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Cognitive War in Ukraine

Abstract: The article aims to identify social impact activities in the context of information operations conducted by Ukraine during the 2022 war. An analysis of the creation and spread of information threats as a result of Russia's ongoing conflict is driven by the increasing impact of communication on global security. The content of the study highlights the impact of trends in the creation of information threats, which are the determinants of social risks. In the article, an analysis of creating information threats, including producing and reporting information in propaganda and the traditional and modern media, is of significant importance. The impact and role of mass media on awareness-raising is presented, revealing mechanisms for influencing public opinion.

Keywords: *information operations, social impact mechanisms, information, disinformation, media, creating public opinion*

The first casualty of war is truth

Hiram Johnson

Introduction

The study is syncritical. On the one hand, it summarises and complements knowledge on social impact operations¹ to date. On the other hand, it confirms it based on an analysis of information actions on the war in Ukraine in 2022. The analysed period is a research area

¹ We assume the standard understanding of social impact as a process that results in a change in: behavior, opinion and / or emotions of a person as a result of what other people do, think or feel (Aronson et al., 1997, pp. 5–6; Doliński et al., 2012).

of the impact of the information on influencing the public opinion. It does not mean that the birth of this information struggle has taken place in Ukraine. The impact of information operations, and thus the role of the media, on the war has already been known. A good example is Napoleon Bonaparte, who said that “three hostile newspapers are more dangerous than a thousand baguettes” (McLuhan, 1995, p. 219).

The authors consider methodological and theoretical issues related to the conceptual design of the study’s subject matter and base their work on a critical analysis of public discourse, particularly on the tools related to the impact of language on the context of the speech. Messages were selected in a collaborative study, reflecting the social mood of a specific time period.

The result is a general analysis of the Russian Federation’s foreign policy. The authors determined that the model of rational actors would be the most useful. It avoids getting into the nuances of internal policies of Russia, Ukraine, Poland, or even NATO. Making such a choice would significantly complicate and exceed the scope of this study. For this reason, the authors also avoided analysing politicians’ speeches, focusing only on several important statements of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov.

Many studies have already been conducted on the information war in Ukraine but the theory emerging from every day of the conflict can be put at risk. The substantive level of these studies varies. Therefore, the authors decided not to suggest any of these, even the best, studies, but to present their own picture and assessment of this armed conflict.

Considering the outlined problem, it should be realised that the well-known correctness in the development of war art is the analysis and evaluation of past events. The studies have led to conclusions for the future, thus, laying the foundations for building new approaches to fighting in the emerging reality. It is particularly important in relation to the ongoing war, where social impact operations play a significant role. It should be stressed that the situation has been demonstrated for both sides of the conflict and the international community. It was initially difficult to define and make it possible to spread information and its impact, particularly on the international public.

In this context, it is very important to make it clear that the psychological and physical dimensions of the conflict are equally important. The conflict is a fight of will taking place in human minds and the battlefield. Conflict is a force clash. Today, these both political (ideological), economic, cultural, religious, and military forces, thus filling all areas of social life that intertwine and influence our will. An effective, whispered war shapes and influences beliefs and behaviours, favouring tactical or strategic aims of the aggressor.

An important aspect of the analysis is the reference to the *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (SBFR) signed by Russian President, Vladimir Putin, on June 2, 2021. It emphasises the role of social impact operations. These activities, which form the basis for a cognitive war, are to be extended to include elements of the energy war, creating an integrated operation, where the two components complement each other.

It is worth noting that there is a battle limited to the fact that the struggle for hearts and minds is to be conducted, apart from the pre-conflict phase, during and after the formal end of the conflict. Furthermore, it is worth stressing that the document, in its excuse, continues the narration of “surrounded fortress”. This narrative allows the Kremlin authorities to keep citizens in a permanent threat. This study explains the reasons why it says that, the “implementation of this strategy will contribute to the saving of the Russian people, the development of human potential, the improvement of the quality of life and the well-being of citizens, the strengthening of the country’s defense capabilities, the unity and cohesion of the Russian society, the achievement of national development objectives, the enhancement of competitiveness and the prestige of the Russian Federation” (Dura, 2021). The Russian media knew that the implementation of the new security document was dictated by the concern of the Russian society and Kremlin’s responsibility for the better tomorrow. It is worth emphasising that the authors of such an important document recognise the threat from psychological manipulation and active propaganda of permissionism² of immorality and egoism. They emphasise the role of operations in the information space, even mentioning the West, that the “Russian Federation’s initiatives to ensure international information security meet with the opposition of foreign countries seeking to dominate the global information space” (Dura, 2021). The important part of the strategy states that, “When foreign countries commit hostile actions that threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, including those related to: The Russian Federation considers it appropriate to take the symmetrical and asymmetric measures necessary to suppress such hostile action and to prevent its recurrence in the future” (Dura, 2021). These assumptions show that the asymmetry between the security and the hybrid has become the main feature of the modern security dimension. This strategy makes it clear that modern activities in the information space are multi-faceted and large, linking non-conflict state actors to their influence, thus, giving them the status of an international security problem.

