
photo: Zuzana Beneková

Jaroslav Buček, Taťjana Iskanderova

Key Aspects of Argumentation and Their Role in the Media-Political Context: Analyzing Manipulation of Truth and Its Impact on Public Perception

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of argumentation in the media-political context and its impact on public perception. In today's media landscape, political discourse is not simply relayed but actively framed to influence political outcomes and shape public opinion. Media platforms construct narratives that can distort reality, often serving particular political or commercial interests. The article examines how media dialogues, moderators, and information framing contribute to political persuasion, focusing on the manipulation of truth in the context of media and political discourse. Drawing on semiotic theory, with a particular focus on the concept of the veridictory square, the article explores how argumentation is employed to manipulate and present truths in distorted ways. The veridictory square, a tool for analyzing the interplay between truth, falsity, and interpretation, serves as a framework to dissect the mechanics of media-driven argumentation. By mapping how narratives are constructed, framed, and delivered, the article reveals the subtle ways in which media channels curate content to serve specific purposes, often at the expense of objective truth. It emphasizes the importance of evaluating media content critically and highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how media influences political discourse and democratic processes.

KEY WORDS

Argumentation. Media Narratives. Media-Political Context. Narrative Construction. Political Discourse. Truth Manipulation. Veridictory Square.

https://doi.org/10.34135/mlar-25-02-06

1 Introduction

The media environment of today depends heavily on argumentation and political discussions to form public perception. Mass media function beyond basic information transmission because they create specific narratives which determine political results. The manner through which information reaches people determines whether it becomes clearer or more misleading which affects personal beliefs and political conduct of groups. The practice of media manipulation exists to promote particular political agendas and commercial goals which create doubts about the accuracy of available information. Media platforms function as spaces where political figures conduct argumentative dialogues to shape public opinion. Media communication achieves its persuasive effects through editorial choices, organisation of debates, and political issue presentation methods which operate at multiple levels of complexity.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of argumentation in the media-political context, focusing on how media dialogues, moderators, and framing of information contribute to this persuasive power. The study also aims to apply semiotic theory – specifically Greimas and Courtés' theory of the veridictory square – to analyze how media manipulates the concept of truth and constructs distorted narratives, particularly in the context of fake news and misinformation.

2 Methodology

The research design of this study combines qualitative methods through systematic literature review and semiotic content analysis to studying media and political discourse manipulation and contextual influence. The literature review section provides theoretical and empirical evidence, while the semiotic content analysis allows for detailed analysis of media signs and framing methods and argumentation techniques used for audience persuasion.

The analytical method for media studies originated with Roland Barthes in 1957 before Greimas (1971) and Eco (1979) built upon his work. The method enables researchers to study media communication through political debates and politician interviews and media reports while analysing both rhetorical and persuasive elements and contextual factors.

The current research demonstrates that this analytical approach provides valuable results. The study by de-Lima-Santos et al. (2024) uses semiotic and computational methods to analyze Brazilian presidential candidates' Instagram content which exposes their visual and symbolic political communication methods. Römer-Pieretti et al. (2025) use qualitative semiotic analysis to identify cultural and ideological content in digital news coverage. The veridictory (semiotic) square according to Schoor (2021) enables researchers to identify oppositions and their negations in populist discourse, which reveals fundamental semio-linguistic patterns and political and media text argumentation mechanisms for meaning and power and persuasion construction.

The analytical framework consists of three contextual dimensions (Buček & Zouhar, 2015):

1. Source context – the intentions, strategies, and institutional conditions of media producers, politicians, and moderators, shaping how information is framed and presented.
2. Medium context – the structural, ideological, and economic environment of media organizations, including ownership, regulatory frameworks, audience demographics, and cognitive biases that influence how information is transmitted.
3. Recipient context – how audiences interpret, internalize, and respond to messages, considering prior knowledge, cultural values, and semiotic or interpretive frameworks, such as the veridictory square.

The triadic framework serves as a structured method to study information presentation methods and strategic communication techniques and potential manipulation tactics, which results in complete media and political communication analysis.

3 Results

3.1 Source Context: Key Features of Argumentation in Media-political Context

The fundamental understanding of media-political argumentation depends on knowing the source context. The production of media communication by politicians and moderators and journalists and editors follows specific intentions and uses particular strategies within established institutional frameworks. The initial information processing at the source determines how content will be presented and framed for public reception.

The way politicians interact with media demonstrates how deeply their communication depends on their source context. The combination of editorial decisions and time limits and audience demands and political actors' goals shapes the discourse structure before it becomes available to the public. The information people receive contains pre-existing modifications from the source because recipients encounter content that has already undergone source-based filtering and framing processes. The current political media contests between politicians have earned their name as modern gladiatorial games because of their coincidence. The public display of political debates through confrontational rhetoric and theatrical performances between politicians resembles gladiatorial combat because participants compete to gain supremacy and audience approval. Political communication through media requires politicians to create strategic public images while working within format limitations to gain viewer support.

For instance, up to 75% of Czech MPs view the media, particularly political journalism, as a platform for promoting their own priorities and reflecting the personal opinions of journalists. This perception reflects the dual role of media as both a stage for political actors to convey their agendas and a gatekeeper that shapes the narratives presented to the public (Válová, 2000).

The authors of the paper identify the political debate moderator as the primary element that forms the core of the media product. The moderator controls both the flow of discussion and the overall atmosphere and sense of fairness that emerges from the debate. Greatbatch and Clark (2005) analyze the moderator's "grilling" technique which creates an interrogative dialogue format. The moderator uses forceful questioning to demand clear answers and thus trying to reveal any contradictions that might exist in political statements. While this style may enhance the perceived accountability of politicians, it also contributes to the adversarial nature of political debates, reinforcing the gladiatorial metaphor.

