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Top-down selection of information as an element of strategic information management in the event of a threat of internal destabilisation

Introduction

Undoubtedly, even in authoritarian states it is possible to identify ways to publish sensitive material. Such situations occur because the authorities do not, by definition, exercise absolute control over the media. This is often because they cannot, or because they do not have to. The reason for this type of situation is that it takes advantage of certain cracks that can be identified in state mechanisms for controlling the flow of information. However, there is then pressure and at the same time risk, which is even less conducive to the free and unhindered flow of information.[1] For the purposes of the analysis carried out within the framework of this article, Russia appears as an excellent example that can be used to show the specificity of the region in terms of the management of information and free media space in systems with authoritarian characteristics. Moreover, the state indicated has a legally elected government with the real support of a significant segment of Russian society. Furthermore, Russia gives its citizens constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, but does not actually boast a free media. Russia has both

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[1]   S. Stier, "Democracy, Autocracy and the News: the Impact of Regime Type on Media Freedom", *Democratisation*, vol. 22, issue 7, 2015, p. 1274, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.964 643.

official and unofficial censorship and is marked by a low media freedom index published by NGOs such as Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House.[2]

Although media control is relatively common in semi-authoritarian countries, the authorities of these countries do not exercise total control over the press. On the contrary, it takes place in a notable majority through the use of indirect methods. The information management model is usually supported by the implementation of so-called soft methods, by which is meant the absence of direct interference involving the use of violence and coercion. There are undoubtedly cases in some countries where such extreme tools are used against those who publish content, of which Russia is an infamous example.[3]

One can distinguish various norms that the Russian authorities used to impose on media content, however, these laws often do not focus on purely political content. Instead, the law restricts media freedom in somewhat different ways, for example, by prohibiting the promotion of dangerous substances, making indecent content public, insulting state authorities, or prohibiting the promotion of extremist activities in the broadest sense. Although the wording of these norms is not directly aimed at restricting freedom of expression, they are used to suppress sensitive political content operating in the media.[4]

The use of the above methods leads to a gradual deformation of society's vision of reality. Despite the widespread availability of the media, and above all of the Internet, it is gradually being deprived of access to reliable information. The methods indicated above are not, however, crucial for the control of the media, especially the electronic media. Indeed, the challenge for the authorities has been to maintain social support and stability in the internet age, given the growing availability and popularity of this medium and a number of social revolutions observed around the world, which have been fuelled mainly by social networks. The essential hypothesis, which will be confirmed later in the article, is the claim that the traditional means used to manage the flow of information proved insufficient in the case of the Russian regime. The question that needs to be answered is what methods and techniques of information management and selection can offset the danger of social unrest and be conducive to maintaining internal stability in a situation of aggressive external policy and military campaign. The essential aim of the article is, on the one hand, to show the mechanisms of effective information management in the era of new media, and on

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[2]   Worth pointing out, according to a report by the organisation Freedom House, is that Russia has a higher rate of various factors limiting press freedom than countries such as Afghanistan, India or Indonesia. See: M.J. Abramowitz, "Press Freedom's Dark Horizon", Freedom House, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017 [accessed: 10 March 2022].

[3]   M. Hem, *Evading the censors: critical journalism in authoritarian states*, University of Oxford 2014, p. 5.

[4]   *Ibidem.*

the other hand, to outline the full range of methods, the proper application of which, in multiple ways, leads to maintaining a high level of confidence in the authority[5] and achieving internal stability despite the complicated economic and international situation in Russia. In order to achieve the above goal, it was decided to use the method of content analysis, as the record of communication[6] fixed on the Internet provides excellent analytical material in the area of top-down selection and management of information by the authorities that interests us. Particularly useful in this area will be the analysis of the discourse operating in the Internet space. As a non-reactive research method, it allows for an effective analysis of content[7] posted within the blogosphere and social networks.

