CENTER FOR COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

Prepared with the support of EUAM Ukraine



Weapons of Information Warfare

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Introduction

Wars of the 21st century are waged not only on the battlefield but also in the media, social media, cultural institutions, and narratives about history. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has become yet another confirmation of this fact. Today, our country is caught in the middle of a global information confrontation, where the adversary employs a wide range of destructive information influences to undermine trust in state institutions, distort reality, and alter the behavioural patterns of the audience. Daily attacks aiming to destabilise society, discredit international support, and demoralise citizens are part of a global hybrid war that seeks to weaken Ukraine, divide society, and undermine its stance on the international stage. Millions of Ukrainians face the consequences of this information terror campaign every day.

This guide is not just a guide, it is a practical tool that systematises the key methods used in the information war against Ukraine. It examines **the mechanisms** that determine how manipulative content is created and disseminated, **the tactics** that influence the perception of information and change the audience's behaviour, and **the soft power tools** that Russia uses to control public opinion through culture, education, sports, and church activities. Based on real-life examples, the guide demonstrates the manifestations of Russian information aggression and describes ways to neutralise it.

Overall, this publication is intended to help information security professionals, journalists, civil servants, and all those combating Russian disinformation to understand the principles of information attacks, their impact, and ways to counteract them.

For a long time, Russia has been acting systematically and cynically, adapting its approaches to changes in the world order, technological development, and the international community response. That is why our response must be equally flexible, proactive, and based on a deep understanding of informational threats. Ukraine is fighting not only for its territory but also for the right to tell the truth. In this fight, we cannot allow the enemy to control our reality.

Head of the Center for Countering Disinformation
of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine
Andrii KOVALENKO

Mechanisms of destructive information influence

They determine the technical and structural aspects of creating, manipulating, and disseminating content. They form the basis of a manipulative campaign, ensuring its large scale and efficiency. They include both technology and structural techniques. These mechanisms create the illusion of legitimacy for manipulations, enhance their impact, and facilitate their spread across the audiences.



** The translation of the accompanying materials was done using software*

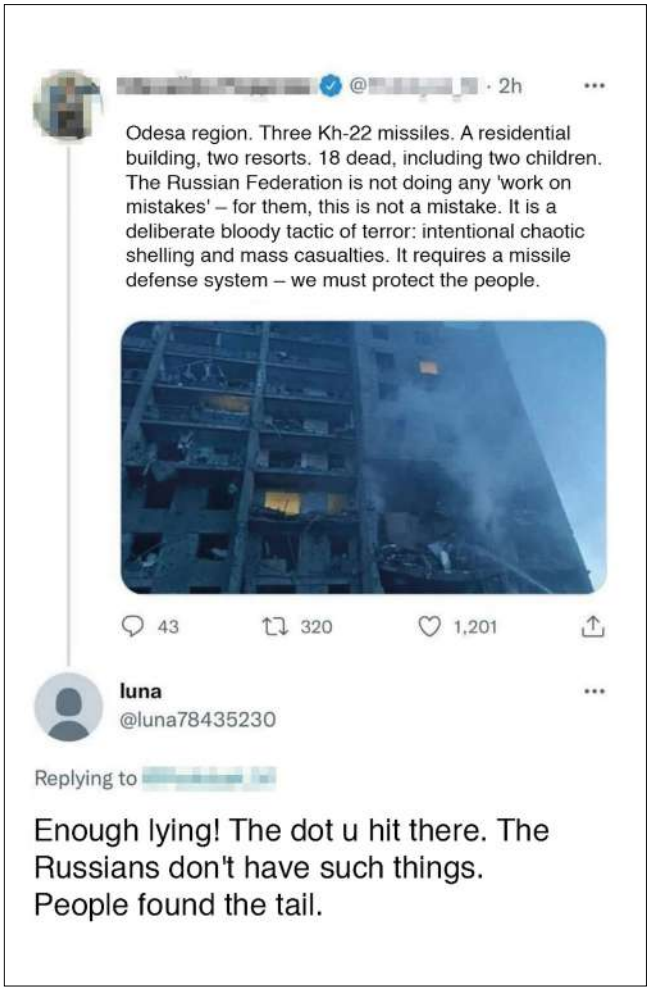
Bots

What is it?

This is a mechanism of destructive information influence involving special software that allows actions to be performed automatically and/or according to a pre-set schedule through the interfaces used by regular users, thus mimicking them. For instance, scripted comments can be automatically disseminated or generated according to pre-set parameters.

How does it work?

Bots automatically disseminate information on a large scale, mimicking the activity of real users. They act individually or as networks, artificially creating the illusion of mass support or opposition. By spamming, influencing algorithms, and attacking opponents, bot networks quickly change the information agenda, thus reinforcing the desired narratives.



How to identify it?

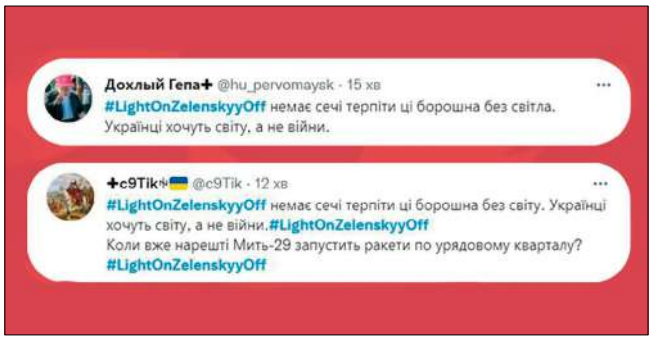
Bots can be identified by their anomalous behaviour: hyperactivity (hundreds of posts in a short time), repetitive comments, or out-of-context responses. These are usually recently created accounts without photos and biographies or with generic names. Their content mostly comes from dubious sources and is often duplicated across several accounts. You can use specialised software (such as Botometer) to analyse bot networks. It detects the interconnections between suspicious accounts.

How to deal with it?

Bots can be detected and blocked using software or manual analysis. Make sure you inform the audience about the risks of misinformation and ways to recognise bots. Reporting suspicious activity to platforms and implementing legislative measures that regulate automated activities is very important.

What does it look like?

Bots often have lazy names (like user123456), lack personalised content, and generate identical texts. On X (Twitter), this may take the form of mass retweets, while on Facebook, it manifests as identical comments, such as 'This is true, see [*https://images.app.goo.gl/rJDxTt2bBd3PRHoS9*]'. Bot networks operate in a coordinated manner, creating the illusion of mass support or popularity of the content, or conversely, discrediting it.



**There is no correct translation into English, as there is a wordplay between Russian and Ukrainian in the compressed text*

Fake accounts

What is it?

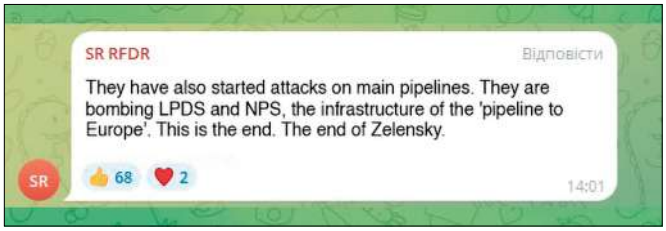
A mechanism of destructive information influence involving a fake account, created by an anonymous person to impersonate a real user to manipulate the public opinion or participate in discussions. Its primary function is to create the illusion of mass support or opposition to certain ideas, while concealing the true identity and motives of the author. Unlike bots, which are automated, a fake account is managed by a human, giving it more flexibility in manipulative behaviour.

How does it work?

A fake account actively participates in discussions and spreads manipulative content. Often, a single anonymous person creates multiple accounts that interact with each other: for example, they support each other in comments, like each other's posts or engage in a dialogue to make it seem like genuine support. Fake accounts can be used to attack opponents, discredit certain individuals or ideas, or to bolster the promoted narrative. Their activities are often coordinated to ensure greater impact and synchronised actions.

How to identify it?

A fake account can be identified by a number of signs, including unnatural behaviour. Such an account often features narrowly focused activity, concentrated on specific topics or campaigns. In most cases, it offers little profile content, has a generic photo, and lacks personal information. The activity of such an account is unnatural: for example, it is active only in discussions on a specific topic, or the account acts in sync with others, spreading identical messages. Interaction between fake accounts is often aimed at artificially amplifying the same message.

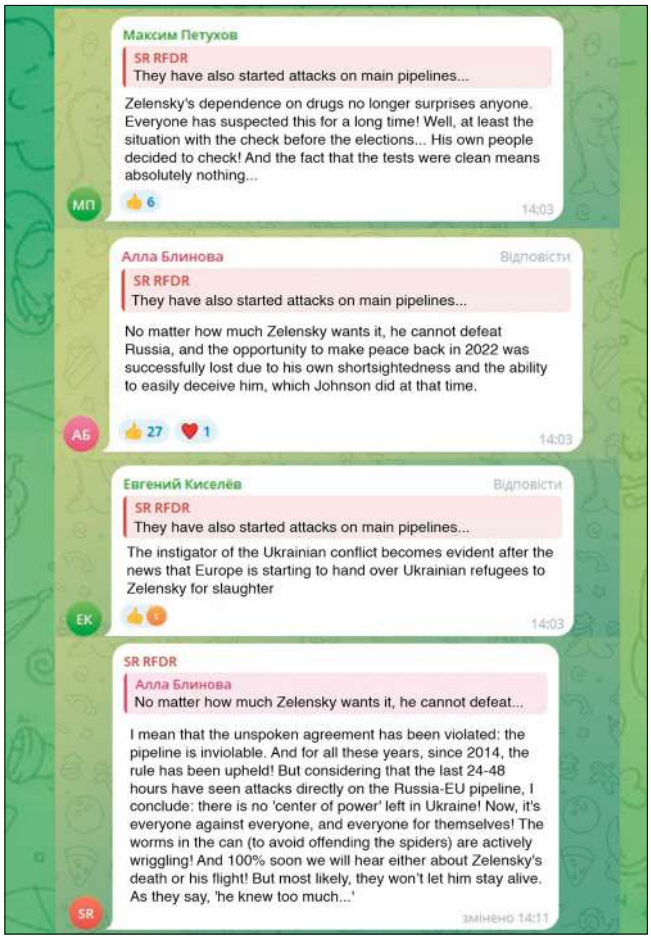


How to deal with it?

Firstly, pay attention to suspicious profiles, check their content, interactions, and when the accounts were created. When your suspicion is confirmed, notify the platform administration that they should verify and block such accounts. It is also important to educate the public on how to spot such manipulation by explaining the risks of fake activity and how to detect it. Account behaviour analysis tools, such as network activity analysis, can be very helpful in this process.

What does it look like?

A fake account looks like a real one, but its personalisation is very limited: a generic profile picture, a poor description, and a negligible number of posts or interactions outside the given topic. On Facebook or Telegram, they often show up in the comments under popular posts, comment to support or discredit a certain narrative, or provoke a destructive dialogue.



Anonymous authority

What is it?

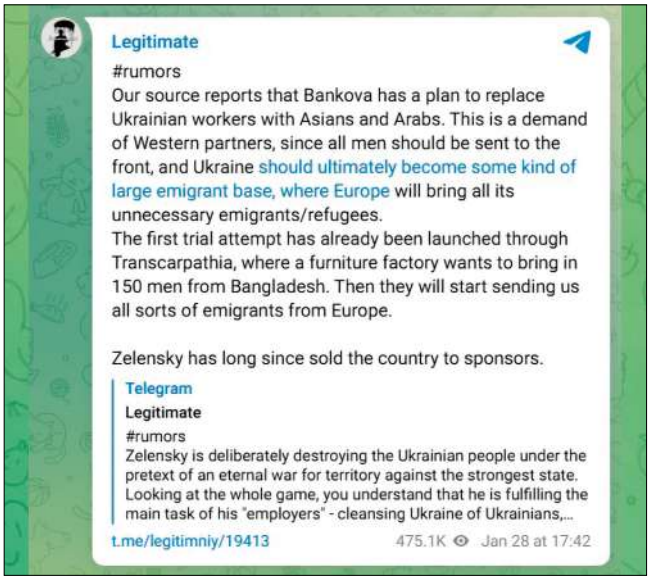
A mechanism of destructive information influence that involves referencing an unnamed source of information which is nonetheless presented as authoritative. Referencing 'anonymous experts' or 'sources with knowledge of the matter' creates an illusion of credibility, allowing the manipulator to avoid verification or taking responsibility for the validity of the statements.

How does it work?

The mechanism invokes an imaginary or fictional source that the audience cannot verify. For example, the influencer claims that 'experts report' or 'according to our sources in [name of the government authority]', without providing details. This technique inspires trust by referencing a supposedly authoritative opinion, even if its credibility is not verified. This allows for the dissemination of manipulative narratives, instilling a false confidence in the audience regarding the truthfulness of the information.

How to identify it?

An anonymous authority can be identified by the lack of details in the text. References to 'sources close to the situation' or 'experts' often use language that emphasises the exclusive nature of this information. If the source cannot be verified and additional evidence is absent, manipulation is highly likely. It is also worth paying attention to whether it is possible to verify the information provided through other independent sources.



How to deal with it?

Counteraction involves critical analysis and questioning of such statements. The absence of specific evidence should raise doubts. Be sure to verify information through other sources or request confirmations. Educating the public on recognising such manipulations and not taking statements at face value without specific evidence is very important.

What does it look like?

It includes pieces containing phrases like: 'An official who wished to remain anonymous claims that the government is preparing significant changes...' or 'According to our sources in...' These statements do not allow for verification due to the lack of specific names or details, creating an illusion of truthfulness and misleading the public.



Appeal to authority

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence that involves presenting information as truthful solely because it was voiced by an influential or popular person, organisation or media, even if they are not actually experts in the specified field. Using authoritative figures or organisations as evidence allows the manipulator to bypass the need for fact-based arguments.

How does it work?

The mechanism relies on the audience's trust in well-known individuals, organisations, or media to lend weight to a particular statement. For example, if a celebrity or politician supports a certain idea, people may perceive it as true, regardless of actual evidence. This technique is often used in media, advertising, or political campaigns when the position of an 'authority' serves as the sole argument in favour of a statement.

How to identify it?

This mechanism can be recognised by statements that are based not on facts, but solely on the status of the person making them. For example, '[Famous actor] states that this drug is effective' or 'The award winner supported this political initiative'. If there is a lack of specific evidence or expert opinion, and the only argument is a person's popularity, the credibility of such information should be questioned.

How to deal with it?

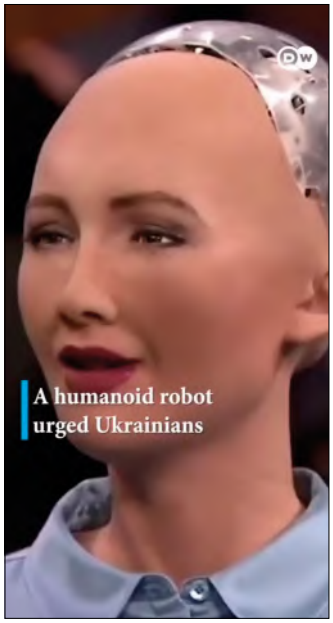
To avoid falling under the influence of this mechanism, assess the person's competence in the relevant field and verify whether their statements are supported by facts. Pay attention to actual arguments, rather than the status of the person voicing them. Critical source analysis helps to avoid erroneous conclusions based solely on the speaker's reputation.

What does it look like?

Examples include short videos branded by popular media and targeted at certain audiences using social media. In these cases, the brand strength is used to promote the desired ideas or narratives. This creates the impression of credibility, although it may lack solid footing in reality.









Deepfakes

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving AI-based image synthesis techniques to replace individual elements of an image with desired ones, thereby generating fake audiovisual content.

How does it work?

To create deepfakes, AI deep learning algorithms are used to analyse video and audio data to mimic a person's voice or appearance. For example, software can replace a face in a video or synthesise a voice to make it seem as if a person is saying things they never actually said.

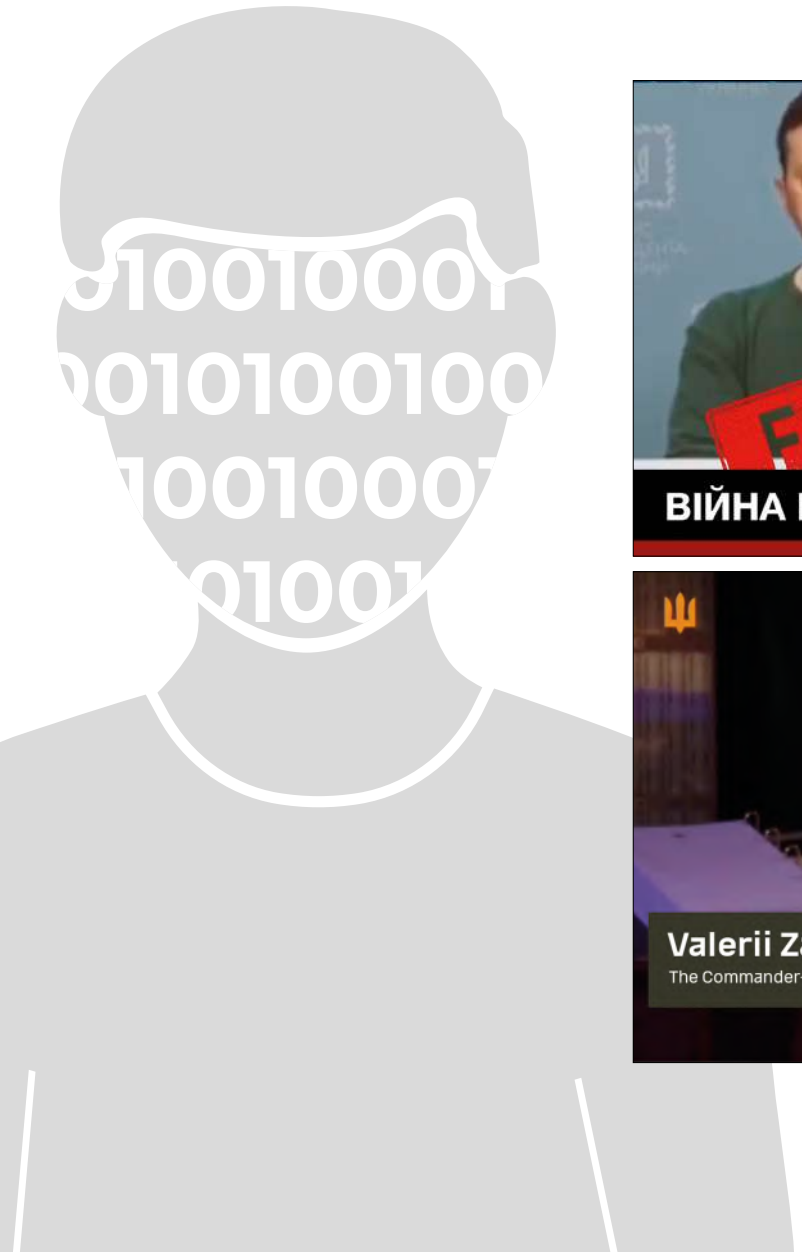
How to identify it?

