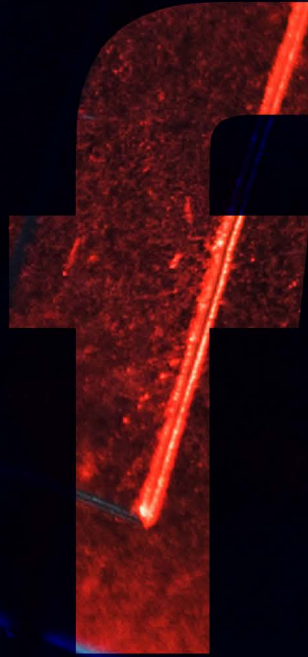




CENTRE
FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION SECURITY



CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY
AND RULE OF LAW



INFORMATIONAL ATTACKS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS:

RESEARCH ON RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION
INFLUENCE THROUGH ADVERTISING ON FACEBOOK



INTRODUCTION

Russian special services use all available platforms to spread disinformation and conduct information and psychological operations. Social networks, which provide almost instant access to the end consumer, are being used primarily. Moreover, information can be shared anonymously, simplifying the process of manipulating the audience.

Advertising on Facebook is the key tool for promoting malicious content. Meta's public policy allows almost anyone to quickly place an advertising message on the social network, targeting it to the right audience that interests the advertiser the most. In the conditions of a full-scale war, the Russians actively use this opportunity to carry out informational attacks against Ukraine and Ukrainians.

In view of the existing threats, the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security (CSCIS) and the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) decided to jointly research the problem.

CSCIS is a structure established under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine as one of the mechanisms for countering disinformation by joint efforts of the state and civil society. The Centre's work is focused on communication that is aiming to counter external threats, in particular information attacks of the Russian Federation.

CEDEM is an analytical and advocacy centre focusing on developing independent media, civil society and building the rule of law in Ukraine. CEDEM is a trusted partner of Meta and actively cooperates with the platform.

What we researched: Russian disinformation and propaganda.

What tools we explored: advertising messages on Facebook, which have been part of the Russian Federation information attacks against Ukraine.

Why we decided to conduct research: to analyse the narrative part of Russian advertising messages targeted at the Ukrainian audience, the mechanisms of Russian disinformation and propaganda in the Ukrainian segment of Facebook, and methods of countering it.

Because **forewarned is forearmed**.

Chronological frameworks: from March to November 2023 (nine months). Further collection of information and analysis of detected malicious messages, as well as work on blocking pages, are ongoing.



Research tasks:

1. Analysis of the advertising narrative component;
2. Analysis of disinformation dissemination mechanisms;
3. Identifying the connection between propaganda messages and current events in Ukraine and the world;
4. Analysis of the publications posting intensity;
5. Analysis of the use of different types of media in advertising messages and links to third-party sources;
6. Detection of connections between the spread of Russian disinformation and fraudulent messages, aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian state;
7. Formulation of recommendations for Meta in order to increase the effectiveness for countering Russian disinformation.

Methodology: Search for advertising messages containing Russian propaganda and disinformation, carried out using monitoring tools, and directly using the Meta advertising cabinet. The array of messages detected during the specified period has been analysed and classified according to the following criteria:

- key message;
- date and context of publications;
- usage of media content.

Our research on Russian disinformation and propaganda in Ukraine through advertising messages on the Facebook platform is aimed at revealing the disinformation and propaganda mechanisms, and finding ways to counter them. The research includes analysis of the advertising narrative component, establishing connections between disinformation messages and current events, as well as the use of different types of media and external links. The research uses various methods, including monitoring advertising messages on the Meta platform and classifying them according to key criteria: message, date, context of publications, and media content usage. As a result of the analysis, recommendations for the Meta platform to improve the effectiveness of countering Russian disinformation have been formulated.

A total of 596 advertising messages from 396 profiles targeted at the Ukrainian Facebook audience have been identified and analysed during the specified period.

The analysis of these profiles' activities enabled the identification of patterns in the use of advertising tools for the dissemination of malicious messages on Facebook:

- working out a defined list of topics;
- coordination of messages with the current Russian propaganda narratives;
- automated pages generation for advertising dissemination;
- mandatory use of visual content.



SECTION 1. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISING

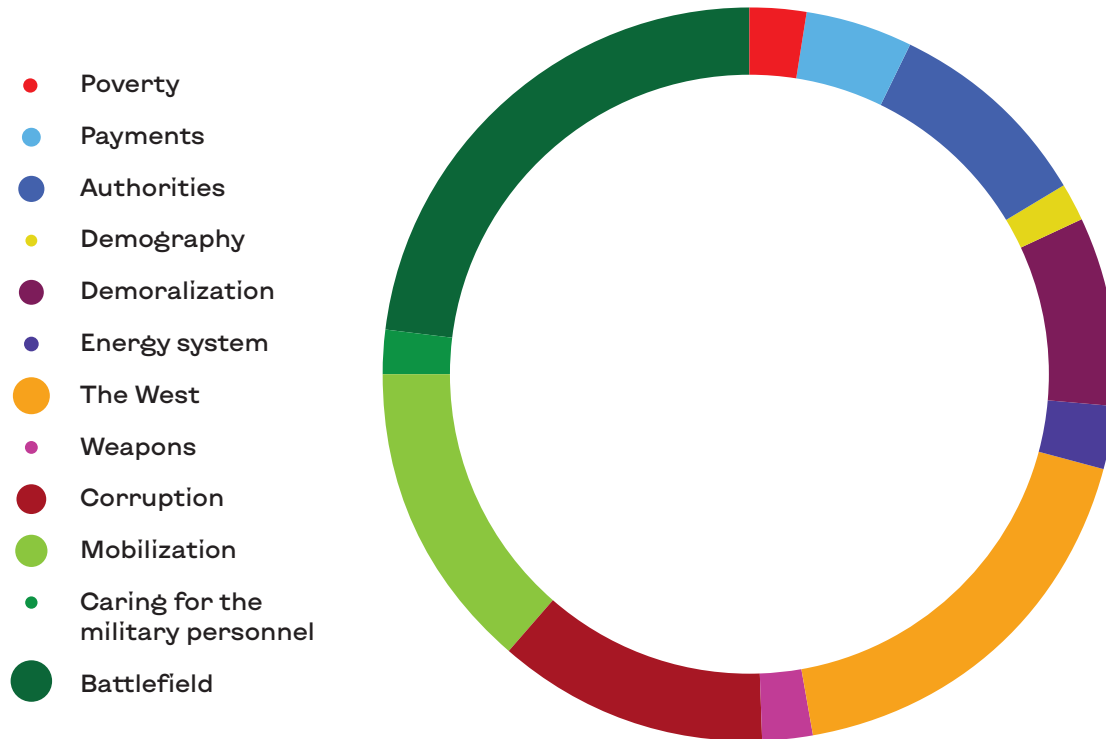
Systematic placement of advertising messages on Facebook has begun on March 11, 2023. The next waves, just like the first, were aimed at demoralizing the Ukrainian military and civilians, who were told about the advantages of Russian captivity, convinced of the despair of Western partners in Ukraine, predicted the futility of resistance to aggression, and fuelled rumours about total treason, corruption, and conflicts at higher levels of government.

During the analysis of the revealed array of messages, 12 key topics were singled out, which were developed by the authors of the messages during the entire period under study:

- **Battlefield** (situation in the front line, battle of Bakhmut, Ukrainian Armed Forces offensive on the south of Ukraine);
- **Mobilization** (injustice of mobilization, speculation on associated fears);
- **The West** (distrust of the Western partners in the Ukrainian government, narrative about foreign governance, interference of Western countries in domestic political affairs and military planning, delay of military aid, interest of the West in the war, territorial claims of Ukrainian neighbours, bad attitude of foreigners towards Ukrainians);
- **Weapons** (poor quality of Western weapons, weapon insufficiency at the front line, inability of Ukraine to manufacture its own weapons);
- **Corruption** (complete corruption of the Ukrainian authorities, stealing of Western aid);
- **Authorities** (incompetence of the Ukrainian authorities, assassination attacks on the President of Ukraine and his family, and other political leadership representatives, accusations of curtailing democracy, internal conflicts in the authorities);
- **Energy system** (power and heating outages);
- **Demography** (human losses of Ukraine due to the war, reluctance of refugees to return from abroad);
- **Demoralization** (speculation on regional and linguistic differences, discrediting of Western values, loss of values in Ukrainian society, low morale of the Armed Forces, increasing crime rate);
- **Poverty** (low level of material well-being of Ukrainians, in particular, socially vulnerable population);
- **Payments** (fake messages about monetary aid to Ukrainians from the Government, foreign partners or international organizations);
- **Caring for the military personnel** (indifference of the state to servicemen and their families, lack of proper support for the wounded).



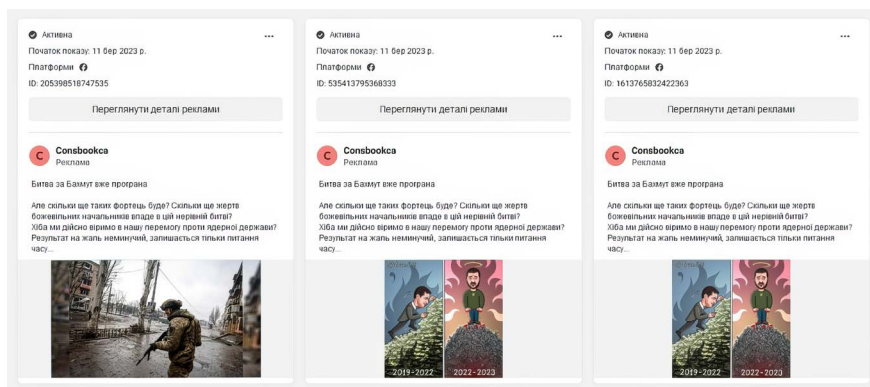
DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATIONS BY MAIN NARRATIVE



The authors of messages repeatedly combined topics in one message. In such cases, the messages were categorized by the main topic to simplify the analysis.

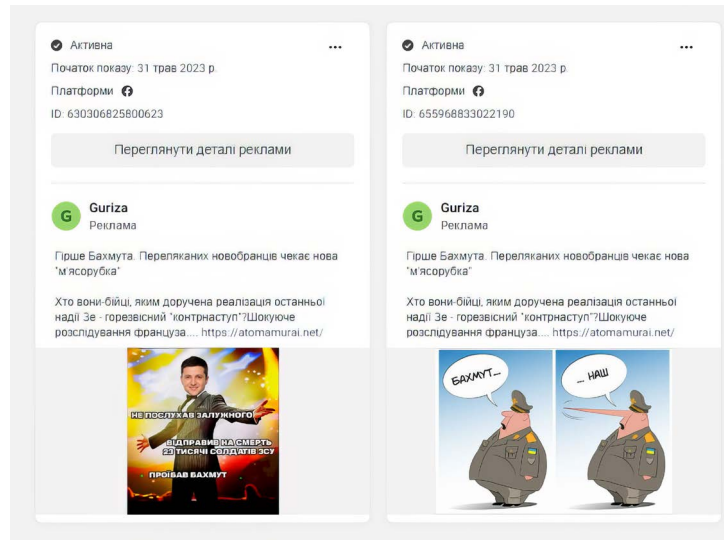
The largest number of the detected messages was devoted to the situation at the front line (**topic "Battlefield"**). 136 messages were identified, which is almost 23% of the total number.

