

Retoryka dziennikarstwa

Rhetoric of/in journalism

5 (1) 2018 EDITOR: KATARZYNA MOLEK-KOZAKOWSKA

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The eristic of newsworthiness in the representation of *Barnevernet* controversy: A case study of the Norwegian Child Welfare Service

Erystyka wartości informacyjnych w reprezentacji *Barnevernet*. Studium przypadku norweskiej Organizacji Ochrony Praw Dziecka

Abstract

This study offers a critical evaluation of news values by four selected contemporary media outlets: *BBC News*, *The Federalist*, *OneEurope* and *Dagbladet*. The material covers the controversy around the Norwegian Child Welfare Service with cases of children being taken away from their families, thus it involves cultural and legal aspects of the issue. The analytic categories are based on news value research guidelines that were introduced in the study by Johan Galtung and Mari H. Ruge (1965). In parallel, the philosophical reference is construed through the works by Artur Schopenhauer and Anton Powell. This, in turn, allows evaluating the language that construes newsworthiness from an eristic perspective. The study demonstrates how the eristic application of news values may influence the fair presentation of an issue, at least when a case is presented as involving a controversy. The focus is on the eristic tools of news value enhancement which lead to channeling consumers' attention in a desirable manner.

Niniejsze studium dotyczy analizy wartości informacji na podstawie czterech wybranych współczesnych kanałów masowego przekazu: *BBC News*, *The Federalist*, *OneEurope* i *Dagbladet* w odniesieniu do kontrowersji wokół norweskiej organizacji Ochrony Praw Dziecka (norw. *Barnevernet*), w tym przypadków rodzin, którym odebrano prawa rodzicielskie. W związku z tym na problematykę pracy składają się również kulturowe i prawne aspekty raportowanego zjawiska. Kategorie analityczne zostały opracowane w oparciu o listę wartości informacyjnych autorstwa Johana Galtunga i Mari H. Ruge (1965). Z perspektywy filozoficznej, analiza pracy opiera się na dorobku Artura Schopenhauera i Antona Powella. Wyżej wspomniana metodologia pozwoliła na analizę językowych czynników składających się na jakość przekazu z erystycznego punktu widzenia. Analiza wykazała, że stosowanie chwytów erystycznych w obszarze kryteriów wartości informacyjnej może zaburzyć dostarczenie autentycznego obrazu rzeczywistości, szczególnie w tak delikatnym i kontrowersyjnym temacie. Studium koncentruje się na erystyce językowych narzędzi kierowania uwagi odbiorcy w pożądanym kierunku.

Key words

news values, newsworthiness, manipulation, eristic, controversy, news reporting
wartość informacyjna, jakość informacji, narzędzia manipulacji, erystyka, kontrowersja, dziennikarstwo informacyjne

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1. Introduction

In the current era of mass media, attracting consumers' attention to information has become an utterly significant process. In the news reporting context, this refers to how information is selected and presented as "events", "facts" and "issues" worthy of attention and reflection. Johan Galtung and Mari H. Ruge (1965), authors of a highly influential work in the field of news discourse claim in their work that "the emission is continuous, corresponding to the truism that something is always happening to any person in the world. (...) what we choose to consider an 'event' is culturally determined" (1965, 65). As today people are surrounded by constantly incoming information, news discourse constitutes an essential research subject. In addition, broad access to various media resources frequently involves a great deal of inconsistency as far as the delivery of the facts is concerned. Hence, the recipients are faced with a challenge to analyze the news critically and assess their value individually. Crucial in the process of aforesaid assessment are news values which Allan Bell (1991, 155) defines in his work as "values by which one 'fact' is judged more newsworthy than another" (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 40).

This study is devoted to exploring the factors that make news stories newsworthy, but also may distort the factual reality and manipulate news consumers. In this sense this study links with eristic argumentation, as it explores how controversial issues are reported not to reflect the essence of the argument, but to win it in the eyes of the audience. The Sophists (i.a. Euthydemus and Dionysodoros) contributed to the popularization of eristic, but the term was introduced into modern philosophy and rhetoric by Artur Schopenhauer in his essay "Die eristische Dialektik" ([1864] 1997). Eristic was nothing like the dialectical, logical and qualitative discussion, but rather, in opposition to Plato, an art of bringing disputes to a favourable outcome, regardless of the material truth. For Plato, these ways of

leading the discussion cannot be classified as a method of argument because of the usage of fallacies. Anton Powell (2002, 45) has added that: “It is characteristic of the eristic to think of some arguments as a way of defeating the other side, by showing that an opponent must assent to the negation of what he initially took himself to believe.”

In its empirical part, this study aims to analyze the quality of information based on the aforementioned guidelines on news values with the use of four distinct articles from international press. Articles cover the issue of controversy around the Norwegian Child Welfare Service (Barnevernet) within multinational cases of children being taken away from their families. The analysis’ objective is to judge the concept of newsworthiness from the discursive perspective, that is to evaluate both language and image factors. The study will be accompanied by a characteristic of both legal and cultural background of Norway. Consequently, the focus of the research will be further oriented to techniques of language manipulation used in order to prematurely channel people’s attention in a desirable manner. The material that the study aims to analyze is drawn from online news sources: *BBC News*, *The Federalist*, *OneEurope*, *Dagbladet*. Additionally, the study was inspired by the work of Maciej Czarnecki entitled *Children of Norway. A Story of an Overprotective Country*.

