



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Scare Tactics, Media Capture and the Pandemic: Argumentative Style in the Online News Media

Egres, Dorottya; Boogaart, Ronny; Garssen, Bart; Jansen, Henrike; Van Leeuwen, Maarten; Pilgram, Roosmaryn; Reuneker, Alex

Citation

Egres, D. (2024). Scare Tactics, Media Capture and the Pandemic: Argumentative Style in the Online News Media. *Proceedings Of The Tenth Conference Of The International Society For The Study Of Argumentation*, 254-264. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107785>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107785>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Scare Tactics, Media Capture and the Pandemic

*Argumentative Style in the Online News Media*¹

DOROTTYA EGRES

*Department of Philosophy and Technology of Science
Budapest University of Technology and Economics
Hungary
egres.dorottya@gtk.bme.hu*

ABSTRACT: This research explores argumentative style in institutional context of the news media, analysing the three aspects of strategic maneuvering. I present a case study from Hungary where the media can be described as mono-polar and statist commercialized. The Government and the pro-government media viewed the coronavirus as a further opportunity to delegitimize the non-government media by claiming that they spread scary rumours and fake news. I carry out the argumentative analysis of this phenomenon.

KEYWORDS: argumentative style, journalism, media systems, news media, political communication, pragma-dialectics, strategic maneuvering

1. INTRODUCTION

Argumentative style has recently received considerable attention in argumentation theory, specifically pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren, 2019). Empirical research on the topic pertains to the analysis of argumentative style in the political, diplomatic, legal, facilitatory, academic and medical domains (van Eemeren et al., 2022). This research explores argumentative style in the institutional context of the news media, taking the three aspects of strategic maneuvering into account as well as relying on the disciplines of journalism and media studies. Strategic maneuvering is an exceptionally useful conceptual framework to study journalistic style because in other disciplines, media content and form often get separated and examined independently of each other, or the focus is solely on presentation. However, with the help of the three aspects of topical potential, audience demand and presentational devices, a new picture of journalistic discourse can be drawn. This research presents an illustrative case study with which recurring patterns of engaged and detached argumentative styles are discussed in a captured media system. The research question is the following: How can the argumentative style of the pro-government media be characterized when they claim that the non-governmental media spread scary rumours and fake news? The research concerns the communicative phenomena in the Hungarian media brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The appearance of the coronavirus resulted in such a crisis that demanded fast, detailed and trustworthy media coverage. This necessitated the government's cooperation with all media outlets. Events in March 2020 (the first month of the pandemic) presented new challenges for the Hungarian press, such as daily press conferences by high-ranking

¹ This research was supported by 'EXPRIMER - Political communication in the age of expressivity' (NKFIH FK_131990) at the Institute for Political Science, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence.

public officials and the amended crime of scaremongering in the Criminal Code.² At the same time, citizens became witness to how the Hungarian government and the pro-government media attempted to delegitimize the non-government media and make their work impossible. As an example, the public broadcasting media started a show called *We uncover the fake news* in which they discussed reliable news items from the non-government media. As another example, in a pro-government television talk show, the following remark was made about journalists not supporting the government: “some of these scaremongers should be visibly sat in a police car and taken away.”³ Pro-government criticism referred to how the non-governmental media scare their readers, moreover, induce danger to the public which is unnecessary thanks to the Government’s adequate crisis management. However, the disinformation and delegitimization propagandized by the pro-government media could not only harm non-governmental journalists, but citizens as well. To understand the severity and significance of the case study, it is important to discuss the Hungarian media system. Hungary as well as many Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries do not fit into the tripartite media systematization conceptualized by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Although CEE countries’ media systems resemble that of the polarized pluralist (or otherwise known Mediterranean) countries, they present meaningful deviations. The Hungarian media system can be characterized as statist-commercialized which means that the government has control of the public media and much of the private media. Despite the semblance of political parallelism, parties in the political opposition do not have their own media outlets. Thus, a mono-polar media landscape has been in the making since 2010, the start of the Fidesz-regime with a parliamentary majority. Journalist often go against professional norms, mainly the duty of helping the public make informed political decisions. Their aim is to ensure the continued rule of the government. As a result of the skewed media system, unethical journalistic practices became profitable. It is political loyalty that pays off instead of high-quality journalistic performance. Meanwhile, trust in media organizations decrease. Hungary fits into the trends observed in CEE countries, but their volume and effects seem to be outstanding. These particularistic media policy practices have been first been enacted in Hungary and can serve as a model for other countries in the region (Bajomi-Lázár, 2017; 2019).

