FRAMING OF THE UKRAINE–RUSSIA CONFLICT IN ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Framing of the Ukraine–Russia conflict in online and social media Representations of the conflict in discourse in Facebook, Vkontakte and internet portals: DELFI, korrespondent.net, pravda.com.ua, kyivpost.com and onet.pl

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the project is to describe and reconstruct the information campaign carried out by Russia and pro-Russian activists in the internet and to reconstruct representations and frames of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict emerging from internet commentary sections and social media posts. Textual and visual analyses reveal the tools and methods used by pro-Kremlin commentators to build representations of Crimea's annexation and the Ukrainian-Russia conflict.

The subject of analysis is the framing of how the Ukraine–Russia conflict played out in internet portals (*DELFI*, *korrespondent.net*, *pravda.com.ua*, *kyivpost.com* and *onet.pl*) and social media (*Facebook*, *Vkontakte*) in the period from 1 April to 31 December 2014. The effectiveness of influence on the internet were also analysed, particularly in mobilizing internet users to engage in communication.

The information warfare conducted around Russia's annexation of Crimea continues to this day, in both traditional and new media spaces. Consequently, war in the internet has become a permanent front in the information war – it is waged not only in times of military interaction, but also in times of peace, as an element of state information policy. Long before the conflict in Ukraine, internet and news outlets were used to disseminate disinformation that aimed to mould Western public opinion in favour of the pro-Russia narrative. Even if these actions are called preventive measures and responses to "information aggression" by the West, they reflect a doctrine aimed at developing a favourable image of Russia abroad.

The analysis of internet content allows the reconstruction of propaganda objectives and of frames in which to portray current and past events. Frames are understood here as means – structures, forms and schemes that influence individuals' interpretations of issues, facts, groups and ideas and 'determine' the choices people make. Frame analysis also enables future actions to be foreseen and a country's strategic and operational objectives to be reconstructed. In the case of Russia, they remain the same: to rebuild the Russian empire while also exposing the decadence of democratic Western societies. These messages justify the necessity for 'civilization change' and Russia's defensive actions.

In internet discussions, several frames, in which to place the current Ukrainian-Russian conflict, recur continuously. The fundamental frame, describing the relationship Russia has with the outside world, is that of a decadent trans-Atlantic civilization trying to impose its liberal values on the whole world. This has led to civilization's regression, barbarity and the spilling of blood.

Russski mir is supposed to be the answer to the West's ideological expansion, which has made puppets out of Eastern and Central European countries. 'Being on a short leash from the West' not only proves the intellectual feebleness of European leaders, but also damages their own national interests. Ukraine as a country has degenerated socially, systematically and politically. Fascism flourishes here, and primitive barbarism and cruelty toward other nationalities prevents constructive dialogue.

The report identifies different methods of influence in news portals' comment sections and in social media – building frames organizing discussions, communication techniques maximizing influence over internet users and printing visuals having impact on the conscious and unconscious mind. It is clear that target audiences also differ, therefore the groups under influence being analysed are the Russian-speaking audience, Russia itself, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Poland.

CONCLUSIONS

The report comes to several fundamental conclusions. There is a strong relationship between the content of articles and the comments posted to them. Even though the discussion itself may deviate from the storyline of the source, the starting points are media reports. The correlation concerns topics, not the perspectives in which they are interpreted.

The comments see the images of the participants in the conflict being continually built, e.g., Russia is a superpower – a country determined to defend its interests, able to achieve its goals with the use of political and military measures. It is a peaceful country that does not react to aggressive Western policies. Ukraine is a country deprived of its roots, a fascist country, unable to survive by itself.

The number of comments is linked to the content of articles and depends on internet troll activity. Photographs of people displaying negative emotions are commented on more 'eagerly'. General images of destruction, death and weapons result in a fall in the number of comments. The number of comments increases when content can be easily used by trolls to incite political antagonism (the political activity of the conflicting sides, their definition of what is happening in Ukraine and what role Russia has in all this) and social antagonism (dissatisfaction, protests, breaking of the law and ethnic conflict).

A much larger number of comments, both validating Russia's actions (justifying separatists' military actions and Russia's involvement) and blaming the West and Ukrainians (their aggression and fascist government) was also observed when articles portrayed Russia's actions negatively.

Even though the narratives, frames in which Russia, Ukraine and the West are portrayed, are evoked constantly in comments, they

> *The number of comments increases when content can be easily used by trolls to incite political antagonism and social antagonism.*

vary between audiences (targets). Although frames of anti-Russian phobia appear everywhere, they occur more often in the Baltic States and Poland than in Ukraine on Russian- and Ukrainian-language websites. 'Fascist Kiev' is referred to everywhere, but in Poland, Wołyń and the genocide of Polish people by Ukrainians is evoked more often in this context. In other countries, Ukraine's cooperation with fascist Germany is evoked more frequently.

Organized troll activity in news portals and social media is coordinated and their audience-influencing techniques are advanced. A scheme for troll activity can be described in three phases: luring, taking the bait and hauling in. The coordinated and massive character of troll activity indicates that we are dealing with the phenomenon of (social) media weaponisation. However, it seems that the nature of the internet and Web 2.0 technologies mean that the effectiveness of this influence may be less than is supposed. First of all, because every propaganda action triggers counter-propaganda, which is obvious in the analysed material. Secondly, because there is no way to eliminate alternative sources of information (such as TV, radio or newspapers). There is no question, however, that the internet is a perfect tool for disinformation, not only on its own, but in combination with traditional media.

Analysing organized trolling is not straightforward, it requires high sensitivity on the part of the researcher, understanding the context of statements and the different communication techniques used by trolls.

> *Internet memes have become a widely used instrument for portraying conflict.*

This still does not guarantee the 100% identification of trolls.

In order to understand the effectiveness of internet comments, linguistic analysis of statements is indispensable. Language defines our personal image of the world. Despite differences in languages, trolls use some universal communication instruments: categorization of 'us' and 'not us', the use of metaphors, idioms, building neologisms and with their help, describing people and events through stereotypes. These are adapted to the linguistic levels of users in the different languages.

Contemporary conflicts and propaganda are highly visualized, above all in social media. Images are more easily perceived than text in articles, but have similar functions. Photographs differ from articles in terms of the emotion they generate and their potential to evoke positive and negative connotations of the objects they portray.

In this way, Ukraine and Ukrainians are often portrayed in contexts of fascist symbolism and violence, while Russia and Russian soldiers ('little green men') are shown in contexts of security and military professionalism.

In a viewer's consciousness, photographs or other imagery are perceived as reality and the emotional system always considers visual experience to be real[1]. This conviction of the 'truthfulness' of images was eagerly used in the framing of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. At the same time, many examples of falsified reality were observed, not only by means of *Photoshop*, but also through untruthful comments and the manipulation of images. Dates, locations and objects in photographs are manipulated to unambiguously prove Russia's and Russians' 'innocence', and the 'lies' of and 'brutality' inflicted on civilians by Ukrainian soldiers, and that the West

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1   A. M. Barry, Ph.D., Perception and Visual Communication Theory, Journal of Visual Literacy, Spring 2002, Volume 22, 1 November, 91-106, pages 95 and 99.

is supporting the Ukrainian *junta* – government forces.

Internet memes (digitalized units of information <text, image, film, sound> that are copied, processed and in this processed form, re-published on the internet) have become a widely used instrument for portraying conflict. Just as in the case of textual discussions, image 'exchanges' also see storylines developing with elements and means of demeaning enemies and motivational elements of conflict. These enhance the frames analysed in the internet and reinforce the myths popular in public discourse in Russia: the Myth of fighting for a new world order based on humanitarian values and the Myth of Great Russia.

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Although this report has a variety of content, it focuses on the internet discourse stemming from Ukrainian-Russian antagonism. Therefore, it does not attempt to present the conflict in military and political dimensions. The consequence is a fragmentary image of the conflict between followers of the Kremlin and Kiev, in linguistic and symbolic terms. A case-study analysis of the convergence between different kinds of media, to construct a coherent image of the world in line with propaganda objectives, would be of great interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The weaponisation of social-media by Russia should be the subject of continuous in-depth analysis and monitoring by NATO's command structures and its allies. This would require employing specialists with excellent Russian-language skills and the cultural awareness to be able to pick up on particular keywords, messages, historic links and interpretations. Similarly, it is important to measure the resonance and effectiveness of Russia's propaganda activities in social media by using network analysis and testing the influence of different content on target audiences.

It is important to ensure the pluralism of information, opinions and voices speaking on behalf of NATO, the 'West' and also on behalf of the Kremlin and Russia. Varied information about the same events results in the mutual reduction of the influence of different senders. The Allied governments and NATO have to empower non-government voices such as journalists, experts, social activists and reputable NGOs by providing them with timely information on issues of importance, ensuring active feedback loops and identifying new information-sharing platforms.

Young audiences in the Allied countries and also in Russia may be internet-savvy but at the same time lack awareness of propaganda and other influencing techniques. Notwithstanding, all society members are susceptible to Russian propaganda as it resonates with their fears, needs and motivations. School education programmes on (digital) media literacy and social-awareness campaigns on the impact of propaganda on society should be introduced to mitigate the effects of hostile information campaigns, particularly online ones. Particular attention should be paid to the potential of manipulation with imagery as it is one of the most effective and widely used online propaganda methods.

It appears that the online-journalist community (both professional and non-professional) also lacks awareness of propaganda and other influencing techniques at times, or does not devote enough effort to checking and analysing sources. Since the media still remains an authority in the eyes of most people, it can unintentionally amplify rumours and propaganda messages as content is shared. Closer cooperation with journalists as regards information is needed, by supplying them with materials and content based on facts, and organizing workshops on the significance of what they publish during particular information-war campaigns.

A major component of combating internet trolls should be unmasking them and exposing their activities. Because, in this type of conflict, the volume of posts matters (even the most intelligent argumentation disappears in an abundance of less sophisticated, but more numerous messages on the part of the opponent), different institutions should activate internet users so that organized masses of troll posts could be opposed by organized groups of citizens aware of trolling. Combatting trolls should utilise two tactics: at the comment level, and exposing falsities. The first requires short, coherent, logical and, above all, numerous comments. It is important to block the propaganda effects of pluralistic ignorance, the spiral of silence and the bandwagon effect (see Section 3.3), which are inherent in the internet. The second level requires cooperation between internet users and researchers who are able to expose and compromise trolls.

Trolls extensively employ personal attacks rather than argument, hence their comments often contain 'hate speech' (text that threatens, insults or attacks a person or group on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, race or religion). Whilst respecting freedom of speech, administrators of websites and social media portals should be more active in monitoring content for hate speech, and blocking and reporting it, as required by law.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND – FRAMES, SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND INFORMATION WARFARE IN THE INTERNET

As internet resources have been deployed on an unprecedentedly large scale in the (dis)information campaign on the situation in Ukraine, the need for clear and explicit reaction to this information strategy is palpable. In order to build an effective response and develop a counter strategy, in-depth analysis of previous actions must be undertaken.

There are many questions regarding the impact of propaganda on media audiences. Some are old and some are new, arising from developments in communication technology. The basic ones relate to the new media: what are the mechanisms for influencing people through the internet? How do frames and linguistic resources persuade internet users to change their opinions? How are social media applied in information campaigns, how might they be applied? In order to find answers and to study how internet media are used for propaganda, a theoretical background needs to be established for the analysis.

1.1 TOOLS OF MEDIA IMAGE BUILDING – FRAMES AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The media[2] are playing an increasingly important role in military conflicts. They are often faced with the temptation to construct an alternative image of events – an image which could be far from reality. A false image of the world does not always have to be the result of conscious, planned policies to distort reality. Very often it might only be the result of posters' lack of professionalism or their partisanship which they may not even be completely aware of. How can these different sources of distortion in the media be differentiated?[3] It is not simple, given that the answer lies in the motivation of posters.

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2   Media here refers both to the traditional mass media operated by professionals and the new – social media run by 'amateurs' who ultimately may fulfil the same functions as regular journalists. These functions have shifted from information transmission to information processing, which is utilised in conflict communication (e. g. A. Robbin, W. Buente (2008). *Internet information and communication behaviour during a political moment: The Iraq war. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(14), 2210-2231).

3   In fact it is a question of differentiating between "paid" and "ordinary" internet trolls. There are many documents that prove that intelligence agencies are attempting to control and influence online discourse with tactics of deception and destruction of reputations (G. Greenwals (2014). How covert agents infiltrate the Internet to manipulate, deceive, and destroy reputations.. Posted on 25 February 2014: https://theintercept.com/2014/02/24/jtrig-manipulation). In the context of this study, the basic difference seems to be motivational: while 'ordinary' trolling is behaving in a deceptive, damaging, or disruptive manner with no apparent instrumental purpose, 'paid' trolling, controlled by intelligence agencies, is aimed at attaining some pre-defined political aims.

However, this is not impossible, because we facing an organized propaganda campaign in which the repetitiveness of statements and predictability of reactions make it easier to identify.

The purpose of this project goes beyond researching the statements themselves and their consequences. They are not going to be the subject of this research nor is the influence of media information on its audience, although we do establish that this influence is substantial. The research focuses on reconstructing the intentional process of building information[4] and comments on the internet as a communication strategy whose aim is to shape the thinking of its audience. We establish that the objectives of Russia's information policies are:

1) to create a positive image of itself
2) to justify its actions and
3) to support its diplomatic activities and military actions

Since the appearance and mass adoption of the internet, specialists in persuasion have been meeting recipients of media statements in virtual reality. Although the influence of media over its recipients is difficult to gauge, certain findings seem to have caused much controversy.

First of all, the influence of the media is neither simple nor immediate. It bears no resemblance to magic bullets with information which – shot into the public sphere – shape public opinion and force it to accept the point of view of the statement's sender[5].

Secondly, the influence of media is smaller, the larger the pluralism of information sources. Although the effectiveness of advertising influence is an irrefutable fact, people given access to information from different senders are more 'immune' to media influence and the effect of the mutual elimination of the influence of different senders

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4   Information building in this study is perceived as the method and process by which paid trolls attempt to create positive coverage in the internet and offset negative coverage in line with the objectives of the patron's information policy.

5   The 'magic bullet' theory was disproved through election studies in The People's Choice –research done in the early 1940s: P. F. Lazarsfeld, B. Berelson, H. Gaudet (1968). The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign. New York: Columbia University Press.

becomes apparent[6]. In other words, broadcasting different information about the same event brings about a balance in gauging its significance and consequently, we see information having a minimal influence[7]. In contrast, when one side of a story is broadcast, we observe the opposite effect: media shape uniform public opinion and then their influence can be considered significant[8].

Thirdly, people are not passive recipients of statements, they actively participate in the process of their reconstruction and interpretation. In order to 'help' them completely understand broadcasts, some conditions must be met for the influence of statements to be effective.

Framing and building media representations of objects, events, personalities or groups are well-known and empirically proved mechanisms that can be used to explain the actual influence of statements on recipients.

Framing explains the process by which media decide what people should be thinking about and in what way, even though they do not tell them exactly what to think. By using frames and popularizing them in the form of social representations, the posters in media have real influence over events, and which of them are important and worthy of comment; they also promote some aspects of events and make those more prominent.

1.2 FRAMING AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Framing was brought into the field of social analysis by Erving Goffman who understood frames as blueprints of interpretation which enable individuals to locate, notice, identify and give meaning to events taking place in their personal lives, as well as in the world around them. Thanks to frames some coincidental, loose elements or events construct a coherent whole, answering the question "*What is going on here?*"[9]. In this way,

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6   M. Allen (1991). *Meta-Analysis Comparing the Persuasiveness of One-sided and Two-sided Messages*, *Western Journal of Speech Communication,* 55, 390-404; L. L. Golden, M. I. Alpert (1987). *Comparative Analysis of the Relative Effectiveness of One- and Two-sided Communication for Contrasting Products. Journal of Advertising*. 16(1), 18-25.

7   S. Aday (2006). The Framesetting Effects of News: An Experimental Test of Advocacy versus Objectivist Frames. Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly. 47(3), 26-48.

8   E. S. Herman (2003). *The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective. Propaganda, Politics,* Power. 1, 1-14; E. S. Herman, N. Chomsky (1991). *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

9   E. Goffman (1986). *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 8-10.

the frame arranges reality, provides ways to understand particular events and changes a group of loose characteristics and facts into a coherent and legible whole, condensing and simplifying the reality of the 'outside world'[10].

Frames understood in this way are a natural and popular tool for making sense of reality.

Apart from selecting information, frames have another function – they emphasize certain aspects of problems, events, making them 'more noticeable, meaningful, and easier to remember for the recipients' (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

This way the process of persuasive impact in media can be reduced to the building of images of reality – in text, narrative and photographs – which take the form of social representations. Social representations are agreed and sustained in discourse images, ideas, 'theories' explaining reality, by means of which people communicate and harmonize their actions. Representations constitute 'handy' knowledge which, in accordance with the theory of the economy of thinking, is easily accessible and 'ready to use'. This way, rather than asking questions, citizens in this study (Russians) reach for commonly accepted narratives about the West, EU, US and Ukraine, so reproducing the dominant propaganda paradigm.

1.3 THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN INFORMATION WARFARE

1.3.1 The internet and the new context of warfare

Generally, media can play three main roles in a conflict. Firstly, they are critical observers of reality who, in an objective and independent way, report on military operations. This assumes a high degree of professionalism among journalists who are able to make critical judgments on content and remain immune to contacts with the antagonists. The second role is adversarial journalism, in which journalists take a clear position in their reporting of warfare, because of their own convictions, or in order to oppose propaganda and the position of the antagonist. Playing the third role, the internet and contemporary media constitute the space in which the conflict is taking place.

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10   R. D. Benford, D. A. Snow (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 614.

This is not about being a supporter of one side or the other, but about serving as a tool of conflict. In this sense, the media are a battlefield where classic means of military action are used[11].

The appearance of the internet and Web 2.0 technology means that it is harder to cast the media in one of these roles and we have to deal with a situation in which their actions transcend those roles. Today, online processes see media intertwining with reality; reality and 'media reality' influence each other, and all this occurs at great speed and across geographic and social borders. This state can be described by use of the mediatisation concept. This allows the relationship between media, society and warfare activity to be described in a different way[12].

Until a few decades ago, researchers placed the world of media and the world of social, economic and military institutions in opposition or next to each other, the assumption being that the influence of one sphere on the other was 'simple'. This was reflected in the titles of publications, e.g., *Mass Communication and Public Health*, *Television and the Public* or *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*[13]. Now, it is more often said that reality has becomes more complicated thanks to the media, and that systematic analysis of the state of reality outside the social-media context is very hard, if not impossible. Works devoted to the mediatisation of politics, religion or war have appeared, implying a hypothesis of the mutual adjustment and modification of media and non-media realities[14]. Therefore, any analysis of warfare operations outside the new media context, i.e., examining propaganda actions in the internet without taking strategical aims into account, is fraught with high risk.

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11   D. Kishan, D. Freedman, Introduction. In: D. Kishan, D. Freedman (ed.), War and the Media, London: Sage, 2003, 1-12.

12   The concept of mediatisation was introduced in the 1980s by Swedish media researcher Kent Asp, who talked about it in the context of political communication, the necessity to adjust political activity to media logic. K. Asp, Mäktiga massmedier: Studier i politisk opinionsbildning, Stockholm 1986.

13   C. K. Atkin, L. M. Wallack, Mass communication and public health: Complexities and conflicts, Newbury Park 1990; H. T. Himmelweit, P. Vince, Television and the child. An empirical study of the effect of television on the young. London 1958; R. T. Bower, Television and the public. New York 1973; D. C. Hallin, The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

14   L. Bennett, R. Entman (ed.), Mediated politics, Cambridge 2001; W. Anselmi, K. Gouliamos, Mediating culture: The politics of representation, Toronto 1994; G. Horten, Mediatization of War: A Comparison of the American and German Media coverage of the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, American Journalism, 28(4), 2011, s. 29-53; B. McNair, Mediated sex: Pornography and postmodern culture, London 1996; D. McQuail, On the mediatization of war: A Review Article, The International Communication Gazette 68(2), 2006, 107-118.

Two fundamental perspectives emerge in the analysis of mediatisation. In accordance with the first, media are a social institution with their own set of rules, however other institutions (political, religious, military) must conform to this particular logic ruling the media, in order to function effectively in the public sphere. In line with the second perspective, the subject of reflection here is the process of building meanings and understandings 'in' and 'through' the media. Researchers' interest is focused on the reality created in communication: the ways in which it is portrayed in the media, and the influence of the context of different media on the process of its creation. It is assumed that the media, with the help of symbolic tools – language, metaphors and narratives – construct an image of the world, build an image of a reality which transcends the media sphere. The mediatisation of the world, events and institutions is represented by the hegemonic ability of the media to symbolically construct meanings read by their users. People – according to the perspective assumed here – reach out to the media's reservoir of definitions and interpretations as tools allowing them to properly interpret broadcasts.

In the first trend, mediatisation is the adaptation of political, military science and social institutions to the media's logic, in the second trend it is a process of constructing a 'new' socio-cultural reality through media in the communication process. Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp connected both traditions and proposed an understanding of mediatisation which fuses different research theories or trends. They understand it generally as a concept to be used for the critical analysis of the mutual relationship between changes in the media and means of communication on the one part, and culture and society on the other[15].

In this way, mediatisation tackles the problem of the dissemination of media in space, time and social dimensions (media are used in different contexts, different places and times); it also analyses their role in various types of communication[16].

From the mediatisation perspective, media are not the source of and reason for social relations, but they merge with social reality and become an important point of reference, source of information and new experiences.

15   N. Couldry, A. Hepp, Conceptualizing Mediatisation: Context, Traditions, Arguments, Communication Theory, 23(3), 2013, 191-202.

16   Ibidem, 197.

This new context in which we function – as John B. Thomson remarks – clearly distinguishes contemporary generations from the lives of previous ones[17]. That is because experiencing reality does not consist exclusively of sharing a common space, but also in synchronically experiencing various micro-worlds and events, at the same time remaining in different contexts.

Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, and Knut Lundby write that the concept of mediatisation "tries to capture long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other. As institutionalized and technological means of communication, media have become integral to very different contexts of human life. The media are not just neutral instances of mediation: Media like television, radio, newspaper, the web or the mobile phone are in themselves mediators of social and cultural change[18]". Without any doubt, we are seeing here the mediatisation of reality and war. "The conduct of war and conflict today … involves the difficulty of the management of such flux amid complex systems that make the cause' and 'effect' of any conduct diffuse[19]". In this way, war is seen as a war "of symbols and representations", the "mediatisation of war matters because perceptions are vital to war"[20]. Therefore, research on military activity is more and more often accompanied by research on mediatisation, because the media not only mediate contemporary wars, they also became a part of the conducting of the warfare itself.

1.3.2 New media, diffused warfare and the weaponisation of social media

If we want to understand present-day warfare operations there is a need to study them in the context of the internet and social media. New communication technologies have significantly changed the way we establish contacts, how knowledge is obtained and publicised, and how disinformation is disseminated. Consequently, they have become an excellent tool in the information war.

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17   J. B. Thompson (1995). The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of Media. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 224.

18   A. Hepp, S. Hjarvard, K. Lundby (2010). Mediatisation – Empirical Perspective. An Introduction to a Special Issue, Communications 35(3) 223.

19   A. Hoskins, B. O'Loughlin, War and Media. The Emergence of Diffused War, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, 13.

