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## INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF UKRAINE THROUGH THE PRISM OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION PROPAGANDA

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**Abstract.** This article is devoted to the definition and analysis of the main methods of Russian information propaganda and the study of their real impact on creating a negative image of Ukraine in the international community.

Analysis of the foreign press showed that the Western information space is a mixture of professional research, falsifications, propaganda, open manipulation and primitive claims. It is important to note that today there is a fairly large number of foreign publications which, while supporting the Putin regime, still consider Ukraine and Russia as inseparable objects and which almost always publish negative materials about Ukraine and its people. Such sources include some information resources of Serbia, France, Turkey, etc.

Western observers can obtain more objective and truthful information from official representatives of the state, diplomats, and from influential world publications that provide high-quality analytics and expert opinions. Through the websites of organizations that provide analytical and statistical materials. Also, well-known bloggers, openly declaring their political preferences and support, can shape the opinion of some people.

Among the main information methods used by Russia in the fight against Ukraine are the manipulation of history and current events, the distortion of historical facts and contemporary events, the creation of a negative identity of Ukraine in the eyes of the international public, speculation on facts, the production of fake news, etc.

In general, the spread of Russian propaganda about Ukraine has a negative impact on its perception in the world. And this, in turn, can create significant obstacles to the preservation and support of Ukraine's sovereignty, as well as its international integration. To combat this phenomenon, it is important to continue to strengthen international cooperation in the field of information security and to openly highlight facts and truthful information about Ukraine.

**Keywords:** propaganda; information space; political manipulation; falsification; negative image.

**Formulation of the problem.** Russian intelligence services have always attempted to destabilize the situation in Ukraine, undermine its sovereignty and independence, create a negative image of the country, and thus, making it impossible to integrate into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, turn it into a

dependent and manipulated satellite. Russia continues to openly lie to the whole world about its aggressive military actions on the territory of Ukraine, calling it a special operation to liberate Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine, thus misleading not only its citizens but also a certain part of Western society.

**Analysis of the study of the problem.** The problem of manipulation of public consciousness is still a subject of active scientific interest. Thus, in a number of scientific sources, both foreign and domestic authors analyse and substantiate the essential characteristics of the phenomenon of manipulation and the main types of its manifestations – S. G. Kara-Murza, A. Tsuladze, V. Bebyk, Y. Kuchera, E. Dotsenko, R. Debreu, A. Derkach, V. Zapolska, V. Zhukova, L. Lapteva, L. McQuail, V. Pankratov, V. Petrenko, G. Frank.

We should also mention the works of Amelina V., Biryukov A., J. Dominic, Zubrytska L., Lytvynenko O., Lyapina T., Zayarna O., Zernetska O., Solonska S., Nedbaevskiy S., Harris, Schiller G., Keane J., etc. that covered the issues of practical application of manipulation technologies.

However, there are still many problems that need to be resolved as soon as possible.

**The purpose of the article** is to outline the methods of Russian information propaganda and determine their real impact on creating a negative image of Ukraine in the international arena.

**Presenting main material.** Due to cyber technologies, information warfare has become more accessible and effective, so information has become a “cheap weapon.” Regular analysis of Western information resources allows us to track the dynamics of references to Ukraine both quantitatively and qualitatively. This dynamics reflects the degree of awareness of Western societies about Ukraine and their interest in our country and events around it.

Among the sources from which Western countries receive information about Ukraine are the following:

- The official level, which presents the state's views in the language of diplomacy on various issues, phenomena and events with different emphases and assessments.
- Assessments can be taken from analytical programs on information resources such as Radio Liberty, BBC, Deutsche Welle and others.
- From a number of influential publications, such as The Washington Post [1], The Guardian [2], Newsweek [3], Le Monde [4], Die Zeit [5], which provide quality analytics and expert opinions.
- Websites of organizations that provide analytical materials, such as Chatham House, Max Planck Institute, McCain Institute [6], Atlantic Council, Carnegie Endowment, and private intelligence and analytical companies such as Stratfor.
- The Western blogosphere reflects its own perspective on Ukrainian issues and perceives them in a variety of ways.

In general, the Western information space is a mixture of professional research, falsifications, propaganda, open manipulation, and primitive statements. It is important to note that there are resources that almost always publish negative materials about Ukraine and its people. Such resources include, for example, the Serbian media outlets Pечат and Vidovdan, the French Agora Vox, the Turkish newspaper Güneş, and the Norwegian resources Steigan.no and Nettavisen. These resources regularly publish materials that denigrate the image of Ukraine and its citizens [7].