In the following section, I will briefly discuss the theory of strategic maneuvering and the concept of argumentative style, as well as the function of the media and the argumentative characteristics of news articles. In the methodological chapter, I will disclose how I chose the articles for analysis. I will then carry out the argumentative analysis of the articles taking the three aspects of strategic maneuvering into account. Results show that most of the articles published by the pro-government media can be

² “First, not only are false statements which may disturb public order now a criminal offense, but also those which are capable of hindering or foiling the effectiveness of the defence (against the coronavirus in the present case). Second, it is no longer necessary to commit the crime at the scene of a public danger, but it is enough for it to take place during a special legal order, regardless of the location. There is currently a state of danger in Hungary and the government is able to maintain this state for an unlimited time period. The penalty has also been tightened, as the act is now punishable by imprisonment for up to five years instead of the previous three.” Hungarian Civil Liberties Union. How not to commit “scaremongering?” April 29, 2020. <https://hclu.hu/en/articles/how-not-to-commit-scaremongering> (Last visited: June 24, 2023).

³ Sajtóklub (2020-03-16) - HÍR TV. March 16, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjxt70Avquc> (Last visited: June 24, 2023).

characterized by the engaged argumentative style, and only one article can be characterized by the detached argumentative style. Lastly, concluding remarks will pertain to the empirical results and the media system.

2. STRATEGIC MANEUVERING IN THE NEWS MEDIA AND THE ARGUMENTATIVE STYLE OF JOURNALISTS

In the theory of pragma-dialectics, strategic maneuvering refers to the arguers' continuous effort to keep the balance between dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness in every step of the argumentation. Within strategic maneuvering, three aspects are distinguished: topical potential, audience demand and presentational devices. The distinct yet inseparable aspects are associated with types of choices made in the process of maneuvering. In each step, the arguer decides how to apply the topical potential and the presentational devices in order to satisfy audience demand. The topical potential includes the arguments and argument schemes available in the argumentative situation. Thus, the topical potential is the repertoire of options for making an argumentative move at a particular point in the argumentative discourse. The topical choice refers to the selection of those arguments and schemes from the topical potential that connect to the audience's preferences and promote the perspective connected to the goals of the arguer. The concept of audience demand refers to the effort of making a selection which pleases the audience or places the case in a perspective which resonates with the audience. The selection of the presentational devices involves a choice about how the argumentative moves are presented in the way that is strategically best (van Eemeren, 2010).

Strategic maneuvering is connected to distinct institutional contexts according to which the communicative and argumentative practices are conventionalized (van Eemeren, 2010). At this point, it is important to mention the institutional goals of the media and journalism, as well as the argumentative characteristics of news articles. The media have multiple fundamental functions: provide information about events and their contexts, articulate suggestions pertaining to the public's attitudes about events, provide fora for a wide range of views, mediate between the government and the people, exercise control over the government etc. (Christians et al., 2019). Journalism is a performative discourse aimed at imposing and legitimizing representations of the social world. Thus, news articles are not merely descriptions of events but strategic interpretations of them, giving journalists the possibility to assert their moral authority. News articles also encase the social world in a professional discourse which "has to convince the readers that events occurred exactly as the newspaper describes" (Broersma, 2017, p. xxviii).

The media became the place, the object and the tool in the fight between political forces. The relationship between the media and politics can be interpreted in multiple models (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These institutions might have an antagonistic or symbiotic relationship, but their close connections and interdependence cannot be questioned (Cook, 2005; Mazzoleni, 2012). The hybridity of contemporary media systems as well as the breakdown of boundaries between journalism and propaganda sold as journalism is well documented (Ekman & Widholm, 2022). No media scholar would ever say that the media are completely neutral anywhere in the world, even if journalists are

committed to the ideology of the objectivity doctrine (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Bajomi-Lázár, 2003).

Articles in the news media cannot be unambiguously distinguished from op-eds. However, based on the previously stated functions of the press, even news reportings can contain argumentation. I do not claim that every writing in the news media can be categorized as argumentative, it is more accurate to state that some articles are partly argumentative (Walton, 2017; van Eemeren, 2018). The difference of opinion is between the journalist and the reader. The journalist and the reader do not necessarily have different standpoints concerning the propositions in the article. The difference of opinion and the persuasion can be interpreted as the adherence of minds (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1959).

