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The specificity of online journalism. Fake news in the communications of selected Polish politicians in 2022

Keywords: fake news, politics, journalism, media, social media

Słowa kluczowe: fake newsy, polityka, dziennikarstwo, media, media społecznościowe

Introduction

The ubiquitous spread of the Internet has led to changes in the media market. In the 21st century, the new media began to engage all human senses for the first time, doing so through various channels which are both intertwined (multi-mediality) and interactive (possibility of generating feedback); simultaneously, they became an exemplification of the old media (Manovich, 2006; McQuail, 2008) having combined different forms of communication. Thus, new media are typified by convergence, i.e. “the conjunction of IT, electronic, digital and media solutions and services into an inseparable whole” (Kunczik and Zipfel, 2000). They are accessible almost everywhere and at all times, regardless of transmission channels and types of user terminals (Kunczik and Zipfel, 2000).

Internet portals are taking over the role of traditional newspapers, and it is there that Poles look for information. According to data from an IBMS and IRBIS report, 2021 saw 62% of citizens of the country obtain information from online portals (Ibims.pl, 2021). On the other hand, a 2022 CBOS survey demonstrated that as many as 75% of Poles used the Internet at that time. The scale of citizens’ online presence has increased in recent years following the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (CBOS, 2022). The Internet combines various forms of the so-called old media, which evolve under the influence of the new media, interacting with the latter in increasingly complex ways (Jenkins, 2007). The new media have penetrated journalism broadly, as evinced by online portals, which, just like newspapers, subsist on advertising but use distinct methods to draw their audiences. The manner in which journalistic content is created differs as well, as it is intended to encourage the reader to click on a particular link or take advantage of a particular advertised product.

Another goal is to connect with the reader and encourage them to write a comment, share a link or add a reaction in social media.

Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdżiarz draws attention to media tabloidisation, which consists in “making the form, language, and image of the world in mainstream media resemble the content, form, language and image of the world in tabloids” (Lisowska-Magdżiarz, 2009). The media competes with audiences by publishing the same or very similar content, seeking to attract them through simplistic and sensational titles so that they click a particular link. Thus, the more clickbaity the title of an article is and the more it concerns issues that interest the reader, the larger the audience and the revenue for the medium (Lisowska-Magdżiarz, 2009). Dorota Piontek notes that the tabloidisation of the media leads to the tabloidisation of politics. The first element which attests to such a process is the commercialisation of the media, resulting in hybrid forms such as edutainment, infotainment or politicaltainment, which aim to combine entertainment with information and, therefore, induce the viewer to choose a particular medium (Piontek, 2011).

The changes that have taken place in the transmission of information – primarily those associated with the development of the Internet – have caused negative phenomena such as disinformation to arise. In addition, there can be no doubt that the disinformation phenomenon, especially as regards political fake news, is reinforced by the characteristics of the new media, including:

- speed and immediacy – the new media allow information to be shared instantly, which means that fake news can spread at lightning speed,
- absence of verification mechanisms – information in the new media can be published by anyone without any control,
- personalised content, which confines the audience to information bubbles and increases user susceptibility to disinformation,
- vast amount of information, which makes it considerably more difficult to verify which information is true (Szpunar, 2012).

It is no coincidence that the domains of the media and politics are considered jointly in this paper. In the 21st century and the era of post-truth, politicians are one of the sources of fake news in the public space, exploiting the nature of the media to publicise controversial and, not infrequently, untrue information to the public. Politicians may use fake news for a variety of reasons. Some may do so deliberately to achieve their political goals or to impose their opinion regarding controversial issues. Fake news may be used to provoke certain emotions, such as anger, fear or hope, which contributes to garnering support or convincing voters. The media, on the other hand, enables politicians to reach a wide audience (Iwasiński, 2018).

This study examines statements from the leaders of the two largest political parties in Poland: Jarosław Kaczyński, chairman of the Law and Justice party, and Donald Tusk, head of the Civic Platform. The aim of the paper is to identify fake news in selected statements made by these politicians in 2022, as well as explain why they conveyed false information to the public (Tab. 1 and 2). It also shows how the media, i.e. online portals tvp.info and tvn.24.pl, either of which

is considered to evidently favour one of the sides, responded to those specific false communications (Tab. 3). With such an objective in mind, critical discourse analysis was employed to reconstruct the ulterior motives and to establish the reasons behind the manipulated message. In addition, the method facilitates the reconstruction of the media response to the information communicated by the leaders of the aforementioned political parties in Poland, and it has been recognised by theorists to be well-suited for studying politicians' statements. Therefore, its application in this case is thoroughly justified (Fairclough, 2005).

