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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.

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Komparativna analiza konstrukcije argumenata u dokumentarcima o bombaškom napadu metroa u Minsku²

Apstrakt: U radu se istražuju razlike u konstruisanju argumenata u tri dokumentarna filma o bombaškom napadu metroa u Minsku (Bjelorusija), koji se dogodio u aprilu 2011. godine. Dokumentarce su napravili vodeće bjeloruske i inostrane medijske organizacije i u njima se zagovaraju suprotna mišljenja o istrazi i suđenju. Komparativna analiza tri dokumentaraca o bombaškom napadu u Minsku nam pomaže da shvatimo kako su masovni mediji koristili isti skup istorijskih činjenica i izvora kako bi izgradili potpuno različita stanovišta. Analiza dokumentarnog modela i glavnih karakteristika konstrukcije argumenata uključuje pregled retoričke strukture i tehnike, tipove izvora i dokaza i upotrebu vizuelne prezentacije. Istraživanje je pokazalo da je dokumentarac sniman od strane BBC News naglasio nejasnoće u slučaju i bio različit od ostala dva filma po tome kako uključuje performativni model i način na koji se novinar pojavljuje na ekranu i u direktnoj je interakciji sa učesnicima pri čemu se stvara utisak ličnog povjerenja. Retorička strategija akumulacije detalja i zastupanje osumnjičenih kao “terorista” u filmu državne TV agencije doprinosi da se izgradi uvjerljiv argument na temelju vizuelnih slika materijalnih dokaza. S druge strane u filmu Belsat TV čini se da nije toliko pažnje posvećeno posledicama, već su se autori bavili pitanjima mogućih razloga za bombaški napad, prateći pokrivenost javne kritike istrage i suđenja. U oba filma i BBC News i Belsat TV koriste se okviri autoritarnog režima kako bi zagovarali njihova mišljenja.

Ključne riječi: *dokumentarni film, konstruisanje argumenata, bombaški napad metroa u Minsku*

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Introduction

On April 11, 2011, a bomb exploded in a Minsk metro station killing 15 and injuring more than 200 people. With no evident religious or racial conflicts, the question about the reasons for the bombing remained unanswered. President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, who often emphasized the stability and safety of the country, portraying himself as the “stabilizing force,” visited the site of the bombing, and at a meeting with top national officials called for immediate investigation (Levy & Schwirtz, 2011). In one and a half days, two suspects allegedly connected to the Minsk metro bombing case and two other bombings in Vitebsk, 2005, and in Minsk, 2008, were detained (Malashenkov, 2011). After the highly publicized trial in the fall of 2011, both men, Dmitry Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalev, were sentenced to death and executed in spring of 2012.

During and after the trial, many people, including some of the victims, expressed concern about the guilt of the two convicted bombers. According to some observers who witnessed the trial, the case did not prove the existence of a link between the men and the explosives. There were objections that the video footage from the surveillance cameras was edited, and most importantly, no motive for the crimes was adequately established (Naumann, 2011). Controversy about the premature verdict became heated over the possibility of a weakened official narrative on national security and stability constantly expressed by government officials and president Lukashenko (Bohdan, 2011). Intensive publicity of the investigation and trial of the accused and public discussion of them in the mass media led to the involvement of the international community and human rights groups who opposed the death penalty and called for its abolishment in Belarus. Some major international organizations condemned the sentences and executions making reference to the flawed justice system of Belarus and ill-treatment of the men (Amnesty International, 2011).

In 2012, three documentaries were made about the Minsk metro bombing by different media organizations: state-run TV News Agency of Belarusian TV and Radio Broadcasting Company, independent Belarusian television channel Belsat TV Channel, and BBC News Channel. The documentaries advocated different opinions: TV News Agency supported the suspects’ guilt, but Belsat TV and BBC News questioned whether justice had been done and expressed concerns about the fairness of the investigation and trial.

This study presents a comparative analysis of three television documentaries about the 2011 Minsk metro bombing. It aims to provide better understanding of how this event was processed and covered in the films produced by major Belarusian and foreign media organizations and how they 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 analysis of rhetorical structure and techniques, types of sources and evidence, and use of visual images.

The next section provides an overview of theoretical framework for analysis of argument construction and rhetoric in documentaries. Next, method of analysis is discussed and the findings are presented.