Russian Information and Psychological Impact During the Conflict in Ukraine

Russia has a very long tradition, dating back to the beginnings of its statehood, in carrying out activities referred to as information and psychological struggle (Woroncowa, 2006, p. 66). Information operations are the main undertaking in this fight. They are carried out in an infosphere composed of all information systems, military and civilian, of a given country, a political-military block or another geopolitical unit (Świerczek, 2021, p. 12). In a broader, metaphysical dimension, information operations are carried out in noosphere (the concept introduced at the beginning of the 20th century by Russian scholar, Vladimir Vernadsky),

² Tendency to be overly tolerant of abnormal social behavior.

which includes ideas, values, and perceptions of the spiritual space of the nation, and even of the entire humanity (Świerczek, 2021, p. 12).

Information operations are a whole range of intelligence, counter-intelligence, disinformation, propaganda, psychological, and psychotropic activities. They can be divided based on different criteria – according to their scale, the driving sphere, the level of operation, intensity, duration, and the predominant nature of the action (Woroncowa, 2006, p. 108). In terms of the action scale, we distinguish strategic and tactical information operations. In turn, taking into account the sphere of conduct, it is distinguished by the operations carried out by internal and external auditors. The internal zone is primarily concerned to countering the impact of information from other parties. However, external information operations may also be defensive. In this case, the main objective is to provide information about the political or economic interests of Russia on the international stage (Woroncowa, 2006, p. 109).

Information operations are primarily aimed at the media, i.e., the press, radio, television, and the Internet. Moreover, diplomats, politicians, political scientists, experts, and business representatives are involved in information operations, same as science in general, culture, and art (Darczewska, 2015, p. 5). Information operations can also involve brutal physical force – acts of terrorism, rapes, or infrastructure and civil objects destruction (including information-related units). The Russian military aggression, acts of terror, and attacks targeting civil artillery in Ukraine carried out since February 24, 2022 should therefore be seen as a specific information impact to bring pressure on the Ukrainian authorities and society and to break their will to fight (Cielma, 2022).

However, the information operations conducted by Russia in Ukraine have a much broader scope and are not limited to the violent use of force to intimidate Ukrainians and break their will to fight. They were started well before February 24, 2022. It is a result of the actions started in 2010 with the victory of the pro-Russian politician, Viktor Yanukovich, in the presidential elections (Darczewska, 2015, p. 20). It is also a result of the Russian invasion of 2014. Both then and now, Russia emphasises in its information operations the division of the affected societies, the expansion of old social conflicts, and the creation of mistrust of the authorities and state institutions. It uses historical and ideological narration and stereotypes and prejudices the consciousness of the attacked societies (Krawczyk & Rekowski, 2022). An example of the use of historical narration and prejudices to impact Ukrainians' consciousness was seen before February 24, 2022, for instance, the message that Poles are planning to join the Polish Lions. This misinformation has a deep historical background. It is because it is based on preemptive prejudices and spreading the ideas of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict. One of its objectives is to increase anti-Polish sentiments among the Ukrainian people to believe that the Polish Government is conducting an unclean policy toward Ukraine, based on a swarms and expansionist basis. It is therefore suggested that this policy is in line with the objectives of NATO's expansionist policy previously set by Russian propaganda. Another goal of this disinformation is to undermine the confidence of the Ukrainian Community toward Poland. Another objective pursued by the intoxication of the information space is

to devalue Poland's position on the international stage, present it as a substitute, a secret aggressor, and a wartime instigator. Although it was also coported through official Russian web portals, it met with a significant response from Ukrainians. Interestingly, this message, in various modifications, continues to appear on Russian and Belarusian websites, and one of the Ukrainian people's proorosynic sympathies of the Supreme Council of Ukraine (Ukrainian parliament), Illia Kyva (Ткачѐв, 2022).

