

MEDIA REPORTS AS A TOOL OF HYBRID AND INFORMATION WARFARE (THE CASE OF RT – RUSSIA TODAY)*

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Abstract. *The study looks at how Russian regional hybrid warfare actions on Ukrainian territory serve as occasions for Russian global information warfare and how media messages become information weapons. The goal is to understand how events in the combat zone and the general situation in Ukraine impact basic features of Russian media reports, such as intensity, eventfulness, and intentionality. The research focused on the informative materials of the Russian multilingual international information channel Russia Today (RT). Titles and leads of over 44 thousand short information messages from October 1, 2014, to June 30, 2020, as well as more than 1 thousand extensive analytical materials for the period from October 1, 2018, to June 30, 2020, are analysed. The article demonstrates that RT media influence is deliberate, targeted, and pre-planned, beginning with the first words of the publications, i.e., the title and the lead.*

Keywords: *Media report, Hybrid warfare, Russia, Information warfare, Ukraine, Information occasion, RT.*

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Rezumat: Rapoartele mass-media ca instrument al războiului hibrid și celui informațional (cazul Russia Today). Studiul analizează modul în care acțiunile războiului hibrid rus pe teritoriul ucrainean servesc drept ocazii pentru războiul informațional global rus și modul în care mesajele mass-media devin arme informaționale. Scopul este de a înțelege modul în care evenimentele din zona de război și situația generală din Ucraina influențează particularitățile de bază ale rapoartelor mass-media rusești, cum ar fi intensitatea, profunzimea și intenționalitatea. Cercetarea s-a concentrat pe materialele informative ale canalului internațional de informații multilingv rus Russia Today (RT). Sunt analizate titluri și clienții potențiali a peste 44 de mii de mesaje de informare scurte, de la 1 octombrie 2014 până la 30 iunie 2020, precum și peste o mie de materiale analitice mai ample pentru perioada 1 octombrie 2018 – 30 iunie 2020. Articolul demonstrează că influența media a RT este deliberată, ținută și în prealabil planificată, începând chiar cu primele cuvinte ale publicațiilor, cum ar fi titlul și subiectul principal.

INTRODUCTION

For both Western military specialists and a wide circle in the West, Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine has generated a conceptual challenge.¹ On the wave of the first reaction, there was a surprise – the West imposed a series of sanctions against Russia, and confusion arose when it became clear that this warfare (actually, information warfare) was being waged not so much against Ukraine as against the Western democracies and Western values. It became obvious the geopolitical interests of Russia required comprehensive information warfare against the West (on a global scale) rather than just local hybrid warfare against Ukraine.²

In this new context, hybrid warfare turns into a local background (by territory, time of deployment) and a collection of consciously and pre-formed local “hybrid” occasions on which full-scale global information warfare can be carried out. Probably, this is what Zdzisław Śliwa et al. mean when they say that the Russian Federation (RF) has started a wave of hybrid wars in the international arena since 2013, manifesting at different levels and with increasing power³.

¹ Ofer Fridman, *The Danger of “Russian Hybrid Warfare”*, in “Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper”, 2017, 17 (5), p. 9, in https://www.cicerofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Ofer_Fridman_The_Danger_of_Russian_Hybrid_Warfare.pdf (Accessed on 12.05.2020).

² Maria Snegovaya, *Russia Report 1. Putin’s Information Warfare in Ukraine. Soviet Origins of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare*, Washington, Institute for the Study of War, 2015, in www.understandingwar.org (Accessed on 25.04.2020).

³ Zdzisław Śliwa, Viljar Veebel, Maxime Lebrun, *Russian Ambitions and Hybrid Modes of*

Volodymyr Horbulin also stated that hybrid warfare has become dominant for many years for the Russian Federation and this form of aggressive solution to its geopolitical problems is not limited to Ukraine but evolves in every way possible. The forms of this war become more and more intricate and spread to new war theatres⁴. Because they influence audience perception, political decision-making, and how later historians assess the development of events, the mass media has become a new type of weapon and an integral part of any conflict.⁵ Disclosed information becomes no less powerful a weapon than artillery.⁶

Both concepts – “information warfare” and “hybrid warfare” – (having a relatively long history of practical application) are new terms. According to Sun Tzu, all warfare is based on the use or misuse of information, as well as military prowess.⁷ In the 20th - 21st centuries, information warfare further evolved as a result of mass communications. Martin C. Libicki⁸, G. J. David and T. R. McKeldlin⁹, Edwin Leigh Armistead¹⁰, Christopher Paul¹¹, Scot MacDonald¹² etc. analysed the nature of conflicts in the information age. The definition of “hybrid warfare” was introduced by Frank G. Hoffman¹³ and was later revised/supplemented by Thomas R.

Warfare, in “Sojateadlane (Estonian Journal of Military Studies)”, 2018, Vol. 7, pp. 86–108, in <https://www.baltdefcol.org/files/files/publications/RussianAmbitions.pdf> (Accessed on 21.03.2020).

⁴ Volodymyr Horbulin, *Hibrydna viyna: vse tilky pochynayetsya* [Hybrid Warfare: Everything is just Beginning], in “Dzerkalo Tyzhnia”, 2016, 25 March, in <http://gazeta.dt.ua/internal/gibridna-viyna-vse-tilki-pochinayetsya.html> (Accessed on 14.03.2020).

⁵ Andrew Hoskins, Ben O’Loughlin, *War and Media: the Emergence of Diffused War*, Cambridge, Polity, 2010, pp. 3-6.

⁶ David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters. How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Basic Books, 2017, pp. 1-17.

⁷ Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

⁸ Martin C. Libicki, *What is Information Warfare?*, Washington, National Defense University, 1995, p. 3-4.

⁹ G. J. David, and T. R. McKeldlin (Eds.), *Ideas as Weapons: Influence and Perception in Modern Warfare*. Washington, Potomac, 2009.

¹⁰ Edwin Leigh Armistead, *Information Warfare. Separating Hype from Reality*, Washington, Potomac, 2007.

¹¹ Christopher Paul, *Information Operations: Doctrine and Practice. A Reference Handbook*, New York, Praeger, 2008.

¹² Macdonald Scot, *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Routledge, 2007.

