INFORMATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS (IPSO) AS A DISCOVERY OF FALSE NARRATIVES IN THE CONDITIONS OF MILITARY CONFLICT IN THE MEDIA

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Abstract: The article examines the information and psychological operations (IPSO) promoted by Russia in the media space through social networks and traditional mass media since February 24, 2022. The scientific analysis includes the advice of media experts, practicing journalists, fact-checkers, and military psychologists on countering various manifestations of the IPSO, and through them, false narratives in the conditions of information warfare. The material was selected by the method of continuous examination of social networks Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as such anti-fake resources and fact-checking projects as NotaYenota, "Brekhunetz", "Media Detector", "BezBrekhni", "Filtr", "Russian fake, go to...", media research of the public organization "Information in Its Pure Form". First of all, the modern media space was examined in order to identify in it the IPSO conducted by Russia in the conditions of the information warfare. It was noted that the activation of the IPSO with the start of a full-scale invasion took place instantly, because the enemy took advantage of the information vacuum in which the Ukrainians fell in the first days of the war due to a lack of understanding of what was happening. The characteristics of typical signs of hostile IPSOs are given, in particular the following: the presence of a bot author or Internet troll; formation of mass despair; patriotic symbols or slogans as an element of cover; intentional division of Ukrainians into "us" and "them"; creating a deceptive effect about the extraordinary power of the enemy; reconnaissance of data that may be useful to the enemy; the use of esotericism; an anti-moral call for the cruelest revenge; excessive emotionality of the texts and call to action; appeal to the individual as a persuasive argument; demanding a quick response to messages; devaluation of official sources of information and involvement of pseudo-experts; discrediting Ukraine in the international arena. It was found that the synchronicity of publications, as well as factual, logical, language errors, and the unreality of the so-called authors of such material are also markers of IPSO. The differentiation of the most common types of IPSO and their transformation in Ukrainian domestic media were studied, along with effective ways of resisting false Russian narratives, forming critical thinking and media literacy when perceiving heterogeneous information content.

Keywords: information and psychological operations; military conflict; media; Russian narratives; content; communication.

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia is trying to fight not only on the battlefield, but also looking for various means of psychological pressure on Ukrainians in order to undermine their fighting spirit, 'teach' them to pessimism, instill despair and hopelessness and, as a result, shake the situation inside the state, suggest the inevitability of its defeat, etc. Information leaks are aimed at demoralizing the Ukrainian people, creating an atmosphere of doom, hopelessness, and panic, the main task of which is to discredit the leadership of the Ukrainian state, its allies, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and demonstrate their inability to wage an active and productive fight against the enemy. Recently, a lot of messages have appeared in various social networks that have a significant communicative and pragmatic effect and influence the reader. The specified objective factors became a prerequisite for raising the issue of information hygiene, psychological safety of Ukrainians, effective resistance to enemy propaganda and manipulation. Understanding all the consequences of informational and psychological operations, the ability to recognize them and resist them will not only ensure a relatively stable emotional state of Ukrainians, but will also be reliable protection and one of the prerequisites for Ukraine's victory in the war.

In the modern scientific paradigm, there are many works devoted to revealing the peculiarities of informational and psychological

operations and describing them in an interdisciplinary context. Researchers have repeatedly involved the achievements of sociology, psychology, psycholinguistics, medialinguistics, clarifying the mechanisms of interpretation and perception of the same events in different aspects and in the plane of hidden content. First of all, it is about false Russian narratives aimed at provoking internal discord among Ukrainians and justifying Russia's actions. Non-military means of conducting a hybrid war, mechanisms of cognitive influence and communication were in the field of vision of H. M. Yavorska, who believes that "wars are inseparable from verbal, discursive practices" [22, p. 55]. O. S. Snytko and G. Kononykhina characterized the modern information and psychological war in the context of projects of total social zombification in the media space [19]. S. V. Nesterenko presented a thorough analysis of information and psychological operations, the scope of the manifestation of which is social networks. The researcher included the use of evaluative vocabulary and means aimed at arousing the emotional state of the listener or reader, carrying out a psychological attack on him, etc., to the methods of conducting information wars used by modern specialists [12]. N. V. Slukhai described in detail the system of various language units that make it possible to implement the negative intentions dominant in the Russian media space. Among them: 1) the intention to humiliate the dignity of the speaker of the Ukrainian language, connected with the use of transliterated and distorted Ukrainian expressions, which gives the narrative irony, realizes insult and contempt; 2) grammatical and lexical markers aimed at expressing the inferiority of Ukrainians; 3) the use of a lowercase letter instead of a capital letter when it comes to proper names related to Ukraine, and, vice versa, writing common names with a capital letter when the information concerns Russian realities and objects. According to N. V. Slukhai, markers of the intention to simplify and establish perception, which occurs with the help of resources from previous ideologized eras or ideological clichés, play an equally important role in the implementation of informational and psychological influence. Such means imply the activation of expressions of the Soviet era, inclusion to the use in language and the repetition of phrases that justify Russian aggression against Ukraine, etc. A separate group of intentions described by the researcher are those that mark the growth of evil, predict the allegedly terrible future of Ukraine, are aimed at disorientation, suggest chaos, etc. [18, p. 361–397]. The relationship to the raised problem is revealed in the works that deal with fakes and various manipulations which serve as a powerful tool of information warfare. Relevant ones are studies in this direction conducted by M. Kitsa [5], I. Mudra [11], N. Nikolayenko, Y. Vasylevich, and O. Komarchuk [13], I. Puciata [17], and others. These works are devoted to the description of fakes and other means of informational and psychological operations carried out by the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine since the occupation of Crimea and part of Donbas, but do not cover the period from the full-scale invasion of the Russians. Modern military realities have become a prerequisite for the fact that the use of information and psychological operations has gained even greater momentum, because the manipulation of public opinion is no less important form of war than war on the battlefield with the use of firearms. The problem of the use of communication technologies of Russian propaganda in the Ukrainian media, which in terms of time parameters coincide with active military operations, is partially reflected in modern linguistics [6, 7]. Fundamental ones in this regard are studies that directly relate to the specifics of the creation, functioning, and dissemination of information and psychological operations (IPSO) in the media space in the conditions of a military conflict. In the publication of Ya. Bedriy, it is noted about the manifestations of the Russian IPSO and how to deal with them [1]. E. Derevyanko generally writes about IPSO in the Ukrainian infospace [3], and I. Zolotukhin analyzes the network sphere of dissemination of information and psychological operations [23]. N. Lavrynets examines information operations from the point of view of

