Are Media Actually a Medium and What if Not?

Observing Recourse in the Discourse of Persuasiveness in Rhetorical Speech and Media Manipulation

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Abstract

This article discusses the question *Are Media Actually a Medium and What if Not?* Looking at the persuasiveness of rhetorical speech in the theory of rhetoric, contrasting it with manipulation techniques established by media as a crucial approach to the contemporary situation imposed by media on humans. After a distinction of the medium in the theory of rhetoric and media and the systematic stance of the concept of the medium as a stylistic means within the theory of rhetoric, we show in a case study of a speech produced by ChatGPT the differences between AI-generated imitative speech fabrication and human speech designed in accordance with rhetorical principles. Further, we distinguish the different frameworks of human communication stemming from rhetoric and technical media that result in the effect of altering the mind of a communicator exposed to them. In the last part we discuss and answer the initial question, presenting a model of media types based on their manipulative impact and the distinctive features of speech and the medium in the theory of rhetoric and content of media that are as containing and contained means of communication open to manipulation as an effect of an auxiliary recourse within a multi-layered discourse.

Keywords: Digital Media, Media Theory, Theory of Rhetoric, Artificial Intelligence

1. Introduction: Medium and Media – Differentiation by Contextual Frameworks

The Medium in the Theory of Rhetoric

We use the concept of persuasiveness by the medium as outlined in the theory of rhetoric, contrasting it with media and show their manipulative effects in contemporary media. The place of the medium in the theory of rhetoric is in the area of the stylistic features of the wordings of a speech. In the treatise *Art of Rhetoric* written by Aristotle the term *medium* is applied to a genre of style. Here in Book III Aristotle (1831) writes that style is related to one of the genres (γένει) that require a matching stylistic expression (λέξις):

- Δεῖ δὲ μὴ λεληθέναι ὅτι ἄλλη ἑκάστῳ γένει ἁρμόττει λέξις. (1414a)
- It must not escape notice that a different style of speech suits each genre.

(Transl. Fee-A. Haase)

The concept of the medium is in the Aristotelian *Rhetoric* mentioned as what is the middle (τὸ μέσον) in *Book* III (1414b), where Aristotle mentions that for the style of the juridical speech (ἡ δικανική), if it is babbling, it is not distinct, nor if it is brief (ἄν τε γὰρ ἀδολεσχῇ, οὐ σαφής, οὐδὲ ἂν σύντομος) (Transl. Fee-A. Haase). Instead of these extremes Aristotle recommends what is the middle (τὸ μέσον), concluding:

- ἀλλὰ δῆλον ὅτι τὸ μέσον ἁρμόττει. (1414)
- Rather it is clear that what is the middle fits.

(Transl. Fee-A. Haase)

Subsequently, the concept of the medium is by Quintilian (1920-1922) in the Institutio Oratoria (12, 10, 58-60) connected to the middle mode of speech. In Book 12 (12.10.60) Quintilian uses the expression middle mode (medius modus) for the middle style of speech comparing it to a river:

- Medius hic modus et tralationibus crebrior et figuris erit iucundior, egressionibus amoenus, compositione aptus, sententiis dulcis, lenior tamquam amnis et lucidus quidem sed virentibus utrimque ripis inumbratus.
- This middle mode will be both more frequent in metaphors and more delightful in rhetorical figures, pleasant in digressions, suitable in composition, sweet in maxims, smoother like a river, and certainly bright, but shaded on both sides by green banks.

(Tr. Fee-A. Haase)

Medium in contemporary theory of rhetoric is documented in Silva Rhetoricae. The Forest of Rhetoric. Burton (2007) writes here in Content/Form. Res/Verba. Logos/Lexis about the rhetorical tradition of style and speech:

- Rhetoric requires understanding a fundamental division between what is communicated through language and how this is communicated. Aristotle phrased this as the difference between logos (the logical content of a speech) and lexis (the style and delivery of a speech).

From the systemic perspective of rhetoric the medium of rhetorical speech is self-contained in *logos (λόγος)*, a word that spans a field of meanings across speech, wording,

and reasoning of the mind. Logos can be present as manifested speech in different media beyond direct speech of a speaker directed to others. As Lane (2004) writes, "Rhetoric is understood politically as a sub-language of influential, and "correct" expressions, which can be applied to a range of media, from visual, textual, and performance forms of art."

Perelman and Sloane (2026) wrote in the article *Rhetoric:*

- Above all, a modern rhetorician would insist that the figures, like all elements of rhetoric, reflect and determine not only the conceptualizing processes of the speaker's mind but also an audience's potential response. For all these reasons figures of speech are crucial means of examining the transactional nature of discourse.

In contrast to rhetoric related to speech Bogost (2007: IX) defines procedural rhetoric in the preface of *Persuasive Games. The Expressive Power of Videogames* as rule-based representaions and interactions:

- I call this new form procedural rhetoric, the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures. This type of persuasion is tied to the core affordances of the computer: computers run processes, they execute calculations and rule-based symbolic manipulations. But I want to suggest that videogames, unlike some forms of computational persuasion, have unique persuasive powers.

