

# **INFORMATION WAR IN THE INTERNET.**

## **THE CONFLICT WHICH CANNOT BE WON.**

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## **Abstract**

The debates over Ukraine in 2014 were very popular. The events shocked people, and the discussions over these events were everywhere. The discussion was particularly massive in the Internet. Eventually the discussion over the discussion became more and more intensive, regarding the issues of propaganda, 'brainwashing' and Information War. So-called Internet Armies became the focus of news, while different groups of people were trying to oppose different propaganda. However, the same concept of Information War is not that clear in science. The role of propaganda in this phenomenon is not researched well enough either. In this paper I attempt to understand what Information War is, what its specifics in the Internet is, and what role propaganda plays in it. I resumed that Information War is actually a social conflict by means of communication. Though in some forms of such a conflict propaganda can play a significant role, in the Internet it can never succeed in its goals of changing people's attitudes. That is why any mobilization of 'Internet Armies' can never lead to a 'victory'. No propaganda in the Internet can force people to change their mind. However, this 'war' is still a social conflict, and it should be treated as such. It is about people fighting each other in a limitless network. It is a conflict which can never be won.

## **Общий Обзор**

Данная работа ставит своей задачей создание четких концептуальных рамок такого явления как Информационная Война. Информационная Война в Интернете на примере обсуждения Украинского Кризиса 2014 года является особым фокусом исследования. Теоретические и практические наблюдения доказывают, что Информационная Война – это коммуникационный социальный конфликт в информационном пространстве. В сети Интернет как особом информационном пространстве этот конфликт невозможно «выиграть» в терминах пропаганды. В интернете всегда будет информационное равновесие основных спорных общественных точек зрения. Пропаганда и контроль Информационных Войн являются несостоятельными в сети Интернет. Однако особенности Информационной Войны как социального конфликта прослеживаются четко. Поэтому наиболее перспективным направлением исследования Информационных Войн является исследование их конфликтных структурных и динамических компонентов. Особым условием таких дальнейших исследований является концептуализация Информационной Войны как коммуникационного социального конфликта.

## Contents:

<b>1. Introduction. The Secret War.</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Theoretical Frameworks. From the Academic Discussion to Building Concepts</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1. Chapter I. Ordering Chaos. Understanding the Basis of Information War</b>	
<b>Conceptualization</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1.1. Three Sides of Mayhem: Understanding the Major Debates and Stances over Information War	8
Military Perspective	8
Cybernetic Perspective	9
Political Perspective	11
2.1.2. The Axis of Mayhem: Finding Shared Phenomenology and Featuring Information War	12
Summarizing Phenomenology	12
Building a Definition	14
Understanding Theoretical Contexts	15
<b>2.2. Chapter II. Caught in the Web. Internet Media War as Information War in the Internet.</b>	<b>21</b>
2.2.1. The Valley of Spiders. Internet Media War as a Specific Type of Information War	22
Defining Internet Media War	22
The Internet Media as Specific Organization Type	25
Internet Media War beyond Propaganda and Democracy	27
2.2.2. Academic War? The Specifics of the Discussion over the Political Crisis in Ukraine.	33
The Ukrainian Political Crisis Limits	34
The Academic Perspectives on the Discussion	35
Understanding Internet Media War in the Case of Ukraine	36
<b>2.3. Chapter III. The Law of Hatred. Social Conflict as a Social Phenomenon and an Object of Study.</b>	<b>38</b>
2.3.1. The Pillars of Conflict Theory: Simmel and Coser	39
2.3.2. Conflict in the Social Dynamics: Marx and Dahrendorf	42
2.3.3. Samsara Wheel: Social Conflict Features in Internet Media War.	44
The Structure of Social Conflict	44
The Dynamics of Social Conflict	46
The Structure and Dynamics of Information War as a Social Conflict	47
<b>3. Reading between the Lines: Content-Analysis of the Online-Messages over Ukraine.</b>	<b>49</b>
3.1. The Research Units.	51
3.2. The Research Indexes.	55
3.3. The Research Findings	59
3.4. Summarizing Discussion	65
<b>4. Conclusion. The Missing Stone.</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>5. References</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>6. Tables.</b>	<b>74</b>

## **1. Introduction. The Secret War.**

The year 2014 was characterized by the massive discussion over the events that took place in Ukraine. The rapid change of power in Kiev, the secession of Crimea and the bloody war in the Donbass region were all widely discussed. Initially, I wanted to contribute to this discussion as well. I went to the Russian-Ukrainian border to speak to the refugees from the Donbass region who camped there. I wanted to understand what was really happening in the war region. This decision was based on my skepticism of media reports, which to me seemed to contradict each other. Surprisingly, the discussion on the coverage of these events was also important to the refugees themselves. They seemed to be very interested in the discussion of this war coverage. In some cases they discussed it even prior to discussing their own experiences. Besides sharing their experiences, many emphasized that they regard Russian media to be much more trustworthy compared to Ukrainian and Western reports. This indicates the importance of war-related information to the people. Unfortunately, I was forced to leave the area and end the initial research. However, I got a strong claim to ask myself what this Information War is that everyone was talking about. It was discussed as some kind of war between media agencies or even nations. Later experiences indicated it to be more complicated, as similar tendencies have been seen in academic debates and in the Internet. Information War is a mystery, but the reaction of the refugees indicates this mystery to be rather important for society.

Several years ago I wanted to research Information War for another paper, but my supervisor strongly recommended me not to touch this dangerous issue. He explained it to be a much speculated issue, greatly affected by its politicization. That time I switched my research focus, but this time I decided to research it nevertheless. The major problem in researching Information War lies in the fact that there is no shared understanding of the concept. The variety of definitions is great, as well as the variety of ways to name it. It is also called Psychological War and PR (Public Relations) War. There are other similar concepts, such as Web War, Cyberwar, Netwar, Informational Warfare and Media War. There are multiple papers about Information War in different scientific areas: political studies, information science, military studies, management, cybernetics etc. There is a scientific journal in Russia called Information War. Multiple books were published. However, there is still no shared tradition to understand this concept. Some researchers claim there is no sense in defining Information War in this mayhem, and that they should be building theories right away (Manoylo, State Information Policy in Specific Conditions (Государственная информационная политика в особых условия), 2003a). However, I argue that in such frameworks proper conceptualization is the number one priority. Contributing to it will make it much more feasible to study Information War without the limitations of its high politicization and diversity of incompatible definitions.

Information War in the Internet is a fresh focus of Information War research. Though there are some academic traditions in studying television-based Information Wars in terms of propaganda, internet-based ones are not so clear right now. Some claim it to provide new opportunities for propaganda, others regard it to be more dependent on social involvement and freedom of speech. The academic effort is just starting to develop in this direction, while the social effort is much more rapid. In the same case of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government established a volunteer structure to “spread the truth” about the political crisis (Mip.gov.ua, 2015). Russians also established some institutions to keep track of public opinion in the Internet and to steer it in the “right” direction (Sobaka.ru, 2015). I argue that such efforts may be devastating and counter-productive. People’s

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

access to and influence over the Internet differs from their interaction with television, meaning that television-based propaganda theories don't necessarily apply. It diminishes the efficiency of propaganda. However, contribution to internet-propaganda can facilitate other mechanisms of Information War, which are not known in the frameworks of the underdevelopment of the concept.

After studying a large amount of literature on Information War, I proposed it to be a social conflict. It is a way people try to resolve their problems by attacking others. The bigger the scale of this phenomenon, the greater its relevance. I proposed it to be an intergroup conflict, which means participation of different groups of society in this process. Its specifics is based on its communicational character. This means that it is waged by sharing information to others, ranging from a dialog with a friend to major news reports. **Information War is an intergroup social conflict in the form of communication in information space.** The latter (information space) is an auxiliary concept, which refers to an area of circulation of information in general. It can be specified to domains, such as television, academic debates or the Internet.

Internet Media War is another important concept. I use it to specify Information War in the Internet. Viewing it as a social conflict legitimizes extrapolation of conflict-related theories to Internet Media War. I adopted a system-related approach of the sociology of conflict, specifying the structure (the number of its major elements in the way they are organized) and dynamics (basic principles of structural changes over time) of Internet Media War as a social conflict. Regarding conflict-related structural and dynamic features, I proved that they take place in the case of the online discussion over the political crisis in Ukraine. A significant number of conflict-related messages in the Internet contained specific markers of its conflict nature. This proves it to be a communicational social conflict.

The propaganda talks in news and academic papers tend to emphasize the importance of propaganda from the perspective of one party over others. In fact, no party has significant prevalence over others in the Internet, assuming that no party has at least twice as much influence as others. I proved this to be the case in the discussion over the Ukrainian crisis with relatively equal total numbers of supporters for both major parties. The informational equilibrium in the Internet means that Information War in the Internet can never be won, and that efforts toward propaganda do not lead to any positive gain, but rather to deepening rivalry of the involved parties. This proves the high importance of the conceptualization of Information War for both academic and social domains. Propaganda is important, but it is not the same as Information War in general and Internet Media War in particular.

This overview emphasizes the importance of studying what Information War is. The proposed concept is that this is a communication-based social conflict. However, it is very hard to answer what Information War is in just one paper. It is feasible, however, to propose these frameworks and apply it to an Internet Media War. This will induce a more focused discussion over Information War. It will also contribute to the understanding that these frameworks are essential, as Internet Media War is an example of this process that is less dependent on propaganda theories. If Internet Media War is not about propaganda but about a specific social conflict, it legitimizes debating these issues over Information War in general.

The research question is: "What features characterize Internet Media War as a communication-based social conflict?" Answering this question depends on the answers on several other questions. What is Internet Media War, and what issues characterize it?

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Assuming Internet Media War is an Information War, what issues does it bring up? What are the specific issues of Internet Media War? What is social conflict, and what features characterize it? Which conceptual instruments can be used to investigate conflict-related features of Internet Media War? Answering these questions will clarify the concept of Internet Media War as a communication-based social conflict, and will contribute to larger debates on the nature and management of Information Wars.

The first chapter of my paper investigates the concept of Information War. It shows a great variety of perspectives on what it is. It helps to explain why I refer to the concept of Information War. It also brings up a number of issues to regard while discussing Information Wars. I define it as an intergroup social conflict in the form of communication in informational space. This part clarifies why I do this, and what this actually means in practice. It also help to explain the features of Internet Media War as a specific Information War.

The second chapter of my paper coins the concept of Internet Media War as an Information War in the Internet. It investigates the conceptual field of multiple relatively similar concepts and defines Internet Media War in details. It also introduces the major debates that concern different aspects of Internet Media War. The major ones regard propaganda, cyber-democracy and meta-coverage (news about news) issues, emphasizing political, social and organizational issues respectively. I situate my concept in these debates and explain which new discoveries it leads to. The main argument is that propaganda talks underestimate the nature of Internet Media War as a complex social phenomenon. It cannot be a battle which can be “won” in terms of achieving political goals by the use of propaganda. It is a social phenomenon, which affects the social system. It follows its laws and principles, which can to some extent reflect the goals of its participants. However, participation in a social conflict consumes resources. In the Internet, these gains are much harder to achieve due to the informational equilibrium and behaving toward rivalry. As a result it can never be won in terms of propaganda, as the costs will always exceed the gains.

The third chapter shows the major theories on social conflict, and it demonstrates which basic arguments created the academic perspective on social conflict. It helps to understand both what social conflict is, and how it turned from a theoretical mayhem to a scientific theory. The main emphasis here is on the conceptual instruments. These instruments relate to system-oriented approaches to social conflict, which allowed defining the term. Social conflict is a specific activity in which people try to achieve their goals by harming their opponents. It is also a specific open system (connected to its environment) within a social system (as society in general), which helps the social system to renovate. The concepts of the system, structure and its dynamics are discussed in this chapter in relation to social conflict. The same frameworks are also adopted for Information War and Internet Media War in particular at the end of the chapter. It results in a list of features, which would prove Internet Media War to be a communication-based social conflict.

The final part of my paper applies these frameworks to the discussion over the political crisis in Ukraine. I chose to assess the content of top search messages on Ukraine. The criteria are built on the base of conflict-related features which are established earlier in Chapter III. Comparing different types of messages to each other, media reports and academic perspectives, I concluded my conceptualization to be fair for a large number of messages (44% based on definition). The information equilibrium was

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

proven as well. These results justify my conceptualization of Internet Media War, as well as indicate its relevance to the academic understanding of Information War.

Assuming the mayhem in understanding what Information War is, as well as its limitations in academic discussions (politicization of academic insights over Ukraine, emphasis on propaganda in many related works), the final arguments seem to be very relevant for the scientific insights on the problem. There is a large number of papers oriented toward policy-making in this area. Providing a new perspective with as little politicization as possible contributes to a better and clearer understanding of the social phenomenon. It also may affect policy-making in society. Many works propose investments in propaganda or counter-propaganda, while they do not mention the possible risks of such activities. Conflict-related conceptualization may help to avoid dangerous social policies.

As for the public, a better understanding of Information War is essential, especially in the context of the emphasis on propaganda issues in the media. Such an emphasis may be dangerous and should be managed with regard to Internet Media War being a social conflict.

My thesis provides an analysis of very complex debates of different origins and scale, and tries to find a shared basis between those. The proposed conceptualization provides a framework to adapt conflict-related theories to the issue, and thus creates a potential for other cross-discipline researches, contributing to an understanding of Information War, many related issues (such as propaganda efficiency) and a dialog with different academic disciplines regarding these issues. It does not answer what Information War is, but contributes to the scientific effort toward building a shared understanding of it.



## **2. Theoretical Frameworks. From the Academic Discussion to Building Concepts**

There is no coherent clear theory on Information Wars. However there are multiple diverse theories, which try to explain it from very different perspectives. The mayhem in theorization of Information Wars is the major problem in studying the object. However I regard it possible to systematize and link the diverse theories. In this part of my paper I will demonstrate very different insights on Information War, Internet Media War and social conflict. I argue that the best explanation of Internet Media War (such as online discussion over Ukraine) is that it is a social conflict by communication in the Internet. The three chapters explain in details, what it actually means, and why I argue that.

### **2.1. Chapter I. Ordering Chaos. Understanding the Basis of Information War Conceptualization**

The main objective of this paper is to build better understanding, what Information War is. The actual research question tries to find, what features characterize Internet Media War (which is a type of Information War) as a communication-based social conflict. To answer this question it is necessary to limit the focus of the research to some specific issues, which will make it possible to understand, what issues specify Internet Media War as Information War, and what Information War is about. In the very beginning I have mentioned a mayhem in conceptualization of Information War. There is no compelling answer, what Information War is. However the number of literature on the topic is vast, and it contains a lot of information to consider. The existing literature on Information War should be systematized. I will not chose perspectives, which compel to me. Rather, I will show a way to systematize it, and this way will clarify the key issues, connected to the topic.

I define three major camps in these debates: the military, the cybernetic and the political camps. They emphasize technological opportunities, organizational structure and acquisition of power respectively in describing Information War. Though very different, they have some common phenomenological issues. First, such issues regard it to be a social conflict. Second, this is an inter-group conflict. Third, it exists in the form of communication. As the result Information War can be defined as an intergroup social conflict in the form of communication in information space. This is an ontological implication from analyzing different phenomenology of non-systemized debates over Information War.

The other important finding is that discussion over Information War is based over three key aspects. They are national, social and organizational agendas. National agenda regards the role of Information War for states and international and national politics. Social agenda regards the behavior and potential of people's different activities in this context. Organizational agenda regards functioning of different types of organizations in such activities. These three aspects clarify the focus of existing theories of Information Wars, and they are very useful in trying to understand the place of the concept within these theories. Understanding these aspects will help to understand, what the place of Information War is in social structure, and what issues and problems it is connected to.

These theoretical findings give better understanding, what Information War is, what issues it is connected to, and how it relates to its context. This understanding is essential

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

for researching Internet Media War as a specific type of Information War, and it helps to assess the relevant debates on Internet Media War in a systemized way.

### **2.1.1. Three Sides of Mayhem: Understanding the Major Debates and Stances over Information War**

What is Information War? There is no clear answer in the academic literature right now. Some researchers even propose to skip defining Information War and go directly to building theories. However, these theories are plentiful. They regard Information War within different frameworks as different phenomena and emphasize the practical importance of this phenomenon in different areas. It is impossible to compare different insights on Information War in such a mayhem, which is why it should be systematized.

Studying a great number of different papers, I decided to place them in three main camps. First, there is a military camp, which emphasizes the new important aspects of warfare in the Information Age. These insights prioritize discussion of the technological advancement of warfare in the Information Age. Second, there is a cybernetic camp. It uses mathematical models to describe the use of cybernetic insights in planning efficient activities aimed at achieving their specific goal. They prioritize the role of communication management in organizational issues. The last, but not least, is the political camp. It regards Information War as a practical way of applying Soft Power in political communication. This emphasizes it to be an efficient tool of politics which should not be ignored.

All three camps have some debates amongst each other. They may reflect other camps as well. However, their terminology and phenomenology are not consistent, neither in general, nor even within the camps. They are completely focused on practical issues, while the use of the concept appears to be the least of their concern. In such circumstances linking their theories together and building efficient debates appears to be a great problem. There is no shared understanding in the academic domain of what Information War is. However the way it is assessed in the literature may be researched and understood.

#### **Military perspective**

The military camp is one of the oldest and most developed camps of understanding Information War, especially in the West. There are multiple papers that discuss Information War and Information Warfare. The latter can be both a synonym for Information War and the definition of military activity in the Information Age. However, it is hard to divide one from another in the papers of this tradition.

There are some debates within the camp. First, there is a debate on the essence of Information War: is it a part of warfare or an alternative to it? Lieutenant colonel Mark Lewonowski thinks of it as a way to wage wars in the Information Age (Lewonowski, 1991). The emphasis of his work is the use of new technology, such as radars, computers etc. For him this is high-tech warfare. Another emphasis of his work is that such technology should target command and communication as the most important informational functions of the military. Richard Baskerville 19 years later argues in favor of Information War being an alternative to warfare, when it consists of cyber-attacks and cyber-espionage (Baskerville, 2010). He sees it as a less dangerous stage within international conflict, which takes the place of kinetic warfare and thus delaying it and diminishing the chance of it occurring. Both regarded authors see it in terms of national-lead espionage and military effort, though they see it quite differently in relation to actual military operations.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

The other debate is about principles or technological support as the main issue within Information War. Timothy L. Thomas (2000) and Alan Chong (2014) both compare Chinese and Western insights on Information War. They both distinguish Western differentiation on Information War(fare) as a strategy and Information Operations as the way to accomplish it. However, Thomas argues that principles are not enough to win wars (Thomas, 2000). He regards technical capabilities and resources as key issues in this matter. Chong argues that speaking in terms of a technological race with the West is not efficient (Chong, 2014). It is more about principles and attitudes. It depends rather on the ability to influence others than on raw technological supremacy. Though both share insights on the Information War and Information Operations dichotomy, they emphasize different aspects of those.

Besides Asia and the West, Russia also gets a stance in this camp. Soloviev refers to the Western academic performance on researching Information Wars (Soloviev, 2011). He argues in favor of implementing this concept from Western academic insights to Russian national policy. However, he is not consistent in using Information War and Information Warfare. He regards Information War(fare) to be different in times of war and peace. In times of war it is a technical way of affecting the enemy, while in times of peace it is “psychological war” on shaping public opinion. This perspective is the result of summarizing different insights on Information War from Western sources. It is not clear, what Information War actually is from his perspective.

To sum it up, it is not clear within this tradition, what Information War is. Is it specific activity, military or not? Is it a principle the military adopted for its activities? Is it technical combat supremacy, or propaganda, or both, or neither? There is not even consistency in its name, as both Information War and Information Warfare are used. Such literature can argue in favor of many practical issues, but it does not make clear what Information War is. However, all of them make an effort to explain their understanding of this concept, which means that conceptualizing Information War is important. All of them link it to war and political conflict in general, which is also important.

### **Cybernetic perspective**

The cybernetic perspective is an attempt to see Information War in cybernetic terms as a part of the decision-making process. Cybernetic perspective advocates emphasize decision-making abilities in the situation of conflicts. They see modern technology as something that just complicates it rather than a real source of this phenomenon. They like to use mathematical and theoretical models trying to understand how to use the cybernetic potential of Information Wars and protect against hostile activities. However their insights lack clarity and feasibility. It is not always clear what they actually mean.

Cybernetics was originally defined as “the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and the machine” (Wiener, 1948). It tends to use mathematical methods in trying to understand the structural aspects of the processing of information. Gray regards Wiener’s theory as a source of the interest in Information Wars in the military (Gray, 1998). However, he mentions the advances in cybernetics since Wiener first published his work, while such developments lacked in “Infowar”-related studies. The use of “Infowar” emphasizes the lack of shared use of Information War(fare) concept within one conceptualization. Gray see this concept as too politicized and more designed for siphoning money than for contributing to science. He criticizes the concept and those using it.

William Luoma is another cybernetic advocate who originated from the military camp. Luoma regards Information Warfare as a concept which was developed into

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

Cyberwar in military studies (Luoma, 1994). Though others largely neglect its cybernetic nature, Luoma coins the concept of Netwar, which emphasizes using networks effectively to achieve goals in the Information Age, instead of the role of technical supremacy in military operations. According to him, the main specifics of the Information Age is the change in networking of the social structure. Netwar is a “war about knowledge [that] seeks to disrupt, deceive, deny how a target knows or thinks about itself and how it relates to the rest of the world” (Luoma, 1994). The main emphasis is not on military purpose or cyber-attacks, but rather on the change of social structure. It is unclear though, what Netwar is in practice, and what creates it.