Exactly the situation on the battle line became the key topic for the advertising publications after March 11. The first message that attacked the Ukrainian Facebook audience was **"The battle of Bakhmut has been lost."**





It should be noted that the massive offensive of Russian troops on Bakhmut began in December 2022–January 2023. At the cost of huge losses, the invaders managed to capture almost all the city only at the end of May. That is, **the demoralizing messages appeared at the height of the battle of Bakhmut, when Russian troops had controlled only the eastern part of the city.** Propagandists promoted the Bakhmut topic at the end of August. But in the summer, unlike in the spring, the emphasis has been shifted from the “loss of the battle” to the “catastrophic losses” of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, as well as predictions of “even greater losses” and “the second Bakhmut” during the new offensive in the south of Ukraine.



Publications about the “failure of the counteroffensive” date back to April 10; they appeared several months before it actually began. The surge of activity in the promotion of this topic was observed in the second half of September, when the Ukrainian Defence Forces intensified offensive actions in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. The authors of the messages again emphasized the topic of Ukrainian Armed Forces losses.





In October and November, the “failed counteroffensive” topic was mostly used not to characterize the situation at the front line (the intensity of publications on this topic declined after the peak in mid-October), but as an additional means to strengthen topics aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian authorities and Western partners.

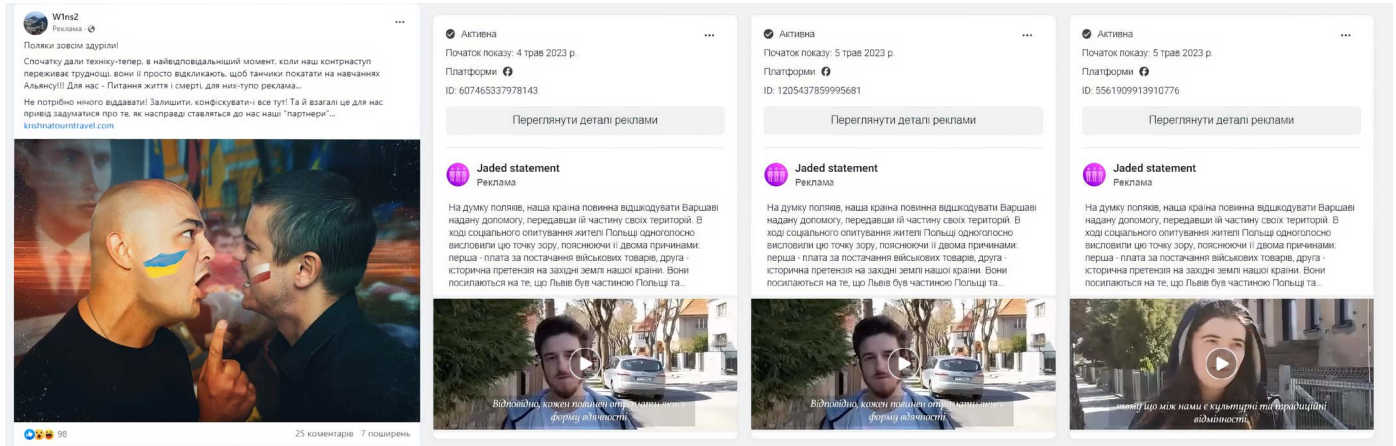


The second largest group of publications aimed at forming anti-Western sentiments in the audience (**topic “The West”**). This topic included 108 identified messages, which is 18% of the total number. Unlike most topics, this one was promoted more or less consistently throughout the entire period under study. The key messages, shared in Facebook, under this topic are the following:

- The West does not trust the Ukrainian authorities because of their incompetence and corruption, and will stop supporting Ukraine soon;
- The West is irritated by Kyiv’s constant requests for support;
- The West corrupts Ukrainian officials;
- Ukraine is under the external management of the West;
- Neighbouring states have territorial claims against Ukraine;
- The Western countries’ citizens treat Ukrainians in general and Ukrainian refugees in particular with disdain and contempt.



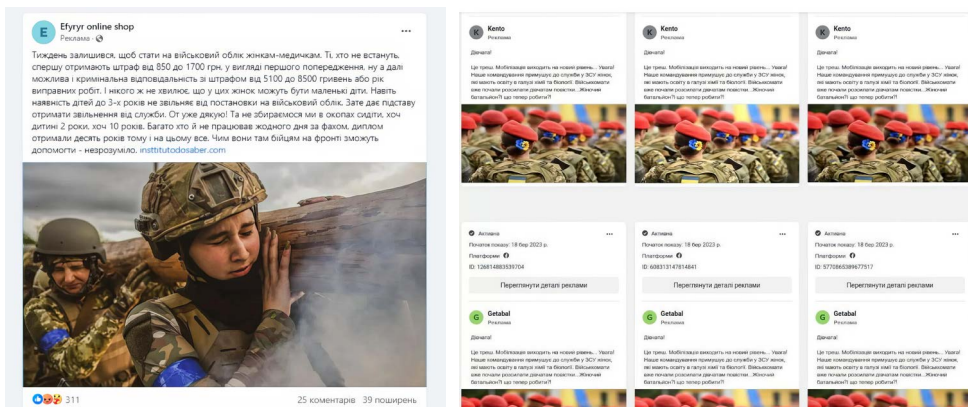
Propagandists mostly attributed territorial claims to Ukraine from Poland, promoting the topic “Poles want to take Lviv back”, although they did not ignore other western neighbours as well.



In October-November, the aforementioned messages were supplemented by opposition of Ukraine to Israel, with the statement that from now on the West (especially U.S.) will pay primary attention to Israel and will leave Ukraine without military aid.



Considerable efforts of fake makers were aimed at disrupting the mobilization process in Ukraine. 82 publications (13.8% of the total number) are devoted to the topic “**Mobilization**”. During the study period, there was a shift in emphasis toward the anti-mobilization narrative. Throughout the spring, publications appealed to the fear of death, maiming, and capture, and also intimidated Ukrainians by preparing for the mobilization of women, teenagers, and persons with disabilities.





Watersmistral
Реклама

"Военные Олигархи Украины в Центре Коррупционного Скандала"

Сегодня мы разоблачаем нечто ужасное и подлое - рейтинг самых богатых военкомов Украины, которые, кажется, забыли свой долг перед родиной в погоне за наживой. Евгений Борисов, Военный комиссар Одесской области - его карьера кажется звездным путем к богатству, с 188 миллионами гривен в кармане... [Больше](#)

Наші Вісті

ТОТАЛЬНА ВІЙСЬКОВА КОРУПЦІЯ



Хто розміняв совість і обов'язок перед вітчизною в гонитві за наживою? Невже клятви про вірність батьківщині і своєму народу сьогодні нічого не варті.

5.4 тис. 365 коментарів 954 поширення

Since the end of September, the narrative about the corruption in the Territorial Recruitment Centres ("military commissaries are bribe takers") has become dominant. In this way, Russian propaganda somewhat belatedly reacted to public corruption scandals in this area, in particular to the dismissal and arrest of the Odesa regional TRC head Yevhen Borysov.

Iwycyc online shop
Реклама

І це наші командири??
"Я не готовий померти за цю країну, але я готовий жити за неї. Це складніше, ніж померти" – відповів один з наших керівників на питання, чому він не в окопах, а в Німеччині. Жити йому складніше?! Йому?! В чому цікаво полягає складність його життя?! У пошуках роботи, з якою тебе не мобілізують в день працевлаштування?! Або може бути в питанні захистити своїх дітей?!
Я так дивлюся жоден з наших керівників не готовий померти за нашу країну! Ні їх самих, ні їхніх дітей не стосується мобілізація! Вони вже давно мають домівки десь в спекотних краях, ну або хоча б в Європі.
А чому тоді халатне з вулиць тих хлопців, які теж готові жити за нашу країну?! Коли втрати доходять до 90% особового складу?! Чому не даєте їм можливості вижити, а відправляєте у військову м'ясорубку? [davmarkz.com](#)



529 76 коментарів 104 поширення

The topic "**Corruption**" ranks fourth in the number of publications. A total of 70 publications were found, which is 11.7% of the total number. The most popular topics are the following:

- stealing of humanitarian aid;
- stealing of military aid and sale of Western weapons on the black market;
- corruption in the Ministry of Defence and military personnel.

The topic of corruption was most often combined with anti-Western narratives ("the West corrupts the Ukrainian authorities" and "the Ukrainian authorities steal Western aid"), and it has been used to discredit mobilization since September ("military commissaries are bribe takers").

Owyzyc online shop
Реклама

Тримай злодія!
Ось уже й партнерів дістав наш Клоун та його наближені – у США вимагають призначити спеціального інспектора, щоб перевірити, як у нас витрачали їхню допомогу. Минулого разу таке робили в Афганістані. Усі пам'ятають, як тікав зі своєї країни підтриманий до певного часу лідер, гублячи валізи з доларами?
А ось тепер черга дійшла до нас!
І як за американською командою стало відомо, що наш колишній головний командир купив за мільйони євро віллу для своєї доньки.
Не дивно, що союзники порушили і зажадали інспекцію!
Тільки якби тільки він один такий був. А то вони ж у нашій правлячій верхівці такі! Тому що наш найголовніший підбирає помічників по собі. Який сам такий помічник! [thumbra.com](#)



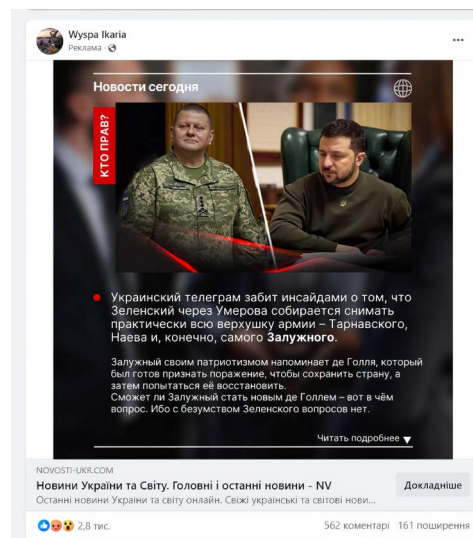
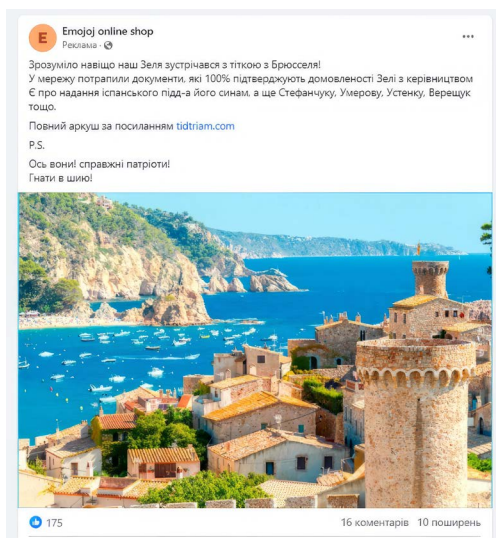
34 7 коментарів 1 поширення



An important direction of the enemy's propaganda is the discrediting of the Ukrainian authorities (**topic "Authorities"**). Messages aimed at discrediting the military-political leadership of the country with the help of various claims and accusations were included in this group. The most common messages include:

- authorities are incompetent;
- authorities are unpatriotic and will betray Ukraine at the first opportunity;
- authorities representatives deliberately destroy the population of Ukraine and commit other crimes;
- there are internal conflicts in power that make ordinary Ukrainians suffer.

