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The Rise of Russian Soft Power

- *A media frame analysis of the Russia-based
channel RT*



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Preface

This thesis marks the end of 5 life-changing and transformative years of study. During these years I have experienced personal growth, acquired academic skills and made friendships for life. For that I'm forever grateful. Writing this thesis has been both a challenge and rewarding. Thankfully, I've been surrounded by people giving me the encouragement and moral support needed to reach my academic goals.

First, I would like to dedicate a token of appreciation to my family. Thank you for always being supportive of my academic work and showing your love and compassion when going through hardship. Next, I would like to thank my tutor Daniel Silander for your guidance and valuable insights. Not only during this thesis, but for being a mentor ever since I started my program studies at Linnæus University back in the fall of 2014. Lastly, I would like to express gratitude to my student colleagues, with whom I've shared this academic journey. Our seminar discussions have cultivated my passion for political science and pushed me to reach higher knowledge.

This thesis is a product of my passion for political science and questions related to international relations in particular. In today's society, media has come to play a crucial role in packaging and delivering messages to the public. It is therefore imperative to gather knowledge of how authoritarian states such as Russia, attempt to use media to influence the minds of an international audience.



Abstract

In the information age, media has come to be recognized as a credible mean and foreign policy tool to pursue soft power. Authoritarian states like Russia are competing in the realm of ideas through state-funded news outlets such as Russia Today (RT). This by reaching out to global and foreign public spheres and by reporting on an alternative reality of events, issues and problems. This thesis studies the role of the media news outlet RT as a mean to promote Russian soft power. This with a focus on how the channel attempts to persuade and attract an international audience based on the construction of a compelling narrative. To approach this theme empirically, a media frame analysis is conducted utilizing five news frames including; morality, human interest, responsibility, conflict and economic consequences. The overall results suggest that RT attracts and persuades largely by providing an alternative Russian perspective on events, issues or problems. It attracts by appealing both in the direction of the western- and eastern world. It appeals to the west by emphasizing how the West needs Russia to find answers to the pressing issues in global politics. It appeals to the east by suggesting an alternative model of development. RT attempts to persuade are made through the construction of counter-narratives which delegitimizes the Western approach in international affairs. The channel devotes efforts to boost these narratives by selective news porting and handpicking statements made by intellectuals from the perceived “other” western camp.

Key words: Soft power, Russian-Ukrainian relations, Crimea, Russia Today (RT), content analysis, media frame analysis,



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1. Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the world was fueled by optimism and confidence in securing a better world for the future. Allowing American scientist such as Francis Fukuyama to anticipate the ‘end of history’ and the victory of liberal democracy. However, 20 years later, the world remains a complex and fractured place, where ideologies have not vanished (Geoghegan 2014:3).

In the post-Cold War era, three development periods can be identified in the world. The first one representing the ‘democratic surge’. A period which began with the “third wave” of democracy in the mid-1970 and had its momentum into the first half-decade of the new century and subsequently began to slow down in the mid-2000 (Diamond, Plattner & Walker 2016:1).

The second one, could be described as a period of “the democratic backlash”. A period where authoritarian regimes reacts to democratic ideas and norms spreading into their front yard. A period characterized by a revival of authoritarianism and repressive regimes. Repressive regimes that starts to crack down on popular uprisings among the public and to limit the free voices of civil society groups and the media to retrieve domestic control (Diamond, Plattner & Walker 2016:216 pp.3-4). During this period, freedom house records a decline in global average scores for political rights and civil liberties for over 10 consecutive years (Freedom House 2019).

The third and the most recent trend in the post-Cold war context is one that has emerged from the period of ‘democratic backlash’. It is a period where the authoritarian states are more coordinated and have taken more decisive steps to contain democracy on a global level. In a way, it's fair to say that ‘*authoritarianism has now gone global*’ (Diamond, Plattner & Walker 2016:3-4, 216).

During the decades that followed the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia, its successor, saw a resurged ambition of political strategy. This embodied in the rise of ‘Putinism’, a state political system formed under the new leadership of Vladimir Putin. A leadership aimed at reviving Russia as a great nation, filled with prestige and great power status, equal to that of China and the United States (US) (Lindley-French 2014.36,38). During the Cold War era security had foremost been understood through *hard power*. Reflected in the bipolar arms race between US and Soviet, between West and East. However, what ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the defeat against 'western' *soft power*. A war in which



'western' ideas and norms prevailed; constituting the most likely reason why Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev eventually implemented the reforms of glasnost and perestroika (Rothman 2011:58).

Today, Russia still uses *hard power* to acquire its needs. Evident in Russian War on Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the ongoing protracted conflict in eastern Ukraine (Lindley-French 2014:38-39). However, the Russian strategy carried out is different from the past, combining *hard power* with *soft*, causing confusion in the west.

The new Russian strategy has been difficult for the west to predict and is different from that of the Soviet. As Russian journalism Igor Yakovenko once said, “*If Stalin was 80 percent violence and 20 percent propaganda, then Putin is 80 percent propaganda and 20 percent violence*” (Pomerantsev 2016:174,184).

Today, authoritarian regimes like Russia, use new means of projecting power beyond their borders influencing international public and investing heavily in their own soft power instruments in order to compete with democracy in the realm of ideas. In the learning process, authoritarian states have learned both how to adopt similar strategies of the west and combine them with its own anti-democratic toolkit. It has turned the very concept of integration, historically assigned to the benign forces of globalization and the strategy of the west, against the west itself. The antidemocratic toolkit these days takes the form of simulated NGO's, think tanks, election monitors, and news media, where the autocrats are actively seeking to undermine democracy from within. To paraphrase Christopher Walker, executive director of the International Forum: “*Authoritarian regimes now exploit the opportunities presented by integration with the west and have set to undermine the very institutions and arenas that welcomed them*” (Walker 2016:216, 230).

With the information-revolution, controlling media has become a considerable instrument for the political regime of authoritarian regimes to maintain its grip on power. Under the centralized rule of Vladimir Putin, the Russian government in Kremlin has been able to run both television and politics like one scripted reality show. Today ruled by a government that uses a mix of political technology, fluid ideology, and corruption, not only domestically but also in handling foreign relations. In addition, it has established an international television broadcaster (RT) that provides an international forum for uniting the different groups that the Kremlin works with. As Latvian Scholar Janis Berzins describes the modern Russian warfare. “It has moved from “a war in the physical environment to a war in human consciousness and in cyberspace” (Pomerantsev 2016:174,177,179, 181,184).



1.1 Aim and research questions

Russia Today (RT) has been devoted considerable little attention in scholarly research compared to western international broadcasters such as BBC. This despite RT being the second most watched international broadcaster in the US 2010 and expanding globally on various social media platforms. Hutchings et al. (2015) suggests this reflects RT's status as a malign news provider, worthy only of contempt and not suitable for study. However, RT's expanding influence on the global media landscape suggests the need of further investigation (Hutchings et al. 2015:632).

The aim of this study is therefore to develop an understanding of how Russia uses state-controlled media: RT as a soft power instrument in the context of Ukrainian-Russian relations. The ambition is to create an understanding of how the regime depicts social reality by studying events, issues or problems related to the Crimean conflict. The question guiding the empirical approach of this thesis is how dominant patterns in RT news coverages fits into the idea of soft power. As soft power ultimately relies on the ability to 'attract and persuade', doing so will always rely on framing compelling narratives and communicating them effectively (McClory 2019:116).

- a. *How does RT make attempts of influencing its audience through persuasion and attraction?*
- b. *How does RT construct a compelling narrative?*

1.2 Disposition

The disposition will provide a guide for the reader and an overview of the thesis different parts. The next section provides a short description of method and material employed in the thesis (1.4). Following this, a theoretical framework will present the thesis theoretical premises divided by power typology (2.) and means of communicating soft power (2.2). The former begins with hard power (2.1.1) followed by normative power (2.1.2), civilian power (2.1.3) and finished with the thesis central concept of soft power (2.1.4). In (2.1.5) a short section of authoritarian understanding of soft power will be outlined. Next, means of communicating soft power is presented, beginning with public diplomacy (2.3.1) followed by propaganda (2.3.2) and lastly media and news reporting (2.3.3). Following this a chapter of background is provided moving the thesis from the broader to the narrower Russian context (3.). This chapter starts with a subsection of the soft power context of Russia (3.1) followed by Russia's soft power strategies (3.2), RT news network (3.3) and previous research review (3.4). Next the methodological premises of the thesis are outlined beginning with



methodological difficulties (4.1) followed by the soft power approach chosen to study RT. In section (4.2) common news frames relevant frames to study soft power will be identified. Next, the theoretical concept of soft power, and the methodological tools of news frames, will be operationalized into empirical indicators. Beginning with news frames (4.3) followed by soft power resources (4.4). Next follows a section of the choice of deductive approach (4.5), the connection between framing, narrative and soft power (4.6) and the process of selection and collection of data (4.7). In the analysis (5.) the main results are presented. The research results are structured according to the normative and analytical frames. This to distinguish how events, issues and problems are framed and forms a dominant pattern in RT news coverage (5.1.1). This pattern will then be used to study how RT's make attempts to persuade and attract its audience by using soft power resources (5.2.1). The discussion in chapter (6.) will utilize these results to make inferences between the empirical data and the wider theoretical body of research. This to provide a more comprehensive base for answering the thesis main question "*a) How does RT make attempts of influencing its audience through persuasion and attraction?*" This question will be answered by discussing *b) How does RT construct a compelling narrative?* The final section (7.) will conclude the thesis principal argument, based on the main findings and arguments of the discussion.

1.3 Method and Material

This thesis is based on the object of study: Russia Today (RT). The method used is a *media frame analysis* of published content on RT's website - RT.com. The main focus of this study will be of studying events, issues or problems in RT articles retrieved from the search word 'Crimea' (during the period 5 Sep - 11 Dec 2019). This thesis will utilize five news frames of *morality, human interest, responsibility, conflict* and *economic consequences*. These will provide ground to identify a dominant pattern in the RT news content. The pattern will then be used to analyze how RT uses soft power resources to persuade and attract. These news frames contain coded questions developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and have been found to be among the most common and discussed within previous literature (Semetko & Valkenburg: 2000:99). Important to underline is that the coded questions were not originally used for the purpose to study soft power. However, in this study these frames will be motivated by their relevance to study soft power by their normative and analytical elements (see section 4.2) (Rothman 2011:54). These frames are based on several questions items and will be used to capture different aspects of how RT attempts to persuade and attracts through storytelling.



