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Polish weeklies in local government election campaign in light of “echo chamber” theory

Introduction

Contemporary media recipients more and more often feel that almost all people around them think in a similar way that they are in the majority, and views contrary to those they express are of an extremely rare nature²⁹. Numerous studies show that such feelings, as well as broadly understood shaping of our beliefs and opinions not only in relation to our decisions or political views, but also to what others think, are created or at least co-created by the media. Interesting evidence confirming this thesis is provided by media reports of events such as Brexit, US elections won by Donald Trump, hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine, waves of refugees arriving in Europe after the Syrian crisis or increasingly popular fake news³⁰. They clearly show that the selection of sources of information we use, whether made by us or through search engines and social media, as well as our existing knowledge and beliefs have a strong impact on the perception and assessment of phenomena related to politics and security.

According to some of these concepts, the individual using the media is exposed to self-censorship, contact only with the information filtered for it, which means that in fact he knows only attitudes and views similar to his own. In this way, the citizen is placed in the chamber with an omnipresent echo. He has many channels and sources of information at his disposal, but on the one hand he reaches for them himself, and on the other hand, technological solutions facilitate his access, to those that allow him to

29 R. Klepka, *Obrazy polityki w mediach: podstawowe uwarunkowania*, [in:] *Medialne obrazy świata. Wybrane problemy społeczno-polityczne w mediach*, ed. R. Klepka, Kraków 2018, p. 9–25; C. Happer, G. Philo, *The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change*, „Journal of Social and Political Psychology” 2013, vol. 1, isp. 1.

30 R. Klepka, *Fake news*, [in:] *Vademecum bezpieczeństwa*, eds. O. Wasiuta, R. Klepka, R. Kopec, Kraków 2018, p. 299–304; O. Wasiuta, P. Wasiuta, *Wojna hybrydowa Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie*, Kraków 2017; D. Geschke, J. Lorenz, P. Holtz, *The triple-filter bubble: Using agent-based modelling to test a meta-theoretical framework for the emergence of filter bubbles and echo chambers*, „British Journal of Social Psychology” 2019, vol. 58, isp. 1; J. Idzik, R. Klepka, *Media Coverage Of Refugee Crisis Some Evidence From Poland*, „International Relations Review” 2018, vol. 1, isp. 1.

confirm the judgments and feelings to which he is accustomed³¹. We mainly look for publications that would prove that our assessments are correct, which in turn may lead to the individual being in a metaphorical room with echo, so that he does not receive views and opinions that are polemical or critical about his position. The choice of a press title, a TV program or a website for most media users is not an expression of the world's curiosity or contingency, but an activity consistent with the psychological confirmation strategy, i.e. a tendency to prefer those sources of information and opinions that confirm already existing expectations or hypotheses³².

Outlined conditions make the supporters of the government mainly watch information programs on public television, and those voting for the opposition on commercial television. Conservative people who prefer religious values go to Catholic media, and viewers and readers with liberal views use the media, which present their ideas about the world. Similarly, on the Internet, search engines and social media using the knowledge of what has been liked by a given recipient, and in particular which topics and reviews followed for the most amount of time, make the user always in a group of topics and points of view similar to his or her own, and never be directed to different values, incompatible with their system³³. This is what makes viewers and readers believe that they stay in the majority, because all the sources they are dealing with not only confirm, but also deepen their thinking, which strongly shapes political views and favors their polarization³⁴.

The aim of the study, the results of which are presented in the article, is to determine whether selected Polish opinion weeklies during the local election campaign in 2018 created room with an echo, so they wrote more and better about the candidates they supported, and avoided writing about representatives of non-pledged groups and wrote about them mainly critically. Before the study, a hypothesis was put forward that the opinion weeklies did not present their readers with different points of view, but expecting the preferences of readers who bought the weekly's did not allow them to get any information or opinion contrary to his expectations.

Methods

The conducted study used a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the press content³⁵. As one of the precursors of this research method, Bernard Berelson pointed out, it aims at an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the explicit content of the message³⁶. Objectivity is based on the assumption that the test should

31 F. Hamborg, K. Donnay, B. Gipp, *Automated identification of media bias in news articles: an interdisciplinary literature review*, „International Journal on Digital Libraries” 2018.

32 D.C. Mutz, *Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference: The Role of Mass Media*, „American Political Science Review” 2001, vol. 95, isp. 1.

