

HISTORY AND MEMORY IN INTELLIGENCE

THE ROOTS AND INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIA'S PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN

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Abstract:

In the contemporary era, the Russian Federation conducts a robust global propaganda campaign, with the Kremlin's information warfare operations serving as a crucial component of its foreign policy. Online social media platforms are key battlegrounds where Russia asserts control. The primary aim of Kremlin propaganda is to reinforce the foreign policy objectives of the Russian Federation, both domestically and internationally, by disseminating pertinent information targeted at Russian citizens abroad. The purpose of the article is to present Russian propaganda as a means used by the Russian Federation in promoting its interests.

As we shall mention in the article, various sources are utilized by the Russian Federation to convey propaganda messages to foreign audiences. Notably, certain media outlets such as Russia Today or Sputnik were not designed for the domestic Russian audience but rather for external influence. In addition to official channels, numerous websites spread Russian propaganda, some purportedly operated directly by the government and others managed by bots.

Keywords: *Russian propaganda, communism, disinformation, influence, manipulation.*

Introduction in Russian propaganda - Historical roots

One of Vladimir Putin's ambitions is for the Russian Federation to have influence over the old territories of the Russian Empire. To achieve

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this goal, the Kremlin political class together with the regime's ideologues officially launched the concept of "Russkiy mir" (tr. Russian World), starting in 2007. Subsequently, the ideology of "Russkiy mir" was conceptualized, developed and promoted insistently through information campaigns and PR companies both among Russian speakers from the domestic environment and from outside the Russian state through television shows, mass media, but also through scientific literature, especially historical, political, and economic. Concretely, this concept, which consists in creating a "Russian World," is used for ideological purposes by both Russian politicians and Russian propaganda, to create a union of Russians everywhere, but especially to "create an alternative to the Soviet Union" (Sazonov & Müür, 2015).

A multitude of myths, ideas, stories, historical phenomena originating in the 18th, 19th, 20th centuries (such as Holy Russia, Russian soul, Russian World) are mainly used by the Russian propaganda machine in an innovative form, to convince the audience it addresses. For example, a variety of myths and historical stories from the pre-1917 period of the Russian Empire have resurfaced and been combined with other narratives of Soviet origin. The concept of Pax Russica was introduced by the Bolsheviks, who, as early as 1920 (Voicu, 2018), had established an official agitation and propaganda commission within the Central Committee of the Communist Party. This newly established unit was called Agitrop, and its main mission was to direct and coordinate the main propaganda activities of Soviet-style institutions.

Later, after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, a new institution appeared called the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, with the role of coordinating the methods and means of transmitting propaganda in states outside the USSR. Thus, the International Department was becoming a very important institution, with a much more precise and detailed role than that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. It is known that until 1979, the institution called Agitprop had the mission of carrying out propaganda on the domestic territory, and the International Department both in friendly communist countries and in enemy countries. The dissemination of Soviet propaganda was achieved through agents of influence, such as the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Teachers' Unions, the

International Organization of Journalists, but also through networks of local organizations, from press clubs to various Soviet friendship societies (Shultz & Godson, 1984).

In addition to the influence manifested within this information, covert influencers were also used to spread disinformation and propagate false ideas. This orientation of the propaganda activity was ensured by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party and the State Security Committee (Voicu, 2018). During the Second World War, the USSR pursued, in addition to the neutralization of Nazi Germany and the achievement of revisionist objectives, using in this sense various Soviet Societies established with the aim of spreading propaganda and carrying out acts of intimidation. The so-called Soviet Societies were established since 1939 (Troncotă, 2004) in the United States of America in four large cities (New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Saint Louis). These centres aimed to carry out propaganda in favour of the USSR. Including the Society of Bessarabia established by the Soviets campaigned in favour of the right to self-determination of the Bessarabian people, and through various manifestos and memos they were preparing to influence American public opinion. Including, the Inter-Balkan Bureau of Minority Agitation functioned in Bucharest, whose aim was the intentional production of agitation, dissatisfaction among the workers who carried out their work for the state institutions. Thus, regarding the USSR we can distinguish the following actions (Troncotă, 2004):

- The USSR used the Pan-Slavic issue in political actions as a way of expansion in Eastern Europe and the Balkans;
- The Third International was involved in an active propaganda process by which it supported the world-wide revolution and wanted the imposition of the proletariat.

