

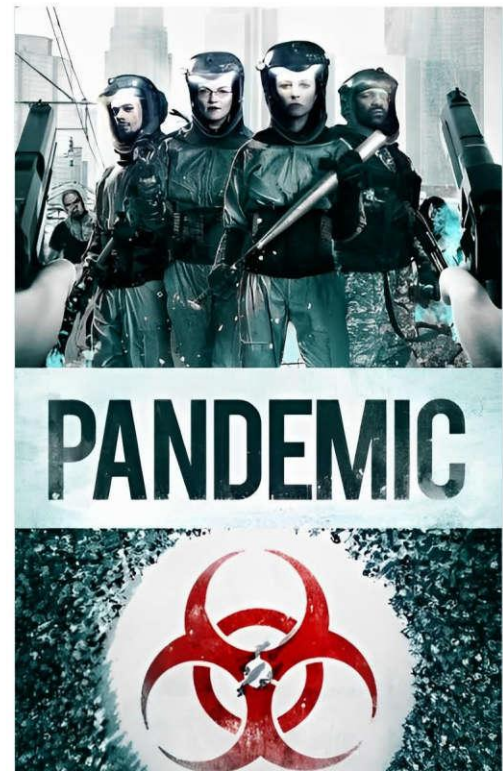
IV CRITICALLY READING MEDIA MESSAGES: THE PANDEMIC

4.1. PERSPECTIVE/POINT OF VIEW/FOCALIZATION

Every news footage is a **narrative**, that means, a story. And it is a presumption of narrative theory that every story has someone telling it, and that every story has a particular angle from which it is narrated or told. This particular angle is called the perspective or **point of view**.

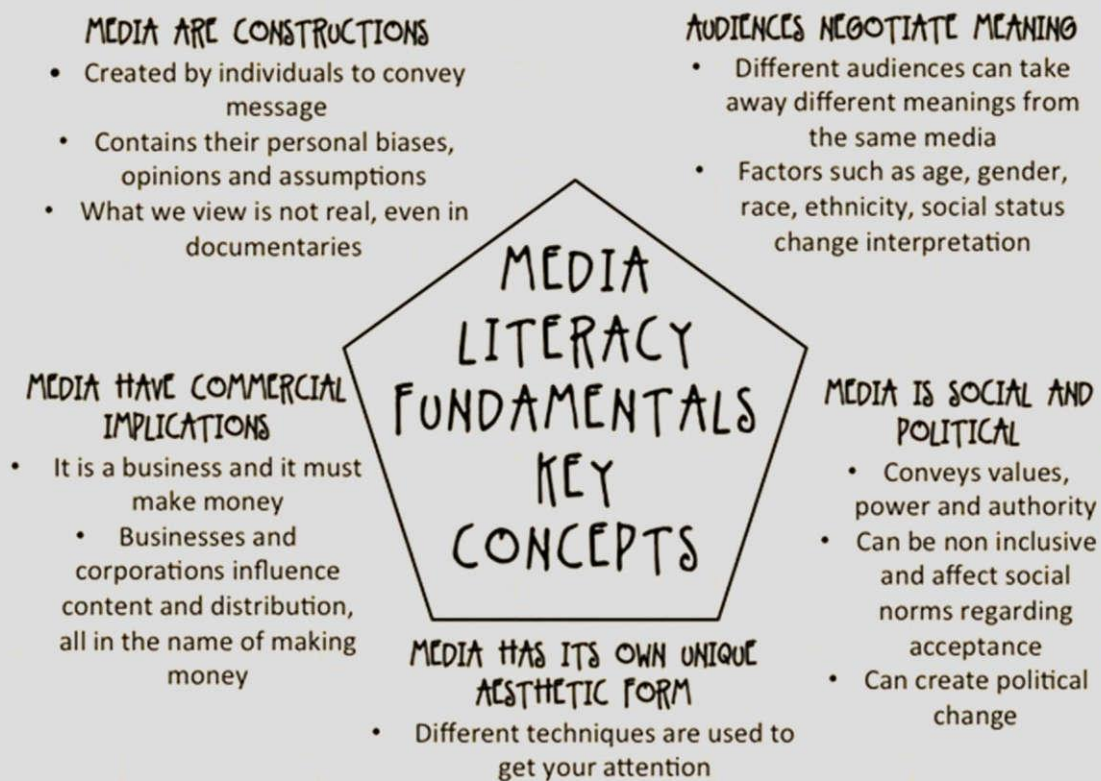
Critically reading media messages means **to be aware, to think**, think critically, about this **angle** that the story is being told.