The moderator must handle extra responsibilities as a gatekeeper because media production requires both journalistic integrity and entertainment value. The moderator needs to fulfill two conflicting duties by upholding political responsibility and creating an engaging format that all viewers can follow. The way viewers perceive the debate and its participants depends on how well the moderator handles the conflicting demands of maintaining political accountability and delivering an engaging format.

English and American theorists, such as Clayman, Heritage, and Greatbatch, use terms like "news interview", "political interview", and "media discourse" to characterize this style of dialogue. In contrast, theorists in the Czech and Slovak context often describe it using genre-specific terms such as "political debate", "televised debate", or "televised political discussion".

Čmejrková and Hoffmannová (2003) base their analysis of media dialogues on an asymmetrical model, in which the moderator asserts an institutionalized right to ask questions. Politicians, however, often attempt to disrupt this asymmetry by: exchanging roles with the moderator, asking questions to the moderator, or challenging the moderator's questions.

The Anglo-Saxon practice compares the moderator's role in a dialogue to a "chess clock". In conducting the dialogue, the moderator focuses on ensuring an even distribution of space and time among the discussants, in addition to organizing the conversation and asking questions. Respondents in the applied research conducted by the authors of the paper likened

the neutral position of the moderator in interviews with politicians to a gearbox, where the moderator maintains neutrality and facilitates the smooth flow of communication.

Mass communication can be understood as general statements about its nature, functioning, and effects. Some aspects, however, involve judgments and try to establish standards for aesthetics or ethics, as well as for different media types. Mass communication follows specific guidelines, including laws, regulations, and media policy. Media professionals are expected to adhere to these guidelines, which, as the authors' research confirms, also applies to presenters (McQuail, 2009).

The moderator serves as the central figure in political debates, but sometimes breaks established rules and ethical guidelines to show preference for one candidate through an unbalanced dialogue. The moderator uses asymmetrical dialogue to control and direct the political interview process.

Schegloff (2002) examines interview environment through his analysis of defensive communication methods and escape strategies and his study of interruptions, turn-taking, and appeals to authority. The main characteristic of political debates leads politicians to interrupt each other because they want to maintain audience engagement. Politicians interrupt their opponents to cut off their extended speaking time because they view debates as competitive events. Political debates transform into competitive exchanges when politicians interrupt each other to gain advantage over their opponents. The main objective of political debates goes beyond finding solutions to problems since participants focus on winning the argument. The primary objective of political debates extends beyond problem-solving and position explanation because participants aim to emerge victorious against their opponents.

In her article "Political Reporting as a Reality Show", Hanyšová Celá (2015) examines the recent trend of presenting political messages through TV debates, where politicians are acutely aware of how the media – reliant on these debates – will portray them. An illustrative example is the TV program *Václav Moravec's Questions* [org. *Otázky Václava Moravce*] on Czech Television (ČT[1]), which frequently poses the question: "What topics will be discussed after today's Questions?". As a result, political decisions are often made in real-time and tested by the media. Politicians often collaborate with the media to communicate their perspectives, generate public interest, and evaluate audience reactions.

The power of news channels becomes evident through ČT 24's continuous live coverage of the Chamber of Deputies because cameras show deputies' clubs during breaks waiting for political party leaders' statements. The news editor selects a vital topic which becomes the main story of the evening broadcast and continues as the leading news for multiple days. The repetition of information leads people to accept it as factual because. This demonstrates the agenda-setting theory by showing how frequently discussed subjects transform into established truths.

Hájek (2015), who serves as the European Journalism Observatory web editor in the Czech Republic, states that political journalism faces two main influences from politicians, who want fast news delivery to reach broad audiences. The survey shows that 77% of politicians believe journalists write about politics to share their personal opinions about political events and to reach the biggest audience possible (91%). Nearly three-fifths of politicians also think that journalists are motivated to write about politics in part to express their own personal views on political events. According to 85% of the surveyed politicians, there has been a noticeable increase in negative coverage of politics in the media in recent years. A similarly large group believes that media coverage is increasingly focused on political tactics (such as alliances and oppositions) rather than the substance of political issues. Two-thirds of MPs and senators agree that news

[1] Authors' note: Czech Television (ČT) is the public service broadcaster of the Czech Republic. It operates several television channels, including ČT1, ČT2, ČT24, and ČT sport, offering a wide range of programming, including news, entertainment, educational content, and sports coverage. As a public broadcaster, ČT is funded primarily through a television license fee and aims to provide unbiased, high-quality content that serves the public interest.

coverage about complicated subjects has become less common. Media ownership consolidation throughout Europe has established new power centers which control political choices and journalist operations even though these entities lack electoral authority. The current situation endangers people's capacity to base their choices on accurate information. The information gap between educated elites and less knowledgeable citizens continues to grow. European politicians demand that national governments protect fundamental rights of their citizens.

The basic structure of manipulation stems from the fact that information is often part of a broader information package and is presented within a specific context. While information manipulation is not a goal in itself, its primary objective is usually to influence the recipients. This manipulation occurs not only in the relatively harmless form of marketing, where advertising campaigns aim to encourage people to purchase products or services from a particular brand, but also in more serious instances, such as in totalitarian regimes. In democratic systems, this manipulation may also take a less overt form, aimed at making societal control easier.

