

## A QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF MEDIA POLITICAL DISCOURSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MANIPULATION

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A survey-based qualitative-quantitative study of manipulation as a psycholinguistic phenomenon provides a good overview of statistical significance and knowledge. The use of qualitative-quantitative research methods in the current study can help us gain a more profound understanding of how people are able to perceive and detect cases of language manipulation. It appears necessary to emphasize that using the methods of qualitative-quantitative research, we can not only assess the respondents' opinions about "manipulation", its linguistic and extra-linguistic expression, but also accurately determine and accumulate the obtained knowledge and data about the phenomenon. The paper summarizes and concludes the results of the selected questions in the online questionnaire which can assist individuals in acquiring information for researches in the same or related fields.

**Keywords:** *manipulation, media - political discourse, qualitative-quantitative study, online survey software, questionnaire, manipulative language, data.*

### Introduction

A good understanding of Media-Political Discourse from the perspective of its manipulative potential expressed by certain linguistic and extra-linguistic properties provides another practical solution with certain suggestive points emerged in a survey that allow us to have a clear idea of how people understand the concept of manipulation and its implementation while reading media-political news articles. In this connection, we have decided to conduct our research with the help of two widely utilized methods of researches – qualitative and quantitative. “Qualitative research is called exploratory and is used to discover patterns in ideas and views, whereas quantitative research is

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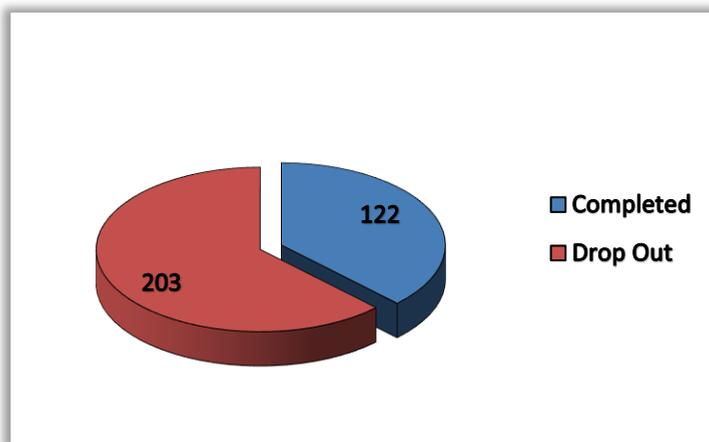
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used to measure the issue through producing numerical data or data that can be translated into usable statistics” (Enas et al, 2021). Another approach is that qualitative study provides insights and understanding of the problem setting through the exploratory and descriptive method that studies highly complex phenomena that quantitative research cannot explain.

It also develops a more profound understanding of the human experience, behaviours, intentions, and motivations referring to a category of study in which the investigator gives a greater importance to the participants’ opinions and experiences. On the contrary, quantitative research is regarded to be a type of research that employs natural science methods, such as mathematical, computational, and statistical methods to establish a cause-and-effect relationship and generate numerical data and facts. Because the research can be accurately and precisely measured, it is also known as empirical research. The information gathered by this method gives the researcher a possibility to classify, rank, or measure the data as well as create raw data graphs and tables making it easier to analyze the results (Sharique et al., p. 2829, 2019).

**Figure 1**  
Completion/dropout



<b>Viewed</b>	<b>Started</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Completion Rate</b>	<b>Drop Outs (After Starting)</b>	<b>Average Time to Complete Survey</b>
<b>746</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>37.54%</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>3 minutes</b>