2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Power typology

Historically “power” was understood as resources, particularly based on military force. The international game of politics was played between great powers who displayed the most military power. Power was considered property of states and constituted measurable units according to well-defined factors. These resources would include; population, territory, wealth, armies, and navies. However, in the second half the 20th century this notion was increasingly challenged by scholars in several disciplines such as philosophy, social science, economics and political science who rather saw power as relational (Carlsnaes et.al 2013: 274-275, 287, 291). In a changed world of growing interdependence and technological advance, new factors arise for states to control its external environment. While military sources remain the ultimate form of power in a self-help system. The use of force had become more costly for great powers than it was in earlier centuries and other instruments such as; communication, organizational- and institutional skills and manipulating of interdependence had become more important (Nye 1990:157-158,164). Now, there seems to be two significant power shifts in the world, one being an ongoing *transition* of power distribution among states towards a multipolar world, another one being a *diffusion* of power, away from states to non-state actors. This means more and more activities tend to take place outside the control of even the most powerful states (Janson 2018:13). Nye (1990) notes that power is passing from the “capital rich to the “information rich”. A shift seems to occur away from power that lies in concrete sources to intangible ones (Nye 1990:153-158, 164).

This problematizes the power concept, earlier treated as if resources inhibited power itself. Now raising the question “power over what?”. Power as a resource now implied something of its usefulness in getting others to change their behavior. Power was instead treated as causal, multidimensional and based on an actual or potential relation between people, groups, or states - this rather than being a property of any of them. This conception of power was rather based on the ability of an actor to change the behavior of another one. A change of behavior which would broadly include beliefs, attitudes, preferences, opinions, expectations and/or predispositions to act (Carlsnaes et.al 2013:274-278). Now, there are different ways in which an international actor can be classified in terms of power, based on the ability to affect others to get the outcome one prefers. This can be accomplished through different means such as *coercion*, *payment*, *attraction* or *persuasion* (Nye 2017:1). Among different power sources available to actors are *hard-* and *soft power* (Nye 1990), *smart power* (Jansson 2018), *civilian power* (Duchêne 1973), *transformative power* (Börzel & Risse 2009), *normative power* (Silander &



Nilsson 2013) and even *energy power* (Foreign Affairs 2015). This essay will go on focusing on the powers of hard, normative, civilian, soft powers, as powers available to states in interacting with its external environment.

2.1.1 Hard power

Hard power represents perhaps the oldest form of power practiced by states. The label 'hard power' was conceptualized by Nye in his development of the notion of 'soft power'. Nye's ideas of hard power can be traced back to the thinkers of the 'power-as-resource' approach within international relations. It is connected to the realism assumptions of an international political system marked by anarchy. In an anarchistic system that lacks a superior authority that can enforce rules, states are forced to build up military capacities to preserve their independence and ensure their survival (Nye 2004:1,56,71). This 'power-as-resource' approach stresses power as 'resources' or 'capabilities' of states (Carlsnaes et.al 2013:274).

Nye's (1990) definition of 'hard power' is put in stark comparison with 'soft power' (Tulmets 2008:62). Nye (2008) defines hard power as the capacity to get what you want through coercion ("sticks") or inducements and payments ("carrots") (Nye 2008:94). Hard power ultimately rests on the capacity of an actor to accumulate as many resources as necessary to impose its will. Here, 'resources' are understood as tangible things and not intangible resources such as ideas and opinions (Pallaver 2011:81). Economics and military capabilities are what Nye identifies as the bases of *hard power* (Viotti 2014:9). In 'hard power' in contrast with 'soft power', there are elements of coercive force and material items present, in the process of shaping preferences of another actor, to adopt one's own preferences. The ability to physically manipulate another actor is the most common way to use hard power to change the behavior of another actor. Hereby, hard power represents the most ultimate form of power, severely reduces the alternatives for the targeted state, in extreme cases creating an ultimatum, of either complying or facing death (Rothman 2011:51-52). Thus, hard power resources are more observable than soft power, and manifests themselves in a practical and concrete way. However, 'hard power' resources such as military do not necessarily need to be deployed in order to say that a state is wielding hard power. Just the mere 'threat' would serve as a deterrent and be a first sign that hard power is present (Pallaver 2011:81).

2.1.2 Normative power

Normative power has often been used to describe the European Union (Silander & Nilsson 2013; Wagnsson & Hellman 2018; Birchfield 2013). The idea of normative power is based on the ability to form conceptions of



the 'normal' and influence the behavior and identities of other actors. EU for example has been labelled a normative power by developing a self-image tied to liberal and enlightenment values (Wagnsson & Hellman 2018:1162-1163. 1172). These values encompass values of democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance etc (Silander & Nilsson 2013:443). This idea builds on the crucial assertion that the most important factor shaping the international role of EU is not what it does or what it says, but rather what it is (Birchfield 2013:908).

The concept of normative power is ideational rather than material or physical. This means it uses normative justification rather than material incentives or physical force. When speaking of EU, the exercise of normative justification can be found in EU's relations with the rest of the world including external dimensions of internal policies, enlargement, trade and development policy. Normative power should also be seen as legitimate in the principles being promoted. For normative justification to be convincing or attractive, then the principles being promoted must be seen as *legitimate* and being promoted in a *coherent* and *consistent* way. *Legitimacy* of principles in world politics may come from established international conventions, treaties, or agreements, and particularly if they have been recognized within the UN system. *Coherence* of principles comes from the extent to which differing principles, and practices to promote, can be seen to be sound and non-contradictory. *Consistency* refers to the extent to which differing principles, and the way to promote them, are uniform both within and without the promoting entity, and are implied uniformly. If normative justification is to be seen as convincing or attractive, then the actions take must persuasion and argumentation. Persuasion in the promotion of principles involves constructive engagement, the institutionalization of relations and the encouragement of multi- and plurilateral dialogue between participants (Manners 2009:2). Scholars have also argued that a normative power has to meet certain discursive standards; representing others in a non-antagonistic way. While it may be necessary for a normative power to expose how the other violates universal principles, it should avoid treating the other as inferior (Wagnsson & Hellman 2018:1172).

2.1.3 Civilian power

The concept of 'civilian power' has long been used by scholars to describe the EU (Stavridis 2001:4). A concept first developed by François Duchêne (1973) with an exclusive reference to describe the European Union ('the Community' at the time) (Smith 2005:65-66). It was ascribed to EU precisely because of the absence of military power and was labelled a 'civilian power' in contrast with superpowers like the USA or USSR (Stavridis 2001:4). Duchêne largely put emphasis on the 'means and ends' of civilian power.



Here the term ‘civilian ends’ referred to; international cooperation, solidarity, strengthening the rule of law in international relations, responsibility for the global environment and the diffusion of equality, justice and tolerance. Civilian means on the other hand refers to *non-military*, primarily economic means used in cooperation with others to secure state goals. Smith (2005) later revised Duchêne’s early definition of “civilian power”. This by adding another two elements to ‘ends and means’, with the use of persuasion, and civilian control over foreign policy making , thereby, providing an explanation of how ‘civilian means’ are used in order to achieve ‘civilian ends’ (Smith 2005:65-68).

This was necessary, since there are multiple ways in which an international actor can influence other international actors, using *persuasion, offering rewards, granting rewards, threatening punishment, inflicting non-violent punishment, or using force* (Smith 2005:67). Therefor the traditional divide by Duchêne is problematic. The ‘stick’ isn’t just military instruments and the ‘carrot’ isn’t purely economic, as the earlier understandings suggested. Economic instruments can entail the promise of aid, aid itself, or sanctions. Military instruments can range from the actual use of force to compel or deter an enemy to ensure defense of national territory. Another difficult question addressed by Smith (2005) concerns the sometimes difficulty of classifying “civilian means”. How do we for example interpret peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, and where do we draw the line whether they the use “civilian” to “military means”? (Smiths 2005:73).

The question of whether ‘civilian power’ must rely solely on non-military means to achieve its objectives, has been recurrent theme among scholars, especially concerning the EU. Is it possible for an actor to use military means under any condition and still be called a ‘civilian power’? (Orbie 2006:125). While some scholars hold that military means are necessary as a residual safeguard and a measure of last resort, to uphold ‘civilian values’ (Orbie 2006:125; McCormick 2007:70). Other scholars reject such a notion and the fact that such as an actor can fully embrace civilian power (Smith 2000:28).

2.1.4 Soft power

‘Soft power’ is a relatively young concept, being added to the list of forms of power more recently (Rothman 2011:49). A concept first developed by Joseph Nye (1990) and today frequently used in international affairs by politicians and analysts (Lovric 2016:30). The notion of soft power grew out of an American foreign policy debate between hard and soft power, originally risen by realists and institutionalists (Tulmets 2008:62). A debate in which Nye challenged the then conventional view of the decline of American power (Nye 2017:2). Yet, activities that wield soft power is



nothing new and is a form of power that can find its origins in the “power as relational power approach” (Carlsnaes et.al 2013:29).

Soft power as a concept is quite complex and difficult to specify in terms of function and resources (Hayden 2012:26). In behavioral terms, soft power is the ability to attract. In terms of resources, soft power are the assets that produce such attraction (Nye 2008:95). Soft power is also a stretched concept and can include a whole array of resources. Over time it has become something of a catchword, applied to any form of influence not using military command. Within the scientific community, scholars have discussed the use of information, philanthropy or even diplomacy, as a mean of wielding soft power. In addition, one could possibly include rhetoric, persuasion and agenda-setting into the soft power category (Rothman 2011:50).

In essence, ‘soft power’, can be defined as the ability to attract others so that they want what you want. Or in other words, the ability to change the preferences over other actors’ choices, so that one’s preferred outcome, becomes the other one’s preferred outcome (Rothman 2011:50).

Or as Nye (2004) described ‘soft power’,

[...] the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced (Rothman 2011:50).

Here Nye identifies three resources in particular: a ‘state’s culture’, ‘political values’ and ‘foreign policy’. This definition also implies that soft power is contextual and dependent on the human relationships between ‘agent’ (the sender) and the target’ (receiver). A relationship that can vary in different contexts (Joshi 2013.310). Following this logic, the agent has access to these resources and creates “demands”, of which the target responds and thereby “grants” soft power. This implies that soft power emerges first when the receiver acknowledges its power, which in large depends on the credibility of the actor who pursues it (Nye 2008:101). Another aspect concerns the truthful fullness of such a claim. Soft power can emerge regardless of the correspondence between perception and reality, the crucial part is how agent is perceived by the target (Nye 2011:100). This allows soft power to be manipulative and doesn't necessarily have to be based on facts or the truth.