33 E. Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You*, New York 2011.

34 C.R. Sunstein, *The Law of Group Polarization*, „Journal of Political Philosophy” 2002, vol. 10, isp. 2.

35 R. Klepka, *Analiza zawartości mediów: dlaczego i do czego można ją wykorzystać w nauce o bezpieczeństwie i politologii?*, „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia de Securitate et Educatione Civili” 2016, vol. VI, isp. 224.

36 B. Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, New York 1952, p. 18. Wiele szczegółowych uwag na temat analizy zawartości i procedur jej stosowania, zob.: J.E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*, Houndmills, Basingstoke,

be carried out in such a way that each subsequent researcher repeating the analysis obtains the same results. The systematic nature of the research is associated with a specific selection of material. The selection criteria must be clear, unambiguous and based on objective premises. For example, in order to analyze a specific weekly in terms of the manner in which the image of the prime minister is presented in it, objectivity is connected with the necessity to create such analysis criteria that are as unambiguous as possible to the research result, regardless of political preferences. In turn, regularity means that either all journal numbers will be examined, either only on the selected day of the week or according to another readable criterion. Only then is content analysis a research technique for obtaining new knowledge, and it is not a tool to justify the views of the author of the study.

The quantitative nature of content analysis is related to the assumption that the most objective results remain those that are quantitative in character. However, it should be borne in mind that most often the quantitative results remain in strong relation with the qualitative analysis.

The study selected magazines addressed mainly to the part of the society that shows particular interest in current political problems, i.e. the most popular opinion weeklies. It was considered that in the group of readers of such a press there are people who are politically active, take part in elections that consciously reach for the journal, to get more in-depth knowledge, from that available in daily television news programs and to read wider comments and opinions regarding social and political life. Polish opinion weeklies were selected for the study, which appeared in the six weeks preceding the second round of the local government elections, that is, on November 4, 2018. On the basis of data on the distribution of paid press in October 2018, when the research process was initiated, a decision was made to select specific titles. The table below provides detailed figures.

Table 1. Jointly paid dissemination of socio-political weeklies

Title	October 2018
„Gość Niedzielny”	118 111
„Polityka”	96 372
„Wprost”	85 352
„Newsweek Polska”	82 431
„Do Rzeczy”	41 481
„Sieci”	40 178

Source: own study based on data from Związek Kontroli Dystrybucji Prasy available on site wirtualnemediia.pl

Hampshire, New York 2007; D. Riffe, P. Lacy, F.G. Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*, Mahwah, New Jersey, London 2005; K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi 2004; G. Shapiro, J. Markoff, *A Matter of Definition*, [in:] *Text Analysis for the Social Sciences: Methods for Drawing Statistical Inferences From Texts and Transcripts*, ed. C.W. Roberts, Mahwah, New Jersey 1997; W. Pi-sarek, *Analiza zawartości prasy*, Kraków 1983; M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Analiza zawartości mediów. Przewodnik dla studentów*, wersja 1.1, Kraków 2004.

Despite the fact that the highest distribution score was held by the „Gość Niedzielny”, due to the specificity of this weekly, it was not taken into account in the research. The weeklies „Do Rzeczy”, „Newsweek”, „Polityka”, „Wprost” and „Sieci” were selected for the study.

Subsequently, a detailed analysis of the content of six numbers of each of the five surveyed journals was performed. All materials that were in any way related to the issue of the local government electoral campaign were qualified for further research. Selected publications were subjected to a deeper quantitative and qualitative analysis, striving to determine in particular: what kind of attention each weeklie’s writer devoted to the election campaign, which of its participants were presented most often and what tone was given to these publications and how these publications were illustrated. In this way, it was attempted to determine how much the reader of a given journal could come into contact with different opinions, and how far these views were uniform and reflected the magazine’s program line, which would mean that they keep the reader in the described room with echoing views. It has been assumed that the weeklies have a curriculum, which they express in their own language, or it results from the current press research. A detailed list of the expected political lines of each of the weeklies is summarized below. It should be emphasized that in the case of the „Wprost” weekly it is very difficult to assess its political line, which has undergone multiple corrections along with changes in the position of the editor-in-chief.

