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THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION ON POLAND'S POLITICAL CULTURE ON VIRTUAL SPACE

WPŁYW ROSYJSKIEJ PROPAGANDY I DEZINFORMACJI NA POLSKĄ KULTURĘ POLITYCZNĄ W PRZESTRZENI WIRTUALNEJ

Abstract: Contemporary political debate – public and individual – is undergoing progressive degradation, exemplified by the growing problem of hate speech, fake news and manipulation etc. The transfer of this debate to the web – further reinforced by the pandemic period – is resulting in the increased involvement of previously relatively passive citizens. The most serious current, though not de facto modern, problem affecting the state of domestic political culture is the disinformation and propaganda of the Russian Federation, especially that part of it directed directly against Poland and its society. Paradoxically, however, apart from the decidedly negative aspects of Russian propaganda, a phenomenon of political activism of Poles is observed. An area of this activism is the Internet, through which the process of strengthening the democratically desirable “participatory” model of political culture is taking place. The text is a reflection on the current state of political culture and its role in levelling the crisis of democracy.

Zarys treści: Współczesna debata polityczna – publiczna i indywidualna – ulega postępującej degradacji, czego przykładem jest rosnący problem mowy nienawiści, fake newsów, manipulacji itp. Przeniesienie tej debaty do sieci – dodatkowo wzmocnione okresem pandemii – skutkuje zwiększonym zaangażowaniem dotychczas relatywnie biernych obywateli. Najważniejszym obecnie, choć de facto niemłodym problemem, wpływającym na stan rodzimej kultury politycznej jest dezinformacja i propaganda Federacji Rosyjskiej, zwłaszcza ta jej część skierowana bezpośrednio przeciwko Polsce i jej społeczeństwu. Paradoksalnie jednak, obok zdecydowanie negatywnych aspektów rosyjskiej propagandy, obserwuje się zjawisko aktywizacji politycznej Polaków. Obszarem tej aktywizacji jest Internet, za pośrednictwem którego odbywa się proces umacniania „partycypacyjnego” (pożądanego dla demokracji) modelu kultury politycznej. Tekst jest refleksją nad obecnym stanem kultury politycznej i jej rolą w niwelowaniu kryzysu demokracji.

Keywords: propaganda, disinformation, political culture, information warfare

Słowa kluczowe: propaganda, dezinformacja, kultura polityczna, wojna informacyjna

Introduction

The fact of the sharpening of public debate, especially in the area of social media, seems obvious. Its components are also well known and described, such as hate speech, confinement of users in filter bubbles, radicalisation of views and closure to dialogue etc. The virtual space of political debate is linked to its real space, but the opinions expressed online are much less balanced and more aggressive.¹ In the real space, on the other hand, there are physical attacks of violence and self-aggression.² It is also a fact that this state of affairs is a global phenomenon taking on, depending on the country or region, different specificities. It is part of a crisis of democracy, affecting in a multidimensional way an extremely important component of democratic systems referred to in political science as political culture. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the earlier Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's much earlier, unspoken hybrid war against the wider West are certainly factors of great importance for the current developmental trend of political culture.

The description of the causes of the aforementioned crisis is undoubtedly an important and interesting issue, and one that is often addressed in political science. Here, however, we restrict the area of analysis to the space of social media in relation to political culture and the impact of Russian propaganda on it. Conclusions from both our own long-term research and that of other authors analysing the modus operandi and nature of the Russian propaganda machine, allow us to posit the thesis of the country's significant responsibility and participation in the architecture of the aforementioned crisis. Is the crisis of political debate and culture (or, indeed, the crisis of democracy I will mention later) planned and implemented by Russia? No. It is a phenomenon (mega-trend) which is the result of many processes (trends) which coexist. However, there is no doubt about the fact of the great responsibility and involvement of Russia and its satellite³ and allied states in this process.

Propaganda and disinformation

Many analysts and political commentators are inclined to argue that the onset of geopolitical "problems" with Russia coincides with the US "reset", initiated by US

¹ Stoppel, A., *War on the net, or the other face of war in Ukraine*, [in:] 'Scientific and Methodical Review: Education for Security', year xiv number 4/2021 (53), Poznań 2022, pp. 15–28.

² Examples of this include the assassination of the Mayor of Gdansk Paweł Adamowicz in January 2019 or the act of self-immolation by Piotr Szczęsny in protest against the Law and Justice government in October 2017.

