

ACTIVE MEASURES

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Abstract: The term active measures refers to a summary of political actions taken by the former Soviet Union as well as by Russia's national security services today to influence the direction of world events along with the gathering of intelligence data and the production of politically correct assessments of them. Active measures include media manipulation, fake news, special actions that include violence, and they have been used since 1920, including misinformation, propaganda, false news, fabrications, but also assassinations, pressure and political persecution. Active measures are clandestine actions launched to advance the goals of Soviet foreign policy and increase its influence in the world. These activities have long been used by the Soviet Union, but the intensity has increased greatly along with the effectiveness of these measures. Only in the last 5 years, interventions in political systems in accordance with active measures have been observed in the United States, Germany, France, Great Britain, Ukraine, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Austria, Bulgaria, in the Baltic country. and in many other states. One of the methods of active measures is the phenomenon of fake news, which is at least as old as the press itself. However, the ease of establishing media, social networks and their algorithms have multiplied and accelerated the dissemination of rumours, lies, propaganda and conspiracy theories. Another relevant case of active measures interference is the 2016 US presidential election. From 2017 to 2019, the US Senate Counter-Intelligence Commission launched an investigation into Russian efforts in 2016 to interfere with US election infrastructure. The commission published a three-volume report on Russia's anti-election efforts, Russia's use of social media, and on the US government's response to Russian activities. The decline in the market and the digitalization of the media have drastically reduced the number of media organizations and professional employees, especially of correspondents from other cities who were a reliable source of information by the local community and filtered news. With the reduction of media capacities, the possibilities of fake news increase and the challenge of today is to find a way to win this battle. The phenomenon came to the fore even more globally after the US presidential election in 2016 and during the referendum in the UK on secession from the European Union when fake news on the political scene was read more on Facebook than real news. Russian users had posted over 45,000 orders for Brexit in just 48 hours before the referendum. Since 2016, the use of the term fake news has increased by 365%. Another interesting issue to research and analyze is the extent of the impact on citizens through active measures that is related to commercial advertising, which were not key to the operations of fake news factories and were not an accurate measure of operations and goals, although the media and citizens were initially focused on this aspect of the activities.

Keywords: active measures, fake news, propaganda, media and politics

1. INTRODUCTION

Plato complemented Socrates in his idea of deception as a "noble lie", while Machiavelli in his Prince argues that a leader should be "a great pretender and dissembler".

Traditional media, as a bastion of civil society and a pillar of democracy, have seen a significant decline in their influence, as well as public trust in them as a result of both the growth of new technological ways of communication, and the rise of the false news, algorithms, and living in the so-called post-truth era.

The word of the year in 2016 was the phrase "post-truth", while in 2017 that of "fake news", describing or indicating a situation where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to personal beliefs and emotions.

The post-truth phenomenon can be described as circumstances of strictly divergent perspectives on any topic or event in the absence of the presence of credible authority, that no longer intend to persuade but to impose one's own facts while rejecting any counter facts which is the opposite of critical thinking.

The post-truth era refers to the rise of online fake news, hate speech, discreditation of institutions, denial of true facts, offer of alternative facts or alternative truths, etc., which represents an intentional misrepresentation of the facts dispensed by the media on a political or social topic. However, oftentimes the media itself engages in the use of such means in an attempt to attract viewers and visitors to their platforms by offering what the public wants.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper examines a comparative-historical perspective and an extensive and comparative summary of the views and positions of world known communicators, consideration of the media-social circumstances in different political

systems on two continents, measurement of public opinion in different contexts with a focus on the change of the communication with the audience on politics. The research methods include content analysis, surveys, focus groups, experiments, observations. Media theories provide the framework of questionnaires on media effects and their impact ranging from advertising to the Internet. Modern research methods are greatly varied and have a broad range. Finally, the literature used, as well as the literature reviewed together with all the sources of the information used for the purpose of this paper, is voluminous. The focus is mainly on American literature, with the most prominent authors in the field, as the most advanced in media studies, to continue with authors from Western and Central Europe, but in general, the study also covers Southeast Europe, and the applicable circumstances almost on all continents.

In the theoretical elaboration of this topic are used official reports from different institutions such as the Senate of the United States of America, the British Parliament, the European Parliament, the CIA, several Commission of Inquiry and the Special Prosecutor. Preparatory steps began with identifying and collecting the necessary and additional literature and then selecting the necessary materials for the work through consultation with the mentor, analysis of reports of organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Reporter Without Borders, Transparency International, Freedom House, institutions European Commission, US Department of State, Senate and Congress, parliaments of Western countries, etc., as well as the analysis of many public opinion polls in the US and EU, along with the current public opinion polls as part of concrete research.