The strategic maneuvering of a news article means that the journalist reasonably presents the facts while attempting to persuade the reader of the article's interpretation of reality (van Eemeren, 2010; Morasso, 2010). The reader might view the article as reasonable because it is based on propositions which represent commitments and aims, and the article prompts the reader to draw seemingly reasonable conclusions based on the argument schemes used. Thus, the cognitive element cannot be disregarded. However, rhetorical effectiveness is paramount as the article emotionally affects the reader, and that is also a way to get the reader to accept the article's conclusion (Walton, 2007). Supporting the standpoint with arguments as well as persuading the audience can be analysed in terms of style. Remarks about style can pertain to the conduct of the debate, the arguers' mode of expression, their attitudes, linguistic elements, nonverbal communicative acts etc. Remarks about style can be analysed in relation to a speech event (e.g., the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden), a person, a type of communicate act (e.g., audio-visual political advertisements) or a period of a certain communicative act (e.g., op-eds in the 21st century) (van Eemeren, 2019).

When it comes to analysing argumentative texts and debates, it is important to differentiate between style and argumentative style. Argumentative style is worth examining based on its instrumental characteristic as it contributes to resolving the arguers' difference of opinion and the aim of the arguer to persuade their opponent and the audience. Thus, the focus is on the argumentative goal of style and connecting style to the characteristics of argumentative discourse. Argumentative style can be analysed in terms of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering: argumentative style systemically and consistently affects the choice from the topical potential and presentational devices in order to satisfy audience demand. Van Eemeren (2019) remarks that argumentation theory does not have a full catalogue of argumentative styles.

In my research, I will analyse two argumentative styles articulated by van Eemeren (2019): the engaged and the detached styles. In an argumentative text written in an engaged argumentative style, the arguer chooses starting points and topics with which they can emphasize their personal relation and involvement in the topic, and which can be familiar and close to the readers. The arguer's engagement and commitment can be expressed with informal language (e.g., first-person plural) and emotionally laden words. With the help of the often-employed comparison (or analogy) argument scheme, the arguer can relate their topic to ones already familiar and accepted. The detached argumentative style can be characterised by factual propositions, objectivity, easily verifiable starting points, formal or expert language and the causal argument scheme.

3. METHOD

The period chosen for analysis is March 2020, the month when the coronavirus was first detected in Hungary. The articles chosen for analysis were published in March 2020 on the 20 most read pro-government news media websites. However, not all news media outlets communicated extensively about how the non-government media spread scary rumours and fake news, only three of them did: Magyar Nemzet (n = 5), Pesti Srácok (n = 2) and Origo (n = 2) did. The aim of my research is not to analyse every article and provide the dialectical routes taken in each of them, only to show recurring characteristics of the engaged argumentative style as well as present the detached argumentative style in the one article published in the pro-government media.

4. THE ASPECT OF TOPICAL POTENTIAL

In the articles characterized by the engaged argumentative style, the most prominent starting point is how other countries deal with the virus. On the one hand, the health crises experienced in Italy and China can be familiar to most readers as these countries, their procedures and statistics got extensive media coverage in Hungary. On the other hand, there is Sweden, a country that is pejoratively labelled as a “*liberal model state*”,⁴ which cannot be called a progressive, nor an exemplary country due to certain provisions.

The pro-government media connect the non-government media to websites which are widely known as fake news sites. This coupling can be inserted into the comparison argument scheme as is known in pragma-dialectics. As previously noted, the comparison argument scheme is characteristic of the engaged argumentative style (van Eemeren, 2019). In the comparison argument scheme, one similarity between two entities justifies another similarity between the same two entities (van Eemeren & Garssen, 2020). In the news articles showing characteristics of the engaged argumentative style, multiple similarities between the non-government media and fake news sites are mentioned, and the same conclusion can be drawn from all the similarities. This conclusion is that the work of the non-government media is reprehensible and harmful, much like that of fake news sites. According to the pro-government media, the work of non-government journalists and “*scaremongering Facebook-champions*”⁵ is “*the biggest scoundrelism*”⁵ because they all cause fear. These news media sites are also falsifying news, therefore their case will be discussed by the Parliament thanks to the amendment of scaremongering in the Criminal Code. Non-government journalists are discussed in the same way as “*other loudmouths*”⁵ who will have to pay for their crimes. Another similarity can be identified in the following excerpt and that is how the non-government media and fake news sites are both controlled by the political opposition: “*The level of scaremongering in the non-governmental media barely surpasses that of fake news factories also operated by the opposition.*”⁶ The pro-