As for Putin’s propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe, analysts point to 200 disinformation sources (media, Facebook pages, Telegram channels, etc.) in 12 countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, as well as the Russian-speaking segment of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia [8].

In terms of security, Putin’s regime is often characterized as a “militocracy” that is led by individuals from the security services and continues the policies of its predecessors, such as the Cheka and KGB. They actively seek to spread hatred of three main aspects: anti-democracy, anti-Westernism, and

anti-Semitism. To ensure their survival and self-affirmation, “militarists” transform the environment by creating quasi-states, such as Transnistria, South Ossetia, the “LPR” and “DPR,” and waging hybrid wars at various levels.

In the Western information space, many assessments are provided by former Sovietologists (now acting as Russian scholars) who still consider Ukraine and Russia as an inseparable entity, unlike contemporary Western scholars, such as Paul Danyeri, Alexander Motyl, Edward Lucas, James Sherr, Andreas Umland, who understand the differences between Ukrainians and Russians, as well as between the two countries, and study Russian great-power nationalism and Russian national consciousness.

The situation is developing in such a way that the influence of “left-wing intellectuals and Putin's agents” is actively growing in the information space of the West, who look at Ukraine as an object for their criticism [9]. It is worth noting that the perception of Ukraine and the assessment of events in the country are shaped by the views and assessments of Ukrainian citizens, in particular those who were supporters of former President Viktor Yanukovich.

For example, in 2017, the Danish newspaper “Berlingske” published an interview with Yevhenia Bondarenko, a member of the Ukrainian parliament from the Party of Regions (2006–2014). In this interview, she tried to convince the Danes that Russia's attack on Ukraine is a lie and that there is a civil war in Ukraine [10].

A different view is presented in a publication on the British website Open Democracy, where Kateryna Yakovlenko from Donbas talks about “respect, love and healthy criticism” of her country. It is also worth noting that MP S. Leshchenko is often quoted in Western sources [11]. Taking this into account, one can understand how the information resource is formed and how assessments, conclusions and forecasts about Ukraine emerge.

Analysts point to 9 main topics on which Russian propaganda forms and disseminates content information about Ukraine, namely [12]:

1. Narratives that discredit Ukraine:
  - Ukraine planned to attack Russia first;
  - Ukrainians are Nazis;
  - Ukrainian society agrees to make concessions to Russia to end the war;
  - Ukraine does not want peace;
  - the population lives better under Russian occupation than under Ukrainian rule;
  - the Russian army is liberating the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine;
  - Ukraine's victory in this war is impossible;
  - Ukraine is blackmailing Western countries;
  - the Ukrainian military is attacking civilians and committing other war crimes;
  - Western society does not support Ukraine;
  - Ukraine is not a sovereign state;
  - Ukraine will not become a member of the EU or NATO etc.
2. Events on the frontline:
  - Ukraine is losing the war;
  - Belarus is not participating in the war in Ukraine;
  - successful results of Russian mobilisation;
  - insignificant losses of Russian troops on the battlefield;
  - Russian strikes are aimed only at military infrastructure;
  - significant success of the Russian army in offensive actions etc.
3. Anti-Western narratives:
  - Europe and the United States provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia;
  - the EU and NATO are weak and will soon cease to exist;
  - non-aligned states favour Russia over the West;
  - the West is profiting from the war in Ukraine;

- Europe is trying to split the ‘brotherly people’, Orthodox, Slavs;
  - the West is using Ukraine as a pawn;
  - European and American media are lying, etc.
4. Conspiracy theories:
    - Russians have new secret weapons;
    - Ukraine has biological weapons laboratories;
    - Ukraine will be divided among other countries;
    - the war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy between the West and the United States etc.
  5. Negative economic consequences of sanctions:
    - Russia is not affected by sanctions;
    - sanctions harm Europe more than Russia;
    - Western civil society does not support sanctions against Russia;
    - Europe is facing an energy crisis and it is its fault, not Russia's;
    - the West not only does not adhere to its own sanctions policy, but often circumvents them etc.
  6. Assistance to Ukraine:
    - Western military aid will not help Ukraine win the war;
    - financial aid is misused;
    - Ukraine uses Western weapons to attack Russian territory and kill Russians;
    - Ukraine takes aid from other countries that need it more.
  7. Ukrainian refugees:
    - Ukrainian refugees are ungrateful;
    - abuse the assistance provided, they are a threat to the security of host countries;
    - have priority over citizens and residents of host countries.
  8. The threat of war goes beyond Ukraine:
    - the world is on the verge of the third world war,
    - the United States and Europe are provoking a nuclear catastrophe by their actions,
    - some countries should join Russia or at least remain neutral for their own safety, etc.
  9. The situation of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities abroad:
    - Ukrainians terrorise and harass Russian speakers
    - Western countries support Russophobia, discriminate against the Russian language, culture, and Russian citizens.

