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Comparative analysis of argument construction in the documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing¹

Abstract: This study examines the difference in the argument construction in three documentaries about the metro bombing, which happened in Minsk (Belarus) in April 2011. The documentaries were produced by major Belarusian and foreign media organizations and advocated opposite opinions about the investigation and trial. A comparative analysis of the three documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing helps to understand how the mass media constructed their distinct arguments using the same set of historical facts and sources. The analysis of documentary modes and main characteristics of the argument construction includes an overview of rhetorical structure and techniques, types of sources and evidence, and use of visual images. The study revealed that the documentary filmed by BBC News emphasized the obscurity of the case and was distinct from the other two films in how it employed a performative mode and how the appearance of the journalist on the screen and direct interaction with the social actors served to create the impression of personal trust. The rhetorical strategy of accumulation of details and representation of the suspects as “terrorists” in the film made by the state-run TV News Agency helped to construct a convincing argument based on visual images of material evidence. The logic of the film by Belsat TV appeared not to be very consequential, but the filmmakers addressed the questions of possible reasons for the bombing and covered public criticism of the investigation and trial. Both BBC News and Belsat TV used frames of the authoritarian regime to advocate their opinions.

Key words: documentary films, argument construction, Belarusian mass media, Minsk metro bombing.

¹ This paper was written by Tatsiana Karaliova as a chapter of the master’s thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism at the School of Mass Communication of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and successfully defended in May 2013.