Chachanidze (2026: 1) in Aristotelian Rhetoric in *Contemporary Media Discourse: A Linguistic Analysis of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos* wrote:

- In the contemporary information ecosystem, media discourse has evolved into a highly complex communicative domain where the boundaries between information, interpretation, and persuasion are increasingly blurred. Modern journalism no longer functions solely as a neutral transmitter of facts; rather, it operates as a strategic discursive practice that actively shapes public perception, constructs social realities, and influences collective attitudes. Within this context, understanding the mechanisms of persuasion embedded in media language has become a central concern across disciplines such as media linguistics, discourse analysis, and communication studies.

Nordquist (2019) defines the so-called *middle style* with reference to ancient rhetoric referring to examples in genres of writing ranging from the concrete example of *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* written by John Steinbeck (1962) and the literary genres of romances and novels, scholarly articles, historical narratives, legal decisions, and medical case studies to digital news stories in *The New York Times*, weblogs, and CD reviews in *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Nordquist (2019) states about the *middle style:*

- In classical rhetoric, the middle style is reflected in speech or writing that (in terms of word choice, sentence structures, and delivery) falls between the extremes of the plain style and the grand style.

Contemporary research on rhetoric today is well aware of the distinction between rhetorical speech and media. So Mateus (2021:1) in *When Homo Rhetoricus Meets the Media: The Field and Scope of Media Rhetoric* mentions in the preface of the volume that it "considers the paramount implications to persuasive communication that media brought regarding how we

think, express, argument and feel together". Mateus (2021:1) here distinguishes between *media practice of rhetoric activity and the rhetorical practice of media activity*, stating that the book "is concerned with both the media practice of rhetoric activity and the rhetorical practice of media activity: it respects how the media integrated rhetorical speech, and analyses how rhetoric adapted to media societies. Media and rhetoric are highly dependent on each other because, to persuasively communicate today, media must also be considered."

Similarly, the online writing lab *Purdue OWL* (2026) at Purdue University considers the concept of the medium separated from rhetorical style principles, while acknowledging that *medium* and *genre* of writing are related to each other in the section *Business Writing for Administrative and Clerical Staff on Genre and Medium:*

- Genre and medium are closely related, although a bit different. Genre is the form of your writing (a business letter, memo, report). A medium is the way in which a piece of writing is delivered (email versus a mailed paper copy, for example). Genre and medium are both determined by audience and purpose. For example, if you need to let people in your office know that there will be a test of the alarm system in a few days, a brief email might be the easiest and most efficient way to get that information across.

From its foundations in Greek antiquity until today, the systematic place of the concept of the medium in the theory of rhetoric exists as a stylistic concept for a formed speech. Contemporary research and practitioners of rhetoric consider media as means of communication distinctively different from the medium as a description of a rhetorical style.

Beyond the Rhetorical Medium: Media – Contemporary Definitions and the Impact on Research

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2026) has two entries for the respective noun *media*. In the first entry of *media* (2026) it states that the earliest known use of the noun *media* is in the 1840s with reference to the earliest evidence in *Oxford English Dictionary* from 1841 in the writing of the ethnologist and philologist Robert Latham. In the second entry of *media* (2026) as the main means of mass communication the earliest known use is recorded in the 1920s in the writing of G. Snow in 1923. Thus, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of the word *media* in the context of communication emerged in the English language in the early 20th century, in 1923. Three years later, in 1926, John Logie Baird gave the first public live demonstration of a mechanical television in London, transmitting an image of a face. This use of the word media in the English vernacular language emerged at the time of the massive use of electricity for the transmission of information. *Medium Theory*, most notably expressed in the statement *The medium is the message* as the title of the first chapter of *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (first published in 1964) written by McLuhan (1994: 7), assumes that any medium has an impact on what is communicated, explaining:

- In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.

According to McLuhan (1994: 7), automation brings positive and negative effects:

- Thus, with automation, for example, the new patterns of human association tend to eliminate jobs it is true. That is the negative result. Positively, automation creates roles for people, which is to say depth of involvement in their work and human association that our preceding mechanical technology has destroyed.

This theoretical stance of media as the extensions of man for an explanation of the function - ality of media as proposed by McLuhan in 1964 is challenged today, since – from a technical perspective – media have increased in terms of their availability and variety, while most recent developments like Artificial Intelligence (AI) are labels that present media with anthropoid feature. As mass media and technical devices are selected by the users enable them to communicate in their pre-set technical frameworks, communicative exchange in media is a condition for communication. As for research, the functionality and effects of media can be theoretically described and explained, but due to their technological change, research requires observing and describing distinctive features of media in the media landscape.

