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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Waves of Disinformation in the Hybrid Russian-Ukrainian War

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ABSTRACT

This article presents research results into waves of disinformation — massive torrents of false information directed at various audiences during the Russian-Ukrainian war in May — July 2022, intending to elicit specific communication effects (manipulation, misleading, intimidation, demoralization, etc.). It was found that waves of disinformation are characterized by narrative and intensity. Based on the Telegram statistics of the "Perevirka" bot ("Check") developed by the Gwara Media organization, we formed a sample of the most resonant messages (298 units), which were subject to informal (traditional) document analysis, as well as classification, narrative, and comparative analysis. We identified 24 primary waves of disinformation, among which the most powerful were the following: 1) "The Armed Forces of Ukraine and those who back them are criminals"; 2) "Ukraine will lose the war"; 3) "The West does not need Ukraine as a state"; 4) "Ukraine is a country of chaos and extremists." The recorded waves testify to the aggressiveness and multi-directionality of Russian rhetoric, which encourages the development of a productive system of information countermeasures in Ukraine and the world and the development of media literacy among the population. Based on the analysis of waves of Russian disinformation, we provided recommendations for the audience on dealing with actual and potential propaganda messages.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

У статті викладено результати дослідження хвиль дезінформації — масованих потоків неправдивої інформації, що спрямовувалася на різні аудиторії під час російсько-української війни в період травня — липня 2022 р. з метою отримання певних комунікаційних ефектів (маніпулювання, введення в оману, залякування, деморалізація тощо). З'ясовано, що хвилі дезінформації характеризуються наративністю та інтенсивністю. На основі телеграм-статистики боту «Перевірка» організації Gwara Media сформовано вибірку найбільш резонансних повідомлень (298 одиниць), які підлягали неформалізованому (традиційному) аналізу документів, а також класифікації, наративному та порівняльному аналізу. Виявлено 24 основні хвилі дезінформації, з-поміж яких найпотужніші такі: 1) «ЗСУ й ті, хто на їхньому боці,— злочинці»; 2) «Україна програє війну»; 3) «Україна не потрібна Заходу як держава»; 4) «Україна — країна хаосу і радикалів». Зафіксовані хвилі засвідчують агресивність та різноспрямованість російської риторики, що спонукає до розвитку продуктивної системи інформаційної протидії в Україні та світі, а також розвитку медіаграмотності населення. На підставі аналізу хвиль російської дезінформації надано рекомендації для аудиторії щодо того, як взаємодіяти з реальними або потенційними повідомленнями пропаганди.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: гібридна війна, політичний дискурс, хвилі дезінформації, фейкові наративи.

Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February 2022 and became the greatest threat to humanity since World War II. Many world leaders gave this assessment to the events: "The war in Ukraine is the most dangerous period for Europe since the Second World War" (NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg); "This crisis is the closest to a nuclear disaster in the last sixty years" (US President Joe Biden); "this war shows the state of the world we are in... a dangerous time when the old stability is being called into question, and the new one has not yet arrived" (French President Emmanuel Macron).

At the same time, politicians, political experts, and communication experts emphasize that it is a hybrid war in which disinformation is used as a weapon. As a result, the boundaries between peace and war are erased through discourses, actual roles, facts, and meanings are distorted, and values are attacked.

According to our observations, disinformation spreads in themed message flows — waves. Therefore, understanding the origin and spread of disinformation waves is vital for international crisis management — for systematic prevention, countermeasures, and consistently expanding media criticality in various audiences.

This study aims to identify and describe the waves of disinformation in the period 01.05–31.07.22, which became the drivers of the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war.

Research objectives:

1) based on Telegram analytics of the fact-checking bot "Perevirka" - "Check" (Gwara Media) to identify massive themed flows of messages in the media discourse;

2) analyze the qualitative and quantitative parameters of the detected waves of disinformation;

3) articulate conclusions and develop recommendations for the audience.

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Literature review

The first theoretical pillar of our research is the theory of hybrid warfare.

Magda defines this phenomenon as follows: "Hybrid war is the desire of one state to impose its political will on another (others) through a complex of measures of a political, economic, informational nature and without declaring war in accordance with the norms of international law" (Magda, 2015, p. 4).

