CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of International Studies

Department of Russian and East European Studies

Dissertation Thesis

2024   **Mgr. Tomáš Mareš**

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The Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Offensive Foreign Policy Strategies

Dissertation Thesis

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Abstract

The dissertation thesis focuses on the issue of the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies. Despite an increased interest in both the offensive potential of mass media assets as well as particular strategies enabling to employ these assets to assertively decide political and military conflicts in the course of the last two decades, there is still a crucial lack of understanding of how the effectiveness of these strategic approaches is produced or could be appraised. Therefore, this dissertation thesis aims to construct a comprehensive definition of effectiveness in the given context and use it to generate a new and unparalleled analytical model that can be applied to proceed with a qualitative assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns led on the information-psychological level. Such a kind of tool (or similar) is still desperately missing. In the last step, a purposefully selected case study framework – Russian mass media in Ukraine in 2013 (but referencing to both: the period of building up the Russian media network starting from the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin and its utilization during the latent and escalation phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict between 2013 and 2014) – is employed to test how the inferred analytical model works in practice and to verify what results we can get when applying it in the conditions of a real contemporary international environment. As such, this dissertation thesis pushes forward our theoretical knowledge (by creating an innovative definition concerning the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven offensive foreign policy strategies) but also enhances our methodological reasoning and contributes to the level of practical analytical work (by using the created theoretical background to generate a general analytical framework that is still desperately missing). In this manner, the thesis fits and extends our knowledge in the specific category of academic literature focusing on the importance of mass media and transborder information messaging in contemporary international relations, strategic, and security studies.

Abstrakt

Disertační práce se zaměřuje na zkoumání problému efektivity instrumentalizace masmédií na informačně-psychologické úrovni v rámci ofenzivních zahraničněpolitických strategií. Navzdory zvýšenému zájmu nejen o ofenzivní potenciál masmédií, ale i o konkrétní strategie umožňující využití těchto prostředků k asertivnímu rozhodování politických a vojenských konfliktů v průběhu posledních dvou desetiletí, se stále potýkáme s nedostatečným porozuměním toho, jakým způsobem dochází ke generování efektivity potřebné k úspěšnému použití masmédií v rámci takovýchto strategických přístupů. Z uvedeného důvodu si disertační práce klade za cíl zkonstruovat komplexní definici 'efektivity' v daném kontextu a její použití k sestavení nového jedinečného analytického modelu, který bude možné aplikovat ke kvalitativnímu posuzování „potenciálu efektivity" (reálných či budoucích) útočných zahraničních masmediálních kampaní vedených v informačně-psychologické rovině. Podobný nástroj stále zoufale postrádáme. Fungování vzniklého analytického modelu v praxi je pak testováno v rámci zvolené případové studie – Ruská média na Ukrajině před vypuknutím konfliktu v roce 2014 (s ohledem na budování ruské mediální sítě od prvního prezidentského období Vladimira Putina a na využívání této sítě v průběhu latentní a eskalační fáze rusko-ukrajinského konfliktu mezi lety 2013 a 2014). Disertační práce posouvá teoretické znalosti v oblasti ofenzivních zahraničněpolitických strategiích, a to zejména vytvořením inovativní definice týkající se efektivity instrumentalizace masmédií. Dále, práce posouvá naše metodologické uvažování a na úrovni praktické analýzy významně přispívá tím, že vytváří nový analytický rámec, který přináší možnost posuzovat ofenzivní kapacity států v oblasti masmédií a prognózovat rizika v této oblasti. Disertační práce tak zapadá a rozšiřuje znalosti ve specifické kategorii akademické literatury zaměřené na význam hromadných sdělovacích prostředků a přeshraničního toku informací v současných mezinárodních vztazích, strategických a bezpečnostních studiích.

Keywords

Klíčová slova

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree with my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on February 06, 2024   Tomáš Mareš

Acknowledgment

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Introduction

The importance of mass media and media-based information manipulation in political and military conflicts has significantly increased during the past two decades, mainly as a consequence of the Russian efforts to develop innovative ways of mass media instrumentalization in (its) foreign policy strategies that have become particularly evident from the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin (since 2000). At that time, mass media assets have become an autonomous tool of statecraft, foreign policy-making, and even conflict resolution. (Brunetti-Lihach, 2018; Mölder & Shiraev, 2021) Constant progress in the evolution of sophisticated media technologies[1] along with the enhancing reach of media networks across numerous states, geopolitical regions, or continents transform the nature of the contemporary international environment and create conditions that enable the waging of malign information campaigns interfering with domestic political affairs of sovereign state entities all around the world. (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2010) In the reality of the contemporary global communication system entwined by ramified trans-border media networks of all kinds, the weaponization of information (utilizing the intentional diffusion of info-content bearing biased political messaging) represents one of the most severe threats to national security that, in some regions, is much more imminent than the inception of conventional inter-state military conflicts. (Bennett, 2004; Boyd-Barrett, 1998) In such a context, hybrid warfare proponents put the main emphasis on the means of non-military confrontation, while the role of mass media and information manipulation is getting more and more considerable position in this concept. And it is not by chance that this strategic approach becomes increasingly popular. (Bērziņš, 2019; Blank, 2013, 2014) Inevitably, the security environment has been progressively endangered by hostile cross-border information streaming that aggressively strikes the cohesiveness of societies within independent states and thus contests their internal political sovereignty. As such, mass media has become a new kind of threat – a tool that is, in the current conditions, powerful enough to sway public discourse, limit the sources of internal sovereignty, and inflict a bottom-up disintegration in the target states. (Waltzman, 2017)

The ability to erode decision-making processes and revise political actions taken by official authorities in particular countries through influencing the thinking and doing of their citizens can provide those who engage in such strategies with a decisive

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[1] *Starting from the digitalization of TV broadcasts up to the engagement of artificial intelligence allowing of generating and spreading desired narratives or comments on the Internet, especially within social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, VKontakte, etc.*

advantage. State entities that do not hesitate to build and employ tools of trans-border information-based psychological manipulation can become powerful enough to achieve a wide spectrum of foreign policy goals or change the dynamics of political conflicts in their favor at a relatively low cost (compared to military confrontation). (Chkopoia, 2021) The advanced distribution of cross-border or transnational media networks, often subjected to overt or covert state control, allowed for a new era of virtual confrontation embracing the principles of offensively tunned soft power that can easily turn into information warfare. These sorts of inter-state confrontations encompass assorted forms of aggression that are engraved in the diffusion of belligerent interpretations regarding various competing ideational, value, cultural, or identity patterns. (Bolin et al., 2016; Klyueva, 2017; Mattern, 2005; Miskimmon et al., 2013) They can contain purposefully manufactured disinformation, conspiracy theories, grievances stemming from unsubstantiated accusations, or direct information-based attacks hitting the weakest spots or the most sensitive (and often dividing) issues existing within target states' societies. (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2017; Hofmeisterová et al., 2018; Mankoff, 2020; Mareš, 2021) Thus, the states that are able to take control over contemporary information technologies with significant cross-border reach or build transnational media networks can use the power of information in their favor and utilize the instigation of (in)security dilemmas as tools of a new kind of permanent or civilizational conflict.[2] (Shiraev & Mölder, 2020) Traditional military confrontation has given way to a seemingly unlimited amount of hybrid warfare variations combining different military and non-military instruments, with diverse forms of information manipulation in the first place, in unique offensive blends (see Literature Review for more details on information utilization in hybrid warfare approaches). (Thomas, 2016) Concerning these formative trends changing the nature of international as well as national security, this dissertation thesis concentrates on the issues related to the instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies. This area of concern revolves around the power of information and deals with approaches, in which states can employ

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[2] *On that account, some states (e.g. Russia, China, Iran) still make concentrated efforts to use various transborder communication channels (including all sorts of mass media) to spread public narratives feeding cultural and identity differences existing among various world areas, regions, countries, nations, or ethnicities thus arousing international/interethnic animosity, grievances, hatred, and struggle in the manner that is reminiscent of what Samuel Huntington describes in his work Clash of Civilizations. (Huntington, 1996; Liu, 2019; Rawnsley, 2015; Wastnidge, 2015)*

mass media assets to influence public opinion abroad and achieve their goals against the will of the political elites of the states so affected.

Despite the fact Russia's hybrid activities against Ukraine started almost after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Russia started to worry about losing Ukraine from its sphere of influence, especially during the Orange Revolution 2004 – 2005), the above-outlined research area has quite recently undergone a new hype incited especially by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that broke out in 2014. The significant role which mass media played throughout this conflict has reignited the interest in exploring the possibilities to assertively utilize mass media in compliance with foreign policy objectives and turned the attention back to the Russian Federation (RF). (Badrak & Kozlov, 2016; Lucas & Pomerantsev, 2016; Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014) In fact, the manner in which the RF employed mass media assets in the course of the escalation and active phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was only the culmination of long-term efforts concentrated on seizing the power of information and utilizing it in foreign media markets to achieve national interests. Shortly after Vladimir Putin began his first presidential term, Russian political elites realized the immense potential mass media have in the contemporary international environment interlaced by 24/7 news messaging able to reach almost every little corner, every little village, and every household on this planet. (Degtereva & Kiriya, 2010) It was the RF that made the first serious attempts to take control over a wide spectrum of mass media outlets, incorporate them into its strategic toolset, deliberately drive these assets on foreign media markets, and launch countless information campaigns in numerous geopolitical directions. (Tokbaeva, 2019) Anyway, the manner in which the mass media assets were utilized in the course of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – revealing the new trends in foreign mass media utilization with emphasis put on offensive strategies – has triggered an extensive and still vibrant debate among academic circles, think-tank community, practitioners, as well as society at large that pervaded through media, foreign policy, security, and even military studies. (Bērziņš, 2019; Boyer et al., 2016; Darczewska & Żochowski, 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2017; Giles, 2016b; Mölder & Sazonov, 2018; Saari, 2014; Simons, 2014; Thomas, 2016)

Notwithstanding, the research regarding non-traditional security threats that stem from the offensive utilization of transnational communication channels and cross-border media networks is still challenging, particularly when it comes to the issue of their effectiveness. It means that despite the mounting attention being devoted to the outlined research area, our understanding of the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization

in offensive foreign policy strategies is weak, any kind of comprehensive definition regarding this particular phenomenon is missing, and there is a crucial lack in our comprehension concerning the conditions under which the efficient utilization of mass media in such a manner is feasible or can be successful. As a result, we also lack the ability (given by suitable analytical instrument) to systematically analyze actual situational settings in different media markets, anticipate future flashpoints (represented by those national media markets that are prone to the media attacks launched by hostile states), and assess the potential effects such malign media strategies can have in individual cases.

For these reasons, the dissertation thesis suggests that the thorough understanding of 'effectiveness' in the given context should become a new hot spot attracting subsequent research efforts. Given this, the presented work conduces primarily to the specific category of academic literature focusing on the importance of mass media and transborder information messaging in contemporary international relations, strategic, and security studies. On that account, this thesis aims to use an innovative way of thinking to construct a coherent 'conceptual framework' defining the 'effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies' and thus it makes an effort to introduce an entirely new perspective on the offensive approach to foreign mass media instrumentalization using the lens of effectiveness. This is of immense importance, especially if we take effectiveness into account as the key parameter – if mass media cannot achieve the desired impact, offensive (foreign policy) strategies using this resource become futile. Moreover, this step is important as the existing writings that elaborate on the issue of offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategies either do not pay attention to the matters of effectiveness at all (and concentrate on other aspects associated with this issue), or perceive effectiveness as something axiomatic (detailed examination is presented in the chapter Literature Review). And, with more and more emphasis put on the malign influence of transborder offensive information streaming, some kind of coherent evidence-based definition that could unify the understanding of this phenomenon across the academic and expert communities is necessary. Thus, the first contribution of this thesis is formed purely in the theoretical realm when responding to the key shortcoming arising from the related literature. However, to construct some kind of comprehensive definition of the phenomenon under our scrutiny requires the interconnecting of vast and detailed interdisciplinary knowledge achieved in multiple fields of study throughout decades of research. Thus, the thesis picks up the threads of the

existing findings and complements them by pursuing the theoretical layer that has been sidelined in both the academic writings as well as related scientific debate so far.

Consequently, the thesis uses the created conceptual framework to generate a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level) which could be prospectively carried out by any chosen state at hand targeting foreign audiences within diverse countries in various geopolitical directions. The analytical model inferred by this thesis on the background of the constructed theoretical framework should allow us to take into account the actions of individual states in the area of mass media, consider whether the conditions necessary for the use of media assets in offensive foreign policy strategies have been achieved, and assess if and why such strategies can be effective/ineffective in particular cases. In essence, the thesis provides an analytical tool that has the potential to explain the fluctuations in the efficiency of various campaigns employing mass media assets in offensive foreign policy strategies. Such kind of threat-assessment tool is desperately needed. We can expect that the number of cases reminiscent of the offensive Russian media-based information campaign launched against Ukraine will only increase and the RF may not be (and is not) the only country having ambitions to use mass media in this way. Therefore, except from pushing forward our theoretical knowledge, this thesis aspires to make a significant contribution on the level of practical analysis by offering a (main or complementary) threat-assessment tool that can easily be utilized by international institutions (e.g. NATO/EU StratCom), national authorities (e.g. special MFA/MIA departments or representatives existing in the majority of EU member-states), academic programs, or multiple think-tanks that pay continuous attention to the monitoring of behavior and actions of particular states in the field of trans-national and cross-border strategic communication. In that regard, the thesis outlines an analytical technique that should allow us to examine the previously defined phenomenon by analyzing past or current real-world situations. The analytical model enabling us to appraise the transborder offensive capacities of various states and thus also anticipate the offensive potential of states intentionally creating such capacities can have a crucial impact on our security environment – it gives a chance to make strategically important forecasts, offers an early warning capacity, and provides space to implement timely counter-measures eliminating the detected threats or minimizing the possible risks in this field. With all this in mind, we should realize that the contribution on this level cannot be seen as purely practical – it represents the epistemological component by

conveying an answer on how (through which steps) we can examine the level of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies in particular cases. As such, the thesis conveys a brand-new methodological background offering a systematic procedure designed for the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns carried out on the information-psychological level.

The thesis utilizes an approach based on principles of theory construction that, generally speaking, is understood as a process of formulating and assembling components (terms, statements, arguments, or scope conditions) into an evidence-based and logically coherent theoretical whole (concepts and conceptual frameworks). This approach is employed to revise and expand our theoretical understanding of the given phenomenon in light of logical and empirical analyses. As such, the process of constructing (combining empirical data and observations with logical reasoning) the conceptual framework clarifying the meaning of effectiveness in the context of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies has been firmly entrenched in the scholarship provided by strategic studies, mass media studies, psychology, political communication research, and last but not least investigations into mechanisms determining the conditions existing in competitively based national media markets. In such a manner, the reasonable inferences used to construct the unique theoretical background for this thesis are rectified and curtailed by previously acquired erudition accepted by the majority academic community. Likewise, the variables constituting the analytical model presented by this thesis are not selected randomly – on the contrary, they are derived from the core tenets that forge the coherent internal logic of the previously constructed conceptual framework defining the phenomenon under our scrutiny (the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies) and their choice is thoroughly rationalized on the background of existing experience. All these interconnections ensure that both the constructed conceptual framework and the generated analytical model are firmly anchored in a cohesive set of widely recognized theoretical findings giving them strong evidence support coming from closely related areas of studies. As such, both products brought up by this thesis (conceptual framework defining the phenomenon under investigation as well as the related analytical model derived from it) do not, figuratively speaking, hang in the air.

Finally, the thesis exploits an instrumental case study template in order to apply and test the functioning of the generated analytical model for the assessment of the

efficiency potential (in the given context). On that note, the thesis employs the most influential case of offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategy that is referential for the absolute majority of academic writings that emerged in the course of the last 10 years – the offensive activities of mass media network centrally controlled by Russian state authorities in Ukrainian media market throughout the latent and escalation phases of the conflict between 2013 and 2014. As outlined later in the chapter Literature Review, it is the initial phase of the conflict that is crucial for the occurrence of effects coming from malign media messaging and it is primarily this phase when the attacker wants the effects to arrive to quickly decide a conflict in his/her favor (see part 1.3 The Offensive Instrumentalization of Mass Media in Russian Foreign Policy – The Information Warfare Modality). However, the investigation carried out within the case study refers also to the period of building up the Russian media network and its expansion in the Ukrainian media market starting from the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin, as this process was (according to the assumptions pursued by this thesis) pivotal for the setting of the Russian mass media assets in this particular media market at the time of the conflict outbreak as well as its effectiveness in its initial phases. This kind of testing is important as the obtained results are relevant for the whole bulk of academic and expert writings dealing with the various aspects related to the issue of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies that work with the automatic, but thus far unverified, assumption about their effectiveness (mostly referring to the effectiveness of Russian media in Ukraine). In this manner, the case study may either support the assumptions and explain why the offensive instrumentalization of Russian mass media in Ukraine was as effective as generally considered or reveal reasons why these assumptions are unjustified, misleading, or incorrect. The author of this thesis is aware that the testing of the newly generated analytical model on only one example is not sufficient to fully verify the general applicability of the model. Therefore, this work encourages further testing by using other cases or designed theoretical situations that could lead to more solid verifications or even improvements in the analytical instrument provided by this work and could support the methodological solutions brought up by the thesis.

To be clear about the terminology, it is now obvious that the thesis works with two essential notions – 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency potential' of the mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies. With respect to the above-mentioned, the first notion refers to the conceptual framework constructed by this thesis

and is used to express the minimum but sufficient conditions in which mass media can be successful in producing desired results (fulfilling objectives of offensive foreign policy strategies). The letter one then refers to the analytical model generated by this thesis and is used to express the prospective capacity of mass media assets controlled by one state to bring about desired results when employed within offensive foreign policy strategy on a particular media market/s thus taking into account specific situational settings (in both: the structure and processes within mass media network instrumentalized for the given purpose as well as conditions existing in the target media market at a specific moment).

To fulfill the stated goals, the thesis has to work with a wide array of different categories and types of sources. As already mentioned above, for the construction of the conceptual framework defining the 'effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies' and the generation of the analytical model designed for the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level) was used extensive interdisciplinary (mostly) theoretical knowledge provided first and foremost by important academic writings that appeared in the related areas of research like strategic studies, international relations, mass media studies, political communication studies, agenda-setting theory and research of competitive media markets functioning, research concerning structural aspects of media companies, but also psychology and the investigation into the human mind processing.

When examining the values of individual variables while applying the analytical model within the case study framework, the thesis relies on findings related to particular issues of interest brought to stage either by academic literature, writings coming from a wider expert community, internet articles published online by recognized journalists, official data provided by institutions and companies under scrutiny, as well as on official political, law, or strategic documents. In addition, two sections within the case study framework strive to map the viewer and confidence ratings achieved by Russian state-controlled media in the Ukrainian media market during the observed period. However, even though the activities of the Russian mass media in Ukraine have been understood by most Ukrainian governments after the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a potential problem or even a risk to national security, official records providing comprehensive data collected by Ukrainian statistical authorities are not publicly available and the official Ukrainian institutions did not respond to the author's appeals to provide them for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, the thesis uses a few available public surveys carried

out by the following (more or less) independent companies or research centers: a) Internews company in cooperation with InMind Factum Group, b) The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), c) Gallup company in cooperation with the U.S. media agency and The Broadcasting Board of Governors, and d) Internet Association of Ukraine in cooperation with InMind Factum Group. At the time of the observed period (2013 – 2014, representing the latent and escalation phases of the conflict), all these (mostly US and Ukrainian) companies already had a long tradition in the field of conducting public surveys in many states from various world regions. (Gallup, 2023; InMind Factum Group, 2023; Internews, 2023; KIIS, 2023; UASGM, 2023) Moreover, after carrying out vast open-source research, the author can confidently state that no other surveys mapping the positions of Russian mass media assets in the Ukrainian media market (in the scope of required categories), that would be valid for the observed period (2013 – 2014; referring to the immediate pre-conflict situation and itinal escalation phases of the conflict itself), are available. The lack of this type of data-sets is perceivable throughout the academic and expert community, as the studies/reports paying attention to the consumption ratings of the Russian mass media in Ukraine in the period between 2010 and 2014 (encompassing the time interval of our interest) unanimously refer to the mentioned sources to support their claims. (Dyczok, 2014; IREX, 2013; OECD, 2022; Onuch et al., 2021; Peisakhin & Rozenas, 2018; Ryabinska, 2012a; Szostek, 2014a, 2014b; Yanchenko et al., 2023) On the other hand, we can see that these data-sets were used in high-quality writings that went through double/blind reviews, were accepted for publishing in prestigious academic journals, and their results were accepted without any major or sound criticism. For these reasons, the author considers these data-sets to be reliable enough to be used in this dissertation thesis (not to mention there is no other alternative).

To conclude the introductory section, at least a brief overview of the planned progress is required for proper orientation. The rest of the dissertation thesis is organized into 4 following chapters: (1) Literature Review; (2) Methodological Context and Research Design; (3) Theoretical-Analytical Framework; (4) Case Study. First, an in-depth literature review concentrating on the recent state of research in the given field is conveyed. At this stage, the precise delimitation of the research area is provided, the main approaches and theories concerning this area of study are covered, the assessment of the current state of knowledge is conveyed, and the crucial blind spots along with the key research problems are identified. This step is followed by the chapter describing the methodological context which precisely determines the corresponding

research questions and goals, and provides a detailed explanation of the methods used to fulfill the declared aims. The next chapter is dedicated to works taking place on the theoretical-analytical level. Here the conceptual framework defining the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies is constructed, the variables determining the level of effectiveness in this context are inferred, the conditions for the effective utilization of mass media in offensive foreign policy strategies are described, and the general analytical model designed for the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns is completed. The fourth chapter then applies the previously described general analytical model in the framework of a purposefully selected case study that is used to test the functioning of the model in the real political environment of contemporary international affairs. The Conclusion of this thesis summarizes the findings acquired in the course of the case study with special emphasis put on the application of the analytical model explaining the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies and generalizes the obtained results.

1. Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review concerning the specific issue of this thesis – mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies – and collect a relevant and cohesive summary of existing writings referring to the stated field of research. The literature review is used to convey a precise delimitation of the research area, cover the main approaches and theories concerning this field (containing also important definitions from related fields of studies, e.g. information influence, the offensive instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level, soft power in the given context, psychological/information/hybrid/new-generation warfare, etc.)[3], assess the current state of knowledge, and identify the crucial blind spot in the research done so far allowing to introduce the related problem. This step is necessary to raise the directions for further research, avoid duplications of existing findings, and choose the most suitable approach enabling us to solve the unique issue under investigation.

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[3] *The terms 'power of information' and the 'power over information' are examined in detail in the following chapter (see chapter 3. Theoretical-Analytical Background: The Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Offensive Foreign Policy Strategies).*

1.1 Research Area Delimitation

The point of this chapter is to provide an in-depth literature review regarding a very specific segment within the issue of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy. This thesis takes into account only the methods on the information-psychological level that are used to induce confessions, reinforce attitudes, or shape behaviors of foreign audiences. The information-technical level, encompassing all types of device elimination practices or cyber warfare techniques designed either to take control over the enemy's information-based technologies or to paralyze software-based electronic devices, is sidelined. The overall limits of the research thus revolve around the symbolic power of information content and deal with strategies in which states can employ mass media assets to influence public opinion abroad. However, contemporary authors assert that the nature of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy has gone through significant changes in the last two decades. And the main game-changer turned out to be the Russian Federation (RF) becoming an inglorious pioneer pushing the boundaries of the possible in this field. (Badrak & Kozlov, 2016; Ermus & Salum, 2016; Fedchenko, 2016; Franke, 2015; Hansen, 2017; Kuzio, 2019; Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014; J. White, 2016) As a result, this area of research has attracted renewed academic interest that has been considerably fueled by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict which broke out in 2013. The significant role mass media played throughout the latent and escalation phases of the conflict has reignited efforts to explore the possibilities in the utilization of this tool in compliance with foreign policy objectives and has turned the attention towards offensive reasoning (i.e. the offensive potential of mass media). (Bolin et al., 2016; Carpenter, 2017; Feklyunina, 2016; Kofman et al., 2017; Kudors, 2014a; Kuzio, 2019; Matviichuk, 2015; Mölder et al., 2021; NATO Stratcom, 2015; Perry, 2015; Pynnöniemi & Rácz, 2016; Rácz, 2016; Sazonov et al., 2016; Szostek, 2014a)

The offensive reasoning puts an emphasis on various techniques of mass media utilization enabling the interference in the internal political affairs of other countries on a mass scale by influencing their domestic value system, belief system, public emotions, or behavior. (Mölder et al., 2021) From such a perspective, one can utilize the attracting, coercing, or dividing power of information content to influence the thinking and doing of foreign audiences, or mix these to develop the most potent approach according to the goals and (foreign) operational environment. (Mareš, 2021) Till now, the offensive instrumentalization of mass media in foreign policy, driven by the recent Russian

progress, has been studied from different angles, through the lens of two major theoretical strands: (offensively tuned) soft power and information warfare. Both these modalities can be offensive to some extent if they are intentionally employed to disrupt and sway the public opinion-making process in a manner that is advantageous to the party that deliberately employs them thus doing harm to the political interests of the country so affected. (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Feklyunina, 2016; Giles, 2016a; Kofman & Rojansky, 2015) The offensive nature of such efforts is implicitly encouraged by the existence of an intention to develop resources allowing to conduct highly opportunistic campaigns in (particular) foreign media markets that seek to influence the thinking and doing of extensive segments within the population of the target state through the means of socio-psychological manipulation that goes against the concerns of the local government. (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Feklyunina, 2016, 2016; Giles, 2016a; Kofman & Rojansky, 2015) The European External Action Service (EEAS) assesses the offensive reasoning in terms of foreign information manipulation and interference as a mostly non-illegal pattern of behavior that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures, and political processes in countries so affected. Such activity is manipulative, conducted in a massive, intentional, and coordinated manner. (EEAS, 2021) The Russian turn to offensive reasoning serves as a reminder that contemporary conflicts do not take place only on traditional military battlefields, but also shift into human minds and involve virtual weapons able to disseminate alternative knowledge which could captivate foreign public audiences even in times of apparent peace.

Even though various states (including the USA, China, or India) have tried to engage in status-seeking foreign policies through mass media assets (by assorted forms of image-making, nation-branding, or public/cultural diplomacy) or in limited psychological operations abroad (by intentionally conveying to an opposing side certain aggregate information which would cause it to make a decision appropriate to the information it had received), the primary referential object for offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategies (as defined in the previous paragraph) has been the RF. (Isar, 2017; Krenn, 2017; Liu, 2019; Molander et al., 1996) There are three mutually intertwined reasons that predetermine such a state of affairs. First, there are principal differences in connotations attributed to notions like soft power, information operations, and information warfare in different strategic cultures. While in the Western rationale soft power is regarded rather as a socially-driven process based on attraction and self-identification, in the Russian strategic culture this notion is apprehended as a state-

directed instrument employed to gain support for national interests channeled by purposefully manufactured strategic narratives. (Rotaru, 2017; Zamorano, 2016) As for information operations and information warfare, in the Western strategic approach (especially in the USA) dominates the practice based on precisely chosen and targeted information leaks via proxies in the target media environment that is used especially in the course of conflict escalation or military operations. (Blank, 2013; Goldstein & Findley, 2003) Albeit not denigrating the usefulness of information tools for the aforementioned purpose, Russia, on the other hand, gives a lot more relevance to the massive psychological pressure information tools can produce. Russian thinkers see information warfare and information operations as means suitable to conduct large-scale political warfare the aim of which is to reshape the thinking of entire socio-political communities abroad. (Giles, 2016a) Compared to other countries, Russian political elites have understood the manipulation of foreign masses as an inherent part of the rivalry between different civilizational systems (adopted by different states) occurring in the information space by means of state-driven instrumentalization of transborder information messaging. (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017) Second, these differences in strategic thinking are (to a large extent) dependent on the degree of power consolidation, because in different political and media systems state authorities have varying capabilities to control mass media, influence their publishing policies, and shape published narratives, not to mention the orchestration of massive information campaigns through mass media assets beyond national borders. This means that semi/authoritarian states have much higher chances to grasp control over the media system in their countries than states with democratic systems of government. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Miskimmon et al., 2013) In this context, since Soviet times the Russian political system is typical for the establishment of varying sets of authoritative practices, and control over mass media has ever been at the center of political concern. (Becker, 2014; Gelman, 2015; Vartanova, 2011) This does not signify that political elites of other states have never made efforts to influence mass media outlets through various forms of media capture and employ them in information operations, but they either do not have intentions to instrumentalize these assets abroad (e.g. liberal democratic states in Europe), failed to gain enough strong control to project coordinated massive media power in state-driven strategies beyond their boarders (e.g. the USA, India, Turkey), lack financial or technological resources to engage controlled media assets in this manner (e.g. authoritarian regimes in Africa, South America, or Middle East), or have not been able to develop functioning strategic

frameworks for the consolidated instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level in foreign media markets yet (e.g. China, Iran, Saudi Arabia). (Chkopoia, 2021; Christensen, 2007; Flew, 2016; Molander et al., 1996; Rawnsley, 2015; Reddy, 2019; Van Vuuren, 2018; Wastnidge, 2015) Finally, in comparison to most other states, Russia has always had the intentions and thus has heavily invested vast state resources in the research of methods that were supposed to legitimize and realize the goals of foreign policy by shaping collective consciousness through manufactured information messaging projected beyond its borders on a mass scale. (Darczewska, 2014) As a consequence, the concentrated resolve to utilize mass media assets with the intention to significantly interfere in domestic policy-making processes of other states has been almost exclusively the domain of the RF and after the end of the Cold War it is quintessential, especially for Putin's era.

It is symptomatic that academic works, as well as expert reports that have appeared in this field in recent times, refer first and foremost to the change in the instrumentalization of mass media in foreign policy accomplished by the RF since the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin. For this reason, the following sections of the literature review scrutinize and synthesize the key theoretical as well as practical findings regarding the evolution of the offensive approach to mass media instrumentalization in the Russian foreign policy that has occurred during the last two decades, provide an assessment of the current state of knowledge in this field, and make an effort to identify the crucial gaps imperative for further progress in the research.

1.2 The Offensive Instrumentalization of Mass Media in Russian Foreign Policy – The Soft Power Modality

With respect to the outlined field of research, this section conveys several specific groups of literature that, combined, constitute the Russian approach to mass media utilization within the offensively tuned soft power modality. The first one deals with the roots and overall nature of Russian soft power, the second interlinks the defined soft power compound with state policies and shifts them to the realm of mass media, and the last one plants the state-led media-based soft power into the offensive strategic thinking of the RF. For this part, it is obvious that the Russian approach to soft power cannot be understood as a pure application of the (soft power) theory due to the high level of state efforts to bring this force under control and deliberately use it in a profit-maximizing manner on account of the others.

Contemporary Russian soft power has its roots in the early 90s. After the end of the Cold War, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the rejection of Marxism-Leninism as a dominant theory that could shape the Russian worldview, the expert community (concentrated around a group of Russian theoreticians called Archipelago / Архипелаг – e.g. Pyotr Shchedrovitskiy, Sergey Gradirovskiy, Efim Ostrovskiy, Yurii Krupnov, Gleb Pavlovskiy) that formed in the newly-established multi-ethnic and multicultural RF made strong efforts to constitute an innovative perspective on Russian identity as well as its role in the changing international environment – the Russian World. (Archipelago, 2022a; Gradirovsky, 2009; Shchedrovitskiy, 2000, 2001; Suslov, 2018) The underlying idea was to outline an alternative Russian spatiality escaping the conventional border delimitation of nation-state models. This perspective conceives of external social entities that could become a part of the greater Russian multiethnic nation, thereby constituting a unique trans-border civilizational space. The RF is then portrayed as a natural center in this sort of commonwealth. (Archipelago, 2022b; Jilge, 2016; Suslov, 2017; Tishkov, 2008) The most extensive imagination of the Russian world, which has been endorsed also by the state authorities of the RF, incorporates the following segments of domestic and foreign populations: a) ethnic Russians living on the territory of the RF; b) residents of the RF, who are not ethnically Russians; c) ethnic Russians living outside the territorial boundaries of the RF; and d) non-Russians living outside the RF, who associate themselves with its cultural-historical heritage or policies. (Feklyunina, 2016; Hellberg-Hirn, 1998; Kudors, 2010; Tiido, 2015; Zevelev, 2001) Over time, Russian theoreticians started a process of forging a common identity by invoking a particular vision of what should constitute the nature of this broadly imagined trans-border socio-political community. The construct has been gradually saturated by neoconservative values with nationalistic overtones meant to serve as a bond of attachment between foreign communities and Russia proper. (Melville, 2017; Skladanowski, 2019) The value complex associated with the Russian World has embraced a wide spectrum of categories stretching from issues of anti-liberalism (extensively recognized codes of moral and ethical behavior emanating from Eastern Orthodox Christianity), anti-globalism (modest anti-consumerist lifestyle with an accent on local traditions), nationalism (patriotism, independence, national sovereignty) up to various political matters (firm leadership, stable political system, centralized governance, multipolarity in international system). (Chebankova, 2015; Lukin, 2014; Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2014; Stoeckl, 2014) As of now, the Russian World provides a cohesive soft

power value framework that may be attractive across nations, ethnicities, societies, and cultures – an agenda that is universalist enough but still relevant, acceptable, and seductive to bind people across all world civilizations. (Keating & Kaczmarska, 2019; Laruelle, 2015a) Russian soft power embraced by the Russian World construct allows different levels of self-identification. It means people can agree with the presented agenda in its maximum range, but also can coincide only with a limited amount of it, or accept precisely chosen pieces that reflect their personal preferences. This way of thinking makes the construct more easily accessible and opens the almost unlimited potential to address like-minded people all over the world. (Rutland & Kazantsev, 2016; Simons, 2013) From this point of view, Russian soft power is designed to arouse sympathies for the proposed values and/or cultural framework that is embodied in the Russian World construct, provides the target audience with the chance of becoming part of it, and thus represents a source facilitating advantageous international connections. (Laruelle, 2015a, 2015b) As a result, the Russian World reasoning presumes a creation of open multiethnic, cross-national, and multicultural trans-border communities bound to the RF (and its policies) by an extremely extensive array of culturally-tainted and value-based fibers. (Chebankova, 2012) The existing literature is in agreement that, by its very nature, the soft power embedded in the Russian World has the potential to address diverse sympathizing groups among foreign populations no matter in which part of the world they live. (Keating & Kaczmarska, 2019; Kudors, 2010; Laruelle, 2015a; Melville, 2017; Rutland & Kazantsev, 2016; Wilson, 2015) To be fair about the issue, the wide-range agenda associated with the Russian World can certainly be treated as a source of multi-varied (soft power) attractiveness.

Second, the available literature brings evidence that, at least since the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin, the Russian state authorities have been taking steps to subdue the defined soft power compound, integrate it within foreign political agenda, and push it forward through speeches, interviews, state agencies, and wider mass media landscape. (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Flew, 2016; Kiseleva, 2013) This is why some authors assert that the Russian authorities have primarily interpreted soft power in a very instrumental manner. As maintained by the broader definition that distinguishes between the state-led category and the civil-society-led category, soft power has been intentionally employed by Russian state institutions in compliance with foreign policy goals. In this sense, the RF has tried to achieve the outcomes it wants not solely because others admire the values associated with the Russian World, but also by deliberately using this

framework for setting an agenda within foreign populations. (Burlinova, 2015; Watson, 2012; Zamorano, 2016) Accordingly, in Russian strategic thinking mass media came to be understood as a bearer of a message that contains a culturally-tainted and value-based ideology that serves to reinforce the country's political agenda; it has become a source of gravitation in terms of building links to potential foreign supporters. (Laruelle, 2015b) As some authors point out, Russian mass media simply employs different forms of manipulation by using this purposefully manufactured content to address foreign audiences on both civic and state levels in an effort to bind them with its cultural/value model and engage them in its foreign policies. (Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014b; Rotaru, 2017) Such a practice is sometimes classified as cultural propaganda or neo-propaganda. The neo-propagandist approach is based on the intention of the Russian policy-makers to win over the foreign public in terms of particular interests through a massive orchestration of seductive conclusions that are packaged to conceal their persuasive purpose. (Zamorano, 2016; Zeleneva & Ageeva, 2017) In comparison to Cold War propaganda directly enforcing the target audience to accept the one and only possibility of political change predefined by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the current form of Russian media-based soft power is less insistent, looser, and vaguer. It is, in line with the above-defined principle of association, much more dependent upon self-identification. (Bolsover, 1948; Dimitrova et al., 2017; Sproule & Lewis, 1994) But still, the current Russian soft power channeled through mass media calls for support or active participation in a multi-national, inter-religious, Russia-centric civilization-strengthening collective identity. Thus, though the current Russian media-based soft power relies on indirect influence, it provides the Russian political elites with an instrument designed to sway the public opinion-making process in target foreign countries, produce public pressure on political decision-making in the country so affected, and influence the political behavior of target country in the manner that is advantageous for Russian political interests. (Bolin et al., 2016; Klyueva & Mikhaylova, 2017; Melissen, 2005) Putting all in one sentence, this cluster of literature points to the fact that Russian state authorities were able to seize the soft power agenda stemming from the Russian World construct and have attempted to engage mass media (among other instruments) in purpose-driven foreign policies by instilling this agenda into public discourse abroad.

The last sort of scholarly literature regarding this issue denotes that the RF has repetitively instrumentalized the above-outlined state-led soft power framework in more radicalized and aggressive media-based strategies with high offensive potential. The

Russian strategic culture approaches soft power in terms of state-run and state-directed power projection – it uses culturally-tainted and value-based pressure in combination with reality deception and information manipulation to take the target foreign audience hostage. (Feklyunina, 2016; Klyueva, 2017) In this sense, the Russian mass media power is associated with what is called 'strategic narratives' – contextual frameworks allowing people to connect social phenomena into structured, comprehensible storylines that are crafted by political actors to advance desired interpretations of (international) socio-political reality. (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017; Roselle et al., 2014; Schmitt, 2018) Russian mass media messaging has often been formulated to antagonistically distort perceptions of international audiences concerning their domestic political reality and, consequently, to cultivate emerging tensions within societies of target states. (Hinck et al., 2018) For this purpose, the offensively tuned strategic narratives stemming from the Russian soft power framework are used in a two-tier procedure. In the first stage, Russia spreads through mass media narratives the aim of which is to attract foreign audiences, extend the ranks of sympathizers, and persuade them to take a supportive stance towards Russian foreign policy initiatives. In the second stage, Russian narratives highlight contradictions and inconsistencies that directly infringe the subjectivity of the chosen elements within the structure of the target audience, especially in contexts that are intolerable for them – e.g. to scare potential sympathizers that their civil or political rights, culture, habits, values, or even socio-economic welfare would be endangered if their government would not align with the political course/requirements set by the RF or even decide to go against it. (Hinck et al., 2018; Hoyle et al., 2023; Schmitt, 2018) Thus the Russian narratives are often organized in such a way that they coerce foreign audiences with unthinkable harm unless they submit (in word and deed) to the terms of Russian foreign policy. This kind of media messaging can harm the targeted society by provoking feelings of identity grievance or fears connected to uncertainties in people's daily lives. Narratives of this kind are employed with the intention of stimulating the target foreign audience to put constraints on the actions of their governments or block the tagged political initiatives. (Wagnsson & Lundström, 2022) This is why the proponents of strategic narratives accentuate that the Russian-style soft power (stemming from loosely defined Russian World construct coupled with extensive neoconservative values and cultural heritage) can captive heterogeneous segments within the ranks of target foreign audiences and trap them in the web of their fears (i.e. distress the Russian supporters living on territories of other states). (Feklyunina, 2016; Hoyle et al., 2023; Mattern, 2005;

Wagnsson & Lundström, 2022) On top of that, there is a set of narratives associated with the Russian World feeding a general distrust in the external world based on the belief that the communities associated with the Russian World are surrounded by hostile governments asserting discriminatory attitudes. In such an environment, Russian media narratives have addressed human rights issues of Russian sympathizers/compatriots/diasporas and turned the attention to the (allegedly) inferior status of these communities in the countries of their residence. (Averre & Davies, 2017; Dagi, 2020) To make the picture complete, the RF exploits this background to claim the country's commitment to safeguarding a civilian population abroad in line with the belief that sovereign states have a responsibility to protect (R2P commitment) their people vulnerable to unfairness, alienation, discrimination, or even atrocities. The RF has used the R2P narratives as a formal legitimizing measure to interfere in the internal political affairs of the target countries or even for justification of foreign military interventions. (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021; Tsygankov, 2016; Ziegler, 2016) Therefore, some authors argue that, as in the case of the RF, the media-based state-led soft power may represent an extension of offensive power projection allowing interference deep within the structure of the target state population and to spread a political influence against the will of the affected states' authorities. (Kearn, 2011; Mattern, 2005; Rotaru, 2017; Szostek, 2014a) From this point of view, in Russian strategic thinking, (strategic) narratives may represent an instrument of enforcement. The literature on strategic narratives thus suggests that the Russian offensively tuned soft power channeled through mass media represents a latent phase of information warfare in times of peace and lays solid foundations for the enactment of information warfare in times of direct conflict appearance or escalation.