Review of literature

Based on a review of relevant literature, it may be asserted that there are relatively few publications which comprehensively discuss the specificity of online journalism and show online media as a platform for politicians to make false claims in the public forum.

There are various definitions of fake news, and different approaches are taken to address the issue. Some of these approaches are superficial and fail to explain the essence of the phenomenon. According to the government website, "fake news stories are posts, news, and news feeds in which the information provided turns out to be false or misrepresented" (Gov.pl, nd.). However, this particular definition does not account for the intentions of the people involved or describe its specificity.

A much broader definition is provided in *Mały leksykon postprawdy*: "The concept of fake news is most often defined as false news, often of a sensationalist nature, published in the media with the intention of misleading the audience for financial, political or prestige-motivated gain" (*Mały leksykon postprawdy*, 2018). Fake news is a very capacious term that encompasses different types of lies and truths. There is no doubt that false information spreads much faster than true information, and its purpose is to arouse certain emotions, which means it is conceptually narrower than disinformation, which aims to change the way people view reality (Cyber Policy, 2019). Fake news relies on three components: tools and services (which are used to manipulate public opinion), social media platforms (whose nature determines the emergence of false information) and motivation (the hidden purpose of fake news is financial or political gain, the enhanced impact of propaganda, deepened social divides and information chaos) (Bąkiewicz, 2020).

It is not without reason that fake news has become increasingly frequent with the development of the Internet and online journalism. Portals have adopted a business-like management model whereby the editors prioritise financial profit, even at the expense of the quality of the content they publish. Whether the content is true or verges on being false is of little importance if it draws many views, which in turn results in increased amounts of false information in the information space (Cyber Policy, 2019).

The unique nature of online journalism, as well as its emphasis on promptness and attractiveness of the content, means that journalism increasingly combines information with entertainment, assuming the form of infotainment – one of the genres of journalism in which information is coupled with opinion (Brown, 2022). It may be noted that the journalists who create content in the media have, over time, “ceased to be” journalists and instead became producers who create news in the online space. Content began to change to meet the demands of the user, who devotes only a few seconds to reading a piece of information. The news-making industry may thus be compared to the culture industry, which, according to critical theory scholars, nurtures a false notion of alleged knowledge about a topic while, in fact, it stifles imagination and independent thinking as well as degrades into entertainment (Hudzik, 2017). In Poland, the mainstream media discourse is dictated by a few nationwide outlets (Mołęda-Zdziech, 2015). Smaller portals focus mainly on work with the already available articles in which they introduce some new information. This is why, when a specific event takes place in a particular country, all the media soon cover it in a very similar fashion, often even using the same quotes. Fewer and fewer articles are being written by professional journalists because it takes more time and financial outlay to deliver such texts.

The visibly increasing amount of false information should also be attributed to the development of social media, where the content is controlled by algorithms while the audiences are locked into information bubbles, in that the users are being shown the content that conforms to their beliefs (Orłowski, 2020). This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which fostered the emergence of conspiracy narratives and false information that, on the one hand, stemmed from widespread ignorance about the virus and vaccines as well as the public’s fears; on the other, much of it was due to the modus operandi of the media, in which the speed of delivering information took precedence. A report by the NASK – National Research Institute demonstrates that the pandemic period witnessed a substantial increase in harmful content, i.e. content considered disinformative (Defence, 2022).

In this context, media politicisation in Poland represents a major challenge, as it leads to adverse changes in the media market. The politicisation of the media consists of the attempts of the political milieus to dominate them and exploit them for their own, often strictly partisan goals. Political parties strive to influence the media, subordinate them and, subsequently, influence the message they create. As a result, the media becomes transformed into a propaganda mouthpiece that no longer carries out the mission of informing the public about the actual state of affairs. Instead, its principal task is to provide information which conforms to the party line, even if it is untrue and manipulated (Oniszczyk, 2011).

