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ANALYSIS OF DIRECTING RECIPIENTS' ATTENTION THROUGH THE COVER DESIGN OF SELECTED POLISH OPINION WEEKLIES

Abstract. Contemporary print media face the challenge of capturing and sustaining audience attention in an era of near-instant communication. The magazine cover has become a crucial element of communication strategy, designed to attract attention and evoke emotions. In this paper we examine the role of covers in publisher–reader communication, by analysing selected Polish opinion weeklies, *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka*, and *Wprost*. We focus on variables influencing the perception of political communication and its actors. Politicians are often depicted in negatively charged poses, with microexpressions conveying core emotions. These function as elements of visual rhetoric, where microexpressions operate as visual arguments. Notably, such expressions are sometimes digitally constructed. The study demonstrates that nowadays technical means enable the management of cognitive and affective responses. As a result, publishers can influence readers' emotions and attitudes by emphasising or fabricating gestures, postures, and emotional expressions of political figures.

Keywords: directing attention; microexpressions; visual rhetoric; weeklies; press; capturing attention; public opinion; shaping opinion

INTRODUCTION

From the standpoint of media and communication studies, the print press cover is a tangible intermediary between publishers and their audience (Smith, Maguire, and Matthews, 2010, p. 408). It provides a surface for signs and symbols referring to fragments of reality (Luhmann, 2000, p. 89), such as events, persons or

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processes, presented in concrete or abstract forms. Covers may convey heterogeneous messages, with opinions accompanying facts (Haacke, 1982). In some cases, however, the informative function is replaced by an op-ed or even a provocative communication strategy.

In each variant, publishers employ specific visual means, seeking dominants that are shallow, vivid and visible (Stockwell, 2002, p. 107). Their advantage lies in immediate recognisability and ease of decoding with no additional knowledge required. In competitive media conditions, such dominants become necessary, particularly for weeklies such as *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* and *Wprost*. To be attention-grabbing, they must relate to current socio-political reality and connect with already available knowledge.

These dominants enable publishers to assign multiple functions to covers, including informational, marketing, advertising and branding (McQuail, 1987, pp. 307-309). As elements of media institutions (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 109), they also serve profit-oriented goals related to audience acquisition and competitiveness.

Beyond these functions, covers fulfil communicative roles linked to affective processes. Referring to Austin's speech act theory, Grice's conversational implicatures and Katz's ABC model, we assume that informative, coherent communication is not always prioritised. Instead, affective communication becomes central, with negative emotions playing a key role and deviations from implicature shaping interpretation. This may contribute to the formation of negatively charged attitudes towards Polish politics and politicians. Based on our analysis, we argue that publishers no longer rely solely on reporting, but actively participate in political communication by expressing their judgements. Our study is based on covers of *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* and *Wprost*, published during the 8th term of the Polish Sejm (2015–2019).¹

The presentation of politicians through photographs, graphic manipulation, staged poses, gestures and visual modifications led us to distinguish additional functions: (1) symbolic, (2) provocative, and (3) attitude-shaping. Although these covers are often controversial, they are not necessarily intended to stimulate reflection or debate.

¹ Elections to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland were held on 25 October 2015, pursuant to the decision of President Bronisław Komorowski of 17 July 2015, as amended by the decision of 3 August 2015. The 8th term of the Sejm began on 12 November 2015, i.e. on the day the Sejm convened for its first session called by President Andrzej Duda. There were 86 sessions in the Sejm's 8th term. The last session ended on 16 October 2019. The 8th term formally ended on 11 November 2019.

Figure 1. Sample covers of weeklies *Polityka*, *Newsweek* and *Wprost*, depicting Polish politicians: (a) Jarosław Kaczyński and Zbigniew Ziobro; (b) Antoni Macierewicz; (c) Antoni Macierewicz, Mateusz Morawiecki and Mariusz Kamiński



Note. (a) *Polityka*, 8.03.2016 (no. 11); (b) *Newsweek Polska*, 21.03.2016 (no. 13); (c) *Wprost*, 16.05.2016 (no. 20).

The visualisation strategies employed relate to cognitive and neurological conditioning (Anokhin et al., 2010, pp. 179, 183), influencing perception and memory. While provocation is characteristic of commercial visual communication (Vézina and Paul, 1997, p. 179), iconic sensory memory plays a key role in processing visual stimuli (Weinberger et al., 2009, pp. 283-284). In competitive display contexts, attention depends on both content and layout. Our analysis indicates that provocation is linked to non-neutral representations of politicians, in which key emotions play a central role. Ekman (1999, pp. 45-48) identifies anger, happiness, sadness, fear, disgust and surprise.

We see that anger and disgust dominate the facial expressions on the covers. Drawing on research on microexpressions (Edwards, 2022, pp. 131-164) and mirroring mechanisms (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 2016, pp. 760-761), we argue that visualised emotions may evoke corresponding responses in recipients. Through the mechanism of the downward emotional spiral (Garland et al., 2010, pp. 850-851), these representations can reinforce negative attitudes towards politicians. The analysis presented here identifies these mechanisms and proposes methodological approaches for their detection.