In addition, soft power concept entails two important abilities, one is the ability to ‘attract’ and the other one is the ability to ‘persuade’ (Wilson 2008:114). Soft power are resources that produce such attraction and that can generate legitimacy or are perceived as having *moral authority* (Cristo 2005:99, Nye 2008:101). Another aspect concerns measurement issue,



between power measured as resources and power judged by outcomes. Whether a particular asset is an attractive soft power resource can be measured through polls. Although, if that attraction in turn produces desired policy outcomes must be judged in each particular case. Nye (2008) explains this discrepancy with that, it is an inherent feature with all forms of powers (Nye 2008:95).

While most scholars seem to be agreeing on what abilities that soft power resources generate, some view this often-dichotomous divide of 'hard and soft power' as too oversimplified. Rothman accuses the previous scholarly of not fully assessing the concept validity of soft power. He seeks to redefine soft power by identifying the practical means and mechanisms by which soft power works to influence international relations. He does so by dissecting the typical divide of 'hard and soft power', by making it continuous, differentiating *softer* from *harder* forms of soft power. The softest forms are the most *non-violent forms* including the use of morals or ideas. This form generates attraction using rhetoric, norm diffusion and discourse dominance. Agenda-setting on the other hand is regarded as a less soft form of power, due to the reduction of preferences and choices for the targeted actor, and the creation of conflict of interests (Rothman 2011:49-51,53).

2.1.5 The authoritarian understanding of soft power

Today the concept of soft power seems to have been "hijacked" by authoritarian states competing with the democratic states in the realm of ideas. The conventional use of '*soft power*' has historically been understood a benign concept generally applied to efforts made to bolster a country's image, contribution to open debate and win friends and allies. By the new understanding, authoritarian regimes are practicing a more malign version of soft power. Although, the principal objective is not to gain respect, prestige and promote authoritarianism, but rather to contain the spread of democracy and shape the norms of the international order. A new set of illiberal counter norms have emerged that emphasized 'state security, civilizational security, and traditional values. In this way they have hijacked the concept of soft, historically ascribed to democratic advance by the West (Diamond et.al 2016:11; Walker 2016: 218, 230).

2.2 Means of communicating soft power

2.2.1 Public diplomacy

Public diplomacy is a concept and a phenomenon that has been practiced for centuries and have constantly adapted to changes in the international system, in states and in societies (Snow 2014:68, Hocking 2008:63). Worth noting is,



that there is no commonly accepted definition of what public diplomacy is. Rather every nation has its own definition in line with its stated goals and objectives (Snow 2014:70).

Traditionally, the concept of diplomacy has been understood as a predominantly hierarchical and intergovernmental process (Hocking 2008:63). A game constituted by sovereign states establishing the roles and responsibilities of international relations. However, today we find ourselves in a much more complex world of postmodern transnational relations, where a wide array of actors are involved in diplomatic activity (Melissen 2005:5). Some scholars even talk about the use of digital media in the field of public diplomacy (Adesina 2017:1).

One major factor that has affected diplomacy in the modern age has been the revolution of information and communication technologies (Adesina 2017:2). If public diplomacy is defined as “the communication of an international actor’s policies to citizens of foreign countries, the term ‘actor’ and ‘citizen’ has widened. Today the term ‘actor’ can refer to; states, associations of states, sub-states and non-states. The term ‘citizen’ can be applied to; civil society representatives, NGO’s, multinationals, journalists, media institutions and members of the general public (Pamment 2013:1-2).

Yablokov (2015) provides a definition, defining public diplomacy as an actors: “attempt of managing its own international environment through engagement with foreign ‘publics’, with the aim of gathering feedback, explain policy and increase the attractiveness of a country” (Yablokov 2015:303). The objective is also, according to Borchers (2011), to bring an understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals (Borchers 2011:1,91). This resonates with the forms of soft power influence. Hayden (2012) suggest that the common emphasis on the “cultivation of influence” suggests a link strong between public diplomacy and soft power (Hayden 2012:13).

According to Nye (2008) public diplomacy can be regarded as an instrument that governments used to mobilize soft power resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries (Nye 2008:95). Public diplomacy can under certain circumstances, serve to amplify soft power resources by strengthening the attraction of the country (Roselle et al. 2014: 73-74). However, soft power can only be produced through public diplomacy if a country’s culture, values and policies are perceived as attractive, credible and legitimate in the eyes of the public (Nye 2008: 95-96).

Nye (2008:101) stated that “without underlying national credibility, the instruments of public diplomacy cannot translate cultural diplomacy into the



soft power of attraction”. This, becomes even more important because of what he refers to as the “paradox of the plenty.” In today's society, with an explosion of information available to people, it's hard to know what to focus on, ‘attention’ rather than ‘information’ has become a scarce resource. Politics has thus become a contest of competitive credibility and reputation is even more important than in the past. “Governments compete for credibility not only with other governments but with a broad range of alternatives such as news media, corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOS), and networks of scientific communities”. Within the game of politics governments compete with each other and other organizations to enhance their own credibility while weakening that of their opponents (Nye 2008:95,100-101).

2.3.2 Propaganda

Propaganda may also be used through public diplomacy and there are areas that overlap. However, unlike public diplomacy, propaganda is based on a one-way flow of information controlled by the protagonist. This without the purpose of promoting mutual understanding and satisfaction of needs (Melissen 2005:18; Jowett & O'Donnell 2012: 45,287-288). Nye (2008) suggests that when public diplomacy proceed to propaganda it fails to convince, lacks credibility and therefor is counterproductive (Nye 2008:101).

‘Propaganda’ has often been used as a catch-all term for “suspicion rhetoric”. Among the words used synonymously with propaganda are often negatively charged. These including word such *ad lies*, *distortion*, *deceit*, *manipulation*, *mind control*, and *psychological warfare*. A more neutral definition of propaganda can be a “means to disseminate or promote particular ideas” (Jowett & O'Donnell 2012:2).

Sproule (1994) provides a definition of propaganda by arguing that “propaganda represents the work of large organizations or groups to win over the public for special interests through a massive orchestration of attractive conclusions packed to conceal both their persuasive purpose and lack of sound supporting reasons” (Sproule 1994:8). his definition tells us something about the concealed component of propaganda. The protagonist is likely to act as a ‘persuader’ with a stated purpose that seems to satisfy mutual needs. However, in reality the true purpose is likely to be concealed and the protagonist wants to promote his/her own interest or those of the organization. So forth a concealed identity is often necessary for the protagonist to achieve these desired goals and objectives. If the true intent and source where known to the recipient, it would possibly undermine the chances of achievement (Jowett & O'Donnell 2012:45).



Jowett and O'Donnell provide a definition of propaganda (2012) by approaching propaganda as a type of communication and placing it as a subcategory of persuasion. Jowett and O'Donnell define propaganda as a “*deliberate, systematic attempt to shape, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the protagonist*” (Jowett & O'Donnell 2012:2, 6-7). The words ‘deliberate’ and ‘systematic attempt’ tells us something about the organized and conscious nature of propaganda. The second part tells us something about how strategic the attempt is of the shaping of complex thought patterns.

Following this definition, propaganda’s relation to persuasion lies in the employment of persuasive strategies and can be described as “organized mass persuasion”. However, it differs from mere persuasion in purpose. Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) differentiated propaganda from persuasion in the sense that [...] persuasion is interactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both the persuader and persuade. “Propaganda on the other hand is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandists” (Jowett & O'Donnell 2012:1).

2.3.3 Media and news reporting

In the 21st century the significance of media and broadcasting has grown. In the information age, technological advances have led to a dramatic reduction in the cost of processing and transmitting information (Nye 2008:99). The spread of internet access has radically extended the range of news source options available to the public in countries where the government blocks traditional media. Broadcasting through internet have enabled flexibility for the targeting of messages to particular groups (Nye 2008:104, Szostek 2018:69). The global communication infrastructure has empowered actors to connect, organize and influence, and have in process altered traditional communication-based foundations for nation-state power. The volume and scale of message flows challenge the ideational monopoly once enjoyed by the nation-state (Hayden 2012:11). Now the governments have come to believe in the media’s potential to affect their nation’s success in the international arena (Szostek 2014:463).

Stevenson (2005) points out that “transnational media organizations’ today have more power and reach than that of any single nation state”. The intensification of globalization processes has meant the world is now a more interconnected space and have created communication environments beyond that of the nation state (Stevenson 2005:67-68). Volkmer (2003) notes that transnational news media have created a *translocal information space* with an audience located beyond ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ news angles (Volkmer, 2003:12).



According to Yablokov (2015), media serves a function in delivering messages and images about a country through various medium and allows news events to be tailored to the country's strategic goals. It may be used to set the agenda and help build links with foreign audiences. Through media a state can communicate with foreign communities, individuals and governments in order to influence their attitudes and opinions (Yablokov; 2015:303). Thus, mass media framing has become one of the central tools that governments uses in the competition for power and influence in the international arena.

Today media has become an integral part of public diplomacy, it has also been exploited by modern propagandists to convey messages and become decisive tool for managing a country's own soft power resources (Yablokov 2015:303; Jowett & O'Donnell 2012:11,296; Borchers 2011:1, 91). Nye once stated that "information is power [...]" and that success in the information age depends not only on whose army wins, but ultimately "whose story wins [...]" (Szostek 2014:463). Thus, international media, has come to be a highly contested international soft power arena (Walker 2016:230). The global circuits of media framing provide a crucial context for international actors to consider methods to both leverage and cultivate their soft power (Hayden 2012:12).

One downside with unimpeded internet access, is that it makes it easier for alternative perspectives to circulate outside the domestic sphere, into a borderless media landscape where restrictions and censorship are harder to impose. This might lead to the creation of different impressions among citizens of what is happening in the world. The pluralism of alternative media has thus created conflicted narratives over world events (Szostek 2018:69). In today's fragmented media world, it is much easier for authoritarian governments to manipulate understandings of important issues, making it harder to distinguish between authentic and bogus information. Today, authoritarian-backed media have become intertwined with the world of 'normal news', especially online (Walker 2016:229). Persuasion and information management has become one of the top government priorities of authoritarian states. This involves propaganda initiatives combined with efforts of incorporating public diplomacy learned from the west (Brady 2016:187). Some authoritarian states deploy a media strategy of combining censorship with propaganda, allowing them to dominate the media space and create an unchallenged alternative reality for their audiences (Walker 2016:227). State-run media authoritarian states try to control the narrative concerning the elections, by spreading disinformation, and blocking or suppressing truth tellers (Merloe 2016:143,150).



