Written Representation 73

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ii. a brief description of the organisation (if any) that the submission is made on behalf of;

Inaugurated in November 2011 for a three-year cycle, the Castex Chair of Cyber Strategy, bearing the name of Admiral Castex, the founder of the IHEDN, was born from the simple yet overwhelming observation that cyber attacks are being more frequent, sophisticated and effective.

The Chair aims to develop fundamental and applied research in the geopolitics of cyberspace in order to feed strategic reflections related to its political, economic, military and regulatory importance.

It also hopes to become a platform for resources and exchanges where researchers, as well as public and private players, can come together to study, share, understand and raise awareness about cyber issues.

To achieve this, the Castex Chair of Cyber Strategy created a team of researchers and regularly organises events to share ideas about on-going projects with other researchers, experts, entrepreneurs, military figures and politicians (including conferences, seminars and study days), as well as publishing articles and scientific works about research advances.

The strategies and mechanisms of Russian informational influence in France

The omnipresence of Russia – in the media and in political debates – was a distinctive feature of the recent electoral campaigns in France and in the United States. Such a presence has revealed the expanding role played by Russia in cyberspace. Even though the decision to publicly blame Russia for the cyberattacks[1] (in the strict sense of the term[2]) against the Democratic National Committee (DNC) operated as a catalyzer, the two events forced us to account for the potential of a Russian strategy launched during the 2000s, and which aims at developing a real presence in cyberspace. They also revealed the capabilities Russia possesses to destabilize individual states. Indeed, and even though it remains almost impossible to attribute the paternity of the cyberattacks to a particular group, least to a specific government, the informational facet of the Russian power has unfolded undisguised. Russian media outlets with an international vocation were very active bullhorns for Moscow's position, both during the American presidential campaign and in France. In France particularly, these outlets are more and more present, followed, and relayed.[3] First and foremost embodied by RT and Sputnik News, the Russian informational apparatus intends to compete with a public discourse presented as unipolar, or even thwart a doxa seen as Western and liberal in political, economic, and moral terms. The alternative discourse offered instead has received an undeniable following in France, but in other European countries and in the United States as well.

The strategy behind this success is articulated in two well-defined elements. On the one hand, the creation and development of Russian platforms occurred within a distinctive historical context as they thrive through the simultaneous crises that Europe faces. Furthermore, their adaptability to the codes of the Internet, which has been widely

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[1] Tracing the paternity is very complex: most of the time, the responsibility is only assumed by the political sphere, and widely covered by the media. After the DNC hack, the presumed Russian responsibility was underlined by a report written by the CIA. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-orders-review-of-russian-hacking-during-presidential-campaign/2016/12/09/31d6b300-be2a-11e6-94ac-3d324840106c_story.html, consulted on August 21, 2017.

[2] We define cyberattacks as a series of malevolent acts committed against digital devices through the use of a computer network.

[3] As of 2018, they each enjoy above one million unique visitors per month. As a comparison, the website of the newspaper *Le Monde* is visited by slightly more than eight million unique visitors per month, *Le Figaro* by about seven million. *Sputnik News*, with a French version launched in January 2015, has registered an impressive growth.

demonstrated, brings them a growing audience. On the other hand, this compatibility has encouraged Russian media to strategically prefer social networks to propagate their contents optimally, as well as their discourse. Hence, by analyzing the big data extracted from the platform Twitter, it is easy to outline the existence of a galaxy of users who, in France, plays an efficient role relaying a discourse favorable to Russia. By covering arguments made by RT or Sputnik, these users form a powerful tool and a kind of "galaxy". And although the vast majority are independent and not directly tied to Russia, they manifestly contribute to a growing media bubble favorable to the interests of Russia. Through the identification of the accounts and an analysis of their behavior, this report aims to illustrate how we mapped and categorized these relays, and ultimately offers a new approach to the Russian informational presence in France.

The development of Russian media platforms.

