

## MASS-MEDIATED UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

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*“Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.”  
Napoleon Bonaparte*

### **Abstract**

Modern conflicts are defined in terms of technological development and innovation. Cyclically, the emergence of new technology propels society towards progress. Launching the personal computer in 1974, development of the World Wide Web and later, of the mobile technology are examples not of mere business innovations, but of values which determined change in matters of mental, relational and behavioural patterns on a macro level. The existing brands grant the illusion of power-holding to the population. If the contestations of political regimes in the Middle East, organized through social media platforms, proved that the Internet and especially the social networking sites are democratic instruments, used for expressing the will of the people, in what regards the binomial relationship social networking and Russian Federation, we maintain scepticism. The international security environment, as it is foreshadowed in the present, can be defined in terms of conflict and uncertainty. For Europe, one of the biggest challenges, security-wise, was and is the Ukrainian crisis. During the military crisis, the Russian Federation used on a large scale the media instruments to create ostensibly the legitimacy of its actions. Starting from simple scenarios, portraying the fight between good and evil, Kremlin perfected in time its propaganda means and symbolism. The article focuses on how the Russian propaganda works more than on what it conveys and addresses the issue of recent developments in technology and software and how they were used as incubators for propaganda.

### **Keywords**

Mass-media; new media; propaganda; Russia; social networking; Ukraine

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Power, defined in simple terms, is the ability of one entity to modify and influence the attitude and the behaviour of other entities for attaining a specific purpose. In democratic states, the political elite maintains its position as a consequence of fulfilling electoral promises. In states with low democratic culture where the governance is made according to authoritarian principles, the legitimacy of the leader relies on hereditary factors or it is imposed by force. Considering recent riots and upheavals, the power holders seek to legitimate their position and consolidate political authority by obtaining support of the governed population. The information disseminated within the society becomes, in this context, an important mean for acquiring power, and the struggle for controlling information a priority on the political agenda. The war of our times consists in continuous, subversive attempts to obtain control of the information conveyed at a collective level.

The theoretical model for conflict resolution developed by Galtung (Galtung and Webel 2007, pp. 14-22) illustrates three stages of conflict, organized in a triangular shape, that escalate from contradictions and attitudes to behaviour. The existence of contradictions in any society is normal and, if maintained under a certain level, will not determine further conflictual states. The Michels Effect explains that in time, decision-makers will reprioritize their political objectives, so as to maintain their position and its inherent advantages (Michels 1915, p. 19). In a struggle for the survival of the ruler's seat, the power-holders within the society seek to limit the polarization process and maintain a satisfaction level that will not affect their status, and the means for attaining this is either by meeting the requests of the population and distributing the resources available as the will of the people dictates, or by persuasion and propaganda.

The political leader can dispose measures for propaganda and persuasion in stages of attitude and behaviour also, but their impact will be significantly lower, due to the fact that the population has acknowledged the faults of the system, has an opinion about it common to collective masses and soon, it will manifest the intention of changing the *status quo*. In stricter political systems, the collective perception of the population revolves around the idea of changing the regime. Even dictatorships and strict authoritarian regimes seek a form to legitimize their power. In these circumstances, the

contestation of the regime perceived as a direct threat by the decision-makers can determine, depending on the degree of the polarization process, an increase in volume and profundity of the propaganda. When the use of propaganda seeks to maintain an illegitimate or contested government, the term is associated with control and is regarded as a deliberate attempt to alter or maintain a balance of power so as to provide advantages to the propagandist (Jowett and O'Donnell 2012, p. 4) usually by exerting authority or coercion.

Persuasive power is present in most of the works and the definitions of propaganda (Hentea 2008, p. 43), its psychological core being substantiated on national values and symbols of identity. The biggest difference between propaganda and persuasion is that the latter occurs in a transactional frame, the persuaded target being aware of and accepting the ongoing process. It is somehow situated between suggestion and obedience and seeks to induce the idea that the will for a certain change or initiative belongs to the population and is authentic. The changes in opinion on a collective level are produced in the absence of coercion and are considered to be the result of a rather complex mechanism of persuasion and reasoning. Thus, it becomes an important mean for attaining legitimacy and consolidating political authority.

