

Emotionalisation Strategy in the Internet News Coverage of the COVID-19 Vaccines

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Abstract. The study encompasses the issues of public opinion manipulation in the post-Covid era. Within the framework of the research, the author delves into the discourse analysis of the most common rhetorical devices used by journalists for implementing the emotionalisation strategy and politicizing the Covid-19 vaccines, including emotional identification with newsreaders, self-presentation as well as appeals to pseudo-authorities. The reliability of the scientific results is supported by the analysis of more than 100 news stories about the Covid-19 vaccines collected from the online versions of the British and US highly-circulated papers. The conducted study shows that emotionalisation of the news coverage of the Covid-19 vaccines is aimed at political decision-making, enhancing or discrediting the image of the vaccines and the countries, polarizing social groups and manipulating public opinion in the digital information warfare. The study promotes deeper understanding of media manipulation tools, thus helping individuals develop media literacy skills.

Keywords: Emotionalisation; manipulation; rhetorical strategy; Covid-19 vaccines; emotional identification; self-presentation; authorities; pseudo-authorities; media literacy

1 Introduction

It is undeniable that the outbreak of Covid-19 has become a new global threat which has fundamentally changed all spheres of human life, putting an additional strain on economic and business models, healthcare system and job market. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of mass media has become quintessential in terms of informing the public on pandemic. [1]

Obviously, journalism has been challenged and largely affected by the coronavirus outbreak, which increased the demands on information veracity and media literacy. In fact, the pandemic revealed the problems of misinformation, disinformation and hoaxes in the Internet news discourse. In fact, misinformation on COVID-19 is so pervasive in the online media that even some patients dying from the disease still say it is a hoax. [2] Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic the task of gathering and distributing accurate information has become more challenging for journalists. Recent studies carried out suggest that during the Covid-19 crisis “journalists found themselves in a vulnerable position within the communication ecology and sought to mitigate the forces challenging their work as they sought to reverse the flow of

misinformation”. [1] Thus, a global epidemic of misinformation or “infodemic”, spreading rapidly through social media platforms and other news outlets, has posed a new serious problem to the whole world and, first and foremost, to the media and public spheres. [3] Furthermore, according to Helvoort and Hermans, fake news are considered “a threat for democracy and civic participation in a lot of European countries”. [4]

One of the factors that contributed to the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation on Covid-19 is the process of digitalisation, which has led to commercialisation and emotionalisation of media coverage. It is evident that the advent of the Internet and digital technologies has fundamentally changed the way recipients consume media content. [5] What we knew about journalism and what the percipient in the media space understood twelve years ago has vastly changed [6], which requires from modern newsreaders a certain level of competence and the ability to critically evaluate the media content, which is the one of the key tasks of media literacy. However, due to the fast pace of modern life and massive flow of information, modern audience or Internet “users” of new media do not have sufficient time or expertise to reflect on and fact-check the veracity of information in the news stories. As a result, this has led to the fact that they are often manipulated emotionally (as well as politically and ideologically) by unverified information and, most often, opinion-based and biased materials though they often do not recognize it themselves. Moreover, media digitalization has brought the opportunities of both visual and textual expression of feelings on a mass scale and resulted in the rise of the so-called post-truth politics, a political culture which is characterized by appeals to emotions. [7] Rational arguments and objective facts are often left behind and ignored, whereas the appeal to emotions has become ubiquitous, especially in online media. The readers tend to trust opinion leaders or those people who seem to be experts, although they lack competence and expertise in certain domains, more than real facts, which resulted in the decrease of public trust in media outlets. Modern journalism is shifting from an objective and impersonal event-based reporting to a reporting that is more subjective and emotional with statements and arguments. One of the reasons why journalists tend to appeal to emotions is economic. Being a commercial project, every newspaper struggles for reader’s attention. In this regard, emotions are considered to be a tried and tested way to grab readers’ attention very quickly. That is why both mainstream and social media are harnessing the emotional content that can quickly engage more audience. Thus, emotionalisation of the news coverage has become a focus of interest to many scientists.

The last factor which has currently gained scientific attention is the development and politization of the COVID-19 vaccines. All Western countries, as well as Russia and China, threw themselves into a race that went beyond purely scientific rivalry and started to promote their vaccines not only to ensure public protection but also to bolster their diplomacy and establish new strategic relations. Similarly, many media outlets, especially those that are politically biased, began to politicize the promotion of the COVID-19 vaccines, viewing them as a “geopolitical weapon” which is aimed at promoting the image of “their” vaccines in the global arena and discrediting “others” vaccines. [8]

All the factors combined have led to the fact that due to the absence of “filters” capable of fact-checking the news [9] and rapid dissemination of incomplete and confusing information, which is often opinion-based and not fact-checked, the sharing of scientific data on the COVID-19 vaccines has become a challenging task for journalists. Therefore, it is undoubtedly vital to conduct a thorough research on the emotional appeals and the most common rhetorical devices employed by journalists with the aim of politicizing the COVID-19 vaccines in the Internet news discourse. Moreover, our study is highly relevant from a pedagogical viewpoint. Designing special educational programs aimed at educating

individuals media literacy and developing their critical evaluation skills - the ability to critically assess the veracity of information about the coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccines, distinguish appeals to experts from non-experts' claims, truth from lies and understand the impact of media content - makes it possible to stop the spread of misinformation and combat “fake news” as well as help debunk the myths surrounding the COVID-19 vaccines.