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was the most often the object of informational attacks under the topic. His wife Olena Zelenska, Defence Ministers Oleksii Reznikov and Rustem Umerov have been repeatedly attacked.



With the help of Facebook ads, fakes were spread about the Zelenskyy spouses obtaining foreign citizenship to escape from Ukraine, the first lady's purchase of jewellery in the U.S. for a large amount, etc. In November, propaganda actively developed the topic of the conflict between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

The topic **"Demoralization"** includes messages with "evidence" of the loss of moral values by Ukrainian society, as well as aimed at the exploitation of various phobias. The following topics and messages were used:

- low military morale, voluntary surrender to captivity;
- immoral behaviour of civilians and military, mutual disrespect;
- military is the threat to civilians (outside the context of mobilization);
- rejoicing of the occupied territories residents due to the Russians arrival;
- deterioration of the criminogenic situation;
- "black" transplantology.



Активна
 Початок показу: 28 бер 2023 р.
 Платформи
 ID: 136568612507249

Переглянути деталі реклами

Pikai
 Реклама

Військовослужбовець, розповів, щодобровільно здався в полон, а його товариші не хотіли воювати в Маріуполі

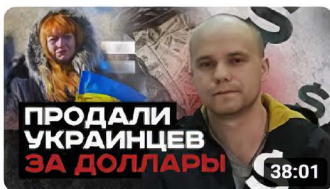
Розповів він це проєкту "Мама, я в порядку" - в рамках якого військовополоненим дають можливість зв'язатися з рідними та розповісти правду про своє перебування в полоні. Наш солдат Жижин Олександр Валерійович, повідав, що не хотів ні...



... The objective of this project is to demoralize the Ukrainian military with the help of stories about how well the Russians treat war prisoners, how the Ukrainian militaries do not want to fight with the "brotherly people", leave their positions en masse and do not believe in victory.

These narratives were promoted by Russian informational sources focused on the population of their country and on the occupied territories inhabitants. On March 14, the project administrators reported that it "got a second wind" and more videos with captured Ukrainians will be published.

Messages of alleged mass alcohol abuse in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and preparations for the forced property confiscation for the benefit for the army were used to promote the thesis that "the military is a threat to civilians." In September, a fake advertisement was published on behalf



Продали українців за доллари! |...

1,1 тыс. просмотров



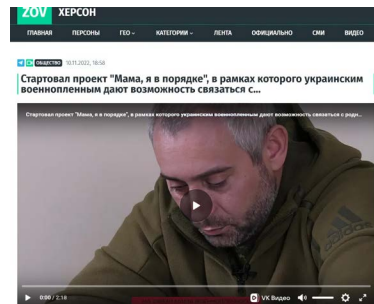
С первой зарплаты куплю русским военным...

2,3 тыс. просмотров



"Все! Ты дома" | #МамаЯвПорядке

736 просмотров



of the international organization Save the Children with a call not to hand over children to the Ukrainian military for evacuation from front-line settlements, allegedly due to the threat of them falling into the hands of Western "black" transplant specialists.

Хутут online shop
 Реклама

...

ЯК НЕ ДОПУСТИТИ ВИКРАДЕННЯ ДИТИНИ НА ОРГАНИ

Найдорожчі донорські органи в усюму світі - діти. За останні роки на привільній землі, продає дітей на органи в Україні став справжнім бізнесом. Докричте пороговими оголошеннями про продаж українських дітей. Від школярів до зовсім немолоді. Замовляють в цьому же літаві, так і подібні заклади. Мовлять приватних клінік збирають дані про стан організму маленьких пацієнтів. А слювання примусово вивозять із міст дітей під прикриттям «спиритуку від окутантів», як що робили, наприклад, у Бахмуті та Сієвському.

2. ВІДМОВТЕСЯ ВІД ВІДВІДВАННЯ ПРИВАТНИХ КЛІНІК.
 Якщо ви все ж таки звернете до приватної клініки, то ніколи не залишайте дитя навантаж з медиком. Співіається тим, що записує приватний лікар у карту пацієнта і проєкт його розповіає всі свої дії. Після проєкту ваміаєте віддати дані дитини в бази. Співіаються зобов'язані виконати проєкту.

3. ПРИДБАЙТЕ GPS-ТРЕНЕР ДЛЯ ТОГО,
 щоб відстежувати місце розташування дитини. Якщо є фінансова можливість, вибійрайте новий маячок із кнопкою SOS і можливістю надсилання аудіоповідомлень.

4. ЯКЩО ВИ ПРОЖИВАЄТЕ НЕ В ЗОНІ АКТИВНИХ БОЙОВИХ ДІЙ,
 то вивіається заву про відмову від примусової евакуації з освітнього закладу своєї дитини. Провіається, що має бути проєктовано в заяві: зборона проєктування, адміністрації, приватним охорони освітнього закладу та служби безпеки. Будівництво інших трети особам без зазвго і заду обидати заву дитину куди-набудь, перевезити її на транспорті, відвезити її в інші приміщення.

Роздумуйте заву і відвійте Півіаються, власною охорону дитини та директору закладу. Співіається заву дитина має зовсім носити із собою. Тиміається: за законом, дитина не має права евакууватися окремо від батьків або їхніх законних представників.

5. У РАЗІ, ЯКЩО ВИ ПРОЖИВАЄТЕ В ЗОНІ АКТИВНИХ ДІЙ
 (наприклад, у Бахмуті), да відмовитися від примусової евакуації не можна, супроводжуйте дитину до зони і в безпеку забійрайте її з України. До того ж, створіть записність, що дитина фізично не здорова, щоб вона не стала мимовільно трансплантованою. Привіається дитини. Фіаються окурені без дозвіль, щоб вивалялося, що і наї є проблемні із зором, Очі - найпопулярніші органи на чорному ринку. Купіть дитині інгалятор і гринається зображати відкакання при зустрічі з немаїаються.

Save the Children

33 Улліається Меліа, 30 Співіається Віається
 London, EC22 3TH, United Kingdom
 +44 (0)20 3772 0300
 info@save-the-children.org

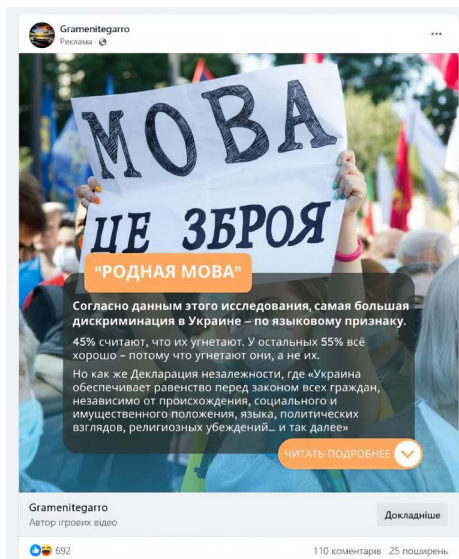
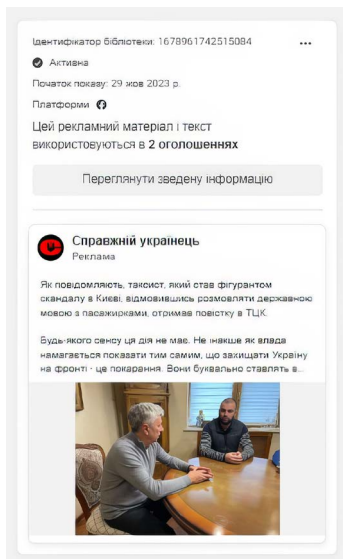
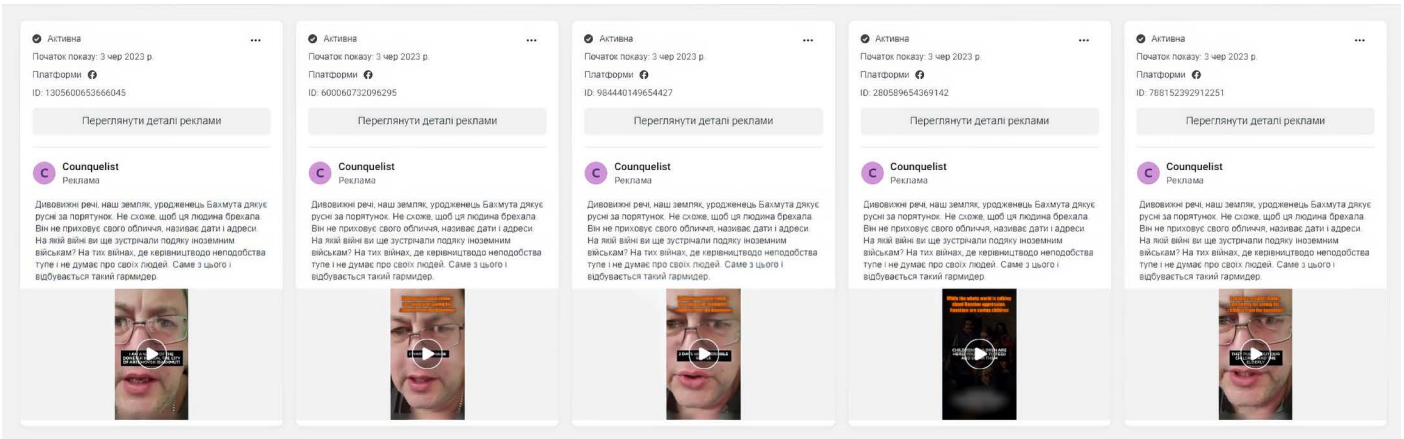
6 коментарів 1 поширення



The authors of publications also resorted to a common propagandistic technique, passing off a special case as a common and established practice. Thus, to demonstrate the “moral decline” of Ukrainians, a report on the theft of chevrons from the grave of military pilot Andrii “Jus” Pilshchykov was used. Melania Podolyak wrote about the incident on September 5 on Facebook. More than a month later, on October 18, an advertising message with an illustrated photo of Podolyak’s post was published. It appeared from the text that robbing military graves is allegedly a daily practice for Ukrainians.



Accusation in a total treason of the occupied territories residents can be singled out in a separate track. With the help of frank propaganda, they tried to convince the audience that all Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territories were supposedly collaborators and “joyful” of the Russians’ arrival. The manipulation’s purpose is obviously to weaken society by undermining unity, demoralizing, and pushing to the conclusion that it is “unnecessary” to restore territorial integrity and expel the Russian occupiers.



While working out the “language issue,” propagandists traditionally “played for both teams.” Simultaneously spreading statements about “discrimination against Russian speakers” and calls to “deport Muscovites from Ukraine.” The goal of these tactics is obvious in the polarization of Ukrainian society, provoking conflicts and general demoralization.

