Russian disinformation tactics at the time of war. Lessons learned from Ukraine

This guide is prepared by Filter.
National media literacy project of Ukraine

Filter

National media
literacy project

Introduction: While most of us are far from the tanks and the bombs, which are now flying over Ukraine, we all are still participating in an information war. The role of Russian propaganda has been integral: without it, Russia would not have been able to launch its invasion of Ukraine. Disinformation narratives have helped the Kremlin to prepare domestic audiences for the invasion, and have stalled Ukraine's EU integration progress. Russians have also tricked the West into thinking they could be reasoned with, an error which Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson admitted on March 16.

As the war in Ukraine has proven, being able to spot fakes can become a matter of personal security. Knowing the mechanisms of disinformation will help us evaluate news messages rapidly and distill hoax news from reality more efficiently.

Russia justifies its aggression with the help of narratives curated for different audiences. This lecture will look into the key Russian disinformation goals, tactics and narratives spread by Russia in Ukraine, among Russians and in the West. We will discuss how these narratives influence public opinions worldwide and how individuals can respond to them.

1. Quiz "Fake – not Fake".

Lecturer/speaker encourages the audience to evaluate the following news messages about Ukraine, discuss in which countries/areas they could be spreading, who they could be targeting and whether they are fake or not.

**Case 1. Target countries: Ukraine, Russia**
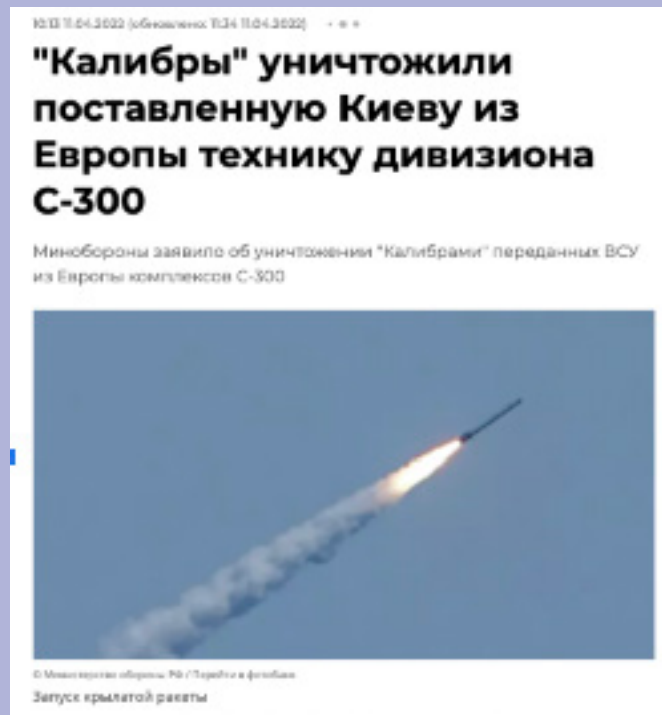
Description: On April 10 Russian media began circulating information about the "immediate" destruction of S-300 air defense systems that Slovakia supplied to Ukraine two days earlier. Citing Russia's Defense ministry, Russian publications claimed that these systems had been completely destroyed in Mykolayiv, Kharkiv and later Dnipropetrovsk regions.

Explanation: This was a fake message. On April 11, Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger denied that any of the air defense systems Bratislava delivered to Ukraine were destroyed. It is worth noting that on the eve of Russia's fake about the alleged destruction of the S-300 systems, Russian media featured stories claiming that Slovakia had sent Ukraine "only old air defense system."

Read more about the case here.

Case 2. Target country: Russia
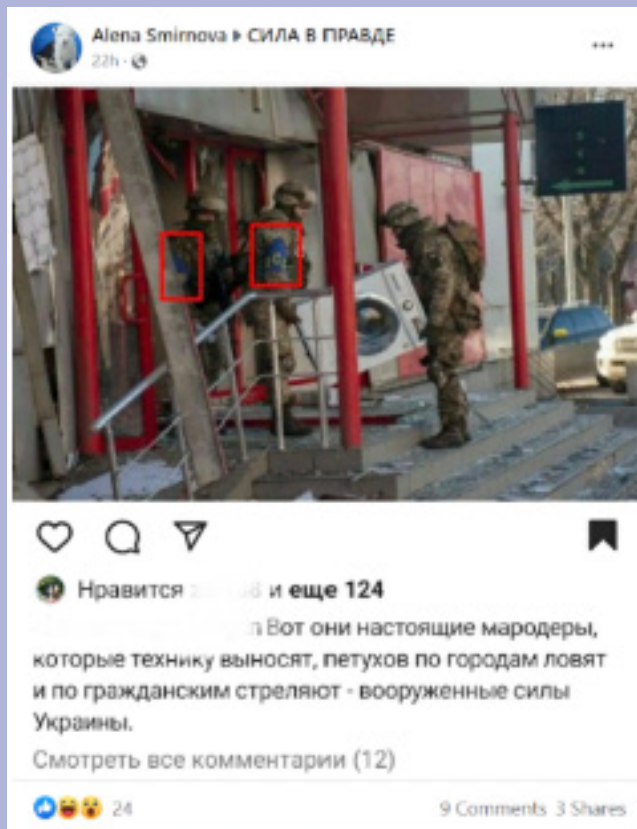
The caption reads: "These are real looters who steal machines and shoot at civilians – these are Ukrainian Armed Forces".

"Ukrainian soldiers are saving a washing machine. Looking forward to [fake] posts about "Russian looters"

Description: These posts make claims that Ukrainian soldiers are stealing from Ukrainians. Russian accounts began distributing this photo right after numerous reports about Russian soldiers looting Ukrainian houses started appearing online. Read more about this case here.

Explanation: In fact, the photo had been taken and posted a month before Russian propaganda used it. It belongs to AP and shows Ukrainian soldiers helping to relocate goods from a market in Kharkiv, which had been destroyed by shelling. See the source.

Case 3. Target: EU

Description: Posts in the media and on social media accounts make a claim that Ukraine has not officially registered its borders with the UN. They also state that the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in 2014 that Ukraine had «not applied for border registration since 1991».

