



Two narratives about Poland and society. Analysis of news programmes: Fakty TVN and Wiadomości TVP

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Abstract

The media landscape in Poland is increasingly polarised, with broadcasters promoting biased narratives that conveniently omit certain issues that do not align with their agenda. These narratives use rhetorical devices and symbolism to manipulate people's perception of social reality and cultivate a shared worldview that legitimises their stance. This polarisation is linked to political parallelism, where media outlets align themselves with specific political factions and abandon their impartiality.

In Poland, identity media is prevalent, with broadcasters providing pre-packaged interpretations of news stories that further fuel the polarisation. It creates echo chambers, also known as epistemic bubbles.

The study examined news coverage from *Wiadomości TVP* and *Fakty TVN*, analysing the narratives presented and the values and topics covered. Broadcasters promoted different narratives, contributing to social divisions and strengthening dichotomy, with fixed topics dominating the coverage. The study underscores the media's significant role in changing public opinion pressure, especially in controlling the authorities.

Keywords:

[news](#), [narrations](#), [dichotomy](#), [polarisation](#), [public opinion](#), [social division](#).

<https://doi.org/10.18778/2300-1690.24.04>

Introduction

This study delves into the narrative paradigm, which postulates that a community's perception of reality is based on stories. The narrative paradigm, prevalent in contemporary media messages, supersedes the rational paradigm that relies on facts and logical arguments. The narrators, who, in this case, are media broadcasters and journalists, employ stories to arrange events in a logical sequence that is comprehensible to the audience, thereby constructing a coherent worldview that is shared among them. Drawing on Walter Fisher's categories, the media viewer assumes the status of homo narrans, implying that communication involves the utilisation of symbols to narrate specific stories, while also listening to stories reported by others (Fisher, 1984, p. 9). Furthermore, the viewer juxtaposes their biography with the symbolically rich stories presented to them. Therefore, narrative serves as a repository of core content and becomes the content itself, providing a coherent model for organising knowledge about the world (White, 2014, p. 69).

When analysing media narratives, we rely on the paradigm of social constructionism. This is because we believe that narratives are used to legitimise a particular view of the world introduced by the sender-narrator. This legitimisation process creates connections between new and pre-existing meanings, which involve various institutional processes (Berger & Luckmann, 2010, p. 136). Legitimation is crucial in helping us understand the reality around us, the logic of subsequent events, and their consequences. It becomes especially significant when deconstruction processes take place within a social system. Such processes create opposing communities that refer to other competing symbolic universes, leading to social divisions and, as a result, polarisation.

We directed our attention to news programs because a growing polarisation in journalistic narratives is noticeable in the Polish media market, concerning competitive or antagonistic broadcasters towards each other. Polarisation in the media is becoming structural and concerns the messages and the journalistic environment (Klimkiewicz, 2021). It results in a biased presentation of selected social and political issues or the silence and omission of specific issues that do not fit the media narrative (Klimkiewicz, 2022). We understand narratives as intentional interpretations of the past (Burszta, 2013, pp. 245–246), with which certain judgements of events and characters are introduced. They influence the understanding of social reality using specific rhetorical devices, including symbolism. They are characterised by consistency and coherence relating to the stories they tell, often having the character of a cause-and-effect sequence. They have the formula of a closed text that leaves no room for interpretation for the viewer. Their function is to legitimise the presented vision of the world by constructing a community that shares this vision. The introduction of narratives into media discourse is, therefore, based on the intentional presentation of data, which is expected to have the desired effect from the narrator's point of view (Wasilewski, 2012, p. 25). Firmly entrenched narratives in the media and their audiences can take on the characteristics of unassailable dogma (Jakubowska-Branicka, 2013, pp. 37–39), resulting in a social divide between the media-constructed communities in this way (Kotras, 2023). This type of polarisation is also related to the issue of political parallelism in the media. This phenomenon refers to the melding and nature of the links between the media and political parties, or in a broader sense, the extent to which the media reflect the political divisions in society. In this case, it is about the explicit involvement of media

broadcasters in supporting a particular political environment, which usually involves abandoning the role of impartial informant (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Following Rafał Matyja, the nature of messages on the Polish media market makes it possible to speak of identity media, i.e. media that are not necessarily used to find out about events taking place in the world around us but to provide ourselves with arguments confirming that someone perceives reality in the same way as we do. Most media reports, therefore, come in the form of ready-made interpretative packages prepared by the broadcaster (Matyja, 2018). The individual feels that he or she is not alone in his or her way of thinking, thus becoming established in his or her opinions and views. Therefore, one chooses a medium closer to her worldview because she finds in it a reference to elements of her own identity. As a result, one does not wonder which news service to watch on a given day or which radio station to listen to because the choice becomes obvious and natural. One is confident that the chosen broadcaster will not radically change how it presents data, as it is usually consistent.