The times we live in are in the final phase of the technological utility, that of ubiquitous use, when the technology available filters through all levels of the society (Oberg and Sullivan 1999, p. 121). The fast-paced developments in technology went beyond mere business innovation and changed thinking, relational and behavioural patterns within the society. In other words, not only have the recent technological advancements reached levels unimagined a decade ago, but they spread within the society on a large scale and have triggered a societal revolution. Internet is currently one of the most (if not the most) accessed sources of information and perceived, due to its image as one of the most reliable democratization tools. Its inherent nature and distribution mode, which seemed to be its biggest strengths in the process of promoting democratic principles, are also its biggest vulnerability.

## 2. RESHAPING COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION: THE INTERNET AND THE NEW MEDIA

*People somehow assume that the Internet is going to be the catalyst of change that will push young people into the streets, while in fact it may actually be the new opium for the masses.  
(Morozov 2009)*

The development of technology and Internet has facilitated the dissemination of propaganda. When the World Wide Web was developed, it was perceived as the main tool for democratization. Now, the population has access to unlimited data and information and is capable of communicating and transmitting information in real time globally. It was portrayed as the most powerful tool of the masses. But the democratization power of the Internet worked as a positive force in that direction only in countries with low democratic culture (Nisbet, Stoycheff and Pearce 2012, pp. 249-265). Indeed, in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes and controlled through violence and repression, the Internet was seen as the *golden fish* willing to bring them the information and the support needed for change. The Internet became a vital element for democratic advance, managing to “open gates” in places where offline efforts did not. That was the message conveyed by the Washington administration (Niță 2011, p. 138). But in Western liberal democracies, Internet and technology overall remained almost exclusively an entertainment device. In the United States of America, self-proclaimed birthplace of democracy, people surf the web mainly for entertainment purposes. So, we have to ask ourselves: how does the new media impact, influence or facilitate the political situations?

Of course, many could argue that the emergence of new media, or social networking sites and mobile communication will determine a higher degree of social cohesion and facilitate the communication among members of the same community. They are *perceived* as instruments for the people to express opinions in matters of political, social and cultural life, instruments for promoting democracy. And at first, that was their purpose, but in time they reshaped the functions and relations of and within the propaganda apparatus.

The face of the propagandist lost itself in the social network and the apparent freedom given by the new media became a more subtle method for propaganda. The ruling regimes realized the force of the power that lies

behind the social network mechanisms and started using it in their advantage. Similar to espionage movies, opinion formatives infiltrated in online social groups and launched small ideas, that similar to a snowball on a slippery slope only grew bigger and gained support. The information received by the primary user was later echoed (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955, p. 309) to social groups (family and friends) and from rumours and transformed itself in facts, opinions and attitudes on a collective level. The options offered by social networking platforms of sharing, liking, commenting and gaining popularity on the newsfeed are used as modern psy-ops instruments. By creating multiple accounts that sustain a certain point of view/policy, a community large enough to be taken into account is created. Through systematic actions it can induce a new system of values, beliefs, emotions, reasoning or reinforce attitudes favourable to the regime.

The main problem in perception management and detecting this kind of propaganda is that it enters the “safe space” and social sites like Facebook and Twitter which are not perceived as governmental instruments for creating opinions, and that reflects in the attitude of the population towards the information gathered from there. As an “insider”, propaganda disseminated in this way is harder to detect. And to that, agnotology adds up. The concept, coined by Robert Proctor (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008, pp. 3-37), refers to the cultural emergence of ignorance, especially in what regards publishing inexact results of scientific studies meant for distorting reality and creating false opinions. In other words, agnotology becomes an active construct within which governmental institutions organize doubt, uncertainty and misinformation in accordance with a plan and with the purpose of controlling the population by intentionally maintaining a level of ignorance<sup>1</sup>. And that reaches peak in countries partly democratic where the illusion of the freedom of the press becomes for the majority of the population a reality, and the distinction between what is propaganda and what is objective is a fine line.