⁴ Bayer, Zs. Az elvtársak össze-vissza beszélnek. *Magyar Nemzet*. March 16, 2020. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemen/az-elvtarsak-osszevissza-beszelnék-7889411/>

⁵ Jeszenszky, Zs. Alattomos haszonlesők. *Magyar Nemzet*, March 19, 2020. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemen/alattomos-haszonlesok-7896260/>

⁶ Bálint, B. Ha az ellenzék és a sajtója így folytatja a pániknak lesznek áldozatai nem a járványnak! *Pesti Srácok*, March 10, 2020. <https://pestisracok.hu/ha-az-ellenzék-es-a-sajtoja-igy-folytatja-a-paniknak-lesznek-aldozatainak-a-jarvanynak/>

government media state that the scaremongering and panic-inducing communication of the non-government media is politically driven as journalists are dominated by their “*superegos*”⁷ as in the politicians. Additionally, the non-government media and the fake news sites “*are driven by profits per clicks*.”⁸ It is important to note that the pro-government media do not reflect on the difference between alarmist news (scary rumours) and fake news, they use these expressions interchangeably.

In van Eemeren’s study about argumentative style, he references the two argumentative techniques of *The New Rhetoric* (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958): association and dissociation. Association is the argumentative coupling of previously distinct elements into one unit, and dissociation is the argumentative separation of previously unified elements. By creating an association between the non-government media and fake news sites, readers are led to the conclusion that non-government media should be prosecuted in the same manner as fake news sites. Moreover, the articles in the pro-government media use dissociation of the non-government media from the traditional media. Thus, non-government media cannot provide reliable or credible news. One article draws attention to the “*disgrace*”⁹ and presents a detailed description of the press’ responsibility – “*it is a deadly sin, if some media outlets do not help the community, do not inform but create panic, aggravate and spread scary rumours*.”⁹ Another article states that “*this is not bravery or journalistic ethic, this is simply scaremongering and causing public danger*.”⁵ According to their reasoning, this is why the amendment of the Criminal Code is not only legitimate but necessary. The following can be an interesting example of degrading non-government journalists: “*I still consider the leftist-liberal press workers to be Hungarians, compatriots, my colleagues, and I respectfully ask them to take a deep breath, count to ten, and leave their 10 year-long pure hatred of Orbán behind, to abandon how their primary duty is not to do journalism but to fail at it [...] and stop spreading lies*.”¹⁰

Another way of degrading non-government journalists is to downgrade them to bloggers: “*the young and dishevelled bloggers of Index with their stretched-out sweaters*.”¹⁰ In the beginning of the 2000s, the battle of discursive legitimation and boundary work in journalism included that print journalists degraded online journalists to bloggers in order to protect the journalistic profession. In the demarcation battle between journalism versus non-journalism, bloggers were described as homebodies, unable to care for themselves or simply infantile (Tófalvy, 2016).

There is only one article showing the characteristics of the detached argumentative style.¹¹ In this article, the amendment of the Criminal Code is justified by factual propositions, the truth of which can be checked: “*The results of most recent opinion poll*

⁷ Bayer, Zs. Az igazi pánikkeltés. *Magyar Nemzet*, March 26, 2020. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/az-igazi-panikkeltés-7931762/>

⁸ Bácskai, B. Akadálytalanul terjednek a legelképezhetőbb álhírek is. *Magyar Nemzet*, March 23, 2020. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/akadalytalanul-terjednek-a-legelkepezhetőbb-alhírek-is-7917953/>

⁹ Nagy, E. Rémhír kufárok, avagy az ellenzéki sajtó becstelensége. *Pesti Srácok*, March 25, 2020. <https://pestisracok.hu/remhir-kufarok-avagy-az-ellenzeki-sajto-becstelensege/>

¹⁰ Apáti, B. Olasz és spanyol apokalipszis. *Magyar Nemzet*, March 28, 2020. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemen/olasz-es-spanyol-apokalipszis-7940387/>

