

A study of threats in the information environment on the example of discussions about Russophobia in the Polish-language section of Facebook based on data from 2018 and January-April 2022

Abstract

The article analyses the accounts most involved in initiating discussions about Russophobia in the Polish-language section of the Facebook social network in 2018 and in the period January-April 2022. The research process was carried out using quantitative trend analysis of the occurrence of a keyword related to discussion about Russophobia, network analysis and frame analysis. The author's intention was an in-depth description of how this group of social media users reacted to the situational factor shaping the information environment, which was Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The author sought to answer the question of how the observed phenomena affected the information security of the state. The study noted positive changes in the segment of the information environment concerning the discussion of Russophobia.

Keywords

information warfare, trolling, propaganda, Russia, Facebook, information environment, network analysis, frame analysis.

Domination in the information space is a constant object of competition between political forces, social movements and commercial actors. Changes in the international order, cultural-ideological tensions between states with different political systems and the revival of social movements contesting the socio-political order are just some of the current trends resulting from the intensifying rivalry between powers and the increased dynamics of phenomena negatively affecting the information space of individuals and societies. These issues should also be considered as elements shaping state security - due to their potential impact on social life and the risk of causing disruptions in the functioning of public administration. They are the subject of interdisciplinary research of both a theoretical and empirical nature.

This article discusses the results of research on the problem of identifying threats to information security of the state resulting from the popularisation of foreign propaganda narratives in the Polish information environment¹. The author adopted an understanding of the state's information security that includes both its telecommunication dimension and anthropocentric aspects related to influencing human decisions and attitudes². The subject of the article concerns the second of these dimensions.

The article is based on the idea that the label of Russophobe or Russophobia, i.e. an attitude hostile to Russians and everything Russian³, is used in a systematic and methodical way to create narratives in the lines of persuasion of Russian propaganda. The source of this belief of the author can be found in both Polish and foreign studies on the subject⁴. In the Polish literature, it is worth noting the Centre

¹ The term "information environment" is explained later in the article.

² The need to take this aspect into account when defining information threats is highlighted by many authors. See: T. Aleksandrowicz, *Podstawy walki informacyjnej* (Eng. Basics of information warfare), Warszawa 2016, pp. 119–123; A. Żebrowski, *Bezpieczeństwo informacyjne Polski a walka informacyjna* (Eng. Poland's information security and information warfare), "Roczniki Kolegium Analiz Ekonomicznych" 2013, no. 29, p. 453. The definition of state information security will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

³ See the entry "Russophobia" in: *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/rusofobia;2574544> [accessed: 28 I 2023].

⁴ In public discourse, whether in Poland, Western European countries or the United States, there are also opinions to the contrary, i.e. upholding the claim that Western policy is motivated by Russophobia. Such opinions also appear in the academic debate. An example is the book by the Norwegian political scientist Glenn Diesen entitled: *Russophobia: Propaganda in International Politics* (Singapore 2022), in which Russophobia is defined as "fear of and contempt for Russia, which is a logical consequence of anti-Russian propaganda". According to Diesen, Russophobia furthermore manifests itself in the stigmatisation of Russia for its difference from the West, especially its liberal values. See in more detail: G. Diesen, *Russophobia...*, pp. 3, 15. In this article, the author does not engage in a polemic with such a claim, as it goes beyond the stated aims of the paper. However,

for Eastern Studies' (OSW) analysis entitled *Russophobia in the Kremlin's strategy. Weapons of mass destruction*⁵, which describes the propagation of Russophobia messages as a strategic narrative direction directed by the Russian authorities to both internal and external audiences. OSW experts note at the same time that the very concept of Russophobia in Russian political discourse has a long tradition, dating back to the 1840s. It was introduced by Fyodor Tyutchev - a poet, diplomat and secret counsellor in the Third Department of His Majesty's Personal Chancellery,

it seems that the available literature exhaustively discusses the problems of identity self-identification of the decision-making political elite of the Russian Federation, which is essentially based on the belief that Russia operates under the conditions of a besieged fortress, and that the source of such a situation is the hostile intentions of the West. This, in turn, conditions Russians' approach to the perception of international relations in the information space (more broadly, in international communication) - it is seen as another domain in which Russia must fight its battles. Such a belief is not only symptomatic of contemporary Russian power; it has a centuries-old tradition. There are a number of items in the Polish literature discussing this issue from a cultural and historical perspective and the implications for more practical issues, such as the concepts and doctrines of Russian information warfare. See in more detail: I. Borowik, *Odbudowanie pamięci. Przemiany religijne w Środkowo-Wschodniej Europie po upadku komunizmu* (Eng. Reconstructing Memory. Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism), Kraków 2000, p. 131; R. Kłaczyński, *Kultura strategiczna Federacji Rosyjskiej* (Eng. Strategic culture of the Russian Federation), "Nowa Polityka Wschodnia" 2012, no. 1, pp. 23–24; A. Zamojski, *Cywilizacja turańska Feliksa Konecznego – założenia teoretyczne oraz współczesna egzemplifikacja* (Eng. Feliks Koneczny's Turanian civilization - theoretical assumptions and contemporary exemplification), "The Peculiarity of Man" 2018, no. 27, pp. 65–80; P. Biliński, *Feliks Koneczny jako badacz dziejów Rosji i Europy Wschodniej* (Eng. Feliks Koneczny as a scholar of Russian and Eastern European history), "Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2003, vol. 38, pp. 227–246; M. Wojnowski, *Aleksandr Dugin a resorty siłowe Federacji Rosyjskiej. Przyczynek do badań nad wykorzystaniem geopolityki przez cywilne i wojskowe służby specjalne we współczesnej Rosji* (Eng. Aleksandr Dugin and the power ministries of the Russian Federation. A contribution to the study of the use of geopolitics by civilian and military special services in contemporary Russia), "Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego" 2014, no. 10, pp. 11–37; R. Bäcker, *Międzywojenny eurazjatyzm. Od intelektualnej kontrakulturacji do totalitaryzmu* (Eng. Interwar Eurasianism. From intellectual counterculture to totalitarianism), Łódź 2000, p. 13; I. Massaka, *Eurazjatyzm. Z dziejów rosyjskiego misjonizmu* (Eng. Eurasianism. From the history of Russian missionism), Warszawa 2009, pp. 9–13. In the remainder of the article, the author focuses only on clarifying the placement of allegations of Russophobia in the propaganda of the Russian Federation and provides other sources - in his opinion - confirming such a state of affairs. The above-mentioned literature is discussed in greater detail in the author's doctoral dissertation. See: K. Baraniuk, *Walka informacyjna jako środek realizacji polityki zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej. Przykład trollingu w polskojęzycznej cyberprzestrzeni* (Eng. Information warfare as a means of implementing the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. An example of trolling in Polish cyberspace), Wrocław 2022, pp. 115–122 (The dissertation is available electronically on: <http://repozytorium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/132316/PDF/Kamil%20Baraniuk%20doktorat%20pdf%5B5683%5D.pdf>).

⁵ J. Darczewska, P. Żochowski, *Rusofobia w strategii Kremla. Broń masowego rażenia* (Eng. Russophobia in the Kremlin's strategy. A weapon of mass destruction), "Punkt Widzenia" 2015, no. 56, pp. 5–28.

i.e. the Tsar's secret police (the predecessor of the Okhrana). At the time, internal critics of the tsarist regime (mainly Occidentalists⁶) and external enemies, especially 'traitors to Slavism', such as Catholic Poland, were called Russophobes. This narrative was therefore intended to deprecate opponents of the authorities on the one hand, and on the other to present worldviews desirable from its point of view, i.e. mainly Orthodox patriots and Russophiles (or Slavophiles) who were the opposite of Russophobes⁷. The authors of the OSW publication emphasise that theses of Russophobia also functioned in the times of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics⁸, but on a wider scale they began to be re-implemented in the activities of the propaganda apparatus of the Russian Federation (RF) since its aggression against Ukraine in 2014. This strategy was intended to facilitate the devaluation of the West's critical stance towards Russian Federation policy. In this context, as OSW experts emphasise, the narrative of Russophobia continues the narrative dualism of self and alien and has become (...) *a key word explaining the political-psychological motives for rejecting everything Russian*⁹. This observation is confirmed by the research of think tanks and non-governmental organisations, including the Centre for the Analysis of Propaganda and Disinformation¹⁰ and the Warsaw

⁶ Narrative labels about Russophobia and Russophobes are part of one of the main Russian worldview patterns presenting Russia as the axiological-cultural opposite of the Occident. Such a current is characteristic of many Russian ideological and intellectual currents, e.g. the pan-Slavist or Eurasian movements. See in more detail: J. Diec, *Doktryna rosyjskiej polityki zagranicznej. Partnerzy najbliżsi i najdalsi* (Eng. Russian foreign policy doctrine. Near and distant partners), series: *Geostrategiczny wybór Rosji u zarania trzeciego tysiąclecia*, vol. 1, Kraków 2015, p. 37; P. Eberhardt, *Rosyjski panslawizm jako idea geopolityczna* (Eng. Russian pan-Slavism as a geopolitical idea), "Przegląd Geopolityczny" 2010, vol. 2, pp. 43–64; R. Bäcker, *Międzywojenny eurazjatyzm...*, p. 11. At the same time, it is worth emphasising that the attitude towards the West is a traditional axis of polemics in the Russian intellectual tradition. In addition to the anti-Western current discussed above, there is an oeuvre that sees Occidentalism as an indispensable source of Russia's modernisation. A view based on such an assumption, called Occidentalism (Russian: *западничество*), experienced its greatest development in the 19th century. Among its representatives at the time were Alexander Herzen (1812–1870), Nikolai Stankevich (1813–1840), Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848) and Pyotr Chaadayev (1794–1856). See in more detail: M. Łoski, *Historia filozofii rosyjskiej* (Eng. History of Russian philosophy), Kęty 2000, pp. 50–62; J. Dobieszewski, *Wissariona Bielińskiego zmagania z rzeczywistością* (Eng. Vissarion Belinsky's struggle with reality), "Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu" 2009, no. 78, pp. 22–31. The author makes these comments in passing, their elaboration going beyond the accepted framework of the article.

