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Countering Russian Propaganda During the War

Abstract. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been going on for a substantial period of history, but over the past decade, the confrontation between the two countries has taken on a major scale. At first, Russia resorted to conducting a hybrid war, and from February 24, 2022, it began a full-scale war. In the course of this, the enemy uses information influence as one of the types of weapons, so today the ability to fight back is very important. The purpose of the study will be to consider and find ways to counter Russian propaganda. In the course of writing the study, the following research methods are used: information analysis, synthesis, specification, and generalisation. As a result of the study, a large amount of information of various types is considered, in particular, studies, books of popular science genre, legislative acts, statements and appeals of high-ranking officials, and, most importantly, publications in the media. In the course of analysing this information, it is determined which aspects of life are affected by Russian propaganda, those include: worldview, history, and information on the conduct of military operations. In addition, the methods Russians use to spread propaganda are considered, in particular, television and social networks. Thus, it is concluded that countering Russian propaganda should take place in the field of education, in particular, the introduction of media literacy courses, the development of the historical industry, statements by Ukrainian state institutions, and cybersecurity. The study creates a new perspective and ground for further investigation by sociologists who study the phenomenon of Russian propaganda in detail, teachers working to develop new teaching methods, and specialists in the field of cybersecurity

Keywords: hybrid warfare, information influence, worldview, history, fake

Introduction

At the time of writing, Ukraine is in a state of full-scale war with the Russian Federation. In addition, Russia has been waging a hybrid war against Ukraine for a long time. The influence of Russian propaganda is very powerful, so it is almost the most important tool in the course of the war with Ukraine. Thus, the definition of effective ways to counter Russian propaganda takes place not only from the standpoint of science but also from the standpoint of winning the war of the entire Ukrainian people. Thus, the relevance of the study is that Ukrainians now live in these realities and fight every day with Russian propaganda, which wants to settle irrevocably in people's minds.

The problem with this examination is that the system of Russian propaganda is quite complex and multifaceted. Given this, it is difficult to identify some specific universal methods that can be used to protect oneself completely from the influence of Russian propaganda. Therefore, before proceeding to the consideration of means of countering propaganda, it is necessary to determine which areas of life are affected by the Russian propaganda

system, and what methods of influence it uses. In addition, the research subject is opposition to propaganda in war conditions, so the study considers certain general aspects of counteraction that can be used both during the war and without being in this state. However, the main emphasis will be placed on ways to counteract during a full-scale war.

Throughout history, since the beginning of the existence of the Russian Empire, Russians have cherished the myth of a single people, and so it was after Ukraine gained independence. However, propaganda began to operate most strongly after Russia's blatant aggression in the spring of 2014. In the period of eight years, before the start of a full-scale war, the Russians increased their propaganda influence. Thus, the reaction to the spread of disinformation arose among Ukrainian researchers back in 2014 and has been increasing since then. In particular, it is worth mentioning the papers of I. Malyk [1] and A. Kavierina [2]. In these studies, the authors consider the influence of mass media on the consciousness of the population in general. I. Malyk considers Russian propaganda

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holistically and deduces a system of advice on how to counteract it. Instead, A. Kavierina in her work relies on a survey of ordinary citizens, and based on this, draws some tips for improving the Ukrainian media in the context of countering Russia.

In the field of history, a substantial number of papers have also been created to counter Russian propaganda. First of all, it is necessary to recall the book of the Institute of National Memory, "War and Myth" [3]. This book provides answers to the main manipulative theses against Ukrainian history. It is also necessary to mention P. Horikhovskiy, the author describes methodological advice for history teachers [4].

The activities of foreign authors are notable because this is a sign that the problem of the influence of Russian propaganda has a global scale, and does not pose a threat only to Ukraine. In particular, A. Fisher [5] describes how Russians demonise Ukrainians in front of the whole world. T. Todor [6] in the paper regards such a phenomenon as hybrid warfare, and in the course of the description focuses on the threats that it poses.

Thus, the study will provide an overview of what Russian propaganda is and what impact it has on people. Various aspects and methods of Russian propaganda will be described. All these actions will be taken for the sake of one goal – to determine ways to counteract the propaganda system of the Russian Federation. The originality of this study is that previously this subject was not as widely covered by researchers.