Table 2. Political line of surveyed weeklies

Title	Political line	A committee or party usually supported by a weekly
„Do Rzeczy”	conservative	PiS
„Newsweek Polska”	liberal-leftist	KO
„Polityka”	leftist	SLD Lewica Razem
„Sieci”	conservative	PiS
„Wprost”	-	-

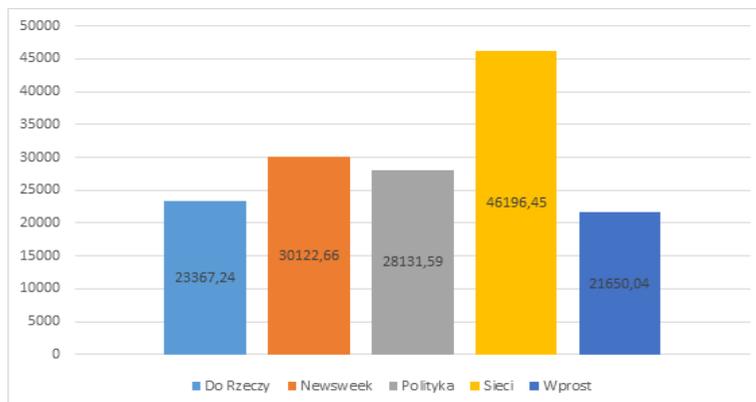
Source: own study based on R. Klepka, *Medialna walka o dobrą zmianę: obraz wyborów parlamentarnych w 2015 roku w wybranych mediach*, Wydawnictwo Libron, Kraków 2018, s. 143 i.n.; M. Kolczyński, *Stronniczość mediów w bipolarnym środowisku politycznym. Tygodnik „Polityka” w kampaniach wyborczych 2015 roku*, „Polityka i Społeczeństwo” 2017, vol. 1, iss 15.

Results

In the analyzed issues of magazines there was a significant variation between the amount of space, which weeklies decided to devote to the subject of the local government election campaign. Definitely the most, because almost 50,000 cm² has been devoted to this issue by the weekly „Sieci”. Only two-thirds of this space was devoted to the second in terms of the amount of space allocated for the coverage of the election campaign weekly “Newsweek” – slightly above 30,000 cm². Slightly less attention was devoted to the weeklies „Polityka” and „Do Rzeczy”, while the smallest

number of self-government elections was devoted to the magazine „Wprost”, slightly over 20,000 cm². Detailed data can be found in the chart below.

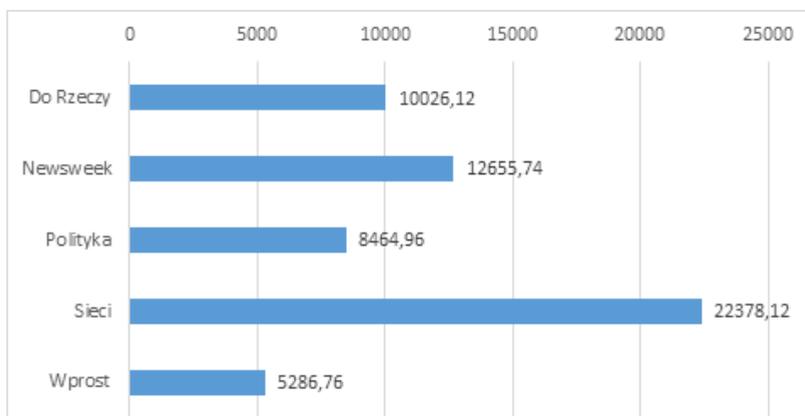
Charvol 1. The surface of publications (in cm²) devoted to the local government election campaign in the examined editions of socio-political weeklies



Source: own study

The analysis of the content of weeklies shows that the main dividing line that existed between them was the attitude towards the ruling party, i.e. Law and Justice (PiS) and its candidates in local elections. The chart below shows how much space was devoted to the PiS presentation in the weeklies surveyed.

Charvol 2. Area of publications devoted exclusively or mainly to the Law and Justice in the studied weeklies

