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Doppelgangers, oligarchs and distortions. Research notes on Russian disinformation tactics in Israel and their influence on Western partners

Introduction

Russian influence campaigns in the West are a widely discussed phenomenon, often associated with the war in Ukraine, especially after the full scale invasion started in 2022. In fact, the campaigns are far older and reaching beyond the goals connected with the ongoing active conflict. Moscow is often accused of influencing local and national political scenes. The public discourse is captivated with the notion of Russian influence campaigns tend to promote narratives that align with core Russian interests in Europe, especially anti-Ukrainian, anti-NATO, anti-EU and anti-Western. These narratives can be identified through analysis of content in media and social media, including Hebrew, Russian and English language information. In order to deepen the analysis of the first hypothesis, the study will also explore the resonance of anti-EU and anti-NATO messaging. It will be tested whether Russian anti-EU narratives are more likely to be effective due to an existing fertile ground of Euroscepticism in Israel's

political and media landscape, as well as check if Russian influence campaigns shy from promoting anti-US narratives.

To better explain the Russian influence campaigns a second hypothesis has been put forward: Russian oligarchs holding Israeli citizenship contribute to advancing Russian interests in Israel by leveraging their philanthropic involvement and institutional roles. This hypothesis will be tested through a case-study analysis of figures such as Moshe Kantor or Roman Abramovich, focusing on their affiliations with cultural, historical and political institutions (e.g. Yad VaShem) and the potential influence these connections grant them over public discourse or foreign policy narratives.

To verify both hypotheses above data sourced from social media as well as traditional media and disinformation campaigns will be categorised into preset themes – anti-Ukrainian, anti-NATO, anti-EU, anti-Polish, anti-US, anti-Western, pro-Russian (positive). Other categories may be applied in the course of the research. Data collected will be tested against available public opinion polling on the perceptions of European Union, Poland, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, United States of America and Western world in general.

Theoretical framework

In modern world disinformation is discussed relatively often, due to availability of mass media, including radio, television and the internet, that frequently become grounds for influencing the public. The interconnectedness of global discussions make it increasingly easier to reach general public not only for internal actors of an institution, region or state, but also for foreign agents of influence. The interconnectedness, or hyperconnectivity did not work towards generating greater engagement, especially among users of the internet, but through the algorithms governing the structure of what content is becoming available to users of social media, which creates filtered bubbles curated through the information gathered from users input¹.

The general public often falls prey to misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. Although in popular discourse all of the three mentioned issues are sometimes used interchangeably it is imperative to underline the distinction, that the term misinformation describes a situation when false information is shared without malicious intent, disinformation

¹ J. Bertoli, E. Silva, F. Casarejos, C. Rufin, *The Loss of a Common World: Disinformation, Post-Truth and Democratic Instability*, "Organizações & Sociedade" 2025, vol. 32, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-92302025v32n0002en>.

happens when false information is shared with malicious intent and mal-information happens when true information is shared with malicious intent (for example, out of context required to interpret facts)².

Popular discourse also widely uses the term 'fake news' or 'false news', what has been popularized especially through the U.S. political discourse in last decade, but can be used as a short term in place of both disinformation and misinformation³. However, fake news being a nebulous term has little use for this research, as it does not differentiate between the actual intentions of users of information that is created or shared.

Demagog, Polish fact-checking institution uses the same definition for disinformation, but underlines that "The creation of this type of information is most often motivated by the desire to make money, publicity or increase political influence" (Demagog). European Commission expands on the above: Disinformation is understood as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm comprises threats to democratic political and policy-making processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security. Disinformation does not include reporting errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary⁴.

Tomasz Kacała⁵ also points that "disinformation means techniques of influencing people", and also that maintaining the pretence of spontaneity is crucial in introducing a right catalyst for social behaviours. He also categorises disinformation as "strategic" and "tactical", showing that the main difference between those two categories may be the scope, where tactical disinformation may be created with shorter aim or as a one-time event, where strategic disinformation includes longer preparation and operational time. Marek Wrzosek⁶ also points to a special type

² H. Derakhshian, C. Wardle, *Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*, Council of Europe, 2017.

³ A. Gibbons, A. Carson, *What is misinformation and disinformation?*, "Australian Journal of Political Science" 2022, vol. 57, pp. 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2022.2122776>.

⁴ Communication from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions, *Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach*, 2018, [on-line:] <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0236> – 20.05.2025.

⁵ T. Kacała, *Dezinformacja i propaganda w kontekście zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa państwa*, "Przegląd Prawa Konstytucyjnego" 2015, no. 2(24), pp. 49–65, <https://czasopisma.marszalek.com.pl/journals/30/608/10058> – 20.05.2025.

⁶ M. Wrzosek, *Dezinformacja – skuteczny element walki informacyjnej*, "Zeszyty Naukowe AON" 2012, no. 2 (87), pp. 18–37.

of disinformation which would be military disinformation, described as spreading “prepared (false) information, rumors, specially prepared documents, and demonstration of military activities aimed at misleading the adversary with regard to the real intentions, plans and undertakings of military importance”.

Dorota Domalewska⁷ also notes that disinformation may be difficult to identify, as oftentimes false information is intertwined with truth. In such cases the understanding of intent is crucial, as a piece of information can be classified as disinformation only if it was created or shared with the motivation to intentionally trick the reader or viewer.

Karina Stasiuk-Krajewska notes, that disinformation is often, especially in public discourse, considered to narrowly or too broadly and shouldn't be confused with terms such as manipulation or propaganda:

It is undoubtedly true that disinformation uses tools of manipulation, that it is sometimes used in the function of propaganda, but such an identification of concepts (in fact, the expansion of the category of disinformation) makes this category – as such – loses its meaning, because it does not refer to any new phenomenon, area of social life (or the functioning of media communication – which, in principle, in modern societies is largely the same)⁸.

Due to the intent of disinformation political actors and researchers alike consider this not part of regular political discourse or activities but a threat to democratic processes, as well as political discourse and freedom of expression in general, as well as harms the trust in media or official communication channels. It has been noted that some societies are less resilient to disinformation than others. The low level of resilience is especially seen in countries with polarized political scene, partisan journalism that is “commentary oriented”, as well as dominated by “social media use for news consumption”⁹.

