



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

IRES
Institutet för Rysslands- och
Eurasienstudier

Postadress:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala

Besöksadress:
Gamla Torget 3

Telefon:
018-471 00 00

Telefax/Fax:
018-10 63 97

Hemsidan:
www.ires.uu.se

E-post:
ires@ires.uu.se

IRES
Institute for Russian and
Eurasian Studies

Postal address:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala
Sweden

Visiting address:
Gamla Torget 3

Telephone:
+46 18 471 00 00

Telefax:
+46 18 10 63 97

Website:
www.ires.uu.se

E-mail:
ires@ires.uu.se

REPORT

By Member of the Dissertation Committee on the

Dissertation of

SYTNIK Anna on the theme:

“Digitalization and Big Data in International Relations:
Theoretical, Methodological, and Applied Aspects,”

Submitted in conformity with the requirements for the
candidate degree in Political Science

Specialisation 5.5.4 –International Relations

Having read the dissertation of Anna Sytnik in the English-language version, I am ready to offer a series of observations and draw conclusions concerning the academic quality of the work. The thesis concerns the development, application and effects of digitalization and big data on international relations settings from a practical, methodological and a theoretical perspective. Sytnik articulates the focus as seeking to understand the evolving and transforming nature of international relations through the influence and effect of digitalization, power and. It employs and blends different academic disciplines and approaches, such as digital politics, international relations and digital diplomacy. This candidate thesis analyses and evaluates a vast set of academic, social media data and popular science literature on the topics. Sytnik has also published several publications and was active in the wider academic community through conferences.



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

IRES

Institutet för Rysslands- och
Eurasienstudier

Postadress:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala

Besöksadress:
Gamla Torget 3

Telefon:
018-471 00 00

Telefax/Fax:
018-10 63 97

Hemsidan:
www.ires.uu.se

E-post:
ires@ires.uu.se

IRES
Institute for Russian and
Eurasian Studies

Postal address:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala
Sweden

Visiting address:
Gamla Torget 3

Telephone:
+46 18 471 00 00

Telefax:
+46 18 10 63 97

Website:
www.ires.uu.se

E-mail:
ires@ires.uu.se

This thesis does contribute to new knowledge through exploring a very new topic that is in its infancy in terms of academic and practical development. In addition, a highly relevant and popular theoretical, policy maker and practitioner issue have many potential and unknown consequences in terms of the academic development and operationalisation in the field of international relations at a point in time of global instability owing to a transforming global order.

In terms of structure and logic, the thesis is well positioned and founded, in a logical and comprehensive manner that permits the reader a smooth progression through the content. The goals and objectives are clearly stated, motivated and are realistic. For the most part, the chosen method and theory is appropriate for the stated tasks and objectives of the candidate thesis, and are soundly explained to the reader in terms of choices made by the author. A comprehensive and very broad literature is used to underpin and support the thesis's theoretical, methodological and empirical content and basis. To reiterate, this is an extremely systematic and comprehensive work; the main provisions and conclusions are ambitious, yet realistic and very significant for international relations as an academic field and a practical endeavour. The work brings a lot of new information and knowledge forward as well as employing innovative methodological means.

However, there are a number of various problems to bring attention to in the spirit of constructive criticism of an otherwise strong candidate thesis. These problems emerge in different categories: translation of text; definition; interpretation and analysis; and missing elements and aspects.



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

IRES
Institutet för Rysslands- och
Eurasienstudier

Postadress:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala

Besöksadress:
Gamla Torget 3

Telefon:
018-471 00 00

Telefax/Fax:
018-10 63 97

Hemsidan:
www.ires.uu.se

E-post:
ires@ires.uu.se

IRES
Institute for Russian and
Eurasian Studies

Postal address:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala
Sweden

Visiting address:
Gamla Torget 3

Telephone:
+46 18 471 00 00

Telefax:
+46 18 10 63 97

Website:
www.ires.uu.se

E-mail:
ires@ires.uu.se

Organisationsnr:
202100-2932

1(1)

There are various problems of translation, which may be beyond the knowledge or control of the author and more related to the quality of the translator's work. At times, there are some constellations of words in sentences that are not particularly clear in meaning. For example on page 256, "Digitalization is a long process of digitalization ..." Rather than digital and real, it is likely to be more accurate to use digital and "physical" (page 273). Otherwise one can get caught in a rabbit hole with the question "what is real?" On page 342, one paragraph is repeated (paragraphs one and two), presumably resulting from copy and paste.

