STRATCOM LAUGHS

IN SEARCH OF AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

PREPARED BY THE
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INTRODUCTION

Žaneta Ozoliņa

Humour is a serious thing. I like to think of it as one of our greatest earliest natural resources, which must be preserved at all cost.

James Thurber

The study "StratCom laughs. In search of an analytical framework" is a multidisciplinary effort to design an analytical framework for *analysing* humour in scenarios where researchers and practitioners find themselves working through large data collections where humour has been used as a potent tool in the *construction* of messages designed for strategic communication. The research was conducted in four stages.

The *first stage* approaches the concept of humour from the perspectives of cognitive, communication, political science and psychology. The relevant components of humour, namely shared knowledge, target audience, perception, function and message delivery have been factored in.

The *second stage* includes *three distinct* case studies:

i. the discrediting of Western political leaders in late-night shows broadcast by the Central Russian TV as a massive humour-driven propaganda tool aimed at national and international target audiences;

ii. the KVN (Klub Vesyeliykh i Nakhodchivikh) TV show and competition broadcast in Russia since the early 1970s; and

iii. the application of humour as a tool of counter-propaganda by the Ukrainian media.

The *third stage* of the research is based on a review of the case studies from the perspective of the proposed analytical framework by identifying conclusions and proposing recommendations drawn from the five identified components of humour. This section also serves the purpose of an executive summary.

The *fourth stage* proposes a tool kit – a resource guide for utilising humour as an effective tool in strategic communication.

The outcome of the study can be used by different audiences. For the research community, the study offers an innovative multidisciplinary analytical framework for conducting theoretical research. Practitioners on the other hand, will find the case studies useful in their daily affairs owing to an extensive collection of facts, examples and practices. The section comprising conclusions, recommendations and the tool kit would be of value to multiple audiences ranging from researchers and practitioners to other members of society with a more general interest in humour.

Six researchers have worked on this project over a span of six months, attempting to unfold the multiple faces and roles of humour in different life situations, including strategic communication. Though it is impossible to embrace every aspect of humour in a single study, the multidisciplinary focus used here paves the way for further studies in the compelling world of humour.

CHAPTER ①

HUMOUR AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL: DESIGNING FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Ivars Austers, Jurǧis Šķilters, Žaneta Ozoliņa

1.1. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Since Russia's occupation of Crimea and its engagement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the issue of winning people's 'hearts and minds' has become one of the dominating themes in the social sciences and the general public sphere. Geopolitical and political confrontation between states and societies based on different values and principles is also reflected in the strategies and policies that governments of such countries are applying in order to win the hearts and minds of both their own citizens and the citizens of other countries. Consequently, there is no shortage of studies debating and challenging the concepts of information warfare, hybrid warfare, propaganda or soft power.

One of the issues that needs more in-depth analysis is the utilisation of humour as a tool of strategic communication. The public space has been filled by humourous videos, cartoons, pictures and articles undermining the credibility of western political leaders; stories have been constructed challenging the values and principles on which 'the West's' decisions and policies are based; diverse platforms and TV programmes are used in Russia and new ones launched to support the policies and actions taken by the Kremlin relating to the West. At the same time humour serves as a comforting or stress-relief tool targeted at the domestic audience, assuring it that the 'storms' brewing outside Russia will pass them by. Humour as a tool of strategic communication is becoming increasingly more powerful, diverse and complex.

It has been utilized by government and non-government actors for different purposes. On the one hand, humour is an integral component of each culture, it is one of the most frequently used communication tools that entertains, attracts attention, serves as light relief or a method of subversion in situations of conflict and discontent, informs and humanizes many actions taken by politicians. But, on the other hand, humour can serve as an effective element of propaganda, manipulating and influencing hearts and minds of with methods which do not fall into the classic category of information warfare. Entertainment can contain much more powerful content and sets of well-planned-in-advance goals to change human behaviour that are not recognised by the audience. Humour can be utilized for strategic communication purposes because of its diverse forms of expression and power to reach individuals. Humour references people's own experiences and background and therefore has a stronger impact on their minds.

Therefore, the ***objective of this study*** is to examine the concept of humour from an interdisciplinary perspective; identifying the role of humour in strategic communication through various functions; as well as to elaborate a methodology to assist in analyzing and applying humour in different situations and referencing different target audiences. The methodological framework we are striving to develop by the end of the study is only one of many that might be proposed by other researchers. In the presented case we combine ideas and concepts from different disciplines and test the feasibility of this interdisciplinary approach as regards the analysis of humour. We argue that the proposed methodology serves the purpose of distinguishing humour as entertainment from humour as a strategic communication tool aimed at influencing the belief systems and even the behavior of individuals and groups.

1.2. HUMOUR – IN SEARCH OF DEFINITIONS

Humour is a very diverse and multifaceted concept and has been studied by researchers from numerous disciplines. A wide range of literature citing humour can be found in disciplines such as anthropology, cognitive sciences, communication, history, linguistics, philosophy, psychology and political science. However, humour to a very large extent has been treated as a second-rank topic in research agendas and positioned on the margins of these disciplines. At the same time, studies on humour tend to be focused within one discipline and very rarely apply an interdisciplinary approach. Our attempt to elaborate a multidisciplinary methodological tool on the application of humour in strategic communication requires delving into the interpretation of the concept in domains such as political science, cognitive and communication sciences and psychology.

As far as ***political science*** is concerned, humour is always associated with authority – laughing at authorityand its numerous manifestations. Since authority is the art of

influencing different social actors and exercising control and power, humour provides the authority with additional tools of influence incorporating emotions and other psychological effects. What politicians cannot achieve with the power of rational argument, they can master with the assistance of humour.

It should be noted, that humour is not at the core of the political-science research agenda. The essence of the concept might be discovered at the crossroads between political and communication sciences and fall under the category of political communication. The studies carried out on humour from a political science perspective can be categorized into several blocks. The clear majority of studies focus on political leaders and the ways they apply humour in their speeches, and their wider political communication with opponents and society at large. Traditionally, research interest has circulated around TV shows and the printed media, but the most recent analysis also focuses on social media[1]. The role of comedy shows in the political lives of candidates for the American presidency is often illustrated by the case of John McCain, who did not make his planned appearance on the *The Late Show With David Letterman* in 2008. After the show Letterman commented that "The road to the White House runs through me", which became a maxim characterizing the outcome of neglecting the role of the media[2].

Another group of studies delve into the political process and uncover how humour can be used either during decision-making processes or elections. These researchers argue that humour can increase the popularity of politicians by humanizing their images, but at the same time jokes told in the wrong context or about sensitive issues can severely damage political careers[3].

In the field of security studies, there are collections of research findings analyzing the role of humour in war situations, emphasizing functions such as stress-relief, mobilization, socialization, superiority and other aspects[4]. Complementary studies in the security and international-relations domains are exploring how humour is also used in political actions, protests, different forms of political activism, and non-violent resistance[5].

A new wave of studies relating to humour and politics emerged after the so-called Muhammad Cartoon Crisis of 2005 and 2006, when Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons featuring Muhammad, thus causing outrage among Muslims and leading to widespread unrest and a series of protests both domestically and internationally. *HUMOUR*, a special edition of the *International Journal of Humour Research*, published a series of articles debating the different facets of humour, its borders, challenges to democratic societies and their international impact[6]. The debate on the negative, dangerous and even deadly effects of humour that started after 2005 was extended in 2015, when terrorists attacked the office of *Charlie Hebdo, a* French satirical magazine, and murdered 12 people.

Another aspect of researchers' interest is institution-based communication looking into administrative structures and the methods which are applied in interaction between policy makers and other groups. As Lawrence R. Jacobs argues "Institutions-based communications have, under certain circumstances, more enduring and deeper effects than situational framing"[7]. The study on institutions offers a new perspective, analysing not only how humour is constructed within administrative structures, but, more importantly, the degree of impact achieved in communication with wider audiences.

A variety of different approaches to defining humour can be identified within the frameworks of semantics and ***communication science***. Usually, at least one of the following mechanisms is used as the underlying explanatory principle[8]:

(a) *aggression* (psychoanalytic theories; their core assumption is that the joke teller attacks the hearer[9]);

(b) *incongruity* (joke consists of two inconsistent or opposite frames of knowledge[10]);

(c) *arousal-safety* (once the message is understood as a joke, the agent perceives two meanings as co-existing; thus, the joke comprehension is a tension and a process of searching for the resolution of this tension that in turn results in the pleasure of capturing the congruity of both meanings; "a hypothesis which underlies so-called *arousal-safety theories*: the tension involved in searching for a solution may be released when the 'meaning' of a joke is discovered" [11].

A prominent way of defining humour in cognitive science is the *frame-shifting model*[12] which is more inclusive than the classical three principles or their combinations. The frame-shifting model is, to a certain extent, compatible with all three classical principles but also assumes that the processing of humour involves other semantic phenomena (such as metaphor, metonymy, polysemy, and irony). According to Seana Coulson, the author of the frame-shifting theory, "frame-shifting is semantic reorganization that occurs when incoming information is inconsistent with an initial interpretation, and conceptual blending is a set of cognitive operations for combining frames from different domains."[13]

In the frame-shifting approach, frames are defined as different, eventually contradicting, cognitive situations (linked to schematic and shared knowledge) that are blended together. The resulting blend contains a new meaning and a subversive buffer (humour is less offensive than a non-humorous message containing the paraphrased content). One advantage of the frame-shifting model is the assumption that frame-shifting is a creative and constructive process of communicative meaning assignment that also involves related phenomena such as irony, metaphor, and metonymy.

From the perspective of communication science, humour fulfils communicative goals in latent, implicit (or – less commonly – explicit) ways and generates new meanings.

Frequently humour starts with a socially preferred frame and then a contrary frame is activated; other typical patterns of humour communication either start with an existing contrast of frames or an abrupt shift from an initially salient frame to a suppressed one during the communication. With respect to social structures, humour can either reaffirm or challenge them. In addition – if not radically contradicting the values and attitudes (and, thus, not exceeding the subversive buffer) of the audience – humour produces an implicit group-affiliation effect even if it challenges the social structure of the audience.

1.2.1. Subversive buffer

Recognizing and assuming the humour (or irony) in a message, its content is perceived as subversive. Therefore humour has a special communicative role assigning a subversive buffer to a message: a humorous message is understood to be less offensive than a non-humorous one[14]. If paraphrased without humour, a message is more offensive than if expressed humorously.

However, the subversive buffer of a humorous message has limited scope and bounds – if the message is radically unacceptable (radically inconsistent with the attitudes and values of the audience) it will be rejected and result in anger.

Thus, humour also has a sorting function[15]: if the humorous message is radically unacceptable it is rejected, even if the speaker and the audience share the same background knowledge.

1.2.2. Sense of belonging

Humour also creates a sense of belonging to a community (by reinforcing similarities among the members of the community and emphasizing the differences with those outside the group; cf. Ritchie, 2005, see a more detailed explanation of humour in relation to identity in Section 3). Thus, humour contributes to a sense of social solidarity that, in turn, is facilitated by shared knowledge.

1.2.3. Basic mechanisms of humour comprehension and communication

Humour fulfils communicative goals in latent, implicit (or – less commonly – explicit) ways and generates new meanings. Frequently humour starts with a socially preferred frame and then a contrary frame is activated; other typical patterns of humour communication either start with an existing contrast of frames or an abrupt shift from an initially salient frame to a suppressed one during the communication.

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This approach to humour is consistent with an approach[16] in which meaning is defined as a substructure of mental models that are functions of incoming stimuli (verbal, visual, behavioural, or otherwise) to the knowledge of the agent (or to put it more precisely, to the shared knowledge that is a subset of the existing knowledge possessed by the agent). If the connection between stimulus and shared knowledge cannot be established, the humour is not perceived.

In the field of ***psychology***, one of the most frequently used definitions is presented in a comprehensive study by Canadian scholar *Roe A. Martin* who argues that "From a psychological perspective, the humour process can be divided into four essential components: (1) a social context, (2) a cognitive-perceptual process, (3) an emotional response, and (4) the vocal-behavioural expression of laughter[17].

There are several unifying components being important from the psychological perspective: (1) an actor or actors who are constructing humorous messages and presenting them by using one or more communication agents, (2) individuals or groups who are recipients of the message/narrative, (3) communication based on delivering a message which is supposed to cause an "emotional response"[18], (4) and/or "the vocal-behavioural expression of laughter"[19], (5) taking place in a specific context, which either facilitates or, just the opposite, hinders the perception of the message and it achieving its intended reaction.

Bringing together the main components of the concept of humour from political science, communication and psychology, we agree with the approach proposed by George Vaillant who writes: "Those who study humour note it is composed of three experiences: intellectual (wit); emotional (levity or gaiety); and physiological (laughter or smiling). Each element can be experienced independently, but when all three are experienced in conjunction, we call it 'humour'".[20]

For strategic communication, the presence of all three components is of crucial importance. The ability to combine wit with emotions and psychological reactions in different and appropriate proportions makes humour an effective communication tool.

PHYSIOLOGICAL
(laughter or smiling)

INTELLECTUAL
(wit)

HUMOUR

EMOTIONAL
(levity or gaeity)
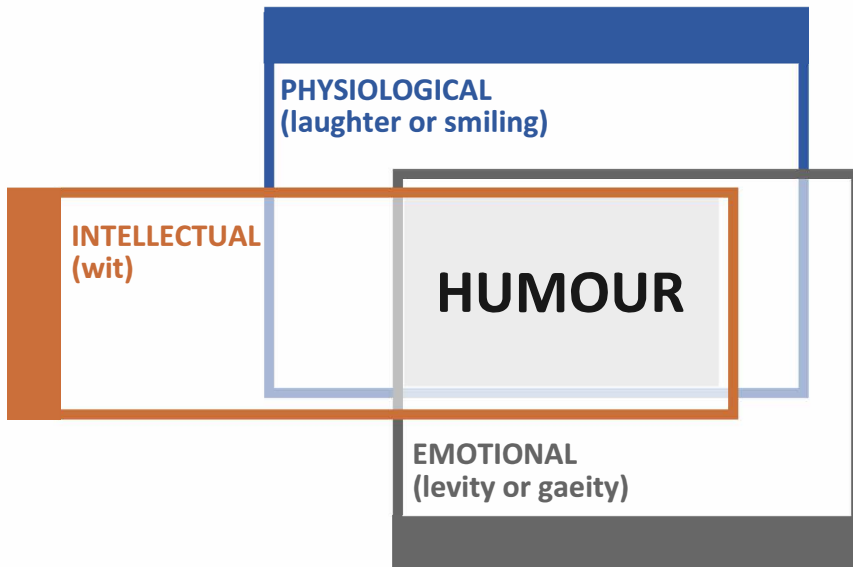
1.2.4. Building an analytical framework

In order to analyse and apply humour as a strategic communication tool, it is necessary to single out those aspects of the multifaceted concept which play the most important role in addressing target audiences. The proposed analytical framework is only one of the possible methodologies for examining humour from an interdisciplinary perspective as far as strategic communication is concerned. The variety of definitions and approaches offered in the previous section of the study enabled us to identify the following aspects of humour relevant to its application in strategic communication: (1) shared knowledge[1]; (2) strategic audience[2]; (3) perception of humour in different audiences/groups; (4) functions of humour; (5) communication of humour.[23]

1.3. SHARED KNOWLEDGE IN HUMOUR INTERPRETATION

1.3.1. What is shared knowledge?

Something is funny, disappointing, or sad to the extent that we have the shared knowledge to interpret it in a common way (i.e., as funny, disappointing or sad). Even if we disagree, we know what is meant. Shared knowledge in humour serves as the initial and mandatory domain of knowledge (consisting of different knowledge sub-structures called 'frames') enabling the interpretation of jokes. Why something is perceived as a joke (*resulting domain*) depends on the shared knowledge (*source domain*). In the situations where the common source domain (i.e., shared knowledge) is not recognized, the humour in the message is not perceived even if the participants share a common language.

Shared knowledge might be (a) *implicit* (unconsciously determining the way things are judged) or (b) *explicit* (a part of the world view that the subject agent is aware of and can verbalize), (c) *culture-dependent* (in this case, shared socio-cultural and historical past is significant), or (d) *relatively culture-universal* (although culture-specific conventions and norms still matter, the knowledge necessary for interpretation of a humorous message is not based on the same socio-historical past).

The distinction between *Culture-dependent* vs. *Culture-universal* shared knowledge partially corresponds to Herbert Clark's (1996) distinction *communal shared ground* (referring to knowledge of cultural communities) vs. *personal common ground* (characterizing personal, perceptual, and relatively culture-independent content)[24].

Culture-dependent shared knowledge can be either *inside information* (knowledge that is mutually assumed by the members of a community) or *outside information* (knowledge that is assumed by a certain group A (outsiders) to be the shared inside information of another group B)[25].

Inside information contributes to the specific and sometimes idiosyncratic expert knowledge shared by a community. This includes (a) nationality-specific information about cultural practices, (b) residence-dependent information referring to local geography and its practices, (c) education-dependent information, (d) occupation- and employment-specific information, (e) hobby-related information, (f) language-specific knowledge (ranging from phonology to semantics), (g) religion-specific knowledge, (h) political knowledge, (i) ethnicity–specific knowledge, (j) subculture-specific knowledge characterizing the specific practices of subgroups, (k) age-specific knowledge, (l) gender-specific knowledge[26]. These different types of information (reflected in beliefs, assumptions, norms, conventions, practices, and skills) vary in each case and can and certainly do also overlap (see picture below).

SHARED KNOWLEDGE	
✓ socially shared past	✓ relatively culture-universal

↓ ↓ ↓ enables

HUMOUR
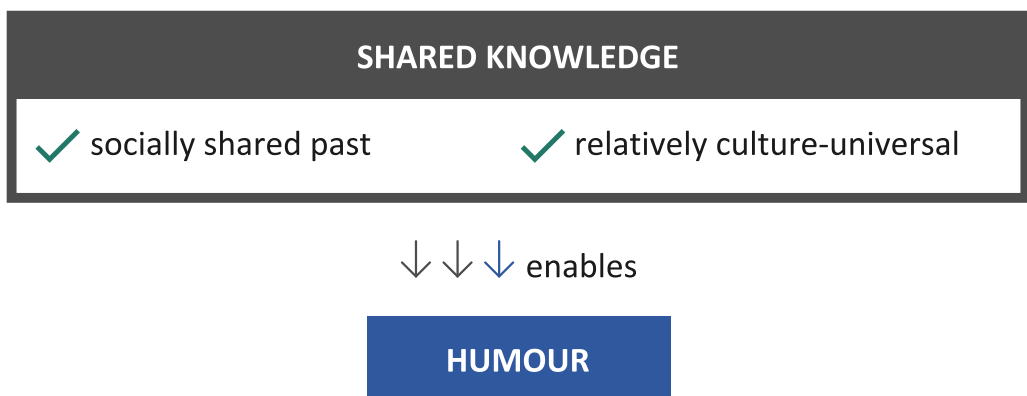
What might a more exact definition for *shared knowledge* be? We would like to define shared knowledge in line with Michael Bratman[27] who calls it *common knowledge*:

Let us assume that there are cognitive agents (they may be individuals or social groups and there can be more than two) A and B:

Shared knowledge – both in implicit and explicit senses – between A and B, concerning a proposition *p* is when:

(a) A knows that *p*;

(b) B knows that *p*;

(c) A knows that B knows that *p*;

(d) B knows that A knows that *p*;

(e) A is in epistemic position to know that (d);

(f) B is in epistemic position to know that (c).

SHARED KNOWLEDGE	
Culture-dependent	**Culture-universal**

Outside information	**Inside information**	
political	nationality-specific
residence-dependent	education-dependent
language-specific	religion-specific
age-specific	subculture-specific
gender-specific	ethnicity-specific
hobby-related	occupation and employment-specific
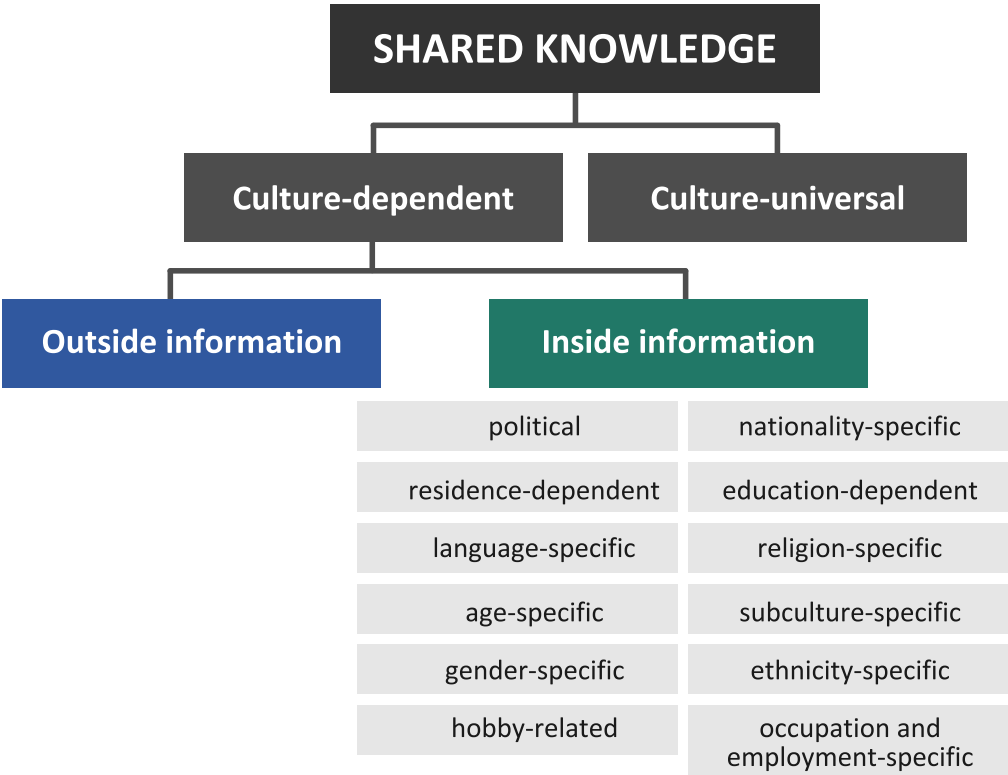
To put it in more comprehensive terms, shared or common knowledge is a "structure of interrelated cognitive aspects of the minds of relevant individuals"[28].

Sperber and Wilson also talk about shared context and shared information that are psychological assumptions (instead of a description of an actual state of the world) affecting the interpretation of utterances; these assumptions are expectations about the future, anecdotal memories, religious beliefs, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental states of other involved persons[29].

Even sharing the same language and the same inferential mechanisms does not necessarily mean having the same shared knowledge. The knowledge referencing the same situation in the world can be different to the degree that successful communication is impossible.

Further, the idea of shared knowledge and its impact on the perception of humour is consistent with Herbert Clark's concept of collective action. According to Clark[30], language use is one part of a highly structured sequence and network of actions.

These actions consist of the following interrelated and constitutive properties:

> (1) *Participants* fulfilling the interactive roles of at least one of:
>
>> (i) speaker,
>>
>> (ii) addressee,
>>
>> (iii) side participant
>>
>> (addressee and side participant can be either individuals or groups); all three can take on additional roles;
>
> (2) *Social processes* (an underlying social process coordinates communication and the steps it consists of);
>
> (3) *Collective actions* (participants are executing collective actions to accomplish the goals of social processes; the intentionality of action is established in coordinating and collaborating separate steps of communication – listening, reacting (speaking), etc.).

To enable these collective actions, shared knowledge is necessary. Furthermore, the message is adjusted according to and coordinated towards the audience. Comprehension of humour is a subtype of collaborative or joint action and therefore consists of the same three constitutive properties.

Shared knowledge at the group level sometimes enables joint commitments, shared values, agreements, different forms of patriotism and authority, and thus can serve as a goal-orienting tool in political communication[31]. Situations of shared knowledge tend to generate an implicit or explicit sense of solidarity and enhance ingroup factors.

Shared knowledge is a relatively *persistent* type of knowledge and is frequently induced by a shared past. However, sometimes that shared past is not personally experienced but transferred (and therefore typically transformed) by families, friends, and communities.

Shared knowledge provides *norms for judging and evaluating* things and also provides implicit criteria regarding what can be perceived as humorous. E.g., in authoritarian or totalitarian societies and fundamental religious communities, it is not appropriate to smile about certain persons, social institutions and principles. Therefore, the perception of humour can serve as an indicator of the normality of communication in particular and a society in general.

Shared knowledge and language: shared knowledge is a complex network of meanings and is only partially verbalized. Thus, a core feature of shared knowledge is semantic relatedness (polysemy), that determines the perception of humour contained in the message. Importantly – items of high ambiguity and distinctiveness are perceived as more humorous[32]. Further, extra-linguistic factors such as gestures, behaviour, and accompanying visual material shape the content of the message.

From the perspective of shared-ground theory in pragmatics (theory focusing of the use of language) – interpreting an utterance means linking it (a) to the shared knowledge and (b) to previous context. "Understanding an utterance involves the making of *inferences* that will connect what is said to what is mutually assumed or what has been said before."[33] If both conditions are satisfied, the results of the communication can be three-fold. Shared ground can result in:

    1. Finding something humorous; in which case it might be one of either:

        1.1. Agreement with the content of the message;

        1.2. Disagreement with the content of the message.

    2. Rejection of the message if the content of the message is radically contrary to the recipient's values, attitudes, knowledge; offensive interpretation.

1.1. and 1.2. contain a subversive buffer, but it is absent (or is rejected) in 2.

Humour not only uses but also extends shared knowledge. During the comprehension of humour, background knowledge can be modified or accumulated and a new meaning created[34]. Therefore, when using humour, a new interpretation of a situation can be presented.

Shared knowledge *unfolds* in a communicative situation (i.e., in the comprehension of humour) and can be classified in three parts[35]: (a) initial shared knowledge consisting of background assumptions, facts, and beliefs; (b) the current state of the joint activity; (c) public events (events that have been leading the communication to the current state).

At stage (b), the intention of the speaker is decoded while processing shared knowledge. Here we assume, according to Stephen Levinson, that "communication is a complex kind of intention [...]. In the process of communication, the 'sender's' communicative intention becomes **mutual knowledge** to both 'sender' (S) and 'receiver' (R), i.e., S knows that R knows that S knows that R knows [..] that S has this particular intention."[36]

In real-time settings, the communicative transition from initially shared knowledge to the communicative result is also linked to the tension between the given and new information[37] – in humour comprehension the new information is typically a contrasting frame of knowledge with respect to the given[38].

1.3.2. Efficiency of messages containing humour within the framework of shared knowledge

An established maxim is that when a message is perceived as humorous, two or more frames are shifted or integrated into a whole. Once this whole is perceived, the tension is resolved[39]. This, however, can be seen as a special case of a more general principle of the tendency towards cognitive relevance according to which "cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance"[40].
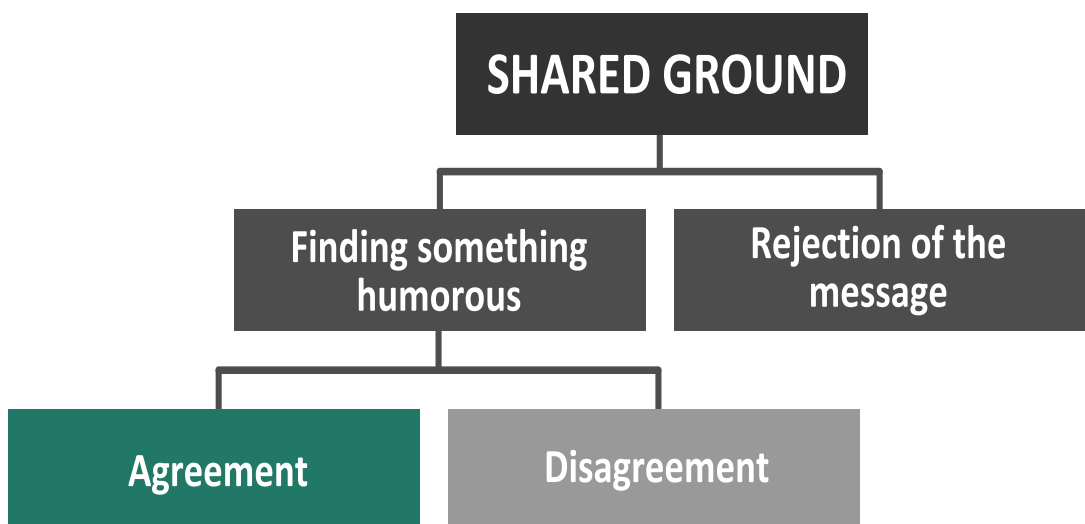
The resolving of tension when integrating two frames is an instance of relevance-generation processes, where a relevant message is defined as a message providing "some positive cognitive effect in one or more of the contexts accessible"[41] to an individual at a certain time. The greater the contextual effects based on shared knowledge, the greater the relevance[42].

Thus, the interpretation of a humorous message is not the simplest but the most relevant and most salient with respect to the shared knowledge of the participants; at the same time, during interpretation, the audience seems to prefer the interpretation that requires the least collaborative effort[43].

Humour comprehension is an efficient way of communication also because humour can contribute to social-contagion processes, especially, emotional contagion[44]. The emotional contagion effects of humorous messages can be clearly seen in large-scale digital social networks, e.g. *Facebook*, where memes with political or other content are liked, shared and distributed with clear, emotionally shaped meanings. (This, however, is a topic for a different, separate study.)

Collective emotions that are frequently induced by humour are typically linked to the underlying intentional structure of the communication. According to a recent study[45], collective emotions can serve as motivators or justifiers for joint actions and, in some situations, can trigger the intentions of particular subjects whereby motivating and justifying function of collective emotions can be prior to individual intentions. Collective emotions also contribute to the generation of a sense of mutual social support and belonging, reduce political or social dissonance, loneliness and exclusion, and therefore facilitate general social sense-making in communities by explaining and clarifying what is happening and why[46]. Emotions frequently contain uncertainty and ambiguity that can be resolved in a strategic way by expressing them verbally in a particular perspective, which can be modulated when articulated in a humorous way.

According to a study by Peters, Kashima, & Clark[47], people are more willing to share social anecdotes with emotionally shaped content than those whose content is neutral. This study also indicates that emotional social events tend to get transformed into the set of shared social beliefs of a community. An exception might be negative emotions (shame, fear or guilt) which people prefer not to share[48].

Emotions also support the persuasiveness of the message: polarizing, but at the same time, arousing (i.e., exciting or inducing anger) content is more efficient in terms of its persuasive potential[49].

1.3.3. Groups with features of temporarily extended shared agency

We agree with the view that cognitive processes – such as emotional attachment, humour processing – can be applied not only to individuals but also to groups[50]. Persuasion at the group level is more efficient because of social-contagion effects in emotional attachment and in the sharing and distributing of memories. Emotionally arousing valence (emotional value that can be either more positive, attractive, or more negative, aversive) seems to impact the efficiency of the perception of the message in the audience[51]. And shared memories or experiences generate a sense of belonging and at the same time reduce uncertainty[52]. However, to be clear on terminology, it is important to note that group members possessing *shared experiences* do not necessarily possess *shared (collective) memories*[53]. This is frequently the case in the post-Soviet region where the Russian-speaking audience is addressed by appealing to certain significant events or features from the past that can be experienced through the memories of close and significant others (e.g., family members).

Although there are different opinions of what comprises a 'group with socially shared agency', at least the following minimum conditions apply: the group should contain (a) *representational states* that represent things in the environment, (b) *motivational states* specifying how things should be in the environment, and (c) *processing capacity* for (a) and (b) that enables interaction with the environment[54]. It should be noted that (a) and (b) are intentional. In fact, goal-orientedness and intentionality seem to prevail over the accuracy and truthfulness of the message in groups with socially shared agency[55].

Groups involved in shared events of humour comprehension (e.g., communities watching TV shows) can have a shared social agency that is temporarily extended. It might also be the case that this shared agency does not persist (or persists to a lesser degree) once the event has ended. Even if there are differences or disagreements in opinions among the group members, there are socially shared (although frequently implicit) expectations and commitments. These are features of shared agency that enable the use of humour as a tool of strategic manipulation.

