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DEMASKUOK – THE LITHUANIAN SYSTEM
TO COUNTER DISINFORMATION

ABSTRACT: This article presents Demaskuok as a practical tool to combat the so-called "fake news", that is, preventing the circulation of false news that misleads recipients. Fake news, also referred to as disinformation, is aimed at evoking an emotional reaction, thus creating or strengthening the existing prejudices against a person, group, in order to obtain specific and intended benefits. As history shows, many fake news were created that had an impact on their audience. The greatest field for the creators of disinformation is the Internet. Despite the fact that disinformation is ubiquitous today, this article presents a reliable 'weapon' to fight fake news. The leader in this field is Lithuania, which has discovered effective tools in the fight against propaganda and disinformation, the creator of which is Russia. The article analyzes the activities of Russian trolls spamming social networks, and at the same time highlights the role of the so-called elves, whose task is to fight Kremlin disinformation and propaganda. It was also emphasized that the basic method of combating Russian disinformation is active and responsible social action by citizens. Lithuanian elves fighting the activities of Russian trolls become, in a way, guardians of citizenship, culture, history and those values that strengthen Lithuanian citizens' resistance to information threats.

KEYWORDS: disinformation, fake news, elves, trolls, Demaskuok, propaganda, social networks, Lithuania, Russia

DEMASKUOK – LITEWSKI SYSTEM PRZECIWDZIAŁANIA
DEZINFORMACJI

ABSTRAKT: W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono Demaskuok jako praktyczne narzędzie do walki z tzw. fake newsami, czyli do zapobiegania rozpowszechnianiu fałszywych wiadomości, które wprowadzają odbiorców w błąd. Fake newsy, zwane też dezinformacją, mają na celu wywołanie reakcji emocjonalnej, a tym samym wytworzenie lub utrwalenie istniejących uprzedzeń wobec osoby lub grupy, w celu uzyskania określonych i zamierzonych korzyści. Jak pokazuje historia, powstało wiele fake newsów, które miały wpływ na odbiorców. Największym polem dla twórców dezinformacji jest Internet. Pomimo faktu, że dezinformacja jest dziś wszechobecna, ten artykuł przedstawia niezawodną „broń" do walki z fałszywymi wiadomościami. Liderem w tej dziedzinie jest Litwa, która odkryła skuteczne narzędzia do walki z propagandą i dezinformacją, której twórcą jest Rosja. Artykuł analizuje działania rosyjskich trolli spamujących portale społecznościowe, podkreślając jednocześnie rolę tzw. elfów, których zadaniem jest walka z dezinformacją i propagandą Kremla. Podkreślono również, że podstawową metodą walki z rosyjską dezinformacją jest aktywne i odpowiedzialne działanie społeczne obywateli. Litewskie elfy wal-

cące z działalnością rosyjskich trolli stają się niejako strażnikami obywatelskości, kultury, historii i tych wartości, które wzmacniają odporność obywateli Litwy na zagrożenia informacyjne.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: dezinformacja, fake newsy, elfy, trolle, Demaskuok, propaganda, sieci społecznościowe, Litwa, Rosja

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an intense search for effective methods of preventing the negative social effects of disinformation and propaganda in cyberspace.

In this regard, the following can be mentioned:

1. Verification tools (classic fact-checking), in particular websites and portals that expose false information[1], including bottom-up factecking initiatives[2];

2. Shaping social awareness and social education, including the creation of foundations for a state of affairs in which the recipients, aware of the goals and methods of disinformation, will not be subject to such influences[3];

3. Automatic detection and removal of false messages (automated fact-checking)[4].

It should be noted that the fight against disinformation is not always comprehensive. For example, there are projects aimed solely at counteracting disinformation in certain spheres of social life, e.g. health care[5]. In addition, there is no global project so far that would affect the entire digital space in different languages, nor a method that could protect every Internet user. Therefore, efforts to combat disinformation tend to be specific in terms of language or geography[6]. Thus, it is possible to have tools that show significant effectiveness but are not widespread, and further implementation of methods that are widespread but not effective, whereby the time or financial resources allocated to their implementation have been wasted to a certain extent.

