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## Myths of Journalism on the Covers of the Polish Trade Magazine “Press”

Piotr Drzewiecki <sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

### Abstract

The article addresses the semiotic analysis of the covers of the Polish trade journal “Press”, focusing on the implicit ideological assumptions about contemporary journalism. The aim of the research is to identify contemporary journalistic myths and to understand what has been left out in the construction of the image of journalism on the covers. A commutative test technique and denotative and connotative analysis were used, allowing key stereotypes such as the myth of the warrior journalist and the lone observer to be captured. The results of the analysis indicate a dominance of male images and a limited representation of women, confirming patriarchal narratives in the media. This phenomenon may be related to the nature of the magazine, aimed at a journalistic community that seeks to affirm its own values. The article highlights the importance of understanding the processes of meaning construction in the context of the crisis of trust in the media and the technological challenges that affect the image of journalists. The findings contribute to a broader reflection on the role of journalism in society and its representation in the media. These can be used as part of contemporary journalism education in higher education, an example of which is given in the article.

**Keywords:** images of journalists, journalism education, journalism in Poland, myths of journalism, semiotic analysis, trade journals.

### 1. Introduction

A basic theoretical reference in the study of the image of journalism can be the classical theories of myth and semiotics, especially in the terms of Roland Barthes, who defined myths as forms of ideological communication through sign systems. Barthes, building on Saussure's structuralism, suggested that myths have a ‘naturalising’ function – they make certain ideologies appear self-evident and objective (Barthes, 1968). In the context of journalism, myths can give certain values, such as objectivity or independence, the status of unquestionable norms.

By myth we mean here not the colloquial notion of something falsified, nor is it a reference to Greek or Roman mythology. Myth in this sense is the implicit ideological assumptions behind a given piece of social reality. In media studies, this allows for a more in-depth analysis of the image, but also of the basis for the functioning of the social groups in question. Contemporary social myths are ‘created, constructed, constructed or planned – whatever degree of conscious action accompanies these activities’ (Lepa, 1999: 7-8). This raises the need for a critical evaluation, an educational and media response to these new ideological constructs, as well as a counteraction to possible professional propaganda.

Therefore, the analysis of the trade press seems an interesting teaching solution for academic journalism classes. The myths associated with the profession of journalism make it possible to

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [p.drzewiecki@uksw.edu.pl](mailto:p.drzewiecki@uksw.edu.pl) (P. Drzewiecki)

establish the contemporary hierarchy of values in the profession, to point out dominant and desirable attitudes, and to see at what is usually an implicit ideological assumption of journalism.

## 2. Materials and methods

A semiotic: denotative and connotative analysis of 69 covers of the Polish trade journal “Press” from the last ten years (2015-2024) was carried out. Specifically, from issue 01-02/2015 (225) to issue 11-12/2024 (293). The magazine has been published since 1999, first as a monthly, and since 2017 as a bimonthly. It is aimed at journalists, advertising and public relations professionals, as well as media professionals. The magazine is known for organising journalism competitions such as Grand Press and Grand Press Photo.

An answer was sought to the question of contemporary journalism myths present on individual magazine covers. They were categorised into larger thematic groups. They were presented – in the form of cross tabulations – in relation to the gender of the people presented on the covers and in relation to age categories. In the semiotic analysis of the covers, the technique of the commutation test was used to seek answers to the question of what was omitted in the construction of the image of journalism on the covers of the “Press”. In preparing the descriptions of the individual covers, the artificial intelligence application The Semiotic Engine was used as a support.

Denotative and connotative analysis, commutative tests performed on 69 “Press” magazine covers indicated 177 detailed myths about contemporary journalism. They were grouped into 5 main categories: the myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth, the myth of the intellectual journalist – authority, the myth of the lonely observer – outsider, the myth of the journalist-artist – creator and the myth of the modern journalist – user of technology. As a side note: one of the covers for issue 05-06/2019 (260) did not contain an image of persons, so its analysis was omitted. On 13 covers, two persons were presented – e.g. issue 11-12/2019 (263) – hence in further analyses the results obtained were related to both persons presented. Some persons, such as Dariusz Rosiak, were presented more than once – issues 05-06/2020 (266) and 01-02/2021 (270) – which was taken into account in the mythological analysis by attributing connotations from different periods to the same person. The age category was also assumed to refer to the year in which the person was first presented on the cover of “Press” magazine.

The results of these analyses are presented below on 5 selected covers relating to the 5 main myths of journalism. A cross-tabulated summary of the mythological analysis is then presented, looking for correlations between gender and age and the dominant journalism myth. In total, images of 69 individuals were analysed. They were assigned to the main categories of journalism myths 190 times, where one person could be assigned to more than one myth.