To sum up this category of the literature review concerning the offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy, it asserts the Russian political authorities have discovered the meaning as well as the potential of soft power, created a unique soft power framework, incorporated it within the Russian strategic culture, and started to push it forward through transborder media messaging in order to boost its power projection capabilities, increase its influence over foreign audiences, more or less aggressively interfere in internal political affairs of other states, enforce 'national' interests on account of other states, or even substantiate expansionist ambitions. Such an approach to soft power can and often goes against the national interests of target foreign countries and gives the RF an instrument to unilaterally enforce its interests on account of others or compel them to act according to its will.

1.3 The Offensive Instrumentalization of Mass Media in Russian Foreign Policy – The Information Warfare Modality

This section logically follows on from the previous findings and completes the overall picture by adding the groups of writings looking into the Russian approach to offensive mass media utilization through the lens of the information warfare modality. The first cluster of related works concentrates on the roots and the general strategic framework that drives the contemporary Russian approach to information warfare (on the information-psychological level), the second specifies the role as well as the purpose of mass media assets within the outlined strategic compound, and the last one takes a look at the nature of the practical engagement of mass media within this context. The information warfare modality developed by the RF should represent a flexible offensive approach that is configured to engage mass media assets in assaults directly undermining the internal stability of target countries.

As maintained by available findings, the current Russian approach to mass media instrumentalization within the range of information warfare modality has its roots in and draws important lessons from Soviet research concerning this phenomenon. (Doroszczyk, 2018; Fedchenko, 2016; Kuzio, 2019; Snegovaya, 2015) The Soviet military and political leadership believed that, sooner or later, the international battlefield would shift to the informational sphere and information-psychological operations would ensure the country a strategic superiority over real or potential enemies at a low cost (in comparison to military operations causing inevitable losses in human lives and expensive military equipment). (Bessonova, 2010; Darczewska, 2014; Nagorski, 1971; Panarin, 2012) The Soviet progress in information warfare (at that time labeled rather as psychological warfare) was driven by the desire to utilize information technologies working on perception management through socio-psychological manipulation (e.g. agitation and massive propagandistic campaigns, disinformation and defamation dispersion, conspiracy theories scattering, reflexive control or active measures techniques)[4] to gain

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[4] *While active measures are usually taken in the form of calculated information leaks published with no obvious relation to the Russian state or its allied organizations, reflexive control is utilized to intentionally convey to an opposing side certain aggregate information that would cause it to make a decision appropriate to the information it received. (Doroszczyk, 2018; Fedchenko, 2016; Kowalewski, 2017; Vasara, 2020) Active measures and reflexive control have many diverse forms, for instance: distraction (creating imaginary threat), overload (a large amount of conflicting info), paralysis (threat to weak spots), division (coalition split-up or arousing internal conflict), provocation (evoking rash disadvantageous decisions), suggestion (affecting legally, morally, ideologically or in other areas), pressure (undermining opinion or political authorities), deterrence (discouraging from action), or deception (trap the target state*

an advantage over an enemy. For this reason, information warfare was understood rather as a form of non-military confrontation in situations when military warfighting was not feasible or threatened by unacceptable consequences (as in conditions of bipolar confrontation bounded by nuclear deterrence and massive retaliation doctrines). (Abrams, 2016; Cull et al., 2017; Finch, 2000; Nagorski, 1971; Nietzel, 2016; Rose, 1988) A series of recent studies show that, in the course of the 2000s and early 2010s, the supreme command of the armed forces of the RF supported by the Russian expert community revitalized the essential principles of information warfare coded in the Soviet reasoning (i.e. subversion by means of psychological manipulation carried out through channels of trans-border communication) and blended them in the concept of hybrid warfare mixing up military and non-military assets. (Bodrunova & Litvinenko, 2013; Chivvis, 2017; Galeotti, 2016; Hoffman, 2009) The hybrid warfare design integrates non-military tools (communication technologies, cyber-attacks, economic pressure) with military force (limited deployment of armed forces, special forces missions, or guerilla-war tactics) thus creating an extremely agile strategic compound that allows to opt for covert or overt campaigns, for civilian, paramilitary, as well as purely military actions. (Hansen, 2017; Hoffman, 2009; Kofman & Rojansky, 2015; Rácz, 2016, 2018) From then on information technologies inducing psychological pressure on foreign audiences have once again been incorporated among essential components of warfighting and, what's more, have become equal to armed forces or economic measures. (Hansen, 2017; Kaufman & Schroefl, 2014; Partanen-Dufour, 2016; Pynnöniemi & Rácz, 2016)

Russia has adapted the nature of this strategic compound to the contemporary interstate conflicts, in which military confrontation is often marginalized to a minimum, and non-military means have become the primary weapons for attacking an enemy. (Bērziņš, 2019; Boyer et al., 2016; Ermus & Salum, 2016; Rácz, 2018; Thomas, 2019a; Thomas, 2016) This stage in strategic reasoning has been termed by the Russian military community as well as the wider expert public new-generation warfare. The evolution in this direction was driven by the idea to carry out (unnoticed) assaults by employing non-military means in times of apparent peace and without an official or actual declaration of war which could have a great potential to cause detrimental effects to the state entity so affected. This kind of rationale opens the way for Russia (or anybody else willing to act in this manner) to conduct offensive actions at present times when public tolerance of

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or population in disadvantageous situation or course of actions). (Giles, Sherr, Seaboyer, 2018; Mateski, 2016)

military interventions has rapidly decreased. (Bogdanov & Chekinov, 2013; Fedyk, 2017; Gompert & Binnendijk, 2016; Mattsson, 2015; Rotărescu, 2015) For the effort to avoid physical confrontation and prioritize the force of psychological pressure the new-generation warfare is sometimes labeled as a contactless war. It also means that in contemporary Russian strategic thinking even conflicts short of military encounters but with the employment of information technologies on the psychological level can be perceived as a war. This is why some works appositely note that while the application of the hybrid warfare logic leads to the blurring lines between different types of war, the adoption of the new-generation warfare principles has resulted in blurring lines between war and peace. (Fedyk, 2017; Franke, 2015; Monaghan, 2016; Slipchenko, 2004; Slipchenko, 2002; Van Creveld, 1991; Vladimirov, 2013) As the Estonian scientists Sazonov and Mölder rightly point out, in such conditions permanent warfare may become the normal form of relationship between states, thus forming a new Hobbesian-like reality in contemporary international relations (i.e. the idea of disorder as an unavoidable outcome of anarchy which results in the war of all against all based on the principles of sauve qui peut and kill or be killed). (Mölder & Sazonov, 2018) In such a manner, states employ non-military means to covertly attack their opponents in long-lasting (primarily information) operations led during peacetime and make constant attempts to undermine or overthrow the governments of target states. Within this environment chaos and uncertainty are spread, security dilemmas are intensified, and conflicts become a part of everyday being. (Mölder & Sazonov, 2018) As a result, the first set of literature claims that information warfare (encompassing communication technologies and transborder media-based messaging) has become an integral part of Russia's new-generation warfare strategic framework having its roots in a unique amalgam of Soviet-style psychological operations and hybrid warfare conception. By its very nature, the new-generation warfare enables Russia to smartly select the most proficient non-military means producing psychological effects including mass media assets, employ them unilaterally against opposing or non-aligned states in a long-lasting (permanent) conflict, or mix them with military tools when necessary (in the course of a conflict escalation).

Furthermore, the current state of knowledge also signifies that (with the establishment of the strategic framework provided by the new-generation warfare reasoning) information warfare and mass media in particular obtained an especially significant role in the Russian approach to conflict resolution. (Bogdanov & Chekinov, 2013; Pynnöniemi & Rácz, 2016; Slipchenko, 2004; Vladimirov, 2013) In this context,

the core mechanism of the Russian information warfare conception on the psychological level should be weaponized media. From such a perspective, mass media are considered to be a weapon through which a decisive offense capitalizing on the psychological effects of massively dispersed information narratives can be launched in peaceful conditions as well as during wartime. (Akimenko & Giles, 2020; Cockrell, 2017; Matviichuk, 2015; Partanen-Dufour, 2016) According to advanced definition, a weapon is an offensive capability that is meant to be applied against an enemy and that a destructive, damaging, or detrimental effect of a weapon need not result from physical impact as the offensive capability need not be kinetic. And in the course of the last two decades, Russia has been increasingly willing to give primacy to non-kinetic operations. (Boothby, 2014; Mattsson, 2015) The traditional assumption has been that psychological effects are mere force multipliers to firearms in combat situations. At present, Russia sees the kinetic and non-kinetic means of warfighting to be interchangeable stand-alone complexes. Therefore, in the context of Russian information warfare, mass media are now understood in a purely offensive and utilitarian manner thus becoming a weapon that can have a similar impact on deciding the outcome of a conflict as firearms like missiles, tanks, artillery, or air force. (Akimenko & Giles, 2020; Gerasimov, 2013; Lupion, 2018; Slipchenko & Gareev, 2005; Thomas, 2019b; Waltzman, 2017) The force of maas-media-based information warfare has been boosted with the development in the field of new technologies, especially in the sphere of TV, internet, or social networking, which accelerated the communication speeds, quickened the news cycle, allowed concealment, and multiplied the impact of malign messaging. (Giles, 2016b; Weitz, 2019) In addition, the research done points out that Russia has incorporated mass media assets deeply into the strategic planning and has reached a high level of synchronization in political, information, and (if necessary) military actions, which facilitated to carry out precisely targeted information campaigns able to produce a significant advantage in all types of conflict situations. (Badrak & Kozlov, 2016; Lucas & Nimmo, 2015; Lucas & Pomerantsev, 2016) The Russian new-generation warfare consists of three stages: a) destabilizing the country by inspiring an intense domestic conflict; b) causing state collapse by ruining the economy and destroying infrastructure; and c) replacing local political leadership with proxies. (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011; Šlabovitš, 2017; Thiele, 2015) This suggests that media-based information warfare is launched in the very first stages of any political/military conflict to stir up processes leading to internal destabilization of the affected country and may be used further on to incapacitate the target state as much as possible before it is even able

to realize that some kind of hostile activity has already started. Thus, the new-generation warfare strategy is largely determined by the success in the offensive instrumentalization of media-based information warfare throughout the initial low-intensity stages of a conflict. (Boyer et al., 2016; Carpenter, 2017; Fedyk, 2017; Mölder & Sazonov, 2017; Sazonov et al., 2016; Strovsky, 2015b) To make these theoretical reflections complete, if the aggressor is able to sway the public opinion-making process within the target state and the coherence of the target society is successfully disrupted, then the chances of the affected state to engage in effective counter-measures are significantly lowered and military actions are not necessarily needed. (Boyer et al., 2016; Giles, 2016a; Rácz, 2018; Thomas, 2016) By and large, this category of literature maintains that Russian information warfare (lead in the strategic framework given by the new generation warfare reasoning) sees mass media as a weapon system the purpose of which is to generate operational, tactical, or strategic effects in pursuit of its foreign political interests, especially at times of political or military confrontation.

The last set of writings in this review addresses the practical engagement of weaponized mass media within the above-outlined margins of Russian information warfare. As in the case of offensively tuned soft power, weaponized media utilize precisely conceived narratives. Despite that, Russian information warfare led through weaponized mass media is deprived of any ideological obligations as it is driven strictly by the principle of proficiency. (Mattsson, 2015; Mölder & Sazonov, 2018; Sazonov et al., 2016; Thomas, 2016; Van Vuuren, 2018) This modus operandi is not about propagation or persuasion in favor of any specific worldview but about opportunistic utilization of information content (agenda) created for hitting the weakest or the most sensitive spots within the structure of the target state population. (Giles, 2016b; Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014) Instead of gaining social control (Soviet-style propaganda) or taking the target audience hostage (offensively tuned soft power), weaponized media use narratives to carry out precisely aimed assaults seriously harming the internal coherence within the target states by causing as much destructive, damaging, or detrimental effect as possible. (Darczewska & Żochowski, 2015; Doroszczyk, 2018; Lanoszka, 2016; Lucas & Pomerantsev, 2016) The aim is not to provide a sole, unified narrative structure as given by the soft power framework stemming from the Russian World construct, but rather to create many customized narratives in order to give rise to the clashing preferences within the population in target states – tensions between different communities are stoked and the confidence of disruptive/subversive elements within the

target society is supported. From such perspective, information/narrative-based assaults exploit a full scale of locally unique social, cultural, economic, or political discrepancies. (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2017; Bugajski, 2020; Ellehuus, 2020; Hofmeisterová et al., 2018; Mankoff, 2020) Therefore, mass media content, that is employed by media-based information warfare, is characterized by the dominant position of tailor-made, country-specific narratives with a strong accent on controversial issues with fragmenting potential. Mass media assets are activated ad-hoc, and with varying intensity they are used to disseminate customized information content fitting the desired intentions that significantly differ in individual target states. (Bugajski, 2020; Fedchenko, 2016; Lucas & Pomerantsev, 2016; Pynnöniemi & Rácz, 2016; Šlabovitš, 2017; Thiele, 2015) As reported, the Russian weaponized media are based on animosity stimulation, while the extent can significantly vary in accordance to the specific needs and intentions in individual geopolitical theatres: a) to inflict confusion to mitigate public reaction to specific Russian policies; b) to arouse opinion fragmentation limiting the maneuvering space of the target country to introduce counter-measures; c) to disintegrate the target audience in an effort to paralyze the state's ability to raise internal support for the central government; and even d) to initiate turmoil or motivate subversion. (Giles, 2016a, 2016c; Meister, 2016; Meister et al., 2018; Pasitselska, 2017) All these goals are focused on depriving the leadership of a target country (or political/interest groups opposing Russian concerns) of a certain amount of actual internal sovereignty without physically seizing the territory of the target state. In Russian thinking, this can be done wherever needed to weaken disadvantageous political tendencies or perceived negative developmental trends with the potential to undermine Russia's political, economic, and even security interests. (Fedchenko, 2016; Meister et al., 2018; Pasitselska, 2017) In short, this cluster of available literature suggests that Russian information warfare utilizes weaponized mass media messaging based on opportunistic theater-based narratives stimulating animosity and fueling fragmentation in the ranks of foreign populations and thus can undermine internal political sovereignty in target states.

In summary, this category of the literature review concerning the offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy asserts that, with the new-generation warfare reasoning, the Russian political authorities have developed an unparalleled strategic framework (rooted in the combination of Soviet-style psychological operations and specific adjustment of hybrid warfare conception) designed to enable to carry out hostile offensive but predominantly non-military actions towards other states. The crucial role

within the new-generation strategic framework is dedicated to information warfare utilizing weaponized mass media assets exploiting theater-based and country-specific narratives hitting the most insistent issues and social conflicts within the target state population. Such an approach directly strikes at intricate relations between countries, multiple ethnicities, and various political or interest groups, challenges the internal stability of target states, and weakens the source of internal sovereignty within the states so affected.

1.4 Current State of Knowledge, Gap, and Problem Statement

All things considered, since the early 2000s the RF has initiated important changes in the instrumentalization of mass media in foreign policy by incorporating these assets into the framework of two offensive strategies – offensively tuned soft power and specific modification of information warfare. Both these approaches are designed to allow Russia to exert psychological influence over the target foreign population in an effort to capture them in the net of culturally-tainted value-based ideology closely associated with Russian political interests or fragment them across the existing socio-political, socio-economical, or socio-religious discrepancies. Both strategies aim to set a pro-Russian agenda on foreign media markets, sway public discourse, intervene in the opinion-making processes of foreign audiences, and last but not least to produce internal pressure on the political representatives, legislative and executive bodies in the countries so affected. In the end, this process should put serious constraints on the internal sovereignty of target states and, if successful, manipulate the decision-making process in favor of Russian foreign policy interests. As such, the current state of our knowledge in this field of research encompasses the roots, nature, purpose, and strategic frameworks, as well as practical aspects regarding offensive mass media utilization in the (Russian) foreign policy within the two recognized modalities examined in the literature review.

However, to the best of our knowledge, very little is known about the effectiveness of these approaches to mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy. So far, Russia has been making strong efforts to engage mass media within the range of both described frameworks for offensive instrumentalization across Europe. Aside from Ukraine, Russia has also been able to launch unrivaled information campaigns which have become particularly evident in Great Britain, Germany, Moldova, Georgia, Baltic states, and the Balkans. These information campaigns are noticeably milder than the one in Ukraine but are exceptional in the precision with which they use Russian-World or country-

customized narratives to influence public discourse and decision-making of these states in its favor. All these media campaigns are important for the Russian efforts to unilaterally interfere in internal political affairs, capture specific segments within the target state audiences, or fragment them along vital dividing lines. (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2017; Ellehuus, 2020; Hofmeisterová et al., 2018; Lucas & Pomerantsev, 2016; Mankoff, 2020) However, it is obvious that Russia was able to reach distinctive results in different foreign directions and the effectiveness of these campaigns fluctuates significantly. The reasons for the occurrence of substantial differences in the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in Russian offensive campaigns employed in various foreign directions are still unclear and some kind of relevant scientific explanation is missing.

Thus, though we are aware of the conceptual changes that have been implemented by the RF in the field of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy that have prioritized offensive strategies as of now, we cannot explain the conditions that are necessary for effective mass media instrumentalization within the outlined offensive strategic frameworks. This is due to the reason that there is no coherent definition determining what the effectiveness of the offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy should mean. The existing writings either do not pay attention to the matters of effectiveness (and concentrate on other aspects associated with this phenomenon – as described above) or perceive it as something axiomatic, something that is implicitly given and automatic, or something that is hidden from our sights in the shadows. Notwithstanding, the effectiveness is essential in this area of research as it gives the fundamental rationale for the efforts to develop and actively employ offensive foreign strategies for mass media utilization. Therefore, the thorough understanding of the meaning of effectiveness in terms of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy on the information-psychological level as well as the conditions enabling (to increase the level of effectiveness) to successfully employ mass media in offensive foreign policy strategies represents the crucial gap in current knowledge as well as natural direction in which the further research should go and thus meaningfully push the current state of knowledge in this field forward.

2. Methodological Context and Research Design

For the time being, we are aware of the fact that (at least) throughout the last twenty years the RF has conducted significant changes in the field of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy by making recurrent efforts to engage these assets

in more or less aggressive strategies in terms of offensively tuned soft power and a specific modification of information warfare. The current state of knowledge encompasses the roots, nature, purpose, and specifications of strategic frameworks, as well as practical aspects regarding the offensive mass media instrumentalization in (Russian) foreign policy. In addition, we also realize that various foreign policy campaigns in which mass media assets were instrumentalized on the information-psychological level in offensive strategies brought about different results. On the other hand, the research has not paid attention to the analysis of the conditions under which the effective offensive instrumentalization of mass media in foreign policy strategies is feasible. Hence, to push our knowledge ahead we have to concentrate our further research activities on the following questions: (1) How should we define the 'effectiveness' in terms of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies? (2) What factors directly influence the (level of) effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies? (3) Under what conditions is the instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies feasible?

With all this in mind, the dissertation thesis aims to generate and test a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level) carried out by the RF (or by any other state at hand) targeting foreign audiences within diverse countries in various geopolitical directions. This overall aim is met through accomplishing several interlinked objectives: (1) constructing a coherent definition of the 'effectiveness' in terms of the mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies, (2) deriving the key variables that directly influence the change in the level of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level and thus can explain the fluctuation in the efficiency of various offensive foreign campaigns, (3) describing the minimum (but sufficient) conditions that are necessary for the mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies (conditions in which the derived variables are functioning), and (4) arranging and contextualizing the derived variables into general analytical model designed for assessing the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns. To be absolutely clear about the overall aim and partial objectives, the goal is

not to quantify or measure the effectiveness of offensive mass media instrumentalization in particular situations or events, but to provide a thorough and qualitatively substantiated insight into the fundamental process through which the generation of effectiveness (regarding the mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies) occurs. As such, the thesis makes an effort to introduce an entirely new perspective on the offensive approach to foreign mass media instrumentalization using the lens of effectiveness. This is of immense importance, especially if we take effectiveness into account as the key parameter – if mass media cannot achieve the desired impact, offensive (foreign policy) strategies using this resource become futile. As such, the analytical model inferred by this thesis on the background of the described theoretical framework should allow us to take into account the actions of individual states in the area of mass media, consider whether the conditions necessary for the use of media assets in offensive foreign policy strategies have been achieved, and assess if and why such strategies can be effective/ineffective in particular cases. With such a tool, anyone can subject the activities of individual states in the given area to scrutiny and investigate prospective risks arising from the behavior of chosen countries that bear the features associated with preparations for the possible instrumentalization of mass media in aggressive power projection beyond their national borders.

In an attempt to address the stated questions, and accomplish the overall aim and individual objectives, this dissertation proceeds in two major stages. In the first stage, a conceptual framework constituting the 'effectiveness' of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies is constructed. For the purpose of the thesis, a conceptual framework is understood as a network of interlinked (sub)concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. (Jabareen, 2009) The (sub)concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a framework-specific philosophy. Thus, a conceptual framework is not a mere collection of (sub)concepts, but rather a construct in which each (sub)concept plays an integral role. It is a chain of (conceptual) units that are linked together with coherent internal logic. The conceptual framework thus lays out the key (sub)concepts, factors, as well as variables and determines the character of relationships that exist among them. As such, the conceptual framework offers a thorough insight into the examined phenomenon that goes far beyond the surface. (Jabareen, 2009) Moreover, such an approach enables us to rationally mix various theories from diverse research areas into a coherent

interdisciplinary compound in order to move forward in theoretical reasoning and develop novel definitions or functional schemes. (Miles & Huberman, 1994) Therefore, despite this thesis being primarily focused on foreign policy strategies and anchored in the area of international relations studies, it extracts important lessons from the field of mass-communication research focusing on how human attitudes to political affairs are transformed as a consequence of information streaming and interconnects them with the sphere of international relations in terms of foreign policy strategies. By employing this specific technique, the thesis postulates a comprehensive definition of the 'effectiveness' of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven approaches. To carry out this step, the thesis interconnects multiple (sub)concepts from various fields of research encompassing mass media studies, communication studies, psychology, or strategic studies and then contextualizes them in one theoretical compound. The next step utilizes the created conceptual framework to derive the key variables that influence the level of effectiveness in the given context, explore the minimum (but sufficient) conditions that are necessary for the mass media instrumentalization in such a manner, and shift this theoretical compound into the realm of foreign policy strategies. Finally, the last step concerning the theoretical-analytical background of this thesis first puts the derived variables into a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns and second carries out their operationalization.

In the second stage, the previously generated analytical model is applied to a case study. The case study approach was chosen as it allows one to conduct an in-depth analysis of a unique situational configuration, bind it to a performance of a particular state entity at the same time, and compare it to the real consequences of such activities. For the given purpose, the thesis makes use of the most influential case that is crucial to contemporary research in the field of offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategies: The activities of Russian mass media in the Ukrainian national media market. This case is of fundamental importance, as the Russo-Ukrainian conflict sparked in 2013 has provided us, for the first time, with an opportunity to observe a full-scale involvement of a whole spectrum of mass media assets in a foreign campaign within the framework of offensive strategies (combining both the offensively tuned soft power and information warfare). At the same time, this media campaign reflected on the calls for improvements in information capabilities stemming from the Russian expert community and military command of the RF that started to appear during the first presidential term

of Vladimir Putin. The Russian information campaign in Ukraine was unique in several aspects: the range of involved information-based resources, the long-lasting high-level intensity (at least from 2013 to 2015), and the widespread implementation of information narratives abroad in an aggressive manner against another state entity on the information-psychological level in compliance with Russian state interests. The selected case study primarily focuses on the actual state of affairs in the autumn of 2013 as the configuration of the key variables directly influencing the level of effectiveness on the Russian side at that very moment predetermined the ability of the RF to employ mass media assets against Ukraine within the offensive strategies in the course of the escalation and the active phases of this political-military conflict (2013 – 2015).

3. Theoretical-Analytical Background: The Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Offensive Foreign Policy Strategies

This chapter, dedicated to the creation of the theoretical-analytical background, is divided into the following parts: (1) The Conceptual Framework, (2) The Variables and Conditions, and (3) The General Analytical Model. As indicated in the paragraphs related to the methodological background and research design, the first part constructs a coherent definition of the 'effectiveness' in terms of the mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies. By using this theoretical background, the further part then derives the key variables that directly influence the change in the level of effectiveness, explores the minimum (but sufficient) conditions that are necessary for the effective mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies, and shifts the final compound to the realm of foreign policy. The third part then puts the derived variables into the relevant analytical model facilitating the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level) and proceeds with the operationalization of the given variables against this backdrop.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The general conceptual framework constituting the 'effectiveness' of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies is constructed in several consequential steps. First, the power of information is outlined in

a direct association with the psychological influence of mass media assets. More precisely, the aim is to describe and explain the process through which the psychological influence (that can be) carried out by information transforms into relations based on power projection. This is the most general conceptual layer in the chain and presents the starting point for our analysis. Here the processes through which the power of information is generated and the role of information within the scope of media power are described. Emphasis is put on the (sub)concepts encompassing mechanisms that affect what affairs people pay attention to and how they form their opinion on them when a judgment is needed. In the second step, this thesis deals with the lower layers of the examined conceptual framework that concern the essential (sub)concepts predetermining the ability to seize power over information channeled through media assets and steer it in a profit-maximizing manner, thus making the mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies feasible. In the third step, the thesis interconnects the layer of (sub)concepts related to the power of information with the layer of (sub)concepts referring to the power over information, puts them into a coherent compound, and provides a comprehensive overview of the conceptual framework constituting and defining the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies. In this place, the thesis formulates an innovative definition scheme concerning the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization.

3.1.1 The Power of Information

An insight into the 'power of information' represents the first and unavoidable step in constructing the conceptual framework through the lens of which we can define the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies and understand this issue in its complexity. To begin with, let's briefly describe the meaning of the 'power of information' and why it is so important for defining effectiveness in our context. Traditional theories of power comprehend social relationships in terms of domination and subordination. The power projection thus requires the ability to intentionally carry out an action that influences the behavior of others. (Freedman, 2015) In particular, the power of information relies on symbolic interactions taking place in information space and having the nature as well as the capacity to influence decisions made by social actors in ways favoring the empowered actor's will, interests, or values. As such, the power of information refers to the actors who allocate resources of symbolic

power in the form of communication tools necessary for transferring the message influencing the formation of human knowledge about social reality. (Freedman, 2015)

Moreover, the progress in the evolution of communication technologies allows us to do this on a mass scale transcending national and regional boundaries or even having a global impact. This background has allowed us to think about global knowledge warfare – a situation in which one state purposefully spreads and manages information to influence public knowledge that targets multiple states in different world regions in pursuit of a competitive advantage over foreign opponents. Information transforms into knowledge when having a purpose or use and requires awareness or a form of understanding of the subject. As such, knowledge warfare is about what information people receive, how they interpret it, and how they use it in their actions. (Shiraev & Mölder, 2020) In this context, the power of mass media stems primarily from the symbolic power of information and it is how information affects the thinking or doing of whole social groups on national, international, or even global levels that makes mass media powerful assets. (Fang, 1997; Shabir et al., 2015) Therefore, the investigation into mechanisms that enable an increase in the effectiveness of mass media in tailor-made strategies should start with properly understanding how the power of information is generated and how it influences the formation of our mindsets.

3.1.1.1 Cognitive Effects and Memory Performance

The basic principles of psychological manipulation based on the massive dispersion of information through various media assets can be found in the writings of Walter Lippman and Edward Bernays, famous American experts in the field of public relations. Their works presented the first serious probe into the world of social manipulation and inspired generations of researchers. In 1922, Lippman stated that images of the world presented by mass media can influence the image in our heads. (Lippman, 1922) In accordance with this view, Bernays described information as incentives that interfere with and influence processes of the human mind – evoke feelings, emotions, desires, lead to persuasion, and weaken the resilience of human thinking to particular content. (Bernays, 1928) According to Bernays, these incentives then take part in shaping human ideas about the outside world and the surrounding reality represented by social, economic, and political affairs. (Bernays, 1928) From the current perspective, we can claim these initial assessments were right in their essence but were too shallow to fully reveal the intricate interactions occurring between information and the process of

thinking. Further revelations in this field of research brought evidence saying that the key to the manipulation of human thinking are the cognitive effects that can be produced through information messaging. (Arendt & Matthews, 2014) Therefore, the following paragraphs in this section elaborate primarily on the group of (sub)concepts explaining the circumstances in which the cognitive effects of information occur and outline the internal logic of the whole process.

According to the available evidence, it is the 'cognitive effects' of information that directly affect the core processes in human thinking – they have a substantial impact on the creation of our knowledge, influence people's real-world beliefs as well as the understanding of issues/events, and they have significant consequences for the formation of judgments, attitudes, or behavior. (Arendt & Matthews, 2014) The place, where the cognitive effects of information materialize, is embedded deeply in the process of 'memory performance'. The term memory performance expresses what knowledge an audience can learn from the information received. 'Learning' is then a result of how much of the received information can be encoded, how well the encoded material was stored, and how many pieces of the stored amount are retrievable from memory. As such, the exposure of our mind to cumulative presentations of information, from which the audience incidentally learns, influences our reactions toward the presented reality. (Lang, 2006) Therefore, theoretical premises concerning the cognitive effects of information assume that the quantity and the quality of the information received are important to enforce the process of their 'retrievability' (ability to recall said information) from memory. Moreover, the manner in which reactions are generated in terms of retrievability is dependent on how specific pieces of information are available in one specific moment in memory for retrieval. (Potter, 2012) The memory performance in terms of 'availability' is then predetermined by the 'accessibility' and 'applicability' of various pieces of information in the human mind. While accessibility is represented by the total received amount of information concerning one issue (particular social reality), applicability is represented by connotations of the received information (stimulating the emergence of interconnections according to content parameters). (Lang, 2006; Potter, 2012) The (sub)concepts of accessibility, applicability, availability, and retrievability thus refer to the core mechanisms constituting the course of memory processing in the human mind, or, in other words, the way through which the received information is stored, encoded, interconnected, and prepared for retrieval. (Lang, 2006; Potter, 2012) Thus, the performance of memory processing, working on the principle of retrievability stimulation

through accessibility and applicability, can be influenced by techniques related to the exposure of the recipient (or an audience) to selective information in which the quantity and content are crucial – cultivation and framing. Both these techniques increase the long-term availability of a particular set of information for retrieval from memory. (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2009; Shrum & Bischak, 2001) Cultivation and framing are the products of deliberate information production and messaging, so it is time to have a closer look at how exactly these techniques influence the performance of memory processing.

Cultivation presumes long-term exposure to the whole system of information messaging and streaming emphasizing particular issues. In its purest form, the cultivation theory suggests that the indirect experience gained from information messaging is stored in memory where it transforms into the primary basis for developing social beliefs and attitudes toward a certain reality. (Gerbner et al., 1980) In particular, this technique affects the accessibility of issues in memory and thus also the general level of ease with which a specific issue can be retrieved from memory (the availability heuristic) and the ease with which a particular issue can be imagined (the simulation heuristic). (Shrum & Bischak, 2001) Moreover, cultivation is based on homogenization in perceptions of social reality and is enhanced with increasing levels of exposure to the same package of information. The long-term exposure of a group of people to homogenous information might lead to the creation of commonality in opinions about the presented issues or to the shared imagination of a prototype. This commonality effect can then be strong enough to overcome the differences stemming from divergent social environments which individual people come from. (Shrum & Bischak, 2001) In practice, the cultivation effect occurs by increasing the salience of a certain issue in a specific information space (e.g. in one media market). To be clear about the logic, 'salience' is enhanced by increasing the amount of information concerning one specific issue and repeating it in the target information space. Therefore, when one issue is emphasized and presented in the information messaging and achieves a high salience rating, it directly influences the importance assigned to the issue by the audience exposed to this technique: the more the information messaging contains specific issue/s, the higher the rate of recipients assessing these issue/s as important. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) In one sentence, the intensity with which a specific issue is presented to the audience increases the accessibility of this particular issue in recipients' memories and thus also its availability for retrieval when they categorize different issues on the scale of importance.

Drawing the attention of the human mind to certain issues through cultivation is only one side of the coin. The other is the ability to draw people to specific (or even intentionally preset) interpretations of these issues. (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2009) In that respect, the communication studies point to the fact that anyone can provide various pieces of information referring to one selected issue with specific content attributes an thus portray a preconceived picture of the given reality. This technique is called framing because providing the information with content attributes means putting them into particular logical frames in an effort to promote specific problem interpretations. (Entman, 1993) The emergence of content attributes includes the creation of specific pieces of information that are intentionally (or even unwittingly) one-sided, biased, or distorted to some extent and may express certain preferences as well as appeals. (Entman, 1993) When referring to the power of information, framing stimulates the applicability (instead of accessibility as in the case of cultivation) of received information – connections between multiple pieces of information are created throughout the memory processing using the specific nature of encoded framing thus increasing the availability of a uniquely tainted set of knowledge for retrieval. (Price et al., 1997) In practice, various messages dispersed by mass media in one media market addressing one issue are captured by our minds, interconnected based on the relations between them given by the attributed content, and then compared and incorporated into the available set of knowledge with certain interpretations. (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2009) Moreover, the content framing having the potential to evoke strong emotional reactions among recipients stimulates memory performance with increased intensity. It means that the information received can be thoroughly encoded, more pieces can be stored and interconnected, and a higher amount of knowledge is applicable (and available) when judgment about the nature of important issues is needed. (Alkire et al., 1996) Notwithstanding, despite the primary outcome of the framing technique is to affect issue interpretation, it is also related to the persuasion and attitudinal effects, as different formulations can lead to the formation of different attitudes. On that matter, the investigation into framing has proved that receiving of information interpretations correlates with the formation of final attitudes toward issues and that every effect stemming from framing is potentially also a persuasion effect. (Matthews & Schemer, 2012) However, when media offer conspicuously biased information people tend to discount the message, if it contradicts, conflicts, or is inconsistent with their priors. This process is referred to as biased assimilation, motivated reasoning, or most precisely as motivated skepticism and can lead to opinion polarization

within the target society. (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Lord et al., 1979; Taber & Lodge, 2006)
It means that to achieve the persuasion effect, one must formulate the information content
carefully to hide the biased attributing as much as possible. On the other hand, if one
wants to employ polarization in order to arouse conflict, then the biased attributing in
favor of a specific group/s within the target audience can be of immense importance to
reach the desired effect. All this is dependent on the appropriateness of the chosen
communication strategy and the precision of individual steps made in the course of the
process. (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006) By and large, the content
attributes in the context of which specific pieces of information are presented to the
audience increase the applicability of such information in recipients' memories and thus
their availability for retrieval when making the interpretations regarding individual issues
at hand.

3.1.1.2 Attitude Forming and Behavioral Activation

For now, we have outlined the basic concepts associated with the cognitive effects
of information and logically linked them together to explain how information messaging
can influence memory processing in the human mind (as utilized within the frameworks
of information, hybrid, knowledge, or cognitive warfare).[5] And though the changes in
interpretations, beliefs, and attitudes are exciting, it is the degree to which they affect
people's engagement in some form of action (practical behavior) that makes them
important. Therefore, the next paragraphs focus on how the deliberate influencing of
memory processing can turn into attitude-forming and behavioral activation.

First of all, it is necessary to mention that when people try to make interpretations
of particular issues, they do not necessarily have to use all the information they have
received or even that they stored in memory. The process of thinking often uses intuitive
shortcuts that may detour important pieces of information or knowledge necessary to
make as much 'objective' judgment as possible in a particular moment. (Tversky &
Kahneman, 1973) Probably the most important shortcut that appears in the course of
memory performance is the reliance on highly available information – techniques for
increasing availability were described in previous paragraphs (cultivation + framing).
(Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) The idea of intuitive shortcuts is based on an associative-

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[5] *Cognitive warfare is an unconventional form of warfare that uses information to attacks that are defined,
structured and organized to alter the knowledge or just mislead reality perceptions of leaders, operators,
entire social and professional classes, or entire populations living in a particular region, country or group
of countries. (Claverie & Du Cluzel, 2022; NATO, 2023)*

network model of human memory. This model assumes that the knowledge created by the information received is organized as an associative network of cognitive units or nodes. Within this network, the activation of one unit can spread through the network to interconnected units leading to the activation of related pieces of information and creating the final picture of an issue. (Arendt & Matthews, 2014) However, there are nodes and pieces of information that can be activated more easily than others. Some nodes are always ready to be activated because they have a high baseline excitation level and are easily accessible. These nodes are associated with particular pieces of information containing specific content attributes referring to the issue under discussion in a particular form. And, the highly accessible nodes bearing pieces of information with increased applicability potential can be strongly influenced by the cultivation and framing techniques (especially when occurring at once). (Arendt & Matthews, 2014) This means that intentional stimulation enhancing the accessibility and applicability of certain pieces of information also induces an increase in the availability of this information in memory by stimulating automatic associative activation thus detouring others. Considering this, the change in salience and framing of issues in the dispersed information messaging directly influences the probability that specifically interpreted information will be (intentionally or automatically) retrieved from memory when attitude formation is required. (Kosicki, 2002) Thus, the intensity of information messaging in combination with the repetition of strong content attributing enhances the level of retrievability of specific interpretations of issues while encouraging intentional as well as intuitive memory processing leading to the formation of attitudes.

