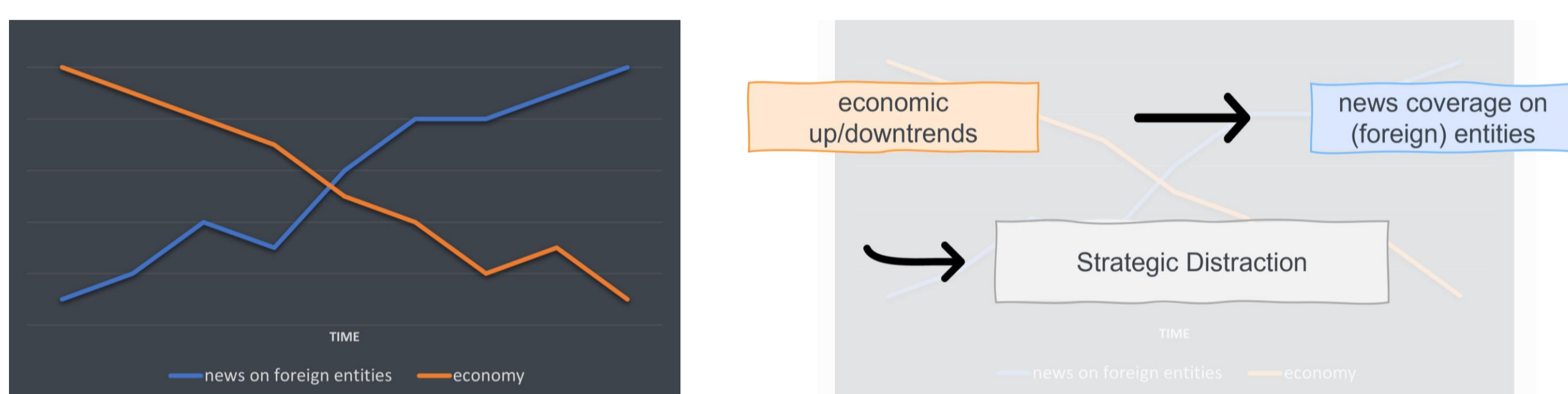


Investigating Independence vs. Control: Agenda-Setting in Russian News Coverage on Social Media

Goal: Test for strategic distraction by exploring whether agenda-setting is used by state-controlled vs. state-independent media outlets as a response to downtrends in the economy.

Agenda-Setting: Setting News Coverage on Foreign Entities and the Economy in Relation

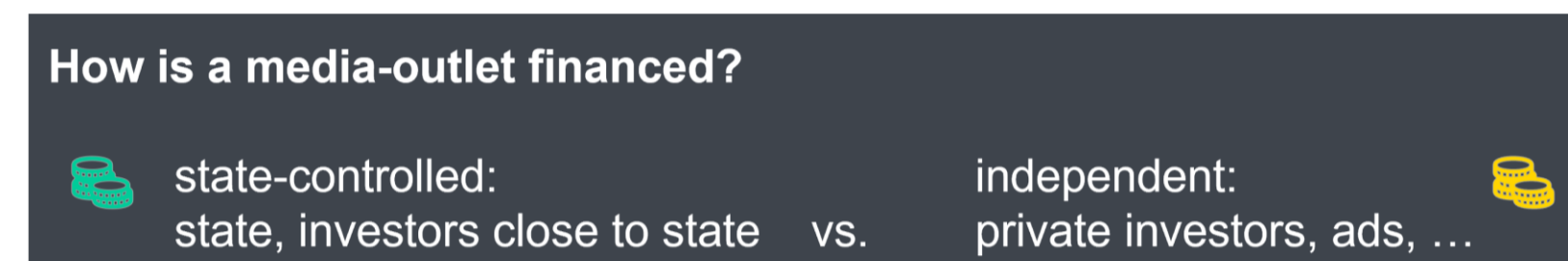


Economic performance (cause) precedes news coverage (effect)

implements notion of Granger-causality (Granger, 1969; Field et al., 2018; Rozenas and Stukal, 2019)

The Russian Media Landscape

Russian media ecosystem ≠ uniform propagandist system



- Agenda-Setting in **social media** (McCombs et al., 2014; Haim et al., 2018)
- Russia: social media became a relevant access point into digital media landscape (Glenski et al., 2018; Glenski et al., 2020; Vartanova, 2020)
- Contribution to systematic analysis of today's complex structure of the Russian media system (Judina and Platonov, 2018; Kiriya, 2019; Bodrunova and Nigmatullina, 2020)

Data

VK Corpus (Judina and Platonov 2018)

Russian Stock Market Values (RTSI)