⁷ J. Darczewska, P. Żochowski, *Rusofobia w strategii Kremla...*, pp. 9–10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ See: M. Kowalska, A. Lelonek, *Rosyjska wojna dezinformacyjna przeciwko Polsce* (Eng. Russian disinformation war against Poland), in: K. Wóycicki, M. Kowalska, A. Lelonek, *Rosyjska wojna dezinformacyjna przeciwko Polsce*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 11–16. Based on a review of the content

Institute¹¹, which monitor the message of the propaganda media of the Russian Federation aimed at the Polish-speaking public.

The issue of the presence of theses about Russophobia was the subject of research of the author of this article within the framework of preparation of his doctoral dissertation¹². The research covered profiles promoting this term, taking into account their assessment for the presence of symptoms of trolling¹³. The analysis shows that in 2018, there were at least several accounts systematically introducing theses about Russophobia into the Polish information space. The features manifested by them indicated that they could be identified as probable channels of propaganda of the Russian Federation in Polish social media¹⁴. Another type of accounts constantly involved in the propagation of Russophobic content were the profiles of various types of activists - real social media users (or profiles crafted for such

published by Polish and Russian media, which is part of the propaganda narrative of the Russian Federation, the authors of the study observed that the narrative of Polish Russophobia (especially of the Polish authorities) is one of the most important narrative lines of Russian propaganda. Other objectives of propaganda influence are related to creating a sense of threat, as well as arousing and sustaining antagonism.

- ¹¹ See: J. Kwiecień, *Polska widziana oczyma Eurazjatów. Rosyjskie tezy propagandowe w przestrzeni medialnej* (Eng. Poland seen through the eyes of Eurasians. Russian propaganda claims in the media space), "The Warsaw Institute Review" 2017, special edition, p. 73. The research discussed in the material shows that one of the main narratives present in the Russian media is that Poland is inherently Russophobic and unjustifiably anti-Russian.
- ¹² The study covered 14,675 messages published on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Using a categorisation key prepared for the study, the content of the 52 most active profiles was analysed for their manifestation of characteristics described in the literature as indicators of trolling. See in more detail: K. Baraniuk, *Walka informacyjna jako środek...*, pp. 203–247.
- ¹³ The following issues were examined: 1) the existence of anomalies indicating identity concealment, 2) the presence in the content of the messages of elements reinforcing the persuasiveness of the message (e.g. vulgarisms, memes, insults), 3) the presence of elements reinforcing the dissemination of the message in the content of the messages (links to other sources, hashtags, advertisements, interaction in social media), 4) the distinction among the places of publication of opinion-forming accounts (publicists, worldview groups, mainstream media profiles), 5) the presence in the messages published by the account of content contesting the political and social order of the Republic of Poland (e.g. migration themes, conspiracy theories, anti-Ukrainian issues, anti-NATO narratives), 6) methodical generation or delivery of messages (anomalies in content propagation, repeated language errors). See *ibid.*, pp. 208–238.
- ¹⁴ Some of the accounts with high symptomatic trolling showed features of an organised response to current events, relevant from a Russian foreign policy perspective (e.g. the assassination of Sergei Skripal). Highly symptomatic accounts also had characteristics indicative of intentional actions, as evidenced by a high degree of message concentration (87 per cent of messages appeared in 20 publication venues). The scale of occurrence of these types of accounts in relation to the total number of profiles involved in discussions about Russophobia in Poland is not large (accounts of high symptomaticity accounted for 28 per cent of the research sample). See *ibid.*, p. 236.

purposes)¹⁵. In almost all profiles (except one), the propagated theses about Polish Russophobia were based on the following reasoning¹⁶:

- Poland is irrationally and morbidly Russophobic,
- the main centre of Russophobia is the government (state), nevertheless friendly social relations between the two nations are possible,
- Polish Russophobia manifests itself in provoking the Russian superpower,
- Polish Russophobia is inspired by the West (mainly the US).

In addition to studies on the Polish information space, there are also foreign publications on this subject. The US Department emphasises that the portrayal of Russia as a victim of the actions of the US and its allies and the allegations of Russophobia of Western countries based on this thesis is one of the five main narrative lines of Russian propaganda. In doing so, it noted that since 2015, the frequency of the terms *Russophobia* and *Russophobe* in the messages of the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Sputnik agency and RT television has definitely increased (for example, in the case of the Russian Foreign Ministry, this number was 10 in 2015 and almost 60 in 2017; a similar upward dynamic was evident in the aforementioned Russian global media)¹⁷. False messages about incidents purporting to indicate Russophobia were also identified by organisations monitoring the information space in Germany, for example¹⁸.

¹⁵ These were profiles that consciously or unconsciously, but spontaneously (i.e. without a clear methodology) participated in the distribution of the Russian narrative on the Polish-language Internet. These accounts did not hide their own (or crafted) identity, and were characterised by a highly persuasive message and emotional form. As hypothetical reasons for the authentic distribution of Russian narratives, unmotivated by the goals of the Russian information warfare, factors of the following nature can be identified: systemic (resulting from the specifics of communication in social media), psychological (resulting from anonymity online and the nature of trolling) and political-social (activity may be an expression of the authentic views of the writers). The last mentioned potential scenario seems particularly interesting from the perspective of the essence of information warfare, as it refers to the agitational function that accounts could play, manifested in unconscious activism. This is a phenomenon that has been known for several decades, described as the Russians' ability to exploit groups and individuals who fit into natural socio-political trends that are in line with the interests of the Russian Federation. See *ibid*, p. 237.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 219.

¹⁷ *Russia's Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives*, U.S. Department of State, 20 I 2022, <https://www.state.gov/russias-top-five-persistent-disinformation-narratives/> [accessed: 28 I 2023].

¹⁸ From the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine until the end of May 2022, the EU Disinfo Lab identified 11 fake or manipulated news stories designed to portray Russians as victims of repression in Germany. These messages were mainly based on three narratives: 1. Russians face institutional discrimination in Germany (in banks, schools, health care). 2. There are attacks on Russian property. 3. Russians are subjected to physical attacks. The messages were given an anti-Ukrainian context - refugees from Ukraine were allegedly responsible for the alleged actions. The authors of these materials were not identified, but the messages on Russophobia were distributed by, among others, the Russian

To sum up this part of the discussion, it should be stated that the presence of Russophobic messages in the narrative lines of the Russian propaganda apparatus targeting the Republic of Poland can be considered in terms of state security. This is all the more so because the current *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland* identifies the imperialist policy of the Russian Federation as the most serious threat to Poland's national security¹⁹.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the author's research devoted to characterising the phenomenon of the popularisation of Russophobia theses in the news environment from the perspective of the information security of the Republic of Poland. The research was based on a sample of posts and comments on Russophobia published on the Facebook (FB) social network in 2018 and analogous data from January-April 2022. The choice of this portal was based on two considerations. The first one was the fact that FB is counted among the most popular social media in Poland²⁰, while the second one was related to the availability of data enabling the implementation of the research process according to the defined assumptions.

The author's intention was to check how a fragment of the Polish-language information space (i.e. FB users involved in the discussion of Russophobia) reacted in a specific situation, i.e. Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The author carried out an empirical verification of whether, during the period adopted in the study, conditions conducive to resonating a propaganda message based on the thesis that Poland is a Russophobic country were present on FB. To this end, he sought answers to three research questions related to the discussion of Russophobia:

1. What was the dynamics of the discussion on Russophobia?

Embassy in Berlin (hashtag #StopHatingRussians). It should be noted that only a few messages about the dislike shown in Germany towards Russians were true. The authors of the EU Disinfo Lab material noted that after the incidents were published, their perpetrators offered an apology. See: R. Miguel, *Russophobia and disinformation in Germany: Weaponising the victim narrative*, EU Disinfo Lab, 23 VI 2022, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/russophobia-and-disinformation-in-germany-weaponising-the-victim-narrative/> [accessed: 28 I 2023].

¹⁹ The section of this document defining the security environment states: "The most serious threat is posed by the neo-imperialist policy of the Russian Federation authorities, also implemented through the use of military force". See: *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej 2020* (Eng. National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020), https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia_Bezpieczenstwa_Narodowego_RP_2020.pdf, p. 6 [accessed: 21 I 2023].

²⁰ *Social Media w Polsce 2021 – raport* (Eng. Social Media in Poland 2021 – report), Empemedia, <https://empemedia.pl/social-media-w-polsce-2021-nowy-raport/> [accessed: 12 II 2023]; *Przewodnik po social media w Polsce* (Eng. Guide to social media in Poland), <https://iab.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IAB-Przewodnik-po-Social-Media-w-Polsce-2019-2020.pdf>, pp. 67–69 [accessed: 12 II 2023].

2. Did the profiles most active in 2018 continue to excel in this area in 2022?
3. What similarities and differences were there in 2018 and January-April 2022 with regard to the concentration of messages in the profiles where discussion took place and the narratives promoted by the most active accounts?

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the research. The discussion of the results requires a theoretical introduction and supplementation (where the author deemed it necessary) in the form of a reference to the literature on the research methods adopted. In the first part of the article, it is explained how the concept of the information environment is defined and characterised in the US military and NATO doctrines. The adoption of such optics is due to the fact that, according to the author, the body of military thought is characterised by a relatively clear systematisation of concepts, tactics, techniques and procedures in the field of information operations, including what the information environment is and what role it plays in them. A separate section of the article is devoted to a discussion of the specifics of social media, with a particular focus on the characteristics relevant to its analysis as a fragment of the information environment. The research was conducted using quantitative trend analysis of keyword occurrence, network analysis and frame analysis.

The article does not exhaust either the substantive or methodological complexity of research on the recipient's susceptibility to prolonged propaganda messages or information operations. It is even less an attempt at a comprehensive account of the threats generated by information warfare in the Polish infosphere, with all their complexity not only in the information space, but also in the physical and cognitive sphere.

Threats in the information environment

The term "information environment" is ambiguous and, depending on the optics adopted by a given author, occurs in different semantic contexts. According to Marta du Vall, the contemporary information environment is made up of the Internet (both public and hidden, i.e. the Darknet), traditional media, libraries, archives, as well as experts, officials and social networks²¹. Wiesław Babik recognises that this term encompasses (...) *the totality of information available to man through his*

²¹ M. du Vall, *Spoleczne bezpieczeństwo informacyjne w erze nowych mediów* (Eng. Social information security in the new media age), "Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka" 2017, no. 4, p. 20.

*consciousness, which he can potentially use in the pursuit of his life goals*²². According to researchers from the University of Oxford, the scope of the information environment in question encompasses all informational processes, services, and entities, thus including informational agents as well as their properties, interactions, and mutual relations²³. Terms closely related to the information environment are “information space” and “infosphere”²⁴.

