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Russian Topic on *Euronews* and Media Manipulations

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Abstract

Based on the previously developed theoretical model of anti-manipulation media educational activities, the authors of the article analyzed 752 materials connected to Russia published in the Russian language on the *Euronews* website over the period of 2021. Unlike many Western newspapers, where most materials on the Russian topic contain signs of media manipulation, *Euronews* is significantly characterized by a much greater balance. The results are drawn that two-thirds of *Euronews* materials on Russian topics contained objective information that was not accompanied by manipulative techniques. Nevertheless, about a third of *Euronews* materials to some extent exhibited signs of manipulation and propaganda clichés. In particular, the most common manipulative techniques used by *Euronews* journalists in their materials associated with Russia, are omission, selectivity and appeal to authority.

Keywords: media manipulation, media, press, TV, Euronews, Russia, fake news, analysis, media studies, media literacy, propaganda, ideology.

1. Introduction

Positioning itself as an independent and objective media agency, *Euronews* defines its main objectives as follows: “We believe All Views matter”: “At *Euronews*, our mission is to provide unfiltered, unbiased, fact-based journalism that empowers rather than unsettles. Unapologetically impartial, we believe all views matter, and we actively resist the temptation to bait clicks or views through bias, outrage, or sensationalism. By staying true to facts but giving voice to many opinions, we provide our audiences with the resources they need to make up their own mind — or perhaps even change it. By focusing on facts, ideas, and solutions, our journalists cultivate clarity, empathy, and integrity” ([Euronews, n.d.](#)). Is this so in fact? In the present article, we attempt to analyze *Euronews* media texts linked to Russia in order to understand how the declared *Euronews* mission is supported by facts.

2. Materials and methods

In the course of the research, we have analyzed a number of scientific studies related to media manipulations and 752 materials connected to Russia published in the Russian language on the *Euronews* website over the period of 2021. We have drawn on the model of anti-manipulation media educational activities developed during our previous research ([Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021: 323-332](#)). The analysis of media texts was carried out taking into account the theoretical model developed by us. This model, based on problematic questions, helps to better understand the essence of the information presented by various media sources.

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3. Discussion

The problems of propaganda, misinformation, media manipulations and fake news have been extensively analyzed in scientific research (Azzimonti, Fernandes, 2021; Balmas, 2012; Bean, 2017; Berghel, 2017; Bertin et al, 2018; Bharali, Goswami, 2018; Bradshaw, Howard, 2018; Bradshaw et al., 2021; Colomina et al., 2021; Conroy et al., 2015; Dentith, 2017; Derakhshan Wardle, 2017; Farkas, Schou, 2018; Figueira, Oliveira, 2017; Goering, Thomas, 2018; Howard et al., 2021; Janze, Risius, 2017; Marwick, 2018; Mihailidis, Viotty, 2017; Quandt et al, 2019; Ruchansky et al., 2017; Vargo et al., 2018 and others).

For example, P.N. Howard, L.-M. Neudert and N. Prakash point out that “the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation (mis/disinformation) online has emerged as a pressing public issue of the 21st century that affects all those accessing online networks, as well as those offline. ... Digital mis/disinformation can proliferate through people, bots and troll factories – organized groups that wage coordinated mis/disinformation campaigns – for a range of reasons: to intentionally deceive and harm, to gain political influence, for financial gain, or unwittingly to share information or garner approval and popularity. Algorithms drive personalized news feeds and curate search results, content and recommendations based on individual profiles that have been created by tracking user behaviour. By sometimes promoting misleading, sensationalist and conspiratorial content over factual information, algorithms are a key part of the mis/disinformation flow” (Howard et al., 2021: 4).

We agree that “the news stories distributed are designed to influence or manipulate users' opinions on a certain topic towards certain objectives. While the concept of propaganda is not new, social media has made the spreading of ideas faster and more scalable, making it potentially easier for propaganda material to reach a wider set of people. Relative to more traditional ways of spreading propaganda, fake news are extremely difficult to detect posing a challenge for social media users, moderators, and governmental agencies trying control their dissemination” (Azzimonti, Fernandes, 2021).

The teaching manual published by the team of researchers in 2021 justly emphasizes that “to be an independent and informed thinker in the digital world of the 21st century is a real challenge and, in reality, few people are prepared effectively to navigate the online environment. This deficit in Digital Media Literacy across the world has been identified as a critical factor explaining widespread belief in online false information, be it misinformation or disinformation, which has led to changes in education policy across Europe and the world, changes in the governance of personal data and the rethinking of the design of technology platforms. This widespread belief in false information circulating online is a critical challenge for today's societies. Indeed, this has become even more apparent in the last year during the pandemic. “The time is now,” tweeted the European Commission: “There has never been a more urgent need for an Internet free of false or misleading information than during the coronavirus pandemic.” Media Literacy is crucial to being safe, positive and respectful online” (Teaching..., 2021: 8).