psychology, gives sound advice on how not to succumb to enemy provocations during wartime [10]. The correspondent of "ArmyInform" A. Pecherskyi analyzes in detail the rashists' IPSO in the media sphere [14–16]. In addition, in our opinion, an emphasis on the system of productive means of countering informational and psychological operations is important, among which speeches by authoritative persons during the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in February 2022, in particular, the President of Ukraine, his advisers, political and military analysts etc. are quite frequent. Scientists resorted to the analysis of printed and oral speeches, occasionally paying attention to their somewhat opposite rhetorical plan – from worried-pessimistic to soothing-victorious [7]. The analyzed works undoubtedly show that informational and psychological operations and the detection of false narratives are an important object of research, which has repeatedly been in the field of view of scientists. At the same time, since a full-scale invasion, the enemy does not stop using various information technologies, seeking to impose false information and gain victory in the media sphere. In view of this, we consider the multidimensional description of informational and psychological operations aimed at the detection of false narratives in the conditions of a military conflict to be an important and relevant issue that requires detailed study.

2 Materials and Methods

The material of the study contained the examples of IPSO, which is promoted by Russia in the media space through social networks and traditional mass media since February 24, 2022. The scientific analysis includes the advice of media experts, practicing journalists, fact-checkers, and military psychologists on countering various manifestations of the IPSO, and through them, false narratives in the conditions of information warfare. The material was selected by the method of a comprehensive examination of the Facebook social network, as well as such anti-fake resources and fact-checking projects as NotaYenota, "Brekhunetz", "Media Detector", "BezBrekhni", "Filtr", "Russian fake, go to...", research of the public organization "Information in Its Pure Form".

The methodology of the analysis of information and psychological operations in the media provided for the step-by-step application of both general scientific and special methods and approaches, which made it possible to achieve a research result. At the first stage, a comparative analysis of scientific intelligence and journalistic publications on the studied problem was carried out. The second stage provided for a direct study of the media space on the basis of systemic and structural-functional approaches to IPSO as a complex technology of information warfare. The analytical-synthetic method, as well as methods of comparison and analogy, a special method of fact-checking provided an opportunity to compare the methodological concepts of the essence of IPSO, to reveal the peculiarities of their aspects in order to reduce the negative impact on the Ukrainian domestic audience.

The article analyzes information-psychological operations (IPSO) as a manifestation of false narratives in the media in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Among the completed tasks, we draw attention to the following: examination of the modern media space in order to identify IPSO in it, which is conducted by Russia in the conditions of information war; characteristics of typical signs of hostile information operations, areas of their distribution and effective ways of minimizing negative impact; differentiation of the most common types of IPSO and their transformation in Ukrainian domestic media; effective ways of resisting false Russian narratives, forming critical thinking and media literacy when perceiving heterogeneous information content.

3 Results and Discussion

Russia began to conduct active informational and psychological operations aimed at Ukrainians in 2004–2008, and the open phase of informational influence was observed during the Revolution of Dignity and the annexation of Crimea.

With the beginning of a full-scale invasion, the invading country intensified psychological pressure on Ukrainians in order to cause panic and achieve victory as soon as possible. After all, it is clear that when the enemy fails to do what he wants on the battlefield, he begins to fight with the help of fakes, manipulations, and propaganda, through which he broadcasts informational and psychological operations as a manifestation of false narratives. The key message to which the negative Russian information and psychological actions lead is that the Ukrainian authorities and the Armed Forces are allegedly powerless against the Russian invasion.