Zbigniew Oniszczyk draws attention to three paradigms of dependency between politics and the media: the paradigm of participation in power (media as the fourth power), the paradigm of instrumentalisation (instrumental treatment of the media by politicians), and the paradigm of independence and symbiosis. In the Polish media system, which represents an example of polarised pluralism,

the instrumentalisation paradigm appears to predominate (Oniszczyk, 2011). It is not without reason that resorting to fake news is noticeable in the statements of politicians. In these cases, fake news stories are usually short slogans that contain elements of truth and spread rapidly in the public space, thus leading to a change in the social and political situation and influencing public sentiment and opinion (Palczewski, 2019). Taking the above into account, the following research question was formulated: Why do politicians choose to create fake news? The resulting hypothesis is that politicians use fake news in the media so that the ideology they proclaim reaches a wide audience. Fake news often involves true, albeit manipulated, elements and concerns, which are considered crucial either by the Polish public or the politicians themselves.

One peculiar type of fake news is political fake news, i.e. news produced for propaganda, political or commercial purposes, fabricated in order to mislead the audience and compel them to make specific decisions or actions (Palczewski, 2017). Adrian Grycuk notes that the dissemination of false information has now been a tool in politics for years, owing to the characteristics of the new media and the fact that they are a popular source of information today. The author further explains that depending on the domain, fake news has a different purpose: elections and referenda (a political marketing tool, e.g. to discredit political opponents and propagate their negative image), international conflicts (weaponised information), public sentiments and opinion (influencing public sentiments and manipulating public opinion, e.g. by diverting attention from inconvenient topics), political polarisation (exacerbating the existing social divides and creating new ones by means of false content concerning emotionally charged issues) and crisis situations (causing panic and chaos) (Grycuk, 2021).

The sources of fake news vary and encompass:

- foreign propaganda centres, whose aim is to stir up social unrest in a specific country,
- celebrities and influencers who, by creating and spreading false information, seek to increase their online reach and attract advertisers,
- the media, because false information is catchy, resonates with people's emotions and makes them click a link,
- politicians, for whom using fake news is often an element of political struggle, a means to create a positive image of their party and prompt negative associations with political opponents or detract public attention from other issues (Bąkiewicz, 2020).

When analysing fake news in political communications, it may be worthwhile to draw yet again on the definition of fake news, which means any false information published in the media with the intention to mislead (*Mały leksykon postprawdy*, 2018). The very intentionality of statements made by specific politicians is a matter of debate. Thus, it is difficult to consider the mistakes made by politicians or erroneous claims that specific politicians believe to be true as fake news. Thus, if a politician states, for instance, that "COVID-19 vaccines are harmful", this may be regarded as:

- their opinion, to which they are entitled,
- false information, with the caveat that it is difficult to determine whether it is fake news because we do not know whether the politician in question fabricates a specific piece of information to achieve a particular public impact or whether they simply believe the theories they propound, which are part of their ideology and which they believe to be true.

However, there are claims whose veracity is not disputable and can be easily verified. As a rule, this includes information concerning figures or, e.g. documented past events. Given the knowledge of the sender and the effect that a particular piece of information has on the public, it may be assumed that a claim made by a politician is fake news when its purpose is to deliberately mislead and evoke specific associations.

Reflection on political fake news made it possible to formulate the question “What do politicians gain from using fake news?” and a resulting research hypothesis, namely “Politicians make use of fake news from various domains instrumentally to maximise support for their own party.” In his statements, Jarosław Kaczyński takes advantage of fake news as this allows him to create a vision of an alternative reality in order to discredit political opponents and the allegedly hostile states and supra-state organisations, divert attention from the current events and generate media hype. Donald Tusk selectively exploits current problems affecting Poles, seeking to create a vision of the world in the public mind for which the representatives of the ruling party are responsible. In either case, the aim of the fabricated message was to gain or maintain power.

The speed at which fake news propagates distinguishes it from other information. Moreover, it appeals to the feelings, preferences and interests of the audience (Albright, 2017). This is the reason why it is often used by the media: it is more profitable to publish false information since it is certain to receive more views. Journalists who create fake news do so deliberately, adding falsified elements to actual news or inadvertently due to time pressure and lack of sufficient fact-checking (Iwasiński, 2018). An interesting mode of media response to information is discussed by Roland Barthes, according to whom the media neither expose nor amplify a political message, for instance, but become a symbol of their presence in the public space (Barthes, 2008). Based on the review of the literature, the following research question was formulated: What is the role of the media with regard to political fake news? In consequence, another research hypothesis was advanced, namely, that the media respond to manipulation and thus contribute to increased media hype and greater political polarisation.