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<sup>1</sup> Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) identify several types of ignorance: as a native state, implied by the naivety of the youth or by the disadvantages of a poor education, as a lost territory, referring to the fact that, as knowledge, ignorance has a political geography, as a virtue, becoming resistant to knowledge and what seems to be the most interesting, as a deliberative strategic plot. In this case, the focus is directed to doubt and uncertainty, as if something is produced and manipulated in accordance with a set of procedures and mechanisms.

The debate over the democratization power of the Internet has its answers in this form of state organizations. Democracies and strong authoritarian regimes both become irrelevant in the discussion, due to the fact that either there is no need for democratization, or no access to Internet. So what are the factors that incline the balance in favour or propaganda to the detriment of democracy and how is the new media used in this scenario?

### 3. THE POLICY OF MATRYOSKA

The paper focuses on addressing the problem from the perspective of the Russian Federation, placed somehow in between Western liberal democracies and pure authoritarian regimes. In order to discuss the way propaganda works within the Kremlin administration, we have to analyze the Russian political decision-making mechanism. The Russian Federation is currently ruled by Vladimir Putin. In *Who Makes Foreign Policy and How*, Margaret and Charles Hermann (1989, pp. 361-87) identified three types of decisional entities within which the decision-making process, influence and power factors manifest differently. According to the Hermann's taxonomy, in how it regards the Russian Federation, it can be classified as singular group. In this situation, the decisional power belongs exclusively to the dominant group which shares the same political option. The most important element becomes the rapidity with which the group reaches consensus. But for the Russian Federation, the singular opinion is predetermined by historical and doctrinaire factors. An important aspect for analysis, in matters of Russian propaganda towards the Ukrainian regime, derives from the Russian architectural system of values. The Russian people are driven by nationalist impulses and by the desire to regain power in the international system. The entire foreign policy revolves around the idea of reconstructing Imperial Russia (Angheloiu 2007). And in the last decade the foreign policy of Russia was Vladimir Putin, a pragmatic leader through excellence. The foreign policy decisions of the Russian Federation were, in the majority of the cases, surprising.

Among the firsts and the most important papers that approached the issue of Russian cognitive patterns in matters of foreign policy was *The Operational Code of the Politburo*, written by Nathan Leites (1951, pp. 11-15). Although Leites did not study Vladimir Putin in his paper but the political

setting at the time, his work is relevant for the current analysis considering the Russian political leader is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a product of the Russian environment. The Russian instincts and Putin's political convictions were shaped by massive transformations of the Russian society, power, lessons learned and own cognitive biases (Lo 2003, pp. 25-27).

Driven by a strong patriotic feeling, Putin considers the fall of the USSR the "biggest geopolitical tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (Galleotti and Bowen 2014). Although aware of the inability to rebuild the empire, Putin's foreign policy constantly sought to consolidate the Russian Federation as a regional hegemon. Based on a pragmatic and rational approach, where the costs always had to be lower than the potential advantages, Putin did not eliminate cooperation of the list. On the contrary, in matters that served his national interest, cooperation, negotiation and mediation were the main instruments for attaining geopolitical goals. But beyond pragmatism, rational calculus and patterns of decision-making lies the problem of Ukraine. For Russians, Ukraine is no longer a matter of territorial gains or of strategic geopolitical advantages, but it is a matter of *nationality and identity*.

The Ukraine conflict started in November 2013, as a consequence of the acceptance of the Ukrainian Government to sign the agreement with the European Union, which implied a certain degree of adherence to European values and principles, hence social inclusion in the largest possible way. The crisis escalated quickly and the pro-Russian population in Crimea voted "yes" in a referendum asking whether Crimea should be annexed to the Russian Federation or not. Russian leaders acted accordingly and the Western Liberal Democracies accused them of infringing international law and national sovereignty. The complexity of the discussion relies on understanding the differences between Ukraine's cultural and historical divisions, and can consist in an explanatory basis for the internal conflict within Ukraine between pro-Russians and pro-Europeans. The division has translated into a general truth and seldom appears as something too obvious to be questioned or explained. Ukraine's internal division is not due to ethnical conflicts or regional issues, but to a more complicated aspect to resolve; value-based attitude and national identity. For a better understanding of why Ukraine is so important for the Russian Federation and why the problem is no longer territorial but rather in identity, we must look back at the history of Ukraine.

