Éva JAKUSNÉ HARNOS
Ludovika University of Public Service, Hungary

WHOSE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE? THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON SOCIETAL SECURITY

Abstract:	*Strategic narratives are descriptions and interpretations of events of the world from the perspective of agents in international relations. They offer a justification for the agent's actions and ambitions and ensure cohesion and support within the agent's community. The article shortly summarises major changes caused by modern technology in the formation and projection of strategic narratives, then discusses reception in detail. In the investigation of strategic narratives, projection got into the focus at the beginning of the digital age and only recently has attention turned towards reception, that is, impact on society.*
	The theoretical background of societal security originating from the Copenhagen School allows an overview of the vulnerabilities of modern communities to disinformation, also highlighting the trans-sectoral nature of the threats. The conclusion of the paper is that modern liberal democracies are at a disadvantage in developing protection against disinformation because of their fundamental values. The privatization of media outlets was welcomed a few decades ago and the concentration of media ownership was not deemed dangerous. However, if media is securitized, the increase of control may be necessary, otherwise maintaining cohesion through one's own strategic narrative and blocking rival strategic narrative may become impossible.
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Contact details of the authors:	E-mail: Jakusne.Harnos.Eva@uni-nke.hu
Institutional affiliation of the authors:	**Ludovika University of Public Service, Hungary**
Institutions address:	Ludovika tér 2, Budapest, 1083; https://www.uni-nke.hu/

Introduction

Our era is often characterised by the intensification of strategic competition among status quo and revisionist powers, with the latter aspiring to take a new position in the international arena as new poles. The outcome of this struggle would be a multi-polar world. The processes are marked by the appearance of advanced technologies, especially digital technologies, which allow reaching target audiences better than before, also amplifying voices in both the conventional news media and social media. Beside the global power shift, various agents try to impact the public: not only states but also non-state actors, for example, international organisations, multi-national corporations and non-governmental organisations, and diverse lobby groups, secret agencies, extremist organisations, just to mention a few.

This article focuses on strategic narratives which contain descriptions and interpretations of events of the world from the perspective of agents in international relations. They offer a justification for the agent's actions and ambitions and ensure cohesion and support within the agent's community. Narratives allocate meaning to past, present or future events and represent perceived interests. Zaffran[1] categorizes strategic narratives into three types: system narratives (about the international order), identity narratives (agents or actors in the international system) and policy narratives (justifying specific policies or action). Narratives can be described as a kind of storytelling, during which the seemingly unrelated facts of reality are organised into a

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[1] Raphael Zaffran, *Strategic Narrative and Security*, in Bryan Taylor, Hamilton Bean (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication and Security*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York, London, 2019, p. 354

"plot" having the structure of any narrative in human history: there is a complication emerging against the background of settings, which is eliminated, and order is restored or created as a result of action. Journalists trained by the classical standards of their profession know that news stories are the best disseminators of information and pass on the evaluation of that information. Although the latter is termed media framing nowadays, which hides the fact that, traditionally, evaluation is always included, what is more, is an obligatory element.

Narratives display structures of attention by bringing to the foreground certain aspects of reality while ignoring others. Besides, they construct chronologies, cause and effect relationships, means and ends links, thus making sense of the flow of information confusing to ordinary people. In summary, narratives create identity to which interests and values can be connected and on which cohesion can be founded[1].

This analysis centres on the following research questions: 1. What changes have occurred in the production of strategic narratives in the digital era? 2. How does the interference of opposing strategic narratives impact societal security? To answer these questions, I will investigate the interrelationship between ideology, persuasion and strategic narrative. Then I will summarise the changes in the formation, projection and reception of strategic narratives in the age of the internet. The theoretical background of societal security originating from the Copenhagen School allows an overview of the vulnerabilities of modern communities to disinformation. The theory of securitization provides a methodological framework for analysing a case study on banning media outlets during the Russia−Ukraine war. Finally, I will highlight the trans-sectoral nature of the threats coming from the modern media landscape.