A similarly broad subject matter approach can be encountered in military terminology. In US Department of Defense doctrine terms, the information environment is (...) *the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information. This environment consists of three interrelated dimensions, which continuously interact with individuals, organizations, and systems. These dimensions are known as physical, informational, and cognitive*²⁵. NATO’s 2014 psychological operations doctrine defines the information environment slightly differently, assuming that it consists of (...) *the information itself, the individuals, organizations and systems that receive process and convey the information, and the cognitive processes that people employ, including the virtual and physical space in which this occurs*²⁶.

²² W. Babik, *Ekologia informacji* (Eng. Information ecology), https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/item/5684/babik_ekologia_informacji_2014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y:December, p. 23 [accessed: 7 III 2023].

²³ P. Röttger, B. Vedres, *The Information Environment and its Effects on Individuals and Groups. An Interdisciplinary Literature Review*, <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/projects/online-information-environment/oie-the-information-environment.PDF> [accessed: 17 I 2023].

²⁴ The terms “information space” and “infosphere”, although similar in meaning, are also defined differently. According to one approach, an information space is “(...) a discontinuous and heterogeneous cluster of information sources - objects (real or virtual) that a person can use as sources of information”. Definitional approaches to the infosphere emphasise both its technical aspect (i.e. “the interconnection of communication networks, databases and information resources into a vast, diverse network of electronic exchanges”) and its social, cultural and political aspects (“the infosphere as a new place to which humanity is migrating, the specificity of which lies in the absence of a physical dimension. In this new place - the Web - people will carry out individual and collective activities, including work, because of the enormous potential of the infosphere to bring together all people and all their knowledge”). See: M. Kisilowska, *Przestrzeń informacyjna jako termin informatologiczny* (Eng. Information space as an informatological term), “Zagadnienia Informatyki Naukowej” 2011, no. 2, pp. 37, 46.

²⁵ *Information Operations. Joint Publication 3-13*, https://defenseinnovationmarketplace.dtic.mil/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/12102012_io1.pdf, pp. 7–8 [accessed: 30 I 2023].

²⁶ *Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations (AJP-3.10.1)*, 31 VII 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ajp-3101-allied-joint-doctrine-for-psychological-operations>, p. 18 [accessed: 17 I 2023]. Similarly, the concept in question is defined by the 2020 NATO OPSEC doctrine, according to which the information environment includes cognitive, virtual and physical spaces and the interrelationships between them. See: *Allied Joint Doctrine for Operations Security*

Notwithstanding the nuances of meaning²⁷, it can be assumed that the quoted military definitions are similar. Firstly, they take into account both the techno- and anthropocentric aspects of the information environment. Secondly, they assume its complexity due to its many components, including: individuals (persons), organisations (public institutions and other entities) and processes (e.g. information flows). Thirdly, common to these views of the information environment is also its division into three domains: physical, informational (virtual) and cognitive (psychological). It is worth discussing their meaning and scope. Zbigniew Modrzejewski explains that in the first domain, the information environment intersects with the physical world - it is in this domain that interactions between cultures, states, societies and individuals take place. It includes, among other things, the devices and communication infrastructure that support the transmission, reception and storage of information. The virtual domain also refers to the flow of information - text, images, data. Information is collected, processed, stored, distributed, displayed and protected within it. It acts as a link between the physical and cognitive dimensions. The last domain consists of the cognitive and emotional elements that influence an individual's decision-making²⁸.

Analysis of the information environment is very important from the perspective of military information operations - its assessment starts the planning process. According to US Army doctrine, defining the information environment includes the following areas: territory (including weather conditions), population, social structures, military and government information system (and communications infrastructure), civilian information system (and communications infrastructure), media and external actors. As part of the social structure diagnosis, networks, religious and political backgrounds, as well as local beliefs and narratives are identified. How (in writing and speech) the identified networks and groups express their shared beliefs is also analysed. As part of the analysis of media issues, the reach of the media, their messages and their potential to influence audiences, among

and Deception (AJP-3.10.2), 31 III 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/allied-joint-doctrine-for-operations-security-and-deception-ajp-3102a>, p. 18 [accessed: 17 I 2023].

²⁷ In material published by other NATO countries, different approaches to this issue in military environments are evident. For example, the Australian Army Research Centre envisages different information spaces - political, social and military. See: C. Brooker, *The Effectiveness of Influence Activities in Information Warfare*, "Australian Army Occasional Paper" 2021, no. 8, p. 13. On definition disputes, see in more detail: *Making sense of the information environment*, "Small Wars Journal", 3 III 2020, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/making-sense-information-environment> [accessed: 30 I 2023]; Z. Modrzejewski, *Information operations from Polish point of view*, "Defence and Strategy" 2018, no. 1, pp. 115-132.

²⁸ Z. Modrzejewski, *Information operations...*, pp. 118-119.

other things, are recognised. Recognition includes private actors, NGOs, state and international institutions that may be relevant from a news operation perspective. In this case, the analysis includes their audiences, agenda and their estimated impact on the activities of the information operation²⁹.

A similarly subject- wide way of defining and analysing the information environment is encountered in civilian doctrine on information security issues. In Poland, an important document in this respect is the 2015 draft *Doctrine of information security of the Republic of Poland*, which was published but not implemented in public administration (the document was not adopted). Its definition of the concept of state information security notes that it is (...) *a trans-sectoral area of security, the content of which refers to the **information environment** (including cyberspace) of the state; a process aimed at **ensuring the secure functioning of the state in the information space by reigning in its own internal national infosphere and effectively protecting national interests in the external (foreign) infosphere***³⁰. The doctrine goes on to define the material scope of information security: *This is achieved through tasks such as: ensuring adequate protection of the information assets at one's disposal and protection against hostile disinformation and propaganda activities (defensively) while maintaining the ability to conduct offensive actions in this area against possible adversaries (states or other actors)*³¹. The document therefore clearly distinguishes between the defensive and offensive aspects of activities related to ensuring the information security of the state. Among the most serious internal threats, not only the intentional actions of external actors (e.g. propaganda of foreign states, ideological sabotage or the activities of influence agents) were listed, but also the vulnerabilities of the Polish public, including its information deficits and susceptibility to anti-state content, resulting, for example, from imperfect functioning of civil society³².

The information space is one of the pillars of the security environment detailed in the current *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland of 2020*. It sets the goal of building capabilities to protect it (including systemic countering of disinformation), while detailing that the information space is made up of three

²⁹ For more on characterising the information environment in the information operations planning process, see: *The Conduct of Information Operations. ATP 3-13.1*, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN13138_ATP%203-13x1%20FINAL%20Web%201.pdf, pp. 18–20 [accessed: 17 I 2023].

³⁰ The highlighting in the article is from the author (editor's note).

³¹ *Doktryna bezpieczeństwa informacyjnego RP* (Eng. The information security doctrine of the Republic of Poland), https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/01/Projekt_Doktryny_Bezpieczenstwa_Informacyjnego_RP.pdf, p. 3 [accessed: 21 I 2023].

³² For more on this type of threat, see *ibid*, p. 6.

layers: virtual (systems, software and applications), physical (infrastructure and equipment) and cognitive. Among the objectives identified in this document are also the integration and systemic undertakings of communication activities and proactively countering disinformation by building appropriate capacities and procedures aimed at cooperation with news and social media, as well as by involving citizens and NGOs in these activities³³.

In summary, defining the information environment is a priority for planning information activities. This also applies to one's own information space - characterising negative trends and phenomena associated with it is an important part of the undertakings undertaken to ensure the information security of the state. Studying the popularity of narratives embedded in foreign propaganda messages about Poland (including claims of Russophobia), identifying broadcasters introducing or propagating them, and determining the conditions affecting the resonance of these messages is part of such activities. Monitoring changes in this area provides measurable indicators that can then be used to diagnose phenomena negatively affecting the state's information security. Social media, due to the availability of data, offer many opportunities in this regard, but it should be borne in mind that the communication processes taking place in them are only a fragment of the information environment.

Social media and the information environment

In order to discuss the importance of social media from the perspective of the information environment, it is first necessary to zoom in on how their development is conditioning changes in contemporary communication processes. In the most general sense, communication is understood as a process aimed at the exchange of knowledge, information and ideas between communicating actors. It is purposeful (i.e. it is intended to have a specific effect) and uses a variety of means³⁴. Among the many models of communication, it is common to find an approach that distinguishes between situational context, process participants (senders and addressees), message (transmission), channel (media), noise (circumstances that impede communication), and feedback (sender to addressee

³³ *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej...*, p. 21.

³⁴ B.A. Sypniewska, *Istota, błędy i bariery w komunikowaniu się w organizacji* (Eng. Essence, errors and barriers to communication in the organisation), "Zeszyty Naukowe PWSZ w Płocku. Nauki Ekonomiczne" 2015, vol. 21, p. 65.

feedback message)³⁵. Many analytical models used to study communication processes (including propaganda³⁶) are based on approaches similar to the above. These include:

- Harold Lasswell’s model of the persuasive act, which captures communication from the perspective of five key questions: Who is speaking? What is it saying? Through which channel is he speaking? To whom is he speaking? With what effect does he speak?³⁷;
- Kurt Lewin’s topological model highlighting the role of information selectors (gatekeepers) in communication, who sift through the enormous amount of information flowing into the media and prepare it for the target

³⁵ Context is the conditions in which the act of communication takes place. In a transactional communication process, participants play the role of sender and receiver. Central to the process is the message transferred between sender and receiver. The content of the message (the communication message) is contained in the meanings and symbols in which the message is encoded by the sender and then decoded by the receiver. The message further consists of its form and its organisation, i.e. its structure. The message is transmitted through a channel, i.e. a route of transmission. In the case of direct communication, all sensory channels can be used, i.e. hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste, and in indirect communication mainly sight and hearing. The recipient’s reaction to the message is referred to as feedback, through which the sender learns whether his or her message has been received and understood by the recipient. The communication process can be disrupted by noises. These can be internal (e.g. human limitations due to psychological predisposition or emotional state), external (these can be physical conditions, e.g. weather conditions or disruption of the transmission channel) and semantic (e.g. wrong selection or reception of a meaning or symbol). See: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Podstawy komunikowania społecznego* (Eng. Basics of social communication), Wrocław 1999, pp. 15–19. Emanuel Kulczycki, a researcher of communication issues, points out that there are generally two approaches to communication - transmissive and constitutive. He puts the differences between the two as follows: “By a transmissive view of communication I mean those positions that assume that the communication process serves to transmit, to convey information, knowledge, ideas, feelings, and that reflection on communication is limited to analysing representational models of the communication process. Such positions assume that the two basic elements of the model, i.e. the sender and the receiver, function as two isolated entities (...). In another view, on the other hand, communication is not about the transfer of thoughts/signifiers from one subject to another, but about the continuous interaction of the interacting subjects. The receiver’s reaction does not depend on how well he or she has decoded the transmitted message, but on the one hand on its interpretation, and on the other (...) on how well the sender has been able to place himself or herself in the role of another (i.e. the receiver)”. See: E. Kulczycki, *Źródła transmisyjnego ujęcia procesu komunikacji* (Eng. Sources of the transmission view of the communication process), “Studia Humanistyczne AGH” 2012, vol. 11/1, pp. 21–36.