The historical cultural ties between Ukraine and the Russian Federation could offer an explanatory basis for the power and upheaval of today's conflicts, illustrating how they shaped mentalities and identity reasoning from centuries of shifting control of European powers. The conflicts most difficult to manage are the ones that invoke identity and cultural arguments, as they are motivated by intrinsic values of the society and cannot be rationally justified. In matters of Ukraine and territorial disputes of the last centuries, the allegiance for the Russian domination impacted and divided the society in the broadest sense possible influencing collective perception. The contradictions within the society between those who perceive the Imperial or Soviet Russian rule more sympathetically and those who see it as a tragedy are the premises for the current conflict in the region (Conant 2014).

The West, although controlled by Poland during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, shares many religious and linguistic influences with the centre. It was influenced by Polish culture, the core values being pertained to the ones of the Roman Catholicism. After Poland was dissolved, the territory entered the rule of the Austrian Empire (19<sup>th</sup> century), thus strengthening the connections with Europe. Although monarchic, the Habsburg Empire offered political freedom and enabled the implementation of modern practices that were only substantiating the ties with the European territory (serfs were freed, right to elect the monarchy's constituent assembly, some of the elected deputies were former serfs, the right to develop associations of any kind, including political parties, minority languages were recognized in education, administration and justice (Szporluk 2009, pp. 3-7)) and laying the basis for future democratic ambitions.

The centre (including Kiev) was mostly influenced by eastern Slavs (early Slavic alphabet), and the region was briefly under the rule of Poland and Lithuania. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the centre was taken by Russian Empire.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the south-east region of Ukraine became a shared social and cultural space (Riabchuk 2009, p. 9), sharing few aspects of cultural and religious life with the Western part of the country. The industrial development and the high degree of urbanization attracted Russians, whose domination controlled the "openness" to European culture, limiting the framework for modern political ideas or creating Western democratic institutions (e.g. representative government, independent judiciary, freedom



of the press) (Riabchuk 2009, p. 9). Each effort for a Western evolution was limited or eliminated. "All seemed to conspire to bring about the integration of the Ukrainian elite and its culture into that of the empire, leading, in fact, to russification, since Russian political culture has achieved dominance and monopoly in the empire" (Raeff 1992, p. 78). The values entrenched in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were retained centuries later and became civilizational identity patterns, within which the Ukrainian society (mostly the eastern region) developed.

Every state form of organization with its implicit characteristic aspects is designed, influenced and created by two interdependent forces: culture and politics. Cultural innovations were translated into reorganizing of social space and reshaping relations within the society. The state architectural sociology connects an ideology with its inherent values. Different ideologies infuse within the society a different set of values; hence the historical differences between the Western and the Eastern regions of Ukraine created distinct patterns of reacting to societal changes and political ruling. Living different histories, Ukraine formed two national consciousness (defined in terms of knowledge, faith, arts, ethics, rule of law, customs), both poorly connected.

The perception of Ukraine and Russia as parts of the same nation was not a unilateral belief. Russian perception of national identity and fundamental values was greatly shaped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before Ukraine became a modern nation. The historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century created the Russian model of a nation, leading from the premise Ukraine is an integrated part of the Russian society. Furthermore, Kiev was considered to be the cradle of the Russian civilizations. Having this idea powerfully implanted in the collective perception, for the Russian population annexing Crimea is just a mean for repairing a historical wrong. For many Russians, it is quite difficult to distance their own history from Ukraine's and acknowledge the autonomy and independence of Ukraine as a state entity. Furthermore, the Ukrainian problem is perceived as a conflict clustered by the West and directed against the constitutional norms and the wish of the Ukrainians. Putin denies the accusations of the United States regarding the deployment of military forces on Ukrainian soil and proposes a diplomatic solution. Although his cognitive and behavioural pattern do not imply the use of force as a mean of crisis management, Putin's declaration stated that Russia will intervene, if necessary, on legitimate grounds in Ukraine.