The link between ideology and strategic narrative

The (political) objectives of actors are mostly supported by seemingly scientific theories, ideologies, which are disseminated by strategic narratives.[2] Ideology provides orientation and goal, which often manifests in the description of ideal end-states. Ideology is a set of beliefs, presented as a coherent world view that shapes norms and attitudes in society, leading to behaviour which is desirable for its propagator. It determines what is acceptable, right or wrong in a particular context[3]. Ideology always manifests in political discourse on certain focus topics and concepts and has a regulatory impact on behaviour. Thus, the prominence of dominant political discourse in international relations is obvious: it sets the agenda, focuses or distracts attention and influences agents in their actions.

In this article the term strategic narrative is used as the storytelling segment of political discourse, which describes the world from the perspective of a specific actor in international relations. This explains the importance of the media: the agents who have access to greater publicity will have more efficient communication. The prevalent political discourse always seems obvious to people who are surrounded by it, and discourse which diverts because it represents different ideologies is noticed and identified as an attempt at persuasion.

Research into strategic narratives

One way of the academic research of strategic narratives is segmenting their operation into formation, projection and reception[4]. Research into formation is as old as history, taking into consideration the history of propaganda and a recent classification of forms of organised persuasive communication (OPC)[5].

It is known that the term "propaganda" has been discredited due to manipulation during the world wars, however, its definition could still be used as an umbrella term for all types of persuasion: it is "a deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve a

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[1] Andreas Antoniades, Alister; Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, *Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives,* "CGPE", University of Sussex, Working Paper No. 7, 2010, p. 5, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=cgpe-wp07-antoniades-miskimmon-oloughlin.pdf&site=359 (21.11.2024)

[2] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, Laura Roselle, *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations,* University of Michigan Press, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.6504652 (21.11.2024)

[3] Garth S. Jowett, Victoria J. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion.* SAGE Publications, 2015, p. 315

[4] Andreas Antoniades, Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, *Op. cit.* p. 5

[5] Vian Bakir, Eric Herring, David Miller, Piers Robinson, *Organized Persuasive Communication: A new conceptual framework for research on public relations, propaganda and promotional culture*, "Critical Sociology", Vol. 45, No. 3, 2018, p. 311−328, DOI: 10.1177/0896920518764586 (21.11.2024)

response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist"[1]. To avoid using the word "propaganda", and to systemize its variations, Bakir et al.[2] coined the phrase organised persuasive communication (OPC) and placed its types along a scale. They argue that the academic study of persuasion is only possible if we recognise that persuasive communication permeates all fields of life in any political system, and it is the degree of transparency that distinguishes acceptable forms from unacceptable ones.

After the end of the Cold War, the concept of public diplomacy became widely used, comprising five areas: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting[3]. Obviously, international broadcasting involved the dissemination of state-sponsored news favourable to the objectives of the stakeholder, that is, of strategic narrative designed from their perspective[4]. Public diplomacy is an area of exercising soft power, which is defined as the ability of a country to attract others, especially with one's culture and values, which may result in an ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices available to others[5]. It appears that, by now, the transparent and regulated operation of public diplomacy conveying positive messages has nearly disappeared and has been replaced by mostly negative messages included in fake news campaigns trying to degrade rivals and intimidate their possible supporters.

Deceptive and fake news campaigns are against the norms of Western journalism and international cooperation, so the fact that digital technology has created a grey zone regarding legal regulations, the standards of maintaining international relations and managing home affairs has led to increased efforts to conceal sources, perspectives, stakeholders and media responsibility. The result is twofold: first, institutionalised news production has experienced upheavals, and the boundaries of professional news industry and social media communication have become blurred[6]. For example, social media posts and videos are routinely used in professional news reports. They are usually embedded in articles created by professionals to give credit to the information and deliver a sense of up-to-datedness. These also suggest inclusion, that citizens can take part in news reporting. Obviously, it is thought to make "conventional" news reporting more interactive and more like social media communication, which is considered a rival. Second, genres (i.e., types of texts) have merged and offer no clue to news consumers about source and quality. The resulting outcomes regarding strategic narratives are as follows.

Changes in formation. The location of international broadcasting in the framework of public diplomacy underscores the importance of news production, even though much of it seems to be out of state control in the era of corporate news production and of social media[7]. In addition, the amount of content from social media coming from concealed or disguised sources is on the increase. Legal regulation and the adjustment of journalistic rules are always delayed in comparison to technological innovations.