³⁶ See In more detail: T. Kacała, J. Lipińska, *Komunikacja strategiczna i public affairs* (Eng. Strategic communication and public affairs), Warszawa 2014, p. 155.

³⁷ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne* (Eng. Political and public communication), Warszawa 2007, p. 32.

audience - shortening, expanding or modifying it. This function is performed by opinion leaders³⁸;

- two-stage communication model (also highlighting the role of opinion leaders), in which the first stage is between the sender and the opinion leader, and the second stage is between the opinion leader and the public³⁹.

The emergence of social media is conditioned by the wider phenomenon of the development of so-called new media⁴⁰. They are distinguished by two key features - their digital and interactive nature⁴¹. In discussing the characteristics that distinguish social media from traditional media, three key elements are highlighted: network communities, their content and their operation under Web 2.0 infrastructure. Network communities are virtual communities gathered around a variety of issues (based on age, interests, worldview, industry, location). The content of social media is various types of content (photos, texts, videos). What distinguishes social media from traditional media (press, television, radio) is that the content is created by the users themselves. The impact of Web 2.0. on social media is linked to the evolution of the Internet from its original form (Web 1.0), characterised by the expansion of the user's function from receiver to creator of information⁴². From the perspective of the changes taking place in contemporary communication processes - and consequently in the information space - the interactivity of new media appears to be of particular importance, reducing the role of gatekeepers⁴³,

³⁸ Ibid, p. 36.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dutch media scholar Jan van Dijk uses the following division: old media - direct communication, print, radio, television, telephone; new media - computer networks, multimedia. See: J. van Dijk, *Spoleczne aspekty nowych mediów* (Eng. Social aspects of new media), Warszawa 2010, p. 28.

⁴¹ For more on the definition of new media, see: L. Manovich, *Język nowych mediów* (Eng. Language of new media), Warszawa 2006, pp. 119–120; D. McQuail, *Teoria komunikowania* (Eng. Communication theory), Warszawa 2007, p. 156; H. Jenkins, *Kultura konwergencji: zderzenie starych i nowych mediów* (Eng. Convergence culture: old and new media colliding), Warszawa 2007, pp. 9–10; M. Szpunar, *Czym są nowe media – próba konceptualizacji* (Eng. What is new media - an attempt at conceptualisation), "Studia Medioznawcze" 2008, no. 4, pp. 33–35.

⁴² M. Popiołek, *Serwisy społecznościowe w przestrzeni internetowej – (social)mediatyżacja życia codziennego* (Eng. Social networks in the online space - (social)mediatisation of everyday life), "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" 2015, no. 1, pp. 62–63.

⁴³ Experts from the Scientific and Academic Computer Network (NASK) describe this phenomenon as follows: "The role of gatekeepers has been transformed. In traditional media, the first stage was to filter information and the second stage was to publish it. In new media, the process is reversed. First comes the publication and then only the filtering, which takes place within the individual social networks. (...) Within these networks, users take on the following tasks: functioning as relays, filters that transmit information; performing the process of verifying media content; adding comments to media content; publishing new messages". See: J. Balcewicz, *Spoleczeństwo informacyjne w czasach*

among others, and increasing the possibilities of establishing and sustaining diverse social networks⁴⁴. These factors are further reinforced by the digitisation and algorithmisation of social media⁴⁵, which are leading to information bubbles⁴⁶.

The described characteristics of social media are therefore important from the perspective of characterising a given information environment, as they affect its different domains: physical - due to the enhancement of the possibility of social networking; informational - through access to the sharing of users' information (and not just the reception of messages); cognitive - as a result of the algorithmisation of message accessibility, users falling into information bubbles and functioning by them under conditions of information overload. Thus, social media is an important determinant of the security of the information environment⁴⁷. At the same time,

cyfrowej rewolucji – o zjawisku bańki informacyjnej i jego następstwach (Eng. The information society in the digital revolution - on the phenomenon of the information bubble and its consequences), in: M. Wrzosek, *Zjawisko dezinformacji w dobie rewolucji cyfrowej. Państwo. Społeczeństwo. Polityka. Biznes*, Warszawa 2019, p. 27.

⁴⁴ R. Szczepaniak, „Plemiona sieci” – *Internet jako medium społeczne i kulturowe* (Eng. “Tribes of the web” - Internet as a social and cultural medium), “Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” 2015, vol. 58, p. 203; M. Maffesoli, *Czas plemion. Schyłek indywidualizmu w społeczeństwach ponowoczesnych* (Eng. Time of tribes. The decline of individualism in postmodern societies), Warszawa 2008, p. 208.

⁴⁵ For more on this subject, see: R. Klepka, *Bańka informacyjna i zjawisko echo chamber* (Eng. The information bubble and the echo chamber phenomenon), in: *Encyklopedia bezpieczeństwa*, O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta (eds.), Kraków 2021, pp. 201–209.

⁴⁶ J. Nowak, *Social media jako sieci obiegu przekazów medialnych* (Eng. Social media as networks for the circulation of media messages), “Nowe Media” 2012, no. 3, p. 20.

⁴⁷ The U.S. Congressional oversight body, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, published a document summarising the results of a survey on perceptions of information environment issues in 2022. This was conducted through surveys and interviews of institutional representatives, experts and officials working on the subject, as well as document searches (the survey mainly covered United States Department of Defense (DoD) entities, as well as federal agency records). The document describes six key areas that should be considered when handling and protecting information. The areas defined in this regard are: pervasive and malicious information, the mission and functions of the Department of Defence, threat-generating adversary activities, threat-inducing activities, institutional challenges, modern technologies, past and planned activities of the Department of Defence. Social media was mentioned as an important enabler of activities in the above-mentioned areas. In doing so, attention is drawn to two of their key features, which create not only opportunities for the information environment, but also threats. These are the formation of networks of their users and the operation of content filtering algorithms. According to US experts, social media can be used to promote information, disrupt adversarial activities and operations, as well as to gather information for decision-making (especially by analysing large datasets) and to coordinate with other federal agencies. Among the main risks, the exposure of Department of Defence personnel to disinformation and manipulated content was identified as a primary concern. See: *Information Environment. Opportunities and Threats to DOD's National Security Mission*, U.S. Government Accountability Office, September 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/730/722922.pdf>, p. 26 [accessed: 30 I 2023].

their different characteristics, particularly their interactivity and the decline in the role of gatekeepers, mean that the research models used in traditional media may be inadequate⁴⁸.

It seems reasonable to consider an immanent element of the information environment from the perspective of social media phenomena, namely social networks. Sociologist Manuel Castells, a researcher into the problems of network society, points out that a network is (...) *a set of interconnected nodes*, and a node is (...) *the point where the curve intersects itself*. Castells specifies that the essence of a node depends on the nature of a particular network, and that the location of a node within it is conditioned by the number and strength of its relationships with other nodes. The flow of information in one network is faster than between nodes located between different networks⁴⁹. The second important element in a network is the relationships between nodes. These can be characterised on the basis of at least three attributes:

- content - covers issues relating to what is provided, shared and exchanged within a relationship (e.g. information),
- direction - refers to which node sends content to whom,
- strength - the intensity of the relationship, which can be expressed by the number of meetings or information exchanged⁵⁰.

The characteristics of the attributes of a relationship depend - as in the case of nodes - on the type of network in question.

The basis of network analysis is therefore the study of relationships/links (edges) between nodes. They can be directional (outbound or inbound) and non-directional. In the methodological heritage of network analysis, various indicators have been developed to assess the influence of individual nodes on the network.

⁴⁸ For more on the contemporary model of the propaganda process conditioned by these characteristics, see: G.S. Jowett, V. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion. Fifth Edition*, Los Angeles–London–New Delhi–Singapore–Washington 2012, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁹ M. Castells, *Spoleczeństwo sieci* (Eng. Network society), Warszawa 2007, p. 468. The researcher explains these issues as follows: “What a node is, precisely, depends on the type of specific networks we are talking about. (...) The typology determined by networks shows that the distance (or intensity and frequency of interaction) between two points (or social positions) is shorter (or more frequent or intense) if both points are nodes in the network than if they do not belong to the same network. At the same time, flows between nodes within a given network are not separated by any distance or are the same distance. Thus, the distance (physical, social, economic, political, cultural) for a given point or position takes the value of zero (for every node in the same network) or infinity (for every point outside the network). The on/off switching in networks and the architecture of relationships between networks, played out through information technologies operating at the speed of light, configure the processes and functions prevalent in our societies”.

⁵⁰ C. Haythornthwaite, *Social Network Analysis: An Approach and Technique for The Study of Information Exchange*, “Library & Information Science Research” 1996, no. 18, p. 323.

A relatively popular indicator is the degree of networking, which indicates the number of links of a single node. The indicator can also appear as a weight degree of networking, which takes into account additional attributes, for example the number of links between the same nodes (their recurrence). Peter Monge and Noshir Contractor, in their paper *Theories of Communication Networks* on the theory of network analysis, stated that when using network analysis to study directional communication, out-degree can be interpreted as the expansiveness of a node (the more links, the greater the expansiveness), while in-degree can be an indicator of the popularity of a node in a network, which in turn can be used as one indicator to measure the influence of a node(s) on a given network⁵¹.

The methodological assumptions of the analysis carried out on this basis will be discussed in more detail later in the article.

