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ARTICLE



# Digital media and perceptions of the United States among the Russian elite, 2004–2016

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explain why Russian elites' exposure to online media for their news contributed to stronger pro-American attitudes than reliance on traditional media. Two causal mechanisms are tested using a repeated cross-section of elite surveys. One operates at the level of attitudes and is suggested by the field of political communication; the other emerges from the literature on cognitive psychology and operates at the level of beliefs by providing a cognitive map through which individuals process information and reach conclusions. I find that both mechanisms are relevant, with framing effects being particularly important to hardliners' perceptions of security threats.

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## Introduction

This paper examines the impact of digital media on Russian elite perceptions of the United States. Russian elites' growing reliance on the Internet and social media for political news has served to increase the polarization of their opinions about the United States. If in 2004, the first year for which data on Internet use are available, perceptions of the United States were the same for those who followed news online and those who relied on traditional media, by 2008 these perceptions had begun to diverge. Consumers of traditional media became increasingly anti-American compared to consumers of digital media.

This study examines why different sources of political information contributed to differences in elite perceptions of the United States by juxtaposing two competing mechanisms. The first operates on the level of attitudes and suggests that online media increase polarization of opinions via the echo chamber effect. For instance, individuals with pro-American attitudes are more likely to read news that is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs, and, in so doing, become even more sympathetic toward the United States. The second operates at the level of cognitive structures through which information about the world is processed. These structures, frequently referred to as "schemas," serve as filters through which information is processed and conclusions are reached. Even when two individuals have similar outlooks on the world, engaging with different types of media (traditional vs. new) leads to a divergence in their perceptions of the United States.

This paper contributes to the rapidly growing literature on anti-Americanism (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2004; Dale and Cohen 2010; Nisbet and Myers 2011; Shlapentokh 2011; Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Manaeva Rice 2015; Bogomoletc 2017) by bringing to the foreground the importance of the digital divide for elite perceptions of the United States. The existing literature suggests that anti-Americanism could be a bottom-up as well as a top-down phenomenon. Factors contributing to the spread of anti-Americanism among the masses include frustration with domestic reforms,

especially when the United States is used as a benchmark. As Sokolov et al. (2018) show, anti-American sentiments among the Russian population have been more prevalent among those individuals who were critical of the effectiveness of the Kremlin's economic policies in the 1990s. Equally, policy disagreements can contribute to anti-American sentiments. The conflict in the Balkans, NATO expansion, arms control, and the war in Iraq are frequently mentioned as divisive issues (Shlapentokh 1998, 1999, 2009).

The top-down explanations of anti-Americanism emphasize its instrumental nature in the elite competition for power (Blaydes and Linzer 2012). Elites competing for public office evoke anti-American sentiments to garner popular support, while incumbents adopt an anti-American stance to divert public attention from domestic policy issues (Gans 2013; Zakem et al. 2018). When anti-Americanism becomes the official regime ideology, pressure for political conformity reduces heterogeneity in elite perceptions of the United States (Shlapentokh 2011).

Because elites can use traditional media to propagate anti-American sentiments, a number of studies have examined the mechanisms by which exposure to the media could evoke anti-American sentiments, finding that the effect of media framing on perceptions of the United States is contingent on pre-existing schemas (Nisbet and Myers 2011) and the educational system (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2004).

The present article advances this literature by addressing several theoretical and empirical gaps that still remain. On the theoretical level, it calls long overdue attention to the heterogeneity of Russian elites by showing that the digital divide is an important source of cleavages. If earlier studies of Russian elites emphasized the importance of ideological cleavages along the politico-economic dimension (Zimmerman 2009), the present study shows that today, technology-driven cleavages also contribute to the heterogeneity of opinions about foreign policy. On the empirical level, by using the Survey of Russian Elites (Zimmerman, Rivera, and Kalinin 2019), this study shifts attention to the media framing effect from the masses to the elite. The implicit assumption in the top-down explanations of anti-Americanism has been that elites are immune to anti-American frames. This study provides a more nuanced account.

The article begins with an overview of the trends in media consumption among Russian elites and provides empirical evidence for the growth of anti-Americanism among those who rely on traditional media compared to those who rely on online sources. The theoretical section that follows spells out two alternative causal mechanisms. The empirical section tests these alternative explanations using the 2008–2016 waves of the elite surveys. In the conclusion, links are drawn between this study and the literature on anti-Americanism worldwide.