Explanation: The allegation that there are no official borders in Ukraine first appeared in April 2014 on a Russian-language website of the Ukrainian Choice organization. This organization belongs to Victor Medvedchuk. Vladimir Putin is a godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter, a fact that reveals their close relationship. Therefore, there is a link between the Ukrainian Choice page, and the organization's policy in general, with the Kremlin.   In early February 2022, the claim reappeared on Slovak websites, and then spread to other countries.

AFP has traced the whereabouts of then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on April 7, 2014, the date the alleged remarks regarding Ukraine are said to have come from. According to the report, Ban was in Rwanda that day to attend a commemoration ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the genocide in the East African country. Various international media reported on the visit at the time. The UN published Ban's speech on its website. He does not mention Ukraine in it.

Read more about the case [here.](here)

ASK: What do you think all these three cases have in common?
Note for the lecturer/speaker: All of them are inventions of Russian propaganda, related to Ukraine. Yet each of them carries a different message, depending on the target audience)
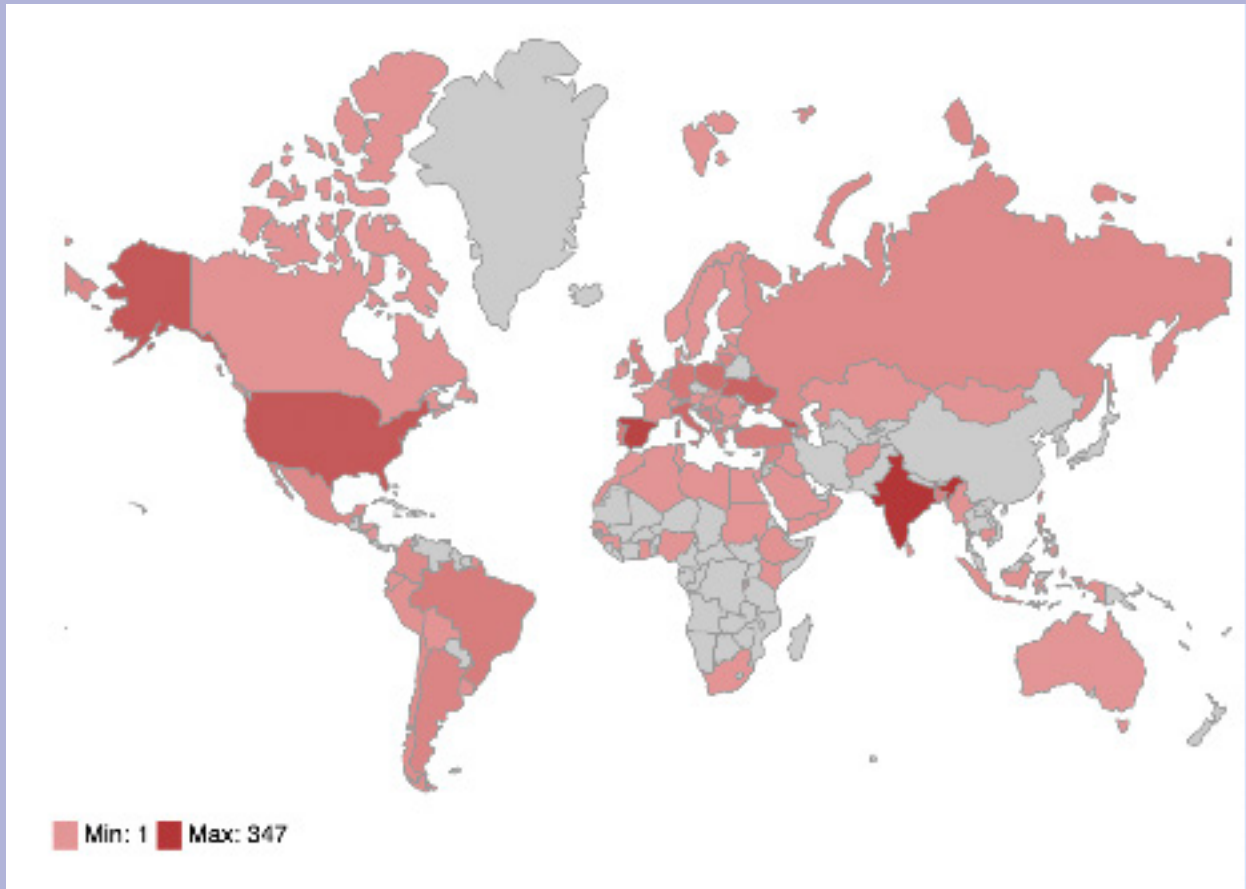
Useful source: https://ukrainefacts.org/. On the map, you can see the ubiquitousness of Russian propaganda.

This map shows that disinformation about Ukraine's invasion has circulated throughout continents. Countries in shades of red represent the amount of disinformation that has been identified and debunked by national fact-checkers in each country.

2. Russian propaganda in Ukraine.

2.1 Goals

1) divide Ukrainians

Explanation: For decades Russia also was fueling the language issue in Ukraine claiming that the rights of the Russian speaking population were violated in Ukraine. Language has become a cornerstone for dividing Ukraine into West, where the Ukrainian language dominated, and East, with a predominantly Russian speaking population. The language issue has also become a prerequisite for supporting another more radical narrative about Ukrainian nationalists.

Note: The full-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, has caused the opposite effect and many Russian-speaking Ukrainians are now shifting to Ukrainian language.

On the basis of language issue, Russia also divided Ukrainians into a loyal majority of "Little Russians" (a dull but harmless provincial branch of Great Russians) and the perverse minority of "nationalists" (arguably corrupted by Western influence and therefore obsessed with a crazy idea of Ukraine's difference and separateness).

2) sow disbelief in Western partners

Explanation: The network of pro-Russian propagandists TV channels operated in Ukraine aiming at undermining public trust to the EU and NATO. These channels, which were linked to the pro-Russian political party "Opposition Platform - For Life", were spreading narratives claiming that Ukraine was under the external control of the Western partners.