IPSO (a somewhat modified variant of the concept of Psychological Operations, PSYOPS) today is usually understood as coordinated activity in the communicative space with the aim of influencing the mood in society. The terms "psychological operation" and "military information operation" are also used to denote this concept. These are certain planned actions through which disinformation and influence on the opinion of a certain group of people are carried out. Today, this term is mostly used in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. After all, IPSO can be equated to a kind of information weapon used by the Russian side to propagate its own false narratives, to manipulate the mood of the population in free or occupied territory. Among the elements of IPSO, such ones as fakes, propaganda, disinformation, exaggeration or understatement of certain information, bot cyberattacks are distinguished [1].

The armed forces of various countries, in particular, the USA, Ukraine, Russia, and other countries are engaged in this type of psychological operations. IPSO is used in peacetime and wartime. Today, during the war, the main goal of the Russian IPSO is to create optimal conditions for the invaders to capture Ukrainian territories, that is, to do everything to sow panic among Ukrainians, to intimidate, in order to reduce resistance to the Russian invaders. An important goal of information operations, which have a psychological basis, is the division of society, the undermining of trust in the leadership of the state and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the demoralization of the people. Rocking the psyche, influencing the mood of the people, their emotions, discrediting the allies are the components of IPSO that arose after a full-scale invasion.

Careful monitoring of such social networks as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter during the martial law in Ukraine makes it possible to identify the most common techniques of enemy IPSOs, as well as to investigate the false narratives promoted by Russia both in its media space and in Ukrainian one.

Constituent components of IPSO are fakes, manipulations, so-called rumors, propaganda narratives, sabotage, cyber attacks, etc. It has been observed that information and psychological operations in the conditions of war are usually implemented through informal communication channels, fake information messages in Viber groups or messengers, etc. In general, those channels that try to reach as many people as possible serve as a communication field for the implementation of IPSO. First, a certain audience is formed, which is encouraged to think in the 'desired' ways, planting the necessary arguments in it. At the next stage, the audience is 'instructed' what needs to be done. We find that IPSO often arises from the constant use of patriotic appeals and some false thesis with harmful content, and as a result, the harmful thesis begins to spread under the guise of correct slogans. A. Kozinchuk, a military psychologist and officer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, notes that IPSO is usually carried out in the form of combat operations, information drops, and disinformation. The purpose of such actions is expressive manipulation of the enemy or people from one's environment [10].

In general, in most cases, IPSO is applied only to the enemy, but in the conditions of war, Russia uses these psychological and informational methods also to its military, as well as to society.

The source of information bearing the hallmarks of IPSO is mainly the so-called "word of mouth". Messages transmitted through such a channel are the most dangerous, because they

show signs of "viral" news. People, unfortunately, tend to trust such information, especially if it is widely distributed on social networks. Provocative markers such as "the government hides the truth", "they don't tell us anything" and the like are often present in such messages. It is hinted that only supposedly a specific Viber chat, messenger, or Telegram channel is a reliable source of information.

Typical features of IPSO are the synchronicity of publications, factual, logical, linguistic errors, as well as the unreality of the so-called authors of such material. Let us analyze each of the signs in detail.

1. *Author-bot or Internet troll participating in the creation of IPSO*. Messages containing elements of propaganda usually have fake authors, mostly bots hiding behind codenames like Userrr1234. The one who works for the state in the field of psychological operations within the infospace is called an Internet troll. The bot farm in Olgino (a suburb of St. Petersburg) is known to the whole world – it was engaged in spreading negative narratives of the Kremlin all over the world, including in Ukraine. This bot farm was exposed by a journalist who got a job working there undercover. The so-called "Olgino trolls" have repeatedly made efforts to shake public opinion in Ukraine since 2014.

2. *Formation of mass despair*. In messages aimed at creating a panic mood, propagandists in the first weeks of the war often emphasized that Ukrainians should leave the country, as evidenced by the following statements: "*People from Kyiv continue to leave en masse in the direction of Zhytomyr*", "*People's deputies and security forces are leaving from Kyiv*" (usually such information is distributed in the Internet communities in Russian). Signs of despondency and inciting the horrors of war were also contained in messages that were actively distributed by the Russian occupiers in Telegram, for example: "*The first groups of the Russian Federation entered Kyiv*", "*Odesa beaches are mined*", "*Chernihiv is roaring*", "*Russia is waiting for the surrender of Ukraine*", "*Assault rifles are distributed in Kyiv*", etc. They repeatedly spread provocative information that the Ukrainian leadership and government allegedly surrendered the country, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyi fled abroad. However, official sources very quickly refuted these fake reports, or warned citizens in advance about possible false information from the Russian side. For example, one of the official statements of the Security Service of Ukraine on its page in social networks states: "*Be sure: capitulation and surrender of Ukraine's interests are not possible!*" As one can see, such appeals marked "officially" add confidence to Ukrainians and help to resist manipulations by the enemy. In the first weeks of the war, the Russian Minister of Defense Oleksiy Reznikov repeatedly warned about the purpose of this informational and psychological operation on his Facebook page: "*At first they plan to disrupt communications. After that, there will be a mass spread of fake news that the Ukrainian military-political leadership has apparently agreed to surrender. "Confirmation" of this will include allegedly signed "documents", as well as edited fake videos*". Further, the minister's post contains optimistic appeals to the Ukrainian people that this is a lie and there will be no capitulation. "*They will not achieve it! Only victory! Warn everyone you can. Let's hold on to our weapons!*", Reznikov sums up at the end of his message. And for persuasion, he adds to the post a real photo taken in Kyiv on Independence Square, where the minister is standing in a bulletproof vest and military uniform. Obviously, such methods are the most effective in combating hostile narratives. A warning from the state leadership and its reaction to the possibility of such negative information from the enemy spreading in the Ukrainian media space is one of the most effective methods of countering negative information stuffings. Optimistic appeals and confidence in a quick victory on the part of the representatives of the military sector and the state leadership help to resist any manipulations and fakes that incite, intimidate and generate panic.