¹³ Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21 St Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Arlington,

Mockaitis¹⁴, James N. Mattis¹⁵, Thomas Bjerregaard¹⁶, Rob De Wijk¹⁷, etc. The scientific findings prove that media are the linking factor for both concepts.

This study critically examines the peculiarities of the Russian Federation information warfare against Ukraine and, to some extent, against the West (with mass media as one of its tools) when hybrid warfare becomes a fundamental condition for its implementation. The study aims to determine how the general characteristics (intensity, eventfulness, and intentionality) of Russian media reports are influenced by the events in the war zone and the general situation in Ukraine, where the hybrid warfare is waged.

The Russian international multilingual information channel *RT* (formerly, *Russia Today*) is analysed as a case study. *RT* has grown into one of the world's largest providers of news content since its launch in 2005 as an alternative to the Anglo-Saxon media environment.¹⁸ *RT* is carefully tailored for specific national (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany) and language (e.g., Arabic, Francophone, and Russian) audiences. Generous state funding allows the media to expand their activities throughout the world and further increase their effectiveness.¹⁹ "Even as Russia insists that *RT* is just another global network like the BBC or France 24, [...] many Western countries regard *RT* as the slickly

Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007, p. 17.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Mockaitis, *A Hybrid War: The Indonesian Confrontation*, in Mockaitis Thomas R., *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, Manchester – New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, pp. 14-44.

¹⁵ James N. Mattis, Frank G. Hoffman, *Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, in "United States Naval Institute Proceedings Magazine", Vol. 131, 2005, No. 11, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶ Thomas Bjerregaard, *Hybrid Warfare. A Military Revolution or Revolution in Military Affairs?* Thesis for the Master of Military Art and Science, General Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2012.

¹⁷ Rob De Wijk, *Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors*, in Julian Lindley-French, Yves Boyer (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 358-372.

¹⁸ Aleksey Solomatin, *Kommunikativnyye strategii formirovaniya mezhdunarodnogo imidzha Rossii (na primere telekanala RT-Russia Today)* [Communication Strategies of Russian International Image Formation (the case of RT- Russia Today)], Moscow, Academy of Mediaindustry, 2014.

¹⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Four Types of Russian Propaganda*, Prague, Aspen Institute, 2015; Levan Makhashvili, *The Russian information war and propaganda narratives in the European Union and the EU's Eastern Partnership countries*, in "International Journal of Social Science and Humanity", 2017, Vol. 7 (5), in <http://www.ijssh.org/vol7/840-HF0035.pdf> (Accessed on 26.03.2020).

produced heart of a broad, often covert disinformation campaign designed to sow doubt about democratic institutions and destabilise the West.”²⁰

The paper contributes to a better understanding of information warfare in general and Russia’s information-related activities in particular. It shows how media reports are transformed into information weapons by demonstrating how local orchestrated events in Ukraine are used to shape favourable information environments for Russia. Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to demonstrate the following *hypotheses*: First, the intensity of *RT* publications is directly proportional to the degree of hybrid warfare. Second, *RT* publications have a selective event orientation. Third, *RT* publications have a distinct purpose and a deliberate positioning.

THE CONCEPTS OF HYBRID WARFARE AND INFORMATION WARFARE

The concept of “hybrid warfare” was shaped at the beginning of the 21st century. However, the mixture of different tactics and combats, on the other hand, is not a modern military strategy, as it existed even in the ancient world; the term is newer.²¹ Frank Hoffman popularised the term: “[Hybrid War] incorporates a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”²² He emphasized that hybrid wars differed from prior conflicts in that the lines between them were blurred even at the most basic levels. “Blurring” is the word that laconically describes Hoffman’s concept, and the new warfare is considered a messy grey phenomenon that needs thorough study to prevent future Groznys, Mogadishus, and Bint-Jbeils.²³ Hybrid warfare in

²⁰ Steven Erlanger, *Russia’s RT Network: Is It More BBC or K.G.B.?*, in “New York Times”, 2017, 8 March, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/europe/russias-rt-network-is-it-more-bbc-or-kgb.html> (Accessed on 11.05.2020).

²¹ Williamson Murray, Peter R. Mansoor (Eds), *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Michael Kofman, Matthew Rojansky, *A Closer Look at Russia’s Hybrid War*, in “Kennan Cable”, 2015, 7 April, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/190090/5-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf> (Accessed on 12.05.2020).

²² Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21 St Century. The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Arlington, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007, p. 17.

²³ Idem, *Hybrid vs. Compound Wars*, in “Armed Forces Journal”, 2009, October 1, in <http://armedforcesjournal.com/hybrid-vs-compound-war/> (Accessed on 12.05.2020) (Accessed on 12.05.2020).

NATO's view is a violent conflict applying combination and simultaneous use of conventional and irregular warfare, involving both state and non-state actors, used adaptively in pursuit of their objectives and not limited to physical battlefield or territory.²⁴ In 2018, at the NATO summit in Brussels, it was agreed to use the term "hybrid" to denote "a wide array of measures, means, and techniques including, but not limited to: disinformation; cyber-attacks; facilitated migration; espionage; manipulation of international law; threats of force (by both irregular armed groups and conventional forces); political subversion; sabotage; terrorism; economic pressure and energy dependency."²⁵

Information warfare, a relatively new doctrinal term in the military lexicon, is understood as "a use and management of information in pursuit of an advantage over an opponent, such as propaganda, disinformation, and gathering assurances that one's own information is accurate."²⁶ It is possible to mobilize and motivate the average person by replacing an objective image in the media with a distorted (manipulated) one.²⁷

The information component should not be merely treated as one of the unconventional means of hybrid warfare; instead, it is worth interpreting the information component as an information occasion (staged events) for the conduct of global information warfare. All this gives rise to a new research problem: the combination of hybrid warfare (including its conventional component) with information warfare. In particular, Ofer Fridman et al. emphasise that in modern hybrid conflicts the role of the informational dimension increases as a virtual space where political goals are promoted at the national and international levels.²⁸ The specific characteristics of hybrid warfare include the use of traditional and modern media tools on any occasion to create narratives that would meet the

²⁴ Jitka Richterová, *NATO & Hybrid Threats*. Background Report, 2016, in https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286344092_NATO_Hybrid_Threats (Accessed on 12.05.2020).