To undermine the partnership between Ukraine and the United States, Russian propaganda portrayed Ukraine as a bargaining chip between the United States and Russia, trying to level its role as a full-fledged subject of international relations. During the war, Russia tried to sow despair and frustration among Ukrainians by convincing them of the Western partners' betrayal.

3) weaken support of the Ukrainian political leadership

Explanation: Russian propaganda also aimed at undermining public trust to the Ukrainian authorities, claiming they were dependent on the West and weak to lead the country.

4) demoralize the population
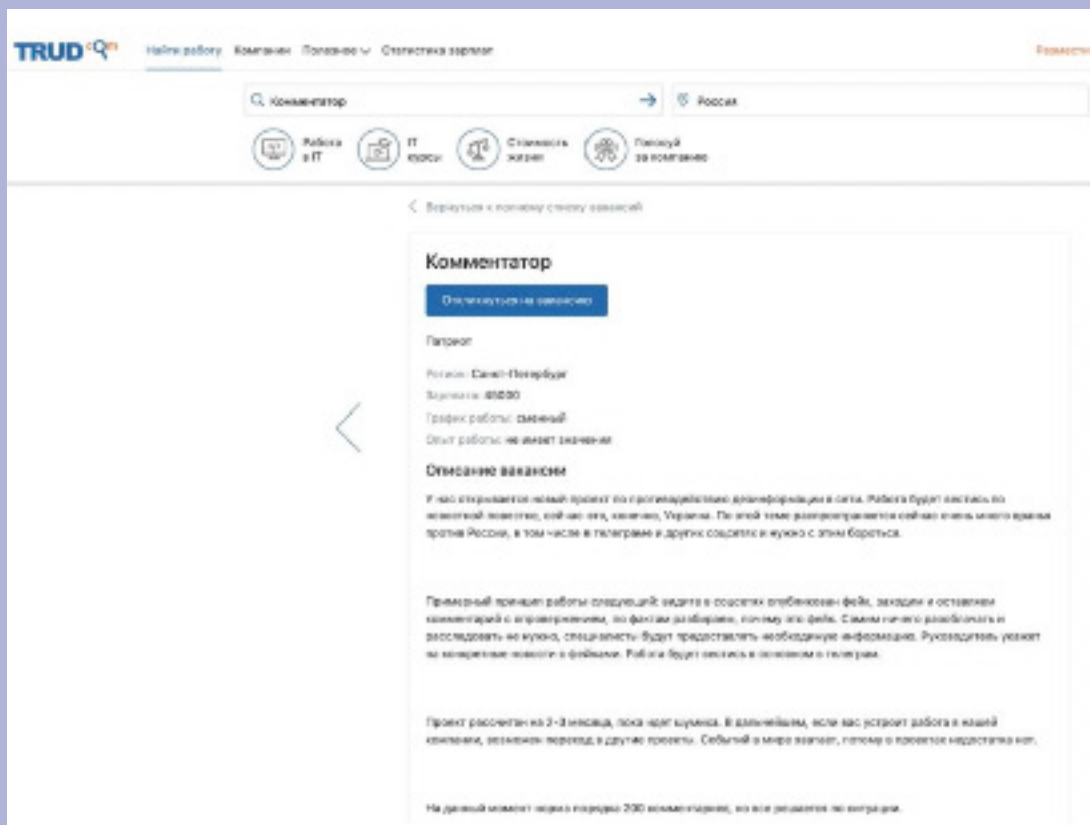
Explanation: it is easier to incline someone to accept another opinion and act accordingly, if the target audience is in fear. Russia has been trying to evoke fear in Ukrainians by making a massive psychological pressure through social media and later – by targeting civilian infrastructure.
Russia has been trying to convince Ukrainians that th
ey were abandonded by its own president and government, thus there is only putin who wishes them well and can protect them from the 'evil' Nazi leadership.

2.2 Tactics during the war.

With the start of the war, Russia intensified its malign information efforts in Ukraine.

Interesting fact: Here is an abstract from a job description of a position of a commentator, which was advertised on a job search site in russia:

"Your role is to refute disinformation. You do not have to analyse anything yourself, the texts for comments will be given to you by management, these messages will be prepared in advance by other specialists."

Below you will find some examples of Russian war-time propaganda tactics in Ukraine.

1) fake Telegram channels

Case. Sumy region. On slide 11, you can see a screenshot of fake TG channels representing towns in the Sumy region. The channels post news as if these Ukrainian towns were already occupied by Russia.
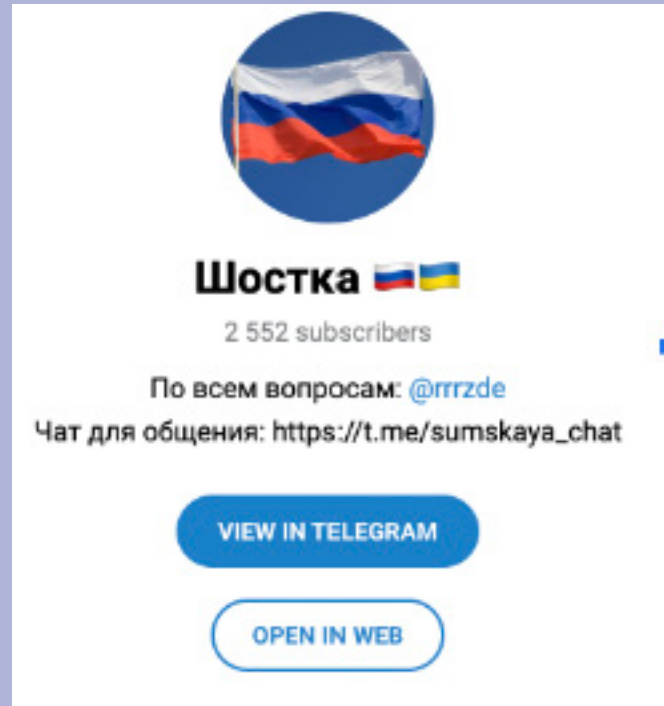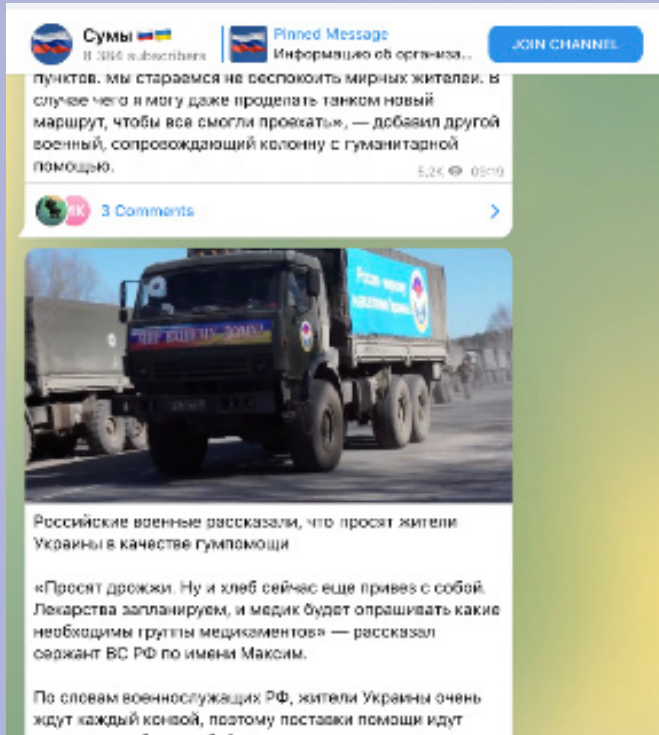
The key narrative these channels promote:
"Ukrainian Army abandoned you, Russia will protect you and take care of you"