Discussion of research results

Methodology for the different stages of the study

The research covered posts containing the keyword Russophob*⁵² published on FB social media in 2018 and in the period from 1 January to 29 April 2022. In the first stage, a quantitative trend analysis of the occurrence of this term in the period January-April 2022 was performed. In the second stage, a network analysis was carried out of the 20 profiles that were most active in terms of publishing posts containing the aforementioned term (in the remainder of the article, this category of accounts is referred to as actors). The above was aimed at isolating the initiators of discussions about Russophobia. Two indicators used in the frame analysis were adopted: degree and weight-degree. A directional variant of the links coming out of the node was used:

- out-degree - indicating the number of profiles on which a given account has published the term Russophob*,
- weight out-degree - determining the number of Russophob* entries published by the account in question.

A frame analysis of the messages propagated by the actors was then carried out⁵³. The literature indicates that the use of framing theory makes it possible

⁵¹ P.R. Monge, N.S. Contractor, *Theories of Communication Networks*, New York 2003, p. 38.

⁵² * denotes each successive string of characters, in this case the words are e.g.: Russophobia, Russophobic, Russophobes, etc. Total number of posts: 2018 - 9032, January-April 2022 - 3381.

⁵³ The concept of frame analysis is derived from Erving Goffman's ideas discussed in his work *Frame Analysis*. The literature points out that the concepts of frame and framing have not been defined

to determine what is prioritised and how it is prioritised in the message of a given communicative text: (...) *the framing process consists in selecting certain aspects from the perceived reality and highlighting them in the communicative text, in such a way as to promote a given definition of the problem, its common interpretation, its moral evaluation, and to indicate a way of behaving*⁵⁴. Importantly, frame analysis can be applied to the study of different stages and aspects of the communication process. Karol Franczak, a sociologist and cultural studies scholar involved in discourse analysis and media studies, points out that researchers involved in frame analysis are united by the reflection on what frames meet with resonance and why they (and not others) carry weight⁵⁵. In his view, the issue of resonance is conditioned by two groups of factors: the credibility of the frame and its enhancement. The first factor depends on the following elements⁵⁶:

- consistency, i.e. the ability to build a complementary message,
- empirical credibility, which is linked to the ability to adapt to the way the recipients of a message see the world,
- credibility of the promoters of the framework, i.e. people lobbying for certain interpretations of events or issues.

The resonance of a frame (interpretive schema) is also related to its enhancement in relation to the other narratives reaching a given audience. The importance of enhancement stems from the essence of framing, which is very much about making selections, accentuating and excluding aspects of the perceived reality⁵⁷. Amplification can take place in three dimensions:

rigorously by this researcher, thus providing room for interpretation. Media scholars note that frame analysis can be successfully applied to media studies and, along with agenda-setting theory or the concept of priming, constitutes one of the most important analytical perspectives in this field. For more on Goffman's interpretation of framing theory, see: K. Wasilewski, *Framing i analiza ramowa – stan badań we współczesnym medioznawstwie. Przegląd stanowisk badawczych* (Eng. Framing and frame analysis - the state of research in contemporary media studies. A review of research positions), "Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna" 2018, no. 1, pp. 92–93. On the application of frame analysis to the study of media messages, see: K. Franczak, *Analiza ramowania* (Eng. Framing analysis), in: *Analiza dyskursu publicznego. Przegląd metod i perspektyw badawczych*, M. Czyżewski et al. (eds.), Łódź 2017, p. 147; A. Galus, *Białoruś, czyli teatr jednego aktora? Zjawisko ramowania na przykładzie wizerunku Białorusi w wybranych tytułach prasowych* (Eng. Belarus, i.e. a theatre of one actor? The phenomenon of framing on the example of the image of Belarus in selected press titles), "Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne" 2015, vol. 4, pp. 198–199.

⁵⁴ R.M. Entman, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, "Journal of Communication" 1993, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 52. From: K. Wasilewski, *Framing i analiza ramowa...*, p. 94.

⁵⁵ K. Franczak, *Analiza ramowania...*, p. 149.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

- centrality, which refers to the values preferred by broadcasters and assumptions about what values are important to audiences and what they focus on and identify with,
- commensurability of experiences, i.e. adapting the narrative (message, meanings) to the everyday experiences of the audience of the framework,
- narrative accuracy to determine the degree to which the frame coincides with cultural narratives or myths specific to a particular group.

The author of this article adopted a hermeneutic approach⁵⁸ and analysed the interpretive framework (narratives) of the posts published in the first four months of 2022. He considered the frame analysis to be an appropriate method to achieve the research objectives, as it allows the examination of messages distributed as part of the propaganda impact in the absence of a full range of data⁵⁹. In the evaluation of the analysed messages, the author chose to include indicators of emphasis and credibility to allow for a deeper content characterisation of the messages.

In the third stage, the profiles on which the term Russophob* was most frequently published were analysed (in the remainder of the article they will be referred to as publication sites). Similarly to the second stage, a network analysis was applied for this purpose, which was carried out on the basis of the following indicators:

- weight-in-degree - indicating the number of Russophob* entries published on a given account,
- out-degree - indicating the number of profiles on which a given account has published the Russophob* term.

Data was extracted through the Unamo tool, Gephi software was used for network analysis. Narratives within the frame analysis were determined from reading the posts using MS Excel software.

In accordance with research ethics, the names of the accounts analysed have been coded, only the details of active public groups are given.

⁵⁸ The author is aware of the unreliability of this method, but agrees with opinions that its use in the analysis of a small sample of material is justified. Other approaches used in qualitative analysis include the holistic approach and the deductive approach. See: K. Wasilewski, *Framing i analiza ramowa...*, p. 102.

⁵⁹ The article assumes that claims of Polish Russophobia are part of the propaganda narratives of the Russian Federation. However, in the case of the research discussed in the article, there is no certainty as to the intentions of the propagators of the Russophobia messages - a diagnosis in this regard is beyond the author's capabilities. The analysed profiles may be both an element of the apparatus intentionally spreading these contents (i.e. from the perspective of the communication process in such a case they would be a medium at the disposal of the sender), and a resonance of these theses (in such a case they would have to be considered as the behaviour of the audience, i.e. an effect of influence).

Stage 1 - results of the quantitative trend analysis of keyword occurrence

An analysis of the frequency of posts on the social network FB containing the term Russophob* in the period January-April 2022 shows that the upward trend was already visible in the first half of February, but its dynamics increased after 24 February. A very noticeable quantitative jump in statements occurred on 21 March, which may have been linked to Dmitry Medvedev's posting on Telegram on that day. In it, the former Russian president directly referred to the policy of the Polish authorities and accused them of pathological Russophobia⁶⁰. After 21 March, there was a significant reduction, lasting several days, in the frequency of publication of content with this keyword⁶¹. The increase in the number of posts containing the term Russophob* after Russia's invasion of Ukraine was visible, but at the same time this frequency was characterised by a high lability (chart). The results obtained do not provide a basis for determining whether such irregularity is due to the nature of the public discussion (unevenly distributed interest in this topic over time), the actions of the FB administration (e.g. blocking certain content⁶²) or the nature of the functioning of profiles that introduced theses about Russophobia into the public space.

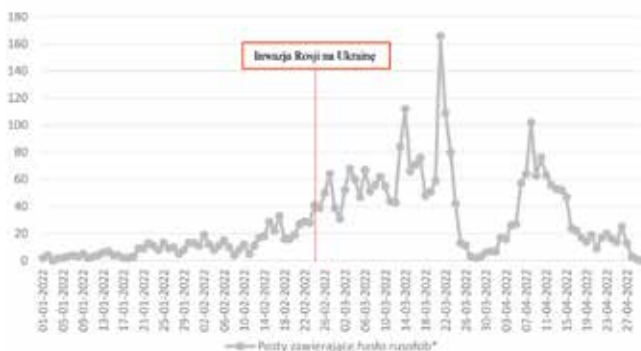


Chart. Frequency of posts containing the term Russophob* in the Polish-language section of the Facebook social network in the period January-April 2022.

Source: own elaboration.

⁶⁰ Experts from the Centre for Eastern Studies point out that this posting was part of the wider context of Kremlin policy and public communication. See: W. Rodkiewicz, *Dimitrij Miedwiediew atakuje Polskę* (Eng. Dmitry Medvedev attacks Poland), Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 21 III 2022, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2022-03-21/dimitrij-miedwiediew-atakuje-polske> [accessed: 28 I 2023].

⁶¹ The findings do not provide a basis for explaining the source of such anomalies.

⁶² Facebook is identifying a network of accounts showing symptoms of coordinated and inauthentic activity with a view to closing them down. See in more detail: <https://about.fb.com/news/tag/coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/>.

Stage 2 - results of network and frame analysis of the most active profiles (actors)

Table 1 presents a comparison of the 20 most active profiles during the adopted research periods (i.e. the profiles that published the most content containing the term Russophob* - weight out-degree indicator) together with the number of profiles on which they published their message (out-degree indicator).

Table 1. Weight out-degree (message strength) and out-degree (networking level) ratios of the 20 most active accounts publishing the term Russophob* in 2018 and 2022 in the Polish-language section of FB (a recurring account in both sets has been highlighted in bold).

| 2018 year | | | 2022 year | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Account code | <i>Weight out-degree</i> (number of entries) | <i>Out-degree</i> (number of profiles) | Account code | <i>Weight out-degree</i> (number of entries) | <i>Out-degree</i> (number of profiles) |
| FB 1 (2018) Unavailable | 172 | 16 | FB 1 (2022) | 61 | 28 |
| FB 2 (2018) | 139 | 1 | FB 2 (2022)/ FB 3 (2018) | 29 | 18 |
| FB 3 (2018)/ FB 2 (2022) | 112 | 32 | FB 3 (2022) | 29 | 12 |
| FB 4 (2018) | 101 | 22 | FB 4 (2022) | 21 | 6 |
| FB 5 (2018) | 62 | 19 | FB 5 (2022) | 17 | 3 |
| FB 6 (2018) Unavailable | 58 | 17 | FB 6 (2022) | 15 | 7 |
| FB 7 | 55 | 16 | FB 7 (2022) | 14 | 8 |
| FB 8 Unavailable | 45 | 15 | FB 8 (2022) | 14 | 12 |
| FB 9 (2018) | 43 | 1 | FB 9 (2022) Unavailable | 13 | 1 |
| FB 10 (2018) | 42 | 8 | FB 10 (2022) | 12 | 7 |
| FB 11 (2018) | 41 | 9 | FB 11 (2022) | 12 | 5 |
| FB 12 (2018) | 40 | 17 | FB 12 (2022) | 11 | 6 |
| FB 13 (2018) Unavailable | 40 | 14 | FB 13 (2022) | 11 | 7 |
| FB 14 (2018) | 39 | 3 | FB 14 (2022) | 11 | 10 |
| FB 15 (2018) | 39 | 6 | FB 15 (2022) | 10 | 4 |
| FB 16 (2018) | 37 | 11 | FB 16 (2022) | 10 | 8 |
| FB 17 (2018) | 35 | 8 | FB 17 (2022) | 9 | 5 |
| FB 18 (2018) | 35 | 11 | FB 18 (2022) | 9 | 3 |
| FB 19 (2018) Unavailable | 34 | 1 | FB 19 (2022) | 8 | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| FB 20 (2018) Unavailable | 33 | 6 | FB 20 (2022) | 8 | 1 |
| Total | 1202 (13,3% ^a) | 233 | Total | 324 (9,5% ^b) | 154 |
| Total number of entries | 9032 | | Total number of entries | 3381 | |

^a Of the total number of entries published in 2018.