The pilot analysis reveals that both Norwegian and international press are missing objectivity, as the majority of arguments base on the reports of the families which are engaged in the controversy or people who identify with whichever of the cases due to country or cause affiliation. Furthermore, emotional stimulation seems to be a tool of readers’ manipulation: the main emphasis is put on the transmission of speculations. The study explores which eristic techniques stand for newsworthiness, among which there are journalistic, cultural and linguistic resources.

2. The Barnevernet controversy

Norwegian Child Welfare Services (Barnevernet) have been involved in a recent controversy over acting on the slightest suspicion of child neglect or abuse. However, many mediated statements and accusations concerning Barnevernet appear to be caused by the outlets’ strategies to exaggerate the controversy – a technique of newsworthiness building discussed below.

Barnevernet, which can be literally translated into “child protection,” was established in 1992 as a consequence of the Child Welfare Act. According to regulations, its main objective is “to ensure that children and youth who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the

necessary assistance and care at the right time” and “to ensure that children and youth grow up in a secure environment” (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2013, n.p.). The Norwegian Barnevernet is a highly developed institution. In his work entitled *Children of Norway. A Story of an Overprotective Country* (2016), Czarnecki notes that Barnevernet’s interventions are much faster and much more frequent than those of any other child welfare services, including Polish ones. According to Child Welfare Act (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2013, n.p.), every municipality in Norway is legally obliged to establish an individual Child Welfare service. In fact, the services’ main aim is to “assist families, so that the family can function better and continue living together in the home.”

For the purpose of this article, it is essential to outline Barnevernet’s manner of functioning. The key notion here is *care order*, as Barnevernet is known for its urgent interventions which are divided into two types. The Norwegian Child Protection Services are entitled to an intervention not only in cases of existent family dysfunctions but also in cases when children are suspected not to receive adequate standards for their future development. It is crucial to indicate that the notion of *intervention* does not necessarily mean separating the family. Interventions involve a wide range of actions including expecting the parents to contact the services in order to establish the most suitable course of action for the child’s well-being and development. In this scenario, Barnevernet’s interference does not include a *care order*, that is, separating a child from its original family and finding foster care. As mentioned in the Child Welfare Act, “to pass a care order is always a measure of last resort” (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2013, n.p.).

The statistics of Barnevernet’s interventions are publicly available and the following figures testify to the fact that emergency care orders and placements are not issued *en masse*, they have not been rising sharply, and they are not the main type of intervention:

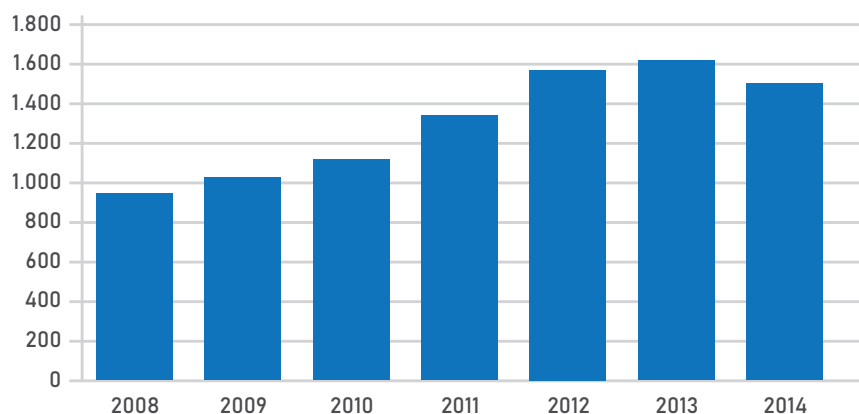


Figure 1. Emergency care orders in Norway. *Source:* www.bufdir.no.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
All children subject to measures	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Assistance measures	68,8	70,5	70,6	70,5	71,3	71,3	71,1	70,3	69,7	68,5	66,2	65
Taking children into care	22,6	21,9	21,8	21,6	20,8	20,4	20,2	20,6	21,3	22,7	24,3	25,7
Placement excluding children taken into care	8,6	7,6	7,6	7,9	7,9	8,3	8,1	9,1	9	8,8	9,5	9,2

Figure 2. Children aged 0-17 years old subject to child welfare services measures in or outside of the home in percentage at the end of each year. *Source: www.bufdir.no/en/English_start_page*

These figures represent factual bases for determining the eristic character of some mediated representations of the Barnevernet controversy. One should bear in mind that the legal duty of confidentiality restrains the institution from exposing more facts concerning the cases of particular families in contact with Barnevernet. This limitation has triggered numerous speculations and has been used by some media as an argument against the institution and its actions (cf. Please Free the Kids 2012). In consequence, news stories often rely only on the information obtained from one party – desperate parents – and cannot be balanced with the institutional point of view or the social workers' testimony. As a result, Barnevernet's authority has been undermined and the coverage has given rise to a belief that the duty of confidentiality stands for disguise and suppression of facts and figures. Taken together, this means that causes of Barnevernet controversy and contrasting claims as to whether the legal proceedings of the institution are accurate exceed beyond one perspective and include not only the legal and cultural background but also the mediated context of linguistic and visual tools of presentation.