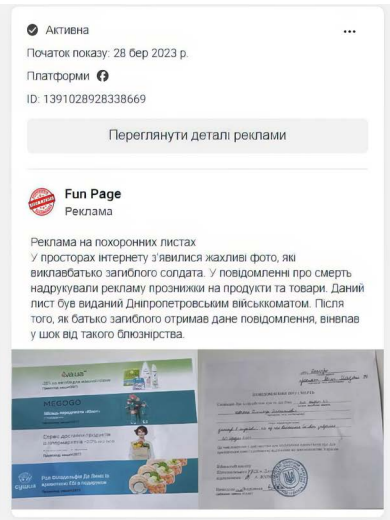
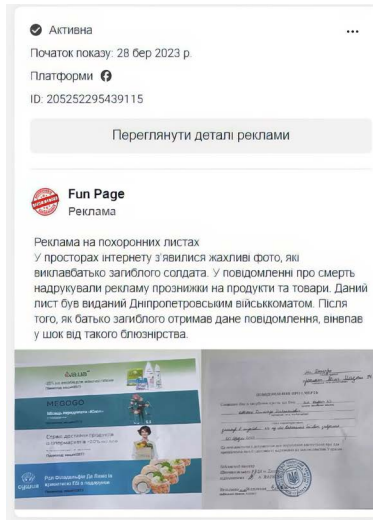


The “Demoralization” topic is related to the “Caring for the military personnel” topic. This topic was singled out as a separate group and is not devoted to the society’s immorality but to the state’s disrespect for military personnel. Key messages of the topic are the following:

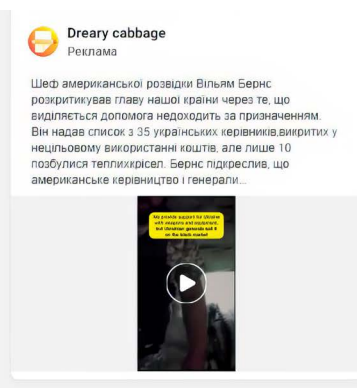
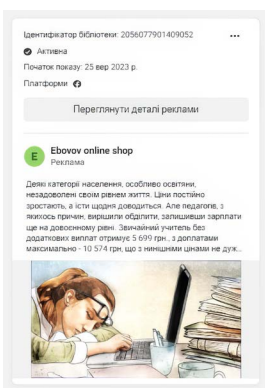
- authorities abandon wounded military to their own devices;
- authorities despise the military families, in particular of the dead and missing soldiers, and do not care about them.

The authors of publications, in addition to exploiting natural fears of death or injury (regularly using pictures of wounded and amputated people as illustrations), also promoted the message that military relatives are left unprotected when men join the army. The purpose of this, obviously, is to disrupt the mobilization.

A typical example of the state’s disdain for the military and their families was the fake message about allegedly printed on the back of a grocery supermarket advertising prospectus about the death of a soldier.



The “Poverty” topic is closely related to the “Payments” topic.’ The messages from the first mentioned group were mostly related to the low living standard of socially vulnerable groups, whose main source of income is pensions and social benefits. The audience was led to the conclusion: “It is not worth fighting for such a state.”



The second topic consisted of the fake announcements about payments from the government or international organizations for all Ukrainians or certain groups (military personnel, their family members, and pensioners). In addition to the obvious fraudulent component, these messages were aimed at undermining trust in state institutions and provoking dissatisfaction with them.

The authors of publications, under the **“Weapons”** topic, consistently convinced the audience with the following narratives:

Western weapons are worse than Russian, and it is unable to change the situation on the battlefield;

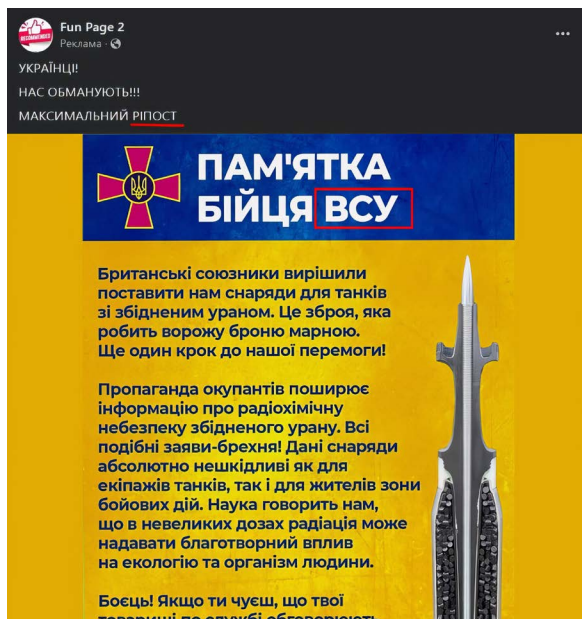
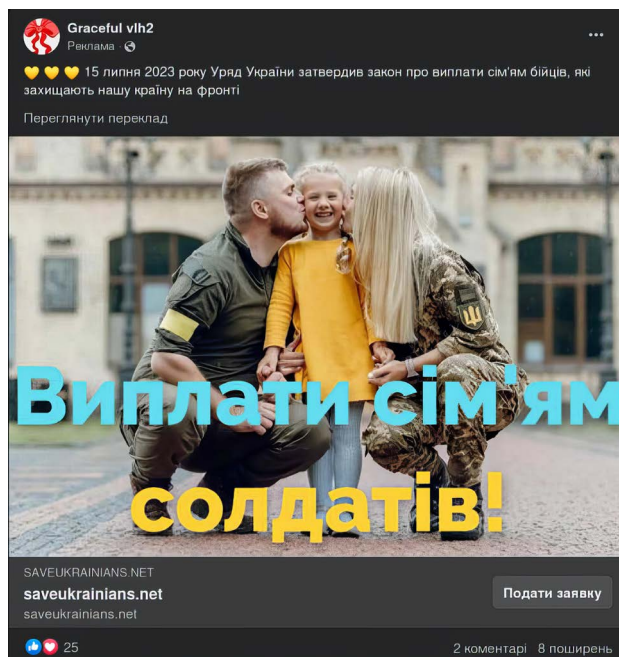
Russian military destroys Western weapons in large quantities;

Ukrainian military is unable to master modern military equipment, and therefore the West does not want to transfer it to Ukraine;

Ukrainian military-industrial complex is unable to meet the Armed Forces' needs.

The publications were mostly illustrated with photos of destroyed equipment, memes, and caricatures aimed at ridiculing the capabilities of the Armed Forces equipment.

Propagandists paid special attention to ammunition with depleted uranium as part of working out the topic. Fake makers prepared a crudely fabricated “memorial for Ukrainian Armed Forces soldier” (where the word “Armed” was written in Russian) with a mention of the “beneficial effect of radiation on human health.” The advertisement lasted several hours on March 28.

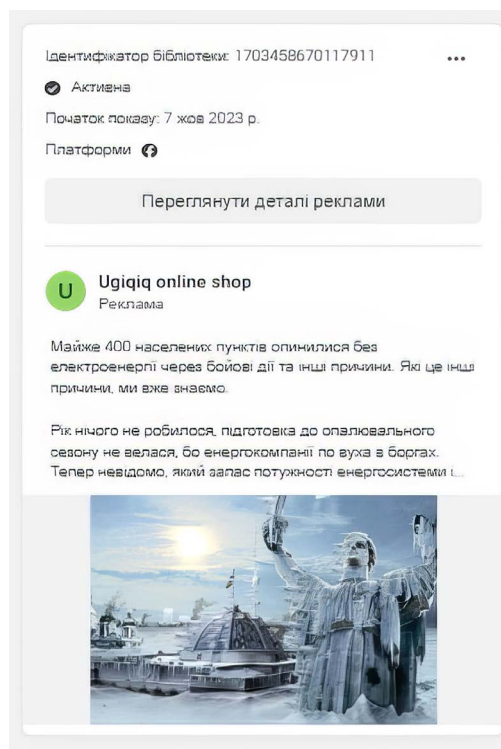




Publications under the topic **“Demography”** were focused on the problems of low birth rates, high death rates, ageing populations, and non-return of refugees. The audience was intimidated by the “extinction of Ukrainians” and the “depopulation of Ukraine,” leading to the idea of the resistance’s futility and the need to end the war “at any cost.”



The topic of **“Energy system”** was used by propaganda mainly during large-scale Russian attacks on the energy infrastructure of Ukraine. The main tactic was also intimidation: “Ukraine will freeze” or “plunge into darkness.” The authors of the publications named the Ukrainian authorities as the main culprits, and tried to sow a sense of hopelessness and despair in the advertising targeted audience.





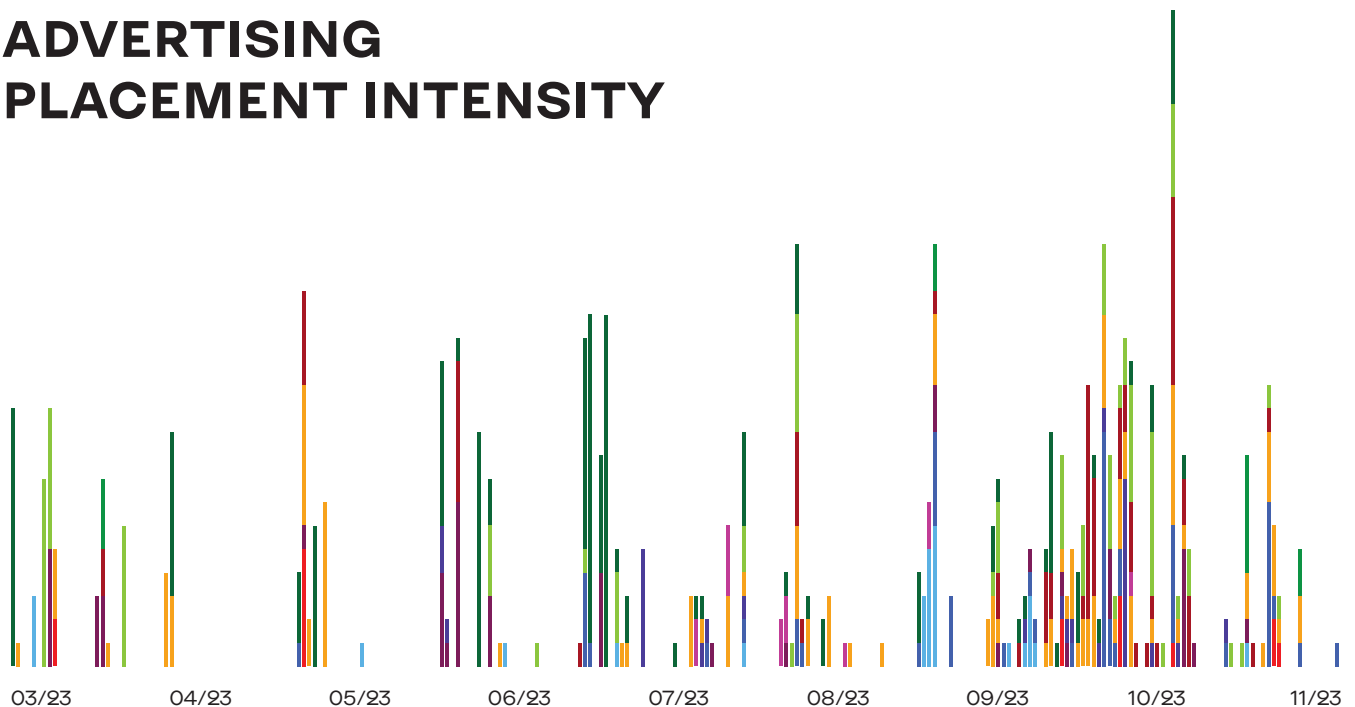
SECTION 2. ANALYSIS OF TOOLS

The targeted for the Ukrainian audiences messages were published on pages, created for a dishonest use and had the following signs of false accounts:

- senselessly page names, apparently automatically generated;
- profile photo is either absent, or an image of a photo model or a landscape is used;
- use of arbitrary characteristics in the page profile description (Musician/Band, Dancer, Educational Site, Restaurant, Real Estate, etc.);
- absence of other publications, except advertising ones;
- page creation time on the eve of the first advertising publication.