Changes in projection. Extensive academic literature discusses the effect and efficiency of targeted communication on digital devices. This technology is available to any of the competing sides, along with forms of deception enhanced by the technology itself. Profiling allows locking individual users into opinion (or (dis)information) bubbles, and digital technology, along with artificial intelligence can falsify a message and its context to make it seemingly credible. The reliance on the persuasive impact of visual images offers a broad area of future research into the psychological impact of self-persuasion as well as the evasion of responsibility by sources which exploit the opportunity lying in the "grey zone" transformation of news production.

Changes in reception. Target audience can be citizens of an actor's own country or citizens of another state. This means that alien strategic narratives mixed into the usual political discourse of a community may impact masses of people within a short time, the result of which can be "hijacking" the majority opinion at least temporarily, while the source of misleading information remains hidden to the community. If the source

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[1] Garth S. Jowett, Victoria J. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* SAGE Publications, 2015, p. 7

[2] *Idem*

[3] Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science", Vol. 616, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World, March 2008, p. 32

[4] *Idem*

[5] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,* Public Affairs, New York, 2004, p. 7

[6] Udo Fink, Inez Gillich, *Fake News as a Challenge for Journalistic Standards in Modern Democracy*, "University of Louisville Law Review", Vol. 58, No. 2, Spring 2020, pp. 263-282

[7] Monroe E. Price, Susan Haas, Drew Margolin, *New Technologies and International Broadcasting: Reflections on Adaptations and Transformations*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science", Vol. 616, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World, March 2008, pp.150-172

is not recognised, the related interests are not detected either. Citizens will not realise their self-persuasion, instead, they will believe the alien perspective and attitude are their own. The outcome may be not only action, which is not founded on informed and responsible decision, but even a shift in identity.

The impact of opposing strategic narratives on societal security

The discussion of examples of securitization and references to securitization theory usually emphasize the role of the media in the persuasion of society that a phenomenon is an existential threat and requires emergency measures even though they may infringe democratic freedoms. In modern democracies the securitization of the media, that is, of news production and consumption seems a taboo except for an armed conflict or war. For example, among the first measures in response to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the European Union "urgently suspended" Russia Today and Sputnik broadcast in its member states on 2 March in 2022[1] because it found that the Russian Federation "engaged in a systematic, international campaign of disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts in order to enhance its strategy of destabilisation of its neighbouring countries, the EU and its member states". As it was mentioned in the previous section, rival or enemy strategic narratives may influence identity, so the significance of identity in the societal sector of security needs examination. In their classic book, Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde describe their sectoral concept of security, which includes societal security[2]. They highlight that identity is the most important organizing concept in the societal sector of security, and communities construct their identity by contrasting "we", that is, the in-group, and "they", that is, the out-group. The integration of groups in the society takes place through common culture and its reproduction processes (an important factor of which is shared language). Thus, the greatest threat to societal security is the conversion of identity, when "people start to think of themselves as something else" – and at this point the issue is often transferred to the political sector. The role of the media, especially of news stories, is the presentation of events in terms of "us" and "them"[3]. Alien narratives provide an opposite perspective and interpretation, consequently, pose a threat to the cohesion and identity of the society.

If the issue is moved to the political sector, it is addressed as a political threat. On one hand, it may impact the ideology or other constitutive idea of the identity of a group or of a state and thus threaten internal legitimacy. On the other hand, an opposing strategic narrative may affect the external recognition of a group or of a state and thus threaten external legitimacy. This means that the sovereignty of a state or the legitimacy of a group can be contested from outside when its pillar, that is, its constitutive ideology is attacked.

The security problems of the modern media landscape

It is known that the sectors of security overlap and are not possible to clearly delineate. Media corporations, however, belong to more than one sector of security, similarly to other phenomena. Apart from their social role, they are profit-centred business enterprises, which hides their possible connections with states, usually, their home state. Consequently, the leading media corporations serve as effective tools of the projection of certain strategic narratives. The sale of news as a product is facilitated by a marketing strategy which emphasizes balance and objectivity, also promoting the ability of the media corporation to project specific strategic narratives[4]. The interpretive role of journalists in compiling facts and assembling them into "stories" or "plots" is quite evident. But the fragmentation of both the production and projection processes leads to the impression that the outside world is anarchic and impossible to understand. It also conceals the goal and lets news consumers focus on the minor goals only.

The products of the news industry coming from the international sphere, especially from the developed world influence home audiences in less developed countries more than the news flow from home sources.