In the field of social and political communication, there is a tendency for media representations of the political scene to reinforce polarisation, particularly among broadcasters competing with each other. They use specific narratives that consistently guide their audiences, creating an attachment between the sender and receiver. This attachment results in the construction of what is known as an "echo chamber," where the individuals within the chamber share similar beliefs and values. It can be seen as an epistemic bank where similar knowledge is deposited and reinforced (Diaz Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023; Nguyen, 2020) the article reports on the flat Earth echo chamber on YouTube, a controversial group arguing that the earth is a plane, not a sphere. By analyzing

how they weave their arguments, this study demonstrates that disinformation circulates through identity-based grievances. As grudges intensify, back-and-forth argumentation becomes a form of knowing that solidifies viewpoints. Moreover, the argument resists fact-checking because it stokes the contradictions of identity work through grievances (pathos. It refers to a communication space where connected participants remain closed, exchanging circulating opinions and beliefs reinforcing their existing beliefs. Similarly, Eli Pariser's filter bubble theory (Pariser, 2012), i.e. gated, closed communication spaces, in which algorithmic processes using our existing information practices are beginning to play an increasingly important role.

Description of the analysis

The subject of the study will be the news material presented in the main edition of *Wiadomości TVP* (News TVP) and TVN *Fakty TVN* (Facts TVN)¹ and the narratives shaped in their messages. In the study, we aimed to answer the questions: What values do broadcasters refer to in their news programmes? What topics do they most often cover? Are the topics presented in the services fixed or variable? What narratives do broadcasters create, and how do they affect divisions in Polish society?

The material comes from the complete edition of the news service or is published separately on the internet site after the broadcast of the relevant programme. The highest viewership among news dailies in Poland characterises *Fakty TVN* and *Wiadomości TVP*. In 2022, the average audience for *Fakty TVN* was 2,294,188, and for *Wiadomości TVP* was 1,811,535. (Nielsen TV Audience Measurement).

¹ *Wiadomości TVP* is the main news programme of the Polish public broadcaster and *Fakty TVN* is the main news programme of commercial broadcaster TVN, owned since 2022 by Warner Bros. Discovery

For almost half of the respondents (49%) of the CBOS survey, television is still the most frequent source of information about the world. The second most common is the Internet (37%), and the third is radio (only 6%). An essential variable in this case is the age of the respondent. The younger the media consumer, the more often he or she indicates the Internet as the primary source of information (in the 18–24 age group 76%), and the less often traditional media, including television (only 9% in this age group). It is also worth noting the data according to which television is a source of information far more often for supporters of the ruling camp (79%) than for the opposition (42%).

Moreover, there is a clear link between the choice of broadcaster and support for a given political environment. Among respondents who indicated television as their primary source of information about the world, supporters of the ruling camp overwhelmingly (88.1%) pointed to TVP and a clear minority to TVN (13.1%). Regarding opposition supporters, TVN is the most frequently indicated broadcaster (80.1%), and TVP has the lowest indications in this group (11.4%). (Badora, 2023).

Preliminary analysis of media reports

At the beginning of the analysis, we randomly selected the observation period – from 8 to November 27th 2022. We considered that 20 editions of each news programme would allow us to identify the main issues for the description and presentation of which broadcasters use the narratives that characterise their messages. The first stage of the analysis allowed us to conclude that differences in media messages were already visible at the level of the existence dimension. Throughout our analysis, we diligently examined the daily news broadcasts within the observed period.

We transcribed specific materials, compiled detailed research notes, and carefully searched for crucial phrases, categorisation, and the narrator's perspective. Using this information, we created comprehensive summaries that encapsulate the patterns observed over the analysed period. Our approach was justified due to both news programs' clear and consistent communication patterns. These patterns enabled the introduction of narratives into media discourse, allowing us to discern how certain themes were emphasised or downplayed over time. By closely examining these patterns, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of how news services shape public opinion and influence social divisions.

During the observed period, 169 materials were broadcast on the *Wiadomości TVP*. Most (69) were presentations of effective government policies in various areas. Thus, these were information on the government's anti-crisis measures (freezing of commodity prices, anti-crisis shields, mobilised funds to fight the crisis), strengthening of security (modernisation of the army, securing Polish borders, agreements with strategic partners) and ongoing investments (Maria and Lech Kaczyński tunnel, road investments, CPK).

Among these messages were also those pointing to Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS (Law and Justice)² as the leader of the political polls with a clear lead over the opposition political parties. This type of argumentation was also evident in those materials that emphasised the importance of the 2023 elections, in which voters will decide on a vision for Poland (strategic investments and actions changing the country for the better were contrasted with 'white elephant investments', sham actions not allowing Poland to develop). Poland's sovereignty and independence are at stake

² Since 2015 it is a ruling party in Poland and Jarosław Kaczyński is the head of this party.

in the elections, as well as the construction of a democratic state that will support everyone and not, as in the days of Donald Tusk's government, become dependent on external states and distribute profits to a select few. It is also noteworthy that every time the information concerned the government's actions, it was supplemented with a commentary pointing to the wrong and ineffective actions of the opposition, especially during the rule of the PO-PSL coalition.