In this regard, we believe it is important to apply the critical analysis to the media texts of major information agencies, such as, for example, *Euronews*.

4. Results

In practical application of the model of anti-manipulation media education that we had developed (Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021: 323-332), key challenging questions were used to uncover the goals and techniques of the authors of media texts (Wilson, 2019). Based on this model and the questions, we analyzed 752 materials related to Russia on the *Euronews* website published in the Russian language.

Unlike many Western newspapers, where many materials on the Russian topic contain signs of media manipulation, *Euronews* is significantly more balanced: about a third of the materials of this agency analyzed, to some extent related to Russia, have positive connotation, another third is predominantly neutral, but about one third exhibits negative connotation with the use of manipulation techniques.

For example, such materials of *Euronews* entitled “Recognition of the Russian *Sputnik V* vaccine: the result is obvious” (Dovil, 2021), “The success of *Sputnik V* in San Marino” (Sheludkova, 2021), “Yuri Gagarin - forever the first one” (Alexandrova, 2021), “The ISS film crew returned to Earth” (Pozdnyakov, 2021), “Sakhalin turns into a green island” (Alexandrova, 2021),

“Ekaterina Alekhina: a female path to Michelin stars” (Kepinski, 2021) contribute to a rather positive image of Russia:

Media text genre: material on current events (in Russia), news text.

Analysis of the media text for reliability (identifying the political, ideological position of the authors of the media text, identifying possible agency of the media text, political and other groups who benefit from the media text):

What is the source of the information? What facts are presented in support of it?

In the story “Recognition of the Russian *Sputnik V* vaccine: the result is obvious” (Dovil, 2021), one of the most authoritative medical journals in the world, *The Lancet*, is presented as the main source of information, which published the results of the third phase of clinical trials of the Russian vaccine *Sputnik V*, confirming its safety and high efficiency against coronavirus. It amounted to 91.6 % (Dovil, 2021).

The report “Success of *Sputnik V* in San Marino” reports (with reference to the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund K. Dmitriev) that the use of the Russian *Sputnik V* vaccine allowed San Marino to become the first country in Europe to defeat the coronavirus and reduced the infection rate and mortality to zero (Sheludkova, 2021).

The text “Yuri Gagarin – forever the first one” reminds the audience of *Euronews* that the first human to be in space, sixty years after the historic flight that opened the vast space of the Universe to mankind, Yuri Gagarin still evokes admiration and pride (Alexandrova, 2021), and the house of the Gagarins in Klushino, in the Smolensk region, was reconstructed and turned into a museum (Alexandrova, 2021). The quotes of the adviser to the director of the Gagarin Museum T. Filatova, the writer and journalist A. Pervushin, and others are provided.

The text “The ISS film crew returned to Earth” (Pozdnyakov, 2021) tells about the successful completion of the space flight of cosmonaut O. Novitsky, actress Y. Peresild and a film director K. Shipenko, who for twelve days filmed episodes for the film *Challenge*. As *Euronews* points out, this is the first professional feature film shooting in orbit (Pozdnyakov, 2021).

The media text “Sakhalin turns into a green island” is dedicated to a reportage from the Sakhalin Region, which is expected to become the greenest region in Russia in the near future. They intend to achieve a carbon neutral balance by 2025. Laminaria can help to implement the plan (Alexandrova, 2021).

The story “Yekaterina Alyokhina: a female path to Michelin stars” (Kepinski, 2021) gives a positive image of a restaurant in the suburbs of Moscow with the concept of “zero waste”, which was opened about a year ago by a business lady, who became the first woman chef in Russia to get a Michelin star. The restaurant has received a star as a very good restaurant in its category and a green star as well, which is given to those that are seasonally aware, reduce food waste and use innovations caring about the future (Kepinski, 2021).

However, a fly in the ointment in this material is the opinion of a restaurant critic who was dissatisfied with the quality of food in the restaurant and whose confidence in the Michelin rating had been undermined. The critic claimed that one reason for giving the star was “politically correct ethics, since the chef of the restaurant is a woman” (Kepinski, 2021).

Can you verify the source?