During the year of the war in Ukraine, informational rumors about the preparation of an offensive from Belarus unfold each time with new force and a greater emotional effect, to which everyone is already accustomed and does not perceive such reports as real. The so-called horror rumors about a possible attack by the northern neighbor have been spreading in the Ukrainian media space since the first days of the war, each time with a new date of the Belarusian invasion. This psychological operation covers several goals at the same time: first, to sow panic among the Ukrainian population, in particular, residents of the border area; secondly, to disorient the Ukrainian defense forces, to transfer them from other directions to the Belarusian border; thirdly, to ensure that Belarus entered the war on the side of Russia.

3. *Patriotic symbols or slogans as an element of cover* (often, such a tool of the IPSO is called False-flag operation). Analyzing the sources of manipulative materials that have distinct features of IPSO, we come across messages in which deceptive narratives are hidden under the slogans "Glory to Ukraine!", "Glory to heroes", "Ukraine is invincible", and similar. It is known that Russian IPSO 'specialists' often hide behind blue and yellow flags, tridents, and patriotic appeals. In social networks, they resemble virtual saboteurs, because as in the rear, the occupiers often wear a Ukrainian pixel and, under the guise of soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, penetrate the rear in order to harm the country as much as possible. The enemy's goal is simple – to capture the trust of the victim through patriotic symbols and slogans, and then, imperceptibly for it, advance the desired idea and force the transformation of the prevailing public opinion in the direction needed by the Russian invaders. Such messages often contain pseudo-constructions such as "*I am a sincere patriot, I do not want to incite treason, but...*". Just the second part after the conjunction "but" conveys a harmful thesis. Sometimes they use the reverse combination: first they write a harmful statement, and then they talk about the invincibility of Ukraine and the indomitability of the people.

Usually, the manipulative thesis is framed by positive statements about strong Ukrainian state, courageous Ukrainian people, confidence in victory, assurances of the invincibility of the Armed Forces.

4. *Deliberate division of Ukrainians into "us" and "them"*. In the conditions of war, the rashist IPSOs often use statements that incite conflict between residents of the west and east of Ukraine. In particular, there is a well-known negative narrative that namely the residents of eastern and southern Ukraine are to blame for Russia attacking them, because they speak Russian and, therefore, have pro-Russian sentiments. This thesis, in various guises, is repeatedly thrown into the infospace with tangible manipulations. The mentioned IPSO is very beneficial to the Russian mass media, because it shifts the responsibility for the invading aggression of the occupiers to those Ukrainians who speak Russian. We understand that it was not actually the use of the Russian language in the Ukrainian-speaking space that caused the Russian Federation's attack on Ukraine, but geographical logistics contributed to this, because temporarily occupied or captured settlements are located mainly on the border territory.

In the conditions of war, the narrative that while the south and east of Ukraine are being destroyed by the occupiers, the west is living a peaceful and calm life is repeatedly circulating on the Internet. First of all, this thesis is broadcast in Facebook groups and Viber communities in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine. In modern realities, we observe the falsity of this statement, because one cannot be categorical about "peaceful" life in the West, as it is impossible in the conditions of war. Western Ukrainian critical infrastructure also suffers from aviators. Ukrainian men and women are also going to the front from this territory, ready to give their lives to protect their native people from Russian aggression.

The narrative that all "Westerners" are fighting on the front lines, while "Easterners" allegedly fled, circulates in the media

space in various interpretations. The harmfulness of this statement is obvious, since the deceptive thesis about the flight of people from the east to the west of Ukraine or abroad is aimed at spreading the conflict between Ukrainians. The audience of the specified IPSO actually includes residents of the western regions of Ukraine. Namely in them, based on everyday observations, a false impression is formed that only men and women from the west are fighting. Such unjustified generalizations arose on the basis of two facts: the appearance of a large number of internally displaced persons from the east and south in the western regions, as well as information about local residents who began to defend their native state. In fact, at the front, in the ranks of the Armed Forces and in the rear, the Ukrainian people are protected by warriors from all regions of Ukraine, their share is represented almost evenly, without any significant emphasis in favor of the west, east, north, south or center. L. Kuzmenko, a member of the Commission on Journalistic Ethics, notes that it is unequivocally unacceptable to divide Ukrainians into "us" and "them". In the conditions of martial law, compliance with standards and journalistic ethics by Ukrainian media is not only a sign of professionalism, but also the prevention of new manipulations, fakes or propaganda by the occupiers [9]. After all, any even small flaws in the work of Ukrainian journalists are immediately picked up by the Russian mass media and, based on them, various types of false narratives are spun. Domestic Ukrainian media, on the one hand, unconsciously, without thinking about the consequences, on the other hand, deliberately spread news containing hate speech to create hype or clickability of content. For example, the headlines "*In Lviv, a man from Kharkiv threw two grenades at patrolmen: he may receive a life sentence*" ("Channel 5", September 04, 2022); "*A criminal from Donetsk was caught in Levandivka (photo)*" ("Warta 1", December 06, 2022) gives readers a negative attitude towards internally displaced persons, and can also cause conflicts in communities that host displaced persons. The indication of territorial belonging does not give anything except a false impression that the residents of Donetsk or Kharkiv can pose a danger to society. According to Article 15 of the Code of Ethics of a Ukrainian Journalist, it is necessary to indicate the characteristics of a person or a group of persons only when this information is truly an indispensable component of the publication.

