Social Media in Information Warfare

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Social media have become a completely new field for information warfare. Social media have impacts on those, who unlike the television audience, desire for information and are not informationally passive. In the "Conflict in the south-east of Ukraine" new players have appeared in information warfare — active, authoritative bloggers, who have their own pages on social media and thousands of subscribers. They actively influence the audience and have professional exposure to the official media. In 2022 social media are actively involved in the dissemination of information in the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Social media are also used by the authorities, professional politicians, and propagandists of the opposition, which is especially evident from YouTube video hosting. Meanwhile, many fakes about the crisis appeared on social media and mainly come from abroad. Therefore, it's important for journalists, who are likely doctors of society, to fulfill their responsibilities in military operations.

Keywords: social media, information warfare, Ukraine crisis, fake news, Russia-Ukraine crisis

Journalism researchers interpret information warfare as a deliberate discrediting of a political, economic, and ideological opponent with the help of compromising information. Specialists give "information warfare" broader meaning. They think the open and hidden targeted information impact of social systems on each other was in order to obtain some material things (Grabelnikov A. A., 2011, pp. 81–101). Many articles and books have been published on this subject (Belyaev Dmitry, 2014; Korovin V., 2014; Panarin I. N., 2014; Starikov Nikolay, 2014).

Social media such as Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter, Odnoklassniki and others have become a completely new field for information warfare. Social media have impacts on those, who unlike the television audience, desire for information and are not informationally passive. Meanwhile, the interactivity of the Internet gives them the opportunity to oppose the official versions of what is happening with themselves. Social media users distribute exclusive information, including videos and messages, which are then actively used by the media of oppositions.

It is very obvious in the "Conflict in the south-east of Ukraine". Several information warfares intertwined there at once, and it is difficult for ordinary people to figure out who is fighting with whom and what goals they are pursuing. The most massive and obvious weapon in the conflict is the Ukrainian media. They didn't fulfill their main functions at that time, namely, an objective reflection of reality. Their task is to introduce political and social myths into the mass consciousness, which are beneficial to the ruling elites. Their activities were divided

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in several directions — internal and external: Firstly, to their own population; secondly, to the enemy's media, which means Russian media; thirdly, to the world media to create a positive image of their country and denounce the aggressor (Russia). After the collapse of the USSR, the Ukrainian media (and educational institutions along with them) have managed to raise a new generation, for which the main enemy is the Moska (Moskal — on knives; Who does not jump is a Muscovite!), communists (komunyaku — to Gilyak, which means hang the communists). These sentiments were especially manifested in western Ukraine, where they openly erected monuments to Stepan Bandera, they sang the exploits of the division of the SS troops "Galicia" and other war criminals. Later, it was known that these forces captured the Kyiv Maidan and began to impose their views on the entire country. All this resulted in an open confrontation between the West and the East of Ukraine, a coup d'état, an illegitimate government, the loss of Crimea by Ukraine, the formation of the republics of the DPR, LPR, "Novorossiya" and civil war. Today, the information (cold) war has grown into a hot one. Now it is a component of the military confrontation, and the local media are already acting in accordance with the military plans of the Ukrainian government and the oligarchs.

They are openly supported by the Western media, which have nurtured this conflict. Most of them kept quiet about the true state of affairs in Ukraine. The German TV channel "KlagemauerTV" published a video, in which it accused the largest German and world media of a criminal conspiracy aimed at a monstrous distortion of information about events in Ukraine. According to German journalists, the presentation of materials in most Western media is "impossible to beat" and it is aimed at strengthening the influence of "the organizers of the war in Ukraine".[1] Therefore, the population of the EU countries is completely unaware of what is happening and had to learn the truth about the events in Odesa, Mariupol, Donetsk, and Lugansk by chance from rallies and pickets organized by immigrants from Russia and Ukraine in the capitals of European countries. Western media are also active participants in information warfare. Considering that they cover up to 80% of the information space in the world, their point of view on Ukrainian events is both dominant and overwhelming.

Since the Ukrainian media have been bought up by local oligarchs, they are also waging internal wars among themselves, protecting the political positions of their masters and compromising opponents (the battle between the media of Kolomoisky and Firtash). Later, I. Kolomoisky waged war against the President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko. "After the collapse of the system of succession of power in Ukraine, which was the result of an armed coup, Kolomoisky sees Poroshchenko's dubious legitimacy as an opportunity for himself. if Poroshenko did not seize power in Ukraine, then he can separate this area from Ukraine, which is already under his control and his vassals (already called by many 'Kolomoisky Khagan')"[2]

New players have appeared in information warfare — active, authoritative bloggers, who have their own pages on social media and thousands of subscribers. They actively influence the audience and have professional exposure of the official media. One of them is Anatoly Shariy, a Ukrainian, who lives in Europe and constantly reveals fakes in the Ukrainian media. His page is on the 10th line of the Ukrainian Facebook rating in 2014 (without any advertising, he has 100 thousand subscribers and 40 million views in three months on YouTube since the Ukraine crisis).