Another example of the use of historical narration, stereotypes, and prejudices in anti-Ukrainian propaganda is calling Ukrainians "Banderite" and "neo-Nazis". As the experts from the International Information Portal geopoliticalmonitor.com said at the beginning of March 2022, the Russian Information Agency RIA Novosti used 40 declinations and forms of the word 'Nazism' (Manucharian, 2022) to describe Ukraine and its people. It is interesting that such an image of Ukrainians, particularly their national authorities, is distributed also through alternative media networks such as the Voltaire Network. The use of Russian propaganda by an independent website should be regarded as a kind of manipulation because when the same information reaches the recipient through different independent channels, it becomes more reliable.

The labels "Banderite" and "neo-Nazis" used by Russian propaganda also sticks to Ukrainian authorities in messages addressed to Ukrainians. The aim is not only to discredit the government in the eyes of the citizens, but also to cause internal doubts and divisions. In Ukrainian society, there are still some animosities between the people from Eastern and Western parts of the country and the Ukrainian national minorities, including, first of all, the Russian minority, representing around 17% of the country's population. However, the accusations of Russian propaganda consider these people dangerous and offensive. They stressed with regret that their grandparents and fathers fought in the ranks of the Red Army with the Nazi invader, and now the Russians accuse them for Fascism and consider them enemies. Therefore, it is possible to risk the claim that the adhesion of the Nazi or Fascist labels by the Russians to the Ukrainians does not have the expected effect, i.e., the triggering of internal disputes. On the contrary, it arouses the reluctance toward Russian invaders.

An interesting example of Russian propaganda using a historical narrative referring to symbols that still have a great emotional potential in the Soviet area is the so-called "Babuszka Z" or "grandmother with flag". This 69-year-old under-charge town of great Danilyka came to a meeting between Ukrainian soldiers and the Soviet flag. The event was recorded on a short online video. It has made the woman famous in Russia and Russian propaganda has presented her as an example of Ukraine, which regrets the break-up of the Soviet Union and considers Russians liberators. The fact that Ukrainian soldiers took the flag of a woman was not irrelevant (Bettiza & Khomenko, 2022). In Russia and Ukraine, some people, including the young generation, feel nostalgia to the USSR.

As mentioned, Russian information operations are not limited only to information, propaganda, and symbol manipulation. Politicians and diplomats also play a major role in them. The group of politicians and diplomats most involved in the information activi-

ties include the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov. This experienced diplomat's job is not only to present Russia's position in relation to the events in Ukraine, but also to attract new allies and limit the influence of Ukraine and its supporting countries on the international stage. Lavrov presents the thesis of Russian propaganda not only in interviews with the media, including the Western ones, but also in talks with foreign politicians and important representatives of international organisations. Among other things, in a discussion with the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom, Lavrov asked the WHO to influence the 'regime in Kyiv' to alleviate the suffering of civilians (Bojanowska, 2022). According to expert assessments, the Russian perspective on war in Ukraine and the global food crisis were spread also by the July visits of Lavrov to Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, and the Republic of Congo (Yusuf, 2022).

Beside people, Russia also engages artificial intelligence algorithms in information operations, mainly 'bots' (computer programs that simulate human behaviours) responsible for spreading Russian propaganda on social networks (Maliszewski, n.d.). According to the NATO Strategic Communication Expert Center, Russian bots were not sufficiently active before February 24, 2022 to raise suspicions of the actual intentions of the Russian side. However, after February 24, Russian propaganda increased significantly, but was rather chaotic. The online attacks of trolls and bots were organised on March 11, 2022 by the Petersburg Cyber Front Z troll farm (*Boty...*, 2022). It is also important that the propaganda attacks with bots are individualised. For example, people in Poland receive different messages than citizens of other countries, such as Lithuania or Estonia. Similarly, the 'personalised nature of the communications on the Russian information portals is provided'. It means that for Pole visitors of, e.g., rambler.ru portal, a slightly different set of messages will be available than for Russians or Germans (Hopkins, 2021). Contrary to the appearances, which may seem strange, these messages do not need to benefit Russia. They may talk about the deteriorating economic situation of that country or conflicts in the governing elite. The purpose of the message providers is not to deliver accurate information to the recipient but to play a disinformation game with a white intelligence analyst, for example, with the publication by Russian media of a portion of the map with a possible administrative division of Ukraine following Russia's planned occupation of its territory (Hybki, 2022a). Therefore, when analysing the news provided by the Russian media, it should be borne in mind that a strict censorship has been introduced in the country and that there are severe penalties for disseminating non-official information (Hybki, 2022b).