³ Belarus, in particular, has been particularly active in the fields of propaganda, disinformation and agenting within Europe. See: Aro, J., *Putin's Trolls*, Krakow 2020.

President Barack Obama in 2009. In my opinion, the “problems” with Russia, resulting today in the final end of the relatively peaceful post-Cold War period, are much earlier. It is Russian imperialism, which has been present in every historical period and political form of that state. It is not the intent of this text to discuss the problem of Russian imperialism as this issue already has an extensive literature. Let us assume that the “problem” with Russia de facto never ceased to exist. It diminished after the collapse of the Soviet Union, only to grow successively after the Russian “smuta” period of the 1990s. It manifested itself again on a global scale in the first decade of the 21st century, benefiting to a large extent from the goodwill of the West (unfortunately sometimes also from its enormous naivety).⁴

The intentional, organised and long-term nature of the activities of Russian propaganda can be shown precisely with the example of digital media, and even before the year 2000, the informal caesura for the Web2.0 phenomenon. Several studies conducted on the commentary layer of the then leading Polish news portals (Onet.pl, Wp.pl and Interia.pl)⁵ concerning online aggression and propaganda revealed a number of interesting observations. The period of analysis was immediately after the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. At the time, the Onet.pl portal allowed both logged-in and anonymous users to comment on forum articles. This feature was eventually disabled in 2018, precisely because of the problem of Russian propaganda taking control of these platforms. When looking at the activity of Onet.pl users whose comments were clearly pro-Russian, anti-democratic and anti-Ukrainian in nature, it was noted that they operated 24 hours a day. Posts were “produced” from the accounts of these users with an average frequency of 3 to 8 minutes. Every 8 to 10 hours there was a break in posting, usually no longer than 1 hour, but most often up to 30 minutes. On the basis of the frequency of breaks, it was possible to select eight groups of accounts (a total of 96 accounts out of several hundred analysed) for which the breaks occurred at exactly the same time (with an average difference of up to 10 minutes). This made it possible to hypothesise that these accounts were handled in an organised manner by a group of people working in shifts: one copywriter or, in colloquial terms, troll, therefore handled around a dozen accounts during an 8 to 10 hour shift (it was assumed at the time that there could have been more, but not all of them were selected because, for example, a given troll might have used some of them less frequently). The continuous activity of the singled out accounts lasted for more than three years (from the Russian aggression in 2014 until the end of the observations in 2017). They were certainly still active after this period, until the media owners closed

⁴ The example of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines should be mentioned. See: Rosicki, R., Rosicki, G., *Significance of the Nord Stream gas pipeline for Poland*, [in:] “Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego”, 2012, no. 4, pp. 139–156.

⁵ Pawlak, P., *War rhetoric in virtual space. Analysis of the content of the commentary layer of Polish information portals*, [in:] R. Sapeńko, P. Pochyły (eds.) *Wojna/pokój humanistyka wobec wyzwań współczesności*, Zielona Góra 2017, pp. 272–296; Pawlak, P., *The nature of political discussion on information portals. A case study*, [in:] ‘Studia Europaea Gnesnensia’, Poznań–Gniezno 2016, vol. 13, pp. 201–224; Pawlak, P., *Socializing political discussions using the example of the Internet: aggression and the search for compromise – a case study*, [in:] “News of Irkutsk State University. Psychology Series”, Irkutsk 2014, no. 9, pp. 57–68.

down the discussion forums. An analysis of the history of the accounts mentioned brought even more interesting insights. About 30% of them were created in 1999, i.e. three years after the Onet.pl portal was launched, as soon as the possibility to post comments on it appeared and, importantly, even before Vladimir Putin assumed power in Russia (which happened on 31 December 1999). These accounts became active only at selected times: first on the occasion of the 11 September 2001 attacks (activity for about a year of time); again on a large scale during the Second Gulf War in 2003 (activity for about 3 years); then on the occasion of Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008 (activity for about a year of time). In all these cases the activity lasted 24 hours a day and was also carried out in an alleged shift pattern.

