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Article

Peculiarities of the Emotional Impact of Propaganda on Society*

Abstract: *The peculiarities of the promotion of the narrative of Ukrainian biological weapons by Russian propaganda during the Russian-Ukrainian war are investigated. The impact of such propaganda on public opinion is deconstructed. Measures to counter such propaganda by non-state research organizations and non-state mass media are outlined. It was determined that in the modern world, propaganda turns the real world into a fictional world. As a form of communication, propaganda seeks to direct the reaction and/or behaviour of the subject. An important factor is that with the help of information that is promoted through certain technologies, an opinion that is important to the government is represented.*

Especially when this government is at war. And when the consumer of information receives a lot of information, he can not only understand the reality in which he is, but can also lose it. Therefore, at least two opposing points of view can form an information space, divide it and counterattack each other. As a result, confrontation between people will be established. In the war with

Ukraine, Russia created a multi-level information space, in each of which Ukraine is accused of spreading Nazism, suppressing Russian speakers, spreading biological weapons, etc. A unique aspect of contemporary Russian propaganda is its creation of numerous narratives on diverse subjects, each consistently highlighting the presence of an enemy. And this is Ukraine. Undoubtedly, the goal of such a strategy is to justify a military invasion of the territory of Ukraine, and not only in 2022, but also in 2014. Propaganda narratives must also be thwarted by a multi-layered countermeasure, an important element of which is NGOs.

Keywords: *biological weapons, bioterrorism, disinformation, manipulation, Ukraine.*

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1. Introduction

In totalitarian countries, the activities of the media are subject to the will of the authorities. The concept of an independent social institution for the media does not exist in such countries, even if the authorities

publicly assure of their democratic reforms and policies. Furthermore, the conditions of media professionalism can serve as an index for measuring democracy within a country. Therefore, in their work, Elizabeth Johansson-Noges and Olena Shimanshi write that „war propaganda and political spin serve an important function in terms of enticing a country’s citizens to ‘rally around the flag’ in defence of national goals and in keeping morale high even in the face of public sacrifice during the conflict“ (Johansson-Nogués and Şimanschi, 2023). Hence, considering that propaganda is directed solely against the other side may be a regrettable mistake. In order for the government’s policies to garner support among the population, no matter how absurd or terrifying they may be, propaganda must be disseminated within the country. The success of the Russian information campaign regarding the discourse of war with Ukraine is evidenced by the reaction of the Russian population. Control over the media, the prohibition of uncontrolled media with the requirement to independently label them as „foreign agents,“ and the formation of a pool of public speakers have gained desired support from the Russian population and a practical absence of protests against the Russian government. Despite numerous statements by the Russian government being fabricated and rehearsed from previous information campaigns (including those in the USSR), modern technologies for spreading falsehoods attract attention for the purpose of understanding, refuting, and predicting them.

This study analysed the technique of promoting the image of a „dangerous Ukraine threatening the world with biological weapons“. The analysis was conducted through the keyword „biological weapons“ used on the Russian Telegram channel „RIA Novosti“ from February 2020 to October 2023 (RIA Novosti. Telegram Channel). The aim of the study was to determine the purpose of promoting the narrative about the threat of biological weapons in Ukraine in wartime conditions. The hypothesis posited at the beginning of the study was as follows: in conditions of a non-democratic political regime, the media do not play the role of an independent institution but act as instruments of power, promoting its narratives to influence the emotional state of the internal and external audience consuming these narratives. This influence occurs synchronously with active military events and can be a marker of hybrid warfare. To test this hypothesis, information was collected about biological weapons from the Russian Telegram channel „RIA Novosti“ from February 2020 to October 2023. The main themes of the bioweapon narrative and active information promotion dates were identified. Then, the emotional tone of each text was determined using ChatGPT 3.5 to establish the export attitude of the Russian government toward Ukraine to the internal and external audience with the aim of shaping certain behaviours.

2. Literature Review

Undoubtedly, the media is one of the important channels for disseminating disinformation. However, in the conditions of a totalitarian political regime, the media becomes more of a tool of power for spreading false information. Therefore, analysing the activities of the media without considering the political regime would be a mistake for a researcher. Since control over information in totalitarian countries is one of the key directions of government policy, Lasswell and his classic communication formula (1948) emphasize the emotional component, which should answer the question „With what effect?“ the information is transmitted. Therefore, propaganda uses emotions to influence certain attitudes and behaviours through media controlled by the government.