## **Russian elites' media diet**

Although there is plenty of information about the Russian population's consumption of traditional media (Colton 2000; Deloitte 2016; Nazarov 2016), empirical studies of the media diet of Russian elites are scarce and have been prompted by the relatively recent advent of social media. Pioneering work by Toepfl (2012, 2016) on the use of Twitter by Russian governors uncovers geographic differences in the adoption of this medium and suggests that regional elites have used this resource not to communicate with their constituencies but to signal their loyalty to the Kremlin. A more recent analysis of social media presence among Duma deputies conducted by a Moscow-based think tank, Internet-Agitatsiya (2017), shows that the adoption of social media has not been uniform at the national level either. In spring 2017, slightly less than a quarter of Duma deputies had active VKontakte accounts. Elected and appointed officials' presence on other online platforms has likewise been low (Renz and Sullivan 2013). The literature above suggests that Russian incumbents' production of online content has been uneven and has lagged behind the rapid adoption of social media in the Russian population.

**Table 1.** Russian elite perceptions of the United States, 2004–2016 (mean values).

	US military power is a threat <sup>a</sup>				US is hostile toward Russia <sup>b</sup>			
	2004	2008	2012	2016	2004	2008	2012	2016
Reads news online	3.38	3.57	3.43	3.04	3.11	3.76	3.17	3.8
Does not read news online	3.55	4.05	3.79	3.38	3.18	4.06	3.21	4.19
Difference	0.17	3.74	0.36	0.34	0.07	0.30	0.03	0.39
t-statistics	1.39	3.40	2.23	2.46	0.79	2.99	0.19	2.86
p-value	0.19	0.00	0.03	0.01	0.43	0.00	0.85	0.01
N	312	236	220	242	308	237	225	239

<sup>a</sup> “Which of the following represents the greatest threat to the security of Russia and which one do not represent any threat whatsoever? Rate the level of threat on a five-point scale, where 1 means ‘the absence of danger’ and 5 means ‘the utmost danger’. The growth of US military power compared to that of Russia.”

<sup>b</sup> “For each country or international organization that I will name, please tell me how friendly or hostile you think it is toward Russia today: very friendly, rather friendly, neutral, rather hostile, or very hostile.”

This section shifts the attention from elite online news production to their consumption during the period between 2004 and 2016 using the Survey of Russian Elites. This period was characterized by the rapid growth of online news consumption: the share of elites who read news online every day or almost every day increased from 39% to 62% between 2004 and 2016. These percentages are even higher when one also includes occasional readers of online news: 68% of the sample in 2004 and 90% in 2016. Remarkably, the consumption of news on social media has lagged far behind Internet usage. In 2016, only 11% of respondents used social media daily or almost daily to read about events; 38% did so occasionally. This delay in Russian elites’ adoption of social media is surprising, particularly when compared to social media penetration among the Russian population at large, which reached 61% of the adult population in 2017 (Statista 2018).

Online news consumption varies substantially across professional categories (see Table A1 of the online appendix). Overall, daily consumption of Internet news was highest among journalists, followed by intellectuals and Duma deputies involved in foreign policy. In 2016, journalists were also among the most frequent consumers of news on social media: as many as 39% of them read news on social media daily or almost daily. Elites in other professional categories were either occasional readers of news on social media or did not use this medium at all.

The growth in reliance on online sources coincided with the divergence of elite opinions about the United States. Table 1 compares mean averages for those elites who read online news daily or almost daily with the rest of the sample. In 2004,

when asked whether the growth of US military power constituted a threat to Russia, the two groups gave answers that were both substantively and statistically similar. Since 2008, however, regular readers of online news have perceived the growth of US military power as less of a danger to Russia than has the rest of the sample. The pattern is similar when it comes to perceptions of US hostility toward Russia. In 2004, the means for the two groups were statistically identical, but since 2008 regular readers of online news have perceived the United States as less hostile to Russia than has the rest of the sample. What factors account for this divergence in views? The subsequent sections are dedicated to solving this puzzle.