Wiadomości TVP was not critical of the ruling camp. Instead, it was always attributed with positive causality, mainly concerning the regulations introduced to curb the effects of the economic crisis and emphasising its subjectivity in the sphere of foreign policy. The negative rhetoric characteristic of the blame discourse in this case, on the other hand, concerned the institutions of the European Union (the category 'Eurocrats' used) (with particular emphasis on Germany). The European Union and the Germans, who played a major role in it, were said to block funding for Poland, and their actions were said to lead to a 'dearth'. The opposition and its leader, Donald Tusk, were also criticised. Politicians from this group were presented as counterpoints to the politicians of the ruling camp. They were the personification of bad politics and acting to the detriment of Poland and Poles. Among the materials presented, five were devoted exclusively to the opposition and Donald Tusk. The attribution of responsibility was introduced both at the system level and the individual level (here, above all, it was Donald Tusk, constantly accused of running to Brussels, servility towards Germany and even racism). The failures of the opposition and the past PO-PSL governments were also consistently highlighted (either of a general nature or concerning individual issues, such as the fault at the National Stadium).

Among this information, in the observed period, there were also nine materials presenting

Poland as a 'great country' and Poles as a 'great nation'. They concerned Poland's growing role in the region (a leader among the Visegrad Group countries) and partnership relations with a "powerful ally" (the USA). The category of 'great nation' was primarily concerned with the assistance Poles would give Ukrainians seeking refuge in our country. *Wiadomości TVP* materials were also devoted to the ORLEN concern, which was presented as a national (and soon European) champion pursuing a strategic energy policy safeguarding the interests of Poles. There were also materials about large state (national) investments (such as CPK), which were supposed to be an example of strengthening the independence and subjectivity of our country. Among these materials were also those that could relate to historical politics. They mainly concerned Poland's regaining of independence in 1918 and were juxtaposed with the actions of the current government, strengthening sovereignty and building an independence camp.

In the period under review, there were also 25 pieces of material directly related to the war in Ukraine, either reporting on the war, the situation at the front or pointing to the criminal practices of the Russian military. There was also material on foreign countries (11), including information on political summits (e.g. the climate summit), the economic crisis and rising inflation in European countries and the US elections. In the first two areas, references to Poland were also introduced. These referred to the fact that Poland is among the countries meeting standards related to sustainable energy policy. At the same time, in the second case, Poland was juxtaposed with other European countries as a country coping relatively well with the economic crisis. In the case of the US elections, however, it was notable that the Republican side was more popular on the site.

Wiadomości also featured information on the activities of the Catholic Church (and related

organisations) and content relating to issues of faith and religiosity. The church was characterised as an institution committed to helping those in need as a guardian of traditional values important to Poles. There was also material about an attack on a church in a Polish city, which was used to introduce a thread about attacks on Catholics in Poland.

During the same period, 174 materials were broadcast on *Fakty TVN*. Around 20 per cent of these were direct, critical reviews of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość government. Above all, the government was presented as not acting in the interests of Poles but its own. The materials referred to the financing of election campaigns with contributions from PiS-appointed board members of state-owned companies. There was also an emphasis on the internal conflict within the ruling camp concerning primarily Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro.

A consequence of this dispute was also said to be blocking the implementation of the necessary changes in the judiciary, which would make it possible to receive funds from the European Union's National Reconstruction Fund. In addition to this type of material, *Fakty TVN* also dealt with the economic crisis (19 materials). This information also criticised those in power as being unable to cope with the difficult economic situation in the country, above all with rising inflation. It is noteworthy that in the case of this type of information, *Fakty TVN* used the frame of the 'common man' by presenting in the coverage profiles of ordinary people (passers-by, shoppers) unable to cope with the ever-increasing cost of living. An internally divided government, also in conflict with the European Union, does not ensure the economic security of Poles, caring first and foremost for the interests of its environment (including material interests).

Twenty materials covered the war in Ukraine. They were primarily of a reporting nature,

describing events in Ukrainian cities and the fighting taking place at the front. The heroism of Ukrainian soldiers and the leadership role of President Zelenski were unequivocally highlighted. There was also criticism of Russia and its President. The materials also presented the increasing military assistance to Ukraine from NATO countries, including the significant participation of Poland. In addition, ten materials directly referenced the tragic events in Przewodowo, where one of the Ukrainian rockets fell, killing two Polish citizens.

