Article

Kremlin Disinformation Discourse: Media Coverage of the Plane Hijack by Belarus on 23 May 2021

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Abstract: This paper approaches Kremlin disinformation from a theoretical perspective encompassing key tenets of media discourse analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, the Appraisal theory, and research on propaganda and disinformation. On 23 May 2021, the Ryanair flight 4978 flying from Athens to Vilnius was intercepted by a Belarusian warplane and forced to land in Minsk. Afterward, a Belarusian dissident journalist, Roman Protasevich, was detained. This paper aims to contribute to Kremlin disinformation research with insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Appraisal theory. The Appraisal theory is used to discern the specific disinformation strategy employed in compromised media publications covering the forced landing. The main disinformation strategy observed in the dataset revolves around deflecting the targets of moral and axiological evaluation and undermining audience's sense of truthfulness.

Keywords: Kremlin disinformation; Ryanair plane hijack; media discourse; appraisal theory; disinformation strategy

1. Introduction

On 23 May 2021, the Ryanair flight 4978 from Athens to Vilnius was intercepted by a Belarusian warplane and forced to land in Minsk, the Belarusian capital, because of an alleged bomb threat. Following the forced landing, a Belarusian dissident journalist, Roman Protasevich, 27, who lived in exile in Lithuania since 2019, was detained. The incident was widely covered by the Lithuanian and international media. It also provided researchers from diverse fields—political science, history, international relations, law, journalism, and others—with insights into how events can be covered in the specific geopolitical context under the conditions of intense information warfare. From a linguistic perspective, news media texts provide valuable data showing how propaganda and disinformation exploit specific linguistic resources such as the language of evaluation.

Russian propaganda and disinformation outlets such as RT (formerly known as Russia Today, the largest Russian state-controlled international broadcaster) and its subsidiaries immediately reacted to the incident. RT is a state-funded multimedia network that has been blocked in the entire European Union (EU) since March 2022 following the wide-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine that started on 24 February 2022. RT owns numerous local outlets such as the Baltnews portal functioning in the Baltics since 2014. Despite bans and restrictions in the EU, the United Kingdom, and the United States, RT clones, such as the Baltnews, continue to re-appear in new guises even after the restriction of access. The existence of such compromised media outlets causes major concerns because Kremlin disinformation seeks to undermine societal trust in legitimate governments and democracies.

Manipulations of the language, cognition, and behaviour of target audiences have become acute after the advent of contemporary information and communication technologies, especially social media. The times of such tremendous changes have been described by researchers as the post-truth era. As noted by Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro (2022), "In the post-truth world, many people are politically swayed not by what something *is*,

but by what somethings *feels* like". The problem of conformity to facts in post-truth times causes major concerns.

An important factor at play in the overall information ecosystem is the shift in the traditional journalistic paradigm that values journalistic neutrality, impartiality, and objectivity. In post-truth times, the overall possibility of journalism's neutrality has been questioned (Ojala 2021; Kumar 2016), and the role of subjectivity and emotionality has been brought to the fore (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen and Pantti 2021; Soontjens 2019). White (2004, p. 244) views "attitudinal positioning" as "[...] a phenomenon which can operate just as easily in apparently 'factual' as in overtly opinionated journalism, though by different mechanisms and with different rhetorical effects". The question of the overall possibility of journalistic impartiality becomes even more problematic when we talk about distorted strategic communication such as Kremlin propaganda and disinformation. The rapidly changing environment is well exemplified by one of the most recent disinformation strategies employed by Kremlin propagandists. The strategy has been spotted by researchers from the Crime and Security Research Institute at Cardiff University (Ymchwil and Diogelwch 2021). The team have found evidence that 32 media outlets (*The Daily Mail; Daily Express; The Times; Fox News; Washington Post; Le Figaro; Der Spiegel; Die Welt; La Stampa* and others) across 16 countries have been targeted through their readers' comments. This new tactic adopted by Kremlin disinformation copywriters involves the streaming of anonymous comments disguised as the public opinion of the users of these media outlets.

The ability to invent and adopt such new tactics raises major concerns especially in the Lithuanian geopolitical context. As Vaišnys et al. (2017, p. 5) maintain, the threats of Kremlin propaganda are understood in the Baltics, but what is needed now is to identify techniques that help to deconstruct the *content* plane of propaganda and disinformation. In Lithuania, important analytical work has been completed by political scientists, communication and media researchers, and philosophers (Buinauskas et al. 2016; Kojala et al. 2020; Laužikas 2018; Martišius 2010, 2014; Mažeikis 2010; Vaišnys et al. 2017). However, as regards the content plane, more research needs to be completed to identify how linguistic resources such as the language of evaluation function in disinformation discourse, and how disinformation discourse seeks to evoke desired emotions and to construct desired worldviews through its evaluative language. Thus, this paper aims to (i) contribute to propaganda and disinformation research with insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Appraisal theory (AT) and (ii) discern the specific disinformation strategy employed in the compromised media publications covering the forced landing of Ryanair flight 4978 by the Belarusian regime on 23 May 2021. The main questions for which answers are sought are: (i) "How is affect (emotion and opinion) expressed in compromised media texts two days after the forced landing of the Ryanair flight?" and (ii) "What specific disinformation strategy is evident in the analysed dataset?" The findings of the research indicate that the most common attitudinal component noticed in the dataset analysed for this paper was the multi-faceted emotion of fear. Fear may be evoked by a range of triggers. The invocation of fear is aimed at undermining audience's sense of truthfulness and trust in national governments, public institutions, and international organisations.

2. Literature Review

This section provides a theoretical framework of two fields: approaches to propaganda and disinformation and the language of evaluation (the Appraisal theory in particular).

2.1. The Origins of Russian Propaganda Theory and Its Contemporary Approach

To better understand how contemporary Kremlin propaganda functions, we need to take into consideration its historical progression starting with the Leninist press theory (that later evolved into the Soviet media theory) and ending with the contemporary propagandist practices. As noted by McNair (1991, p. 10), Marx believed that media reproduce "the ideological conditions of the capitalist mode of production". At the dawn of the 20th century, Lenin incorporated this Marxist view into his media theory. As further noted by

McNair (1991, pp. 12–14), Lenin distinguished two functions of the press—ideological and organizational. Furthermore, McNair (1991, p. 13) points out that the Soviet propaganda, in line with the Leninist postulates, advanced "'as a goal, the socialization of the members of society to communist convictions... to disseminate a particular image of social reality which corresponds to the values of a socialist society; and... to create a particular kind of attitude towards reality amongst the people to whom the image is addressed' (Grushin and Onikov 1981, p. 49)". The Soviet author Baluev (1983) provides a detailed analysis of Lenin's theory regarding the negative aspects of the bourgeois press in the West: its "political ballyhoo", "phrase-mongering", defending "the cause of the exploiting minority", safeguarding "the interests of the ruling classes", being "deceitful in their concrete political programmes", being "false in its reporting of specific events and facts of life", and keeping "silence on facts and events that it was not in their interest to mention" (Baluev 1983, pp. 38–39). These criticisms formed an important ground for the later Soviet media theory. McNair (1991) notes that, after World War II, the Soviet media turned to praising the economic development and achievements of the Soviet Union, the merits of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, its events, documents, official speeches, and so on. Until the 1980s, the coverage of crime or corruption was scarce unless it could serve as a means of educating the Soviet citizens about the efficiency and justice of the Soviet legal system, its quick and ruthless reaction to transgressors.

