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"COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WESTERN AND EASTERN MASS MEDIA COVERAGE IN THE SYRIAN POLITICAL CONFLICT IN THE YEAR 2018-2019"

„VAKARŲ IR RYTŲ ŽINIASKLAIDOS LYGINAMOJI ANALIZĖ SIRIJOS POLITINIAM KONFLIKTE 2018-2019 METAIS“

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ABSTRACT

The bachelor thesis will aim the explore a contemporary phenomenon that roams around the world today – the mass media communication methods in political conflicts, to be more specific in the Syrian political conflict context that has been going on since the early 2011 what is known as the Arab Spring events. The context of the Syrian political conflict was chosen due to the fact that it is the current most prominent subject of political conflict discourse and makes a perfect ground to analyze the behavior of mass news organizations and their primary function of objective reporting. The research is based on mostly on the news articles, reportings and statistical data that is extracted from the two biggest regional news media outlets Cable News Network (CNN) and Russia Today (RT). The research will also aim to compare through particular research methods the mass medias modes of operating and will attempt to provide comprehensive explanations how the media works, also it will aim to bring awareness to the atrocities being committed in the Syrian political conflict by giving context to the political situation.

Keywords: Syrian political conflict, Russia Today, CNN, media, news organizations, media behavior, Russia, Syria, United States
SANTRAUKA

Bakalauro baigiamuoju darbu bus siekti šiuolaikinį fenomeną, vykstančį šiandieniniam pasaulyje - žiniasklaidos komunikacijos metodus politiniuose konfliktuose, konkrečiau apibūdinti Sirijos politinio konflikto kontekste, vykstančiame nuo 2011 m. pradžios, taip vadinamo Arabų pavasario įvykio. Sirijos politinio konflikto kontekstas buvo pasirinktas dėl to, kad jis yra aktualiausias politinių konfliktų diskurso objektas ir sudaro puikų pagrindą analizuoti masinių naujienų organizacijų elgesį ir jų pagrindinę objektyvios informacijos per davimo funkciją. Tyrimas daugiausia grindžiamas naujienų straipsniais, reportažais ir statistiniais duomenimis, kurie yra renkami iš dviejų didžiausių regioninių žiniasklaidos priemonių „Cable News Network“ (CNN) ir „Russia Today“ (RT). Tyrimu taip pat bus siekiama tam tikrais tyrimo metodais palyginti masinių žiniasklaidos priemonių veikimo būdus ir bus bandoma pateikti išsamius paaškinimus, kaip veikia žiniasklaida, taip pat bus siekiama supažindinti su Sirijos politiniame konflikte įvykdytais žiaurumais pateikiant kontekstą dabartinėje politinėje situacijoje.
INTRODUCTION

The ongoing debate about the situation in the Syrian country is an unresolved issue. With over seven million people internally displaced, and over five million refugees the country is in a versatile state\(^1\). The whole friction began in March 2011 inspired by the Arab spring events. An organized group of Syrians were marching through the streets demanding change in the government action. The government’s response to these protest was harsh right from the start. Armless protestors were shot at, got beaten or been imprisoned for their controversial actions according to the United Nations reportings.

**Novelty and relevance of the topic.** The research will be conducted by analyzing western (CNN) and eastern (Russia Today - RT) media sources interpretation of the events that took place over the last several years in the Syrian political conflict. The research will aim to provide an extensive and a more objective view on the matter giving the reader a comprehensive intake on how media influences perception based on different political contexts and interests. The topic covering this research is by itself relevant as the Syrian conflict has not been resolved and is still ongoing. This research also contributes by bringing awareness to the atrocities that are being committed within Syrian borders and the absence of international aid that should be provided by such organizations as United Nations.

Also a closer look will be taken when analyzing specific mass media outlets such as Cable News Network (CNN) - strategies on presenting certain facts, influencing the opinions of people, main auditoriums of this media outlet, measuring the sphere of influence and the same will be done with the media outlet supposedly on the opposite spectrum - Russia Today. The research will also try to find out how each media outlet perceives the other - what role do they play in the Syrian political conflict. Overall this research will primarily cover the Syrian political conflict through the prisms of major international western and eastern media outlets, a series of events will be analyzed throughout the conflict year up to the recent years of 2018 and 2019.

**Research problem.** How perception of the events is influenced based on different mass media sources. The objectivity of the events are skewed with mass media interpretations and presentations of the facts which reduces the trust of receiving a non-biased information to the general public thus a need of awareness of wholesome of the information arises which is one of the aims of

\(^1\) Source: UNCHR - [https://www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people](https://www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people)
this research is to present as objective analytical interpretations of the Syrian political events as possible.

**The object of the research.** The influencing behavior of mass media outlets - Cable News Network (CNN) and Russia Today (RT) - in the Syria's political conflict.

**The goal of the research.** To analyze the way different mass media sources represent facts based on their political and geopolitical context.

**The tasks of the research:**
1. To present distinguished differences between analyzed media sources of CNN and RT.
2. To contextualize ownership of the medias CNN and RT.
3. To distinguish international western and eastern mass media outlets political agendas.
4. To examine the audience on the receiving end from the analyzed media outlets of CNN and RT.
5. To examine the way media organizations CNN and RT captures the viewer.
6. To make a comparison analysis of CNN and Russia Today media outlets.

**Research source base:** The source base of this research will be drawn from the most popular mass media outlets Russia Today (RT) and Cable News Network (CNN) in the year 2018-2019. The majority of the research will be conducted through analyzing the prior mentioned mass media news articles covering the topic of the Syrian political conflict, social media posts, public speeches of influential political leaders that are covered in the media articles regarding the Syrian political conflict topic.

**Research methods.** The way this research will be conducted is primarily using media content analysis to analyze the information provided by the selected media source bases while secondary using comparative analysis regarding the two mass media outlets (CNN and RT) to provide a more extensive comparison, generally secondary sources will be analyzed (media articles, press, public speeches of government officials, video reports of mass media), as this research is mostly based on mass media outlet interpretations and their presentations of facts. Further the research will involve quantitative data analysis from numerous polls that will be involved in the research in attempt to make a more comprehensive data interpretation.

**Structure of the paper.** The research is divided into introduction, several main parts, conclusion and the list of literature used. Firstly an extended review of research conduct will be presented - they keywords used in the research within the first part the content of media will be thoroughly analyzed, the analysis will consist of - identifying the type of information source, identifying the information source, identifying the targeted topic of the information, examining the goal of the information presented, identifying the targeted audience of the information. A categorical
analysis will be formed where the data gathered will be divided into categories that make the data more comprehensive.