Top-down information management methods and techniques by state authorities

Thanks to the multitude of ongoing empirical studies on media systems in the 20th and 21st centuries, we can draw on a rich literature that presents findings on the sources of media bias. These are not infrequently referred to as "[...] distortions that originate on the supply side of the media market."[8] In contrast to the problems presented earlier, several authors agree that private ownership of the media reduces media bias, and stress the need for competition in news markets, as concentration of ownership makes it easier for political and economic interests to dominate the media. It is also argued that government ownership of media companies is negatively correlated with a variety of public policies, including press freedom.[9]

At the outset, it is worth pointing out the basic types and methods of top-down control of the media by non-democratic governments. These, of course, do not give the full picture, as they reveal the underlying mechanisms that lead to a significant restriction of media freedom. In most modern democracies, the media industry, despite guaranteed, constitutional freedoms, is subject to a licensing system. Broadcasting licences are issued by specially appointed state bodies. However, in countries with authoritarian characteristics, concessions can be a welcome weapon in the fight against media freedom, despite legally falling within the regulations of a democratic state. For broadcasting via terrestrial transmitters, concessions are necessary for the allocation

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[5]   E. Karczewski, "Destabilizacja bezpieczeństwa społecznego a problemy bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego", *Przegląd Nauk o Obronności*, no. 3, 2017, p. 248, https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.9856.

[6]   E. Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research*, 4th ed., Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008, p. 350.

[7]   D. Batorski, M. Olcoń-Kubicka, "Prowadzenie badań przez Internet – podstawowe zagadnienia metodologiczne", *Studia Socjologiczne*, no. 3, 2006, p. 102.

[8]   M. Gentzkow, J.M. Shapiro, "Competition and Truth in the Market for News", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2008, pp. 134.

[9]   S. Stier, *op. cit*, p. 1275.

of broadcasting bands to media players, which is the modern democratic norm. However, for some governments, the concession and the decision to grant it is only a means to an end of exercising control over the broadcaster. Authorities may decide not to renew a licence without indicating a reason.[10] Thus, if the media company in question is not granted a renewed licence, content creators will not know where the line between acceptable and unacceptable content is, as the authority is not obliged to communicate the reasons for refusal. Such a phenomenon inevitably leads to self-censorship.[11] Another example of the clear abuse of the institution of concessions by the authorities of non-democratic states, is Russia. Under Vladimir Putin, the right to freedom of expression is notoriously violated. The basic argumentation is that democratic authorities influence the transmission of content anyway using various types of social engineering, and that media freedom is a façade.[12] In Russia, as in most countries, newspapers, radio and television stations need licences to operate. A number of publications have had their licences revoked for, among other things, inciting religious hatred, or violating other laws, although the withdrawal of licences has largely been political.[13]

In the vast majority of countries around the world, laws are implemented to regulate the media market, as part of the state authorities' management of information. These mechanisms are applied in parallel to concessions, and are specifically referred to protection against hate speech, racist messages or attacks on religion. It is not uncommon for these to be provisions that are not specifically aimed at the media, and while they may restrict freedom of expression to some extent, they are not considered a direct tool for media control. Nevertheless, in a large number of cases, such laws can be used in just such a way. For example, Russia has implemented laws prohibiting the promotion of drugs. These laws are used to intimidate media outlets, or even close them down, when they publish material deemed sensitive. In the December 2011 edition of the Russian magazine *Esquire*, the story of opposition leader Alexei Navalny was told, with a photograph depicting him on the cover. The same issue also published a report on illegal trade on the internet, which mentioned, among other things, the sale of banned substances online. As a result, *Esquire* magazine was accused of promoting drug trafficking and received a warning from the Russian Federal Drug

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[10]   M. Majorek, S. Olczyk, M. Winiarska-Brodowska, *Cyberpolityka. Internet jako przestrzeń aktywności politycznej*, Warszawa: Texter, 2018, p. 91.