Assessing Russian information and psychological actions in Ukraine, it should be considered that they are not limited to Ukraine and the so-called "close-abroad" countries but are global. For this reason, the Ukrainian and Polish propaganda that Ukraine won an information war seems somewhat questionable. It is a fact that, as soon as February 24, 2022, Ukraine began a massive attack on propaganda. It has made use of the media potential of President Volodymyr Zelensky and has achieved considerable success in this field, mainly by bringing together European and North American public opinion. However, it does not

mean that Russia has suffered a complete disaster in this area. The fact that Russia initially had apparently given up to the Ukrainian attack in the propaganda field can be interpreted as a propaganda technique whereby the opponent is allowed to freely express his views to understand his propaganda strategy and prepare a response to his arguments. The massive Russian propaganda attack immediately after February 24, 2022 could prove counter-effective also because, at least in European culture, the public opinion mostly takes on the victim's side, especially when it is weaker than the aggressor. When planning an information operation against Ukraine, Russians also had to realise that in the post-Soviet states and the so-called former Eastern bloc, their propaganda narrations will be mostly rejected. Propaganda practice teaches that strong attitudes are better not to crush in one stroke but to act by the principle of hollow rock. Therefore, the assessment of Russian information and psychological activities cannot be guided by emotions, as these are usually bad advisors. For we can make a severe mistake in their direction, which is to ignore a dangerous opponent. Let us also remember that, as the US Senator, Hiram Johnson, said during World War I, the "first casualty of war is truth".

The War in Ukraine

When analysing Ukraine's activity, its involvement before the Russian Federation's aggression should be appreciated. At that time, steps were taken to inform the international community of Russia's preparations for war and the imminent armed clashes. In the second stage, starting on February 24 this year, information measures were taken to inform the private and international communities about the progress of the fights. The aim of these activities was, on the one hand, to strengthen the morale of the fighting Ukrainians and, on the other hand, to gain the support of international public opinion. With this in mind, particular attention should be paid to the nature of the messages. The news from the battlefield have not been limited to reports read by the speaker or the red bar at the bottom of the screen, but have been highly personalised. The content has been delivered with the faces of fathers, mothers, and sisters. It has made it easier for recipients to identify with these people and their messages. Information in the media have been filled with the determination to fight the aggressor, mutual assistance, friendliness, concern, and mentions about the forgotten, such as pets. It has made the image of Ukraine different from the Russian one. Russians in the Ukrainian messages are presented as people who rape, rob, murder, send demanding or crying letters, describing how sick they are and military weak.

One of the main directions of the Kremlin influence on Ukrainian society is the historical area. The article published on the Russian President's website last year is a specific interpretation of that narration. The role of the article entitled *On Unity, Russians and Ukrainians* is to present the attitude of the President of the Russian Federation to Russian and Ukrainian nations. In this article, Putin claims that Russians and Ukrainians are in principle one nation, with the common historical heritage so strong that the only reason why the integration of

the two nations was impossible is the influence of foreign forces, mostly European, which allegedly want to prevent the integration of the so-called Russkiy mir.

Probably, there will be disputes over the effectiveness of these measures, but when considering this issue, there are circumstances that must be taken into account. One of them is, from the perspective of social communication, to gain the publicity of an article about the Russian leader's intention – another failure from the point of view of the Russian military strategy. The Ukrainian community is important for the sides of the conflict and has lost its original vulnerability due to the aggressor's "special operation". It is worth noting that strategic communication researchers often emphasise the advantage of acting on ordinary verbal communication. It is confirmed by the conflict, in which the least significant topic is the scale and potential of the measures used to persuade Ukrainians, their suffering, destroyed homes and fields, and area occupation. Not only the propaganda does not allow any messages about efficiency but, on the contrary, it builds negative attitudes. In other areas, mostly among Western societies, there are undertaken long-term social impact operations. Their geographical proximity to Ukraine, and thus to NATO's eastern flank, can be an important argument about the assessments of what is currently happening in Ukraine. Another aspect is the promotion of this narrative in the countries close to the East, becoming increasingly vulnerable due to developing cooperation with Russia. We can confirm the actions taken by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who, during the meeting of the Arab League in Cairo, stressed that the "overriding goal of Moscow is to change the Ukrainian government". In the following part of the speech, he accused the Ukrainian authorities of spreading propaganda saying that Russia "will certainly help the Ukrainian people get rid of a regime which is inhuman and anti-historical" (Zubel, 2022).