It is also important to consider that disinformation can and often is used as a tool in hybrid warfare where states are increasingly using non state actors for political gain or to harm other actors, or they can also be employed by non-state actors for the same purposes. The boundaries

⁷ D. Domalewska, *Dezinformacja jako zagrożenie dla demokracji i regulacje prawne w Polsce i Europie*, “Politeja” 2024, vol. 21, pp. 359–379, <https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.21.2024.92.16>.

⁸ K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, *Dezinformacja. Próba ujęcia dyskursywnego*, “Media Biznes Kultura” 2023, no. 1 (14), pp. 55–72, <https://doi.org/10.4467/25442554.MBK.23.004.18027>.

⁹ E. Humprecht, F. Esser, P. van Aelst, *Resilience to Online Disinformation: A Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research*, “The International Journal of Press/Politics” 2020, vol. 25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219900126>.

and definitions of hybrid warfare are fluid and change rapidly with new methods, techniques and strategies unraveled. Disinformation, in these strategies, is often a tool employed when two or more actors are yet not officially in the state of war and “allow to influence the opponents morale, manipulate the public opinion and destabilise societies without the necessity to deploy regular armed forces to the battleground”¹⁰. It is imperative to recognize, that such hybrid warfare can take place on a territory (physical, virtual or cognitive) of a third party actor, not necessary the one that is actually meant to experience the consequences of such campaigns. In this context – the actual victim of many of Russian influence or disinformation campaigns in western societies are the Ukrainians that are engaged in open conflict with Moscow, but may experience the backlash of the manipulation of public opinion in their partner states. Numerous endeavours aimed at changing the perception of events in the Russian-Ukrainian war have been identified, including the creation of false narratives such as portraying victims of bombing of a children’s hospital as actors, or portraying NATO as an institution pushing Kiev to continue combat despite narratives about Russian readiness to cease fighting¹¹.

This paper will concentrate on explaining activities in Israel, that may be attributed directly to Russia or Russian-connected actors in the country, that may be considered disinformation as per discussed above theoretical framework – i.e. contain shared false information with the intent to trick the general public to improve political standing of an actor or to sow dissent in Israel or Israeli relations with foreign, preferably Western, partners.

State of the art

Disinformation in general and Russian disinformation strategies used abroad within the societies and political scenes of partners and rivals alike, are phenomena often researched which is evident by the number of publications available through search engines of major publishers, libraries and paper aggregators.

Quick Google Trends search for last 5 years shows that the word “disinformation” was at peak popularity in April and May 2022, two months

¹⁰ I. Grabowska-Lepczak, B. Szykuła-Piec, J. Wasiłuk, *Dezinformacja jako jedno z narzędzi w wojnie hybrydowej*, “The Central European Journal of Security Studies” 2024, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 7–15.

¹¹ M. Szulc, *Walka z dezinformacją w Unii Europejskiej na przykładzie wojny w Ukrainie*, “Pomiędzy. Polsko-Ukraińskie Studia Interdyscyplinarne” 2024, vol. 12(1), pp. 53–61.

after the Russian full scale invasion on Ukraine, when the topic gained traction in connection to the Russian-Ukrainian war.

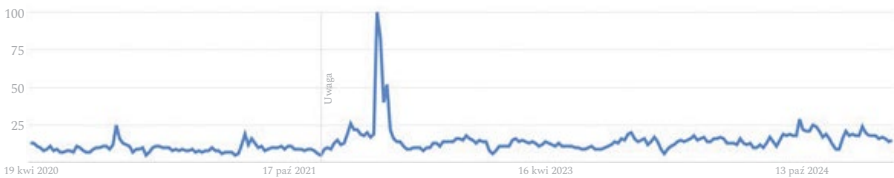


Figure 1. Google Trends worldwide search for word “disinformation” for five years between April 19 2020 and 2025

However, the same search expanded to start in 2004 shows that the popularity of the term changes overtime. It started decreasing at the beginning of the data collection ,and rose again slowly after December 2016.

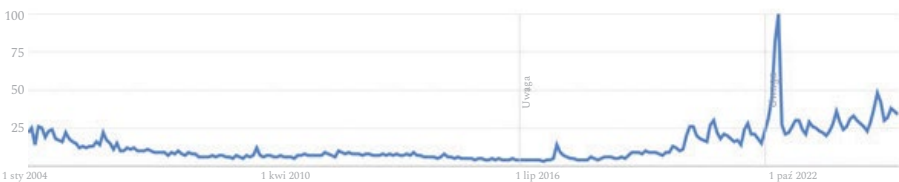


Figure 2. Google Trends worldwide search for word “disinformation” starting in 2004

Quick search through Scopus database for the keyword “disinformation” yields 4227 document results from various fields, and 2158 when narrowing the search to social sciences.

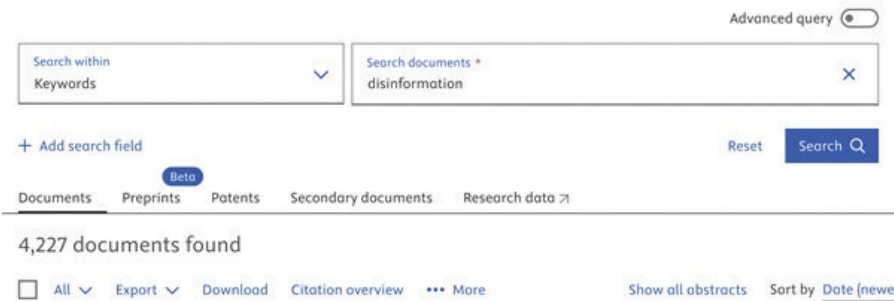


Figure 3. Simple search for “disinformation” keyword in Scopus

Furthermore, searching for “fake news” yields 6438 document results with 2299 in social sciences area, whereas “malinformation” yields only 25 results with 10 in social sciences.

The above data alone however, shows that the topics of disinformation of influence campaigns are popular among researchers, as well as general population using search engines.

Wide array of research papers concentrate on the matter of definitions and distinguishing between disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and fake news for the sake of precision.