¹¹ Lomnici, Z. Drákói szigor szükséges a köznyugalom és közbizalom megzavaróival. *origo.hu*, March 18, 2020. <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20200318-drakoi-szigorszukseges-a-koznyugalom-es-kozbizalom-megzavaróival-szemben.html>

show [...] that in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, there is a public consensus about the government's actions." This article also references statistical data: "74% of the respondents think that the spread of the coronavirus is alarming." However, the most important difference is that a causal argument scheme can be identified instead of the comparison scheme. According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992), one of the subtypes of the causal argument scheme is the pragmatic argument scheme. A pragmatic argument contains an appeal to the expediency of an act. The article notes that the amendment of the Criminal Code is necessary because "*the objected propositions are capable of increasing panic and decreasing the effectiveness of acts aimed at protecting the lives of Hungarian people.*" The author of the article is the legal expert, and he argues for the "*necessary draconian measures against those breaching the peace and public confidence.*"

To conclude, according to the pro-government media, there are multiple reasons for the scaremongering of the non-government media: overthrowing the government and Fidesz, helping the opposition make profit ("*even in this time of crisis, they are serving political interests*"⁹), increasing their readership ("*exchanging people's fear for clicks*"¹²) or simply viciousness ("*they are all cheering for the virus*"¹⁰).

5. THE ASPECT OF AUDIENCE DEMAND

Most schools of argumentation theory emphasize the importance of taking the audience into consideration (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958; Tindale, 2004; van Eemeren, 2010). However, these theories segment the audience differently: primary and secondary (van Eemeren, 2010), intended and actual (Crosswhite, 1996; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958; Tindale, 2006), real and projected (van Eemeren, 2015a). These distinctions imply that it is not unambiguous who the audience is in an argumentative situation (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2016; Tindale, 2015).

The makeup and attitudes of the audience watching and reading the pro-government media could be identified by the pro-government media outlets themselves or public opinion polls. Present research cannot undertake the analysis of the intended or the actual audiences of the news articles published by the pro-government media. However, in the analysis of strategic maneuvering, the aspect of audience demand can be inferred from the argumentative characteristics of the articles – those characteristics with which the audience could be reached according to the authors.

In the articles characterized by the engaged argumentative style, authors regularly use the plural first-person personal and possessive pronouns. 'We' refers to the whole population of Hungary fighting the coronavirus or the community between the author and the readers who reach the article's conclusion together: "*Miklós Hargitay* [a non-government journalist] *opened our eyes on Saturday.*"⁴ The author supposes that the readers are unfamiliar with something published in the non-government media: "*I decided to share the news articles from the opposition media with you, so that you can also see.*"⁴ There is a sudden distancing from 'we' when it comes to the victims of the non-

¹² Az ellenzéki média pánikot akar kelteni a koronavírus miatt, aki pedig ezt szónak teszi, azt megpróbálják megaláztatni. *origo.hu*, March 1, 2020. <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20200229-hisztéria-panik-balliberalis-media.html>

governmental media's scaremongering – "*if they are led to believe that nothing works, everything is faulty, that the decision-makers and authorities are not on top of the situation, they might not only panic*,"⁵ "*the opposition media spreading scary rumours is making many people unstable*."⁹

In the article representing the detached argumentative style,¹¹ the pronoun 'we' refers to the standpoint of the author and the organization he is working for: "*we believe that this is not only about morally questionable clickbait or political profit-making*." This article also mentions the increasing anxiety "*in the Hungarian population*" and the protection of "*Hungarian people*," as well as abstract concepts such as freedom and law.

6. THE ASPECT OF PRESENTATIONAL DEVICES

The analysis of presentational devices includes stylistic and structural characteristics, such as choice of expression, mode of argumentation (verbal, visual, multimodal), the venue at which the arguments are made (Fahnestock, 2009; Zarefsky, 2009). In the following, I will focus on how the pro-government media refer to the non-government media because this can be connected to the topical choice of associating them with fake news sites as well as dissociating them from traditional media.