[11]   W. Wijayanto, "Old Practice in a New Era: Race as the Basis of Self-Censorship in Kompas Daily Newspaper", *GSTF Journal on Media & Communications*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2015, p. 67, https://www.globalsciencejournals.com/content/pdf/10.7603%2Fs40874-014-0019-0.pdf [accessed: 3 November 2017].

[12]   D. Skillen, *Freedom of Speech in Russia: Politics and Media from Gorbachev to Putin*, London – New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 321.

[13]   M. Hunt, *Gorodskiye vesti*, 22 February 2006, http://blog.matthewhunt.com/2006/02/gorodskiye-vesti.html [accessed: 11 March 2022].

Control Service. Under current law, when a publishing house receives two warnings in one year, its licence can be revoked.[14]

The law is also used to blacklist websites, both domestic and foreign, effectively limiting access for Russian internet users. For those in power, the main advantage of this method is that it is not always clear whether action is being taken against the promotion of drugs or the censorship of otherwise uncomfortable content. The government may claim that political censorship has not been applied, but editors will see it as a warning against unwanted coverage of events from the political scene.[15]

A relatively simple yet practical way for authoritarian authorities to manage information is for the government to have its own media. However, this method is all too obvious, and it is not uncommon for the authorities, as part of their information management strategy, to choose to hand over the media to people close to the regime. Despite the fact that the authority is no longer directly in possession of the public media, it entrusts them into the hands of people who are significantly dependent on it. In countries with authoritarian features, this is not uncommonly becoming the norm. Dependent Russian news agencies have successfully used the idea of freedom of speech to spread disinformation in American and European media spaces. According to Timothy Snyder, an American historian, the aim of Russian propaganda is to show that the truth does not actually exist.[16] Thus, everything that is portrayed in the media is dependent on the interpretation and perspective from which an event is assessed. Modern information management initially served primarily to ensure Putin's power. Subsequently, the Kremlin, having mobilised the media in Russia and pro-Russian media abroad, significantly strengthened its influence in Ukraine's information space. At the same time, Russian propaganda began to operate in a more diversified manner towards the population, i.e. ordinary consumers of information. Pro-Russian media in Ukraine convinced citizens of the need for friendship, cooperation and strategic partnership between the two countries. In addition, the Kremlin actively using the mass media, in which for many years it was difficult to find more or less objective material about Ukraine, consciously formed among Russians an image of the indolence of the Ukrainian state and thus intensified anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Russian society.[17]

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[14]   A. Galperin, "Putting on Putin. Criticism gets creative at Russian Esquire", *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 2008, http://archives.cjr.org/short_takes/putting_on_putin.php [accessed: 11 March 2022].

[15]   "Russian federal censor adds Snapchat to government list of instant messengers without company's knowledge", Meduza Project, 10 August 2017, https://meduza.io/en/news/2017/08/10/the-first-major-western-instant-messenger-caves-to-russian-internet-censors-it-s-snapchat [accessed: 11 March 2022].

[16]   L. O'Neal, "Yale Professor Talks Russian Propaganda in Ukraine", *The Emory Wheel*, 9 February 2015, http://emorywheel.com/yale-professor-talks-russian-propaganda-in-ukraine [accessed: 14 April 2022].

[17]   P. Katerynchuk, "Russian Media Policy As A Factor Of Political Destabilization In Central And Eastern European Countries", *Eurolimes*, 23 Supl, 2018, p. 187.

Top-down control and management of information on the Russian internet as part of maintaining internal stability

