *Wizerunek prezydenta Andrzeja Dudy na* łamach „*Tygodnika Powszechnego" (2015-2020)* will be well received by the Polish media studies community, political scientists, and other representatives of social sciences.

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ADAM SZYNOL (2023). THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHIEFS. REGIONAL PRESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS (FORMER) EDITORS, WROCŁAW, 178 PP., ISBN: 978-83-7977-783-9.

Followers of the discussion around the condition of the regional press segment in Poland in the last few years will have seen that it focuses on two main areas. The first involves the consequences of the decreasing importance of printed editions, enforcing the need to digitize the regional press. The second involves the functioning of regional dailies after the withdrawal from the Polish market in 2021 of the German publishing group Verlagsgruppe Passau and the takeover of this publisher's regional titles by PKN Orlen, a company controlled by the State Treasury. The latter event was a consequence of the announcement by the right-wing ruling party, Law and Justice, of its pre-2023 policy about the need to repolonize the media in Poland. This event meant that the largest publisher of regional press in Poland became an entity dependent on politicians, in which the authorities change depending on the results of the parliamentary elections.

In such a situation, the book, based on research with the participation of editors-in-chief of most regional dailies published by Polska Press Grupa, who held their positions before the takeover of PPG by PKN Orlen deserve the attention. For several or even dozen of years, these former editors-in-chief were responsible for the functioning of individual editorial offices in the provinces. It's also worth to appreciate the author's reaction to the changes that have influenced the shape of the regional press. This work is even more valuable in the context of the observed shortage of empirical research on the functioning and status of journalists of regional media in Poland.

The book consists of four chapters. In the first two, the author synthetically presents the functioning of the regional newspaper segment in Poland after 1989. This part discusses the transformation of the regional press, investments made in the regional press market by foreign investors, the decreasing importance of printed editions of regional newspapers, and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for the regional press. In the third chapter, the author presents in detail the process of repolonization of the regional press, which took place during the rule of Law and Justice, as well as the reactions of the media and political environment to the purchase of regional newspapers by a state-controlled company.

The essence of the book lies in the fourth chapter. In it, the author presents the results of research on the regional press, which was based on interviews with 14 editors-in-chief of regional dailies belonging to Polska Press Grupa. Most of those journalists lost their positions, following the Orlen takeover of PPG publishing house. Only one of the interviewees continued to manage the editorial office after the ownership changes.

The author's research provides knowledge in three areas. First, the editors-in-chief diagnose the most important problems they faced while working in their positions. Secondly, they present the process of ownership changes and the purchase of regional dailies by PKN Orlen from their perspective. Thirdly, the respondents referring to their professional experiences assess what the future of the regional press will look like under the management of Orlen, which is a business operating in the fuel sector.

The scope of research constructed in this way provides a lot of empirical data from the editorial offices about how the regional press has operated in recent years. In this way, the work broadens the scope of knowledge about the regional press in Poland and fills the research gap in this area.

It is worth noting that the editors-in-chief mentioned other important problems for the regional press beyond their concerns about the decline in sales of paper newspapers and the need to digitalize the media. An important issue was the financial situation of the editorial offices and the pressure to generate income for the owners, while the economic situation in terms of the regional press was deteriorating. This is an important area because it also affects the status and professional position of regional journalists. This, in turn, is related to the lack of staff, which some editors-in-chief also indicated as a problem when it comes to the functioning of the editorial offices. This issue has a broader dimension. On the one hand, there is a question about the professional preparation and financial expectations of young journalists entering the profession. On the other hand, there is the question of what the editorial offices of the regional press have to offer job candidates, who would constitute the strength of individual editorial offices. The latter issue relates to the serious problems in the lowering of the status of regional journalists as an attractive profession.

An interesting thread of research is the issue of the political independence of the editorial office and the ensuing pressure on editors-in-chief and individual journalists. The problem is exacerbated not only by the regional dailies largely were owned by foreigner holders but also by the tense relationship between the editorial office and, for example, the advertising departments in individual publishing house.

The research presented in the book also covers the most discussed issue of recent years in the context of the functioning of regional dailies in Poland—the purchase of Polska Press Grupa by the PKN Orlen concern. The author

interviewed former editors-in-chief of individual PPG newspapers to present their perspectives of the changes in terms of ownership, showing how the entry of a company controlled by the State Treasury into the press business was received by journalistic teams and consequences it had for regional editorial offices. The former editors-in-chief also try to present a catalogue of the challenges facing current editors-in-chief of dailies owned by Orlen.