3. Contextual background

3.1 The soft power context of Russia

Since the mid-2000, Russia has attempted to develop a soft power concept (Sergunin & Karabeshkin: 2015:347). Media has been recognized as a credible mean and effective foreign policy tool to pursue soft power. The Russian Doctrine of Information Security adopted in 2000 emphasized the necessity of promoting a new image of Russia abroad through international broadcasting (Yablokov 2015:304). In 2011 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov declared that it was “impossible [...]” to effectively defend national interest “without proper use of solid soft power resources [...]”. The Russian Foreign Policy Concepts of 2008 and 2013 thus included pledges to “develop effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad [...]” (Szostek 2014:463-464).

Also, digital networks have increasingly been utilized to engage with foreign publics in digital diplomacy. In 2012, President Putin designated digital diplomacy as one of the most effective foreign policy tools used to explain the positions of the state (Adesina, 2017:8). In 2013, the term “soft power” (*myagkaya sila*) was been incorporated into Russian Foreign Policy Concept with President Putin describing it as “an indispensable component of modern international relations” (Szostek 2014:465).

3.2. Russia’s soft power strategies

Some scholars argue that the Russian understanding of soft power strongly deviates from the classical definition of Nye (Sergunin & Karabeshkin: 2015: 352, 359). As earlier mentioned in (2.1.5) this reflects a new trend of an authoritarian understanding of soft power. Russian leaders have initially interpreted soft power in an instrumental, pragmatic and interest-centric way. Russia favors a state led-led approach rather than letting Russian culture, values and policies elicit attraction themselves (Szostek 2014:466). Soft power initiatives were initially perceived as an instrument of policy towards its compatriots in post-Soviet countries and pursued to secure state goals, this rather than taking international partners’ interests into account. For this reason, Russia’s soft power initiatives have been met with suspicion or even hostility abroad (Sergunin & Karabeshkin: 2015: 352, 359).

Most academics studying Russia’s soft power strategy have done so through the prism of various political communications concepts, including image making, political branding and public relations. Within the strand currently dominating, publications have focused on Russia’s soft power policies towards so-called ‘compatriots in the near abroad (e.g. in the Baltic States or



in the European Union's Eastern Partnership Area) (Sergunin & Karabeshkin: 2015:347-348).

These soft power policies have been studied as part of Russian civilizational ambitions emphasizing the distinctiveness of Russia's culture and values and its responsibility to protect and unify those whom it has historical ties. Russian speakers in neighboring states would be considered compatriots, whose educational, linguistic, social, labor, and humanitarian rights Russia must protect (Szostek 2014:466). With the help of the soft power concept, Russia has aimed at fostering economic, political and socio-cultural integration of the 'Russian World' that covers Russian speakers living abroad. The Russian World Foundation established in 2013, is based on cultural and communication resources of the Russian language and can be interpreted as soft power capital that can be utilized for agenda-setting (Sergunin & Karabeshkin 2015: 349, 355).

Another important soft power strategy of Russia has been of improving a more positive international image. Kremlin has increasingly launched a massive propaganda campaign to downplay Russia's image of an 'aggressive' and 'undemocratic' country with the aim of making it more attractive to international actors (Sergunin & Karabeshkin: 2015.349). Another important soft power strategy has developed during the last decade of the second term of Vladimir Putin's reign. From the initially pragmatic interpretation of the soft power, Vladimir Putin has come to inject ideology into the soft power concept, casting Russia as a bulwark of traditional conservative values worldwide. Putin explicitly promotes Russia as a global model with universal appeal and defender of traditional conservative values (Wilson 2015:1195). It has done so while simultaneously advocating a vision of Russia as a civilization in a world of competitive cultural visions, including values and development models (Tsygankov 2013:261).

Nonetheless, Russia's soft power ambitions are by many perceives as a threat to sovereignty and national identity, especially in countries like Ukraine where attitudes towards Russia vary substantially along a West-East divide (Szostek 2014:466). Also, NATO has recognized Russia's strong influence in international politics. This year, NATO secretary Jens Stoltenberg stated that Russian behavior of "sophisticated disinformation campaigns" is a clear threat to NATO and the peace and democracy in Europe (NATO, 2019).

The strong ambition of Russia to promote soft power through media underlies the relevance of studying RT as a possible *medium* of Russian soft power. The news outlet has close ties with Kremlin and has established itself as a strong global media presence (Shevtsova 2016:51). RT has also been



considered a central tool of mediated public diplomacy in achieving foreign policy goals (Borchers 2014:89,93).

3.3 RT news network

RT was formed in 2005 as a part of a large-state funded programme to promote Russia abroad, at the time known as 'Russia today'. Russia today was eventually rebranded RT in an attempt to soften its straightforward affiliation with Russia and take on a more neutral name. According to RT's editor-in-chief, this was done to appeal to as large audience as possible (Yablokov 2015: 305). According to RT's own website it has a global reach and an audience of 100 million viewers residing in over 100 countries. Whereof its largest regional viewership residing in Europe. It proclaims to be an autonomous, non-profit organization that is publicly financed by the Russian Federation (About RT, *Russia Today*). Its budget has increased from an initial \$30 million to more than \$300 million and it claims to be the most watched news channel on YouTube with a billion hits (Pomerantsev 2014:20).

Important to keep in mind that Russia is a country that severely suppresses the freedom of journalists. In 2010 Reports Without Borders placed Russia 140th out of 180 according to Press Freedom Index (Borchers 2011:92). RT media outlets operates through a fundamentally different value system compared with its 'western' equivalents of BBC and Deutsche Welle (Walker 2016: 218-219). While BBC broadcasts in line with its ethos of neutrality, objectivity and balance, RT is unable capitalize on its reputation in a similar way (Miazhevich 2018:590). Even though it's not operated by Kremlin and the Russian state itself, but by an NGO called TV-Novosti, some serious doubts can be casted on the journalistic independence of the news network (Borchers 2011:93).

As some scholars and news anchors testifies, RT does not follow journalistic logics but rather answers to the Kremlin (Borchers 2011:93). RT distinctly frames news according to an anti-'western' news agenda. Yablokov (2015) points out that "[...] given the ambiguity and heterogeneity of the ideological foundation of the current Russian regime, anti-Americanism can be said to constitute the only constant element of RT's agenda" (Yablokov 2015:305-306).

In 2014, US secretary of State John Kerry called RT a "propaganda bullhorn for Moscow" saying the channel devoted full time to propagandize and to distort what is or not happening in Ukraine. RT's coverage of the ongoing Ukrainian crisis and especially Russian intervention in the region of Crimea has come under intense scrutiny from 'western' corners and even internally



(LoGiurato 2014). In 2014, RT news anchor Abby Martin spoke out against her own workplace, saying the coverage has been “truly disappointing and ripe with disinformation” (Moss, 2014). As a consequence, another anchor Liza Wahl quit her job saying she couldn’t be a “part of a network that whitewashes” the actions of Putin (LoGiurato 2014).

Some scholars even assign RT as serving a propagandistic function. Evidence suggests direct censorship of journalists and the dependence on reporting on Kremlin’s official position throughout RT’s program. In this way Russia can apply strict control and secure access to global and foreign national public spheres (Borchers 2011:93).

3.4 Previous research review

RT has been a subject of study in academic research, perhaps most notably in content analysis. Borchers (2011) argues that RT is a central tool for mediated Russian diplomacy. In his study, he conducted a content analysis of RT, by focusing on the interview show *Spotlight*, which contains discussions of Russia’s relations to the Baltic States. The results suggest that RT construct a one-sided pro-Russian reality in order to achieve its foreign policy objectives and at the same time aiming at isolating the Baltic states internationally. Borchers reveals how RT constructs an alternative reality from the perspective of justice, morality, truth and common sense, and thereby convincing its viewers of taking sides with Russia (Borchers 2011:1, 104-105).

In another study Yablokov (2015) explores the use of conspiracy theories in RT programmes based on the populism theory of power. This by studying the process of how conspiratorial notions legitimize Russian domestic and foreign policy and in turn delegitimize politics of the American government. According to Yablokov (2015) one of the organization's main objectives are of counterbalancing the ‘information monopoly’ of Western media. At heart of RT news agenda is to take a clear stance against the ‘mainstream media’ allegedly controlled by Western policy makers and business elites (Yablokov 2015:1, 305-306).

Other scholars study how part of RT’s agenda has been to compete with the west over global narratives while mimicking the media strategies of the west to gain credibility. Rawnsley (2015) demonstrates how RT copy the style, approaches and characteristics of CNN, BBC, and Al-Jazeera to reinforce its respectability (Rawnsley 2015:275). Pomerantsev (2014) talks about how news are presented by native English speakers to make the content look more authentic. RT has also shifted its strategy from a mere Russia focus to targeting and exploiting anti-western segments that were already hostile to



the US and western hegemony. This way it increases the number of sympathizers with the channel (Pomerantsev 2014:19).

4. Methodology

4.1 Methodological difficulties

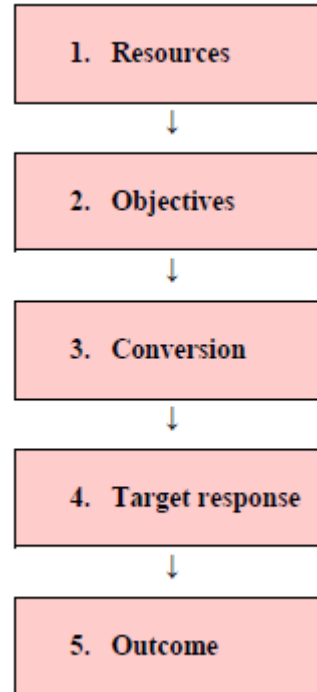
As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, the theoretical basis of soft power is vast, difficult to assess and is often pursued covertly. Hutchings et al (2015) points out that “soft power is most apparent when uncontrived and invisible” (Hutchings et al 2015:631). For these reasons, scholars have had troubles in assessing the overall impact of soft power on the outcomes of foreign policy (Borcher 2011:105). Szostek (2014) points out that establishing soft power’s effectiveness empirically would be a formidable task (Szostek 2014:465).

The methodological difficulty lies in assessing the overall impact information has on people. It is for example hard to determine if a reader or a viewer have been persuaded of the ‘rightness’ of a news agency’s stance on an issue. The task to examine the persuasion of a single viewer, would perhaps require the whole RT programme to be analyzed (Borcher 2011:93). Tracing the causal links between policies and their effect might even be said to impossible (Yablokov 2015:311). Another obstacle concerning RT lies in the lack of open data about the popularity of the network (Borcher 2011:93).

