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## Media Manipulation in the Modern French and Swiss Press

Anastasia Levitskaya <sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Taganrog Institute of Management and Economics, Russian Federation

### Abstract

Applying the anti-manipulation media education model that we have developed, we analyzed 70 articles on Russian topics in French and Swiss newspapers over the period 2018-2021. The findings show that only few of them feature objective information, not accompanied by manipulative techniques. Thus, many of articles in the French-language press contain, to one degree or another, signs of manipulation, bias and propaganda techniques. It is only in the case of the coverage of the Russian political opposition's activities that the article might have a positive key. In particular, it turns out that the most common manipulative techniques used by French-speaking journalists in their articles on the Russian topic are: half-truth/leaving out some information, plain folks, appeal to authority, selection/framing, loaded language aimed at emotional impact rather than relying on the facts' logic.

**Keywords:** media manipulation, media, press, France, Russia, fake news, analysis, media studies, media literacy, propaganda, ideology.

### 1. Introduction

The topic of media manipulation has become more than relevant in recent years. The drastic development of the Internet, in particular social networks, has added additional opportunities for the dissemination of fake news and other false information. Notably, traditional media go along with these trends as well. The modern press, as a rule, comes out in two versions - on paper and the Internet, and, as our study of the French language press has shown, it often resorts to manipulative methods of various kinds, pursuing certain political and economic goals.

### 2. Materials and methods

In the course of our research, we analyzed a number of scientific studies related to media manipulation and 70 articles from French-language newspapers that deal with the Russian topic.

### 3. Discussion

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

One should agree that "around the world, disinformation is spreading and becoming a more complex phenomenon based on emerging techniques of deception. Disinformation undermines

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [a.levitskaya@tmei.ru](mailto:a.levitskaya@tmei.ru) (A. Levitskaya)

human rights and many elements of good quality democracy; but counter-disinformation measures can also have a prejudicial impact on human rights and democracy. COVID-19 compounds both these dynamics and has unleashed more intense waves of disinformation, allied to human rights and democracy setbacks. Effective responses to disinformation are needed at multiple levels, including formal laws and regulations, corporate measures and civil society action" ([Colomina et al., 2021](#)).

In the study encompassing the year 2020, S. Bradshaw, H. Bailey and P.N. Howard identify three key trends of disinformation activity:

"1. Cyber troop activity continues to increase around the world. This year, we found evidence of 81 countries using social media to spread computational propaganda and disinformation about politics. This has increased from last years' report, in which we identified 70 countries with cyber troop activity.

2. Over the last year, social media firms have taken important steps to combat the misuse of their platforms by cyber troops. Public announcements by Facebook and Twitter between January 2019 and November 2020 reveal that more than 317,000 accounts and pages have been removed by the platforms. Nonetheless, almost US \$10 million has still been spent on political advertisements by cyber troops operating around the world.

3. Private firms increasingly provide manipulation campaigns. In our 2020 report, we found firms operating in forty-eight countries, deploying computational propaganda on behalf of a political actor. Since 2018 there have been more than 65 firms offering computational propaganda as a service. In total, we have found almost US \$60 million was spent on hiring these firms since 2009" ([Bradshaw et al., 2021](#)).

These disturbing trends emphasize the relevance of teaching and learning how to identify, counter media misinformation, and develop effective technologies for their analysis, especially for educational institutions.

#### **4. Results**

Having applied the model of anti-manipulation media educational activity developed by us ([Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021: 323-332](#)), we rely on the following challenging questions: What is the source of information? Can you verify the source? What is the main message? What facts are presented to support the main idea? Is there any information missing? What is the purpose of this media text? Who will benefit if people accept this message? Who will lose? Whose point of view does the media text present? Does it appeal to logic or emotion? With what effect? Which values and priorities are conveyed as a result? ([Wilson, 2019](#)).

Based on this model and problematic issues, we analyzed 70 articles on "Russian topic" in French-speaking French and Swiss newspapers for the period 2018-2021. The analysis shows that only few (5) of them contained objective information, not accompanied by manipulative techniques. Thus, most of the articles in the Francophone press contained, to one degree or another, bias and propaganda clichés. It is only in the case of the coverage of the Russian political opposition's activities that the article has a positive key.