Russian propaganda, component of hybrid warfare

Currently we are witnessing an increasingly accentuated revisionism on the part of Russia, this new orientation is determined by the so-called Gherasimov doctrine which includes many features of the hybrid war that Moscow is waging both in Ukraine and in countries of interest. Valeri Gherasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces gave a speech in 2013 (Galeotti, 2016), clarifying the way of action and approach of the Russian Federation in the war of the contemporary era,

where there are no clear borders or well defined, and military operations do not copy a specific model.

Thus, Gerasimov's speech provides insight into the fact that "the rules of the game have changed" and the current security environment is defined by the changing nature of conflict. The vision focuses on the idea of using the protest potential of the population, together with akinetic means (Medar, 2018) to generate political, religious, social and economic tensions. Gherasimov talks about a technology of disruption, which involves a strong and specific component, intended to create a cooling of relations between the so-called adversaries of Moscow among the population, especially within Russian ethnic minorities (Galeotti, 2016). However, these particularities enunciated above are not necessarily new, many of them being enunciated by Colonel Evgheni Messner since the Cold War period. He was a theorist and thinker who understood the importance of popular movements, and in his view the most important battle is in the minds of the people, while the main fronts are behind enemy lines and contain a political, social and economic substance. Messner's theory of influencing the perceptions of the civilian population contrasts with the conventional way of understanding war, based on the conquest of territories. Thus, propaganda along with disinformation are used to create a society where propagandists have freedom of movement, being able to capitalize on the grievances of the population, amplify disapproval and discourage any actions against Russian power.

The anti-Bolshevik colonel Evgheni Messner (1891-1974), a former career soldier in the Tsar's army and theorist, developed a new theory about the notion of war in the middle of the last century: "In the wars until now, the conquest of territories was important. From here on, the most important thing will be winning the minds of those who are in the enemy state" (Messner, 2015, p. 40). This vision of Messner is one of the new methods that Russia is constantly applying in areas of interest, including Ukraine.

Theory of Reflexive Control

Disinformation, propaganda, information operations represent a strategy of action of the hybrid war pursued by the Russian Federation at the global level. Propaganda is one of the most important components of hybrid warfare, and the efficiency of this means is due to the fact that

the adversary cannot anticipate and counter the disseminated message in time. Thus, the propaganda messages developed by the Russian Federation through its various channels, but also through certain agents of influence, are very well anchored in the current political, social, technological, economic and religious particularities of the targeted state.

The theory of reflexive control (TCR) represents a way of influencing the decision-making act of the adversary, and this mechanism involves the transmission of information (fabricated data), which causes the enemy to resort to a variant favourable to the initiator of the action. The theory of reflexive control is an essential principle frequently used in most propaganda, manipulation and disinformation actions by the Russian Federation, even during the Cold War (Nicolescu, 2017, p. 25).

One key goal of a government is to actively engage in the decision-making processes of an opposing state. This objective is achieved by the Russian Federation through the use of information warfare based on the theory of reflexive control. The most complex form of influencing the informational resources of a state consists in the use of reflexive control measures against the decision-making factor. An information resource is best defined by (Thomas, 2004):

- all information and the means of transmitting information, which include methods of gathering, obtaining, processing, analysing, transmitting, capitalizing and storing;
- infrastructure consisting of centres and means of automating information processes, information switches and data transfer;
- computer programs and mathematical means for information management;
- the administrative and organizational body that manages the information process, the scientific staff, the databases, as well as the staff that serves the information means.

The theory of reflexive control represents a method with a major impact in approaching reality, and among the tactics used are: determining the enemy to approach a certain strategy, transferring an image onto reality, influencing in making a decision. Among these methods there are other ways such as: transmitting false information, carrying out information dissemination at certain key moments, projecting a non-conforming reality or an altered image that contradicts reality. The theory

is based on the principles stated by Pavlov Ivan Petrovici, author of the conditioning theory (Stamatin, 2017). Thus, TCR implies the exercise of control over an actor on the international stage by transmitting a certain informational stimulus.