As we can see, Russia is trying to shift the responsibility for the war in Ukraine to Europe and the United States by spreading fake theories about a global conspiracy.

The Kremlin is blackmailing the West with nuclear war or World War III, emphasising the invincibility and greatness of the mighty Russia, although the results of the war are very controversial. It also tries to avoid sanctions, explaining that they are not effective.

Russian propaganda is also actively working to discredit Ukrainian citizens in Europe, accuse Western countries of Russophobia, and convince them that Ukraine is using the military aid to attack Russian territories and civilians.

It is also important to consider the methods of “producing information” filled with various assessments and forecasts about our country in order to understand how this happens and what tools are used for this purpose [11].

The first method is the manipulation of history and current events.

Access to information is more diverse and widespread than ever before: from TikTok to YouTube, from everyday conversations to scientific publications. This is not only a good opportunity for information dissemination, but also a great risk of simplification and manipulation of historical truth – social media and mass culture have the ability to promote myth-making [8].

That is why today it is very important not only to study history, but also to be able to analyse the information received, develop the ability to think critically, evaluate different opinions, distinguish myths from facts, and as a result, form a well-founded vision.

For example, in an article published on February 1, 2017, on the French Agora Vox, signed by Courtois Laurent, the author presents Kyiv and Ukrainian statehood as a “fruit of imagination” and expresses sympathy for the tsarist decrees of the 60s of the XIX century against the Ukrainian language. The author also argues that the Ukrainian language was banned at that time as a “vector of rebellion and separatism” and even refutes the ethnic status of the Kuban Cossacks, considering them not Ukrainians [11].

As we can see, one of the main challenges of modern history is its use as a tool in social and political debates. Myths become levers of influence in the hands of the media and politicians and form narratives that serve the interests of certain categories of people. This can lead to a distortion of historical truth and a change in public consciousness [8].

It is worth remembering that the past is not unambiguous, and history is not a set of ‘correct’ and convenient answers, but a complex process of constant dialogue between the past and the present, with the truth somewhere in between.

The media play an important role in shaping people's perceptions of the past. Very often, we take for granted what we read on the Internet, listen to on the news, or even watch in historical films. The truth is often distorted for the sake of entertainment or sensationalism. Therefore, it is the duty of every citizen to critically evaluate information and try to find answers in the past on their own, no matter how difficult it may be.

Critical thinking and a deep understanding of historical processes can be a reliable defence against the substitution of meanings. The ability to distinguish facts from manipulations should become an integral part of civic consciousness.

Courtois Laurent also tries to justify the crimes of the Soviet Union and Russia's actions in Crimea, and justifies the occupation of Crimea and the war in Donbas by glorifying the Russian army and praising the level of Russian military technology. Experts point out that these propaganda attempts “border on self-caricature” [13].

It is also worth noting the specific use of words, phrases and concepts in this method, such as “Kyiv junta” and “fascists”, which have a negative connotation and are used to create images. Concepts can also be used to create the impression of truthfulness and validity of propaganda. In general, this method aims to distort historical facts and contemporary events, as well as to create a negative identity of Ukraine in the eyes of the international community [14].

Among other methods:

- falsifying the picture of the world: an attempt to distort reality and create a negative impression of Ukrainians, distinguishing them as “we are fighters for the good of all” and others as “fascists” and trying to change the borders on the world map;
- tautological rhetoric and stylistic tricks: the use of excessive repetition of words or phrases in rhetoric, such as “DPR” as “people's business” or the use of synecdoche that tries to take a single element (e.g., President Putin) for the whole of Russia;
- cultivation of false generalizations: an attempt to impose the idea that all Crimean Tatars and the entire nation collaborated with the Nazis, creating a common negative identity;
- direct falsification of facts: creating or disseminating false information, such as pointing to the interview of the Ukrainian President in the New York Times or the story of the “crucified boy” spread by the Russian media [9];
- use of false sociological data to reinforce the impression of widespread support for Putin in Russia;
- use of empty statements: inclusion of empty statements in assessments and forecasts that have no substance but sound promising and justify the situation;

- creation of non-existent dilemmas: an attempt to create artificial alternatives that are intentionally false, such as “protecting Mother Russia or perishing from fascism and fake democracy”;
- use of “trap words”: the inclusion of words that create the appearance of objectivity or hide the true nature of the situation, such as “so-called” or “believed”;
- conspiracy theories: the use of conspiracy theories, such as the existence of a Western conspiracy against Russia or its Orthodox values;
- manipulation of determinants: playing with the causes and effects of events, trying to change the true causes and effects by creating a false story;
- the use of fake “experts” and “specialists” on television and in the media to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion.

