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THE IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION ON SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The article examines modern approaches to disinformation, which has become a key element of hybrid warfare, including the use of algorithms, deep learning technologies, and social media on various platforms. It also presents the mechanisms of disinformation's impact on society and its consequences, as well as the impact of disinformation on international relations. Methods for analyzing these phenomena are discussed and strategies for countering them at the state and societal levels are proposed. Special attention is paid to the role of social platforms in spreading fake news, the influence of bots and trolls on public opinion, and methods of creating and disseminating disinformation campaigns. The authors analyze how digital technologies can manipulate users' emotions, create alternative realities, and undermine trust in traditional media. In addition, specific examples of information operations aimed at discrediting political leaders, destabilizing the economy, and increasing the polarization of society are examined. It also emphasizes the importance of digital literacy, the development of critical thinking and the creation of independent mechanisms for verifying information. Great importance is given to the problem of "information noise" – a huge amount of data among which it is difficult to distinguish truthful information from manipulative messages. The methods used by various states and corporations to control information flows are considered, as well as the threats associated with censorship and restriction of freedom of speech. The conclusion suggests possible ways to protect against misinformation, including legislative initiatives, international cooperation, and the development of technology to detect fake data. It also discusses the role of artificial intelligence and machine learning in combating the spread of false information, as well as the prospects for creating automated fact-checking systems.
Key words: disinformation algorithms, hybrid warfare, social networks, cybercrime, modern propaganda.

Introduction. The digital age has led to the rapid spread of misinformation through social media, messengers and other online platforms. Disinformation is used as a tool to influence elections, public opinion and public policy, causing social polarization. States and non-state institutions actively use disinformation as part of hybrid warfare, influencing international relations, exacerbating conflicts and undermining trust between countries. Fake news and propaganda are used in cyber warfare and information attacks, threatening national and international security. Disinformation also affects financial markets, business reputation and consumer behavior, which can lead to economic instability. In recent years, countries have been developing strategies to combat fake news, introducing laws and forming mechanisms to

counter disinformation, making this an important topic to study. Thus, the study of this problem has not only theoretical but also practical significance, helping to understand the mechanisms of disinformation spreading and to develop effective measures to combat it.

The digital age has granted humanity unprecedented access to information, but this advantage comes with new challenges. Among the most alarming phenomena of recent decades is the development of information wars, where states, groups, and even individuals use disinformation as a weapon (Lance, Livingston, 2020; Stengel, 2024). Modern propaganda, equipped with digital technologies, can manipulate public opinion and undermine international stability.

With the advancement of information technologies, easily and quickly accessible information is considered an ideal tool for both state and societal expression. As a result, terms like "information warfare" have recently gained traction in economics, politics, and the military (Pomerantsev, 2019). The evolution of information warfare technologies and geopolitical conflicts between states highlight the relevance of this topic, suggesting that countries will continue to use it as a means of confrontation in the foreseeable future.

In the future, capturing information, responding swiftly to it, and accessing real-time intelligence from adversaries while neutralizing their sources will become strategic advantages. The protection of national information resources remains a pressing issue, particularly in Azerbaijan. The country's use of information weapons and its development of a global information infrastructure stem from its 30-year conflict with Armenia (Talishskiy, 2021). The expansion of open information networks on the Internet, the rise in cybercrime, and the growing threat of high-level information attacks aimed at achieving political and economic goals have made issues such as information warfare and cybersecurity increasingly relevant.

The roots of information warfare and its application date back to ancient times. Researchers argue that as long as people exist, information aggression will persist in some form (Copeland, 2000). Thus, humans cannot live without information. It is possible to wage an information war without physical conflict, but physical wars cannot be fought without information warfare. In other words, conducting physical warfare necessitates an informational component. The oldest historical and religious texts are based on forms of information warfare among people. For instance, during Genghis Khan's campaigns, a specially trained group of riders spread the notion that his army consisted of exceptionally strong and ruthless soldiers. Similar psychological tactics were employed by other renowned commanders such as Alexander the Great and Amir Timur.

Even during World War II, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin understood the significance of psychological influence and skillfully employed such methods. The only difference between the information operations of that era and today's operations is that they were not formally classified as military tactics.