The strategy behind the production and diffusion of informational content from Russia towards the rest of the world is a recent phenomenon, stemming from the Russian government's desire to regain the upper hand inside its informational space,[4] which they had been unable to control after the disintegration of the USSR. Indeed, extremely weakened throughout the 1990s by problems pertaining both to its territorial integrity and its dire economic situation, Russia saw a succession of events challenge its control over its informational space. A representation of foreign threats weighing on the security of information, the latter strategic for its national security, emerged and reinforced itself during the 2000s, leading to a progressive stiffening of the controls over the informational space.[5]

The color revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) initiated this dynamic. They were perceived as resulting from Western interferences in Russia's "near abroad,"[6] and

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[4] It is necessary to understand that the general representation of cyberspace by Russian authorities differs from that of other countries. Indeed, the official doctrine prefers the adjective "informational" (*informacionnyi*) to "cyber." Russian official documents refer to "informational space," "informational defense," or "informational security." This difference highlights an enduring attitude of Russian authorities, which have historically worried more about controlling information (the content) than the technical systems allowing the circulation of information (the container).

[5] LIMONIER, Kevin, « Le cyberespace, nouveau lieu d'affirmation de la puissance russe ? » in RAVIOT, Jean-Robert (ed.), *Russie : vers une nouvelle guerre froide ?*, La Documentation française, Paris, 2016, 192 p.

[6] The concept of "near abroad" is attributed to Andreï Koryzev, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation; it refers to all the former republics which sprung from the disintegration of the USSR, and which are seen today (with the exception of the Baltic states) as part of a zone of Russian

it led to worsening relations between Russian and Western powers who accused Moscow of not letting the former Soviet republics decide of their fate on their own. The informational war we know today has its roots in the creation of the 24/7 TV news channel Russia Today[7] (later renamed RT) that streams worldwide. It constitutes the first media tool of a nascent policy of public diplomacy carried out by the Russian government.[8] Later on, the RussoGeorgian conflict of 2008 and the massive demonstrations in Russia during the winter of 2011-2012[9] led to another evolution of the Russian strategy. The 2008 war, which was disastrous for Russia's image, reinforced the need on the part of the Russian elite for an effective public diplomacy. Meanwhile, the demonstrations marked the start of a habit of "flooding" social networks and news websites with comments left by trolls or bots created (or paid for) for that purpose. If there is no formal proof of the involvement of the Russian government, some testimonies, all refuted by the Kremlin,[10] emerged to support that hypothesis.

The last step in regaining control of the informational space took place in December 2013, a few days after the start of the Ukrainian revolution. By presidential order (oukase), the historic press agency RIA Novosti was dismantled and replaced by Rossija Segodnja ("Russia Today," not to be mistaken for RT), a new public media holding statutorily constituted as a unitary enterprise.[11] In November 2014, Russia Today launched the Sputnik agency, a radio and Internet news service broadcast in 34 languages,[12] to target in priority the countries of the European Union and the United States. Today, RT broadcasts its content in

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influence. For more information: LITERA, Bohuslav, "The Kozyrev Doctrine – a Russian variation on the Monroe Doctrine," *Perspectives*, vol. 4, 1994, pp. 45-52.

[7] AUDINET, Maxime, « La voix de Moscou trouble le concert de l'information internationale », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2017, pp 6-7

[8] AUDINET, Maxime, « Un soft-power d'Etat russe : la miagkaïa sila », in RAVIOT, Jean-Robert (ed.), *Russie : vers une nouvelle guerre froide ?*, La Documentation française, Paris, 2016, 192 p., pp.

[9] Starting on December 4, 2011, hundreds of thousands of protestors took the street of Russia to denounce that V. Putin would run for a third presidential term during the presidential elections of March 2012.

[10] On that question: "The Agency," *New-York Times,* June 2, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html (last consulted on June 15, 2017).

[11] A state unitary enterprise (Federal'noe Gossudarstvennoe Uniternanoe Perdprijatie – FGUP) is a statute generally granted to structures with activities considered as highly strategic by the state.

[12] Among them, we can find the "big languages" (English, French, Chinese, Spanish, and so on), some "intermediary" languages such as Turkish and Farsi, and down to languages which are rarer: Georgian, Latvian, Dari (Eastern Farsi spoken in Afghanistan), and even Ossetic and Abkhaz, which is spoken by no more than 100,000 individuals. However, the agency does not own offices in all the countries which language it works with, such as in Ukraine where the government banned both *RT* and *Sputnik*.

six languages, including on TV cable in four countries. [13] Additionally, it owns a documentary channel, RT Doc, and a unit producing video contents, Ruptly.