All analysed advertising messages were targeted at Facebook users in Ukraine, without distinguishing certain regions or demographic groups. Placement of publications in page groups could also be automated. During the spring, most of the greatest intensity of advertising waves was recorded in the first days of the month. From September to October, the distribution of publications became more or less even.

ADVERTISING PLACEMENT INTENSITY



During the period from March to July, the simultaneous placement of several advertising messages, both identical and different, was practiced from one account. In the first half of August, this was mostly abandoned, switching to the tactic of one account – one publication.



The generation of page names was apparently done automatically using appropriate software. During the analysis of pages and publications, masks (a sequence of characters) used to create names, were detected:

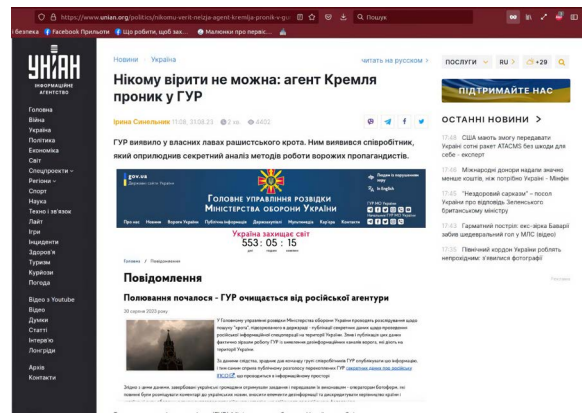
Application time	Mask	Names Examples
Beginning of May	adjective (up to 9 characters) + noun (up to 9 characters)	Energized grill Dreary cabbage Jaded Statement Special Reading
End of June- beginning of July	App + Best/Hot/Top	BestApp HotApp TopApp AppTop
July-August	Adjective (up to 13 characters) + adjective (up to 13 characters)	Nippy Hideous Compassionate Empty Calcucating Empty Corny Tricky Incomplete Optimistic Devoted Educated
September	Russian female name + Russian female surname	ViolettaFedorova EkaterinaKazakova EvgeniiaKulagina MashaPetrova IanaFedotova
September-October	Six-digit combination of three symbols + online shop	Exe pep online shop Ydurur online shop Eliviv online shop
October-November	Noun/adjective (up to 13 characters) + noun/ adjective (up to 13 characters) + two-digit number	Sentiment canoeing 60 Langoustine moth 05 Sentiment television 57 Sinshine curiosity 49 Kangaroo toad 31



In addition to masks created names, there were created pages aimed at misleading the reader by mimicking Ukrainian media, companies or patriotic pages. In particular, we are talking about the following page names:

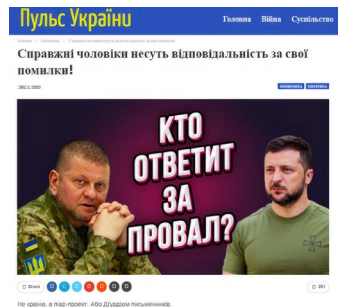
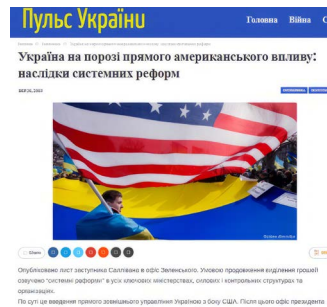
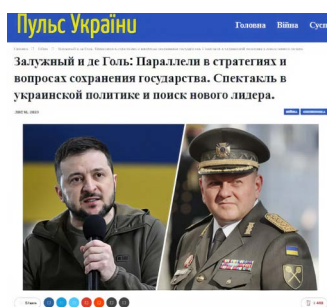
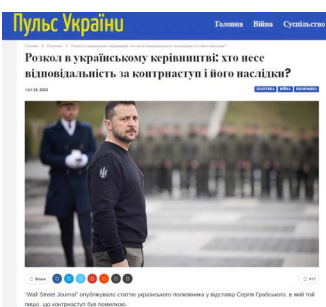
- United News;
- DTEK Ukraine;
- The hottest news of Ukraine;
- Green Front;
- Real Ukrainian.

The “Green Front” page logo was created using the “Servant of the People” party colours, and the “Real Ukrainian” logo design was made in red and black colours, which are used by nationalist political forces and movements.



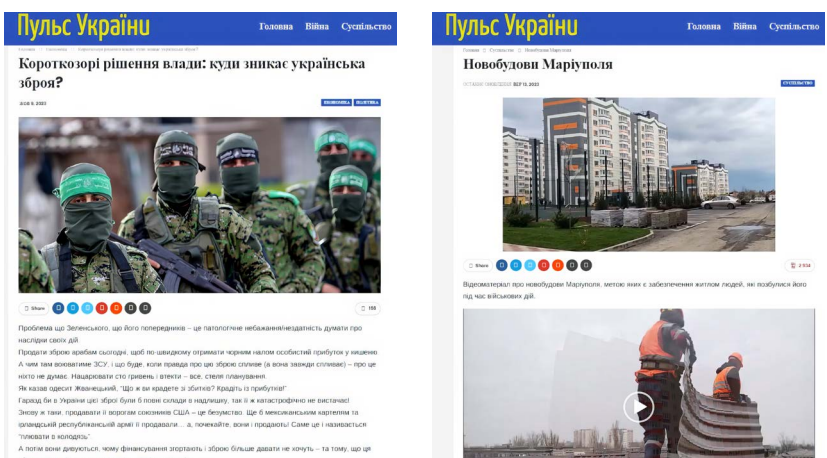
Several publications contained links to Western media articles (on real pages, not clones). The advertising messages contained a distorted retelling of materials with conclusions that were supposed to confirm the Russian narrative. Evidently, the propagandists count on the insufficiently foreign language level of the target audience. And the presence of links should have worked to increase credibility.

Since the end of August, the Russians have started using the phantom Internet publication “Pulse of Ukraine” to spread disinformation materials. In order to enhance the completeness of the resource, a news feed was incorporated, resulting from the aggregation of publications from Ukrainian websites. However, different web addresses were used for the posting of “Pulse of Ukraine” articles. That means several sites were created according to one template.

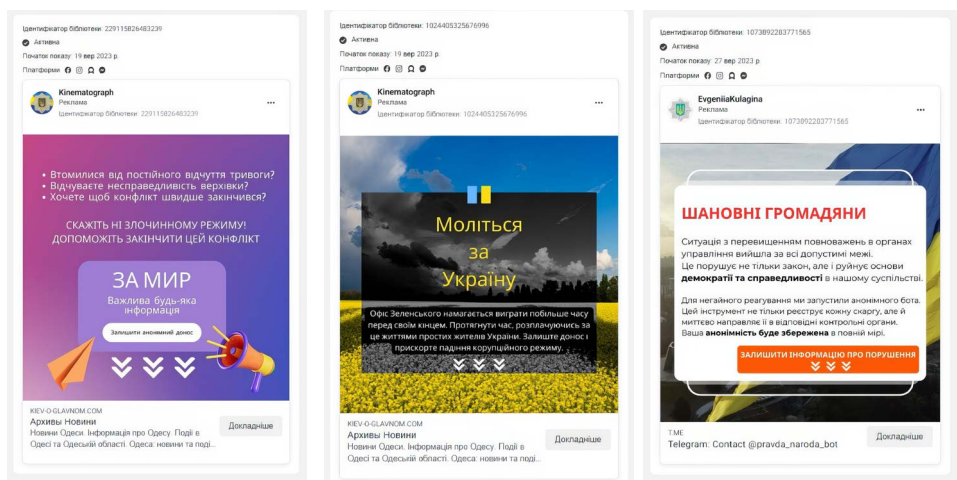




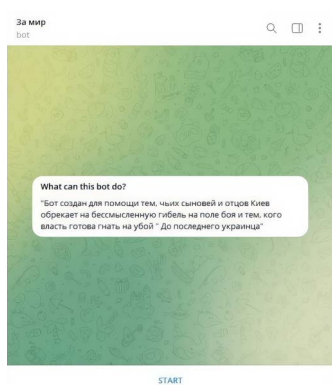
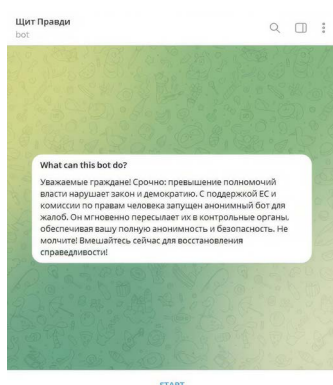
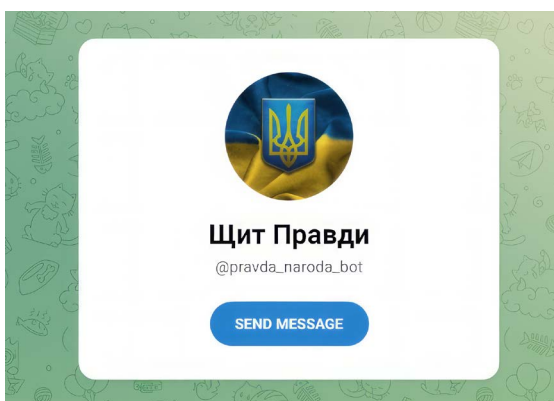
“Pulse of Ukraine” was also used to post Russian propaganda materials about the reconstruction of Mariupol and fakes about “Ukrainian weapons of Hamas.”



In addition to websites links in advertising, there were also links to Telegram channels and chat-bots. Including those whose task was to recruit agents or gather intelligence information. At the end of September, advertising was distributed with appeals to complain about the “excess of authority in the governing bodies”, to help “end this conflict”, or to “leave a denunciation and accelerate the fall of the corrupt regime.”