²⁵ Sean Aday, Māris Andžāns, Una Bērziņa-Čerenkova, et al., *Hybrid Threats. A Strategic Communications Perspective*, Riga, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2019, p. 8, in <https://stratcomcoe.org/hybrid-threats-strategic-communications-perspective> (Accessed on 26.04.2020).

²⁶ Daniel Ventre, *Information Warfare* (2nd ed.), San Francisco, Wiley-ISTE, 2016.

²⁷ Viljar Veebel, Raul Markus, *Die Wirtschaftssanktionen als die Mittel der Internationalen Druck*, in "Discussions on Estonian Economic Policy", 2015, Vol. 1, p. 5-6.

²⁸ Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, James C. Pearce (Eds.), *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare: New Labels, Old Politics*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019, p. 5.

intentions, goals, interests of the initiator of influence.²⁹ While investigating the Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine, Ukrainian researchers stress the importance of describing and providing information support for any war, including hybrid warfare, “physical actions on the battlefield are constantly accompanied by processes of their discursive comprehension, verbal description, and analysis.”³⁰

Hybrid threats have the malign intent of manipulating the political decision-making processes of a targeted nation by influencing the behaviours and attitudes of key audiences such as media organisations, the public and political leaders.³¹ That is why the analysis of hybrid threats should distinguish between the physical world, where various actions take place, and the conceptual world, where information exists and communication takes place and where people think, understand, and make decisions. Media create and disseminate propaganda at the conceptual level, where cultural differences, misunderstandings, insults, prejudices, and stereotypes play a significant role in harming the target nation while promoting and consolidating the aggressor's interests. “[When] skilfully combined, disinformation, malicious attacks on large-scale information and communication systems, psychological pressure, can be even more dangerous than traditional weapon systems since they are extremely difficult to discover and combat.”³²

In the situations of hybrid war and information, war media are used to deter or to destroy opponents by disinformation, fakes and propaganda. In such context, “Russian propaganda has become an extremely aggressive, well-calculated and effective tool of Moscow's policy internally and abroad.”³³ On the operational level, the purpose of Russian media propaganda is to confuse rather than to persuade or convert – to spread enough versions of reality to leave the target audience struggling to deal with moral and even factual relativity, resigned to the unknowability of the world, and unable to find the cognitive basis for policy

²⁹ Andreas Jacobs, Guillaume Lasconjarias, *NATO's Hybrid Flanks. Handling Unconventional Warfare in the South and the East*, Research Paper, No. 112, Rome, NATO Defense College, 2015, p. 3.

³⁰ Volodymyr Horbulin (ed.), *Svitova hibrydna viyna. Ukrayinskyi front* [World Hybrid Warfare. Ukrainian Front], Kyiv, NISD, 2017, p. 42.

³¹ Keir Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West. Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016, p. 6-8.

³² Viljar Veebel, *Russian Propaganda, Disinformation and Estonia's Experience*, Tallinn, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2015, in https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194051/veebel-russian_disinformation.pdf (Accessed on 14.03.2020).

³³ Alexander Rondeli, *Moscow's Information Campaign and Georgia*, in “GFSIS Expert Opinion”, 2014, Vol. 29, pp. 1-10.

action.³⁴ Scholars also compare it to the older Soviet '4D' strategy – dismiss, distort, distract and dismay³⁵; Putin's Russia reinvents reality by creating and disseminating disinformation, fakes, lies, leaks, and cyber-sabotage and then translates them into political action.³⁶

In a broad sense, information warfare is a struggle for information and information flows shaping public opinion. "By controlling the flow of information, a near-peer competitor can effectively take over a country or force a state to change its policies without ever firing a shot."³⁷ One of the shortcomings of this concept was that information warfare needed a real basis, without which information flows and information influences could not exist regularly. Events generated by hybrid warfare can create such a permanent basis. Russians who had been trained in hybrid warfare in Georgia quickly understood this, and Ukraine became a type of testing ground for the Russian notion of hybrid warfare in practice.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The above concepts made it possible to identify independent and dependent variables to form and prove the research hypotheses.

Independent variables have been identified based on the "hybrid warfare" concept. In terms of eventfulness, hybrid warfare can be seen as a series of events that impact the conflict or a series of events created by the war that also influence the war's progress. All events can be divided into three groups: holidays (state, national and religious holidays of both sides of the conflict); events related to the war (in the participating countries, as well as international events - meetings, summits, etc.); events at the front (what happens directly on the front line). One

³⁴ Peter Pomerantsev, Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, New York, Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, p. 15-16.

³⁵ Ben Nimmo, *Anatomy of an Info-War: How Russia's Propaganda Machine Works, and How to Counter It*, 2015, in <https://www.stopfake.org/en/anatomy-of-an-info-war-how-russia-s-propaganda-machine-works-and-how-to-counter-it/> (Accessed on 12.05.2020).

³⁶ Levan Makhashvili, *The Russian information war and propaganda narratives in the European Union and the EU's Eastern Partnership countries*, in "International Journal of Social Science and Humanity", 2017, Vol. 7 (5), in <http://www.ijssh.org/vol7/840-HF0035.pdf> (Accessed on 26.03.2020).

³⁷ Devon L. Suits, *Growing concern over information warfare continues to shape military*, in "Army News Service", 2019, 5 December, in https://www.army.mil/article/230573/growing_concern_over_information_warfare_continues_to_shape_military (Accessed 3.05.2020).

way or another, all these events impact the war, notably the amount of violence. Each group of events determines an independent variable.

Dependent variables are formed based on the "information warfare" concept considered in terms of information influences. These, in turn, can be characterised by the following indicators: intensity (number of media reports for a certain period); eventfulness (number of media reports as a reaction to certain events); intentionality (quantitative and qualitative indicators of intentions present in the reports and aimed at the object of influence).

The paper analyses information messages about Ukraine on the RT website. (<https://russian.rt.com/trend/334986-ukraina>). The current study is the second part of a larger investigation into Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine. The first phase, which coincided with the start of the war, covered more than 30 thousand news articles with the hashtag #Ukraine from the same web page *News* section (<https://russian.rt.com/news>) for the period from April 1, 2013, to February 3, 2016 (articles for this period are no longer available), and a part of the results was published.³⁸ The current phase of the study covers information messages from October 1, 2014, to June 30, 2020 (more than 44 thousand materials), as well as more extensive analytical materials for the period from October 1, 2018 (site archive does not give access to previous publications) to June 30, 2020 (more than 1 thousand articles). The title, the lead, and the date of publication are analysed for each article.