The theory of reflexive control is a key element of the information warfare that the Russian Federation uses on a global scale. Through this technique, the Kremlin wants to take advantage of all the social, psychological, moral, religious vulnerabilities that it exploits to the maximum. The successful application of the technique consists in knowing the enemy from a social and psychological point of view, having a consistent volume of information about him, about his ability to analyse the events around him, but also the level of precise observation of certain stimuli that can provoke reactions.

The theory of reflexive control differs from other concepts of the informational war in that through the circulated information it is aimed to determine the modification of the decisions related to the decision-making factor. Thus, propaganda and disinformation aim to influence the population, while TCR focuses on influencing the decision-making factor.

Reflexive Control – instrument of the Russian Federation

In recent years, as a result of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, international interest in the Kremlin's hybrid warfare has increased. At first, this modus operandi of the Russians was treated as something new, but analysts noted the similarity of the current methods with disinformation and propaganda tactics used by the Soviets in the past (Minton, 2017). Thus, the Russian Federation uses the theory of reflexive control from the Soviet period, but connected to the realities existing today. The key element of TCR is the use of propaganda and disinformation. Disinformation can be divided into two categories: offensive and defensive. Offensive disinformation seeks to influence foreign public opinion and decision makers, while defensive disinformation is primarily aimed at influencing the Russian population (White, 2016). For example, Russia Today (RT) is a Russian government-funded news site whose purpose is to spread disinformation and

propaganda using the Kremlin's perspective on global events. Former Russian blogger Anton Nosik considered Russia Today to be a "Soviet-style propaganda agency dating back to the days of Joseph Stalin" (Minton, 2017, p. 5).

Soviet reflexive control contained specific strategies for both domestic and foreign policy. Domestically, influence consisted of the defensive use of propaganda and disinformation. This was possible by altering reality, altering the truth and creating a new reality. In the Soviet Union, the government propagated ideas and messages through newspapers, radio and restricted any access to Radio Free Europe. The same methods are still used today, but connected to the realities of the 21st century. Due to the fact that the world has evolved, and the main source of information has moved from the radio to the Internet, the Russian Federation blocks the Internet protocol addresses of some foreign sites. In addition to the information they follow on the Internet, the Russian population watches news bulletins on television. As a way to defend itself, the Russian government has banned all foreign nationals from owning any media companies in Russia (Minton, 2017).

The disinformation and offensive propaganda that Moscow is intensively promoting is the main concern of the international community. To achieve offensive propaganda through reflexive control, the Kremlin uses what Snegovaya (2015), call the 4D approach (dismiss, distort, distract, dismay). At the moment of the appearance of data and information related to the actions of the Russian Federation, members of the Government come out publicly and deny any accusation. An example is the accusations dismissed by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin in the case of the occupation of Crimea by Russian militants (White, 2016). Thus, Russia constantly tries through propaganda, fake-news and disinformation to distort certain ideas, facts, data that are against their interests, with the aim of distracting the attention of both countries and international bodies. In addition to the classic 4D approach, two new forms seem to have emerged: destruction and destabilization (Snegovaya, 2015). Russia combines destruction and destabilization as part of its propaganda and disinformation technique to change the international system of the balance of power.

Background and objectives of Russian propaganda

The Russian Federation is engaged worldwide in a powerful propaganda campaign. The Kremlin's information warfare operations are an extremely important chapter of foreign policy, and online social media is where Russia exerts its control. Information warfare analyst Timothy Thomas stated that: "A veritable cognitive war is being waged in the airwaves and mass media for the hearts and minds of its citizens both at home and abroad" (Thomas, 2014, p. 12). Another analyst on the eastern space, the British Keir Giles was of the opinion that: "Russia considers itself to be engaged in a full information war" (Giles, 2016, p. 23).