The Concepts of Rhetorical Persuasion vs. Media Manipulation: Critical Distinctions of the Ethical Stance of the Human in Rhetoric and Communication Media

Persuasiveness is in the theory of rhetoric a kind of influence on others based on rhetorical features of what is communicated with the three impacting appeals of *ethos, logos*, and *pathos*, custom, words, and emotion. Central to rhetorical persuasiveness is the goodness of the speaker. So Quintilian (1920-1922) in the *Institutio Oratoria* (12, 1, 1) defines the speaker (*orator*) with reference to the Stoic Cato as a "good man experienced in speaking" (Transl. Fee-A. Haase; "Vir bonus dicendi peritus"). In other words expressed, a good human being is the condition and prerequisite for a persuasive rhetorical speech.

Beyond rhetoric, persuasion can come into existence due to other means that influence others. We use the umbrella term manipulation for them and define manipulation as an obscured and obscuring approach to change the mind of other persons concerning a thing in their own interest, in our specific cases by the involvement of media. For the English noun *manipulation* five meanings are listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2024), one of them labelled obsolete. *Manipulation* has developed meanings and uses in subjects including chemistry (late 1700s), medicine (1810s), and stock market (1820s). The English manipulation is a borrowing from French *manipulation*. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the earliest evidence for manipulation is from 1728, in the writing of the encyclopaedist Ephraim Chambers. As for the origin and history of manipulation of the noun *manipulation*, the Online Etymology Dictionary (2026) states that by 1730 its meaning was a method of digging ore derived from French *manipulation* from *manipule* "handful" (a pharmacists' measure) from the Latin word manipulus "handful, sheaf, bundle" from *manus* "hand" (from PIE root **man-* (2) "hand") and the root of plere "to fill" (from PIE root *pele- (1) "to fill"). Its sense of "skillful handling of objects" is attested by 1826 and extended 1828 to "handling or managing of persons", especially to one's own advantage.

Contemporary cases of manipulation by media are publicly discussed. A critical stance towards the use of contemporary media is held by the Catholic Church. In his *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* (2026) Pope Leo XIV uses the concept of the means that overshadows humanity with dehumanisation without a god and the use of others as a means as a temptation today present in "a technical guise". In *Two Biblical Images* (10) the *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* states as stance towards AI that "we must, then, avoid the "Babel syndrome," namely the idolatry of profit that sacrifices the weak, a uniformity that neutralizes differences, and the pretense that a single language — even a digital one — can translate everything, including the mystery of the person, into data and performance." The "risk of dehumanization" is explained from the theological perspective as "building a future that excludes God and reduces the other to a means" and traced back to "an ancient and ever-new temptation that today takes on a technical guise." The recommendation of the *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* encourages the making of the place "City of God" for returning exiles: "Instead, let us choose the "way of Nehemiah," which highlights the importance of working together to make

the City of God a safe place for returning exiles." With truth as a "common good" the *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* (102) establishes a general value that cannot be owned. The "manipulation of information" in digital media that employ artificial intelligence is highlighted rejecting the self-presentation of AI systems as "neutral or objective":

- 102. The use of AI is never a purely technical matter: when it enters processes that affect people's lives, it touches on rights, opportunities, status and freedom. [...] There are clearly harmful uses, such as the manipulation of information or violations of privacy. Yet there is also a subtler danger, for when AI systems present themselves as neutral and objective, they end up reflecting and reinforcing the stereotypes or ideological bias of their designers and developers.

In *Communication and the Collective Imagination* (135) the *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* addresses the effects of digital content: "The content that circulates within digital environments shapes how people perceive the world and introduces into the collective consciousness images and narratives that direct our desires and influence our daily choices." The *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* (136) notices that the manipulation of digital media stems from the owners of digital platforms and requires guidance "by the pursuit of truth" and "respect of human dignity" to avoid that "the culture fostered on the internet does not become an instrument of excessive distraction, homogenization or dominance, but rather a setting in which inner freedom and critical thought can mature." In *Toward an Ecology of Communication* (137) the *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* recommends that

- 137. Our first task is neither to demonize nor idolize technological tools, but to utilize them on the basis of a fundamental principle, namely that truth is a common good and not the property of those with power or influence. We must therefore promote an ecology of communication.

In the *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* the "ability to affect the collective imagination" is considered the powerful impact of "those who control digital platforms and means of communication". The imagination is a non-realistic and fantastic mental faculty and what it contains. In publicly visible media content across media platforms imaginative elements of the discourse are formed and their back-binding to reality is hard to verify.

Not only due to digitally and by automation produced data assemblages AI is problematic, but in any 'digitally born' content with a reduced degree of reference to the non-digital world, in each instance its relevance must be critically assessed. Additionally, the question of its authorship and ownership is problematic. The content is not only open to manipulation, but also its authorship and so the responsibility for the content is problematic. While in the theory of classical rhetoric the ethical stance of the speaker is implemented in the rhetorical framework, technical devices functioning as media require a much wider perspective and spectrum of ethics involving owners, users, and the settings of the technical devices themselves as potential sources of manipulation by media and other negative media effects.