The pro-government media articles characterized by the engaged argumentative style only call non-government media as opposition media or independent in quotation marks: "*the opposition media chorus who thinks of themselves as independentobjective*,"⁸ "*objective-independent-progressive (synonyms of leftist-liberal) media*."⁹ These expressions can be taken as justification for political subordination, much like the following: "*party press of Gyurcsány [former Prime Minister, now opposition politician]*,"¹² "*party press of DK [party of Gyurcsány]*,"¹² "*the amendment of the Criminal Code is not supported by the opposition while their servants in the press are whining like a dog scared of reprimand and messing under the table*."⁹ Other expressions are put between quotation marks as well: "*journalist*"⁵ and "*expert*"⁴ with which non-government journalists are discredited. Similarly, the following expressions are employed to degrade them: "*trash media*,"⁷ "*cunning grabbers*,"⁵ "*crooks*."⁷ Non-government media are being compared to fake news sites as such: "*the leading fake news sewer of the opposition*,"⁶ "*peddlers of scaremongering*."⁶

An important stylistic characteristic of audience demand is irony. In an argumentative and rhetorical sense, irony serves to build a connection between the rhetor and their audience. Irony is a sign of shared knowledge and a confidential relationship between the author and the readers (Booth, 1974; Kaufer, 1977; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958). It can be argued that the authors of the news articles would not employ irony if they did not presume that the intended meaning could be inferred by the audience, like in the following instances: "*the excellent thinking of Comrade Hargitay [a non-government journalist] fascinated me as well*,"⁴ "*how interesting it is that the opposition media chorus who thinks of themselves as independent objective has instantly taken the amendment up on themselves*."⁸

In the article representing the detached argumentative style,¹¹ the most important presentational device is the matter-of-fact technical language. Since the author of this article is a legal expert, the legal jargon is present: "*in addition to the need to preserve one's*

own authority (interior aspect), it is also necessary to speak briefly about the effectiveness of the external, primarily EU, institutional environment (exteriority).” The author refers to the non-government media in a markedly different way than in the articles characterized by the engaged argumentative style. He mentions “*certain online media*”, and when he quotes the titles of some articles, he refers to the media outlets as “*one of the popular online news media.*”

7. CONCLUSION

*“For the record, we don’t make up fake news. Moreover, we sometimes soften harsh reports because this is a time of emergency. We are fully aware of our responsibilities, and we report on reality by following the most serious rules of journalism”*¹³ – this was stated by one of the most prominent and widely read non-government online news media sites, as a response to the allegations brought up by the pro-government media.

News media with different political attitudes attacking each other is not unusual, but due to the amendment of the Criminal Code, the attacks took a turn for the worse. Actual fake news spread with an astonishing speed on social media platforms, thus it is undoubtedly important to combat the dissemination of fake and scaremongering news. However, the delegitimization attempts of the non-government media by the pro-government media could be seen as a political action, rather than a helpful warning to the people. Similarly, the amendment of scaremongering in the Criminal Code could be viewed as a “*political bludgeon*”¹⁴, rather than the attempt at sanctioning false rumours.

In my research, I carried out the analysis of argumentative style in the news articles published in the pro-government media, written about the scaremongering communication of the non-government media. Most news articles showed the characteristics of the engaged argumentative style, while only one article could be characterized by the detached argumentative style. The non-government media were associated with fake news sites and were dissociated from traditional media. This was justified by the allegation that non-government journalists create panic and spread scary rumours with the goal of getting more clicks and serving the political opposition. Concerning the strategic maneuvering identified in the news articles, the topical choice was reinforced with presentational devices, thus they could fulfil audience demand.

Based on the empirical analysis, two important conclusions can be drawn. First, media products can simultaneously serve multiple functions, but these functions distinctly come to the forefront in each article, e.g., providing information gets subsumed under the support for the government. Second, articles written in either argumentative style could inform people about events, build a community, create consensus as well as delegitimize certain actors. However, the dominance of articles showing the characteristic of the engaged argumentative style leads me to conclude that the authors of those articles believed that the engaged argumentative style could have a bigger potential.

The limitation of this research pertains to the small number of articles analysed, thus results may vary for another topic or period. A large-scale analysis could also shed

¹³ Magyari, P. Felelősségünk tudatában. *444.hu*, March 20, 2020. <https://444.hu/2020/03/20/felelossegunk-tudataban>

¹⁴ Urbán, Á. Az álhir az új Soros? *Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely*. June 4, 2020. <https://mertek.eu/2020/06/04/az-alhir-az-uj-soros/>

light on the potential connection between the media system and the argumentative style of journalists. However, some argue that this type of engagement and emotional involvement is becoming prominent in journalistic reporting and there is an “increased variety of valid news styles” (Peters 2011, p. 301). Lastly, one potential long-term influence of the consumption of politicized media is worth noting, and that is the loss of trust for the media by the consumers (Guess et al., 2020).