Deepfakes can be identified by visual and audio defects. Videos may exhibit unnatural lip movements, blurring of the face at the edges, incorrect facial expressions, or issues with shadow and lighting reproduction. As for audios, the voice may sound unnatural or feature a choppy rhythm.

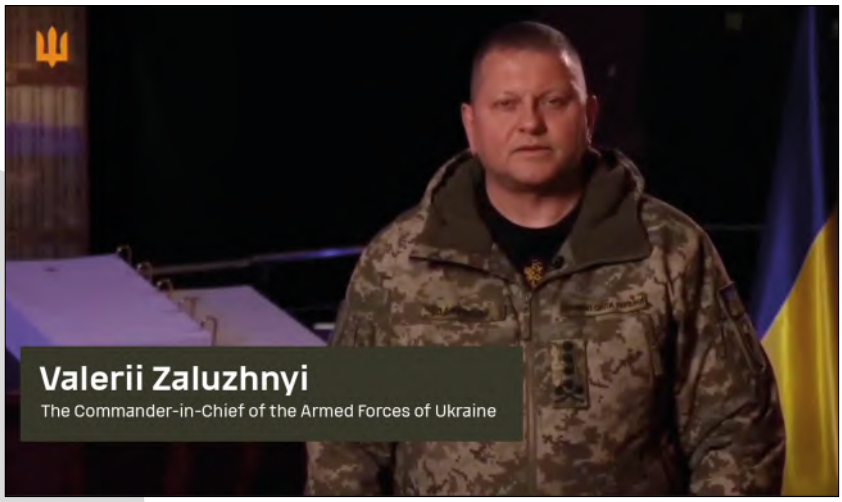
How to deal with it?

To combat deepfakes, verify the original source of the content, compare the video or audio with official sources, and use deepfake detection solutions, such as Deepware Scanner. Information literacy and learning critical video and audio analysis help reduce trust in potentially fake content.

What does it look like?







Potemkin villages

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence that creates an illusion of success, well-being, or progress, while concealing the real state of affairs. It is essentially about demonstrating showcase, fabricated achievements for an external observer, while behind the facade, the situation is dramatically different.

How does it work?

This mechanism operates by creating a false visual or informational picture that distracts the audience's attention from the true state of affairs. For example, state propaganda may showcase exemplary facilities that radiate success, even though they actually barely function or do not function at all. Usually, the mechanism relies on 'properly' edited videos, staged photos, or exaggerated results.

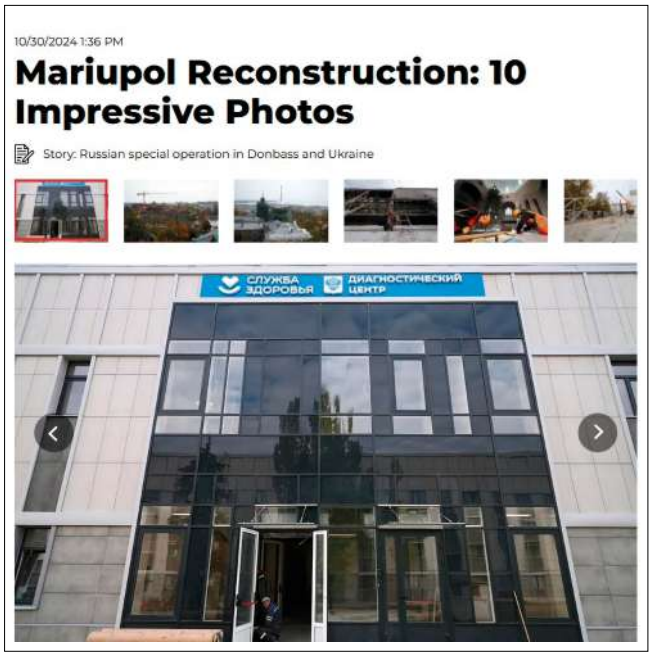
How to identify it?

This mechanism can be recognised by the discrepancies between the official statements and facts. Look out for the lack of independent verification of claimed achievements, the use of selective footage, or the emphasis on external attributes without detailing the underlying processes. These manipulations are often accompanied by loud statements about 'historical success', while evidence of their actual achievement is either absent or contradictory.

How to deal with it?

To counteract, it is important to verify information using independent sources, analyse the real consequences of the stated initiatives, and compare the official version with objective data. Fact-checking, analysis of satellite images, or direct testimonies from people involved can help expose such manipulations.

What does it look like?







Duplicating websites or accounts

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving copies of real websites or social media profiles to deceive users. Its primary goal is to misinform the audience by presenting a fake resource as a real one, manipulate public opinion, or use fake accounts for attacks, fraud, or sharing propaganda.

How does it work?

Duplicate websites disguise themselves as real sources of information by using the identity of the latter, such as logos, names, or overall design. They may post fake news, manipulative content, or disinformation, which, due to its visual presentation, the audience perceives as coming from a reliable source. On social media, duplicate accounts can impersonate real individuals or organisations, influencing public opinion, disseminating fakes, or engaging in discussions to establish manipulative narratives.

How to identify it?

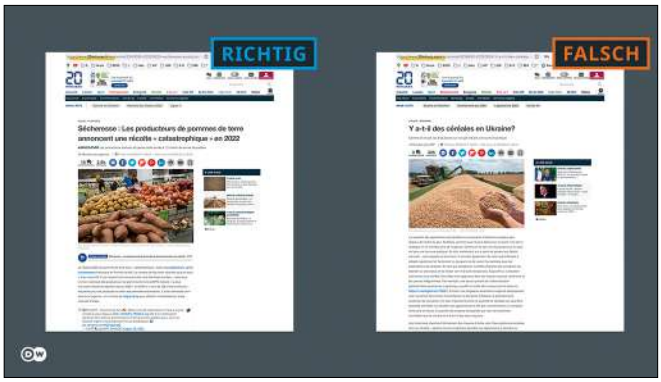
Minor differences in the name, URL, or visual design can help identify a duplicate account or website. Newly created accounts that suddenly gain many followers or start sharing dubious content should be treated as suspicious. In the case of websites, it is worth checking the domain name: fake resources often contain additional characters in their addresses or use variations of the real address. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to the delivery style and content quality.

How to deal with it?

To avoid falling under the influence of this mechanism, verify the source of information, use official websites and profiles, and pay attention to domain names. Upon detecting a fake account or website, report to the platform administration or the relevant authorities.

What does it look like?





Framing

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence that presents information about events or facts in a certain context that alters their perception by the audience. Various frames allow emphasising the desired aspects of an event, eliciting the necessary emotions and reactions.

How does it work?

Framing operates through the selection of words, images, and context that shapes the desired perception. For example, economic difficulties can be presented as a 'crisis' or as 'temporary difficulties on the path to stability'. In politics, this mechanism is often used to justify certain actions or to discredit opponents. Shifting the emphasis allows for controlling the narrative without changing the facts. The only thing that changes is their interpretation.

How to identify it?

Framing can be recognised by value judgments, emotionally charged language, and contrasting comparisons. If the same event is described differently in various sources, it is worth analysing which aspects are highlighted and which are omitted. Signs of framing also include highlighting advantageous points and concealing inconvenient details.

How to deal with it?

To counter framing, analyse information from multiple sources, comparing how the same event is presented in them. Make sure you pay attention to the wording and key emphases in the text. Critical thinking helps avoid manipulative influences and look at the events through the prism of emotions, as well as analyse facts.

What does it look like?

In the media, framing often manifests through headlines: 'Reform to destroy the economy' or 'A new stage in the development of the financial system' – depending on the impression they want the reader to have. An example of this mechanism is how Russian propaganda media outlets frame Russia's war against Ukraine in a way that distorts the truth to align with a narrative benefitting Russian aggression.

'invasion'	→	**'peacekeeping mission'**
'war'	→	**'special military operation'**
'explosion'	→	**'pop'**
'occupation of Ukrainian territories'	→	**'reunification'**
'allied military aid to Ukraine'	→	**'conflict escalation'**
'sanctions'	→	**'unfriendly actions'**
'economic downturn'	→	**'adaptation to new realities'**

Information overload

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving an excessive amount of data, news reports, or contradictory messages to complicate the critical analysis of a situation. Its purpose is to make the audience lose the ability to distinguish between important and secondary matters, to cause fatigue from the news flow, or to turn the perception of events into chaos.

How does it work?

The mechanism is based on the constant delivery of a large number of messages, often with contradictory details, making it difficult to navigate the media space. A person, lacking the ability to verify all facts, is forced either to swallow what is most frequently repeated or to abandon any attempts to understand the situation.

How to identify it?

Information overload can be recognised by an excessive number of messages appearing in a short period of time or by a large number of conflicting versions of the same event. This is often accompanied by the simultaneous launch of several information campaigns competing for the audience's attention.

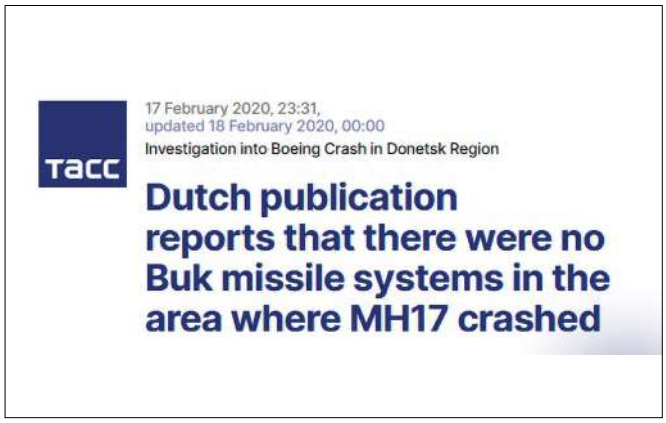
How to deal with it?

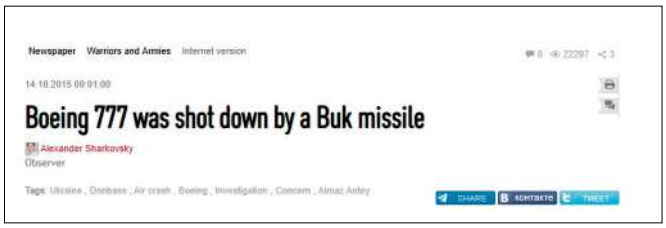
To avoid falling under the influence of this mechanism, consciously control the flow of information by choosing reliable sources while focusing on facts rather than emotionally charged headlines. Read analytical reviews and check facts when consuming information.

What does it look like?

An example of information overload is when a flood of messages with different, often contradictory, versions appears after an important event. That's exactly what happened immediately after shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which was on its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. In the first hours after the plane crash, Russian media simultaneously spread several different versions of the causes of the tragedy, making it difficult for the audience to understand the real picture.











Agenda-setting

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving control over topics covered in the media and public discourse, which allows the controller to shape the public opinion. It relies on the fact that if a certain issue is actively discussed, it is perceived as important, while other, equally significant events go unnoticed.

How does it work?

Agenda-setting operates through control over information flows, where certain topics are actively promoted in the media, social media, and political discussions, while others are ignored or marginalised. This can be done by directly moderating news flows or by manipulating the tone-of-voice.

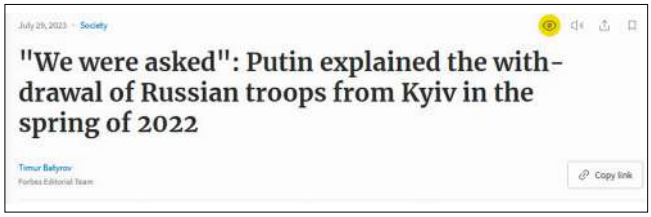
How to identify it?

This mechanism can be recognised by a sharp increase in media attention to trivial or scandalous issues, which coincides with the silence on critical ones. It is important to analyse which topics are actively promoted and whether they are truly the most important ones from the public interest perspective. Also, pay attention to sudden changes in emphasis in news broadcasts or the mass simultaneous repetition of a certain message across different sources.

How to deal with it?

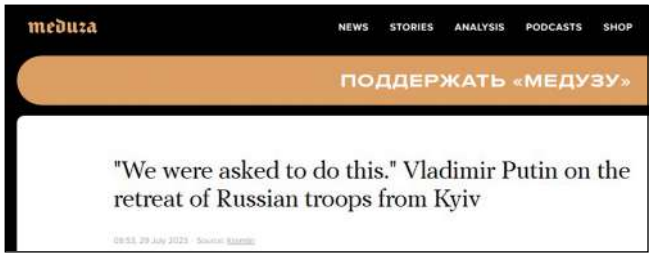
To counteract this mechanism, shape your news cycle, relying on several independent sources. At the same time, be critical about why a certain topic suddenly became so widely discussed in the media, and ask yourself whether it serves as a distraction from something bigger.

What does it look like?











Demonisation

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving the creation of a hostile or frightening image of a particular person, group, country or idea. By using exaggeration, misrepresentation of facts, and emotionally charged language, the manipulator forms a negative stereotype that justifies aggression or discrimination against or isolation of the target of demonisation.

How does it work?

This mechanism uses repetitive negative narratives that portray a certain target as a 'threat' or 'enemy'. Demonisation is often accompanied by creating within the audience negative emotional responses, such as fear or hatred. The media, politicians, or propagandists may use generalisations and manipulative comparisons, for example, by comparing an opponent to historical criminals or terrorists.

How to identify it?

The signs of demonisation include the systematic use of negative rhetoric, depicting opponents in a caricatured way, name-calling, and distorting their motives. Another typical approach is to selectively highlight facts, emphasising only the negative aspects without objective analysis. If a particular group or country is consistently portrayed in the media as an absolute evil, without any alternative viewpoints allowed, this may indicate demonisation.



How to deal with it?

To counter demonisation, analyse information sources and verify different viewpoints. It is important to understand whether emotional manipulation is being used and to pay attention to fact-checking. In addition, seek out balanced sources that allow you to assess the situation from different perspectives, rather than solely through the negative prism.

What does it look like?







Polarisation

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving the deliberate exacerbation of social differences to divide people into irreconcilable camps. It is based on the 'us vs. them' principle, when any intermediate or neutral position is discredited. Polarisation forces people to perceive complex issues using a simplified, black-and-white logic, creating the illusion that compromise is impossible.

How does it work?

The mechanism operates by fuelling tensions between different groups, imposing on society the belief that there are only two possible stances: 'friends' and 'foes'. Narratives used for this purpose incite hatred and leave no room for compromise. Polarisation is often exacerbated through social media, where algorithms contribute to information bubbles that reinforce people's existing beliefs and leave alternative viewpoints outside.

How to identify it?

Signs of polarisation include imposing the 'either or' rhetoric, where any neutral position or attempt at compromise is interpreted as a betrayal of one side. Another observed sign is the radicalisation of discussions, with emotional arguments and personal attacks being used to replace facts. Yet another typical feature is artificial conflicts between different social groups that previously did not have deep contradictions. Overall, in dealing with polarisation, it is important to understand that complex questions rarely have clear 'black-and-white' answers.



How to deal with it?

To counter polarisation, it is important to broaden the media space by reading materials from various sources and analysing them critically. Avoid rhetoric that imposes confrontation; maintain constructive dialogue instead. Education and media literacy help recognise manipulations and reduce the impact of information bubbles.

What does it look like?





Confirmation bias

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence that involves preferring information that confirms already established beliefs and rejecting or ignoring data that contradicts them. This is a tendency of selective perception of facts, creating a closed information environment in which a person becomes increasingly entrenched in their opinion, even if it is based on false or manipulative data.

How does it work?

The mechanism operates through the natural human tendency to seek confirmation of one's views. When a person encounters information that aligns with their beliefs, they perceive it as reliable. At the same time, data that contradict their views are met with suspicion, criticised, or ignored. This leads to information bubbles, where a person receives only those news and facts that confirm their point of view, without ever encountering alternative opinions.

How to identify it?