Migration along the emotional scale allows propaganda to use both fear, hopelessness, anger, and positive feelings of joy, success, victory. For effectiveness, propaganda technologies try to use combinations of positive and negative emotions. Negative emotions are formed by introducing the image of an enemy, while positive emotions are created by elevating the attitude towards the heroism of the authority, which employs the strategy of the „defender“ archetype against the enemy. This strategy is implemented through the media and combines emotions of joy or fear. Thus, political communication itself uses the media as a tool for promoting its ideological narratives. The authority’s credibility grows with each additional tool at its disposal. Hence, in the Russian information space, scientific articles, fiction literature, films, concerts emerge that promote Russia’s ideology as a collector and defender of „Russian lands.“

As Elizabeth Johansson-Noges and Olena Şimanschi indicate, the Russian public’s openness to fabricated realities can also be explained by the theory that fictional experiences may be more emotionally appealing or gratifying to an individual than factual experiences. The fictional characterization of Donbas as the clear-cut ‘victim’ and the Ukrainian government-cum-the West as the brutal ‘enemy’ produces a sense of a black-and-white narrative of events, which for many people is emotionally reassuring (Johansson-Noges, Şimanschi 2023). This was also written by Hannah Arendt in her work „The Origins of Totalitarianism“ when pointing out the priority of fabricated stories in collective thinking over trust in facts. „The effectiveness of this kind of propaganda demonstrates one of the chief characteristics of modern masses. They do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part. Repetition, somewhat overrated in importance because of the common belief in the masses’ inferior capacity to grasp and remember, is important only because it convinces them of consistency in time“ (Arendt 1958, p.351).

Elizabeth Johansson-Noges and Olena Şimanschi write that a significant portion of Russian propaganda reflects unfounded accusations, and the speakers themselves participated in a massive manipulation aimed at fabricating a war in the Russian mass imagination. Therefore, despite partial resistance, the Russian population supported the position of the Russian government. Researchers analysed over 1000 units of (dis)information products from 15 media companies that were disseminated almost a year before the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine. Their conclusion is as follows: „We posit that the media has exerted a larger influence in the information manipulation on Ukraine than the government itself, and is the key emitter responsible for the emotional mobilization of the Russian audience. The media has not only transmitted the government’s official policy, but has also generated false or biased news content of its own accord“ (Johansson-Noges, Şimanschi 2023, p.2029). Therefore, „RIA Novosti,“ which was examined in this study, cannot be perceived as an information agency in Russia but rather as one of the instruments for promoting the narratives of the Russian government. This approach immediately categorizes this resource as an official channel for propaganda. Information dissemination through it cannot happen without government intervention. And when it comes to international politics or Ukraine, this resource promotes the interests and ideology of the Russian government and cannot be considered an independent institution.

3. Event Context

International Context. In the context of international politics, the issue of biological weapons is closely linked with the concept of „bioterrorism“ as a form of terrorism. In 1972, the „Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BTWC)“ was signed. Ukraine joined this convention in February 1975, and in 1998, the convention was ratified (VR).

Local Context. With the onset of the war between Russia and Ukraine and after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, the territory of Ukraine became a target for terrorist attacks, mostly occurring in the eastern and southern parts of the country. And although the topic of biological weapons on Ukrainian territory was not raised in the information space, since the full-scale invasion in 2022, the situation has changed dramatically. Russian resources began to massively disseminate information that experiments with coronavirus samples from bats were being conducted in Ukrainian laboratories. For example, on March 10, 2022, the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that sponsored by the US, experiments with bat coronavirus samples were being conducted in Ukraine to create a „mechanism for covert dissemination of deadly pathogens“ (RTVI, 2022). Although several US agencies immediately denied Moscow’s accusations, information about bioweapons on Ukrainian territory continued to be spread through the channels of Kremlin propaganda.