The concept of Netwar also got into the chaos of the conceptualization of Information War. Dugin (2008) adopts this concept, but from a different angle. He emphasizes the meaning of networks in the Information Age, but he sees Netwar as control over symbolic reality (Dugin, 2008). Networks are lead not by people, but by symbols and images, which create their identity. Control over symbols is control over reality, over decision-making and behavior of people. Dugin also discusses information processing and algorithms in his work. Netwar is not a military concept that reflects social issues. For Dugin it is a social abstract concept, working as a mathematical model. In this regard it hardly reflects Luoma’s vision of Netwar.

Bukharin and Tsiganov published a large number of papers on Information War in “Information Wars” journal and in other places. They define Information War as “the main way of capital and power acquisition by information impacts on target segments of population, society and state in the conditions of competition” (Bukharin & Tsiganov, The Mechanisms of Information Wars (Механизмы Информационных Войн), 2007a). They regard Information War in practice as a part of competition in general, in economics, politics, and organizational issues. They emphasize operationalization and algorithms as cybernetic ways to achieve the desired in the situation of competition. They also regard it as an alternative to conventional war in politics. Their understanding of Information War differs greatly from other authors regarded in this chapter.

However, the most cited Russian theorist on Information War is Rastorguev. His monograph (1998) is an important contribution to the studies of Information Wars. Rather than focusing directly on academic insights on Information Wars, he deploys the state-of-art theory of “Self-Generating and Self-Destructing Structures” (Теория Самозарождающихся и Саморазрушающих Структур). He argues that any learning system, including society, mankind and personal computers, is such a structure, which destroys itself to create itself (Rastorguev, 1998). Likewise brain cells die during memorizing, the elements of society die as this society learn. Therefore, such systems have a potential to self-destruction. However, this inner self-destruction mechanism can be triggered outside as well by some specific actions. Such actions aimed at certain profit constitute Information War for Rastorguev. Though most of his monograph does not specify Information Wars and such actions, this insight was often reflected by many scientists after (e.g. Manoylo, 2003a). However, Rastorguev does not explain it as a social phenomenon, focusing rather on the algorithms of self-destruction and abstract models.

To sum it up, the advocates of the cybernetic camp regard Information War to be inherited in social phenomena, other than war, that are social structure change, competition in general, learning as a self-destructing structure etc. Regardless their contribution to understanding of Information War, none of them give an explanation as to what it is on its own. Such theories expand the range of possible conceptualizations of Information War, but they do not contribute to finding common ground in the mayhem.

### **Political perspective**

In this part I do not regard all the academic insights on the political issues connected to Information War. I would rather show some insights on Information War as a political phenomenon, which emphasizes new abilities for the acquisition of power for different political agents. Regarding different papers of this tradition is essential to understand what Information War is.

There are also several perspectives on Information War within this tradition. Pickerill and Webster (2006) regard Information War in the context of anti-war movements in Britain. They argue that the issues of power are to be decided on the level of symbolic realm. Information creates power (Pickerill & Webster, 2006). They emphasize the power of media as being crucial, and they argue that people and journalists can have a share of such power in creating politics. Though Information War here is linked to a real war, it is regarded as a symbolic phenomenon of power rather than a war-related issue. Control over symbolic reality controls politics, including warfare.

Panarin and Panarina (2003) view it from a different angle. They regard it as a new direction of geopolitics, where nations fight each other by other means (Panarin & Panarina, 2003). They adopt Rastorguev's definition to a very specific context, though they do not reflect Rastorguev's theory and only discuss geopolitics. On a practical level, they discuss spreading rumors about political elites as a way to influence their decision-making process. Their book is rather a collections of implications on different aspects of political communication, which does not actually show what Information War is.

Manoylo (2003a) was closer than others to conceptualizing social conflict. He discusses many definitions, as well as many connected concepts. His monograph analyzes the concept and tries to reflect it in Russian national policy. He also emphasizes the importance of Rastorguev's definition, though he considers it to be very vague. However, he also argues that there is no sense in defining Information War in such a mayhem of definitions. He does not give a compelling definition, arguing only that Information War is "an extreme way of settling political differences in the informational society" (Manoylo, 2003a). This definition does not point out the essence of Information War, but it clearly shows that Manoylo regards it as a political phenomenon.

The political camp advocates are united by the idea that Information War is a political phenomenon. Everything beyond this argument is different for every author. However, the actual nature of Information War is largely neglected. These authors focus rather on creating political arguments than on discussing the phenomenon itself.

To summarize all of the academic insights, there is no shared way to define Information War. There is definitely a mayhem in understanding Information War. There is no compelling debate line to reflect as well. Thomas and Chong debate each other, though their perspectives are rather similar. Panarin and Panarina agree with Rastorguev, though their perspectives are very different. Regarding the academic perspectives, it is impossible to answer, what Information War is. However, there are some common things that keep being mentioned in very different papers. These issues should be investigated and studied. They may lead to a better understanding of this phenomenon on the shared basis.

### **2.1.2. The Axis of Mayhem: Finding Shared Phenomenology and Featuring Information War**

Understanding Information War is a difficult task. Academic definitions differ greatly, as well as the objects of defining Information Wars. Before arguing about the definition and nature of Information War, it would be wise to explain what Information War actually is in practice. For many authors there is an inconsistency between their definitions and their phenomenology, which means that what they define logically is not exactly the phenomenon they speak about in their analysis. For example, Panarin and Panarina (2003) use Rastorguev's definition to explain geopolitical struggle, instead of information processing. In such cases the definition does not reflect the arguments of the research. Before debating a suitable definition there should be consensus on the object of the definition. I would argue that the concept of Information War explains a social phenomenon *sui generis* (of its own nature), which has certain phenomenological limits.

Oxford Dictionary defines phenomenology in a broad sense as "the science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being" (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Being applied to a concept it would mean regarding the concept apart from its ontology but in relation to its forms in practice. In other words, I would try to emphasize what people actually mean when they are talking about Information Wars. What they call Information War. For me phenomenology in this case is the range of practical phenomena which are meant to be called Information Wars.

The specifics of Information War conceptualization, precisely the critical lack of a clear shared conceptualization, makes phenomenology an important tool in defining the concept. However, the specifics of the object implies a wide range of phenomena to be considered, which creates its phenomenological limits – the whole range of different phenomena that can be described by the concept. In practice that means collecting all such phenomena, classifying those and clarifying what is Information War and what is not. Studying phenomenology leads to a better understanding of the ontology of Information War and to defining Information War. This will help answering the question what Information War is.

#### **Summarizing phenomenology**

Summarizing phenomenology of the concept of Information War in the regarded works, it is about a conflict in the postmodern reality context by specific actions. I will show the phenomenological limits of every aspect and try to understand which limits can be conceptualized, and which cannot. Also it is important to conceptualize every phenomenological aspect in its relation to the other aspects.

Most insights regard Information War to explain political conflicts. They discuss whether it is a mostly military way of managing political conflicts, or a way to manage political conflicts in general. Lewonowski, DiNardo and Hughes saw it purely military, while Gray, Panarin, Panarina, Pickerill and Webster described it as purely political in general. Luoma, Manoylo, Chong, Baskerville, Thomas and Soloviev regarded it in an extended way, but emphasized the importance of military operations within such frameworks. I would support Gray's argument that military proponents emphasize its military perspective rather for their own sake, and in practice it is more political than military (Gray, 1998). Pickerill and Webster's insight (2006) can be taken into account considering that military activities are affected by Information Wars even prior to the actual deployment of troops.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Dugin, Rastorguev, and Bukharin and Tsiganov go even further. Dugin (2008) sees it as the specifics of network influence in conflicts, political or social. Bukharin and Tsiganov (2007a) see it as an aspect of any competition from the cybernetic perspective. Rastorguev (1998) sees Information War in information processing in general, where any aimed interaction of informational nature can be an Information War. Dugin's perspective does regard conflicts, though not only political, but social conflicts in general. Bukharin and Tsiganov (2007a) and Rastorguev (1998) see any minor antagonism to be processed the same way. It changes the debates. The debate is no more whether it is a military or a political conflict in general, but rather what kind of antagonism it is. I would mention Manoylo's (2003a) insights on the intensity of such antagonisms on the line competition-aggression-war. Here, competition appears to be something outstanding, as it is only emphasized in Bukharin and Tsiganov's approach (2007a). Rastorguev's definition mentions different parties that try to gain some profit by harming an opponent. Though "harm" for Rastorguev is education of the systems, his definition has a lot of similar features with Coser's definition of social conflict (Coser, 1956): interactions of parties, aimed to get profit, harming each other. From this perspective everyone except for Bukharin and Tsiganov mean a specific conflict (military, political, social) when they regard Information War.

The other part of Information War phenomenology that events relating to Information War are not any specific-area conflicts, but those specific for postmodern reality. Some proponents, like Lewonowski (1991) and Baskerville (2010), see it only in postmodern reality. Others, like Chong (2014) and Rastorguev (1998), see the concept beyond postmodernism, but the large-scale development of such phenomena they see in the specifics of the Informational Era. The reason for such a dependence on postmodernism is also debatable. It may be new technology, or it may be the revolution in information processing. On one hand, revolution in information processing can be linked to technological advance. On the other hand, as the concept develops it regards only up-to-date technology. Radars as technological development were mentioned by Lewonowski (1991), but not by other regarded researchers. However, cyberspace as a technological revolution is mentioned in many works. Others focus their attention on information space. For Rastorguev, for instance, information space plays an important role, as it is the only area of Information War. With large-scale mass-media development, information wars have a chance to be a massive phenomenon. With the development of cyberspace the natural limits to escalation of such conflicts stop to work. In other words, Information Wars are about the phenomenon of information space, which mostly expand in cyberspace. The emphasis on cyberspace as the battlefield of Information Wars is important. This is the specifics that actualize Information War in postmodernism. However, there is proof that this has existed in a pre-cyber reality. Cyberspace here is the specific information space, created by artificial systems of information processing. However different information spaces just show different contexts of the phenomenon. The reality of Information War is about the processes, occurring in information space. It is about information processing.

So, this is phenomenologically a specific conflict, related to information processing, which has its ultimate shapes in postmodern reality. Is it a quintessence of the academic phenomenology of Information War? Many researchers, like Chong (2014) and Luoma (1994) emphasize the role of specific information operations. Others, like Rastorguev (1998) or Panarin and Panarina (2003) emphasize the role of unspecified informational impacts of different parties on each other in order to change their informational context. The difference here lies in the fact that there are general actions, that can have influence,

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

and there are coordinated actions, which can be much more devastating, as Baskerville (2010) argues. However, it seems to affect only the importance and relevance of the study of such processes, but not their nature. While some researchers regard cybernetic attacks, other regard any actions of information processing. There is no consensus on this line within academic frameworks, so that I would argue that the actions constituting Information War activity is the main phenomenological debate on the concept of Information War.

### **Building a definition**

I have laid out the phenomenological limits, which lie around the three anchors. The first one is the anchor of “War”. This means that anything called information war is a specific conflict. Some regard it as a large-scale armed conflict, which would refer to a conventional meaning of “war”. Others see “war” more as an allegory to a large-scale conflict in many areas, such as the Cold War (see Soloviev, 2011). The other thing is that in Russian media the concept is largely used in its political sense, which also should be regarded (see Manoylo, 2003a). Meanwhile, Bukharin and Tsiganov (2007a) and Rastorguev (1998) propose to see this concept beyond the political domain. To put it clearly, though most of such researchers and journalists see it as a political conflict, some works give good arguments to extrapolating it to economic conflicts. This creates a good base to regard it as a social conflict as a more general phenomenon. I would argue that any Information War is a social conflict.

However, the scale of such conflicts is an essential issue in many works. For Baskerville (2010) only organized actions seem to be a power that may be regarded as an Information War. For example, government-lead hacking. However, none of the researchers gives a good explanation of the difference in scale that lies beyond state-controlled effort. So that what distinguishes minor informational conflict from Information War? How many participants or resources should be involved to call it an Information War? I would argue this is more about quality than quantity. According to the classification of conflicts by participants, conflicts may be personal, interpersonal, group and intergroup conflicts (Grishina, 2008). War as an armed conflict can be defined as an intergroup conflict. Every soldier fights not only for himself, but also as a part of a group. This classification does show a difference in conflict dynamics by participants, while the number alone does not. Therefore, I would argue that only intergroup conflict can be called a war, and that the number of participants in intergroup conflicts only emphasizes such specifics.

The second anchor is “information”. In its early military theories it is referred to the Informational Era. Later conceptions clarify that such conflicts are always about information processing. This is the main split on this point: some emphasize Information War to be an ancient social phenomenon, others see it only in the specifics of cybercommunication. I agree with the argument that Information War is ancient. I also agree that the change in information processing abilities does facilitate Information War. However, I do not agree that it is about cyberspace wars. I would refer to the conflicts in cyberspace as Cyberwar. The conflicts in information space as the field of information circulation can refer to Information Wars. It is vague, but it does relate to the terminology, as well as to academic arguments on the issue.

The third anchor is the most struggling one – what actions can be regarded as constituting Information Wars. In the logical structure of the notion “Information & War” I would call this anchor “&”. What can be considered to link both information and war? In the academic tradition there are two distinct lines, which I called the main



## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

phenomenological problem of the conceptualization of Information War. The first one regards nearly any information-related action as an act in Information War as a conflict. The other one regards only specific operations, specified by national governance, secrecy, aims or instruments, “weaponry”. I find it quite epistemological that some emphasize the structure, while others emphasize the agency. That is why it is impossible to consolidate these perspectives. However, I can pick a stance here – which I will do, in favor of the structure. Information War relates to social conflict in information space. Social conflict is always about interactions (Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, 1956). Information space refers to information processing. Therefore, Information War is about social interactions by information processing, in other words, social communication. This means that cyber-attacks are not considered, as they refer to actions addressed toward artificial information systems. According to Rastorguev (1998), the processing of information in cybernetic systems is quite different than in social systems. Cybernetic systems are not social agents and they do not create social conflicts. However, cyber-attacks are always people-lead, and they can potentially harm an opponent by destroying its resources or providing additional resources into different levels of the conflict. In the former case it goes beyond information space as it is defined, in the latter case in terms of espionage it can only be Information War if the information investigated is exchanged and used to change the conflict dynamics. Either way, it is not Information War if it is not based on social communication.

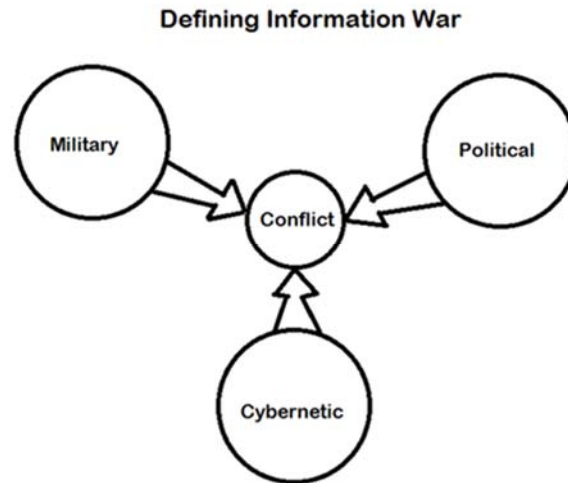
To summarize, in my perspective Information War is an intergroup social conflict in information space by the means of communication. I regard Information War to be a part of neither military nor political systems. In this sense it is a social phenomenon of its own kind, a phenomenon *sui generis*. Thus it should be studied in its specifics, rather than in a political or military context. However the context still plays a great role in theorizing

### **Understanding Theoretical Contexts**

Information War is a social conflict. However most academic works about Information War try not to define it, but rather to build theories of its role in the society. These theories are quite specific in every area of research. However they have some issues in common. These theories regard national, social and organizational agendas. They specify the essence of this social phenomenon to different forms of communication, which are dependent on the information space they take place in.

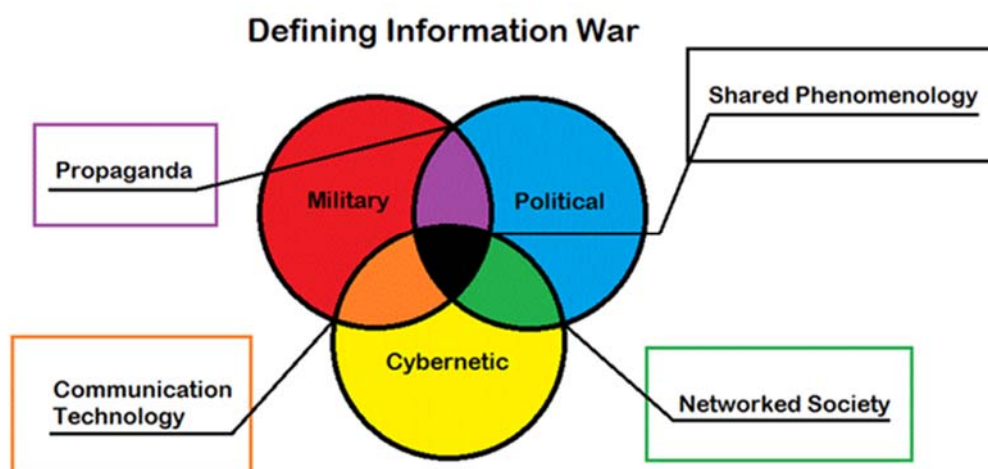
The literature on Information War considered in this paper is structured in a three-leaf way: there are military, political and cybernetic sources. The main distinction is based on the emphasis on the nature of Information War – whether it is about warfare, power or information processing. When trying to link the phenomenology of the discussed issues and their ontology, I concluded that all of them mean conflict as the core of their phenomenology (Picture 1).

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.



**Picture 1. Conflict as Phenomenological Core of Information War**

DiNardo and Hughes in their critical research classified Information War-related literature into a vast understanding group (which emphasizes propaganda), and a communication group (which emphasizes communication technology) (DiNardo & Hughes, 1995). While Luoma (1994) focused on the advance of communication technology in his vision of Netwar, for Dugin (2008) Netwars are based on the networked society. The other cybernetic proponent, Rastorguev (1998), regards to some extent both technology-based cybernetic systems and social system as a network as the main specifics of Information War. Political realists regard the core of Information War in propaganda (e.g. Panarin & Panarina, (2003), while political constructivists focus on the changing of power in networked societies in the informational era (e.g. Pickerill and Webster, 2006). To sum it up, the phenomenology of the informational specifics of Information War can be narrowed down to three key issues: communication technology, networked society and propaganda; all of those relate to the three domains of defining Information Wars (picture 2).



**Picture 2. Defining Information War: Literature Review**

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

However, the black sector in the center is not that obvious from the literature study. In order to understand the shared phenomenology of different theories of Information War it is necessary to go through all of the elements of the diagram. It is important to show how the academic domains distinguished the specifics of Information Wars. Studying those in depth is necessary to understand, what ontology is hidden behind this phenomenology.

### ***Military Perspective***

Alvin and Heidi Toffler's book (1993) on war in the Information Age has sparked a major interest within military studies on the specifics of warfare in the Information Age. It follows a well-known book by Toffler on the "Third Wave" (1980) about the specifics of the Information Age and shows the proposed specifics of warfare in terms of the post-industrial reality. This vocabulary and insight was widely adopted by many military researchers (e.g. Sullivan & Dubik, 1994; Smith, 1994; etc.) and affected later insights on warfare in the Information Age (Alberts, Garstka, Hayes, & Signori, 2001). This resulted in discussion of new types of war in military research, including Information War.

Military perspective proponents discuss several key issues, specifying Information Wars as connected to the Information Age. For DiNardo and Hughes (1995) the proposed issues are propaganda and communication technology (in terms of command and control). For Soloviev (2011) it is military technical actions (cyber-attacks) and psychological war (propaganda). For Baskerville (2010) it is technological control and cyber-attacks. All the other works tend to emphasize one of the three proposed elements (Command and Control, Propaganda or Cyber-attacks), though they mention other war-related specifics. All the elements relate to the advantages of new information technology, used for different purposes. Communication technology plays an important role for both command and control, and propaganda (Smith, 1994). These two aspects emphasize organizational specifics of army and possible directions in national policy respectively.

### ***Political Perspective***

The political perspective proponents regard the Information Age to affect the politics the most. Manoylo (2003b) regards the Information Age as a major political change due to new technology of mass political communication. Manoylo discusses the concepts of information, social information and mass communication. In regarding these concepts he concludes that the information character of Information War is built on the change in mass communications in the Information Age. Though he mentions new agents of such communication, his main argument is that national elites rule mass communication, and mass communication controls people's minds. Thus, for Manoylo, the specifics of Information War lies in the fact that new technology gives political elites new instruments to overwhelmingly control the population by means of propaganda, which is able to significantly control minds. However, other nations can also use the same technology, so that Information War relates to national policy in international power-sharing. Panarin and Panarina (2003) also regard Information War to be a national project, but they emphasize not psychological control, but geopolitics in general. They also argue that new technology advances political analytics greatly. Social networks, Internet, other mass media – all of them provide a lot of information for policy planning and framing, and cyber-analytics provide great opportunities for the political domain. Such approaches are quite realists-like.

Rothkopf (1998) on the other hand regards the main specifics of Information War in the changing power equilibrium toward more advantages for non-state actors. He coins the concept of Cyberpolitik as an alternative to Realpolitik in the Information Age

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

(Rothkopf, 1998). National actors lose power to the networked society, thus power shifts to the rising number and complexity of power-based relationships in society. Pickerill and Webster (2006) also regard the specifics in the rising power of journalists and political activists. This position is more constructivist in this sense.