Documentaries as social commentary

Documentary as a genre for “documenting reality” is one of the most effective ways to advocate a certain point of view and persuade the viewer. As “a mixture of visual, auditory, and verbal stimuli” it is sometimes approached as a “visually laid out argument” (Alcolea-Banegas, 2009:260). According to O’Shaughnessy & Stadler (2008), technologies, in contrast to literature or paintings, appear to be objective, and this makes people believe in the realism of photographs or films. But, the authors remind us that these “realistic” media are constructed as well. With numerous choices of selection or omission of specific facts, images, or sources, a certain vision of events and facts is created. As the result of these choices, a particular viewpoint, or argument, is constructed. To describe this in terms of communication theory, filmmakers are *framing* the subject matter of their films.

According to Nichols (2010), questions of framing and interpretation are especially important for films with judicial and historical rhetoric where filmmakers try to answer the question of what really happened. Documentaries, as social commentary, can effectively shape public perception of a certain subject or an event. Filmmakers use different kinds of cinematic elements: camerawork, placements of people, lighting, editing, and sound. As Spence and Navarro remind us, “there is nothing natural about the structure of a documentary” (2011:114).

Aesthetic techniques used by filmmakers over the years vary “from traditionally journalistic to uses of direct cinema and cinema verité techniques to self-conscious use of dramatic narrative” (Dow, 2004:59). As such, television documentaries often tend to employ journalistic features of information presentation, including objectivity, fairness, and balance. This particular strategy of television documentaries could be very effective, because the most influential rhetorical form of persuasion is the one that is not realized by the audience and the seeming aim of the film is informing, not persuading (Snee, 2006). The difference between argumentation and the usual demonstration of facts or events is that the aim of the former is “not to deduce consequences from given premises,” but “to elicit or increase the adherence... of an audience to theses that are presented” (Perelman, 1982).

Argumentation and rhetoric in documentary films

Major questions of rhetoric were discussed in classical Greek philosophy. Acknowledging the importance and powerfulness of rhetoric, Aristotle developed the theory that described practical speaking and guidelines for rhetorical analysis (Cisneros, McCauliff, Beasley, 2009). In the past, speech was mainly described and studied as a means of persuasion. Today, rhetoric as “the art of persuasion” in-

volves images and sound, as well as different media and genres (Spence & Navarro, 2011).

As Nichols argues, rhetoric is integral to a documentary as a form of embodied speech with the “voice of documentary” explained as follows:

The voice of documentary...refers to a given film’s situated, embodied expression as it is conveyed by spoken words and silences, intertitles, music, composition, editing, tone or perspective with a primary emphasis on the effect of this symbolic form of action on the viewer (2008:36).

In documentaries, rhetorical structure and strategies, along with the use of different types of sources and evidence, are major components of argument construction. Filmmakers create messages to advocate certain visions of facts or events. They try to prove or dispute a claim, support the existing status quo or make an attempt to discredit it. Reasoning and appeal to logic are not the only means to build a case in visual media like documentaries. Appealing to senses and emotions are also very relevant to documentaries (Spence & Navarro, 2011).

Visual context plays an important role in this process. Because of a special influence images have on the minds of people, filmmakers arrange visuals to appeal to our emotions and passions (Alcolea-Banegas, 2009). Birdsell and Groarke (2007) contend that visual arguments are used for different reasons: as argument flags for attracting an audience to a particular claim, as a method to convey a message more effectively than a verbal claim, and finally as a more effective way to appeal to the emotions of the audience.

With this understanding of argument construction and rhetoric in documentaries, I suggest the following research question for investigation:

RQ: What is the difference in the argument construction in the three documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing produced by major Belarusian and foreign media organizations?

Method

Three documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing were produced by media organizations with different political worldviews. The first media organization, TV News Agency of Belarusian TV and Radio Broadcasting Company, is a state-owned company that explicitly supports the pro-government position in its television and radio programs. The second one, Belsat TV channel, describes itself as the first independent television channel in Belarus. The channel is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and other foreign institutions and the office of Belsat TV is situated in Warsaw, Poland. The third of the three documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing was made by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) News Channel. It presents the bombing from the point of view of a major Western mass media outlet.

A framework was developed for comparative analysis of the argument construction in the three documentaries (see Appendix A for details). It includes two

stages of assessment: analysis of documentary modes and main characteristics of the argument construction.

To understand the main principles of the films' construction, their aims and filmmakers' role, the documentary modes of the films were identified as described by Nichols. They are: expository mode, observational mode, participatory mode, and performative mode (2010:149-152). Poetic and reflexive modes were not included into the framework of analysis because they were not applied in the studied documentaries.