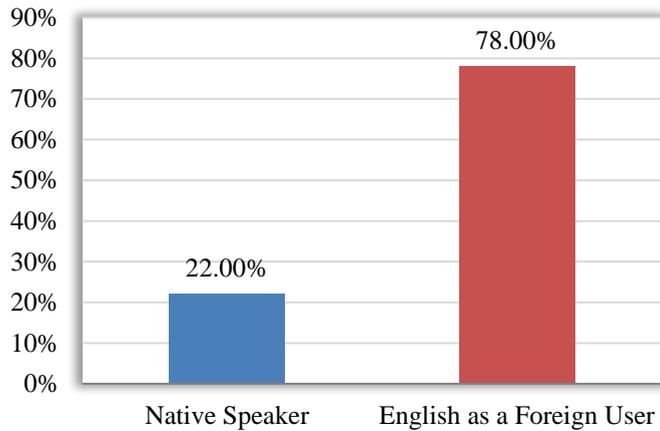
Within the context of this study, we have decided to conduct the following survey to learn how people with different language abilities grasp and understand the concept of manipulation, as a psycho-linguistic phenomenon, as well as what factors influence their decision when selecting certain media-political news items to read. Setting off the methodology of the current survey we are aimed at identifying what are the main linguistic and extra-linguistic components that people are likely to find attention grabbing, propagating and manipulative while reading news reports. This is supported by the fact that surveys of this kind are important and useful as models of comprehension of the manipulative nature of the language since outlining the details, specifics and observations provided by the public allows for logical and reasonable conclusions to be reached.

The following survey “Media-Political Manipulation” was conducted via online survey software “*QuestionPro*” (<https://www.questionpro.com/v18/>) and the results are based on the answers provided by a reasonable number of participants, as evidenced in the figures presented below. Figure 1 shows the number of respondents (325) who have answered the offered questions completely or partially.

Against the background of this, it seems essential to emphasize that the respondents were requested to choose their language proficiency, since we strongly believe that in the realization of manipulation, one requires receptive and expressive language skills in the aspects of syntax, vocabulary, semantics, etc. where language knowledge can be demonstrated. Dependent on the mentioned skills and abilities of the readers, the interpretations and comprehension can vary greatly thus, giving the writer a chance to implement manipulation.

This approach aims at identifying whether people’s cognitive control can be similar irrespective of their being native speakers or foreign users. The survey reveals the participation of different respondents from different parts of the world: (*see figures 2, 3*)

**Figure 2**  
Your English proficiency



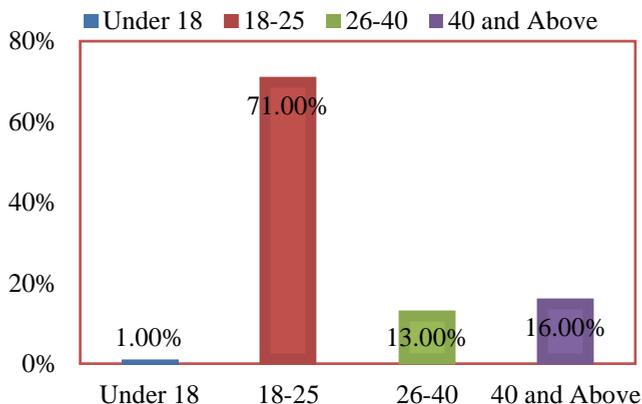
**Figure 3**  
Distribution/countries



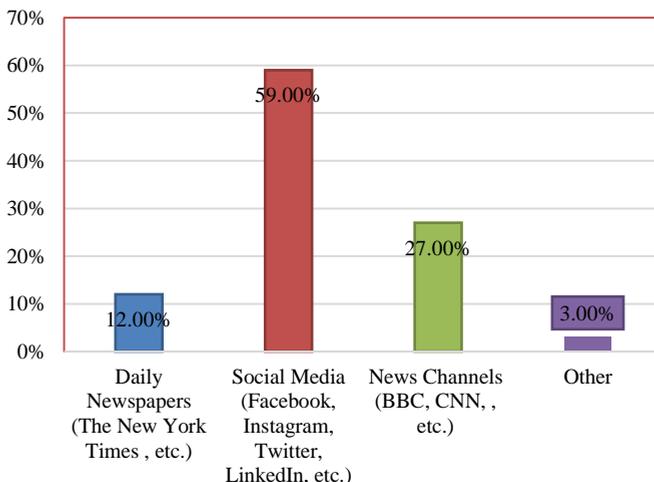
Of special interest is the fact, that people experience heavy social media use in their daily lives where they encounter an uncontrollable information flow. The factor of age as one of the questions in the current survey will help us identify different age groups, interested and following news articles that have special reference to politics. Finding out which media platforms are used as their main source of information enables us to come to preliminary conclusions. Added to this, it seems essential to emphasize that the 71% of the participants are aged 18-25 (*see figure 4*) and 59% of them (*see figure 5*) are using social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) as their primary source of information.