In spite of that, memory processing is negatively affected by the reception of information offering diverging or even contradicting connotations in the real world. When the initial information gathering is incomplete or confused by conflicting findings, feelings of ambiguity (uncertainty) might occur – the audience knows that something has happened, but does not know what it means, what consequences it brings to them, or what attitudes they should take in such circumstances. (Ellsberg, 1961) In this kind of situation, the majority of people naturally strive to resolve such ambiguity. By its very nature, the feelings of ambiguity resulting from incomplete or conflicting messaging can be resolved first and foremost by delivering additional information to the audience. And, the one who can provide a higher amount of information with further reasoning has a better chance of influencing the process of attitude forming among the members of the target audience. (Marginson, 2006) The resolution of ambiguity leads to the formation of new feelings and

opinions about the issue (social reality under discussion) and the culmination of this chain of effects is a felt need to act that might lead to public expression/demonstration of attitudes. The subsequent motivation that comes in the form of a public announcement of a protest or the overt expression of support by other people may further contribute to the overcoming of ambiguity and can motivate (or even provoke) individuals to take part in an action, while others may be activated to organize a counteraction. Both cooperation and aggression may be activated depending on the content of the information messaging received. (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) Therefore, behavioral activation refers to instances in which the target audience does something it would not otherwise have done as a consequence of consuming specific information messaging that influences their attitude forming through memory performance (in terms of accessibility, applicability, availability, and retrievability of issues with specific connotations). (Dimitrova et al., 2011) Regarding the issue of this thesis, the desired end of politically motivated and purpose-driven media messaging is to trigger this urge to engage in socio-political processes actively.

To conclude this section, it implies that information can be used to exert one's will over other subjects by exposing them to highly intensive streaming offering a set of intentionally fabricated pieces of information arranged into tailor-made connotations that contain specific attributes related to the social realities in question. In light of this, behavioral activation presents the practical manifestation of the power of information projected through mass media that is triggered by deliberate and calculated stimulation of accessibility and applicability of particular information in the human mind thus increasing its availability for retrieval from memory and utilization in the process of attitudinal forming.

3.1.1.3 The Conceptual Layer Referring to the Power of Information

The first step in the creation of the conceptual framework introduced a group of interrelated (sub)concepts associated with cognitive effects – accessibility, applicability, availability, and retrievability – that establish the 'power of information,' explain how the memory performance in the human mind can be affected by information streaming channeled through mass media assets, and rationalize the activation of a target audience towards expected behavior. In summary, memory performance is highly dependent on two essential aspects: a) the quantity of received information about one issue which influences the level of accessibility of related knowledge in memory, produces

commonality in opinions, and affects the judgment concerning the categorization of various issues on the scale of importance; b) the quality of received information which influences the level of applicability of related knowledge in memory, shapes interpretations and affects the judgment concerning the nature of issues. All these components are intertwined and together they constitute the level of availability of specific knowledge which directly affects the ability to retrieve it from memory when a particular attitudinal forming or behavioral activation (i.e. one in line with the propagandist's intentions) is needed, required, or desired.

3.1.2   The Power over Information

An insight into the power over information represents the second step in constructing the conceptual framework which rationalizes the effectiveness of mass media assets in goal-driven strategies. This step further elaborates on the previous findings by arguing that the instrumentalization of the power of mass media is critically dependent on the level to which cognitive effects of information messaging can be taken under control. For this purpose, it is essential to manage control over processes that allow arbitrarily modify: a) the salience of information affecting the accessibility (thus also availability and retrievability) of particular issues in memory, and b) the framing of information affecting the applicability (thus also availability and retrievability) of specific connotations in memory. Via controlling the power of information, the one who is in charge can extract benefits by creating public support for his/her plans or by activating aversive stands towards enemies. As such, the next sections investigate how the conceptual framework continues and functions in this second layer – the layer of mass media outlets and the media market.

3.1.2.1 Agenda-Setting and Media Messaging

Most mass media are not merely carriers channeling various types of information to the public, but they are also large producers of information content. This is particularly true in the case of news media possessing editorial staff responsible for selecting what issues are covered and in what context they are released. This grants mass media assets the capacity to select and shape messages presented to the public and this kind of primary decision-making role is encapsulated in the 'agenda-setting' functions. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) The core principle of the agenda-setting concept is the transfer of issues from the media agenda to the public agenda which is a two-phased process. In the first

phase, the agenda-setting function is based on the information dispersion that can influence the extent to which issues take root in the consciousness of the target public and are perceived as important for public affairs. In the second phase, the agenda-setting function rests on the assignment of content attributions which allows the transferring of biased interpretations into the public discourse. (McCombs, 2014) In this manner, mass media outlets can, through agenda-setting functions, influence what issues the general public thinks about and how it thinks about them – something that Lippman and Bernays predicted in the 1920s.

The reliance on 'media messaging' – or information channeled and dispersed through mass media assets – becomes a fundamental precondition for the agenda-setting functions to work in practice. If the target audience does not rely on mass media in the phase of information gathering, the effects of media messaging embedded in both agenda-setting functions are unlikely to occur. (Wirth et al., 2010) In this context, reliance is given by the extent to which a certain medium is important to information acquisition – the previous research in communication shows that only those individuals who rely heavily on mass media for information gathering can be influenced by purpose-driven media messaging. (Fortunato & Martin, 2016) On the other hand, there are some mitigating factors that heavily bind public attention to mass-media-based information.

The vital factor binding public attention to media messaging is the natural human effort to obtain and evaluate information. Agenda-setting studies have consistently focused on the audience's need for orientation in public affairs and, according to them, the need for orientation stems from individuals' uncertainty (ambiguity) toward specific issues associated with public affairs that surround them. (Fortunato & Martin, 2016) Notably, the consumption rates of mass media information increase in times of uncertainty, and if the matter is a new reality (that cannot be adequately judged using experience and previous knowledge) or a complicated social process (that requires sophisticated expert knowledge), the level of reliance on information dispersed by mass media assets is further encouraged. (Scheufele, 1999) Second, as the media technologies providing information messaging on a mass scale are more available and affordable, people become increasingly susceptible to their effects. These days, most people possess a TV, radio, or Internet receiver and thus the amount of those who become aware of the flow of real-time events from mass media rapidly increases. As such, an unprecedently vast amount of people have become reliant on the information that has been crafted in newsrooms operated by various media companies in the course of the last several decades.

(Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010) Thus, news mass media including predominantly the TV and Internet (e.g. internet-based newsrooms, information agencies, electronic broadcasting, as well as social media like Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, or Telegram) are currently the most important channels through which ongoing events in the political, social, and economic spheres of life are reported to the public. Especially in politics, the number of people who are directly involved in the process is strictly limited, and even those who are politically active obtain a majority of information through mass media news coverage or social media posting. (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010) While the mass media have become a primary source of information, the defining and structuring effect of the information provided by them on people's perceptions of reality has been more and more considerable. It is, therefore, for this reason in particular that the control of mass media messaging through agenda-setting functions can play a crucial role in limiting the range of issues and interpretations that the members of the target audience can use to form an opinion about newly-emerged situations and their possible consequences. (Happer & Philo, 2013) In the end, the one who wants to influence the thinking and doing of the people through agenda-setting functions must increase the reach of the messaging streaming to the target audience and make the media assets easily accessible.

Furthermore, the majority of the general public is more prone to turn their attention to mass media messaging when looking for information (that helps them understand the course of events as well as possible repercussions), especially in periods of political, social, or economic instability. (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) In times of instability, uncertainty, or heightened anxiety about future development, people use media predominantly in a purposive manner – mass media become a source of reassurance. This is because these situations place heavier requirements to satisfy informational needs as the course of events is often extremely fast, chaotic, and difficult to predict. (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) As the investigation into information-seeking strategies suggests, people in such situations are more determined to search for information, increase consumption of mass media, and turn their attention to the most accessible source providing topical issues concerning the actual state of affairs. Such an increase in attention paid to mass media messaging can have a twofold effect – people either mitigate their worries when receiving benign information or become highly alerted to perform defensive (or even offensive) actions and thus engage in a form of related behavioral activation. (Loveless, 2008)

To sum it up, media outlets have the chance to select issues that would be involved in the messaging provided by them to the public on a mass scale as well as shape the content of the dispersed information. In such a manner, by using the agenda-setting functions mass media outlets can influence the public agenda and discourse, affect the attitude forming, and achieve behavioral activation within the ranks of the target audience. However, the range of media messaging is crucial to increase the dependency of the target audience on mass media assets in the process of information gathering. In addition, the effects of agenda-setting and media messaging are even higher in times of uncertainty, instability, or crisis. For these reasons, the control over agenda-setting functions through the manipulation with mass media assets (that allows for managing the information messaging in a desired manner) is of enormous importance. Thus, the further paragraphs offer a more detailed investigation into both phasis of agenda-setting that are necessary to complete the conceptual framework.

3.1.2.2   First-Level Agenda-Setting: Salience Management

As briefly signaled above, the first-level agenda-setting function is based on the transfer of issues selected by mass media outlets into the public consciousness through means of information dispersion. (McCombs, 2014) The aim is to manage the process of information production dispersion in order to increase the salience of selected issues in the target media market as much as possible. Therefore, the first-level agenda-setting function is based first and foremost on the process that, in short, can be called the 'salience management.' The salience management takes advantage of the intentional techniques allowing maneuvering in the area of 'issue visibility.' (McCombs, 2011) Now let's get down to the internal logic of this process to see how it all works.

The concept of issue visibility consists of 'attention' given by the number of published information referring to one issue and 'prominence' given by placement and length devoted to selected issues in printed media, or by placement and time-footage devoted to them on broadcast or internet media. (Kiousis, 2004) The issue visibility can be enhanced by exercising the manipulations with both attention and prominence imparted to selected (informational) issues. This is done by increasing the number of published references associated with one issue and by placing them on the first pages or into the broadcast prime-time. Thus, by changing the visibility of said issues through regulating attention and prominence, mass media can signal to the target public space different levels of importance attached to various issues and incite the selective attention

of the target audience. (McCombs, 2011) As a result, the salience management through which the media outlets tend to some issues (and not others) directly influences the standards by which people evaluate a variety of public issues on the scale of importance. (Kiousis, 2004; McCombs, 2011) The manipulations in visibility become even more important if we realize that people cannot notice everything and that the life cycles of individual issues are determined by the rise and fall of public attention. This means that there is only a limited amount of issues, dispersed throughout the media market, which people can engage with. (Zhu, 1992) In this context, the term 'issue capacity' is used to measure the number of issues that an individual considers before making the final decision about the most important ones. However, issue capacity is significantly reduced by the time available for information searching and by the limited capability of memory performance in terms of information processing in the human mind. (Zhu, 1992)

Since the time available for information searching and memory performance is limited, salience management (in terms of the first-level agenda-setting function) is a zero-sum game to a large extent. In every media market and in every public space, competition among different issues for public attention emerges. (Hyun & Lee, 2008) The competitive environment in media markets becomes even tougher as the publishing time (and especially the prime-time hours) of individual media outlets is limited too. This also applies in the case of the seemingly unlimited publishing capacity of the internet – people have to divide their activity into multiple web pages and they have only limited time for information searching at their disposal. (Hyun & Lee, 2008) Moreover, previous research in this field shows that only a very limited number of issues (approximately up to ten) can simultaneously exist on the media and the public agendas and can be considered salient. (McCombs, 2014) In that respect, the zero-sum game theory suggests that the public attention devoted to various issues fluctuates due to changing levels of their salience in the competitive environment of media markets. This means that the issues gaining more visibility also gain more public attention at the expense of others while the ratio can change over time. Thus, the zero-sum game reasoning asserts that the competitive media market creates an environment conducive to some issues and not to others because each media newsroom has to make the decision on which issues get the prime visibility positions (thus employing the salience management techniques). (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2010) Finally, the issue competition is bolstered by the existence of rival media companies which give preference to different (competing) issues (e.g. problems, affairs, or events) in their publishing policy and information messaging. The media outlets that

can win this contest – retake more 'publishing space' on account of rival companies, make their issues more visible, and attract more public attention over a longer period – have a better chance of projecting their influence in the target media market and a higher probability to succeed in determining the accessibility and availability of selected issues in memories of the people representing the target audience. (Fortunato & Martin, 2016) As such, we can state that salience management is about proficient utilization of information space and its results are vitally dependent on the range of mass media information streaming. Particular media outlets must be able to reach the target audience, provide the selected issues with maximum visibility (give them maximum publishing time and place them where they can be more easily spotted), and win over the competition in the target media market to get the chosen issues to the eyes and ears of the target audience as much as possible.

The goal-driven media strategies thus aim to deliver selected issues to the target media market (predefined by the target audience's composition and socio-political context) with maximum salience in terms of visibility (attention + prominence) compared to rival companies and thus to address as many people as possible. To complete the chain of events, the changes in the reach of media messaging and in the visibility of issues achieved through salience management cause changes in levels of accessibility, availability, and retrievability of these issues in peoples' memories.

3.1.2.3 Second-Level Agenda-Setting: Framing Management

The second-level agenda-setting function then refers to the information content and predominantly works with the importance of exposing the target audience to certain content attributions that are assigned to selected issues by framing. (Price et al., 1997) The aim is to manage the information production process purposefully in order to increase the salience of specific frames regarding selected issues in the target media market as much as possible. Therefore, the second-level agenda-setting function is based first and foremost on the process that, in short, can be called the 'framing management.' The framing management takes advantage of intentional techniques allowing maneuvering in the area of 'issue interpretation.' (McCombs, 2014)

To begin with, we can repeat that 'to frame' means 'to select specific content attributes' (related to the issue in question). The concept of issue interpretation is based on supplying the media messaging with frames bearing some kind of 'context' and/or 'valence' attributes. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) In terms of contextual attributing,

framing management means supplying messages concerning an issue with content emphasizing certain aspects of a story. Using this technique one can define a problem (describe an action of a chosen agent), diagnose causes (identify the roots of a problem), make moral judgments (evaluate causes of a problem), and/or suggest remedies (offer and justify possible solutions to a problem with expected outcomes). (Entman, 1993) These basic operations that are employed to frame the information context can be complemented by another one – valence attributing through which the affective (emotional) messages are assigned to the selected issue. (Kiousis, 2004) There are methods on how to produce an affective/emotional framing of a message. First, it could be done by assigning a conflictual background to the selected issue. The higher the potential to arouse a conflict among recipients of a message, the higher the affective framing is. Another technique makes use of positive and negative attributing coded into the problem definition, diagnosis of causes, associated moral judgments, or suggested remedies. And, again, the higher the number of positive or negative attributes, the stronger the effect of affective framing. (Entman, 2010; Kiousis, 2004) Both techniques of framing management (contextual and valence attributing) allow one to emphasize certain parameters of an issue while minimizing or ignoring others. Therefore, framing is defined by the attributes included as well as by the attributes omitted from the information messaging. The omission may be as critical as the inclusion in the effort to guide the formation of issue interpretations among people who are part of the target audience, especially if the audience receives messaging offering one viewpoint and will possess little or incommensurable data about alternatives (Edelman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999) As such, the social world can be imagined as a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by using alternative sets of contextual and valence attributes. To some extent (especially in conflict situations), it is the continuation of the zero-sum game – in terms of competing interpretations associated with particular issues in one media market. (Zhu, 1992) In the end, by changing the context and valence it is possible to make the information referring to selected issues, problems, or actors more salient in media as well as public agendas either with positive connotations or in aversive discourse instead.

In the process of framing management, when authors wish to convey contextual or valence attributes to frame an issue and create the desired media messaging, they must craft words and sentences into narratives – stories with explanatory power. (H. White, 1980) Accordingly, words and sentences are linked together in such a manner that the content is presented as a discovery of a truth realized through the accumulation of

evidence (and for the general tone of a narrative/message, it is crucially important what evidence is included and what pieces are omitted). (H. White, 1980) However, there are different ways to do so – one might structure a narrative as an argument, a negotiable proposition, a metaphor, a direct challenge, a threat, an explanation, or give it some kind of personal evaluation. (Mattern, 2005) Thus, with many approaches to framing management, journalists must choose from a wide spectrum of various communication strategies. Any framing process thus begins with the choice of what message is going to be sent to the target audience – meaning the choice of contextual and valence attributes upon beliefs about which frames will be the most proficient for advancing the selected issues in a chosen communication strategy. In this manner, the results of the second-level agenda-setting, in terms of framing management, are highly dependent on journalistic attitudes that are biased by their experience, knowledge, intentions, or work tasks. (Mattern, 2005) Therefore, the responsibility of journalists is to say what is on their mind to successfully code their intentions into the media messaging. Intentionally fabricated narratives thus can turn the attention of the audience to particular actors, events, or policies and tinge them with specific 'ideology' designated by the narrator's viewpoint, or by editorial demands of individual media outlets. Thus, different pieces of information clustered into tailor-made narratives spread by mass media directly address the formation, diffusion, and reception of ideas on the target media market in the framework of the chosen communication strategy and influence the issue interpretation in the ranks of the target audience. (D'Angelo & Shaw, 2018; Roselle et al., 2014) As such, we can state that framing management refers to the publishing process (instead of the reach/range of the media messaging as in the case of salience management), that exists within all media outlets, the aim of which is to fill the selected issues with context and valence attributing providing the outgoing messaging with the issue interpretations fitting the selected communication strategy. All is done in an effort to win the competition and get the chosen interpretations to the eyes and ears of the target audience as much as possible.

The instrumentalization of mass media in purpose-driven strategies inevitably includes the deliberate utilization of framing management to produce media messaging with encoded issue/s interpretations (by using contextual and valence attribution) that is in line with the given communication strategy and increases its salience in the target media market. To complete the chain of events, the change in the interpretation of issues through framing management causes changes in levels of applicability, availability, and retrievability of particular issue connotations in peoples' memories.

3.1.2.4 The Conceptual Layer Referring to the Power over Information

This step introduced two groups of interrelated (sub)concepts that, together, form the 'power over information' and refer to the control over media messaging. These two groups can be depicted as two branches of the agenda-setting process: a) the aim of the first-level agenda-setting is to deliver the information messaging to the target media market and employ salience management to change the issue visibility through attention and prominence; b) the aim of the second-level agenda-setting is to activate the publishing process and employ framing management to change the issue interpretation through context and valence. The first-level agenda-setting function thus assumes the necessity to achieve sufficient reach/range of information messaging and participation in competition between issues for visibility in one media market. Visibility can be increased through salience management in the target media space that enables to pay more attention to specific issues and give them more prominent positions in the public information space. The second-level agenda-setting function assumes the creation of different interpretations associated with chosen issues in accordance with the intentions of the producers of the media content. Interpretations consist of contextual and valence/emotional attributes that are assigned to information messages/narratives through framing management with respect to the chosen communicative strategy. All these building stones are intertwined and together they constitute the power over information enabling to employ mass media assets in order to influence what issues people pay attention to and what interpretations they use (retrieve from memory) when a particular attitudinal forming or behavioral activation (i.e. one in line with the propagandist's intentions) is needed, required, or desired.

3.1.3 The Conceptual Framework Constituting the Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Purpose-Driven Strategies

With respect to the findings referring to both 'the power of information' and 'the power over information,' we can conclude that the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies can be depicted in terms of influence transfer that goes from media outlets to the target audience, from information forging process to attitudinal/behavioral forming, and from agenda-setting activities in the media market to cognitive processes occurring in the human mind.

The influence is transmitted along two lines that can be, in a simplified form, expressed by two chains of (sub)concepts interlinked with a unique internal logic

(thoroughly elaborated in previous sections of this chapter) that has origins in various fields of studies. The first starts with the enhancement of the mass media reach/range through salience management using attention and prominence to influence the issue visibility of selected information in the target media market and thus directly affect accessibility, availability, and retrievability of this information from memory in the ranks of the target audience when public pressure or inner feelings require to take some attitude or action. The second starts with the activation of publishing policy through the framing management using content and valence to influence the issue interpretation of selected information in the target media market and thus directly affect the applicability, availability, and retrievability of these information connotations from memory in the ranks of the target audience when a public pressure or inner feelings require to take some attitude or action. Both these chains of events are inseparably linked together. In practice, they have to work simultaneously and efficiently to provide anyone with the power to engage mass-media-based information messaging in serious efforts to sway the target audience, change their attitudes to particular political affairs, or even activate them to desired actions. In this context, the effectiveness is given by the ability to construct convenient sociolinguistic connotations (reflecting the goals predefined by the communication strategy) and the ability to deliver such information within the ranks of the target public space (reflecting the specifics of different operational environments).

If we put all these pieces into one picture, we get the conceptual framework constituting and defining the 'effectiveness' in terms of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: *The Conceptual Framework Constituting the Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Purpose-Driven Strategies.*

3.2 Variables and Conditions
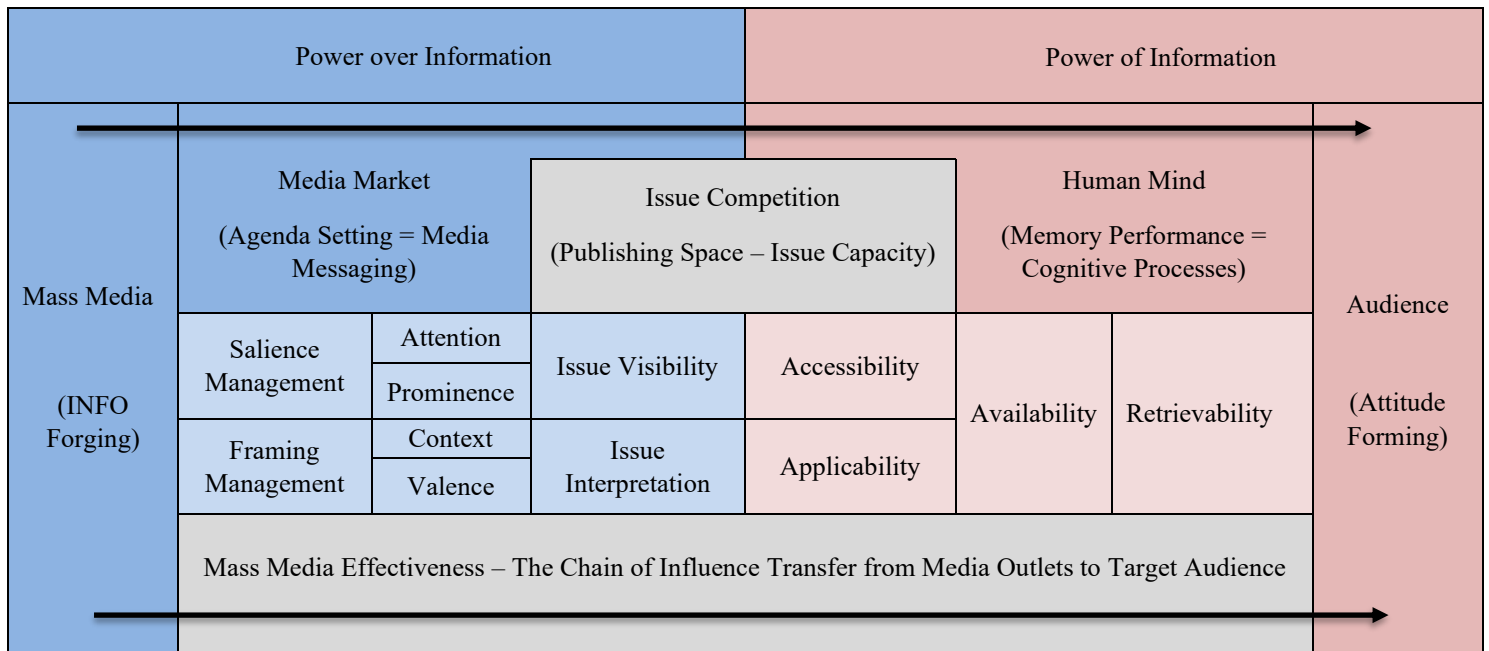
Concerning the constructed conceptual framework (portrayed as the chain of influence transfer from media outlets to the target audience) giving primacy to the salience and framing management, this thesis suggests that the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies is, in the first place, determined by two variables: a) the control over mass media outlets, and b) the range (reach) of the controlled mass media outlets. In combination, these variables express variations in situational settings within structural qualities of a mass media network (encompassing selected media outlets) used by some entity to deliberately influence the attitudes/behavior of the target audience through information messaging. While the variations in the first variable change the level to which one entity is/was able to take control over individual media outlets, steer the publishing processes within them (through framing management), and produce the information with desired content/valence, the variations in the latter change the level to which one entity is/was able to extend the activities of the controlled media outlets to chosen media market, spread there the manufactured information efficiently (through salience management), and win over the issue competition. So, let's have a closer look at what minimum conditions it is

possible to achieve sufficient effectiveness in terms of purpose-driven mass media instrumentalization to make serious efforts to sway the thinking and doing of the target audience in a favorable direction or even evoke the desired behavioral activation.

Regarding the first mentioned variable, if one wants to effectively influence how the target audience thinks about selected problems, he/she must gain as much control over the structures of mass media outlets responsible for publishing policy as possible. By controlling the publishing policy, one can manage information framing, produce narratives providing favorable interpretations of reality, and bring the desired viewpoint to the target audience. In such circumstances, it is possible to create specific contextual and valence frames concerning selected issues that match the goals outlined by the communication strategy. The control over framing management allows to make efforts to set off the desired discourse in the target destination (in the chosen media market), to influence the cognitive processes of the target audience, and thus increase the effectiveness of goal-driven media instrumentalization. Therefore, sufficient control over mass media structures allowing steering of the publishing policy and production of narratives is the first crucial condition for the effective utilization of the power of information in purpose-driven strategies – in this case, through framing management. The higher the level of control over media outlets, the more effectively can the power of information through framing management be projected. Only by sufficiently increasing the 'control over media outlets' one can seize the agenda-setting function and strive to utilize the issue framing management (through interpretations manipulation) to increase the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in a profit-maximizing manner.

About the second mentioned variable, if one wants to influence the target audience effectively, the mass media outlets under his/her control have to spread their activities in the chosen media market, succeed in the competition, and gain as advantageous position as possible on account of the others. From this point of view, the structure of a mass media network is fundamentally important because it determines the ability of mass media to reach the target audience with its information messaging. The more the media channels are accessible and become important to the target audience for info-acquisition, the higher the chance to manage the issue salience, set the media agenda in the target destination, influence the cognitive processes of the target audience, and thus increase the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies. This is precisely the reason why the position of the controlled mass media (network) on the chosen media market is the crucial condition for effective utilization of the power of

information in a deliberate manner – in this case, through (issue) salience management. Only by sufficiently increasing the 'territorial range of selected mass media outlets' (included within the observed mass media network), one can strive to seize control over the agenda-setting function in the target media market and utilize the issue salience management (through visibility manipulation) to increase the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in a profit-maximizing manner.

As a consequence, if we theorize about state strategies, the key decision-making institutions of one state entity must be able to deliberately modify the value of both variables to effectively employ agenda-setting functions with the aim to influence the public discourse by manipulating information. In terms of foreign policy, this means that the decision-making bodies of one state entity must be able to project the power of both agenda-setting functions on media markets located beyond its borders and succeed in the competitive media environment that is (on top of that) regulated by another state entity. In light of this, the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategies can be defined as follows: the level of a state's capability to deliver favorable information (dependent on the level of state control over the publishing policy of individual mass media outlets) to target foreign audiences in a sufficient amount (dependent on the level of territorial range of media outlets' production). Therefore, enhancing the effectiveness of mass media in foreign policy can be achieved only by creating a centrally controlled media network that allows for the influencing of agenda-setting processes (through salience and framing management) in the chosen foreign media market and consequently by shaping what issues the target foreign audience thinks about and how it creates its opinions regarding ongoing events. Only if all these conditions are met, the political elites of one state can make serious attempts to seize control over the agenda-setting processes on a foreign media market through mass media outlets and can influence the salience of selected and specifically framed narratives among the target audience (delimited by the chosen media market) using goal-driven information dispersal. Moreover, the effectiveness is further enhanced in times of crisis when the reliance on mass media information increases and when contextual and valence framing can be of immense importance (taking the occurrence of a conflict as a mitigating factor).

Finally, if the control over agenda-setting processes in the foreign media market is high and the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization is sufficiently enhanced, it should be possible to expand the set of available strategies with the offensive ones that allow to fulfill such ambitious goals like destabilizing the affected country by activating

the target audience towards conflicting behavior through dispersing purposefully selected information with a high salience ratio and paralyze the affected country by fueling internal disputes which cripple public support for the state's central decision-making bodies by dispersing information with purposefully chosen contextual/valence framing. As such, offensive foreign policy instrumentalization is impossible, if one does not have strong enough control over the production process limiting the ability to project narratives corresponding with goals outlined by the communication strategy. Additionally, if the media network under control does not gain sufficient territorial range (and cannot successfully compete in the chosen media market in terms of salience management), achieving the goals outlined by the strategy is impossible as the mass media are either not able to disperse purposefully framed content within the target audience or acquire sufficient salience in a competitive environment existing on a chosen foreign media market. As a result, mass media effectiveness directly impacts the set of available foreign policy strategies (see Figure 2). This is exactly how the two stated variables – the (level of) control over the mass media outlets and the (level of) territorial range of the mass media outlets – have the potential to explain why offensive foreign policy strategies utilizing mass media on the information-psychological level as the main source of power projection achieve distinctive results and efficiency fluctuates significantly in different cases.

Figure 2: *The effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies.*

State Control over Mass Media (Network)	Territorial Range of Mass Media (Network)
Media Effectiveness in Foreign Policy The level of the state's capability to deliver favorable information *(dependent on the level of state control over publishing policy of individual mass media outlets)* to target foreign audiences in sufficient amounts *(dependent on the level of territorial range of media outlets production).*	
Set of Available Foreign Policy Strategies Enhancing the effectiveness opens the way to mass media employment within offensive foreign policy strategies.	

3.3 The General Analytical Model

The previous part of this chapter has provided theoretical suggestions that allow us to generate a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of real or prospective offensive foreign mass media campaigns led on the information-psychological level and carried out by any chosen state entity in any geopolitical direction. Concerning the described theoretical framework, we can claim that there are at least two significant variables: a) State Control over Mass Media (Network), and b) Territorial Range of Mass Media (Network) – for now it is apparent that the change in the value of these variables has a crucial impact on the state capabilities to project its power abroad through the instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level as well as on the prospective effectiveness of offensive foreign policy strategies using this resource.

However, within the general analytical model, these variables should be treated rather as intermediate variables. The above-mentioned findings concerning the (level of) control over media outlets indicate that it can be measured using two independent variables (located at the lover position): a) the (level of) hierarchical control over the selected media outlets (determined by the ability of one entity to control the publishing

policy and production process in all selected media outlets); b) the (level of) centralized coordination among selected outlets incorporated into the mass media network (determined by the ability of one entity to coordinate the publishing policy and production processes among all selected media outlets in line with the centrally stated communication strategy). These independent variables give us the overall number of mass media outlets that are under the control of one state entity that can be employed in a coordinated manner as a power resource in an effort to purposefully manufacture information content and disperse it in the desired geopolitical directions. In the same manner, the (level of the) territorial range of media outlets' production can be measured by using two independent variables (again, located at the lover position): a) the (level of) expansion of selected media outlets in a chosen media market (determined by the number of media outlets able to publish/broadcast on the territory of chosen state/s); b) the (level of) establishment of selected media outlets in the chosen media market (determined by the public consumption of and confidence in mass media outlets included within the observed mass media network achieved in a competitive environment in the target media market). These independent variables give us the overall number of mass media outlets that can be used as a power resource in terms of the offensive foreign policy strategy and convert the potential range of the mass media network in selected countries into measurable quantities of consumption and confidence ratings thus allowing to assume the level of their establishment in these states. Finally, the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies represents the dependent variable in this chain of events, the value of which is modified through the changes of the given intermediate variables. The outlined analytical model is summarized in Figure (3).

Figure (3): *General analytical model for the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level).*

Independent Variables	Intermediate Variables	Dependent Variable
Hierarchical control over the selected media outlets	State control over mass media (network)	Effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies
Centralized coordination among selected outlets incorporated into the mass media network		
Expansion of selected media outlets in a chosen media market	Territorial range of controlled mass media (network)	
Establishment of selected media outlets in the chosen media market		

Now it is time to unfold and rationalize the intermediate and independent variables into observable and measurable factors precisely delineating the framework for the analysis that will be applied in the following case study.

The configuration of the first intermediate variable – state control over mass media (network) – is directly set by the following independent variables:

- The hierarchical control over media outlets: This independent variable expresses the level of state control over the media outlets and is primarily given by three observable and/or measurable factors:
  a) The role of the state in the given mass media system;
  b) The concentration of state ownership in the given mass media system;
  c) The state power over personnel management within incorporated media outlets.

In combination, these features constitute the capability of state authorities to create a convenient media environment that allows them to control the given (mostly domestic) media market, increase state ownership in selected media outlets, and retake control over publishing policies within these media entities.

- The centralized coordination of incorporated media outlets: This independent variable expresses the level of state potential to engage media outlets in centrally set communication strategies and is primarily given by three observable and/or measurable factors:

  a) The existence of a central organizing unit with sufficient authority;

  b) The ability of the central organizing unit to coordinate the actions of incorporated media outlets;

  c) The ability of the central organizing unit to manage incorporated media outlets and act as an agenda-setter (e.g. in terms of distribution of publishing orders).

  In combination, these factors constitute the state's capability to enforce the implementation of the strategic approach outlined by the key state decision-making bodies and coordinate the activities of media outlets under control with an effort to maximize the chances of achieving the goals stated by the chosen communication strategy.

The unique configurations of these two independent variables inevitably lead to variations in the level of state control over the mass media network. In consequence, the more significant the state control over the mass media network, the more we can consider this variable a substantial modifier increasing the level of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies.

The configuration of the second intermediate variable – territorial range of mass media (network) – is directly set by the following independent variables:

- The expansion of controlled media network on target media market: This independent variable expresses the potential to which the mass media network under control is/was able to penetrate and expand on the target foreign media market and is primarily given by three observable and/or measurable factors:

  a) The existence of the strategic framework for expansion in foreign media markets;

b) The ability of incorporated media outlets to penetrate the target media market;

c) The level of penetration of the target media market (the real number of mass media outlets able to anchor in the target media market).

In combination, these factors constitute the state's capability to enforce the implementation of the strategic framework for the foreign expansion of controlled media outlets, successfully steer the process of expansion of mass media outlets under control in the desired geopolitical directions, and start the dissemination of advantageous media messaging in the target foreign media markets.

- The establishment of a controlled media network on the target media market: This variable expresses the level to which the mass media network under control is/was able to entrench in the competitive (or restrictive) environment existing on a target media market and is primarily given by two observable and/or measurable factors:

    a) The ability of mass media outlets (capable of anchoring in the target media market) to reach a substantial consumption ratio among the target audience;

    b) The ability of mass media outlets (capable of anchoring in the target media market) to reach a substantial confidence ratio among the target audience.

    In combination, these two factors constitute the potential of mass media under the control of the given state entity to overcome the competitive (or restrictive) environment, gain public attention in the target media market, and address the population of the country so affected by advantageous media messaging.

The unique configurations of these two independent variables produce variations in the level of territorial range of the mass media network. In consequence, the more significant the territorial range of the mass media network, the more we can consider this variable a substantial modifier increasing the level of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies.

As both intermediate variables become more and more tangible, and the control of one state entity over the salience and framing management on the chosen media market becomes firmer and firmer, the level of effectiveness of foreign mass media instrumentalization increases. With the increasing level of media effectiveness, the probability that a state can reach its goals set by offensive foreign policy strategies is

much higher. In conditions when the media effectiveness is sufficiently enhanced, and the influence on the agenda-setting process in the target foreign media market is high, it is possible to deliberately disperse manipulated information within the target state's population and affect (by salience and framing management) its thinking and doing – only in such circumstances the attacking state can make a serious effort to employ mass media in offensive strategy the aim of which is to destabilize the internal political situation of a target state by taking the target foreign audience a hostage, activating its population in conflicting behavior, instigating critical decrease in public support for the target state's government, or activating them in protest or turmoil. The political leadership of a target state loses its political legitimacy, the system of political power starts to disintegrate in the bottom-up direction, and the internal sovereignty of the states so affected starts to crumble. Therefore, this analytical model allows us to take into account the actions of individual states in the area of mass media, consider whether the conditions necessary for the use of media assets in offensive foreign policy strategies have been achieved, and assess if and why such strategies can be ineffective/effective in particular cases. To find out how this analytical model functions in practice, the next chapter of the dissertation thesis applies it within the framework of a precisely selected case study.

4. Case Study: Russian Media and the Case of Ukraine

The fourth chapter of this thesis employs the previously created analytical model to assess the 'efficiency potential' of the offensive foreign mass media instrumentalization in the case of the Russian Federation (RF). As presented in the literature review, the RF is regarded as the primary referential object of this dissertation thesis, because, by and large, it was the Russian media operations that attracted the renewed interest of academic and expert communities in exploring the possibilities of utilizing mass media in compliance with foreign policy objectives. Thus, the first part of this chapter aims to assess the capability of the Russian state authorities to take the key mass media assets under control, steer the information production through framing management, and coordinate the publishing activities of all the media outlets incorporated in the network. Second, the activities of Russian mass media on the Ukrainian media market in the course of the latent and escalation phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (that became evident in 2014) have been considered to be the most recent and also the most vivid example referring to the performance of offensive mass media instrumentalization carried out by the RF in a conflict situation. Therefore, the latter part

of this chapter aims to assess the capability to increase the territorial range of the mass media network controlled by the RF in the Ukrainian media market, steer information production through salience management, and establish a strong position among the Ukrainian audience on the eve of the conflict outbreak in 2013. This two-tier procedure allows us to analyze to what extent was the mass media network under the control of the Russian Federation in 2013 ready to steer decisive offensive media campaigns on Ukrainian territory and shine a light on the role played by the unique configuration of the key structural variables predetermining the capabilities of the Russian media network on Ukrainian media market in this one specific moment.

In that context, we should accentuate here, that the case study is oriented, above all, on the examination of the centrally implemented strategy through directly controlled mass media assets and thus it does not deal with decentralized media sources like YouTube, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, other internet-based social networks, or individuals communicating through similar means. These media sources could have been (and certainly were) abused by pro-Russian propagandists throughout the given Ukrainian campaign but the organizational structures of these companies, publishing policies set within them, as well as public publishing spaces they provided were (at least through the observed period) outside of the direct control of Russian state authorities and hardly could be used as pillars of the centrally-set purpose-driven strategy. The same problem is also related to the media sources (TV as well as internet sites) associated with the Russian Orthodox Church or other non-state institutions. All these sources could have been seen by Russian authorities as welcomed multipliers for their efforts at the time of the conflict outbreak but without the major success of the centrally controlled assets involved in the system of hierarchical handling (supervised and driven by responsible state actors) their potential effects would be unmanageable, questionable, uncertain, and vague. Moreover, there are no analytical instruments that could be used to appraise the real numbers of Ukrainian users who regularly consumed pro-Russian media messaging in internet-based social networks, not to mention the number of those who put their confidence in information gathered from this category of resources (there is no possibility to count how many people read some comment on YouTube/Twitter and believed in the message as there are no surveys mapping these features valid for the observed period). Telegram, on the other hand, was established as a private company with no official connections to the Russian state literally on the eve of the given Russian-Ukrainian conflict in August 2013 and in the course of its latent and escalation phases (2013 – 2014) this social network was

just beginning to gain its first users. Despite that, the case study reflects two private-owned Russian internet-based companies, VKontakte and Yandex, because they both reached the top 5 of the most popular internet-based resources for information gathering among the Ukrainian population in the observed period and we can assume that their multiplying effect was more than negligible.

In addition, the thesis does not work with the effect of 'counter-propaganda' reaching the Ukrainian population from the West or Ukrainian expatriates living in other countries (e.g. in the USA or EU). This is because of the simple fact that the thesis uses a double-check system for measuring the real effect of Russian state-managed messaging in Ukraine – it uses information gathered from available surveys mapping both viewer as well as confidence ratings (that were reached by the mass media assets forming the core of the Russian state-managed messaging strategy in Ukraine in the given period) and thus seeks the positive correlation of these two data-sets. As such, the case study selects only those Ukrainians who regularly watched Russian mass media assets involved in the state-controlled media network in Ukraine and put their trust in the information these media spread in the Ukrainian media market. Therefore, from the point of view of this category of media consumers (as for the results of the research presented by this thesis) were the Western influencing efforts irrelevant.