The standard content and event analyses, as well as the method of data visualisation, in particular the development of line plots with a trend in the form of loess regression, were employed to test hypothesis 1.

Data on the dynamics of Ukrainian troops shelling in the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) / JFO zone (since April 2018 – Joint Forces Operation) during the study period are processed as part of testing hypothesis 2. The data source was made up of daily reports from the Ukrainian news agency UNIAN under the heading Shelling. In this case, the method used was that of data visualisation – line plots with the selection of the trend in the form of a loess regression. In addition, correlation analysis of data sets was used to investigate the synchrony between

³⁸ Bohdan Yuskiv, Sergii Khomykh, *Rol media-propahandy v umovakh "hibrydnoyi viyny"*, [The Role of Media Propaganda under Conditions of Hybrid Warfare], in "Aktualni Problemy Mizhnarodnykh Vidnosyn", 2017, Vol. 132, pp. 27-43; Idem, *Ukraińsko-rosyjski konflikt na wschodzie Ukrainy a propaganda w mediach rosyjskich*, in *Na pograniczach. Kultura – literature – media*, Sanok, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa, 2017, s. 173-191.

the number of shoots and publications, i.e., Pearson correlation and Spearman rank correlation with the correlation tests were calculated.

The verification of hypothesis 3 is related to the analysis of the post-event discourse of *RT* reports, which analyses how *RT* journalists interpret the events of the hybrid war and related events (the attitude of *RT* journalists). The method of intent analysis was applied³⁹ to reconstruct the actual intentions of the interaction subjects. The main task was to compare the intentions of journalists on the main reference subjects presented in the discourse and to identify qualitative differences. This section analyses the communicative intentions of the materials, which should reconstruct the hidden intentions of the authors as a deliberate, meaningful, and organised influence on the audience to impose Russian ideas.

The verification of hypothesis 3 has required, for each article, the identification of reference objects and the disclosure of intentions derived from title structures, i.e., the title and the lead. The evaluation of the material is carried out as a result of the coordinated work of three experts. After coding, the total number of intentions, their relation to certain reference objects, the level of intentional saturation such as the ratio between the number of intentions and the total number of intentions was calculated, and the mode of intentions was defined (positive/negative nature). To assess the difference in the expression and proportions of the particle, the one proportion Z-test and the two-proportions Z-test were used, the relevance of the differences was recorded at $p < 0.01$. The calculations were performed using the software package statistics from the R programming environment.

INTENSITY OF *RT* REPORTS AND HYBRID WARFARE ACTIVITY

The intensity of short information news (reports) clearly illustrates the information picture of the beginning of hybrid warfare. In total, 30,180 articles were analysed in the first phase of our study in 2016, divided into two unequal groups: 260 vs 29,920. The first group is peacetime reports (11 months – from April 2013 to February 2014), but it is less than one per cent of all analysed reports, and more than half of them appeared in the last three months of the period and were devoted

³⁹ Tatiana Ushakova, Natalia Pavlova (Eds.), *Slovo v deystvii. Intent-analiz politicheskogo diskursa*, [Word in Action. Political Discourse Intent Analysis], StPeterburg, Aleteya, 2000; Nataliya Pavlova, Taisiya Grebenshchikova, *Intent-analiz postsobytiynogo diskursa v internete*, [Intent Analysis of Post-event Discourse on the Internet], in "Psikhologicheskoye Issledovaniya", 2017, Vol. 10(52), p. 8.

to Ukraine's European integration and events "on the Maidan" in December 2013 – February 2014. On average, in 2013 there were 1–2 short information messages per week, and at the end of the year – 5 per week. At that time, Ukraine was of little interest to *RT*. The second group includes media reports from the first 24 months of hybrid warfare (the period is only 2 times longer than the previous one), which accounted for more than 99 per cent of the total. In some months, *RT* devoted more than 2,000 reports to Ukraine, or 70 a day. The weekly number of *RT* reports from April 1, 2013, to January 31, 2016, is presented in Figure 1.

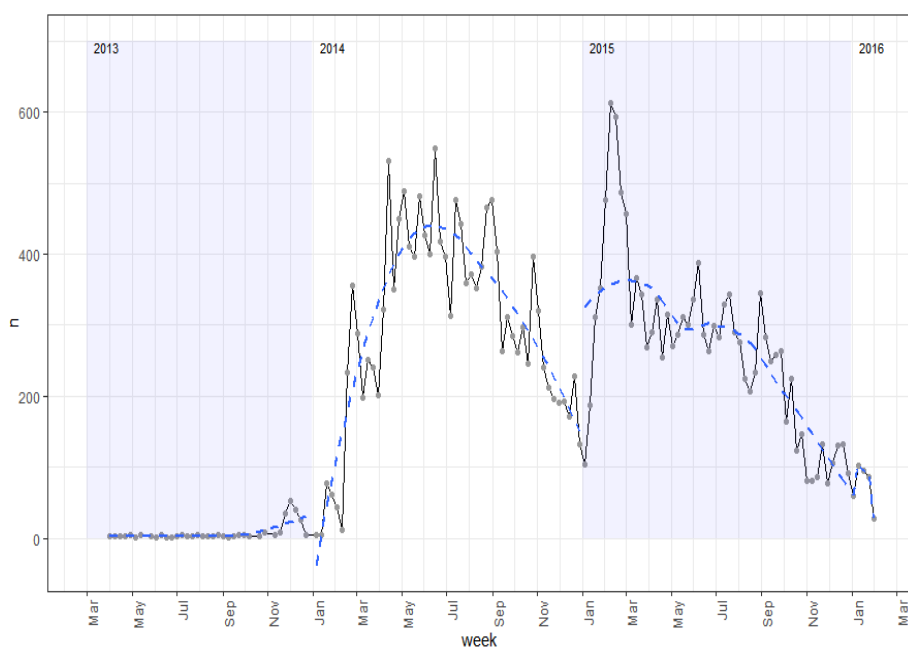


Figure 1. Weekly number of RT media reports about events in Ukraine during 1 April 2013 – 31 January 2016

Following the increase and decrease in the number of publications, information campaigns are timed to meet the war's current objectives. Thus, the active events in Crimea caused a sudden increase in the number of publications in February – March 2014. The subsequent escalation of the military conflict and a series of pro-Russian protests in eastern Ukraine, as well as the proclamation of the "state sovereignty" of the DPR (Donetsk People's Republic) and the LPR

(Luhansk People's Republic), led to reports concerning Donbas. Crimean themes were reduced to a minimum.