Fake is falsification, forgery, and deceit. In social media, fakes can be internet rumors disguised as real news,

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[1] The German TV channel showed the truth about the Euromaidan and accused the major Western media of collusion, March 11, 2014, Nakanune, available online at: https://www.nakanune.ru/news/2014/3/11/22344375.
[2]   Rojsers A. Kolomoisky vs Poroshenko: Wall to wall, July 16, 2014, Odnako, available online at: http://www.however.org/blogs/kolomoyskiy-vs-poroshenko-stenka-na-stenku/.

fake pages, which imitate the pages of real users — containing identical personal data, photo albums, records and so on. In the political struggle, they are created to compromise with politicians and other defendants. Anatoly Shariy mainly exposed video clips and photographs of the Kyiv media, which are trying to give out information materials of past years from Chechnya, Iraq, Syria, and other hot spots for the "atrocities" of the separatists in the Donbas. They indulge in these informational crimes not for a good life: mainly Russian journalists work on the battlefield (who are targeted for hunting — that's why they die), and Ukrainian journalists got their news from military headquarters, which were located far from the clashes.

In order to organize the publication of objective video materials from the battlefields, the journalist of the TV and radio company "Crimea", Dmitry Taran — the column "information warfare" host since March 2014 （the videos of these programs are posted on his youtube account[3]), suggested that the local residents report themselves — take photos by mobile phones, video cameras or cameras with video filming of the events taking place around them and post it on social media. In his opinion, such a massive horizontal spontaneous movement will break the information blockade, will enable residents of other regions of Ukraine, and enable other countries to see the true state of affairs, rather than get information from edited pictures of Kyiv.[4] Residents as participants in information warfare, in fact, guaranteed the objectivity of reflecting the results of the enemy's attack with their mass of amateur publications.

In social media, you can find instructions, on how to detect fakes, for example, fake pages. 1) all photos of a person were uploaded on the same day. 2) all posts on the pages are uploaded on the same day. 3) complete lack of subscribers, a small number of friends. 4) and if there are a lot of friends and subscribers, look at the likes: a small number of likes under the posts, that is most likely fake.[5]

The daily routine of individual information fighters in social media is to catch, denounce, compromise, to reveal the truth, etc. They conscientiously do this routine work. In addition, there are many groups on social media that have their own pages, which cover the true situation in the southeast of Ukraine.

On Facebook, for example, there is a group page, which is called "Great Patriotic Information Warfare". Its organizers wrote "you can discuss current news, express your opinions, and spread the necessary, useful information. Here we honor the history of our ancestors, we respect our traditional confessions and family values, we respect the elders, and we have the right orientation. we glorify the culture of Russian civilization." On November 5, 2014, the group already had 2,938 members.

Because of social media, militias and residents of the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics have the opportunity to convey to a large Internet audience the truth about what is really happening in the Donbas. This was reported on Facebook on the pages of the "News of the Donetsk People's Republic" (1285 participants — the number in March 2014), "New Eastern Ukraine" (3101 participants), "Be New Russia!" (1580 members, "Donbas' support group! (Everything you would like to know about the war in the south-east of Ukraine. Latest news"), "Donbas people's militia" (4194 members, "The fate of Donbas is in our hands. Join us!"), "Slavic peace against fascism", (8345 participants, "...there will be a moment when the Slavic peoples unite. And a ruler will come to power in the Russian state, who will be able to bring together all the Slavs. And

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[3]   Dmitry   Taran,   Information   War,   May   30,   2014,   *YouTube*,   available   online   at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIt31ZVL7c0&list=PLDAuNWwvITBEEFoJ5osgDO9XZOaVRSsEH&index=27;   Dmitry Taran, Information War, July 10, 2014, *YouTube*, available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ftxXo016zs.
[4]   Appeal   to   the   people   of   Donetsk   on   the   information   war,   available   online   at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FM6onFpHQrY&list=PLDAuNWwwITBEEFoJ5osgDO9XZOaVRSsEH& index-4.
[5] How to understand VKontakte that this is a fake page? *Otvet*, available online at: https://otvet.mail.ru/question/168552517.

most importantly, he will be able to stop numerous wars. — Vanga"), "Novorossiya-actual" (3011 participants), "news of Novorossiya" (2849 participants), "Novorossiya" (6578 participants).