2 Research objective and methodology

This paper represents a case study of the phenomenon of emotionalisation of the Internet news discourse in the post-Covid era. The study poses the following research questions:

RQ 1: Does emotionalisation strategy contribute to the politicization of the COVID-19 vaccines' coverage in the online news discourse?

RQ 2: How is this strategy linguistically and rhetorically marked in this type of discourse?

Our research hypothesis suggests that emotionalisation strategy is used by journalists as a political tool for enhancing “our” vaccines and discrediting “their” COVID-19 vaccines, which is aimed at public opinion manipulation, ideological polarization of the effectiveness of the vaccines, creating the country's positive or negative image and establishing the new strategic relations in the global arena.

Hence, our research aim is to study the most common rhetorical devices used by journalists for politicizing the COVID-19 vaccines and implementing emotionalisation strategy as well as their role in the British and American Internet news discourse. There are several research objectives which facilitate the achievement of the research aim, which are as follows:

- a. to define the notion of emotionalisation strategy and its function in the British and American Internet news discourse;
- b. to analyze the most common rhetorical devices and identify their linguistic markers employed in implementing this strategy and politicizing the COVID-19 vaccines in the British and American Internet news discourse.

To do it we used a CDA analysis. More than 100 news stories taken from the online papers published between 2020 and 2021 were extracted to detect the rhetorical devices and analyze the implications of the emotive language used by journalists in the news statements about the COVID-19 vaccines. News stories were collected using the LexisNexis database as a data collection tool. The British and American papers, including The Times, The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Metro, The Independent, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic and The Washington Post, were selected based on their high quality and popularity in the UK and USA, as they are considered to be the most reputable, influential and highly-circulated papers that may contribute to the reliability of the scientific results of the analysis of the collected material. The content analysis of the news stories was used to make inferences about the specifics of mediated emotions and their rhetorical functions in the Internet news discourse.

3 Literature review

It goes without saying that emotions are an efficient tool for communication, exerting a powerful impact on human behavior and all spheres of our life. The role of emotional components in communication has been of scientific interest since antiquity. In this regard, it

is noteworthy to refer to the views of Aristotle who recognised the power of emotions to influence judgments and claimed that "the persuasion of a public audience does not only depend on arguments, but also on the emotional state the audience happens to be in".[10] In other words, by imposing certain emotions on the audience, the author (speaker) influences the latter and makes it accept the point of view that is advantageous for the author, which is the ultimate aim of persuasion.

In his treatise "Rhetoric" Aristotle determined persuasion as a combination of three appeals - "logos", "pathos" and "ethos" - and put "pathos" (emotional impact) on the same footing with "ethos" (authority) and "logos" (facts) as a means of persuasion or rhetorical proof.[11] From this stance, it can be inferred that anyone seeking to persuade an audience should craft his/her message with facts ("logos"), tapping an argument's emotional aspect ("pathos"), and presenting his/her apparent moral standing ("ethos") - see Figure 1.

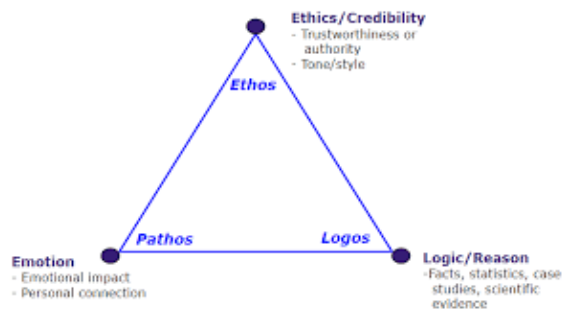


Fig. 1. The rhetorical triangle.

It is essential to note that emotions can be cognitive and embody thoughts which may be evaluated like any ideas. [10, p. 10] In this sense, they may be viewed as a tool for public opinion manipulation. For instance, when considering the ways how to direct the crowds, the famous French psychologist and sociologist, Gustave Lebon claimed that "given to exaggeration in its feelings, a crowd is only impressed by excessive sentiments. An orator wishing to move a crowd must make an abusive use of violent affirmations. To exaggerate, to affirm, to resort to repetitions, and never to attempt to prove anything by reasoning are methods of argument well known to speakers at public meetings".[12] Thus, in order to direct the audience the author (speaker) should appeal to emotions rather than valid logic in case he/she aspires to win an argument. However, the validity of the premises that establish such an argument does not prove to be verifiable. Therefore, emotional appeals are considered a logical fallacy, whereby a debater attempts to win an argument by trying to get an emotional reaction from the opponent and audience.