^b Of the total number of entries published in 2022.

Source: own elaboration.

Two observations emerge from the comparison of the 2018 and 2022 data sets:

1. Only one actor was active in both study periods⁶³.
2. The six accounts most actively promoting the term Russophob* in 2018 (30 per cent of the sample) are currently unavailable. With regard to the 2022 survey sample, this situation applies to only one account.

The data obtained shows that **in 2018 and 2022, different accounts were most involved in the discussion of Russophobia**. The exception is one debater, consistently showing high interest in the discourse on Polish Russophobia. **Some of the accounts active in 2018 are no longer able to promote claims about Russophobia on the Polish-language internet**⁶⁴.

The places where the discussion was concentrated in both research periods are discussed later in the article.

Another part of the research conducted in the second stage consisted of a frame analysis of posts published by actors. **Sixteen out of twenty of the most active accounts in 2022 affirmed the narrative that Poland is a Russophobic country**⁶⁵. These accounts highlighted a variety of theses about Polish Russophobia in their messages, including the following:

- Polish Russophobia comes from politicians⁶⁶,

⁶³ This has been coded as FB 3 (2018)/FB 2 (2022).

⁶⁴ They could have been undertaking intentional activities aimed at infecting the Polish network (e.g. with theses about Polish Russophobia) and this activity could have been suddenly interrupted for unknown reasons, e.g. due to the FB administration's decision to block these profiles. However, the research carried out does not provide grounds for verifying such a hypothesis.

⁶⁵ These were the following profiles: FB 2 (2022), FB 3 (2022), FB 4 (2022), FB 6 (2022), FB 7 (2022), FB 8 (2022), FB 10 (2022), FB 11 (2022), FB 12 (2022), FB 13 (2022), FB 14 (2022), FB 15 (2022), FB 16 (2022), FB 18 (2022), FB 19 (2022), FB 20 (2022).

⁶⁶ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- Polish Russophobia is inspired by the West, particularly the US⁶⁷,
- Polish Russophobia has no rational basis, it is a disease⁶⁸,
- Polish Russophobia meets the definition of racism, stems from hatred⁶⁹,
- Polish Russophobia leads to a distortion of historical memory with regard to World War II and the political situation in Poland between 1944 and 1991⁷⁰.

The aforementioned claims often co-occurred, which demonstrates the relatively high flexibility of the individual components of the narrative of Polish Russophobia and, from the perspective of the resonating framework, their consistency. It should also be emphasised that some of the accounts promoting the content in question adapted their message to the current situation, mainly to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which, in turn, can be interpreted as their attempts to gain empirical credibility, i.e. the ability to adapt to the way

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- „Nasz pisowski rząd powinien udać się na leczenie psychiatryczne. Rusofobię publicznie uprawiają od kilku lat i niestety takie są ubytki na umyśle. Nienawisć złym doradcą”;
 - „Teraz Jankesi nie mają prawa wkroczyć na Ukrainę. Ludzie dali się wciągnąć w tę zagrywkę już dawno. Od dłuższego czasu nasz rząd masowo uprawia Rusofobię”.

⁶⁷ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „Jankeskim strategom po nocach śnił się koszmar zjednoczonych gospodarek Rosji i Niemiec, na co znaleźli rozwiązanie, które obecnie obserwujemy na Ukrainie i w Polsce, a podpuszczeni rusofobiczni naiwni Polacy jak zwykle nie zawiedli jak ten głupi Jasio, co na złość babce odmraża sobie uszy”;
- „Rusofobie, zanim cò napiszesz, to zastanów się. Nasz sąsiad to Rosja, a nie USA ulokowane za oceanem. Działanie zgodnie z interesem USA nie jest naszym interesem. Oni wyręczają się naszymi głupkami w rządzie”.

⁶⁸ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „Ludzi ogarnął amok w temacie Rosji!!!!!!!”;
- „Widzę rusofob. Oj jakim trzeba być ignorantem i ćwierć inteligentem żeby taki komentarze pisać. Już o ograniczeniu nie wspomnę. Serio gdyby idiotyzm twój miał skrzydła oj poleciał by wysoko (...)”;
- „Rusofobię się leczy”.

⁶⁹ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „rusofobia polityków i mediów osiąga kosmiczne rozmiary jeszcze trochę i dojdzie do nocy długich noży w stosunku do Rosjan;
- „#rusofobia i #matolectwo, daremniaki i POdzęgacze wojenni, dramat”; „Jeszcze może Noc Kryształową urządźcie „ruskim”, rasiści”; „#WojnaWojnie”.

⁷⁰ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „drogą z Moskwy do Berlina i 8 maja 1945 prowadzi przez Polskę /Warszawa Kołobrzeg Wał Pomorski Forsowanie Odry Berlin To na tym szlaku żołnierz Polski brocząc krwią szedł przy boku Armii Radzieckiej wyzwalając Polskę. To dzisiejsze rusofoby rządowo prezydenckie wasale USA zakłamują fakty historyczne i potem tacy jak ty piszecie farmazony!!!!!!!”;
- „Cześć i chwała Armii Radzieckiej i Ludowemu Wojsku Polskiemu. To dzięki ich walce i poświęceniu przetrwaliśmy jako państwo i naród. I żadne bzdziny i pierdoły rusofobiczne tego nie zmieniają (...)”.

the message's audience sees the world. There was more of this type of activity. For, as indicated earlier, claims of Polish Russophobia were often set in the context of historical Polish-Ukrainian relations and accusations of Ukrainians holding Nazi views⁷¹. With regard to current events, it has also been argued that Poles' Russophobia manifests itself in the aggressive foreign policy of the Polish government towards its eastern neighbours, with negative economic consequences for the Polish state and society as a consequence⁷². During the analysis, it was observed, which is noteworthy, the occurrence of statements by some authors that Russophobia is another, after the sanitary-epidemiological policy related to the coronavirus pandemic, tool of "enslavement by the system"⁷³. Furthermore, in the opinion of the authors of the posts, the narratives about Russia and the war in Ukraine were manipulated by the media and politicians, which gives the interpretative frame about Polish Russophobia the features of manipulation consisting in undermining the credibility of the opponents (i.e. the creators of narratives hitting the image of the Russian Federation)⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „Stop rusofobom stop banderowcom”;
- „(...) co do Hitlera to był faszysta myślę że Ukrainie bliżej do nich np odzisy Azova albo prawy sektor. Ale trzeba mieć choć minimum wiedzy”; „zgubiłeś w twojej historyjce „subtelny” fakt, że to ukraińska junta wspierana przez Yankesow i pożytecznych idiomów w rusofobicznych krajach jak Polska bez kozery obnosi się z sympatia do nazizmu i to ukraińska armia pod dowództwem marionetkowej junty a nie separatysty od 8 lat bombardowała artyleria ludność miast Doniecka i Donbasu ponieważ nie rozpoznała zbrojnego puczu orkiestrowanego przez eurokolchoz i yankesow za demokratyczne władze ukraińskie”.

⁷² Example (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article): „Ten ‘szanowny’ beczelnie kłamie! Bardzo wysokie ceny nawozów zawdzięczamy prowadzonej zbrojecką, rusofobiczną polityką tego rządu w stosunku do Białorusi i Rosji, gdzie nawozów, jak i taniego gazu potrzebnego do ich produkcji jest do oporu! - A jeśli będą dopłaty, to będą obciążały budżet, czyli nas wszystkich. ‘Czemuś biedny, boś głupi...’”.

⁷³ Example (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „Dostali rozkaz koniec srovidu czas na rusofobie trzeba trzymać niewolników na smyczy w ciągłym strachu”.

⁷⁴ Examples (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „Co wyzwała w naszym kraju owo, rzekomo pro ukraińskie szaleństwo? Wyzwała go hodowana, pielęgnowana, podsycana i celebrowana przez ponad trzy dekady, irracjonalna, zwierzęca, pozabawiona jakichkolwiek racjonalnych podstaw, rusofobia”;
- „Świat ogarnęło szaleństwo rusofobii!! Politycy doprowadzili do tego szalenstwa kosztem społeczeństwa!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”;
- – „jedna z setek proxy wojen Ameryki i ich militarne industrial Complex daleko od ich granic, potrzebnych im do egzystencji jak tlen. Tym razem dzięki zwyczajowej propagandzie promującej ich wojenna doktrynę okraszona rusofobia wschodnioeuropejczyków udalo im sie dla swoich geopolitycznych celow wykrwawiac slowian przeciwko slowianom. Czy ktokolwiek potrafacy

Four of the analysed accounts promoted content not supporting the thesis that Poland is a Russophobic country⁷⁵. One of these profiles distributed a long post popularising the knowledge of the intensification of Russian information warfare in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In its content, Russophobia was identified as a narrative component of the propaganda message targeting Poland. The manipulation techniques used in this regard were described as follows:

Poles are presented using archetypal and stereotypical forms. Russian disinformation and propaganda describes the current actions of Polish society as unacceptable, barbaric, predatory and xenophobic. Polish-Ukrainian cooperation and joining international action on sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine becomes a pretext for imaging Poles as a xenophobic nation towards Russians. Added to this are notions of the Polish nation as barbaric and predatory, which pushes Poles outside the orbit of civilised nations. Stripping away seriousness, prestige and destroying the image of Poland and Poles has become a common form of propaganda. At the same time, accusations of Russophobia are attributed by Russian disinformers to Polish society as a whole at one time and only to the political elite at another time⁷⁶.