## The echo chamber effect and online media

This section juxtaposes two causal mechanisms that might account for growing intra-elite differences in perceptions of the United States. One operates at the level of attitudes and is suggested by the field of political communication; the other emerges from the literature on cognitive psychology and operates at the level of beliefs by providing a cognitive map through which individuals process information and reach conclusions. Differences in the media environment activate these mechanisms in different ways and offer distinct testable implications.

### ***The echo chamber effect and perceptions of the united states***

The literature on political communication portrays the echo chamber effect as an impediment to the creation of a public sphere conducive to public discourse. The echo chamber effect is usually defined as selective exposure to online content. When individuals are given an extensive political spectrum from which to choose their news, they select those sources that are closest to their political orientations (Wilhelm 1998; Davis 1999; Noveck 2000; Mutz 2001; Sunstein 2001; Bimber and Davis 2003; Kushin and Kitchener 2009; Stroud 2010). The Internet and social media can contribute to the polarization of public opinion because they increase the homogeneity of information to which individuals are exposed in their online networks. This leads to a situation in which the flow of information and online communication takes place among like-minded individuals who share politically homogeneous content with one another. As a result, both the public sphere and discourse become fragmented and balkanized.

Empirical evidence regarding the existence of the echo chamber effect online has been mixed. A set of studies that used big data analytics and focused on the flow of communication on Twitter during election campaigns in the United States, Germany, and the UK found that most communication took place along partisan lines: members of the same party were more likely to share content with one another than with members of other parties (Conover et al. 2011; Feller et al. 2011; Boutet, Kim, and Yoneki 2013; Colleoni, Rozza, and Arvidsson 2014). However, studies based on survey data call into question the prevalence of the echo chamber effect by claiming that political clustering found on one platform may not be applicable to all types of media. As Dubois and Blank (2018) show using online survey data from the UK, the probability that an individual will find himself or herself in an echo chamber depends on the diversity of his/her "media diet" and his/her level of political interest. Specifically, individuals who draw on multiple news sources are less likely to be in an information bubble than those who rely solely on online sources.

Some scholars define the echo chamber effect as the degree to which frames produced in the mainstream media resonate online in user-generated content. For example, Wallsten (2005) examines whether the US blogosphere serves as another medium for the dissemination of frames coined by the elite or whether, on the contrary, blogs provide an opportunity for citizens to express their political opinions independently of the frames disseminated in the mainstream media. He finds that when it comes to foreign policy issues, blogs produced by rank-and-file bloggers are unlikely to pick up mainstream media frames, suggesting that the echo chamber effect of the Internet tends to be lower on foreign policy than on domestic policy issues.

### ***The echo chamber effect and runet?***

Studies of the echo chamber effect on the Russian Internet, frequently referred to as "RuNet," are scarce. The first and most comprehensive analysis of the Russian blogosphere to date (hosted largely on the LiveJournal.ru platform) was produced by Etling et al. (2010), who concluded that the degree of ideological fragmentation of the Russian blogosphere in 2010 was lower than that of its US counterpart due to a high level of interlinking between competing ideological clusters: the democratic opposition, the nationalists, and other bloggers. In their follow-up study, Etling, Faris, and Robert (2014) show that in 2010 and 2011, the Russian blogosphere exhibited a substantial degree of autonomy from the frames disseminated by government sources and provided an alternative public sphere for civil engagement. Traditional media content, for its part, was closer to the official position.

There has been little discussion of echo chamber effects on the Russian blogosphere since the publication of Etling et al.'s 2010 study because the waves of protests on Bolotnaya Square in 2011–2012 shifted the focus of scholarly inquiry from polarization to mobilization, leading to the emergence of several insights (Gladarev and Lonkila 2012; Smyth and Oates 2015). Bodrunova and Litvinenko (2016) show that the media diet of Bolotnaya Square participants was different from

that of the rest of the population. Social media sites (Facebook and VKontakte), as well as the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, constituted protesters' primary source of information, whereas the majority of the Russian population relied primarily on TV. These differences in media diet mirrored the existing fragmentation of Russian society along an urban-rural divide and in terms of attitudes toward freedom, self-expression, and political stability (Bodrunova and Litvinenko 2016). Enikolopov, Makarine, and Petrova (2016) demonstrate that the greater penetration of VKontakte in urban centers facilitated the coordination of protests.

