INFORMATION STRATEGY AND MANIPULATION TECHNIQUES IN ARMED CONFLICTS

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Abstract: This scientific article analyzes the role and impact of information strategies and manipulation techniques in modern armed conflicts. Information warfare is viewed as an integral element of warfare, employed to influence public opinion, politically and morally weaken the opposing side, and mislead the international community. The research examines widespread fake news and emotion-driven information manipulation, using the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts as case studies. The main research question explored is: "What strategies are used in information warfare during modern armed conflicts, and how do they affect information consumers?" Qualitative research methods such as observation and content analysis were applied, as they help reveal how information strategies function as a real force in warfare. The study concludes with recommendations on ensuring information security, promoting media literacy, and developing systematic approaches to counter manipulation.

Keywords: information warfare, disinformation, framing, manipulation, strategic communication, Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine conflict

QUROLLI TO'QNASHUVLARDA AXBOROT STRATEGIYASI VA MANIPULYATSIYA USULLARI

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu ilmiy maqolada zamonaviy qurolli to'qnashuvlarda axborot strategiyasi va manipulyatsiya usullarining tutgan o'rni va ta'siri tahlil qilinadi. Axborot urushi urushning ajralmas elementi sifatida qaralib, u orqali jamoatchilik fikriga ta'sir o'tkazish, raqib tomonni siyosiy va axloqiy jihatdan zaiflashtirish, xalqaro hamjamiyatni chalg'itish kabi strategik maqsadlar ko'zda tutilishi ko'rsatiladi. Tadqiqot davomida Rossiya-Ukraina va Isroil-Falastin to'qnashuvlari misolida keng tarqalgan yolg'on xabarlar, emotsiyaga asoslangan axborot manipulyatsiyasi kabi holatlar tahlil qilindi. Maqolada "Zamonaviy qurolli mojarolarda axborot urushi qanday strategiyalar orqali olib boriladi va ularning axborot iste'molchisiga ta'siri qanday?" savoliga javob topishga harakat qilingan. Bu jarayonda Sifatiy tadqiqot metodlaridan ya'ni kuzatish va kontent tahlilidan foydalanilgan. Chunki bu metodlar asosida to'plangan ma'lumotlar orqali axborot strategiyasining urushdagi real kuch sifatida qanday ishlatilishi ochib beriladi. Tadqiqot yakunida axborot xavfsizligini ta'minlash, media savodxonlikni rivojlantirish va manipulyatsiyalarga qarshi tizimli yondashuvlar taklif etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: axborot urushi, dezinformatsiya, framing, manipulyatsiya, strategik kommunikatsiya, Isroil- Falastin, Ukraina-Rossiya urushi

ИНФОРМАЦИОННАЯ СТРАТЕГИЯ И МЕТОДЫ МАНИПУЛЯЦИИ В УСЛОВИЯХ ВООРУЖЁННЫХ КОНФЛИКТОВ

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Аннотация: В данной научной статье анализируется роль и влияние информационной стратегии и методов манипуляции в современных вооружённых конфликтах. Информационная война рассматривается как неотъемлемая часть военных действий, посредством которой ставятся

стратегические цели, такие как воздействие на общественное мнение, ослабление противника в политическом и моральном плане, введение в заблуждение международного сообщества. В ходе исследования были проанализированы случаи распространения ложных новостей и манипуляции информацией на эмоциональном уровне на примере конфликта между Россией и Украиной, а также противостояния между Израилем и Палестиной. В статье предпринята попытка ответить на вопрос: «Какими стратегиями ведётся информационная война в современных вооружённых конфликтах и каково её влияние на потребителя информации?». В рамках работы использовались качественные методы исследования, в частности наблюдение и контент-анализ. Эти методы позволили выявить, как информационная стратегия используется как реальная сила в условиях войны. В заключении предлагаются системные подходы к обеспечению информационной безопасности, развитию медиаграмотности и противодействию манипуляциям.