Giving a Russian point of view on the news is the mission shared by RT and Sputnik, and their activities subscribe to a logic of "counter-propaganda." Physically present with several offices around the world,[14] both media agencies split the production of content between their national editorial boards[15] and their sieges in Moscow, where the Russian editors are in charge of writing dispatches which account for the majority of contents displayed on their websites, in all the languages they broadcast. If the managers display their independence, and refute the idea that the Kremlin is giving them instructions,[16] the internal structure of the two outletsrely on a vertical organization, in concert with the logic, dominant in Russia, that encourages greater control over information. With its slogan "Tell the untold" (translated in French as "Nous dévoilons ce dont les autres ne parlent pas"), Sputnik explains that it wants to show "the way towards a multipolar world which would respect the national interests, the culture, the history, and the tradition of each country,"[17] and the agency systematically challenges the information broadcast by European and American media, both presented as hostile to Russia's undertakings. Although they were seldom known when they were created, Sputnik and RT have been progressively gaining recognition in Europe, in France notably, where they are often presented as organs of aggressive Russian propaganda, and as mostly broadcasting fake news and conspiracy articles, all in a context of global misinformation serving the interests of the Kremlin. Both outlets display a narrative portraying the end of a "unipolar" world, as the narrative is always showcased in their articles, as it is in their respective slogans: "Tell the untold" and "Question more." These clearly demonstrate one of the leading representation vehicled by the Russian narrative: Western media are broadcasting a hardline, anti-Russian propaganda, systematically opposed to

[13] In France, they launched the channel on the cable by the end of 2017.
[14] The complete list of national offices has not been made public by either *Sputnik* or *Rossija Segodnja*, as they both maintain a certain opacity on their activities.
[15] In France, the national units were launched in 2015, and they own editorial boards of about twenty journalists. However, the two national offices do not work together.
[16] On that point, it is interesting to look at the interview of Ivan Ehrel, spokesman for *Sputnik France*, which was broadcast in February 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fr9xtFz78dg (last consulted on May 13, 2017).
[17] https://fr.sputniknews.com/docs/about/qui_sommes_nous.html (last consulted on June 6, 2017).

Russian politics and its values, and more generally to everything that do not fall in line with the “uniform thinking” conveyed by the said media outlets.

To develop this narrative, several methods are used: first, every piece of information that may discredit the United States, a country from the European Union or NATO, or at least present a negative aspect of one of them, will be turn into an article with the catchiest title possible, in order to cast doubt in the reader’s mind. We can take as an example an article by Sputnik that reads that “chaos in Ukraine is American-made, such as in the Middle East.”[18] Actually, this accusatory article is nothing more than the retranscription of an analysis from the Italian newspaper Primato, founded by the Minister of National Education of Fascist Italy, a detail not mentioned by the author at Sputnik. In other cases, a tactic of the news agency is to present Russia as a victim, thus trying to highlight a strategy of demonization orchestrated by Western media. Here, we can use the media counter-campaign launched by RT and Sputnik after the United States accused Russia of interfering in its presidential campaign. Meanwhile, both platforms took advantage of being in American and European media’s visor to strengthen the idea of a diabolization of Russia. Hence, a multitude of articles were published that covered this idea, exaggerating it, and even satirizing the accusations of Western media. A hashtag[19] #LaMainDuKremlin [#KremlinsHand] was even propagated in February 2017 (cf. figure 1).

Figure 1 A typical Sputnik ironical tweet. Translation : #Kremlinshand My cat is staring at me weirdly ... Is it the Russian hackers fault ?

In both media, we do notice a seeming desire to polarize the opinions of the readers who eventually face only two choices: to be part of a unipolar axis dominated by the Americans and their ultra-European allies, or to choose the side of the freethinkers and

[18] « *Comme au Proche-Orient, le chaos en Ukraine est l'œuvre des USA* », *Sputnik* France, December 25, 2015; https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201512261020578557-ukraine-chaos-usa/ (last consulted on June 6, 2016).