1. METHODOLOGY FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGEMENT OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL MIRRORING

Press covers always come with a specific content and structure. In the set of elements that shape it, the following are distinguished: (1) the headline, i.e. the main title referring to the most important article or theme of the issue; (2) the teaser, i.e. announcements pointing to other featured texts; (3) photographs or illustrations reinforcing the message and focusing attention on a particular issue; and (4) the logo, i.e. elements of the title and branding of the magazine, usually occupying the upper section of the cover. In the case of the weekly magazines under scrutiny, also referred to as opinion weeklies (Ekman, 1982, pp. 67, 72), each issue refers to the events of the past week, so that the press cover can also be regarded as a symbolic record of a segment of the era.

According to the principle that the problem defines the method, the analysis of the meaning and function of each element of the cover presents media and communication researchers with different challenges and requires the use of different methodologies. The methods can include:

- evaluating the overall message conveyed by the cover,
- examining how the arrangement of elements affects its reception,
- applying semiotic analysis, discourse analysis and audience research.

Since it is the problem that defines the method, the choice of research methods depends on the objectives formulated by the researcher. The method should be both effective and sense-making, enabling the solution of the research problem and a deeper understanding of the analysed phenomena. In the methodological procedure we have designed, the problem is that press publishers may want to influence readers' attitudes towards Polish politicians and politics through the use of elements contributing to the overall message conveyed by press covers. However, we do not focus on elements such as the headline, teaser or logo along with branding. We analyse photographs and illustrations, concentrating on facial microexpressions to decode the key emotions behind them (Objective 1 – O1). We also analyse image colour (Objective 2 – O2), treating it as supporting O1.

Having identified the research objectives outlined above and based on findings in the field of non-verbal communication, we formulate Hypothesis 1 (H1), which states that through the selection of photographs and the creation of images, depicting politicians with specific facial microexpressions, it is possible to activate mechanisms of emotional mirroring and the downward spiral of emotions, influencing the emotions and attitudes of recipients.

In pursuit of our objectives (O1, O2), we provide possibilities for verifying H1, by combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, acknowledging their complementary nature. In the quantitative approach (Method 1 – M1), we conducted a statistical analysis to quantify the number of images of politicians' faces appearing on the examined covers of the weeklies *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* and *Wprost* during the 8th term of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland (12 November 2015 to 11 November 2019), as well as the frequency of appearance of particular politicians. The choice of weeklies was deliberate because in the period under scrutiny, Poland was governed by politicians belonging to the conservative right-wing political party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) and some other minor factions. All of these entities were referred to as the United Right (Zjednoczona Prawica). During this period, Beata Szydło (16 November 2015 to 11 December 2017) and Mateusz Morawiecki (11 December 2017 to 6 September 2024, i.e. until the end of the 9th term of the Polish Sejm) served as prime ministers.

The selected weeklies represented different profiles: liberal (*Newsweek Polska*), centre-right with elements of liberalism and social democracy (*Polityka*), and centre-right with elements of economic and moderate social liberalism (*Wprost*). For the weeklies chosen, we adopted the second hypothesis (H2) that the magazines' policy, differing from the agenda of the United Right party ruling Poland at the time, would be an additional guarantee, other than journalistic objectivity, of pluralism in the treatment of political topics, depiction of politicians, choice of photographs depicting them, as well as the graphics created. Under another hypothesis (H3), we also assumed that such pluralism would be shown in the choice of photographs and in the design of graphics in terms of the microexpressions of the persons portrayed and the key emotions that could be captured.

We began our study with a careful selection of covers. Their choice was determined by the initial and final publication dates of the issues of the analysed weeklies, corresponding to the dates of the beginning and end of the 8th term of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. For *Newsweek Polska*, the boundaries were set out by issues 44 in 2015 to 42 in 2019 (203 covers). For *Polityka*, these were: issue 46 in 2015 and issue 47 in 2019 (189 covers). For *Wprost*, we analysed issues from 46 in 2015 to 41 in 2019 (195 covers). At that stage, we looked at 587 covers in total (Table 1).

Table 1. Breakdown of the set of selected covers

Weekly	Number of covers in the period considered
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	203
<i>Polityka</i>	189
<i>Wprost</i>	195
	Total: 587

Next, we applied a data-cleaning procedure, removing covers that did not feature any face images, either of politicians or non-politicians. Covers without such images depicted a variety of abstract and commemorative visuals (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Magazine covers alluding to the general election of 13 October 2019, not showing faces



Note. (a) *Polityka*, 8.10.2019 (no. 41); (b) *Newsweek Polska*, 3.06.2019 (no. 23); (c) *Wprost*, 3.03.2019 (no. 10).

One by one, we also discarded covers that featured faces of non-politicians. Data-cleaning resulted in a final dataset of 436 images of politicians' faces (see Table 2).

We employed the second method (M2), the tool relying on machine learning results for the emotional analysis of facial microexpressions (SightCorp software), to recognise and read the key emotions in the images of politicians' faces. We used luminance histograms to analyse the photos and illustrations, where we focused on exposure, i.e., the application of a certain amount of light necessary

to produce a photograph or illustration. While luminance is a measure of the brightness of perceived objects (Bucher, 2009, p. 117), a luminance histogram is used to quickly assess the correctness of the exposure of a photograph and is found in both camera and editing software. It was possible to create luminance histograms thanks to the automation of the process with Adobe Photoshop version 14.0. This automated qualitative method (M3) allowed us to determine the extent of interference in the photograph or image by changing the exposure.

