TWO REALITIES OF ONE REVOLUTION: COVERAGE OF MASS PROTESTS OF 2011 IN STATE-RUN AND INDEPENDENT BELARUSIAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the way the Revolution through Social Networks (the series of mass protests organized with the help of social media in Belarus in 2011) was covered in Belarusian press. After the overview of the news representation and ideology concepts, it looks at the difference in the nature of discourse on the Revolution through Social Networks in major Belarusian state-run and independent newspapers. Then it addresses the question of the diversity of voices presented in the articles. A total of 72 news stories from four Belarusian newspapers were examined with the help of discourse analysis methods. The study revealed that state-run and independent Belarusian media constructed two distinct realities of the event and their representations were often in contradiction with each other. The state-run newspapers covered the event occasionally and explicitly favoured pro-government perspective. They never allowed the participants of the rally to speak on their pages and represented them as a detached and dangerous group of people. In their articles, anti-oppositional and anti-revolutionary ideological standpoints were disseminated and the image of stability in the country was supported. Independent media covered the event more systematically, presented diverse voices, and discussed different aspects of the mass protests. They made attempts to evaluate the phenomenon, and attached to it a significant importance. At the same time, the use of the frames of the authoritarian regime, idealized representation of protesters as well as appealing to emotions could have influenced the reporting in the independent media.

KEYWORDS: Belarus, mass media, news representation, ideology, and diversity of voices

INTRODUCTION

In June 2011, a new phenomenon – Revolution through Social Networks (Революция через социальную сеть) – emerged in Belarus when a series of protests erupted in several big and small cities of the country. Public discontent with Belarus' long-time president Alexander Lukashenko was triggered by the economic and political situation in the country. In early 2011, Belarus faced its worst economic crisis in the last twenty years. The Belarusian government and the president appeared to be under growing domestic and international pressure because of human rights abuses and economic crisis in this former Soviet republic (Kramer & Mitchell, 2011). Another reason for criticism of Lukashenko was a crackdown on opposition party leaders after the presidential elections in December 2010, when several hundred protesters and journalists, who disputed the legitimacy of his re-election, were jailed (Mijuk, 2011). The purpose of this discourse analysis is to describe the characteristics of coverage of the Revolution through Social Networks (RTSN) in Belarusian state-run and independent media.

The Revolution through Social Networks started with Russian-language social network VKontakte and progressed later on Facebook and Twitter. The initiative called for countrywide actions to oust the president of the country using the Internet as the means of communication in an attempt to replicate the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East (Mijuk, 2011). Starting on June 8, 2011, protesters began to gather on the main squares and streets in different Belarusian cities to participate in silent protests. People did not have any banners or flags but only clapped hands to express their discontent. Nonviolent rallies took place every Wednesday from early June to August 2011. People used social media (VKontakte, Facebook, Twitter) to inform each other about rally locations and strategies, giving the protests the name *Revolution through Social Networks* (or *Silent Revolution* because of the peaceful and silent nature of the protests).

Police forces reacted by detaining protesters and journalists (BelaPAN, 2011). Also, police blocked websites of the initiative and chased activists[1]. By the end of July, nearly 2,000 people were detained for participating in rallies, or passing by or standing near the people who were clapping; more than 500 received sentences of 5 to 15 days

[1] In 2012, *Reporters without Borders* named Belarus among other 11 countries in the list "Enemies of Internet" for content filtering, access restrictions, and tracking of cyber-dissidents (Reporters without Borders, 2012).

in jail (Mouzykantskii, 2011). According to the annual report made by the Belarusian Association of Journalists, more than 95 journalists were detained during the "silent protests." Some of them were battered, and their professional equipment was damaged. Twenty-two journalists stood trials and 13 of them were sentenced to administrative arrests (BAJ, 2012).

In late July/early August the number of protesters began to decline and the last rally happened on August 3, 2011. The next attempt to unite the people was in September/October 2011, but it was not successful.

According to Jarolimek (2009), the main shortcoming in the research on the mass media transformation in Central and Eastern Europe in recent years is the lack of published in-depth studies of media coverage. With the existing restrictions on academic freedom in Belarus, especially in the fields that involve inquiries that could challenge the dominant ideology (Shaton, 2009), the study of content of the Belarusian mass media is particularly important as it helps to better understand the way mass media function in this country today.