Looking at the evolution of the Soviet media after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, one can arrive at a conclusion that all the negative aspects that Lenin and the Soviet media theory saw in the Western media apply to today's state-of-the-art of the Russian media system: the suppression of independent media, prosecution of dissident journalists and opposition, control of the media by those in power, and sophisticated propaganda apparatus. Kuznetsova (2021) investigated today's institutional practices and journalistic ethics of RT and paid attention to two concepts that guide RT's journalistic routines today— "adekvatnost" (a professional standard legitimizing journalistic propagation of pro-Putin narratives) and journalistic self-censorship (viewed positively as a "moral responsibility") (2021, p. 2). Kuznetsova (2021, pp. 2–3) also argues that the key to understanding RT's practices is the concept of systemic counter-propaganda—*kontrpropaganda*—"a Soviet formula of constructing arguments through direct rebuttal and delegitimization of opponent's discourse". As we will see below, this formula continues to play an important role today. Kuznetsova (2021) also highlights that the post-Soviet journalism inherited "the specific discursive framework for making sense of current affairs" (p. 5) and that it is engaged in "defensive" practices organized around "a 'noble' goal—Russia's international recognition" (p. 14).

Disinformation—intentionally false information—has always performed and continues to perform an essential role in the Kremlin's psychological and information warfare (Vaišnys et al. 2017, p. 217). Today, however, one important feature stands out. According to Pomerantsev (2019), the purpose of Kremlin propaganda is to cause public confusion (contrary to the former ideologically systematic Soviet propaganda aimed at promoting the "merits" of the Soviet system and criticising the "rotten" West). This problem is aggravated by the fact that contemporary Kremlin propaganda outlets fully exploit the affordances of digital media for amplifying confusion and disinformation.

2.2. Complexity of the Term "Propaganda" and the Essential Features

Approaches to propaganda and its definitions encompass many concepts, and no single approach or definition can explain such a complex phenomenon concisely. Snow (2019, p. 4) notes that, in the second half of the 20th century, we observed "a competitive propaganda that integrated economic progress with ideological superiority", and that, "After the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, propaganda did not end but transformed into maintenance of the victor, democratic capitalism (in the case of the United States), or retreat and rebuilding on the part of the former Soviet satellite states. Twenty-five years after the fall of the USSR, new terms like "fake news" and "disinformation" would enter into the mainstream and spotlight efforts by Russia to use authoritarian methods to weaken

democratic societies from their ideological advantage, including to the point of threatening the outcomes of elections in the United States and France." (Snow 2019, p. 4)

Contemporary propaganda researchers have singled out such key features of propaganda as intentionality; systematic and institutional organisation; the role of human psychology (shaping beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes. Mažeikis (2010) believes that the essential feature of propaganda is its institutional organisation; in his opinion, propaganda should be distinguished from common public persuasion practices because such practices do not employ systematic indoctrination and they are not aimed at substituted thinking (Mažeikis 2010, pp. 194–95). Similarly, Jowett and O'Donnell (2014, p. 464) highlight the systematic and intentional nature of propaganda: "Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist". In Snow's view (Snow 2019, p. 1), "Propaganda is sponsored information that uses cause- and emotion-laden content to sway public opinion and behavior in support of the source's goals".

As the affective content of propagandist discourse is the major focus of this paper, the latter, Snow's (2019), definition that highlights the affective side is taken as the guiding one.

2.3. The Key Models for Analysing Contemporary Russian Propaganda

Specific models for analysing Russian propaganda and disinformation have been proposed by researchers and analysts. For the purposes of this paper, three models—the Firehose of Falsehood model, the 4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns, and Jowett and O'Donnell's (2014) model—have been chosen as the most suitable ones.

2.3.1. The Firehose of Falsehood Model

The Firehose of Falsehood model (Paul and Matthews 2016) was developed to explain the evolution of the Russian propaganda following Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008. The authors note that contemporary features of the Russian approach became evident during the subsequent occupation of Crimea, conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, and constant confrontation with NATO. According to Paul and Matthews (2016, p. 2), the contemporary approach merges old Soviet techniques (obfuscation and triggering desired actions) and distinctive new features: contemporary Russian propaganda is "high-volume and multi-channel", "rapid, continuous, and repetitive", it lacks "commitment to objective reality" and "commitment to consistency". Paul and Matthews (2016, p. 4) also note that repeating and recycling is an important part of the Russian disinformation model. The authors further highlight that, "Russian news channels, such as RT and Sputnik News, are more like a blend of infotainment and disinformation than fact-checked journalism, though their formats intentionally take the appearance of proper news programs" (Paul and Matthews 2016, p. 5). The Firehose of Falsehood model brought attention to one essential feature of the contemporary Kremlin propaganda: it is inherently based on lies. Having in mind such complexity, researchers sometimes resort to metaphors in describing their approaches. For instance, in their study of contemporary Russian propaganda as a strategy of deception, Pynnoniemi and Racz (2016, p. 14) use the metaphor of a kaleidoscope: "Soviet propaganda was anchored in ideological truth claims, whereas the contemporary Russian variant can be compared to a kaleidoscope: a light piercing through it is instantly transformed into multiple versions of reality." Paul and Matthews (2016, p. 1) called their model the Firehose of Falsehood model primarily because of such distinctive features: "We characterize the contemporary Russian model for propaganda as "the firehose of falsehood" because of two of its distinctive features: high numbers of channels and messages and a shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions."

2.3.2. The 4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns

In another influential approach to contemporary Russian propaganda, the 4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns, Ben Nimmo () lists the following four features of Russian disinformation:

Dismiss: if you do not like what your critics say, insult them;

Distort: if you do not like the facts, twist them;

Distract: if you are accused of something, accuse someone else of the same thing;

Dismay: if you do not like what someone else is planning, try to scare them off.

This model is very easy to apply because of its clear guidelines that people can use every day to spot disinformation.