For example, consider an article titled "Russia: *Sputnik V*, Launched Like a Rocket Vaccine, Causes Distrust", published in the newspaper *Libération* ([Jacques, 2021](#)).

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

*Analysis of the media text for credibility (identifying the political, ideological position of the authors of the media text, identifying possible mastermind 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?*

As sources of information, the article uses the opinions of an anonymous Russian nurse, a doctor and a representative of the Alliance of Doctors trade union close to the Russian opposition: "in fact, the *Sputnik V* vaccine, intended for certain age groups and the most vulnerable professions, is actually available for everyone. It comes in five-dose vials", – explains a nurse at a Moscow clinic, "and as soon as the bottle is opened, it should be used as soon as possible or thrown away". The young nurse went so far as to suggest that I, a non-priority foreigner, be vaccinated to prevent the loss of already opened doses, which indicates that those who wish are not fighting for places. ... The doses are not enough in relation to the population of the country, and too many in relation to the number of applicants, – said a representative of the Alliance of Doctors trade union close to the Russian opposition. – There are very few people who want to be vaccinated. Sometimes

you open a dose of vaccine, but only one or two people come in and the rest of the solution is thrown away unused. ... "Last week", says Nikolai, a doctor from a provincial town, "they came to us and asked who wants to be vaccinated. Naturally, there were not many people willing, only two or three people. I don't want that myself" ([Jacques, 2021](#)).

*Can you verify the source?*

It is impossible to verify the sources of information indicated in the *Libération* article, as they are presented in the text anonymously.

*Does the message refer to logic or emotion?*

This article is primarily addressed to the emotional sphere of readers, arguing that in addition to this vaccine, Russian society in general is very apprehensive about its national medication, and especially of the pharmaceutical industry. When there is a choice between imported pills, and their Russian counterparts, the population prefers foreign ones. This is even being used as a marketing argument by many private medical offices: the same will undoubtedly be the case when Western vaccines currently unavailable, will become extremely expensive in private clinics when allowed ([Jacques, 2021](#)).

*What is the main purpose of a media text?*

The main objective of the article is to discredit Russian medicine in general and the *Sputnik V* vaccine, in particular, since, according to the French journalist, even among Russian doctors who are most susceptible to coronavirus infection and have priority for obtaining a vaccine, there is widespread mistrust. It makes the reader suspect that there is a reason behind the unwillingness to get vaccinated of people living in the country that is proud of the fact that it was the first one in the world to certify its national vaccine.

This was facilitated by the lack of quarantine and strict sanitary measures, as well as the underestimated mortality statistics until recently, which do not create a sense of emergency among the population. But, above all, despite all the triumph that accompanied the announcement of *Sputnik V*, there is great mistrust of this vaccine. ... The original sin of the *Sputnik V* vaccine continues to haunt it: after the euphoria of its official recognition this summer, it quickly became clear that it was made prematurely, and the third phase of clinical trials has not even begun ([Jacques, 2021](#)).

*Is there any information missing?*

The article only marginally mentions that *Sputnik V* turned out to be quite effective for vaccinated Russians. And there is no information at all about the opponents of vaccination in France and other Western European countries, although in fact, there are quite a few of them (see, for example, a publication on this topic by the France-Presse news agency ([France-Presse, 2021](#))).

*Whose point of view does the message present?*

This article clearly represents the opinion of the opponents of the Russian vaccine and lobbies the interests of manufacturers of Western antiviral vaccines.

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

If readers take the stand of the article's author, the manufacturers of Western antiviral vaccines will benefit, as indirectly the article supports the political decision not to certify the Russian vaccine in Europe.

*Assessment of the media text's credibility:* the facts are carefully mixed with biased selection, relying on the "authority" of anonymous experts and "plain folks" technique.

*Conclusion:* the media text contains a mixture of factual information and manipulation techniques.

Similar manipulative techniques can be found in the article "Covid-19: the controversial fate of the Russian *Sputnik V* vaccine" published in the newspaper *Le Monde* ([Mandraud, Ayache, 2021](#)).