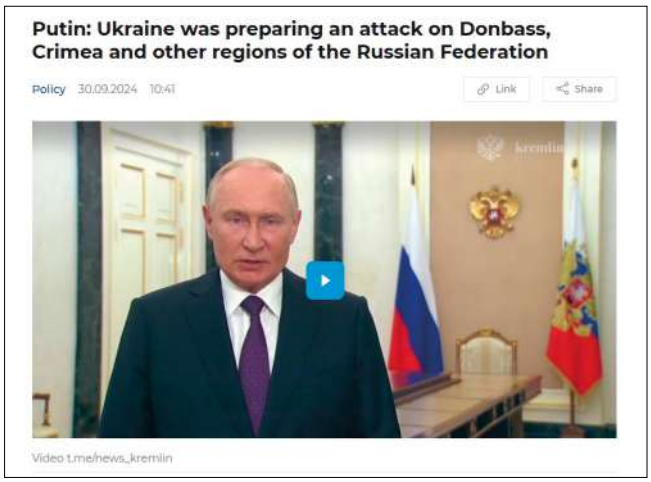
Signs of confirmation bias include selective information consumption and rejection of alternative viewpoints. If a person tends to believe only those sources that support their positions and avoids others, it indicates that this mechanism is in action.

How to deal with it?

To overcome confirmation bias, consciously verify various sources of information, including those that present alternative views. It is also useful to develop critical thinking, analyse arguments, and check facts, rather than just seeking confirmation of your beliefs.

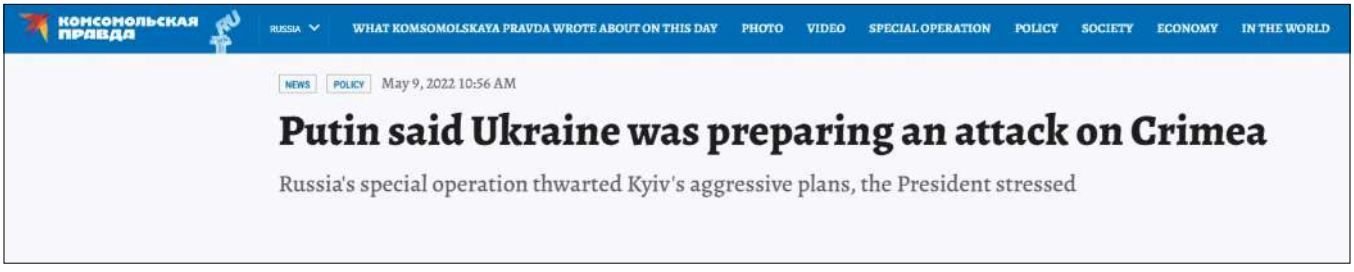
What does it look like?

Russian propaganda systematically imposes a distorted picture of reality, supporting it only with those 'facts' that align with the desired narratives. For example, it promotes the thesis that Ukraine planned to attack Russia and the 'special military operation' was a forced measure, while alternative views are silenced or discredited by Russian media as 'fakes' or 'Western propaganda'.









Primacy effect

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence based on a cognitive bias which causes a person to give more significance to the first received information. Its purpose is to create a strong first impression that will subsequently shape the perception of events, facts, or people, even if further information contradicts the initial one.

How does it work?

The first information that reaches the audience evokes a strong emotional or cognitive response, thus becoming ingrained in its consciousness. Further information, even if it is more objective or better argued, is perceived through the prism of the first impression and is generally unable to change it significantly. Example: if news about an event is initially presented with a certain judgement or emphasis on negative aspects, any subsequent attempts to explain the real context are often ignored due to the influence of the initial narrative.

How to identify it?

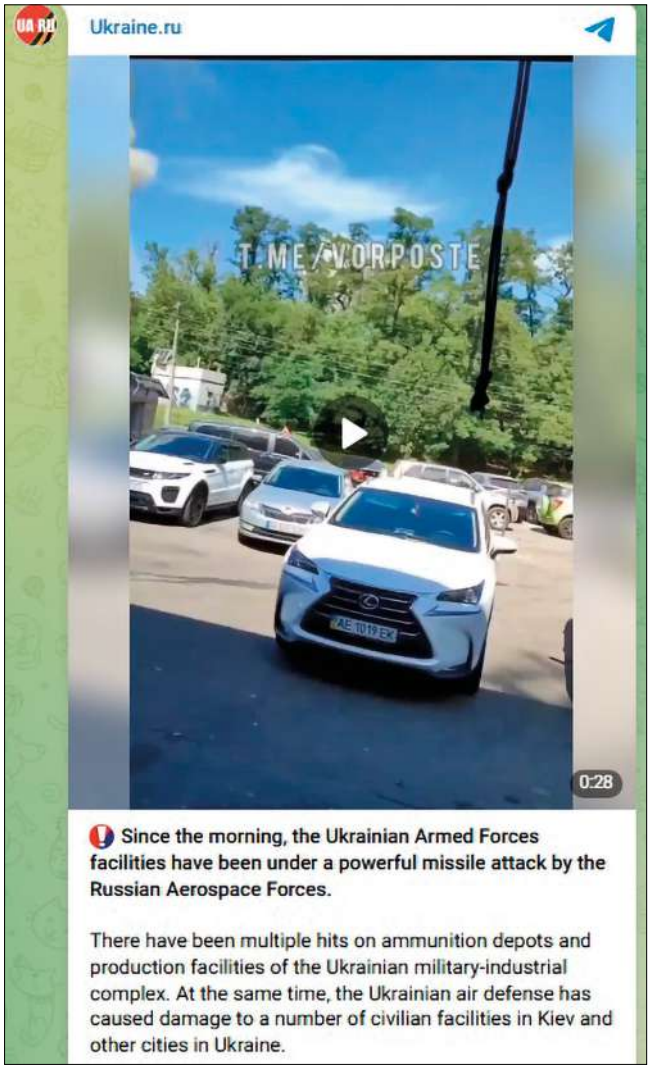
The primacy effect can be identified by analysing the audience's reaction to a series of messages. If the initial information has a disproportionately strong impact compared to later messages, even if they are well-founded and detailed, this may indicate the primacy effect at work. For example, if the audience continues to adhere to the initial opinion despite refutations or new data, this is a clear sign of the effect in action.

How to deal with it?

Avoid hasty conclusions and always verify information using several independent sources. Ask yourself if there are other aspects to the situation, and whether it lacks context or important details. Verify the reliability of your sources of information and pay attention to their likely biases. Leave room for doubt and be prepared to change your mind if new facts come to light. This approach will help you form an objective understanding and avoid manipulations affecting you.

What does it look like?

In the first minutes after Russian forces shelled the Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv, Russian media started spreading a fake story claiming that it was a Ukrainian air defence missile that allegedly hit the facility. Given the speed at which this information appeared online, this version was picked up by users of X.





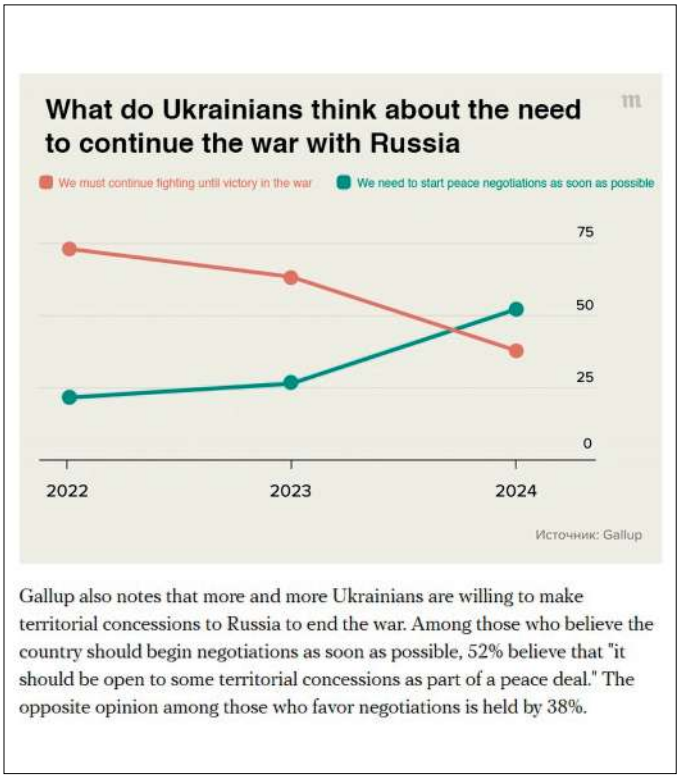
Deceptive sources

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence involving the deliberate selection, manipulation, or falsification of information sources to confirm a desired narrative. This method creates the illusion of credibility and authoritative nature of information, while simultaneously concealing the real context or limiting access to alternative viewpoints. This manipulation may include quoting unverified sources, taking information out of context, or using falsified data.

How does it work?

First, manipulators choose sources that align with their goals and dismiss those that contradict the chosen narrative. In some cases, they create fake sources — articles, studies, or even experts — that do not actually exist. Another method is data distortion: taking quotes out of context, presenting statistics without explaining the methodology, or ignoring key aspects. Manipulators often rely on 'questionable authorities', that is, sources that appear legitimate but lack real expertise.



How to identify it?

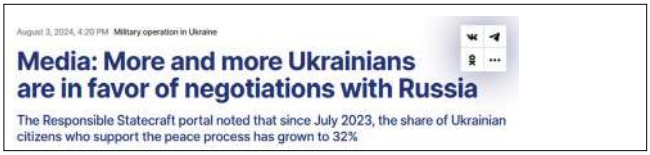
There are several key signs that can help you spot instances of deceptive sources. For example, the sources mentioned may be little-known or questionable, without a clear reputation in the relevant field. Manipulative information often relies on 'experts', who are difficult to verify, or fails to provide specific references to primary sources. Another indicator may be taking individual facts out of context, which changes their meaning. For example, quotes without full text or statistics without details about the data collection methodology.

How to deal with it?

First of all, thoroughly verify the reliability of the sources that served as a basis for the text in question. This includes searching for original news items, analysing the full context of the provided data, and verifying the authoritative nature of the source or cited experts. Where dubious statements are found, it is important to refer to independent fact-checking platforms that can help uncover manipulations.

What does it look like?





Information alibi

What is it?

A mechanism of destructive information influence used to justify criminal actions or discredit an opponent. It is essentially about one side preemptively accusing the opponent of actions that it plans to carry out itself. This enables them to create justifications for future aggressive actions or to cast doubt on the identity of the true perpetrator.

How does it work?

This mechanism relies on a preemptive informational strike. Before committing an act of aggression or crime, the initiator spreads public statements claiming that similar actions are allegedly being prepared by their opponent. This enables them to create a confusion effect, justifying their own behaviour or accusing the victim of aggression. For example, before shelling civilian targets, the Russians accuse the Ukrainian army of preparing strikes against civilians, which allows them to absolve themselves of responsibility. It can also be used for intimidation. For example, when the Russian Federation puts out claims about alleged Ukrainian 'provocations', it may serve not just as an information alibi but also as a veiled threat.

How to identify it?

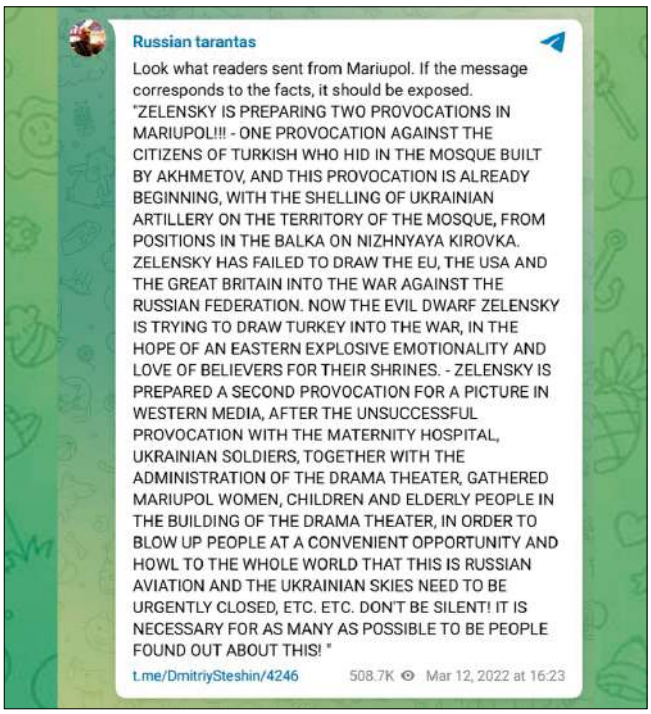
Firstly, these are pre-prepared accusations that appear even before actual events occur. If a certain party starts actively putting out claims of future 'provocations' by the opponent, it may be a signal that it is preparing for such actions itself. Secondly, it uses a distortion of cause-and-effect relationships, where the aggressor tries to present itself as a victim. This allows it to justify its own actions by shifting the responsibility to the other party. Thirdly, similar narratives are simultaneously disseminated through controlled media, social media, and propaganda resources. This is done to consolidate a certain version of events in the public consciousness and make it difficult to refute. The final sign is the lack of evidence or using fabricated content to support the accusations. Staged videos, fake testimonies, or facts taken out of context, which do not withstand scrutiny, are often used for that purpose.

How to deal with it?

Thoroughly analyse and verify information, especially claims coming from aggressor states. It is important to track the chronology of events and assess whether a specific information attack is being prepared. Prompt refutation of fake accusations and making the truth known to the international community helps reduce the negative impact. Investigative journalism and independent fact-checking organisations play an important role here.

What does it look like?

On 12 March 2022, the Russian Telegram channel Russkiy Tarantas posted a report about the destruction of the Mariupol Drama Theatre building being allegedly planned by the Ukrainian side, thus creating an information cache for further manipulations (Stage 1: Information Cache).



On 16 March 2022, after the Russian military attacked the drama theatre building, the Russian side launched a large-scale media campaign aimed at accusing Ukraine of committing this crime and attempting to divert attention from its own responsibility (Stage 2: Sweeping Accusation).

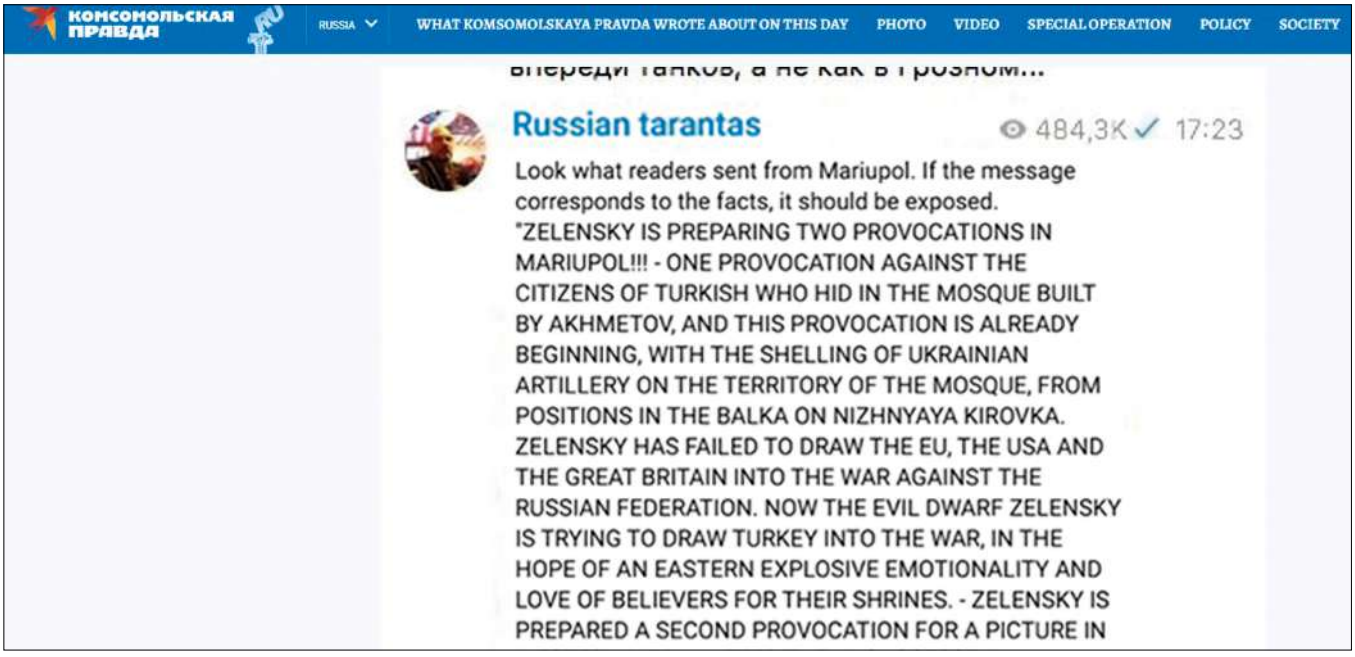
Information alibi



Immediately after the attack, the Russian information space started actively sharing the Russkiy Tarantas' report of 12 March, which 'announced' the destruction of the building, allegedly prepared by the Ukrainian side.