[19] The “hashtag” is a referencing tool on the Internet. It is mainly used today as a clickable “keyword” on Twitter.

support Russia, portrayed as the ideal country. Indeed, one of the tactics they use the most is to present Russia from its best side. If we look at the Yukos affair, which has seen Russia and the former oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky fight for more than ten years, a set of elements which are otherwise fundamental to understand the dispute are voluntarily omitted from the articles written by journalists at Sputnik and RT. Thereby, and even though there is no questioning the decisions of Russian courts, there is often no mention of the context around Mr. Khodorkovsky's arrest. Indeed, he was arrested during a "oligarch hunt" set during the first term of Vladimir Putin, when simultaneously the former CEO (of an oil company) entered politics. If he is not to be exempted from all the criticisms highlighted in Russian media (i.e. the conditions of his acquiring of Yukos during the 1990s), the brutality that led to the forced auction of the oil company, and the intriguing links between the new acquirer and the stateowned company Rosneft are never mentioned. In that story, Russia is generally presented as mostly victim of corrupted shareholders.

To enlarge their audience, Russian media outlets follow practices that, by using the algorithms of social networks, allow them to "dope" the visibility of their contents. For example, they use the "codes" of the Internet, and various technics called "clickbait" to increase their audience. If the latter were originally conceived to generate online revenues, these technics are visible in the shared contents published by Sputnik and RT on social networks, such asin "quirky" articles with catchy titles and sensational or emotional contents. These articles, which usually have little to do with the editorial line of Sputnik, [20] are seen as part of a larger communication strategy increasingly widespread on social networks.

That strategy proves very efficient on Facebook. Indeed, the content of the "news feed" on the social network, that is the homepage which appears on the screen when logged in, relies on an algorithm based on a code kept secret by Facebook, but that still can be analyzed. It takes into accounts hundreds of features, including the "liked" contents, those we click on, those we share, comment on, hide, or report. Once each content has received its score of "relevance," the algorithm that makes the selection ranks them on the screen. As a consequence, the content than ranks at the top of the "news feed" is perceived as the most

[20] We can quote a recent article untitled "Is he training for war? Armed with a sword, this chameleon became an Internet star." https://fr.sputniknews.com/insolite/201708261032796461-guerre-epee-cameleon-star/ (last consulted on August 27, 2017).

relevant for a particular user. Obviously, some features are not controllable as they depend on human behavior, but the strategy ensures that Sputnik gets an optimal visibility.

The massive production of elements of speech by Russian press agencies is an efficient, and cheap, way to offer narratives that put into perspective, or contradict, the socalled “mainstream” flow of Western media. To do so, using social networks is at the core of the Russian informational strategy. An important share of visits on the websites of RT and Sputnik comes from redirections from social networks.[21] However, these platforms represent more than just the sharing of content. They make it possible to propagate efficiently the discourse and arguments of Russian media outlets. Hence, the role of social networks needs to be studied as part of a more global phenomenon than simply as the sharing of web content. The users that we are interested in largely act according to a scheme of appropriation, replication, and rerun of ideas and arguments born by Russian media outlets. We will aim at understanding how the French-speaking population, and to a lesser extent the Englishspeaking population, structures itself as it serves as a relay for contents created by Russian platforms and for the ideas they vehicle.