The source of the text “Recognition of the Russian *Sputnik V*” vaccine: the result is obvious can be easily verified, because the article in *The Lancet* (Logunov et al., 2021) is freely accessible on the Internet, and it does make favorable conclusions about the *Sputnik-V* vaccine.

The source of the story “Success of *Sputnik V* in San Marino” was the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund and real facts about the total vaccination of San Marino residents with the Russian vaccine, this can be verified by numerous similar reports in Western and Russian media.

The reliability of the information in the text “Yuri Gagarin – forever the first one” is out of the question, this fact is enshrined in history.

Adequacy of the sources of materials “The ISS film crew returned to Earth”, “Sakhalin turns into a green island” and “Ekaterina Alekhina: a female path to Michelin stars” can also be verified by the news stories by other news agencies around the world.

Does the message appeal to logic or emotion?

These messages are more focused on logic and facts, although, of course, affect the emotional sphere.

What is the main purpose of a media text?

The main objective of these messages is to provide objective, fact-based information related to “Russian” topic.

Is there any information missing?

The article “Recognition of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine: the result is obvious” does not contain the opinions of the opponents of the Russian vaccine, and the article “The ISS film crew returned to Earth” does not reflect the views of opponents of filmmakers' flight into space.

Whose point of view does the message present?

These messages successfully represent the core concept of *Euronews* as an agency that provides objective and unbiased information to a mass audience.

Who will benefit if people accept this message? Who will lose?

As a result, supporters of objective and non-politicized information will benefit.

Assessment of the level of reliability of the media text: these media texts contain true and verified information.

Below are some examples of *Euronews* media texts related to Russia in a neutral key: “Moldova and Russia have agreed on gas supplies” (Pozdnyakov, 2021), “COVID-19 in Russia: a new highest record of deaths” (Alexandrova, 2021), “Scammers offering fake vaccination certificates have become more active in Russia” (Alexandrova, 2021), “Mockery on the verge of sadism: the Russian Foreign Ministry criticized the United States for issuing visas to Russians in Warsaw” (Pozdnyakov, 2021), “Vladimir Putin is a true friend of Israel” (Barsukov, 2021), “Nord Stream 2 is ready to launch” (Barsukov, 2021), “Latvia stops broadcasting Russian TV channels” (Kepinski, 2021).

Genre of media texts: materials about current events (in Russia), news texts.

Analysis of media texts for reliability (identification of the political, ideological position of the authors of the media text, identification of possible agencies of the media text, political and other groups who benefit from the media text):

What is the source of the information? What facts are presented in support of it?

The material “Moldova and Russia have agreed on gas supplies” (Pozdnyakov, 2021) provides real facts reflected in dozens of reports from news agencies around the world with links to Gazprom and the Moldovan government. The *Euronews* article also presents the opinion of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs J. Borrell, who “accused the Russian side of using the gas price dispute for political pressure on Moldova” (Pozdnyakov, 2021).

The text “COVID-19 in Russia: a new highest record of deaths” sets out the real facts that in October 2021 in Russia, against the background of an outbreak of coronavirus infection, the daily number of deaths from COVID-19 reached another maximum (Alexandrova, 2021). One of the sources of information for this media text is the opinion of the head of the temporary infectious diseases hospital R. Dmitrishin. *Euronews* notes that, “trying to stop the spread of the coronavirus, the Russian authorities declared eleven days non-working - from October 30 to November 7, and allowed the regions to vary these periods depending on the epidemic situation” (Alexandrova, 2021).

Just as neutrally *Euronews* presents the text “Scammers offering fake vaccination certificates have become more active in Russia” (Alexandrova, 2021). This media text accurately notes that the Russian authorities “urge Russians to get vaccinated, since this is the only way to defeat the virus,” but “the campaign to immunize the population is complicated not only by the reluctance of many to refuse vaccination, or to postpone it. Scammers have intensified their activities by posting advertisements of fake vaccination certificates and promising to enter the data into the State Services database for a fee. There is also medical personnel among violators of the law” (Alexandrova, 2021). The statement is sustained by opinion of the director of the National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology of the N.F. Gamalei.

Quite objectively, *Euronews* covers the US-Russian visa conflict in an article entitled “Mockery on the verge of sadism”: Russian Foreign Ministry criticized the U.S. for issuing visas to Russians in Warsaw” (Pozdnyakov, 2021). It is objectively noted here that “Moscow is outraged by the refusal to issue American visas in Russia after the demand of the Russian government to reduce the US diplomatic mission. Moscow criticized Washington for issuing US visas to Russians outside Russia. To draw up documents for entering the United States, Russian citizens need to contact the American Embassy in Warsaw, - says the new edition of the State Department's instructions on the work of diplomatic missions. ... The Russian Foreign Ministry called it “mockery on the verge of sadism”. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused American diplomats of

prolonged and consistent destruction of the system of rendering consular services in Russia created before them (Pozdnyakov, 2021). The media text cites the opinion of M. Zakharova that “the decision of the State Department no longer affects only tourism or cultural exchanges, but also families and relatives” (Pozdnyakov, 2021), as well as a brief history of the mutual confrontation between the United States and Russia from 2014 to our days.

