ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
EKT NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Envisioning the Future of Communication

Vol 2, No 1 (2025)

Envisioning the Future of Communication - Conference Proceedings vol. 2

Commandos, frigates, and other media imaginations

Michalis Tastsoglou, Michalis Chatzikonstantinou

doi: 10.12681/efoc.7933

Copyright © 2025, Michalis Tastsoglou, Michalis Chatzikonstantinou

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0.

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 21/01/2026 20:56:19

Commandos, frigates, and other media imaginations: Aspects of media discourse in the 2023 Greek political leaders' debate

Michalis Tastsoglou, Michalis Chatzikonstantinou*

Abstract

Political communication research on televised political debates has focused primarily on the roles and performances of politicians, subsequent news coverage or party statements ("the debate about the debate") and public discussions of social media users. Following a different perspective, this study analyses journalistic discourses during the televised debate among Greek political leaders ahead of the 2023 general election. It examines through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) whether and how journalistic questions reflect the Polarized Pluralist Model of media systems in an age of increased mediatisation. Guided by four research questions, this study: a) investigated whether news values were prioritised over the political agenda, b) analysed journalists' evaluative comments (adjectives and metaphors), c) examined types of journalistic criticism towards political leaders and d) explored whether follow-up questions were actually predetermined by the journalists. The findings highlighted the dominance of a particular media logic which encompasses ideological orientations, power displays and corporate status in line with the Polarized Pluralist Model.

Keywords: media discourse, critical discourse analysis, media systems, televised debates, mediatization, political campaigns.

Introduction

This research examines the journalistic discourse in the televised debate of Greek political leaders in 2023, ahead of the general elections. In this debate, we consider journalistic discourse to lie at the very core of media discourse, insofar as each of the journalists/anchorpersons works for a private television station. The Polarized Pluralist Model, to which the Greek media system belongs (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 89-96), is characterised by weak commercial practices, while media owners, who are typically among the wealthiest individuals in Greece, seek to promote their own

* Michalis Tastsoglou (Dr.), Adjunct lecturer, Communication and Media Studies Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, tastsog@media.uoa.gr
Michalis Chatzikonstantinou (Dr.), Scientific Associate, MSc Programme Politics in the Era of the Internet, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, chmihalis@media.uoa.gr

interests through their privileged position in the political debate in an attempt to transfer their power from the economic to the political sphere. As a result, Critical Discourse Analysis is employed here, because of its appropriateness for exploring and revealing power relations (Fairclough 1989: 46). With power relations in mind, we attempt to draw a conclusion about the media discourse in the debate: *does it contribute to the political logic of the elections, or does it advance a so-called media logic?*

This research explores four research questions, which reflect our main objectives. The first one asks if news values are prioritised over the political agenda. This study adopts Van Dijk's view (1988: 119) that news values are "values about the newsworthiness of events or discourse, shared by professionals, and indirectly by the public of the news media". We examine whether journalists' questions reflect well-established news values or are utilised in order to maintain a political agenda. In our view, news values seem more suited to a market-driven media model and to self-referential content that reflects media logic at the expense of the political one. On the other hand, the political agenda, while ostensibly tends to satisfy the interests of political elites in a higher degree, frequently entails hard news and more complicated and hard-to-solve social issues and problems (Dearing & Rogers 2005).

The second research question asks whether journalists use evaluative discourse when they formulate their own questions. To investigate their evaluative discourse, the research focuses on the adjectives and the metaphors used by each journalist and whether these discursive elements tend to signify either positive or negative conditions of social reality.

In a similar way, the research also examines the opinions of the journalists as expressed in the 72 questions. Each question ends with a question mark. Nevertheless, we attempt to investigate the purpose of affirmations in journalistic discourse.

Finally, we seek to investigate the discursive relationship between the initial and the follow-up questions. We assume that a seemingly predetermined supplementary question promotes media logic, while unprompted occasions serve the interests of political logic, insofar as independent journalism is supposed to hold accountable those in power.

The Polarized Pluralist model

The Polarized Pluralist model (also known as the Mediterranean model), introduced by Hallin and Mancini (2004), describes the way that the media system operates in the countries of southern Europe, including Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. However, this is not a homogeneous group of countries, as their media systems vary (Papathanassopoulos, Giannouli & Archontaki 2023: 134). The term "model" describes a set of common characteristics of these countries' media systems that distinguishes them from countries belonging to other models, such as liberal and democratic corporatist.

In the Mediterranean countries, including Greece, television still dominates the media market. Concurrently, while Greeks tend to be heavy viewers, related surveys have indicated that their trust in television is either minimal or non-existent (Papathanassopoulos, Giannouli & Archontaki 2023: 140). The Greek media system is also characterised, if not determined, by political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 98, Papanagnou 2015). Following the deregulation of 1989, the Greek media owners were found to act in parallel and symbiosis (Papathanassopoulos 2007: 193) with the two political powerhouses, New Democracy and PASOK, which have governed Greece since the restoration of democracy in 1974, with a four-year exception of SYRIZA (2015-2019). Political parallelism is defined as "the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or the main ideological tendencies of society" (Fernández-Viso & Fernández-Alonso 2024). Consequently, media instrumentalisation is more prevalent in Greece, particularly when issues of conflict are at stake. Given that powerful magnates, whose business groups are active in sectors such as shipping, the oil industry, media and sports, are the proprietors of all Greek private national television channels (Papathanassopoulos et al. 2021: 180-181) one might expect that the journalists representing these TV channels would express congruent opinions in debates or, at the very least, that their questions would reflect a shared media logic.