In the information war in which it is involved, Russia uses various techniques such as: propaganda, cyber operations, disinformation, with the aim of influencing its neighbours and the countries of Western Europe. The state-funded television network Russia Today (RT) broadcasts global news in various languages (Arabic, English, Spanish). The Russian state also controls online news sites such as Sputnik, spreading its own news in over 30 languages. In addition to these elements, Russia uses cyber operations on a large scale, with Russian trolls playing a prominent role. The Russia Today and Sputnik networks were thought of as tools to broadcast information in various languages and through which the Kremlin can attack democratic values and spread false information (Christopher & Matthews, 2016).

The Russian state began to attach increasing importance to the media following the anti-government protests that took place in 2011 (Giles, 2016). The Internet was thus becoming an instrument of democratization and a way through which people censored by their own states could organize and protest. The scale and dynamics of the protests, amplified by the role of the mass media, led the Russian government to increase its actions and efforts to increasingly monitor, control and influence the virtual environment and social media. In the 2011 demonstrations, Russian citizens mostly organized on Facebook, took to the streets, and protested the elections that saw Vladimir Putin regain the presidency. Thus, in order to exercise this control effectively, the Kremlin has begun its offensive on the Internet and has invested in personnel, technology, and developing an army of trolls and bots, a kind of commentators paid to intervene with various opinions in comment

sections on social networks, but also on certain foreign news sites. The government has been involved since 2012 in a vast propaganda campaign in the virtual environment by establishing internal control, and externally influencing public opinion (Giles, 2016).

Although Russia seems to have a global aim in terms of propaganda campaigns, the area of major interest is the states in its immediate vicinity. The close neighbourhood refers to numerous Central Asian states such as: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Transcaucasia (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia (Pomerantsev, 2014). These states express their concern especially that the Russian Federation has annexed the Crimean Peninsula and is actively involved in the Ukraine War through a hybrid war that combines kinetic elements (green men) with akinetic elements (propaganda, fake news, disinformation) (Medar, 2018).

Russia has various reasons for using the phenomenon of propaganda in former communist countries. These are:

- influencing the political class, the citizens of these states – helps to establish a buffer zone that ensures security against the influence of NATO and the EU, which is perceived a threat to Russia;
- in many of the former communist countries there is an important Russian-speaking minority population, and propaganda acts effectively on them.

The Kremlin pursues a policy of protecting the interests of the Russian minority population and thus tries to effectively influence the policy of neighbouring states.

Russian propaganda instruments

As far as Moscow is concerned, propaganda, fake news, disinformation and cyber-attacks are essential to achieving its own goals. The activities stated above are carried out with the help of trolls (social media accounts behind which certain people are) and bots (automated programs), which operate in the online environment on social networks, with the aim of exploiting vulnerabilities, transmitting certain information and strengthening credibility in messages subject to misinformation (Giles, 2016). The Russian Federation makes extensive use of fake social

media accounts that are fully or partially automated, or operated by handpicked individuals. This mechanism of Russian propaganda deserves a very careful examination in order to correctly and concretely understand how the propaganda machine works. Moscow's orientation towards the specific activity of information warfare results from the confirmation of the fact that "the virtual environment has become the main and only channel of information and political communication for a growing number of young people. In the virtual environment, they receive primary information, here they shape their visions and political opinions, having the opportunity to influence the processes related to the functioning of power." (Velichka, 2012, p. 55)

Thus, the life of a troll employed by Moscow requires making numerous comments, posts from different accounts to create an authentic and real appearance of the people who do this. The troll factory is based in St. Petersburg, and employees are paid at least 500 dollars per month to handle various fake accounts. In a 12-hour shift, a troll generates hundreds of comments, and sometimes they operate in mixed teams of three people on a particular topic. Thus, on a certain political or social topic, one of the trolls shows a negative point of view, while the other two trolls disapprove of it and thus creates the feeling of a debate (Aro, 2016).

A study carried out by NATO's Strategic Communication Centre aimed to observe and evaluate the impact of the activity of Russian trolls in cyberspace. In this study, approximately 3 671 articles and comments referring to the annexation of Crimea or the war in eastern Ukraine posted on a variety of Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, Estonian social networks were examined. The study found that these troll comments automatically generated a significant increase in comments from real people, who were practically invited into the discussion (Szwed, 2016).