The accounts in question and the content they produced are the product of just eight shift-work "positions." What is meant by "post" is both the physical workplace (which was probably still the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s) and, as is probably already the norm today, remote work, involving the transfer of operation of a network of troll-accounts from one shift to another. Certainly, many more such "posts" were set aside to handle a single information portal. How many, unfortunately, we do not know. It is also worth mentioning that the described instances of organised Russian propaganda influence significantly predate the creation of the so-called "network brigades" of the Internet Research Agency, popularly known as the "troll factory," which has been operating at Olgino since 2013. The work of the trolls in the Agency actually resembled that in a factory, with shifts of workers arriving in the building at a specific hour. From informal information⁶ it can be inferred that this form of Russian disinformation production did not work from the technical point of view. The Olgino centre quickly became the target of pro-Western hackers and certainly also the target of special services' attention. From about mid-2017 onwards, the Russians therefore began to move to a mode of disintegrated remote work (otherwise closer to the nature of a network).⁷ The reader may have noticed that tackling the problem of Russian propaganda is moving in the dark, so to speak, and mostly based on circumstantial evidence. For this is a front of information warfare for which the term "fog of war", coined by Carl von Clausewitz, is an apt description.

The question must be asked – why does the enormous scale of Russian disinformation not meet with a symmetrical response from the West? Well, paradoxically, the lack of a symmetrical response can be seen from the point of view of democracy and its political culture as a positive phenomenon. Democratic states and societies respond in a democratic manner. The centres and staff of Russian propaganda are beings anctioned, being analysed and, as far as possible, exposed. Numerous articles (such as this text) and formal documents⁸ are being written, guidelines for the media are being

⁶ Miloš, G., Mlejnková, P., *Challenging Online Propaganda and Disinformation in the 21st Century*, Cham (Switzerland) 2021.

⁷ In 2017, the official profiles of the Internet Research Agency were successively suspended and closed in the social media area. Among other things, this is what happened to the Agency's Twitter account.

⁸ For example, the EU Strategy 2019–2024, which includes a number of solutions to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation.

developed, certain communication canons are naturally crystallising and measures are being taken in the area of the media itself.⁹ In democratic states there is a legally regulated and market-driven profession of copywriters, present primarily in advertising and political marketing. Such individuals also often do the work of moderating discussions in specific areas of the web, mostly in professional forums and social media. Political parties in democratic states use the services of marketing companies, contemptuously referred to as troll farms by political opponents. However, organising such a gigantic yet anti-democratic enterprise as the Russian propaganda machine is simply, and fortunately, impossible in democratic systems. The provision of a huge budget, uninterrupted continuity of work, personnel facilities, IT support (both in the form of software for multiplying activities – likes, for example, and IT protection against external attacks) and the freedom to enforce strict secrecy requirements (including about torture and death) are only possible if two factors are met. The first is a totalitarian or authoritarian state and the second is a society that has operated for centuries in a servile (and/or parochial) type of political culture. It is these two factors that have enabled states such as Russia, Belarus, China and North Korea to effectively control online content and impose their preferred narrative within their own countries, as well as a massive propaganda and disinformation campaign directed outwards. However, while Chinese propaganda tends to have a selective dimension, with a strong focus on selected business areas,¹⁰ Russian propaganda is far more aggressive, ideological and political in nature and targets democratic societies and states.¹¹ This is how Russia's organised and long-term propaganda activity has co-created the phenomenon of the so-called crisis of democracy. An analysis of this problem based on the concept of political culture makes it possible to grasp serious differences in the cultural space of the warring parties and their allies. It is in this space that a struggle is taking place, the outcome of which will prove crucial for the future of democracy and the free world.

With regard to social media, the destructive work of the Russian propaganda machine may be frightening in its scale and systematic nature, however, it should be borne in mind that this machine was at work well before it was subjected (as it is now) to scientific and social criticism. With the increase in virtual participation in the political culture of citizens of Western countries, the problem and extent of Russian propaganda is being successively exposed, which, in my opinion, will contribute both

⁹ Such as the removal of comments and even entire accounts identified as spreading Russian disinformation. Another example is the complete removal by the Onet.pl portal of comments to articles, or the removal by the CDA.pl portal of all Russian and Soviet war films, which took place a few days after the Russian aggression against Ukraine on 24.02.2022 (only a few films remained, which were not part of the portal's offer, but were materials added by individual users). Now, however, some Russian films have been made available again in the official part of the portal.

¹⁰ China's online propaganda was originally built and developed on defensive assumptions. The former "Great Chinese Firewall" was primarily used to control the information available to domestic Internet users. Krotoski, A., *Virtual Revolution, part 1*, BBC [documentary], London 2010.