Ключевые слова: информационная война, дезинформация, фрейминг, манипуляция, стратегическая коммуникация, Израиль-Палестина, война Россия-Украина.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, armed conflicts have always been fought not only with weapons but also for dominance in the information sphere. In the era of globalization and the internet, this dynamic has taken on an entirely new form, and information strategy has become one of the key factors of military success. Every war takes place on two levels — one on the battlefield and the other in people's minds. For this reason, military information policy and manipulative methods hold a prominent place in modern journalism, political science, and information security studies. An information strategy refers to a communication system designed to influence public opinion during conflicts, strengthen a country's international

position, weaken the internal unity of the opposing side, and boost the morale of one's own army and civilians. The war in Ukraine and the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip differ significantly from previous armed conflicts. In both cases, we observe two types of warfare: one on the battlefield and the other in the information domain, conducted with unconventional "weapons." Both conflicts led to an unprecedented spread of disinformation worldwide. In the Gaza war, false information was widely circulated via social media — even major media outlets in various countries broadcasted this content without verification. This was largely due to the rapid development of artificial intelligence, which made it more difficult to determine whether images were genuinely from war zones or fabricated. In addition, the rise of citizen journalism has posed challenges, particularly in terms of verifying the accuracy of the information being shared. (Georgiana, S., 2023)

Although the wars between today's societies are fought on the front line, it can be stated that these wars are carried out at the point of managing perceptions. Information wars are waged not only by the states party to the war but also by those living in other states in order to create a positive or negative perception about the countries participating in the war. The most basic strategy applied in this sense is fake news. (Kazım Babacan., Mehmet Sinan Tam., 2022). Fake news is often built around controversy. Wars, religious and ethnic conflicts, and internal political struggles around the world are frequently driven or exacerbated by false information. For instance, during so-called "color revolutions," opposition groups and third-party actors disseminated fake news via the internet and mass media to expose the "true face" of ruling governments. The conflicts in Ukraine, the civil war in Syria, and the war in Iraq are all rooted in — or have been fueled by — disinformation. The Collins English Dictionary named "fake news" the most used phrase of 2017. (Qosimova. N., 2019) Information manipulation in armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon. It has manifested in various forms for centuries. As noted by Associate Professor Boybo'ta Do'stqoraev in the book "O'zbekiston jurnalistikasi tarixi" (History of journalism in Uzbekistan), during the Russian

Empire's colonization of Central Asia, ideological manipulation was prominently used in the pages of "Turkestanskiy Vedomosti" (1870). The newspaper's article dated May 4, 1913, titled K.P. Kaufman – "Founder of Turkestanskiye Vedomosti", partially quotes how the colonizers used information to legitimize their conquests. Manipulative influence was expressed in the following ways:

• Justifying the colonizers' expansionist policies;

• Showcasing the military power of the imperial army;

• Boosting the fighting spirit of soldiers;

• Instilling fear in the local population through displays of military might. (A. Safarov., 2023)

This article aims to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies are used in information warfare during modern armed conflicts?

2. How are the roles and effectiveness of information strategies and manipulative techniques assessed in the context of armed confrontations?

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to analyze how information strategies and manipulation techniques are employed during modern armed conflicts. To achieve this, a qualitative analytical approach was adopted. The selected methods serve to identify tools of information manipulation, examine their content and nature, and understand their influence on public consciousness.

1. Document and Content Analysis
2. The primary methods applied in this research were document analysis and content analysis. The following materials were examined:

–Fabricated videos, edited images, and AI-generated visuals disseminated in the context of the Russia–Ukraine and Israel–Hamas conflicts;

–Relevant news and rebuttals issued by official and unofficial news agencies and various international media organizations.