It was also noticed that if Russian trolls used denial techniques, amplified hatred, denigrated the enemy's image on a post, it had many comments. In the first phase, a troll posted a certain negative message, which generated controversy and attracted the attention of other users, prompting them to comment based on the topic. The next step was to attract other users to counter the previous comments and thus create conflicting opinions. The last stage was based on deviating from the topic

of the respective article, thus, instead of creating a contradictory discussion, they generated strong antagonisms among users. In addition to the mode of operation of the trolls, the NATO study also identified the following behaviours of them (Szwed, 2016):

- transmission of certain information without reference to credible sources;
- posting certain links without other comments;
- sending off-topic messages;
- involvement in discussions about conspiracy theories;
- generating conflicts and intimidation through posts;
- claimed to be pro-Ukrainian, provoked others and generated responses from pro-Russian users.

Russian trolls have diversified and perfected their modus operandi to be more efficient, effective and to have a much greater impact. Thus, four types of trolls have been identified (Boffey, 2016):

- trolls who accuse the United States of conspiracy to create a feeling of mistrust;
- aggressive trolls who harass, induce negative ideas and participate in online discussions;
- Wikipedia trolls who edit sites, web pages to the advantage of the Kremlin;
- attachment trolls who linked their posts to Russian sites.

Russian propaganda is repetitive, fast, and continuous

The main characteristics of Russian propaganda are: repetition, rapidity and continuity. Thus, the repetitiveness of propagandistic message dissemination leads to familiarity, and familiarity leads to public acceptance. Russian propaganda is always based on creating a first impression, which is very durable and difficult to change.

Nowadays, the actions of the Russian propaganda machine are based on continuity, on the quick response of trolls, on the lack of coherence, but also on the lack of commitment to objective reality. Based on the characteristics stated above, Russian propagandists do not aim to verify the veracity of the facts, but pursue their presentation with great speed and precision so as to fully and correctly support their objectives.

Thus, the formidable ability to transmit “first news” is determined by the remarkable agility and responsiveness of Russian trolls.

The existence of numerous propaganda materials disseminated in the media space by Russian propagandists was observed (Paul & Matthews, 2014). These fake materials included a so-called statement by President Andrzej Duda demanding that Ukraine cede former Polish territory that belonged to it, as well as false information that Islamic State fighters had joined forces in Kiev (Paul & Matthews, 2014).

In some situations, the dissemination of Russian propaganda falls to certain news channels that take certain information, stories and broadcast them as if they are legitimate and true. Later, in the virtual environment, on social networks, trolls come into action and resume the themes covered by the news channels, amplifying the topic even more, giving it a negative connotation (Zorina, 2015).

From a psychological point of view, first impressions are the most important and determine a resistance over time. Thus, a person is very likely to accept the first information about a topic, give it credence, and expose or support it when faced with conflicting information (Petty, Cacioppo, & Strathman, 2019). However, repetition leads to familiarity which then turns into acceptance (Paul & Matthews, 2014):

- Repeated presentation of a state, reality or facts about a certain theme, considerably increases the level of public acceptance.
- The “illusory truth effect” refers to the fact that people consider some statements to be true, valid and credible when they have encountered them before and in the past than when they access them for the first time.
 - When people are less interested in a topic, they tend to accept information with which they have become familiar over time (familiarity produced by repeating that information).
 - When processing information, individuals can save time and energy by using a frequency heuristic, which refers to favouring information that they have heard repeatedly in the past.
 - Even when exposed to “outlandish” stories and legends, people who have heard them repeatedly in the past are more likely to believe them to be true.

- When an individual is familiar with a certain idea or claims to be familiar with it (just because they have heard of it in the past), they tend to process information about that idea more superficially, often giving it more credibility weak arguments against strong ones.

Russian propaganda has the characteristic of being agile, fast and continuous, which allows propagandists to create a first impression. Subsequently, rapid responsiveness is correlated with a large volume of information, with a variety of dissemination channels. All these together make Russian themes very popular among the audience, thus giving them an extra boost in terms of credibility and expertise.

