

The Spread of Disinformation During Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to draw attention to the concept of disinformation as false or misleading information that is created, presented, and disseminated to deceive the public, cause confusion, and increase tensions in society. The paper examines the Russian disinformation campaign that has been applied in Russia's war against Ukraine. Russian agents of disinformation use various means of communication, such as official press releases from Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, social media channels on Twitter and Telegram, and the websites of the Russian embassies. This qualitative study is based on the content produced by RT and Sputnik, the leading state-controlled media outlets that spread information to non-Russian speakers abroad. Furthermore, social media accounts that support the Russian government's policies are considered. The paper argues that the Russian information war strategy follows the classical "4D Model of Disinformation Campaigns" (Ben Nimmo), where information gets dismissed, distorted, distracted, and dismayed by disinformation actors. The results show that the disseminators of the pro-Kremlin content use a variety of tactics, in particular promoting narratives, attacking and demonizing opponents, rewriting history, and using labels, clichés, and exaggeration to manipulate citizens' perceptions of the war, justify Russia's invasion, undermine trust in government agencies of Ukraine.

Keywords: false information, manipulation, misleading information, narratives, propaganda.