Hoffman, one of the founders of the theory of hybrid warfare, warned in 2007 about "unique combinations and hybrid threats": "Instead of separate opponents with fundamentally different approaches (traditional, irregular or terrorist), we can expect to face competitors, which will use all forms of warfare and tactics, perhaps simultaneously" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 7). The quoted work was about the USA, but the mentioned challenges were also faced by other countries worldwide, particularly Ukraine. Hoffman pointed out: in hybrid wars, military and non-military methods and means are used, and conventional forms of warfare are combined with criminal elements, terrorism, and the latest technologies.

Bachmann added that conflicts arise due to an "asymmetric situation/war" and are formed "with the use of digital communication technologies." At the same time, "the main purpose of protection is to preserve one's own sovereignty" (Bachmann, 2020).

Denning, a well-known expert in computer security, specifies the complex of cyber threats: "computer hacking, fraud, terrorism, espionage, piracy, theft of personal data" (Denning, 1988). All these are tools of hybrid warfare.

The hybrid war in Ukraine is already reflected in previous research. Pohl notes that in the digitalized world,

> authorship can be masked even better, and propaganda can be spread faster. It can take the form of disinformation, fake news, manipulation, and propaganda through social media/networks, hacking of critical infrastructure, or even cyberwarfare. The conflict in Ukraine is considered an example of a hybrid war par excellence since it is about the orchestration of different means (Pohl, 2022, p. 4).

The second theoretical pillar of our study is a subject-based investigation into the nature of disinformation. According to Kuklinski et al.,

> being misinformed differs from being uninformed when one has no factual beliefs about the topic under investigation. Therefore, misinformed people are firmly convinced that they fully comprehend a certain situation and at the same time are guided by false beliefs (Kuklinski et al., 2000, p. 792).

In our investigation, we support the concept of "post-truth." Lewandowsky and co-authors analyzed the origin of this phenomenon: "The post-truth world has emerged as a result of such social megatrends as the reduction of social capital, the growth of economic inequality, the strengthening of polarization, the decline of trust in science, and an increasingly fractionalized media landscape..." (Lewandowsky S. et al., 2017).

Jerit and Zhao, in their work "Political misinformation," distinguish disinformation from other forms — and not only from "misinformation" or "manipulation": "Disinformation differs from such pathologies as belief in rumors and conspiracy thinking" (Jerit & Zhao, 2020). Conspiracy theories explain political or historical events by referring to the 'craftiness of powerful people' (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009, p. 205; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2019). In the meantime, disinformation may elicit within a person, e.g., the desire to adhere to beliefs that correspond to his or her worldview (Kuklinski et al., 2000).

Notably, world elites have already recognized disinformation as a global threat. Thus, the mechanics of spreading disinformation became "one of the key topics of Davos-2021" (Gulievska & Adashis, 2021, p. 51).

The third theoretical pillar of our research is the theory of narrative (narratology). We are close to its "concept of plot and action, the figure of the narrator, the structure of the story," storytelling, in which "in the presence of an innumerable number of stories, all of them have a sufficiently established structure that can be modified in certain aspects" (Batsevych & Sazonova, 2020, p. 273).

Researchers emphasize the interpretability and ambiguity of the narrative. Lyotard writes with a certain bitterness: "Narratives are fables, myths, legends suitable only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to add a ray of light to this obscurantism with an attempt to civilize, enlighten, and develop" (Lyotard, 1995, p. 25). The wording is harsh, but it contains a valid conclusion about the "necessary" profanation of reality in narratives for their accessibility and digestibility.

In post-classical narratology, one of the central ones is the concept of "possible worlds" (Bell, 2019), which Bell, Alice, and Marie-Laure appeal to, particularly Ryan. They write about the nature of fiction as opposed to the real world.

No less attractive heuristic direction in modern narratology is also

> "mnemonic narrative" (mnemonic or memory narrative), which is understood as narrative texts united by the theme of memory or memories, which is used as a narrative strategy. Mnemonic narrative is constructed based on one's own experience and involves a subjective assessment of the events described by the narrator, a significant time distance between the events, and the moment of their fixation (Veshchykova, 2020, p. 26).

In recent years, Ukrainian and foreign scientists (Murray, Mansoor, Renz, Chivvis, Zykun, Parakhonskyi, Yavorska) have been investigating the use of narratives and hybrid warfare tools. Milchenko concluded about the logic of the spread of Russian narratives and the construction of propaganda discourse:

> The analysis of the Russian mass media … shows that the content of the narratives does not change, they do not disappear; on the contrary, they are supplemented with new messages to strengthen them, and the priority of messages also varies. This, in particular, happens when informational occasions inside our country allow propagandists to broadcast information that reinforces a certain Kremlin narrative. Moreover, if there is a lack of information sources, they are created by spreading false information (fakes) (Milchenko, 2021, p. 9).

