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ФЕЙКОВЫЕ НОВОСТИ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ПРОПАГАНДЫ В ЦИФРОВОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ РОССИЙСКОГО ОБЩЕСТВА

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Аннотация. Цель исследования – рассмотрение коммуникационных механизмов возникновения и распространения фейковых новостей в цифровом пространстве российского общества.

Методологическим основанием выступает социолого-коммуникативный подход к исследованию фейковых новостей как преднамеренных слухов, распространяемых в цифровом пространстве в форме заведомо ложной и социально вредной информации. Для доказательства этого вывода использовались методы коммуникативного анализа, критического дискурса-анализа и контент-анализа.

Результаты исследования связаны с анализом реакции государства и массовой аудитории на фейковый контент. Изучение тематики фейковых новостей с начала СВО и появление новых ресурсов, распространяющих их, свидетельствует об информационной войне, активно ведущейся в российском цифровом пространстве.

В заключении делается вывод о том, что традиционных информационных мер борьбы с фейками недостаточно и необходимо активнее применять правовые механизмы, ограничивающие распространение фейковой информации во «всемирной паутине».

Ключевые слова: фейковые новости, социальные сети, цифровое пространство, отбор новостей.

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FAKE NEWS AS A PROPAGANDA TOOL IN THE DIGITAL SPACE OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to consider the communication mechanisms of emergence and dissemination of fake news in the digital space of Russian society.

The methodological basis is the sociological and communicative approach to the study of fake news as deliberate rumors spread in the digital space of Russian society in the form of deliberately false and socially harmful information. To prove this conclusion, the methods of communicative analysis, critical discourse analysis and content analysis were used.

The results of the study consist in the analysis of the reactions of the state and the mass audience to fake content. The study of the topic of fake news since the beginning of the SVO and the emergence of more and more new resources disseminating them indicate an information war actively waged in the Russian digital space.

The conclusion is drawn that traditional information measures to combat fakes are insufficient and it is necessary to more actively apply legal mechanisms to limit the dissemination of fake information on the World Wide Web.

Key words: fake news, social networks, digital space, news selection.

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Introduction. In the digital space of Russian society, news content in the form of fakes is becoming a means of propaganda. So-called hard, hot news has become especially popular on the network — these are reprisals, political insiders, scandals, they are positioned as “news without censorship”. The predominance of such news content contributes to the fact that the news is transformed from a fact into a rumor. Deliberate rumors have always been used as a means of propaganda, but in the digital space they have acquired new communication capabilities. They are associated with social networks as channels for disseminating fakes and artificial intelligence as a tool for selecting news. The aim of this study is to examine the communication mechanisms for producing and disseminating fake news in the digital space of Russian society.

Methods and materials: Fake information includes “unreliable socially significant information disseminated under the guise of reliable messages that creates a threat of harm to the life and (or) health of citizens, property, a threat of mass disruption of public order and (or) public safety, or a threat of interfering with the functioning or termination of the functioning of life support facilities, transport or social infrastructure, credit institutions, energy, industrial or communications facilities” [1]. Russian legislation interprets fake information not just as false, but as socially harmful. Russia has a legislative framework for actively combating fake news. Back in 2019 Federal Law No. 31-FZ of March 18, 2019 “On Amendments to Article 15.3 of the Federal Law “On Information, Information Technologies and the Protection of Information” was adopted, which is known as “the law on fakes”. It contains a definition of a fake and establishes a special blocking procedure in the event of detecting false information on a resource that is related to online publication.

Another important legislative act in the field of protection against fake information is Federal Law No. 32-FZ of March 4, 2022 “On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation”. It provides for large fines for “public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” outside the territory of the Russian Federation (Art. 207). This applies to both individuals (natural persons) and the media (legal entities): the maximum fine for citizens is 400,000 rubles, for officials - 900,000 rubles, for legal entities — 1.5 million rubles [2]. In line with communicative approach to the study of fake news as deliberate rumors spread in the digital space of Russian society, it is necessary to analyze the entire structure of digital communication, identify the sources of fake information and the manipulative technologies they use.

Social networks allow fakes to spread among a mass audience at lightning speed. According to the study “Dialogue Regions” on countering fake information on the network in 2022, with 4 thousand unique fakes identified, the total number of their copies was about 10 million [3]. And this trend is increasing every year. In 2025, the number of copies of fake messages increased by 2.7 times compared to the previous year, and the number of views increased by 5.5 times [4]. Such disappointing statistics show that the digital space, due to its technical characteristics, is a favorable environment for the spread of fakes. Socio-psychological factors, stereotypes of users’ thinking and their usual online behavior practices contribute to the viral spread of fake news.