2. RESULTS OF ANALYSES OF THE MANAGEMENT OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL MIRRORING

2.1 MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE SELECTION OF FACIAL IMAGES

The quantitative analysis of the set of 587 covers yielded a number of results enabling the verification of hypotheses H1 and H2. The positioning of facial images on covers proved to be a key strategy of communication with potential audiences. A total of 273 faces belonged to published in *Newsweek Polska*, of which 54.2% (148) belonged to politicians. In *Polityka*, 213 faces were identified, including 63.8% (136) politicians. In *Wprost*, 707 faces were published, of which 21.5% (152) belonged to politicians (Table 2).

Table 2. Structure of temporary (A) and final (B) exemplification corpus containing faces printed on the covers

Weekly	(A) number of all faces on the covers	(B) number of politicians' faces
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	273	148
<i>Polityka</i>	213	136
<i>Wprost</i>	707	152
	Total: 1,193	Total: 436

As the analyses were conducted using specialised software, they had the character of automated qualitative analyses. The research objectives were achieved through the analysis of politicians' faces on selected covers to verify our hypotheses. Of a total of 1,193 face images (100%), 436 (36.5%) were images of politicians (Table 3). The share of politicians' images in the total number of face images indicates that this is one of the most frequently used strategies of interaction with potential readers. It also suggests that political issues constitute a dominant motif in this type of press.

Table 3. Proportion of the politicians' faces to all faces published

Provisional collection of all face images	Final set of images of politicians' faces
1,193 (100%)	436 (36.5%)

When treating the set of 436 images of politicians' faces as the final analytical corpus, it becomes evident that certain individuals appeared much more frequently than others, indicating a selective mechanism of visual exposure. In *Newsweek Polska*, the most frequently featured politicians were Beata Szydło, Mateusz Morawiecki, Zbigniew Ziobro, Antoni Macierewicz, Jarosław Kaczyński and Jacek Kurski (President of the Management Board of TVP, i.e. Telewizja Polska S. A.), all of whom played key roles in the political system during the analysed period. In *Polityka*, these included Andrzej Duda, Jarosław Kaczyński, Beata Szydło, Mateusz Morawiecki, Zbigniew Ziobro and Donald Tusk. In *Wprost*, the dominant figures were Andrzej Duda, Beata Szydło, Mateusz Morawiecki, Zbigniew Ziobro, Antoni Macierewicz, Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk.

The preliminary quantitative analysis thus identifies eight key figures: Andrzej Duda, Beata Szydło, Mateusz Morawiecki, Zbigniew Ziobro, Antoni Macierewicz, Jarosław Kaczyński, Donald Tusk and Jacek Kurski. Their frequent presence on covers can be linked not only to their political roles, but also to their visibility and symbolic significance within Polish political communication.

In regard to the qualitative analysis, supported by opinion poll data (Grosse, 2019), we can see that these figures were associated with strong controversies and intense socio-political debates. In a highly polarised political landscape, particularly since the 2010 Smolensk catastrophe, these actors functioned as strong emotional triggers for audiences. Their presence on covers corresponded with readers' interest in politics and aligned with publishers' marketing strategies, especially during periods of political tension and heated public debate.

The data obtained in the quantitative analysis (M1) led us to reject Hypothesis H2. The editorial policies of the analysed weeklies did not guarantee a pluralistic representation of political actors. Instead, a marketing-driven logic prevailed, prioritising audience engagement and sales, even at the cost of reinforcing social polarisation.

2.2 MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE SELECTION OF FACIAL MICROEXPRESSIONS

The next step, involving an automated qualitative analysis (M2), was the decoding of key emotions present in images of politicians' faces featured on magazine covers. For this purpose, we scanned covers containing the eight

most frequently appearing politicians and uploaded them to the SightCorp software interface. The software recognised six key emotions (anger, happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, surprise) and measured their intensity, as well as overall mood. Emotions were measured on a scale from 0 (no emotion) to 100 (highest intensity). This scale, commonly used in image analysis, enables a precise comparison of results and detection of subtle differences in emotional expression. The method also allowed for the analysis of images that, albeit resembling original photographs, had been digitally modified or created (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Face of Jarosław Kaczyński, President of the Law and Justice party, on the cover of *Wprost* (1 February 2016), alongside the system window of the SightCorp software (measured on 10 July 2020)



The M2 analysis showed that, in relation to the processes we studied, when reaching for face images, editors-in-chief choose facial microexpressions manifesting negative emotions. In the averaged measurement, anger is the dominant emotion, with an average measured value of 30.0 units. Disgust came second (15.8 units), with sadness in the third place (11.7 units). It is also worth pointing out that the mean value of the 'mood' parameter is 37.0 units (Table 4).