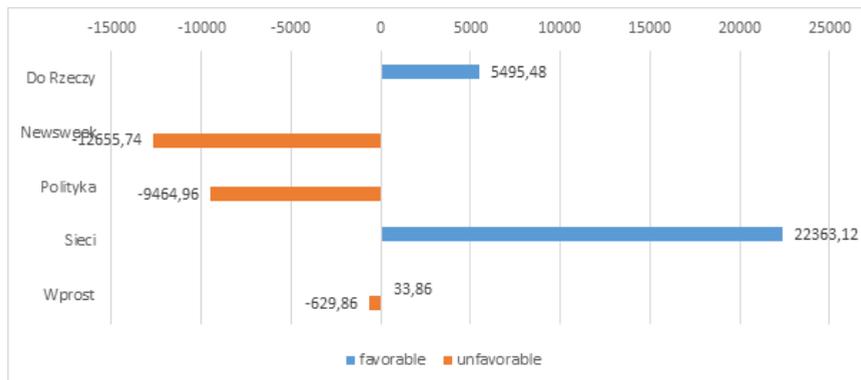


Source: own study

The selection of press materials that would present exclusively or predominantly the PiS content allows in the first instance to indicate that in principle each of the weeklies surveyed is the one that devoted more space to that party than to any

other. From this perspective, the „Sieci” weekly stands out in a special way, which has devoted approximately as much space to this party as the next two volumes of PiS materials in total. The least space for the analysis of the election campaign of this group was provided by the weekly „Wprost”, which paid the least attention to the election campaign.

Charvol 3. The tone of publications devoted to Law and Justice in the studied weeklies



Source: own study

Analysis of the overtone of materials devoted to PiS leads to unequivocal conclusions. Apart from the „Wprost” weekly, in all the studied journals, materials devoted to Jarosław Kaczyński’s group had the same overtones in a given title. Readers of „Do Rzeczy” and „Sieci” had the opportunity to learn only positive materials about the PiS, while in the weeklies „Newsweek” and „Polityka” there were only critical texts devoted to this party. An interesting complement to the analysis of the content of texts is the presentation of selected illustrations posted by weeklies.

Illustration 1. Patryk Jaki’s staff



Source: „Do Rzeczy” 2018, no. 40, p. 32.

Illustration 2. Patryk Jaki



Source: „Do rzeczy” 2018, no. 41, p. 34.

Illustration 3. Mateusz Morawiecki and Jarosław Kaczyński



Source: „Sieci” 2018, no. 44, p. 32–33.

In the „Do Rzeczy” and „Sieci” weeklies, the candidate for President of Warsaw, Patryk Jaki was presented as a professional surrounded by a group of experts. Similarly, the photos of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Jarosław Kaczyński were meant to arouse sympathy. The chairman of the party was captured on the photograph in a benign, full of warm smile. Such an illustration undoubtedly had a positive effect, warming the image of Kaczyński. The politicians associated with PiS in „Polityka” and „Newsweek” have been illustrated differently.

Illustration 4. Graphics showing Mateusz Morawiecki and Zbigniew Ziobro



Source: „Newsweek” 2018, no. 45, p. 22–23.

Illustration 5. Graphics showing Mateusz Morawiecki



Source: „Polityka” 2018, no. 39, p. 16.

Expressive in this context were the graphics of Morawiecki and Zbigniew Ziobro, which ridiculed the material about the dispute between politicians regarding the election result of the party. The illustrations in the „Polityka” weekly, which ridiculed many merits, which the prime minister and the ruling party attributed to themselves in the course of the local election campaign, were no less critical and mocking. The montage showing Morawiecki as Superman or Maria Skłodowska-Curie criticized the prime ministerial campaign in which he described the landmark changes he made with his government.

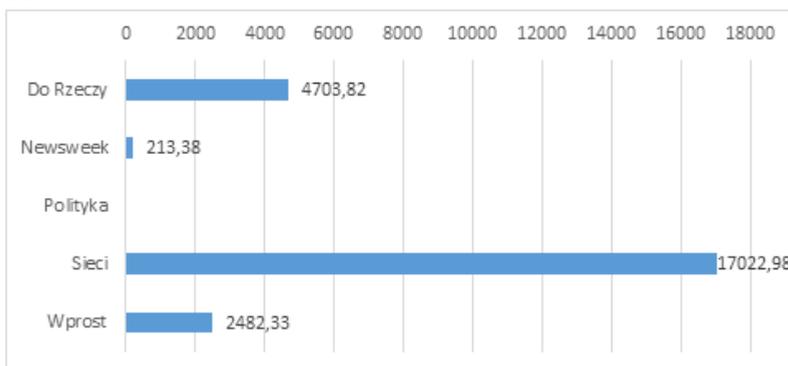
Illustration 6. Billboards of Rafał Trzaskowski and Patryk Jaki



Source: „Wprost” 2018, no. 40, p. 8.