These challenges can be divided into several areas. They concern market issues, i.e. creating a strategy for the functioning of Polska Press Grupa, which can allow them to retain older readers, but also to attract younger ones. The first element of this process is the completion of the digitization of regional press and the concept of monetization of online content. Another challenge is the response to the outflow of staff from regional journalism. The second area is related to the fulfillment of the function of journalism. If the owner of regional editorial offices is a company dependent on politics and susceptible to electoral changes, how is the regional press supposed to build its credibility, fulfill a control function towards the government and function during an election campaign?

All these questions are important for the discussion about regional newspapers in Poland. This book is an element of the discussion because it broadens the scope of knowledge about the regional press. The topics discussed in it also open the field for further empirical research in this area.

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JÁN VIŠŇOVSKÝ, JULIÁNA MINÁRIKOVÁ, MIROSLAV KAPEC (2022). SLOVENSKÝ MEDIÁLNY PRIEMYSEL (SLOVAK MEDIA INDUSTRY). PRAGUE: WOLTERS KLUWER ČR, A. S., 135 PP., ISBN 978-80-7676-596-2 (PDF ONLY – E-BOOK),

This text is a counterview of the book by Ján Višňovský, Juliána Mináriková and Miroslav Kapec, entitled "Slovenský Mediálny Priemysel (Slovakia's Media Industry)" published by Wolters Kluwer ČR which Magdalena Ungerova previously reviewed in the Spring Issue, 2023 of the Central European Journal of Communication.

Primarily, the publication seems to be a "special deal" production, in which publishers offer a range of preferential terms to authors who order an electronic or hard copy of their books. These "special deal" books are not sold through the publisher but go directly to the author. The key aspect is that this type of production, albeit by a recognized and possibly a foreign publisher does not offer any guarantees of the content being of the same high scientific level of the publisher. Ultimately, anyone can publish almost anything this way, provided they are willing to pay.

The imprint of the book states that „The authors are responsible for the professional and linguistic aspects of the publication." Ultimately, the name of the publisher only serves to create the impression that it is a quality scientific publication. The publisher Wolters Kluwer ČR, a.s., does not publicly endorse the publication, its website does not promote the book, nor does it sell or distribute it in any other way.

Special deal publications may not be easy to find, which was initially the case with this book. Currently, the publication is freely available on the Internet. However, on the front page, immediately after the cover, it is paradoxically stated that „This work, or any part of it, cannot be published without the consent of the copyright holder."[1] Does this mean that this restriction no longer applies, or is one of the authors arbitrarily violating it? Or has the meaning of „to publish" fundamentally changed, also in connection with the uncertain or de facto symbolic determination of the publisher's role, as mentioned in the first paragraph? Be that as it may, a somewhat unusual and normatively difficult-to-accept explanation

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[1]   https://fsvucm.academia.edu/JanVisnovsky

is offered: that the real and extensive dissemination of the publication's text (new knowledge) was not the original intention of the authors. Considering the support for writing and publishing the text from public sources, and formally scientific research, this is an incomprehensible and normatively absurd situation.

The authors (as well as the reviewer Ungerová, who quotes them) admit that „the monograph does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the three media industries – print, radio and television, and the Internet, respectively, calculation of all factors that would determine the current state of selected areas of the media system in Slovakia. However, that was not even its intention." (p. 8). But then, why is the publication based on the grant project no. 1/0283/20 entitled „Synergy of media industry sectors"? What synergy was or could be discussed here? Based on which criteria, did the authors select the factors determining the current state of the media system, or, more precisely, its selected areas?

Furthermore, aren't there already four (or even more) media industries, namely press, radio, television, and internet media, instead of just three? After all, it is clear that radio and television no longer share a unique common link in the form of electronic or digital signal processing and distribution. Additionally, we already have a convergence of different media (e.g., online editions of traditional print media or podcasts). The author of the third part of the publication was aware of this fact: „However, the Internet industry has modified (not absorbed, as was originally assumed) all existing (not only) media industries…" (p.85). Likewise, in the second part of the publication, we find a discussion on media convergence, beginning on page 62. The structure of the work used by the authors made thinking about paradigmatic changes in the media system more confusing.