20   Ibid., 5.

The mediatisation of reality has been used in defining the concept of diffused, unconventional or hybrid war. As Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin describe it: "As a result of changes in the communications technologies available to news media, citizen media and to militaries themselves, media are becoming part of the practices of warfare to the point that the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one carefully accounts for the role of media in it"[21]. Information war is a part of warfare operations whose aim is to achieve military objectives by using different unconventional means, including new instruments of communication and information dissemination. Although war has always meant a conflict between military forces, mercenaries and activity in the information space, the context of tools serving to influence, track, control and witness military activity creates a completely new battlefield. Rivalry does not simply take place on a specific territory, but in a symbolic space where the processes of perceiving and giving meaning to the actions of the conflicting sides occur. T. E. Nissen accurately notes that "The battle-space today can be described as a contest that, besides the military one, also includes the political, social and economic contests even at the local (tactical) level, where actors seek to persuade audiences in such a way that the delivery of the political message is an end in itself"[22]. Therefore, the contest also takes place in the news, films, blogs, computer games, the traditional media and social media. The tools of this contest are not only military weapons, but also symbolic weapons in the form of narratives and representations of reality which have real, not just virtual, consequences.

The creators of the Russian concept of 'information war' are professors Alexander Dugin, ideologist of Greater Russia nationalism, and Igor Panarin, a lecturer at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Federation's Foreign Affairs Ministry and an expert on Russia's information warfare[23].

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21   Ibid., 4.

22   T. E. Nissen (2015). The Weaponization of Social Media. Characteristics of Contemporary Conflicts. Copenhagen: Danish Defence Collage, 24.

23   See more in: J. Darczewska (2014), The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare. The Crimean Operation. A Case Study. Warszawa: OSW Point of View, 42.

Information war, from their perspective, is influencing mass consciousness in international rivalry between civilization systems with the aid of media[24]. It is waged through the manipulation of information, i.e., using real information in a way to create false impressions, disinformation, including the dissemination of manipulated or fabricated (false) information, lobbying, blackmail and the extortion of desired information. Panarin not only developed information-warfare tools (propaganda, interviews, analyses, organization), but also defined different stages of the management process: from forecasting and planning, organization, simulation, feedback, to adjusting information[25]. Dugin, on the other hand, developed the Russian version of the 'netcentric-warfare'[26] concept which should be led by a special group including senior officials, representatives of the special services, intellectuals, researchers, political science professors and 'patriotically oriented' journalists and cultural activists.

Dugin's and Panarin's concepts, even though they focus on the ideological-tactical dimension, should be treated as a part of the hybrid (scattered) war concept which has been developed in Western literature over recent years.

Such operations were seen in the annexation of Crimea and continue in the case of the 'strange war' waged in the Lugansk and Donetsk region, as well as on Ukraine's eastern borders. During and after the annexation of Crimea, a propaganda, rumour and disinformation campaign was run on Russian TV channels, radio, magazines and new media. It was backed by politicians, representatives of science and culture, and journalists.

The disinformation campaign was coupled with cybernetic, ideological, political and social-cultural diversionary, provocative and diplomatic activity.

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24   The two most important civilization systems are the one connected to the Russian concept of 'euroasiatization', and the Atlantic one lead by the US. И.Н. Панарин, Пропаганда и информационные войны. М.: Поколение, 2012; И.Н. Панарин, Информационная война, PR и мировая политика. Горячая линия – Телеком, 2006; А.Дугин, Четвертая политическая теория. Россия и политические идеи XXI века, СПб, 2009.

25   И.Н. Панарин, Презентация книги Панарина Информационная война и коммуникации, Телеком, 2014.

26   Netcentric warfare focuses "on the combat power that can be generated from the effective linking or networking of the warfighting enterprise" (Alberts, Garstka, Stein (2000), 88). The concept was introduced by David Alberts, Art Cebrowski and John Garstka. See: A. K. Cebrowski, J. J. Gartska (1998). Network-Centric Warfare: Its Origins and Future. US Naval Institute Proceedings, Jan., 28-35; D. S. Alberts, J. J. Garstka, F. P. Stein (1999). Network Centric Warfare. Washington: CCRP Publication Series; D. S. Alberts, J. J. Garstka, F. P. Stein (2000). Network Centric Warfare. Developing, and Leveraging Information Superiority. 2nd Edition. Washington: DoD C4ISR Cooperative Research Program.

Each dimension of hybrid war – military, cybernetic, economic, energy and information – requires detailed reflection, but should also be considered in relation to the others. Currently, a lot of attention is focused on new media where decisions are made on which activities are taken up in the real world and given meaning.

Thomas E. Nissen uses the term 'weaponisation' to describe warfare actions on the internet and in social media, i.e., the utilisation of internet resources for 'military' purposes[27]. Even as recently as 2010 or 2011, the term weaponisation connoted 'outer space', 'architecture', 'biological weapon' or 'weaponised food'. In the last few years, however, the situation has changed, and weaponisation is used in the context of the internet and social media. Even though internet communication was employed in military conflict on a larger scale for the first time during 1999 in Kosovo, the vision of such actions integrated with other areas of operation only recently became a coherent concept.

Nissen places the 'new war' not only in the space connected to territory, but in the information space where ordinary people have the ability to influence the course of a conflict, its reception and decision makers' actions through the use of information and communications technology. It is a new situation, as Murphy and White remark: "The historical use of information as power was primarily limited to nation-states. Today a blogger can impact an election, an internet posting can recruit a terrorist, and an audiotape can incite fear in the strongest of nation-states, all with little capital investment and certainly without the baggage of bureaucratic rules, national values (truthful messaging), or oversight[28]". This new context changed the character of war and placed internet activity at the centre of attention: "As contemporary conflicts are also characterized by being 'wars of choice', perhaps 'necessity', but not 'wars for survival' (for liberal democracies, less so for some authoritarian regimes) and by that they are fought 'amongst people' resulting in many spectators and audiences to the conflict, who all have a say in its outcome.

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27   T. E. Nissen (2015). Weaponization of Social Media...

28   D. M. Murphy, J. F. White (2007) Propaganda: Can a Word Decide a War? Parameters, Autumn, 23.

This makes issues such as legitimacy, credibility, perceptions, and public opinion, prerequisites for acting in contemporary conflicts, since much of what informs different audiences' behaviour is inter-subjective understanding and meaning created in social networks (physical or virtual) through arguments (logical and emotional) and communication[29]". Understanding the meanings and consequences of internet communication during the course of a conflict, as well as developing instruments of control and influence within information warfare, became the centre of Nissen's interest.

In his model of social-media weaponisation, Nissen distinguished six kinds of activities and their consequences:

1) targeting (as guidance concerning the coordination of target nominations in support of the achievement of effects)
2) intelligence (as the product resulting from the collection, processing, integration, analysis, evaluation and interpretation of available information concerning countries or areas of interest)
3) cyber-operations (as defensive and offensive activities associated with computer-network attack and defence, i.e., deny, disrupt or destroy)
4) psychological war operations (shape, inform, influence, manipulate, mislead, expose, demean, promote, deceive, coerce, deter, mobilize, convince)
5) defence operations (that refer to the protection of one's own social-media platforms, sites, profiles and accounts)
6) command and control[30].

Of the six components, this report mainly investigates targeting, psychological-war operation and command and control aspects.

It should be noted that all the elements mentioned above have to be present in information warfare – they support and enhance each other. They are more efficient when they are planned and coordinated, as it is more probable that they would then meet their objective. What is the character of internet operations concerning the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the war in eastern Ukraine? Research on the framing of the Ukraine–Russia conflict in the period from 1 April to 31 December 2014 was conducted for this purpose. The subjects were selected information websites and social media.

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29   T. E. Nissen (2015). Weaponization of Social Media ..., 32.

30   Psychological war operations are the focus of interest in the report. If organized trolling is determined, then the presence of command and control actions would be proved.

CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

To recap, the aim of the project is to describe and reconstruct the formation campaign carried out by Russia and pro-Russian activists in the internet, to reconstruct the representations and frames of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, hence the methodology chosen. Textual and visual analyses reveal the tools and methods used by Russia to build representations of Crimea's annexation and the Ukrainian-Russia conflict in internet news portals and social media. The information warfare waged in internet-news comment sections and social media fan pages is also analysed.

This study provides us with: (1) the factors that determine the frequency of comments in the internet; (2) the frames and narrations used by (pro-) Russian activists in the internet-based public sphere, (3) social representations of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, (4) the discursive and narrative strategies used to build storylines that explain and justify the Russian invasion, (6) descriptions of different target audiences for particular information activities, (7) recommendations for effective counter-measures against Russian propaganda in the internet.

The methodology reflects the research objective and focuses on the study of messages (textual and graphic) and actions taken by (pro-)Russian activist/ organised-troll networks in the internet.

Different methods were used to analyse the data:

- Content analysis (articles, comments, photographs and social media messages),
- Narration analysis (articles, comments, photographs and social media messages),
- Visual and semiotic analysis (article photographs, and social-media multimedia messages).

The research questions (RQ) refer to the different types of actions taken by members of internet audiences. The first research question follows the intuition that the number of comments depends on the interest in the article posted:

RQ1: How does the number of comments vary in different types of articles? Is it correlated with the theme of the article, photographs accompanying the article, or the frame the article uses to define the situation in Ukraine?

There is also a widespread belief that the comments to articles published in the internet have nothing to do with the content of the article. In other words, internet comments depend more on the information politics of

'propaganda principles' than on reflective, rational evaluation of the article itself.

Consequently, another research question arises:

RQ2: Is there a correlation between the comments and the content of the article?

There is also a well-known difference in definitions of the situation in Ukraine, the Donbass region and Crimea between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian politicians. Are there similar differences between 'civil' supporters of Russia and Ukraine? What are the differences between their perceptions of pro- and anti-Ukrainian soldiers, the Ukrainian and Russian governments? How was *Euromaidan*, Russian intervention and the annexation of Crimea perceived in Ukraine? So the next questions become:

RQ3: Which definitions of the situations in Donbass and Crimea are more widespread?

RQ4: How does the proportion of frames differ in the different internet portals and social media analysed?

RQ5: How did the proportion of frames vary at different stages of the war between Ukraine and pro-Russia separatists?

As trolling has been observed in the internet, several questions on the scope and character of troll activity were posed:

RQ6: How often do trolls engage in conversations about the Ukraine-Russia conflict?

RQ7: What kind of activities are carried out by trolls?

RQ8: Are internet comments planned and synchronized?

Some detailed questions explore the semantic and pragmatic means and strategies used to build linguistic images of the conflict, and similar questions are posed to explore the visual portrayals of the conflict.

Furthermore, narratives expressed in social media were coded and analysed. A sample was drawn from fan pages in *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* to find out if there is a difference between the comments and photographs published in internet news portals and those in social-media subpages. So, the next research question was: RQ9: Is there any difference between discussions in social media and those in internet news-portal comment sections?

In order to analyse these different definitions of situations, etc., quantitative and qualitative web-content analyses were carried out. The units analysed were articles in the news and opinion sections of internet portals *DELFI* (Lithuanian-, Latvian-, Estonian- and Russian-language versions), *korrespondent.net*, *pravda.com.ua*, *kyivpost.com* and *onet.pl*. While *DELFI* was chosen for the Baltic States as it is published in all three local languages and Russian, the others are the most popular and influential news portals in the Ukraine and Poland, carrying great importance because of West-Russia relations (particularly *DELFI*). *Facebook* fan pages (АнтиМайдан, Euromaydan, Крым Реалии) and Vk (Україна – понад усе!, Новости Донбасс) were selected for having open access and being directly connected with the Crimean situation and the Donbass conflict. There were not very many thematically coherent discussion groups, but those selected were the most popular.

Articles must have touched on the subjects of the annexation of Crimea or the eastern Ukraine war. The following five keywords were used in the selection process: Крым/Crimea, ATO (from Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone, the official name for the War in Donbass), Донбас/Donbass/, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk; Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk military actions.

In total, 3 671 articles were randomly chosen and qualified for further analysis. 2 913 of the articles (79.4%) had comments posted by readers (trolls and others). Article and comment coding was performed by four doctoral students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, and Faculty of Humanities of the Catholic University of Lublin. Because of the vast sample of articles, a deductive approach to research with the content-analysis method was selected as the best option. The aim of the analysis was to identify predefined definitions/framing categories, in articles and comments, as variables for the content analysis and then to test their prevalence in the published media items. Because of the sampling process adopted, the subset of articles and comments can be considered representative of the whole population.

The structure of the randomly chosen sample was divided into the following archive datasets:

1) Kyivpost.com n=785 (articles)/135 (comments)
   keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 197, ATO – 23, Donbass/Донбас – 239, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 258; Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 68

2) Korrespondent.net n=747/747
   keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 136, ATO – 154, Donbass/Донбас – 192, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 176, Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 89

3) Pravda.com.ua n=1000/919

keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 200, ATO – 200, Donbass/Донбас – 200, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 200, Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 200.

4) Delfi

DELFI (ru.delfi.lv) n=259/254

keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 72, ATO – 39, Donbass/Донбас – 73, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 88, Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 19.

DELFI (ru.delfi.ee) n=385/385

keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 64, ATO – 23, Donbass/Донбас – 75, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 124, Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 66.

DELFI (en.delfi.lt) n=85/0 (no archive dataset with comments available)

keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 43, ATO – 0, Donbass/Донбас – 15, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 20, Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 17.

5) Onet.pl n=203/198

keywords: Krym/Крым/Crimea – 66, ATO – 0, Donbass/Донбас – 40, Donieck/Донецк/Donetsk – 57, Ługańsk/Луганск/Lugansk – 40

6) Facebook.com – 150/133

АнтиМайдан – 35, ЄвроМайдан – 37, Russian Crimea – 40, Крым Реалии – 38

7) Vkonakte – 150/143

Україна – понад усе! – 45, Vk – Новости Донбасса – 40, Крым – 40, Ми Українці!!!!! – 25

At the same time, qualitative analysis was undertaken to reconstruct the underlying meanings of narratives and photographs. In order to do this, a subset was drawn up of 152 memes and photographs, and a sample of 200 discussion threads referring to published articles.

CHAPTER 3
DISCOURSES ON CRIMEA, THE WAR IN EASTERN UKRAINE AND RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

This study's purpose is to examine the internet representations of the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, the framing tools and methods used by Russian propaganda operatives with the intention of influencing their target audiences[31].

What are the audiences for information about the Ukrainian-Russian conflict? Who are the people reading and posting comments in *korrespondent. net*, *pravda.com* and *DELFI*? How can users of *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* be categorised? They can be assigned to three broad, general categories based on language, geography and nationality/ethnicity[32].

However if we also consider state/institutional association, four key target audiences emerge:

1) the Russian internal and 'near-abroad' audience
2) west and east Ukrainian audiences
3) non-NATO/EU border nations,
4) European/European Union countries.

Within the nation/country category there are several 'local' audiences: Ukrainian, Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Polish, Belarusian and others.

The themes/topics of discussion and comments in the internet differ between target audiences. In the new EU member states, the EU is criticized as a "bankrupt organization", overregulated and with no prospects (Poland and the Baltic States). Following this logic, the Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Polish governments are criticized as pro-European, and insanely anti-Russian – and in this way jeopardizing the well-being of their citizens (Baltic States and Poland). There are also some topics/problems specific to local audiences which are often evoked by pro-Russian commenters, such as the Wołyń genocide of Polish citizens by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (east Ukraine, Poland) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army during WWII, and Russian minority problems in the Baltic States (Ukraine, Russian 'near-abroad' and internal). There are also still recurring themes, like blaming Ukraine for the conflict (Ukraine, Russian 'near-abroad' and internal, European/EU states), that are interrelated with pity for them because of their blindness in following European/American interests ('new' EU states), the omnipresence of fascists/Bandera followers in Ukraine (EU/NATO States, East Ukraine, non-NATO/EU border states), denying the existence of the Ukraine

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31   A target audience is defined here as a collection of people who have common characteristics and are vulnerable to information campaigns.

32   There are also media that are intermediate targets through following their fascination with violence and might thus be exploited by attention-seeking schemes.

state and the unceasing efforts by the Western nations to humiliate Russia (East Ukraine, Russian internal and near-abroad audiences). There is also a persistent narrative on "historically substantiated" American imperialism that has affected/harmed nations all over the world, and that Russia is the only state that could impede the "world conquest" plan of the US (all target audiences).

The analysis of articles and comments in news comment sections and social media shows clearly how different the narratives/representations of the conflicting sides and events are, depending on the medium.

It is easy to identify websites penetrated by supporters of pro-Russian separatism in Ukraine (*DELFI* and *Vkontakte*), websites where discussion participants support the Kiev authorities (*kyivpost*, *onet*, *Pravda*) and websites where the rivalry between the adversaries is balanced (*Facebook*, *korrespondent.net*). The variations between pro- and anti-Russian commenters' activity is illustrated in the following tables:

Table 1. Commenters' view on Crimea's annexation as a result of Russian aggression.

		THE 32 OF CRIMEA IS RUSSIAN AGGRESSION		
		YES	NO	TOTAL
Facebook	n	25	19	44
	%	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
korrespondent.net	n	49	39	88
	%	55.7%	44.3%	100.0%
kyivpost.com	n	11	2	13
	%	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
onet.pl	n	65	7	72
	%	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%
pravda.com	n	88	16	104
	%	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
ru.DELFI.ee	n	2	67	69
	%	2.9%	97.1%	100.0%
ru.DELFI.lt	n	18	28	46
	%	39.1%	60.9%	100.0%
Vkontakte	n	12	40	52
	%	23.1%	76.9%	100.0%
Quantity		270	218	488
%		55.3%	44.7%	100.0%
p=0.000; Phi, Cramer's V=0.1				

Table 2. Commenters' view on Ukrainian soldiers being fascists

		UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS ARE FASCISTS		
		YES	NO	TOTAL
Facebook	n %	10 37.0%	17 63.0%	27 100.0%
korrespondent.net	n %	122 41.6%	171 58.4%	293 100.0%
kyivpost.com	n %	1 6.7%	14 93.3%	15 100.0%
onet.pl	n %	0 0.0%	4 100.0%	4 100.0%
pravda.com	n %	4 9.5%	38 90.5%	42 100.0%
ru.DELFI.ee	n %	221 96.1%	9 3.9%	230 100.0%
ru.DELFI.lt	n %	75 75.0%	25 25.0%	100 100.0%
Vkontakte	n %	34 68.0%	16 32.0%	50 100.0%
Quantity %			467 61.4%	294 38.6%
p=0.000; Phi, Cramer's V=0.58				

Depending on their sympathies, commenters justify Russian activity in Ukraine, delegitimize the government in Kiev and accuse Western Europe states; or they attack Putin and support the European aspirations of Ukrainian society.

3.1 DEFINITION OF THE SITUATIONS IN CRIMEA AND DONBASS

In March 2014, a landing of 'little green men' took place in Crimea, that is soldiers who posed as locals, but turned out to be Russian military personnel. Fearing a repetition of the Georgia scenario, when the Tbilisi authorities allowed themselves to be provoked, which in turn enabled Russia to take over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Ukrainians wanted to avoid confrontation in Crimea at all costs. In the end, Crimea was annexed anyway.

At almost the same time, public protests began in the cities of eastern and southern Ukraine, followed by clashes between the supporters of Russian federalism – inspired by Moscow, and Ukrainians supporting the new government. Thanks to Russia's support, separatist divisions took over large parts of eastern Ukraine. The Lugansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic were established after 'referendums' were conducted in the occupied territories, and these new 'states' signed a bilateral agreement on the creation of the Novorossiya Federal Republic on 24 May 2014. This was accompanied by a propaganda campaign expounding the pro-Russian version of events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Were these events mentioned on the internet and in social media, and how?

It turns out that, in the selected articles, only in 418 of 3 671 (11.4%) did journalists attempt to describe what actually happened in Crimea, and in 2 049 (55.8%) – what happened in Donbass. It is interesting that the annexation of Crimea or the clashes in Donbass were not described more often in the comments posted to those articles. What happened in Crimea was mentioned in discussion in 486 (13.2%) cases, events in Donbass were mentioned in 1 290 (35.1%) cases. A high correlation between articles and comments was also present (in the case of Crimea Phi, Cramer's V =0.49, p=0.000, in the case of Donbass Phi, Cramer's V=0.43), which means that internet discussions were closely related to journalists' activities.

On the basis of articles and comments, what did 'actually happen' in Crimea? The articles unequivocally spoke of Russian aggression, and only in 45 cases was the annexation called "Russian reaction to the aggressive policies of the US and Western Europe" (Table 3). Current events in the annexed territory were sporadically commented on.

Table 3. Description of what happened and what is going on in Crimea (articles and comments).

CATEGORIES WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT IS GOING ON IN CRIMEA?	YES	%	NO	%
The integrity of Ukrainian territory was violated by Russia/Russian aggression (articles)	255	61.2	162	38.8
The integrity of Ukrainian territory was violated by Russia/Russian aggression (comments)	271	55.4	218	44.6
Annexation is Russia's reaction to the aggression of the West/to the Maidan revolt organized by the West (articles)	45	10.8	373	89.2
The annexation is Russia's reaction to the aggression of the West/to the Maidan revolt organized by the West (comments)	67	13.8	420	86.2
A positive, neutral process incorporating Crimea into Russia's structure (articles)	122	29.2	296	70.8
A positive, neutral process incorporating Crimea into Russia's structure (comments)	258	7.0	228	46.9
A failure to incorporate Crimea into Russia's structure (articles)	34	8.2	383	91.8
A failure to incorporate Crimea into Russia's structure (comments)	70	14.4	417	85.6

Although articles about Donbass more often state that the war is between Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists, comments state more directly that this is a war between Ukraine and Russia (Table 4). In the case of Crimea, arguments justifying Russian aggression, such as Russia's need to look after its interests and respond to Western aggression, appeared more frequently. In the case of Donbass, such justifications appear more rarely, probably for the reason that, officially, Russia is not directly involved in military activity in Ukraine. That does not mean, however, that the idea of the historical fusion of Ruthenian territories under the leadership of Moscow does not appear on the internet at all, they are just one-off cases. After Vladimir Putin's major teleconference with the nation in April 2014, a month after Crimea's annexation, Putin called Donbass a part of Novorossiya[33].

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33   Novorossiya is a historical term, used from the 18th to 20th centuries to describe territories incorporated into Russia. It describes – after wars with Turkey – territories to the north of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and south of Poland's border before 1793, which today is part of Ukraine.

Since then however, conflicts have arisen between separatist leaders and today, the idea of a Novorossiya rooted in Russian ideology remains frozen – absent from the comments analysed[34].

Table 4. Definition of what happened and what is going on in Donbass (articles and comments).

CATEGORIES WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT IS GOING ON IN DONBASS?	YES	%	NO	%
A war between Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists (articles)	1066	80.1	265	19.9
A war between Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists (comments)	764	58.4	544	41.6
A war between Ukraine and Russia (and its mercenaries)/Russian aggression (articles)	249	18.7	1082	81.3
A war between Ukraine and Russia (and its mercenaries)/Russian aggression (comments)	637	48.7	671	51.3
Russia acted as part of a peace/humanitarian mission (articles)	31	2.3	1300	97.7
Russia acted as part of a peace/humanitarian mission (comments)	22	1.7	1286	98.3
Russia's reaction to the aggression of the West/to the Maidan revolt organized by the West (articles)	9	0.7	1322	99.3
Russia's reaction to the aggression of the West/to the Maidan revolt organized by the West (comments)	74	5.7	1234	94.3

Both in the case of Crimea and Donbass, a convergence can be observed, a correlation between journalistic content and comments.

What is interesting in the analysis of the portrayal of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is the reconstruction of the representations of the states which are in conflict. Even though Russia, both in articles and comments, remained an aggressive conqueror, differences in emphases were observed – in comments, the most common was the image of Russia as a superpower, a state which should not be provoked, fought with.

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34   Vladimir Putin rarely uses the term 'Novorossiya' in the context of eastern Ukraine, and then usually on minor occasions, such as in September 2014, when he appeared in a Moscow Orthodox church where aid for separatists active in eastern Ukraine was beingcollected . Putin lit a candle for those – as he put it – "injured or dead in defence of the people of Novorossiya".