The remaining part will generally consist of comparing the examined information sources with one another and drawing conclusions. Interpretations of the facts will be cross examined through different media outlets and later compared on the differences between them.
1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ASPECTS OF MASS MEDIA IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

In this chapter the basic concepts and tools of mass media will be presented. The research will also be based upon the cultivation theory which - in short- assumes that the media can reinforce an individual's’ preconceived notions about the thing that one has an opinion about. Cultivation theory was founded by George Gerbner in the year 1976 and it examines the long-term patterns of media’s ability to influence the perception of reality in an individual.

1.1. Influence of the media

Mass media is a form of wide spread information communication in a given society. Mass media has several purposes in society - it can act as a watchdog, can perform an advocacy function of marketing, propaganda, political communication and public relations. It can also have an entertainment function through acting, music and TV shows and it can also serve by giving public service announcements, emergency alerts. The general role of media (mainly in western democracies) is to play as an intermediary between a given society and the government.

**Table.** Conceptual model.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Learning)</th>
<th>Incidental Information</th>
<th>Social reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tv viewing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity, focusing strategies, attention,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inference skills, social structure, other experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Source: Hawkins and Pingree (1983), table made by the author.
The figure above displays a scheme explaining the relationship between the media’s influence and the individual. This scheme was formed in the framework of this research basically explains how one’s reality is formed through the tools of mass media, primarily television as it is the most common form of communication. It all starts with the time spent viewing television as the individual is at the receiving end of the information given to him, than the viewing process is influenced by variable factors such as the capacity to absorb the information given, focusing strategies which refers to psychological phenomena of the reticular activation system (RAS) that is responsible for filtering the information received by the individual, the attention span which indicates the focus time that an individual can hold whilst absorbing the information and active involvement of the viewer. Next the received information is reinforced with “incidental information” which are sources outside the media (but not necessarily) that confirms the preconceived notion passed on by the television and at the end of the continuum resolving with conclusions that represent the social reality. Also inference skills and social constructs influence the construction process of the reality as well.

However the conceptual model above has its own limitations. It is taken into account that the conceptual model may be outdated due to such new phenomena as social media and the time that it was conceptualized, but the overarching principals remain the same as well as the model itself, arguably social media even amplifies some aspects as the model itself such as involvement which than increases learning which increases the construction process and so on and so forth. The difference may vary in TV viewing, instead the exposure to digital media should be replaced thus optimizing the model and applying it to the 21st century’s context which this research aims to do.

1.2 Tools of mass media

There are multiple forms of communications that mass media utilizes in attempt to send out the information. One of the forms of communication of mass media is broadcast which is transmitted by television, radio and social networks whilst being not relevant to this research the other instruments in communicating are films, music, video games and excluding from the not relevant category – the digital media. In this research primarily the form of communication that will be focused is the digital media. The internet is a more interactive medium of mass media, and can be briefly described as "a network of networks". Specifically, it is the worldwide, publicly accessible network of interconnected computer networks that transmit data by packet switching using the standard Internet Protocol (IP). It consists of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business, and governmental networks, which
together carry various information and services, such as email, online chat, file transfer, and the

Besides the conceptual model above (in the 1.1 chapter) the influence of mass media spans
way more across different levels of communication. Nowadays with the gaining rise of social media
many businesses including the mass media expands itself into this sphere of influence. Unfortunately
social media is relatively a new phenomenon thus not much analytical scientific work has been done
in the field in order to examine its effects fully. Regardless of its novelty, this research will include
social media as a tool of communication and one of the more important ones. To briefly describe the
differential aspect of social media – a much more engaging way to communicate with the audience
giving it interacting opportunities such as to publicly express an opinion of oneself or to leave a
positive review. In specific a branch of social media will be analyzed which is – digital media.

1.3 The Cultivation theory in mass media

While briefly mentioning in the beginning the cultivation theory in mass media has much
more to it than simply analyzing mass media behavior. The theory has the capacity to examine how
social realities are constructed through intermediary information. Gerbner and Larry Gross the
founders of the cultivation theory suggest: "Television is a medium of the socialization of most people
into standardized roles and behaviors. Its function is in a word, enculturation". Also there are key
concepts that cultivation theory offers for the reader to better understand the behavior of media and
individual (see the table bellow).

The essential concepts in the mass media cultivation theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstreaming</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Mainstreaming is the blurring, blending, and bending process by which heavy TV viewers from disparate groups develop a common outlook on the world through constant exposure to the same images and labels on TV.&quot;[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resonance</strong></td>
<td>Resonance occurs when things viewed on television are congruent with the actual lived realities of viewers. Gerbner writes that this provides a double dose of messages that resonate and amplify cultivation[6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean World Index</strong></td>
<td>Viewers who consumed television at a higher rate believed that greater protection by law enforcement is needed and reported that most people &quot;cannot be trusted&quot; and are &quot;just looking out for themselves&quot;[7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dramatic violence</strong></td>
<td>Dramatic violence is the &quot;overt expression or serious threat of physical force as part of the plot.&quot;[8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heavy viewers</strong></td>
<td>Heavy viewers are individuals who watch at least four hours of television a day[9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Magic bullet theory</strong></td>
<td>The &quot;magic bullet&quot; theory graphically assumes that the media's message is a bullet fired from the &quot;media gun&quot; into the viewer's &quot;head&quot; (1995).[10]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These six essential concepts is what provides an element of the theoretical framework of the cultivation theory.

Assumption of the theory claims that television is fundamentally different from other forms of communication. Gerbner argues that "television is the source of the most broadly shared

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4 The table is made by the author based on listed below literature sources


images and messages in history. Television cultivates from infancy the very predispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other primary sources. The repetitive pattern of television's mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment.\textsuperscript{11} The author further explains “Television has a lower threshold for consumption than print media (because of the need for literacy) and film (because it requires a level of financial capability)”\textsuperscript{12}. However this can be also said about the internet and how mass media utilized it. The internet executes the author’s mentioned “mass produced images and messages” quite more rapidly and it has a much more larger engaging audience than it does in television. Yet television has not completely resided and the internet did not yet completely replaced television. As of now both forms of communication are relevant in today’s day and age.

There is one more key concepts about cultivation theory that was not included in the table 2 and that is “television reality”. This concept refers to the subtle process that is taken place while an individual or a viewer spends an extended amount of time watching television. “Television reality describes the effects television viewing has on heavy viewers. Cultivation theory research seems to indicate that heavy television viewing can result in the creation of a television reality, which is a set of facts and beliefs based on television content rather than actual facts.”\textsuperscript{13}. This concept states that an individual spending a lot of time watching television may be unaware of the influence that this communication instrument causes.

The challenge of this research is relating the concepts mentioned above into today’s context of mass media and applying it to the media outlets that are going to be analyzed. Mainstreaming or dramatic violence is quite relevant to the mass media today as it still one of the tools that the media attracts the public, however concept like resonance may be a bit more difficult to adept. Surprisingly well all other concepts like the mean world index or heavy viewers are perfectly applicable to this day given the fact that the model itself was formed over forty years ago. Further into the research several of these concepts will be applied for the purposes of still demonstrating their relevance and portraying the intended message that this research aims for.