The definition of information includes false content which falls under the category of misinformation. The term "information" appears throughout different situations with varying degrees of frequency. People commonly use terms like "misleading information" and "distorted information" and "false information" without understanding their complete meaning. The definition of "information" would become nonsensical if we added truth criteria because "misleading information" would mean "misleading true semantic content" and "false information" would mean "false true semantic content". The proposed definitions contradict both logical reasoning and human understanding according to Hájek (2015).

The different elements of an information package link to each other through multiple connections, which determine their specific functions within the package. The connections between different pieces of information exist because they fulfill particular functions within their designated package. The same information establishes different relationships inside separate packages because of its assigned roles. The editorial team selects central claims for headlines when they determine which information stands out most in television reports and newspaper articles. The evidence section in a package supports main points through evidence while the explanatory section explains information and the illustrative section presents visual content. Political products use media strategies which depend on creating asymmetry and tension through selected arguments.

The process of argumentation depends on multiple elements which include rhetorical elements and psychological factors and linguistic components and logical reasoning. The linguistic aspect stands as the fundamental requirement for argumentation because it is carried out through language. The actor uses specific verbal methods to reach their audience during their performance, which makes the rhetorical aspect obvious. The actor chooses verbal and non-verbal communication methods which they believe will create the most significant effect on their audience during argumentation. The logical aspect of argumentation requires that reasons supporting a proposition must directly link to the proposition while being both relevant and logically valid. The success or failure of an argument depends on how well each of these elements functions. Each aspect of argumentation presents its own set of potential dangers to consider.

The unpredictable nature of quarrels shows they operate without rules because people abandon all social etiquette during these conflicts. The starting point of quarrels emerges from opposing viewpoints between participants who show no interest in finding common ground through compromise. The discussion started as a serious exchange where both sides explained their stances while trying to convince each other about their perspectives. The discussion transforms into an argument when both parties fail to achieve a mutually acceptable compromise. The parties demonstrate their deepening commitment to their original positions while showing no willingness to make concessions. The process of finding common ground becomes impossible during arguments which waste energy but deliver strong emotional rewards.

The presidential candidates' debates on television serve as an example of debates beyond courtroom proceedings. The results of presidential debates become known only after voters select their candidates through elections which take place after the debates. The parliamentary debates follow specific rules under the supervision of the presiding officer while MPs vote to determine the final outcome.

Regular television debate formats, such as *In Politics*[2], *Topic of the Day*[3], or *Five Minutes to Twelve*[4], generally do not meet all the defining criteria of a debate. The shows occasionally transform into debates when they focus on pre-election discussions during election seasons yet they do not use voting to determine their outcomes. The televised programs serve as social platforms which utilize argumentation as a fundamental element of their content. The argumentation rules in these shows maintain some flexibility because they differ from court proceedings although they follow specific guidelines. The discussion moderator leads the conversation through questions, but the guests who participate in the show sometimes ask their own questions, which violates the established rules. The shows allow this rule violation when it remains within reasonable limits.

Media dialogues between politicians and their audience receive their presentation format from various operational elements which remain invisible to viewers. The audience needs to understand the information while also handling external media signals that require their reaction. The moderator maintains social interaction control during political debates yet they must remain impartial to all political groups. The media dialogue requires the moderator to maintain central position while functioning as the main persuasive force. Media content must follow four essential norms which include neutrality for preference avoidance, objectivity, truthfulness, and balance according to Jirák and Köpplová (2007).

3.2 Medium Context: Role of Context and Manipulation in Media

The medium context consists of institutional, economic, and structural elements which determine how mass media distribute information to the public. The medium context focuses on media organizations as institutional entities which operate within social systems, whereas the source context examines individual actors' intentions and strategies. The delivery of messages to audiences depends on four main factors which include ownership structures, regulatory frameworks, ideological orientations, and market competition.

Mass media serve as the main distribution method for information, yet they exist independently from other media sources. The information they share exists within a complete communication framework which includes social elements, cultural aspects, economic factors, and political influences. The production of media content depends on both the creators' goals and the environmental conditions that exist during content development. The political environment and cultural values of target audiences and financial constraints on media organizations determine how information gets presented and received by audiences.

[2] Authors' note: *In Politics* [org. *V politike*] is a Slovak TV show broadcast on the channel TA3. The program features discussions on current political issues, bringing together politicians, experts, and analysts to offer insights on the most pressing topics in Slovakia.

[3] Authors' note: *Topic of the Day* [org. *Téma dne*] is a prominent television show broadcast on the Czech channel ČT24, dedicated to analyzing and discussing the most pressing issues of the day. The show features interviews with political figures, experts, and journalists, offering viewers in-depth insights and diverse perspectives on current events and key societal topics.

[4] Authors' note: *Five Minutes to Twelve* [org. *Za pět minut dvanáct*] is a talk show broadcast on TV Nova, focusing on urgent political and social topics. The show features discussions with experts, politicians, and other important figures, addressing critical issues that demand attention.

The presentation of information is further conditioned by ownership structures, audience demographics, and the competitive nature of the media market. Research on media ownership and stakeholder influence demonstrates that political and economic interests can significantly shape content. Such pressures may result in selective topic coverage, biased reporting, or the amplification of narratives aligned with the priorities of powerful actors (e.g., McChesney, 2015; Sjøvaag & Ohlsson, 2019). Similarly, assertions regarding the "spread of misinformation and fake news" are supported by studies mapping the operation of disinformation campaigns, the mechanisms of spreading false information, and their impact on public opinion. These studies often analyze concrete cases, such as politically motivated disinformation efforts, Russian interference in the 2016 US elections (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019), or the dissemination of false information during crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) (Zarocostas, 2020).