For the purpose of the following case study, the thesis uses a generally accepted definition of the term mass media: a set of various media technologies allowing mass communication or, in other words, to transfer information content to a large amount of the general public. (Cambridge dictionary, 2023; Potter, 2009) However, due to the specific focus and goals of this thesis, the subsequent sections work first and foremost with one exact category of mass media assets – news media. To be clear about this notion, news media are elements of the mass media system that deliver newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent political events, to the target public and incorporate a wide array of assets comprising broadcast media (TV/Radio), print media (newspapers/magazines), and internet (mixing up broadcasting practice with digitalized forms of newspapers or magazines while simultaneously allowing everyone to comment on the news, provide their various interpretations, and share these comments with other interested observers). (Cambridge dictionary, 2023; Potter, 2009)

The category of news media represents an extremely wide amount of media companies, outlets, and technologies even if narrowed down solely to the Russian national media system. Despite that, the research done in this field so far clearly shows

that in 2013 television and digital media available via the internet were the most important means for news gathering for the majority of the public audience in Ukraine, while the print media and radio played a significantly less important role in this context. (Szostek, 2014b) This claim can be supported by the survey results concerning the news media consumption in Russia and Ukraine which were conducted by Gallup company in cooperation with the U.S. state media agency The Broadcasting Board of Governors at that time. According to these datasets, nearly 97 % of Ukrainians turned to television when it came to news consumption in 2013. The usage of internet news media varies significantly by age, ranging from 90 % for those aged 15–24 to only 12 % for those over 55 years. (BBG Gallup, 2014a) This implies that while television (TV) was the dominant news source for the mid and senior generations of Ukrainians, the younger part of the population started to significantly incline to the internet. This trend is rather similar to the general tendencies in many developed countries and the decreasing interest of young Ukrainians in TV who started to prefer internet streaming and video online is another consequence of the digital revolution occurring in the last decade. Notwithstanding, as for the year 2013 we can still claim that television was the main source of news consumption among the vast majority of the grown-up Ukrainian population that was primarily expected to become politically active.

In comparison, only 37 % of the Ukrainian population used to switch on the radio to get access to the news while the print media reached an even lower rate counting for 34 % of the population. This means the Internet had extensively overtaken radio and print media as the second most dominant news source in the country with about a 48 % consumption rate. (BBG Gallup, 2014a) In addition, the consumption of print media is highly fragmented and the public attention is divided among a wide array of sources which even more diminishes the impact on the general public in one specific moment thus print media are not very suitable for offensive strategies. In 2013, the print media market in Ukraine was divided between two media models: a) quality dailies and weeklies that were mostly business-oriented and had relatively small readerships; and b) popular newspapers and magazines that were inclined to tabloidization. This implied that the structure of the print press market was much more crumbled and publications with entertainment content, glossy fashion magazines, or pure tabloids were dominating the news sources in the field of print media at that time. (IREX, 2013; Szostek, 2014a)

With these findings in mind, it is legitimate to assume that television broadcasting supported by online news media represented the most prospective instrument to be

utilized for the offensive foreign policy on the Ukrainian media market in 2013. Therefore, the following parts of this chapter will focus predominantly on: a) the level of state control over the news TV and digitalized internet news channels in the RF, and b) the overall position of Russian news media from these categories on the Ukrainian media market (symbolizing here the territorial range of the mass media network under control) at the verge of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2013.

4.1 State Control over Mass Media Outlets

Although the principal issue of the dissertation thesis is the area of foreign policy strategies, this part pays more attention to the indigenous Russian media system. The intention is to carry out a qualitative analysis of the unique situational setting regarding the two independent variables derived from the general analytical model: a) the level of hierarchical control of the Russian state (authorities) over domestic media companies/outlets, and b) the level of centralized coordination of mass media companies/outlets incorporated in the network controlled by the Russian state (authorities). These findings are then used to provide the assessment of the level of control over mass media (network) achieved by the Russian state authorities (representing the first stated intermediate variable) and thus also the appraisal of to what extent the configuration of this intermediate variable comply with the conditions for the effective use of the mass media (network) controlled by the Russian state (authorities) within offensive foreign policy strategies (representing the dependent variable). In practical terms, the unique situational settings in the 'hierarchical control over media outlets' and the 'centralized coordination of incorporated media outlets' constitute the capability of the Russian state authorities to create a convenient environment that allows them to seize control over the domestic media companies/outlets and retake the influence on publishing policies within these media entities. In other words, the analysis within this framework gives us the knowledge background that is indispensable for the assessment of the Russian preparedness for the state-driven expansion of selected domestic mass media companies on foreign media markets and for the implementation of effective offensive strategies on the information-psychological level beyond Russian borders.

4.1.1 Hierarchical Control over Mass Media Outlets

The hierarchical control over media outlets represents the first above-determined independent variable influencing the level of state control over the media outlets.

Hierarchical control refers to the system of vertical relationships of superiority and subordination in a given organizational structure. This independent variable is, according to theories concerning the nature of media systems, given by the following factors: a) the role of the state in the media system, b) the concentration of state ownership, and c) state power over the personnel management within chosen media outlets. (Becker, 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Stiglitz, 2017) Hence, in the following paragraphs, we are going to analyze the arrangement of the Russian media system with special emphasis put on the field of news TV and internet news media in 2013 by consecutively using the perspective of the three given observable factors.

4.1.1.1 The Role of the State in the Media System

The mass media system that has been evolving in the RF since the year 2000, when the long-lasting reign of still incumbent President Vladimir Putin began, has often been classified as a semi-authoritarian or neo-authoritarian one. (Becker, 2014; Ottaway, 2003) Semi-authoritarian systems allow no or little competition for political power but they leave limited space for political parties, civil society organizations, or alternative media channels to form and provide bounded political debate. (Ottaway, 2003) Similarly, neo-authoritarian systems traditionally refer to large-scale and hierarchically organized bureaucratic systems, in which official, semi-official, as well as informal procedures for ensuring the acquiescence of mass media outlets to the will of the leading elite are set out behind the scene. (Becker, 2014) Thus, the establishment of both the semi- and neo-authoritarian systems presupposes that authoritarian practices overrule societal democratization processes in a country. In such conditions prevailing in a media market, between domains of state and close-to-state private media companies (that are usually inseparably interlinked) only a little place is left for truly independent providers. (Petrov et al., 2014) It means that despite certain pluralism in media can be tolerated in semi/neo-authoritarian systems, state authorities still retain a decisive role in a media market as an owner and a donor of media companies as well as the most powerful regulator setting up limits for sanctioned journalistic, editorial, or publishing works. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)

In accordance, the elements that are typical for democratic media systems, such as media plurality, private ownership, apparent freedom in journalistic work, and some level of anti-regime critique existed in the RF in 2013, but they were significantly weakened to be used to mask and disguise the authoritarian nature of the system. (Dunn, 2014) For instance, the radio station Echo of Moscow, Novaya Gazeta newspaper, and

Dozhd television channel represented dissenting opinions at that time and thus they helped to create an impression of press freedom to outside observers. Such media assets were useful to the Russian political leadership since they allowed to release of accumulated social dissatisfaction through expressed political disapproval. (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018) However, even these media outlets were heavily institutionalized within the system of state regulation and were subjected to various censoring as well as restricting instruments. In the end, these media outlets did not play the role of mediator (the basic function of the public sphere according to Habermas) but rather were indirectly instrumentalized to isolate and marginalize the critically thinking opposition within the Russian society. (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018)

Furthermore, the Russian media system has been designed to create convenient conditions allowing for a high level of 'manual' control over the performance of media outlets from the side of the state. President Putin has believed from the beginning that the mass media should support his efforts to bring 'order' back to Russia by strengthening central institutions. For this reason, he started a long-term process of recentralization in the mass media sector that still has not been completed. (Kovalev, 2020) First, changes in the field of media ownership, which were accomplished shortly after Putin's inauguration into the presidential office, have had crucial negative implications for the character and the extent of media pluralism (which is believed to be an essential condition for the functioning of the democratic public sphere) in Russia. (Kovalev, 2020) Second, Russian governmental institutions have made strong efforts to create and refine a system of direct control over the state media as well as to produce considerable influence over private media outlets through both formal and informal means. Strict legislative measures that set limits for publishing policies, particularly on issues that are of central importance to the political leaders such as national security or elections, have successively been introduced. (Azhgikhina, 2007; Simons & Strovsky, 2006) This is a top-down (or structural) practice based on general control over individual mass media outlets through diverse techniques of media capture. Media capture techniques enable to limit the freedom in information production and restrain media autonomy – Russian state authorities in charge resort to manifold ways of censorship, management appointments, different kinds of economic pressure (from limiting advertising space to cutting state financial support), selectively applied legal and quasilegal measures against private companies, criminal and civil penalties for journalists who interfere in state interests, national security, or in the image of the state. (Ognyanova, 2014; Richter, 2008;

Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2014) Third, the media environment in Russia has not only been becoming more hostile for independent domestic companies not owned by the state or close-to-state businessmen, but also for foreign/international companies or investors trying to project their activities on the Russian media market – with restrictions on foreign ownership shares in Russian media outlets, the restrictive legislature on 'foreign agents' (first enacted in 2012) strictly limiting possibilities of funding (having direct consequences for cooperation and staff policies), or multiple censorship measures applied on foreign media companies. (Lipman, 2014) The role of the Russian state in the national media system in all three mentioned categories was consecutively consolidated until 2013 to give the state authorities more and more power over media affairs in the country and provide them with a wider array of superior restrictive instruments. (Lipman, 2014) Due to such a state of affairs, the apparent diversity in the Russian media sector has not shifted into independent political power.

In essence, despite the illusive pluralism in the media sector, the Russian media system, which has evolved after President Putin retook political power in the RF, has been significant because of the dominant role of the state in the media sector. State institutions have been making various efforts to reinforce their tools to intervene in the media environment in order to regain decisive control, eliminate independent political messaging, and ensure the media system would work as a valuable power resource for the ruling political elites.

4.1.1.2   The Concentration of State Ownership in the Media System

While in semi/neo-authoritarian systems the state can allow to form of quite liberal and open market in the entertainment media, it usually takes a strong grip over the news media and information agencies which regularly provide up-to-date commented information streaming primarily on domestic as well as foreign socio-political and socio-economic affairs. (Becker, 2014; Ottaway, 2003) Equally, state institutions in semi/neo-authoritarian systems concentrate available instruments of direct control primarily on broadcast media, as those are perceived to be a highly efficient medium through which communication with the wider public can be arranged. (Becker, 2014; Ottaway, 2003) Broadcast media, notably television, have been the most important tool of communication, particularly in countries like Russia, because they are extremely cheap for consumers, the terrestrial or satellite transmission infrastructure is widespread in

distant or underdeveloped areas of a country, can even have trans-border reach, and allow to provide almost real-time information messaging. (Mickiewicz, 2008)

Assumptions that TV was the most widespread and popular means of news gathering for Russians in the observed period can be underpinned by media consumption ratings from that time. In 2013 virtually all Russians (98 %) had at least one TV set in their households. (Khvostunova, 2013) About half of the TV owners (51 %) got their signal via a terrestrial antenna, while most of the rest (35 %) had cable TV. Satellite television remained limited with 23 % of TV owners having access to individual or shared satellite devices. On the other hand, only 6 % of Russian television owners declared that they received the TV signal through an internet connection. (BBG Gallup, 2014b) Moreover, 79 % of Russians got access to some type of news at least daily, 95 % did this at least once per week, and nearly 96 % of Russians turned to television for this purpose which dominated the news media market in 2013. (BBG Gallup, 2014b) On the background of the semi/neo-authoritarian system establishment in the RF, and with respect to the development of news media consumption ratings, substantial structural changes, which became remarkably evident in the area of news television, took place in the RF during the 2000s and the early 2010s.

Between 1996 and 2000 the process of media privatization in the newly born RF culminated and the television market was not an exception. Despite that, the diffusion of the TV market sustained rather low as more than 20 media companies, especially terrestrial TV broadcasters, were concentrated in the hands of a few private business empires established by emerging 'oligarchs' such as Boris Berezovsky (LogoVAZ), Viktor Chernomyrdin (Gazprom), Vladimir Gusinsky (MOST Media Group), and Vladimir Potanin united with Mikhail Prokhorov (Onexim). (Koltsova, 2006) However, this was about to change soon. The newly elected President Vladimir Putin perceived oligarchs with close private, business, or political ties to his predecessor Boris Yeltsin as threats to pertaining political power. Putin openly manifested the resolve to restore the state control over the domestic media market early after the first inauguration. In his address in June 2000, Putin divided media outlets existing on the Russian media market into 'state' (gossudarstvennye) and 'anti-state' (anti-gossudarstvennye) and accused private owners of turning media into sources of misinformation through which anti-state campaigns are encouraged. (Becker, 2004) For these reasons, the next stage in the Russian media market, which began in the course of the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin (2000–2004), was characterized by the redistribution of media ownership. (Koltsova,

2006) Famous Russian political scientist Ivan Zassoursky, who devoted a substantial part of his research to the study of the Russian media system, encapsulated the change in Russian media policies with the arrival of Vladimir Putin in a more poetic but perfectly fitting statement: 'The hopes and dreams of the rebellious nineties were somehow transformed into the image of Great Russia once again coming together to meet challenges and combat enemies at home and abroad. The main difference between the new system and the preceding one was the monopolization of state control over television, the node of the national information space.' (Zassoursky, 2004)

As the state apparatus under Putin's presidency set in motion the elimination of media empires owned by wealthy businessmen with political aspirations, the state shares in the Russian news media market started to consolidate. The most important assets were held by media empires owned by oligarchs Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky. Both were soon exposed to aggressive state policies. As they fled abroad, their media assets were either directly redistributed in favor of the state or entrusted to politically reliable owners. (Koltsova, 2006) Popular TV company NTV, the leading non-state news broadcaster with a national reach, fell into the hands of the government-controlled energy corporation Gazprom as a consequence of the attack on Vladimir Gusinsky's empire MOST Media Group. Gusinsky described the manner that had led to the takeover of the MOST Media Group as a means of legal coercion (sredstva zakonnogo prinuzhdeniya) – this suggests that Gusinsky was forced to sell the company as a result of selectively applied quasilegal measures. (Zassoursky, 2004) Later Gazprom struck a deal with state-connected bank Evrofinans to set up a new media company – Gazprom Media Holding – that retook the ownership of NTV Network. Gazprom owned a 51 % stake in the Holding and the bank the remaining 49 % share. (Aksartova et al., 2003) Shortly thereafter, Berezovsky was forced to close the channel TV-6, having the largest national reach after the NTV company, and sell his 49 % share in the media empire ORT. This venture was acquired by another Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich who almost immediately sold the ORT to the Federal Agency for State Property Management (Rosimuschestvo) through which the Russian state obtained the majority in this TV company. Similar to Gusisnky, Berezovsky claimed that he was threatened to sell his shares in ORT at an artificially low price. (Zassoursky, 2004) Till 2013 the ownership structure of the ORT network was changed but the state-owned 51 % majority remained preserved (State-controlled shares: Rosimuschestvo 38,9 %, TASS 9,1 %, OTC – Ostankino Technical Center 3 %). (Vartanova et al., 2013) Besides that, Putin accelerated the process of

reorganization within the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Vserossiyskaya gosudarstvennaya televizionnaya i radioveshchatelnaya kompaniya / VGTRK). By virtue of the reorganization, the Federal government of the RF turned out to be the sole owner of the company. VGTRK started to operate several nationally distributed news TV channels and maintain a network of more than 90 state-controlled regional television stations with 100 transmission centers, which were separated into individual but still state-owned companies. (Vartanova, 2016)

The acquisition and consolidation of power over NTV, ORT, and VGTRK networks proved to be the crucial step in the effort to gain control over the news TV sector in the RF. The Russian state became a dominant player in this field of the media industry. (Tokbaeva, 2019) These three media companies significantly enhanced their portfolio of included channels with some providing 24/7 news coverage of domestic and foreign affairs and most of them producing at least some regular/daily news programs. Moreover, the ORT company was restructured and renamed to Channel One (Perviy Kanal) network operating the most popular news TV programs in the RF in the upcoming years. The list of channels operated under the auspices of the three media networks providing news coverage on a daily basis in the observed period is summarized in Figure (4). (Degtereva & Kiriya, 2010; Tokbaeva, 2019)

Figure (4): *List of TV channels comprised in Channel One, NTV, and VGTRK networks providing news programs with notifications to ownership status and the form of affiliation to the Russian state.*

Channel / Company	Ownership	Affiliation to State
Channel One Network • Channel 1 Russia • Channel 1 International • Channel 1 Baltics	Consortium of owners (51 % state agencies: Rossimuschestvo, TASS, OTC)	Majority through state agencies
NTV Network • NTV • NTV – Mir • NTV - Plus • TV-3	Gazprom Media Holding (51 % Gazprom)	Majority through state-owned Company
+ TNT Network	Gazprom Media Holding (51 % Gazprom)	
VGTRK Network • Rossiya 1 • Rossia 2 • Rossia 24 • RTR • RTR-Planeta • Vesti 24	VGTRK (100 % All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company)	Direct state ownership

In 2013 the three media networks had a nationwide outreach grossly exceeding 90 % coverage of the Russian territory: Channel One 99 %, VGTRK 98 %, NTV 96 %. (Vartanova et al., 2013) On top of that, the Russian state undertook measures to strengthen the position of the main TV channels operated by the three above-mentioned media networks (now in the hands of the state) on the Russian media market by including Channel One, Russia 1, Russia 2, Russia 24, Russia K, NTV, TNT, TV-3 into the Register of Federal Channels. (KVG Research, 2013) This register has been annually determined by the Federal Supervision Agency for Information Technologies and Communications and supervised by the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service – this means that state agencies hold full control over the formation and updating of the Registry. By its very nature, TV channels included in the Registry obtained their own terrestrial frequencies and official

permission to be broadcast on the entire territory of the RF. As well, all operators became obliged to integrate these channels into the basic must-carry package, which means broadcasting them for free regardless of whether terrestrial, cable, or satellite technology is used to distribute the transmission. (KVG Research, 2013) Second, satellite broadcasting in Russia was carried out by two state companies in 2013 – NTV-Plus along with National Satellite company Trikolor TV. The channels included in all 3 multiplexes (packages of channels broadcasted digitally with additional services via one frequency) provided to the audience by both satellite companies must have been approved by the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service at that time. What is more, all the channels included in the Register of Federal Channels were also included for free into the essential first multiplex distributed to all signal receivers of both companies providing satellite broadcast. (KVG Research, 2013) Such a state of affairs gave the state the instrument to put an approval/ban on any chosen domestic or foreign channel having the intention to establish itself in the Russian media market and enabled it to give preferential treatment to selected companies and channels operated by them.

In the end, the Russian statistical data shows that Channel One, Russia 1, and NTV turned into the main Russian channels reaching the highest audience consumption rates on the Russian TV market in 2013: Channel One 37 %, Rossiya (1) 36 %, and NTV 14 %. On top of that, if we take into consideration also ratings of the rest of the news TV channels that were operated by the three largest Russian TV networks (Channel One, VGTRK, and NTV), together they attained the absolute majority in news consumption in Russia. (KVG Research, 2013; Vartanova et al., 2013) The unrivaled popularity of these channels amongst the Russian population is the reason why they were often utilized by state authorities to bring information of national importance to the attention of the Russian (but also foreign) public. (Degtereva & Kiriya, 2010)

To complete the image, President Putin turned his attention to information agencies that have shifted their production mostly to internet platforms and retook the role of print media in the Russian (as well as foreign) news media market. Information agencies have been considered the ultimate multimedia information providers supplying information to newspapers as well as broadcasters and setting the news agenda for both national and global media outlets. (Bartram, 2003; Boyd-Barrett, 2008) Not long before the inception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Putin ordered to dissolve of the main state information agency Ria Novosti, and merge it with the radio service Voice of Russia. This step aimed to create a new corporation offering to the audience a constant supply of

internet broadcasting, information podcasts, news comments, interviews, and news stories – Rossiya Segodnya. The leadership of Ria Novosti called the move to be the latest in a series of shifts in Russia's news landscape which appear to point toward a tightening of state control in the already heavily regulated media sector. (Viren & Frolova, 2015) The multi-media website of Rossiya Segodnya (which included the domestic news wire RIA Novosti, the digitalized form of foreign radio wire Sputnik, the business wire Prime, and others) became almost immediately the leading news media (and also news internet) platform in the Russian Federation. By 2013, Rossiya Segodnya outnumbered all non-tv Russian media in terms of audience, brand awareness, international respect, and influence. (Viren & Frolova, 2015)

Besides Rossiya Segodnya, the Russian state initiated also the transformation of another information agency under its control – ITAR-TASS. From 2011 to 2013 the agency was renamed simply to TASS, it received new management, and the budget of the agency was almost doubled. The agency started to open offices in previously not covered territories in Russia as well as in foreign states, significantly increased the number of its correspondents, and established its research center. (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020) The goal of the transformation was to change the conservative news agency into a modern multi-media company heavily embedded in the internet. As a result, the domestic and foreign popularity of the agency began to rise rapidly. In 2013 TASS was able to join Rossiya Segodnya and Interfax in a leading trio of the most popular Russian information agencies that can even keep up with the most advanced global players – Reuters, AP, and CNN. (Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020) Only the Interfax news agency from the big three was private-owned with its information production focused not on political news coverage (which is the prominent field of Rossiya Segodnya and TASS) but rather on financial information, economic analysis (oriented first and foremost on Russian oil, gas, and metallurgy industries), or on selling financial information to corporate customers and private banks. (Boyd-Barrett, 2014) The three mentioned agencies – Rossya Segodnya, TASS, and Interfax – the Russian 'Big Trio', stabilized their positions in Russian as well as foreign media markets (especially in the post-Soviet geopolitical realm) till 2013, which further empowered the position of the state ownership within the news media sector dominated by broadcast companies heavily supported with internet-based information agencies. (Kovalev, 2020)

All in all, in 2013 the largest national news TV networks (Channel One, NTV, VGTRK), broadcasting providers (terrestrial and satellite), and two largest news agencies

primarily focused on internet messaging (Rossiya Segodnya and TASS) were owned and operated as state-controlled enterprises. As a consequence, through the means of media ownership, the Russian state became an unrivaled leader in the field of news media in the RF.

4.1.1.3 State Power over Personnel Management

The concentration of ownership is one side of the coin but making the media outlets act in favor of the ruling elites is another one. Even in semi/neo-authoritarian systems, the media enterprises under the state-control (either through direct or indirect ownership) should be heavy-handed through appointments of loyal senior managers and editors to serve political purposes. (Huskey, 2010; Yanatma, 2016) The only way to make the widespread media provide the public with content that is instrumental in maintaining social stability and ensuring the longevity of the power-elite is to achieve the circumstances in which owners, managers, editors, and journalists comply with the overall political framing. (Mattern, 2005) Therefore, in semi/neo-authoritarian systems, central state authorities sustain strong formal and informal relations with the leadership of controlled media. Such an environment is characterized by increased intrusion of the state in the internal affairs of media companies in both the management and the content that they produce. (Stiglitz, 2017)

Many post-Socialist countries have experienced similar pressures from central governments, which have used the state-controlled media to promote their political philosophy and values (despite those being frequently restructured as a public service). The peculiarity of these media systems is often represented in the state paternalism over the media – media management has limited autonomy, while appointments to key positions are linked to political loyalty. (Vartanova, 2011) The available evidence shows that at least between 2000 and 2013 Russia was not an exception. The radical shift in terms of political and organizational power in Russia and its media sector in this period resulted in the establishment of firm state control over appointments in managerial, editorial, but also journalistic ranks. (Dougherty, 2014a; Huskey, 2010) As the Russian state started to retake ownership over the news media sector, managers loyal to previous owners began to be dismissed, whilst in the vacant positions were installed trusted administrators and editors. The Russian state officials actively engaged in sending its trustees to state-aligned media outlets with one 'simple' goal – to transform the internal working environment by introducing whole sets of measures ensuring loyal journalistic

work leading to reliable, resolute, and state-devoted production of news content. (Yablokov & Schimpfossl, 2020)

The newly appointed management of Russian state media companies began to install their proxies in senior editorial positions. Furthermore, the new sort of editors started to accumulate their pool of loyal journalists. Rebellious links in the chain of subordination were either immediately dismissed or lost any prospects for professional promotion. (Gehlbach, 2010) The management of the state media companies, fully dependent on their political curators, thus created a pyramid of leadership based on personal devotion. Everybody in the pyramid was dependent on his/her status, career promotion, and material/financial benefits to his/her patron. The higher someone rose in the pyramid of leadership, the more he/she had to lose. (Gehlbach, 2010; Pasti, 2011; Schimpfossl et al., 2017) The dependency concerning career promotions and financial resources made the senior officials of state media companies prone to corruption, coercion, or extortion. These instruments were used to guarantee the lasting loyalty of higher ranks as well as to reduce the possibility of disobedience. (Lipman, 2009; Pasti, 2011) Editors-in-chief swiftly began to serve their bosses disposing of their independent journalistic judgments, supporting the required news framing, looking for like-minded journalists, guarding the positions of their managerial leaders, and enjoying their social status with premium financial benefits. (Schimpfossl et al., 2017) Additionally, in Russia, the success of media managers depended also on how loyal they were to the President or political regime in general. That means, how decisive was their initiative in manufacturing consensual attitudes towards the current regime. This practice led to the creation of a system in which it was not necessary to direct every story from above. Editors and journalists who understand their limits and drivers of publishing policy could act with some autonomy using an adequate level of self-censorship. (Oates, 2007; Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2017) This intriguing complex of interpersonal relations and professional dynamics that has formed in the Russian state media sector allowed for to set up of direct hierarchical control over editorial as well as journalistic work, making it possible to eliminate incompatible links in the chain of news-making and ensure the media production conforms established political lines. Let's have a look at what happened in the three main Russian television companies NTV, Channel One (ORT), and VGTRK after their takeover by state-operated institutions/companies in the course of the 2000s and early 2010s to bring some vivid examples to our argumentation.

Right after the state-controlled corporation Gazprom took over the NTV network in 2001, Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller became the chairman of the board of directors at the newly created Gazprom Media Holding. Nikolay Senkevich was appointed to the position of the Gazprom Media Holding CEO. (KVG Research, 2013) Under the baton of these people were swiftly installed also the new NTV CEO (an American manager) Boris Jordan and the chairman of the NTV board of directors Alfred Kokh. (Dunlap, 2001) In addition, experienced media manager Vladimir Kulistikov was drafted as an Editor-in-Chief who also became a member of the board of directors. In the period from 2004 to 2015, Kulistikov substituted Boris Jordan and worked as the CEO of the NTV network. (Belin, 2002) On the other hand, Yevgeny Kislyev (who served as NTV CEO until 2001), his wife Masha Shakhova (who headed up the station's public relations unit), along with other figures from the leading, editorial, and journalist staff including Svetlana Sorokina, Tatiana Mitkova, or Pavel Lobkov left the company because of their disapproval with the changing journalist culture in NTV. (Coalson, 2011) Shakhova asserted that she was asked to sign a letter of loyalty to the new leadership of NTV coming from Gazprom Media Holding, but she refused to do it and was promptly told to leave. (Lipman & McFaul, 2001) Apart from them, dozens of NTV employees left or were dismissed because of their unwillingness to submit to the new leadership and publishing rules, many of them moved to the small nonstate channel TV-6, which was soon shut down by the Russian government as well. (Lipman, 2009) A few years later one of the most successful political reporters in Russia, Leonid Parfyonov, lost his job on NTV as he ignored the restricting rules on reporting concerning the war in Chechnya. (Sborov, 2004) Later Parfyonov addressed the change in editorial and journalistic culture in NTV and other state news media as follows: 'Television news has become an important tool of the government. […] For television journalists and their managers, top public officials are not newsmakers, but their bosses to whom they report directly. […] There is no information at all on news programs, only PR. […] Reporters are not journalists, but governmental employees.' (Parfyonov, 2010)

As for Channel One, though the personnel changes were carried out more cautiously and over the course of a longer period, in the end, they were extensive with a heavy impact on internal journalistic culture. The incumbent CEO Konstantin Ernst was able to maintain the influence over the company's performance, as he fully accommodated his managerial style to the demands of the Russian political leadership and directives coming from the Presidential Administration. (Schimpfossl & Yablokov,

2017) The rebranding of the company after the takeover in 2002 reflected the shift in editorial policies – many programs were canceled and more time was given to the news agenda. Since 2003 the channel switched to round-the-clock broadcasting with news releases provided every hour. (Channel One, 2003) In 2004 Kirill Kleimenov was appointed the Director of Information Programs and Alexey Brodsky became his deputy. After their arrival, the reform of the information service began with a large personnel shift – Pyotr Marchenko, Andrei Baturin, Vyacheslav Kriskevich, Oksana Rostovtseva, and others left, while a new wave of loyal journalists represented by Dmitry Borisov, Yulia Pankratova, Maxim Sharafutdinov, Valeria Korableva, Anatoly Lazarev, Pyotr Tolstoy, Vitaly Yeliseyev and Natalya Semenikhina started to appear on the screen. (Aksartova et al., 2003; TAdviser, 2022) As for the nature of the internal journalist culture within the Channel One network, Elisabeth Schimpfössl and Ilya Yablokov were able to conduct multiple interviews with ordinary as well as high-ranked Channel One journalists with the following results: restrictions on negative reporting about President Putin and bans to cover certain topics were set down, news narratives were formulated in compliance with predetermined contextual framing corresponding with statements of official authorities, the ability of editors as well as journalists to react appropriately to political issues was required, self-censorship was the main mechanism to keep with the official state narrative framing, journalists not in line with the preset guidelines or not able to deal with self-censorship requirements were punished or dismissed. (Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2014) In 2011, one of the leading Channel One journalists Vladimir Pozner admitted that there was a 'stop list' of potential guests (discussants) who were banned from being invited to the company's television shows. The list included opinion leaders whose political views were not in line with official state interpretations. The list was valid for the entire editorial/journalist staff of the TV network. (Pozner, 2011) Pozner also revealed that for his political-oriented talk show (aired also on Channel One) there was compiled a special stop-list that partially differed from the general one determined for the entire company. Pozner also asserted that stop-lists were created with the participation of the network CEO Konstantin Ernst and thus were prepared in compliance with the requirements and directives of the company's highest management. (Pozner, 2011)

The restructuring of the VGTRK network significantly affected the highest ranks of the company leadership almost immediately. In 2000 remarkably skilled journalist and manager Oleg Dobrodeev, who departed from NTV, was appointed chairman of the VGTRK organization. At that time, this managerial shift was perceived as a sensation,

especially for the reason that Dobrodeev left the NTV network less than a year before the company was assumed by Gazprom. (Smirnov, 2006) Though Dobrodeev has never commented on his reasons for the termination of cooperation with NTV, media sources pointed to his disagreement concerning the unwillingness of the company's owner Vladimir Gusinsky to support the second Chechen war, which was especially important for the future political career of the newly elected President Putin. (Zassoursky, 2004) Two other key managers were entrusted posts in VGTRK structures personally by Dobrodeev at that time – the first deputy director Anton Zlatopolskiy and the head of the development for news broadcasting and thematic channels Dmitriy Mednikov. In the following years, Dobrodeev became the CEO of the whole VGTRK network and Zlatopolskyiy started to work (apart from VGTRK deputy director) as a general director of the network's most popular channel RTR (named from 2002 Rossiya and 2010 Rossiya 1). (Roskongress, 2022; RusTeam, 2022) Hiring this managerial team turned out to be a smart decision as they had a significant influence on the development of the company. VGTRK was supposed to reach a qualitatively new level, and these qualified media managers were supposed to bring the demanded results. (Kachkaeva et al., 2006; KVG Research, 2013) They initiated the expansion of the company by seizing other broadcasting companies, creating advanced branches, establishing new channels, producing new sorts of TV programs, and, more importantly, they changed the internal working culture having a major impact on editorial and journalistic performance. (Degtereva & Kiriya, 2010; Vartanova, 2016) Despite the quality of VGTRK news broadcasting being improved, the channels incorporated in the network have also significantly reinforced their pro-presidential stances. Numerous journalists who left VGTRK structures reported that the editorial routine, from issue selection to content production, was fully controlled by the management. (Azhgikhina, 2007) Journalists were not allowed to raise any criticism of governmental policies or out-of-line statements based on their initiatives and were not supposed to submit stories or narratives to their editors. On the contrary, it was editors and sometimes directly the representatives from state authorities who assigned tasks to individual journalists with instructions on reporting contextualization (narrative framing). (Azhgikhina, 2007; Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2014) As a general rule, editors opted for journalists whose opinion was the most compliant with the story that was to be written, and the whole system heavily relied on a high level of self-censorship. Anybody who wanted to join VGTRK was supposed to support official state policies and be compliant with the official statements of the state

representatives. According to some reports, the editors were personally responsible to Dobrodeev and his managerial team for the journalist performance making sure no hint of criticism, disloyalty, or incoherence would be exposed on air. (Schimpfossl et al., 2017)

A very similar journalistic culture was set down also in state information agencies including Ria Novosti (Rossiya Segodnya), RT, and TASS. In the period from 2000 to 2013, the most considerable development can be observed in the case of RIA Novosti, which became the supreme Russian news source. In 2003, Svetlana Mironyuk joined the managerial staff of RIA Novosti, where she worked in the positions of the company's CEO and Editor-in-Chief. (RIA Novosti, 2022) Soon after her arrival, Mironyuk started to actively engage in editorial work – conduct meetings with Federal politicians and officials, arrange regular meetings with her editors, approve publishing lines on a daily basis, and personally instruct the newsrooms. (Dougherty, 2014a; Schimpfossl et al., 2017) Mironyuk transformed the Soviet-era agency RIA Novosti into a sophisticated, modern, and influential digital 'behemoth' – a network covering more than 45 countries, reporting in 14 different languages. (Dougherty, 2014a) Despite that, Mironyuk introduced editorial/journalistic practices that were reminiscent of the Soviet model of ideological and personnel control – together with her management team she exercised a considerable amount of coercion and required obedience from the editorial as well as journalistic staff. While some journalists were repeatedly criticized and penalized for speaking out in support of the political opposition, others were generously rewarded for their loyalty. Only those who adhered to the limits of the publishing policy got Mironyuk's confidence and were given free rein to carry out the work autonomously in their own manner. (Schimpfossl et al., 2017) Though Mironyuk had a firm position with political backing for a long time (she was often referred to as one of the most powerful figures in the Russian media), she was dismissed in 2013 after RIA supported anti-regime gatherings at Bolotnya square in Moscow and criticized the violent crackdown of security forces on protesters. What is more important, the very fact that Mironyuk was fired by the head of the Presidential Administration Sergey Ivanov in person (this act was completely outside of his statutory powers) demonstrates the strong grip of the political leadership over the media agency. (Dougherty, 2014b; Graef, 2021) In 2013 RIA Novosti was rebranded – it was renamed to Rossiya Segodnya and Dmitriy Kiselev replaced Mironyuk as the head of the agency. Not only that, Kiselev was assigned to the agency based on a recommendation made by the VGTRK head Oleg Dobrodeev to President

Putin. In many respects, it looked like a takeover of a state enterprise orchestrated by state officials against someone who failed to the confidence entrusted by the political leadership and, considering the involvement of the Presidential Administration in the whole process, also by the President personally. (Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2017) The agency changed the leader, but not much changed as the strict internal rules for publishing policy, heavy editorial supervision over journalistic work, and devotion to official narrative framing were preserved or even strengthened. (Yaffa, 2014a) But this was not the first time Oleg Dobrodeev made a successful attempt to deploy his loyal fellows to leading positions in competing media outlets. In 2005 he suggested President Putin appoint Margarita Simonyan, who worked as the VGTRK correspondent affiliated with the Presidential Administration at that time, as the head of Russia Today (RT) media company. Dobrodeev personally backed Simonyan's admission to the infamous Friday meetings at the Presidential Administration three years later in the wake of the Russo-Georgian war. (Schimpfossl et al., 2017) As a result, Dobrodeev created a unique media conglomerate consisting of VGTRK, Rossya Segodnya, and RT when connecting these media companies through his managerial pyramid directly (but unofficially) subordinated to the Presidential Administration.

Simonyan maintained her close ties to state institutions and even in the position of the head of the Russia Today information agency she continued to regularly discuss the publishing policies, narratives, and framing at least with the Russian Presidential Administration, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (GEC, 2022) The Russian government (or rather the Presidential Administration) was involved in daily RT work in different ways – the government appointed an advisory team to supervise the hiring of journalists at RT in Moscow, controlled the hiring of managers, imposed story angles, and (in some instances) directly disapproved stories submitted by RT editors. Journalists working for the agency called it a wing of the government information team or a PR organization for the Russian government. (Elswah & Howard, 2020) Regarding the journalistic culture within the organization, it is characterized by three features: assignment of issues from editors to journalists (not vice-versa), top-down intervention in journalistic work, and establishment loyalty through monetary incentives or job promotions. (Shuster, 2015) RT management frequently resorted to forcible imposition of decisions on their employees – at RT, all the stories were assigned and approved by the channel's editors, agency managers, or directly by senior state officials. At the RT newsroom in Moscow, there were several news teams and each team was supervised by

two editors: a Russian editor who was responsible for the political editing of the stories and a foreign editor who ensured that the writing was at a professional level. (Elswah & Howard, 2020) RT journalists were trained to adopt the Russian government's position toward events. When it comes to politically sensitive issues, self-censorship through awareness of the messages that RT senior editors want to put forward for broadcast (similar to the above-mentioned cases) was one of the main mechanisms to avoid problems and stay in editors' favor. (Elswah & Howard, 2020; Shuster, 2015) To complete the image, we can briefly state that the internal journalistic culture did not differ much even in the TASS information agency. Late in 2012, the CEO of TASS was, directly by President Putin, appointed the former presidential aide Sergey Mikhaylov, who was tasked to restructure the agency. (TASS, 2022) As in the case of other state-controlled media, TASS was built first and foremost as a political instrument and employees on all levels were required to follow the publishing lines stated by the leadership of the agency and authorized by the senior level of editors. (Boyd-Barrett, 2008; Vartanova & Vyrkovsky, 2020)

Finally, there are features referring to the nature of the internal culture of editorial and journalistic work that are common for all state-controlled media outlets. First, strict management style and editorial hegemony prevailed in all the above-mentioned (but also other Russian state-controlled) media outlets till 2013. The news production was being overruled or bent in accordance with the desire of the Editors-in-Chief who took hints from the media owners. (Burrett, 2010; Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2014) Second, the position of journalists who were committed to truthful reporting was weak as they suffered from very precarious work conditions. Perceptions of professional responsibility were formed under the conditions of state officials' interference and strict editorial control. When individual journalists chose to pursue controversial issues, they were penalized, forced to leave the air (show), or lost their jobs. (Fossato, 2006; Pasti, 2011; Strovsky, 2015a) Third, journalists restrained their initiative or refused to comment on controversial political events or provide a framing that goes against the line of the editorial board. For instance, journalists coming back from the shooting at the site, where had gathered protesting people, asked their editors how to report on the events – to provide the real picture of what happened or to follow the official version. (Fossato, 2006; Pasti, 2011; Strovsky, 2015a) Fourth, most Russian journalists viewed themselves as political players and did not seek to change this role – they worked for their political patrons, and as such the news coverage coming from state sources (such as Vremya on The First

Channel or Segodnya on NTV) was arranged through strong political filters. (Degtereva & Kiriya, 2010; Oates, 2007)

Long story short, till 2013 Russian state authorities were able to built-up strong hierarchical control over the news media sector (consisting of news TV and internet-based information agencies) through personnel management – appointments of loyal trustees to senior managerial posts within individual media outlets. Newly appointed managers then formed strict systems of top-down control of journalistic work by installing their proxies on editorial posts thus ensuring positive coverage of politically sensitive affairs. The system allowed for a high level of intrusion of state institutions and officials in the structural affairs of media companies, their publishing policies on the editorial level, as well as daily work of common journalists. Self-censorship was required and corruption, coercion, or extortion were used to keep journalists in line with officially predetermined narrative framing when necessary.