2.3.3. Jowett and O'Donnell's (2014) Approach

In their analysis of Russian propaganda, Lithuanian researchers (Vaišnys et al. 2017) have applied yet another—Jowett and O'Donnell's (2014)—approach. This model investigates propaganda in relation to persuasion. The model lays focus on propagandist aims. The aims are defined as attempts (i) to evoke a certain state of mind, disposition, and viewpoints (through manipulations of language, slogans, and symbols); (ii) to manipulate cognition (through formation of desired knowledge construction habits of the target audience); and, subsequently, (iii) to trigger desired behaviour and actions of the target audience. Awareness of propagandist aims allows different actors in the communicative chain who are either involved in the spread of propaganda or are likely targets and further disseminators of propaganda to be discerned. In distorted communication such as propagandist communication, message senders are those who resort to intentional systematic manipulations of language and symbols to achieve desired changes in their audience's cognition, behaviour, and affective states. Message receivers may not realise the malicious attempts because, for instance, certain emotions in them have been targeted and successfully evoked. Significant research from the perspective of emotions in discourse has been performed by linguists investigating the relationship between the consequences of populist discourse (that often employs propagandist techniques and spreads disinformation) in cases such as Brexit or 2016 US presidential elections (Breeze 2019; Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro 2022).

The three models discussed here—the Firehose of Falsehood model, the 4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns, and Jowett and O'Donnell's (2014) model—are seen as highly relevant for this paper because such a complex phenomenon as propaganda can be understood in-depth only if its multifaceted nature is investigated from various angles and multidisciplinary. These three models highlight many inter-related features. However, if supplied with additional methodical tools, they can become even more effective. Some of these tools are offered by social semiotic linguistics and research on the language of evaluation.

2.4. The Language of Evaluation

The language of evaluation is related to the expression of authorial opinion concerning the depiction of various phenomena, events, individuals, and societies. Evaluation, according to Thompson and Hunston (2000, p. 5), encompasses "[...] the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about". Evaluation in news media texts, according to White (2004, p. 229), concerns "how it is that a text such as a news report might influence or position readers/listeners/viewers to take a negative or positive view of the people, events and states of affairs being depicted in the text".

2.4.1. The Appraisal Theory

The Appraisal theory (AT) (Martin and White 2005) is rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1978, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). AT is a very effective tool for analysing evaluation in discourse. It is seen as "[...] the most complete and articulate theory of evaluation to date" (Alba-Juez and Mackenzie 2019, p. 6). AT is "[...] concerned with the construction by texts of communities of shared feelings and values, and with the linguistic mechanisms for the sharing of emotions, tastes and normative assessments" (Martin and White 2005, p. 1). As Alba-Juez and Mackenzie (2019, p. 5) note,

investigations of emotion span across sciences (for instance, psychology, anthropology, and others) and across linguistic fields (such as cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and conversation analysis). AT studies emotion and opinion not "in and of itself", but "as a subsystem of language which is completely attached to, and dependent on, evaluation systems." (Alba-Juez and Mackenzie 2019, p. 5)

Since the key publication by Martin and White (2005), the original AT has been refined and its functionality across various domains tested (Bednarek 2008, 2009; Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio 2019; Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro 2022; Hood 2010; Macken-Horarik and Isaac 2014; Marín-Arrese 2017; Thompson 2014).

The original APPRAISAL system consists of three subsystems: ATTITUDE (ways of feeling, positive and negative assessment of discourse entities), ENGAGEMENT (interpersonal construal of the world, heteroglossic background, alternative viewpoints, value positioning, reader–writer alignment, and relationships), and GRADUATION (modulation of both ATTITUDE and ENGAGEMENT, upscaling and downscaling of evaluative meanings).

2.4.2. Attitudinal Meanings

This paper focuses on the manifestations of attitudinal meanings. In Martin and White's (2005) classification, ATTITUDE is composed of AFFECT (emotions, reacting to behaviours, texts, processes, phenomena), JUDGEMENT (ethics/morality, rules and regulations, evaluation of behaviour, that is, the principles that construe our attitudes to people and how they behave), and APPRECIATION (aesthetics, value criteria and assessment, evaluating texts, processes, semiotic and natural phenomena, that is, the aesthetic principles that construe our evaluations of things). However, in this paper, affect will be approached from a perspective based on evidence from psychological research on emotion, as it has been suggested by Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019). These researchers note (2019, p. 326) that "Emotion lies at the core of human behaviour, as our experience and understanding always seem to be filtered through emotion." In addition, as they point out (2019, p. 304), "The term *attitude* thus seems too narrow in its scope, as it applies to generalized stances, but fails to capture the more temporary, event-driven nature of many instances." Therefore, they promote AFFECT to a superordinate position in appraisal, building on the classical work by Ochs and Schieffelin (1989) who thus explain their approach to affect in language: "We take affect to be a broader term than emotion, to include feelings, moods, dispositions, and attitudes associated with persons and/or situations". (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989, p. 7) Importantly, Ochs and Schieffelin (1989, pp. 7–8) also note the following: "We are not concerned with issues of speakers' actual feeling states or the extent to which their affective expression is sincere. [...] Our primary focus is on those linguistic features that key affect in everyday talk across a range of genres and social situations."

Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019, p. 305) propose viewing the AFFECT system as two sub-systems of EMOTION and OPINION (it was originally suggested by White (2004) and afterward proposed by Bednarek (2009)). OPINION here encompasses two sub-categories and their sub-systems from Martin and White's (2005) taxonomy: JUDGE-MENT and APPRECIATION. The latter two categories refer to what Martin and White (2005, p. 45) have termed "institutionalised feelings" that "[...] take us out of our everyday common-sense world into the uncommon sense worlds of shared community values".

3. Methodology

The dataset of 21 news reports (11,315 words in total) was analysed for the manifestations of the evaluative language. This dataset forms part of a larger 2-year research project (2020–2022) investigating the relationship between Media and Information Literacy and Systemic Functional Linguistics carried out by the author of the paper. Though the dataset analysed for this paper is small-scale, it has important advantages in terms of the specific context knowledge. First, the data can be described in close relation to both the local and international contexts, and second, the reports were published in close temporal proximity

(on 24 and 25 May 2021) to the incident of 23 May 2021. A total of 20 texts were originally published in the Russian language in the Baltnews portal. A total of 4 of the 20 texts published in Baltnews were republished by Laisvas laikraštis (a local newspaper notorious for spreading disinformation and republishing Baltnews publications) in Lithuanian translation to reach the audience that does not speak Russian. One text (T5)[1] was published in Laisvas laikraštis based on information retrieved from an undefined source, but this text supplemented the data set because it formed an important part of the entire stream on the 24 May and contained an image mocking Michael O'Leary, CEO of Ryanair. As regards the genre of the texts, all the texts most closely resembled the news article type. It must be noted, though, that all the texts were unauthored except for one (T16). In compromised media such as the Baltnews portal, indication of authorship is not considered a priority and it is often impossible to determine the real author as such. Therefore, it is rather difficult to apply the conventional genre labels to such texts. However, the texts can be regarded to be of the news article type though they do not conform to the conventional quality standards of neutrality and objectivity: their purpose is to tell the reader what has happened from the particular vantage point desired by the propagandists.

The UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 (O'Donnell 2012) was used for the annotation of attitudinal meanings. The UAM Corpus Tool is software for linguistic annotation (either manual or automatic). For this paper, the manual annotation of the appraisal features was performed. The software allows the use of built-in schemes for annotating appraisal elements. Importantly, the built-in schemes can be edited and adapted. For the analysis of this data set, the original APPRAISAL annotation scheme was modified by incorporating the revised version for annotating AFFECT (Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio 2019) as a superordinate node encompassing the sub-systems of EMOTION (Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio 2019; Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro 2022) and OPINION (encompassing the sub-systems of JUDGEMENT and APPRAISAL from the original Martin and White's (2005) taxonomy. The combined taxonomy used for the annotation of the dataset is shown in Appendix A. Following the annotation stage, a qualitative analysis of textual data was carried out to obtain deeper insights about attitudinal meanings grounded in contextual information.

4. Results

The analysis of evaluative attitudinal meanings showed that OPINION items outnumbered EMOTION items in the given dataset (Table 1). This was determined by the genre of the texts. Though far from being objective reports, the texts sought to be conceived as reliable journalistic writing. These texts also sought to construct a desired attitudinal stance of the audience towards the depicted phenomena favouring the Kremlin side.

Table 1. EMOTION and OPINION features in the data set (total number of annotated items N = 426).

Feature	Number of Instances	Percentage
EMOTION	104	24.41%
OPINION	322	75.59%

It is important to note that the dataset included texts exploiting many intermingled narrative lines. Thus, the coverage of the plane incident was interspersed with, for instance, messages about "information hygiene" intended as a criticism of Lithuania allegedly adopting unfair practices of media censorship (T10, T14). (However, on the contrary, in 2021 World Press Freedom Index ratings, Lithuania ranked 28 among 180 countries[2].) Similarly, the topic about the COVID-19 vaccination was embedded in the flow of the coverage of the Ryanair incident. Such texts sought to imply the unfair treatment of the Sputnik vaccine or bring to the fore the supposed problems related to deaths and other serious side-effects of the vaccines approved in the EU. References to mortality and the dire consequences of vaccination were aimed at stirring the emotion of fear in the audience. By doing this, the authors sought to imply the supposedly existing problems and fears inside

the country. In their view, these problems should have been taken much more seriously than the landing that was necessary because of flight security issues (T11, T12, T13). In addition to the implications of media suppression by government, other internal problems were sought. T15, for instance, brought back the long-debated topic of the decriminalisation of certain drugs that has surfaced in the Lithuanian media from time to time, especially in pre-election periods mostly involving the question of legitimising the use of medicinal cannabis for terminally ill patients, cancer patients, etc. T21 went even further claiming the supposed disappearance of patients in mental health institutions based on the discrepancies in numbers during the organisational restructuring of the institutions. Yet another vein of information flow on 24 and 25 May built on the traditional narrative of the Kremlin propaganda concerning the supposed weakness of the Lithuanian statehood, state, and its government, and this line of communication was aimed at causing and increasing the distrust of the audience towards their state. It also exploited the notion of rottenness of Western values. It has not been uncommon for the Kremlin propagandists to depict the Baltic states as prone to fascism. This has proved to be a very effective strategy inside Russia in creating the negative attitudes towards the Baltics among the Russian citizens. T18 elaborated on the claims of fascism reviving in the Baltics in modern guises. Moreover, references were made towards the pending economic losses caused by the short-sightedness of the government or political analysts unable to evaluate appropriately the state-of-affairs. Thus, the dataset contained content that targeted a range of institutions and spheres of societal life: healthcare, law, statehood, values, democracy, media, economic relations, etc.

4.1. Foregrounding Fear from Multiple Perspectives

Within the EMOTION group, the goal–achievement-type emotions were the most common (see Appendix B). Most cases of the goal–achievement-type emotions were identified in the texts about side-effects, adverse reactions such as deaths, blindness or deafness caused by the COVID-19 vaccines (goal achievement: dissatisfaction: insecurity: disquiet: fearful) often implicitly as in (1):

(1) Šalutinis poveikis gali pasireikšti [įvairiomis formomis:] nuo mirties dėl širdies nepakankamumo ar smegenų mirties iki labiau nekenksmingų simptomų, tokių kaip viduriavimas ar galvos skausmas. Ypač dažnai pasitaiko kurtumas, aklumas ir nemiga./The side effects range from death by heart failure or brain death to more harmless symptoms such as diarrhoea or headaches. Deafness, blindness, and insomnia seem to be particularly common. (T20)

In addition, fear experienced by various actors (the EU or the regime) was also referred to explicitly in the texts about the forced landing of the Ryanair plane and the detention of the Belarusian dissident as in (2):

(2) "Подобная реакция демонстрирует определенный страх ЕС, что данный гражданин может выдать какую-то важную информацию, которая может раскрыть многие факты, связанные с событиями 2020 года",—добавил п олитолог./"Such reaction demonstrates a certain fear of the EU that this citizen may give out some important information, which may reveal many facts related to the events of 2020," the political analyst added. (T7)

The Belarusian regime's fear of the independent mass media was also referred to, but this was introduced through the mocking authorial attitude towards the opposition as in (3) where the irony was evident in expressions such as "embraced opposition journalists" or "rocking the Belarusian boat":

(3) Вильнюс считает, что этот портал [Tut.by] "в соседней стране является крупнейшим новостным сайтом". У официального Минска иная позиция: по сообщению генпрокуратуры РБ, портал занимался распространением информации от незарегистрированного фонда BYSOL, что запрещено по закону о СМИ. Сотрудникам литовского внешнеполитического ведомства безразличен отсыл к законодательству "диктатуры", поскольку им лучше

известно, кто и чем занимается на информационном поле соседней страны. "Нелегитимный режим боится независимых СМИ и систематически уни- чтожает их",—МИД грудью встал на защиту оппозиционных журналистов, раскачивающих белорусскую лодку./Vilnius believes that this portal [Tut.by] "is the largest news site in the neighbouring country". Official Minsk has a different position: according to the Prosecutor General's Office of Belarus, the portal distributed information from an unregistered BYSOL foundation, which is prohibited by the law on media. Officials of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry are indifferent to the law adopted by the "dictatorship", as they know better who does what in the information field of the neighbouring country. "The illegiti- mate regime is afraid of independent mass media and systematically destroys them," the Foreign Ministry embraced opposition journalists who were rocking the Belarusian boat. (T10)

In the goal–achievement-type emotion, according to Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo- Tenorio (2019, p. 320), "[...] the focus is on the feeling of (dis)pleasure itself, derived from event or situations with a bearing on our goals, needs and values". Dissatisfaction concerns "[...] cases of inability, threat or blockage in trying to pursue or keep them" (2019, p. 320). Disquiet denotes "[...] unpleasant cognitive arousal" (2019, p. 321), and fear causes "[...] a quick flight or fight response to an imminent or current menace" (2019, p. 321). Based on the observations regarding the dataset of this paper, certain inferences can be drawn as to why publications of this kind (invoking fear of the vaccination's side-effects or concerns about the freedom of media) re-appeared alongside reporting on the forced landing of the Ryanair flight: the invocation of fear in the context of the flight incident may have been intended to assist in diverting the attention of the audience from the flight incident to the atmosphere of fear concerning individual and societal well-being in general.

