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A TACTICAL MODEL OF MALICIOUS TARGETING  
– A CASE STUDY OF REPORTING RACISM  
ON THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER  
AT THE BEGINNING OF WAR IN 2022

INTRODUCTION

The growing public awareness of disinformation's harmful effects evidences this phenomenon's importance. According to the 2019 report by NASK, more than half of Poles have encountered disinformation (Safe Elections. Opinion survey on (dis)information on the Internet, 2019). In the Digital Poland report of 2022, 86% of Poles declare that they are aware of this term (Disinformation through the eyes of Poles, 2022). So there is a clear upward trend in awareness but not necessarily in the ability to effectively recognize and counter disinformation. Disinformation has been a subject of research to a certain extent. Some articles address the topic in a historical (Bittman 1985), political (Bittman 1972), wartime, or espionage context (Bennett & Livingston 2018; Prier 2017; Volkoff 1999; Pacepa & Rychlak 2015; Rid 2022) as well as from the perspective of social influence (Golicyn, 2007; Aleksandrowicz 2022). The complexity of defining disinformation (Świerczek 2018; Wachowicz 2019), including its powerful tool, Fake News (Rosińska 2021), is also an important topic of academic consideration. The first turning point in the broad discussion of disinformation, which triggered a massive public debate on how to counter it, was the COVID-19 infodemic (Cinelli et al. 2020). During critical moments like that, fake news constitutes one element

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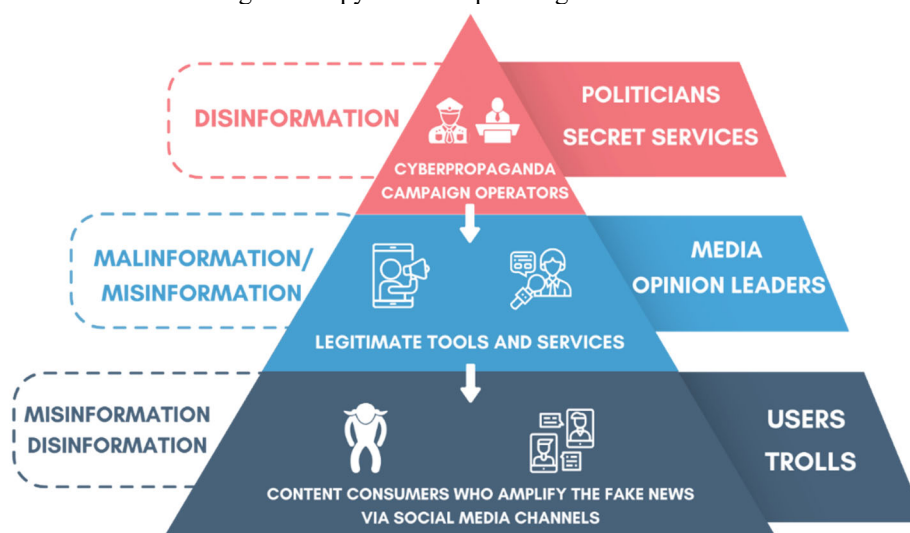
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of disinformation. It can enormously influence significant social decisions (Bastos & Mercea 2019; Hänska-Ahy & Bauchowitz 2017). However, the war in Ukraine contributed to a deeper understanding of the impact of disinformation on individual, political, geopolitical decisions, and international relations. Academic discourse also refers to a hybrid war or information war (Adamczyk & Morinière 2022; Benabid 2022).

From this brief overview, it is clear that the topic of disinformation is important and requires a multifaceted approach. For a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it is essential to define it precisely. The report, prepared for the Council of Europe, identifies three frameworks that describe the dynamics of media information disorder: manipulation, errors, and lies, including dissemination of these messages by naive recipients and dishonest senders (Wardle & Derakhshan 2017). The report categorizes such message interruptions based on two criteria: (1) intent to harm with false content, and (2) falseness of the message. The common element for both criteria is disinformation. This report identifies disinformation as an intentionally provided type of fake content intending to harm or cause harm. The second framework is unintentional misinformation, which is false news disseminated without the intention to cause harm. Even if the intention to spread such news is not harmful, the phenomenon can become a tool to distract from important political or social issues, requiring communication measures that include interventions. Malinformation is a slightly different category – it is true information but published for malicious reasons. It can involve, for example, the distribution of private photos or the publication of events that should not reach the general public. It is also manipulation, intimidation or causing panic with real videos or photos. Malicious messages can be dangerous in the context of exerting social influence and can become an element of a disinformation campaign. The terminology from this report has already become common knowledge and can be considered foundational for understanding the phenomenon of disinformation on the Internet.