The Research Question and Theoretical Fundamentals: Discourse Analytics by Remodelling the Status Quo of the Theory of Rhetoric

The Research Question

The research question *Are Media Actually a Medium and What if Not?* confronts the concept of media as means of communication with the concept of the medium,

which is fundamentally grasped and historically in linguistics traceable to what represents an 'in-between-state'. Methodologically, we approach the modern concept of media by contrasting features of the medium and media and what effects the latter have beyond a means of persuasion with the systemic functions of the medium as a classified style. It is not only at the linguistic level a challenge to understand the difference between medium and media in their contextual framework. In its most simplistic conceptual understanding, the word *medium* represents a. something what is between something else (as the middle) and/or b. what contains something else (as the means). We can transfer these conceptual features of the historical linguistic meanings of medium to the meaning of media in communication processes: Thus, the word media represents media with the features

a. to be something located between users who communicate

b. to be the containing means of what is communicated

These features of media are immediately challenged when it becomes obvious that what is communicated by media is neither objectively true but, on the contrary, subjectively produced by a communicator) or emerged from a pure human origin (as currently most predominant in AI content), nor can the media be distinguished as a container from its content. At that point, the association of the media as a means between communicating entities fails. Here is our starting point to have a closer look at contemporary media.

Theoretical Foundations of the Theory of Rhetoric: The Four Categories of Change as the Underlying Principle of Rhetorical Speech

The four categories of change are in the theory of rhetoric considered an underlying principle of the formation of style in a rhetorical speech. Further to the above-mentioned use of the medium as a stylistic term for a particular genre of speech with stylistic features located between two other styles, we describe now how stylistic speech is produced in accordance with the theory of rhetoric. The four categories are:

- Addition
- Subtraction
- Transposition
- Substitution

Burton (2007) in *Silva Rhetoricae. The Forest of Rhetoric* describes the four categories of change with reference to the Quintilianian *quadripartita ratio* (*Institutio Oratoria* 1, 5, 38) as follows:

- Addition, subtraction, transposition, and substitution comprise the four categories of change. These are fundamental rhetorical strategies for the manipulation and variation of discourse across a vast array of linguistic levels: word forms, sentences, paragraphs, entire texts or speeches, etc.

While systematically connected to *logos* comprising word, speech, and reasoning, the categories of change can also be considered an underlying principle for rhetorical phenomena in mediated texts that contain speech. In mediated formats (e.g., a digital video platform with a live stream of a speech) these figures can also occur in rhetorical speech.

In the theory of rhetoric *addition* is the process of producing speech by the production of rhetorical elements (figures of words, figures of thought) that add something to the wording, forming a figure. Examples are pleonasms or vivid descriptions. In media, these figures are present in mediated speech. Examples are pleonasms in written speech, technically recorded speech, and speech in non-digital or digital multimedia formats with figures from an underlying process of addition. *Subtraction* is the process of producing speech by figures of words and thought that omit something in the wording. Examples are the ellipsis of a word or the omission of several words in rhetorical speech. In mediated formats of speech such figures can occur. Examples in contemporary media are media texts in print or digital media with an ellipsis, e g. headlines of news stories that omit the verb *to be*. *Transposition* occurs in rhetorical speech when figures of words or thoughts present an exchange in the wording. Examples are the change of the standard word order in a sentence or the exchange of sections in a speech. In mediated speech these exchanges can occur in rhetorical speech. Digital news and news in legacy media employ as a standard format of news writing the latest events first and the last at the end of the narrative, referirng to the rhetorical principle of *the latest as the first* (*hysteron proteron*, *ὕστερον πρότερον*). *Substitution* is the process of speech production that replaces words or thoughts. Examples are the use of tropes for proper words or a unit of words for another unit of words (e.g., a rhetorical question replaced by a vivid description). A concrete example is the use of metonymic replacements of political decision-makers by the name of the capital city of the respective country in international news.

2. Analysis of Media Inquiring Are Media Actually a Medium and What if Not?

Beyond Rhetoric: The Four Categories of Change Applied to Changes in Media

We can distinguish the persuasiveness of rhetoric from other ways of persuasion by media when looking at the four categories of change as a principle that manifests changes in media. Here, in contrast to rhetoric, the underlying categories of change describe processes performed within the media content system. These processes might be initiated by a human, but they are usually executed by the automation processes of the machines. Here are examples of processes that can be described with the four categories of change:

The process of addition as change in media can be present whenever respective operations are observable in the media system. Beyond rhetorical operations at the level of the media text, any *addition of the media* should be observed and scrutinized concerning its value for reality. An example are massive news about a particular event.

The process of subtraction can be, like the process of addition, as rhetorical persuasiveness of media present whenever respective rhetorical operations occur. Like in the case of an addition, any *subtraction of the media* should be observed and scrutinized concerning its value for reality. Examples are missing factual data in a story of a media outlet or the complete neglect of a relevant event in a newspaper.