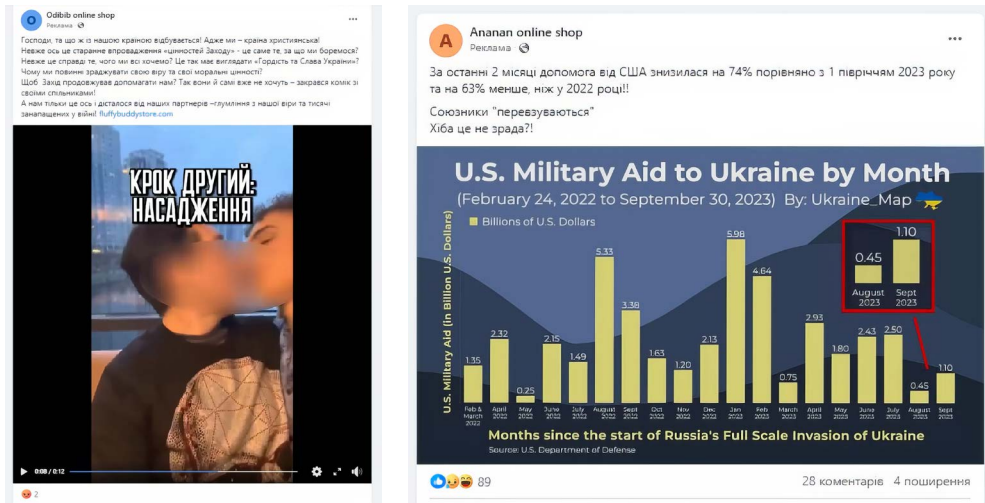


The link led to Telegram bots named “Shield of Truth” and “For Peace”, where you could leave a supposedly anonymous message.

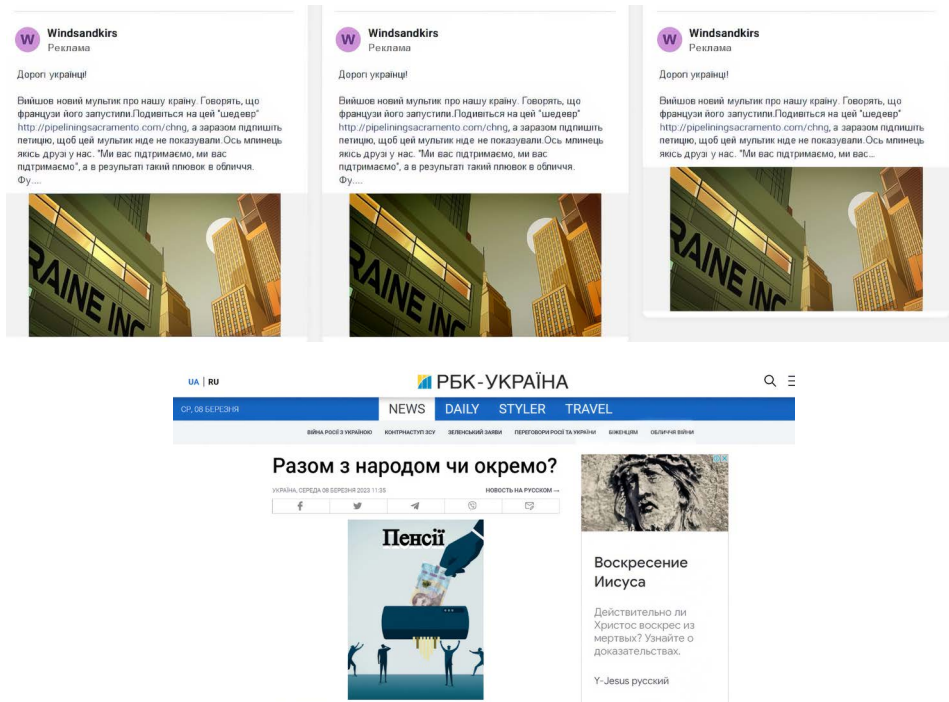




All detected Facebook posts were accompanied by visual content. Photos, infographics, memes and caricatures, as well as videos were used to illustrate publications.



The “French animated series” should be paid with special attention. In the distribution of this “satirical” product, which the authors passed off as European animators work, not only advertising on Facebook were involved, but also a network of Russian Telegram channels, propaganda sites, profiles on Twitter (X), channels on TikTok and YouTube.



The first series of the pseudo-French cartoon appeared online on April 9. But the day before, the persons responsible for the campaign obviously confused the points of the media plan. On March 19, two Facebook accounts posted a link to the fake “RBK-Ukraine” page, one of them wrote in a post about indexing. The second announced a “French cartoon about Zelenskyy”, but the link placed below the text led to the above-mentioned clone of the news source.



The narrative of “external governance” is the main storyline in most series. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky depicted as a drug and alcohol addict, as a “puppet of the West”, who is controlled not only by the leaders of the EU and the U.S., but also by the “secret world Masonic government.”

Winsome ck4
Реклама

Всім привіт!

Ну що, подивився я тут другу серію мультика від французів...

А взагалі, є, над чим задуматися. Мультик-то непростий. Олена з. - темна конячка, на яку ростуть ставки. У Давосі в січні її провели по всім потрібним людям, а в березні вона...



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In October, during the active work on mobilization topic, a series dedicated to this topic was released. According to the plot, Volodymyr Zelensky ends up in the TRC, where soldiers with thick gold chains around their necks (this accessory is supposed to illustrate the corruption of the characters) send obviously sick men to the front.

Eternity steam 17
Sponsored · 🌐

Французи, звичайно, ті ще тварюки, але в цій серії аж сльозу вибили. Б'ють по живому: тут і мобілізація інвалідів, і свавілля військомів, і відсутність лікарів у лікарнях...

І головне, що вони точно помітили: для начальників уся ця війна та мобілізація – по суті гра! І тоді все зрозуміло: адже якщо це просто гра, навіщо шкодувати про втрати? Ось і спостерігають за результатами своїх "трудів", посміхаючись повним ротом золотих зубів.

Жаль тільки, що насправді господар Офісу ніколи на це власними очима не подивиться: elgawla.com

👍 🤔 🙄 172 24 comments 13 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Delicacy curiosity 12
Sponsored · 🌐

Французи, звичайно, ті ще тварюки, але в цій серії аж сльозу вибили. Б'ють по живому: тут і мобілізація інвалідів, і свавілля військомів, і відсутність лікарів у лікарнях...

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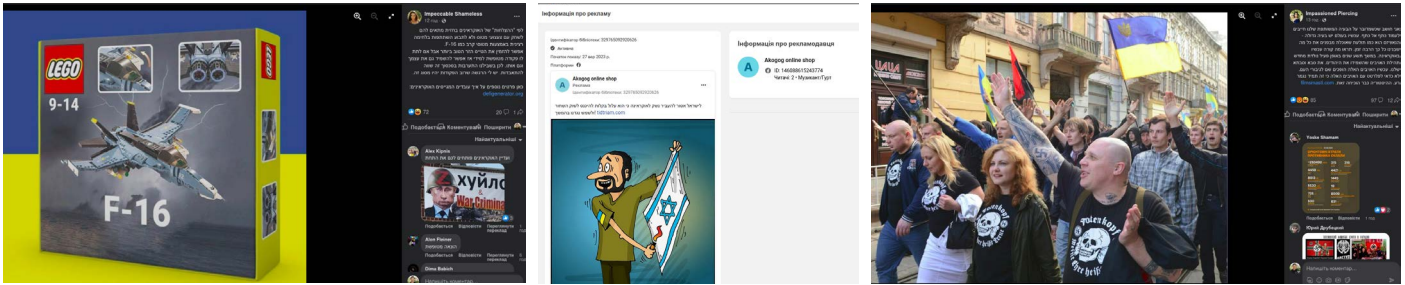
Жаль тільки, що насправді господар Офісу ніколи на це власними очима не подивиться: elgawla.com

👍 🤔 🙄 97 17 comments 22 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

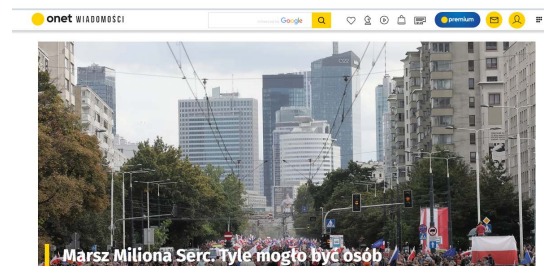
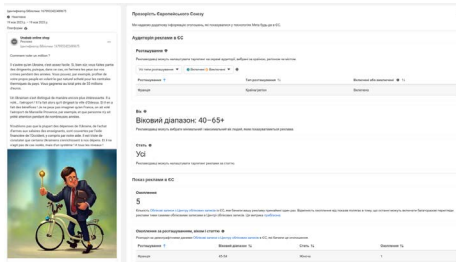


The research revealed advertising messages targeted at audiences in Israel, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Germany, and other countries. These advertisements were not the subject of research, and the messages discovered are obviously only a small part of the total array. With the help of advertising, anti-Ukrainian messages, adapted to the audiences of particular countries, were promoted. In particular, an advertisement about “Ukrainian Nazism” was targeted at the Israeli audience. At the beginning of September, a month before the terrorist attack on October 7, the issue of weapons from Ukraine on the black market was already discussed. After it, a wave of dispersal of the fakes about “Ukrainian weapons of Hamas” continued.

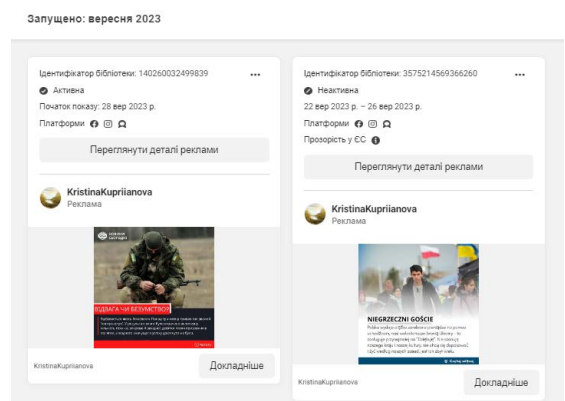


In order to incite hatred towards refugees from Ukraine, traditional anti-migrant messages were targeted at European audiences, as well as statements about the alleged xenophobia of Ukrainians towards national minorities and neighbouring nations. To promote anti-Ukrainian advertising, the same tools were used as for the Ukrainian audience:

- blank pages with automatically generated names;
- use of photos, videos, memes, and caricatures;
- links to clones of information resources (in particular, to the fake page of the Polish website Onet).



The identical tools, the consistency of the messages, as well as the use of the same pages for the distribution of advertising targeted at Ukraine and other countries, gives reason to believe that the same structures are engaged in information attacks on different countries.



SECTION 3. DISINFORMATION AND FRAUDULENT MESSAGES

In addition to the promotion of various goods and services, as well as political and social advertising, Meta's advertising tools are used for dubious and sometimes outright illegal activities.

