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THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR (2022–2025)

This paper analyzes the evolution of Russian disinformation strategies during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war from 2022 to 2025, highlighting key phases, operational methods, and the adaptive nature of propaganda in the context of hybrid warfare. It demonstrates how the Russian Federation systematically transformed its disinformation campaigns from traditional Soviet-style narratives into complex, technology-driven operations capable of targeting both domestic and international audiences. The paper also examines the impact of major geopolitical developments, such as the return of D. Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2025, which Russian actors exploit to amplify doubts about Western unity and continued support for Ukraine. The study traces the intensification of false narratives, the use of deepfakes and AI-generated content, and the coordination with cyberattacks and psychological operations to destabilize Ukrainian society and weaken Western support. Special attention is given to Ukraine's proactive countermeasures, including rapid fact-checking, strategic communication, pre-emptive exposure of planned manipulations, and efforts to strengthen public resilience through digital literacy and community engagement. The paper also examines the role of social media platforms, troll farms, and bot networks in amplifying fake news and the necessity for stronger collaboration between governments, civil society, and technology companies to mitigate the spread of falsehoods. Moreover, it explores the significance of international cooperation in exposing and sanctioning state-sponsored propaganda, emphasizing the importance of a unified response at the EU and UN levels. The findings underline that the Russian-Ukrainian war has become a testing ground for modern information

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warfare, where adaptive tactics and resilient societies are equally decisive as military strength. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary disinformation evolves and what measures are essential for democratic states to safeguard information integrity and national security in the face of persistent hybrid threats.

Keywords: disinformation, propaganda, hybrid warfare, information security, Russian-Ukrainian war, narratives, misinformation campaigns, media manipulation.

Еволюція російських дезінформаційних стратегій у контексті російсько-української війни (2022–2025)

У статті проаналізовано еволюцію стратегій російської дезінформації під час повномасштабної російсько-української війни у період з 2022 по 2025 роки, з акцентом на ключові етапи, методи впливу та адаптивний характер пропаганди в умовах гібридної війни. Показано, як Російська Федерація системно трансформувала свої кампанії дезінформації від традиційних наративів радянського зразка до складних операцій, заснованих на використанні новітніх технологій, спрямованих як на внутрішню, так і на міжнародну аудиторію. У статті також розглянуто вплив важливих геополітичних подій, зокрема обрання Д. Трампа на пост президента США у 2025 році, що використовується російськими акторами для посилення сумнівів щодо єдності. У дослідженні простежується посилення фейкових наративів, використання дипфейків та контенту, створеного штучним інтелектом, а також координація цих заходів із кібератаками та психологічними операціями для дестабілізації українського суспільства та послаблення підтримки Заходу. Особлива увага приділяється проактивним контрзаходам України, зокрема швидкій перевірці фактів, стратегічним комунікаціям, превентивному викриттю запланованих маніпуляцій та підвищенню стійкості громадян через розвиток цифрової грамотності та залучення громад. У статті також досліджується роль соціальних мереж, фабрик тролів і ботмереж у поширенні фейкових новин та наголошується на необхідності тіснішої співпраці між урядами, громадянським суспільством і технологічними компаніями для протидії поширенню неправдивої інформації. Крім того, підкреслюється важливість міжнародного співробітництва для викриття та санкціонування державної пропаганди, особливо у форматах ЄС та ООН. Висновки демонструють, що

російсько-українська війна стала випробувальним полігоном сучасної інформаційної війни, де адаптивні тактики та стійке суспільство є так само важливими, як і військова сила.

Ключові слова: дезінформація, пропаганда, гібридна війна, інформаційна безпека, російсько-українська війна, наративи, кампанії дезінформації, маніпуляція медіа.

Problem Statement. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, which escalated dramatically in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has brought to the forefront not only conventional military confrontations but also unprecedented information warfare. In this hybrid conflict, disinformation has emerged as one of Russia's most sophisticated and adaptive tools for destabilizing Ukrainian society, undermining international support for Ukraine, and influencing political discourse in Western democracies. Despite substantial efforts by Ukraine, allied governments, and international organizations to detect, counter, and debunk false narratives, Russian disinformation campaigns continue to evolve, adopting new tactics, channels, and narratives that reflect changing battlefield realities, geopolitical shifts, and technological advancements. In particular, recent political changes, including the re-election of D. Trump as President of the United States in 2024, have the potential to further shape the information security landscape, given his previous administration's controversial stance on Russian activities and its perceived impact on the cohesion of the Western information space. Existing academic research has primarily focused on the early stages of the conflict and the initial response mechanisms employed by Ukraine and its partners. However, there is a noticeable lack of systematic studies examining how Russian disinformation strategies have transformed during the prolonged phase of the war and how they adapt to evolving domestic and international contexts, including shifting power dynamics within the United States and the European Union.

