Russian new media propaganda about the events in the eastern Ukraine and Crimea

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The article presents a content analysis of the Russian mass media regarding coverage of events in the Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, identifies main methods, models of propaganda, provides examples of disinformation based on analytical and search services. Monitoring and content analysis has been carried out on the basis of ten Russian Internet Sources on the beginning of 2019.

Keywords: propaganda; disinformation; manipulation; fake news; "hybrid" war; information warfare; network mass media.

Introduction

Russian propaganda issues regarding events in Ukraine began to be actively studied after the Dignity Revolution 2013. Since that moment, journalists and scientists are constantly working on exposing of disinformation, fake photos and video materials, misrepresented facts and comments, as well as materials that contradict journalism ethics and standards. Confirmation and dissemination of the facts of information manipulation by Russia is important for the Ukrainian people, because once again it proves to the European and world community that in Ukraine there is no fratricidal war (as indicated by the RF) and there is no restriction on freedom to speak Russian or another language, no harassment of national minorities etc. Instead, the war in the Eastern Ukraine continues with Russia concerning the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state, the protection of its borders and people, and in the information space continues to counteract manipulations aimed at influencing the mass consciousness and changing its settings and publicizing the facts of Russian propaganda.

During all time of the information war, this issue was studied by scientists in various aspects and manifestations. Regarding the information wars of the present and the first semantic wars (Ukraine, Russia, the Crimea) is written by a well-known scientist G. Pochepstov in Ukraine (Pochepstov, 2015). The history of information wars, methodology, strategy and tactics in the network space is studied by researcher O. Kurban (Kurban, 2016). In political science work, Valushko I., an academician (Valyushko, 2015) examines the origins of Russia’s informational aggression against Ukraine, about strategic communications as a counteraction to Russian propaganda writes D. Dubov (Dubov, 2016), on the effectiveness of Russian propaganda and the strategy for its counteraction, wrote the researchers A. Kavierina (Kavierina, 2015), as well as the team of authors (Pyevczov, 2014); G. Pevtsov, S. Zalkin, S. Sidchenko, K. Khudarlvsksky, A. Gordienko.

Although the issue of propaganda of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine is devoted to many studies, there are new aspects and methods. The latest scientific publications on this issue date back to 2018, therefore the continuation of monitoring and content analysis of news containing disinformation manipulating the facts in Russian Internet media should be disclosed and publicly presented.

Therefore, the relevance of our study is to reflect the complex processes of Russia's "hybrid" war against Ukraine and is only part of the nationwide resistance to Russian information manipulation. Of course, the issue of information warfare is multifaceted and so wide that it is impossible to cover the whole area concerning Russian propaganda in one article.

The purpose of the study is to conduct an up-to-date (beginning of 2019) content analysis of Russian mass media that cover the news of the Eastern regions of Ukraine, as well as the Crimea and have a separate section on the site (illegally naming the Ukrainian regions of the DPR (The Donetsk People’s Republic), LPR (Luhansk People’s Republic), Novorossiya). The goal is to solve the following tasks:

- to provide examples of disinformation and propaganda of Russian network media about the events in Ukraine, in the war in the East, Crimea based on analytical and search services (TinEye, Google, Alexa):

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to define basic methods and models of propaganda from the side of the Russian Federation.

- to present facts about violation of journalism standards that cover the issue of war with Russia in the Eastern Ukraine in Russian Internet Sources.


Analyzing the propaganda problem of, it is needed to determine this term. Particularly, according to the dictionary, "propaganda is an ideological influence on the broad masses or certain groups of people of a political or religious nature" (Busel, 2004, p. 980).

Scientist N. Zrazhevs’ka notes: "Compare to other ways of spreading knowledge and ideas, propaganda differs in targeting the manipulation of consciousness and behavior of people" (Zrazhevs’ka, 2010, p. 43). Russia’s information policy on Ukraine uses propaganda, which disinform primarily Russians who are in an informational vacuum, knowingly destabilizing interethnic relations. The false, biased, not objective information generates an idea of spreading knowledge and ideas, propaganda differs in targeting the manipulation of consciousness and behavior of people. Of course, such a show is only for informational purposes: "propaganda is an ideological influence on the broad masses or certain groups of people of a political or religious nature" (Busel, 2004, p. 980).

Scientist N. Zrazhevs’ka describes such basic methods of propaganda, in particular methods of specific suggestion such as "sticking labels", "shining generalization", "transfer", "testimony", "game of ordinary", "general platform" (Zrazhevs’ka, 2010, p. 52-54).