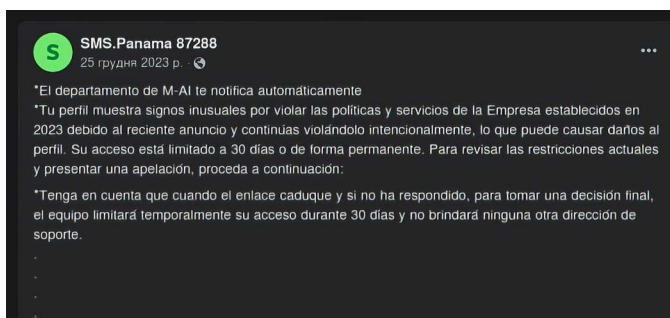
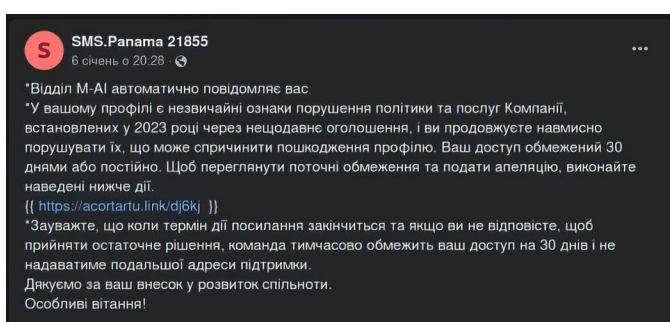
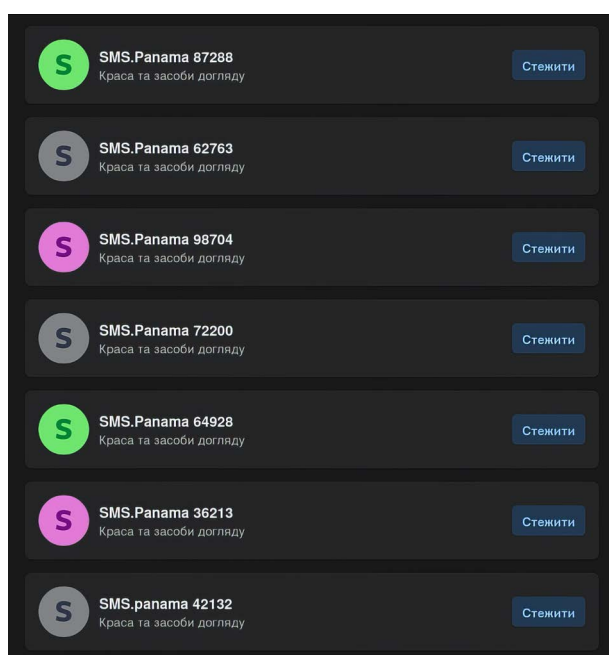
There are various players operating in this field, from medicine sellers and a 90% discount goods, to arms and drug dealers. A separate direction is the distribution of advertisements about alleged social payments from the UN, Diia, NATO, Red Cross, etc. Such advertisements are mostly financial phishing or, in some cases, advertising for anonymous Telegram channels. As a rule, advertising of such "payments" is carried out either through hacked profiles or through automatically registered pages created according to a certain template on a fairly significant scale.

The same pages can be used for other non-advertising activities, page phishing aimed at hacking accounts in social networks and further malicious activity.

Aside from being a targeted attack aimed at harming a specific person, for the most part, phishing is very similar to fishing. The fraudster casts a "digital" fishing rod and waits for the next victim to "peck" at it. The purpose can be different, from the scaling of phishing activities to financial phishing and the distribution of commercial advertising at the expense of the victim.

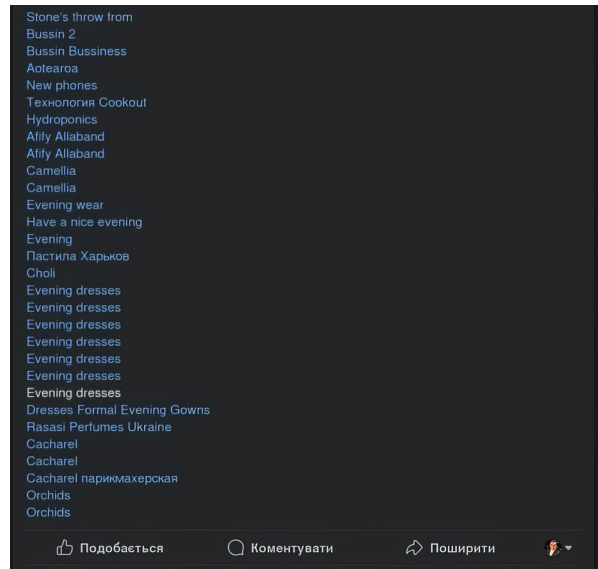
The main reason for the phishing effectiveness is insufficient digital literacy of the victim or a vulnerable psycho-emotional state caused by various circumstances: from being busy with current affairs to the consequences of shelling by Russia.

The main type of phishing spread in 2023 is "Dear Fanpage Admin!" or «The M-AI department automatically informs you.»





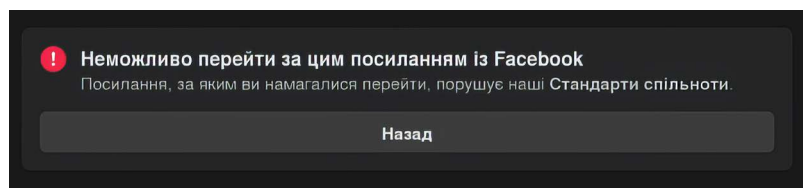
Pages of the same type spread messages to different audiences.



These messages are designed primarily for the smartphone format. That is, the text of the fraudulent message must fit on the screen and look like a complete message. The remaining parts of the message, namely: dozens of empty lines and the lower part of the post with closed pages, which are actually the target of the attack, are hidden. This is done so that the user does not notice that such a message is an ordinary post from an ordinary page and thinks that it is a real official message from the Meta administration.

The main emotional anchors are statements about the existence of a violation and the time period after which the sanction will appear: either the page will be deleted in 24/48 hours, or it will be blocked for 30 days. Since the Meta sanctions system is quite strict and can lead to the limitation of publication, which means the lack of interaction with the audience (for example, the downrate does not allow to reach more than 5 thousand readers), and the blocking of content. Not many experienced administrators of accounts/groups are quite sensitive to such notifications and may fall into a trap.

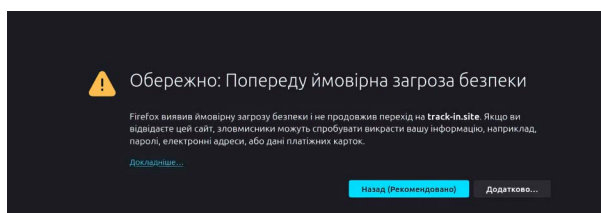
The main marker that should stop a potential victim is a link to third-party resources. So, the URL shortening services and links to various websites around the world are largely used here. At the end of 2023, links to the Brazilian service pages.net.br were repeatedly encountered. Unfortunately, direct communication with the owner of the portal was not successful, but CERT.br's notification of malicious activity became a good example of combating fraud not only at the META level.



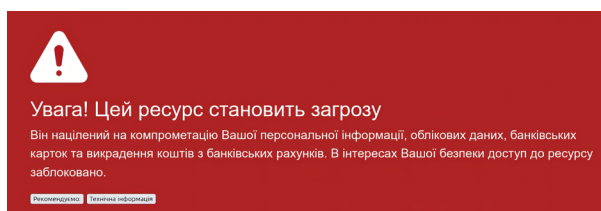
Clicking on the link in such a message does not pose a threat. Moreover, in certain cases, Meta already tries to protect the user and does not allow him to go to a suspicious link.



Similar protection mechanisms can work at the level of the Firefox browser, which uses a Google database, as well as at the level of the National Cyber Security Coordination Center (NCSCC), which provides ISPs with a list of threats.



Firefox Warning



NCSCC Warning

However, fraud schemes are constantly evolving to bypass protections, and it's like an arms race. Therefore, it is not always possible to detect and block phishing links in time. If the resource was not blocked, the user gets to a warning page that imitates the Facebook design and is offered to log in again to “solve the problem”. At this stage, system hacking takes place. A misled user voluntarily gives his data to fraudsters. The consequence may be unauthorized use of the advertising cabinet, loss of control over the profile, etc.

For example, an abandoned Instagram profile of a Kyiv citizen was hacked by fraudsters and used to distribute financial phishing ads; and a hacked cultural institution was turned into a fake Meta business support page. Verified pages are especially valuable for fraudsters, because changing the name or title does not remove the “blue bird” (a sign of verification, that this is an authentic profile). In this way, fraudsters try to increase the credibility of the profile and mislead uninformed victims.

The advertisement for payments from various institutions is one of the fraud messages largely used on the Meta platforms, which has been systematically and massively spreading since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. There were fake messages about payments from Diia, UN, and Red Cross. The most cynical was a series of advertisements about payments to the military personnel families. Also, some advertisements used notifications about the decision (law) adoption on payments from the government.



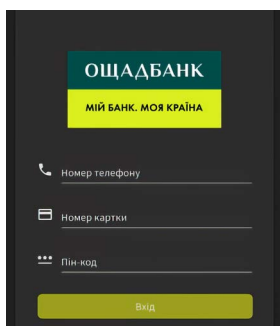
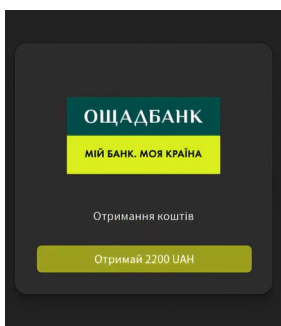
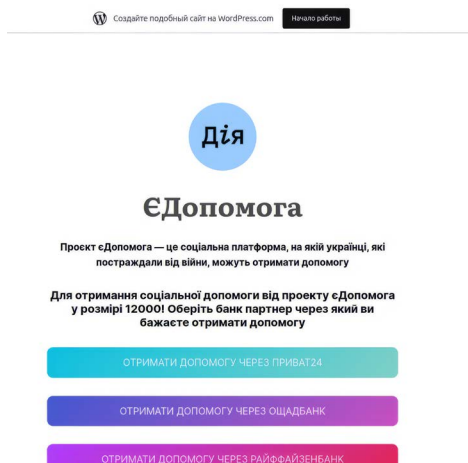
The technology of such messages is diverse. Advertisements can redirect a potential victim to a website imitating a government portal like “ERecovery”, “EHelp”, or on a website simply created ostensibly for payments. At the same time, there is no information about the mythical fund. The victim is offered to choose a bank for “payment accruing”. The next step is to transfer to another website, imitating either a login form for the corresponding bank or a form for entering bank card details.

Увага громадяни!