The debates over national and social issues in Information War are quite intensive. In both cases Information War still relates to Information Age, rather than to information. However, information-related theories are also mentioned. For example, Manoylo (2003b) emphasizes the role of information space as the main arena of Information War. He regards the concept of information space as the basic one in understanding Information War. However, for Manoylo, information space is a part of geopolitical space, which regards all social information communication. That sphere directly affects the way people think, according to Manoylo. Pickerill and Webster (2006) use the concept of symbolic reality which is regarded as a specific social realm, which affects social processes, including war-related ones. Both information space and symbolic reality regard a specific area of Information War. Political communication is largely regarded as its main way (e.g. Manoylo, 2003b; Vershinin, 2004).

Summarizing the political literature insights on the phenomenology of specifics of Information Wars, it is possible to distinguish the following components: national policy (including propaganda), networked society (with the specific relation to the power of each group), information space (based on mass communication technology), political communication (which constitutes the relationships of power), and cyber-analytics (as a technology-based way of acquiring political information).

### ***Cybernetic Perspective***

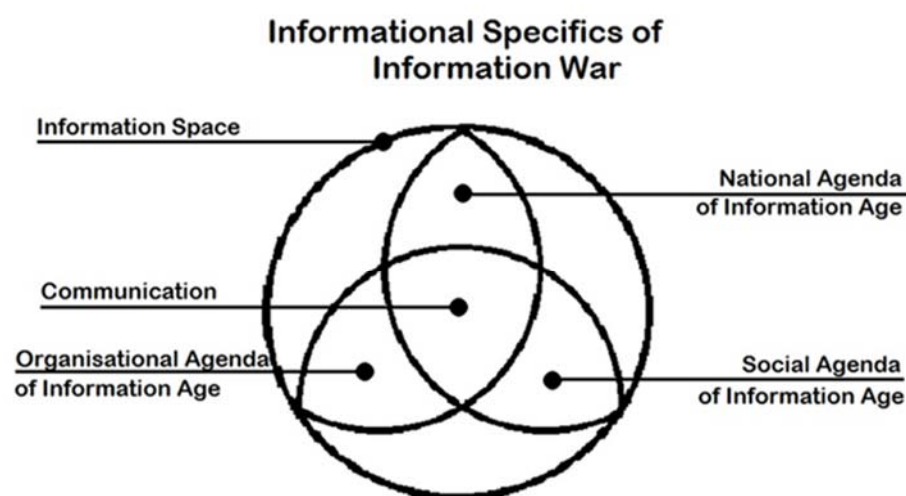
Cybernetic literature regards the main specifics of the Information Age in the way the structure of organizations changes within the social domain. Dugin (2008) regards new conflicts of the Information Age as Netwars, as they are waged in the networked society. The way social structure is more about networks than social classes and nations is the main emphasis of his work. Bukharin and Tsiganov (2007b) regard new social system first of all in terms of organization. They mention that the politics, economy and social structure of the Information Age have changed with processes like globalization. However, the unit of Information War for Bukharin and Tsiganov is organization. Different types of Information War are based in feedback and in the way organizational unity fights social structure diversity. The dichotomy of social and organizational is the key split for these theorists. First of all it affects business and economy, as reputation starts to play more important role, and the perception of organization in society is the measure of its wealth in information society. Though they regard Information War to be ancient, they emphasize the development of this phenomenon with new technology of mass communication, based on learning. Learning as the main communicational aspect of information society is the key concept in understanding Information War. The ways of deception, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, advertisement and other ways of building knowledge and framing information are important in understanding, how Information War works. Rastorguev (1998) also emphasizes learning as the main engine of Information War, as well as its ancient nature. The spread of Information War is explained as the result of communication technology development, first of all in mass communication. While the scale of new Information Wars is explained by the spreading of information space by cyber-space. Though Rastorguev do not regard cyber-processes as something creating Information War, he regards it as an important facilitator of Information War escalation, as it provides more efficient algorithms for waging the war and becomes some sort of Information Weapon.

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

To sum such insights up, Information War from cybernetic perspective is based on learning as a communicational process. The one who frames information creates reality. With the development of new communication technology this process also develops, affecting mainly organizational and social agendas, while also relying on some marketing technics in business and on deception in general. Information is important, but the process is mainly caused by communication specifics, as well as the specifics of information space.

### *Theoretic Agendas*

Regarding the academic literature of different perspectives, the initial insights on Information War specifics in terms of propaganda, communication technology and networked society (picture 2) can be transformed and re-framed into picture 3.



**Picture 3. The Informational Specifics of Information War**

The concept of networked society is the most clear here. Both political and cybernetic perspectives emphasize the change in social structure in the way it becomes more complicated and diversified. In addition, political perspective emphasize that such networks in society have expanded access to power, while cybernetic perspective emphasizes the way such social structure distributes its wealth and power to different organizations regarding their perception of organizational reputation and its link to the interests of different social groups. Such changes are caused by turning the society into information society with the Information Age transition and communication development. The specifics of such changes can be regarded as social agenda of Information Age.

The concept of propaganda in different perspectives also contributed by different insights on national policy, national security and national interests. Political perspective emphasizes national policy as the main way of realization of national interests in the Information Age with the emphasis on propaganda and national planning. Military perspective regards the same as a security measure aimed to defend the state from other nations. Both can be summarized as the national agenda of Information Age.

The concept of communication technology should be transformed the most. In military sense efficient communication means mostly command and control systems,

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

aimed for better military management and joint coordination of troops. For Cybernetic perspective this means efficient management in general as the main informational process. These issues constitute the organizational agenda of Information Age.

### ***The Role of Communication and of the Information Space***

The concepts of communication and information space seem to be extremely important as well. Communication is in the center of discussion of every academic tradition regarded. For military perspective it is mostly communication technology, which provides both propaganda abilities and military management systems. For political perspective it is political communication as the main political phenomenon of Information Age. For cybernetic perspective it is about learning and transformation of framed data into knowledge, which is the main process for every mankind and organization in Information Age. Information space regards all the means and elements, creating communication and making it possible, and the main specifics of Information Age here lies in new technology, mainly cyber-technology. Communication always take place in information space, though information space is always superior to communication content-wise as it contains also all the technical and cultural means making it possible.

To conclude, theorizing Information War lies not in the understanding of the concept of information, but rather in the specifics of Information Age, particularly in the specifics of its national, social and organizational agendas. This specifics also regard communication as the main process of Information War, while information space is regarded as its area. Going back to my definition of Information War, it is an intergroup social conflict in information space by means of communication. From the position of existing theories the emphasis goes on its “information” specifics in terms of its national, social and organizational agendas, which are important contexts of understanding, what Information War is. All of them emphasize the importance of the specifics of communication in different information spaces. That is why it is hard to asses Information War concept in general, and it should be specified. I argue that Internet Media War can be a better research focus as it refers only to the Internet.

## **2.2. Chapter II. Caught in the Web. Internet Media War as Information War in the Internet.**

Information War is a social conflict by communication. This is the result of my analysis of different theories on the issue. Though it is not actualized in the literature, the elements of this definition are largely discussed in most academic sources. If there is a phenomenon to call Information War, it is about an intergroup social conflict by communication in information space. However, this implication is too general for a practical research, and it needs specification. I cannot prove any Information War to be an object of conflict-related conceptualization, but I can try it on a specific type of Information War. The concept of Internet Media War is a feasible way to go in depth on this social phenomenon. It is an Information War in the Internet. In this paper, the concept of Internet Media War is based on the specification of my vision of Information War rather than any investigation on the existing concept of Media War and revealing the role of media in military activities. However, some implications of such literature on Media Wars are useful in understanding the debates, such as debates about the dependence of Media Wars on the actual political conflicts it covers and the debates about propaganda and cyber-democracy.

To clarify this concept in details I will explain the discussion over the political crisis in Ukraine in the Internet as its example. I will not try to comprehend the political crisis itself. I need to know what the limits of the discussion are, and what features reflect this case to be a communication-based social conflict, as well as any important issues to keep in mind, both case-related and related to the Internet as an information space.

During this theoretical discussion I position myself in the key debates over more specific issues with regard to my general conceptualization of Information Wars. I argue that the Internet Media War on Ukraine is a separate conflict from the actual political crisis in Ukraine. Moreover, the specifics of the Internet provides additional abilities for rival points of view to counter each other, providing that there cannot be a victory in propaganda/counter-propaganda terms in the Internet. Which means that it is not a way to achieve a goal efficiently. The actual diversity is seen on many levels with multiple factors that influence it. Organizational, social and national factors should all be considered in trying to understand how the concept works in the proposed frameworks.

Understanding the current debates over the Information War on Ukraine can specify how conflict-related conceptualization can contribute to a clear understanding. Unfortunately, academic insights are often too politicized in this regard. They tend to use one-sided language and refer to non-proven theories and views, which are more ideological. A neutral perspective in this regard is essential, and it should be built in a scientific way of building concepts free from ideological premises.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

### **2.2.1. The Valley of Spiders. Internet Media War as a specific type of Information War**

Internet Media War is a specific Information War with regard to its information space. Internet Media War is waged in the Internet. The understanding of such a specifics will clarify, what factors are key in this case. It also clarifies the major debates on this scale, and how conflict-related conceptualization contributes to such debates. Understanding this specifics is crucial for the research, as it may greatly influence the way conflict-related conceptualization is reflected in this particular type of Information War.

I argue that Internet Media War is a conflict on its own rather than an extension of other conflicts. It can have the same disagreements as other conflicts, but a different structure and dynamics because it is a different system. The political component is based on the equilibrium of national and social issues in Internet Media Wars, which creates informational parity of its political parties. This parity prevents any side from winning and thus limits the positive gains for any side while still having all the destructive potential of conflicts. In current conditions Internet Media War is a social conflict with a destructive potential. Internet Media War cannot be won.

#### **Defining Internet Media War**

I have chosen Internet Media War as a concept, both relevant and feasible for studying. It is relevant as communication in the Internet is becoming more important (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006) and as both the Internet and Media are in the very center of many Information War researches regarding its importance. I have found that most studies on Media Wars regard it more as a coverage of war-related events by the involved parties. However, there are thoughts and concepts, which can legitimize regarding Internet Media Wars as a specific conflict. My definition of Internet Media War regards it as a social conflict, and the substitutes of this concept do not show this properly. However, they are still useful in understanding the specifics of media in Information Wars.

The vast spectrum of literature focuses either on media (as a specific way of communication) or on the advantages of the Internet (as a new information space). Specification of Information War based on these lines would make understanding social conflict features more feasible. That is why I coin the concept of Internet Media War. It is not similar to most academic concepts, which is why I need to define it and show that Internet Media War is a specific Information War.

Internet Media War can be defined as an intergroup social conflict in the Internet as media. It adopts the regarded earlier perspective on Information War and specifies information space as the Internet and communication as media. Thus Internet Media War regards only messages in the Internet that relate to different media processes. To show this I need to show the specifics of the Internet in Information War. But first I need to prove that this definition regards Internet Media War as a specific Information War, which is a specific social conflict. The alternatives can be taken from the existing alternative concepts, such as media war or cyberwar.

#### ***Internet-Centering Concepts***

Internet Media War is not a Cyberwar. The concept of Cyberwar is one of the most used ones in the literature. Chong (2014) regards Cyberwar as alternative military actions in information networks, not limited by current treaties and political trends. Cyberspace here is an area that does not have the same kind of institutionalization as physical, international or legal areas. Luoma (1994) regards Cyberwar as one of the developments



## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

of Command and Control Warfare, which focuses on military objectives and offense in cyberspace by the means of cyber-attacks and cyber-security. Rastorguev (1998) emphasizes cyberspace as a new information space. In this space there is no mechanisms of goal alteration, so that cyberwar as a war in cyberspace is an endless destructive algorithm. All these insights are different, but they all focus on cyberspace as a specific arena of an external battle. Cyberwar is a characteristic of the place of a struggle, but not its other elements. It can have different forms, participants and reasons – only the place is accounted for.

Internet Media War is not Web War. Stephen Blank coins Web War as a concept, explaining “denial of service, botnets, and hacking” of Estonian communication networks during the political crisis over the Bronze Soldier. (Blank, 2008) For him this is a specific Information War of “new kind”. This is a political conflict in national terms in the form of cyber-attacks. As this is focused on cyber-attacks, it is not about communication.

Both internet-centering concepts either prioritize cyber-attacks, or the use of networks by nation states in an unspecialized way, they are not sufficient in explaining a specific Information War in the Internet. They do not regard a specific conflict, but rather specific instruments (“cyber-weapons”) in political conflicts of international scale. This makes it reasonable to focus on media-based concepts when analyzing Information War in the Internet as a communication-based social conflict.

### ***Media War, Coverage of Events and Metacoverage***

For Joel Fishman Media War means the use of propaganda as a totalitarian political tool, which makes control of the population easier (Fishman, 2007). The concept of Media War here focuses on national-driven propaganda. For Chris Galloway Media War regards the way how the “heterogeneous western public” is being influenced by different media that cover war (Galloway, 2005). And this in turn shapes public opinion, which influences decision-making in foreign policy. Both theorists study the example of the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian war, but regard it either in the realists’ or in the constructivists’ way, emphasizing national and social agendas of the phenomenon respectively. The focus on communication from its national and social perspectives makes this concept relating to my conceptualization of Information War. From these perspectives Media War is a specific Information War mediated by mass media. Galloway (2005) also coins the internet-specific concept of “cyber-PR-war”, which narrows his perspective on Media War to the Internet. This vision can be in some issues very similar to my definition of Internet Media War. However, these concepts have some implications and limitations that should be regarded. First, they are always linked to military operations and their coverage. Second, they always play an important role in national policy. Third, they are never regarded separate from their respective events and policy-making. Such implications should be remembered.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn also think of Media War as media coverage of war-related events. In their view, it has 2 aspects: the actual interpretation of war-related events that reflect national policy; and organizational war of media of different kinds and levels (Biressi & Nunn, 2004). They emphasize the fact that regardless the dependence of national policy on media coverage of wars, there is also a clash on the organizational level of different media struggling for public. This difference is mostly seen in the rivalry of printed press and television, as the latter has a stronger effect on the audience, though lacks depth. Frank Esser (2009) regards the concept of metacoverage as a better substitute to such a perspective. Metacoverage is a struggle of different media over their coverage of wars, and this is a type of metacommunication – communication about communication

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

(Esser, 2009). Such insights also correlate to my definition of Information Wars as a communication-based conflict, though it mostly emphasizes its organizational aspect in Biressi and Nunn's (2004) understanding. However, Esser (2009) also mentions success in studying the phenomenon of metacoverage in election and political conflicts. In this interpretation, the metacoverage understanding of media war can be spread from coverage of military operations to coverage of political conflicts in general.

This creates the problem of whether or not Media Wars are always about the coverage of military conflicts. Ginna Husting shows how the mechanisms of Media War are similar for coverage of the Iraq War and coverage of the so-called "war on abortion" (Husting, 1999). She proves the fact that Media Wars are waged not only about coverage of military operations, but rather for any major political conflict that has strong societal implications on its own. However, it does not prove that this phenomenon is distinct from political conflicts. Cees Hamelink regards "propaganda and perception wars" as an escalating factor for other political conflicts (Hamelink, 2008). There are two important implications here. First, it distinguishes political conflicts and these "wars" as distinct phenomena which are linked together. Second, it regards it in terms of escalation. Media War appears to be a part of the political conflict environment, supplying the political conflict. Such insights legitimize regarding Media War as more than just coverage of military operations. In addition, this means that it is more dependent on its own features (metacoverage issues, escalation potential) rather than being directly controlled by the sides of the actual political conflict.

The major result of this coverage/metacoverage debates here is that Media War is a distinct conflict from the object of its discussion. Metacoverage is based not so on the original disagreements of the objects of coverage, but on some others characteristics, such as struggling for audience (Esser, 2009). In their criticism they also refer to the policies of media sources, rather than to initial problem. It is important to understand that this is a distinct phenomenon, rather than an extension of other phenomena. However this phenomenon is linked to the actual problem. That is why it is difficult to distinguish the difference between the original problem and media war on its coverage and metacoverage.

### ***Internet Media War among Other Concepts***

Internet Media War in this context relates more to Media War theories, than to Cyberwar theories. Internet Media War relates to the Internet, but it is not inherent in the Internet apart from Cyberwar. To some extent any Internet Media War can be considered as a cyberwar, but cyberwar-centered theories usually focus on something else, other than Internet Media War, such as hacking. Web War theories do not relate to Internet Media War, as cyber-attacks are not the ways of social communication in general (though they still might be those in a very specific context). Media War is more precise concept, as it does discuss communication and conflict. However Media War theories are often incased in national terms and ignore social participation in this process. None of these concept is ample to clearly describe Internet Media War as an Information War in the Internet, but the relevant theories on Media Wars can be useful in understanding the issue.

To conclude, some concepts built around the concept of Media War do explain specific Information War. Others see it rather as an extension of other conflicts. However, regarding this concept in its current state implies some limitations and assumptions to reflect. It is important to understand the specifics of the Internet and Media in the regarded visions of Media War and communication processes. According to my agendas of informational specifics for Information War, the internet media specifics of Internet

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Media War as an Information War should contain organizational, national and social agendas. Regarding those agendas specifically would give a better understanding of the specifics of Internet Media War. The key assumption that Internet Media War is a social conflict should not be forgotten as well.

### **The Internet Media as Specific Organization Type**

The concept of Media War in the literature is often explained as a media-coverage of wars, military conflicts or even political clashes. The Internet as a specific medium is also mentioned in such discussions, as well as in discussions on communications and Information Wars in general. The specifics in different literature is often encased in terms of three major agendas: organizational, national and social. Regarding these agendas as the main scope would benefit analyzing the literature on media specifics in media wars. It will help to show what features characterize the specifics of Internet Media War as a specific social conflict.

The main specific of the Internet Media is that it is a different kind of organization of communication. Such organizational differences specify Internet Media Wars as a specific Information War. The organizational agenda also implies some specifics in its relation to the national and social agendas. Organizational issues are important and should be kept in mind. Studying such features can help to understand the specifics of national and social agendas as the most debated aspects of Information War.

### ***Ownership***

The organizational perspective regards media agencies as organizations that work in different political, social and economic contexts. The organizational perspective regards decision-making and labor policies of journalists as members of organization. First and foremost, it shows the dependence of media policy on the ownership. Yoram Peri in a retrospective on the change of media policy in Israel proves the fact that media policy is dependent on the ownership of media organizations, as well as on their ratings and the public (Peri, 1999). Being a puppet of politicians in the very beginning of the Israeli state, it became a commercial agent which fights for its audience. Robert Handley and Amani Ismail also regard the issues of ownership and funding as very important for war-related media policy, which makes a “professional” agenda important in analyzing such conflicts (Handley & Ismail, 2010). Therefore, when analyzing Internet Media Wars, it is necessary to keep this dependence in mind and also regard the organizational context of media agencies, specifically the ways it is funded.

I will regard media policies as the result of interactions of all three agendas: social, organizational and national. Handley and Ismail (2010) place media war between organizational (“professional”) and national agendas, debating professionalism and the issues of the states as two competing perspectives. Peri (2009) regards organizational politics rather as a reflection of the rivalry of national and social agendas, while organization should decide, what opinion to reflect. It can be the opinion of the state, or the opinion of the public. Peri regards the concept of citizenship as a solution to national-social struggle. I see all three perspectives as competing each other in this regard. The dependence on funding is based on governmental subsidies, public attitudes and the “professional” principles to follow. However this dependence on all three agendas affect the content of messages, spread by such media organizations.

### ***Media type***

The second way to understand the organizational agenda of Media Wars is in the dependence on the media type. Internet as a medium is quite different from both

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

television and newspapers. However it is important to understand, how media type affects its policies. Sheppard and Bawden in their study on Media War concluded that the perspectives shown on television are generally different from those in newspapers (Sheppard & Bawden, 1997). The former is about image, affects emotions more, but is very limited in time and depth; the latter does not appeal to people as much, but is deeper and more detailed. In the case of the Gulf War papers showed more criticism on the situation and its coverage, while television just tried to get the public's attention. Nah et Al (2006) compare the political effects of both television and newspapers to those of the Internet. They conclude that internet news and social networks provide both political discussion and political participation, and that their role in politics is rising. They connect it to greater abilities to participate in discussions and reflect on them, thereby providing greater access for different people and social groups. This emphasizes the civil participation in the political process, moving from the national agenda in media policy to the social agenda. Susan Carruthers mentions the difference in perspectives of news agencies on one side and alternative sources of information on the other side (Carruthers, 2008). In the case of the Iraq War, these sources of information were documentaries and YouTube videos made by the public. She concluded that the role of media (television for instance) in trustworthy coverage of war-related events was disappearing, and the role of social media was rising. Here, she sees a dichotomy between the national and social agenda in the type of media involved. Will Ward studied social media in the Gaza conflict and concluded their importance in the situation of lack of attention to war-related issues from the traditional media perspective (Ward, 2009). He also regards "citizen journalists" to change the way media works, as national agents are too "slow" in managing social media. Thus, in social networks, the social agenda is emphasized over the national agenda. All regarded papers show that the Internet as a medium is more social-oriented than "traditional" media, such as newspapers and television. Radio is not in the center of such talks however. The issue to concern is that different papers mean different aspects of the Internet. While Nah et Al (2006) regard internet news as their subject, Carruthers (2008) emphasizes video-hosting sources, and Ward (2009) focuses on social networks. Also, the difference between video-news and textual news is not clearly shown by Nah et al (2006), though the difference between television as video-based and newspapers as text-based is mentioned. This may be a limitation in regarding the Internet as special media.