Analysis of the Revolution through Social Networks coverage in Belarusian media calls for attention due to several factors. First, the phenomenon of the Revolution through Social Networks was notable and unique for Belarus because the protests "created a precedent for the effective use of social media for communication" (Manaev, Manaeva, Yuran, 2011: 108). This uniqueness, along with the number of the participants, was the reason for intense discussion of the event both by authorities and mass media. Second, with the increasing gap in the way the news is covered in state and independent Belarusian newspapers (Jarolimek, 2009), analysis of discourse on the Revolution through Social Networks will help to understand what ideological standpoints journalists and news outlets developed towards the rallies and protesters and how they differ. Concepts of news representation and ideology will help to identify these differences and understand how the specific ways of seeing the reality are constructed and justified by state-run and independent Belarusian mass media. Also, analysis of the sources used by journalists of state-run and independent newspapers will help to evaluate coverage of the event in terms of the diversity of voices presented in news stories

and see how newspapers fulfil their role of presenting different views and opinions on the matter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

NEWS REPRESENTATION AND IDEOLOGY

The theoretical framework of analysis includes an overview of the concepts of news representation and ideology that helps to understand the difference in the nature of discourse and diversity of voices presented in media reporting. Representation is broadly defined as "a set of processes by which signifying practices appear to stand for or depict another object or practice in the 'real' world" (Barker, 2004: 177). Several theoretical traditions, such as semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism elaborated on the idea of representation as the cultural construction of reality (Orgad, 2012). Mass media play an important role in the process of selection the ways of seeing and excluding other ways of seeing in news representation. Frames and angles, as well as use of language, structure and hierarchy, are important aspects in portraying an event or practice by the mass media. In this process, the mass media play a significant role in communicating and reinforcing ideologies as a "naturalized, a taken for granted, common-sense view about the way the world works" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008: 176). In this regard, cultural studies speak about "a 'politics of representation'" (Barker, 2004: 177).

O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008) suggest that ideological meanings in news texts can be identified by looking at the values, beliefs, and feelings that help to make sense of the world. Ideology is also defined as an overarching aspect of the text that is embedded in all elements and characteristics of the text, such as actors, language, rhetoric, and discursive strategies (Carvalho, 2008).

According to the Marxist paradigm, ideology is linked to the ruling class and is the part of the superstructure regulated by the economic base (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Political theorist and philosopher Antonio Gramsci developed theories of hegemony and described the press as the most significant and dynamic part of the ideological structure aimed to defend and develop the ideological base for maintaining power by the dominant group (Gramsci, 1985). Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1970) described two types of mechanisms

that are used to make people accept the dominant or ruling ideology: the repressive state apparatuses (government, army, police, courts, etc.) and the ideological state apparatuses (educational and religious institutions, press, arts, etc.). Cultural studies combined some aspects of political economy and the Marxist structuralist approach and rejected a simple base/superstructure connection, but rather offered to look at relationships between media and society more closely (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Today, the concept of ideology stands for the "'binding and justifying ideas' of all social groups" which define and produce one way of understanding the world and excluding others (Barker, 2004: 98).

STATE OF BELARUSIAN MASS MEDIA

The development of mass media systems in post-Soviet countries took different paths after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Some countries managed to accommodate and implement democratic traditions of freedom of the press and plurality, but others are not so willing to part with the Soviet heritage (Jakubowicz, Sukosd, 2008). In Belarus, the transition toward greater transparency in terms of a Western perspective failed and the country still did not develop some major democratic fundamentals (Jarolimek, 2009). The characteristics of social and political life in the country are government control, absence of transparency, and lack of public involvement in political discussions (Miazhevich, 2007).

In the early 1990s, like most of the former communist-led societies, Belarus experienced a short period of democratization. But, after the election of Aleksandr Lukashenko as president "on the wave of massive expectations 'for change'" in 1994, the country regressed toward authoritarianism (Manaev, 2009: 131). Supported by cheap energy deliveries from Russia in exchange for rhetoric about being an anti-Western outpost, the regime has proved to be long-lasting, despite demands for democratization from the European Union and other Western organizations (Sahm, 2009). Over the last 15 years, the government of Belarus has used legal and economic means to control the media and close independent outlets whose reporting challenged the status quo (Sys, 2007). The state has a monopoly on printing, distribution and broadcasting services, and the mass media are used by the government not only to create and support the picture of a

prosperous country, but also to control and limit information about the situation in Belarus from abroad (Bekkerman, 2005).