5. *Creating a deceptive effect about the extraordinary power of the enemy*. In the media, misinformation was spread that red flashes on the horizon can be seen allegedly through the cameras on the phones – the tracking of Russia. As it turned out later, if to take a closer look, the image on the phone does not move, even when the position of the hand changes, so the information about Russian surveillance, which is supposedly visible through the phone, is not true. The mass media spread fake news that the occupiers were installing mobile communication equipment that would disrupt Ukrainian networks. In addition, there was even a message with advice on how to correctly choose a network.

6. *Reconnaissance of data that may be useful to the enemy*. Recently, groups with the names "Search for people during the war", "Missing persons", "Search", "Prayer", "Search for people in Ukraine who disappeared after February 24, 2022", "Search for people and military 2022", and similar have become popular on the Facebook network. The audience of such groups is also large – from several thousand to a million subscribers. At first glance, it may seem that such groups are really engaged in the search for missing servicemen, as the content that is almost the same everywhere: posts about missing servicemen with their photos and private information is convincing. However, we do not record a single report that someone was found, which casts doubt on the existence of such groups. On the other hand, joining the activities of such groups poses a danger for our soldiers, because behind such virtual communities, there may be Russian special services, which collect data on Ukrainian prisoners. Due to desperation and at the same time hoping for the omnipotence of social networks, relatives, activists, or concerned citizens post detailed information about the missing serviceman in the specified groups, submitting his photo in a uniform and specifying the surname, first name, patronymic, military

position, unit or company number. In this regard, the Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Malyar, calling on Ukrainians for information security, noted in one of the posts on her Telegram channel that any published information about the soldier could harm the negotiations regarding his exchange. Also, in captivity, for security purposes, Ukrainian military personnel may present themselves as civilians, some of the missing may be in temporarily occupied territories, looking for ways to return home. It is necessary to observe information hygiene and not to publish in the public space the surnames, first names, patronymics of military personnel, their photos in uniform, designations, callsigns, military units and places of their deployment, the circumstances of their disappearance or capture. It is not needed in any case to indicate the date, place, and time of the last contact, as well as information about political views and information about the composition of the family. It is not recommended to tag profiles of military personnel, because hidden information may also be posted there, which will complicate the process of finding them or releasing them from captivity. The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine advises relatives of missing soldiers to contact the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War for information and not to post information on social networks. Also, reports on missing soldiers attract fraudsters who, during the war, not only extort funds from gullible Ukrainians through fictitious aid from abroad under the guise of charitable organizations. Relatives of missing soldiers are offered fake services to find, exchange, release from captivity or return the body of a soldier. Another example of data reconnaissance by the enemy was used in the first months of the war, when evacuation routes were organized from temporarily occupied territories. For example, in March 2022, false information was spread, allegedly on behalf of Ukrzaliznytsia, that an evacuation train would be sent from Kharkiv to the west of Ukraine. For those willing, a special Telegram chat was organized, where it was necessary to indicate one's last name, first name, patronymic and contact phone number. In this way, the enemy tried to collect data on Ukrainian citizens. In January 2023, similar information began to spread that there are allegedly wounded boys in the Burdenko hospital, who may be wanted by their relatives. This was followed by a list of the names and surnames of three military personnel with their dates of birth. Doubt in this message is obvious: connotative markers such as the epithets "*unconscious*", "*severely injured*", appeals "*People, there is a request!*", "*Forward this information to your contacts*", "*Word-of-mouth radio works best*", "*Thank you for your concern*". The appeal to emotions did not leave Facebook users indifferent, because they shared this fake 43 thousand times in one day. It seemed illogical to say that someone was looking for these people in different groups or chats. As it is known, information about missing persons is usually found out in the competent authorities, not in social networks. Fact-checkers of the anti-fake project "NotaYenota" established that the hospital which was mentioned in the message is located in Moscow, and the provided information was distributed for the purpose of collecting detailed data about the Ukrainian military.

7. *The use of esotericism for various types of IPSO*. It is known that the main direction of manipulative psychological operations is to change the thinking and behavior of the opponent. In this regard, the communication expert O. Moroz notes: "If there is a question which the enemy provoked with some tool, say, IPSO or other throws, they go to tarologists, astrologers, numerologists with this question" [4]. It turns out that the use of esotericism as one of the IPSO's tools to demoralize the enemy began a long time ago. For example, as early as World War II, the Allies circulated a fake astrological magazine, Der Zenit, to mislead Germany. Historically, Ukrainian nation has always sought to find quick solutions to certain problems. In times of full-scale war, this desire intensifies even more.