Mediation and mediatisation

The existing literature on mediatisation tends to conceive it either as a subfield of mediation (Altheide 2016) or as a distinctive, more dynamic concept compared to the latter (Couldry 2008: 376, Hjarvard 2004: 114, Strömbäck 2008: 229). However, mediation and mediatisation do not belong to the same spectrum (Nie, Kee & Ahmad 2014: 365). Mediation has to do with communicating via a medium. It is rather a matter of intervention, which cannot produce any transformation to "politics as a social institution" (Hjarvard 2004: 114), despite being both technological and social (Silverstone, 2002). According to Silverstone (2002: 762), mediation explains "the fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalised media of communication are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life".

On the other hand, mediatisation denotes "the transformation of many disparate social and cultural processes into forms or formats suitable for media representation" (Couldry 2008: 377). Hjarvard (2004: 115) highlights a significant point of difference that serves to distinguish mediatisation as a transformative concept. The media do not only play a role of their own determination. They also enjoy a great level of institutional independence, which allows them "to provide the means by which other social institutions and actors communicate". Kepplinger (2002: 973) puts it more simply: mediatisation signifies "the adaptation of politics to the needs of the mass media". In this essay, mediatisation is of particular interest because it signifies the dominance of media logic across a multitude of social and political institutions.

The best-known definition of media logic is provided by the work of Altheide & Snow (1979: 10). Media logic refers to "a form of communication, the process through which media present and transmit information" and indicates that a variety of political and social institutions tend to adopt media formats as a "framework or a perspective that is used to present as well as interpret phenomena". Media logic characterises a process where events, action, and actors' performances follow the media grammar of specific technologies and formats (Altheide 2016). Accordingly, a constructionist approach to communication sees media logic as a key element in the understanding of the construction of social reality.

However, the domain of political communication is subject to the influence of both political and media logic. Here we argue that this is the intersection point between media systems theory and mediatisation. Assuming that the logic variable is a crucial indicator of a media system, we attempt to explore the degree and the aspects of media logic in the journalistic discourse of the debate.

Strömbäck (2008: 234) conceptualises mediatisation as a four-phase process. The first step occurs when the media become the most important source of information in a society. The second one refers to the degree of independence of the media from political institutions. In this phase, the media logic becomes dominant. The third phase concerns the degree to which media content is governed by media logic especially in comparison with political logic. Finally, in the last phase, political actors tend to adopt the media logic and adapt their actions to media technologies and formats.

To discuss what media logic is, Haßler, Maurer and Oschatz (2014) highlight five main aspects of media logic: absence of policy issues, personalisation, negativity, topicality, and absence of ambiguity. These five factors mark the dominance of the media logic over political logic, in political media coverage.

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis for two principal reasons. First, because CDA seeks to empirically prove what people may already know and dig deeper into it (Fairclough 2015: 106). In this case, our critical stance focuses on how media content intertwines with politics and how the power relations deriving from the political economy of the media refract the political debate. Second, because CDA is indicated when the manipulative character of discourse needs to be revealed, according to the socio-diagnostic critique proposed by Reisigl & Wodak (2015: 25). From this perspective, CDA utilises "social theories and other theoretical model from various disciplines". In this approach, media theories such as mediatisation and media logic are treated as discursive tools.

The 2023 political leaders' debate

Most research on Greek televised debates has focused primarily on the role and language of the politicians involved (Matsaganis & Weingarten 2000, Samaras & Papathanassopoulos 2011), the polemics surrounding the assessment of political leaders' performance (Vamvakas 2006) and the discussions held by social media users (Bourchas & Gioltzidou 2024). In order to examine the manifestations of mediatisation, this study adopts a distinctive approach, focusing on the journalistic discourse expressed during the debate.

The televised debate between the leaders of the Greek parliamentary parties took place on 10 May 2023, ahead of the general elections on May 21st. It was held at the premises of the Greek public broadcaster (ERT) with the participation of six party leaders, six anchorpersons and ERT's main anchorman who acted as moderator.

Party leaders attending were New Democracy president and Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, SYRIZA-Progressive Alliance president, Alexis Tsipras, PASOK-Movement for Change president Nikos Androulakis, Communist Party of Greece secretary general, Dimitris Koutsoumpas, Greek Solution president Kyriakos Velopoulos, and DiEM 25 secretary general, Yanis Varoufakis. The format was agreed by a cross-party committee chaired by the caretaker Minister of the Interior. Each anchorperson was a "representative" of one of the major national television channels (Alpha, Ant1, Mega, Open, Skai, Star) and the moderator was appointed by the public broadcaster (ERT).