The cultural and historical ties Russia has with the Ukrainian territory outline a new perspective regarding power structures and regional interactions. One of the main characteristics of the current security environment is the arrangement of the states in a network. The ongoing events and the emergence of areas of conflict emphasize the need of a good positioning within the international network. Each state seeks to consolidate its position, strengthen its ties and connections and become an important node in the system that generates strategic competitive advantages (remain independent, but generate dependence to others). Taking into account the common cultural background of Eastern Ukraine and the Russian Federation (interpreted as a cohesion force) and precedents such as Kosovo (where the claims of independence were driven by different systems of values, and legitimated by the international organizations on the basis of the right of each nation to identity), the Kremlin's main objective became consolidating its position by uniting the Russian territories, regardless of their geographical position. Kiev, perceived as the cradle of the Russian civilization, its *Mittelpunkt*, from where the development of the inchoate modern state, became a priority. And in an effort to legitimize any action oriented towards eastern Ukraine, the Kremlin appealed to propaganda and other influential instruments.

#### 4. WEAPONS OF MASS DECEPTION

The Russian Federation has directed its efforts of persuasion and influence in three different directions: first of all, internally, to obtain legitimate support for foreign political actions from the governed population; in Ukraine, to maintain the spirit of the pro-Russian protesters; and within the European Union, to gain their trust and avoid a military intervention. Considering the historical and cultural background, even though we have in mind three different geographical spaces, all targets of the Russian propaganda machine, there are only two types of messages conveyed. In matters of internal and Ukrainian propaganda, the psychological warfare taken has as main purpose maintaining the perception existent within the society and adding a higher degree of consistency, pertained to the foreign policy adopted. When talking about the European space, the propaganda shifts

from maintaining the idea to creating the idea. Vladimir Putin seeks to obtain if not the support, at least the trust of the European leaders and avoid a military confrontation. This is realized in a rather formal and institutionalized environment, through official declarations, interviews and negotiations within international organizations.

Focusing on internal propaganda, the three piers on which the propaganda machine relies upon comply with the three fundamental elements of a persuasive action identified by Aristotle – *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* – the tryptic status, logic, emotions (*apud* Kapferer 2002, p. 22).

In matters of *ethos/status*, Vladimir Putin appealed to its presidential authority and as the first step of a highly complex process, he decided reducing the power of the free press. The independent media trusts directors/editors were gradually eliminated and replaced with people of the regime, who had the possibility to convey the message accordingly to the ruler's interests. In December 2013, Vladimir Putin ordered the restructuring of the state owned (and yet, historically independent) RIA Novosti, known for delivering unbiased news and producing balanced coverage (Sandford 2013). Pursuant to a merge with Russia Today (reorganized as International News Agency Russia Today, under the reason it will make more rational use of public money), Dmitry Kiselyov became chief editor, a TV presenter known for being disinclined to US policies (Hyll, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Dozhd (Rain), Russia's independent TV channel was eliminated<sup>2</sup> before the Olympic Games and the radio station Ekho Moskvy had its long-serving editor Alexei Venediktov and director Yuri Fedutinov replaced by an editor from state media, without being offered any justification of the decision<sup>3</sup>. The director of the independent news

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<sup>1</sup>A sharp critic of Euromaidan, he started a propaganda campaign demonizing the pro-European protesters in Ukraine, labelling them as fascists and neo-Nazis who are trying to grab power in Kiev and condemning the support offered to them by Western liberal democracies (especially US). He declared on national television the Russian Federation can turn US into radioactive ashes. His belligerent rhetoric became the object of European sanctions (Frum 2014).

<sup>2</sup> First aired in 2010, Dozhd knew a constant growth in audience. However, after approaching sensitive subjects, Dozhd was excluded from all cable and satellite services and became the target of economic inspectors, the owner of the building refused to extend the lease, forced to close down (\*\*\*, Rise and fall of Dozhd, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> In October 2014, EkhoMoskvy received an official warning regarding the Ukraine-related program aired and was requested by Roskomandzor to eliminate the information justifying war

site Lenta.ru, Galina Timchenko, was replaced by Aleksei Goreslavsky, a pro-Kremlin editor.