More or less since the turn of the century, one can observe the successive emergence and development of new forms of relatively stable regimes with authoritarian characteristics. These states are capable, to a far greater extent than the earlier, ossified authoritarianisms, of dealing with flexible borders, issues of free flow of information and other effects of increasing globalisation. These "hybrid," semi-democratic, or in other words, façade regimes tend to combine some formal democratic institutions with elements of authoritarian rule, leaving somewhat more space for some forms of free expression and free media than previous forms of closed authoritarianism allowed. These regimes are characterised by the skilful management of civil society institutions and even grassroots movements and initiatives that remain in opposition to power and its media presence.[18] They are extremely effective in managing the emergence and flow of information while accepting the lack of total control more characteristic of closed regimes. The façade of their operation is a severely limited democracy that is, in a sense, the key to participation in the global system which, to some extent, legitimises such a state externally and internally. Compared to closed authoritarianism, the new structures tend to be less systematic in their use of high-intensity coercion headed by brutal repression to maintain internal control and stability. Instead, the states in question prefer to enjoy the benefits of social engineering involving many subtle, quasi-legalistic and less obvious forms of control over society. Such measures, for example involving soft governance without resorting to traditional coercive measures, are less likely to risk global condemnation or undermine domestic support.[19]

It is interesting to note that states with highly constrained democratic mechanisms and institutions learn from each other's successes and failures, seeking to copy those policies that appear to mitigate the threat of internal instability. Numerous examples of revolutions in recent decades, such as the Arab Spring, have been recognised and analysed, and regimes with authoritarian characteristics, led by Russia, and in fear of destabilising the system, have adopted new laws and control techniques aimed at deterring and limiting the ability of activists to emulate protest movements observed in other states.[20]

It would seem that in many authoritarian states, the internet remains the last bastion of freedom of speech – and therefore represents, if not completely free, at least a freer space for the transmission of content than traditional information

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[18]　M. Majorek, S. Olczyk, M. Winiarska-Brodowska, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
[19]　S. Levitsky, L. Way, *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 37–40.
[20]　M. Majorek, S. Olczyk, M. Winiarska-Brodowska, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

providers. It can therefore be assumed that the internet is, by definition, much less restricted than is the case with traditional media, but that does not mean that it is not restricted. One has to come to terms with the fact that the total freedom of this medium is gone irretrievably. Almost since the beginning of the 21st century, countries with non-democratic features have tried to experiment with various control mechanisms directed towards new forms of communication. Already at that time, it was realised that the Internet, as yet little understood and researched, was becoming a space for arousing and intensifying social unrest. Thus, it was necessary to start implementing solutions to counteract this, although at the same time in violation of the ubiquitous and accepted position that the Internet should be a place free of state regulation. The universally accepted norms on the one hand, and the danger of internal destabilisation on the other, required the development of a multi-pronged approach to prevent potential protests. Consciously accepting the loss of some legitimacy was a necessary cost of maintaining internal stability. Initially, the management of information on the internet, categorised as the so-called first generation, was based on very coarse practices, which were basically limited to blocking sites and filtering published content by simply blocking or deleting content.[21] Then there are the more sophisticated methods, some of which were described earlier and involve legal restrictions, but these are not the most interesting in this aspect. Namely, pressure on editors of online publications, manipulation of their content, the introduction of a top-down and at the same time false message by the authorities, and relying on the growing popularity of blogs, vlogs and social channels, i.e. all the available benefits of the Web 2.0, come to the fore. What emerges, therefore, is a picture of a regime that relies on the façade institutions of democracy, i.e. it must, to some extent, be aware of the risks of internal destabilisation linked to the growing availability of new means of communication.[22] It is to be expected that any such power will seek to implement certain forms of information management on the internet, ranging from the most primitive to measures aimed at decentralising forms of interference with the message, building informal and semi-legal structures of management and control not only over content but also over users of the web.

Those wishing to disseminate messages unflattering to the authorities obviously use social media and other websites to publish material that cannot be posted in traditional media, and online newspapers are usually affected by less stringent censorship laws. However, as previously mentioned, increasingly governments in authoritarian countries are trying to restrict online content as well. One reason for this

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[21] R.J. Deibert, R. Rohozinski, "Liberation vs. Control: The Future of Cyberspace", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 21, no. 4, 2010, pp. 43–57.

