Disinformation in 21st century Russia

The case of disinforming the murder of Boris Nemtsov

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PREFACE

A tragic event happened on the eve of February 27th. Boris Nemtsov, a well-known Russian politician, was shot and killed in cold blood on the streets of Moscow. During the last months of his life Nemtsov had been working on a report about Russian interference in Ukraine, including a chapter on lies and propaganda in which he emphasis the position of television in Putin's rule. "Vladimir Putin", the report states, "managed to create a telecentric state in which all public institutions from the church to the army have been replaced by their televised images."[1] But not only has television become a display of a Kremlin-friendly reality, the Russian state-media as a whole have become instruments for public management. This is also described in Nemtsov's report with the example of the disaster with MH17. "After the downing of the Boeing, Russian media began to resound with different versions of the tragedy that had happened. Essentially, the Kremlin propaganda gave the signal for a special information [intelligence] operation aimed at creating a kind of "smokescreen" around the investigation into the reasons for the crash of the Malaysian plane."[2] This smokescreen has in the meantime drifted away public accusation from the Kremlin-backed separatists and made Russians blame Kiev for shooting down the plane.[3]

Paradoxically, a similar smokescreen campaign of media manipulation started right after Nemtosv died of the shots fired in his back, right next to the Kremlin walls. In the hours after his murder multiple official theories about his death were covered in the state-media, except ignoring the possibility of government or official involvement. Instead, media discourse shifted the blame towards radical Muslims and, not surprisingly, Ukraine.

These instances of inconceivable media attention, combined with the international involvement, have generated a large response in Western countries, from governments, journalists and society alike. Because since the military escalation in Ukraine many other countries that Russia regards as within its sphere of influence feel threatened by Russian interference in their national media, addressing not only the Russian minorities but also in some cases also national majorities. As a reaction Western countries have intensified their efforts to deal with this phenomenon of distorting media coverage. Even though Western focus is mainly on the implications for the public outside Russia, the issue of public manipulation is even more so the problem domestically. It is this internal media manipulation that this study will focus on. The instances mentioned above, as well as

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[1] I. Yashin & O. Shorina, eds., *Putin. War* (Moscow 2015) p. 9

[2] Ibidem. p. 44

[3] A. Luhn, 'MH17: vast majority of Russians believe Ukraine downed plane, poll finds', *The Guardian,* 30-07-2014, available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/30/mh17-vast-majority-russians-believe-ukraine-downed-plane-poll, last visited 25-09-2015

common practices in everyday Russian state-media, have been described in Western media as *disinformation.* It is this form of propaganda that this study will analyse.

One of the problems, however, with the term disinformation is that up to date it has only been vaguely described, and clearly lacks extensive academic foundation. Even though this clear definition of disinformation is absent, many authors have however used it to describe Kremlin media tactics. Coverage of Nemtsov's death and the downing of MH17 are just two explicit instances, some authors use it in a broader sense to identify the Russian state-media as a whole. The guardian compared disinformation to "so much electronic chaff dropped out of the back of a Tupolev bomber to confuse an incoming missile"[4], or should it be seen as longer-term effort to discredit any notion of truth? Shrouded in ambiguity the specifics of still haven't been clearly described.

This study will analyse the use of disinformation in Russia according to the following research question: How is disinformation applied in the coverage of the murder of Boris Nemtsov in the Russian state media? As has become clear above, to answer this question first a substantive description of disinformation has to be established, for in academic literature on propaganda studies it is a rather undescribed subject. Therefore the research question exists of three sub-questions: What are the main characteristics of disinformation? Are these characteristics, and therefore disinformation, present in Russian state-media? And to what extent is disinformation applied to the coverage of the murder of Nemtsov?

The two elements that make this study needed have already been mentioned above. Not only the high international attention and occasional panic about Russian disinformation campaigns makes it an important topical issue, the main necessity comes from the fact that up to date no scholar has done extensive research to clarify on the description of disinformation. Other scholars that concentrate on propaganda acknowledge this, like for instance Jonathan Auerbach, editor of the Oxford Handbook of Propaganda: "Increasing globalization and growth in transnational communication networks… would all seem to combine to spell the end of propaganda as we know it. [And therefore] study of propaganda remains highly relevant and in all likelihood will continue to be a critical issue in the future."[5] With the emergence of large-scale disinformation this future is now more present than ever. This study will be among the first attempts at describing and analysing disinformation in an academic context. The criteria established in this study may therefore hopefully become a starting point for future research.

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[4] Editorial, 'The Guardian view on Russian propaganda: the truth is out there', *The Guardian,* 02-03-2015. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/02/guardian-view-russian-propaganda-truth-out-there, last visited 25-09-2015
[5] J. Auerbach & R. Castronovo eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda* (Oxford, 2013) p. 8

The method of analysis consists of establishing a basis of academic definitions on disinformation and from there constructing the criteria needed for deeper analysis. The criteria will then serve as a backbone for the rest of the chapters. As mentioned above, this study will follow the path of three different sub-questions. In the first chapter the theoretical basis will be laid out using academic literature. This will cover the relation between propaganda and disinformation and gradually develop to a set of characteristics of disinformation. In the second chapter popular secondary literature and public policy papers about Russian disinformation will be evaluated against the theoretical background to establish an overview of the presence of disinformation through the eye of journalism and think-tanks. The third chapter will then analyse, by the hand of the information from the first chapters, the presence of disinformation in the coverage on the murder on Nemtsov by taking examples of primary sources from the Russian state-media in the first day after the murder.

CHAPTER I SETTING THE FRAMEWORK: DISINFORMATION DEFINED

In the recent year and a half, publications that have tried to describe Russian media practices have often used the word *disinformation*. While the term had been out of fashion for over 25 years, vanished together with the Soviet Union and the Cold War that provoked these practices, in the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine it suddenly re-emerged in popular discussion. However, as will be elaborated further below, the term "disinformation" has undergone a modern transformation. For more than a decade already, this shape shifting has been noticed and described by a handful of scholars. They declared that disinformation nowadays is widely used as a synonym for propaganda.[6] Somehow then both terms, propaganda and disinformation, arouse similar feelings of negative connotations and false, misleading, manipulative communication. In popular discussion however, the specifics of both terms often ends up neglected. As this study will research the topic of specifically disinformation, it cannot hide behind the ambiguity that surrounds these popular expressions.

As this study will show, terms such as disinformation and propaganda, as well as many other words used to describe some sort of manipulation of the audience, are largely intertwined and difficult to define. Because this difficulty of definition remains a persistent factor throughout this study, transparency from the start will be helpful for the reader. This study will argue that disinformation is one of the many forms that fall under the umbrella term propaganda. This relationship will be more closely described in this chapter, as the reader will discover that it turns out to be quite problematic to define these two terms even in scientific discourse. Not only has disinformation been used to describe multiple practices which are entirely different from one another, but defining the umbrella term itself (propaganda) has been the cause of century-long debate. The root of that discussion lies in the fact that propaganda studies require a multidisciplinary approach. Because the boundaries between the many forms of propaganda and their parent-term are fluid regarding many criteria, the most important issues of this discussion will be described in the sections below.

After establishing an idea about the scope and theories about propaganda, this chapter will quickly zoom in on the practice of disinformation. The form of disinformation this study will analyse is the more recently developed idea of influencing an audience by distracting it through information overload, as opposed to the form of disinformation that has mostly been used to describe a technique for covertly influencing the decision-making process in foreign governments by deflecting

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[6] S. Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction* (Westport, 2002) p. 110

the source of misleading information published in that country. The Soviet KGB professionalized this technique in the 20th century, naming it *dezinformatsia.*[7] At the end of the first chapter this form of disinformation will be given some attention in order to clarify the existence of similarities in practice, and more importantly, to prove that they are, in theory, two completely distinct forms. To keep this distinction clear throughout this study, this older (KGB) description of disinformation will be referred to as *dezinformatsia*. Another terminology issue consists of the use of somewhat similar words to describe either similar, or rather distinct processes. The most persistent these is so-called *misinformation,* which has in the past been used to describe dezinformatsia, but also in recent popular articles to describe whatthis study defines as disinformation.[8] Misinformation is also often used to differentiate between deliberately misleading information and "merely misguided or erroneous information."[9] Nuances in this terminology will be explained in more detail below.

This chapter will establish the theoretical basis for the other chapters. Through a short introduction to the literature on propaganda it will gradually close in on disinformation and its characteristics. First, a short introduction will be given on the past century of multidisciplinary propaganda studies that have brought forward the literature for this study. Second, some light will be shed on the basics of the discussion within academia on the definition of propaganda which is still occurring. The issues discussed regarding the definition of propaganda are in many ways similar to the discussions on disinformation. Third, disinformation will be introduced by the connection between information and propaganda, and the similarities and differentiations authors make when describing disinformation. Fourth, various scholarly definitions and descriptions of disinformation will be discussed so as to distil a common base from which to look into disinformation in more detail. Fifth, having determined the key elements of disinformation, all characteristics of disinformation will be determined through a detailed evaluation of each characteristic, from means to message. This is in in line with the earlier descriptions as well as further research into sub-criteria. Finally, a comparison with Soviet dezinformatsia will be given to show that there are similarities, but more important, elemental differences.

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[7] G. Jowett & V. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks, 2006) p. 22
[8] See L. Bittmann, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation* (Virginia, 1985)
[9] Jowett & O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* p. 22

The collection of disciplines that have a distinct perspective on the study of propaganda is quite extensive. The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda, one of the most recent publications of a selection of essays on propaganda, comes up with a little as eleven subareas of propaganda studies: "art history, history, theology, communications, education, media studies, public relations, literary analysis, rhetoric, cultural theory and political science."[10] Even though this appears to be quite a collection of disciplines, they still omit other basic fields of research like psychology and philosophy. As the concept of propaganda enjoyed an unprecedented level of interest over the past century, the focus of propaganda research changed over time because of the multifariousness of the subject and changes in the scientific environment.[11] This multidisciplinary attention has led to differentiating ideas on propaganda and has shown that the subject cannot be studied satisfactory from the perspective of a single discipline. In a short history of the shifting disciplinary attention in the past century the main literature on propaganda will be introduced below.

The 20th century has seen the focus in propaganda studies shift from identifying propaganda in the first half of the century, to theorizing propaganda and empirical analysis in the second half. In the period before WWII the focus was mainly on identifying techniques "to help the intelligent citizen to detect and to analyse propaganda, by revealing the agencies, techniques, and devices used by the propagandist."[12] Much of this work was done by scholars associated with the *Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA).* Sociologist Alfred Lee and his wife published an often-quoted work on rhetorical analysis of propaganda in this period, which focussed on fallacies in the use of speech to distract from substantive argumentation. This is needed for analysing messages and argumentation but does not theorize or analyse propaganda as a phenomenon at all.

After WWII the focus shifted to sociological research. An important account here is the work of Leonard Doob, sterling professor in Psychology at Yale, who pursued a similar goal as the *IPA:* "The ability to label something propaganda and someone a propagandist and a simultaneous insight into the fundamental nature of the process of propaganda will combine to render many kinds of propaganda less effective".[13] In contrast to Lee, however, Doob focuses on the psychological effect of the phenomenon, rather than on the structure of the message. The second half of the 20th century also saw a move away from these practical objectives. One of the most important works of this

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[10] Auerbach & Castronovo eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda,* p. 1-2

[11] practically all scholars agree on the emergence of propaganda awareness in the 20th century. See for instance G. Jowett and O'Donnell eds., *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: New and Classic Essays* (Thousand Oaks, 2006) p. ix

[12] A. Lee & E. Lee eds., *The Fine Art of Propaganda: A study of Father Coughlin's speeches* (New York, 1939) p. II

[13] L. Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* (New York, 1935) p. 5

period from a sociological perspective is from Jacques Ellul, probably the most influential scholar on propaganda, with his work called 'Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes'.

Near the end of the 20th century focus shifted to communication research. The most representative, most used, most reprinted and most frequently seen in education, is the communication handbook *Propaganda and Persuasion* by scholars Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell. However, while their focus on communication and their at times rather oversimplified arguments and definitions make it useful for practical research or analysis, these same qualities also detract from further theorization.