Table 4. Values of core emotions measured for *Newsweek Polska* covers

Parameter value	Emotions indicated by the facial microexpressions study [SightCorp units of emotion intensity]						
	mood	sadness	disgust	anger	surprise	fear	happiness
Maximum	88.0	93.0	85.0	99.0	13.0	58.0	88.0
Average	37.0	11.9	15.8	30.0	2.1	6.9	11.0

In a corresponding comparison, the average indications show that anger also outweighs other emotions in *Polityka*, although its index is lower than in the previous round of the measurement procedure and stands at 27.3 units. The second place was taken by sadness this time (14.7 units), and disgust was third (12.9 units). The measurement of individuals' overall mood showed that the value of the 'mood' indicator is high and closest to the middle of the scale, reaching as high as 45.9 units (Table 5).

Table 5. Values of core emotions measured for *Polityka* covers

Parameter value	Emotions indicated by the facial microexpressions study [SightCorp units of emotion intensity]						
	mood	sadness	disgust	anger	surprise	fear	happiness
Maximum	100.0	76.0	74.0	96.0	25.0	78.0	96.0
Average	45.9	14.7	12.9	27.3	2.7	8.7	15.3

This stage of the analytical process ended with a summary prepared after measuring the facial microexpressions that can be seen in the depictions presented on the covers of *Wprost* weekly. The average measurement values indicate that fear is the dominant feature in the faces of the public figures taken into consideration in this weekly (59.0 units). This is followed by anger (25.3 units), disgust (15.5 units) and sadness (11.1 units), respectively. The overall mood parameter of the people depicted is even lower than in the previous case due to a decrease in the 'mood' value to 35.0 units (Table 6).

Table 6. Values of core emotions measured for *Wprost* covers

Parameter value	Emotions indicated by the study of facial microexpressions [SightCorp units of emotion intensity]						
	mood	sadness	disgust	anger	surprise	fear	happiness
Maximum	97.0	73.0	80.0	98.0	16.0	70.4	99.0
Average	35.0	11.1	15.5	25.3	2.1	59.0	16.6

Decoding key emotions and measuring their intensity in relation to all images of politicians' faces published on the covers of *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* and *Wprost* weeklies allowed us to narrow down the list of names of figures appearing on the covers more frequently than others. The number of lists varies across titles. However, in order to standardise the numbers, we included in List 1 (Table 7) and

List 2 (Table 8) the names of persons originally present only in List 3 (Table 9). Their presence was additionally marked.

Table 7. List 1: values of core emotions visible in the images of the faces of the seven politicians most frequently depicted on the covers of *Newsweek Polska*

Politician	Emotions indicated by the facial microexpressions study [SightCorp units of emotion intensity]						
	mood	sadness	disgust	anger	surprise	fear	happiness
A. Duda	35.3	5.8	21.1	13.4	2.7	3.6	37.5
B. Szydło	49.9	6.5	34.0	17.7	1.8	4.1	17.4
M. Morawiecki	22.1	14.4	14.8	21.4	1.6	8.4	9.4
Z. Ziobro	52.2	13.8	8.4	47.6	1.4	3.6	10.6
A. Macierewicz	44.9	5.1	14.0	27.3	2.5	0.8	39.2
J. Kaczyński	31.1	6.7	9.4	26.9	1.5	10.1	7.2
D. Tusk	18.3	9.3	28.3	43.3	1.0	4.0	6.0
J. Kurski	21.2	10.4	21.8	41.5	1.2	10.0	4.2

Note. Despite appearing on three covers of *Newsweek Polska*, the image of Donald Tusk was included for comparative reasons.

Table 8. List 2: values of core emotions in the images of the faces of the six politicians most frequently depicted on the covers of *Polityka*

Politician	Emotions indicated by the facial microexpressions study [SightCorp units of emotion intensity]						
	mood	sadness	disgust	anger	surprise	fear	happiness
A. Duda	51.8	6.2	17.4	24.2	5.4	7.4	23.8
B. Szydło	51.6	7.6	22.6	13.4	4.8	23.8	13.8
M. Morawiecki	47.2	8.6	15.1	30.1	1.7	6.7	12.4
Z. Ziobro	39.2	16.7	8.0	49.2	0.5	2.5	11.0
J. Kaczyński	54.7	21.5	6.2	32.8	1.4	7.0	11.6
D. Tusk	34.3	19.3	15.7	36.0	2.3	3.3	8.3

Table 9. List 3: values of core emotions in the images of the faces of the seven politicians most frequently depicted on the covers of *Wprost*

Politician	Emotions indicated by the facial microexpressions study [SightCorp units of emotion intensity]						
	mood	sadness	disgust	anger	surprise	fear	happiness
A. Duda	35.4	4.9	19.1	18.0	2.3	4.7	27.4
B. Szydło	31.4	10.8	14.7	37.1	2.4	4.4	9.3
M. Morawiecki	40.4	10.4	11.1	39.7	0.6	7.1	14.5
Z. Ziobro	36.1	14.7	36.6	18.7	2.1	4.3	10.9
A. Macierewicz	55.5	9.7	19.0	51.2	1.2	1.7	4.0
J. Kaczyński	29.6	17.6	9.6	30.5	2.7	10.7	3.9
D. Tusk	54.7	5.7	36.3	19.3	1.2	2.3	26.8
J. Kurski	54.5	1.5	2.5	40.5	0.0	2.5	46.0

Note. Despite appearing on two covers of *Wprost*, Jacek Kurski's image was included for comparative reasons.