The combination of these elements determines the constructed narrative which influences how people view political matters and public events and political personalities. Mass media information presentation lacks neutrality because it uses selective framing to emphasize particular viewpoints while minimizing others, which distorts audience perceptions of reality. As Wiener (2019) observes:

> One is manipulated by the mass media. Sometimes, he behaves like a fool, and where there are enough fools, villains have greater opportunities to exploit them. This politics of lies will persuade him to buy a particular brand of cigarettes; it will induce him to vote for a particular candidate. (p. 53)

This statement highlights the dual role of media as both a vehicle for information and a tool for manipulation, emphasizing the susceptibility of audiences to messages crafted to exploit cognitive biases, emotions, and preexisting beliefs.

Research on media effects demonstrates that cognitive biases significantly shape how political messages are interpreted. For instance, Stroud (2010) highlights the influence of selective exposure on political polarization, Valentino et al. (2011) examine how emotional appeals in news coverage affect voter attitudes, and Garrett et al. (2016) explore the role of confirmation bias in online environments. More recent studies further emphasize the emotional impact of content and the role of algorithmic amplification in reinforcing these biases, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A systematic review by Soprano et al. (2024) identified 39 cognitive biases affecting fact-checking processes and proposed practical strategies to mitigate their negative effects on media practice. These findings underscore the importance of understanding cognitive vulnerabilities for media literacy and for developing effective countermeasures against misinformation.

The process of media message reception and interpretation and subsequent behavioral response involves multiple complex steps. Media messages that reach audiences contain more than neutral content because editorial decisions, linguistic structures, visual elements, and cultural references all contribute to their meaning. The way audiences understand media content depends on their individual life experiences and existing knowledge and their social environment, which demonstrates how media producers and audience members interact with each other.

Contextual framing plays a critical role in this process. The way information gets presented through headlines, imagery, tone, and narrative structure determines how people understand its meaning and effects. Media content achieves greater persuasive power through emotional appeals and sensationalist and authoritative language, which guides public opinion and behavior toward specific directions. Through their active role in shaping content media create new social realities which in turn form public discussions and shared knowledge.

The combination of media content with its surrounding environment creates significant ethical problems because of the current widespread distribution of false information. Understanding how media operate within their broader communication ecosystems is essential for developing critical media literacy, fostering resilience against manipulation, and promoting informed civic

engagement. By examining the mechanisms underlying media influence, scholars and practitioners can work toward mitigating the risks associated with media manipulation, while harnessing the potential of mass communication to serve democratic and educational purposes.

3.3 Recipient Context: Analyzing Media and Political Manipulation through a Semiotic Framework

The recipient context focuses on how audiences interpret, internalize, and respond to media and political messages. The context differs from source or medium context because it shows how audiences create their own meanings from media content. The process of interpretation depends on what people already know along with their cultural background and social experiences and their individual and collective media interaction methods. Media manipulation requires recipient acceptance of intended messages for its success to occur.

Semiotics enables researchers to understand how audiences decode and respond to media content through their interpretation of messages. The analysis of truth and falsehood and appearance and reality through semiotics shows how deliberately made stories affect what people believe.

Recent research demonstrates the effectiveness of this methodological approach. The research by de-Lima-Santos et al. (2024) employs semiotic and computational methods in their study. The authors collected Instagram posts from candidates during the 2018 and 2022 Brazilian presidential elections and analyzed them using semiotic content analysis to interpret signs, symbols, and visual rhetoric in political messaging. This analysis was complemented by computational techniques, including image recognition and text mining, enabling systematic, large-scale identification of patterns and strategies across electoral cycles. By integrating qualitative semiotic interpretation with quantitative social media analytics, the study provides both depth of meaning and broad comparative insight (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2024).

The research by Römer-Pieretti et al. (2025) investigates Spanish digital news media reports about Biden's inauguration to understand how hate discourse forms through construction and framing and symbolic representation. The research uses signs and symbols and rhetorical methods to move past basic content evaluation and reveal the cultural and ideological forces which direct public communication. The case study approach delivers detailed findings, but restricts the ability to apply results to broader situations because it focuses on a particular political event and media environment.

Schoor (2021) uses the methodology framework grounded to study populist political discourse. The study employs the veridictory (semiotic) square to identify fundamental semio-linguistic patterns in populist discourse by showing how oppositions and their negations create ideological structures. The research methodology unites qualitative text analysis with semiotic modeling to help the author understand how political and media texts create meaning and distribute power and persuasive effects. The method reveals the fundamental structures which influence populist communication across different environments while creating a systematic framework to study argumentation patterns that helps detect manipulation in fake news and other deceptive content. The veridictory square concept developed by Algirdas Julius Greimas and Joseph Courtès provides researchers with a systematic approach to study how truth and falsehood interact in discourse and argumentation through textual communication (Hérbert & Tabler, 2019).

The theory of Algirdas Julius Greimas and Joseph Courtès depends on the veridictory square as its core element which helps researchers study complex discourses and arguments effectively. The method examines how truth relates to falsehood in semiotic operations which focus on textual communication to reveal the mechanisms of veridictory aspects (truthfulness) (Greimas, 1987).

The semiotic framework helps us understand how textual communication mechanisms create our perceptions of truth and falsehood. The framework enables researchers to study how sign systems and their interpretation processes affect information perception and how these interpretations function in argument construction and public opinion control.