The reactive nature of Russia's aggressive actions was underlined (its involvement is forced by the actions of the West), the image of a country that defends the interest of its citizens above all (Table 5).

Table 5. Russia as a state (articles).

CATEGORIES RUSSIA:	YES	%	NO	%
A victim of the Western establishment, reacting to the aggressive, hostile actions of other countries (articles)	34	3.9	835	96.1
A victim of the Western establishment, reacting to the aggressive, hostile actions of other countries (comments)	174	11.9	1283	88.1
An aggressor state directly or indirectly interfering in the affairs/functioning of other states (articles)	672	77.4	196	22.6
An aggressor state directly or indirectly interfering in the affairs/functioning of other states (articles)	1048	71.9	409	28.1
Empire/superpower (articles)	56	6.5	790	93.5
Empire/superpower (comments)	276	18.9	1182	81.1
A country that defends the interest of its citizens above all (articles)	77	8.9	790	91.1
A country that defends the interest of its citizens above all (comments)	284	19.5	1172	80.5
A neighbourly state trying to help its fraternal nation (articles)	135	15.6	730	84.4
A neighbourly state trying to help its fraternal nation (comments)	362	9.9	1095	75.2

In the case of Ukraine, articles were dominated by its image of a victim state, suffering from Russian aggression. Comments, however, were entirely different from article content. Commenters more often underlined the lack of foundations for a Ukrainian state, its sovereignty was questioned, as were the lack of historic and ethnic roots, as well as national autonomy, and finally the incompetence of Ukrainians in managing their own country. The topic of Ukraine as a state attacked by Russia appeared only in second place, but only a little more often than the image of a fascist state (Table 6).

Table 6. Ukraine as a state (articles).

CATEGORIES UKRAINE:	YES	%	NO	%
victim of Russia's imperial politics (articles)	442	58.0	320	42
victim of Russia's imperial politics (comments)	580	42.2	795	57.8
state incapable of existing on its own, has no raison d'être (articles)	57	7.5	705	92.5
state incapable of existing on its own, has no raison d'être (comments)	670	48.8	701	51.1
'normal' country trying to cope with a war situation (articles)	357	46.9	405	53.1
'normal' country trying to cope with a war situation (comments)	218	15.9	1154	84.1
fascist state (articles)	20	2.6	742	97.4
fascist state (comments)	546	39.7	829	60.3

Although the differences in descriptions of the conflicts in Crimea in eastern Ukraine lay more in semantic descriptions of what aggressors and defenders actually are, where one of the conflicting parties was described, an ideology and assumptions being a part of the foundations of both countries, would be referred to. In the case of Russia, an aggressor state emerges, confident of its position, defending the interests of the state and its citizens; in the Ukrainian case, the depiction is of a state founded on doubtful grounds, because that is the nature of Ukrainian society (they cannot govern themselves) or historic entanglements (fascist roots).

In the research, the images of soldiers fighting for both sides were also reconstructed.

In the case of Ukrainian forces, the articles usually described them neutrally, as soldiers, ordinary people fighting on the government's side, Ukrainians. Infrequently, they were described as people fighting to liberate their motherland. In comment sections, the picture was very different – Ukrainian soldiers were portrayed as fascists and *Bandera men*, several times less often as patriots and liberators. This proves how much more the pro-Ukrainian narrative loses out in comparison with the pro-Russian one. The fighters of 'Novorossiya' are also portrayed differently.

Neither in articles nor comments are they portrayed neutrally, but as Russian or pro-Russian separatists, terrorists and mercenaries. Conversely, in comment sections they are much more often described as liberators.

This reveals there are coherent strategies for the framing of the conflict and the images of the conflicting parties, but the pro-Russian narrative is clearly more effective in terms of frequency.

The images are completed by that of the Ukrainian government, which is viewed as incompetent (88.6% of comments), corrupt (38.9%) and pro-European in the sense of 'being on a tight leash from the US and EU' (28.2%).

3.2 COMMENTS ON WEBSITES

Interactivity – the opportunity to publish and comments online – is one of the most important features of the new media. Web 2.0 has shaped contemporary journalism and influences the way the public sphere acts. The appearance of the online audience was described by Mark Briggs as an appearance of readers who "are no longer passive receivers of our messages. They create, share and comment. And they expect to do it on news Web sites, too[35]". That is why we now speak of participatory[36] or networked[37] journalism.

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35   M. Briggs, M. (2007). Journalism 2.0: How to Survive and Thrive. University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism and the Knight Citizen News Network. Retrieved 25 June2015, from http://www.j-lab.org/_uploads/publications/Journalism_20.pdf.

36   S. Bowman, C. Willis (2002). We Media: How Audiences Are Shaping the Future of News and Information. Reston, Va.: The Media Center at the American Press Institute, 2003; M. Deuze, A. Bruns, C. Neuberger (2007). Preparing for an Age of Participatory News. Journalism Practice, 1(3), pp. 322-338.

37   B. van der Haak, M. Parks, M. Castells, The Future of Journalism: Networked Journalism, International Journal of Communication 6 (2012), pp. 2923–2938; J. Jarvis (2006, July 5). Networked journalism. www.buzzmachine.com. Retrieved July 12, 2015, from http://www.buzzmachine.com/2006/07/05/networked-journalism.

Discussion in the internet

New media offer readers the opportunity to participate in discussions, and in this way, contribute to the democratization of the public sphere[38]. However, not always do these discussions lead to positive outcomes. For example, John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Mores prove that real deliberation can purposelessly fuel emotion, worsening, not decreasing fundamental differences between discussion participants, making people frustrated with the system through discussion. In their opinion, it may even lead to worse decisions being made than those that would have been if the discussion had not taken place[39]. Simon Jackman and Paul M. Sniderman[40], Tami Mendelberg and John Oleske[41], Sheen S. Iyengari and Mark R. Lepper[42] or Shawn W. Rosenberg[43] came to similar conclusions in their research. All of them prove that deliberation does not necessarily lead to the creation of more reasonable convictions among citizens, to common attitudes, does not increase mutual understanding and tolerance, does not decrease conflict, and instead of building consensus, contributes to the appearance of doubts about finding any appropriate solutions to problems.

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38   C. Sunstein (2001). *Republic.com*. Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press; J. Bohman (2004). *Expanding Dialogue: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Prospects for Transnational Democracy*. W: N. Crossley, J. M. Roberts (red.). *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*. Oxford: Blackwell/The Sociological Review, s. 131–155; L. Dahlberg (2007). *The Internet, Deliberative Democracy, and Power: Radicalizing the Public Sphere*. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics 3*(1). They note here, among other things, that the internet is a potentially ideal tool for generating a public-citizen sphere in which rational and informed public opinion can take shape, where egocentric, disoriented individuals are transformed into public-oriented citizens; pre-discourse attitudes transformed into critical, meditative public opinion.

39   J. R. Hibbing, E. Theiss-Morse (2002). *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work*. Cambridge University Press, p. 191.

40   S. Jackman,P. M. Sniderman (2006). *The limits of deliberative discussion: a model of everyday political arguments. Journal of Politics 68*(2), 272–283.

41   T. Mendelberg, J. Oleske (2000). *Race and public deliberation*. *Political Communication 17*, p. 169–191.

42   S. S. Iyengar, M. R. Lepper (2000). *When choice is demotivating: can one desire too much of a good thing? Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 79*, 995–1006.

43   S. W. Rosenberg (2007). *Types of discourse and the democracy of deliberation*. W: Tenże (ed.). *Deliberation, Participation and Democracy: Can the People Govern*? Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

The situation is not changed by new technologies based on the Web 2.0 platform. They additionally blur the distinctions between authors and audiences, what is real and what is made up, authentic and fictional. Not only do they disregard objectivity – as Andrew Keen writes in *The Cult of the Amateur*, but also reduce discussion participants' feeling of responsibility for their words[44]. This results from, among other things, the fact that internet commenters and discussion participants are not in direct, interpersonal and physical contact, and this distance can lead to dehumanizing effects: treating discussions as games, seeing interlocutors as opponents that can be used for one's own purposes. The environment intensifies anonymity which "fosters a sense of impunity, the loss of self-awareness and the likelihood of acting on normally inhibited impulses[45]".

From the perspective of using the internet for military purposes, another danger appears: that of the instrumental exploitation of the virtual space, influencing public opinion through fictional, remotely managed accounts, moderating comments on internet forums which create the impression of discussion, media consensus on various issues. In this domain, several mechanisms are used to make influence on the internet effective:

- 'pluralistic ignorance' – a phenomenon of people having a false impression of what others think about various matters[46]. The phenomenon occurs when people have an incorrect belief about the preferences of the members of a group they belong to or aspire to be part of. It may occur in a situation of information deficit – lack of communication between members of a group, when we have an impression that other members know better than us and are able to use substantive arguments in discussion. In this situation we rely on 'their opinions', even though those opinions do not actually exist.

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44   A. Keen (2007). *Kult amatora. Jak Internet niszczy kulturę.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne. While developing the thought mentioned above, Keen continues: "The arrival of the cult of the amateur resulted in it being extremely difficult to define the line between readers, artists and opinion leaders, art and product, amateur and expert. The result? A decrease in the quality and credibility of the information we receive, which leads to the disfiguring, not to say, complete destruction of our national discourse" (Ibidem, 45).

45   C. Hardaker (2010). *Trolling in asynchronous computer-mediated communication: From user discussions to academic definitions*. *Journal of Politeness Research, 6*, 224.

46   F. H. Allport 1924. *Social Psychology.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin; D. Katz, F. H. Allport. 1931. *Student Attitudes.* Syracuse, NY: Craftsman.

- The 'spiral of silence' occurs when we keep quiet in fear of the majority's opinion, not wanting to be criticized by them. The mechanism can be activated when we are surrounded by unanimous opinions suggesting we take a particular attitude when faced by a phenomenon, event or person. Media which present one view as dominating generating a huge number of artificially created one-sided messages, play a particular role here. Such opinions and messages matter because people who are convinced that their opinion is similar to the dominant one in their group speak – as research shows – louder and more often than those who think their opinion is in the minority. Minority opinions are gradually hushed up in way that as a result, paradoxically, decisions might not be supported by a majority because that majority believes that the minority opinion is dominant.

This effect can be achieved in the internet where the readers of posts do not know whether they are supported by few, or by many, because one person may be hiding behind several e-mail addresses, log-ins or because of a silent, disorganized majority. This way, a majority is not needed to convince others to change their opinion, it is enough to create the impression that the opposite side is in the minority. If the latter came to believe this, they would be less keen to speak, and group convictions would slowly change in favour of those who believe they are in the majority.

The spiral of silence mechanism is interconnected with the widely discussed 'bandwagon effect' which is based on people's natural need to be on the winning side, the majority. The aim of persuaders is to convince members of the audience that an opinion delivered is an expression of mass sentiment and that it is in their interests to join the course of action that everyone else is taking.

Similarly, in the analysis of the propagandist-audience interaction mechanism, it consists of invoking the audience to adopt the attitudes and beliefs of the 'common man'. This is simply an attempt to convince individuals and groups that the position taken by the persuader reflects the views of the common people. The result is winning the confidence of people who distrust officialdom and state authorities but are likely to trust 'plain folks' – people like themselves.

Operations observed in the last couple of years reveal that these exact mechanisms are being employed in propaganda campaigns on the internet. Are they effective, do they attract readers' attention? What does the frequency of comments in news portals' comment sections depend on?

This kind of research had not been carried out to date, *inter alia* because we cannot be sure about the authenticity of posts, the involvement and honesty of contributors and to what extent they represent their own convictions, not someone else's. However, an attempt can be made to determine the relationship between the number of comments and the presence and content of photographs, articles and comments.

The impact of photographs on comments

It is assumed that the appearance of photographs of itself attracts readers' attention. That could be the case, but comment numbers only increased for certain types of photograph.

Increases in the numbers of comments were observed when people appeared in the photographs rather than objects, buildings, symbols, statues or barricades ($p=0.009$; $t=2.617$; $df=1628$). A substantial difference was observed in the case of the persons involved: comment numbers increased for politicians and security-force personnel. This can be explained by people placing greater value on politicians and high-level military leaders as sources of information and this encourages them to agree with their statements. What might be surprising is that the number of comments does not increase for civilians, representatives of the financial world or journalists. Differences were also observed in line with the emotion expressed by the portrayed persons. Most comments appeared in cases of repugnance and contempt ($p=0.000$; $t=3.845$; $df=1623$), anger and rage, grief and torment, as well as fear and anxiety, i.e., negative emotions. Positive emotions, such as joy and satisfaction, and neutral emotions surprisingly did not have significant impact on the frequency of commenting.

It is surprising that more comments are not drawn by photographs of the destruction of buildings, corpses, acts of cruelty (severed body parts) or threats (including weapons, not as toys, but as instruments of death). It turned out that not only do these not increase commenters' interest, threats actually decrease it ($p=0.028$; $t=-2.196$, $df=1626$).

The impact of topics on comments

Another problem concerned the influence of articles' topics on the numbers of comments. The following article topics were defined: warfare, military operations, political, diplomatic action by Russia, Ukraine and Western states, business and economic issues, public protests, social movements, Maidan and anti-Maidan protesters, examinations of different scenarios, and social issues.

It turned out that a statistically significant impact on comment frequency occurred in articles about the actions and political appearances of Russian politicians (p=0.0000; t=11.784; df=2628), Ukrainian politicians (p=0.0000; t=6.595) and representatives of Western policies (p=0.000; t=8.004). Comment frequency also increased for articles depicting the situation of families, deaths of close ones, human rights, national, ethnic and religious conflict (p=0.000; t=4.968) as well as social protests (p=0.000; t=6.694, df=2626).

All this indicated that factors involving antagonistic citizens attract more interest (the political activity of the conflicting parties, their definition of what was happening in Ukraine and what role Russia has in all this) as also do issues affecting them personally (dissatisfaction, protests, breaking the law and ethnic conflict), more than do economic and business issues, or even military operations.

While analysing the comment frequency in articles, we also determined whether articles sympathizing more or less with Russia, Ukraine and the Western world significantly increased, decreased or had no effect on comment numbers in news portals' comment sections.

Impact of article undertone on comments

Data indicates that the undertone of articles influences the number of comments in that journalists expressing clear pro- or anti-Russian, Ukrainian or Western positions attract more comments. While it was expected that neutral articles would generate the least interest (this was apparent in every category), in the case of clearly pro- and anti-West articles, the average number of comments was significantly higher. For pro- or anti-Ukraine articles, no substantial differences in interest were found, and for anti- or pro-Russian articles, only the latter generated more interest. This could mean that discussion participants are no longer moved by criticism or support for Kiev, however categories inducing antagonism were continually used in articles and comment discussions to intensify an atmosphere of irreconcilable conflict.

Table 7. Article undertone: pro-, anti-Russian (F=21.356; p=0.000).

SENTIMENT	N	SUBSET FOR ALPHA = 0.05	
		MEAN1	MEAN2
neutral	1549	124.14	
anti-Russian	851	132.51	
pro-Russian	230		256.54

Table 8. Article undertone: pro-, anti-West (F=134,454; p=0.000).

SENTIMENT	N	SUBSET FOR ALPHA = 0.05	
		MEAN1	MEAN2
neutral	2492	117.70	
anti-West	39		449.03
pro-West	99		537.89

Table 9. Article undertone: pro-, anti- Ukrainian (F=1.655; p=0.191)

SENTIMENT	I	SUBSET FOR ALPHA = 0.05
		1
neutral	1509	129.54
anti-Ukraine	815	142.14
pro-Ukraine	225	165.19

Apart from reaction to an article's sentiment, an increased number of comments arose when there were suggestions of Russia being a victim of the Western establishment, reacting to the aggressive, hostile actions of other countries (p=0.000; t=5.204 – the average number of comments to articles claiming that Russia was the victim was 611 comments, while the absence of this statement meant an average of 212 comments).

However, no change in comment frequency was observed when articles portrayed Russia as an aggressor, empire-building state, directly or indirectly interfering with issues in and the functioning of Ukraine and other countries, or a state which "defends its citizens' interests". A similar mechanism was observed where Ukraine was portrayed as a victim of the Kremlin – the average number of comments here was 367, while the absence of such content meant an average number of 99 comments (p=0.000; t=6.444).

The impact of descriptions of the situations in Crimea and Donbass on comments

Another subject of this analysis was the way pro-Russian fighters in the east of Ukraine and occupying Crimea were portrayed. Among the diverse descriptions of them (neutral – soldier, separatist, liberator, mercenary, terrorist, Ukrainian, Russian, non-Ukrainian (different nationality/citizenship), the following categories increased the number of comments: liberator (p=0.000; t=10.024), separatist (p=0.000; t=8.315) and Russian (p=0.001; t=3.288).

Other categories, just like different descriptions of Ukrainian soldiers fighting the separatists, did not provoke any substantial differences.

An important question was how the course of discussions and the style of commenting influenced subsequent comment numbers.

It turns out that, in fact, comment frequency depends firstly on whether the subject of discussion is defining the situations in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. If the topic includes the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity by Russia, Russian aggression in Crimea, annexation as a reaction to Western aggression or that Maidan was organized by the West, discussion is more active. It is interesting to note that non-military and non-political plots to incorporate Crimea into Russia's structure and related problems and successes do not attract the same degree of attention by discussion participants.

Similarly, definitions of the military dimension of the conflict in Donbass focus readers' and commenters' attention: increased comment frequency is observed when the subject is civil war between the government and separatists and when suggestions appear about the war in Donbass being Russia's reaction to Western aggression.

It is surprising that discussions questioning Ukraine's sovereignty, undermining its existence or calling it a fascist state actually see comment numbers decrease (p=0.000; t=-4.522, df=1367). Just like when Ukrainian ATO soldiers are called fascist (p=0.000; t=-3.645; df=758). This is surprising, because the presence of this content is widely considered to be the most reader-activating on websites.

The impact of eristic[47] arguments on comments

Does eristic behaviour increase the activity in comment forums? Unsurprisingly, yes. Above all, comment frequency increases when there is a greater presence of trolls (r_{xy}=0.154; p=0.000). Statistically, issues were commented on more often if they used such 'operational techniques' as: denial (p=0.016; t=2.420), building/preserving the image of the enemy (p=0.016; t=5.520), fuelling national, ethnic and religious hatred/quarrels (p=0.000; t=6.313).

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47   An argument that aims to successfully dispute another's argument, rather than searching for truth.

Certain communication strategies such as building information chaos (including disinformation, gossip), fuelling internal conflict (accusations of incompetence, corruption, betrayal, and animosity), threatening, discouraging and constructing conspiracy theories did not attract more comments.

Troll activity increased other users' activity, not necessarily because of any refined eristic techniques, but just because they initiated certain discussion threads (p=0.000; t=9.568), frequently responding to their own comments (p=0.000; t=13.922). For comparison, of the 1 552 discussions in which trolls responded to their own comments, the average number of comments was 178, while in threads where they did not use this technique, it was only 36 comments. Some actions proved to be counter-productive – pasting links caused a decrease in the number of comments, from an average of 133 to 101 comments (p=0.007; t=-2.676).

To sum up this part of the analysis: more intense internet discussion was not caused by the following topics recurring in articles and discussions: supposed fascism, calling Stepan Bandera the ideological father of Ukraine, Russian or Ukrainian patriotism or questioning the existence of the Ukrainian state. It seems that during the internet propaganda campaign, these came to be seen as clichés overused by propagandists. Techniques inducing emotion connected with military and political activity in Crimea and Donbass were much more effective, when interlocutors tried to justify war and aggression as Russia's justifiable reaction to the actions of the West. It is more effective to motivate internet forum readers by undermining the myth of the West, questioning Eastern and Central Europe countries' independence from the EU and the US, as well as by using classic eristic techniques.

3.3 FRAMES USED IN THE INTERNET DISCOURSE ON THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA CONFLICT

The concept of framing is based on the assumption that the way an issue is reported by the media influences its perception by the audience. In the context of framing, the most significant aspect in terms of communication is the fact that whoever manages to determine and impose interpretation frames on a given issue, also determines the perception of that issue by the audience, and in consequence, the way it is understood and evaluated.

Which frames appeared in comments on the Ukraine-Russia conflict?

3.4.1. Criticism of Western and Atlantic civilizations under the US's leadership

This is the basic frame organizing Russia's relationship with the outside world and is the foundation for all the other frames. According to this frame, Russia is defending traditional values which have contributed to the spiritual and moral attitudes of civilizations and nations for thousands of years: the traditional family, human religious and spiritual life, the value of humanism and global diversity. In the opinion of Russian leaders and commenters, these values have been rejected by the West which is trying to impose its liberal values on every society in the world, which in turn has led to the regression of 'civilization', barbarity and the spilling of blood. In discussions, examples are invoked of morality and traditional identity being rejected – national, cultural, religious and sexual values. It is scandalous that Western policies place the same value on the traditional family and same-sex marriage, this is "believing in God and Satan simultaneously".

So, on the one hand, the West is weak and degenerate, with 'gay' ideology, while on the other hand it finds itself in spiritual and financial crisis. In the West, only the egotistic interests of the rich and powerful are acted on, and that is why the West would not help the countries of Eastern Europe. In Poland, for example, the memory of 1939 is frequently evoked as an example of the "betrayal" of Poland by Western states, which should be "a lesson learned forever".

In the narrative of pro-Russia commentators, we are dealing with an intensified political and military rivalry between superpowers, and this rivalry begins to have a civilizational dimension, between alternative development paths and socio-political models. The West has broken its promise not to interfere with *Russkiy Mir*. According to the logic expressed on all the forums being analysed, the West, in particular the US, is attempting to impose Western values on Russia (policies supporting the 'colour revolutions'). Consequently, the ideological sphere became an important part of this international rivalry ("the West and the US tricked Gorbachov in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the West and the US promised Gorbachov they would not extend NATO's boundaries by a single inch", *~zLos,* 28 August 2014, *korrespondent.net*). Arguments calling on European values, human rights and democracy are rejected as propaganda tools undermining the division between the decadent countries of so-called Western democracy, and the countries with traditional values and governments working closely with Russia.

Russia's operations in Ukraine are portrayed here not as aggressive, but as defensive action. Putin is not portrayed as an aggressor, but as a defender of the traditional *status quo*, in the senses of both values and policies. He highlights what is "the most disgusting and demoralizing issue, that USS-men[48] and the EU, who call themselves the depositaries of democracy, law-abiding and human rights, support this Bandera lawlessness!!!" (~*Maurycy,* 2 April 2014, onet.pl).

3.4.2 Criticism of Ukraine (and Central and Eastern Europe countries) as puppets of the West

From the Russian perspective, the world is divided into areas of influence, in which weaker countries implement policies consistent with the expectations of more powerful states. The current Ukrainian authorities are a puppet of the West, and the current government – a great threat to stability in Europe because it aims to break the *status quo* and wants to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, opening up Ukraine to NATO influence. The Ukrainian Prime Minister and Baltic States' leaders are technocrats put in their seats by the EU, 'on a tight leash from the US'. This way Ukraine (and other countries in this part of Europe) is not self-reliant and dependent on Western states and the US, above all, for its policies and economy.

Descriptions such as "paid US errand boys" and "puppets of the EU" are used to portray the status of the Ukrainian government. The actions of decision makers are for the benefit of a small group of (fascist) oligarchs, not the development of the country; they serve "fattened *Bandera men and their dogs* to grow rich from the US's money", they serve purely for "thirty pieces of silver". As one commenter says: "Ukraine is needed by the West as a stick to beat Russia with and nothing more. All that the West does there, it does in its own interests. It is an investment for future exploitation" (Mads**,** 28 May 2014 *korrespondent.net*).

