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Deconstructing the Ideological Frame of President Vladimir Putin's Rhetoric: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis

A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates the world of politics, focusing on the ideological frames that President Vladimir Putin used in his exclusive interview on NBC News in December 2024. The paper aims to explore Putin's framing of Russia's political agenda and policies and investigate the strategies he employs to deconstruct his ideological frames. The data is limited to the transcript of President Vladimir Putin's interview with the host Keir Simmons on NBC News in which three extracts are analyzed. The analysis is carried out through the qualitative content analysis approach based on an eclectic model including Van Dijk's (2006) Socio-Cognitive Theory, Fairclough's (1995) Three-dimensional model of discourse, and Goffman's (1974) Frame Theory. The paper concluded that President Vladimir Putin uses "Us" versus "Them" as a cognitive framing tool to justify his foreign and domestic policies. Moreover, he positions Russia as a stabilizing actor rejecting interference and calls for legality, reasonableness, and cooperation highlighting mutual benefit dialogues and compromise among countries.

تفكيك الإطار الأيديولوجي لخطاب الرئيس فلاديمير بوتين :
تحليل اجتماعي-معرفي

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قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

كلية الآداب، الجامعة المستنصرية

المُستخلص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى استكشاف صياغة بوتين للأجندة والسياسات السياسية الروسية والتحقيق في الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها لتفكيك أطره الأيديولوجية. تقتصر البيانات على نص المقابلة التي أجراها الرئيس فلاديمير بوتين مع المضيف كير سيمونز على قناة إن بي سي نيوز ، التي تم فيها تحليل ثلاثة مقتطفات. يتم إجراء التحليل من خلال منهج تحليل المحتوى النوعي استنادًا إلى نموذج انتقائي يتضمن النظرية الاجتماعية المعرفية لفان دايك (2006)، ونموذج الخطاب ثلاثي الأبعاد لفيركلاف (1995)، ونظرية الإطار لغوفمان (1974). وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن الرئيس فلاديمير بوتين يستخدم عبارة "نحن" مقابل "هم" كأداة تأطير معرفي لتبرير سياساته الخارجية والمحلية. علاوة على ذلك، فهو يضع روسيا كجهة فاعلة لتحقيق الاستقرار وترفض التدخل، ويدعو إلى الشرعية والمعقولية والتعاون، ويسلط الضوء على حوارات المنفعة المتبادلة والتسوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفكيكية، نظرية الإطار، الأيديولوجية، السياسة، المقاربة الاجتماعية المعرفية، فلاديمير بوتين

1.Introduction

Vladimir Putin is a well-known and controversial figure in the global political scene and his involvement with international media, especially American television, shows how important it is for political communication to be understood and depicted by the media, and the population (Noble & Chaisty, 2022). The portrayal of Vladimir Putin as a strong and powerful leader carries important implications and the way the media presents him highlights his physical power which deeply influences public perception (Goffman, 1974). He is often depicted as a wicked and cunning person by American news media and therefore, his war against Ukraine is characterized as being an unjustified act of aggression. This type of framing builds up an extremely negative image of Putin, strengthening and magnifying existing biases and mistrust against him (Hon, 20023).

Using political rhetoric to spread ideas and unravel the ideologies in political discourse through the critical discourse analysis approach (henceforth, CDA) has been of interest to researchers (Riaz *et al.* 2022). Ideological framing and rhetoric are crucial in determining how information is interpreted and transmitted. It delves into how Putin crafts his messages by employing propaganda and deliberately manipulating media simulacrums (Brugman & Vis, 2019). Accordingly, this paper provides valuable insights for scholars and policymakers by examining the ideological frames and discursive strategies utilized in the discourse of President Putin. The paper is structured around two questions:

1. How does President Putin represent his political rhetoric to frame his political agenda and policies?

2. What discursive strategies does Putin use to deconstruct his ideological frames?

2. Review of Literature

A. Framing Theory

The concept of framing focuses on media and how certain issues are discussed and given meaning. It is concerned with how something is presented to the population. It is used in media news since it determines how the population perceives the message sent to them (Goffman, 1974; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Scheufele, 1999). The term was first coined by Goffman (1974) who distinguished between natural and social frames. The former, natural frames, refer to the physical world such as weather phenomena; while the latter, the social frames refer to the human interactions in which intentions, policies, and ideologies are

present such as conversations, political interviews, and court trials. The social frames represent roles and norms that interpret human actions and reveal their ideologies. Frames are subdivided into further types including:

1. The Moral Frame represents issues regarding good versus bad or right versus wrong. This type is mainly concerned with values and ethical judgments.