The live programme lasted more than two hours and consisted of 36 pairs of questions. In particular, each journalist took turns to pose a 30 second question to a different political leader each time, with the opportunity to ask a short follow-up question lasting 15 seconds. The questions were divided into six issue areas or "rounds" in journalistic jargon: a) the economy, growth and employment, b) foreign policy and national defence, c) the state, institutions and transparency, d) health, education, and the social state, e) the environment and energy and f) youth. At the end, all political leaders were allowed to make additional comments and brief closing remarks.

The 2023 debate was the first televised Greek general election leaders' debate in eight years. The first televised debate in Greece took place in March 1990 ahead of the June general election that year and a few months after the deregulation of television at the end of 1989 (Papathanassopoulos 2017: 80). It should be noted that the first debate did not take place in a television studio, but in an auditorium of a Greek university (Panteion University). Moreover, it focused exclusively on diplomacy and foreign affairs and was moderated by a former deputy foreign minister and journalist (Yannis Kapsis). The questions to the politicians were posed by the professor and founder of the Institute of International Relations, Dimitri Constas. This is mentioned to highlight the differences in the degree of mediatisation compared to the 2023 televised debate in terms of venue, format, issues discussed and media participants.

Table 1: Journalists and party leaders that participated in the 2023 Greek political leaders' televised debate.

Presenter/Host	**TV channel**		
Giorgos Kouvaras	ERT		
Journalist	**TV channel**	**Political leader**	**Party**
Sia Kosioni	Skai	Kyriakos Mitsotakis	New Democracy
Giorgos Papadakis	Ant1	Alexis Tsipras	SYRIZA- PA
Antonis Sroiter	Alpha	Nikos Androulakis	PASOK-MfC
Panagiotis Stathis	Open	Dimitris Koutsoumpas	Communist Party
Rania Tzima	Mega	Kyriakos Velopoulos	Greek Solution
Mara Zacharea	Star	Yanis Varoufakis	DiEM 25

Research questions and operationalisation

Critical Discourse Analysis refers to a school of discourse analysis that strives for revealing power relations constituting a discourse (Fairclough 1995). This study attempts to negotiate the power of media logic and to investigate discursive elements in order to demystify its eventual dominance over political logic. It is therefore particularly important to highlight aspects of journalistic discourse that imply that the 2023 political leaders' debate tends to reproduce the media logic- something that is almost expected, given that the Greek media system is at the core of the Mediterranean model-, even though it concerns national elections. CDA is implemented here in two steps. The first step concerns the formulation of the research questions. This is followed by the selection of discursive elements to be examined. Each research question to be answered requires a set of secondary questions related to the discursive elements which will be scrutinised during the reading of the text. Each research question aims to expose the kind and characteristics of logic that become dominant in the journalistic discourse.

RQ1: Do journalists tend to prioritise news values over the political agenda?

In this case, our research explored two concepts whose relationship is dialectical. It focused on how news values are entextualised in the journalistic discourse, while a political discussion takes place. To answer RQ1, the analysis of two discursive elements was employed. The first one is a matter of agenda-setting theory. Despite the fact that the questions were on predefined issue areas, CDA permitted us to search for the thematic core of each question. Doxiadis (2011) calls this discursive-analytical process strategic integration, while Gee (2011: 61) prefers the term integration tool. The second discursive element is the logic of the question. Here, questions were analysed by focusing on the logic they represent. When the subjects' reasoning is disrupted by breaking down its components, the logic of the query emerges. Therefore, by assuming that each

question was based on a reasoning, we expected that the media or political logic would be reflected in these reasoning components.

RQ2: Do journalists use evaluations when asking their questions?

According to Pleios (2001), there are three prominent types of media discourse. Pragmatic discourse describes facts (news reports), evaluative discourse expresses a specific meaning, or a point of view (comments and opinions) and propagandistic discourse is a mixture of the other two. Since the end of the twentieth century, evaluative discourse has tended to displace pragmatic discourse in the news (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001). This tendency is expected to be more commonly found in the Polarized Pluralist model, where the media tend to be less independent from other power institutions such as religious, financial and political organisations inter alia (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 109). Drawing on these critical aspects of journalism, in order to answer the RQ2 we collect and analyse, firstly, the adjectives and adverbs used by the journalists in formulating their question and, secondly, the metaphors and similes, which are of great discursive importance in revealing how the journalists crystallise their myths in order to construct reality. These discursive elements combine evaluations with myths and pragmatic discourses with evaluative ones. And the comments seem to have been embodied in the news. In the same vein, evaluations are also crucial in tracing the relationship between knowledge and power (Van Dijk 2014: 209).

RQ3: To what extent do journalists' questions contain opinions?

Following Pleios' categorisation (2001), expressing an opinion belongs to evaluative discourse, as well. As a result, when a journalist expresses it, he/she is showing us his/her own position on an issue. However, a political leaders' debate is supposed to give voters the chance to compare the leaders' positions on specific issues (Benoit et al. 2001: 259). Insofar as this happens, when a journalist expresses an opinion through a question, the balance between pragmatic and evaluative discourse is disturbed. On the other hand, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are fundamental liberties in democracies. A politically functioning public sphere must allow journalists to feel free to ask the questions they want in order to criticise those in power. Our research examines every affirmation contained in the journalists' questions. Questions are followed by a question mark. If a question has a full stop, we assume that it is not that much of a question. Furthermore, when an affirmation is recorded, the subject usually shows us a specific point of view. This facilitates our attempt to unmask the media logic, because it allows us to clearly understand the extent to which these opinions are mediatised and whether they represent the social and political agenda or they reflect the media logic.