*Media text genre:* article 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 masterminds 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 to support it?*

The main source of information is the opinion of two journalists of the newspaper *Le Monde*, who claim that the Russian vaccine against SARS-CoV-2, which was touted by the head of the Kremlin as the best in the world, has to fight for recognition. The *Sputnik V* vaccine – a name that refers to the first Soviet satellite launched into space and the letter V for a symbol of victory – has so far been adopted by only a handful of developing countries attracted by its cost – less than \$ 10

(about euro 8.30) per dose; defending requires two doses, as is the case with its Western competitors, while maintaining close ties with the Kremlin. ... The *Sputnik V* vaccine, developed by the National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology ... under real conditions suffers from the speed of its development. Its approval by the Russian authorities even before the scientific data was published and after limited testing undermined its credibility. Everything had to be done quickly, since Vladimir Putin first of all saw in this a powerful geopolitical tool for competing with the West. As a result, the spread of the *Sputnik V* vaccine primarily follows the influence curve of the Kremlin networks ([Mandraud, Ayache, 2021](#)).

*Can you verify the source?*

The article provides a number of real facts that are easy to verify (V. Putin's support for the Russian vaccine, its cost, the lack of recognition of *Sputnik V* by the leading Western countries).

*Does the message appeal to logic or emotion?*

The article mostly refers to the emotions of the audience, although it contains a number of well-known facts.

*What is the message of a media text?*

The political, ideological standpoint of the authors of the article is to discredit the actions of the Russian authorities (accusations of haste in the development of a vaccine, in the use of the vaccine as a geopolitical instrument of influence on the "third world countries", etc.). This stance undoubtedly meets the political and economic interests of the governments of leading Western countries, the interests of Western manufacturers of antiviral vaccines.

*Is there any information missing?*

The article does not say anything about the shortcomings of Western vaccines, nor about their testing period, as well as about the certain groups of people protests (including France) against vaccination, although there are many of them ([Euronews, 2021](#); [France-Presse, 2021](#); [VOA news, 2021](#) and many other authoritative media sources).

*Whose point of view does the message present?*

This article clearly represents the opinion of opponents of the Russian anti-virus vaccine and lobbies the interests of manufacturers of Western antiviral vaccines.

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

Obviously, if readers support the position of the authors of the article, the manufacturers of Western antiviral vaccines will benefit. In addition, the article will add to the flow of excuses not to certify the Russian vaccine in the West.

*Assessment of the level of reliability of the media text:* the facts are intertwined with biased ones, framing, plain folks and scapegoat techniques are used.

*Conclusion:* media text contains a mixture of factual information and manipulation techniques.

An article in *Libération* with the eloquent title "Russia: the authorities are to blame for the Covid outbreak" ([Markovic, 2021](#)) is also devoted to the topic of a pandemic and vaccination.

*Media text genre: article 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 masterminds 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 main source of information is the biased opinion of a journalist from the *Libération* newspaper, who persuades the readers that facing the rapidly growing numbers of infection and deaths from Covid-19, the Russian authorities have announced a number of measures. But this is too little and too late for a country with a very low level of vaccination ... "Measures announced in a dispersed manner over several days generally produce the effect of half measures ... This method is symptomatic of the manner in which the Russian government manages a pandemic: minimal and without a coherent strategy... A strategy like this could make sense if it were accompanied by mass vaccinations, but the people in the homeland of *Sputnik V*, proud to be the first in the world to officially register a vaccine against coronavirus, continue to avoid vaccinations. Only 35 % of the population received at least one dose of vaccine ... The responsibility is on the Russian propagandists. For 20 years they have been spreading conspiracy messages, discrediting any form of public involvement in political life, thereby creating conditions for the current vaccination fiasco. Discrediting Western vaccines was only reflected on the image of Russian vaccines. Explaining the failures of *Sputnik V*, which has not yet been approved by WHO or the European Union, by a

conspiracy of pharmaceutical companies, certainly Western and therefore Russophobic, could only reinforce the idea that vaccines are not so much a tool for saving lives as a geopolitical tool against which better to stay aloof. With enthusiasm broadcasting conspiracy theories about the coronavirus created by the American armed forces, one can only open the door for strengthening conspiracy theory to such an extent that a quarter of Russians today believe that the statistics of deaths from Covid are untrue, while they are not underestimated, but overestimated"(Markovic, 2021)

*Can you verify the source?*

A number of facts presented in the article are true (the relatively low degree of vaccination of the Russian population at the time of publication of the article in the second half of October 2021; non-recognition of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine by the WHO or the European Union; inconsistency of some measures) and are easily verified by official data. However, these real facts are manipulatively mixed in the article with political attacks against the course of the Russian government, while completely ignoring Western sources claiming the artificial origin of Covid-19, created with American money in a biological laboratory in Wuhan (see: Kessler, 2021; Lerner, Hvistendahl, 2021 and many others), etc.