4. Sources and methodology

This paper provides the results of content analysis regarding the dynamics and techniques of spreading the topic of bioweapons on Ukrainian territory to establish narratives, speakers, and waves of dissemination of false information. The source of the analysis was the Russian information telegram channel „RIA Novosti.“ During the analysis period, the number of subscribers to this channel was almost 3 million people (2,967,913). This media resource is one of the main state information agencies, headquartered in Moscow. Since June 2014, it has been part of the media group „Russia Today.“ The analysis was conducted as follows:

At the first stage, using the keyword “biological weapons,” all material published on this telegram channel from February 2020 to October 2023 was collected, and the main topics regarding biological weapons and Ukraine were identified. This helped determine the most active phase of promoting the bioweapons narrative and compare it with the events of the war;

At the second stage, using ChatGPT 3.5, emotional clusters related to Ukraine through messages about biological weapons were identified, and key words that evoke certain emotions were extracted. This allowed us to identify the images that the Russian government promoted to both the domestic and international audience.

All this helped identify the tactical methods of information strategy in hybrid warfare.

5. The research process

The study was conducted over the period from February 1, 2020, to October 31, 2023, using the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, which has its Telegram channel with the same name, „RIA Novosti.“ During this period, 69 information messages about biological weapons were published, out of which 53 were related to Ukraine. The subscriber count for this channel dur-

ing the analysis period was almost 3 million people (2,967,913). The keyword chosen for analysis was „биологическое оружие“ (biological weapons). The aim was to analyse the frequency of Ukraine’s mention in the context of biological weapons.

The results of information collection demonstrated that before the full-scale invasion, the topic of biological weapons was raised only 19 times. Mostly, these were reports about the coronavirus. The main narrative was that the US created sanction lists, including Russian research institutes involved in bioweapon development. There was no mention of Ukraine’s involvement before this point. The main speakers were former member of the UN Commission on Biological and Chemical Weapons Igor Nikulin, representative of the Russian Security Council Yuri Averyanov, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, and Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev. The latter unequivocally stated on April 7, 2021, that „the Russian Security Council believes that the United States is developing biological weapons in laboratories near the borders of Russia and China“ (RIA Novosti. Telegram Channel).

However, by March 6, 2022 (10 days after the full-scale invasion), the rhetoric regarding Ukraine in the context of biological weapons began to change dramatically. The main source of information on „RIA Novosti“ became the Russian Ministry of Defence.

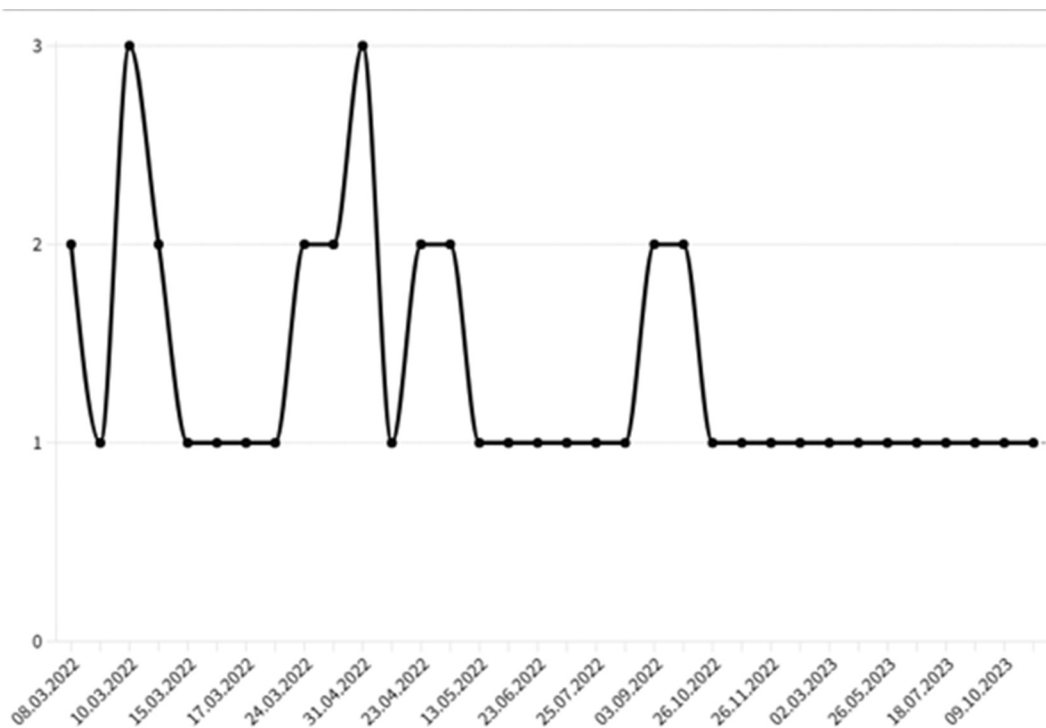
During the first stage of the research, it was important to determine the most active phase of promoting the topic of biological weapons in Ukraine to establish the highest point of narrative concentration. To achieve this, narratives were identified, the frequency of promotion was established, and the highest number of views for a particular narrative was recorded. During the study, eight stories were identified that promoted the Russian theme of the presence of biological weapons in Ukraine under US supervision:

- Conducting secret biological experiments in Ukraine, evidence of which the Pentagon ordered Ukraine to destroy immediately (RIA Novosti. Telegram Channel – March 6, 2022);
- Project UP-4 aimed at studying the possibility of spreading highly pathogenic infections through migrating birds, including highly pathogenic H5N1 flu, with a human mortality rate of 50%, and Newcastle disease. At least two species of migratory birds were found, the routes of which pass mainly through Russia (March 10, 2022);
- Projects UP-4, UP-9, UP-10 aimed at studying the pathogens of Siberian plague and African swine fever. Transfer from the laboratory in Kharkov abroad more than 140 containers with ectoparasites of bats – fleas and ticks (March 10, 2022);
- US turned Ukraine into a „super-range“ for testing means and methods of biological warfare on humans, animals, and plants, and as a result, outbreaks of diseases and even epidemics occurred in Ukraine since 2014 (March 12, 2022);
- US planned during the time when Crimea was part of Ukraine to open their biological laboratory in Simferopol, and only the „reunification of Crimea with the Russian Federation“ prevented the implementation of plans to create pathogens in Crimea (March 12, 2022);
- Project P-781 for transmitting diseases to humans through bats was developed based on the laboratory in Kharkov jointly with the scandalous Lugar Centre in Tbilisi (March 17, 2022);
- Biological weapons developed in Ukraine affect the reproductive system of women and the immunity of „certain ethnic groups“ (March 21, 2022).

A US pharmaceutical company, in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, conducted tests of unregistered medical preparations on Ukrainian military personnel (March 24, 2022).

The frequency of promoting each story is presented in the graph (Fig. 1). A large amount of information about biological weapons in Ukraine was published by „RIA Novosti“ in March 2022, and this topic gradually declined by the end of the year.

Figure 1. Frequency of Promotion of Narratives about Biological Weapons



The most active information waves occurred in March 2022 when the occupation of the Zaporizhzhia and Chernobyl nuclear power plants, Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, Kherson, Izyum, Novoaidar, battles for „Azovstal,“ bombing of the Mariupol Drama Theatre, missile strike on the Kharkiv Regional Council, and ammonia leak at the Sumykhimprom chemical plant in Sumy took place. It was in March 2022 that the President of the UN Human Rights Council, Federico Villegas, announced the establishment of a commission to investigate war crimes and other abuses committed during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. „March 2022 is called the deadliest month for civilians by the UN. At least 4,154 deaths are mentioned“ (TSN 2023).

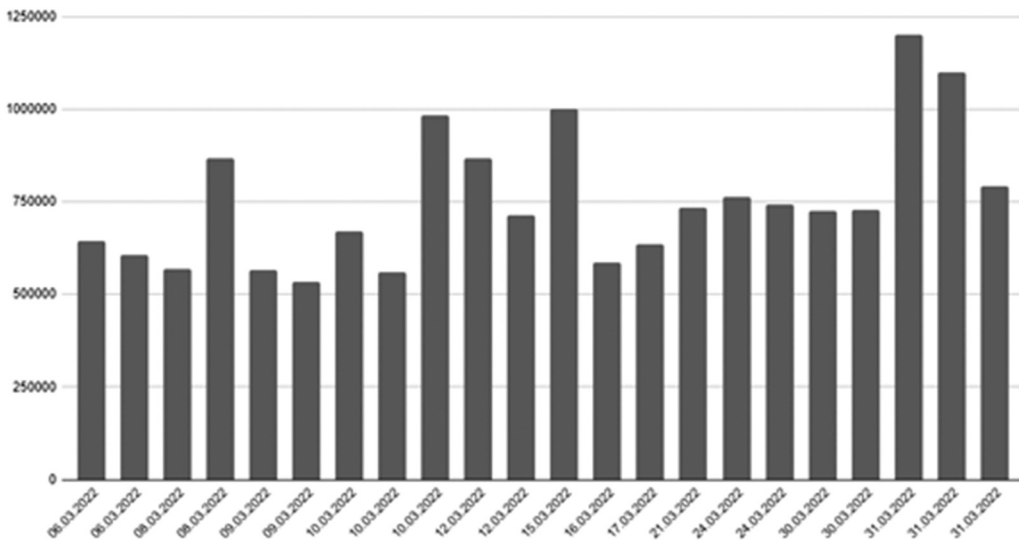
For example, throughout 2022, the majority of posts about Ukraine in the context of biological weapons were published (39 out of 53 about Ukraine). Specifically, in March, there were 17 posts, while in April, there were 8, and there was nothing in December (Tabl. 1).