Thus, the results of the survey make our statement mentioned above logical and rational.

**Figure 4**  
Age distribution chart



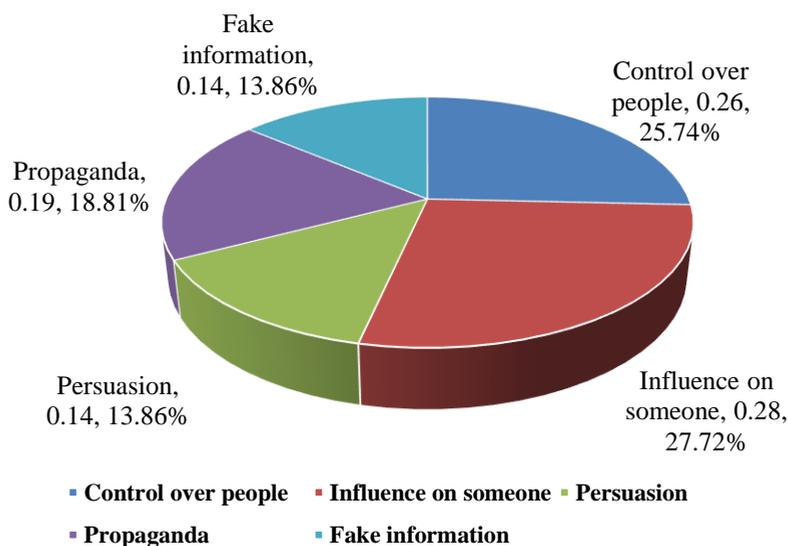
**Figure 5**  
Media platform distribution chart



The term manipulation has been defined differently by researchers in their approaches to the study of the concept (see also about it in Gasparyan, Harutyunyan, 2021). It was also interesting to observe how manipulation is viewed in the eye of the reader. Interestingly enough, to the question “How do you understand the ‘concept of manipulation?’”, the participants (27.72%)

answered “influence on someone”, while 25.74 % chose “control over people”. For the 18.81% of the respondents, manipulation is “propaganda”, others (13.86%) think it is “fake information” and persuasion” (see figure 6).

**Figure 6**  
Response distribution chart



Experience shows that people, willingly or not, “love words”, not only because the latter make any written text more interesting, but also because we generally give meaning to and get meaning from them. Media-political news articles are not exceptions, since the journalists love to play with words changing their denotational, connotational and pragmatic aspects, so that their news reports are attention grabbing and make an intense impact.

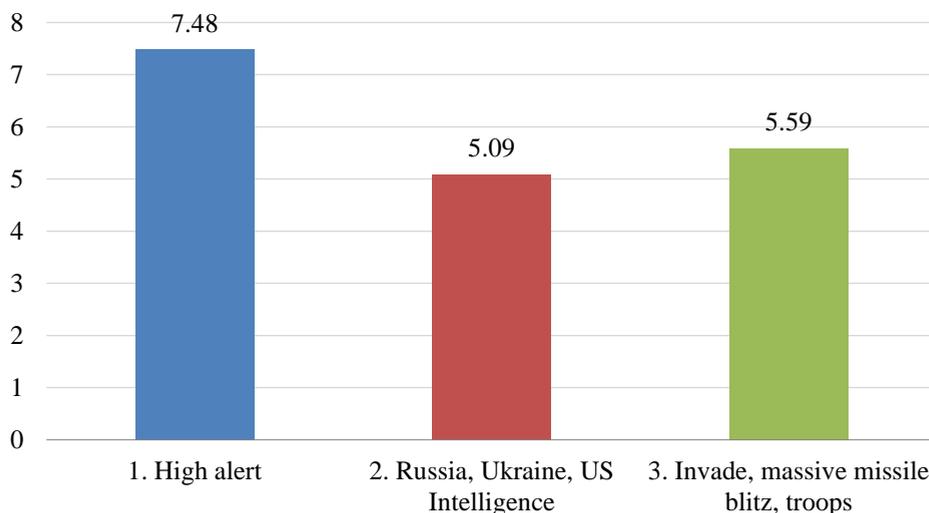
The study of the lexical aspect of the media-political news articles has brought us to the conclusion that purposefully picking words that might seem harsh and powerful in a given context, the journalist has the intention to manipulate. We are also inclined to think that extremely compelling and contentious themes can also have influence on the semantic meaning of the lexical components and mislead the reader (see also about it in Gasparyan & Harutyunyan, 2022).