Later, the construction of the argument in each of the films was analyzed. First, their thematic rhetoric was considered. That is, themes or subjects that were developed in the films were analyzed. Though the metro bombing in Minsk was the main subject of all the films, some of the documentaries included other major topics that significantly affected representation of the main subject. Secondly, the rhetorical structure and techniques of the documentaries were evaluated. The following characteristics and strategies were addressed: placement of information, reasoning, proving or disputing the claim, comparisons and contrasts, repetitions, accumulation of details, accentuation, argument from authority, example, analogy, and metaphor. Thirdly, the types of sources and evidence used in the films (primary and secondary sources, use of archival footage, interviews and testimonies, photographs, documents, and sound recordings) were described. Fourthly, visual arguments were evaluated according to the types of visual images use as identified by Birdsell and Groarke. They are: visual flag (when it is aimed to attract attention to a message), visual demonstration (to present information in the most effective way – visually), visual metaphor (when the visual message is presented figuratively), visual symbols (symbolic representation based on strong associations), and visual archetypes (type of visual symbols that derives from popular narratives, mythology, etc.) (2007:105).

Documentary modes and thematic rhetoric

The documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing produced by the state-run TV agency TV News, Belsat TV and the BBC News Channel rely heavily on the expository mode, which “addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices that propose a perspective or advance an argument” (Nichols, 2010:167). The specifics of the television documentaries play an important role in the way they were made. To create an impression of objectivity, expository films use “informing logic carried by the spoken word” (ibidem, 167).

The producers could not adopt an observational mode of presence “on the scene” because of the subject of the documentaries (ibidem, 175). But, the footage from surveillance cameras and video from the investigative experiment were used in the films and this could be considered as a form of observational mode. This footage also played an important role in making the film look more impartial and allowing viewers to make conclusions for themselves.

In this study, the most significant difference in structural rhetoric was found in the use of the participatory and performative modes in the documentaries. These two types of modes are distinguished by the extent to which the filmmaker becomes involved with the subjects that are filmed (Nichols, 2010). For the performative mode, the interaction of the filmmaker with the social actors is more explicit and expressive. Interviews, which usually are used for participatory mode, played a significant role in the three films. But, it is only in the BBC documentary that the filmmaker, journalist John Sweeney, is shown on camera. He appears several times in the documentary: in the train arriving to Belarus, at the Minsk metro station, talking to people about the trial and prison, and walking on streets, etc. Though the film is about the Minsk metro bombing, another major argument is built over the course of it: Belarus is ruled by the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko and that is why fairness of the investigation and trial is very questionable. John Sweeney emphasized that he came to Belarus “undercover” and was not able to film openly. The way the journalist appeared in the film (his documents scrutinized on the border, he is filmed from a distance on Minsk streets, he walks near the building of the KGB, etc.) helped to convey the message of danger and animosity of the Belarusian government towards nonconformity and to enhance the credibility of a person who went to Belarus under the risk of being arrested.

This approach is also justified by the variety of themes that are addressed in the BBC documentary. The thematic rhetoric of the film made by the state-run TV News Agency is focused on the explanation of the events of the bombing, investigation, and trial with the aim of proving the suspects’ guilt. The documentaries produced by Belsat TV and BBC are more diverse in terms of their thematic rhetoric, and they disputed the claim of the suspects’ guilt. Both of them presented the political background in their documentaries and related it to the case of the bombing. In the BBC documentary, the journalist talked about the presidential elections of 2010 in Belarus, the crackdown on opposition, and political prisoners. This framing strategy of discussing the bombing and questioning the fairness of the trial that took place in the authoritarian country is used both by Belsat TV and the BBC News channel.

Rhetorical structure and emotional stimuli

The main argument of each film was constructed with the help of certain rhetorical structure and techniques. The documentary by the TV News Agency was designed to prove the claim about the guilt of the suspects, and the filmmakers did it in a logical and consistent way. The rhetorical strategy of accumulation of details is used to build the argument. The filmmakers consequentially construct the case from the starting point of the bombing to the complete history of the life of the suspects, their psychological description, involvement with the bombing, detention, confession, and trial. Information is very carefully placed and well-thought-out, with a detailed description of material evidence, of how Konovalov bought and

tested explosives, and with the explanation of what is shown on metro surveillance cameras. To further support the argument of the suspects' guilty and evil nature, the rhetorical technique of contrast is used when the drunken suspects are shown detained by police while the wounded victims are on operating tables in the hospitals. One of the suspects is shown on the left part of the screen and an operating room with a victim is shown on the right part of the screen simultaneously.

