

Juliusz Sikorski

ORCID: 0000-0002-0579-0158

Akademia im. Jakuba z Paradyża w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim

Disinformation as one of the key contemporary security issues. Review of the book by Robert Kupiecki, Filip Bryjka, Tomasz Chłoń, *International disinformation. Concept, recognition, counteraction*, (Dezinformacja międzynarodowa. Pojęcie, rozpoznanie, przeciwdziałanie), Scholar Scientific Publishing House (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar): Warszawa 2022, pp. 313)

Abstract

The article discusses the monograph entitled “International Disinformation. Concept, recognition, counteraction”. It was pointed out that it is an excellent compendium of knowledge on this subject and can also be successfully used as an academic textbook.

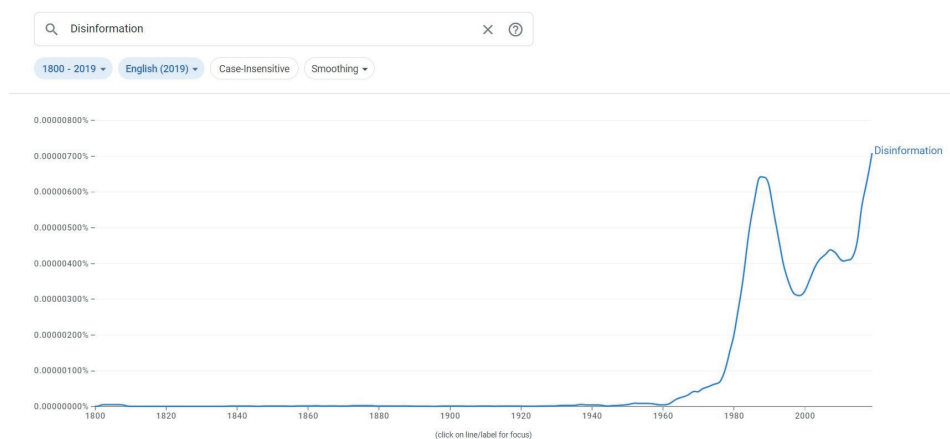
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In recent years, the phenomenon of disinformation has found a prominent place among the most important problems faced by Western democracies, but at the same time it is one of the ways authoritarian regimes maintain power. The dynamics of contemporary socio-political transformations, but also the huge potential of social impact of disinformation make it the subject of numerous analyses and studies, both scientific¹

¹ Just to mention some: *Commercial communication in the digital age. Information or disinformation?*, red. G. Siegert, M. Bjørn von Rimscha, S. Grubenmann, Berlin 2017; P. Pogorzelski, *Zagrożenie rosyjską dezinformacją w Polsce i formy przeciwdziałania*, Wojnowice 2017; Y. Benkler, R. Faris, H. Roberts, *Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics*, New York 2018; *Zjawisko dezinformacji w erze cyfrowej. Państwo. Społeczeństwo. Polityka. Biznes*, red. M. Wrzosek, Warszawa 2019; A. Demczuk, *SARS-CoV-2 i COVID-19. Plotki, dezinformacje i narracje spiskowe w polskim dyskursie publicznym*, Lublin

and journalistic². These possibilities, enhanced by technological progress, mean that it carries threats – until recently unimaginable – to states and international organizations as such, but also to the organizations and individuals operating within them.

The scale of this interest to some extent is also illustrated by the frequency of occurrence of the term “misinformation” as measured by the Google Books Ngram Viewer, a tool that allows you to measure the occurrence of the indicated phrases in printed sources starting from the 16th century. The increasing frequency of the use of this concept since the early 1960s, with an abrupt thousand-fold increase in the 1980s, the subsequent decline and again dynamic growth in the current century, perfectly reflects the temperature prevailing on the international arena (see graph)³.



Graph. The occurrence of the term “disinformation” measured by Google Books Ngram Viewer

Source: *Disinformation*, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Disinformation&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3.

2021; *Dezinformacja – Inspiracja – Społeczeństwo. Social Cybersecurity*, red. D. Boćkowski, E. Dąbrowska-Prokopowska, P. Goryń, K. Goryń, Białystok 2022; *Information, Security and Society in the COVID-19 Pandemic*, red. N. Moch, W. S. Wereda, J. Stańczyk, New York 2023.

² An interesting book by a Polish journalist who has been dealing with this problem for several years has recently been published. See: A. Mierzyńska, *Efekt niszczący. Jak dezinformacja wpływa na nasze życie*, Warszawa 2022.

³ *Disinformation*, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Disinformation&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3 (17.6.2023).

It is necessary to note here that in Polish only the term disinformation was used for a long time, which semantically included three terms used in English: disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. The situation has changed in recent years, precisely because of the interest in the problem and the popularization of knowledge about it.

The publication by Robert Kupiecki, Filip Bryjka and Tomasz Chłoń, whose dossier is an excellent recommendation of the discussed monograph, is part of the trend in the aforementioned interest. The first of the mentioned authors is currently a professor at the University of Warsaw at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, previously also the ambassador of the Republic of Poland to NATO, director of the Department of Security Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Washington and deputy minister of national defense. The second is an analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs and, when the book was published, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Security Sciences of the Military University of Land Forces in Wrocław, and currently an assistant professor at the Institutions of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The third author is a philologist and political scientist, but he is also a diplomat, a former ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Estonia and Slovakia, but also a former director of the NATO Information Office in Moscow.