Talking to politicians who are not self-directed makes no sense, leads to nothing and, until the government changes, opposition to Kiev is justified.

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48   USS-Men is a play on words to link SS-men (Nazi Germany) and US-men (United States).

The purpose of the 'Kiev *junta*' is to sustain a pseudo-democratic system, a façade thanks to which 'banksters' and the US will be able to rule this part of Europe behind the backs of corrupt politicians ("larcenous privatization (at the bidding of the West) still continues in Poland [...] it started with changing 'Wesołych Świąt' into 'Seasonal Greetings... I would gladly see the winners and supporters of <revolutionary > changes in court [...] Ukraine – when it goes down the path of implementing anything under pressure from the EU or IMF – also has a great chance of dying with a smile on its face, pretending that it has just entered the path of development" (wojtek roz**,** 27 December 2014,*onet.pl*).

3.4.3 Other countries' support for Ukraine means neglecting their own national interests

The fear of war and losing financial profits are certainly strong components in the consciousness of European countries and are eagerly used in propaganda intrigues. The first dimension of acting to the detriment of national interests concerns financial affairs. Here Winston Churchill's words are sometimes invoked: "We have no lasting friends, no lasting enemies, only lasting interests". That is why, for example, *~miro* reminds us that "Poland's development depends on us having ordered relations with Russia. The Germans, French, Hungarians and many other nations know that, but not the Poles" (3 April 2014, *onet.pl*).

The classic fear of aggression is also present, and it is heightened not only by classic threats of using military arsenals, but also by building a lack of trust between allies who, in the moment of truth, would indubitably betray their partners (like they betrayed Poland in 1939). The image of a two-faced Ukraine is underlined here, as a state aiming to draw 'neutral' neighbour states into its confrontation, even though they should be avoiding unnecessary confrontation with Moscow.

The pro-Ukrainian attitudes of European countries and governments are portrayed as a call to arms, but the perpetrators of conflict are, above all, Ukrainians (fascists, *Bandera men*) or the West (the US, NATO, the Pentagon). As a consequence, countries are directly endangering their own national interests and the interests of Ukraine itself, and unreasonable sanctions, blockades and restrictions on contacts lead to the further escalation of conflict and unavoidable losses on both sides ("The discontent with Russia in western Ukraine is facilitating the EU and the US in inducing problems. Those in Washington and Europe who want to destroy Ukraine's

independence portray independent Ukraine as a hostage of Russia and Ukraine in the EU allegedly being under European and US protection. The large sums of money that Washington allocated to NGOs in Ukraine serve to propagate this idea, driving people into mindless folly. Never in my life have I been a witness to people as mindless as the Ukrainian protestors who are destroying the independence of their own country" (~*OcenNIK*, 7 May 2014, *kyivpost.com*).

Commenters using this frame speak of "Ukrainian mayhem" and that the national interest is "to mind one's own business, not support fascists and put oneself on the front lines of combat with Russia" ("Everyone should consider, putting Russophobia aside, what and where our Polish national interest lies" ~*Turkuć* 15 May 2014, *onet.pl*; "Does anyone think that Poles will stand by the Bandera men against the Russia that defeated them? Give yourselves a firm bang on the head! The French clearly stated that NATO ends with the Bug River, the Germans will not stand against Russia because they remember Stalingrad, Great Britain will not come because their Parliament will not allow it, neither will Spain because they are more of a pro-socialist country", ~*MARZENIA ZYDOWSKIEJ MILIIARDERKI ZLODZIEJKI,* 2 April 2014, *onet.pl*). This 'minding one's own business' is, in consequence, supposed to take a specific form. Although in the beginning it is about "not teasing Russia", about building normal relationship with that country (regardless of what it does), finally it means taking its side and supporting it.

3.4.4 Ukraine is incapable of functioning as a country

Every democracy is based on society's trust in government officials and institutions, and the actions of government officials should reinforce this trust. Another frame used in the interpretation of the current situation in Ukraine (and beyond) portrays its political system (and those of the Baltic States) as dysfunctional, corrupt, incompetent and oriented towards narrow interests, not the common good. Referring to all kinds of social dissatisfaction, citing examples of inappropriate actions by the state and its institutions create an impression of the country's helplessness. This leads to the atomization of society, the atrophy of ties and the domination of the belief that only egotism, self-interest and individualism count. This kind of narrative can be especially effective in countries with low social capital, which include Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States (to a slightly lesser degree). Further weakening of social ties and social capital might be an effective tool to derail a country's socio-economic development.

Certain common threads have drawn eager commenting activity in post-Communist countries since the 1990s. These include the disappointment with economic reforms constantly present in the public's consciousness, political transformation and, in Poland, the Round Table talks. It should be noted, however, that it is hard to determine the line between the justified and understandable expression of social dissatisfaction and the hostile propaganda activity exploiting it. Persuasive endeavours, however, exploit the weak points of the countries being criticized ("Since when has this parliament been democratic, since most representatives from the overthrown president's party were driven out by armed Nazis. Do not talk drivel, Ukrainian marauder. This government results from a *putsch* because Ukraine was taken over by a bunch of Neo-Nazis. Previously, Ukraine was governed by thieves, now they are MURDERERS, too", *~oo* 7 May 2014, *ru.delfi.ee*).

In the following internet comments, different frames are invoked simultaneously and they form a metaframe – "Ukraine/Poland is a puppet of the West, governed by incompetent <elites> oriented only towards their personal gain" ("for now our <political elites> act as barking dogs on a tight leash from Jewropean institutions and they will do anything to keep taking their money, and let's not beat about the bush, take it even at the expense of the Polish state", *~fefel* 11 April 2014, *kyivpost.com*).

3.4.5 Russophobia

According to this frame, all criticism of today's Russia is a result of an anti-Russian obsession ("Russophobia, as I see, overtook most politicians sitting in the Yanks' pockets" (*~dr ross,* 15 July 2014 *ru.delfi.lv*). Two situations should be distinguished here: in the first, the criticism of Russia can be an expression of the disapproval of its policies, in the second it can actually constitute camouflage for an anti-Russian attitude hard for society to accept. How can these two be differentiated? Nathan Sharansky's proposition can be employed here. He established three criteria allowing secular criticism of Israel to be differentiated from one of anti-Semitic character[49]. These criteria are: de-legitimisation (denying the nation or ethnic group has the right to self-determination, e.g., by stating that a country should not exist), double standards (if someone criticizes a country and its citizens for specific actions, but ignores similar behaviour on the part of other states) and demonization (describing a given group of people as evil).

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49   N. Sharansky (2004). *3D test of anti-Semitism: demonization, double standards, de-le-gitimisation. Jewish Political Studies Review*. 16, 3-4.

Utilising these to evaluate 'Russo-phobic behaviour', it can be stated that these comments do not deny Russians the right to their own country and do not intend to strip them of their national rights, they do not criticize Russia more than other countries supporting terrorist activity and do not demonize Russians, and, above all, the criticism is aimed at the Russian authorities, not the people.

Despite all this, the Russophobia frame is a convenient tool, eagerly used in comments ("The West has a monopoly on liberation and watching over the observation of human rights, humanitarian bombing and imposing sanctions on the defiant. Putin was denounced as a second Hitler a long time ago, and in Poland many think he is even worse" ~*jeszcze1.uk,* 10 May 2014 *onet.pl*; "Putin takes only one thing into account – the interests of his country. His alleged <imperial inclinations> are nothing in the face of global US hegemony. One has to be a complete idiot not to see that. The *battue* of Russia is an idiotic and dangerous idea. Even the gentlest dog when cornered – will bite", ~*soboart,* 22 July 2014, *ru.delfi.lv*).

3.4.6 Ukraine as a quasi-state – fascist state

This frame discredits both the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian nationality. According to this frame, Ukraine is a quasi-state, and Ukrainians are not a legitimate nation. After the fall of Yanukovych, the Ukrainian authorities are illegal and consist of fascists and *Bandera men*. This judgment was directly formulated by Russian politicians and Victor Yanukovych stating that a bunch of ultranationalists wants to put the army under the Bandera banner and cause a civil war – incorporating and arming nationalist fighters. The Polish issue of the Wołyń Massacre is utilised here. Ukrainians are depicted as savage and cruel beasts mindlessly murdering Poles, without sparing women or children. The personage of Stepan Bandera plays a key role, as he becomes the symbol of these crimes. On the one hand, Bandera as a negative symbol is a creation of Soviet propaganda. On the other hand, he became a symbol of the fight for independence for today's Ukrainian public opinion and consequently a subject of continuous attacks by their opponents. His presence in the Ukrainian discourse is intended to lead readers to a negative evaluation of modern Ukrainian society and be proof of its extreme nationalism.

The subject of Bandera and his men, as well as Ukrainian nationalism is present on all websites, and in the Polish internet it constitutes one of the main elements of anti-Ukrainian argument in attempts to heighten Polish-Ukrainian discord.

Thanks to the description of the cruelty at and criminality of the Wołyń Massacre, this problem is seen as being so emotionally charged that it obstructs any Polish-Ukrainian dialogue ("Propaganda works. Oh, how great these Westerners are, how bad the ones from the East are. It is just that the Poles in Wołyń were murdered by western Ukrainians. And now their descendants are on Maidan Square and in the Ukrainian government. That is the truth" ~*Potomek zamordowanych na Wolyniu,* 18 August 2014, *onet.pl*; "You Bandera scum. You go mad because murdering the weak is in your genes. Go back to Kiev and wait there. We will hunt you all down for Wołyń and send you to the Russians as a gift", ~*wolyn* 9 July 2014; "Ukraine is an artificial creation carved from the Republic of Poland's and Russian territory. Russians have a greater right to Donbass than the Ukrainians. The oligarchs are lying that this is about the territorial integrity of Ukraine – they want the Donbass's resources. Without Donbass, Ukraine is expendable ballast for the sponsors of this trouble", ~*ee,* 3 August 2014, *korrespondent.net*).

3.4.7 Russians are Slavic brothers

The frame of solidarity between Slavic people and building a community of nations based on common ethnic roots appears in two situations. Firstly, when a common fight of Slavic people against non-Slavic elements is mentioned, going back to the Turkish invasion or the last war with Germany ("Without the Russians, Poland would have been lost because only the strong Slavic Russians helped the Slavic Poles beat the deadly enemies of Poland such as Germans, Mongolians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Swedes and Turks. Is that clear? You are blind and stubborn, like an SS-man" ~*Jedność Słowiańska*, 17 September 2014, *onet.pl*). Secondly, it contrasts the interests of the Slavic states with those of the US and Western Europe. In this way, a community based on common historic fates and shared values is constructed ("Russians and Ukrainians murder each other, but the Anglo-Saxon empire dances on their graves and waits on a final solution to the Slavic problem. And we participate in this, dumbly and unconscious of the real objectives of the players in this war. Shame!", ~*jan,* 3 August 2014, *kyivpost.com*; "I would like Ukraine to be peaceful again. I wish for Ukrainians not to dispute with their Slavic brothers, but respect each other. There is no East-West, there is one Ukraine of different, respectful citizens. It does not matter, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish ancestors – one Slavic family!" ~*Igor Triputin*, 19 August 2014, *korrespondent.net*).

CHAPTER 4

TROLL ACTIVITY IN THE MEDIA AS AN ELEMENT OF RUSSIA'S INFORMATION STRATEGY

4.1 TROLLS – AN ATTEMPT AT A DEFINITION

Trolling is an unclear concept – it has different meanings for different people and is used to describe different kinds of negatively evaluated internet behaviour. Generally, trolling can be characterized by behaviour such as publishing provocative comments on the internet with the intention of causing conflict. Claire Hardaker proposes four basic characteristics of troll behaviour: aggression, success, disruption, and deception[50].

Aggression means behaving in a way that makes recipients angry and wanting to retaliate. Success is measured by whether the troll's provocation has led to the desired behaviour – responses, comments which lure the reader into a game with a troll. Disruption assumes that the troll's objective is not to have a substantive conversation, but to lead the conversation in the direction desired by the troll and instigating personal attacks on both sides. Deception reveals the troll's true nature and the real purpose of trolling – it is not to discuss, but to "cause disruption or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement[51]".

To what degree do these particular features allow trolls to be distinguished from people who simply enjoy heated argument with others? It is difficult because, while everyday discussion has its own set of rules in which such factors as respect for the discussion partner, consciousness of the roles being played and responsibility for the words used, are very important – in internet communication, interaction is indirect, delayed and participants can remain anonymous, which encourages behaviour inconsistent with commonly binding rules. Such behaviour, though, does not necessarily mean the person displaying it is a troll. The internet also has mediated communities, of people sharing the same values, convictions and norms which divide the world into 'us' and 'them' – people identifying with their group and rejecting others. This also strengthens antagonism and might cause aggression, which is why, while trying to determine who is a troll, apart from the features indicated by Hardaker, the motivation of commenters must be considered; do discussion participants aim to evoke negative emotions in online community members, cause anger, rage, irritation, do they deviate from the point or simply post snide comments. As readers, we do not have the opportunity to observe motivation, which is why we have to focus our research on the course of discussions and the consequences of specific posts.

In the case of Russia's information campaign, it is widely known that the people used in it support military, intelligence and propaganda activity on the internet.

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50   C. Hardaker (2010). Trolling in asynchronous …, 215-242.

51   Ibid., 237.

On the one hand, these are people acting to order, obtaining remuneration for work done, which, in the case of organized trolling, is posting messages and comments portraying certain people and events in a particular light, using selected, modified facts in, to them, suitable contexts[52]. On the other hand, they are also 'useful idiots', that is regular commenters unconsciously inspired to proliferate disinformation, and people with profiles in social media and/or personal blogs in which they publish texts 'desired' from the pro-Russian perspective. It is extremely difficult to differentiate between these two categories of commenter because they can be using the exact same communication techniques and referring to the same sources. However, comments from people working in the troll 'swarm' are usually more extensive and better-elaborated than the inadvertent comments of ordinary internet users. 'Requested' material is written on similar templates, often copied, posted within a short period of time and highly rated by other 'users'. In contrast with such 'infected' opinions, comments opposing propaganda content are rated lowly by 'discussion participants' and the subject of much criticism.

When looking to identify trolls, mistakes can be made by evaluating each post separately. However, if sequences of statements are analysed, then trolling activity becomes clearer. These sequences consist of three phases: luring, taking the bait and hauling in.
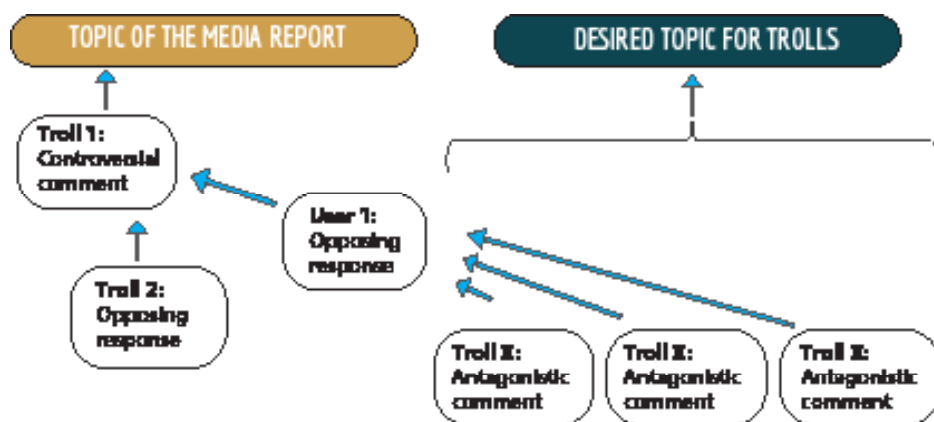
....
52   The organized nature of the propaganda was proved by two independent journalists' investigations – in 2013 by Novaja Gazieta and the MR7.ru website, and in 2014 conducted by the Sobaka.ru website. The results of these investigations were the subject of many media reports, e.g. BBC: Olga Bugorkova, Ukraine conflict: Inside Russia's 'Kremlin troll army', 19 March 2015: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31962644, retrieved 10 July 2015; The Guardian, Shaun Walker, Salutin' Putin: inside a Russian troll house, 2 April 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/putin-kremlin-inside-russian-troll-house, retrieved 10 July 2015; New York Times: 29 May 2015, http://nypost.com/2015/05/29/russias-online-kremlin-troll-army/, retrieved 10 July 2015.

Luring

In the first phase, a controversial comment is posted with the intention of attracting the audience's attention. Such comments will often question the worth, sense and truthfulness of articles placing Russia and the separatists in a negative light. One good example of how trolls lure readers into discussion is the comments which appeared to an article on the violation of truce stipulations by separatists (*"Ukraina: pod Słowiańskiem zginęli ukraińscy żołnierze"*[53]). It relates how separatists fired at Ukrainian watchtowers and killed three soldiers. One of the first posts was published by *~Robinson* who writes: "Dear journalists. A real sensation. One Ukrainian soldier died. Go on YT. There are hundreds of corpses there. Take lorry drivers 'mistakenly' shot by the Ukrainian army, people killed with rockets from helicopters in the city centre. Women and civilians. And you are trying to create the impression that nothing happened there. It is sad that in order to get to the truth I have to read foreign news channels' websites and 'przekaziory'[mass media]" (28 June 14).

The above post contains an opinion opposing that held by the majority of Poles. These Poles think that pro-Russian separatists are to blame for the Ukrainian conflict, as they are trying to annex part of Ukraine's territory. A post opposing that Polish opinion 'asks' for readers' responses. The commenter additionally tries to evoke emotion with the images of 'hundreds of corpses', material published on *YouTube,* and claims innocent women and children were killed by Ukrainians. This kind of post is treated as a provocation by readers and leads to an antagonistic reaction. We have then reached the second phase of 'discussion development'.

Taking the bait

Taking the bait sometimes takes the form of a response from a person opposing the initial statement. However, very often that bait has actually been 'taken over' by another troll who employs different techniques to incite discussion. For example, they may ridicule the opponent's weak arguments ("there are always civilian casualties in wars, the Ukrainians did not intend to kill women and children"), clumsily deny ("there is no proof that the Ukrainians shot any civilians in the Donetsk People's Republic") or propose opinions in line with their option, but in an exaggerated fashion.

....
53   http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/ukraina-pod-slowianskiem-zgineli-ukrainscy-zolnier-ze/ 5fnpr.

One example is the response to ~*Robinson* posted by ~*to* who writes: "exactly! let's destroy the Bandera embassies" (28 June 2014). ~*to*'s opinion was posted 20 minutes after ~*Robinson*'s post which apparently did not attract enough attention. The aggressive undertone of ~*to*'s post leaves no room for doubt and encourages objections. In this way both comments, through parody, ridicule and exaggeration, are supposed to motivate non-Russians and encourage more comments. In this situation, ~*mimek* posts to criticize ~*to*: "You can see for yourself, you are now inciting hate. This circle has been turning for centuries" (28 June 2014). However, there is much that indicates that this is another troll who, within a few comments, puts on a show of weakly criticising, absolving his predecessor a little. The supposition that we are dealing with a troll stems not only from this rather mild criticism, but the word order in the message. Basically, every statement here includes grammatical errors or expressions not used in Polish (*przekaziory* in ~*Robinson*'s post, "Bandera embassy" in ~*to*'s, "this circle has been turning for centuries" in ~*mimek*'s). It is interesting that this post also attracted no interest and it needed two more posts to stimulate discussion: ~*lipa* who demanded the truth about the "Murders of Kiev *putsch* participants'" and ~*olkat* stating that "there is no truth in this". Finally, *kobra* posted briefly, asking "what are you writing, think a little, guy". Only in response to these did a few comments criticizing trolls appear (the commenters directly using the term troll).

At this moment we observe the transition to the third phase – hauling in.

Hauling in

At this stage, trolls deviate from the article's content and the first post, commenting on selected statements to make the discussion antagonistic. In this way they draw out the statement on attacking the "Ukrainian embassy", reminding readers that only a few days earlier, there had been riots of "red-black Bandera fighters" in front of Kiev's Russian embassy. This fact is summed up by ~*ku-ku* who pretends to be as objective as the Polish media and writes: "And there is already a new joke going around that the Polish media reported that <the Russian embassy in Kiev assaulted peacefully demonstrating activists of the *Right Sector*>. I feel kind of ashamed for the Polish media" (28 June 14, rating: 70%). In this way, the trolls themselves create the impression of a discussion, expressing 'differing' views on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

They use different techniques to do this, from openly insulting interlocutors – calling them names, dehumanizing Russia's opponents by denying them rights other people are entitled to, even denying competencies, abilities and honesty by using the linguistic tools elaborated on by Paweł Nowak in the next chapter of this report. At the same time, trolls assume different roles, from exaggeration for parodic effect, irony, sarcasm expressing apparent respect for the opponent ("you are so CLEVER"), to naiveté and ignorance, in order to enable other trolls "to cast light on the issue" ("really, do Ukrainians shoot at their own people?").

Analysing trolling is not simple, it requires a high degree of sensitivity on the part of the researcher, understanding the context of statements and the different communication techniques used by trolls. This still does not guarantee that, apart from the reconstruction of the discussion, the appearing narratives would allow us to be 100% certain who is and who is not a troll. Despite some doubt, some behaviour can be categorised which increases the probability of identifying particular discussion participants as trolls:

- Copies information not supported by sources, without commenting on it

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EXAMPLE 1. ГЛАЗЬЕВ: ЕС МОЖЕТ ПОТЕРЯТЬ 1 ТРЛН ЕВРО ИЗ-ЗА САНКЦИЙ ПРОТИВ РОССИИ

04.04.2014 20:15
Советник российского президента Сергей Глазьев в пятницу заявил, что потери Европейского союза в случае применения санкций против России могут достичь 1 трлн евро.
«Большой еще вопрос, на кого эти санкции направлены с точки зрения максимального ущерба? Если американцы постараются реализовать модель, которая была применена к Ирану, а это практически отключение страны от мировой финансовой системы в ее долларовой части и части евро, то, по нашим подсчетам, потери Европейского Союза могут достичь 1 трлн евро»,
«По нашим подсчетам, потери Европейского Союза могут достичь 1 трлн евро»
По его словам, Германия может получить ущерб в 200 млн евро.
«Но относительный ущерб будет нанесен, как это ни странно, Украине, за интересы которой они так, вроде как, беспокоятся, и Прибалтике, которая наиболее агрессивно себя ведет», – сказал он.
Как считает Глазьев, Прибалтика может потерять «величину, практически сравнимую с объемом ВВП».
«Так что санкции для Европы – это самоубийство экономическое».

- Denies and reverses the focus – "not us, but them"

EXAMPLE 2. ВРОДЕ

10.07.2014 09:53
РОССИЯ ни на кого не нападала, так же можно считать Европу агрессором, которая захватила все республики бывшего союза....ТАК ? Вообще был страшный фашизм, а сейчас ещё страшней – америкашизм.....

- Troll repeats the same content, e.g., "Russia is not taking part in the conflict"

EXAMPLE 3. ИДИЕТУ

11.09.2014 12:05
поц написал:
Харьковчанин Евгений Безсонов написал: «...Мы не убили ни одного россиянина, не захватили ни одного клочка чужой земли, не ввели войска на их территорию, не присвоили их ресурсы. Мы просто на одну неделю стали свободной страной. И этого хватило, чтобы Россия объявила нам войну ЕДИНОДУШНЫМ решением Совета Федерации и при тотальной поддержке российского населения!!! За что они нас так ненавидят? За свободу? За то, что по-другому думаем? За что мы награждены такой лютой и всенародной ненавистью, что война оправдана в глазах россиян?»
А одессит Михаил Жванецкий сказал: «Они нам просто завидуют».
ненавидят вас за вашу тупость и жадность,глюпый поц и харьковчанин!! Россия войну не начинала,ее втянули в ваш конфликт,вы и амеры!!так что протрезвей и старайся меньше лакать горилки).