Thus, foreign and Ukrainian researchers have already been studying the problem of disinformation (including narratives of Russian propaganda). At the same time, the wave-like nature of this propaganda, the spread of these waves through narratives, has yet to be investigated. This testifies to the innovative nature of the proposed intelligence. The available theoretical background makes it possible to analyze the collected empirical data and deepen the formed understanding of the disinformation dynamics in hybrid Russian aggression.

Method

The empirical research is based on the monitoring and analysis of media reports received by the fact-checking bot "Pereverika" (@perevir_bot) of the organization "Gwara Media" (https://gwaramedia.com/).

The organization's fact-checkers conducted the research: Tetiana Krainikova, Dasha Lobanok, Serhii Prokopenko, Oleksandr Tolmachov, Yuliana Topolnyk, Alesya Yashchenko (Tolmachov et al., 2022).

The period of media monitoring is three months, from 1 May to 31 July 2022.

The research was organized in three stages:

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1) We constructed a theoretical base at the conceptualization stage (January — April 2022). To this end, the primary research approaches were examined: the theory of hybrid war, the theory of discourse, and the theory of narrative. In addition, scientific views were to be compared and systematized.

At the conceptualization stage, the "Methodology of fact-checking in the editorial office of Gwara Media and the Verification bot" (Methodology of fact-checking, 2022) was also developed, while the Code and principles of the IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network, which is a division of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies) were taken as a guide.

2) In the period from 1 May to 31 July 2022, the "Perevirka" bot (@perevir_bot) received 16,598 requests to verify information from users; on average, 185 requests per day, with a peak daily load of 300–500 requests.

Based on fact-checking conclusions, the most popular and influential false materials were selected daily based on Telegram analytics. From them, selections of "Feikotnya" ("fake mass") were formed, which were published in the Gwara Media Telegram channel (https://t.me/gwaramedia).

Therefore, in the second stage of the research, we carried out media monitoring, collected empirical data, and established a list of the most vibrant pieces of content. Based on the monitoring, we put together a sample of media documents — a total of 298 items.

3) At the third research stage (August — September 2022), we analyzed collected data and revealed waves of disinformation. For this, the research team applied the methods of informal (traditional) document analysis and classification, narrative analysis, and comparative analysis.

A set of criteria has been developed for document examination:

- Main narratives;
- Audiences targeted by disinformation;
- Protagonists of propaganda stories;
- Dominant types of disinformation;
- People and organizations are the most active producers of false messages;
- Dynamics of disinformation;
- Expected effects that producers of disinformation tried to achieve.

The collected and analyzed data made it possible to draw conclusions. At the same time, we compared our data with the research data of the "Detector Media" (research of Telegram channels, January — August 2022) and the Institute of Mass Information (research of professional standards, July — September 2022).

Based on the study's results, we also developed recommendations for the audience regarding behavior in the conditions of the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war.

Results and Discussion

General characteristics of disinformation waves

The collected data and its analysis proved that disinformation spreads through waves — intensified false messages directed at different audiences to achieve specific communication effects (misleading, manipulation, intimidation, demoralization).

Waves of disinformation have two main characteristics:

1) narrative — waves are formed from purposefully broadcasted messages that thematically focus on particular topics/stories/characters and form a current agenda for the audience, and thus a general picture of the world;

2) intensity — the power of the waves depends on the number of messages of similar or compatible content distributed by various media and the coverage and ratings of the specific media.

To understand the nature and dynamics of disinformation, we focused on relevant qualitative and quantitative characteristics. We emphasize that specific analyzed messages are carriers of not one but several narratives, and these narratives have different intensities, coexisting and reinforcing each other. In addition, the narratives acquire certain thematic accents — we tried to capture them while monitoring the intensity.