### ***Sources***

It should be remembered that different sources, mostly news and social networks, can be different in their effects and policies as well. This dependence on content-orientation is the third important issue of the organizational agenda. More propaganda-centered papers prefer analyzing the concept of news – television news, newspapers, and internet news. Sheppard and Bawden (1997) regarded "news" as one of the central concepts of their research. For them this concept is in constant change regarding the media-policy of the state. The literature of mass propaganda tends to regard the Internet as a good source to streamline propaganda. For example, Galloway (2005) regards the Internet as an important media space to fight an Information War in the same national-termed sides, in addition to Media War by means of television and newspapers. It seems to be just another space for propaganda in terms of covering the news. There is another perspective on these issues. Nah et Al (2006) also view the Internet regarding the concept of "news" from a perspective where the specifics of the Internet allows news outlets to reflect all types of public and be oriented toward a specific public. From this perspective, news in the Internet reflect the political participation of different social groups. Though it is still

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

dependent on media policies, it is more social. Ward (2009) also emphasizes the social part of political participation, but in the example of social networks. Husting (1999) emphasizes the role of both online resources of news agencies and social networks in “constructing identity” and nation by communication between different social groups. These are examples of explanations and debates over media influence that emphasize political and social issues over organizational issues. Though the difference between online news and social networks can be real, the major effects are similar for both. This part of the organizational discourse is not in the focus of the study of media war, but it is important in the discussion of social and national agendas of Internet Media Wars.

In fact some papers see different media more like national agents than organizations. For example, Ingrid Volkmer regards media diplomacy as a part of international politics (Volkmer, 2008). The national stance of many agencies, like Al Jazeera, is mentioned in many works. From this perspective media-organizations are just political agents of international politics. Galloway (2005) regards this as a way political groups within a state fight each other, aimed to affect the foreign policy of the state. Fishman (2007) regards it as the opposite – as a way for the government to control its people. National and social issues appear to be more significant than organizational issues in studying Internet Media Wars. However, this makes it clear, that sides involved in Internet Media War are not entirely controlled by governments.

To sum it up, though organizational issues – such as ownership (state-owned or private), media type (television, newspapers or the Internet, including online television and newspapers) and the specifics of the source (news, social networks, blogs) have their implications, they are less significant for Internet Media War than social and national issues. Some organizational issues (ownership) reflect social-national agendas rather than affect it. As a result, Internet Media War is more dependent on its national and social characteristics. Such characteristics are built in the shape of debates. One camp of researchers emphasizes national issues and sees Internet Media War as specific propaganda. The other camp regards Internet Media War from a social perspective, specifically the way political groups engage in politics. This debate appears to be central in the discussion of Internet Media Wars.

### **Internet Media War beyond propaganda and democracy**

Propaganda and cyber-democracy are two main issues, emphasizing national and social agendas of Internet Media war respectively. Though propaganda as a concept do not necessary rely to geopolitics, in this theoretical concept it is regarded mainly as an instrument of geopolitics. Cyber-democracy is another concept, explaining political communication in the Internet by activities of different groups of people in the political arena. Theories based around this concept tend to emphasize that such activity actually represent people and their political will. I will not pick a stance in favor of any camp. I argue that both approaches can have a place at the same time. People and organizations try to propagate their perspective in the situation of a political dialog. This dialog participants try to affect politics, but the dialog abilities are based on the specifics of the Internet and the actual social attitudes. In the situation of democracy in the Internet all social and political groups have a voice, though some groups have more abilities to spread their opinion.

However there is an information overload in the Internet, and the quantity of available data is supreme to the ability to consume it (Yevtovich & Arazki, 2011). So that all excessive information beyond certain limit is not consumed efficiently. In addition, centralized propaganda is always slower than social reaction (Ward, 2009). As the result,

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

there is an informational equilibrium of all major positions in the Internet, which makes it impossible to win in propaganda terms – as changing opinion of other people by providing specific information. Propaganda may exist, but it will affect only those, who shares the group affinity of the source of propaganda. This implies that Internet Media War can never be won (in propaganda terms).

### ***Propaganda in Totalitarian Societies and Democracy***

The most discussed political implication of Information War is propaganda. The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives several definitions of propaganda, one of them is “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In the literature on Information War, national propaganda is often seen as a way to influence citizens' attitudes on politics and the government. Totalitarian propaganda is regarded as a way to control the minds of all the citizens. Dr. Joel Fishman regards propaganda as a way of “inversion of reality” (Fishman, 2007). He sees its origins in the totalitarian propaganda of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as the easiest way to totally control the people of their state. He sees propaganda against contemporary Israel as having the same roots as Nazi Germany propaganda, in that it changes the understanding of reality. Rastorguev (1998) regards propaganda cases also mostly on Soviet examples rather than on contemporary technics.

Though many researchers talk about the propaganda of the mid-twentieth century, there are multiple researchers who emphasize the growth of the propaganda potential in postmodern reality with the development of more sophisticated communication technology. Deepa Kumar regards present day propaganda as originating from the Cold War, where television and technology of mass media have proven to be valuable in spreading propaganda (Kumar, 2006). Yevtovich and Arazki (2011) regard the abilities for propaganda to grow with more sophisticated use of information technology. More up-to-date technology gives more ways to completely control minds, while information overload prevents audiences from reacting critically. However, Ward (2009) argues that new technology diminishes the abilities of state-driven propaganda, as such actors are too slow to react the changing information context in the Internet. Regarding these views, new technology provides both new abilities and limitations for propaganda. In the Internet its character changes because of the rapid changes and information overload.

So that the role of propaganda in politics is growing in postmodern world, while most of the regarded countries that create propaganda are democracies. Regarding the difference of power in totalitarian states and democracies, it is important to understand what creates propaganda in democracies. Justin Lewis (2008) studied how the US military affects public opinion toward support of military spending. As politics is dependent on public opinion, influencing it is important for the functioning of different governmental branches, including the military. By affecting the information in the media, the American military changes the public opinion towards boosting military expenses (Lewis, 2008). Here media technology provides the government with some tools to use in its support. Cottiero et Al (2015) regard “Kremlin propaganda” to greatly affect the Russian population (Cottiero, Kucharski, Olimpieva, & Orttung, 2015). Though they tend to label the Russian government as authoritarian, they still regard the political process in Russia in democratic terms of public participation in politics. They see television-driven propaganda as a tool to shape public opinion, though they also mention the way the Internet as least controlled information space shapes the discourse of such propaganda, so that it tends to reflect public opinion. Though Russia and US are different democracies, both tend to use media in shaping public opinion in order to legitimize their policies.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Here, media provides additional resources for governments to use democratic principles against the population and in favor of the elites.

### ***War-Related Propaganda and Anti-War Movements***

The most discussed use of propaganda in democracies is war-related propaganda, aimed to get public support for military activities. Kumar (2006) regards the Bush administration to control the coverage of the Iraq War. This was done by playing with the public: though journalists were allowed to be present at the frontlines of military operations, they were limited in their abilities by the agreements with the government they signed. Though the rights of journalists to cover the events were provided by the government, the state has limited it by military secrecy obligations, which prohibited any report that may threaten the operation. So that war-related propaganda in this case is built based on secrecy limitations rather than on planned news-making. In such conditions media technology is used to legitimize military operations rather than threaten it.

However, new technology also gives opportunities for anti-war movements. Carruthers (2008) shows that though the Iraq War was shown in a one-sided way on television, many people were able to make documentaries and spread them. Such documentaries has shown an alternative picture that changed the public attitudes toward the war. A major role in this process is given to the Internet and YouTube in particular. In this case, the Internet gave new abilities to provide information about the war to the public.

In addition, such information stimulates political participation. Nah et Al (2006) studied the same Iraq War in online news. They concluded that the Internet provided new abilities for both alternative coverage of the events and political discussion about it. It not only gave a ground to anti-war movements, but also mobilized people into political discussion and political participation. The latter indicates that the Internet here gives more opportunities for political participation by the people, which increases the value of their social role in the political processes due its coverage.

Thus, inner propaganda within a state gets its own specifics in democracies. On one hand, public opinion becomes more important, and technology affecting it develops due to its high value for the government. Governments invent new sophisticated and hidden ways to manipulate public opinion, and it attracts great attention of researchers. On the other hand, democracy implies certain limitations to governmental abilities to control people. Alternative sources of information are harder to shut down, and they find a way to address its audience. The Internet gives the most abilities to both spread alternative information and mobilize people into political action on its base. Therefore, both government and society get new instruments to participate in politics, which do not give a supreme advantage to any agency, state or social, to engage in politics on a communicational base.

### ***Cyberdemocracy***

Cyber-democracy is another aspect of the political process born by the development of the Internet. It shows constructivist views on the way people affect the political process in the Internet. Lincoln Dahlberg distinguishes three camps in the discourse on cyber-democracy, revealing the three main emphases of this phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2001). One camp emphasizes the way people can affect decision-making by providing interactivity-based feedback based on their personal vision. The second camp emphasizes the group-building dynamics of creating online-communities and their participation in politics. The third camp emphasizes the abilities of different people to engage in dialogue, which affects their political decision-making. Combining the major arguments as

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

regarded by Dahlberg's academic positions, some important implications can be made. First, people in the Internet do affect politics – by electronic voting and community-building. Second, their positions can be affected through dialog, based on different online messages. Third, the public has the ability to show the entire spectrum of opinions, and they can use it in argumentation. In this regard creating explanations can affect politics, and these explanations can be made by everyone.

The other perspective is shown by Ferber, Foltz and Pugliese (2007). They regard cyber-democracy in terms of a new efficient medium which provides better opportunities for creating a dialog between people and their political representatives (Ferber, Foltz, & Pugliese, 2007). Though they view governmental sites as not very efficient in this regard, they still find abilities for political dialog important, as there are many non-governmental spaces for political discussion, which may be regarded in policy-making. This shows that explanations in discussions have all the possibilities to affect political process. However, it still needs governmental involvement to some extent.

To sum it up, explanations of political situation play an important role in the political process of postmodern democracies. There are ways of direct interactions, supported by governments, as well as indirect ways in terms of online-communities and discussion grounds which are able to greatly affect the political process. Such indirect ways are less dependent on the governmental position and demonstrate the way people affect the politics rather than the government affecting people.

### ***International Propaganda and Media Diplomacy***

International propaganda is also in the focus of the researchers of Information War. Handley and Ismail (2010) show how state-controlled internationally-oriented media represents its governmental position in covering war-related events and thus shapes public opinion on its base. In the case of the Gaza crisis they show how Israeli and American news agencies lobby their state interests while reporting the war. This shows the way national impact shapes international propaganda by controlling internationally-oriented media.

Media diplomacy is often regarded as a new specific way of management of political conflicts. Volkmer (2008) regards two perspectives of such media diplomacy. First is the “sphere of reflection”, where national media represent the national politic position in a non-official way. Second is the “sphere of action”, where major media appear as agents of politics, “magnifying” some issues and creating political discourse. Both implications are important. This means that major media to some extent are controlled by government policy. However, they are also self-esteem agents of politics, which indicates that to some extent they depend on their own organizational policy, which is oriented toward its audience. This indicates that political involvement in the media (in the regarded cases of democracies) is in between national and social agendas. For Volkmer this is especially relevant in case of new communication technology, specifically the Internet. She regards the “action” model to be the case of online media. Therefore, Internet in democracies places the role of media agencies between national and social trends. And this has major political implications.

However, the main focus of the literature is at defensive strategies aimed to prevent foreign intervention in national politics by means of propaganda. Timofeeva argues that American and Western media in general create negative attitudes to Russia, as well as media inside Russia (Timofeeva, 2008). The latter is shown to greatly affect public opinion, criticizing national politics as much as covering any political events in general. She emphasizes the urgency of the development of political communication, as well as



## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

state PR (Public Relations) as priorities for the government as a way to win this “information war against Russia”. Manoylo (2003b) in his monograph about national policy in special conditions regards information war and Western geopolitical propaganda as a major threat to Russian national security, which should be opposed by planning a good national informational policy. Both approaches emphasize the threat of foreign propaganda for the state. While Timofeeva sees it in terms of PR and reputation, Manoylo sees it in terms of deception and mind-control. Attitudes to actions against such propaganda differ, while there is a strong emphasis on the fact that it should be countered by the government. Also such theories have strong political positions, which leads to politicization of the topic.

International politics is also encased in terms of propaganda. On one hand, television seems to be controlled by the government as an instrument of diplomacy. On the other hand, media organizations have the power to create international politics and make important decisions, which can affect international relationships. Though it provides states with new opportunities, it also creates new threats of similar activities by their geopolitical opponents. Therefore, countering this kind of propaganda becomes an important task. Media in this situation also get power as they shape public opinion inside Russia, which they can do the way that is most profitable for them. Despite all the criticism about state control of media in foreign diplomacy and national politics, it is greatly limited by trends in public opinion and organizational policies of media organizations. All three elements – national, social and organizational – seem to be important in this process and none has a clear supremacy over others.

### ***Internet Media War in Democracies***

In a democracy both national and social agendas are institutionalized as priorities in information policy. In such a situation no agency in political conflict, state or political group, has obvious supremacy. National politics and international relationships, creating a good image of a state and demonstration of political participation – all of it stands between national and social, as they are regarded equal in democracy. Elimination of any side is regarded problematic if it represents any social group, even the slightest minority; though there are some exceptions and limitations to this proposal regarding groups prohibited by the state for the sake of public interests. Thus, all the sides are always present (though prosecuted ones can have some significant limitations) and none have obvious supremacy, as democracy is based on the rights of different social groups to participate in politics. Propaganda as a tool is available to any political group in cyber-democracy, and it is estimated to be efficient in lobbying the interests of such groups. In the Internet, where anyone can be a medium of Information, all the new power-related abilities of media are available for everyone. In the situation of information overload these abilities have a handicap of efficiency.

The other important issue is the domination strategy for all the regarded propaganda mechanisms aimed at a win/lose result. The domination strategy is aimed at achieving the goal of the conflict regardless of the interests of others (Grishina, 2008). All the regarded literature uses win-lose language (e.g. Timofeeva, 2008) and orientation toward elimination of the rival perspective on the object of conflict as a threat. For Internet Media War this is a position-bound explanation. As all groups are able to create and spread their explanations, and none can easily get rid of other explanations, there is always information parity and never only one supreme explanation in case of Internet Media War in a democracy. Therefore, in case of Internet Media War in a democracy, a win/lose aimed strategy will always lead to conflict escalation and institutionalization rather than to its ending. This is an important proposition, as it means that Internet Media

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

War can never be won in democracy. It is either institutionalized or ends with the end of the original disagreement by other means.

Thus Internet Media War is a viable concept as an Information War in the Internet. The existing concepts are not sufficient to explain it, though theories on Media War in general provided a good basis for conceptualization Internet Media War. This concept explains Information War in the Internet. The specifics of this social conflict lies in three main agendas of Information War. First, it is organizational agenda. Both news agencies and social media have some organizational limits of their activity, which should be reflected in the research. Second, it is national agenda. Propaganda-based theories explain the abilities and interests of nations to wage Internet Media Wars. It also reflect metacoverage issues in the terms of assessing news in news, as it often discusses national propaganda. Third, it is social agenda. Everyone can be media in the Internet, so that there is always some social representation in such process.

The theoretical analysis of the relevant theories also proposed informational equilibrium in the Internet, meaning that every political camp have relatively equal abilities in representation of their perspective in Internet Media War. This means that Internet Media War can never be won in propaganda terms as spreading one opinion over others. As many participants expect to win in propaganda terms (as it is assessed in relevant theories), they can never win Internet Media War.

### **2.2.2. Academic War? The Specifics of the Discussion over the Political Crisis in Ukraine.**

It might be wise to illustrate the concept of Internet Media War as a specific Information War. I propose the case of Ukraine to be a good example of such a phenomenon. In this part I will try to show Information War (and Internet Media War in particular) over the political events in Ukraine. I will try to show the basic line of events, their reflection in media and scientific articles, and reflections on those. The case of Ukraine is definitely a very complex and large-scale Information War, linked to other social processes. The discussion over Ukrainian political crisis in the Internet appears to be an interesting case for reflection, especially in its relation to the actual political events. It is viable for understanding the concepts of Information War and Internet Media War as well.

I discussed the conceptualization of Media War in the literature in the terms of covering political conflicts in a specific way, which is a social conflict on its own. The academic literature argues in favor of multiple issues, creating such communicational conflicts. Competition of media companies and sources, struggling for funding, propaganda, cyberdemocracy, media diplomacy, alternative journalists' activities – explanations are multiple.

I argue that the core essence of this phenomenon is in its conflict nature as a specific social conflict in information space by the means of communication. Especially it is relevant in the case of the Internet, which provides the greatest abilities for multiple participants to communicate. This provides the base for a very specific Information War, which is Internet Media War. It is specified by a massive amount of information, shared by very different people, governments and organizations. The explanations of these differ from Rastorguev's "unstoppable algorithm" of destruction (Rastorguev, 1998), to information overload mechanics (Yevtovich and Arazki, 2011). The former emphasizes the lack of "breaks" in processes, mediated by the Internet. The latter shows that any propaganda beyond a certain limit loses its efficiency due to inability of humankind to assess similar information over a certain amount of its volume. Multiple other researchers emphasize both abilities to stream more information than ever before, and availability of such abilities not only for governments and corporations, but for independent journalists and regular citizens as well. Information overload, propaganda potential and shared access together create information equilibrium in the Internet. This means that any perspective can (and willing to) compete with others. Moreover, after a certain limit the difference in abilities to communicate diminishes (due to information overload), which prevents any disputed perspective from supremacy. People want to prevail in "sharing the truth", but they can never do it. Internet Media Wars can never be won (in propaganda terms).

The case of Ukraine can illustrate both the difference (and popularity) of major positions, and the way they are explained in propaganda terms as willing to overwhelm other perspectives for own sake. The public and academic perspectives see these issues as a struggle, fight of somebody against somebody. However they contribute this fight themselves. The reason is in the way they do not understand, that this is a social conflict, which is by far more complicated than just a "fight".

### The Ukrainian Political Crisis Limits

The political crisis in Ukraine consists of a number of events of political character in Ukraine of 2013-2015 years. The greatest intensity of the crisis is reported to occur in 2014, so that I will focus on the discussion of the events of 2014.

In the end of 2013 there were multiple pro-European demonstrations in Ukraine. It was reported in media to be a reaction on the postponing of the integration agreement between European Union (EU) and Ukraine. The participants of these manifestations also opposed corruption in the government. The major manifestation took place in the Maidan Nezalezhnosti (The Place of Independence) in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. This gave the name to this political activity – Euromaidan, or just Maidan. This demonstration had some bloody clashes and many people killed – both of police and citizens of Ukraine. There were also public demonstrations in the support of the president Yanukovich– Anti-Maidan.

February 22 2014 the president Yanukovych fled the capital, and the new government was formed. This caused a difference in the recognition of the legitimacy of the new government, both in Ukraine and by other countries, Russia, EU and the United States (US) in particular. Anti-Maidan movements were popular in Southern and Eastern regions of Ukraine. However it didn't work out for creating a dialog inside Ukraine.

Anti-Maidan movements in Crimea created insurgent movements, which seized power in the region with the support of Russian Military, based in the region. According to the official results of the referendum in Crimea, 96% of the voters supported the secession of Crimea and its “reunion” with Russia. Anti-Maidan movements in other regions, traditionally represented in the government by its now ousted part, argued toward federalization. In Odessa they had a clash with Maidan supporters, resulted in the fire, which caused multiple casualties. In Lugansk and Donetsk (home region of the ousted president) rebels managed to seize power, capture weapons and create militias. This resulted in the war between the official Kiev and these two regions (which represent one area of Donbass).

Both the secession of Crimea and the war in Donbass caused major international implications, regarding not only Ukraine, but European Union, United States and Russia. EU and US opposed Russia by international diplomacy, economic sanctions and diplomatic support of different parties in Ukraine. The highest peak of these clashes followed the crash of MH-17 plane of Malaysian Airlines over Donbass with multiple casualties. By the time of this article the war in the Donbass region is still waged, though the situation is rather institutionalized without major changes. Crimea is considered Russian by Russia, but not by the West. The legitimacy of the government and its efficiency are still debatable inside Ukraine.

These events, reported in different media, constitute the eventual limits of the crisis very roughly. In academic areas the situation as a whole is often characterized as a crisis. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines crisis as “a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). According to the official website of the OSCE, it is a crisis, as this situation caused changes to national borders, multiple deaths and massive destructions (OSCE, 2015). The chronological limits of the crisis itself are not that clear though. Some researchers propose November 2013 as a starting point of the political crisis with the start of Euromaidan (e.g. Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015). Others link it to the Orange Revolution (a political event in Ukraine of 2004-2005) or the crash of the Soviet Union of 1991 (e.g. Lisovsky and Samarin, 2014; Bertalan & Nagy, 2014). There are those who regard it in terms of the Cold War and relate to it (e.g.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Babayan, 2015). However, I consider the start of the political crisis to be February 22 2014. It caused the crisis of governmental legitimacy, as the government changed suddenly in an unexpected way, which was not supported by many citizens, who lost their representation. Also, it changed Russian attitudes to the situation and internationalized the conflict, as well as lead to its rapid escalation (Cottiero et Al, 2015). Starting February 2014 it is still ongoing. The geographical limits I see it regard the whole Ukraine by February 22 2014, as the governmental change affects the whole country by the moment it occurred. Donbass as a disputed region and Crimea as not-recognized part of Russia are also parts of this conflict, physically or diplomatically. Eventual, chronological and geographical limits define this crisis as a political situation.

However, the discussion on the political crisis in Ukraine goes far beyond these limits. Both news articles and academic papers show that talks on the situation go beyond the proposed limit. It is linked to the Russian-Western rivalry, post-soviet political processes and internal political issues. The crisis itself is not the focus of this paper, so that I will not analyze it in details. However the difference of opinions is essential, as it constitutes an Information War on its own. The proposed limits of the Ukrainian Crisis and its outline serve a purpose of objectification of the situation and an anchor to link the discussions to.