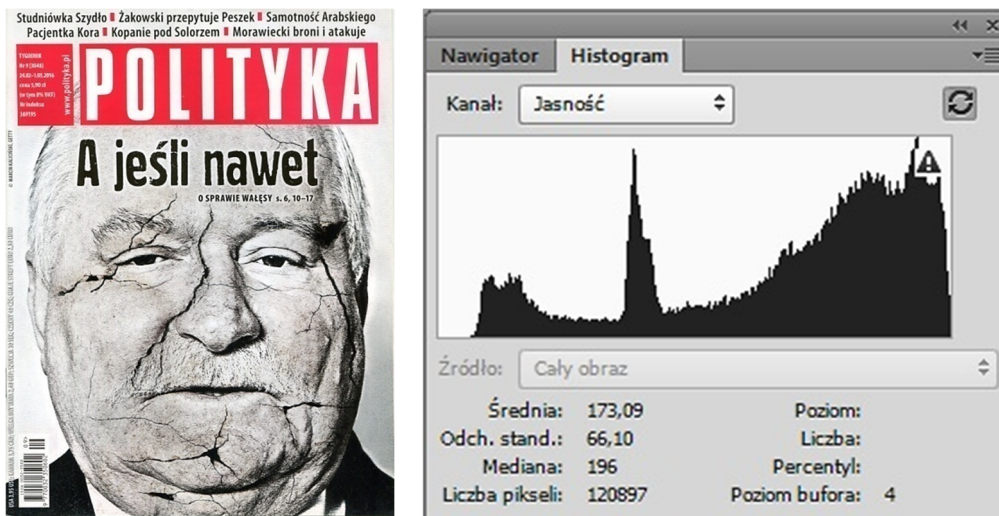
In our pursuit of Research Objective O1, we obtained data to verify Hypotheses H1 and H3. It is difficult to conclude that the selection of images depicting politicians' faces would be so random as to reproduce the same emotional dominants. The observed repetitions indicate a systemic approach to the selection of images published on covers, accompanied by a consistent selection of key emotions manifested in facial microexpressions. This approach creates conditions for exploiting mechanisms of emotional mirroring and the downward spiral of emotions to shape the audience's negative emotions, stances and attitudes towards the depicted politicians. In Poland's polarised society, images of political decision-makers can evoke strong negative reactions. The mechanism of the emotional downward spiral functions in such a way that encoding a negative emotion triggers a corresponding negative reaction. Thus, creating a cover with an image of a political figure, whose microexpressions manifest anger, sadness and disgust, combined with a dominant negative mood, constitutes an element of negative emotional mirroring.

We also believe the data justify the falsification of Hypothesis H3. We were not able to confirm that pluralism manifests itself in the selection of facial microexpressions. Negative emotions prevail over positive ones, and the data indicate a systemic prevalence of visualisations of individuals displaying a worse emotional mood.

2.3 MANAGEMENT THROUGH SELECTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF LUMINANCE VALUES

Exposure (i.e. letting in a certain amount of light to render a photographic image), is one of the basic parameters in photography (Duchemin, 2016, p. 15). In essence, controlling this parameter skilfully helps to produce high-quality photographs. The luminance histogram is an extremely important tool that supports photographers in controlling exposure. As a reminder, luminance is a measure of the brightness of perceived objects (Bucher, 2009, p. 80). An exposure is assumed to be correct, if the light used allows the light and dark tones to register correctly. Underexposure or overexposure (cut-off of tones) can be considered a mistake in the photographic and graphic arts industry (Horyń, 2021). In the histogram, it is indicated by peaks adhering to the edge of the graph on the left (underexposure) or on the right (overexposure).

Figure 4. (a) artwork based on the photograph of Lech Wałęsa from the cover of *Polityka*, 23.02.2016 (no. 9), and (b) the luminance histogram of this image



The histogram slightly extends beyond the right edge of the scale, indicating that the graphic based on the photo of Lech Wałęsa is overexposed. A comparison of the histogram with the cover composition confirms that the image is unnaturally brightened. Excessive or insufficient lighting may result from deliberate artistic manipulations, but it is unlikely that professionals would make such basic errors typical of amateur photography. Rather, such effects should be treated as evidence of intentional modification of otherwise correctly exposed