Methodology

This research relied on a critical analysis of political discourse. For the purposes of the study, it was assumed that political discourse consists of official statements (regardless of the form) made by politicians and/or persons who officially discuss politics. Thus, discourse indicators include the venue where they

were articulated by the politician (the media, political rallies, the parliament) and the nature of reference of the statements to political issues. In mediatised politics, the mass media is the most important platform for political statements to function and reach a wide audience. Political discourse in the media employs ideologised language with a view to reinterpreting the realities in such a manner that the vision created corresponds to the political line of a particular party (Nowak and Zimny, 2009; Skowronek, 2016).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) may be readily applied for practical purposes. Norman Fairclough defines it as “an analysis of the implicit causal relationships between (a) texts, events and discursive practices and (b) broader social and cultural structures, relationships and processes. CDA seeks to expose how such practices, events and texts are produced and how they are ideologically shaped by power relations and power struggles. CDA also aims to unmask how the implicit nature of the links between discourse and society is itself a factor which safeguards power and hegemony” (Fairclough, 2005).

Critical discourse analysis is a method of analysing reality that is based on subjective interpretation. The researcher not only describes specific phenomena but also takes a specific stance towards them, positioning themselves as a defender of those who are affected by implicit power dynamics. Hence, the aim of the person who employs this method is to bring about social change. Often enough, the object of interest of CDA is political and media reality, with respect to which the method can expose the ideological dimension of the statements, in line with the principle that ideology lends words a new meaning (Sztompka, 1975).

Applied to examining fake news in politicians’ communications, critical discourse analysis makes it possible to discover the reasons why politicians deliberately choose to make false statements.

Fake news statements in Jarosław Kaczyński’s political communications were identified based on articles published on *Konkret 24.pl*, a fact-checking portal which specialises in verifying false assertions of politicians. To ensure greater objectivity, other media were consulted to determine whether those statements were referred to by the latter as well. This yielded five statements by Jarosław Kaczyński, which undoubtedly constituted fake news (Tab. 1).

It was much more challenging to find fake news in Donald Tusk’s political communications. The politician would often make statements that could not be conclusively identified as fake news. Also, fact-checking portals discussed his statements much less often. Thus, Łukasz Schreiber’s video “TOP 10 LIES, MANIPULATIONS AND INSINUATIONS OF DONALD TUSK (THE RADOM CONVENTION)” was used as a source to identify false information; subsequently, the arguments cited by the Law and Justice politician were verified and confronted with the information available in the media. Finally, three statements by Donald Tusk were selected from the video by Łukasz Schreiber. The remaining two originated from texts published by *Polskie Radio* and the fact-checking portal *Konkret 24.pl*. In total, five fake news statements by Donald Tusk (Tab. 2) and five statements by Jarosław Kaczyński were chosen. Afterwards, two statements by both politicians were selected at random to examine the corresponding reactions of *tvp.info* and *tvn.24.pl* (Tab. 3).

Results

Table 1

Fake news in the 2022 statements by Jarosław Kaczyński

Statement	Actual state of affairs
Grójec, 12 July: Kaczyński claimed that Daniel Obajtek, as mayor of Pcim, had “created probably the only such American-style store in Poland so far, where you can drive in by car and buy straight from the car, take from the shelves” (Krakow Wyborcza, 2022; Konkret 24.pl, 2022c).	In reality, no such shop was built.
Kórnik, 23 July: Kaczyński said that Germany had paid reparations to 70 countries for the losses incurred during World War II (Konkret 24.pl, 2022a).	In reality, 12 countries received reparations.
Wrocław, 24 September: Kaczyński stated that “Germany paid reparations even to Mexico” (Konkret24.pl, 2022b).	Mexico did not receive any reparations.
Starogard, 2 October: Kaczyński stated that, “We are second to Japan in terms of wages” (Konkret 24.pl, 2022e; WP News, 2022).	Poland is indeed second to Japan, but in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranking cited by the party leader, Poland is 26 th and Japan 24 th .
Meeting in Elk, 5 November: Kaczyński stated that “the decline in fertility in Poland is a result of women hitting the bottle too much.” Furthermore, according to Kaczyński, “it takes 20 years for a man to become an alcoholic and only 2 for a woman” (YouTube, 2022a; Konkret 24.pl, 2022d).	In fact, the birth rate is 1.4 children per couple. The record low birth rate should be attributed to high mortality in Poland in recent years, ineffective and unstable family policies, as well as other social factors, such as the precarious situation in the labour market or the availability of housing. It is also false to claim that it takes women 2 years to become addicted to alcohol while men need 20. Alcohol addiction is contingent on individual factors as opposed to gender.