2. The Problem-Solution frame which is commonly used in political speeches where the politician defines a problem and suggests an action or policy response.

3. The identity frame which focuses on the identity within group affiliation. This type is associated with national identity, group loyalty, and patriotism

4. The Conflict frame reinforces rivalry, opposition, and competition.

5. The economic frame discusses financial aspects. This requires using terms such as costs, benefits, jobs…etc.   (Pan & Kosicki, 1993)

Moreover, frames are considered cognitive structures since they shape how people interpret information in a given context by defining issues, identifying problems, and offering the best solutions. The use of framing, particularly in political discourse draws the population's attention and presents interpretations that collocate with the agenda promoted (Scheufele, 1999). Applying ideological analysis through framing allows for examining the different media sources frame political events according to their ideologies, and perspectives. Therefore, it is best studied through the socio-cognitive approach since it addresses individuals' mental models that interact with broader social structures. Moreover, it provides a better understanding of how frames are structured and internalized with representation of their societal and cognitive impact (Bock, 2020).

Framing theory focuses on how issues are framed, and understood within the policy context. In contrast, discourse theory views media discourses as contentious, and evolving, thereby broadening media influence beyond established power structures (Roslyng & Dindler, 2023).   The frame theory has been used in media studies, sociology, and political discourse since this theory highlights how people construct meaning in their interactions with others.

The Framing theory in discourse requires investigating a very important concept and that is deconstruction which is a method of critical analysis that explores and examines how meaning is constructed in texts to uncover hidden ideologies power dynamics and

certain rhetorical strategies. (Culler, 1982)The core principle of deconstruction is that meaning is not stable since it can carry different interpretations depending on the context and the cultural background. Moreover, deconstruction focuses on contradictory terms such as oppositions (good/ bad, us/them).

Dealing with politics can best be investigated and interpreted through the critical discourse analysis approach since both the deconstruction and framing theories require CDA since it provides the tools to critically examine these concepts providing deeper insight concerning how texts are structured, and interpreted (Culler, 1982; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; van Dijk, 2001, 2006). The socio-cognitive approach and the frame theory can best be used in political discourse since they both focus on the cognitive structures that organize and guide social as well as political interactions and interpret how frames function in discourse.

B. Deconstruction as a Theoretical Lens for Political Discourse

Dealing with Framing in discourse requires investigating a very important concept and that is deconstruction which is a method of critical analysis that explores and examines how meaning is constructed in texts to uncover hidden ideologies, power dynamics, and certain rhetorics. It reveals multiple layers of interpretation that language may conceal (Culler, 1982). "Deconstruction" was first developed by Jacques Derrida in the late 20th century as a critical approach intended to analyze and reveal the underlying binaries, assumptions, and contradictions within texts or discourses. This concept challenges the idea that meanings are fixed. It emphasizes that meaning is always shifting and reconstructed through means of language. Moreover, it focuses on contradictory terms such as oppositions (good/ bad, us/them) (Derrida, 1978). As far as political communication is concerned, deconstruction provides a better lens to critique and clarify how language and rhetoric shape political realities and ideologies (Norris, 1987).