- Troll intimidates, creates internal conflict (e.g. Poroszenko is a bandit, Bandera followers must be destroyed):

EXAMPLE 4. АЛЕК

06.06.2014 09:12
Порошенко привели к власти бандеровцы, он будет осуществлять их волю.
А это террор, смерть, разруха. Строить отношения эти люди не будут. С Хунтой нормальные люди жить тоже не согласятся никогда. Ключ к решению проблем найден, это уничтожение лидеров Хунты.

- Troll puts in links without commenting on them

EXAMPLE 5.

06.06.2014 09:50
http://politikus.ru/video/20858-day-bog-vam-zahl...

- Troll builds up conspiracy theories (e.g. NATO is behind the Ukrainian conflict)

EXAMPLE 6. МЫ ВСЁ ПОНИМАЕМ

08.06.2014 12:46
Украина страна лжи и пропаганды..полигон психологической войны стран НАТО против России..достаточно почитать цензор.нет что бы понять какую пургу несут украинские СМИ под чуткими указаниями из Ленгли..хотя эту пургу не решаются печатать в западных СМИ..там ешё люди не совсем тупые как население Украины

- Troll puts in off-topic comments (information chaos):

EXAMPLE 7. ЦИРК НА МАЙДАНЕ, ЗАПАСАЕМСЯ ПОПКОРНОМ!

10.08.2014 20:33
«Ты, падла в золоте – а ну иди сюда!» – социальный взрыв на Майдане.http://youtu.be/hvibSusxvdY

- Troll assumes the role of a false anti-hero (a seemingly pro-Ukraine troll), provoking responses from pro-Russian commenters

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EXAMPLE 8. ЭСТИЧ.RU

19.08.2014 21:27
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:23
а «Эстет» так стесняется своего хохловства,даже шарфик надел)))
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:22
и теперь Путину ПРИДЁТСЯ встретится с Порошенко! как раз с победой его поздравит!!
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:20
уже Донецк освобождают....бегут колорадыши....командиры то слиняли в «отпуск»)))))
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:17
смотрю фуфаечники притихли)))))Слава Украине!!
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:13
Луганск взяли!!
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:13
Украинская армия в ЦЕНТРЕ ДОНЕЦКА!!
беня задунайский, 19.08.2014 21:13
как РАЗ ДОНЕЦК ОСВОБОДЯТ!!!!!!!!!
Это твои комменты только к этой статье. да ты больной... спермотоксикозом.:))))
Шпилька
05.10.2014 19:42
беня задунайский написал:
очень жаль.....
Вот видишь Бенька как мы разительно отличаемся от друг друга. Ты жалеешь убийц,а мы детишек, женщин и стариков которых они убили.

Summing up, identifying internet users as trolls is not an easy task, but not impossible. First, it requires in-depth analysis of sequences of statements including context sensibility, factual knowledge and understanding as methods of analysis. Second, taking into account individual comments, it can be done with an appropriate analytic tool which allows all of the posts by a single author in different websites to be examined quantitatively and qualitatively.

Therefore a combination of sociological-linguistic output and information-technology output might be applicable. In the process of preparing such a tool, it would be worth referring to the theory of examining styles of expression, the basis for the linguistic analysis of a single author, sociolinguistic methodology and software investigating frequency and the difficulty level of texts communicated by internet users. Software calculating the frequency that particular words appear by means of models and charts already exists (visual and statistical *Many Eyes* by IBM or Polish *logios.pl* and *jasnopis.pl*). NATO could develop similar software, based on the same algorithms, for use by interpersonal-communication researchers, likely to be its most efficacious users.

4.2 TROLLS' OPERATIONAL AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

In this part of the analysis we focus on the techniques used by trolls in psychological warfare. This is an extremely important area because ultimate success, both on the battlefield and in democracy, depends on the numbers of supporters and followers. This is why this area of interest is described by Nissen as "those activities associated with influencing a target audience's values and belief system, their perceptions, emotions, motives, reasoning, and, ideally, their behaviour"[54].

The purpose of psychological warfare is to weaken the morale of the opponent and strengthen one's own morale, creating an atmosphere in which the recipients of statements are more prone to suggestion. This can be achieved through different techniques. Nissen incorporated them into the 'inform and influence' group of techniques, nominating "mislead, expose, demean, promote, deceive, coerce, deter, mobilize and convince". Media serve these techniques well, as recipients' consciousness can be penetrated with words and images.

Organized internet trolling is not equally common on all websites. It turned out that trolls are relatively less active in social media (*Facebook*, *Vkontakte*) than on news portals. Why is this? Firstly, it may be a result of the policies of different websites regarding commenting and numbers of comments (the blocking of unwanted posts and the potential lack of anonymity). Secondly, the social-media space is predominantly visual. Images are the cornerstones of *Facebook* and *Vkontakte*.

....
54   T. Nissen, Weaponization …, 67.

At the present time, people are so overloaded with information that they instinctively tend toward items that are easy to consume and absorb. This might mean people using *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* are reluctant to comment on troll posts and are limiting their engagement to 'liking'. Consequently, when internet users do not agree with content, do not support it, they simply do not click and this way interaction with trolls is broken off. While trolls appreciate visuals are an effective tool for increasing website traffic, they realize they do not necessarily involve users in reciprocal actions. Finally, audience members avoid media content over-packed with one-sided, biased and propaganda messages that are not in line with their beliefs, values and opinions. Consequently, *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* 'share and like' pages are avoided by users.

Table 10. Trolling in the internet.

		TROLLING		
		YES	NO	TOTAL
kyivpost	n	55	79	134
	%	41.0%	59.0%	100.0%
pravda	n	319	600	919
	%	34.7%	65.3%	100.0%
onet	n	132	65	197
	%	67.0%	33.0%	100.0%
ru.delfi.lt	n	189	65	254
	%	74.4%	25.6%	100.0%
ru.delfi.ee	n	385	0	385
	%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
korrespondent	n	683	22	705
	%	96.9%	3.1%	100.0%
Facebook	n	56	77	133
	%	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%
Vkontakte	n	46	97	143
	%	32.2%	67.8%	100.0%
Total	N	1865	1005	2870
	%	65.0%	35.0%	100.0%

The analysis of the discourse on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and research of the frames which set the context of discussion in news-portal comment sections and social media revealed that all possible techniques for influencing the public were used. Trolls (both Russian and Ukrainian) constantly try to influence the audience by posting all sorts of information, as well as by manipulation[55], misleading[56], exposing, demeaning[57], promoting, deception[58], deterring[59], and mobilizing[60]. Although the above techniques were employed continuously, it is hard to determine to what degree the course of discussions actually influenced the convictions, values and attitudes of readers.

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55 "Just yesterday the prime minister of India visited Moscow and all kinds of bilateral agreements were signed. Relations with China are improving every year, as are relations with Latin America. The West isn't the world, if you think so that's due to your typical American outsized ego" takeo3, "New EU foreign policy chief Mogherini, known for her pro-Putin sympathies, to visit Ukraine in new role" 15 December 2014, kyivpost.net

56 „Вот такие они – лица новой украинской власти. В центре фото – руководитель администрации президента Украины Пашинский, прошу любить и жаловать. Тот самый, который привозил и вывозил снайперов с майдана http://takie.org/_nw/97/86530141.jpg", Лица новой украинской власти, 01.04.2014, rus.delfi.ee/

57 „Как гражданин украины, постоянно проживающий в эстонии – очень, очень стыдно за Украину, за придурков-украинских политиков и за их мерзких послов", george2, „Посольство Украины в Эстонии опровергает данные, опубликованные в таблице Посольства РФ", 20.05.2014, rus.delfi.ee.

58 "Wow. Kiev Propaganda to the max... 'Ukraine's Heroes is a Kyiv Post project devoted to Ukrainian army heroes injured in Russia's war against the nation.'?? Are you serious? Did you forget who attacked whom??? Hint: Kiev degenerates attacked the east, not the other way around. This, Daryna reporter, is a joke. A country that calls Ukrainians that kill other Ukrainians if they do not agree with them our kiev: heroes?! And it wants to join the EU? Yeah, good luck" Amoun, "Ukraine's Heroes: A soldier says he is going back to war as soon as he feels better", Oct. 16, 2014.

59 "Poor Ukraine. Sold down the river by the American billionaires – the same people who have destroyed the States, and talk of freedom [...]", "Pritzker, US commerce secretary, calls existing sanctions against Russia 'quite severe'", jack dunster, Sept. 27, 2014.

60 "About Ukraine soldiers, yesterday (16.04.14) entering the Russian parts of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, and the peaceful takeover of 16 armoured transporters NOT A WORD ON ONET! The inhabitants of these villages celebrated victory, adults and children took photos with soldiers next to tanks. Onet does not convey facts and misinforms Polish public opinion on purpose. Onet derives from sources which are not credible, e.g. Ukrainian websites. The government in Kiev lies through its teeth, defaming Russia. It is high time I established my own blog in order to pass on information and advice. Regards to compatriots in Holland" ~Izabela, „Ukraina: 5-tysięczna demonstracja jedności kraju w Doniecku", 18 kwi 14 00:37, onet.pl.

In addition to the influencing techniques described by Nissen, six main operational communication strategies were observed, which enhance the effectiveness of the frames described above. These are denial, building information chaos (including disinformation and gossip), fuelling internal conflict (through underlining the incompetence, corruption and political wrangling of the authorities), threatening and discouraging, building the image of the enemy (Ukrainians, Americans, representatives of the West, inciting national, ethnic and religious hatred/discord, and building conspiracy theories.

Table 11. Operational communication strategies in news comment sections and social media.

CATEGORIES	YES	%	NO	%
Denial	1323	45.8	1563	54.2
Information chaos	1124	39.0	1761	61.0
Fuelling internal conflict	1187	41.1	1699	58.9
Building the image of the enemy	1607	43.8	1279	44.3
Threatening and discouraging	827	28.7	2058	44.3
Inciting national, ethnic and religious hatred	1234	33.6	1654	57.3
Building conspiracy theories	741	25.7	2145	74.3

Most often, trolls denied facts, events and opinions, as *Jim Jacobson* did on the *kyivpost.com* website, responding to a post from a Kiev supporter: "Do not speak for the <whole world> – you do not represent anyone except yourself. There is no Russian army in eastern Ukraine and has never been. That is a myth invented by defeated Ukrainian troops to justify their defeat. There are hundreds of OSCE observers in eastern Ukraine and they have never seen regular Russian army units, so stop pushing lies. By now, more than 3 000 people have been killed in eastern Ukraine by Ukrainian shells, bullets and bombs, and bombing still continues to this day, you had better pay attention to this situation" or *AlexR* on correspondent.net "Люди добрые покажите хоть одно доказательство наличия ВС РФ в Украине!!! Ну хоть малюсенькое!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

А другое более весомое где 50 танков РФ или 3000 чеченцев ну хоть пару кадров ну хоть кадрик без фотожабы"[61].

On various occasions, trolls constructed or preserved an image of the enemy – usually American or European (Виталий Жилин na *Facebook*: „Частично трудности у всех стран мира искусственно созданы руковоством США, желающего получить мировое господство... Все это 3.14здешь, что виноваты главы государств, которые противостоят однополярности мира. РФ и Китай положат конец самодовольству и безнаканности США, а Европа ляжет под тех, кто предложит лучшее" 31 December 2014; "In part, the problems of all the world's countries were artificially created by the guidance of the US, interested in achieving world domination... This is nonsense, that the heads of the states resisting a one-sided world are guilty. The Russian Federation and China will put an end to the complacency and impunity of the US, and Europe will lie down before those who offer the best") or Ukrainian (лира na rus.*DELFI*.lv, „Гадайте! Так вам страшнее жить! Расплата придёт...только вот какая она будет?! За невинно убитых людей по всему свету,за слёзы,смерти и горе Донбасса,за все войны развязанные Западом! Пираты и колонисты в современном обличье,гадайте!" 08.07.2014; "Guess! In that way you live with more fear! Atonement will come... but what will it be?! For innocently killed people all over the world, for the tears, deaths and grief of Donbass, for all the wars unleashed by the West! Pirates and colonists in modern appearance, guess!").

Often, commenters wanted to create information chaos, just as on e.g., *Facebook* or *Vkontakte*[62] and antagonize societies by fuelling internal conflicts

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61   "Kind people, show me at least one piece of evidence about the presence of the army of the Russian Federation in Ukraine!!! At least one small piece of eviden ce!!! [...]And other more important where are 50 tanks of Russian Federation or 3 000 Chechens so [show me them or] at least few shots, at least one shot without a Photoshop".

62   Facebook, Profil ірина костів: „РАСПИНАЮТ ДЕТЕЙ, А младенцев садят на кол. Это со слов учительницы в одесской школе". "[They] CRUCIFY CHILDREN and impale babies on poles. This is from the words of the teacher in the Odessa school", 16 October 2014 . Vkontakte, profil, Рома Нивин "ХАРЬКОВ ВСТАВАЙ!!!! Первого мая майдауны опять хотят устроить шествие. Не позволяйте сволочам устанавливать свои порядки в вашем городе. Собирайтесь все в одном месте и дайте отпор захватчикам, так, как это сделали в Донецке. https://vk.com/club69896772?w=wall-69896772_822/all", 30 кві 2014.

[63]and ethnic or religious discord.[64]

Trolls used threats most rarely, that is a bit more often than in every fourth thread analysed, like *netilten* on *Pravda.com.ua*: „по хохлыдскому каналу112 идет строчка между прочим про ги-бель детей-вам сволочам пощады не будет ваши сдохнуть" (10.06.2014, "by the way, on khokhol channel 112 a line about death of children goes – it will not be mercy for you scum, yours will die").

Discouraging was also rare, as *betmax2* on *rus.delfi.lv*: „Донбасс кор-мил всю украину надеюсь себя точно прокормит/ Вот что будут делать дармоеды с западной украины это вопрос, тем более За-харченко пока по хорошему просит киев вернуть все территории принадлежащие Донбасу, а то будет "бобо" 05.11.2014 ("Donbass fed the whole of Ukraine I hope it will feed itself as well / But what will the spongers from western Ukraine do, that is the question, moreover Zakharchenko asks Kyiv, in an amicable way, to return all territories belonging to Donbass, otherwise things will be bad").

....

63   „Янукович был агентом Путина и желал погубить Украину, но его свергли агенты Путина из «правого сектора», желающие погубить Украину, и тогда к власти пришли агенты Путина – олигархи и продажные чиновники, желающие погубить Украину, но против этого восстали агенты Путина на востоке Украины – желающие погубить Украину, но им помешала агент Путина Юлия Тимошенко, желающая погубить Украину" IP: 144.76.166.---Chukcha Rybak _ 06.04.2014 03:55 ("Yanukovych was an agent of Putin and wished to ruin Ukraine, but he was overturned by agents of Putin from the Right Sector wanting to ruin Ukraine, and then the agents of Putin came to power, they are oligarchs and corrupt offi-cials, wanting to ruin Ukraine, but the agents of Putin rose against them in revolt in the east of Ukraine – persons interested in ruining Ukraine, but agent of Putin Julia Tymoshenko prevent-ed them, a person interested in ruining Ukraine"); „Хохлы (не украинцы) как всегда смелые только воюя против женщин и детей. А сами под дулами автоматов почему-то писаются, плачут и пускают сопли. Вояки. Противно даже писать об этом быдле" Mark Smith, 29.06.2014, rus.delfi.lv ("Crests [Khokhols] (not Ukrainians) are as brave as usual, only fighting against women and children. And under the muzzles of automatics for some reason they piss, cry and get runny noses. Warriors. It's nasty even to write about these rednecks").

64   Говоря серьёзно написал: Вам нравяться сепаратисты из Славянска? Серьёзно?! Вы тоже хотите побольше чеченцев у себя в городе? Серьёзно? Если хотите попробовать что это такое в действительности – сходите попробуйте пообщаться с Бесом (Абдулмуслимовым). Думаю, Вам хватит. Вам нравится бандеровская мразота сжигающая людей заживо? Серьёзно? Тогда не сопротивляйтесь приходу правосеков. Думаю вам хватит... Навсегда" Телегин – говоря серьёзно, 28.05.2014, rus.delfi.lv (Говоря серьёзно wrote: Do you like the separatists from Sloviansk? Seriously?! Do you also want more Chechens in your city? Seriously? If you actually want to try it – do try to communicate with De-mon (Abdulmuslimov). I think that will be enough for you. Do you like Bandera's crew burning people alive? Seriously? Then do not resist the arrival of rightists. I think that will be enough for you.... Forever").

What did using these, and not other persuasion measures depend on? On the subject of comments and strategic objectives (which we can partly reconstruct while analysing frames):

When commenters defined the events in Crimea and Donbass as Russian aggression, pro-Russian trolls statistically more often responded 'to attack with attack' and constructed a negative image of a Ukrainian or American. In these situations, comments aiming at causing internal conflict in Ukraine, the Baltic States or Poland were observed more often. On the other hand, when Ukrainians were spoken of as *Bandera men*, and Ukraine was called a fascist state, the strategies of threatening and information chaos were used eagerly, which contributed to internal conflict.

The aforementioned strategies were also effectively used in describing Ukraine as a badly governed, corrupt country. However, when the source of the current conflict was traced back to the anti-Constitution coup (Maidan), then as well as constructing images of the enemy, conspiracy theories were referred to, in which the main roles were played by the US and Western European countries.

Commenters used links in their posts surprisingly rarely. It had been assumed that this form would be used more often by internet users. It turned out that among commenters, only 17.8% posted links to content from other sources. This happened most often on the *DELFI* websites and social media (p=0.000; df=7; Cramer'sV=0.66).

Very often, trolls employed techniques to initiate discussion, encouraging it and luring internet users in. This happened in between one-third to half of the discussion threads analysed. The mechanism of luring, taking the bait and hauling in was described in the previous section of this report.

The fact that trolls sometimes initiated discussions in which Russia was the victim of Western policies, and Russia's actions were a response to US policies, is not surprising (p=0.000; ChiSquare=42.257). They did not initiate discussion when Russia was portrayed as an aggressor state, they did it more often when the process of incorporating Crimea into Russia was portrayed positively (p=0.000, ChiSquare=22.414), as opposed to when the failures of this process were portrayed, or when the events in Donbass were called 'civil war' (p=0.000, ChiSquare=20.460).

Does the analysis of comments in comment sections and social media support Thomas Nissen's concept of the weaponisation of the internet and social media? It certainly does in the dimension of psychological warfare techniques. What is more – these activities are facilitated, coordinated and synchronized by command and control. There is no doubt that the activities of commenters are organized, not coincidental, and that in the face of the collected data and leaks about the purported Troll Factory in St Petersburg, targeting, intelligence collection, and command and control are taking place. Therefore, there is no doubt that we are currently faced with a war on the internet. However, it is difficult to state unequivocally to what degree social-media activities are coordinated and effective. Igor Lyubaschenko and Klaus Bachmann postulate the thesis that the sources of information campaigns on the internet are more de-centralized than common knowledge has it. The proof would be different narratives emerging from conflicting self-proclaimed people's republics in Donetsk and Lugansk, as well as the Kremlin. The case-study analysis of the use of the words "Russian genocide in Ukraine" shows that different actors disseminated seemingly similar, but different slogans at different times. Sergei Ivanov, the Russian President's Chief of Staff talked about "civil war" in eastern Ukraine, which "has turned into the genocide of their own people"; Denis Puszylin –leader of the Donetsk People's Republic talked about "the genocide of peaceful people", whilst "the genocide of Russians in the Ukraine" was only used by Ukrainian sources claiming that Puszylin said to Ivanov that "ATO is the genocide of Russians in Donbass". At the same time, Russian media were using emotionally weaker statements such as "humanitarian catastrophe, massacre, civil war", but did not use the term 'genocide' while describing cruelties allegedly committed against Russians in Ukraine.

> *There is no doubt that the activities of commenters are organized, not coincidental, and that targeting, intelligence collection, and command and control are taking place.*

If the action had been coordinated, as Lyubaschenko and Bachman say, we would be dealing with one narrative, not, as here, several.[65]

It is hard to declare whether the authors are right because this could just as well be proof of the lack of coordination. Perhaps the term 'genocide' affects Western societies more strongly and causes irritation in Ukraine, in contrast to Russian society to whom more peaceful statements were directed. There is no doubt, however, that there are attempts to coordinate activities in the internet communication space, even though the internet is so massive it is hard to manipulate it in an unlimited way. In addition, internet propaganda activity induces increased counter actions, counter propaganda. As a result, in line with *Condorcet's Jury Theorem,* the arrangement of a given society's opinions does not differ from the opinions this society has gained independently from outside influences.[66] In any case, this must not mean taking the information war being waged by Russia lightly, and propaganda using more and more refined influencing methods could turn out to be very effective.

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65   K. Bachmann, I. Lyubashenko, The Role of Digital Communication Tools in Mass Mobilisation, Information and Propaganda, 349-378 In: K. Bachmann, I. Lyubashenko (eds.) The Maidan Uprising, Separatism and Foreign Intervention. Ukraine's complex transition. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2014.

66   Referring to mathematical proof, Condorcet indicates that in the case of a decision to choose one of two options – true or false, a jury consisting of at least three people has a better chance of making the right decision than any member of the group separately. In addition, he states that the larger the group, the smaller the probability of making a mistake. See:
R. Szwed, Reprezentacje opinii publicznej w dyskursie publicznym, Lublin: Wyd. KUL, 2011.

CHAPTER 5

LINGUISTIC IMAGE OF THE CONFLICT. SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

PAWEŁ NOWAK

„Разваливающееся государство всегда является ареной борьбы. А участниками с обоих сторон являются оболваненные и дезориентированные НАШИ. Я не говорю о тех выродках, возомнивших себя хранителями Украины, на основе запугивания и террора. Им все равно, рано или поздно будет пипец. Вождей приголубят на другом континенте, где собирают и дрессируют весь сброд, чтобы потом спустить этих псов войны в нужное время и в нужном месте."[67] (post from *rus.delfi.lv*)

No natural language describes reality or portrays the world in an objective and neutral way because people's aim is not only to perceive reality, but also, or even most of all, to understand and 'tame' it (to ensure one's sense of security in the world). Ludwig Wittgenstein stated that "the borders of my world are the borders of my language" therefore reality can only be understood and perceived through language, or in principle, through notions which are named and characterized by a language system.

Therefore it is not surprising that native speakers are used in propaganda activity such as organised internet trolling, as they are able to reliably, and in accordance with a given national culture, depict a linguistic image of Russian activities in Ukraine (and other political, social and economic events in Ukraine and Russia), and do it in a way that is appropriate from the Ukrainian, Russian or Polish point of view.

Shaping the awareness of the readers of the analysed internet forums, and influencing their intellect, emotion and will, happens through many linguistic means which can be divided into two basic categories: grammatical-semantic and pragmatic.

5.1 GRAMMATICAL-SEMANTIC MEANS

Statements in which such mechanisms are employed are created as a result of the phonetic transformations of words and their connectors, by using many kinds of prefixes and suffixes, different inflectional forms and clause constructions, and also by overlapping different word connectors or creating new words, as well as by changing the meanings and values of the words used or the structures they form.

....

67   "A collapsing state is always a scene of fighting. And the participants of the fight are OUR people from both sides who have been brainwashed and disoriented. I'm not talking about the bastards who imagine themselves to be the keepers of Ukraine through bullying and terrorizing. They are destined to go down. The chiefs will be cherished in other continents where the entire rabble is taken to be trained to unleash the dogs of war at the right time and place."