4.2. Deflecting Targets of Moral Evaluations, Undermining Truthfulness, and Demeaning the West

Most features in the dataset (299 out of 322) denoted authorial opinion concerning JUDGEMENT (Appendix B). Judgement refers to institutionalised feelings stemming from principles of ethics/morality applied to evaluations of persons and their behaviour. Within judgement, two types of resources are available: social esteem and social sanction. As Martin and White (2005, p. 52, bold in the original) maintain, "**Social esteem** tends to be policed in oral culture, through chat, gossip, jokes and stories of various kinds—with humour often having a critical role to play (Eggins and Slade 1997). Sharing values in this area is critical to the formation of social networks (family, friends, colleagues, etc.). **Social sanction** on the other hand is more often codified in writing, as edicts, decrees, rules, regulations and laws about how to behave as surveilled by church and state—with penalties and punishments as levers against those not complying with the code. Sharing values in this area underpins civic duty and religious observances."

Social sanction resources were most common (243 items annotated as social sanction out of the total of 299 items of judgement resources). Within social sanction, propriety, as a category of ethics, concerns how good, moral, law abiding, fair, just, etc., the appraised be- haviour/action is, and veracity implies how honest, frank, credible, discrete, tactful, etc. the appraised behaviour/action is. Within social sanction, most of the items were allotted to the sub-category of negative propriety (163 items), i.e., behaviours considered to be improper morally, legally, and in other ways, and negative veracity (34 items), i.e., seen as contra- dicting truth. Social esteem resources consisted of 56 items. Of these, 30 items belonged to the category of *negative capacity*, i.e., questioning/criticising someone's capabilities to act effectively. Further on in this section, the most numerous—social sanction—resources are analysed in more detail.

4.2.1. Extremist Behaviour/Attitude

The main arguments concerning the legitimacy of the detention of the Belarusian dissident journalist revolved around the label "extremist" that was attached to opposition

activists (or the Telegram channel Nexta) and that was used in 10 of the texts in the dataset, as exemplified in excerpts (4) and (5) below.

(4) "Я думаю, что Литве наверняка бы не понравилось, если бы в Минске сидели литовские оппозиционеры экстремистского толка, выступающие против законной власти. Вот такие действия со стороны Белоруссии и последовали",— добавил политик./"I think that Lithuania would probably not like it if there were Lithuanian extremist opposition activists sitting in Minsk, opposing the legitimate [Lithuanian] government. That's why Belarus reacted that way," added the politician. (T6)

(5) В воскресенье, 23 мая, самолет компании Ryanair, летевший рейсом Афины—Вильнюс, совершил вынужденную экстренную посадку в аэропорту Минска после сообщения о минировании, которое не подтвердилось. Этим же рейсом летел Роман Протасевич, основатель Telegram-канала Nexta, признанного в Белоруссии экстремистским, которого после приземления самолета в Минске задержали./On May 23, Ryanair airplane, flying from Athens to Vilnius, made an emergency landing at the airport of Minsk after a report on the bombing, which had not been confirmed. The same flight was taken by Roman Protasevich, founder of the Telegram channel Nexta, recognized as extremist in Belarus, who was detained after landing in Minsk. (T3)

4.2.2. References to the 2013 Landing of the Bolivian Presidential Plane in Vienna

Another important line of narration that was interwoven with the 23 May incident concerned the 2013 Bolivian president Evo Morales' plane landing in Vienna (mentioned in 11 texts in the dataset).

(6) Напомним, что это не первая практика вынужденных посадок самолетов в европейском небе. Наиболее громким случаем стала принудительная посадка самолета президента Боливии Эво Моралеса в Вене в 2013 году. Причиной этому стали слухи о том, что на борту вместе с президентом находится бывший агент ЦРУ Эдвард Сноуден, обвиняемый в США в разглашении государственной тайны./It should be reminded that this is not the first practice of forced landings of aeroplanes in the European sky. The most high-profile case was the forced landing of the Bolivian President Evo Morales in Vienna in 2013. The reason for this was the rumour that the former CIA agent Edward Snowden, accused in the US of divulging state secrets, was on board with the president. (T14)

This passage manifested an intricate interplay between truth concerns (veracity) and ethical/legal evaluation (propriety). For instance, the item "not the first practice of forced landings of aeroplanes in the European sky" was introduced as a reminder of a past event that was seen by the authors of the article as justifying the behaviour of the Belarusian regime. The authors depicted the incident as analogous in character to Western practice, and, in doing so, they aimed at convincing the critics in the West that the West had no right to accuse the Belarusian regime of an analogous behaviour that was not seen by the West as criticisable in the past. Furthermore, the item "high-profile" functioned as an invocation of the feeling of multiplicity of factors at play, suggesting that certain behaviours cannot be viewed as just black or white. The other items—"forced landing", "rumour", and "accused in the US of divulging state secrets"—served to amplify the negative evaluation of the earlier incident and to play down the negative evaluation of the new incident.

4.2.3. Landing: Forced vs. Emergency

The authors of the analysed texts sought to foreground the similarity between the two incidents by engaging in an intricate word play. This occurred with two terms—"forced" and "emergency"—in describing the circumstances of the plane landings. The landing of the Bolivian presidential plane in 2013 was mostly referred to as a "forced" landing, and a typical example can be seen in (6) above. Only in two cases (T1 and T3), was

the 2013 incident referred to as an "emergency" landing alongside the reference to the Athens–Vilnius landing also as an "emergency" type (see (5) above).