Indirect evidence for a possible echo chamber effect in the aftermath of the 2012 election protests emerges from an experiment conducted by Robertson (2015) in Moscow. Participants were exposed to allegations of electoral fraud during the presidential elections; these allegations used different discursive frames about the election watchdog Golos, which was particularly vocal about election irregularities and was subsequently shut down. The control group received a neutral message about the nature of Golos activities, whereas the treated group was told that Golos was receiving funding and other types of support from the US government. When presented with different frames, pro-Kremlin respondents were on average more likely to dismiss the information about electoral fraud than those who voted against Putin in the 2012 elections. This experiment points to the existence of a confirmation bias among the Russian electorate that might subsequently contribute to the formation of echo chambers among Russian Internet users.

### ***Testable implications of the echo chamber effect***

A peculiar feature of the debate on the echo chamber effect is the lack of attention to any potential differences between elites and the masses. Are Russian elites as likely to live in an information bubble as the general public? If so, elite choices regarding their news medium should have been influenced by their attitudes toward the United States. As the content of traditional media became more nationalistic and pro-Kremlin, pro-American elites should have switched to digital media because this source of information has been more consistent with their beliefs. This subsequently should have widened the gap between Internet users and non-Internet users in terms of their perceptions of the United States; it should have also increased the homogeneity of perceptions of the United States among those elites who rely on digital media. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: If the echo chamber effect is true, the within-group variances in perception of the United States should be smaller for elites who frequently use the Internet than those who rely on traditional media.

### **Schemas, the internet, and attitudes toward the united states**

The schema theory developed by the literature on cognitive psychology offers an alternative causal mechanism that might account for cross-group differences in anti-Americanism (George 1969; Larson 1994). Schemas are belief systems that affect how information is processed and conclusions are reached. For example, when presented with a news article about the outbreak of a conflict, individuals with a Hobbesian view of human nature may draw different conclusions about potential solutions than those who consider individuals to be altruistic. These schemas can also affect how individuals process frames to which they are exposed by the media and influence their perceptions of foreign policy. Nisbet and Myers (2011) apply the schema theory to explain the spread of anti-Americanism in the Arab world by comparing how pan-Arabic, pan-Islamic, and nationalistic schemas interact with news coverage provided by two competing television networks, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Using survey data from the Middle East and North Africa, they find that a pan-Arabic schema mitigates exposure to anti-US coverage and increases the effect of pro-American news on pro-American attitudes. A pan-Islamic schema has the opposite effect.

Because schemas operate at a deeper level than attitudes, the schema theory can provide an alternative mechanism by which differences in the information environment created by traditional and new media can affect elite perceptions of the United States. Unlike cognitive bias, which leads to selective search for and retention of information, the schema theory implies that individuals apply the same cognitive framework systematically to diverse information presented across media platforms. Thus, the observed differences between those who use the Internet regularly and those who do not are *produced* by differences in the content provided by new media and old media, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

### **Testable implications of the schema framework**

To test for the interaction between schema and the media environment, one needs to focus on schemas that are relevant to both the Russian context and foreign policy. The schema that is most frequently mentioned in the literature on foreign relations is one's outlook on the nature of world politics – whether it is conflictual or cooperative and whether hard power is more important than soft power (Zimmerman 2009). For the purposes of this paper, I will label this the hardliner schema. Differences in the information environment can affect the salience of this schema and contribute to the divergence of perceptions of the United States between those elites who are exposed to online news and those who rely on traditional media. The interaction of the Internet and social media with the hardliner schema could be either negative or positive. On the one hand, if hardliners who read online news daily are exposed to more diverse information than traditional media would provide, then new media will reduce the importance of the hardliner schema. On the other, if hardliners read only hardline online sources and interact online mostly with other hardliners, then new media will reinforce the salience of the hardliner schema. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: If the schema theory is true, the effect of online news consumption on attitudes towards the United States will be conditional on pre-existing schemas. On average, respondents with a hardliner outlook will have stronger anti-American sentiments ( $\beta_{\text{Hardliner}} > 0$ ), but hardliners' exposure to digital media will make them even more anti-American compared to those hardliners who rely on traditional media because digital media facilitates selective exposure to information consistent with their prior beliefs (i.e.,  $\beta_{\text{Hardliner} \times \text{Internet}} > 0, \beta_{\text{Hardliner} \times \text{SocialMedia}} > 0$ ).