The intensive spread of the phenomenon of disinformation, as well as the faster and faster development of methods of counteracting it, undoubtedly lead to the necessity to evacuate the effectiveness of the methods that have existed so far. However, there is a growing need to implement solutions that prove effective in other information spheres in practice. In other words, there

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[1] T. Pavleska, A. Školkay, B. Zankova, N. Ribeiro, A. Bechmann, *Performance analysis of fact-checking organizations and initiatives in Europe: a critical overview of online platforms fighting fake news*, "Social Media and Convergence" No. 29 2018, pp. 1-28.

[2] R. Babraj, *Czym jest fact-checking?–zarys inicjatyw na świecie iw Polsce. Zjawisko dezinformacji w dobie rewolucji cyfrowej* [*What is Fact-Checking? - Outline of Initiatives in the World and in Poland. The Phenomenon of Disinformation in the Age of Digital Revolution*], NASK Zjawisko dez-informacji w dobie rewolucji cyfrowej. Państwo. Społeczeństwo. Polityka. Biznes 2019, pp. 43-44.

[3] S. Van der Linden, J. Roozenbeek, *Psychological inoculation against fake news, The psychology of fake news: Accepting, sharing, and correcting misinformation*, 2020, pp. 147-169.

[4] X. Zeng, A.S. Abumansour, A. Zubiaga, *Automated Fact-Checking: A Survey*, "Language and Linguistics Compass" 15(10) 2020, p. 14.

[5] M. Mourali, C., Drake, *Debunking Health Misinformation on Social Media: The Challenge of Dynamic Conversations*, "Journal of Medical Internet Research" 24(3) 2022.

[6] T. Pavleska, A. Školkay, B. Zankova, N. Ribeiro, A. Bechmann, *Performance*… op. cit.

is a need to analyze the activities undertaken by individual countries and organizations in order to be able to extend the scope of application of effective tools to other countries.

This article deals with the interdisciplinary scientific issue of combating disinformation based on the so-called fake news. This issue can be located to a large extent, but not in its entire conceptual scope, in the area of the emerging field of scientific research, which is the psychosociology of the Internet. In addition, the research area defined in this way also includes issues traditionally recognized in the area of legal sciences (law of new technologies), information technology (internet network), national security (information interference by other countries), and internal security (social security, information security). In some approaches, the issue of false news (similarly to the issue of propaganda) can be considered a research area primarily of media studies.

The purpose of this article is to present and evaluate the Lithuanian system for counteracting disinformation, called Demaskuok as used to combat false information spread on the Internet.

This article aims to verify the following research hypothesis: Demaskuok can be an effective tool for counteracting disinformation in cyberspace. For this purpose, the article answers the questions of what are the disinformation phenomena involving the so-called fake news and the so-called troll farms and how they can be counteracted by the Lithuanian Demaskuok system. The conclusions presented in the end are discussed in the context of the goal of combating disinformation.

The research methods used are literature review, elements of critical analysis and logical reasoning (deductive and inductive), logical analysis, and synthesis of conclusions.

'FAKE NEWS' PHENOMENON BASED ON DISINFORMATION

The term fake news became the word of the year in 2017, when it was also published in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, which dates back to 1829. In 2018, this phrase became the subject of interest of Internet users, as evidenced by the statistics of the Google search engine[7]. It was also widespread in the election campaign of Donald Trump in 2017. It is used to describe the partiality of the media, the lack of objectivity, it appears in politics, the economy, and above all in the media spreading its reach[8].

The very term fake news is a neologism that does not confine itself to definitional frames. It is a media message that cannot be labeled as truth and lies; it is based on disinformation, and is made up of parts of the truth. According to the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language, it is a procedure that intensively manipulates facts that are to arouse emotions, and

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[7]. *Słowo roku 2017* [*Word of the year 2017*], TVN24, https://www.tvn24.pl/kultura-styl,8/slowo-roku-2017-fake-news,*787106*.html (23.11.2021).

[8] M. Ziółkowska, *Internet opanowany przez fake newsy* [*Internet Overrun with Fake News*], http://dziennikarstwo.wroclaw .pl/internet-opanowany-fake-newsy 2018 (23.11.2021).

not be a source of real information[9]. The task of fake news is to mislead recipients in order to gain financial, political, or propaganda benefits[10]. This results in distortions, overinterpretation, and lies spreading throughout the public space[11]. One of the definitions of fake news is to define it as an instrument of propaganda based on the dissemination of false information to create social attitudes[12].