## 3. Discussion

Recent empirical research has focused on the myths about journalism that affect its perception and professional values. For example, research by Jurado Martín shows how the film industry reflects the image of journalists and media subjects through thematic narratives that often reduce journalism to sensationalist content. A content analysis of 290 films revealed that films often portray journalism in a sensationalist manner, with little emphasis on economic, sports or health issues (Jurado Martín, 2024). In contrast, Coronado Ruiz's research analyses how women journalists are portrayed in US television series over more than three decades. Stereotypes of female journalists were shown to have evolved, but some archetypes still persist, reflecting societal progression in diverse representations (Coronado Ruiz, 2024). Assaf and Bock also analysed another myth – that of Robert Capa – and its impact on photojournalism education. The research shows that the Capa myth is characterised by a hegemonic masculinity, which can obscure the humanity of the famous photographer (Assaf, Bock, 2022). Other studies like De Wulf Helskens and Arriaza Ibarra have focused on representations of journalism in the Danish series *Borgen* (TV broadcasting from 2010 to 2022) and the Spanish series *El Caso. Crónica de sucesos* from 2016. The analyses showed that both series criticise the myth of a free press by presenting journalism in the context of political and commercial challenges (De Wulf Helskens, Arriaza Ibarra, 2024). Meyers, on the other hand, argued in his study that responsible journalism can be biased, provided it meets standards of accuracy and comprehensiveness. In his view, embracing bias can serve the public good if there is a wide range of information sources (Meyers, 2020).

Sybert, on the other hand, examined the archetype of the family newspaper and its impact on public discourse. The analysis shows that this archetype often perpetuates romanticised versions of

journalism's past, which can block visions of alternative futures (Sybert, 2023). Similarly, Sridharan and Bosse's research suggests that the closure of local newspapers in the US creates an information myth that reinforces the importance of local journalism in the face of a crisis of trust in the media. Analysis of the farewell statements of local newspapers that have closed show that they often memorialise institutionalised journalistic myths, emphasising the importance of local news and creating myths about community news (Sridharan, Bose, 2024). In contrast, Hess and McAdam explored myths about the future of local newspapers in Australia. Analysis of interviews and focus groups reveals three key myths: print is dead, the traditional advertising model has collapsed and there are no jobs in journalism (Hess, McAdam, 2024).

Contemporary studies on journalistic mythology also include analyses of the trade press for media professional groups. Thus, Engelke studied the discourse on participatory journalism in two leading trade magazines in the USA and Germany. The research showed that evaluations of participatory journalism vary and depend on the context of audience participation (Engelke, 2023). Ferrucci and co-authors investigated how trade journalism journals in the US construct the notion of 'news deserts'. The analysis showed that industry leaders find it difficult to clearly define this phenomenon and its implications for citizens (Ferrucci et al., 2023). Čehovin Zajc and Lukan, on the other hand, studied the career paths of insecure millennial journalists in Slovenia. According to their findings, young journalists are motivated to work, but the structural conditions of journalism often lead to career changes or precarious work (Čehovin Zajc, Lukan, 2023). Camponez and Oliveira analyse the impact of the health crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic on the working conditions and image of journalists. Their analysis showed that economic hardship and ethical challenges affect journalists' job satisfaction (Camponez, Oliveira, 2021).

The topic of the social myths of journalism still seems relevant, especially in an era of technological changes in the profession, questions about the political independence of newsrooms or ethical doubts about the journalistic mission in public life. A semiotic analysis of the covers of the trade journal "Press" allows us to see the hidden ideological assumptions about contemporary journalism.

#### 4. Results

##### *The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth*

The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of the truth presents the silhouette of the professional reporter as a heroic, courageous and indomitable figure. In this view, journalists become symbols of strength, intellectual power and moral courage, struggling against dangers both in the field and in the virtual world. Their work requires cold calculation, but also deep empathy and commitment to the struggle for truth and freedom of expression. The journalist is shown as a guardian of democracy, a personal warrior who faces pressures and threats to uncover the truth, and as a moral judge who is not afraid to confront darkness. The image of the journalist as an independent individual, a steadfast professional who fights against hatred and manipulation, reflects not only his role in society, but also his inner struggle and determination. In the context of contemporary challenges such as disinformation and pressure from authority, this myth highlights the importance of journalism as part of the protection of truth and democracy, creating the image of the 'knight of light' in an age of turmoil.

This category was formed from 58 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 32.77 % (the most numerous group of myths). In total, it was assigned to 61 individuals. This represents 32.11 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was attributed to 41 men (the most numerous group, 67.21 %) and 20 women. By age, up to 4 individuals were assigned 21-30 years, 15 individuals were assigned 31-40 years, 30 were assigned 41-50 years (the most numerous group, 49.18 %), 6 were assigned 51-60 years, 3 were assigned 61-70 years, and 3 were assigned 70+.