Multiple analyses of Russian disinformation strategy or influence campaigns are available, especially concerning Russian interests regarding to the war in Ukraine. For example a mixed methods analysis of Russian tactics used on Twitter for justification of the invasion revealed that the predominant topic was the accusation of United States imperialism and portraying Ukraine as a “victim of American aggression”, along with the narrative on the plans for expansion of NATO¹². The above categories are also present in data collected for our study as will be presented further.

Among Polish scholars, the subject of disinformation and information warfare has been extensively examined, including in the works of Hanna Batorowska and Paulina Motylińska, Katarzyna Bąkowicz, Hanna Batorowska, and Robert Rajczyk¹³. Several of these authors have addressed the issue specifically in the context of Russian activities, particularly with regard to operations targeting Ukraine¹⁴, including analyses conducted prior to the outbreak of the full-scale war¹⁵. Additionally, the influence of Russian disinformation on Poland—especially through social media—has been the subject of scholarly inquiry¹⁶. However, within Polish academic discourse, relatively little attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of Russian disinformation in the Israeli context.

¹² I. Alieva, I. Kloo I., K.M. Carley, *Analyzing Russia’s propaganda tactics on Twitter using mixed methods network analysis and natural language processing: a case study of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine*, “EPJ Data Science” 2024, vol. 13, no. 42, <https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-024-00479-w>.

¹³ *Bezpieczeństwo informacyjne i medialne w czasach nadprodukcji informacji*, red. H. Batorowska, P. Motylińska, Warszawa 2020; K. Bąkowicz, *Dezinformacja: Instrukcja obsługi*, Warszawa 2023; *Walka informacyjna: Uwarunkowania, incydenty, wyzwania*, red. H. Batorowska, Kraków 2017; R. Rajczyk, *Nowoczesne wojny informacyjne*, Warszawa 2016.

¹⁴ K. Bąkowicz, *Dezinformacja: Instrukcja obsługi*, Warszawa 2023.

¹⁵ *Walka informacyjna...*

¹⁶ R. Paradowski, *Trends and mechanisms of Russian disinformation concerning Poland: the analysis of information operations on Twitter in 2009–2020*, “The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies” 2025, pp. 35–59, <https://doi.org/10.12775/CJPS.2023/2024.003>.

Nevertheless, in general, Russian disinformation activities in Israel are subject to multiple research projects and reports prepared by think-tanks and analysts. Report on Russian disinformation in Israel has been published as part of Disinformation in MENAT project financed by Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and published in Kraków in 2024 with the aim of identifying of techniques and narratives used in disinformation efforts as well as researching how they influence current situation in Israel¹⁷.

The issue was also discussed in reports by Israeli analysts, which were chosen for comparative study for this paper. One such instance is the report published by The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security which concentrates on the *Doppelganger* campaign aimed in this case at influencing decision making processes in Jerusalem¹⁸, that will be discussed further in this paper. This was also addressed in an article prepared for the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv, which analyzed an FBI report concerning Russian influence in both Israel and the United States. The analysis also focused on the *Doppelganger* operation, along with propaganda supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It further highlighted the impact of Russian propaganda on the Arab population residing in Israel¹⁹. Another publication by the same institute referenced the *Doppelganger* operation in the context of the Gaza conflict²⁰. A separate study, jointly produced by INSS and the Institute for the Study of Intelligence Methodology at the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center (IICC), examined the methods by which Russian agents seek to influence Israeli public opinion during the war in Gaza, particularly through the media, as well as the potential consequences of such efforts²¹. Additionally, an analysis prepared for the American think tank, the International Council on Clean Transportation, reported on Russia's use of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to advance pro-Russian narratives among the Israeli public²².

¹⁷ M. Gajewska, J. Katulski, *Rosyjska dezinformacja w Izraelu*, Disinfo in MENAT, 20.01.2024, [on-line:] <https://disinfoinmenat.com/raport/rosyjska-dezinformacja-w-izraelu> – 20.05.2025.

¹⁸ D. Rakov, *Russian Interference in Israel's Internal Affairs*, The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, 2025.

¹⁹ D. Siman-Tov, V. Michlin-Shapir, *A Worldwide Russian Influence Campaign – Implications for Israel*, Institute for National Security Studies, 2024.

²⁰ M. Czerny, V. Michlin-Shapir, D. Siman-Tov, *Russia's disinformation campaign: Strategic and Cognitive Implications*, Institute for National Security Studies, 2024.

²¹ O. Barel, V. Michlin-Shapir, M. Czerny, *Russian influence in Israel During the War in Gaza*, Institute for National Security Studies, 2024.

²² M. Shamrai, *How Russia uses the Israel-Gaza Crisis in its disinformation campaign against the West*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2023.

The studies and report by Israeli analysts seem to focus on the Doppelgänger campaign as they underline it, with the creation of multiple fake accounts and linking to fake websites as the greatest threat, or at least a major threat, which will be discussed further.

It is also noteworthy that the issue of Russian influence and disinformation in Israel has been addressed in journalistic reporting. The independent investigative journalism organization Shomrim conducted an inquiry revealing that Israel is among the targets of Russian propaganda efforts²³. The subject of Russian attempts to shape public opinion in Israel was also covered in an article published by the widely read Israeli magazine *Israel Hayom*, in which the journalist primarily referenced comments made by analyst Daniel Rakov, the author of the aforementioned JISS report²⁴.

As demonstrated, the topic of disinformation attracts significant scholarly attention and serves as a central focus in numerous studies. The terminology surrounding disinformation is of interest not only to academics but also to practitioners and policymakers. In particular, the issue of Russian disinformation has been extensively explored by researchers specializing in information warfare. Even when the scope of inquiry is limited to Israel, it becomes evident that this phenomenon remains highly pertinent. A steady stream of reports and analyses continues to emerge, examining Russian influence operations and disinformation efforts targeting Israeli society. These texts are produced primarily by Israeli think tanks, although similar studies are also conducted in other countries, including the United States²⁵ and Poland²⁶.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methods, particularly critical discourse analysis and media content analysis, which were combined to examine Russian influence operations and communication efforts in Israel. The study takes the form of a meta-analysis, relying on a critical review of existing publications and reports on the topic, rather than original data

²³ U. Blau, M. Czerny, *Russia's Influence Campaign in Israel: Creating New Party, Stoking Social Discord, Fueling Arab Discontent, and Straining Foreign Relations*, Shomrim, 2024.