The process of transposition, like the previously mentioned processes of addition and subtraction, can be present as rhetorical persuasiveness of media whenever the respective rhetorical operation occurs. As previously mentioned, any *transposition of the media* should be observed and scrutinized concerning its value for reality. Examples are exchanged features in a media platform (like beauty filters applied in video platforms) or media texts that present an event in a reverted way (like a news report that puts last events at the first place in

contrast to the common practice to put newest occurrences first when reporting an event). The swapping of the position of two data-containing files in a program (e.g., *Word*) in two folders is another example of an exchange.

The process of substitution can like the other previously mentioned processes be present whenever respective rhetorical operations occur. Again, any *substitution of the media* shoul be observed and scrutinized concerning its value for reality. An example is the promotion of the use of AI chatbots for its users as a substitution of real communicators on social media like *Whatsapp*. Another example is the substitution of a photograph of an event with a placeholder photo that is only abstractly related to the actual event is a common practice in journalistic outlets in the case that a photograph of the event is lacking.

The difference between the use of the categories of change in the theory of rhetoric and for media is that in media changes are not artfully applied to speech, but executive actions in technical processes of information or structured data within the medium with a digital representation of meanings present as formations of bits and bytes as the smallest communicable entities in digital media. Thus, changes in media are describable from the standpoint of an observer at the level of changes of information and units of data. But these changes at the level of information are not intrinsically systematic in contrast to the systematic application of changes of wording in applications of the theory of rhetoric.

3. Human and Machine – A Case Study: A Speech by ChatGPT vs. Rhetorical Speech

Elimination of the Medium Style and its Replacement by Formatisation and Automation

Under the impact of digital processes without the influence of human selection that lead to formal and automated execution processes of data assembly, the medium as a rhetorical description of speech style is to a lesser degree reflected in common media. But we can break down the contents to something that, at a meta-level, can be described as arguable: Media can be considered means of communication holding right or false opinions they contain, open to any argument or critical approach) or imaginations (e.g. so-called 'hallucinations' of AI chatbots that are themselves an anthropoid expression).

Content of media is never independent, they are held under the condition that the media exist. Semiotically expressed, to function as a sign, content needs the container, and the quality of the significance of what is contained is every time in each particular case what has to be inquired. Furthermore, content of the media is always limited to what is contained and without a change of the medium not transmittable to the physical world. The actual degree of the impact on the mindset of a human being depends on the assessment of content by the human being.

We assess now in a particular case the quality of AI concerning its ability to answer the in introduction described stance of the medium in the theory of rhetoric. If we retrieve from *ChatGPT* an answer to the question What is the medium in the theory of rhetoric?, it becomes obvious that this AI application is not able to refer to the place of the medium as a stylistic element of the theory of rhetoric, but equalizes medium with (technical) media. When *ChatGPT* (2026) is asked what the medium in the theory of rhetoric is, it reiterates the separation of medium and rhetoric, being unaware of the actual theory of rhetoric and the position of the medium in it:

What is the medium in the theory of rhetoric?

ChatGPT:

In rhetorical theory, the medium is the channel or form through which a message is communicated to an audience. It is the means of delivery, and it shapes how the audience receives and interprets the message.

Examples of rhetorical media include:

Speech (face-to-face or recorded)

Writing (books, essays, articles, emails)

Print (newspapers, posters, brochures)

Digital media (websites, social media, podcasts, videos)

Visual media (photographs, infographics, advertisements)

Multimodal texts (combinations of text, images, sound, and video)

Table 1. Anwer by *ChatGPT* by Prompt
What is the Medium in the Theory of Rhetoric?

Obviously, the data accessible to ChatGPT are not sufficient to understand the systematic place of the concept of the medium in the theory of rhetoric. Additionally, ChatGPT lacks any references to rhetoric and adapts terms and expressions from medium theory.

The following speech was assembled by *ChatGPT* (2026) after the author's prompt *Compose a speech in the medium style of rhetoric on the manipulation of media*:

You said:

Compose a speech in the medium style of rhetoric on the manipulation of media.

ChatGPT said:

Here's a medium-length speech with a balanced rhetorical style:

Speech on the Manipulation of Media

Good day, everyone.

Today, I would like to speak about an issue that affects all of us, whether we realize it or not: the manipulation of media.

Media is one of the most powerful forces in modern society. It informs us about current events, shapes our opinions, and connects us with the world. However, this power can also be misused. When information is manipulated, facts may be distorted, important details may be omitted, or emotions may be exploited to influence how people think and act.

Media manipulation can take many forms. Headlines may be written to provoke outrage rather than inform. Images and videos can be edited to create false impressions. Social media algorithms often prioritize sensational content because it attracts attention, even when it is misleading. As a result, misinformation can spread faster than the truth.