In general, the use of "false" or illogical reasoning has been studied since Aristotle who introduced a theory of logical fallacies. According to his theory, fallacies are instances of specious reasoning and not merely logical errors but hidden errors which give the illusion of an argument being sound. Aristotle divided fallacies into two broad categories: those which depend on language and those that are independent of language. The famous English philosopher, Francis Bacon, also contributed to the knowledge of the fallacies by paying attention to prejudice and bias in scientific investigation and the effect they could have on our beliefs. Bacon distinguished four types of false notions which he called the idols of mind ("Tribe", "Cave", "Marketplace" and "Theatre"), which mislead and prevent men from

attaining true understanding. Irving Copi identified eighteen core fallacies, including the following appeals to emotions: the appeal to the populace (“argument ad populum”), the appeal to pity (“argument ad misericordiam”), the appeal to envy (“ad invidiam”), the appeal to fear (“ad metum”), the appeal to hatred (“ad odium”), and the appeal to pride (“ad superbium”).[13] In all of these, the underlying mistake is the argument’s reliance on feelings as premises.

Some modern researchers think that people respond to emotional cues more than to rational arguments. For instance, Drew Westen believes that appeals to emotion will always beat appeals to reason: “when reason and emotion collide, emotion invariably wins”. [14] From this perspective, in order to convince the audience the speaker (author) has to use emotional manipulation rather than logical argumentation. Therefore, the study of emotions and their rhetorical potential in the modern mass media discourse is crucial in online papers since mass media play a crucial role in shaping the audience’s perception of social, political and cultural events and problems, especially in the context of modern uncertain times and such a global threat as the outbreak of Covid-19.

4 Results

For the purpose of this research, we have studied over 100 statements taken from the British and American online papers and found out the following most common rhetorical devices that are used by journalists to politicize the COVID-19 vaccines and emotionally manipulate the opinions of the readers of British and American online papers:

4.1 Emotional identification

The key purpose of the appeal to emotions in the media is to evoke certain feelings in the readers in order to identify and convince them in the correctness of the journalists' arguments, which, namely, can be called "emotional identification".

Burke considered identification to be a key principle of rhetoric and claimed that identification was more important than persuasion.[15] From his viewpoint, our society is divided into groups according to their interests. Hence, the aim of a rhetorician (speaker) is to identify with the interests of the audience in order to overcome this division and possible conflicts. In other words, in order to convince the news audience, it is necessary to identify with it. Therefore, in a broad sense, identification may be considered to be not only a specific rhetorical device but also one of the key principles of communication. Following Kenneth Burke, by identification we mean “a general principle of communication process used to make a speaker's viewpoint acceptable to the addressee and, thereby, convince him/her”. [16]

Identification is the most widely spread rhetorical device in the news media, especially in online media, and is aimed at “emotional infection” of the reader by identifying the feelings and emotional state of the journalist with the reader’s feelings in order to manipulate him/her. Journalists identify with the newsreaders by making them believe that they share the same opinions, which arouses trust and confidence in the journalists' arguments. In these cases, they often use the so-called “inclusive” pronouns (“we”, “you”, “everybody”, “nobody”, etc), which imply not only the speaker but also the addressee. As Fowler and Kress note, “inclusive” pronouns create the impression of the “intimacy” of communication and, more importantly, assume the solidarity of the views of the speaker and the addressee, thereby contributing to the effective impact on the latter.[17] Furthermore, avoiding the direct

expression of the journalists' views suggests removing responsibility from him/her and shifting it to the addressee as well as making the statement sound less categorical. Therefore, with the help of these pronouns journalists express their own opinion, thus hiding their true aim - emotional manipulation of the readers. Let us study the following examples:

- a. The vaccine [AstraZeneca] has given us hope, but we still need to follow the rules.[18]
- b. We expect this expertise <...>. Vaccines are our most powerful tool in fighting epidemic diseases, which as the 2019-nCoV virus demonstrates so ruthlessly, obliterate borders, remind us of our common humanity, and affect us all.[19]
- c. Brexiteers aren't "smug" about the EU's vaccine failure, we're angry. As the European Commission continues daily to flout the late Denis Healey's law of holes, pointing out its idiotic behaviour over vaccines and the ensuing idiotic behaviour of the most senior national leaders in the European Union is being deemed a red card offence by members of the Remain elite. [20]
- d. The European Medicines Agency seems likely to pronounce the shot safe. But will anyone want to take it [AstraZeneca] after this week's panic? [21]
- e. If the EU can threaten to ban the export of vaccines, what else might it ban? [22]

In these examples (№ 1-5) journalists emotionally manipulate the audience through the use of inclusive pronouns and emotive vocabulary either to portray the positive image of the vaccine Oxford-AstraZeneca and show their negative attitude towards the vaccine opponents ("anti-vaxxers") who cast doubt on its effectiveness or to show their mistrust in the vaccine. Journalists' attitudes towards the vaccine and its opponents are transmitted through the use of emotionally marked vocabulary with positive ("hope", "expect", "our most powerful tool") or negative ("idiotic behaviour", "angry") meanings.