The basis of effective persuasion and manipulation is causing a clear division in internet users and in Ukrainian society by using appropriate grammatical forms, which results in division into FRIEND and FOE, US and THEM categories, the polarization of society into GOOD and EVIL, without any gradation or ambiguity. The most important method of this kind is using the pronoun 'US' INCLUSIVELY and EXCLUSIVELY.

- *Us, our* – very often both sides in a conflict use both personal pronouns and appropriate grammatical forms of verbs: first-person plural – *we fight, we defend, we build, we organize, we create*, etc. – verbs in this form only have fundamentally positive meanings, or they describe misfortune and disaster caused by the enemy in this conflict, e.g., *we suffer, we are sick, we are afraid, we are worried*. („Крым наш!.. Харьков наш!.."; „Вот наконец то мы увидели,лицо западной демократии в действии."[68])

- *They, their, them* – grammatical forms used just as eagerly as *us* attributes. However this time the third-person singular serves to indicate enemies – *they* are guilty of everything – *they attack, they murder, they ruin, they destroy, they lie*, so they only do evil, clearly negative things. („А Вы станете мирно жить рядом с людьми, которые убивали и убивают ваших близких ?? Никогда !!! Поэтому бывшей Украине не быть никогда !"[69])

Neologisms (newly coined words) and modified proper nouns – by means of phonetics and word-building – are seen mainly in the internet forum activity of Ukraine's supporters, because in this case the name *Putler* (*Putin + Hitler*) appears: "he uses the same methods and is the same as Hitler", *rascism* (*Rasija[Russia] + fascism*) "the ideas of Putin's followers are the same as those of fascists" or even *rascist* (*Rasija + fascist*) "a follower of Putin is just like a fascist" („О боже. Именно рашистан и поделил мир на два (как это по вашему, по руззки) лагеря: тех кто за путлера (во всем и всегда) и остальных (остальные конечно же фа шисты (по мнению руззкого)). Какое впечатление у вас еще могут складывается, вам ваши впечатления прямо в мозг уже вложено, за что спасибо говорите вашему фюреру.")

....

68   "Crimea is OURS! Kharkov's OURS! And we've just finally seen the face of Western Democracy in action."

69   "Oh, God! To sound more RUZZIAN: it was exactly for Russiastan who had divided the world for two camps: for those who always support Putler and the rest – Nazzies, of course, according to Ruzzians. What personal opinion can you have if you've already been brainwashed to thank your Fuhrer for everything?"

5.2 METAPHORS IN TEXTS AND COMMENTS ON WEBSITES

Metaphors used in everyday language are, for most people, imperceptible by the central track of cognition (completely conscious and controlled) because they are so common that they are automatically interpreted by the peripheral track of cognition (unconscious and uncontrolled but influencing judgment and opinions) without any effort on the part of the recipient[70]. By carefully choosing these, posters/trolls guarantee influencing the knowledge and will of internet users, without the risk of accusations of manipulation or deception because recipients simply do not notice these actions. To accomplish this, senders employ three kinds of metaphor:

- 'Worn-out'/etymologically weak metaphors
- Notional metaphors
- Less typical notional metaphors

'Worn-out'/etymologically weak metaphors – entire statements in which noticing the metaphoric process requires the awareness of tracking it, not being focused on content, e.g., the Americans are toying with us; Politicians fight each other for influence; the eyes of the West are directed at Ukraine; Ukrainians have hard lives and their fate is sad, etc. In each of above sentences, posters used at least one metaphoric construction with a specific evaluation and particular interpretation of reality: toy with ('they do not treat us seriously, 'they do not care about us'), fight each other ('they want to be better and more famous than others'), influence ('power', 'importance', 'popularity'), eyes ('attention', 'interest') are directed at ('devote attention to', 'deal with'), hard ('tiring', 'tedious') and sad ('inducing sadness in Ukrainians and observers'), even the West itself is a metaphor. The fact that they are not noticeable at first sight does not mean they do not work, because in the collated material it can be seen clearly that trolls use them deliberately.

Notional metaphors – words and expressions explaining more complicated, abstract notions which are difficult to explain by means of elementary notions. At the same time however, they do it in a way specific to given cultures, which is why they are noticed by recipients, but not brazen and easy to interpret because they appear in more or less every text devoted to the phenomenon described by the metaphors.

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70   P. Nowak (2002). SWOI I OBCY w językowym obrazie świata (THEM AND US in linguistic image of the world). Lublin: UMCS , pp. 93-95.

The most fundamental metaphor in European and Anglo-Saxon communication is the war metaphor which is used to explain many complicated notions and which describes a discussion between disagreeing parties, as well as rivalry in sport or political arguments. In the case of the Ukrainian conflict, war metaphors are hard to detect, not only because of their popularity, but also because many events in this region were not metaphorical, but actual war. Apart from the 'worn-out' attributes to fight, to defend, to attack, literal and metaphorical constructions appear: battlefield, fierce fight, battle, to arm, to bring down, to kill, to bring the heaviest arms, to destroy, arms, victory, defeat, etc. What is most interesting is that Putin's followers (perhaps trolls) are not keen on using the definition war in regard to pro-Russian activity because it has a negative connotation, instead they talk of military action, armed intervention, bringing order and calming down the situation, so diminishing its significance. In reference to Ukrainian actions however, the attributes war, cruel, inhumane appear in order to underline and exaggerate its negative appraisal in the eyes of recipients.

Another metaphor of this sort is constructions where words connected to BUILDING are used. This way a bloc of followers is created, alliances are built, foundations of national concord are strengthened. Trolls demonstrate that Russian followers are united because the following days cemented their group, Ukrainian followers on the other hand destroy or ruin Ukraine, wreck the bloc of believers in peace. In these last expressions, a fusion between the war metaphor and build metaphor can be seen, underlining even more the evilness of the actions of the opponents to Crimea's annexation. Other metaphors are no different, they are commonly used for descriptions of political events and social, economic, religious or military conflicts – metaphors of PATH/JOURNEY or SPECTACLE. In the case of the road metaphor, but not only in this one, the interpretation of a statement by recipients depends on connecting it with an orientation metaphor (FORWARD is GOOD, BACKWARDS is BAD, STRAIGHT is GOOD, ASKEW and SPIRAL are BAD, UP is GOOD, DOWN is BAD). Russia's followers consider Putin's activities to be going in the right direction, Putin chose the right path and it is good that he does not want to turn back from it, the Ukrainians have to back off, turn back from this road. It is hard not to notice trolls using the deliberate polarization of both sides' actions in their statements – Russians and their followers go forward, straight and up, and Ukrainians and their allies weave and go round and round, retreat and move back and lower their quality of life.

On the other hand, in the case of the spectacle metaphor, the evaluation of the events described depends on the choice of art form – THEATRE and FILM are GOOD, CIRCUS and FESTIVAL/FAIR are BAD. Furthermore, the following opposites are embedded in this kind of metaphor : NATURAL/ SPONTANEOUS is GOOD, ARTIFICIAL/REHEARSED is BAD. Leading role, scenario of events, directed actions, spectacle, political circus, clown, juggler, matters run their course according to previously predetermined scenarios (four metaphors: PATH (run), ORIENTATION (previously), ARTIFICIALITY (predetermined), SPECTACLE/FILM (scenario). The source of a post or a piece of information is crucial: sometimes it is the Russians who are connected with theatre, film and well prepared/written scenario or leading role, in a different communication situation, it is the Ukrainians. (": Что то зачастил Запад со своими «идеями» в Федерацию.то коммунисты с западной теорией переустройства РоссииТо.Дуче и Фюрер со своей западной теорией нового порядка.То ЕС.со своими «западными ценностями».И все прут и прут.как тараканы.Их давят.а они прут и прут."; „В Славянск едут тонны колбасы и другую провизию. Кровавая киевская хунта везет продукты, чтобы подкормить жертв перед съедением."; „Украинский Роджер Кролик пригрозил к зиме перекрыть трубу Европейским потребителям !Так,что Европа ! ПОКА НЕ ПОЗДНО.........Запасайся русскими валенками и шапками ушанками.!!!!!!!!!!!!"[71])

Less typical notional metaphors – the set of four elementary notional metaphors listed above was complemented by other, more original ones which are more clearly visible and more evaluating. That makes them influence recipients more by using metaphors of the ELEMENTS (STORM, WIND, WATER, FIRE), ECONOMICS and the BODY. Military activity in Ukraine can be a storm, hurricane, flood, fire and conflagration, therefore it can destroy, abduct, drown, burn down, turn to ashes. All the elements mentioned and used by posters are very powerful, destructive, and the words associated with them are intended to underline that the actions described by them should be condemned and considered very evil.

....
71   "It is strange that the West should have visited the Russian Federation so often, bringing its 'ideas'. The Communists arrived with their theory of rebuilding Russia. The Duce and Fuhrer arrived with their Western theory of a new order. The UN arrived with its 'Western values'. And they all come and swarm like cockroaches despite being crushed every time." "Tonnes of sausage and other provisions are being transported to Slaviansk. The Bloody Kievan Junta exports goods to feed the prey before it is eaten itself."
"Ukrainian Roger Rabbit threatened to block the gas pipe for European consumers by winter. So Europe! Stock up on Russian valiankis and ushankas before it's too late!"

What is extremely interesting is economic metaphors, based on the opposites lose – gain. In the case of statements addressed to the inhabitants of a poor European region, referring to the notion of MONEY/MATERIAL VALUE is surely the most effective rhetorically and in the context of eristics. America uses Ukraine, creates a new outlet market, Europe wants to rob Ukrainians, only Russia's help can make the lives of Ukrainians better. In the trolls' opinions, there is a belief in an American-Jewish conspiracy which would lead to wars all around the world, waged only to create new outlets for US producers and gain access to natural resources. This conviction appears directly or in a camouflaged way. The irrationality of such stereotypical thinking does not diminish the effectiveness of referring to it, on the contrary, it improves its effectiveness. Finally, there are body metaphors referring to specific parts of the body and the distance between people and things, as well as things that people crave. A favourite expression of Russian trolls is the statement that the US and Europe brought Ukraine to its knees. Other expressions include the Ukrainian government crawls and kowtows to the West, something happens under Russia's (or Ukraine's) nose, as well as many statements of this kind based on idioms which show that Putin's activities will bring freedom and pride to Ukraine, and make it equal to other countries in Europe and in the world. („Можно подумать, что Россия будет закрывать глаза на то, как чубатые бендерлоги градами уничтожают жилые кварталы городов........ И мирных жителей страны................"; „ОБСЕ как всегда выполняет заказ Запада – стягивание военной техники украинской армии не видит, наёмников воюющих на стороне Киева не видит, обстрелы мирного населения оружием массового поражения замечает только тогда, когда гибнет европеец, а подготовку к отражению готовящегося наступления Киева ополченцами увидели сразу. Да, и добровольцы возвращаются на Украину, и ополченцы из госпиталей и от семей-беженцев и что дальше? Любому понятно, что война как воздух сегодня нужна Киеву, чтобы оправдаться перед националистами и списать на войну социальный коллапс."[72])

....
72   "You'd think Russia would close its eyes to Banderlogs' with forelocks destroying whole living blocks and killing peaceful citizens…" "The OSCE obeys the West's orders, as usual: doesn't notice the concealed support for Ukrainian army military vehicles, the mercenaries fighting on the side of Kiev, it notices attacks on civilians by weapons of mass destruction if a European dies, but has it noticed at once the preparations to repel the impending onslaught of the Kiev militia. Yes, and volunteers return to Ukraine, and the militia from the hospitals, and so do the families of refugees. And what's next? Everyone understands that the war, like air, is needed by Kiev in order to justify itself in the face of the nationalists and blame the war for social collapse."

Of course, the metaphors mentioned do not constitute the whole register of metaphoric constructions utilised by internet users. The presented metaphors are mentioned here because they influence the mind, emotions and will of website users to the greatest and most dangerous degree. Other unusual or very transparent metaphoric expressions do not have the same degree of impact because readers see right away that they are dealing with a metaphor and pay more attention to how it is being said rather than what is being said.

5.3 IDIOMS

Permanent word connections employed by internet users commenting on events in Ukraine stem from the same concept area as metaphors, most of them are actually metaphors. This fact makes the trolls' activity coherent and enhances the impact of an ideology consistent with their image of the Ukrainian conflict. Idioms are based on the same cultural experiences as metaphors, they employ war, theatre, film, building and destroying vocabularies, at the same time having metaphoric quality. Therefore metaphors and idioms complement each other and make the images conveyed by the trolls more difficult to dispute. There is the novelty of schematic connections comparing people to things and animals, e.g. *ass, treating someone as an object*, which demonstrates the bad treatment the Ukrainians have received from Europe and the US, and Ukrainians *agree to all of this like lambs*. Idioms of this kind update, in an obvious way, the metaphor EVENTS IN UKRAINE AS A HUNT and see the appearance of attributes such as *pigsty* or *to gobble*. ("На самом деле только кажется, что у соседа свинья жирнее. Европа во все века грабила другие страны и сейчас грабит."[73])

5.4 LABELLING PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The use of single words or short expressions to describe, or in fact characterize Ukrainian and Russian citizens, the leaders of these countries, as well as events and actions. Russians are, above all, fascists (see word-building and phonetic means) and Ukrainians are Banderamen, killers, cruel murderers, victims of the US and NATO, manipulated by the US and NATO.

....

73   "Actually, the grass is always greener on the other side. Europe has always plundered other countries for ages and it is doing so now!"

Simplifying and stereotypical labels are easily remembered and 'stick' to the subject so labelled (it is hard to break free of them), they close discussions on a given subject. ("Укропы[74] тут как-бы уже и ни причем... Кому интересно, что они этот договор разорвали... И то, что разорвали,кстати, вполне могут себе засунуть в..."; „Бандеровцы хотят что бы сироты погибали под авиабомбежками? По моему до такого да же фашисты не додумались."; „Естественно.Это же проамериканские фашисты.Киевская хунта может и дальше продолжать убивать женщин и детей.Нигер дал добро.")

5.5 POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL STEREOTYPING

Labels are an expression of stereotypes passed on by trolls and other discussion participants that are neither affirmative nor descriptive, but negative and prejudiced. The posts of opponents of Russia and Putin update yet again the connection between the Fascism and Stalinism stereotypes. Russia is also a Tsarist Empire (Putin being the Tsar) and an invader. Ukrainians, on the other hand, are the descendants of Stepan Bandera – Bandera men, nationalists, murderers and brutes, as well as fascists and collaborators.

In many statements, especially on Polish websites, the Wołyń genocide returns. A well-updated, political-historical stereotype, described in a well-considered, consistent and coherent manner introduces a very plastic and expressive emotional image of the world into recipients' consciousnesses, and that is why it is so effective in terms of propaganda and so dangerous cognitively. („весь этот трындёж был хорош до второго мая. а вот второго мая случилась точка не возврата. ОДЕССА. поэтому, ребята дорогие, меня, как гражданина ЕС и гражданина государства, которое входит в состав НАТО пугает наличие практически по соседству ФАШИСТСКОГО государства Украина. я требую, чтобы против Украины ввели экономические санкции, я требую, чтобы против Украины ввели военные санкции. потому что мне страшно за себя и за родсвенников. где гарантия того, что эти фашисты не объявятся в Латвии?")

....
74   Укропы refers to the Ukrainian political party UKROP – the Ukrainian Association of Patriots. In the Ukrainian consciousness, it is now a word of pride – the party's logo was designed to serve as a sleeve badge for participants in the war in Donbass.

5.6 CONCEPT AREAS/THEMATISATION OF TEXTS CONCERNING UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

That trolls are active on the analysed websites is proven also by the consistent use of attributes from one particular concept area, keeping a close eye on the coherence of text, reaching for interconnected emotional attributes from one association area. Therefore Ukrainians are – *Bandera men, murderers, killers, thieves* and *criminals*, and their actions, especially the decision not to agree with Russia's annexation of Crimea is, from a linguistic perspective, a symptom of mental illness: *he went mad, he went nuts, madman, foolishness, recklessness*. Concept areas and the thematisation of statements enable rhetoric gradation, causing (along with the 'rule of triad') trolls' statements to influence the imagination of internet users more through their consistency, coherence and unambiguity. („яйценюк и хунта киева незаконные правители ! и они ничего не могут обещать они нелегетимны ! не верте им люди ! определяйте путь развития своего региона и будте там хозяевами ! позор хунте киева которая довела людей до такой жизни !”; „пока хунта в киеве по указке вашингтона не прекратит бойню на юго востоке не будет им покоя ! научитесь слышать юго восток и перечитайте результаты референдума и не называйте зачисткой убийства мирных жителей ! вы фашисты и киевская влвсть рано или поздно за эти убийсва вместе со своими подельниками из фашингтона[75] ответит руки прочь от юго востока”; „Давно уже говорили про то, что хунта и ее фашисты используют кассетные бомбы, а так же фосфорные и что? Только русское сообщество ужаснулось и негативно относится, что к армии укропов, что к ее руководству, остальным плевать... Вот это действительно показывает насколько во всяких европах и америках равнодушное сообщество т.е. население...”[76])

....

75   "You'd think Russia would close its eyes to Banderlogs' with forelocks destroying whole living blocks and killing peaceful citizens..." "The OSCE obeys the West's orders, as usual: doesn't notice the concealed support for Ukrainian army military vehicles, the mercenaries fighting on the side of Kiev, it notices attacks on civilians by weapons of mass destruction if a European dies, but has it noticed at once the preparations to repel the impending onslaught of the Kiev militia. Yes, and volunteers return to Ukraine, and the militia from the hospitals, and so do the families of refugees. And what's next? Everyone understands that the war, like air, is needed by Kiev in order to justify itself in the face of the nationalists and blame the war for social collapse."

76   "Actually, the grass is always greener on the other side. Europe has always plundered other countries for ages and it is doing so now!"

5.7 PRAGMATIC MEASURES

The analysed material features linguistic operations which surpass the formal and semantic level, and transfer the essence of ideological impact into the level of statement and text. The aim is to force recipients to consider the proposed interpretation of reality as the only correct one. There are many measures of this kind, but the ones that could be considered fundamental to trolling activities are:

Building platforms and using the 'broken record' as a means of trolls conducting website discussions

This is one of the most effective methods of introducing ideological content. 'Building platforms' means connecting every subject to the content one wants to communicate through the use of logical linkage between them, e.g. It is worth remembering that…, Those are interesting remarks, however, in order to understand the situation well, one has to remember that…, etc. The 'broken record' however, means the consistent reiterating of one's opinions and evaluations, while not allowing other discussion participants to throw us off balance, but still referring to them, e.g. the Americans want to rob Ukraine repeated many times in different levels of discussions. This is in accordance with an old Roman rule: Repetitio mater studiorum est (Repetition is the mother of studies/learning). („Да-да мы русские именно такие хотим всех спасать, угу... Нам что делать больше нефиг? Какой он к чертовой бабушке востоковед? МЫ ТУПО НЕ ХОТИМ АМЕРИКАНСКИХ БАЗ У СЕБЯ НА ГРАНИЦЕ! И не надо сюда приплетать религию. На дворе 21 век, а не средние века.")

Categorical and incontestable nature of judgment

Trolls use affirmative statements in which there is no trace of hesitation or assumption. Even the most absurd judgment preserves a grammatical and pragmatic form characteristic of stating the truth. There is no two-sided argumentation in these statements because trolls do not want to give arguments to the other side; there are personal attacks on the grounds of various characteristics, even ones irrelevant to the events in Ukraine. The recipients are not warned about what is opinion and what is information. In addition, many statements are very emotional and 'cross' – they talk about emotion, evaluation and observation in a brief way, leaving less competent recipients unable to defend themselves.

The trolls particularly employ great quantifiers – *every one, no one, everybody, always, never* etc., and utilise one of the best means of manipulating people – social proof. („Сколько можно печатать и перепечатывать откровенную ложь!? Украина сбила Боинг. Ясно как белый день. США это знают и покрывают в своих интересах.")

***

The linguistic image of Ukraine and events in this country passed on to the world by Russian trolls is a propaganda image, characteristic of every well-conducted communication of an ideology. Statements against Ukraine, NATO and the US contain every effective linguistic method of political communication, they are rhetorically and eristically very efficient, but at the same time they function pragmatically because they fit the communication abilities of the readers of the analysed websites.

The high quality of the techniques employed and the wide spectrum of activities suggest that Russian trolls are very well-prepared specialists in internet communication.

Therefore, if one cannot and should not censor the internet, a group of suitable, competent internet forum users should be prepared for counter-communication.

CHAPTER 6

THE ROLE OF VISUALIZATION IN SOCIAL-MEDIA INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

JUSTYNA SZULICH-KAŁUŻA

The role of visual material published in social media is increasing continuously because people are eagerly adopting this simple, easy-to-perceive and emotion-inciting form of communication[77]. Graphic material inspires confidence and is extremely effective because of the transparent message it takes to people, even in communication between different cultures[78].

Social media stem from the idea of visual communication where various forms of graphics are used. The first, most natural group are private photographs in which people portray themselves, their family, friends, acquaintances, interests, leisure activities and important life events. Next come information photographs – referring to current social, political cultural or religious events. They are records of events more or less important to large audiences. The third group of photographs present in social media are portraits. Events are often portrayed through the prism of the participation of political leaders and their statements – a report on the words used is often accompanied by portrait photographs. These photographs are, above all, intended to attract interest, generate opinions and convince readers to adopt specific views. In each photograph category, the description is important, framing the photograph, telling the viewer which aspect should be noticed and how it should be viewed. The description is an element of the reading context[79]. On websites, comments often act as descriptions – it is they that complete and stimulate the character of the photography message. More recently, another, more effective form of visual and linguistic-visual expression has been disseminated – internet memes. A meme is a digitalized unit of information (text, image, film, sound) disseminated by means of the internet, which then is copied, processed and in this processed form, re-published on the internet. Meme genres include expressions of original opinions or jokes; memes that are a reaction, a comment on specific events and situations;

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77   G. Rose (2012). Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials. London, UK: Sage; H. Seo, D. Kinsey, (2012). Meaning of democracy around the world: A thematic and structural analysis of videos defining democracy. Visual Communication Quarterly, 19(2), 94–107; H. Seo (2015). Visual Propaganda in the Age of Social Media: An Empirical Analysis of Twitter Images During the 2012 Israeli–Hamas Conflict. Visual Communication Quarterly, 21(3), 150-161.

78   For example: S. Fahmy (2005). Photojournalists' and photograph editors' attitudes and perceptions: The visual coverage of 9/11 and the Afghan war. Visual Communication Quarterly, 12, 146–163.

79   I. Goffman (2012). Ramy fotografii. In: M. Bogunia-Borowska, P. Sztompka (eds.) Fotospołeczeństwo. Antologia tekstów z socjologii wizualnej. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 277.

and memes which incorrectly describe photographs with the intention of misleading or joking. In this understanding, memes constitute a fully entitled representation of a fragment of reality, with one proviso – this reality cannot be properly affirmed on the basis of the description[80].

Graphics are being employed more and more often as a tool of war propaganda. Visual materials are eagerly employed at the stage of initiating conflicts, throughout their duration and after they end[81]. With the aid of photo-graphs and graphics, disinformation, and the manipulation and fabrication of information are accomplished, as are word and image provocation. Image manipulations are a convenient and effective means of achieving desired effects among recipients for at least three reasons:

Firstly, visual materials fit very well into the mechanisms of emotional stimulation in the ways of reading meanings, as a means of gradually eliminating rational behaviour.

Secondly, visual messages are simple and comprehensible, the recipient needs no special preparation in order for the desired version of events to be accepted.

Thirdly, because of the trust we place in visual materials, they are an effective tool for creating false realities, e.g., when the content of photographs and films is not consistent with the information they are illustrating, because the source of information is unknown or when people with false identities make statements in line with the expectations of senders.