Some more recent literature, however, has proven to fill this theoretical gap in literature. Among the best works is Stanley Cunningham's philosophical approach to the *idea of propaganda*, which evaluates all differentiating views from the past century. As Cunningham himself explains, it is "a conceptual analysis of just what propaganda is or how we should describe it."[14] It is this work that will be regarded as the main theoretical basis of this study. Not only because it proves to be the most extensive on the subject of disinformation, but because it is the finest evaluation of all authors named here. Another work from this new, reflective generation is by historian Oliver Thomson, who combines a doctorate in the history of propaganda with, interestingly, directing an advertisement agency. Also worth mentioning is the *Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, which consists of a selection of essays, edited by Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo.

There is no abundance of definitions of disinformation in literature. Most of the works that describe disinformation are in fact about dezinformatsia, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Even the widely used Jowett and O'Donnell only refer to this type of reflective source propaganda. Another problem is differing names for disinformation, which include, among others: misinformation, new propaganda, and propaganda of palaver. It is for this reason that when focussing on disinformation, other authors, some of whom not active in the field of propaganda but for instance political argumentation, will also be referred to. These include communication scientist Neil Postman, political scientist Robert Goodin, and an important work by political scientists and communication scholars James Combs and Dan Nimmo, which unfortunately was only available to the author in the form of paraphrases and quotes from Cunningham's book.

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[14] See Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction*

A short overview of the discussion surrounding propaganda studies and the definitions that the above mentioned authors have come up with is used to illustrate the fluidity of the concept of propaganda and to create a starting point for narrowing down the term disinformation, as propaganda as a whole should cover all different forms of malicious communication.[15] Some understanding of the larger discussion on propaganda is also important because of its similarities with the much less documented discussion surrounding disinformation. This section will therefore be an introduction to the relationship between these two terms, which in recent times are being used interchangeably, and will reveal the importance of the criteria used in the rest of this study. Of these criteria deliberateness and falsity will prove to be among the most debated issues.

The result of all the propaganda research of the past century is an interesting mix of definitions, most of them from a limited perspective and therefore insufficiently able to define propaganda as a whole. The multifariousness of the umbrella term propaganda makes it impossible to form a satisfying universal definition. Some scholars have admitted to this problem, such as Doob who has stated that because of this reason "a clear-cut definition of propaganda is neither possible no desirable."[16] Others have come up with definitions that may serve their field of study, but are based on a short-sighted view of the matter. This section will compare these definitions with one another, and set them against the more extensive descriptions supplied by the more critical scholars.

Some scholars stress the necessity of intent in their definitions of propaganda. For instance Jowett and O'Donnell, who claim that their definition has been gaining popularity for a while now, focus on the *purpose* of the propaganda used, and therefore explicitly include deliberateness in their introduction: "Propaganda is the deliberate systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."[17] This is quite like the definition given the *IPA* fifty years earlier: "an expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to predetermined ends"[18] For these scholars, communication scholars like Jowett and O'Donnell, and the early propaganda-fighters of the *IPA* alike, intent can indeed be the identifying characteristic of propaganda, however, many other scholars do not agree on the necessity of intent within propaganda. Thomson for instance claims that "it is unwise to insist on the words deliberate, or systematic in any definition of propaganda

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[15] Even this description is in many way not representative of propaganda, but it serves as a mental image.
[16] L. Doob , *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (Hamden, 1966) p.375
[17] Jowett & O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* p. 7
[18] Lee & Lee eds., *The Fine Art of Propaganda: A study of Father Coughlin's speeches*, p. 15

[for] too many great movements of mass persuasion have begun and continued without any master plan."[19] One of the ways in which Thomson's argument can be considered correct is that propaganda messages can often, unwittingly, be further distributed and that the existence of a main propagandist is not a necessary precondition. This discrepancy is exactly what will come back in the discussion surrounding disinformation, because in many cases unintentional propaganda has the same effect as deliberate propaganda. Taking up deliberateness in the definition is therefore problematic because it would exclude many manifestations and forms of propaganda in advance.

Another element of discussion is the need for information to be false in propaganda. Even though most scholars agree that information does not need to be false or misleading to be used as propaganda, when experts define propaganda the falsity condition often makes it into the definition. As an example of how pervasive these critical categorizations can be, the Oxford Dictionary on Media and Communication has included in its definition exactly these two debated criteria, intent and falsity. They define propaganda as: "Persuasive mass communication that filters and frames the issues of the day in a way that strongly favours particular interests; usually those of a government or corporation. Also, the intentional manipulation of public opinion through lies, half-truths, and the selective re-telling of history."[20] While it is definitely correct that some propaganda contains lies to persuade an audience, false information also makes propaganda vulnerable. Selective use of information is therefore more sustainable and just as effective. Thomson, among many others, therefore states: "if anything, it is easier for propaganda to be effective if it is based on the truth."[21]

That these criteria have proven rather problematic does not render them useless. Criteria are needed to divide between propaganda and "normal" forms of communication, or even more difficult division, between propaganda and education. Basically, what these discussions show is that propaganda is impossible to define in a comprehensive manner. That is also why, among others, Cunningham, Doob, and Auerbach and Castronovo refuse to come up with a single definition, but instead describe the practice of propaganda using about dozen individual characteristics. This study will not further elaborate on describing propaganda as a whole, as it would take up a completely different study. Instead it will elaborate on relevant subdivisions of propaganda that are used to define the certain characteristics specific for certain types of propaganda. It is in exactly these subdivisions where discussions have taken the shape of identifiable differentiations within propaganda.[22]

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[19] O. Thomson, *Easily led: A History of Propaganda* (Pheonix Mill, 1999) p. 3
[20] D. Chandler & R. Munday, *Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication* (Oxford, 2014), accessed online.
[21] Thomson, *Easily led: A History of Propaganda,* p. 3
[22] See for instance Jowett & O'Donnell (2006) pp. 16-26

Even though this study is about disinformation, some explanation of others forms that are subdivided under the umbrella term propaganda is important. It is possible to find many variations in names of propaganda forms, varying from rather explicit definitions of specific types like *hotel propaganda[23]*, to more general divisions between *black* and *white* propaganda. Fuzzy boundaries and overlapping remain present in all forms.[24] Because of the focus on modern day Russia, not all subdivisions of propaganda are needed for this study. The discussion above can be found back in the division between "white" and "black" propaganda, where white is often described as communication "that is mostly true and/or whose sources are known or readily apparent"[25] and black is often portrayed as "messages that are false erroneous or misleading, and/or whose source concealed or unknown."[26] As these instances show, it might be better to look at these criteria as scales, rather than boundaries.

The scale that will prove to be important in this study, as a way of distancing disinformation form other forms of propaganda, is described by Jowett and O'Donnel as a symptom that is present in most other propaganda, namely some form of *activated ideology,* whether agitative or integrative.[27] In other words: forms of propaganda that promote specific ideas. This activated ideology can be found for instance in two more specific forms of propaganda that Cunningham describes. They give a more concrete picture of features of propaganda that might easily be found in the Russian media: *hate propaganda*, and *integration propaganda*. Hate propaganda, he states, has a specific aim: "the promotion of hate, dislike, contempt, and actions against a race, gender, or groups.[28] Integration propaganda, Cunningham describes, are "those types of messages, interactions, or communication environments designed to unify, integrate, and harmonize a society, or which have that as their result."[29] As the sections below will show, it is the absence, or rather a high-level on the scale of absence of this activated ideology, that distinguishes disinformation from these other forms of propaganda. That will prove to be more important than dividing between the general terms of black and white. It is also Cunningham, who rather unsurprisingly, places disinformation, somewhere in the middle, "not unlike the ambiguity of *grey propaganda.*"[30]

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[23] Cunningham (2002), p. 71
[24] Ibidem, p. 75
[25] Ibidem, p. 67
[26] Ibidem, p. 67
[27] Jowett & O'Donnell (2006), p. 16
[28] Cunningham (2002), p. 70
[29] Ibidem, p. 66
[30] Ibidem, p. 68

In the literature other subdivisions have been made on the type of medium the propaganda is making use of. However, according to the Oxford Handbook, even though "propaganda changes according to specific media, [it] cannot entirely be defined by the attributes of a given medium."[31] Even though this division is important in some subareas of propaganda studies, for instance in propaganda that makes more use of art, whether it is film or fine arts, it is of less importance for this study as it will mainly focus on textual news items, or language used in television news or talk shows. Televised news, however, could possibly require more research into this matter if one would include visual imagery.

As some details about disinformation have already been introduced in this section, it now is time to focus solely on the subject of this study. The sections above have shed some light on the debates and definitions surrounding propaganda, and many of these issues will return in the next sections.

1.3 DISINFORMATION

The association with *information* is quite logically the first association a person will make when hearing the term disinformation. The prefix *dis-* which implies "having a privative, negative, or reversing force"[32] combined with the word *information,* gives the idea of a paradoxical set of data that is passed onto the audience that somehow negatively and/or reversely informs. Information itself, moreover, is maybe even harder to define then propaganda. Therefore, together with the fact that disinformation has been used to describe multiple forms of propaganda, this semantic introduction, even though it is actually pointing in the right direction, will not be sufficient. It is the combination of propaganda and information that this study will analyse. The distinction between the two elements is, however, also an element that not all scholars agree on. This disagreement is mainly created by the difference between theory and practice. On the one hand are the radical thinkers, one of which Jacques Ellul, who states that there is no possibility of distinguishing between information and propaganda in practice.[33] According to Cunningham, this might be true, however, Cunningham emphasizes that Ellul is *not* saying that the *concept* of propaganda is the same as the *concept* of information.[34] Others, however, see it in a more positive, but maybe naïve light. Jowett and O'Donnell for instance see information as a way to reduce uncertainty, and claim that "people

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[31] Auerbach & Castronovo eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda,* p. 7
[32] Dictionary.com, available at: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dis-
[33] Cunningham (2002) p. 102
[34] Ibidem.

seek information when they need to understand the world."[35] They call this type of information *informative communication*, when it is "used to accomplish a purpose of sharing, explaining, or instructing."[36] Ellul, however, claims that "much of the information disseminated nowadays – research findings, facts, statistics, explanations, analyses- *eliminate* personal judgement and the capacity to form one's own opinion even more surely than the most extravagant propaganda."[37] So according to Ellul, it is this constantly growing quantity of *informative communication* that in the end eliminates the audience's personal judgement. Jowett and O'Donnell however, state that the difference between propaganda and information is "that the *purpose* exceeds the notion of mutual understanding."[38] This statement, however, does not contradict Ellul's argument, it only introduces another variable: *purpose*, or, *intent*. According to Ellul, purpose does not matter, instead he points to *overload*: "excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him."[39] Not surprisingly therefore, the Oxford Handbook of Propaganda states that "the relation between propaganda and information is fluid, varying according to context and function."[40] This similarity in effect and difference in concept will be analysed in further detail below. It is the discrepancy between informative communication, deliberate overload, and unintentional overload, however, which is the home of disinformation.

1.4 DEFINING MEANS AND MESSAGE

As there is practically no extensive academic literature on the subject of disinformation, this section will evaluate all mentions of disinformation in academic literature, as well as references to otherwise named communication processes that are similar to disinformation. It will then look at similarities and differences between the mentions of the authors. This will introduce the criteria that will become the pillars of further analysis below. Just to remind the reader: this section will not get into the definitions of dezinformatsia, which is often defined by scholars as the only form of disinformation. To start the challenging task of describing a relatively underexposed form of propaganda, this section will not provide a comprehensive description, but instead form a general idea of disinformation. This general idea will then be discussed in more detail in the following section.

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[35] Jowett & O'Donnell (2006) p. 30
[36] Ibidem, p. 44
[37] J. Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York, 1973) p. 87
[38] Jowett & O'Donnell (2006) p. 44
[39] Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* , p. 87
[40] Auerbach & Castronovo eds. (2013) p. 6

The section above has already shed some light on the idea of disinformation; this introduction is in line with the description that Cunningham gives, which will be considered as a basis for further analysis.   Cunningham's description is valuable, as he describes both dezinformatsia and disinformation, and has published the most balanced book on propaganda that evaluates practically every scholar who has contributed to the propaganda discussion in the past century. Cunningham very briefly (not even half a page) discusses disinformation. "Others", he states, "now situate disinformation [in contrast to dezinformatsia] more broadly, as a form of *nescience*."[41] This idea of 'lack of knowledge' is indeed what is in line with what this study wants to identify as an effect of disinformation. Cunningham further states that "[Disinformation] signalizes if not factual falsity, at least the falsity of intent within the propaganda enterprise at the same time as it refers to the feature of information exchange."[42] He does not however, further elaborate on this in his own words, but refers to the works Postman, Combs, and Nimmo, which he sees as exemplary of this new use of the word disinformation. In the descriptions below, the variables mentioned above will come back: intent, overload and falsity.