During the analysis of 298 sample units, 24 significant disinformation waves were revealed:

1) "The Armed Forces of Ukraine and those who back them are criminals";
2) "Ukraine will lose the war";
3) "Ukraine is not needed by the West as a state";
4) "Ukraine is a country of chaos and extremists";
5) "Russia wants peace / Putin will liberate everyone";
6) "There is reason to fear for your children";
7) "Ukraine is a mess";
8) "The West is an enemy that wants to destroy Russia";
9) "Ukrainian authorities do not care about the citizens who remained in the temporarily occupied territories";
10) "Ukrainian authorities do not need their own citizens; they are like cannon fodder";
11) "Nazis are in power in Ukraine and pro-government structures";
12) "NATO is fighting in Ukraine";
13) "Russophobic Ukraine";
14) "People abroad support the Russian Federation, although their authorities are against it";
15) "The Armed Forces of Ukraine is only a proxy army used for war; the West supplies weapons to Ukraine in order to prolong the conflict";
16) "The West/USA does not trust the government of Ukraine";
17) "Ukrainians do not know how to handle weapons/The Army of Ukraine is not capable of fighting";
18) "AZOV are Nazis";
19) "Ukrainians need a new government";
20) "Sanctions do not function";
21) "Ukrainian government makes money from the war";
22) "To finish the war, Ukraine must cede its territories";
23) "If Russia had not started a special operation, Ukraine would have attacked first";
24) "Legitimization of L/DNR".

Disinformation was spread primarily through Internet platforms and television (TASS, RIA Novosti, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Izvestia, Vzglyad, RBC, NTV, Zvezda, website of the Russian Orthodox Church). Social media, in particular Telegram channels, played the role of the most active "ventilators" that spread waves of disinformation. However, propaganda did not abandon the form of a traditional printed newspaper for a loyal audience.

Information waves as carriers of narratives

Groups of narratives. The identified waves of disinformation are ideologically and thematically grouped into four groups of narratives:

1) military-strategic: "Ukraine will lose the war," "If Russia had not launched a special operation, Ukraine would have attacked first," "AZOV are Nazis";

2) political: "Russia wants peace / Putin will liberate everyone," "The West does not need Ukraine as a state," "People abroad support the Russian Federation, although their authorities are against it," "In order to end the war, Ukraine must cede its territories";

3) socio-economic: "Sanctions do not function," "Ukrainian authorities do not take care of citizens who remained in the temporarily occupied territories";

4) cultural: "Russophobic Ukraine" and others.

Narrative analysis confirms Russian rhetoric's aggressiveness, manifested in military-strategic and political narratives. The leadership of the Russian Federation does not demonstrate

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readiness for political dialogue and constructive cooperation. Russia is not interested in diplomacy but in war and establishing a new model of the world order centered in Moscow. At the same time, Moscow's rhetoric ranges from a "special operation" to a systemic conflict with the West. In addition, Russian propagandists are nostalgic for the USSR, trying to resuscitate it in the new "Greater Russia" model.

Social narratives are thematically focused. They relate to creating a depressed image of Ukraine as a failed state (inability to earn money to provide oneself and one's family with basic resources). Moreover, one of them concerns extremely sensitive realities — children and parenthood; here, disinformation reveals its cynical essence in an obvious way: under the shell of care, propagandists sew up messages which generate fear, panic, readiness to act rashly and to the detriment of one's children.

On the one hand, the cultural narratives of Russian propaganda are associated with the traditional mantra of Nazi policy, the persecution of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine. However, on the other hand, they aimed to contrast the "Russian world" with the Western world, which, they say, imposes its values on everyone.

Protagonists of propaganda stories. In 61% of cases, Ukrainian military personnel, state, and political figures (Volodymyr Zelenskyi, Kolomoiskyi, Stefanchuk, Bakanov, Venediktova, Medvedchuk, Poroshenko), state institutions (Ukraine's Ministry of Defence, State Migration Service, Ukrposhta – state post service, Vinnytsia Blood Transfusion Center), financial institutions became the protagonists of disinformation in 61% of cases and commercial companies (PrivatBank, Zaporizhzhia Oblenergo), charitable foundations, volunteer organizations and volunteers (Charity Fund of Sergii Prytula). Images of historical and cultural figures (Bandera, Petliura, Khrushchev, Taras Shevchenko) were also involved; new ones were created (Banderomobile).

Ukraine's Western partners are in second place (16%). Among them are famous politicians (President of France Macron, President of Poland Duda), experts – "friends of Putin" (Frank Cohen), and ordinary citizens.

The heroes of 13% of the messages were Russian state and political figures (Zhyrinovsky, Putin, Lavrov, Shoigu, Leonidchenko), representatives of show business (Gazmanov), children of Russian officials, and ordinary citizens (a resident of Pskov). In addition, Russian armed formations (Russian special services, the army of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, Belarusian saboteurs).