Problems of definitions used in the text of the candidate thesis were noted. It is noted on page 315 that digital technology can be used by an actor to their advantage. However, it can also be used by another actor with obstructive marketing to disrupt or damage the image and interests of another actor. Further on page 321, I am not sure I understand completely or agree with the definitions of media sharp power layers. More commonly white is honest and attributable information and sources, grey is the use of lesser transparent and accountable sources, and black refers to the use of deception and non-attributable sources. On page 389, there is a need to proceed with caution on the definition of fake news. It is a concept that is rapidly evolving as a concept, but it is also a label to be used against other actors or views and is therefore highly subjective and politicised.



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

IRES
Institutet för Rysslands- och
Eurasienstudier

Postadress:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala

Besöksadress:
Gamla Torget 3

Telefon:
018-471 00 00

Telefax/Fax:
018-10 63 97

Hemsidan:
www.ires.uu.se

E-post:
ires@ires.uu.se

IRES
Institute for Russian and
Eurasian Studies

Postal address:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala
Sweden

Visiting address:
Gamla Torget 3

Telephone:
+46 18 471 00 00

Telefax:
+46 18 10 63 97

Website:
www.ires.uu.se

E-mail:
ires@ires.uu.se

1(1)

The reviewer has noted a number of various problems associated with the author's interpretation of data, processes and trends. I would caution on the reliability of the "influence indexes" used to demonstrate the effect of the social media activity of influencers. Especially in terms of an accurate understanding of the actual influence may be hard to calculate with the variables used to measure it. This is particularly so when sock puppets and other tactics used to amplify a message narrative may be employed, where measure of activity may not equal measure of effect. At times, there seems to be bordering on a rather idealistic understanding of the intentions and actions of actors, taking for granted the rhetorical positions of Western powers seeking to "spread democracy" via public diplomacy (or "digital emancipation" on page 339). A more critical stance may use the concept of "guerrilla diplomacy" rather than public diplomacy to better characterise the intention of the activity. On page 352, the mention of the "traditional geopolitical understanding of power loses its relevance." This would depend on whether digitalization is a means or an ends, if it is an ends then this statement holds. However, I would rather argue digitalization of international relations is a means to gaining geopolitical power. Thus the means to the ends changes, but the end goal and objective of power accumulation remains.



**UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET**

IRES
Institutet för Rysslands- och
Eurasienstudier

Postadress:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala

Besöksadress:
Gamla Torget 3

Telefon:
018-471 00 00

Telefax/Fax:
018-10 63 97

Hemsidan:
www.ires.uu.se

E-post:
ires@ires.uu.se

IRES
Institute for Russian and
Eurasian Studies

Postal address:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala
Sweden

Visiting address:
Gamla Torget 3

Telephone:
+46 18 471 00 00

Telefax:
+46 18 10 63 97

Website:
www.ires.uu.se

E-mail:
ires@ires.uu.se

I(1)

A problem of missing elements and aspects that would have assisted in further strengthening the thesis were also noted. For example, it was surprising not to note any literature used from prominent authors such as Andrey Manoilo or Oleg Karpovich and others that have written extensively on issues covered in this candidate thesis and would have added further backing and even potentially developed Sytnik's line of thinking. It may have assisted to delve in to the possible and potential roles and purpose of knowledge and information, including in the digital environment – influence, profit and/or strategic advantage. This can add to the depth of the context of the findings at a later stage of analysis. Likewise, the concept of “new public diplomacy” would have proven to be a useful concept to include in terms of the conceptual clarity of intentions and tactics of international actors.

In the wider picture and totality of the work, the thesis does solidly cover a relatively new and developing issue that holds a great deal of relevance and interest to the academic and practical worlds of international relations. The strengths of the candidate thesis outweigh the weaknesses, and the work helps to contribute to a better understanding of the trends and processes at play in this digital realm in international relations and the pursuit of geopolitical power.



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

IRES
Institutet för Rysslands- och
Eurasienstudier

Postadress:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala

Besöksadress:
Gamla Torget 3

Telefon:
018-471 00 00

Telefax/Fax:
018-10 63 97

Hemsidan:
www.ires.uu.se

E-post:
ires@ires.uu.se

IRES
Institute for Russian and
Eurasian Studies

Postal address:
Box 514
SE-751 20 Uppsala
Sweden

Visiting address:
Gamla Torget 3

Telephone:
+46 18 471 00 00

Telefax:
+46 18 10 63 97

Website:
www.ires.uu.se

E-mail:
ires@ires.uu.se

Organisationsnr:
202100-2932

1(1)

The dissertation meets the basic requirements established by Order, No. 11181/1 of 19 November 2021, "On the Procedure for Awarding Academic Degrees at Saint Petersburg State University," the candidate Anna Sytnik deserves the award of the scientific degree of Candidate of Political Science in the specialty 5.5.4. –International Relations. Clause 11 of the aforementioned Order by the author of the thesis is not broken.



IRES
Institute for Russian
and Eurasian Studies

23.11.2021

Member of the Dissertation Council

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden, Associate Professor Greg Simons