Postman argues that disinformation "means misleading information – misplaced, fragmented, irrelevant, or superficial information- information that creates the illusion of knowing something, but in fact *leads one away from knowing*."[43] Taken in this understanding, it becomes clear that disinformation does not necessarily have to be false: true information can be presented in a misplaced, fragmented, or irrelevant way, transforming it into disinformation.

Also, regarding the matter of intent, Postman is cautious. He states that this does not imply that "television news *deliberately* aims to deprive Americans of a coherent, contextual understanding of their world. [But] that when news is packaged as *entertainment*, that is the inevitable result."[44] These explanations by Postman contain several important variables. The illusion of knowing implies that even though the audience gets information, it somehow doesn't become *informative communication.* One of the reasons Postman introduces for this is the need for entertainment; important in this sense is that he doesn't point to a propagandist, but rather to developments in news broadcasting that are responsible for the spread of disinformation. Even though this excludes deliberateness, the effect in practice is the same, just as Ellul has tried to prove.

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[41] Cunningham (2002) p. 68
[42] Ibidem, p. 110
[43] N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York, 1985) p. 107, emphasis mine
[44] Ibidem, emphasis mine

In a similar fashion, Combs and Nimmo write about what they call the *new propaganda of palaver.*[45] In their historical analysis they explicitly make a distinction between *old* and *new* propaganda, in which they see lightweight talk, unserious and uncommitted babble, as highly influential in present day propaganda. They even state that this new propaganda has become the dominant form of communication in modern culture.[46] In a general sense, propaganda of palaver is similar to the disinformation Postman talks about. Combs and Nimmo claim that "prolix, extended, ambiguous, confounding discourse that does not inform, evaluate or express –in short, palaver-deserves scorn."[47] It is in this same fashion as Postman that Combs and Nimmo do not point to the existence of a propagandist, they even state that this disinformation is "a pervasive or sociological phenomenon in contemporary society."[48] It is not only scholars who criticize this development. Commercialization of the news industry, as they describe it, is mentioned by many others: "The perceived dilution of news and information globally, as a result of market-driven television journalism and its impact on the public sphere, has become a major concern for critical media theorists."[49]

In both these mentions of disinformation deliberateness is not a significant factor, and is in fact, absent. Even though commercial incentive might be influential in the process, it is often not purposely misleading for political gain. Another scholar, Robert Goodin, however argues from another angle. He describes the same practice, which he calls *information overload,* but from the perspective of politics, it can be described as "maniplulatory" politics. He describes this as a final strategy in his model of *rational ignorance*, where, due to the access to and quantity of information in their media landscape, citizens can ultimately be *overloaded*. According to Goodin, "the informational base of an individual's decision can be undermined by providing him with too much information," leading to the public having trouble assimilating it all. It is this characteristic that was also quoted from Ellul in the section above. Overloading an audience with information, according to Goodin, will make the audience rely upon official interpretations more readily.[50] It is this official interpretation that then can be introduced to the public by an intentional propagandist. In this way, Goodin has connected disinformation to intent and shown how it can be applied to achieve various goals. Disinformation in this sense serves the propagandist, as "additional information more generally can often simply serve to confuse the issue, undermining our confidence in our

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[45] See Cunningham (2002) pp. 26-27, 101, 173
[46] Ibidem, pp. 26-27
[47] Quoted in Cunningham (2002) p. 27
[48] Ibidem.
[49] D. Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (London, 2008) p. 3
[50] R. Goodin, *Manipulatory Politics* (New Haven, 1980) p. 39, they support this idea with a phenomenon in information science analyzed by Harray and Batell called negative information.

judgements about the probability of the various alternatives without actually adding new possibilities."[51] This is actually quite similar to a statement by Ellul: "A surfeit of data, far from permitting people to make judgements and form opinions, prevents them from doing so and actually paralyzes them."[52]

If disinformation is applied deliberately in order to lead an audience away from knowing by overloading it with information and diverting away from sensitive or accusatory information, an another element that is of importance is the structure and content of the messages distributed. First of all, by diverting attention away from unwanted information, messages will often have to omit relevant information and replace it with disinformation. It is therefore not necessarily the withholding of information, but rather the selective use of information that becomes relevant. Strictly withholding information makes the position of the propagandist actually more vulnerable for criticism. As Postman noted above, the entertainment factor of a message is also important—a message has to be attractive to the audience. In addition, rhetorical tricks can be of importance in order to downplay certain information or to mislead an audience within a certain message. Entertainment and relevance are therefore important. This will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

What this study argues, is that the basis of disinformation is highly selective, and consists of mostly factual information that is on some degree dispensed with the intent that it will spread in large quantities and lead the populace away from knowing, and eventually, uninterested in getting a comprehensive oversight or accept a framework presented by the authorities. By having placed the need to mislead as a function of the message above the need to inform, fact and opinion are often merged with the result of high entertainment value, whether this is fear or other emotions. Every degree between palaver and disinformation can be considered to exist at some point on the scale of disinformation. The criteria that will be evaluated below are therefore: intent, control, quantity, message, emotion, and falsity.

1.5 CRITERIA

Having established an idea of disinformation based on the relatively few mentions of it in academic literature, this section will focus on the matter from means to message. The criteria that will be

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[51] Ibidem, p. 58
[52] Ellul (1973) p. 87

analysed derive from the discussions mentioned above. By concentrating on specific elements more literature becomes available to identify and discuss these criteria. The subjects of criteria are:

1) the need for intention, or deliberateness, of disinformation and how this is controlled;

2) the quantity of messages that is needed for disinformation to be effective and how this can be achieved; 3) the content of disinformation messages: in what way do rhetoric fallacies play a role and what are similarities in these messages, how important is narrative if advocating ideology is not an element of disinformation?; 4) emotion, if disinformation is so much about message or narrative, then what role does emotion play in these messages?; 5) falsity, to what extend do messages need to be false, as many descriptions mention.

INTENT & CONTROL

As shown above, there is no clear academic answer to the necessity of deliberateness in propaganda, as well as in disinformation. Even when deliberateness is a factor in disinformation, it should be measured on a scale instead of a sharp boundary. This section will further analyse the need for intent in disinformation, and elaborate on how to define and prove intent. Another important element discussed here is the idea of a goal behind deliberate disinformation.

As shown in the descriptions by Postman and Combs and Nimmo, their descriptions of disinformation exclude the necessity of intent. Instead, these scholars see disinformation as a sociological phenomenon caused by public desire or as a result of commercial incentives. This study argues that deliberateness is therefore not a necessity, as the effect of unintentional disinformation is in practice the same: it leads away from knowing. The division between deliberate and accidental is nonetheless still very important, because when disinformation is created and distributed by a propagandist with political or commercial gain, it can achieve certain goals as was described by Goodin. Control of the information flow in this sense makes it easier to shift attention away from undesired information. However, as Jowett and O'Donnell, as well as many others rightly observe: "the expansion of access to information around the world through new mass communication technologies has made control of information flow difficult."[53] Contradictorily, this is not disadvantageous for disinformation. On the contrary, it has become much technologically easier to distribute an even larger quantity of messages.

This division between deliberate and unintentional is not a clear line, but is instead a scale from intentional disinformation to palaver for other (commercial) purposes. This deliberateness can

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[53] Jowett & O'Donnell (2006) p. 46

be a result of self-initiative. In this way, intent does not have to mean a deliberate attempt by one propagandist, but rather a sympathiser.[54] Also, unintentional disinformation can unwittingly be supportive of deliberate disinformation if the unintentional palaver is reproducing disinformation. For this study, the presence of some form of intent is necessary. We must assume that the disinformation in Russian media is at least to some extent deliberate in order to conclude that there is in fact disinformation, and not a media environment which has become victim to commercial infotainment.   The question of self-censorship remains, and accordingly of initiative by reporters to produce disinformation as a habit rather than as a result of instruction by a main propagandist. This idea is also stated by Auerbach: "people can actively use propaganda and are not simply passive dupes used by it. Propaganda does not necessarily spread from the top down."[55] Therefore, more information on the control and structure of the media landscape is needed. If intent is highly suspected, it should be visible in the structure of media ownership and control over the information flow within a specific region. For this reason Auerbach also emphasizes that "analysing propaganda requires paying as much attention to networks of information flow (how) as the content (what)."[56] Others recommend focussing on commonalities in disinformation. Jowett and O'Donnell for instance suggest searching for the person or organization who has most to gain from disseminating disinformation.[57] Doob offers another way, and suggests looking for what he calls verbal compulsions: "look for the person who speaks frequently and with authority."[58]

QUANTITY

If disinformation is indeed intentional, for it to have any effect the quantity of messages is of great importance, as was also described by Ellul and Combs and Nimmo earlier in this chapter. In order to overload citizens with disinformation, the quantity of messages is essential. According to Goebbels, a malign expert in propaganda practice, "propaganda must be simple and repetitive."[59] In contrast to the propaganda of the Third Reich however, disinformation does not necessarily have to be repetitive because it in essence does not try to *activate ideology*, as mentioned above. It is extremely important to realize that in disinformation the need for quantity of differentiating views exceeds the need for narrative. Quantity will achieve the desired effect that Ellul has comprehensively described:

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[54] Doob , *Public Opinion and Propaganda,* p. 246
[55] Auerbach & Castronovo eds. (2013) p. 9
[56] Ibidem, p. 8
[57] Jowett & O'Donnell (2006) p. 26
[58] Doob (1966) p. 274
[59] Cunningham (2002) p. 33

"[The Reader] cannot remember [all data], or coordinate them, or understand them; if he does not want to risk loosing his mind, he will merely draw a general picture from them. And the more facts supplied, the more simplistic the image."[60] Goodin also explains this in his description of the need for consistency in a politician's narrative for it to stick with the masses. Turning this idea around shows the power of a quantity of differentiating stories: "if a politician or a party offers a different framework for interpreting every event, then none of them will stick."[61]

The new technologies of the present have made the distribution of information and disinformation relatively easy. Where Lee observed in 1939 that there had never been "so much propaganda so powerfully implemented now we have radio and newspapers"[62], technological development has only created more possibilities for communication. Not without reason did Jowett and O'Donnell see the 21st century as "global society bombarded with information."[63] Where propaganda aimed at foreign countries was difficult to distribute in the 20th century, with the coming of Internet and the digitalization of the media, this this process has become childishly easy.

MESSAGE & EMOTION

Even though quantity might be more important than the content of the message, without messages there simply can be no disinformation. Within the message two elements are of importance: language and emotion. That it is not about the message, but about function, does not mean that the content of the message is unimportant. These messages have to lead away from knowing, as was established above as one of the main characteristics of disinformation. To construct an idea about this, literature on propaganda structure will be used that describes several rhetoric techniques and fallacies which can create the desired effect. Emotion is another important factor within the message, because in the end the emotion needs to remain while the message content serves only a temporary purpose as it fades away into the overload of messages. As will become clear below, the importance of emotions resonates in every sub criteria—it is practically impossible to discuss rhetoric or fallacies without naming a relation to emotion. There are several ways to create such artificial credibility in messages: theme, rhetoric, public agents, entertainment, conspiracies and emotion.

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[60] Ellul (1973) p. 87
[61] Goodin, *Manipulatory Politics,* p. 60
[62] Lee & Lee (1939) pp. 14-15
[63] Jowett and O'Donnell eds., *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion*, p. x

It is important for the messages to adhere to an actual theme. Messages must adhere to a certain sense of *truth potentiality* in order to be accepted by the audience.[64] In some cases, this means that messages have to fit into the propagated reality instead of what an outsider would see as reality. This is where there is an interaction between disinformation and other forms of propaganda that *activate ideologies*. The messages have to fit into the ideologies that the media have made popular.