It is important to talk about how the concepts are interlinked. The heavy viewers concept is largely correlated with the magic bullet theory. The more that the viewer watches television the more


\textsuperscript{12} "Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process”.Same page , p40

the media “fires its bullet” into the individuals mind. Also by adding in dramatic violence to the front of the formula it adds the number of viewers captured by TV due to the drawing attention from the audience. Finally when these variables interact with each other the last outcome of is the mean world index that is an expression of all the variables interacting together which results in increased perception of violence and higher rate of involving into violent activities.

The cultivation theory in part will be used to explain the behavior of the analyzed mass media outlets in the internet space where the influence extends beyond television and printed press thus highlighting the new form of communication that is being exercised by the contemporary medias. So the previously mentioned concepts like “heavy viewers”, etc. will be adopted in attempt to display the affected audience not through consumption of television but rather through their internet supporting devices like smartphones and computers.
2. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

In this part methodological aspects of the research will be presented. The description of the research methods used - qualitative media content analysis, quantitative data analysis, comparative analysis, secondary sources analysis and the explanation behind the research methods used. The research will be conducted in a chronological order that will be explained in the next sub-chapter.

2.1 Research structure design

In attempt to examine and identify mass media behavior the research uses a combination of several methods. Media content analysis is the first chosen research method to be conducted as it is not possible to escalate further the research using comparative analysis method only. Media content analysis method is used to extract the information necessary from the analyzed source base in order to further proceed with the research, secondly quantitative data analysis will be used in order to contextualize the information gathered for the research. And lastly comparative analysis will be added on.

The information criteria that will be extracted from the research source are the following: 1) the timeline of the information; 2) the source of the information (the source of the information has to fall into one of the two categories - Cable News Network (CNN) or Russia Today (RT); 3) the facts presented in the information source; 4) the interpretations of the facts provided by the information source;

The study further analyzes qualitative media content. The data collection and analysis according to individual criteria is based on qualitative analysis from the research source base of CNN and RT. Various methods of analysis are used to better disclose the research findings data based on triangulation research method. The final stage is a summarized qualitative approach, since the evaluation of the results of the research is required not only to be simply qualitative, but objective as possible interpretations of the qualitative results. Based on this research, the method can be systematically and consistently evaluating the content of the texts to formulate conclusive and reliable conclusions. The purpose of the research is to find out the effects of mass media behavior in forming the public opinion in the context of the Syrian political conflict.
Further a *qualitative analysis* will be conducted where particular opinion polls will be used as the research’s source base for the purposes of better contextualizing the situation in Syria and the media behavior.

Next *comparative analysis* will be executed. This method will be used in order to contrast the opinion presented by both information sources (CNN or RT). by using this method it is more likely to identify a more objective view of the events that took place in the Syrian conflict. Also the comparison methods aims to distinguish how CNN and RT form interpretations in the Syrian political conflict. Lastly this methods aims to spot any incongruence that might occur when contrasting the data.

**The research sample base and timeline.** *Sample base:* the most popular international western mass media outlet Cable News Network (CNN) and the most popular international with largely captured region of Eastern Europe audience news network Russia Today (RT). Also the opinion polls of particular research centers. These particular mass media conglomerates were chosen in order to represent a distinct regional (western and eastern) allied positioning in the matter of Syria’s political conflict. *The timeline:* 2018.01.01 - 2019.12.31. The reasoning behind the selected timeline is because this research primarily aims to cover not the overall length of the Syrian political conflict, but just to provide the latest review of the conflict in the year 2018 and 2019. Also in the context of the selected timeline mass media behavior is analyzed which is the main emphasis on the research.

**Justification for the choice of case studies.** The main object of the research is the Syria’s political conflict and the associated mass media outlets that are acting as a secondary information source. The selected mass media outlets are based on the following criteria. Firstly, me as the researcher, I am fully equipped to handle complicated texts written in English that would require some experience in the international politics research field to understand, the norms, notions associated with Syrian political conflict, as I have expressed an interest in the past covering the conflict through different methods of analyzing the topic. So in conjunction to the mentioned facts both selected mass media articles (CNN and RT) are international news organizations which are covering events that are happening in the world mostly in the forms of media articles, social media posts, live broadcasts and other related forms of communications primarily using the language of English. The reason the Syrian political conflict was chosen is that in a certain way of looking at it the conflict represents a cold war scenario from a geopolitical perspective where the opposing sides can not engage directly one another directly, media is chosen as form a of communication to spread propaganda to the public, to influence the opinion of individuals.
3. EXECUTION PART OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 The audience

The audience research has been conducted. Given the fact that both mass media outlets have different captured audiences, the analysis of the viewers that spend time to the preferable news source must be conducted. Presumably audiences differ based on their geographical location and associated nationality.

Based on Ipsos statistical reporting on TV news consumption in the world 2017\textsuperscript{14} the study was carried out in Russia, Poland, Greece, Ireland, UK, Turkey, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium, Austria, US, Canada, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Columbia, Chile, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Libya, Palestine, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Lebanon, Tunisia, KSA, Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, India, New Zealand, and Australia. The findings of the study revealed that nearly 100 million people consume Russia Today news content in one way or another through their communication devices.

The study also revealed that RT’s most growing audience was Latin America, the viewers watching RT international news network has tripled over the last two years, specifically in the Latin American region. However the most captured in terms of actual numbers across borders was the Middle East region, specific country has the largest concentration of viewers of the RT news and it is the republic of Iraq with over 2 million viewers based on the report.

Quite different results were found referring the same study\textsuperscript{15} when analyzing CNN. The study has shown that the audiences captured by CNN were quite differently dispersed geographically relative to RT news organization. The most regionally captured audience are in North America (USA and Canada), Europe, United Kingdom, also northern Africa and middle east, however the latter are less profound in having universal recognition in the region.

### 3.2 Ownership of CNN

Research of ownership has been conducted. Target task of this research is to identify origins of the Cable News Network Organization. A link was found between three mass organizations 	extit{American Telephone and Telegraph, Warner Media News & Sports} and 	extit{Cable News Network}. A further analysis was conducted to clarify the relationship that each entity has with one another. A hierarchical relationship was expressed by the illustration bellow.

\textbf{3 table. CNN ownership Table}. Table made by the author

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{ownship.png}
\caption{Ownership of CNN}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{hierarchy.png}
\caption{Hierarchical relationship between entities}
\end{figure}

Examining the hierarchy further there seems to be no evidence of direct or indirect government involvement in the news organization information output that could be linked to a state institution. Further research also reveals that the organization has favorable conditions to operate freely as a press organization (see chapter 3.4 World press freedom index). The political bias identified is that the reporting news agency (CNN) in the Syrian political conflict is operating in the same country which has a political interest in Syria’s conflict area – United States. Thus political implications of favorable review for the US is assumed meaning that the analyzed news organization may be biased towards presenting the information in the Syrian political conflict.