Hébert and Tabler (2019) describe the veridictory square as the semiotic square that displays the opposition between being and appearing. The opposition structure of the veridictory square provides researchers with a method to study different textual meaning levels. Analysts can use the veridictory square to decipher the complexity of marked elements and recognize the subtle dynamics between truth and falsehood embedded in the semiotic structure. The factors (signifying elements) analyzed within this theory are as follows:

1. **The observing subject (S1, S2, etc.)**: The term describes people who observe the subject matter under study as well as the discourse being analyzed. The subjects who analyze signs and symbols bring their individual perspectives and cultural backgrounds and personal biases which shape their interpretation of the material.
2. **The object being observed (O1, O2, etc.)**: The object refers to the text or discourse under examination which can include literary works and political speeches and visual art. The identification of the object enables researchers to study how signs and symbols function in their particular context.
3. **The characteristic of the object Being Observed (C1, C2, etc.)**: This factor is crucial in the veridictory square of Greimas and Courtés' concept. Characteristics may include verifiability, consistency with known facts, or conformity with social norms.
4. **Markers for seeming and being (M1, M2)**: M1 is the marker for seeming, suggesting that something is not what it appears to be. M2 is the marker for being, confirming that something is what it appears to be. Identifying these markers helps analyze language and discourse structure.
5. **The four terms: being, seeming, not-being, and not-seeming***:* These terms are arranged to create different relationships, enabling the analysis of statements in a text and identification of contradictions or inconsistencies.
6. **The four metaterms (or compound terms)***:* These define the veridictory categories:
   a) **True** or **truth** (*being* + *seeming*): This category addresses situations wherein actors are engaged in the pursuit of truth or endeavoring to uphold truthfulness. Here, it concerns the realm where actions and attitudes are intertwined with transparency, openness, and sincerity.
   b) **Illusory** or **lie** (*not-being* + *seeming*): Actors in this category may deliberately deceive or create false impressions in order to achieve a certain goal or maintain power.
   c) **False** or **falsehood** (*not-being* + *not-seeming*): Here, the actors are associated with the general concept of falsehood and untruthfulness. This could encompass situations where the actors are dishonest, manipulative, or deceitful.
   d) **Secret** or **dissimulation** (*being* + *not-seeming*)**:** This category pertains to situations where actors are associated with concealing information or maintaining secrecy. It involves actions carried out in secrecy to protect certain interests or achieve a specific outcome.
7. **The object's position on the square (1, 2, 3, 4)**: Assigning a number based on its relationship to the four categories, helping to identify contradictions or inconsistencies:
   a) **Position 1 – Truth** *(being + seeming)*: This position represents the assertion of truth or the genuine nature of an object. When an object occupies this position, it signifies a claim or representation that aligns with reality and factual accuracy. Analysts assign the number 1 to objects in this category, emphasizing the adherence to truth and the absence of distortion.

b) **Position 2 – Falsehood** *(not-being + not-seeming):* Objects positioned here convey falsehood or an assertion that diverges from reality. When an object is placed in this category, it implies a departure from truth, introducing elements of fabrication, misinformation, or distortion. The number 2 is assigned to denote the deviation from truth and the presence of falseness.

c) **Position 3 – Secret** *(being + not-seeming)*: Objects in this position project an appearance of falseness, yet upon closer inspection, they align with reality. Assigned the number 3, this category indicates instances where the initial impression may be deceptive, but the object, upon thorough examination, proves to be truthful. It underscores the importance of scrutinizing apparent falsities for hidden truths.

d) **Position 4 – Lie** *(not-being + seeming)*: This position involves objects that present themselves as truthful but may carry elements of deception or misrepresentation. Assigned the number 4, this category suggests a semblance of truth, making it a critical area for analysis. It highlights instances where an object may appear genuine but requires scrutiny to uncover underlying inaccuracies.

8. **Time (T)**: Represents the temporal aspect of the veridictory square. It includes time represented in the story, narrative time, and tactical time.

These factors provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing language, discourse, and the construction of meaning within a given context.

To illustrate the application of the veridictory square in political discourse, consider the "Ghost of Kyiv" misinformation that emerged during the early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The researchers chose this case because it provides detailed information about how misinformation spreads through political communication channels during times of conflict. The case demonstrates how myth-making interacts with media manipulation and public perception, thus making it suitable for veridictory square framework analysis. The "Ghost of Kyiv" represents an important case study because it demonstrates how symbolic stories get created and spread to affect public spirit and direct political conversations.

The case's selection is further justified by its clear demonstration of key theoretical concepts – such as seeming versus being and truth versus falsehood – and its direct relevance to contemporary geopolitical events. The story contains various semiotic elements which create multiple layers of meaning that help explain how fake news operates and how information warfare functions through symbolic communication.

The "Ghost of Kyiv" fake news story first appeared when Russia started its invasion of Ukraine through reports of a MiG-29 pilot who downed six Russian aircraft in quick succession. The pilot's true identity remained unknown to the public while multiple established news organizations and fact-checkers started questioning the validity of the reported achievement. The story emerged as part of an information warfare effort to enhance Ukrainian national spirit and fight against Russian psychological operations during the invasion.

Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko even contributed to the spread of this misinformation by sharing a photo on Twitter (X), falsely presenting it as a picture of the "Ghost of Kyiv". This only added to the confusion and made it difficult for many to distinguish between fact and propaganda. In a subsequent revelation, Ukraine's Air Force Command eventually admitted that the "Ghost of Kyiv" was a purely mythical figure, intentionally created to lift the spirits of the Ukrainian people and serve as a symbol of resistance.

Compounding the situation, it was later discovered that the video footage supposedly showing the "Ghost of Kyiv" was actually computer-generated content from 2013, depicting a simulated dogfight between a Ukrainian pilot – referred to in the game as the "Ghost of Kyiv" – and a Russian aircraft. This video had initially been uploaded to YouTube using footage from a video game simulation, and it was later shared by the official Twitter account of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Eventually, the content was debunked by Snopes, a widely recognized social

media fact-checking website, which revealed that the video had been misrepresented and taken out of its original context (Eisle, 2022).