Meanwhile, the journalistic work of Maciej Czarnecki (2016), designed for the Polish audience, introduces a criticism with respect to a number of Barnevernet interventions among the Poles living in Norway, along with a detailed insight into the legal procedures imposed on the families at particular stages of the cases. The author makes a disclaimer concerning his information sources: any information on Barnevernet's policies with respect to individual families is derived from parents' perspective and subsequently used for a publication intended for a wide readership. However, in the title he already asserts that Norway is an (over) protective state, which is a case of a subtle use of *petitio principii* eristic technique (Schopenhauer 1997, 74), where what needs to be proved is already inserted into the name. According to Czarnecki (2016), in each of the 428 municipalities in Norway, Barnevernet must investigate an individual report on suspected

child abuse, regardless of how “trivial” it may seem. Correspondingly, Czarnecki claims that the Norwegian society has been inculcated a belief that any hypothetical abnormality must be reported, which is why the most frequent suspicions are those delivered by teachers, neighbours, doctors and nurses from local health centres, police officers, and even friends, which purportedly questions the sense of solidarity.

The claim that recurs in Czarnecki’s work is that Norwegians have a “contrastive mentality” to the one that the Polish immigrants to Norway possess (topos of contrast). Firstly, Norwegians consider their government to be an ally of, not a threat to, the family. Such a relationship between individuals and the state reflects this nation’s trust in its institutions. By contrast, Czarnecki highlights that Poland is known for a widespread belief that a family must not be parted and, thus, children shall not be separated from their parents by institutional orders. It is therefore believed that children are bound to stay in the family which displays dysfunctions because the family should be reformed and restored, not separated. However, in Norway, as Czarnecki emphasizes, child welfare and safety are a priority. Similarly, Norway openly admits to representing a belief that it is better to separate a family which is not capable of building a proper ground for child-raising than to try to restore it. Finally, Czarnecki points out that the differences in perception and cultural education may be the reason why there are frequent communication breakdowns between the Norwegian state services and residents who originate from societies that have a distinct approach when it concerns child upbringing and protection. To exemplify this, the author points to an essential cultural difference between the Norwegians and the Poles: Norway is known for its concept of appreciation towards nature and free time (*friluftsliv*). This means that spare time is sacred and should be spent actively and with family. Correspondingly, Norwegian parents consider it natural and necessary to devote their time to children – this also applies to many other areas of life, including education, and they will see it as a flaw if a parent disregards this social convention.

According to Czarnecki, Norwegian school officials’ will to confront a parent serves a purpose of discussion on the child’s development or frequently on his or her assets. It is therefore a far-reaching cultural argument to consider in terms of Barnevernet controversy in relation to distinct nations and their values. Czarnecki also examines the mentality of the Norwegian society with the use of a selection of historical facts. He refers to the fact that Norway acquired independence through peaceful negotiations with Sweden, not an armed conflict and presents it as “an originator of the Nobel Prize with an etiquette of ‘a humanitarian superpower,’ preaching democracy, human rights, egalitarianism, sexual and race quality and innovative solutions in the field of ecology” (Czarnecki 2016, 52). At this point

a cross-cultural dilemma may arise: peaceful negotiations as such are said to be rooted in the original members of the Norwegian society's values. However, they seem to be problematic in terms of foreigners who aim to assimilate. The differences in the values related to proper child rearing are significant and thus the issue of miscommunication emerges. Additionally, some immigrant families are faced with a language barrier which is particularly acute in the process of conflict solving.

This section has been focused on a portrayal of the Norwegian Child Welfare Service along with the legal and (multi)cultural perception of the institution. The most significant observation to emerge from the presentation is that numerous legal aspects could be used by the media to stir up controversy and harness receivers' negative opinions. For example, the duty of confidentiality can be used as a tool of manipulation. Barnevernet's restraint from revealing personal information on a particular case can be seen as a convenient excuse for the institution to disguise its wrongdoing, rather than being portrayed as a legal obligation. Section 4 below examines four distinct articles drawn from international press that cover the issue of particular cases of children being taken away from their families by Barnevernet. The aim is to prove that newsworthiness (discussed in section 3) is an eristic technique deployed by a particular application of language, image and background knowledge to stir up controversy.

3. The notion of newsworthiness in journalism

The original study in terms of news values entitled "The Structure of Foreign News" was conducted by two Norwegian researchers, Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge (1965), who also presented the alternative term for newsworthiness: *news criteria*. According to Galtung and Ruge (1965, 64), *news criteria* "determine how much prominence a news story is given by a media outlet, and the attention it is given by the audience." In the work "What is News? News values revisited (again)," Harcup and O'Neill (2001) re-evaluate the set of news values presented by Galtung and Ruge (1965). What appears to be interesting is that, according to Harcup and O'Neill (2001), despite having been introduced over a 50 years ago, the list of news criteria remains relevant in the scope of the challenges (and opportunities) faced by journalism today, including social media. Similarly, Bednarek and Caple (2012, 40) publicize four diverse definitions of *news values* nevertheless, they rely on this classical concept and emphasize that the common ground for all of them is that "news values are said to determine what makes something newsworthy – worthy of being news."

