# LOGICAL AND RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF NEWS. CASE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT.** Usually, we read news to form opinions and expand our knowledge. However, especially in the past years, more and more publications are moving apart from being objective. Therefore, we get biased[1] knowledge. In this article, we aim to observe the way information is passed from a logical and rhetorical point of view in different publications. By this, we do not aim to evaluate the morality of the publications or journalists in questions, our aim is purely theoretical (i.e. logical and rhetorical). In order to be able to provide such an analysis, we picked different pieces of news with the same topic from various publications[2].

The chosen topic[3] is irrelevant to the theoretical content, therefore we do not aim to focus on its political or social implications. The decision was made in order to have sufficient material to provide a proper theoretical analysis. It should also be added that any evaluative terms that are going to be used in this article (e.g. 'biased', 'subjective', 'not objective', 'one-sided', etc.) are strictly directed to a theoretical perspective, not a moral, social or political one. As already mentioned, our aim is as theoretical as possible: we are interested in the logical and rhetorical structure of a piece of information.

**Keywords:** logical fallacies, manipulation, rhetoric, arguments.

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[1] The term is not used with a derogatory connotation.

[2] Due to the fact that our common spoken language is English, we had to narrow the publications to those written in English.

[3] It should be added that by no means we are supporting abortion bans by pointing out some fallacies used in supporting the other party. Our focus is on the logical structure of the articles, not on the political or sociological side the author is supporting.

### I. The topic of the articles

On June 24, 2022 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a constitutional right to abortion. As a result, these days, at least 13 states banned abortion (McCann&all, 'Tracking the States Where Abortion is Now Banned'). The review was mostly heavily criticised and raised a support that has 'never been higher' (Tolentino, 'We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse'). As one can imagine, the media jumped on the topic and it was heavily debated both nationally and internationally. Therefore, there are multiple sources for the same piece of information and this perfectly shows how the 'tone' of a piece of what should have been - at least in the beginning - an objective knowledge, quickly turned - as it was expected - into biased and subjective information.

We are mainly going to focus on three different articles:

(1) 'We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse' by Jia Tolentino, in *The New Yorker*, June 24, 2022.
(2) 'What's happening with abortion legislation in States across the country' by Sophie Kasakove, *The New York Times*, June 28, 2022.
(3) 'US supreme court overturns abortion rights, upending Roe v Wade', by Jessica Glenza, Martin Pengelly and Sam Levin, *The Guardian*, June 24, 2022.

### II. The logical structure of news

Usually news articles are informative and argumentative. (2) and (3) are mostly informative. At most, it can be said that they aim to persuade the reader of the truthfulness of their information. (1), on the other hand, is persuasive (or manipulative, it depends on the used arguments).

Informative articles usually present the information in an objective manner, without having the author interfering. The author is present through their writing style or through the picked sources, but usually they do not want to make their presence sensed and alter the objectivity of their article. Some of the informative articles are simply descriptive. By descriptive we mean that they are focusing on presenting the situation, without trying to convince of any thesis. Such articles simply aim to convince the reader that what they read is true. Other informative articles have a secondary aim of convincing the reader of a specific thesis.

Argumentative essays or articles have different aims. They focus on convincing the reader of a specific thesis; usually, this thesis is different from a factual one - as

in the case of informative articles. Mostly the thesis is evaluative or action based. In order to properly support such a thesis, similar premises should be used. Meaning that from factual premises, those two kind of conclusions do not follow.

An argumentative essay can either follow a structure of an analytical essay (presenting both alternatives with strong and weak points of each side), or they can focus only on their thesis and try to persuade the reader into believing it.

There is a huge difference between persuasion and manipulation. While persuasion uses sound arguments and focuses on rationally convincing the reader, manipulation focuses on emotions and most of the time uses fallacious arguments. In this article we are going to focus on informal fallacies.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to observe the differences between the three articles both in their logical and rhetorical structure, and if they are moving towards persuasion or manipulation in their try to convince the reader.