Due to these conceptual, theoretical and empirical concerns it might be more accurate to define soft power as a label signifying actions undertaken by states *in the hope* of influencing opinions abroad and look at how these attempts are made (Szostek 2014:465). This thesis will then go forward with looking at how RT make *attempts* of influencing its foreign audiences, and how these attempts manifest traits of soft power. Important to emphasis is that this thesis will not trace the causal link in the *conversation process* between soft power ‘resources’ and their ‘outcomes’ (outlined in figure 1 below) (McClory 2019:26). After all, RT is only one instruments among others in Russia’s arsenal of projecting influence abroad. Nevertheless, RT is probably not the least powerful one if applied successfully (Borcher 2011:93). Despite this, linking causes and effects to just 1 Russian medium would be foolish. This leaves us to study how RT makes attempts to persuade and attract and how these attempts manifest traits of soft power. These attempts will relate to the first box ‘resources’ without knowing their intended ‘objectives’. This means that the link between box 2-5 will not be assessed in this study.



Figure 1: **Soft power Conversion Process**
Source: Nye, J. (2011) *The Future of Power*



4.2 The soft power approach of this thesis

Rothman (2011) identifies two sorts of framing relevant to soft power that may influence ‘outcomes’ in international relations. These can be divided by framing that appeals to people's moral and emotions - Rothman labels these *normative framing*. Frames can also generate a causal story, establishing causes and effects of a problem - Rothman labels these *analytical framing* (Rothman 2011:54-55).

Normative framing consists of identifying an issue at a moral or emotional level, suggesting that attending to the issue *is the right thing to do*. Moral framing can affect the behavior of a second actor because the frame can affect the context within which actors look at specific issues. Framing a particular choice as morally right or wrong can influence the availability of choices to the other actor. By introducing moral norms within international relations, some acts are made unthinkable. Emotional framing can appeal to people's emotions and often also utilizes other media such as images and sounds (Rothman 2011:54).



Analytical framing involves the creation of a causal story, arranging and connecting the causes and consequences uniquely. This framing involves descriptions of the harm or difficulty and attributions of blame or responsibility for the harm. By establishing an analytical frame in terms of the causes and effects of a problem, the frame can bring some actors into discussion because they become either victims or perpetrators or establish costs and benefits for states (Rothman 2011:54).

Within these broad generalizations of normative and analytical framing a diversity of sub frames are expected to exist. Five underlying frames most prevalent in literature (Kozman 2017:780; De Vreese 2005:56; Semetko & Valkenburg:2000:99) have been identified and tested to fit this soft power description; namely *morality frames*, *human interest frames*, *responsibility frames*, *conflict frames*, and *economic consequences frames*. While the normative type of framing can be identified in moral- and human-interest frames, analytical type of framing can be identified in responsibility-, conflict- and economic consequences frames.

4.3 Operationalization of news frames

The measure frames relevant to soft power this thesis will use 5 frames identified and coded by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). In Semetko & Valkenburg's study, the authors used a binary coding strategy of simple yes-no categories (Semetko & Valkenburg: 2000:99). However, in this study, based on a qualitative research approach, it will distinguish patterns to capture the dominant storytelling of RT. This instead of counting frequencies through yes-no answers.

Moral frame

Moral frames put the event, problem or issue in the context of moral prescriptions. Journalists can refer to moral frames either directly in the text or indirectly through quotation or inference. Due to professional norm of objectivity, journalists often refer to moral frames indirectly. This for example by having someone else raising the question or by taking in the views of an interest group into account in order raise certain questions. Such a story may contain moral messages or offer social prescriptions of how to behave (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:96). The moral frame includes the following items:

M1: "Does the story contain any moral message?"

M2 "Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?"



Human interest frame

Human interest frames bring a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem. This frame refers to an effort to personalize the news, dramatize or “emotionalize” the news, in order to capture and retain audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:96). The human-interest frame includes the following items:

- H1: "Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?"
- H2: "Does the story provide a human example of "human face" on the issue?"
- H3: "Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?"
- H4: "Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?"
- H5 "Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?"

Responsibility frame

The responsibility frame presents an issue or a problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:96). The responsibility frame includes the following items:

- A1: "Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?"
- A2: "Does the story suggests that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?"
- A3: "Does the story suggests solutions(s) to the problem/issue?"
- A4" Does the story suggest that an individual (or group of people in society is responsible for the issue-problem?"
- A5: "Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?"

Conflict frame

The conflict frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:96). The conflict frame includes the following items:

- E1: "Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?"
- E2: "Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?"
- E3: "Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of actions?"



Economic consequences frame

This frame reports an event, problem or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region or country. The wide impact of an event is an important news value, and economic consequences are often considerable (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:96). The economic consequences frame includes the following items:

- C1 "Does the article reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups?"
- C2 "Does one-party-individual-group-country-reproach another?"
- C3 "Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?"
- C4 "Does the story refer to winners and losers?"

4.4 Operationalization of soft power resources

This thesis will operationalize ‘soft power’ based on the definition of the Soft Power 30 framework. The framework consists of both objective set of data and international polling to measure the three primary sources of soft power underlined by Joseph Nye (2004), namely a ‘state’s culture’, ‘political values’ and ‘foreign policy’. This framework is described by Joseph Nye as the “clearest picture of global soft power to date” and is based on a comprehensive review of the academic literature on the subject (McClory & Harvey 2016:314; McClory 2019:10).

The framework captures a broad range of factors that contributes to a nation’s soft power and all of them cannot be assessed here (McClory & Harvey 2016:314). The international polling will be excluded, due to lack of open data about the popularity of RT. Instead, the objective sub-indexes will be used as reference to operationalize the three mentioned soft power resources.

State’s culture

A state’s culture can be measures by the quality, international reach and appeal of a country’s cultural production. This can be measured on the metrics of language, arts, film, music, sport and tourism (McClory 2019:60). Nye (2008) describes culture as the set of practices that create meaning for a society, which has many manifestations. He does so by separating between high culture; comprised of literature, art, and education which appeals to the elites and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment (Nye 2008:96). Nye (1990) describes the characteristics of culture as



universalistic, instead of unique and localized. Soft power through culture is measured by a nation's global reach and appeal of output. It also possesses a widespread appeal, being embodied in products and communications. These metrics have been grouped and labelled: 'Cultural sub-index' (Nye 1990:169; McClory 2019:27).

Political values

A state's political values can be measured through metrics of individual freedom, human rights, democracy, it also includes measures of government effectiveness and broad metrics of citizen's outcomes in human development and violence in society. In addition, the global ranking of soft power identifies values of; gender equality, good governance, rule of law, and population well-being as factors contribution to the soft power of a nation political values. These metrics have been grouped and labelled: 'Government sub-index' (McClory 2019:28, 59, 120).

Foreign policy

A state's foreign policy can be measured through a country's overall contribution to the international community. The Soft Power 30 framework metrics essentially captures the ability of states or governments to engage with international audiences, drive collaboration, and ultimately shape global outcomes. It includes metrics of the reach of countries diplomatic networks and commitment to international development and environmental challenges. These metrics have been grouped and labelled: 'Engagement sub-index' (McClory 2019:27,59).

4.5 Deductive approach

Approaches to identify frames can be divided into different methods of reasoning. De Vreese (2005) identifies two approaches within previous research of studying framing in news. One being *inductive* in nature which refrains from analyzing news stories with a priori defined news frames in mind. Another one being *deductive* in nature which uses frames that are defined and operationalized prior to the investigation (De Vreese 2002:53).

This thesis is based on a *deducting approach* with frames operationalized prior to the investigation. Among advantages with the deductive approach employed that it can be replicated more easily, can cope with large samples and easily detect differences in framing between media (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000: 94-95). Deductive approaches are also assumed to be less subjective in nature than inductive ones and so forth have a higher level of reliability. Important to keep in mind that deductive



approaches still are afflicted with some level of subjectivity. Interpretation of frames is a subjective process and an outcome of the researcher's unique individual's knowledge structures, experience and context (Porter & Hulme 2013: 344). Among disadvantage with a deductive approach is that it is restricted to researchers pre-existing expectation of the frames (Porter & Hulme 2013: 344). This means priori assumptions may also limit the scope of the selected material and the researcher might leave out important aspects. In order to enhance the replicability of the results, the focus lies on the manifest rather than on the latent content of the news items (Deprez & Raeymaeckers 2010:7).

4.6 The connection between framing, narrative and soft power

Framing in media can find connections with soft power ideas. Soft power has been theorized as 'framing' power based on the ability of "changing of opinions and agenda-setting". Framing thus forms a central soft power tool framing policy issues and constructing narratives (Jamal 2013:245, Crow & Lawlor 2016:475). The relationship between narrative and framing is that narrative can be seen as individualized stories which can produce a longer standing frame and are usually more abstract than frames (Crow & Lawlor 2016:481).

While news frames are the central organizing ideas that serve to provide meanings on issues and events, narratives can be said to be a higher discursive concept which combines and connects frames (Lück: et al., 2018:1637). Narratives can be defined as the packaging of a sequence of connected events or themes to generate particular meanings or embody particular values (Hutchings et al. 2015:634). Narratives in contrast to frames are more closely connected to their respective cultural background and political particularities of each country. Journalists often tend to embed their stories within culturally bound narratives, recognizable to the audience, so that new information is formulated in new episodes in a longer and familiar story (Lück et al. 2018:1637).

While frames provide the information for a basic interpretative framework, by organizing and structuring discrete elements in order to make sense of relevant events and suggest what the issue at hand actually mean. Narratives can be said of comprising complete stories of characters, plots and casual relationships. In other words, framing concentrate more on the argumentative elements, while narratives provide for the cultural resonance and meaning perception (Lück et al. 2018:1637,1651). Frames used in this study will shed light on the content from the different aspects (perspectives) to form a dominant pattern of interpretation. This pattern itself will related to how RT constructs a Russian narrative.



4.7 Selecting and collecting data

The process of selection was guided by the purpose of studying Russian soft power through relevant news events, issues and problems. The search of 'Crimea' was found to be suitable as it yielded articles covering the central aspects of the conflict between Russia-Ukraine and often involved foreign actors, predominantly US and the EU. Through a soft power perspective, this is deemed to be important to see how RT engages with the outside world. The search of 'Crimea' yielded more than 300 articles, so a delimitation had to be made to obtain a sample which is manageable in size. The initial ambition was to look at articles from the year 2014 in order to examine published articles at the time of Russian annexation of Crimea. However, these articles were not found when searched for according to the website the content has been either moved, updated or deleted. Therefore, articles published during the fall of 2019 (5 Sep - 11 Dec 2019) was selected. The selection process was guided by the principle of reaching theoretical saturation. The gathering of articles was stopped when theoretical saturation was reached. In other words, "where no additional data were being found, to the extent that the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated" (Rowlands, Wadell & Mckenna 2016:40). The initial corpus of 46 selected articles was subsequently reduced to 31 when no additional data were found.