Materials and Methods

When writing the paper, a number of the following methods were used: information analysis, synthesis, specification, and generalisation.

In the first stage of writing the study, the method of information analysis was applied. In the course of propaganda examination, a large number of sources were used, which first of all should be checked for reliability. Separately, it was worth paying attention to what kind of idea certain words carry, since the study of the influence of propaganda does not involve the use of exclusively truthful sources of information. For example, this study considered the study and statements of the president of the Russian Federation, the main ideas of which are opposite to reality, but the reference to them was made to consider the essence of Russia's propaganda narratives. In addition, the study divided which areas of life are most affected by Russian propaganda and which methods are most used. The implementation of such a distribution required the analysis of a substantial number of Russian sources. The study also considered Ukrainian information, which was created to counter information aggression. Thus, an analysis of what the Ukrainian media is talking about was conducted.

In the second stage of the study, the selected information was synthesised. In the course of writing the study, a large number of heterogeneous sources were selected. In particular, Ukrainian information resources attracted a large amount of information that is distributed from the media, in addition, some books were used in which the authors regard countering enemy information aggression,

and previous papers were considered. Given that the subject of the study is the examination of countering Russian propaganda, some Russian primary sources were considered, which were created to defend their propaganda ideas. Some foreign sources were also considered, in particular, by British, American, and Spanish authors. Thus, it can be noted that a large amount of diverse information was used in the study, which must be combined into one whole, so the method of information synthesis was used for this purpose.

In the third stage of writing this paper, the specification method was used. Russian propaganda covers many subjects, so in the context of the study, it was necessary to select and focus on important aspects. In addition, the concretisation method was used to show the purpose of the Russian authorities defending certain theses. In particular, the use of this method is manifested in the context of considering information about the history of Ukraine. In this case, it was necessary to specify which aspects of history Russians pay the most attention to, and what consequences this entails in general.

In the fourth stage of the study, the generalisation method was used. In the course of writing the study, a lot of materials were used and some conclusions were drawn that needed to be summarised in the context of what methods of countering Russian propaganda would be effective in war conditions.

Results

The Russian propaganda machine is very strong and multidimensional, so it affects not only citizens of the Russian Federation. In a full-scale war, the propaganda factor is very important, because for victory it is necessary to maintain unity between the citizens of Ukraine and support from foreign partners.

In addition, Russian propaganda defends views on various aspects of human existence, in particular, on history, ideology, politics, etc. Thus, before considering ways to counter this propaganda, it is necessary to consider the main narratives that it defends and the methods that it uses.

The modern Russian state inherited the conquering ambitions of its predecessors: the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire. However, given a large number of restrictions, it is difficult for Russia to use its full military potential, so the establishment of this country rather resorts to the use of so-called soft power, that is, the use of means that do not involve coercion. Thus, to realise its geopolitical ambitions, Russia needs to resort to strong propaganda tools [7].

The first and most important aspect of Russian propaganda is ideological. This aspect is the mainstay of all Russian propaganda since it is in this vein that the self-identification of Russians and their main goal is conducted. Propaganda forms a worldview based on the concept of fascism as the greatest evil in the world, and in return, Russians as defenders of the world from the fascist offensive. This aspect would be more appropriate to call ideological, but in its essence, it is philosophical, since it is impossible to trace a clear idea of the Russian Federation. The theory of fascism is key for Russians because without the existence of an external enemy in the form of these very

fascists, it is impossible to consolidate the Russian people. Thus, propagandists try to cling to any detail: symbols, facts of restriction of the Russian language, etc. This is all done to justify the fact that a particular country is a representative of fascism. This idea is based on the fact of the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II and was cultivated throughout the entire period from the day of the German surrender, so it has a substantial impact on society [8].

The ideological aspect of Russian propaganda has many consequences, in particular, the beginning of a full-scale war in Ukraine, which is called a “special military operation”, was justified by Putin in the context that “Russia must protect civilians from the Kyiv fascist regime.” Thus, Russian propaganda justifies an attack on Ukraine, since an attack on a “fascist state” is not considered aggression.