For the purpose of this study, the following definition of news values will be used: "News values are the values by which events or facts are judged more

newsworthy than others, shared both by producers and audiences of news discourse” (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 40). For the sake of the thematic domain, the list of news values used in this paper will be drawn from the research by Galtung and Ruge (1965). As Owen Spencer-Thomas (2005) relates in his article, the list consists of the three groups which include the following news values: *Impact*: Threshold, Frequency, Negativity, Unexpectedness, Unambiguity; *Audience Identification*: Personalisation, Meaningfulness, Reference to elite nations, Reference to elite persons; and *Pragmatics of media coverage*: Consonance, Continuity, Composition. The concept of newsworthiness thus has a direct impact on the news receivers as well as their interpretation of the content. According to Bednarek and Caple, we can conceptualize news values in terms of how newsworthiness is construed through discourse (2012, 44). Therefore, it is claimed that newsworthiness is not an indelible part of events but a status validated through language and image. This is where newsworthiness studies can overlap with rhetorical analyses that leave room for exploring how language can be used to construct a controversy through eristic techniques.

The theory of news values posits that a probable news story needs to be evaluated by opinion leaders. To exemplify, both newspapers and radio broadcasters have certain limitations – space and time. However, according to Nico Meissner (2015, n.p.), “in times of the Internet, one might argue, time and space limitations have become obsolete (...) But an audience’s capacity to absorb and digest news remains limited, as does the opinion leader’s ability to share news – simply because of limitations to one’s own available time.” It is necessary to underline the fact that the implementation of news criteria does not guarantee the quality of news. As previously mentioned, news criteria are cumulative and compensatory, which, according to Galtung and Ruge (1965, 64), suggests that a particular story does not have to apply the entire list of factors in order to come to reader’s attention. The following parts of the article describe the news values and relate them to the present discussion of how they function eristically in the Barnevernet’s coverage.

3.1. Impact

What Galtung and Ruge name in their research as threshold for impact has two alternative terms of size and *superlativeness* (e.g. Bednarek and Caple 2012). For a journalist such as Owen Spencer-Thomas, threshold stands for the rule that “the bigger impact the story has, the more people it affects; the more extreme the effect or the more money or resources it involves, the better its chances of hitting the newsstands” (2005 n.p.). Threshold assumes that the more resources are inherent in the process of creating events of news quality, the better the outcome and

audience response. The threshold value increases along with the “desire to present the more balanced whole,” which results in the events becoming less relevant. Correspondingly, Bednarek and Caple mention that news stories including impact “focus on maximizing or intensifying particular aspects of an event, say the amount of people it involved, the consequences it has or might have, the numbers mentioned, the size of things, the force of actions, the intensity of behaviour” (2012, 44). The use of exaggerated figures and unverified numbers as statistical information is a known eristic technique (cf. Dean 2017).

The next factor included in the category of impact is frequency. Galtung and Ruge define the term of frequency in relation to news values as “the time-span needed for the event to unfold itself and acquire meaning” (1965, 66). As an example, the researchers present the following situation: “For a soldier to die during a battle this time-span is very short; for a development process in a country to take place the time-span may be very long” (1965, 66). Significantly, the authors also imply that the shorter the time distance between an actual event and the news report on its occurrence, the bigger the probability that it will be regarded as news by a certain medium. Similarly, events which are sudden and short-term tend to get more prominence. In this context it is not uncommon to hear about Child Services “stealing children” from families (Metzgar 2016), which implies a swift and illegal action.

Numerous researchers observe that a negative aspect of events seems to draw more attention of the receivers. Negativity is therefore sometimes called “the basic news value” (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 42). Significantly, Galtung and Ruge claim that negativity stands for a valuable criterion due to its close ties to the frequency criterion. Authors equal negativity with destruction in the following example: “compare the amount of time needed to bring up and socialize an adult person and the amount of time needed to kill him in an accident; the amount of time needed to build a house and to destroy it in a fire, to make an airplane and to crash it” (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 69). Moreover, the value of negativity is said to be foremost due to the fact that it is connected with an aspect of unexpectedness which will be developed in the following paragraph. It can be concluded that negative news is more unexpected than positive news, both in the sense that the events referred to are rare, and in the sense that they are less predictable (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 70). To stir controversy, Barnevernet’s actions will be probably presented as primarily destructive (to families) and unexpected (with few attempts to alert parents and to allow them to reform themselves).

Galtung and Ruge emphasize that the idea of negativity and unexpectedness are linked in a way that they most often do not correspond to the pre-image of receiver, which adds to prominence of an event. Quoting the authors: “the word

expects can and should be given both its cognitive interpretation as ‘predicts’ and its normative interpretation as ‘wants.’ A person *predicts* that something will happen and this creates a mental matrix for easy reception and registration of the event if it does finally take place. Or he *wants* it to happen and the matrix is even more prepared” (1965, 67). This claim implies that what is mentioned as *pre-image* may lead to misinterpretation and false perception of the event. Pre-image is distorting in a way that the receiver is influenced to the extent that it makes him convert the actual events into his own visions and expectations. As a consequence, according to the authors, such scenario leads to “news” becoming in fact “oldies” (Galtung and Ruge 1965). In this sense, Barnevernet’s related-stories are often put in the larger script of the evil state oppressing its citizens.