Case. Kherson. Kherson is the only large Ukrainian city that has been under temporary Russian occupation since March 2, 2022 (as of May 11). Having cut the Ukrainian population from all communications the Russian propaganda spreads false messages among the citizens of Kherson, which discredit the actions of the Ukrainian authorities:
"Kherson was abandoned"
"Ukraine does not need Kherson"
"Ukraine has left the civilian population without means of subsistence"

Center for countering disinformation responded to that (Source):
"Ukraine will never leave the people of Kherson in trouble. Against the background of the situation at the front, the Ukrainian army does not start fighting within the city, since it could lead to casualties among civilians. Ukraine appreciates the efforts of the local population, which goes to rallies in support of Ukraine, despite the temporary occupation of Russia."

2) Russian bots and trolls in the comments sections of the local groups and chats

These bots aim at demoralizing Ukrainians. Often they post made-up stories about a 'raped daughter' or a 'son who never returned home' – normally followed by a summing-up narrative: "Ukrainian political leadership is responsible for ordinary people's suffering". They usually post these stories in comment sections under the war-related posts. The goal of these comments is to sow panic and charge people with emotions.

Profiles who spread these messages usually do not display any information (it is usually one photo, often stock) and have zero activity on their page. Likes under their posts often belong to Ukrainians who came across those comments and decided to support their 'compatriots' by liking their posts or profile picture.

3) fake statements - purportedly from Zelensky- calling on the Ukrainian people to lay down their arms.

On March 2, the Ukrainian government's Center for Strategic Communication warned that its enemies might be preparing a "deepfake" video that appeared to show president Volodymyr Zelensky announcing his surrender to Russia's invasion. In a few days, that warning appeared prescient. A fake and heavily manipulated video depicting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy started circulating on social media and was placed on a Ukrainian news website by hackers. The video, which shows a rendering of the Ukrainian president appearing to tell his soldiers to lay down their arms and surrender the fight against Russia, is a so-called deepfake that ran about a minute long.

The national television station Ukraine 24 confirmed that hackers managed to send the fake Zelenskyy message across live television on the scrolling-text news crawl known as «the ticker,» and the video showed up briefly on the news station's website.

The Zelensky deepfake failed to unleash confusion and mayhem, as seems to have been the intention. As Sam Gregory, the program director for the human rights group WITNESS, observed, it was a «best-case scenario» for a situation like this. The Ukrainian government had engaged in extensive «prebunking» — warning of possible manipulated videos before they emerged. However, regardless of where it came from and its quality, the video could potentially make some people question the veracity of videos of Zelenskyy in the future.

3. Russian propaganda in Russia. Goals, tactics and key narratives.

3.1 Goals:

1) instil blind belief in president Putin/ kill critical thinking

Explanation: Over the past several years, Putin has enhanced his ability to pursue his aims unencumbered.

For instance, key images were placed in the Russian media and often around the world: Putin on horseback, Putin practising judo, Putin arm-wrestling or strolling bare-chested by a river in Siberia. The goal was to ensure that Putin corresponded to the Hollywood image of a savior. Russians were more than ready for a strongman to ride to their rescue. More here.

2) unite nation around common enemies - West and NATO

Explanation: The demise of Western civilization is one of Russia's oldest disinformation tropes, with claims of "the decaying west" documented since the 19th century. Russia pushes the claim that Western civilization is collapsing and has strayed from "traditional values" because it supports LGBTQ movements and promotes female equality and multiculturalism. This "values"-based disinformation narrative is built on the concepts of "tradition," "family values," and "spirituality." Russia argues it serves as a moral counterweight to the"decadence" of the US and Western countries.

3) disengage potential opposition from politics

Explanation: In 2016, Dr Maren Rohe conducted interviews with Moscow university students who were fluent in either English or German, and who often used international media in these languages. Many of them were acutely aware of the differences in reporting between Russian and Western media. Realizing that a lot of media stories are fabricated led them to adopt an extremely critical stance towards all news, no matter the origin. More here.

Their belief that all media are lying led to disengaging from politics. This suits the Russian leadership as disengaged citizens are unlikely to put up any resistance. Depoliticized people also do not typically hold coherent opinions, and can believe contradictory accounts without noticing their incompatibility.

4) radicalize Russians on Ukraine (intensified during the war)

All the justifications that [Putin outlined in his notorious early-morning speech](#) on Feb. 24, 2022 — proclaiming a war against Ukraine that in Russia may only be referred to as a "special military operation" — were intensively discussed in a confrontational manner [by hosts and guests of prime-time TV shows](#).