Since the beginning of 2016, the number of publications has decreased – hybrid warfare has entered a “sluggish” phase, and information warfare shifted its strategy and focus from “pure” fakes to mixed facts with fakes, with the emphasis on specific, profitable for the RF interpretations of real events, particularly speeches by state leaders.

Figure 2 depicts the dynamics of analytical publication (more extensive media materials) during the current research period.

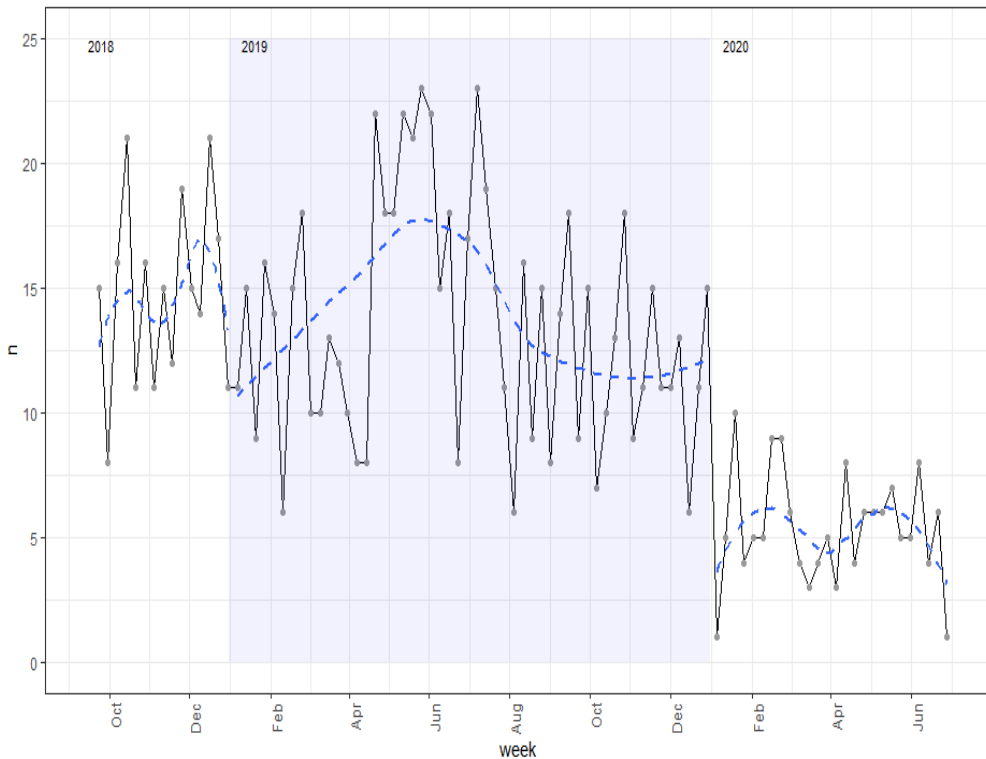


Figure 2. Weekly number of RT analytical reports on events in Ukraine during October 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020

The figure shows that the number of analytical publications has decreased tenfold, although the scheme and commitment to information campaigns have not changed. However, the strategy of hybrid warfare has changed: the strategy of the Russian “*blitzkrieg*” is no longer justified and the stage of long-range hybrid warfare has begun. The Russian Federation priorities were initially set as follows: “hybrid war in eastern Ukraine – an

imbalance in Ukrainian society," but later changed to "imbalance in all of Ukraine – a hybrid war in eastern Ukraine". In terms of information warfare, it has progressed to the stage of the battle for personalities. The alternatives – P. Poroshenko vs. V. Zelenskyi – were determined by the timing of Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections. The relatively rapid increase in the number of publications related to the receipt of the *Tomos* by Ukraine and the reaction to the Ukrainian church's attempts to obtain autocephaly (56 articles) are directed against the President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko during the election campaign. Increased attention to Ukraine in late spring and early summer is again associated with the elections, which took place amid the confrontation between the race's two leaders, as well as pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian political forces. In other words, the power of hybrid warfare and the number of publications is slowing down, whereas information influence is not only increasing but also transforming as its "ideological glaze" shifts.

Thus, the main thesis of hypothesis 1 is confirmed: the intensity of *RT* short media materials and analytical publications is directly related to hybrid warfare tasks; the implementation of these tasks determines whether the intensity of information influences in the form of information campaigns increases or decreases.

SELECTIVE EVENT DEPENDENCE OF *RT* REPORTS

The assumption that the intensity of *RT* publications on Ukraine depends on events is obvious. John Kerry, United States Secretary of State, commented on *RT*'s activities: "It was organised to spread Putin's fantasies about what was happening on the scene [...]. Their goal is to propagandise and distort what is happening or not happening in Ukraine"⁴⁰.

To verify the assumption the events were divided into groups: g – common holidays, n – Ukrainian national holidays, r – Ukrainian religious holidays, e – events concerning Ukraine directly and its relations with other countries, u – events and situations of Ukrainian-Russian relations. The visualisation was used to check the hypothesis, and Figure 3 presents the events of each group against

⁴⁰ John Kerry nazvav telekanal *Russia Today* «*Ruporom propahandy*». Redaktsiya vymahaye vybachen [John Kerry called *Russia Today* a "propaganda mouthpiece" and the editorial office demanded an apology], in "Media Sapiens", 2014, April 25, <https://ms.detector.media/profstandarti/post/987/2014-04-25-dzhon-kerri-nazvav-telekanal-russia-today-ruporom-propagandi-redaktsiya-vimagae-vibachen/> (Accessed 3.05.2020).

the background of a weekly schedule of analytical materials. The graphs demonstrate clearly that the events and situations of Ukrainian-Russian relations serve as an information occasion that increases the number of reports.