To understand the complexity of the dynamics of shifting disinformation into misinformation and vice versa, as well as the significant role of malinformation, it is essential to consider the process of creating and disseminating false and harmful narratives. Creators of disinformation can be divided into distinct subcategories, forming a pyramid structure (Pic. 1).

Fig. 1. The pyramid of spreading disinformation



Źródło: Own work based on L. Gu, V. Kropotov, F. Yarochkin, The fake news machine: How propagandists abuse the Internet and manipulate the public, TrendMicro 2017. [https://documents.trendmicro.com/assets/white\\_papers/wp-fake-news-machine-how-propagandists-abuse-the-internet.pdf](https://documents.trendmicro.com/assets/white_papers/wp-fake-news-machine-how-propagandists-abuse-the-internet.pdf)

The model proposed by the Trend Micro organization illustrates one of the Russian disinformation strategies that incorporates elements of misinformation and malinformation. This strategy entails a certain overarching narrative that arouses social emotions, representing only the top of the pyramid. The subsequent process is much more flexible and often relies on the involvement of unaware or inexperienced entities.

At the top of the pyramid are cyber propaganda operators, designated entities responsible for determining and crafting disinformation goals, tools, and techniques. This group includes high-level politicians conducting their informational campaigns, state entities responsible for direct and indirect communication, and security services of individual countries engaged in information warfare (NATO, 2005).<sup>1</sup> They aim to influence the behavior of other societies through activities in cyberspace, particularly through disinformation and ma-

<sup>1</sup> According to NATO, information warfare is an operation conducted to gain informational advantage over the adversary, which involves controlling one's own informational space, protecting access to one's own information, while simultaneously acquiring and utilizing adversary information, destroying their information systems, and disrupting the flow of information (NATO, 2005). This is not a new phenomenon, but it contains innovative elements resulting from technological development, leading to faster dissemination of information on a larger scale [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/5/pdf/2005-deeportal4-information-warfare.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/5/pdf/2005-deeportal4-information-warfare.pdf)

linformation, and to induce social polarization by producing false content or harmful narratives. At the second level, various types of informational and pseudo-informational portals operating within a specific country are funded and supported. At this level, another group consists of opinion leaders or agents of influence producing opinion-forming content based on disinformation narratives. These individuals create network brigades whose task is to produce false or harmful content and replicate opinions originally generated by cyber propaganda operators. For this purpose, they may also utilize media that promote propaganda narratives and distribute new content through legal online tools to national markets. The last level of creators consists of information consumers. These are recipients of various sources from the second level who freely distribute the news they read on their social media profiles and create their own versions of such messages inspired by previously acquired information. These can be various types of creations, from jokes and memes to conspiracy theories and personal reflections inspired by false or harmful content. Of course, such creators do not necessarily have economic ties to first-level cyber propaganda operators, but they constitute an essential element of social influence. They serve as propagators of misinformation.

The Pyramid of Spreading Disinformation constitutes a model for creating disinformation narratives, which requires time for implementation and appears to be a long-term strategy for communicative influence on societies. The author, following Anton Shekhovtsov, posits that the Kremlin develops disinformative narratives on two levels: strategic and tactical. Strategic narratives reflect long-term visions and deeply rooted beliefs, while tactical narratives are associated with short-term goals. This distinction inspired the author to hypothesize that, in addition to the strategic model of implementing specific disinformation narratives into the infosphere (Pic. 1), there may also be tactical models of maliciously managing the existing media discourse<sup>2</sup> to align it with misinformation. It seems that several such models may exist, but no variant has been developed so far. Therefore, this article aims to develop a tactical model for managing the spread of misinformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Rozumiemy przez to zespół sposobów celowego, nieprzypadkowego używania języka do komunikowania informacji, opinii, wartości, koncepcji, **poglądów mediów** na różne tematy