Objectives of the Russian Federation

The propaganda actions carried out by the Kremlin have the main purpose of supporting the foreign policy of the Russian Federation both in the mass media inside the country and abroad by transmitting relevant information aimed at Russian citizens outside the country. The Russian Federation maintains the tradition of the Soviet era and seeks to influence its adversaries through the extensive use of propaganda and disinformation. This tradition is also doubled by the statement of General Valeri Gherasimov, the Chief of Staff of the Army, who explained that the role of non-military means has increased, surpassing the power of weapons in many cases (Van Harpen, 2016).

One of the main goals of the Russian Federation is to have the status of a world power, and as part of this effort, it intends to restore its influence over the former territories dominated by the Soviet Union.

Russia also identifies NATO as a major threat to national security, being against certain international organizations. It believes that any nation must defend its own position in the international system. Thus, weakening the European Union and its member states is one of the main objectives of Russian propaganda. Moscow's strategy is to weaken the unity of the EU member states, because in a divided Europe, the Russian Federation could use a strategy of division, aiming to expand on the European continent. Russia's advantage is to have a military superiority over any other nation on the European continent (Cioroianu, 2009).

The Russian Federation aims to block any possible colour revolution that might take place in the former Soviet republics. They

represent the immediate vicinity that the Putin regime considers to be part of their sphere of influence. The concept of “Russkiy Mir” can also refer to the fact that national borders are of little importance for ethnic ties, thus the expression defines Russia not as a country, but as a community of people. This concept is again used by the Russian administration as a tool in its relations with former USSR countries (Courtois & Ackerman, 2017).

Identifying Russian propaganda

It is important to identify the official channels that belong to the Russian state, such as Russia Today and Sputnik, in order to be able to determine exactly which narratives are addressed in a certain period of time. These news agencies are professional because of the manner in which they present their messages, but they are not objective, they are biased like unofficial propaganda sites. Sputnik and RT amplify the voices and statements of certain pro-Russian MEPs, and in some broadcasts, they take only those quotes of European representatives that they take out of context. The views and comments of European politicians who have criticized the Kremlin are not included in the TV programs broadcast in the Russian state. The interviews broadcast on Russia Today or Sputnik mainly feature politicians who give statements in favour of Russia. Later, on social media networks these statements are picked up and falsified with the obvious purpose of misinforming (Cull et al, 2017).

Russian propaganda sites generally deal with a number of common topics: Ukraine, Syria, migration, the European Union and NATO, liberalism and liberal media. Alternative sites usually justify and legitimize the Kremlin’s actions and views, and in other cases offer completely different narratives about the same events to create confusion. Propaganda sites also spread conspiracy theories that often attract public attention. Conspiracies are illegitimate, invented theories that are a temptation for all people, although many consider themselves resistant to such methods (Makukhin & Tsybulska, 2018).

For the manipulation of individuals, the Russian propaganda machine fakes pictures, videos, etc. Mostly, pictures or videos are modified with the help of software. In addition, sites upload images or

videos that depict events unrelated to the content of the article, which may even be taken in other locations or on different dates. It is possible to misinform readers through a wrong translation (for example, Arabic to English translation). It is very important that readers access original content as much as possible (Makukhin & Tsybul'ska, 2018).

In addition to the above, pro-Russian sites falsify or manipulate data, statistics, figures, surveys to justify their point of view. They regularly and continuously try to draw wrong and completely untrue conclusions from public opinion polls.

It is very important that before reading an article, news or document we try to accurately establish the credibility of the sources, to determine who the author is and whether he is real. Some sites link to anonymous blogs, pro-Kremlin propaganda sites, Facebook posts or extremist sites. In these cases, the sites admit that the source of inspiration was represented by the Western European media. Propaganda sites also claim that the information disseminated is taken from official sources, but in fact this is just a manipulation, since most of the time there is no connection with specialized institutions. Many times, countless people interviewed by the pro-Kremlin media appear in different poses and roles (intentionally changed), and it is quite possible that some of their words are taken out of context or translated differently. There are various allegations (Cull et al, 2017) directed at the pro-Kremlin media, being suspected of paying people to report certain events in an interview.