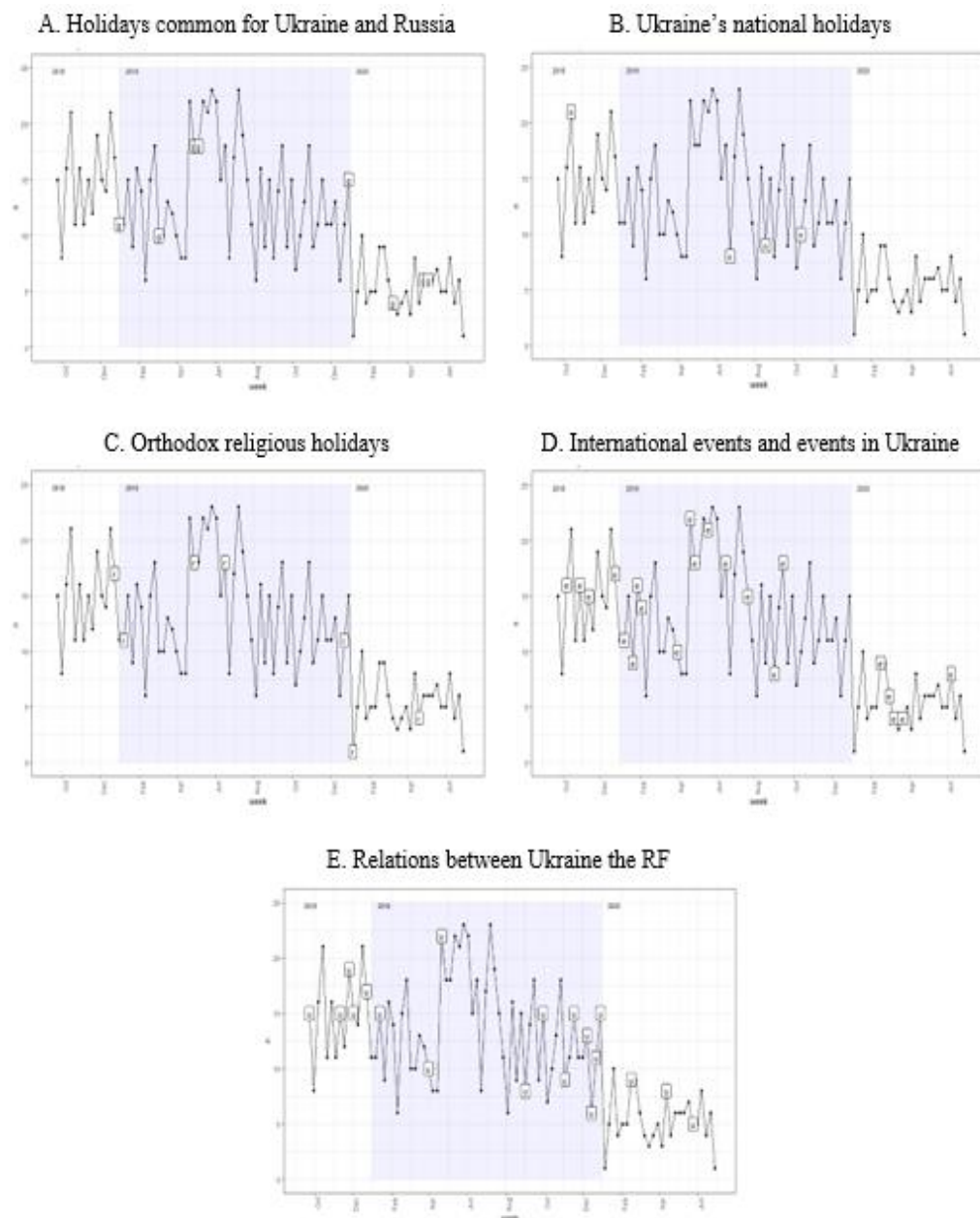
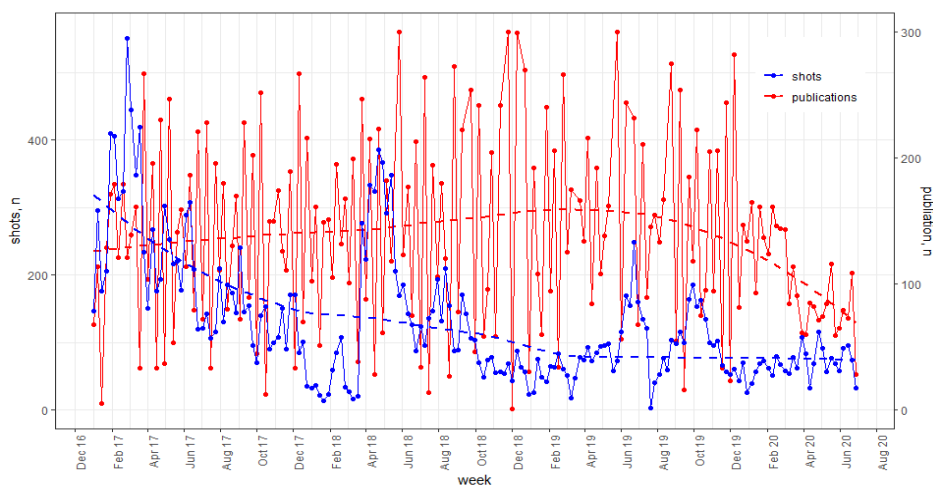


Figure 3. Number of RT analytical publications against the background of events, 2018-2020

In part, this group includes events that directly affect Ukraine or its relations with other countries. The vast majority of events in this group occur as the result of a hybrid war, or they are the result of actions related to it or the result of resistance to war. The majority of RT analytical publications (during the study period) concern events in Ukraine, with 243 reports, and the state of Russian-Ukrainian relations, with 207 messages.

In terms of the holidays, they do not affect the number of reports: g – unequivocally “no”, n – generally “no”, r – also “no” on Orthodox holidays, while, on the other hand, *RT* simply pays no attention to Catholic holidays.