Another area that Russian propaganda is aimed at is closely related to the previous aspect. This is history. For a substantial period, Ukraine existed as a colony of the Russian Empire, and later – the Soviet Union. Russian propagandists use this fact to discredit the existence of an independent Ukraine, emphasising that Ukrainians are a fraternal people to Russians, so they cannot exist except as part of the Russian Federation [9].

The next aspect of Russian propaganda concerns a lower level than the president’s statements but also has a substantial impact. It consists in spreading fake information about military operations and spreading it through bots. Such information may relate to the seizure of a particular city, the destruction of important infrastructure, appeals from officials, etc. The main purpose of this information is to spread panic in Ukrainian society. In particular, the Russian media drew attention to the effectiveness of the MLRS (multiple launch rocket systems) “HIMARS” provided to Ukraine, so they decided to spread fake information about the destruction of these vehicles [10].

Putin’s regime differs from previous authoritarian regimes in that the modern Russian dictator does not resort to the use of cruel means of terror and intimidation of their population. Instead, it is an “information autocracy”, that is, control over the population is conducted by distributing the necessary information to the state. Thus, Russia exercises strict control over the media, in particular, television and the print press [11].

At first glance, it may seem that the restrictions on information on television and in the print press do not apply to the internet. However, this is not the case, as the Russian authorities have introduced some legislative acts that limit criticism, independent reporting, and dissent on the internet [12].

In addition, an important element of Russian propaganda is Roskomnadzor, an institution that is responsible for security in the internet space. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Roskomnadzor has blocked some online publications that distribute undesirable Russia information [13, 14].

Given this material, it can be stated that since Russian propaganda is quite strong and multifaceted, it is impossible to highlight a single way to counter information aggression. Therefore, it is necessary to consider various ways to counter Russian propaganda by its aspects and forms.

The worldview aspect is fundamental for state-building, especially in the context of Ukraine’s development. That is why it is necessary to cultivate the actual Ukrainian idea, which will allow Ukrainians to identify themselves as a single whole organism. An important element of this is the development of Ukrainian identity in the context of the civilised world. In other words, it is necessary to emphasise that Ukraine is part of the European family and that mentally Ukrainian people are close to Western culture. However, it is necessary to consider the actual Ukrainian ethnic characteristics, and not adapt to certain limits. [15].

It should be understood that the state idea is a rather complex concept, so a large number of representatives of the Ukrainian intellectuals must be engaged in its cultivation: researchers, artists, writers, politicians, etc. The importance of the Ukrainian idea in the context of countering propaganda is enormous since Russia will not be able to introduce among Ukrainians the idea that they are no different from Russians if the Ukrainians themselves are aware of themselves as a separate nation with their ideas and priorities [16].

In addition, it is necessary to pay due attention to the concept of fascism, since, as noted above, this term is actively used by Russian propaganda to manipulate consciousness. It is necessary to give a clear definition of this concept and give its characteristics, as, for example, did U. Eco [17]. The ultimate goal of this is to compare and convey the idea that Ukrainians, like the entire civilised world, are not fascists and oppose this phenomenon.

In this context, an important aspect is to preserve the memory of the Second World War as a terrible page in history, and it is also important to emphasise that Nazism was defeated by Allied forces, and not to attribute the victory to only one people, as Russian propaganda does. In support of this, it is worth recalling the words of Putin, which he said live in December 2010: “without Ukraine, we would still have won, because we are a country of winners” [18].

In contrast, the video appeal of V. Zelenskyy on May 9, 2022, in which the president of Ukraine says that Ukrainians were able to defeat fascism precisely in alliance with other peoples [19].

Thus, it is worth countering Russian propaganda in the historical field, since in this area Russia has created and defends a large number of fakes about the past of Ukraine, the essence of which boils down to showing the absurdity of the existence of an independent Ukraine and a separate Ukrainian people as such. It is necessary to work to ensure that this information is not just not received by Ukrainians, but also to show its fallacy [18].

In particular, an important method of struggle in this area is state funding of the activities of the Institute of National Memory, which operates on many media resources.

As a result of the work of this institution, the project “War and myth” was created, which provides for debunking Russian myths about the past of Ukraine. The information is presented concisely and clearly. At the beginning of the consideration of each fake, the sources of their origin and the significance that it carries are indicated, thus, the

diversity of consideration of a particular historical event is indicated. Such a project is very important, as it allows consumers to get acquainted with the primary sources and understand the true essence of the event [3].