C. Rhetorical Strategies in Political Communication

Political communication is built upon using rhetorical strategies to influence public opinion, shape policy debates, and enhance a politician's image. Rhetorical approaches have been of interest form many researchers who developed different approaches to studying rhetoric. Different rhetorical devices are used to shape political speeches such as

appeals, repetition, metaphors contrast, and narratives. Starting with Aristotle's (1991) rhetorical appeals including ethos, pathos, and logos, his approach is considered one of the fundamental frameworks for analyzing political communication. Ethos is often used by politicians to enhance credibility, portraying themselves as a trustworthy leader. Pathos is used to reflect emotional appeal and evoke feelings of fear, hope, patriotism, …etc. Finally, logos supports logical reasoning and arguments by providing facts and evidence (Murthy, 2018)

Another rhetorical strategy is the use of metaphors which shapes how the audience conceptualizes political issues. Metaphors have a close relationship with framing since they impact how policies are perceived. Politicians rely heavily on using metaphors of different types such as war metaphors, and economic metaphors to frame concepts in familiar terms to influence the population's interpretation (Charteris-Black, 2014). Moreover, repetition reinforces the political messages and makes them more memorable and persuasive such as the repetition of slogans. Another rhetorical strategy involves the use of contrasts and antithesis which juxtapose contrasting ideas emphasizing differences and creating memorable rhetoric (Leith, 211). Further, storytelling is another powerful rhetorical strategy that is used in political communication compelling narratives that resonate with cultural values. Storytelling is considered one of the most important techniques that politicians use to humanize themselves and align with the population (Fisher, 1984). In sum, rhetorical strategies in political communication reveal diverse techniques that politicians use to influence the population and President Vladimir Putin is one of those politicians who relies heavily on such techniques to present his policies and convince the audience about his political ideologies at the domestic and global levels. Putin's mode of communication is crucial to Russia's political rivalry with the West, particularly with the United States. He projects himself as a significant global actor, striving to enhance Russia's standing through displays of economic, and military prowess. Analyzing, his rhetoric reveals how he meticulously crafts his public image and messaging to influence public opinion, and direct geopolitical development. Political media rhetoric is a burgeoning field that integrates classical rhetoric, media linguistics, and stylistics to analyze political media discourse (Lears, 1985).

D. Previous Studies

Goudimiak (2016) explored Putin's rhetoric as far as domestic and international issues are concerned in a thesis entitled "Justifying War in Ukraine: An Analysis of speeches, excerpts and Interviews by Vladimir Putin". The data involved 57 speeches, interviews, and excerpts of Russian President Vladimir Putin from the years 2013 to 2016. The study concluded that Putin's rhetorical strategies relied heavily on the justification frame of the conflict through the duty that Russia set to itself as a protector of its brother nation. Being a global political actor, Putin's discourse has received great attention and many studies tackle his speeches and interviews in analysis.

A closely related study was conducted by Laksono and Rahmasari in 2022. The study entitled "Conversation Analysis of Repair and Adjacency Pairs on an Interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin in NBC News America". The study was conducted through the qualitative content analysis approach relying on Paltridge (2000). The results showed that 39 of the data are repairs, 32 self-initiated while adjacency pairs constitute 52 of the data, 28 questions-answers, and 16 assessment-agreement.

Hoon (2023) studied "Framing Russia-Ukraine war and Vladimir Putin's image: a content analysis of New York Times online commentary articles". The data involved 29 commentaries taken from February to December. Agenda setting and framing theory were employed. The findings revealed that President Vladimir Putin and Russia were framed as unprovoked invaders of Ukraine `while Ukraine on the other hand tries to put up a defense for its sovereignty.

A study by Hasson and Al-Ghezzi (2023) investigated the manipulative and persuasive strategies that Putin used in his claim on the war with Ukraine through a pragmatic analysis. The sample of the study included one of Putin's speeches on the Security Service Board. The study was tackled through the qualificative research approach relying on an eclectic model including Walton's (1995) and Johnson's (2000) theories of fallacies and argumentation. The study concluded that Putin used various pragmatic strategies to justify his war on Ukraine while the pragmatic concepts which he violated proved that his claims are illogical and unreasonable.

A study by Anber (2023) published a paper entitled "A Pragmatic Study of Persuasion in Declaring Wars" to reveal the persuasive strategies used by President Vladimir Putin. The data involve selected speeches of the Russian President in 2022

concerning the Ukrainian war. The study was conducted through the descriptive qualitative approach in which Lucas's (2007) persuasion strategies were applied. The study revealed that Putin used two persuasive strategies, logos with 56% and pathos with 46 % to justify his decision concerning the war against Ukraine.