An example of a cover that reveals this myth is issue no. 01-02/2020 (264) of "Press" (Press, 2020) magazine. The cover features Tomasz Sekielski (1974-), a Polish radio, television and newspaper journalist, documentary film director, novelist and author of television reports. He is dressed in a dark, hooded coat-like outfit, which gives him a mysterious and somewhat dark appearance. His face is partly in shadow and his expression is serious and concentrated. In his hands he holds a light object that looks like a lightsaber, giving the cover elements associated with pop culture and fiction, such as the world of *Star Wars*. On the left side you can see the text I was wandering in the market, and below, in smaller letters, *Dziennikarz Roku 2019 – Tomasz Sekielski* (the Journalist of the Year 2019 – Tomasz Sekielski). At the top of the cover are the titles of other

articles, including *TV Republika zrezygnowanych* (TV Republic of the Resigned), *Czy Pieczyński musiał odejść?* (Did Pieczyński Have to Leave?), *Sekcja: Direct Mail* (Section: Direct Mail) and *Exclusive: Panorama Reklamy 2019* (Exclusive: Panorama Advertising 2019).

The hooded cloak and lightsaber are associated with the archetype of the warrior or knight, suggesting struggle, the defence of values and the search for truth. These elements refer to the symbolism of the 'good warrior' who works in the dark but with a clear purpose – this may suggest investigative journalism that uncovers what is hidden. The inscription *Bląkałem się po rynku* (I wandered in the marketplace) may refer to Sekielski's personal journey, both literally and metaphorically. It suggests a search, difficulty or loss in the media world, which may contrast with his image as a 'warrior'. The overall cover has a dark, dramatic atmosphere, which may evoke the struggle against adversity and the dark sides of society, for example in relation to exposing difficult topics.

The commutation test involves swapping elements of the cover to see how its meaning would change. If, instead of a hooded coat, Sekielski wore a suit, the cover would stop looking like a scene from an epic battle and would look more like the formal image of a media professional. It would have changed the connotation from warrior to traditional expert. Changing the lightsaber to a regular microphone would also change the context. The lightsaber suggests activity, combat and the symbolic 'cutting through the darkness', while the microphone would be a more literal symbol of the journalistic work involved in interviews and speaking. Changing the background colour to bright pastel colours would dramatically change the perception of the cover, giving it a lighter tone and taking away the drama and dark atmosphere that are key to building the image of the 'warrior'.

Several myths can be identified from the symbolism and texts. The lightsaber and the hooded cloak are reminiscent of the archetype of the knight or hero who fights against darkness, which in the context of investigative journalism means fighting against disinformation, corruption and hiding the truth. There is a strong myth of the journalist as a hero who strives for justice and light in dark times, and Tomasz Sekielski is presented as such a knight – brave and determined. The subtitle *Bląkałem się po rynku* (I wandered in the marketplace) suggests that Sekielski has not always been sure of his path, which makes him a seeker. It is the myth of a journalist who is not afraid to get lost on the way to discovering the truth, even if it means difficulties and challenges. He is a symbol of travel and discovery, not just reportage. Sekielski's hooded coat and the serious, solitary expression on his face may suggest that he acts alone, unafraid of being alone in his mission. This is the myth of the journalist who stands up for the truth whether he has support or not. It can suggest independence and the courage to stand up to forces greater than oneself. The overall contrast between the dark background and the bright sword of light is a classic metaphor for the struggle between darkness and light. Journalism is depicted here as a force that brings light where there is darkness, which, in the context of Sekielski's work, may refer to his investigations into controversial and difficult issues.

#### *The myth of the intellectual journalist – authority*

The myth of the intellectual journalist – authority – constructs an image of the professional as the voice of the people, who combines the qualities of a leader and a reflective critic. In this narrative, the journalist becomes not only a guardian of tradition but also a moral guardian, exposing evil and acting as an arbiter of truth. His authority is based on knowledge, authenticity and the ability to communicate complex ideas in a way that can be understood by a wide audience. This image emphasises both individualism and intellectual responsibility, as well as the journalist's dual identity as expert and observer. At a time when traditional authorities are being undermined by the new media, the critic's role as an influential but somewhat limited person becomes even more important. The classy journalist, talented but also humble, becomes a symbol of moral resistance to disinformation. At the same time, this myth highlights the dangers of information overload and crises of authority, in which the intellectual must redefine his or her role. In the face of these challenges, the journalist not only reports events but also shapes public discourses, acting as a mentor and controversial authority. His or her intellectual strength and passion for the truth become the foundation of modern journalism as it grapples with the challenges of digital times, in which knowledge and reflection are crucial to maintaining authority.

This category was formed from 43 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 24.29 % (the second largest group of myths). In total, it was attributed to 46 individuals. This represents 24.21 % of all assignments of a given main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was assigned to 36 men (the most numerous group, 78.26 %) and 10 women. By age, up to

1 person from the group 21-30 years, 10 people – 31-40 years, 18 – 41-50 years (the most numerous group, 39.13 %), 10 – 51-60 years, 4 – 61-70 years, 3 – 70+.