The entire propaganda machine was launched to increase its impact. On the one hand, institutionalised mass impact tools such as RT, RIA-Novosti, Lifesto, TASS, Echo Moskva, 'Комсомольская правда', and 'Sputnik' media project; on the other hand, support from trolls and artificial intelligence (bots). The measure of the effectiveness of that propaganda is the extent of the intoxication of threads and affected objects. The social impact operations carried out on the territory of the former USSR, including Ukraine, meet with vulnerable socio-cultural grounds. Thus, awakening the Russian diaspora and preserving cultural and emotional ties with Russia are the main objectives of the operation. However, it is not the only goal of the impact. Another, equally important one, is the attitude of the international community. In this respect, the Russian propaganda machine effectively infects the reported content and spreads it in other media, especially in the Western and Middle-East, including the mainstream media.

At this point, it seems necessary to refer to the history in which the conduct of social impact operations was one of Russia's constant activities. For centuries, the aim of achieving short-term political and communication effects was to cause costs for many countries and nations active in this area. The aspects of the historical policy have always been presented by the Russians in blacks and whites. It is demonstrated by the NATO Strategic Commu-

nication Expert Center in Riga, which published the 2020 report on the reclassification of history as a tool of impact used by Russia (Łyko, 2022). The paper analyses actions against Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, and Poland. However, there are no differences in techniques or methods compared to activities undertaken in relation to Kyiv. They are one of the war tools that distort history, thereby creating an alternative reality and transforming it into a convenient version and making the influenced objects to make decisions in line with Russian interests.

Another aspect is the technological area, which, in the form of commercial communications satellites, is an important ally of Ukraine. Their use is a key way of promoting information on the side of fear. With the involvement of private companies like Maxar Technologies, BlackSky, and NGA, we can keep track of both sides by open-source information (PAP, 2022a). As a result, monitoring the conflict has never been possible for all those concerned by the war. Thus, on an unprecedented scale, the transmitted content is authenticated, and the confusion is immediately overtaken. A good illustration is information about the Russians' withdrawal from the border area of Ukraine before the conflict. At that time, the reaction of the US and British intelligence was supported by images from commercial satellites presenting a different situation and increasing the disinformation spread (PAP, 2022a). Thanks to visibility into imaging people with access to the Internet have the ability to track both sides' moves in real time. That availability to information governments have accessed exclusively through specialised services have enabled ordinary citizens to access information without filtering. In the context of information activities, it is an unprecedented situation. It is worth highlighting that access to real-time imaging of the battlefield, together with other open-source information and intelligence data, allows verifying information about military movements, battles, and attacks on the civilian population of Russia. Moreover, using external technologies has significantly contributed to the fight against Russian disinformation. That made it difficult for Moscow to create false narratives and spreading false truths.

The information activities have undoubtedly changed the face of the war. They have made it transparent like never before. The huge accumulation of personal messages from the fighting area delivered by refugees through social media has led the audience to identify with the situation. The television speeches by President Volodymyr Zelensky to the EU Member States strengthen this message. The media activity of Ukraine's society, with the head of state, aimed at its citizens and the international community, is multi-faceted and multi-level. The intensity of the activities carried out in the information space is comparable to those carried out in the land by the military forces. Since the first day of the conflict, the international community has been continuously informed by authorities on the war, and communications to the international community have been sent to raise the awareness of the situation and gain support. A good example is the speech of February 24, 2022, when Zelensky called: "If you my dear European leaders, my dear world leaders, leaders of the free world, don't help us today, if you do not strongly help Ukraine, then tomorrow war will

knock on your doors” (Breuer, 2022). It is another information activity that uses the potential of mass media communications that remains unprecedented.