The post was probably intended to serve a popularising-preventive function in connection with the information battle going on in the Polish Internet. From

jeszcze w Polsce myslec zdaje sobie sprawe, jak odwrocenie sytuacji orkiestrowania przewrotu politycznego przez Rosje w kraju graniczacym z USA i plany zbudowania na ich terytorium wyrzutni rakietowych skierowanych na miasta USA skonczyloby sie?. nie wspominajac gdyby Rosja chciala stworzyc pakt militarny odpowiednik NATO, ktory podobnie jak NATO zmuszalby do kontrybucji w ich geopolitycznych wojnach i kupowania wylacznie od nich uzbrojenia. Warunkiem zakonczenia zimnej wojny i rozpoczecia pierestrojki bylo nie rozszerzanie sie NATO poza mor berlinski. Kto kontynuuje tutaj doktryne wojny? kto odmawia przedluzenia umowy o nie powiekszanie arsenu nuklearnego? Kto wydaje na zbrojenia wiecej niz reszta rozwinietych krajow swiata razem wzietych?”;

- „Daremne rusofobiczne oszołomstwo, które podjudzone do nienawiści fejkowymi filmikami o „węzowych hierojach” uprawia dziś durnowatą hejterską propagandę i bierze się za walkę z cmentarzami”; „Moze ktos napisze i ma odwage do czego zdolni sa tacy jak Biden ile juz wojenek wywolali ile ludzi zginelo ile krajow zaatakowali ile bogactw naturalnych ukradli co posobie zostawili co zrobili u siebie z indianami i porownajmy z tym co wedlug rusofobow zrobila Rosja i ten wasz wrog Putin prosze o obiektywna odpowiedz”.

⁷⁵ Such a situation occurred in the case of profiles: FB 1 (2022), FB 5 (2022), FB 9 (2022), FB 13 (2022).

⁷⁶ Examples of arguments that were given in Russian propaganda in the context of justifying the liquidation of Poland were (original spelling):

- „Rusofobia narodu polskiego oraz polityka władz państwa nastawiona na niszczenie wizerunku Rosji w Świecie”;
- „wyparcie się współpracy gospodarczej z Rosją na rzecz promocji rusofobii na świecie”.

the perspective of frame analysis, it reduced the credibility of the promoters of the opposing interpretative framework (according to which Poland is a Russophobic country).

The posts from the other three accounts were strongly embedded in the context of the public debate. One of them circulated a post that suggested that there was a convergence between the media narratives of Polish public television and Russian media regarding the fact that Western societies are (original spelling) *degenerate Russophobes, are <<Gay-Europe>> and <<liberalists>>*. Two of the other accounts, on the other hand, promoted narratives that the former allegations of the current parliamentary opposition regarding the Law and Justice party's Russophobia claim in the light of current events proved to be wrong⁷⁷.

The study also found that postings varied considerably in terms of form. This issue goes beyond the main problem of analysis addressed at this stage. It is only worth mentioning that there was both long content that was duplicated (i.e. sent out as duplicates) by one account on different profiles, and shorter texts constituting polemics with other FB users. One of the duplicated texts was based on 50 rhetorical questions, which should be read as a suggestion that, in fact, it is the West and the United States, and not Russia, that pose a threat to Poland's national security and are the source of limiting Poland's sovereignty. In order to show an example of the technique of creating material based on such a message, the said post will be quoted in full (original spelling)⁷⁸:

Questions for the Russophobe... A handful of tough questions for the stunned and manipulated. If you too are afraid of Russians, consider Putin a bloodthirsty beast, are convinced that it is Russia that is breaking the law in Ukraine and not the west, read the following questions and answer for yourself WHO IS DOING IT ALL:

1. Are Mr Soros and Mr Sachs, the authors of the Balcerowicz Plan, who took several hundred billion dollars out of Poland, Russians?
2. Was it perhaps at the request or instigation of other Russians that Poland carried out the political and economic transformation after 1980, the effects of which we are seeing today?
3. Was it the Russians who bought up the pearls of Polish industry for a pittance?

⁷⁷ Example of a post (original spelling, emphasis is from the author of the article):

- „Przecież całe PO wmawiało że PiS to rusofoby którzy z szabelką chcą iść na Rosjan. Już Tusk o tym zapomniał? Przecież tak ocieplał wizerunek Rosjan że ci nazwali go naszym człowiekiem w Warszawie. Przecież był największym sojusznikiem Kremla”.

⁷⁸ Example of a commentary published on 24 February 2022. See: https://www.facebook.com/5050342581654500_5050806171608141 [accessed: 11 II 2023]. During the studied period, the message was duplicated eight times by two different profiles.

4. Was it because of the Russians that we got rid of our textile, chemical, textile, pharmaceutical, construction, electronics, mining, steel, defence, transport, textile, telecommunications, shipbuilding and many other industries?
5. Was it the Russians who bought up Polish workplaces for a few percent of their actual value in order to close them down, lay people off and take equipment abroad?
6. Was it the Russians who bailed out Polish banks, and are Russian banks now sucking Poles dry of their hard-earned money in this neo-colony called the Third Republic?
7. Was it the Russians who forbade us to bail out the shipyards?
8. Was it the Russians who told us to flood the mine shafts, never to use them again?
9. Was it the Russians who told us to get rid of our sugar factories?
10. Was it the Russians who destroyed our agriculture and fisheries?
11. Was it the Russians who ordered the introduction and increase of criminal taxes, and refuse to allow them to be reduced?
12. Are the Russians the ones issuing thousands of idiotic directives that are binding on Poland and destroying the remnants of our economy?
13. Was it the Russians who introduced fifty hypermarkets into our country that do not pay a penny to the State Treasury?
14. Are the Russians the ones who have territorial claims on us and who are buying up huge swathes of Polish land (especially in Warmia and Mazury)?
15. Are the Russians the ones making us pay a hundred billion in membership fees every year?
16. Was it the Russians who destroyed, and are now trying to buy out, Poland's railways?
17. Are the Russians the ones who want to privatise our forests?
18. Was it the Russians who bought up our waterworks and power stations?
19. Are the Russians and their corporations the ones who have a concession, almost for free, to mine everything our land has in Poland?
20. Was it the Russians who destroyed the Polish Army by putting it in a state where there are only about ten thousand real, capable soldiers for every hundred thousand people?
21. Are the Russians the ones who claim the right to decide our future, often in contravention of our Constitution and the laws passed in our country?
22. Are the Russians the ones sending our soldiers to the stupid wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?
23. Is it the Russians who send our soldiers to Libya, Chad or Mali to fight for their claims to the gold and oil deposits present there?
24. Is it for the Russians that GROM was created?

25. Is it for the Russians that all Polish politicians make pilgrimages to shuckle at the walls of the Kremlin promising a strategic partnership to the heads of Russian intelligence?
26. Is it the Russians who hold the patents on GMOs and are forcing us to introduce this poison?
27. Was it the Russians who forced us to buy vaccinations for swine or bird flu?
28. Are the Russians the ones spraying chemicals over our heads and shrugging their shoulders at the fact that this is wiping out the world's bee population?
29. Are the Russians the ones who are rampaging through our country, claiming rights to everything they like in it?
30. Are the Russians the ones whose passports entitle them to reclaim tenements or arable land?
31. Is it the GRU that is wandering around our country with soldiers armed with machine guns, with excursions of young Russians who are shown the execution sites of Russians and Polish murderers?
32. Is Jan Tomasz Gross a Russian and did the Russians coined the statement about the murderers of Poles in Jedwabne or about Polish concentration camps?
33. Are the Russians the ones who set us an example of a country with unpunished security services that have the right to shoot, torture and surveil any citizen?
34. Is it the Russians who set the example of facilitating abortions for entertaining ladies, legalising and explaining perversions (including paedophilia), and living carelessly without rules and principles, which is destroying the whole of Latin civilisation?
35. Are the Russians the world's biggest producers and traffickers of drugs?
36. 3Is it the GRU which, in the interests of its drug wars, is leading to the degeneration and destruction of whole generations?
37. Are the Russians the ones bombing dozens of UN member states?
38. Are the Russians the ones urging us to legalise drugs or euthanasia?
39. Are the Russians the ones who are surrounding other countries with walls and cutting off their access to drinking water?
40. Is it the Russians who drive bulldozers into the residential areas of representatives of another religion?
41. Are the Russians the ones who can ignore more than seventy UN resolutions and penalties with impunity?
42. Are the Russians the ones who have not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, despite possessing vast quantities of nuclear weapons?
43. Are the Russians the ones who have no constitution or borders of their own?
44. Are the Russians the ones who are pursuing a eugenics policy by sterilising women of other skin colours, forcing them to have abortions or driving them out of their country?

45. Are the Russians the ones who have continually waged wars costing their taxpayers trillions of dollars over the years?
46. Are the Russians the ones who incite non-stop revolutions in other countries and bring about the overthrow of democratic governments?
47. Are the Russians the ones making us pay sixty-five billion in reparations?
48. Are the Russians the ones dropping depleted uranium bombs on thousands of innocent civilians?
49. Are the Russians the ones organising attacks as provocations for their next wars or for more and more surveillance of their citizens?
50. Was it the Russians who led to poverty and genocide across Africa, e.g. by provoking a civil war in the Congo or a revolution in South Africa, where they only sensed deposits of something valuable?

Some of the above claims were present in other posts by the most active promoters of the term Russophob*.

Stage 3 - results of the network analysis of the publication sites

In the final stage, an analysis was conducted of the publication sites, i.e. the profiles on which the highest number of Russophob* entries were published in both research periods. Similarly to the network analysis conducted in stage 2, publication venues were examined taking into account two attributes: the strength of the message, i.e. the number of posts published on them (weight-in-degree indicator), and the degree of networking, i.e. the number of profiles that published posts on a given profile - publication venue (in-degree indicator). A comparison of the data from both periods is presented in Table 2. In the event that a given profile-publication site was also among the actors examined in stage 2 (i.e. the most active accounts), this information was included in a footnote. A visualisation of the results is presented in Diagrams 1 and 2⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ Diagrams visualise the links (edges) between accounts (single points, nodes in the graph) that published the term Russophob* on the social network FB during both research periods. The figures denote the profiles included in the comparative analysis presented in Table 1. The profiles with the highest in-degree weight index are denoted by their names, the colouring depends on the in-degree index. The following colour palette was adopted: green - low number of links, yellow/orange - medium, red - high. A group of red edges coming out of a given node therefore means that the account in question had a high out-degree rate, i.e. it published the message on a large number of profiles. Similarly, yellow/orange indicates a medium number of related profiles on which the message was published, and green a low number. The distribution of the individual nodes follows the mechanism of the Force Atlas algorithm.