### **Empirical analysis**

The empirical analysis that follows is based on the 2008, 2012, and 2016 waves of the Survey of Russian Elites. The analysis begins with the 2008 wave because the level of traditional media freedom deteriorated rapidly after 2004 (Schimpfoss and Yablokov 2014; Yablokov 2015; Zakem et al. 2018), whereas the Internet remained practically free of government censorship until 2011 (Nocetti 2011; Oates 2013; Soldatov and Borogan 2015). As such, similar levels of freedom between the traditional and online media in 2004 can account for the lack of observed inter-group differences in that year (see Table 1). The same variables listed in Table 1 were used as constructs for two dependent variables: respondents' perceptions of US hostility toward Russia (hostility perception) and attitudes toward the growth of US military power (threat perception).

### **Echo chamber hypothesis**

To test the echo chamber hypothesis (H1) the Levene test was used. As suggested by the echo chamber hypothesis, if Internet users read only information consistent with their pre-existing beliefs about the United States, the degree of homogeneity in their opinions will be greater than the rest of the sample. The Levene test for the equality of variances for the two groups (users and



non-users) was performed (see Table A2 in the online appendix), but the hypothesis of equal variances could not be rejected in three out of four cases. The difference in variance for the two groups was statistically significant only in 2016, but in a direction that contradicted H1: intra-group differences in the perceptions of the United States were greater for social media users compared to consumers of traditional media. This result is inconsistent with the echo chamber hypothesis.

## ***Schema effect hypothesis***

### ***Model specification***

The regression analysis below tests H2, which predicts that the hardliner schema will interact with the type of media consumed by respondents. The empirical model utilizes an instrumental variable approach to address the non-random assignment to the exposure to online news (operative in the echo chamber explanation). Unlike an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, the instrumental variable (IV) regression approach allows us to address the potential problem of an individual's selection into the type of media used by finding a variable that is correlated with the type of media consumption but not with the respondent's attitudes toward the United States. The professional background of the elite respondent was used as this kind of variable. As noted above, the extent of the use of the Internet and social media has varied systematically across professional categories, with the media and foreign policy elites using the Internet and social media at much higher rates than business or military elites (Table A1 in the online appendix). Professional background is assumed to be uncorrelated with attitudes toward the United States.

Because H2 focuses on the interactive effect between digital media consumption and the hardliner schema, one also needs to address the problem of endogeneity in the interaction term. A cutting-edge identification strategy recently developed by Bun and Harrison (2018) was used to estimate the coefficient on the interaction term.

### ***Constructing independent variables***

The key explanatory variable *Internet* is based on the following question: "People find out about events in the world and in their country from many sources: radio, television, newspapers, Internet. In regard to the past week, how often did you learn about events in the world and in Russia from each of the following sources?" The variable equals 1 for those respondents who read online news "every day or almost every day" and 0 otherwise. The question was changed slightly in 2016. Rather than asking about the "Internet" as the source of information, the question focused on "online media" and "social networking sites" separately. The 2016 survey therefore provides an opportunity to compare the differences between the media environments of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.

The *Hardliner* variable equals 1 for those respondents who believe that "military force ultimately decides everything in international relations" and 0 for those who said that "the economic and not military potential of a country determines the place and role of the country in the world today."

The variable *MediaDiet* measures respondents' exposure to traditional media. It was constructed from questions about how frequently respondents learn about political events from television, radio, and newspapers (with 1 corresponding to "never" or "once a week" and 3 to "almost daily" or "daily"). This variable was constructed by averaging the responses across media categories.<sup>2</sup> The age and gender of respondents, as well as year dummies, were also included as control variables.