All these participants, who make up groups in networks, also conduct active information work on their own pages, fight against fakes from official Ukrainian and Western media reports, reprint and distribute the most relevant and important posts, messages and video materials. The new information force — the interactive audience of the Internet — significantly affects the mindset of users and public opinions about the events in Novorossiya. I think this topic requires more attention of modern media researchers. After all, information warfare is moving from traditional media to internet media.

The above content was published in 2014 — the first months of the military confrontation in the Donbas (Grabelnikov A. A., November 5, 2014). The past eight years have shown that the information warfare there has not weakened, on the contrary, the war has become more severe. Moreover, Kyiv often won victories in it (Revyakina Anna, Feburary 8, 2022). Why did this happen? A survey of Donetsk journalists and bloggers showed that "we are losing the information war because we try to tell the truth, while the enemy lies and does not blush. Firstly, ordinary people are more likely to believe lies in their rationality. Secondly, one fact can generate 100500 lies of facts — nothing limits them. Accordingly, truthful information is simply overwhelmed by misinformation, like an avalanche... We have a conscience, and therefore we often do not cross red lines. Unfortunately, this is impossible in information warfare... As a result, it turns out that more and more misinformation is pouring into our minds, and we respond with uncertain actions... One might get the impression that since the truth is on our side, then we don't need to protect it. We are taught from childhood that the truth will reveal itself and that lies will be exposed sooner or later. Unfortunately, the reality is not as it seems. It is the truth that needs both powerful armor and protection, not because it is weak, but because too many do not want and are afraid to hear it (Revyakina Anna, February 8, 2022).

The special military operation, which began on February 24, 2022, again sharply aggravated the situation on the information frontline. Social media are actively involved in the dissemination of information, unlike the media filled mainly with texts of the population, where each author judges what is happening in their own understanding. Social media are also used by the authorities, professional politicians, and propagandists of the opposition, which is especially evident from YouTube video hosting. In the current media field, foreign information sources play an important role, which launched a fierce war against Russia with the help of fake news and information provocations. Maxim Zamshev (Максим Замшев), editor-in-chief of Literature Gazeta ("Литературной газеты"), stressed "the information warfare is worse than the real one in some places. You can trust only verified information and do not be distracted by Instagram bloggers' nonsense" (Zamshev Maxim, 2022, pp. 2–8). President V. V. Putin (В. В. Путин) also emphasized that our country and other countries were constantly faced with cynical deceit and lies from the West. For example, the West deployed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. "It was unbelievable and shocking, but the fact remains. A lot of lies are also told at the national level and on the platform of the UN, which results in huge casualties, destruction, and an incredible surge of terrorism (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2022).

Today, in the special military operation of Russia, the information and psychological warfare in Ukraine has reached a scale that was simply unimagined before. On March 1, 2022, the head of the Civic Chamber's working group on combating the spread of misinformation, Alexander Malkevich (Александр Малькевич), announced that almost 1,400,000 misinformation about the situation in Donbas had been detected in Russian Internet in just a week. "In 2020, we identified 35 thousand fakes, in 2021 we have already identified almost 90 thousand fakes.

This year, in two months, excluding fakes about Donbas, about our special operation, 20,000 fakes were discovered."[6]

The Ukrainian authorities created information isolation from the Russian media, misinformed the population of their country with their messages, disorientated them, caused panic, and intimidated them with the atrocities of the Russian troops, but at the same time talked about the heroic victories of the armed forces of Ukraine, which in some places drove the enemy back to the Russian borders. In order to prove this, blogger Yuriy Podolyaka (Юрий Подоляка) showed on his YouTube channel, journalists even rework maps and move cities. In the news of TSN TV channel, the city of Lozova from the south of the Kharkiv region moved 300 kilometers to the north-west between Bogodukhov and Akhtyrka in order to show that the battles near Lozova are taking place not far from the Russian Federation.[7]

The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky (Владимир Зеленский) was also actively involved in the video deception, talking about the 15 dead courageous soldiers who defended Snake Island in the Black Sea. He also awarded the title of "Hero of Ukraine" to all of them. Fortunately, total 82 inhabitants of the island all survived and surrendered to the Russian warship.[8]