RQ4: Were the follow-up questions predetermined or were they used to reflect on the political leaders' answers to the initial questions?

This research question is posed on the assumption that predetermined questions represent the media logic, as they are based on schemas and interests that characterise mediatised journalistic roles. On the other hand, a follow-up question aimed at reflecting on a leader's initial answer, is more in line with a basic journalistic task: to criticise those in power by asking questions that are difficult to answer. Drawing on the literature on follow-up questions in political interviews we view these supplementary questions as an important journalistic tool for holding politicians accountable (Romaniuk 2013). We argue that this purpose is served when journalists make use of follow-up questions in order to "pursue what appear to be evasive or insufficient answers" (Eriksson 2011: 3332). A necessary condition for this is that the follow-up question actually arises as a reaction to the politician's answer to the initial question. In this case, we claim that the journalist of the televised debate assumes the role of the "political journalist" and acts "as a representative of the institution of political journalism" (De Smedt & Vandenbrande 2011: 86), which is indicative of political logic. On the contrary, when follow-up questions appear to be predetermined, we believe that journalists assume the role of the representatives of their television channel, which is indicative of media logic. In the context of deliberation and political dialogue, we think that the journalists must respond to the initial answers of the politicians in order to criticise them or to put further pressure on them when they do not explicitly answer a question. Thus, the political logic of follow-up questions seems to be more relevant in a debate, especially if we want it to be considered as an essentially political and not a preplanned media event (Dayan & Katz 1994).

News values and political agenda

Our research uses news values as an indicator of how the political agenda is adapted to the media logic. A total of 32 out of 36 pairs of questions were found to focus either on political communication (political programmes costing, references to social media etc.) or on turning a blind eye to the political core of an issue by presenting it as a matter of conflict (NATO vs. Russia, Androulakis or Tsipras vs. Mitsotakis etc.). In fact, the four pairs that were found to be more interested in the political substance of the issues they referred to were presented by women journalists (however, three out of four concerned the foreign policy and national defence section). Conflict frames were dominant, while the journalists tended to emphasise issues of low political importance (parallel currencies proposed by smaller parties, personal way of life etc.). As a result, the media logic was profound in the journalistic discourse.

The journalistic discourse tended to be oriented towards either news values or partisan communication. Regarding news values, two excerpts were found to be indicative. Sia Kosioni (Skai) said at the end of a question to the Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis: "…unless you have some news to tell us". Likewise, Panagiotis Stathis (Open), in his question on foreign affairs,

presented a scenario according to which "there is a strong possibility that Turkey will react, and that two frigates will appear there". In the first case, the Prime Minister seems to be used as a journalistic source or a content creator, whose words signal news items and not political decisions (the relevant news value here is Novelty). In the second, the journalist attempts to involve the Secretary General of the Greek Communist Party, Dimitris Koutsoumpas, in a war-conflict scenario (the relevant news value here is Negativity, which includes conflict).

At the same time, issues pertaining to partisan communication also constituted a central topic within the journalistic discourse with a tendency to focus on negativity and conflict. More specifically, two questions were aimed at reproducing the public dispute between the ruling party (New Democracy) and the Official Opposition (SYRIZA). Each of them tended to criticise its recipient. The leader of the Official Opposition, Alexis Tsipras, was accused of showing indifference to the fact that the ruling party "would focus on the cost" of his party's manifesto. On the other hand, the Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, was accused of portraying his "costly" policy of benefits as "relief and support for the citizens", while he criticised the Official Opposition, for "announcing in its manifesto that benefits in public health and education will be increased" and he foretell recourse to "memorandum (bailout programmes) and bankruptcy", should they return to government. Also of significant importance were some questions on parallel currencies that were directed at the leaders of smaller parties, such as Greek Solution (Kyriakos Velopoulos) and DiEM 25 (Yanis Varoufakis) in a manner reminiscent of sensationalist tabloid journalism.

Evaluative adjectives and media discourse

As far as evaluative discourse is concerned, 33 out of 36 pairs of questions contained evaluative elements, such as adjectives ("*major armament programme*", "*clear answer*" etc.), similes ("*Boris Johnson- Sebastian Kurz- Richard Nixon- Willy Brandt*", "*like telling the kids not to read*") and metaphors ("*fiscal gap*", "*public services turning a blind eye*" etc.). In a similar vein our findings revealed that the vast majority of these elements tended to reproduce negative valuations (28 out of 33 pairs).With regard to the cases that did not contain any evaluations, it should be noted that all of them (3 pairs of questions) were uttered by female journalists. Moreover, more than six evaluative elements were found in 28 pairs of questions. We therefore believe that journalists, whenever the time limit didn't prevent them from doing so, tended to displace pragmatic discourse- in terms of facticity- in favour of an evaluative one[1]. Their evaluations are strengthened even more due to the importance of the debate.