The monograph consists of three parts, each of which contains four chapters and ends with a summary. The first part is devoted to the environment, concepts and dangers of disinformation. It consists of the following chapters: “The security environment and the information “ecosystem” of modern states”, “Disinformation: traditions, lies, strategy and ties to politics”, “Disinformation: conceptual framework and origins” and “Disinformation: anatomy and trends”.

The first chapter discusses the impact of disinformation on the security environment of modern states. It also draws attention to the negative consequences of equating truth and lies, but also characterizes the information ecosystem of modern countries and indicates the shortcomings of human cognitive processes. The infodemic is also briefly characterized here as a case study of disinformation impact. The chapter closes with an analysis of the role of the media in the contemporary information ecosystem. This is an excellent introduction to the next chapter of this part of the book, which is devoted to historical disinformation.

The reader will find here an analysis of philosophical reflection on truth and falsehood dating back to antiquity. The views on these matters of the Dutch lawyer, philosopher and diplomat Hugo Grotius, Niccolo Machiavelli, the author of the famous “The Prince”, and Ambroise Guillois, a Catholic theologian, are also discussed here. Of course, there are also references to other classics, such as Sun Tzu or Clausewitz and their approach to information (including the defective one) as a weapon of struggle. Further, the authors characterize the phenomenon of propaganda in the elementary scope, rightly pointing to the so-called “black propaganda” as an area of disinformation influence (p. 57).

In the third chapter, the reader has the opportunity to get acquainted with various definitions of disinformation that can be found in the literature on the subject, the origin of the concept itself and the susceptibility of democratic societies to disinformation. The authors rightly emphasize in this part that: “the less civil liberties and stronger authoritarianism in governance and the more media control and exclusion of foreign content – the potentially higher the level of systemic resistance to disinformation (external – because it is no longer disseminated by its own authorities)” (p. 80). In this sad statement, it is worth noting that such a cut-off of national infospheres from the global network, which is well known to us (see China, Russia), is absolutely not related to the permanent and effective shaping of social resistance to disinformation.

In the fourth chapter, the authors focus their attention on the analysis of disinformation trends, concluding that the experience of disinformers shapes their current and future activities, which is supported by technological development. They also point out that China is playing an increasingly important role in the “disinformation arena” (pp. 88-97).

The first part of the book ends with a summary in which the reader will find answers to the most important questions in the discussed area: What is disinformation? What is international disinformation? Is it a 20th century invention? Does it pose a threat? Is it always based on false information? Are disinformation and propaganda different names for the same phenomenon? What is fake news? Where does disinformation most often appear? In what forms can it manifest itself? How to protect yourself from it? (pp. 98-99).

The second part of the book is entitled “Disinformation: Identification and Analysis of the Phenomenon”. It contains chapters on “Intelligence and military disinformation and its impact on information security: theoretical, practical and legal aspects”, “Recognition of mass disinformation”, “Disinformation analysis – the first line of defense: critical thinking, fact-checking and open source intelligence” and “Information Militarization in Russian Strategic Culture”.

In the first chapter of this part of the book, the authors characterize the information security of the state (pp. 103-107), paying attention to the particular importance in this context of protecting information resources, protecting state institutions and society, and having offensive capabilities in the field of information warfare. Further on, the reader will find an analysis of the problem of intelligence and counterintelligence disinformation, including the role of agents of influence in such activities. One will also find here the characteristics of military disinformation. When analyzing the latter type, the authors point out that it is carried out at all levels of command (pp. 107-122).

In the second chapter, the authors focus their attention on identifying disinformation, suggesting that the reader uses in this respect the British model of disinformation recognition, analysis and response to it, known as RESIST (Recognize, Early warning, Situational insight, Impact analysis, Strategic communication, Track outcomes) (pp. 131- 132). They also indicate the basic components of disinformation, which can be defined by the acronym FIRST (Fabrication, Identity, Rhetoric, Symbolism, Technology) (pp. 132-133).

In the third chapter, the researchers draw attention to the importance of critical thinking in the process of developing resistance to disinformation, the need to verify information, and the role of open source intelligence, while pointing to a catalogue of potentially useful tools for unmasking disinformation (pp. 151-154). They also present one of the models useful for analyzing disinformation and propaganda SCAME (Source, Content, Audience, Media, Effects) (pp. 154-155).

In the final chapter of this part of the book, the authors characterize the Russian propaganda and disinformation ecosystem. They also discuss Russian interference in the democratic processes of other countries, Russian military disinformation, and disinformation as the science and practice of Russian politics. The chapter traditionally ends with a summary in which the reader will find hints

about the following questions: What components does the information security of the state contain? What separates agents of influence from useful idiots, trolls and bots? What are the basic types of false information? What is the Russian scheme of interference in elections in democratic countries? What are the basic principles of disinformation in the RESIST model? What methods and techniques does the Russian disinformation model developed by EUvsDisinfo consist of? What is critical thinking? What principles should fact-checking organizations follow? What elements does the simplified disinformation recognition model consist of? What are the basic operational security practices for open source intelligence?