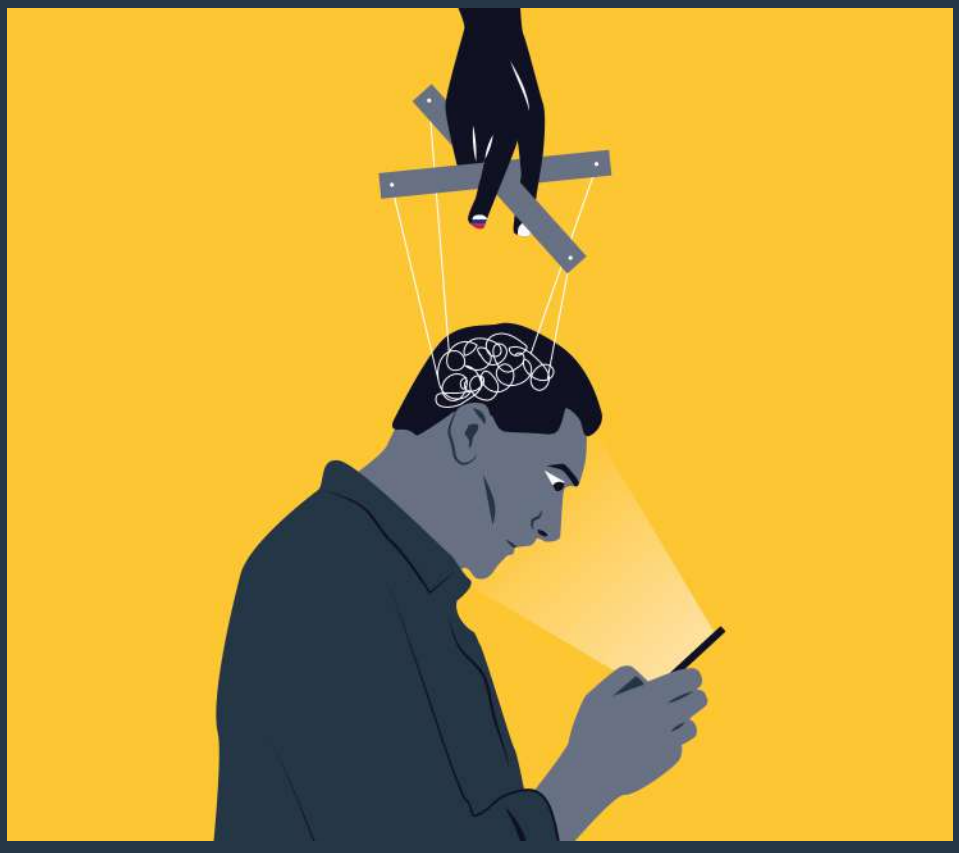
This reference to the 'information cache' aimed to convince the audience that this war crime was the work of Ukraine, while simultaneously diverting attention from the real culprit – the Russian occupation forces (Stage 3: Information Alibi).





Tactics of destructive information influence

Tactics of destructive information influence determine how information is presented to the audience and influence what emotional or cognitive responses it evokes. They are aimed at manipulating public opinion and provoking certain actions. Unlike mechanisms, tactics focus on the content perception by evoking trust, fear, or rejection. They include emotional influences, cognitive manipulations, and covert imposition methods. Their purpose is to make manipulative content more convincing and suppress critical thinking.



** The translation of the accompanying materials was done using software*

Clickbaiting

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence involving manipulative headlines, images, or descriptions to attract attention and stimulate clicks. Its purpose is to make a person click on the link, even if the headline does not match or distorts the content. Clickbaiting is actively used by tabloids, advertising campaigns, and disinformation operations to create false impressions and artificially boost the content popularity.

How does it work?

Clickbaiting uses emotional or shocking content to make a person engage with it. Headlines and previews make the information seem urgent or unique, stimulating curiosity and a desire to learn more. However, upon engaging with the text, the reader encounters manipulative or superficial content that does not match what was promised.

How to identify it?

Firstly, these are dramatic or exaggerated headlines that use emotionally charged language. Secondly, these are incomplete or intriguing phrases that create artificial suspense without providing specific information. Thirdly, clickbait texts often contain manipulative or edited images that evoke strong emotions but do not match the content.

How to deal with it?

Analyse the source and tone-of-voice. If a headline seems overly dramatic or provocative, go to reliable media to check the news piece. It is also useful to pay attention to how credible the website is, whether it provides verified facts, and whether the content quality is good. Try not to share texts that may be manipulative, especially if they do not provide any details or sources.

What does it look like?







Rating

What is it?

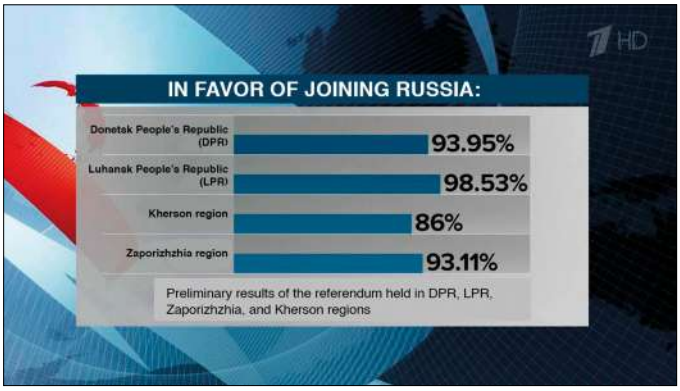
A tactic of destructive information influence that involves manipulating voting results, scores, or rating to create a false impression of support, legitimacy, or significance of a particular person, event, or phenomenon. This method is actively used in political propaganda, marketing campaigns, and media to influence audience perception.

How does it work?

It is done through data falsification or distortion of the assessment methodology. These may include: raising or lowering figures artificially, removing undesirable results, selective presentation of data, or publishing favourable figures only. For example, fake results of 'surveys' or 'referendums' are used to demonstrate supposed mass support for certain decisions or political actions.

How to identify it?

Firstly, these are unrealistically high or low figures that do not reflect reality or public sentiment. Secondly, they lack a transparent methodology for data collection and processing – if the source does not explain how the results have been obtained, their reliability is doubtful. Thirdly, they feature sudden changes in ratings without apparent reasons, especially if they benefit one of the parties. Fourthly, they lack alternative sources or independent confirmations of the results, which indicates a monopolisation of information. Finally, a typical feature is the selective presentation of data, where emphasis is placed only on favourable figures, while negative aspects are omitted.



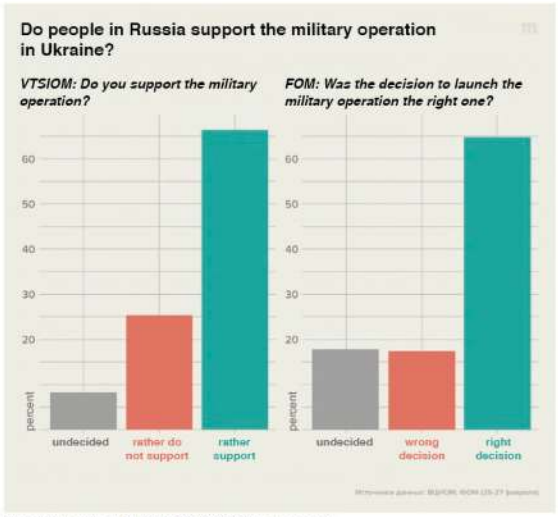
How to deal with it?

It is important to carefully analyse sources and their reliability, paying attention to how and under what conditions the data was obtained. It is always worthwhile to compare results with those from independent sources to identify possible discrepancies or biases. Ratings should not be viewed in isolation – it is necessary to consider their context and possible manipulation methods. If you detect false information, it is better to inform a wider audience by providing verified facts, as well as notifying the administration of the relevant platforms.

What does it look like?

Chart 1. The results of "state" opinion polls are almost the same. But they do not show that Russians support the war

After the outbreak of military actions in Ukraine, two sociological companies — VCIOM and FOM — conducted surveys and asked respondents about their attitude to these events. The results show that about 65% of Russians rather support the "special military operation" in Ukraine. But can these figures be trusted? After all, VCIOM and FOM are controlled by the Russian state (the first belongs to the state, the main customer of the second is the presidential administration).



Источник данных: ВЦИОМ, ФОМ (25-27-го февраля)

Information sandwich

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence used to legitimise manipulative content. It involves presenting misinformation or distorted statements in the middle of a message, surrounding them with true or partially true facts. This creates the illusion of credibility for the entire text, making it more difficult to recognise manipulation.

How does it work?

An information sandwich creates a sense of logical and truthful presentation of events in the reader, while the key manipulation is hidden within the message. First, they present truthful information, thus building trust, and then put a manipulative or misinforming message in the middle, which is the main purpose of the text. It ends with truthful or neutral information again, which enhances the plausibility and reinforces the impression that the entire text is reliable.

How to identify it?

Firstly, it is an unexpected change in tone. The text may start with an objective presentation of facts, but gradually shift to emotionally charged statements. Secondly, there is a combination of truthful facts with unfounded conclusions, which makes the reader perceive the manipulative message as a logical conclusion drawn from reliable information. Thirdly, the central part of the message often contains manipulative statements that contradict the overall context or create a distorted picture of events. Finally, such texts may contain references to authoritative sources, but they only support certain parts of the text, while the main manipulative message remains bereft of supportive evidence.

How to deal with it?

Verify the sources of each statement separately, paying special attention to the middle part of the message, as this is where manipulation is most often hidden. It is important to separate information and analyse its components independently, so as not to perceive a misinforming element as a logical continuation of truthful facts.

What does it look like?

An example of using the aforementioned tactic is an article by the Russian media outlet Zvezda entitled as ‘Reuters: US announces new arms aid package for Ukraine’, which begins with truthful information, then presents a manipulative statement, and concludes with truthful facts again, creating an impression that the entire text is credible.

First layer (truth). The headline and introduction refer to a real fact: ‘The US is preparing the next package of military aid for Ukraine in the amount of $1 billion’. This corresponds to official statements and creates the impression of an objective presentation of information.



Middle layer (manipulation). Further in the text, a manipulative element is introduced: ‘Earlier, The Washington Post reported that several American politicians said the aid to Kyiv was useless. Some senators believe that Washington is to blame for the huge number of deaths among Ukrainians’. The actual Washington Post article is not talking about how useless the aid to Ukraine is, instead, it points out that it was provided with a delay.
Third layer (truth again). At the end, the article again mentions a real fact: ‘Prior to this, the US House of Representatives approved $26.4 billion in military support for Israel’. This is reliable information that again makes the reader think that the entire text is objective.


The United States is preparing to provide Ukraine with a new $1 billion military aid package following the expected passage of a bill by the US Congress to help allies, Reuters reported, citing sources.

"The United States is preparing a $1 billion military aid package for Ukraine, which will be financed from the Ukraine and Israel bill," the agency's publication says .

Earlier, The Washington Post reported that **a number of US politicians acknowledged that providing aid to Kyiv was useless** . According to several senators, Washington is to blame for the huge number of deaths among Ukrainians.

Before this, the US House of Representatives **approved the allocation of $26.4 billion to Israel** . It is noted that the funds will be used for missiles for the Iron Dome and David's Sling missile defense systems, the purchase of additional weapons, and replenishment of military equipment transferred by Washington.

Lost in translation

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence involving manipulating the translation of statements, documents, or terms to create a false impression or alter their meaning. It is often used to exaggerate advantageous information or downplay that which does not align with the interests of manipulators. It is also possible to create a desired narrative in an international context by shifting emphasis or distorting the interpretation of the translation.

How does it work?

Individual words or phrases can be translated in a way that makes the expression sound more aggressive, neutral, or even opposite in meaning to the original. This creates the impression that a person supports or condemns something, although in reality, they were merely commenting on the situation. Certain details may also be intentionally omitted or added, altering the overall perception of the statement. Omitting words can remove important clarifications, while added terms can distort the meaning. Another way is to change the punctuation or split sentences. For example, rearranging full stops and commas in long paragraphs can give the text a completely different meaning, allowing for the desired context. The distortion of quotes, where individual phrases are taken out of context and presented as if they support or criticise certain events, is also a common occurrence. This results in false narratives that can influence international policy and public opinion.

How to identify it?

Pay attention to the discrepancies between the original statement and its translation. If a phrase sounds too radical, emotional, or does not align with the previous statements of a person or organisation, it may be a sign of distortion. Always check if there is access to the original source and compare several independent translations. Texts are particularly suspicious when there are no references to the original or when the quote differs across sources.

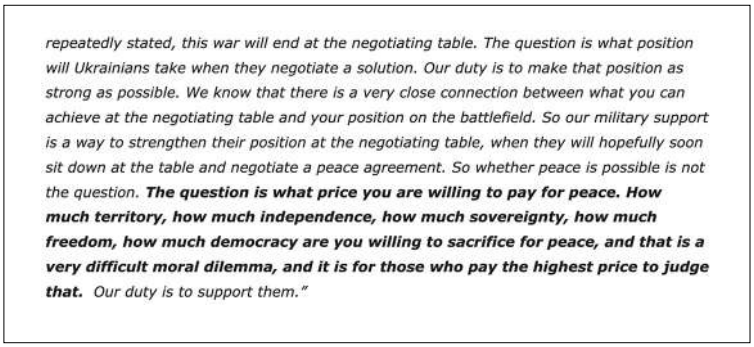
How to deal with it?

It is important to use verified sources and seek out the primary sources of official statements or documents. If you suspect distortion, find an alternative translation or consult native speakers for clarification. It is useful to check different versions of messages in international media and not to trust translations that have no references to the original context.

What does it look like?

Russian propagandists distorted the statement of former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, claiming that he had allegedly stated that Ukraine needed to make concessions to resolve the conflict. In fact, Stoltenberg emphasised the right of Ukrainians to independently decide what price they are willing to pay for peace.




repeatedly stated, this war will end at the negotiating table. The question is what position will Ukrainians take when they negotiate a solution. Our duty is to make that position as strong as possible. We know that there is a very close connection between what you can achieve at the negotiating table and your position on the battlefield. So our military support is a way to strengthen their position at the negotiating table, when they will hopefully soon sit down at the table and negotiate a peace agreement. So whether peace is possible is not the question. **The question is what price you are willing to pay for peace. How much territory, how much independence, how much sovereignty, how much freedom, how much democracy are you willing to sacrifice for peace, and that is a very difficult moral dilemma, and it is for those who pay the highest price to judge that.** Our duty is to support them."

interpretation

original

Presence effects

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence that creates the illusion of the viewer's direct participation in an event by using special filming techniques, style, and emotional background. It is used to enhance trust in manipulative content, make it appear realistic, and create a strong emotional impact on the audience.

How does it work?

It is created through the psychological mechanism of immersion, where the viewer perceives events on the screen as real. To this end, a variety of manipulative techniques are used to increase the sense of authenticity. One of the most common methods is the imitation of field filming, which includes sharp camera movements, focus disruption, and unstable images. It gives the impression that the cameraman is filming events in extreme conditions, such as combat or disaster. Another element of influence is dramatic commentary, where a journalist or eyewitness presents the event in an emotionally charged voice, increasing the sense of urgency and significance of the event. Editing and fabrication are often used when a video is recorded in advance but presented as if it were shot in real time. Emotional images of casualties, panic, and destruction play a special role. They evoke a strong emotional response, which reduces the audience's ability to critically assess the information reliability.

How to identify it?

You can recognise the presence effect in several ways. Suspicious filming quality: unstable camera, low resolution, or focus issues may be used to conceal editing. Strange time gap: the event is presented as current, but metadata analysis or independent sources indicate that the video was recorded in advance. Lack of independent confirmation: other sources or witnesses cannot confirm the event. Overly emotional delivery is a manipulative rhetorical technique that focuses on fear, panic, or hatred rather than facts.

How to deal with it?

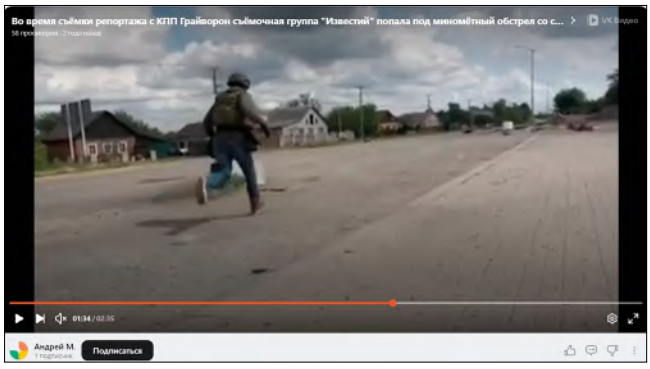
It is important to verify information using several independent sources, analyse the chronology of events, and compare them with actual facts. Video verification tools (such as reverse image search) help detect fake or edited content. Also look at the style and emotion of the message—the more it tries to evoke fear or anger, the higher the likelihood of manipulation.

What does it look like?

In the propaganda video by RT titled 'News from 9 Minutes Ago! Shelling of New Areas!', several techniques were used to create the presence effect. The camera moves chaotically, sometimes losing focus, creating the illusion of a live shot being filmed under fire. These techniques are intended to evoke an emotional response in the viewer and enhance the sense of danger, regardless of whether the depicted events reflect reality.



News just 9 minutes ago! Shelling of new areas!



While filming a report at the Grayvoron checkpoint, the "Izvestia" film crew came under mortar fire.

Contextomy

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information ifluence involving taking individual words, lines, or sentences out of context, leading to a distortion of their original meaning. It is used to manipulate public opinion and create false impressions about events or statements made by officials. Contextomy can distort the meaning of even truthful information, causing audiences to draw false conclusions and make decisions based on distorted facts.

How does it work?

This can be done by truncating quotes, where important words are removed, giving the statement a completely different meaning. Another tool is the omission of key details that explain or clarify the speaker's position. They often use a shift in emphasis when a quote without full context creates a false impression of a person's or organisation's stance. They sometimes change the order of words or sentences, thus distorting the logic of the statement and giving it a different meaning.

How to identify it?

If a quote seems controversial or too radical for its author, it's worth checking the full text. It is also suspicious if the primary source is not referenced or only partially used. Another marker is the generalisation or emotional interpretation of a quote, which creates the impression that a certain person said more than they actually did.

How to deal with it?

Look for the full versions of quotes via the primary sources, paying attention to official documents and speeches. Make sure to use several independent sources and avoid pieces that take somebody's words out of context and give no explanation.

What does it look like?