To validate fairness of the investigation and trial (argument from authority), interviews with the representatives of specialists from another country (the Russian Federal Security Service) and international organization (Interpol) were conducted by the TV News Agency. This was made to enhance the credibility of the argument and provide an impartial opinion on the case. It is important to note that only the TV News Agency provided a supporting opinion of Interpol. The BBC documentary, instead, criticized the Interpol Secretary General Ronald Noble for praising the actions of the Belarusian investigators, while Belsat TV ignored the comments of Interpol in their film.

Argument construction of the documentary made by Belsat TV is aimed at disputing the claim about the guilt of the suspects. Though its rhetorical structure also implied accumulation of details, they were used to challenge the status quo. Reasoning in the documentary is based on the disclosure of case weaknesses, casting doubt upon the authenticity of the material evidence, and the reliance on the emotional appeal. In the beginning of the film, the rhetorical strategy of example is used to show a young man who lost his legs in the bombing. He did not blame the suspects for what happened and said that he did not believe in the Belarusian judicial system. What is important, and is absent from the film by the TV News Agency, is that Belsat TV accentuated the absence of motives for the suspects. It looked at the history of other bombings in Belarus and emphasized the absence of possible reasons for terroristic attacks in Belarus in general. This message was also developed in the comparison of what the head of KGB said was the motive for the bombing when suspects were not yet interrogated and what Konovalov said was the motive for his deeds in his confession. They both said the motive was the "destabilization of the situation in the country."

In the BBC documentary, the rhetorical structure and techniques served to dispute the claim of the suspects' guilt and develop the argument that the authoritarian regime could have framed the case. The journalist repeated several times the main question of the film "Who did it?" The emphasis is made on the obscurity of the case throughout the entire documentary. To prove the possibility of the torture of the suspects to make them confess, former political prisoners were interviewed. Their stories served to explain the conditions in the prison and the practices of interrogation. John Sweeney goes so far as to make his own experiments to prove his argument. He verified the time of walking from the site of the bombing to the place where the suspects lived to check if the time indicated by the Belarusian investigators is sufficient. Also, he checked how long a person can stand one of the types of torture described by the former political prisoners: Sweeney stood naked

in freezing conditions in a London cold storage facility for 40 seconds. Both Belsat TV and BBC showed scenes from the coverage of the case on the state-run TV and criticized it. In this way, they acknowledged the existence of pro-government opinion, but did not elaborate on it.

In the BBC film, the rhetorical technique of metaphor was used most effectively among the three films. One of the most powerful examples is the section where the journalist goes to the museum full of discarded statues. A close-up of the monument of Stalin is the final shot of the documentary with the voice-over proclaiming: "This is not a country that is recovering from Stalin's nightmare; it is a country still living one."

Appeals to emotions play an important role in all three films, but in a different way. The state-run television conducted interviews with the relatives of the people who were killed in the bombing and, in the end of the film, the pictures and names of all who died were shown. The Belsat TV and BBC, apart from showing victims of the bombing in the beginning of the films, also showed relatives of the executed suspects, and the crying mother and sister of Vladislav Kovalev. Also, the BBC documentary largely appealed to the fears of the viewer by portraying Belarus as a place of "Soviet tyranny of political prisoners and torture, a land where people disappear." Because the target audience of the film is most likely English-speaking Western countries, this emotional stimulus could be very effective.

Types of sources and evidence

It is assumed that all the three documentaries used the same set of historical facts and evidence about the case. However, the analysis of the documentaries revealed that both material evidence and sources were used by the films in different ways.

The state-run TV News Agency to a great extent relied on the commentary of the Belarusian officials. The Belsat TV included commentary from the head of the Belarusian KGB only to stress the point they were disputing. The elaboration on the material evidence in the film made by TV News Agency is very detailed and included a description of psychological aspects of the suspects' personalities, their childhood, and suicide attempts, etc. Video recordings of the tests of explosives from the cell phone of Konovalov were shown. The culminating point in the documentary is when the man confessed to the crime. The filmmakers of TV News Agency talked to the people who knew the suspects, but never presented the opinion of their relatives. Commentary from one of Konovalov's friends was used in the documentaries made by TV News Agency and by Belsat TV differently. In the former, his friend stated that they used to "blow things up" together when they were kids. And in the latter, he talked about the awkwardness of the outcome of the trial. Another difference in these two documentaries was revealed in how they showed the investigative experiment where Konovalov made the bomb. In the first film, the investigative experiment was shown almost without commentary. In the second one, an

expert commented on the process and said that the bomb could not have the same explosive force as the one that was used in the Minsk metro.