Table 2

Fake news in 2022 statements by Donald Tusk

Statement	Actual state of affairs
1	2
Twitter, 12 August: Tusk retweeted the fake news regarding the fact that mercury had been found in the Odra River and blamed the Law and Justice government for this (Polskie Radio, 2022; WPolityce.pl, 2022).	A European Commission study found that the death of around 360 tonnes of fish was caused by a major toxic algal bloom of <i>Prymnesium parvum</i> , resulting from drought, low water levels and industrial wastewater discharge.
Meeting in Radom, 21 September: Tusk said that “the arrogant authorities are raising food prices and not allowing people to live, breathe” (YouTube, 2022b; Polish Radio, 2023).	The state reduced VAT on food, while the prices increased due to various factors, such as the increase in commodity prices related to the war in Ukraine, the crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic and certain government actions in the area of social policy.
Meeting with voters in Radom, 21 September: Tusk said that Poland had the highest inflation in Europe, for which the Law and Justice government was responsible (YouTube, 2022b; Polskie Radio, 2023).	In September 2022, the highest inflation in Europe was in Turkey. In the European Union, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia recorded higher inflation than in Poland.

cont. Table 2

1	2
Meeting in Radom, 21 September: Tusk said that Morawiecki and his ministers had not yet made any decision whilst pocketing one billion PLN a year (YouTube, 2022b; Polskie Radio, 2023).	There is no doubt that ministers and the prime minister make many decisions every day. The annual budget of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister is not one billion PLN but approximately 830,000 PLN, and the amount does not go solely towards the salaries of the prime minister and ministers.
Meeting in Płock, 9 November: Tusk said that the Civic Platform government had not shot at the miners during the 2015 protests, and no one had been injured (Konkret 24.pl, 2022f).	On 3 February 2015, police fired smoothbore weapons at the miners protesting outside the Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa headquarters, and used water cannons and tear gas. Several persons were injured during the incident.

Table 3

How did the tvp.info and tvn24.pl portals respond to selected fake news?

Who created the fake news and how was it worded?	Response of tvp.info	Response of tvn24.pl
1	2	3
Grójec, 12 July: Kaczyński claimed that Daniel Obajtek, as mayor of Pcim, had “created probably the only such American-style store in Poland so far, where you can drive in by car and buy straight from the car, take from the shelves.”	No pertinent material released.	Tvn24.pl itself released no pertinent article, but a text exposing the false information was published on Konkret 24.pl (Konkret 24.pl, 2022c).
Twitter, 12 August: Tusk retweeted the fake news regarding the fact that mercury had been found in the Odra River and blamed the Law and Justice government for this.	Tvp.info published several articles stating that Donald Tusk resorted to fake news in his statements, as well as quoted Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, other Law and Justice politicians and the Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection (TVP Info, 2022b).	Tvn.24.pl reported on Donald Tusk’s press conference and quoted the politician extensively. No other articles stating that Donald Tusk had lied appeared, but an article discussing how the government changed the narrative on the disaster was indeed published (TVN 24.pl, 2022b).
Meeting in Elk, 5 November: Kaczyński stated that “the decline in fertility in Poland is a result of women hitting the bottle too much.” Furthermore, according to Kaczyński, “it takes 20 years for a man to become an alcoholic and only 2 for a woman” (YouTube, 2022a; Konkret 24.pl, 2022d).	The tvp.info portal reported that Jarosław Kaczyński had observed that the problem of alcoholism among women is serious. Also, TVN was attacked for making a lead story out of Kaczyński’s claim. It was also pointed out that not a single commentary on TVN expressed a similar position or stated that a problem indeed existed. Reference was made to various TVN publications concerning women who abused alcohol (TVP Info, 2022a).	Konkret 24.pl responded to Jarosław Kaczyński’s statement with an extensive post in which journalists demonstrated that Kaczyński’s statement was untrue. Meanwhile, the tvn24.pl portal reported that such a statement had been made (TVN Białystok, 2022). Another article noted that Jarosław Kaczyński had been reprimanded by the Deputies’ Ethics Committee (TVN 24, 2022a).