To further analyzing the hierarchical corporate structure it is important to briefly cover the ruling body that maintains a cohesive relationship with its’ branch companies. “American telephone and telegraph” (AT&T) is the largest telecommunications company in the world, the largest provider of mobile telephone services in the United States and in the recent year 2018 made a public acquisition of the conglomerate Warner Media that is the mother company of CNN, the AT&T company is considered to be a strong lobbyist.

3.3 Ownership of RT

Research of RT Ownership has been conducted. The findings show that the news media organization at its core is owned by the The Federation of Russia. An incongruence was found that the news organization self-proclaims to be “autonomous non-profit organization”

After further examination the relation of RT news organization to superior hierarchal bodies is displayed in the illustration below. The revealings show that the top of the hierarchy is the Russian ministry of communication and mass media following the fact that is controlling the largest Russian news organization “Rossiya Segodnya“ which is not to be confused with the Russia Today (RT) news agency as both entities are separate in the hierarchy ladder. The confusion may arise due to the fact that the English translation is the same as their foreign news „TV novosti“ branch news organization Russia Today (RT) which is at the bottom of the hierarchy chain. Another finding is that prior to the “Rossiya Segodnya“ ,which is a new state-owned entity that came into existence by the executive order of the president of The Russian Federation in the year 2013 December 10th,.The origin head organization was “RIA novosti“ (Russian: РИА Новости) which dates back to June 1941 where it operated under name of “Soviet inform bureau” or “Sovinformburo (Russian: Совинформбюро)”.

16.
4 Table. RT Ownership table. Table made by the author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian ministry of communication and mass media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rossiya Segodnya (Russian: Россия сегодня)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Novosti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia Today (RT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 World press freedom index

5 Table. Press freedom index. Source: RSF\textsuperscript{17}

The necessity of media freedom press research is mandatory in order to further examine transparency of the news organizations CNN and RT in the political climate that they operate. Based on the evaluation of Reporters Without Borders organization displayed by the illustration above the freedom of press differs in the context that analyzed media organizations have to function in. By examining the table it is observable that there are several metrics which indicate the presented country’s state position in scoring. The first one on the left column represents the evaluated “press freedom score” that each particular country possesses (from 180 to 0, (closer to number 0 meaning that the country has more freedom of press) over certain period of time which is displayed on the bottom row table indicating the years since 2013.

Observing data it is noticeable that countries of Russia and United States are among the relative scale. The prior identified origins of the analyzed media organizations is traced to United States (CNN) and The Federation of Russia (RT). The evidence show clear distinct positions in scoring meaning that The Russian Federation has scored among the countries in which freedom of press is the most limited thus falling into a category of having almost no freedom of press. The finding is highly correlated with the fact that the self-proclaimed autonomous news organization RT is indirectly controlled by the Russian ministry of communication and media as the largest news organization “TV novosti”. The United States scoring relative to the Federation of Russia is much higher and its ranging from 50 to 35 in the scale, unlike RT there is no apparent linkage the organization and the state control.

The research does not completely assume that having more freedom of press is related to political biases being discounted entirely in the Syrian political conflict. However the assumptions is that it is more likely for a news organization to be politically biased having less freedom press than having more freedom press thus the state controlling the news organization by in large being the deciding factor of the validity and transparency of information output by the mass media organizations.
3.5 RT and CNN coverage of the Syria’s political conflict 2018

The terms “Syrian political conflict”, “Syrian conflict”, “Syria civil war”, “war in Syria”, “Syria crisis”, “Syria cnn”, “Syria russia today” and other related keyword word combinations were used in the research source base of CNN\textsuperscript{18} and RT\textsuperscript{19} data center in order to find the information necessary in the form of news articles regarding the research topic. Than the information was filtered through according to its identified source base (discussed in the chapter 2.1) which by the framework of the research the source of information has to be from the media outlet either Cable News Network (CNN) or Russia Today (RT). Next \textit{media content analysis} was executed on the gathered information in order to distinguish the key components of the material. A total of a 100 data samples were gathered of potential 1200 data samples. Out of the 100 data samples gathered 50 were qualified to be categorized in the 2018 category.

\textbf{6 table}. Source: made by the author based on the information provided by CNN and RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Media source</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018-01-01-2018-11-01</td>
<td>Cable News network (CNN)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia today (RT)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The timeline was chosen (from 2018-01-01 to 2018-11-09) because the research only accounts the year 2018 regardless of the Syrian conflict beginning in March 2011. As mentioned in the introductory part of the research the media research source base will only consist of the two most largest western and eastern international news stations - Cable Network News (CNN) and Russia Today (RT). The reason these two media outlets particularly were selected in the research is due to

\textsuperscript{18} Cable news network - \url{https://edition.cnn.com/}
\textsuperscript{19} Russia Today - \url{https://www.rt.com/}
\textsuperscript{20} The table is made by the author based on the information provided by the CNN.org and RT.com
high popularity ratings thus being a representation of a general opinion of two dividing western and eastern regional news. In the research it is also taken into the account that the analyzed Syria’s political conflict will not be taken fully to the account as this research focuses on the media’s behavior more so than it does on the actual conflict. The total amount of news articles is 50. The reason for this sample base is that the articles gathered would be equally dispersed regarding both media outlets so that one would not overtake the other in regards to news article numbers gathered thus potentially skewing the end result, so the number justifies a balanced approach.

Next furthering *media content analysis* the data is processed and compiled into different categories based on the information gathered. The second process of information is required in pursuit of one of the tasks of this research paper which is to identify the political agenda in the analyzed news networks.

**7 table.** Source: made by the author based on the information provided by CNN and RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cable News Network</th>
<th>Russia Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implies blame on United States and its’ allies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies blame on Russian Federation and its’ allies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies blame on Syrian government</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies blame on terrorist organization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies blame on Syrian rebels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not imply any blame to any party</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies blame to a foreign party</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data processing categorized the gathered information into six categories: 

- implies blame on United States and its’ allies; 
- Implies blame on Russian Federation and its’ allies; 
- Implies blame on Syrian government; 
- Implies blame on terrorist organization; 
- Implies blame on Syrian rebels; 
- Does not imply any blame to any party; 
- Implies blame to a foreign party.

When analyzing the data gathered these categories were formed in order to distinguish the targeted enemy of audience thus making it more clearer of the news organizations’ associated political allegiance.

The first category implies blame on United States and its’ allies are all media articles that their implications were identified as blaming the United States as partially or in full at the cause the of the problem and the media article source was identified either falling into CNN or RT.

Implies blame on Russian Federation and its’ allies is a category that filters the information gathered that is identified blaming the Russian federation either direct or indirect actions as partially or in full at the cause of the problem in covering event of the media article.