This is how Russia deliberately radicalized Russian society on the question of Ukraine and Ukrainians. And it still keeps doing it aiming to mobilize Russians for a lasting war with Ukraine.

3.2 Tactics. Before the war.

1) Historical Revisionism.

Explanation: When history does not align with the Kremlin's political objectives, Russian government officials and their proxy voices deny [historical events](#) or distort historical narratives to try to cast Russia in a more favorable light and serve its domestic and geopolitical agenda. Reinventing history is an old tactic used to support imperialistic ambitions and the 'one people' narrative.

Case. The 1939 non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which helped precipitate World War II, is politically inconvenient for the Putin regime. In 2020, in an attempt to minimize and rationalize Stalin's decision to align himself with Hitler, Putin [published](#) a twisted version of the start of World War II, downplaying the Soviet role and shifting blame for the war to other countries.

2) Promoting imperialistic narratives curated and adapted for different audiences:

• **'Mighty Russia'**

Explanation: One of the most eloquent imperialist narratives spread by Russia is World War II and the victorious role of the Soviet people who protected the whole continent against German Nazi.

Even now, Russia keeps reminding of the supremacy of their culture over European: "Russian culture traditionally had a much higher moral bar compared to the Europeans. Russians are idealistic by default. This protects our people from Western infantilism and "cancel culture". However, other civilizations may shun us because of this fact" — [Life.ru](#)

- **'Mighty Putin': there are constant crises that only Putin can save the Russian people from**

Explanation: Today's Russian neo-imperialism, perfected over a long period of time, is the most dangerous one because it is being realized covertly, under the guise of «guardianship/protection» slogans about Russian-speaking and/or Orthodox citizens, fraternal peoples, peacekeeping, implementation of economic and energy projects. Russia led by Putin is always portrayed as a protector and generous supplier of help.

Propaganda is embedded in various formats to meet the needs of different audiences:

Case. Imperialism narrative through humor.
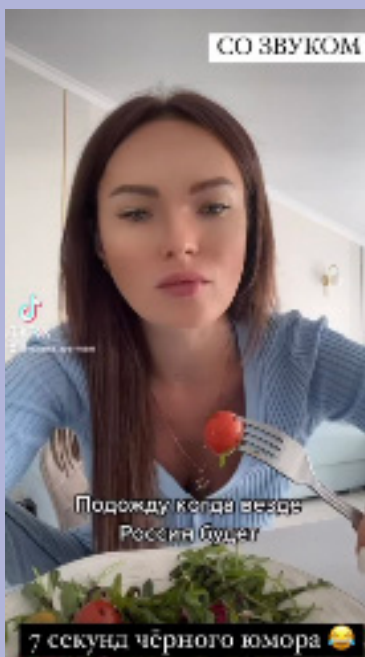
Here you can see a still from Oxana German's Instagram story (originally from her TikTok) where she is making a joke (Oxana German has over 1 mln followers):

"I do not have an international passport to travel abroad. But it is not a problem. I'll wait until it's Russia everywhere so I can travel freely".

See the video

- **'Brotherhood'/'one people' narrative: 'Russia is Ukraine's elder brother'. Ukraine is diverting from the family, we must show them the true path.**

Case. Propaganda cartoon to support the narrative:

Here you can see a still from a cartoon created to promote the "one people" narrative among Russians. The three-minute video shows children wearing t-shirts representing Ukraine, Germany, Russia and the US before going on to explain the War in Donbas.
Watch the cartoon here.

It starts with inseparable 'friends' Ukraine and Russia playing together in a sandbox and sitting next to each other at school before Ukraine leaves to 'hang out by himself', representing its independence from the Soviet Union.

The video, which has since gone viral on social media, goes on to explain the war in Donbas and is captioned 'How to explain to a child what the war in Donbas is and why Russia and Ukraine quarreled?'

Notes for the lecturer:
If following Russian propaganda during the war has taught us anything, it's that Russia accuses others of doing what Russia has done/plans to do itself.

Quote: Propaganda, as Timothy Snyder, a Yale professor of history, notes, is not "an edited version of reality, but rather a **crucial part of the endeavour to create a different reality** (...) not a flawed description, but a **script for action**(...) Propaganda is part of the action it is meant to justify".

Case. Putin's essay «On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians»:

- "true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia"
- Referring to 17th-century and later imperial Russia; Bolsheviks "chopp[ed] the country into pieces" and "Russia was robbed"

Putin's essay is included in the list of mandatory works to study by the Russian military.

The essay denies the existence of Ukraine as an independent nation. Noting the large number of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, Putin compares «the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia» to a use of weapons of mass destruction against Russians.

Putin openly questions the legitimacy of Ukraine's contemporary borders. Stockholm Free World Forum senior fellow Anders Åslund branded the article "a masterclass in disinformation" and "one step short of a declaration of war."

As a result of a lasting systematic propaganda, the majority of Russians supported Putin's actions in Ukraine. Sociology speaks for itself.

**Levada-Center, non-governmental research organisation,
17-21 February, 2022**

52% felt negatively towards Ukraine

60% blamed the US and NATO for the escalation of tensions in Eastern Ukraine

71% expressed approval of russian leadership

Explanation: The most reputable public opinion data available in Russia are from the Levada Center, a non-governmental research organisation conducting regular surveys since 1988. Levada surveys on 17-21 February found that the majority of respondents (52%) felt negatively towards Ukraine. Most (60%) blamed the US and NATO for the escalation of tensions in Eastern Ukraine, while only 4% blamed Russia. Their polls suggest that net public approval of Putin had surged by about 13 percentage points since December, a rally-round-the-flag effect, with almost three-quarters (71%) expressing approval of his leadership by February.

Even stronger sentiments were recorded in the pre-war poll conducted on 7-15 February for CNN in Russia by a British agency, Savanta ComRes,

50% agreed that "it would be right for Moscow to use military force to prevent Kyiv from joining NATO".

64% said that Russians and Ukrainians are 'one people'

Explanation: These were not isolated results; In the pre-war poll conducted on 7-15 February for CNN in Russia by a British agency, Savanta ComRes, half (50%) agreed that "it would be right for Moscow to use military force to prevent Kyiv from joining NATO". Two thirds of Russians (64%) in the poll said that Russians and Ukrainians are 'one people', a position taught in the Soviet era and a view that Vladimir Putin has been pushing, compared to just 28% of Ukrainians.