1.3.4. Coordination of goals and intentionality

All normal communication is intentional. Also in comprehending humour there are underlying structures of intentionality (social processes in the sense mentioned previously) that the speaker is implementing in collective actions taking place while processing humour. Each step (a collective action) of a humorous communication is a substructure of a larger intentional superstructure (social process) that can also be implicit or latent.

Thus, the coordination of intentionality is a hierarchic process where there are goals represented by social processes (eventually implicit) that are underlying concrete sub-goals – concrete collective actions.

Coordination of goals can occur in manipulating the shared knowledge, which (frequently together with the perception of a shared past) contributes to the generation of a sense of familiarity, solidarity, and belonging that in turn leads to ingroup effects. However, the sense of belonging and the commitment to shared content are gradable phenomena: different members of a community can feel different grades of commitment at different times. Nevertheless, a humorous message has to contain shared ground to function as a coordinating device[56].

Two levels of intentionality-coordination in humour comprehension can be distinguished: (a) public, explicit goals and (b) implicit goals.

Coordination of goals and intentionality
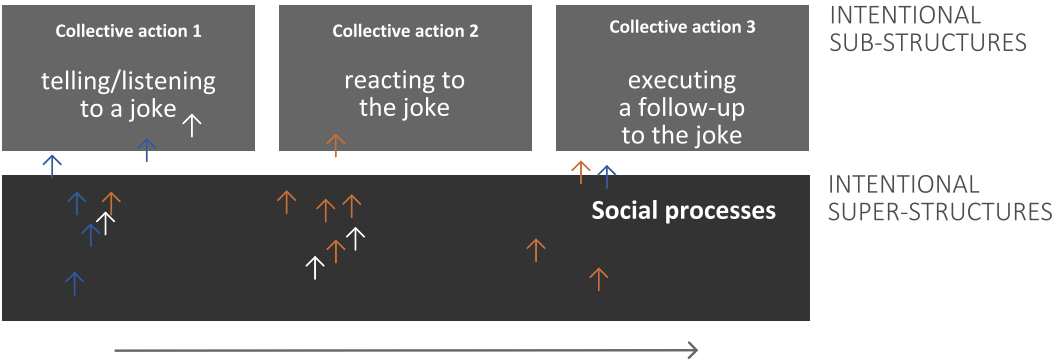
The public goals are the goals that the audience is aware of. For example, they may be official propaganda-machinery slogans. However, frequently social processes are coordinated by implicit goals that the audience is typically not aware of.

In interpreting a joke, an implicit, unconscious (or explicit which is rarely the case) adjustment to the content of the message takes place. This, in turn, creates an implicit sense of belonging or solidarity and eventually also emphasizes the differences between ingroup and outgroup members.

Humour, however, also has subtler and more complex effects – it is possible that the audience's knowledge is restructured, reorganized according to the results of the shifted or blended frames[57].

1.4. STRATEGIC AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

A crucial step in detecting the impact of a humorous message is **strategic audience analysis.** The following *general preventive analysis key-points* have to be distinguished, explored and strategically adjusted:

AUDIENCE
Existing political, religious impacts in the audience The degree of discrepancy between the content of message and the attitudes of the audience has to be taken into account. The message has to be adjusted to the audience to the degree that no radical conflict between opinions arises and therefore communication is not impaired.
Age Age seems to be a variable that is sensitive to the openness vs. closeness spectrum and can reflect substantial differences in general worldview, also influencing political opinions.
Sex The reactions of male and female subjects to humour vary with content. Certain messages induce considerably different reactions from male and female subjects (e.g., sexist jokes).
Degree of dependence on particular culture; Communities with a higher dependence on a particular culture may have a higher specificity in humour perception. Less culture-dependent communities have a wider range of humour that they are sensitive to. Therefore, less culture-dependent communities can have a greater potential for subversion in the way they comprehend humour.
Moral: restrictive, permissive. The scope of what is considered humorous is narrower in communities with more restricted moral standards. In order to prepare a humorous message for a society with restricted moral standards, potentially socially forbidden or unacceptable themes and topics have to be checked and avoided. In general, the more culture-dependent and restricted the audience, the smaller the range of humorous components that can be applied.

Additionally, the following more specific audience-characterizing factors can be identified according to Berger[58]:
Tie strength inside the audience Strong ties are the ties linking frequent communication partners, mutually trusted and directly known persons, whereas weak ties characterize acquaintances. Embarrassing content is less likely to be shared among those with weak ties. Strong ties in turn tend to contribute to the subject's self-concept and are therefore more relevant in impression management.
Audience size The degree of success with an audience depends also on its size: the larger the audience the harder it is to coordinate the message among the different opinions and attitudes. But at the same time, larger audiences generate stronger communicative-contagion effects. The larger the audience, the more perspectives are involved and therefore the message has to be adjusted to a degree that does not radically conflict with the background knowledge of the audience.

The previously mentioned components have to be considered and taken into account to reduce communicative *start-up costs* when launching a new act of communication. Starting up a new discourse requires a higher cognitive-processing load since the initial communicative grounding (i.e., the mutual belief that communicative partners have understood what was meant by a message for the particular purpose) has to be established[59].

1.5. PERCEPTION OF HUMOUR BY DIFFERENT GROUPS (INGROUP/OUTGROUP)

What makes one perceive something as being humorous? An easy and straightforward answer would be – what makes one laugh. The central issue in defining what makes an utterance, a cartoon, or an episode in a film humorous is whether it contains a cognitive component – something incongruent in its nature – that something usually being independent, like ideas, situations, or concepts we think about from different and independent perspectives[60]. In cases of humour arising from those seemingly non-fitting elements, some new, paradoxical, joyful combination emerges from those elements that makes people laugh. Yet, we know that not every paradox or unexpected combination of images leads to laughter, which would signal that humour was present. What facilitates something to become a member of the category labelled as 'humour'?

Whether we will perceive something as being humorous depends on the context of a joke, as well as on our own experience. Those two variables – *experience* and *context* – are united by our *identity*.

Positive social identity is something we may achieve by an appropriate way of joking. There are several prerequisites for this to happen – by perceiving the joke one has to identify with the character present in the joke, story, or film. Simplifying slightly, we are able to divide characters into winners and losers. We will perceive an event as being more humorous when we are able to identify more with the winner[61]. The psychological process of humour in this case can be explained by social identity theory, which holds that one basic human motivation is to achieve a positive part of the identity as a whole, particularly that part of identity which we derive from our ingroup[62]. Thus, an event which portrays an outgroup member in a substantially more negative light than an ingroup member will be perceived as more humorous. Humour can serve as the mediating link between identity and a positive self-image.

Among psychologists, William James[63] was the first to try to explain self-concept. According to James, the global Self is formed of two parts – the *I-self*, which in a way is the experiencing centre of the Self, and the *Me-self*, which forms the outer aspect of the Self, dealing with how others see one behaving. George Herbert Mead (1934), in his book *Mind, Self, and Society*[64], further developed the distinction between the concepts of the I-self and Me-self. Mead based his reasoning on Darwin's approach that both social and biological drives activate people's motivation to act. In the majority of cases, social relationships are essential to satisfy human needs like hunger or sex. Social relationships involve communication through gestures (for Mead, these may be either a movement of hands or verbal utterance). Frequently, those gestures are symbols representing something else. The aim of the communicator then should be described in pragmatic terms similar to the reasoning of James; the aim of communication will clearly be to cause the desired response by making the intended meaning as unambiguous as possible. Consequently, we can say that communication, in Mead's terms, is an ongoing process where the roles of both senders and receivers of a message have to be constantly switching. Communicated symbols to a large extent are deliberate, since they reflect the self-awareness of the communicator, because of that the communicator must know (or guess) how the communicated message (symbol) is being perceived by the other. It is the *Me-self*, a self-concept which results from reflective interpretation of the other's reactions. Consequently, the *Me-self* always has several perspectives from which to consider external reality. In other terms, a reality for a person may be interpreted as the co-existence of more than one possible perspective for perceiving this reality.

In analysing humour as a strategic communication tool, the theory of social comparison, describing basic rules of what happens when people become dependent on others to

achieve a grasp of external reality, is of crucial importance[65]. For instance, is what I am going to say funny? If external reality is ambiguous, people have to initiate the process of social comparison. This process is not so much a question of a kind of accuracy which defines some 'truth', it is more a need to achieve a state of social consensus – a socially shared reality or as in our case, what we call shared knowledge – it has to reflect an essence of the immediate world to achieve an effective social interaction. In this respect, humour can be only a collective phenomenon – it has to be communicated to someone who would appreciate the funniness of a joke.

Humans do not behave or think only as individual persons, we are 'social animals', we also share *social groups*. Those groups form a part of our *identity*. To explain, if we are asked ""who are you?" it is almost impossible to give an answer without indicating the groups we assign ourselves to. Yet, not all the groups we nominally belong to will be important at any given time[66], the very feeling of belonging to a group will affect the way we judge a group we belong to (*ingroup*) and a group we subjectively do not belong to (*outgroup*).

From the perspective of strategic communication, the following two groups, based on criteria (external and internal) elaborated by Tajfel[67], are of critical importance. External criteria are those imposed to people as belonging to a certain group from the 'outside'. On the other hand, internal criteria deal with group identification. To 'identify oneself' is to fulfil at least two criteria: there has to be a cognitive component – a person has to be aware of belonging to a group; another is an evaluative component dealing with value associations related to that awareness. Sometimes the emotional importance of awareness and evaluations are used as the third criterion, according to Tajfel. To perceive some individuals as a group from 'outside' does not necessarily mean that those individuals perceive themselves as being members of the same group. Internal and external group should both be defined to face an instance of intergroup perception/behaviour.

Today, Social identity theory (SIT), developed by H. Tajfel (Tajfel, 1981, Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is probably the most frequently employed theoretical background in social psychology for studying intergroup judgments and behaviour. *Social identity* is "that part of an individual's' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership"[68]. That is, social identity is what positions individuals in relation to different social categories (groups) within a society. SIT has several basic theoretical assumptions. *Firstly*, any behaviour we engage in on an everyday basis can be viewed as either interindividual or intergroup. In the case of interindividual behaviour, the interaction of individuals is based only on their individual qualities. On the other hand, intergroup behaviour is ruled purely by people's respective group membership. In reality, all human behaviour falls somewhere on a continuum between

interindividual and intergroup. In terms of humour – a person may construct a joke as an individual, or as a group member. Psychologically, those will not be identical processes.

There is also a very important consequence of identifying with a particular social group, the so-called *accentuation effect*. It posits that in terms of grouping stimulus objects, members of the same category are perceived as being more similar than they are in reality, while members of different categories are perceived as being more different than they

> *We will perceive an event as being more humorous when we are able to identify more with the winner.*

actually are. Thus, intercategory differences are overestimated and intracategory differences are underestimated. Thus, a good joke has to show that "they all are almost the same", yet "we are pretty different". *Thirdly*, there are a vast number of identities we derive from various social categories. As individuals we strive to achieve positive self-esteem, as group members we strive for a positive social identity. This implies that we have a tendency to positively evaluate those social categories to which we belong[69]. This process of evaluation of a social category (group) is connected to the fourth basic assumption of SIT – *comparison processes*. If we are aiming to obtain a positive social identity, we have to compare our ingroup to a relevant outgroup. To do this, one has to deal with two problems before these comparisons become feasible. Firstly, we have many potential referents of comparison; one has to be chosen from several available groups. In such cases, the selection of strategic audience described in Section 2 will assist. Secondly, we also need a dimension for this comparison, since there are no innate categories that can be used in the perception of the world. The categories we use are made accessible by the world (culture) we live in. Where humour is concerned – what are the groups we make jokes about? Which ethnic groups? Which nations? Which minority groups within our society?

Social identities may be positive or negative – what are the differences between the two? Striving for a positive social identity is commonly accomplished by a positive intergroup comparison – the ingroup is perceived to be better by some comparative measure. It is important to note that derogation of the outgroup is not necessarily a consequence of that. For instance, Mummendey and Schreiber[70] demonstrated that outgroup discrimination will be present only if there is no other alternative to having a high opinion of an ingroup, that is, it will be present only if the only way for the ingroup to achieve a positive image is at the expense of the outgroup.

Where a group accepts a negative social identity, it may defend the social system responsible for giving it this relatively low ingroup position.

Negative social identity may also lead to a sense of fatalism, which may inhibit social action, consequently – no social change is produced. It should be noted that, within the theoretical framework of SIT, the positive consequences of social identity have been studied more than negative ones. Yes, SIT states that people (groups) strive to achieve positive social identity through positive intergroup comparisons. Yet, studies have shown that this may come at a cost[71]. There are two kinds of costs, personal and social. Personal costs may be present in the form of greater demands being placed on individual group members by the group, since group pressure works in the direction of retaining greater group cohesiveness. That is, the price to be paid may be an individual's autonomy. On the other hand, at a social level, intergroup tensions and hostilities may arise as costs.

Then status of a group within a given context is a substantial variable of our everyday lives. Both justifications of group behaviours and justification of the social *status quo*[72] are traditionally approached as being important functions of stereotypes. What is more, as Hardin and Higgins[73] have stated, social consensus is crucial for the existence of stereotypes. According to Hardin and Higgins, for stereotyping effects to be strong, the stereotypes have to be socially shared. Where alternative beliefs are established and maintained in social communication, a certain set of stereotypes may become 'weaker'. Shared truth is very helpful in guiding interaction within groups. It is not assumed that a set of shared stereotypes has to be an undisturbed reflection of a reality; it is more of a consensus about the identity (as well of stereotypes) of different groups with respect to each other. We can go a step further and broaden the application of shared stereotypes to humour. The application of humour within intergroup relations would be similar to the one of stereotypes – (1) to provide a group with a positive social identity, and (2) to defend the status of the ingroup within a society. Looking at the interaction both within and between groups in terms of humour, we have to take into account the human ability of perspective-taking, since not everything that has the potential to be a joke will become a shared (or understood) joke within a group setting. Some aspects of perspective-taking theory will shed light on this process.

The term 'perspective' means the employment of a specific viewing angle (an analogy with visual perception). This means that it is impossible to obtain a complete mental representation of an object without taking (or imagining) different perspectives of that object. Which perspectives are employed is influenced by people's goals. During the flow of everyday life, one can be confronted by different situations, which may force a person to acknowledge that the 'reality' being perceived as 'real' is only one of the possible ways of thinking about it. To give an example, quite often we wish to argue with an outgroup member, and we want to prepare our arguments. This may cause us 'to see the world through their eyes' or 'to step into their shoes'. Or we may want to tell a funny joke to our ingroup members. In this case we have to imagine how the respective ingroup members will perceive the joke; we have to take their perspective.

Montgomery[74] has argued that perception of and thinking about an object are directly related to the adoption of a perspective, and this perspective has to satisfy interests related to the adopted point of view. Where humour is concerned – what will be perceived as being funny? will it fit in with our general knowledge (stereotypes) about certain groups? And of utmost importance – how will others perceive the joke one is going to communicate? This idea of adopting perspective in thinking has grown out of the pragmatic tradition. Perspective in this case is a mental position from which a person views (judges) an object. This

> **All human behaviour falls somewhere on a continuum between interindividual and intergroup. In terms of humour – a person may construct a joke as an individual, or as a group member.**

mental position may apply to addressing a group. It is supposed that an object (or a group) has a set of qualities, which are independent of the viewing perspective, yet, the chosen perspective influences which of the object's qualities become salient by coming into the foreground and consequently influencing the perceiver. More specifically, any given object, group or fact may be seen as being positive or negative depending on the perspective. The chosen perspective, however, depends on the interests of the moment: to think about an object from a certain perspective involves identifying oneself with certain interests, related to the person's goals. In the case of humour, those interests would be to reduce internal tension or external stress, so also maintaining a positive social identity. Where an object's features and our interests are congruent, the *inside* perspective of the object is chosen. An object is seen in relatively positive terms, the positive features of the object come to the foreground – this means that jokes have to be benevolent, complimentary, even flattering. In this way, the object is seen as agreeing with one's own interests and goals. Meanwhile, an *outside* perspective makes us think of an object as threatening and resisting our goals or interests. Or inversely, we take the outside perspective when judging an object if we perceive the object to be threatening our goals or interests. The object's negative features are now in the foreground and the object is evaluated more negatively. This is how jokes about an outgroup are often constructed – we have to run impression management of our ingroup since our goal is a positive ingroup image.

An important model of language use in social cognition in general and intergroup behaviour in particular has been proposed by Semin[75] and Semin and Fiedler[76]. Their basic assumption is that the process of social cognition is reflected in language. People generally use four categories to encode behaviour they make cognitions about: *descriptive action verbs* (DAV), *interpretive action verbs* (IAV), *state verbs* (SV), and *adjectives* (ADJ). DAVs denote a single behavioural event, where context is essential. The language employs an objective description of experienced events, which normally do not have positive or

> *Where a group accepts a negative social identity, it may defend the social system responsible for giving it this relatively low ingroup position.*

negative connotations (for instance, eat, visit), IAVs denote a class of behaviour which have positive or negative semantic connotations (for instance, cheat, help). SVs denote enduring mental/emotional states where reference to a social object, but not a situation, is important (for instance, like, hate). ADJs represent the highest level of abstraction encoded in language, abstraction prevailing over situation and context (for example, honest, impulsive). It is argued that in the domain of intergroup relations, the same behaviours are encoded at different levels of abstraction, depending on the positive or negative nature of the behaviour within the context of behaviour and whether the behaviour is implemented by an ingroup or outgroup member[77]. Behaviour which is socially desirable and displayed by ingroup members is described in more abstract terms than are the socially desirable acts of outgroup members. In the case of socially undesirable behaviour, the pattern of language use will be the opposite – more abstract terms will be used than for outgroup behaviour. This pattern of language use helps build and retain a positive social identity. In the realm of humour, it will mean that socially undesirable behaviour should preferably be encoded as ADjs, with a direct reference to the outgroup's set of negative stereotypes. This pattern of encoding (and communicating) jokes about an outgroup will also promote positive ingroup image, much more effectively than using DAVs.

1.6. FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR – IDENTIFYING THE MAIN ROLES HUMOUR PLAYS

Identifying the functions of humour is a necessary analytical exercise which offers grounds for the selection of the most effective tools, messages and tactics for reaching particular target audiences/groups. Different disciplines put forward functions more relevant to their research agenda. For instance, *Avner Ziv* considers the five most important ones to be: (1) aggressive, to achieve superiority and as a response to frustration; (2) sexual; (3) social; (4) defensive, as black/gallows humour and self-directed humour; and (5) intellectual[78]. *Roe A Martin* puts forward three groups of psychological functions for humour, such as "(1) its cognitive and social benefits; the positive emotion of mirth, (2) uses of humour for social communication and influence, and (3) tension relief and coping"[79].

For methodological purposes, we will list and categorize the functions of humour which are the most relevant to strategic communication and how they can be identified in the empirical case analysis. These functions represent the diversity of domains where humour has the greatest capacity for impact and allow the purpose of the humour and how that is applicable to different audiences to be identified. We argue that almost all functions of humour are interlinked and that the categorization presented here is more an analytical exercise rather than an all-embracing concept. As a result of the shared ground and mechanisms of subversion generation, the following basic functions of humour can be differentiated:

1.6.1. Functions of persuasion and strategic-image construction

Image construction – (positive, negative, self and others) can be expressed in different ways. For instance, Latvians telling jokes about Estonians construct an image of slow but smart ethnicity. Well-planned comedy shows could assist in constructing images of different politicians, political parties or other groups.

Convincing and persuading.
Humour can assist in defining arguments with different meanings, thus leaving space for manoeuvring when straight language does not help.

1.6.2. Functions of Cultural Interaction

Cultural interaction.
Humour is a cultural phenomenon. Telling jokes means communicating within the same cultural environment. Cultural interaction serves as shared ground and later evolves into new circles of cultural exchange among the actors. Humour as a cultural interaction is very closely linked with the other functions of humour. In its own manner, it creates material and non-material environments for producing and consuming humour. Cultural settings provide criteria for understanding and evaluating humour.

1.6.3. Functions of Aggression, Offence/Defence

Humour as a defence mechanism in war and conflict situations.
When individuals or groups experience massive suffering at the hands of an aggressor and use humour as a tool which helps survive hardship and injustice. Frequently in such cases, individuals laugh at enemies or their negative characteristics and use laughter to humiliate them[80]. For instance, jokes about either the war-theatre situation or about their enemies are very widespread among military personnel.[81]

Aggression/offence.
Not usually the function associated with humour. Evolution-oriented scientists assume that humour is a civilized version of the expression of anger or aggression towards others; we may channel our anger[82]. Humour promotes the subjective comfort of a person – it transforms inner tension, inner conflict into the pleasure of laughter. This theoretical perspective states that the power of laughter will be positively correlated to the tension it reduces. However, in day-to-day politics, aggressive or offensive messages are delivered in order to gain attention, to minimize the role of a political leader or regime. One example of causing offence is Jan Boehmermann, a German TV comedian who wrote a poem about Turkish president Recep Erdogan, which later caused tension between Germany and Turkey.

1.6.4. Functions of Knowledge Accumulation and Problem Solving

Source of social information.
Through social interaction, individuals can acquire specific information about what is considered wrong and right in a group of people, what are its shared values and moral principles, what are the social roles in the societal structure, what are the issues which cannot or can be sources of laughter. The essence of humour is rooted in communication, therefore humour in communication among social agents offers different perspectives, it is more attractive, engaging, empathy-based, and shared ground develops a sense of belonging to a particular group.

Accumulating social capital.
A network of more or less formalized relations that are generated by humour which is based on shared knowledge. These networks foster the formation of communities with their own support systems, communication codes, specific mutual relations. Networks also generate emotional contagion effects. The function of social capital works particularly well in situations when humour becomes institutionalized and applied for strategic purposes (for instance, the KVN case presented by Solvita Denisa-Liepniece).

Developing social skills.
It is also consequence of the previous functions. With the assistance of humour, certain social skills can be taught and learned in formalized, socially constrained (regular, public-financed TV shows, organizations, institutional strategies) and non-formalized ways.

Educational.
This refers to different aspects of education, including building atmosphere in classrooms, applying humour in teaching methods, advancing relations between teachers and students, drafting teaching materials and textbooks (Maritin, 2007)[83].

Constructing exit strategies/problem solving.
Humour with its innovative and creative character, as well as its stress-relief capabilities, can serve as a tool for finding solutions in complicated situations. For instance, the mushrooming appearance of comedy shows with a political context in Ukraine after 2014 is an example of this.

1.6.5. Functions of Belonging and Social Balance

Psychological adjustment.
The ability of an individual to cope with the demands of the socio-environmental context as well as with the stress created by these demands. In other words, psychological adjustment characterizes the ways an individual adapts to a changing environment. Humour can play an important role at individual and group levels, particularly when the external environment is hostile[84].

Stress-relief.
Humour helps a person adapt to difficulties in cases where the 'natural' way of reacting would be expressing sadness or being afraid, people occasionally reframe the situation in humourous terms[85]. By this mechanism, a joke produces the illusion of being less vulnerable, which is considered to be a healthy, so-called psychological mechanism of defence. This mechanism of producing/perceiving humour is highly dependent on the perceived degree of ability to change the environment. One example from recent history – the culture of political jokes was particularly well-developed in Communist countries where there were almost no opportunities to influence the political agenda, while there were almost no political jokes in Western democracies[86]. This idea has been tested in both laboratory and field settings – making something funny reduces stress. And vice versa – if something reduces stress, it is perceived as being funnier[87].

The sense of belonging to a particular community and sense of social solidarity – the function of humour that can be observed in the jokes that a group tells about itself.

1.6.6. Functions of expressing or oppressing political freedom

Expression of freedom.
A function of humour which was very widely used in the Soviet Union. Numerous jokes about political leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev or Leonid Brezhnev became part of the inner freedom of individuals. If there were no opportunities to criticize politics and the political establishment, then laughter became a substitute for political freedom[88].

Support for or justification of agenda setting – (political, social, individual, groups). Several aspects of agenda setting can be considered. One is related to politicians' speeches and statements when humour is used to 'relieve' the content of policy and convince voters to support an adopted or proposed political decision. Another perspective is linked to different comedy shows which strongly influence their societies, their political attitudes and preferences. Examples include *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart, Saturday Night Live, KVN* and others[89].

Legitimization of the existing political establishment.
Mostly performed in non-democratic regimes as a tool of political influence aiming to the control and containment of society. Even if some features of the political establishment are portrayed in a critical light, they are presented in a 'soft' manner and with positive connotations. Many examples of this function can be found in KVN shows.

Legitimization of the superiority of an individual/leader.
This function is similar to the previous one but the main object of humour is a political leader. Humour serves to increase social status or reinforce the existing one[90].

1.7. COMMUNICATION OF HUMOUR

The next component of the study's analytical framework is the communication of humour – a multifaceted process examining several aspects, including: message content, how the message is delivered, what are the channels and what results might be expected.

The core component of communicative act is a message[91], which has a multilevel and multidimensional structure. Not only message content, but also the way the message is delivered determines its impact. Additionally, a complex interaction between the author and the audience occurs where the communicative reference to the objects in the content of the message is established. Furthermore, ae variety of media settings determines the impact of the message. Message if defined simple contains the following aspects:

Message[92]

1. Occurrence/performative mode of the message (including subversive buffer).

This component refers to the process of how the content of the message is presented to the audience. Visual and behavioural information is also included. The most important result of humorous messages in terms of their performative mode is their subversive buffer.

2. Content of the message.

This is the propositional information that is to be communicated. The propositional information is the content of the message that can be expressed in declarative sentences and can be either true or false depending whether these sentences are mapping onto states of affairs in reality or not.

3. Utterer/author.

Utterers or authors can be either individuals or groups of persons. They may also be mediating persons (e.g., somebody presenting a message created by another person or group of persons).

4. Qualities.

According to the model of Semin[93], the positive qualities of an ingroup, as well as the negative qualities of an outgroup have to be communicated as adjectives, which will lead to both a higher level of perceived humour in a message and a more positive ingroup image.

The *principle of minimization of collaborative effort (or: least collaborative effort)[94]* applies to both the audience and the message: participants prefer the interpretation that requires a lesser collaborative effort, starting from the initiation of the act of communication until the acceptance (or rejection) of the message. There are different reasons why the principle of minimization of collaborative effort is so important. Although from a more comprehensive perspective it can be considered an instance of the general structural tendency of cognitive processing towards simplicity[95]. In concrete communicative situations, factors such as time pressure, ignorance and idiosyncrasies in interpretation force the audience to choose the interpretation that requires a lower processing load.

Another important component of a message is the *establishment of reference to certain objects (persons, things or events)*. Understanding the referential identity is a precondition for the ability to interpret the message, make the content entertaining or fill in conversational space and further to manage the audience's impressions. Establishing referential identity is a process where the signalling of a single or complex identity takes place and mutual belief is generated on the identification of an object.

According to Clark & Brennan[96] and also Berger[97], there can be at least four reference-establishing processes:

> (a)   *Alternative descriptions.* This is a process consisting of three stages. At stage I, an object is described by participant A; then at stage II, participant B provides an alternative interpretation but, at the same time, is implicitly asking the other participant to accept or confirm that interpretation (which might be humorous, intentionally deviating from the initial description); finally, at stage III, for a successful communication, participant A implicitly or explicitly accepts participant B's description. Alternative descriptions are a powerful technique of reference generation, because they correspond to a core principle of communicative interaction – the co-referential coherence generation that occurs in using co-referential links (e.g., anaphors).

(b)   *Indicative gestures* are a communication process where a partner can be visually observed while communicating. Pointing, touching and looking are examples of this kind of reference establishment.

(c)   *Referential instalments* are a process where the identity of a referent is established before it is explored in more detail. The advantage of referential instalment is the simplification of the rest of the communication (because the audience now explicitly knows what is being discussed). Without referential instalment, it can be difficult or impossible to understand the content of the message.

(d)   *A trial reference is* a process where reference generation occurs in mid-utterance. This is frequently the case when speakers are unsure whether their description is correct (or whether they are referring to the correct person) and are asking the audience to confirm their view. This can also be used as an intentional tool to involve the audience, which is important because, once the audience is involved, further coordination of the communication and persuasion is easier.

If the reference is not established, the message is not perceived or is perceived partially (e.g., without understanding the humorous connotations and thus without capturing the subversive buffer)[98]. However, depending on the concrete act of communication, establishing a referential identity can be strategically coordinated and also manipulated by emphasizing the humorous dimensions of the message.

Finally, different grades of plausibility are assigned to a message according to inside or outside, shared ground information. Certainly, some information is perceived as more plausible or truthful (in a particular situation and from a particular speaker) than others. Therefore, the plausibility and humorousness of the message are different, although related features.

According to Herbert Clark[99], different communicative settings can be distinguished; in our approach they serve as the categories and constraints for further media analysis (depending on media channels and their audiences).

1.7.1. Media settings[100]

Basic media settings[101]; core distinction: spoken vs. written media. Spoken media typically do not allow the content of the message to be edited because of real-time, turn-taking sequences. Written media are typically editable.

1. *Personal vs. non-personal settings.* Personal settings are more closely linked to attentional and interactional processes and refer to the concrete knowledge backgrounds of the communication partners, whereas non-personal settings concern relationships with typically larger audiences consisting of a variety of different knowledge backgrounds. In non-personal settings, the common perspective has to be established in a typically longer communication process.

2. *Institutional settings.* According to its institutional settings, a communication might be more or less formal. Institutional settings typically involve additional conventions and norms. If institutional settings are formal they are typically restrictive and the potential for a message to have a subversive buffer is smaller.

3. *Prescriptive settings.* Prescriptive settings characterize information concerning how certain activities have to be performed, what is prohibited and what allowed. Prescriptive settings typically contain normative information.

4. *Fictional settings.* Non-real or imaginary contents are communicated within fictional settings. Shared ground contains information about these persons, events or objects that do not exist in the physical world. Fairy-tale characters typically belong to fictional settings.

5. *Mediated settings.* Mediated settings include at least one communication channel and a medium. This type of setting is indirect and non-personal, and characterizes large-scale communicative situations involving TV, radio, newspapers, docial networking and the internet.

6. *Private settings (without addressing anyone else).* Monologues, note-taking are typical for private settings.

Non-basic media settings[102]:

1. *Co-presence*. Participants share the same physical surroundings and can see and hear actions that are executed in the same context; the best example is face-to-face communication.

2. *Visibility.* Situations where participants can see each other without necessarily being in the same place.

3. *Audibility*. Situations where participants can hear each other and therefore can recognize and react to intonation and pauses.

4. *Instantaneity*. Situations where the perception of each other's actions occurs without a perceptible delay. This setting requires readiness to react without reviewing the message. Accordingly, errors and faults can have a higher cost in this setting (one failure is likely to induce another one). Situations of instantaneity typically correspond to *extemporaneity* (formulation and execution of actions in real time).

5. *Evanescence* characterizes the speed at which the medium fades. E.g., spoken speech is evanescent if not recorded. In rapidly evanescent media, it is more difficult to coordinate interaction with the audience but the advantage is that smaller failures are more easily forgotten. Highest-degree evanescent communicative situations are *recordless* (i.e., participants' actions leave no record); the comprehension of humour in this setting is a 'here and now' phenomenon.

6. *Simultaneity*. These are situations where participants can produce and receive messages simultaneously. Visible communication frequently includes simultaneous gestural or facial reactions to a verbal message; e.g., A is smiling while B is talking.

7. *Self-determination and self-expression*. This category characterizes (a) the ability to determinate what actions have to be taken and when, and (b) the execution of the actions themselves. Usually informal situations have a high degree of self-determination and self-expression.

8. *Spatial or temporal delay*. Although not explicitly distinguished as separate type of media setting in Clark's framework, spatial or temporal delay can have a significant impact on the process and result of the communication. Participants can revise, delete, modify, and improve their messages and, thus, strategically better coordinate communicative turn-taking in spatially or temporally delayed communication. However, delay can have a very different impact in real-time or face-to-face communication – longer delays may indicate a speaker's anger or confusion and can distract the flow of a communicative event.