To be able to elucidate the above point we have decided to turn to a brief consideration of the example in the survey to see how respondents analyze and differentiate between the constituent parts of the lexical components. For this,

the participants were requested to respond to the question: Which of the lexical components (words and phrases) do you find attention grabbing in the headline “*HIGH ALERT Russia set to invade Ukraine at any time with massive missile blitz and 200,000 troops, US intelligence claims?*” by using the slider to scale from 1 to 10. The survey shows that the expression “HIGH ALERT” is an attention grabbing phrase and can be manipulative in the context of the article. On the other hand, it may be suggested that the proper nouns “*Russia*”, “*Ukraine*”, “*US Intelligence*” as well as military vocabulary “*invade*”, “*massive blitz*”, “*troops*” also have a manipulative potential, which to our firm belief, is largely conditioned and determined by some extra-linguistic, historical, political, etc., properties (See about it in figure 7).

**Figure 7**

Response distribution chart



The analysis of the news article “*IF DONALD TRUMP ISN’T SH--TING HIS PANTS OVER TODAY’S JANUARY 6 HEARING, HE PROBABLY SHOULD BE*” has led us to observe several lexical, morphological, syntactic and stylistic components of the language that have been used to convey the manipulative intention of the journalist. (see picture 1)

**Picture 1**

(taken from Levin, 2022)



On that premise, we chose to assess how these manipulation related factors impact the associations and connections that people form after reading the headline and viewing the image attached to the news story. In the light of these data, we can come to the conclusion that the journalist's intention to bring a lively headline into life has been succeeded by the choice of the image which has incompatibility to the news story.

The inclusion of the question in the survey brought to the opinion that the majority of the respondents think "Donald Trump is worried, scared, frightened, concerned, thoughtful, etc." (*see figures 8, 9,10,11*).

**Figure 8**

Response ID	Response
80798248	Donald Trump is scared
80683198	Trump is thinking that Social Media talks nonsense
80665819	A president
80665384	Trump looks worried in the image and the headline feels threatening.
80663183	Donald Trump should be worried
80638728	Trump is frightened/worried
80576486	Superficial
80556481	There is something going on he should be worried about.

80528492	Donald T is concerned, thinking of a way-out rapid solution, knows he failed...
80507091	A non-professional media outlet,
80501542	Donald Trump seems to be concerned
80467820	Donald is worried
80460475	It is an opinion piece and as such I will have to be wary of its content
80457601	Gosh another Donald Trump issue?
80453889	Image doesn't match the headline. False info, manipulation, miss-information.
80450437	He has doubts about something
80437952	Manipulation
80421537	Trump should be worried
80416773	Donald Trump should be worried about January 6 hearing
80414021	Trump is a good leader.

Figure 9

Response ID	Response
80501542	Donald Trump seems to be concerned
80467820	Donald is worried
80460475	It is an opinion piece and as such I will have to be wary of its content
80457601	Gosh another Donald Trump issue?
80453889	Image doesn't match the headline. False info, manipulation, miss-information.
80450437	He has doubts about something
80437952	Manipulation
80421537	Trump should be worried
80416773	Donald Trump should be worried about January 6 hearing
80414021	Trump is a good leader.

Figure 10

Response ID	Response
80193161	I don't know he looks kind of thoughtless
80193133	Looks like he doesn't want to accept something
80191159	Donald Trump is worried about
80192995	Donald Tramp is afraid of something
80192766	Scared, fearful, defeated
80192762	Donald Trump is avoiding something
80192755	Donald Trump doesn't even care
80192695	Fear, at loss, nervousness

Figure 11

Response ID	Response
80210410	Misleading title
80210316	Donald Trump should be worried about getting into trouble.
80210156	Donald Trump should be worried, but isn't
80209189	Usually, I don't pay attention for news of this type, because they make me nervous.
80209036	Instinctive antipathy for Trump. Rejection of language used (too informal, inappropriate, partisan). Would not click.
80208988	Donald trump should be scared about something
80208586	D. Trump is thinking