4.1.1.4   Assessment: The Level of Hierarchical Control over Mass Media Outlets in the RF

Till 2013, Russian state authorities were able to regain a dominant position in the sector of news media by systematically reinforcing their tools designed to eliminate independent political messaging. The Russian state was able to reestablish control over news media outlets by gaining direct ownership over major news TV companies and internet-based information agencies, or by reaching majority shares through state-owned companies and state-operated agencies. Besides that, Russian authorities were able to bolster the position of the state on the news media market using privileging instruments/legislation – dominating the market of signal/transmission providers, imposing preferential treatment to state-controlled media outlets, and introducing law constraining activities of independent media. Instruments of strong hierarchical control allowing direct interventions into decision-making processes were introduced over time. State owners were extremely successful in appointing loyal trustees to managerial posts within individual media outlets and in forming managerial pyramids with devoted proxies dispatched on senior as well as junior editorial levels. The system of vertical subordination allowed intrusions of state officials into structural and personnel affairs of the major Russian news media companies, their publishing policies (formed and supervised on managerial and senior editorial level), as well as the daily work of common journalists in newsrooms. Through this system of managerial pyramids, the state

(represented by state-controlled media owners and senior officials in charge) acquired access to the approving of publishing policies and determining limits for framing politically sensitive information. The system of vertical control was further enhanced as self-censorship was required and corruption, coercion, or extortion were used to keep journalists in line with predetermined narrative framing. As a result, the analysis within the framework of the three factors (the role of the state in the given mass media system; the concentration of state ownership in the given mass media system; and the state power over personnel management within incorporated media outlets) has shown that the Russian state reached an extremely high level of the hierarchical control over domestic news media companies/outlets. Thus, the situational setting of the first independent variable valid for the observed period meets the configuration implying that the intermediate variable – (a high level of) state control over the mass media network – complies with the conditions for the effective use of the mass media (network) within offensive foreign policy strategies.

4.1.2 The Centralized Coordination of State-Controlled Media Outlets

The centralized coordination of media outlets incorporated in the given media network represents the second above-determined independent variable influencing the level of state control over the media outlets. Centralized coordination refers to the system of relationships of superiority and subordination between assigned authority/s on one side and all media outlets that are part of the given group/system. This independent variable is, according to a predefined analytical model, primarily given by the following factors: a) the existence of central organizing unit/s with sufficient authority; b) the ability of central organizing unit/s to coordinate the actions of incorporated media outlets; c) ability of central organizing unit/s to act as an agenda-setter. (Becker, 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Stiglitz, 2017) Hence, in the following paragraphs, we are going to analyze the arrangement of the Russian media system with special emphasis on the field of news TV and internet news media in 2013 by consecutively using the perspective of the three given observable factors.

4.1.2.1 The Existence of a Central Organizing Unit/s with Sufficient Authority

The existence of traits of strong hierarchical control does not automatically guarantee in itself that all elements of the system (individual media outlets) would work

uniformly and that their activity will not be fragmented between the particular interests of various power groups in the leadership of a state. To manage the effective performance of the whole media network under control one must establish a central organizing unit/s having sufficient authority to coordinate the performance of all incorporated bodies to work towards one common goal.

Russia has become a highly centralized state with formal and informal powers concentrated in the hands of the President. In the framework of executive-legislative relations presidential will is officially channeled through and materialized in the form of presidential decrees and directives. (Remington, 2014) In addition, the unofficial tool of presidential powers is epitomized in assignments. In comparison to decrees and directives, assignments are not mentioned in the Constitution and thus they refer to an extra-legal declaration of intents of the President. (Burkhardt, 2021) Assignments are utilized in the form of unofficial tasks regarding the specific field of policy-making which are proceeded to selected addressees represented either by various state political and bureaucratic institutions or by individual politicians and officials responsible for the implementation of requested tasks. (Burkhardt, 2021) Potential addressees of the presidential assignments in Russia encompass the entire political-administrative apparatus of the state, including the federal government (governmental apparatus and ministries), regional governors and administrations (subordinated to presidential plenipotentiary envoys), courts, law enforcement authorities (prosecution office and investigative committee), but also state agencies or state-controlled enterprises containing, among others, mass media networks. (Budaev, 2019; Shamiev, 2018)

However, even in a highly centralized system, in which a President can act unilaterally by decrees or assignments, like the one existing in Russia, these acts are not self-enforcing. The president needs some kind of authority through which his will in the form of decrees, directives, or assignments is enforced. (Budaev, 2019; Remington, 2014) In this context, the literature on bureaucratic authoritarianism concentrates on the institutionalization of authoritarian rule through the progressive strengthening of executive bodies or granting executive powers to administrative bureaus that are directly linked to the position of the President. (Collier, 1979; Pepinsky, 2014; Schmitter, 1973) This not only leads to the institutionalization of extra-constitutional channels of power but also provides neo-authoritarian presidential regimes with instruments of covert directive management enabling significant enhancement of the ruling powers of the systemic center. (Collier, 1979; Schmitter, 1973) In practical terms, this process is

characterized by the entrenchment of a large, stable, and balanced resource base for the chosen authority/authorities within the state apparatus in the form of unofficial executive and controlling powers. As a result, the establishment of neo-authoritarian regimes tends to be accompanied by the emergence of democratic-looking institutions that are granted powers significantly surpassing the given constitutional framework. (Pepinsky, 2014) And, in the Russian political-bureaucratic system, at least after the year 2000, this role has been institutionalized in the Presidential Administration (Presidential Executive Office). (Burkhardt, 2021)

In the course of presidential terms of Vladimir Putin, the Russian Presidential Administration evolved from an executive office to a sustainable self-sufficient center of governance able to help the President formulate policies, communicate them to the relevant state agencies, coordinate their execution, and monitor their performance in the given field. (Galeotti, 2020; Zuikov, 2011) As of 2013, the Presidential Administration was a powerful and complex agency, the influence and competencies of which extended within the Russian vertical of power far beyond those envisaged in the law that framed it – informal practices, network governance, and virtual politics have become a pervasive feature of its performance. (Ledeneva, 2013) Presidential Administration dominated access to the President, provided him with information and analysis, channeled his decisions in the form of directives, decrees, and assignments to a wide range of addresses within the Russian political-administrative system, and oversaw their implementation. (Ledeneva, 2013) As Russian political scientist Kirill Shamiev stated in his report, this institution became the mastermind behind state authorities having exclusive superiority in relation to almost all other political bodies or state agencies (except for security agencies such as the Security Council, FSB, or SVR). (Shamiev, 2018) Moreover, the Presidential Administration was able to seize control over a wide field of competence within which it could act autonomously only based on general principles given by the President. In some cases, it was able to form political prerogatives and set the official lines that became obligatory for all the above-mentioned types of addresses. (Galeotti, 2020) This is why Eugene Huskey argues Russia has become a technocratic authoritarian regime with an ever-increasing bureaucratization of politics implying the state of affairs in which administrators run the politics instead of politicians. (Huskey, 2010) For these reasons, the Presidential Administration, sometimes colloquially called 'the Kremlin' (after the presidential residence), has become a metaphor symbolizing the alleged omnipotence of Russia's presidents. (Burkhardt, 2021)

To properly understand the system of decision-making and executive management in the field of Russian mass media, we should first outline the relations of subordination and principles of distribution of power among individual officials within the Presidential Administration. Presidential Administration is led by the Chief of Staff who holds the position of the supreme presidential plenipotentiary responsible for conducting the Administration's business, personal policies, or performing special tasks assigned directly by the President. (KREMLIN, 2022a) The Chief of Staff presides over the team of deputies, who are in charge of individual thematic sections within the Presidential Administration (individual thematic sections are then divided into specialized directorates executing the agenda on a working level). (KREMLIN, 2022a) As well, the deputy heads are responsible for specific fields of state policy and coordinate the work of the state political/administrative institutions in the field that is in their competence. (Burkhardt, 2021) Aside from the common working structures, there are also aides/assistants (pomoshchniki) and advisers (sovetniki) who have special status within the structure of the Presidential Administration. The aides/assistants, who usually head their own administrative apparatus (e.g. the Press Secretary of the President or the Head of the Presidential Office), are subordinated to both the President as well as the Chief of Staff. In comparison, the weight of advisers is more symbolic as they are not in charge of any specific working apparatus and often represent an intermediate post for civil servants personally close to the President. (Zuikov, 2011) Despite the official hierarchy, deputy heads or aides/assistants who have close personal relationships with the President, or have gained his favor and trust over the years, can emerge out of the influence of the Chief of Staff and become subjected directly to the President. Thus, the real influence of the deputy heads, presidential aides/assistants, but also advisers can vary a lot in accordance with the degree of trust the President places in individual personalities. (Galeotti, 2020; Zuikov, 2011) As such, the Presidential Administration brings together a range of individuals whom President Putin appears to trust for their advice, the capacity to devise/develop/implement purposeful programs, or even strategies in various fields of policy-making, and the area of mass media is not an exception.

Hence, when looking for some kind of command-and-control center within the Russian state apparatus having sufficient administrative power for setting the lines in political as well as information space, it is (despite the fact it does not officially possess such competencies conferred by the Constitution or by federal law) the Presidential Administration. This administrative body brings together trusted managers responsible

for the coordination of all relevant state-controlled bodies in key areas of policy-making (including the area of mass media) that are subordinated directly to the President or his supreme plenipotentiary – the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration.

4.1.2.2 The Ability of the Central Organizing Unit/s to Coordinate the Actions of Incorporated Media Outlets

The system of political-administrative power in Russia has been characterized by a high level of personalization. The ability to coordinate actions of all relevant agents involved in the process of policy-making in one specific field (in this case – information policy) is inherently related to the status of the assigned coordinator within the vertical of political power. (Ledeneva, 2013; Zuikov, 2011) The status is primarily determined by the position and authority of individual personalities in the Presidential Administration, by the nature and extent of entrusted competencies, as well as by the scope of administrative apparatus allotted for the execution of given assignments. (Burkhardt, 2021) At this stage, it is time to have a closer look at who was in charge of the news media sector and information policies and what was the status of these people in the vertical of Russian political power in 2013.

At that time, the key figure within the structure of the Presidential Administration responsible for media policies and information strategies was the First Deputy of the Chief of Staff Alexei Gromov. (Stanovaya, 2012) Though officially subordinated to the Chief of Staff (Sergei Ivanov), Gromov succeeded in gaining the confidence of the President himself which granted him an unrivaled position in the field of mass media management. (Gatov, 2015; Proekt, 2019; Zakem et al., 2018) His exceptional status as well as the value he has had for President Putin over time can be best expressed by his longevity – in 2013 he had worked in the Presidential Administration for more than 15 years. Gromov accompanied President Putin in the course of all his presidential terms, where he was concerned with news media and information policies most of the time spent in the Administration. (KREMLIN, 2022a) The high level of autonomy bestowed on Gromov stemmed from his role in the process of recentralization of the domestic media market in the course of the 2000s. It was he who became the key strategist driving the restoration of state control over news media through newly established ownership structures and the installment of loyal individuals in key positions in all major outlets – Channel One, NTV, VGTRK, various information agencies (TASS, Rossiya Segodnya, RT), and state-controlled media enterprises like Gazprom Media Holding. (Burrett, 2010;

Gatov, 2015) He is also the architect who designed something that is called the 'Kremlin pool of journalists.' It is a kind of exclusive club of trusted Russian correspondents accredited or invited by the Presidential Administration on a regular basis to cover the activities of the Russian President and Russian governmental bodies. (Tregubova, 2003) In this political-journalistic environment, Gromov has acted as a gatekeeper adjusting the access to the President for most of the people from the Russian establishment dealing with media agenda and has become the unparalleled channel conveying the President's will (in the form of decrees, directives, or assignments) to managerial or editorial staffs of individual media companies. This is why Gromov has been called 'Putin's media puppetmaster'. (GEC, 2022; Proekt, 2019)

Regarding his competencies, Gromov had the authority to determine guidelines for acceptable content, on behalf of the President he assigned tasks to various state-controlled media agents (governmental bodies, state agencies/enterprises, media outlets, individual correspondents, bloggers, etc.), and supervised their managerial and executive staffs. (Gatov, 2015; GEC, 2022) Within the scope of this general framework he acquired the authority to: set directives on news framing; invoke restrictions on coverage and prevent specific news/narratives from being published; summon representatives of all media outlets controlled by the state or representatives of state agencies in charge of press and information policies to discuss with them publishing as well as personnel policies; conveying important media players together in particularly sensitive moments and coordinate their response; intervene into the internal affairs of media outlets; selection, management, and financial support of the presidential pool of journalists. (Proekt, 2019)

To execute these extensive competencies, Gromov had at least two directorates (subdivisions) of the Presidential Administration at hand. First, the Directorate for Public Relations and Communications, headed by Alexander Smirnov, was responsible for: exercising presidential powers regarding state information policy; drafting proposals for the President and participating in the implementation of the President's instructions on issues of state information policy; developing information support strategy for presidential decisions as well as coordinating its implementation; and coordinating information activities of federal government bodies and federal executive authorities to provide objective information to the media on the state policies. (KREMLIN, 2022b) In practical terms, this directorate was the central node where the guidelines on publishing policies were finalized and distributed in the form of presidential assignments to all relevant state-controlled media agents in order to coordinate their publishing policies on

selected issues/events. This body also checks whether the given guidelines (tasks) are implemented and followed by the relevant addressees. (Galeotti, 2017; Tregubova, 2003) Second, Gromov was free to give tasks to the Presidential Press and Information Office, headed by Andrei Tsybulin. Though this subdivision was primarily subordinated to the Press Secretary of President Dmitry Peskov, it closely cooperated with the Directorate for Public Relations and Communications on drafting proposals for the President on matters concerning state information policies, formation of Russia's information space, and took its part in their implementation. (KREMLIN, 2022b) The Press and Information Office was also the key subdivision of the Presidential Administration that coordinated the work of the 'Kremlin pool of journalists' in the area of information proceedings concerning the President's activities, decrees and instructions, speeches, statements, meetings and other events in which he took part at that time. (Proekt, 2019; Tregubova, 2003)

Despite the high level of autonomy, strong administrative authority, and the far-reaching apparatus that was under his sway, Gromov was dependent on dealings with other high-rank officials of the Presidential Administration. The most significant interaction was established with the First Deputy Chief of Staff responsible for internal political affairs Vladislav Surkov (called Kremlin's grey cardinal) and his successor Vyacheslav Volodin replacing Surkov in this position in 2011. (Kolesnikov, 2021) Volodin was in charge (among other matters) of the Domestic Policy Directorate providing support for setting the main outlines of Russian domestic policy. Within the scope of its mandate, this directorate gathered and processed information on the social and political situation in the country and worked out proposals on state-building, federal relations, local self-government, regional policies, or technical aspects of elections. (KREMLIN, 2022b) This directorate emerged as Putin's main agency for intrastate political control which helped the President to formulate political prerogatives, communicate them to state executive agencies, and monitor their performance. (ISR, 2012) In the field of coordination of state-controlled media activities, this directorate significantly contributed at the level of content framing – it was preparing ideological framing concerning internal but also foreign political affairs that were used by Gromov's apparatus to instruct relevant state-controlled media agents. (Gatov, 2015) The framing of news media messaging in the field of foreign political affairs could have been done in cooperation with the Directorate for Foreign Policy led by Aleksandr Manzhosin, the Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign countries led by Vladimir Chernov, and the Presidential Aide for Foreign Policy Yuriy Ushakov at the

top – constituting the backbone of the foreign-policy block of the Presidential Administration. (KREMLIN, 2022b) However, the primary goal of these foreign policy bodies (rather) was to help with the formulation of general tenets of foreign-policy strategy (or completing of special tasks) that were transferred to the mass media space through the work of Volodin's and Gromov's apparatus in the first place. (Galeotti, 2017; Zakem et al., 2018) Aside from them, the cooperation with the Press Secretary of President Dmitry Peskov is channeled through the competencies of the Presidential Press and Information Office as described above. In addition, Gromov and Peskov share long-term working history in the Presidential Administration in the course of which they established close professional relations. (Sharafutdinova, 2020) Peskov was the direct subordinate of Gromov when he served as the president's Press Secretary in Putin's first two terms. Thus, Peskov perfectly knows long-established procedures for working with the Russian news media. After Gromov moved on to the position of the Deputy of the Chief of Staff, Peskov substituted him for the position of press secretary which he assumed in 2012 and which he still held in 2023. (Bocharova & Vinokurova, 2012) Even though the high-ranked officials – Gromov (managing news media), Volodin (managing internal politics), Peskov (managing presidential PR and press releases), and Ushakov (managing foreign politics) – became independent of each other (in terms of their power status) and over time there appeared some serious disagreement or even competence disputes, they were able to sustain the cooperation on the working level to make the whole system running, at least in the field of news media. (Romanova, 2015; Sharafutdinova, 2020) Finally, the Chief of Staff Sergei Ivanov helped to communicate especially important decisions regarding media and information policies when it was required to add maximum administrative-political weight (as in the case of the dismissal of Mironyuk from RIA Novosti), demonstrate that an issue is of special importance for the President himself, or coordinate the work of the big three (Gromov, Volodin, Peskov), when necessary, because of their squabbles. (Romanova, 2015; Zakem et al., 2018)

In 2013 the Presidential Administration, with the First Deputy of the Chief of Staff Alexei Gromov at the top of the hierarchy, worked as a superior coordinating unit having enough political as well as administrative power to steer the activities of state-controlled media agents in a desired manner and supervise their performance to make the system work as unilaterally as possible in favor of the President. Gromov was able to concentrate strong authority, an extensive range of competencies with executive powers, and sufficient administrative apparatus (necessary for processing assignments) in his hands.

As well, he was able to establish beneficial interactions with other key figures of the Presidential Administration having an important influence on the arrangement of information policies.

4.1.2.3 The Ability of the Central Organizing Unit/s to Act as an Agenda-Setter

Over time, the Russian Presidential Administration has created a centralized system designed to process the assignments regarding information coverage to all state-controlled media agents. The underlining idea of the whole system is to consolidate the ability of the Presidential Administration to directly interfere in the process of information-making in individual media agents in an effort to merge their short/mid-term as well as ad-hoc publishing policies with the interests of the President. (Simons, 2005) This has been done by integrating all the relevant media agents into a single centrally managed information space. By using the single information space (encompassing all the controlled media agents), the state authorities in charge can maximize the salience of narratives with encoded framing that support (internal or foreign) political goals given by the President on the domestic or target foreign media markets. (Simons, 2005)

According to multiple sources bringing the evidence based on manifold interviews with various middle- and high-ranked Russian journalists from state-controlled news media outlets, Presidential Administration has developed four mutually intertwined tools to make the system based on the principle of a single information space (facilitating the agenda-setting function) running: a) briefing sessions arranged for leading managers/editors from individual outlets; b) distribution of guidelines for framing of information policies; c) telephone hotlines for solving ad-hoc tasking, pressing affairs, or crisis situations; d) repressive measures to suppress and punish disobedience. (Alyukov et al., 2022; Galeotti, 2020; Gatov, 2015; Gessen, 2022; Proekt, 2019; Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2017; Yaffa, 2014b; Zakem et al., 2018) It has been this system that has made the centralized coordination of relevant systemic units from the Presidential Administration feasible and thus has enabled to set of purpose-driven agendas in the Russian (and later also foreign) information space. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we will have a closer look at how these instruments are operated by the Russian Presidential Administration in daily routine to attain a coordinated and consolidated agenda-setting effect.

The essential pillar of the centrally coordinated agenda-setting efforts has become the regular briefing sessions with representatives of all relevant news media agents arranged by the Presidential Administration. (Yaffa, 2014b) Till 2003 these briefing sessions were organized by the then Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Aleksandr Voloshin but after he departed from the Presidential Administration the original event was divided into two (mostly) separate meetings: the one led by the First Deputy Chief of Staff responsible for internal political affairs Vladislav Surkov (substituted by Vyacheslav Volodin in 2011) was dedicated to planning in political affairs and the other led by the presidential aide Mikhail Lesin (substituted by the Deputy Chief of Staff Alexei Gromov in 2008) was dedicated to planning in media affairs. (Proekt, 2019) In 2013, the briefing sessions dedicated to planning in media affairs were organized primarily by Alexei Gromov (at this time already promoted to the position of the First Deputy Chief of Staff) once per week at the main office of the Presidential Administration situated at the Old Square (Старая площадь) in Moscow. (Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2017) Depending on the nature of the current information agenda, the Gromov's sessions were attended by a broad group of participants coming from diverse media agents and state institutions: leading managers/editors of all state-controlled news TV channels (comprised in Channel One, NTV, TNT, and VGTRK networks); leading managers/editors of major information agencies (Rossiya Segodnya, TASS); journalists from the 'Kremlin pool'; proxies from selected private media outlets; high-ranked officials of the Presidential Administration, representatives of the press offices of the federal government (governmental apparatus and ministries), security and law-enforcement bureaus, parliament, or other relevant state agencies involved in the subject matter. (Gatov, 2015; Gessen, 2022; Proekt, 2019; Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2017; The Insider Team, 2015) At these sessions, Gromov sketched the upcoming presidential agenda and instructed the gathered attendees on how to cover the scheduled presidential performances. This part was often prepared in cooperation with the Press Secretary of President Dmitry Peskov supported by the Presidential Press and Information Office. (Galeotti, 2020) Based on footings prepared for him by the apparatus of the Presidential Administration (most notably by the Directorate for Public Relations and Communications and the Domestic Policy Directorate), Gromov was used to introducing issues that should be covered in the upcoming period and set restrictions on particular events or framing that should not be reported. (Proekt, 2019) Invited attendees were also asked to provide plans of their institutions on information coverage and were free to offer

their ideas to help formulate the most favorable message framing. (Gessen, 202) With time, the sessions took rather the form of a 'situation room' – the representatives of present media agents or state institutions were allowed to enter the debate and took part in the final selection of issues intended for information coverage as well as the way of their framing. (Gatov, 2015) Attendees of these briefing sessions then transferred the main points regarding the information coverage to their home institutions and distributed them to the senior editorial staff which instructed teams of journalists subordinate to them. (Gessen, 2022; The Insider Team, 2015; Yablokov & Schimpfossl, 2020) By its very nature, the briefing sessions have become the driving force of the entire system providing the Presidential Administration with a unique platform to consolidate the short/mid-term planning of information coverage in the spirit of the single information space.

Aside from these briefing sessions that were routinely conducted in the oral form, the apparatus of the Presidential Administration subordinate to Gromov regularly issued a specific sort of 'theme lists' in 2013. (Proekt, 2019) In Russian journalistic slang, these lists have been called 'temniki' (темники). This term was derived from the word 'theme' (тема) which in the Russian language includes also the meaning of other expressions like topic, issue, and subject matter, but also incentive, stimulus, suggestion, or proposal. All these expressions capture a specific part of the purpose to which the theme lists have served in practice – they have been used in the form of written instructions on issue coverage distributed by the Presidential Administration to all the relevant controlled media agents and state institutions. (EU StratCom, 2017) Compared to the briefing sessions, the theme lists were issued with higher frequency (even up to 5 times a week) and thus they enabled the Presidential Administration to perform a much more agile approach to short-term agenda-setting that (thus) could be adjusted on a daily basis. (Gessen, 2022) The theme lists offered detailed guidance memos elaborating what issues/events should be covered, what issues/events should be ignored, and provided the selected issues with predetermined guidelines for contextual and valence (emotional) framing. (Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2017; The Insider Team, 2015; Yablokov & Schimpfossl, 2020) In line with the agenda-setting theory, the theme lists accentuate or exclude certain aspects of the portrayed reality and thus endorse the required perspective on the selected issues. They can include layouts and suggestions on specific evaluations, assessments, or guidelines on positive/negative framing putting forward aversive or positive emotions about the message. (Roonemaa, 2018; The Insider Team, 2015) The system of theme lists has replaced the previous reactive practice based on ex-post

censorship with a proactive approach utilizing the preemptive distribution of guidelines. Due to the system of theme lists the editorial staff of controlled media outlets received timely notifications identifying the no-go zones and instructions on how to formulate the news messaging to avoid getting into trouble with the Russian authorities. (EU StratCom, 2017; Gessen, 2022) While the briefing sessions in the form of a 'situation room/center' served as a tool to generate issues and set the most advantageous lines for information coverage in the short/mid-term horizon, the theme lists provided newsrooms with precisely formulated memos for content/valence framing on daily basis.

The briefing sessions and the theme lists are mighty instruments in terms of coordinated agenda-setting efforts. However, these tools are highly dependent on precise scheduling and require thorough preparation which limits their usability in crisis situations calling for rapid reaction or agile 'manual' control in order to quickly adapt the issue coverage/narrative framing in reaction to abruptly changing affairs. For solving pressing problems in crisis situations outside of tasking cycles given by briefing sessions and theme lists, a network of telephone 'hotlines' was established. (EU StratCom, 2017; Kudors, 2014b) Telephone hotlines interconnect Gromov's apparatus in the Presidential Administration with leading managers, editors in chief, and/or news editors at individual state-controlled media outlets. (Galeotti, 2020; Proekt, 2019; Zakem et al., 2018) Sometimes, the system is described as a network of 'yellow telephones' that were installed on the desks of media managers responsible for information policies – for instance, Margarita Simonyan (RT, Rossiya Segodnya) publicly declared she was provided with a secure line to the Kremlin via a 'yellow phone'. (Shuster, 2015) The Russian media analyst Vasily Gatov mapped another example of using the yellow telephone hotlines coming from the VGTRK structure: 'Alexander Orlov, who served as deputy editor-in-chief of the Rossia-24 television channel from 2008 to 2012 explained that VGTRK Deputy Chairman Dmitry Mednikov and Rossia-24 chief editor Yevgeny Bekasov frequently take calls on their yellow phones — not so much to receive their latest orders as to consult with Kremlin staff on how best to present this or that news story. […] Orlov recalls that during the economic crisis of 2008, the caller on the yellow phone prohibited VGTRK channels from using the word crisis in their broadcasts, even while simultaneously requiring that they report on the crisis.' (Gatov, 2015) In her interview with the Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen, the former VGTRK news anchor Farida Kurbangaleeva described how in 2013 the VGTRK editorial staff was instructed through the yellow telephone hotlines in the process of newsmaking on the information

framing concerning the Russian-Ukrainian war – e.g. to substitute the word labeling pro-EU supporters from 'protesters' to 'Nazi collaborators', the word labeling the new Ukrainian government that retook the power after President Yanukovich fled the country from 'Ukrainian authorities' to 'junta', or label the capture of Crimea peninsula by Russian army as 'reunification' and never an 'annexation'. (Gessen, 2022) This practice has been applied in a very similar manner for all news TV channels operated by state-controlled media networks (Channel One, NTV, TNT, VGTRK) as well as information agencies (TASS, Rossiya Segodnya) – issues selection, narratives formation, and contextual/valence framing has been modified in real-time in the course of news-making with respect to the development of the covered events just on a call from above. (Lipman, 2009)

To make the described system founded on the directive top-down distribution of issue/narrative framing (channeled through briefing sessions, thematic lists, or telephone hotlines) effective, a simple practice of repressive measures to suppress and punish disobedience was established in all Russian state-controlled media companies. (Fossato, 2006; Pasti, 2011; Simons & Strovsky, 2006) Inconvenient journalistic works are rewritten and journalists/editors/managers grossly violating established rules on information coverage/framing are punished with salaries or financial rewards reduction, suspensions in career progress or demotion, complete pushing away from the news-making process, or even firing with little perspective to be engaged with other Russian (state or private) news media outlets. (Kovalev, 2020) Anyone who wants to survive in this system must develop a refined sense of what is admissible in particular cases and rather think twice about what is put on paper. As a consequence, journalists look for permission for publication by their editorial staff and leading managers/editors demand approval from the Presidential Administration when in doubt or prior the reporting on precarious issues. (Servettaz, 2016) This state of affairs induces circumstances in which state-controlled media are practically banned from or are not willing to formulate independent news interpretations regarding political affairs that have not been authorized by the Presidential Administration. (EU StratCom, 2017) This is how the system of censorship transfers into self-censorship practice on the working level – journalists in newsrooms turn on their anticipatory sense to avoid troubles and try to come up with creative framing that, nevertheless, suitably cultivates the publishing instructions coming from the top. In the end, all links of the chain play (most of the time) by the rules to support the coherence and the effectivity of the agenda-setting machinery. (Bodrunova &

Litvinenko, 2013; Schimpfossl & Yablokov, 2014) As such, despite the system of directive top-down communication and repressive measures for disobedience, the general approach is to give journalists some space for improvisation in applying personal interpretations of the Kremlin's political line. (Alyukov et al., 2022) Journalists in newsrooms may apply the received instructions with some level of autonomy and improvise using their understanding of the framework outlined by the Presidential Administration – they can play in a well-defined sandbox, but they cannot cross the delimited borders. (Lough et al., 2014) This leads to a certain diversity in publicly presented opinions that may be in some aspects inconsistent with the proposed guidelines, but do not go against the core directions on messaging.

In a nutshell, the Russian Presidential Administration was able to develop an effective system of agenda-setting coordination based on directive top-down management. Gromov's apparatus in Presidential Administration was able to create a single information space: assemble all the state-controlled media agents on a regular basis, synchronize their plans for information coverage in short- and mid-term horizons, regularly select issues for coverage, plus produce guidelines for issues framing, distribute these guidelines throughout the system, introduce a tool for rapid adjustment of information policies in crisis situations, and establish systemic conditions ensuring that everyone (regardless of the level in the workflow) would play by the given rules. The lasting practice of centrally set guidelines in combination with repressive measures (that imply a punishment for disobedience) stimulate also the bottom–up filtering of news framing on the lower levels of journalist work, which heavily contributes to the widespread occurrence of self-censorship – journalists learn to understand both red-lines and interests of the incumbent political leadership and try not to cross them. All this indicates that the ability of the central organizing unit within the Russian news media system – the Presidential Administration – to act as an agenda-setter has got to a very high level.

4.1.2.4 Assessment: The Level of Centralized Coordination of Incorporated Media Outlets in the Russian Media System

Despite the fact it does not officially possess such competencies conferred by the Constitution or by federal law, the Russian Presidential Administration (Presidential Executive Office) was able to establish itself as the one-and-only central organizing unit responsible for the formulation and coordination of national information

strategies/policies in favor of the President. The First Deputy of the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Alexei Gromov, entrusted to lead this sector of policy-making, was able to concentrate strong authority, an extensive range of competencies with executive powers, and sufficient administrative apparatus to coordinate and supervise actions of all media agents under control as well as relevant state institutions to make the system work as unilaterally as possible within the framework of predetermined information strategies/policies. Presidential Administration headed by Gromov was able to develop a sophisticated and well-functioning agenda-setting system using the principle of a single information space allowing for the coordination of activities of all incorporated units by supporting a directive top-down managerial style. This approach enabled the Presidential Administration to assemble the state-controlled media agents on a regular basis, synchronize their plans for information coverage in short- and mid-term horizons, and regularly select issues for coverage. The system provided the Presidential Administration with a powerful tool to produce guidelines for issues framing, distribute these guidelines throughout the system, introduce a tool for rapid adjustment of information policies in crisis situations, and establish systemic conditions ensuring that everyone (regardless of the level in the workflow) would play by the given rules. In the end, the analysis within the framework of the three examined factors (the existence of a central organizing unit with sufficient authority; the ability of the central organizing unit to coordinate the actions of incorporated media outlets; the ability of the central organizing unit to manage incorporated media outlets and act as an agenda-setter) has shown that the Russian state established enough effective system of management to reach a remarkably high level of centralized coordination of incorporated media outlets. Thus, the situational setting of the second independent variable (valid for the observed period) implies the configuration of the intermediate variable – (a high level of) state control over the mass media network – that complies with the conditions for the effective use of the mass media (network) within offensive foreign policy strategies.

4.1.3 State Control over Mass Media in the RF in 2013: Summary of Findings and Outcomes

Since the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin, which began in 2000, the Russian state authorities have made cardinal progress in an effort to control the national news media market and manipulate the flux of news dispersed by these assets. First, the Russian state was able to claim the dominant position in the sector of news media and

establish control over media outlets through direct ownership, personnel appointments, and managerial pyramids, thus reaching a very high level of hierarchical control over news media assets. Second, the Russian state was able to establish itself as the one-and-only central organizing unit (responsible for formulation and coordination of national information strategies/policies), concentrate strong authority and extensive range of competencies (to coordinate and supervise actions of all media agents under control), develop sophisticated and well-functioning agenda-setting system using the principle of a single information space (allowing for coordination of activities of all incorporated units by implementing directive top-down framing management), and thus to achieve a high level of centralized coordination of incorporated media outlets. The comprehensive outline of findings concerning the level of state control over the news media in the RF is summarized in Figure 5.

Figure (5): *The comprehensive outline of findings and outcomes concerning the level of state control over the news media in the RF.*

State Control Over Mass Media Outlets in the RF in 2013	
The Level of Hierarchical Control over Mass Media Outlets in the RF	*The Level of Centralized Coordination of Incorporated Media Outlets*
The Role of the State in Media System • The RF set a semi-authoritarian media system; • Russian authorities started to play a dominant role in the national media sector; • Russian authorities successfully eliminated independent political messaging;	*The Existence of a Central Organizing Unit/s with sufficient Authority* • Assignation of unrivaled political-administrative powers to Presidential Administration in the RF; • Subordination of officials within the Presidential Administration directly to the President or the Chief of Staff in the RF; • Presidential Administration as a center for the development and coordination of information policies in the RF;
The Concentration of State Ownership in the Media System • Russian news TV networks owned and operated as state-controlled enterprises; • Russian broadcasting providers (terrestrial and satellite) owned and operated by the state; • Russian Internet-based news agencies owned and operated as state-controlled enterprises;	*The Ability of Central Organizing Unit/s to Coordinate the Actions of Incorporated Media Outlets* • The concentration of enough authority, extensive range of competencies with executive powers, and sufficient administrative apparatus (to effectively coordinate actions of controlled media) in the hands of Presidential Administration in the RF;

State Power over Personnel Management	The Ability of Central Organizing Unit/s to Act as an Agenda-Setter

• Appointments of loyal trustees to senior managerial posts within individual Russian state-controlled media outlets;
• Hierarchical control over Russian state-controlled news media through the system of managerial pyramids;
• Interference in internal personnel affairs in Russian stated-controlled news media outlets by using corruption, coercion, or extortion;
	• The success of the Russian Presidential Administration in:
	  - creation of a single information space;
	  - assembling of all state-controlled media agents;
	  - synchronization of plans for information coverage in short- and mid-term horizons;
	  - selection of issues for coverage and production of guidelines for framing;
	  - establishment of tools for rapid adjustment of information policies in crisis situations;
	  - setting of systemic conditions ensuring that everyone would play by the given rules;

Outcomes: Russian state authorities were able to: • gain of dominant position in the national market of news media; • establish control over news media outlets by gaining direct ownership; • establish control over news media through the system of managerial pyramids; *= gain a high level of hierarchical control over news media outlets in the RF.*	*Outcomes: Russian state authorities were able to:* • establish a central organizing unit responsible for the coordination of controlled media agents; • concentrate sufficient authority, extensive competencies, and administrative apparatus for coordination of controlled media agents; • develop effective agenda-setting system based on directive top-down practice; *= the state was able to achieve a high level of centralized coordination of incorporated media outlets in the RF.*
= Till 2013 the ruling Russian political elites used the state apparatus to reach a high level of state control over the Mass Media	

As a result, the analysis within the framework of the given independent variables shows that the Russian state authorities were able to create a convenient media environment that allowed them to seize a high level of control over the domestic media market, increase state influence in selected media outlets, and retake control over publishing policies and framing management within these media entities. By setting down the strong system of vertical/hierarchical control over the news media outlets and system of directive top-down coordination of their publishing activities on the eve of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict outbreak, Russia met the first step to master the agenda-setting function (as outlined in the theoretical-methodological chapter) – to gain the ability to produce information framing in line with political demands on domestic, but also foreign media markets. Finally, the agenda-setting effect, given by the strong state hierarchical/vertical control over the news media sector and effective system of directive

coordination of their publishing policies in the RF, was multiplied as many domestic as well as foreign media outlets commonly retook the information published by official TV/information agencies and released them with the original framing. In light of this, in the course of the 2000s and early 2010s the Russian state undertook and completed all the steps necessary to gain enough control over the news media sector to start a purpose-driven expansion of these assets on foreign media markets and contest there (by utilizing coherent pro-Russian information framing) in the agenda-setting competition with local and/or international media outlets. In essence, the Russian state authorities were able to set such domestic (intrastate) conditions that enabled them to make serious efforts to deliberately increase the efficiency potential in terms of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies. With all this in mind, we can assert that the situational configuration of the first intermediate variable (state control over mass media network) in the observed period fully meets the conditions for the effective use of the mass media (network) within offensive foreign policy strategies.

4.2 The Territorial Range of the Controlled Mass Media Network

For this moment, the case study has brought up strong evidence that the Russian state was able to acquire heavy control over selected categories of domestic mass media companies/outlets (by achieving enough hierarchical control over the domestic news media sector and a high level of centralized coordination of incorporated media outlets) thus creating an extensive form of single information space in the RF till 2013. The following part of this chapter builds on these findings and provides an insight into the process through which the single information space set down in the domestic media market of the RF obtains an external dimension. From this perspective, the subsequent progress in the analysis brings us into the sphere of the interplay between intrastate and foreign policies. We are going to pay attention to the process of purpose-driven expansion of (originally) domestic mass media outlets controlled by Russian state authorities (with the Presidential Administration at the top of the hierarchy) in the Ukrainian media market.

The intention is to carry out a qualitative analysis regarding the unique situational setting within the two independent variables derived from the general analytical model: a) the expansion of Russian state-controlled media outlets in foreign media markets with special emphasis on Ukraine, and b) the establishment of Russian state-controlled media outlets in the Ukrainian media market. These findings are then used to provide the assessment concerning the level of the territorial range of the Russian state-controlled

mass media network (designated for power projection) in the Ukrainian media market (representing the second stated intermediate variable). Thus, this part of the work gives an appraisal of the extent to which the configuration of this intermediate variable complies with the conditions for the effective use of the Russian mass media network within offensive foreign policy strategies against Ukraine (representing the dependent variable) in the observed period. In practical terms, the unique situational setting in 'the expansion of the controlled media network in the target media market' and 'the establishment of the controlled media network on the target media market' constitute the ability of the Russian state authorities to purposefully extend the territorial reach of its mass media network into the Ukrainian media market. Or, in other words, the analysis within this framework gives us the knowledge background that is indispensable for the assessment of the Russian ability to successfully engage selected domestic mass media companies/outlets within state-driven expansion in the Ukrainian media market and for the implementation of effective offensive strategies on an information-psychological level against this particular country in the course of the escalation and active phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (2013 – 2015).