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3. RESULTS

In a situation where news that addresses people's emotions are more potent than the news that conveys facts, there is a huge increase in the descriptive category in the media and information world. Fake news and false facts, beyond politics and the truth, have already taken an important place in social and media life, as well as in science. Information insecurity and preferential sources impose new realities and circumstances, because yesterday the truth was absolute, while in today's world it is not so much so.

It appears, the truth, it is no longer fashionable, especially in politics. It has probably never been, given that deception and lies have always played an important role, but our collective relationship with the truth has deteriorated. The expanding overall impact of the post truth phenomenon today is linked to two major events, the British referendum on EU membership and the 2016 US presidential election, however other current topics such as manipulated information on the CoVid-19 pandemic, the installation of the 5G telecommunications network, religious sentiments, mass protests in the United States after the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, the distribution of amateur videos on social platforms, or previous topics on the Cold War, Watergate, the war in Iraq and many other cases, cannot be ruled out.

Therefore, I consider that the nature of the post truth in politics refers to the relative irrelevance of the value of truth in the modern world for reasons people would rather believe in comforting lies than face the harsh truth.

Post truth politics and its impact on political developments refers to the overall decline in the importance of traditional epistemological standards in public discourse and therefore political rhetoric that encourages the deepening of this phenomenon constitutes a sophisticated strategic intervention in public forums and social developments.

Today we are in the midst of a cultural transition from a society of facts to a society of data, despite that facts are sacred in science and democracy.

Consequently, the possibility of seizing and misusing of situations, elections, political processes has deep geopolitical, economic, and security implications, making it imperative to find a way out of the challenge of our time and this can only be done through interconnected and coordinated actions by state and private institutions to stop the an infodemic of fake news.

Recommended measures include the advancement of technological means for fact checking and their more pronounced presence than news sources with "alternative facts" and their close cooperation with traditional media. According to the survey presented in this paper, the denunciation of false news has resulted in a significant decline in the credibility of these sources of manipulated information, but also decline of the trust in the media in general. Verification of information accuracy is working today even though it is in the early stages of development. Another

measure could be the verification of the sources of information and publishers themselves, including the greater presence of the scientific, academic, expert world in public discourse.

Government action, but monitored by the genuine non-governmental sector to prevent the restriction of human rights and censorship, is essential. Recently, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, in cooperation with the OSCE and the Organization of American States, in March 2017, adopted a joint statement⁷⁵ warning against the effects of fake news and propaganda, but also condemned state efforts for censorship and it is precisely this thin and delicate line between fighting post truth and censorship over free speech that will be the border frame of our efforts to adapt our activity with the infodemic of our century.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Active measures⁷⁶ refers to a summary of political actions undertaken by the former Soviet Union as well the security services of today's Russia in order to influence the direction of world events together with collecting intelligence data and producing politically correct analysis out of those. Active measures include media manipulation, fake news, special activities that include violence, whereas those have been used since 1920 up to date and include disinformation, propaganda, fake news, fabrications, but also assassinations, pressures and political prosecution. Active measures represent clandestine activities initiated to advance the Soviet foreign affairs goals and increasing its influence in the world.⁷⁷

In May 1979, former active measures officers of KGB Stanislav A. Levchenko stated that the "KGB through its active measures disorders or changes the reality. People through these deceptions support Russian policies without even being aware of it and thinking that they're supporting something else. This is the art of the active measures, its kind of soviet black magic."

Active measures include open and secret propaganda, manipulation of international organisations, fabrications, deceptions, sabotage and terrorism for psychological effects, fake news, disinformation and usage of agents for influence.

For decades, soviet active measures have promoted a conspiracy and disinformation discourse, in particular related to the United States as KGB authored the articles and fabricated letters related to the assassination of Kenedy, CIA role in Martin Luther King's death, publications against Reagan in Denmark, France and India, including also the American role in occupying the grand mosque in Mecca or that USA produced the AIDS virus against black people, etc.

In an interview with CNN in '98, former KGB General Oleg Kalugin said that the active measures were the heart and soul of Russian intelligence as it was not just collecting information, but mining the system and the institutions.⁷⁸ Also, in May 2013, Russian General Valeriy Gerasimov published the famous article "The value of science is in the prediction."⁷⁹ Gerasimov invented the new warfare, a war that seems more as hijacking enemy societies rather than territories.