In both the Belsat TV and BBC documentaries the mother of one of the suspects, Lubov Kovaleva, spoke about her son, read letters from him, questioned the fairness of the investigation and trial, and said that she did not believe that her son did that. Also, it was stressed that Kovalev recanted his confession and said that he admitted guilt under pressure from interrogators.

The increasing public criticism of the investigation and trial was not addressed in the film made by the state-run TV News Agency. The opposing view was ignored. On the contrary, the Belsat TV documentary showed interviews with people who commented on the trial and questioned its fairness.

The analysis also revealed that in the three documentaries impartial sources not related to the bombing or investigation commented on the case in different ways. The TV News Agency shared the opinion of the famous Belarusian TV and theatre actor Vladimir Gostyukhin who said that he believed the trial was fair and the suspects deserved the verdict. Belsat TV conducted an interview with one of the opposition leaders in Belarus, Stanislav Shushkevich, who questioned the rationality of Lukashenko going with his seven-year old son to the bombing site when there were still dead people on the metro platform. Also, in the documentary, a former Belarusian investigator described the interrogation and torture practices of Belarusian police. BBC News interviewed the former British ambassador to Belarus who stated that “the problem with Belarus is that nothing is open and transparent.” In this way, all the three documentaries made careful choice of interviewees to support the arguments put forth in each of the films.

Visual images use

The first shots of the films by the TV News Agency and Belsat TV are the moments after the blast with crying wounded people, blood, and ambulances. These images served as a visual flag to capture the attention of the viewers. In the three documentaries, the footage from surveillance cameras was used. However, the TV News Agency used it as a form of visual demonstration most effectively. They included video scenes filmed by surveillance cameras on railroad stations and in the metro to show how one of the suspects came from Vitebsk to Minsk where he planned the bombing. The last minutes before the blast are presented in detail, and, when commenting on the appearance of the man with the bag in the metro, the voice-over called him “Konovalov” or “terrorist,” not “suspect” or “man.” In this way, the film unquestionably assigned the name of the man to the image of the alleged bomber in the film. A similar type of visual argumentation was used in the other two films as the most effective for this type of evidence. Clearly, the TV News Agency possessed a wider range of this type of visual materials, and, because foreign journalists needed accreditation to work in Belarus, this could have created barriers in access to information for Belsat TV and BBC News.

The TV News Agency used snapshots from Konovalov's personal camera, when he tested the explosives, as well as material evidence, in particular, parts of the bomb, as visual demonstrations of his maturation into a "terrorist." To further keep the attention of the audience, wounded people and parts of the bodies on the metro platform were shown again after that. In this way, the scenes served as a visual flag.

One of the notable instances of visual demonstration in the film made by Belsat TV was when the former interrogator spoke about the practices of interrogation and torture used by the Belarusian police. His story was accompanied by the scene where he cut a hole in the ice and described one of the methods of interrogation where a person was put into the ice-hole and forced to confess to the crimes he never did. In the BBC documentary, all three political prisoners who were interviewed for the film were asked to draw the pictures of the cells and how they were tortured and describe their experience in prison. Their sketches served as visual flags to attract the attention of the viewers.

The close-ups in the three documentaries focused on different people. The TV News Agency used that technique when filming experts, witnesses, and relatives of the people killed in the bombing. As a result, the emotional appeal to the documentary viewers who observed crying people who lost their children, or spouses, or parents became even more powerful. In the documentaries of the Belsat TV and BBC News, there was a close-up view of the suspect's crying mother.

The image of president Lukashenko appeared several times in the documentaries filmed by the Belsat TV and BBC News, as opposed to the film made by the state-run TV News Agency. Images of Lukashenko served as a visual symbol to label the authoritarian political order in the country. For example, BBC showed shots of Lukashenko in military uniform during the parade, him walking to his inauguration, and a picture of his little son with a golden gun. Also, the building of the KGB head office in Minsk was shown in the BBC documentary several times. The most powerful visual symbol in the BBC film was the image of the monument to Stalin at the end of the documentary. It was used to spectacularly finish off the picture of the totalitarian regime.