Another example is the information on the military condition of the Russian army, its potential, and its subsequent moves being published in open sources. The consequence is Moscow losing the element of surprise. Furthermore, open-source information also reveal numerous financial and moral scandals and information about the immediate family of politicians and the main military officers. As a result, the Russians’ uncovered “soft underbelly” has been contributing to the exploration of topics by international media. Thus, the resonance of the raised content has become extensive. However, the sword is a double-edged weapon. An example is the prevention of the Ukrainian sub-units in Sievierodonetsk from completing combat activities. The reason was that the range of activities carried out was made public through the media. It was done early in army conspiracy. Furthermore, this non-strategic narration is a result of communication inconsistencies from which the anti-enemy analysts derive sensitive data (PAP, 2022b). It is not conducive to efficient operations. The military needs absolute information silence to protect their actions. An exception may be information activity dictated by operational masking.

In conclusion, we should address the aspects that hinder the activities of the Ukrainian side. The first factor is the widespread availability of open-source information that allow the opponent to understand the deployment of Ukrainian defence and access sensitive data. The second is cyber attacks that fail. An effective attack on, for example, civil companies’ telecommunications satellites would result in their exclusion or manipulation of the transmission. One excluded satellite could probably be replaced by a second one, and the effect would therefore be short-term, although it could be severe due to operational activities. However, a change in the message, such as the false image of the current struggle, or the inclusion of false information on political, economic, or military decisions could have far more adverse and long-term effects. In his work, *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz answered the question about the causes of the image war disaster, which he described as follows: “The most important thought from the point of view of my profession, (...) is as follows: A soldier, even the most efficient and committed to his homeland, is only one element of a certain triad. To make our projects successful, all three elements, that is, the military, the government and society must act together” (Strachan, 2009, p. 8).

A reference should be made to the impact of information on the front-end struggle. There is no doubt that information activities are characterised by a multi-threaded and growing spectrum of impacts. It is thus evolving. Its role and impact are becoming increasingly important. Ukraine has taken a lesson in this respect and a step further to institutionalise strategic communication. In order to intensify communication and improve its efficiency, a propaganda centre was set up at the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine and a strategic communication centre at the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. The latter was created by restructuring the Ministry of Culture. The implemented solutions strengthen military action, diplomacy, the economy, and culture. Russian communication

activities have not undergone a spectacular metamorphosis. They are still based on the same assumption, used in other battles, such as the war with Japan conducted between 1904 and 1905. At that time, the tsarska Russia's – like a contemporary Putin's Russia's toward Ukraine – thought totally underestimated the opposition, as it was founded on a short and successful campaign.

Conclusion

When this paper is being published, the war in Ukraine is not over yet. It seems it will last for weeks or even months, either as a devastating conflict, the struggle of rebels to overthrow the occupation, or a global disaster. However, since the first missiles were launched, it has become clear that the invasion has started a new era, one that will be defined not only by the outcome of the war in Ukraine, but also by the role of communication. A person can effectively interact with opponents using various resources. Not all of them must be treated with fire. Ryszard Kapuściński (2008, p. 16), one of Poland's most outstanding journalists, wrote that “it is no longer possible to imagine the life of a world community without media. In previous stages, man could not survive without using weapons, later without the aid of machinery or electricity, and today his survival is impossible without the media”.

We should be aware of the presented trends – the geographical circumstances of the war and the increasing range of information impacts. As noted by Orzechowski (2016, pp. 105–106): “[...] in geopolitical doctrine, information is a dangerous orthosis: firstly, it is a relatively low-cost weapon, secondly, it has a virtually unlimited scope. The information and networking fight and its extreme forms, the information and psychological war and the network, are a means of achieving the objectives of the state in international, regional, and internal policies and of ensuring its geopolitical advantage”.

As a consequence, political actors, with the support of experts equipped with appropriate technological tools, are given opportunities to have a stronger impact on social attitudes and shaping views than ever before. In this situation, questions are raised as to whether leaders create propaganda or propaganda creates leaders. In principle, the answer is the same as to the question of whether the media create public opinion or public opinion create the media. Today, the courts do not determine who is guilty or who has made a mistake – today the public does so (Wiśnicki, 2019, p. 203). A synthetic expression of the public opinion's impact in the context of the international community's attitude to the ongoing war is the decisions taken by governments to help Ukraine and impose sanctions on Russia.

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