Today, the challenges of information warfare are studied in many countries with advanced information and communication technologies (ICT) such as the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, and Japan. These countries actively implement comprehensive concepts for protecting their national information infrastructures. Various factors explain the emergence, development, and widespread application of modern information warfare technologies: rapid advancements

in computing and communication tools, the improvement of network technologies, and the increasing importance of information as a primary societal resource. Information, due to its efficiency, has surpassed material resources in value (Alakparova, 2010). Scientific and technological achievements have enabled the mass production of ICT tools for both civilian and military applications. Advances in the study of the brain and human behavior have also enhanced understanding of psychophysiological influence techniques in various domains.

The purpose and tasks. Information warfare is becoming increasingly sophisticated, with disinformation being used to achieve political, economic, and military goals. The core issue lies in the fact that modern technologies significantly simplify the production and dissemination of false information. The key objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Identify contemporary technologies used to create and spread disinformation.
2. Analyze the impact of disinformation on public opinion and behavior.
3. Develop strategies to counteract its negative effects.

The focus on this topic is driven by the need to understand how the digital age has transformed the information landscape and the threats it poses to society and global security.

Methods of research. Unlike traditional 20th-century propaganda, which was aimed at mass broadcasting, modern disinformation techniques focus on audience personalization and the use of social media algorithms (Lance and Livingston, 2020; Benkler, Faris and Roberts, 2018). The research identifies the following forms of disinformation:

I. Algorithmic Manipulation and Targeting. Modern technologies enable the analysis of user data on social media platforms, tailoring information to exploit individual vulnerabilities. Algorithms amplify the spread of emotionally charged content, fostering the creation of echo chambers where individuals are exposed to a single point of view. One notable example of algorithmic manipulation occurred during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Social media algorithms, such as those used by Facebook, were employed to target users based on their psychological profiles (Kupiecki, Legucka, 2023). A central role in this campaign was played by Cambridge Analytica, a company that accessed personal data from millions of users. One of the manipulation mechanisms involved data collection. Cambridge Analytica gathered data from 87 million Facebook users, including their likes, comments, and friend profiles. This data was used to create detailed psychological profiles of users. Psychographic targeting was then implemented, segmenting users into categories based on their beliefs, fears, and political preferences. Groups that were undecided or susceptible to certain messages were identified. Personalized content was also developed, with unique messages tailored to each group. For instance, individuals with nationalist tendencies were shown ads emphasizing the threat of immigration, while undecided voters were presented with materials undermining trust in Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton (Kupiecki, Legucka, 2023). Social media algorithms automatically promoted content that generated high levels of engagement, including emotionally charged or polarizing messages. This significantly expanded the reach of targeted messages, enhancing their impact.

As a result, the algorithm-driven information environment deepened societal polarization. Swing voters were subjected to intensive targeting, which influenced

the election outcome. The scandal that followed led to Facebook being fined and Cambridge Analytica ceasing operations.

II. Use of Deepfake Technologies. Deepfake technology enables the creation of realistic video and audio that mimic statements or actions of prominent figures (Internet resource, 2024). These materials are used to discredit political leaders, undermine trust in government institutions, and provoke conflicts. For example, during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a deepfake video of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appeared online (Internet resource, 2022). The video depicted Zelensky allegedly addressing Ukrainian soldiers, urging them to lay down their arms and surrender to Russian forces. Artificial intelligence technology was employed to simulate Zelensky's face, voice, and mannerisms. The video appeared realistic enough to mislead part of the audience. It was uploaded to fake or hacked accounts on social media platforms, including Facebook and Telegram, and actively disseminated through pro-Kremlin media outlets and chats targeting both Ukrainian and international audiences.

The primary objective was to demoralize the Ukrainian public and military by creating the illusion that the country's leadership had capitulated to the aggressor. The message targeted audiences without access to reliable news sources. However, the Ukrainian government responded promptly by issuing an official statement in which Zelensky himself declared the video a fake. This statement was widely distributed through official channels and social media to mitigate the damage. Cybersecurity and visual technology experts also quickly confirmed that the video was a deepfake. Detailed analysis revealed inconsistencies in lip movements, unnatural facial expressions, and other signs of forgery. The consequences of this deepfake incident were not as intended: rather than demoralizing Ukrainians, it was perceived as a propaganda attempt, which strengthened their resolve to resist. Furthermore, this case drew global attention to the issue of deepfake technologies as tools of information warfare. It became a prominent example of how such materials can be used for manipulation.

III. Bots and Fake Accounts. Bots and fake accounts play a significant role in disinformation, artificially inflating the importance of specific topics and creating the illusion of widespread support or outrage.