Examples № 1 and 2 show that the journalists use the verbs "expect" and "hope", denoting the anticipation of a positive outcome of the situation with the pandemic. This way they create the impression of emotional "involvement" of the journalist and highlight the sense of togetherness with thoughts and feelings of the readers. Undoubtedly, the feeling of emotional "involvement" and unity with the reader increases the emotionality and persuasiveness of the information, brings the readers closer to the opinion of the journalists and is used for their emotional manipulation.

In example № 3 the journalist identifies his emotional state with the feelings of the majority of the newsreaders by directly addressing them ("Brexiteers"). This is intended to show that the journalist is one of the readers - the majority of the British people who are dissatisfied with the EU's vaccine failure. By uniting with the readers, the journalist engages the readers with the feeling of anger over the actions of the most senior national leaders in the European Union. Moreover, expressing his indignation about the actions of the European leaders over the vaccine is unlikely to leave anyone indifferent, which, in its turn, is aimed at making the readers take the journalist's viewpoint. This is a striking example of emotional manipulation in online media.

The use of rhetorical questions addressed directly to the newsreaders in examples № 4 and 5 is intended to capture the readers' attention, encourage them to reflect on the AstraZeneca vaccine and make them accept the journalist's opinion about the effectiveness and urgent necessity of this vaccine. Shifting the argument from medical discussion to the political sphere distracts the readers from the discussion of the vaccine's effectiveness, thus making them accept the journalist's view.

Therefore, from these examples it is evident that the use of emotions with the intention of identification and solidarity with the readers has a profound effect on the latter, making them

believe that they and journalists share the same views on the issues of vaccines, which is one of the widespread ways to emotionally manipulate the audience in the Internet news discourse.

4.2 Self-presentation

As we have already noted, modern journalism is shifting from an objective and impersonal reporting to a more emotional and personalized reporting with statements and arguments based not only on knowledge and facts but also on emotional appeals. [7, pp. 138–139] Thus, currently it is very common for journalists to explicitly express their emotional attitude towards the discussed events in the media. In these cases, they tend to employ the rhetorical device of self-presentation. By self-presentation we mean a rhetorical device that is used by journalists when they express their personal opinion on the issues or appeal to their personal experience to convince the readers in the rightness of their viewpoint. By using this device, journalists show themselves as emotional people who openly express their feelings, which produces a sympathetic response from the reader and undoubtedly arouses confidence in the audience. This device is closely related to identification since self-presentation is reader-oriented, which allows us to presume that identification is a fundamental communication principle, according to which the author (journalist) writes his/her text. Hence, self-presentation is intended not only to enhance the image of a particular journalist but, first and foremost, to influence the reader. Let us illustrate it by considering the following examples:

- a. In the past few days, I spoke or corresponded with more than a dozen such people. I told them that I was staunchly pro-vaccine... [23]
- b. Why I Got the Russian Vaccine: A New York Times reporter juggled fears engendered by the politicized rollout of the Sputnik V vaccine with the urge to gain protection from the deadly virus. Russian promoters have compared the vaccine to the Kalashnikov rifle, simple and effective in its operation. I was even lucky in avoiding some of the common side effects of Sputnik V, such as a raging headache or a fever. With many of my fears alleviated, another reason I chose to get inoculated with a product of Russian genetic engineering was more basic: It was available. Russian clinics have not been dogged by the lines or logistical snafus reported at vaccination sites in the United States and other countries.[24]
- c. If the presentations led by medical regulators in the UK and Europe on Wednesday do not build confidence in vaccines I'm not sure what will. [25]

To enhance the persuasiveness of the journalists' arguments and to persuade the audience by appealing to their own opinion (№ 6, 8) or personal experiences (№ 7) the journalists appeal to self-presentation. The marker of this device is the personal pronoun "I" which is used together with opinion verbs, nouns or adjectives such as "I believe/feel/think/doubt that...", "I am sure/certain", "My opinion/idea/thought is...". By expressing their opinion on the issue of vaccines directly and sharing their own experiences of getting a COVID-19 vaccine, the journalists intend to enhance their image in the eyes of their readers, making the latter trust their opinion and evidence. In example № 7 the journalist shares his experience of getting the Russian vaccine "Sputnik V" compared to a "Kalashnikov rifle" - a metaphor which is intended to increase the emotionality and persuasiveness of his arguments. Moreover, he lists the benefits of this vaccine with the help of the words that have a positive meaning ("simple", "effective", "available"). This way the journalist shows his approval of the effectiveness of this vaccine, which undoubtedly contributes to the emotional impact of the latter.