Review of Current Research. Recent scholarship highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of Russian disinformation strategies throughout the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. Bronk C., Collins G., and Wallach D.S. (Bronk, Collins, Wallach 2023) analyze how cyber operations and information warfare have intertwined, demonstrating Russia's capability to combine technological exploits with narrative manipulation. Earlier, Buchyn M. and Kurus Y. (Buchyn, Kurus 2018) emphasized the mechanisms

of countering such threats, which laid the groundwork for understanding today's more complex hybrid warfare tactics described by Dolzhenko A. (Dolzhenko 2022). Helmus T. and Holynska C. (Helmus, Holynska 2024) provide insights into Ukraine's resilience against disinformation, underlining the importance of societal adaptability and media literacy initiatives. Polegkyi O. (Polegkyi 2023) contrasts Russia's propaganda narratives before and after the 2022 invasion, showing a shift towards more systematic targeting of Western audiences. Complementing this, Krainikova T. and Prokopenko S. (Krainikova, Prokopenko 2023) discuss the waves of disinformation as a continuous hybrid tactic, while Nieminen H. (Nieminen 2024) explores why disinformation finds fertile ground in liberal democracies. Dervis L. (Dervis 2024) connects these trends to historical geopolitical ambitions, broadening the context for analyzing modern strategies. Taken together, this body of research reveals an evolution from isolated propaganda efforts to a highly integrated, multi-level disinformation ecosystem that exploits both digital vulnerabilities and sociopolitical fractures. These findings underscore the urgent need for coordinated international responses to safeguard information security and democratic institutions.

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the key transformations in Russian disinformation strategies during the Russian-Ukrainian war from 2022 to 2025, with a focus on identifying how these strategies adapt to shifting military, political, and international contexts. The study aims to examine the mechanisms, narratives, and technological tools employed by Russian actors to influence public opinion and destabilize Ukraine's information environment. Additionally, the article seeks to assess the effectiveness of Ukrainian and international countermeasures, contributing to the development of more resilient information security frameworks in the face of evolving hybrid threats.

Research Methodology. This study employs a qualitative research design combining content analysis, comparative analysis, and case study methods. Primary data sources include official statements, governmental and non-governmental reports, and verified media content from 2022 to 2025. Secondary data consist of scholarly articles, expert analyses, and think tank reports addressing Russian information warfare and hybrid conflict dynamics. Content analysis is applied to identify dominant narratives, techniques, and channels used in Russian disinformation campaigns. A comparative approach evaluates shifts in strategies before and after key military and political turning points, including significant battlefield de-

velopments and changes in Western support. The case study method highlights specific disinformation incidents that illustrate broader strategic trends. Overall, this methodological framework enables a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Russian disinformation and informs recommendations for strengthening information security and counter-disinformation measures in Ukraine and allied states.

Presentation of the main research material. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian Federation has systematically adapted its disinformation strategies to address both domestic and international audiences under rapidly changing military and geopolitical conditions (Bronk, Collins, Wallach 2023). That is to say, this evolution reflects a shift from traditional Soviet-era propaganda techniques to sophisticated, multi-layered, and technologically integrated operations aimed at shaping perceptions, undermining Ukrainian resilience, and fracturing Western unity. Furthermore, by tracing key phases of this transformation from 2022 to 2025, we will examine how Russian disinformation has remained a central component of hybrid warfare, even as Ukraine and its allies have developed countermeasures to mitigate its impact (Dzhush 2023). Understanding the evolution of Russian disinformation strategies during the Russian-Ukrainian war is crucial for strengthening global information security and democratic resilience (Helmus, Holynska 2024). As disinformation tactics become more sophisticated – incorporating deepfakes, AI-driven bots, and localized narratives – they pose serious threats to public trust, political stability, and international solidarity with Ukraine (Nieminen 2024). The following phases in the evolution of Russian disinformation strategies in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war will be examined in greater detail below.