REFERENCES

- Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2003). Az objektivitás-doktrína nyomában. A politikai újságírás normái az Egyesült Államokban. *Médiakutató*, 4, 13–38.
- Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2017). Particularistic and universalistic media policies: Inequalities in the media in Hungary. *Javnost - The Public*, 24, 162–172.
- Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2019). A patrónusi-kliensi médiarendszer és az újságírói szükségletek Maslow-piramisa. *Médiakutató*, 20, 41–58.
- Booth, W. C. (1974). *A rhetoric of irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Broersma, M. (2007). Form, style and journalistic strategies. An introduction. In M. J. Broersma (Ed.), *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News 1880-2005* (pp. ix - xxix). Groningen Studies in Cultural Change; No. XXVI: Peeters.
- Christians, C. G. et al. (2019). *Normative theories of the media. Journalism in democratic societies*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Cook, T. E. (2005). *Governing with the news. The news media as a political institution*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Crosswhite, J. (1996). *The rhetoric of reason: Writing and the attractions of argument*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Eemeren, F. H. van (2010). *Strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse: Extending the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- (2015a). *Reasonableness and effectiveness in argumentative discourse: Fifty contributions to the development of pragma-dialectics*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- (2015b). Strategic manoeuvring in argumentative discourse in political deliberation. In F.H. van Eemeren, & W. Peng (Eds.), *Contextualizing pragma-dialectics* (pp. 123–44). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- (2018). *Argumentation theory: A pragma-dialectical perspective*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- (2019). Argumentative style: A complex notion. *Argumentation*, 33, 153–171.
- Eemeren, F. H. van, & Garssen, B. (2020). *From arguments schemes to argumentative relations in the wild. A variety of contributions to argumentation theory*. Cham: Springer.
- Eemeren, F. H. van, & Grootendorst, R. (1992). *Argumentation, communication and fallacies*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum.
- Eemeren, F. H. van, & Grootendorst, R. (2004). *A systematic theory of argumentation: The pragma- dialectical approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eemeren, F. H. van et al. (2022). *Argumentative style: A pragma-dialectical study of functional variety in argumentative discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Ekman, M., & Widholm, A. (2022). Parasitic news: Adoption and adaption of journalistic conventions in hybrid political communication. *Journalism*, 0, 1–18.
- Fahnestock, J. (2009). Quid pro nobis: Rhetorical stylistics for argument analysis. In F.H. van Eemeren (Ed.), *Examining argumentation in context: Fifteen studies on strategic maneuvering* (pp. 191–220). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Guess, A. M. et al. (2021). The consequences of online partisan media. *PNAS*, 118, 1–8.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufer, D. (1977). Irony and rhetorical strategy. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 10, 90–110.
- Mazzoleni, G. (2012). *La comunicazione politica*. Third edition. Bologna: Il Mulino.

- Morasso, S. G. (2010). Contextual frames and their argumentative implications: A case study in media argumentation. *Discourse Studies*, 14, 197–216.
- Palmieri, R., & Mazzali-Lurati, S. (2016). Multiple audiences as text stakeholders: A conceptual framework for analyzing complex rhetorical situations. *Argumentation*, 30, 467–499.
- Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1958). *La nouvelle rhétorique: Traité de l'argumentation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Peters, C. (2011). Emotion aside or emotional side? Crafting an ‘experience of involvement’ in the news. *Journalism*, 12, 297–316.
- Tindale, C. W. (2004). *Rhetorical argumentation: Principles of theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Tindale, C. W. (2006). Constrained maneuvering: Rhetoric as a rational enterprise. *Argumentation*, 20, 447–466.
- Tindale, C. W. (2015). *The philosophy of argument and audience reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tófalvy, T. (2016). Pízsamás bloggerek, hiteles újságírók: az újságírás határmunkálatainak fogalmi alapjairól. *Szociológiai Szemle*, 26, 4–17.
- Walton, D. (2007). *Media argumentation: Dialectic, persuasion, and rhetoric*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zarefsky, D. (2009). Strategic maneuvering in political argumentation. In F.H. van Eemeren (Ed.), *Examining argumentation in context: Fifteen studies on strategic maneuvering* (pp. 115–30). Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company.