In turn, the „Wprost” weekly remained impartial and distanced from the electoral issues also with reference to illustrations. Most of the PiS materials in this weekly were neutral or ambivalent. The illustrations were intended solely to illustrate the text, presenting the election as one of many themes, focusing rather on the distanced presentation of rival candidates, as illustrated in the one-space billboard of the main contenders for the function of the President of Warsaw.

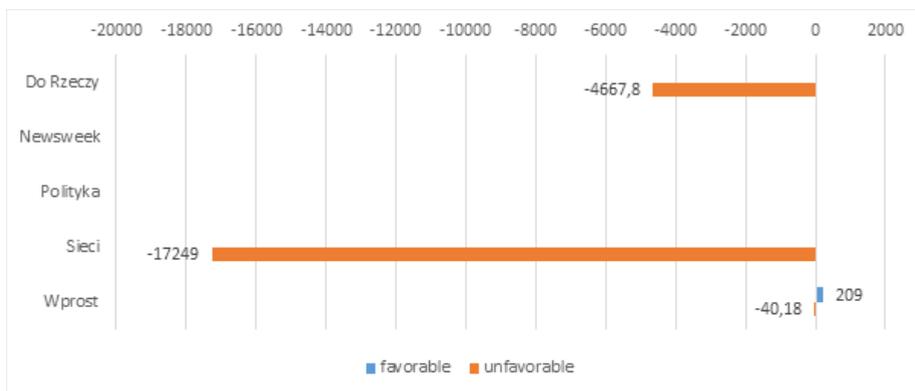
Charvol 4. Area of publications devoted exclusively or mainly to the Citizens’ Committee in the studied weeklies



Source: own study

Materials devoted only or mainly to the Citizens' Committee in the studied weeklies were presented far less, and the weekly „Polityka” did not devote a single publication, either entirely or predominantly, to the Committee. As in the case of the PiS, the weekly magazine „Sieci”. wrote the most about KO. Publications devoted exclusively to or main KO's included in this weekly took up more than twice as much space as in all the others combined.

Charvol 5. The overtone of publications devoted to the Citizens' Committee in the studied weeklies



Source: own study

A small number or lack of publications devoted only or mainly to KO in the „Newsweek” and „Polityka” weeklies made it impossible to capture the overtones of the materials devoted to the committee in the mentioned titles. „Wprost” rarely explicitly commented on the topic of KO in its texts, most publications were ambivalent. In turn, weeklies „Sieci” and „Do Rzeczy” in all of their publications presented KO in an unfavorable way. Also, the illustrations included in the conservative weekly papers had a ridiculous or critical character towards the KO.

Illustration 7. Barbara Nowacka, Grzegorz Schetyna and Katarzyna Lunbnauer



Source: „Do Rzeczy” 2018, no. 42, p. 36–37.

Illustration 8. Donald Tusk



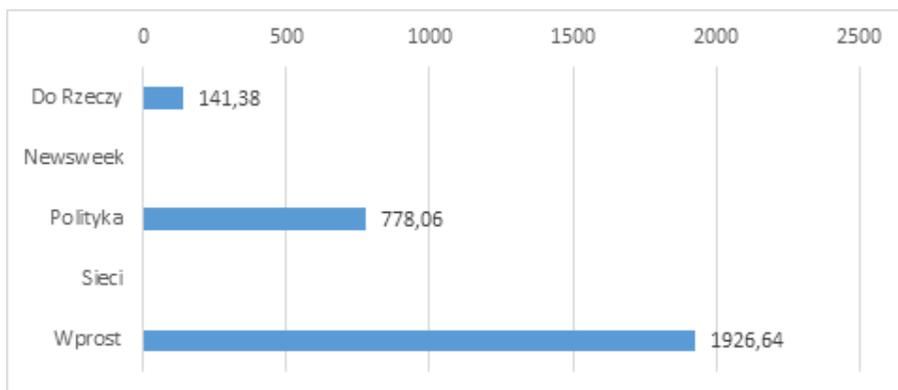
Source: „Sieci” 2018, no. 42, p. 40.

The indicated illustrations were generally characterized by capturing characters on them in a highly unfavorable way. In contrast to the photos posed by PiS politicians, photographs presenting people associated with Grzegorz Schetyna’s group were usually made in a casual way, when the people on them had specific faces, looking disgraceful and amused. The pictures themselves were enriched with a quote or commentary that gave the illustrations even more unfavorable to KO’s overtones.