Fakty TVN dealt with climate risks relatively frequently. It was linked, among other things, to the climate summit in Egypt at the time. *Fakty TVN* also used this issue to criticise the government. Insufficient action by those in power to protect the climate was pointed out. Examples of environmentally devastating policies were also cited, as illustrated by the degeneration of the Mazurian ecosystem or Poland's continuing dependence on coal as an energy resource.

During the observed period, 15 materials were about foreign countries. It was dominated by information about the US election, and in this case (unlike in *Wiadomości TVP*), more attention was paid to the Democrats. In contrast, the Republicans' victorious election result was described as below expectations.

It is noteworthy, however, that very little, only four pieces of material dealt directly with opposition groups. Information on this subject (mainly voices of politicians) was found in the section devoted to, for example, criticism of the government, but coverage focusing exclusively on the opposition was rare in the observed period. They were mainly concerned about the opposition's problems with building a single electoral party that could effectively compete with PiS in the parliamentary elections.

Synthesis of the analysis

In the initial stage of our analysis, we pinpointed distinct narrative patterns for each broadcaster. Next, we drew conclusions regarding the media environments in question and endeavoured to merge them for each broadcaster. Our objective was to uncover any emerging content that could potentially alter the nature of either broadcaster's narrative. From December 9th, 2022, to March 8th, 2023, we continued to monitor both news outlets, honing in on the media arenas of dispute we had identified rather than analysing every broadcasted material. While broadcasters often concentrate on particular issues commonly tied to current political situations and the competition between political groups, the narratives they employ possess a broader, overarching quality. It is because they tackle how the entire societal structure functions, particularly regarding its fundamental norms and values. Moreover, constructing these narratives entails blending various temporal dimensions, connecting historical periods with future possibilities.

The subjects of analysis in this case were materials that dealt with: (1) the rivalry between the government side and the opposition, (2) the economic crisis and rising inflation, (3) relations with the European Union and the raising of funds from the National Reconstruction Plan, (4) the sale of part of Orlen's shares to Saudi Aramco. For each dispute arena, a separate analysis was carried out for *Fakty TVN* and *Wiadomości TVP*. The first step sought the naming strategies, adjudication, argumentation and perspectivation of the broadcaster used within the message (Reisigl, 2011). In the second step, the rhetorical structure of the text was investigated, taking into account: the audience (the audience of the message), the dominant genre of the utterance (types of rhetoric), the credibility of

the narrator (the status of the utterer of the message; the status of journalist), the constructed divisions at the level of the message, the rhetorical subject produced at the level of the utterance and the implied audience. The consideration of the cited aspects of the message is taken from Ann M. Gill and Karen Whedbee (2001).

How information is presented in *Fakty TVN*, as well as the argumentative strategies and narratives introduced in the messages, allow us to assume that their addressees, in this case, are those who are not voters or supporters of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. It can, therefore, be assumed that the programme is targeted primarily at those who have a critical attitude to the ruling party (they may also be voters or supporters of the opposition).

A thorough analysis of the naming strategies employed by *Fakty TVN* in referring to politicians and political parties throughout various disputes reveals that most of the names used are neutral. These names include first and last names, positions held, political affiliations, and institutions, all identifying individuals and organisations. Negative naming strategies were rarely utilised, appearing only a few times, whereas positive ones were utterly absent. It is important to note that the negative categories only appear when the journalist uses quotes or statements from other individuals in the material, most often political opponents. In the analysed broadcasts, opposition politicians mainly made these statements regarding representatives of the ruling camp, including those managing state-owned companies and those sitting in the Constitutional Tribunal. This message formatting reinforces the 'Us' – 'Them' polarisation.

This broadcaster primarily utilises blame discourse as its primary mode of expression. The blame is placed on the government and the ruling party for their ineffective fight against the crisis, lack of European Union

funds, destruction of the rule of law, and restriction of women's rights. The broadcaster employs various types of rhetoric to achieve this, including loss (the collapse of the economy, decline in the European Union, and end of the rule of law), claims (the need for change, return to the rule of law, and EU funds), entitlement (restoration of democratic institutions, fulfilling obligations to the European Union's requirements), and threats (uncertain times ahead, loss of EU funds, collapse of democratic institutions, blocking of the political market, and domination of the political scene by ruling groups).

The journalists present materials designed to create divisions between opposing groups, with the two main axes of division being ruling-governed and traditional-progressive.

However, these divisions are universal and not specific to any particular group. The journalists present themselves as acting on behalf of the aggrieved Poles, who have lost trust in the state and its institutions, unable to pursue their interests due to the government's fault and state concerns, losing their jobs and money.

As a result, the collective fantasy constructs an audience (recipients) adopting the formula of a community of the discontented. An analysis of the rhetoric in the different arenas of the dispute suggests that *Fakty TVN* presents the government side as ineffective in dealing with the economic and political challenges, including achieving unity and agreement within its camp.