Table 2. In-degree (message strength) and in-degree (degree of networking) weight indicators of the 20 profiles, the most active accounts publishing the Russophob* term in 2018 and 2022 in the Polish-language section of FB (recurring accounts in both sets have been highlighted in bold).

| 2018 year | | | 2022 year | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Profile name | Weight in-degree (number of entries) | In-degree (number of profiles) | Profile name | Weight in-degree (message strength - number of entries) | In-degree (degree of networking - number of profiles) |
| Public group | 332 | 125 | Gazeta Wyborcza | 123 | 109 |
| Unavailable | | | | | |
| Niezależna PL | 190 | 74 | tvp.info | 114 | 84 |
| STOP dla Rusofobii ^a | 154 | 14 | Polsatnews.pl | 67 | 54 |
| Telewizja Republika | 102 | 47 | WP Wiadomości | 60 | 43 |
| Kresy.pl | 90 | 49 | Dziennik Rzeczpospolita | 58 | 47 |
| wPolityce.pl | 68 | 32 | Onet | 54 | 34 |
| TVN24.pl | 61 | 41 | Interia Wydarzenia | 49 | 30 |
| tvp.info | 55 | 34 | Natemat.pl | 46 | 30 |
| Public group | 52 | 7 | Tygodnik Polityka | 41 | 33 |
| Unavailable | | | | | |
| Individual profile ^b | 51 | 16 | Gazeta.pl | 41 | 34 |
| Unavailable | | | | | |
| Individual profile | 51 | 21 | Goniec.pl | 39 | 26 |
| Individual profile ^c | 49 | 22 | Sok z Buraka | 39 | 24 |
| Sok z Buraka | 49 | 31 | Newsweek Polska | 37 | 26 |
| Studio wschód | 48 | 23 | Nie dla Islamizacji Europy | 35 | 25 |
| Individual profile | 48 | 26 | PCh24.pl | 32 | 11 |
| Unavailable | | | | | |
| Public group | 48 | 10 | Money.pl | 32 | 27 |
| Unavailable | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|------|-----|-----------------------------|------|-----|
| Individual profile ^d | 47 | 32 | Fakt24.pl | 30 | 25 |
| Tygodnik Polityka | 47 | 2 | Tygodnik Do Rzeczy | 29 | 18 |
| TVN, GW, Polsat, TVP1- Kłamstwa i manipulacje | 47 | 20 | Kresy.pl | 28 | 24 |
| Gazeta Wyborcza | 45 | 28 | Zespół Myślenia Ironicznego | 28 | 26 |
| Total | 1610 | 650 | Total | 982 | 730 |
| Total number of entries | 9032 | | Total number of entries | 3381 | |

^a Actor coded as FB 2 (2018). ^b Actor coded as FB 1 (2018).

^c Actor coded as FB 19 (2018). ^d Actor coded as FB 4 (2018).

Source: own elaboration.

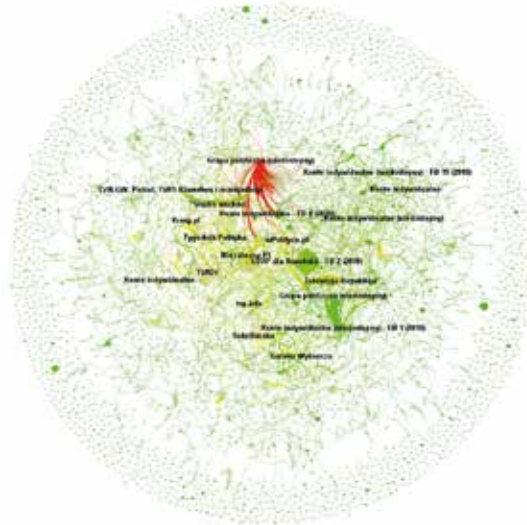


Diagram 1. Visualisation of the network of links between accounts posting the term Russo-phob* on Facebook in 2018. The diagram marks the 20 profiles that stand out in terms of concentrating discussions.

Source: own elaboration using Gephi software.

content than 2018. In 2018, the 20 profiles with the most frequently published keywords accounted for 13.8 per cent of the total publication sites of the period⁸¹, while in 2022 this rate was only 4.6 per cent⁸².

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that in the period January-April 2022, the nature of discussion about Russophobia on FB was significantly redefined compared to 2018. This was due, among other things, to the fact that **some of the profiles that focused the discussion in 2018 were inaccessible in 2022, i.e. they were closed or blocked.** In this context, the observation that **some of the most popular publication sites of 2018 were at the same time the most active promoters of the studied term (i.e. actors) is important. This suggests that a network of several accounts developed in 2018 that both introduced claims of Polish Russophobia into the information space and focused discussion on such a phenomenon, which in turn created favourable conditions for the formation of an information bubble.** It is also significant that two such accounts are currently unavailable⁸³, and the data obtained shows that in 2022, **a group of accounts was not created in their place similarly channeling the activity of participants in the discussion of Russophobia, as was the case in 2018.** Instead, in the period January-April 2022, the discourse was mainly focused on profiles with high popularity⁸⁴, to some extent also in groups on anti-immigrant themes⁸⁵, associated with a broadly right-wing political and social orientation⁸⁶, as well as on other profiles actively participating in the debate on Polish political life⁸⁷.

⁸¹ The ratio of the number of entries published in 2018 (9032) to the total number of out-degree ratio in Table 2 for 2018.

⁸² Ratio of the number of entries published in 2022 (3381) to the total out-degree ratio in Table 2 for 2022.

⁸³ It can be assumed that they were closed by the FB administration due to their violation of the site's rules and regulations, which in turn may have been a manifestation of persistent influence on the Polish infosphere (trolling). Due to the lack of relevant sources, this statement is only an assumption.

⁸⁴ These were both profiles associated with large traditional (tvp.info, Polsatnews.pl, Tygodnik Polityka, Newsweek Polska, Fakt24.pl, Do Rzeczy) and online media (WP Wiadomości, Onet, Interia Wydarzenia, Natemat.pl, Gazeta.pl), as well as with other places that focus the attention of social media users (e.g. Gonicz, Zespół Myślenia Ironicznego).

⁸⁵ Nie dla Islamizacji Europy.

⁸⁶ PCh24.pl.

⁸⁷ Sok z Buraka.

Summary

With regard to the first research question posed, it should be noted that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine there was an increase in the discussion of Russophobia on the FB social network. Its dynamics increased and on 21 March 2022 the highest number of posts containing the term Russophob* was recorded, followed by a sharp decrease. The answer to the second research question is in the negative - the accounts that were most active in 2018 did not stand out again in such a character in 2022 (the exception was one profile that showed the highest activity in both research periods). The results of the analyses lead to the following answers to the third research question:

1. In 2018, the discussion was focused around a few profiles, and in the first months of 2022 it was more fragmented⁸⁸.
2. In 2018, accounts linked to larger media as well as individual profiles and public groups with russophobic content stood out. In 2022, the situation changed, as the dominance of accounts linked to large media outlets and world-diverse fanpages was greater.
3. In the period January-April 2022, compared to 2018, content that fit the claims of Polish Russophobia continued to dominate. They were observed to be highly flexible and tailored messages to the current situational context (messages often had anti-Ukrainian and anti-American overtones, and anti-vaccine content was also observed). It should be emphasised that in 2022, there were more messages that did not support the claim of Polish Russophobia. This was not a dominant group (only four of the 20 profiles analysed showed such a feature), but at least one profile conducted systematic communication aimed at breaking the narrative that Poland is a Russophobic country.

The responses to the research questions show that in the first four months of 2022, two positive developments from the perspective of the information security of the Republic of Poland emerged in the fragment of the information environment covering the discussion on Russophobia:

- less concentration of messages (resulting from the lack of activity of accounts that stand out in this respect in 2018), and thus less risk of creating information bubbles in which content about Polish Russophobia was promoted,

⁸⁸ Such a change may have been due to the unavailability (closure, blocking) of the profiles that focused this discussion in 2018.

- the emergence of systematic messages that break the narratives described above.

In the context of these observations, it should be concluded that activities that popularise knowledge of the mechanisms and directions of foreign propaganda in the information space reduce the credibility of the accounts promoting this message, reducing - from the perspective of frame analysis - their resonance. For this reason, the activities of fact-checking organisations, strategic communication of public administration and expert statements in the media are important. Activities aimed at informing about the phenomenon of the use of Russophobic slogans in Russian propaganda can be interpreted as raising awareness of this issue.

At the same time, the main narrative directions observed in 2022 remain essentially unchanged, as can be seen when comparing them with the claims made in 2018. Nevertheless, they are characterised by a high degree of flexibility and adaptability to the current situational context. In the author's opinion, the functioning of this type of content can be regarded as an example of the susceptibility of participants in various fragments of the Polish information environment to the resonance of foreign propaganda messages. The peculiarities of social media make this group an audience for the propaganda message of the Russian Federation and can both reinforce the distribution of these materials online and create this type of content on their own initiative.

In the author's opinion, network analysis and methods of investigating communication messages (e.g. frame analysis) may be used - subject to their methodological and substantive limitations⁸⁹ - to characterise fragments of the information environment threatened by foreign interference or exposed to dysfunctional internal processes, e.g. related to deep polarisation of public debate, hate speech or the growth of radical attitudes. As signalled at the beginning, this article is a methodological proposal; it is neither a ready-made analytical model nor an exhaustive study of the issue of exposing the Polish audience to foreign, including Russian, propaganda.

The undertaking of analyses and studies based on empirical research by representatives of security sciences, political scientists, sociologists, media experts or IT specialists contributes to broadening the state of knowledge of threats to the information environment in the Polish infosphere and may have practical implications - from the identification of threats, risks and opportunities from the perspective of the state's information security to the determination of directions

⁸⁹ Linked, for example, to the lack of data and the knowledge that it often corresponds only to virtual human activity.

and prioritisation of activities undertaken within the framework of strategic communication.

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