Connotatively, the cover combines elegance with a certain distance. The monocle that Wielowieyska holds in front of her eye is associated with an attribute used by people from the upper classes or former authorities, which may symbolise journalistic perspicacity, caution and analysis of reality with a certain distance. The journalist's facial expression, which is serious but at the same time calm, emphasises professionalism and self-confidence. The composition itself – subdued colours, elegant dress and a distinguished gesture – points to classy journalism, where analysis and accuracy have a special place. The monocle, as a symbol of a tool for careful observation, further emphasises the intellectual nature of Wielowieyska's journalistic work.

The application of the commutation test could involve changing the gesture or the monocle for another element. If, instead of a monocle, the journalist held, for example, a pen, the cover's message would be less formal and more traditionally associated with journalism – instead of reflection and detachment, writing activity would be shown. Conversely, if the background had been changed to a more modern or dynamic one, it would have changed the overall tone of the cover from a distinguished elegance to a more contemporary feel, affecting the perception of the journalist as someone more involved in the current fast-paced media environment.

This cover identifies several important myths associated with journalism. The monocle, elegant outfit and serious facial expression suggest the figure of a journalist-intellectual who constantly observes, analyses and approaches her work with great perspicacity and intellect. Wielowieyska is presented as a person who, instead of reporting events on the run, carefully examines them and draws conclusions. The styling, the use of a monocle and the neutral, elegant background give the journalist a certain distinguished aura. This is a picture of a journalist who acts with class, professionalism and a subtle sense of humour. The caption *Taki nasz urok* (Such is Our Charm) suggests that this class and elegance is a natural characteristic of those in the profession. The monocle can symbolise not only elegance, but also a profound capacity for observation. Wielowieyska is portrayed as a journalist who penetrates facades and sees more than what is visible at first glance. She is someone who emphasises analysis and accuracy in her journalistic work. The title *Taki nasz urok* (Such is Our Charm) also suggests that the cover has a certain note of irony. In this way, Wielowieyska not only shows a distance from the world she analyses, but also a certain self-irony towards herself and her work. She is a journalist who is aware of the importance of her profession, but does not take it too seriously in the sense of puffery.

#### *The myth of the lonely observer – outsider*

The myth of the lone observer – outsider – portrays the journalist as a detached figure who, through his unique perspective, is able to perceive reality in a way that eludes others. This archetype combines the qualities of an empathetic detective and an ironist who, on the one hand, seeks the truth and, on the other, comments with detachment on the absurdity of the world around him. The journalist-outsider, as a lone leader or rebel, stands in opposition to mainstream narratives, often struggling against the censorship and silence that limit his possibilities. Elements of naivety and idealism are present in his work, which, although they may appear to be weaknesses, are in fact the foundation of his independence and authenticity. This character can be seen as an anti-hero who, despite his solitary mission, is not afraid to criticise the system and take risks in pursuit of the truth. The journalist-humorist and satirist in the media, through his ironic view of reality, provides the audience with a deeper reflection on the condition of society. In the face of conflict, his role as a multilingual observer becomes even more important, as he is able to bring together different perspectives, becoming a voice for those who are marginalised. The myth of the lone observer thus underlines the importance of an independent view of the world, which, although embedded in solitude, has the potential to change and inspire.

This category was formed from 31 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 17.51 % (the third largest category). A total of 35 were attributed to this category. This represents 18.42 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was assigned to 25 men (the most numerous group, 71.43 %) and 10 women. By age, up to 4 individuals in the 21-30 age group, 11 individuals in the 31-40 age group, 13 individuals in the 41-50 age group (the most numerous group, 37.14 %), and 7 individuals in the 51-60 age group. No assignments in the 61-70 and 70+ age categories.

An example of a cover story that reveals this myth is issue no. 01-02/2024 (288) of “Press” (Press, 2024a) magazine. It depicts Wojciech Czuchnowski (1964-), journalist and columnist,

associated with “Gazeta Wyborcza” (The Electoral Gazette) since 2002. The central element is a man holding a newspaper, whose facial expression exudes confidence, with a slight grimace that may suggest irony. The figure is dressed in dark, probably overcoat clothing, wears glasses and his stubble adds to his character. The text on the cover, including Czuchnowski's name and the slogan *Innej takiej gazety nie ma* (Another Such Newspaper Does Not Exist), together with the date of publication (01-02/2024), emphasises the topicality and importance of the content. The colour scheme of the cover, with a black and white photograph juxtaposed with yellow typographic accents, suggests simplicity and elegance, as well as seriousness and distance.