According to the report *Freedom of the Press 2011* by the Freedom House organization, Belarus had a score of 93 on a scale from 10 (most free) to 99 (least free) and was placed between Iran (91) and North Korea (97) (Freedom House, 2011). The state has monopolized major broadcast media;[2] it owns the main newspapers and has adopted several policies that limit the activities of the non-state press (Klaskouski, 2011). There is a practice of suspending media outlets after three warnings by the Ministry of Information. Usually, the frequency of warnings increases before significant political events (Jarolimek, 2009). Government control over the mass media is done through means such as libel law, politicized registration and licensing of mass media outlets, and different types of economic pressure (Manaeva, Aniskevich, Dinerstein, 2011). Another method used by the government to control information flow is a system of accreditations that largely limits access to official information for independent media.

Since the 1990s, the mass media in independent Belarus has been characterized by the coexistence of two major forms of mass media: state-run media (which constitute the majority of socio-political print outlets, TV and radio stations) and independent media. These two types of mass media led to the emergence of two different journalistic settings, including two distinct associations of journalists, which are the Belarusian Union of Journalists and the Belarusian Association of Journalists The gap between these two forms of journalism is increasing (Jarolimek, 2009). Accordingly, the events are presented in state-run and independent media in a very distinct way.

As of November 1, 2011, 1,394 periodical print media were registered in Belarus, including 406 state-run and 988 non-state print media (Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, 2011). The authorities purposefully emphasize that a minority of the print periodicals are owned by the state, but they fail to note that the majority of non-state print media deal with specific areas such as entertainment, advertising, etc. and are apolitical (Jarolimek, 2009). According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, no more than 30 registered independent socio-political mass media exist in Belarus

[2] According to the *Belarus Media Sustainability Index* report by IREX, in 2011 there were 139 state-owned radio stations versus 23 private radio stations in Belarus. Out of 82 television channels, 50 were private, but their reach was significantly limited (IREX, 2012).

(BAJ, 2011). In the circumstances of economic and political pressure, independent newspapers cannot get close to matching the state-run newspapers' circulation numbers. The combined weekly circulation of the two major state-run newspapers *Belarus Today* and *The Republic* is more than 2,750,000 compared to combined weekly circulation of less than 60,000 for the two major independent newspapers *Narodnaya Volya* and *Belarusians and Market* (Manaev, Manaeva, Yuran, 2010: 322).

Theoretical concepts of news representation and ideology will be helpful in the analysis of the coverage of the Revolution through Social Networks in Belarusian state-run and independent media as well as finding the answers to the following research questions:

> **RQ1.** What is the difference in the discourse on the Revolution through Social Networks in major Belarusian state-run and independent newspapers?

> **RQ2.** Whose voices were presented in the news coverage of the RTSN in the state-run and independent newspapers?

> **RQ3.** How can each type of mass media (state-run and independent) be described in terms of the ideological viewpoints?

METHODOLOGY

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS COVERAGE

Journalism is a discursive re-construction of reality and language plays a central role in this process (Carvalho, 2008). When meaning is being constructed, discourse is determined by the use of words, pictures, layout, design, format and editing (Sullivan, 2008). Discourse analysis is defined as "a form of linguistic investigation that inquires into the workings of stretches of the text" (Barker, 2004: 55). It allows the study of naturally occurring text within its global and local context. This method helps to understand the "description, inference, interpretation and criticism or evaluation" of the messages (p. 55). A discourse analysis of the coverage of the Revolution through Social Networks (RTSN) in four Belarusian newspapers (*Belarus Today*, *Respublika*, *BelGazeta* and *Narodnaya Volya*) was used as the

method that helps to analyse coverage and understand the ideological viewpoints of Belarusian mass media organizations.

Two state-run and two independent Belarusian newspapers were chosen for analysis based on two criteria:

> 1. The newspapers had to have countrywide distribution. This criterion was set because of the country-wide nature of protests of the Revolution through Social Networks. The protests did not take place only in the Belarusian capital city, Minsk.

> 2. The circulation of the newspapers should be more than 20,000 copies. In summer 2011, the circulation of *Belarus Today* was more than 400,000 copies; the circulation of *Respublika* was more than 95,000 copies; the circulation of *BelGazeta* was more than 20,000 copies; and the circulation of *Narodnaya Volya* was more than 20,000 copies. The minimum limit was set with the rationale that in the summer of 2011 there were no independent Belarusian newspapers with a socio-political orientation that had a circulation more than 30,000 copies. The circulation numbers were determined based on the issues of the print versions of the newspapers published within the period of analysis.

All news stories that covered the events of the Revolution through Social Networks from June 8, 2011 to August 31, 2011 were examined. The time frames for selecting news stories are justified by the chronology of events (see *Table 1*).