1. Early Phase – Shock and Confusion (2022).

It is important to note that, at the outbreak of the invasion, Russian disinformation campaigns capitalized on shock and uncertainty to establish control over the narrative both at home and abroad. Bronk C., Collins G., and Wallach D.S. (Bronk, Collins, Wallach 2023) highlight that Russia rapidly deployed state media, troll farms, and automated bots to spread conflicting stories about the justification for the «special military operation», framing it variously as «denazification», «protection of Russian speakers», and a defensive action against NATO encirclement. Domestically, this messaging leveraged existing control over broadcast and online media to suppress dissent, while internationally, the Kremlin aimed

to muddy information spaces in Europe and North America by flooding social media with contradictory narratives, conspiracy theories, and fabricated civilian casualties caused by Ukrainian «provocations» (Dervis 2024).

For example, a notable tactic in this early stage was the amplification of fabricated «biolabs» stories, alleging that the United States and Ukraine operated secret biological weapons facilities, posing an existential threat to Russia (New Report Documents Russia's Disinformation Campaign Against Ukraine. 2024). This claim, repeatedly debunked by independent investigations and fact-checkers, nonetheless circulated widely, aided by influencers and fringe websites in the West. Polegkyi O. (Polegkyi 2023) argues that such tactics targeted the far-right and far-left online communities simultaneously, exploiting ideological divisions and anti-establishment sentiment. These efforts were reinforced by coordinated cyberattacks on Ukrainian government websites, aiming to erode public trust in official information channels and create panic among civilians (Undermining Ukraine: How Russia widened its global information war in 2023. 2024). Additionally, Russian operatives manipulated authentic footage from unrelated conflicts, presenting it as evidence of Ukrainian atrocities, further fueling confusion and undermining international support for Kyiv's defensive efforts in early 2022 (New Report Exposes Russia's Strategic Disinformation Warfare. 2025).

2. Adaptation and Recalibration Phase – Targeted Narratives and Proxy Channels (2023).

In this context, as the initial shock faded and Ukrainian resistance proved unexpectedly resilient, Russia recalibrated its disinformation approaches. Dzhus O.A. (Dzhus 2023) identifies that by mid-2023, Russian strategists increasingly focused on targeted narratives tailored to specific audiences. For instance, in Europe, pro-Russian outlets emphasized themes of «Ukraine fatigue», energy insecurity, and the economic burdens of supporting Kyiv (Blank 2022). Social media campaigns highlighted protests in Germany, France, and Italy against rising utility costs, often exaggerating attendance figures or fabricating clashes with police (Krlis 2024).

Simultaneously, Russian channels invested in indirect amplification: instead of overt state channels like RT or Sputnik, Moscow increasingly relied on proxy influencers, pseudo-independent «alternative media», and local sympathizers who reproduced Kremlin-friendly talking points without overt links to Russian authorities (Krasnodemska, Kalinichenko,

2024). Krainikova T. and Prokopenko S. (Krainikova, Prokopenko 2023) describe this shift as a move toward «waves» of micro-influencer operations, which evaded platform moderation more effectively than direct propaganda. For example, the Wagner Group mutiny in June 2023 provided a striking example of adaptive disinformation (New Report Exposes Russia's Strategic Disinformation Warfare. 2025). While Western media focused on the power struggle within Russia, pro-Kremlin outlets abroad framed the mutiny as evidence of Western attempts to destabilize Russia internally. By distorting the narrative, the Kremlin sought to externalize blame and portray domestic fractures as consequences of NATO interference (Dolzhenko 2022).

Building on this recalibration, Russia also intensified its linguistic and cultural tailoring of disinformation to resonate more deeply within specific national contexts. In Eastern Europe, narratives exploited historical grievances and anti-EU sentiment, framing Ukraine as a source of regional instability draining EU resources (Bilichak, Huz, 2024). In parallel, disinformation campaigns targeted diaspora communities, spreading manipulated stories through community forums and encrypted messaging apps. Therefore, these operations blurred the line between organic dissent and orchestrated manipulation, complicating detection. Researchers noted that by late 2023, these multi-layered strategies had become increasingly decentralized, relying on loosely connected networks rather than centralized command, making counter-disinformation efforts more challenging and resource-intensive (Helmus, Holynska 2024).

3. Technological Integration and Deepfakes – Weaponization of Emerging Tools (2024).

It is worth noting that, by 2024, Russian information operations integrated emerging technologies to enhance the credibility and reach of false content. One significant development has been the widespread use of AI-generated deepfake videos and audio clips. In addition, Helmus T. and Holynska K. (Helmus, Holynska 2024) document instances where fabricated videos, allegedly showing Ukrainian officials surrendering or Western leaders making derogatory statements about Ukraine, circulated rapidly on Telegram and TikTok before being debunked. These deepfakes exploited the high speed of social media virality and the low digital literacy in some audiences to achieve quick, short-term impacts even if later exposed (Krlis 2024).