**Figure 4. Number of RT media reports and shots
in the ATO/JFO zone, 2017-2020**

There is one more group of events – shots/shelling from all types of weapons in the ATO/JFO combat operations zone, which, according to our assumption, could have given rise to regular *RT* publications. An estimated correlation between the weekly number of shots in the ATO / JFO and the number of messages per week was applied. Such estimates were calculated separately for short media reports and analytical materials. In the first case: Pearson correlation – $r = 0.018$, $p = 0.810$; Spearman rank correlation – $\rho = 0.036$, $p = 0.640$. In the second case: Pearson correlation – $r = 0.156$, $p = 0.135$; Spearman rank correlation – $\rho = 0.183$, $p = 0.080$. These results indicate the absence of a linear correlation between the number of publications (short media reports and analytical materials) and the number of shots during the study period. Visualisation is given in Figure 4 and Figure 5; each process has its logic of development not only at the

level of weekly data but also at the level of trends.⁴¹

Figure 5 shows an example of how strategic trends can be interpreted. From October 2018 to July 2019, the intensity of Russian media influence gradually decreased, and the intensity of shots increased. Those trends were tied to the following events of that period. In mid-October 2018, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate annulled the subordination of the Kyiv Metropolitan Church to the Moscow Patriarchate. The Kyiv Metropolitan Church was restored as a canonical territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The election of the head of the PCU (Ukrainian Orthodox Church) took place in mid-December 2018. There was also the adoption of the Law of Ukraine *On termination of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation*.

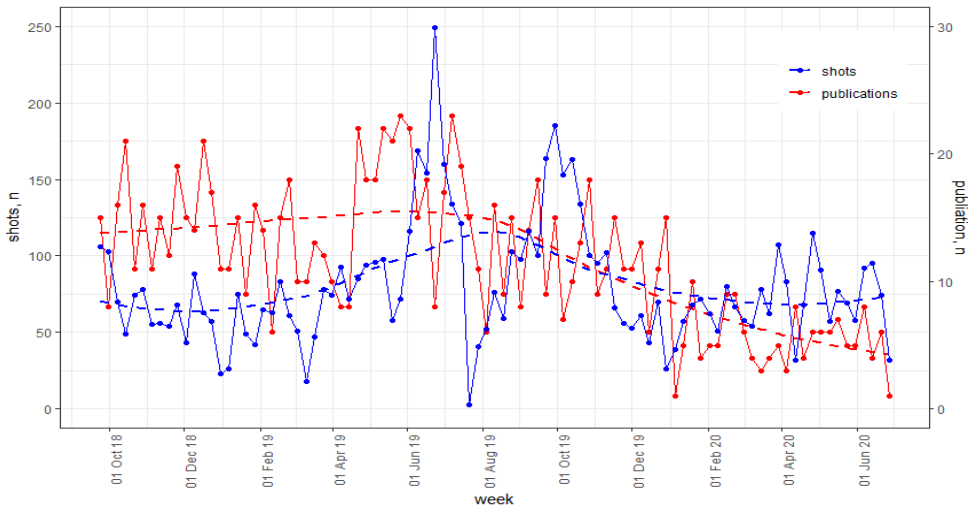


Figure 5. Number of RT analytical publications and shots in the ATO/JFO zone, 2018-2020

The second round of elections of the President of Ukraine was another event at the end of April 2019. The President of the RF signed a Decree simplifying the process

⁴¹ It is essential to mention that the previous study (Yuskiv Bohdan, Khomych Sergii, *Roľ media-propahandy v umovakh "hibrydnoyi viyny"* [The Role of Media Propaganda under Conditions of Hybrid Warfare], in "Aktualni Problemy Mizhnarodnykh Vidnosyn", 2017, Vol. 132, pp. 27-43) proved that there was a certain dependence between the average daily number of shelling of the Armed Forces from heavy weapons plus shots fired by separatists and the frequency of certain words in the RT news. This dependency is more of a correlation than a cause. The explanation is that both media publications and military actions are planned and coordinated in a single centre and are clearly carried out according to the developed plan.

of obtaining Russian citizenship for residents of the occupied districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Finally yet importantly, mention should be made on the inauguration of the new President of Ukraine in May 2019. The situation has changed during the Verkhovna Rada elections: the number of shootings has increased significantly. In the situation of uncertainty about the forces that could come to power in Ukraine after the presidential and parliamentary elections, Russia, not relying on media influence alone, has escalated the hybrid warfare and sought to demonstrate its strength to the new government. Following the parliamentary elections, the intensity of both publications and shelling decreased and reached a minimum. The only exception was the beginning of October 2019 – the so-called period of the “Steinmeier formula”, when, against the background of mass protests of Ukrainians against such a settlement of the war in the Donbas, Russia again decided to demonstrate its strength. Surprisingly, *RT* paid minimal attention to this topic – 3 relatively neutral analytical materials.

As a result, a positive conclusion can be drawn in regards to hypothesis 2: *RT* publications use events that occur during hybrid warfare as information occasions.

OBJECT AND INTENTION ORIENTATION OF *RT* REPORTS

The recipient of media propaganda, particularly Russian propaganda, is viewed as an “object” that is not fully aware/educated, has stereotypical thinking, is unable to draw sound conclusions, and for whom information should be presented in a simplified, emotionally coloured form with the appropriate emphasis. The producer, as a “subject,” inserts hidden meanings into a communication, attempting to express a specific communicative aim, and occasionally exerting a significant manipulative influence.

The communication goal of media reports about Ukraine has an intense psychological focus on the individual consciousness of the mass audience, which researchers refer to as “a monologue of one (in our example – Russian) culture.”⁴² The purpose of this strategy is to destroy the unity and independence of Ukraine.

To build an intentional model of media propaganda based on hybrid warfare,

⁴² Andrey Negryshev, *O roli SMI v mezhekulturnoy kommunikatsii (k postanovke problemy)* [On the Role of the Media in Intercultural Communication (the Problem Formulation)], in “INTER-CULTUR@L-NET”, 2004, Issue 3, in <http://www.my-luni.ru/journal/courses/133/> (Accessed 3.05.2020).

a list of reference objects was created and the intentional profiles of each of them were determined. The intentional space of the propagandist discourse is made up of a collection of reference objects and intentions. This section of the research was based on the title structures of over a thousand analytical papers published between October 1, 2018, and June 30, 2020. Reference objects were chosen among those that were referenced several times in the reports and to which the intents of the subjects of influence were focused. These objects are grouped into four main categories: 1) "They": the Government of Ukraine / authority, the President, the Verkhovna Rada, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ukrainian nationalists, Ukrainian society, the church; 2) "We": Russia, the DPR / LPR / Crimea, pro-Russian forces in Ukraine; 3) "Third-party": Europe, the USA, others (the IMF, the NATO, etc.); 4) "Situation": events in Ukraine, Russia, Europe, and the world.