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[1] Council of the EU, *EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's broadcasting in the EU.*
2   https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rtrussia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/ (12.12.2024)
[2] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis,* Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, Co., 1998, pp. 119-140
[3] *Idem*, pp. 122-124
[4] Clausen, Lisbeth, *International News Flow*, in Allen Stuart (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism,* Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2010, p. 131

Thus, the international news industry reinforces the values of capitalism and the strategic narratives of the elites of leading industrialised states. The concentration of media content production poses a risk to the plurality of opinions and to societal security.

According to Google, currently the most important news agencies in the world are as summarised in Table 1. Seven out of the 18 agencies in the rank are from English speaking countries, which reflects the dominance of their language and their news storytelling. Another five can be added representing Western values from France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Japan. Beside the mentioned twelve agencies, those of regional powers are included from Turkey, India and Egypt. The greatest rivals of the Western worldview and strategic narrative, Russia and China are represented by one news agency each: TASS and Xinhua.

Name of news agency	Country of origin
Agence France-Presse	France
Agencia EFE	Spain
Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata	Italy
Anadolu Agency	Turkey
Asian News International	India
Associated Press	USA
BBC Scotland	UK
Bloomberg	USA
Deutsche Presse-Agentur	Germany
Kyodo News	Japan
Middle East News Agency	Egypt
Press Trust of India	India
Reuters	UK
TASS	Russia
The New York Times	USA
The Washington Post	USA
United Press International	USA
Xinhua	China

Table 1. Leading news agencies of the world[1]

It seems that, below the surface of institutionalised news production and recognised news agencies, that is, the so-called conventional media, contestation and persuasion are ongoing in the social media. One reason can be its "grey zone" character: the lack of legal regulation, the difficulty of identification of sources and actors, and the lack of technological knowledge of the users, which grants almost unlimited power to the platform operators over the consumers[2]. When social media was a novelty, consumers believed it the most democratic forum for communication in society because most of its content would be user created. Instead, user generated content, including clicked-on websites and recording the length of time spent viewing them
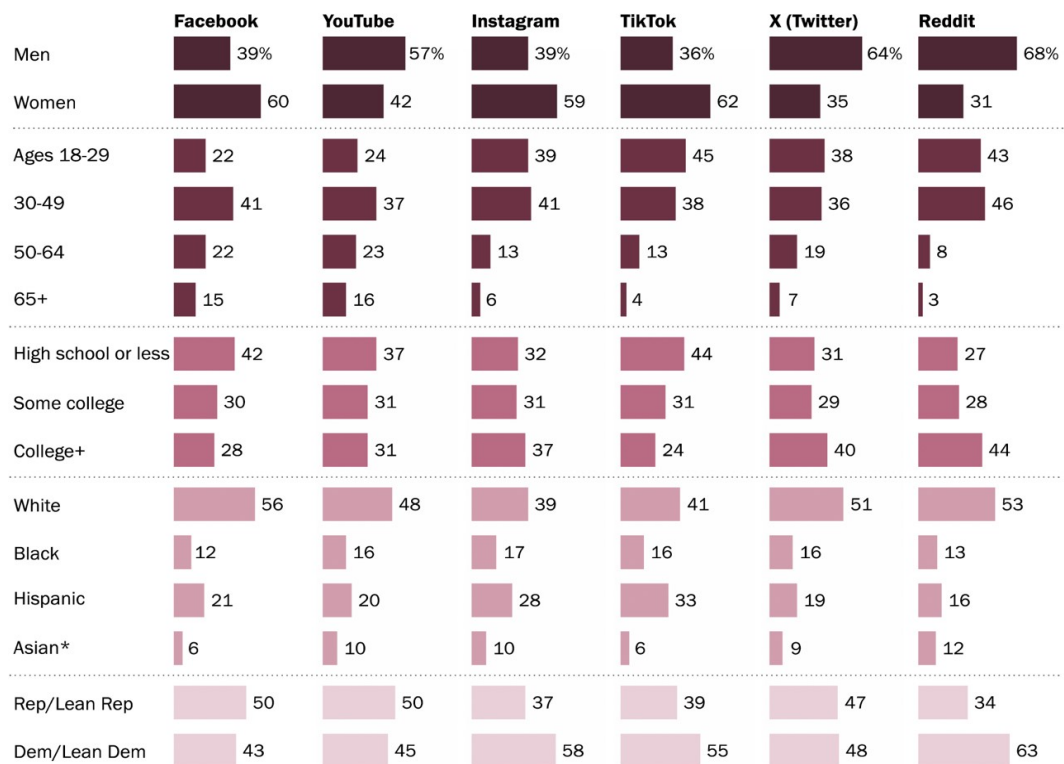
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[1] Author's compilation based on Google