The final point included in the category of impact is unambiguity. Spencer-Thomas explains the idea with a statement: “Events which are easy to grasp make for better copy than those which are open to more than one interpretation, or where understanding of the implications depends on first understanding the complex background to the event” (2005, n.p.). In order to resolve likely doubts concerning understanding the idea of unambiguity, Galtung and Ruge make an important remark on the matter: the less ambiguity the more the event will be noticed: “an event with a clear interpretation, free from ambiguities in its meaning, is preferred to the highly ambiguous event from which many and inconsistent implications can and will be made” (1965, 66). Consequently, this claim aims to suggest that unambiguity represents clarity, thus, by extension, the truth. This might be how Barnevernet’s critics try to strengthen their argument.

3.2. Audience Identification

Identifying a target audience is crucial in the process of events becoming newsworthy. The first highlighted factor is personalization. As mentioned by Galtung and Ruge, what makes personalization a substantial factor is that it is a consequence of the *need for meaning* and consequently for identification. It is claimed to be in the line with newsworthiness due to the fact that people search for sense of belonging and correspondence. According to Spencer-Thomas, people are interested in people: “news stories that are presented from a human interest angle are likely to make the front page, particularly if they involve a well-known person” (News Values: What are News Values? 2005). Similarly, Galtung and Ruge point out that people tend to react to identification process through a combination of projection and empathy (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 69). Thus parental feelings, shared by so many in the audience of Barnevernet-related stories, will likely be foregrounded.

The following factor in this category is meaningfulness, which is claimed to provoke numerous interpretations. According to Galtung and Ruge (1965, 67), meaning is when the news item is “interpretable within the cultural framework of the listener or reader.” The fundamental element is what the authors call cultural proximity: receivers are more likely to be responsive to events which are culturally comparable. Another element is based on recognizing meaningfulness in the sense of relevance. Such interpretation assumes that an event may happen in a culturally distant place but still be loaded with meaning in terms of what it may imply for the reader or listener. Thus the culturally remote country may be brought in via a pattern of conflict with one’s own group (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 67). As discussed above basing on Czarnecki (2016) Barnevernet controversy is based on cultural conflict, but at the same time the meaning of parenthood, family and state responsibility are eristically universalized for the news value of proximity.

Reference to elite nations is a related factor in the category of audience identification. It is considered to retain close ties to the notion of cultural proximity due to the fact that it refers to countries or nations which are granted the status of global powers. Those countries’ authoritative character is claimed to draw attention of the recipients and hence, gain news coverage. Quoting Nico Meissner (2015), “events in powerful nations will be more consequential for an audience.” The last factor is reference to elite persons, due to which people outside the elite status do not make it to the world of elite-centred news communication unless something particularly strange occurs (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 68). The strength and prominence of Norwegian state may thus be invoked in reporting on Barnevernet’s actions to criticize its benevolent “overprotectiveness” (cf. Czarnecki 2016).

3.3. Pragmatics of media coverage

The closing category focuses on a course of action when establishing newsworthiness by a medium. The study by Galtung and Ruge (1965) reveals that there is much complexity to consonance, which is claimed to be fairly problematic and dependent on individual perception. Negative news will “more easily be *consensual* and *unambiguous* in the sense that there will be agreement about interpretation of the event as negative” (1965, 69). The reason is that while one person may consider an event “positive,” the other may associate it with negativity. Spencer-Thomas (2005) claims that “consonance refers to the media’s readiness to report an item, which they are more likely to do if they are prepared for it” (2005, n.p.). As a consequence of such a scenario, an event may not fulfill the unambiguity criterion, but instead a controversy criterion (Harcup and O’Neill 2001). The idea behind consonance is that news fulfills some latent or manifest needs for understanding

the world, so they will follow the sustained coverage on a controversial issue, such as Barnevernet's actions.

This is the case when an issue is what is usually called "the running story" (Spencer-Thomas 2005). Due to being reported earlier, such a news story is available to the recipient and thus, considered worthy of attention. People are more likely to follow the events with a particular course of action, which are not limited to one atomized incident. Additionally, receivers seem to share an opinion that events which become the running story and are resumed in the news stream "must be important." As Galtung and Ruge report in their work, "once an event has 'made it' the news channel will be more readily open for the follow-up events, at a lower threshold value" (1965, 82). Many readers of the Barnevernet controversy expect to reach a resolution or a closure to the narratives.

The final factor of the research on news values refers to composition. Authors of numerous studies highlight that composition is rather dependent on the editors' assessment than on the role of the audience. The matter of composition was exemplified by Galtung and Ruge (1965, 67) in the case of contrasting domestic and international news to achieve prominence: "if there are already many foreign news items, the threshold value for a new item will be increased."

3.4. Evaluative language

To expand the rhetorical perspective on the issue of newsworthiness, one could also draw from the language-oriented study by Bednarek and Caple (2012). The authors confirm that mediation conquers the nature of events: their focus is not on the "nature" of news events, "but rather on how such events are mediated through language and image – how news discourse makes them newsworthy" (2012, 45). Having analyzed the set of news criteria, the remaining (yet not less important) matter to consider is evaluative language. This phenomenon is connected with the implementation of what is known as the loss of journalistic objectivity, or a way in which news criteria are applied in practice. In "The Lost Meaning of Objectivity," Walter Dean (2017) claims that when the idea of objectivity first emerged, its aim was not to suggest that journalists were unbiased, but quite the opposite. The notion of objectivity was first implemented in journalism in the 1920s. It was related to the fact that journalists were accused of being, even if unintentionally, partial. Consequently, journalists were to introduce a method of "testing information – a transparent approach to evidence." The claim that Dean also makes is that eventually the method emerged as unbiased, but the journalists remained partial. The way in which journalists manipulate news values in practice is basically rooted in their subtle uses of linguistic resources.