The communication of humour is therefore a situation-dependent, multidimensional structure containing a message that depends on internal communicative processes such as reference establishing and coordinating, but also on a variety of media settings and situational features constraining and transforming the impact of the humour. Although each of the categories mentioned above can be used as an analysis variable and trends for successful humour communication can be defined, there are no universal principles for success in communicating humour.

To sum up, the five main components of humour as a strategic communication tool – shared knowledge, strategic target audience, perception, functions/roles and communication – should be measured against the achieved result – outcome. A more formalized schematic of the analytical framework is presented in the drawing below.

Humour as a strategic communication tool
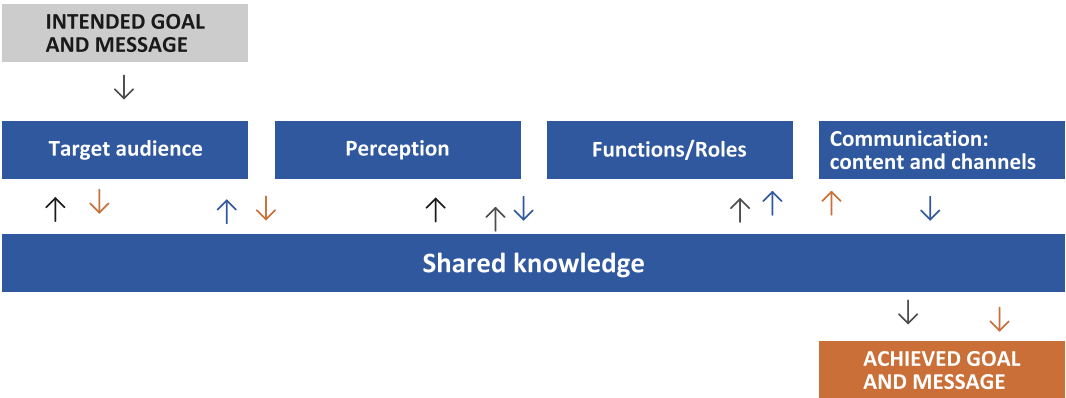
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CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY: LATE-NIGHT SHOWS ON PERVIY KANAL AND DISCREDITATION OF WESTERN POLITICAL LEADERS

Sigita Struberga

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This case study looks at how Russian television uses humour as a support mechanism for strategic communications with its audience, specifically on the issue of Western leaders, and endeavours to determine the essence of the core message. To do this, various Russian *Perviy Kanal* (Первый Канал/ Channel One) entertainment broadcasts specializing in comedy will be analysed.

Recent studies of Russian media content reveal a great emphasis on entertainment, different forms of which are present in almost all the content offered to audiences[1]. As the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media of Russian Federation has acknowledged, the structure of the content of the major Russian TV channels has not changed noticeably and it is possible to speak about "a genre-thematic model of national television, which is unlikely to change soon"[2]. According to *Analytical Center Vi*, who studied the broadcasts of the major national TV channels over the past five years, serials and entertainment took up almost half of broadcast time in 2015, the same as a year earlier (both 21%; 22% and 21%, respectively in 2014)[3].

Russian television comedy shows cover a wide range of genres: stand- up shows, late night shows, sitcoms, benefits[4], sketch shows as well as quiz shows. *Perviy Kanal* broadcasts the entire range of these entertainment programme sub-genres. The study will analyse four entertainment shows with elements of humour: *Prozhektorperishilton*[5], *Yesterday Live*[6], *Vecherniy Urgant*[7] (Вечерний Ургант/Evening Urgant) and *MaksimMaksim*[8] (МаксимМаксим). All these programmes fully or partly fit the sub-genre of late night shows[9]. The structure of these shows is distinguished by its hybridity, which allows the inclusion of different types of humour in a combination of soft news[10] and entertainment content. Their common structure consists of different jokes, sometimes video sketches as well as interviews with local and foreign celebrities.

An integral part of these programmes is political humour, including jokes about foreign countries and their leaders. Traditionally, these jokes are included in the news section, but may appear in other segments.

In addition, the programmes here can be fully or partly considered as offshoots of KVN (comedy quiz show *Klub vesjolih i nahodchivih* (Клуб веселых и находчивых/ Club of the cheerful and facetious)), as numerous former KVN personalities (nicknamed ka-veenshiki/квнщики) present these programmes. The scriptwriters and production team also feature many former KVN staff[11]. Furthermore, three of the four programmes (the exception being *Vecherniy Urgant*) are produced by the *Krasniy Kvadrat*[12] (Красный квадрат/ Red Square) media company.

Another common aspect is that a whole industry has been created around these shows[13]. This includes specially built fan websites, live shows (with the participation of the presenters of these broadcasts)[14] as well as a complex of related enterprises. Besides being a very profitable industry in itself, it also provides support functions to media discourses. For example, the *Vecherniy Urgant* audience can communicate with programme producers via the official web-site http://urgantshow.ru or social networks – *Vkontakte*, *Facebook* or *Instagram*. Viewers can get detailed information about episodes, comment on them, enter various competitions or even get involved in the production of episodes. But a mysterious aura has been created around the programme hosts, inducing viewers to take an interest in their biographies, private lives and activities. Articles and rumours about them are integral to this aura and their cult status[15], as for celebrities in general.

The period selected for the analysis is May 2008 to July 2016. There are several reasons for this choice. Firstly, this period coincides with the beginning and end dates of the television broadcasts that are being analysed here[16]. Secondly, a number of international events influencing both the worsening and improvement of relations between the West and Russia occurred within this period. That makes it possible to monitor whether and how the dynamics of these relations affects the content of the media entertainment discourse in relation to Western countries. Thirdly, during the period studied, there were two elected national leaders (Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev), so it is interesting to see whether the jokes told about these personalities in the selected comedy programmes have anything in common and what differences there were, if any. Fourthly, the study of the ever growing number of television comedy shows characterizes the developments in this genre on Russian television over the past eight years.

The analytical framework that will be used was developed by Ivars Austers, Jurģis Šķilters and Žaneta Ozoliņa and utilises five steps. In line with this framework, the first chapter will clarify the context and background which are important for this analysis. This will be followed by an analysis of the strategic audience and the specifics of its perception of the media. The next chapter analyses programme content to show how Western

political leaders are portrayed. In contrast, the subsequent steps of the analysis will discuss the functions of humour and the most important aspects of the communication process characteristic of comedy shows.

The method for gathering data from the content of the four selected programmes is qualitative content analysis[17]. In this study, it functions as an instrument to explore the meanings underlying actual messages. It is inclusive, grounding the examination of topics and themes, as well as the inferences drawn from them, in the data. The aim of this approach is not to count the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts or concepts, rather it pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon[18]. That means that this case study will focus on the essence of messages about Western political leaders featured in the four analysed comedy shows.

2.2. CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE

Political humour has an impressive history in Russian culture, dating back to the 17th Century[19] or even earlier, when the function of court jesters was to alleviate mutual tension and aggression[20]. Thus, humour has always also had a political dimension in Russia[21]. During the post-Soviet period, political engineers saw humour as a means of influencing the masses. In that case, television was the most convenient platform for achieving this influence[22]. Today, this approach has developed massively and has been fitted into the common net of the state system as a support mechanism for political propaganda and effective public influence.

Many media analysts have concluded that television in Russia has become one of the most important links in the chain of state administration[23]. It "holistically shapes the content of human capital, thereby actively influencing various areas of people's lives. [...] This institution is an unprecedented one when we take into consideration the number of functions it performs, including the creation and popularization of the basic concepts and meaning of life"[24]. In addition, it has the capacity to influence the construction and imposing of values, attitudes, ideals, and desired models of society and state structure, as well as the ideals and orientations of viewers[25]. Furthermore, television content is used as a tool for breaking down the critical thinking of viewers[26].

One can conclude that the circulation of formal and informal messages within the media is a rather complex process, lacking transparency and often being intentionally blurred. On the one hand, this is because of the national government's pressure on media workers[27]. *"The state plays a triple role for television: it owns its infrastructure, it owns directly some television channels and it is a regulatory authority"*.[28] One such example is the company *Krasniy Kvadrat* (see Annex 5, page 80). On the other

hand, self-censorship and other forms of pressure are undoubtedly present. For example, Aleksander Filipenko, one of the scriptwriters of the programmes analysed in the case study has acknowledged, that "in *Perviy*[29], of course, you could not joke about *certain* (*ponyatniye/понятные*) things. […] No one comes and tells you: that is not allowed. All the censorship occurs within yourself, you yourself realize, that it does not make sense to put in certain types of joke. They will not be approved anyway or will be taken out[30]. In this context, Stephen Hutchings and

> The state plays a triple role for television: it owns its infrastructure, it owns directly some television channels and it is a regulatory authority.

Galina Miazhevich have described the situation at *Perviy Kanal* as "remaining almost entirely subservient to the authoritarian state that payrolls it, staffs it and determines its broadcasting policies and output"[31].

Fierce internal competition does exist, which is supplemented by the entry of competitive, external Western media into the Russian market, as well as by the increasing popularity of new media[32]. In 2015, in addition to more than 20 national channels, a large number of thematic and regional channels operated in the Russian television market. The latter are mainly offered by subscription-based television service providers. Consequently, as shown by data from *Analytical Centre VI*, urban households in Russia have access to over 50 different channels. In addition, the number of people who prefer to watch television through new types of media is growing rapidly. For instance, in 2015, 43% of the adult population in cities chose to watch films, TV shows or broadcasts online[33]. These developments affect the mutual competition characteristics of the advertising market and television channels as participants thereof. Even *Perviy Kanal* and *Rossiya* (Россия) – the channels directly owned by the state – obtain as much as 50% of their revenue from advertising, which strongly influences their content[34].

In addition, the government's stated interest in attracting Russian-speaking viewers beyond national boundaries requires that the Russian media work on modernizing itself, while simultaneously maintaining significant elements serving the needs of the regime, such as maintaining its role as a propaganda tool. Thus, despite the considerable constraints – a mixture of market forces, state ownership, obstacles to media freedom and the challenges of media convergence[35]– the media have to maintain some degree of credibility and keep up with developments in the contemporary global media space.

This complex process has resulted in Russian entertainment shows being based on Western models[36]. Thus, a casual look at the content on offer gives the impression that it does not differ significantly from that of western European TV channels.

Screenshot, the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Screenshot, Vecherniy Urgant

Several programmes are very similar to popular broadcasts in the West (starting from the *Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* or *Saturday Night Live* to *MadTV*). Unsurprisingly, there is an US media specialist involved in production at *Vecherniy Urgant* with experience of similar productions in his homeland[37]. *Prozhektorperishilton* has been described as an adaption of the German comedy show *7 Tage, 7 Köpfe,* whereas the scriptwriters of *Yesterday Live* have acknowledged, that it is an adaption of the American late-night live sketch-comedy show *Saturday Night Live.* However, what distinguishes the Russian version are certain common features, explained below, that sustain the pro-Kremlin oriented media discourse.

One of the most characteristic features is the blurring of borders between fact and fiction. Also, no less important is the concealment of information or its presentation in a form which alters its content, which can be used as a manipulative technique.

Moreover, often the presentation of information or opinions is in the form of *shared knowledge*. This means the extensive use of pronouns such as *we; we all; we, the state; we, the nation,* which is common to the discourse of *Perviy Kanal* and Russian television in general[38]. For example, the achievements of Russian athletes are used and interpreted as victories of the entire nation in all four shows analysed in this case study.

Another important feature is the *conservation of the former Soviet consciousness* of the audience. Private property is portrayed as something nefarious and immoral. People are not assigned any value as individuals. In this discourse individuals are presented as the object of care: they are assumed to be unable to provide for themselves, with limited abilities in general and, through their nature, bear no responsibility for their own personal lives[39]. Meanwhile, the paternal presence of the Head of State and his supposed concern for the wellbeing of ordinary people is perceived as sufficient justification for restricting the ideals of democracy. But where the media and independent journalism are concerned, one finds indifference, even hostility among the Russian population[40].

The next feature is the attempt to develop *positive self-representation,* where the opposites *us* versus *them* are actively employed. In addition to the features mentioned above, the emphasis is on tradition and traditional values as guarantees of national survival. With the direct or indirect activation of family, gender and other similar stereotypes, the creators of the programme make viewers aware, sometimes even from meanings *written between the lines*, of the differences between conservative Russia and multicultural and tolerant Europe. Thus, this special set of conservative values becomes an integral part of the basic concept on which the comedy programmes are based, thus aligning naturally with the wider media discourse.

In general, the outside world is seen as hostile, not to be trusted. This is portrayed in several forms. This narrative is frequently employed when describing the relationships of the Russian nation with external players. In the same way, as in the Soviet era, today it is also assumed that other countries, especially the democratic West, not only have no interest in Russia's development, but are even hostile to and actively working against the state's interests. Thus, Russia is portrayed as a fortress surrounded by hostile forces whose influence must be resisted[41]. In the case of the analysed comedy shows, this was particularly well seen during Russia's sharp reaction to discussions about the construction of a missile-defence system in Central and Eastern Europe.

In this context, the special place given to understanding the *mysterious Russian soul* and Russian *high culture* as the unifier of the *Russian world* should be emphasized, thus making these concepts particularly vulnerable to manipulation. A no-less topical element is the emphasis on the *common historical memory* that unites all Russian-speakers. Not only is this artificially maintained by using elements of Soviet history, but also shaped in accordance with the needs of the regime through the process of *implementing the nation project*[42].

Screenshot, MAKSIMMAKSIM 04.06.2016

An interesting example of the selective use of common historical elements is the 30 May 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, when the famous Soviet actor Veniamin Smehov said that "we are not the country of Ivan the Terrible or Nikolai I, but the country of Pushkin, Brodski ..." and underlined Russian culture as the extraordinary feature Russians possess, as well as pointing out that culture's superiority[43].

Another feature is the maintenance of shared memories and shared rituals that supposedly combine Soviet and contemporary elements. This is highly visible during interviews with guests invited to appear on the shows (especially *Vecherniy Urgant)*. Many of these are celebrities who have remained popular since Soviet times, and they perform popular songs of that era that remain well known. Often jokes and allusions are also borrowed from the USSR's *classic hits.* They include popular Soviet songs, books, poems and films, elements of cultural heritage, which take the audience back to the Soviet past and remind them about the myths and images of that period. This allows the construct of the former Soviet space to be maintained, while emphasizing those elements of the Soviet value system which are convenient to the current regime[44].

People are told that those wanting to get away from the old constraints and become more liberal are, in fact, acting as 'enemy agents' (a very specific term which, as during the Soviet period, has a particularly negative connotation), even if they may not actually be aware of it[45]. In a similar vein, popular Russian sayings such as *the one who is with me, is a hero (kto so mnoi, tot geroy/кто со мной, тот герой) or those who are not with us, are against us (kto ne s nami, tot protiv nas/кто не с нами, тот против нас)* are frequently heard in the analysed shows (particularly when Georgia or the Baltic States are being discussed), as well as being common in the media discourse[46].

To some extent, this can be compared to a peculiar type of proto-feudal consciousness, where Russian cultural matrixes have been so adapted to the new conditions[47] that most of the public sees this as a model of democracy unique to Russia and the only one able to ensure its prosperity and development.

Another feature of the discourse highlighted by media analysts is related to the depiction of social structure and interpersonal interaction[48]. The social environment is depicted as if relationships between individuals and groups were regulated by a strict, prison-like hierarchy, as if the meaning of individual honour and dignity were the same as a prisoners' code of conduct, as if being cheated and similar treatment were the norm. In this situation, even the use of criminal slang is accepted as normal[49]. Such use of criminal slang is also expanded to jokes about Western leaders. This is especially present in the content of *Yesterday Live,* when former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is the object of ridicule and his connection to the world of crime is hinted at.

These and other similar discursive peculiarities enable these entertainment broadcasts to transform the time and space axis into a very peculiaStratr hybrid form – on the one hand allowing it to move back into the past, but on the other – to expand it spatially to unprecedented levels so as to cover not only the former Soviet Union countries, but extending its influence even further. This ensures that the convenient elements of the Soviet and early post-Soviet value system can be retained and reconstructed, new constructs can also be created. Thus, the external frames of contemporary Western television are placed into an alien environment and provide an opportunity for building bridges between the modernity offered by the West and Soviet morality, as well as between the two different cultures, while creating a new, adapted media space, which reaches a wide range of Russian-speaking audiences all over the world.

2.3. STRATEGIC AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Despite new media entering the Russian market, television still occupies a major place. Therefore, one can say that TV can help reach the majority of the Russian population[50]. Moreover, television content in Russia holds an influential position not only as a direct information and entertainment source for viewers, but also because it has succeeded in attracting other media audiences both through modernization (e.g. new media users accessing TV products[51]), and the decreasing roles of print media and radio[52]. As the *Levada Center* has concluded: "Russian television – and the three state channels in particular – today have an almost unbreakable monopoly in setting the country's socio-political agenda"[53].

In addition to the news, the most popular genres among Russian viewers are serials, entertainment programmes and feature films. As Jil Daugherty and Riina Kaljurand have pointed out: "Russian TV is often described as *propaganda*, but, in reality, it is a couch potato dream: an attractive, even mesmerising mix of frothy morning shows, high-decibel discussion shows, tear-jerker serials and song-contests – peppered with news bulletins and current events shows that toe the Kremlin line[54]". Statistics show that serials and entertainment programmes took almost half of broadcasting time in 2015 (also in 2014)[55].

In addition, according to data from the TNS company, in 2014 seven of the ten most popular TV broadcasts in Russia were entertainment. Explanations of this trend often simplify it by assuming that viewers are tired of politics and serious informative-analytical programmes. However, such an approach fails to explain several important contextual aspects of audience characteristics, which result in demand for specific media content. To identify these characteristics, it is necessary to consider not only the viewing figures for traditional media, but also several other factors influencing viewers' tastes.

Perviy Kanal is the most watched TV channel in Russia. 95% of its general audience are Russian adults, most of whom are women (69%). The largest age group represented is adults aged over 25. Retired people also comprise a significant proportion – 37%[56]. But the audience for evening programmes is mainly composed of adults 35-45 years of age, as well as of adolescents. While the average viewer of late-night broadcasts is an adult of age 18-25 or 35-45[57]. This is the principal audience of the programmes analysed in this case study.

However, peripheral audiences are also important. According to information provided by *Perviy Kanal* itself, its international audience is 250 million viewers, of whom 200 million can speak and understand Russian, but only 50 million are ethnic Russians[58]. Although not broadcasting officially in full or partial formats in all post-Soviet countries, several *Perviy Kanal* programmes are broadcast by local channels[59]. But in some Western and other countries (for instance, Israel or US), many Russian speakers use the opportunities provided by cable and internet TV.

Currently, *Perviy Kanal* also has an extensive range of online options. Both live and archived programmes can be viewed online at the channel's website. And the channel has started cooperating with internet portals providing online-television services in Western Europe, Israel and the US[60]. In addition, internet users can watch some of the most interesting parts of the comedy or other shows on *YouTube* or other social media (such as *Facebook*). In this way, younger audiences who do not watch TV are also being reached[61].

To explain why such a broad audience is interested in this channel's content, the framework by which specific signs or messages can be understood and shared by broad masses of Russian speakers is analysed. The analysis shows that this TV channel uses tropes[62], which are easily picked up by different ethnic, social, or otherwise socially diverse groups. "Most importantly, these tropes support each […] viewer in forming his or her own identity".[63] At the same time, the common factor unifying the audience is the *nostalgia phenomenon[64]*. This includes the Soviet past and the memories of it[65] (for example, including the artificial construct *the friendship of peoples* (*Дружба народов*), which unites different nationalities.

And although the *nostalgia phenomenon* is considered to be the lowest common denominator, it is precisely the one most widely shared[66] and hence is able to attract the widest range of the Russian-speaking audience around the world. And this is extremely important, because the "the speaker and the audience can communicate by using two or more fields of information, and these fields may differ in their conceptual saturation. However, they must have certain points of contact; these are mutually overlapping semes[67] or associational links"[68].

> " *According to information provided by Perviy Kanal itself, its international audience is 250 million viewers, of whom 200 million can speak and understand Russian, but only 50 million are ethnic Russians.* "

The second has to do with the 'nation–construction' project currently being executed by Russia's government. This project is intended to unite domestic Russian speakers with those in the former USSR countries, as well as in states with large Russian-speaking diasporas or communities, such as Israel, Germany, and the United States. This channel's main emphasis being on entertainment allows the supporters of the current Russian regime to be supplemented with those parts of that external audience who sometimes define their identity by national and/or cultural, rather than political affiliation, but are not prepared to obtain information on the most important political events from Russian news programmes, giving preference to local news broadcasts or other information resources.

For instance, a 2015 study by the International Centre for Defence and Security Estonia revealed some key principles for how Russian speakers in Estonia consume Russian media: "entertainment is primary, news secondary; scepticism about any and all news sources is rampant [...] local news, not international, is of paramount interest[69]". And it was concluded that "watching Russian TV, joining the virtual *Russian World*, does not necessarily mean that a person identifies with Russia politically". A 2016 research project – *Societal Security. Inclusion- Exclusion Dilemma. A portrait of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia* – showed similar results. It was concluded that Russian-speakers, particularly young people outside the capital, mainly consume Russian comedy broadcasts in the internet and find them appealing . But at the same time, their interest in TV news content is limited[70]. Thus, one can conclude that this entertainment and comedy format brings even apolitical Russian speakers outside Russia into the *Russian World.*

The target audience of *Vecherniy Urgant* provides a good example of the reconstruction of Soviet mass culture. The programme's ability to draw the largest possible audience in Russia is cited as one of the reasons for its popularity[71] and therefore also its prolonged existence. Unlike its predecessors, this programme, thanks to its specific guest-engagement mechanism, has been able to appeal to that part of the Russian audience, which during the Soviet period was described as *cultural man* (*культурный человек*[72]) or were members of the Soviet *intelligentsia*. But at the same time, the structure of the show allows the inclusion of different jokes aimed at different social strata.

Another facet of the audience is its acceptance of the mechanism of *reduced selectivity*: in these circumstances, the media, in response to the audience's demands for as many emotional scenes as possible, turns to the hidden stereotypes that have been ingrained in the way of thinking for centuries (such as sexual orientation, feeling of inevitability, fear of death)[73], as well as creating appropriate new artificial constructs around them. This emotional dependency, like drug addiction, makes the audience tolerate lower standards of content at the expense of educational or analytical content. Thus, moral, ethical and aesthetic standards are often significantly lower than, for example, those observed in western European television audiences[74].

2.4. PERCEPTION OF HUMOUR

For a statement to appear humorous or ridiculous to a certain audience, it must meet several preconditions. The most significant of these is language. Knowledge shared between the speaker and the recipient is another one, since it provides a similar understanding of morality, aesthetics and ethics[75], as well a common perception of deviations from the norm, which then also serves as the basis of creativity for the comedian. As part of *shared knowledge*, *political memory* is likewise discussed in this case study.

In the first stage of the analysis of the situation, the main determinant is the common element uniting the target audiences – Russian-language skills and the post-Soviet space as a carrier of specific cultural and social, as well as political codes. This is especially relevant in cases where allusions are used[76]. In the comedy shows analysed, these appear frequently. The creators of the content form allusions based on phrases borrowed from Soviet films[77], songs and other mass culture products that do not require knowledge of the peculiarities of *high culture*[78].

Another commonly recognized group is expressions which require a significant amount of content-specific knowledge of the peculiarities of the Russian social structure and the verbal art they represent. A striking example of this is the phrase: *if there was any reason, I would actually kill [a specific person]* (*если было бы за что, вообще убил бы)* and the popular saying *if he beats you, he loves you* (*если бьет, то любит*),

Screenshot, Vecherniy Urgant 27.12.2013.

which include two major individual interaction aspects characteristic of Russian social structure. Firstly, aggression and violence are widely spread in Russia[79]. Secondly, the social role of women in its traditional meaning is still a concept inherent in both males and females.

As a result, the analysis of the latter statement was based on the observation of jokes included in the content of the four entertainment broadcasts analysed in this case study. Gender stereotypes were widely used[80], and were attributed to all the possible spheres of life, including politics. The four social roles of women – wife, mother, housewife (*хозяюшка*) and object of sexual desire – are the basic constructs or the ideal forms, deviations from which are perceived as a good reason for creating jokes.

This correlates with the view of Ludmila Voronova. She has observed "tendency that in the Russian context male media producers hold the power to make jokes (Kalinina and Voronova 2011). Moreover, these jokes in the Russian media content tend to draw on and feed into traditional gender stereotypes, ridiculing those who are considered "other" in comparison to the heterosexual masculine norm: women (especially active), and homosexual and elderly men".[81] She also points out that "Russian journalists admit that women politicians are more often subject to gendered critique in the media discourses than men".[82]

A similar situation can also be observed regarding the reproduction of ethnicity-based racial stereotypes, emphasizing the supremacy of the titular Russian nation. In fact, all four programmes analysed in this case study instrumentalise the ethnic origin of different individuals for the creation of humour, which corresponds to the existing sources of tension within society. References to ethnicity are used in story-telling, ironic comments, including self-deprecation, or open mockery. In the case of Western leaders, this particularly refers to comments regarding the skin colour of US President Barack Obama.

Screenshot, Vecherniy Urgant 24.10.2012. Parody on Lavrov's visit to Fiji

However, the above elements of the creation of humour also help recipients to address some of the needs that are important to them. The first is the need for strong emotional experiences[83], while the second is the need for support in creating a positive social identity. In situations where an individual is surrounded by a number of intractable social problems that create frustration with oneself and one's surroundings, a reference to ancient stereotypes and instincts helps overcome internal discomfort, finds a sense of superiority in such primitive constructs as skin colour or peculiarities in mentality, which can be further processed as laughter, pride or other positive feelings.

In addition to the observations on the shows analysed, expressions such as 'guys' (*ребята*) or 'friends' (*друзья*) are widely used when addressing the audience, thereby achieving the effect of equalization and diminishing the gap between the listener and the speaker. At the same time, this allows the viewer to experience a feeling of inclusion and belonging to a select group, a member of which he has now become – he feels like an insider when being addressed by the speaker.

This and similar elements are associated with a significant part of the nation-building project – achieving individuals' sense of belonging to Russia and the *Russian world*. Emotionally sharp, oftentimes even aggressively shaped attitudes towards strangers are transformed into jokes about the Second World War, the message being – *we have given you a lesson*[84] or even *how we are going to teach you a lesson now,* as well as other similar demonstrations of superiority (such jokes are particularly well represented in *Prozhektorperishilton* and in softer forms in *Vecherniy Urgant*.

For example, in the 3 October 2009 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton*, the presenters discussed the election in Germany and its future Cabinet of Ministers. The fact which was emphasized was that the Foreign Minister of Germany was homosexual. One of the statements made in this context was that the Russians had already predicted this in 1943[85].

These and other linguistic constructs clearly indicate to the viewer the division between *us* and the *important strangers*, the good guys and the bad guys. Furthermore, the latter are always painted in a darker colour than *us* – any humorous situation emphasizes their negativity over ours. But victory over them is an integral part of most of the humour[86].

One more important internal stress-management tool offered by the discussed transmissions is self-deprecation. Through watching humorous broadcasts viewers have an opportunity to reduce internal stress related to the external environmental challenges posed by social, political and economic problems (for example, extremely high levels of corruption, major problems in health care, hatred that individuals of various nationalities feel towards each other, the economic crisis in the country) and to adopt to the new conditions.

A similar self-deprecating mechanism can be applied to help reduce the internal stress associated with deep personal problems (for example, by offering to use self-deprecation and laugh about alcoholism, ignorance, social passivity, distrust, and aggression against other members of society). Such self-ironic constructs that allow viewers to recognize themselves are also used in jokes about Western leaders, especially in relation to matters concerning their personal lives – the comedians mimic everyday situations, such as the episodes on Berlusconi's relationship with his son-in-law or the Obama family scene when he returns home drunk.

Given the above, it can be concluded that such an approach actually provides space for exploiting sharp emotional reactions to media-led stimuli that turn on mechanisms of stereotypical thinking, help the recipients to avoid analytical thinking and reduce internal stresses associated with the need to adapt to a social environment.

2.5. WESTERN POLITICAL LEADERS – HOW ARE THEY PORTRAYED?

Jokes about Western leaders can be divided into two major groups. The first group concerns personal and social information, touching upon such topics as family relationship, relationships with the opposite sex, an individual's appearance and how they correspond to accepted standards, as well as a person's intelligence. The second group features jokes about specific political areas related to individuals' professional activity. Here the leaders' decisions, implemented policies, relationship with other aspects of the leaders' professional activity are discussed.

Combining both groups of jokes, we obtain a specific image of a leader, which either conforms to the perception held by society regarding the ideal type of a leader, or highlights deviations from that image, mostly in an exaggerated manner.

The content analysis of the four broadcasts included in this case study demonstrates that jokes were most often made about the following leaders: Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, Silvio Berlusconi, George Bush and Angela Merkel. In the last year, however, along with jokes about Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, a substantial part of comedy broadcast airtime was devoted to Donald Trump. Moreover, such a sequence is not accidental, given that the *principle of the power vertical* is an essential element of Russian policy and, thus, also of the media discourse. This means that, by placing one or another leader in a given axis of time and space, the level of influence these leaders are assumed to possess is being clearly demonstrated.

2.5.1. US Political Leadership

The shows analysed mainly focus on jokes about US political leaders and their activities. However, specific symbolic codes are mainly used in relation to the following: *this person has low intelligence*; *this person has minor, but still physical defects*; *this person has problems in their private life*; *is a liar*; *a double-dealer*.

For example, on 22 July 2012, *Yesterday Live* aired a parody about Hillary Clinton. One of the running jokes incorporated the idea that she is a liar who has no understanding of geography and shows no concern for the next country to be invaded by the US[87].

George Walker Bush has been portrayed in the most negative light – both personally and professionally, as a person of extremely low intelligence, hated by people all around the world.

For example, when guests of the *Prozhektorperishilton* show, aired on 17 May 2008, discussed the wedding of George W. Bush's daughter, a joke was made saying that his son-in-law would now deal with the president's daughter in the way the whole world would like to deal with Bush himself[88]. Another remark made in this episode expressed regret regarding the continuation of the Bush family.

In the 20 December 2008 episode, a sketch about the US decision to invade Iraq and Afghanistan included the following text [referring to the logic of decision-making]: "… I think that Bush has developed a certain scheme in his head, and it takes a lot of thinking to explain things to himself … It goes something like this: a shoe flew [referring to the journalist who threw a shoe in the US President's direction during a press conference] … He is now thinking– oh, where did this shoe come from? OK. He sees the size 43 and thinks immediately about Teheran 43. /Then he concludes / let's bomb Iran! You follow? And then it is like – Going to go strawberry-picking, Friday. *Elektrichka* [Russian slang for a passenger train]. A boot. Have to steal it. And a conclusion – Yes, let's bomb! Yes, bomb, bomb Iraq"[89]!

*Screenshot, Yesterdaylife
12.09.2010*

Furthermore, in the 18 April 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant* US President Barack Obama is seen in his office playing with a staff member's child, and one of the statements he makes is that George Walker Bush had actually been the first to pee on that carpet[90].

During his first presidential election campaign, as well as during the initial period following the election, jokes about President Barack Obama were relatively neutral. Rather, events around him were often ridiculed. In fact, the *Prozhektorperishilton* production team repeatedly expressed the hope that US-Russia relations could be improved and cooperation deepened.

For example, in the 13 September 2008 episode, the *Prozhektorperishilton* presenters discussed the US presidential candidates. One of the statements made was that Russia would be much better off if Barack Obama were elected. One of the speakers even claimed that personally, he liked Obama[91].

In the 28 February 2009 episode, when parodying the US President's inauguration ceremony and his first days working at the White House, none of the sketches was actually about Barack Obama's personality. The humorous content dealt with everyday scenes in which the president showed initiative and a willingness to get actively involved in the duties performed by his staff[92].

The situation changed after the disagreements between the two parties over US plans to place anti-missile defence systems in European territory in 2010.

For example, in the 26 November 2011 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton,* the decision of the president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, to *react to* the US's decision about the construction of a missile defence system in Europe was addressed. The rhetoric used to describe the actions of the US was especially aggressive.