Dates	Events
June 8, 2011	The first silent protests at major squares in Minsk, Mogilev, Brest and Gomel. From that date, protests took place every Wednesday at 7 p.m. in several Belarusian cities.
July 3, 2011	Protest during the Independence Day of Belarus. Extremely harsh suppression by police forces.
July 20, 2011	The last mass protest. After that date the number of participants decreased.
August 3, 2011	Numerous protesters in only one city – Vilejka. The protestors decided to temporarily stop rallies.
September 21 – October 12, 2011	Another attempt to organize rallies was not successful; the number of protesters was low.

Table 1.
Main events of the Revolution through Social Networks in 2011.

Due to the fact that the attempt to repeat rallies in September and October 2011 was not successful and therefore did not receive broad coverage in newspapers, news stories from that period were not analysed.

The news stories for analysis were retrieved from the online versions of the newspapers on their websites (Sb.by, Respublika.info, Belgazeta.by and NV-Online.info). The online versions of the news stories were compared with the versions in print editions of the newspapers. No difference in the headlines or content of the articles was found. The total amount of 72 items (56 items in the independent newspapers and 16 items in the state-run newspapers) included all news stories, editorials, letters from the readers, and speeches from press conferences in the specified time.

For this study, the framework developed by Carvalho (2008) for the analysis of media discourse was used with some modifications relevant to the study. The layout and accompanying images in the online versions of the newspapers did not always match up to the printed editions, so those elements were not analysed.

Several codes were identified as potentially effective in the process of open-ended reading of the texts. The framework for the analysis of media discourse includes two stages (textual analysis and contextual analysis) as listed below and explained in this section:

> I. Textual analysis
>
> 1) Actors (protesters; police forces; journalists; other people)
>
> 2) Representation of actors
>
> 3) Language and rhetoric (rhetoric; tone of the writing; writing style)
>
> 4) Discursive strategies (selection; composition; positioning; legitimation; de-legitimation; politicization; de-politicization)
>
> II. Contextual analysis
>
> 1) Comparative-synchronic analysis[3]

In this study, the term "actors" refers to "social agents (someone who has the capacity of doing something) and characters in a (staged)

[3] Based on the framework developed by Carvalho (2008).

story," in other words they are both subjects and objects of the story (Carvalho, 2008: 168). Representation, in its turn, means how the media use a language system to construct and evaluate the world and reality (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008).

Language and rhetoric are important aspects in the process of meaning construction in mass media. Carvalho (2008) suggests that while examining language and rhetoric a researcher should look both at formulations of social actors and at the discourse of journalists. Also, discursive strategies are linked with the actors and their representation in the articles and could be defined as "forms of discursive manipulation of reality by social actors, including journalists, in order to achieve a certain effect or goal" (p. 169).

Contextual analysis of the text helps to understand the social context in which the discourse on the event was constructed. Here, the number of texts about the event in a particular medium shows the importance assigned by the mass media outlet. Between the two types of contextual analysis offered by Carvalho (comparative-synchronic and historical-diachronic) this study used the comparative-synchronic analysis. This approach involves examining the different representations of the event – Revolution through Social Networks – at the same time. In this way, the comparison of the alternative representations of reality helps to identify discursive strategies of the news outlets more clearly. Finally, as Carvalho suggests, ideology serves as an overarching aspect of the text embedded in all elements and characteristics of the framework.

For this study, the web application Dedoose, for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research, was used. Two descriptor sets were used to assist in the process of comparison of the intensity of coverage by the state and independent media:

> I. Mass media
> a) Ownership of the mass media
> b) Name of the mass media
> II. Timeframe
> a) Month when the news story was published

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Application of these descriptors helped in evaluating the intensity of coverage (by analysing the total number of stories depending on the ownership of the media and the distribution of news stories in time).

To answer the research question about the voices presented in the news coverage, all stories were analysed in terms of what sources were used in the articles. For that purpose, all quotes, direct or indirect, were identified and connected to sources, which were protesters/participants, officials, police, experts, other people/witnesses or readers. Officials in the news stories were the president, the minister of the interior, the prosecutor general, the spokesperson for the Minsk police, etc. Other people/witnesses were both people who either witnessed the protests themselves or had heard about it and shared their opinion with journalists. Voices of readers were presented in the letters published in the newspapers. Finally, by comparison of the alternative representations of reality one can identify discursive strategies of the news outlets and understand ideological standpoints they present.

DIFFERENCE IN THE NATURE OF DISCOURSE AND DIVERSITY OF VOICES

The first research question addressed the difference in the nature of discourse about the Revolution through Social Networks (RTSN) in major Belarusian state-run and independent newspapers. The analysis revealed several observations that are reported in the following subsections.