¹¹ Although, of course, not only, as exemplified by the parallel developing Russian propaganda targeting African or Middle Eastern countries.

to weakening its destructive influence and to minimising the crisis of democracy. Russian propaganda is still a dangerous factor, but the effectiveness of its influence is clearly waning.

At this point, it is necessary to give the reader a necessary brief overview of the concept of political culture. This concept is an attempt to categorise the psychological orientation towards social objects. This orientation is formed by the feelings, evaluations and attitudes of citizens towards the political system. The whole mechanism of bringing individuals into this system is also crucial. In terms of political science, the term political culture has been developed since the mid-1950s, although the origins of the research go back to the second decade of the 20th century,¹² and it was popularised in the 1960s. According to the first American researchers of this phenomenon, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, we can speak of political culture in the same way as economic or religious culture. It is a set of attitudes towards a specific set of social phenomena and social processes. These authors distinguished three basic ideal types of this culture:

– a parochial culture, which is characterised by a significant passivity of citizens towards the political system. Societies that function within this type of political culture are characterised by a relative lack of expectations (lack of claims) towards the political system.

– a culture of submission characterised by citizens' relative knowledge of the political system and the norms of behaviour arbitrarily assigned by that system, while having no interest in actively participating in political processes. Citizens of such, often complex, societies are aware of the existence of a particular system and function in relative conformity with the rules of conduct imposed by that system. For the most part, however, they are not, apart from a very limited number of individuals who usually belong to a narrow circle of the privileged, interested in the mechanisms of entry into the structures of such a system. The individual's approach to the system may vary here: he or she may be proud of it, he or she may not be in favour of it, he or she may consider it legitimised or not. However, the individual's relationship with the system is generally based on a one-way flow of information, from the exit mechanisms to the individuals (subjects).

– a participatory culture in which citizens have real opportunities to influence the shape of the political system and do so by participating in many ways in political phenomena. Compared to the other two, this type represents a higher developmental form of political culture that is necessary for consolidated democracies to function. The activity of citizens in the co-creation of the political system (political participation) manifests itself both at the local (regional and local government) and central (national) levels. An important factor ensuring the reproduction of this culture is the awareness of at least partial influence of individuals (their decisions and behaviour) on the shape of the system and on the quality of their own lives.

Of course, these are only basic theoretical models, which as abstract ideal entities are unlikely to exist in their pure forms. But in most contemporary political cultures it is possible to find certain elements of them, the coexistence of which in

¹² Siemiński, J., *Kultura polityczna wieku XVI*, Kraków 1932, p. 121.

a certain configuration is a characteristic feature of a given society. This is the essence of the canonical concept of political culture, for it should be remembered that this issue occupies a very important place in political theory, and has been and continues to be studied by representatives of political science, starting with the pioneers already mentioned, through such names as Arend Lijphart, Michaela Baun, Daniel Franklin, Peter Reichel, Jürgen Gebhardt, Ronald Inglehart, Kazimierz Biskupski, Władysław Markiewicz, Jerzy Wiatr and Marek Sobolewski, among others.

We therefore assume that we can consider the current situation through the prism of a clash of political cultures. From a theoretical perspective, then, we are dealing with a phenomenon consisting of a virtual (and not only) confrontation between subject culture and participatory culture. A culture of submission operates among communities in which not only is there no civic culture, but also anti-civic attitudes are entrenched: individualism, initiative and creativity of individuals are considered reprehensible, since the role of the citizen is to submit uncritically to a regime (a narrow group or leader) that is the embodiment of society at large. Dialogue with representatives of such a culture is extremely difficult, often even impossible. The social media space is a case in point. Enthusiasts of the ICT revolution and the information society assumed that once enlightened thought began to circulate among individuals in the world thanks to the ICT infrastructure, nothing would be able to stop it. Even at the beginning of the 21st century, a significant number of them shared this post-Cold War optimism. Stephen Frey asked the rhetorical question in 2010, "How quickly would the Berlin Wall have fallen if the Internet had existed at that time?" Today we can criticise that optimism. Indeed, a culture of submission is a communicatively closed culture. A participatory political culture, on the other hand, is characterised by an open communicative culture, accessible even to the most controversial points of view. This state of affairs exposes the communicative culture of democratic states to the negative impact of the propaganda of non-democratic states (servile cultures). There is therefore no room for dialogue. A discussion with Russian or Belarusian propaganda workers is not a dialogue or exchange of ideas. On top of that, it takes place exclusively in the "democratic part of the Internet." Despite the technical possibilities of the Net, hostile societies do not talk to each other. The network space of Russia (and to a lesser extent Belarus) can today be described in terms of a gigantic information (filter) bubble, the framework of which is determined primarily by the internal constraints of a submissive type of political culture. Of course, both Vladimir Putin's regime and some Western companies have imposed certain restrictions on the ability to access internet content, but in most cases these obstacles are relatively easy to bypass. The technical barrier is therefore not as important here as the cultural barrier.