The opinion weeklies devoted much less space to other electoral committees participating in the self-government election. The „Sieci” weekly did not devote any separate material to the committees of the Polish People’s Party and SLD Lewica Razem. The weekly magazine „Wprost”, devoted the most space on the theme of the peasants to the most-important topic, the texts of which were predominantly neutral. The materials devoted to the PSL and SLD in „Do Rzeczy”, though not numerous, have always been characterized by a negative overtone. The most favorable to the discussed committees was the weekly „Polityka”, which also the SLD Lewica Razem committee devoted the most space from all the studied magazines, presenting both SLD and PSL in a favorable way. The illustrations contained in the „Polityka”

presented leaders of the committees, Włodzimierz Czarzasty and Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz as dynamic and efficient politicians. An interesting concept was to use the conventions of photographs of characters that appear to be moving, which makes them particularly expressive and active. Also the expression on the face or the outfit of the leaders of both groups allowed us to feel that the weekly was very sympathetic to the campaign they were running.

Charvol 6. Area of publications devoted exclusively or mainly to the Polish People's Party in the studied weeklies



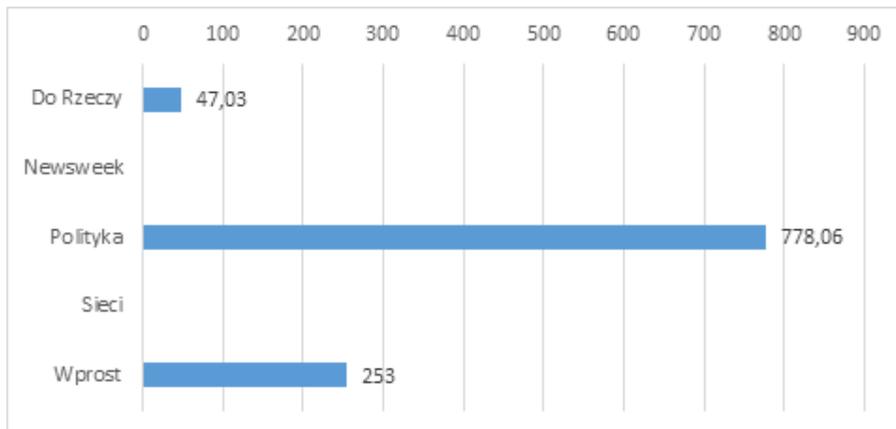
Source: own study

Illustration 9. Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz



Source: „Polityka” 2018, no. 44, p. 21.

Charvol 7. Area of publications devoted exclusively or mainly to the SLD Lewica Razem committee in the surveyed weeklies



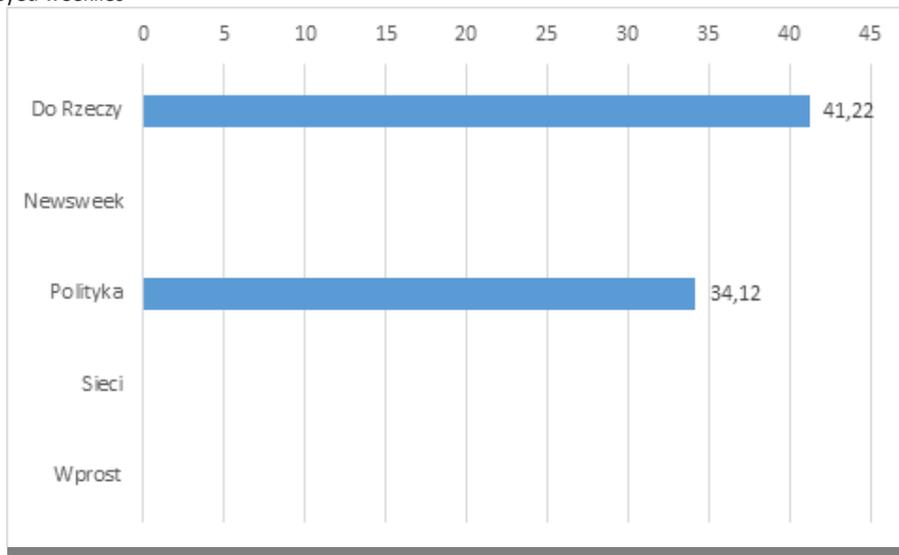
Source: own study

Illustration 10. Włodzimierz Czarzasty



Source: „Polityka” 2018, no. 44, p. 21.