The methods used by *Wiadomości* to present their content, including the narratives and argumentative strategies employed, suggest that the service broadcaster is directing its message towards supporters of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party. The villains in these narratives are usually opposition politicians and Zbigniew Ziobro's Suwerenna Polska (Sovereign Poland)³. The materials employed by the broadcaster use positive naming strategies for those in power, especially PiS, while using negative or even offensive terms towards the opposition. The most common genre of expression used in these broadcasts is a binary discourse, with elements of a blame discourse. A dichotomy is created, with "We" (the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość camp) portrayed as good, wielding positive causality, and "They" (Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform], other opposition parties, local government officials, and even the PiS coalition partner, Suwerenna Polska) are portrayed as evil. The broadcast portrays "We" as successfully dealing with the economic crisis, as evidenced by the statements of "ordinary Poles". The Civic Platform, and its leader in particular, is blamed for the low standard of living of Poles during its government in coalition with the Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL (Polish People's Party) and for threatening to increase fuel prices with the arrival of the new year, wanting to build its political capital on human harm and the misfortune of Poles, or attacks on PKN Orlen. The broadcast shows that Russia is to blame for rising energy prices and inflation. The analysed materials spoke from the perspective of Poles who are satisfied with the actions of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość government, who are cared for by the government, and who value the principle of the tripartite division of power as one of the foundations

of democracy. Identifying a single universal target audience reflected in every communication is difficult. However, it is possible to distinguish a community that is satisfied with the actions of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość government and wants the political party to continue in power in Poland.

Table 1. Rhetorical analysis of the messages of the *Fakty TVN* news program (period: 09.12.2022–04.01.2023)

Audience/Addressee	Recipients who are not PiS voters.
The dominant genre of speech	The rhetoric of guilt, the rhetoric of loss, the rhetoric of danger.
The credibility of the narrator (journalist)	Presentation of different sides of the political scene, an expert's voice, the journalist's involvement and inquisitiveness visible in the broadcast material, and the use of infographics to present financial data.
Social divisions and conflicts	On one side, the government and the other, Poles who are living in crisis, the government in conflict with the EU and the society waiting for funds, the state-owned company over-profiting and Poles are forced to overspend, the government is violating the rule of law, and its critics are guarding the rule of law democracy.
Rhetorical subject produced at the level of utterance	A representative of aggrieved Poles, critical of the government's actions, a defender of democracy, holding ineffective and dishonest politicians accountable.
Implied audience (a form of collective fantasy)	A community of discontented, waiting for better governance (without PiS).

Source: Own elaboration

³ The party currently operates under the name Solidarna Polska (Solidarity Poland)

Table 2. Rhetorical analysis of the messages of *Wiadomości TVP* (period: 09.12.2022–04.01.2023)

Audience/Addressee	Recipients who are PiS voters or supporters and accept governmental policies
The dominant genre of speech	Binary discourse, guilt discourse, and agency rhetoric.
The credibility of the narrator (journalist)	A question about the opinion of people with similar views to those presented by the broadcaster, particularly conversations with influential people, the person of the journalist usually invisible. Using archive materials to show chronology and cause-and-effect sequence.
Social divisions and conflicts	On the one side, those who guarding the Polish rule of law, and on the other, judges favouring the opposition, the government striving to preserve sovereignty and the “Eurocrats”, the government and Brussels, the reasonable government and the dangerous opposition, Orlen caring about the stability of fuel prices and the opposition accusing it of exploiting Poles, seeking to obtain funds from the KPO PiS and Solidary Poland opposing the reform of the judiciary.
Rhetorical subject produced at the level of utterance	A representative of Poles satisfied with the rule of PiS, who values the principles of independence and absolute independence of judges, a PiS voter with a negative attitude towards opposition parties (mainly PO)
Implied audience (a form of collective fantasy)	Satisfied community with the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość government. Proud Poles whom their democratically elected government looks after.

Source: Own elaboration

Based on an analysis of the rhetoric of the materials in *Wiadomości*, it can be concluded that the message presented there focuses on the causality of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, expresses a positive view of the actions of the party’s government during the economic crisis and the war across the eastern border, points to the threats posed by the opposition and the uncooperative coalition partner in power, and emphasises the importance of both Polish military independence and political sovereignty.

Moreover, referring to the analysis of the rhetoric of the broadcast material, it is also possible to synthesise the narratives conveyed to viewers by the creators of *Fakty TVN* and *Wiadomości TVP* in these services. Below are the narrative patterns shaped by the broadcasters updated based on further observation of the programmes.