Nevertheless, having analysed the material, we have come across with the cases when journalists, unwilling to express their personal opinions about the vaccines directly, "hide" them by making their statements sound impersonal. Let us refer to the following examples:

- a. It appears increasingly clear that the suspensions have as much to do with political considerations as scientific ones. But there have been shifting concerns about the vaccine [Sputnik V] in Europe.[26]
- b. The key message is this: the benefits of taking the AstraZeneca vaccine greatly outweigh the "serious but vanishingly rare" clotting risk associated with it.[25]
- c. It remains unclear whether Sputnik V, the world's first registered Covid-19 vaccine, is the medical breakthrough proclaimed last summer by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, but it has proved itself to be remarkably effective in spreading disarray and division in Europe. <...>Slovakia provides the most concrete example of how Russia's vaccine diplomacy has had side effects that can be highly toxic.[27]
- d. <...>the AstraZeneca shot, like many other drugs is considered effective and safe.[28]

To increase the emotionality of the arguments and "hide" their attitude towards the discussed issue, journalists often use intensifying adverbs (№ 9, 10, 11), impersonal constructions (№ 11) as well as constructions with passive voice (№ 12). From these examples, it is obvious that the journalists intentionally incorporate the emotional components into their statements about the Covid-19 vaccines in order to show their attitude towards them and incline the readers to take their viewpoint. Thus, both explicit and implicit self-presentation is one of the common means of emotional manipulation in the Internet news discourse.

4.3 Appeals to authorities

Another way to strengthen the argument and make the statement sound more objective and trustworthy is to appeal to authorities. In news reporting authority plays a very important role. The use of the authority stimulates the thinking activity of the audience, convinces it to include the proposed information into the fund of its knowledge, helps the author guide the logic of perception of information by news audience and justify his/her opinion. In this context, both for the reader of newspapers and for the reader of any other literature, it is very important to deal with reputable experts and their testimonials which are used as arguments in favour of journalist's opinion. Here are some examples:

- a. "The results from the U.S. trial of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine give strong evidence that the vaccine is both safe and highly effective," Matt Hancock, the British health secretary, said on Monday. [29]
- b. "This was a very big, well-powered study that I think that confirms now that this vaccine is a good vaccine," said Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's leading infectious-disease expert. [29]
- c. "...new data showing it is safe and effective is ..." said Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at the University of Southampton in Britain. [29]

The reference to authority or "experts" in online media is virtually a substitute for the evidence of the author's viewpoint. The communicative purpose of these appeals to authorities is mainly persuasion since they are usually used by people who have expertise and competence in the certain field. Moreover, these appeals are supported by sufficient evidence which can prove the reliability of the authority's opinion.

When it comes down to the discussion of the COVID-19 vaccines, the journalists often rely on the opinions of “generalised” experts - mainly health organizations or institutions that can be considered reliable and reputable in the field of medicine. For instance:

- a. The UK medicines regulator says the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine continue to outweigh any risks. [30]
- b. Regulators, including the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK and the European Medicines Agency, say the overall benefits of the vaccine outweigh the risks for all age groups. [31]
- c. Brazil’s health authority said it has serious doubts about the safety and efficacy of Russia’s Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine and defended its decision to block the shot for emergency use, saying Russia lacks vaccine experience and was defensive in its responses to the agency. [31]

In these examples (№ 16-18) the appeals to authorities are intended to support the journalists’ viewpoint and enhance the importance and credibility of the provided information, thus making the readers trust the journalists and media source on the whole.

4.4 Appeals to pseudo-authorities

Nevertheless, when persuading the audience, journalists tend to appeal to those authorities that are either not mentioned in the news stories so that the source of information remains unknown and is not disclosed to the readers or the authorities that contain insufficient evidence of people who either lack competence or knowledge in a certain field. These appeals are aimed at misleading the audience and lead either to distortion of facts, subjectivity of the news content or even intentional disinformation and ideological propaganda. That is why studying them is highly important, especially when it comes to discussing health issues such as Covid-19 vaccination.

In these cases, journalists often use testimonials of famous people (celebrities, politicians, etc.). Celebrity endorsements often have an enormous impact on the entire online community since they are trusted role models for many people. To illustrate it, let us study the following examples:

- a. The prime minister of Lithuania, Ingrida Šimonytė, tweeted in February that Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, saw the shot not so much as a “cure for the Russian people” but as “another hybrid weapon to divide and rule”. [32]
- b. France’s foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, has described the shot as “more a means of propaganda and aggressive diplomacy than of solidarity and assistance”. [Ibid.]
- c. “I trust AstraZeneca, I trust the vaccines,” Ursula von der Leyen, the top European Union official, said at a news conference in Brussels. [33]
- d. Apprentice and Countdown star Hewer, 77, praised the “amazing efficiency” of the vaccination centre where he received his jab. [34]
- e. [Michael Kretschmer about Sputnik V]: “Russia is a great land of science and I don’t have the faintest doubt that scientists there are capable of producing an effective vaccine.” [26]
- f. Speaking during a Fine Gael parliamentary party meeting on Wednesday, Leo Varadkar, the tánaiste, said that Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine seemed to work and its data was very good. He noted that the Russians led the way in scientific innovations during the Soviet era. [35]

In these examples the opinions of celebrities and politicians who are non-experts in the field of medicine serve as “sound” arguments either in favour (№ 21-24) or against (№ 19-20)

the COVID-19 vaccines, thus enhancing or discrediting the image of both the product and the country as well.