[1] On numerous occasions the evaluative language did not reflect factual reasoning but rather personal preference or sensationalism. For example Panagiotis Stathis urged the leader of PASOK to take part in a coalition government in order to "resolve" (sic) the issue of a possible by-election. Likewise, in a follow-up question Rania Tzima said to the leader of Greek Solution: "so I maintain

Six excerpts have been selected to support our argument. All of them contained an evaluation that was explicitly manifested in the journalistic discourse. Sia Kosioni (Skai) said to the Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, that food prices *"...are still going up"*, which was true, but expressed metaphorically for the sake of sensation. Similarly, she stressed that Official Opposition (whose leader is Alexis Tsipras) didn't support *"important elements"*[1] of the government's "*large armament programme*[2]*",*as if approval of highly expensive weapon systems was statutory for all Greek political parties regardless of their ideology or politics. Antonis Sroiter (Alpha) criticised the leader of the Official Opposition, Alexis Tsipras, by asking him *"how difficult would it be to produce a really detailed cost breakdown of policies, measure-by- measure, and then present it to us?"*, a question that also reflects a political communication issue. Giorgos Papadakis (Ant1) argued that the president of Greek Solution, Kyriakos Velopoulos, is pro-Russian and that his *"preference has been expressed in various ways after the recent invasion to Ukraine*[3]*"*. In this instance, the journalist evaluated Velopoulos' stance by categorising him as pro-Russian, thereby focusing on a particular aspect of his political positions. The same political leader heard Sia Kosioni (Skai) claim that the energy costs in *"Greece as is the case in other European countries"* are *"skyrocketing as a result of Western embargoes on Russia*". Finally, a follow-up question by Rania Tzima (Mega) to the president of PASOK-MfC, Nikos Androulakis, began by insisting that *"I didn't get a clear answer, at least not the way I understood it".* The discourse analysis showed that the journalists tended to conceal various comments in their questions. These comments were manifested either by including their own statements in their questions, or by taking for granted evaluations that are common in public discourse, especially in media discourse. Yet, they are still far from being considered as axioms or unquestioned facts. All journalists tended to challenge political leaders by constructing questions based on their own beliefs and opinions which are strongly linked to the Greek media discourse. A large part of their statements reproduces this media discourse and logic, while it includes simplified and simplistic causal attributions for complicated social phenomena, such as linking Russian invasion with inflation, huge armament programmes with peace and personal indifference with an electoral manifesto that is not costed. Of course, the sheer structure of the televised debates, with the obvious need for short and punchy questions and

that you do propose dual currency" which was an oversimplified evaluation of his argument in favor of a "Plan B" for Greek economy.

[1] Note the journalistic decision to use an adjective with a positive connotation «important (elements)» rather than a neutral one «e.g. contentious, debated (elements)» or even a negative one «e.g. problematic (elements)».

[2] In this case the journalist chooses to use the euphemistic metaphor «large (armament programmes)» instead of an adjective that might more accurately describe the essence of the debate: «costly, expensive etc. (armament programmes)».

[3] It is noteworthy that the journalist frames these complex issues of foreign policy (political logic) in Manichean terms of Pro-Russian vs Pro-Ukrainian Greek party leaders (media logic).

answers, significantly affects those choices. Thus, the structure of televised debates promotes sound-bite journalism (Rinke 2016) which is governed by media logic.

Journalistic opinions

Despite the time limit, the journalists uttered at least one affirmation in each pair of questions. An affirmation is the opposite of a question, so we assume that affirmations connote the journalists' intention to be both critical and evaluative. The main conclusion regarding the third research question confirms that evaluative discourse tends to displace pragmatic discourse. The role of journalists seems to be expanded through the use of affirmations. This means that they manipulate their questions in order to express their own opinions. Nevertheless, these opinions don't seem inevitable, while they don't bring anything new in the discussion; affirmations are wasted in secondary issues and simplistic rationales that reproduce superficial perceptions that distract from focusing on the core of the contemporary social problems. Journalists seem to be very dependent on media logic. They repeat oversimplified points of view even when they are not supposed to do so.

More specifically, our findings are inferred by a series of journalistic affirmations. Antonis Sroiter (Alpha) accuses the leader of SYRIZA-PA, Alexis Tsipras, of repeating exactly the same promises in his election manifesto, eight years after: "But if you read the 2015 manifesto, eight years later we are saying the same things". This clearly exaggerated claim is largely based on journalistic "cherry picking" and not on an actual 'vis-à-vis' comparison of policy proposals between the 2015 and 2023 manifestos. In our view, it reveals a tendency to reproduce a common propagandistic argument, taken from the field of political communication, that "Party X (i.e. our opponents) is never going to change". It goes without saying that such questions are usually addressed to all political leaders since they are not dictated by party affiliation but by media logic.