Media reports are texts created for a specific purpose. Like other pieces of writing, they contain aesthetically colored words and expressive means, figurative meanings that increase the probability of language manipulation. In the given example “*Entire population of the region was subjected to **violence beyond belief, violence which was planned to exterminate the whole Turkish people of the region to the last man, woman and child***” we have detected cases of exaggeration, enumeration, anadiplosis, etc. that are used for special impact and propaganda, to provoke prejudice, mislead, change the contextual meaning, etc. To be able to clarify the point we have included this sentence in the survey for critical analysis and as a result with a brief account we can state that the anonymous journalist has reached to his/her goal, i.e., manipulation. The classification of the data is as follows (see figures 12, 13, 14, 15)

Figure 12

Response ID	Response
80412628	curiosity, anger, frustration.
80406091	Despair
80405647	pain, fear
80395802	“Violence beyond belief” is manipulative. The violence should be described using precise examples. Attribution should be given that the entire population was to be exterminated.
80389061	Horror
80388532	Fear, horrified
80384134	Anger, sadness, fear, confusion
80377764	Outrage
80371887	Anger, Despair

Figure 13

Response ID	Response
80501542	That's ridiculous because there are historical facts proving the organization of genocides organized by Turkish government themselves.
80467820	Anger
80460475	Sadness, despair, hopelessness
80453889	Lie, exaggeration, false information.
80437952	No emotions
80421537	Anger
80416773	anger
80414021	We live in difficult times.

Figure 14

Response ID	Response
80798248	Pain and inflammation
80683198	Turkey is faking history, because as a matter of fact is one of the countries that organized 2 genocides at the same time.
80665819	Ache
80665384	If I was asked this question a few years ago, I'd say: "I feel relief". But as for now, being a descendant of a nation that overcame the genocide, and even more importantly, having felt the pain of a war, having lost a lot of innocent people, I'd feel anger after reading the sentence above, because I think I'd never wish any other nation walk in our shoes (even though they're our so-called enemies). And what is more important, from my pov, innocent people shouldn't suffer because of some idiotic "political games"
80663183	Empathy, despair, anger
80638728	Anger
80576486	Would want facts. Curious
80556481	pity
80528492	Curiosity, compassion, alert
80507091	Sadness, curiosity

Figure 15

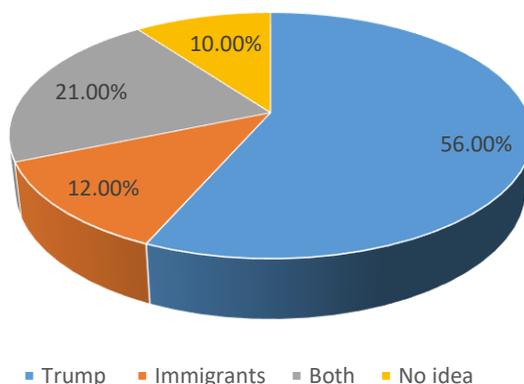
Response ID	Response
80366218	Fear, hopelessness
80363646	Despair. It happens over and over again all over the world. I did notice it said Turkish, when my Armenian heritage goes to the genocide so it peaks my interest to see what else is said in the article.
80356514	Sadness, fear, hysteria
80350146	Curiosity, shock, disbelief

80342389	despair, sadness, disbelief, curiosity, anger (a little)
80339796	Anger
80339779	curiosity, suspicion

As generally accepted, active and passive voices are one of the strategies of language manipulation on the syntactic level. We are inclined to think that the grammatical voice can greatly influence the strength of the effect (See about it also in Nordlund, 2003, Gasparyan & Harutyunyan, 2022).

The inclusion of the sentence in the active voice is also listed in the survey in order of importance, as it can help us verify the statement that in subject-predicate sentences subjects are responsible for the results of the action, most of the time bearing all the responsibility and guilt in the eye of the reader. To the question “*Who do you think should bear the responsibility and guilt according to the sentence? – “Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants ‘Animals’ in Rant”*”, the 56% of the participants, whether subconsciously or not, have chosen Donald Trump, and only 12% of them choose Immigrants. It is interesting to note, that only 21% of the respondents consider both sides to be responsible, and to our surprise those answers are mostly among native speakers who are not only aware of the political situation in the country, but also show determination to read between the lines and give feedback (*see figure 16*).