2. Discourse Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of information manipulation strategies, discourse analysis was employed. This method facilitated a linguistic, semantic, and contextual analysis of selected propaganda messages and widely shared narratives on social media platforms. The research utilized case study analysis based on two major events:

• Disinformation campaigns circulated during the Russia–Ukraine war (2022–2023);

 • False news stories and manipulated imagery spread during the Israel–Hamas conflict (2023).

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In the war in Ukraine, a weapon more dangerous than military equipment is being widely used: disinformation, the spread of false information, and propaganda techniques. This was stated by Germany's Minister of State for Culture and Media, Claudia Roth, at the Global Media Forum held in Bonn on June 20–21, 2022. The invasion of Ukraine has become a serious test for the media. Journalists working in life-threatening war zones are now expected to distinguish truth from lies, and facts from fabrications. A report by Reporters Without Borders also notes that disinformation and propaganda have intensified significantly in recent times. According to analysts, Russian media greatly increased the dissemination of false information about Ukraine after the invasion began. A few examples of fabricated stories published by Russian outlets include:

• "Kyiv is sending young children to fight,", "Ukraine has developed bulletproof vests for pregnant women", "Ukrainian refugee mothers are selling their newborns in Swiss bunkers", "A concentration camp has been established near Odesa for those unwilling to fight against Russia." These headlines were identified by Ukraine's Stop Fake project. The platform also reports that in the previous year, Russia employed artificial intelligence tools to produce some of these fake stories. In one such video, the commander of the Ukrainian armed forces appears to be calling for a coup, while another shows a conversation allegedly involving President Zelensky's wife.

Researcher Dilshod Ro'ziqulov, in his monograph "Harbiy jurnalistikada axborot integratsiyasining nazariy va amaliy xususiyatlari" (Theoretical and Practical Features of Information Integration in Military Journalism) offers a nuanced perspective. He argues that, at certain stages of the conflict, more fake news was spread from the Ukrainian side than from the Russian side. For example, President Zelensky once stated that soldiers defending Snake Island had been killed and would be posthumously awarded the title of "Hero of Ukraine," yet it was later confirmed that the soldiers were alive and taken prisoner. Furthermore, Ukrainian and Western media were accused of spreading unverified claims that Russia had bombed Ukrainian civilians using military aircraft. The only response from Russian authorities was a brief press conference held by the Ministry of Defense. According to Ro'ziqulov, Russian military journalists should have countered these accusations more effectively—by broadcasting live from military units to present the real situation. From the sources analyzed, the following conclusions can be drawn: In any armed conflict, each side views its own interests as paramount. These kinds of fake news stories mislead information consumers, leading to the emergence of new forms of information manipulation. (Ro'ziqulov, D., 2024)

Key manipulation strategies include:

• Framing – presenting information within a predetermined narrative or angle.

 • Visual manipulation – presenting photos or videos out of context to mislead audiences. This technique is particularly prevalent on social media during armed conflicts. Alarmingly, even reputable and trusted news outlets sometimes unknowingly rely on such manipulated visuals. For example, a staged photograph originally taken by a Saudi photographer in 2014 as part of an art project resurfaced online. This time, it was falsely presented as a scene from the war in Gaza. The same image had previously been misattributed as originating from the Syrian war. In June 2024, a viral post claimed the image showed a child sleeping beside their parents' grave—again, a completely fabricated context.

He sleeps next to his parents grave 💔🏴
We will judge the Zionist responsible for the lie that they are chosen. Their works prove otherwise.

MISCAPTIONED

(Source: Reuters image)

However, the widely circulated image on social media was originally published on January 7, 2014, on the Instagram page of a Saudi Arabian photographer named Aziz Alotaibi. In response to comments under the photo, Alotaibi clarified, "This is a staged image that tells a story about orphanhood." His profile also contains

other photos taken in the same location with the same child. In a 2014 interview with journalist Harald Doornbos, Alotaibi explained that the photo was created as part of an art project. The concept was conceived with his nephew, and they traveled to the city of Yanbu in Saudi Arabia, where they constructed grave-like mounds using sand and stones for the shoot.