Implies blame on Syrian government this category refers to media articles gathered that identifies blaming Syrian government as the cause of a particular political event, blaming it directly or indirectly.

Implies blame on terrorist organization - this category is a bit more complex than the others due to the fact that both news organizations define “terrorism” individually and do not share an objective consensus over the definition. By CNN the terrorist organization that generally is referred to is the Islamic State, also known as ISIS. However when analyzing the media articles which source is identified as RT, terrorist organizations not only refers to ISIS, but also involves the uprising rebellion that is fighting against the government regime.

Does not imply any blame to any party category refers to the media articles that do not conceivably express any blame to the opposing political parties. Generally these type of articles involve reporting the living conditions in Syria, warzone affected areas, the life of migrating refugees and other similarly related media articles.

Implies blame to a foreign party portrays political actors that are seemingly foreign to United States or Russia. This category is relevant due to the later on involvements of nation states such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc.

The finding results based on the categorized information distinguishes higher number frequencies in some categories more so associated with one media source than the other. Using the comparative analysis method it is observed that CNN has a different dispersity in associated categories: 

- implies blame on United States and its’ allies (1), 
- Implies blame on Russian Federation and its’ allies (6), 
- Implies blame on Syrian government (8); 
- Implies blame on terrorist organization (4); 
- Implies blame on Syrian rebels (2); 
- Does not imply any blame to any party (4) than RT: implies
blame on United States and its’ allies (9), Implies blame on Russian Federation and its’ allies (0), Implies blame on Syrian government (2); Implies blame on terrorist organization (6); Implies blame on Syrian rebels (7); Does not imply any blame to any party (1).

From the findings of the research it is observed that bias of the media is to associate itself to its geopolitical context thus any objectivity covering the matters are skewed and should be relied on media outlets that do not have political affiliation in the region if one should seeks more objective news organizaitons, the difficulty in that though is that usually media outlets with no political interest in conflicts do not cover the event that well as it there’s no incentive to do so thus objectivity on delivering the news with mass media outlet that has a political interest is not the one that should be mostly relied on. RT media outlet shows quite strong affiliation with the Russian Federation as does CNN with US, however there comes a consensus when covering the topic of terrorism in the conflict whilst at the same time there are major incongruencies. This will be further explained in the table below.

The data gathered was repeatedly compiled this time however under different categories in order to shift the evaluation of the qualitative data for the purposes of making different assessments that require a changed examination (see the table below).
Table made by the author based on the information provided by CNN and RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Russian Federation, United States, The Syrian Arab Republic, Terrorist organizations, Revolutionary comando army (ISIS, Hezbolah) Iran, Turkey, Rojava (Kurds), Saudi Arabia, Israel, Syrian democratic forces, YPG, The free Syrian army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narratives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The conflict is mostly caused by the Syrian government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Russia facilitates the conflict, also establishing itself in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- United States war against terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fighting terrorists is a priority for Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normative arguments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Chemical attacks in Douma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Rif Dimashq Offensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. American led intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further data processing led to a whole new categories of research – **Actors, narratives, normative arguments and identities**. The data is categorized in such a manner where it is more clear to make further interpretations.

The first category of information is **actors**. The category was made to distinguish particular entities that are the most relevant in the Syrian political conflict. Both of the columns have the
mentioned category in order to spot any incongruence or difference in general that news organizations may exhibit.

On the CNN side of column the actors are - The Russian Federation, United States, The Syrian Arab Republic, Terrorist organizations (ISIS, Hezbollah) Iran, Turkey, Rojava (Kurds), Saudi Arabia, Israel, Syrian democratic forces, YPG, The free Syrian army. The importance of highlighting this information is better contrast it with opposite side (the RT column).

On the RT side of the column the actors are - The Russian Federation, United States, The Syrian Arab Republic, Terrorist organizations (ISIS, Revolutionary comando army, Anti-Syrian government rebels,) Iran, Turkey, Rojava (Kurds), Saudi Arabia, YPG.

The information was contrasted and presented above. There seems to be an incongruence on the actor of terrorist organization. It appears that both of the media outlets consider terrorist organizations to be different actors. On the RT side actors such as - Revolutionary comando army, Anti-Syrian government rebels, Syrian democratic forces, YPG – are presented as terrorist organizations whilst on the CNN side the mentioned actors are not considered to be under the umbrella of terrorist organization. The finding potentially may reveal particular perceptions and alliances that divide the news organization audiences.

Narratives is a category made to better portray the overall general message that the media agencies are to convey to their audiences. The necessity of this category is important to better distinguish the potential political positioning and biases.

On the CNN side of the column the narratives are - The conflict is mostly caused by the Syrian government; Russia facilitates the conflict, also establishing itself in the area, United States war against terrorism

These mentioned narratives are the general underlying messages that are guided by most of the information output that the news organizations are presenting.

On the RT side of the column the narratives are - The conflict is mostly caused by US and its allies; US supports terrorist organizations; US facilitates the conflict. Clear distinguished narratives are observed when comparing the news organizations.

When contrasting the data in the narratives category there are some similarities and differences that come into highlight. The first similarity that is observed is that both medias seem to hold accountable their politically associated state opponents for the Syrian political conflict atrocities. The overarching narrative of CNN is that Russia’s involvement facilitates the conflict and prevents it to be resolved. An identical narrative is observed in RT where the US is to be blamed for the conflicts escalation and the inability to resolve due to its’ involvement. The partial difference however is that
CNN’s narrative by in large holds accountable the Syrian government for most of the conflicts contribution and portrays Russia only to be partially responsible for the conflict. The RT’s narrative seems to hold more argumentation why US is by in large responsible for the atrocities being committed and seemingly it is sole to blame for the orchestrating the Arab Spring events, arming the terrorist organizations and supporting the rebels (terrorists). Another quite interesting thing to note is that both medias portray the narrative of fight against terrorism, however this narrative is quite lacking the consensus of who exactly are these terrorist organizations as it seems that both news organizations identify and frame them differently.

*Normative arguments* category is for contextualizing arguments that were presented that particular year in order to add to the overarching narrative that guides the normative arguments output by the medias.

On the CNN side of column the *normative arguments are* - 1. Chemical attacks in Douma 2. The Rif Dimashq Offensive.

On the RT side of the column the *normative arguments are* - 1. Israeli missile strikes September 2018, 2. American led intervention.

Using the normative arguments presented above CNN attempts to feed into the general narrative their audience by reporting the chemical attacks in the city of Douma carried out allegedly by the Syrian Armed forces that were responsible for nearly 100 deaths\(^{21}\). The allegations were denied by both the Syrian and the Russian governments claiming that it was staged thus rendering the supposed facts obsolete (supposedly). Another *normative argument* that CNN incorporates into its’ narrative is the The Rif Dimashq Offensive\(^{22}\) where the pro-Syrian government forces had made siege to the area of Ghouta suburb, killing hundreds of innocent civilians in the process. The RT *normative arguments* for the year 2018 is the missile striking by Israel\(^{23}\) which led to a destroyed Russian airplane and hitting multiple targets in the Syrian government controlled territory and the American-led intervention against ISIL which was associated with criticism from the RT media that the US should no longer involve itself in the Syrian political conflict due to the chaos that allegedly follows after the military action.