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## METHODOLOGY

To achieve the research objective and confirm the hypothesis, a case study research strategy was deemed the most suitable. This strategy allows for an in-depth analysis of the dependencies and relationships occurring in the examined case, thereby enabling the development of a general model, referred to as an explanatory case study (Jemielniak 2012). In media studies, we can speak of a media case or a media event, which will be the subject of analysis. To develop a tactical model, it was necessary to select a media event whose impact was emotionally strong enough to be used for managing misinformation. It was determined that the exposure of the topic of racism at the Polish-Ukrainian border at the onset of the war in 2022 would be such a case. The main argument for the significance of this topic was its popularity in the early days of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Russian media produced a narrative suggesting that Russia was defending minorities in Ukraine rather than attacking the country, which in itself was a significant clue suggesting the use of this topic for disinformation purposes in Western societies as well. Additionally, the topic of racism is inherently highly emotional in the media discourse of Western societies, as evidenced by numerous actions related to the Black Lives Matter movement. These arguments prompted the author to look at this topic more closely.

Quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods were chosen to analyze the selected case, focusing on the contexts of media messages. Platform X (formerly Twitter) was used as the analysis space, as it is where disinformation appears and spreads the fastest. Data for the analysis were collected from Brand24. The analysis was carried out based on tweets from February 26, 2022, to 1:00 p.m. on March 2, 2022. The English-language sample included 9,002 tweets posted during the analyzed period. According to the search criteria used, all results had to contain at least the word „racism” and additionally, tweets had to involve one of the words: “Polish”, “Poland”, or “border”. This ensured that the results were narrowed down to those related to the discussed problem.

For a better understanding of the conducted analysis, it is also necessary to define important concepts and issues concerning the selected case (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. Analytical terms

Term	Description concerning the topic of racism at the border
Media case	Individual accidents at the Polish-Ukrainian border were highlighted by the media as a piece of news. These will include reports of dark-skinned men in line at the Polish-Ukrainian border, emotional interviews indicating deliberate discriminatory actions by border guards, etc.
Misinformative interpretation	An understanding or explanation of an event, situation, or piece of information that is based on incorrect, incomplete, or misleading data. This type of interpretation can arise unintentionally due to misunderstandings, lack of knowledge, or poor analysis. In the analyzed context, the misinformative interpretation will be journalistic assumptions that the reason for the detention of dark-skinned men at the border is racism, rather than other possible causes, such as prioritizing women and children.
Disinformation narrative	A statement aimed at presenting events in a falsified chronological and causal order, along with associated characters and environment. In the analyzed context, the disinformation narrative will link isolated media events, interpreting them as deliberate actions stemming from the racism of border guards. The subtext of this narrative will attribute racism to Ukraine and Poland as countries aiming to provoke a negative reaction from Western societies.
Disinformation meta-narrative	The manner of depicting a distorted image of reality that underpins the formation of subjective judgments about reality, as reflected in texts disseminated by individuals, groups, political parties, social movements, etc. In this context, the narrative of racism at the Polish-Ukrainian border aligns with the disinformation meta-narrative that portrays Russia not as an aggressor against Ukraine but rather as conducting a defensive operation in response to adverse actions by the Ukrainian government towards minorities. The underlying aim of this meta-narrative is to deter Western societies from providing support to Ukraine.

## CASE DESCRIPTION

The topic of racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border probably started gaining mass popularity in the account of the British BBC correspondent Stephanie Hegarty. On the third day of the war (February 26, 2022), after 5 p.m., BBC reporter Stephanie Hegarty reports having been in touch with some African students stuck on the Ukraine border. They said that black people were being sent to the back of the queue and that Ukrainians were to be let through first.

Hegarty clarified, however, that it was Ukrainian soldiers rather than Polish border guards turning them away. Photographs from the Polish side of the border show that several people of color have crossed from Ukraine (Pic. 1).

Pic. 1. Stephanie Hegarty tweets



During this period, individual tweets also appeared on the BBC profiles with video materials showing students of different nationalities standing in queues. One video, which has been watched over two million times on Twitter, shows a group of African students in a confrontation with officials, who appear to be refusing to let them pass. Some descriptions attached to the video suggest that they are Polish officers, though, in fact, they were Ukrainian. Some of the statements included specific allegations against the guards and soldiers, who supposedly did not want to let them through. At 21:37, the office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland referred to this narrative on

Twitter, explaining that refugees of various nationalities are allowed into Poland, and the entry was marked #StopFakeNews.