Copies appear not only due to re-publications of news in active users of social networks feeds, i.e. unintentionally, but also intentionally with the participation of bots. Modern development of digital technologies allows one moderator-propagandist to work with a large number of fake accounts, and copies of fakes increase many times. Currently, entire news channels are created for this purpose, for example, in the Telegram messenger. They also become the primary sources of fakes, launching them, and then they are picked up by bots. The results of the bots’ work - numerous copies of the fake, that are designed to demonstrate interest in this information to the mass audience, which should allow the fake news to appear in the top positions in various news feeds.

Another digital technology that contributes to the spread of fakes is targeting. That is how the concept of “smart feed” appears which makes a personalized selection of news for the interests and requests of the user and subscriber, and also focuses on popularity among viewers with similar interests [5, p. 70]. On all major portals such as Google, Yandex, news selection for the smart feed is carried out by artificial intelligence. In the competition between fake and quality news, the former wins, since surprising events or an unusual form of information presentation are needed to get into the smart feed. This is why the demand for shock news content is growing.

Thus, in the digital space, fakes surround the user everywhere, both in social networks and in search engines. Getting to the user as an interesting, extraordinary event, supported by fake photos and videos, an unintentional viral spread of a fake is launched. Moreover, the majority of the mass audience is unable to distinguish true information from fakes. Thus, 65% of users claim that they have at least once become a victim of a fake, and 34% of respondents admit that they have repeatedly trusted fake information [6].

Content analysis of the main topics of fakes shows that their content

is aimed at actualizing collective fears, which make them similar to scare rumors. In 2022, a significant amount of fake information was associated with the introduction of sanctions and the alleged collapse of the Russian economy. The main topics of fakes in February 2023 were reports of a possible threat of a missile strike, additional mobilization within the framework of the SVO [3]. In 2025, most fakes are still related to the SVO, but a new topic has emerged related to the celebration of May 9. Annual sociological studies show that from 2022-2025, the SVO topic attracted the greatest attention of the mass audience. According to the latest survey, 46% of those who encountered unreliable information claimed that they remembered fake news about a special military operation [6].

A critical discourse analysis of the daily chronology of the Kursk events in Wikipedia allows us to conclude that the public encyclopedia, where any individual can be the author of messages, uses manipulative technologies, distorted semantic filling of the metastructures “friend-foe”, “hero-antihero”, masking the inversion with the help of a large number of well-known facts. Let us give a small sample of ideologized and false statements in the chronological feed of the Kursk events in Wikipedia.

“The Insider has discovered that the Russian Defense Ministry is passing off old footage from the Donetsk direction as fresh video recordings of “successful strikes” on the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Kursk direction.”

“A Russian KA-52M helicopter mistakenly attacked a Russian troop column, as a result of which a 2S19M2 Msta-S self-propelled gun was destroyed near the village of Krivitskiye Budy in the Belovsky district of the Kursk region.”

“As of November 20, the Russian army is suffering significant losses in equipment and personnel. Z-channels explain the failures of the Russian Armed Forces by the lack of intelligence and misinformation of the situation by the higher command.”

“Minister for Temporarily Occupied Territories Irina Vereshchuk stated that Ukrainian officials are working with the Ukrainian military to create a possible humanitarian corridor for the evacuation of civilians from the Kursk region of the Russian Federation to the Sumy region of Ukraine... And she emphasized that Russia has not yet asked the Ukrainian authorities to open a humanitarian corridor going further into Russia.”

Residents of the Glushkovsky district complained that two men in Russian military uniform robbed a mobile phone store and a Wildberries warehouse in the village of Zvannoye in the village of Glushkovo in the Kursk region” [7].

Having read the military chronicle to the end, a very clear picture emerges in which “the incompetent command of the Russian army, together with the military looters, is fighting the Armed Forces of Ukraine with complete disregard for their own civilian population.” The direction of the interpretation of facts by the mass audience is carried out with the help of the metastructures such as friend-foe, heroes-villains [8, p. 254]. And this incorrect, distorted filling of the mental scheme is offered to the Russian mass audience, and is unfolding in the Russian information space.

Secondary data of sociological research has confirmed the hypothesis that fake news has been used as the main tool of information warfare in the digital space of Russian society. Russians believe that fakes are created intentionally and are hostile propaganda. According to the VTsIOM study, 78% of respondents believe that unreliable news is often published intentionally. 34% of respondents call external forces the sources of fakes, including “ill-wishers, Western countries, foreign media” — 19%, “Western intelligence services” — 8%, “Ukrainian intelligence services” — 5%, the USA — 2%. The majority of respondents believe that unreliable information on the Internet/social networks should be blocked (82%), including 47% who advocate blocking any such information [6]. Finally, 73% of respondents advocate holding disseminators of disinformation accountable, and 51% advocate banning sources of fakes [6]. In this sense, Russian and foreign researchers understand fake news as “news reports that are intentionally and verifiably false” [9, p. 23].