Fake news specialists emphasize that they cannot be subsumed under the category of lies, because they contain real information that is distorted or out of context[13]. It is a 'supposed fact' that is either false or partially true. It is not based on any context or additional information that could make it credible[14].

The media, which still enjoys the trust of many recipients, are an excellent source for its dissemination. Belief in the truthfulness of the media comes from the conviction that the information flowing from them is prepared by a team of professionals and that it is verified at the source[15]. It is a half-truth whose task is to manipulate recipients and build in them erroneous beliefs that are passed on without moderation. The result is a 'media mix' made of a tangle of facts, opinions, interpretations, and narratives that hides disinformation[16].

The dangerous speed of fake news is connected with emotional involvement in its distribution. A false message spreads faster than a one that communicates the real facts. This is confirmed by the research of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which found a 70% speed compared to the spread of real news[17]. An example of this is the August 2015 disclosure of real information about Donald Trump who had flown to New York City for treatment 1,400 times, and the fake news about Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz's call for a Democrat vote was shared about 16,000 times[18].

A perfect comparison is to define fake news as a virus of unknown origin, taking many forms and spreading at tremendous speed through various channels, to a vulnerable recipient who passes on contamination with fake news. One example of numerous disinformation built on fake news is the propaganda of the Kremlin's policy targeting the Baltic states and the European Union.

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[9] Słownik Języka Polskiego, www.sjp.pwn.pl (23.11.2021).

[10] M. Drzazga, *Cała prawda o fake news czyli jak rozpoznać fałszywe wiadomości* [*The Whole Truth about Fake News, or How to Recognize Fake News*] 2017 http://www.legalniewsieci.pl/aktualnosci/cala-prawda-o-fake-news-czyli-jak-rozpoznac-falszywe-wiadomosci (23.11.2021).

[11] E. Lalik, *Czym są fake news i dlaczego walczymy z nimi dopiero od kilku miesięcy?* [*What is Fake News and Why Have We Been Fighting Them for Only a Few Months?*] 2017, http://www.spiderweb.pl/2017/01/fake-news.html (23.11.2021).

[12] D. Barclay, *Fake News, Propaganda and Palin Old Lies: How to Find Trustworthy*, London 2018, p. 81.

[13] J. Gilin, *Fact-checking Fake News Reveals How Hard It Is To Kill Pervasive*, Nasty Weed 2017, p. 111.

[14] M.R.X. Dentich, *The Philosophy and Plain Old Lies: How to Find Trustworthy*, London: Rowman&Littlefield 2014, p. 66.

[15] Ibidem, p. 68.

[16] Ł. Iwasiński, *Fake news i post – prawda. Krótka charakterystyka* [*Fake News and Post-Truth. Brief Characteristics*], "Przegląd Edukacyjny" 2(109) 2018, p. 45.

[17] Ibidem, p. 48.

[18] K. Bąkowicz, *Wprowadzenie do definicji i klasyfikacji zjawiska fake newsa* [*Introduction to the Definition and Classification of Fake News*], "Studia Medioznawcze" 3(78) 2019, p. 285.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RUSSIAN 'TROLL FARMS'

The Russian Federation is one of the countries that conduct extremely aggressive and sophisticated disinformation activities, especially on the Internet. Today's Kremlin relies on conspiratorial discourse and uses disinformation to increase its influence on society and to disrupt public debates in the West. According to E. Lucas and P. Pomeranzev, the strength of the Russian policy is strengthened by disinformation that triggered an anti-government uprising (eastern Ukraine), arouses a sense of threat to Western institutions and alliances (Lithuania), weakens the position of states on the international arena (Latvia), supports post-Kremlin media (the Czech Republic and Estonia), and provokes opposition movements and organizations against the government (Poland)[19].

The hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine exposed the use of fake identities and accounts that spread the narrative through social media[20]. Investigative journalists proved the existence of the so-called 'troll farms' (Russian: *fabrika trolli*, *фабрика тролли*). It turned out that the people behind it were hired to spread disinformation over the Internet. This phenomenon, although so accessible and widespread today, is still not well-researched. The effects are still immeasurable, as it is difficult to distinguish paid trolls from those who express their opinion on a given topic. Nevertheless, a very plausible theory is that trolling is attention-seeking, revenge, pleasure, and the willingness to harm someone through aggression and deception[21]. The troll farms are structured and divided into departments that employ people who specialize in various work techniques. They include content managers, whose task is to rewrite real agency news, modifying them in such a way that they correspond to the Kremlin propaganda, and placing them on websites that are under the control of the agency. The next group are bloggers who create entries in social media and blogs; then illustrators come up with thematic demotivators and SEO specialists dealing with spam and website positioning. According to the Russian portal Open Media, in 2019 preparations were made for the creation of a farm of 'patriotic trolls' on the internal Russian market[22].

The largest groups of provocateurs are the 'Olgino trolls' (Russian: *trolli iz Olgino* or *olginskiye trolli*; *троллии з Ольгино ог ольгинские тролли*) and network brigades (Russian: *Vyebbrigady*; *Веббригады*). They gather people who are paid for spreading Russian propaganda, creating fake posts and comments. They have at their disposal specially equipped offices in the historic district of St. Petersburg in the offices of the Internet Research Agency

[19] E. Lucas, P. Pomeranzev, *Winning the Information War Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe*, A Report by CEPA's Information Warfare Project in Partnership with the Legatum Institute 2016.

[20] O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta, *Wojna hybrydowa Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie* [*Russia's Hybrid War against Ukraine*], Kraków 2017, p. 44.

[21] E.E. Buckels, P.D. Trapnel, D. L. Paulhus, *Trolls just want to have fun. Personality and Individual Differences*, September 2014, pp. 97-102.

[22] Polityka.pl, *Po co Rosji nowa patriotyczna fabryka trolli*? [*Why does Russia Need a New Patriotic Troll Factory*?] November 2019, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1933926,1,po-co-rosji-nowa-patriotycznafabryka-trolli.read (23.11.2021).

(Russian: *Agentstvo internet-issledovaniy*; *Агентство интернет-исследований*). It employs commentators who, for example, through distorted text and graphic messages, have become part of the information war that Russia has caused by hitting Ukraine[23].

Trolls are people who get paid for contract work. They not only deal with posting messages and comments, but also show people and events from the Kremlin's perspective, using crafted facts communicated in the right context. Unaware people, who, through their opinions and comments, spread disinformation on various profiles, on social networking sites and blogs, also play a role by publishing 'desired' content from the perspective of Russian politics. Most often they have higher education, and are unable to find a job. They are aware of the process in which they participate, but they do so because of higher earnings (45 thousand rubles). Russia spreads deceitful propaganda through various routes and through the troll farm. This was proved in the Resolution of the European Parliament in November 2016, which diagnosed the danger of Russian propaganda toward the European Union by "distorting the truth, sowing doubts and discord among EU countries, paralyzing the decision-making process, discrediting the EU institutions and the transatlantic partnership, arousing fear and uncertainty among EU citizens"[24].

The Kremlin's actions are still active. Tools are used to transmit disinformation, which include: analytical center, foundations, incl. Ruski Mir, TV stations broadcasting in various languages such as Russia Today, RIA, Novosti or Sputnik, pro-government pseudo-agencies, officially registered organizations, e.g. (Rossotrudnichestvo), cross-border social and religious groups, social media and the already mentioned troll farms or the so-called 'useful idiots' who, believing in heard or read messages, pass them on as the proven and verified truth. The aim is to cause a split in Europe, to gain internal supporters, and to create a negative image of the countries – the EU's eastern neighbors[25].

ELVES AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION

There are various forms of combating hostile disinformation activities. The most important ones focus on blocking access to the Russian information area, counteracting the administrative and legal system, as well as social activity in the virtual world. It is emphasized that the most common method of combating Russian disinformation is to use the committed

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[23] S. Wasiuta, *Rosyjska fabryka trolli z Petersburga* [*Russian Troll Factory in St. Petersburg*] [in:] O. Wasiuta, R. Klepka (edit.), *Vademecum bezpieczeństwa informacyjnego* [*Information Security Handbook*], Vol. 2, Kraków 2019, p. 141.