As regards the 2021 Athens–Vilnius flight and the detention of the journalist, the landing was often referred to as "emergency", and only occasionally (in T18) it was referred to as a "forced" landing where Vilnius municipality's position was described and criticised (see (7) below):

(7) Вильнюсское самоуправление в знак поддержки белорусской оппозиции и в качестве протеста против принудительной посадки в Минске самолета Ryanair вывесило исторический флаг Белоруссии, сообщает 15min.lt. "Это отношение города и мэра к событиям в Белоруссии, когда самолет совершил принудительную посадку, и в принципе был совершен "теракт",—заявил представитель мэра Вильнюса по связям с общественностью Каролис Вайткявичюс. Отмечается, что решение мэрии не было согласовано с Министерством иностранных дел Литвы. По словам Вайткявичюса, Вильнюс выразил солидарность с Ригой, которая во время Чемпионата мира по хоккею сменила официальный белорусский флаг на исторический бело-красный. В ответ на это Белоруссия выслала посла Латвии из Минска, а латвийское правительство ответило зеркальным шагом./The Vilnius municipality has hung up the historic flag of Belarus as a sign of support for the Belarusian opposition and as a protest against the forced landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk, 15min.lt reports. "This is the attitude of the city and the mayor to the events in Belarus, when the plane made a forced landing, and, in principle, a "terrorist act" was committed," said Karolis Vaitkevičius, representative of the Mayor of Vilnius for public relations. It is noted that the decision of the Mayor's office was not coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. According to Vaitkevičius, Vilnius expressed solidarity with Riga, which had replaced the official Belarusian flag with the historical white-red one during the World Hockey Championship. In response, Belarus expelled the Latvian ambassador from Minsk, and the Latvian government responded with a mirror step. (T18)

Such choices evidence the authorial attempts to mitigate the gravity of the Minsk incident. It must also be noted that the headline of the report (T18) was aimed at invoking a strong negative connotation of fascist leanings ("Полицайская тряпка": Как Литва подключилась к флаговой истерии по Белоруссии/"Polizei rag": How Lithuania joined the flagging hysteria about Belarus). As has already been mentioned above, the Kremlin propagandists exploited profusely the claims of alleged fascist leanings in the Baltics. Though this kind of narration is nothing new, it is worth noticing how the headline containing the word "Полицайская" invoked the desired negative connotation that threw a shadow of doubt and criticised the municipality official's opinion. As EUvsDiSiNFO (2022, March 24) viewed it, "[...] the Kremlin's Nazi obsession has internal purposes as well. Namely, to distract attention from the weaknesses of Russia's regime and unite Russian society against an imaginary external enemy to then battle against it."

4.2.4. The "Combination with Protasevich"

The "combination with Protasevich" was another important track of narration that was repeated across several texts in the dataset (T1, T2, T3, T6, T7, T8, T9, T14). Its aim was creating the impression that guilt was being placed on the wrong actor, the Belarusian government. It also implied that the event was instead planned and devised by the Western intelligence services, as it was claimed in excerpt (8):

(8) "Осмелюсь предположить, что комбинация с Протасевичем планировалась западными спецслужбами. Это такая ловля на живца. Поэтому отсюда такая четкая скоординированная позиция [Запада]. Обратите внимание на количество западных стран и то, насколько синхронно отреагировало западное медиаполе. Все ведущие западные СМИ—Le Monde, New York Times—сразу же выпустили на первых полосах информацию об инциденте",—

заявил Лущ в разговоре с Baltnews./"I dare to suggest that the combination with Protasevich was planned by Western intelligence services. It is a kind of baiting. Therefore, there is such a clear coordinated position. Pay attention to the number of Western countries and how synchronously the Western media reacted. All the leading Western media—Le Monde, the New York Times—immediately published information about the incident on the front pages," Lushch told Balt-news. (T1)

More typical examples of emotion and opinion words and expressions are given in Appendix C.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research evidence that the available Russian propaganda and disinformation analysis models must be applied as a complex that takes into consideration the language of evaluation.

Each of the models allowed various inter-related aspects of Russian propagandist discourse to be discerned: Ben Nimmos' 4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns focuses on the component layers; the Firehose of Falsehood model (Paul and Matthews 2016) allows a better understanding of the nature of the increasing flows of Russian disinformation; Jowett and O'Donnell's (2014) model aids in discerning the actors in the communicative chain, their motives and targets (who does what, who is targeted and for what purposes).

Thus, if we consider the research data in the framework of the 4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns, the above-mentioned criticism deflection tactic, first and foremost, relates to the "Distract" layer: when accused of wrongful behaviour, Kremlin propagandists deflect criticism and elaborate on similar accusations against their critics as with the case of the Bolivian presidential plane landing in 2013. Deflection was the driving force in the disinformation strategy used by Baltnews on 24 and 25 May 2021. It is interesting to note how the deflection functioned together with the attempts to evoke fear (the "Dismay" layer). As the data show, the triggers of fear in general may be hard to identify. Multiple fears were evoked by bringing in other narratives concerning the events that are not directly related to the forced landing incident (such as the fear of potential harmful side-effects of the newly developed COVID-19 vaccine or wrongful claims about the suppression of media in Lithuania or lies about disappearing patients in hospitals). The deflection tactic undermines the quality standard of journalistic argumentation, but it does not bother the propagandist writers because their aims are different. The two above-discussed layers ("Distract" and "Dismay") were also strongly enhanced by the attempts to undermine the audience's sense of truthfulness. For this, the linguistic resources for distorting facts (the "Distort" layer) and insulting/demeaning critics (the "Dismiss" layer) were employed in the analysed texts. Distortion of facts was achieved by such evaluative expressions as "the combination with Protasevich" followed by "It is a kind of baiting". This served to insinuate that the plane landing was organised and coordinated by the Western intelligence services. The dismissal of the Kremlin's critics was often achieved by irony as, for instance in the fragment of the excerpt (3) quoted above: "Officials of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry are indifferent to the law adopted by the "dictatorship", as they know better who does what in the information field of the neighbouring country". Here, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry was criticised for ignoring the laws of Belarus as well as mocked for over-confidence. In another case, the members of the Lithuanian Television and Radio Broadcasting Commission were called "a strange team of dilettantes", "recruited from scratch" but "given solid powers". Most prominent Lithuanian political analysts were called "good-for-nothing jugglers".

A dangerous effect achieved by Kremlin propagandists was related to what some propaganda researchers (Pomerantsev 2019; Vaišnys et al. 2017) have referred to as information obfuscation. Pomerantsev (2019) states that information obfuscation is among the key aims of contemporary Kremlin disinformation and propaganda. In addition, information overload, in combination with obfuscation, dangerously hinders the search for facts. Therefore, the Firehose of Falsehood model is also indispensable. The data analysed for this research

confirmed that it does not require much to cause confusion. For instance, the numerous repetitions of the message about the 2013 landing of the Bolivian presidential plane in Vienna was an effective tactic to make the audience doubt the gravity of the landing of the Ryanair plane. This occurs because repetitive propaganda may undermine perceptions of reality: Paul and Matthews (2016, p. 8) note that people exposed to persuasive propaganda may ignore contradictions and inconsistencies if a message convinces them to shift their opinion.