Connotative analysis brings out additional meanings and cultural associations. The man's facial expression may suggest arrogance or irony, representing the attitude of a critical journalist who takes a detached view of the media. Glasses and facial hair are associated with intellectuals, reinforcing his image. “Gazeta Wyborcza” (The Electoral Gazette) symbolises committed journalism, and the colour yellow can signify energy and exclusivity, suggesting that the magazine's content is aimed at professionals. The commutation test, which involves changing elements of the composition, shows how different details affect the meaning of the message. For example, changing the colour from yellow to red can give it an alarming tone, while turning the newspaper into a tabloid would transform the man into a sensationalist character. A smile instead of an ironic grimace would soften the message, giving it a friendlier feel.

An analysis of the myths, based on Roland Barthes' theory, reveals several important layers. Czuchnowski, holding a newspaper, becomes a symbol of an independent journalist and an uncompromising defender of the truth, where the newspaper is not only a medium but a symbol of the fight for freedom of speech. His outsider image, accentuated by his beard and glasses, creates the image of a critical media observer. The yellow accents and professional styling of the cover suggest that the audience of “Press” magazine is the elite of the industry, people aware of the value of information and its impact.

#### *The myth of the journalist-artist – creator*

The myth of the journalist-artist who creates his environment reveals the complex relationship between journalism and art. Such a journalist not only reports on events, but becomes an integral part of the story, in which he documents both the world and himself. Elements of refined elegance and ironic professionalism intermingle in his or her work, creating the impression of an artist-nonconformist who often breaks conventions. The journalist-artist sees sport as a metaphor for life, discovering universal truths and emotions in it. As a reflective traveller and empathetic analyst, he explores the diversity of cultures and experiences while becoming their portraitist. Also present in his work are playfulness and spontaneity, which give his accounts authenticity. Through his actions, he acts as a linguistic rebel, provoking thought and challenging established patterns. The journalist-artist is not only a documentarian, but also an explorer who confronts his inner demons, becoming a voice for those who remain in the shadows. In this way, he creates a new reality in which journalism ceases to be just a profession and becomes an art form, full of passion, commitment and creative expression.

This category was formed from 24 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 13.56 %. In total, it was assigned to 26 individuals. This represents 13.68 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was attributed to 20 men (the most numerous group, 76.92 %) and 6 women. By age, up to 5 individuals in the 21-30 years group, 9 individuals in the 31-40 years group (the most numerous group, 34.62 %), 8 in the 41-50 years group, 2 in the 51-60 years group, and 2 in the 61-70 years group. No assignments in the 70+ age category.

As an example of a “Press” (Press, 2016) cover that reveals this myth, we can cite the magazine's issue 06/2016 (239). It depicts Max Cegielski (1975-), journalist, writer, radio and TV presenter, cultural animator and traveller. His face is covered in black paint, contrasting with his blond beard and blue eyes. Cegielski is wearing a woollen cap, which may suggest a cold environment or a fashion element. The title on the cover is *Uciekam na Wschód* (Escape to the East), which suggests that the subject of the article is his journey or fascination with Eastern culture. His gaze is intense, which attracts attention and builds a mysterious aura.

On a connotative level, the cover evokes a mask or disguise, which may suggest wandering, a search for identity or blending into another culture. The black face paint gives Cegielski a stern and mysterious look, which may allude to rituals or symbolism associated with travel to the East, particularly in the context of exploring other cultures and spirituality. This suggests that the journalist is symbolically taking on a new ‘skin’ in an attempt to understand a foreign culture

through immersion. The title *Uciekam na Wschód* (Escape to the East) may refer to his desire to escape the Western lifestyle in search of something more primal or authentic in the East.

In a commutation test, the paint on Cegielski's face could be swapped for another element, such as traditional Eastern dress. This change would give the cover a more classic travel or anthropological feel. The black paint, however, is a more unusual element, suggesting a deeper cultural immersion or symbolic take on identity. If Cegielski had been wearing ordinary, everyday clothing without additional props (such as a hat or paint), the cover's message would have become less puzzling and more subdued, and the cover itself might have looked less intriguing. The face paint is crucial in building a mysterious, almost ritualistic atmosphere.

In this cover, Max Cegielski plays the role of a journalist-discoverer who not only travels but also deeply immerses himself in foreign cultures. The black paint on his face symbolises the process of transformation, of embracing other identities, which is characteristic of the explorer who seeks to understand a foreign culture from the inside. It is the myth of the journalist as an explorer who explores other worlds, unafraid to become part of the reality being explored. The title *Uciekam na Wschód* (Escape to the East) suggests that Cegielski, tired of the Western lifestyle, is looking for something more authentic and spiritual in the East. This is the myth of a man who turns away from the materialism and consumerism of the West, escaping to a simpler, more primal life in the East. The journalist is thus portrayed as someone who not only travels, but also tries to find a deeper meaning of existence. The black paint on Cegielski's face symbolises the transformation he undergoes during his travels to the East. It is the myth of the journalist who becomes more than an observer – he turns into a participant, exploring other cultures by experiencing them first-hand. Paint can also refer to ritual symbolism, suggesting a spiritual or cultural immersion in the world under study.