Applying Greimas and Courtés' theory of the veridictory square to analyze the dissemination of misinformation concerning the "Ghost of Kyiv" entails an intricate semiotic inquiry utilizing several key components (markers): 1. the observing subject (S1, S2, etc.), 2. the object being observed (O1, O2, etc.), 3. the characteristic of the object being observed (C1, C2, etc.), 4. the marker(s) for seeming and being (M1, M2), 5. the four terms: being and seeming and their negations, not-being, and not-seeming. 6. the four metaterms that define the four veridictory categories, 7. the object's position on the square, and 8. time (T).

1. The observing subject (S): Various sources, including the Security Service of Ukraine, Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, and media outlets, have reported on the "Ghost of Kyiv".
2. The object being observed (O): The "Ghost of Kyiv", a mythical MiG-29 Fulcrum flying ace credited with shooting down six Russian planes over Kyiv during the Kyiv offensive on February 24, 2022.
3. The characteristic of the object being observed (C): The "Ghost of Kyiv" is a myth credited as a morale booster for Ukrainians and as a narrative for Ukraine's success during the invasion.
4. The marker(s) for seeming and being (M1, M2): Seeming refers to how something appears or is perceived while being refers to what something actually is. The "Ghost of Kyiv" seemed to be a real person who shot down six Russian planes, but in reality, he did not exist.
5. The four terms:
   a) Being:
      - The fake news story claimed that the "Ghost of Kyiv" shot down six Russian planes during the initial invasion.
      - Former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko even tweeted a photo falsely claiming it to be the "Ghost of Kyiv".
      - The video shorts of the "Ghost of Kyiv" were a computer-generated video of a dogfight between a Ukrainian pilot called the "Ghost of Kyiv" and a Russian plane that was uploaded on YouTube using a video game in 2013.
   b) Seeming:
      - The identity of the pilot was never confirmed.
      - Multiple sources suggest that the story was likely part of an "information war" to counter the Russian invasion.
      - The "Ghost of Kyiv" was a mythical character created by Ukrainians to boost morale.
      - The video was shared by the official Twitter account of the Armed Forces of Ukraine but was later debunked by Snopes, which proved the video was miscaptioned.
   c) Not-Being*:*
      - The "Ghost of Kyiv" did not actually shoot down six Russian planes.
      - The "Ghost of Kyiv" was not a real person.
   d) Not-Seeming:
      - The story was not true and was likely part of an "information war" to counter the Russian invasion.
      - The video was not authentic and was uploaded on YouTube using a video game in 2013.
      - The photo tweeted by Poroshenko was not of the "Ghost of Kyiv".
6. The four metaterms:
      - True or truth (B+S)*:* The "Ghost of Kyiv" is not a real person but a myth created for moral and narrative purposes.
      - Illusory or lie (NB+S)*:* The belief in the "Ghost of Kyiv" as a real person who shot down six Russian planes is a falsehood.
      - False or falsehood (NB+NS)*:* The "Ghost of Kyiv" did not exist, so the claim that he shot down six Russian planes is a falsehood.

- Secret or dissimulation (B+NS): The creation and spread of the "Ghost of Kyiv" myth was intentionally fabricated to deceive and manipulate people's perceptions of the conflict.

7. The object's position on the square: The object's position on the veridictory square is in the quadrant of Lie (4), where there is a seeming appearance of truth, but in reality, it is a fabrication meant to deceive people.
8. Time: The belief in the "Ghost of Kyiv" as a real person who shot down six Russian planes was prevalent during and shortly after the Kyiv offensive. However, two months later, the Ukrainian Air Force acknowledged the myth's falsehood.

The examination of the fabricated news narrative surrounding the "Ghost of Kyiv" through the lens of Greimas and Courtés' semiotic theory of the veridictory square elucidates that the narrative served as a concocted legend crafted to bolster morale and shape the narrative landscape amidst the Russian invasion. While the story initially conveyed an air of authenticity or semblance thereof, it ultimately unfolded as a deliberate fabrication intended to mislead individuals.

The object stands in the Lie (4) quadrant of the veridictory square which presents deceptive truth that aims to distort public understanding of the conflict. The myth gained widespread acceptance during the Kyiv offensive period and its immediate aftermath until Ukrainian Air Force officials revealed its falseness two months later. The situation demonstrates why people need to verify information sources before sharing content, especially when conflicts or emergencies occur (Iskanderova, 2024).

The application of Greimas and Courtés' veridictory square to analyze the "Ghost of Kyiv" myth reveals how truth interacts with perception and manipulation in contemporary war stories. The strategic creation and spread of this story functioned as an effective instrument to influence public attitudes and military spirit during Ukraine's essential defense against Russian invasion. The story gained initial credibility through its believable nature before experts exposed it as a strategic fabrication which Ukraine used to strengthen its resistance and present a more favorable view of the conflict.

The veridictory square demonstrates how myths and misinformation function as lies because they present themselves as true content but actually contain false information. The combination of emotional resonance and sense of immediate danger makes these false narratives highly successful when people are most susceptible to manipulation during crisis situations.

The "Ghost of Kyiv"example demonstrates that information ecosystems require both content creators to evaluate ethical risks of their stories and users to verify facts before accepting or spreading information.

Public figures need to stay away from information manipulation because their statements affect public understanding of reality. The veridictory square framework helps people identify misinformation methods, which demonstrates why media literacy training and fact-checking practices remain crucial for protecting information accuracy during periods of conflict.