A second important factor is the use of rhetoric to create the propagandist's desired effect. As Cunningham describes, "[propaganda] does not use language as a vehicle of thought with a connection to the real world, but rather reduces it to the status of a tool to generate feeling and mere reflexes, or lead us to meaninglessness."[65] This is also what the early 20th century propaganda researchers tried to identify. It is in this form of propaganda that some of the techniques described by, for instance, Alfred Lee, can come in useful as descriptors of language use in disinformation. Whether they are intentionally used or not, the fallacies he describes can form the basis of the message which may be factual, but at the same time make the argument misleading. Since there should not be an intention to promote a single narrative, or activate ideology, the methods described below are used to create an artificial emotional connection or artificial credibility.

Name-calling is how Lee describes one of his seven 'tricks of the trade'. Name-calling is a trick where an *omnibus word*, "words that mean different things and have different emotional overtones for different people", are used to describe persons, groups, ideas or any form of event etc. by giving it a bad name. It thereby "makes us reject and condemn the idea without examining the evidence."[66] Name-calling is the opposite of the technique that Lee calls 'glittering generality', which involves associating something with a 'virtue word' that resonates with deep-set ideas like 'democracy' or 'patriotism'. According to Lee, these *virtue words* are used to "make us accept and approve the thing without examining the evidence."[67] For exactly these reasons, *virtue words* and *omnibus words* can be important tools, not only because they generate an emotional response, but also because they can be used to create emotionally appealing messages without the need for substance. The use of these words can be improved for disinformation by staying deliberately vague, as shown by Marvin Williams, doctor of Philosophy: "According to this strategy the speaker clearly addresses those issues which he feels are acceptable to the audience and *equivocates* those issues

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[64] Ibidem.
[65] Quoted in Cunningham (2002) p. 107
[66] Lee & Lee (1939) p. 26
[67] Ibidem, p. 47

with which they disagree."[68] Staying vague while creating an emotional response can create an endless stream of reactions that produce a favorable environment for disinformation. This should not have to be a necessity however, as disinformation could just as easily be clear in its message, provided there is a sufficient quantity of divergent messages.

Another important argumentative fallacy is what Lee calls testimonial: "having some respected or hated person say that a given idea or program or product or person is good or bad."[69] This can be used to create arguments or even complete stories out of thin air. It can be used to quote from other sources or persons, when actually the message itself does not have any weight. In addition, it is also a way for the deliberate propagandist to distance himself from potential recoil from risky messages, because these messages are only quoted from someone else. For disinformation, moreover, the quoted person does not even have to be respected or hated; it could practically be anyone that would voice his opinion, as long as it contributes to the quantity of messages.

In a similar fashion argumentation can construct, or build upon, conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories always lead away from knowing, because they are essentially self-sealing prophecies.[70] The external elements that create an atmosphere that is susceptible to conspiracy theories are when, according to Zarefsky, an expert on political argumentation, "they explain an otherwise ambiguous evil… when they explain a pattern of anomalies… when polarizing positions helps to resolve ambiguity… [or] at times of social strain."[71] In an environment with disinformation allows conspiracy theories to potentially become even more accepted, as Zarefsky claims that "the general appeal of a conspiracy argument derives from its ability to explain paradox and incongruity."[72] And it is especially in such an environment that paradox and incongruity between propaganda and day-to-day life occur most.

As described above, emotion is more important than content in disinformation. Not only for its initial attraction value, but also to create an overall feeling, and as an addictive element to assure the prevalence of disinformation over alternative *informative communication*. It is not the quantity of narratives that will be remembered, but the overall feeling of emotion. As is common in propaganda,

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[68] M. Lee Williams, *The effects of deliberate vagueness, order of agree-disagree issues, source credibility, and time on receiver agreement and recall,* dissertation (University of Oklahoma, 1974) Available at: https://shareok.org/bitstream/handle/11244/3885/7506566.PDF?sequence=1 Last visited 25-09-2015. Emphasis mine
[69] Lee & Lee (1939) p. 4
[70] D. Zarefsky, *Political Argumentation in the United states* (Amsterdam, 2014) pp. 205-206
[71] Ibidem.
[72] Ibidem.

since it often serves to simplify and therefore strengthen its persuasive power, is the feeling of knowing who is good and who is evil.[73]

Overall, emotion is an important factor in propaganda. As Cunningham already described above, language is mainly there as "a tool to generate feeling and mere reflexes, or lead us to meaninglessness."[74] Of the range of emotions, Thomson points to fear as being the most exploited by propaganda, "with the ability to spin dangers almost out of thin air – the torments of hell, devils, Napoleons in the cupboard, witches, phantom armies, and millennial cataclysms, all dressed up and given fearsome attributes."[75] However, fear is not the only emotion needed, as Stanley states: "To be effective propaganda must harness a rich affective range beyond negative emotions such as hatred, fear, and envy to include more positive feelings such as pleasure, joy belonging, and pride."[76] In the same sense, the argumentative tricks described above are used to elicit these emotional responses.

Last but not least, for retaining credibility, occasional self-criticism would serve the propagandist in order to prove that "all" perspectives are treated alike. This also confuses the sharp-eyed or more critical audience. For this reason, negative information about the propagandist country is sometimes also published by propaganda vehicles, in order to give the other messages more credibility.[77]

FALSITY

As mentioned before in this chapter, and as becomes clear from the discussions on propaganda and disinformation, there is no necessity for falsity in disinformation. Using rhetorical techniques to bend reality and omitting important information is also effective. Selective use of truth is the best method for the propagandist. Cunningham emphasizes this as well, stating, "it is widely recognized among the practitioners themselves that the success of disinformation campaigns is proportional to the degree in which *correct* information is communicated."[78] While lying might just as easily occur, it not a necessity for propaganda. It is often more convenient for a propagandist to distance himself from lies by using testimonial as a technique and consequently offer an interpretive framework,

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[73] Thomson, *Easily led: A History of Propaganda*
[74] Quoted in Cunningham (2002) p. 107
[75] Thomson (1999) p. 48
[76] Auerbach & Castronovo eds. (2013) p. 10
[77] Ibidem.
[78] Cunningham (2002) p. 110. Emphasis mine

because, as Goodin states, "someone found advancing an ill-fitting interpretive framework might be thought a fool, but he probably will not be called a liar."[79]

1.6 DEZINFORMATSIA

In what way then, after constructing this more detailed idea of disinformation does it differ from dezinformatsia? The term dezinformatsia was used in the Soviet Union first to describe what later would be called active measures.[80] Active measures is a soviet term that describes overt and covert techniques aimed at "influencing the policies of another government, undermining confidence in its leaders and institutions, disrupting relations between other nations, and discrediting and weakening governmental and non-governmental opponents."[81] Cunningham describes it as a term "to denote contrived news accounts or reports that have been planted in the news systems of adversary nations, and that are designed to weaken and destabilize the latter."[82] Most authors seem to agree on these basics of dezinformatsia, as do Shultz and Godson, experts on dezinformatsia: "The objective of [dezinformatsia] is to manipulate target persons and groups to believe in the veracity of the message and consequently to act in the interests of the nation conducting the operation."[83] Dezinformatsia is also explicitly described in KGB reports: "strategic disinformation assists in the execution of state tasks and is directed at misleading the enemy concerning basic questions of state policy, the military-economic status, and the scientific-technical achievements of the Soviet Union"[84]. Even though the Soviets had become quite well organized in distributing dezinformatsia, they surely were not the only ones, as Jowett and O'Donnell also have observed that "[dezinformatsia] is no less widely practiced by most of the major world powers."[85]

What comes forward from these descriptions is that the main idea behind dezinformatsia is different from what this study describes as disinformation. Its main element is secrecy through deflecting the real source of the information, and above all, it is only aimed at foreign audiences. That is certainly different from disinformation that is based on the technique of misleading through overload. It is some ways similar, in that both phenomena try to mislead, but in essence these phenomena are not the same. This is not to say however, that these sort of active measures are not

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[79] Goodin (1980) p. 60
[80] R. Shultz & R. Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, 1984) p. 195
[81] Ibidem, p. 193
[82] Cunningham (2002) p. 67
[83] Shultz & Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, p. 17
[84] Ibidem, p. 37
[85] Jowett & O'Donnell (2006) p. 24

around anymore. Among other instances, the short war between Georgia and Russia in 2008 and the Crimea military campaign seem to have been supported through these Soviet-style active measures.[86]

CONCLUSION

One of the most important elements in describing propaganda is the fluidity of boundaries. As scholars have been arguing for over a century on the definition of propaganda it has become clear that there are no strict divisions and the phenomenon itself is far too multifarious to fit into a sharp definition. Even though much literature has been dedicated to describing propaganda, literature on disinformation as a form of propaganda is hard to find. The characteristics of disinformation are therefore created from a composition of references to disinformation or phenomena that resemble the same characteristics.

From this combination of data this chapter concludes that there are several important elements that describe disinformation in general. Disinformation leads away from knowing, as a form of nescience, by either overloading the public with (superfluous or misleading) information or rendering it numb through an abundance of nonsensical infotainment, or *palaver.* In concept overloading can be intentional, while entertaining is more described as a sociological phenomenon. In both instances however, they lead away from knowing, thus the effect is the same.

It are exactly these different variable characteristics that can distinctively transform this idea of disinformation. These characteristics are: the difference between the deliberate attempt at deploying disinformation as a tactic to distract, or the presence of an unintentional sociological phenomenon that lets a society generate its own disinformation, and everything in between; the quantity of messages and differentiating narratives for disinformation to have an effect; the rhetorical fallacies used to generate emotional response, like the use of virtue words and omnibus words, and the use of testimonial to create an argument; and the use of lies and truth or the creation of a framework for interpretation that is less vulnerable for criticism.

The main element that is absent in disinformation, the characteristic that most importantly differentiates disinformation from other forms of propaganda, is the idea of activating ideology. Above all, the distinction between disinformation and dezinformatsia should be clear, they should not be regarded as similar phenomena.

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[86] N. Vogel, 'This Info-War, the Problem is not only Russia', *The Interpreter,* 11-12-2014. Available at: http://www.interpretermag.com/in-this-info-war-the-problem-is-not-only-russia/, last visited 25-09-2015

CHAPTER II DISINFORMATION IN RUSSIA

Now this study has established the boundaries of disinformation in the first chapter, the question now is to what extent this practice is common in the Russian state-media. Even though there has been decade-long criticism of the freedom of the Russian press, the Russian state-media have caught renewed international attention after their coverage of events and developments in the protests against former president Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine and has grown even more since the geopolitical turmoil that followed. This chapter will review secondary literature on the analyses of the Russian state-media and thereby identify the presence of disinformation in Russia's main national media. After the indicatory presence of disinformation, a more detailed analysis following the criteria from the first chapter will follow. This study thereby excludes Russian international media for, even though they might make perfect examples of the use of disinformation in a competitive environment, these media and accompanying tactics and organization would require a separate analysis. The narrowing down on the Russian media coverage also brought up a differentiation within the established description of disinformation, for it turned out to be complicated to classify all disinformation without sliding into other forms of propaganda, therefore a distinction will be described between *pro-active disinformation* and *reactive disinformation*. Both of these terms, however, can vary on a scale sliding down to *disinformative palaver*. Nonetheless, first of all a short introduction on the Russian media landscape, the framework of analysis, and the literature used is required.

2.1 LITERATURE ON DISINFORMATION

Just as encountered in the first chapter, there seems to be a shortfall of academic literature on disinformation in present-day Russia. And not even just disinformation, but propaganda in general seems to be an unattended subject in Russian Studies. As also mentioned above, there is academic literature on active measures, or *dezinformatsia*, however, even though there are similarities in the descriptions between the two forms, as in all subdivisions of propaganda, it is also too explicitly different on a multiple of aspects that this literature is of little use.[87] However, where there is a lack of academic literature, there is an abundance of popular literature on the subject, due to popular international attention for Russia's propaganda activities. Some of these articles and papers mention the term disinformation to describe the activities of Russian state-media in Russia and abroad. In these articles, however, it is not always clear as to why they choose to use the term

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[87] See for instance Bittmann or Shultz

disinformation, also occasionally described as misinformation. The articles and papers this chapter will evaluate are among the most referred to and credible sources to be found publicly on the subject of propaganda in present-day Russia. These include articles and papers by think tanks, international organizations and political magazines. Think tanks that published substantively on the subject are The Institute of Modern Russia, the Central European Policy Institute and the Warshaw Centre for Eastern Studies. Public policy papers have been published by NATO Stratfor, on Russia and information warfare, and a monitoring report supported by several EU organizations. The political magazines that have provided views on Russian disinformation are The Economist, Foreign Affairs, the Interpreter and Time. Most of these publications, however, focus on implications for Russia's near abroad as a victim of *information warfare*.[88] The most extensive documentation up to date is the paper by television producer and writer Peter Pomerantsev and journalist Michael Weiss for the Institute of Modern Russia dealing with what they call *the weaponization of information*. Another important author is journalist and media-owner Vasily Gatov, who has published multiple articles in the past months on the Russian media, where he used to be part of himself.