Convergence, or converged media (e.g., podcasts), should be set aside in a special section, or at least in a section titled „Internet industry in the context of the domestic media environment." Likewise, it would be better if radio and television broadcasts were already analytically separated. Such an analytical division does not at all contradict the trend of institutional merging of radio and television broadcasters. Alternatively, we can think primarily in terms of the division between traditional media and new media. This discussion is not unimportant; the authors originally intended to investigate the „synergy" of the press within the grant, which is primarily related to their technological convergence. What was the authors' intention? In the introduction, they specify their research plan as „the most important facts and aspects shaping the current nature and character of the three media sectors" (p. 8).

In reality, however, we do not find any paragraph in the introduction that systematically defines „the most important facts and aspects shaping the current nature and character of the three media sectors." Only some, apparently randomly selected, factors are mentioned – for example, these concern „the legal regulation of the status of publishers and operators of web portals, ownership and

ownership relations in the publishing sector, an overview of current ownership structures and the largest publishing houses, and the impact of the economic crisis of 2008" and broadly defined "other important milestones in the development of the printing industry" (p. 6). These „facts and aspects" contradict the later definition we find, somewhat illogically, only in the section on electronic media. There, the authors dealt with individual frameworks that „constitutionally define" the media system. (p. 7).

What are the „constitutional frameworks of the media system?" First, we find only a fairly general definition of the media system: „a social system that includes, in addition to the activities of all mass communication media and their products intended for the mass customer, the system of media enterprises with their social, ownership, economic, cultural and political structures and ties, including links to other social subsystems – economic, political, cultural, educational, etc." (p. 47). Such a definition is possible, but it is unsuitable for the scientific analysis of the media system. The authors were probably aware of this because they ended the discussion of this key definition by citing D. Hallin and P. Mancini, who identified four elements of the media system. These are: „1. the development of media markets concerning the development of the press with mass circulation, 2. political parallelism – represents the level and nature of the connection between the media and political parties, or the extent to which the media system reflects the political division of society, 3. the development of journalistic professionalism, 4. the degree and manner of state intervention in the media system. (p. 47).

Such an analytical division of the media system is possible, although it is now obsolete and indeed not useful for discussions about converged media. In any case, it is unclear why the authors did not use it, even in a modified form, in the structure of their work. The outline of their work does not take into account the division of the media system into the four key elements mentioned by Hallin and Mancini. The work is divided into three essential parts: the Slovak periodical publishing industry, the radio and television industry in Slovakia, and the Internet industry in the context of the domestic media environment. It is not explained why the authors did not employ the more analytical approach cited, which they identified internally, as they essentially concluded the theoretical debate on this topic here. They did not even mention (except for the introduction) that they wanted to use a different analytical approach. Perhaps the only indication in this line can be found in their focus on economy and ownership issues (p. 48).

The entire theoretical discussion, including the determination of the elements of the media system, is then useless. The selection of criteria for analysis seems to be random, possibly customary, and certainly unsystematic. This can be seen, for example, in the conclusion (p. 114), where it is stated that „an overview

of listenership, or viewership of individual radio and television stations provided a relevant basis for the analysis of selected economic aspects and media ownership ratios, which contributed to the primary fulfilment of our ambition – mapping the economic potential of the segment of radio and television broadcasters in Slovakia." One may then wonder whether determining the economic potential of radio and television broadcasters in Slovakia was the primary aim of the second part of the book.

In the conclusion (p. 114), the authors then claim that „from the given data on the profits of individual companies or on viewership, we can conclude that their position on the media market is still strong and they are still able to position themselves in the competitive environment of new broadcasting and income opportunities to keep". In other words, the economic potential of the media system is defined as the ability of large media companies to remain competitive in the market. We will not learn much about the impact of convergence. We do not get information about the ability to stay in the market in the case of individual media or smaller and medium-sized publishing/media houses, and where has the key topic of synergy been lost? The authors state (p. 6) that one of the main goals of the project was „to bring a set of knowledge that, in the context of multidisciplinary starting points, leads to the definition of synergies among individual branches of the current media industry." A summary of all the main objectives is also missing. It appears that this was a relatively free and indefinite form of writing, covering a wide range of topics, and it can be said that, naturally, the results turned out that way as well.