The impact of the media on the population is significantly, considering that 98% of the households have access to television (2002 est.) and almost 76 million Russians have Internet access (2013 est.) (Nationmaster). Exposing the people to the same message coming from different sources of information can create a powerful informational space within which a contradictory data can hardly enter. Putin put Roskomnadzor (the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media) in motion and set the criteria for awarding warnings really low. According to the Russian legal framework, if a media-based company receives more than 2 warning in a year, it is forced to shut down. By doing so, Putin placed the Russian Federation in a rather dictatorial scenario and gained almost absolute control on the informational flow: WHO & WHAT. And once perception and expectancies are formed on a collective level, they are harder to eliminate and correct. Talking about mind-sets, Richard Heuer (1999, p. 10) stated that they “tend to be quick to form, but resistant to change”. In other words, it is easier to form a new opinion than to change an existing one. Putin’s efforts in gaining legitimacy and support focused only on consolidating an already subjective perception of Ukraine as being a part of modern Russia. The information he conveyed through specific means and instruments translated itself into added value and was assimilated to existing images, adding brick after brick to the one-nation cultural foundation.

In matters of social media and new media, censorship, even in the form of limiting the access to information, is not a viable scenario. Hence, Putin appealed to the oldest techniques in the books, an inside job. Google counts more than 1.4 million media entries under “Putin attacks Ukraine” and in order to change that perception, the Russian leader must counteract and respond similarly. Thus, he built himself an army fighting online. An article on Buzzfeed (Seddon, 2014), quoted in Forbes’ article *Putin’s new weapon in the Ukraine propaganda war: Internet trolls* (Gregory 2014), identifies the number of

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crimes. Alexei Venediktov, editor in chief at the time, rejected the claim (\*\*\*, EkhoMoskvy warned by Russia media watchdog, 2014).

online interventions planned daily per individual – post 50 articles, maintain six Facebook accounts and ten Twitter accounts, with 50 tweets.

In terms of *pathos/emotions*, the Kremlin appeals to historic, doctrinaire and cultural ties with Ukraine, exploits the Western articles according to which Ukraine is divided between Russians and Ukrainians and emphasizes the discrepancies existent within the society, from a political, spiritual and cultural point of view. The MIMETIC (Military Industrial Media Entertainment NETWORK) war as it is called by Der Derian (2002), as a form of asymmetrical conflict, supplies a “black and white narrative of villains and heroes”, pleading for a victory by the forces of virtue. The disseminated information in social online spaces clearly differentiates Vladimir Putin as being the hero in the story. The psy-ops/propaganda transformed itself in the military equivalent of marketing or advertising campaigns, appealing to emotions and arousing them in the intense, but shallow way that sports do (Carruthers 2005, p. 236). The defining elements of the Russian population can be identified as triggering factors in creating attitudes towards the Ukrainian conflict: nationalism, patriotism, and religion. One of the most brutal photos identified on Facebook related to the ongoing Ukrainian conflict and used as propagandistic instruments is one belonging to the Facebook account “The Russian Federation”, which illustrates Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama in an arm wrestling fight. It is not difficult to identify which is the hero and which is the villain, considering Vladimir Putin is wearing a white cape and has a halo, while Obama spits fire and has a devilish red colour and horns. Between them, as a stake, lies a church. The symbols of Christianity and arguments of patriotism were invoked as legitimacy elements for reunification demands. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, tens of thousands of people gathered in the Red Square to mark one year from the annexation of Crimea. The political leader of the Russians held a speech that encompasses the *pathos* used in the mediated campaigns. Thus, the people of Crimea and Sevastopol *returned to their native shores*, after an annexation that has not been done for strategic reasons, but about the fate of *millions of Russians, millions of compatriots and the historic cradle of (the Russian) spirituality and statehood* (Oliphant and Parfit 2015). During one of Putin’s speeches (18<sup>th</sup> March 2014) held after the results of the Crimea referendum, the political leader used the term *ruski* (defining ethnicity) instead of *rosiski* (which defines citizenship), announcing the ideological unification of Russian ethnics, regardless of the borders of the Russian Federation.