If we relate the problem of the state of public debate within democratic states to the phenomenon of the lack of intercultural communication at the junction (front) of the democratic and non-democratic worlds, it would seem easiest to put an equal sign here: here is the problem of the fierce struggle between the feuding "political tribes" of the Western world manifesting itself in a new international dimension. However, this would be an erroneous simplification. For discussion, even at its most

heated, and conflict are inherent in the nature of democracy.¹³ In the case of the relationship between the non-democratic world and the democratic world, however, there is no exchange of views or even the most heated communication: what we see here is only an organised, coordinated propaganda message directed towards the wider West, and an equally coordinated internal message, reproduced, sustained and cultivated by the Russian social media space. The discussion here, as I have already mentioned, takes place only in the democratic space and mostly as a reaction to Russian propaganda and disinformation. It would seem that such a state of affairs is undesirable for the democratic world, and yet the West, specifically the political participatory culture, has a number of advantages here, which began to become apparent even before the outbreak of war. A surprising reinforcement for the participatory type of political culture just before the full-scale, kinetic phase of the conflict began was the fact of the global and massive transfer of political discourse precisely to the virtual space, including above all the area of social media. From our point of view, this can be considered one of the few positive aspects of the decidedly negative and tragic phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the pandemic, the relationship between these cultures consisted largely of a more or less visible, deliberately masked and organised influence of a serf culture whose task was (and is) to disintegrate the participating culture. In principle, we should use here a model in which one serf culture destructively influences, through propaganda and disinformation, many participatory cultures in a planned manner, but we remain with the bipolar model, assuming that the democratic states as a whole are a functioning environment for a political participatory culture, although of course internally differentiated. At the same time, we assume that it was the outbreak of the pandemic and the ensuing months-long lock down that triggered the increased interest of citizens of democratic states in participating in political culture. Many people sat down in front of their computers and, for such various reasons as entertainment, boredom, increased exposure to virtual stimuli, observation of friends' activities on social media and the desire to express one's own opinion, began to participate more and more actively in public debate. On one hand, this has intensified the political and ideological conflict gaining momentum more or less since the middle of the second decade of the 21st century in most democratic countries. On the other hand, this intensification of virtual participation has contributed to exposing both the existence and the enormous scale of Russian propaganda and disinformation to many who were, hitherto, unconscious of or downplayed its effects. On a theoretical level, the increased interest in politics due to its transfer to the web, as an effect of the pandemic, the expansive nature of media development and generational change, can be interpreted as a strengthening of the participatory type of political culture. This amplification during the pandemic period was sudden, massive and global, which certainly translated in various ways into an exacerbation of the disputes that had been going on for years in the areas of local political cultures, much to the delight of the ruling elites of non-democratic states. Out of the chaos of these online disputes

¹³ See: Mouffe, Ch., *The Paradox of Democracy*, Wrocław 2005.

within democratic societies, however, the first symptoms foreshadowing future stability have already begun to emerge. What about the question of the relationship between subjective and participatory culture? Well, it has changed, shifting from a mode of unilateral, covert and destructive influence to a mode of conflict. In this mode, with the conscious resistance of the participatory culture, the destructive networking action of the serf culture is doomed to failure.

