

IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	Glasgow 2678791 Trento 233470 Charles 31862928
Dissertation Title	Russia's information aggression before and during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine

<p>Word Count Penalty (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)</p> <p>Word Count: 22,000 Suggested Penalty: no penalty</p>		

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark. C2 [13]

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
A. Structure and Development of Answer	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Good
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Weak
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Good
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Good
B. Use of Source Material	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Very Good
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Good
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Good
C. Academic Style	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Very Good
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Excellent
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Excellent
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Yes

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- *Appropriate word count*

Yes

ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This thesis explores the evolution of information warfare in Russia's security doctrine and its adaptation of the digital, information ecosystem in the lead-up to the war against Ukraine. Essentially, it investigates how Russia employs disinformation for military and strategic purposes (Chapters 1 & 2), as well as how NATO and the EU (may) respond to disinformation (Chapter 3). The topic is relevant to the aims of the IMSIS programme and original (even though after the Russo-Ukrainian war we have seen a proliferation of scholarly analyses investigating its causes, consequences and dynamics). The thesis builds upon scholarly debates in International Relations (IR) and media studies that engage with the wider theme of post-truth politics, as well as the role of new technologies and digital media that transform disinformation operations and play a crucial role in the "hybridisation" of contemporary warfare. Especially in the literature review chapter, the student demonstrates that he is able to navigate these debates and understand their theoretical premises. Through the empirical material and discussion presented in the analytical chapters, the student attempts to make a contribution to these debates, which revolves around the role of disinformation in war with a particular focus on the case of Russia.

Notwithstanding these qualities, I want to raise three points of critique that the student may want to take into consideration in future research:

(1) The two central research questions are presented on page 7. However, these could be better formulated, ideally with the addition of actual question mark. For clarity purposes, it would be also good to unpack the central research questions into a series of subquestions to be investigated in the different chapters.

(2) While the research questions do appear in the thesis, what I really missed is a discussion on the methodology employed by the student to find and analyse the empirical material. There is no need to have a separate methodological chapter. But at least some discussion on methodology should appear in the introduction. At some points in the thesis the student argues that he explores Russian disinformation from a "discourse-related viewpoint", without however unpacking what this exactly involves. Did you employ discourse analysis? If so, how exactly? The student also discusses some interview material. It would be good to clarify how interviews were conducted, how reflexivity was guaranteed, how transcripts were analysed etc.

(3) Finally, I think that the student could do a better job in connecting the literature review/conceptual chapter with the empirical ones, which at some points appear quite descriptive.

Reviewer 2

This dissertation, focusing on the Russo-Ukrainian war and the role of disinformation, unfortunately falls short of expectations in several key areas. The most glaring issue is the lack of an explicitly stated research question. This fundamental omission leaves the reader without a clear understanding of the dissertation's purpose and direction. Similarly, the absence of clearly stated objectives further muddies the waters, making it difficult to discern the author's intent.

The dissertation also fails to provide a broader rationale for the research. Without this, the reader

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is left questioning the relevance and importance of the work. The literature review, which could have provided some context and justification for the research, is disappointingly unfocused and lacks organization. The author does not explicitly state any gaps in the literature and fails to focus on how others have answered the research question.

Moreover, the dissertation relies heavily on the output of anti-disinformation think tanks, which often provide a shallow and ideologically skewed perspective. The author's uncritical acceptance of these sources, and their failure to engage with top scholarly sources, undermines the credibility of the work. Particularly concerning is the author's acceptance of the myth of the Gerasimov doctrine, a concept that has been widely debunked by 2023.

The lack of analytical rigor is another significant shortcoming of this dissertation. The author does not explicitly state a methodology section, and the empirical chapters often present a random sample of 'Russian disinformation', some of which are not even disinformation. This lack of methodological clarity and analytical depth further undermines the dissertation's credibility.

In conclusion, this dissertation fails to deliver a comprehensive, insightful analysis of its chosen topic. The absence of a clear research question, specific objectives, and a broader rationale for the research, coupled with an unfocused literature review and lack of analytical rigor, make this a disappointing work that does not meet the standards one would expect for a dissertation.