Among the heroes of the propaganda stories are also citizens and politicians of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (leaders of the L/DNR, collaborators, the occupation authorities of Kherson, Volodymyr Rogov and Oleksiy Chernyak).

Messages (approximately 4%) focused on foreign armed units fighting on the territory of Ukraine (Belorussian Kalynovsky regiment, Georgian Legion, Libyan terrorists, mobilized Hungarians) were also discovered.

Dominant types of disinformation. A variety of forms characterize disinformation. Including:

• denial of the truth — statement of disagreement with someone or something, refusing to admit facts.

• fake — wholly fabricated, misleading, often sensational, emotionally charged information.

• manipulation — directed distribution of wholly or partially false data, which purposefully forms the desired opinion of the audience, inclines the audience to one's side, and programs the expected reactions in the audience.

• provocation — deliberate actions against individuals, organizations, and states aimed at pushing them into decisions and actions harmful to them.

• labeling, stereotypic judgments — the spread of simplified, established, often exaggerated, or one-sided ideas that do not stem from one's own experience.

• fraud/cybercrime — cunning deception aimed at obtaining some benefit, for example, misappropriation of funds.

Audiences targeted by disinformation. Disinformation is very resilient in terms of audience setting. Producers targeted it both precisely (e.g., local audiences) and broadly (national target audience, global TA); also combined different settings (e.g., Russian and Moldovan TA).

In addition, the cases were identified that were aimed at several audiences at once, e.g., Russian and Ukrainian at the same time. Thus, the report about the "successes" of the Russian army implies the elevation of the spirit of the Russian TA and the demoralization of the Ukrainian one.

Most of the disinformation was directed at different segments and combinations of segments of the Ukrainian audience. Moreover, the narrow targeting of messages was adjusted according to various criteria: geographically — residents of specific regions (primarily Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia regions); gender (male/female); professional field or interests (e.g., an audience interested in cultural issues).

The programmed effects that the disinformation producers were trying to achieve. Disinformation was spread to achieve several effects in different audiences (domestic Russian TA, Ukrainian mass and local TA, and international TA). At the same time, the expected results were diverse, depending on the specifics of the audience segment.

For the Russian audience, disinformation aimed at achieving the following effects:

1) glorification of the Russian military, which commits crimes in Ukraine;

2) support of the Russian Federation's military-political leadership and the tasks of "special operations" (demilitarization, denazification, change of the country's leadership).

Ironically, Russian propaganda interprets the situation so that Russia is the victim of Ukraine and the West's encroachments.

For the Ukrainian audience, disinformation was aimed at achieving the following effects:

1) spread of fears, panic moods;

2) mistrust, anger at the Ukrainian authorities, discord, and disputes in society;

3) uncertainty about the future, inability to support a family;

4) consumer panic;

5) disorientation, inability to separate truth from fiction, the spread of useless expectations, rumors, and gossip;

6) moral support and motivation of Ukrainians (a case of Ukrainian disinformation).

In the international arena, disinformation was aimed at producing the following effects:

1) self-affirmation of the Russian Federation as a major political player, a nuclear superpower;

2) generation of international hatred and conflicts.

The intensity of disinformation waves

Powerful waves of disinformation

The most powerful waves were found in 142 false reports that spread four main narratives (see Figure 1):

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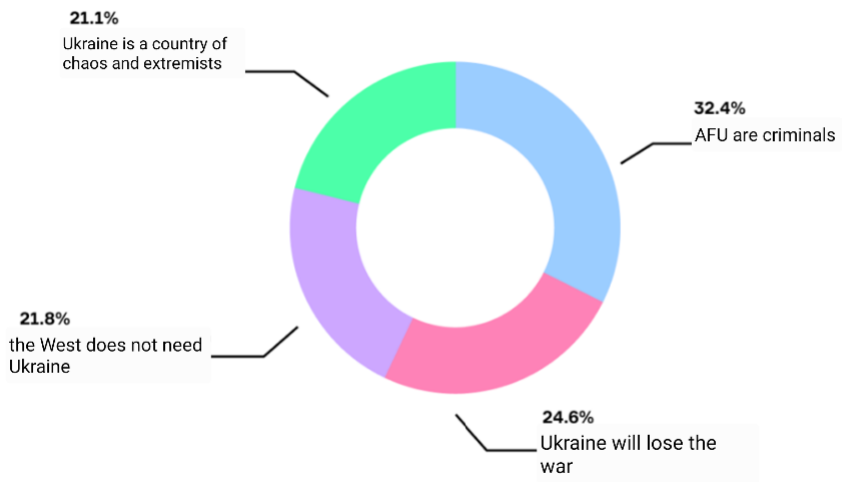

Figure 1. Powerful waves of disinformation.