3.6 Opinion polls 2018

The importance of examining the public opinion that is being provided by news organizations is vital in order to get a general view how the public opinion is influenced by the news organizations. The opinion polls will be used as a source base for providing a rough estimate on distinct views of the public that regards political action mostly in foreign affairs taken by the governments. The research will only limit itself to the public opinion of United States and The Federation of Russia as the mentioned countries have political interest in the Syrian conflict and they are hosting the analyzed media sources CNN and RT.

In 2018 The Chicago council on global affairs center cooperating with the Levada center in Moscow conducted a public opinion research regarding the Syrian conflict which revealed the following – “Russians seem unsure of the benefits from Moscow’s military involvement in Syria. Nearly as many Russians say that the intervention has brought more harm (33 percent) as good (31 percent), and 37 percent say it has brought neither good nor harm”\(^{24}\). Results show that the public opinion of Russians as not as cohesive as it could be imagined. Further analysis of the research reveal that the approval rating for Russia’s involvement in the conflict has significantly dropped over the year since the initial intervention in 2015. Another finding reveal that: “more Russians support combating groups like ISIS (48 percent) than preventing the overthrow of Assad (27 percent).”\(^{22}\) while in contrast “Only a quarter of Americans would support the United States helping negotiate a settlement that keeps Assad in power (25 percent) compared to 70 percent who would support a U.S.- aided settlement that establishes a new leader for Syria”\(^{12}\). The result is very surprising to see that both American and Russian particular audiences seem to share a similar statistical evaluation about keeping the president of Syria in power, however the differences quickly dissipates as a large amount of US public opinion agrees that the current president of Syria should be replaced. It seems that the Russian public opinion is no longer as concerned to keeping the Syria's president in power as threats from terrorism seem have overaken the public’s concern as supposed the Russian government interest for maintaining political alliances. So far the revealings show that the prolonged involvement

in the conflict has divided the public opinion of Russian citizens more so than United States into several categories that the public sees benefit of being in a certain political stance.

The poll further reveals that there is a common overlap are where both US and Russia public opinions agree on and that is a joint cooperation against nuclear proliferation of weapon of mass destruction. This involves a joint effort to limit the North Korea’s further acquisition of nuclear arsenal and Iran’s attempt to add nuclear weaponry as an asset to be used. Another common overlap is that the public opinion in Russia expresses a cooperative stance with the United States in fighting against global terrorism, specific both countries public opinion share that the government would prioritize eliminating terrorist groups in the Syrian political conflict above everything else. However these are the only apparent spheres in which the public opinion reach a consensus.

Surprisingly enough both US and Russia countries public concern is the terrorist groups. When referencing the 7th table in chapter 3.5 it is observed that terrorist reportings are quite consistent in the both analyzed news organizations. This quite highly relates to a couple of concepts from the cultivation theory – dramatic violence and mainstreaming. It is quite highly probable that the medias CNN and RT use shocking material to get the publics’ attention and develop a common outlook for the world thus explaining the disproportionate growing concern for terrorism that the opinion polls express.

As mentioned in the previous chapter before there seem to be a disagreement between RT and CNN media over what are the terrorist organizations. It appears what one media outlet considers to be a terrorist organization the other media outlet does not seem to share the consensus. For example the YPG organization (the peoples protection unit) which is mostly made of ethnic Kurds that reside in the Northeast Syria is consider to be a terrorist organization by the RT media outlet, however it does not seem to be samely regarded in the CNN media outlet. This finding may potentially lead a revelation that “terrorist groups” identity is related with political associations more so than the terrorist groups themselves.

3.7 RT and CNN coverage of the Syria’s political conflict 2019

The repeated terms of “Syrian political conflict”, “Syrian conflict”, “Syria civil war”, “war in Syria”, “Syria crisis”, “Syria cnn”, “Syria russia today” and other related keyword word
combinations were repeatedly executed like in the prior year 2018 research part in order to find the information necessary. This was done so repeatedly in order to double check any missed data samples. the information was filtered through by the same exact categorical parameters to its identified source base which by the framework of the research the source of information has to be from the media outlet either Cable News Network (CNN) or Russia Today (RT). Next media content analysis was executed on the gathered information in order to distinguish the key components of the material.

9 table. Source: made by the author based on the information provided by CNN and RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Media source</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019-01-01-2019-12-31</td>
<td>Cable News network (CNN)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia today (RT)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For further examination see the table below)
The necessity for contrasting the years analyzed is to observe any changes in media’s reporting that might occur. This is to identify any perceived political agendas that the media outlets might act out or at the very least spot any incongruences that may occur that would require further investigation to formulate proper explanations. When contrasting the data to the prior year it seems to be an increase in reportings of a foreign party getting involved in the conflict on both medias. The finding is attributed to the Turkish military operations involved in the area thus explaining the increased number of reportings especially in the RT news organization where the coverage of Turkey actions in the Syrian political conflict is not represented as cooperative towards Russia as it was in the prior year of 2018.

25 Source: made by the author based on the information provided by CNN and RT
**Table.** Table made by the author based on the information provided by CNN and RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data analysis</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
<td><strong>CNN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Russian Federation, United States, The Syrian Arab Republic, Revolutionary comando army, Terrorist organizations (ISIS, Hezbollah) Iran, Turkey, Rojava (Kurds), Saudi Arabia, Israel, Syrian democratic forces, YPG, The free Syrian army</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Narratives** | - The conflict is mostly caused by the Syrian government  
- Russia facilitates the conflict, also establishing itself in the area  
- United States war against terrorism | - The conflict is mostly caused by US and its allies  
- US supports terrorist organizations  
- Fighting terrorists is a priority for Russia  
- Turkey’s actions are counterproductive to the joint Russia Syria operations |
| **Normative arguments** | 1 Northern Syria Buffer Zone established  
2. Northern west Syria offensive  
3. Death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdad | 1. US withdraw from the buffer zone  
2. Turkish offensive in the Northeast Syria[^26] |

The data presented above is the year 2019 media content analysis which is categorized according to the research’s defined parameters. This was done in the attempt to spot any differences in the narratives, actors, normative arguments that the medias provide the following year after 2018 which would reveal particular incongruence that may or may not occur.

Taking a first look in the actor category there is no apparent difference in the information circulation for either of the mass medias. This is mostly due to the fact that the time frame selected of the research (2018.01.01 – 2019.12.31) is too close of another thus any expected variety in the actor category is very improbable, a larger time frame of the conflict must be selected in order to better identify any changes in the mentioned category, however this is not available in the ongoing research because the defined time line are the years of 2018 and 2019. Any further observations prior to the 2018 examination table is difficult to spot as already the incongruence of particular political organizations associated to terrorist organizations seem to differ under different political context that the analyzed media organizations have to operate.