4.2.1 The Expansion of the Controlled Media Network in the Target Media Market

The expansion of Russian media outlets in the Ukrainian media market represents the first above-determined driver influencing the level of territorial range of the mass media network controlled by the RF. Expansion refers to the process through which the activities of media companies/outlets controlled by one state entity make purpose-driven efforts to penetrate a foreign media market controlled by another state entity by successfully avoiding local restrictive measures and obtaining broadcasting licenses or publishing accreditations. This independent variable is, according to the theoretical background concerning media imperialism, primarily given by the following factors: a) the existence of the strategic framework for expansion in foreign media markets, b) the ability of incorporated media outlets to penetrate the target media market; and c) the level of penetration of the target media market. (Boyd-Barrett, 1977; Ding, 2003; Yazovskaya & Gudova, 2020) Hence, in the following paragraphs, we are going to analyze the arrangement of the Russian foreign media strategy towards Ukraine with special emphasis on the field of news TV and Internet-based news media in 2013 by consecutively using the perspective of the three given observable factors.

4.2.1.1 The Existence of the Strategic Framework for Expansion in Foreign Media Markets

The purpose-driven expansionism of Russian state-controlled mass media assets in foreign media markets has been deeply encoded in the contemporary Russian strategic culture, which is characteristic for understanding soft power in terms of state-run and state-directed power projection through political/cultural/economic pressure, reality deception, and information manipulation (and not spontaneous self-identification stemming from optional attractiveness). (Bogdanov & Chekinov, 2013; Kofman & Rojansky, 2015; Laruelle, 2015a; Wilson, 2015) When speaking on account of the instrumentalization of mass media, we can associate the Russian foreign policy approach with what Boyd-Barrett (and other scholars) has defined as the core of information/media imperialism – a process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subjected to substantial pressure from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected. (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, 1998; Fuchs, 2010; Mirrlees, 2019)

Tenets of information/media imperialism have been useful in articulating the manner in which mass media operate as transborder agents driving the flow of content and information on an international scale. (Fejes, 1981) The symbolical power of states representing strong political centers is supposed to be projected on a 'periphery' (neighboring/surrounding states) through the broadcasting of information designed to form a favorable image of the center. (Yazovskaya & Gudova, 2020) By definition, the center makes efforts to capture most of the information messaging broadcasted by news media outlets in the assumed periphery. Therefore, the communication center is located where the production of original media content is placed. (Yazovskaya & Gudova, 2020) The intention lying in the very heart of this school of thought is to engage the means of advanced transborder communication to attain domination in production as well as distribution of information content in foreign countries, achieve submission of a target population, and hereby expand political influence abroad. (Ding, 2003; Mirrlees, 2019) A state asserting such a strategy must be able to establish channels allowing to stream purposefully manufactured information messaging across national and cultural boundaries. As the flow of information intensifies, the country so affected suffers political, economic, psychological, technological, or cultural pressure. (Ding, 2003) With

respect to the role of mass media in the process of globalization, Russian political elites have revealed the issue of the rising dependence of the national media markets on transborder/transnational content producers and comprehended the problem of uneven information flow. (Vartanova, 2013) Russian strategic thinking has consecutively espoused the idea mass media are tools instrumentalized by dominant political and technology centers (e.g. USA, PRC, RF) that are able to produce consent and shape the contours of public opinion abroad for their own benefit. (Orttung, 2014; Yazovskaya & Gudova, 2020) The Russian modification of information/media imperialism, which has been formed by the idiosyncratic Russian strategic culture at least since the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin, has stemmed from two intertwined principles – offensively tuned soft power (that in its final stage, in conflict situations, turns into an instrument of information warfare) coupled with guided media expansionism.

The Russian approach to media soft power became highly instrumental as the political (and later also military) leadership got inspired by precisely chosen pieces of Joseph Nye's works stating that information is power and success in the information age depends not only on whose army wins but also on whose story wins. (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Laruelle, 2015a; Nye, 2004) In the course of his presidency, Vladimir Putin repetitively published his thoughts that appealed to Russian state institutions and officials to come up with mechanisms allowing the utilization of soft power within purpose-driven foreign policies – to project Russia's message abroad more forcefully and effectively or to assertively promote traditional Russian values along with social solidarity, patriotism, multipolarity, sovereignty and great power status in foreign countries. Putin claimed the RF is supposed to set up a 'matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levers of influence.' (Putin, 1999, 2012) These ideas, presupposing the deliberate instrumentalization of soft power, were overtly supported by many other Russian high-ranked politicians and officials. The most vivid example we can bring to the stage is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the RF Sergei Lavrov, who demonstrated his awareness of this issue stating that 'the effective defense of national interests [abroad] is impossible without the proper use of solid soft power resources.' (Lavrov, 2011) As soon as the expert military circles entered the debate a more aggressive tone was established and this specific soft-power scheme was swiftly shaped with much more offensive reasoning. Russian military experts let themselves inspired by the original Western concept of hybrid warfare mixing up the military with non-military assets and they appealed to incorporate soft power resources in nature –

including news mass media – within this framework. (Hoffman, 2009; Thomas, 2016) In his work on information warfare, the head of the Directorate for Electronic Warfare of the Main Naval Staff, Admiral Vladimir Pirumov, wrote that information warfare includes the influence on an enemy's information system and psychic condition. Among such influence techniques, he included: disinformation (deception), manipulation (situational or societal), propaganda (conversion, separation, demoralization, desertion, captivity), lobbying, crisis control, and blackmail. (Pirumov, 2010) Russian Army specialists, Col Chekinov and Lt Bogdanov, underlined the offensive understanding behind the evolving approach to the foreign mass media instrumentalization adding that it will be dominated by information and psychological warfare that will seek to depress the opponent's armed forces personnel and population morally and psychologically. (Bogdanov & Chekinov, 2013) The Chief of General staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Valery Gerasimov, stated that 'the impact (of mass media) can be the same as the large-scale employment of troops and forces' and that 'The massive influence on people's consciousness (in peacetime) facilitated the inflammation of nationalism in Ukraine and upheavals in the Arab world.' (Gerasimov, 2013) It is obvious that the Russian leadership found out that a war for the hearts and minds of foreign audiences is an integral part of contemporary political practice as well as military conflicts taking place in a globalized world interconnected by 24/7 news information streaming. However, in contrast to most Western concepts of soft power, the Russian approach has understood this concept as an offensive tool designed for purpose-driven interference in the internal political affairs of foreign countries leading to the calculated submission of target foreign audiences, power projection, and geopolitical control.

This kind of strategic reasoning, calling for the development of effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad, has inherently envisaged the need for expansion (of the reach) of the Russian state-controlled mass media (and other soft power resources) in foreign media markets. We can detect such requirements even in most of the foreign policy and security documents that have emerged in the RF from the 2000s to early 2010s. The Foreign Policy Concept introduced by President Medvedev in July 2008 explicitly appealed to develop effective instruments of information influence on public opinion abroad and, in comparison to the Foreign Policy Concept issued in 2000, to strengthen the role of Russian mass media in an international information environment. (MFA RF, 2000, 2008) Russia's 2013 Foreign Policy Concept definitely outlined the important role Russia's leadership expected mass media to play in foreign affairs saying

that Russia will seek to ensure its objective perception in the world, develop its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad, strengthen the role of Russian mass media in the international information environment providing them with essential state support, actively participate in international information cooperation, and take necessary measures to counteract information threats to its sovereignty and security. (MFA RF, 2013) This state of affairs was only confirmed by the Russian Military Doctrines (issued in 2010 and updated in 2014) which integrated information measures among essential components of the contemporary conflict-resolution practice and warfighting side by side with military force, special forces missions, or economic measures. (PRF, 2010, 2014) Despite there was a strong effort to formulate Russian Military Doctrines in defensive phrasing, they have codified the attitude that shifted mass media among offensive resources designed to attack enemy states on their own soil, in their own information space both in peacetime as well as in conflict situations (regardless of the level of militarization). (PRF, 2010, 2014) As such, the RF openly declares that it would resort to the purpose-driven expansion of state-controlled mass media assets beyond its national borders with the intention to retake control over foreign media markets to subjugate the process of opinion-making within the target countries and codifies it in official strategic documents.

In practice, Russia has created quite an explosive strategic compound that has been inherently dependent on the transborder expansion of state-controlled mass media assets and their establishment in information spaces of other countries. There is vast evidence that Russian media outlets have started to penetrate foreign media markets and spread there narratives that either arouse sympathy with Russian perspectives, defame those who oppose them, or capitalize on the logic that divides the population of the target states into 'us' (the good) and 'them' (the bad) on the background of social, religious, cultural, ethnic, value, ideological or political determination. (Kofman et al., 2017; Laruelle, 2015a; Sazonov et al., 2016) In order to achieve submission of target foreign populations, Russian media resort to the diffusion of purposefully manufactured content with the potential to arouse public support for Russian policies/interests, inflict confusion (to mitigate public reaction in target countries to specific Russian policies), arouse opinion fragmentation (limiting the maneuvering space of the target country to introduce counter-measures to Russian policies), disintegrate the target audience along severe dividing lines (in an effort to paralyze the state's ability to raise internal support for the central government), motivate subversion, or initiate turmoil. (Bechev, 2019; Hofmeisterová et

al., 2018; Mareš, 2021; Meister et al., 2018; Pasitselska, 2017) With that respect, Russia has invested significant financial resources into developing various soft power institutions, the purpose of which is to exert multinational/transnational communication and carry out information campaigns promoting the new culture/value-based ideology among foreign audiences. (Wilson, 2015) Moreover, Russia has achieved remarkable success in establishing state-owned media outlets (e.g. Russia Today, Russia Beyond the Headlines, Voice of Russia, Sputnik International, etc.) possessing multi-language mutations as well as in the expansion of these assets into foreign media markets, especially within the range of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eastern European states, and in the Balkans, where they have been able to gain significant public attention. (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Hofmeisterová et al., 2018) This state of affairs corroborates also findings of the EU asserting the RF has made strong efforts to retake control over the media spaces of various foreign countries and has used mass media assets under state control for information manipulation of target foreign civil societies. According to the EU, Russia has engaged its mass media assets in systematic international campaigns of disinformation, information manipulation, and distortion of facts in the information space of foreign countries in order to enforce consent or enhance destabilization. (CEU, 2022)

Aside from the efforts to succeed in dominating the domestic media landscape (as shown in the previous parts of this chapter), the RF set its sights on a broader international audience. For this purpose, it has developed a specific strategic framework for mass media instrumentalization in its foreign policy with roots in information/media imperialism reasoning that combines basic principles of soft power logic with expansionist tendencies. This strategic amalgam permeates through the thinking of the key Russian political and military leaders and has been anchored in fundamental strategic documents of the RF till 2013. As such, the RF has deliberately advocated for creating channels of transborder information streaming based first and foremost on the purpose-driven expansion of state-controlled media assets in foreign media markets with the aim to engage them in an assertive power projection through influencing public opinion-making processes in foreign countries (by dominating the agenda-setting process in favor of Russian foreign policy interests).

4.2.1.2 The Ability of the Controlled Media Network to Penetrate the Target Media Market

In the previous section, we put forth reasons why the RF is seen as an ambitious world power employing sophisticated mass media strategies for restoring its international status. We determined principles driving the strategic transformation, initiated by President Putin, the aim of which was to increase the potential of projecting political and cultural influence abroad. And according to the established strategic direction, this should have been done (also) through the extension of the geopolitical range of state-controlled mass media messaging. Albeit the Russian leadership has had global aspirations, most of the efforts made in this direction were dedicated to the consolidation of power in the neighboring countries and thus to recover the mass media influence in the geographically adjacent regions that once were an integral part of the Soviet Union (Baltics, Caucasus, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe) – 'Near Abroad.' (Bugajski, 2020; Gorenburg, 2021; Hofmeisterová et al., 2018)

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the consecutive failure of socialist regimes, the newly emerging political entities have suddenly turned into (more or less) sovereign independent states with various levels of democratization. (Götz, 2022) Despite that, the Russian political elites have always believed that the geopolitical areas constituting Russia's Near Abroad should be considered the privileged sphere of influence of the RF. Any external or independent policies appearing in these regions were considered by the RF as attempts to undermine its 'natural' rights and national concerns. (Cooley, 2017; Götz, 2022) This is why Russian foreign policy involvement has been much stronger in the surrounding states than in more distant foreign countries. With Vladimir Putin retaking the presidential office such a course of thinking has only intensified amid the Russian foreign policy community. In Russia, maintaining this sphere of influence under control became perceived as the key to strengthening Putin's system domestically as well as creating the image of the RF as a great power in what has been called the emerging multipolar world. (Götz, 2018; Kästner, 2010) The RF has adopted an overtly critical stance towards the promotion of Western liberal-democratic principles or cultural patterns in its Near Abroad and has begun to develop its image as a 'more appropriate' political, cultural, and economic alternative across the region. Hence, the 'colored revolutions' in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) were seen in the RF as being inflicted by Western-controlled NGOs and triggered harsh

reactions from the Russian political leadership. (Cooley, 2017) To encroach the spread of Western-led political, economic, and cultural globalization, the RF has gradually enhanced its direct engagement in these states in the form of closer cooperation with local political elites or by various forms of interference in the domestic socio-political affairs of these states. (Yazovskaya & Gudova, 2020) For this purpose, Russian authorities created multiple state-led institutions that should systematically assist the projection of political power and cultural influence with special emphasis put on the Near Abroad. These state-promoted activities have included strong support for the penetration, spread, and establishment of Russian-language broadcasting, Internet-based messaging, and manufactured mass media content in the media markets of these countries, especially those with significant portions of the Russian-speaking population. (Saari, 2014)

The administrative center responsible for the implementation of the envisaged spread of media activities in the media markets across the Russian Near Abroad has become the Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries of the Russian Presidential Administration established by President Putin in February 2005. The first head of the Directorate Modest Korelov was substituted in 2012 by Vladimir Chernov who navigated the activities of this structural body through the second Ukrainian crisis (that quickly transformed into war) starting in 2013. (Anisimova, 2021; Saari, 2014) In the field of mass media, the Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries has been assigned to help Gromov's apparatus to understand the internal socio-political dynamics within individual neighboring states as well as to examine the local media markets, penetrate them with Russian state-controlled media companies, disperse there locally-adapted content advantageous for the RF, and thus to increase the range of the single information space envisioned by Gromov across the regions that fall within the Near Abroad concept. (Saari, 2014; Zakem et al., 2015) In practice, these activities have consisted of the establishment and management of Russian media ventures abroad, co-option of the Russophone diasporic journalism in the system, initiating cooperation with local/national media providers, and orchestrating media campaigns or softer cultural, language- or history-related PR campaigns in the media markets across this geopolitical area. (Saari, 2014; Voronova et al., 2019; Zakem et al., 2018) Therefore, when Russian interests in these countries are at stake, primarily this administrative apparatus is assigned to mobilize all the available media-based resources and push for the advantageous political agenda

within the target public space as seen for instance in Moldova (2006), Georgia (2008), and Ukraine (2013). (Zakem et al., 2015, 2018)

Although it is obvious the Russian media have begun to penetrate all markets of the post-Soviet space and the former Eastern Bloc, they have probably done best in Ukraine. In the course of the 90s and 2000s, dozens of Russian mass media outlets encompassing TV and Radio stations, newspapers with their Internet-based branches, as well as Internet-based information agencies, including multiple media companies under the direct control of Russian state authorities, were able to gain broadcasting licenses or publishing accreditations in Ukraine (see the following section). Moreover, the products of the Russian media industry in both the field of entertainment and news reporting started to pervade through the Ukrainian national media adopting and retranslating/republishing Russian media content on a large scale. (Ryabinska, 2011) This state of affairs was possible because the RF was able to take advantage of several closely intertwined mitigating factors that made the Ukrainian media market extremely accessible for them – a) historical legacies regarding structural relations of the Russian and Ukrainian markets, b) the status of the Russian language in Ukraine, c) inactive approach of Ukrainian governments toward restrictive regulations and licensing, and d) assertive intervening from the side of Russian authorities. (Dyczok, 2014; Kulyk, 2013b; Pieper, 2018; Saari, 2014)

To start with, till 2013 the RF was able to establish close cooperative relations with most of the post-Soviet Ukrainian governments (except for Yushchenko, who led the country from 2005 to 2010) and preserve historical legacies determining the high level of interconnection between Russian and Ukrainian media markets. (Kuzio, 2005) In Soviet times the Russian media system was organized in the form of a multi-layered series of concentric circles covering the entire territory of the Soviet Union with the emphasis put on the development of central (Russian) TV broadcasting on account of the national media sub-systems – central (Russian) media outlets were better funded and produced higher quality programs than those in the individual Soviet republics. (Dyczok, 2014) With that respect, the organization of Soviet Times broadcasting in Ukraine was typical of the dominant share of the Russian production, while Ukrainians had to get used to the centrally provided content. This structural setting laid solid foundations for the prevalence of Russian as the language of interethnic communication as well as the major language for TV and Radio programming in Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. (Dyczok, 2014) In the post-Soviet period, the RF was able to retain the close structural

interconnection of the Russian and Ukrainian media markets with the predominance of Russian language production. Though the Ukrainian state started to integrate into transnational networks (like the European Broadcasting Union), its media system remained a part of the former Soviet (Russian) communications network and Russian Ostankino remained the most watched TV channel because it continued to broadcast on the most powerful TV frequency in Ukraine until the second half of the 90s. (Dutsyk & Dyczok, 2021) As a result, post-Soviet changes in the Ukrainian media sector continued to be constrained by lingering Soviet stereotypes.

In addition, as the share of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine did not change much over the years (oscillating around 30 percent of those calling Russian their native language and nearly half of those using that language in everyday life – with a strengthening propensity to use Russian towards the east/south-east and, conversely, a weakening towards the west/north-west of the country), the Ukrainian legislative changes regulating the language policies in the mass media sector in favor of Ukrainian were rather ambiguous, inconsistent, and ineffective till 2013. (Besters-Dilger, 2009; Kulyk, 2013b; Matviyishyn & Michalski, 2017; Reznik, 2018; UCIPR, 2017) Most of the regulating attempts were done to reconcile concerns for the national revival in Ukraine and simultaneously preserve good relations with the RF cautiously monitoring the situation. This state of affairs became even more problematic as the Ukrainian political leadership was getting under mounting pressure from the side of the RF after Vladimir Putin retook the presidential office. (O'Loughlin et al., 2016; Pieper, 2018) During that period, the RF started to put an increased emphasis on pursuing the rights of Russian diasporas, compatriots, or Russophone public in foreign countries and Ukraine became one of the focal points for this newly emerging foreign policy direction. In this context, the Russian political elites had repetitively expressed objections against attempts to implement language regulating laws in the field of official/administrative communication, education, and (last but not least) in the sphere of mass media in Ukraine. (O'Loughlin et al., 2016; Pieper, 2018) Therefore, despite the Ukrainian governments were introducing requirements on the minimal share of the Ukrainian language in the airtime of media outlets (broadcasting in the Ukrainian media market), the National Television and Radio Council responsible for the licensing process was not compelled by Ukrainian political bodies to take resolute measures in order to ensure these requirements were met. (Bowring, 2011) As a result, the domestic as well as foreign (in vast majority Russian) television and radio stations operating in Ukraine could easily circumvent the stated

legislative measures and use as much Russian as their owners and managers deemed expedient, thus creating very convenient conditions for both the incoming Russian media outlets and Ukrainian private providers taking over the originally Russian media production (in entertainment and news coverage) for years. (Ryabinska, 2011)

This state of affairs was about to change after the orange revolution and the high resolve of the Yushchenko's government to strictly limit the share of Russophone broadcasting in the Ukrainian media market by restricting the use of Russian. In 2004 the incumbent Ukrainian government stated clear provisions requiring a minimum 75 % share of the Ukrainian language on airtime for nationwide broadcasters and constituted the mandatory audio-dubbing television programs thus hitting especially the Russian mass media outlets. (Reznik, 2018) However, instead of enforcing immediate compliance, the National Television and Radio Council tried to engage the media (already having Ukrainian licenses) in a deal on the gradual increase of the share of the Ukrainian language, thus being ready to tolerate violations for some time on the condition that the scope of Russophone programming would be progressively reduced. (Kulyk, 2013a) Despite such a benevolence, the new language regulations in the media sector were harshly criticized by the domestic anti-Orange opposition (supporting uninhibited use of Russian) that was firmly backed by the Russian political authorities as well as by individual (Russian as well as Ukrainian) broadcasters (complaining about higher production costs and decreased ratings as many Russian-speaking viewers and listeners were supposed to reject the new programming priorities). (O'Loughlin et al., 2016) Therefore, when Viktor Yanukovych was elected to the presidential office in 2010, his new administration restored close cooperative relations with the Russian political leadership and rolled back the previously enforced reforms concerning the language regulations in the Ukrainian media sector. (Szostek, 2014a) Within months, Yanukovich started an extensive transformation of the Ukrainian media sector including the reduction of the quota for the Ukrainian language in broadcast media to 25 %, the establishment of the state TV channel ahead with Russian-speaking Yegor Benkendorf, and the 're-privatization' of the Ukrainian media companies that were acquired by close to state (Yanukovich) oligarchs. (Dyczok, 2014) In general, in countries where many ethnic Russians reside, the Russian language is still widely spoken, and the restrictions for language use are not thoroughly implemented, the penetration of Russian state media has been more effective and Ukraine is a great example.

Finally, there were no official regulations for language use introduced in the sphere of Internet media in Ukraine till 2013. (Shumilo et al., 2019) The Ukrainian web domain was closely interlinked with and heavily dependent on the Russian Internet (RuNet), while the latter being an important source of online information for Ukrainian consumers who did not care about the origin of texts in a language they preferred or at least perfectly understood. (Kulyk, 2013a; Ryabinska, 2012b, 2012a) Most Ukrainian websites either had only Russian-language versions or offered it as a starting page, which most users (primarily urbanites for whom Russian is the main language of everyday use) saw no reason to change. According to an available survey conveyed before 2013, as many as 82 % of Ukrainian sites relied on the Russian language, with only 14 % using Ukrainian and 4 % being bilingual. (Kulyk, 2013a; Ryabinska, 2012a) The same was true for the internet news media, which used Russian internet-based agencies as a welcomed source of information on events outside Ukraine and, in turn, became an increasingly important source for the domestic Ukrainian print and broadcast media outlets. (Ryabinska, 2012a; Watanabe, 2017) As such, for most of the time of the Ukrainian independence (gained after the dissolution of the Soviet Union), the Ukrainian media market was heavily penetrated by Russian media companies and Russian media production. Most Ukrainian and Russian TV stations actively broadcasting in the Ukrainian media market kept their prime time largely Russophone and Ukrainian web pages were dominated by Russophone sites broadly filled with originally Russian content. (Besters-Dilger, 2009; Matviyishyn & Michalski, 2017)

In general, the Russian political authorities have been able to prioritize the foreign policy directions driving the strategy for the penetration of the foreign media markets with national media outlets, steer it primarily into the area of the Near Abroad, and create a specific administrative coordinating center dispatched in the Presidential administration responsible for managing and implementing such kind of mass media activities. Perhaps the most successful attempt to implement this strategic approach accomplished by the RF was the case of the Ukrainian media market. In Ukraine, the RF was able to use historical legacies, structural interconnections, language conditions, and legislative inconsistencies to extract more benevolent conditions for Russian media companies. Russian media outlets wanting to expand their activities to Ukraine were able to easily gain broadcasting rights and publishing accreditations, while the Russian foreign policy pressure was able to minimize most of the possible restrictions, especially those concerning TV broadcasting and internet-based messaging. For these reasons, we can maintain that

throughout the 90s and 2000s the ability of the Russian (state-controlled) mass media outlets to penetrate the Ukrainian media market and spread Russian-language programs (and news coverage) was extremely high. This claim can only be confirmed by the high number of Russian media outlets operating in Ukraine before 2013 (for more details see the following section).

4.2.1.3 The Level of Penetration of the Target Media Market with a Controlled Media Network

While the previous section used the analysis of the state support and conditions existing in the Ukrainian domestic media market to explain the high ability of Russian mass media companies to penetrate the Ukrainian media market since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 up to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2013, the following paragraphs bring evidence necessary to assess the real level of penetration of the Ukrainian media market with Russian media outlets in the same period. The examination concerning the 'level of penetration' is the last step in assessing the expansion of the Russian mass media network in Ukraine. This factor is measured primarily by the real number of media outlets coming from one country that can anchor in the target foreign media market and/or by the extent to which the domestic mass media outlets of the target country retranslate/republish purposefully manufactured content produced by the media industry under the control of the intervening country.

Unfortunately, there are no official nor unofficial lists of Russian (or foreign in general) mass media companies/outlets having broadcasting licenses and/or publishing accreditations in Ukraine that would be accessible and valid for the period before 2013 or this particular year. Notwithstanding, some kind of measurement – and one that is quite accurate – is possible. Following the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the annexation of Crimea, and continued fighting between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian security forces in eastern Ukraine, the new government in Kyiv led by President Petr Poroshenko started to impose restricting sanctions on Russian mass media outlets participating in pro-Russian propagandist efforts (e.g. by supporting or justifying Russian military operations in southeast Ukrainian regions or blaming Ukrainian political elites for planning alleged violent actions against the Russophone population living in Ukraine). (CPJ, 2017) The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine officially advocated that restricting sanctions were used only against Russian media outlets spreading fabricated disinformation or aggressive pro-Russian propaganda, adding that 'As an

independent sovereign state, Ukraine can and should protect its media space from aggression coming from Russia, which has been deliberately inciting hatred and discord among Ukrainian citizens.' (REUTERS, 2014) This particular measure was part of the comprehensive response to the threat of Russian disinformation that was introduced by Ukrainian authorities in an effort to strengthen the domestic information and media environment after 2014. The primary aim was to establish a set of mechanisms and tools allowing to directly respond to information threats which included providing the Ukrainian public with accurate information, disclosing (correcting) disinformation appearing in Ukrainian media space, and restricting activities of mass media outlets spreading malign information content. (OECD, 2022) As well, the Ukrainian authorities tried to spend resources to limit and prevent cross-border (terrestrial or satellite) broadcasting of Russian TV channels from reaching Ukrainian viewers, especially in eastern regions adjacent to the RF. (Peisakhin & Rozenas, 2018) And, while the disclosing of disinformation and limiting of cross-border broadcasting achieved inconsistent results, the restrictive sanctions banning activities of selected Russian media companies/outlets in the Ukrainian media market seem to be efficient. (OECD, 2022; Peisakhin & Rozenas, 2018)

Anyway, the initially loosely coordinated and unsystematic procedure in terms of imposing sanctions on Russian media companies has been gradually formalized in Ukraine from 2017 through the issuing of summarizing presidential decrees (Decree of the President of Ukraine) that have codified and progressively extended the list of Russian media, the activities of which have been restricted or completely banned in Ukraine from 2014 (and in most cases, the restricting sanctions continue to be valid to the present day). (OPU, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a) With that respect, to get a real number of Russian mass media companies (and outlets run by them) that once operated in the Ukrainian media market is possible only by screening the related presidential decrees that have imposed a ban on these assets for spreading malign propaganda and have prohibited their further activities in the Ukrainian media market. Moreover, the related presidential decrees do not impose sanctions solely on Russian TV broadcasting in Ukraine but encompass all types of mass media platforms including radio, press, as well as Internet, and thus can offer a very complex picture of the situation. (OPU, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a) In some cases, the ban on particular Russian media companies/outlets includes also websites directly affiliated with the given legal entity (media company) – in these cases the ban means that all Internet providers registered in Ukraine are prohibited from

providing access to websites related to selected legal entities for a given period (usually 3 years). As some decrees expire and new decrees are published, some Russian media appear in the decrees repeatedly. (OPU, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a) Beyond that, the thesis uses a cross-checking procedure to identify the Russian state-controlled mass media that were instrumentalized in Ukraine during the given period – it looks through the above-determined presidential decrees (Decree of the President of Ukraine) and searches for the media companies that were identified as pillars of the Russian single information space (and thus as the core assets channeling the Russian information influence both home and abroad) in previous sections of this case study (which were focused on the structure, functioning, and managing of the Russian state-controlled mass media network). In this manner, the work selects from the list of Russian media companies based on the Ukrainian presidential decrees primarily those resources for which it previously demonstrated direct control of Russian state authorities in the sense of centrally managed/restrained publication and production processes. Finally, the vast majority of the Russian mass media companies/outlets that appeared in the related presidential decrees had acquired their broadcasting license or publishing accreditation prior to 2013 and so they automatically become the object of our interest as they pose the channels of Russian foreign policy influence that were active in the escalating and high-intensity phasis of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (2013 – 2015).

For the purpose of this thesis, the decrees No. 133/2017, No. 126/2018, No. 82/2019, No. 184/2020, No. 109/2021, No. 203/2021, and No. 379/2021 issued by the President of Ukraine were examined. These particular presidential decrees legalize and summarize the sanctions restricting the activities of selected Russian media companies and outlets operated by them on all types of media platforms (TV, Radio, Press, and Internet) in the Ukrainian media market. (OPU, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c) For better clarity, a table encompassing an aggregated list of all Russian legal entities that were found in the aforementioned decrees was created (see Figure 6). The list is arranged according to the following categories: an original (official) name of the legal entity (company/outlet); the English name of the legal entity (if stated within the decree); websites related to individual banned legal entities (companies/outlets); specification of the presidential decree through which the restricting sanctions were imposed.

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Figure (6): The aggregated list of all Russian mass media entities having broadcasting licenses or publishing accreditation in the Ukrainian national media market prior to 2013 which were banned by the Decree of the President of Ukraine for spreading malign pro-Russian propagandist content (as claimed by official Ukrainian state authorities).

	Original Name	**English Name**	**Related Websites**	**Decree**
1.	**РТР-Планета**	RTR Planeta	rtr-planeta.com russia.tv vesti.ru tvkultura.ru digitalrussia.tv	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018
2.	**Яндекс**	Yandex	yandex.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 82/2019 č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
3.	**Всероссийская государственная телевизионная и радиовещательная компания**	All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting	rtr-planeta.com russia.tv vesti.ru tvkultura.ru digitalrussia.tvvgtrk.com mobile.vgtrk.com i-mult.tlum.ru multvkino.tlum.ru 100kwt.com vgtrk.com vesti-k.ru smotrim.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 82/2019 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
4.	**НТВ-ПЛЮС**	NTV Plus	ntvplus.ru ntvplus.tv	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
5.	**ЗВЕЗДА**	Zvezda	tvzvezda.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021

Figure (6): The aggregated list of all Russian mass media entities having broadcasting licenses or publishing accreditation in the Ukrainian national media market prior to 2013 which were banned by the Decree of the President of Ukraine for spreading malign pro-Russian propagandist content (as claimed by official Ukrainian state authorities).

6.	**ТНТ-ТЕЛЕСЕТЬ**	TNT	tnt-online.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
7.	**МОСКВА МЕДИА**	Moscow Media	tnt-online.ru moscowmedia.net m24.ru mskagency.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
8.	**РК МЕДИА**	RK Media		č. 133/2017
9.	**ВЕРА, НАДЕЖДА, ЛЮБОВЬ**	Radio Vera	radiovera.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
10.	**Цифровое телевидение**	Digital Russia		č. 133/2017
11.	**Россия сегодня**	Rossiya Segodnya	россиясегодня.рф sputniknews.com ria.ru rsport.ria.ru 1prime.ru realty.ria.ru riarating.ru inosmi.ru ria.ru/sn ukraina.ru crimea.ria.ru inosmi.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 109/2021 č. 203/2021
12.	**Национальная медиа группа**	National Media Group	nm-g.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018
13.	**Телерадиокомпания Петербург**	5TV	5-tv.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
14.	**Рен ТВ**	REN TV	ren.tv	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021

15.	**Редакция телеканала Совета Федерации**	Vmeste-RF		č. 133/2017
16.	**Общественное телевидение России**	Public Television of Russia	otr-online.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
17.	**Медиа Контент**	Media Kontent	wbc.com.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018
18.	**Наше Радио/Мультимедиа холдинг**	Nashe Radio	nashe.ru	č. 133/2017 č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
19.	**Телекомпания НТВ**	NTV	ntv.ru	č. 126/2018 č. 203/2021
20.	**Первый канал. Всемирная сеть**	Channel One	1tv.com domkino.tv domkino-premium.tv muz1.tv vremya.tv telecafe.ru bober-tv.ru kanal-o.ru poehali.tv katyusha.tv karusel-tv.ru pobeda.tv	č. 126/2018 č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
21.	**РИА Новости**	RIA Novosti	rian.com.ua	č. 126/2018
22.	**Газпром-Медиа Холдинг**	Gazprom Media		č. 126/2018
23.	**Первый канал**	Channel One	1tv.ru	č. 126/2018 č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
24.	**Региональный радиоканал**			č. 184/2020

25.	**Русское радио Иваново**			č. 184/2020
26.	**Русское радио-Крым**			č. 184/2020
27.	**Телерадиокомпания Крым**		1tvcrimea.ru crimea24.tv crimea-radio.ru	č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
28.	**Максимум-Крим**			č. 184/2020
29.	**Комсомольська правда**	Komsomolskaya Pravda		č. 184/2020
30.	**Радио Рокс-Регион**			č. 184/2020
31.	**Стайл медиахолдинг**			č. 184/2020
32.	**Общественная крымскотатарская телерадиокомпания**			č. 184/2020
33.	**Телерадиокомпания Сан-Фуэто**			č. 184/2020
34.	**Телерадиокомпания Медиапрофиль**			č. 184/2020
35.	**Про-радио**			č. 184/2020
36.	**Карусель**	Carousel		č. 184/2020
37.	**Национальный спортивный телеканал**			č. 184/2020
38.	**СТС Медиа**	CTC Media		č. 184/2020

39.	**Межгосударственная телерадиокомпания Мир**	Mir		č. 184/2020
40.	**Севастопольская телерадиокомпания**		stv92.ru ikstv.ru	č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
41.	**Медиа ТВ Севастополь**			č. 184/2020
42.	**Сеть телевизионных станций**	STS		č. 184/2020
43.	**Спас ТВ**	Spas		č. 184/2020
44.	**Новый канал**	Novyi Kanal		č. 184/2020
45.	**Профмедиа ТВ**			č. 184/2020
46.	**Телеканал ТВ3**	TV3		č. 184/2020
47.	**Телекомпания Пятница**	Friday		č. 184/2020
48.	**Муз ТВ**	Muz-TV		č. 184/2020
49.	**Федеральное агентство новостей**	Federal News Agency	riafan.ru jpgazeta.ru dnronlane.su i-don.ru rumedia24.com dnr24.su rmnews.ru howto-news.info novosti.icu	č. 184/2020 č. 109/2021
50.	**Новинфо**		newinform.com inforeactor.ru politros.com	č. 184/2020

51	ТВ Центр	TV Centre	tvc.ru telesputnik.ru	č. 184/2020 č. 203/2021
52.	Интернет-Пресса		svpressa.ru	č. 109/2021
53.	Газета.Ру	Gazeta.ru	gazeta.ru	č. 109/2021
54.	Утро.Ру		utro.ru	č. 109/2021
55.	Кассад Групп (Голос Севастополя)		voicesevas.ru	č. 109/2021
56.	Лента.Ру	Lenta.ru	lenta.ru	č. 109/2021
57.	СМИ2	SMI2	smi2.ru	č. 109/2021
58.	ТВ-Новости	TV Novosti	rt.com	č. 109/2021
59.	ИТАР – ТАСС	TASS	tass.ru	č. 109/2021
60.	Известия	Izvestia	iz.ru	č. 203/2021
61.	Росбизнесконсалтинг	RBK Group	rbc.ru tv.rbc.ru	č. 203/2021
62.	Московский комсомолец	Moskovskij Komsomolets	crimea.mk.ru mk.ru	č. 203/2021 č. 379/2021
63.	Информационная платформа Крымпресс		crimeapress.info	č. 203/2021
64.	Крымская газета		gazetacrimea.ru	č. 203/2021
65.	Телерадиокомпания ИТВ		трк-итв.рф	č. 203/2021
66.	Телерадиокомпания Ялта	Yalta TV	yaltatv.ru	č. 203/2021

67.	Студия Ялта ТВ		yalta-tv.ru	č. 203/2021
68.	Версия		versia.ru	č. 379/2021
69.	Народные новости		news.ru	č. 379/2021
70.	Анна-ньюс	Anna News	anna-news.info	č. 379/2021
71.	Лайт-принт		luga1news.ru	č. 379/2021
72.	Наше завтра		zavtra.ru politexpert.net	č. 379/2021
73.	Фонд изучения исторической перспективы		stoletie.ru	č. 379/2021
74.	Бизнес ньюс медиа (Ведомости)		vedomosti.ru	č. 379/2021
75.	ТРК-3		vesti92.ru	č. 379/2021

Using the list/table, we can convincingly claim that the penetration of the Ukrainian media market with Russian mass media, which took part in supporting Russian foreign policy interests by dispersing advantageous information content, was extraordinarily vast before the conflict outbreak in 2014. At least 75 Russian mass media companies having broadcasting licenses or publishing accreditation in Ukraine prior to 2013 (in some cases operating multiple internet websites or TV channels) were, according to the Ukrainian authorities, involved in malign information messaging in favor of the RF. All the Russian state-controlled TV channels and internet-based information agencies, which have constituted the central axis of the single information space once envisioned by Gromov and created by the Russian Presidential Administration, are present in the list and were active in the Ukrainian media market in the observed period. All of the TV channels listed below as well as the websites associated with them (providing both various forms of online broadcasting and written forms of information messaging) function as an extended arm of a single information space directly controlled

and coordinated by the Russian state authorities beyond Russian borders – in this case covering the whole Ukrainian territory:

- **Channel One** (+13 operated web-sites: 1tv.com, 1tv.ru, domkino.tv, domkino-premium.tv, muz1.tv, vremya.tv, telecafe.ru, bober-tv.ru, kanal-o.ru, poehali.tv, katyusha.tv, karusel-tv.ru, pobeda.tv);

- **All Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting** / **VGTRK** – encompassing Rossia 1, Rossia 2, Rossia 24, and RTR Planeta TV channels (+ 12 operated web-sites: rtr-planeta.com, russia.tv – vesti.ru, tvkultura.ru, digitalrussia.tvvgtrk.com, mobile.vgtrk.com, i-mult.tlum.ru, multvkino.tlum.ru, 100kwt.com, vgtrk.com, vesti-k.ru, smotrim.ru);

- **Moscow Media** (+ 4 operated websites: tnt-online.ru, moscowmedia.net, m24.ru, mskagency.ru) – TV company established and owned by VGTRK;

- **NTW Network** – encompassing NTV, NTV Plus, and TV3 TV channels (+ 3 operated websites: ntv.ru, ntvplus.ru, ntvplus.tv);

- **TNT** (+ 1 operated website: tnt-online.ru);

- **TV-Novosti** (+ 1 operated website: rt.com) – TV-Novosti is an on-line TV platform that was established by Russian state company RT and functions as an aggregator of news originally produced by leading Russian TV outlets (Channel One, Ren TV, NTV, etc.);

- **REN TV** (+ 1 operated website: ren.tv) – REN-TV is a TV channel operated by National Media Group (NMD), more than 50 % of which is owned by Russian state corporations or institutions;

- **Public Television of Russia / PTR** (+ 1 operated website: otr-online.ru) – PTR is a TV Channel established and owned directly by the Government of the RF;

- **Zvezda** (+ 1 operated website: tvzvezda.ru) – Zvezda is a TV channel established and owned by the Ministry of Defense of the RF.