However, the problem was getting worse and before midnight, another tweet appeared, this time about students from India. A stronger negative overtone can be observed about Ukrainian soldiers in this case as well, but the message itself also evokes the Polish side (Pic. 2). Moreover, other reports have indicated that Indians are facing similar difficulties, with BBC reporter Poonam Taneja sharing a video purporting to show Indian students not being allowed to enter Romania. But one Indian student also said that Polish officials were refusing to let Indians cross. This was denied by Poland's ambassador to India, Adam Burakowski, who tweeted that "Poland is allowing to enter without any visa all Indian students who escape from Russian aggression in Ukraine"(Adam Burakowski, 27.02.2022).

Pic. 2. Tweets about Indian students





The next day (February 27, 2022), Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama referred to the case of African students, claiming that he had spoken with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba. “He asserted that Ukrainian border guards have been instructed to allow all foreigners to leave. He promised to investigate and revert quickly,” Onyeama wrote on Twitter (Pic. 3). Meanwhile, Poland’s ambassador to Nigeria Joanna Tarnawska has also dismissed claims of unfair treatment. In this situation, tweets in the afternoon were directing the discussion towards blaming the Ukrainian army. However, the case gained publicity and popularity again thanks to an emotionally charged tweet, in which the word RACISM was used for the first time.

At 12:15, Ravinder Singh, head of the UK-based Khalsa Aid humanitarian group, tweeted to his 340,000 followers that Polish authorities were turning away international students at the border in what he called “absolute racism” (Pic. 4). In response, the Polish prime minister’s office accused Singh of “spreading misinformation”. It said that Ukraine refugees were admitted to Poland regardless of nationality. In the tweet, there was used #PolandFirstToHelp.

Pic 3. Geoffrey Onyeama’s tweet



Pic. 4. Ravinder Singh's tweet used the word "racism"



It can be said that from that moment, individual cases of students of different nationalities were combined into one, creating a specific narrative, which we can call racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border (BBC News, 27.02.2022). There is no denying that it was used in Russian propaganda and Vladimir Putin's diplomatic contacts. The Russian News Agency TASS reports that in the weeks following the incidents at the border, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during a telephone conversation with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that Russian military personnel were doing everything possible to evacuate Indian citizens from the Ukrainian city of Sumy. "It was noted that Indian students held by radicals in Kharkiv were only able to leave the city after strong international pressure on the Kyiv authorities. Russian military personnel are doing their best to ensure the evacuation of Indian citizens from the city of Sumy" (Putin discusses a special military operation in Ukraine in an interview with Modi, 2022). It should be noted that Modi expressed grati-

tude to the Russian side for the measures taken to return students to their homeland.

The next day, February 28, The Indian Express newspaper said it had been in contact with Indians stuck on the Ukrainian side of the border with Poland who said that they were being discriminated against by Ukrainian officials, who were letting through Ukrainians first (Students stuck at Poland border, India looks at Budapest route, 28.02.2022). Rao Maddukuri, president of the Poland-India Business Council, told the Indian Express that one reason for the problems may be that authorities are giving priority to women and children at the border. On Saturday, February 26, he visited the Ukrainian side of the Medyka crossing and said that almost 2,000 Indian students were stuck there. The BBC also has an extensive article on discrimination at the border on its website (Ukraine crisis: Black and Indian students allege discrimination for the border, 28.02.2022). Furthermore, the information was reported by CNN and Aljazeera and many media from other countries.