As is evident from examples № 19 and № 20, where the journalists refer to the politicians who consider the vaccine as “a means of propaganda and aggressive diplomacy”, quotations of non-experts (politicians) are intended to “hide” the journalists’ opinions, removing responsibility from them and shifting it to the politicians, thus making the argument sound more valid in the eyes of the audience. The quotations that contain words with negative meaning (“aggressive diplomacy”, “another hybrid weapon”) are used to emotionally manipulate the audience and justify the negative opinion of the journalist about “Sputnik V” as a political tool for Russia's propaganda. Undoubtedly, such negative emotions as criticism and accusations contribute to the polarization of public opinions about the vaccines and further political confrontation.

Examples № 21-24 show that politicians and celebrities express their positive opinion about the vaccines. The use of the emotive language with positive meaning (“trust”, “amazing efficiency”, “effective vaccine”) is intended to identify the thoughts and feelings of the celebrities about the efficacy of the vaccine with that of the audience and contributes to the emotional impact on the audience. In examples № 23 and 24 the journalists appeal to the opinions of politicians, who speak about the efficacy of “Sputnik V” and enhance the image of Russia by referring to historical allusions and the stereotype of it as “a great land of science”, which “led the way in scientific innovations during the Soviet era”. Stereotypes often have rhetorical function: they evoke a number of associations in the minds of representatives of national and cultural communities, have an axiological meaning and are used by the journalist in the text in order to make the audience believe the journalist’s opinion.

In order to make the arguments about the efficacy of the vaccines more compelling and sound, journalists may refer to testimonials of the vaccinated people. In these cases the evidence from those who have been inoculated serves as the argument in favour of the journalist’s opinion so that the audience cannot but believe and accept it. For instance:

- a. *Actor James Norton, 35, was ‘relieved’ to have been vaccinated.*[36]
- b. “Sitting nearby was Galina Chupyl, a 65-year-old municipal worker. What did she think of getting vaccinated? “I am happy, of course,” she said.[24]
- c. Stephen Fry, 63, received his jab on March 10 at Westminster Abbey and said getting his first dose was a ‘wonderful moment’.[36]
- d. ‘I’m very happy that I’m gonna get my Moderna shot today and I wanted to tell everybody that you should get out there and do it too, I even changed one of my songs to fit the occasion,’ Dolly teased, before launching into song. [36]

In these examples (№ 25-28) the journalists appeal to the testimonials of the vaccinated celebrities that prove journalists’ positive opinion about the vaccines, making the readers accept their viewpoint about vaccines' efficacy. The use of emotive language (“relieved”, “wonderful moment”, “very happy”, “euphoric”) contributes to the persuasiveness of the appeals to pseudo-authorities and creates positive image of the European vaccines.

When it comes to the discussion of the efficacy of the Russian vaccine “Sputnik V”, journalists often use the so-called “implicit” pseudo-authorities, which are defined as rhetorical strategies used by journalists when there is deliberately no indication of an authoritative source of knowledge. Thus, the information transmitted with the help of them is perceived by the audience as obvious, generally accepted and does not require special evidence. Let us study pseudo-authorities by considering the following examples:

- a. Observers say the Sputnik V jab is aimed more at sowing political division than fighting coonavirus. [32]

- b. Russia expected a surge for its Sputnik V vaccine. But many skeptics still stayed away. [37]
- c. Experts say that approving a vaccine even for limited use before large-scale testing carries risks.[38]

In examples № 29-31 common nouns (“observers”, “experts”, “skeptics”) are used as “implicit” authorities. The journalists identify their opinion with an authoritative source of information, but the name of this source is not mentioned. In fact, it is hidden from the reader. Replacing specific nouns by general nouns which contain the notion of authority in their meaning has a rhetorical function. It allows the journalist not to prove his/her point of view and is intended to create an illusion of objectivity and reliability of the information presented by the journalist, which contributes to the manipulative impact on the reader.

In some cases mentioning the name of the authoritative source is unnecessary. In these cases the journalist employs statistical data to enhance the “pseudo-visibility” and persuasiveness of the material in the paper. By “pseudo-visibility” we mean the use of such language means that contain large numbers and serve to enhance the emotional effect of information with the aim of public opinion manipulation. Here are some examples to illustrate it:

- a. A recent survey by the Globsec research group found that among those willing to be vaccinated, only 1 percent of Poles and Romanians and 2 percent of Lithuanians would choose Sputnik over American and European brands. Even in Hungary, the lone European Union member to start inoculating its citizens with Russia’s product, only 4 percent want Sputnik V. [27]
- b. The UK’s health service is the first in the world to begin rolling out the Pfizer/BioNTech’s Covid-19 vaccine, which has proved to be 95 per cent effective in trials.[39]
- c. AstraZeneca’s Covid-19 Vaccine Is Found to Be 79% Effective in U.S. Study.[30]
- d. Distrust of vaccines is so high in Russia that 53 per cent of people who say they are worried about catching the virus also say they will not get vaccinated, according to a recent opinion poll by the Levada Centre. About 60 per cent of all respondents said they had no plans to get the jab.[40]
- e. A recent survey found that 52 per cent of Russians do not want to receive the vaccine [Sputnik V] due to safety concerns.[41]

Under the data with large numbers the journalists do not seek to deceive the audience but rather disguise their true goal - the emotional influence on the addressee. As is seen from the examples, they refer to a very detailed statistics in order to support their negative viewpoint - the skepticism and distrust of the Russian vaccine. In these cases the appeals to statistics are used not as factual information but as a means of emotional manipulation since many readers are laymen and tend to trust statistics and large numbers in the papers.