When it comes to *logos/logic*, the persuasive technique appeals to facts and statistics, makes logical analogies so as to prove the momentum gained and the impact it has. The reasoning made is not exclusively based on logic, but appeals to emotions and historical ties to add relevance for the masses. The main arguments for why Russia needs to annex Crimea derive from real historical facts. The end of the Cold War created a unipolar international system in which the power holder was the United States. From a realistic perspective of zero-sum game, the Washington administration would implement any policy needed in matters of both internal and foreign affairs in order to maintain its position of power and to assure itself that the Russian Federation (a historic enemy) will not become a threat to its security. So, the options the Washington administration had at the time were either to assimilate Russia into the Western system or to decrease its power by “conquering” the states located in Russia’s sphere of influence. NATO was an international organization founded in 1949 as collective defence mechanisms in response to an attack by any external party. With the end of the Cold War and with the disintegration of USSR, the external threat disappeared, and so NATO become irrelevant pertained to its initial purpose. Taking this into account, Russia perceived the NATO and EU expansions (12, respectively 16 members, of which former USSR republics) as an aggression. The perception of threat obtained a high degree of intensity within the Russian political elite due to the close borders it now had with NATO and EU. Furthermore, the image that prevailed in the Russian society was that Western forces activate intensely in former Soviet republics so as to encourage the administration to oppress their Russian-natives. Perhaps the most conclusive examples offered were Latvia and Estonia, where respectively 12% and 6% of the population is of Russian ethnicity and allegedly do not have their rights respected and cannot vote in national elections, enrol in Russian schools, or access Russian media.

In defining “security”, Arnold Wolfers perspective lays the premises for explaining state’s behaviour within the modern international system, introducing the idea of security in a subjective sense (Wolfers 1952, p. 483). In other words, states rather react to perception, not necessarily reality. Political powers do not trust their political decisions exclusively on the realities of the international system, but that dispose of measures in order to respond to perceived threats. And what propaganda does is influence the collective perception of threat, thus legitimating political decisions in matters of both

internal and foreign affairs. The Russian propaganda system seeks to enable the catalysts within the Russian and East-Ukrainian society that shape public opinions and gain enough popular support to attain its objectives. Societies aim at ensuring security and welfare and once they sense those values to be attacked. They polarize and band against the perceived source of threat in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

The efficiency of the Russian propaganda machine was quantified in a survey conducted by Levada Center, a non-governmental research organization. The survey was carried among 1600 people aged 18+, from over 134 localities (urban and rural) of 46 of the country's regions (Information warfare, 2014). The results were conclusive and proved the efficiency of the Russian administration in polarization. Almost 60% of the population interviewed considers the Russian media offers an objective picture of events in Ukraine and 88% believe USA and western countries are conducting an informational warfare against Russia.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the current security environment which gradually transformed itself and shifted its centres of power from traditional military to informational arenas, each state seeks to legitimize its actions, regardless of the regime type. This means that in a certain degree, even the strictest dictatorial regimes aim to gain popularity among its citizens and obtain their support in matters of both internal and external affairs. The backbone of societal decision-making is the information and the way it is perceived at a collective level.

Technology created a space within which the people access information easier, comprehend it, acknowledge it using specific instruments, internalize it and act. The paradox of the current society is that in this manner, technology empowers the population in the same degree it threatens its security. The Internet has become this elusive enemy, a territory which hosts the war for the hearts and minds of the population. And while it unravels as a force of democratization which grants the freedom of the speech to the people, offering them a space to protest; it also provides the decisional body the framework for launching informational warfare in an environment perceived as "safe". The mediated view of the world becomes prominent in the collective

perception and shapes beliefs and attitudes. Thus, the power lies in the hand of those who can control the information.

In terms of power obtained through propaganda, the Kremlin administration conveys messages revolving around concepts of historical and cultural identity. These are values that define a nation and in a conflict become non-negotiable, exploiting all the channels available for transmitting the information. And the Internet, a democratic unbreakable space, became an incubator for propaganda in the informational war.

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