It is also necessary to work not only with the local audience but also with the whole world. Ukraine as an independent state appeared relatively recently, so its historiography is in a state of active development. A foreign reader must get acquainted with the actual Ukrainian view of history, so it is necessary to conduct research in this area [21].

It is worth noting that the ideological and historical aspects of Ukrainian society should develop as independent elements of the consciousness of Ukrainians, and not only in the context of the fight against propaganda. This is a long-term process that includes media support and state funding. However, the most important element of patriotic education is the school, which should aim to develop children as future citizens of a strong democratic country. In addition, it is necessary to introduce media literacy training into the programme of schools and universities, which will give skills in protecting against fakes and verifying information [22].

Regarding the next aspect of Russian propaganda, namely the spread of fakes in the context of military operations, it is necessary to take a number of the following actions. The most important of them is the reaction of Ukrainian officials to any fake information and the dissemination of these opinions in the media. As, for example, it was the case when the Security Service of Ukraine debunked a fake about the Russian Sergeant Krasnov, whom enemy propaganda tried to glorify [23].

In the field of social networks, countering fakes is much more complicated, since it is more difficult to control by the state. However, the presidential decree adopted a decision that provides for the blocking of some Russian online publications, due to which it was possible to limit Ukrainians from receiving information from the Russian media [24]. Similar measures of restriction were also adopted in the European Union, according to which certain propaganda sites were blocked [12].

Such actions on the part of state institutions are very appropriate in times of war since during this period propaganda sources spread a very large amount of information, which would be extremely difficult to confront independently. However, despite the blocking, the Ukrainian media space is not devoid of fakes, so Ukrainian programmers created a Telegram bot "Verification". This tool allows quickly checking any information for accuracy.

In general, countering Russian propaganda is quite complex, since it is, as already mentioned, a multifaceted phenomenon that consists of many aspects. Thus, in war conditions, it is necessary to carefully check information for its reliability, and compare it with official media sources and high-ranking officials. As for the creation of a state idea and historical memory, these processes go beyond war, since they are fundamental not only in terms of countering enemy propaganda but also in building a future state. Thus, it is necessary to involve a large number of different researchers and artists in this process.

Discussion

The subject of countering Russian propaganda is very relevant today, so many researchers have expressed their opinions on ways to counteract it.

I. Malyk is the author of a thorough and extensive study on countering Russian propaganda at many levels [1]. However, in contrast to this study, the author focuses on how to protect oneself from hostile information influence and expresses certain opposite methods and advice. One of these tips is the thesis that a person needs to choose authoritative sources of information, whose opinions can be trusted for themselves. However, this method is not entirely appropriate, since absolutely all media outlets tend to make mistakes – consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the ability to filter out fake or questionable information and be able to compare this information with official sources.

It is worth mentioning the work of T. Todor, which describes the phenomenon of hybrid warfare, which until February 24, 2022, Russia waged against Ukraine [6]. The author claims that the influence of propaganda in this war is enormous, which is why it is necessary to find methods of counteraction. The same opinion was expressed in this scientific study, but the controversial point is that T. Todor recommends introducing strict control over the media, but this idea is not suitable for Ukraine as a democratic state, because it contradicts fundamental values, in particular, freedom.

Another researcher, A. Kavierina, also considered the problem of the influence of Russian propaganda. In her work, the author relies on interviews that were taken with many Ukrainians who are active consumers of information from the media and are representatives of different regions of the state [2]. As a result, it was identified that representatives of the south-eastern regions of Ukraine do not listen to Ukrainian sources and prefer Russian ones since they are not comfortable consuming content in Ukrainian, so the researcher concludes that it is necessary to increase the amount of Russian-language Ukrainian content. However, as noted in the results of this study, it is necessary to increase the amount of Ukrainian content itself. The researcher's opinion is erroneous, since, first of all, the Ukrainian language is an important element of state-building, and in the conditions of war with Russia, one should not give in to the aggressor's language at the media level. Secondly, at the time of recording this interview, some information channels in Ukraine provided information in Russian, in particular, Inter and 112 TV channels, in addition to many talk shows, a large number of experts speak in Russian. Thus, it can be concluded that it is more appropriate to block Russian information sources than to increase the number of Ukrainian ones in Russian.