First Draft News, a fake news checking agency identified seven types of disinformation methods that pro-Kremlin media use. These are as follows (Barclay, 2018):

1. The first type of disinformation refers to false links, where titles, images, videos or translations are inconsistent with certain parts of the article.

2. The second method of disinformation refers to the false context, when a certain authentic informational content is correlated with an untrue or non-existent context or event.

3. The third method is manipulated content, and information, data, statistics or images are altered with the aim of deceiving readers and changing certain perceptions.

4. The fourth variant is represented by satire, parody, through which the aim is to influence individuals without causing any harm.

5. The fifth method involves the use of misleading content that formulates a problem through the information circulated.

6. The sixth method refers to falsifying truthful sources and replacing them with false and untrue ones.

7. The seventh method is to 100% modify a material and disseminate it to create uncertainty and harm.

Russian propaganda is complex because it often combines pieces of accurate information with false information. Thus, authentic information is manipulated by taking facts out of context and analysing them in a way that paints an incorrect picture of events. For the fake-news phenomenon to generate important changes and to be successful, it is necessary to establish a certain form of credibility. Many times, a particular news story is completely fabricated.

Methods and practices for combating Russian propaganda

Over time, both rational and ludicrous arguments have been observed to be effective in spreading conspiracy theories. Reality still matters, but it is difficult for some people to differentiate between true facts and alternative facts. Analysing the ultraconservative image of the Russian Federation, one can see the kleptocratic nature of Putin's regime, the declining birth rate, the social problems that bring Russia closer to the aging Western societies, from which it wants to distance itself (Kochis, 2014). Even though Russian propaganda does not necessarily seek to convince the public, it is very important to be able to identify the different narratives made to describe a particular event. The Russian government uses the lies spread to achieve its own goals.

First of all, to notice and discover a Russian propaganda material we need to focus our attention to the photos in the online environment that are most popular on social media. In order to establish the credibility of these photos, we must carefully analyse and try to get information from other sources in order to find other images related to that event (Bodine-Baron et al, 2018).

Second, other information should be sought in connection with the videos posted on pro-Kremlin sites, finding the original ones on YouTube or other networks is very important. In addition to these, it

is necessary to check the date the video was uploaded, its description, but also the license, to determine if the video was taken directly from the source (Bodine-Baron et al, 2018). Afterwards, you have to go to the comments section to see if someone has uploaded the original video.

Thirdly, attention should be paid to witness statements and interviews of certain people featured in reports on Russian propaganda sites and channels. It is imperative to determine whether the testimony or interview is closely related to the content of the article and whether there is any difference between the interviewee's statement and what the report claims. In addition to these, translations are a means of influence, therefore transposition verification should not be ignored (Bodine-Baron et al, 2018). Another way to identify the influence of Russian propaganda is to identify the roles played by some witnesses. There are numerous people paid to support the Kremlin's point of view.

Regarding the method of citing individuals, it is important to check whether the quote has been taken out of context. Thus, the material must be viewed and read carefully. The experts and sources used by the pro-Russian sites must be investigated. The experts that the pro-Russian sites cite mostly serve the interests of Moscow, and in other cases the source of the citation is a prestigious European magazine, but in reality, the citation refers to a lesser-known blog with a similar name (Kochis, 2014).

In conclusion, Russian propaganda employs various tactics, including information pressure (repeated dissemination of news), information intoxication (overloading with true and false data), rumour transmission (rapid circulation of rumours), erosion of trust in leaders (revealing half-truths or lies about trusted figures), and an appeal to history (presenting false information about Romanian Army actions in World War II).

In contrast to Soviet-era propaganda, contemporary propaganda exhibits a heightened level of conviction, superior organization, and strategic planning, employing a diverse array of manipulation and influence techniques. Unlike the past focus on disseminating processed information to gain support for the communist regime, modern propaganda is prominently present in the virtual sphere, with its primary objective being to induce a state of confusion rather than convince the target audience.

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