Similarly, Sia Kosioni (SKAI) expressed her personal view that there are very few policy alternatives for halting increasing commodity prices in Greece. And she presents this opinion as an undisputable fact. "You (previously) indicated that you would be reviewing VAT (policy) within the next two years. However, budgetary constraints are tight, and I imagine that (market) control mechanisms will remain the same. So what? Do you tell people that they should be patient?" she said in a follow-up question directed to prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Panagiotis Stathis (Open), while questioning the leader of PASOK-MfC, Nikos Androulakis, claimed that PASOK, a party that governed Greece from 1981 to 1989, from 1993 to 2004 and from 2009 to 2012 (and it was also a part of the 2012-2015 coalition government), "has always been a stabilising force". This is not a criticism, of course, but a highly subjective position that may seem laudatory at first glance, but in fact attempts to promote the journalists' argument. That is: "PASOK has always been a stabilising force, so it should help at all costs to form a coalition government in order to avoid by-elections" (which are synonymous with instability according to

the journalist). As for the subjective view of PASOK as a stabilising force, it should be noted that the last time PASOK either had won the national elections, or had taken part in the government, Greece almost went bankrupt (Skaperdas 2015). Furthermore, Mara Zacharea (Star) told the president of PASOK-MfC that "perhaps the opinions are right in theory" (affirmation) and she then asked him whether "in practice, the attitudes of the past have not disappeared?". In this case, the journalist asks for the interviewee's opinions, but at the same time she manifests her own positions. She expresses both an opinion in the form of an affirmation and a criticism in the form of a question.

The questions addressed to the Secretary General of DiEM 25, Yanis Varoufakis, also produced some vigorous excerpts. On the one hand, Rania Tzima (Mega) asked him to respond to her hypothetical and fictitious scenario: "Excuse me, maybe it's my problem, but I didn't understand what you were doing at the moment when the Turkish commandos are on the Greek island. I heard a theory about how we won't get there and a general outline". The journalist created a scenario, and accused the interviewee of not answering exactly what he would do if this war-conflict scenario came true. On the other hand, Antonis Sroiter (Alpha) used an affirmation in order to assert that the DiEM 25 general secretary had the highest energy footprint among the political leaders. The journalist placed particular emphasis to this episodic affirmation in order to arbitrarily[1] argue that the general secretary is not so environmentally friendly and to insinuate that he had too many vehicles in his possession.

Connections between initial and follow-up questions

Our analysis found that the majority of the follow-up questions were pre-designed. In particular, 26 out of the 36 follow-up questions were either irrelevant to the produced answers that followed the initial question or topically unrelated. In other words they were "pseudo follow-ups". In many cases the journalists even explicitly said that they didn't want to ask a follow-up question and used their turn to ask something else. Panagiotis Stathis (Open) said to the leader of SYRIZA-PA, Alexis Tsipras: "But I go on to another question…". In fact, his initial question was about the system of admissions to higher education and his "follow-up" about the political leader of the past whom the leader considered a "reference point". It should be noted here that this question referred to the heated, if politically superficial, debate of the election campaign, as to whether Tsipras was attempting to emulate Greece's first socialist prime minister and founder of PASOK, Andreas Papandreou.

[1] This particular assessment was miscalculated because it was based exclusively on ownership of private vehicles (not frequency of car use) and without any consideration of other properties, modes of living, or more significantly the frequency of long-haul air flights.

An intermediate category with regard to the initial question/answer/follow-up question sequence includes five cases where the journalist responded to the politician's answer but with a view to pose a question that sounded premeditated. We consider these five cases as a hybrid of media and political logic because they tried to hold politicians accountable but at the same time, they served the media logic of self-presentation and TV channel representation. For example, Sia Kosioni (Skai) asked the leader of the Greek Solution, Kyriakos Velopoulos, about Western sanctions against Russia and then reacted to his answer on Greece's exploration of natural gas in the Aegean but without really delving into her original question. "If you believe that our country should be independent, as you rightly say, why have you not supported any renewable energy bills?", she asked without any effort to pursue an answer to her initial question.

Some journalists took on the role of the political reporter and asked a total of five questions that could be described as real follow-ups criticising evasive or insufficient answers. "I didn't get a clear answer, at least as I understand it. If you participate in a (coalition) government the next day, will you ask for the Public Power Corporation to remain as it is today or change it?", Rania Tzima (Mega) asked the President of PASOK-MfC, Nikos Androulakis, when she felt that he had not given her a clear-cut answer on the proposed nationalisation of Greece's largest electricity company. However, as it was described earlier in this text, this question also reflects the media logic by supporting a worst-case scenario built by the journalist.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has examined the power of media logic through the use of CDA which facilitated an understanding of media discourse as a top-down process, directed from news organisations to the public at large. According to Reisigl & Wodak (2015: 24), "critique refers to the examination, assessment and evaluation, from a normative perspective, of persons, objects, actions, social institutions and so forth". It would have been a truism to say that media logic prevail over political logic in a contemporary televised debate. There is not just one "media logic" and the mediatisation of politics can vary considerably (Strömbäck 2008: 234, Strömbäck and Esser 2014: 7). In such a context, the implementation of CDA enabled the emergence of a critique that situates mediatisation and the prevalence of a specific form of media logic in the Polarized Pluralist Model.

Of particular importance is the observation that this specific media logic was dominant in all research questions. Even if we accept the view that a political debate is more than a media event and aims to inform the electorate about policy platforms, while at the same time cultivating a fertile ground for rhetoric competition among the candidates, it still has a mediatising function. The

debate is almost a demonstration of the power of media over politics[1]. Our findings demonstrate that the major media companies represented in the televised debate were able to impose their own context, preferences, ways of thinking about politics as well as practices for constructing the political spectacle. And journalists seemed to serve this media logic not so much as a result of straightforward commercial considerations, but mainly as a means of maintaining and increasing their "corporate status" in the context of the so-called Mediterranean model.