Table 3. Synthesis of narration for *Fakty TVN* (period: 9.12.2022–8.02.2023)

TVN Fakty
The main positive characters of the narrative
Citizens of Poland (dissatisfied with the rule of PiS), the opposition side, those who want a change and stop the demolishing of Polish democracy
Values and views vital to heroes
Democracy, equality, human and civil rights, tolerance, European integration, separation of powers, the welfare of Poles, minority rights, environmental protection, economic and social development, predictable tomorrow.
Threats, enemies and obstacles
A quarrelling ruling coalition, unable to reach an agreement with the European Commission and provide Poles with coal for the winter; war criminal Putin; PKN ORLEN striving for a monopoly on the market, ruled by Daniel Obajtek; Jarosław Kaczyński; Mateusz Morawiecki; Zbigniew Ziobro; Przemysław Czarnek and his changes in the education system and the „Willa +” (“Villa+”) programme; President Andrzej Duda; Constitutional Tribunal with Julia Przyłębska; Government media.
Heroes’ action
Application for ORLEN inspection by NIK; taking action and opposing harm to citizens (e.g., not providing abortion); introducing amendments to bills from PiS; submitting draft laws; an attempt to vote for the resignation of Zbigniew Ziobro; uniting the opposition.
Helpers/Allies
The European Union, local government officials supporting the opposition or the opposition, the United States with President Biden; citizens rejecting the government of PiS; Protesters against the government
The vision of the future that the heroes aspire to
The opposition alliance, Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition), wins the elections. The judiciary system was reformed, and the government passed the act on wind energy investments, which enabled Poland to receive funding from the National Reconstruction Plan. The abortion law is either restored to its previous state before the 2020 Constitutional Tribunal verdict or replaced with a new law that provides free access to safe abortion on demand, financed by the state. The government creates family-friendly conditions by eliminating the pregnancy registry. The discriminatory “LGBT-free zones” are also abolished. There is a possibility of legalising same-sex marriages and registering civil partnerships. The government invests in renewable energy sources, and Poland strengthens its relationship with the European Union. The economy and society continue to grow, and Poland becomes a modern, friendly, tolerant, libertarian, and prosperous country. The citizens become active participants in social life and contribute to the betterment of their communities.

Source: Own elaboration

Table 4. Synthesis of narration for *Wiadomości TVP* (period: 9.12.2022–8.02.2023)

Wiadomości TVP
The main positive heroes of the narrative
PiS, government, state under PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, Mateusz Morawiecki, Andrzej Duda, state-owned companies, ordinary people who want continuity of governmental policies
Values and views vital to heroes
patriotism, tradition, family, statism (the state as a good owner and host), Polishness, military strength, Catholicism, the good of citizens, Polish national culture, national sovereignty, the principle of separation of powers
Threats, enemies and obstacles
Putin and Russian thugs; Donald Tusk, sympathetic to Russia and Germany, who left the Poles and fled to Brussels; Władysław Sikorski acting on behalf of Russia, with questionable income; Rafał Trzaskowski wanting meat rationing and limiting the freedom of Poles; Belarusian hybrid attack and illegal migration; the inflationary and energy market crisis caused by Putin's war; Eurocrats; Solidary Poland; judges sympathetic to the opposition (including Iustitia); German boot; left-wing media; TVN television attacking Saint Pope John Paul II.
Heroes' actions
Independence from Russian oil and gas; the intention to allocate as much as 4% of GDP to defence; military support for Ukraine – Poland as a leader in aid; stabilisation of fuel prices; applying for money from KPO; implementation of state-of-the-art investments; construction of a nuclear reactor; regulation of electricity and gas prices; reasonable MPC policy; constructive talks with the undecided, successive negotiations; building an alliance with the US; construction of the Via Karpatia road
Hero Helpers/Allies
Lithuania, the United States, pro-PiS local government officials, common people, traditionalists, Poles close to the catholic church and traditional values, voters who in 2015 opted for change, and People who are better off after PiS social reforms.
The vision of the future that the heroes aspire to
Poland, under the democratic government constructed by PiS, has become a significant contributor to global economic and political affairs. It has played a vital role in helping Ukraine regain its independence. The former President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and his team, have been held accountable for their actions. Putin has been dealt with, and his influence on Polish politics has been diminished. In Poland, sovereign power is exercised by the people, represented by PiS, who actively listen to their needs. The country's economic growth is fostered by a supportive environment for working mothers, which includes numerous allowances that make it easier for them to balance work, childcare, and home care. This has contributed to the ever-increasing development of the country. Poland is a safe country with an efficient and modern health service, where typical Catholic families with multiple children can live in abundance and happiness.

Source: Own elaboration.

Conclusions

In this analysis, we have delved into a range of scholarly and journalistic considerations that pertain to the emergence of divisions within societies and the specific categories assigned

to emerging groups. One key observation we made is that media broadcasters often introduce moralising elements in their narratives, which tend to be a defining feature of the Polish political and policy discourse. However,

it is essential to note that the way moral values are referred to in these narratives plays a pivotal role in forming dividing lines between their audiences.