What these publications have in common is that they signal a form of propaganda from Russia, and consequent ways of implementation, that the authors see as threat to the established, democratic press and has potential devastating effects on easily influenced target groups. The publications mention a range of terms varying from 'information warfare' to 'new propaganda' to 'disinformation' and 'misinformation', however, as it is inappropriate in these types of publications to elaborate and justify extensively on their terminology, most of these publications lack a comprehensive description of this type of propaganda this study is about. In other words, these publications combined come close to situating the use of disinformation as described in the first chapter in Russia but are not unified in their terminology. Even though these publicists often speak of disinformation it is never evidently clear what the boundaries of disinformation are, how they have interpreted the term and where they found a usable definition.

As the above mentioned literature will mainly serve as a mainframe to show how these authors think about the presence of disinformation in Russia by establishing the similarities between the criteria from the first chapter and the observation form the literature on Russia. These sources, however, do not provide enough in-depth analysis for a comprehensive evaluation of disinformation applied. Other sources for this chapter therefore include academic sources on

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[88] See for instance: J. Darczewska, 'The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, a Case Study', *point of view* (2014:42) Available at: http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/the_anatomy_of_russian_information_warfare.pdf, last visited: 25-09-2015

Russia's media landscape, mainly by an extensive analysis by Anna Arutunyan, a Moscow based journalism expert. Another publication that is of value is a recent publication by the Journal of Soviet and post-Soviet Studies, that published a special on Russian media and the war in Ukraine. For more in-depth analysis per criteria there are specific academic articles, that even though not specifically on propaganda or disinformation, deal with specific criteria discussed above implemented on the Russian media, like for instance the prevalence conspiracy theories in Russia.

Because of a growing insecurity about the negative influence of Russian international channels, aimed at targeting former Soviet-states and the West, much focus in on international effects and consequences, however, this study will only use the information necessary for an analysis of the national use of disinformation.

2.2 MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Some introduction on the characteristics of the Russian media is needed for understanding in what environment this analysis takes place. This overview will be short to generate just an idea of the landscape and not to explain it in extreme detail, for that would take up to much space. The focus within this study is on the main national media, which is on a large scale owned by the state or otherwise by holdings connected to the state through companies with close ties to the Kremlin, like Gazprom Media or National Media Group.[89] Within the Russian media landscape television has shown to be the most popular and influential medium.[90] Polling suggests that there is an evident top three in popularity of channels: the most watched television channels are First Channel, Rossia 1 and NTV, which attract practically over two-thirds of the total viewers. The respondents show a clear preference for television as their main medium for news about Russia and the world.[91] Even though research shows that the amount of news time devoted to domestic politics has seen a decline.[92] The second most popular medium for news gathering is, according to the respondents, news acquired from friends, family and neighbours, as well as from internet. Internet in Russia, even though gaining popularity, is often not used for obtaining news but rather for looking up

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[89] NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, 'Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine' (2014) p. 17. Available at: http://www.stratcomcoe.org/~/media/SCCE/NATO_PETIJUMS_PUBLISKS_29_10.ashx, last visited: 25-09-2015
[90] D. Volkov & S. Goncharov, 'Rossiyskiy media-landshaft: televidenie, pressa, internet', *Levada Center* (2014) p. 2. Available at: http://www.levada.ru/17-06-2014/rossiiskii-media-landshaft-televidenie-pressa-internet, last visited: 25-09-2015
[91] Ibidem.
[92] T. Burrett, *Television and Presidential Power in Putin's Russia* (Hoboken, 2010) p. 103

information or for entertainment.[93] Newspapers have seen a decline in the recent decade, but of course play a role on the internet too as portals for news messages.

In addition to a strong grip on the media through ownership, the Kremlin also exters power through legislation. One of the first decrees signed by Putin was the Information Security Doctrine in 2000, in which "freedom of information was subordinated to the needs of national security and the preservation of Russian moral values."[94] Following the turmoil after Putin's re-election in 2012 more limiting laws have been adopted. One of the most recent ones being the law that prohibits foreign ownership of Russian media.[95]

The only mainstream editorially independent national media are formed by a small group of outlets that gather combined only a marginal amount of audience.[96] Among some others this group consists mainly of TV Dozhd, Echo Moskvy, Novaya Gazeta and RBK.

2.3 PRECENCE OF DISINFORMATION

By evaluating the literature mentioned above, this section tries to show the presence of disinformation as explained in detail in the first chapter. It will establish a first sense of the observations of the authors that have published about disinformation that is present in the media landscape mentioned above. Even though some articles literally spell it out, it is not that easy to form a solid argument based on these articles. The following quote is exemplary for this dilemma: "The Russian Federation uses extensive propaganda, outright lies, and—most importantly— disinformation as part of the hybrid warfare it is waging against Ukraine and the West."[97] This quote by Paul Goble, an American Russia analyst, is exemplary for several reasons. At first glance it should serve as a contribution to the argument this chapter tries to prove: it argues that there are multiple forms of propaganda produced by the Russian government, that one of those forms of propaganda is disinformation, which is different than outright lies. As it turns out, however, like many other authors, and already described above, the disinformation Goble describes is dezinformatsia. He thereby refers to a book by Natalie Grant, an expert in revealing Soviet deception methods,

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[93] Volkov & Goncharov, 'Rossiyskiy media-landshaft: televidenie, pressa, internet', p. 10
[94] Burrett, *Television and Presidential Power in Putin's Russia,* p. 49
[95] P. Sonne, 'Russia Moves to Restrict Foreign Ownership of Media Outlets', *The Wall Street Journal* (26-09-2014) Availabe at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-moves-to-restrict-foreign-ownership-of-media-outlets-1411760000, last visited: 25-09-2015
[96] NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, 'Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine'
[97] P. Goble, 'Hot Issue – Lies, Damned Lies and Russian Disinformation', *The Jamestown Foundation* (13-08-2014) Available at: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42745#.VfvCH9_vOUk, last visited: 25-09-2015

published in 1960. Moreover, not only is it not about this study's idea of disinformation, Goble is not the most objective source as his career includes functions at the State Department, CIA, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio liberty. It is no guarantee of partiality, but these functions show that he is prepared to publically defend and even propagandize *the West*, as he mentions in his quote. It is exactly these types of articles that this study is cautious about, even though they seem relevant. Therefore this quote is of no use at all. Instead this section has to focus on the small amount of publications that distinguish between dezinformatsia and disinformation.

As mentioned above, Weiss and Pomerantsev, have most extensively tried to establish a common description for what they call disinformation that is many ways is less suggestive in their approach. In 'The Menace of Unreality', they give in a general sense an idea of what they see as disinformation in Russia. They argue that: "the aim of this new propaganda is not to convince or persuade, but to keep the viewer hooked and distracted, passive and paranoid, rather than agitated to action."[98] In contrast to Goble, Weiss and Pomerantsev clearly distinguish between old and new propaganda and in this sense distance themselves from dezinformatsia by calling this disinformation *new propaganda.* This argument seems to be in line with what this study described in the first chapter, it follows Combs and Nimmo's description of the propaganda of palaver. Also their emphasis on keeping the viewer distracted rather than agitated to action is exactly what differentiates disinformation from other forms of propaganda that activate ideology. As becomes clear from the beginning of the statement, Pomerantsev and Weiss clearly see in this disinformation the work of a propagandist, the Kremlin, for this disinformation is applied with an *aim.*

How this is done, they state, is by marginalizing the idea of truth: "no one even tries proving the 'truth'. You can just say anything. Create realities."[99] According to them, "the kremlin's power is entrenched not by trying to persuade people that it is telling the truth, but by making it clear that it can dictate the terms of the "truth" and thus enhancing its aura of power. Information, and television in particular, is key in this society of pure spectacle"[100] That resonates Postman's emphasis on entertainment as a cause of disinformation, as well as the creation of conspiracy theories to create 'truths'. One of the reasons that this is possible is through manipulation of language, the use of rhetoric fallacies as described by Lee: "the point of ideas and language are not what they represent, but what function they fulfill. The point of any statement is its effect rather

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[98] D. Weiss & P. Pomerantsev, 'The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money', *The Interpreter* (New York, 2014) p. 11. Available at: http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, last visited: 25-09-2015
[99] Ibidem, p. 9
[100] Ibidem, p. 10

than any notion of truth."[101] It is this combination of elements that according to Weiss and Pomerantsev has led to the point that "the border between fact and fiction has become utterly blurred in Russian media and public discourse."[102]

These general features are at sometimes also combined in specific instances. It is in a similar fashion that the guardian explained disinformation after the murder of Nemtsov in an editorial as "the idea that there are multiple interpretations of the truth has become the founding philosophy of state disinformation [in Russia]."[103] Weiss and Pomerantsev, however, do not link their description directly to a disinformation campaign in Russia, they do however point to the coverage of English-language Russian TV-channel RT, "RT spread conspiracy theories regarding the cause ranging from the flight being shot down by Ukrainian forces aiming at Putin's personal plane to Ukrainian deployment of Buk SAMs in the area."[104]

These descriptions of disinformation are to a large extent the same as mentioned in the chapter above. Weiss and Pomerantsev are not alone in this idea of the Russian state-media carrying out disinformation. A range of publications endorses these views. For instance the more general problems of the Russian media are discussed by many, for instance in a report funded by the EU: "the media monitoring report revealed that [First Channel, Rossiya 1 and NTV] in their evening newscasts demonstrated a lack of balance, distorted, biased and incomplete information. The most alarming finding was the consistent practice of neglecting to air opposing views in numerous news stories. In fact, such approach appeared to be a usual part, the of the Russian state-controlled broadcasters."[105] They continue to observe that "beside frequent news reports that lacked the balance, the stories were quite often distorted and twisted into a different meaning, supported by selective use of sources or facts. Moreover, such approach contained subjective and partisan evaluations and assessments from the journalists, making it almost impossible for viewers to distinguish between facts and commentaries."[106]

This mixture of fact and fiction seem to be best presented by one of Russia's main television hosts: Dimitry Kiselev, an anchor on the Rossiya channel and head of news agency *Rossiya Segodnya*, watching his show, claims Joshua Yaffa, a Moscow based journalist for The Economist, "leaves the viewer with the exhausting impression that no one is objective, everyone is compromised, and

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[101] Ibidem.
[102] Ibidem.
[103] Editorial, 'The Guardian view on Russian propaganda: the truth is out there', *The Guardian* (02-03-2015) Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/02/guardian-view-russian-propaganda-truth-out-there, last visited: 25-09-2015
[104] Weiss & Pomerantsev, 'The Menace of Unreality' p. 31
[105] EaP Civil Society Forum et al., 'Messages of Russian TV: Monitoring Report 2015' (2015) p. 36
[106] Ibidem, p. 37

anyone who attempts to make sense of what is happening in Russia and the world must be serving one side or another."[107] Another element is described by Ben Nimmo, former NATO press officer and freelance writer and propaganda analyst. He emphasizes the vagueness in Russian propaganda. Among four other tactics he describes to the techniques of Russian present-day propaganda he sees distraction as an important tactic: "Sometimes the distraction serves to create doubt and confusion, as in the case of the MH-17 disaster, which has become a source of burgeoning conspiracy theories."[108] Nimmo continues that "the techniques of distraction create uncertainty, confusion, and ultimately a doubt whether any source can be trusted without detailed personal experience. It generates a moral quagmire in which everyone is wrong, and therefore wrong actions become normal."[109] The most comprehensive and corresponding comes from the Atlantic Counsel: "The Kremlin's disinformation campaign goes far beyond controlling its own media. It is aimed at nothing less than presenting a parallel version of reality and disseminating it as if it were news. The Kremlin's goal is to make people question the value of media at all; to reject the idea of an absolute truth; and to persuade the public that "reality" is relative."[110]