Bednarek and Caple (2012) analyze news values from the perspective of language and offer numerous examples of headlines, newsreels, news abstracts and images that confirm the adequacy of the allegation. The authors list linguistic expressions which tend to be used in order to manipulate and channel recipients' attention. As mentioned in their study, a medium adds to the negativity of an event by using expression like "sexual predator" or "wannabe" without having a sufficient amount of information (Bednarek and Caple 2012). Another example is a premature claim that something might be "key, vital, historic, momentous" in order to add to prominence of the event. Then, to exemplify the use of manipulation in the category of impact, Bednarek and Caple mention expressions like "amazing, astonishing, extraordinarily, curious, unexpectedly, unprecedented, unusually" (2012, 46). Frequently events become maximized and intensified in terms of superlativeness or prominence by expressions like: "full fury", "complete destruction", "rapidly rising", "just hours after", "took only a few seconds" (Bednarek and Caple 2012).

Another common method of manipulating recipients' attention is the use of comparisons. The researchers claim that such method adds to both unexpectedness and consonance, "if an event is said to be very much in line with past events, for example, talking about *yet another personal scandal* for former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi" (2012, 47). Quoting Allan Bell, "the function of evaluative devices is to make the contents of the story sound as *X as possible*, where *X* is big, recent, important, unusual, new; in a word – newsworthy" (in Bednarek and Caple 2012, 46). The conclusion that each of the researchers makes is, however, that the striving for newsworthiness is frequently lacking the value of authenticity and amounts to eristic.

4. Newsworthiness as eristic

This section is a final stage to this research and its main objective is to analyze in detail four distinct articles from international media outlets. The choice of articles was reasoned: various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including of those who are subjects to the controversy, should allow the readers' interpretation of events. The selection was made by tracing the most-read articles tagged to Barnevernet's actions between 2014 and 2016 in online media. This is not to claim that these articles represent the coverage of the controversy in its entirety. Instead, the claim here is that newsworthiness is a form of eristic manipulation where the truth behind the nature of event is irrelevant and the winning of the audience's attention is at stake. Hence, the following part of the work is to examine the application of news values in the articles, as well as identify tools of manipulations used

in order to channel the audience attention. The aim is to show that news values are not inherent in the event but applied through various linguistic and eristic tools, as well as to demonstrate that newsworthiness may distort institutional credibility in the case of Barnevernet. Articles subjected to such intensive critical rhetorical analysis are excerpted from the following online media outlets: *BBC News*, *The Federalist*, *OneEurope*, *Dagbladet*.

4.1. *BBC News*

The initial source to the analysis is BBC News which delivers a piece by Tim Whewell entitled *Norway's Barnevernet: They took our four children... then the baby* (2016). According to the available audience statistics, BBC News accounts for the most favored newsgathering source in the United Kingdom, claiming around 70 million entries per week, up to 70% of which belong to British citizens. The background of the presented story includes a prominent case of Bodnariu family, a young Romanian-Norwegian couple's battle with Barnevernet, which became known across the country and for that matter, across the continents. The story's prominence has led to numerous demonstrations of people in the UK who aimed to empathize with the family.

The article constitutes a valid subject for news values analysis in order to estimate credibility of information and a manner in which it is provided. From the very beginning, the author aims to evoke emotions (particularly pity) and appeal to sensory values. The title of the article relies on speculations and primarily channels attention to the feeling of concern, empathy and mercy. Therefore, it can be observed that the author heightens the value of unexpectedness and negativity. Similarly, the author familiarizes a reader with the "oppressed" who, as highlighted, are "a pediatric nurse whose family has lived in the valley for generations" and "a computer expert" which imposes both the value of personalization and references fairly elite people. Whewell underlines the nobility of the "distressed" in order to establish a sense of assurance that the child service's decision could not have been valid. Moreover, the reader is faced with subtle language complexities. The author introduces the characters in a statement: "a woman from the local child protection service knocked at the door. She told Ruth to come to the police station for interrogation." The author brings forward an expression of interrogation which immediately invokes a pejorative meaning. However, the documents reported on the case state that what was called an *interrogation*, was indeed "a talk" (norw. "samtale") which has no negative connotations. At this point, one observes eristic techniques which emerge from both cultural background and deliberate use of exaggerated vocabulary.

Significantly, the author uses numerous expressions that concentrate on creating tension and distorting the facts out of proportion, for example “torn apart without warning,” “close to tears,” “acting like Nazis” (superlativeness, topos of comparison). These factors also stand for what Spencer-Thomas introduced as news value of conflict – people are attracted by conflicts which on the other hand involve drama and thus, a story becomes far more controversial. The author includes many speculations based on few available facts, yet presents them out of context which changes their value significantly. To exemplify, Whewell argues that Barnevernet’s duty of confidentiality is hardly a legal obligation but a choice to hide information from the public: “the child protection service won't discuss individual cases.”