The message was menacing – the US have overstepped the permissible limits and Russia must react to such actions accordingly[93]. When describing Barack Obama, jokes about his skin colour have since become common.

For example, in the 17 October 2009 episode, the *Prozhektorperishilton* presenter informed the audience that Barack Obama had won the Nobel Peace Prize, referring to him as *the black dove of peace*[94].

Furthermore, in the 30 March 2012 episode of *Yesterday Live*, when parodying Barack Obama's conversation with the Pope, the jokes contained various elements of stereotypical constructs indicating that all black people want to be rappers.[95] In turn, the *Prozhektorperishilton* presenters, commenting on the upcoming 2008 US presidential election and Barack Obama as a candidate, mentioned that Americans could have their *black Tuesday* then. And the series of jokes about Barack Obama continued with themes such as rap music and rappers and other elements, which are used when stereotypically portraying people of colour[96].

In the same series of parodies, the US President is referred to as a stingy person and an adulterer. Similarly, Barack Obama himself admitted, while apparently laughing, that he had killed Gaddafi and Bin Laden, the joke referencing US policy in the Middle East.

As a result, just by switching on the above mechanisms – both verbal and visual – through which stereotypes are triggered within the audience, the shows analysed in this paper benefitted from the fact that the President of the United States is black. This stereotypical manner carries in itself the idea that people of colour are less competent than white people, and that they can be entrusted with less serious roles than their white counterparts.

By contrast, Hillary Clinton has been the butt of jokes particularly intensively during the last two US presidential election campaigns. The image that has been created by the discussed comedy shows is closely linked to specific traditional roles of women.

For example, in the 9 June 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant,* it was reported that Hillary Clinton had chosen a vice-president. This news was followed by a considerable number of jokes about her decision, such as what would happen if the vice-president's wife wore the same dress as Hillary Clinton, and other similar situations[97].

Moreover, Hillary Clinton has been portrayed as an unattractive woman looking to take revenge on her once unfaithful husband Bill Clinton. In Hillary Clinton's case, special linguistic and visual characterization techniques are used to achieve the desired effect[98].

For example, in the 7 March 2009 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton*, while presenting a number of photographs of Hillary Clinton, the presenters discussed the reasons she smiles so much. One of the answers given was that Monica Lewinsky had probably dropped dead. Within the same joke cycle, it was suggested that one of the images clearly

demonstrates how much bigger Hillary Clinton's face really is when compared to Nicolas Sarkozy's face[99].

In the 8 June 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, while commenting on Hillary Clinton's relentless efforts to become US president, the following opinion was expressed: [...] her motivation is clear – she wants to get into the Oval Office and take revenge on her husband. But ... but ... this is actually a unique situation for Bill Clinton – first he was the President and now he may have an opportunity to become the First Lady"[100].

In contrast, Hillary Clinton's political activities were rarely discussed in the comedy shows, but those that appeared were mainly related to US military actions in the Middle East. In this regard, her duplicity, indifference, and cruelty, as well as the lies told during public appearances were mocked.

For example, in the 23 March 2013 episode of *Yesterday Live*, a parody about the US Secretary of State, John Kerry was staged, during which the involvement of Hillary Clinton in the killing of people in the Middle East was also addressed. It was claimed that John Kerry, while performing his duties, had found a bearded head in his refrigerator, allegedly forgotten there from Clinton's time in the office[101].

In turn, Donald Trump has been depicted as being *mad*, but wanting to become the president of the US. A lot of the jokes are created around this and his appearance[102].

For example, in the 8 June 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant* it was concluded that this presidential election was going to be unique, since either a woman or a madman[103] would become president for the first time.

2.5.2. French Presidents

François Hollande's name has been mentioned rather often in programmes such as *Prozhektorperishilton* and *Yesterday Live*. He is portrayed as a countrified, dim-witted head of state, lacking any leadership qualities.

For example, in the 21 October 2012 episode of *Yesterday Live* a sketch featured the topics discussed by the bodyguards of the Heads of State during a summit. The bodyguard of Francois Hollande expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that everybody else was entrusted with the task of making sure their presidents were not assassinated, while in his case he had to prevent the president from banging his own head[104].

In turn, the comedy shows portrayed Nicolas Sarkozy as someone who cannot be separated from his social role as the husband of model Carla Bruni. This relationship serves as basis for almost all the jokes about him, including those related to Sarkozy's professional activities as president of France. This emphasis draws attention away from more serious aspects of his presidential leadership.

For example, in the 27 September 2008 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton,* the presenters discussed the UN General Assembly. When joking about it, the main emphasis was placed on Carla Bruni, who supposedly had come to a meeting, resulting in her becoming the centre of attention. Moreover, among other things, the comedians theorized that Nicolas Sarkozy gained such popularity in the blink of an eye only thanks to his wife[105].

In the shows analysed, neither French presidents was portrayed as the leader of an influential western European state or a politician who makes important political decisions. On the contrary – we see two rather simple men who struggle to overcome the challenges of their everyday lives like any other average person.

2.5.3. Angela Merkel

The content of jokes about Angela Merkel mainly consists of humour that is concerned with questioning her appearance, sexuality and femininity – aspects which are closely related to the understanding of the traditional roles of women[106].

For example, in the 16 May 2009 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton*, while discussing an advertising campaign, which uses photos of Angela Merkel in her underwear, the presenters pointed out how unattractive she was[107].

Furthermore, in the 10 February 2013 episode of *Yesterday Live*, a conversation between Angela Merkel and Silvio Berlusconi was parodied, interpreting it as follows: "Angela, could you please move to another seat? This woman – the Argentinian President – is about to arrive." Here again, it is made clear that Angela Merkel is not considered sexually attractive by her colleagues[108].

Screenshot, Yesterdaylife 30.03.2012

Consequently, the basic set of codes transmitted to the viewer is related to Angela Merkel's compliance or rather non-compliance to the aesthetic standards set by gender stereotypes, while her role as one of the leading politicians of the European Union is almost completely ignored, thus directing the viewers away from the potential power that the German Chancellor holds. With the help of this blurring effect, Angela Merkel's image is portrayed in a way that emphasises the fact that she is a woman, rather than the political leader of a major state.

2.5.4. Silvio Berlusconi

In the shows analysed Silvio Berlusconi's image is often used as basis for jokes regarding sexual assault. The content of these jokes carries the following codes: legal nihilism, immorality, impunity.

For example, in the 24 May 2008 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton*, while discussing the fact that several ministerial posts in Silvio Berlusconi's government are held by women, the hosts intimated possible sexual relations between the Prime Minister and his subordinates. One of the comedians stated that "after the incident in the sauna[109]... she [one of the ministers] told Berlusconi – either I become a minister or I publish the video I took with my phone"[110].

But in the 29 September 2015 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, Silvio Berlusconi's 79th birthday celebrations were discussed, mentioning a possible gift for the former Italian prime minister. Ivan Urgant joked that "we would like to give him a live present, but all of them are older than 18, so he would not be interested"[111].

Screenshot, Prozhektorperishton 16.04.2011. Translation: "When I met Silvio, I had butterflies in my stomack."

РУССКАЯ ПОДРУГА БЕРЛУСКОНИ: «КОГДА Я ВСТРЕТИЛА СИЛЬВИО, У МЕНЯ ЗАПОРХАЛИ БАБОЧКИ В ЖИВОТЕ!» (ФОТО)

17.04.11 23:01

29-летняя Раиса Скоркина дала «Комсомольской правде».

Мария РЕМИЗОВА

Западные СМИ на прошлой неделе активно обсуждали обнаружившуюся в «гареме» итальянского премьера Сильвио Берлускони русскую фотомодель и актрису Раису Скоркину.

Сначала Раиса категорически отказалась от разговора с корреспондентом «КП», объяснив, что общается с журналистами только за гонорар в 10 тысяч евро. Но позже — наши корреспонденты к тому времени успели взять интервью у мамы Раисы, рассказавшей о том, что ее дочь замужем за итальянцем. — Скоркина передумала и

Such use of a prime minister's image, when characterizing the political leadership of European states, makes one wonder whether the values proclaimed by Europe are really practiced in everyday life. This may also serve as a basis for the active promotion of information consisting of heuristic content in relation to a particular political leader. In contrast, for example, the British political establishment rarely appears in the reviewed shows. The appearance of any other political leaders of Western countries is also extremely rare in the mentioned broadcasts.

It can be concluded that the content of the shows analysed in this case study demonstrates a specific selection of Western countries, and their political leaders being made the butt of jokes. These countries are: the US, Germany, France, and Italy. In the context of cognitive sciences, such portrayals mean that the addresser wants the addressee to remember specific information about the *Others*. Here the US in particular stands out. An powerful image is always remembered better. The countries that appear more often in the media are always presented as bigger and more inhabited, but their people – as better known and different[112]. At the same time, the countries and leaders mentioned in the broadcasts are put in a strict hierarchal frame, with the US and Russia as dominant powers, whereas other countries just jump on the respective bandwagon. Several mechanisms are used to demonstrate this hierarchy, including texts with a clear message, intensive humour, as well as the lack of any mention (as a demonstration of unimportance).

The analysis of the content of jokes about Western leaders in the shows covered by this research puts forward some important conclusions regarding the presented discourse. The most significant of these findings are:

1) The world portrayed is based on the legacy of the Soviet period characterized by a bipolar perception of the world. The intensity with which US political leaders are depicted therefore implies that this superpower is regarded as a significant stranger. At the same time the content of jokes is directed towards discrediting and challenging the personalities concerned, thus questioning their ability to measure up to the constructed stereotypical ideal of a political leader – Vladimir Putin;

2) The leadership potential of the highest ranking Western European officials as such is questioned by using mockery and by pointing out a whole range of deficiencies, as well as by highlighting a certain degree of subordination vis-a-vis the US or Russia;

3) Existing or imaginary personal qualities of Western political leaders become a basic source of ridicule, while much lesser emphasis is placed on their professional actions.
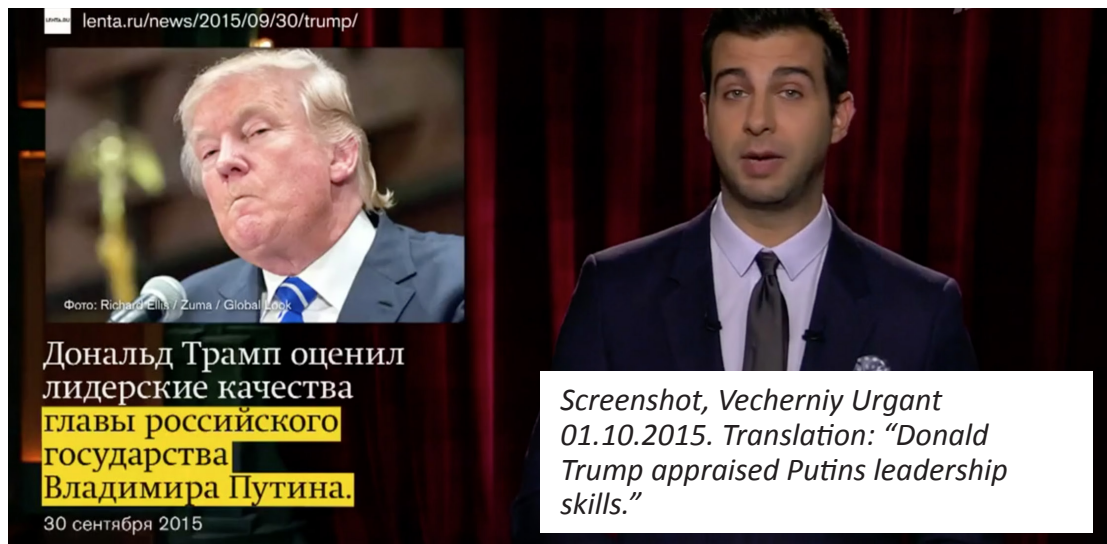
As such, it can be concluded that the portrayal of major international policy subjects – political leaders – in the content of the analysed programmes is realized in accordance with a defined hierarchy that corresponds to the perception about power distribution in the international system that is in line with the Russian official political discourse. In turn, jokes about Western political leaders, which are formed based on a description of their everyday activities, as well as real or imaginary features of their character, help to construct a peculiar vision of reality that is presented by the media as naturally and as comprehensibly as possible to the audience. Thus, these specially designed images are directed towards discrediting the whole system of Western political leadership.

2.6. FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR

The format hybridity of late-night shows allows them to present information in a large variety of forms and, at the same time, to include considerable humorous content that performs a range of functions. This is also demonstrated by specific jokes about Western leaders. This analysis can shed light on functions discussed below.

2.6.1. Legitimization of the superiority of the leader

During the period analysed it was possible to distinguish two leaders in particular – Vladimir Putin (over the whole period of observation) and Dmitry Medvedev (during his presidency)[113], whose superiority was underlined in various forms, thus increasing its legitimacy. The first is the default form. In fact, no jokes regarding the possible dark side or weaknesses of the Russian presidents' personalities are made. Comedians make fun of challenges or weaknesses associated with abstract power, MPs, civil servants, but not of the president as the embodiment of absolute power[114]. A similar situation was with jokes about the *main political tandem – Putin and Medvedev* – during Medvedev's presidency of, or Putin and Lada automobiles, or controlling the preparatory works for the Sochi Olympics. As Andrey Arhangelskij concluded, "the empire of humour clearly demonstrates freedom, where laughing about authority, even the highest one, is allowed. But at the same time, it presents strict borders, which cannot be violated"[115]. If the president is seen as something comical, this may challenge the integrity of the president, or question his actions or statements. One important observation in the light of this is that comedians use formal form of address traditionally used in Russia –name and patronymic – in this case, Vladimir Vladimirovich and Dmitry Anatoljevic.

Screenshot, Vecherniy Urgant 01.10.2015. Translation: "Donald Trump appraised Putins leadership skills."

The other form is the spoofing of situations surrounding the president. Reflecting on the president's relationships or communication with leaders of other nations, his superiority in every respect (intellectual, physical, visual) is always being emphasized. Particular emphasis is placed on power relations that are being viewed with respect to the actual lines of power[116], through which the power matrix is established.

For example, during the 8 June 2008 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton,* when discussing a telephone conversation between US President George W. Bush and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a joke was made about the fact that only Medvedev switched to the more familiar form of 'you' (thou), while the US president did not. The idea was that Russians should long ago have pointed out to Americans that their manner is a rude form of communication[117].

Furthermore, in the same episode, when commenting on the decision on the venue for the Summer Olympic Games of 2016, the following text was announced: Obama personally campaigned for Chicago. Putin travelled to campaign for the Sochi Olympics in Sochi. Obama travelled to campaign for Chicago. [...] And the Olympics – in Sochi[118]. The presenters made the point that, unlike Obama, Putin easily achieves the desired result.

In addition, in the 1 October 2015 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, while discussing Donald Trump's statements about Vladimir Putin's leadership skills, which are better than those of the US president, a joke was made that the Dean's Office had presented a list of grades for presidential candidate with Putin receiving the highest grade – a five[119], while Obama only rated a bit higher than average – a weak four. Then came students paying for their own education – the Netherlands – with a three. However, the leader of the Komi Republic had to retake the exam, as he had failed[120].

Such simplified frames allow wider audiences to be reached and cause a sharper emotional experience. Moreover, there is another function, no less important, realised simultaneously – <u>power superiority is being humanized</u>. The message expressed here: our president is one of us, while, at the same time, there is a huge distance between us and him.

For example, the 3 July 2016 episode of *MaksimMaksim*, parodied Russian politician Zhirinovsky. One of his remarks stated "we in the *Duma* also have a voice; it is not that of the *Duma*, however, but it is superior"[121].

This is in line with the image of the President of Russia having been developed, over recent years, from a central figure in the political field to the image of a leader who is above the political field. And "this is the archetypal image of a saviour; it is formed only in extreme conditions. And people do not give up on saviours for years, sometimes even for decades"[122].

2.6.2. Support and justification of agenda setting and foreign activities carried out by the government

The above demonstration of superiority helps to maintain support for the country's official discourse, according to which Russia is actively advocating the restoration of its superpower status. Western countries are depicted as hostile and interested in weakening Russia.

By showing its strength, a country can demonstrate its willingness to fight for its position, despite the obstacles created by the West. In this situation, the content of the programmes fulfils another important function – it constructs <u>exit/problem solving strategies</u>.

For example, this works in the case of sanctions imposed on Russia by the West. Viewers are shown the sanctions as being consequences of short-sighted decisions taken by Western leaders, encouraged to support the country's leadership and survive the economic challenges that affect lives of almost every citizen of Russia[123].

Another interesting example: In the 31 October 2013 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant,* the US's decision to impose sanctions on the post-Soviet mafia was announced. As a response, a picture of popular Russian singer Iosif Kobzon was shown with the comment that he is a brilliant example of how it is possible to live very well without the US (the Russian dictum *жить и не тужить* was used)[124].

It should also be noted that Russia is never discussed or portrayed as an aggressor or a less developed country. The nature of the relationship is rather paternalistic, emphasizing Russia's national superiority or in the role of an innocent victim. For instance, this was actively used, when commenting on the decision of the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to deploy missile systems in the Kaliningrad region, which was presented as being in response to the US political leadership's decision to place anti-missile defence systems in Europe.

However, whenever US–Russian relations improve, the change can also be observed in the content of comedy shows: the rhetoric becomes much softer and jokes are much less harsh, ideas about potential cooperation (although not on an equal footing) between the parties appear, based on common values and orientations. Thus, this content guides the viewer to become less critical and more positively disposed towards the clearly identified *stranger*. This can then, to some extent, be classified as the reduction of tension and aggression in relation to the particular external agent.

2.6.3. Image construction

In the comedy shows analysed, the characters of Western leaders examined here are constructed and based on gender, race, national or other simplified stereotypes that are easily comprehensible to general audiences. In addition, humorous content has almost never been linked to any successful political decisions or economic and democratic achievements in the West. Thus, by emphasizing the real or imagined flaws of Western political leaders and questioning, mocking or deprecating their decisions, an opportunity is created not only to discredit them as leaders, but also the countries and international organizations they represent (such as the European Union, UN, NATO), and hence the values they stand for – democracy, multiculturalism and tolerance.

For example, in the 11 April 2009 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton*, the comedians announced that NATO has appointed a new Secretary-General. The sketch then continued by stressing that *there are already enough tellers of tales there*. Moreover, that same year, in the May 30 broadcast, when commenting on the Russia- European Union summit in Khabarovsk, the presenter, as if by mistake, but clearly sarcastically, called Javier Solana, (at the time the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), the High Priest[125].

Furthermore, in the 5 June 2014 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, one of the topics discussed was the G8 summit Russia had not been invited to. The presenters not only called it G (GE) 7, using the letter as if to suggest that it refers to the word *shit* (borrowed from the Russian colloquial *дерьмо*), but also expressed their condolences to the whole world in this regard[126].

According to social identity theory, such negative *image construction* has implications for intergroup behaviour. This theory argues that "through the cognitive processes of categorization and grouping, the in-group member will develop a stereotypical view of out-group members, and through the motivational process of seeking to maintain a relatively high social identity, the stereotype of the out-group members will tend to be negative"[127]. In addition, the construction of hostility or battling against external adversaries helps develop self-image as an exceptional, special position in relation to the outside world.

> *In the comedy shows analysed, the characters of Western leaders examined here are constructed and based on gender, race, national or other simplified stereotypes that are easily comprehensible to general audiences.*

Other functions of *image construction* are related to the formation of positive self-image. For instance, jokes depicting Western leaders as people with problems that are characteristic of the average Russian citizen (such as the joke about Barack Obama's mother-in-law who, while in the *White House*, preserved vegetables for the winter) are actually used as a tool to encourage people to take their daily difficulties as being the norm.

For example, in the 24 September 2013 episode of *Prozhektorperishilton,* a parody news item reported that US President Barack Obama's uncle had been arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol. This was interpreted as similar to the situation on Russian roads[128].

2.6.4. Educational function

The content included in the programmes directly, as well as indirectly provides guidance on how to view various significant events of international importance. In fact, the national enemy and its characteristics are clearly formulated.

For example, the 28 October 2013 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, shown before the beginning of the Russian-West European crisis resulting from the events in Ukraine: when commenting on US intelligence agencies having tapped the telephone calls of West European leaders, Urgant stated: "the '*Amerikosi*'[129], and I can call them that, have been listening to our leaders." This kind of narrative, which points to common ground with Europe, does not appear in later broadcasts[130]. Interestingly, in June 2015, when commenting on a new phone-tapping scandal, the following words are said: "We can't be interested in this topic until Barack Obama decides to learn Russian", whereas

Screenshot, Yesterdaylife 24.02.2013. Video parodies the fact that Swedish defence minister is a woman.

in the 16 June 2016 episode the following was announced: I am going to answer with the words used by the enemy – NO [ENG][131]!

Also, humour content reveals what these relationships mean to viewers and, consequently, what kind of behaviour is expected from them as citizens and as members of society.

For example, in the 25 March 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, pre-schoolers share their vision on specially selected topics in the item *View from Below*. While watching the presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, the view was expressed: I don't know what Clinton's chances are, but I would rather vote for Putin[132].

Furthermore, in the 26 June 2016 episode of *MaksimMaksim,* the presenter, wearing a cap with US symbols, said it would have been cool in the 1990s, but now one should better not appear in Rio looking like this[133].

2.6.5. Comedy shows as agents of socialization, psychological adjustment

Comedy broadcasts are used to generate viewers' interest in politics, certain specific political and international events and the persons involved. In addition, such programmes showcase social-behaviour models[134] in a modern society and set the limits of normality, also as regards international relations[135].

*Screenshot, Yesterdaylife
17.04.2011*

2.6.6. Disorientation, distraction from reality; stress reduction

The content of comedy programmes can be used to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction and divert viewers' attention from important political decisions and their consequences. This is achieved in several ways: creation of an artificial problem or an empty design (for instance, by bringing forward issues related to Angela Merkel's looks); redirection of focus towards emotional, sexual, and other dimensions (for example, interpretation of Silvio Berlusconi and Sarkozy's negotiation styles by using sexual humour); conversion of certain issues into absurd situations.

Such artificially created empty designs, combined with pointless, strange news items, disorientate, and enables viewers' focus to be drawn away from being analytical[136] to taking an emotional approach. They facilitate viewers' achieving a state where thinking and reasoned judgement about serious international policy issues are switched off[137]. Instead, preference is given to positive emotions, discovery of fun and other psychological stress-reduction mechanisms.

2.6.7. Humour as a defence mechanism in war and conflict situations

The changes in comedy show content during war and conflict situations reveal two trends. In situations where severe crisis conditions prevail, jokes about the parties involved or their leaders disappear completely. Jokes about other parties and their leaders only gradually emerge after some compromise has been achieved.

2.6.8. Recreational function

The recreational function is the basic function of comedy shows as such, even if the jokes revolve around the leaders of Western countries. This function provides easily accessible pleasure. In Russia, this is particularly topical these days, given the socio-economic situation, when most of the population have difficulties accessing various entertainment or high-culture events.

2.7. COMMUNICATION OF HUMOUR

The *late-night* show setting comprises a synthesis of abstract language, conversational and even slang elements[138]. The phrases used by programme presenters are syntactically simple, sometimes short, and truncated. Sharp evaluations are offered, idiomatic expressions and impersonated stylistic techniques are used. Also, abstract words are commonly used in broader contexts and a vague personal and nominative style is employed.

Programme content covers a variety of topics. The following are common targets of ridicule: civil servants; traffic police; corruption; family relationships; male-female relationships (highlighting those between husbands and wives, as well as sexual relationships)[139]; sport (especially football); political events and popular politicians (including foreign ones). However, jokes about religion and terrorism are extremely rare. Moreover, programme content excludes any humorous reference to any possible dark side of the President's personality or his decisions' potential for being wrong .

The category of political jokes includes object-specific jokes about Western leaders. Such jokes appear alongside other categories, mostly in reviewing current events. Thus, often a situation is created when, for example, the US presidential election is analysed alongside silly events in the Russian countryside.

In terms of form, jokes about Western political leaders can be divided into categories similar to other joke types. These can be categorized as: ethnic slurs (jokes created by addressing the individual characteristics of representatives of different nationalities in an exaggerated manner); dry humour (ironic jokes where mockery is disguised under the cover of seriousness); shaggy-dog stories (absurd jokes); banana-skin humour (primitive jokes); elephant jokes (stupid or cheap jokes); contaminations (the meaning is distorted by replacing certain words or expressions with other ones of similar sound and meaning); theatrical anecdotes[140]; hints. In turn, the manner of speech, when joking about a specific topic, is pseudo-neutral as if imitating the form of speech of Western politicians, or exactly the opposite – clear, undisguised Soviet-style controversy openly demonstrating the presenter's position as regards the nation's highest-ranking officials.

The humorous content demonstrates the use of various psychological mechanisms to influence the audience. Some of the methods utilized are: references to security, patriotic appeals, symbols, references to family, affection, sentiments and weaknesses, the personal attitudes of popular people, references to values, and others.

In contrast, identifying the essence of the message the speaker wants to transfer to the listener through making fun of Western leaders, the following are the most significant simplified messages:

1) the President is the one who takes care of the state and society, as well as one's personal well-being. He always knows what is best for everyone. The President of Russia is the provider of security and stability not only in Russia itself, but also globally;

2) everybody, even the world's most powerful people, has the same problems as everyone else;

3) one does not have to be socially and politically active; it does not make any sense and is not interesting to study and analyse international policy (one can never know the whole truth because everybody tells lies);

4) the world around the individual and the country is hostile. Russia has no friends among Western countries and their leaders;

5) the attitude of Western countries towards Russia and its people is unfair, based on interests of a hegemonic nature. Also, Western leaders represent double-dealing politics, are unfair and only interested in themselves;

6) there are no sincere, strong leaders in the West;

7) there is a lot of cynicism, evilness and abnormality surrounding the private lives of Western leaders and that does not correspond to the ideal image of a President;

8) for Russia, the most important foreign country is the US. Other countries are mainly subordinated and take the side of either Russia or the US[141];

9) the US is to blame for the instability in the Middle East and conflicts in other regions;

10) the leaders of Georgia and Eastern Europe are naive or fools, and for this reason the United States have been able to subordinate them in line with their interests;

11) European countries, the United States and their leaders do not adhere to traditional values, one of the pillars of the *Russian world*;

12) the democracy of the West is false.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the essence of the message about Western leaders in the humorous content not only coincides with the official discourse advanced by the state, but also complements it with supportive elements of its basic concepts, which by their nature are not included in official rhetoric, however, they are useful in developing support for strategic communication. In addition, thanks to the format of the show, it is possible to convey the message to a very broad audience. The accessibility and easy retrievability of the information, as well as its form, which relaxes the mind and leads to positive feelings, are the factors that increase the potential impact of television's entertainment content.

CONCLUSION

Despite its relatively recent history, the development of the *late-night show* sub-genre on Russian television has achieved quite remarkable results. The modern form corresponding to worldwide trends, and a successfully worked-out strategy for attracting wide audiences has ensured the popularity and longevity of such shows. However, unlike their counterparts in the West, there are several significant differences in the substance of programmes, at the basis of which is the inextricable link between politics, the general media and comedy show-specific discourses. In this situation, so-called *politentertainment* becomes an integral part of information campaigns implemented by the regime. Another common feature of this entertainment space is the limited recruitment of personnel to work in this industry. Basically, the same people are recruited from show to show, leading to the use of identical joke categories, as well as the same images, specific values and orientations.

As demonstrated by this case study, the impression that these shows do not require any thinking and are meant only for fun is, in fact, just a mask of innocence, under which lurks evidence of significant and careful political nuancing. The industry is subordinated to the needs of the regime and the broadcasts feature the most important narratives in creative and soft forms that are attractive and appeal to wide audiences, including apolitical ones or those opposed to the regime. The opportunities offered by new media outlets, audiences who do not generally watch television are also being reached. In addition, it is possible to identify several common features of the audience, closely related to reduced selectivity, as well as *nostalgia* for the Soviet past being the lowest common denominator.

The way Western leaders, especially those the United States, are portrayed in the comedy content of the entertainment broadcasts points to a disinformation campaign. And its sharpness depends on the dynamics of relations between Russia and Western countries. Another factor influencing the intensity of joking about a particular state and its leaders, as well as the content of the jokes, is the position of the country in the

hierarchical frame of international relations created by the shows' discourse. Russia and the US are portrayed as the leading actors. Germany, France, and Italy are recognized as less influential, but still important actors, while the images of other Western countries and their political leaders are not featured as regularly as those mentioned. Being ignored here works as another, no less important instrument for underlining the hierarchy built by the discourse.

The analysis confirmed that jokes about Western political leadership is not just a reactive activity or a practice that functions as a support mechanism in the process of communicating the desired political discourse to the public. These jokes simultaneously function as an information space, within which, through a variety of images, symbols, and concepts (sometimes false), particular public knowledge, vocabulary and orientations are being created. The messages are short, clear, and simple enough to cover all audiences. These created images of Western leaders hold the definition of who society's real enemies or allies are, and what that means to the viewer/recipient as a member of that society or state.

As a result of constructing images of Western leaders with humorous content, certain codes about the Western political establishment have been highlighted, now seen as weakened by its own internal problems and representing an environment that is antagonistic to Russia. This type of narrative, coupled with the active maintenance of Soviet values and moral standards, mechanisms of stereotypical thinking and the strengthening of longstanding prejudices, serve as support in the maintenance of the regime's internal self-defence system, while simultaneously providing support for the nationwide *Russian world* project and its goals also being implemented in the country's foreign policy.

ANNEX 1. THE PROZHEKTORPERISHILTON COMEDY SHOW

Prozhektorperishilton was aired on *Perviy Kanal* from May 2008 to June 2012. It was officially known as an informative entertainment programme. The producers of the show described it as a Russian version of *stand-up* comedy[142]. However, its structure has quite a lot in common with the late-night show sub-genre. The show was aired once a week on Saturday nights. The average length was 30 minutes (excluding advertisements). The presenters were Ivan Urgant, former KVN competitors – Sergey Svetlakov and Garik Martinosjan, as well as veteran of Russian comedy Alexander Cikalo, who was particularly popular in the 1990s. Each of them played a specific role but with differing on-screen times.

The show was produced by *Krasniy Kvadrat* (see Annex 5, page 80). However, the creative team consisted not only of the well-known, on-screen personalities, but also of other influential former KVN competitors. Those with no past relation to KVN were in the minority, including scriptwriter Alexander Filipenko and director Mary Danieljan.

To some extent broadcast *Prozhektorperishilton* can be considered a parody of *ProjectorPerestroki*, extremely popular in the 1980s[143]. This is obvious from the first part of its title. In turn, the second part of the title has been described as "a tribute to the *ideology of glamour*, which currently dominates in Russia, and symbolizes scandals, intrigue, and money"[144]. At the same time, it was also known as a counterpart of German television channel RTL's *7 Tage, 7 Kopf*e.

The format was a review of the week's most important events by commenting on newspaper and magazine articles, as well as on some of the most visible events that are shown on TV, in a humorous manner. Also, various popular Russian and foreign guests were invited to the studio to not only give their opinions on the review of events, but also to participate in the musical performances that concluded the show.

Prozhektorperishilton has received several TEFI Russian media awards[145]. The official reason for the discontinuation of this comedy show was the contractual arrangements between presenters Sergei Svetlakov and Garik Martinosjan and another major television channel – TNT.

ANNEX 2. THE YESTERDAY LIVE COMEDY SHOW

Yesterday Live was broadcast on *Perviy Kanal* from September 2010 to May 2013 once every two weeks, on Sundays. It was a humorous parody show which mocked both politicians and other television programmes, theatre, cinema performances and other public events, as well as colourful and popular personalities. The main emphasis was placed on a variety of sketches. As with *Prozhektorperishilton*, a popular personality was also invited to every show (they mainly came from the world of theatre) and was actively involved in playing out various humorous situations. A special role was assigned to the topic of *Wikileaks*, in which the main focus was on parodying Western leaders.