Observing the Narratives category a symbolic addition is spotted regarding that the media outlet RT is trying to convey to its’ audience which is - Turkey’s actions are counterproductive to the joint Russia Syria operations. The new narrative originates where Turkey expressed its’ policy of securing Syria’s Northern border for purposes of providing shelter and aid to the Syrian refugees who crossed the borders of Turkey. The tension even further escalates as the city of Idlib comes to be of strategic importance and still is the current last stronghold of the opposition of the Syrian regime. Under the pretext of terrorist groups attacking local civilians and Turkish troops, Turkey expressed discontent with the Syrian regime and the The Russian Federation, stating that it is only a matter of time before Turkey takes offensive operations in the city of Idlib.27

Normative arguments category seems to be the most changing among prior discussed categories. This is to no surprise as the normative arguments are directly related with the political events that take place within the Syrian conflict. The northern west Syria offensive is one of the main highlights of the year 2019 within the conflict area. CNN reporting includes attributing atrocities being committed via military operations to the Syrian regime whilst also framing Russia as the contributor for supporting the military operation carried out. The use of normative argument of the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdad is quite strongly feeds into the narrative of United States war against terrorism policy, the mention example being yet another milestone for the exercised foreign policy.

It is important to give context for United States foreign policy not being a byproduct of the Syrian political conflict but rather a long-term publicly declared global initiative to reduce the influence of terrorism around the world. However the findings of the research show that the identity of “terrorists groups” seem to be used both by the governments and the media as a political tool for creating perceptions that do not necessarily reflect an accurate depiction or motives of the so called terrorist organizations. It rather more so seems that identity politics is used to portray a narrative to the public that gives a cohesive explanations on why certain events take place, this can both be equally attributed to the analyzed news organizations of CNN and RT that help facilitate this process.

Under the RT’s narrative of Turkey’s actions are counterproductive to the joint Russia Syria operations the normative argument Turkish offensive in the Northeast Syria is used. To address the mentioned normative argument it is necessary to get acquainted with actual situation that took place in Syria October 2019. United States declared withdrawing troops from Syria due to the set out by in large achieved goal of eliminating the Islamic State and the associated terrorist groups. Several days after October 9th Turkish armed military forces crossed their southern military border into the Northern part of Syria for securing a defined ground of territory that was threatening Turkey’s sovereignty according to the official representatives of Turkey. The Russian Federation while at first supporting Turkey for the right of self-defense now drastically changes stances and does not support the deployment of Turkish troops in Syria. The potential threat for Russia is that it mostly views Turkey as one of the NATO member states which in general viewed as an organization that potentially may compromise the state security of Russia. Coincidently the numbers of reporting about Turkey in the RT media has increased. This is to no surprising of course as it is quite a normal reaction to a military invasion, however the image created for Turkey in the RT media after the discussed events no longer seem to be cooperative towards Russia.

The rather seemingly neutral event yet very decisive moment in the Syrian political conflict was the establishment of a buffer zone. The decisive moment came when US withdrew its’ troops from the zone and the several days after the event Turkey launched an offensive military operation that shifted the dynamic of war in the Syrian political conflict. The reporting seemed to be consistent in both media outlets about the temporary established buffer zone yet the political implications were not as severe, meaning that media articles covering the topic were not as rigid associating blame to any political actors in the area.

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3.8 Opinion polls 2019

A public’s opinion poll research was carried out in Russia 2019 by the Levada research center in Moscow this time without the coordination of The Chicago council on global affairs center regarding the (Russia’s) states’ political involvement in the Syrian political conflict. It appears that the participants of the research\(^{30}\) were asked a question do they approve Russia’s policy in Syria to which the answers were – I fully approve (18%); I mostly approve (33%), Mostly disapprove (20%), I do not approve at all (15%), difficult to answer (14%)\(^{29}\). The findings show that the public opinion still remain divided when comparing the data to 2018. However if we would subtract the data to those who would approve in general and those that would disapprove in general, the group that would approve in general would be predominant, however only with a slight edge of those that would not approve. It appears that the public opinion is no longer as one sided as it were in the initial phase of Russia’s intervention in the Syrian political conflict where it was favored by the public opinion. The diversification in opinion shows that the public lost its’ complete confidence for the state and no longer considers it to be as legitimate in the conflict.

Further examination of the research reveals that additional series of question were asked the participants – should the government of Russia continue the operations in Syria or should it abandon it. To which the answers were – Russia must continue its’ operations in Syria (30%), Russia must end its’ operations in Syria (55%), difficult to answer (15%). The finding come to be very interesting as it statistically expressed the general public opinion of the Russian citizens is to resolve the conflict and no longer involve itself in it. The expressed discontent of the population may be attributed to the seemingly never ending length of the conflict which drags on since Russia got itself involved in it in 2015. This is also may be related to the fact the publics’ expectation of government involvement in the conflict was – precisely carried out military operations that would result in a fast and effective resolving outcome – which as it turned out was not as it was planned out due to unforeseen events of war.

The poll also tried to examine the Russian citizen interest in the conflict and how closely do the public follows it asking whether the participants closely follow the events in Syria to which they had a choice to reply with - I closely monitor the latest developments in Syria (14%), I know a little

\(^{30}\) Levada research center in Moscow, Syria events, 2019 - [https://www.levada.ru/2019/05/06/sobytiya-v-sirii/?fromtg=1](https://www.levada.ru/2019/05/06/sobytiya-v-sirii/?fromtg=1)
about the latest events in Syria, but I do not follow them closely (55%), I know nothing about recent events in Syria (14%). This category of research demonstrates the general public awareness of the events that take place in the conflict. The revealings show that the public opinion should not be taken very reliably as a huge chunk of the public is not evaluating the actions, decisions, events, etc. that government makes thus limiting the public’s capacity of making an accurate assessment of the situation in Syria and mostly being reliant on outdated news, word of mouth information and other not as reliable information sources. The statement made was in no shape or form to completely discredit the public’s opinion, but rather an observation where the public’s opinion should not be regarded as data for precision, only a general estimation that helps to understand the data processing related with opinion poll research.

Quite different opinions reveal the polls carried out in the US by the Full Service Marketing Research firm. The poll conducted in October 2019 reveals that 51% of the participants believe that US should remain involved in the Syrian conflict while 43% do not, which to contrast with the opinion poll generated in Russia only 33% believe that it should continue its operations. It seems that the general public opinion hold their government more accountable in conducting military operations in Syria. Further examining reveal that 72% of democrats are for the US involvement while 65% republicans say no.