Thus, it is evident that references to those people who are non-experts in a certain domain have a profound effect on the mass audience, forcing it to trust the words of pseudo-authorities. This is one of the widespread manipulative tools in the modern Internet news discourse.

5 Discussion

Our study found that there is abundance of research addressing the concept of emotion which is rather ambiguous. Considering the role of emotional elements in media

communication, it is vital to define what an emotion precisely is or how it differs from other interrelated concepts such as 'affect', 'feeling' or 'mood'.

An important distinction of emotions from moods is the fact that emotions can be acute and momentary, while moods are considered to be longer-lasting and more stable, providing a general background to our more immediate experiences. Affect theorists differentiate between emotions and affects [42], viewing the former as personal experiences that are conscious, whereas the latter are seen as subconscious and body-related forces that precede, produce, and inform such experiences. A fundamental difference between feelings and emotions is that feelings are experienced consciously, while emotions are both conscious or subconscious.

In general, emotion classification can be divided into two classes: primary emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise, and secondary emotions, which evoke a mental image that correlates to memory or primary emotion. In psychology, Tomkins and Ekman connected the concept of emotions with universal face expressions, such as anger, sadness, or joy [43]. Nevertheless, this popular approach received criticism from scholars, such as Feldman Barrett [44], who emphasised the socio-cultural constructedness of emotions, pointing to the link between learning, emotion vocabulary, and emotion awareness. In fact, these approaches retake the classical Western division between (cognitive) mind and (emotional) body. This distinction goes back to the Classical Antiquity and Enlightenment, which assumed a rationalist bias for individuals devoid of passion and human emotions.

Currently, the study of emotions in the media has become of great importance to many scientists. For instance, a Russian media researcher, N.S. Dankova points out that "the media product is currently becoming not only the subject of factual and formal information, but also the subject of the information experienced by the recipients emotionally and causing a sense of involvement". [45] From her viewpoint, emotionally marked language can have a strong impact on the recipient. Considering the strategy of emotionalisation in mass communication, Dankova concludes that emotional argumentation plays a key role in the process of modern communication and, especially, in terms of mass communication. Similarly, discussing the role of emotional components of the journalistic text, Van Dijk claimed that "facts are better described if they contain strong emotions". [46]

It is notable that the impact in modern media is carried out both with the use of traditional (logical and emotional) and modern (information) methods of influence. Recent studies have shown that a more reliable and quick method of changing the public opinion is to change the emotional meaning and attitude to a particular problem, which is the most effective and quickest way to give a news story more prominence, draw the audience's attention to it and manipulate public opinion [7, p. 129]. Following the views of Antje Glück, who considered mediated emotions as a means and base of social communication [43], we define them as a set of conscious and unconscious emotional reactions of subjects or objects of reality to social and political events discussed in the media. Mediated emotions are mainly used with the purpose of public opinion manipulation, which occurs when a manipulative person (the journalist) seeks power over someone else (the reader) and employs dishonest or exploitive strategies to gain it. Therefore, these emotions have become not only part of the communication repertoire of social actors, but also a means of both information and manipulation which journalists deploy in news production. In this regard, mediated emotions may be seen as a means of political communication, contributing to the process of decision-making. For instance, in examining the content that went viral online, scholars found individuals were significantly more likely to take actions when the encountered article evoked highly arousing emotions such as satisfaction, awe, and anger [47].

Furthermore, mediated emotions have always had a direct impact on political processes [48]. Habermas viewed media as an ideal platform for public communication that might generate the critical consensus on the prevailing issues of the day [49]. From his viewpoint, mediated emotions may be thought-provoking and make substantial contributions to social, economic and political spheres. Similarly, Okpadah noted that TV coverage “has affected and influenced the trends of world politics” [50]. Nussbaum also emphasized a correlation between political realms and the types of emotions or reactions that they evoke or by which they can be characterized [51].

Therefore, mediated emotions have become one of the determining factors in defining news value. Moreover, the transmission of emotions in the media is almost as important as that of knowledge [52]. Our research has revealed that journalists increasingly incorporate emotional elements in news stories [53], since emotions influence the way the news audience perceives information and forms its opinion [54]. Notably, they may also impact upon how the content is shared. Considering the correlation between emotions and virality, Berger and Milkman came to the conclusion that the emotional valence of online content (positive, negative, or both) “could cause a higher degree of cognitive involvement and enthusiasm, which can, in turn, impact the exchange of information. Users are much more likely to take actions when they were exposed to emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness in messages”. [47, p. 19] Notably, there are certain emotions that contribute towards communicative success of TV programs by capturing viewers' attention and not concentrating on their knowledge of the matter. This may be explained by the fact that the audience is diverse and can be unprepared for the scientific or technical issues discussed in these programs. In this regard, emotionalization becomes an important strategy in the programs that seek to spread scientific knowledge among the general public.