The 2016 Brexit referendum, in which the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, serves as a notable example of the large-scale use of bots to automate disinformation campaigns. Research revealed that a significant portion of social media activity related to Brexit debates was initiated and supported by automated accounts.

Thousands of bots were registered on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. These accounts were designed to resemble real users, complete with profile photos, posts, and even comments, to create the appearance of genuine activity. Bots widely shared fake news about alleged economic and social threats linked to the UK's EU membership (Internet resource, 2019). False information included exaggerated claims about immigration, financial losses, and bureaucratic restrictions. Bots retweeted and liked posts supporting Leave campaigns, creating an illusion of massive backing. This affected the perception of real users, leading them to believe that a majority supported Brexit. These accounts specifically targeted users interested in immigration policy or nationalism to amplify their negative attitudes toward the EU.

The result of this disinformation was an increase in societal polarization. Automated activity deepened divisions between supporters and opponents of Brexit, intensifying emotional debates. Studies showed that undecided voters were influenced by these campaigns, potentially affecting the referendum's outcome. Following the referendum, investigations into the role of bots began in the UK and other countries. It was revealed that a significant portion of the accounts was operated from abroad, including from Russia, the United States, and other nations.

IV. Platform-Level Disinformation. Large technology companies frequently face the issue of "information warfare". For instance, false news often spreads through platform algorithms, such as those used by Facebook and YouTube, more quickly than factual information (Kupiecki, Legucka, 2023; Benkler, Faris and Roberts, 2018; O'Connor and Owen, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram became primary channels for spreading disinformation. False claims about the virus, its origin, treatment methods, and vaccine effectiveness circulated rapidly among users, fueling mass fears and doubts about official information. Platform algorithms, designed to maximize user engagement, often prioritized sensational, shocking, or emotionally charged content (e.g., false claims about the dangers of vaccines or "miracle" cures). For example, a YouTube video falsely claiming that COVID-19 was caused by "5G towers" went viral and garnered millions of views before it was removed. In the early stages of the pandemic, social media platforms struggled to identify and remove disinformation promptly. For instance, Facebook saw widespread posts promoting "miracle cures", such as ingesting bleach or using unverified treatments. Organized groups, including state actors, deliberately exploited these platforms to disseminate fake news. In 2020, U.S. intelligence reported activities by Russian and Chinese actors promoting false claims about the virus's origin to undermine trust in other countries. Messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram were also used to spread conspiracy theories, such as claims that COVID-19 was created in a laboratory for military purposes or that vaccination involved implanting microchips.

The consequences of this disinformation included:

1. Vaccine skepticism (in countries like the U.S. and France, disinformation about vaccine side effects led to lower vaccination rates, slowing efforts to combat the pandemic).

2. Social panic (false reports about product shortages, "treatments" using harmful substances, or refusals of medical care heightened societal anxiety).

3. Erosion of trust in science (the spread of anti-scientific ideas contributed to general mistrust of experts and organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO)).

In response, social media platforms began labeling questionable posts as disinformation and linking them to verified sources. Platforms also increased moderation efforts to remove false COVID-19 materials. For example, Facebook and Instagram deleted millions of posts containing vaccine-related disinformation. Companies like Google and Twitter partnered with the WHO and government agencies to promote accurate information.

V. Microtargeting Technologies and Social Media. Using data collected by tech giants, actors in information warfare can identify the preferences, fears, and vulnerabilities of specific population groups. This enables the tailoring of messages

for maximum emotional impact. For example, microtargeting technology (or pinpoint targeting) was extensively utilized during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, particularly by Donald Trump's campaign team (Alakparova, 2010). Microtargeting involves the use of big data and analytics to target small voter groups with personalized messages, increasing the likelihood of influencing their behavior.

How Microtargeting Was Used:

a) *User Data Collection.* Trump's campaign gathered vast amounts of user data from the internet. Data on preferences, interests, political views, and even emotional states were collected through social media, search queries, and other sources.

b) *Audience Analysis and Segmentation*. Based on the collected data, a detailed segmentation of voters was created. For example, specific messages were targeted at:

– White working-class individuals who felt threatened by globalization and immigration.
– Black voters who might have been disillusioned with Democratic policies.
– Women and minorities seeking reassurance and economic stability.

c) *Advertising via Social Media.* The campaign actively used platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others to create personalized advertisements tailored to the interests and emotions of different voter groups.

d) *Use of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica.* One of the most notable examples of microtargeting during the 2016 election was the collaboration with Cambridge Analytica. The company used data from millions of Facebook users to deliver highly targeted advertising. Through data analysis and algorithms, they created personalized political messages that appealed to users' emotions, such as fear or hope. Cambridge Analytica collected data on 87 million Facebook users, enabling the customization of advertisements for groups most vulnerable to political influence.