### III. A short rhetorical analysis of the articles in question

Usually when a rhetorical analysis is made, some aspects have to be taken into account: purpose, audience, topic, the author(s) and the context. In this short overview on the rhetorical aspects of the articles in question, we are not going to analyse the authors, but we are going to take into consideration the other four.

When it comes to the **purpose** of an article, usually, the main focus is on the persuasive aspect; namely, convincing the reader. Two of the articles we are going to analyse in this case study - (2) and (3) - aim to convince about the truthfulness of the information presented. We called them informative, based on the fact that their main aim is to convince the reader of the truthfulness of the presented information. (1) aims to convince the reader that the decision regarding abortion is immoral and regressive. (1) is the only article that has an evaluative thesis; the other two papers have a factual one. Despite the fact that all the articles have a common ground - they focus on the same **topic** - their approach is different because of their purpose and the thesis they aim to argue for. While (2) and (3) aim to convince their readers that the presented information is truth, (1) has an evaluative thesis that goes beyond the events and their truthfulness.

Solely based on the fact that (2) and (3) are informative, we can assume that their **audience** might be a bit larger than (1)'s. However, (1) is the only article that has an audio support for the text; in this situation, its audience exceeds the limits of the other two articles' audiences, including people that might not have access to the others. (3) includes some video clips. Some of them are excerpts from

news that present short moments mainly with protesters or from protests break outs because of the decisions related to abortions. Another one is longer and it contains Biden's reaction to the news. These different types of evidence (both written and audio-video) allow the reader to have a more complete understanding of the discussed topic. Taking this into account, (3) might be said to have a larger audience than (2). However, based on their purpose, (2) and (3) should have a larger target audience than (1).

There are different ways in which a reader can get a more complete overview of the discussed subject. For example, (1) uses a piece of art by Chloe Cushman that is meant to grab the attention of the reader and support the main evaluative thesis argued throughout the article. It should be noted, that any form of emotional argument is in the manipulation's field. Persuasion is based on rational arguments, not emotional ones. Therefore, using art in order to support a specific thesis cannot be considered persuasion. We do not try to argue that manipulation is always negative, nor that it is the darker side of persuasion. Our conclusions and claims are not coming from a moral perspective. Both manipulation and persuasion are ways of convincing others of a specific thesis. Strictly from a logical point of view, the main difference between the two is solely their method: persuasion is rationally based, while manipulation is emotionally focused. Taking into account (1) is the only article that aims to support an evaluative claim, it is obvious it might move towards emotion slightly more than others - especially taking into account the topic of the articles.

Both (2) and (3) use at least one picture. However, none of them uses art. The pictures they used are either images of political figures or images of protesters. Any picture has an emotional impact on a viewer. A well-known political figure can have an impact on the reader. For example, a reader can accept something more easily if an authority figure is linked to a specific claim. On the other hand, they can reject a claim based on the fact that they do not agree with the person that is linked to that specific claim. Of course, such links are far from being causal ones; they are merely based on emotions and reactions to those emotions. Therefore, pictures have a stronger impact on a reader than just written words. On the other hand, one can say those pictures were meant to simply inform the readers. This can be the case, but we should keep in mind that a well-picked picture can also send some subliminal messages. For example, one of the pictures used in (3) shows a protester holding a sign that has written on it "Abort the Supreme Court". On one hand, the picture is meant just to inform the people about the ongoing events on that date. On the other hand, the quote from the sign the protester holds might be considered a subliminal message: that the author agrees with the protester, rather than they

agree with the Supreme Court's decision regarding the abortions. To conclude this, until further proven facts, we should consider pictures from an informative article as simple presentations of the events and give the authors the benefit of the doubt.

When it comes to the **context**, all articles were written as a reaction to the changes regarding abortions in the US from June 24, 2022. Two of the articles (1) and (3) were written on that exact same date; while (2) was published on June 28, 2022. The fact that (2) has some extra days since the events it is shown in the multitude of the external sources presented in the article as support to the claims made. However, both (1) and (3) have such external sources as well; but (2) abounds in them.