[22] J.A. Kerr, "Information*,* Security, and Authoritarian Stability: Internet Policy Diffusion and Coordination in the Former Soviet Region", *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 12, 2018, p. 3818.

is that online media are becoming more popular and online content is becoming a greater threat to the authorities. With internet surveillance and landing page blocking tools readily available, the authorities have more and more opportunities to control content and limit its dissemination.[23] Some signs of this, are easy to observe. For example, as already mentioned, the Russian authorities are in the habit of blacklisting websites containing sensitive content and, moreover, have introduced a law that requires bloggers to certify the factual accuracy of information on their blogs.[24]

The Russian model of media information management in the face of the conflict in Ukraine

An excellent illustration for the top-down management of information by the authorities is the indirect pressure exerted by the Russian authorities against the local, popular online newspaper *Lenta.ru*. It was known for its independent, reliable publications and was one of the most popular online resources in Russia. *Lenta* decided in March 2014 to publish a report on Ukraine, covering the current situation of the country including the Russian invasion of Crimea. Shortly after the aforementioned publication, the owner of the portal, Alexander Mamut, made a change in the position of editor-in-chief and, as an act of solidarity, a number of leading journalists resigned. Publicists working at the portal believe that this change was politically motivated and that the new chief executive no longer allows journalists as much freedom.[25]

It is worth noting at this point that the Russian model of information management is based on a two-faceted concept. In the first place, therefore, we have a total power-controlled media, in which the message is top-down imposed and the information provided has nothing to do with reliable journalism. And this branch is dominant in this state. Within the second area, let's call it the freedom area, there is a kind of safety valve, i.e. a certain amount of heavily marginalised media, which generate a more objective message. The media with the greatest reach, are ruthlessly controlled, while the less important ones have a degree of freedom to generate the message themselves. We should see this as a politically controlled process,

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[23]   M. Nekrasov, L. Parks, E. Belding, Limits to internet freedoms: Being heard in an increasingly authoritarian world, [in:] *Proceedings of the 2017 Workshop on Computing Within Limits (LIMITS '17)*, Assosiation for Computing Machinery: New York, 2017, pp. 120–122.

[24]   N. Maréchal, "Networked authoritarianism and the geopolitics of information: Understanding Russian Internet policy", *Media and Communication*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2017, p. 32, https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v5i1.808.

[25]   M. Bodner, "Lenta.ru Editor Replaced After 'Extremism' Warning", *The Moscow Times*, 12 March 2014.

where members of the regime decide the fate of a huge number of media by assigning them to area one or area two, and then promoting and at the same time degrading them according to their impact on public opinion. In this type of situation, the authorities manage the media by assigning them different roles, on the one hand to the state-controlled media and on the other to the independent ones. While the role of the former is to present the news in a way that legitimises further authoritarian rule, the latter are used by the regime to demonstrate that its rule is in fact not as repressive as its critics claim.[26] The underlying assumption of power is therefore to guarantee just enough space for independent media activities to sustain the desired image of political freedom and respect for the rule of law without compromising its influence. Such a pattern could be seen, for example, during the invasion of Crimea, where the state-controlled media uncritically applauded the actions of the Russian regime, including those of the "green men,"[27] while less influential, previously marginalised outlets were allowed to post more critical comments.

It follows from the above that, until some time ago, the internet remained in the realm of the less influential media, as numerous surveys indicated that the vast majority of Russians obtain their knowledge of events in Ukraine from media controlled by the authorities, namely state television channels. However, fearing that reliable information would not reach wider social groups and cause social unrest, the Russian authorities have taken steps to block public access to a large number of IP addresses on the pretext of fighting extremism and to put pressure on operators of social networking sites, such as Vkontakte, to close down anti-regime forums. The internet is increasingly seen as a destructive sphere that allows citizens to bypass state-controlled information providers. To further control the internet, the Russian National Guard, created to maintain internal security,[28] announced the creation of a new cyber-division dedicated to monitoring social media to identify "extremist" messages. The creation of this cell has been justified by an increase in the number of messages of a forbidden nature nevertheless this increase is due more to the increasingly broad definition of "extremism" used by the Russian authorities.[29]

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[26] J.A. Dunn, "*Lottizzazione* Russian Style: Russia's Two-tier Media System", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 9, 2014, p. 1435, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.956441.