A lack of a systematic approach can be documented as early as the first part, which begins with the legal regulation of periodical publication. The second part starts with the previously mentioned discussion of the media system. In contrast, the third part completely omits the legal regulation of the Internet and social media, and as previously indicated, traditional media that have converged with online forms. It does not matter that convergence is, in part, included in the Act on Media Services, which was partly discussed earlier. And there is no systematic mention of self-regulation (apart from occasional references to the wording of the law in that respect), which has flourished in Slovakia, especially in the context of internet communication. It should also be noted that, upon analyzing the wording of the law, it should be subordinated to the goal of the work – either its possible or real economic impact, or its possible or actual impact on media synergy and convergence.

The book's structure contradicts the authors' theoretical discussion, which was supposed to clarify the research methodology. The selection of criteria used for analysis is consequently unclear and random rather than systematic. The goals of the work are also vague, and in some cases, contradictory. Finally, the authors, as well as the cited reviewer, somewhat unexpectedly openly admit that the

monograph does not provide a comprehensive analysis of media industries, nor a list of all factors that would determine the current state of selected areas of the media system in Slovakia. In other words, we have a partial analysis, primarily a description, based on randomly selected analytical and evaluation criteria.

Andrej Školkay
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EWA NOWAK-TETER WINS THE MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY KAROL JAKUBOWICZ AWARD 2024

Opinia publiczna online (Eng. *Public Opinion Online*; Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2023) – a recent book by Ewa Nowak-Teter received the Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award 2024. A special Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award 2024 was awarded to Piotr Pytlakowski for his book *Strefa niepamięci* (Eng. *The Zone of No Memory*; Warszawa: Agora, 2023).

Photo 1. Book cover of Nowak-Teter E. (2023). *Opinia publiczna online* (Eng. *Public Opinion Online*). Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
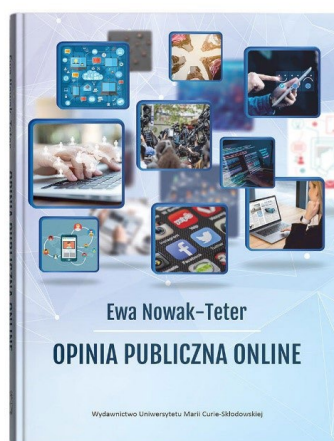
The Selection Committee awards the Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award 2024 to the recent book *Opinia publiczna online* by Ewa Nowak-Teter. This book is a comprehensive and multidimensional coverage of public opinion in the real world and virtual sphere. The author identifies the key issues of public opinion functioning in democratic systems and argues these issues are important for policy makers and experts because of the increasing social conflicts and the growing trend toward polarization.

Professor Ewa Nowak-Teter is a political scientist in the Department of Mediatization at the Institute of Social Communication and Media Sciences at the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She is also the Editor-in-chief of the scientific journal „Mediatization Studies" and the Chair of the Mediatization research section

of the Polish Communication Association. Her research interests include mediatization of public and private spheres, media logics, public opinion online and political communication. In 2021, she was awarded the Bronze Cross of Merit for her work in the advancement of science.

Photo 2. Professor Ewa Nowak-Teter. Source: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin.

Furthermore, the Selection Committee awards the excellence of the book *Strefa niepamięci* (Eng. *The Zone of No Memory*), written by Piotr Pytlakowski, with the Special Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award 2024. The book was acknowledged for the striking image of the mechanisms of evil, which do not change, but only gain new attributions. This high-class reportage about the human conscience and the drama of our humanity, which we experience every day, is record of a very important part of our past and present.

Photo 3. Book cover of Pytlakowski P. (2023). *Strefa niepamięci*
(Eng. *The Zone of No Memory*). Warszawa: Agora.
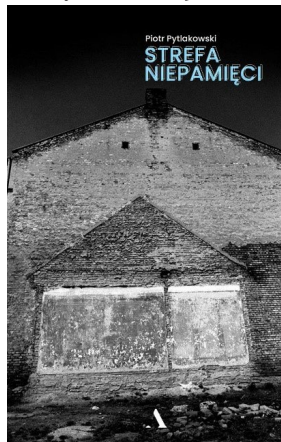
The Committee also notes that the success of last year's special award shows the importance of continuing to reward journalistic publications that resonate not only with the idea of the competition but also go beyond the academic framework.