Therefore, the three articles have both common and different points when it comes to their rhetorical aspect. (1) stood out from the other two based not only on its purpose and thesis, but also based on audience (it includes an alternative for readers that are unable to access the written word) and different ways of convincing the audience (it uses art in order to provoke emotions in the readers).

**IV. The logical analysis of the articles in question**

Among the already mentioned articles, maybe the most objective and clear one - from a logical perspective - is (2). It was published on June 28, meaning the author had few days to prepare the information and make sure to have support for their claims. The article aims to be an objective one and sticks to presenting the situation in an unbiased manner. There is a slight tone of disapproval in the article, however, it cannot be considered biased or unjustified. There are few evaluative terms and those that occur are not moral ones, they are mostly used to express the gravity of the situation. The article is packed with information. Most of it is supported with links to other informational articles, both from the same journal and different ones. The majority of the sentences are simple declarative ones, objective and without the author interfering. From a logical perspective, there is not so much to analyse. The arguments are simple and most often based on previous information that is provided to the reader through the already mentioned links to external articles. There are few names mentioned, but they cannot be considered arguments based on authority, taking into account there is no underline on those specific parts and the mentioned persons are authorities in their domain.

To conclude, article (2) has a simple logical structure, being based on arguments with mostly factual conclusions. Taking into account the article focuses on presenting the facts, the author does not interfere in the information, thus, the reader has access to unbiased information, presented in a clear and correct manner.

When it comes to objectivity and logical correctness, (3) seems to be in between. It should be mentioned that the article was published in the day the decision was made, therefore is an informational one; its main aim is to provide an overview on the decision and its consequences. The journalist focuses on presenting the information, without interfering. Phrases are mainly used at past tense, to show no intrusion in any way with the piece of information presented; despite the fact that the article was written as soon as the decision was made, so everything was quite new at that point. The situation is characterised as 'a tragic error', or that it ' had pointed America down "an extreme and dangerous path"' (Levin&Glenza, 'US supreme court overturns abortion rights, upending Roe v Wade') and many others, but they are all quoted, they do not represent the authors' own words. This might be a form of argument of authority. However, taking into account that the persons that were quoted are indeed authorities in the domain[4], at most, it can be said that such quotes might have an emotional impact on the reader[5].

The first paragraph of the article includes a sentence that contains two terms with negative connotation: '*reversal* of a long-settled law that will *fracture* reproductive rights in America'. Both 'reversal' and 'fracture' might be considered terms that have a negative implicature. In this situation, they might not be considered objective. However, taking into account the tone of the article - and the inserted quotes - it rather looks like the authors are trying to follow the common sense's path, not necessarily interfering in the provided information. In such situations, one can gain and keep their benefit of the doubt as long as there is not an abundance of such situations. In the case of this article, the occurrence of authors' own evaluative terms are quite rare. In the first half of the article, the authors are focusing on presenting the main politicians' reactions to the news, while in the second half, consequences and reactions to the decision are brought to attention. It should also be added that some evaluative terms that are used, are supported by evidence - mostly appealing to authority.

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[4] It should be noted that we did not go in depth with checking the truthfulness of the quotes used in the discussed articles. Because our discussion is merely theoretical, we do not aim to present an adequate history of the subject. We will simply assume the truthfulness of the information written in these articles.

[5] Argumentum ad verecundiam implies that an influential person is used as an authority in a domain that persons has no competency in. Such an argument is meant to have an emotional impact on the person that is used on, but it usually presents conclusions that are poorly supported - because of the fact the picked authority has no expertise in that domain. As examples, one can take any commercial that includes a star (e.g. A movie star that recommends a toothpaste).