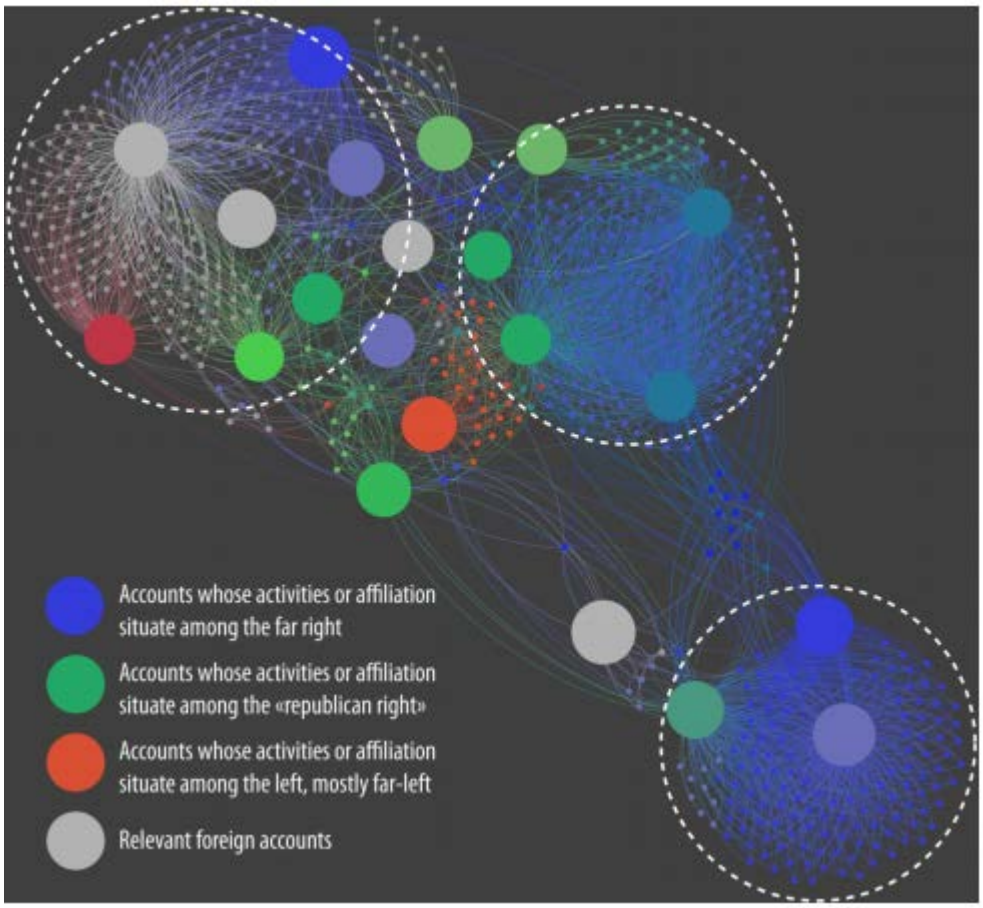
The “pro-Russian” galaxy in French on Twitter.

To comprehend this galaxy of Internet users that takes part in the propagation of a discourse produced by Russian platforms, Twitter is the ideal social network. This has to do with the “open” nature of the website,[22] but also with the possibility of collecting some of its data. Indeed, the API of Twitter authorizes anyone to collect the data of its users. Using a method with a very limited margin of error, it became possible to extract more than a thousand accounts in French that are considered “relays” of the Russian informational apparatus – either actively (relays of contents directly produced by Russian media outlets) or passively (propagating the discourse produced by these media). For each of these identified accounts, many details are furnished by Twitter (number of follows, followed, tweets, “likes,”

[21] More than a fourth of visits on the websites of RT and Sputnik (all editions included) come from links published on social networks. For all the other international media outlets, the figure is below 20 percent. Data from Alexa.

[22] As opposed to Facebook and others, the default way Twitter functions allows anyone to read all the tweets written by other users.

the description on the profile, its date of creation, even the possible location…)[23] as well as subscriptions that link them to each other. Hence, it became possible for us to create a preliminary cartography, which is very instructive of the links that unite all the accounts identified as relays one to the other.



On this cartography, each of the 1,030 dots represents a Twitter account. The big dots represent the most important accounts in the galaxy, meaning that they aggregate interactions with a lot of small accounts. Among them are media outlets, political

[23] Twitter is a "micro-blogging" platform. The website functions as a webpage that lists the publications (the "tweets" which cannot go beyond 140 characters but may contain images, videos, or links) of individuals you subscribe to (*followed*). Hence, you have the possibility of "retweeting" (share the content with the people that *follow* you), of "linking" (which shows an interest in the publication without sharing it to your entire network and making it more visible).

personalities, intellectuals, but also some accounts that are more anonymous but remain influential. The colors (blue, green, red) shows an indication of the probable political orientation of these accounts.[24]

The first community, at the bottom-right, represents the nationalist far-right, mainly organized around three accounts close to the National Front, and which each totalizes thousands or tens of thousands of followers. The second visible community is mapped at the center-right of the graph. It is close to the far-right as well, but its accounts are to a larger extent linked to other accounts sharing different political opinions. It is made of users closer to the National Front as an institution, seemingly more educated, such as some leaders of the party. Finally, the third community is more politically varied, and is mostly organized around the account of a Belarus engineer. Based in Gomel, he relays daily, and in several languages, information produced by Russian platforms on various topics related to the Russian foreign policy. He is followed by several academics, bloggers, and political personalities with different political leanings that are identified here as network nodes.