[2] Søren Vigild Poulsen, Gunhild Kvåle, *Studying social media as semiotic technology: a social semiotic multimodal framework,* "Social Semiotics", Vol. 28 No. 5, 2018, pp. 700-717, https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1505689 (21.11.2024)

were monitored by the platform operators, justified by commercial and marketing purposes. Soon the method was transferred to political marketing activities, and now both the methodology and much of the technology (data mining software's, bots and botnets) are available to anyone.

User profiling, as it was said above, allows data collection on personal qualities of digital media users, probably violating their privacy. It is not known how the data are collected, where the data are stored and processed. Figure 1 proves the detailed profiling of US citizens for the 2024 election campaign. The same is probably true for any state's citizens nowadays if they use digital devices.

Demographic profiles and party identification of regular social media news consumers in the U.S.

*% of each social media site's **regular news consumers** who are …*

	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram	TikTok	X (Twitter)	Reddit
Men	39%	57%	39%	36%	64%	68%
Women	60	42	59	62	35	31
Ages 18-29	22	24	39	45	38	43
30-49	41	37	41	38	36	46
50-64	22	23	13	13	19	8
65+	15	16	6	4	7	3
High school or less	42	37	32	44	31	27
Some college	30	31	31	31	29	28
College+	28	31	37	24	40	44
White	56	48	39	41	51	53
Black	12	16	17	16	16	13
Hispanic	21	20	28	33	19	16
Asian*	6	10	10	6	9	12
Rep/Lean Rep	50	50	37	39	47	34
Dem/Lean Dem	43	45	58	55	48	63

* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.
Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanic adults are of any race.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 15-Aug. 4, 2024.

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Figure 1. An example for user profiling: The demographic profiles of social media consumers in the US in 2024[1]

If giant tech corporations have opportunity to collect data on the society of any state, it may pose a security risk, especially if they, as it is experienced nowadays, create their own regulations which affect not only consumer behaviour but also freedom of speech. Apart from the regulations, technological solutions can influence the visibility and accessibility of posts and commercials. But the most dangerous interference in a society's life is probably falsifying societal preferences by using bots and botnets to boost shares, likes and dislikes. This may threaten societal security because it fakes majority and thus "hijacks" democratic will. It results in confusion and disturbances and shatters the citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

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[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2024/09/17/appendix-demographics-and-party-identification-of-regular-social-media-news-consumers-in-the-united-states/ (21.11.2024)

Although conventional media is still popular among news consumers, social media sources gain more and more ground. This highlights why the merge of genres, professional journalism and private communication endanger security: news consumers can be exposed to alien strategic narratives unnoticed. Nevertheless, the securitisation of media ownership and media control, apart from the usual antitrust regulations, is inconceivable because of the values of Western democracies and because profits, competition and discourse about fast technological development legitimise grey zone for the media platforms.

Securitization in wartime: a case study

As it was mentioned above, the EU-imposed ban on two Russian media outlets, Russia Today and Sputnik in 2022, is a recent example of securitization of media. Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350 of 1st of March 2022[1] reflects that the securitization of the mentioned media outlets was a long process: the council decision amended Regulation (EU) No 833/2014[2] created in response to the Russian annexation of the Crimea, which did not yet affect the Russian media broadcast in the EU. The mentioned 2022 Regulation states that the two media outlets "are engaged in propaganda actions." The following paragraph illustrates how rival strategic narrative works and which aspects of society it targets: "(6) The Russian Federation has engaged in a systematic, international campaign of media manipulation and distortion of facts to enhance its strategy of destabilisation of its neighbouring countries and of the Union and its Member States. In particular, the propaganda has repeatedly and consistently targeted European political parties, especially during election periods, as well as targeting civil society, asylum seekers, Russian ethnic minorities, gender minorities, and the functioning of democratic institutions in the Union and its Member States". The paragraph below hints at the dissemination of the Russian strategic narrative by the mentioned and other media outlets.