### **The academic perspectives on the discussion**

In order to understand all the difficulties of the discussion itself, the literature on the political crisis should be regarded. I would argue that such literature links this current conflict with many other political processes at different levels. It builds an explanation of the crisis in specific lexical and historical context. The literature seems to be as polarized and as problematic as the political discussion over the crisis, so that research papers on the crisis seem to share the limitations of this Information War, being its part.

First, the problems, participants, interests, stakes and even events can be seen quite differently. Some regard the problems of the crisis in the problems within Ukraine (e.g. Miller, 2015), others argue that it originated from the post-soviet political processes between Russia and Ukraine (e.g. Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015), there are those who regard it as a regional problem in Russian and EU relationships (e.g. Haukkala, 2015), but the most popular perspective is that of a proxy-termed war between Russia and the West in general, led by the United States (e.g. Lisovsky & Samarin, 2014). There are also papers that extrapolate the political crisis on Russian inner politics in terms of the Western liberal lobby (e.g. Jarzynska, 2014; Ibraev, 2015). Most papers regard it to be geopolitical, but the stakes are perceived differently, from the national security of Russia to a Cold War related rivalry between Russia and the United States.

The events are interpreted very differently as well, while the problem is regarded to be the result of different actions of different people. However, there is often a “guilty one” and the “coalition of good” that need to oppose it with a good policy. For example, Delcour and Wolczuk regard Russia to be a democracy spoiler, which leads the population toward a democratic turn (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015). They argue in favor of the spread of democracy, arguing that Russia is not a democratic power, which does not want to spread authoritarianism, but just its ambitions. Lisovsky and Samarin see it from a Russian perspective – as use of political technology by the United States against Russia to maintain its hegemony and spread its power (Lisovsky & Samarin, 2014). Babayan sees Russia not as imperial, but as defending its interests against the West as it violates all the agreements that provided Russia’s security after the crash of the Soviet Union

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

(Babayan, 2015). However, she still regards it as a threat to the West, and the other way around.

It is important that many sources regard the discussion over the events as being even more important, than the events themselves. Pilyugina regards this Information War based on mythology, while these myths are created by different political groups pursuing their goals (Pilyugina, 2015). She mentions the threat of this “chaos” created by contradicting myths to get out of control. This correlates with my perspective in the way I regard Information War to be a social conflict which is always out of control of any agency that does not have an obvious supremacy. Cottiero et Al (2015) argue these myths to be created by state-owned Russian channels, regarding the strong correlation between internet-based narratives and television-shown narratives in the way television affects internet perspectives. However, they mention that only several of such narratives became popular in the Internet giving no ample explanation to this, which rather indicates that key narratives are rather social-created, than given by the government. In any case these myths and narratives are thought to be extremely important for Russian society. I argue that the concept of explanation as an object of Information War can reflect such insights, as explanation can compel to both narratives and myths in its simplest form.

The language that politicians use shows clear polarized stances (Stepanova, 2015). However, the literature on the crisis also uses similar markers. For example, Delcour and Wolczuk’s article (2015) mention the “annexation” of Crimea, Russian “intervention” and that “Russia has sought to undermine Ukrainian statehood”. Even literature that is barely linked to the discussion on the political crisis spends a lot of effort to demonstrate their position. For example, Owczarzak et Al in their research about HIV prevention in the region (Owczarzak, Karelin, & Phillips, 2015) mention the Russian “occupation” and “annexation” of Crimea extensively. This indicates a robust position in the academic tradition of these researchers in their interpretation of the events.

This shows that academic insights are also often position-bound, blame someone, and use unambiguous vocabulary. This greatly limits the value of such papers and gives the current research some abilities to contribute to a better understanding of academic perspectives on the political crisis itself as it shows that such papers risk being involved in a communication-based social conflict and thus lose grasp for the sake of winning – to create a compelling explanation within a political position. There is Information War over Ukraine in academic area as well.

### **Understanding Internet Media War in the case of Ukraine**

I have shown the limits of the Ukrainian crisis, academic perspectives on those and the reflections on such perspectives. I argue that there is an Information War in academic area as well, so that the value of such papers is quite limited. However it indicates, that there is a communication-based conflict over Ukrainian events, and that this conflict takes place in academic area as well. Academic insights do not tend to collaborate to understanding the events, but rather argue in favor one or another explanations, which are often either anti-Russian, or anti-Western, blaming somebody in the crisis, but not seeking a shared solution.

Understanding Internet Media War on the example of Ukraine is partly reflected in such literature. Cottiero et Al (2015), for example, show the situation in propaganda terms. According to them, Kremlin propagates its perspective toward its goals. This reflects the propaganda talks over Internet Media War, discussed earlier. Lisovsky and Samarin see it the other way around – as an American propaganda toward supporting its hegemony, though they do not focus on the Internet (Lisovsky & Samarin, 2014).

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Jarzynska (2014) emphasizes the way different political groups inside discuss this situation, and how it relates to their goals. In this regard the ideas are being propagated in favor of different political groups, Russian nationalists in particular (Jarzynska, 2014). It also do not focus on the Internet, but it explains how different media sources reflect social opinion, including “Sputnik and Pogrom” in the Internet as a major nationalists’ perspective speaker. This indicates that academic perspectives emphasize either propaganda or cyber-democracy in the case of Ukraine as well. However it does not show, that this is a social conflict.

According to media-reports, the Internet played a great role in the crisis. For example, many arguments are taken from official social media pages of governmental or rebel leaders. Arsen Avakov’s facebook and twitter pages are largely discussed in media. A publication from Strelkov’s page was an argument in the discussion of the MH-17 crash (Business Insider, 2014). However in this regard internet-sources are linked to the position of officials and hardly independent from the actual political crisis.

The other issue that is largely discussed in media is internet-propaganda. Russian liberal media mentioned some agencies, assumingly funded by the Kremlin, which employs newsmakers and “internet-trolls” (professional commenters in social media and news), which propagate the “right” perspective (Sobaka.ru, 2015). Russian media report about the initiative of Ukrainian government of creation of “Internet-army”, in which organizers instruct volunteers to spread “the truth” to target news and social media sites (KP.ru, 2015). News agencies and bloggers all over the world criticize different messages about Ukraine, seeking for fake news, disinformation and hiding the facts. Metacoverage issues here also play role, criticizing the trustworthy of information in the Internet. Such criticism leads to stereotypes and the lack of trust toward opposite opinion. Especially if your opponent is expected to be a paid “troll”.

This demonstrates that both academic and social opinions on Ukraine are split in camps, expecting hostile communication (mostly propaganda and disinformation) from the opposite camp. They try to prevent it by revealing lie and opposing propaganda. They try to explain the reality and overthrow the explanation of the other party. It is a struggle, fight in the Internet by communication. It is a social conflict.

At this point I need to specify, what social conflict is. It is an activity of different parties towards getting the desired by harming each other. For Information War harming each other means blaming each other. Cyber-PR-war concept of Galloway (2005) also mentions it to undermine the reputation of the opponent, while Rastorguev (1998) emphasizes the harm in losing self-confidence. I will not specify the impact or mechanics of this harm. I will specify the action of communication, meaning harm. This is blaming. In the context of Ukraine this blaming is mostly defensive, while still has the potential to harm (reputation, self-confidence, argumentation abilities etc). This is the most destructive form of communication, which is made by different parties. It is a social conflict in my definition.

However my definition is not enough to characterize it. The concept of social conflict has a long tradition in science, and this concept is quite difficult and complex. In order to understand, what specific details specify Internet Media War as a social conflict, I need to show the academic perspective, what social conflict is.

### **2.3. Chapter III. The Law of Hatred. Social Conflict as a Social Phenomenon and an Object of Study.**

In order to understand, what features characterize Internet Media War as a Social Conflict, it is necessary to understand, what social conflict is. I define social conflict as a specific activity of getting desired by making harm to the opponents, while opponents can be real competitors in getting the desired, or they are just perceived as such. However the definition is by far not enough for understanding, what it is. Natalia Grishina (2008) mentions that there cannot be any proper academic paper regarding social conflict, which does not define it and explain it. In my analysis of Information War, Internet Media War and related theories I emphasized the specifics of Information War as a concept. Most theories are built in researching these specific issues. However I also argued that Information War is a social conflict. And this issue is massively underdeveloped in most related theories. It is meant in definitions or phenomenology, but it is scarcely explained. I argue that Internet Media War and Information War in general are social conflicts. Now, when the specific theoretical context on Information War and Internet Media War is built, I can compare it to the theoretical context on social conflict.

I argue that the best way to address social conflict is to refer to a set of authors, regarded as the classics of sociology of conflict, which are Marx, Simmel, Dahrendorf and Coser (Grishina, 2008). Each of the names in this framework is largely discussed in Conflictology in Russia. There are some academic traditions in interpretation of classic works in a certain way. The most popular one is in conceptualizing two main lines of Marx and Simmel, followed in their tradition by Dahrendorf and Coser respectively (Turner, 1975; Grishina, 2008). Their state-of-art theories have created the basis of understanding, what social conflict is. Their works are the most essential ones in explaining this phenomenon.

I want to build the discussion of these theories in the way they debated each other. This demonstrates how conceptual mayhem can be turned into a robust clear concept. This may be useful in trying to conceptualize Information War. I see the key to shared understanding in adopting of several other concepts, such as system, structure and dynamics. Coser and Dahrendorf built their theories rather on criticism of Parsons' theories, than on reflection of their predecessors. This criticism and the adopted theoretical approach of Parsons made it possible to conceptualize social conflict.

I tried to investigate, what are the theories on social conflict, which research its structure, dynamics and systematics. Then I tried to adopt these theories to understanding of Information War as a social conflict. In the result I got a list of features, which will indicate Internet Media War being a social conflict. This list creates my hypotheses, how to distinguish the features, which indicate Internet Media War being a social conflict.



### 2.3.1. The Pillars of Conflict Theory: Simmel and Coser

Revising my very first lecture on General Conflictology in Saint-Petersburg State University, I remember well, when the lecturer Musa Aldaganov asked his students, when Conflictology (Conflict Studies) began. When nobody answered, he looked at his students with a certain grade of disappointment. “Conflictology starts with Georg Simmel”. Indeed, many papers discuss Georg Simmel and Karl Marx to be the true founders of sociology of conflict as a scientific perspective on the conflict as a social phenomenon (e.g. Turner, 1975; Grishina, 2008). However, the main concept Marx tended to use was antagonism or class struggle. In his “Manifesto” he used “struggle” 37 times, “antagonism” 22 times, while “conflict” was used only once as a noun, and once as a verb (Marx & Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848). Simmel in his works “The Sociology of Conflict” (1904) and “Conflict” (1955) placed the concept of social conflict at the first place. Coser in his analysis on the progress of sociology of conflict do not even discussed Marx’s insights, emphasizing the role of the pioneers of social study (Coser, 1956). He saw Simmel as the author of the most fruitful research on sociology of conflict and the most comprehensive theory, though some points had since been greatly improved by the time of Coser.

So, what makes such insights important for academic understanding of conflict? Simmel emphasized the fact that social conflict is not a danger. “Conflict itself is the resolution of the tension between contraries” (Simmel, The Sociology of Conflict, 1904). For Simmel conflict is natural in social systems, as it is inherent in the way they are built. Talking about conflict in relationships, he emphasized that relationships are entirely sui generis, and both love and hostility in them are just labels people use, but not separate aspects. Otherwise there would be multiple examples of relationships with no negative emotions at all. Both “Liebe und Hass” of dialectics also play a significant role in social systems, where there are always “harmony and disharmony, association and disassociation, liking and disliking” as the mechanisms of sustaining society (Simmel, 1904). Close relationships are more robust to conflicts and thus people involved in those would be less likely to avoid conflict behavior. Apart from interpersonal relationships, Simmel studied personal reasons of conflict behavior, as well as “the ultimate form of social conflict” – judicial conflict, which involves the whole society. Thus Simmel defined the levels and types of social conflict in society.

Despite the distinguishing of Simmel and Marx lines in later literature, Simmel in his work (1904) did discuss Marx. However, he discussed his approach mostly in terms of labor conflict in a very short part of his work. He did not debate conceptualization of conflict with Marx, but rather used his perspective as an out of date way of explaining labor antagonisms. This indicated the discourse on conflict of this time being less clear than it is shown later.

Simmel’s ideas were influential in sociology of the beginning of the twentieth century. However, as Coser mentions, the sociology of conflict had been largely neglected by the time of his publication (1956). Lewis Coser’s book “The functions of Social Conflict” became a bestseller among scientific publications in United States (Coser, Preface to the Russian Edition (Предисловие к Русскому Изданию), 2000) and is largely regarded as the start of systemized scientific study on social conflict (Antsupov & Shipilov, 2000; Grishina, 2008). Coser himself explained the success of his theory in United States as the result of political processes inside the country as they had shown the inefficiency of Parson’s theory (Coser, 2000). Coser saw his own work as a criticism of Parson’s ideas most of all, and this insight had proven to be success.

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

“The Functions of Social Conflict” reflects Simmel’s ideas in the way they are picked separately and discussed in contemporary academic context. Coser saw Simmel’s main argument in the way conflict is a form of socialization (Coser, 1956). He got some fragments of Simmel’s work “Conflict” and explained them in details, debating to contemporary American sociologists. He defined 16 theses of Simmel and placed them in 8 thematic chapters. He concluded that conflict in many aspects has positive functions in society, mostly in terms of group dynamics and identity creation. The other important implication was the classification of conflicts to realistic and non-realistic regarding their object. Conflict based on objective antagonisms is realistic. If it is based on personal psychological issues, it is not. However, realistic conflicts can be affected by frustration as well, so that there is no certain line of diversification. However, most of Coser’s arguments in this book were based on his interpretation of Simmel’s ideas. Ideas alone could never be considered revolutionary. Indeed, criticism of Parsons here plays the most important role, as well as the way of presentation the ideas of Simmel in an excellent way. I would argue that the form of Coser’s representation as well as political context of his time made his book a “Bible” of sociology of conflict, though it did not deploy anything radically new.

The fact Coser tried to contribute to Simmel’s theory is undeniable. It is written quite clearly in his book (1956) and is not disputable in academic reflections on it. It is quite clear, why Turner (1975), Grishina (2008) and many others saw Coser as a researcher, who followed Simmel’s tradition. Less clear however, why Coser’s line is completely separate from the line of Karl Marx. Coser contributed Marx’s perspective the same way he contributed Simmel’s perspective. In his paper Coser reflected Sorel’s and Marx’s theories in investigating the role of social conflict in the theory of Social Change (Coser, Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change, 1957). He used the concept of social conflict to represent such ideas in a coherent framework to criticize Parsons, as he did in his book (1956). He agreed with Marx in the way that conflict is the way of the transformation of society, and that this transformation moves social dynamics. He saw this process over classes in a large sense of the social change. However, he did not mention Marx in the development of sociology of conflict as a scientific discipline (Coser, 1956), may be because conflict was not a central concept for Marx.

Regardless the validity of this tradition of putting the names of Simmel and Coser together, it is hard to deny the fact they have become pillars of conceptualization of conflict. They made social conflict an important object of social sciences as a phenomenon that needs to be considered. The result is the base of building conflict ontology as an important social phenomenon, which resulted in a creation of a new valid branch of social sciences. They provided the basis of understanding the concept of social conflict with regard to its nature. Social conflict is a social phenomenon, and it has its own purpose. It is aimed for achieving some goals in the situation of rivalry, and it does affect group dynamics greatly.

Coser defined social conflict as “a struggle over values and claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals” (Coser, Continuities in the study of social conflict, 1967). This definition is a well-known classic of understanding social conflict, and it makes it quite clear, what social conflict is. However, social nature of social conflict, emphasized by Simmel, makes it difficult to regard understanding of social conflict apart from social dynamics. Some other classic works on social conflict can provide a better contextual understanding, what social conflict is.

**Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

### 2.3.2. Conflict in the Social Dynamics: Marx and Dahrendorf

It is hard to deny the influence of Karl Marx ideas in theorizing class struggle. Turner mentions both Marx and Simmel as founders of sociology of conflict (Turner, 1975). Grishina also mentions the fact that till 80-s years of last century Marx was one of the most influential theorists of conflict (Grishina, 2008). Grishina mentions contemporary academic consensus in regarding Karl Marx as a theorist created the base of sociology of conflict (Grishina, 2008). However, she does not make it clear, why there is such an undoubtable consensus. Antsupov and Shipilov, for example, place Social Darwinists and Herbert Spenser as the very first to theorize conflicts (Antsupov & Shipilov, 2000). Grishina also mentions Social Darwinists as predecessors of theorizing conflict, while sociology of conflict as special discipline starts from Marx (Grishina, 2008).

Marx and Engels in their works mentioned that social structure is based on the relationships to property – there will be always those who own, and those who provide their labor to such owners (Engels, 1884). The way it is done builds the social structure of certain type. History is the history of changes of social structures in terms of class systems (Marx & Engels, 1848). The only form of such change is the class struggle, culminated in revolution. Thus social struggle based on imminent social antagonisms on the base of people economic activity is the main engine of history (Marx & Engels, 1848). Antsupov and Shipilov emphasize the fact, that in Marx's theory people go to conflict regardless their will and initiative but of their place in property-based social structure (Antsupov & Shipilov, 2000). Grishina mentions the fact that though Marx was not an inventor of class struggle concept, he built the most clear and comprehensive theory of it (Grishina, 2008).

To sum it up, in academic understanding of social conflict the main emphasis is on some points of Marx's theory of social struggle. First, conflict is the major force driving history. Second, conflict (class struggle) is real and based on economy-based social structure, rather than on people's will. Third, all the advantages of civilization and progress are based on conflicts, thus they are not negative (in the form of class struggle). However, it is rather neglected, that Marx did not actually discuss conflicts, but rather class struggle. In this way he said nothing about conflict as social phenomenon. He also politicized class struggle (Marx & Engels, 1848), while the concepts of property and added value were the major ones to his theory (Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, 1867). For sociology of conflict the main issue was in the fact he explained social dynamics by conflict, making the concept relevant and central for social studies. He did not conceptualize social conflict, but emphasized its role and relevance for society.

Ralf Dahrendorf is regarded to be a researcher who turned Marx's theory of class struggle to a complete conflict theory (Turner, 1975; Grishina, 2008). Indeed, the first part of his book (1959) he focused on criticizing Marx's insight. Dahrendorf emphasized the role of Marx in development of the class theory, trying to complete the unfinished chapter on social classes by Marx's quotations and Dahrendorf's own comments (Dahrendorf, 1959). His analysis and later reflections on Marx's theory are rather critical, emphasizing both accomplishments and limitations of the class theory of Marx. Debating in this reflections with modern theorists, Dahrendorf built his own class theory, the theory of class conflict and the theory of political conflict.

Dahrendorf's debates with other researchers is a matter of interests of its own. The most interesting is his debates with Parsons as the most influential sociologist of the time. Debating Parsons takes more and more place with every page of his book, replacing criticism of Marx and contributing to it. In many aspects Dahrendorf faced both theories

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

of Marx and Parsons, finding the arguments of both not fully reflecting reality. For instance, Dahrendorf criticized overemphasizing stability of social structure in Parsons' theory. He refused to the strong dichotomy of the processes within social system and processes of the change of social systems, as they are sometimes the same (Dahrendorf, 1959). He called Parsons to be an integrationist or even utopian, as his theory do not regard the essential role of conflict in social change, which is constant for social systems.

Dahrendorf debated Lewis Coser as well in his chapter about group conflicts (Dahrendorf, 1959). He argued that Coser's analysis was a convincing way to prove conflicts are facts of social reality. He also emphasized Coser's contribution in understanding the role of social conflict in group dynamics. However, he blamed Coser to be too positive in estimating the role of conflicts in social systems and too "integrative" in his thinking. This is particularly curious, as this places Coser at the same camp as Parsons, who was the main opponent of Coser's analysis. In addition, Dahrendorf criticized the way Coser did not explain the mechanisms of social conflicts apart from its "functions".

Coser in his turn also reflected Dahrendorf's book. In his review (1960) he mainly criticized the way Dahrendorf built his class theory. Coser called it too vague and empirically useless (Coser, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, 1960). However, he found Dahrendorf's second chapter to explain the role of class conflict in industrial society. Though Coser highly recommended this book, he did not mention it to be a contribution to sociology of conflict.

However, the insights of Dahrendorf (1959) on social conflict are quite interesting. He argues that class system is much more universal and changing in industrial society, rather than just a clash of "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat". In contrast to Marx's ideas, such relationships refer not to property relationships, but to relationships of power. Conflicts between classes in social system are class conflicts, while conflicts insight class over power are political conflicts. Such conflicts are imminent in society and even more violent as they are being institutionalized and redirected. The power struggle is emphasized by group dynamics.

So that Dahrendorf (1959) followed Marx in seeing imminent social change via conflicts. Apart from Marx, Dahrendorf saw another types of social conflicts and recognized class struggle to be just one case of the powers affecting social structure. In addition, the concepts of social structure, social dynamics, elites, power distribution, groups, group interests and so on are widely absorbed from social and political theories of 1950s. However, the concept of social conflict is not shown, though mentioned. Dahrendorf focuses his attention on class conflicts and political conflicts only, which is still much wider perspective that those of Marx.

Both Marx and Dahrendorf crucially contributed studying conflict role in social dynamics. They have proved that conflict is central for any social change and thus relevant. They proved strong connection of social dynamics and social conflict, contributing the insight that social conflict is the way social system renovates, changes or expands. Social conflict is not just a goal-centered aggressive activity, this is the way the elements of social structure interact, and this way affects the whole structure of social system and its dynamics. Studying later insights on social conflict structure and dynamics with the regard to Internet Media War definition can help to explain, what features of social conflict are reflected in Internet Media War.