Gerasimov's doctrine builds upon a framework for the new methods and emphasises that nonmilitary tactics are not an addition to use of force, but the preferred way to win through constant creation of continuous unrests and internal conflicts.

USA and Great Britain was also a target of this warfare through distribution of intentionally false information, deception, hacking materials and creation of alliances with particular groups without even being noticed.

This interference caused a big debate in the USA and UK during and after the presidential elections of 2016 which led to the creation of the special prosecution to investigate Russian interference in 2016 and the Brexit referendum. According to Gerasimov, the info space opens asymmetrical opportunities to decrease the war potential of the enemy.

The fake news phenomena as an effective method of active measures is as old as press itself, but the easiness to create media, the invention of internet, social platforms and their powerful algorithms have multiplied and facilitated the distribution of rumours, lies, propaganda and conspiracy theories.

Fake news have returned with the tendency of sensationalism and extreme, aiming to instigate emotions and prejudice challenging such the journalism norms because the algorithms and aggregators do not observe the correctness or objectivity of the news.

⁷⁵ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56336#.WO4euVt9670>

⁷⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84B00049R001303150031-0.pdf>

⁷⁷ <https://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/russia/rgb-su0523.htm>

⁷⁸ Oleg Kalugin, "Inside the KGB: An interview with retired KGB Maj. Gen. Oleg Kalugin," *CNN*, January J998.

⁷⁹ https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf

Research have shown that Russian users have published more than 45.000 messages for Brexit only in the last 48 hours of the referendum campaign, whereas the British communication agency report of 2018 proved Russian interference on social platforms amounting to 4.6 million euro during the referendum campaign.⁸⁰ Also, since 2016, the usage of the term fake news has increased for 365 %.⁸¹

In August of 2017, USA imposed sanctions against Russia for the 2016 elections interference and after the nerve gas attack against former Russian Skripal agent on British soil in 2018, USA imposed additional sanctions to include 16 institutions and individuals working for the Internet Research Agency known as a Russian troll factory.

Russian interference specialised in election intrusion, instigating ethnic tensions and provoking conflict and this was confirmed in the report of the American Senate committee on Counterintelligence that covered the investigation between 2017 and 2019⁸².

The report was published in March 2020 and stresses that Russian activists related to the Internet Research Agency stationed in St. Petersburg have used social platforms to develop an information warfare aiming to distribute disinformation and cause societal divisions in USA.⁸³

According to the experts during the hearing in the Senate, Russia has implemented an unprecedented and very successful campaign to influence the American political discourse during the election campaign.

The report claims that the activities of IRA have been very wide and included targets beyond results of the 2016 presidential elections, but rather mine the public trust in democratic processes and institutions.⁸⁴

The report confirmed that Russian government ordered and supported IRA interference.⁸⁵ However, Russian history of usages of social platforms for operations of online influence started long before 2016 and its wider than just IRA.⁸⁶

Even though the infowar was staged at the 2016 American presidential elections, the operational focus of IRA was societal divisions in USA such as race, immigration, second amendment and attempts to put Americans one against each other and against the Government.

Evidence can be found in the commercial contents of IRA on Facebook, Youtube and Twitter where over 66% of the content is related to racial issues, targeting directly african-americans. Another interesting issue is the commercial ads of IRA and according to Facebook, IRA has spent about 100.000 dollars in ads on social networks which is minor compared to their monthly budget of 1.25 million dollars. IRA has advertised about 3.400 times on Facebook and Instagram and this is minor compared to over 61.500 posts on Facebook, 116.000 posts on Instagram and 10.4 million tweets that were organically created by IRA activists with masked identities.

Even though all known profiles related to IRA were suspended or shut down in 2017, commercial researchers continue to reveal additional IRA accounts dedicated to the distribution of malcontent. In October 2018, over 6.6 million tweets were examined with regards to fake news and conspiracy theories and over 80% of the accounts are still active and continue to publish more than 1 million posts on a normal day.⁸⁷

The rapid development of technology coincides with the lost of trust of the citizens towards media and the institutions and this has made it possible for the democratic institutions to be challenged such as in the cases of the American presidential elections or the British EU referendum.⁸⁸

British Government report on Russian interference during Brexit was read online by almost 1.600 times and over 63% of the readers where with foreign IP addresses from Russia, first time visitors, whereas usually over 80% of the visitors of the webpage are British.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/nov/13/theresa-may-accuses-russia-of-interfering-in-elections-and-fake-news>

⁸¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/620230/EPRS_ATA\(2018\)620230_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/620230/EPRS_ATA(2018)620230_EN.pdf)

⁸² <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/publications/report-select-committee-intelligence-united-states-senate-russian-active-measures>

⁸³ https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf

⁸⁴ Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections," *Intelligence Community Assessment (Unclassified Version)*, January 6, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_O1.pdf.