The third and final part of the monograph is entitled “Disinformation: countering and building resilience”. It consists of the following chapters: “Counteracting disinformation: general characteristics”, “Media education and countering disinformation at the individual level”, “Counteracting disinformation – corporate and civil society level” and “Counteracting disinformation – national and international level”.

In the first, the authors start by generally characterizing the problem of combating disinformation and draw the reader’s attention to the fact that “Euro-Atlantic institutions treat resistance to disinformation – as well as to other hybrid challenges – in terms of the ability not only to survive and cope with the challenge, but also to overcome it in an irreversible, fair and democratic way” (p. 196). They also rightly note that “Global awareness of the harmfulness of disinformation has clearly increased with the advent of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, and especially as a result of military and disinformation activities against Ukraine” (p. 197). Further, the researchers analyze the challenges faced by the creators of effective regulations defining the functioning of online platforms in connection with the disinformation spreading through them, and they also point out that counteracting it is particularly important at the individual level.

In the second chapter, the researchers focus on the role of media education in the process of building social resistance to disinformation, illustrating the argument with examples of activities of various European countries. They also characterize the forms of counteracting disinformation at the individual level and point out the importance of hygiene in the infosphere. In turn, in the last chapter of the monograph, the authors analyze the problems related to combating

disinformation at the civil society and corporate level. Here, they look at the transformation of social platforms and the actions of their owners, also pointing to their negative and socially harmful behavior dictated above all by the desire to multiply profits. They further discuss the activities of various fact-checking organizations and point out the important role they play in building social resilience to disinformation. The chapter ends with reflections on the challenges facing journalism in connection with the ubiquitous disinformation.

The last chapter of the book is devoted to counteracting disinformation at the international and state level. Here, the authors reiterate the importance and need to combat disinformation. They also provide a list of activities that are used to limit it. These are: creating structures, introducing legal regulations, cybersecurity, educating authorities and officials, warnings, administrative decisions, diplomacy and attribution, and cooperation with the public (pp. 252-254). The researchers also look at the regional perspective of counteracting disinformation and the activities of the European Union, NATO and the United Nations in this area. The chapter ends with recommendations for international organizations potentially strengthening resistance to disinformation.

This part of the book ends with a summary. It contains answers to the questions: What is disinformation immunity? Who is responsible for preventing it? What is media education and what are its goals? What are the individual possibilities to counter the spread of disinformation? What is the working model of social media platforms? What is content moderation? What is the role of researchers and the media in countering disinformation? What is the role of state authorities and international organizations in this regard? What is the Digital Services Act (DSA)?

The entire monograph is complemented by a bibliography of over thirty pages, which is a valuable hint for all those readers who would like to deepen the knowledge gained while reading this extremely important publication.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that thanks to the efforts of the authors, we have received a book that is highly substantive and contains in-depth analyses of numerous problems that are related to its subject matter. The researchers, paying attention to the most important trends in the modern world, have successfully shown that disinformation is a very serious security threat to both societies and individuals. The arming of information, the development of IT means of

international influence, both overt and of course hidden, the change in the nature of conflicts, the destabilization of the liberal international order – all this makes us live in exceptionally restless and unstable times. These problems are also aggravated by the mechanisms of social vulnerability to disinformation.

The monograph is undoubtedly also an important contribution to the research on the theory of disinformation. In this context, it is possible to argue with some of the authors' proposals, such as whether the tools of disinformation operations are e.g. active measures, hybrid activities, soft power, diplomacy, psychological operations, or maybe it is the other way around and disinformation is used as part of these activities, as a means and method of achieving goals. This absolutely does not detract from the high quality of the monograph. The issues of classification of information warfare tools are an unresolved problem in science. In the context of information warfare and the disinformation impact that it entails, research to date has focused on the most important current needs: recognizing harmful narratives, indicating the potential and harmfulness, and shaping social resistance to disinformation. And this is what the authors of the discussed monograph do very matter-of-factly and competently.

Among the numerous advantages of the publication, which cannot all be mentioned in a short discussion, one should acknowledge the fully successful attempt to define disinformation. It should be remembered that in the literature on the subject, one can find many attempts of this type, and these concepts are sometimes quite diverse. Therefore, it is even more worth quoting the authors' findings in this regard in this review. They recognized that “disinformation is the doctrine and practice of the deliberate use of manipulated or falsified information by states or non-state actors in order to induce a desired change in a specific group of recipients in a planned field of influence. With the intention of harming the recipients, it is used as part of information and propaganda operations using the technique of influence and psychological influence in times of peace, crisis and war” (p. 73).

To sum up, in this monograph, the reader receives a compendium of knowledge on disinformation. Its internal layout and the way of conducting the argument makes the publication an excellent textbook for university classes, during which problems related to the issues discussed in the monograph are analyzed.

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