The reference profile of each generalised object comprises the following intentions: "They": discrediting, accusing, criticising, threatening, sarcasm/contempt; "We": self-presentation (in a positive context, active), demonstration of power, support of "our people", refuting accusations; "Third-party": accusations, criticism, support, compassion; "Situation": analysis "+" (positive analysis), analysis "-" (negative attitude), analysis "0" (neutral coverage, statement of facts).

The entire set of analytical materials was expected to indicate the effect of intentional asymmetry towards the negative. However, it turned out that throughout the entire period the share of negative intentions reached 72 per cent, of which 60 per cent were reference objects from the group "They" (Ukraine), as well as 8 per cent of coverage of events in Ukraine. "Third-party" (European countries, the US, other countries) generally acts as the object of intentions in only 9 per cent of cases with emotionally balanced assessments. "We" held 17 per cent of positive analytical materials. This leads to the conclusion that the main goal of *RT* reports about Ukraine is to put the state in a negative light in the eyes of the *RT* audience. The differences between the attention to these reference groups of objects are statistically significant, the yearly and general (for the study period) attention to the group "They (Ukraine)" exceeds the attention to other groups (over 50 per cent). All this is confirmed at the level of significance $p \leq 0.01$ by two-proportional and one-proportional z-tests.

The following conclusions resulted for each reference object:

- "They": for the selected period, the largest number of publications were devoted to the President of Ukraine (198 – 18 per cent of all publications), the government/authorities (196 – 18 per cent), the Armed Forces (88 – 8 per cent). The intentions "sarcasm/contempt" (265 – 25 per cent) and "criticism" (202 – 19 per cent) dominated and they concerned all categories. Criticism and mockery, as

well as ridicule, are common means of propaganda against the opponent, to undermine the enemy's adequacy and strength. As a result, the following attitude is formed: the government/authorities are losers and do everything to make people's lives worse; the Verkhovna Rada is a collection of idiots who adopt clumsy, anti-people laws; one President is the embodiment of aggressive evil, the second is a clown, a puppet; the PCU is a sect of schismatics; Ukrainian society consists of aggressive radicals and nationalists who are destroying the Soviet historical past; the Armed Forces are associated with desertion, corruption, all weapons are solid scrap metal (but at the same time the *RT* intimidates with the Ukrainian army);

– “We”: most of all the news were devoted to the RF, first of all to its leader (184 – 17 per cent), then to pro-Russian forces in Ukraine (50 – 5 per cent), and the LNR/DNR / Crimea (49 – 5 per cent). The following intentions prevailed: “support of ‘our people’” (105 – 10 per cent), “demonstration of power” (54 – 5 per cent). In addition to emphasising the favourable attitude to the LPR / DPR / Crimea and pro-Russian political forces in Ukraine, throughout the selected time, 26 articles were devoted to Kyrylo Vyshynsky, the editor-in-chief of *RIA-Novosti Ukraine*, who was arrested in Ukraine. Additionally, the idea “Russia does not abandon its people” was traced in each article.

– “Third-party”: the EU and European countries were mentioned 35 times (3 per cent), the second place was occupied by the US – 32 messages (3 per cent). The analysis of intentions has shown the following: when the West provides some assistance to Ukraine (consultations on the freedom of speech, provision of weapons), there is criticism (30 – 3 per cent). If the West criticises the actions of the Ukrainian authorities or emphasises monitoring/control (for example, on social networks during the parliamentary elections), the reaction of the RF is “support” (29 – 3 per cent). If Western partners refuse to cooperate (no matter in what area) or, for example, claim slow reforms, Russia shows its sympathy (26 – 2 per cent) by sending the following implicit message: “Ukraine is a burden, a failed state”. Accusations (eight – 1 per cent) are generally addressed to the US for its military assistance.

- “Situation”: the greatest attention of *RT* media reports is focused on the situation in Ukraine (129 – 12 per cent), which is generally portrayed as negative (analysis “–” – 48 or 4.5 per cent) or neutral (analysis “0” – 29 or 3 per cent). The situation in the RF is mentioned only 11 times and the intention is only positive (analysis “+” – 11 or 1 per cent). The situation in Europe is described only 7 times and the intention is generally neutral (analysis “0” – 6 or 0.5 per cent).

These proportions are also statistically relevant at the level of significance $p \leq 0.01$ by the two-proportional and one-proportional z-tests.

As a result, Hypothesis 3 was confirmed. Analytical publications were found to be sufficient in showing the presence of Russian overt objectives toward Ukraine. The goal of RT media coverage was to denigrate, accuse, criticize, and threaten the opponent while demonstrating contempt for him.

CONCLUSIONS

Modern media became an information weapon and an instrument of both information and hybrid warfare, with a high potential for harmful influence on targeted audiences. The RF makes full use of this potential to create narratives that correspond to the intentions, goals, and interests of the influence initiator; to form several variants of “reality”, to confuse the audience, to make people constantly doubt and, as a result, to be unable to distinguish between the facts from the fakes. The article looked at how the intensity, eventfulness, and intentionality of Russian media information broadcasts (in this case, RT) are influenced by events in the war zone and the general situation in Ukraine where hybrid warfare is being waged.

The following conclusions can be drawn: 1) The intensity of *RT* short information materials and analytical publications directly depends on the tasks of hybrid warfare; the increase or decrease in the intensity of information influences are adjusted to the tasks. 2) *RT* publications use events that occur during the hybrid warfare as information occasions; these are the events from Ukraine's internal life, international events and events related to hostilities in the ATO/JFO zone. 3) *RT* publications have a clear object and intention orientation. In all publications about Ukraine (“They”-reports), the intentions of “sarcasm/contempt” and “criticism” dominate; in the “We”-reports the intentions of “support of ‘our people’” and “demonstration of power” prevail. In other words, *RT*'s main communication goal concerning Ukraine is to discredit the state, to demonstrate its inferiority, while emphasising the “power” of the RF.

From a scholarly perspective, the current article opens at least two new avenues of research. First, the huge potential of media to manipulate public opinion of the targeted audience/nation (as to the image of the authorities, domestic and foreign political priorities, etc.), and second, the ability of media to dismiss, distort, distract and dismay the targeted nation to win the war and reach the geopolitical goals.

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