To illustrate, our analysis regarding the *RQ1: Do journalists tend to prioritise news values over the political agenda?* divulged that the political substance of the issues discussed in the debate was largely obscured as journalists tended to focus more on aspects of political, if not partisan, communication and horse-race coverage rather than on political positions and policies. We claim that there are two reasons for this. First, news values demand an issue to be simplified to be in tune with the audience. Therefore, the debate has become yet another product-to-be-consumed. It appears to have been constructed in accordance with the (perceived) demands of media consumers rather than the principles of a politically functional public sphere. Second, partisan communication is omnipresent during the debate, either in the politicians' answers or in the journalist questions which were found to be highly reflective of partisan agendas. Partisan communication seems to prevail, and it is ultimately represented in the debate via political parallelism, as well as media instrumentalisation (Hallin & Mancini 2004, Papathanassopoulos et al. 2021) indicating the Polarized Pluralist Model.

With regard to *RQ2: Do journalists use evaluations when asking their questions*, negative evaluations were found to be a common place in the journalistic discourse. However, they were restricted to a simplistic and superficial criticism which is related to the popular form that the media logic usually takes. Indeed, in some cases journalistic discourse seemed to transcend the boundaries of pop culture and tap into populism. As a result, negative evaluations focused on platitudes and reasonable, but not deep and critical, thinking. It is evident that this is not a consequence of unprofessionalism, but rather of a "limited professionalism" (Papathanassopoulos 2007:196) that serves media logic in the Polarized Pluralist Model[2].

Furthermore, *RQ3: To what extent do journalists' questions contain opinions?,* builds on the findings of *RQ2.* The anchorpersons were used to integrating affirmations in their questions. These affirmations tended to reproduce simplistic criticisms that were either the result of "common sense" approaches or a reproduction of the dominant ideology. By employing these affirmations, the journalists attempted to present their positions as indisputable and axiomatic.

[1] Of course this doesn't imply that we are opposed to any debate or discussion of political programmes in public. Yet, this research advocates that there are significant restrictions to the political function of the debate in its current style and format. Most of them stem from the media logic and its dominance.

A combination of the answers given to *RQ2* and *RQ3* impels us to think that, while journalists exercise their right to criticise those in power, they construct or maintain a reality, that does not address the deeper causes of socio-political problems. In contrast, it is based on a media logic that highlights the interests of both media organisations and partisan communication. It is also noteworthy that several of these positions appeared to be aligned with neo-liberal, nationalist, and militarist ideologies. To illustrate, one may consider the question about "budgetary constraints" or the question with the hypothetical scenario involving Turkish commandos or another supporting a "large armament programme".

Another finding showed the tendency of journalists to use predetermined questions as a substitute for genuine follow-up questions (*RQ4: Were the follow-up questions predetermined or were they used to reflect on the political leaders' answers to the initial questions?*). This predetermination met the requirements of media logic and prevented journalists from rigorously and directly criticising the politicians who answered their initial questions. It appears that journalists (and their respective media outlets) had their own priorities through which the media logic manifested itself.

To sum up, a particular media logic emerged as a crucial feature of televised debates. The journalistic discourse was highly mediatised, and the political logic was clouded by media and partisan interests. As a result, journalists even when their discourse was restricted due to time limits, still managed to promote certain point of views, practices, and ways of thinking.

The crux of our research provides a basis for a critical examination of the intertwined functions of journalists and media political economy in the context of political debates. Did journalists represent themselves or their respective media organisations, and to what extent? Our findings recall the debate about objectivity/impartiality and demonstrate that, even if they exist, power relations between employers (media magnates) and employees (anchorpersons and journalists) are omnipresent in journalistic practice, especially in the Polarized Pluralist Model.

As for the political economy of the media within a Polarized Pluralist Model, it appears as a key factor in the conduct of the debate. It could be argued that media discourse represent the dynamics of the media political economy and is appropriately and apparently subject to the corresponding power relations. Media logic in a Polarized Pluralist Model, can be understood as an amalgam of power relations between (i) media magnates and political parties, (ii) media magnates and journalists, and (iii) journalists and partisan communication.

In conclusion, although it is customary for a televised debate to occur prior to a national election, the primary focus is on media concerns rather than on the political substance of the debate itself. It is clear that this is a normative critique which is particularly evident in the context of the Polarized Pluralist Model. While we concur with the view that a televised debate "should not be judged by the standards of the university seminar" (Coleman 2013: 28), we nevertheless believe that the function of media logic should be judged on the political landscape where it is imposed.

In other words, we propose the hypothesis that the supremacy of media logic may be more detrimental in the Mediterranean model, where the news media are highly instrumentalised "by oligarchs, industrialists, parties or the state" (Papathanassopoulos 2007: 196). But now, in an age of increased mediatisation, it appears that the parties and the state are losing ground to media logic. And this may reshape power relations in favour of other entities.

References

Altheide, D. L. (2016). *Media logic. In G. Mazzoleni, ed., The international encyclopedia of political communication*. Wiley Blackwell.