[Reports](#) suggest that Russians have dismissed the word of friends and relatives living in Ukraine with first-hand experience of the war. Instead, Russians suggest that the Ukrainian army attacked its own population in 'false flag' operations to blame Putin, following the orders of the Ukrainian government consisting of "neo-fascists", "nationalists" and "drug-addicts".

In their survey of 25-27 February, [VCIOM reported](#) strong support for the "special military operation" in Ukraine, with two thirds (68%) in favour, around one quarter (22%) against, and only 10% unable to provide an answer. FOM [showed](#) that 65% of respondents supported the "launch of Russia's special military operation" in a 25-27 February survey. A private survey agency, Russian Field, [reported](#) that 58.8% of respondents supported "Russian military action in Ukraine" in polls conducted from 26-28 February. Finally, [the Washington Post](#) also reported that a poll conducted a week into the assault by a consortium of researchers again confirmed that the majority of Russians (58%) approved of the invasion while only a quarter (23%) opposed it.

3.3 Tactics. During the war.

- **Victimising Russians: if Russia didn't attack first, the West would have attacked Russia**

Russian government officials falsely portray Russia as a perpetual [victim](#) and its aggressive actions as a [forced response](#) to the alleged actions of the United States and our democratic allies and partners. To further these claims, Russia turns to one of its favorite labels to attempt to hit back: ["Russophobia."](#) After invading Ukraine in 2014, the Russian government and state-controlled disinformation outlets began to accuse anyone who questioned Russia's actions of being xenophobic Russophobes.

- **dehumanizing Ukrainians: war in Ukraine is the war with evil and nazis**

Case. On 3 April, Russian propaganda news agency RIA [published](#) a long article headlined "What Russia should do with Ukraine", written by Kremlin-affiliated Russian film director and political philosopher Timofey Sergeytsev. The article stands out as a perverted intellectual framework which forms the background for atrocities.

RIA Novosti is the main Russian news agency. It is owned 100 per cent by the Russian state and forms part of the state media conglomerate Russia Today. The ideas form a logical continuation of Putin's (twisted) description of Ukraine's history. The terms "Nazis" and "Nazism" are used excessively in the article to brand anything associated with the Ukrainian state, the Kyiv government, or the Ukrainian authorities. [More here](#)

Extract:

"Ukraine must pay for its guilt towards Russia. It must be treated as an enemy, and therefore may develop only in dependency to Russia…
The history has proven: Ukraine may not exist as a national state. Any attempt to create it leads to Nazism. Ukrainism is an artificial anti-Russian construct. Denazification of Ukraine must be De-Europeization of it"

- **'Sacred war' narrative. Russia as a crusader**

The government tries to stimulate blind loyalty to the state and a demand for an almost religious sacrifice of the individual for the cause of the leader.

Russia's war in Ukraine is also something of a holy war. Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has long been a key ideological ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and at least tacit supporter of his military adventures. He also publicly supported Putin's bloody war in Ukraine and called Russia's war against Ukraine 'sacred'.

Case. Children holding Z symbols

- **Information iron curtain, blockade of all communications channels which are not in line with propaganda**

Even before the full blockade, everyone was exposed to propaganda: propaganda was communicated not only via legacy media such as TV, radio, and newspapers, but also via social media, educational institutions, parades and celebrations. Even if you do access alternative information, the constant repetition of certain messages across media makes you more likely to believe them.

4. Russian propaganda in the West. Goals and tactics.

4.1 Goals.

- **Conviction is not the chief goal of disinformation; instilling doubt is.**

This "Russian firehose" model of propaganda is high-output, contradictory and multichannel. The stream encourages us to sleepwalk into apathy, distrustful of everything. This renders us supremely malleable, and dangerously disengaged. [Source](#)

Rather than take a side, these campaigns create decision paralysis that leads to inaction.

- **Strengthen the Ukraine-blaming sentiment and erode the public support amongst Western audiences.**

The Kremlin frequently tries to create multiple false realities and insert confusions into the information environment when the truth is not in its interests. Often intentionally confusing, Russian officials make arguments designed to try to shift the blame away from the Russian government's role, even if some of the narratives contradict one another.

Case. Bucha. In April, Ukraine accused withdrawn Russian troops of massacring civilians. However, Moscow denied it. Numerous posts on social networks were claiming that this was a staging of the «Kiev regime». [One of the videos](#) was showing one of the corpses raising his hand.

The Russian Defense Ministry also shared this video on April 3 on its [Telegram channel](#). The message says that one of the «corpses» can be seen moving his arm and another standing up in the rear-view mirror.

On Facebook, the video is slowed down and distributed in low quality. Several users on social networks pointed out that the corpse on view was not moving ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#)).

The first man on the right in the video actually doesn't raise his hand. It's actually a drop on the windshield of the vehicle from which the scene is filmed, as also described in this [tweet.](#)

More about the case: https://faktencheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.327Q4CR.

Optional: Russia has used the same technique of flooding the information space with many false claims following other events, such as the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, and Russia's 2008 invasion and ongoing occupation of Georgia, to distract conversations from their role in the events. Again, the purpose is to confuse and distract others and manipulate the truth to suit Kremlin interests.

4.2 Tactics

- **Threaten with WW3 and nuclear weapons**
Explanation: We cannot completely exclude the use of nuclear weapons from real threats but for many years, the Russian propaganda has been trumpeting the superiority of its conventional army over any army in the world, including its nuclear capabilities. Threats to turn the U.S. and its allies in Europe into radioactive ashes have been made openly numerous times. Russia's army even has its own highly popular TV channel that works 24/7 to promote war and aggression.

- **Portray Ukrainians in a bad light (racists, nazis etc)**
Explanation: Russia has also worked to discredit the image of Ukraine among its western partners. Special vocabulary was even promoted to portray Ukraine negatively. The war in the Donbas was referred to by many experts as the Ukrainian "crisis," distracting attention from the real problem — Russia's occupation of those territories. Ukraine was also depicted as a failed state. The fact that the country has been at war for eight years has been often diminished or even ignored as the war was presented as an internal problem.