### 2.3.3. Samsara Wheel: Social Conflict Features in Internet Media War.

Likewise social conflict reflects social structure as its domain, Internet Media War reflects social conflict structure as the structure of social phenomenon it originated from. I have answered, what Information War is – it is an intergroup social conflict in information space in the form of communication. Internet Media War is a specific Information War in the Internet in this case. I have answered, what social conflict is – it is “a struggle over values and claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals” (Coser, Continuities in the study of social conflict, 1967). Now I should specify, how these concepts are connected in details.

I emphasized the fact that conflict researchers found a common ground on comparison of social conflict to social system in terms of their structure and dynamics. Social conflict as a phenomenon is clear when placed into society as a system. It is the way the system renovates and compares the ties between people to their differences. A quarrel in a family demonstrates the robustness of family ties, while international war demonstrates the difference between nations as separate groups of people. Both phenomena can be linked and understood only within system-related frameworks. A way to a shared understanding of Information War can be in this as well. However I will not try to understand the role of Information War in the society. Rather I will try to understand the structure and dynamics of social conflict. Specifying these issues may clarify, what features may indicate Internet Media War to be a social conflict within its specifics.

First, I need to demonstrate existing points on the structure of social conflict. Second, I should show the dynamic perspectives on social conflict. Third, I need to adopt these insights for Internet Media War with the regard to its specifics. This will answer the question, what features characterize Internet Media War as a social conflict.

#### **The structure of social conflict**

The structure of social conflict is the way its most essential elements are connected. The structure of social conflict regards both the list of its most essential elements, and the principle of their organization. Taken together this structure demonstrates the major features of social conflict as a system.

The structural aspect of social conflict is a very debatable issue. The core reason of this is in multidimensional way such a structure could be built. Parson's insight on social structure also regarded different aspects of social system to be different and interconnected at the same time (Parsons, 1951). Such perspective is also applicable to social conflict as a specific subsystem of social system. This is an insight to keep in mind, studying academic perspectives on the structure of social conflict.

Grishina in her book (2008) demonstrates a survey on academic and common understanding of conflict structure features. Conflict parties and events were mentioned by everyone (1.0 correlation index), results (0,89) and place (0,75) were largely mentioned, time (0,19) was barely mentioned. Within these elements she also estimated some of their sub-elements with different correlation indexes. She concluded, that general structure of social conflict is as follows: parties, conditions, object, actions, and result. Parties are mostly encased in terms of role models, while conditions are represented extremely vague from the relationship history to objective adversaries of different kinds. The interests are mentioned very shortly in the discussion on the parties (Grishina, 2008). The conditions here appear to be the weakest point of such a structure. They refer to explaining parties, actions and object. Objective antagonisms both explained as object

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

and conditions, relationships are both a party issue and a condition, conflict actions are both actions and conditions. There is no separate distinction of these concepts. In addition, such structure refers only to the social dimension of conflict in terms of actors, relationships and actions as parts of Parsons' social system (Parsons, 1951). They do not show personal psychological aspect or cultural aspect (as two others aspects, shown by Parsons). Grishina combines everything specific in one concept of "conditions". It is quite surprising that she avoids psychological domain in conflict structure being a psychologist. However, most of this book (Grishina, 2008) is still about psychological dimension of social conflict. It is possible that avoiding psychological and cultural domains in building structure of social conflict is done due to the methodology of the book.

A psychological insight on the structure of social conflict can be seen in the work of Coombs (1987). He regards the structure of conflict to be built around the preferences of the parties (Coombs, 1987). He tries to use mathematical models to explain decision making in conflict on the way of compatibility and incompatibility of the interests of the participants of a conflict. However, it still makes it unclear, what is conflict for Coombs, and what other elements consist its structure.

A key to comprehensive and combined perspective can be found in the work of Alexandr Karpenko (2007). He tries to show social conflict structure in the way it can be used in practice. Karpenko studies multiple definitions of social conflict to understand, what features of such definitions explain its structure. He also builds his own definition of conflict, which is close to Coser's definition, but a bit more specific. For Karpenko social conflict is "a process of clash and antagonism of individuals or groups, which is characterized by harming each other aiming to defend real or imagined interests" (Karpenko, 2007). The main point of such a definition is prioritization of interests in social conflict. In contrast to Parsons, Karpenko says that any social system is changing over time, so that explaining robust structure has no sense. The static dimension of social conflict is regarded as conflict situation, though academic perspectives on conflict situation differ. The structure of conflict is the structure of conflict situation, and it changes as conflict proceeds. Karpenko emphasize it to be an open system, which means a system, strongly connected to its environment. In this aspect he also distinguishes inner conflict area and environment with a regard that such dichotomy was largely neglected in academic literature. Karpenko makes some statements as important rules to remember for anyone working with conflicts in practice. First, environment resources are always superior to conflict resources. Second, bigger the conflict as an open system, more impact the environment has on it. Such assumptions are curious in understanding, how the structure of social conflict affects its dynamics. As for the structure itself, Karpenko defines it twice in the text (2007). First time, he creates a draft on the conflict structure defining conflict area. Second time, he separately shows the structure of social conflict. His structure includes parties, object, interests, and positions. His draft structure also mention resources as a potential of the environment to affect parties, object, interests and positions. Though resources are not mentioned in his final structure, they can be still regarded as a medium concept, connecting conflict structure and conflict dynamics, conflict area and environment. As to the elements themselves, Karpenko also specify each possible type of a party, interest, position etc.

Though the structure of conflict have different dimensions – social (e.g. Grishina, 2008) and psychological (e.g. Coombs, 1987), I would prefer a complex approach of Karpenko (2007) as the most suitable for practical applications. Regarding social conflict as an open system in its interactions with environment in terms of resources, which affect both social (parties) and psychological (interests) aspects of social conflict structure.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

However, I would also regard actions to be an integral part of conflict structure, as it is shown in social dimension. If regard a social conflict within Karpenko's definition, it is still impossible without regarding actions as static units of social conflict structure.

However, I would also emphasize the fact that conflict structure is an important issue in understanding conflict dynamics. As social structure affects social dynamics by means of social conflict, the same way conflict structure affects conflict dynamics by means of escalation.

### **The dynamics of social conflict**

The way social conflict structure affects social conflict dynamics is shown pretty well in Karpenko's work (2007). Interactions of the conflict and its environment in Karpenko's view occur pretty similar to Parsons' view of social change caused by interactions of social system and its environment (see Parsons, 1951). In the case of conflict system it causes conflict escalation. However, it should be made clear, what is escalation for Karpenko. He mentions his dynamic model very briefly in his work on social conflict structure (2007). He distinguishes pre-conflict, incident, conflict, escalation, ending and post-conflict. Escalation appears to be for Karpenko the part of the most intensity in social conflict, while he does not specify different dynamic processes of enlargement of conflict system.

Grishina (2008) also do not build a comprehensive dynamic system. She mentions shortly, that conflicts usually estimated to have the following stages: (pre-)conflict situation, acknowledgement of this situation, conflict interaction and settlement. However, she does not discuss neither her perspective on conflict situation, nor the logics of such dynamics. She mostly concern dynamics in cognitive and psychic aspects, creating her vision on psychology of conflict in a dynamic way. Her insights can be an object of different debates, but here she does not show her stance, relying on "most common way" to show conflict dynamics.

Antsupov and Shipilov, though not presenting their perspective on conflict structure clearly, argue in favor of a complex vision of conflict dynamics. First, they define conflict beginning and conflict ending to limit the social conflict (Antsupov and Shipilov, 2000). Such limits start and finish according to the presence of actual harming behavior. Next, they show slightly different perspective, including extended pre-conflict, which goes beyond their conflict limits. They define pre-conflict in different stages, such as emerging of objective problem, acknowledgement of such a problem, non-conflict attempts to resolve it and feeling threat. "Open period" does satisfy their understanding of conflict limits, and it includes incident, escalation, balanced counter-actions and ending. Post-conflict stage refers to partly or full reconciliation. In its combined form such dynamic system is pretty similar to Karpenko's version, with the exception of this balanced counter-action phase of combatants being tired of fighting, which is still not ending. On one hand, escalation appears to be one of the stages of conflict dynamics. On the other hand, Antsupov and Shipilov provide their following next paragraph about escalation as a development of conflict via sharpening of tension. It starts from the incidents and ends with weakening and ending of the conflict. In other words, it maintains conflict all along the proposed limits of conflict. From this perspective escalation is the main driving force of conflict. It is followed by several specific processes, such as uncritical thinking, specific image of the enemy, emotional tension rise, turning from arguments to blaming, polarization of interests, turning to violence, loosing initial object of conflict, expanding, growing number of participants. It appears to be multidimensional and specific for conflict number of processes, signaling the development of conflict.



## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

The other perspective on escalation is shown by Mitchell (2005). He distinguishes four types of conflict dynamics, such as formation (genesis), escalation (growth of conflict interactions), mitigation (diminishing of conflict), and transformation (resolution) (Mitchell, 2005). However, he criticizes over-estimating of escalation, regarding it only as intensifying of fighting. He proposes five alternatives, rising tensions in conflict. They are mobilization (of resources), enlargement (of number of participants and interests), polarization (in interests and positions), disassociation (diminishing the number of contacts with enemy), and entrapment (inability to stop regardless the costs). This insight to some extent correlates Antsupov and Shipilov insight with the difference in conceptualizing escalation. However, it gives better understanding of the processes, rising tensions in conflicts.

The same way conflict is not the only way of changing society in Dahrendorf's terms (Dahrendorf, 1959), escalation is not the only way of conflict dynamics. In this point I would argue with Mitchell (2005) and his processes of conflict dynamics. However, escalation is the major way conflict develops (in terms of Antsupov & Shipilov, 2000), as this is the way it expands as an open system and changes its structure (in understanding of Karpenko, 2007). Karpenko regards other ways environment may influence changes in conflict structure.

Though escalation is not the only mechanism of conflict dynamics, I will focus my attention on this mechanism in my research. Likewise Mitchell and Antsupov and Shipilov, I will try to specify escalation to several specific dynamic processes, combining their approaches into one. It will make a list of the features, which characterize social conflict in a dynamic way. However both structural and dynamic features of social conflict should be adopted for Internet Media War.

### **The structure and dynamics of Information War as a social conflict**

Regarding Internet Media War as a communication-based social conflict gives some advantages in understanding its features. First, it is understanding social conflict as a sub-system within social system, having specific structure and dynamics. Treating Internet Media War as a system can be an important perspective in conceptualizing Information War, as it is one of points of agreement within many researches on the nature of social conflict. Second, it gives some base in trying to reconstruct the structure and dynamics of Information War on the base of some viable insights on the structure and dynamics of social conflict.

In this regard I would like to adopt Karpenko's structure insights (2007), though I will also add actions to it from Grishina's model (2008). To sum it up, my social conflict structure includes:

- parties
- interests
- object
- positions
- actions

I regard Information War to be an intergroup social conflict by communication, which means that parties in this conflict are groups of people, while actions are acts of communication. The literature over Information War on Ukraine does show, that different groups (mostly political) communicate over Ukraine. The coverage and metacoverage debates on Media Wars regard its specific object – explanation. If it is explanation of reality, it is coverage. If it is explanation of coverage issues – it is metacoverage. All

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

parties try to explain something. In the literature over Information War on Ukraine different parties explain reality in terms of propaganda. They do not just explain it, but do it with a purpose. It reflects another element of the structure – interests. The last but not least are positions. Multiple sources on the war coverage and anti-war movement split their positions on the official\alternative line. In the case of Ukraine those are Russian/Cremlin perspective, Western/American perspective, pro-Maidan, anti-Maidan, and other labels. All these elements are regarded essential for Information War and Internet Media War in particular.

So that the structure of Internet Media War (and Information War in general) is as follows:

- Groups of people
- Interests and goals
- Explanation as a specific object
- Positions
- Communication

In addition, I may say that all of them can be supplied from within, from the environment. Any user of the Internet may join any group. New events can change interests and goals. New information can be used for explanation. The environment provides resources to social conflict, and they are always supreme to it (Karpenko, 2007). If this structure is the case for Internet Media War, it would mean that any message in the Internet can contribute this conflict.

As to the dynamics, Information War escalates. Regarding the discussed literature (e.g. Antsupov & Shipilov, 2000; Mitchell, 2005), I would see the following aspects of escalation: labeling enemy, expanding (in numbers and frequency), polarization (more robust and opposing positions), blaming the opponent, demonstrative avoidance of contact, emotional tension, consistence of dynamics (as a substitute to Mitchell's entrapment). Some of these issues are discussed in the literature on the Information War over Ukraine (like labeling enemy, blaming), others are not. I expect Internet Media War to escalate. However other conflict-related issues, such as mitigation and settlement, should be remembered as well.

To conclude, I defined Information War on the basis of very different approaches and insights on it. It is a communication-based social conflict. I also coined a concept of Internet Media War as Information War in the Internet. This helped me to explain the academic context of this phenomenon and show different relevant debates on the issue, characterizing the phenomenon from different perspectives. I illustrated these conceptualizations with an example of the Information War over Ukraine, which is waged in academic area, in media and in the Internet. After clarifying, what is Internet Media War, I showed very briefly, what is social conflict. The logics of conceptualization of social conflict implies regarding it in terms of system, structure and dynamics. Adopting structural and dynamic characteristics of social conflict, I proposed a number of features, characterizing Internet Media War as a social conflict. However these proposed features should be investigated on a real example. They should be verified. I conducted a content-analysis of Internet Media War over Ukraine to test the theoretical frameworks in practice.

### **3. Reading between the Lines: Content-Analysis of the Online-Messages over Ukraine.**

The discussion on the political crisis in Ukraine in the Internet is an interesting case for a research to try to understand whether the proposed conceptualization of Information War as a communication-based social conflict works in practice. Discussing Information War, propaganda and mind-control technology is very popular both in media and scientific works on the Ukrainian problems. Such talks are highly politicized as well. The way to overcome this problem lies in the use of scientific instruments, such as theories and concepts. However, there is a mayhem in understanding of Information War in academic literature and media talks, which is why defining this is important to understand these politicized media processes around Ukraine. The problem lies in the fact that the whole conceptualization of such a general phenomenon as Information War cannot be based on a single research; however, a single specific type can be tried within the proposed framework. One of these types is Internet Media War, and the discussion on the political crisis in Ukraine in the Internet can be taken as a case of a suggested Internet Media War within my conceptualization of Information War as a communication-based social conflict.

So, what features characterize the Internet Media War on Ukraine as a communication-based social conflict? In the previous chapters of this thesis I proposed a number of hypotheses which may indicate the case to be a communication-based social conflict. There are additional hypotheses based on unexpected relevant findings in the literature as well. Now, these hypotheses can be used to build a practical research which can prove the concept to apply to the case of Ukraine. It would explain the limits of the specific phenomenon of the discussion on the political events in Ukraine. Such a conceptualization will build a base to extrapolate many existing conflict-related theories from to this case. This will contribute to understanding this phenomenon beyond ideological and political frames but related to existing theories and neutral insights of understanding social conflicts and communication. That is why I should regard this research not in terms of positions and attitudes, but in terms of conflict actions and communication in the Internet.

According to the theoretical frameworks, Internet Media War is an intergroup social conflict (1). This conflict is waged by means of communication (2). It has a large scale (3). It escalates (4). It represents both diversity and propaganda (5). This diversity creates informational equilibrium (6). The main strategy in this conflict is domination (7). This is why Internet Media War can never be won (8). Internet Media War on Ukraine is a distinct social conflict from the Ukrainian political crisis (9). These hypotheses should be approached and investigated in order to understand the legitimacy of conflict-based conceptualization of Information War, as well as specific theoretical findings on Internet Media War on Ukraine.

Regarding the specifics of the conflict-related structure of Information War, I proposed communication to be an action in this conflict. The unit of communication in the Internet is a message – the simplest way of sharing information in the network. Regarding the differences between video and text, discussed earlier among other organizational issues of Internet Media Wars, I have chosen textual messages as they are easier to trace and specify into markers in comparison to audio, video and pictures. All the information apart from written text is ignored. This will provide a better focus on the issues of content independent of shape. The content of such messages can be studied relating to the features of Internet Media War on Ukraine as a specific communication-

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

based social conflict. That is why I chose content-analysis as a methodology to understand the shared features of multiple messages content-wise.

The messages are found by Google-search based on different search words. The main search word is “Ukraine”. Besides that, “Crimea”, “Anti-Terrorist Operation”, “Maidan” and “Donbass” are also used, which relate to the conflict more than the generic “Ukraine”. The search word “Ukraine” indicates the place of the topic in the Internet in general, as “Ukraine” does not mark any conflict issues directly. Other search words provide extra information, relating to positions, time, source, language etc.

This content-analysis traces specific topics and vocabulary in such messages. These topics and vocabulary are regarded as markers to trace. The relation between several markers is regarded as a research index which can prove a specific hypothesis to be true, false, partially true or not proven. Every research index is specific and is traced separately during the analysis phase. Though the choice of every topic or vocabulary is highly dependent on the researcher, repeating the procedures on a high number of units provides more objective and trustworthy results.

The research provided proof that the Internet Media War over Ukraine is a communication-based conflict. However, in the research limits it is diminishing, not escalating. The Information equilibrium was also proven, as well as low desire to find a common solution. This means that this conflict can never be won in terms of propaganda in a situation of democracy. This demonstrates the limitations of most existing theories on the case, which is the result of a lack of conceptualization. This actualizes the importance of valid conceptual frameworks. It also shows the way this research contributes to building the concept, as well as provides an additional perspective to some practical issues.

### **3.1. The Research Units.**

My research is a content-analysis tracing the features that indicate the discussion on Ukraine in the Internet to be a specific communication-based social conflict. The units of this research are the textual messages of this discussion. However, they are specific messages which need to be selected in a specific way out of billions of internet-messages. I decided to select these messages via specialized search in the Internet. I searched for specific words (Ukraine, Crimea, Maidan, Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) and Donbass). These words were searched specifically to reflect different kinds of messages on different chronological points in order to give additional information for later analysis. The focus on textual information makes searching the units more efficient, as well as tracing markers and indexes for later analysis.

Though the unit selection methodology implies multiple limitations to the research, these limitations are not expected to be sufficient to greatly change the outcomes of content-analysis as they relate to formal issues rather than to the content of the messages. However, they still should be remembered in understanding the limitations of the research.

The final list of units consists of 400 messages. They represent equally sources in English and sources in Russian, news and social media. In addition, they relate to the same extent to four chronological periods, which helps to understand the dynamics of conflict. The search words and conditions are being recorded for each unit as well.

The main way of selection of the units is online search. This indicates the first limitation of the research – the use of search engine. I used Google for the selection of research units. The advantages of this way of selection are simplicity, traceability and universality. It is rather simple, as it does not need special software or much special knowledge to carry out. All you need is an internet connection and some basic knowledge of using search engines. It is traceable as this operation can easily be performed again. It will probably not provide the same links, but it will allow one to redo the research in order to check the results. It is universal as many people use this way to get new information, and it provides an access to the whole range of public information in the Internet, making it possible to try the conceptualization with regard to such specifics. Regarding the multiple aspects of the specifics of the Internet it is a valuable advantage.

The limitations are the specifics of the search engine and the organizational policy of Google. Search engine relates to specific indicators of search, as well as the search history of the user. This greatly limits the range of selected messages, as well as their order in the list. The organizational policy of Google may also influence these issues, making it even more specific. However, I would argue that it does not influence the content of the messages. It may make them available and pick content-specific ones as important, while ignoring others, but it cannot change their features. This conceptualization relies on the fact that messages related to Internet Media War are units of a very specific social conflict. If the message has the issues to be regarded within a conflict framework, it should have these features proposed in a statistically sufficient way. Therefore, selection of a few of those over others would not greatly affect the results of the research. In addition, these preferences can be reframed as availability of a message to people. Regardless all user-related specifics, the main engine is still dependent on some general issues, which may in fact indicate availability of such messages to the public. As to organizational specifics of Google, comparing its results to other search engines would

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

not contribute to the research, as this difference is still not relating to the content of the messages. However, it should be remembered as well.

The search specifications are designed to pick very specific units for research. First, its dynamic aspect. Several hypotheses rely on dynamic issues, which can be traced only by comparing messages of different periods of the conflict. In my proposed frameworks of the case the starting date of the political crisis in Ukraine is the day of the power change, 22 February 2014. Therefore, I will not use messages prior to this date. The conflict is ongoing, thus the end date can be any date prior to the research. Messages are generally very dependent on the events of that day, so that it is more reliable to pick periods to consider. However, these periods should be neither too long nor too short. A too long search period can overemphasize the importance of major events over the period specifics; a too short period can be very dependent on single-day events as well. I propose ten days as a period that is both time-specific and not very dependent on particular events. It still can share both limitations, but to smaller extent than the shorter or longer alternatives. The dynamics should be shown in the long run; however, this range should be limited somehow. In addition, it should be no less than four periods to regard, as two or three cannot show trends on dynamics very well, and such periods should be selected evenly during a period. However, selection of more than 4 periods will not sufficiently contribute to the dynamic perspective of the research, while it will outweigh the methodology. I regard that the best way to do it is to take the first ten days of every quarter of a year, starting from the first full month of events which is March 2014. These periods will be labeled I-IV. A year is a very good dynamic option for even selection of four periods. Quarter specifics is also not too long and not too short for a specific chronological period of the crisis. However, it will limit the research abilities to the researched periods. As my hypotheses reflect the phenomenological nature of the concept, it should not influence the results greatly, as it is sufficient to show the directions of change, but not all the stages.