Discussion

The images of Belarus that emerge from the three documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing are very different. The state-run TV News Agency focused exclusively on the case of the bombing, Belsat TV and BBC related the political situation in the country to the bombing and discussed the investigation and trial in frames of the thematic rhetoric devoted to the authoritarian regime. The analysis revealed that though all the three documentaries heavily relied on the expository mode, the documentary filmed by BBC News was distinct from the other two films in terms of how it employed a performative mode. The appearance of the journalist on the screen and direct interaction with the social actors served to create the

impression of personal trust toward him and provided the film with an additional persuasive effect. At the same time, the absence of the filmmakers on the screen in the other two documentaries could be explained by the desire to support the impression of impartiality.

The rhetorical structure of the film made by TV News Agency proved to be more logical and consistent than that of the other two documentaries. The rhetorical strategy of accumulation of details and representation of the suspects as “terrorists” helped to construct a convincing argument based on visual images of material evidence. Because the film was made for the state-run television channel, it promoted the pro-government standpoint and most likely had more material evidence available in the process of the film production. The logic of the film produced by Belsat TV appeared to be not very consequential, with major deviations from the storyline. Also, much time was spent for not very important details. But, the filmmakers addressed the questions of possible reasons of the bombing and covered public criticism of the investigation and trial better than the other two films. The BBC documentary made emphasis on the obscurity of the case and used stories of former political prisoners about torture as examples of how the Belarusian legal system works.

There was a difference in the way the films appealed to the emotions of the viewers. All the three documentaries did so by evoking compassion toward the victims of the bombing. However, in the BBC and Belsat documentaries additional time was devoted to showing the mother of the suspect, which served to evoke compassion toward her.

The three documentaries made very careful choices of interviewees to support their arguments. The state-run channel relied on the commentary of Belarusian officials and interviewed people who knew suspects, but never talked to relatives of the two men charged with the bombing. The Belsat TV and BBC used alternative sources and interviewed oppositional leaders, a former investigator, political prisoners, and the mother of one of the bombing suspects.

Visual argument constructions in the form of visual demonstration were used in the three documentaries. For the TV News Agency, footage from surveillance cameras served to confirm the argument and create the image of the “terrorists.” For the other two media, the same footage was the evidence of the falsehood of the whole case. The presence or absence of the figure of Lukashenko also influenced the construction of the argument in the three documentaries. For the documentary made by TV News Agency, it helped to distance the image of the president from the bombing. For the other two documentaries, his image served as a symbol of obscurity of the case and, especially in the BBC documentary, it served as the symbol of the authoritarian regime in the country.

Conclusion

This study confirmed the opinion about the existence of a gap in coverage of events and facts in Belarusian state-run and independent media (Jarolimek, 2009). Furthermore, this study showed the gap between how the event was presented by Belarusian state-run media organization and western media organization. This gap was revealed in how with the same set of historical facts and evidence regarding the case of the Minsk metro bombing, different types of mass media constructed their arguments differently, exposing distinct ideological viewpoints.

Limited coverage and lack of diversity of presented voices and the reliance on the commentaries of state officials resulted in pro-government perspective in the state-run media, which did not present or discuss alternative opinions. At the same time, with the financial support of the government and easier access to the information, the state-run media are sometimes able to construct stronger argument than independent mass media, as it is evident from the analysis of the documentaries.

The study showed that Belsat TV presented diverse perspectives on the Minsk metro bombing. The use of the frames of the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko was revealed in the documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing produced by the independent media organization, Belsat TV, and by the western media organization, BBC News. Such frames could have influenced the objectiveness of their reporting, however. Existing restrictions on access to information for independent and foreign mass media could serve as a partial explanation for the weaker argumentation in their documentaries about the Minsk metro bombing.

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- **Appendix A**

Framework for comparative analysis of the documentariesDocumentary modes³

- a) expository;
- b) observational;
- c) participatory;
- d) performative.

Argument construction:

- 1) Thematic rhetoric (themes or subjects).
- 2) Rhetorical structure and techniques (placement of information, reasoning, proving or disputing the claim, comparisons and contrasts, repetitions, accumulation of details, accentuation, argument from authority, example, analogy, and metaphor);
- 3) Types of sources and evidence (primary and secondary sources, use of archival footage, interviews and testimonies, photographs, documents, sound recordings);
- 4) Visual images use⁴ (visual flag, demonstration, metaphor, symbols, and archetypes).
- 5) Emotional stimuli.

³ Nichols, B. (2010). *Introduction to documentary*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

⁴ Birdsell, D.S. and Groarke, L. (2007). Outlines of a theory of visual argument. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, 43 (3/4), 103-113.