4 Discussion

The research results demonstrate that media-political argumentation exists as a multifaceted system which affects how people understand information while respecting truth boundaries. Across sources, platforms, and audiences, argumentation proves to be a strategic tool used by politicians, moderators, journalists, and media organizations to influence how information is presented, understood, and acted upon. Using the veridictory square, the study shows that narratives are rarely neutral; instead, they are carefully constructed, balancing appearances and reality, truth and falsehood, with the aim of persuading and guiding public opinion.

In the source context, the research illustrates how the intentions, rhetorical strategies, and institutional positions of media producers shape political discourse before it reaches the public. Media professionals who serve as moderators and journalists actively shape political discussions through their argumentative frameworks which determine how debates appear to audiences and what topics receive emphasis and what level of trust they will have in the information. The political dialogue shows an unequal power dynamic because question selection and interruption patterns and editorial choices create a system that functions as both a performance and a persuasive tool. Political figures use these communication patterns to support their positions while creating emotional and intellectual connections with their audience to gain strategic benefits in media environments.

Within the medium context, structural and institutional factors, such as ownership, regulatory frameworks, market pressures, and algorithmic amplification, play a central role in shaping argumentation. Media organizations use their position to select which stories will receive attention and which will fade into obscurity. The mediated space allows argumentation to pass through two layers of influence which stem from both source intentions and structural incentives that include audience metrics and political-economic factors. The reinforcement of cognitive biases through selective exposure and confirmation bias and emotional susceptibility shows that argumentation surpasses logical reasoning to affect psychological and social cultural aspects of audience reception.

The recipient context emphasizes that argumentation is fully realized only when interpreted by audiences, whose prior knowledge, cultural values, and social experiences mediate the perceived meaning of messages. The veridictory square semiotic analysis reveals that the "Ghost of Kyiv" narrative presents itself as authentic, yet it remains completely made-up. These examples demonstrate how symbolic narratives and misinformation use emotional appeal together with social context and perceptual plausibility to shape beliefs and political attitudes and military morale. These narratives gain increased power through audience reception and sharing activities which demonstrate how political communication creates arguments through collective participation.

The study shows that media-political argumentation contains multiple layers which combine rhetorical elements with logical structures and psychological aspects and linguistic components. The persuasive strength of argumentation depends on logical evidence, performance, emotional impact, and symbolic meaning equally. The veridictory square serves as an analytical tool which helps researchers distinguish between truthful and false arguments while revealing how political and social goals are achieved through strategic combinations of truth and falsehood.

5 Limitations

The study acknowledges several methodological limitations. First, the context-specific nature of the analysis may limit the transferability of findings to other national or cultural media systems. To address this, the study provides detailed descriptions of the media contexts and cases examined, allowing readers to evaluate the relevance of the findings in different settings.

Second, the analysis depends on temporal sensitivity because media and political discourse evolve quickly, which impacts how interpretations remain relevant throughout time. The study uses recent documented media examples and integrates previous research findings to establish temporal context for the observed patterns.

Third, the interpretive nature of qualitative semiotic analysis creates subjectivity because researchers must use their analytical judgment to reach conclusions. The study reduces subjectivity through systematic coding methods and source triangulation and theoretical framework cross-references which improve both analytical precision and research transparency.

Finally, the availability of particular media content might restrict the research because it could affect how well the qualitative corpus represents its subject matter. The research uses multiple sources to overcome this challenge by providing complete material coverage and reducing missing information in the analyzed materials.

The research's credibility and trustworthiness increase through these measures, which recognize the natural limitations of qualitative research in media and political discourse.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this publication was to examine the role of argumentation in media-political discourse, focusing on how media dialogues, moderators, and framing of information contribute to the persuasive power of political communication. The research demonstrated how media organizations create political outcomes through their ability to construct and alter narratives, which affects how people perceive political events. Media platforms function as battlegrounds where political figures use strategic argumentation to influence public opinion while promoting their preferred beliefs and agendas.

This exploration has highlighted the significant impact of media framing, which can either clarify or distort reality, depending on the political, ideological, or commercial motives behind it. The rise of digital platforms and the increasing prioritization of engagement over accuracy further complicate this dynamic, fostering sensationalism and polarization. The role of argumentation in these media exchanges is crucial, as it employs a range of psychological, linguistic, and logical techniques that appeal to emotions, biases, and pre-existing beliefs, often shaping how audiences interpret political messages.

The application of semiotic theory through the veridictory square has provided essential knowledge about how media organizations create relationships between authentic and fake information. The analytical framework helps us identify hidden patterns of information presentation, which shows how media organizations influence what people understand about the world. The protection of public discourse depends on both media producers and consumers, who need to handle media content with critical awareness.

The research showed different ways to enhance the current system for studying media and political discourse analysis. The framework demonstrates its ability to analyze contemporary media effects on political communication through the addition of semiotic tools and advanced argumentation technique knowledge. The updated framework enables researchers to understand media narrative development and control methods and consumption patterns, which strengthens political discourse media analysis.

Bibliography

Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. Éditions du Seuil.

Buček, J., & Zouhar, M. (2015). *Argumentácia a médiá*. Comenius University Bratislava.

Čmejrková, S., & Hoffmannová, J. (2003). *Jazyk, média, politika*. Academia.

de-Lima-Santos, M.-F., Gonçalves, I., Quiles, M. G., Mesquita, L., Ceron, W., & Couto Lorena, M. C. (2024). Visual political communication on Instagram: A comparative study of Brazilian presidential elections. *EPJ Data Science*, *13*, 72. https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-024-00502-0

Eco, U. (1979). *The role of the reader: Explorations in the semiotics of the text*. Indiana University Press.