ACTORS AND REPRESENTATION OF ACTORS

It was noted that on the level of actors, the main difference is in how roles were assigned to either subjects or objects of news stories. The most significant observation here is related to the protesters as actors. In the independent media, protesters are both subjects (they act or their opinion is presented) and objects (they are observed). In the state-run media, most often they are presented only as objects that are discussed by the journalist or characterized by other actors: officials, other citizens or experts. The independent newspapers often reported from the rallies and protesters were subjects and interviewees in this reporting. The state-run media preferred general opinion writing (in this case, the opinion of a journalist is taken for

granted), talking to experts or publishing speeches from press conferences. These practices also explained the specifics of using other people as actors of news stories. In the state-run media, other people are never the people who witnessed the rallies directly. Most often they are readers or people who share their opinion about the Revolution through Social Network in a discussion with a journalist. The distribution of roles in terms of subject or object in the stories where the police forces are presented is similar to the described distribution of roles regarding protesters. In the independent media, policemen act and talk often, while in state-run media they are represented indirectly.

Analysis of the way the four major types of actors are represented in the media showed a significant difference in the nature of discourse. The Revolution through Social Networks as a phenomenon itself was represented in the state-run media most often as a flashmob. Journalists wrote about it as the "strange flashmobs with mobile phones,"[4] provocative acts that "wreak havoc in our society,"[5] "rat race,"[6] "small actions,"[7] an "insult not only to the government but to the nation"[8] and as an action organized by Western countries[9]. On the other hand, the independent media presented the RTSN as a "creative peaceful rally of the progressive youth"[10] saying that "there was nothing criminal, nothing anti-authority, and nothing aggressive about it."[11] They also presented it as an expression of discontent. In June, when the protests began, some journalists characterized it as fun for people and wrote about it as the "public saunter," "fashion," and "new amusement."[12] Later, after more people joined the rally, and police began to intervene, this type of representation was discontinued. Two important characteristics of the RTSN representation in the independent media were attempts to analyse it and place in the socio-political context. Also, the independent media wrote about the momentum of the rallies and reported from other cities of Belarus (state-run media never mentioned that protests happened in several cities in the country, thus supporting the image of the RTSN as a gathering with a small amount of participants).

The representation of the protesters in the newspapers makes the above described discourses even more apparent. In the state-run media, protesters are portrayed as young people and are characterized as those who have "youthful extreme views and the tendency to

[4] *Belarus Today*, August 02, 2011.
[5] *Respublika*, July 02, 2011.
[6] *Belarus Today*, June 18, 2011.
[7] *Belarus Today*, June 18, 2011.
[8] *Belarus Today*, June 18, 2011.
[9] All translations in this section were made from Russian and Belarusian languages.
[10] *Narodnaya Volya*, June 17, 2011.
[11] *Narodnaya Volya*, June, 17, 2011.
[12] *BelGazeta*, June 20, 2011.

[13] *Belarus Today,* August 30, 2011.
[14] *Belarus Today*, July 02, 2011.
[15] *Respublika*, June 25, 2011.
[16] *Respublika*, August 30, 2011.
[17] *Respublika*, June 25, 2011.
[18] *Narodnaya Volya*, June 17, 2011.
[19] *BelGazeta*, June 20, 2011.
[20] *BelGazeta*, July 11, 2011.
[21] One of the most significant stories was the one about a handicapped man without a hand who was detained for "clapping hands," see *BelGazeta*, July 11, 2011.

nonconformity that are typical at that age."[13] They are also presented as initiators of disorder who "need chaos and mess in our country,"[14] as idlers "with no studies or work to do,"[15] or people looking for fame with the desire to "make history."[16] On several occasions, the protesters were described as "cannon fodder,"[17] or people who are used by, or belong to, the opposition forces. In the independent media reports, these characteristics are mentioned only in quotes from the press conferences or other speeches of the president when the newspapers tried to evaluate the interpretations of the RTSN by the state ideological machinery. Both *BelGazeta* and *Narodnaya Volya* represented the participants of the rallies as ordinary citizens who did not necessarily belong to the opposition. Protesters were described as an "educated computer-literate generation."[18] Later, several stories appeared in the newspapers that indicated older people participated in the rallies. Both independent newspapers created positive, and to some extent idealized, images of protesters and often presented them as brave and spirited people ("I saw many faces – nice, intelligent, and thoughtful"[19]).