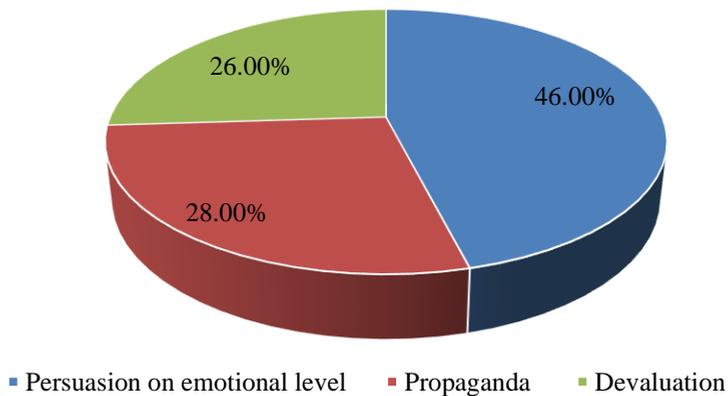
**Figure 16**  
Response distribution chart



Concentrating on other results of the survey, it seems essential to highlight the results of the following question “*What is the central message of the given sentence? – “Trump hates you, even if you love him”*”. Our analysis has shown that the journalist’s goal is to utilize such language components as conditional

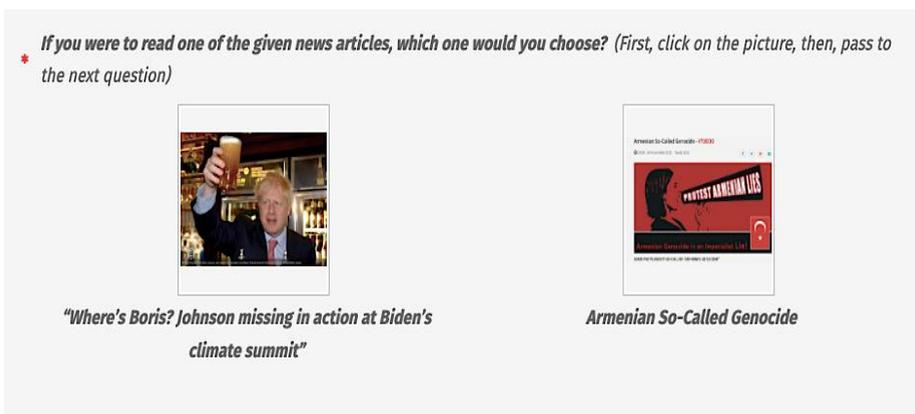
sentence, ellipsis, oxymoron to convince and influence on the emotional level rather than rational. To support our views, we have decided to bound our observations up with the survey to have a clear understanding about public opinion. As a result, 48% of the respondents think, that the central message of the sentence is persuasion on the emotional level, 28% think it is propaganda, while the other 26% of the respondents are intended to think it is devaluation (*see figure 17*).

**Figure 17**  
Response distribution chart



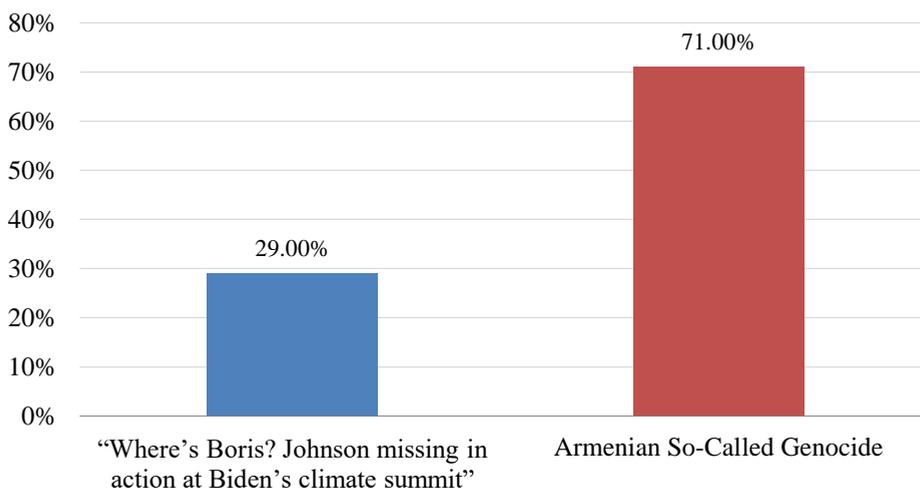
In the framework of this study, we have also tried to understand whether people reading a media-political news article pay attention to its contextual or visual components, or both. To reach our aim, we asked the respondents to pick one of the two given news reports they might prefer to read (*see figure 18*).