For Example, for white working-class voters who felt threatened by immigration, Trump's campaign emphasized advertisements focused on immigration issues. Conversely, for a more liberal audience, some messages included slogans related to minority rights and social justice. Microtargeting effectively influenced small but highly significant voter groups in key states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, which ultimately proved decisive for Trump's victory. This approach allowed him to bypass traditional campaigning methods aimed at broader, less segmented audiences. The use of microtargeting during the 2016 election demonstrated the powerful role that social media and personalized advertising can play in political campaigns. While this practice raised numerous concerns about data privacy and voter manipulation, it highlighted the importance of precise targeting and personalized messaging in the digital age.

VI. Creation of Fake News Platforms. False information portals mimicking legitimate media outlets are another element of digital propaganda (O'Connor and Owen, 2019; Rampton and Stauber, 2003). These sites often publish sensational or emotionally charged materials, which are then amplified through social media. Fake news spreads faster than factual information due to the characteristics of human psychology: people are more likely to share emotionally engaging content without verifying its accuracy. For example, in 2016, the UK held a referendum to leave the European Union (Brexit) (Internet resource, 2024). During the campaign leading up to the vote, numerous fake news platforms spread misinformation to sway voter opinion (Fig. 1). Some of these platforms were created in the interests of foreign states seeking to weaken the unity of the EU.

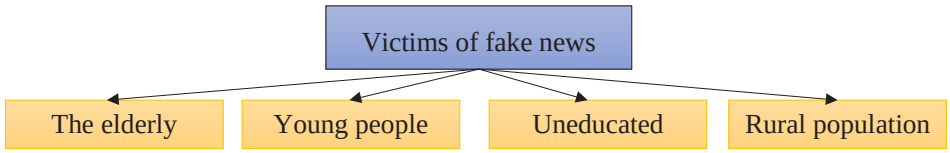

Fig. 1. Populations that are often victims of misinformation
(Vesterbay, Dzhuraev, Marazis, March, 2023)

Portals styled to resemble legitimate news websites were launched to gain trust. Examples of such sites included "news agencies" that published articles with headlines like: "The EU Spends Millions on Bureaucracy While Ignoring the Poor in the UK" or "Immigrants Take Over British Jobs." Stories were circulated claiming that staying in the EU would cost the UK enormous sums of money, such as the often-repeated but false assertion that £350 million per week could instead be allocated to the National Health Service. Myths about mass immigration from EU countries, which incited fear among voters, were also propagated. Content from fake platforms spread rapidly on Twitter, Facebook, and other social networks. Fake accounts and bots actively reposted articles, creating the illusion of popularity. The emotionally and sensationally charged nature of this false information made it go viral quickly. People, believing the material to be credible, shared it with friends and family.

The consequences of fake news platforms were significant. They amplified anti-European sentiments and fueled widespread mistrust of the EU, which influenced voters' decisions. After the referendum, British society became deeply polarized, with opposing groups of Brexit supporters and opponents. British media and authorities launched investigations into the sources of disinformation. It was revealed that some sites and campaigns were linked to foreign actors, including Russian "troll factories". This case sparked a broad discussion about the role of fake news in democratic processes. The Brexit example demonstrates how fake news platforms can undermine democratic systems by manipulating public opinion and creating a distorted perception of reality.

Results. Research shows that disinformation in the era of information wars has a significant impact on societies and economies of different countries. It deepens social divisions, polarizing communities and undermining the foundations of democracy. The spread of fake news and propaganda contributes to distrust of traditional media, making societies more vulnerable to manipulation. The Internet accelerates the spread of conspiracy theories, negatively impacting public health and political decision-making. Disinformation has become a tool of hybrid warfare between states, including election interference and cyberattacks on the media, increasing international tensions. It can also undermine economic stability by causing panic in markets or provoking product boycotts.

Conclusions. Based on the investigation of disinformation methods, it can be concluded that combating information warfare requires a comprehensive approach. The study suggests the following key methods to counteract and fight disinformation:

1. Develop fact-checking tools by leveraging artificial intelligence and advanced technologies to identify fake news and deepfake materials (Fig. 2).