[24] Dorzeczy.pl, *Ostrzeżenie przed rosyjską propagandą. Europarlament przyjął ważną rezolucję* [*Warning against Russian Propaganda. The European Parlia-ment Adopted an Important Resolution*], November 2016, https://dorzeczy.pl/swiat/15254/Ostrzezenie-przed-rosyjska-propaganda-Europarlamentprzyjal-wazna-rezolucje.html (23.11.2021).

[25] Polskieradio.pl, *Parlament Europejski wzywa UE do działania ws. Rosji. Przyjęto rezolucję Anny Fotygi* [*The European Parliament Calls on the EU to Act on Russia. The Resolution of Anna Fotyga was Adopted*] 2016, http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1695772,Parlament-Europejski-wzywa-UEdo-dzialania-ws-Rosji-Przyjeto-rezolucje-Anny-Fotygi (23.11.2021).

and responsible attitude of society[26]. This attitude is typical of the 'elves' who are online volunteers. This organization began operating in the Baltic states in 2014, hitting the activities of Russian trolls by catching them online and debunking messages they had modified.

Effective measures have been taken by three Baltic countries; Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, which are successfully combating Kremlin propaganda. Unlike trolls, elves are not hired on a formal contract and are not provided with a place to work. These are volunteers who are against spreading false information, most often in their spare time. The task of the elves is to identify and report to the administrators of social media groups a fake account, which is verified by monitoring comments on news-type portals. A form of retaliation for blocking disinformation was the publication of 1,000 Lithuanian elves on Russian websites in 2017. As a result, the Internet database Vatnikas.lt was created, in which the names of Russian trolls were disclosed[27].

Latvia followed in the footsteps of Lithuanians, where, in 2017, Latvian elves began to be recruited to fight propaganda under the leadership of a former employee of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Latvians based their struggle on the pattern of Lithuanian actions[28]. The second half of 2018 saw the development of elven organizations also in the Czech Republic, where Czech citizens, on their own and without the support of the country in an anonymous but organized manner, started fighting Russian trolls on social networks. They act anonymously, fearing for their own and their families' safety. An example of troll attacks was the Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro, who was intimidated and harassed on the Internet after publishing an article about Russian troll farms[29].

Returning to Lithuania, it can be observed that the Lithuanian opposition in recent years has been of great importance in the fight against disinformation through close cooperation of the media, state authorities, which include secret services, the army and the public. This allows you to remain calm against the hostile actions of Russia and to act effectively and thoughtfully[30]. Lithuania's success in combating disinformation is the creation of a military, media, and social platform. Military activity, in particular raises the importance of fighting with Russia. It is constantly being monitored what information is disseminated through the media and where it comes from.

One of the reasons that fake news is so easy to spread is that by looking for savings, the media get ready-to-broadcast products that do not require high funding. Such creations,

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[26] A. Król, *Obrona przestrzeni informacyjnej na przykładzie Litwy, Łotwy i Estonii* [*Defense of the Information Space on the Example of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia*], July 2017, https://warsawinstitute.org/pl/obrona-przestrzeni-informacyjnej-na-przykladzielitwy-lotwy-estonii/ (23.11.2021).
[27] O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta, *Kremlowska dezinformacja w Internecie i reakcja społeczeństw zachodnich* [*Kremlin Disinformation on the Internet and the Reaction of Western Societies*], "Przegląd Geopolityczny" No. 34 2020, pp. 136-147.
[28] О. Хорошилова [O. Khoroshilova], *Война и мода. От Петра до Путина* [*War and fashion. From Peter to Putin*], Moscow 2018, pp. 55-57.
[29] Ibidem, p. 59.
[30] M. Sankowski, *Litwa: Europejski prymus w walce z dezinformacją* [*Lithuania: European Leadership in the Fight against Disinformation*], February 2019, https://osluzbach.pl/2019/02/20/3097-2/ (23.11.2021).

according to The Financial Times, can be watched on 10 television stations. Often inconspicuous problems are conveyed, which, by manipulating the recipient, promote Russia and the Kremlin's policy, and at the same time build a negative image of the West.