The Award Ceremony took place on June 10, 2024 during the plenary meeting of the Committee on Social Communication and Media Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences at the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. The special award was presented on April 28, 2024, on the 11th anniversary of the passing of Karol Jakubowicz.

Photo 4. Prof. Ewa Nowak-Teter receives the Award from Prof. I. Hofman and M. Semil-Jakubowicz during the plenary meeting of the Committee on Social Communication and Media Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences on June 10, 2024 at the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. Photo by: Anita Has-Tokarz (Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin).

Every year, the Media and Democracy Karol Jakubowicz Award recognizes original methodologies and the societal impact of scholarly publications in media systems, media policies, media ethics, and public service media in Central and Eastern Europe, and beyond. A full list of this year's nominees can be found on the Award's website: https://www.ptks.pl/en/awards/the-media-and-democracy-karol-jakubowicz-award.

On behalf of the Committee and all the stakeholders, we warmly congratulate the Winners and the Nominees!

Dagmara Sidyk-Furman and Michał Głowacki
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THE 10TH ECREA CONFERENCE "COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL (DIS)ORDER", LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA, 24–27 SEPTEMBER 2024

Media and communication scholars from all around Europe participated in the 10th Conference of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). The theme of the conference, "Communication & social (dis)order," reflects disruptions in the fields of politics, economy, health, and technology that have significantly reshaped contemporary communication. Recent technological developments and changing communication practices have often been labeled as exacerbators and even the origin of these systemic disruptions, emphasizing their destructive (disorder) or creative potential (new order) (https://ecrea2024ljubljana.eu/conference-theme/). The keynote speakers, Dr. Vesna Leskošek and Dr. Jelena Kleut, addressed "Communicating the welfare state through a discourse on welfare fraud" and "The interplay of uncertainties in transitional media systems", respectively.

Before the general conference, eight pre-conferences took place. The topics of these events corresponded with the main theme and represented major concerns related to changes in the communication field, such as disorder in academic culture, the future of journalism, the informational influence of autocracies, digital content creators, platforms, and changing cultural institutions, as well as the impact of AI.

The conference was accompanied by the General Assembly of ECREA, the election of ECREA's Governing Body, and voting on General Assembly items. Elections were held in each thematic section and temporary working groups, as well as in permanent networks. Members of the Polish Communication Associations have been actively participating in ECREA's activities for many years. This year, two of them were elected to serve as members of the Governing Body: Małgorzata Winiarska–Brodowska and Beata Klimkiewicz – both from the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland. Małgorzata Winarska–Brodowska was elected as ECREA vice-president. She will be responsible for co-ordinating the Sections, Temporary Working Groups, and Networks. She became a member of the Bureau (the Daily Governing Body), and an IOC member for ECC conferences. Małgorzata Winiarska-Brodowska's role also encompasses being a member of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Subcommittee (including scholars at risk). Last but not least she will be a member of both the Subcommittee on minimizing the environmental impact, of the Subcommittee

responsible for cooperation with other associations (e.g. ICA, IAMCR, ALAIC). Beata Klimkiewicz was elected as the Ethics Committee Liaison Officer. She will have seats on the ECREA Book Series Subcommittee, the Public Statement Committee, and the Subcommittee for research, data, and policy collaborations (incl. EASSH and EAO cooperations).

Other members of the Polish Communication Associations were elected as either a chair or vice-chair of the following sections and networks: Agnieszka Stępińska (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland) is the chair of the Political Communication Section, Tomasz Gackowski (University of Warsaw, Poland) is a co-chair of the Mediatization Section, while Marlena Sztyber-Popko (University of Warsaw, Poland) is a vice-chair of the same section. Also, Mateusz Sobiech (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland) is the YECREA representative of the Mediatization Section and Roksana Gloc (Jagiellonian University, Poland) is the vice chair of the Central and East-European Network. It is worth mentioning that Nicoleta Corbu, who served as an associate editor of the CEJC in 2019-2022 was elected a vice-chair of the ECREA Political Communication Section.

At the conference, we celebrated the launch of the CEJC Special Issue on "The Construction of the Future of Platforms." The Special Issue Launch Party was organized on September 27th, 2024 by the special issue guest editor Nico Carpentier (Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Charles University, Prague, Czechia).

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