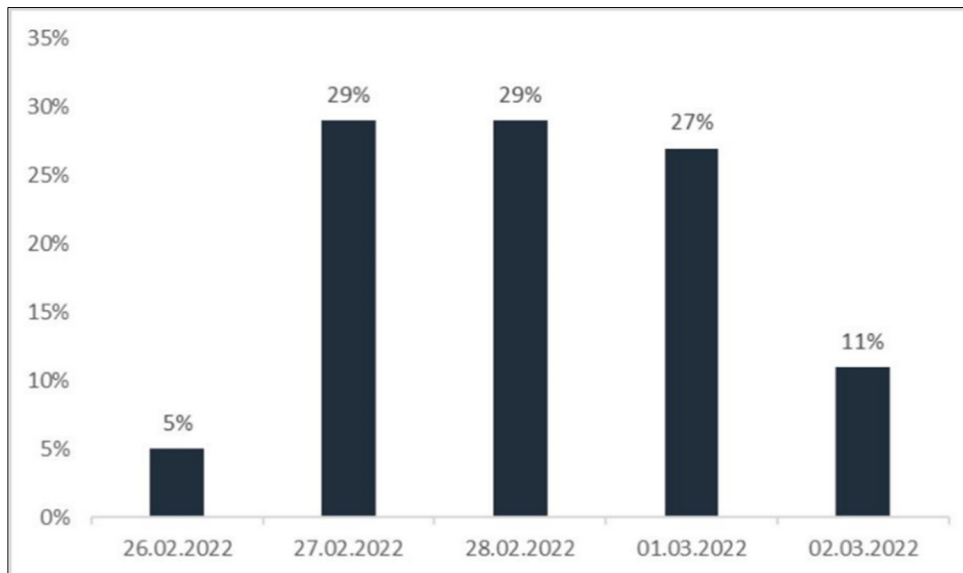
On Twitter, the BBC published an interview with a Nigerian who complained about officers on the Polish-Ukrainian border. The material suggested that the Polish Border Guard treats people “like animals” at the border and treats immigrants from Africa or India worse. Network users quickly reached the entire recording with the Nigerian’s interview. When complaining about the officers, it turned out the man spoke about the events at the railway station in Lviv, not in Poland. The video sparked an avalanche of comments, but it quickly disappeared from the Internet. Experts pointed out that this is probably material promoted and used by Russian propaganda, and its purpose is disinformation. However, it is worth mentioning that the tweet had a huge impact and thousands of shares. The topic resonated for several more days, both in social and traditional media. The statement by the head of the European Council, Charles Michel, can be regarded as its summary, as he stated that “Russia has employed hostile propaganda in an attempt to raise suspicion and doubt among African countries, while we were engaging in a diplomatic battle at the UN against the war in Ukraine” (Reports of racism at EU PL-UA border is Russian propaganda: EU top official, 6.03.2022).

## ANALYSIS

The analysis of the English-language Twitter shows that the dynamics of the spreading of the racism narrative are closely correlated with the previously

presented discussion. At the turn of Sunday and Monday (February 27-28, 2022), there was a sharp increase in data about racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border. The following days showed that the trend was not dying out. Considering that data from March 2, 2022, were analyzed until 1:00 p.m., it can be assumed that the total number of tweets remained at the level from previous days (Pic. 5). The topic has thus become a significant thread on social media. Although it started with important social actors such as journalists and opinion leaders, the large number of posts reinforcing this topic is the responsibility of ordinary users, probably involved in the topic of racism (Tab. 2). Interestingly, the analysis shows that most of the accounts sharing content did not show the characteristics of bots, but half of them are suspended by X, which is a common practice for violations of the platform's regulations. This suggests that accounts active on this topic may have been used for malicious purposes as part of influence operations. Based on this, it can be inferred that, unlike standard Russian disinformation activities, the interest in this topic was partly artificially generated.

Pic. 5. Impact on English-language Twitter by days



Source: Brand24

Tab. 2. Accounts with the biggest number of English-language tweets on the topic

Top 10 accounts on X	Number of publications on the topic
@sbererscien (suspended)	51
@9HiaHHYw6aPfHOY (suspended)	35
@JeevanGmailcom (bot)	29
@RB_131295 (suspended)	27
@brwantyyy____y (suspended)	25
@marikishtar (real)	21
@Kbnt_KenyaTv (suspended)	17
@tyska1111 (deleted)	17
@DNAradionet (alternative media)	16
@sp3tui (bot)	15

Source: Own elaboration based on Brand24

A detailed analysis of the case of reporting racism at the Polish-Ukrainian border has uncovered key elements and significant actors involved in the dissemination of this information (Tab. 3).

Tab. 3. Analysis of Key Elements in the Case of Reporting Racism at the Polish-Ukrainian Border

Individual stages of reporting	Important actors	Social role
<i>Media case or Malinformation</i> Presentation of individual cases involving African and Indian students at the border	Stephanie Hegarty, Poonam Taneja, Mocking Monk	Journalists
<i>Misinformative interpretation</i> Biased, emotional interpretation of events—eliciting strong emotional reactions	Ravinder Singh, Indian Express, Narendra Modi	Activists, local journalists, politicians, media users
<i>Disinformation narrative</i> Directing the discussion towards disinformative interpretations of events and fostering polarization	TASS, BBC, Wladimir Putin, @sbererscien @9HiaHHYw6aPfHOY @JeevanGmailcom @RB_131295 @brwantyyy____y @marikishtar @Kbnt_KenyaTv @tyska1111 @DNAradionet @sp3tui	Bots, trolls, fake influencers, and so-called alternative media