In this context, another technological evolution involved the use of chatbots and generative AI for comment flooding and auto-generated fake news articles. Fake «leaks» of NATO intelligence or fabricated reports of Western war crimes in Ukraine proliferated in multiple languages, often hosted on newly registered websites designed to mimic legitimate outlets (New Report Exposes Russia's Strategic Disinformation Warfare, 2025). Once published, these fake reports were picked up by fringe journalists or recycled through sympathetic politicians, especially in far-right or Eurosceptic circles in Europe and North America. That is to say, the Russian strategy thus evolved into a «spray and pray» model: produce enormous volumes of seemingly credible falsehoods, overwhelm fact-checkers' capacity, and ensure that even after debunking, fragments of doubt remain embedded in public consciousness (Nieminen 2024).

Furthermore, this tactic not only amplifies confusion but also erodes public trust in authentic information sources, contributing to a climate of cynicism and polarization. In response, Ukraine has invested in rapid-response teams and AI-driven detection tools to identify manipulated content more quickly. Social media platforms have faced increasing pressure to update content moderation algorithms capable of detecting deepfake signatures and bot activity (Undermining Ukraine: How Russia widened its global information war in 2023, 2024). Despite these efforts, the sheer scale and adaptability of Russian technological disinformation highlight a persistent arms race between malign actors and defenders of information integrity, underscoring the urgent need for sustained international cooperation and robust digital literacy initiatives worldwide (Bilichak, Huz 2024).

4. Resilience and Countermeasures – Ukraine's Strategic Communication (2024-2025).

Facing this onslaught, Ukraine and its partners have significantly improved their counter-disinformation frameworks. In addition, Taranenko A. (Taranenko 2024) and Dervis L. (Dervis 2024) emphasize that Ukraine's international diplomatic communications – especially during UN sessions and summits – have increasingly focused on exposing Russian information operations with evidence, thus pre-empting Kremlin narratives. That is to say, Ukrainian civil society organizations, independent media, and volunteer fact-checking groups expanded «digital hygiene» campaigns to educate citizens on verifying sources and reporting suspicious content (Buschman 2024).

Internationally, Western governments strengthened collaboration with tech companies to detect coordinated inauthentic behavior faster (Krlis 2024). The EU's Digital Services Act provisions were actively enforced to demand transparency from platforms hosting pro-Kremlin disinformation networks. Despite these efforts, Nieminen H. (Nieminen 2024) warns that structural factors like polarization and mistrust of mainstream media continue to provide fertile ground for disinformation to take root, even in liberal democracies. Nevertheless, Ukraine's proactive approach has set important precedents for other states facing similar hybrid threats (Helmus, Holynska 2024). Government agencies have partnered with social media platforms to flag harmful content promptly, while rapid-response fact-checking units debunk viral falsehoods within hours (Bronk., Collins, Wallach 2023). Additionally, Ukraine has intensified cooperation with NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence to exchange best practices and strengthen regional resilience. Social media platforms, under increased regulatory pressure, have begun to implement more robust labeling of state-affiliated content and to suspend accounts linked to coordinated disinformation campaigns (Blank 2022). Nevertheless, challenges persist as disinformation actors continually adapt to bypass new safeguards. These combined measures underscore that countering disinformation requires not only technological solutions but also sustained public education, cross-border collaboration, and unwavering political commitment.

5. Geopolitical Factors and the Trump Presidency – A New Inflection Point (2025).

It is important to note that, one of the most consequential developments shaping the disinformation landscape is the return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in early 2025. While it is too early for comprehensive scholarly analyses, preliminary observations suggest that Russia perceives an opportunity to exploit renewed divisions within American politics (Nieminen 2024). For example, several viral clips and fake statements have circulated on X (formerly Twitter) and Truth Social, claiming that President Trump would recognize Russian control over occupied Ukrainian territories – a claim denied by the White House but still echoed by pro-Kremlin channels to sow doubt about Washington's commitment to Kyiv (Krasnodemska, Kalinichenko 2024).