The article “Vladimir Putin is a true friend of Israel” (Barsukov, 2021) provides a neutral overview of the brief visit to Russia by Israeli Prime Minister N. Bennett. Avoiding any evaluative comments, the *Euronews* channel quotes the key statements of V. Putin and N. Bennett, which they made at this meeting in Sochi.

The media text “Nord Stream 2 is ready to launch” (Barsukov, 2021) gives account of the facts that technical gas was pumped into the first string of the pipeline, which runs along the bottom of the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany. *Euronews* reports that “the Russian side is only waiting for permission from the German regulatory authorities ... Moscow calls on Berlin to respond as soon as possible, given the very small volumes of European reserves on the eve of winter. Several countries have already had to raise tariffs for heating and electricity. At the same time, the price of gas in Europe on Monday again exceeded \$ 1,100 per thousand cubic meters” (Barsukov, 2021). Objectively, *Euronews* informs the audience that, at the same time, there are some opponents of this project (for example, Naftogaz of Ukraine) (Barsukov, 2021).

In the *Euronews* text “Latvia stops broadcasting Russian TV channels” (Kepinski, 2021), it is reported that “the largest telecommunications company in Latvia, Tet, from February 1, 2021, will stop relaying five Russian TV channels on the territory of the republic ... within ten days it plans to make a decision to restrict the retransmission of the Russia-RTR TV channel on the territory of the republic. ... The Russian Foreign Ministry called the actions of the Latvian authorities against Russian-speaking journalists a punitive action and a blatant example of violating the foundations of a democratic society – freedom of the media and expression. The Russian Embassy in Latvia emphasized that the searches and criminal prosecution of the company's management “testify to only one thing - the desire of the local elite to restrict residents' access to alternative sources of information” (Kepinski, 2021).

Can you verify the source?

All sources of the above media texts are available for verification, the information presented is objective and based on real facts.

Does the message appeal to logic or emotion?

These messages primarily refer to audience's logical thinking.

What is the main purpose of a media text?

The main task of these media texts is to provide the *Euronews* audience with objective information related to international (related to Russia) political, business, and healthcare news.

Is there any information missing?

In media texts, in many cases, the points of view of different parties are presented, which creates the effect of a balanced presentation of materials.

Whose point of view does the message present?

These messages successfully stand for the core concept of *Euronews* as an agency that provides objective and unbiased information to a mass audience.

Who will benefit if people accept this message? Who will lose?

As a result, supporters of objective information will benefit, without the biased politicization of situations and conflicts.

Assessment of the level of reliability of the media text: the media texts contain objective and balanced information.

The third group of the analyzed *Euronews* media texts includes materials where manipulation techniques can be found. Unlike many Western media sources, *Euronews*, generally, does not slip into Russophobic propaganda and apparent distortion of facts. Media manipulations are used more subtly – in the form of deliberated omissions and selection. Examples can be found in: “NATO has decided how to restrain Russia” (Alexandrova, 2021), “The head of the Pentagon in Romania accused Russia” (Khachatryan, 2021), “Navalny is accused of extremism. He faces up to 10 years in prison” (Pozdnyakov, 2021), “Award to the Kremlin's opponent” (Sheludkova, 2021).

Media text genre: material on current events (in Russia), news text.

Analysis of the media text for reliability (identifying the political, ideological position of the authors of the media text, identifying possible agency of the media text, political and other groups who benefit from the media text):

What is the source of the information? What facts are presented in support of it?

In the article “NATO decided how to restrain Russia” it is reported that “NATO defense ministers assessed the threats from Russia's missile potential, decided to strengthen their air force and air defense, and agreed on a general defense plan” (Alexandrova, 2021)

The media text “The head of the Pentagon in Romania accused Russia” states that “the United States will continue to help strengthen the navies of Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Georgia to support their efforts to contain and defend against hostile Russian actions in the Black Sea region” (Khachatryan, 2021).

The sources of this material about NATO and the Pentagon are NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Pentagon Chief Lloyd Austin.