Source: Own elaboration

We can observe that the primary actors introducing the topic of racism into the infosphere were journalists and activists. They misinterpreted individual events, forming the basis for further media discussion, particularly in English-speaking countries. It was only in the third phase that this information was leveraged by Vladimir Putin for political discussions and subsequently promoted by Russian media and false influencers. The entire narrative regarding alleged racism at the Polish-Ukrainian border was consistent with the actions of Russian politicians and local media. This narrative partially aligns with the Russian disinformation meta-narration, which emphasized Nazism and the threat to Ukraine's residents as reasons for the attack on Ukraine (Lavrov: "No one is going to occupy Ukraine," 25.02.2022). It appears that, although the issue of racism was not initially designed as a tool of cyber propaganda, it was later exploited as such. The narrative was disseminated to African countries and India via websites categorized as alternative media. Such widespread dissemination could have had severe implications for global reactions to the conflict and the provision of necessary aid to Ukraine. From Russia's perspective, it was critical in the initial days of the war to deter NATO countries or the EU from supporting Ukraine. At that time, Poland was Ukraine's main ally and advocate on the international stage.

## DISCUSSION

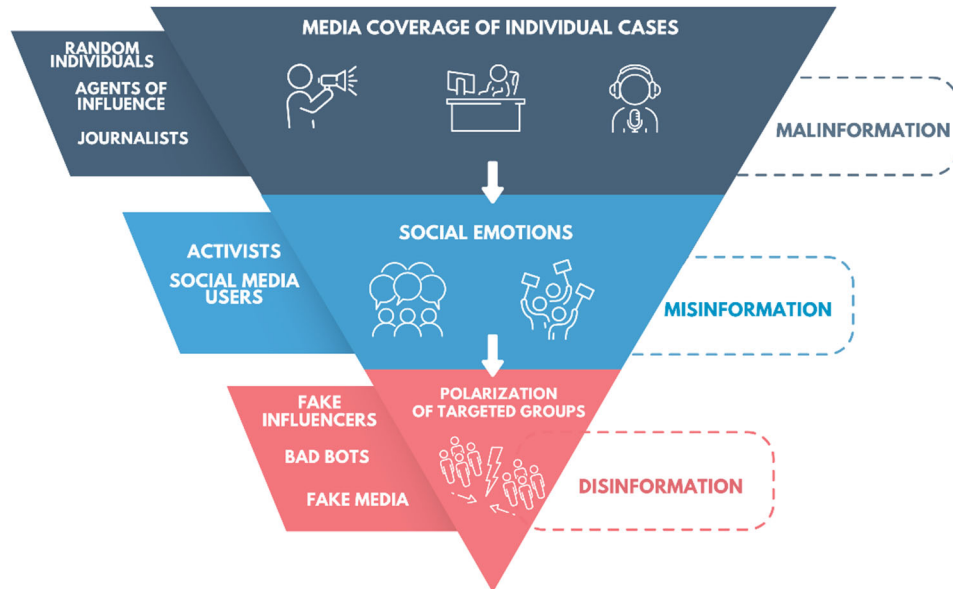
The presented analysis is part of numerous activities related to learning the disinformation narratives created by the Russian services at the beginning of the intensified fighting in Ukraine (Adamczyk & Morinière 2022; Benabid 2022; Disinformation narratives about the war in Ukraine 2022; Disinformation related to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, 2022). Analyzing the example of informing about racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border allowed us to understand several important points in the activities related to creating tactical disinformation narratives.

First of all, the main actors introducing the topic were journalists from popular and reputable stations, and public figures. Their actions, aimed at informing about difficulties at the border crossing, introduced international public opinion into a kind of frame thinking, related to a biased interpretation of these phenomena. Due to the sensitivity related to racism in Anglo-Saxon countries and their former colonies, both journalists and the public opinion perceived the events at the border (long queues of students from Africa and

India) as negative actions because their historical background told them so. In most of these interpretations, a perspective related to the priority of women and children in situations of danger, not related to race, did not appear. It can be said that this was the first stage, partly based on malinformation, and its effect was a kind of interpretative setting of the information environment. Increasing emotional arousal on English-language Twitter was done through individual videos supporting the discriminatory narrative, and their spreading was the responsibility of committed users and mainstream media. This was the second stage – misinformation. It seems that this was expected by the Russian side, which only from March 3 began to use the activities of foreign media for disinformation purposes, as evidenced by Putin's speech referring to racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border (SkyNews 3.03.2022). Arguments are highlighted in the context of the detention and torture of residents of other countries in Ukraine, particularly residents from India, Pakistan, and China. In this narrative, Russian media and officials talk about helping international populations living in Ukraine. Putin speaks with presidents of other countries and assures them of the protection of Ukraine's foreign residents.