Domestically within the U.S., Russian-linked troll farms revived «America First» slogans blended with calls to reduce military aid to Ukraine and

focus on domestic priorities (McKay, Tenove 2020). This narrative finds resonance among segments of the American public already skeptical of foreign entanglements. In this context, Buschman J. (Buschman 2024) provides a useful framework to understand how such narratives function as systematically distorted communication that exploits gaps in public understanding. In addition to exploiting domestic divisions in the United States, Russian disinformation efforts have also adapted to target European audiences by portraying Trump's return as a signal of weakening transatlantic unity. Kremlin-affiliated outlets emphasize narratives suggesting that NATO may fracture under renewed U.S. isolationism, aiming to undermine European resolve to sustain sanctions and military support for Ukraine (Dervis 2024). Furthermore, Russian operatives amplify voices within the EU advocating for peace negotiations on Moscow's terms, depicting continued Ukrainian resistance as futile without unwavering American backing (Kravnikova, Prokopenko 2023). These coordinated information attacks highlight how geopolitical shifts are quickly weaponized to fracture alliances and erode international solidarity.

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Looking ahead, several emerging trends merit attention. First, the localization of disinformation is becoming more granular. Jeronimo P., Esparza M.S. (Jeronimo, Esparza 2022) observe that community-level disinformation is harder to detect and disrupt because it often piggybacks on real local grievances. Russian operators increasingly harness local Telegram channels, WhatsApp groups, and neighborhood Facebook pages to inject polarizing content subtly tied to local disputes or municipal corruption (Krlis 2024). Second, the information battlefield is expanding beyond Europe. In 2024–2025, Russia has invested substantial resources in spreading disinformation across the Global South, portraying Western support for Ukraine as a form of neo-colonial interference (Taranenko 2024).

In this context, effectively countering Russian disinformation during the Russian-Ukrainian war requires a comprehensive, multi-level approach that combines technological tools, legal frameworks, public awareness, and international cooperation. First, strengthening rapid response systems is crucial. Fact-checking organizations, independent media, and government agencies must collaborate to detect and debunk false narratives swiftly before they gain traction (Buchyn, Kurus 2018). Ukraine's experience shows that coordinated rebuttals, timely press briefings, and pre-emptive exposure of planned disinformation campaigns can

significantly reduce the impact of falsehoods. Second, enhancing digital literacy among the population is vital to build societal immunity against manipulated content (Buschman 2024). Public education campaigns, integrated into school curricula and community initiatives, should teach citizens how to critically evaluate information sources, verify content, and report suspicious material (Nieminen 2024). Third, fostering closer partnerships between governments, civil society, and technology companies is necessary to disrupt networks of fake accounts, troll farms, and bot-driven amplification (Krlis 2024). Social media platforms must be held accountable through clear regulations obliging them to remove or label disinformation and disclose the origins of politically motivated content. Fourth, international cooperation is essential to share intelligence, harmonize policies, and expose state-sponsored propaganda on global stages such as the United Nations and the European Union (Taranenko 2024). Ukraine's case demonstrates that resilience against disinformation must be adaptive, combining technological innovation, resilient institutions, and an informed citizenry capable of resisting systematic deception in an era of hybrid threats.

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Conclusion. In summary, the evolution of Russian disinformation strategies from 2022 to 2025 demonstrates the Kremlin's persistent commitment to information warfare as a core element of its hybrid tactics against Ukraine and the broader West. From the initial shock phase, marked by crude and contradictory justifications for invasion, to increasingly sophisticated techniques involving deepfakes, localized misinformation, and the exploitation of emerging geopolitical events, Russian operators have shown remarkable adaptability in sustaining confusion, division, and fear. The integration of cyberattacks with disinformation campaigns, as evidenced by DDoS attacks on critical Ukrainian digital infrastructure during military escalations, further underlines the hybrid nature of modern conflicts where digital and physical fronts are inseparably linked. The return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2025 has opened a new inflection point, providing Russian strategists with fresh narratives to weaken transatlantic unity and erode confidence in continued Western support for Ukraine. Simultaneously, the targeting of European and Global South audiences illustrates Moscow's global ambition to shape perceptions far beyond the immediate battlefield.

Nevertheless, Ukraine's resilience in the information domain, supported by active civil society, international partners, and adaptive techno-

logical responses, offers crucial lessons for other democracies. Rapid fact-checking, pre-emptive diplomatic communication, legal measures, and enhanced media literacy have proven effective in containing and countering false narratives. The Ukrainian case underscores the need for sustained international cooperation, robust regulatory frameworks for digital platforms, and public awareness to mitigate the impact of future information warfare. In conclusion, recognizing and understanding the trajectory of Russian disinformation strategies is vital not only for Ukraine's security but also for safeguarding democratic societies worldwide against the destabilizing effects of systematic deception in an age of rapid technological and geopolitical change.

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