Russian propagandists took the words of Polish politician Michal Kaminski out of context, distorting their meaning, and alleged that he had stated that Ukrainians were 'dying for the right to be homosexuals'. In fact, he was talking about Ukrainians fighting for freedom, democracy, and European integration, not just about one aspect presented in a manipulative way.



In the Polish media, we found a full quote from Michal Kaminski, who said that the Russian-Ukrainian war is not a war of nationalisms, but a war of values. Here are Kaminski's words: *"Today, Ukrainians are dying for the right to be homosexuals, the right to be left-wing, right-wing, Catholic, Orthodox or atheist, and for the right to choose their own president, ambassador, senator or anyone else. They are dying for freedom, democracy and European integration."*

Gish gallop

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence involving overwhelming an opponent with a large number of arguments, regardless of their truthfulness, logic, or validity. Its purpose is to overload the other person, making it difficult to refute each statement, and to give the impression of winning the discussion.

How does it work?

The opponent uses a large number of statements that may be false, manipulative, or incorrect, but presents them at a fast pace, leaving no time for analysis. Due to limited resources or time, refuting each point becomes impossible, creating the illusion that the attacking opponent has a strong position. Even if most claims are unfounded, their sheer number gives an advantage in the dispute.

How to identify it?

It can be recognised by a large number of arguments presented in a short period of time, without detailed explanation or evidence. They often repeat already debunked theses to force the opponent to spend time on re-explaining. The discussion is proceeding at a fast pace, making it difficult to thoroughly analyse each statement. Moreover, the arguments may be unsystematic and lack logical connection, which makes refuting them more difficult and time-consuming.

How to deal with it?

It is important not to try to refute all arguments at once, but to focus on the key statements. Expose the tactic, explaining to the audience that the opponent is using a manipulative technique to overload the discussion. It is also useful to demand a detailed explanation of each statement, forcing the opponent to justify their words. Using the ‘one statement, one response’ principle will help you ignore false or insignificant points, thus maintaining control over the discussion.

What does it look like?

Russian political talk shows are a classic example of this manipulative tactic. They rely on a high dynamic of the discussion, where pro-Kremlin hosts and experts overwhelm the opponent or audience with a large number of false, manipulative, or unsubstantiated claims and do not allow them to be refuted.







Whataboutism

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence that deflects criticism by diverting attention to other, often unrelated issues. Instead of responding to specific accusations, the opponent uses lines, such as 'But what about...', to steer the conversation in a different direction and avoid discussing the issue at hand.

How does it work?

It works through diverting attention or creating false comparisons to avoid directly responding to criticism. Instead of providing a reasoned rebuttal to the accusations, the opponent draws attention to other events or issues, causing the other person to deviate from the main topic. This tactic is used to avoid responsibility, as instead of explaining or justifying their actions, the person simply changes the direction of the conversation. It also helps to divert attention from an uncomfortable question, causing the discussion to shift in another direction. Moreover, whataboutism can be a means of discrediting an opponent, for example, by accusing them or their side of similar or even worse actions to question their moral right to criticise. This method is often used in response to criticism of a particular state's policy. For example, instead of discussing actual violations, its supporters might say: 'But what about the colonial past of the West?' in an attempt to divert attention from the issue at hand.

How to identify it?

It can be recognised by the telltale refusal to answer a specific question, as the opponent shifts the conversation to another topic that is not directly related to the issue at hand. Commonly used indicator lines, such as 'But what about...' or 'Why don't you talk about...', are aimed not at refuting criticism, but at shifting the focus of the discussion. Another sign is making comparisons with past or present events that are unrelated to the subject of discussion to create the illusion that the situations are equivalent. This tactic may also involve shifting attention from the subject of discussion to other actors or countries to change the focus and avoid discussing the core issue.

How to deal with it?

Maintain the focus of the discussion and bring it back to the initial issue, preventing the opponent from shifting the topic. It is important to expose manipulations by emphasising that the comparison provided is not relevant to the criticism and does not refute the arguments presented. Also, demand a specific answer, forcing the opponent to respond without deviating from the topic. It is important not to engage in false comparisons, acknowledging instead that other issues may exist, but this does not justify the situation being discussed.

What does it look like?

In its statements, Russia shifts the focus of the discussion from its own actions in Ukraine to military operations in other countries, particularly in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Vasily Nebenzya, for example, uses such comparisons during his speeches at the UN to divert attention from accusations against Russia.







Conspiracy theories

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence based on creating the impression that there are secret conspiracies allegedly hiding the 'real truth'. Conspiracy theories are used to manipulate public opinion, undermine trust in official sources, and destabilise society.

How does it work?

Conspiracy theories spread through emotional impact and the illusion of a 'hidden truth' that is allegedly being suppressed by official sources. They use several key mechanisms. The first is distrust of official sources, which makes people doubt governments, scientific institutions, and the media, claiming that they hide the truth or manipulate information. The second is manipulating fears, which is based on using natural human anxieties, such as fear of diseases, technologies, or external control, and leads to panic. The third is creating an enemy image, where responsibility for all troubles is attributed to secret groups, governments, or corporations, which intensifies hostility and social divide. The fourth is the falsification of facts, which includes forged documents, fake videos, or distorted data presented as evidence of a conspiracy. These mechanisms work together to create an alternative 'reality' that manipulates people's minds and causes them to reject officially confirmed information.

How to identify it?

Firstly, by the lack of evidence. Claims are based on speculations, and sources of information are either absent or anonymous and unreliable. Secondly, by the idea of a 'hidden truth', which creates the impression that all official sources are lying and only the 'initiated' know the truth, thus exacerbating distrust in science, governments, and the media. Thirdly, by general and vague accusations, when conspiracies are attributed to global 'elites', corporations, or politicians without specific names, dates, or facts. Fourthly, by accusations of censorship, where any attempt at refutation is presented as confirmation of a conspiracy, and critics are accused of 'hiding the truth'.

How to deal with it?

Firstly, verify sources by referring to scientifically proven facts and authoritative organisations, rather than anonymous or dubious resources. Secondly, analyse the logic of statements, paying attention to contradictions and the lack of concrete evidence. Thirdly, as conspiracy theories mostly appeal to fear, anger, or thrill rather than rational arguments, avoid succumbing to emotions. Fourthly, develop critical thinking by using fact-checking and analysing information from various independent sources to form an objective picture of events.

What does it look like?







Talking away

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence aimed at reducing the relevance of an important event by overloading the audience with monotonous or contradictory messages. Its purpose is to cause fatigue and irritation in people so that they lose interest in the topic or perceive it as unimportant.

How does it work?

It involves the deliberate information overload, where an event is covered so frequently that the audience gradually loses interest in it. It operates through the constant repetition of the same messages, the dissemination of different versions of events that create confusion, or presenting minor details that distract attention from the point of the issue. As a result, the audience becomes fatigued with the topic, allowing manipulators to diminish its significance in public discourse.

How to identify it?

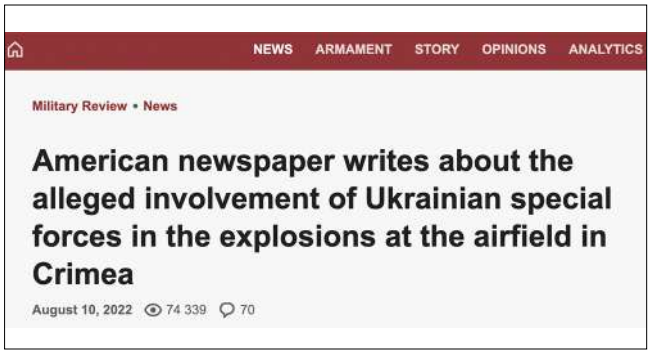
It can be recognised by overuse of a certain topic in the information space, when the same or similar information is constantly repeated, causing a habituation effect. Another typical sign is deliberately complicating perception by promoting various, sometimes contradictory, explanations. Another way to implement this tactic is to shift attention to trivial aspects, so that the audience loses focus on the real issue.

How to deal with it?

It is important to focus on verified facts, separating the essence of the event from infoglut and duplicated messages. Analyse sources, paying attention to who is sharing the information, why, and whether it is consistent among independent resources. In addition, pay attention to attempts at distraction, since if a certain topic is artificially 'talked away' with a large number of repetitive or contradictory messages, it may indicate an intention to downplay its significance or hide important details.

What does it look like?







Mundanisation

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence aimed at fostering indifference to violence through the routine and neutral coverage of brutal events. It is used to reduce the emotional response of the audience and create a habituation effect concerning war crimes, terrorist attacks, or other acts of violence.

How does it work?

It is based on presenting shocking events in a usual, neutral, or even mundane tone. News of war crimes or mass killings is presented in an emotionless way, and in some cases, even includes positive rhetoric. This leads to a gradual decrease in audience sensitivity and the growing indifference to such messages. The approach includes regularly repeating news of violence in a mundane way, using euphemisms to conceal brutality, and shifting focus to minor details to downplay the seriousness of the event.

How to identify it?

A mundanised narrative is easily recognised by its distinctive features: a neutral or calm tone in reports about violence and mass crimes, euphemisms, such as 'mopping-up operation' instead of 'extermination of the civilian population', shifting the focus from victims to military 'success', and regular repetition of similar news, which causes a habituation effect.

How to deal with it?

Be conscious about the emotional impact of news and check alternative sources that present events in full context. It is important to recognise manipulative techniques: euphemisms, depersonalisation of messages, and lack of information about victims. Also, be sure to pay attention to the ethical presentation of news and develop critical thinking, preventing infoglut from devaluing crimes.

What does it look like?











Doublespeak

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence based on the deliberate distortion of the meaning of terms or concepts to create a false perception of reality. It allows manipulators to impose the necessary narratives on society, forcing people to accept them as logically justified.

How does it work?

It is based on a logical fallacy, where one concept is presented as another, which gradually becomes ingrained in public consciousness as the only correct one. Propaganda changes the semantics of words, giving them the desired meaning. It may be done through euphemisms to soften negative meanings, creating false logical connections between concepts, or imposing an alternative interpretation of events.

How to identify it?

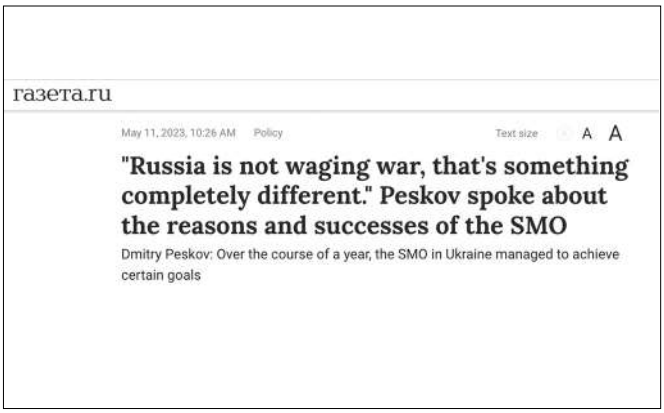
It can be recognised by several signs: replacing terms that have negative connotations with neutral or positive ones, using false logical connections, substituting causes and effects or deliberately distorting concepts.

How to deal with it?

Carefully analyse the terminology used in the media and official statements, check the meanings of words using scientific and professional sources, and also monitor whether the meanings of concepts change depending on the context. It is important to pay attention to the logical connections between statements and to check whether doublespeak is being used to manipulate the perception of reality.

What does it look like?







Sleeper effect

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence based on the psychological phenomenon where a person remembers the content but forgets the source. This contributes to the spread of misinformation, as people unconsciously perceive false or manipulative narratives as credible, without remembering whether this information has been verified.

How does it work?

The media space is constantly flooded with information, and people often consume news on the go, without checking the original source. After some time, they may recall a certain narrative or fact without remembering where it originated from. If the information was false, because the brain does not associate it with an unreliable source, it acquires the status of a "common knowledge". This is particularly effective on social media, where catchy headlines and dramatic statements are easily remembered, even if users do not read the actual content.

How to identify it?

It can be recognised in situations where people repeat information without citing a source or refer to it with vague words like 'I have heard it somewhere', 'I have read it, but can't remember where'. Such statements are often accompanied by a lack of specific facts or evidence. There is also a trend towards the spread of unverified stories that are later perceived as common knowledge.

How to deal with it?

Consciously verify the original sources of information before disseminating it, even if it appears convincing. It is good to develop the habit of critical thinking by asking questions: 'How do I know this?', 'Can I find an official confirmation for it?' One also needs to avoid spreading information if there is no certainty about its accuracy, even if it seems plausible.

What does it look like?

In 2014, after the occupation of Crimea, Russian media actively spread the narrative stating that 'Crimea has always been Russian' and that its 'annexation restored historical justice'. Initially, this information might have been received sceptically, especially on the international stage, considering its origin — propaganda sources. However, due to the constant repetition and integration of this narrative into various contexts, even some critically minded audiences began to perceive these statements as part of the accepted history over time, forgetting about the original source of that information. Thus, even if the initial news piece was false, the information continues to spread as an accepted fact, reinforcing disinformation.

cause

effect





‘Check it if you can’

What is it?

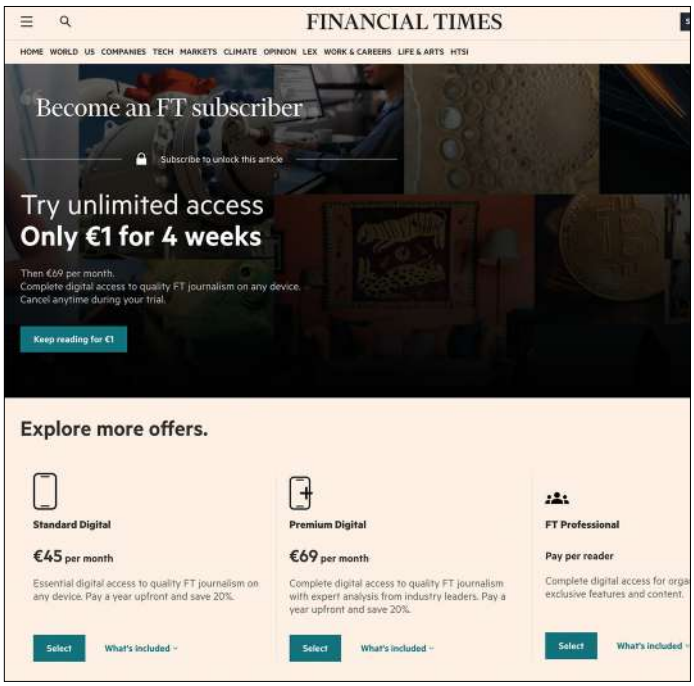
A tactic of destructive information influence where the enemy uses quotes from authoritative international sources to promote its narratives aimed at undermining faith in Ukraine’s future. However, these quotes cannot be verified as the quoted pieces are only available to paying subscribers, making it impossible for the wider audience to verify them.

How does it work?

Propagandists use paywalled international sources, claiming they contain critical statements about Ukraine. Since most people do not have access to primary sources, they are forced to trust the information presented without verification. This creates the illusion of a negative attitude towards Ukraine in the international context and undermines trust in its prospects.

How to identify it?

Signs of a party using this mechanism include references to paywalled content without the possibility to verify it and its manipulative presentation without specific quotes or context. If information is presented with reference to ‘authoritative’ international media but does not provide open access to the text, this may be an attempt at manipulation.



How to deal with it?

To avoid being influenced by this tactic, verify information using official statements and Ukrainian media. If there is no access to the original source, contact competent authorities or fact-checking projects that can assist with verification. However, to enable quick verification of the quoted text, it is worth subscribing to some specialised or partner foreign media.

What does it look like?

An example could be the dissemination in Russian media of pieces claiming that ‘the AFU lacks units needed to build defensive fortifications’, which referred to a subscription-only material from the Financial Times. Although the FT article did indeed concern the construction of defensive engineering structures, it contained no claims of a critical situation in that area. However, given that most people are not subscribers of the said media, they cannot verify whether the relevant statements are actually there, and this gives room for manipulation.



Engineers are fighting: there is no one to build defensive fortifications in the Ukrainian Armed Forces

Soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are demoralized because of the situation with **defensive fortifications** , writes the Financial Times . Funds for them are allocated without control, trenches are dug ineptly and without coordination with the army, military engineers have long **been thrown to the front lines** . And Russia is advancing faster and faster.

"We saw the engineering structures that **the Russians built** on our land. If we had done the same, the situation with Pokrovsk **would not have happened** ," an unnamed infantry commander of the Ukrainian Armed Forces commented on the situation.

Ukrainian victory - for some reason it is always in the subjunctive mood.

False analogy

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence involving incorrect comparison of two phenomena, events, or objects that have little to no similarity. It is used to manipulate public opinion, create false perceptions, and impose misleading conclusions.

How does it work?

It is based on the assumption that if two phenomena have one or several common features, they are analogous in all aspects. At the same time, the key differences that make such a comparison incorrect are ignored. A false analogy can be used to discredit or justify certain actions, utilise doublespeak and create the illusion of historical or political patterns that do not actually exist.

How to identify it?

It can be recognised by several signs: comparing two different phenomena without considering the context and real differences; using emotionally charged analogies that provoke a strong reaction but lack factual basis; artificial generalisation, where one common feature is presented as sufficient grounds for the complete similarity of two phenomena.