⁸⁵ Indictment, *United States v. Internet Research Agency*, et al., Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF (D.D.C. Feb. 16, 2018).

⁸⁶ Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti, "The Plot to Subvert an Election - Unraveling the Russia Story So Far," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2018.

⁸⁷ Matthew Hindman and Vlad Barash, "Disinformation, 'Fake News' and Influence Campaigns on Twitter," Knight Foundation, October. 4, 2018, <https://knightfoundation.org/articles/seven-ways-misinformation-spread-during-the-2016-election>.

⁸⁸ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomeds/1791/179109.htm#footnote-085>

⁸⁹ Këto statistika janë siguruar nga Njësia e Rrjetit dhe Publikimeve nga Kuvendi britanik.

Cardiff university research and the Council's Digital Lab has a detailed presentation of Kremlins influence over British politics.⁹⁰ Kremlin related media has published a significant number of articles on British referendum. The researches of "89 Up" have analysed the distributed articles and identified 261 anti-european articles in its report through the mean media RT and Sputnik⁹¹ and those articles went viral with over 134 million potential impressions compared to the impression on the leave.eu and the Vote Leave which had 33 and 11 millions respectively on their content.⁹²

Subsequently, in 2019, Facebook removed over 289 pages and 75 profiles that had over 790.000 followers and had spent 135.000 dollars on ads between October 2013 and January 2019 as the websites were controlled by employees of Russian state news agency Sputnik that were pretending to be independent pages that organised about 190 events.⁹³

According to New York Times, in November 2018, Facebook has discovered suspicious Russian activity on its platform since 2016 in attempts to influence American presidential elections⁹⁴

Russian elections interference was not focused only on Facebook. In October 2018, Twitter published its entire archive of tweets from the entire world distributed by the accounts that originated from IRA and it included 3.841 accounts that originated from Russia and 770 other accounts potentially from Iran and they had all posted more than 10 million times on Twitter and posted over 2 million pictures. All these accounts were used to influence the US presidential elections and the British referendum, but also for the Ukrainian war.⁹⁵

finally, in February 2019, the senior advisor to Russian President Putin, Vladislav Sukroy would say: "Foreign politicians accuse Russia of interference in elections and referendums all over the planet. But in fact it is more serious than just that. Russia interfere with their mind and they don't know what to do with their changed awareness".⁹⁶

5. CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon beyond truth can be described as a moment of strictly divergent perspectives on any topic or event in the absence of the presence of credible authority, because we no longer aim to persuade, but rather to impose our facts and reject the facts of the others that is the opposite of critical observations.

The era of beyond the truth as a consequence of the active measures refers to the rise of fake news online, hate speech, discrediting institutions, denial of facts, presentation of alternative truths, etc, which is deliberate misrepresentation of the facts in the media on a political or social topic, but it often happens that the media themselves make such efforts to attract visitors and viewers to their platforms by offering what the public wants.

The fading of the beyond the truth phenomenon will not result in broad public agreement and harmony, but will create a healthy infosphere where fruitful debate can take place and in order to achieve this fading, it requires the participation of all to get out of this labyrinth of truths and alternative facts because censorship is not the way to stop unreliable news. The race to gain the trust of the public is to provide the most reliable alternatives as well as increase the credibility of the traditional vis-a-vis monopoly media of social media platforms.

People today do not need the media as an intermediary channel to transmit the message due to the possession of the personal channel for transmitting the message, while the consumption of news through the personalising capacities of the Internet and the very powerful algorithms of social platforms has impoverished the media supply environment and it dramatically changed the way people understand the world around them.

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⁹¹ Ruptly GmbH është video agjencion lajmesh në pronë të rrjetit televiziv rus RT

⁹² 89up.org/russia-report, 2 tetor 2018.

⁹³ <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/01/removing-cib-from-russia/>

⁹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/14/technology/facebook-data-russia-election-racism.html>

⁹⁵ https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/enabling-further-research-of-information-operations-on-twitter.html

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