It also proves that technology allows a proliferation of sources, which makes the spread of unreliable or false information uncontrollable: "(8) Those propaganda actions have been channelled through several media outlets under the permanent direct or indirect control of the leadership of the Russian Federation. Such actions constitute a significant and direct threat to the Union's public order and security". The regulation also cites Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights[3], which says "1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary". (Emphasis by the author.)

The emphasis we added in italics underscores that the Charter of Fundamental Rights allows certain procedures for maintaining national security, territorial integrity and public safety. Besides, it places these procedures in the context of states, consequently, recognises the right of a state to securitize media if deemed necessary. Regarding the interrelationships between societal security discussed above and national security, the latter can be interpreted as the protection of the components of the state from outside threats and interference according to Buzan[4]. What prevents the full securitization procedure by the EU is hinted at by mentioning

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[1] *Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350 of 1 March 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.065.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A065%3ATOC (21.11.2024)

[2] *Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine,* https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014R0833 (21.11.2024)

[3] *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,* Article 11, https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/11-freedom-expression-and-information (21.11.2024)

[4] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Op. cit.,* 100

Article 16 titled Freedom to conduct a business[1] and Article 17 on Right to property[2]. This sheds light on the reason for avoiding securitisation of the media: it would be contrary to some civil liberties as well as the freedom of enterprise in capitalism. Thus, the regulation mitigates the impact of the suspension of broadcast license (not a final prohibition) and its consequences: "(11) Consistent with the fundamental rights and freedoms recognised in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in particular with the right to freedom of expression and information, the freedom to conduct a business and the right to property as recognised in Articles 11, 16 and 17 thereof, these measures do not prevent those media outlets and their staff from carrying out other activities in the Union than broadcasting, such as research and interviews". The EU is in a trap concerning media securitisation because this would be against the Union's fundamental principles. One of the outcomes of the efforts to try to follow advancements in digital technology and the proliferation of platforms and regulate online content and services in the interest of EU citizens may have been the Digital Services Act (DSA) approved by the Council of the European Union on 4 October 2022 and enacted on 17 February 2024[3].

The case of Russia Today and Sputnik can be examined from the aspect of the components of securitization to draw consequences. Buzan et al.[4] include three units in their securitization theory, underlining that the procedure is more important than the exact constituents: the referent object, the securitizing actor and the functional actor. The referent object is a thing that is existentially threatened although it has legitimate claim to survival. The securitizing actor is someone or something that declares that the referent object is existentially threatened. The functional actor is the one that influences the dynamics of securitization without being a referent object or a securitizing actor. Generally, thinking within the conventional framework of a state, the referent object is either the state or the nation; the securitizing actor is a government or a political personality, and the functional actor could be, for instance, an enemy state, a terrorist organisation or an industrial corporation.

Who is who in the case described above? Buzan et al. remark that sets of rules or principles may also become referent objects in the securitization process: for example, "liberal world economy" and "free trade"[5]. In the case of the sanctions imposed on Russian media outlets, the referent objects are the values included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights discussed above. The securitizing actor is the European Union. The functional actor is the Russian media outlets or, indirectly, the leadership of the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, what would an existential threat mean in the case of European values is difficult to interpret, since, as it was pointed out above, the media belongs to at least three sectors of security: political, economic and societal. The economic sector was de-securitized after the Second World War because of gradual economic liberalization. Political security involves the organizational stability of social order as well as the sovereignty of a state. The quotes from Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350 imply that, in the narrow sense, societal security is the referent object of securitization.

To sum up, societal security and political security are interrelated and overlap, while economic security seems to be easier to delineate. The problem with securitization of the media in the case discussed is that, focusing on political security, stability and/or sovereignty could be the referent object, while, by shifting the focus on societal security, social peace and/or identity could be the referent object. However, both are difficult to imagine outside the context of the state, within the framework of the EU, because the EU is not a state (though it has some state-like features) and does not have sovereignty, what is more, researchers disagree over the existence of European identity. The concept of society is also hard to apply generally in the EU context because its member states do not have uniform societies. In addition, the securitization of the two Russian media outlets contradicts the principles of liberal economy, which belong to the fundamental ones of the EU.