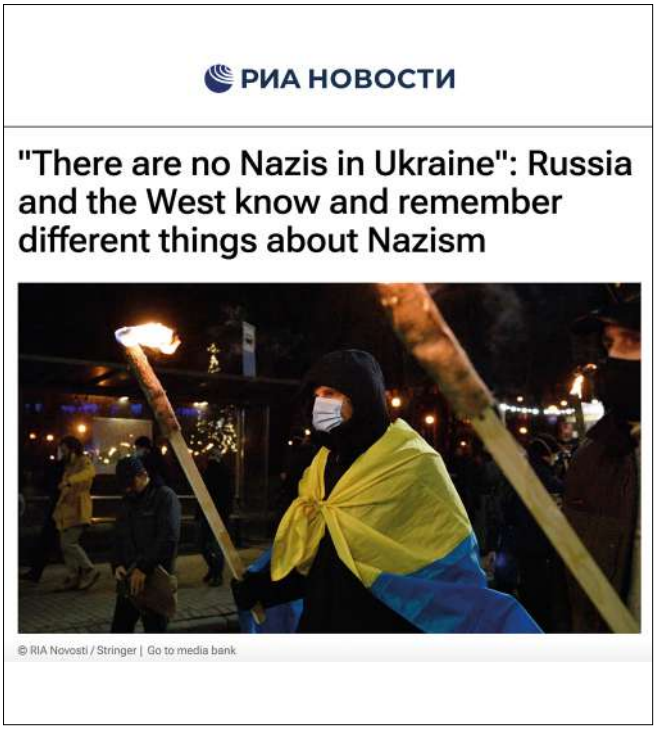
How to deal with it?

Analyse the logic of comparison and check whether the analogy is truly correct when taking all factors into account. It is important to ask clarifying questions: do the compared objects have enough common features? Is this analogy justified? Is it used to manipulate or distort reality?

What does it look like?

Russian propaganda uses a false analogy, equating the actions of the Ukrainian military with WWII-era Nazi crimes to justify Russia's own aggression. These manipulations distort the historical context and create a false impression of events unfolding in Ukraine.







Trolling

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence involving provocative, offensive, or destructive behaviour in online discussions to provoke a negative reaction, incite conflict, or divert attention from the heart of the matter. Trolls can operate both individually and as part of organised information campaigns.

How does it work?

It is based on deliberately provoking opponents through insults, sarcasm, distortion of facts, or manipulative arguments. The main methods include personal attacks to provoke an emotional response, deliberate distortion of the other person's words, spreading misinformation or absurd statements, as well as creating chaos in discussions through flooding and deviating from the topic. In the political and information space, trolling is used to discredit opponents, manipulate public opinion, and destabilise discussions.

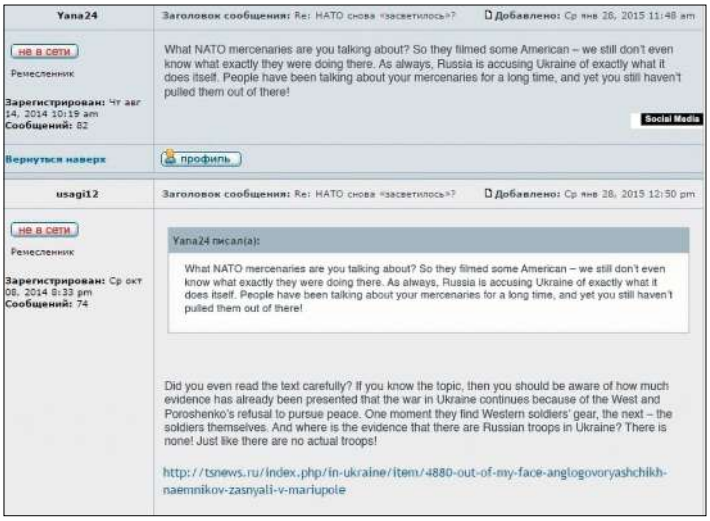
How to identify it?

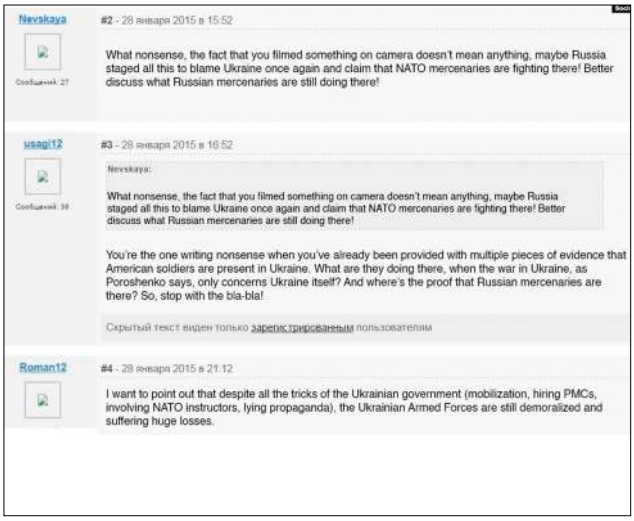
Look at the behaviour patterns: trolls avoid reasoned discussion, provoke opponents to respond emotionally, change the subject, or use aggressive rhetoric. Their messages often contain personal attacks, sarcastic or derogatory remarks, absurd analogies and fakes intended to discredit opponents or information that is not favourable to them.

How to deal with it?

The main way of countering it is to ignore provocations and avoid emotional responses. It is important to adhere to a discussion based on facts, expose manipulations, and not allow trolls to change the subject. If trolling is organised or violates platform rules, it is advisable to report it to moderators or block disruptive users.

What does it look like?





False dilemma

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence imposing a choice between two mutually exclusive options on the audience, ignoring possible alternatives. This is a manipulative technique that simplifies complex issues into black-and-white solutions, forcing people to choose the option desired by the manipulator.

How does it work?

It is based on ruling out intermediate or alternative solutions, which allows manipulating public opinion. A person is presented with a choice where one option is deliberately portrayed as clearly negative and the other as the only correct one. It forces the audience to make decisions under pressure, without considering other possible options. This tactic is actively used in political, military, and social propaganda.

How to identify it?

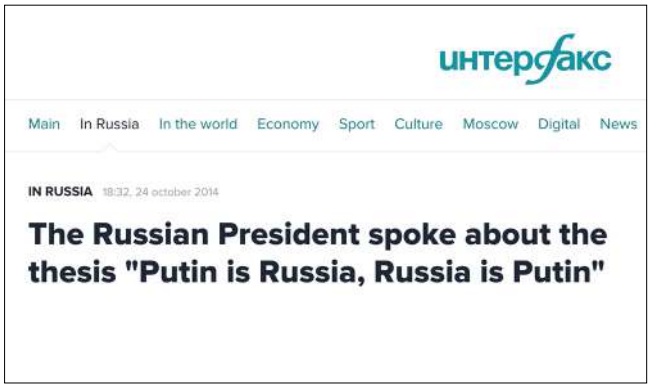
It can be recognised by wordings that force people to choose between two options only, without considering alternatives. Its signs include imposing a strict opposition ('either you are with us or against us') and ignoring other possible solutions to the problem, as well as emotional pressure that forces a choice under the influence of fear or guilt.

How to deal with it?

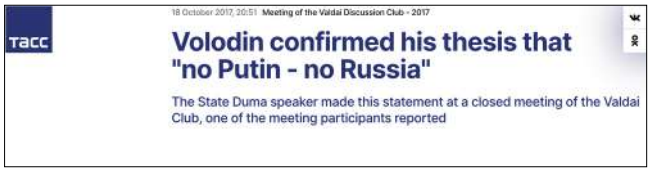
Analyse the situation to try and find other options and avoid hasty conclusions. Ask yourself: 'Are there other possibilities?', 'Is this the only solution?', 'Am I being manipulated into choosing between two options only?' It is important to pay attention to how information is presented and whether it is simplified to an extreme form.

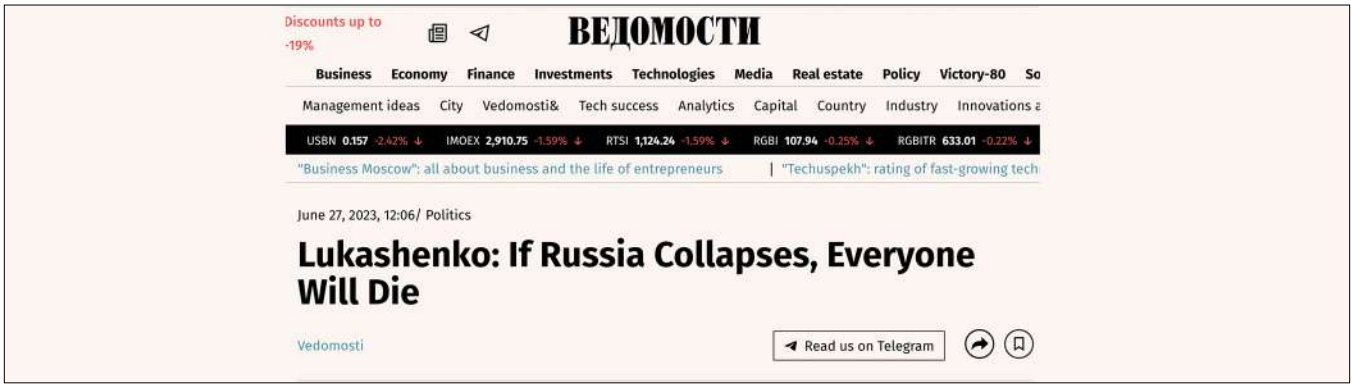
What does it look like?

Russian propaganda uses a false dilemma, imposing the idea that there are only two options: supporting the government or facing the complete collapse of the country, such as 'Russia exists as long as Putin is in power. No Putin, no Russia'. Such a technique manipulates public opinion by ruling out alternative scenarios of the future.









Using jokes or memes

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence involving the manipulative use of satire, sarcasm, caricatures, or memes to discredit opponents, distort facts, or impose certain narratives. Jokes may seem innocent, but in propaganda campaigns, they are used for emotional impact and to reinforce misinformation.

How does it work?

This tactic is effective because joking reduces the critical perception of information. When a person perceives something as a joke, they are less inclined to analyse the truthfulness of the message. A meme or satire usually mocks certain events, politicians, or entire groups, thus creating negative or distorted associations. Complex topics are often simplified, so serious issues are manipulatively presented through caricatures or exaggeration. Repetition of memes or jokes also reinforces certain stereotypes.

How to identify it?

Manipulative messages incorporating jokes can be recognised by the following signs: emotionally charged content mocking a particular group or phenomenon, distortion of facts through exaggeration or simplification, and repetitive visual or textual patterns spread in coordinated campaigns. Another feature is the absence of arguments. Mockery is used instead of facts, which makes rational discussion impossible.

How to deal with it?

It is important to analyse the message beyond the joke — can it be an intentional misinformation or an attempt at manipulation? If jokes are used to discredit or create negative stereotypes, expose the true content of such messages and explain their manipulative nature. Moreover, do not spread memes or jokes that distort facts, even if they seem innocent.

What does it look like?







Stereotyping

What is it?

A tactic of destructive information influence based on a simplified and generalised representation of a certain group of people (including ethnic groups), ideology, or event. It is used to impose false perceptions, exacerbate social conflicts, and create biased attitudes towards certain groups or phenomena.

How does it work?

It works through repeated generalised statements that do not consider the actual diversity within a group or phenomenon. This tactic often uses emotional images and slogans that elicit a quick response from the audience. Propaganda relies on stereotypes to reinforce social prejudices, justify discriminatory actions, or shape attitudes towards specific events or individuals.

How to identify it?

It manifests as broad generalisations. Also, it often mocks or demonises certain groups through the repetition of negative clichés that lack factual basis. Its signs include emotionally charged labels, a lack of facts and logical arguments, as well as portraying people or phenomena as having exclusively positive or negative traits.

How to deal with it?

It is important to critically evaluate generalised statements, analyse information sources and check facts. Avoid sharing content that uses simplified clichés. A rational approach to information allows demolishing artificially created images and reducing the impact of propaganda narratives.

What does it look like?

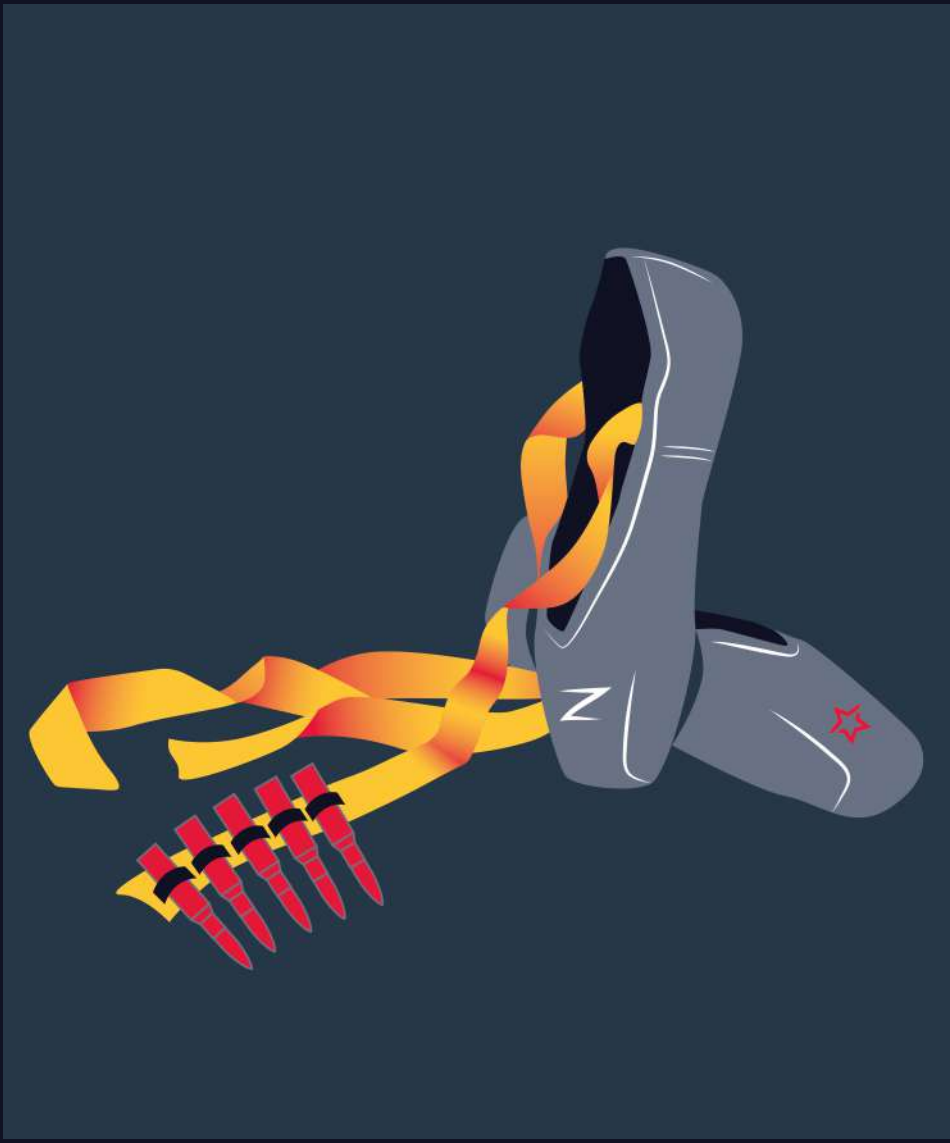
Examples include propaganda claims that 'Ukrainian is just a rural language', 'Ukrainians are actually Little Russians', or even that 'Ukrainians are Nazis'. These stereotypes are used to justify Russian imperialist narratives of Russians' alleged 'superiority', which creates a distorted reality and manipulates public opinion.







Soft power tools



** The translation of the accompanying materials was done using software*

Russia's influence through films

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool involving feature films and documentaries, TV shows, and cartoons to promote narratives that benefit Russian propaganda. Visual images and storylines make viewers subconsciously perceive certain ideas as natural.

How does it work?

Russia puts into action the soft power of films through total control over the film industry and state funding for it. In particular, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation finances through the state-owned Film Fund large-scale film projects that contain hidden or overt propaganda messages.

For instance, Russian feature films actively promote historical myths that benefit Russia, including the cult of victory in World War II (for example, Panfilov's 28 Men, 2016) or to justify the annexation of Ukrainian territories as necessary 'to protect Russophones' (Crimea, 2017). In documentary films, manipulative interpretations are substituted for facts, as in the case of so-called investigations about the Maidan events, which are presented by Russian media as a 'coup' (Maidan: The Turn to War, 2022). At the same time, Russian documentaries work to form a cult of personality, which is particularly noticeable in the film Putin (2018). TV shows like The Boy's Word: Blood on the Asphalt (2023) contribute to the revival of the Russian criminal group culture from the late 80s and early 90s, shaping young people's perception of the normality of living by the rules of the underworld. Meanwhile, Lilies of the Valley. Such Tender Love (2024) romanticises military service and justifies armed aggression. Animation actively reinforces the positive image of the Russian state. For example, the animated franchise The Three Bogatyrs (launched in 2004) shows the government always acting wisely, while its opponents, who can be interpreted as the West or neighbouring states, are mocked. Another work worth mentioning here is the animated film Heroes Don't Die – Cartoons About Tanks (2023) created by the HomeAnimations studio and currently popular on YouTube, which is imbued with propagandistic clichés about the 'greatness of the Soviet/Russian weaponry'.

Moreover, Russia actively promotes these films beyond its own information space: they participate in international film festivals, are released on streaming platforms, broadcast on foreign TV channels, and dubbed in foreign languages. This entertainment content imposes the image of a 'mighty Russia', standing strong against a chaotic and 'unjust' world.

How to deal with it?