The consequences are serious. Manipulated media can divide communities, influence elections, damage reputations, and weaken public trust in reliable sources of

information. When people cannot distinguish fact from fiction, making informed decisions becomes much more difficult.

But responsibility does not lie only with journalists, media companies, or governments. As consumers of information, we also have a role to play. We should verify information before sharing it, consult multiple credible sources, and think critically about the messages we receive. Asking questions such as "Who created this?" "What evidence supports it?" and "Could there be another perspective?" can help us avoid being misled.

In conclusion, media is a powerful tool that can educate, inspire, and unite people when used responsibly. Yet when it is manipulated, it can misinform and divide society. The best defense against manipulation is not fear, but critical thinking, media literacy, and a commitment to seeking the truth.

Thank you for your attention.

Table 2. Speech by *ChatGPT* by Prompt

Compose a Speech in the Medium Style of Rhetoric on the Manipulation of Media

The prompt is not processed to reflect the concept of the medium style, but as a medium-length speech with a balanced rhetorical style. The speech is not assembled in the way a medium speech style is supposed to be in the ancient tradition of rhetoric. Despite giving examples, it is a superfluous reflection on journalism, video, and images without any self-reference. The speech assembled by *ChatGPT* has three parts: A short introduction to the topic, a narrative with examples of media manipulation and the stance of the consumers in respect to media to avoid media manipulation, and a conclusion. On the contrary, traditional rhetoric requires four partitions of the speech: In *Book* IV of the *Institutio Oratoria* Quintilian (1920-1922) (4, 1) mentions the prooemium or exordium and 4, 2) the narratio or statement of facts, and after the treatment of digressions (4, 3) the preparation of propositions for the proof (4, 4), and the partition of propositions (4,5). In the chapters 1 to 14 artificial and unartificial proofs (5, 1) are as the devices of the argumentation are distinguished. Among the unartificial proofs are previous decisions (5, 2), public report or opinion (5, 3), evidence extracted by torture (5, 4), refutation of documentary evidence (5, 5), taking an oath (5, 6), documentary and oral evidence; oral evidence; production as well as witnesses and supernatural evidence (5, 7). Among the artificial proofs (5, 8) are signs, indications, circumstantial evidence that are different from proofs as well as appearances and prognostics (5, 9), arguments (5, 10 and 5, 12), examples and instances (5,11), refutation and proof (5,13) and enthymeme, epicheireme, and syllogism 5, 14). In *Book* VI Quintilian (1920-1922) treats the peroration (6, 1).

The speech presented by *ChatGPT* relies heavily on enumerations of examples and questions. The introduction and the conclusion use tricola for the syntax of the sentences: It informs us about current events, shapes our opinions, and connects us with the world or The best defense against manipulation is not fear, but critical thinking, media literacy, and a commitment to seeking the truth. The speech lacks the use of any tropes, while its choice of words is congruent with common words of contemporary standard English without any explanations, definitions, or reference. The speech presented by *ChatGPT* lacks an argumentation concerning the topic, taking media manipulation for granted. It addresses the audience with advice regarding behaviours and questions to inquire into the existence of media manipulation.

4. Medium, Media and Manipulation, A Media Typology and Principles for Sorting Out Fillings (Manipulation)

Medium, Media, and Manipulation

Theoretically, from the perspective of an overarching communication theory, the distinction of persuasiveness via rhetorical speech and manipulative means can be described as follows: Rhetorical change by the operators of addition, subtraction, transposition, and substitution operates at the level of speech, forming speech in a structured, patterned form and reaching persuasive aims by ethos, pathos, and logos (including speech itself). This persuasion is visible in the formality of rhetorical speech. As a means of persuasion, the application of rhetorical elements is clear and visible in communication processes as a formal structure that can even be implemented in other media. The medium in an artifice, be it the art of rhetoric or an art that brings beautiful things into existence, relies on a human skillset. An example is painting, where the medium is the material of the artifice used by the skillful artist. The human skillset is drastically reduced in applications of digital media. Generally speaking, media as manipulative means become obscured and obscure what they communicate. Their visible surface on any media (including speech) is not consistent but corrupted; their aims are not clearly expressed or different from what they pretend to be.

Media can also be used as a means to communicate a representation of speech about topics or questions in a correct way, serving a communicative aim consistent with ethical practices, affects, and wordings. Here the responsibility lies in the hands of the producing and consuming users of media. Distinguihing the practice of a rhetorician or someone who applies rhetoric in their speech from so-called influencers on social media, the differences ate that the rhetorically trained speaker uses his/her voice towards the audience for the delivery of a speech that follows rhetorical principles in terms of its genre, structure and style, purpose, discoursive elements, ways of persuasion, and the audience addressed at tge specific time the speech is given. On the contrary, an influencer on social media aims at attracting followers who watch multimedia content that promotes the influencers themselves or/and products/services they appraise directly or indirectly. Their produced content does neither rely on rhetorical principles nor journalistic principles of professional media outlets, but is controlled by the policies of the digital platform used by the content producers.