The programme was produced by the *Krasniy Kvadrat* television company (see Annex 5, page 80). The main presenter was Viktor Vasilyev, a popular Russian showman, previously a leader in St. Petersburg's KVN league. The creative team consisted of other former KVN members: Alexander Gudkov (team *Fjodor Dvinjatin* (Фёдор Двинятин)) Denis Privalov (former leader of team *Megapolis* (Мегаполис)), Dmitry Kolchin (*Sok* (СОК) leader), Stanislav Jarshin (team *Ujezdniy Gorod* (Уездный город) and *Luna* (ЛУНА)), Sergei Borodin (*Universitetskiy Prospekt* (Университетский проспект)), Maxim Anikino (*Stepiko* (СТЭПиКО)) and others. Alexander Olesko, a well-known actor and TV personality also took an active part in the creation of the show. The director of the show was Vasily Barhanov[146].

Yesterday Live was shut down together with several other entertainment programmes, with no specific reasons given.

ANNEX 3. THE VECHERNIY URGANT COMEDY SHOW

The *Vecherniy Urgant* late-night show has been running on *Perviy Kanal* since April 2012, daily from Mondays to Fridays. The duration of the programme is about 30 minutes– and its overall concept corresponds to a typical American *late night show*. Content is adjusted to the discourse characteristic of Russian television.

Ivan Urgant is the main presenter, with Dmitry Hrustalov – a former KVN competitor, former *Comedy Club* participant and *Comedy Women* host – in a supporting role. Unlike the previous three shows, this broadcast is produced by *Perviy Kanal* itself: producer – Ivan Urgant, general director – Andrei Boltenko, general producer – Alexander Faiman and CEO – Konstantin Ernst.

The main screenwriter is D. Rtisev, who was also the writer for the *Megapolis* (Мегаполис) KVN Higher League team. Other members of the creative team include T. Akakov (KVN team *Assa* (Acca)), A. Gudkov (*Fjodor Dvinjatin* (Фёдор Двинятин)), V. Seleznev, A. Shavkero, G. Shatohin (*Das ist fact* (DasISTfak't)), S. Kancher, A.Skok (*Parapaparam* (Парапапарам)), American creative producer Billy Kimall (worked on such projects in the US as *Not Necessarily the News*, *The Clash*, *Saturday Night Live*), Andrew Saveljev, Vyacheslav Omutov, Said Davdijev and Nikolai Kulikov.

The show enjoys high popularity among Russian-speakers both inside and outside Russia. Moreover, Ivan Urgant has been recognized as one of the most popular and most preferred television programme hosts in Russia in the recent years[147]. He has more than 3.5 million followers on *Twitter*. His financial status, according to *Forbes,* puts him in the list of TOP 20 celebrities in Russia[148]. He has received several TEFI Russian media awards.

ANNEX 4. THE MAKSIMMAKSIM COMEDY SHOW

MaksimMaksim has been on air since May 2016, presented by and named after popular Russian comedian Maxim Galkin. To attract a wider audience, some material is filmed in the studio, but the rest in the home Galkin shares with popular Russian singer and his wife Alla Pugacheva.

The programme first went on air in May 2016. It is aired on Saturday evenings, for about 30 minutes. The first episode of *MaksimMaksim* was widely viewed – according to *TNS Russia* ratings*,* it was the most viewed comedy broadcast in the week of 16 to 22 May 2016. The programme was broadcast until July and it was announced that a second season of the show would air in September 2016.

Guests are popular presenters of *Perviy Kanal* programmes (such as Urgant, Guzejeva, Ernst), as well as singers, actors and other celebrities who traditionally attract great interest from the audience. Typically, ironic jokes target domestic social and political problems, as well as local and international celebrities, from time to time jokes feature foreign politicians, especially those of the West. However, it should be noted that there is no specific segment featuring political jokes.

MaksimMaksim is also a product of *Krasniy Kvadrat*, produced by Yuri Aksjuta. As acknowledged by Maksim Galkin himself, the director of the *Perviy Kanal* – Konstantin Ernst – plays a meaningful role in shaping the show.

ANNEX 5. THE KRASNIY KVADRAT TELEVISION COMPANY

Krasniy Kvadrat is the most important content provider for *Perviy Kanal*, *Rossia 1* (Россия 1), *Rossia 24* (Россия 24), *Moskva 24* (Москва 24), STS (СТС), *TV Centre* (ТВ Центр), *Perec* (Перец) and other major Russian television channels. It operates in various areas related to mass media – television, feature film and TV series' production, the internet, advertising and show business. The company has created popular Russian television shows such as *Голос* (The Voice), *Минута славы* (Minutes of Fame), *Давай поженимся* (Let's Get Married), *Кто хочет стать миллионером* (Who Wants to be a Millionaire). Three of the shows analysed here – *Prozhektorperishilton*, *Yesterdaylife* and *MaksimMaksim* – are *Krasniy Kvadrat* products. According to information on the company's website, the air time of the company's television products exceeds 1 200 hours annually[149].

Krasniy Kvadrat was founded in 2007, on the basis of the *ВИД* company. The company consisted of the following affiliates: *Krasniy Kvadrat*, *Granat* (Гранат); *Mandarin* (Мандарин); *Izjum* (Изюм); *Belaya Studija* (Белая студия) and others[150], which were consolidated in 2013-14[151].

Initially, the company was owned by Larisa Sinelscikova – the former spouse of *Perviy Kanal* CEO Konstantin Ernst. However, in the period April 2014 to July 2015, the company was purchased by influential billionaire Arkady Rotenberg, a close friend of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin. The costs of the transactions are not officially known[152].

ANNEX 6. EXAMPLES OF VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WESTERN LEADERS

The shows analysed in the case study generally put emphasis on the linguistic content of humour. However, some visual characterization effects are also used. In such cases, they are mainly used as activators of visual stereotypes and to support the verbal content.

Images of Hillary Clinton have been used the most. *Photoshopped* by the shows themselves, they reflect specific traditional roles of women. For example, in the 15 June 2016 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, Donald Trump's birthday was discussed, accompanied by the image below of Hillary Clinton *jumping out of a birthday cake*.

Donald Trump's image has been portrayed through his bizarre behaviour. Interestingly, an integral part of the visual presentations of Donald Trump has been his *strange* hairstyle (as been pointed out several times in Urgant shows). For example, in the 10 December 2015 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, Ivan Urgant described Trump's hairstyle as the best place for birds to nest.

The main basis for jokes about the German Chancellor of Angela Merkel is her appearance. For example, in the 29 September 2015 episode of *Vecherniy Urgant*, Silvio Berlusconi was congratulated on his birthday and presented with the picture above, which, as it was pointed out, incorporated the three things that Berlusconi loves the most – power, women and football.

As can be seen, all three examples connect different elements, thus orienting the audience to a simplified and stereotypical way of thinking.

ENDNOTES

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2. Федеральное агентство по печати и массовым коммуникациям, (2016), *Телевидение в России в 2015 году Состояние, тенденции и перспективы развития Отраслевой доклад,* the website of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, p.44, retrieved from http://www.fapmc.ru/rospechat/activities/reports/2016/television-in-russia.html, viewed 17.09.2016
3. Ibid
4. Benefit – a performance commemorating and featuring an actor
5. For more information about *Prozhektorperishilton*, see Annex No. 1
6. For more information about *Yesterday Live*, see Annex No. 2
7. For more information about *Vecherniy Urgant*, see Annex No. 3
8. For more information about *MaksimMaksim*, see Annex No. 4
9. This means talk-shows in which comedy comprises an important element. It is

clear from their titles that these programmes are broadcast later in the evening. The classical scenario is when a programme presenter is chosen and performs scripted monologues with different stand-up comedy elements, with live music in the background. Each programme is divided into several thematic segments. Traditionally they concluded with a performance by a famous musical artist. Usually, these types of shows are broadcast five times a week on workday evenings or, on the contrary, on weekend evenings. They are usually pre-recorded.

10. Several of these programmes feature soft news – newsmagazine shows, entertainment and tabloid newsmagazine shows as well as day-time and late-night shows, which is the focus for this case study. Soft news overemphasizes trivial events, downplays significant current-affairs issues as well as oversimplifying complex realities. Research on late-night shows in the USA demonstrates that such programming significantly frames the political opinions and knowledge of viewers (Baumgartner J., Morris J.S., Rauchfleisch A., Kohler F., (2011)

11. For example, the main scriptwriter of *Vecherniy Urgant* is D. Rtishev, who was also the writer for KVN Higher League team *Megapolis* (Мегаполис). T.Akakov (KVN team *Assa* (Асса)), A. Gudkov (*Fjodor Dvinjagin* (Фёдор Двинятин)), V. Seleznev, A. Shavkero, G. Shatohin (*DasISTfak't*), S.Kancher, A.Skok (*Parapaparam* (Парапапарам)) are also active in in shaping programmes). In addition, several of those named have participated in creation of programmes such as *Prozhektorperishilton* or *Yesterday Live*

12. For more information about the *Krasniy Kvadrat* company, see Annex No. 5

13. See: Ждакаев И., *Юмор конвейерной сборки,* 30.03.2010., retrieved from http://www.sostav.ru/articles/2010/03/30/ko1/, viewed 16.09.2016.; Тихомирова А., *Улыбайтесь, господа: сколько зарабатывают российские юмористы,* the website of *Forbes Russia,* retrieved from http://www.forbes.ru/forbeslife/dosug/284241-ulybaites-gospoda-skolko-zarabatyvayut-rossiiskie-yumoristy, viewed 16.09.2016; *Ургант, Галкин, Зеленский: Сколько стоит позвать звезду на Новый год,* 21.12.2011., portal http://www.bigmir.net, retrieved from http://finance.bigmir.net/budget/9172-Urgant--Galkin--Zelenskij--Skol-ko-stoit-pozvat--zvezdu-na-Novyj-god, viewed 16.09.2016; Юмор: от *идеи до концепции,* the portal LIVE, retrieved from https://readlivemagazine.ru/online/jul-2016/humor-from-ideas-to-concept, viewed 19.09.2016

14. Attending such shows (particularly for Russian-speakers outside Russia) is considered very trendy, but also expensive. It is popularly assumed that such activities are in line with the current understanding of a glamorous lifestyle

15. In Russia, this aspect of popularity is of particular importance. For instance, Khazanov the famous Russian master of satire has stressed the importance of rumours in his professional career (Hutchings S., Rulyova N., 2008, p.101)

16. Broadcasting of *Vecherniy Urgant* and *MaksimMaksim* will be restarted in autumn 2016, after the summer holidays

17. This "qualitative approach usually produces descriptions or typologies, along with expressions from subjects reflecting how they view the social world. By this means, the perspectives of the producers of the text can be better understood by the investigator as well as the readers of the study's results". (Zhang Y., and Wildemuth B.M., (2009))

18. Zhang Y., Wildemuth B. M., (2009), *Qualitative Analysis of Content,* retrieved from https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Content_analysis.pdf, viewed 20.09.2016

19. *Русский политический фольклор. Исследования и публикации*, Ed. Панченко А., (2013), Moscow: Новое издательство, retrieved from https://www.litres.ru/aleksandr-panchenko/russkiy-politicheskiy-folklor-issledovaniya-i-publikacii/, viewed 27.08.2016

20. One interesting example is *Puppets* on the NTV channel. Before being closed down for political reasons, it enjoyed great popularity with ratings even reaching 22%. Russian media experts explained this phenomenon by the fact that political humour and puppet shows have traditionally been facets of the Russian culture. And the combination of these two cultural traditions made the twin of the well-known British programme interesting for the Russian audience. (Hutching S., Rulyova N., (2008), p.140)

21. One of the peculiarities of Russian political humour is reading between the lines

22. Tagangaeva M., Political Humour on Russian Television, *Russian Analytical Digest*, No.126, 10 April 2013, p. 11, retrieved from http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD-126-11-16.pdf, viewed 26.08.2016

23. See: ТВ форматирует жизнь, Vera Zverjeva's interview with Daniil Dondurei, website of the journal *Искусство Кино,* No.10, 2014, retrieved from http://kinoart.ru/archive/2014/10/tv-formatiruet-zhizn, viewed 08.08.2016, Круганская Н., „*Машина по производству юмора": The Village смотрит КВН с телеобозревателем и культурологом,* 29.01.2016, retrieved from http://www.the-village.ru/village/weekend/oba/230677-kvn, viewed 16.09.2016; Ostrovsky A.,(2015), *The Invention of Russia. The Journey from Gorbachov's Freedom to Putin's War,* London: Atlantic Books, pp. 320-321

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29. Channel One

30. Саша Филипенко, *О «Прожектореперисхилтон» и приторности ТВ*, 23.07.2014., retrieved from https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/vozduh/cinema/seychas-vse-delaetsya-tupo-radi-babok-kto-pridumyvaet-shutki-na-rossiyskom-tv/, viewed 28.08.2016

31. Hutchings S., Miazhevich G.,(2010), Television, Nation Building and the Everyday in Contemporary Russia, *Russian Journal of Communication*, Ed. Klykanov I., Vol.3. No3/4. Summer/Fall 2010., p.78, retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19409419.2010.10756772, viewed 17.09.2016

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50.   For example, according to data provided by the Levada Center, in May 2016, 86% of Russia's population admitted that they learn about domestic and world events from television

51.   *Первый канал* content is one of the most consumed in the *Runet* (V. Murugov, *CTC Media*, 11.04.2014)

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58. *Реклама на Первом канале,* official website *Первый канал. Всемирная сеть,* retrieved from http://www.1tv.com/corp/advertising, viewed 04.09.2016

59. Russian TV channels still play an important role in the former Soviet space. They are freely available in Armenia, Belarus and Moldova. They are also available to a comparatively limited extent in Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Baltic States and Ukraine. And despite the fact that Ukraine has recently imposed a series of restrictions on Russian broadcast media, including prohibition of the retransmitting of certain channels via cable networks, the proportion of the broadcasts available is still quite high. For instance, according to information provided by the *Ukrainian Institute of Policy Analysis and Management*, at the beginning of 2015, "Russian television products were estimated to take from 7 to 12 hours of broadcast time on Ukraine's Central Television. But regional subsidiary *Perviy Baltiyskiy Kanal* (Первый Балтийский Канал) has 4 million viewers in the Baltic States.

60. For example, in February 2016 Perviy Kanal signed an agreement with the portal Kartina.tv, which provides online TV services in western Europe and the US. According to information provided by Kartina.tv, its audience includes 52% of Germany's Russian-speaking population. (https://www.kartina.tv/media/pdf/RU-Kartina.TV_mediakit_06-2016_web.pdf).

61. According to statistics, young active internet users in Russia aged from 15 to 24 years spend 19.5 hours a week watching feature films, online programmes and other TV content, as well as short video films, in this environment (http://www.sostav.ru/publication/ujti-chtoby-ostatsya-19391.html). Separate qualitative research reflects a similar situation among young Russian-speakers in the Baltic States

62. According to the definition, is the use of figurative language. There are several

types of tropes: allegory, antanaclasis, irony, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche (http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Trope+(linguistics))

63. Sarsenov K., (2009), Televising Soviet Tropes: Re-forging a Supra-ethnic Cultural Identity, in *The Arts in Dialogue. Essays in honour of Fiona Bjorling, Vol. 24,* Ed. by Lindbladh J., Paulsson T., Sarsenov K., Slavickova M., Tornquist- Plewa B., Lund: Lund University, pp. 257-277

64. Ibid

65. As Arhangelskij has concluded, "the appeal of Soviet times remains as the base of loyalist pop culture. However, this only proves the inability to leave the Soviet framework". Архангельский А. in Круганская Н., „*Машина по производству юмора": The Village смотрит КВН с телеобозревателем и культурологом,* 29.01.2016., portal http://www.the-village.ru, retrieved from http://www.the-village.ru/village/weekend/oba/230677-kvn, viewed 16.09.2016. See also: Laurelle M., The "Russian Idea" on the Small Screen: Staging National Identity on Russia's TV, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization,* No2/2014, p.313, retrieved from https://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/GWASHU_DEMO_22_2/95W8R530T4103376/95W8R530T4103376.pdf, viewed 16.09.2016

66. See: Тараканова Д., *Стендап-комик, сценарист ситкома и их коллеги о состоянии юмора в России*, 01.04.2015., portal www.wonderzinecom, retrieved from http://www.wonderzine.com/wonderzine/entertainment/entertainment/205025-comedy-is-no-joke, viewed 17.09.2016

67. A seme is the minimal distinctive unit of meaning (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/seme)

68. Наговицина И., Информационное преимущество как фактор восприятия комического в кинотексте и передача юмора в ситуативной модели перевода, Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. Серия 9. Филология. Востоковедение. Журналистика. No.1/2015, open-access electronic scientific library cyberleninka.ru, retrieved from http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/informatsionnoe-preimuschestvo-kak-faktor-vospriyatiya-komicheskogo-v-kinotekste-i-peredacha-yumora-v-situativnoy-modeli-perevoda, viewed 19.09.2016

69. Dougherty J., Kaljurand R., (2015), *Estonia's "Virtual Russian World". The Influence of Russian Media on Estonia's Russian Speakers.* International Centre for Defence and Security Estonia, pp16-17, retrieved from http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/Jill_Dougherty__Riina_Kaljurand_-_Estonia_s__Virtual_Russian_World_.pdf, viewed 19.09.2016

70. The results of focus-group interviews conducted during the research project *Societal Security. Inclusion-Exclusion Dilemma. A Portrait of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia* (2016)

71. The rating of the evening programme *Vecherniy Urgant* is around 11%, which is very high

72. Lauruelle has underlined that "the notion of being a *kul'rurnyi chelovek* (a cultured person, with culture being understood as involving not only knowledge, but also values and mores) encompasses the idea of being a responsible citizen and true patriot". She characterizes this as a part of Soviet heritage. (Lauruelle, M., 2014, pp322-3)

73. Дондурей Д., (2009), *Медиа — взаимодействие и репрезентативность*, р., website of the Институт общественного проектирования, retrieved from http://www.inop.ru/files/Chapter14.pdf, viewed 27.06.2016

74. See: Тараканова Д., *Стендап-комик, сценарист ситкома и их коллеги о состоянии юмора в России*, 01.04.2015., portal www.wonderzinecom, retrieved from http://www.wonderzine.com/wonderzine/entertainment/entertainment/205025-comedy-is-no-joke, viewed 17.09.2016; *Евгений Никишов: сегодня зритель хочет юмора, основанного на наших реалиях,* portal www.advertology.ru, 03.02.2016., retrieved from http://www.advertology.ru/article135249.htm, viewed 17.09.2016

75. To a large extent this is in line with the humour theory proposed by Thomas Weatch – the recipient will find a joke funny only in the event that he sees it as relevant and not too offensive. So recipients will perceive linguistic or visual constructs as funny if they lead to certain associations with their own life or personality and, at the same time, do not trigger any other stronger emotions

76. In order for allusions to be applied properly, one needs the following preconditions: equal thesaurus; the game material must feature elements from both elite and mass culture (Цыренцова А., 2011)

77. For example, the expression "my Lida arrived" (*моя Лида пришла)*, which comes from the cult movie *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath* (*Ирония судьбы или с легким паром),* was used in *Vecherniy Urgant.*

78. The sophisticated artistic pursuits of an advanced society such as fine arts, classical music and theatre performances

79. Several studies have been conducted within the Russian Federation to address these issues. One such is research carried out by the World Health Organization presented in its policy briefing material *Interpersonal Violence and Alcohol in the Russian Federation*, available at http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/98804/E88757.pdf

80. See also: Тараканова Д., *Стендап-комик, сценарист ситкома и их коллеги о состоянии юмора в России*, 01.04.2015., portal www.wonderzinecom, retrieved from http://www.wonderzine.com/wonderzine/entertainment/entertainment/205025-comedy-is-no-joke, viewed 17.09.2016

81. Voronova L., (2015), *Gendering in political journalism in the framework of other "ing-s": Russian and Swedish political journalists about gender, ethnicity and*

sexual identity as politicians' characteristics and political categories, ECPR, p.14, retrieved from http://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/027ff917-55d5-4958-99bb-ccb3a36c39ea.pdf, viewed 18.09.2016

82. Ibid. p. 13
83. See the previous chapter
84. The expression, which in Russia is sometimes used colloquially, refers to the *Russian nation's victory* in World War 2
85. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-03-10-2009
86. This phenomenon is explained by D. Zillmann's affective disposition theory, according to which people derive pleasure from the fact that the characters, who they consider positive, win, while the negative characters receive the punishment deserved
87. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/yesterday-live/vypuski/yesterday-live-vypusk-ot-22-07-2012
88. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-17-05-2008
89. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-20-12-2008
90. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-629-vypusk-ot-18042016
91. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-13-09-2008
92. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-28-02-2009
93. Available at the Perviy Kanal website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-26-11-2011
94. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-17-10-2009
95. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/yesterday-live/vypuski?order=desc&from=2012-03-30&to=2012-03-31
96. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: https://www.*YouTube*.com/watch?v=CH5v6CKNKJQ
97. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski?order=desc&from=2016-06-09&to=2016-06-09
98. For a visual illustration from *Vecherniy Urgant,* see Annex No.6
99. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-07-03-2009
100. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-660-vypusk-ot-08062016
101. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: *http://www.1tv.ru/shows/yesterday-live/*

vypuski/yesterday-live-vypusk-ot-23-03-2013

102. For an example of the visual characterization technique, see Annex No.6

103. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-660-vypusk-ot-08062016

104. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/yesterday-live/vypuski/yesterday-live-vypusk-ot-21-10-2012

105. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-27-09-2008

106. For an example of the visual characterization technique, see Annex No. 6

107. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorevrovizhn-vypusk-ot-16-05-2009

108. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/yesterday-live/vypuski/yesterday-live-vypusk-ot-10-02-2013

109. In Russia, saunas are associated with places where sexual services are provided for a fee

110. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-24-05-2008

111. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-517-vypusk-ot-29092015

112. Желтухина М., (2003), Политический и масс- медиальный дискурсы: воздействие- восприятие- интерпретация, *Язык, сознание, коммуникация.* Сб. Статей. Ed. Красных В., Изотов А., Москва: МАКС Пресс, стр. 42-43, retrieved from http://www.philol.msu.ru/~slavphil/books/jsk_23_05zeltuchina.pdf, viewed 17.09.2016

113. As soon as Dmitry Medvedev's presidency ended, jokes about him appeared in the content of comedy shows

114. Laughter is the expression of feelings; a person cannot simply switch to being serious without destroying and distorting the bare truth that is being revealed during the process of laughter. Laughter relieves one of their internal self-censorship, which in the given situation is not the purpose of the author of the content.

115. Архангельский А. in Круганская Н., *„Машина по производству юмора":* *The Village смотрит КВН с телеобозревателем и культурологом,* 29.01.2016, portal http://www.the-village.ru, retrieved from http://www.the-village.ru/village/weekend/oba/230677-kvn, viewed 16.09.2016

116. Such mechanisms are also used to depict the relationships between the head of state and senior officials to demonstrate the principle of the power vertical.

117. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: *http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-08-06-2008*

118. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-10-10-2009

119. All grades are presented in line with the assessment scale used in Russia's education system

120. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-518-vypusk-ot-01102015

121. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/*MaksimMaksim*

122. Abbas Galljamov of the *Levada Center* in *Пора звать Путина*, 01.09.2016, website of the *Levada Analytical Centre*, retrieved from http://www.levada.ru/2016/09/01/pora-zvat-putina/, viewed 19.09.2016

123. Interestingly, between 2008-2010, when the economic crisis began in Russia, initially no one in comedy ever mentioned it. Later, the idea appeared that the crisis was a consequence of US economic policy. Comedy shows only started to joke about this topic after the country's economic crisis had been officially declared.

124. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-228-vypusk-31-10-2013

125. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton/vypuski/prozhektorperishilton-vypusk-ot-11-04-2009

126. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-327-vypusk-05-06-2014

127. Halse R., Negotiating Boundaries between Us and Them. Ethnic Norwegians and Norwegian Muslims Speak out about the "Next Door Neighbour Terrorist" in 24, Nordicom Review, 33(2012)1, pp. 39, retrieved from http://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/359_halse.pdf, viewed 29.08.2016

128. Available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW5TVXiLd5M

129. Coarse conversational form describing Americans

130. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-225-vypusk-28-10-2013

131. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-665-vypusk-ot-16062016

132. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/vecherniy-urgant/vypuski/vecherniy-urgant-614-vypusk-ot-25032016

133. Available at the *Perviy Kanal* website: http://www.1tv.ru/shows/*MaksimMaksim*/vypuski/*MaksimMaksim*-vypusk-ot-26062016

134. For example, everyone votes in the same way (*MaksimMaksim*)

135. For example, on issues of international norms and rights

136. One of the ideas frequently included in comedy shows is that not being aware of international and internal political developments, or even being in general a rather simple-minded person is normal (as there are many such people), fun and appealing.

137. In March 2014, in Urgant's show various confusing world events were reported (e.g., a car filled with honey rolling over in California, celebration of Tree Day in

Italy), while events in the neighbouring country were completely ignored. The only message that appeared regarding Ukraine, was on 25 March, which was the deadline for the submission of presidential candidates' applications. In addition, this message was displayed in a peculiar way, without giving any information on the candidates, nor elaborating on the socio-political situation in Ukraine.

138. For example, this expression: the main thing is that the surgeon determines whether this is jaundice or not*главное чтобы хирург определил есть желтуха или нет*), *Vecherniy Urgant*, 15.06.2016

139. Active use of jokes involving representatives of non-traditional sexual orientations (with particular focus on gays)

140. Here it is important to note that the meaning of the word anecdote is understood differently in English than among Russian speakers

141. In this situation, the consumer of the media product is actually brought to believe that Russia's active participation in various international confrontations, including military action, is normal. The resulting collapse of economic and social well-being does not seem to constitute a problem

142. Сергей Светлаков: "Смысл "Прожектора..." – в высмеивании новостей на злобу дня", Независимая газета (6 июня 2008), retrieved from http://print.lenizdat.ru/articles/1063045/, viewed 15.07.2016

143. Ibid

144. Tagangajeva M., Gallen St., Political Humor on Russian Television*, Russian Analytical Digest,* No.126, April 2013, retrieved from http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD-126-11-16.pdf, viewed 18.09.2016

145. TEFI is an annual Russian national television competition, organised by the Russian Television Development Fund since 1994. Awards go to national and regional television channels, programmes and personalities.

146. *Yesterday Live: актёры и команда*, *VokrugTV* portal, retrieved from http://www.vokrug.tv/product/show/yesterday_live/, viewed 27.08.2016

147. Тихомирова А., *Улыбайтесь, господа: сколько зарабатывают российские юмористы,* 31.03.2015, the *Forbes Russia* website, retrieved from http://www.forbes.ru/forbeslife/dosug/284241-ulybaites-gospoda-skolko-zarabatyvayut-rossiiskie-yumoristy, viewed 31.07.2016

148. Ibid

149. K*rasniy Kvadrat* website*,* retrieved from http://www.red-red.ru/, viewed 01.09.2016

150. *Аркадий Ротенберг купил контрольный пакет акций "Красного квадрата",* 04.04.2014, portal *RBK,* retrieved from http://www.rbc.ru/economics/04/04/2014/57041a979a794761c0ce895d, viewed 20.08.2016

151. See: *«Красный квадрат» присоединил к себе «дочки». Такой шаг говорит о возможной предпродажной подготовке бизнеса, отмечают эксперты,*

05.06.2016, the website of *Газета Известия*, retrieved from http://izvestia.ru/news/551298#ixzz4KyHUevEq, viewed 23.08.2016

152. *Посторонним вход в телепродакшн закрыт, если вы не «Газпром» или Ротенберг,* 11.08.2014, portal *RBK* , retrieved from http://www.rbc.ru/magazine/2014/08/56bc7ebb9a794701b81d2bc2, viewed 26.08.2016

CHAPTER ③

CASE STUDY: KVN

Solvita Denisa-Liepniece

Analysis of the Performances of Parapaparam, the Official Moscow State Institute of International Relations Team at the KVN Summer Festival Golosyashiy Kivin in 2014 and 2015

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This case study examines the KVN (*Klub Vesyeliykh i Nakhodchivikh*)[1] TV show. This is the "post-1991 version of the Soviet-era show KVN, which achieved cult status among students, spawning a nationwide competition with teams from every Soviet republic competing against each other in leagues, forming panels of experts with socio-political satire skills"[2]. **KVN** could be considered a phenomenon, having extended beyond being a TV show, it presents concerts in cities and runs local competitions in schools[3].

After the Soviet-era, KVN was banned on Central Television because of censorship, it returned only with *perestroika,* becoming a politically controversial programme under a less authoritarian regime. Previously taboo topics were now covered and subsequently, following the collapse of the USSR, it became hugely popular[4].

It is also a fundamental part of the eco-system of Russian humour (in Russian culture)[5]. Though the brand itself has existed for several decades and its roots come from the post-totalitarian, post-authoritarian Soviet media structure[6], only in post-Soviet times has it developed into an entity existing separately and beyond the media system (not just as a media product, but running events like concerts or other activities, which are not media content and are not published or broadcast)[7].

This study will show that **KVN is a ready-to-act tool of strategic political communication.** Any part of its content (a performance or single joke) has access to different strategic distribution channels (TV, website, social networks, reprints of jokes in the press, radio (*Humour FM*), etc.)*,* including the main federal TV channel and a number of platforms in social media and wide access to the strategic audience[8].

KVN can also be described as a commercial product and **as a business model**[9]. This business is made possible and is growing largely because of the KVN brand owner's **special relationship with the Kremlin**[10]. This case study, will provided background information on the KVN phenomenon, including the said relationship between the KVN copyright owner and the Kremlin.

The KVN content has been analysed in line with the methodology developed to study humour. It is focused on the performances of *Parapaparam* the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) team at *Golosyashiy KiViN* (Voicing KiViN), the annual festival run by KVN. The data selected for comparative analysis covers the years 2014 and 2015. In 2014, *Golosyashiy Kivin* was held in Latvia, the same venue it had used since 1996 (since 1996 it has been the main summer KVN competition and the main event for the KVN community outside Russia[11]). Following Kremlin pressure arising from geopolitical complications over events in Ukraine and Crimea, the *KiViN* festival was relocated ᵗo Svetlogorsk, a city in the Russian enclave *Kalingradskaya oblast* (Kaliningrad District).

The *Parapaparam* team comes from MGIMO, the main university linked to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs[12]. The team's nickname, promoted by the team itself is 'Diplomats'[13].

The two *Parapaparam* performances selected for this case study are analysed in a number of steps to show their role in strategic political communication, emphasized in the methodology.

Each step of the analysis has a short introduction, followed by the analysis in accordance with the methodology. The first chapter covers context and shared knowledge, the second chapter examines the strategic audience, the third chapter focuses on the perception of humour, and the fourth chapter presents an overview of the functions nominated by the authors of the methodology.

The fifth step is restricted because of the lack of statistics, as the study is focused on the effectiveness of the communication process. However, this step is used to show the layers relevant and important to the communicator. Finally, the study presents its main conclusions on the role of KVN.

3.2. CONTEXT, BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE, SHARED KNOWLEDGE

According to the first step of the analysis, the context, including social context should be addressed. Context is a controversial issue in communication science. For some authors, social context relates to the media and power relations.[14] The concept of shared knowledge used here corresponds directly to the methodology and is narrowed to the source domain (as defined by the authors of the methodology). Shared knowledge will be examined and compared in the 2014[15] and 2015[16] performances of the *Parapaparam* team.

Before turning to the main source domains, it is important to describe the venue and form of the performances. Each team performs for 10-12 minutes. *Parapaparam* uses long scenes (a set of jokes connected by one theme) in each performance – approximately four scenes of 3-4 minutes each. Each performance starts and ends with a song. Jokes with no international relations' context are mixed with jokes referencing international relations. Though not a common practice in the KVN competition, from time to time teams, including *Parapaparam*, repeat successful content/parts of performances (for example – the same successful NNC/CNN newscast parody was used in both 2014 and in 2015).