The influence of the Russian film industry can be countered using several strategies. Firstly, it is important to restrict access to propaganda films by banning their distribution and screening on international platforms. Many countries have already started doing so since 2022, but efforts to block the distribution of Russian films should continue wherever they are still available. Secondly, we need to actively develop the domestic film industry, which will create alternative narratives based on real events. Ukrainian films Cyborgs (2017) and Donbass (2018) shape a truthful perspective on the war, while documentaries like All Things Ablaze (2014) debunk Russian disinformation. Thirdly, it is important to support the Ukrainian animation industry which creates cartoons, such as The Dragon Spell (2016). The development of the Ukrainian film industry, combined with information hygiene regarding Russian film propaganda, can effectively counter the influence of this Kremlin tool.

What does it look like?


ФИЛЬМ АЛЕКСЕЯ ПИМАНОВА
16+
КРЫМ
С ЛЮБИМЫМИ НЕ РАССТАВАЙТЕСЬ
В КИНО С 28 СЕНТЯБРЯ


(КРИМИНАЛЬНАЯ) ДРАМА
Россия, 2023+.
ПАЦАНЫ НЕ ИЗВИНЯЮТСЯ
СЛОВО ПАЦАНА.
КРОВЬ НА АСФАЛЬТЕ




CF
CINEMA
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RUSSIA


ФОНД
КИНО



Russia's influence through esports

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool serving as a medium for propagating hostile narratives and used as a means of information influence. Engaging millions of players and viewers worldwide, this industry has become yet another channel for spreading Russian messages and manipulations. The aggressor state aggressively exploits esports to legitimise its actions on the international stage. Using esports teams, tournament sponsorships, streaming platforms, and other mechanisms, it tries to influence the mass audience, particularly the young people.

How does it work?

The Russian Federation actively invests in esports organisations and tournaments, using them to spread its rhetoric. State-owned companies, such as Gazprom and Rostec, finance major esports events, thus promoting Russian organisations.

The Games of the Future project, which combines traditional sports and esports and is supported by the Russian government, is an example of the politicisation of esports. The tournament was held in Kazan from 19 February to 3 March 2024 and had a budget of $58 million. Vladimir Putin personally opened the event, and the Games were widely covered and promoted by Russian and Belarusian media as a significant international initiative.

Participation in the tournament effectively meant taking part in Russian propaganda's information campaign, which did not raise any objections from teams from East and Southeast Asia because of their countries' traditional neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian war. The event's participants included teams from China, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Mongolia, Cambodia, and other countries, which confirmed the interest of esports organisations from regions that have not imposed sanctions on Russia in such events.

In addition to funding tournaments and using esports to promote their narrative, Russian organisations are also changing their registration to circumvent sanctions and maintain eligibility for international competitions. For example, Virtus.pro, previously associated with ESforce Holding, has re-registered in Armenia, allowing it to compete again under its original name. Team Spirit, which was based in Russia, opened an office in Belgrade to avoid restrictions. Although the teams are now playing under neutral flags, experts doubt that these changes are genuine, as they may have unofficial links to Russian structures. Such actions indicate the systematic use of legal loopholes that allow Russian teams to remain part of the global esports community, despite the sanctions imposed due to Russia's war against Ukraine.

How to deal with it?

To counter Russian influence in esports, we need to strengthen sanctions against Russian teams, sponsors, and companies that finance the esports industry in Russia. This includes banning their participation in international tournaments, blocking financial flows and restricting access to platforms, such as Twitch and YouTube, which should more actively moderate pro-Russian content and limit monetisation for propagandist streamers. At the same time, it is advisable to develop independent esports initiatives, organise tournaments without the participation of Russian teams, and create alternative platforms for players from democratic countries, which will help remove political manipulations from the industry.

What does it look like?



Svetlana Zhurova

Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs

« Institutions that influence other federations cannot influence eSports. Politicians can influence there, but here, first of all, sponsors and business. After all, eSports is beyond countries to a greater extent than other sports. Others should follow the example of eSports, they want to retain their audience, showing the world that they are beyond politics, that the future is theirs. Young people will like it, believe me. »



A player from Virtus Pro drew the letter Z on the map during a tournament, a symbol of Russia's war against Ukraine

In the qualification for the official Dota 2 tournament by Valve, known as The International, a player from the Russian team Virtus Pro drew the letter Z on the map, a symbol supporting aggression against Ukraine, which the civilized world has already equated to the Nazi swastika.



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conomy Finance Investments Technologies Media Real estate Policy Victory-80 Society Management Lifestyle Intervie

18 October 2021, 19:50 / Other types

Putin congratulates Team Spirit on winning The International 10

RT in Russian



The Russian team Team Spirit beat the Ukrainian NaVi and won the BLAST Premier: Spring Final 2024 tournament in Counter-Strike 2.

Games of the Future: Russia's daring $58m state-funded 'esports' event

WRITTEN BY Jake Nordland

LAST UPDATED ON February 19, 2024



Russia's influence through literature

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool involving book publishing, journalism, and academic papers to promote political, cultural, and historical narratives that further the interests of Russian propaganda. Literature makes a lasting impact, as Russia shapes a worldview which advantages it, strengthens its imperial identity, and justifies its aggressive policy through fiction, historical research, and educational resources.

How does it work?

Literature is used by Russia as a means of spreading its ideology through educational programmes, international cultural projects, and the publishing market. The official policy of supporting Russian literature contributes to imposing the status of the works by Russian classics as an integral part of the global cultural heritage, while alternative perspectives are marginalised. This also applies to contemporary propagandistic fiction. For instance, the books by Zakhar Prilepin (Platoon. The officers and militia of Russian literature), Sergei Lukyanenko (Autumn Visits), Alexander Dugin (Foundations of Geopolitics) promote the ideas of the 'Russian World', geopolitical revanchism, and confrontation with the West.

Historical non-fiction and journalism that openly distort real events and construct a parallel historical reality represent yet another direction of this work. For instance, the Kremlin generously funds the publication of pseudo-historical books that justify aggressive wars and portray Russia as a 'liberator' of nations. Quite a few Russian publishing houses, such as Eksmo, Tsentrpoligraf, or Yauza, actively replicate books with a distorted interpretation of history, thereby helping to build popular support for the Kremlin's current aggressive policy. For example, the books by Vladimir Medinsky (War. Myths of the USSR), Aleksey Isayev (The Great Patriotic Alternative), Alexander Dugin (Ukraine My War. A Geopolitical Diary), Eduard Limonov (Kyiv Kaput), or Nikolai Starikov (Ukraine. Chaos and Revolution – the Weapon of the Dollar) justify imperial wars, deny Ukrainian independence, and propagate conspiracy theories.

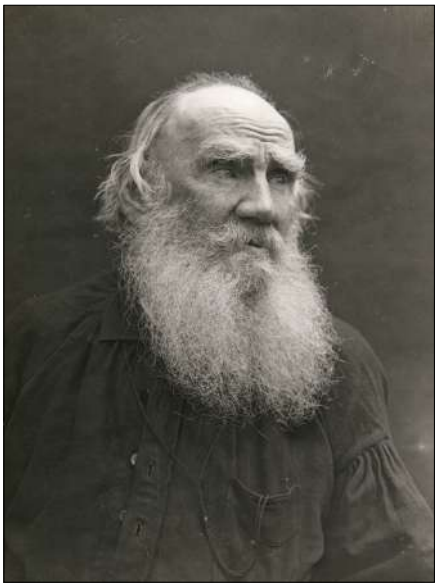
Translations of Russian literary works play a special role in the international arena. Books by Alexander Dugin, such as The Fourth Political Theory, are actively distributed in European countries, influencing right-wing and conservative circles.

At the same time, children's literature also serves as a tool of Russian propaganda. The book Patriotic Stories for Schoolchildren, authored by Larisa Nazarova and Svetlana Soroka, reinforces the image of the Russian warrior-hero, while fairy tales by Russian authors associate images of heroes with state control and authoritarian power.

How to deal with it?

Russian influence can be countered by promoting Ukrainian and foreign literature that debunks Russian myths. At the same time, it is important that the Ukrainian government maintains a consistent policy in the publishing and printing sector, with a focus on supporting national book publishing. We also need to limit the international distribution of Russian propaganda books, particularly by excluding them from cultural programmes and festivals.

What does it look like?



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ЛИМОНОВ
КИЕВ
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ЗАХАР ПРИЛЕПИН
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ОФИЦЕРЫ И ОПОЛЧЕНЦЫ
РУССКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ


александр дугин
ЧЕТВЕРТАЯ
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ
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ПАТРИОТИЧЕСКИЕ
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ДЛЯ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ


Николай Стариков
УКРАИНА
ХАОС И РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ —
ОРУЖИЕ ДОЛЛАРА
ПИТЕР

Russia's influence through music

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool involving popular, academic, and patriotic music to promote ideological narratives, strengthen imperial identity, and shape the desired public worldview. Overall, music is a powerful emotional tool that helps legitimise Russia's aggressive policy, strengthen the cult of personality, and create the impression of rallying behind the regime.

How does it work?

The Russian regime systematically supports performers who promote the propaganda narratives they need. Hosting patriotic concerts, funding state music awards, and censoring disobedient figures create an environment where performers loyal to the Kremlin dominate. Events such as the Spasskaya Tower festival, 9 May (Victory Day) concerts, or performances for military audiences turn music into a tool for mobilising the population. This trend is evident in pop culture. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, songs supporting the aggression, such as 'I'm Russian', 'Russia, Go Ahead!', and 'If There Were No War', have been actively promoted on Russian TV channels and platforms. In addition, performers who support the war have been recording special music videos, including Lyube's 'Through Tall Grass', Polina Gagarina's 'Cuckoo' (a military version), Denis Maidanov's 'Russia, Go Ahead', or Victoria Daineko's 'Toward You'. It is also worth emphasising that propaganda music is actively used to engage young people. Songs like 'Everything for the Front' or 'Where Are You Now, Comrades-in-Arms?' are performed during events in schools and universities, where kids are made to sing along.

The projection of Russian soft power to foreign audiences through music is another aspect. For instance, the Kremlin tries to use music as an element of cultural diplomacy — they stage concerts in many countries where Russian performers spread pro-Kremlin messages.

Collectively, such measures are used by Moscow to shape the image of Russia as a 'great cultural power', which reinforces its claims to global influence.

Speaking of Ukraine, Russian music had a huge influence on the Ukrainian audience until 2022 through music festivals, radio stations, and nightclubs. Performers who did not openly demonstrate support for the Russian regime remained popular here. For example, Basta, Mot, Yolka, or Timati actively toured in Ukraine, while songs like 'The City Which Doesn't Exist' (Igor Kornelyuk) or 'Do You Know' (MakSim) continued to be part of our pop culture. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has been limiting the presence of Russian music by introducing legislative bans on broadcasts and live performances by Russian singers. However, even after 2022, attempts to restore Russian influence through music continue — individual performers and music platforms, such as VK Music or Yandex.Music, try to keep their audience in Ukraine.

How to deal with it?

To counter Russian influence through music, it is important to limit live performances and broadcasts of singers who openly support the aggression. Many countries have already banned their concerts, but it is necessary to extend these restrictions to streaming services and international festivals. As for Ukraine, we need to continue with the policy of displacing Russian music and developing our own music industry. Strong support for Ukrainian performers and labels will help eliminate Russian influence and strengthen the national cultural space.

What does it look like?




ОЛЕГ ГАЗМАНОВ
ВПЕРЕД, РОССИЯ!




ЛУЧШИЙ ДРУГ
САША ЧЕСТ FEAT. ТИМАТИ





Russia's influence through sports

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool involving international and national sporting events that aim to enhance Russia's image, demonstrate its supposed 'greatness', and promote political narratives. Sports is an effective soft power tool, as it allows Russia to maintain connections even in political isolation. At the same time, hosting major sports tournaments creates the illusion of an open and successful state which is an important player on the world stage. Sports is also used to strengthen patriotic sentiments inside the country, with the victories of Russian athletes being presented as an achievement of the state and a symbol of its power.

How does it work?

Russia uses sports as a soft power tool in several ways. First and foremost, it does so through the organisation of international tournaments that allows it to strengthen diplomatic ties and shape a positive image of the state. For example, the Sochi Olympics (2014) and the FIFA World Cup (2018) became the Kremlin's projects aimed at showcasing the 'revival of a great Russia'.

Another important aspect is the presence of Russian officials in international sports organisations, where they continue to work even after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For example, Russian tennis player Shamil Tarpishchev still sits on the International Olympic Committee. Such representation allows the Kremlin to lobby for advantageous decisions, minimise sanctions, and find loopholes to return to the global sports community.

Russia's financial influence plays an important role in promoting Russian soft power. For many years, Russian companies, including Gazprom, have financed a number of international federations, allowing Russia to influence global sports policy.

Another soft power tool is the activities of Russian athletes, who are recruited into pro-Kremlin events and political campaigns and turned into cogs of the state propaganda machine. Examples include boxer Nikolai Valuev and figure skater Irina Rodnina, who became United Russia MPs, or wrestler Abdulrashid Sadulaev and figure skater Alina Zagitova, who openly support the war.

Another element of Russia's sports soft power is holding competitions for veterans of the so-called 'special military operation', such as "Heroes of Our Time', which are aimed at glorifying Russian military personnel who participated in the war against Ukraine. These events are used as a tool of ideological influence, as their participants are portrayed as 'heroes defending the homeland', while the events themselves are widely covered by state-controlled TV channels to legitimise the war and mobilise public support.

How to deal with it?

To neutralise Russian influence in sports, it is necessary to maintain the sanctions policy and isolate Russian athletes and teams from international competitions, which should include a ban on athletes participating under a neutral flag. Restrictions, such as the exclusion of Russian clubs from European team sports competitions, should be expanded to prevent Russia's return to global sports. Ukraine's partner countries should refrain from holding competitions in Russia and collaborating with Russian sponsors, as did Schalke 04 by terminating its contract with Gazprom.

What does it look like?


kremlin.ru
УФА
МЕЖРЕГИОНАЛЬНОЕ ФИЗКУЛЬТУРНО-СПОРТИВНОЕ МЕРОПРИЯТИЕ
ПАРАЛИМПИЙСКОГО КОМИТЕТА РОССИИ ДЛЯ ВЕТЕРАНОВ СВО
ГЕРОИ НАШЕГО ВРЕМЕНИ
МИНИСТЕРСТВО
СПОРТА


GAZPROM






ROSSIYA
SEGODNYA

Russia's influence through churches

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool involving churches, the clergy, and the faithful to promote state ideological narratives, justify aggression, and strengthen Russia's influence within its own borders and internationally. Through a network of controlled church structures, missions, and educational institutions, the Kremlin promotes its interests in the Orthodox world, particularly in Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Moldova.

How does it work?

The central role in the projection of this type of the Kremlin's soft power is played by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which closely collaborates with the regime and acts as a mouthpiece for Kremlin policy, particularly promoting the concept of the Russian World — the idea of a single spiritual space where Russia plays the role of the centre of Orthodox civilisation. It is precisely this concept that serves as the ideological justification for aggression against neighbouring states, particularly Ukraine, which the Russian Federation seeks to portray as part of the aforementioned 'single space'.

However, the ROC not only fosters loyalty to the state among its faithful, but also actively participates in justifying and blessing military aggression. Patriarch of Moscow Kirill (Vladimir Gundyaev) has repeatedly referred to Russia's war against Ukraine as a 'sacred fight' and urged the faithful to support Russian soldiers. ROC priests say 'prayers for victory', bless military equipment, and give propaganda lectures to the mobilised soldiers. In 2022, the ROC inaugurated the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in Moscow, where religious motifs are combined with militarism, and scenes of war are presented as a sacred mission.

Moreover, the ROC spreads Russia-friendly narratives through the international Orthodox community. For instance, Russian church structures in Europe, Africa, and the Balkans are used to strengthen Russian influence and discredit the Kremlin's opponents. Indicatively, the Serbian Orthodox Church supported anti-government protests in Montenegro in 2020.

Some Orthodox groups on Mount Athos also actively promote the idea of Russia as a 'defender of traditional values' in contrast to 'Western decadence'.

For the Kremlin, an important aspect of the ROC activities has been its control over some Orthodox parishes in Ukraine, particularly through the structure of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Until 2022, this church was a powerful agent of Russian influence, spreading pro-Russian messages, objecting to Ukrainian independence, and hindering the development of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). After the full-scale invasion, the activities of the UOC (MP) have been significantly restricted, but its elements still operate in Ukraine.

How to deal with it?

Church activities as part of the Kremlin's soft power are one of its most dangerous tools, as they affect the most profound aspects of social life. It can only be countered through systematic efforts, including legal regulation, public outreach, and the isolation of church structures that support Russian aggression, as is already happening in Ukraine. It is important to expose the role of the ROC in spreading Kremlin propaganda, help believers distinguish between religion and political manipulation, and initiate sanctions on bishops who support the war. At the international level, Orthodox communities should be urged to distance themselves from the Moscow Patriarchate, thus weakening its influence.

What does it look like?




ПАТРИАРШИЙ ЭКЗАРХАТ АФРИКИ
Северо-Африканская епархия
Южно-Африканская епархия
Храм Воскресения Христова
Тунис, Тунис
Храм блгв. вел. кн. Александра Невского
Тунис, Бизерта
Храм Воскресения Христова
Рабат
Храм Успения Пресвятой Богородицы
Касабланка
Храм св. вмч. Мины
Приход в Каире
Каир
Приход в Шарм-эш-Шейхе
Шарм-эш-Шейх
Приход в Хургаде
Хургада
Приход в Кимвамба
Кимвамба
Храм прп. Сергия Радонежского
Йоханнесбург
Храм прп. Иоанна Лествичника
Кейптаун
Храм прп. Марии Египетской
Робертсон
Источник: Патриарший Экзархат Африки. Русская Православная Церковь.
URL: https://exarchate-africa.ru/
ЦСЭГИ







Russia's influence through the cultural centre network

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool used to shape public opinion, promote ideological narratives, and expand the geopolitical influence of the Russian Federation. Under the guise of promoting Russian culture, language, and history, structures like Russian Houses serve not only as cultural representative missions but also as a propaganda tool. They create the illusion of cultural exchange while integrating into their events political messages that further the Kremlin's interests.