Studying articles published the present year enables an updated view of salient issues to date. In the work process, certain considerations of different RT *medium* have been made. While RT has a presence across various social networking platforms, such as twitter and Facebook, this thesis will limit itself to one medium by examining published articles on the RT website. One reason for the choice of RT's website was because Twitter and Facebook offer a format of smaller content. This means it that would provide less ground to analyze through news frame analysis.

5. Analysis

In the following subsections the results of the analysis will be presented, structured by the *normative frames* (moral- and human-interest frames) followed by the *analytical frames* (responsibility-, conflict-, and economic consequences frames) (5.1). Next the dominant pattern discerned will be used to analyze to how RT's attempts to persuade or attract through compelling stories. This by using the three soft resources of culture, political and foreign policy (5.2).



5.1. How are events, issues and problems framed through RT?

Moral frame

In the corpus of articles studied some inferences can be made based on frame items of moral frame. The general pattern of the research results suggests moral messages usually follows the perception that Russia have been wrongly accused and treated in international relations since the Crimean and Ukrainian conflict broke out in 2014. These messages usually departure from the overall question of Crimea's status as legally part of Russia or not. Since the news coverage consistently states that Crimea chosen to rejoin Russia by democratic vote, the Western punishment and accusations for this cause is unjustified on moral grounds. These punishments including imposed sanctions, spread of anti-Russian sentiments (20/11 22:27), soaring relations (9/11 14:16) and expulsion from the economic organization G8 (19/9). Accusations include; Russian invasion and occupation of Crimea (10/12, 00:25) human rights abuses (25/9) and demonization of Russia heightened as an "aggressor" supposedly out to destroy Ukraine (26/11 11:32).

These moral messages are almost exclusively targeted towards the west and especially the US. In response of accusations RT usually makes counterassaults combined with efforts of delegitimization. The west is accused of acting as moral police, condemning others while violating international law themselves. This is illustrated with examples of the invasion of Iraq 2003, Kosovo War, or the Euromaidan protests in Kiev 2014, branded as a US-backed coup (9/12). (13/9) (9/9 09:12). In addition, EU is accused of massive violations of Russian speaking population rights in a number of EU and EU-neighboring countries (23/9). Thereby RT concludes that the west has practiced a rather selective approach in international law characterized by double standard. The lack of coherence between the values it preaches and the approach it conducts in international law makes it hypocritical. While the west is usually quick to condemn others whenever it feels necessary, it turns a blind eye to its own (11/12). In addition, US is accused of spreading anti-Russian sentiments through the 'Russian Threat', described as a fabricated lie exploited by capitalists and NATO in their role as vanguard of the fight against Russia (20/11 16:33).



Human interest frame

In the corpus of articles studied some inferences can be made based on frame items of human interest. The general pattern of the research results suggests that RT usually takes the interest of individuals or group of individuals into account by sidelining with them and by showing how these are affected by the issue/problem. RT reporting usually sidelines with Crimean people (11/12) (23/9) the newly elected President Volodymyr Zelensky (10/12 12:37) (8/12 18:34; 26/1111:32) or the Ukrainian people (14/11 12:29). By sidelining with the Crimean people, it emphasizes how the Crimean's decided to rejoin Russia during the 2014 referendum, while firmly refusing to discuss its territorial integrity with anybody (11/12). By sidelining with Volodymyr Zelensky the article emphasis how the new president is under mounting pressure from the opposition camp, being threatening to delivering the results they want (8/12 12:29). RT also describes how Zelensky is painted as pathetic political politician who loves Trump in the impeachment debate in Washington (26/11 11:32).

By sidelining with the Ukrainian people, RT emphasizes how millions of Ukrainians, in the Southern and Eastern parts are affected by the so called "West's zero-sum game". This by "wresting the country out of Moscow's orbit"- a process which they didn't support. RT also emphasizes what the Ukrainian people really wants, which is peace, a good life, and not being at war - an agency which is normally denied in western discourse. The United States are accused of forcing Ukraine to be at war by using Ukraine as a geopolitical proxy against its archrival Russia. The situation in Ukraine framed as bad, with millions of Ukrainians gone abroad and the West doing little to support the country financially (14/11 12:29).

RT's also utilizes other media of visual information that might generate feelings. In one article, a video is utilized showing protesters confrontation with the police, claimed to threaten the newly elected if Zelensky if he doesn't meet their demands during the Normandy four talks (8/12 18:34). These visual items might generate feelings of outrage and sympathy with Zelensky being "held hostage" by Ukrainian nationalists. Another item show teenagers in Crimea holding a Russian flag during the National Unity Day celebrations in Sevastopol (28/9). Possible sending a signal that the youth of Crimea has chosen Russia over Ukraine. Overall these items portray how the lives of Ukrainians are affected in a negative way by western involvement and suggest how Russia takes their best interests into account.



Attribution of responsibility frame

In the corpus of articles studied some inferences can be made based on frame items of attribution of responsibility. The general pattern of the research results suggests that the West and US is usually assigned responsible for contributing to tensions in the Eastern Ukrainian region. US is only worsening the prospects for peace and peace-talks between Ukraine and Russia (26/11 11:32). In addition, the former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko's is assigned responsibility for bringing instability and war to the Eastern Ukrainian region (10/12 00:25). Poroshenko hard stance, inability to compromise coupled with a war fueled anti-Putin rhetoric has made peace-talks impossible (10/12 00:25). RT refers to a list of failures that can be assigned his administration during his mandate period (28/9).

Among the items of solutions suggested to the problems include that the West and EU should drop its confrontational approach and instead seek partnership to cooperate, build equal and friendly relations with Russia instead (11/12). This to ease tensions, improve bilateral relations and guarantee European security (9/9 14:16). Macron's new more active and positive stance is described as respectful (8/12 12:38) implying he has the ability to alleviate the problem of souring tensions with Russia and "normalizing" relations (10/12 00:25). RT quotes Macron saying "pushing Russia away from Europe is a profound strategic mistake (9/9 09:12) calling for readmitting Russia to the G7/8 (19/9)

Big hopes are also put in the new leadership of Ukrainian president Zelensky to bring peace to the war-torn country through a more Putin-friendly stance. Articles show moves of progress between Zelensky and Putin of reconciliation through prisoner exchange, described as an unprecedented step in reaching peace (7/9). A reference is also made to a poll suggesting 75 percent of Ukrainians support Zelensky's outreach to Putin (10/12 00:25), (5/9). Thereby, Zelensky is framed as the solution, with the ability to alleviate the problem and maintaining stability in Ukraine, this by keeping ultra-nationalists under control and by sidelining with Putin (14/11 12:29) (10/12 12:37).

Conflict frame

In the corpus of articles studied some inferences can be made based on frame items of conflict frame. The general pattern of the research results reflects disagreement between the west and Russia particularly over; the Crimean issue (8/12 12:29), over basic facts (9/12) and whether Crimea decided rejoin Russia or if it was annexed (11/12). They also reflect allegations of Russian interference in the US election (13/10) and of conflicting views over



information. One article published by the Washington Post is reproached, by dismantling its claims to peddling disinformation and falsehood, framing it as part of an ‘information war’ (28/9). Another article “*battle of the borsch*”, published by BBC, is reproached as trying to politicize the question of whether borsch belongs to Ukraine or Russia. This article is accused of contribution to political tensions (17/10). US is reproached and blamed for using the Crimean issue as a pretext to “*isolate*” Moscow in world affairs. This is illustrated by moving the metaphorical “*iron curtain*” from Berlin to Russia’s border through a myriad of exclusions and sanctions (19/9).

In the framing process the storytelling establishes a set of winners and losers. While NATO, Petro Poroshenko, and Ukraine are referred as losers of the conflict (11/12) (10/12 00:25). Russia and the Putin-friendly regime of Zelensky is framed as winners (18/11). Petro is described as a loser suffered a crushing against Zelensky, who won over 73 percent of the vote in the run-off in April (18/11). The region of Crimea is depicted as a winner, a region increasingly prospering from tourism, setting new records and attracting travelers from United States and Europe (8/12 17:53).

Ukraine is framed as a divided nation being pulled in two directions. Ukraine was under the leadership of Poroshenko pulled in the direction of west deceived on the promise of membership in the EU. The western pivot of Ukraine, under the leadership of Poroshenko, campaigning on patriotic and militant platform, backed up by Ukrainian nationalists, has only worsened the prospects for peace and stability in the country, making it impossible to reach compromises and bringing peace to the Eastern Ukrainian region (14/11 12:29) 10/12 00:25).

Economic consequences

In the corpus of articles studied some inferences can be made based on frame items of economic consequences. The general pattern of the research results suggests economic consequences of costs are related to the unfair sanction war US is waging on Russia (20/11 22:27). Among other economic consequences include cost of; worsening relations related to the expulsion of Russia from the economic organization G8, framed as a message that Russia is not welcome in the west anymore (19/9). RT concludes that US and its European allies cited the accession of Crimea as a pretext to impose trade sanctions on Russia, this with the hopes of “*isolating*” Moscow and breaking its economy (9/11). Part of the reason for the sanction war pursued by the US is an accusation of Russia trying to tighten its economic grip on Europe (9/9 14:10). US is attributed responsible for the sanction policy pressuring Europe to dutifully follow (9/9 14:16) (9/9 14:10).



RT also states that the sanction war has hit west as much as Russia. Sanctions will deprive European businesses and consumers of affordable gas. If the Nord Stream Project would be carried out, It would significantly increase delivery of gas to Europe and benefit the European Union's economy (Germany in particular) by providing cheaper energy fuel to drive businesses and heat homes (9/9 Sep 14:10). The sanctions has instead ruined economic prospects, barred hundreds of US companies from profitable projects in Russia and money invested into the country lost (13/10 08:03).

In addition, the economic situation in Russia as described as stable (13/10 08:03) with investor confidence and bonds in Russia on the rise, surpassing the interest rates of the US and EU (20/11 22:27). The economic situation in Ukraine framed as bad (10/12 12:37) (14/11 12:29) with the West doing little to support the country financially (14/11 12:29). Zelensky is framed as the solution to the economic situation, with the possibility of renegotiating gas deals with Russia to bring home tangible benefits (10/12 12:37). Lastly economic consequences are also related to the construction of the 'Russian Threat', framed as an invention by American capitalist's profiting from scaremongering tactics. This threat is sold as a lie and making NATO-member states pay to maintain its military complex (20/11 16:33).