Following a number of important recent publications on emotionality in journalism studies, it is also important to refer to the study of Maja Stenvall who considered the representations of emotions in the news discourse and focused on the complementarity of both emotionality and objectivity as opposed to the old and rather simplistic view that emotionality has to be excluded in news reporting [55]. From her viewpoint, emotionality does not necessarily run counter to objectivity but may operate alongside. Stenvall considers representations of journalists' emotions as a powerful tool to influence or create social emotional climates. Furthermore, she thinks they perform a strategic function for journalists to structure news material, using the devices of personalization, simplification, or non-authorial affects to establish a link to news audiences or emphasize emotive information. Contrary to the views of Stenvall, this paper views emotionalisation from a rhetorical viewpoint as an intentional “evoking of emotions” [56]. We define emotionalisation as “a deliberate use of rhetorical devices and emotive language aimed at emotional manipulation” [7, p. 130]. By creating a positive or negative image (opinion or attitude) of some person (thing or event) in the media journalists emotionally manipulate public opinion, forcing the readers to accept the journalists' view and thus undermining the principle of journalistic objectivity, which may lead to subjectivity, distortion of facts and disinformation.

From our viewpoint, emotionalisation strategy can be carried out in two ways: explicitly and implicitly. To accurately discern the difference between explicit and implicit emotional appeals it is essential to understand their communicative intention which can be either persuasive or manipulative.

Following the views of Aristotle who considered persuasion as inherently good because it is one of the primary means through which truth becomes known, we have concluded that the

communicative purpose of the explicit emotional appeals is mainly persuasion since the audience has a choice to either accept or reject these persuasive appeals. In contrast, when it comes down to the implicit appeals to emotions which “hide” the journalist’s opinion, their ultimate intention is manipulation since they are aimed at misleading the audience and forcing it to accept the journalist’s opinion without any sufficient evidence or proofs. The difference between these two types of appeals is displayed in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. Explicit and implicit emotional appeals in the media.

Therefore, detecting the explicit and implicit emotional appeals is critical to mass communication which is vulnerable to manipulation.

6 Conclusions

From the analysis of more than 100 news stories about the Covid-19 vaccines, we have come to the conclusion that emotionalisation strategy can be carried out in two ways: both explicitly and implicitly. Its communicative intention is mainly manipulative, since its main aim is to draw inward feelings from the recipient of the information and convince the audience in the rightness of the presented arguments. The study also reveals that the most common rhetorical devices used for politicizing the Covid-19 vaccines include emotional identification, self-presentation, appeals to authorities and pseudo-authorities, whilst emotional identification being one of the key principles of communication as well as fundamental premises of manipulation. At a micro-textual level, various linguistic devices have been identified that can create bias in news texts about the vaccines: from inclusive pronouns, emotive language, discourse markers and intensifiers to impersonal structures and rhetorical questions.

Furthermore, we have inferred that the narratives about the COVID-19 vaccines play a crucial role in political decision-making and implementing the macro-level discursive strategy of expressing journalists’ views towards political issues: either enhancing or discrediting the country’s image on the global political arena. In fact, mediated emotions have a profound influence on the people’s mental models - the way they perceive not only the COVID-19 vaccines, but also the countries on the whole. The attitude towards the vaccines that is imposed on the readers by journalists is transferred to the image of the whole country. It is evident that the discussion of the vaccines in the British and American online media is undoubtedly politicized to a large extent and reflects the prevailing pro-European and anti-Russian moods, which contributes to further polarization of the social groups and intensifies existing internal and external political tensions in many countries. Therefore, the key functions of emotionalisation strategy include ideological polarization of the effectiveness of “our” and “their” vaccines, intensifying political tensions between the countries, creating a positive or negative image of the country, encouraging political decision-making as well as establishing new strategic relations in the global arena. In this sense, it is important to continue studying emotional appeals as they can be used as a tool for political propaganda, posing a serious threat both to democracy and the credibility of the information in the media. In this regard, the role of media literacy is quintessential. By designing educational literacy programs aimed at

raising the readers' awareness of the modern tools for public opinion manipulation such as emotionalisation strategy, we can teach them to detect false opinions that have no relation to real facts or scientific knowledge, develop their expertise in the understanding of media manipulation and transformations in the field of journalism that have been caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 and the significance of their influence on individuals, society and politics in the post-Covid era.

As a result of the research, it is obvious that emotions play a crucial role in news reporting and modern argumentation, leaving the facts behind and becoming a key factor that determines the credibility of information in the modern online media. They have become one of the “landmarks ” of the “post-truth” discourse, which is characterised by the use of language means that lack any references to facts, truths, and realities. Hence, we have assumed that mediated emotions have become a purely strategic medium for public opinion manipulation and play a crucial role in disseminating false and unverified information in online media. Thus, the paper opens up perspectives for further research in the fields of linguistics, journalism, psychology, media studies and political science.

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