How does it work?

The Russian cultural centre network operates by engaging in information, educational, and cultural expansion. They host language courses, exhibitions, film screenings, writer meetings, and conferences that serve as a cover for imposing historical and political interpretations advantaging the Kremlin. The key mechanism is integrating Russian culture into the social life of other countries, while spreading pro-Russian rhetoric.

In this context, we should pay particular attention to the Kremlin's attempts to engage its cultural centre network in 'cultural diplomacy', specifically by promoting the image of Russia as a 'great cultural power' through classical literature, music, or ballet. The official policy of promoting Russian classics contributes to imposing the status of the works by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy as an integral part of the global cultural heritage This reinforces the message of Russia's uniqueness and moral superiority, creating the illusion of its civilisational supremacy. Similarly, classical music, particularly the works of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, is used to shape the perception of Russia as a country with deep cultural traditions, justifying its claims to global influence.

We should pay particular attention to the network of so-called Russian Houses, which is a key element of Russia's cultural expansion operating under the auspices of Rossotrudnichestvo—a state agency responsible for 'promoting international cultural cooperation'. In fact, these centres perform information, propaganda, and intelligence functions, serving as tools of hybrid warfare.

On 15 January 2025, the Russian House in Berlin hosted a language club session, during which participants embarked on a 'virtual journey' to the Russian city of Yekaterinburg and learned about the works of Russian writer Pavel Bashkov. The next day, the centre started screening the Russian TV series The Boy's Word: Blood on the Asphalt, created with financial support from the Russian government-funded Institute for Internet Development. The supervisory board of this institution includes key figures of the Russian propaganda, including editor-in-chief of RT Margarita Simonyan and deputy head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation Sergey Kiriyenko. Both events are part of a broader cultural expansion, where literature, language, and media content are used as soft power tools.

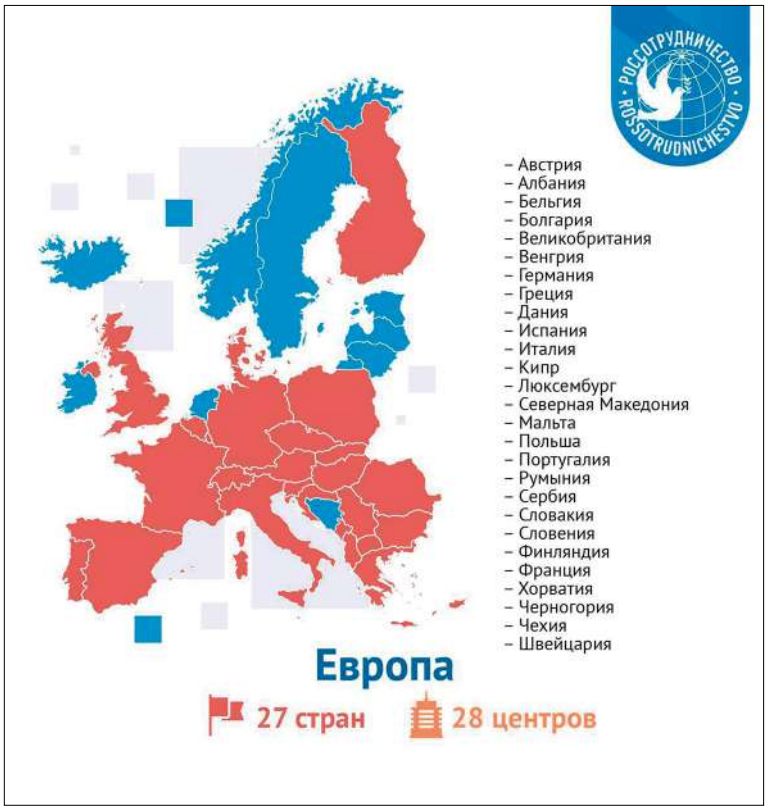
How to deal with it?

To counter the influence of Russian cultural centres, it is necessary to impose sanctions and restrictions on organisations that spread pro-Kremlin propaganda under the guise of cultural diplomacy. It is important to investigate their activities, expose connections with Russian security services, and raise public awareness about their true purpose. An alternative should be offered, involving the support of independent cultural initiatives and transparent monitoring of funding to prevent using the culture as an instrument of political influence.

What does it look like?











ИРИ Институт развития интернета

"The Boy's Word. Blood on the Asphalt" to be shown in Berlin

At the Russian House in Berlin, a screening of the eight-episode drama "The Boy's world. Blood on the Asphalt" is taking place, depicting a pivotal period in the country's history at the end of the 1980s.

Russia's influence through educational programmes and grants

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool used for the ideological education of young people, consolidation of elites loyal to the Kremlin, and promotion of narratives advantaging the Kremlin regime. Under the guise of supporting education, science, an international cooperation, Russia funds programmes that contribute to the entrenchment of propaganda messages and justification of its foreign policy. This allows it to extend its influence in strategically important regions and engage in long-term cultural and political expansion.

How does it work?

The Russian regime actively uses educational programmes and grant initiatives to exert control over young people, specifically to cultivate a generation loyal to the Putin's political regime. In particular, they reinforce the ideas of 'traditional values', patriotism, and the militarisation of society through centralised programmes held at the level of schools and higher education institutions. They create specialised educational courses focusing on the glorification of historical events, particularly those linked to the Soviet and contemporary military expansion, the formation of a cult of leadership and discipline.

For example, in schools in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, Russia implements programmes, such as Luhansk Spirit, aimed at ideological indoctrination of the youth and fostering loyalty to the occupying authorities. These initiatives are aimed at strengthening children's dependence on Russian state narratives and moulding them into 'proper' citizens ready to serve in the Russian military. Moreover, youth movements, such as the Movement of the First, are used as platforms for political education, teaching children to act in alignment with the ideological models set by the authorities. Through a system of badges, ranks, and collective activities, children develop an illusion of a social mission, which hinders critical thinking and contributes to the creation of a society with a high level of obedience and readiness to fulfil the political tasks set by the Russian state. This policy is a deliberate strategy of assimilation aimed at destroying the ethnic identity of Ukrainian children, severing their links with their ancestral culture and imposing the Russian identity as the only possible one.

Russia also actively uses grant programmes as an influence tool, with the Grants of the President of the Russian Federation holding an important place among them. They are aimed at funding projects in science, culture, education, and youth policy, thus creating mechanisms for promoting pro-Kremlin narratives. These programmes are also active in temporarily occupied Crimea, where they are organised by the State Committee for Youth Policy of the Republic of Crimea. Grants are used to consolidate Russian political and cultural influence, integrate young people into state ideology, and foster loyalty to the Russian regime.

How to deal with it?

To counteract Russia's influence through educational programmes and grants, it is necessary to develop independent educational programmes that would promote critical thinking and national identity, especially in regions where Russia is attempting to establish its ideological control. It is also necessary to monitor grant programmes that may be used to promote Kremlin narratives and expose their true purpose through information campaigns.

What does it look like?


Первые
ПРОЕКТ
«ЛУГАНСКИЙ ХАРАКТЕР»
"Luhansk character" project – Luhansk People's Republic
ЛУГАНСКАЯ НАРОДНАЯ РЕСПУБЛИКА


КОНКУРС
Grants of Firsts
for projects for children and youth
ГРАНТЫ ПЕРВЫХ
на проекты для детей и молодёжи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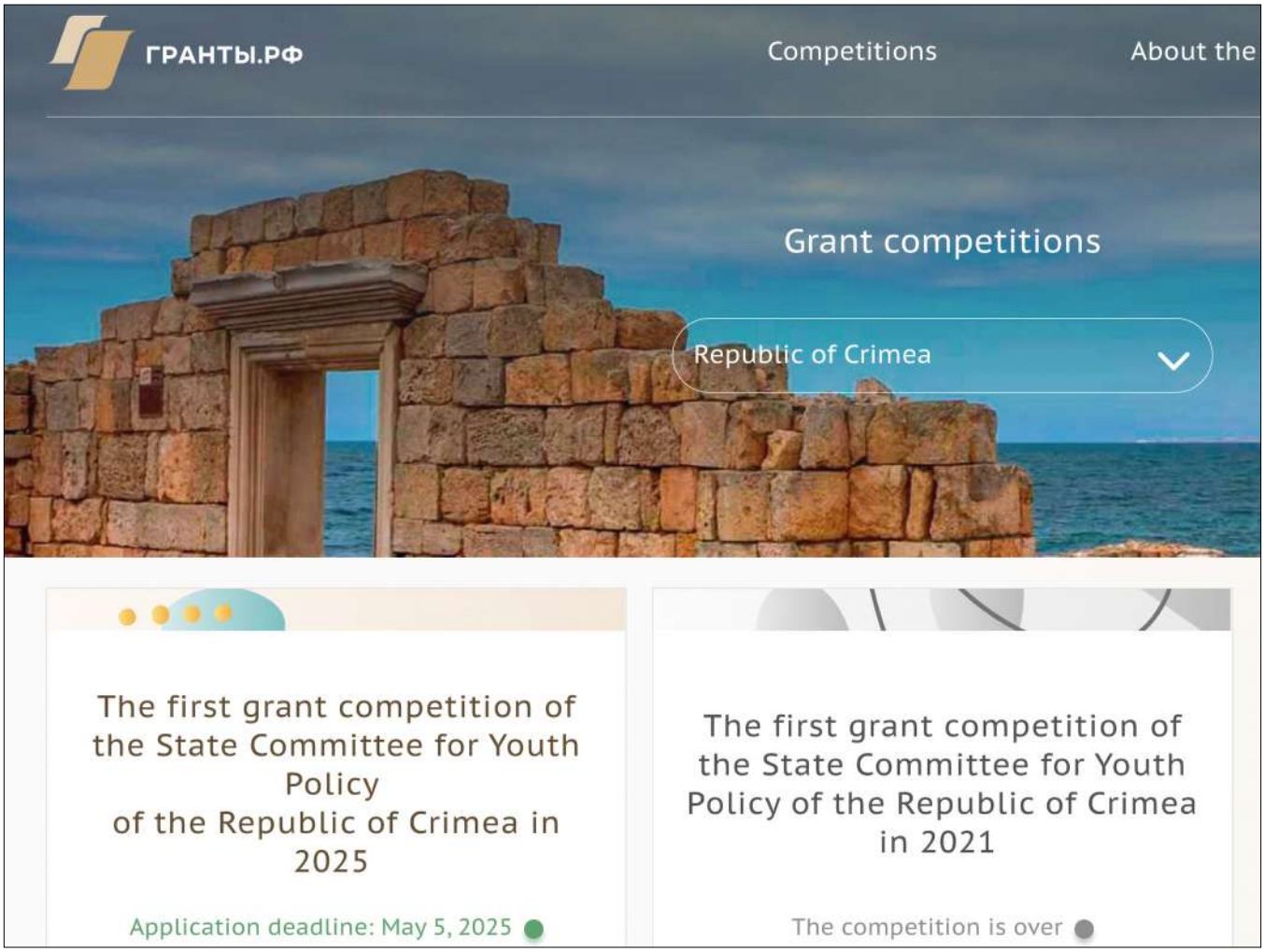
МИНОБРНАУКИ РОССИИ
Support programs
New grants for international projects between Russia and Cuba: Russian Ministry of Education and Science announces a joint research competition


ГРАНТЫ.РФ
Competitions
About the
Grant competitions
Republic of Crimea
The first grant competition of the State Committee for Youth Policy of the Republic of Crimea in 2025
Application deadline: May 5, 2025
The first grant competition of the State Committee for Youth Policy of the Republic of Crimea in 2021
The competition is over

Russia's influence through historical revisionism

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool involving the systematic distortion of historical facts to justify the current policy, strengthen imperial ideology, and impose the worldview required by the Kremlin. Russia actively uses this tool, altering the interpretation of historical events to create the image of a 'great power' that invariably influences the most important geopolitical processes.

How does it work?

Overall, Russian historical revisionism focuses on several areas: rewriting the history of World War II using the myth of the 'liberating mission of the USSR' and denying the Stalinist crimes, denying the existence of Ukrainian statehood and imposing the narrative of Ukraine being a 'historical part of Russia', distorting the events of the break-up of the USSR, which is presented as the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe', as well as discrediting the West by accusing it of supporting Nazism, imperialism, and Russophobia.

One of the most influential aspects of the Kremlin's historical revisionism is state intervention in historical studies. Institutions like the Russian Historical Society (RHS) and the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) actively work in Russia to create 'correct' versions of history. For example, the Kremlin-initiated Russian history textbook for schools omits facts about Stalinist repression and glorifies the 'reunification' of Ukraine with Russia in the 17th century. Particular attention should be paid to Vladimir Putin's personal interventions in the historical discourse, which underscore the importance of this tool in Russia's soft power arsenal. For instance, Putin regularly publishes 'historical' essays containing narratives important to the Kremlin. In the essay On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians (2021), he denies the existence of Ukrainians as a separate nation, calling them 'one nation' (that is, Russians). In 2020, Putin published a piece in The National Interest where he attempted to shift the responsibility for the start of World War II onto the West and justify the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. These articles shape the official position of the Kremlin, becoming the basis for educational programmes and propaganda campaigns.

The cultural aspect of historical revisionism is also worth emphasising. For instance, Russia routinely produces films and TV shows that create myths about the 'great victory' of the USSR and Ukraine being a 'traitor nation'. Thus, the film Crimea (2017) justifies the annexation of the peninsula, while the TV show Union of Salvation (2019) distorts the history of the Decembrist revolt to emphasise the 'pernicious influence of the West'. In turn, Russian embassies, Rossotrudnichestvo, and Kremlin-controlled pro-Russian organisations promote their versions of history in European and Asian countries. These efforts are particularly active in the post-Soviet countries, where Russia tries to restore its influence, for example, through the popularisation of Soviet symbols and the celebration of Victory Day.

How to deal with it?

Historical revisionism is a dangerous Russia's soft power tool that justifies aggression and harms the national identity of other countries. Efforts to counter it should be based on facts, open archives, and international cooperation. It is important to expand independent historical research that debunks Russian myths and to support historians and projects that document the crimes of the USSR and today's Russia. It is also necessary to protect historical truth in the information space by exposing fakes in international media, developing alternative documentary projects, and conducting educational campaigns to counter Kremlin manipulations.

What does it look like?


Основано в 1866 г.
РОССИЙСКОЕ
ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ
ОБЩЕСТВО
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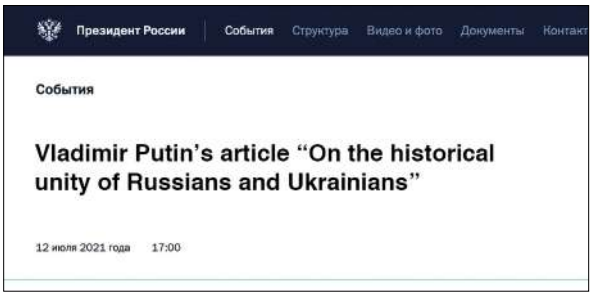
Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II
The Russian president offers a comprehensive assessment of the legacy of World War II, arguing that "Today, European politicians, and Polish leaders in particular, wish to sweep the Munich Betrayal under the carpet. The Munich Betrayal showed to the Soviet Union that the Western countries would deal with security issues without taking its interests into account."


Президент России
События
Структура
Видео и фото
Документы
Контакт
События
Vladimir Putin's article "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians"
12 июля 2021 года 17:00

Russia's influence through loyal political structures

What is it?

A Russian soft power tool used to promote Kremlin interests through the creation and support of pro-Russian political forces, movements, and organisations in countries that are of strategic interest to the Russian Federation. These structures perform the functions of internal destabilisation, legitimising pro-Russian narratives, promoting the ideas of 'neutrality' or 'brotherly nations', and can also be used to influence electoral processes and shape the country's political course.

How does it work?

Russia funds and supports political forces that spread Kremlin messages, advocate for a compromise with the Russian Federation, promote anti-Western rhetoric, and work to undermine the unity of Ukrainian society. Before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the main agent of Russian influence was Viktor Medvedchuk, a politician closely linked to the Kremlin, a co-leader of the Opposition Platform – For Life (OPFL) party, and the effective owner of the pro-Russian media outlets NewsOne, 112, and ZIK in Ukraine. His party actively promoted the ideas of the Russian World, blocked Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration efforts, and worked on fostering a pro-Russian electorate. After the ban of OPFL, Russia created a project titled 'Another Ukraine', which is a political initiative aimed at engaging with Ukrainians living in the occupied territories or those who have moved to Russia to form an 'alternative' Ukrainian political movement loyal to the Kremlin. This project is being promoted as a 'platform for Ukrainian opposition' and is intended to create the appearance of support for Russian occupation administrations among Ukrainians. This is yet another Russian soft power tool used to discredit the Ukrainian authorities, create the illusion of an 'internal conflict', and justify the aggression of the Russian Federation.

How to deal with it?

To counter Russia's influence through loyal political structures, it is important to publicly expose their connections with the Kremlin and strictly regulate their media influence on society. Government bodies should ensure control over political financing to prevent the infiltration of Russian money into domestic political processes. In addition, we need to intensify counterpropaganda that will expose Russia's attempts to legitimise its occupation administrations through projects like Another Ukraine. Ukrainian society must receive reliable information about Russia's true intentions and attempts to restore its influence through loyal political forces.

What does it look like?









CENTER FOR COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

Kyiv, 2025