These overall descriptions of disinformation used in Russian media have many elements in common with what this study presented in the first chapter. However, as the disinformation campaign surrounding the downing of MH17 has been mentioned, it is these instances that a specific campaign is launched to minimize the damage of factual information. As mentioned above, this study wants to argue that these instances lead to another form of disinformation than the general mentions above. It is exactly this difference that this study wants to highlight, for the deliberateness is in those instances is more prevalent. This study will refer to this form as *reactive disinformation.* The example of reactive disinformation is also described during a Chatham House session: "Several examples illustrate the power of [information war]. First, after MH17 was shot down, the Russian media churned out dozens of versions of possible events. This included the story that MH17 had been shot down accidentally by Ukrainian forces aiming at Putin's plane. This was not done out of ignorance, but was instead a cynical exercise in confusion that aimed to distort the

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[107] J. Yaffa, ,Dimitry Kiselev is Redefining the Art of Russian Propaganda', *New Republic* (01-07-2014) Available at: http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118438/dmitry-kiselev-putins-favorite-tv-host-russias-top-propogandist, last visited: 25-09-2015
[108] B. Nimmo, ,Anatomy of an Info-War: How Russia's propaganda machine works, and how to counter it', *Central European Policy Institute* (15-05-2015) Available at: http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/anatomy-info-war-how-russias-propaganda-machine-works-and-how-counter-it, last visited: 25-09-2015
[109] Ibidem.
[110] J. Emerson,'Exposing Russian Disinformation', *Atlantic Counsil* (29-06-2015) Available at: http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/exposing-russian-disinformation, last visited: 25-09-2015)

media space and introduce uncertainty into the Western narrative."[111] It is this deliberateness of distorting the media coverage of these important events that is also described by the Guardian: "the idea that there are multiple interpretations of the truth has become the founding philosophy of state disinformation in Putin's Russia, designed to confuse those who would seek out the truth with multiple expressions of distracting PR chaff. The tactic is to create as many competing narratives as possible. And, amid all the resultant hermeneutic chaos, to quietly slip away undetected."[112]

These description of disinformation in Russia, most of which written by Western journalists, however, still make up only meagre proof of the presence of disinformation. Interestingly however, elements of organized attempts to distribute disinformation or specific words or phrases can often be proved by open source information analysis. Not only do traceable bot-networks spread disinformation at specified times, also can companies that claim to be independent local news organizations actually be traced back to one several similar Google Analytics accounts, that way establishing a digital trace that links all these "independent" websites back to one person.[113]

Other than disinformation, the Russian media are also often ascribed other forms of propaganda as well. As an example is late Nemtsov's daughter who describes a form of propaganda that resembles more the idea of hate propaganda, as mentioned by Cunningham in the first chapter: "The issue is not just the bad-faith work of some media. The Putin information machine, like the Nazi and Rwanda machines, uses criminal methods of propaganda, sows hatred, which causes violence and terror. The main method is the dehumanization of the group attacked. Russia opposition members are portrayed in Putin's media as "alien" on the analogy of monsters from a warrior with the same name."[114]

The mentions of disinformation by the authors in this section serve to create an average idea of the presence of disinformation in Russia's state-media. As a starting point for a more detailed evaluation of the characteristics of disinformation, the sections below will analyse these elements in more detail and address more academic literature in the process. That way a more coherent image of disinformation in Russia can be supplied.

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[111] J. Lough et al., 'Russian Influence Abroad: Non-state Actors and Propaganda', *Chatham House* (24-10-2014) p. 9. Available at:
https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20141024RussianInfluence Abroad.pdf, last visited: 25-09-2015
[112] Editorial, 'The Guardian view on Russian propaganda', *The Guardian*
[113] L. Alexander, 'Open-Source Information Reveals Pro-Kremlin Web Campaign', *Global Voices* (13-07-2015) Available at: http://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/07/13/open-source-information-reveals-pro-kremlin-web-campaign/, last visited: 25-09-2015
[114] C. Fitzpatrick, 'Nemtsov's Eldest Daughter Goes Abroad, Citing Climate of Hatred', *The Interpreter* (09-06-2015) Available at: http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-update-june-9-2015/, last visited: 25-09-2015

As the rhetoric of the authors above already illustrates the main idea is that disinformation in Russia is deliberate and controlled by the state. There is also an abundance of literature on the Russian media repressions under Putin. As mentioned above, recent legislature is also in line with an on-going crackdown on freedom of media in Russia. Freedom House reported in 2012 that "the state owns, either directly or through proxies, all six national television networks, two national radio networks, two of the 14 national newspapers, more than 6 per cent of the roughly 40.000 local newspapers and periodicals, and two national news agencies."[115] As Arutunyan points out, although she is careful of linking ownership directly to state sanctioned censorship, that the government, as many other media corporations, "dictate to an extent, the content of the media it owns"[116] Direct influence is according to multiple sources applied by the use of direct telephone contact between heads of media organizations and the Kremlin through a "media hotline", created in the mid-2000s which created a "system of direct communication between Kremlin "handlers" and chief editors at state controlled media."[117] This government interference in the media is also verified by former Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration, Sergei Zverev: "political meetings where we discussed the agenda of the coming week and developed proposals on how to cover those topics in the media, primarily television."[118] These arguments would imply that the state is in direct control over the dissemination of disinformation. Applying Doob's verbal compulsions theory would also clearly point to the Kremlin as controller of the media, for "the president and government dominated the news, taking up some 93 per cent of airspace."[119].

There are, however, also other theories on state control in Russia. Robert Orttung and Christopher Walker, for instance, claim that "over the course of the Putin era widespread self-censorship has grown deep roots at news organizations."[120] It is also according to Arutunyan that this self-censorship is one of the stronger mechanisms of control. She quotes a journalist that said he never had experienced government pressure, but the more so from his bosses "who would always try to run in front of the government train."[121] She sees this as a "deeply embedded" legacy from the Soviet Union, where, even though there was an official censor, it was the politically

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[115] R Orttung & C. Walker, 'Putin and Russia's Crippled Media', *Russian Analytical Digest* (2013:123) p. 2
[116] A. Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (New York, 2009) p. 54
[117] S. Shuster, 'Inside Putin's On-Air Machine', *Time* (05-03-2015) Available at: http://time.com/rt-putin/, last visited: 25-09-2015
[118] V. Gatov, 'How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together', *The Moscow Times* (11-03-2015) Available at: http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article.php?id=517323, last visited: 25-09-2015
[119] Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* p. 73
[120] Orttung & Walker, 'Putin and Russia's Crippled Media', p. 2
[121] Arutunyan (2009) p. 137

appointed editor that decided how far a story could go. "Editors sometimes urge reporters to 'sense' what is expected 'from above'", without any clear orders.[122] It is in this sense that the only political control over the media are reprimands after the fact, as a future guideline for "the sense" of reporters.[123]

Elizabeth Schimpfossl and Ilya Yablokov, who have written an article on Russian censorship in the 2010's, go even further to argue that "media governance in contemporary Russia does not need to resort to coercive methods, or the exertion of self-censorship among its staff, to support government views."[124] Actually, they state, it is "quite the contrary: reporters enjoy relatively large leeway to develop their creativity, which is crucial for state-aligned television networks to keep audience ratings up. Those pundits, anchors and reporters who are involved in the direct promotion of Kremlin positions usually have consciously and deliberately chosen to do so."[125] Vasily Gatov also emphasizes this theory: "the primary characteristic of the new censorship is that it motivates so-called "journalists" to not only serve the Kremlin agenda, but to creatively advance it."[126] This self-initiative, however, also can lead to overenthusiastic coverage of events. An example is for instance the crucified child in Ukraine, for which the First Channel eventually had to make a public apology.[127]

However, some sort of coordination should still be present to coordinate reactive disinformation campaigns. This is also stated by a NATO report: " Because of the synchronous execution of messaging on different media channels, it can be assumed that the news reports were prepared by political technologists"[128] This study will argue that it is actually a hybrid control from the top. This means that incentives come from public figures who are tied to the government and regarded influential, but that the actual production of disinformation is up to the editors and reporters to produce on their own initiative. If a medium starts to divert from the Kremlin-line the government has all the power over the media landscape it needs to marginalize or dismantle the medium. This hybrid process will become more clear in the next chapter.

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[122] Arutunyan (2009) p. 77
[123] Ibidem.
[124] E. Schimpfossl & I. Yablokov, 'Coercion or Conformism? Censorship and Self-Censorship among Russian Media Personalities and Reporters in the 2010's', *Demokratizatsiya* (2014:22) p. 295
[125] Ibidem.
[126] Gatov, 'How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together'
[127] Ibidem.
[128] NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, 'Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine', p. 15

QUANTITY

By owning or controlling most of the national media it is easier for the government to sustain the environment wherein disinformation can flow. It would, however, require a quantitative analysis of the Russian media to be able to make a valid argument. Another way in which the aim for quantity can be proven is by the analysis of open source information on websites and twitter-bots. Multiple open source researches have established connections between pro-Kremlin websites that distributed information that was misleading. As for instance the website emaidan.com.ua, which "appears at first glance to be a legitimate information resource for the Ukrainian protest movement. But closer inspection shows it is laced with rising anti-Ukrainian sentiment, as if written by a disillusioned former Maidan supporter."[129]

MESSAGE & EMOTION

As described in the first chapter, the function of the message is more important than its content. This is also described by Weiss and Pomerantsev: "the point of ideas and language are not what they represent, but what function they fulfil. The point of any statement is its effect rather than any notion of truth."[130] Even though, the function of the message should still be analysed. As regards the content of the messages there are several elements that the authors describe: the mixing of facts with opinion, the high degree of entertainment, the use of conspiracy theories, the use of rhetorical fallacies and the use of public agents to shape the messages.

According to Daya Thussu, professor in International Communication and author on a book on the rise of global infotainment "one of the most notable signs of the globalization of infotainment is to be found in the former communist countries."[131] Russia is in this sense no exception. Tina Burrett, Political scientist and specialist on Russian television, explains this by pointing at the need for Russian news executives to entertain their audience for market share: "In order to keep audiences happy in a rapidly expanding and increasingly competitive marketplace, television news in Russia became part of the entertainment industry. … Russian news executives are often more concerned with entertaining the public than serving their informational needs"[132] The monitoring report commissioned by the EU emphasizes a same conclusion: "Presenters and journalists of news programmes … mixed facts with their own opinions and attitudes, including their feelings and

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[129] Alexander, 'Open-Source Information Reveals Pro-Kremlin Web Campaign'
[130] Weiss & Pomerantsev (2014) p. 10
[131] Thussu, *News as Entertainment* p. 76
[132] Burrett (2010) p. 101

position on a subject or topic or often gave their own assessment of facts and events."[133] Burrett, however, also mentions another possible reason for the significant presence of the Russian infotainment culture. She states that "some commentators suggest that more sinister motives lie behind the development of an infotainment culture in Russian news. … owing to the political expediency of Russia's power holders … entertainment news is used to *numb* its hapless recipients and render them oblivious to the insufferable drudgery of their dreary, crime-infested, corruption-laden and, in general, rather doomed lives … using low-calorie news to distract public attention from government failures and misdemeanours."[134]

On the matter of word use, an analysis of the buzzwords used by Dimitry Kiselev in his weekly news show *Vesti Nedeli* shows a pattern of buzzwords that create an immediate response in internet searches. They are often emotionally laden words that resonate WWII or anti-Americanism, like 'fascists' or 'Russophobes'.[135] These words resemble the omnibus words and virtue words described by Lee. Other representative examples of the use of words and emotive language can be found in the foreign publications that get translated for inoSMI, an abbreviation for foreign press: "two types of articles dominated: on the one hand, texts –high on adjectives, historical analogies, and sweeping simplifications- that criticized Putin and Russia; on the other, texts that exculpated Russia."[136]

It is not only the selective reusing of foreign articles, thereby also adding to the quantity of narratives, adding negligible criticism as disinformation to the scene, it is also selective in translating: "emotive language is generally ratcheted up, e.g. "disastrous" became "fatal", while sensitive details are toned down, e.g. "the shooting down of" flight MH17 became "the fall of flight MH17."[137]

The use of testimonial is widely described by several authors. As Schimpfossl described: "those pundits, anchors and reporters who are involved in the direct promotion of Kremlin positions usually have consciously and deliberately chosen to do so. The more famous they are, the more partake in the production of political discourses."[138] Not only do they deliberately participate, they actively form the news too, according to Yablokov. He states that Kiselev's show "can have a