cont. Table 3

1	2	3
Meeting in Plock, 9 November: Tusk said that the Civic Platform government had not shot at the miners during the 2015 protests, and no one had been injured.	The outlet quoted Donald Tusk's assertion and showed pictures of a man severely injured in the incident. Reference was also made to a statement made by a miner who, speaking for TVN 24, stated that "the police were shooting blindly, they attacked people for no reason, I got hit for nothing" (TVP Info, 2022c).	Tvn24.pl published an extensive article attacking the public media for manipulating the 2015 incident. The article defended the then government and explained that the use of smoothbore weapons against the protesting miners was justified in view of the circumstances. It also corrected the false information given by Donald Tusk, from which it followed that no one had been injured (Konkret 24.pl, 2022f).

Conclusions

The analysis of politicians' statements makes it possible to conclude that using fake news in the public space is a way of furthering one's own interests. Adrian Grycuk, the author cited in the literature review section, noted that depending on the domain, fake news may serve different objectives (Grycuk, 2021). This analysis confirmed that both politicians use manipulated information in various domains.

In several interviews, Antoni Dudek maintained that everything Jarosław Kaczyński says has a political meaning (Rogoziński, 2022), much the same as in the case discussed. Thus, the opinions articulated by the politician were intended to reinforce the message of the ruling party, prevent voters from associating the decline in birth rates with inept pro-family policies, cause a "media storm" and divert attention from current problems (this being the domain of "public sentiment and opinion": all that aims to influence public sentiment and manipulate public opinion by detracting attention from inconvenient topics), foment resentment towards the opposition (the domain of "elections and referenda", as part of which the politician seeks to discredit political opponents, Civic Platform and Donald Tusk in the main) and draw a negative image of the European Union and Germany (the domain of "international conflicts" – using information as a weapon). Thus, Jarosław Kaczyński does not address his words to new, young voters but to the hardcore electorate in order to reassure them that the theses propounded by the ruling party are correct. The politician focused on topics that aroused emotions within the party and among the public, as this helps to divide Poles into "the good ones" who support Law and Justice and "the bad ones" who support Civic Platform (the domain of "political polarisation").

Donald Tusk had an interesting way of focusing attention of the audience, highlighting topics that resonated strongly with the public, notably inflation and high prices, in order to evoke negative associations with the ruling party, which he held responsible for all the problems in the country, as well as exploits current

crisis situations – such as the contamination of the Odra River – to that end (the domain of “public sentiment and opinion” to influence public sentiment and manipulate public opinion, and the domain of “crisis situations” to cause panic and chaos). His intention is to create the following impression: the evil government is profiting off poor Poles. In order to spin such a narrative, Tusk uses fake news and half-truths. The aim, therefore, was to convince the undecided who currently enjoyed social benefits but are dissatisfied with, e.g. the rise in prices of goods, as well as motivate opposition supporters to take part in parliamentary elections. False statements made by Donald Tusk most often concern the current political situation and focus on the most important problems in the country. Each time, his words referred to current affairs and drew the audience’s attention to the price issue. At the same time, the Civic Platform leader resorted to exaggeration, saying that “the prime minister and ministers do nothing” and significantly overstating the actual budget of the Chancellery of the Prime Ministers. In an interview for *Wojewódzki&Kędzierski*, columnist and commentator Sławomir Sierakowski observed that according to research, the primary motivation for Poles to vote is money (Wojewódzki&Kędzierski, 2023). It is, therefore, no surprise that Donald Tusk focuses the media’s attention on those rather than any themes. Nurturing the notion that the ruling party is “taking Poles’ money away” is an election tactic to support a return to power (the domain of “elections and referenda” as a political marketing tool which relies on discrediting political opponents and creating a negative image of the latter). Thus, just as Jarosław Kaczyński, Donald Tusk contributes to increasing political polarisation.

When analysing political statements, it is worth noting how the media respond to them. It would seem that the media adopt three types of approaches towards fake news communicated by politicians:

- they applaud the words of a particular politician,
- they strive to criticise and expose them,
- they relate them as a piece of information, i.e. “politician x said that...”.