Lithuania was the pioneer in the desire to adapt the legal provisions to the disinformation reality. It is about a real fight in suppressing and eliminating fake news, not just slowing them down. One of the regulations was used for this, which allows the Lithuanian authorities to block a server that spreads or disseminates false information for 48 hours without a court order. Despite the drastic solution, the argument for its use is the linking of disinformation 'projections' with the possibility of carrying out cyber-terrorist attacks. However, there is no doubt that the services and the army do not have enough resources to fight the activities of Russian trolls on their own, although politicians are also involved in such actions and transfer the necessity of such action to the international and European area. Therefore, it is of great help to involve the elves[31].

DEMASKUOK AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL OF LITHUANIA TO FIGHT DISINFORMATION

Demaskuok is a nationwide initiative involving representatives of society, the media, and the state fighting against false information. As stated on the website Demaskuok.lt, the mission is "to bring together professionals and amateurs of various backgrounds, from the community, the humanities and science, to the media, business, the entertainment world, or their supporters, who can contribute to the fight against disinformation."[32] The goal of opponents of disinformation is to protect societies and states from negative psychological, emotional and economic effects.

The world is fed with fake news that hits even the most powerful countries or organizations, such as the United States, the European Union, or NATO. Both the European Union, Facebook, and Google joined forces to fight fake news. As Lithuanians admit, the problem of falsified news in Lithuania was neglected and favored by incoordination, the lack of specific actions and measures, despite the great threat to national and personal security. Despite the claim that Lithuania is one of the countries that are not interested in other countries, it is nevertheless hit by fake news, cyber media and is subject to constant propaganda[33].

Demaskuok.lt uses the many tools offered to them by various organizations and research centers, and by the European Commission, which has come up with a proposal to adopt a common EU code to combat disinformation, support data verifiers, and other activities to promote high-quality journalism. In addition, Demaskuok.lt has developed and uses

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[31] Ibidem.
[32] Demaskuok.lt, https://demaskuok.lt/apie-projekta/ (3.11.2021).
[33] Ibidem.

highly advanced technological tools based on artificial intelligence, which identifies fake news and inhibits it.

One way to fight disinformation is through media awareness-raising. This task is entrusted to Baltic journalists from The Baltic Center for Media Excellence who work on programs increasing the qualifications of journalists and supporting the media environment in the Eastern Partnership countries. They use their experiences and examples of good practice to do so. An important activity is raising the level of critical thinking in society[34]. Another way to raise awareness is through organizing public lectures by journalists. Lithuanian journalists use the described news portal to analyze fake news produced by Russian and Belarusian media. This initiative is communicated to the readers of the Delfi portal. An example of fake news stopped and explained by Lithuanian journalists of Demaskuok.lt is the article "Kiek toli gali žengti Lukašenka: po kraupių vaizdų iš pasienio laukia Nauja provokacijų banga" (translation from Lithuanian: How far can Lukashenko go: after a new wave of crazy provocations images from the border)[35]. On the Demaskuok.lt website, there is a form by which users report a given topic to journalists or inform about the appearance of new fake news.

It might seem that actions to eliminate disinformation across the ocean of fake news, there is evidence in the history of fake news that confirms the effectiveness of the action. One of them was an event started by the Lithuanian journalist and publicist Andrius Tapinas. As a result of historical distortions about the Baltic resistance against the Soviet Union in the 1940s, Tapinas launched the action #Кремльнашуисториюнеперепишешь (#Kremluwillnot falsifyourhistory). This event involved the Lithuanian Internet society in just a dozen or so hours. It was joined by ordinary users, popular publicists, actors, social activists who posted on the fanpage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation with propaganda graphics and 13,000 comments that revealed the truth about this topic. This resulted in the reduction of the rating of the Ministry's fanpage from 4.2 / 5 to 1/5[36].