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[133] EaP Civil Society Forum et al., 'Messages of Russian TV: Monitoring Report 2015' p. 60
[134] Burrett (2010) p. 102
[135] C. Cottiero et al., 'War of Words: The Impact of Russian State Television on the Russian Internet', *Nationalities Papers* (2015) p. 12
[136] R. Fredheim, 'Filtering Foreign Media Content: How Russian News Agencies Repurpose Western News Reporting', in: *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society: Russian Media and the War in Ukraine* (2015:1) p. 81
[137] Ibidem, p. 53
[138] Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 'Coercion or Conformism?', p. 295

powerful impact on the way that other Russian media outlets cover important stories."[139] It is in this same sense that the monitoring report has described that these public agents "behaved as if they were the experts, presenting their own opinion as facts."[140] They also observed that many of the people invited to the shows were the same people that promoted the official line of the Kremlin.[141]

The use of conspiracy theories in Russia is extensively described by multiple scholars, among others Marlene Laruelle, expert on Russia, and professor Russian politics Richard Sakwa but also novelist Viktor Pelevin. Pelevin argues that in early 20th century Russia "the overarching atmosphere was one of conspiracies, or rather, of multiple conspiracies that had somehow penetrated every corner of the cultural imaginary."[142] This development is also described by Laruelle: "since the liberalizing of speech and privatization of the Russian publishing market, books devoted to conspiracy theories against Russia, secrets of world history, or undisclosed negotiations between major world leaders, from Alexander the Great and Napoleon to Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, have become legion." Goble links this to the idea that this is actually part of an organized attempt: "the main thing the fanatics want is to divert the attention of the population away from its real problems to a mythologized enemy. And that tendency is reinforced by the inclination of Russians to believe in conspiracies as the explanation for everything."[143] The presence of conspiracy theories on the main news broadcasts as a reactive form of disinformation are described by political scientist Elizaveta Gaufman in an article on the Russian media in the framing of the Ukraine crisis: "Conspiracy theories reached their apogee after the downing of Malaysian airlines flight MH17… [First Channel] reported that the Ukrainian military may have "confused" the Malaysian plain with Putin's presidential plane … it is surprising how persistently it was reported on [First Channel] and Rossiya 1."[144]

FALSITY

Weiss and Pomerantsev argue that falsities are common in Russian media. Like lies spread by television hosts: "False assurances are common, especially in the shows of Dmitry Kiselyov"[145]

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[139] Ibidem.

[140] EaP Civil Society Forum et al. (2015) p. 8

[141] Ibidem.

[142] Quoted in R. Sakwa, 'Conspiracy Narratives as a Mode of Engagement in International Politics: The Case of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War', *The Russian Review* (2012:71) p. 588

[143] Goble, 'Hot Issue – Lies, Damned Lies and Russian Disinformation'

[144] E. Gaufman, 'Memory, Media, and Securitization: Russian Media Framing of the Ukrainian Crisis', in: *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society: Russian Media and the War in Ukraine* (2015:1) p. 163

[145] Weiss & Pomerantsev (2014) p. 11

However, they also point at another development: "The underlying mind-set of the kremlin's political technologists exploits the idea that "truth" is a lost cause and that reality is essentially malleable, and the instant, easy proliferation of fakes and copies on the internet makes it the ideal forum to spread such ideas."[146] The idea is that it is easier to produce new lies to distract from a debunked story: "while it is true that people might not like being lied to, neither do the producers of the falsehoods mind having their myths busted."[147]

The monitoring report also mentions the use of lies, however, as part of large diversity of manipulative messages: "manipulative use of images and sound, pseudo-diversity of opinions, mixing comments and opinions, appeals to fear, scapegoating, demonizing the enemy, lack of transparency and credibility of sources, selective coverage, omission of information, manipulative search for sympathizers, labelling and stereotyping, vagueness, repetition and exaggeration, inaccurate reporting and lies etc."[148]

CONCLUSION

Even though disinformation is often mentioned in popular literature on Russia, it is often not completely clear what the authors mean by disinformation. In several ways the secondary literature provides an idea of disinformation present in Russia. The literature largely confirms the presence of the characteristics of disinformation as established in the previous chapter. It is however not an overwhelming proof, for the description at times do not completely correspond. The characteristics that are mentioned include: mixture of fact and fiction, conspiracy theories, abandoning the idea of truth, to create as many competing narratives as possible, and coverage on MH17 and the murder of Nemtsov as disinformation campaigns.

It is because of the difference between mentions of these campaigns that create an overload of competing narratives, and the overall development of an entertainment culture that eliminates the notion of 'truth', that this study will divide between reactive and pro-active disinformation. In effect they are the same, but just as mentioned in the previous chapter, in concept they can vary.

The Kremlin is by some authors identified as the main propagandist that controls the stream of disinformation, while other authors emphasize the well-willingness of the press to initiate disinformation by themselves. For now it will be regarded as a hybrid, for this is an element for further analysis in the next chapter. What certainly can be stated, however, is that the Kremlin has a great potential influence on the media landscape.

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[146] Ibidem, p. 17
[147] Ibidem, p. 39
[148] EaP Civil Society Forum et al. (2015) p. 5

According to the authors, falsity is largely common in the Russian media, and especially present in the shows of Dimity Kiselev.

Unfortunately this study has not been able to integrate a quantitative analysis for establishing more insight on the quantity of disinformation in Russia.

CHAPTER III CASE STUDY: DISINFORMATION AND THE MURDER OF BORIS NEMTSOV

As in the chapter above has been described how other authors place disinformation within the Russian state-media, this chapter will analyse a case study as to show in more detail how disinformation is applied by using primary sources. It will therefore focus on the coverage in the Russian state-media of the murder of politician Boris Nemtsov. His death was followed by an intensive media campaign. The time and place of the murder made it a sensitive issue for the Kremlin, since his tragic death came unexpected and had happened just some meters away from the Kremlin walls and just a little over a day before planned anti-government protests. Before getting into the analysis some background on the murder and course of events is needed, as well as a framework for the analysis: timeframe, media consulted and method of analysis.

Nemtsov was hit by multiple shots in his back in the night of February 27. He was walking home with a female companion, a Ukrainian model named Anna Duritskaya, whom he just had dinner with in the city centre. While walking home over the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky bridge shots were fired from a car. Nemtsov died instantly while his companion remained unharmed. These facts were about the only public information available the first day after the tragedy. This analysis will focus on this first day, February the 28th, with the start of reporting on the event from about 00:40 Moscow time. The media consulted for this analysis are a broad range of popular (textual) news media and the messages from television shows and broadcasts, mainly focussing on the three most popular channels as mentioned in chapter two: First Channel, Rossiya 1, and NTV. The most used textual sources are press agencies Interfax, RIA Novosti, and ITAR-TASS, not only because they extensively publish on the matter, also because they serve as a supplier of news messages for other media. In the section on quantity more sources will be mentioned as also to show that the chosen media are representative for a large part of the Russian state-media. Even though the examples presented are only small parts of the information flow, they represent the overall coverage in the Russian state media.[149]

To establish and justify a framework for analysis is rather difficult. There is no place here for a large quantitative analysis of news messages. Rather than evaluating on the level of the messages itself, as the chapters above have shown that effect and function are named to be more important, it is better to look at the overall commonalities in the messages. Even though that sounds paradoxically for disinformation should actually distract through a multifariousness of messages, it is the official rhetoric that will show to be the starting point for the process. This official rhetoric

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[149] See for instance the composition of the turn of events published by TASS: http://tass.ru/proisshestviya/1798132, or the recap by First Channel: 1tv.ru/news/print/278760

therefore dominates in the coverage of the event and largely adheres to the characteristics that are described in the previous chapters and thus are conducive for the development of disinformation.

3.1 THE ELEMENTS FOR ANALYSIS

Having established the theoretical and secondary described characteristics in the previous chapters, this section will follow up on this analysis by evaluating the primary sources against the framework of the variables intent, control, quantity, message, emotion, and falsity. Even though, messaging has been defined as not the most important, it will serve as an identifier for the other criteria in this section. As this section will show there are some words that are deliberately distributed through official channels that will give form to the coverage in a large amount of the media.[150] These 'buzzwords' show rather similar characteristics as mentioned in the criteria for language that is instrumental for disinformation. This section will introduce these elements for analysis in a general chronological order.

An hour after the first messages of the murder appeared in the news, the first buzzword was rather careful introduced by the president who stated, through his spokesman Dimirty Peskov, that "it has the characteristics of a hit and looks like a provocation (*provokatsiya*) ."[151] After which he emphasized the coincidence that it happened just a day before the planned protest march, as if the 'provocation' would serve the opposition. This message is spread by practically all state-news media as it is the authority of the president that has made this statement.[152] It is this buzzword *provocation* (*provokatsiya*) that subsequently starts to resonate through the coverage. Three hours later, without any new evidence, Peskov is again quoted in the media, now speaking on his own behalf, saying that "It is too early to draw any conclusions about the death of Boris Nemtsov, but with absolute (*stoprotsentnoy*) certainty we can say that this is a provocation (*provokatsiya).*"[153] Around this same time aslo show up other testimonials that claim the murder is a provocation. For instance a group of 'political scientists', expressed through their director Pavel Danilin, that claim that "the murder of

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[150] See also Shuster for this observation, available at: http://time.com/3727379/putin-boris-nemtsov-kremlin-provocation/

[151] Interfax, 'Putin Zayavil o provokatsionnom kharaktere ubiystva Nemtsova' (28-02-2015, 01:50) Available at: http://www.interfax.ru/russia/427018, last visited: 25-09-2015

[152] See for instance RIA Novosti: http://ria.ru/incidents/20150228/1050111094.html, last visited 25-09-2015

[153] Interfax, 'Peskov nazval ubiystvo Nemtsova "stoprotsentnoy" provokatsiey', (28-02-2015, 04:16) Available at: http://www.interfax.ru/russia/427052, last visited: 25-09-2015

Boris Nemtsov [is] a provocation (*provokatsiya)* aimed against the government."[154] It is in this same message that they also mention a new buzzword that has slipped into the stream of messages: destabilization (*destbilizaciya*).

Danilin states that "without a doubt, this rude provocation is aimed at *destabilizing* (*destabilizirovat*) the country."[155] Provocation and destabilization thereafter practically become one, the act and the goal of an obscure imagined enemy of Russia. Other public figures spread the idea of destabilization further, one of them former president of the Soviet Union Michail Gorbachev, who claims that the murder is "committed with the aim of *destabilizing* the situation in Russia."[156] Another statement is from the former head of the Interior Ministry and the FSB, Sergey Stepashin: "I think the murder of Boris Nemtsov did not attempt to opposition, and Putin's enemies, to *destabilize* the country."[157] This sequence of testimonials spreading the Kremlin's buzzwords all started with Peskov's initial statement. This is also observed by Time reporter Simon Shuster: "Putin's spokesman set the tone ... his implication was clear: the Nemtsov shooting was staged by Russia's enemies, not to silence the victim but to discredit the regime he opposed."[158]

Eventually, these buzzwords get 'standardized' through the press releases of the Investigative Committee. Combined with ill-founded theories about potential motives for the murder *provocation* and *destabilization* become one of the 'versions' that the Investigative Committee follows upon. It is in the person of Vladimir Markin, head of the Investigative Committee that new guidelines for the media are presented: "The investigation is considering several versions of the murder: a *provocation* to *destabilize* the political situation in the country; ...a version associated with the Islamic extremist connection ... a version associated with the internal events in Ukraine. [And] versions related to Nemtsov's commercial activities and personal problems."[159] This framework of discussion, or rather the boundaries for discussion, eventually are explicitly ratified by Markin, serving as arbitrator for media coverage, warning about media that provide "unverified information" whisch he paradoxically calls *disinformation*: ""I would like to ask [the public] to take a

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[154] Tass, 'Politologi schitayut ubiystvo Nemtsova politicheskoy provokatsiey' (28-02-2015, 4:16) Available at: http://tass.ru/politika/1798244, last visited: 25-09-2015
[155] Ibidem.
[156] Interfax, 'Gorbachev schel ubiystvo Nemtsova popytkoy destabilizirobat situatsiyu v Rossii' (28-02-2015, 09:21) Available at: http://www.interfax.ru/russia/427060, last visited: 25-09-2015
[157] Interfax, 'Stepashin nazval ybiystvo Nemtsova popytkoy destabilizirovat situatsiyu v strane' (28-02-2015, 10:10) Available at: http://www.interfax.ru/russia/427066, last visited: 25-09-2015
[158] Shuster, 'Inside Putin's On-Air Machine'
[159] Ria Novosti, 'Ubiystvo Nemtsova: SK otrabatyvaet I politicheskie, I bytovye versii' (28-02-2015, 13:27) Available at: http://ria.ru/incidents/20150228/1050162166.html, last visited: 25-09-2015

more accurate and balanced attitude towards such sources because they tend to be *disinformation* and often *blatant provocation*."[160]