In Romania, the National Audiovisual Council, which monitors compliance with audiovisual legislation, has targeted three T.V. stations. They provided footage of alleged bombings of the Gaza Strip, and the images used were taken from Platform X. The footage was of fireworks in Algeria after the victory over football team CR Belouizdad. However, members of the National Broadcasting Council have been quite sympathetic to these editorial lapses, issuing simple warnings to those responsible. (Informational War: Analyzing False News in the Israel Conflict (Georgiana, S., 2023)

• Disinformation — the dissemination of false, misleading, or deceptive information — is another major issue in armed conflicts during the era of globalization. The strategic importance, but also a certain obsession with disinformation, is also confirmed by the statement of former KGB chief Yuri Andropov, who said: "disin-formation has the effect of cocaine, if you sniff it once or twice, it may not change your life. But if you use it every day, it can make you an addict - a different person" In the modern digital technological environment, disinformation are given more media space and power, and the term weaponization of information is used to stress their lethality, penetration, and impact on the targeted population, nation, or society. (Josip Mandić., Darijo Klarić., 2023)

The Gaza hospital explosion and media slippage The timing of the Gaza hospital explosion was a real test of how fake news is distributed (Kahn, G., 2023). Media around the world distributed the message from the Gaza Health Minister that a rocket allegedly fired from Israel hit a Gaza hospital and caused over 500 deaths and injuries. Even though Israel later proved that the rocket that hit the

hospital belonged to Islamic Jihad, this news did not matter as the information from the Health Minister had already been spread by Hamas and led to widespread social protests in Turkey or Jordan and later in Europe. This was like a test given to media organisations worldwide, and the results illustrated how easily journalists can be manipulated. So, media outlets published a series of corrections. The New York Times published an editors' note saying their reporting "left readers with an incorrect impression of what was known and how credible the reporting was" (Kahn, G., 2023).

• Selective reporting — the practice of highlighting only one side or selectively presenting either positive or negative facts — is another manipulation technique. For example, during the Israel–Gaza conflict, both parties highlighted their own casualties in the media while demonizing the actions of the opposing side. In armed conflicts, the side that gains informational dominance often secures political advantage. Manipulative strategies are not only aimed at shaping public perception but also serve to legitimize military actions. As such, both journalists and media consumers must develop media literacy to identify and resist such manipulative techniques.

CONCLUSION

The information space in armed conflicts is now as crucial as the battlefield itself. Through information strategies and manipulation methods, states not only gain military advantages but also achieve political and diplomatic successes. This situation demands a high level of media literacy, critical thinking, and ethical approach from journalists, politicians, and ordinary citizens. Therefore, when we hear about any war, our first focus should be on how it is being "narrated." The research found that fake news and disinformation campaigns are being planned and disseminated through centralized and networked methods. Particularly, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, such information attacks were carried out on a large scale, creating significant public turmoil and

distrust, as demonstrated by examples. The strategy of pressuring users' emotional consciousness through AI-generated false images, edited videos, and emotion-driven manipulative narratives was observed. These situations lead to the following conclusions:

1. Information strategy is an integral part of warfare, and accepting it indifferently can lead to serious military and political consequences.

2. Manipulation methods are mainly implemented through emotional, visual, and discursive tools, leading to the distortion of real events.

3. Fact-checking platforms play an important role in preventing fake news, but their effectiveness remains insufficient, especially in the early stages of a conflict.

4. Protecting the information space should be a priority in any state's information security policy.

5. Increasing media literacy can help build immunity against information attacks by developing the ability to recognize false news within the general public.

At the same time, international organizations, mass media, and academic circles need to deeply study the global consequences of information warfare and develop systematic strategies in international cooperation to combat it. Overall, information is the weapon of the new generation. Whoever controls it shapes the interpretation of events and public opinion. Therefore, in the context of military conflicts, not only is there a struggle for weapons, but also for the truth.

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