The other search condition is to equally reflect both news and social media. As I mentioned before, the organizational difference between news and social media is closely bound to the positioning of the researcher between emphases on propaganda and on cyber-democracy. As I emphasize their equilibrium, both news and social media should be addressed equally. This will also provide opportunities for comparative analysis of these source specifics, and to position my conceptualization result-wise in propaganda/cyber-democracy debates.

For news this appeared to be quite easy, as Google search has an option to search only among news sources. All other search conditions (except for the date range) were set to default, which means all the available news of the period, ranged by the relevance. Similar news was grouped together, providing variable sources for the same event. This selection allows to reflect the period better than sorting by date, which is the alternative to sorting by relevance. However, it limits it more on the line of the dependence on engine. The number of results on the page is not relevant, however, the variables of every news event were important. I took the top 8-9 units per word and period in most cases, while I used only one top variable from every variables option.

Social Media were much harder to trace. First, many of the social media units rely more on photos and videos than on text. Second, many social networks have no separate message-related search abilities. Tracing messages with a specific date range can only be done manually for every personal or public page. This would take a lot of extra time and would make the selection more dependent on researcher's choice of the unit within the

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

range. Third, microblogging would be hard to analyze on a small number of units due to its small number of words. Regarding the size of news articles, which should be reflected equally, it would make the research much more difficult to perform. I have chosen regular blogs, as they are close in size and volume to news articles but are still created by ordinary people, not affiliated to media organizations. Though blog services can ban some pages content-wise, they are still regarded as social media. However, the specifics of different social media is not the focus of the research, only the difference between news and social media is. I would argue that using blogs as social media examples is the best option for the research. It will make it possible to use similar search and analysis methodology while still being able to compare news to social media.

This selection of messages would make it likely for the messages to be related to the discussion on the political crisis in Ukraine. However, the date of the message is not enough. To find messages viable for analysis, there should be specific search words. These should be both specific and general to indicate the area but not specific events. They should be linked to the political crisis however, as this is the main specific of the messages to regard. The language of the messages also plays a role. In my theoretical research I relied on literature in both Russian and English. The phenomenological limits of my proposed conceptualization are based on shared features discussed in this literature. It implies that there is no significant difference in potential research units for both Russian-speaking and English-speaking researchers. This was not mentioned in the theoretical discussion, but it should be kept in mind for the practical part of the research. There cannot be a preference for messages in either of the proposed languages, so that they should be researched in equal numbers. In searching messages in different languages I used different search engines (Google.ru for Russian search, and Google.nl for English research). Google.com automatically redirects to Google.nl in the Netherlands. I will mention only the English translation of any Russian search word. However, the specifics of search in different languages should be mentioned separately.

The linguistic diversification made it quite hard to trace social media which would be likely to provide contents similar in shape to news. Finding messages in Russian proved easier, as LiveJournal.com is a popular site for blogs in Russian. The English contents of LiveJournal.com was not ample to provide enough units in research frameworks, so that it was replaced by Blogspot.com as a particular blog hosting of Blogger.com. Search conditions were narrowed to the search on current sites, rather than showing the full diversity of blogs. However, it still should contain the social media specifics, which is being compared to news specifics. These two sites are limits of the research though.

The practical specifics for search showed differences in the use of search words and search conditions. First, it was different date-wise. Using “Donbass” and “Anti-Terrorist Operation” for the first period (the first ten days of March 2014) was unappropriated as the conflict-related events linked to these words were not occurring yet. However, “Maidan” was still relevant, therefore this word was using instead. Second, it was dependent on language. Russian messages used ATO as an abbreviation, while English messages relied on Anti-Terrorist Operation in full. Third, it was source-dependent. Searching for blogs in English based on Anti-Terrorist Operation didn’t give an ample numbers of case-related messages, and I replaced it with “Donbass”, which was not efficient in the case of news in Russian.

Finally, there are 16 small groups of 25 units each. Every group contains the 9 highest ranked units for the search word Ukraine and the 8 highest ranked units for the search word Crimea. They also contain the 8 highest ranked units for either Maidan, Anti-

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

Terrorist Operation or Donbass. I decided to use 3 search words for every group. “Ukraine” as the most neutral and universal search word got 9 units to show a greater diversity of the messages and estimate the popularity of conflict-related messages. This search word can be regarded as a key one in regarding the frequency of conflict-related units. The total number of units of this search word is 144. “Crimea” is the second geographical marker, relating to the contested peninsula which status relates to the political crisis in Ukraine. It is less neutral and universal, but still shared for all the groups. With a total number of 128 units it enlarges the analysis criteria on different shared search words for every group. This comparison allows to study what issues are shared for all the groups regardless the search word. The third search word for every group brings the total number of units to 400. It can help to understand the dependence on the search word and compare it to dependence on other unit-related specifics. This composition was not anticipated initially. Though it may seem quite chaotic, I see in it a maximum potential for analytic work within a feasible unit selection.

The result is a situation in which the selected search word relates to most units of its top search as relating to the political crisis in Ukraine, which is the main target message group. However, some messages within the selection do not mention these events or other Information War related issues. Such messages provide additional abilities for later analysis of the research units regardless the research indexes.

To sum it up, the procedure of unit selection appeared to be more complicated than expected, though it greatly affected the research abilities. Diversification and specification of multiple search criteria provides many abilities for comparative analysis, and it provides a lot of data on the unit selection stage. However, it also implies multiple limitations. The major one is the dependence on the search engine and search words. Some other ones are linked to diversification problems of formal issues. These limitations do not relate to the content of the messages, which is the most important issue of the analysis. These content-related issues are dependent on the research indexes, which are based on the hypotheses.



### 3.2. The Research Indexes.

The research is aimed at trying the hypotheses on Internet Media War being a communication-based social conflict with its specifics. In this sense it is important to understand how to trace these hypotheses in practice regarding the case. The units of this content-analysis are internet-messages of the discussion on the political crisis in Ukraine. Regarding the analysis of the messages, I first need to list all the hypotheses one more time. Second, I should understand what markers would indicate the hypotheses to be true. Third, I need to design indexes which would link the textual elements to the hypotheses.

1) **Internet Media War is an intergroup social conflict.** Proving this hypothesis would mean that the online discussion on the political crisis in Ukraine can be characterized this way. First, it refers to the definition of social conflict. To Karpenko, it is “a process of clash and antagonism of individuals or groups, which is characterized by harming each other aiming to defend real or imagined interests” (translation from Russian; Karpenko, 2007). Coser’s definition also relies on different parties harming each other for the sake of some gain. The key features here are interests and inflicting harm. Interests can be traced by the Relevance (Re) marker, which indicate that the events of the political crisis in Ukraine are either the central topic of the message, or it is considered to be very important in the discussion of another topic. The latter is dependent on the researcher’s interpretation and skill, though it is still feasible as a topic. Inflicting harm can be traced in causation of Rival’s Guilt (RG) marker, which indicates the goal of the message as blackmailing the opponent rather than addressing an objective goal. Both these topics were traced on a yes/no basis. The values of both Re and RG could imply a correlation between the messages and the definition of social conflict. Inflicting harm (RG) is the key feature to judge the definition of social conflict. Second, Information War correlates to the structure of social conflict. In addition to Interests (traced by Re), some other features of conflict-related structure can be traced. First, it relates to Positions (P). Every message with a clear position in the conflict was marked. The criteria of position is the relation to the power change in Ukraine: either supporting it (Pro-Governmental (PG)), or rejecting it (Pro-Rebel (PR)). Messages without a clear position were marked as Neutral (N). Experimentally, another less popular position was found, which rejects both the result of the power change and the counter-movement, while emphasizing the way the power changed. This position was marked as Maidan (M). It is close to the Pro-Governmental position, but much more critical to the new government. The second structural element is object, which was estimated earlier as explanation. It can be traced by the topic of Causation (Ca). The Causation marker depicts whether or not a message discusses the cause of the political crisis in Ukraine. Actions are also part of the structure. They were estimated earlier to be in the shape of communication. Though all the messages in the Internet are communication acts by definition, it is still not clear whether they regard communication acts to be actions of their opponents as well. This creates a base for tracing the topic of Hostile Communication Acts (HCA). This topic reflects mentioning information war, propaganda use and references to deliberate deception. The number of different sources regarding each position is a way to prove the intergroup character of the conflict. Each position is expected to be supported by a large number of sources.

The intergroup character is calculated by measuring the number of sources relative to the major positions. This number should be over 1. The share of the number of sources compared to the total number of position-related messages affects the strength of the hypothesis.

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

To prove the hypothesis Position should not be Neutral in most conflict-related cases. Causation should be significantly present, as well as Hostile Communication Acts. The index to prove the hypothesis: Re, RG is high - validity; P (not N), Ca, HCA – strength of the argument.

2) **Internet Media War is waged by communication.** Despite every message being an act of communication, communication-based conflicts should regard communication actions as hostile acts by their opponents. This is traced by the HCA marker. Index: HCA is high.

3) **Internet Media War has a large scale.** A lot of literature refers to the “large scale” of Information War compared to other communication-based conflicts. It can be traced by the number of messages related to the Political Crisis Events (PCE), which regards its Relevance. Feedback (Fe) is another way to estimate this. Some sources, however, did not provide feedback abilities, though their numbers were not high. Also, this means the message was not reacted on directly by a comment in the Internet, while feedback markers regard messaging which is linked to the original message directly and in a traceable way. Feedback was estimated as low (1-50), medium (51-500), high (501-5000) and very high (over 5000). If there were several types of feedback, the higher value was considered as its marker. Index: PCE + Re is high – validity; Fe – strength of the argument.

4) **Information War escalates.** This is another conflict-related hypothesis. Apart from structural hypotheses, this one regards different scenarios. Of Mitchell's structure (Mitchell, 2005) the proposed chronological limits do not include the genesis and resolution stages, but it may rely on the escalation and diminishing stages. Escalation is taken as a focus in this hypothesis due to its importance. It is specified to labeling the opponent as enemy, expanding, polarization, blaming the opponent, disassociation, and rising emotional tension. Blaming the opponent is already traced by the Rival's Guilt marker. Political Crisis Events and Feedback markers can be traced for expansion. Polarization can be traced by the Position markers. Labeling the opponent as enemy and rising emotional tension can be traced by examining vocabulary. Though this way is more dependent on the researcher's choice, it relies on written-out vocabulary which is estimated to be a marker apart from the text. These markers are Hostile Opponent Identification (HOI) and High Emotionality (HE). Hostile Opponent Identification traces specific linguistic markers, such as terrorists, gunmen or giving politicians obscure nicknames etc. It does not trace relatively neutral factual words, such as militias and separatists. High Emotionality refers to obscure or expressive vocabulary, which is not an integral part of reporting, but a way to refer to humanistic or personal attitudes. Disassociation can be traced by Cooperation Skepticism (CS) marker, compared to cooperation optimism (as its special value). This marker regards a clear opinion towards possible results of any collaboration between the parties. All these markers should be traced for all the periods, regarded by unit selection specifics. Index: RG, PCE, Fe, P (not N), HOI, HE, CS are rising I-IV.

5) **In the case of Internet Media War it represents both diversity and propaganda.** This is taking a stance in the Cyber-democracy/Cyber-propaganda debates. I argue that Internet Media War lies in between, which means that despite all propaganda abilities for news, there is no significant difference in total coverage of the conflict, while there may be a difference in organizational issues. It compares Positions in Social Media (SM) and News (N). It also may trace it linguistically for more data. Index: PG(SM)/PR(SM) differs from PG (N)/PR(N). Both PG(SM)/PR(SM) and PG (N)/PR(N)

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

lie between 0,5 and 2 (there is no overwhelming dominance of any position relating to the source type, while propaganda is still slightly relevant).

6) **There is information equilibrium in the Internet.** This hypothesis is a stance in Cyber-democracy/Cyber-propaganda debates, but from a different angle. It shows that both main positions are equally present in the Internet. For more data Positions may be traced regarding the organizational type and language. Index: PG is relatively equal to PR.

7) **Domination is the main strategy in Internet Media War.** Domination as a strategy relies on enforcing the demands over rival's will. This is a strategy aimed to Resolution of the conflict through Rival's Surrender (RS). Both markers are to be traced and compared as to whether, according to the message, resolution of the conflict can only be achieved when the enemy gives in. Index: RS(Rsn)/Rsn is over 0,5.

8) **Internet Media War can never be won.** This is a synthetic hypothesis, which is proved logically by the approval of hypotheses 6 and 7. It means it can never be won in terms of propaganda, such as providing ample amounts of information to change people's understanding of the situation in a specific way. Many academic sources build the essence of Information War as propaganda versus counter-propaganda, where successful (counter)propaganda is at stake. In such frameworks Internet Media War can never be won, assuming lack of cooperation and information equilibrium. Index: hypotheses 6 and 7 true.

9) **The Internet Media War on Ukraine and the political crisis in Ukraine are different conflicts.** This hypothesis analyzes the actual data on Internet Media War within conflict conceptualization and compares it to the opinions on the political crisis in Ukraine. It depends on the comparison between the structural and dynamic features of this Internet Media War and the academic understanding of the original political crisis. In this regard multiple markers of hypotheses 1 and 4 are compared to several academic perspectives on the crisis itself, which were discussed earlier.

To sum it up, multiple hypotheses can be traced on the base of multiple markers. Many markers can prove several hypotheses, if they are compared to other variables. Some hypotheses have several markers to trace. Therefore, the indexation list in its content is different from the hypotheses list. In order to make it clear, I will mention all the specific markers to trace in a separate list.

1. Causation topic
2. Relevance topic
3. Hostile Communication Acts topic
4. Hostile Opponent Identification vocabulary
5. Message's Feedback
6. Rival's Guilt topic
7. Cooperation Skepticism topic
8. High Emotionality vocabulary
9. Political Crisis in Ukraine Events topic
10. Resolution topic
11. Rival's Surrender as Resolution topic

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

### 12. Position

These indexes should consider the unit selection specific for every unit as well. Topics and vocabulary are central to this content-analysis.

### **3.3. The Research Findings**

The research itself was difficult to accomplish, but quite fruitful. Many indexes appeared to be just as expected, while others turned out rather surprisingly. Also there were some additional unexpected findings, which can contribute to the understanding of Information War.

#### **Hypothesis 1. Information War is an intergroup social conflict. Proven with a solid claim.**

I calculated the frequencies of all regarded markers in the messages on the political crisis in Ukraine and compared them to the total number of units mentioning the political crisis in Ukraine. The results are shown in table 1.

Relevance is regarded in 84.45% of all conflict-related messages, while Rival's Guilt is regarded in 54.2% of those. This means that about a half of the messages on the political crisis in Ukraine show the markers that demonstrate them to be related to the definition of social conflict in terms of harming the opponent for some sake. The methodological reliance on blaming the opponent as a hostile activity is a good marker, as hostility does specify conflict, while a lack of these markers does not mean the opposite. People may be involved in conflict by other means as well, for example, by providing more resources or supporting belligerents. Such a high number of hostile actions (54% of conflict-related messages) is a good basis for conflict conceptualization of Information War, assuming that it takes place in quite significant, though not overwhelming, numbers.

The Causation and Hostile Communication Acts markers are less present (33.23% and 27.74% respectively). However, their clear presence may justify the conflict conceptualization in the proposed frameworks of conflict-related Information War structure. The number of 76.22% of non-neutral messages demonstrates a strong claim on an overwhelming presence of positions in this conflict, which justifies the conflict conceptualization.

The final judgment on this hypothesis is that it has been proven. Though the claim of the definition-related markers is not very strong (54.2%), the ample presence of structural elements and strong presence of positions do build a case for it being a social conflict. However, this does not mean that it is a distinct conflict from any other conflicts yet.

As for the intergroup character, the number of sources for the three regarded positions is 73, 70 and 13 for Pro-Governmental, Pro-Rebel and Maidan positions respectively. Every position is represented by multiple sources. The lowest ratio of sources to messages is 49% in the case of the Pro-Rebel position. The highest is 100% for the Maidan position. The Pro-Governmental position ratio is 61%. This is the number of sources, which provided only one position-bound message to the discussion in the proposed limits. This makes every position represented by a vast number of sources.

To be sure of the results of these calculations it would be wise to compare the RG and Position markers to the search words. This would show all possible dependencies of those markers on the search word. The tables of this comparison with regard to Political Crisis Events are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Different search words do show different results in neutrality. "Donbass" is more neutral (25% of conflict-related messages), "Maidan" is less neutral (9.37% of conflict-related messages). Both have a rather low total number due to the methodology. However, all of them show strong clear positions in the messages. "Ukraine" as the main search word shows 19.44% of neutral conflict-related messages, which is even lower than

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

the average of 23.78%, but close to it. The average seems to be different from “Ukraine” by less than 5% of the statistical margin of error, which is acceptable. Thus, strong positions are not greatly dependent on the search words.

However, the most relevant marker here is RG. As expected, conflict events based words (“Maidan” and “ATO”) got 62% and 66.15% respectively, which is reasonably higher than the average of 54.2% of Rival’s Guilt. “Crimea” got only 44.89%, while “Ukraine” as the major search word got 52.9%, which is very close to the average. Concluding, though some specific words can have some influence on the conflict character of the messages, the total set results are close to the result of the main search word “Ukraine”. This means that the total set of search words is quite balanced and the numbers it gives are trustworthy in these relations. However, it should be traced for other Indexes and markers as well.

### **Hypothesis 2. The specifics of Information War is in its communication character. Proven with a weak claim.**

According to Table 1, the share of HCA is 27.74% of conflict-related messages. This certainly plays a role in this conflict, but does this prove its informational character? Messages are acts of communication. 27.74% of these acts of communication mention hostile communication acts. This relates to the war-coverage\meta-coverage debates. 27.74% is the share of meta-coverage in this case. Regarding both the unit nature and this, I regard the communicational character to be proven. However, the value here is rather low, so that most messages can be one-sided propaganda rather than a reflection on it. Therefore, I will consider this hypothesis to be proven with a weak claim.

### **Hypothesis 3. Information War is a large-scale conflict. Proven with a strong claim.**

First and foremost, this is the share of conflict-related messages in the whole range of messages. This number is 82%, which makes it very clear, that this Information War is largely discussed. If to consider only 54.7% of messages with the Rival’s Guilt marker as the scale of this Information War, it would still be 44.44% of all the regarded messages, which is quite a high frequency. It is definitely a large-scale conflict, as it gets at least 44% of all the popular messages within the methodology.

Let us see, how search word methodology could influence this (Table 4). This is 81.25% of conflict-related messages out of all the messages for “Ukraine”, which is very close to the average. The lowest value is for “Crimea” – 76.56%. The highest is value for conflict-centered search words – 90.62% and 90.27% for “Maidan” and “ATO” respectively. Though the word specifics do play a role, the wholesale numbers are trustworthy, comparing to the general “Ukraine” results.

Let us check the feedback (Table 5). First, let us compare the feedback value of conflict-related messages to all the messages. Feedback on messages with the PCE (Political Crisis Events) marker is 71.03%, while for non-PCE messages it is 75%. PCE “low” feedback is 35.36%, while non-PCE “low” feedback is 43.05%. PCE “medium” feedback is 22.56%, while non-PCE “medium” feedback is 26.38%. PCE “high” feedback is 10.97%, while non-PCE “high” feedback is 5.55%. PCE “very high” feedback is 2.13%, while it is 0% for non-PCE. To conclude, non-PCE messages have slightly more total feedback, though most of its feedback is quite low. The higher the amount of feedback, the more of those messages are conflict-related messages. However, the statistical trustworthiness of these numbers is quite low, mostly due to the total number of non-PCE messages in the selection. In addition, high overall number of

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

messages demonstrate information overload, which can also affect the feedback. However, “high” and “very high” feedback do correlate to the relation to the conflict, showing that the share of conflict-related markers in the highly discussed issues is high. Overall the hypothesis is proven with a strong claim, which means that the scale of this conflict is quite high. At its lowest it is 2 out of 5 messages in the whole set of search words and in the case of “Ukraine”. Regarding the amount of such messages in the Internet, it is a huge number. Even though this is only about top-search messages, this means that a lot of people would read it and reflect it.

### **Hypothesis 4. Information War escalates. Questioned. It rather mitigates within these limits.**

Let us consider every element of escalation separately. First is expansion, which is measured by PCE and feedback frequencies over time (tables 6 and 7). Surprisingly, the number of conflict-related messages is slightly diminishing (93, 82, 79, 74), while the amount of feedback is also slightly diminishing on the periods I to IV, while statistically insufficiently rises for the IV period. The number of high feedback is also diminishing, while other feedback markers change differently over time.

Hostility is measured by blaming and labeling the opponent, represented respectively by Rival’s Guilt and Hostile Opponent Identification markers (tables 8 and 9). While labeling the enemy diminishes gradually over time, blaming the enemy shows cycles with higher numbers for periods I and III, and lower numbers for periods II and IV. However, both III and IV are very close to the average of I (as the highest value) and II (as the lowest value). This cycling may represent a stabilization of the change of hostility over time and diminishing of the amplitude. Though it does not show any linear processes, it shows a cycle of slight diminishing. However, for a more trustworthy argument more data is needed over longer periods of time. Cycles are not as easy to trace as linear processes.

Polarization and emotional rising are important markers of escalation. They are represented by the number of non-neutral positions and High Emotionality markers (tables 10 and 11). For positions, the numbers also show the lowest values of non-neutral positions for periods II and IV, while highest are for periods I and III. This phenomenon may be connected to the cycle dynamics, mentioned for blaming the opponent (table 8). However, unlike those numbers, these numbers go to the lowest value, instead of the average value. This is also cyclically diminishing, but this cycle also represents linear diminishing in the long run. Surprisingly, it does not represent the dynamics of non-PCE messages, which is strongly connected to the neutral position. Most non-conflict-related positions were marked as neutral by default. However, if to remember that the number of neutral messages is gradually rising (table 6), it may mean that the current dynamics is even more similar to the cycles of blaming (table 8). In addition, we can see the linear diminishing of the “Maidan” position towards the “Pro-Governmental” position. In this regard, polarization is traced in forging two main opposing camps out of a larger number of opinions in the earlier stages. However, this argument is not strong in the limits of the proposed data.