The case study provides general insights into the tactical diversity in the practice of disinformation operations. In the introduction, a disinformation pyramid illustrates the tactic of narrative creation by specific actors. Disinformation narratives are then created top-down by small groups of creators, and their various variants depend on the social initiative of unaware disseminators, which constitutes a component of misinformation. However, the analyzed case suggests that disinformation operations can also occur in reverse. Let's call this tactic malicious targeting. It involves leveraging a popular media topic, often based on malinformation. Contents generated by journalists or popular influencers are used for generalization, which becomes a deliberate disinformation operation targeted at specific audience groups. This process will be illustrated in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. A Tactical Model of Malicious Targeting



In this case, the thematic content is not imposed top-down but rather depends on the current state of public debate and journalistic activities. If it is deemed useful from the perspective of disinformers, they then reinforce radical interpretations, sometimes utilizing artificial or malicious accounts to boost the reach of content and target it towards specific audience groups. The analysis of the case suggests that Russian activities in the field of information are not accidental, but also not fully planned, because they fit into the themes created by important actors, such as journalists and public figures. From a tactical perspective, Russian propaganda can turn the content created by political and media actors into an immediate and effective tool of disinformation and confusion, which can be faster and even more dangerous. Such actions may also serve as an alternative creation of reality in Western media, diverting the attention of media consumers to less critical issues compared to the direct consequences of the war.

The question arises: why is the narrative about racism so important from the Russian perspective? Initially, it seemed that the armed attack on February 24, 2022, would bring the expected and quick success. It can be said that the entire Russian propaganda machine was focused on arguing why Russia would occupy Ukraine and whom it would protect. At the same time, Russia did not focus on one narrative or a ready-made plan of informing about the war but



adapted it depending on the circumstances and the development of the situation. An example of such adaptation is the case of racism at the border analyzed in this article. On the international stage, Russian representatives claim that their actions are intended to help the persecuted international community, which is being intimidated by the Ukrainian government (March 4-6). There is also disinformation aimed at Western countries to slow down their responses, especially sanctions. The BBC and CNN followed this thread in their materials from the Polish-Ukrainian border. After some time, these materials were removed, but these arguments are still frequently used in the Russian narrative. In the second week of the war, there was also a significant increase in quotes of manipulated news from abroad in the Russian media. It seems that Russian disinformation creates its narratives for various information bubbles, also in the continental dimension. It works differently in the European field or the USA and sends a different message to the countries of the Global South. At the same time, it is not always a new or artificial message. Perhaps even more often, these are actions supporting already existing conflicts, doubts or fears.

One of the most important features of Russian disinformation (Golicyn, 2007) is its long-term strategic dimension. The disinformation narratives created at the beginning of the armed attack did not appear accidentally but are a deeply thought-out geopolitical tool. The theme of racism allows us to observe how the strategy of geopolitical division is outlined in the face of a long-term war. The alliance of the communist bloc states, with its various phases, suggests that Russia and China are collaborating in the field of information warfare. Although China tries not to take an unambiguous position on the war in Ukraine, it can be inferred from its official statements that it is not opposed to this war (Russia's war on Ukraine: 'It has to be China' as a mediator, EU foreign policy chief says, 5.03.2022). Moreover, the Chinese call for peace in a strategic dimension supports the Russian narrative that the war in Ukraine is essentially defensive. The aggressor in the foreground is Ukraine with Poland helping her, and in a fairly clear subtext, it is the United States. And it is in this division that racism seems to be crucial. This narrative evokes powerful emotions in the countries of America, Africa, India, and Turkey, i.e. wherever there are natural historical tensions in relations with the United States or Great Britain. It is intended to remind us of colonial treatment and lack of freedom.