#### *The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology*

The myth of the modern journalist as a user of technology reveals a complex portrait of contemporary media, in which technology plays a key role in shaping both content and the way it is presented. The modern journalist, often portrayed as a vulnerable person in the digital world, has to balance professionalism with personal experience, making her vulnerable to the onslaught of information. In this context, we see a successful woman who, on the one hand, controls technology and, on the other, struggles with the rat race in the big city, where the push for glass becomes an integral part of her everyday life. However, the modern journalist is also a technology critic who looks at digital reality with distrust, striving for authenticity and a return to nature. The myth of the 'eye of truth', which aims to reveal reality in the face of ubiquitous media filters, is present in his or her actions. The contemporary journalist becomes a guide for the future, combining 'feminine strength and delicacy' with the need to reflect on humanity in the face of technological challenges, making her role in today's world both relevant and complex.

This category was formed from 21 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 11.86 % (the smallest category). In total, it was assigned to 22 individuals. This represents 11.58 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was assigned to 12 men (the most numerous group, 54.55 %) and 10 women. By age, up to 1 person in the 21-30 years group, 9 persons – 31-40 years (the most numerous group, 40.91 %), 8 – 41-50 years, 4 – 51-60 years. No assignments in the 61-70 and 70+ age categories.

An example of a cover that reveals this myth is issue no. 05-06/2024 (290) of "Press" (Press, 2024b) magazine. Denotatively, the cover depicts Joanna Dunikowska-Paź (her exact age is publicly unknown, she has been assigned to the 41-50 group), a journalist and television presenter, now back on public TVP (Polish Television). She is dressed in a bright trench coat, against a backdrop of modern glass city architecture. She looks confidently ahead, standing upright, in the soft daylight. The upper left corner shows slogans related to the magazine's subject matter, such as *Metoda Gluchowskiego* (Gluchowski's Method) or *Suwart wiecznie żywy* (Suwart Eternally Alive). The bottom right corner contains the caption: *Dobrze jest wrócić – Joanna Dunikowska-Paź* (It is Good to Be Back – Joanna Dunikowska-Paź).

Connotatively, the cover promotes an image of return and rebirth. Dunikowska-Paź's body position, her confident, calm expression and the setting of modern buildings suggest a triumphant return or continuation of her career after a break. The trench symbolises professionalism and elegance, while the scenery in the form of glass skyscrapers connotes progress, success and modernity. The bright trench contrasts with the cool glass surroundings, which can further emphasise the strength and confidence of a woman who is finding her place in a modern, fast-

changing world. The title itself *Dobrze jest wrócić* (It is Good to Be Back) has a metaphorical meaning, indicating the feeling of returning to something important, not only professionally but also mentally, which is reinforced by the presence of a modern background, suggesting a dynamic professional environment.

The commutation test is to see how changing certain elements would affect the perception of the cover as a whole. If, for example, the background was changed to a more traditional one (e.g. with a brick facade), the message about modernity and dynamic careers would be weakened. In such a situation, the cover would suggest more conservative, stable values rather than a return to something new and innovative. Also, changing the colour of the coat to a darker colour – black, for example – would reinforce the seriousness and authority of the character, but at the same time could dilute the warmth and accessibility that the light trench suggests. Also, a change in facial expression to a more serious one could suggest challenges or difficulties the character has had to face. In contrast, the current facial expression suggests confidence and calmness in the face of these challenges. The commutation test shows that the key elements of the composition (background, clothing, facial expression) are deliberately chosen to convey confidence, professionalism and success in a modern setting.

The journalistic myths present on this cover are primarily related to the myth of success in the big city. The modern architecture in the background symbolises the city as a space for career and success, and the figure in the foreground epitomises the successful individual who has returned to professional life in a metropolitan context. This myth is often used in the media to emphasise the power of individualism, determination and adaptability to a modern, globalised world. The slogan *Dobrze jest wrócić* (It is Good to Be Back) connotes a rebirth or a return to full activity after a break. In media culture, comebacks are often glorified, especially after difficult periods, suggesting that success can be achieved not just once, but that it is possible to rise again and again after temporary lows or breaks. Joanna Dunikowska-Paź on this cover is portrayed as a modern woman coping in a complex, metropolitan environment, combining elegance with determination and confidence. This is a classic image in the media, where a woman not only finds her way in the dynamic professional world, but also brings her own principles to it.