5.2 RT's attempts to persuade or attract through compelling stories

5.2.1 Persuasion

RT's ability to persuade its audience depends on framing a story or event in a compelling way. For a story or event to be compelling the claims made by RT are dependent on underlying credibility both of the agency (actor) and nation (Russia). RT's constructed narrative is made by generating a causal story that links causes and effects uniquely, thereby establishing a chain of events into a chronological, coherent and logical order.

RT attempts to persuade and attract can be identified in the use of Russia's own soft power resources being promoted. However, these attempts are often combined with attempts of counterassaults, repudiation of claims, and the handpicking of quotes and statements made by sources from the perceived "other camp".

The 'Russian Threat' is dismissed as nonsense and 'utter rubbish and invented by those who try to cash in on it (20/11 16:33). The accusation of Crimea being annexed and forced at gunpoint to rejoin Russia is rejected on the notion that the Crimean citizens democratically voted to rejoin with Russia, this with an overwhelming majority (over 90 percent of them) (29/9



08:22). RT also states that Crimea historically is a predominantly Russian region (10/12 12:05) (23/9) and boosts this claim by using quotes from interviewed informants suggesting Crimean Russians never wanted to be a part of Ukraine (29/9 08:22). Another stated reason for Crimea joining Russia was to seek protection from the violent Maidan protesters in Kiev which they saw on TV. Hereby linking the vote on reunification to the cause of the Crimean's escaping violence and civil unrest, incited by Ukrainian nationalists (29/9 08:22).

Among other strategies carried out are of "fact checking" assertions made by western new providers. In one article RT cites opinion polls carried out in the US suggesting an overwhelming majority of Crimean's believes the referendum reflects "the view of most Crimean's" and that rejoining Russia would have a "positive impact on their lives". Thereby repudiating accusations of the Washington post saying Russia disinform and uses propaganda to distort the view of Crimean's true sentiments (28/9). The reference made to several surveys carried out in the West is aimed at boosting the credibility for Russia's official stance on the Crimean issue.

In another Washington Post article, "five myths about Ukraine", are challenged by "fact checking" the claims and by reducing them to mere disinformation and falsehood (28/9). In BBC's article of "the battle of the borsch" accusations of Russian "cultural appropriation" are repudiated by counterassaults on BBC for trying to politicize the shared culture of Russian and Ukrainian through national cuisine. Thereby accusing BBC of contributing to political tensions between Russia and Ukraine (17/10).

RT reporting also seeks to damage the image of the US in the world. This by exposing it as a global force conspiring against other nations. The Euromaidan protests are labelled a US backed coup (9/12). (13/9) (9/9 09:12). In another article US is exposed as a "terrorist enabler" in Syria seeking to prevent the complete eradication of terrorists on Syrian soil (27/9 Sep 01:41). RT also portrays an image of west arbitrary using policies of sanctioning, economic strangulation and military threats against of a number of independent and sovereign nations (23/9). Overall the channel seeks to undermine the legitimacy of the West as a proclaimed champion of liberal values and rule of law.

Part of RT's attempts to enhance its credibility is done by handpicking statements made by sources from the "western camp" discrediting the West. The Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl is quoted on calling into question the selective and unfair approach of the 'West' in international law (11/12). French president Emmanuel Macron statement of the "brain death" of NATO, is used to frame a possible rift within the organization and



call into question the purpose of the block (11/12). Another statement made by Macron of the “end of Western hegemony” is used to urge a rethinking of a more positive approach of the West towards Moscow (5/9 15:26).

In addition, Maidan activist and political prisoner Oleg Sentsov is quoted and used as evidence that Crimea have never been fully Ukrainian. Oleg was in western media portrayed as a central figurehead for the resistance movement to Russian intervention. As an ethnic Russian and not a Ukrainian nationalist, New York Times wrote that he “infuriated Kremlin by insisting that he and his fellow Russian-speakers in Crimea never wanted or needed to be saved”. Here RT answers by creating a counter narrative using handpicked quotes of him saying “Crimea has always oriented itself towards Russia and never been fully Ukrainian”. RT attempts to reveal the “truth” by calling Oleg exploited by a political media campaign in Ukraine (29/9 08:22). Lastly, RT’s attempt of enhancing the credibility for its storytelling can be identified in a strategy of letting Western journalists write several articles (17/10) (28/9) (26/11 11:32) (17/10) (9/9 14:16) (26/9). But also, by republishing articles of Western scholars. This for example, by Stephen Cohen Professor of Russia studies (19/9) or by John Laughland doctorate in philosophy at the University of Oxford (10/12 12:37). These republished articles are assumed to be selected based on its Russian-friendly content.

5.2.2 Attraction

RT’s attempts to attracts through the soft power resources of ‘culture’ ‘political values’ and ‘foreign policy’ are both by ‘neutral’ reporting and thereby letting them elicit attraction themselves. However, the reporting is mostly biased and combined with efforts of calling out Western hypocrisy in international relations.

RT attempts to attract through culture can be identified in reporting of Russian tourism (8/12 17:53) and in articles about food (17/10). As of tourism, Crimea is described as a region becoming increasingly popular, this year setting a post-Soviet record and attracting tourists from United States and Europe (8/12 17:53). Here, RT attempts to attract by showing Crimea’s widespread appeal and the region’s successes after Russian ‘reunification’. As of food, a social media debate of the soup of Borsch sparked tensions and raised accusations of Russian “*cultural appropriation*” of Ukrainian cuisine. In this article RT can be seen as trying to reconcile the dilemma by depoliticizing the issue. RT states that borsch is part of a shared culture of former soviet states, and much like ravioli, dumplings and dim sum there may be several culinary connections to the same dish. Therefore, Ukraine have every right to say Borsch belongs to them (17/10). Here RT attempts to attract by giving references to Borsch widespread appeal and outreach in the



Eastern Europe, instead of being a unique and localized dish part of Russian cuisine.

RT's attempts to attract through political values can be identified in strategies of challenging liberal notions and the western-promoted development model. This with the overall aim of making it more attractive to international partners. As of political values, RT promotes a more inclusive global and multilateral system based on the values of voluntary participation, consensus, equality and sound pragmatism, marked by less confrontation and bloc approaches. Thereby providing an alternative path for the countries not fitting the Western notion and "basket" of liberal values (23/9). Nevertheless, most examples where RT attempts to promote political values are often combined with counterattacks calling out Western hypocrisy. RT states that the West-promoted order does not meet the needs of humankind's harmonious development (23/9).

The Western order is rather: *"driven by an interventionist ideology of responsibility to protect, which justifies violent humanitarian interventions without UN Security Council approval"* (23/9).

This order is described as non-inclusive, aims to revise the key international legal mechanisms and rejects the principle of collective action in the relations between states (23/9). As of hypocrisy, RT repeatedly accuses the west of claiming to be the defendant of liberalism, individuals and their freedoms, while at the same time partitioning arbitrarily sanctioning, economic strangulation and military threats of a number of independent and sovereign nations (23/9). Thereby, the western approach is marked by a contradictory, non-coherent and selective approach in international law (11/12) (23/9).

RT's attempts to attract through foreign policy can be identified in topics related to Russia's engagement and collaboration with the rest of the world. This including; gas deals (3) economic business models, infrastructure projects (9/11), language education for national minorities in Crimea (17/9). and space discoveries by a Crimean astronaut (14/11 14:37) (12/9). Another article highlights Russia's overall contribution to the international community including world class science and stable alliances with all the other emerging powers that are not part of the US-NATO Western 'world order'. RT also promotes the idea a multipolar world with multiple developing models and partnerships such as the; Eurasian partnership, G20 and other organizations for all of the world to work together (23/9). In addition, RT stresses how Europe needs Russia to find the answers to the pressing issues in global politics, mostly for strategic reasons. Quoting President Macron saying, "only an alliance with Russia can produce a true



European Strategy”. Having Russia on board is described as the solution to solve conflicts in Iran, Ukraine, and Syria (9/9 09:12). Another RT article republished of Professor Stephen Cohen suggests west’s foreign policy of “driving” Russia from the west could risk driving Russia away from the West’s liberalizing influences back to its more authoritarian traditions (19/9). Due to the western imposed sanctions since the ‘accession’ of Crimea, Russia’s has increasingly begun to look east, signing a major gas deal with Beijing in 2014 (9/11). To summarize it up RT attempts to attract are often combined with of efforts of active persuasion, this rather than letting Russian culture, values and policy elicit attraction themselves.

6. Discussion

The empirical focus of this thesis has so far been on published articles on RT website analyzed through normative and analytical frames. Now the results of the analytical framework will be discussed in the light of the broader theoretical literature to provide a more comprehensive base for drawing inferences to the research questions: *a) How does RT make attempts of influencing its audience through persuasion and attraction?* This question is connected to and relies on the second question *b) how does RT construct a compelling narrative?*

Several findings may cast light on RT’s attempt to form a compelling narrative. First, most of the topics retrieved from the search word ‘Crimea’ are connected to the main question of whether Russia is having legal basis for its claim of Crimean reunification or if human rights abuses were in fact committed. The story telling of RT consistently states that Crimea decided to rejoin Russia in 2014 voluntarily by democratic vote. Since Crimea, from RT’s (and Russia’s) standpoint of view, legally and historically belongs with Russia, most moral messages suggest how wrongly and unfairly Russia has been treated by its opponents since the Crimean- and Ukrainian conflict broke out in 2014. Accusations of annexation, invasion, occupation, human rights abuses, as well as demonization of Russia as an aggressor, are all groundless and unjustified. Normatively speaking, this is an attempt of RT of framing the context of which the audience looks at these issues, suggesting that attending to Russia’s standpoint of view, *is the right thing to do*. It is also an effort of legitimizing Russia’s claim by delegitimizing that of the opponent. US legitimacy is undermined by a counter narrative that establishes it as a malign actor, conspiring against other nations and consistently violating international law. The west is depicted as a rather contradictory entity lacking coherence between the liberal values it preaches and its practices to promote them.



By generating a causal story, RT establishes causes and effects and attribution of blame or responsibility. The actor (or entity) assigned responsibility for the problem is almost exclusively the 'west', represented by EU and NATO, led by the US. These claims are connected to the invention of the 'Russian Threat', made up by the US and sold a lie to maintain the military complex of NATO. A complex which is backed up and supported by its member states having vassal-like dependency on the US as the dominating force. This accusation is connected to a larger remark of unjustified Western domination in international affairs and the need of an alteration to reflect a new world of realities, with new players wielding influence on regional and global development trends. International law today is characterized by; selective legal interpretation, division, and confrontational approach shaping the global agenda. RT attempt is to promote an alternative development model while at the same time damaging the image of US. This by exposing it as malign actor practicing exceptionalism, unilateralism and dictating the terms in international relations.