Altheide, D. L. & Snow, R. P. (1979). *Media Logic*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Benoit, W. L., McKinney, M. S. & Holbert, R. L. (2001). Beyond learning and persona: extending the scope of presidential debate effects, *Communication Monographs, 68*(3): 259-273.

Bourchas, P. V. & Gioltzidou, G. (2024). Television Debates as a TV Typology: Continuities and Changes in Televised Political Competition. The Case of the 2023 Pre-Election Debates in Greece. *Journalism and Media 2024, 5*(2): 799-813.

Coleman, S. (2013). Debate on Television: The Spectacle of Deliberation. *Television & New Media, 14*(1): 20-30.

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling, *New Media & Society, 10*(3): 373–391.

Dayan, D. & Katz, E. (1994). *Media events*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

De Smedt, E. & Vandenbrande, K. (2011). Political television formats as strategic resources inachieving journalists'roles. In M. Ekström, & M. Patrona, eds., Talking politics in broadcastmedia: Cross-cultural perspectives on political interviewing, journalism and accountability. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Dearing, J. W. & Rogers, E. M. (2005). *Agenda-setting*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Doxiadis, K. (2011). *Discourse analysis: A social-philosophical grounding*. London: Common Ground Publishing.

Eriksson, G. (2011). Follow-up questions in political press conferences. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43*, 3331-3344.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. New York: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2015). *A dialectical-relation approach to critical discourse analysis in social research*. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer, eds., Methods of critical discourse studies. London: SAGE.

Fernández-Viso, A. & Fernández-Alonso, I. (2024). The evolution of government intervention in the Mediterranean media system: Spain, France, and Portugal, *Media & Communication, 12*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.7738

Gee, J. P. (2011). *How to do Discourse Analysis: A toolkit*. Oxon: Routledge.

Hallin, D. & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haßler, J., Maurer, M. & Oschatz, C. (2014). Media logic and political logic online and offline: The case of climate change communication, *Journalism Practice, 8*(3): 326-341.

Hjarvard, S. (2004). The Mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change, *Nordicom Review, 29*: 105-134.

Kepplinger, H. M. (2002). Mediatization of politics: Theory and data, *Journal of Communication, 52*(4): 972-986.

Kovach, B. & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. New York: Crown.

Matsaganis, M. & Weingarten, C. (2001). The 2000 U.S. presidential debate versus the 2000 Greek prime minister debate, *American Behavioral Scientist, 44*(12): 2398–2409.

Nie, K. S., Kee, C. P. & Ahmad, A. L. (2014). Mediatization: A grand concept or contemporary approach?, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 155*: 362-367.

Papanagnou, V. (2015, 22 May). 'What is wrong with the Greek media?'. London School of Economics. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2015/05/22/what-is-wrong-with-the-greek-media/ [accessed 21 April 2024].

Papathanassopoulos, S. (2007). *The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model countries*. In G. Terzis, ed., European media governance: National and regional dimensions. Bristol: Intellect Book.

Papathanassopoulos, S. (2017). *Greece: A continuous interplay between media and politicians in media*. In P. Bajomi-Lázár, ed., Third-Wave democracies: Southern and Central/Eastern Europe in a comparative perspective. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Papathanassopoulos, S., Giannouli, I. & Archontaki, I. (2023*). The media in Southern Europe: Continuities, changes and challenges*. In S. Papathanassopoulos & A. Miconi, eds., The media systems in Europe: Continuities and discontinuities. Cham: Springer.

Papathanassopoulos, S., Karadimitriou, A., Kostopoulos, C., & Archontaki, I. (2021). *Greece: Media concentration and independent journalism between austerity and digital disruption*. In J. Trappel & T. Tomaz, eds., The media for democracy monitor 2021: How leading news media survive digital transformation (vol. 2). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

Pleios, G. (2001). *The discourse of image: Ideology and politics*. Athens: Papazissis.

Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2015). *The Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer, eds., Methods of critical discourse studies. London: SAGE.

Rinke, E. M. (2016). The impact of sound-bite journalism on public argument, *Journal of Communication, 66*(4): 625–645.

Romaniuk, T. (2013). Pursuing Answers to Questions in Broadcast Journalism, *Research on Language & Social Interaction, 46*(2): 144-164.

Samaras, A.N. & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2011). *Negativity and Attacks in Party Leader Debates in Greece*. In Papathanassopoulos, S., ed., Communication and Society in the 21st Century. Athens: Kastaniotis. (In Greek).

Silverstone, R. (2002). Complicity and collusion in the mediation of everyday life, *New Literary History, 33*(4): 761–780.

Skaperdas, S. (2015). Myths and self-deceptions about the Greek debt crisis, *Revue d'économie politique, 125*: 755-785.

Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics, *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 13*(3): 228-246.

Strömbäck, J. & Esser, F. (2014). *Mediatization of Politics*. In Esser, F. & Strömbäck, J. (eds.) Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vamvakas, V. (2006). *Elections and Communication in the post-dictatorship period: Politicality and Spectacle.* Athens: Savalas. (In Greek).

Van Dijk, T. A. (1988). *News as discourse*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2014). *Discourse and knowledge: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.