There is one example of an obvious argument of authority - despite the fact that, once again, the quoted person is indeed an authority in the domain. The decision is considered:

'one of the most consequential in generations[6]. It will have profound, immediate and enduring consequences for tens of millions of women and other people who can become pregnant. Ripple effects could play out over decades.' (Levin&Glenza, 'US supreme court overturns abortion rights, upending Roe v Wade')

In order to support such a strong claim, a visiting professor of constitutional law is quoted. However, the quotes are not relevant premises to support such an evaluative claim. At most, the quotes can be considered a reaction to the news, not premises to support the idea that the decision is one of the most consequential in generations. The first sentence of the paragraph (i.e. one of the most consequential in generations) might be supported from an economic and social point of view by the following paragraphs - where, once again, arguments of authority are used.

A form of the argumentum ad hominem is presented to explain Thomas' decision to not mention interracial marriage. Such arguments are not really relevant or helpful in order to support their conclusion.

The final part of the paper mainly consists in quotes, therefore we are not going in depth with its analysis. To conclude, this article aims to provide an objective overview of the situation. The authors rely mostly on quotes and studies. Multiple cases of argumentum ad verecundiam are used in the article. Despite the fact that each time the quoted influential person represents an authority in the domain, the abundance of the already mentioned fallacy might raise some questions; especially taking into account there was a situation when this fallacy was combined with an erroneous case of supporting an evaluative premise. The only occurrence of argumentum ad hominem is not necessarily intended against the mentioned person, but rather tries to explain his actions.

(1) was also written on the day the decision was made - June 24, 2022. However, this article is quite different from the other two[7], starting with the title. Both (2) and (3) had quite objective headlines: (2) was focusing on the main

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[6]  A slight form of hasty generalisation can be sensed here.

[7]  Taking into account the journal where it was published - *The New Yorker* - usually publishes essays, it should be noted that the mention is not an evaluative one, is simply a declarative one. By it we do not aim to consider this article lower or upper than the others, we picked it because it is different from the others two and we wanted to underline how its logical structure varies from the informative articles that were already discussed.

question that was answered in the article, while (3) simply stated what was going on. (1), on the other hand, has as a title an evaluative sentence. Starting with the title, (1) wants to point out this article does not want to simply inform people, it wants to convince people to adopt a specific position and attitude regarding the situation.

Because this article has a different aim than the other two, we are not going to focus on that, we are rather interested in its logical structure and the way it uses arguments and their soundness. At first sight, there are some evaluative statements that are not supported by premises. For example: "(…) this is plainly an era of repression and regression, in which abortion rights are not the only rights disappearing" (Tolentino, '*We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse*'). However, if we take a closer look, this statement is supported by four external links that are meant to provide arguments for it.

The author is also quite careful with the used information: even though there are some phrases meant to catch the attention, they are explained afterwards and the information is correctly presented. Let us take for example the following paragraph:

> "Support for abortion has never been higher (*authors' note: here is an external link to support this claim),* with more than two-thirds of Americans in favor of retaining Roe, and fifty-seven per cent affirming a woman's right to abortion for any reason." (Tolentino, '*We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse*')

The catchy part is that 'two-thirds of Americans' are in favor of abortion, but without any other explanation, this would have been a misleading sentence, since it is plainly false. The fact that the author added not only a direct source to the statement, but also some details to explain it further, changed that status of the sentence. It does not work solely as a catchy phrase, it rather becomes an informative one.

However, the article contains some logical fallacies. We are going to mention few of them. There are forms of argumentum ad baculum[8], as:

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[8] There are more instances of this kind of arguments. For example: "(…)state-level anti-abortion crusades have already turned pregnancy into punishment", "Search histories, browsing histories, text messages, location data, payment data, information from period-tracking apps - prosecutors can examine all of it if they believe that the loss of a pregnancy may have been deliberate", "Some of the women who will die from abortion bans are pregnant right now" and many others. We are not going to point out a complete list, since it is not the aim of this article. We are going to point out the main fallacies used with at least one example, in order to fulfil the main interest of this paper.