Taking the thesis of the crisis of the current democracy¹⁴ as valid, one can hypothetically assume that it will emerge from this crisis strengthened. This hypothesis is already supported by numerous phenomena in the area of political culture observed both nationally and internationally. As an example, there is widespread stigmatisation, unmasking and rejection of the Russian narrative by the majority of serious parties, politicians, institutions and, most importantly, citizens. In the Polish media space, the Russian threat has begun to be widely perceived.¹⁵ The danger was also publicised through social media. At the same time, there was a noticeable decline in the audience of all sorts of preachers of conspiracy theories, immensely popular throughout almost the entire second decade of the 21st century, operating largely on platforms such as YouTube.¹⁶ The widespread condemnation of Russia's war of aggression extends to the entire political and cultural component that makes up the Russian vision of the world. This component is a phenomenon that requires a separate study, and has already been undertaken many times.¹⁷ For the purposes of this text, I will limit its description to a few terms: imperialism, nationalism, racism, intolerance, aggression, chauvinism, hatred, contempt, grandiosity mania, mythomania and falsehood.

The unequivocal rejection of such a world view by the vast majority of democratic societies is a resounding event. Importantly, this rejection has also occurred in the area of broadly defined right-wing circles, except in cases of the extreme fringe. This is all the more significant because the weight of Russian lobbying and propaganda activities, along with the whole gamut of covert operations, has been reoriented since the end of the Cold War from organisations, political parties and an electorate of left-wing provenance, towards the conservative pole. Thus, the predictions of Russian elites and propagandists regarding support among Western right-wing circles did not come true. This support has been built over the years on arousing and/or amplifying

¹⁴ Numerous indicators, such as the level of democratisation, the level of freedom in the world and the level of press freedom, prove this point (Economist Intelligence, Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House).

¹⁵ A telling observation is one of the key motifs of the Russian propaganda message according to which 'Russia does not threaten anyone, but only defends itself'. This motif has been successfully distributed by the Russian propaganda machine in the societies and elites of Western countries. Proof of the success of Russian propaganda is the fact of unfettered de facto economic cooperation (Nord Stream 1 and 2, arms trade, etc.) lasting until the aggression of 24 February 2022 and hardly slowed down once it started.

¹⁶ Cf.: YouTube trends, <<https://www.youtube.com/feed/trending>>, [accessed: 12.04.2022].

¹⁷ Cf.: Dugin, A., *Essay on geopolitics. Geopolitical future of Russia*, Moscow 1999; Dugin, A., *Postmodern geopolitics. Time of new empires, essays on geopolitics of the 21st century*, Sankt-Petersburg 2007; Dugin, A., *Concept of network wars*, Geopolityka, 2, 1(2), Czestochowa 2009, pp. 187–190; Trienin, D., *Russia*, Washington 2019; Gumilov, L., *From Russia to Russia*, Krakow 2004.

resentment against neo-liberal optics. In the tasking dimension of propaganda, this translated into actions stigmatising LGBT people, ridiculing/negating the climate crisis, denying the COVID-19 pandemic, feminist thought, the development of the concept of animal rights protection and most of the characteristics of consolidated democracy such as the multi-stage process of consensus building, decision-making and law-making, and tenure of government etc.

The role of social media in strengthening a participatory type of political culture and thus bridging the crisis of democracy is particularly important. Observation of social media reveals that its users increasingly understand the need to verify sources of information.¹⁸ It is becoming increasingly common for ordinary users to attempt and demand such verification. Users themselves, from either side of a political dispute, are also acting as verifiers. The correction of a particular pieces of information which are, for example, out of date, out of context, manipulated or untrue, is also becoming more common within one's own filter bubble.

Institutions specialising in verifying the veracity of information and the credibility of its sources are also increasingly common. At the same time, these institutions are increasingly present on social media and, interestingly, try not to identify themselves with the ongoing ideological and political dispute. An example of this is the social project FakeHunter, in operation since 2019, as well as a number of representatives of the so-called creative sector: most often sole traders or micro-entrepreneurs such as bloggers, you-tubers and instagrammers etc. who professionally earn money by verifying information. It is also worth mentioning innovative technological solutions emerging in response to the problem of fake news, such as machine learning applications. The potential for the use of artificial intelligence (AI¹⁹) in this area is, at present, even difficult to estimate. In the media reality of recent years, this is a revolution of sorts: these media and applications are satisfying the growing need for possibly objective information, covering an increasingly distinct segment. Perhaps the emergence of specialised solutions heralds a breakthrough for an ICT space characterised by political struggle and propaganda? Perhaps this breakthrough will result in the "bursting" of information bubbles and the return of a rational level of public debate? At this point, it is important to mention an important conciliatory process that can be observed in Poland, as well as in other Western countries. We are talking about the phenomenon of uniting in the face of a threat, joining forces against a common enemy and putting aside ad hoc political and ideological disputes. In the case of the Polish social media space, this topic is currently difficult to address, given the pre-election campaign period. Certainly, the division of the domestic electoral market and the relations between its segments are very clear and fierce, but it is impossible to exclude or minimise the impact of the "common enemy" as an identity-shaping factor. A paradoxical example could be the mutual accusation of political adversaries of being pro-Russian or subscribing to the Russian narrative. A rational example,