A fake story in the hands of these “experts” leads to a disturbance in the minds of viewers and consumers of content. The inability to obtain information from alternative sources and fears are factors that contribute to the successful use of information “weapons”. The war in Ukraine has further reinforced these fears. As a result of the activities of these fake scholars, perceptions of Ukraine, its history, political present and future are formed based on stereotypes and false information.

**Conclusions.** To summarize, the spread of Russian propaganda about Ukraine is an important aspect of the information warfare that has a significant impact on the overall perception of Ukraine in the world. This is manifested in the following:

1. Media. Control over Russian media and information resources gives the Kremlin the ability to influence the perception of events in Ukraine and the world. Russian media outlets spread false information and mix facts with speculation.

2. Formation of a negative stereotype. Russian propaganda is actively working to create a negative stereotype of Ukraine and its people. This may include attempts to portray Ukrainians as radical nationalists or extremists.

3. Disinformation and manipulation. Russian propaganda actively uses disinformation, fake news and political manipulation to create a negative image of Ukraine. This may include spreading speculation about the conflict, internal problems and threats to stability.

4. Political influence. Russian propaganda also influences political dialog and decisions in different countries. This can affect support for Ukraine in international organizations and in relations with other countries.

5. Countermeasures. To counter Russian propaganda, many countries are taking countermeasures, such as funding independent media, increasing media literacy, and analyzing and exposing disinformation.

In general, the spread of Russian propaganda about Ukraine has a negative impact on the world's perception of Ukraine. This can complicate Ukraine's efforts towards international integration and support for its sovereignty. To combat this phenomenon, it is important to continue to strengthen international cooperation in the field of information security and to openly present facts and truthful information about Ukraine.

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### **МІЖНАРОДНИЙ ІМІДЖ УКРАЇНИ КРИЗЬ ПРИЗМУ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОЇ ПРОПАГАНДИ**

**Анотація.** Дана стаття присвячена визначенню та аналізу основних методів російської інформаційної пропаганди і дослідженню їх реального впливу на створення негативного іміджу України у міжнародному співтоваристві.

Аналіз зарубіжної преси показав, що західний інформаційний простір представляє собою суміш професійних досліджень, фальсифікацій, пропаганди, відкритого маніпулювання та примітивних тверджень. Важливо відзначити, що сьогодні існує достатньо велика кількість закордонних видань, які, підтримуючи путінський режим, все ще розглядають Україну і росію як нероздільний об'єкт і які практично завжди публікують негативні матеріали про Україну та її народ. До таких джерел належать деякі інформаційні ресурси Сербії, Франції, Норвегії, Туреччини тощо.

Більш об'єктивну та правдиву інформацію західні оглядачі мають змогу отримувати від офіційних представників держави, дипломатів, від впливових світових видань, які надають якісну аналітику та експертні висновки. Через сайти організацій, які надають аналітичні та статистичні матеріали. Також відомі блогери, відверто заявляючи про свої політичні вподобання та підтримку, можуть формувати думку частини людей.

Серед основних інформаційних методів, що застосовуються росією в боротьбі проти України, є маніпуляція історією та подіями сьогодення, перекручування історичних фактів та подій сучасності, створення негативної ідентичності України в очах міжнародної громадськості, спекуляція фактами, видуванням рейкових новин тощо.

Загалом, поширення російської пропаганди щодо України має негативний вплив на сприйняття її в світі. А це, в свою чергу, може створювати суттєві перешкоди для збереження та підтримки суверенітету України, а також її міжнародної інтеграції. Для боротьби з цим явищем важливо продовжувати зміцнювати міжнародну співпрацю у сфері інформаційної безпеки та відкрито висвітлювати факти та правдиву інформацію про Україну.

**Ключові слова:** пропаганда; інформаційний простір; політичні маніпуляції; фальсифікація; негативний імідж.