Table 1: Performances of MGIMO team Parapaparam

Year	Prize[17]	Length of performance*
2012	Gold KiVin (1st place)	11:34:00
2013	not placed	11:48:00
2014**	Black KiVin (3rd place)	10:02:00
2015**	Gold KiVin (1st place)	11:57:00

Length of performance broadcast on Perviy kanal (Channel One)
*** Selected for analysis*

Table 2, on the next page, shows the sources[18] used in *Parapaparam*'s performances in 2014 and 2015. Some of these were used in both performances, others were unique. The knowledge of the biased nature of the Western media and knowledge of the English language were used both in 2014 and in 2015. The shared background is based on recent events (in 2014 – ice hockey results at the Sochi Olympic Games; Eurovision Song Contest performances, including that of the winner Conchita Wurst[19]; in 2015 – sanctions implemented by some Western countries against Russia and those implemented by Russia in return, LGBT and relocating KVN to Kaliningrad) and on events not related to the media or the political agenda, such as family relationships, friendship, alcoholism, etc.

Table 2: Shared knowledge referenced in 2014 and in 2015

2014 performance	2015 performance
TV watching experience	TV watching experience
Western media experience	Western media experience
English language	English language
Specific knowledge of the team's background (Diplomats)	Specific knowledge of the team's background (Diplomats)
Recent law initiatives in Russia	Recent international events (sanctions)
Parody songs (culture-related)	Alcoholism/hangovers
Russian swear words (without the words actually being said)	Russian songs and karaoke
Hobbies, leisure activities (e.g. hiking)	Sport (fitness)
Everyday life (problems with health, renovations)	Amber Hall (Jantarnij) (new building in Svetlogorsk)
Sport (Bad football in Russia)	Partnership (everyday life)
Literature (Russia)	Mothers-in-law
Russian Politicians (Putin, Rhinovirus) and Obama	Putin, Obama, Lavrov as one of the heroes, as well as Zhirinovsky and Kadirov
Brother nations (Soviet language for Soviet Republics)	Americans and their stereotypes about Russia
Negative experience in a Latvian cafe (expensive)	Russia's armed forces (tank biathlon, submarines, helicopters)
Media literacy	Media literacy
Stereotypes: poor knowledge about Russia in the US	Homosexuality and LGBT
Interest in sport (Sochi 2014), Olympics, Oleg Znarok, the coach of the Russian ice hockey team, renowned for his emotional and contradictory behaviour[22].	Terminator (the film and quotes from it)
Following Eurovision, Conchita Wurst and singers from Russia	Creativeness of Russians (internet sources)
Religion (Jesus Christ)	Geography of Russia and military functions/significance of Kaliningrad
Symbols of countries (flags ...)	Symbols of countries (anthems ...)
Film (Terminator)	Film (Terminator)
Friendship	Friendship/Partnership
Economy: China and Gas	
Sexual relations	
Latvia is only of interest to Russia and Russians	

Other shared background issues are based on common cultural knowledge. For example, in 2014 and in 2015, the team referenced and used stills from the film *Terminator*. Parodies of popular songs (Russian, Soviet-era and international songs) are used in every performance. Notably, some films and songs were popular more than thirty years ago. For example, *Terminator* was released in 1984, but Soviet-era band *Syabriy* first performed its song *Alesya* in 1981[20]. New songs are also used, for example – *Nikolay* (sung by two pop singers, one of them the so-called golden voice of Russian pop music Nikolay Baskov, and a singer popular in the 2000s, but who returned to the stage 10 years later using the pseudonym *Natali*)[21].

The themes, presented in the Table 2 demonstrate the use of different domains connecting political, social and personal aspects of life. Though the methodology of this study is focused more on verbal communication, for this particular case study non-verbal communication is as or even more important. For example, decoding or explaining the parody on Lavrov (2015 performance), which includes specific vocal effects or decoding the invited guest Znarok, head coach of the Russian ice-hockey team (during the game against Sweden at the Sochi Olympic Games, he had gestured to the opposing coach that he would kill him by the classic finger across the throat sign) requires the inclusion of non-verbal communication aspects[23].

Another example of non-verbal codes is *Parapaparam*'s parody of US TV news in 2014 and in 2015, creating a bogus channel – NNC. The knowledge needed to interpret this message as a joke is the visual connection to CNN (a transformed logo is used). However, a lack of knowledge about CNN does not hinder the process of decoding the message as a joke (at the verbal level, the message is any popular US TV channel). At the same time, the team imparts the knowledge that CNN content (for those not familiar with it) is not a reliable source, emphasised by the logo.

In this chapter, the shared knowledge called upon is studied (that used to produce a joke and to achieve its understanding calls for a wide spectrum of themes, which includes everyday practices and also specific knowledge). Songs, films as well as national and international news agendas are used as shared-knowledge elements. This referenced content has been created in different times, including cultural products of both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras (and more recent products such as the Baskov-Natali song). The next step of the analysis considers the target audience.

In conclusion, it can be seen that everyday-life experience (such as friendship, partnership, etc.), specific social experience linked with culture (Russian, Soviet, global or Western) and news-media based experience (linked more to on-going processes) are used to encode/create the message.

Language (Russian) plays the leading role in the specific social experience. This conclusion was made not only because of Russian being the performance language, but also for the reason that Russian culture (including songs) was used as a source of jokes.

Therefore, knowing Russian is a kind of border marking the in-group's understanding of the coded message. Literature is also widely used by KVN. Often whole performances are based on literature, i.e. on writers, leading roles or scenes from plays. Usually the playwrights and plays are Russian or connected with Russia.

Looking at the news-media based agenda (some on-going events, or of news presenters) leads to an emphasis on the personal dimension (faces/leaders) in constructing perceptions of international processes. This could be regarded as simplification, demonstrating attempts to connect social experience to personal, everyday life experience. In the fourth step of the analysis, the constructing of leaders will be examined more closely.

3.3. THE STRATEGIC TARGET AUDIENCE

The second step of the methodology examines the audience. Analysing the strategic audiences in the **KVN case reveals a pyramid-like audience,** which begins with assessing the live audience seen in the video, and goes on to the potential and strategic audiences, that could be reached through different communication channels: the live, TV and social-media audiences of this KVN summer show.
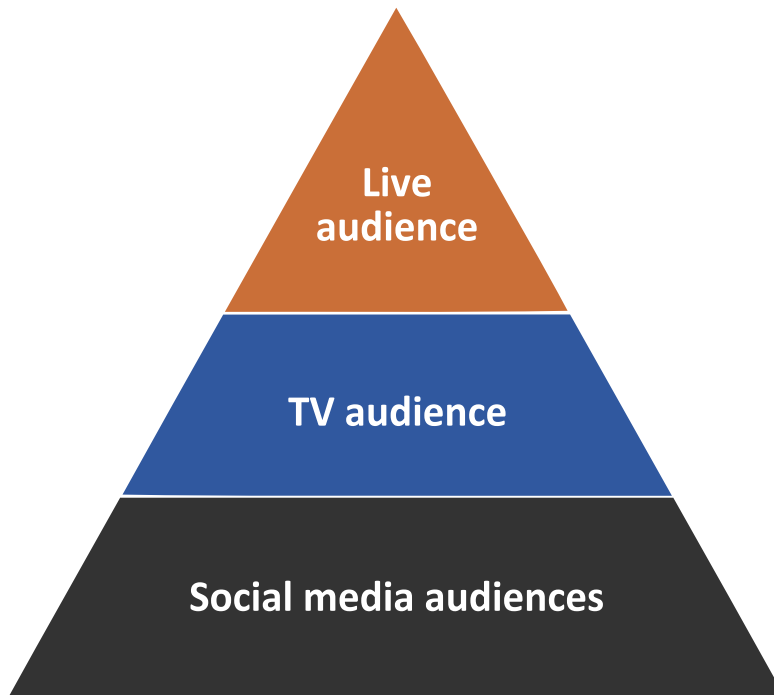
The first level: live audience, this audience (authority figures, including V. Putin and D. Medvedev, opinion leaders, other popular personalities such as sportspeople, former KVN competitors, actors, young people, successful people) is used to create a

theatre-like effect: 1) to show live reaction; 2) to demonstrate the importance of the competition; 3) to provide opportunities to be a part of the event; 4) to be manipulated for added emotion (close-ups and pans) during editing.

Second-level audience: the TV audience. Statistical data demonstrate the huge popularity of KVN. The TV audience should be divided into:

- Russians in Russia;

- the Russian-speaking audience abroad.

Traditionally, KVN is shown during **prime-time**[24], which means the audience is of all ages, both genders, with different social roles. KVN is among the most-watched TV programmes on the most-watched channel – *Perviy Kanal*[25]. In 2014, the *Golosyashiy Kivin* music festival itself was the 5th most-watched entertainment show on all channels (7.1% of all viewers, not audience share[26]), equating to around 10 million viewers. Since 1 June 2016, *Gazprommedia* has launched an entire KVN channel, showing recorded KVN shows non-stop[27].

Third-level audience: Social Networks. After being aired on TV, shows appear on KVN's own official social-media platformsf (as the first step). They are then posted on the accounts of 1) the production teams and actors involved; 2) the fan groups involved, who record or share the content from the official KVN platform; 3) random users. Jokes from and other features of the performances are liked and shared on *Facebook* and on the most popular Russian social media platform *V kontakte*. Another important aspect of KVN shows' lives after broadcasting is video becoming available in viewer-friendly formats (individual jokes, performances) and in long formats (complete games, or mixes of one team's performances in different competitions); the content is visual, which is an asset on social networks, but text banners repeating jokes (not as video) also appear .

The number of users on different channels may include visitors to websites (official[28], unofficial[29], the *Parapaparam* team's[30]); *YouTube* (official[31], actors', independent users'); *V kontakte* (official, KVN actors', KVN fans', *Parapaparam* team members'); *Facebook* (official; KVN actors', fans').

Table 3: Number of views on the official YouTube channel

	Views
Official *YouTube* channel *Golosyashiy KiViN* 2014	2 938 270
Official *YouTube* channel *Golosyashiy KiViN* 2015	2 915 385

NB: KVN's Official YouTube channel is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of distribution of videos on the internet.

Given that recent media-consumption trends in Russia[32] and the world[33] demonstrate the growing use of mobile devices in information consumption and the decreasing popularity of traditional media, KVN already has a significant presence in social networks. KVN is readily distributed without traditional TV and can target an audience not reachable by the traditional media. This becomes even more significant, given that KVN is mainly popular among young people. KVN is played in schools and the actors are treated as role models. In schools, the most active young people with the brightest prospects engage in KVN activities.[34]

KVN also provides access to Russian young people abroad who come together to compete in KVN[35]. In order to compete successfully, participants must follow 1) the mainstream media; 2) the news agenda; 3) to be in the context or understand the context of events (such as sanctions or Russia's position on LGBT issues); 4) analyse previously successful team performances; 5) be interested in Russian and Soviet culture, understanding their usefulness as sources of jokes.

Summing up the findings about the audience, KVN has access to a wide audience, both through traditional and non-traditional media. It is extremely popular and reaches every stratum of the poulation, as it is also aired at prime time. And the live audience is even used to show powerful emotions for their audiovisual effects. The following step of the analysis will focus on the perception of humour.

3.4. PERCEPTION OF HUMOUR

The perception of humour can be analysed by examining responses to single jokes, separately. Another way of looking at the perception of humour is to focus on a whole performance or even take a broader perspective, assessing pre- and post-performance effects. While there are no limitations in the analysis, there may be room for interpretation.

In this study, all three of the methodology's strategies for assessing humour perception are utilised (by examining jokes separately). However, it was not possible to determine the superiority of one strategy over the other, and it should be underlined that the strategies for measuring humour perception of were combined and used simultaneously. In the following, step 3 of the analysis, some examples of using the strategies will be presented.

The main theme of the *Parapaparam* team's entries (identified by the length of the scene within the performance) in 2014 and in 2015 was media reality in the US. The parody on American news (the NNC new channel) provided the opportunity to draw out different problems (sources of stress) from the international agenda. At the same time, in addition to international affairs, these parodies were aimed at constructing or reconstructing Russian identity (in a positive way, by comparisons or by demonstrating Russia's uniqueness).

The dominant perception modus was reinforcement of the **positive social identity of Russian news anchors** versus the negative image of American ones (we are winners, they are losers, but think they are winners). Simultaneously, **a parody of the inner tension resulting from anger on the part of the US side** was successfully implemented at both levels: the recognition of Russia's superiority (by comparison with a representative of the out-group) and the reinforcement of Russian superiority for in-group members. Interestingly enough, for both the live and TV audiences, an important aspect is also the **reduction of externally induced stress**, because the media agenda in 2014-2015 was full of Russia-West relations. As for social networks, it is more difficult to re-create/re-imagine the informational agenda of the user, especially of those users abroad, as readers outside Russia may not be that familiar with the agenda and contexts created by Russian federal TV-channels. More broadly, are they familiar with/do they share the same tensions? Do they follow the news? How do they use media?).

This is why this (the NNC news parody) and other performances recreate the frames of 'us and them' used in the news. Grouping into *us* and *them* was also present in other jokes on international relations.

Examining the *us* and *them* aspect in the performances (jokes) on international relations, there is a change in their framing between the two performances analysed. The *us* group underwent less transformation than *them*. Analysing the jokes on international relations, the following main *us-them* groupings appeared:

Figure 1: *US* and *THEM* in the two *Parapaparam* performances

RUSSIA	:	THE EU
RUSSIA	:	THE EU - LATVIA
RUSSIA	:	THE US
RUSSIA	:	THE WEST
RUSSIA	:	THE WEST - CHINA

In performances prior to the 2013 Crimea conflict (not included in this analysis, but observed for *us-them* grouping in 2013), the main *them* group was the EU. During the conflict in Ukraine, the groupings changed to Russia – the US. Because of the *Golosyashiy KiViN* venue (in Latvia until 2015), jokes on local themes (Latvia) were included. In several jokes, Latvia was framed as a temporary *them*, but close to the *us* group. All these jokes provoke significant positive emotional feed-back from the live audience (including many Latvian and Russian celebrities) in the venue, the *Dzintari* concert hall, as can be clearly seen on TV, because the audience is frequently shown on the video.

In 2015, Latvia was no longer on the of *Parapaparam* agenda, and 'the West' replaced Latvia as the *them* group. In 2015, China was also portrayed as a partner (closer than the US).

Summing up the findings in step 3 of the methodology – all strategies mentioned were used in the analysis of the two performances. It can be concluded that KVN can be used as a tool to influence its audience. The social functioning of humour is relevant to strategic political communication. KVN provides quick access to its agenda for a wide audience and this chapter provides evidence and examples of how this works in practice.

This KVN case shows that humour is used to reduce externally induced stress. The US is identified as the main source of this externally induced stress. Several markers provide evidence for this tension, including narratives and frames, as well as persons. The most vivid example is the parody of a U.S. State Department spokesperson. Humour was used to discredit leaders and other faces/sources, which were inducing externally induced stress.

At the same time, there are clear indicators of the presence of a positive identity. Humour was used to construct a nation with and without actual borders, and other nations, including Latvia are welcome to return to the fold (but avoiding references to the Soviet Union). One example is Latvia being mentioned both as an in-group and out-group actor. Building that positive identity utilised two main elements: 1) a comparative approach and 2) uniqueness. However, this positivity also contained contradictions, for example, in jokes with photos from the internet, showing curious cases (for more details see Chapter 2, page 77)

In addition, some processes were activated simultaneously and it is difficult to identify the leading one: positivity or stress reduction, as it was in the case of inner aggression. This can be illustrated here with one joke that was more visual than verbal. A parody of Sergei Lavrov moving sexually while expressing ignorance of Western sanctions, therefore trying to discredit the Western sanctions[36]. Aggressiveness was mixed with the content of jokes, pointing to superior power, manpower and military power/capacity.

As stated in the first part of the analysis, where the methodology is discussed (the authors call it a tool kit), different psychological elements are activated by humour at the moment a joke is perceived as a joke and these mechanisms can be coded into the content of the message transmitted to the target audience. With these mechanisms which, in other words, construct an identity and a reality, strategic political communication can be easily delivered to its targets in a pleasant and humorous way (entertainment with information elements).

3.5. FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR

In analysing the functions of humour in the context of strategic political communication, the key is to focus on the coding of the humour or the desire of the coder for the function to be decoded in the way planned. It is difficult to detect precisely which functions are coded in a message. However, every joke provides an opportunity to discuss at least one function that might be activated in the audience (target audience).

The methodology provides an extensive list of functions. Grouping of functions identifies several main groups. The connecting element of all the functions is socialization of the receiver (a member of the audience that received the message). The checklist of functions, developed in the methodology tool kit, is used to identify the main trends in *Parapaparam*'s performances in 2014 and in 2015. The main group of functions analysed below focuses on leadership.

Before going into a detailed analysis of leadership functions, a brief overview of other relevant functions is presented. **Humour as a defence mechanism in war and conflict situations** as a function is not only connected with the agenda, but also with silence, something uncovered in this case study. Ukraine is noticeable by its absence in the analysed performances. The main part of the conflict being coded into messages/jokes on international relations was between *us* and *them*, where *they* were the EU and the US. See the joke (parody of) about Sergei Lavrov and sanctions, that perfectly illustrates anger, aggression and, to quote the methodology, "control over oneself, others and 'external' processes"[37].

Many jokes were aimed at **Self-discovery, self-learning.** For example, the jokes on how Russians are perceived by Americans (the parody newscast in 2014 and in 2015) shows elements of self-discovery ('traditional' Russian (homophobic) values, for example)[38]. This positive self-discovery was already discussed in the third step, focusing on the perception of humour.

Referring to **Social interaction**, as one of functions, it could be argued that the construction of social groups mainly emphasized political/state/national identity. Turning to other functions, **aggression** was mostly expressed by comparing countries (Russia – the EU, Russia – the US), including comparisons of leaders (Putin as aggressive

in the perception of the US). Aggressiveness was denoted as something good. Jokes on international politics provided knowledge (**educational function**) about the status of Russia, its current relations with other countries; the hottest or most relevant topics (like the joke about gas and Russia's control of gas supplies)[39].

Constructing exit strategies/problem solving was presented in the following aspect – one exit strategy for the US is to be seen as significant by Russia, because Russia is an important international player[40]. Moreover, Russians were constructed as an unpredictable nation, ready to solve problems in illogical ways (for example, a video showed a tractor helping people get across a river). As for the function **deterring the adversary and deconstructing tension in relations with other agents**, the adversary was deterred in a very open way. Tensions with the adversary were not minimized. This consisted of the following elements: attitudes towards LGBT; Russia's interests are not taken into account by the US and the EU; the adversary uses stereotypes and quasi-knowledge about Russia.

The Creativity function is shown, for example, by provoking the audience to read between the lines of diplomats' messages. The creativity of ordinary people is shown to emphasize that it is comparatively difficult for the adversary to predict the steps Russia will take. Creativity is used both as a function and as a guide for action.

Support of or justification for agenda setting (political, social, individual, groups) was present in each performance, as mentioned in the first step of the analysis, the media and political agendas played important roles in the analysed performances. The best evidence for this were the jokes about sanctions, Russia's military power, gas supply relations, relations between leaders and also placing Russia at the same level as the US. The inadequate knowledge of Jen (Jennifer) Psaki (former US State Department spokesperson – statements made by her were shown and analysed in prime-time programmes on Russian Federal Channels, for example, she was portrayed as a person with poor knowledge of geography and so on) and keeping up with the local Russian agenda (Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Ramzan Kadirov) are important. This function is also very important because of the strategic audience, which includes young people.

This overview of important functions, relevant to the significance of KVN in Russia's strategic political communication, will be followed by a detailed analysis of functions relating to political leaders.

Legitimizing and delegitimizing leaders

This subsection considers the following functions: **legitimization of the existing political establishment and legitimization of the superiority of an individual/leader; sense of belonging to a particular community and sense of social solidarity and acquiring social status or strengthening the existing one, and others.** This part of the analysis contains illustrations (visual and verbal) to provide a better understanding of the message and about the functions of humour used. Some references to the previous analysis steps are made to show the complexity of the coding and decoding processes.

The portrayals of leaders in the performances on international relations should be divided into three groups: the largest group – political leaders; the second group – local actors (non-political leaders) – real persons; the third group – common man and other heroes or products of the imagination, such as the man who played the role of the *lats* (Latvia's currency before the euro), saying that he will be back after the first economic problems (default)[41].

Leaders and leadership are the focus of both performances, the following analysis shows some of the main elements of how these images were constructed. The main leading political roles included Vladimir Putin, Barack Obama, Lavrov and Psaky. Several jokes were developed by comparing Putin and Obama (NNC in 2014 and in 2015). The superiority of Putin was the clear basis for these jokes. At the same time, **externally induced stress was reduced.** The photo (see below) of the President of the US riding his bike (smiling) was shown.
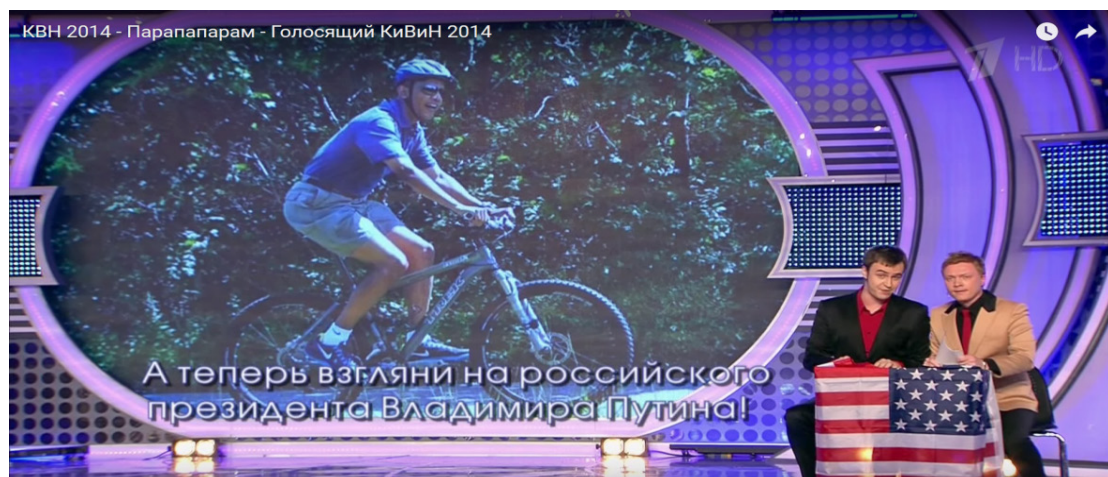
The President of the Russian Federation was also shown in contrast to Obama, in the form of the popular internet meme of a shirtless Putin riding on a bear (taken from an official photo session with Putin shirtless), see on the next page.

The TV news presenters (parody) said that this was not a *Photoshopped* picture, and, to show what an actually edited photo would look like, displayed the following picture:

"This is *Photoshopped*" – said the news presenter to his colleague. And the soundtrack for this shot was the song *When you smile*.

In 2015, the same template was used and a collage of photos of the President of the US was used. "Look at Barack Obama's office" said one presenter to the other, the photo is then zoomed to a close up showing that there is a photo of Putin behind Obama.

First presenter: "He looks very happy."

Second presenter: "Yeah, but look at the portrait".

And the next joke – the breaking news presenter: The best news for the whole of America is that now a man can marry another man[42].

In 2015, another political leader appears – Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov. A Parody on Lavrov opened the 2015 performance. He was portrayed as a man with a weak, tremulous voice and an uninspiring speaker. The words he actually said were very diplomatic (reaction to sanctions), but his body movements were overtly sexual (demonstrating that the sanctions against Russia were totally inconsequential, that Russia was standing above them).

These messages frame a special attitude towards Russian diplomacy, i.e. that official texts do not reflect the actual views regarding problems. And it also means that subtexts are important in international relations. However, no one was shown in contrast to Lavrov. At the same time, Psaki was compared with populist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky. They were both shown on one screen wearing bright red clothing.

Russians see this politician as a clown, raising unacceptable issues (both moral and linguistic) and being involved in a number of conflicts. This comparison 1) demonstrates how well known Psaki is in Russia; 2) discredits Psaki by comparing her with Zhirinovsky, who is famous for his rhetoric on political and gender issues: "women should stay home, cry, cook and sew"[43].

В Америке есть Псаки,
в России - Жириновский
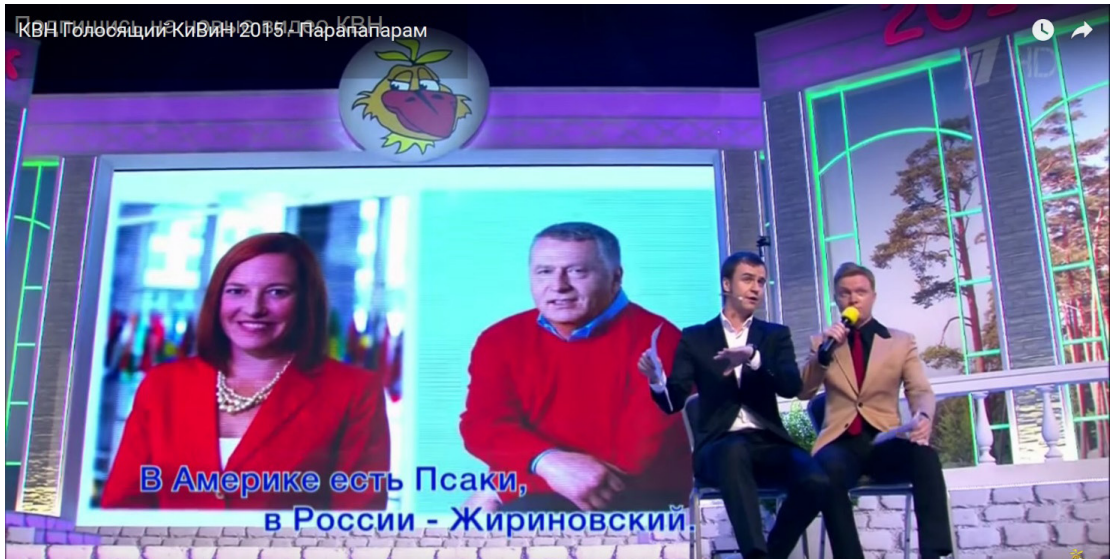
Another comparison was between the *Terminator* (as a hero) and Kadyrov, the President of Chechnya. Kadyrov was shown as a hero, like the indestructible *Terminator* of Russia politics.

У нас есть Терминатор,
в России - Рамзан Кадыров

For this picture, shared knowledge is important – the film *Terminator*, which is more universal and demonstrates the specific audience's familiarity with the film and the character, and the leader of Chechnya – Kadirov. This joke creates an image of Kadirov for those who know nothing about him (for example, active young people abroad).

Framing American values and attitudes towards Russia

The main synopsis of the jokes used in the analysed performances is the following: the American value of the freedom of the press is an illusion (by parodying the TV-channel and revealing the actual attitude to fact-checking and news selection). This case has already been mentioned in this research paper. The use of LGBT themes – Americans are propagandising LGBT issues – was also repeated. These jokes are also highly visualized. In 2015 – in a joke in *Breaking news* (A man can marry a man) – a transformed US flag was used (as visualization – a background to presenters to show that LGBT issues are relevant to the whole country). And it was announced that in five years it would be possible to marry a plant.

And the same LGBT symbol – the rainbow – was used to show that "the best country in the world is where it will be possible to marry a plant", by painting the NNC logo in the colours of the rainbow (music used – YMCA).

Another frame: Americans are stupid, but very patriotic. Americans are easily duped by stereotypes and are afraid of Russia or do not even know where Russia is (see the 2015 performance) mainly verbally and non-verbally portrayed by the presenters ("I am afraid of Russia"). Russians are crazy (picture with a tank biathlon as a military competition were shown as a part of the NNC newscast with comments by the presenters). At the same time, some funny pictures from the internet showing the stupidity of Russians are shown, as is a video showing how one can move from one coast to the other by heavy transport machinery.

In general, Russia is shown as a highly militarized, dangerous and barely predictable country (in the perception of Americans).

Summing up the main functions analysed in this chapter, the case study shows the potential for activating numerous functions important in strategic political communication. The functions can be separated into general functions and specific, conflict-oriented functions. By connecting the fourth and third steps of the analysis, ties between managing stress and aggression and constructing a positive identity can be found.

Close examination of how leaders are constructed in these jokes reveals how the agenda is shaped and how international relations are the focus of that agenda. This is common not only to the jokes of *Parapaparam*, but to the performances of other teams. It would be worth having a closer look at the images of certain leaders across the performances of other KVN teams.

3.6. COMMUNICATION OF HUMOUR

The last step of the methodology opens the way to important processes in understanding the strategic meaning of humour in strategic (political) communication. In this step, it is crucial that the study focuses not only on the message, audience and communicator, but also on the communication process, given the different levels of communication, the socio-historic background and the media platforms used for distribution.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to study the effect of this communication without additional research (lack of data about the audience). At the same time, this step of the analysis provides an opportunity to demonstrate the complexity of the communicator (as the main actor in the process of communication). **The known/visible communicator is the Parapaparam team acting on stage but the unknown/ invisible communicator is** 1) the team's scriptwriter; 2) the editor of the top league[44]; 3) the directors of the TV

version, who edit video and sound[45].

This is typical not only for *Parapaparam*, but for KVN in general. Visible communicators can be used as manipulators to provide a better understanding of jokes (better in the sense of strategic political communication). They are supported by the on-stage communication of teams, the jury and KVN principal Maslyakov. The process of the communication is simplified for viewers, but censorship, the identity of the scriptwriter, the identities of advisers remain hidden, to make it easy to consume without thinking about the communicator and the effects the communicator planned.

Given the willingness of the receiver to engage in the communication process, KVN is primarily a TV show. But for those who do not watch TV – the content also is available on social networks. KVN is popular in social networks and the unclear system of news-feed aggregation may be helping the communicator reach a specific audience. In other words, the potential cooperation of the strategic communicator (actor in Russia's strategic political communication) can be used to deliver a concrete message to a specific audience in a native manner – in a more comfortable and natural way, akin to native advertising .

It is important to take into account the growing popularity of native advertising in marketing. Native or disguised advertising is that made to look native to the platform on which it appears (platforms that are not primarily commercial). By replacing 'native advertising' with 'native strategic political communication', we can reach a ready-to-act corpus of online communities and fans ready to accept messages quickly. It should be noted here that this is a ready-to-act network for mobilizing a specific audience (young people).

On the other hand, there is growing competition in the field of entertainment. Former KVN competitors and others are producing new projects, similar to KVN. Faces that became popular on KVN are creating their own programmes and channels outside Maslyakov's system, known to be loyal to the Kremlin. The multiplication of communication channels providing high-quality audio-visual product (humour-based) is a challenge for those controlling or influencing KVN.

Today, a number of clearly visible facts demonstrate the Kremlin's very close relationship with the KVN owner, such as financial support to build the *Planeta KVN* concert hall (http://domkvn.ru/); support of KVN competitors abroad (contest venues); top-level politicians (including Putin and Medvedev) attending the main shows/games in the top league; Maslyakov, the main face of KVN, being awarded the *Za zaslugy pered Otechestvom (III level)*[46] state award.

In other words, relations are close and beneficial for both sides: the KVN owner receives more income; the Kremlin has access to a specific and strategic audience, ready to serve the regime with the best emotion-touching content made for the target audience:

entertainment – the First Channel has a prime-time product (with a large audience); the audience fulfils the expectations of the content and 'shares' and 'likes' it in social networks, which also addresses the question of accessing digital media.

The best evidence of the splitting up of the KVN movement after the annexation of Crimea is the launching of Ukraine's *Liga smeha* (Laughter League). The Russia-Ukraine conflict has also influenced KVN-related relations between the two countries and the notable result is the appearance of *Liga smeha* as a response to the Kremlin-friendly comedy factory. *Liga smeha* contestants also performed in Jurmala (Latvia) in 2016, under the *Made in Ukraine* brand.

Liga smeha can be considered an alternative and symbolic adversary of KVN. For example, at the end of October 2016, *Liga smeha* organised a concert in Mariupol. The concert, lasting 10 hours, was a visible act of support for the inhabitants of a war zone.