How were visual materials employed to portray the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in *Facebook* and *Vkontakte*? Are we dealing with manipulation here, and if so, what is its nature? The characteristics of photographic reporting of this conflict in social media, as well as proliferated internet memes are described below.

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80   I. Goffman (2012). Ramy fotografii…, 278.

81   M.B. Bruce (2014). Framing the Arab Spring Conflict: A Visual Analysis of Coverage on Five Transnational Arab News Channels. Journal of Middle East Media, 10, 1-26; S. Fahmy, D. Kim (2008). Picturing the Iraq war: Constructing the image of war in the British and US press. The International Communication Gazette, 70, 443-462.

6.1 PHOTOGRAPHY[82] IN THE SOCIAL-MEDIA DISCOURSE – QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

To analyse the photography, quantitative content-analysis and semiotic-analysis techniques were employed. For the needs of quantitative analysis, a categorizing key was elaborated, which included form and substance categories to describe photographs. Detailed analysis included all photographs posted by users on the *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* social network websites in the period from 31 December 2012 to 1 April 2014. Three basic criteria were applied while selecting posts:

1) key words: Krym/Крым/Crimea, Донбасс/Donbass, Maidan/ Майдан, АТО
2) number of signed-up users (a category on *Vkontakte*)
3) number of likes (a category on *Facebook*)

In all, the research material consisted of 197 randomly selected photographs, 112 published on Facebook and 85 on Vkontakte.

In this analysis, we assume that the photographs accompanying comments on social network websites are visual codes serving to evoke a particular version of the conflict in viewers. Content analysis would allow the intended version to be elucidated.

In the first stage of the analysis, we take a closer look at the formal characteristics of the analysed photographs – their diversity in genres. Traditional information (portraits, satellite photographs, infographics, situation photographs) and journalistic (photo-essays) genre categories were used.

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82   Photography come from websites: https://www.facebook.com/RussianCrimea, https://www.facebook.com/EuroMaydan, https://www.facebook.com/radiosvobodakrym.org, http://vk.com/sdamnaleto, http://v.com/budspravjnimukraincem, http://vk.com/vosto4nuy-front, http://vk.com /revolution.

Table 1. Photographic genre.

NAME OF WEBSITE	PORTRAIT	SITUATION	PHOTO ESSAY	INFOGRAPHICS	SATELLITE
Facebook АнтиМайдан	10	9	0	3	1
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	13	16	0	6	1
Facebook Russian Crimea	2	11	0	4	1
Facebook Крым Реалии	8	24	0	3	0
Total	33	60	0	16	3
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	12	16	0	3	0
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	7	16	0	6	0
Vkontakte Крым	3	12	0	0	0
Vkontakte Ми Українці	1	4	0	4	0
Total	24	48	0	13	0

Source: own elaboration

Both *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* are dominated by information photography: situation and portrait photographs. These genres best depict the developing nature of the conflict, at the same time documenting the main characters involved in the conflict: civilians, military command and political authority figures.

The next feature of the photographs evaluated is their source.

Table 2. Source/authorship.

NAME OF WEBSITE	AUTHOR'S	AGENCY	OUTSIDE SOURCES	NO AUTHOR
Facebook АнтиМайдан	0	0	4	25
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	0	1	25	11
Facebook Russian Crimea	1	0	1	38
Facebook Крым Реалии	1	0	34	1
Total	2	1	64	75
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	0	0	19	23
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	0	0	19	20
Vkontakte Крым	0	0	9	25
Vkontakte Ми Українці	0	0	8	12
Total	0	0	55	80

Source: own elaboration

Both websites are dominated by two groups of photographs – those without an author and those sourced elsewhere. The external sources are given as website addresses or links from the users posting the content. There are very few photographs from named authors or agencies and lack of that information suggests that the published content has low credibility. That is because a specific name, or sometimes the function and social status, of a photograph's source is what make a post credible and enable its truthfulness to be confirmed. In the research material, two cases of agency photographs were found, depicting Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Russian forces in Crimea.

Facebook АнтиМайдан

Facebook Russian Crimea

The people portrayed in photographs can be arranged into several categories, specified in the table below.

Table 3. People in photographs

NAME OF WEBSITE	CIVILIANS IN EVERYDAY LIFE	POLITI-CIANS	JOURNAL-ISTS	ECONO-MISTS	PROTE-STORS	FORCES OF LAW AND ORDER	UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS	SEPARATIST SOLDIERS
Facebook АнтиМайдан	6	9	0	0	3	0	2	2
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	6	8	0	1	0	0	4	4
Facebook Russian Crimea	1	11	0	0	3	1	0	8
Facebook Крым Реалии	10	9	1	0	4	2	0	0
Total	23	37	1	1	10	3	6	14
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	4	12	0	2	1	1	8	3
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	3	12	0	2	1	1	8	3
Vkontakte Крым	5	14	1	0	4	1	2	3
Vkontakte Ми Українці	2	5	0	0	0	0	4	0
Total	12	43	1	4	6	3	22	9

The photographs predominantly feature civilians and politicians – soldiers are only in third position. Facebook features more Russian soldiers wheras Vkontakte has more Ukrainian ones. The prevalence of photographs of Ukrainian soldiers on Vkontakte can be reasonably explained by its users being more inclined to believe that Ukraine is the aggressor. To enhance the impact, national soldiers are portrayed more often as 'ready to fight' (e.g. separatists on the Russian Crimea website or Ukrainians on the Ми Українці website), as they are supposed to inspire admiration, pride and a sense of security. Enemy soldiers depicted in the same way could incite uncertainty, fear and anguish. The analysis of the photography indicates that if enemy soldiers (or civilians) are shown, it is in a context which not only causes no fear, but shows some weakness of the enemy.

Facebook Russian Crimea

Facebook Russian Crimea

The numerous visualizations of politicians as actors in armed conflicts also indicate that, in the media, contemporary armed conflicts create the illusion that politics are indispensable as a fundamental element of war strategy[83]. The conventional division into soldiers and civilians fades away, uniforms disappear – everyone in society is or can be a soldier, truly or potentially[84].

Death and killing are not exposed in photography. The motifs of death and civilian casualties definitely appear more often in memes. The exceptions are three photographs: one shows corpses of Russian volunteers; the second: the remains of a woman in a shop; the third: the remains of victims of the Boeing 777 plane crash. All were published on *Vkontakte* Новости Донбасса.

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83   Ch. Barker Ch. (2005). Studia kulturowe. Teoria i praktyka. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 42.

84   H. Yee-Kuang H., 2006, The 'transformation of war' debate: Through the looking glass of Urlich Beck's World Risk Society. International Relations. 20(1), 71-73.

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

What is surprising is the small number of photographs depicting violence and death, which may demonstrate a trend to cease popularising photographic aestheticism in depictions of repressive war actions in social media. **The aesthetic of death** can make killing a duty to one's homeland, therefore something noble and beautiful.

The phenomenon of aestheticizing death is well-illustrated by the examples from the Second World War – German soldiers would, without hesitation, take photographs of themselves in front of executed or murdered victims because this made them look like good sons of the Third Reich[85].

Other research categories were objects appearing in photographs in various contexts. We assumed that in the face of war or military conflict, fight scenes would dominate, which would mean weapons, ashes, fortifications, barricades.

Table 4. Objects in photographs.

NAME OF WEBSITE	NATIONAL SYMBOLS	STRATEGIC BUILDINGS	RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS	RUINS, ASHES	WEAPONS, ARMS	STATUES	BARRICADES
Facebook АнтиМайдан	14	2	3	1	4	0	0
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	12	4	2	1	6	0	0
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	18	0	3	1	9	0	1
Facebook Russian Crimea	26	1	0	0	10	0	1
Facebook Крым Реалии	12	2	0	0	1	0	0
Total	64	9	5	2	21	0	1
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	14	1	0	2	9	0	0
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	18	0	3	1	9	0	1
Vkontakte Крым	22	2	0	0	3	0	0
Vkontakte Ми Українці	13	0	1	0	2	1	0
Total	67	3	4	3	23	1	1

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85   J. Kurowicki (2000). Fotografia jako zjawisko estetyczne. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 124.

It turned out, however, that national symbols and military weapons were shown most frequently in visualizations. Therefore, for social-media users it was more important to display symbols, flags, emblems and crests, than to share photographs depicting the course of the war. From a propaganda perspective, this is understandable, since national symbols are elements which appeal to recipients' emotions: they have the power to unite 'comrades' – on one hand building an identity, patriotism, on the other building an image of the enemy. Weapons are displayed nearly three times less often than symbols and elicit feelings of power, control and domination amongst those who possess it, and trigger anguish, fear and panic amongst those who are defenceless.

Facebook ЄвроМайдан

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

Facebook Russian Crimea

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

Facebook Russian Crimea

Facebook Russian Crimea

The emotional functions of photography were also analysed, but with the assumption that the dominating force would be photographs with strong expressiveness: either positive or negative. We were interested in determining the presence of an expressive dimension in photographs (that is, showing the author's emotional involvement in the content, either in the form of sympathy or lack thereof) and/or an impressive dimension (that is, making an appropriate impression, influencing feelings and convictions, attracting attention). This turned out to be a difficult task as the people in the analysed photographs rarely expressed any emotion, neutral expressions dominating.

Facebook ЄвроМайдан

Facebook Крым Реалии

Facebook ЄвроМайдан

Facebook Russian Crimea

What were the emotions displayed in photographs?

Table 5. Emotions in photographs

NAME OF WEBSITE	JOY, CONTENTMENT	SURPRISE	SUFFERING, PAIN	FEAR, ANXIETY	CONTEMPT, REPULSION	ANGER, RAGE	NEUTRAL EXPRES- SION
Facebook АнтиМайдан	3	0	1	0	3	0	14
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	1	0	1	0	0	0	14
Facebook Russian Crimea	3	0	1	0	2	1	15
Facebook Крым Реалии	1	0	0	0	0	0	21
Total	8	0	3	0	5	1	64
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	1	1	1	1	0	0	18
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	3	1	1	1	0	2	12
Vkontakte Крым	5	2	0	1	2	1	12
Vkontakte Ми Українці	3	3	1	0	0	0	5
Total	12	7	3	3	2	3	57

We discovered that, in the photographs depicting people's emotional states, positive feelings of contentment stand out. These are linked with achieving success, self-assurance, triumphant enthusiasm, but also with the awareness of being photographed.

Could these photographs be indisputably connected to locations in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict: Crimea and Donbass?

Table 6. Locations in photographs.

NAME OF WEBSITE	CRIMEA	DONBASS	OTHER LOCATIONS/ FRONT LINES	OTHER PLACES
Facebook АнтиМайдан	1	3	1	1
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	0	4	6	17
Facebook Russian Crimea	1	7	0	3
Facebook Крым Реалии	21	0	0	5
Total	24	14	7	26
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	0	7	4	14
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	2	6	5	11
Vkontakte Крым	7	1	0	6
Vkontakte Ми Українці	0	2	1	3
Total	9	16	10	34

As we discovered, at least half of the photographs overlap with the military activity of the conflicting parties, but on *Facebook* more locations were connected to Crimea, while on *Vkontakte* more were connected to Donbass. These numbers are not very different, though. It is clear that the domination of photographs taken in Crimea or Donbass is a function of the posters, not the website.

Another purpose of the analysis was to determine the function of the photographs. The categories determined were: purely informative (neutral) and intentionally improving the image of one of the conflicting parties. Some examples of the latter:

Facebook Russian Crimea

Facebook Russian Crimea

Facebook ЄвроМайдан

The table below presents the numbers for the functions determined for photographs:

Table 7. Function of photographs

NAME OF WEBSITE	INFORMATIVE NEUTRAL	IMPROVING RUSSIANS' IMAGE	IMPROVING UKRAINIANS' IMAGE
Facebook АнтиМайдан	7	2	1
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	28	0	8
Facebook Russian Crimea	0	26	0
Facebook Крым Реалии	35	0	1
Total	70	28	10
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	23	0	8
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	19	7	0
Vkontakte Крым	10	12	0
Vkontakte Ми Українці	4	0	12
Total	56	19	20

Unsurprisingly, the information function came first in the analysed photographs. However, the function improving a party's image is more interesting. The number of photographs improving Ukrainians' and separatists' images is almost equal on *Vkontakte*, however *Facebook* had many more photographs depicting Russians positively. The reason for this is quite simple: the websites were fulfilling their ideological-propaganda function for 'their' users by presenting one-sided pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian messages. That is why the *Russian Crimea Facebook* page portrays the Russian army as giving a sense of pride and security, being modern and successful. The *Ми Українці Vkontakte* page portrays the Ukrainian army in the same light. Although equal numbers of pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian pages were analysed, the overall tendency favoured pro-Russian content as commenters were more active here.

6.2 FUNDAMENTAL INFORMATION-WAR OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES ON SOCIAL-MEDIA WEBSITES UTILISING PHOTOGRAPHY

An in-depth semiotic analysis consisting of reading the meanings in photographs enabled fundamental information-war strategies on social-network websites to be identified and characterised. It was assumed that photography had become a tool for implementing these strategies.

6.2.1 Strategy to create information chaos with visual material

Some of the content portrayed in the photographs is intended to create doubt and uncertainty. The strategy of creating information uncertainty is most noticeable in the *АнтиМайдан Facebook* group.

Here we can discern two spheres of information-chaos creation in the photographs: military and political. The military sphere includes military activity on both sides.

One example is connected to the information war in the media environment. It concerns the events that took place in Mariupol on 9 May 2014 and the information reported by the Ukrainian medium СМИ about an attack by Donbass separatists on pro-Ukrainian residents of Mariupol. Civilians stood in the way of tanks. The information broadcast by the medium (documented by a print-screen) talks about peaceful Mariupol residents being shot at by a tank.

Film material with commentary[86] on the *АнтиМайдан Facebook* disputes this information. The film shows that the residents 'attacked' the tank, preventing it from passing. The film indicates that the tank being taken over by separatists is a lie because the tank's number is different to that mentioned in the event report.

....
86   The commentator Анатолий Шарий is a pro-Russian Ukrainian journalist.

О том, как сепаратисты давили людей и стреляли по домам
Source: YouTube

The use of photography to introduce information chaos into the second, political sphere is connected with politicians' messages. Users post portrayals of politicians uttering doubtful, undocumented and quite absurd statements. The first example is a photo of Yulia Timoshenko and her alleged words: *Poroshenko is an agent of the Kremlin* (*Facebook* АнтиМайдан) which is intended to suggest there is conflict in the top echelons of power in Ukraine. Another case is a photograph of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov at a press conference, disputing the authenticity of US satellite photographs showing the encroachment of the Russian army into Ukraine; he called them computer simulations (*Facebook* АнтиМайдан). This photograph fits into the strategy of denying Russian military involvement in eastern Ukraine.

6.2.2 STRATEGY OF THREATENING AND DISCOURAGING

The threatening strategy, with the use of photographs on websites, covers four spheres of activity: military, ideological, political and economic. Threatening photography can be found in *Facebook* discussion groups: *Facebook* АнтиМайдан and *Facebook* Крым Реалии as well as on *Vkontakte* in forums: *Vkontakte* Україна – понад усе! and *Vkontakte* Ми Українці. Photographs from the sphere of military and ideological activity were the most transparent and easiest to decipher. In the military sphere, threat appears in the form of manifesting the power, strength and modern equipment of the Russian army, Berkut

divisions, less often Ukrainian divisions. These features are usually depicted by convoys of tanks and armoured vehicles: Russian (*Facebook* АнтиМайдан, *Facebook* Russian Crimea, *Facebook* Крым Реалии) and Ukrainian (*Vkontakte* Україна – понад усе!, *Vkontakte* Ми Українці).

Facebook Крым Реалии

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

Facebook ЄвроМайдан

The portrayed soldiers are masked – black or with a camouflage pattern, which allows them to stay anonymous, but also to act more menacingly, unpredictably and go unpunished for their deeds. The conventional uniform identifying a soldier's nationality and rank has disappeared – it is hard to determine which side is being represented on the basis of uniform alone. One symbol distinguishing Russians and pro-Russians is the St George's ribbon attached to their uniform.

Facebook ЄвроМайдан

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

In the sphere of ideological activity, menacing includes exposing Nazi symbols used by the Ukrainians. Examples include photographs of *Sieg Heil* fascist gestures, clenched fists in the air, symbols of Ukrainian political groups referencing Nazi symbolism, e.g. the emblem of the Ukrainian National Guard *Donbass*, symbols of the neo-Bandera and *Right Sector* organizations, among others, *Wolfsangel* (*Facebook* АнтиМайдан, *Vkontakte* Новости Донбасса).

Facebook АнтиМайдан

Facebook АнтиМайдан

In the sphere of political-economic activity, photographed politicians utter threats of all kinds. Arseniy Yatsenyuk threatens Europe with difficulties in providing it with Russian gas (*Facebook* АнтиМайдан), Sergey Aksyonov menaces companies paying taxes in Ukraine (*Facebook* Крым Реалии), President Petro Poroshenko is stylized as a ruthless politician demanding unconditional obedience (*Vkontakte* Україна – понад усе). No economic threats made by Russian politicians were found among the photographs.

6.2.3 Strategy of perpetuating the image of the adversary[87]

Each of the websites analysed builds and perpetuates a specific image of the adversary, depending on its audience. On the АнтиМайдан *Facebook* group, photographs multiply and expose Ukrainian nationalism. Historic photographs are published, e.g. of Ukrainian women welcoming the Nazis in 1941 with *Sieg Heil* salutes, photographs documenting the crimes of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army during the Wołyń massacre of Polish people.

....
87   The research authors did not attempt to check all images for their truthfulness but concentrated on the content and semiotic analysis of the images.

Other published material records current events – protests by *neo-Bandera men* with Stepan Bandera's portrait, a swastika flag next to the Ukrainian flag and aggressive behaviour on the part of young Ukrainians.

Facebook АнтиМайдан

Facebook АнтиМайдан

Facebook АнтиМайдан

In portraits, Ukrainian politicians are depicted as lacking charisma and with vacant eyes (Yatsenyuk, Turchynov).

On *Vkontakte* Новости Донбасса, photographs of *Right Sector* members behaving brutally can be found, as well as photographs exposing the Ukrainian army's lack of morale, e.g. a photograph of ATO soldiers in clean uniforms, shiny helmets and a comment suggesting that the soldiers were part of a photoshoot.

Visual materials posted on *Facebook* Russian Crimea, *Vkontakte* Новости Донбасса, *Vkontakte* Крым create the image of a pow-

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

erful, militarily strong Russian army.

On *Vkontakte* Україна – понад усе! there is a very different image of the separatists' military strength: a collage of photographs depicting

the brutality of the Russian military manifested by physical aggression against protesting civilians, including women.

Vkontakte Україна понад усе!

6.3 INTERNET MEMES IN THE SOCIAL-MEDIA DISCOURSE – QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

In the analysis of internet memes, a quantitative content-analysis technique was used (on the basis of a pre-prepared categorizing key), as well as semiotic analysis – reading meanings into the image layer. The analysis covered all the memes posted by users on *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* in the period from 31 December 2012 to 1 April 2014. Additionally, three basic criteria were applied to the selection of posts:

1) key words: Krym/Крым/Crimea, Донбасс/Donbass, Maydan/ Майдан, АТО
2) number of signed users (a category on Vkontakte)
3) number of likes (a category on Facebook)

Overall, 348 internet memes constituted the research material, including 52 published on *Facebook* and 289 on *Vkontakte*.

Quantitative analysis of memes published in comment sections enabled formal findings to be established, useful for determining the rules for visual representations of the conflict. In terms of rapid dissemination of linguistic-visual content which divides, provokes and incites conflict, *Vkontakte* employs a much richer armoury for meme confrontations. Almost six times more memes were published on *Vkontakte* than on *Facebook*. Social-networking websites, in particular *Vkontakte* became additional battlefields of communication domination with the intent of manipulating the public.

Table 8. Memes in social media.

NAME OF WEBSITE	NUMBER	GENERAL THEME OF MEME			
		MILITARY	POLITICAL	IDEOLOGICAL	ECONOMIC
Facebook АнтиМайдан	23	5	6	10	2
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	3	1	1	1	0
Facebook Russian Crimea	16	2	9	5	0
Facebook Крым Реалии	10	0	3	3	4
Total	52	8	19	19	6
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	12	3	4	4	1
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	39	6	10	20	3
Vkontakte Крым	82	18	28	24	12
Vkontakte Ми Українці	156	23	53	59	21
Total	289	50	95	107	37

Political and ideological themes predominate in memes, ahead of military and economic ones. In modern conflicts, military action is accompanied by non-military activity, political alliances play a key role (the illusion of the indispensability of politics), as also do ideological disputes: ethnic, national and religious. As Newman wrote: "In our time, wars are designed to hit and destroy societies, their basic bonds and functioning mechanisms[88]".

Table 9. Functions of memes – positive evaluation

NAME OF WEBSITE	RUSSIA	UKRAINE	US	EU
Facebook АнтиМайдан	4	0	0	0
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	0	2	0	0
Facebook Russian Crimea	7	0	1	0
Facebook Крым Реалии	0	3	0	0
Total	11	5	1	0
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	1	3	1	0
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	5	4	0	0
Vkontakte Крым	18	3	0	0
Vkontakte Ми Українці	8	14	0	1
Total	31	18	1	1

While comparing the numbers of positive linguistic-visual content popularized by memes, the dominance of positive information about Russia is observed, as opposed to similar statements about Ukraine (half the positive content), while the numbers for the US and EU are almost zero.

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88   E. Newman (2004) The 'new wars' debate: A historical perspective is needed. Security Dialogue. 25(2), 174-176.

Table 10. Functions of memes – negative evaluation

NAME OF WEBSITE	RUSSIA	UKRAINE	US	EU
Facebook АнтиМайдан	1	12	1	1
Facebook ЄвроМайдан	1	0	0	0
Facebook Russian Crimea	2	1	5	1
Facebook Крым Реалии	6	0	0	1
Total	10	13	6	3
Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!	10	1	0	0
Vkontakte Новости Донбасса	9	8	2	1
Vkontakte Крым	8	14	10	3
Vkontakte Ми Українці	31	49	12	10
Total	74	72	24	14

However, taking a closer look at negative content memes, which are more numerous on both websites, we have similar figures for Ukraine and Russia. The upward trend also remains stable for the number of negative memes about the US and EU (more about the US than the EU).

6.3.1 Visual narratives using memes – structural matrix

The activity of website users in utilising memes enables two styles of publishing memes to be identified. The first is a one-off expression of an opinion without the development of any storylines, the second consists of creating an elaborate sequence of memes, a linear string. The structure of meme sequences features the following stages:

1) Initiating meme (its author may be known)
2) Memes developing storylines linearly, gradually enhancing their impact. These usually include:
   • elements and means of destroying opponents (ideas, values, actions, symbols)
   • motivational elements of conflict
3) Memes disturbing the linear discourse
4) Buffer memes (defusing emotional tension, semantic).

These elements will be elaborated on the basis of comments using memes published in the АнтиМайдан *Facebook* group.

The initiating meme portrays president-elect Petro Poroshenko in a negative light. The politician is depicted with specific promises written on the right side of the photograph, with a note below: *what I don't remember didn't happen*. The meme exposes negative, undesirable features of politicians: promises without any real possibility of being fulfilled, passiveness, hopelessness, ineffectiveness.

Initiating meme

Mechanisms for destroying a person's credibility are hidden in the meme (as well as a person it might be any other object: an institution, group, fellowship, nation, idea, value or symbol). In this case, it is ridiculing the President's lack of political activity and the inability to introduce the expected reforms.