- **Victimizing Russians in the West, narrowing down to only putin's responsibility**
Explanation: After invading Ukraine in 2014, the Russian government and state-controlled disinformation outlets began to accuse anyone who questioned Russia's actions of being xenophobic Russophobes. For example, Russia claims that the international community's negative reaction to its invasion of an independent country was simply because people feared and hated Russia.

Below you can see a graph showing mentions of the words "Russophobia" and "Russophobe" by the Russian Foreign Ministry, Sputnik and RT, 2001–17. (Source: DFRLab)

"Russophobia" mentions 2001-2017

Graph showing mentions of the words "Russophobia" and "Russophobe" by the Russian Foreign Ministry, Sputnik and RT, 2001–17. (Source: DFRLab)
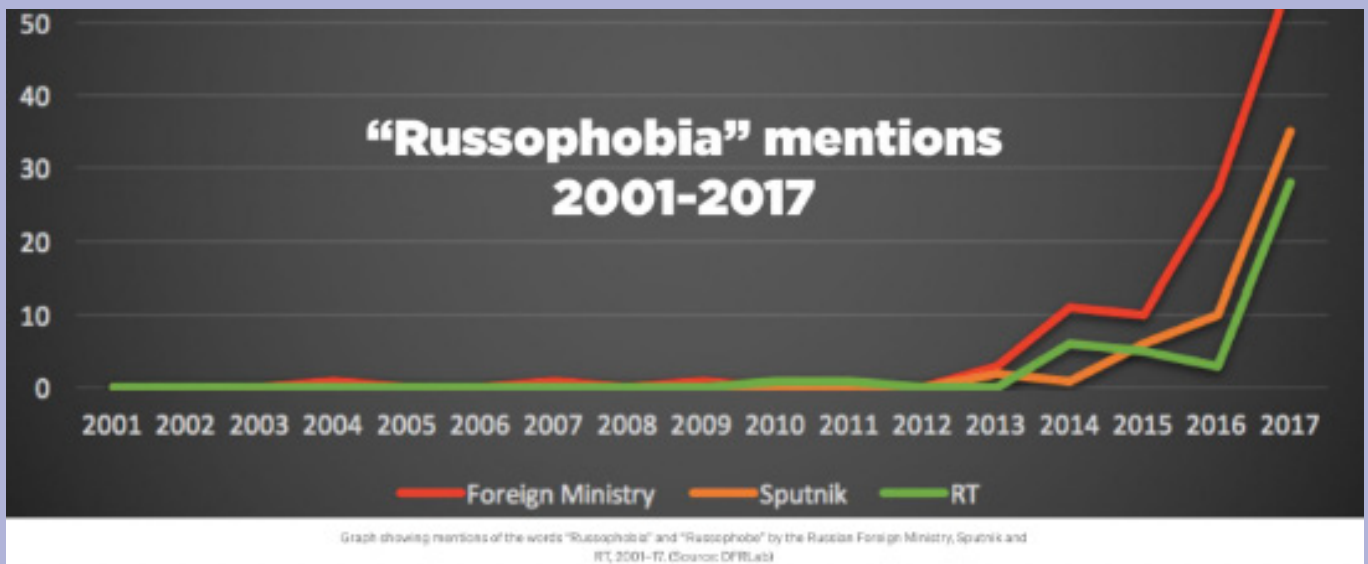
According to the chart, Russophobia was not an issue of major concern to the Russian Foreign Ministry and state-funded disinformation outlets until the Russian military invaded Ukraine in 2014. Claims of "Russophobia" persist across a range of topics and are employed whenever the Russian government wants to play the victim, when it is actually the aggressor.

Optional:

Western cultural and academic institutions have launched multiple programs designed to "reconcile" Ukrainians with Russians and moderate "intercultural dialogue." Numerous residencies and support programs across Europe and North America welcome applications from Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians alike, treating all three groups as "victims of war" who are equally affected by the Russian state.

Ukraine sees it as a contribution to victimizing Russians and as an effort to dilute the shared responsibility of Russians for over two decades of Putinism, the current war in Ukraine, political passivity of the Russian society, failure, and defeat of its civil resistance.

These moves – perceived with anger and frustration in Ukraine are not accidental. They are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Ukrainian-Russian relations as well as perception of Ukrainian culture as lacking agency and significance.

- **Idea of surrender as a 'chance to save civilians'**

Case. On BBC Radio 4, a member of the public asked the UK Ambassador to Ukraine who at the Ukrainian government had made the decision to "reject the russians' offer to surrender Mariupol" and thus [presumably] «save civilians,» and whether people trapped under the rubble in a basement with no food or water had been consulted with on that decision (from 09:00 at https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0015lkr).

In the comments sections in BBC and Guardian articles, there's been a massive invasion of «experts» (i.e. bots) with profiles pointing to origin from African or Asian countries, who have been consistently promoting different narratives depending on the news agenda. E.g. the first week of war those comments were mainly about alleged racism ('that is why Ukrainians deserve to die' - quote). After a few weeks, the prevailing message was the need to surrender in order to save lives, with a very particular repeating detail: " it is the president Zelenskii who should stop this" and it's either the president's ego which makes him sacrifice his people, or "the fact that he is a comedian", that is why he (not Russians) is responsible for people dying.

4.5. Ovsyannikova - Trojan horse of Russian propaganda

Background: Marina Ovsyannikova, who had been an editor at the Russian state TV broadcaster Channel One for 9 years, suddenly appeared on March 14 behind the host of the news program on Russia's Channel One holding a poster reading "NO WAR" in English and "Stop the war. Don't believe propaganda. They are lying to you" in Russian. The bottom line of the poster said "Russians against war" in English. She also shouted in Russian «Stop the war. No to war."

A German media outlet has hired Russian journalist Marina Ovsyannikova as a correspondent. She will work for the company which owns Die Welt newspaper, reporting from Ukraine and Russia, it announced.This move has been widely criticized by independent journalists worldwide. The main question is how can die Welt hire someone without a proper record of journalism work?