The article demonstrates a blatant lack of objectivity and offers few conclusions concerning the institutional aspect, focusing on the parental side of the conflict. Citations and personal input seem to overwhelm a reasoned understanding of factual situations. The article delivers no information on the legal procedures and instead bases its newsworthiness mostly on appealing to emotions.

4.2. The Federalist

The following article subject to the analysis is a text concerning the same family published by Jayme Metzgar in *The Federalist*, which is an English-language online newspaper which deals with the political, religious and cultural matters. *The Federalist* is considered an authoritative source in terms of conservative spheres. One of its 2015 articles is entitled *Read about Norway Stealing These Kids, Then Tout “Democratic Socialism”*. Similarly to the previous author’s manner, Metzgar disposes of objectivity from the very headline. The title appears to be judgmental and imposes a feeling of shame on anyone who seemed to share the “disgraceful opinion” (impact, also ad personam). The first paragraph introduces a statement: “Norwegian authorities have put four young children at high risk of *sexual assault* just because the parents have occasionally spanked the kids and are Christians.” Importantly, following the legal side of Bodnariu family, there is no sign and no report of an alleged sexual assault at any stage of the case which raises a question as to where the information was taken from. This imposes a value of negativity and invokes a speculative script that foster homes must be riddled with abuse.

Along the article, the author frequently applies a method of contrast between what is commonly believed and what he aims to prove. To exemplify, at the beginning the Norwegian system has acquired the names “a comprehensive social safety net,” “a utopia,” “a nanny state,” whereas a few lines later it is characterized as “undemocratic,” with “frightening degree of control” and “tyranny

of the bureaucrats” (negativity, superlativeness, consonance). This method also aims to prove that the truth about Norwegian system is different from the stereotype and, what is more, it provokes a controversial image of the state, possibly leaving readers not familiar with Norway with the feeling of confusion. Similarly to Whewell, the author makes a reference to readers’ emotions (“The heartache of this moment can only be imagined,” “Horrors and Heartbreak Ensnare”). Likewise, the author highlights the prominence of the “oppressed” by listing their impressive educational background and at the same time trying to prove that this couple could not have been wrong in how to discipline their children (reference to elite people, personalization). Moreover, the constantly changing family situation and sudden reactions of both parents and the institution are portrayed through values of novelty and unexpectedness.

The final part of the article is directed to the author’s target audience which is faced with a list of arguments why the Norwegian child protection services’ actions may have some serious repercussions that could affect Americans. Hence, the author establishes a feeling of concern due to the sense of affiliation (proximity). Finally, the article deals with the same issue of cultural differences and complexities that the previous one – these are mostly differences in the perception of physical punishment, no matter how benign, as a disciplinary tactic. The reader, however, instead of being allowed to decide, is instantly forced upon a particular viewpoint.

4.3. OneEurope

The forthcoming analysis is based on the article published by Anna Władyka in an online magazine *OneEurope* entitled *Grey areas of democracy: when law and order push the limits*. *OneEurope* is an independent non-profit civilian online source whose “mission is to raise awareness on relevant issues of Europeans, encourage debates on key topics, give a voice to citizens, stimulate freedom of speech in Europe, provide opportunities to Europeans build bridges and connections between cultures.”, as mentioned on its official website. Each month, the outlet claims around 30,000 entries and over 250,000 subscribers according to the official source.

Correspondingly to the previous sources, the author of a given article exposes her lack of objectivity at the earliest stage. The title is filled with presuppositions and generalizations but leaves no room for personal interpretation. The author poses an introductory statement that “the recurrent cases of immigrant parents losing the custody over their children raised questions of civil rights and democracy.” In respect thereof, one may conclude that since the emphasis is put on the

immigrant parents – the cultural background/immigrant status is the predominant factor when taking children under custody in Norway. However, the data published on the annual basis (see section 2) show that the percentage of children of immigrant background who are taken under custody is neither different from the one of Norwegian-born, nor has increased throughout the years.

The author uses evaluative language (Bednarek and Caple 2012) and terms which carry an extremely pejorative meaning in order to influence readers, which indicates the use of consonance (“outrageous news,” “Stalin-like,” “kidnapping,” “a tyranny,” “evil business”). Significantly, the author mentions Nina Witoszek, a Polish professor living in Norway who actively helps the “oppressed” families and instructs the parents on how to deal with the child services properly (reference to elite people). In the latter part of the article, Władyka makes a point that frequently the parents who become a centre of Barnevernet’s attention “seem so serious and trustworthy that one keeps asking the same question: why?”. Hence, the author not only invokes prominence, but also establishes a feeling of personalization – if a conflict with Barnevernet applies to “good people,” it can apply to anyone (ad auditors fallacy). What is more, the author compares Barnevernet to its German equivalent – Jugendamt (consonance), and delivers quite an extreme portrayal of both organizations: “chasing families which try to escape,” “placing children in foster families by force” which is an overstatement based on speculations (argumentum ad absurdum).