Table 1. Frequency of Promotion of Narratives about Biological Weapons for 2022

Month of 2022	Number of posts about Ukraine in the context of biological weapons published
March	17
April	8
May	3
June	1
July	2
August	1
September	4
October	2
November	1
December	0

Analysing the number of views of all posts about biological weapons on the „RIA Novosti“ Telegram channel, the highest number also falls in March 2022. Among them, starting from March 15, the quote: „Patrushev: it has become obvious that it is precisely US advisors who are helping the Kyiv regime in the creation of biological and nuclear weapons,“ garnered 1 million views. And on March 31, information about the involvement of American citizens in „creating components of biological weapons in Ukraine“ in one post reached 1.2 million views, and in another post on the same day about „Motor Sich,“ which allegedly turned to the Turkish manufacturer „Bayraktars“ to disperse aerosols from them, garnered 1.1 million views (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Number of Views of Narratives about Biological Weapons



Thus, establishing narratives, frequency of promotion, and the highest number of views helped to identify the active phase of promoting the topic of biological weapons, and it was the month of March 2022. When Russian forces were actively advancing across Ukraine, occupying Kherson, threatening to capture Kyiv and Kharkiv, launching a massive offensive on Sumy, blockading Chernihiv, airstrikes on the Mariupol hospital and drama theatre, and occupation of the cities of Rubizhne and Izyum. All eight narratives recorded were created and published in March. Posts in the following months only repeated these narratives.

In the second stage of the research, the emotional tone of the posts was analysed using ChatGPT 3.5. For each post on „RIA Novosti“ (just a reminder, there were 69 cases found from February 2022 to October 2023), the prompt „Determine the emotional state for the text“ was provided (each message was then provided separately). Three emotional states were identified, which ChatGPT 3.5 mostly denoted with two values. For example, the post from June 24, 2021: „Putin, in greeting the participants of the conference on biological security, emphasized the need to strengthen mechanisms that ensure the prohibition on the development and spread of biological weapons,“ was labelled as „objective and decisive,“ while the post from October 26, 2022: „Putin: Ukraine has become a tool of US foreign policy, practically lost sovereignty, turned Ukrainian territory into a testing ground for biological experiments, and now they are pumping it with weapons,“ ChatGPT 3.5 marked as „outraged and paranoid.“ And the post from March 24, 2022: „The Russian Ministry of Defence reports that Russian military experts have revealed new facts proving the direct involvement of the Ministry of Defence in the development of components of biological weapons in Ukraine. It promises to soon provide original documents demonstrating that biological project UP2 (RIA Novosti. Telegram Channel – https://t.me/rian_ru/152578) was developed and approved specifically at the Pentagon,“ ChatGPT 3.5 marked as „outraged, accusatory, and possibly paranoid“.

The predominant emotion associated with Ukraine is „outrage,“ and in 2022, this emotional tone in the context of bioweapons was used 31 times (out of a total of 42). Here, two images of the Russian government were possible through such emotional tones:

1. For the domestic audience, as the image of a „defender“ against a „dangerous country that possesses bioweapons and threatens Russian citizens“;

2. For the international audience, as the image of a „peace guarantor“ protecting the world from American influence. It’s worth noting that the emotion of „concern“ was often used alongside „outrage.“ For example, the post from September 19, 2022: „Russia, Belarus, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Syria called for the activation of the mechanism provided for in Article 6 of the Biological Weapons Convention in connection with the military-biological activity of the United States in Ukraine, said Konstantin Vorontsov, the deputy head of the Russian delegation to the UN,“ was labelled by ChatGPT 3.5 as „outraged and concerned.“

It is obvious that the main goals of such massive propaganda narratives included justifying Russian aggression. This self-justification included a complex of narratives about Ukraine’s danger to Russia due to its alleged development of biological weapons, as well as the narrative of a pre-emptive strike.