The official versions of the Investigative Committee also serve as the boundaries for discussion in the two main talk shows that evening on the main national TV channels: Vremya pokazhet and Spisok Norkina. The question that the hosts and the guests constantly keep repeating is: who benefits from this murder? (*komu vygodno*)[161]

The most radical coverage is combining all these accusations in stating that the murder was a "sacred sacrifice" (*sakralnoe zhertvo*). These sacred sacrifices are in these articles presented as necessary blood sacrifices to start color revolutions. An article in the Komsomolskaya Pravda for instance warns for this process: "Expert on the murder of Nemtsov: The sacred sacrifice has come!"[162] The more aggressive accusations, however, follow in the days after the mourning march.[163]

What all these efforts combined have in common is that the divert attention away from the Kremlin and politicizing. Omitting other possible explanations of the event creates a controlled environment wherein a phony discussion can be fully exploited. In contrast to the state-media, the independent media did cover all possibilities. In this way RBK for instance, did provide reflection on the media campaign by the state-media: "The authorities want to remove the tension and cleanse itself of suspicion, said president of the Centre for Political Technologies Igor Bunin."[164] Even though this could be regarded as just a same testimonial as the ones above, the argument of this type that this 'political technologist' shares can nowhere be found on national state-media. Igor Bunin states eventually what he thinks this media campaign described above is all about: "With regard to the allegations of the Kiev connection and sacred sacrifices, they only say that because the Investigative Committee has no facts and they are looking for some simple and effective words."[165]

INTENT & CONTROL

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[160] TASS, 'Rassledovanie ubiystva Borisa Nemtsova. Khronika sobytiy' (28-02-2015, 16:37) Available at: http://tass.ru/proisshestviya/1798132, last visited: 25-09-2015

[161] The talk shows can be found here: Spisok Norkina (28-02-2015): http://www.ntv.ru/video/1073460/ , and Vremya pokazhet (28-02-2015): http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_edition/si=5962&d=28.02.2015

[162] Komsomolskaya Pravda, 'Ekspert ob ubiystve Nemtsova: Sakralnaya zhertva prinesena!' (28-02-2015, 13:44) Available at: http://www.kp.ru/daily/26348.7/3230469/, last visited: 25-09-2015

[163] See for instance: http://www.ntv.ru/video/1074520/, last visited: 25-09-2015

[164] RBK, 'Usluga ili provokatsiya: kak vo vlastnykh krugakh kommentiruyut gibel Nemtsova' (28-02-2015, 15:44) Available at: http://top.rbc.ru/politics/28/02/2015/54f1aafd9a7947266747b317, last visited: 25-09-2015

[165] Ibidem.

As shown above, it is clear that official buzzwords set the tone for the coverage in the first day after the murder. The Kremlin had motives to divert attention away from suspected government involvement or the humiliation of a high profile murder right next to the Kremlin walls. The first buzzword, at the very start of news coverage, was in the name of the highest authority, President Putin. It then shifted towards Dimity Peskov and finally came under authority of the Investigative Committee. These are the persons that in this case have spoken with authority, as Doob pointed out in the first chapter as a way of identifying *verbal compulsions*; the deliberate propagandist is the person who speaks frequently and with authority. This incentive should then clearly be at the authorities. The clear hints that should be "sensed" by reporters, as was mentioned in the second chapter, seemed to control the media coverage. The most exemplary being the statement by Vladimir Markin to adhere to the official *versions* of the Investigative Committee. This way it seems like the disinformation campaign was a deliberate attempt to control the media coverage, however, it did not have to rely on pressure, but on a loyal press that can interpret public hidden messages.

The discussions within talk shows are strictly controlled by the hosts, as becomes clear in the broadcast of *Vremya Pokazhet* on the First Channel. Even though it is set up as a public discussion with a dozen commentators, the talk show host strictly decides who gets airtime. The person that has the most moderate opinion is physically denied the microphone after he pointed out that the media should not incite hatred.[166] These types of control, the versions as well as the airtime granted by the host, imply that disinformation in this sense is not just an unlimited overload of messages, but an overload of messages within an approved framework.

QUANTITY

The quantity of messages covering the murder of Nemtsov was overwhelming. However, that should be seen as a sincerely normal reaction to the murder of a well-known politician. The quantity of messages that used the words that were instigated by the Kremlin made up between ten and forty per cent of the coverage.[167] Striking is also the omnipresence of the buzzwords in practically all state-media.[168] Important, however, in this sense is that there was no attempt at suppressing the coverage of the event.

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[166] See http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_edition/si=5962&d=28.02.2015
[167] The result of combining the keywords 'nemtsov' and 'provokatsiya', set out against the total number of articles about Nemtsov on the websites of RIA Novosti, ITAR-TASS, and Interfax. More extensive quantitative analysis could prove to be insightful.
[168] S. Shuster, 'Why the Kremlin is Blaming Putin Critic's Murder on a 'Provocation'', *Time* (28-02-2015) Available at: http://time.com/3727379/putin-boris-nemtsov-kremlin-provocation/, last visited: 25-09-2015

As mentioned in the previous chapters, deliberate quantity can also be traced through open source analysis of digital media and social media. It is in this sense that independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta has shown that right after the murder the Kremlin trolls all switched from their usual subjects to trolling articles on Boris Nemtsov: "When Nemtsov was killed Kremlin bots changed work: they stopped criticizing Ukraine and transferred to the murder. If you follow the news, you could see that under the hundreds of articles on the murder of Nemtsov where thousands of comments in which different words were repeated: this murder is a provocation, the Kremlin is not to blame, he was killed by the opposition to attract more people to the march." [169] This is also proven by Lawrence Alexander, a Social Sciences student who analysed a network of twitter accounts that tweeted the same sentence about Nemtsov "Ukrainians killed him...he was stealing one of their girlfriends", just hours after the murder. In this analysis he found out that there were 2900 bots spreading this same message. [170]

MESSAGE & EMOTION

First of all, the buzzwords introduced by state officials are similar to the omnibus words that have been described in the first chapter. They are deliberately vague and create a strong emotional reaction. *Provoktsiya* has in Russia more emotional charge then the English provocation. According to Shuster, the term translated into English "does not begin to capture its ability in Russian to shift blame and manipulate suspicion."[171]

It is also this vagueness that in turn stimulates the creation of conspiracy theories. The phrase 'who benefits?' is in the same sense an impetus for the creation of all sorts of theories, or *versions,* and thus in turn creating more disinformation. An example of such continuously creating of conspiracy theories is for instance also to find in the TASS interview with Danilin, who is convinced that the murder has been planned long before by the Ukrainian secret services, and that the crime scene so close to the Kremlin was planned just as the killing of Anna Politkovskaya on Putin's birthday.[172] Interestingly these types of wild, unsubstantiated arguments are not met with any scepticism by the press agency.

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[169] D. Khachatryan, 'Kak stat trollxanterom', *Novaya Gazeta* (11-03-2015) Available at: http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/67574.html, last visited: 25-09-2015

[170] L. Alexander, 'Social Network Analysis Reveals Full Scale of Kremlin's Twitter Bot Campaign', *Global Voices* (02-04-2015) Available at: http://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/04/02/analyzing-kremlin-twitter-bots/comment-page-3/, last visited: 25-09-2015

[171] Shuster, 'Why the Kremlin is Blaming Putin Critic's Murder on a 'Provocation''

[172] Tass, 'Politologi schitayut ubiystvo Nemtsova politicheskoy provokatsiey'

As was became also clear from the section above was the use of testimonial as a constant confirmation and further spread of the buzzwords, creating a diverse coverage within the desired framework. Political scientists, duma speakers, former politicians, and many other types of public figures support the initial storyline by Peskov and continue themselves to create more disinformation. The origin of the testimonials also shows how there is no distinction in political affiliations in supporting the disinformation campaign, for the communists participate even more radically. The first deputy chairman of the CPRF Central Committee and first vice-speaker of the State Duma Ivan Melnikov states in a TASS interview that, "if you look at it from a political perspective … that it is a same bloody provocation , organized for the same reasons as shooting down of [MH17]."[173] These testimonials do have another advantage for serving to create more overload of messages, as they practically all state the same only just in other words. This creates more messages without adding new information while at the same time overloading the audience.

In talk shows it also becomes clear that it is not just the same discussion that perpetuates within the small framework, but even more so that is the same emotional trigger that is repeated: fear.[174] This is at the same time combined with righteous speech on the need for finding the killers and bringing justice.[175]

FALSITY

The use of testimonial and emotional omnibus words indicate that lying is not a necessity. The creation of false associations and referring to statements by other public figures divert away from questions about truth. Instead the emotional falsity is exploited, creating false emotional relations. On the other hand, in order to support various conspiracy theories, sometimes falsehoods are created to form a story, like for instance the manipulation of aerial photography.[176] As the case study of Nemtsov however showed, there is no real use of blatant lies to support the different theories. Instead, suggestive arguments and supplying a framework for exposing emotional opinions creates enough distraction.

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[173] TASS, 'Rassledovanie ubiystva Borisa Nemtsova. Khronika sobytiy'
[174] See for instance Vremya pokazhet (28-02-2015) Available at: http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_edition/si=5962&d=28.02.2015, last visited: 25-09-2015
[175] See for instance TASS, 'Putin: budet Delano vse, chtoby organizatory I ispolniteli ubiystva Nemtsova byli nakazany' (28-02-2015, 1600) Available at: http://tass.ru/politika/1798913, last visited: 25-09-2015
[176] M. Tucker, 'Meet Eliot Higgins, Putin's MH17 Nemesis', *Newsweek* (22-06-2015) Available at: http://www.newsweek.com/meet-eliot-higgins-putins-mh17-nemesis-345485, last visited: 25-09-2015

CONCLUSION

In three stages this study has shed some first academic light on the presence of disinformation in the Russian media. By first setting the framework for analysis, through analysing the limited academic descriptions of disinformation, the characteristics of disinformation have been described in detail. In the second chapter secondary sources that mention the presence and techniques of Russian propaganda and disinformation have been compared with the characteristics from the framework. And third a case study focussing on the coverage of the murder of Nemtsov in the Russian state-media has led to new insights on the presence of disinformation in Russia.

By using the information from the previous chapters, and separating the analysis along the lines of the characteristics intent, control, quantity, message, emotion and falsity, this study can now answer the research question: How is disinformation applied in the coverage of the murder of Boris Nemtsov in the Russian state-media?

Concerning the matter of intent and control, the disinformation surrounding the murder of Nemtsov can be divided in three stages of influence. Even though control is exerted on the media as a whole to behave to the kremlin standards, this analysis has shown that only the first incentive of disinformation comes from the authorities and this control is not exerted directly, but through keywords and the setting the boundaries for the discussion. The second step is for public figures to repeat and further develop stories within the framework to create substance for disinformation. The third stage is for the reporters to fill up the coverage by self-initiating stories that will further develop the quantity of messages and the range of conspiracy theories within the framework.

The framework is carefully guided by the authorities and therefore disinformation is not exactly the same as an information overload, as is it only overload within the boundaries. As the coverage of the murder of Nemtsov has shown, there is no direct need for lies to create stories. Testimonials by public figures provide the state-media with a function as a supplier of a framework for interpretation, making the media less vulnerable for criticism.

The buzzwords used in the disinformation, like *provokatsiya* and *destabilizatsiya*, are vague, suggestive, and highly emotional and therefore create all sorts of negative associations of fear and guilt. They are moreover created out of nowhere by public figures all making the same point, saying practically the same, varying between different conspiracy theories.

However, this disinformation described surrounding the murder of Nemtsov should be considered reactive disinformation, which is different from all year round around proactive disinformation. The latter has more in common with infotainment and palaver. Most interestingly,

the authorities can apparently switch to a reactive disinformation campaign within a matter of hours.

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