The narratives conducted in the media reveal that moral values are often based on selected principles. This selectivity results in the formation of groups that take pride in their moral values while creating a sense of antagonism towards others who do not share these values. As Jonathan Haidt has pointed out, this phenomenon gives rise to a moral community defined by its shared values but also creates a sense of exclusion for those who do not share them.

In conclusion, it is essential to recognise that the media plays a significant role in shaping public discourse and contributing to forming social divisions. By being mindful of how moral values are presented in the media, it is possible to create a more inclusive society characterised by unity and mutual respect (Haidt, 2014). Thus, the image of the other group as well-intentioned people who have their hierarchy of values and, based on this hierarchy, shape their positions on issues of importance to them disappears, and what emerges is the perception of others as unjust rivals who must be fought against and denied the right to participate in public debate. The goal ceases to be getting to the truth and begins to be defeating opponents. Haidt also presents the notion of a moral matrix⁴, which organises the worldview of individuals, which, over time, acquires a status that is unshakable and immune to any challenging arguments. The Matrix serves groups to build their moral capital, and its construction is based on five pillars of morality: (1) harm/care, (2) fairness/reciprocity, (3) in-group loyalty, (4)

authority/respect and (5) sanctity/purity. Liberal-minded people (and thus their moral intuitions) primarily recognise the values of the first two pillars – care-worthiness and justice/reciprocity. All of the pillars mentioned above are important for conservatives, and on their foundation, they shape their moral worldview and strengthen their group affiliation. It is impossible to unequivocally attribute the labels of liberal and conservative media to *Fakty TVN* and *Wiadomości TVP*. Our analysis, however, allows us to argue that the TVP service builds its messages far more frequently by referring to each of the five pillars. The ordered image of the world and society presented in this service introduces a vision of an ordered, relatively homogenous national community based on tradition and loyalty to authorities (including political ones). In this vision, there is no room for arbitrariness and deepening differentiation because this brings unnecessary risks, introduces chaos and threatens the community. During one of his speeches, Haidt used the metaphor of an equaliser, whose five sliders correspond to the five pillars of morality. Liberals, according to the researcher, mainly use the first two, while conservatives use the full five-step moral scale. Building moral capital across all pillars, Haidt believes, is more effective in the process of organising supporters and bonding members of a social group. At the same time, he stipulates that both liberals and conservatives fall into a controlled moral matrix that distorts their perception of the world, limiting their field of vision to the image reproduced within the group of which they are members. Such a position is close to the view of the problem of social divisions present in the echo chamber or cognitive bubble conspecifics.

In describing the formation of social divisions through media narratives, we also drew on David Goodhart's thesis about people from everywhere (Anywheres) and people from

⁴ This notion can be understood in a straightforward way, as the Matrix is depicted in the film with just such a title.

everywhere (Somewheres) and the deepening separation between them. People from everywhere are educated and mobile and value autonomy, openness and fluidity because they see the world from different perspectives (Goodhart, 2017). They are usually wealthy and act in their interests, reluctant to see themselves as members of groups and communities. In contrast, people from somewhere are more rooted in a particular place (usually their place of birth origin) and are usually less educated than people from everywhere. What is important to them is attachment to a group (usually family), security, a predictable future and tradition. They perceive the world in a particularistic way and maintain a distance and distrust towards strangers and progressive changes that require them to adapt and change their habits constantly. They regard their national identity as a precious value and feel more comfortable among people similar to them. Under such conditions, they are willing to act in favour of their collective. According to Goodhart, these differences (exposed in the referendum campaign) in British society led to Brexit. (*David Goodhart: Are you an 'Anywhere' or a 'Somewhere'? – Viewsnight*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jya7nThQp8I> dostęp: 07.04.2023)

It can be seen that the message of *Wiadomości TVP* is addressed to 'Somewheres'. The broadcaster emphasises values such as patriotism, family, and security. Relatively often (in almost every edition of the service), there is information about the growing strength of the Polish state, the Polish army's power and new weapons purchases. Solutions introduced by the government in the field of social policy are presented in a positive light. The success of the Family 500+ programme and additional benefits for senior citizens, the regaining of dignity by ordinary people are pointed out. During anniversaries of moments important for Polish history, materials

are broadcast to strengthen national pride, presenting the proper attitude of Poles under challenging moments of history. We, therefore, believe that the broadcaster of *Wiadomości TVP* directs its message to 'Somewheres'. In *Fakty*, on the other hand, the message often considers the European perspective, also introducing progressive content. The material included themes about changing our behaviour and habits concerning climate issues. Themes that confronted viewers with the need to solve critical problems such as growing migration were introduced. That is why the target audience seems to be more 'Anywheres' than 'Somewheres'.