Hence, and as opposed to certain preconceived ideas, this “Russosphere” is not homogenous, either based on the profile of the individuals who comprise it, or on their political orientation. On the contrary, it is a really diversified galaxy and a large part of it could exist without any action from Russia. Yet, we can notice that the “central” accounts, either that of Russian media outlets or of political personalities, play an important role linking the accounts together and making the whole coherent.

Automatization and unusual behaviors on Twitter

Leaving its important ideological and political heterogeneity aside, another remarkable aspect of this community lies in the singular behavior of some of its members. Several measures made on the data of this “Russosphere” show us that, in average, its

[24] To do so, we have studied the behavior of the “big” accounts and we have given one of the three basic colors to each of them. Then, and thanks to the tool Gephi, variations of these colors automatically appeared according to the number of links linking the accounts in the graph to each other. For example, the more an account “turns” blue, the better the chances that it is linked to far-right communities. The “big” accounts in grey do not use French as their main language, but we found them interesting enough to be kept in the graph.

accounts have an unusually high activity: some accounts tweet several hundred times a day whereas others add more than sixty accounts daily to their lists of followers.

Automatization could explain the behavior of these accounts.[25] So-called bots are entirely automatized accounts, often managed in a very centralized fashion from "bot farms." Using such services is quite common in some fields, and it is probable that numerous platforms[26] use them to exaggerate their audience, but also to be more visible by toying with the algorithms of social networks. Yet, automatized accounts are not the only reason behind these unusual behaviors. In fact, the networks that relay Russian contents are characterized by forceful online activism, especially linked to the far-right. It is thus necessary to understand these "unusual" behaviors beyond the limited question of "bots." The intricacy of automatized accounts with a commercial purpose (bought bots), or with a political purpose (networks organized by activists), semi-automatized, and non-automatized is very important, and we need a classification that takes into account this diversity.

To start, it is necessary to assert beyond what daily number of tweets, follows, or likes it is possible to determine that an account acts abnormally. To respond to this methodological question, we have divided our databases into percentiles. For example, in the case of our Twitter database of pro-Russian accounts, we have created a compartmentalization in percentiles according to the rate of tweets/day, favorites/day, follows/day (the average number of individuals to which the account subscribes every day) for each of the accounts in the database:

Translation : Pro-Russian accounts activity rates sorted by centiles (Tweets/day, Likes/day, follows/day)

[25] The project *Computational Propaganda* of the Oxford Internet Institute did important research on that topic. http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/ (last consulted on August 5, 2017).
[26] http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-40344208 (last consulted on August 5, 2017).

By following a geometric-arithmetic rule,[27] we have determined that we could regard a behavior as abnormal beyond the 75th percentile according to the number of tweets/day (30,6/d), beyond the 83th according to the number of favorites (17/d), and beyond the 91th percentile for the number of follows (10,62 follows/day). In total 511 accounts in our database can be seen as having an abnormal behavior. It is important to remember that these rates are still of a "human" scale, that is to say, that they can be reached without any automatization. Hence, the accounts that evolve around such rates can be considered as abnormally proactive. However, accounts situated between the 95th and the 100th percentiles are clearly processed by bots.

The 511 accounts with an "abnormal" behavior, and that have been detected thanks to the percentile method, can be divided into four groups:

♣The "archetypal" bots (group 1, group 3, group 4, group 7)

The accounts with an abnormal behavior easiest to identify on Twitter are those corresponding to the first generation of automatized accounts, and used in the context of informational actions potentially organized by the Russian authorities. There were used for the first time during the demonstrations of the winter of 2011-2012. During these manifestations, largely organized through social networks, some Internet users saw large amounts of messages being published on Twitter and Vkontakte[28] by what we must call trolls, and made to discredit, harass, and disorganize the protest movement. Several observers[29] realized then that a significant share of these trolls published very similar messages with as objective to discredit the movement. Today still, we can find about forty archetypical bots in our Twitter database relaying and/ or interacting on a regular basis with Russian media platforms. They were usually easy to recognize, thanks to three elements. First, their account names are usually random strings of letters and numbers. Then, their profile pictures are usually taken from royalty-free image banks, and are simultaneously used by many accounts. Finally, their behaviors are very often monotask: they "like," tweet, or follow other accounts,

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[27] An arithmetic-geometric suite is a suite that follows both an arithmetic logic (additive) and geometric logic (multiplicative), defined as an affine recurrence between a term and the term that follows in the suite.