### ***Testing for causality***

The analysis presented in Table 2 tests for a causal link between Internet use and political attitudes. The OLS coefficients in columns 1 and 3 capture correlation between the two variables, whereas the instrumental variable regression coefficients in columns 2 and 4 seek to estimate causal relations.<sup>3</sup> The OLS estimates, reported in columns 1 and 3, point to the presence of a statistically significant negative correlation between anti-US attitudes and use of the Internet, albeit this correlation is substantively small. The difference in threat perceptions of the United



**Table 2.** Estimated effects of the Internet on Russian elite perceptions of the United States, 2008–2016.

	US military power is a threat <sup>a</sup>		US is hostile toward Russia <sup>b</sup>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	OLS	IV <sup>c</sup>	OLS	IV <sup>c</sup>
Internet	–0.39*** (0.00)	–1.09*** (0.00)	–0.12* (0.06)	–0.34 (0.17)
Media Diet	–0.02 (0.84)	0.11 (0.35)	–0.09 (0.19)	–0.05 (0.54)
Age	–0.00 (0.52)	–0.00 (0.79)	–0.00 (0.79)	–0.00 (0.92)
Male	0.13 (0.21)	0.10 (0.36)	0.00 (1.00)	–0.01 (0.90)
Year 2012	–0.12 (0.26)	–0.08 (0.47)	–0.61*** (0.00)	–0.60*** (0.00)
Year 2016	–0.56*** (0.00)	–0.51*** (0.00)	0.25*** (0.00)	0.26*** (0.00)
Intercept	3.92*** (0.00)	4.10*** (0.00)	4.13*** (0.00)	4.19*** (0.00)
R-squared	0.04	0.09	0.20	0.18
N	644	644	649	649

*p*-values are in parentheses; \*\*\* corresponds to 1 percent significance level, \*\* to 5 percent, and \* to 10 percent *p* < 0.1.

<sup>a</sup> The dependent variable measures respondents' perception of the growth of US military power as a threat to Russia, with 1 corresponding to "absence of threat" and 5 to "the utmost danger."

<sup>b</sup> The dependent variable measures respondents' perception of US hostility toward Russia, with 1 corresponding to "very friendly" and 5 to "very hostile."

<sup>c</sup> The Internet variable was instrumented using dummy variables for respondents' professional background, with military used as the reference category.

States between those elites who read online news daily or almost daily is 0.39 points for the threat variable (column 1) and 0.12 points for the hostility variable (column 3). In absolute terms the effect of the Internet variable is small; nevertheless, it is larger than the effect of the demographic variables or the media diet variable. The coefficients on the respondent's gender and age and the *MediaDiet* variable are not statistically significant in any of the model specifications.

The coefficients on the year dummies capture interesting inter-temporal differences in elite perceptions of the United States. In 2016 (compared to 2008), elites perceived the United States as less of a threat to Russia (column 1) but as more hostile towards it (column 3).

The OLS coefficients capture correlation but not causation between Internet use and perceptions of the United States. OLS estimates might be biased because the frequency of online news consumption is correlated with unobserved individual-level characteristics, including anti-American sentiments as well. One possible way of addressing this issue is by finding a variable that is correlated with online news consumption but not with the perceptions of the United States. The professional background of the elite was chosen as such a variable.

The IV coefficients are reported in columns 2 and 4. In the model with threat perceptions as the dependent variable, the IV coefficient on the Internet variable (–1.09) is about three times larger than the OLS one and is statistically significant. This points to a strong negative causal effect of online news consumption on anti-US attitudes: increasing consumption of online news reduces the perception of the United States as a threat by 1.09. Given that the scale for the dependent variable ranges from 1 ("absence of threat") to 5 ("the utmost danger") this reduction of 1.09 units is equivalent to a 20% decrease. The pattern is similar for the model specification in column 4 that uses US hostility towards Russia as the dependent variable. The IV coefficient on the Internet variable is larger in magnitude than the OLS coefficient, albeit it is not statistically significant.

## Framing effect hypothesis

Whereas Table 2 allows us to assess the direction of the selection process, Table 3 directly tests H2 about the interactive effect between schemas and online news consumption, particularly whether the hardline schema (i.e., the belief in the role of military force in international relations) has produced a divergence in attitudes between Internet users and non-users. Here, particular attention is paid to the difference between the Internet and social media. Social media platforms provide opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction and blur the line between consumption and production of online content, whereas Web 1.0 technologies are more suitable for the top-down dissemination of online content. Unfortunately, the data for social media usage are available for only 2016 and the model that includes the social media variable was estimated using the 2016 wave. Two interaction terms – *Internet*×*Hardliner* and *SM*×*Hardliner* – test for the conditional effects of the media environment on elite perceptions of the United States.