The Non-Neutrality of Media: A Media Typology of Media according to their Effects on Users

We cannot call all that is labelled ‚media' media in the sense of a content-containing medium that appears ‚neutral ‚. The blurredness between both of them, content and container, is a source of manipulation: It can alter what is communicated to the maximum degree of fabrication without any traces and as a ‚fictitious reality' on its own. But what is considered today media are concerning their effects deriving from non-neutrality not identical. A typology of contemporary media by their effects might help assessing the type of media that exist.

Type	*Examples*	*Effects:* *Main Functions /* *User Perspective and Stance /* *Level of Potential Manipulation*
Manipulative Fabricating Media	AI Chatbots Containers that have an imaginative design, obscured data retrieval, assembly, and transmission	*Main Function*: Imagination and Production and Communication of Data *User Perspective and Stance*: 'Seeing an imagined reality' *Level of Potential Manipulation*: Extremely high technical and low human manipulation
Technical Media	'Legacy media' (print, radio, television), digital computer program *Word*, Video Conferencing Platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams) Containers without Alteration of Human Input for the production, transmission, and storage of data; they can have additional manipulative tools (e.g., Beauty filters for video)	*Main Function*: Recording and Transmission *User Perspective and Stance*: 'Using it as Real Communication Means' 'Seeing more or less than what can be seen without the media' *Level of Potential Manipulation*: Technical and human manipulation can be balanced
Nominal Communicative Media	'Social Media' like *Facebook*, out-of-home (OOH) media like advertisement billboards Containers that are named media, but are open to manipulation and are declared media to involve and reach out to mass audiences	*Main Function*: Organization and Exchange *User Perspective and Stance*: Low level of manipulation: 'What you get is what you see' *Level of Potential Manipulation*: High technical and high human manipulation

Table 3: Media Typology
Contemporary Media and their Effects

Media serve as their core functional feature as communicative means between communicators. Whenever other features are added to this communicative purpose, the range of effects might be extended beyond this core functional feature. Here an assessment of their existing functions beyond their communicative setting might be necessary.

Principles for Sorting Out 'Fillings' (Manipulations)

If media are not a medium, the question what? concerns not only what else they might be and what kinds of effects they have on users, but also what to do with them, how to handle them. Now we look at principles for sorting out the impacts the media as non-neutral elements of communication processes have:

1. The assessment of what type of media takes part in a communication process allows for assessing it against speech in unmediated communication and the degree to which it, as a container, contains and establishes meaning of what is communicated.

2. If content represents factual reality (an identifiable relation between words and things is established), it is reliable for non-digital reality. If content does not represent reality, e.g., in a false statement about something, or if content and even the containing system present (but do not represent) an exclusive media reality, they are not reliable due to lacking a back-binding to reality.
3. The question Is the content system presenting something other than a medium? might help to contrast manipulative intentions, practice, or representations with actual needs of the user.
4. The mind is not present within a content system (despite all attempts to mask it as such by the respective industries). A content system can be filled with content it alters. Mental processes are represented in a complex human concept as mind and it can only theoretically examined.

The manipulation of media produces, broadly speaking, in the basic conceptual understanding of manipulation as 'filling' (corresponding to the Latin infinitive *plere* 'to fill'), fillings in the mind of those exposed to them due to a specific handling (corresponding to Latin *manus* 'hand') of the media beyond their communicative function and purpose. These fillings derive from content that might not be present in any other media format or device and in the non-mediated world.

5. Medium and Media in an Overarching Theory of Communication

Words-Mind-Things Inside and Outside Media Settings

In our mini-model we break down what, in the broadest sense, is knowledgable for a human into the triangle of words, things, and mind. As a default description of rhetorical speech we can describe this speech as what the mind of the speaker forms in accordance with rhetorical principles out of words about things directed towards the minds of an audience. While the concept of the mind is theoretical, it helps to explain observable effects in humans and speech that can subsequently also alter things in the world. Quintilian (Vol. 3, 1922) in his *Institutio Oratoria* (8, prooemium, 6) states that any speech consists of things and words ("orationem porro omnem constare rebus et verbis;"). As for speech as a means of communication, the ‚handling of things with words' is not an unknown idea in the history of the theory of rhetoric. In his lecture *How to Do Things with Words* delivered at Harvard University in 1955 Austin (1962: Lecture 1, p. 2) expresses the distinction between statements and pseudo-statements that are despite their "unexceptionable grammatical form" nonsense: "But now in recent years, many things which would once have been accepted without question as 'statements' by both philosophers and grammarians have been scrutinized with new care. This scrutiny arose somewhat indirectly—at least in philosophy. First came the view, not always formulated without unfortunate dogmatism, that a statement (of fact) ought to be 'verifiable', and this led to the view that many 'statements' are only what may be called pseudo-statements. First and most obviously, many 'statements' were shown to be, as KANT perhaps first argued systematically, strictly nonsense, despite an unexceptionable grammatical form: and the continual discovery of fresh types of nonsense, unsystematic though their classification and mysterious though their explanation is too often allowed to remain, has done on the whole nothing but good."