The war justification resource was used by Russia during missile strikes, resulting in casualties, and the narrative about biological weapons in Ukraine was intensified. For instance, on March 13, 2022, Russians launched missiles at the Yavoriv training ground in Lviv Oblast. As a result, 35 soldiers died, and 130 more were injured (ZAXID.NET 2022). Four days later,

new information appeared on „RIA Novosti“: „The Russian Ministry of Defence published a document dated March 6, 2015, confirming the Pentagon’s involvement in funding military-biological projects in Ukraine. According to the ministry, money was received by laboratories of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence in Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, and Kharkiv, totalling \$32 million.“ Mass missile strikes on Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa were accompanied by informational support like: „The Russian Ministry of Defence reports that details of project UP-4, involving laboratories in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa, and planned until 2020 (message from March 10, 2022, the day when missile strikes on cities occurred).

It can be argued that during shelling, offensives, and occupation, aggressive informational promotion of the bioweapon narrative occurred more than twice a day. For example, here’s a brief summary from the front lines for March 8, 2022: „Kharkiv region. As a result of shelling in the village of Dinetz in the Chuhuiv district, two people were killed, including a seven-year-old child... Kyiv region. An airstrike on a military unit in the Borispil district, there are injuries... Mykolaiv region. Russian forces shot at a minibus with women caretakers from a children’s home, at least three of them were killed and two were injured... Chernihiv region. A civilian car exploded on a mine – 3 dead, children injured. Zhytomyr region. In Zhytomyr, occupiers bombed a dormitory and a plant that produces insulation for buildings. Russian troops shelled a bus with refugees from Makarov, which is in the Kyiv region. In Malyn, as a result of an air strike, 7 private single-story residential buildings were destroyed, 5 people were killed, including 2 children (born in 2021)“ (Ukrainska Pravda 2022). And on this day, the „RIA Novosti“ Telegram channel published four pieces of information on the topic of biological weapons:

09:31 – China urges the US to clarify its biological activities for military purposes inside the country and abroad, including in Ukraine, said the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

15:41 – Data on laboratories in Ukraine confirm claims against the US regarding compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention, said the Russian Foreign Ministry.

22:42 – The US is working with Ukraine to prevent materials from biological research from falling into Russian hands, said Nuland.

22:57 – Nuland asked the Senate if Ukraine has biological and chemical weapons: „There are biological research facilities in Ukraine, and we are concerned that Russia will take control of them,“ she replied.

Interestingly, until March 6, 2022, Ukraine is not mentioned in the context of biological weapons, but after this date, the bioweapon topic begins to spread. The more shelling and destruction, the more messages emerge about Ukraine’s alleged involvement in bioweapon development funded by the US.

Following the narrative of the „danger of Ukrainian biological weapons,“ Russia resorted to promoting the narrative of a pre-emptive response that Russia must take to prevent further development of this weapon. The popularity of this narrative is evidenced by the fact that the message quoting Patrushev’s words about the need to destroy „Ukrainian biological weapons“ from March 15 gained 1 million views for the first time: „Patrushev: it has become clear that it is advisors from the US who are helping the Kyiv regime in creating biological and nuclear weapons.“ The publication of this message on March 15 is related to the fact that the day before, on March 14, the EU adopted a decision to impose the 4th package of sanctions against Russia, and on March 15, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the final version of the document „Consequences of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.“ The document mentions not only the occupation of Ukrainian territories but also Georgia and Moldova.

Another striking example is the information about the alleged involvement of American citizens in „creating components of biological weapons in Ukraine,“ published on March 31, which gained 1.2 million views. This happened after the arrival of US President Joe Biden in Warsaw and the Ukrainian army’s counteroffensive. It was on March 31 that the occupiers left the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, and control was restored in the town of Bucha, where later the world was horrified by the crimes of Russian soldiers.

The emergence of new means of mass dissemination of propaganda in the form of social media like Telegram has also brought a new means of countering propaganda. And that is the same Telegram channels owned not only by state media but also by ordinary citizens and non-governmental organizations.