²⁴ A. Bulshtein, *Exposed: How Russia tries to exert influence on public opinion in Israel*, "Israel Hayom", 7.02.2024, [on-line:] <https://www.israelhayom.com/2024/07/02/exposed-how-russia-tries-to-exerts-influence-on-public-opinion-in-israel> – 20.05.2025.

²⁵ M. Shamrai, *op. cit.*

²⁶ M. Gajewska, J. Katulski, *op. cit.*

collection. The authors did not collect data directly from platforms (e.g., through web scraping), but instead relied on data gathered in the framework of other studies and analyses.

The sources of data primarily included social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, as well as public media sources and an overview of relevant events and debates in the Israeli political sphere and society. The analysis was further enriched by the use of statistics drawn from official surveys and reports published by think tanks. Additionally, some of the information analyzed in earlier studies originated from declassified documents, which provided further insight into the scope and nature of Russian influence activities.

This triangulation of sources helped to contextualize the identified narratives and techniques within the Israeli environment and to examine their implications for Israeli society and foreign policy, particularly in relation to Poland.

Due to limited resources, this research does not adopt a quantitative approach and does not aim to count the number of events attributed to Russian influence campaigns in Israel. However, its qualitative nature allows for the fulfillment of the research goal: to identify narratives and techniques through both data-driven and concept-driven approaches. While certain analytical categories were defined beforehand, the study remained open to incorporating additional categories as they emerged during the analysis. Categorization involved evaluating described examples of disinformation as anti-Ukrainian, anti-NATO, anti-EU, anti-Western, as well as anti-American and pro-Russian. This approach enabled a flexible and comprehensive examination of a wide range of strategies, techniques, and narratives, covering not only disinformation on social media but also events involving Russian-Israeli public figures²⁷.

Russian disinformation in Israel, targets, techniques, instruments/tools

Russia's disinformation activities in Israel closely resemble those conducted in other parts of the world. As observed in the United States and European countries, the *Doppelganger* campaign has also been active in Israel since 2022. This operation involves the imitation of official websites belonging to reputable news organizations and political institutions. The counterfeit sites disseminate articles designed to spread Russian

²⁷ A. Seklecka, *Metodologie łączenia analizy treści z analizą dyskursu*, "Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne" 2023, no. 78, pp. 195–208.

disinformation. In parallel, numerous fake accounts impersonating citizens of various countries have been created to distribute links to these deceptive websites. The campaign also employs bots posing as unique users to amplify its reach. Another component of the *Doppelganger* operation involves promoting pro-Russian content already present in Western media, as well as recruiting influencers to propagate narratives aligned with the Kremlin's agenda.

According to leaked documentation, the campaign includes efforts to monitor and analyze public sentiment with the aim of exploiting societal divisions and manipulating opinion. Its overarching objectives include legitimizing the invasion of Ukraine, eroding Western support for Kyiv, and undermining confidence in the effectiveness of sanctions imposed on Russia. The resulting narratives tend to foster anti-American, anti-EU, and anti-NATO sentiments²⁸.

In the Israeli context, Russian disinformation pursues similar anti-Western and anti-NATO goals. However, it tends to focus less on promoting a positive image of Russia and more on discrediting Western actors—especially Ukraine, but also the European Union and the United States. In addition to the general *Doppelganger* tactics of creating fake websites and distributing misleading social media content, Russian operations in Israel exploit the country's unique sociopolitical and media landscape. One such example that also involves Poland is a telegram post from 18 August 2024 which involves a picture mimicking headline from an article by The Standard with the caption *Chief Rabbi of Poland called what happened in the Kursk region he second "7 October."* The post also includes a caption in Hebrew that can be translated to:

The chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, said that the Ukrainian armed forces kidnap civilians from the Kursk region and hold them captive to force ransom payments. Palestinian terrorists from Hamas did the same during the attack on Israeli towns on 7 October 2023.

The post itself does not include any link, nor does such an article appear on The Standard's website. However, the comment section leads to an article on Russian language website "utyug.info" (Utrenniy Yug), that uses the same picture mimicking The Standard. The article itself does not include any quotes by Michael Schudrich, but says that

²⁸ K. Chawryło, *Doppelgänger: The pattern of Russia's anti-Western influence operation*, "Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich", 13.09.2024, [on-line:] <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-09-13/doppelganger-pattern-russias-anti-western-influence-operation> – 20.05.2025.

an important factor making both attacks similar is the fact, that neither Ukraine nor Palestine had any military reason to attack – other than intimidation of civilians²⁹.

The same article also calls the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, Moshe Reuven Azman, a “nazi-rabbi”, underlining that Azman was born in Leningrad and moved to Ukraine in 1991 and that he was “caught” driving Israeli army armored car³⁰. Such framing is supposed to show readers that Ukrainian actions are not legitimate in the eyes of close partners of Ukraine and using the figure of Chief Rabbi of Poland is an appeal to authority in Judaism.



Figure 4. screen grab of Doppelganger article from a Telegram group named “Ukronazim”

Key element is the high degree of media privatization in Israel. Many television and radio stations are privately owned, often by individuals whose identities and affiliations may not be transparent. As a result, editorial content can be shaped by the political or ideological leanings

²⁹ We reached out to the office of Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich and received a direct confirmation from the Rabbi that he did not state such words in an interview with *The Standard*.

³⁰ [on-line:] <https://utyug.info/new/47462/> – 20.05.2025

of media owners, which may inadvertently (or deliberately) align with pro-Russian narratives.

Israeli media are also distinguished by their multilingual nature. The country is home to a substantial Russian-speaking population, consisting of both immigrants from the former Soviet Union and their descendants. Consequently, Russian-language television is broadcast domestically; however, it also competes with Russian state media that target this demographic, such as the Russia Today news channel. As a result, Israeli citizens are exposed to information disseminated directly by Moscow-based outlets.