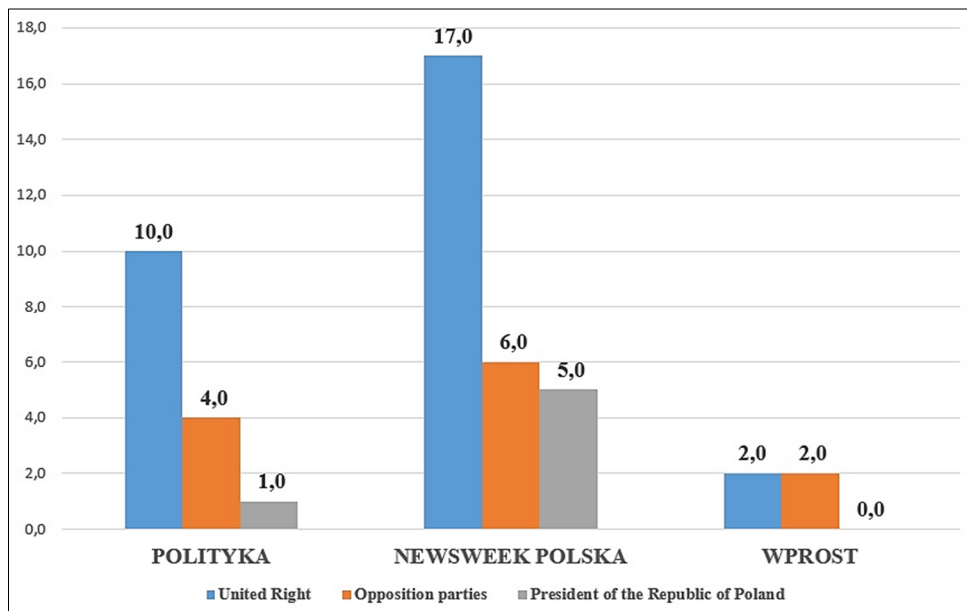
images. The M3 analysis shows that the manner and extent of such interference were related to specific individuals featured on the covers.

In the analytical procedure conducted using Adobe Photoshop 14.0, the material was examined on two levels: first, by identifying images characterised by under- or overexposure; second, by analysing the relationship between these treatments and the political affiliation of the depicted individuals.

2.4 DEFORMATION THROUGH EXPOSURE

We found significant differences between the three weeklies selected for the study regarding their approach to interfering with images through improper exposure (Figure 5). In *Newsweek Polska*, 27 of the analysed covers were overexposed. In *Wprost*, this effect was detected in four covers, and in *Polityka*, 14 covers were found to be overexposed. However, there were far fewer cases of underexposure of photographs and illustrations. In all the titles combined, only four such cases were recorded.

Figure 5. Number of covers depicting politicians' faces with a luminance histogram exceeding 255 (overexposure)



2.5 AVERAGE LUMINANCE

In the following analysis step (M3), we compared the arithmetic mean of the luminance values of the covers containing the face images under consideration. Using the histogram function, we analysed the so-called luminance (image brightness) distribution. Overexposed covers were excluded from the analysis due to their intentionally and unnaturally inflated parameters. In Figure 6, two blocks can be distinguished. The blue represents the mean luminance for all covers containing face images, and the red represents the mean luminance for those outside the range 0 and 255. Comparing the titles listed, we note that the arithmetic mean for individual covers is the highest in the case of *Polityka* – 124.2 units. *Wprost* came second with 109.6 units, and *Newsweek Polska* ranked last with 108.7 units. The values are lower in all cases after eliminating covers outside the 0–255 range.

Figure 6. Comparison of mean luminance for covers showing images of politicians' faces