A study by Naji (2023) entitled, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Vladimir Putin's Speech Announcing Special Military Operation in Ukraine" investigates Putin's political discourse. The paper was tackled by adopting van Dijk's (2001, 2006) analytical models of discursive strategies. The study concluded that Putin showed negative behaviors whether towards Russia or other countries such as Libya and Syria, yet he purified the image of the Russian government.

A more recent study of President Vladimir Putin has been carried out by Ononiwu (2024) to examine the representation of the Russia- Ukraine conflict in Russian and Ukrainian state news media. The study intended to investigate the ideologies embedded in news reports to identify the discourse structures and strategies to portray the conflict. The study was conducted through critical discourse analysis relying on (van Dijk T. A., 1998) Socio-cognitive approach and Martin and White's Appraisal framework of attitude and graduation. The findings of the study implied that media reports are laden with militarism and nationalism which are presented through emotive verbs, positive self-representation, actor description, and comparison.

Despite the many studies that have been carried out to investigate Putin's discourse, rhetoric, power, and ideology; further investigation can still be carried out to investigate the deconstruction of the ideological frame in Putin's speech on NBC News and it is the task of this paper to analyze Putin's Rhetoric in his interaction with the American journalist Keir Simmons.

4. Methodology

A. Research Design

This paper is conducted through the qualitative approach to analyze the ideological framing in Vladimir Putin's rhetoric in his interview with Keir Simmons on NBC. The data is analyzed relying on the implementation of van Dijk's (2006)   Socio-Cognitive Theory, Fairclough's (1995) Three-dimensional model of discourse, and Gofman's (1974) Frame Theory. The paper will include: a review of existing literature, and theoretical frameworks,

a detailed methodology section describing the research design, a theoretical framework, an analysis and a discussion of data. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings of the paper.

B. Sample of the study

The sample of the study is limited to one interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin on NBC news channel. The interview was hosted by Keir Simmons on the 11th of June 2021. The full transcript of the interview is available on the NBC news website Full transcript of exclusive Putin interview with NBC News' Keir Simmons. This interview is important because President Putin is one of the global leaders whose interviews are seen internationally. Moreover, during this interview, he provides instances of critical issues such as international relations, public agendas, and domestic policies. In addition, the interview presents contentious global conflicts as such Syria, NATO, and Ukrainian wars. Most importantly above all is Putin's interaction with Western media and how he responds to a Western journalist like Keir Simmons in an international context. Overall, it is worthy of study since it is an opportunity to provide a better insight into Putin's leadership and strategic thinking, frame his ideologies, and how he portrays Russia's image in an International context and through Western Media.

C. Analytical Framework

A content analysis will be carried out to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret the frames used in Putin's rhetoric. The model adopted to investigate the deconstruction of ideological frames in Putin's discourse in his interview with the American host Kier Simmons includes van Dijk's (2006) Socio-Cognitive Theory, Fairclough's (1995) Three-dimensional model of discourse, and Goffman's (1974) Frame Theory. A key concept in van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis is the distinction between US/ THEM and this is considered a powerful rhetorical device politicians use to frame their ideologies and influence the population's opinions. The "Us/Them" dichotomy, is essential for understanding how political leaders create ideological divisions. This model will be utilized to analyze how Putin distinguishes Russia as "Us" versus the Western countries or entities as "Them" . The study will investigate how Putin's positive self-presentation, highlights Russia's legitimacy, rationality, and cooperation, while his negative portrayal of the West depicts it as unreliable, obstructive, and aggressive. This

approach demonstrates, how the in-group (Russia), is framed favorably to enhance ideological solidarity, whereas the out-group (the West), is framed negatively to legitimize political positions and influence public views.