**Figure 18**



It is interesting to note that 71% of the respondents have chosen the second news article “*Armenian So-Called Genocide*” (See figure 19). According to the results, 80% of their choice was conditioned by the headline and the textual components, while the choice of the 20% of participants was determined by the image, design and colors.

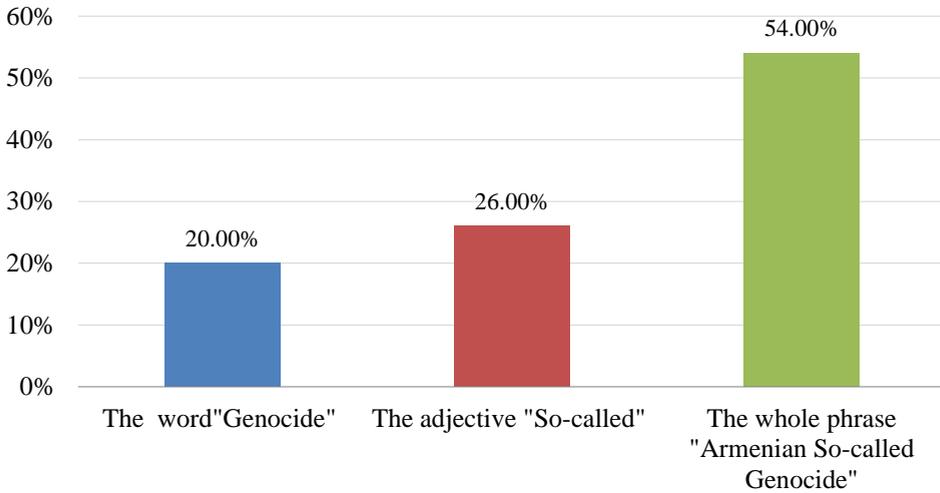
**Figure 19**  
Response distribution chart



People, who have chosen the second article based on the textual components, consider the whole headline attention grabbing (54%). Added to this, it is of paramount importance to note that the word “*Genocide*” itself is provocative, since the 20% of the people’s choice was determined by that word only.

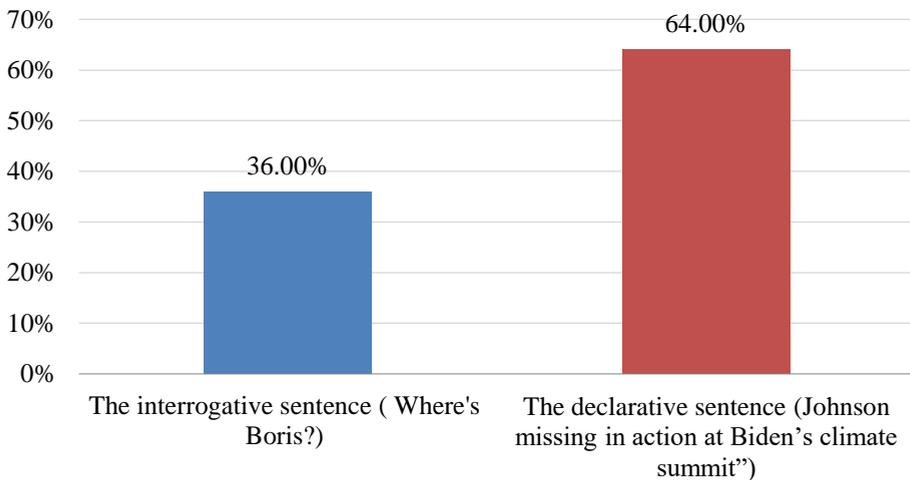
Interestingly enough, we can see that in our classification of the options the word “*Genocide*” has been applied twice, which allows us to come to the preliminary conclusion that the word is attention grabbing and propagating (74% of the total responses) (see figure 20).