The 'non-sensual', the nonsense, in the tradition of the speech act theory developed by Austin expressed, entailed in statements of AI-generated speech-like sentences derived from a prompt from a fallacy of reference established between the words assumed to be words of sentient being that is aware of what they mean in the world of things. On the contrary, the content system does not know them. It can only process and re-assemble information in data sets. Technical media neither produce any artifice stemming from the mind nor are they related to things, while rhetoric is an art and falls within the technical skill-set of an educated human shaping words. Within the operational framework of the theory of rhetoric, the stylistic change to a medium style is a change within the framework of human speech imposed by its operations by artful skills applied to natural languages. Technical media, on the contrary, do not require artful skills, but reduce productivity to the human initiative of manipulative actions performed by an input activity on the interface within the pre-established settings of an automated machinery for data contained in the digital system.

In contrast to the medium as a stylistic classification of three kinds of speech, the concept of the medium in applied media like digital media is used without a triangular structure. The triangular framework exists in rhetoric with the three components speech, mind capable to express logos and things altered by the impact of logos-expressing speech and mind. Speech ('words' in lexis) is here the initiating vehicle bridging between the minds of the communicators and things in reality that are changed by the impact of speech. As for media, they cannot serve as a bridge between the mind(s) of the communicators. Media can process, transform, exchange, and maintain representations of speech and other information in an array of assembled data. The claim of a progression in terms of the availability of knowledge (especially by data collections and assemblages via AI) comes actually at the cost of a regression regarding the reliance of stored and as information re-assambled contents of media. At the peak of this self-contained data arrangement the functions of representation and presentation of the things of reality are swapped: What is supposed to be a truthful representation of human self-expression (speech) becomes a presentation of a human-imitating technical device that assembles collected data according to data models, presenting them at the interface as speech in a natural language to the human.

Manipulation aims at the presentation of things in a fabricated way serving the interests of its manipulator. Words and things do not congruently represent each other in this case. Exceeding the area of words, manipulative means can be media themselves, seemingly used by manipulators with the interest to be taken as reality by the receiving communicator(s). AI applications are an example in the case when they represent human-like features as chatbots mimicking dialogical speech patterns, in which they present accrued data in grammatical patterns of natural language.

Answer to the Research Question as Loss of the Medium Stance: The Limitation of Media in Communication between Recourse and Discourse

The research question *Are Media Actually a Medium and What if Not?* can be answered upon our previous elaborations, answering that not all that is supposed to be media operates in the same way regarding its feature as medium, and so different effects exist (cf. section media typology). While their medium stance, being in-between, might be noticed due to their communicative location between two or more entities in a communication process, their functional range of effects on what is contained and their containing set-up comes with an extended functionality. This functionality cannot be explained as a continuity of a style principle as in the theory and practice of the theory of rhetoric.

Media can in a social context be considered a technical means as a medium in the

sense of a containing means shared between human communicators. But beyond this in-between state of exchange media per se are manipulative regarding what they contain: They select, shape, and communicate information in accordance with and conditioned by their technical capacity, having a limited impact on the humans who use them. A recent tendency is the diminishing insight and impact humans users have on the technical processes while the media tend to appear as human-like communicators (Example: AI chatbots). Additionally, media can technically exceed in terms of their functions to manipulative means in respect to what they produce, transmit, or store, altering data to information that appears factual, but is either formed as alternative content relative to reality or a reality on its own (imagined reality) by the medium. While the manipulations have long been considered to be processes initiated by humans and represented by the media, with the emergence of AI human impact and control are diminished. Being aware of the different features of contemporary media and their impact is a required critical stance for human users in order to use them in accordance with responsibility. Media that are not a medium have lost their communicative function, their 'inbetween-place', be it as apparently automated producers of speech like AI bots, be it as regulated means of a pre-set functionality for the users.

While all forms of communication we discussed here fall under the umbrella term of discourse, we can say that the most recent tendency of automated speech-like production by means of AI might be considered a contribution to the overall discourse in society. But, -and here comes the caveat-, this superficially apparent contribution to a discourse turns out to be, besides its fabrication, the holder of an apparently auxiliary strategic recourse scattered in many cases untraceable fragments of the timeless copies of the past now becoming untimely assembled data. Its patterns as a technical stylistic assemblage might be aesthetically appealing, while its assemblage is a dead data body of information. This immanent recourse entails the manipulative, yet obscuring processes. At that point, media lose their function as media usable for humans for communicative purposes: They are like containers that recycle what should not have gone into them since it was still usable. Assembled inside this container, their (re-)usability and successful reuse are not always guaranteed.

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