In the fakes of Ukrainian cyberfighters military stories of 2014 in Donbas are actively used as today's ones to disorient and intimidate the population. Videos about conflicts in other countries and even computer games are used for the same purpose. For example, the destruction in Beirut after the explosion in the port in 2020 is presented as the result of the shelling of Kharkiv, although the sea is clearly visible in the background of the picture. They are not shy about staged scenes. Many media claimed that a large hole in the kindergarten was shot by the Russian army. Many Western correspondents were invited to inspect it. The interior of the building hit by rockets has few intact parts. But there the windows are not broken, and even the toys on the shelves, the lamp on the ceiling, and other items remained untouched. Also, all the Western media went around the same photo with a pregnant woman who allegedly escaped from a maternity hospital in Mariupol shot by Russian troops. A local fashion model starred as a woman in labor. But the terrorist attack, organized by the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Donetsk on March 14 with the help of the Tochka-Utactical missile, in which 21 people were killed and 37 were injured, but they were "not noticed" by Western or Ukrainian media and social media.

Many fakes are not from Ukrainians but from abroad. According to Igor Ashmanov (Игорь Ашманов), a well-known specialist in the field of information technology, information centers have been created around the perimeter of Russia that creates disinformation for different social strata. The production and distribution of fakes are based on the principle of viruses. Social media are filled with them and objective news is removed. Thus, Facebook introduced de facto censorship, blocking the publications of Russian media. The vision of the situation from Russia became inaccessible to the Facebook audience. It is no coincidence that Roskomnadzor (Роскомнадзор) blocked Facebook in Russia — for distorting information, closing the pages of major Russian media and pro-Ukrainian political advertising (Panin Igor, 2022, pp. 9–15). Later, the General Prosecutor's Office demanded that Meta be recognized as an extremist organization (it owns Facebook and Instagram), which allowed their users to publish calls for violence against the Russian military participating in a special operation in Ukraine,

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[6] OP said that about 1.4 million fakes about the situation in Donbass were revealed in Runet, March 1, 2022, *TASS*, available online at: https://tass.ru/ekonomika/13910503.

[7] Podolyaka Yuri (March 4, 2022). War in Ukraine. what does "honest" news look like for "aquarium fish", *YouTube*, available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrTFBClPTb0.

[8] In Ukraine, they admitted that they lied about the border guards from Snake Island, the appeal of the "dead" AFU officer, *YouTube*, available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUtAgpuP3-s.

as well as against the leaders of Russia and Belarus, and ban its activities in Russia. The Foreign Ministry sent a note to the American embassy in Moscow initiating a criminal case against the management of Meta. The maximum penalty for this crime is five years in prison.

Roskomnadzor also restricted access to the websites of Meduza (Медуза) and Radio Liberty (both publications are also recognized in Russia as foreign agents), the BBC Russian Service, and several Ukrainian media. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova (Мария Захарова) said the BBC plays a big role in undermining Russian stability and security, adding that Russia has been the victim of "unprecedented information terrorism that is creating hysteria around Ukrainian events". The website of the media company Deutsche Welle was also blocked. Their broadcasting in Russia had previously been terminated, and employees of the Moscow office were deprived of accreditation. The sites of Present Time ("Настоящего времени"), New Times, Crimea. Reality ("Крым.Реалии"), and the Russian-language version of Interfax-Ukraine ("Интерфакс-Украина") were also blocked. At the request of the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ukrainian publications Gordon ("Гордон"), Correspondent ("Корреспондент"), and Ukrainska Pravda ("Украинская правда") were included in the list of banned sites. Experts believe that since February 24, the Security Service of Ukraine has managed to post millions of fakes on Facebook, "fake resources" spent $1.7 million daily on the Russian-language network, and $5 million on the English-language network.[9]

Now a lot of fakes are spreading in the information space, the purpose of which is to lay all the responsibility on Russia. Domestic producers of disinformation have also joined Western and Ukrainian side. TV channel Rain ("Дождь") and the radio station Echo of Moscow ("Эхо Москвы"), were convicted of information sabotage within the country. Rain has long been recognized in Russia as a media-foreign agent. At the request of the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia, Roskomnadzor restricted access to the resources of the channel.[10] And the Echo of Moscow was taken off the air. According to the department, the websites of the TV channel and radio station contained materials with calls for extremist activities and disinformation about the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine. After that, Rain suspended work, and the board of directors liquidated the Echo of Moscow and the radio station's website.