According to Fairclough (1995), "CDA developed as a response to the traditional divide between linguistics and areas of social science such as sociology. Whereas linguistics traditionally focused on the microanalysis of texts and interactions, social science was traditionally concerned with social practice and social change." (Cited in Almnaseer & Shaban, 2018,p.2). Fairclough's (1995) model "focused in his approach on concepts like dominance, difference, and resistance. He argued that language is an essential tool of social control and power" (As cited in Alhusseini, 2024,p.613).

Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model provides a nuanced approach to discourse analysis through its three levels: text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice. In fact, it is important to state that "Every occurrence of language is a three-dimensional communication event. First and foremost, it is a text (speech, writing, visual image, or a combination of these). Second, it is also a discursive practice that involves the creation and consumption of texts, and third, it is a social practice." (Philips & Jorgensen, 2002 as cited in Almnaseer & Nori,2023 , p.975). At the textual level, the focus will be on the linguistic features and rhetorical methods used by Putin. This includes his employment of formal, and authoritative language, repetition, and metaphors to depict Russia as a principled actor, and to confront Western narratives. The analysis will investigate how these rhetorical techniques aid in forming Putin's ideological perspective and framing his discourse. At the discourse practice level, the study will examine how the interviews are created, circulated, and consumed. This involves, analyzing the interactions between Putin, and the interviewers, as well as the media's role in framing, and distributing the discourse. It will be, important to understand how the interviews are presented, and how translation affects the interpretation of Putin's rhetoric to fully grasp how the discourse is constructed, and interpreted by different audiences. At the socio-cultural practice level, the study will contextualize Putin's rhetoric within the broader social, and political structures. This dimension will analyze how his discourse reflects and upholds ideological, and power dynamics in the international sphere. It will explore, whether Putin's statements align with or challenge prevailing global power structures, and ideological frameworks, shedding

light on how his rhetoric interacts with and affects the larger context of international relations, and global politics. Together, these analytical frameworks offer a comprehensive approach to understanding how Putin's rhetoric constructs ideological divides, reinforces Russia's position, and challenges Western dominance, providing a detailed examination of the interplay between language, power, and ideology in political discourse.

D. Analysis and Discussion

Extract 1:

"What we count on is that nobody should interfere in domestic internal affairs of other countries, neither the U.S. in ours or we in— the USA's— political processes or any other nations. All nations of the world should be given an opportunity to develop calmly Even if there are crisis situations they have to be resolved by the people domestically, without any influence or interference from the outside. I don't think that this call by the U.S. administr— today's administration is worth anything. I— it appears to me that the U.S. government will continue to interfere in— in— political processes in other countries." (NBC News.com).

President Vladimir Putin in this extract expresses a clear stance on the issue of non-interference, reflecting a particular mental representation of International relations. He links both national sovereignty with the concept of self-determination. He refers to the United States and other nations as part of the cultural and historical representations and the conflicts in the global world. At the societal structures level, this extract is constructed in terms of groupness in which he considers Russia and other countries are victims of the United States interference in their domestic issues. This framing of the Us versus Them influences the audience's perception of the political conflicts and portrays the cognitive structures that shape Putin's discourse. The text analysis is presented through the phrases "nobody should interfere", and " domestic internal affairs " which emphasize Russai's strong position and reject any kind of external interference. Moreover, the use of the terms "crisis situations" versus "domestic resolution" stands for positive Us and Negative Them. At the discursive level, the extract implies that President Putin is engaging with the audience revealing the internal policies and reinforcing the country's solidarity. At the social practice level, this extract involves a criticism of the policy of the United States and its foreign intervention. In this extract, Putin reflects on the power dynamics of global

politics. He challenges the legitimacy of the United States and focuses on the sovereignty of his country and policy. Putin frames the United States policy as an interference issue in the domestic affairs of Russia. This framing creates a clear understanding of how the population can perceive a clear image of the United States interference as wrong and damaging. Further, he frames the continued interference as being illegitimate motivating other countries to reject this policy.

Extract2:
"Cyberspace is a very sensitive area. As of today, a great deal of human endeavors rely upon digital technologies, including the functioning of— government. And of course interference in those processes can cause a lot of damage and a lot of losses. And everybody understands that. And I am repeating a third time— for the third time: Let's sit down together and agree on joint work on how to— achieve security in this area. That is all."(NBC News.com).