Association with the activities of Polish and Ukrainian services is intended to question the innocence of these countries in the perception of the societies of the Global South. If this is combined with propaganda activities promoting

Russia through information channels, it may turn out that a large part of the world does not have an unambiguous assessment of the situation in Ukraine. The very fact of the division became apparent after the first month of the war. On March 24, 2022, the General Assembly of the UN adopted a resolution – drafted by Ukraine and 90 co-sponsors entitled Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine – with 140 votes in favor, five against – Russia, Syria, North Korea, Eritrea and Belarus – and 38 others abstaining (Ukraine: General Assembly passes resolution demanding aid access, by a large majority, 24.03.2022). Most of the abstentions came from African countries as well as India. Less than a year after the start of the open conflict in Ukraine, Russia opened a military base in Sudan (Majmurek 2023), clearly indicating that Africa is an important continent around which it wants to build its military power in the international arena.

Therefore, in a crisis, it is not always crucial to identify the first source or author of a given disinformation message. Of course, this should be investigated and monitored to reveal connections, but it is equally important to understand the social and communicative context. For example, if a journalistic message about a particular issue aligns with the strategic objectives of a hostile state's operational activities, there is a high likelihood that it will be exploited for disinformation purposes. From a counteraction perspective, the original author's identity is irrelevant because the key is to undertake actions countering the disinformation narrative and highlighting its broader manipulative dimension. In this context, prebunking actions are of paramount importance. This approach involves efforts to inoculate society against disinformation through education on the psychological mechanisms of information processing, manipulation techniques, the spread of disinformation on the Internet, and identifying specific disinformation narratives whose symptoms have been detected at an early stage of their development (van der Linden 2024). Another crucial element is strategic communication which takes into account the disinformation activities of hostile states. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Global South and the disinformation narrative about racism. Within strategic communication, it is essential to promote the positive values of European Union countries and Ukraine to counteract Russian and Chinese influence operations on this continent.

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A TACTICAL MODEL OF MALICIOUS TARGETING –  
A CASE STUDY OF REPORTING RACISM ON THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER  
AT THE BEGINNING OF WAR IN 2022

Summary

The article is an analysis of disinformation about racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border. This article aims to show the process of creating a narrative and present the relationship between disinformation activities and the formation of the global divide. The research method is a case study based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of tweets of racism on the Polish-Ukrainian border in English (from February 26, 2022, to 13:00 on March 2, 2022). The main conclusions from the analysis are: Russian activities in the field of information are not accidental, but they are also not fully planned because they follow themes created by important actors such as journalists and public figures; the process of building harmful narratives has its stages, which often start with the malinformation, and then, thanks to the involvement of ordinary users, transform into misinformation and finally be directed as disinformation. The topic of racism is important in the geopolitical dimension and is addressed mainly to the societies of the Global South, to build a bloc of States that are in opposition to the domination of the US and the EU.

**Keywords:** disinformation; misinformation; racism; Russia; Ukraine; war

TAKTYCZNY MODEL ZŁOŚLIWEGO UKIERUNKOWANIA – STUDIUM PRZYPADKU  
RELACJONOWANIA PROBLEMATYKI RASIZMU NA GRANICY POLSKO-UKRAIŃSKIEJ  
NA POCZĄTKU WOJNY W 2022 ROKU

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest analizą przypadku dezinformacji dotyczącej rasizmu na granicy polsko-ukraińskiej. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie procesu tworzenia narracji dezinformacyjnych oraz przedstawienie związku między działaniami dezinformacyjnymi a powstawaniem polaryzacji i globalnych podziałów. Metoda badawcza to studium przypadku oparte na ilościowej i jakościowej analizie zawartości tweetów w języku angielskim dotyczących rasizmu na granicy polsko-ukraińskiej (w okresie od 26 lutego 2022 roku do 2 marca 2022 roku). Główne wnioski z analizy są następujące: działania Rosji w obszarze dezinformacji nie są przypadkowe, ale także nie są w pełni zaplanowane, ponieważ wpisują się w tematy tworzone przez ważnych

aktorów społecznych, takich jak dziennikarze i osoby publiczne; proces budowania narracji ma swoje etapy, które często zaczynają się od prawdziwych, ale szkodliwych wiadomości, następnie dzięki zaangażowaniu zwykłych użytkowników przekształcają się w dezinformację niezamierzoną, a ostatecznie stają się intencjonalnie polaryzującą dezinformacją. Dezinformacja dotycząca rasizmu ma istotne znaczenie w wymiarze geopolitycznym i jest adresowana głównie do społeczeństw Globalnego Południa, aby stały się one sojusznikiem Rosji i stanowiły blok państw przeciwstawiających się dominacji USA i UE.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dezinformacja; rasizm; Rosja; Ukraina; wojna