The second meme develops a linear discourse and enhances the message of the initiating meme – in this case it is a conversation between Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk, in which further negative features of politicians are exposed: the tendency to provide preferential treatment to political friends and favouritism. Vulgar vocabulary is used – an outhouse as an appropriate position for Yatsenyuk. The strategy of destroying the opponent's credibility is continued, the discrediting of politicians as public servants deepens, and the credibility of Ukraine's new power structure is destroyed.

Developing meme

As a meme disturbing the linear order of creating opinions has not yet appeared, the next meme in the discourse should have an even more negative message. Usually memes' authors add additional elements to enhance the impact of the message. In milder forms, this can be discrediting information, photographs and extracts from an 'inconvenient' story.

In more severe forms, linguistic techniques are used, including pejorative attributes with different intensities of negative evaluation, from disregard to contempt, verbal aggression and vulgar vocabulary, including such extremes as pornographic and zoophilic elements. In the third meme here, an impact-enhancing element can be found – a montage photograph in which the statue of Stepan Bandera is surrounded by a herd of pigs.

Слава Україні!
героям слава!

Meme disturbing the linearity of the message

This is a good example of mildly exacerbating the language of the message. The next meme comes a little late in relation to the development of the earlier storyline, and continues the motif of the negative features of politicians' – it burdens President Poroshenko with responsibility for the deaths of Ukrainian soldiers.

Developing meme (delayed)

Another meme again changes the linearity of the message – it is a response using an expressive means of striking at the opponent: a Cossack from Donbass dressed in Nazi uniform, a reminder of the Cossacks' fascist past. Another motivational element of the conflict is a shameful history.

Meme disturbing the linearity of the message

Another meme balances the previous piece of information – it references the photographs of children murdered by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army during the Wołyń massacre. The adversary is well-prepared in the field, he or she publishes a meme verifying the photograph of hanged children, in which he or she refers to the story of Maria Dolińska, a Polish Gypsy infanticide.

Developing meme

This storyline is not continued visually, another change of linearity occurs, and it now concerns the demeaning treatment of Ukrainian women in the EU (demeaning physical work such as cleaning toilets). In response, news is published about the activities of the Donbass National Republic army – soldiers killing and wounding civilians, without suffering any casualties themselves. Another meme continues the contemptuous pig motif – Poroshenko has a pig's snout. In the narrative presented, buffer memes defusing tension are complemented by memes with symbols of New Russia. All the memes constitute a kind of complete set of sequences, created by specific rules.

Meme disturbing the linearity of the message

Developing meme (delayed)

Developing meme (delayed)

Buffer meme

Fundamental information-war operational strategies on social-network websites utilising memes

The analysis of memes enabled the mechanism for enhancing the image of the adversary to be determined. The subjects of this detailed examination are the strategies for enhancing Russia's positive image (initiator's accreditation role in propaganda activity), as well as the strategies for enhancing Ukraine's negative image (adversary's discrediting role). Memes from the analysed website, enriching the resources of the visual and linguistic categories and helping develop Russia's positive image, oscillate between three topic categories:

- Myth of Great Russia;
- Myth of fighting for a new world order based on human-dimension values, with the guarantee of being able to use one's ethnic language;
- Myth of combating lapsed traditional values in the West (fighting homosexuality)

In the Крым Реалии *Facebook* group, memes strongly enhance the narrative of Great Imperial Russia. One meme in particular deserves mention, as it describes the myth of Great Russia with linguistic-visual means. The symbol of the Great Bear is used – imperial, Soviet, Orthodox Russia – the language stylizes the narrative into glorifying the greatness: *Russia defeated the Cossacks… Russia defeated the Poles… Russia defeated Napoleon… Russia defeated Hitler… Russia will defeat the US… Russia wants peace… American right wing wants war… God help us all…*
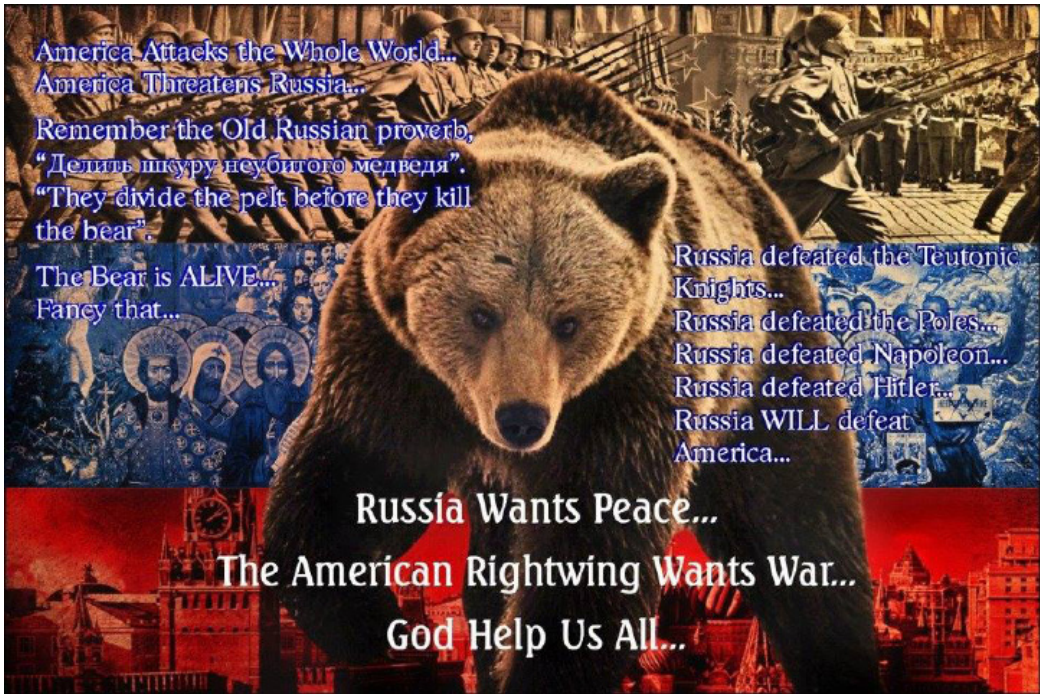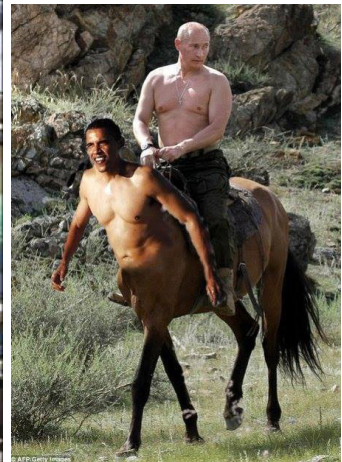
Facebook Крым Реалии

n confronting Great Russia, the US is a defeated state – in the narrative of memes from *Facebook's Russian Crimea* page, President Obama acknowledges Putin's superiority.
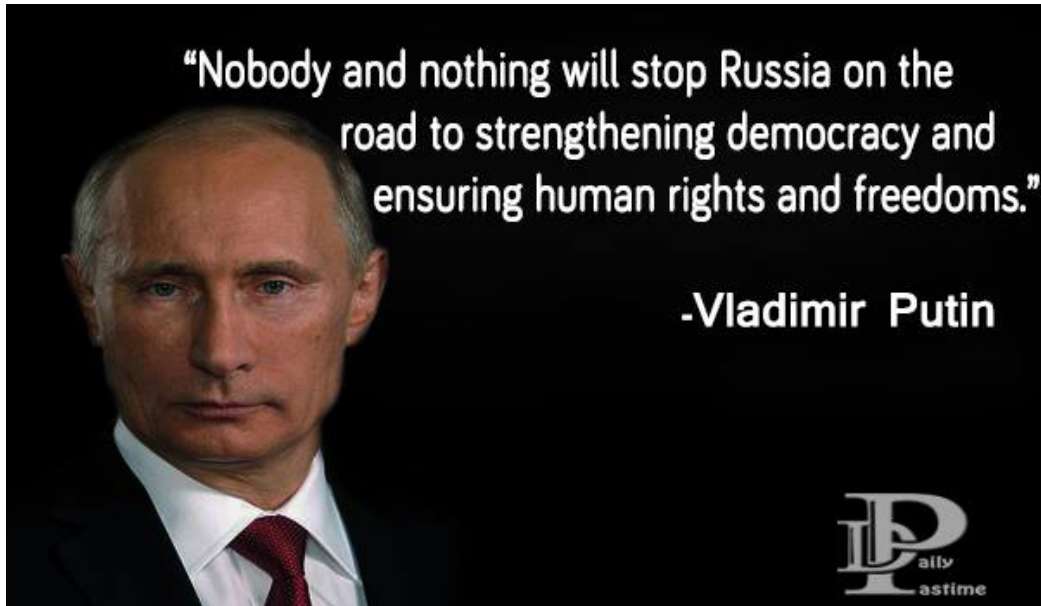

Facebook Russian Crimea

Memes on *Vkontakte* continue to strengthen the myth of Great Russia. Historic heroes are summoned, e.g., Yuri Gagarin with the linguistic comment: *We are the best… as long as Russia exists, others will hate us* (*Vkontakte* Крым).

Another example is a portrait of Putin saying: I don't want war, I want peace in the world, or even better, the whole world (Vkontakte Україна – понад усе!). In the model of imperial Russia, the role of creating a new world order based on human-dimension values is a key element. For example, Putin, a politician conscious of his power, stands for the rights of different nations, the right to democracy, human rights: People who destroy the nations of whole countries do not have the right to teach us democracy – the value of free life (Vkontakte Крым).

"Nobody and nothing will stop Russia on the road to strengthening democracy and ensuring human rights and freedoms."

-Vladimir Putin

Facebook Russian Crimea

тебе решать на каком языке будут говорить твои дети

Vkontakte Новости Донбасса

Russians are depicted as people caring for the good of others – the example is a drawing meme in which a Russian covers the whole globe with a blanket, sharing its warmth with others (*Vkontakte* Крым). The strategy of caring for one's native language is communicated on websites. In one of the memes a small girl points her finger and says: *You decide which language your child will speak* (*Vkontakte* Новости Донбасса).

Memes are also used to enhance the image of Ukraine as the adversary. The following mechanisms are used:

- Objectification of Ukrainians, demeaning their dignity and humanity,
- Attributing nationalism, referencing a fascist past,
- Political incompetence of the government, lack of concord, corruption at the highest levels, consent to killing civilians,
- Betrayal of your Russian brothers, joining alliances with the US and the EU (betraying the loyalty of allies).

The instrument of meme war based on contempt for and the demeaning of Ukrainians is particularly dangerous. Stripping people of their values and dignity is stripping them of their humanity and thus makes it fair to treat them as being undeserving of solidarity or compassion. On *Vkontakte,* Ukrainians are commonly referred to in an offensive way: "хохлы". The contexts are also offensive, e.g. *I will sell хохлы for the price of fertilizer, possibly exchange for bitches* (*Vkontakte* Крым). Especially vulgar is a photograph of a women with a pig and the comment: *conceived from a thinking mulch*. Another means of visual provocation is a lack of respect for the most prominent Ukrainian politicians. Here is a short biography of Petro Poroshenko: *born 26.06.1965 as the son of Romanian Jew Walzman. They dressed him in a laced shirt and registered him not as a Jew, but a Ukrainian... 50 years later this Ukrainian started to kill thousands of real Ukrainians* (*Vkontakte* Ми Українці). The aspect of murdering innocents is extensively depicted:
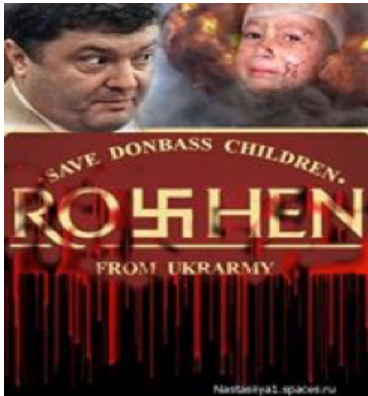
Facebook АнтиМайдан

Facebook Russian Crimea

Facebook Russian Crimea

While death did not appear in photographs, it is eagerly used in propaganda-war memes. Through collages, Ukraine is connected to fascist ideology. Memes often utilise Nazi symbolism: Prime Minister Yatsenyuk is placed next to Hitler, a small child raises a clenched fist, and next to them, the *Right Sector* symbol appears (all examples come from *Vkontakte* Крым). The colours of the Ukrainian flag, called Ukropia, are described as follows: *blue – the tears of the forever-whining West supporters, the trident is a clown's hat reflecting the mental state of Ukropian*[89] *patriots, yellow – the colour of urine, because Bandera men are in fact cowards, brave only in large groups against the defenceless and children* (*Vkontakte* Ми Українці)

Facebook АнтиМайдан

Facebook Russian Crimea

Memes strongly expose the servility of Ukraine in the face of the US and the EU. Below are many examples from *Vkontakte* Ми Українці. In the first meme, Putin says: *Ukraine means nothing to the EU*; there are joint Ukrainian and EU flags and a comment: *Who do you serve, Ukraine, when trembling on your back paws you shoot Russia in the back, looking slavishly towards the West.* In the second meme, a man symbolizing Ukraine is kissing the behind of another man symbolizing the US and the EU. Another meme is textual, and we read that *the US is actively intervening and controlling*

....

89   As previously mentioned, Ukrop (also, Ukr) literally means 'dill' (the herb) in Russian, but for those opposed to the Ukrainian government, army, or even nation, it became (initially a derogatory) word for Ukrainians. In the war-torn Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, it indicates Ukrainian soldiers and volunteer fighters. This neologism was invented by separatists back in summer 2014 and just like cyborg, it soon became popular with the Ukrainians. Later it inspired artists and designers to produce T-shirts with pictures of dill and the word ukrop, which Ukrainian volunteer fighters and patriotic civilians commonly wore. http://www.kyivpost.com/content/kyiv-post-plus/ukrainian-wartime-glossary-ukrop-vatnik-and-more-376978.html

the situation in Ukraine, the CIA has access to all Ukrainian state secrets and documents, the aim of the US and the EU is to destroy Ukraine, cause famine and chaos, in order to create tension near Russia.

Vkontakte Ми Українці

Vkontakte Ми Українці

In summary, having analyzed visual materials published in social media, it turns out that photographs and memes reporting conflict between Russia and Ukraine use techniques of disinformation, manipulation and fabrication of information. The falseness of them is obvious in many instances and the purpose of visual propaganda is clear: faked photos are 'proof' of statements made by Russian and separatist authorities, present arguments and create alternative realities.

Visuals became a tool of implementing the Russian information-war strategy perpetuating negative images of Ukraine, EU and NATO allies, simultaneously enhancing Russia's positive image. Photos and memes frighten, intimidate, mislead, discourage, subvert the identity of and humiliate opponents, and contrarily, mobilize, comfort, reassure and encourage pro-Kremlin supporters.

What surprises to some extent is that the main actors in an 'internet war' are not soldiers, weapons or barricades but politicians, civilians and national symbols that trigger sentiments and emotions, antagonizing and uniting being an universal point of reference to the audience.

CONCLUSION

Within last two decades, the world has witnessed the powerful tool of the internet becoming not only a global mean of communication, but also one of the major sources that define reality, frame politics, cultures and societies. What is more, it turned out that the media might be used not only to mediate contemporary wars, but they also might became a part of the conduction of that warfare. This way, while some internet and social-media forum users utilize these opportunities to debate, share and exchange information for knowledge and social change, others exploit it as a battlefield for propaganda, influence, mobilization, persuasion and moulding public opinion.

While it was quickly spotted that the internet may have served as a means of manipulating information, disseminating disinformation, lobbying or blackmailing, the scale and diversity of the internet and social networks being exploited for political-propaganda purposes in Russia has, to a large extent, surprised the democratic West. Following the optimism connected with the introduction of the 'reset' policy in Russia-US relations and the toning down of anti-American rhetoric on the part of Russia, Russia's reformulations of its strategic objectives went unnoticed, and the disagreements between Russia and the West, as well as propaganda activity, under-estimated. Meanwhile, the Kremlin connected long-standing elements of psychological war with the new opportunities provided by the internet. Dugin and Panarin took the concept of 'net-centric warfare' and creatively developed it for effective use during the annexation of Crimea. Even before the "war without firing a single bullet" had started, a propaganda, rumour and disinformation campaign had been run in Russian TV channels, radio, magazines and new media.

The analysis of frames and representations was undertaken in order to understand the phenomenon of interlinking activities on different levels (military, political, information and identity) in the internet. The study of comments and posts in social media reveals the planned, organized and coordinated influence pro-Kremlin supporters have had on Ukrainian and Western public opinion, what Thomas E Nissed calls the 'weaponisation' of the internet and social media.

Both quantitative (content) and qualitative (narration, visual and semiotic) analyses of frames and representations of the annexation and war in Donbass unveiled internet-troll actions aimed at shaping, influencing, manipulating, misleading, deceiving, deterring, mobilizing and convincing pro- and anti-Russian audiences.

> *The scale and diversity of the internet and social networks being exploited for political-propaganda purposes in Russia has, to a large extent, surprised the democratic West.*

Empirical analysis offers answers to the research questions. The first and second questions refer to the hypothetical correlation between the numbers of comments in different types and subjects of articles, which may also be influenced by photographs accompanying the articles, or the frames used to portray the situation in Ukraine.

It turns out that there is a strong relationship between the content of articles and the comments posted to them, however the correlation is between topics, not the perspectives in which they are interpreted. The comments see the images of the participants in the conflict being built continually, e.g., Russia is a superpower – a country determined to defend its interests, able to achieve its goals with the use of political and military measures; it is a peaceful country that does not react to aggressive Western policies; Ukraine is a country deprived of its roots, a fascist country, unable to survive by itself.

What is important is that the number of comments is linked to the content of articles and depends on internet-troll activity. This refers to the sixth and seventh research questions. Photographs of people displaying negative emotions are commented on more 'eagerly'. General images of destruction, death and weapons result in a fall in the number of comments by both pro- and anti-separatist supporters. The number of comments increases when the content can be easily used by internet trolls to incite political antagonism (the political activity of the conflicting sides, their definition of what is happening in Ukraine and what role Russia has in it all) and social antagonism (dissatisfaction, protests, breaking of the law and ethnic conflict). A much larger number of comments, both validating Russia's actions (justifying separatists' military actions and Russia's involvement) and blaming the West and Ukrainians (their aggression and fascist government) was also observed when articles portrayed Russia's actions negatively.

The relationship between the number of comments and content of photographs, articles and comments was quantified. Increases in the numbers of comments were observed when people appeared in photographs as opposed to objects, buildings, symbols, statues or barricades. Most comments appeared when negative emotions were portrayed, while positive emotions, such as joy and satisfaction, and neutral emotions surprisingly did not have significant impact on the frequency of commenting. As far as the theme of the article increases frequency of commentaries, it turned out that factors involving antagonistic citizens attract more interest (the political activity of the conflicting parties, their definition of what was happening in Ukraine and what role Russia actually has) as also do issues affecting them personally (dissatisfaction, protests, breaking the law and ethnic conflict), more than do economic and business issues, or even military operations. It is surprising that discussions questioning Ukraine's sovereignty, undermining its existence or calling it a fascist state actually see comment numbers decrease, just like when Ukrainian ATO soldiers are called fascists. This is surprising because the presence of this content is widely considered to be the most reader-activating on websites.

It turns out that different eristic techniques led to diversified activity in comment forums: comment frequency increases when there is a greater presence of trolls and if they used such 'operational techniques' as denial, building/preserving the image of the enemy, fuelling national, ethnic and religious hatred/quarrels. Summing up this part of the analysis: more intense internet discussion was not caused by the following topics recurring in articles and discussions: supposed fascism, calling Stepan Bandera the ideological father of Ukraine, Russian or Ukrainian patriotism or questioning the existence of the Ukrainian state. It seems that during the internet propaganda campaign, these came to be seen as clichés, overused by propagandists. Techniques inducing emotion connected with military and political activity in Crimea and Donbass were much more effective when interlocutors tried to justify war and aggression as Russia's justifiable reaction to the actions of the West. It is more effective to motivate internet-forum readers by undermining the myth of the West, questioning Eastern and Central Europe countries' independence from the EU and the US, as well as by using classic eristic techniques.

The third research question examines definitions of the situations in Donbass and Crimea. Firstly, the Crimea annexation is rarely commented on, both in articles and comment sections and is several times less frequently present

in internet discourse than the Donbass war. What did 'actually happen' in Crimea and Donbass? The articles and comments unequivocally spoke of Russian aggression in the Crimean case, about the war between Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists in Donbass (articles), and the war between Ukraine and Russia (comments).

The next research questions refer to the frames and representations used in internet articles and social media posts. Dominant frames and narrations are of great importance since they create context for readers' experience of reality and trigger mechanisms (pluralistic ignorance, spiral of silence or the bandwagon effect) potentially distorting their image of the world. Which frames appeared in comments on the Ukraine-Russia conflict? The presence of the following frames is clearly evident: (1) Frame criticising Western and Atlantic civilizations under the US's leadership, (2) Frame criticising Ukraine (and Central and Eastern Europe countries) as puppets of the West, (3) Frame suggesting other countries' support for Ukraine is to the detriment of their own national interests, (4) Frame of Ukraine being incapable of existing as an independent state, (5) Frame of Russophobia, (6) Frame of Ukraine as a fascist state, and (7) Frame of Russians are our Slavic brothers.

These frames were used simultaneously in internet-comment sections and social media, thus it was impossible to establish how proportions of frames have varied at different stages of the war between Ukraine and pro-Russia separatists.

When seeking to identify trolls, it became clear that evaluating posts individually can result in mistakes. However, if sequences of statements are analysed, then troll activity becomes more evident. These sequences consist of three phases: luring, taking the bait and hauling in. While it is not easy to differentiate between internet trolls and 'ordinary' posters, some behaviour can be isolated, which increases the probability of identifying a discussion participant as a troll (e.g., copying quotes not supported by sources and repeating the same content: < Russia is not taking part in the conflict>; intimidating, creating internal conflict <e.g., Poroszenko is a bandit, Bandera followers must be destroyed>; putting in links without commenting on them, building up conspiracy theories, etc.).

Does the analysis of posts in comment sections and social media support Thomas Nissen's concept of the weaponisation of the internet and social media, the presupposition that certain comments were planned and synchronized (eighth research question)?

The data collected, together with investigative journalists' reports about the Troll Factory in St Petersburg support these assumptions and prove that the activities of some internet posters are not haphazard but planned, facilitated, coordinated and synchronized, most likely by intelligence agencies.

Moreover, we can find additional arguments that support this hypothesis in the analysis of the linguistic and visual images of the

> *The 'weaponisation' of the internet and social media enables the manipulation, misleading, distraction and confusion of public opinion. Russia makes use of and exploits these opportunities.)*

Ukraine-Russia conflict. It is not difficult, by carefully selecting certain linguistic means (e.g., metaphors, idioms and labels), to effectively amplify images that describe Ukrainians as *Bandera men*, killers, cruel murderers, victims of the US and NATO, manipulated by the US and NATO, while simultaneously introducing ideological content from the *Russkij Mir* and filling comment sections with 'evidence', 'arguments' and 'facts' which demonstrate that the Ukrainians' and NATO allies' 'actions', 'thoughts' and 'intentions' are clearly aggressive and dishonest. Similarly, photographs and memes reporting the conflict between Russia and Ukraine use techniques of disinformation, manipulation and fabrication of information that perpetuate negative images of Ukraine, the EU and NATO allies, simultaneously enhancing Russia's positive image.

Summing up, the 'weaponisation' of the internet and social media offers both opportunities and significant challenges in the information war. It enables the manipulation, misleading, distraction and confusion of public opinion. Russia makes use of and exploits these opportunities. The high quality of the techniques employed and the wide spectrum of activities suggest that Russian trolls are very well-prepared specialists in internet communication. Facing this hostile and organised Russian propaganda, the West has to respond and consistently increase resources to strengthen its own communication potential.

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