"Anyone who can get pregnant **must now face the reality** that half of the country is in the **hands of legislators** who believe that your personhood and autonomy are conditional—who believe that, if you are impregnated by another person, under any circumstance, you have a legal and moral duty to undergo pregnancy, delivery, and, in all likelihood, **two decades or more of caregiving, no matter the permanent and potentially devastating consequences for your body, your heart, your mind, your family, your ability to put food on the table, your plans, your aspirations, your life**." (Tolentino, '*We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse*') (*authors' bold*)

There are at least two fallacies in this paragraph. The first one was already mentioned: argumentum ad baculum. This argument appeals to emotions and tries to inspire fear in the reader. The bolded parts are the ones we consider to fulfil this aim. However, the second part of the argument may be considered a form of slippery slope. Slippery slope argument presents a chain reaction resulting in an undesirable end for a specific action. Such an argument implies that the succession of events has no direct evidence to the starting point (i.e. in this case, the fact that abortion becomes illegal). A slight form of false dilemma is also used in the paragraph. Women are presented with two choices: either they have the right of abortion or they are going to support 'devastating consequences'.

The article also contains some not so obvious forms of argumentum ad hominem. There are some situations where evaluative terms towards a specific group, that are not necessarily required to support a claim are added. For example: "this approach has been steadily tested, **on low-income minorities in particular**, for the past four decades" (Tolentino, 'We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse') (*our bold*) The bolded part might be taken as an argumentum ad hominem. However, it might have been added to restrict the generality of the claim and in that situation, it is not fallacious.

It seems that the whole article presents just the negative consequences of the legal decision. Usually when such a legal (political or social) change is faced, an article (especially one that has the form of an essay) has a structure of an analytical essay: it presents both sides, while obviously supporting one of them. Such a structure provides the reader the freedom of choice and is more likely to be characterised as unbiased or even objective. It is obvious what Tolentino aimed in this article, but the author's choice of structuring and supporting the thesis of the article, moved it towards the manipulation side, rather than keeping it in the persuasion's field. It should also be added that because of this structure, one could consider that the author created a straw man by just pointing out the extreme negative consequences of abortion bans.

To conclude, (1) has a different form and aim from the other two articles. This one is an essay that wants to convince people that abortion bans represent a huge step backwards, meaning it aims to support an evaluative statement. The statement is mostly supported by factual examples that are insufficient in order to argue for an evaluative claim. However, the article abounds in evaluative terms: some of them are argued for and explained, while some of them lack such an explanation and are simply mentioned. This article is the most powerful one from the three mentioned. By powerful we are referring to its capacity of convincing people. It should also be noted that part of this power might come from the fact that the essay aims to convince through the appeal to emotions, which is closely linked to manipulation. Despite the fact that it abounds in fallacies and its logical structure is far from being perfect, it does its job: not only it presents the situation, but it also manages to underline the dark possible consequences of abortion bans and convince people.

To sum up, the aim of this article was to focus on the logical structure of three different articles. In order to do so, we picked articles with different aims: two of them were informative, while one aimed to convince of an evaluative thesis. We noticed that one of the informative ones had a clear and sound logical structure and managed to fulfil its aim. The other one had some instances of informal fallacies - mainly argumentum ad verecundiam. Both of them provided information that was unbiased by the authors' perspective, their authors did not directly interfere in presenting the data. The other discussed article had a different aim and structure than the two already mentioned. (1) is an essay that underlined the negative consequences of abortion bans and tries to convince the reader that the decision was far from being the best one. Because the thesis that the author aims to argue for is an evaluative one, this article abounds in evaluative terms - while (2), for example, lacked in such terms. Some of these terms are supported, while some are not backed. The main consequence entailed by these differences consists in the fact that (1) - mainly because it appeals to emotion in order to convince - can be considered quite manipulative, while (3) is between persuasive and manipulative and (2) is simply descriptive - based on persuasion.

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