The narratives of both broadcasters can be linked to the theory of so-called strong and weak identity programmes (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Strong identity programmes are based on traditional social institutions such as church, family or state. Individuals are assigned to traditional social roles and communities with clearly defined boundaries, giving the individual a sense of belonging and anchorage in return for demonstrated loyalty. One can see a clear link between these values and the messages of *Wiadomości TVP*. The service draws the viewer's attention to the positive actions of state authorities and their subsidiaries (e.g. the Orlen concern), speaking, for example, of the effective fight against the economic crisis. The importance of the Catholic Church as a guardian of traditional values is emphasised, and faith itself is part of the media-constructed category of Polishness. The historical achievements of the Polish nation are emphasised (e.g. regaining independence, wartime heroism, the ideals of the so-called first Solidarity), the aim of which seems to be to build community. The idea of strong identity programmes was used to create a specific image of reality. In this reality, the government takes care of ordinary people while strengthening Poland's European

subjectivity and sovereignty. However, there is a perceived threat to the improving well-being of the community from external groups such as opposition parties, Brussels Eurocrats, and Germany. Traditional and Catholic values and caring government policies bind the community together. The narrative also raises questions about the recipients' identity, which may result from the unanimity of the supporters of the "good change" that is constantly emphasised in the stories.

In contrast, weak identity programmes are based on transgression, progression, design, tasking, and fluidity. In comparison, *Fakty TVN* presents the practical side of the solutions introduced by the government, how a piece of legislation works (or not) and what consequences it has for Poles. A dynamic social change perspective is presented, leading to societal cultural changes. The church's voice is sometimes presented critically, mainly when addressing women's and procreation rights. The journalists' material presents content relating to questioning established cultural patterns and social institutions, where, for example, the changing role of the family, the church or the education system is highlighted. *Fakty TVN* frequently emphasised the audience's identity, depicting them as waiting for politicians who would represent their interests by fighting for their rights. This approach aimed to legitimise diversity and progressivism, in contrast to the image of community created by the public media.

The media often highlights social divisions that stem from varying narratives, consistent with findings from a survey aimed at understanding the characteristics of the electorates of major political parties. According to the survey, the left-right axis is the primary differentiator among political parties' electorates. This axis shows much stronger differentiation than the statism-economic liberalism axis. Left-leaning voters tend to support formal same-sex

partnerships, deeper European integration, a shift away from coal in the energy sector, religious neutrality of the state, liberal abortion regulations, acceptance of refugees from Africa and the Middle East, and broad powers for local government. In contrast, right-leaning voters tend to disapprove of formal same-sex unions, prefer greater independence within the EU, support the use of coal, see value in cooperation between the state and the Catholic Church, support a legal ban on abortion, oppose accepting refugees from Africa and the Middle East, and support broad powers for central government. (Roguska, 2023).

Given the nature of the narrative in *Wiadomości TVP* and *Fakty TVN*, it can be assumed that they are addressing their messages to an increasingly antagonistic audience. In this case, the media speak to 'their' audience without forcing them to confront a different world vision and petrify the character of social division. Moreover, the media broadcasters' style of operation realises the conventions of a self-reproducing discourse (Giza, 2013). Their aggressive stance is apparent, as they are not competing to take over the audience, but it is mainly about retaining a loyal audience. Therefore, if one broadcaster were to stop participating in this 'tussle', the other would lose the antagonist that has driven content production. This phenomenon can already be observed now, for example, in the intense criticism of the TVN station and the controversial material about John Paul II entitled *Franciszkańska 3* (Franciscan 3) aired on TVN24 on March 6th 2023. In *Wiadomości TVP*, there was an accusation of breaking the principle of journalistic integrity by using the files of the former Security Service and a charge of undermining the most crucial authority for Poles. In *Fakty TVN*, one can observe attempts to defend this material vigorously and a refusal to confront a story that is not always easy to accept.

Our analysis has uncovered that media broadcasters' news programs reinforce social divisions. These divisions can be categorised as progressive-traditional, liberal-conservative, or based on the political preferences of media consumers. By selecting specific topics and issues, these services create coherent narratives that highlight political differences and varied positions on social and cultural changes. Our primary goal was to draw attention to the problems arising from their functioning logic rather than to evaluate news services. It is worth noting that similar phenomena can also be observed in other forms of media beyond television.

Furthermore, modern societies face excess communication, with messages constantly circulating. It can result in viewers being frequently exposed to content that challenges their worldview. Information is often presented in slogans, catchphrases, and intentional visualisations, simplifying the issue and prompting quick reactions, whether in favour or against. It can lead people to lock themselves within relatively homogeneous communities with the same viewpoints, gradually becoming immune to competing messages. The consequence of this phenomenon can be a change in the sense of functioning, and in the extreme case, basically an annulment of public opinion. The question is whether this media operation formula will continue to appeal to younger generations as they enter the electoral market. 🗳️

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