Police forces in the stories published in the state-run outlets are presented as a hand of justice that reacts adequately to a threat, and their actions are in line with internationally accepted law enforcement practices. At the same time, reporters of the independent newspapers witnessed the reaction of the police and described it as a harsh and not appropriate: "[They detain] everybody without distinction: women, old men, teens, journalists [and] … bystanders."[20] There are plenty of examples of irrationality and the detention of bystanders[21]. Also, journalists of *Narodnaya Volya* mentioned violation of the Belarusian Constitution several times in their news reports. In particular, they made claims about the violations of the Constitutional right of assembly, journalists' rights to acquire information, and the violations of the Constitution by the plain-clothes police forces. Also, in several stories journalists of the independent newspapers reported about incidents when some policemen demonstrated support for the protesters.

Other people presented in the news stories were readers who expressed their opinion in letters to the editor, experts who discussed the phenomenon, officials, and other citizens who acted specifically or spoke about the event. In the state-run newspapers, all these ac-

tors were presented as antagonistic to the RTSN. They spoke about the protesters as "freaks from the Internet."[22] Also, journalists as actors in the articles (not the authors themselves) were portrayed in the state-run media most often as those who often report untruthful information and disturb the stability in the country. In this way, the mass media were presented as a threat. In the independent media outlets, other people were presented most often as either being neutral to the protesters or supporting them: "I am proud of our young people."[23]

LANGUAGE AND RHETORIC

In the process of constructing the images of the Revolution through Social Networks, the state-run newspapers used various figures of speech in their writing. For instance, they used similes by comparing the "virtual revolution" to a "toy" for kids.[24] Also, they used proverbs and oxymorons, such as "silent talkfest,"[25] more often than the independent newspapers. These rhetorical figures of speech were used to emphasize ideological meanings in the discourse (for example, the above mentioned structures emphasize the insignificance of the RTSN). When appealing to emotions, news outlets were very often either promoting antagonism toward protesters (this was done by the state-run newspapers), or appealing to compassion toward detained and battered people (this was done by the independent newspapers).

The tone of writing in the news stories that appeared in the state-run media was most often serious, sarcastic (for example, the protesters were called "our homegrown revolutionists"[26]), patronizing, and/or threatening: "The state has resources and power to call down those who break laws and infract the Constitution."[27] The independent newspapers, as an alternative to that, often wrote with irony, for example, when they reported about the "preventive dancing in the centre of the city,"[28] and also expressed optimism: "But our children are better, more brave and dignified than us. That is why there will be changes."[29] As for the writing style, both types of mass media often applied a conversational and narrative style. However, the independent outlets often used analytical and descriptive styles of writing in many of their news stories that reported about the protests.

[22] *Belarus Today*, August 02, 2011.
[23] *Narodnaya Volya*, July 19, 2011.
[24] *Belarus Today*, August 02, 2011.
[25] *Belarus Today*, August 05, 2011.
[26] *Respublika*, June 25, 2011.
[27] *Belarus Today*, July 02, 2011.
[28] *BelGazeta*, July 04, 2011.
[29] *Narodnaya Volya*, July 07, 2011.

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DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

[30] *Belarus Today*, June 28, 2011.
[31] *Belarus Today,* June 18, 2011.
[32] *Respublika*, August 12, 2011.
[33] *Belarus Today*, June 26, 2011.

Based on the above observations, the newspapers' discursive strategies emerged. Both state-run and independent newspapers used selection, composition and positioning. However, it was noted, that selection and composition were used by the state-run media rather blatantly. One of the demonstrative examples is the story "Trash from the Net."[30] It was a report about a neo-Nazi teenage girl who committed suicide. The story discussed the reasons for racial hatred, the legislation that was adopted to curb extremism, and how similar dangerous trends are disseminated in the world via the Internet. Within these frames, the second part of the story was about the politicized youth who use the Internet for communication. With the help of this "transfer" technique, the article puts the protesters into the position of alienated persons who represent a threat to the country and could be compared to the threat constituted by neo-Nazism. This strategy of placing all people who do not accept pro-government opinion among the "other" or "enemy" is another discursive strategy often applied by the state-run media (Miazhevich, 2007). Also, by emphasizing the young age and small amount of protesters, state-run media represented the event as something temporary and insignificant. This served to confirm the vision of stability in the country.

Here is another example of the selection, composition, and positioning discursive strategies from the *Belarus Today*. In a published speech of the president,[31] it was mentioned that the protesting youth want to initiate disorder, and people were reminded about the Minsk metro bombing in spring, 2011. The event was still heatedly discussed in Belarus. Such manipulations of facts and appealing to the emotions of people, while positioning the participants of the rally as detached and dangerous people, is further supported by the discursive strategy of de-legitimation of the RTSN as expressed in an opinion of an expert in one of the articles in *Respublika*: "I do not think a revolutionary situation is possible in Belarus."[32] Also, the state-run media used the discursive strategy of politicization in reference to the RTSN: "Oppositional politicians want to use the street protests to accumulate critical mass."[33] These strategies serve as the excuses for violent suppression of the possible revolution, thereby "saving" the country. These observations helped to reveal another important ideological characteristic of the state-run outlets: strong anti-opposition

and anti-revolutionary pathos.