However, their enemy of Russian disinformation is a formidable adversary who wants to manipulate Lithuanian citizens. Russia has at its disposal a powerful TV platform, which is the Media Alliance (BMA) group registered in Great Britain. Its task is to retransmit appropriately modified content created by Russian TV. The largest sites that do the same thing are the local version of Sputnik and the Baltnews platform. The difference between the two portals is that Sputnik is officially associated with the Kremlin and is a pro-Russian propaganda mouthpiece, while Baltnews hides its ties to the Russian authorities. Its task is to strengthen the resources of the Russian information war. On page two of the platform, the titles of the articles are not flashy and provoking violent actions, but the information published has its source in the Russian media. On the contrary, Sputnik willingly places aggressive titles.

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[34] A. Król, *Obrona przestrzeni informacyjnej…* [*Defense of the Information Space…*], op. cit., p. 51.

[35] V. Saldžiūnas, *Delfi*, 2021, https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/demaskuok/kiek-toli-gali-zengti-lukasenka-po-kraupiu-vaizdu-is-pasienio-laukia-nauja-provokaciju-banga.d?id=87896347 (23.11.2021)

[36] A. Król, *Obrona przestrzeni informacyjnej…* [*Defense of the Information Space…*], op. cit., p. 52.

It was on his website that an article appeared with the provocative title "Nazism developed in the Baltic states them after their accession to the EU and NATO"[37]. This article proves that Russian propaganda focuses on building a negative image of the West – the European Union and NATO. On the previously mentioned portals and the Rubaltic portal, there are special tabs entitled 'Baltic states in NATO' or 'Rusophobia'. They contain interpretations and biased analyzes as well as statements by false experts that often contain outright lies. The purpose of expert statements is to convince the citizens of the Baltic states of how harm they are with membership of the EU and NATO and how to create a negative public opinion, threaten security, and cause social discontent[38].

Interestingly, Russia, which caused a media war by spreading fake news, not only deals with manipulation based on existing social fears or myths, but also produces information that has nothing to do with reality. One of such activities was the broadcasting of material on 5th March 2014, which talked about the arrival of 300 armed mercenaries from the United States to Kiev, whose aim was to carry out ethnic cleansing of Russians in Odessa and Lviv. Another event was that the Russian station was informed that the Verkhovna Rada was planning to take Ukrainian origin from the 2 million inhabitants of Donbas. The speed of spreading fake news on the Internet, flashy titles, and aggressive content cause a feeling of fear or aggression among Internet users. The way of presenting and discussing armed conflicts, low censorship, presenting statements by aggressors and terrorists is an effective tool for manipulating the society. Published content has become a strong player, but at the same time an effective instrument used in any war conflict[39].

CONCLUSION

The examples presented on fake news, and the dissemination of disinformation based on them, show the scale of how society can be manipulated and its attitudes created. We can talk about attempts to gain power over others with the power of the media and entire armies of trolls fabricating the truth. The range of damage to false information is wide, from intimidating an individual by creating memes about him, spoiling his image, or even the authority to distort the history of states, whitewash the actions of his country, and slander other countries, which is mainly specialized in Russia. The response to fake news may be causing a sense of threat, panic, but also aggressive and terrorist behavior. The stupefaction of societies and wider circles not only in the country, but also outside it, favors gaining allies who blindly believe in false sources of knowledge, the division of society into those who consciously or unconsciously spread untruth

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[37] Ibidem, p. 58.
[38] Ibidem, p. 60.
[39] O. Wasiuta, R. Klepka, *Vademecum bezpieczeństwa informacyjnego* [*Information Security Handbook*], Vol. 1, Kraków 2019, p. 626.

and those who oppose it, which in turn allows to gain power over 'useful idiots', which is a separate 'channel' of transmitting information to other social groups[40].

This state of affairs proves the necessity to counteract such actions. The fight against disinformation is a method of capturing and rectifying manipulated data. This is done in many ways, with the help of many charitable people who want to preserve the true history of the country, its true *present based* on authentic, not imaginary facts. Demaskuok.lt is responsible for such a responsible task, gathering Lithuanians of various education and specialization in its ranks, who not only protect against false information by publishing articles on their website and refuting their falsehood, but also raise the awareness of Lithuanian society and teach critical thinking. It should be remembered that only an informed society and its critical approach to newly heard 'news' while effectively checking the sources of that news and the credibility of the content, constitute a powerful step in discovering and spreading the truth.

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[40] Ibidem, p. 627.

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