The news story “Navalny is accused of extremism. He faces up to 10 years in prison” repeats popular in European and American media propaganda clichés at the level of uncorroborated allegations (Novichok poison, etc.) and mixes them with actual points of fact (Navalny's charges of the criminal case Yves Rocher, street demonstrations in support for Navalny, etc.).

The media text “Prize to the Kremlin's Opponent” first states that “Alexei Navalny has become a laureate of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In Russia, an oppositionist is serving a sentence in a colony on a fraud case, and the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which he heads, has been recognized as an extremist and a foreign agent organization” (Sheludkova, 2021). And then the Muscovites' quotes selected by the *Euronews* correspondent follow: 1) “I believe that Alexei Navalny was absolutely justified in receiving this award, because he really did a lot to ensure that civil liberties took place”; 2) “I believe that he deserves this award, because he has been fighting for our rights, for the rights of people in general, for a very long time, and sits (is in prison) for the fact that many people are silent and cannot express their opinion on politics”; 3) “Even if you don't sympathize with him as a person, there is still some respect for what he has experienced, some sympathy from people, this is also important”; 4) “Of course he hasn't deserved the award. Why was it given to him? I don't see any of his feats, except for scandals” (Quoted in: Sheludkova, 2021).

Thus, the main sources of *Euronews* materials about A. Navalny are the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, statements by A. Navalny himself and some anonymous residents of Moscow.

Can you verify the source?

The statements of officials contained in the above materials can be easily verified, since they were widely replicated by the media of different countries, including video versions. The statements of anonymous sources are of course much more difficult to verify, most likely it is impossible.

Does the message appeal to logic or emotion?

To a greater extent, these materials are addressed to the audience's emotions.

What is the main purpose of a media text?

The main aim of these media texts is to shape the image of Russia as a state with non-legal practices that might become a military threat to the West.

Is there any information missing?

The media texts presenting the anti-Russian views of the NATO and Pentagon leaders lack any alternative information. Not only are the views of the Russian leadership on the topic of military confrontation not presented, but also any information about the number of US and NATO bases placed in the states directly bordering on Russia.

In the story about A. Navalny (Sheludkova, 2021), three positive opinions of Moscow residents about his activities and significance were intentionally selected, and only one negative one, so the *Euronews* audience may get the impression that the overwhelming number of Russians (75 % against 25 %) sympathize with opposition leader A. Navalny and his supporters.

Meanwhile, the reality of A. Navalny's reputation in Russia is utterly different. According to the results of the elections to the State Duma, the United Russia party received 49.82 % of the vote, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation – 18.93 %, the Liberal Democratic Party – 7.55 %, A Just Russia – Patriots – For the Truth – 7.46 %, New People – 5.32 %, Party of Pensioners – 2.45 %, Yabloko – 1.34 % (RBC, 2021). It is clear that the voters of United Russia, KPRF, LDPR, and Fair Russia have never been and never will be A. Navalny's electorate. And if Navalny's

opposition party had run in the 2021 elections, it could have probably only counted on a small fraction of the popular vote that eventually went to the New People and Yabloko parties. But taking into account that these parties also have an electorate determined to vote specifically for these, and not for other oppositionists, the logic leads to the fact that Navalny's supporters on an all-Russian scale cannot collect more than 5 % of the vote. However *Euronews* in its text, through omission of data and selection of opinions to quote, strives to create the illusion of Navalny's recognition and support by a significant part of the population in Russia.

Whose point of view does the message present?

These media texts represent the point of view of opponents of Russian foreign and domestic policy.

Who will benefit if people accept this message? Who will lose?

If the audience accepts the political position of these media texts uncritically, anti-Russian-minded political forces will win, and supporters of dialogue between Russia and the West will lose.

Assessment of the level of straightforwardness of the media text: the analyzed media texts contain a mixture of factual accounts and biased manipulative messages.

5. Conclusion

While the role of media in shaping public opinion and the value of critical perception of information is by now common knowledge, media agencies and educational institutions continually fail to confront this issue with the urgency it deserves. By examining 752 *Euronews* materials, related to Russia and published on the website in the Russian language in 2021, this study established that two-thirds of them contained objective information, not accompanied by manipulative techniques. Still about a third of *Euronews* materials contained some signs of manipulation and propaganda clichés. We need to consider the implications of such manipulations. These manipulations might contribute to social, international misunderstanding, making the gap between cultures and nations wider and sharper. Media literacy education, among other things, is designed to evaluate ourselves and our communities, to activate critical thinking, intelligence, and cross-cultural awareness in the spirit of mutual respect and looking for common values and attitudes to unite people.

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