Eisle, I. (2022, April 5). *Fact check: The 'Ghost of Kyiv' fighter pilot*. https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-ukraines-ghost-of-kyiv-fighter-pilot/a-60951825

Garrett, R. K., Weeks, B. E., & Neo, R. L. (2016). Driving a wedge between evidence and beliefs: How online ideological news exposure promotes political misperceptions. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *21*(5), 331-348. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12164

Greatbatch, D., & Clark, T. (2005). *Management speak*: *Why we listen to what management gurus tell us*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087718

Greimas, A. J. (1971). Narrative grammar: Units and levels. *MLN*, *86*(6), 793-806. https://doi.org/10.2307/2907443_

Greimas, A. J. (1987). *On meaning: Selected writings in semiotic theory*. University of Minnesota Press.

Hájek, R. (2015). *Politici: Média jsou vlivná, demokracii nepomáhají*. https://cz.ejo-online.eu/3284/medialni-zurnalistika/politici-media-jsou-vlivna-demokracii-nepomahaji

Hanyšová Celá, Z. (2015). Politické zpravodajství jako „Reality show". In *Média a politika: Metodický materiál* (p. 2). Media Set Box. http://www.mediasetbox.cz/data/_text/000003/media-a-politika-uprava-metodickeho-materialu-media-set-box.pdf

Hébert, L., & Tabler, J. (2019). The semiotic square. In L. Hébert, & J. Tabler (Eds.), *An introduction to applied semiotics* (pp. 40-49). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429329807

Iskanderova, T. (2024). *Unveiling semiotic codes of fake news and misinformation: Contemporary theories and practices for media professionals*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53751-6

Jirák, J., & Köpplová, B. (2007). *Média a společnost*. Portál.

McChesney, R. W. (2015). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times* (2nd ed.). The New Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.31731998

McQuail, D. (2009). *Reader in mass communication theory*. Sage.

Römer-Pieretti, M., Said-Hung, E., & Montero-Díaz, J. (2025). Semiotic analysis of hate discourse in Spanish digital news media: Biden's inauguration case study. *Violence, Hate Speech, and Gender Bias: Challenges to an Inclusive Digital Environment*, *13*, 9295. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.9295

Schegloff, E. A. (2002). Accounts of conduct in interaction: Interruption, overlap, and turn-taking. In J. H. Turner (Ed.), *Handbook of sociological theory* (pp. 287-321). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36274-6_15

Schoor, C. (2021). Probing into populism's core: An analysis of the deep semio-linguistic structure underlying populism. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *18*(2), 226-244. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1769698

Sjøvaag, H., & Ohlsson, J. (2019). Media ownership and journalism. In *The Oxford encyclopedia of journalism studies*. Retrieved January 30, 2024, from https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.839

Soprano, M., Roitero, K., La Barbera, D., Ceolin, D., Spina, D., Demartini, G., & Mizzaro, S. (2024). Cognitive biases in fact-checking and their countermeasures: A review. *Information Processing & Management*, *61*(3), 103672. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2024.103672

Stroud, N. J. (2010). Polarization and partisan selective exposure. *Journal of Communication*, *60*(3), 556-576. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01497.x

U.S. Department of Justice. (2019). *Report on the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election: Volume I of II*. U.S. Department of Justice. https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf

Valentino, N. A., Brader, T., Groenendyk, E. W., Gregorowicz, K., & Hutchings, V. L. (2011). Election night's alright for fighting: The role of emotions in political participation. *The Journal of Politics*, *73*(1), 156-170. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000939

Válová, I. (2000). Ne vláda lůzy ani elity, ale vláda lidu. In *Diskuse o roli televize veřejné služby v české společnosti na počátku 21. století* (pp. 108-111). Česká televize. https://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/publikace-ct/pdf/CT_vec_verejna.pdf

Wiener, N. (2019). *Cybernetics: Or control and communication in the animal and the machine* (Reissue of 2nd ed.). MIT Press.

Zarocostas, J. (2020). How to fight an infodemic. *The Lancet*, *395*(10225), 676. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30461-X

Authors

Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Jaroslav Buček, Ph.D.

AMBIS High School
Department of Marketing and Tourism
Lindnerova 575/1,
Praha 8 – Libeň, 180 00, Czech Republic
jaroslav.bucek@mail.ambis.cz
ORCID-ID: N/A

Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Jaroslav Buček, Ph.D., is an associate professor at AMBIS High School in Prague, where he has been delivering lectures and seminars on argumentation, negotiation, media communication, and interaction with the media since 2016. He is a prolific author, having published extensively in professional studies and books. His expertise extends to lecturing and training for companies and institutions both domestically and internationally. With two decades of experience as a creative producer, screenwriter, and presenter in the media, he combines practical insights with academic knowledge in his work.

Mgr. Taťjana Iskanderova, Ph.D. et Ph.D.

AMBIS High School
Department of Marketing and Tourism
Lindnerova 575/1,
Praha 8 – Libeň, 180 00, Czech Republic
tatjana.iskanderova@ambis.cz
ORCID-ID: 0000-0002-4176-0271

Mgr. Taťjana Iskanderova, Ph.D. et Ph.D., is a researcher at AMBIS High School and has been a senior lecturer in the Department of Social and Media Studies for over 10 years. She has been collaborating with such esteemed institutions as Charles University in Prague, Jan Amos Komenský University, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Her expertise spans media analysis, sociology, public opinion research. She has contributed to numerous European and national ministerial research projects and has been actively engaged in consulting and academic initiatives. Her work is recognized through publications with leading international academic publishers.