Though the independent media also applied de-legitimation discursive strategies, they did not direct it towards the RTSN and protesters, but rather towards the political order, police actions and violation of the Constitution. Journalists legitimized the peaceful rally and the right of assembly of Belarusian citizens by describing the character of the rally and presenting protesters as educated, rational people who do not constitute a threat to the country and can unambiguously explain the reasons for their discontent. By reporting about the protests in the different cities of the country and the momentum of rallies, the independent newspapers attached greater significance to the protests.

It is important to note that the two types of newspapers were using discursive strategies of politicization (state-run media), or de-politicization of the event (independent media) by describing protesters either as opposition forces or everyday people.

COMPARATIVE-SYNCHRONIC ANALYSIS

As demonstrated in *Figure 1*, there were far more news stories about the Revolution through Social Networks in the independent newspapers than in the state-run newspapers: 56 stories in comparison with 16 stories. This difference is especially significant because the sample included many articles from the state-run newspapers that were written based on the press conferences of Lukashenko or his interviews and speeches during working trips (fragments or full speeches were published).
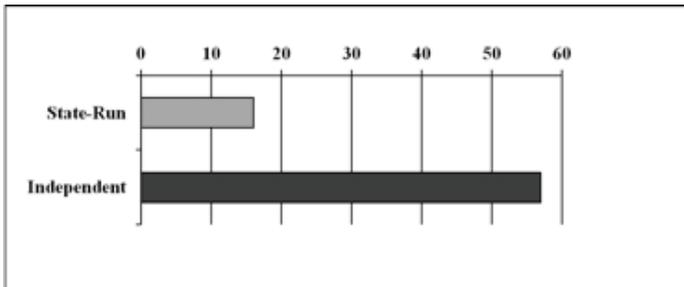
Figure 1.
Number of news stories depending on the type of the mass media.

These numbers allow for the evaluation of the importance assigned

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by the media outlets to the RTSN. For the independent media, it was a major event discussed in almost every issue during that time. Conversely, the state-run newspapers did not cover it so intensively or systematically. This minimal coverage supports the idea of the discursive strategy of further de-legitimation of the phenomenon.

Another observation is the distribution of news stories in time as documented in *Figure 2*. The independent media followed the development of events and covered the Revolution through Social Networks according to the momentum of the rallies, reflecting the growth and decrease of the number of protesters, and according to the amount of the events related to it during a specific time. The state-run newspapers covered the event with nearly the same intensity in June, July, and August, which confirms their inconsequential coverage.

Figure 2.

The intensity of coverage depending on the type of the mass media (distribution of news stories in time).
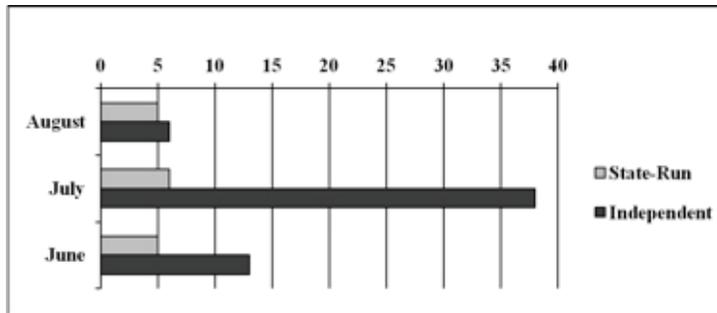
A considerable time gap was discovered in the way all four mass media started to cover the events of the RTSN. After the first protest on June 8, 2011, the stories in the independent newspapers appeared on June 17 (*Narodnaya Volya*) and June 20 (*BelGazeta*). Both newspapers presented stories about the first (June 8) and second protest (June 15). The state-run media wrote about the protests later, after the press conference of president Lukashenko on June 17, during which he expressed a strong negative opinion about the rallies and participants. In the several days after the press conference, both state-run newspapers published articles that confirmed the position of the government and reinforced the negative image of protesters (*Respublika* – on June 25 and *Belarus Today* – on June 28). This practice is common for the state-run media, and it suggests their inability to act independently, without the prior approval of the president or other top government officials.