On 30 May 2024, an article was published on the home page of the New York Times claiming that, according to a study, hundreds of websites were multiplying and disseminating Russia Today produced content

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[1] *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights Article 16,* https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/16-freedom-conduct-business (21.11.2024)

[2] *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights Article 17,* https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/searchresults?combine=Article+17 (21.11.2024)

[3] *The Digital Services Act (DSA),* https://www.eu-digital-services-act.com/ (21.11.2024)

[4] Buzan, Barry; Waever, Ole and Wilde, Jaap de, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis.* Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, Co., 1998, p. 36

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 38

in EU member states.[1] The study proved that unsuspecting internet users were exposed to RT propaganda on seemingly innocent, family issues related websites. The journalists sent an email inquiring who operated the website and where it was registered but received no answer. This is evidence of the ease with which modern technology allows the circumvention of any legal regulation. The legal aspects of the case were discussed in European Papers[2].

Conclusions

The article has tried to analyse the interconnections between technological advancements and the dissemination of strategic narratives, assessing the possibly resulting security risks for societal security. The sectoral theory of the Copenhagen School was used as theoretical background and securitization theory was used as methodological framework for analysis. I have summarised the still prevalent effect of the work of conventional news agencies, which spread news stories developed mostly with Western perspective; however, news agencies of rival powers are also active and on the rise.

Research question 1 asked "What changes have occurred in the production of strategic narratives in the digital era?" I have found that digital technology has caused profound changes in the formation, projection and reception of strategic narrative. One remarkable result is the adaptability of its formation because data collection on users allows more purposeful design and flexible and fast response. This major change has led to an erosion of legal regulations which are not always applicable to new technological advancements and the resulting alterations in journalistic work methods and professional standards. In fact, the boundary between professional journalism and social media users' texts seems to be blurring. It leads to a simplification of messages in strategic narratives as well as a shift of focus from verbal texts to visual texts, especially photos and videos, which are technologically easy to falsify and more difficult to trace back to their source. In addition, human language has been used for millenniums, thus, verbal signs of lying are more commonly recognised than deception achieved with innovative technological tricks. The short and simplified stories break up the strategic narrative and better hide its goal, that is, persuasion in an actor's interest. Due to user profiling and other ways of data mining, the projection of strategic narratives has become more targeted and more efficient.

Research question 2 was "How does the interference of opposing strategic narratives impact societal security?" I have summarised the concept of societal security and highlighted that strategic narrative creates the cohesion in society which provides societal security. If the strategic narrative of a community is broken up or challenged, for instance, because adversarial narrative is mixed into it and this fact remains unnoticed by the population, it can be considered a threat to societal security. If the rival strategic narrative is efficient, it may lead to questioning the legitimacy of the social order and the political system, thus, posing a threat to the sovereignty of a state. The latter is especially true because, on social media, either a disruptive internal group or an external power may create an impression of majority with technological tricks. The dangerous innovation is, that earlier the enemies tried to influence mostly the decision-makers and the external source of this attempt could be detected. Because of the opportunities of digital technology, now external influence on the decision-makers can be disguised as internal, that is, as if it represented the public opinion of their own society.

The case study has proven that digital technology mediated adversarial strategic narratives threaten societal security because they attack Western democratic values by abusing these values. For example, since stricter regulation of the media would impact basic democratic freedoms like freedom of speech, of expression, of the media, among others. What is more, news reporting and media are cross-sectoral, that is, they are interconnected with more than one sector of security: societal, political, economic, and even the military sector. Although we have seen examples when certain news media were suspended or banned in a country or an international organisation because of an armed conflict or war, still, the Western values, the political interests of status quo states and economic interest of giant media corporations currently prevent such a move. In summary, hybrid warfare is continuing in all fields of life, from economy through politics to military conflicts. The same process is reflected by the contestation of strategic narratives in the digital media. Whose

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[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/30/business/media/russia-rt-disinformation-europe-ban.html (21.11.2024)

[2] Ferenc Gergely Lendvai, *Media in War: An Overview of the European Restrictions on Russian Media*, "European Papers", 2023, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 1235-1245, https://www.europeanpapers.eu/es/europeanforum/media-in-war-overview-of-european-restrictions-on-russian-media (21.11.2024)

story wins in the global power shift is to a large extent dependent on the construction of new strategic narratives and the strategic use of the digital media.

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