Here’s how the "label" on the sites of Russian Internet Sources primarily denote the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the Ukrainian authorities with negative meanings: punishers, neo-Nazis, Banderas, Kiev junta etc.

Examples of "Shining Generalization" are: "Political scientist: Western Ukraine may follow the path of Donbass", "Our Crimea and our Donbas!", "Donbass is Russia", "Head of the Crimea: Putin saved us life". Summarized ideas that sound like slogans are also nonsense, and as a result they have an impact on Russians.

"Testimony": "Ukraine begins to recognize Crimea as Russian", "Belarussian residents in a video survey have told that they are thinking about the Crimea as part of Russia (in the context of the Belarussian article the affiliation of the Crimea of the Russian Federation was proved), "In the United States, acknowledged that Donbass and Crimea will not return to Ukraine", "Poklonska is confident that Donbass will officially become part of Russia soon". Propaganda finds evidence of those propagandistic ideas, showing that others recognize them.

"The game of "common people" is manifested in the fact that the leaders of the so-called LPR and the DPR are worried about the fact of shelling the school; arrange various pleasure activities, support the youth and supposedly do everything for people, they with the people, think and care about them. Of course, such a show is only for informational reasons and to be written about in propaganda media.

During the content analysis of news in 2019 on the Russian Internet Media Sources, a number of techniques were used to manipulate mass consciousness from the side of Russia:

1. Submission of obsolete information issued as current; disinformation. The same applies to photos that do not correspond to the real state of things. On the website of the newspaper "Kharkov" on 19.03.2019 a news with the title "The United States recognized that Donbass and Crimea will not return to Ukraine" and a quote from the Special Representative of the State Department of the United States, Kurt Walker (Fig. 1). Search by quote in the Google search engine proved that the said is true, but outdated for a year. Particularly a year ago, he spoke about this, which is confirmed by the articles dated May 17, 2018 (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Outdated news, issued for the current date of 19.03.2019
In news on March 19, 2019 Kurt Walker’s statements relate to possible supplies of anti-aircraft defense systems for Ukraine, a presentation of the site about Russia’s aggression.

Thus, in the Internet publication "PolitNavigator" a photo was submitted on March 18, 2019 with the signature that it is Kiev (Policies heading, https://www.politnavigator.net/timoshenko-russkuyu-vesnu-bygli-getovy-poddzerzhat-2 -3-ukrainy.html), which depicts a rally with Russian flags. In fact, there is a photo from Dnipropetrovsk on 03.01.2014 (https://dp.vgorode.ua/news/sobytyia/213222-v-dnipropetrovsk-protshel-antyfashystsky-mytyhn-s-flahamy-rossyy). Such a photo with the title "2/3 of Ukrainians were ready to support Russian Spring" creates a false idea that Ukraine wants to join the Russian Federation.

In this way, the picture of the world of the audience of certain Internet publications is deformed by false information, and also that which does not correspond to the realities.

2. Information in news about events in Ukraine is given with negative connotations. Examples of news headlines in the negative manner: "The population of Ukraine in January decreased by 30.5 thousand people" (https://novorossinform.org), "It became known how much Poroshenko cost to Ukraine" (http://www.pravda-tv.ru), "Whom the Russians do not like the same as they do not like the Americans" (http://www.pravda-tv.ru), "Donbass today: the second for a week soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine surrendered to LPR in the Ukrainian army rise a wave of suicides and non-battle-related losses" (https://riafan.ru), "Lyashko disrupted the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers with a speech about "debilitating" decisions of Kiev" (http://voicesevas.ru/) and others like that. Of course, such negativity is closely linked to the one-sided coverage of information that is contrary to the standards of journalism and is aimed at promoting chauvinism.

3. The idealization of everything connected with Russia, its president, the annexation of Crimea.

An example is the following headings: "Crimea is able to protect itself from any aggression with the help of the C-400" (https://nahnews.org), "Crimea became the most popular destination for Russians to rest on May holidays" (https://nahnews.org), "The participant of the Crimean spring called, from what Putin saved the inhabitants of the peninsula" (https://riafan.ru), "Shoigu told how Russia has improved its defense and prepared for Western attacks" (https://riafan.ru), "The State Duma has adopted a law on raising pensions above the subsistence minimum" (http://voicesevas.ru), "Posner told about the difference between Russian and Western people" (http://voicesevas.ru), "The head of "Russian quality" called the most useful products in Russia" (https://russian.rt.com).