VOICES PRESENTED IN THE NEWS COVERAGE

To answer the second research question, all news stories were an-
alysed in terms of sources used in the articles. The analysis of the
sources used by the state-run media confirmed they favoured
pro-government perspectives in their stories. As shown in *Table 2*,
journalists of the *Belarus Today* and *Respublika* never allowed partic-
ipants of the rally to speak. Furthermore, they never cited policemen
who were detaining people or witnessed their colleagues doing so. In
their reports about the RTSN, there was only one conversation with
an expert about the protests. In two letters from the readers that ap-
peared in the state-run media, pro-government opinion and antag-
onism towards the protesters was expressed. Most often, journalists
either quoted officials, or expressed their own opinion and attitude
towards the event and the people who participated in it.

	State-Run	Independent
Protesters/participants	0	23
Officials	9	18
Police	0	19
Experts	1	7
Other people/witnesses	5	33
Readers	2	4

Table 2.

Voices
presented in the
news stories by
the two types of
mass media.

The independent media used other people or witnesses and protest-
ers or participants most often as their sources. Also, officials and
policemen were cited frequently in both *Narodnaya Volya* and *Bel-
Gazeta*. Though there were only four letters to the editor in the inde-
pendent mass media (all of them were published in *Narodnaya Vol-
ya*), this lack of readers' opinion was often balanced with the opinion
of witnesses of the rallies that appeared in the reporting.

CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCE IN DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGI-
CAL VIEWPOINTS

In their reporting, the state-run and independent newspapers con-
structed and justified two very distinct ways of seeing the significant
political event, Revolution through Social Networks. In fact, they

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constructed two distinct realities of the event and their representations were often in contradiction with each other.

The anti-opposition and anti-revolutionary ideological standpoints of the Belarusian state-run media were revealed in the efforts to alienate the audience from the opposition forces and transfer characteristics of extreme acts, such as terrorism and fascism, to them. News stories in the state-run media served to confirm a negative opinion of the RTSN expressed by the president and other top officials. The state-run newspapers represented protesters as a detached and dangerous group of people and therefore justified harsh suppression of the rallies by the police. These efforts often resulted in the broken logic of the coverage in the state-run media, where the opposition was characterized as insignificant and, at the same time, very dangerous. The characteristics of the rallies as temporary and insignificant served to support the image of stability and control in the country, which is one of the main ideological standpoints of the government in Belarus.

The state-run media avoided presenting voices of the participants of the rallies or anyone supporting them. Both *Belarus Today* and *Respublika* did not allow participants of the rallies to speak on their pages. Limited coverage and lack of diversity of presented voices and the reliance on the commentaries of state officials resulted in a pro-government perspective in the state-run media, which did not present or discuss alternative opinions. The anti-opposition and anti-revolutionary ideological standpoints of Belarusian state-run media demonstrate the constant fear of political changes in Belarus.

The ideological viewpoints presented in the studied independent media differed significantly from those in the state-run outlets. The independent mass media covered the Revolution through Social Networks more systematically and presented diverse perspectives on the silent protests. By reporting from the rallies, the independent media presented most actors as subjects of the news stories. Coverage included opinions of both sides of the stories and representation of different aspects of the events, such as irrationality and unlawfulness of certain actions of state officials and police. They also reported about the harsh suppression of protests and perceived violations of certain constitutional rights of the people. The independent media made an

attempt to assess the initiative and strengths and weaknesses of the RTSN in discussions with experts. Criticism of the current political regime was often combined with explicitly or implicitly expressed desire for change.

Another characteristic of the independent media is its use of the frames of the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko in the coverage of the events and facts. These frames, along with the idealized representation of the people who share the same views as the news outlet,[34] as well as paying more attention to graphic details of the detentions rather than the reasons for the uprisings, could have influenced the quality of reporting in the independent media. Appeals to the strongest emotions of the audience or, adversely, ironical writing could mean inconsistency or indicate uncertainty on the part of the media organizations in their assessment of the event.

The results suggest some topics for future studies related to the subject of reality construction by state-run and independent mass media. Perception of the mediated messages by the audience is one potential area of future studies. Aspects of credibility and trust are particularly important in the Belarusian society where the media market is not established and continues to experience changes.[35] With the Internet becoming a more affordable and popular source of information in Belarus, it is also important to examine the representations of the independent and state-run media on the Internet and social media, as well as the content and journalism practices of Belarusian online media.

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[34] This was noticed in the coverage of the RTSN made by *Narodnaya Volya* where protesters were often represented as brave, clever, and heroic.

[35] According to the Minister of Information Oleg Proleskovsky, it is planned to reorganize five main republican newspapers into one socio-political media holding (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, 2012).

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