4.4. *Dagbladet*

The final text subject to analysis is an article drawn from The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO); however, it was originally published in the Norwegian media outlet, *Dagbladet* (Eng. the daily magazine). According to the available data, *Dagbladet* continually represents the second tabloid and the fourth newspaper in general in terms of popularity. The source collects around 224,000 readers (print version) according to Statista Inc. The author of the article entitled *Public Trust in the State* attributes the Barnevernet controversy to people’s lack of trust in the state, even though the data proves otherwise. As far as the news values are concerned, the author uses a tool of superlativeness and negativity; similarly, she uses expressions which are evaluative and speculative (“allegedly,” “no respect for the family,” “above the law,” “fear and disempowerment,” “heated debate”). The author underlines the fact that an actual case scenario may result in population entirely losing its trust towards officials. By that, the author aims to influence the receivers using a tool of threshold. Moreover, the author emphasizes in “several cases over the past year” which establishes a sense of timeliness and frequency

– after all, it is not one case, but several. Yet, no specific details on the several cases are given throughout the article. Likewise, one can observe a resort to the tool of personalization due to the fact that the author focuses her observations on a particular group of people: Norwegian-Pakistanis and Poles. Similarly, she puts an emphasis on immigrants, which may give the wrong idea of a controversy based on cultural clash.

Finally, the author concludes that after all “Most immigrants in Norway work and pay their taxes as law-abiding citizens.” This statement is an attempt to establish consonance construed through a method of simile. The statement has no actual relevance to the controversy (“law-abiding citizens” may also be a subject to any kinds of family dysfunctions) but is introduced in order to appease the target reader – domestic audience.

5. Conclusion

This study offers an analysis of the Barnevernet controversy from the perspective of four English and Norwegian language newspapers. Furthermore, the aim was to analyze the quality of information in terms of the concept of newsworthiness, which was described in detail in the methodological part of the article. The analysis allowed to point out that the articles are touched by manipulations at both the linguistic and journalistic level of representation – understood here as an eristic use of newsworthiness factors. Moreover, the articles present how a firm and unambiguous attitude of criticism towards Barnevernet’s actions could have been fostered with the use of eristic techniques that frequently have no relation to the facts (as presented in section 2 of the article), which exemplifying Schopenhauer’s means of eristic decoupling from the objective reality (1997, 64-67), or such overgeneralization that makes it impossible to deny the claim (1997, 56-59). The articles portray the institution in a one-sided manner – using only the parents’ reports, which emerge as emotional testimonials of their struggle, seen by Schopenhauer as a particularly insidious eristic trick aimed at emotionally stimulating the discussion to such a degree that reasonable argumentation does not proceed (1997, 71). Such a form of controversy portrayal influences the reader’s sensibility instead of delivering facts and figures that help draw rational conclusions.

The main finding of the research is how newsworthiness is a property of coverage that is constructed with many linguistic means. It confirmed that, contrary to some popular beliefs, the drive to achieve newsworthiness may distort the credibility of a source instead of making it dependable. The analysis of the articles drawn from *BBC News*, *The Federalist*, *OneEurope* and *Dagbladet* supports the

above arguments. In considering four articles across four distinct news outlets, the research findings show that the contrasting perceptions in terms of interpretation are dependent tools which exceed beyond one category. While analysing the issue of news values from the perspective of chosen sources, it can be assumed that four news values are dominant: superlativeness, negativity, consonance and prominence. Due to the fact that the sources were analysed through a discursive lens, these four factors were examined and presented based on evaluative language. Superlativeness and negativity which aimed to intensify and maximize the events were construed through terms such as: *allegedly, forcibly taken, deprive of, precious, sadly, undoubtedly, devastating, tyranny, heated debate* and many more. Consonance was construed through expressions like: *Stalin-like, a tyranny of bureaucrats, utopia, nanny-state*, etc. Finally, prominence is applied through making a reference to the characters' importance through notions: *pediatric nurse, IT specialist, Norwegian psychologist, civil rights attorney, expert witnesses* and other. The claim that was made is that although core assumptions of news reporting are impartiality and reliability, readers tend to be faced with various efforts to influence their thinking in a desired manner. Finally, this study aspires to draw attention to the fact that the way in which journalists manipulate news criteria in practice leaves a lot to be desired about journalistic impartiality.

The quality of information was evaluated through the concept of newsworthiness from the discursive perspective. Based on the evaluation, it can be deduced that the above-mentioned news criteria were enacted by its authors and not always originally inherent in the structure of events covered (Bednarek and Caple 2012). Moreover, the analysis has given proof to the fact that newsworthiness is frequently a tool used to distort source credibility and make it as controversial as possible (cf. argumentum ad hominem, ad auditors, Schopenhauer 1997, 88). The final conclusion to the analysis is that the manipulations may result from the news item being a cross-cultural dilemma which assumes cultural variations of both language and manner of expression (rational expression vs. emotional display) relevant to targeted audiences.

The case study of Barnevernet controversy was to illustrate the claim that the press resorts to eristic techniques when reporting such news. Because the issue involves institutional and individual antagonists, a conflict of cultural values on different levels and a universal human issue of parenting and family relations, it was quickly and easily defined as a controversy and exploited for the purposes of driving up newsworthiness. It proved that the role of the press is not to "mediate" between various interest groups or to help understand the problem better by providing information, but to sell more copies/subscriptions/ads by drawing readers' attention to an artificially sensationalized controversy.

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