Paradoxically, according to the Institute of Sociology, in 2018, Ukrainians trusted astrologers as a source of information more than the government. In the media, astrology is usually used for the purpose of creating clickable content, violating professional standards, because when real qualified experts do not know the

final answers to complex questions, regarding, for example, the date of the end of the war, they are, unfortunately, replaced by pseudo-experts – the so-called tarologists or astrologers. In the Google search engine, entering the tag "tarotologist_war" we come across contrasting media materials with flashy headlines: "*A tarotologist stunned with a prediction about the end of the war: «Not soon!»*" ("Unian", January 23, 2023); "*The war will end in the spring of 2023: the tarologist predicts*" ("Facts", January 15, 2023); "*Famous tarot reader: when there will be a fabulous flowering Ukraine*" ("Volyn", January 8, 2023). As one can see, the predictions of astrologers and magicians flooded the network space with hyped information that supposedly answers the most common questions of Ukrainians today: "When will the war end?", "When will Putin die?", "When will Russia fall apart?". In TikTok and Instagram, tarot became extremely popular during the war, because the so-called "foretellers" make weekly predictions with the aim of promoting their activities, and at the same time advertise personal consultations, the cost of which can reach thousands of hryvnias. TikTok even created a thematic section with the appropriate name TarotTok. Rumors about predictions on possible missile strikes, as well as the date of the end of the war, which is different for all tarologists, have gone viral. Such videos collect hundreds of views. At the psychological level, a person always needs a point of support, especially in a period of instability in society, when panic arises due to a vacuum of information and questions arise for which there is no concrete answer. Often, people do not check whether the predictions of a particular astrologer came true, thus so-called "fortune tellers" continue to spread their popularity on hype topics, especially in conditions of armed aggression. Often, these media characters act in favor of the enemy and become an element of enemy IPSO. Russian mass media use esotericism that affects both their audience and Ukrainian one. Those Ukrainians who practice astrology do not even realize that they are playing along with the occupiers. After all, by talking in network videos about the fact that there will be a lot more blood, dead and wounded due to mass strikes in Ukraine, they oppress the national society, sow panic and fear. The periodic dispersal of disinformation about a possible attack from Belarus in the Ukrainian media space as another example of a false Russian narrative is supported by the testimony of such "visionaries". Examples of this can be found in the publications of the Ukrainian mass media, which differ in astrological specifics and testify to the low level of competence of such experts: "*Will Belarus attack: the tarot reader gave the answer*" (Radio Track, May 31, 2022); "*Belarus will attack Ukraine in the second week of July*" ("Volyn", July 29, 2022); "*At the end of December, an offensive from the Belarusian side is possible*" ("Facts", November 15, 2022); "*«The summer will be intense»: a tarot reader predicted whether Belarus will attack*" ("Time of action", May 29, 2022).

8. *An anti-moral call for the cruelest revenge.* In the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is quite acceptable in social networks to call for the punishment of the occupiers: their expulsion from Ukraine, capture, physical destruction. However, in the comments, users en masse turn to emotional appeals of an anti-human nature: bloody and cruel dealing with the Russian invaders, killing their children as a response to aggression. From a military-political point of view, this thesis is very harmful and absolutely morally unacceptable, as it is often speculated on by the enemy side, using in their informational and psychological operations broadcast through the Russian media. Correspondent of "ArmyInform" A. Pechersky is convinced that "the danger of this IPSO is that the enemy seeks to dehumanize Ukrainians, to expose them to the same subhumans as the rashists" [14]. We understand that such messages are directed primarily at the international community on the one hand, and on the other hand – at the Russians themselves. For foreigners who observe the war from the outside, such messages carry misinformation about the alleged brutality of Ukrainians as well. In reality, according to official data released by the Office of the Prosecutor General, on February 2, 2023, the rashists killed 460 Ukrainian children, while Ukraine did not harm a single Russian child. Through this IPSO, the occupiers are trying to create an opinion in the world that Ukraine does not commit brutal war