CONCLUSIONS

The tool kit developed to study humour guides the researcher through very difficult processes connecting the different levels of communication, including the communicator, multiplicity of channels, messages and different audiences. This particular case study deals with the KVN movement, which first appeared on Soviet television but has now been transformed into a comedy factory, still going out as a TV programme, but its hidden (frequently it is not possible to identify the source sharing KVN content) and unpredictable life on the internet can give it many strategic turns.

This case study presents an overview of KVN as a TV show and a movement. To study the humour content, one team's performances were selected. The step-by-step analysis enabled an examination of the communicator or, more accurately, of the communicators behind the messages. The messages were studied at different levels, as outlined in the methodology.

The main conclusions from the first step of analysis are the identification of the main trends in shared knowledge. The content of each performance was analysed to examine these domains and identified three main groups: everyday life, cultural experience and the news/media agenda.

The second step of analysis studied the target audience. Three main audience levels were identified: 1) the live, on-site audience; 2) the TV audience; 3) the social-network audience. All of these audiences can also have members of the other audiences. Measuring the third-level audience is challenging, the on-going life of the content in social networks is not clear.

The main conclusion of the third step, dealing with the perception of humour, is that all the psychological elements listed in the description of the step were present in the analysed performances. The constructing of positive self-identity was studied and it was established that comparison and demonstrating uniqueness were the two functions mainly used.

The fourth step focused on the functions of humour. The step was divided into two subsections – an overview of the main functions identified in the performances, and a focus on leaders and leadership. The latter subsection included illustrations (visual and transcriptions).

The fifth step provides some specific information on the communicator (visible and non-visible); on the potential for mobilization of the social-network audience, which becomes especially relevant with the growing popularity of native advertising and the aggregation of news feeds by social networks themselves; the final step of the analysis identifies some points weakening the effectiveness of the KVN 'machine'.
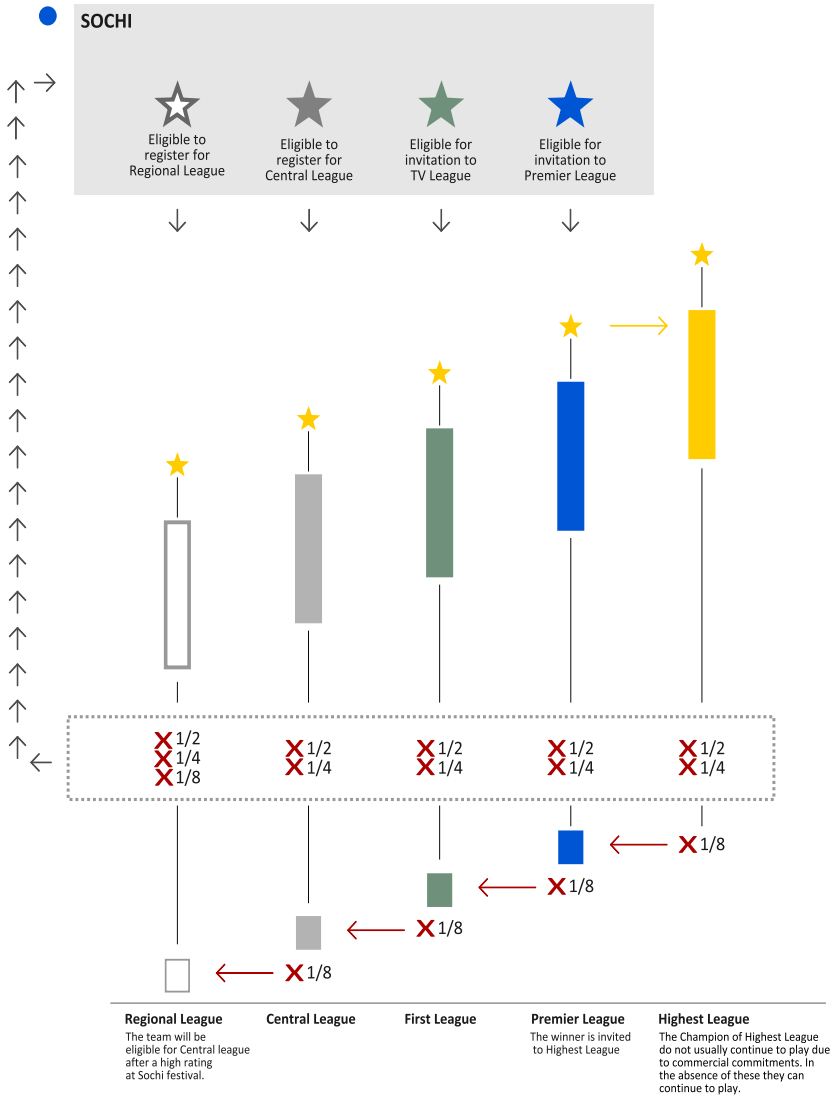
To sum up, this multidisciplinary framework, designed to study humour, provides a unique opportunity to open up, step-by-step, the strategic tools and elements coded into jokes and performances. It can be concluded that KVN as such and the two *Parapaparam* performances are humour elements that have been used as tools of strategic political communication.

Further research should focus on the perception of the different KVN audiences in order to measure the effectiveness of this type of strategic political communication.

APPENDIX 1

Pyramid of Maslyakov

● **Team**
Create a team, come up with a name, register it on the internet site „AMiK".

● **Registration**
Registration is required in order to travel to Sochi, perform and be rated.

● **SOCHI**

☆ Eligible to register for Regional League

★ Eligible to register for Central League

★ Eligible for invitation to TV League

★ Eligible for invitation to Premier League

Regional League	Central League	First League	Premier League	Highest League
The team will be eligible for Central league after a high rating at Sochi festival.			The winner is invited to Highest League	The Champion of Highest League do not usually continue to play due to commercial commitments. In the absence of these they can continue to play.

Source: data of the teams

Source: *Maslyakov's Pyramid* Жохова, А. (7 августа, 2013). Нешуточные деньги: как глава КВН зарабатывает на веселых и находчивых. Форбс (русское издание). http://www.forbes.ru/kompanii/internet-telekom-i-media/243149-neshutochnye-dengi-kak-glava-kvn-zarabatyvaet-na-veselykh-i

ENDNOTES

1. Translation: Club of the Merry and Quick Witted

2. Hutchings, S., Tolz, V. (2015). *Nation, Ethnicity and Race on Russian Television: Mediating Post-Soviet difference.* Routledge.

3. Марфин, М., Чивурин, А. (2002). *Что такое КВН?* Симферополь. Бланк Экспресс.
    Кольцова, О. (2009). КВН как средство социализации подростков и развития из творческой активности в условиях детского оздоровительного лагеря. *Педагогика, психология и медико-биологические проблемы физического воспитания и спорта.* 87-89.

4. Following the collapse of the USSR, Russian central TV was no longer broadcast in the newly independent countries, see Evans, C. (2016). *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television.* Yale University Press.

5. Hutchings, S., Tolz, V. (2015). *Nation, Ethnicity and Race on Russian Television: Mediating Post-Soviet difference*. Routledge. Milne, L. (2004). *Reflective Laughter: Aspects of Humour in Russian Culture.* Anthem Press.

6. Evans, C. (2016). *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television.* Yale University Press.

7. The KVN concept (a show and humour-based competition of two or more teams) is used at different levels – both official and informal (in schools). This huge virtual pyramid includes leagues in regions of Russia and 'near abroad' with promotion possible to the top division.
    Becoming a top-league team is a ticket to TV appearances, a door to popularity (concerts for Russian and Russian-speaking audiences in other parts of the world); increased potential to find a well-paid job in the entertainment-focused media business; an opportunity to become visible/known and use this in other non-media-related spheres.

8. In Russia the strategic focus on exploiting entertainment TV content is growing. Very recently, on 1 June 2016 *AmiK* (the owner of the KVN trademark) launched a new TV channel – KVN TV – together with *Gazprom* media. (For details see http://kvnru.ru/06.04.2016/1/comments/). The target audiences are not only in Russia, but also in neighbouring countries, including the Baltic countries, Georgia. Notably, the owners stated at the very beginning that the channel would be commercial-free.

9. The owner of all KVN rights is the *AmiK* company. *AmiK* is owned by Alexander Maslyakov (presenter of a *Perviy Kanal* show). In 2015, the Russian edition of *Forbes* (*Нешуточные деньги: как глава КВН зарабатывает на веселых и*

находчивых. forbes.ru) calculated that *AmiK*'s annual income (broadcasts, live shows) was not less than USD 3.5 million. Local KVN leagues pay to participate in the KVN eco-system. Those teams using the KVN brand are obliged to pay 10-20% of their income to *AmiK*. Maslyakov also has a sizeable real-estate portfolio, acquired with the support of the government. V. Putin and D. Medvedev have attended the official openings of new KVN centres. *Forbes* has also published *Maslyakov's Pyramid*, revealing the importance of the annual festival in Sochi (at the beginning of the season). See attachment for more detail.

10. Жохова, А. (7 августа, 2013). Нешуточные деньги: как глава КВН зарабатывает на веселых и находчивых. *Форбс (русское издание)*, retrieved from http://www. forbes.ru/kompanii/internet-telekom-i-media/243149-neshutochnye-dengi-kak-glava-kvn-zarabatyvaet-na-veselykh-i

11. 13 января, 2015. «КВН» и «Юрмалина» тоже уходят из Юрмалы. *Балтийский курс*. http://www.baltic-course.com/rus/tourism/?doc=101025

12. See: http://parapaparam.msk.ru/

13. For more details see: Балоян, А. (16 сентября, 2016). Холостяк недели бизнесмен Антон Гаспарян. *People Talk*. http://peopletalk.ru/article/__trashed/

14. Van Dijk, T. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach.* Sage Publications.

15. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndm9HyZY3iw

16. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNQb1gwgvXM

17. Traditionally, Golosyashiy KiViN festival winners are selected by a jury made up by actors, singers, TV presenters and sportspeople. Approximately 20 teams participate in every festival. *Parapaparam* are among the best, and its performance was included in the list of winners and was shown on the First Channel (Perviy kanal) in September/October.

18. See Step 1 of the methodology for details

19. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaolVEJEjV4

20. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaqTQTmFkWo

21. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4m2Wmebbsw

22. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqtZvDavMbg

23. Ibid

24. See Gitlin, T. (2005). *Inside Prime Time* (Routledge) for a detailed explanation of prime time.

25. See official web-site www.1tv.ru

26. For more details Самые рейтинговые телевизионные шоу 2014 года, retrieved http://www.vokrug.tv/article/show/samye_reitingovye_teleshou_2014_goda_46098/

27. For more details http://kvn.ru/news/13589

28. See: http://www.kvn.ru/

29. For example, http://kvnru.ru/ (КВН для всех)

30. See: http://parapaparam.msk.ru/

31. See: https://www.youtube.com/user/kvn

32. 13 сентября, 2016. Первый канал уступил пяти ресурсам по популярности в России. *Спектр.* Retrieved from http://spektr.press/news/2016/09/13/pervyj-kanal-ustupil-pyati-internet-resursam-po-populyarnosti-v-rossii/

33. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016,* retrieved from https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf

34. Экспресс школа КВН, see: http://www.kvner.ru/projects/express_shkvn/

35. For example, see Лига Рига: http://www.ligariga.com/ Западноевропейская лига КВН https://vk.com/kivineu

36. See: 00:20 – 1:10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNQb1gwgvXM

37. The actor playing Lavrov said that Russia will take the sanctions into account, but at the same time he displayed overtly sexual movements, demonstrating that Russia would actually ignore the sanctions. However he addressed Western countries as *Dorogie dryzya* (dear friends). See: 00:20 – 1:10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNQb1gwgvXM

38. See: 8:40 – 9:15 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNQb1gwgvXM

39. The parody on American newscast (NNC – CNN). See: 06:20 – 6:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndm9HyZY3iw
   Two anchors present the news (translation):
   Presenter 1: And now, the economic news.
   Presenter 2: Now China and Russia have signed a major gas contract.
   Presenter 1: And now gas from Russia will go to China.
   Presenter 2: Wait, and what about Europe?
   Presenter 1: O, Lally Lallay (words from the preceding song showing a sexual context, meaning here – none).
   Presenter 2: Oh, I am really afraid of the Russians …

40. See: 6:35 – 8:50 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNQb1gwgvXM

41. See: 8:29 - 10:30 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wro29-D_g_M

42. See: 8:12 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqZ_TK_i0pA

43. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtdYxKIv784

44. 26 марта, 2016. Интервью с Андреем Чивуриным: «Шутки про Путина в КВН носят исключительно комплиментарный характер». *Сегодня.uа.* Retrieved from http://www.segodnya.ua/life/interview/intervyu-s-redaktorom-i-prodyuserom-ligi-smeha-andreem-chivurinym-odnazhdy-ya-poteryal-zhenu-vo-vremya-dayvinga-702334.html

45. Хотног, В. (2014). *Двадцать пять лет в плену у КВН.* Москва: Центрполиграф.

46. For Merit to the Fatherland – a mixed civilian and military order awarded for outstanding contributions to the state associated with the development of Russia's statehood, advances in labour, peace, friendship and cooperation between nations, or for significant contributions to the defence of the Fatherland

CASE STUDY:
USE OF HUMOUR FOR SOLIDARITY, DENIGRATION AND STRESS-RELIEF IN THE UKRAINIAN MEDIA DURING THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN 2014-2016

Maksym Kyiak, Ukraine

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Ukraine is a unique case for study as far as the use of humour as a strategic communication tool is concerned. Russia launched a massive information war against another country. During the first months after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine, there was no unified or coordinated approach to countering Russian propaganda[1]. Furthermore, during the first phases of the war, civil and military volunteers, and the Ukrainian diaspora took the place of the official Ukrainian authorities in countering Russia's information attacks. A horizontally organized, post-*Euromaidan* Ukrainian civil society had to combat Russia's vertically constructed propaganda machine. That horizontally structured civil society provided such functions of humour as solidarity (belongingness) and stress-relief. As the information war progressed, Ukraine, a country with no real experience in counterpropaganda and with restricted financial capacity, had to learn how to fight back, literally from square one. That is why Ukraine counterpropaganda and use of humour were and still are more a product of a variety of independent and spontaneous initiatives, rather than a systemic approach. Nevertheless, the diverse landscape of humour in the Ukrainian media provides a rich source of information for the case study.

Media is now one of the main counterpropaganda tools in Ukraine. The main source of news in Ukraine is still TV (90%), with online media second (62%[2]). More than one third of the population reads print media, mostly local press. About a quarter of Ukrainians use radio as a source[3] of news. The five most popular TV Channels in Ukraine are: *STB*, *Channel Ukraine*, *1+1*, *Inter* and *ICTV*[4].

There are a lot of examples of using humour in Ukrainian media. It has been used by TV channels: *1+1*, *ICTV Channel*, *Channel 24*, *Espreso TV*, by political caricaturist Grigoriy Kliuchnik, *PekelnyiBulba*, in magazines and newspapers *Perets na peredoviy*, *Der Hunta Zeitung*, *Narodna Armiya* (People's Army), *Satiric Checkpoint* and *Vsesmikh* (Bcecmix. com), in online media Censor.net and durdom.in.ua, radio *Armiya FM*, singers Antin Muharskiy (stage name – *OrestLiutyi*) and Mirco Sablich, etc.

Since humour is applied by Ukrainian media very widely, this case study will focus on specific examples applied by television, newspapers and political caricaturists. These are examples of how humour is used as a tool for deepening the sense of belonging, of social solidarity and as a mechanism for stress-relief – the functions of humour that can be identified as the most important here.

The presented research aims to explain how humour is being applied to counter Russia's propaganda in Ukraine, utilising the proposed methodology. In line with that framework, the structure of the paper comprises five analytical steps. The first chapter will give a short description of the context and background that is important for the analysis. The second step will be devoted to analysis of the strategic audience, followed by the description of the specifics of the perception of media content. The next chapter will analyse the three main functions of humour – deepening solidarity, stress relief and deterring an adversary by denigrating and satirizing its capacities – in this specific case. In contrast, the last part of the paper will examine several aspects of the forms of communication used to transfer the humorous content and the messages included in it. A short conclusion and final remarks conclude the paper.

4.2. SHARED KNOWLEDGE/CONTEXT

The recent events of 2014-16 in Ukraine have united its citizens and led to significant changes in Ukrainian identity. Currently, about 90% of Ukrainians are proud of their state symbols and attributes, and the level of patriotism has increased significantly. At the same time, Ukraine is known for the coexistence of different identities and cultures. Such differences have historical roots because, before independence, Ukraine was ruled by different states and under the influence of different cultures. Such fragmentation was also caused by the Soviet system of social control with its policy of breaking trust in state institutions and in fellow citizens[5].

One of the examples of these differences between Ukrainian citizens are the linguistic peculiarities of Ukraine. Currently, about 60% of Ukrainian citizens consider the Ukrainian language to be their native language (cf. the Russian language – 15%, 2% – other languages, 22% – both Ukrainian and Russian languages). It should be mentioned that Ukraine has many bilinguals, readily using both languages. Interestingly, in comparison to previous years, the number of Ukrainians using both the Russian and Ukrainian languages has increased, as also has the number who speak Ukrainian. At the same time, the number of Russian-speaking Ukrainians has decreased[6]. Furthermore, almost half of Ukraine's Russian-speaking citizens consider themselves representatives of Ukrainian culture and of European traditions, while almost a quarter – of Soviet traditions, and only one-tenth – of Russian culture and traditions[7].

One of the latest surveys on Ukraine's linguistic map was published by the *Rating Group Ukraine*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 90% of Ukrainian-speaking citizens are in favour of independence. But at the same time, fewer than 50% of Russian-speaking citizens are in favour of independence for the country in which they live. According to May 2016 research by the Independent Centre for Policy Studies carried out in six different Ukrainian regions, the conflict in the eastern part of the country has nothing to do with language, but is mostly based on values. Moreover, if we look at Donbas in 2013, only 3% of Donbas residents perceived the language issue as most important[8]. It should also be noted that the aggression against Ukraine has led to the solidarity between Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking citizens increasing[9].

For a better understanding of how humour can be applied, it is also crucial to understand the context of the main cultural and socio-political peculiarities. Since Ukraine's independence, Donbas regional identity has prevailed over national identity. This regional identity is tightly intertwined with Soviet identity. According to statistics, only 17% of Donbas region citizens perceive patriotism as the primary unifying factor (in contrast to central Ukraine – 44%, western Ukraine – 47%, southern Ukraine – 39%)[10]. During 2013-14, the number of Soviet Union supporters in Donbas has grown, while these numbers have declined in the rest of the country. 31% of Donbas residents are in favour of closer ties with the European Union and 34% – of a customs union with Russia[11]. It should be mentioned that before 2014, the Donbas region was under the strong influence of Russian media.

Another important aspect is religious belief. While Ukraine is one of the most religious countries in Europe, the religious sphere exhibits a number of peculiarities. First of all, there are a number of Orthodox churches: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchy, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchy) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. If the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchy is more popular in the eastern and southern parts of the country, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchy) has more followers in central and western regions. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Catholic

Church are also very popular in the western region. Ethnic Russians usually prefer the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchy, while ethnic Ukrainians prefer the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchy), the Ukrainian Orthodox Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. 97% of religious organizations are Christian (Orthodox – 55%, Catholic – 14.7%, Protestant – 30%)[12].

4.3. STRATEGIC AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Strategic Audience Analysis is extremely important in this case study. Its importance is determined by the structure of society and the information space used by society's different groups. It is clear that there are two specific groups that can be fundamentally be divided by geography: the in-group – the majority of Ukrainians and the out-group – eastern Ukraine. The existence of these separate groups is a considerable obstacle restricting the consumption of humour. On the other hand, it should be noted that this distinction exists only in part. Russian propaganda can also be accepted by a significant proportion of the in-group.

It is not an easy task to examine the use of humour in temporarily occupied territories in eastern Ukraine and humour is applied there quite rarely as an element of propaganda. Donetsk radio station *Respublika* (Republic) and newspapers *Novorossia*, *Novosti Novorossii* (NovorossiaNews), *Zhyzn'Luganska* (Luhansk Life) do not usually use humour. If we look at online media, we find the so-called *KVN team of Novorossia*, which has a page in the *Vkontakte.ru* social network and a video channel on *YouTube*. In these videos, a number of men in uniforms and balaclavas mock Ukrainian soldiers, politicians, the sovereignty of Ukraine, the European Union and the United States. To achieve this, they parody famous Russian TV-shows and songs. Several dozen pro-Russian separatist groups presenting humorous content can be found on the *Vkontakte.ru* and *Odnoklassniki.ru* social-media websites. Often, the humour of pro-Russian separatists lacks creativity and mirrors the same messages and even caricatures from the Ukrainian side.[13]

The main messages and features in the humour of Russian and pro-Russian separatist media are the following:

- denigration of *Euromaidan* and its achievements. *Euromaidan* is described as the cause of the war;
- Ukraine is described as a failed state;
- defamation of the Ukrainian army and media;
- denigration of Western and Ukrainian political leaders;
- positioning Ukrainian citizens as being opposed to the authorities;
- use of World War II symbols, as well as the narratives of Soviet-era films;
- blaming the West and not Russia for the war against Ukraine, which is described as a civil war;
- attempts to show that there are no Russian troops in eastern Ukraine.

Screenshot from youtube.com, Команда КВН Новороссии "Barack Obama, Give Us Back Your Nobel Prize!"

Obviously, the denigration of Ukrainian politicians and Ukraine as a country by the Russian Federation, as well as by the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic is optimized for the domestic audience to draw their attention away from internal problems and prevent any sympathy arising towards Ukraine. At the same time, the lack of using humour and predominance of aggressive humour may be a consequence of the Kremlin's thought-out strategy of disseminating **long-term moral trauma and hate in the Donbas region towards Ukraine and the West.**

4.3.1. Perception

Another key and sensitive issue is the differing perceptions of history and of historical events in different parts of Ukraine. For example, more than 53% of the respondents in eastern Ukraine are convinced that victory in the Second World War was the main achievement in Ukrainian history. At the same time, only 21.8% of Ukrainians from western regions agree with that proposition and most of them perceive their country achieving independence as that significant event[14]. In addition, western and eastern Ukraine differ in their perceptions of the Ukrainian Resistance Army or certain historical personalities, especially those prominent during and after World War II.

As is clear, Ukrainian citizens and the peculiarities of their identities in different regions of the country are markedly different. Immediately after Ukraine regained its independence, the Russian government tried to deepen this fragmentation with the help of media, information warfare, cultural diplomacy and political actors. Certain Russian stereotypes about Ukrainians were also used for this purpose. Long before 2014, the Russian media were portraying Ukrainians as stupid and uncouth peasants[15].

Along with Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression in Donbas, this trend increased even more. Russian propaganda used and exaggerated the old fears and prejudices of Russians during *Euromaidan* and also during the aggression in Donbas. These stereotypes were transformed into Russian media messages such as: there is no Ukrainian state, nor any culture or language; Ukraine is a non-sovereign, non-independent country and a failed state; Ukrainians and Russians are one nation. Another stereotype is that all political processes inside Ukraine, including *Euromaidan*, are managed by Western states and are a part of some geopolitical game. Patriotic Ukrainians were portrayed as "nationalists" and "fascists" from western Ukraine, who hate everything Russian[16].

In this way, Russian propaganda tried to divide Ukrainian society by denigrating *Euromaidan* and its achievements, by defaming the Ukrainian army and media, denigrating Ukrainian political leaders and positioning Ukrainian citizens as being opposed to the authorities. Russia has utilised its international media such as *RT* and *Sputnik* for this purpose, as well as domestic and online media. All of this was also intended to create an atmosphere of panic, fear and frustration and total distrust in Ukrainian society.

4.4. FUNCTIONS AND COMMUNICATION OF HUMOUR

As mentioned above, humour is one of the means used by Ukraine to counter such Russian propaganda and policy of division. Several functions are performed by the content of different forms of humour. The author will demonstrate some of the most important.

Humour as a stress-relief factor

This is the simplest and the most obvious, but at the same time critically important function of humour. Especially in wartime and immediately after, it provides specific elements for stress-relief and for the alleviation of psychological traumas.

Humour as a tool to deepen a sense of belonging to a community, a sense of social solidarity

A large volume of humorous content providing such senses can be identified, as also can different forms used to execute it. One example is the patriotic video for the song *I love Ukraine* by *Wellni featuring Sergej Kush*, where elements of humour are included alongside highly patriotic calls for unity and solidarity. [17]

Screenshots from youtube.com, Vlad Kovalyov, "Я люблю Україну"

Humour as a tool for deterring an enemy by denigrating and satirizing its capacities

During the current war, some efficient counterpropaganda strategies utilising humour have been applied by the Ukrainian side. One of them is **reduction to absurdity.** The first example of this was a video of Ukrainian soldiers from the Azov battalion recorded near Mariupol[18].

Screenshot from www.unian.ua, Бійці "Азова" у жартівливому відео підняли американський прапор над Широкіним

The material features the US flag and Ukrainian soldiers, speaking in English and extolling Barack Obama and Coca-Cola. Though this video did not go truly viral, it had several thousand views on YouTube, it was one of the first examples of the Ukrainian side using humour. Two soldiers, introducing themselves as "Thomas Miller" and "Ashton Kutcher" satirized the Kremlin's propaganda and its stereotypes. This strategy was then often applied in social media. For example, the Russian government accused Arseniy Yatsenyuk, at that time Ukraine's Prime Minister, of taking part in the first Chechen war, which initiated numerous humorous pictures, cartoons and caricatures in the internet. Yatsenyuk was portrayed in those pictures as a terrifying, bearded Muslim warrior, etc. False information presented by Russia's First National stating that Ukrainian soldiers were fighting because they were promised "two slaves" was totally ridiculed and reduced to absurdity by Ukrainians, especially in Twitter and Facebook.

This strategy was also used by Russia's RT channel in a video satirizing the Western perception of Russian media. One example is the video RT broadcast "Watch how the evil 'Kremlin propaganda bullhorn' REALLY works"[20]. This short film offers a look at "the way news content is produced on RT". Certain important messages included in this video can be identified.

Firstly, several stereotypes used by Western media are reduced to absurdity. For instance, the image of a bear counting money in a Soviet-style office is presented as an element of everyday life in the RT office.

Screenshots from RT, youtube.com, "RT exposed in leaked video: Watch how the evil 'Kremlin propaganda bullhorn' REALLY works".

Secondly, images of the President of the Russian Federation are used to give the impression that the concept of control over television is absurd. For example, the image of a cleaning woman, connected directly by phone with Vladimir Putin, giving orders about broadcasting content.

It can be concluded that both sides are using the same communication strategies.

Another, no less valuable form of humour is parody. One example is the short parody of the Soviet TV series *Seventeen moments of Spring*, which is about World War II spies and produced by the *Kvartal 95 Studio* for the *1+1* channel.

Screenshots from Іван Гадевич, youtube.com, "Штирлиц. 17 мгновений РУССКОЙ ВЕСНЫ – Квартал 95 (трейлер)".

In the parody, Soviet spy Stirlitz is operating among Ukrainians, who are stereotypically portrayed as stupid, hard-drinking fascists, totally subservient to a Jew, Arseniy Yatsenyuk– fully reflecting Russian propaganda[21]. This short film parodies the main stereotypes, prejudices and narratives of Russian propaganda about *Euromaidan*, Ukrainians and then Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

Another interesting aspect touched in this video is the joke about how much spy Stirlitz 'loves' President Vladimir Putin.

Several famous parodies have been made by this studio. One of them is aimed at the Russian journalist Dmitriy Kiselyov and his way of interpreting facts during his weekly

political TV-program *Vesti Nedeli* (News of the Week), called *Liar Liar,* referencing the eponymously-named Hollywood film with actor Jim Carrey[22]. Just as in the film, an actor playing Dmitriy Kiselyov, suddenly and against his will starts to tell the truth, which causes humorous situations. But in the end, the whole filming crew are shown applauding him for being honest.

Shows such as *LIEF News* and *Antizombie* on *ICTV Channel* are also worthy of mention. Both are dedicated to uncovering Russian propaganda falsehoods and satirizing Russian politicians. Other similar TV programmes include *VestiKremlia* (KremlinNews) and *Vesti.ua* on *Channel 24*. Another national channel, *Espreso TV*, produces *Hunta News*, where Ukrainian political news is complemented by satire of events in Russia. *Espreso TV* broadcasts another humorous daily show – *Vata News* – a Kremlin-style parody of Russian and world news. The show reduces the majority of events in Russia to absurdity. The *Vata News* anchor man even wears a padded cotton jacket, one of the unofficial, but recognisable symbols of the so-called 'Russian World', with a samovar and a drawing of the Kremlin in the background[23].
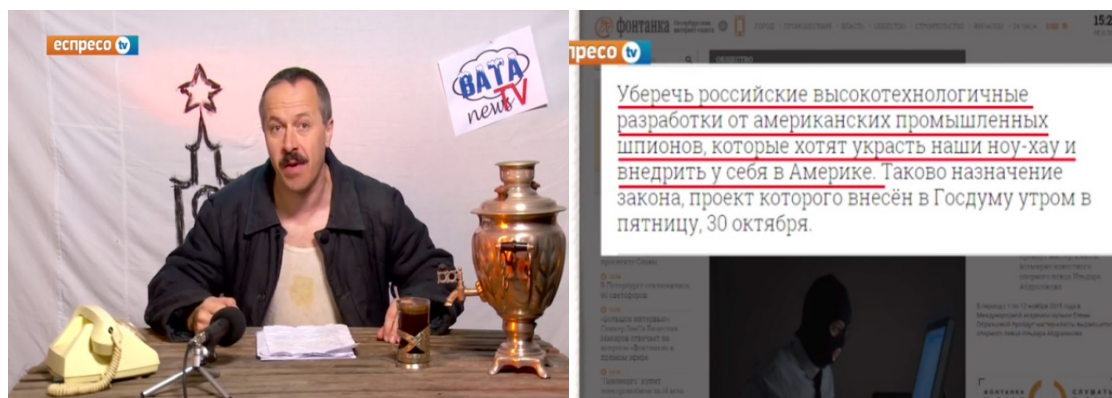
Screenshots from BATA TV, youtube.com, "Ватные новости 15 (2016). #BATATV. Выпуск 70". Translation: "*To protect Russian highly technological developments from American industrial spies, who want to steal our know-how and apply it in their America. This is the meaning of the project of the law, which was taken into State Duma in the Friday morning of 30th October.*"

As for newspapers and magazines, *Perets naperedoviy* has been published since 2014. It is the initiative of several famous Ukrainian artists, who publish their own caricatures free of charge. The newspaper is distributed by volunteers in military hospitals and near the frontline. Alongside the caricatures, *Perets naperedoviy* also includes funny poems satirizing the Kremlin's propaganda and policies. Another example of a newspaper is *Der HuntaZeitung* (see next page), published by the Office of Patriotic Work and Promotion of Territorial Defence since 2014 and distributed for free. The word *Hunta* (Junta) is taken from Russian propaganda terminology. The Russian media uses this term to refer to the Ukrainian government. *Der HuntaZeitung* is written in a humorous manner, utilising Ukrainian-German terminology taken from Soviet films about World
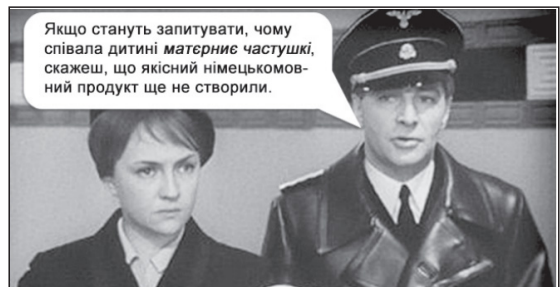
Screenshots from *Der HuntaZeitung*. Translation: "*If someone asks why you are singing your explicit chastushkas, tell him that a quality German product is not yet produced.*"

War II, with scenes of the German occupation affecting the local population. This is done because Russian propaganda often references World War II stereotypes when it refers to the aggression against Ukraine, which it still mostly refers to as a civil war. *Der Hunta Zeitung* also features articles from other media, patriotic poems, as well as analytical articles by well-known Ukrainian journalists and experts[24].

