

## IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

<b>Student Matriculation No.</b>	<b>Glasgow</b> 2377920 <b>DCU</b> 19108354 <b>Charles</b> 25223283
<b>Dissertation Title</b>	Domestic depiction of Russia's foreign information operations

### INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

<b>Reviewer 1 Initial Grade</b> <i>Select from drop down list</i>	<b>Reviewer 2 Initial Grade</b> <i>Select from drop down list</i>	<b>Late Submission Penalty</b> <i>no penalty</i>
<b>Word Count Penalty</b> (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)		
<b>Word Count:</b> 22762 <b>Suggested Penalty:</b> no penalty		

### JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

<b>Final Agreed Mark.</b> (Following correspondence reviewers should list the agreed final internal grade taking before and after any penalties to be applied).
<b>Before Penalty:</b> C1 [14] <b>After Penalty:</b> C1 [14]

### DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
<b>A. Structure and Development of Answer</b>	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Very Good
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Very Good
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Good
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Good
<b>B. Use of Source Material</b>	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Very Good
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Good
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Good
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Excellent
<b>C. Academic Style</b>	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Good
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Excellent
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Excellent
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Not required
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

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### ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

#### **Reviewer 1**

This dissertation took a potentially novel approach to information activities by focusing on their domestic implications. This was explained carefully in the introduction and set the ground for an interesting thesis. You were able to draw on a wide range of literatures and demonstrated good awareness of various salient issues relevant to the topic.

While there was much to like here, there were parts that needed fuller development, including theoretical and methodological aspects of the research.

One of the most striking weaknesses of the thesis was that it was largely repetitive. Many sections felt like we were going over similar ground. It felt as if we were constantly told about how Russia manipulates information without getting to the heart of any new insights. It was a shame that we didn't get to the new empirical data until page 48. By this time, I was eager to learn something new and move on from the rather linear argument that Russia tries to manipulate narratives and creates enemy images etc.

In terms of the methodology, I felt that there were large gaps that needed to be explained in more detail. For example, on page 17, you note that "The respective parts of the Talk-Show were analyzed thematically according to the main frames". It was not entirely clear what these main frames were. A more robust methodology would have explained in detail what the themes were and how they were derived. At the same time, the use of Russian television shows was a potentially useful way of examining the domestic-international nexus and information tactics.

The main innovation of the thesis was this focus on how information operations are used for domestic purposes. While this was an interesting approach, not enough was done to explain the potential connections between the domestic and foreign-policy aspects of information activities. For example, when the data from 'Vecher' was presented, it felt as if we were learning about domestic identity issues – this could easily have been a study into Russian identity narratives and media. I felt more needed to be done in order to create stronger links between domestic and international factors.

One way to do this was to tackle the issues more systematically. The literature could have been used to identify how information operations were used in an international context. Then, it would have been possible to see how these issues were used to present messages to domestic audiences. For example, some people have asserted that Russia benefits from the US reaction to Russia's alleged election meddling as it shows the great power potential of Russia, as they are potentially able to affect and manipulate US elections. These were the sorts of connections I was perhaps hoping to see more of.

I felt that another weakness of the dissertation was that much of the consulted literature came from a policy-based perspective. Often these reports are somewhat anti-Russian from the outset. While this is not necessarily a problem, it did sometimes present a one-sided perspective on information operations – seeing Russia as a nefarious actor whereas the 'West' was an innocent set of actors. To balance this out, more use could have been made of the more academic literatures alongside the policy-based and think tank literatures. This would have allowed you to have drawn on more critical perspectives.

Overall then, this was an interesting dissertation with much potential. The fundamental idea behind the thesis was sound. It was clear that you had good understanding of many important issues and you were able to write fluently on them. Despite this, there were a number of weaknesses that were not fully resolved in the course of the thesis.

#### **Reviewer 2**

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I think this is potentially an exciting dissertation. It asks “how Russia uses its foreign information operations to improve its domestic image and influence domestic audience.” Such a question is both novel and relevant. I think the dissertation can be applauded for the topic. The dissertation could have brought important insights into burgeoning literature about Russian information operations. I am, however, afraid the dissertation does not deliver its full potential. I think several changes and clarifications would be beneficial.

First, it was not entirely clear to me what is being analyzed. How do Russian information operations abroad actually influence the domestic audience, as the research question suggests? What narratives does Russia use to portray its information operations abroad to the domestic audience, as the methodology suggests? How Russia portrays the West as the actual empirical analysis suggests? These three are connected but not necessarily the same. At least, I would like to see a better explanation of how the pieces work together.

Second, I think more could have been provided in terms of the actual analysis of the narratives. The dissertation puts too much emphasis on various contextual information. A lot is provided about Russian information operations and how these operations are depicted in the existing literature. In contrast, the actual empirical part, which presents and analyses data from Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim is only nine pages long. Furthermore, the analysis could have been more systematic. The methodology could have been more explicit about what is narratives analysis and how it is executed.

Third, while the dissertation draws on a respectable number of sources, I was not always convinced by the quality and balance of these sources. The dissertation might have consulted academic literature more than it did. Furthermore, some sources appear to be rather dubious (c.f. AS, Bojang, 2018. “The Study of Foreign Policy in International Relations.” *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 6 (4); Aram Terzyan, *Sustaining Power Through External Threats: The Power Of Enemy Images In Russia And Azerbaijan*, *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*), and might well be from predatory journals.

Fourth, I would like to see a proper conclusion. The current one reads more like a summary and leaves the reader wondering, ‘so what.’ What are the policy implications of this analysis? Do the findings support existing theories or undermine them? What broader questions arise? Is further research needed?

Fifth, while being a lesser issue, I was sometimes lost in the text. Having read a paragraph, I was often not entirely sure what it means for your research question. I would avoid long paragraphs (e.g., the last paragraph on page 6, which spans over three pages), making sure each paragraph has one central idea/argument. This central idea/argument should appear already in the first sentence of the paragraph. The paragraph then elaborates on the central idea and supports it with evidence. I think clarity would have benefited from this principle.