Due to the large Arab population (approx. 20% of Israel's population), there are also Arabic-language media that reach not only the Arabic-speaking residents of Israel, but also the Palestinians who receive them. Unfortunately, Arabic-language media in Israel are affected by censorship, repression, financial problems and political pressure.

Given the significant privatization of the media sector, alongside the availability of non-Russian-language outlets and, at times, even direct broadcasts from Russian channels, it can be argued that Russia occasionally leverages existing official media in Israel to advance its strategic narratives.

In addition to traditional media, social media platforms enjoy widespread popularity in Israel. According to 2024 survey data, the most commonly used applications among the population include WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, Telegram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter). Naturally, the frequency and duration of platform usage vary across different age groups. Nonetheless, social media constitute a significant and influential source of information for Israeli society³¹.

Statistical data indicate that websites are the most frequently used source of news in Israel, cited by 63% of respondents. Social media ranks second (59.5%), followed by television in third place, with messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram occupying fourth place. Traditional media formats—such as the printed press and radio—are considerably less prevalent. Among social media platforms, Facebook (72%) and Instagram (46.5%) are the most commonly identified as primary or secondary sources of news, whereas X (formerly Twitter) is used to a far lesser extent for this purpose (12%). Regarding online news portals, YNet emerges as the leading source (40%), followed by N12 (24%)³².

³¹ A. Wiener, O. Stegman, *Social Media and Digital Platforms use in Israel*, Israel Internet Association, 2024.

³² T. Shwartz-Altshuler, I.O. Sapozhnikova, *Media and Social Media Consumption, Trust, and Literacy*, The Israel Democracy Institute, 2024.

Notably, the level of trust in Israeli media stands at approximately 46%, a figure nearly identical to the 45% trust level reported for social media platforms. The same survey assessed the public's perceived ability to identify disinformation: 56% of respondents believed they could reliably distinguish between accurate and false content. Nonetheless, 70.5% acknowledged that they did not regret having shared inaccurate or misleading information on social media³³.

It is therefore unsurprising that the *Doppelganger* campaign has actively exploited social media, particularly platforms popular among Israeli users. On networks such as Facebook and X, fabricated or satirical visual content is disseminated with the intent to mislead and to foster negative perceptions of the European Union, the United States, and Ukraine. To amplify the impact of such messaging, inauthentic accounts are frequently employed to generate and circulate disinformation³⁴.

One of the platforms where Russian activity is particularly evident is Telegram. It is through Telegram that popular channels are utilized to reach broad segments of the Israeli audience. Examples of such channels where Russian disinformation has been disseminated include Carmel News and Sdartoli. More concerning, such false information can occasionally infiltrate traditional media, as exemplified by the report regarding Hamas's alleged capture of Ukrainian weapons, which appeared on the Kan11 television channel³⁵. Another propaganda outlet is Ukronazim, whose very name suggests an association between Ukrainians and Nazis—an alignment consistent with Russian propaganda narratives. Unsurprisingly, the group promotes a distinctly anti-Ukrainian message³⁶. In this outlet posts such as “The terrorist Zelenski starts openly threatening Hungary” are posted often (posted on 24 August 2025) twisting the narrative after Ukraine struck the Druzhba Pipeline temporarily halting its operations and pumping oil at least partially meant for Slovakia and Ukraine³⁷.

One of the narratives disseminated via Telegram included disinformation suggesting that Israeli participation in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris could pose a threat comparable to that of the 1972 Munich Games. During the Munich Olympics, a tragic massacre occurred in which 11 Israeli athletes and coaches were killed by Palestinian terrorists from the Black September organization³⁸.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ O. Barel, V. Michlin-Shapir, M. Czerny, *op. cit.*; D. Rakov, *op. cit.*

³⁵ O. Barel, V. Michlin-Shapir, M. Czerny, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ [on-line:] <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/08/22/hungary-and-slovakia-demand-ukraine-stop-attacks-on-russias-druzhba-pipeline-a90321> – 20.05.2025.

³⁸ M. Czerny, V. Michlin-Shapir, D. Siman-Tov, *op. cit.*

Importantly, within the context of social media, Russian propaganda and disinformation are disseminated using languages commonly spoken by the target audiences. Consequently, fabricated news, propaganda articles, and related content circulated among Israeli users are typically presented in Hebrew. Moreover, preexisting sentiments within Israeli society are often leveraged—provided they align with the narratives promoted by the Kremlin³⁹.

In Addition in Israel, the Russian disinformation campaign is exploiting the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The war, which began on October 7, 2023, and in which Israel is directly involved, represents one of the most significant recent developments in Israeli politics and society. Consequently, the Doppelganger campaign is amplifying social anxieties surrounding the military operations in the Gaza Strip by disseminating disinformation. This campaign is also being used to further anti-Ukrainian propaganda. One example of such fabricated content involves claims circulating on fake websites that Ukraine and Israel are competing with each other. Specific examples and their effects will be discussed in greater detail later in the article.

However, Russian influence extends beyond the media. Russian oligarchs with Israeli citizenship exert political influence through direct connections with Israeli politicians. Additionally, some of these individuals are linked to institutions of public trust. By leveraging their positions, they can impact the dynamics of Israel's relations with Western countries. A notable example of this phenomenon is the figure of Viatcheslav Moshe Kantor, the deputy chairman of the Yad Vashem council, who in 2025 was reelected for the position of chairman of the European Jewish Congress for fifth term.

Kantor is a divisive figure, considered close to Russian president Vladimir Putin. Among other endeavours he is a major shareholder of Grupa Azoty through Acron, holding almost 20% of shares in a chemical company, that is also partially owned by the State of Poland and is considered a strategic company, being one of the most important consumers of gas in the country. Kantor's shares were frozen in 2022 after he appeared on a list of individuals sanctioned by European Union in connection to Putin and the war in Ukraine. Polish sanctions imposed on Kantor were given with the following argumentation:

Controls an entity of strategic importance to the Russian government, and therefore benefits from or supports the government of the Russian Federation, whose actions destabilize or undermine the territorial integrity,

³⁹ D. Rakov, *op. cit*

sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. There is an ongoing threat of coordination between V.M. Kantor and the Russian government⁴⁰.