In this extract, Putin constructs his mental representation of cyberspace as being a highly sensitive and crucial domain focusing on domestic security. He uses the phrase "human endeavors" to reflect his understanding of the modern dependency on technology to govern their social and political systems. His rhetoric is shaped by using many adjectives such as "sensitive" and "great" to highlight the role of technology. Then, he presents the point of interference again in his discourse stating the damage resulting as is seen in the clause "And of course, interference in those processes can cause a lot of damage and a lot of losses". This represents a cognitive schema of cyberspace. At the social structure level, the clause "Let's sit down together and agree on joint work on how to__ achieve security in this area", reflects Putin's policy and openness to cooperate with other countries to maintain security. He is framing the issue as something that requires collective action. The repetition of the phrase "for the third time" suggests urgency and signals the number of attempts he made to call for cooperation and at the same time the failure to do so. The discursive strategy that Putin implies in this extract appears in the appeal for cooperation to have cyberspace security and his repeated efforts to discuss this with other countries. At the social practice level, the ideological perspectives intended to imply global cooperation

and call for international cyberspace security. Putin's framing of cyberspace security as being great yet requiring collaboration positions him as an advocator who criticizes others' policies and at the same time, calls for cooperation. He focuses on collective responsibility and joint work to achieve cyberspace security.

Extract 3:

"The first thing I want to say is that over the last few years, the last few decades, we have developed a strategic partnership relationship— between Russia and China that previously had not been achieved in the history of our nations, a high level of— trust and cooperation in all areas: in politics, in the economy, in the area of technology, in the area of military and technical cooperation. We do not believe that China is a threat to us. That's one. China is a friendly nation. It has not declared us an enemy, as the United States has done."(NBC News.com).

In this extract, Putin frames the relationship between Russia, China and the United States. The phrase "strategic partnership relationship" represents a mental model framing the Russia-China relationship as being long-term and crucial. He uses the hedging "I think" to reflect what he thinks about Russia's relationship with China as compared to the United States. Using positive phrases such as "trust and cooperation" and "friendly nation" frames the relationship as encompassing partnership. The description in the clause, "China is a friendly nation" stands for the close relationship between both countries. Then Putin compares Russia's relationship with the United States pointing out that Russia has always been described as the enemy of the United States. Using the expression " high level" reinforces a positive cognitive representation of the relationship between the countries. Putin uses the negative word "enemy" as a contrastive linguistic device to compare China and the United States and how both countries frame their relationships with Russia. Putin criticizes the United States's policy by invoking the idea that Russia constitutes a threat against the United States. Moreover, repetition is another device used in Putin's rhetoric in the phrases "over the last few years" and "the last few decades" to refer to the long-term relationship between countries. The political context involves a diplomatic narrative concerning international relationships. The ideological frame highlights multipolar

international relations and attempts to change the United States' presupposition of Russia as a possible threat.

Conclusions

Based on Van Dijk's Ideology Square Model, President Vladimir Putin uses rhetorical strategies involving Us versus Them self-image, contrast, repetition, motivational framing, and positive and negative framing. He reveals a clear ideological divide, distinguishing Russia, and its allies ("Us") from Western countries, and media ("Them"). This binary opposition is established through strategic discourse that emphasizes a positive self-image for Russia while delegitimizing the West. Putin meticulously constructs a picture of Russia as a lawful, and collaborative global force. Furthermore, Putin highlights Russia's efforts towards maintaining arms control. Putin's image of the West as obstructive and antagonistic is negative to other people. According to him, United States interventions are reckless and self-serving while contrasting Russia's stable and constructive role with those unpredictable and disruptive actions. Thus, this representation portrays the West as a destabilizing agent that makes up stories to restrict Russia's strategic cooperation so that it can promote its agenda. Moreover, Putin focuses on Framing the United States policy as an interference in the affairs of Russia and other countries worldwide. This framing creates a clear understanding of how the population can perceive a clear image of the United States interference as wrong, damaging, and illegitimate motivating other countries to reject this policy.

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