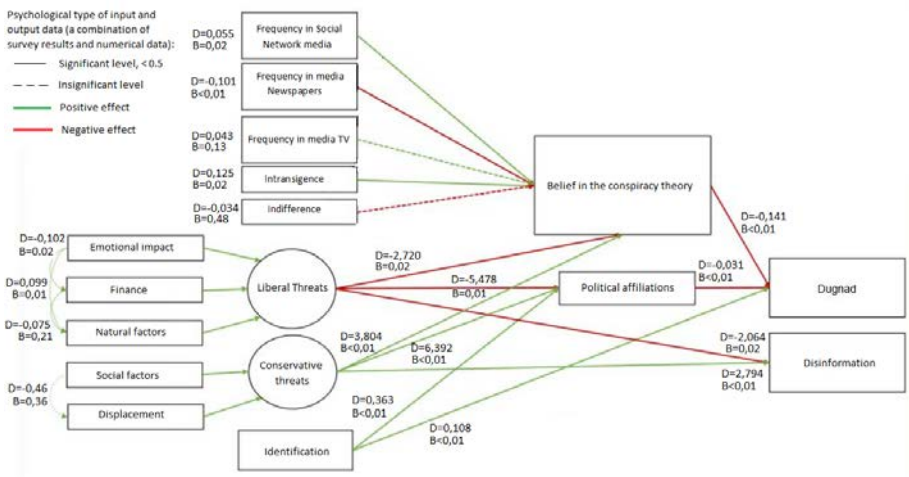

Fig. 2. AI-based multi-agent behavioral simulation model (ALAN Company) with 3 main types of inputs and outputs (Justin, 2021): B – behavioral (were obtained from surveys); P – psychological (were a combination of survey results and numerical data); D – digital (were taken from online sources such as Twitter)

2. Create laws requiring technology companies to monitor and remove disinformation, ensuring that such measures do not infringe on freedom of speech.

3. Design and promote various educational programs aimed at fostering critical thinking skills to help individuals recognize manipulation and disinformation.

4. Encourage states to collaborate in establishing standards for combating infor-mation warfare, including the exchange of technologies and coordination in the event of large-scale attacks.

Thus, information warfare and state propaganda based on disinformation in the digital age have become one of the main threats to global stability. Their impact on society and international relations highlights the necessity of developing new approaches to counter disinformation. Only through the combined efforts of governments, the private sector, and civil society can this issue be effectively addressed while maintaining a balance between security and freedom of speech.

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ВПЛИВ ДЕЗІНФОРМАЦІЇ НА СУСПІЛЬСТВО Й МІЖНАРОДНІ ВІДНОСИНИ

Резюме
У статті розглядаються сучасні підходи до дезінформації, яка стала ключовим елементом гібридної війни, включно з використанням алгоритмів, технологій глибокого навчання й соціальних мереж різних платформ. Представлені механізми впливу дезінформації на суспільство та її наслідки, а також вплив дезінформації на міжнародні відносини. Обговорюються методи аналізу цих явищ і пропонуються стратегії протидії їм на державному й суспільному рівнях. Особлива увага приділяється ролі соціальних платформ у поширенні фейкових новин, впливу ботів і тролів на громадську думку й методам створення та поширення дезінформаційних кампаній. Автори аналізують, як цифрові технології можуть маніпулювати емоціями користувачів, створювати альтернативні реальності й підривати довіру до традиційних засобів масової інформації. Крім того, розглядаються конкретні приклади інформаційних операцій, спрямованих на дискредитацію політичних лідерів, дестабілізацію економіки й посилення поляризації суспільства. Підкреслюється важливість цифрової грамотності, розвитку критичного мислення і створення незалежних механізмів перевірки інформації. Велику увагу приділено проблемі «інформаційного шуму» – величезної кількості даних, серед яких важко відрізнити правдиву інформацію від маніпулятивних повідомлень. Розглядаються методи, які використовують різні держави та корпорації для контролю інформаційних потоків, а також загрози, пов'язані із цензурою та обмеженням свободи слова. У висновку пропонуються можливі шляхи захисту від дезінформації, включаючи законодавчі ініціативи, міжнародне співробітництво й розвиток технологій для виявлення фейкових даних. Обговорюється роль штучного інтелекту й машинного навчання в боротьбі з поширенням неправдивої інформації, а також перспективи створення автоматизованих систем перевірки фактів.
Ключові слова: алгоритми дезінформації, гібридна війна, соціальні мережі, кіберзлочинність, сучасна пропаганда.