Ukraine's Ministry of Defence publishes two newspapers for Ukrainian soldiers: *Narodna Armiya* (The People's Army) and *KrylaUkrayiny* (Wings of Ukraine), but they have no humorous content. The Scientific and Research Centre for Humanitarian Problems in the Armed Forces of Ukraine publishes a magazine *Satiric Checkpoint* with comic strips in which Ukrainian volunteers and soldiers are praised while Russian soldiers are ridiculed.

For almost two years from the start of the war, there was no army radio station for Ukrainian soldiers. However, the *Armiya FM* (Army FM) radio station has been broadcasting since March 2016. It is run by the Central Television and Radio studio of the Ministry of Defence. The vast majority of its listeners are soldiers, and the main goal of *Armiya FM* is to boost the morale of the Ukrainian military. However, it is now becoming more and more popular among civilians. *Armiya FM* broadcasts in four cities of the Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone (ATO-zone) (Bahmut, Konstiantynivka, Kramatorsk, Pokrovsk) and also online. Soon this radio station will be available in five more cities in the ATO-zone. *Armiya FM* broadcasts the news every hour. The majority of its on-air content consists of music (70%) and talk-shows (30%). Some of these shows feature humorous content. For example, *Rota, pidyom* (Squadron, move) has regular humorous segments such as *Vata News* and *News of the Russian World*. *Okupatsia* (Occupation), hosted by journalist Sergiy Garmash, satirizes news from the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic and exposes their falsehoods .The anchor man of *MinBrest*, Martin Brest, is a well-known military blogger and former soldier who was born in the Donetsk region. The show discusses the problems of the Ukrainian army in a joking manner.

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Another important instrument of humour is political caricature. One of the most productive Ukrainian cartoonists is Grygoriy Kliuchnik, his caricatures (see above) usually have no text and only visual stories. Most of his current caricatures are about the war against Ukraine and domestic politics.

On the subject of the war, his work references the differences between Ukrainian and Russian mentalities, the habit of Russians to blame other countries and nations for their own domestic problems, etc.

Another famous Ukrainian cartoonist, with the pen name *Pekelnyi Bulba*, (Hell's Bulba) began producing his pictures, stickers and comic strips at the start of *Euromaidan*. He was one of the first, in 2014, to offer his patriotic cartoons and stickers to civil volunteers. Since then, his creations have become very popular among Ukrainian soldiers.

Unlike Grygoriy Kliuchnik, *Pekelnyi Bulba*'s main message is disguised much more in the text than in the drawing. His drawings are simple, often with explicit language, which feels closer to soldiers' way of communicating. In his cartoons, Russian soldiers and pro-Russian separatists are depicted as ugly and miserable, while Ukrainian soldiers are brave defenders.

Ukraine's Ministry of Defence also uses caricature as one of its tools and has initiated an international competition *Totalitarianism. Caricature and Cartoons* in Poltava city. Drawings from this competition were shown at exhibitions in the Donbas region. The majority of the caricatures were targeted at the Russian government and propagandists[25].

Combining humour and music is another tool. One well-known exponent in Ukraine is Antin Muharskiy (stage name – *Orest Liutyi*), a writer and a singer, who performs all over the country.

The songs of Antin Muharksiy are usually based on famous Soviet melodies, but with Ukrainian-language humorous, patriotic, anti-chauvinistic and anti-Kremlin lyrics. The singer also has a side-project called *Ipatiy Kazanskiy* with even more aggressive anti-Kremlin rhetoric. Antin Mukharskiy has published several satirical books including *Tales of the Russian World* and *Death of the Maloros* (the 'little Russian') *or the Night before Trinity Sunday*. The music of Antin Mukharskiy was one of the reasons for the appearance of another project *Mirco Sablich and art-formation Liutyki*. Its participants upload humorous videos, many of which go viral, but the creators remain unknown and virtual. The videos are usually based on scenes from Soviet or Russian films, concerts or cartoons, appended with counterpropaganda lyrics and anti-Kremlin pictures. The project participants explain this use of Soviet product as necessary, because the concepts they are combatting come from older times and should be defeated by applying the same symbols and narratives[26]. This project has already uploaded 29 clips. The average number of the views for them exceeds 200 000.

Another good example, albeit amateur use of a mix of music and humour is the *YouTube* channel of Vadym Dubovskyi, a long-haul driver from the US with Ukrainian roots. His videos are very simple, recorded in a car and have anti-Kremlin lyrics over well-known Soviet-era melodies. The main narratives used in his songs include Russia and Vladimir Putin personally being responsible for the war in Ukraine, and Ukraine being on the way to joining the 'European family'.

Source: www.moyby.com, Grills with burning Kremlin have become a trend in Ukrainian social networks (Мангалы с горящим Кремлем стали трендом украинских соцсетей).

In combatting propaganda, the usage of **symbols, symbolic language and metaphors** is another effective strategy when it utilises humour. The Ukrainian side has applied this strategy quite actively during the war. One of the best known examples is the use of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* mythology and symbols to describe Russian aggression against Ukraine. The Kremlin was described as Mordor, Russian soldiers as orcs, but Ukrainians as kind dwarfs and brave elves. Interestingly, at the beginning of 2016, *Google Translator* even translated the word "Russia" as "Mordor"[27]. Later, this occurrence was explained by *Google* as a "technical error". Subsequently, during the summer of 2015, charcoal grills called *Mordor on Fire* were produced, featuring an outline of the Kremlin.

During Ukraine's independence celebrations in 2015, President Poroshenko described so-called *Novorossia* as a "failed project", "myth" and "Mordor"[28]. These symbols were also applied by famous Ukrainian military blogger Martin Brest in his humorous story *ATO in Middle Earth*, which went viral. One of the latest successful examples of combining humour and symbolic language is a video with Ukrainian soldiers labelling separatists as characters in the popular video game *Pokémon Go*[29].

CONCLUSIONS

Although Russian propaganda has been trying to use and exacerbate a number of differences between social groups so as to create an atmosphere of total distrust and panic, in the last few years' Ukrainian society has shown its potential to resist this and achieve solidarity. To counter Russia's policy of division and its propaganda (which also includes humour in its toolbox), the Ukrainian media have quite often used humour. The examples presented in this case study not only prove this trend, but also demonstrate several lessons worth learning. The main conclusions that can be drawn:

- as a special tool, humour appeals not only to the emotions, but also to critical thinking. For instance, mirroring propaganda messages in a way that helps underline their absurdity;

- humour is a universal factor of influence, since it can be disseminated quickly and with minimal effort;

- on the one hand, humour must be supported by real facts and news. On the other hand, humour creates an altered reality. This makes humour an exceptional tool of propaganda and counterpropaganda;

- humour often requires the use of stereotypes and socio-political myths. It is used to diminish opponent's capacities and to emphasise one's own strengths;

- humour is an adaptive reaction during the so-called 'borderline state' and can be used as a tool for overcoming fear and panic.

These specific features of humour content analysed demonstrate that it can be used for stress-relief and deepening the sense of social solidarity, as well as a tool to deter an adversary by denigrating and satirizing its main messages and capacities. At the same time, it should be underlined that one important aspect, not covered in full because of the project's restrictions, is the question of the specific reflections and actions of the strategic audience as a response to humorous content. Additional studies in this field could give more in-depth knowledge about the potential effects of humour consumption within societies during wartime and post-war periods.

ENDNOTES

1. The Russian media and authorities did not very often use humour against Ukraine. However, if they did so, it was usually in a very aggressive manner. For example, if we look at online media, the Mount Show features blunt anti-Western and especially anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. While it satirizes global events and those in Russia itself, jokes about Ukraine are very different from those about other countries. This show is a copy of American-style, one-person shows. Ukraine is described here as a country that is totally dependent on and managed by the West, and its political leaders are described as low-qualified and stupid. The aggressive humour on the part of the Russian side was intensified by Mikhail Zadornov with his jokes about the shooting down of Flight MH-17 and about Ukrainian military personnel. Such Russian radio stations as Dyadya Vanya (Uncle Vanya) and Yumor FM (Humour FM) apply humour to moderate the critical thinking of listeners and to provide them with 'appropriate' news every hour.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Humour is a universal concept that has been analysed within different disciplines of social sciences. The study presented by a group of scholars aims to elaborate a multidisciplinary methodological framework that can be applied in the *analysis* of humour, particularly if researchers or practitioners are confronted with very large sets of data, as well as to the *construction* of humorous messages for strategic communication purposes. The methodological framework is not a template to follow when generating humorous stories or jokes, but rather a collection of the most relevant attributes of humour that can be combined in different groupings to achieve the initial strategic goal. In order to test the functioning of the methodological framework and identify its strengths and weaknesses, three case studies were conducted. The first case study, on the discrediting of Western political leaders in late-night shows broadcast by the central Russian TV channels, identified humour as a massive propaganda tool aimed at national and international audiences. The second case study dealt with KVN (*Klub Vesyeliykh i Nakhodchivikh*) which is a TV-show and competition broadcast since the early 1970s. While the third case, focusing on the use of humour by the Ukrainian media, provides rich evidence on humour as a tool of counter-propaganda. The Ukrainian case also serves as an example of the role of humour in a situation of on-going information warfare. The following conclusions and recommendations were identified from the analyses of the three case studies.

5.1. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.1. CONCLUSION

Humour helps reduce both internal tension and externally induced stress. A joke produces the illusion of being less vulnerable, which is considered a healthy, so-called psychological defence mechanism. A person's subjective comfort is raised by means of humour – internal tension, internal conflict are transformed into the pleasure of laughter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Internal tensions such as being politically incorrect, or pertaining to cultural taboos can be reduced by humour.
- External concerns, such as threats to national security, political, or economic crisis may serve as building material for humour.

5.1.2. CONCLUSION

Humour can be creative. Even if it is well considered, planned and exercised, during the communication process, the target audience recreates and adds interpretations and can assign new meanings to the content of the message. The target audience becomes a receiver (consumer) of the previously constructed message and producer of a new message. At the same time, the roles of both producers and receivers of messages can constantly switch. Creativity invigorates creativity. But at the same time, it is difficult to foresee the outcome and perception of innovative jokes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to achieve the goal, the possible effects of new/added meanings of the humorous content should be monitored and utilized if needed for strategic purposes.
- Identify which groups engage in switching the roles of producer and receiver.

5.1.3. CONCLUSION

Successfully constructed and communicated examples of humour provides members of a group with a positive social identity. If they identify themselves with the character present in the joke, then affiliation with the smartest/winning group is enhanced. Identities of groups become more salient by means of humour – members of the same category (both in- and out-groups) are perceived as being more similar than they are in reality, while members of different categories are perceived as being more different than they are.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To achieve this effect, characters in the joke have to be clearly identified as members of a particular group by employing stereotypical traits, dressing style, language, patterns of consumption, etc.
- A good joke has to implicitly/explicitly fit the positive traits of the in-group, as well as the negative ones of the out-group.

5.1.4. CONCLUSION

Language matters immensely! On the one hand, there is no need to repeat this well-known statement about the role of language in communicating humour. But very often this axiom is taken for granted, neglecting the social and historical aspects of language. The translation of jokes without a wider context can cause misperception, misunderstanding and consequently increase the negative effects of the attempt at humour.

RECOMMENDATION

In strategic communication, language within its cultural framework should be treated as a priority issue. It is not enough to be proficient in the language used to communicate the message, a variety of different social aspects framing the meaning of the message should be taken into account. The involvement of specialists from localities, communities, groups should be ensured.

5.1.5. CONCLUSIONS

The impact of humorous messages is dependent on the mental models shared by the audience and the authors of the messages. In the studied cases, these shared mental models contain certain several stereotypical images:

a) 'Father of the State' image (represented by V. Putin);
b) Victimization of the in-group (i.e., Russia at the hands of the Western world);
c) Clear divisions between the in-group and out-group (i.e., Russia and its enemies);
d) The out-group has a specific hierarchical structure: the US at its centre and Eastern European or other post-Soviet countries (like Georgia) as insignificant and marginal players;
e) Russia as the place securing the true version of democracy and correct values (i.e., conservative, sexist and an ethnic system supporting a variety of gender- and ethnically biased stereotypes).

RECOMMENDATION

Before starting to communicate, it is important to reconstruct the mental models present in the shared ground of the audience. In other words, try to define the main features of how the local audience thinks; and utilise those in subsequent steps.

5.1.6. CONCLUSION

The borders between the factual content of news and humour are intentionally blurred to make the content of the message more entertaining and at the same time, to map the content to a particular purpose within the larger intended strategy. A similar process happens when political and politically neutral content is mixed.

RECOMMENDATION

Humour supports blurring the division between purely factual and interpretative information. This can be used to reduce tension and to support the subversive content of the message (at the same time, not necessarily rejecting the factual content). Further, the communication can be manipulated according to the strategic goals of the situation. In other words, try to think of the primary strategic message and then adjust the factual and interpretative content to it.

5.1.7. CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of the case studies (that essentially confirm our theoretical framework), there are some core principles in transforming and manipulating messages (within the settings of political humour in Russian state-controlled media):

a) Simplification of content to support in-group and out-group generation;

b) Simplification of content to attract an audience and therefore enable further and greater manipulation with it;

c) Simplification making the content structurally more conforming with and corresponding to the existing mental models;

d) Structural manipulation of message content: several aspects that are important to the political content of the message are emphasized whereas other aspects that are not relevant are eliminated; in jokes, content is emotionally reshaped and has positive valence, which in turn makes them good candidates for social-contagion processes.

Despite the simplifying of content increasing the communicative efficiency of messages, it should be noted that audiences can disregard over-simplified messages. To a certain degree, simplification corresponds to the intuition expressed by the *Gricean* Maxim of Quantity: in order to achieve communicative success, one has to be sufficiently informative in accordance with the stage of the conversation[1]; in the communication of humour, the additional mental models employed by audiences have to be taken into account.

RECOMMENDATION

If a humorous strategic communication is planned, the content of the message has to be simplified (in line with the mental models of the community) to activate the socio-attentional processes of the audience and to support in-group and out-group effects.

5.1.8. CONCLUSION

The mental models used in Russian propaganda in Ukraine share most of the core aspects that are applied elsewhere, but have some unique features such as characterizing the Ukrainian state as weak, fake, and failed, contrasting Soviet symbols (related to WWII) with Ukraine ones, and emphasizing the discrepancy between the state of Ukraine and its citizens that (according to the Russian propaganda) the latter are Russian-oriented whereas state-authorities are more oriented towards Western Europe. An additional mental model is generated according to which Russians and Ukrainians belong to one and the same strong nation (a strong in-group) that can only be secure acting as a single nation against the Western world (the prototypical out-group and enemy). Thus, the out-group is portrayed consistently in line with the content of the general Russian media.

RECOMMENDATION

Try to generate an image of a strong and powerful in-group. Because of the tendency to want to belong to a stronger and more salient group (in order to reduce social uncertainty and fear), politically undecided subjects might join the group having the image of being stronger and more powerful. Alternatively, the generation of subgroups in relatively homogenous groups might decrease their authority and effectiveness.

5.1.9. CONCLUSION

Communication serving strategic purposes is different in situations where there is an established system of local media as opposed to situations of a largely spontaneous and unstructured reaction to a highly structured propaganda offensive (as in the Ukrainian case described by Maksym Kyak). Spontaneous counter-reaction is less detailed and more chaotic, but can eventually create stronger effects of social belongingness and can be seen to be an expression of stress-relief. Furthermore, political, religious and cultural discrepancies (and the fact that the Ukrainian population is divided among different interpretations of the same historically shared past) lead to a more multifaceted content of humorous messages and at the same time make the perception of humour more complex.

RECOMMENDATION

Try to create bottom-up (audience-triggered) processes of humour generation. If the humorous messages are co-created by different sub-groups representing different political, cultural or religious segments in the audience, then they might have a higher and more prolonged impact. The audience feels not only that it is a part of the shared ground, but is also a part of a group activity generating humorous messages.

5.2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Shared knowledge in humour interpretation

According to the case studies, the shared Soviet past and its post-Soviet transformations build the interpretative background that enables subjects to perceive and interpret most of the politically oriented humour in Russian media in the way it is intended. Frequently, that shared past operates together with a specific sense of nostalgia in older generations.

The sense of belonging to that shared past is intentionally and strategically mapped and is known as 'the Russian world'. In general, two processes seem to occur – on the one hand, mnemonic anchors are activated by certain events in the shared past (e.g., relating to the Soviet system of values in the context of music or poetry), but at the same time they are aligned to actual events and occurrences in politics or everyday life (e.g., LGBT, Olympic Games, Eurovision Song Contest).

Russian political humour is perceived differently in different communities. For example, the Russian-diaspora audience in Western countries may perceive the content of a message as humorous because of its subversive buffer but is actually more likely to disagree with it, and if the content were expressed non-humorously it would be rejected without question.

5.2.1. CONCLUSIONS

1. An important stage in the communication of humour is establishing shared ground. Once it is in place, the audience can be manipulated to different degrees, e.g., social or post-Soviet past as shared ground and the 'new Russia' project as manipulated content. In the same manner, the audience can be negatively biased towards the Western world once shared ground is established. (Note that the shared ground itself does not necessarily contain, e.g., a positive attitude towards the 'new Russia' project). Therefore, humour not only uses (and is enabled by) shared knowledge, it also extends that knowledge.

2. The impact of the shared past influencing humour perception in Russian political propaganda in Eastern and Western European countries and the rest of the world may decrease because younger people have fewer (or no) direct memories and no common social past.

3. The generation of laughter involves multiple factors – it is not enough to capitalize on shared reality, another important factor is touching on an internal conflict present in the audience. Perception is a mixture of several factors – to build a joke, a shared reality/common interpretation of cultural signs may not be sufficient to perceive the joke as funny – the joke has to deal with an internal conflict, or externally induced stress. There has to be something personal, in terms of this conflict, to identify with. Otherwise, the subject may see/understand what is supposed to be funny in a joke, yet that is not sufficient to be transformed into the pleasure of laughter, consequently – no laughter results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Before any act of strategic communication, the shared ground between the author of the message and the audience has to be established.

2. The demographic profile in general and the age of the audience in particular are of high importance; therefore, mnemonic anchors have to be selected according to the shared knowledge of a particular age group (and, if possible, taking into account other demographic characteristics such as gender, income, and education).

3. A joke has to aim at the internal conflicts and worries of the audience to be efficient (i.e., to result in laughter).

4. In the case of political jokes, the internal conflict may concern the relationship of an individual to a group, or several groups.

5. Identity confusion may serve as a basis for making jokes about it.

5.3. STRATEGIC AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

As identified in Sigita Struberga's case study, the state-controlled Russian political humour of late-night TV targets two distinct audiences in strategic terms: (1) *basic* (the domestic audience in Russia) and (2) *peripheral* (the Russian-speaking audience in post-Soviet countries, Western Europe and the US).

Both audiences respond to simplified messages containing mainly positive content. Furthermore, because the factual and interpretative components of the studied humorous messages were often blended, it is frequently impossible to distinguish between content and its interpretation.

Discrediting of political leaders in the West is another frequently used theme expressed as humour by the state-controlled Russian media. Understanding/speaking Russian does not necessarily mean that these jokes will be perceived as funny. There is quite a high probability that peripheral audiences will be able to deduce how a joke has been constructed, or why laughter is expected, yet internal conflict may be missing, since different countries have substantially dissimilar political and economic agendas.

5.3.1. CONCLUSIONS

1. The post-Soviet audience in the Russian-speaking world appears to be dependent on a culture and value system that is relatively conservative and restrictive.
2. The analysed TV shows have large audiences and thus have strong communicative and emotional contagion effects that give messages more impact.
3. The understanding of a joke by the audience does not necessarily lead to the resolution of the audience's internal conflict(s) by means of humour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. If the communication is going to reach a large audience, simple but emotionally shaped, positive messages can be recommended because they can generate effects of socio-cognitive emotional contagion, i.e., the spread of emotions attached to the messages through social networks, face-to-face or digital communication. Once social contagion affects are generated the messages are more committing and have a higher impact on the audience.
2. A joke has to target the audience's internal conflicts and worries to be efficient (i.e., to result in laughter).
3. The internal conflict between the motivation(s) of an individual and a group may only be revealed during the communication of a joke; a good joke in this respect is one which takes a person or a group of persons from a semi-understood internal conflict to a conscious understanding of it.

5.4. PERCEPTION OF HUMOUR BY DIFFERENT GROUPS (IN-GROUP/OUT-GROUP)

Political messages contain content with emotional valence and thus frequently generate emotional attachment among audience members, and subsequently induce emotional contagion effects. Emotional valence is frequently linked to group-building processes: the message contains words suggesting a sense of belonging (such as *we, all of us, we (the Nation))* and here, appeals to the shared Soviet or post-Soviet identity. This in turn – if applied to shared knowledge – activates a mechanism of metonymic projection, where a part of something is perceived as the whole or, *vice-versa*, the whole is substituted for a part of itself. Consequently the sense of the individual is linked to the sense of the community or nation.

Belongingness to the in-group and the emphasizing of the out-group's negative valence is a categorization method that was used during the Soviet era and is being applied in current comedy shows.

5.4.1. CONCLUSION

Strong in-group/out-group divisions are generated by using strategically constructed and emotionally shaped language and by activating mental models that support these divisions. The Russian nation or the 'right Russia' vs. 'false' Western democracy with a multicultural and tolerant systems of values.

RECOMMENDATION

A crucial aim in strategic communication is to generate salient and strong in-groups. Powerful, salient and strong in-groups are more appealing than out-groups and therefore have both stronger persistence and tend to increase in numbers of members.

5.5. FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR – IDENTIFYING THE MAIN ROLES HUMOUR PLAYS

The case studies show that language, together with shared knowledge (Soviet and post-Soviet past containing a specific system of moral, aesthetic principles and values), serve as the interpretative framework enabling the comprehension and communication of the humorous political messages strategically formulated by Russian state-controlled media. Typically, allusions to films, songs, books, events, shared narratives, and persons from the Soviet period are used to reference the shared knowledge and language.

The communication of political humour is linked to specific mental models having shared cultural and political components. These models contain specific systems of norms and principles: e.g., gender and ethnic stereotypes, and masculinized discourse. Further, the tolerance of aggression towards others (the out-group in particular) is significantly higher than in the Western world.

Humorous political messages in Russian media have emotional valence; this has two interrelated aims: (a) to boost the sense of belonging by emphasising the differences from the emotionally, negatively valenced out-group, and (b) attempt to simplify the content of messages, biasing them towards a simple positive or simple negative interpretation.

5.5.1. CONCLUSION

A core principle in humour communication is the simplification of the message: this supports the generation of in-group and out-group effects but at the same time transforms and reduces audiences' internal stress and tensions (cf. Maksym Kyak's case study). It is worth mentioning, however, that this stress can arise from both social and personal events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. If shared ground is used, a system of allusions enables and extends the shared ground (allusions have to be significant and not emotionally negative); they have to fit into the mental models of the social group.
2. Simplification of content can be used in order to increase in-group effects and the sense of belonging, and can at the same time reduce the audience's internal stress and tensions. It is important, however, to avoid the trivialization of content by oversimplifying it. If trivialization is perceived, the message may be ignored and therefore communicative impact lost.

5.6. COMMUNICATION OF HUMOUR

As the case studies indicate, political humour is used in a multi-channel communication environment involving TV (live and recorded shows), further circulation in the press, radio, digital social networks (e.g.. *Facebook*, *YouTube*), and the internet. In the Russian case, the entire infrastructure required seems to be state-supported and controlled. This basically means that the entire 'official humour industry' (that – as the studies show – has huge impact in the Russian-speaking world) is directly Kremlin-controlled.

The mental models constituting shared ground also determine the things that are not discussed or not considered to be the subjects of jokes – the prime example being Putin himself. Once mental models are accepted by a community, which content is taboo becomes clear. This is characteristic feature of communication in authoritarian or totalitarian communities.

The results of the case studies show that the *occurrences* and *formats* of political humour are partly borrowed from Western traditions (e.g., late-night shows) but content is significantly adapted to the political purposes. The similarity to Western media formats is also crucial to attracting Western-based Russian-speaking audiences.

An important feature increasing the impact of the content in these particular cases: the humorous messages are communicated in a particular regular pattern (e.g., the shows are broadcast every two weeks).

Another format-related feature is the involvement of the audience (in particular, young people) as can be observed in the gaming and quasi-gaming competition TV-show KVN (cf. Solvita Denisa-Liepniece's case study).

One particular impact factor is the format of the language presenting the message: it frequently contains simple colloquialisms sometimes also including slang (thus, appearing familiar to a substantial part of the audience). This form of language contributes to the overall simplification of the message.

Contents of messages vary, including both ethnic slurs and condemnations, but do not include jokes about religion, terrorism and current Russian political leaders, unless the jokes are unidimensional and conform to official political opinion and show them as ordinary members of society ("they are just like us"). The content of messages also refers to the shared past and the values it is based on. As indicated in the case study conducted by S. Struberga, humour concerning Western leaders more often references their personal and social lives, less often their political stances.

Messages contain simple in-group and out-group divisions. The world outside the in-group area is dangerous. The in-group area (Russia) is a victim of the unfair and bad policies of the out-group (the Western world). The in-group is what is securing true democracy and real values – the values of the victimized Russian world. All other values are bad or are pseudo-values. Those are some of the patterns of mental models represented by the humorous messages identified in the case studies.

Message content is usually simplified and results in critical analysis being replaced by stereotyped bipolar categorization and stress reduction.

Utterers/authors: although the messages are most likely to have been designed by a team of professionals, they are usually uttered by one or a few speakers – usually popular Russian celebrities (e.g., actors, musicians, often having remained popular since Soviet times), in an entertaining and relaxing setting accompanied by appropriate music that is also a part of the socially shared past.

The analysed humorous TV shows have a multichannel *audience* (both online and offline media – including TV, the internet, and social networks). As was shown, audience distribution is particularly efficient (as in the KVN-case), reaching the live audience, the TV audience, and several social-network audiences.

One technique used effectively in Ukrainian counter-propaganda (cf. Dr. phil. M. Kiyak's case study): ideas, events and actions presented by the out-group are portrayed as absurd and in this sense – laughable. Furthermore, Russian messages with well-known content (a part of contemporary or long-past shared ground) are turned into jokes by making them absurd. Frequently the reference in the original communication is established by introducing a well-known object, person or event but that is then turned into the absurd. Although most of the reference-establishing objects are related to the Soviet past, the characters of JRR Tolkien (e.g., orcs, dwarves, Mordor) are also used in Ukrainian counter-propaganda jokes (e.g., *Novorussia* as Mordor), therefore showing that contemporary shared ground (film) can also be used as an efficient tool in strategic communication.

5.6.1. CONCLUSIONS

1. Simplification of content contributes to both the efficiency of content perception and also to the entertainment and relaxation of the audience.
2. Multi-channel communication is more efficient because it reaches more age-groups and audience segments.
3. Analysis of humour communication supports the *principle of minimization of collaborative effort*[2]: audiences are sensitive to simplified messages not least because that requires less interpretative effort
4. Analysis of the content supports the *principle of reference establishment*[3]: before the audience can be manipulated, its shared ground must be elaborated and references to content (e.g., specific objects, persons, events) have to be established.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Because of the preference for simplified content, personal media content and tone are more preferable. Prescriptive messages can be recommended in cases where shared ground and the reference have already been established. Fictional content can be used if they are a feature of the audience's shared knowledge.
2. In situations where the audience background is not known, non-simultaneous communication settings are recommended (to be able to coordinate messages and to avoid situations where an unexpected audience reaction might occur).
3. Reference-establishment components have to be considered before communicating; where possible content with positive emotional valence should be used (because that is more likely to support the message's social contagion effects).
4. Characters and narratives of the contemporary shared ground (e.g., used in popular culture) known to both the in-group and out-group should be utilised where possible. This may succeed in involving the younger generation less linked to the more distant past.

5.7. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH METHODS

In the future, several research designs and methods could be combined and applied to explore the impact of humour in more detail:

Large-scale surveys can be conducted asking respondents to describe the content of certain constructed humorous messages and to evaluate their acceptability. The messages would be specially constructed for the purposes of the survey to avoid any impact from previous experience and to appeal to both in-group and out-group factors.

For visual messages: firstly, a visual semiotic content analysis (e.g., of the political cartoons commenting on a particular political arena) has to be conducted.

Secondly, based on the results of that analysis, the most starkly different images would be selected and modified, and subsequently included in an opinion survey to rate them for acceptability in aesthetic, ethical, cultural, and political terms.

In both cases, the sample would include demographically diverse segments (differing in age, occupation, place of residence) of subjects corresponding to active, politically opposed groups. If political memes (a frequently used, usually bottom-up tool in political communication) are being tested, social network dynamics (number of shares, likes and re-tweets together with structural information) can be additionally examined.

Certain selected visual messages could be experimentally tested by repeated measurements designed to determine micro-level differences in the perception of humour (reaction time measurements could be applied together with acceptability rating tasks (where participants have to evaluate a statement or a picture according to a scale) or production tasks where a statement or a picture has to be described).

In order to apply the proposed methodology in situations where humour needs to be analysed or humorous messages need to be constructed, a tool kit is proposed in the following table.

ENDNOTES

1. Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J. Morgan (Eds.) Syntax and semantics. 3: Speech acts. New York: Academic Press, pp. 41–58.
2. Clark, H. H., & Brennan, S. E. (1991). Grounding in communication. In L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, & S.D. Teasley (Eds.), Perspectives on socially shared cognition. Washington D.C.: APA, pp. 127-149.
3. Clark, H. H., & Brennan, S. E. (1991). Grounding in communication. In L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, & S.D. Teasley (Eds.), Perspectives on socially shared cognition. Washington D.C.: APA, pp. 127-149; Berger, J. (2014). Word of mouth and interpersonal communication: A review and directions for future research. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 24(4), pp. 586-607.

TOOL KIT – HUMOUR AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

SHARED KNOWLEDGE	TARGET AUDIENCE	PERCEPTION	FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION	ACT OF COMMUNICATION
Aim: to establish the shared knowledge.	**Aim: to determine socio-demographic segments and their proportions in the target audience.**	**Aim: to prepare the message so that it is perceived as efficiently as possible**	**Aim: to elaborate the functions and to emphasize those appropriate to the specific act of communication.**	**Aim: to transmit the message – elaborated in the previous stages – to the audience.**
Tasks: Try to determine: A. what is the shared past/present of the audience; B. what knowledge is the most salient to and strongest in the community; C. what are the things, persons, phenomena that are not laughed about; exclude these when communicating humour; D. What are the group-specific interpretations of history and the group's common contemporary experience; E. What is the common cultural experience/knowledge of both 'low' and 'high' culture; F. 'Play' with perceptions – try to imagine how members of different groups would interpret the message.	**Tasks:** A. Define the group boundaries – us vs them; B. Try to identify a third group against which division into us vs them is self-evident and may be useful; C. Try to establish the differences between the audience segments in age, income and education and take these into account when formulating messages; D. Try to identify any internal conflict in perception that can be utilised; E. Shape messages to be emotionally strong and positive.	**Tasks:** A. Try to use forms supporting the sense of belonging 'we, all of us, our ...'; B. Give preference to emotionally positive content referencing the in-group; C. Emphasize the in-group; D. External concerns, such threats to national security, political, or economic crisis have to be present in the humorous content.	**Tasks:** A. Try to simplify messages without trivializing their content; B. Try to identify which functions of humour are most appropriate to the intended message and overall goal of the humorous content; C. Elaborate specific attributes of the selected function/s; D. In communication with a strategic purpose, it is preferable to focus on the function of reducing stress in the audience rather than widening any gaps; E. Check references to the shared past contained in messages and emphasize their emotionally positive aspects.	**Tasks:** A. Check the available infrastructure and use as many channels as possible (TV, radio, printed media, social networks) without substantially replicating the same content in the same medium (e.g., avoid frequent replication of the same content in a single platform such as Facebook); B. Use the language appropriate to the majority of the intended audience; C. Try to use a popular person that is uttering the messages; D. Avoid complex, technical content or uncertain, ambiguous content; E. Avoid simultaneous communication in cases where audience reaction is uncertain.