*Does the message refer to logic or emotion?*

The article is primarily addressed to the emotional sphere of the audience, with the expectation that it lacks critical thinking and the skills of comparative analysis of facts and trends.

*What is the media text aimed at?*

The political, ideological pose of the author of the article is to discredit the actions of the Russian authorities (standard accusations of haste in the development of a vaccine, in the use of a vaccine as a geopolitical instrument of influence, in the absence of an effective plan for antiviral actions). This position undoubtedly meets the political and economic interests of the governments of leading Western countries, the interests of Western manufacturers of antiviral vaccines.

*Is there any information missing?*

This article does not say a word about the similar difficulties that the leading Western countries have experienced and are still facing when implementing anti-Covid measures, and there is no information about the statistics of Covid in the USA, Great Britain, France and Germany and other countries.

Nevertheless, according to BBC data as of the end of October 2021 (BBC News, 2021):

- in the United States, the total number of infected with Covid-19 reached 45.7 million, of which 0.7 million died, that is, the mortality rate was 226.1 per 100 thousand inhabitants;
- in the UK, the total number of infected with Covid-19 reached 9.1 million, of which 0.14 million died, that is, the death rate was 210.4 per 100 thousand inhabitants;
- in Russia, the total number of infected with Covid-19 reached 8.4 million, of which 0.2 million died, that is, the mortality rate was 162.2 per 100 thousand inhabitants;
- in France, the total number of infected Covid-19 reached 7.2 million, of which 0.12 million died, that is, the death rate was 175.4 per 100 thousand inhabitants;
- in Italy, the total number of infected Covid-19 reached 4.8 million, of which 0.13 million died, that is, the death rate was 219.1 per 100 thousand inhabitants;
- in Germany, the total number of infected with Covid-19 reached 4.6 million, of which 0.09 million died, that is, the death rate was 115.2 per 100 thousand inhabitants.

Thus, despite the high incidence of Covid-19 in Russia, in terms of mortality per 100 thousand inhabitants, as of the end of October 2021 the United States and Great Britain, France and Italy were ahead of Russia.

*Whose point of view does the message present?*

This article clearly represents the views of opponents of Russian politics and the Russian antioxidant vaccine and lobbies for the interests of Western anti-Russian politicians.

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

Obviously, if readers support the position of the authors of the article, then anti-Russian Western politicians and manufacturers of Western antiviral vaccines will benefit.

*Assessment of the level of frankness of the media text:* biased selection, and anti-Russian propaganda are part of the submerged message of the media text.

*Conclusion:* the media text contains a mixture of real information and manipulation techniques.

An article in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* titled "Moscow will never concede Crimea but fears sanctions" ([Barluet, 2021](#)) is devoted to an acute political problem, due to which, since 2014, Western countries have imposed a number of sanctions on Russia.

*Media text genre:* article on current events in the world and 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 commissioner 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 journalist of the *Le Figaro* newspaper mentions a number of experts who express different points of view on the legal status of Crimea. For example, "the most serious consequence of the Crimean Platform will be putting the Crimean issue back on to the international agenda, says political analyst Alexander Bedritsky. Although this topic is not very relevant, its resumption in the news could have the effect of consolidating and extending the sanctions policy, which was decided after the events of 2014. "From the point of view of the stated goals of the platform, such as the de-occupation of Crimea, this event is absolutely fruitless," another expert confirms, associate professor of the Department of Religious Studies of the Taurida Academy of the Crimean Federal University, political scientist Nikolai Kuzmin. "But various countries can use the "Crimean Platform" and participate in it as a subject of political bargaining with Russia", the expert adds ([Barluet, 2021](#)).