The most powerful waves of disinformation during May — July 2022 aimed to create an image of Ukraine as "a country that has historically failed and has already lost." At the same time, Russian propagandists emphasized real and imagined difficulties in the military, political, economic, and other spheres.

A separate stream of disinformation is devoted to the Ukrainian military-political leadership, which is depicted as incompetent, corrupt, Nazi-like, and dependent on the West. In particular, in 10% of the analyzed texts, disinformation personally affects the figure of the President of Ukraine. The logic of coverage leads to a prepared, in advance conclusion about the need for a change of power in Kyiv, and it is emphasized that this is precisely what the Ukrainian people want.

Throughout the analyzed period, there was a powerful wave of disinformation aimed at discrediting the Armed Forces of Ukraine by demonizing the fighters of the Azov Regiment. The propaganda image is highly ambiguous and contradictory. On the one hand, the Ukrainian military is depicted as "criminals, punishers, militants, terrorists/bioterrorists, Banderivtsi / Nazis / neo-Nazis" and, on the other — as weak and inept losers. The thesis that the Ukrainian military is "drug addicts" and "cannibals" also reinforces entirely negative connotations.

Quantitative analysis has shown that powerful waves of disinformation have stability. For example, figure 2 demonstrates that the messages we selected for analysis were distributed consistently throughout the study period — May, June, and July.

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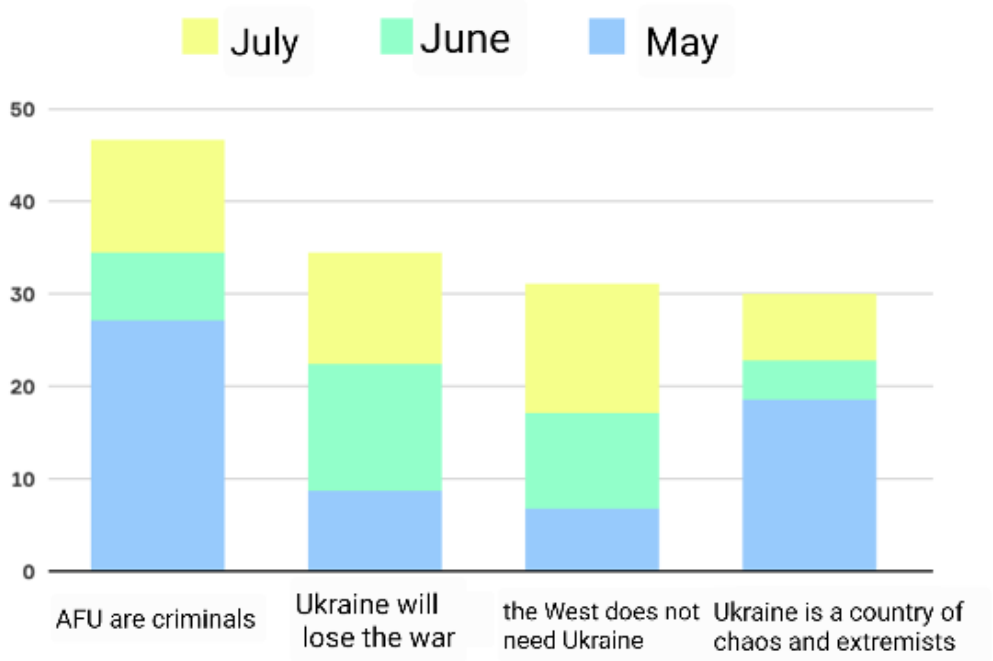

Figure 2. Persistence of powerful waves of disinformation during the monitoring period.