crimes against Russia, supposedly because it is technically incapable of doing so. Thus, such theses expose Ukrainians in the eyes of the world as barbarians, similar to Russians, they are aimed at persuading the leadership of other countries not to supply weapons to the Ukrainian military. On the other hand, the narrative about "bloodthirsty Nazis" is widely spread in Russian society with the aim of strengthening anti-Ukrainian sentiments and fanning militarism among the already zombified Russians. Every time they receive new arguments that explain the so-called "special military operation in Ukraine". Russians are constantly being 'fed' the narrative that if the Russian army does not exterminate Ukrainians, than the "Banderians", "voracious neo-Nazis", as the occupiers call Ukrainians, will kill them and their children. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Russian propaganda has spread the thesis that Ukraine itself was going to attack Donbas and Russia, and the Russian army acted only in advance and launched a "preemptive special operation". The second informational and psychological propaganda spread in this context is that Russian IPSO specialists complement the thesis about the responsibility and inevitable punishment of persons who agreed to voluntary cooperation with the occupiers with dangerous ideas designed to split the Ukrainian nation. Emotional appeals such as "*There will be no excuses for the collaborators!*", "*The collaborators will be punished most severely!*" are spreading by Russian bots in social networks. This statement reinforces the so-called "Nazi brutality", presented through the eyes of the Russian invaders, about the alleged bloody punishment of all indiscriminately, who somehow interacts with the Russians in the occupied or temporarily captured territories. The provocative message that all Ukrainians who are in such territories are already collaborators was repeatedly spread on the Internet. It is clear that such blanket accusations of collaborationism are a way of justifying the occupation. The purpose of this IPSO is obvious – to show the residents of the occupied territories that after the de-occupation, Ukraine will terrorize the local residents, therefore widespread Russian propaganda calls on Ukrainians in the occupied territories not to seek liberation, but to remain under the rule of the invaders. The specified informational and psychological operation was broadcast to three groups of recipients: Ukrainians in the occupied territories, citizens of Russia, and the international community. Accordingly, in each of the groups to which the propaganda is directed, information is represented from the most advantageous angle for Russia. Citizens of Ukraine, who are in the temporarily occupied territories, are being sent a message that they are supposedly being protected from "punishers". For Russian society, this IPSO carries the thesis of protecting civilians from the "Nazi Kyiv regime". On the international stage, they are demonstrating a false narrative that if Ukraine de-occupies the captured territories, bloody revenge against local residents will begin along with repression. This IPSO is dangerous for Ukrainians in the temporarily occupied territories, who are in an information vacuum, because it can split Ukrainian society, increase hysteria and panic among the population, which has been under occupation for a long time.

9. *Excessive emotionality of texts and call to action.* A typical feature of false propaganda narratives is a call to active action, conveyed through the excessive emotional load of the message. Usually, important connotative aspects of IPSO are placed in text fragments, written in capslock or highlighted in bold. An emotional direction can also have a correspondingly designed image, through which the audience read the desired emotion – fear, panic, despair, disappointment, occasionally – elation, admiration, or delight. The verbal components of IPSO are lexemes that have an emotional effect: *danger, catastrophe, save, violence*, etc. Despite the dominant role of negative emotional content in Russian narratives, we rarely come across positive markers that supposedly hide an important fictitious message under a morally reinforcing context. Guided by the emotional perception of the offered message, a person often forgets about critical thinking, clings to the hook of a false narrative, picking up and spreading the IPSO beneficial for Russia. On a psychological level, the effect of such a message causes double damage, because at the level of euphoria, people believe the perceived information, and then, when they

understand the reality, they become disillusioned and hopeless, which is exactly what the enemy is trying to achieve. An example of such informational and psychological operation is the dissemination of messages on the network about the alleged liberation of a particular settlement, although there is no official information about the de-occupation before that. Under the influence of a portion of positive emotion, which was presented at the beginning of the thesis, a person mentally rejoices, but then it turns out that there was no such liberation, the information is false. After that, a moment of disappointment comes. For the category of particularly vulnerable people, such narratives are dangerous, because they instill hopelessness and produce a depressive state. This is the main goal of Russian propaganda: through the negative or positive emotional components of the text of the messages, to induce fear and panic in Ukrainians, make them despair, flee abroad, etc.

10. *Appeal to the individual as a persuasive argument*. This technique is always used to spread manipulation and propaganda, it resembles fraud, because starting from the initial phrases such messages usually create a psychological trap for the recipient. Phrases like "*All informed persons have known for a long time...*", "*All reasonable people should definitely know this*", have a distinct personified direction, they inspire confidence in readers, because they contain an element of praise. After them, in the message, IPSO specialists provide the necessary information.

11. *Demanding a quick response to messages*. The Russian narratives embedded in certain IPSOs, particularly those represented by short network messages, contain appeals that demand a quick response in the audience. Usually, such messages are formatted with the syntaxemes "*Urgently distribute*", "*Notify everyone!*", "*Spread to all possible groups*", "*Transmit to family and friends as soon as possible*", and similar. At the same time, the responsibility for the distribution of such messages is transferred to the recipients, as evidenced by the manipulative call phrase "*Do your part in spreading the message, and then it will finally reach the addressee*". Following it, we subconsciously read a phrase that transfers the element of guilt to the recipient: "*If you don't spread it, you yourself will be guilty of it*". At first glance, we do not think twice, but when we think carefully about it, we can realize – why should we spread a certain message just because someone thinks it is necessary? Precisely this paradoxical request points to the falsity of such infostuffings, as we understand that true and valuable information is transmitted through official channels, and not via addressing to the virtual audience of social networks for help.

12. *Devaluation of official sources of information and involvement of pseudo-experts*. A typical feature of Russian IPSO is the indication of ignoring Ukrainian official sources, their devaluation. Often, fake messages are accompanied by the phrases "*the government does not say anything*", "*everything is hidden from us*", "*the official mass media is silent*", etc., which not only incite despair among the population, but also discredit the state authorities. If the news spreads the opinion that official sources of information are not trustworthy, distort or hide something, then this is an element of IPSO. An effective means of false narratives is the thesis that supposedly "*all the media is lying, and I will tell you the truth*". This phrase is played out in different ways in the manipulative interjections of the occupiers, which are broadcast on the network in the form of so-called "information rumors". 'Experts' of such fake news are usually relatives or acquaintances in the prosecutor's office, the police, the Security Service, the Armed Forces, etc., without any specifics regarding personal data. Sporadically, we come across generalized statements, for example: "*experts say*", "*according to military experts*" and the like, again without specification.