As described in the previous sections of this thesis, an important part of the scheme of the Russian single information space represents also state-controlled internet-based information agencies providing first and foremost 24/7 news coverage underpinned with almost real-time publishing capacity (enabled by broad journalist and editorial staffs as well as by the new opportunities of the Internet offering much faster publication process without delays in the printing phase). Therefore, when screening through Figure 5, we cannot miss that all the major Russian state-controlled internet-based information

agencies and secondary websites directly related to them were actively spreading information in the Ukrainian information space before 2013 and were put into the list:

- **Rossiya Segodnya** (operating 12 additional websites: россиясегодня.рф, sputniknews.com, ria.ru, rsport.ria.ru, 1prime.ru, realty.ria.ru, riarating.ru, inosmi.ru, ria.ru/sn, ukraina.ru, crimea.ria.ru, inosmi.ru);
- **RIA Novosti** (operated on the website: rian.com.ua) – run by the Rossiya Segodnya company;
- **TASS** (operated on the website: tass.ru);
- **National Media Group / NMD** (+ 1 operated website: nm-g.ru) – more than 50 % owned by Russian state corporations; NMD runs online news provider Izvestia (operated on the website: iz.ru).

The important fact is that the decree signed by President Poroshenko in 2017 blocked public access to some extremely significant private Russian companies for allowing the spread of malign anti-Ukrainian or one-sided pro-Russian information messaging thus ousting them from the Ukrainian media market – this applies to social media outlets VK (VKontakte), Odnoklassniki, and the search engine Yandex. (Golovchenko, 2022; OPU, 2017) According to Human Rights Watch, 78 % of the Internet users in Ukraine had a VK account and 48 % used the search engine Yandex on a daily basis prior to 2013. (CPJ, 2017) In addition, on the list, we can also find media companies owned by two Russian influential close-to-state oligarchs – CTC Media owned by Alisher Usmanov, and Federal News Agency (+ 9 operated websites: riafan.ru, jpgazeta.ru, dnronlane.su, i-don.ru, rumedia24.com, dnr24.su, rmnews.ru, howto-news.info, novosti.icu) owned by Evgeniy Prigozhin (a friend of President Putin, one of the leading proponents of the annexation of Donbas and Crimea, and one of the key proponents of the war in Ukraine). (Laruelle & Limonier, 2021; OPU, 2020, 2021a; Van Herpen, 2015) In this association, we should also mention (though it is not included in the Ukrainian presidential decrees) that the Ukrainian Internet started to be pervaded (especially during the escalation phase of the conflict) by Russian 'trolls' working for the Internet Research Agency (Агентство интернет-исследований) established by Prigozhin in Olgino (St. Petersburg) in July 2013. Some authors show that the Olgino 'troll farm' was responsible for the dissemination of pro-Russian or anti-Western narratives by posting comments also within Ukrainian Internet space (mainly internet-based social networks) on demand of Russian propagandist authorities. (Aro, 2016;

Doroshenko & Lukito, 2021; Giles, 2016b; Jaitner & Mattsson, 2015) The inclusion of these companies (except for the Olgino troll farm) in the list of Russian legal entities under restrictive sanctions indicates that the Ukrainian government has considered all these companies to be part of the propaganda machine controlled by the Russian state authorities. This perspective further expands the scope of the penetration of the Ukrainian media market by the Russian state-driven or state-coordinated media industry by important private-sector companies.

However, products of the Russian media industry get to Ukrainian audiences not only via Russian companies/outlets. Prior to 2013, the most viewed Ukrainian TV companies were concentrated in the hands of four oligarchs closely cooperating with President Yanukovich's central government (often asserting pro-Russian stances in both domestic as well as foreign policy) – Inter Media (Dmitro Firtash and Serhiy Lyovochkin – the head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine), Media Group Ukraine (Rinat Akhmetov), 1+1 Media (Ihor Kolomoyskiy), Ukrainian Media Holding (Serhiy Kurchenko), StarLightMedia (Viktor Pinchuk). (Orlova, 2016) All these media companies, more or less, used the news content referring to political events that were retaken from Russian state-controlled media producers (mainly TV and internet information agencies like Tass or Rossya Segodnya). (Ryabinska, 2012a) About TV Inter, a minority share was held by a Russian state-controlled stakeholder – a 29 % stake in Inter was owned by Channel One (the leading Russian TV channel directly controlled by the Russian state authorities with a publishing policy coordinated by the Presidential Administration). This Russian state broadcaster held a stake in Inter since the latter was founded in 1996 as a joint venture between ORT (as Channel One was then known), Pegas Televidenie (Пегас Телевидение), and Bussines World / Delovoy Mir (Деловой Мир) and originally was retranslating much of the content produced by the Russian ORT channel. (Szostek, 2014a) As a result, till 2013 Ukrainian TV schedules have become heavily padded with Russian serials, reality shows, gala concerts, soap operas, or comedy shows regularly reaching top ranks in the ratings of the most popular Ukrainian programs and, what is more important, news messaging produced by Russian TV channels and information agencies have become heavily incorporated by the top Ukrainian media. (Ryabinska, 2012a; Shumilo et al., 2019; Watanabe, 2017) As such, the previous research has shown that the news providers in Ukraine that had a Russian shareholder/partner or were affiliated with Yanukovich's group of oligarchs tended to be more restrained in their criticism of Russia than comparable news providers without such Moscow connections

and have the propensity to publish information content corresponding with Russian foreign policy discourse. (Szostek, 2014a) Finally, there are not mentioned the popular Ukrainian TV channels 112, NewsOne, and ZIK affiliated with strongly pro-Russian Ukrainian businessman and politician Viktor Medvedchuk. This is because Medvedchuk acquired them in 2018 – 2019 to fill the vacuum created by the massive restrictions of Russian state-controlled media in Ukraine (as described above). (Yanchenko et al., 2023)

In brief, over 70 Russian mass media companies, including all the state-controlled news-TV channels and internet-based information agencies, possessed broadcasting licenses or publishing accreditations before 2013 and actively spread pro-Russian narratives in Ukrainian public space in the escalating and active phasis of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that broke out in 2014. In addition, Russian authorities were able to engage in its support of significant private media resources. Finally, at that time the leading Ukrainian media companies were owned by oligarchs linked to President Yanukovich maintaining close cooperative relations with the RF and according to the available data they profoundly took part in pro-Russian propaganda by retaking originally Russian news production or republishing narratives advantageous for the RF. As a result, we can assert that in 2013 the level of penetration of the Ukrainian media market with Russian mass media companies/outlets, or with the Russian media industry in general, was extremely high and the RF was able to vastly expand the reach of the single information space controlled by it in Ukraine.

4.2.1.4 Assessment: The Level of Expansion of the Russian State-Controlled Media Network in the Ukrainian Media Market

In the course of the 2000s, the RF was able to develop a comprehensive strategic framework driving the expansion of state-controlled mass media companies/outlets in foreign media markets rooted in the combination of soft power reasoning and purpose-driven media imperialism. This strategic strand obtained strong political support in the RF and it was incorporated with gradually increasing emphasis in all foreign policy and security doctrines of the RF till 2013. Though the political leadership of the RF has had global ambitions, most of the efforts concerning this field of foreign policy were given to the geopolitical regions of the Near Abroad that received priority status. In the case of Ukraine, Russian media companies/outlets (heavily supported by Russian state authorities) were able to make advantage of historical legacies, structural interconnections, language conditions, as well as legislative inconsistencies existing in

the Ukrainian media market to overcome local restrictions, extract more benevolent conditions, obtain licenses or accreditations without obstructions, and thus easily penetrate the market. By virtue of that, dozens of Russian media entities covering all the key mass media companies/outlets under the direct control of the Russian state authorities were able to penetrate the Ukrainian media market and start to spread there its media production. In addition, Russian news media content was adopted and retranslated by all the main local media outlets owned by close-to-state Ukrainian oligarchs that supported the pro-Russian political tendencies of President Yanukovich, who was in office between 2010 and 2014. This only amplified the level of penetration of the Ukrainian media market by the Russian state-controlled media industry. As a result, the analysis within the framework of the three factors (the existence of the strategic framework for expansion in foreign media markets; the ability of incorporated media outlets to penetrate the target media market; the level of penetration of the target media market) has shown that the ability of the Russian state to drive the controlled mass media companies/outlets to penetrate the Ukrainian media market and spread there the Russian narratives was extremely high in the observed period. Thus, the situational setting of the third independent variable (valid for the observed period) meets the configuration of the intermediate variable – sufficient territorial range of the controlled mass media network – that complies with the conditions for the effective use of the mass media (network) within offensive foreign policy strategies.

4.2.2 The Establishment of a State-Controlled Mass Media Network in the Target Media Market

The establishment of Russian media outlets in the Ukrainian media market represents the second above-determined driver influencing the level of territorial range of the mass media network controlled by the RF. The establishment refers to the ability of the mass media network under state control to entrench in the competitive (or restrictive) environment existing on a target media market and gain as much public attention and confidence as possible. This independent variable is, according to the communication studies and agenda-setting theories, primarily given by the following factors: a) the ability of controlled mass media outlets (capable of anchoring in the target media market) to reach a substantial consumption ratio (among the target audience), and b) the ability of controlled mass media outlets able to anchor in the target media market to reach a substantial confidence ratio (among the target audience). (e.g. Fisher, 2018; Kiousis &

Strömbäck, 2010; McCombs, 2011; Moody, 2011; Strömbäck et al., 2020; Young & Anderson, 2017) Hence, in the following paragraphs, we are going to analyze the arrangement of the Russian foreign media strategy towards Ukraine with special emphasis on the field of news TV and internet news media in 2013 by consecutively using the perspective of the two given factors.

4.2.2.1 The Ability of the Controlled Media Outlets to Reach a Substantial Consumption Ratio in the Target Media Market

The ability of mass media outlets controlled by one state entity to penetrate a particular foreign media market still does not automatically imply that these media assets can succeed in competitive conditions existing in the target media environment, gain significant attention from the audience, and achieve substantial consumption ratio/s. To be clear about the terminology, the term 'mass media consumption' determines what media sources are preferred and utilized by the target audience for specific purposes – in our context, for information and news gathering. (Jensen et al., 2016) In that sense, the 'consumption ratio' indicates how the attention of the target audience (or particular groups existing within the target society) is divided between individual mass media outlets (or selected groups of media assets) dispersing specific content in the target media market. (Young & Anderson, 2017)

The analysis of the consumption ratio carried out with a special focus on mass media providing news messaging can give us knowledge on what outlets are important to the target audience (or particular groups existing within the target society) when it feels the urge to gather information about domestic socio-political affairs, adjacent geopolitical regions, or the global international arena. (Young & Anderson, 2017) According to the first-level agenda-setting theory dealing with salience management, mass media outlets able to win the contest in the competitive environment and pile up considerable consumption ratio have a better chance to take-over the agenda-setting process in the given media market, influence public discourse, and succeed in determining the availability of selected issues in the target audience's memories (as illustrated in the theoretical-analytical chapter of this thesis). (Jensen et al., 2016; McCombs, 2014) Mass media assets under the control of one state entity, which are anchored in the target foreign media market, must work hard and take concentrated actions to attract as much public attention as possible, convince the selected audience to receive (read/watch) their information messaging on account of competing media channels, allocate highest

attainable consumption ratio, and maintain this ratio in order to move up in the spiral of generating foreign-political influence. (McCombs, 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Young & Anderson, 2017) We should remind here that television was still the most popular source of news gathering in Ukraine and the Internet started to beat print media and radio in terms of popularity among news consumers in the period of our concern. (BBG Gallup, 2014a) Therefore, this part of the dissertation thesis examines the consumption ratio/s gained by Russian mass media in general and Russian state-controlled media outlets in particular with special emphasis put on the sector of news TV and Internet in order to make an assessment of their approximate aggregated position in the Ukrainian media market on the eve of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2013 as well as in the course of its escalation and active phases taking place mainly during 2014.

However, even though the activities of the Russian mass media in Ukraine have been understood by most Ukrainian governments after the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a potential problem or even a risk to national security, official records providing comprehensive data collected by Ukrainian statistical authorities are rare. More importantly, there are no official statistical data sets capturing the consumption of Russian TV or Internet-based media in the Ukrainian media market that would map the situation in the immediate pre-conflict period (2010 – 2013) or throughout the escalation and active phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (2014). Such surveys either were not done at all or have not been publicly available. For this reason, the author of this thesis repetitively asked various Ukrainian state institutions responsible for statistical data collection and media monitoring (National Council of Television and Radio broadcasting in Ukraine / Національна рада України з питань телебачення і радіомовлення; State Committee for television and radio broadcasting of Ukraine / Державной комітет телебачення і радіомовлення України; National Commission for the State Regulation of Communications and Informatization / Національна комісія, що здійснює державне регулювання у сфері зв`язку та інформатизації; State Statistics Service of Ukraine / Державна служба статистики України) to provide the required data for the declared academic purpose, but none of them replied. The lack of this type of data-sets is perceivable throughout the academic and expert community, as the studies/reports paying attention to the consumption ratings of the Russian mass media in Ukraine in the period between 2010 and 2014 unanimously refer to a few available (more or less) independent public surveys to support their claims. (Dyczok, 2014; IREX, 2013; OECD, 2022; Onuch et al., 2021; Peisakhin & Rozenas, 2018; Ryabinska, 2012a; Szostek, 2014a, 2014b;

Yanchenko et al., 2023) The most important survey, that has been done in this area, was sponsored by The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in cooperation with the U.S. non-profit organization Internews and conducted by the sociological center InMind Factum Group – this survey monitors both the aggregated and individual consumption ratios of Russian TV and Internet media outlets in 10 selected regions of Ukraine (from west to east: Lviv, Uzghorod, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Odesa, Cherkasy, Mykolayv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Donetsk) and is valid primarily for the pre-conflict period (from 2012 to early 2014). (InMind, 2014) The second major survey was conducted by The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) – this survey monitors only the aggregated consumption ratio of all Russian TV channels in four supraregional territorial units including western, central, southern, and eastern Ukraine and is valid for the escalation and active phasis of the conflict (from February 2014). (KIIS, 2014) Because these surveys are short of data regarding the mass media consumption in Crimea (one of the key Ukrainian regions that found itself in the center of the conflict), these were completed by another survey done by Gallup company in cooperation with the U.S. media agency The Broadcasting Board of Governors valid for the year 2014. (BBG Gallup, 2014a) Fourth, there is a series of surveys sponsored by the Internet Association of Ukraine and conducted by InMind Factum Group providing consumption ratings (expressed through the quantity of reach – the total percentage of Ukrainians who saw the content in a period predefined for monitoring, mostly in monthly intervals) embracing top 2000 websites, including the Russian ones, having the Ukrainian publishing license in selected months of 2011, 2012, and 2013. (InMind, 2011, 2012, 2013) All the above-mentioned surveys conducted by InMind Factum Group are active (verified as of November 17, 2023) but are available only through the digital document library SCRIBD and accessible exclusively via paid accounts.

It should be accentuated that all the surveys mapping TV and Internet consumption were conducted on samples representative of the Ukrainian population at both the national and individual regional levels. This means that the resulting numbers do not express the exact situation comprehensively but have to be understood rather as indicators implying trends in mass media consumption valid for the monitored period/s. Notwithstanding, the data from representative samples will suffice for the approximate reconstruction of the then situation in the Ukrainian media market allowing to make a basic assessment saying whether the Russian state-controlled mass media assets were able

to reach substantial consumption ratio/s in the Ukrainian media market in the observed period (2013 – 2014).

Let's have a look at what information we can get from the above-mentioned surveys. According to the InMind survey referring to the period between 2012 and early 2014, the highest consumption ratios reached by all Russian TV outlets broadcasting in Ukraine were recorded in the Donetsk region (71 %) followed by Mykolayv and Odesa regions (35 % both). The aggregated consumption ratio of all Russian TV channels in the rest of the Ukrainian regions, that were included in the survey, fluctuated around 13 % with minimal deviations. (InMind, 2014) In the nationwide average (considering the weight of all the included regions) the Russian TV channels were used for news gathering by 18 % of respondents every day and by 27 % of respondents at least once per week. The highest weekly consumption of Russian TV channels for news gathering was recorded in the south-east of Ukraine, specifically in Donetsk (68 %), Mykolayv (34 %), Odesa (26 %), Sumy (19 %), and Vinnytsia (17 %) regions. (InMind, 2014) The InMind survey was not conducted in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Luhansk, and Crimea but we can estimate the results that could have been reached by Russian media in these regions at that time based on the knowledge we already have – all representing south-east Ukrainian regions with large Russophone populations and strong representation of pro-Russian sentiments, in which we could expect high popularity of Russian news media with consumption ratios ranging somewhere between the numbers reached in Donetsk (thus meaning around 60-70 % in Luhansk and Crimea) and Odesa / Mykolayv (thus meaning around 20-40 % in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson). The results of InMind research as well as our estimates for the rest of the south-east regions more or less correlate with the findings of the KIIS survey. Nevertheless, as reported by KIIS, the situation regarding the consumption ratio of Russian TV in general and Russian news TV in particular among the Ukrainian population slightly dropped after the conflict outbreak in 2014. In the nationwide average considering every region's weight (except for Crimea), only 9 % of Ukrainians regularly watched Russian TV channels, 29 % did so from time to time, and 61 % did not watch Russian TV channels in this particular year (i.e. during the escalation and active phases of the conflict). (KIIS, 2014) When looking at individual territorial parts of Ukraine, also the KIIS survey indicates that the consumption of Russian TV was significantly higher in the south-east direction considerably exceeding the rest of Ukraine. Only 5 % of the Ukrainian population living in western regions of the country watched Russian TV regularly and 20

% from time to time, and 5 % of the Ukrainian population living in the central regions of the country watched Russian TV regularly and 22 % from time to time. (KIIS, 2014) On the other hand, 9 % of the Ukrainian population living in southern regions of the country watched Russian TV regularly and 24 % from time to time, and 19 % of the Ukrainian population living in eastern regions of the country watched Russian TV regularly and 51 % from time to time in the course of 2014. (KIIS, 2014) To the question 'From what sources do you get news about the situation in Ukraine? Please indicate three main sources.' 21 % of the KIIS respondents stated that the source of such news for them was Russian TV, thus keeping the consumption ratio over 20 % even in the peak of the active phase of the conflict. (KIIS, 2014) To convey some kind of comprehensible assessment, the above-mentioned surveys indicate that Russian news TV was reaching a substantially high aggregated nationwide consumption ratio fluctuating between 20 % and 30 % of those regularly using Russian channels for news gathering (at least on a weekly basis) during the observed period (2012 – early 2014); this is something between one-fifth and one-third of the whole Ukrainian population watching the Russian news TV channels regularly. However, the consumption ratios reached by Russian news TV sharply varied when comparing western and central regions (achieving 4-13 %) with southern and primarily eastern regions of the country (achieving 30-70 %) generating most of the national consumption ratio and balancing the generally low interest in Russian media recorded in the west.

When turning to Russian TV for news gathering, Ukrainians switched on the TV channels controlled by Russian state authorities in the absolute majority of cases according to the InMind survey. In the period from 2012 to early 2014, the top 9 places in the ranking of the 10 most watched Russian TV channels (in the Ukrainian nationwide average considering the weight of all the included regions) were occupied by the state-controlled outlets. (InMind, 2014) Asked to name up to 3 Russian TV channels, which they watch for news, Ukrainian respondents most often marked the following ones: Rossiya 24 (43 %), RTR-Planeta (31 %), NTV/NTV-Mir (24 %), Channel One (23 %), Rossiya 1 (11 %), REN TV (11 %), Channel One – World-Wide-Web / Первый Канал – Всемирная сеть (a subsidiary of Channel One; reaching 9 %), EuroNews Russia (TV channel operated by VGTRK; reaching 5 %), and STS (TV channel operated by National Media Group; reaching 5 %) – all of them being under the direct state control. (InMind, 2014) The position of the Russian state-owned TV was especially strong in Crimea. Asked to name their 3 most important sources of news and information, Crimeans' five

most commonly named media outlets included four TV channels owned by the Russian state during 2014: Russia 24, NTV, Channel One, and RTR (Russia 1). (BBG Gallup, 2014a) These results indicate that the absolute majority of the above-determined percentage of Ukrainians regularly watching Russian TV for news gathering (counting for something between 20-30 % of the whole nation and 30-70 % in the south-east of the country in the period from 2012 to 2014) intentionally consumed the news content produced by Russian state-owned media companies establishing the core axis of the Russian 'single information space' (conception) enforced by the Russian Presidential Administration (described in previous sections of this case study).

Regarding the Internet representing the second most popular media platform in Ukraine, the results provided by the InMind survey show that the average nationwide consumption ratio (considering the weight of all the included regions) embracing all Russian Internet-based media assets publishing/broadcasting in Ukrainian media market was regularly reaching around 44 % in the period from 2012 to early 2014. (InMind, 2014) The consumption of Russian web resources was the most widespread in Donetsk (75 %), Kyiv (51 %), Cherkasy and Odesa (both 40 %), Kharkiv (34 %), Vinnytsia (23 %), and Mykolayv (21 %) regions, while the lowest consumption was recorded in Zakarpattia (12%), Lviv (10 %), and Sumy (7 %) regions. (InMind, 2014) For the purpose of news gathering, 21 % of Ukrainians used Russian web resources at least once per week in the given pre-conflict period. The most significant average weekly consumption of Russian Internet-based media assets for news gathering was recorded in south-east regions of the country with the highest shares in Donetsk (31 %), Cherkasy (24 %), Kyiv (23 %), Odesa (21 %), Sumy (16 %), Kharkiv and Vinnytsia (14 % both), and Mykolayv (13 %). (InMind, 2014) We miss the results for Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Luhansk, and Crimea but, again, we can expect high popularity of Russian Internet news websites in these Ukrainian regions with consumption ratios ranging between the numbers reached in Donetsk (thus meaning around 30 % in Luhansk and Crimea) and Odesa / Mykolayv (thus meaning around 15-20 % in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson). Other InMind surveys indicate that, within the above-outlined consumption rates, the lion's share was taken by numerous online media platforms operated by Russian state-controlled outlets mostly providing news agenda. (InMind, 2011, 2012, 2013) For example, in June 2013 – only a few months before the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – the Ukrainian nationwide consumption ratings (expressed through the quantity of reach – the total percentage of Ukrainians who saw the content in the predefined

period) of the internet websites operated by Rossiya Segodnya (RIA Novosti) reached 25 % (ria.ua 18 %, ria.ru 5 %, inosmi.ru 1 %, rian.com.ua 1 %), VGTRK reached 10 % (vesti.ru 9 %, Russia.tv 1 %), Channel One reached 8 % (1tv.ru 4 %, 1tv.com 3 %, poehali.tv 1 %), Moscow Media (owned by VGTRK) reached 4 % (tnt-online.ru 3 %, m24.ru 1 %), NTW Network reached 4 % (ntv.ru 3 %, ntvplus.ru 1 %), TNT reached 3 % (tnt-online.ru 3 %), and TASS (itar-tass.com 1 %). (InMind, 2013) The InMind surveys also revealed that the overall position of the web-sites operated by the Russian state-controlled media was heavily backed by two private Russian Internet platforms (social media outlets) VK/VKontakte and Odnoklassniki taking the 2 top places among all internet resources used by Ukrainians when searching for news in the period from 2012 to early 2014. As such, VK (regularly reaching 70-80 %) and Odnoklassniki (regularly reaching 50-60 %) got ahead of all specialized Russian as well as Ukrainian internet-based news agencies, aggregators, and online broadcasting. (InMind, 2012, 2013, 2014) This state of affairs was only confirmed by another survey conducted by Gallup saying that the two Russian social media giants – VK and Odnoklassniki – were the top 2 most popular social networks among Ukrainians who used their sites at least weekly, both inside and outside Crimea. (BBG Gallup, 2014a) In this context, some studies show that these platforms were used to spread pro-Russian propaganda and organize pro-Russian protest rallies in Ukrainian cities in the course of the escalation and active phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which correlates with the later decision made by the Poroshenko's government to block also these social platforms and oust them from Ukrainian media market. (Dobysh, 2019; Golovchenko, 2022) In essence, we can claim that the Russian online media seized nearly half of the whole Ukrainian Internet-based media market, while the use of these media resources for news gathering was reaching approximately one-fifth (20 %) of the nation. Significant shares in this consumption ratio were generated by websites operated by state-controlled news media outlets in combination with the two main Russian private social networks VK and Odnoklassniki. The surveys showed that the sector of Internet-based media rather supported the overall position of the Russian state-controlled TV in the Ukrainian media market and strengthened the role of Russian media in the news-gathering habits of Ukrainians. Despite that, all the surveys indicate that the consumption of Russian Internet-based media assets was unevenly distributed across Ukrainian regions, as the highest consumption ratios were reached in the south-east regions of the country, thus mostly

copying the territorial division typical also for the consumption ratings of the Russian TV.

To make the picture complete, 66 % of Ukrainians watched the news on national Ukrainian TV channels every day, and 15 % watched the news on these TV resources several times in the period from 2012 to early 2014. (InMind, 2014) When asked to name up to 3 national TV channels used for news gathering most often, the absolute majority of Ukrainians mentioned the TV channels owned by Ukrainian oligarchs closely cooperating with President Yanukovich's central government: 57 % of respondents mentioned TV Inter (owned by Dmitro Firtash and Serhiy Lyovochkin – the head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine with minority shares of Russian state-owned company Channel One), 52 % mentioned 1+1 (Ihor Kolomoyskiy), 28 % mentioned ICTV, and 21 % pointed to STB (both under the control of StarLightMedia owned by Viktor Pinchuk). (BBG Gallup, 2014a; InMind, 2014) The only Ukrainian national TV channel from the top 5 that was not directly linked to the political regime of President Yanukovich was Channel 5 (owned by Petro Poroshenko, who was elected as president of Ukraine after Yanukovich fled from the country) reaching 30 %. (BBG Gallup, 2014a; InMind, 2014) The available studies concerning this issue show that the aforesaid Ukrainian media connected to the political regime of President Yanukovich was largely broadcasting in the Russian language and retranslating news content produced by Russian state-controlled TV companies and information agencies ahead with Rossya Segodnya, TASS, and RT. (Kulyk, 2013a; Orlova, 2016; Ryabinska, 2011, 2012a; Szostek, 2014a) According to Ryabinska, in these conditions, the narratives produced by Russian TV and Internet companies (even when in the minority) get a high share in messaging as well as consumption. (Ryabinska, 2012a, 2012b) Thus, the influence of the Russian state-controlled media providers in the Ukrainian news TV market was multiplied by the news coverage provided by the leading national Ukrainian channels reaching extremely high (viewer) ratings and at least partially compensating for the weak position of Russian news media in the west of Ukraine.

Summing up the results, the data extracted from the above-mentioned surveys indicate that the heavy penetration of the Ukrainian media market by the Russian state-controlled news media turned in considerably high average nationwide consumption ratios in both the sector of TV and the Internet in the observed period (2012 – 2014). At that time, Russian TV was used for news gathering by nearly 30 % and Russian websites by around 20 % of all Ukrainians, while the major share in these numbers was taken by

Russian state-controlled media companies. Moreover, the influence of the Russian state in the nationwide agenda-setting process in the Ukrainian media market was strengthened by the dominant position of the two Russian private-owned social networks (VK and Odnoklassniki) as well by leading Ukrainian TV outlets that were heavily involved in the spread of narratives produced by the Russian state-owned media companies. Despite that, the ability of the Russian state-controlled news media outlets to attract the attention of the Ukrainian population was limited. This state of affairs was given primarily by the uneven consumption ratios reached by Russian media outlets in different Ukrainian regions. As such, we can claim that the Russian state-controlled news media were able to attract substantially high (or even dominant) portions of the Ukrainian population living especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country, convince them to regularly receive (read/watch) their information messaging, and allocate there significantly high aggregated consumption ratio/s. Nevertheless, with such consumption ratios reached by the state-controlled news media in Ukraine (though unevenly distributed across the Ukrainian territory) the Russian authorities definitely were able to occupy an enough strong position in the target media market to make serious attempts in order to launch some kind of effective media-based offensive foreign policy strategy (as described in Literature Review of this thesis) towards Ukraine.

4.2.2.2   The Ability of the Controlled Media Outlets to Reach a Substantial Confidence Ratio in the Target Media Market

First of all, a proper understanding of what is meant by the term 'confidence' in our context is necessary, as this can be a little bit tricky (in the sense of ambiguity). In general terms, confidence is a feeling or belief that one can have faith in someone or something. It is a sense of trust or willingness to rely on people or institutions. At the same time, confidence is a result of a considered choice to make an important decision based on evidence, experience, or just by accepting information without any questioning. Confidence may also be described as a firm belief in reliability, credibility, or simply as a hope others do the right thing for the right reason. (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003) Taking into account the realm of information messaging, the term 'confidence' is first and foremost given by perceived objectivity, credibility, reliability, believability, or trustworthiness in published content, mostly beyond any tangible proof about the real accuracy of the released contentions. (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2018; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Yale et al., 2015) In that manner, confidence represents a crucial foundation for

any social order as well as social cohesion and, because it informs how mass media are evaluated and interpreted by the target audience (or particular groups existing within the target society), it is also referred to as an important variable for media effects. (Kohring & Matthes, 2007)

Regarding the news media, the level of confidence is established by a unique setting in the relationship existing between the target audience (trustors) and the selected group of mass media outlets (trustees). In this kind of relationship, trustors take a decision based on expectations that interactions with given trustees will bring them gains instead of losses. (Strömbäck et al., 2020) The emergence of confidence in received information messaging can be located at several levels. Each level identifies a specific category of trustees and thus represents various types of news sources. As such, one can have confidence in news media (in general), various platforms of news media (e.g. TV, Internet, Press, Radio), individual media outlets (e.g. particular companies, channels, newsrooms), or specific forms of news coverage (e.g. framing/narratives). (Fawzi et al., 2021) To make the final decision, on whether to put confidence in a specific information message, most people take into account (intentionally or subconsciously) the knowledge as well as inner feelings they have about the source on one or multiple above-mentioned levels. It is a form of natural evaluation process utilized by people to consider what media sources should be the most relevant to them when looking for (objective) information referring to specific issues. (Fawzi et al., 2021; Strömbäck et al., 2020) This approach does not exclude the situation in which people do not have confidence in the news media in general but they still consider information provided by those media outlets they regularly consume or perceive to be ideologically closest to them as credible, reliable, or trustworthy. (Fawzi et al., 2021; Strömbäck et al., 2020) As such, confidence directly determines what media sources are preferred and utilized by the target audience for news gathering when they feel the urge to get information that is reliable, credible, or which they can trust according to their assessment. In that regard, the emergence of confidence (no matter on which level) influences the use of particular media sources when risky choices (e.g. political voting, investments, demonstration of political support, joining protest/s, activation against supposed danger) are to be made and thus also affects socio-political and socio-economic behavior. (Boukes et al., 2021) With that in mind, we can state that the 'confidence ratio' indicates how believable, credible, reliable, or trustworthy individual media platforms, outlets, and even particular narratives are for the target

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audience and how the public reliance/trust is divided between individual outlets (or selected groups of media assets) dispersing specific content in the target media market.

At this point, we should shed more light on the complicated relationship existing between consumption and confidence. The previous research done in this field proves that some positive interconnections between consumption (of news media) and confidence (in particular media outlets) occur. On one hand, there is evidence that the emergence of confidence in a particular news media source can lead to an increase in its consumption. And, on the other hand, regular consumption of (or exposure to) a particular media source can lead to the emergence of confidence in the information, narratives, or contentions published by it. This means the influence is reciprocal. (Schranz et al., 2018) Despite that, it is not feasible to simply convert these two quantities (consumption and confidence) into a one-to-one ratio. The problem complicating the mutual influence of these two quantities is the wrong assumption that people use news media only with the intention of getting as much accurate, credible, reliable, or trustworthy information as possible and fulfilling their informational gaps. (Schranz et al., 2018) On the contrary, people usually have various sorts of motivations that drive their consumption habits related to news media, which sometimes can supersede the need for trusted information – entertainment, diversion, identity, cultural or language needs, support for inner feelings or personal beliefs (e.g. in terms of motivated reasoning or affective polarization). Thus, the strive for confidence is often substituted by convenience, comfort, or indolence when it comes to making the choice of what source to use for news gathering. (Moody, 2011) In that context, the force of a habit plays an important role. Confidence may be pushed out and replaced by habit, as a lot of people are used to return to the same media source/s they prefer even in spite of the ever-expanding offer of media innovations, platforms, companies, and outlets. (Moody, 2011) As a result, the ability of mass media outlets to gain a substantial consumption ratio/s does not automatically imply the ability to arouse feelings of confidence in the ranks of the audience. Simple leaning on consumption ratings or deducing the confidence ratio from consumption ratings are not sufficient in our analytical model – in such a case, the procedure would be incomplete and the results obtained could be misleading. Therefore, confidence should be treated as a stand-alone independent variable that is influenced by a different set of factors than consumption and thus should be examined separately. Moreover, the confidence ratio is the ultimate indicator of effectiveness, into which all previous variables are reflected; it is an event horizon that started by efforts of state authorities to take the domestic mass media under

control, manage their publishing policies and internal editorial processes, create single information space, and spread its reach to foreign media markets.

The analysis of the confidence ratio carried out with a special focus on mass media providing news messaging can give us knowledge on what outlets are important to the target audience (or particular groups existing within the target society) when it feels the urge to search for credible, reliable, trustworthy information for making opinions about domestic socio-political affairs, adjacent geopolitical regions, or the global international arena. (Young & Anderson, 2017) According to the second-level agenda-setting theory dealing with framing management, mass media outlets able to win the contest in the competitive environment and pile up a considerable confidence ratio have a better chance to take over the agenda-setting process in the given media market, influence public discourse, and succeed in determining the availability of selected interpretations along with particular narratives (containing content and valence framing) in the target audience's memories (as illustrated in the theoretical-analytical chapter of this thesis). (Jensen et al., 2016; McCombs, 2014) This is why the mass media assets under the control of one state entity, which anchored in the target foreign media market and even gained significant consumption, must still work hard to convince the selected audience to put confidence into their information messaging on account of competing media channels, allocate the highest attainable confidence ratio, and maintain this ratio in order to move up in the spiral of generating foreign-political influence. (McCombs, 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Young & Anderson, 2017) Just to remind you, television was still the most popular source of news gathering in Ukraine and the Internet started to beat print media and radio in terms of popularity among news consumers in the period of our concern. (BBG Gallup, 2014a) Therefore, this part of the dissertation thesis examines the confidence ratio/s gained by Russian mass media in general and Russian state-controlled media outlets in particular with special emphasis put on the sector of news TV and Internet in order to complete the assessment of their approximate aggregated position in the Ukrainian media market on the eve of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2013 as well as in the course of its escalation and active phases taking place mainly during 2014.

The analysis of confidence ratio/s of Russian mass media in general and Russian state-controlled media outlets in particular in the Ukrainian media market, which would be valid for the observed period, meets the same problems that were related to the previous part of this thesis (see the section 4.2.1.1. The Ability of the Controlled Media Outlets to Reach Substantial Consumption Ratio in the Target Media Market). This means

the required data are extremely scarce and official statistical data sets capturing the confidence of Ukrainians in Russian TV or Internet-based media, that would map the situation in the given period, are not publicly available at all. And because the official Ukrainian authorities have not replied to the request for providing the required data (for the declared academic purpose), there are only two surveys examining the confidence ratio/s of the Russian mass media in Ukraine in the given period. First is the survey sponsored by The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in cooperation with the U.S. non-profit organization Internews and conducted by the sociological center InMind Factum Group – this survey monitors the aggregated confidence ratio of Russian news TV and Internet-based media outlets in 10 selected regions of Ukraine (from west to east: Lviv, Uzghorod, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Odesa, Cherkasy, Mykolayv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Donetsk); it is valid primarily for the immediate pre-conflict period (from 2012 to early 2014). (InMind, 2014) Second is the survey conducted by The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) – this survey monitors only the aggregated confidence ratio of all Russian news TV channels in four supraregional territorial units including western, central, southern, and eastern Ukraine and is valid for the escalation and active phases of the conflict (from February to December 2014). (KIIS, 2014) In addition, these surveys do not include the results for confidence ratios reached by individual Russian media outlets. For that matter, we can work on the findings derived in the previous part of this thesis, which indicate that the absolute majority of Ukrainian respondents using Russian TVs or Internet-based media for news-gathering purposes turned to the outlets operated by Russian state authorities. Therefore, most of the shares within the aggregated confidence ratios reached by all Russian news TVs and Internet-based media pertain to state-owned or state-related assets. All the above-mentioned surveys conducted by InMind Factum Group are active (verified as of November 17, 2023) but are available only through the digital document library SCRIBD and accessible exclusively via paid accounts. Finally, let's repeat that these surveys were conducted on samples representative of the Ukrainian population at both the national and individual regional levels, and thus the resulting numbers do not express the exact situation comprehensively but have to be understood rather as indicators implying trends in mass media confidence valid for the monitored period/s. Notwithstanding, the data acquired from these surveys are still sufficient for the approximate reconstruction of the then situation in the Ukrainian media market allowing to make a basic assessment saying whether the Russian state-

controlled mass media assets were able to reach a substantial confidence ratio/s in the Ukrainian media market in the observed period (2013 – 2014).

Because of its ambiguity, there is no agreed-upon set of factors designed for the measurement of confidence ratio in the field of news mass media. Thus, different surveys utilize assorted sets of questions focused on various parameters and this also applies to both above-mentioned surveys. (Fawzi et al., 2021; Fisher, 2018) To measure the confidence ratio/s associated with news TV in Ukraine, the InMind survey (referring to the period between 2012 and early 2014), uses five specific parameters: a) convenience with info-publishing periodicity, b) promptness of info-publishing, c) importance of published information, d) sufficiency of detail in published information, e) objectiveness and reliability of published information, and f) trust in published information. (InMind, 2014) In all these categories, except for trust, the Russian news media reached extremely high ratios exceeding 50 %. In particular, 73 % of Ukrainian respondents answered that the broadcasts of Russian news media came out with periodicity convenient for them, 68 % stated the information published by this category of media sources was being given promptly, 64 % mentioned the given information was important for them, 58 % considered Russian news TV broadcast comprehensive or detailed, and 55 % found the information provided by Russian news TV outlets objective and reliable in the immediate pre-conflict period. What is more, in all these parameters – except for the first one, which asked if the news were published with periodicity convenient for respondents (indicating the desire of respondents for higher periodicity of news published by Russian media in Ukraine) – the Russian news TV outlets obtained higher aggregated results than the domestic Ukrainian media. (InMind, 2014) The highest shares of those who considered the Russian news TV objective and reliable were recorded in the Donetsk region (reaching as much as 74 %), followed by Mykolayv and Uzghorod (both 48 %), Odesa (47 %), Kharkiv (44 %), and Cherkasy (33 %). On the other hand, the survey shows that the lowest ratios of those considering the information provided by Russian news TV to be objective and reliable were reported in Kyiv (only 1 %), Lviv (9 %), and Vinnytsia (where the ratio reached respectable 19 %). (InMind, 2014) Interesting results were obtained when respondents were directly asked to reply if they trust Russian news media. When it comes to the feeling of trust, the number of positive answers was significantly lower reaching 20 % of all respondents on a nationwide scale. The highest ratios of trust were reached by Russian news TV in south-east regions of the country – Donetsk, (57 %), Odesa (22 %), and Mykolayv (20 %), while the lowest ratings were recorded in the western direction

– Kyiv (1 %), Lviv (3 %), Vinnytsia (8 %), and Uzghorod (9 %). (InMind, 2014) The numbers referring to the parameter of trust strongly contradict the opinion of Ukrainians (55 %) considering that the Russian TV outlets provided objective and reliable news messaging. Unfortunately, we have no convincing explanation for why people, who see some information as objective and reliable, hesitate to put their trust in such messaging. To speculate a bit on that matter, this evident disbalance could have appeared as a consequence of ambiguous ways of understanding the meaning of trust. But still, the ability to reach 20 % (indicating one-fifth of the whole nation) of those who trust this specific category of news media is a respectable ratio, especially if we realize that political parties reaching the same percentage of votes can win national elections in many countries (with proportional electoral systems). The InMind survey was not conducted in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Luhansk, and Crimea but we can estimate these results that could have been reached by Russian news TV in the mentioned regions at that time based on the knowledge we already have – all representing south-east Ukrainian regions with large Russophone populations and strong representation of pro-Russian sentiments, in which we could expect high confidence ratios ranging somewhere between the numbers reached in Donetsk (thus meaning around 70 % considering these media objective and reliable and 50-60 % feeling trust in them in Luhansk and Crimea) and Odesa / Mykolayv (thus meaning around 40-50 % considering these media objective and reliable and approximately 20-30 % feeling trust in them in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson). These results indicate that the Russian news TV outlets were able to obtain a substantially high confidence ratio on both the national and regional scales. Despite that, the key confidence ratios were reached in south-east regions representing the core area of Russian news TV influence in Ukraine in 2013 and early 2014.