One of the most significant outcries in regards to Moshe Kantor was the 5th World Holocaust Forum organised in Jerusalem on January 23 2020. Moshe Kantor is seen as a driving force behind this event, as well as he was the president of World Holocaust Forum Foundation. The event was attended by 47 world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin who was allowed to address the forum which raised numerous controversies as well as boycott from Polish President Andrzej Duda who declined to take part in the Forum when he was not allowed to address the gathered participants.

Kantor also addressed the Forum giving a memorable quote underlining his stance on Russia, mentioning Russia as one of five examples of combating antisemitism:

And Russia where we find maybe the lowest rates of antisemitism due to a very uncompromising, long term policy towards antisemitism. And antisemitic incidents are treated with maximum severity. Therefore practically eliminating antisemitism in the public arena⁴¹.

The above example shows that Russian oligarchs close to Vladimir Putin can and do exercise significant influence on Israeli political scene, also shaping foreign relations of state of Israel and perception of Russia both within the Israeli society as abroad. However, Kantor is only one example along with also sanctioned Mikhail Fridman, co-founder of Alfa Bank, one of the largest private banks in Russia, together with German Khan, and along others with whom they fund the Genesis Prize being awarded yearly to Jewish people for exceptional success in professional life (among notable recipients of the award are the Argentinian President Javier Milei or actresses Nathalie Portman and Barbara Streisand). Both Fridman and Khan through Alfa Group and Alfa Bank are considered by numerous institutions such as the US Treasury Department close contributors to Vladimir Putin's politics⁴².

⁴⁰ *Lista osób i podmiotów objętych sankcjami*, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji, [on-line:] <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/lista-osob-i-podmiotow-ob-jetych-sankcjami> – 20.05.2025.

⁴¹ T. Staff, *Educate, legislate, enforce: Full text of Moshe Kantor's Holocaust Forum speech*, "The Times of Israel", 23.01.2020, [on-line:] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/educate-legislate-enforce-full-text-of-moshe-kantors-holocaust-forum-speech/> – 20.05.2025.

⁴² *US Section 241 CAATSA Report (2018)*, Open Sanctions, [on-line:] <https://www.opensanctions.org/programs/US-CAATSA2018> – 20.05.2025.

Results of Russian disinformation in Israel

Israeli society is only partially resilient to disinformation. Crucial factor that allows disinformation and actors using disinformation to function and thrive in the society is the polarization of Israeli political system and the society. What is important to note is the fact that Israeli polarization has multiple layers: from government v. opposition, through attitudes towards religion, to perceptions of Israeli-Palestinian conflict and minorities within the society as well as the perception of democracy itself among many other polarising factors.

Furthermore, Israeli society has a deeply ingrained distrust of some western institutions, or institutions that are considered Western. The 2018 Israeli Foreign Policy Index of the Mitvim Institute shows that 7 years ago 55% of respondents considered European Union as “more of a foe to Israel” while only 18% considered EU as “more of a friend”⁴³. In latter years the number of Israelis considering EU as an adversarial institution fell to 39% in 2023, but in 2024 rose again to 54%⁴⁴.

However, other surveys provide different numbers. Pew Research shows that the lowest score for European Union in Israel was 2013 when only 41% of Israelis saw EU positively. No results for 2018 were given, but for 2019 51% of respondents saw EU positively and in 2023 59% which is a record number. However it has to be considered that the survey was conducted until may 2023 and does not reflect the views Israelis may hold of the EU after European reactions to the Gaza War⁴⁵.

Though, this numbers do not correlate with the staunchly positive outlook on Russia or Ukraine, nor do they correlate with negative perception of United States. 2018 Mitvim Index noted that 63% Israelis consider US-Israel relations “good” while also respondents chose Russia as the second most important state actor for their country, after the US, but before EU partners⁴⁶. But still in 2024 Russia is already considered less important than United Kingdom, Germany and France, as well as there is a clear

⁴³ *The 2018 Israeli Foreign Policy Index*, Mitvim Institute, 2018, [on-line:] https://mitvim.org.il/wp-content/uploads/English_report_-_2018_Israeli_Foreign_Policy_Index_of_the_Mitvim_Institute-1.pdf – 20.05.2025.

⁴⁴ *Israeli Foreign Policy Index 2024*, Mitvim Institute, 2024, p. 6, [on-line:] https://mitvim.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Mitvim_Israeli-Foreign-Policy-Index-2024.pdf – 20.05.2025.

⁴⁵ S. Gubbala, *People broadly view the EU favorably, both in member states and elsewhere*, Pew Research Center, 24.10.2023, [on-line:] <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/24/people-broadly-view-the-eu-favorably> – 20.05.2025.

⁴⁶ *The 2018 Israeli Foreign Policy Index...*

divide in the Israeli society with how positively the respondents perceive IL-US relations – only 40% of Israelis who consider their political views as “center-left” see the relations as good, while almost 70% of right wing voters consider the relations good⁴⁷.

Also, the public is sharply divided in their preferable stance towards Russia with 35% Israelis preferring to “Join the Western world and strengthen diplomatic support for Ukraine”, 12% to “Seek to erode Russia’s regional influence even at the expense of a direct clash”, while 34% to “Continue “tiptoeing” between Russia and the West” and 19% preferring to “Strengthen relations with Russia to reduce friction”⁴⁸.

According to Pew Research Center in 2024 81% of Israelis held “unfavourable” views of Russia with as far as 56% declaring their views as “very unfavourable”⁴⁹.

As mentioned earlier, Russia exploits events, public sentiment, and preexisting beliefs held by certain groups within the countries targeted by its disinformation campaign. This is also the case with Israel.

One example of such activity is the exploitation of the tense situation surrounding the judicial reforms proposed by the Israeli government. As part of Russian disinformation efforts, it was alleged that the protests against the reforms were left-leaning and orchestrated by American Democrats. A narrative emerged accusing the-U.S. President Joe Biden of acting against the Israeli government. Claims circulated that the United States sought to alienate Jews from Judaism and aimed to morally undermine the State of Israel. Genuine criticisms voiced by opponents of the reforms and critics of the U.S. administration were appropriated to support these claims. This content was designed to exacerbate socio-political divisions between religious and secular communities⁵⁰.