Крайній день проводиться
ГАРАНТОВАНА виплата на
кожного громадянина України

Виплата від Дії для всіх Українців



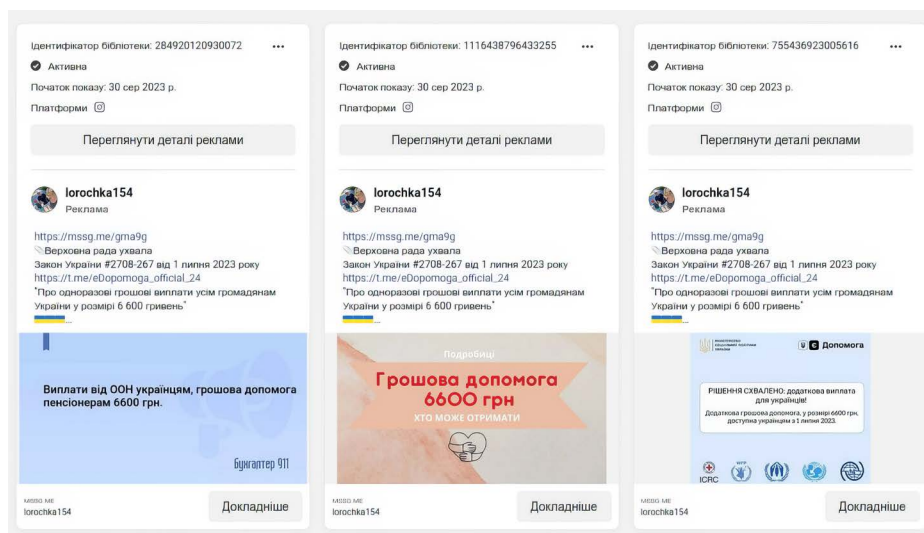
Fake page offering to choose a bank for payments.

Phishing form for “extracting” card information.

Another way to lure a victim can be a Telegram channel or a Telegram bot, which is used with the same purpose to redirect a potential victim to a phishing form.

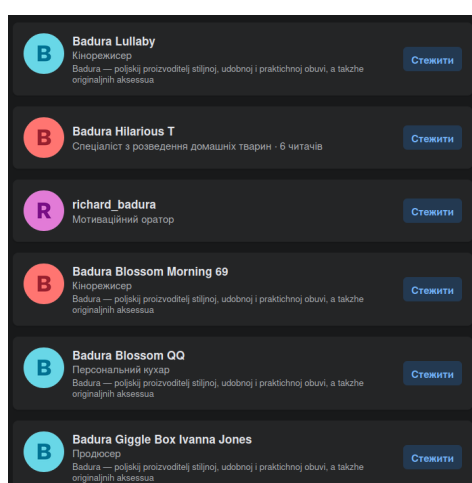
The countering of such frauds is carried out both at the Meta level and at the level of hosting providers to whom complaints about phishing sites were sent. This allows us to break the chain between the advertisement and the phishing form.

Like disinformation campaigns, phishing can have political intent. During 2023, there was malicious activity hybridization where announcements about payments actually led people to anonymous Telegram channels, both for the purpose of audience building and disinformation spreading. Such advertisements are also submitted for removal due to the inauthentic behaviour of their distributors.



The same types of networks are used to spread disinformation, phishing, and dubious advertising. The same types of pages' names often consist of a word, three or four letters, and a number, like Radiant qt6 or Charming qrt5. Also, popular is the use of descriptions like Vinicius Junior or transliterated descriptions of various brands, taken from anonymous Russian-language websites <https://brand-info.com.ua/>, for example: Badura – poljskij proizvoditelj stil'noj, udbonoj i praktichnoj obuvi, a takzhe original'nyh aksesua. In addition, pages that spread both phishing and disinformation were detected. This may indicate a connection between the both directions of malicious activity in the social network.

One complaint to Meta can contain from 200 to 300 same type accounts, and the volume of daily complaints by CEDEM experts to Meta can reach several thousand. Thus, 7,000 complaints on the same type accounts have been filed within two days, in the second half of October.



Restoring victims' access to the accounts is one of the activities of Meta trusted partners. It is important to have contact with the victim and clearly follow Meta's instructions. Unfortunately, attempts to stop the spread of fraudulent advertising of public figures from other countries whose profiles were hacked were unsuccessful - requests remained unconsidered. The cases of Ukrainian users were mostly resolved positively. A side effect of the hack may be the loss of the archive or the long time it takes to restore the account.



SECTION 4. COOPERATION WITH META PLATFORMS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COUNTERING DISTRIBUTION OF HARMFUL CONTENT THROUGH ADVERTISING

From the end of February 2022 to the beginning of November 2023, CEDEM initiated numerous complaints to Meta, which included requests to remove advertisements and posts, as well as to block Facebook and Instagram accounts that spread Russian disinformation and fraudulent messages.

Since the end of March 2023, an intense influx of advertising disinformation has been recorded, which was characterized by wave-like dynamics, often associated with both calendar dates (for example, May 9 - "Victory Day") and events at the front line. In the summer period, disinformation alternated with phishing attacks. The consequences were especially significant in October, when phishing attacks compromised media pages and blogs of public figures in various countries, in particular Ukraine, Georgia, Madagascar, and the United States.

The disinformation posts and advertisements sent by CEDEM for consideration by Meta mostly related to the following topics:

- **Counteroffensive of the Ukrainian Defence Forces.** Attention was focused on the problems with Western military equipment, on the inefficiency and futility of the Ukrainian military losses, on the incompetence of the military command, etc.;
- **Mobilization.** Replenishment of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with new servicemen was described as a mechanism of subjugation and "destruction" of the population;
- **Dissemination of false information in order to sow panic among the population.** Fictional messages about powerful explosions in regional centres or imaginary chemical attacks on regions of Ukraine far from the front, restoration of black-out regimes, etc.;
- **Imitation of news from real Ukrainian media.** Spreading Russian propaganda by creating fake screenshots of modified articles from Suspilne, TSN, and Hromadske or links to sticker websites UNIAN, RBC-Ukraine, Obozrevatel, NV, UNN, UP.

Types of fraudulent content detected and submitted to Meta:

- **Message from the alleged Meta support service about violations of community standards,** in particular, fraudulent activities, copyright infringement, and receiving a blue mark. Fraudsters create fake pages or hack existing social media pages that mimic Meta warnings and send messages to users as if they have violated community standards and must follow a link to take appropriate action or their account or page will be banned;



- **Social payments.** Fraudsters offer to follow a link and then fill out confidential information to receive funds from a bank, government or international organizations, such as the UN or even NATO;
- **Renting or selling accounts.** Advertisements are circulating that offer to rent or buy a user's account. This account is then used to commit fraudulent acts;
- **Advertising for men to go abroad or change citizenship;**
- **Advertisements for obtaining a driver's licence;**
- **Advertising of dubious medicinal products** using modified TV broadcasts, stories, and media press conferences. Special emphasis is placed on channel 24 and 1+1.

Requests to remove disinformation and fraudulent messages made a significant share (41%) of all requests to Meta: 18% and 23%, respectively. It is worth noting the improvement in the processing time of requests, which by the end of the year was reduced to several hours on average, with a record 16 minutes response time. In total, in 2023, CEDEM contacted Meta 105 times regarding disinformation and 136 times regarding fraudulent messages. Importantly, one request often contained more than one page with problematic content. This especially applies to fraudulent pages, which can be dozens or even hundreds in one request.

CEDEM, in cooperation with Meta, has applied carefully thought-out methods to identify and remove unwanted information in social networks. This included using key phrases and words such as: counteroffensive, Zaluzhnyi, Zelenskyy, weapons and others to identify malicious ads. CEDEM experts identified bot farms by analysing the activity of one account, followed by a search for similar ones. After finding relevant information, each case was contested separately. Any advertising that contained disinformation was contested as disinformation, while phishing advertising was contested as phishing, and so on. This process took place through a special communication channel available for Meta trusted partners. Among the main types of advertising were phishing, financial phishing, disinformation, as well as dissemination of information about narcotic substances, advertising of anonymous Telegram channels. Systematic work made possible to significantly increase the effectiveness of efforts in the fight against negative information campaigns in social networks.

Due to the systematic submission of complaints about malicious advertising, Meta's social network algorithms have improved in detecting and automatically removing this kind of content, which has reduced the load on the communication channel. This work made it possible to create effective mechanisms for detecting and combating phishing, disinformation, and other types of malicious advertising. With these improvements, CEDEM experts no longer need to complain about content on a daily basis. Thus, they focused their efforts on monitoring and discovering new ways of spreading malicious content through advertising. This allows us to respond more effectively to the changing tactics and strategies that may be used to spread unwanted messages and information.



In addition to establishing communication with Meta, CEDEM interacted also with hosting providers on whose platforms fraudulent (phishing) content was hosted. This has become an important component of the fraud-fighting strategy on the Internet. Active communication with hosting providers, sending them comprehensive information about phishing sites and other fraudulent resources, that require immediate blocking, allows them to effectively solve the problem not only at the level of individual platforms, but also at the scale of the Internet network and provide a comprehensive approach to combating digital threats.

There are also more frequent cases when Meta removes harmful content even before CEDEM specialists have time to file out a complaint form. This is a manifestation of systemic positive changes because Meta's regular detection and notification of new waves of disinformation and fraud helps to improve the work of social networks' algorithms, which, based on this data, are increasingly better at detecting malicious content.

Although cooperation with Meta to combat disinformation and fraud is well established, the spread of malicious content is not limited to Meta platforms. This is a cross-platform issue. Disinformation campaigns and fraudulent messages are actively spreading on other platforms, in particular, Telegram and X (Twitter), which are more difficult to interact with. This highlights the need for coordinated efforts and a comprehensive approach to effectively combating harmful content on social networks.

At the same time, the volume of disinformation and fraud on social networks is only growing. Fraudsters are finding new ways to bypass social media algorithms. Artificial intelligence systems do not always manage to respond promptly to these challenges. So it is important to continue working with Meta, establish contacts with other platforms, and help train AI algorithms to better counter new manifestations of disinformation and fraud.



CONCLUSIONS

In the conditions of full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the Russian special services are actively using the capabilities of all social networks to spread disinformation and conduct informational and psychological operations.

Since mid-March 2023, advertising messages targeted at the Ukrainian audience, containing both direct disinformation and malicious messages, have regularly appeared on Facebook. Their goal is to demoralize Ukrainian society and reduce its ability to resist aggression.

Content authors use a wide range of tools to attract attention and increase trust in publications, they illustrate them with bright images and videos, mimic popular Ukrainian news sources, and refer to foreign media.

During the research period, propagandists focused on several main topics. Most of the publications were devoted to discrediting the Ukrainian government by accusing it of corruption, incompetence, and bad intentions, as well as discrediting mobilization and Western partners and predicting military defeats.

Phishing messages were distributed using the same methods as propaganda messages. A number of accounts were found that distributed both types of content at the same time. This gives reason to believe that the same structures are responsible for both directions. The same situation exists for the distribution of anti-Ukrainian content aimed at a foreign audience. After all, there were found accounts promoting messages in Ukraine and EU countries at the same time.

CEDEM actively requested Meta regarding the removal of malicious content. This led to the improvement of social network algorithms and helped increase the effectiveness of combating information campaigns. In turn, cooperation with hosting providers has become an important part of the strategy for countering fraud on the Internet. These actions contributed to the creation of a safer digital space.

In view that **Facebook's capabilities are actively used by fraudsters in order to distribute malicious content, which is part of Russian informational and psychological operations, and military propaganda, we recommend to Meta the following:**

- Take into account Ukraine's experience in combating the spread of malicious content on Meta platforms.
- Strengthen advertiser and link verification procedures to prevent the platform from being used to spread disinformation and fraud.
- Develop and implement algorithms to detect and block fake accounts and pages used for mass disinformation.
- Increase the transparency of advertising campaigns, in particular, by providing users with more detailed information about the sources of advertising publications.
- Raise awareness among users about the risks of disinformation and methods of its detection through educational campaigns.



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