Similar to Table 2, both OLS and IV coefficients are reported in Table 3. Panel A focuses on the perception of the US as a threat to Russia, whereas Panel B uses the US hostility towards Russia as the dependent variable. The coefficients in the shaded area correspond to H2. Overall, the evidence for the framing effect is weak. In Panel A, although all coefficients have positive signs as predicted by H2, the results are statistically significant only in one case (column 3). In the OLS model, the framing effect of social media ( $\beta_{SM \times H}^{OLS} = 1.04$ ) is almost 10 times as large as that of the Internet ( $\beta_{I \times H}^{OLS} = 0.10$ ) and is statistically significant. The magnitude of the coefficients on the interaction terms becomes larger after accounting for the endogeneity problem by using the IV model, albeit that in both models they stop being statistically significant (see columns 2 and 4).

Panel B focuses on perceptions of US hostility toward Russia. The evidence for the framing effect of either the Internet or social media is weaker. This is due in part to the weaker correlation between the hardliner schema and perceptions of hostility. The coefficients on the interactive

**Table 3.** Framing effect of the Internet and Social Media on threat perceptions, 2008–2016.

	Panel A: US military power is a threat to Russia				Panel B: US is hostile toward Russia			
	(1) OLS	(2) IV	(3) OLS <sup>a</sup>	(4) IV <sup>a</sup>	(5) OLS	(6) IV	(7) OLS <sup>a</sup>	(8) IV <sup>a</sup>
Internet	−0.37*** (0.00)	−0.62 (0.23)			−0.10 (0.18)	0.05 (0.90)		
SM			−1.00*** (0.00)	−1.24 (0.29)			−0.42*** (0.01)	0.16 (0.82)
Hardliner	0.40*** (0.00)	−0.02 (0.98)	0.57*** (0.00)	0.50 (0.19)	0.30*** (0.00)	0.56 (0.39)	0.10 (0.23)	0.28 (0.23)
Internet×Hardliner	0.10 (0.53)	0.84 (0.58)			−0.03 (0.77)	−0.50 (0.66)		
SM×Hardliner			1.04** (0.02)	1.80 (0.63)			0.34 (0.23)	−1.50 (0.51)
Media Diet	−0.05 (0.59)	−0.11 (0.48)	−0.16 (0.36)	−0.15 (0.43)	−0.11 (0.11)	−0.07 (0.53)	0.10 (0.35)	0.07 (0.59)
Age	−0.00 (0.46)	−0.00 (0.41)	−0.00 (0.25)	−0.00 (0.25)	−0.00 (0.79)	−0.00 (0.87)	−0.00 (0.70)	−0.00 (0.76)
Male	0.10 (0.32)	0.06 (0.66)	0.18 (0.23)	0.18 (0.24)	−0.04 (0.60)	−0.01 (0.90)	−0.04 (0.66)	−0.03 (0.77)
Y2012	−0.07 (0.53)	−0.01 (0.96)			−0.63*** (0.00)	−0.67*** (0.00)		
Y2016	−0.69*** (0.00)	−0.72*** (0.00)			0.15* (0.08)	0.17* (0.09)		
Intercept	3.88*** (0.00)	4.20*** (0.00)	3.10*** (0.00)	3.12*** (0.00)	4.13*** (0.00)	3.93*** (0.00)	3.99*** (0.00)	3.94*** (0.00)
R-squared	0.12	0.09	0.19	0.18	0.22	0.20	0.06	0.08
N	615	615	222	222	618	618	221	221

*p*-values are in parentheses; \*\*\* corresponds to 1 percent significance level, \*\* to 5 percent, and \* to 10 percent  $p < 0.1$ . The interaction term was instrumented using Age<sup>2</sup>, Age×Hardliner, Hardliner×Age<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Estimates are based on 2016 wave only due to data availability.

terms are negative in all but one specification. This weaker correlation is perhaps due to the closer cognitive link between the reliance on force inherent in the hardliner schema and threat perceptions than between the willingness to use force and perceptions of hostility. Due to the relative balance of power, a country can be hostile without posing a security threat. The coefficients on the media interaction terms with the Hardliner variable are not significant in either model specification.