In order to understand exactly how media communications work, it may be worthwhile to draw on the concept of myth by Roland Barthes, who noted in his *Mythologies* that the cover of a French daily which featured a black man dressed in a French military uniform looking at the French flag does not “expose its meaning”, while the dark-skinned man does not become an alibi for French imperialism, but merely manifests its presence (Barthes, 2008).

Thus, politicians play an important role in terms of propagating fake news, using the media as a platform for making controversial and often false claims. The reaction of the mainstream media depended on which party they supported. The *tvp.info* portal, which represents the public media funded by public subsidies and licence revenues, has – since the takeover by the ruling party – attempted to debunk false information communicated by Donald Tusk, but avoided referring to any false information coming from Jarosław Kaczyński. The *tvn24.pl* portal reported on the false information from Jarosław Kaczyński while at the same time very rarely commenting on Donald Tusk’s words or showing their broader context.

Tvn.24.pl tried to maintain an appearance of objectivity, which cannot be said of Tvp.info. The media (especially online outlets, which respond to the statements of politicians almost instantaneously) are not a symbol of reinforcing or refuting a political message but a symbol of the presence of specific statements of politicians in the public space. Consequently, political messages are popularised, and emotions around them arise. By disseminating the words of the leaders of the two largest parties, the online media gained new audiences who commented on what the politicians had said, reacting to the article, commenting on it and sharing it further in social media, although their actual goal was to convince the audience of a certain position towards a given issue – which they rather failed to achieve – because when the communications are examined in a broader context, and one side is confronted with the other, one experiences media hype.

The application of critical political discourse analysis to reconstruct fake news stated by politicians and disseminated by the media demonstrates that such statements in political communications may be interpreted in a different manner. This method allows for uncovering the sender's goal and understanding the media's role in promoting a politician in the public sphere. The analysis of selected statements made by politicians showed that none of them were accidental. Politicians chose to convey false information as the media readily cited them as a result. The media chose to publicise politicians' untrue words since it was intended to boost their media agenda, but in reality, it generated controversy among media users and led to increased viewership and profits for individual portals.

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Summary

This paper focuses on the analysis of fake news identified in the communications of two prominent Polish politicians, Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk. The aim of the text is to show untrue statements, explain the reasons why they were made in the public forum, and subsequently present how online outlets such as tvp.info and tvn.24.pl responded to such communications. The study takes advantage of critical analysis of media discourse, which demonstrates that Jarosław Kaczyński uses fake news in his statements to create a vision of an alternative reality so as to discredit political opponents and the allegedly hostile states and supra-state organisations, divert attention from current events and thus generate media hype. Donald Tusk selectively exploits problems currently faced by Poles and attempts to instil a vision of the world in the minds of the public, which the ruling party bears responsibility for. In either case, the aim of such contrived messages was to gain and maintain power. The media respond to manipulation and, therefore, contribute to increasing media hype and deeper political polarisation.

Specyfika dziennikarstwa internetowego. Fake newsy w przekazach wybranych polskich polityków w 2022 roku

Streszczenie

Artykuł skupia się na analizie fake newsów zidentyfikowanych w przekazach dwóch prominentnych polityków w Polsce – Jarosława Kaczyńskiego i Donalda Tuska. Celem tekstu jest wskazanie nieprawdziwych wypowiedzi oraz wyjaśnienie przyczyn wygłaszania ich na forum publicznym, a następnie przedstawienie, jak na te przekazy reagowały portale internetowe: tvp.info i tvn.24.pl. W pracy zastosowano krytyczną analizę dyskursu medialnego, z której wynika, że Jarosław Kaczyński w swoich wypowiedziach używa fake newsów, ponieważ to pozwala mu na stworzenie wizji alternatywnej rzeczywistości w celu zdyskredytowania przeciwników politycznych i uznanych za wrogie państw i organizacji ponadpaństwowych, odwrócenie uwagi od bieżących zdarzeń i tym samym wywołanie szumu medialnego. Donald Tusk wybiórczo wykorzystuje bieżące problemy Polaków i stara się stworzyć w umysłach odbiorców wizję świata, w której za wszystkie te problemy odpowiedzialni są przedstawiciele partii rządzącej. W obu przypadkach celem wytworzonych przekazów było zdobycie i utrzymanie władzy. Media reagują na manipulację i przyczyniają się tym samym do zwiększenia szumu medialnego i pogłębienia polaryzacji politycznej.