[27] M. Pokrzywińska, "'Zielone ludziki' w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku", *Acta Politica Polonica*, no. 2, 2019, p. 48, https://doi.org/10.18276/ap.2019.48-04.

[28] N. Kusa, "Gwardia Narodowa Federacji Rosyjskiej jako element systemu bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego Rosji", *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, no. 1, 2017, pp. 156–158, https://doi.org/10.14746/ssp.2017.1.9.

[29] S. Sukhankin, "Russian National Guard: A New Oprichnina, 'Cyber Police' or Something Else?", The Jamestown Foundation, 21 March 2017, https://jamestown.org/program/russian-national-guard-new-oprichnina-cyber-police-something-else-2 [accessed: 18 March 2022].

The Russian blogosphere and social networks
as a space for disinformation

Nowadays, it appears that social networks, personal blogs or news platforms claiming to be independent serve as a tool for manipulating the population by creating a public opinion favourable to the ruling political class. There is a group of individuals who, in exchange for financial remuneration, are prepared to spread through comments or posts favourable to the doings of their employer, which are often the ruling politicians. These types of people are called trolls, and their main task is to improve the image of power in cyberspace in order to hide or discredit those sources of information that reveal the true activities of those in power. Members of the so-called "army of trolls" operating for political purposes are a common phenomenon in Russia and beyond. A "troll cell" was recently discovered in Finland, and the Finnish authorities suspect that the source of funding is the Russian embassy in Helsinki. Putin has been using a host of trolls in his information war against Ukraine, following the annexation of Crimea and during conflicts with his eastern neighbours.[30] Trolling consisted of creating multiple blogs and fake accounts on major social networks (Vkontakte, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and spreading pro-Kremlin messages. The strategy was to create a mix of news that would be difficult when trying to manipulate public opinion. This can be achieved by creating a flow of information through both non-political posts (such as fashion news or recipes) and political comments that are strictly created by editors and shared by trolls. One should therefore maintain a regular themed blog or fanpage, and occasionally weave in a political post about the fascism of the government in Kiev. The effect of these posts is achieved when readers of the blog and comments accept the posts, and subsequently click on likes and share this content further.

The reality is that we are dealing with hundreds of state-employed commentators on social and political life, whose main purpose is to negate posts unfavourable to the authorities and to slander the authorities. This is by no means done ostentatiously; years of cyber information warfare have perfected Russia's troll industry. The simple deletion of comments unfavourable to the authorities is in fact no longer necessary, because the trolls generate so much content that the designated comments are lost in a sea of support for the government. In the so-called content factory, we have people writing on a variety of topics and operating a variety of forums and blogs. At the end of 2016, the greatest emphasis was on creating sections dealing with Ukraine, where content undermining both Ukrainian statehood and the nation dominated,

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[30]   A. Eşanu, "Centrul de Telecomunicatii Speciale al R. Moldova l-a votat pe Plahotniuc primministru. Lista postacilor de partid", *Ziarul de Gardă*, 19 December 2015, https://www.zdg.md/stiri/centrul-de-telecomunicatii-speciale-al-r-moldova-l-a-votat-pe-plahotniuc-prim-ministru-lista-postacilor-de-partid [accessed: 25 April 2022].

successively discrediting the independent country. Separate sections, considered to be among the most prestigious, were dedicated to the US elections and foreign policy in general, where hired individuals pretended to be commentators from outside Russia, writing posts in English.[31] In this way, the reach of Russian trolls was wide and, over time, they gained more and more influence on the beliefs and worldview of internet users from all over the world. Such a wide and global influence would not have been possible without a perfectly contracted disinformation machine, built and perfected over the years.