Medium waves of disinformation

Medium waves of disinformation are associated with 12 narratives implemented in 124 texts (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Medium waves of misinformation.*

Russia wants peace / Putin will liberate everyone	19
panic	16
Ukraine is a mess	15
The West is an enemy that wants to destroy Russia	11
Ukrainian authorities do not care about the citizens who remained in the temporarily occupied territories	10
Ukrainian authorities do not need their own citizens; they are like cannon fodder	10
Nazis are in power in Ukraine, and pro-government structures	9
NATO is fighting in Ukraine	8
Russophobic Ukraine	7
People abroad support the Russian Federation, although their authorities are against it	7
The Armed Forces of Ukraine is only a proxy army used for war; the West supplies weapons to Ukraine in order to prolong the conflict	6
The West/USA does not trust the government of Ukraine	6

One of the powerful waves noted above aimed to discredit the AFU soldiers. The opposite wave was made up of massive messages related to the glorification of the Russian military-political leadership and the Russian army. “Russian soldiers are liberating Donbas, Kherson

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Oblast, Zaporizhzhia region," "Russians have defeated German Nazism — they will overcome Ukrainian Nazism as well," and "Russians voluntarily concede in some situations in order to bring peace closer" — these are the main messages of this wave.

A noticeable wave of disinformation justifies the "special operation": "If Russia had not started a special operation, then Ukraine would have attacked." Under this narrative, the propagandists used a complex of fabricated documents that "attest" the aggressive plans of the Ukrainian military-political leadership, which prompted the Russians to "save Donbas from attack" and not only Donbas.

A powerful wave of disinformation became a wave of fakes about Ukrainian refugees who "do not want to work," "fight on the streets of European capitals," "arrange noisy rallies," and "burn down the homes of Germans." This unattractive image is expressed visually — "photos from the scene of events" and "eyewitness video."

Tangent to the previous one was the wave about the "tiredness of the West from Ukraine," and this "tiredness" is also felt by politicians ("It makes no sense to provide weapons to Ukraine — Russian soldiers are destroying it," "War for Europe is expensive," "Ukraine must capitulate for the sake of peace"), and ordinary citizens ("People abroad support the Russian Federation, although their authorities are against it," "Ukrainians are not allowed in shops in Prague," "In fact, the USA is not ready to support Ukraine").

Point waves of disinformation

In 32 messages received for fact-checking, we recorded 8-point waves of information. They are associated with the least persistent and thematically narrower messages (see Figure 3).

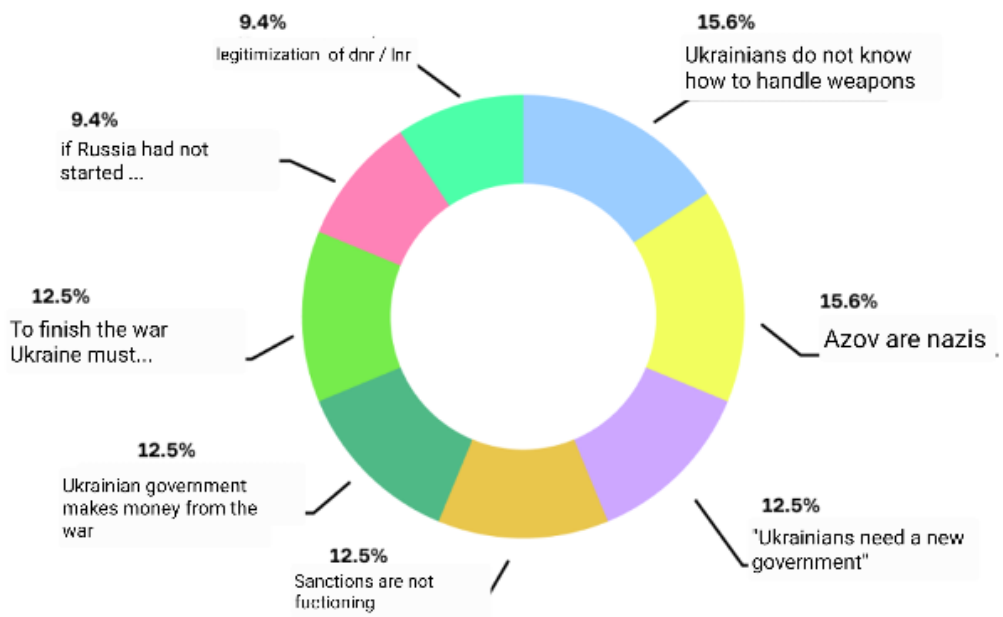

Figure 3. Point waves of disinformation.

An intriguing phenomenon was a wave of reports about the Russian president's allegedly severe illness and possible death, apparently separate but firmly embedded in the propaganda content plan. It ended with the sacramental "you will wait for it forever," which clearly reveals the purpose of such messages — to disappoint and demoralize the Ukrainian audience. A wave of social narratives aimed at a similar effect: "Ukrainians are losing their jobs," "Unemployment, hunger, and poverty await Ukrainians," and "Children in Ukraine and in the West are in danger."