The war in the Gaza Strip is a major event frequently exploited in Russian disinformation efforts. As part of the broader strategy to discredit Israel’s Western allies, narratives emerged suggesting, among other things, that the United States had allegedly trained Hamas militants⁵¹. Additionally, some claims implied that the entire conflict was a consequence of failed U.S. policy in the Middle East. Furthermore, it was asserted that Israel’s overall relationship with the United States was detrimental.

⁴⁷ *Israeli Foreign Policy Index 2024...*

⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁹ M. Fagan, S. Gubbala, J. Poushter, *Views of Russia and Putin*, Pew Research Center, 2.07.2024, [on-line:] <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/07/02/views-of-russia-and-putin-july-24> – 20.05.2025.

⁵⁰ D. Rakov, *op. cit*

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

According to these narratives, the U.S. poses a threat to Israeli security or has already abandoned its ally, thereby leaving Israel weakened⁵².

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also instrumentalized to advance anti-Ukrainian narratives within Israel. As previously noted, it is suggested that Israel and Ukraine are in competition for Western assistance. Consequently, claims have circulated that aid to Ukraine might be suspended due to the war in Gaza, and that Israel should refrain from supporting Ukraine in order to avoid placing additional strain on its own budget⁵³.

Additional accusations were also directed at Ukraine. For instance, disinformation was disseminated alleging that the Ukrainian military was purportedly selling weapons to Hamas, which were then allegedly used to kill civilians. Furthermore, a recurrent Russian claim—aligned with the official Kremlin narrative—portrayed Ukrainians as Nazis and, particularly significant in the Israeli context, as anti-Semites. Such accusations were even directed at the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, despite his Jewish heritage⁵⁴.

Interestingly, in the context of antisemitism, the Doppelganger campaign itself contributed to its proliferation in Western societies⁵⁵. Despite this, the Russian government sought to portray itself as an ally of the Jewish people, a narrative that was particularly evident during the 2023 incident in Makhachkala, when riots erupted at the local airport. A crowd of demonstrators stormed a Red Wings Airline flight arriving from Israel, chanting antisemitic slogans. This episode was part of a broader wave of antisemitic unrest in the North Caucasus in 2023, a region predominantly inhabited by Muslims sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The immediate trigger for the riots was reportedly a rumor that refugees from Israel were aboard the aircraft. The Kremlin publicly condemned the incident, placing responsibility for its occurrence on Ukraine⁵⁶.

Although content disseminated by Russian-affiliated accounts typically fails to achieve significant traction, on occasion it manages to permeate mainstream Israeli media. Such was the case when Channel Kan 11 aired fabricated claims regarding Hamas's alleged seizure of Ukrainian weaponry⁵⁷.

Russian disinformation and propaganda likely existed in Israel prior to 2023. In addition to inflaming tensions surrounding judicial reform, Russian messaging at the time also sought to sustain anti-vaccination

⁵² M. Shamrai, *op. cit.*

⁵³ O. Barel, V. Michlin-Shapir, M. Czerny, *op. cit.*; D. Rakov, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ D. Rakov, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ O. Barel, V. Michlin-Shapir, M. Czerny, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ M. Shamrai, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ M. Czerny, V. Michlin-Shapir, D. Siman-Tov, *op. cit.*

attitudes related to the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁸. Although the reach of content disseminated through the Doppelganger campaign on platforms such as Facebook remained limited, certain demographic groups appear particularly vulnerable. In the Israeli context, one of the primary targets of Russian influence efforts has been the Arab population. Another segment frequently exposed to Russian propaganda comprises individuals with right-wing political orientations, for whom the narratives promoted by Russia often align with preexisting ideological views⁵⁹.

As shown, Russian propaganda in Israel seeks to exacerbate social unrest, primarily by exploiting existing societal challenges. It also endeavors to deepen social divisions and foster hostility towards the United States, Europe, and particularly Ukraine, which is often portrayed as a Nazi state. Antisemitism plays a significant role in these efforts, with the Kremlin occasionally attempting to position itself as a protector of Jews. However, more commonly, it highlights the issue of antisemitism in other nations.

It needs to be noted, that in case of Doppelganger campaign, as well as other efforts promoting Russian narratives, the readers are suspicious of any efforts to correct false news provided in the accounts, oftentimes resorting to explaining lack of actual websites or articles that doppelgänger posts mimic through “Western censorship” that supposedly deletes articles.

The consequences of Russian actions extend beyond societal influence, impacting political dynamics, including international relations. According to intercepted documents from the Social Design Agency, a Russian IT firm responsible for executing the Doppelganger operation, one of the objectives was to reduce Israeli military support for Ukraine⁶⁰. This objective has, to some extent, been achieved. In addition to Israel’s ambiguous stance on Ukraine, it has refrained from providing military aid, particularly in terms of Iron Dome technology. The Netanyahu government has expressed opposition to supplying such technology to Ukraine, citing concerns that, should it fall into Russian hands, it could potentially be used to arm Israel’s adversaries, especially Iran. However, this position is not solely influenced by Russian disinformation; it is also shaped by the legitimate security concerns of both the government and many Israeli citizens.

⁵⁸ A. Bulshtein, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ D. Rakov, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ U. Blau, M. Czerny, *op. cit.*

Verification of hypotheses

As demonstrated by the analysis of the collected material—through examples of various forms of Russian activity, their impact on social and traditional media, and the resulting effects—it becomes evident that Russian disinformation efforts, including the Doppelganger campaign, promote anti-Western narratives within Israel. These narratives primarily center on anti-American, anti-EU, and especially anti-Ukrainian themes, aligning with the typical objectives of Russian disinformation. The campaigns aim to erode Israeli public trust in Western institutions and frequently portray Ukraine as a country unworthy of Israeli support—justified not only by appeals to national security but also by ideological arguments (such as accusations of antisemitism or Nazism). In doing so, they exploit existing fears and opinions within Israeli society. Russian disinformation efforts also draw on events that hold significance for Israeli citizens and tap into prevailing social sentiments. While these campaigns generally seek to discredit Western countries and institutions, they occasionally depict Russia as a nation sympathetic to Jewish interests, as well as a starkly positive example.