Moreover, the persuasiveness of propaganda also depends on the success of the manipulations of language, symbols, and slogans (as noted by Jowett and O'Donnell (2014)). Thus, for instance, the historical Belarusian flag (a white–red–white triband used in 1918, 1942–1944, and 1991–1995) was mentioned in one of the articles mocking Vilnius Municipality for raising the flag in support of the Belarusian opposition and dissidents living in exile in Lithuania. Such action was referred to as "the flag hysteria". Referring to the raising of the historical flag as "hysteria" was aimed at demeaning any arguments that Belarus once had an independent past.

This research has indicated that the integration of the methodical analysis of affect (both emotion and opinion within the framework of the Appraisal theory) is critical for a better understanding of disinformation flows and content. The importance of emotions in propagandist discourse has been known for a long time, but the Appraisal theory has allowed the specific linguistic items that serve to evoke such feelings as fear, insecurity, and doubt to be identified in the given dataset. It must be noted that, currently, research on the language of affect and its analysis methods across various contexts is increasing. Venäläinen (2021, p. 3) stresses "[...] the facility of affects and discourse to reinforce each other and to together contribute to the spread of certain kinds of meanings". Wetherell (2012) and Wetherell et al. (2015) propose the concept of "affective–discursive practice". As Wetherell (2012) views it, affects and discourse inherently reinforce each other. Wetherell (2012, p. 20) argues that "[...] human affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic (broadly defined) and the discursive. It is futile to try to pull them apart." Investigation of affect-related linguistic units sheds new light on what is already known about Kremlin propaganda and disinformation. This research has supplied methodologically obtained linguistic data substantiating, for instance, what has been noted by Lucas and Pomerantsev (2016): the overarching aim of Kremlin's disinformation in Lithuania is to alienate the West from Lithuania by demeaning Lithuanian statehood and depicting the country as unreliable (as in "Vilnius has long pursued an aggressive anti-Belarusian policy" or "Lithuania [...] is interfering in the internal affairs of a neighbouring country"), hysterical ("russophobes"; "the flag hysteria") and weak (for instance, by claiming that the Lithuanian army is "vulnerable"; and though this has been a very common message for many years, in the given dataset, a new line of argumentation appeared: the claim built on the lie that there were many soldiers infected with COVID-19). As Lucas and Pomerantsev (2016, p. 29) note, Kremlin propaganda seeks to undermine the Lithuanian population's trust in its government (as can be seen in the instances when the Foreign Ministry officials are described as "helpless" and failing "on the anti-Lukashenko information front"; parliament members engaged in "informational sanitation"; or there being "not enough prisons in Lithuania to isolate millions of dissenters") and thus to curb the country's economic and national security aspirations and to increase the overall sense of societal, national, and economic insecurity.

6. Conclusions

Kremlin disinformation discourse is emotion-laden and replete with subjective interpretation and evaluation. The data have shown that, two days after the forced Ryanair plane landing incident, the news articles published by the Baltnews portal involved attempts to evoke fear (seen as a cluster of related emotive experiences such as apprehension, worry, insecurity, or panic caused by the threat of danger or harm).

The evocation of fear served as the driving tactic forming part of the disinformation strategy noticed in the dataset. The most salient features of the strategy were (i) deflecting

the targets of criticism and (ii) undermining audience's sense of truthfulness. The findings confirmed that deception lies at the core of contemporary Kremlin propaganda, and it is very likely to remain so in the long run because contemporary Kremlin propaganda seeks to maintain, spread, and amplify confusion, and to blur the line separating lies from facts.

The applied methodology has served as a valuable tool in identifying the specific linguistic evaluative items. The fact that emotions play a considerable role in the spread and persuasiveness of propaganda and disinformation is not new. However, methodological research approaches have been lacking. The Appraisal theory is a tested and well-grounded approach to the language of evaluation. This research has shown that the Appraisal theory can contribute to a better understanding of contemporary Kremlin propaganda and disinformation. However, what needs to be completed further is the framework's further refinements. One possible vein could be applying the theory in investigating Kremlin propaganda and disinformation across geopolitical contexts. An international comparative panorama would be extremely insightful.

However, certain limitations of the research must also be taken into consideration. First, the annotation was performed by only one annotator, the author of this paper, and this may have involved potential inconsistencies in annotation. Second, the dataset was small-scale and more media outlets and larger datasets covering a range of events/phenomena across different geopolitical contexts should be researched.

Given the above, incessant multi-disciplinary further research is essential for raising audiences' capability to resist and their conscious and responsible use of information and media. Seeing single events such as the forced landing of the Ryanair plane by the Belarusian regime as just a single element in the entire series of the Kremlin's implementation of its long-sought aims rooted in historical revanchism, future research should analyse linguistic appraisal in such directions as the current Russian war against Ukraine and media coverage of the war, the disinformation aimed at undermining trust in Western democracies, the EU institutions, NATO, or Western values. Such research would significantly contribute to the deconstruction of the content plane of Kremlin disinformation and propaganda. In education, such research could be used to increase media and information literacy skills thus making media users more resistant to disinformation and propaganda.

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Data Availability Statement: Dataset from this project is available on OSF at the following link: https://osf.io/9hwnc/ (accessed on 15 August 2022).

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Appendix A

The system of AFFECT and its two sub-systems: EMOTION (as suggested by Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio 2019; Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro 2022) and OPINION. Attitudinal meanings are classified into EMOTION and OPINION following (Bednarek 2009; Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio 2019). This taxonomy graphically represents the Appraisal theory and its framework of labels used to describe attitudinal meanings. It has served as a code list during the annotation of evaluative items.
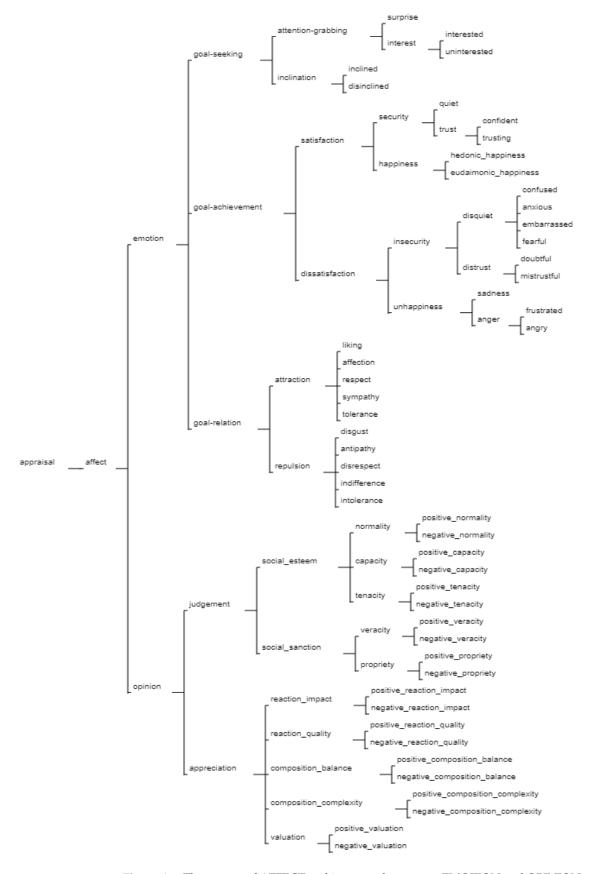
Figure A1. The system of AFFECT and its two sub-systems: EMOTION and OPINION.