Here's what Ovsyannikova [replies](#) to that, admitting herself that she has no proper journalistic experience:

I spent many years working for the Russian state broadcaster, Channel One, where I was involved in creating aggressive Kremlin propaganda. Propaganda that constantly sought to deflect attention from the truth, and to blur all moral standards. I was just a tiny cog in this system, but in my job I made sure that the system worked. I did not write or produce any propaganda pieces myself. But I helped others to do so. And in the process, I earned enough money to travel extensively and make friends in many countries of the world.

In March, in an interview for the Italian audiences, Marina Ovsyannikova qualified Western sanctions as Russophobia & equated the impact of the war on Ukrainians with that of sanctions on ordinary Russians thus supporting the narrative about 'vicitmising Russians'.

'Today there are many Russians who suffer alongside Ukrainians'. Putting the tragedy of Ukrainians on the same footing as Russians' economic difficulties is an attempt to **soften sanctions by portraying the invasion as Putin's pet project and de-responsibilising Russian society.**

Ovsyannikova changed her post. Originally, she had equated Western sanctions to Russophobia: **"ordinary Russians must not carry collective responsibility for what is happening in Ukraine"**. The edited post simply mentions her interview at the programme Che tempo che fa.

5. Ukrainian response to Russian propaganda. Best initiatives launched at the time of war

1) [A bot for fact-checking launched by Gwara Media, Kharkiv-based media outlet.](#)
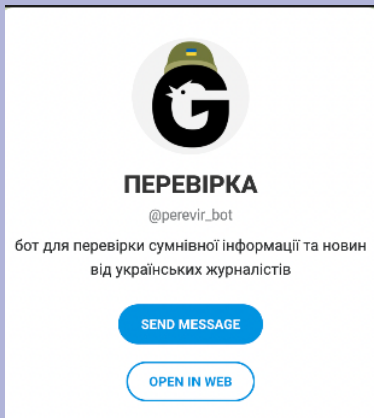
Available in Ukrainian. An English version is being developed.

There are no analogues of such a service on Telegram. The bot works 24/7 and currently receives about 500 requests per day, but peak activity was 9,000 requests a day. Information is checked by people with journalistic or law background and experience.

2) [Internet Army of Ukraine](#)
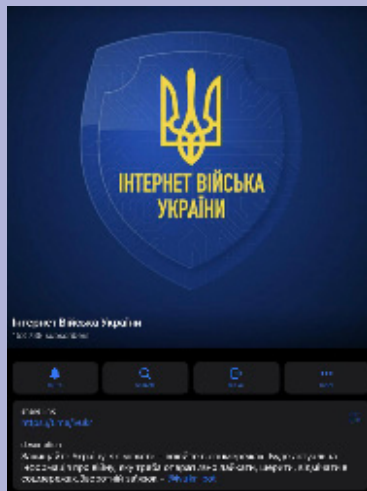
In the war, not everyone had and still has the opportunity to join the physical assistance to Ukraine, for this reason that Internet troops have emerged. The tasks were varied, but always simple. One of the first popular tasks was to block pro-Russian telegram channels, which later prompted the cyber police to create a special bot to block such resources. Often people join the Internet Army after returning home from work.

3) [Stopfake](#) is a fact-checking organization, founded in March 2014 by Ukrainian professors and students, to refute Russian propaganda and combat fake news.
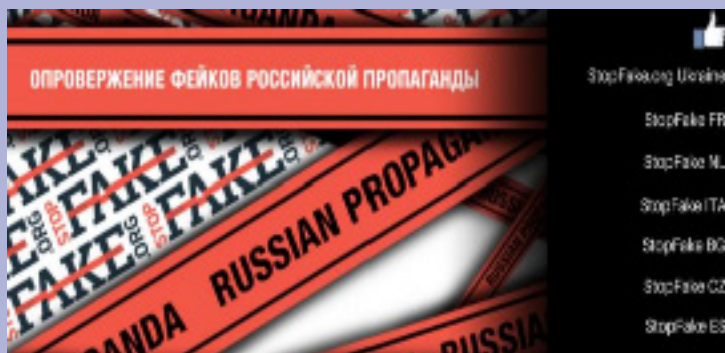
Stopfake has plenty of platforms where it publishes its investigations. It is one of the first organisations who combat fake news in Ukraine. Now it continues its work and also offers an opportunity for its readers to send suspicious news and photos for investigation through their [Messenger.](#)

Now it is one of the most acknowledged fact checking organisations in Ukraine as they became [official partners](#) of Facebook in fact checking.

4) Ukraine World: monitoring of fakes

This chronicle updates regularly and warns about the most dangerous fakes or propaganda cases of Ukraine.

Official resources:

● Генеральний штаб ЗСУ / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine
● Міністерство оборони України/ Defence Ministry of Ukraine
● МВС України/Ministry of Internal Affairs
● Національна поліція України/ National Police of Ukraine
● Державна служба України з надзвичайних ситуацій/State Emergency Service of Ukraine
● Центр стратегічних комунікацій та інформаційної безпеки /Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security of Ukraine
● Центр протидії дезінформації при РНБО / Center for Countering Disinformation

Ukrainian media and channels who report in Eng:

● https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/
● https://www.ukrinform.net/
● https://english.nv.ua
● https://kyivindependent.com/

Twitter:
@ukraine_world
@KyivIndependent

Telegram:
● https://t.me/ukrainenowenglish

Photo bank by the agency UNIAN. Free to use
● https://photo.unian.info/

Note for the lecturer/speaker: This is a brief overview of Russia's disinformation goals and tactics before and during the war. Russia keeps and will keep justifying its aggression and international laws violations by promoting its narratives and curating disinformation for various audiences. Today, we have discussed the information space of the aggressor state (Russia), Russian narratives and tactics used to distabilise the situation in Ukraine and the disinformation techniques aimed at misleading the international community. Despite this is just a tip of the iceberg and encountering dis- and misinformation is inevitable, we believe that our best approach to mitigate its effects is to improve societies' abilities to recognize it. We hope this guide will help you recognise Russian disinformation more effectively and stay alert in the ongoing information war.