In the context of television, it is important to pay attention to such an element as movies. Each film carries a certain message and idea that has a certain impact on the viewer. Thus, it is possible to contribute to the development of Ukrainian identity, which is one of the aspects of Ukrainian propaganda activities discussed above. Thus, L. Walden considers the role of art as a means of ideological

propaganda. He argues that art and, in particular, cinema should be objective, and not promote ideological messages [25]. Notably, the role of cinema in the modern world is very important, so this tool should be used in the context of the development of patriotism among the population.

The next aspect that was considered in this paper, and which the researchers paid a lot of attention to, is national and patriotic education. In particular, in the paper of I. Bekh considers the problem of a sharp surge in patriotism after the beginning of Russia's aggression in 2014, and how it is necessary to spread national patriotic ideas among schoolchildren [26]. The author notes that the education of patriotism is a holistic and rather complex process that includes many aspects. The most important of these elements is history as a branch of consciousness education. Another aspect is the creation of military-patriotic camps, where appropriate education is conducted. The author argues that such camps are necessary for the context of educating patriotic youth. However, it is necessary to disagree with this opinion, because it is critical to pay attention to what kind of state is being attempted to be built. If this is a democratic state with an active civil society, then it is necessary to focus on the appropriate type of patriotic education, and not prepare for war at school age.

In the context of studying history at school, the paper of P. Horikhovskiy is important. The researcher understands the scale at which Russia is waging an information war, resorting to manipulations and fakes in terms of the history of Ukraine [4]. The researcher also notes that young people being the target audience should be protected from the influence of Russian propaganda. Thus, the study contains methodological recommendations for teachers on the presentation of material on problematic issues of Ukrainian history. Thus, as a result of the study, the author analyses many aspects and issues of the history of Ukraine, and most importantly, creates a methodology that allows protecting oneself from manipulation by Russia.

In addition to research on countering Russian information influence in the field of Ukrainian history and worldview, researchers pay attention to the legal aspects of countering enemy propaganda. In particular, the central element of the paper by U. Koruts is Ukrainian legislation [27]. In the course of the study, a substantial number of legislative initiatives were considered and evaluated in the context of the effectiveness of information confrontation. However, the most interesting idea of this study is the thesis that it is necessary to create organisational and legal support for detecting the facts of propaganda, identifying them, fixing them, and exposing performers and initiators. The introduction of such measures will reduce the influence of Russian propaganda on the territory of Ukraine. However, it should be understood that a difficult problem is the wording of the law, according to which it would be possible to clearly define what exactly is Russian propaganda. On the one hand, it can be noted that this propaganda is information provided by the Russian media. However, pro-Russian narratives can be present in the Ukrainian information space, so the problem is to identify hostile messages and limit them, while not threatening freedom of speech.

The next element of the Russian-Ukrainian information war is social networks. The importance of these resources in the context of information warfare is noted in the paper by O. Semenova [28]. The study examined the role of bloggers in influencing a wide audience, and the amount of Ukrainian content on social networks today. As a result, it was identified that Russian bloggers have a much greater predominance in social networks. Attention is also focused on the importance of the Telegram social network and its information channels, which are often openly pro-Russian or defend pro-Russian messages. Thus, as a result of the study, it was determined that the method of blocking each Telegram channel is ineffective since new ones immediately appear in its place. Therefore, the author claims that it is necessary to conduct media literacy courses starting from the school years.

If the previous study concerned social media content, then X. Weiai considers the statements of high-ranking officials [29]. As a result of the analysis, it comes to the politics of Russia and China, which are the most active in social networks among all other countries. Thus, the author claims that representatives of such countries are more democratic. However, it should be understood that Russian messages are the most aggressive and, in general, freedom of speech in Russia is somewhat more limited than in other democratic countries. Thus, the number of statements made by high-ranking officials on social networks is not an indicator of democracy.