Appendix B

EMOTION and OPINION categories in the corpus of analysed texts (the occurrences of the annotated evaluative items expressed in numbers and percentage). The statistical data were obtained from the UAM Corpus Tool used for the annotation of evaluative items. The statistical data served as an initial analytical stage leading to the identification of the most common attitudinal meanings in the framework of the Appraisal theory. Following this stage, a deeper analytical stage followed when the most salient items were analysed in context.

EMOTION	N	Percent
goal-seeking	3	0.70%
goal-achievement	73	17.14%
goal-relation	28	6.57%
attention-grabbing	3	0.70%
inclination	0	0.00%
surprise	1	0.23%
interest	2	0.47%
interested	0	0.00%
uninterested	1	0.23%
inclined	0	0.00%
disinclined	0	0.00%
satisfaction	10	2.35%
dissatisfaction	63	14.79%
security	8	1.88%
happiness	2	0.47%
quiet	4	0.94%
trust	3	0.70%
confident	1	0.23%
trusting	1	0.23%
hedonic happiness	0	0.00%
eudaimonic happiness	2	0.47%
insecurity	47	11.03%
unhappiness	16	3.76%
disquiet	43	10.09%
distrust	4	0.94%
confused	0	0.00%
anxious	0	0.00%
embarrassed	0	0.00%
fearful	43	10.09%
doubtful	0	0.00%
mistrustful	2	0.47%
sadness	4	0.94%
anger	12	2.82%
frustrated	1	0.23%
angry	4	0.94%
attraction	7	1.64%
repulsion	21	4.93%
liking	6	1.41%
affection	1	0.23%
respect	0	0.00%
sympathy	0	0.00%
tolerance	0	0.00%
disgust	0	0.00%
antipathy	0	0.00%
disrespect	17	3.99%
indifference	2	0.47%
intolerance	2	0.47%

OPINION	N	Percent
judgement	299	70.19%
appreciation	23	5.40%
social esteem	56	13.15%
social sanction	243	57.04%
normality	10	2.35%
capacity	40	9.39%
tenacity	6	1.41%
positive normality	1	0.23%
negative normality	9	2.11%
positive capacity	9	2.11%
negative capacity	30	7.04%
positive tenacity	1	0.23%
negative tenacity	5	1.17%
veracity	47	11.03%
propriety	196	46.01%
positive veracity	13	3.05%
negative veracity	34	7.98%
positive propriety	30	7.04%
negative propriety	163	38.26%
reaction impact	4	0.94%
reaction quality	6	1.41%
composition balance	11	2.58%
composition complexity	2	0.47%
valuation	0	0.00%
positive reaction impact	0	0.00%
negative reaction impact	4	0.94%
positive reaction quality	4	0.94%
negative reaction quality	2	0.47%
positive composition balance	5	1.17%
negative composition balance	6	1.41%
positive composition complexity	0	0.00%
negative composition complexity	2	0.47%
positive valuation	0	0.00%
negative valuation	0	0.00%

Figure A2. EMOTION and OPINION categories in the corpus of analysed texts (the occurrences of the annotated evaluative items expressed in numbers and percentage).

Appendix C. Typical Examples of Emotion and Opinion Words/Expressions

Table A1. Typical Examples of Emotion and Opinion Words/Expressions.

EMOTION: goal-achievement: dissatisfaction: insecurity: disquiet: fear
[. . .] the existence of criminal liability can *scare off* users as they are *afraid* to seek help because of [. . .] (T15)
"The illegitimate regime is *afraid* of independent mass media and systematically destroys them," the Foreign Ministry embraced opposition journalists who were rocking the Belarusian boat. (T10)
Safety report *shocks*: Is this vaccination a human experiment? (T20)
Mr O'Leary said the incident was "very *frightening*" for the passengers and the crew as they were held under armed guard and their bags were searched. (T5)
Further *worrying*, however, is that the list of types of adverse reactions reported has now grown to 176 pages. (T20)
Such reaction demonstrates certain *fear* of the EU [. . .] (T7)

OPINION: judgement: social sanction: propriety: negative propriety
[. . .] the Telegram channel Nexta recognized as *extremist* in Belarus [. . .] (T6)
We should remind that this is not the first practice of *forced* landings of aircraft in the European sky. (T14)
[. . .] the West could have arranged the *combination* with Protasevich itself [. . .] (T6)
[. . .] needs to understand that it is *wrong* to house opposition members [. . .] (T6)
[. . .] as Vilnius has long pursued an *aggressive* anti-Belarusian policy, said First Deputy Chairman . . . (T6)
US President Joe Biden *threatened* to slap so many sanctions on the builders [. . .] (T16)
For such "journalism" in democratic Lithuania, a similar media outlet would be *whacked* in no time at all, not even caring about the reaction of its neighbours. (T10)
The minister calls the chairman of the SCTR, saying—I see a threat to national security. That's enough to *slam* the entire TV channel's broadcasts. (T10)

OPINION: judgement: social sanction: veracity: negative veracity
Probably, even the "*philologists in uniform*" who *manipulate* these words will *not give an exact explanation.* (T10)
The reason for this was the *rumour* that [. . .] (T14)
Only strongly *biased* Belarusian opposition can go to a meeting with the Lithuanian leadership [. . .] (T14)
[. . .] Vilnius will try to make more *noise* [. . .] (T14)

Notes

[1] The texts in the dataset have been coded as T1, T2, etc., where T stands for "text" and the number refers to the number of the texts in the dataset. The dataset (texts and the links) from this project is available on OSF at the following link: https://osf.io/9hwnc/ (accessed on 15 August 2022). Following the war in Ukraine, access to RT and Baltnews has been blocked by the EU and therefore the links may not accessible within the EU. In Lithuania, the access to Baltnews has been restriced since May 2022.

[2] https://rsf.org/en/country/lithuania (accessed on 15 August 2022)

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