#### *Cross-tabulation analysis of myths*

Men made up the largest group in the “Press” magazine cover study, accounting for 69.57%. Women – 30.43%. The largest number of men was in the age groups 21-30, 61-70 and 70+, where they made up 100% of these groups. In contrast, the highest number of women was in the 31-40 age group, where they made up 50% (Table 1). The results suggest that men and women have different age distributions in the sample, indicating a moderate relationship between gender and age groups. Cramér's V value is 0.364. Men dominate most of the age groups, especially in the younger and older age categories. The survey included N = 69 people, both men and women, appearing on magazine covers.

**Table 1.** Gender and age groups on the covers of “Press” magazine

	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	70+	
Male	6	9	19	9	3	2	48
	100,00 %	50,00%	65,52 %	81,82 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	69,57 %
Female	0	9	10	2	0	0	21
	0,00 %	50,00 %	34,48 %	18,18 %	0,00 %	0,00 %	30,43 %
	6	18	29	11	3	2	69
	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %

In the analysis of the main categories of journalistic myths on the covers of “Press” magazine, men were the largest group, accounting for 70.53 % of the total sample, while women accounted for 29.47 %. The survey included N = 190 assignments by gender to myths. The most frequently attributed category for men was ‘The myth of the intellectual journalist – authority’, which 78.26 % of men fell into. In contrast, women were most frequently assigned to ‘The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology’ category, accounting for 45.45 % of this group (Table 2). The results

suggest that men and women have different preferences or tendencies in the context of the journalism myth categories. Cramér's V value of 0.196 indicates a weak relationship between gender and journalistic myth categories. This means that gender has little influence on which categories of journalistic myths appear on journal covers. In other words, there is little difference in the occurrence of these myth categories between men and women.

**Table 2.** Gender and the main categories of journalistic myths on the covers of “Press” magazine

	The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth	The myth of the intellectual journalist – the authority	The myth of the lonely observer – the outsider	The myth of the journalist – artist – creator	The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology	
Male	41	36	25	20	12	134
	67,21 %	78,26 %	71,43 %	76,92 %	54,55 %	70,53 %
Female	20	10	10	6	10	56
	32,79 %	21,74 %	28,57 %	23,08 %	45,45 %	29,47 %
	61	46	35	26	22	190
	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %

In the same analysis on journalistic myth categories on magazine covers, the largest age group was 41-50 year olds, or 40.53 % of the total sample, while the smallest group was 70+ year olds, or 3.16 %. The survey included N = 190 age category assignments to myths. The most frequently attributed category in the 41-50 age group was ‘The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth’, which accounted for 49.18 % of this group. The least frequently assigned categories were ‘The myth of the lonely observer – outsider’ and ‘The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology’ in the 61-70 and 70+ age groups (0.00 %), and ‘The myth of the journalist-artist – creator’ in the 70+ age group (Table 3). The results suggest that different age groups have different preferences or tendencies in the context of journalistic myth categories. Cramér's V value of 0.187 indicates a weak relationship between age groups and journalistic myth categories. This means that age has little influence on which categories of journalistic myths appear on journal covers. In other words, there is little difference in the occurrence of these myth categories between different age groups.

**Table 3.** Age and the main categories of journalistic myths on the covers of “Press” magazine

	The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth	The myth of the intellectual journalist – the authority	The myth of the lonely observer – the outsider	The myth of the journalist – artist – creator	The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology	
21-30	4	1	4	5	1	15
	6,56 %	2,17 %	11,43 %	19,23 %	4,55 %	7,89 %
31-40	15	10	11	9	9	54
	24,59 %	21,74 %	31,43 %	34,62 %	40,91 %	28,42 %
41-50	30	18	13	8	8	77
	49,18 %	39,13 %	37,14 %	30,77 %	36,36 %	40,53 %
51-60	6	10	7	2	4	29
	9,84 %	21,74 %	20,00 %	7,69 %	18,18 %	15,26 %
61-70	3	4	0	2	0	9
	4,92 %	8,70 %	0,00 %	7,69 %	0,00 %	4,74 %

	The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth	The myth of the intellectual journalist – the authority	The myth of the lonely observer – the outsider	The myth of the journalist – artist – creator	The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology	
70+	3	3	0	0	0	6
	4,92 %	6,52 %	0,00 %	0,00 %	0,00 %	3,16 %
	61	46	35	26	22	190
	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %

### *Didactic possibilities of semiotic analysis in journalism education classes*

In contemporary journalism education, semiotic analysis is a unique and invaluable tool for understanding the creation of contemporary images of media workers, including journalists. Hence, we use this method with students of the subjects: Qualifications and Competences in Journalism and Popular Science Journalism, which I teach as part of the Journalism and Social Communication major at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, during the 2024/2025 academic year. This method opens up a critical space in which they can reflect on how articles, headlines, images and even journalistic practices are never purely neutral, but are shaped by a range of social, cultural and professional norms. This research method challenges students to go beyond superficial readings and encourages them to engage with the underlying structures of communication that determine how stories are told, how audiences interpret them and how journalism, as a profession, communicates its myths and values.