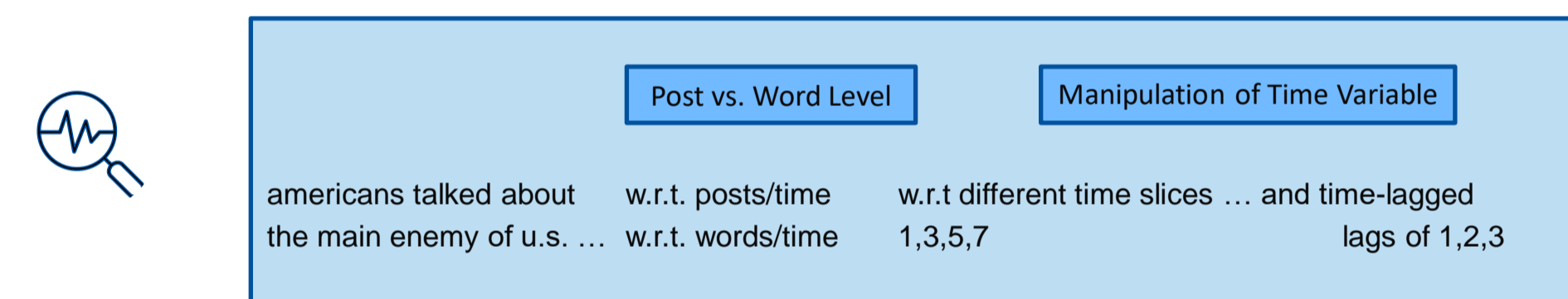
VK corpus	state-controlled	RT TASS
	independent	RBC Meduza



- News on the Russian social media Platform VK
 - State-controlled: Russia Today (RT), TASS,
 - Independent: RBC, Meduza
- Collected during time frame of 17.1.-9.3.2018
- 14,910 posts, distribution relatively uneven:
 - State-controlled: RT (7.632), TASS (3.555)
 - Independent: Meduza (1.900), RBC (1.823)

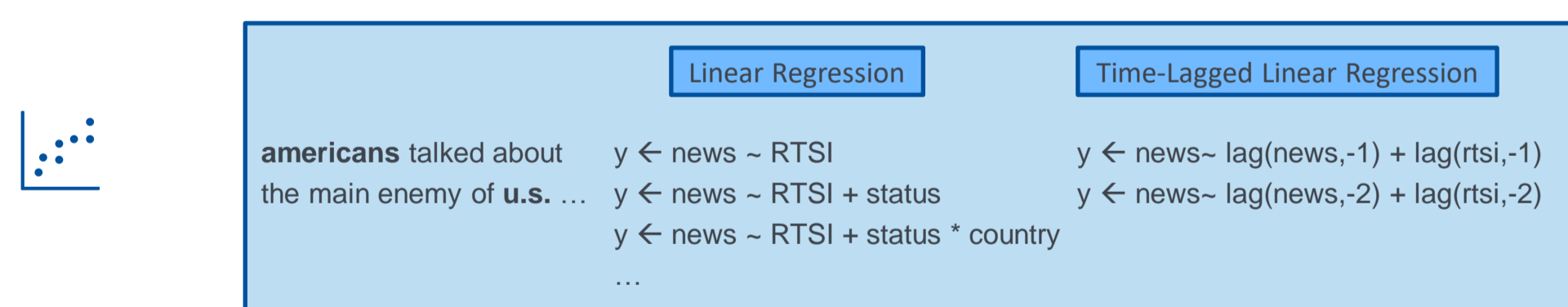
- International benchmark for Russian trading and economic performance
- Daily stock market closing prices for time frame 17.1.-9.3.2018

Correlation Analysis: Experiments and Results



- Post vs. Word Level**
 - word level results oscillate around post level findings, exception: label CIS
 - impact of post length
- Manipulation of Time Variable**
 - Mixed results for different time resolutions and time-lagged correlation analysis
 - more coarse-grained time slices seem to help in capturing stock market trends

Regression Analysis: Experiments and Results



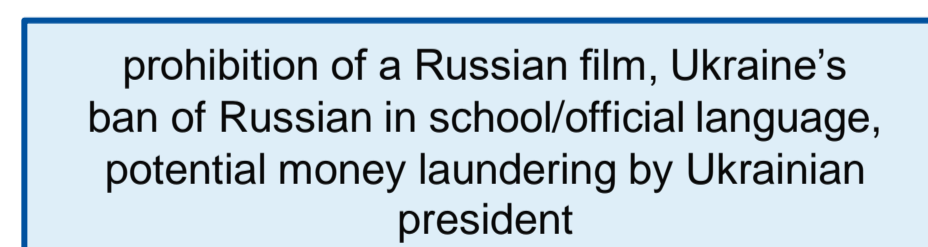
Independence vs. Control // Country Label: not predictive
→ VK corpus size, categorization?

- Considering each subset and country individually, time-lagged linear regression:
 - Independent:** positive relations for North America and Mexico, inverse relations for the Near East, mixed relations Ukraine
 - State-controlled:** inverse relations for the Near East, mixed relations Ukraine

Qualitative Analysis

- State-controlled**
 - Fair amount of communication about military incidents, relevant political figures and moves, as well as Russia's role in the matter
- Concerning the Russian economy:

"anti-Russian sanctions hit the Ukraine economy" like an "(e)conomic boomerang", doing Ukraine more harm than Russia
- Independent: Qualitative difference between the two independent outlets: RBC vs. Meduza**
 - RBC tends to report more about Ukraine and provides a perspective that is closer to the state-controlled media outlets



vs.
• **Meduza** does not cover the topic Ukraine much, tend to focus on more positive events

Conclusion

Strategic manipulation: Indications for the use of targeted distraction as a strategy of manipulation in the VK corpus, using agenda-setting

Independence vs. control: Difference captured, qualitative difference between two independent news outlets

... and future work:

- Collect a larger and more diverse dataset to further explore independence vs. control
- Investigate framing in VK Corpus: How are certain topics represented?
- Investigate how Russian media landscapes changes w.r.t. Russian invasion in Ukraine