**Figure 20**  
Response distribution chart

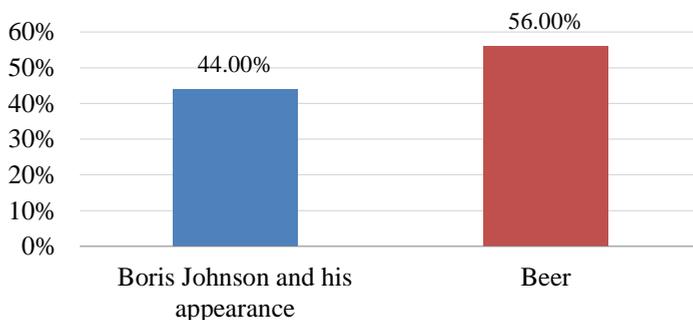


As far as the other news article is concerned, (*“Where’s Boris? Johnson missing in action at Biden’s climate summit”*), 29% of the participants found it interesting to read. Thus, we have the following results: (see figures 21, 22)

**Figure 21**  
Response distribution chart



**Figure 22**  
Response distribution chart



### **Conclusion**

The observation of the online survey results makes it possible to come to a definite conclusion that people can easily be manipulated if they don't have a critical approach to the texts they are reading. In the broadest sense of the word manipulators who target various groups of individuals have different purposes, such as changing their perspectives, forming/building public opinion, devaluing, gaining more clicks, earning money, distorting the facts, advertising, and so on. It may well be concluded that most of the time, individuals read news that provides information on political events, investigations, crimes, wars, and electoral campaigns, and one way or another, they create their opinions subconsciously.

An obvious case is that the Internet provides us with access to never-ending journalism, and we cannot help noting that it is difficult to resist being deceived, because it is not every journalist's duty and sole responsibility to be unbiased enough to reflect correct stories and real facts while still pursuing personal profit.

The survey results help us come to the conclusion that the targeted audience can easily be manipulated on the visual level, because most of the time people choose the articles based on the images and design features. In this regard, it is important to note that the vast majority of people who are sufficiently informed pay attention to language components such as words, grammar and other details. However, depending on the number of the viewers, a lot more people simply click the news because they find the pictures, headline design, font and colors appealing, and in this sense, one of the manipulator's intentions, which is to gain numbers and earn money is realized.

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**ՄԵԴԻԱ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԴԻՍԿՈՒՐՍԻ  
ՈՐԱԿԱԿԱՆ-ՔԱՆԱԿԱԿԱՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ  
ՄՍԱՇԱՀԱՐԿՄԱՆ ՏԵՄԱՆԿՑՈՒՆԻՑ**

**Ռաֆայել Հարությունյան**

Մտաշահարկման որակական-քանակական ուսումնասիրությամբ վիճակագրական նշանակության և գիտելիքների մասին լավ պատկերացում կարելի է ստանալ տարբեր առցանց հարցումների միջոցով: Այս ուսումնասիրության մեջ որակական-քանակական հետազոտության մեթոդների օգտագործումը կարող է օգնել մեզ ավելի խոր պատկերացում կազմել այն մասին, թե ինչպես են մարդիկ կարողանում ընկալել և բացահայտել լեզվական մտաշահարկման դեպքերը մեդիա-քաղաքական լուրեր ընթերցելիս: Հարկ է նշել, որ որակական-քանակական հետազոտության մեթոդների կիրառմամբ մենք կարող ենք ոչ միայն գնահատել հարցվողների կարծիքը «մտաշահարկում» երևույթի, դրա լեզվական և արտալեզվական արտահայտման միջոցների և առանձնահատուկությունների վերաբերյալ, այլև հնարավորինս ճշգրտորեն դասակարգել և կիրառել ստացված գիտելիքներն ու տվյալները:

*Բանալի բառեր՝ մտաշահարկում, մեդիա-քաղաքական դիսկուրս, որակական-քանակական ուսումնասիրություն, առցանց հարցման ծրագիր, հարցադրում, մտաշահարկման լեզու, տվյալներ:*