The aim of such an exercise is to develop the ability to critically analyse the visual and linguistic elements that construct the image of journalism and the values associated with it, such as objectivity, independence and professionalism. Students analyse “Press” covers from selected issues, focusing on how visual and linguistic elements together construct the image of the journalistic profession. This exercise will help to understand how the myth of objectivity and professionalism is constructed through semiotic codes. Typically, students work in two groups and select one cover each of different issues of the “Press”. They then identify the main visual elements (e.g. photographs, illustrations, colours, layout) and linguistic elements (e.g. titles, headlines, texts) used on the covers. Then, applying Barthes' theory, they analyse how these elements act as myths that make certain ideological assumptions (e.g. objectivity, journalistic independence) natural and obvious (Barthes, 1968). Consequently, they consider how layout and photographs affect the perceived authenticity or professionalism of the journalist. They also pose questions for group discussion: What values and norms (e.g. independence, objectivity) are symbolically conveyed through images and words? What visual and linguistic codes reinforce the impression that journalism is a profession based on ‘unbiased’ and ‘scientific’ truth? What might be the ideological consequences of this type of representation in the context of journalism education? Finally, prepare a presentation in which you present your conclusions on how “Press” covers construct the image of the journalist.

## **5. Conclusion**

A semiotic analysis of the covers of the trade journal “Press” allows us to discern hidden ideological assumptions about contemporary journalism. An answer was sought to the question of the contemporary myths of journalism present on individual magazine covers. The semiotic analysis of the covers used the technique of the commutation test, seeking answers to the question of what was omitted in the construction of the image of journalism on the magazine covers.

“Press” covers construct the image of journalists through recurring motifs that fit certain stereotypes. The image of the journalist as a ‘warrior-defender of truth’ suggests that this role is not only a profession, but also a mission. Such an image shapes the ideological message that journalists are heroes who struggle against threats to truth and freedom of expression. The analysis shows that 58 of the 177 myths described relate to this archetype, the largest group among the images studied (32.77 %). In the light of Jurado Martín's research, which points to the way the media shape

perceptions of journalists, it can be seen how these archetypes influence perceptions of the profession (Jurado Martín, 2024).

Commutation tests reveal how the omission of images of women journalists limits the diversity of representations and reinforces patriarchal narratives in the media. When only men appear on the covers, traditional stereotypes about gender roles in journalism are reinforced. It is worth noting that the analysis showed that 67.21% of the attributed myths are about men, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in this context. A study by Helskens De Wulf and Arriaz Ibara found that representations of women in the media are central to their social perception, confirming the observation of an imbalance in representation (De Wulf Helskens, Arriaza Ibarra, 2024).

Denotative and connotative analysis makes it possible to distinguish between the literal and contextual meanings of the images portrayed. Coverage often depicts journalists as 'lone observers' or 'creators', which gives them a specific identity and reinforces the myth of the 'journalist-artist'. Such images not only illustrate their role, but also build the perception that journalism is a creative activity, which can lead to a distortion of the real image of a journalist's work. Similar observations appear in the research of Meyers, who argues, however, that embracing bias in journalism may nevertheless be compatible with a responsible approach to the job (Meyers, 2020).

In the context of contemporary challenges such as disinformation and a crisis of trust in the media, the analysis reveals how these myths affect perceptions of the role of journalism in society. Many of the covers analysed depict journalists as 'modern technology users', indicating their adaptability in the face of a changing media landscape. However, again, it can be seen that certain aspects are overlooked, such as ethical issues related to the use of technology in journalistic work. Hess and McAdam's study shows that changes in media work patterns have serious consequences for the perception of journalists as professionals in the face of new technologies (Hess, McAdam, 2024).

It is possible that this construction of the image of journalists on the covers of "Press" is due to the fact that it is a trade magazine, which is mainly aimed at journalists themselves and media professionals. Consequently, the creators of these covers may feel the need to affirm certain values and myths that are close to the professional environment. Journalists may seek to portray themselves in a way that emphasises their role as defenders of truth and independent thinkers, which may be very different from the image they have in the eyes of the wider public. This internal need to identify with heroic and ambitious archetypes can lead to the creation of narratives that do not necessarily reflect the actual public perception of their role, but rather idealise it, resulting in the reproduction of myths and stereotypes that do not always correspond to reality.

In conclusion, the semiotic analysis of "Press" covers reveals important processes of meaning construction and their ideological implications. Images in the media space influence public perceptions of journalism, reflecting ideologies that make certain values 'natural' and 'self-evident', such as objectivity or independence. It is therefore worth continuing research in this area to better understand the impact these myths have on our perception of the media and journalism as a profession. It also has an important educational dimension, hence the proposal to use this method of analysis in practical classes for future journalists.

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