The disinformation and manipulation of facts in this case takes place through a "snowball" effect, meaning that a given comment, seemingly harmless, is increasingly distributed to observers and friends on social networks. The whole process takes place naturally and the numerous shares lead to a strong embedding in the social media space and thus its credibility. It is worth mentioning that the work of these bloggers was and is illegal, as they were and are all unofficially employed and only receive their emoluments in cash. Thus, it is possible to qualify the activity of trolls as a clandestine activity born of initiatives designed and managed by specific state structures in order to build a distorted image of an alternative reality to achieve relative social stability.

In light of recent events in Ukraine, Russia has blocked the use of most social media on its territory. This included Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.[32] Of course, this blockade only affects less knowledgeable users, as the sites can still be used with an active VPN service. The attempt to cut the public off from the world's social networking resources is an act of desperation on the part of the Russian authorities, who, in the face of international ostracism, do not want to allow their citizens' perceptions to change at any cost. Among the biggest players, YouTube still remains, with a partial blockade of some functionalities. On the one hand, it is a window to the world for Russians, while on the other it is still a powerful propaganda tool in the hands of the Kremlin. From this, however, it follows that a simple cut-off from social networks at this stage makes little difference, as the successive work of creating an alternative reality by the authorities in the social media space has caused deep and perhaps irreversible social damage.

Conclusions

According to the above analyses, what emerges is a picture of a total degeneration of the role of the media, which, as a rule, in democratic systems are supposed to serve citizens, not the authorities. The news coverage here is so one-sided that, in

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31 F. Splidsboel Hansen, *Russian hybrid warfare: A study of disinformation*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017, p. 22.

32 K. Rutkowska, "Czy Rosja zabije YouTube?", Benchmark.co.uk, 19 March 2022, https://www.benchmark.pl/aktualnosci/youtube-rosja.html [accessed: 17 April 2022].

principle, it should be disqualified in terms of reliability. Most devastatingly, it does not necessarily contain untruths, but is truncated of relevant facts in such a way that it ultimately leaves the viewer with a certain mixture of emotions which, when juxtaposed with political preferences projected over the years, is itself a tool in the hand of power.

It is not uncommon for the regime-controlled media to ignore relevant facts, erasing them, as it were, from reality. Something that is unspoken does not exist, so in the minds of the vast majority of Russian citizens, if there is no talk of war, only of a special operation, it means there is no war. From this it follows that it is not always telling untruths that is harmful, it is just as destructive to be vague, or to omit important issues in silence. Nonetheless, this type of information management leads to the desired effect of sustained support for power. However, the most imaginative and effective method is disinformation. Disinformation understood as the spreading of false or fabricated information, or the distortion of facts through role reversal. The use of social media and the internet in general to spread this type of false information leads to a widespread belief in the veracity of the message, which has been reinforced by hundreds of shares and likes. This is by far the most powerful tool in the hands of the Russian authorities and it has contributed and will continue to contribute to the relative internal stability of the state, despite the deteriorating living conditions of the population and the international isolation of the country and its citizens.

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Top-down selection of information as an element of strategic information management in the event of a threat of internal destabilisation
Abstract

In many authoritarian countries, the Internet is an oasis of freedom of speech and the free transfer of knowledge – thus, if not completely free, then at least a more free space for transferring content than traditional information providers. Nevertheless, the total freedom of this medium has passed irretrievably. Use of social media and other websites to post material that cannot be posted on traditional media, and even online newspapers tend to be affected by less stringent censorship laws. However, this does not change the fact that contemporary authoritarian regimes are going so far as to interfere with social media, either by blocking access to content or by promoting false information. The conducted analysis is to show the mechanisms of top-down information management in order to lead to widespread disinformation and distortion of reality. In this respect, it is worth bringing up the actions of the Russian authorities in the context of the conflict in Ukraine and the possible opposition of the Russian society to the ongoing military operations.

Key words: information management, destabilisation, media, Russia, Ukraine