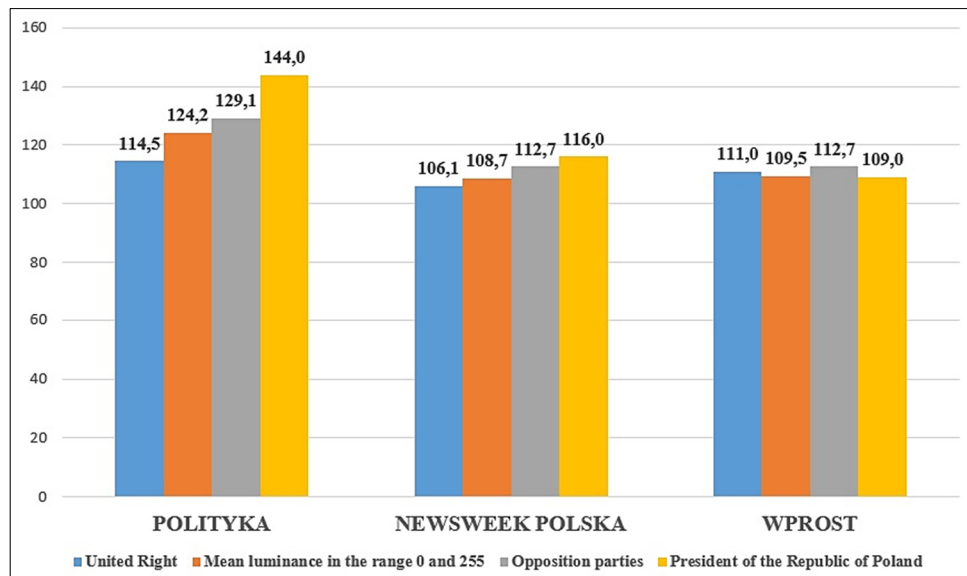
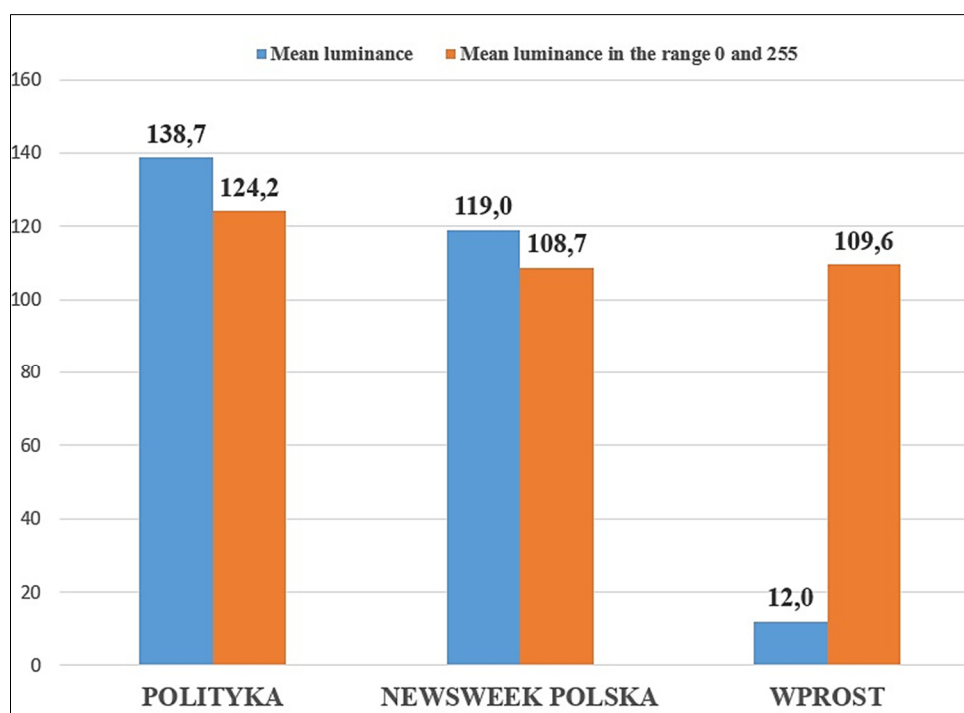
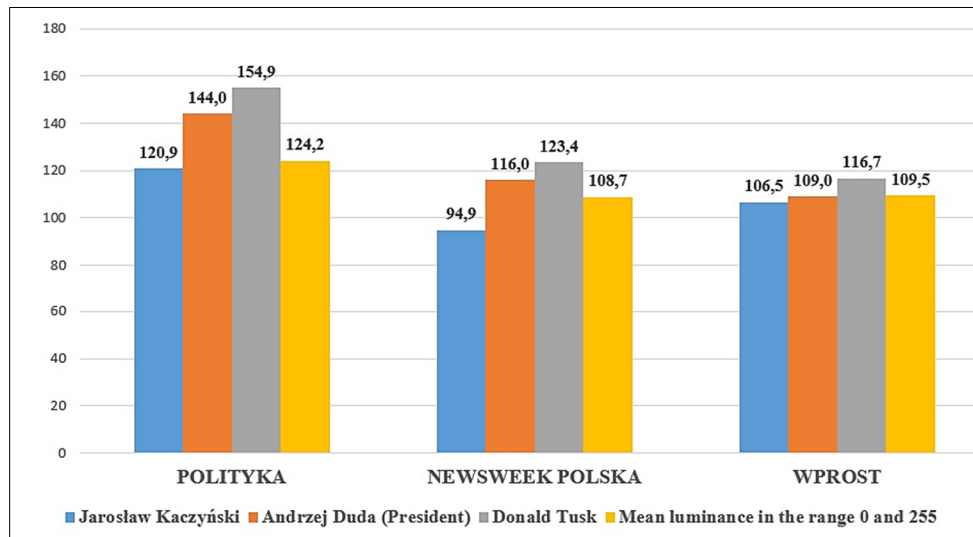


Figure 7. Comparison of mean luminance for covers containing images of politicians' faces from opposition and ruling parties and the Polish President



As illustrated in Figure 7, there are significant differences in the portrayal of representatives of opposing political forces. However, several regularities can be observed. In two weeklies, *Newsweek Polska* and *Polityka*, the image of the President obtained the highest values in comparison with other political options depicted on the covers. On the other hand, in all the weeklies, representatives of the opposition parties received better luminance scores than politicians of the parties forming the United Right, at the same time exceeding the average for all the titles. Some of the tendencies discussed above are reinforced when we compare the luminance of covers containing photos and illustrations depicting Andrzej Duda, Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk. In this case, the highest values characterise Donald Tusk in all the weeklies. The second place with average values is occupied by Andrzej Duda, and the third by Jarosław Kaczyński (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Comparison of mean luminance for covers containing images of the faces of opposition and ruling party leaders and the Polish President



Drawing on the M3 analysis of luminance and image manipulation, we proceeded to examine patterns within selected subsets of frequently depicted politicians. When analysing covers featuring the most frequently depicted politicians – Andrzej Duda, Beata Szydło, Mateusz Morawiecki, Zbigniew Ziobro, Antoni Macierewicz and Jarosław Kaczyński – we found that the small sample makes it difficult to identify consistent trends or determine editorial intentions with certainty. The only recurring observation is the very low luminance values in images of Jarosław Kaczyński. A similar tendency appears in images of Mateusz Morawiecki and Zbigniew Ziobro, although with deviations that prevent clear conclusions. This also applies to Andrzej Duda, who (except for *Wprost*) is generally portrayed with above-average luminance values.