[28] The social network the most used in Russia.

[29] http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-16108876 (last consulted on August 12, 2017).

but rarely the three tasks at the same time. Generally, these bots are not focused on one topic, because they are managed from farms whose owners have clients with very different needs.[30]

♣ The “undertaken” bots

These are totally automatized accounts not even trying to hide their nature. We can take the example of accounts belonging to press agencies, blogs, or feed readers which tweet every time a certain piece of information is published. That is the case, in our database, of a news account in Russian language, and which data indicates a very symbolic localization that highlights the political leanings of the owner: “Donetsk, Russia.” These accounts usually correspond to abnormal behaviors in terms of tweets/hours.

♣ The semi-automatized accounts

These are the accounts effectively owned by a physical person, but which activities are partially automatized thanks to strings of command.[31]

♣ The non-automatized accounts

These are accounts probably managed by human operators who are particularly prolific. Here for example, we have the case of an account that publicly endorsed François Fillon and which posts about 150 tweets each day. It appears that the account is effectively managed by an individual who spends a lot of time on Twitter, which interrogates the new technics of activism that emerged alongside social networks: the emergence of true “political posters 2.0.”

Finally, it is reasonable to assume the existence of sophisticated bots, conceived not to be detected. They do not have codes in common with the other bots, and often imitate accounts managed by human operators. In the current state of the art, they were effectively impossible to identify strictly.

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[30] Hence, when the American researcher Brian Krebs updated a database of about two thousand bots that was established during the demonstrations of 2011-2012, he showed that only five or six accounts are still active today. And none of these “survivors” tweets about political topics, not even in Russian. The contents published are mostly advertisings of all kinds, which shows that at the time, somebody brought the services of a company to manage the bots.

[31] IFTTT is one of these tools, and among the most used. Among other things, they make it possible for a Twitter account to publish regularly contents from news websites that include keywords chosen in advance.

Conclusion

Russia carved a prime position for itself in the geopolitics of cyberspace. As a major actor which importance has been even more inflated by its detractors,[32] the country has developed during the past fifteen years a strategy which has proven increasingly successful. The decision to focus its informational actions on the West worked: the majority of the visitors on the websites of Sputnik and RT are from these countries. The success of Russian media outlets, in France especially, can be explained by different means, based on their editorial line, the frequency and the modes of their publications, but also on the use of powerful external tools such as social networks. Eventually, the political context plays an important and evident role in the process; a role even amplified by the media outlets[33] in such a dynamic of media escalation.

It remains difficult to detect behind this network of technics a precise strategy that could be described in terms of objectives. Yet, it is evident that the growth of the audience of Russian media outlets, the appropriation of their discourse by Internet users, and the ability of identifiable “pro-Russian” networks to get mobilized is a powerful tool of influence for the Russian state.

Some tools have been developed at different geographical scales to face and counter this phenomenon. The most remarkable remains the European External Action Service East Stratcom Task Force. Launched in 2015 by the European Union, it aims at, among other objectives, “improve[ing] EU capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors. “ [34] So far, its successes are limited, partly due to divergences between the member states. It makes research on a national scale even more important in France, notably on the potentially negative effects of this strategy. Furthermore, any firm initiative against these relays is seen as a denial of democracy, and contributes to their success as a result. In the end, the Russian influence finds its strength and echo less in a planned global strategy than in the asperities of the political life in France.

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[32] LIMONIER Kevin, GERARD Colin, « Guerre hybride russe dans le cyberespace ». *Hérodote*, Vol. 166-167, pp. 147-166

[33] On that note, the share amount of publications by Sputnik on the migration crisis is especially telling.

[34] https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/2116/%20Questions%20and%20Answers%20about%20the%20East%20StratCom%20Task%20Force (last consulted on October 3, 2017).

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