The emotional tension decreases in the long run (comparing periods I and IV). Periods II and III show their intermediate, though the value for period II is slightly higher in a non-significant scale. I would consider it as a linear diminishing of emotional tension over time.

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

The last relevant marker for this hypothesis is Cooperation Skepticism, tracing disassociation (table 12). Though cooperation issues are barely mentioned in the proposed messages, there is an obvious increase of disassociation between periods I and II. For periods II-IV the value of disassociation is stable, while cooperation optimism vanishes. The disassociation appears to take place, though it is rising only in the beginning.

Summarizing the data, the hypothesis is definitely not proven. There is no gradual rise of tensions in most aspects within the proposed limits. However, disassociation shows that there might be some previous escalation. Mitchell's classification (Mitchell, 2005) regards mitigation to be the next phase of conflict after escalation. And in this regard, all the numbers suit perfectly – with linear diminishing for overall frequency and emotionality, with stable disassociation, and with a cyclic frequency of diminishing of all the other aspects. It refers to conflict institutionalization and entrapment, while the dynamics represents slow but stable diminishing.

### **Hypothesis 5. Internet Media War show both diversity and propaganda. Proven.**

Here I want to understand what is prevailing in Internet Media War, and how much of this is propaganda. The cross-table below will help to understand it (Table 13).

Propaganda basically concerns news in most of the literature. Comparing news to blogs shows the obvious difference: news is more “Pro-Governmental”, while blogs are more “Pro-Rebel”. Though blogs and news both show textual information of similar abilities to go in depth, they are very different by their stances. In addition, these tendencies are shared for both Russian and English sources, except for Russian news, which equally represents both major positions. This is quite surprising, and it contradicts some case-bound literature focused on Russian propaganda. The literature, concerning Western propaganda, may have an argument here. However, total numbers are quite equal, which means that Cyber-Democracy balances Cyber-Propaganda, and it even slightly outweighs it in the Internet. To mention, the value of neutral insights is relatively equal for both news and blogs, while blogs are even slightly more neutral. To conclude, propaganda does exist in the terms that news is basically not neutral, and their stance differs greatly from the social opinions in the Internet. Western propaganda is stronger in this regard. However, social media balances and outweighs these opinions, lowering the efficiency of such propaganda greatly.

### **Hypothesis 6. There is information equilibrium. Proven.**

Regarding the data from table 13, the value of total positions is relatively equal with a slight majority of Pro-Rebel messages (mostly from the blogs). For Russian sources there is also a slight majority of Pro-Rebel insights, while there is a slight majority of Pro-Governmental in the case of English sources. If to combine Pro-Governmental and Maidan positions (regarding that one dynamically incorporates another), this ratio of this slight majority of the opposites would be basically the same both for Russian and English sources. The dynamic insight (Table 10) shows strengthening of the equilibrium over time with incorporation of Pro-Governmental and Maidan positions into one. As a researcher to conduct this content-analysis I would add that these positions were indeed very close, but Maidan was skeptical of the new government. All the aspects of the numbers show that they are not always totally equal, but their presence (especially due to their high frequencies) is always significant. There is no clear overwhelming position in any linguistic groups. Within all Russian messages, the ratio of Pro-Governmental to Pro-Rebel messages is 63%, which does not show a complete dominance. The other group shows even more equal numbers. According to table 10, such ratios are constant



## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

throughout all stages of the conflict, and the supremacy may even switch sides. All this mean that there is no clear overwhelming position in any linguistic group researched, so that there is indeed an informational equilibrium in the Internet. Reflecting the previous hypothesis, this equilibrium is the result of a balance of propaganda and social networking, which means that both appear to be mechanisms of one social phenomenon in the Internet, which as a result is distinct one from both propaganda and social networking, but still very connected to both.

### **Hypothesis 7. Domination is the main strategy in Internet Media War. Not proven.**

Strategy as a decision-making feature is hard to trace. However, there are some markers to indicate it. I have chosen the marker of Resolution as the main one. I will compare it to the marker of Rival's Surrender in order to understand whether the participants of the Internet Media War on Ukraine regard resolution of the Crisis by the surrender of their opponent (table 14).

The table is complex, and it shows that 59.26% of Resolution is seen in terms of Rival's Surrender. However, the total frequency of Resolution is only 13.5%. The slight majority does still regard Rival's Surrender, but those numbers are not sufficient to make any argument. Dynamically, the frequency of the Rival's Surrender marker is 7, 9, 7 and 9 for periods I, II, III and IV respectively, showing the dynamic cycle which was regarded earlier. Curiously, resolution without surrender is also cyclic, only inversely (table 14).

Thus both "good" and "bad" resolutions are quite cyclic with dynamic dominance of both one after another. Thus, dominance is not proven to be a leading strategy in this conflict. However, the main reason here is the low frequency of the Resolution marker as a whole.

### **Hypothesis 8. Internet Media War can never be won. Proven.**

Though hypothesis 7 was not proven, there is still a place to discuss this hypothesis, as its main base is hypothesis 6. Information equilibrium is very important for understanding this implication. In conditions of information equilibrium there cannot be a win\lose solution, but only win\win or lose\lose. Win\win solution is based on the assumption that the other party can win as well. The numbers of table 14 show an even lower commitment to cooperation and searching for a mutually beneficiary solution, than for fighting. Here, the low number of the Resolution marker may be an obvious marker for a low commitment to cooperation and a low desire to reach a win/win solution. The numbers show, that a win/win solution cannot be reached, a win/lose solution is impossible to reach as well due to the information equilibrium. The only option left is a lose/lose solution. The data show that there is no scenario within the current frameworks where any party wins. The hypothesis is proven – Internet Media War can never be won.

### **Hypothesis 9. The Internet Media War on Ukraine is a distinct conflict from the political crisis in Ukraine.**

I will try to compare some structural and dynamic arguments of the proven hypotheses to the data from the same media sources – and I have read at least 328 related sources, according to the methodology. I will not give links to the sources here but rather use very general ideas, which can be checked quite easily by reading news about Ukraine from any sources.

First, these conflicts have different actors. Most messages regard the events in Ukraine itself, while they are put out by multiple sources all over the world. The source

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

list shows the highest frequency of messages for a single source as 21, there are two more sources of 10 messages, and all others show a lower count. Only one message directly refers to the government— a post from former Russian Presidential advisor Illarionov from his personal blog. Table 13 does not show a clear affinity by language, although both Russia and the West are widely regarded as aggressors. The actual messages do not correlate to the existing explanations of the parties in the political crisis in Ukraine. The participants are not the same, which means this Information War and the political crisis in Ukraine have a different structure.

Second, it has special dynamics. According to the media, between period I and period IV the dynamics was constantly changing, among others because of the secession of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbass between periods I and II. There were ceasefires and violations of those ceasefires later. Period II witnessed an ongoing war, while period I saw only demonstrations and military presence in Crimea without much actual violence. However, the highest hostility of the Internet Media War belonged to the most peaceful period, period I. Some indicators, like Rival's Guilt, show their lowest frequencies during the bloody period II. The total number of conflict-related and opponent-blaming messages slowly and gradually diminished, not correlating to any events, while the actual political crisis does not quite diminish after the 10th of May 2014. The Hostile Communication Acts comparison over time (table 15) shows the same "pendulum cycle" as the other dynamical markers, providing a base for an additional explanation of this cycle. With its lowest value in period II, it provides a base to suggest that actual events influence this ratio: the more events happen, the more descriptive the messages become. This may also explain the cyclic shape of other markers. However, the total frequency is quite constant, which is why a lower number of events causes more discussion on causes, enemy guilt and hostile communication acts. In that regard this phenomenon is quite interesting: events do affect Internet Media War content-wise, but they do not affect its scale and total attitudes. This is an explanation that suits both the "pendulum cycle" (tables 8, 10, 12) and linear dynamic models.

To resume, it seems to be a different conflict (mostly due to different parties and overall dynamics). However, it is strongly connected to the discussed events, and many conflict-related features are shown properly according to the events frequency. This may mean that this hypothesis is true, but it also means that meta-coverage issues compensate the changing dynamics of actual event coverage towards its consistence. This argument can be a good contribution to coverage\meta-coverage debates.

All the discussed core hypotheses, additional hypotheses and unexpected findings are important for the research and answering of the research question. They all should be regarded as an important argument in the final discussion over the value of the conflict-related conceptualization of Information War and Internet Media War on Ukraine as its particular case.

### 3.4. Summarizing Discussion

According to the research data, there are features of a communication-based social conflict in at least half of the top search messages on the political crisis in Ukraine. This is about 44% of the search results for all search words, relatively equal to the search word “Ukraine” in news and blogs. Not every message shows these features, but a considerable number of messages does represent Internet Media War. It is a significant social phenomenon, which refers to the definition, structure and dynamic characteristics of social conflict. There is also a correlation with the communication character of this phenomenon, as well as with the communication-based adaptation of the structure of social conflict. It is a communication-based social conflict. In the regarded frameworks, there were numerous actors in this conflict, with about 5% of the total amount of messages produced by a single one. In fact, this refers more to the unit selection methodic, but it does definitely show the presence of multiple formally independent actors in this social phenomenon, which are split between two major positions. The dynamics of some conflict-related features is constant and independent from the events of the political crisis in Ukraine. Others do depend on it, but correlate negatively in the way of complementation of the events by meta-coverage and debating. It shows this social conflict to be a different one, but connected to the actual political crisis in the resource terms. All of it do clarify that there is a large-scale social phenomenon, which is a distinct communication-based social conflict. And this is the thing, most researchers and journalist refer to, speaking about Information War. It does give a strong claim to argue that Information War is a communication-based social conflict in this case. This is a distinct social conflict. And it should be regarded this way, rather than part of propaganda talks.

This conceptualization was possible only in the theoretical frameworks of system-related concepts. Social conflict was conceptualized by the reflection on Parsons’ insights on social structure and social dynamics, in the same way Information War can be conceptualized by the reflection on social conflict structure and dynamics. This makes an important scientific claim to be more concerned about concepts prior to building theories. Multiple literature sources try to build different theories on Information War while trying to deny the need for conceptualization. As a result such theories have great problems correlating to each other, which is also widely discussed. Referring to the literature on social conflict can help to avoid such problems and contribute to a much better understanding of Information War.

In addition, conflict-related conceptualization shows great opportunities in adopting theories on social conflict. For example, polarization dynamics reflects Coser’s theory of forging group identities by social conflict. Minor positions are being consumed by greater ones. Regarding it to be a social conflict gives opportunities to study how this creates groups, their identities, values, attitudes and behavior. The other direction of conflict-related research concerns social dynamics. The research data show that physical events can be regarded as a resource for Information War. But can it be it indeed? Can it be the other way around or both ways? How does it correlate to other social processes? Conflict-related conceptualization of Information War shows a lot of directions for later research. And the major one should be aimed to investigate and improve this conceptualization further.

Internet Media War appears to be a very specific type of Information War. The issue that makes it specific is its information diversity. This information diversity creates an information equilibrium, which means that no opinion can overwhelm others if there is

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

space for different perspectives. Information War positions are never shown one-sided. Maybe that is why they are based on actual political conflicts – no Information War is waged on the Earth being round right now. This is also an interesting point for later research – the structural connection between Information Wars and other conflicts.

However, there are debates that are connected to the topic. The major one is about propaganda in the Internet and Cyber-democracy. The first perspective regards the Internet as an instrument for massive targeted propaganda, while the other emphasizes the abilities to show the truth and demonstrate different political positions within the Internet. The former emphasizes channeling power top-down in the way major players control populations. The latter emphasizes the bottom-up way different citizens affect policy-making. In fact, both are the case. The research data confirms one-side directions both for news and blogs, but they complement each other toward an information equilibrium. This gives me a strong stand in these debates on the side of information diversity. Both political trends collaborate and contribute to the formation of a separate social phenomenon. This may be one of the sources of Internet Media War as a social phenomenon.

This is especially important in the case of Ukraine. Multiple literature and news sources focus on trying to find the guilt of some major power in projecting its will. However, they tend to ignore the role of many independent people who are involved in it. Conflict-related conceptualization can provide a basis for a more efficient perspective on the current crisis as a specific research object. This is also important for understanding the way it can be managed.

All these implications confirm the importance and potential of Information War conceptualization as a communication-based social conflict. Conceptualization is possible, the markers of conflict-related features are present. However, the concept should be developed and investigated further for a stronger claim and more precise shape. And after the concept is built, there may be new great opportunities for building a better understanding of it in its full depth.

## **4. Conclusion. The Missing Stone.**

The research and research data show the importance and potential of the conceptualization of Information War. The existing theories on Information War largely ignore proper conceptualization of this phenomenon, while trying to theorize related phenomena on their own. As a result there is a mayhem in the academic understanding of Information War. Some researchers (e.g. Manoylo, 2003a) even find defining Information War meaningless and not essential in such a diversity of opinions about Information War. I tried to structure the existing insights into three major camps, which are military, political and cybernetic. Phenomenological analysis resulted in the development of rather general but universal frameworks of Information War being a communication-based social conflict. This conceptualization does not explain this phenomenon, but it helps to situate the concept within the academic domain. The content-analysis on the case of Ukraine has shown that such frameworks are valid for about a half of the messages that cover the political crisis in Ukraine. There is a phenomenon within such frameworks, and this phenomenon is rather significant.

To specify the conceptualization I coined the concept of Internet Media War as a specific type of Information War. The conceptual frameworks in this more specific case appeared relevant in building theories. Understanding Information War as a social conflict helps to discover that propaganda in the Internet can't achieve its goals, while it consumes resources. As a result, in conflict-related terms it can never be won or achieve anything it claims to achieve. The research confirms this argument in the case of Ukraine. On the other hand it creates groups and facilitates identities. How it can be controlled or be beneficial for anyone involved is a good question for later research. The role of other messages as resources to Internet Media War is also a point of interest.

The case of Ukraine has shown clearly that the high politicization significantly limits the abilities of the research. This has been emphasized for Information War earlier (e.g. Gray, 1998). However, in this case it is polarized, which limits the abilities for scientific dialog. It is very dangerous for both science and society. In such circumstances, the need of a neutral conceptualization is great, and the conflict-related perspective appears to be a relevant contribution. Instead of trying to understand who is guilty, it tries to understand what it is, and how it should be dealt with. The research data show some interesting points about Ukraine that go beyond the theoretical debates. For example, it diminishes the efficiency of propaganda by social media. It also shows interesting numbers on position-bound messages, especially in the case of news in Russian. This is why a neutral conceptualization is so crucial for research of the case. However, this research was not designed to say anything about the case itself. This direction can also be fruitful for later research.

Summarizing the research results, a number of recommendations may be proposed.

For researchers, it is important to provide more attention to conceptualization and development of a shared understanding of Information War, rather than to the development of theories. Theories are numerous, while the discourse is actually absent. The theories cannot be properly linked due to the difference in conceptualization and using the 'Information War' label for a number of different concepts. Conceptualization remains a priority in this regard.

For policy makers, it is important not to overestimate the potential of online propaganda (and propaganda in general) and not to underestimate the risks of Information War. All initiatives and projects should regard it as a social conflict, rather than a policy

## **Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.**

tool. It is more likely to control than to be controlled. Rather, it would be wise to fund additional research on the topic, which would be focused on the shared risks, rather than on the opportunities for you or your rival.

For journalists, it is important to note that Information War cannot be countered by blaming anyone for waging Information War. On the contrary, journalists contribute greatly to this phenomenon. It is a social conflict, which is harder to control than governmental propaganda. The only thing to do is to keep yourselves as neutral as possible, avoiding not only blaming, but also vocabulary which may position yourselves within this Information War. This does not improve your ratings or give organizational perks, but at least you will not be guilty of any possible complications caused by Information War.

As for others, do not get involved in any Internet Media War. It is a social conflict which can never be won. It can improve your standing within some groups, but it can also destroy your relationships with other groups, drain emotions and waste your time. It is never cost-effective.

Information War is a communicational social conflict, and it should be treated as any other social conflict. This is the main argument of this work. This is also the major point of my conceptualization of Information War, which can create a framework for existing theories on Information War to work and reflect each other.

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## 6. Tables.

Table 1. The frequency of major structural features of social conflict in conflict-related messages.

Marker	PCE	Crisis-Related	% of PCE(+)
Re	328	277	84,45
RG	328	178	54,2
Ca	328	109	33,23
HCA	328	91	27,74
P:	328	Not N:	76,22
N	328	78	23,78
PG	328	112	34,15
PR	328	127	38,72
M	328	11	3,35

Table 2. Search word influence on position values for conflict-related sources.

Position			Search Word					Total
			Ukraine	Crimea	Maidan	Anti-Terrorist Operation	Donbass	
Neutral	Political Crisis	No	18	21	0	5	2	46
		Yes	28	29	3	12	6	78
	Total		46	50	3	17	8	124
Pro-Governmental	Political Crisis	No	5	1	1	1	0	8
		Yes	41	32	6	30	3	112
	Total		46	33	7	31	3	120
Pro-Rebel	Political Crisis	No	4	8	0	1	3	16
		Yes	46	36	12	23	10	127
	Total		50	44	12	24	13	143
Maidan	Political Crisis	No	0	0	2			2
		Yes	2	1	8			11
	Total		2	1	10			13
Total	Political Crisis	No	27	30	3	7	5	72
		Yes	117	98	29	65	19	328
	Total		144	128	32	72	24	400

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

Table 3. Search word influence on the Rival Guilt marker frequency.

Guilt			Search Word					Total
			Ukraine	Crimea	Maidan	ATO	Donbass	
No	Political Crisis	No	26	28	3	6	5	68
		Yes	55	54	11	22	8	150
	Total		81	82	14	28	13	218
Yes	Political Crisis	No	1	2	0	1	0	4
		Yes	62	44	18	43	11	178
	Total		63	46	18	44	11	182
Total	Political Crisis	No	27	30	3	7	5	72
		Yes	117	98	29	65	19	328
	Total		144	128	32	72	24	400

Table 4. Search words correlation to the PCE values.

		Search Word					Total
		Ukraine	Crimea	Maidan	ATO	Donbass	
Political Crisis	No	27	30	3	7	5	72
	Yes	117	98	29	65	19	328
Total		144	128	32	72	24	400

Table 5. Feedback in conflict-related messages.

		Feedback					Total
		None	1-50	51-500	501-5000	over 5000	
Political Crisis	No	18	31	19	4	0	72
	Yes	95	116	74	36	7	328
Total		113	147	93	40	7	400

Table 6. PCE over time.

		Political Crisis		Total
		No	Yes	
Period	I	7	93	100
	II	18	82	100
	III	21	79	100
	IV	26	74	100
Total		72	328	400

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

Table 7. Feedback over time.

	Feedback					Total
	None	1-50	51-500	501-5000	Over 5000	
Period I	22	37	20	17	4	100
II	26	40	25	8	1	100
III	33	32	27	8	0	100
IV	32	38	21	7	2	100
Total	113	147	93	40	7	400

Table 8. Blaming over time.

	Guilt		Total
	No	Yes	
Period I	50	50	100
II	60	40	100
III	53	47	100
IV	55	45	100
Total	218	182	400

Table 9. Labeling as enemy over time.

	Hostile Identification of the Opponent		Total
	No	Yes	
Period I	70	30	100
II	83	17	100
III	84	16	100
IV	89	11	100
Total	326	74	400

Table 10. Polarization over time.

	Position				Total
	Neutral	Pro-Governmental	Pro-Rebel	Maidan	
Period I	19	29	40	12	100
II	38	26	35	1	100
III	29	38	33	0	100
IV	38	27	35	0	100
Total	124	120	143	13	400

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

Table 11. Emotionality over time.

		High Emotional Character		Total
		No	Yes	
Period	I	74	26	100
	II	88	12	100
	III	83	17	100
	IV	94	6	100
Total		339	61	400

Table 12. Commitment to cooperation over time.

		Non-Cooperation			Total
		No	Yes	Cooperation Optimism	
Period	I	88	6	6	100
	II	89	11	0	100
	III	87	12	1	100
	IV	90	10	0	100
Total		354	39	7	400

Table 13. Positions regarding different source types in different languages.

Type			Position				Total
			Neutral	Pro-Govern.	Pro-Rebel	Maidan	
News	Language	Russian	30	34	33	3	100
		English	30	52	14	4	100
	Total		60	86	47	7	200
Blogs	Language	Russian	24	19	51	6	100
		English	40	15	45	0	100
	Total		64	34	96	6	200
Total	Language	Russian	54	53	84	9	200
		English	70	67	59	4	200
	Total		124	120	143	13	400

## Information War in the Internet. The conflict, which cannot be won.

Table 14. Resolution tactics over time.

Period			Surrender		Total
			No	Yes	
I	Resolution	No	83	0	83
		Yes	10	7	17
	Total		93	7	100
II	Resolution	No	88	0	88
		Yes	3	9	12
	Total		91	9	100
III	Resolution	No	85	0	85
		Yes	8	7	15
	Total		93	7	100
IV	Resolution	No	90	0	90
		Yes	1	9	10
	Total		91	9	100
Total	Resolution	No	346	0	346
		Yes	22	32	54
	Total		368	32	400

Table 15. Hostile communication acts over time.

		Communication		Total
		No	Yes	
Period	I	70	30	100
	II	81	19	100
	III	72	28	100
	IV	78	22	100
Total		301	99	400