*Can you verify the source?*

Due to the fact that the article mentions the specific names of the experts (and their positions, places of work), it is possible to contact them in case one would want to, so that they could confirm the correctness of the citation of their opinions in *Le Figaro*. The author of the article draws the conclusion that although "Russia will never cede Crimea and will hold on to this position like cement for the foundation. It even serves as the basis for consensus in society" ([Barluet, 2021](#)), Russia still fears new Western sanctions. The article does not provide any real arguments in favor of such concerns.

*Does the message refer to logic or emotion?*

The article appeals to logic rather than emotion.

*What is the main purpose of a media text?*

The main objective of the article is to convince the audience that "international mobilization around Crimea worries Moscow, since this topic is at the heart of the national narrative promoted by Vladimir Putin. A narrative praising a great country that has raised its head and maintains its international status despite the hardships embodied in the image of the West" ([Barluet, 2021](#)), and Russia ultimately fears Western sanctions.

*Is there any information missing?*

This article in *Le Figaro* is a vivid example of maintaining the facade of balanced information, when the views of Russian officials, pro-Russian experts, and not just the opposition are brought to the readers of the newspaper. However, the article is missing the key information provided already in its title - any factual evidence of the Russian government fearing new Western sanctions related to Crimea.

*Whose point of view does the message present?*

This article was written not from the point of view of anti-Russian "political hawks", but rather reflects the point of view of more moderate Western politicians who do not sympathize with Russia, but also do not reject the possibility of having a dialogue with it.

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

It can be assumed that as a result of the article's impact, political and social actors that neither have sympathy for Russia, nor belong to its aggressive opponents, will benefit.

*Assessment of the level of frankness of the media text:* the estimated level of reliability of the media text is quite high, but still it contains some manipulative methods of selection and unsubstantiated conclusions.

*Conclusion:* the media text contains a significant part of reliable information and well-grounded expert opinions, but at the same time contains elements of media manipulation.

The Crimean topic is also touched upon in the article "From Crimea with Love: A Trip to Vladimir Putin's Landmark Land", published in the newspaper *Le Monde* ([Vitkine, 2021](#)).

*Media text genre:* article 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 commissioners 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 French journalist in his article cites the conflicting opinions of several people, including those who support the reunification of Crimea with Russia: "Having driven over the bridge, we find ourselves in Kerch. From the point of view of Ukraine and international law, we have just illegally entered the territory of Ukraine. But, according to the director of city museums, Lyudmila Umrikhina, we are entering "the oldest city in Russia". ... Lyudmila Umrikhina reminds us with ardor and repeats, like a mantra, that "Crimea has always been Russian". As if in support of her words, on the outskirts of the city, there is a military base in plain sight, and air defense systems ... Before our departure, Anna Kolin Lebedeva, a French expert on the post-Soviet space, warned us: "Crimea became Russian primarily due to its principles of operation, its inclusion in political schemes and distribution channels of money. As in other regions, the people in charge are given complete freedom of action to enrich themselves, and in return they guarantee control over the region". ... In the opinion of 49-year-old Alexander Gorny, "a dream" is the confidence to participate in a fabulous collective adventure. On the day Crimeans voted to reunite with Russia in a hasty referendum in March 2014 following armed intervention, the Moscow businessman drank two bottles of cognac. To celebrate the "rectification of historical injustice" that arose from the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954" ([Vitkine, 2021](#)).

*Are the journalist's sources reliable?*

If the interlocutor of the journalist has indicated not only the surname, but also his/her position, verification of the source's opinions is possible.

*Does the message appeal to logic or emotion?*

Quotes of the interviewed people are emotionally colored, overall, the article in the newspaper *Le Monde* has a dominant emotional connotation.

*What is the media text aimed at?*

The main objective of the article is to convince the audience that although "it has been seven years since the fate of Crimea turned the other way, which led to a shift in relations between Moscow and the West. "Annexed" for some, "reunited" with the motherland for others, the peninsula that belonged to Ukraine joined Russia in March 2014. The positions remained motionless, but the reality of this territory with grandiose landscapes is inexorably changing, and so does the life of Crimeans" ([Vitkine, 2021](#)), but changes are moving towards supporting the Russian population and infringing on the rights of the Crimean Tatar minority ([Vitkine, 2021](#)),

*Is there any information missing?*

The article lacks any facts of infringement of the rights of the Crimean Tatars.