Charvol 8. Area of publications devoted exclusively or mainly to the Kukiz'15 committee in the surveyed weeklies



Source: own study

On the subject of the Kukiz'15 committee in the weeklies surveyed, there appeared single materials with a very small area only in two titles, „Do Rzeczy” and „Polityce”. In each of them, the publications had a negative connotation. It should also be emphasized that in the weeklies surveyed there were no materials devoted to any minor electoral committee, such as the Partia Razem, Bezpartyjni Samorządowcy or Partia Zieloni.

Discussion

The conducted research proves that apart from „Wprost” all weeklies implemented a substantially uniform strategy, with the way of presenting the PiS committee as the most important one. Readers of „Polityka” and „Newsweek” did not have the opportunity to learn any advantage or positive element of the PiS self-government campaign, while the buyers of „Do Rzeczy” and „Sieci” had the opportunity to learn only the positive sides of the election campaign of this group. The weeklies wrote much less about the other election participants, devoting independent materials to all of them. One can get the impression that the weekly „Newsweek” did not support any participant in the electoral rivalry, emphasizing in particular the negative attitude towards PiS. In turn, the „Polityka” weekly, in addition to the PiS criticism, presented the electoral campaign of SLD Lewica Razem and PSL in a positive light. Thus, each of the four analyzed weeklies in subsequent issues of the magazine implemented a predetermined strategy, which was aimed at presenting to the reader a clear and unambiguous message about the local government campaign.

Among the analyzed weeklies, the „Wprost”, seemed to be the opposite, which with a distance and most often in a neutral way presented a self-governmental

electoral campaign. However, it should be emphasized that in this weekly newspaper the least materials on the election campaign appeared, and the reading of the journal leads to the conclusion that although it has the status of a socio-political weekly, one can speak about its depoliticisation, concentrating on popular social issues and far-reaching distance in presenting current political issues.

The results of the presented research prove that socio-political weeklies, treated as opinion-forming sources of information, but also the level of exchange and shaping of opinions, predominantly serve only to consolidate opinions and beliefs. The vast majority of them do not try to present different points of view, collide with each other sources, build polemics. It seems that opinion weeklies use this policy, like many other media, a significant part of the press, television or internet services, in the belief that readers and viewers expect that from them. Thus, a question arises that it is difficult to answer in this study whether recipients even need as much impartial information as possible, where facts prevail, not opinions, and whether they want to confront their points of view with others. A negative answer to this question may be an indication that before the media and journalism there are other tasks than it had until recently. Perhaps their main goal is to create comfortable and convenient rooms with an echo so that readers can not feel any doubts that their beliefs are right, and all the materials read in their favorite journal confirm their point of view and the world of values.

Regardless of the local character of the conducted research, their result can also be related to the specificity of the Polish political scene. Strong polarization, leading to confrontation, the tendency to seek opposites, not compromises, and the lack of readiness to listen to other voices for several years have become a permanent feature of the specificity of Polish political discourse. If we assume that similar phenomena occur also in other European countries as well as in the USA, one may ask questions about the interdependence of the phenomena studied and the increasing political polarization. It should be assumed that both political scientists, security specialists and the media should seek answers to these questions and doubts in their research.

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Studied weeklies:

- „Do Rzeczy” 2018, nr 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44.
- „Newsweek Polska” 2018, nr 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45.
- „Polityka” 2018, nr 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44.
- „Sieci” 2018, nr 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44.
- „Wprost” 2018, nr 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44.

Polish weeklies in local government election campaign in light of “echo chamber” theory

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the results of the analysis of the content of Polish weeklies in the period of the local electoral campaign in the context of the „echo chamber” concept. This theory assumes that the media are willing to perpetuate the views and attitudes of recipients, who in turn reach for titles in which the materials are created in accordance with a political line that is consistent with their views. The content of five socio-political weeklies was analyzed, examining all published materials devoted to particular committees participating in the elections. The study aimed to verify the hypothesis that social and political weeklies

do not confront opinions and conduct discussions, but to achieve the goal of maintaining and perpetuating readers’ views and confirming their position.

Słowa kluczowe: echo chamber, analiza zawartości, tygodniki społeczno-polityczne, wybory samorządowe

Key words: echo chamber, content analysis, socio-political weeklies, local government elections

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