There is virtually no negative news regarding Russia’s politics or economy on the analyzed resources. 100 per cent of the materials about the annexation of Crimea describe only the positive side of the phenomenon. However, one of the publications does not address the problem of oppression of the Crimean Tatar people. Mejlis as an executive minority has been recognized as an extremist or organization in Russia and has been banned since 2016. On the official website of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people on February 27, 2019, it was decided that "The results of the forthcoming presidential elections in Ukraine will be extremely important for the restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of independent Ukraine within its internationally recognized boundaries, which include the...."
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4. Creating Internet publications with titles related to Ukraine and its affiliates, but are not really Ukrainian for the purpose of propaganda. The Kharkov news agency, which contains in its title the relevant Ukrainian city, states that "this is a joint project of the Ukrainian and Russian public ... The editorial board of Kharkov gives a unique opportunity for Ukrainian and other opposed to Kyiv authorities journalists to publish their reports, analytics on Ukraine economics and politics... ". The publication also announces that the editorial staff is no longer in Kharkiv, while their branches are being transferred to St. Petersburg and Luhansk (2019). Web analytics of this resource using the service alexa.com proves that the Internet publication "Kharkov" has only 5.5% of Ukrainian readers, while the Russian audience is 29.5% (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Statistics of Kharkov site visitors (https://nahnews.org) according to alexa.com resource as at March 19, 2019.

Another edition of "Russian World. Ukraine" (http://russmir.info) notes that it is an all-Ukrainian newspaper, but the name itself and rhetoric itself are pro-Russian. Having verified the analyst of this web resource using the service alexa.com, we understand that the site's audience is more Russian (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Statistics of the visitors of the site "Russian world. Ukraine" (http://russmir.info) according to the resource alexa.com as at March 19, 2019.

The launch of such online publications is confirmed by the model of the distorted source, when the propagandist creates a source from which propaganda messages come out (Zrazhevs'ka, 2010). We would like to add that in practice this model is implemented in a new way: N-number of propagandists creates n-number of sources of information (in our case, Internet resources), posting propagandistic news for them, and providing hyperlinks between them. An example is the web analytics of the resource of the "Kharkov" (https://nahnews.org) resource, where the publication "Russian Spring" is sent to. In addition, the latter is related to https://nahnews.org. Another edition of PolitNavigator is related to the "Russian Spring" (Figures 5, 6).

It is important not the fact of hyper links between propaganda publications, and the articles to which they are sent and distributed. Thus, the Internet media "Russian Spring" presents the material "Three scenarios of the collapse of Ukraine", referring to NA "Kharkov". "Voice of Sevastopol" was created in 2014 and positioned itself as a "special information project designed to objectively cover events in the Crimea, the Donbass, the Middle East and Russia. The resource, which truly reports the events in Novorossiya, tells about crimes that can not be left unpunished ... " (2019).

However, the rhetoric of this edition speaks of the opposite: the news related to Ukraine do not have different points of view, the facts are biased and even downright. There is an English version with the heading "War in Novorossiya". Novorossiya (New Russia) edition calls the Ukrainian territories of the Eastern part, which the Russian Federation is trying to "protect" from Ukraine.
During the study of Russian propaganda on events in the East of Ukraine and Crimea, we come to the following conclusions: propaganda and disinformation is global in scope and is spread across two levels: 1) between Ukrainians and Russians to incite hostility between them. This is confirmed by the leading false idea on the Russian new media that Ukrainians are oppressing the Russian-speaking population, all-Ukrainianization is taking place, and the authorities have been seized by the nationalists who have brought the country to poverty. Instead, Novorossiya needs help from Putin and people want to join Russia; 2) impact on the international audience, which does not always have a definite point of view on this issue. For example, the television network RT, formerly known as Russia Today, has information internet portals in six languages (Russian, English, German, French, Arabic, Spanish) and offers biased (with a single point of view), inequitable information about Ukraine and others post-Soviet countries. The publication in the Russian version has an appropriate heading (Former USSR). The Internet publication spreads to the international audience the relevant provocative contexts propagating the idea of Russophobia and Ukrainian nationalism, radicalism.

Further research on Russian propaganda is needed to counteract and counter-propaganda of a “hybrid” war that continues in the information area as well as in the Eastern regions of Ukraine. Moreover, only the joint efforts of politicians, journalists and scientists in exposing the facts of disinformation by Russia will be able to demonstrate the real situation for the international community.

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