This is also important through the lens of the secondary hypothesis provided in the introduction to this paper. Examples given earlier show how the so-called Russian oligarchs with Israeli citizenships influence not only Israeli politics, but also society and Jewish diaspora through means of organising forums, forwarding discussions or providing popular awards such as the Genesis Prize. Russian oligarch activities also puts strain on relations of Israel and European partners, as is evident from the case of Andrzej Duda's denial to join the World Holocaust Forum in 2020 which resulted in political and commentary backlash and tensions, as well as accusations of distorting historical narratives for political gains.

Russian influence and disinformation campaigns are an useful tool for Moscow to maintain interests in Israel and moderate Israeli responses to cases that are vital to Russia. A notable example to consider is the Israeli response to the war in Ukraine which didn't yield any significant political nor military support from Israeli politicians despite repeated calls from Kiev as well as pressure from Ukraine's allies in Europe or Washington.

Conclusion

Russian disinformation campaigns are present in Israel and, as in other countries, aim to disseminate anti-Ukrainian propaganda and erode public trust in Western nations and institutions. Although the activities

associated with the Doppelganger campaign rarely penetrate traditional media or attract significant engagement from genuine social media users, there are instances where Kremlin-backed content reaches a wider segment of Israeli society. Numerous documented cases illustrate how such propaganda is typically rooted in narratives designed to instill fear and uncertainty. The strategic use of significant events and deeply held beliefs is a common feature of Russian disinformation efforts. As a result, it is not possible to dismiss the potential impact of these campaigns on Israeli society—particularly given the ongoing exposure to Russian propaganda—despite the difficulty of precisely measuring their effectiveness.

This paper opens new avenues for research into the influence of Russian oligarchs on international relations of Israel and Western partners, as well as perceptions of this activities within the Israeli society.

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Abstract

Russian disinformation and influence strategies in Western countries are a widely discussed phenomena, especially in connection to the full scale invasion on Ukraine. Such strategies are also used in Israel, where several factors have been identified - most prominent among them being the Doppelganger operation concerned with fabricating of websites and articles mimicking respected and well established media outlets, as well as the activities of wealthy persons connected to Russian state through business enterprises and often citizenship and place of origin, who exert significant influence on the political scene in the country as well as the relationships with foreign partners in the West. This article puts forward two hypotheses: Russian influence campaigns tend to promote narratives that align with core Russian interests in Europe, promoting anti-Ukrainian, anti-NATO and anti-Western narratives. The second hypothesis states that Russian oligarchs with Israeli citizenship contribute to advancing Russian interests in Israel through their affiliations with important political, social and cultural institutions such as Yad Vashem or European Jewish Congress. Through case-study approach

to public figures such as Moshe Kantor and queries of analyses on the Doppelganger campaigns done by Israeli think-tanks as well as Israeli media we propose a framework for researching the influence and verify the hypotheses put forward positively, looking into their impact on European Union, United States, Ukraine and Poland. In conclusion, this paper sees the importance of such influence campaigns as well as argue that they are at least partially successful due to prejudices that are present within the fabric of Israeli society and appeal to the imagination of citizens that show a high level of distrust towards international institutions or are cautious of any notions of anti-Semitic incidents or Nazism, that are frequently used in such narratives.

Keywords: Israel, Russia, disinformation, Doppelganger, oligarchs

Doppelgangery, oligarchowie i zniekształcenia. Notatki badawcze na temat rosyjskich taktyk dezinformacyjnych w Izraelu i ich wpływu na zachodnich partnerów

Streszczenie

Rosyjskie strategie dezinformacji i wywierania wpływu w krajach zachodnich są szeroko dyskutowanym zjawiskiem, zwłaszcza w związku z pełnoskalową inwazją na Ukrainę. Takie strategie są również stosowane w Izraelu, gdzie niektóre ich formy zidentyfikowano. Pierwszą, najbardziej znaczącą jest operacja Doppelganger polegająca na tworzeniu stron internetowych i artykułów naśladujących szanowane, dobrze ugruntowane media. Natomiast drugą jest działalność zamożnych osób powiązanych z państwem rosyjskim poprzez przedsięwzięcia biznesowe, a często także obywatelstwo i miejsce pochodzenia. Te osoby wywierają znaczący wpływ na scenę polityczną w kraju, a także na relacje z zagranicznymi partnerami na Zachodzie. Niniejszy artykuł stawia dwie hipotezy: Rosyjskie kampanie wpływu mają tendencję do promowania narracji (antyukraińskich, antynatowskich i antyzachodnich), które są zgodne z podstawowymi interesami Rosji w Europie. Druga hipoteza głosi, że rosyjscy oligarchowie posiadający izraelskie obywatelstwo przyczyniają się do wspierania rosyjskich interesów w Izraelu poprzez swoje powiązania z ważnymi instytucjami politycznymi, społecznymi i kulturalnymi, takimi jak Yad Vashem czy Europejski Kongres Żydów. Poprzez studium przypadku osób publicznych, takich jak Moshe Kantor, oraz analiz kampanii Doppelganger przeprowadzonych przez izraelskie think-tanki, a także izraelskie media, proponujemy strategię badawczą tych wpływów i pozytywnie weryfikujemy postawione hipotezy, analizując wpływ tych narracji na Unię Europejską, Stany Zjednoczone, Ukrainę i Polskę. Podsumowując, niniejszy artykuł dostrzega znaczenie takich kampanii wpływu. Argumentuje, że są one przynajmniej częściowo skuteczne ze względu na uprzedzenia obecne w tkance izraelskiego społeczeństwa i przemawiają do wyobraźni obywateli, którzy wykazują wysoki poziom nieufności wobec instytucji międzynarodowych lub są ostrożni wobec wszelkich przejawów antysemickich incydentów lub nazizmu, które są często wykorzystywane w takich narracjach.

Słowa kluczowe: Izrael, dezinformacja, Rosja, Doppelganger, oligarchowie