Thus, the sociological and communicative approach allows not only to reveal manipulative technologies that disguise fake news as truthful information, but also to analyze the communication resources of their dissemination.

Results. In 2022, all Meta company resources were blocked. In 2023, according to the “Roskomsvoboda” registry, almost 400,000 different Internet sources were blocked in the Russian Federation. At the same time, 2,000 new media were registered [10].

Many resources avoided blocking. For example, such as Topor+, Topor - Hot News, Topor Life. All of them are “millionaire” resources, and the number of views can reach 500,000 per day on each of them. Therefore, the channels successfully earn money not only on advertising, but also on propaganda. It is significant that they appeared on VK network in 2017, and in 2019 successfully moved to Telegram. Since the scandalous news content was so indecent that it could exist and freely gain an audience only in the Telegram messenger. And even

there, “Topor+”, “Topor - Hot News” are closed channels (you can only get there via links from other channels, since the channels are excluded from the Telegram search engine), which does not prevent them from being in the Top 5 news Telegram channels and in the top 10 Telegram channels.

According to the SCAN expert group, Telegram channels are placed on the same level as news, analytical and official sites, as well as the central and regional press. This means that in the modern digital space, Telegram channels have become sources of news along with authoritative official media. According to TGstat, the most widely covered news Telegram channels in 2025 were: “Topor Life” 4,089,806, “Moskvach.News of Moscow” — 3,546,975, then “Live. News” — 3,434,917, “RIA Novosti” — 3,364,846, “SMI Rossiya ne Moskva” — 3,243,325 people [11].

Almost all media outlets are represented in Telegram. The most popular of them are: Kommersant, Komsomolskaya Pravda. Despite their popularity, the number of subscribers is less than 300 thousand people.

Finally, there are state, official Telegram channels “Mash”, “RT”, “RBC. News”. Most importantly, “TASS. They try to keep the attention of the mass audience by constantly updating news information with 10-20 posts a day and a selection of the latest news for the evening. Finally, they have tools for feedback with subscribers in the form of opportunities to leave a comment and join the discussion, as well as send their own news for posting.

The following rating news channels are successfully operating: “Siloviki”, “go338”, “Major and General”, publishing unique news about law enforcement agencies and reflecting the views of these agencies on the current events. Their popularity is explained by shock content.

Ratings of political Telegram channels of the Medialogia company by the number of views for February 2025 show an optimistic picture: First place is D. Medvedev’s Telegram channel — 2,1093,000 views per month, second place is V. Volodin’s Telegram channel — 1,8438,000 views per month, etc. [12].

In this context, it seems that the information space of Telegram channels is saturated with high-quality news demonstrating the position of the state and directing the perception of the situation in the country and in the world into a single channel.

But the results of the TGstat rating, based on the number of subscribers, show that the so-called citizen journalism is popular with the mass audience. Of the five most popular news channels, only one — “RIA Novosti” is a news agency and a registered media outlet, while the rest are channels with colloquial vocabulary and a complete lack of fact-checking.

And while “Topor”, “Moskvach and Rossiya ne Moskva” indicate their informality in their names, “Pryamoy Efir Novosti” disguises itself as a serious news resource, although its content is no different from the above. This strategy is used by fake aggregators that spread fakes in the digital space. They use the reputation of popular media and disguise themselves under tube names: “Zarya”, “Vesti”, “Ogni”. For example, the “Inforos” group owns 1,498 domains with similar names [10].

All unreliable resources have the following features. Firstly, they use the format of short notes, not limited by censorship and news printing rules. Secondly, the content of the news is becoming the so-called “shock content”: reprisals, political insiders, scandals and information discrediting the state, authorities and their representatives. They periodically publish ordered materials in the form of rumors, presented as unique data, supported by fake photos and analytics.

Conclusion. In the digital space, news is increasingly used as a propaganda tool. This is facilitated, on the one hand, by current socio-political situation in Russia and in the world, and on the other hand, by expanding communication technologies from automatic selection of news in smart feeds to deepfakes. Fake news as a digital analogue of deliberate rumors gets the opportunity to spread quickly among mass audience through reposting and targeting. At the same time, the danger of fake news content is recognized by both the state and public opinion. In Russia, a legislative basis has been created to counter fake content on the network. Educating mass audience to identify fakes and saturating the information space with quality news through authoritative media is clearly not enough. It is necessary to pay attention to the numerous Telegram channels and other news resources that are sources of fake news.

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