Ukraine is framed as a divided nation pulled into multiple directions, most notably by its western and eastern and factions. Ukraine's western faction, represented by the old administration of Poroshenko's, is described as disastrous for the country. This administration has failed to promote peace and stability in the country due to its hard stance and anti-Putin rhetoric. Ukraine has been betrayed by the West with hopes of EU membership and financial support and exploited by the West in a zero-sum game of geopolitics. In the RT storytelling Ukraine is depicted a country plagued by; chaos, instability, economic problems, and war. These effects are mostly connected to the causes of Western involvement. The principal argument being promoted is that Ukraine-Russian relations would be better today if the west did not intervene and if Ukraine were left to decide its own faith. US is blamed for ruining the prospects for peace by adding tension to the region. Therefore, the solution proposed is that the new administration of Ukraine should near Russia, by seeking mutual partnerships.

In summary, RT constructs a somewhat dichotomous narrative of good and bad characters, assigned positive and negative attributes, referred to as winners and losers of the conflict. Positive aspects are normally attributed to Russia and those who are perceived as Putin-friendly, while negative aspects are attributed to political opponents in Ukraine, Europe and the US. RT tries to take the interest of actors who sympathize with Russia and are perceived as Putin friendly into account. This by sidelining with them and emphasize how they are affected by problems/issues related to the crisis. The narrative RT constructs is clearly underlined by pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiments, a narrative which leads to a somewhat one-sided view. RT



attraction may be undermined by its antagonistic representation of west as “the other”. While RT attempts to expose the west as a malign actor violating universal principles, it might at as well lose legitimacy by treating others as inferior.

The research results can find connections with previous research with scholars suggesting part of RT is of competing with the democratic states in the realm of ideas (Diamond et.al 2016). RT competes by challenging the notions of “liberal” values preached by the west, this by assessing how the west lives’ up to these standards. By using counterattacks and calling out the western countries as hypocrites, the channel attempts to undermine the basis of the current world order, thereby “allowing” Russia to suggest a new and more Russia-friendly one. In the context of Ukrainian-Russian relations, RT competes with other discourses and actors to enhance its own credibility while weakening that of its opponents, including western news providers and particularly the US.

As previous studies of RT point out, the news coverage clearly follows a one-sided pro-Russian reality (Borchers 2011). RT also constructs a narrative heavily based on an anti-western (Yablokov 2015) and counter-hegemonic agenda challenging a corrupt and hypocritical western establishment (Miazhevich 2018). This reporting also departs from the perceived “otherness” (Horbyk 2015). which can be identified in what Russia perceives to be a social construction of “Russian Threat” invented by the west.

The results suggest that Russia’s soft power of attraction may emerge in its global appeal as an alternative to the established western order (Miazhevich 2018). Part of RT’s strategy or agenda may just be to discredit its political opponents and undermine their credibility. This rather than letting Russian culture, values and policies elicit attraction themselves (Szostek 2014). In other words, Russia’s soft power strategy might be based more on active persuasion than passive attraction. Russia’s attraction may lie in its appeal as an alternative model of development and advocater of a revised international system. This may be placed in the wider context of the emergence of a new world order including the “non-western” (mostly authoritarian states) possibly sharing sentiments of exclusion from the western establishment.

Whether these attempts of constructing a compelling narrative have been successful or not can be measured through polls and will be left unanswered in this thesis. As earlier mentioned, some scholars have claimed that Russia uses the Russian mass media in Ukraine to influence the pro-Russian population (Horbyk 2015). It might be the case that RT only reinforces opinions among the viewers who already sympathizes with Russia and the channel. As an emerging broadcaster with a less established status, RT is still



unable to capitalize on its reputation like western broadcasters of BBC, broadcasting with an ethos of neutrality, objectivity and balance (Miazhevich 2018). Attempts of handpicked quotes from prominent individuals from the “opposition camps” might be a way of compensation for the lack of good reputation and by enhancing the credibility for the channel.

Before this thesis moves on to the conclusion, a few notes should be made on the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Studying roughly 31 news articles selected from a period of 4 months does not provide comprehensive grounds for generalizations. In addition, RT is just 1 medium among others in Russia’s arsenal of projecting influence abroad. Nevertheless, perhaps the greatest strength of this thesis is to contribute to how five news frames covering normative and analytical elements of soft power can be identified in the news coverage of RT.

Lastly, some notes are warranted on the validity and reliability of the thesis. Concerning the validity, the interpretation of frames is a subjective process and an outcome of the researcher’s unique individual knowledge structures, experience and context. This means there's always a risk of the results being afflicted with a degree of uncertainty. Regarding the chosen media frames, these were related to normative and analytical characteristics outlined as relevant to study soft power by Rothman (2011). The coded questions of Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) were not explicitly developed for purpose to study soft power in their study. Thereby the correspondence between the methodological tools and empirical results may contain a degree of certainty. Operationalization of the soft power resources of state’s culture, political values and foreign policy are arguably more valid, based on a comprehensive assessment of global soft power 30 framework.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to develop an understanding how Russian uses state-controlled media: RT as a soft power tool in the context of Ukrainian-Russian relations. This was broken down into questions of a) “*how RT make attempts of influencing its audience through persuasion and attraction*” and b) “*how does RT frame a compelling narrative?*” Despite the aforementioned limitations of assessing the overall conversion process in mind, this thesis can provide several insights into these questions.

RT’s attempts to attract by appealing in both the western and eastern directions. It appeals to the west by stressing how the west needs Russia to find answers to the pressing issues in global politics. It appeals to the east by promoting an alternative model of development that challenges the western establishment. RT promotes an “eastern model” of development that



incorporates the countries who doesn't fit the western "basket" of liberal values. This within a multilateral system based on less confrontation, selective interpretation, exceptionalism and based more on values of inclusion, equality and voluntary participation. Attempts of attraction are also based on intangible and tangible benefits if you sideline with Russia, of both resources and better relations.

RT attempts to persuade by repudiating accusations, counterassaults and by challenging conventional notions promoted by Western actors. It challenges the western notions by seeking to undermine the legitimacy of western policies by calling them out as hypocritical. The channel doesn't necessarily promote authoritarian counter norms but rather challenges the western ones and thereby questioning their *raison d'être*. This by demonstrating the lack of coherence between the principles being preached and the selective approach it conducts. Accusations connected to Russia are usually repudiated by "fact checking" and reduced to disinformation and falsehood. These repudiations are often combined with counterassaults discrediting the opponent. Part of RT's attempts to create compelling counter-narratives are by handpicking statements and quoting people from the "other camp" discrediting the West, including European ministers, presidents or activists. To enhance credibility for these statements several articles are either written by western journalists or prominent scholars.

Lastly, as previous scholars have pointed out, Russia favors a pragmatic state led approach to soft power. This rather than letting Russian culture, values and policies elicit attraction themselves. Russia's soft power resources might primarily be used through active persuasion strategies rather than being a passive pole of attraction. In this corpus of articles studied, the promotion of illiberal counter norms noted by Diamond et al (2016) were not identified. The political values given reference to were rather liberal norms and values. The results suggest RT is not explicitly communicating these counter norms and/or are being subtle about them.

What is more evident is that RT attempts to persuade and attract by capitalizing on western ideas. Thereby, RT could be seen as mimicking the strategies of the west by promoting liberal values in a way of undermining democracy from within. Russia's might also use western norms and values to reverse negative perceptions of Russia to improve its international image. This by erasing the view of Russia as an undemocratic and aggressive actor in world affairs. After all, RT content should be approached with caution, scholars have pointed out that the Russian interpretation of soft power is instrumental and interest centric to secure foreign policy goals. The one-sided, biased and overly West-hostile content suggest RT might only report on Moscow's official position and not from an independent standpoint of



view. Based on the listed limitations of this study, future research on RT should seek to trace the link between Russian soft power ‘resources’ and their ‘outcomes’. This to attempt to assess the whole chain of soft power process and the effectiveness of RT as a soft power tool of Russia.



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Appendices

Table 1 : Normative frame matrix

<i>Normative frames</i>	
Framing items	Identifying an issue at a moral or emotional level
Moral frame M1: "Does the story contain any moral message? M2 "Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?"	Framing a particular choice as morally right or wrong. Influences the availability of choices to the other actor, given that the other actor adopts this framing (Rothman 2011:54)
Human interest frame H1: "Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem? H2: "Does the story provide a human example of "human face" on the issue?" H3: "Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?" H4: "Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?" H5 "Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?"	Appealing to an individual's emotions. This is often utilized through a multitude of media, such as images and sounds (Rothman 2011:54)



Table 2 : Analytical frame matrix

<i>Analytical frames</i>	
Framing items	Generating a causal story of causes and effects
<p>Responsibility frame A1: "Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?" A2: "Does the story suggests that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?" A3: "Does the story suggests solutions(s) to the problem/issue?" A4: "Does the story suggest that an individual (or group of people in society is responsible for the issue-problem?" A5: "Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?"</p>	Generating a causal story involves descriptions of the harm or difficulty and attributions of blame or responsibility for the harm (Rothman 2011:55).
<p>Economic consequences E1: "Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?" E2: "Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?" E3: "Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of actions?"</p>	Generating a causal story can establish costs and benefits for states (Rothman 2011:55).
<p>Conflict frame C1 "Does the article reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups? C2 "Does one-party-individual-group-country-reproach another?" C3 "Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?" C4 "Does the story refer to winners and losers?"</p>	Agenda setting represents a <i>harder form</i> of soft power and can create conflict of interest between actors rather than co-option (Rothman 2011:53).



Table 3 : *Soft power matrix*

<i>Soft power resources</i>	<i>Objective data structured into sub-indexes</i>
S1 State's culture	Culture sub-index A state's culture can be measured by the quality, international reach and appeal of a country's cultural production. This can be measured on the metrics of language, arts, film, music, sport and tourism (McClory 2019:60,118)
S2 Political values	Government sub-index A state's political values can be measured by individual freedom, human rights, democracy, it also includes measures of government effectiveness and broad metrics of citizens outcomes in human development and violence in society. In addition, the global ranking of soft power identifies values of gender equality good governance, rule of law, and population well-being (McClory 2019:28).
S3 Foreign policy	Engagement sub-index A state's foreign policy can be measured through a country's overall contribution to the international community. Essentially it captures the ability of states or governments to engage with international audiences, drive collaboration, and ultimately shape global outcomes. It includes metrics of the reach of countries diplomatic networks and commitment to international development and environmental challenges. This will be measured by the engagement sub-index (McClory 2019:27).