For instance, media footage can be told by a narrator, that is, say, a voice over telling the story or relating the news. This is, presumably, a reporter writing the news. It can also be told by a witness or someone who tells the story by its own voice. More often than not, footage involves both the narration by a news reader, and statements from various officials, people on the ground, witnesses, victims etc. It is usually believed that, if a story incorporates, contains multiple agents or voices, it is more objective. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that in narrative theory there is no such thing as absolute objectivity – every utterance involves someone’s particular, subjective position, and every narration is made from a particular standpoint, whether this standpoint is openly expressed or concealed in some way. So, in a way, before we can even ask ourselves which story is more truthful from another, we should become aware of these various strategies that the media use in order to be more persuasive.



4.2. FIVE KEY IDEAS/CONCEPTS

Before we try to critically examine some media content – in this particular case, some video clips about the Covid-19 (Corona) virus, let’s just briefly have in mind some key assumptions and ideas about the media. From a theoretical perspective, all media messages contain the following:



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1. All messages are created in a certain way – constructed.
2. Media messages are using a creative language in a specific, unique way
3. Different people understand media messages differently.
4. Media contain in itself values and views of the world.
5. Most media messages have been created for power and/or profit.

4.3. TASK – ANSWER THESE 5 QUESTIONS

When you understood the 5 key concepts above, you could apply them by asking yourself 5 key questions about any media message and try to respond to it:

1. Who is the author of this message?
2. How it attracts my attention?
3. How can different people understand it differently?
4. Which values, attitudes, and point of views does it contain, and which ones is it excluding?
5. Why was this message sent/created?

Let's illustrate the previous, more theoretical talk now by watching and analysing some clips about Kovid-19/Corona virus. There's been a huge debate about the origin of the virus, whether it was passed on accidentally from animals (bats most likely) to humans, or it was made by humans and accidentally or deliberately leaked from a laboratory, if the Chinese or American or some farmako- mafia etc. are responsible for it. The following clips are gathered from various TV stations worldwide, and enable us to see how in this crisis different media houses report and transmit messages in line with their overall agenda, their predefined political/ideological views.

Example 1 **China in US politics and the media**



Source: Blame game escalates between US and China over coronavirus disinformation, CNN Politics, 4.1.2020.

Who are the "bad guys"?

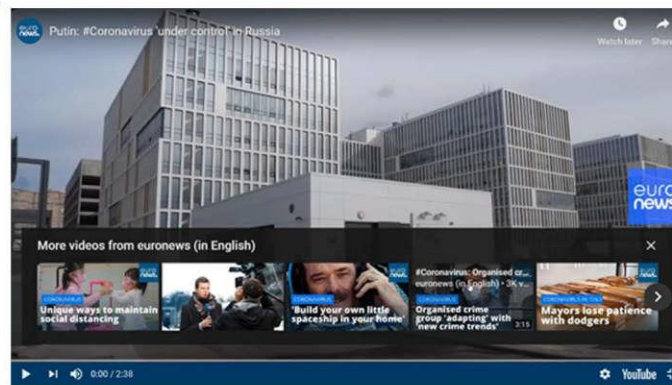
Who among the officials has been included, i.e. whose statements have been presented?

How does the clip from China look like?

What do you think about the overall position of the clip's author?

What does this tell us about the general position of this TV network?

Example 2 **Russia in Western Politics and the media**



Source: Euronews, 4.1.2020.

How is Russia portrayed in this clip?

Who is the correspondent from Russia? A government official, someone highly ranked within the system or someone without an official position?

How are the common Russians presented?

What are narrative and visual strategies of undermining/questioning official Russian figures and statements?

In conclusion, once we try to think more critically and thoroughly into these clips, it can tell us a lot about a particular TV station or network, about their relation to mainstream politics of their country, their hidden biases and agenda, and about the more or less subtle, but always necessarily present subjectivity or particular point of view and values transmitted by media messages, in this case especially about the visual means, editing and montage used to create powerful video content.