13. *Discrediting Ukraine in the international arena*. During the war in Ukraine, Russia uses a wide range of tools of information influence in order to prevent the supply of weapons to Ukraine from Western partners through fakes and various provocations. The purpose of false rashist narratives is to block the supply of weapons to Ukraine and split the international coalition

regarding Ukrainian support. In the context of this, propaganda materials appear in the Russian mass media, in which Ukraine is accused of smuggling, reselling, and improper use of weapons provided by the international community. It is clear that they are all created around the same IPSO, the main goal of which is to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of the Western world, so that the country, which is suffering because of the war, will lose its main support.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish IPSO among the news, since elements of informational and psychological operations can also be real events. Evidence of this is the information intelligence data published in the "Dzerkalo Tijnia" ("*Mirror of the Week*") publication that on the night of February 25, the Russians planned to carry out sabotage activities on power grids and substations in order to disconnect a large part of the city of Kyiv from electricity supply and communication in order to sow panic among people. It was also planned that arson and acts of looting would be committed in order to cause even greater panic, to direct the power of law enforcement agencies to stabilize the situation in the country instead of fighting saboteurs. The occupiers, taking advantage of the panic of the Ukrainians, were to carry out a massive cyber attack on the websites of the authorities.

The components of IPSO are fitting and cyber-attacks, turning off the websites of authorities. More than once, Telegram and other messengers spread fake information under the pretext of allegedly official information from the Security Service of Ukraine, which requires Ukrainians to follow a link for verification purposes. This link resembles the address of the SBU website, but in fact it is fake. They offered to add a new device to the account so that the enemy could gain access to personal information, and there was also an opportunity to write on behalf of the person who followed this fake link.

Usually, IPSO does not have a 'limitation period', because pseudo-concreteness allows it to exist for a long time and periodically appear in the media space from a different point of view each time (there are, for example, known narratives about the lack of a certain blood group that must be donated, as well as ten-year-old fakes about soldiers in difficult conditions, "informational horror stories" about the expected Belarusian attack, etc.). Sporadically in the mass media, we come across examples when Russian info-'injections' are collapsing instantly, just after appearing in the information space. This is what happened with the Kremlin's IPSO about the "dirty bomb" that Ukraine allegedly intended to use. This was confirmed by A. Yusov, a representative of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense: "The whole world did not believe in this outright fake, it is a completely unsuccessful information and psychological operation" [17].

4 Conclusion

We reviewed some of those IPSOs that Russia conducts in social networks, broadcasting them to the Ukrainian domestic media sphere starting from February 24, 2022. Their activation with the beginning of a full-scale invasion happened instantly, because the rashists took advantage of the fact that the Ukrainians fell into an information vacuum from the first days of the war – the lack of certain information, the lack of understanding of what was happening, the lack of full official information. In these conditions, they tried to spread a large number of IPSOs, and through them, false narratives that would lead Ukraine into a state of panic and despair, discrediting it in the eyes of society and the international community. But Ukrainians have shown the world that they are capable of resisting the information war, because now, after a year of the invasion of the Russians, they have already developed effective tools and designed effective strategies to counter the Russian IPSO in all their manifestations. In the Ukrainian media space, such anti-fake resources and fact-checking projects as "NotaYenota", "Brekhunetz", "Media Detector", "BezBrekhni", "Filter", "Russian fake, go to...", public organization "Information in Its Purest Form", the fact-checking bot "Perevirka", which fights against false narratives and Russian interference, appeared. It is necessary to counteract

IPSOs carefully and competently, so as not to accidentally increase their effect. Among the basic tips on information hygiene in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which will help effectively resist Russian propaganda and manipulation, we note the following:

1. It is worth subscribing only to reliable sources, that is, pages or channels of state structures, heads of regional military administrations, national mass media from the so-called "white list", authoritative local news [15].

2. It is also necessary to monitor anti-fake resources, which often talk about enemy IPSO, Russian propaganda and manipulation, refute fakes, and point out the signs of so-called informational rumors.

3. In social networks, one should communicate only with people whom he/she knows, one should ignore those suspicious messages that come from unknown accounts, especially if the page has some unusual content, or if it is poorly filled or closed.

4. It is necessary to avoid groups with suspicious messages, information about the military, with Russian names, etc.

5. When splashing on information containing IPSO, in no case should it be distributed, even with an indication that it is fake, manipulation, propaganda, etc. After all, by reposting any harmful information, we do not minimize it, but on the contrary, we contribute to the development of IPSO.

6. One should not show any reactions to the messages from the IPSO, as this way attention will be drawn to the submitted false information, which can spread even more widely.

7. It is not necessary to publicly convince acquaintances in open comments to not spread messages containing IPSO - it is better to say this in private communication.

8. It is also necessary to remember that critical information is often transmitted through closed channels, and messages in the form of viral videos or spam mailings are a clear sign of the information and psychological operation of the Russians.

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