*Whose point of view does the message present?*

This article reflects the point of view of Western politicians who do not sympathize with Russia, but do not resort to outright confrontation.

*Who will benefit if readers accept this message? Who will lose?*

It can be assumed that as a result of the article's impact, political and social actors that neither have sympathy for Russia, nor belong to its aggressive opponents, will benefit.

*Assessment of the level of trustworthiness of the media text:* the article gives readers an opinion that Crimea remains a controversial issue, the author cites viewpoints of several parties.

*Conclusion:* the media text contains a number of real facts, interspersed with unsupported allegation that the rights of the Tatar population are being infringed on in Crimea.

An article published in *Le Temps* newspaper titled "American-style murder in a Russian school" is dedicated to the tragic fact of a mass shooting committed by an 18-year-old student at the Polytechnic College in Kerch ([Grynszpan, 2018](#)).

*Media text genre:* article on current events in the world (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 commissioners 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 source of information for the journalist from *Le Temps* was the real facts, widely covered by the Russian media.

*Can you verify the source?*

The facts can be verified through numerous television reports and other media reports from major news agencies.

*Does the message refer to logic or emotion?*

The article is largely addressed to the emotions of the reader.

*What is the main purpose of a media text?*

The main task of the text is: 1) to convince readers that Russia is "adopting" the worst American experience, where for many decades the so-called "school shooters" have killed dozens of innocent people; 2) remind once again that "the Crimean peninsula was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014" ([Grynszpan, 2018](#)). Noteworthy, in the title of the article, the author uses the adjective "Russian".

*Is there any information missing?*

The article does not provide any grounding for the allegation of the "annexation" of Crimea by Russia.

*Whose point of view does the article give?*

This article reflects the point of view of Western politicians opposed to Russia.

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

It can be assumed that as a result of the impact on the audience of this article, forces that are far from sympathy for Russia will benefit.

*Assessment of the level of trustworthiness of the media text:* the article is trustworthy as far as the tragic event coverage, however there is bias by word choice and omission of facts in the reference to the 2014 Crimea history.

*Conclusion:* the article contains a description of the real fact that happened in Kerch, but the reference to this specific location (Crimea) is then used by the journalist for political purposes of anti-Russian propaganda.

An article published in *Le Temps* entitled "Vladimir Putin's Red Line" ([Grynszpan, 2021](#)) is a commentary on the speech of the President of Russia, which he delivered in April 2021.

*Media text genre:* article on current events in the world (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 masterminds 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 source of information is V. Putin's speech: "The President's Message to the Federal Assembly" on April 21, 2021 ([Putin, 2021](#)), the text of which was published in the Russian press.

*Can you verify the source?*

The source of information can be checked on the official website kremlin.ru ([Putin, 2021](#)).

*Does the message refer to logic or emotion?*

*Le Temps*'s comments on the President's speech are largely emotional.

*What is the main purpose of a media text?*

One of the objectives of the *Le Temps* article is to minimize the significance of the Russian President's speech: "During his annual address to the Russian political elite, Vladimir Putin took a revengeful pose. However, in the context of tighter than ever relations with Ukraine and the West, he did not announce any innovative foreign policy decisions" ([Grynszpan, 2021](#)). But the main objective of the article is to emphasize the aggressiveness of Russian political intentions with a quote, using the following phrases of V. Putin: "But I hope that no one will think about crossing the "red line" with regard to Russia. We ourselves will determine in each specific case where it will be drawn... Russia's response will be asymmetrical, swift and tough" ([Putin, 2021](#)). Grynszpan comments that "here the head of state recalled his methods. Asymmetry implies unpredictability; speed is contrasted with the slowness of democracies where decisions are negotiable; finally, rigidity is the characteristic with which he intends to act. Although he did not specify where the red line is, the most obvious and relevant of them is certainly the hypothetical accession of Ukraine to NATO" ([Grynszpan, 2021](#)). Remarkably, the article's author omits the following phrase in Russian President's speech (which should be right there where ellipsis is, before the words "Russia's response..."): "We really want to maintain good relations with all those engaged in international communication, including, by the way, those with whom we have not been getting along lately, to put it mildly. We really do not want to burn bridges" ([Putin, 2021](#)).