Most of these authors in their papers considered the influence of Russian propaganda in Ukraine and the means of countering it, but Russians are trying to spread disinformation against Ukrainians around the world [5]. This is noted by A. Fisher, who emphasises that the Russians are trying to demonise Ukraine to leave it without the support of the Western world. As a result, the researcher proves that Russian propaganda is a dangerous phenomenon not only for Ukraine but also for the whole world.

Thus, it can be noted once again that the fight against Russian propaganda is quite difficult. It is necessary to conduct activities in different fields of life and by different methods to protect oneself from Russian information influence.

Conclusions

The study examined the importance of Russian propaganda in the context of the war with Ukraine. As a result of the study, it was identified that most of the propaganda materials relate to the following aspects:

- Worldview, which consists in forming the opinion that Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a people cannot exist separately, but must necessarily be part of Russia.
- The historical aspect is closely related to the previous one, but fakes about the history of Ukraine occupy a substantial place in the Russian information space, so it is necessary to highlight this as a separate point. This aspect concerns the fact that the history of Ukraine is part of Russian history, so there can be no question of the separateness of this state.
- The military aspect is the spread of disinformation about the conduct of hostilities. This type of fake is necessary to

spread panic among Ukrainians and prevent active military operations.

It was also determined what methods Russian propaganda uses. In particular, they are the dissemination of information in the media, activities on social networks, and statements of high-ranking officials.

As a result of the study, some ways to counter Russian propaganda were proposed:

- Education of patriotism and national identity among young people starting from the school age. This method will prevent the spread of fakes that Ukrainians are part of the Russian people, and will contribute to building a democratic country. This also includes the education of media literacy.

- Development of the historical industry. This refers to strengthening historical research; state support for initiatives that involve countering Russian propaganda; and methodological changes in the study of history in schools.

- The reaction of high-ranking officials and state

institutions to disinformation from Russia. This method will enable the verification of Ukrainians of the accuracy of information provided by the Russian media.

- Countering and blocking Russian sources on television and the internet. Due to this, it will be possible to limit the number of Russian media resources on the territory of Ukraine.

Notably, such methods can be applied not only in wartime but also in peacetime. However, during a full-scale invasion, they are necessary.

Further research is necessary primarily in the field of sociology, since, as already mentioned, Russian propaganda is very complex, so it is necessary to investigate this phenomenon in more detail to create effective methods of counteraction. The next branch is pedagogy since the worldview and skills that will be formed in the child would prevent the influence of Russian information in the future. It is also necessary to conduct research in the field of cybersecurity to counter Russian propaganda on the internet.

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Протидія російській пропаганді в умовах війни

Анотація. Конфлікт між росією та Україною триває протягом значного періоду історії, але під час останнього десятиліття протистояння між цими двома країнами набуло значних розмахів. Спочатку росія вдавалась до ведення гібридної війни, а з 24 лютого 2022 почала повномасштабну війну. У ході цього, противник використовує інформаційний вплив як один з різновидів озброєння, тому на сьогоднішній день дуже важливим є вміння давати цьому відсіч. Метою наукової роботи буде розгляд та знаходження способів протидії російській пропаганді. У ході написання статті було використано наступні методи дослідження: аналіз інформації, синтез, конкретизація та узагальнення. У результаті дослідження було розглянуто велику кількість інформації різного типу, зокрема, наукові роботи, книги науково-популярного жанру, законодавчі акти, заяви та звернення високопосадовців, та, найголовніше, публікації у ЗМІ. У ході аналізу цієї інформації було визначено, на які аспекти життя поширюється вплив російської пропаганди, якими є: світогляд, історія, та інформація щодо ведення військових дій. Окрім цього, було розглянуто те, які методи використовують росіяни для поширення пропаганди, зокрема це є телебачення та соціальні мережі. Таким чином, було зроблено висновок, що протидія російській пропаганді повинна відбуватись у сфері освіти, зокрема впровадженні курсів медіаграмотності, розвитку історичної галузі, заявах українських державних інституцій та кібербезпеки. Стаття створює новий погляд та підґрунтя для подальших досліджень соціологів, які детально вивчають феномен російської пропаганди, а також для педагогів, які працюють з ціллю виведення нових методів навчання, та для спеціалістів з галузі кібербезпеки

Ключові слова: гібридна війна, інформаційний вплив, світогляд, історія, фейк