The results may raise doubts as to whether luminance values are randomly distributed or reflect editorial patterns. However, analysis of mean values for covers featuring a broader group of politicians from both the United Right and the Opposition contradicts the assumption of randomness. A larger dataset allows for a more comprehensive interpretation of this phenomenon (Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10. Mean luminance value in the final analysed exemplification corpus of images of politicians' faces

Weekly	Mean luminance value
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	187.7
<i>Polityka</i>	124.2
<i>Wprost</i>	109.5

Table 11. Comparison of luminance values for images of six politicians' faces most frequently featured on the cover

Politician	Weekly		
	<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>Wprost</i>
A. Duda	116.0	144.0	109.0
B. Szydło	107.5	149.6	118.1
M. Morawiecki	105.1	96.0	110.9
Z. Ziobro	116.2	110.7	102.9
A. Macierewicz	107.2	–	111.8
J. Kaczyński	94.9	120.9	106.4

Note. The image of Antoni Macierewicz did not appear in the sample of analysed editions of the *Polityka* weekly.

By realising Objective O2, defined as a diagnostic objective supporting O1, we obtained an additional tool enabling the verification of the adopted hypotheses and complementing the quantitative (M1) and qualitative (M2) analyses. The M3 method extends these approaches by identifying under- and overexposure in photographs and graphics on the covers of *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* and *Wprost*. This indicates a relationship between the political affiliation of depicted individuals and the average luminance of their facial representations, observed across the final exemplification corpus.

Our analysis shows that the average luminance for images of politicians from the Law and Justice party and the United Right was lower than for opposition politicians represented in the 8th-term Sejm. The aim of this stage was not to determine the impact of luminance on perception, but to confirm the existence and systemic nature of these differences.

Managing luminance is one way of shaping the overall impression of an image. This impression is influenced by factors such as light and shadow, colour,

composition and the emotional expression of depicted figures. Under- or over-exposure of portraits affects the direction of the emotional spiral, determining whether it descends or ascends.

In pursuing O2, we implemented a diagnostic procedure supporting the verification of Hypotheses H1 and H2. This procedure complements earlier analyses by indicating how mirroring mechanisms may influence attitudes towards depicted individuals and associated phenomena.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of visual strategies used by selected Polish weekly opinion magazines led to several key conclusions. A major strength of the proposed procedure is the use of advanced diagnostic tools such as SightCorp software. Based on machine learning, it enabled the detection and decoding of facial microexpressions in the images of politicians featured on magazine covers. This provides insight into core emotions as an argumentative resource in visual rhetoric (Hocks, 2003, p. 631) and communication with potential audiences. Emotions such as anger, sadness and disgust, systematically present in the material, appear to form part of a broader strategy to influence public perceptions of politicians and shape attitudes towards politics in Poland.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods strengthens the reliability of the analysis. Techniques, such as luminance histogram analysis allow us to assess how photographic manipulation, including over- or under-exposure, affects the emotional appeal of images and provides additional insight into editorial decision-making.

At the same time, the study is not without limitations. One of the main challenges concerns the potential bias in interpreting emotional data, even when using advanced algorithms, as audience responses may vary depending on individual perspectives. Another limitation is the scope of the study, restricted to three selected weeklies.

In the future, the proposed procedure could be extended by incorporating diagnostic surveys conducted among actual readers of *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* and *Wprost*. Such research would make it possible to verify the real impact of visualised emotions on audience perception and attitudes, and it would also be valuable to conduct comparative studies encompassing all opinion weeklies published on the Polish press market.

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ANALIZA KIEROWANIA UWAGĄ ODBIORCÓW
ZA POMOCĄ SZATY GRAFICZNEJ
WYBRANYCH POLSKICH TYGODNIKÓW OPINII

Streszczenie

Współczesne media drukowane stoją przed wyzwaniem przyciągnięcia i utrzymania uwagi odbiorców w erze niemal natychmiastowej komunikacji. Okładka magazynu stała się zatem kluczowym elementem strategii komunikacyjnej, projektowanym tak, aby przyciągać uwagę i wywoływać emocje. W niniejszym artykule poddano analizie rolę okładek w komunikacji między wydawcą a czytelnikiem, badając trzy wybrane polskie tygodniki, *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka* i *Wprost*. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono w nim zmiennym wpływającym na postrzeganie komunikacji politycznej i jej aktorów. Na okładkach politycy są często przedstawiani w negatywnie nacechowanych pozach, z mikroekspresjami wyrażającymi emocje podstawowe. Funkcjonują one jako elementy retoryki wizualnej, w której mikroekspresje pełnią rolę argumentów wizualnych. Co istotne, tego rodzaju ekspresje bywają czasami konstruowane cyfrowo. Przedstawione w artykule badanie pokazuje, że środki techniczne umożliwiają obecnie zarządzanie reakcjami poznawczymi i afektywnymi odbiorców. W rezultacie wydawcy mogą kształtować emocje i postawy czytelników poprzez podkreślanie lub fabrykowanie gestów, postaw oraz ekspresji emocjonalnych postaci politycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: kierowanie uwagą; mikroekspresje; retoryka wizualna; tygodniki opinii; prasa; przyciąganie uwagi; opinia publiczna; kształtowanie opinii