¹⁸ Kupiecki, R., Chłoń, F., Bryjka, T., *Platform for countering disinformation. Building social resilience research and education*, Warsaw 2020.

¹⁹ AI (Artificial Intelligence).

on the other hand, is the common reaction of users on opposite sides of a political dispute to obvious Russian propaganda or to news from the frontline.²⁰

Conclusion

What, then, is the current impact of Russian propaganda and disinformation on the political culture of Polish society? Despite the numerous negatives associated with the spread of fake-news, hatred and false stereotypes etc., this influence today paradoxically contributes to the strengthening of a “participatory” type of political culture. Summarising the considerations of this text, three phenomena in particular have influenced this state of affairs. Firstly, the pandemic period preceding the war resulted in a surge of interest in the networked form of political culture participation. Secondly, with the launch of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 22 February 2023,²¹ the problem of Russian propaganda warfare took a key place in academic, popular science and journalistic analyses, thus being largely exposed, and being unmasked is a critical situation for any propaganda.²² The first two phenomena can be regarded as the result of chance, the negative consequences of globalisation and the consequences of political bad will on one hand, and political naivety on the other. The third phenomenon, which is the ever advancing ICT revolution, seems to be less influenced by the determinants of the first two.

It cannot, of course, be said that everything changed with the advent of a pandemic or the outbreak of war. Global civic engagement began to grow almost simultaneously with the emergence of the crisis of democracy. In the case of Poland, one can point out, for example, the successively increasing interest in security issues, geopolitics and strategy etc., since 2014. However, a significant acceleration of this process occurred precisely during the pandemic, when, as a result of the lock-down, citizens shifted their activity online and with the outbreak of the full-scale, kinetic phase of the conflict. These events set in motion a whole range of social and psychological phenomena related to electronic communication, often already well understood and described in the fields of sociology, psychology and political science. Both positive and negative²³ aspects of virtual communication have therefore been reinforced in parallel. To summarise: we are becoming more and more courageous in proclaiming our views and in engaging in political debate; we are increasing our resistance to fake-news, which is greatly supported by technology initiatives of individual organisations, individual users and media owners; our tolerance of conspiracy theories is decreasing, etc. These are only the first positive symptoms on the way to stabilising the free

²⁰ This condition can be observed, for example, on the Twitter platform, in reactions to information from the front shared on the accounts of war correspondents or white intelligence personnel. See: Wolski, J., <https://twitter.com/wolski_jaros>.

²¹ It should be remembered that Russian aggression against Ukraine began in 2014. In turn, it was certainly being prepared even earlier.

²² See: Głowiński, M., *Jak nie dać się propagandzie*, Warszawa 2016.

²³ E.g. increase in aggressive speech, vulgarisation of language etc.

flow of information and knowledge that the pioneers of information society theory would like to see. Despite the still numerous negative phenomena, the noticeable positive trends can be seen as a promising prognosis. The dialogue between political subject culture and participatory culture does not exist at the present time.²⁴ With the outbreak of war, however, the implicit, long-term and planned destructive influence of the former on the latter came to an end. This does not mean, of course, a stopping or diminishing of the propaganda message, but a gradually increasing resistance to its influence by Western societies.

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²⁴ From the point of view of authoritarians, such dialogue is always a critical threat. See: Radkiewicz, P., *Authoritarianism and Ockham's razor*, Warsaw 2012.

Summary

Theorists and enthusiasts of the information society concept predicted a technologically determined, harmonious development of societies towards deepening cooperation within globalization. However, we are currently witnessing serious negative situations, such as a democratic crisis and a security crisis. These crises are especially visible in the area of social media, which are a digital field of competition between different types of political culture. Despite the still difficult situation, in this competition the subservient political culture is in a losing position compared to the participating political culture, which is represented by broadly understood democratic societies.