Roskomnadzor also demanded that the materials of Novaya Gazeta ("Новая газета"), Mediazona ("Медиазона"), and other media outlets be removed for calling what is happening in Ukraine a war. A week after the start of a special military operation in Ukraine, in response to information terrorism, the State Duma Committee on State Construction and Legislation approved an amendment introducing criminal liability up to imprisonment for up to 15 years for spreading fakes about the actions of the Russian Armed Forces. It is proposed to supplement the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation with Article 207.3 "Public dissemination of knowing disinformation about the Russian Armed Forces". Such acts will be punished by a fine of up to 1.5 million rubles or imprisonment for up to three years. If an official position is used or there are mercenary motives for disseminating disinformation about the Russian Armed Forces, then the fine will be up to 5 million, and the term of imprisonment — from 5 to 10 years. If the spread of fakes caused serious consequences, then the term of imprisonment will be from 10 to 15 years. It is proposed to supplement the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation with a new article "Calls for the introduction of restrictive measures for Russian citizens or Russian legal entities". Such actions will be punishable by a fine of up to 500 thousand rubles, by restriction of freedom,

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[9] Zelensky thanked Meta after allowing calls for violence, March 22, 2022, *RBC News*, available online at: https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/13/03/2022/622e481b9a794724f4df8b01.

[10] TV channel "Rain" suspends work, March 3, 2022, *TASS*, available online at: https://tass.ru/obschestvo/13952963.

or by deprivation of freedom for up to three years with a fine of up to 200 thousand rubles.[11]

"War, including information war, removes many peacetime taboos, it is foolish to believe the decency of the enemy here," Vitaly Tretyakov (Виталий Третьяков) writes in Literature Gazeta, "our information policy needs to be radically changed today. If you see a 'fifth column' of traitors, it must be informationally killed, just like an external enemy. Of course, everyone is entitled to their own opinion. But it's one thing when you talk about something in the kitchen with your wife, and it's quite different when you, a famous person, speak in a public space and millions of fans trust you. This is no longer your own business, which means that you will have to be responsible for these words." (Sarkisov Georgy, Vitaly Tretyakov, 2022, pp. 9–15).

Experts urge citizens to keep information hygiene, which must be followed at this time. It is necessary to create civil information defense — the interaction of social media users with each other to identify fakes, and expose disinformation.

An example of the general mutual assistance between people is shown by the activities of the Ukrainian journalist Anatoly Shariy (Анатолий Шарий), who organized streaming on his YouTube channel from the first day of the special operation in Ukraine. He abandoned the standard media reflection of hostilities, when journalists support one of the parties. And he focused on the mutual help of people, who suffered from hostilities. "We are not interested in geopolitics, there are other channels for that," he says. "The main thing for us is to help equal, real people."[12] Users themselves take an active part in this, sharing information from their places. These messages are rechecked by the editorial team of Anatoly Shariy. Only after that these messages are brought to the attention of the audience. The main task is to separate the truth from fakes, to filter out information stuffing. Since there is propaganda on both sides of the war, exaggeration of their military successes and losses of the enemy, many turn to the Sharia channel, which has become their eyes and ears, a reliable source of information and support in a difficult situation. His stream is watched by 100 thousand to 220 thousand of people. In total, Shariy has 2.9 million subscribers on YouTube. He conducts his programs from the European Union.

In the modern information world, it is difficult for a simple user to distinguish. Nevertheless, there are reliable resources, whose objectivity comes first. Among them are bloggers Yuri Podolyaka (Юрий Подоляка) and Mikhail Onufrienko (Михаил Онуфриенко). Their opinions are gaining several million views. Yuri Podolyaka, for example, is an engineer, who worked at the Sumy television center. However, he's always interested in military history, tactics, and strategy of military operations. In 2014, he began to blog on LiveJournal, describing the war in Donbas. His analytical reviews were a great success. So he accurately predicted the Battle of Ilovaisk. He came to the attention of the Security Service of Ukraine and was forced to move to Russia. And now he has been fighting on the information frontline for eight years. Today he is invited as an expert to the programs of Channel One Russia (Первый Канал) ("The Great Game/Большая игра"), Vladimir Solovyov (Владимир Соловьев) and others also join this show. His activities can be fully attributed to the journalism profession.

The well-known journalist and politician Vitaly Tretyakov (Виталий Третьяков) emphasizes "the atmosphere in a society largely depends on journalists, which means that a journalist must be responsible for every word of his article. We all like doctors, and it is also important for us — do not to harm. This is the main thing in our career" (Sarkisov Georgy, Vitaly Tretyakov, 2022, pp. 9–15). This responsibility especially increases

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[11] Anton Novoderezhkin, The State Duma Committee approved the amendment on imprisonment up to 15 years for fakes about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, March 3, 2022, *TASS*, available online at: https://tass.ru/obschestvo/13945709.

[12] Anatoly Shary, We broadcast truth and common sense, *YouTube*, available online at: https://www.youtube.com/user/SuperSharij.

in the conditions of military conflicts.

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