A separate wave of disinformation is associated with the opposition "Russia-Western Civilization," "Russia-USA," "Russia-NATO," and the like. The propagandists specifically focused on Poland ("Poland wants to seize western Ukrainian lands"), Moldova ("Moldova's problems are due to Ukraine"), Lithuania ("A Polish-Lithuanian military contingent will be introduced into Ukraine," "Lithuania wants to annex Kaliningrad"). In this wave, experts — "friends of Putin" and "friendly" Western media became active producers of false reports. At the same time, a complex of techniques aimed at manipulating the public opinion of domestic Russian, Ukrainian (from national to local), and global world audiences was used. Taking words out of context, twisting, hiding/adding specific facts enabled propagandists to interpret the events of the analyzed period in a favorable context.

Recommendations for the audience

The results of the monitoring study of disinformation waves for the period May — July 2022 encourage us to provide the audience with the following recommendations:

1) Realize that there is a physical and a media reality. Unfortunately, they are not always congruent. After all, some people and organizations want to create a media quasi-reality and control the masses. This is how the propaganda in the Russian Federation works – as an element of a large-scale and prolonged hybrid war against Ukraine.

2) Focus on official sources. It is advisable to obtain reliable information about the government's position from official websites and verified pages in the social media of national and local authorities.

3) Learn about events not from a single mass media but from several different ones. This will allow us to see events from different angles and compare interpretations. According to the Institute of Mass Information (https://imi.org.ua/), we recommend resources for reading that have a good reputation: "Suspilne," "Hromadske," "Liga," "Ukrainian Pravda," Ukrinform, "Radio Liberty," "Dzerkalo Tyzhnia," "Babel," NV.

4) Avoid toxic Telegram channels and other projects in social media. Among them: "Legitimny," "Black quarter," "Kherson Live," "Rebel," "Onion UA," "ZeRada," "Whisperer UA Ukraine War," "Nablyudatel," "Woman with a Scythe," "Ukrainian format," "Ukraine. Special operation, Monitoring", "KhtoSho." Recognize toxic projects in social media by the following cues: salient ideological accent; sensational, stressful headlines; lack of references to sources or strong doubts in the reliability of cited sources; the presence of manipulative evaluative judgments and ready-made conclusions in the texts; spread of panic moods, etc.

5) Accept messages about "exact coordinates of missile strikes," "offensive from Belarus," etc., without panic. The threat exists — that is right. Nevertheless, the primary guideline for actions is observing information from official sources.

Conclusions

Waves of disinformation are massive flows of false messages aimed at different audiences to obtain specific communication effects (misleading, manipulation, intimidation, demoralization, etc.).

Waves of disinformation have two main characteristics: content quality (thematization, focus on certain protagonists, genre forms, and data formats) and intensity (massiveness of messages).

From 1 May to 31 July 2022, the fact-checking bot "Perevirka" detected 24 central information waves, among them powerful, medium, and spot waves. Disinformation was generated primarily by professional internet platforms and television (TASS, RIA Novosti, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Izvestia, Vzglyad, RBC, NTV, Zvezda, the website of the Russian Orthodox Church). On the other hand, social media, in particular Telegram channels, played the role of the most active "ventilators" that spread waves of disinformation.

False messages were directed at different target audiences (internal - external, Ukrainian - Russian - Western, national - local), trying to achieve programmed effects (manipulation, misleading, intimidation, demoralization).

Waves of disinformation carried narratives actively promoted by their producers. Four groups of narratives were identified: 1) military-strategic; 2) political; 3) socio-economic; 4) cultural. Such a complex of narratives proves that the modern hybrid war takes place simultaneously in different social domains, and its massive course is reflected in the information field.

An analysis of disinformation waves for May — July 2022 proves that Russia is destabilizing the world order and routinizing military conflict in Ukraine. Moreover, Russian rhetoric currently does not give reason to hope for a peaceful settlement shortly and encourages the intensive development of strategic communications.

At the same time, we consider it particularly important to preserve Ukrainian identity through knowledge of national history, language, culture, and the development of civil society and democracy. Equally important are information countermeasures, rapid response to information leaks, tracking the appearance of specific narratives and media characters, and the targeted formation of media literacy among the population in Ukraine.

Further monitoring of disinformation waves will provide more context for conclusions about stability, dynamics, and their transformations, contributing to developing global and local counter-reactions models.

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