The estimates in Panel B suggest that the framing effect of the media environment becomes weaker when the link between the schema and the outcome of interest becomes more tenuous. Alternatively, different cognitive processes could be at work when assessing security threats compared to a country's hostility. Although these two dependent variables are closely correlated, the thought process by which elites translate the information they receive online may be different. Threat assessment requires comparing the likelihood of a potential attack and the probability of an adversary's success. Assessments of a country's hostility, meanwhile, depend on the subjective evaluation of the balance of forces. The hardliner schema is relevant in this context because those who assume that hard power constitutes the key component of international relations place a higher probability on an adversary's attack, especially if the adversary's military power increases. Social media can have a stronger framing effect than the Internet due to the greater opportunities for hardliners to interact with other hardliners and also because the line between consumption and production of information is blurred. When individuals are given an opportunity to express themselves, they exert a greater cognitive effort than when consuming news. This subsequently increases the magnitude of the framing effect. The process that contributes to the perception of hostility is somewhat different. It focuses on a subjective assessment of the attitude of the "other" toward the respondent's country. Facing a hostile country is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the use of force. Thus, a hardliner's outlook is less relevant to the perception of hostility because the need to use force to counteract it is not part of the consideration. As such, even when the hardliner schema is activated by online discourse, it does not translate into changes in the perception of hostility.

## Conclusion

This study establishes that the digital divide is associated with differences in Russian elite perceptions of the United States. Those elites who read about politics online perceive the United States as less hostile and as less of a security threat than do those who follow news online less frequently. In so doing, the study identifies a new source of cleavages among the Russian elite. If previous works showed that foreign policy preferences are influenced by politico-economic orientations (Zimmerman 2009), this paper demonstrates that exposure to new media has become an important factor. By applying an instrumental variable approach, the paper provides empirical evidence of the causal link between type of media and foreign policy attitudes. The paper shows that for the threat perception variable the empirical evidence is more consistent with the framing effect rather than with the echo chamber hypothesis. Rather than contributing to a greater homogeneity of opinions among the Russian elite due to selective consumption of online news that is consistent with their political attitudes, the online content was filtered through pre-existing world views that served as an intervening variable for attitudes towards the US. The framing effect is less relevant for the perception of the US as hostile to Russia, perhaps due to a different cognitive process that links a hardliner schema to the outcome of interest.

The paper also showed that Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 media environments have different implications for framing effects. The interactive nature of social media, which allows users to both consume and produce content and also increases the probability of the echo chamber effect, increases the relevance of the hardliner schema for the assessment of threats, albeit that this schema is less relevant for the perception of hostility. To the best of the author's knowledge, this study is pioneering in this regard, because the literature on anti-Americanism focuses purely on the effect of television, while the literature on political attitudes and the Internet is restricted to domestic politics. By juxtaposing social

media with the Internet, this study reveals that the effect of these two variables may not be the same. As such, the paper has called long overdue attention to the heterogeneity of new media. Furthermore, by shifting attention from the masses to the elites, this paper shows that elites – like the masses – are sensitive to framing effects.

By differentiating threat perceptions from perceptions of hostility, the paper also underscores the importance of paying close attention to the choice of a construct for anti-Americanism. Depending on the region and availability of data, the constructs for anti-Americanism range from attitudes toward American pop culture to the assessment of hostility, while paying no attention to threat perceptions. This study suggests that a closer look at differences in the causal mechanisms that contribute to different dimensions of anti-Americanism could be a fruitful line of future research.

## Notes

1. User-generated content and content produced by foreign and Kremlin-independent sources, as well as content produced by elites themselves, are distinctive features of new media.
2. For 2016, the response categories ranged from 1 (not once) to 5 (every day). To ensure consistency across the waves, the answer categories were aggregated to three categories before taking the average. The author is thankful to Sharon Rivera for this suggestion.
3. A linear model rather than a limited dependent variable model was used because we are interested in testing for differences in the means across the two groups rather than in the probability of observing the specific outcome. When a linear model specification is used for a limited dependent variable, standard errors become larger because the model is misspecified, which increases the probability of Type II error, i.e., failing to reject the null hypothesis of no effect when it is false.

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