The other points of V. Putin's speech in an article published in *Le Temps* are merely mentioned, and are coloured with irony: "Nine-tenths of the president's speech were devoted to domestic issues ... Vladimir Putin described a perfectly governed country where the state will pay a one-time additional allowance to large or single-parent families" ([Grynszpan, 2021](#)).

*Is there any information missing?*

The article contains no information about NATO's actual actions against Russia and about many other political aspects related to the topic of NATO, Ukraine and Russia.

*Whose point of view does the message present?*

This article clearly reflects the point of view of Western politicians negatively biased against Russia.

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

It can be assumed that this article might reinforce anti-Russian political moods.

*Assessment of the level of trustworthiness of the media text:* the article does not strive to be objective, often the phrases of actual text of the Russian President's speech are used out of context.

*Conclusion:* the article contains biased and manipulative comments on the President's Address to the Federal Assembly.

The article "Russia: Can the Regime Survive Without Putin?", published in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, is an interview of political expert Hadrien Desuin with a journalist Victor Rouart.

*Media text genre:* interview about the political situation in Russia.

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

*What is the source of the information? Are there any supporting evidence?*

The only source of information in the article is the political expert Hadrien Desuin, his opinions are left by the journalist practically without comment.

*Can you verify the source?*

There is probably an opportunity to address Hadrien Desuin himself to confirm his opinion given in this interview.

*Does the message appeal to logic or emotion?*

To a large extent, the text in *Le Figaro* is directed to the emotions of the audience.

*What is the purpose of a media text?*

The main objective of the article is to convince readers of *Le Figaro* that "the Russian people do support their president's policy, but less and less" ([Desuin, 2021](#)).

*Is there any information missing?*

Through stern selection, this interview mainly selected information negatively biased against Russian politics: "Since European countries have more or less aligned their position with that of the United States, the latter will have to follow Joe Biden in his crusade for the democratization of Russia. ... The United States are urging Ukraine to resume the reconquest of Donbass and, to a certain extent, to raise the issue of Crimea again. The US military will not engage in intense frontline conflict against the Russian military. Given Russia's nuclear deterrent forces, the consequences would be too risky. Thus, the Ukrainian game of the U.S. is an indirect strategy that involves logistical and financial support" ([Desuin, 2021](#)).

*Whose point of view does the message feature?*

This interview reflects the point of view of anti-Russian political forces, which, however, admit that in Russia "a palace coup remains unlikely, and the return of Navalny and his videos ... was nothing more than a storm in a teacup" ([Desuin, 2021](#)).

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

It can be assumed that as a result of the impact on the audience of this article, anti-Russian political circles will benefit.

*Assessment of the level of trustworthiness of the media text:* the article contains an opinion of a political commentator, so it is by definition cannot be fully objective.

*Conclusion:* the media text contains clearly visible manipulative features: selection, ellipsis, "plain folks".

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical model of the anti-manipulation media literacy activities that we have developed ([Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021: 323-332](#)), we have analyzed 70 articles on Russian topics in

French and Swiss newspapers over the period 2018-2021 with the help of guiding questions. The findings show that only few of them contain objective information, not accompanied by manipulative techniques. Thus, most of articles in the French-language press contain to various degree signs of manipulation and propaganda clichés. It is only in the case of the coverage of the Russian political opposition's activities that the article has a positive key. In particular, the most common manipulative techniques used by French-speaking journalists in their articles on the Russian topic are: half-truth/leaving out some information, plain folks, appeal to authority, selection/framing, bias by word choice, loaded language aimed at emotional impact rather than relying on the facts' logic, bias through selection and omission. In general, the articles under study are aimed to support a particular perspective on Russia and its policy, and to reinforce the EU political actors' attitude towards the Russian Federation in masses. The survey carried out by Ifop (French social polls institute) in December 2018 provides the following information: "An overwhelming majority of French people (81 %) consider the situation of public freedoms in Russia unsatisfactory" ([Dabi, Dubrulle, 2018](#)), an opinion, which the vast majority of the French people could only gain through media coverage.

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