As well, in the case of Russian Internet-based news media, the InMind survey revealed similar tendencies as observable in the case of news TV in the given period. In that respect, 64 % of respondents stated that the use of Russian Internet-based news media is convenient to them, 59 % said it is easy to look for information on these websites, 55 % claimed news is published promptly, 54 % mentioned the information provided is important for them, 47 % considered the news published on these websites in any form comprehensive or detailed, and 43 % believed the news published by Russian Internet-based media platforms were objective and reliable. (InMind, 2014) The highest ratios of those who considered the Russian Internet-based news media objective and reliable were

recorded in Donetsk (reaching an incredible 82 %), followed by Mykolayv (55 %), Odesa (48 %), Cherkasy and Uzghorod (both 45 %), and Kharkiv (still reaching 40 %). On the other hand, the survey shows that the lowest ratios of those assessing the information provided by Russian Internet-based news media as objective and reliable were reported in Vinnytsia (8 %) and Kyiv (9 %), Sumy (17 %), and Lviv (reaching up to 24 % or, in other words, almost a quarter of the regional population). (InMind, 2014) The results concerning the level to which Ukrainians trust Russian Internet-based news messaging (once again) corroborated the findings from the field of news TV (quoted in the previous paragraph) being significantly lower compared to the ratios reached by parameters for objectivity and reliability. Thus, when directly asked to say if they trust Russian Internet-based news media, only 16 % of them responded positively. This definitely is not a negligible ratio, but it indicates serious disparity with analogous results for objectivity and reliability. The highest ratio of trust was reached by Russian Internet-based news media in Donetsk (37 %), Odesa and Cherkasy (both 17 %), and Kharkiv (16 %), while the lowest numbers were recorded in Kyiv, Uzghorod, Lviv (all just 4 %), and Vinnytsia (7 %). (InMind, 2014) Even here we can estimate the results that could have been reached by Russian Internet-based news media in regions not included in the survey (Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Luhansk, and Crimea) using the knowledge we already have – all representing south-east Ukrainian regions with large Russophone populations and strong representation of pro-Russian sentiments, in which we could expect high popularity of Russian news media with confidence ratios ranging somewhere between the numbers reached in Donetsk (thus meaning around 80 % considering these media objective and reliable and at least 50-60 % feeling trust in them in Luhansk and Crimea) and Odesa / Mykolayv (thus meaning around 40 % considering these media objective and reliable and up to 20 % feeling trust in them in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson). These results indicate that the Russian Internet-based news media outlets were able to obtain a significantly high confidence ratio measured through objectivity and reliability reaching over one-third of the whole country and relatively decent results when asked about the trust reaching nearly one-fifth of all respondents. However, most of these numbers achieved by Russian media outlets were recorded in the southern and eastern regions of the country, while in the central, northern, and western regions the share reached by this category of Russian media was desperately low in 2013 and early 2014.

Compared to the InMind material, the KIIS survey (referring to the escalation and active phases of the conflict from February to December 2014) utilized only the parameter of trust to measure the confidence ratio/s obtained by Russian news TV in Ukraine. Concerning this particular parameter, the results of the KIIS survey more or less correlate with the findings brought about by InMind company. However, as reported by KIIS, trust in Russian news TV among the Ukrainian population notably dropped after the conflict outbreak in 2014. The opinion poll carried out by KIIS indicates that, at the end of 2014, only 5 % of Ukrainians fully trusted Russian news TV, and 26 % of the Ukrainian population trusted these media sources partially. (KIIS, 2014) When looking at individual territorial parts of Ukraine, also the KIIS survey confirmed that the confidence ratios of Russian news TV were significantly higher in the south-east direction. As such, less than 1 % of respondents fully trusted the information published by Russian news TV and 8 % did so partially in the western part of Ukraine, and in central regions the respective results were less than 1 % of those who trusted them fully and 14 % of those who trusted them partially. In southern regions of the country was recorded the most significant drop in trust in Russian news TV – only 4 % of the regional population had full trust in these sources of information and 25 % did so partially. The best results were traditionally registered in the eastern part of the country, where 17 % of respondents stated that they fully trusted Russian news TVs, 63 % still trusted them partially, and only 12 % of respondents gave the answer they did not trust these sources at all. (KIIS, 2014) Regarding the results provided by the KIIS survey, we can claim that Russian news TV suffered severe reputational damage in the course of the escalation and militarization phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that occurred throughout the year 2014. The trust (parameter representing the confidence in the KISS survey) of the Ukrainian population in Russian news TV significantly dropped in all of the territorial parts of Ukraine, while the Russian news TV was able to retain a significantly high confidence ratio only in eastern parts of Ukraine and Crimea (BBG Gallup, 2014a) representing the core of the Russian media influence in Ukraine by the end of 2014. These assumptions have been at least partially confirmed by other works in this field of research, they correspond with the course of the conflict in real-time, and they also correspond with the final territorial division of the country. (OECD, 2022; Ray & Esipova, 2014)

Taking this issue from different perspectives, both surveys confirm that national Ukrainian news TV outlets and Internet-based news media were reaching tremendous confidence ratios, which in central and north-western regions were oscillating between

60-70 % of those considering news coming from these outlets objective and reliable and between 40-90 % of those having trust in information published by these sources. (InMind, 2014; KIIS, 2014) Taking into account the fact that the main national Ukrainian news media outlets were retaking originally Russian news content at large in the observed period, we can assume that these media sources supported the spread of Russian media influence in the course of the hot phase of the conflict and that they (rather than Russian outlets in itself) contributed to the confusion, uncertainty, and weakening of pro-European unity among the Ukrainian population living in the western 'half' of Ukraine.

In summary, the available data sets show that Russian news TV was able to reach substantially high confidence ratios in the Ukrainian media market. The surveys indicate that over half of Ukrainians considered the information published by Russian news TV objective as well as reliable and a fifth of them put their trust in these media in the immediate pre-conflict period (in 2013 and early 2014). The Russian TV influence was heavily backed by the Internet-based news media reaching only slightly lower ratios. Moreover, the influence of the Russian state in the nationwide agenda-setting process in the Ukrainian media market was strengthened by the dominant position of the leading Ukrainian TV outlets that were heavily involved in the spread of narratives produced by the Russian state-owned media companies. Despite that, the direct ability of the Russian state-controlled news media outlets to arouse feelings of confidence in the ranks of the Ukrainian population was limited. This state of affairs was given primarily by the uneven distribution of confidence across Ukrainian regions. As such, we can claim that the Russian state-controlled news media were able to attract substantially high (or even dominant) portions of the Ukrainian population living especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country, convince them to perceive their information as objective and reliable, or arouse feelings of trust. With confidence ratios reached by the Russian state-controlled news media in Ukraine (though unevenly distributed across the Ukrainian territory) the Russian authorities definitely were able to occupy an enough strong position in the target media market to make serious attempts in order to launch some kind of effective media-based offensive foreign policy strategy (as described in Literature Review of this thesis) towards Ukraine, as we, after all, could have observed during 2014. Finally, we should add that trust in Russian news TV significantly dropped in all of the territorial parts of Ukraine as a consequence of severe reputational damage, which was most probably caused by the aggressive campaign based on dispersing anti-Ukrainian narratives in the escalation and militarization phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

(throughout the year 2014) – but this happened only after it irreversibly interfered with the internal political stability of Ukraine.

4.2.2.3   Assessment: The Level of Establishment of the Russian State-Controlled Media Network in the Ukrainian Media Market
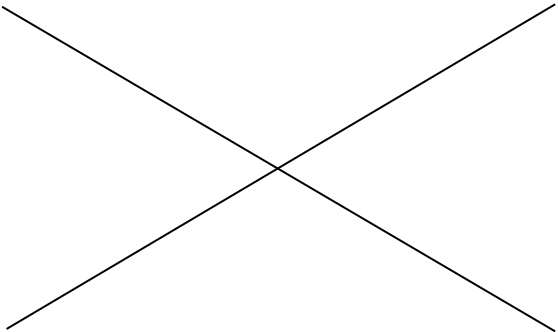
The 'establishment' is the fourth independent variable expressing the level to which the mass media network under the control of one state entity is able to entrench – attract attention and arouse feelings of confidence – in the competitive (or restrictive) media environment existing in a foreign media market (regulated by another state entity). In that context, the Russian state-controlled news media outlets (in both the sector of news TV and the Internet) were able to succeed in the competitive environment existing in the Ukrainian national media market and reach substantially high consumption as well as confidence ratios among the Ukrainian population (gain significant percentual shares in both these indicators in the immediate pre-conflict period in 2013 and early 2014). Besides that, the influence of the Russian state in the nationwide agenda-setting process in the Ukrainian media market was strengthened by the dominant position of Russian private-owned social networks (VK and Odnoklassniki) as well by leading close-to-state Ukrainian TV outlets that were heavily involved in the spread of narratives produced by Russian state-owned media. Yet despite everything, we have to assert that the direct ability of the Russian state-controlled news media outlets to attract attention and arouse feelings of confidence in the ranks of the Ukrainian population was limited. The main reason was that the Russian news media production was not able to attract nor convince the Ukrainian population living in the central, western, and north-western regions of the country. As such, the Russian state-controlled news media fully utilized their potential to attract substantially high (or even dominant) portions of the Ukrainian population living especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country, convince them to perceive their information as objective and reliable, and arouse feelings of trust. As a result, the analysis within the framework of the two factors (the ability of the controlled media outlets to reach substantial consumption and confidence ratio in the target media market) has proved the ability of the Russian state to allocate enough attention and confidence to reach a high level of establishment in the Ukrainian media market, launch there effective media-based offensive foreign policy strategy (aiming at capturing and coercing, especially the Russia-friendly population living in the south-east of Ukraine), use this societal division to encourage conflict, and inflict bottom-up erosion of the internal

political sovereignty. Thus, the situational setting regarding the fourth independent variable (valid for the observed period) – the establishment of the Russian state-controlled media network in the Ukrainian media market – meets the configuration of the intermediate variable (sufficient territorial range of the controlled mass media network) that complies with the conditions for the effective use of the mass media (network) within offensive foreign policy strategies.

4.2.3   Territorial Range of the Mass Media Network Controlled by the RF in the Ukrainian Media Market in 2013: Summary of Findings and Outcomes

With the increasing control over the domestic mass media sector and along with the creation of a single information space, the Russian state authorities gathered around President Putin ahead with the Russian Presidential Administration (representing the national coordination center) and Russian military circles started to put strong efforts aiming at extension of the range of national media influence beyond Russia's borders. First, Russian authorities developed a unique strategic compound for the expansion of state-controlled mass media assets and their establishment in information spaces of other countries. In line with this strategic background, Russian state-controlled media started to penetrate foreign media markets, while the countries of Russia's Near Abroad became the key target. If we focus exclusively on Ukraine from the set of countries forming the Near Abroad, Russian state-controlled media assets were able to take advantage of local conditions to achieve heavy penetration of the Ukrainian media market, project there the influence of the Russian single information space, and thus reach a very high level of expansion in the Ukrainian media market. Second, the Russian state-controlled media assets in the fields of news TV and Internet-based news messaging were able to attract significant public attention, reach substantial consumption as well as confidence ratios, especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country, and thus achieve a high level of establishment in the Ukrainian media market. The comprehensive outline of findings concerning the level of range of Russian state-controlled news media in the Ukrainian media market is summarized in Figure 7.

Figure (7): *The comprehensive outline of findings and outcomes concerning the level of the territorial range of the Russian state-controlled mass media network in the Ukrainian media market.*

Territorial Range of Russian Sate-Controlled Mass Media Network in the Ukrainian Media Market in 2013	
The Level of Expansion of the Controlled Media Network in the Target Media Market	*The Level of Establishment of Controlled Media Network in Target Media Market*
The Existence of the Strategic Framework for Expansion in Foreign Media Markets • The RF set the strategic framework for mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy; • The RF actively pushed for a purpose-driven expansion of state-controlled media assets in foreign media markets; • The RF created channels of transborder information streaming;	*The Ability of the Controlled Media Network to Reach Substantial Consumption Ratio in the Target Media Market* • Russian state-controlled outlets in both categories (TV + Internet) reached a considerably high average nationwide consumption ratio in the Ukrainian media market; • Russian state-controlled outlets in both categories (TV + Internet) reached weak consumption ratios in central, western, and north-western regions of Ukraine; • Russian state-controlled outlets in both categories (TV + Internet) reached significantly high (or even dominant) consumption ratios in southern and eastern regions of Ukraine;
The Ability of the Controlled Media Network to Penetrate the Target Media Market • The RF established a coordinating center for the expansion of media outlets in foreign media markets; • The RF set of priorities driving the strategy for the penetration of foreign media markets; • The RF successfully used historical legacies, structural interconnections, language conditions, and legislative inconsistencies to penetrate the Ukrainian media market;	*The Ability of the Controlled Media Network to Reach Substantial Confidence Ratio in the Target Media Market* • Russian state-controlled outlets in both categories (TV + Internet) reached a considerably high average nationwide confidence ratio in the Ukrainian media market; • Russian state-controlled outlets in both categories (TV + Internet) reached weak confidence ratios in central, western, and north-western regions of Ukraine; • Russian state-controlled outlets in both categories (TV + Internet) reached significantly high (or even dominant) confidence ratios in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine;
The Level of Penetration of the Target Media Market with Controlled Media Network • The RF achieved heavy penetration of the Ukrainian market including all the leading state-controlled news media assets; • The RF drew the leading Ukrainian news media in the spread of narratives produced by state-owned outlets in Ukraine; • The RF drew the leading Russian private-owned Internet-based social networks in the spread of narratives produced by state-owned outlets in Ukraine;	

Outcomes: Russian state authorities were able to:	Outcomes: Russian state-controlled media were able to:
• create a strategic framework for expansion; • prioritize directions for penetration and reflect it in real activities; • make use of local socio-political conditions to achieve heavy penetration of the Ukrainian media market; *= achieve a high level of coordinated expansion of the state-controlled media network in the Ukrainian media market.*	• attract substantially high attention to launch effective media-based offensive foreign policy strategy in Ukraine; • arouse substantially high confidence ratio to launch effective media-based offensive foreign policy strategy in Ukraine; *= achieve a high level of establishment in the Ukrainian media market.*
= Till 2013 the Russian state-controlled media network was able to reach sufficient territorial range and take a solid position in the Ukrainian media market, especially in the south-east of the country.	

As a result, the analysis within the framework of the two given independent variables (expansion + establishment) shows that the Russian state authorities were able to create a systematic approach allowing them to significantly increase the range of its political influence, channeled through mass media assets, beyond its national borders. By setting down a systematic approach to the expansion of the controlled media assets in foreign media markets, assigning this task to a single coordination center, and undertaking tangible steps towards establishing channels (media companies) with transborder information reach, Russia met the second step to make purpose-driven efforts to master the agenda-setting function in foreign countries (as outlined in the theoretical-methodological chapter) – gain the ability to disperse advantageous information narratives beyond its territorial boundaries. Moreover, Russia focused this strategy (first and foremost) on the states of the former Soviet Union in the initial stages of this state-driven program and Ukraine has become one of the most important targets. The analysis confirmed that, till the conflict outbreak in February 2014, the Ukrainian media market was literally filled with Russian state-controlled news TV channels and Internet-based news websites spreading biased and coherent pro-Russian information framing adjusted by the Russian Presidential Administration, that were reaching substantially high consumption as well as confidence ratios, especially in the south-east of the country. The penetration of the Ukrainian media market was only sealed when the close-to-state Ukrainian media outlets started to heavily retake information narratives produced by Russian state-controlled companies. In the end, at least in the given case, we can assert that the Russian state authorities were able to build up companies with enormous transborder reach enabling them to radiate advantageous political messages to the Ukrainian audience on a mass scale, increase the efficiency potential in this particular

media market to the level on which they definitely could have instrumentalized mass media messaging in real and massively damaging offensive foreign policy strategies (offensively tuned soft power or/and information warfare modalities).

4.3   Case Study Outcomes

The thesis applied a precisely selected case study to test the outlined analytical model designed for the assessment of the efficiency potential of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies. The chain of variables inferred from the unique conceptual framework defining the mass media effectiveness in purpose-driven strategies was put under thorough scrutiny to verify its explanatory power as well as the predictive capacity concerning the instrumentalization of mass media in past or prospective state-led offensive foreign policy campaigns.

This dissertation thesis employed the given analytical model retrospectively to review the changes initiated by the Russian state authorities in the domestic Russian mass media sector, interconnect these internal developments with the evolution of the Russian foreign policy strategies, and associate them with a purpose-driven transfer of the mass media influence beyond state borders of the RF. The case study proved that, starting from the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin, the RF has been progressively taking the national news media resources (notably in the field of news TV and the Internet) under control and preparing them for the possible instrumentalization in power projection strategies in foreign media markets. The post-Soviet space, with Ukraine among the top priorities, got to the center of the Russian foreign policy concerns and the area of spreading mass media influence was not an exception. The analysis within the given case study framework shows that, till 2013, the RF was in full readiness to incite a hostile mass media messaging in the Ukrainian media market as it was able to: a) set a strong hierarchical control over the domestic news TV and Internet-based media outlets, b) manage a high level of centralized coordination among them in pursuing state interests articulated by the Russian political elites, c) reach an enormous level of expansion of the state-controlled mass media in the Ukrainian media market, and d) establish these information sources in Ukraine by gaining extensive viewer popularity and high confidence among Ukrainian audience. In brief, the Russian state authorities were able to integrate the domestic news media sources into a single information space, implement steps to expand its reach in Ukraine, and thus 'colonize' (occupy for extraction of benefits) the Ukrainian information space to a high extent.

In terms of the mass media efficiency potential, the Russian state authorities were able to engage required media sources in producing favorable information (dependent on the level of state control over the publishing policy of individual mass media outlets) and delivering it to Ukrainian audiences in sufficient amounts (dependent on the level of territorial range of media outlets production), and thus also to meet the minimum but sufficient conditions necessary for enhancing the effectiveness of mass media within offensive foreign policy strategies against Ukraine in the immediate pre-conflict period in 2013. Thus, when considering the results regarding the two key intermediate variables – state control over media and territorial range of the controlled media network – the efficiency potential of the state-controlled mass media network in the Ukrainian media market was extraordinarily high in the observed period (between 2013 and 2014). Therefore, when the conflict appeared on the scene and the relations started to escalate in a negative manner, the Russian authorities started to easily release narratives with advantageous emotional and content framing among Ukrainian society to mobilize support for its own interests, discredit opposing ideas, capture selected parts of the Ukrainian society in fear, and divide the coherence of Ukrainian population, thus pushing for a bottom-up disintegration of the state's internal sovereignty. In the end, the derived analytical model helped us to understand the unique situational setting existing in the Russian mass media sector as well as in the Ukrainian media market before the conflict outbreak. This unique setting allowed for the formation of such conditions, in which the RF could have almost immediately activated offensive mass media strategies against Ukraine by hitting the core dividing lines existing within the Ukrainian population and intensifying the malign information messaging when the situation started to escalate. The situational insight, driven by the derived analytical model, enabled us to reveal the causes determining the success of the Russian mass media campaign in Ukraine, rationalize the sources of effectiveness, and explain how the RF was able to reach such a strong destructive/disintegrating effect in such a short time after the conflict flared up.

In essence, the dissertation thesis has provided an analytical tool that has the potential to explain the fluctuations in the efficiency of various campaigns employing mass media assets in offensive foreign policy strategies. However, the case study also revealed the prospective capacity of the employed analytical model. The same procedure can be used to assess the actual state of affairs in contemporary cases to appraise the efficiency potential of mass media networks associated with various state entities in terms of offensive foreign policy instrumentalization, anticipate the current efficiency potential

in other or similar cases, or make a prognosis of future risks. In this context, the analytical model can serve as an early warning tool – it gives us a systemized procedure for revealing and assessing steps taken by particular states, the aim of which is to extend the strategic compound by possibilities of efficient purpose-driven mass media instrumentalization beyond their national borders. By its very nature, the derived analytical model has the potential to increase our predictive capabilities, give us the ability to foresee prospective threats, and get us ahead of the event horizon. It can be used for brief preliminary screening to get quick indicative results or for thorough investigation getting into details of the selected case/s (similar to this dissertation) to make the insight and assessment in this field as accurate as possible. All in all, the case study fulfilled its purpose and brought about important results in both understanding the generation of effectiveness in terms of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies (in general) and elucidating the sources of (or causes behind) the high level of effectiveness in case of the Russian mass media campaign in Ukraine in 2014 (in particular).

Conclusion

The dissertation thesis has made a serious effort to push forward our knowledge referring to the field of research dealing with the issue of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies on the information-psychological level. Within this research area, the primary focus was placed on the problem of effectiveness, which has been overlooked, pushed aside, or taken as something axiomatic by the academic and expert literature emerging in the field of international relations, transborder communication, and strategic or security studies so far. For that reason, the emphasis was put on a thorough qualitative understanding of the term effectiveness and on the rationalization of conditions enabling to increase the effectiveness of mass media for successful employment in offensive foreign policy strategies. As such, the thesis set down two major goals: a) to construct a coherent definition of effectiveness in the given context and b) use it to generate a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns led on the information-psychological level.

To complete these challenging tasks, the thesis created a conceptual framework defining the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies. This definition framework enabled us to put together a comprehensive and detailed image depicting the effectiveness in terms of influence transfer that goes from mass media

outlets to the target audience, from information forging process to attitudinal/behavioral forming, and from agenda-setting activities in the media market to cognitive processes occurring in the human mind. The approach based on the completion of the conceptual framework allowed us to interrelate seemingly incongruous (sub)concepts originating in various fields of studies into one unifying theoretical compound and create an innovative insight into mass media effectiveness in our context. To answer the first question[6], we can sum up that the multidisciplinary attitude channeled through the procedure based on the creation of a conceptual framework turned out to be a productive way how to address and define such a complicated phenomenon as the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies.

Subsequently, the following part of the theoretical-analytical chapter made use of the created conceptual framework defining the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in purpose-driven strategies (which gives primacy to the salience and framing management processes) to derive the key variables that directly influence the change in the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies: a) the control over mass media outlets, and b) the range of the controlled mass media outlets. The rationalization and interpretation of both variables brought about the answer to the second question – in combination, these variables express variations in situational settings within structural qualities of a mass media network (encompassing selected media outlets) used by some entity to deliberately influence the attitudes/behavior of the target audience living in other countries through information messaging.[7]

Next, the thesis replied also to the third stated research question[8] by shifting the derived variables into the realm of foreign policy and contextualizing the minimum but sufficient conditions for the effective instrumentalization of mass media assets in offensive foreign policy strategies. In light of this, the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategies was defined as follows: the level of a state's capability to deliver favorable information (dependent on the level of state control over the publishing policy of individual mass media outlets) to target foreign audiences

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[6] *How should we define the 'effectiveness' in terms of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies?*
[7] *What factors directly influence (the level of) effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies?*
[8] *Under what conditions is the instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies feasible?*

in a sufficient amount (dependent on the level of territorial range of media outlets' production). This reasoning implies that enhancing the effectiveness of mass media in foreign policy can be achieved only by creating a centrally controlled media network that allows for the influencing of agenda-setting processes (through salience and framing management) in the chosen foreign media market and consequently by shaping what issues the target foreign audience thinks about and how it creates its opinions regarding ongoing events. On this background, the thesis incorporated these findings into a newly generated analytical model designed for the assessment of the efficiency potential of real or prospective offensive foreign mass media campaigns and provided the operationalization of the whole chain of variables. By doing this, the thesis has produced a unique generalized methodological background for the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of foreign offensive media campaigns, which could be prospectively carried out by any chosen state at hand targeting foreign audiences within diverse countries in various geopolitical directions, thereby being characterized by extensive applicability with no restrictions stemming from the selection of particular aggressors or target markets.

Finally, the thesis applied the generated analytical model to the case of the Russian mass media in Ukraine before the conflict outbreak in 2014. Precisely speaking, the case study provided a thorough and evidence-based assessment of the efficiency potential of the Russian state-controlled mass media network in the Ukrainian media market in the immediate pre-conflict period (2013 and early December 2014). In this context, the case study reviewed the changes initiated by the Russian state authorities in the domestic Russian mass media sector, interconnected these internal developments with the evolution of the Russian foreign policy strategies, and associated them with a purpose-driven transfer of the mass media influence into the Ukrainian media market. The results of the case study confirmed that, in 2013, the RF was perfectly prepared to launch a highly efficient offensive mass media campaign in Ukrainian media market as it was able to set a strong hierarchical control over the domestic news TV and Internet-based media outlets, manage a high level of centralized coordination among them in pursuing state interests articulated by the Russian political elites, reach an enormous level of expansion of the state-controlled mass media in the Ukrainian media market, and establish these information sources in Ukraine by gaining extensive viewer popularity and high confidence among Ukrainian audience. Thus, the case study driven by the derived analytical model was able to map the actual state of affairs at the observed moment and

convincingly reveal the causes determining the high level of effectiveness of the Russian mass media campaign in Ukraine in the course of the initial and escalating phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Here it is important to mention that, though the ability of the Russian state-controlled news media outlets to attract attention and arouse feelings of confidence in the ranks of the Ukrainian population was limited, it was enough to significantly disintegrate the Ukrainian nation and sway the public discourse at least in several south-east Ukrainian regions (definitely not all of them). From the current view, we can see that the internal sovereignty devoted to the central government in Kyiv was substantially weakened especially by specific groups of Ukrainian citizens living particularly in these regions. These results confirm that the RF achieved the primary goal of its offensive media strategy – to heavily cripple the target state's internal sovereignty – carried out against Ukraine in the course of the latent and escalating phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (2013 – December 2014). As such, by retrospectively assessing the efficiency potential of the Russian offensive foreign mass media campaign on the information-psychological level targeting Ukraine in 2013 the thesis was able to clearly show that the axiomatic assumptions about the effectiveness of this concrete Russian offensive foreign mass media campaign, used as a starting point for the large amass of literature related to the research of both the Russian offensively tuned soft power and information warfare in the given case, was rather right – the RF has created a wide-spread centrally-controlled media network that heavily pervaded through the Ukrainian media market and profoundly established itself at least in some Ukrainian regions being enough to strike the decisive blow to the country's internal cohesion. In this manner, the results of this study, providing us with the 'behind the scene picture,' correlate with the real developments at the beginning of the conflict as well as during its course as observed by the existing academic and expert literature.

In essence, we can state that the thesis answered the stated research questions and met the goals set in the methodological chapter. As such, the thesis significantly extended our understanding of the phenomenon of the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies and achieved important contributions to both, the further development of our theoretical knowledge in this specific research area as well as in the field of practical analysis and methodological reasoning. In the theoretical realm, the thesis brought about an innovative definition of the phenomenon under investigation, and at the practical level, it generated an

idiosyncratic analytical model – a systemized procedure for revealing and assessing steps taken by particular states, the aim of which is to extend the strategic compound by possibilities of efficient offensive mass media instrumentalization beyond their national borders. In practice, this method can be used to assess the situation regarding contemporary cases and appraise the efficiency potential of mass media networks associated with various state entities in terms of offensive foreign policy instrumentalization, anticipate the current efficiency potential in other or similar cases, or make a prognosis of future risks. Most importantly, the analytical model can be used by the wider academic community, expert society, national state authorities, or specialized supranational bodies like EU/NATO StratCom to improve our security environment in terms of advanced threat assessment.

At the very end, we can only summarize that the thesis has brought major contributions to the existing academic literature dealing with various aspects of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign-policy strategies intersecting the boundaries of psychology, strategic, foreign policy, international and territorial, mass media, or military studies. First, the thesis added to the new theoretical layer by successfully defining the meaning of effectiveness in the given context thus determining an intricate and exceptionally complex notion that was lying in the grey zone of vagueness and haziness. Dealing with this intricate task, by uncovering the main defining features and fine characteristics of this phenomenon, we finally opened the way to further theoretical considerations focused on how to investigate the change in the level of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive mass media strategies. As such, the creation of a basic conceptual framework allowed us to make new evidence-based theoretical assumptions on variables influencing the change in effectiveness. Moreover, it enabled us to develop an unparalleled methodology meant for the assessment of the efficiency potential of offensive foreign mass media campaigns in particular cases – an area of theoretical thinking that goes significantly beyond the scope of the existing academic literature related to the research area (which has rather focused on other aspects of offensive mass media instrumentalization encompassing the roots, nature, purpose, and strategic frameworks, as well as practical aspects regarding offensive mass media utilization primarily in the Russian foreign policy within the two recognized modalities – offensively tuned soft power and information warfare – as outlined in the Literature Review). This is of immense important if we once again remind ourselves that the effectiveness is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end, and the everlasting desire

for all of those who seriously think about instrumentalizing mass media in offensive strategies. Thus, understanding what the effectiveness in this context means, what makes mass media an effective instrument for enforcing offensive foreign-policy strategies, and what causes the changes in efficiency potential in this context gives us important theoretical knowledge allowing us to improve our security environment when used in the right way.

Summary

The dissertation thesis concentrates on the problem of the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies on the information-psychological level. The overall limits of the research thus revolve around the symbolic power of information content and deal with offensive strategies in which states can employ mass media assets to influence public opinion abroad, interfere in the internal political affairs of other independent entities, and change the decision-making processes in the countries so affected in the desired manner. The overall aim is not to quantify or measure the effectiveness of offensive mass media instrumentalization in particular situations or events, but to provide a thorough and qualitatively substantiated insight into the fundamental process through which the generation of effectiveness (in the given context) occurs. As such, the thesis is divided into four chapters: (1) Literature Review; (2) Methodological Context and Research Design; (3) Theoretical-Analytical Background; and (4) Case Study.

First, the literature review is used to convey a precise delimitation of the research area, cover main approaches and theories concerning this field, assess the current state of knowledge, and identify the crucial blind spot in the research done so far allowing to introduce the related problem. In this sense, the first chapter reflects on the crucial changes concerning the nature of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy that have occurred in the last two decades (starting from 2000). And, because the main game-changer in this field turned out to be the Russian Federation (RF), the literature review focuses primarily on the transformations developed and implemented by this particular state. By and large, the literature review demonstrates that the current state of our knowledge in this field of research encompasses the roots, nature, purpose, and strategic frameworks, as well as practical aspects regarding offensive mass media utilization in the (Russian) foreign policy within two specific modalities – offensively tuned soft power and information warfare (representing the key strategic frameworks for the offensive foreign mass media instrumentalization as of now). However, very little is known about the effectiveness of these approaches. There is no coherent definition determining what the effectiveness of offensive mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy should mean and, as such, we cannot explain how the effectiveness is generated in this context nor the conditions that are necessary for effective mass media instrumentalization within the outlined offensive strategic frameworks. In addition, we are also missing an

instrument allowing us to make a qualitative assessment of the efficiency potential of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns led on the information-psychological level – the development of such a tool is heavily dependent on filling the outlined pieces of knowledge.

The second chapter introduces research questions, main goals as well as partial objectives, and outlines the research design used to fulfill the stated tasks. In short, the dissertation thesis aims to generate and test a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level) carried out by the RF (or by any other state at hand) targeting foreign audiences within diverse countries in various geopolitical directions. This overall aim is met through accomplishing several consequential steps constituting a systematic procedure: (1) constructing a coherent definition of the 'effectiveness' in terms of the mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies, (2) deriving the key variables that directly influence the change in the level of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level and thus can explain the fluctuation in efficiency of various offensive foreign campaigns, (3) describing the minimum (but sufficient) conditions that are necessary for the mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies (conditions in which the derived variables are functioning), (4) arranging and contextualizing the derived variables into general analytical model designed for assessing the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns, and (5) testing the derived analytical model on purposefully selected case study.

By employing this specific procedure, the third chapter – Theoretical-Analytical Background – creates a conceptual framework defining the 'effectiveness' of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies. To carry out this step, the thesis interconnects multiple (sub)concepts from various fields of research encompassing mass media studies, communication studies, psychology, or strategic studies and then contextualizes them in one theoretical compound. In light of this, the thesis depicts the effectiveness in terms of influence transfer that goes from mass media outlets to the target audience, from the information forging process to attitudinal/behavioral forming, and from agenda-setting activities in the media market to cognitive processes occurring in the human mind. The next step utilizes the created

conceptual framework for deriving the key variables that influence the level of effectiveness in the given context and explores the minimum (but sufficient) conditions that are necessary for mass media instrumentalization in such a manner. This step reveals the key variables that directly influence the change in the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies: a) the control over mass media outlets, and b) the range of the controlled mass media network. The contextualization of these variables shows that, in combination, these variables express variations in situational settings within structural qualities of a mass media network (encompassing selected media outlets) used by some entity to deliberately influence the attitudes/behavior of the target audience living in other countries through information messaging. The next step shifts this theoretical compound into the realm of foreign policy strategies and describes the minimum but sufficient conditions for the effective instrumentalization of mass media assets in offensive approaches. From this point of view, the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy strategies is defined as follows: the level of a state's capability to deliver favorable information (dependent on the level of state control over the publishing policy of individual mass media outlets) to target foreign audiences in a sufficient amount (dependent on the level of territorial range of media outlets' production). The last step concerning the theoretical-analytical background of this thesis puts the derived variables into a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns and carries out their operationalization. However, within the general analytical model, the above-mentioned variables should be treated rather as intermediate variables that are directly influenced by a specific set of independent variables having immediate impact on their values: (1) the (level of) hierarchical control over the selected media outlets (determined by the ability of one entity to control the publishing policy and production process in all selected media outlets); (2) the (level of) centralized coordination among selected outlets incorporated into the mass media network (determined by the ability of one entity to coordinate the publishing policy and production processes among all selected media outlets in line with the centrally stated communication strategy); (3) the (level of) expansion of selected media outlets in a chosen media market (determined by the number of media outlets able to publish/broadcast on the territory of chosen state/s); (4) the (level of) establishment of selected media outlets in the chosen media market (determined by the public consumption of and confidence in mass media outlets included within the observed mass media

network achieved in a competitive environment in the target media market). These independent variables give us: a) the overall number of mass media outlets that are under the control of one state entity that can be employed in a coordinated manner as a power resource in an effort to purposefully manufacture information content and disperse it in the desired geopolitical directions; and b) the overall number of mass media outlets that can be used as a power resource in terms of the offensive foreign policy strategy and convert the potential range of the mass media network in selected countries into measurable quantities of consumption and confidence ratings thus allowing to assume the level of their establishment in these states. Finally, the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies represents the dependent variable in this chain of events, the value of which is modified through the changes of the given intermediate variables. This reasoning implies that enhancing the effectiveness of mass media in foreign policy can be achieved only by creating a centrally controlled media network that allows for the influencing of agenda-setting processes (through salience and framing management) in the chosen foreign media market and consequently by shaping what issues the target foreign audience thinks about and how it creates its opinions regarding ongoing events. On this background, the thesis incorporates these findings into a newly generated analytical model designed for the assessment of the efficiency potential of real or prospective offensive foreign mass media campaigns and provides the operationalization of the whole chain of variables.

Finally, the fourth chapter applies the generated analytical model to the case of the Russian mass media in Ukraine before the conflict outbreak in 2013 (but referencing to both: the period of building up the Russian media network starting from the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin and its utilization during the latent and escalation phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict between 2013 and 2014). As presented in the literature review, the RF is regarded as the primary referential object of this dissertation thesis, because, by and large, it was this state that initiated the evolution of media strategies in the given field and it was Russian media operations that attracted the renewed interest of academic and expert communities in exploring the possibilities of utilizing mass media in compliance with foreign policy objectives. Precisely speaking, the case study provided a thorough and evidence-based assessment of the efficiency potential of the Russian state-controlled mass media network in the Ukrainian media market in the immediate pre-conflict period (2013 and early December 2014). By using the systematic assessment of the derived independent and intermediate variables the case study reviewed

the changes initiated by the Russian state authorities in the domestic Russian mass media sector, interconnected these internal developments with the evolution of the Russian foreign policy strategies, and associated them with a purpose-driven transfer of the mass media influence into the Ukrainian media market.

The results of the case study confirmed that, in 2013, the RF was perfectly prepared to launch a highly efficient offensive mass media campaign in the Ukrainian media market. First, the ruling Russian political elites used the state apparatus to reach a high level of state control over the Mass Media. In this regard, the Russian authorities started to play a dominant role in the national media sector and successfully eliminated independent political messaging through recovering direct state ownership and implementation of instruments allowing strong hierarchical control over main Russian news media outlets. Additionally, the Russian authorities were able to transform the Presidential Administration into a dominant central organizing unit having enough authority, an extensive range of competencies with executive powers, and sufficient administrative apparatus to effectively coordinate actions of controlled media assets. In such a manner, the Russian state authorities succeeded in forming a single information space and acting as the key agenda-setter – synchronizing plans for information coverage, selecting issues, producing guidelines for issue framing, establishing tools for rapid issue/framing adjustment, and setting conditions for journalistic obedience. In sum, the Russian state was able to set a strong hierarchical control over the domestic news TV and Internet-based media outlets and manage a high level of centralized coordination among them in pursuing state interests articulated by the Russian political elites till 2013. Second, the Russian state-controlled media network was able to reach sufficient territorial range and take a solid position in the Ukrainian media market, especially in the south-east of the country, before the conflict outbreak. On that account, the RF set a strategic framework, priorities, as well as a national coordinating center responsible for the purpose-driven expansion of state-controlled media assets in foreign media markets. In particular, the RF became successful in using historical legacies, structural interconnections, language conditions, or legislative inconsistencies to heavily penetrate the Ukrainian media market with a state-controlled media network. Moreover, Russian state-controlled media outlets were able to achieve significant viewer and confidence ratings in the Ukrainian media market that helped channel malign information messaging contributing to the internal disintegration of the country. In brief, Russian state authorities were able to reach an enormous level of expansion of the state-controlled mass media in

the Ukrainian media market and establish these information sources in Ukraine by gaining extensive viewer popularity and high confidence among the Ukrainian audience till 2013.

All this indicates that the RF was able to reach strong control over key mass media resources and reach a high level of territorial range heavily hitting the Ukrainian media market in the immediate pre-conflict period in 2013, thus significantly increasing its offensive potential and enhancing its strategic compound by offensive media strategies. As such, the case study driven by the derived analytical model was able to map the actual state of affairs at the observed moment and convincingly reveal the causes determining the high level of effectiveness of the Russian mass media campaign in Ukraine in the course of the initial and escalating phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

In conclusion, the thesis significantly extended our understanding of the phenomenon of the effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies and achieved important contributions to both, the further development of our theoretical knowledge in this specific research area as well as in the field of practical analysis. In the theoretical realm, the thesis brought about an innovative definition of the phenomenon under investigation, and at the practical level, it generated an idiosyncratic analytical model – a systemized procedure for revealing and assessing steps taken by particular states, the aim of which is to extend the strategic compound by possibilities of efficient offensive mass media instrumentalization beyond their national borders.

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