Around 42% of the US public opinion was for the decision of Donald Trump to withdraw the troops from Syria whilst 50% disapproved. The result is quite surprising as giving the general political context an avid researcher would assume Russian audience to be more aggressive, but rather the revealings show that the public opinion of US citizens is that the US military would not withdraw their troops.

69% of US citizens are convinced that US troop withdrawal will result in the reemergence of ISIS whilst 23% believe to be the opposite and state that the terrorist group will not reemerge. There seems to be also a general agreement in the parliament as 80 of democrats believe that it will result in the reemergence of ISIS which is the majority of the democrats party whilst the 56% of the republicans (which is the majority) also believe that the withdrawal of troops will result in an increased activity terrorist groups.

In the case of Turkey attacking US’s Kurdish allies the majority of public opinion (42%) believe that US has not been hard enough on Turkey whilst 33% feels that the way Turkey was handled in accordance to the attacks committed was about right, 8% of poll participants say that it was too tough. Turkey seems to be quite a unique case where it receives criticism from both of the great powers in the conflict (US and Russia). This is a sign that Turkey by in large is caring out military operations mostly in its own interest.
CONCLUSION

1. After commencing the research particular outcomes were found in relating the first task of the research which is - to distinguish the differences between the analyzed mass media organizations CNN and RT. The most apparent distinguished difference identified in the research part is political association that both news organization had a separate lean towards. It is identified that that CNN whilst claiming to be an independent international news organization a political association is observed with western, more economically developed regions of the world such as North America, Europe, United Kingdom, United States in particular whereas RT appeals more to the eastern regions of the world such as parts of Eastern Europe, the middle east, Latin America, in particular The Federation of Russia oddly with countries having less economic development relative to CNN audience.

2. The finding show that there is a distinct difference of ownership between the news organization of CNN and RT. It appears that the news organization Russia Today is indirectly controlled by the ministry of communication and mass media of The Russian federation whilst CNN being a branch company of telecommunications conglomerate AT&T. The fact that the media is being owned by a state ministry shakes the traditional definition of democracy where the medias’ job as a watchdog comes obsolete and redundant. Another problem arises when there is a potential to abuse the information flow that is coming top down from a state entity thus risking to withhold, skew or manipulate the information output in such a manner where there are favorable conditions for the ruling body to subjugate its’ populous. One more incongruence is identified where RT media organization self-proclaims to be autonomous which directly objects to the words’ meaning due to the fact that the mentioned organization is for the most part dependent on the sate ministry of communication and media of The Federation of Russia.

3. The third task of the research was to identify the political agendas of both of the news organizations covering the Syrian political conflict.

The first step for a better interpretation of the findings was to evaluate the media organizations through the prism of the world freedom press index. Evidence show that in the political context that both organizations (RT and CNN) operate (in Russia and United States) the scoring of how the freely the press can operate differs greatly – US position based on the index among the top countries that has the most liberty in exercising their press freedoms whilst The Federation of Russia occupies a lower ranking which is mostly correlated with the fact that was discussed above of how the government owns the means of communication within the country.
4. The results show that both mass media organizations executed on their primary function based on the Cultivation theory which is organized communication to the public. Thus a large amount of biased, one sided information was found, with both of the mass media “cherry picking” the events that took place in the Syrian political conflict and framing it that appeals to the watching audience. It is observed that the number of events reported by the medias favoring particular political state actor quite often correlates to the associated allegiance that the given media outlet has. E.g. RT favors Russian federation and The Syrian Arab republic. The political agendas identified are: CNN- favors reporting events that appeals to the western audience, presents the opposing force (Russian federation and Syrian Arab republic) as the perpetrators of crisis, highlights the inadequacies of perpetrators via atrocities being committed against local civilians, breaking the international law (reported cases of using chemical weapons) which was almost used as casus belli by US during the initial phase of the conflict, RT – favors similarly as CNN reporting events that contribute to the concept of west (Rus. lat. Zapad) which is portrayed by the state owned media as a region that potentially has a conflict of interest with the defined region. An identical to CNN module is observed when taking a closer look of the practices that RT embodies – highlights the opposing force as the perpetrators of the crisis via media articles, atrocities to local civilians, breaking the international law. As mentioned previously the mode of operating is very similar relative to CNN.

5. The research show that both mass media outlets have generally different geographically located audiences, however with slightly overlapping audiences such as the middle east. The viewers of CNN are generally dispersed in the western part of the world - United States, Europe, United Kingdom whilst RT viewers are from more economically conservative places from the world - Latin America, middle east, parts of Eastern Europe.

6. Relating with the cultivation theory concept of dramatic violence both mass media organizations practice similar strategies when trying to capture the audience's views. “Clickbait” titles of media articles are used with dramatic or violent images that psychologically triggers a threat in the human mind to pay attention thus manipulating the viewer into further engaging with the content presented. The opinion polls revealed that the public opinions of Russian and United States citizen seem to express a very large concern for terrorist groups and organizations. This is mostly due to the fact that the mass media by in large contributed by large number of reportings the atrocities that the supposed terrorist groups commit. Referencing to the cultivation theory concepts of dramatic violence and mainstreaming it appears that the public perception of Russia and US citizens seemed to have formed an image of terrorist groups among the priority threats in Syria. However another finding showed that the identity terrorist groups potentially may have been misused or could have been used misleadingly
in order invoke particular associations to the public’s opinion to justify political encounters in the Syrian conflict.

7. Using the *comparative method* and keeping in mind the Syrian political conflict it is observed that the news networks are politically associated either with one of the great powers in the conflict which is - United States or the Russian Federation. In the execution part of the research two distinguished time periods were selected 2018 and 2019. This was done so to distinguish incongruences or at very least spot any behavioral shift that the medias acted out. It is observed that in the year 2019 a minor shift of focus regarding the media article output was noticed. There seems to be an increase both CNN and RT news outlets in reports regarding *implies blame to a foreign party* in tables 6 and 4. This was mostly due to another state actor getting directly involved in the conflict – Turkey. Turkey does not fall completely into either distinct zones of west and east as it has its’ own declared political interest i.e. establishing a safe zone in the northern Syrian border which neither Russian federation nor current United States administration is committed to support thus increased output by both of the media outlets expressing blame to Turkey has been noticed.

Also when observing the tables there seem to be a noticeable decrease *implies blame to a terrorist organization* in the year 2019. This phenomena is due to the supposed defeat of the Islamic State that state actors such as United States and Russian federation seemed to have contributed and made the terrorist organization mostly obsolete. However the implication of a terrorist organization being active did not decrease in the RT outlet. This is because the RT media is continuing to use the term “terrorist organization” even with the defeat of the Islamic State, mostly referring to political organizations such as the Syrian Democratic Front or the YPG. It is hard to distinguish what is this supposed terrorist organization as it varies media article by media article indirectly implying by the RT media that is somehow linked with the conveniently acknowledged Syrian opposition forces.
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