Throughout the entire war since its beginning in 2014, civil society communities such as InformNapalm (Telegram Channel InformNapalm), the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (2022), IntentPress (Telegram Channel IntentPress), TextyOrgUA, and others have been working to expose pro-Russian disinformation and propaganda. In particular, texty.org.ua has devoted several materials to exposing propagandistic texts about „biological weapons development in Ukraine“ (Polovyi 2022).

6. Conclusions

Research on the formation and spread of the topic of biological weapons in Ukraine through the Telegram channel „RIA Novosti“ for the period from 2020 to 2023 once again confirms the thesis that armed warfare occurs in parallel with information warfare, indicating the existence of hybrid warfare. For the enemy, it is important not only the psychological state of the military on the front lines but also the attitude towards the war within the international community and among Ukrainians themselves in the rear. Russian strategy of using narratives about biological weapons employed the following tactical techniques:

1. Instilling fear. During the occupation of Ukrainian territory by Russian forces, the psychological state of Ukrainians was crucial. In a state of „fear,“ a person loses critical thinking and is more responsive to destructive information capable of influencing their resistance to occupiers.

2. Justification of war. With every strike by the Russian army, the tragic consequences of which became known, Russian propaganda attempted to „counterbalance“ with narratives about the alleged danger Ukraine posed to Russia, with the main role played by the narrative of „Ukrainian biological weapons.“

3. Pre-emptive response. Justification of invasion by the necessity of a pre-emptive response is not a new idea in Russian propaganda. Many military aggressions in the past were justified by the „threat“ from the victim. Russia and the USSR have used this motif for at least a hundred years, so it would be strange if they did not resort to it again. As past practice and the reaction of Russians to corresponding texts in 2022 show, the motif of a pre-emptive response has great potential for emotional influence.

The research shed light on how information is employed during military operations, advancing the understanding of information influence technology. Through this case, the dissemination of disinformation through the Russian-controlled channel aimed at influencing both internal and external audiences is demonstrated. The internal Russian audience received the idea of justifying war for public support. The external Ukrainian audience received a message of fear. As for the European audience, there was a combination of justification and fear, which

overall should not raise doubts about supporting Ukraine. However, in all three cases, disinformation undoubtedly concerns emotions that the disinformant sought to control through the narrative of biological weapons in Ukraine. But, contrary to the widespread belief that the audience perceives invented and untrue information much better than true information, we want to emphasize that in conditions of war, such a belief is not always confirmed. When the population is forced to defend its territory and simultaneously receives false and invented information, it does not develop the emotions that the disinformant aims for. Since the lack of trust in invaders cannot build trust in their media. Therefore, it can be considered that such an information campaign was successful only for the Russian internal audience. Since the standard construct of building information messages is related to Russian political culture, for which only government speakers are authoritative sources, and the possibility of commenting in such vertical communication is disabled. This conclusion may have useful application in further research on political culture, political communication, and information influence in conditions of hybrid warfare.

An important conclusion is the identification of the participation of NGOs and other institutions of civil society in countering hostile propaganda. At a time when state media are limited in the speed of their reactions to propaganda by a multi-tiered system of management, NGO channels and their media in social networks can react almost instantly. This reaction occurs at several levels:

- At the level of refutation of propaganda narratives, which creates direct opposition to propaganda,
- At the level of informing about the aggressor's cruelty, which neutralizes their information-psychological measures,
- At the level of exposing the enemy's disinformation system in general, which reduces the overall level of trust of the population in enemy media in general and, consequently, reduces the overall level of perception of enemy information and propaganda.

Thus, civil media is one of the most important means of countering hostile propaganda aimed at the emotions of the population.

Note

* *Critique.* The conclusions drawn are based on empirical research of one official Telegram channel. This allowed establishing narratives, frequency, and emotional content associated with international and military events in the war. It may indicate the synchronicity of the biological weapons theme with the advancement and retreat of Russian forces on the front. To obtain a broader range of results regarding the role of information in hybrid warfare, it is necessary to investigate a number of other Telegram channels, compare them, identify information waves, and determine specific features, patterns, and new trends in digital influence. Analysing the emotional state of messages requires cross-verification through other computer programs, as the prompt itself from ChatGPT 3.5 can provoke various responses. The main emotions in informational messages related to Ukraine are „outrage and concern.“ Outrage mostly demonstrates acute irritation, while concern may indicate a feeling of anxiety. Both irritation and anxiety can indicate different polarities: from hatred to caring. This method is simple and effective, but it does not yet take into account the context and semantics of the text.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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